

## When Non-Negotiation is the Norm: Sorokin's *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* and Tsvetaeva's *Krysolov*

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Сложные взаимоотношения с чужим словом  
во всех сферах культуры и деятельности  
наполняют всю жизнь человека.<sup>1</sup>

MARINA TSVETAEVA'S *Krysolov* (*The Ratcatcher*) and Vladimir Sorokin's *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* (*Marina's Thirtieth Love*) are two innovative literary works in which the authors use the clashes of values and the ongoing negotiations in everyday, vernacular Russian of their time for their own artistic purposes. Although one is representative of modernist and the other of postmodernist aesthetic practices, both relate to language as a producer of communal values, and both texts appear to be born out of an experience of suspicion of, or distrust in, the communicative situation as such. The second being apparently modelled upon the first—as will be suggested in the following—both works can be interpreted as declarations of a non-negotiative standpoint when it comes to the aesthetic dimension, and as demonstrations of the artist's ability to escape, by the force of his or her own word, the world of social and ideological conflict and value-laden social languages.

### *Marina's Thirtieth Love*

Vladimir Sorokin's *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* is dated as written between 1982 and 1984, and the action is set in 1983.<sup>2</sup> By this time the

1 Mikhail Bakhtin, 1986, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Moscow, p. 367.

2 Vladimir Sorokin, 1998, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow, pp. 595–798. Quotations from *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny*, abbreviated TLM, refer to this edition, with page numbers in brackets.

Brezhnev era had come to an end and the former KGB officer Andropov was head of state. Most of the dissidents had emigrated or been expelled abroad; Joseph Brodsky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had already been living more than ten years in the US. This was the time of a quiet *post festum*, after the dissident turmoil of the 1960 and early 1970s, and it was dominated by material concerns and a minimum of expectations.

The plan economy and corruption, in combination with the *nomenklatura* system and the ongoing war in Afghanistan, kept hollowing out the Soviet economy and the morals of the citizens. People did not go to their jobs, in the big cities almost everyone knew how to change foreign currency into cheap roubles and the black market flourished. Still, nobody could foresee that the forthcoming collapse was so close. The secret service kept doing its job, and the saying from the seventies, that the only common activities you could devote yourself to without being suspicious in the eyes of the state were sexual, still seemed to be valid. The percentage of divorces was extremely high and abortion was used as a contraceptive, due to the shortage of other means of protection. In short, the moral “landslide” that had begun under the cover of mechanically repeated political slogans in the Brezhnev era was now more acutely felt.

Official artistic life was characterized by political and sexual puritanism, as in most totalitarian systems. In literature, Iurii Trifonov and Valentin Rasputin were counted among the more daring writers, and it was still impossible to mention repressed authors like Lev Gumilev, Evgenii Zamiatin or contemporary, taboo-breaking ones like the émigré Eduard Limonov. Meanwhile, *any* text by these authors, or by any other forbidden writer, could be found in *samizdat* or bought on the black market in foreign editions. Underground unofficial art had become a permanent institution, with its own clubs, exhibitions and journals, although not without repressive actions taken against them. Just as the dissidents had done in the sixties, these artists and writers kept in contact with the outside world through diplomats and journalists—not necessarily as a life-insurance, but at least in the hope of making some kind of living from their art that could make material life easier. Foreign publications, exhibitions about and books by forbidden, unofficial or emigrated Russian artists had contributed to a new demand for this culture in the West.

A rather big literary event in 1983 was the publication of the third and fourth volume of Tsvetaeva’s collected poetry by the New York pub-

lishing house Russica.<sup>3</sup> These books immediately appeared on the black market and contributed to a resurgent interest in Tsvetaeva's poetry; those of her poems that had been banned or abridged by Soviet censorship—among them *Krysolov*—now became accessible to a broader public. This fact cannot be overlooked in connection with Sorokin's novel, the heroine of which carries the same name and patronym as Tsvetaeva: Marina Ivanovna.

*Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* describes an Odyssey around Moscow, mainly by taxi, made by the lesbian piano teacher Marina Ivanovna Andreevna during three days in March 1983. She goes to see her colleagues and pupils, her lovers, friends and party as well as dissident acquaintances with whom she exchanges material assets and sexual favours. During this trip, at the very bottom of the journey's downward decadent spiral, Marina's political ideas and ethical thought undergo a paradigmatic change. The journey ends with a final "homecoming" in a Soviet factory where Marina—a former enemy of the Soviet system—joins the workers' collective and becomes a devoted communist. She breaks up with her old friends and old life-style, turns to collective means of transportation, leaves her apartment and moves in with her new comrades in a dormitory.

The detailed account of the journey is regularly interrupted by a retrospective narrative of Marina's personal background and biography. This narrative informs the reader of Marina's early sexual experiences in nursery school, how she used to watch her mother with a lover and how she was raped by a teacher at a pioneer camp. A central scene in this line of reminiscences is the description of how she was abused by her father during a summer vacation by the sea, and how she was left alone in the hotel as he committed suicide by drowning himself the following day. As a result of this, we learn, Marina has become incapable of experiencing an orgasm together with a man, but is still dreaming of the perfect meeting with a male individual who would render her that experience.

Subsequently, there is the story of Marina's first lesbian love affair and a catalogue of the twenty-eight following ones, brought to the fore by her finding a pink notebook in which she keeps photographs of them all. Finally, recollections of how she became involved in the hippie movement and Moscow dissident circles in the seventies explain how she came to

3 Marina Tsvetaeva, 1983, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy v piati tomakh*, vol. 3 & 4, New York.

adopt the dissident Solzhenitsyn as an idealized, Pugachev-like defender of the true Russia and some kind of Christ-like father figure to come that would heal her personal traumas.

Recurrent recollections of dream sequences constitute a third level or dimension of the narrative, in which the past and the present are intertwined. In one of these dreams, beginning on the island of Lesbos, HE, that is, Marina's ideal man in the guise of Solzhenitsyn, reproaches her for never *really* having loved anybody in her life. Shaken by this message, Marina instantly breaks up with her girlfriend, slaps her on the way out and embarks on a sentimental walk through the streets of Moscow. As some kind of ritual or transitional process, this is followed by two equally violent break-ups with old acquaintances, before Marina runs into the believing communist Sergei Nikolaevich Rumiantsev—an exact copy of Solzhenitsyn as a young man.

This fateful meeting is crowned by a night with this Soviet soul in a dissident's body, during which Marina gets her desired orgasm to the sound of the Russian national hymn. The next morning she accompanies Rumiantsev to his job and decides to leave the decadent life behind her and start working at the factory. The description of her life as a factory worker and a happy Soviet citizen, who has found the meaning of life in working on fulfilling the plan, follows the dramaturgy of a typical socialist-realist novel.

Initially, the text appears to be an ideal example of a neutral, biographical account. It is told in the third person by an invisible narrator and with a dialogue bordering on the documentary. The careful description of the heroine's moral development puts it in the realm of the *Bildungsroman*, while the more explicit parts about Marina's sexual experiences have more in common with the genre of soft-porn literature and its taboo-breaking ingredients, including that of the sexually interested child. In the end socialist realism seems to prevail. But the Komsomol girls' dialogue gradually turns into a modernistic polyphony of interfering voices in a veritable Virginia Woolf-like style, before finally giving way to a twenty-page monological-ideological text that seems to be taken directly from a news broadcast on Soviet radio in the 1980s.

*Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* can hardly be read as an example of any kind of realism—neither psychological, social nor socialist. It is not a typical *Bildungsroman* and it can scarcely pass even as a soft-porn novel.

Rather, it is an affront to the conventional semantics of literary genre as such. Like the play with genres in Sorokin's later novels and short stories, and in particular his author clones in *Goluboe salo* (*Blue Lard*, 1999), these stylistic remakes are reminiscent of original genres and styles, the combination of which results in a de- and even re-semanticization of genre.<sup>4</sup> The elaborate mimicry of different categories of speech is the most prominent feature of the text, and speech genre as such appears to be the semantically most loaded element of the text.

