

## The Compliance with and Imposition of Social and Linguistic Norms in Sorokin's *Norma* and *Den' oprichnika*

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### *Norms in Sorokin's works*

MY TITLE contains a *hysterion proteron*: the norm is complied with before it is imposed. What is illogical in time is possible in literature, in my case: in the chronology of Vladimir Sorokin's works. Although various aspects of the implementation and imposition of norms can be found in almost any of these texts, there are two texts which are especially concerned with norms—one of the earliest works by this author, *Norma*, and one of his recent texts, *Den' oprichnika*, the first devoted to compliance with, the second to the imposition of repressive norms. Whereas the concept of norms is present on the surface in the early novel, it is presupposed implicitly in the 2006 short novel. This, of course, is not the only difference between the two texts; it is precisely the significant contrast in poetics which might help us to better understand the way both texts depict norms imposed from above and negotiate these norms by their artistic means—which also allows the diagnosis of a certain continuity in Sorokin's works between his indisputably conceptualist and his alleged post-conceptualist period.

### *Norma*

As is evident from the very title of Sorokin's early "novel" *Norma* (*The Norm*) the concept of social norms has intrigued this writer from the very beginning of his literary career. Probably written in 1979–83, the text was published in 1994; it received new attention in Russia when re-published in 2002.

In *Norma* the reader witnesses the unquestioned functioning of social norms on various levels of life in a repressive system. The only common element is the signifier норма, derivations of it or the signified *norm*, *normality*, *normativity* etc. Due to redundant repetitions of words such as норма or нормально, of rhetorical devices and of poetological patterns, it is almost impossible to paraphrase some parts of this work. The most appropriate way to address them is to enumerate the particular elements or to quantify them. In this case academic reconstruction must be restricted to diagnosing the dominant device. In this respect, the novel's eight parts can—with reservation—be subdivided into sociological and metaliterary parts.

The parts of the “novel” in which sociological aspects prevail are the first, second, fifth and sixth. The first, largest and most enigmatic part consists of 30 short stories each with entirely new protagonists. In a certain sense, the signifier норма (norm) functions here as the hawk in Paul Heyse's novella theory. The social panorama of Soviet society revolves around this catalyst for psychological and sociological dynamics. The “protagonists” who have individual names but hardly any history are characterized almost exclusively in terms of their communications, given in phonetic notation (if not as exclusively as in Sorokin's *Ochered'* (*The Queue*)).

The short passages of narrator's discourse, however, do not inform the reader what kind of food goes by the product name Норма. The unprepared reader only gradually begins to realize what Норма is. Any doubts are dispelled in the eleventh short story, a dialogue between a boy and his mother who fulfils her duty of eating Норма:

—Мам, а зачем ты кашки ешь?

—Это не кашка. Не говори глупости. Сколько раз я тебе говорила?

—Нет, ну а зачем?

—Затем.—Ложечка быстро управлялась с податливым меси-вом.

—Ну, мам, скажи! Ведь невкусно. Я ж пробовал. И пахнет кашкой.

—Я кому говорю! Не смей!

Юля стукнула пальцем на краю стола.

—Да я не глупости. Просто, ну а зачем, а?  
 —Затем. (N 44)<sup>1</sup>

We are confronted with what can be called a classical Lacanian scene: a child who is not yet subjugated to the symbolic order is still objective enough to see dried excrement as excrement.<sup>2</sup> Continuing in the spirit of Lacan's theory of the inevitable subordination of young people under the norms of the symbolic order, the short story informs us that Норма is meant only for adults (N 45).

A significant dose of irony is inherent in the fact that the Soviet symbolic order demands of Soviet people that they do exactly what is excluded from the civilizing process: eat excrement. The child's legitimate question concerning the reason for this break in civilization remains unanswered. In *Norma*, the norm is fulfilled without being questioned.

The eighteenth short story of the first part contains a lesbian sex scene during which Marina—a self-quotation from Sorokin's *Tridtsataia ljubov' Mariny* (*Marina's Thirtieth Love*)<sup>3</sup>—and Vika discuss the production of Норма:

—Слушай, Маринк, но после аппарата-то все равно ведь говно? Ведь правда? Или другое что-то получается?

Марина осторожно ложилась на нее валетом:

—Да нет. Конечно, говном остается. Тут, как ни перегоняй, ни фильтруй, все равно. Из говна сметану не выгонишь... (N 61)<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 References to *Norma* (abbreviated N) are to V.G. Sorokin, 2002, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, Moscow, vol. 1, pp. 7–314. “‘Mum, why do you eat poo?’//‘It’s not poo. Don’t be silly. How many times do I have to tell you?’//‘No, but why?’//‘Because!’ The spoon coped quickly with the pliant mush’//‘Look, Mum, tell me! It doesn’t taste good, does it? I’ve tried it! And it smells of poo’//‘Are you deaf? Don’t you dare!’//Iuliia jabbed at the table’s edge with her finger.//‘I’m not being silly. It’s just—why?’//‘Because!’” Translations into English are my own.
  - 2 Cf. Peter Deutschmann, 1999, “Der Begriff der Norm bei Sorokin,” *Poetik der Metadiskursivität: Zum postmodernen Prosa-, Film- und Dramenwerk von Vladimir Sorokin*, ed. D. Burkhart, Munich, pp. 37–52; p. 49.
  - 3 Cf. Dirk Uffelman, 2003, “Marinä Himmelfahrt und Liquidierung: Erniedrigung und Erhöhung in Sorokins Roman *Tridcataja ljubov' Mariny*,” *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 51, pp. 289–333.
  - 4 “‘Listen, Marina, when it comes out of the machine, it’s still shit, isn’t it? Right? Or does something else come out?’//Marina carefully lay down on top of her in the sixty-nine position.//‘No. Of course it’s still shit. You can distil it or filter it as much as you

Since the violation of taboo so typical of Sorokin's early texts is present on the sexual level, it comes as an even greater irony that the counter-civilized norm of shit-eating is reflected only incidentally.

The attitudes of people towards these briquettes vary. Those who find it so disgusting that they throw their daily ration of *Hopma* away are persecuted by the police. The norm *Norma* is imposed with Soviet state power. As the first part of this text suggests, swallowing counter-civilized norms is constitutive of Soviet reality.<sup>5</sup> The remaining individual preferences are diminished by the serialization of the ritual eating scene.<sup>6</sup>

What do we learn from this redundancy? The obligatory compliance with this absurd norm leads to a relatively homogeneous society of people who have become accustomed to everything, have learned to get along with everything imposed from above.<sup>7</sup> Civilized and rational abhorrence are countermanded by "presenting the absurd and unnatural as something usual, self-evident which cannot be avoided," as Irina Skoropanova stresses.<sup>8</sup> The same scholar argues that the redundant plot of this "novel" is based on the literary materialization of the phraseological metaphor чтобы тут выжить, нужно дерьма наестся.<sup>9</sup>

The second part of *Norma* embraces the entire life of Soviet man by means of a list, forty pages long, of combinations of the adjective *нормальный* (*normal*) with different nouns—from birth to death, from Нормальные роды to нормальная смерть ("A normal birth"—"a nor-

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like, it's still the same. You can't squeeze cream from shit...")