*The languages of pre-glasnost Moscow*

Sorokin's story begins, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in a biographical *medias res* when the heroine is 30 years old.<sup>5</sup> As Dirk Uffelmann's reading of the novel shows, Marina's moral-political journey is accompanied by Christological symbolism and could be interpreted in terms of a figurative transformation of Eve into Maria—that is, from an earthly to a more spiritual kind of love.<sup>6</sup> This transformation also has its counterpart in Dante and his visions of Beatrice, further developed in his *Vita Nuova*. But as a description of a descent-into-the-underworld of sorts, during which Marina comes across people from different social strata, the novel also brings to mind Balzac's attempts to write a *Comédie Humaine*. The first part of Balzac's comedy, "Scènes de la vie privée," actually includes a short story about a thirty-year-old woman, "La femme de trente ans." But if in this text Balzac gives a psychological picture of the intimate life of a young woman, Sorokin concentrates on the heroine as a linguistic subject, involved in some kind of Comedy of human languages.

With *Ochered'* (*The Queue*, 1985) it became obvious that Sorokin possesses a rare sensitivity to spoken Russian and that his great artistry reveals itself above all in the dialogue. Like *Ochered'*, *Tridsataia liubov' Mariny* gives a sample assortment of high and low language of the *zastoi* period that presents a detailed sociolinguistic map of pre-glasnost Mos-

4 On the mixture of genres in Sorokin's short prose, cf. Mark Lipovetskii, 1997, *Russkii postmodernizm: Ocherki istoricheskoi poetiki*, Ekaterinburg, pp. 256–59.

5 Marina's age is further emphasized by the frequent appearance in the text of the number three: thirty love affairs, thirteen etudes, three days during the third month of the year of 1983.

6 Dirk Uffelmann, 2003, "Marinā Himmelfahrt und Liquidierung: Erhöhung und Erniedrigung in Sorokins Roman *Tridcatataja ljubov' Mariny*," *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 51, pp. 289–333.

cow. It reflects the constantly ongoing erosion of all kinds of social and linguistic norms and displays neologisms and violations typical of the eighties—a phenomenon that was to surface and appear in print only after the economic reforms and the abolition of censorship.

First we meet the concert pianist Valentin with his cultivated turns (“Mille pardons, ma chérie...”; Ты просто незаконнорожденная дочь Пинкертона. TLM 597), then the party-member Leonid Petrovich and his pseudo-ironic party jargon (Все в норме... TLM 653), the intellectual dissident’s mixture of high and low (А что это? Диссида? TLM 657; А что, прикажешь мне в лагерях сгнить? TLM 662), the girlfriend’s slang expressions, saturated with diminutives (Маринк, я тебя люблю офигенно. TLM 680; Кайфовый уголок. Здесь любовью заниматься клево. И ночничок уютенький... TLM 680), the black-market dealer with his broken Russian (Маринэ, гамарджоба! TLM 690; Ну за дэньгами, дарагая, мы же кожу запарили! TLM 690), and the drunk American Slavist with his (Нет... Марина... ти должен... должен мне гаварить... You ever fuck a dog? Никогда? А? TLM 700; Ф писде на ферхней полке! TLM 700), and finally the underground-artist’s coarse expressions (Заебался уже [...] TLM 703; Ну, хуй с тобой! TLM 705; Ой, бля, охуенная герла. TLM 705)<sup>7</sup>—all as if overheard and convincingly rendered as text by Sorokin. This special sensitivity to spoken language the author seems to share with his heroine:

Не успевали они открывать свои рты, как Марина уже знала, что будет сказано и как. Речь их была ужасной,—косноязычие, мат, канцеляризм, блатной жаргон свились в ней в тугой копошащийся клубок:

—Девушк, а как вас звать?

—Я извиняюсь конечно, вы не в балете работаете?

—Вы не меня ждете?

7 Translations from Sorokin, here and onwards, are my own. “You are simply Pinkerton’s illegitimate daughter.”; “All according to the norm...”; “And what is this? Dis-sida?”; “What? Are you commanding me to putrefy in the camps?”; “Marina, little darling, I love you a helluva lot.”; “What a cool little spot. Awesome making love here. And what a cosy bed lamp.”; “Marinae, gamardzhoba!”; “Fell, for the money, deerest, fe have racked our skins.”; “No... Marina... you maast to tell me... [You ever fuck a dog?] Never? Have you?”; “In the cunt on the apper shelf!”; “Fucked already.”; “Well, fuck you!”; “O, fuck, what a fucking bint.”

—Натурально, у меня щас свободный график. Сходим в киношку?

—У вас глаза необычайной красоты. Красота глаз на высоком уровне.

—А я, между прочим, тут как бы неподалеку живу...

Она морщилась, вспоминая тысячи подобных приставаний в метро, в автобусе, на улице. (TLM 655–56)<sup>8</sup>

There are also a number of explicit examples of the power relations at stake in any linguistic practice:

—А лето любите?—еще шире заулыбался он, все чаще оглядываясь.

—Люблю.

—А за город любите ездить? На природу?

—Люблю,—вдохнула Марина,—Охуительно.

Он дернулся, словно к его желтому уху поднесли электроды, голова сильнее погрузилась в куртку:

—А... это... вам...—по кольцу?

—По кольцу, по кольцу...—устало вдохнула Марина, брезгливо разглядывая шофера—старого и беспомощного, жалкого и суетливого в своей убого-ущербной похотливости... (TLM 620–21)<sup>9</sup>

8 “Before they had even opened their mouths, Marina knew what was going to be said and how. Their speech was awful, corrupted, full of obscenities, bureaucratic phrases and criminal slang, and it was all gathering inside her in a taut, crawling knot://—Hello gal, what’s your name?//—Excuse me, of course, but you don’t work at the ballet, do you?//—You wouldn’t happen to be waiting for me, would you?//—Evidently, I have a window in my schedule. Shall we go to the movies?//—You have eyes of extraordinary beauty. High-level beauty.//—By the way, my house is not far from here, somehow...//She frowned as she recalled thousands of similar molestations, in the subway, on the bus, in the street.”

9 “—And do you love the summer? He smiled even more broadly, looking around more and more often.//—I do.//—And do you like to go out of the city? Into the countryside?//—I do, Marina sighed. Fucking much.//He jumped, as if someone had put an electrode to his yellowish ear. His head sank deeper down into his jacket.//—Eh... and... So you wanted to go on the ring?//—That’s right, the ring...—Marina sighed wearily, and scrutinized the driver with disgust—old and helpless, pathetic and fussy in his miserable, waning horniness.”

In such trials of strength Marina, like Sorokin, seems able to hold her own. The more significant, therefore, the point in the novel when Marina's voice—as an ultimate consequence of her political conversion—is lost in a flood of Soviet ideological discourse. And it is precisely this flooding of language, or metaphorical drowning of the speaking subject, that adds a dimension to Sorokin's text where Tsvetaeva becomes relevant.

*Marina—Tsvetaeva?*

What reasons, then, do we have to interpret Sorokin's Marina as somehow modelled upon or referring to the author Marina Tsvetaeva? Besides the fact that they have their first as well as fathers' names in common, there are a number of details and parallels that indicate such a reference. The epigraph to Sorokin's novel is given as a quotation from Montaigne—an author central to and often quoted by Tsvetaeva. The name of the believing Communist Rumiantsev is also reminiscent of the Rumi-antsev museum in Moscow, the director of which was Tsvetaeva's father. At a closer glance, Tsvetaeva's autobiographical myth in general appears to be omnipresent in Sorokin's novel.<sup>10</sup> As in Tsvetaeva's *Mat' i Muzyka* (*Mother and Music*, 1935), music and piano playing are central to Marina's life and associated with her demanding mother; Sorokin's Marina is also said to have had synaesthetic experiences from music, just like the young Tsvetaeva in *Mat' i Muzyka*.