- 5 David Gillespie's assumption that this concerns "life in general" is a minority interpretation (David Gillespie, 1997, "Sex, Violence and the Video Nasty: the Ferocious Prose of Vladimir Sorokin," *The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Circle* 22, pp. 158–75; p. 161).
- 6 Florence Tchouboukov-Pianca, 1995, *Die Konzeptualisierung der Graphomanie in der russischsprachigen postmodernen Literatur*, Munich, p. 113.
- 7 "The Norm is normal only for them: its swallowing creates the conditions of life in a society of equals; [...]" (M.K. Ryklin, 1998, "Medium i avtor: O tekstakh Vladimira Sorokina," Vladimir Sorokin, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, pp. 737–51; p. 737).
- 8 I.S. Skoropanova, 1999, *Russkaia postmodernistskaia literatura*, Moscow, p. 268.
- 9 "In order to survive here, you need to eat your fill of shit." (Skoropanova, 1999, p. 268; cf. also M.N. Lipovetsky (Leiderman), 2000, "Vladimir Sorokin's 'Theater of Cruelty,'" *Endquote: Sots-art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*, eds. M. Balina, N. Condee & E. Dobrenko, Evanston, Ill., pp. 167–92; p. 178; O.V. Bogdanova, 2005, *Kontseptualist, pisatel' i khudozhnik Vladimir Sorokin: Uchebno-metodicheskoe posobie*, St Petersburg, p. 24).

mal death” N 95 and 134).<sup>10</sup> The nouns are mostly derived from the sphere of everyday life. At the beginning of the list many of them are related to birth, babies, childhood, while towards the end they refer to diseases, hospital etc. In the abundant quantity of combinations, politicized terms such as нормальные политзанятия (“normal citizenship lessons” N 109) pass without special attention; ideology is viewed as a “normal” ingredient of life. Everything in Soviet people’s life is interpreted as complying with the norm. According to Skoropanova, the enumeration demonstrates “the total ideologisation of their lives.”<sup>11</sup> As in the first part, this enumeration can be connected to Soviet Russian phraseology; this time there are even two competing interpretations. On the one hand, as Juri Talvet correctly observes, the adverb нормально (normally) served as a “commonplace in everyday Soviet Russian parlance.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, in the list which constitutes the second part of Sorokin’s *Norma*, the adjective “normal” can well be replaced by “Soviet” as in Soviet nationalist clichés such as советский человек (“the Soviet man”).<sup>13</sup> In the latter case there is no longer any distinction between “Sovietness” and declared “normality.” The local is naturalized.

The letters to Martin Alekseevich which form the fifth part of *Norma* are written by an anonymous, rather unskilled letter writer, an ordinary veteran who looks after Martin Alekseevich’s dacha in the countryside.<sup>14</sup> The addressee seems to have a higher position in the hierarchy than the writer, which gives his letters, as Ol’ga Bogdanova observes, “the form of reporting of, let’s say, a manager to the landowner.”<sup>15</sup> As gradually becomes clear, the veteran suffers from a lack of acknowledgement, which

10 Cf. Sylvia Sasse, 2003, *Texte in Aktion: Sprech- und Sprachakte im Moskauer Konzeptualismus* Munich, pp. 228–34.

11 Skoropanova, 1999, p. 269.

12 Juri Talvet, 2003, “Vladimir Sorokin. *Norma*, Book Review,” <http://www.srkn.ru/criticism/talvet.shtml>.

13 Skoropanova, 1999, p. 268–69.

14 As Mark Lipovetsky argues the fact that the letter writer is becoming increasingly aggressive lays bare the anti-urbanistic aggressiveness inherent in village prose: “[...] cursing, which is intended as an embodiment of the absurdity of ‘Village’ discourse, here becomes a bridge into the realm of the unconscious, of aggression no longer expressed by means of words.” (Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 180). Thus this part of *Norma* has metaliterary implications comparable to those discussed below.

15 Bogdanova, 2005, p. 27.

he overcompensates by epistolary graphomania.<sup>16</sup> As he does not receive a single answer from Martin Alekseevich, his letters become increasingly permeated with non-lexematic interjections and words taken from the Russian vulgar language known as *mat*:

Здравствуйте Мартин Алексеевич!

Вы думаете я тут значит паши а вы там клубничку приедите с молочком поедите и на тераске анекдотики-хуетики разные а мы тут паши за вас. Значит кто так вот паши а я не общественность просветить вас и я тебя срал чтобы ты не гадить мне а мы значит торф и срать чтобы! Нет уж мы тоже срать чтобы не кулаки и я не гадить на вот и все. Я хуесор чтобы срал а я ебал тебя чтобы ты не паши а мы гады ебал вас. Я тебя ебал гад. [...] Я тега ебал могол сдять и все. Я тега егал сдаты мого. (N 248)<sup>17</sup>

Kuritsyn describes this progressive derailment as the “usual device” of Sorokin’s prose,<sup>18</sup> which often starts with the simulation of a foreign discourse and subsequently destructs it. The last four pages of this fifth part of *Norma* contain uniform lines consisting of the interjection: “aaaaaaaaaaaa [...]” (N 253–57).

In contrast to the minimalization of semantic meaning and the disappearance of punctuation on the last pages of the letters to Martin Alekseevich, the sixth part, the shortest of the book, consists of no more than 28 lines in capital letters, each ending with an exclamation mark. These lines can be subdivided into seven groups of four sentences with the same phraseological pattern, each concerned with one particular aspect of norm sociology. The norm is first addressed from a bureaucratic point of view: ПРАВОБЫЕ НОРМЫ СОБЛЮДЕНЫ! (“THE LEGAL NORMS ARE BEING OBSERVED!” N 258). Subsequently, the juridical norm is implemented by means of mutual social control, enacted with the ag-

16 Deutschmann, 1999, p. 44; Tchouboukov-Pianca, 1995, p. 114–15.

17 “Dear Martin Alekseeich, // You think I slave here and you eat strawberries there, eat with milk and tell fucking anecdotes on the terrace and we slave for you here. So I slave there and I not society enlighten you and I fuck on you to let you not fuck me and we I mean peat and for fuck! Oh no we also fuck for not letting the kulaks and I don’t fuck on everything. I fuck for fuck and fuck you to let you not slave and we scum fuck you. I fucked you scum. [...] I scum fuckwas scum magusses.”

18 V.N. Kuritsyn, 2001, *Russkii literaturnyi postmodernizm*, Moscow, p. 96.

gressive question ТЫ СВОЮ НОРМУ ВЫПОЛНИЛ? (“HAVE YOU FULFILLED YOUR NORM?” N 258). The reaction to such aggressive attempts to control somebody else cannot but be defensive: У ВАСИ С ЛЕНОЙ ВСЕ В НОРМЕ! (“EVERYTHING’S NORMAL WITH VASIA AND LENA!” N 258). Rather than the norm itself being negotiated, it is the human subjects who are adjusted to it. But everyday life undermines foreign impulses, conveyed in this case through the respectful description of an advanced drunkard: ЛИТР—ДИМКИНА НОРМА! (“ONE LITRE IS DIMA’S NORM!” N 259).

In subdividing the book into eight parts arranged in two categories, I have slightly simplified its structure. Apart from the eight parts which display redundant patterns with reduced literariness, the book also possesses one indisputably narrative device: a framework plot. This paratext connects a sociological aspect with a metaliterary one. When a certain Boris Gusev is arrested on 15 March 1983 (N 9)—the year Sorokin finished the manuscript of *Norma*—the secret service confiscates a manuscript of supposedly “anti-Soviet literature.” In the search protocol the responsible officer describes the manuscript as follows:

[...] папка серого картона. Содержит... 372 машинописных листа. Название «Норма». Автор не указан. Первое предложение: «Свеклушин выбрался из переполненного автобуса, поправил шарф и быстро зашагал по тротуару». Последнее предложение: «—Лога мира?—переспросил Горностаев и легонько шлепнул ладонью по столу.—А когда?» (N 11)<sup>19</sup>

The reader’s expectation of a traditional plot linking the first and last sentence which this record evokes is, however, dashed. In contrast to the inner unliterary parts, the framework plot of arrest and confiscation follows the “normal” Soviet pattern. The only unusual element is the detail that the expert who is charged with evaluating the manuscript of supposedly “anti-Soviet” literature is a 13-year old boy (N 13). At the end of the framework plot (and the end of the book *Norma*) the boy finishes his

19 “A grey document file... contains... 372 typewritten pages. Title ‘Norma’. No author given. The first sentence is: ‘Sveklushin emerged from the overcrowded bus, adjusted his scarf and set off briskly along the pavement’. The last sentence is: ‘Loga mira?’, Gornostaev asked, and gently patted the table with his palm. ‘And when?’”

reading and evaluates the manuscript as “4.” This terse mark has consequences within the КГВ hierarchy.

The third, fourth, seventh and eighth parts of *Norma* strengthen the metaliterary tendency evident in the framework plot. Comparable to the first and fifth parts, they are only partially intended for reading; many readers will merely leaf through some of them once they have grasped the device of redundancy.<sup>20</sup> In these parts the topic of *Norma* turns out to be literature and its norms:

[...] «главный герой» произведения—советская литература, основные жанровые и стилевые коды которой воссозданы в «Норме», так что возникает своеобразная антология ее характерных образцов.<sup>21</sup>

The third part consists of several pieces in different styles of realistic prose. Whereas the initial horse motif is reminiscent of Tolstoi's *Kholstomer* (*Strider*), the narrative style alternates between Turgenev, Chekhov and Bunin<sup>22</sup> and the rural mood evokes late Soviet village prose with its “‘patriotic’ ethos.”<sup>23</sup> Back in his native village, the intellectual Anton remembers his rural childhood in the 1930s or 40s in idyllic colours. Anton reads a letter by Tiutchev and understands that Tiutchev was his grandfather; then he finds the autograph of Tiutchev's most frequently quoted poem “Umom Rossiui ne poniat” (“Russia cannot be grasped with the mind.” N 151). As the choice of this Tiutchev poem shows, originality is not intended; on the contrary, knowledge about traditional Russian realism appears to be standardized to such a degree that the two people who suddenly discuss this piece of realistic prose about the protagonist Anton and its Tiutchev montage evaluate it as a “normal” but somehow boring story,<sup>24</sup> the latter because of the predictability of the Tiutchev poem:

20 Cf. Bogdanova, 2005, p. 24.

21 “[...] the ‘main hero’ of the work is Soviet literature, whose main codes of genre and style are reproduced in ‘Norma’, creating a kind of anthology of its characteristic patterns.” (Skoropanova, 1999, p. 267).

22 Skoropanova, 1999, p. 270.

23 Gillespie, 1997, p. 164.

24 нормальный рассказ (“a normal story” N 166).



—Мне вот еще чего... понимаешь, вот с кладом нормально, но скучновато. Тютчев там, все такое. Скучно как-то. Вот если б он чего другое нашел, вообще рассказ пошел по кайфу. (N 167)<sup>25</sup>

Back in the Anton plot, Anton digs up a second chest in which he finds a manuscript entitled *Padezh* (*The Cattle Plague*) and begins to read again. This piece, dated 7–29 May 1948, belongs to the poetics of Socialist Realism but deconstructs its clichés. The description of the collectivization of agriculture in the early 1930s during which people die like cattle<sup>26</sup> can easily be connected to Platonov's *Kotlovan* (*The Foundation Pit*).<sup>27</sup> The fact that, at the outset, two supervisors seek to impose justice on the Kolkhoz director for not fulfilling the norm seems to correspond to the postulates of Socialist Realism. But the brutality with which they burn the director alive is a clear over-implementation of Socialist norms.<sup>28</sup> This, however, means nothing to the two persons evaluating this story. They review it with the standard topos of non-expert conversations about literature: нормальный ("normal" N 202). Nevertheless the interlocutors decide to bury the manuscript again, obviously afraid of the norm-violating literal depiction of Stalinist violence. From an aesthetic point of view, neither of them finds normative poetological concepts satisfying.

The narrative interdependence of the various levels and framings cannot be brought into a logical order. It remains unclear which part of the story frames the other. Peter Deutschmann interprets this vagueness as a metaliterary message: "Norma ist wie ein offenes Rahmensystem gebaut, das die historische Bedingtheit literarischer Aussagen reflektiert [...]."<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, the structure of the fourth and seventh parts follows the principle of seriality again. In the seventh part, 32 prose texts are introduced by a Стенограмма речи главного обвинителя ("Transcript of the main prosecutor's remarks"). The prosecutor accuses somebody of violating aesthetic norms. For the sake of metaliterary incrimination the

25 "And another thing... you see, the stuff with the treasure is normal but a bit on the boring side. Tiutchev and the other stuff. It's kind of boring. Now if he'd found something else, the story would be cool stunning."

26 In this respect the story is an inverted Orwellian *Animal Farm* (Skoropanova, 1999, p. 272) and a materialization of a colloquial metaphor again.

27 Gillespie, 1997, p. 164.

28 Cf. Deutschmann, 1999, p. 45–47.

29 Deutschmann, 1999, p. 39.

prosecutor mentions such prominent figures of the art scene as Duchamp and Sorokin's fellow conceptualist Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (N 264). The following 32 examples of incriminating texts range from a third of a page to as much as two pages in length.

Reaffirming rather than negotiating the literary norms imposed by the Soviet cultural bureaucracy is also the context of the eighth and last part of *Norma*. It describes an editorial meeting at which the participants present texts they have evaluated for this assembly. In making their presentations and talking about the texts in question, they adopt the deformed words of the text:

Первый материал—«В кунгеда по обоморо»—мне понравился. В нем просто и убедительно погор могорам досчаса проборомо Гениамрос Норморок. И, знаете, что меня больше всего порадовало?—Бурцов доверительно повернулся к устало смотрящему в окно главному редактору.—Рогодтик прос. Именно это. Потому что, товарищи, главное в нашей работе—логшано процук, мари-напри и жорогапит бити. (N 301)<sup>30</sup>

Only the narrator's discourse describing the course of the editors' discussion remains comprehensible. This is how we arrive at the last sentence already quoted in the search protocol of the framework plot.

The dwindling difference between the language of the object and metalanguage illustrates the inescapable power of the ideological discourse of Soviet literary criticism. It has influenced literature to such a degree that it has ceased to be literature. Neither do we learn anything about the historical genesis of the Soviet literary norms nor about their content.