Moreover, the scarcity of *explicit* references to Tsvetaeva in Sorokin's oeuvre as a whole is significant in itself. Tsvetaeva is not among the author clones in *Goluboe salo* and her name is not found on any of the books lying in Marina's drawer in *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny*. All major writers from the pantheon of twentieth-century Russian poetry are represented in this collection, with one exception. As if to fill the empty place of Tsvetaeva's name, there is instead the *tetrad'*—a pink notebook in which Marina registered all her lesbian love-affairs:

10 The phrase describing Marina's birth apparently echoes Tsvetaeva's poem "Krasnoiui kist'iu riabina zazhglas" Cf. Natalia Seim, 2007, "Vladimir Sorokin—um, chest' i sovest' epokhi postmoderna," MA thesis, University of Lund, pp. 46–47, [http://theses.lub.lu.se/undergrad/search.tkl?field\\_query1=pubid&query1=1188932385-7793-771&recordformat=display](http://theses.lub.lu.se/undergrad/search.tkl?field_query1=pubid&query1=1188932385-7793-771&recordformat=display).



Справа—три увесистых тома «Архипелага», «Дар», «Машенька» и «Подвиг» Набокова, владимовский «Верный Руслан», орвелловский «1984», две книжки Чуковской.

Дальше аккуратным блоком лежала поэзия: Пастернак, Ахматова, Мандельштам, «Часть речи» и «Конец прекрасной эпохи» Бродского, сборники Коржавина, Самойлова и Лиснянской.

Все книги, уложенные друг на друга, напоминали трехсторонний бруствер, в центре которого на дубовом дне ящика покоилась Тетрадь.

Тетрадь. (ТЛМ 669)<sup>11</sup>

It was a well-known fact in the eighties that Tsvetaeva wrote and rewrote her poetry and letters in a number of notebooks that she saved for posterity. The mention of a notebook in combination with lesbianism is therefore significant. Tsvetaeva's love-affairs with women was a secret kept in these notebooks, locked up in the archives throughout the Soviet era. In Sorokin's novel the writer Marina Tsvetaeva thus seems to be metonymically represented by the notebook.

The two Marinas also share an almost prophetic vision of an ideal Russian homeland. In her letters to Rilke, Tsvetaeva wrote about it as a spiritual, otherworldly dimension of the poet, bordering on the kingdom of death. As for Sorokin's Marina, a nationalistically coloured vision of a heroically suffering Russia is presented to her in a dream, as some kind of revelation, brought to her by Solzhenitsyn's prophetic voice (ТЛМ 685–86).

But it would be a mistake to interpret Sorokin's Marina as a parody or a misogynist portrait of her namesake. The satirical point of the novel is directed elsewhere. The novel rather manifests the return of some of the inconvenient truths of human nature and society that were repressed in the Soviet Union, manifesting themselves only under the surface. As a bisexual, decadent and experimental-modernist writer, Marina Tsvetaeva

11 "From the right—three weighty volumes of *The Archipelago*, *The Gift*, *Mashenka* and *A Deed* by Nabokov, Vladimov's *The True Ruslan*, Orwell's *1984* and two books by Chukovskaia.//Further on, in a neat block, the poetry: Pasternak, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, *A Part of Speech*, *The End of a Wonderful Epoch* by Brodsky, volumes by Korzhavin, Samoilov and Lisnianskaia.//All these books, placed on top of one another, resembled a three-sided breastwork, in the midst of which, on the oak panel at the bottom of the drawer, rested The Notebook.//The Notebook."

taeva appears as a worthy representative of this “return” of the repressed subconscious of Soviet society. Only Platonically embraced by the Soviet audience, in Sorokin’s version she seems to have been given back her highly political and controversial corporeality.