The anti-genealogical quality of norms which becomes especially evident in the eighth part is a constitutive feature of all kind of norms with which people in Sorokin's *Norma* comply. The unquestioned normality generates a pure being. All connections to a ratio behind these norms or to a reality to which they refer diminished long before the various

30 "I liked the first material, *V kungeda po obomoro*. It simply and convincingly *pogor mogaram doschasa proboromo Geniamros Normorok*. And do you know what I liked most?' Burtsov turned confidentially to the editor-in-chief, who was wearily looking out of the window. '*Rogodtik pros*. Precisely this. Because, dear colleagues, the most important thing in our work is—*logshano protsuk, marinapri i zhorogapit biti*'."

snapshots of *Norma* were taken. In order to describe Sorokin's self-reproducing norms, Sylvia Sasse refers to Baudrillard's concept of simulation:

Sorokin geht es [...] um das Fortleben einmal aufgestellter Normen, die den Bezug zum Prozeß ihrer Ermittlung, ihrer Gültigkeit und Institutionierung verloren haben. Die weiterlaufende Norm—Sprachnorm, Handlungsnorm—existiert als Automatismus einfach weiter, in ihrem entfunktionalisierten Automatismus aber wird sie literarisch.<sup>31</sup>

It is precisely because of the literary automatization Sasse has in mind that one cannot interpret *Norma* without taking into account the metaliterary parts so often neglected by scholars. These metaliterary parts suggest that there was no exit from the seemingly endless Soviet reality, but only the serial reproduction of acts of compliance with norms. The dominant device of serialization in particular parts and the all-encompassing quality of all parts put together deprive the "novel" of the conventional nature of a *textus* (etymologically: a web) and give it the status of an "encyclopaedia."<sup>32</sup>

Just as an encyclopaedia lists the achievements of other people, in *Norma* Sorokin emulates foreign texts (the main gesture of conceptualism), which are integrated in "his" text almost as "ready-mades."<sup>33</sup> Neither the narrator nor his protagonists becomes individually palpable. Narrator and protagonists diminish in an overpowering impersonal, normative reality, in the reality of schizophrenia, as many scholars have pointed out unanimously. In 1997 Genis stated:

Изучению такой «шизореальности» посвящен не только самый непонятный, но и самый непонятый роман Сорокина—«Норма». Составленная из принципиально разнофактурных частей, эта книга объединена одним приемом: автор уничтожает знак, истребляя значение слов. Метафора тут осуществляется настолько буквально, что перестает ею быть.<sup>34</sup>

31 Sasse, 2003, p. 228.

32 Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 178.

33 Cf. P.L. Vail', 1995, "Konservator Sorokin v kontse veka," *Literaturnaiia gazeta* 5, p. 4.

34 "*Norma*, not only the least understandable but also the least understood of Sorokin's novels, is devoted to the analysis of this 'schizo-reality'. Composed of parts that each have their own, fundamentally different texture, this book is united by one device:

In 1999, Skoropanova developed this thesis further, speaking of the “schizophrenic absurd as a norm of the Soviet way of life.”<sup>35</sup>

But a literary text which leaves no exit for its protagonists does not necessarily do the same with its readers. The description of a hopeless situation on the level of the plot or even in the structure of the text itself can obviously trigger a counter-movement in its readers, ranging from laughter<sup>36</sup> to a moral distancing from the textual world,<sup>37</sup> potentially allowing them to transform the characters’ unquestioned reaffirmation of norms into critical renegotiations. Tempted by the pathos of a kind of exit from the hopeless world of automatized norms, Sasse claims that ultimately the project of total standardization collapsed.<sup>38</sup> Symptomatically, however, she cannot name any single social mechanism which eventually led to the end of the Soviet project. As Alexei Yurchak has demonstrated convincingly, Soviet reality came to an end entirely unexpectedly.<sup>39</sup>

### *Den’ oprichnika*

In contrast to the ubiquitous unquestioned norms in *Norma*, in Sorokin’s 2006 short novel (*povest’*) *Den’ oprichnika* (*A Day in the Life of a Guardsman*) the norm neither occurs on the lexical level nor serves as generative materialised metaphor. What Sorokin demonstrates in this novel is the means by which social norms are imposed in a neo-totalitarian society. Whereas in *Norma* Sorokin showed the unquestioned existence of norms and people’s obedient and silent compliance with them, while excluding any genealogical dimension, *Den’ oprichnika*, on the contrary, depicts the

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the author destroys the sign and exterminates the meaning of words. Metaphors are deployed so literally that they cease to be metaphors.” (A.A. Genis, 1997, “Chuzn’ i zhido’: Vladimir Sorokin,” *Zvezda* 10, pp. 222–25; p. 224).

35 Skoropanova, 1999, p. 268.

36 It has been widely discussed in Sorokin research whether *Norma* can be understood as a comical text (I.P. Smirnov, 1999, “Der der Welt sichtbare und unsichtbare Humor Sorokins,” *Poetik der Metadiskursivität: Zum postmodernen Prosa-, Film- und Dramenwerk von Vladimir Sorokin*, ed. D. Burkhart, Munich, pp. 65–73; p. 67, 72; Talvet 2003) or not (Kenzheev, 1995, p. 204; Genis, 1997, p. 225; Renate Lachmann, 2004, “Der Bachtinsche Groteskebegriff und die postsowjetische Literatur (das Beispiel Vladimir Sorokin),” *kultuRRevolution* 48 (2), pp. 44–51; p. 50).

37 Laird in Sally Laird, 1999, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers*, Oxford, p. 144.

38 Sasse, 2003, p. 233.

39 Alexei Yurchak, 2006, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton & Oxford.

actual imposition of norms by means of violence. In the Russian monarchy of 2028 (this is the year Sorokin himself mentions in interviews), the social, juridical and aesthetic norms are still young, not yet unquestioned and need to be re-imposed again and again. The relativity and the recent imposition of the norms of this closed society are reflected in the inner monologue of a representative of a new repressive regime which leads to manifold comical collisions and contaminations, although the first-person narrator Komiaga himself hardly displays a sense of humour.<sup>40</sup>

The perspective of a perpetrator,<sup>41</sup> of an imposer of norms, is the main difference to the protagonist of Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*, Ivan Shukhov, with whom the guardsman Andrei Danilovich Komiaga shares a love of accurately built walls (ДО 24). Apart from this detail, the difference between the typical day of a victim of totalitarian violence and Sorokin's first-person narrator could hardly be greater. The most interesting point in the psychology of the perpetrator—yes, in contrast to *Norma* and many other early texts by Sorokin, *Den' oprichnika* is a piece of psychological literature—is his attempt to internalize the righteousness of the norms he implements by murder, rape and arson. Despite all his attempts to “armour himself” with “self-imposed insensitivity,”<sup>42</sup> Komiaga's monologue provides the “hypocritical verbalization”<sup>43</sup> of violence with such imperatives as А коли замахнулся—руби!<sup>44</sup> Spurring himself on to acts of utmost brutality, the guardsman still remembers examples of anti-totalitarian critique, for example Mandel'shtam's poem *Ariost (Ariosto)* (1933):

[...] я принципиально не согласен с циником Мандельштамом —власть вовсе не «отвратительна, как руки брадобрея». Власть прелестна и притягательна, как лоно нерожавшей златошвейки. (ДО 9–10)<sup>45</sup>

40 Cf. L.A. Danilkin, 2006, “Vladimir Sorokin: *Den' oprichnika*,” <http://www.srkn.ru/criticism/danilkin.shtml>.

41 Cf. Kerstin Holm, 2006, “Iwans Rückkehr. Wladimir Sorokins neuer Roman: Rußland im Jahr 2027,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 11.10.2006, p. 35.

42 Andreas Tretner, 2007, “Komjagas Klöten: *Der Tag des Opritschniks* aus der Nahsicht des Übersetzers,” *kultura* 2 (2007), pp. 12–14; p. 13.

43 Tretner, 2007, p. 14.

44 “Once you have brandished the axe, start chopping!” ДО 18, incidentally, a self-quotation from Sorokin's *Роман (Roman)*.

45 “I fundamentally disagree with the cynic Mandel'shtam—power is not at all 'as dis-

Driven by the same psychology of self-justification, Komiaga and his fellow oprichniks, having committed rape and murder, hurry immediately to the Uspenskii cathedral, where Komiaga prays with special devotion.

Another important stabilizing factor is the corporate identity of the group of oprichniks with their physical cult of Russian masculinity [...] из одного русского теста слеплены (“[...] shaped from the same Russian dough” DO 21), their ritual formula, which they always shout three times (e.g. DO 19), their collective drug experiences and their homosexual orgy called *зусеница* опричная (“oprichniks’ caterpillar,” emphasis in the original, DO 200), which is triggered by sexual enhancers.

The oprichnina, an institution introduced by Ivan the Terrible in the middle of the sixteenth century,<sup>46</sup> is the new Russian regime’s strongest weapon. Notorious for murder, rape, looting and arson, the members of the oprichnina extort protection money from civilians (DO 124). They display blind subordination towards the ruler of this hereditary monarchy (DO 161): [...] за взгляд этот я готов не колеблясь отдать жизнь свою (“[...] for this gaze I won’t hesitate to give my life” DO 53). From the cult of the Tsar they derive a general nationalist discourse: [...] Государь наш жив-здоров, а главное—Россия жива, здорова, богата, огромна, едина, [...] матушка, [...]. (DO 101).<sup>47</sup>

The Russia of 2028 has insulated itself from the surrounding world by walls (DO 8 and 38). Earlier, the citizens of this closed society were forced to burn their travel passports (DO 137). Komiaga even manages to praise the present Tsar’s father for the closed economy he introduced:

Хороша была идея отца Государева, упокойного Николая Платоновича, по ликвидации всех иноземных супермаркетов и замены их на русские ларьки. И чтобы в каждом ларьке—по две вещи, для выбора народного. Мудро это и глубоко. Ибо народ

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gusting as a barber’s hands’. It is as beautiful and attractive as the bosom of a virginal gold-seamstress.”

46 The emblems of the historical oprichnina, a dog’s head and a broom, are fixed to the protagonists Mercedes (DO 15). There are other elements of a long-time cultural memory as well. From the Muscovite point of view, Novgorod is still remembered as insubordinate (DO 61).

47 “Our Emperor is alive and well, and what’s most important of all is that Russia is alive, healthy, rich, vast, united [...] our Mother, [...]”

наш, богоносец, выбирать из двух должен, а не из трех и не из тридцати трех. (ДО 102–103)<sup>48</sup>

Such a self-censoring affirmation of all measures of the repressive regime cannot but produce massive anti-Western propaganda as well. But the temptation of the competing Western discourse remains. Although afraid of anti-Russian propaganda, Komiaga nevertheless listens to Deutsche Welle (ДО 78) but conscientiously refutes the radio's messages. One of the instruments with which he refutes the voice of the other in him is a state-imposed anti-Semitism (ДО 162, 164), which Komiaga redirects, for example, against a узкогрудый очкарик-иуда ("narrow-chested four-eyes Jew" ДО 78) of Deutsche Welle.

Whereas this psychology draws upon the experience of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, the other prophecies about the year 2028 are made by extrapolating from phenomena of the Russian 1990s and 2000s. Post-Soviet everyday life is merely prolonged in such motifs as closed villages (ДО 76), competing semi-administrative, semi-criminal clans (ДО 114), the performance of neo-animistic rituals or a strong anti-democratic mood (ДО 213). The creeping occupation of Siberia by Chinese immigrants (ДО 178) is projected to 28 million Chinese settlers—a rather conservative estimate. The dependency of the Russian economy on trade with China, which in 2028 is even bigger than in 2008, is envisaged as a kind of Chinese yoke: Доколе России нашей великой гнуться-прогибаться перед Китаем?! ("How long must our great Russia bend and buckle before China?!" ДО 183).

In contrast to the El'tsin period and—with the exception of the cases of Berezovskii, Gusinskii and Khodorkovskii—the Putin era, in 2028 Russian oligarchs, although epitomized as *неприкосновенные* ("Untouchables," emphasis in the original, ДО 190), are no longer untouchable. The negative discourse of the *oprichnik* is focused on a period of 16

48 "Splendid indeed was the idea of our Emperor's father, the late Nikolai Platonovich, to abolish all foreign supermarkets and replace them with Russian stalls. For those stalls to have two things each, for the people's choice. That's wise and profound. Because our God-bearing people must choose from two things, and not from three or thirty-three." One might interpret this as an ironic reference to Lotman/Uspenskii's "dual model" of Russian culture as opposed to the alleged tripartite "Western" scheme (Iu.M. Lotman & B.A. Uspenskii, 1977, "Rol' dual'nykh modelei v dinamike russkoi kul'tury (do kontsa 18 veka)," *Trudy po russkoi i slavianskoi filologii* 28, pp. 3–36).

years, presumably from the beginning of perestroika in 1985 to the end of the El'tsin era 1999/2000. Under the new regime, the heritage of this time is doomed to be burnt: [...] сжечь наследие Белой Смуты. (“[...] to burn the legacy of the White Time of Troubles.” DO 137).

On the other hand, Komiaga is full of pathos for a less clearly dated neo-authoritarian revival of “Holy Rus” (DO 38–39), which restored the lost super-power status by the “collection” of all Russians within a renewed empire (DO 193). This new empire, however, is—unconvincingly—described as entirely de-communized. The Kremlin has been re-painted in white (DO 107), the Lenin mausoleum has been closed and Lenin’s corpse has been buried (DO 43).

As far as cultural politics is concerned, the regime of 2028 appears almost more repressive than Stalinism. The production of literature is restricted, centrally organized and electronically controlled. All 128 Russian writers are instantly accessible via digital circuit in order to receive the monarch’s commands (DO 58–59). The ruler takes personal care of the “purity” of Russian culture, in the theatre ([...] Государь наш, как известно, борется за целомудрие и чистоту на сцене (“As is well known, our Emperor fights for chastity and purity on the stage” DO 67) as in other fields. Reacting to a malicious pasquil, the *oprichniks* obey a conditioned reflex. They anticipate the command to find and punish the poet (DO 52). Komiaga also defends the burning of books by Dostoevskii, Chekhov, and Tolstoi in terms of defending purity: [...] у нас [...] токмо вредные книги жгут. Похабные да крамольные. (“[...] in our country [...] we burn only harmful books. Dirty and subversive ones.” DO 135). In the context of burning books, he inverts Bulgakov’s famous quotation: Вообще, книги хорошо горят. А уж рукописи—как порох. (“In general books burn well, and manuscripts burn like gunpowder.” DO 137).