*Tsvetaeva’s “Krysolov”*

*Krysolov* was written in 1925 in Prague, two and a half years after Tsvetaeva’s emigration, when she was 33 years old. Together with *Molodets* (*The Swain*, 1924) and *Tsar-devitsa* (*The Tsar-Maiden*, 1922) it belongs to her folkloristic period and is a typical example of what Efim Etkind has labelled Tsvetaeva’s “polemic with genre.” By pointing at dialogue, and even disagreement, with established genres and classical subjects as a prominent feature in Tsvetaeva’s poetics, Etkind highlights Tsvetaeva’s strategies for domesticating any foreign word, making it speak of her most urgent thoughts and truths as a poet.<sup>12</sup>

During the folkloristic period it was the enchanting, delusive power of language as such that stood at the centre of Tsvetaeva’s attention, and she worked on the semantization of sound and rhythm in order to make language sound and speak out for itself, as it were. For this project the medieval German tale of the Ratcatcher—with a flute that could speak to certain select individuals of a paradise elsewhere—presented an ideal master plot.<sup>13</sup>

Tsvetaeva labelled the poem a “lyrical satire,” and by a careful linguistic casting of the characters she created what Catherine Ciepiela has described as “a deeply felt diatribe against bourgeois society, fuelled partly by her experience as an impoverished émigré.”<sup>14</sup> Still harmonized into a whole by means of rhythm and phonetic patterns, the different parts

12 Efim Etkind, 1992, “Fleitist i krysy,” *Marina Tsvetaeva 1892–1992* (Norwich Symposia on Russian Language 2), eds. S. El’nitskaia & E. Etkind, Northfield, Vermont, pp. 118–53.

13 Tsvetaeva’s singular way of transcribing the name of the village Hameln as Гаммельн, instead of Гамельн, could be explained in accordance with this musical poetic ambition. Transcribed with a «g» and a double «m» the name encodes not only the German word «Hammelbraten» (cf. Livingstone in Marina Tsvetaeva, 1999, *The Ratcatcher: A Lyrical Satire*, trans. A. Livingstone, London, p. 113) but also the Italian word gamma, which in Russian is used as a musical term, denoting a musical «alphabet» of notes or a harmonic sequence of sounds.

14 Catherine Ciepiela, 2006, *The Same Solitude: Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva*, Ithaca & London, p. 162.

are contrasted to each other as bearers and proponents of different political and aesthetic world-views, and interpreters have discerned traits of Gorkii, Briusov and Maiakovskii. With its polyphonic character and ambiguous presentation of the forces behind the Revolution, the poem has been compared also to Blok's poem "The Twelve."<sup>15</sup>

The introductory chapter, "Hamlin Town," opens with a description of a petty-bourgeois German city with its honest and chaste inhabitants, and it ends with a picture of how they all go to sleep, with nothing but practical, material concerns on their minds. This is followed by "The Dreams," in which the citizens' lack of symbolic imagination is mocked by the narrator: to them everything is what it is, nothing ever stands for anything else and there is no desire for a spiritual reality beyond the material. The only exception is the Burgomaster's daughter Greta, who in her dreams perceives promising scents and whispering voices that feed a boundless imagination.

In the third chapter, "The Affliction," the city is invaded by class-conscious Bolshevik rats that are stealing and breaking the laws of civil society, introducing their own rules in terms reminiscent of the language used during the years of War-Communism. These famished and unsatisfied invaders horrify the orderly citizens, above all with their use of a perverted language: У нас: взлом, у них: Ком,/У нас: чернь, у них: те'рн,/Наркомчёрт, наркомшиш,—/Весь язык занозишь! (к 68).<sup>16</sup> The final lines of this chapter see the entrance of the Piper through the gates of the city, after the Burgomaster's announcement of a reward to anyone who could help them get rid of the rats.

The melodious beginning of the fourth chapter, "The Abduction," comes from the pipe of this hunter, who plays a song that evokes symbolic meanings and desire for all kinds of elsewheres. He observes the material satisfaction and gradual corruption of the rats, who begin to negotiate their former ideals in ways similar to the Bolsheviks during the НЕР pe-

15 Catherine Ciepiela, 1994a, "Leading the Revolution: Tsvetaeva's *The Pied Piper* and Blok's *The Twelve*," *Marina Tsvetaeva: One Hundred Years*, eds. V. Schweizer, et al. Berkeley, pp. 111–30.