The centralization of culture goes even further than in the 1930s. The press is confined to three newspapers (DO 115), smoking is a taboo (DO 34). In sharp contrast to the Soviet regime the state takes care of pro-religious censorship (Не богохульствуй! “Do not blaspheme!” DO 27). The dystopian world of 2028 results from the successful implementation of Uvarov’s “unholy trinity” of самодержавие, православие, народность (autocracy, Orthodoxy, nationality).

Other details from practical cultural life hint at the 2000s again, especially nostalgia in cinematography (DO 115) and neo-monumentalism



in choir music (DO 16).<sup>49</sup> A panegyric poem devoted to the monarch's childhood (DO 105) is reminiscent of analogous books about Putin. The literary critics Andrei Nemzer and Pavel Basinskii are ridiculed as Ananii Memzer and Pavlo Basinia.<sup>50</sup>

An ethically problematic detail is a passage connected with Komiaga's listening to Western radio stations which displays a strong satirical tendency towards Sorokin's former co-conceptualists (DO 142–44), ranging from an anti-Semitic allusion to Barukh Gross/Boris Groys to a mockery of Anna Alchuk's role as a victim in the case of the exhibition *Ostorozhno, religia* (бабуля [...] лепечет—“the granny's [...] prattling on” DO 143).<sup>51</sup>

In combining heterogeneous elements from various periods of Russian history—from the sixteenth century through to the ideology of Tsarism, Stalinism and finally to the 1990s and 2000s, this short novel follows a classical pattern of literary dystopias. It contaminates elements of futurist technology with archaic social mechanisms.<sup>52</sup> In *Den' oprichnika* we find highways on two levels with 9 lanes (DO 15), voice remote control of car radios (DO 15), three-dimensional image telephones (DO 16–17) and high-tech detectors (DO 27). In the vast majority of cases, these futurist gadgets are used to implement an Orwellian surveillance state: А Государь все видит, все слышит. И знает—кому и что нужно. (“But the Emperor sees and hears everything. And he knows what is due to whom.” DO 103). What has been detected by these technologies in the field of anti-state behaviour is prosecuted with pre-modern brutality: the intelligentsia, for example, is punished in the most traditional manner: [...] секут интеллигенцию. (“They beat up the intelligentsia.” DO 145).

The archaic-innovative paradox is most apparent in the way the dystopian regime and its guardsmen address language—especially if one bears in mind that the fictitious spokesmen of archaic purity of the great

49 The mention of a цирюльник (barber, DO 9) establishes Nikita Mikhalkov with his *Sibirskii tsiriul'nik* (*The Barber of Siberia*) as an agent of nostalgia.

50 DO 59. For further allusions to writers, recent books etc. see Karlheinz Kasper, 2007, “Terror der Oprichnina oder Diktatur der Vampire? Sorokin und Pelevin warnen vor Russlands Zukunft,” *Osteuropa* 57 (10), pp. 103–25; pp. 108–12.

51 What makes it even worse is the fact that Anna Al'chuk's role as a victim in this case eventually contributed to her death in March 2008, one-and-a-half years after the publication of *Den' oprichnika*.

52 Aleksandr Chantsev, 2007, “Sotsial'nye fobii v sovremennom russkom romane,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 86, pp. 269–301.

mighty Russian language are to be found in a text by an author who was hitherto notorious for violating any possible linguistic taboo. Once most productive in materializing vulgar phraseological metaphors,<sup>53</sup> in *Den' oprichnika* Sorokin confines his linguistic innovations to the invention of words and phraseological units reminiscent of folkloristic Old Russian. Although the politically repressive moment is obvious, I doubt that Holm's association of "Orwellian Newspeak" is exhaustive as a means of describing the paradoxes of purism which Sorokin lays bare in *Den' oprichnika*, this case-study in political-linguistic psychology.<sup>54</sup>

Corresponding to the closed society and economy of the dystopian Russian monarchy of the year 2028, Sorokin draws a picture of a closed linguistic culture with walls protecting the Russian language against слова, навязанные ему в старину иноземцами ("words thrust upon it in ancient times by foreigners" ДО 80). In such a context of political hyper-caution towards everything foreign, even the use of such a rather old-fashioned French loan-word as маркиза ("marquess" ДО 57) is viewed as an act of hatred against Russia. Although unfortunately we learn nothing about the institutional context that takes care of the purity of the new Russian language, apart from learning that the monarch himself promotes this purity, in the dystopian world there must be a whole *dispositif* in the sense of Foucault with a central agency, similar to the *Institut russkogo iazyka* RAN of the Putin era, which is in charge of inventing old Russian equivalents for banned foreign words.<sup>55</sup> The device of purist lexical substitution produces the majority of the comical effects in this short novel. On the very first page of *Den' oprichnika* Komiaga is woken up by the ring-tone of his мобило ("mobilo" ДО 5) instead of сотовый or мобильник. He receives instructions from his boss through a пузырь вестевой ("news bubble" ДО 8), a utopian news bulb which one imagines as something like an interactive screen. To break into an oligarch's house, the *oprichniks* use a laser beamer called резак лучевой ("cutting beam"

53 Cf. Dirk Uffelmann, 2006, "Led tronulsia: The Overlapping Periods in Vladimir Sorokin's Work from the Materialization of Metaphors to Fantastic Substantialism," *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), eds. I. Lunde & T. Roesen. Bergen, pp. 100–25.

54 Holm, 2006, p. 35.

55 One could imagine this as a combination of Iceland's native purism and the Vatican's agency which invents new Latin words for new technological and civilizational phenomena.

ДО 25). By the time they have finished their murky business, вестники (“messengers” ДО 36) rather than журналисты (journalists) are already waiting outside the burning villa. The list of similar examples could be continued ad infinitum.

But the purist control is not all-encompassing. Internationalisms like джакузи (“Jacuzzi” ДО 8), паркуюсь, машина (“I park my car”, “car” ДО 18) or министр (“minister” ДО 179) have escaped the cleansing impetus. The combination умная машина (“intelligent machine” ДО 211) instead of компьютер merely replaces a relatively new foreign word with an older one. And the purism is directed only against foreign words associated with the West; Chinese loan words, on the contrary, are not only not erased but even viewed as stylish (ДО 112), like in Sorokin’s 1999 novel *Goluboe salo* (*Blue Lard*).

Even indisputably native Russian words are re-fashioned in an archaic manner, e.g. the vocative мамо (“Mum” ДО 171). On the level of lexicology, the particle только is replaced by токмо (“solely” ДО 40). The intelligence service КГБ or ФСБ is renamed the Muscovite Тайный приказ (“Secret department” ДО 43). In phonology and morphology the archaisms tend towards dialectisms, for example the initial в in умом востра (“with a sharp mind” ДО 182). The syntactical postposition of the adjective as in для выбора народного (“for the people’s choice” ДО 103) can be associated with solemn classicist poetry. A simple alternative flexion ending is used in в прошлом годе (“last year” ДО 179). The style of the Bylina is evoked in Победу на супротивныя... (“Victory over the enemies” ДО 12). An etymological principle is the guideline for the greeting formula Здравы будьте (“Be healthy” ДО 6–7). Sometimes whole sentences are stylized with the help of various archaic devices: Склоняется Батя над руцею моею, яко Саваоф. (“Batia bows over my hand like Sabaoth” ДО 88). On page 212 we find almost the whole Church Slavonic credo integrated into the text.