16 References to *Krysolov* (abbreviated к) are to: Marina Tsvetaeva, 1994, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, Moscow, vol. 3; "We say 'rob', they call it 'kom—'/We—'mob', they—'intern':/Devil's Commisar's of scorn—/Devkomdung: splits your tongue!" (Tsvetaeva, 1999, p. 57. All further English translations of *The Ratcatcher* are taken from this book.)

riod and the socialist-revolutionary emigrants in Europe: Начинаю вводить крахмал//В туалет.//—Самоллично вощить паркет./—Господа, секрет:/Отвратителен красный цвет. (к 73).<sup>17</sup> Eventually, they start to long for *another* Hamelin and lend an ear to the Piper's flute, which lures them away toward a new paradisiacal garden—a “Himalaya,” a “Hindustan.” But this journey leads, as in the German myth, down to the river, where they all drown.

In the fifth chapter, “In the Townhall,” the Piper has come to get his reward—the hand of the Burgomaster's daughter. But the councillors deny him this, explaining that she could be given to anyone but a musician. A lengthy dispute among the councillors follows, concerning the questionable value of music. Together they are vindicating the bourgeois standpoint that music is for nothing but pleasure, just an idle distraction. This is counterbalanced by the Burgomaster, who declares that music is violence, possession and revolt—a viewpoint that is softened up by a “Romantic” councillor: Музыка в малых дозах—/Это не так серьезно (к 92).<sup>18</sup> The discussion results, however, in a unanimous decision to present the Piper with a box made of paper for his flute, instead of the promised bride.

The Piper refuses to negotiate the prize and declares that he is a “hater of packings” and “a smasher of wrappings,” and that he is still waiting for his reward. In the sixth and last chapter, “The Children's Paradise,” the Piper exacts his revenge for the withheld payment by leading all the children—and among them Greta—out of the city to the tunes of his pipe, and further down into the river. As a contrast to the quarrelsome, post-Babelian world of disputing tongues that they are leaving behind, the children's paradise is presented as one that satisfies all needs, a world of total understanding: Рай—сути,/Рай—смысла,/Рай—слуха,/Рай—звука. (к 106).<sup>19</sup>

From Tsvetaeva's own comments, we know that she read the myth of the Ratcatcher as an allegory about poetry's exaction of revenge or retribution on everyday life, for not living up to its promises.<sup>20</sup> Over the

17 “Putting starch in//My washing./’And I’m personally waxing the floors./’My aversion:/I can’t abide any shade//Of red.” (Tsvetaeva 1999, p. 64).

18 “A moderate dose of music’s charm/Will not do us any harm.” (Tsvetaeva, 1999, p. 87).

19 “Heaven of being,/Heaven of meaning,/Heaven of sounding,/Heaven of hearing.” (Tsvetaeva, 1999, p. 106).

20 Толкование: Охотник—Дьявол-соблазнитель—Поэзия.//Бургомистр—Быт.

years, different suggestions have been given for how the drowning of the children at the end of the poem should be interpreted—in a tragic or a victorious vein. Readers contemporary with Tsvetaeva tended to see it as connected to the tragic fate of Russia in the twentieth century, while later interpreters have read it more specifically as political allegory for the fate of the revolutionary myth. Yet others have emphasized the literary references and seen it as an apocalyptic description of the development of Soviet literature and cultural politics.<sup>21</sup>

From a mythopoetical perspective, however, the end of the poem rather illustrates the cathartic act of spiritual rebirth, connected to the appearance of the lyrical “I,” according to Timo Suni.<sup>22</sup> A similar interpretation had already been proposed by Boris Pasternak, in his letters to Tsvetaeva, and later also by Catherine Ciepiela, who reads the Piper as the embodiment of the apolitical and amoral force of poetry. According to Ciepiela, the poem could be interpreted in Bakhtinian terms as staging the conflict between poetic language and social heteroglossia: “The Pied Piper” narrates the triumph of monologism over dialogism, of the poet’s truth over the truths of the “market square.” It is an allegory of the finalizing action of the poet’s language.<sup>23</sup> On these grounds, Ciepiela uses Tsvetaeva’s poem to clarify Bakhtin’s distinction between the monologic essence of poetry and the dialogics of prose.