The main thrust of purist aggression, however, is directed against the use of *mat*. Interestingly, the West is blamed for the use of vulgar words in Russian as well: А Запад гниющий подыгрывает нашим подпольным матерщинникам. (“And the rotting West plays up into the hands of our underground foul-mouths” ДО 81). The oprichniks try to substitute vulgar words with similar ones. For example, they use уд instead of муде (“balls” ДО 198).

As this example shows, the purism is confined to the level of signifiers. It does not extend to decency on the level of signified or referents. This practical distinction is made clear by the metalinguistic and metaliterary discussion of Komiaga with his fellow *oprichnik* Posokha following a gang rape and Komiaga's praise for this "privilege" (ДО 31). Posokha, the second to rape the hanged oligarch's wife after Komiaga, joins the latter in front of the door to smoke a cigarette. When Posokha fetches his cigarettes, a small book with Afanas'ev's *Zavetnye skazki* (*Intimate Tales*) falls out of his pocket:

Из-под кафтана книжка вываливается. Поднимаю. Открываю—«Заветные сказки». Читаю зачин вступительный:

В те стародавние времена  
на Руси Святой ножей не было,  
посему мужики говядину хуями разрубали.

А книжонка—зачитана до дыр, замусолена, чуть сало со страниц не капает.

—Что ж ты читаешь, охальник?—шлепаю Посоху книгой по лбу.—Батя увидит—из опричнины турнет тебя!

—Прости, Комяга, бес попутал,—бормочет Посоха.

—По ножу ходишь, дура! Это ж похабень крамольная. За такие книжки Печатный Приказ чистили. (ДО 32)<sup>56</sup>

Komiaga's main argument for disciplining his fellow *oprichnik* is the monarch's will:—Государь ведь слов бранных не терпит. (ДО 33).<sup>57</sup> Danilkin emphasizes that this imposition of purity from above via the agents of repression has bizarre and comical effects:

56 "A book falls from the folds of his kaftan. I pick it up and open it. It's 'Intimate Tales'. I read the beginning of the introduction.//'In those ancient times/There were no knives in Holy Rus'/Therefore men chopped beef up with their pricks'//The book was very well thumbed and had been read to pieces. Lard was virtually trickling off the pages.//'What are you reading, you foul-mouth?', I smack Posokha on the forehead with the book. 'If Batia sees this he'll chuck you out of the oprichnina!//'Sorry, Komiaga, it's the devil's work', Posokha mutters.//'You're walking on a razor's edge, you fool. That's subversive filth. The Secret Department was purged because of books like these."

57 "After all, the emperor cannot stand coarse words."

Государственное регулирование речевой деятельности [...]— вот, собственно, главное фантастическое допущение «Опричника» и одновременно первейший источник комического в романе: опричники рьяно следят за соблюдением табу, которые нарушают здесь прежде всего враги России.<sup>58</sup>

Komiaga conscientiously defends the newly imposed norm and imposes it on Posokha without paying the slightest attention to the outrageous contradiction between the *oprichniks'* excessive deeds and their controlled words.

But the contradiction between deeds and words is not the only inconsistency in official purism. The norm is hardly fulfilled by all citizens. It is less significant that what is officially repressed serves as a means of protest for the political opposition:

Только интеллигенция никак не может смириться и все изрыгает и изрыгает матерный яд [...], не желая расставаться с этим гнусным полипом на теле русского языка, отравившим не одно поколение соотечественников. (ДО 80–81)<sup>59</sup>

The other person beyond control is the highest authority of the purist norm, the monarch himself, who uses vulgar words (but no *mat*) himself (ДО 57). Some of the instruments for the imposition of the regime's norm such as hangmen and army sergeant majors are officially exempt from the purist norm, too: Палачам и армейским старшинам в России ругаться по-матерному разрешено. Сделал Государь наш для них исключение ввиду тяжелой профессии. (ДО 147).<sup>60</sup> It is not entirely clear why this privilege is not extended to the members of the oprichnina as well (the main reason might be the comical effects). Their behaviour

58 "State regulation of speech activity [...] is the principal fantastic assumption of the 'Oprichnik' and simultaneously the primary source for the novel's comic elements: the oprichniks zealously monitor the observance of taboos that are violated above all by Russia's enemies." (Danilkin, 2006).

59 "Only the intelligentsia finds itself simply unable to submit, and spews out coarse poison again and again [...]. They have no desire to part with this abominable polyp on the body of the Russian language, which has poisoned more than one generation of our compatriots."

60 "In Russia hangmen and army officers are allowed to swear. The emperor made an exception for them due to their difficult job."

seems to take place in a grey zone. Thus they use *mat* in various contexts, for example the oprichnik Pravda:—Комяга изобретательный! В университетах учился, еб твою!—усмехается Правда. (“‘Komiaga is inventive. He fucking studied at universities,’ Pravda grins.” ДО 100). For this utterance he is immediately punished by Batia, the commander of the oprichnina, but not very severely. The same happens to Komiaga (ДО 189), who disciplines others for using *mat* but in his own speech practice is no less hypocritical, for example with the exclamation [...] пробище-убище, прости Господи (“Fucking traffic jam, God forgive me!” ДО 155). This hypocrisy is omnipresent; it even affects the discourse of the narrator, who translates the Chinese vulgar word Дяодалянь! in a footnote (which cannot be authored by the personage who utters it) as Хуй на рыло! (*кут.*). (“Prick in the snout” ДО 142). Escaping the official purism, Chinese words allow the speakers to creatively negotiate the repressive norm.

### Conclusion

In comparing Sorokin’s early work *Norma* to his recent short novel *Den’ oprichnika*, it is evident that the excessive use of the word норма in *Norma* is not paralleled in *Den’ oprichnika*, where the word remains marginal.<sup>61</sup> The almost entire lack of any prescriptive speech acts in *Norma* contrasts with the dominant role of commands in the plot of *Den’ oprichnika*. Whereas *Norma* depicts only the people’s compliance with a norm which was established earlier, whose genealogy is not reflected and which is hardly questioned at all, in *Den’ oprichnika* we learn a lot about a repressive system *in statu nascendi* from the perspective of an executor of the norm. If Henning Andersen is right that the binding effect of internalized norms is higher than that of explicit normative statements,<sup>62</sup> the norm system of the early novel appears to be more effectively repressive than that of the recent novel; an ongoing process of norm implementation has failed in the long term to abolish all alternatives.<sup>63</sup> Thus, *Den’ oprichnika* can be viewed as a less pessimistic dystopia than *Norma*.

61 The oprichnina’s commander Batia welcomes the drug-goldfishes acquired by Komiaga with the exclamation—Ага... норма! (I see... norm!) (ДО 87).

62 Cf. Henning Andersen’s article in this volume.

63 See Chantsev, 2007, p. 286.

This processuality also allows the narrator of *Den' oprichnika* to develop a real plot, although the restriction to *one* day in the life of a guard-  
man suggests that there is little variation between Andrei Danilovich's  
days or between the various ways he imposes the monarch's norm. In  
contrast, the hundreds of mini-plots in the anti-novel *Norma* seem to  
remain beyond time and space.<sup>64</sup>

An indisputable parallel between both texts can be found in the ana-  
logous schizoid split between signifier and referent: in *Norma* excrement  
is not called excrement, in *Den' oprichnika* rape is not called rape, acts of  
violence are accepted but *mat* is banned.

Although both texts address similar schizoid effects of social, liter-  
ary and linguistic norms, the structure of the texts (if *Norma* is a text at  
all), the plot construction in particular (if *Norma* has a plot at all) and  
the role of the narrator (who is for the most part absent in *Norma*), differ  
significantly. Does the comparably "classical" literary narration of *Den'  
oprichnika* suggest that this text is non-conceptualist in nature? At first  
glance it seems less conceptualist than *Norma*, although Sorokin wrote  
classically narrated texts in his early, indisputably conceptualist period as  
well, for example *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny*.

In his own evaluation of the conceptualist or non-conceptualist char-  
acter of his works after 2000, Sorokin is highly contradictory. The occur-  
ring contradictions concern the topicality and satirical character of his  
*Den' oprichnika*.<sup>65</sup> The same goes for the question of continuity or non-  
continuity between his early writings, the *Led* trilogy and *Den' oprichni-*

64 In the sequel to *Den' oprichnika*, *Sakharnyi Kreml'* (*The Sugar Kremlin*, 2008), So-  
rokin returns to the static seriality of micro-plots. In this text the dystopian society  
of the future whose norms are imposed in *Den' oprichnika* appears stabilized. Norms  
are complied with (mostly) without questioning them—a new closed and seemingly  
eternal society. This aspect will be explored in a subsequent article.

65 Москва за последние 10 лет стала цитаделью «новых опричников». ("In the last  
10 years Moscow has become the stronghold of 'new oprichniks'") (Sorokin in Ma-  
rina Suranova, 2006, "Vladimir Sorokin: Luchshe sobaki druga net," <http://www.srkn.ru/interview/suranova.shtml>). Especially when talking to Western interviewers  
Sorokin stresses his civil commitment: "Natürlich ist das ein Buch über die Gegen-  
wart. Sie ist leider nur noch mit den Mitteln der Satire zu beschreiben. [...] Nun ist  
der Bürger in mir erwacht." In the same interview he nevertheless refuses to call *Den'  
oprichnika* a satire on Putin (Martin Doerry & Matthias Schepp, 2007, "Die finstere  
Energie unseres Landes: Der Schriftsteller Wladimir Sorokin über Meinungsfrei-  
heit in Russland, Opposition gegen Putin und die Gleichgültigkeit des Westens," *Der  
Spiegel* 5 (29.01.2007), pp. 106–108; p. 106–107).

ka. As far as his conceptualist writing in alien tongues is concerned, Sorokin (implicitly) admits continuity. In his answer to Dmitrii Baviľ'skii, Sorokin describes the development from the trilogy to *Den' oprichnika* as a "return" to his early works, "to the author's free voice."<sup>66</sup> But the lack of such an authorial voice was precisely the main distinctive feature of all his early, conceptual works. If Baviľ'skii is right in his evaluation of *Den' oprichnika* as a "language 'corpse' so typical of Sorokin, the creation of a self-sufficient, autonomous language reality,"<sup>67</sup> this description would apply to many early texts including *Norma* as well.

How could we then redirect the question raised in the discussion about *Led (The Ice)* and *Put' Bro (Bro's Way)* by Smirnov in 2004<sup>68</sup> to the 2006 short novel *Den' oprichnika*? As I stated in an article of 2006 concerning the *Led* trilogy, my thesis is that the answer is implied in the second alternative of Bogdanova's reply to Smirnov "A new Sorokin or a new conceptualist project by Sorokin?" of 2005.<sup>69</sup> With his preferences for psycho-diachronic logic, Igor' Smirnov correctly observes a certain moment of self-negation in Sorokin's development after *Goluboe salo*.<sup>70</sup> But the kind of logical negation he diagnoses is wrong. Sorokin moves on in contrary negations, not in contradictory ones. In this sense Bogdanova is right: "By announcing his retreat from conceptualism Sorokin just continued the game he had begun earlier."<sup>71</sup> This is—*mutatis mutandis*—true for the dystopian satire of *Den' oprichnika* as well.<sup>72</sup> In the trilogy and in this dystopia, Sorokin simply exchanges the objects of his conceptualization. The main vector of emulating alien tongues and simulating foreign voices, however, remains the same. Leaving behind

66 D.V. Baviľ'skii, 2006, "Perestroika u nas eshche ne nachinalas"; <http://www.srkn.ru/interview/dbavil'skiy.shtml>.

67 D.V. Baviľ'skii, 2006, "Mertvye dushi na novorusskii lad", <http://www.srkn.ru/criticism/dbavil'skiy.shtml>.

68 I.P. Smirnov, 2004, "Novyi Sorokin?," *Mundus narratus: Festschrift für Dagmar Burkhart zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. R. Hansen-Kokoruš & A. Richter, Frankfurt et al., pp. 177–82.

69 Bogdanova, 2005, p. 44.

70 Smirnov, 2004, p. 177.

71 Bogdanova, 2005, p. 49–50.

72 Alina Vituchnovskaia who interprets *Den' oprichnika* mimetically as a political satire of the Putin regime nevertheless recognizes connections to Sorokin's early novel: "Putin [...] is a character of Sorokin's *Norma*." (Alina Vituchnovskaia, 2007, "Strashnaia kniga," <http://www.nazlobu.ru/publications/print1693.htm>.)



Socialist Realism, Sorokin conceptualized the neo-esoteric tendencies in the post-Soviet society in his trilogy. In *Den' oprichnika* he continues with a conceptualization of neo-authoritarian tendencies in the Putin era in combination with an imitation of the post-Soviet boom of historical novels of dystopian character<sup>73</sup>—something which even Sorokin's sworn enemy Andrei Nemzer acknowledges: "[...] by imitating the style and texture of a typical historical novel."<sup>74</sup> The device of over-realization and exaggeration which is used extensively in *Den' oprichnika* does not distinguish it from the early works either. In this continuity of Sorokin's conceptualizing device, the only thing that changes is the targets, which one could call "conceptualacra" by analogy to Baudrillard's "simulacra." As Sorokin said to Kerstin Holm: "Jedes [meiner Bücher] ist die Frucht einer bestimmten Epoche."<sup>75</sup>

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73 B.A. Lanin, 2007, "Voobrazhaemaia Rossiia v sovremennoi russkoi antiutopii," *Slavic Eurasian Studies* 17, pp. 375–90; cf. also Chantsev, 2007.

74 A.S. Nemzer, 2006. "Eshche dva 'nichego'," *Vremia novostei* 29.09.2006, <http://www.vremya.ru/print/162026.html>.

75 Kerstin Holm, 2006, "Kehrt Iwan der Schreckliche wieder?," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 11.10.2006, p. 35.