Pasternak’s and Ciepiela’s interpretations show the extent to which the poem lives up to its paradoxical subtitle “lyrical satire.” Using a novelistic appeal to social languages, the poet speaks through her characters, creating a distance that is necessary for the satirical aspect. By means of

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//Дочка бургомистра—Душа...//Крысы—земные заботы, от которых Охотник освобождает город.//Быт не держит слово Поэзии, Поэзия мстит... (Tsvetaeva, 1994, vol. 3 p. 779), “Elucidation: The Hunter—The Devil-seducer—Poetry//The Burgomaster—everyday life//The Burgomaster’s daughter—The Soul//The Rats—worldly concerns from which the city is released by the Hunter//Everyday life does not keep its word to Poetry. Poetry takes its revenge.” (My translation.)

21 Overviews of the different interpretations are given in: Timo Suni, 1996, *Kompozitsiia “Krysolova” i mifologizm M. Tsvetaevoi*, Helsinki; Günther Wytrzens, 1981, *Eine russische dichterische Gestaltung der Sage vom Hamelner Rattenfänger* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Sitzungsberichte, 395), Vienna, pp. 5–42. Cf. also Marie-Luise Bott, 1981, *Studien zu Marina Cvetaevas Poem “Krysolov”: Rattenfänger- und Kitež-Sage* (Wiener Slawistischer Almanach: Sonderband 3), Vienna, pp. 138.

22 Suni, 1996, p. 148.

23 Ciepiela, 1994b, “Taking Monologism Seriously: Bakhtin and Tsvetaeva’s ‘The Pied Piper,’” *Slavic Review* 52 (4), pp. 1010–24; p. 1023.

sound repetition and rhythmical patterns she still manages to unite these different languages, imposing her poetical voice upon them, thus turning the poem as a whole into an advocacy for a romantic, idealistic concept of art and poetry. As we shall see, it is possible to draw a similar conclusion from the conflicts that are set in Sorokin's novel.

*Sorokin's Moscow—Tsvetaeva's Hamlin*

Sorokin's general description of Moscow and its inhabitants shows some stunning similarities to Tsvetaeva's Hamlin. Appearing on the first pages are the representatives of official, petty-bourgeois Soviet society: the musician Valentin Nikolaievich and the party member Leonid Petrovich, with champagne, delicious food and packages from special stores indicating material wealth and carnal, rather than spiritual, interests. Still, everything is hypocritically "according to the norm," as the party member laconically puts it, just like in Hamlin's "buttoned-up" society in the first chapters of *Krysolov*.

The dissidents and artists, for their part, live as some kind of revolutionary rats, undermining the social order with taboo-breaking artistic performances and by pinching tidbits from the tables of the privileged. Like their long-tailed counterparts in the poem, the caviar-eating dissidents also begin to show signs of corruption—as when one of the women interrupts a conversation by dashing away to pick up a coat brought to her from abroad. Meanwhile, they all dream of emigrating to the West as some kind of distant "Hindustan," with Solzhenitsyn as their inspiring Piper.

Marina, for her part, is dreaming of something more, just like the Burgomaster's daughter in "The Dreams." Greta, the promised bride of the town's rescuer in *Krysolov*, throws a rose to the Piper from her balcony as he marches out of the city with the rats. Sorokin's Marina envisions herself as the future bride of Solzhenitsyn, with his enticing visions of the true Russia as the alluring melody, portended by Daniil Andreev's book *Roza mira*. When this bridegroom materialises in the socialist Rumiantsev, he appears as a seducing Piper in Marina's life as well; there is even an abduction by music, with the National Hymn marking Marina's exodus from her old life during her first heterosexual orgasm.

Rumiantsev's loyalty to *his* reality, his refusal to negotiate and compromise his Soviet norms and the value of his work, also reminds of the

Piper's refusal to negotiate the value of his deeds. In the end, Marina and the Komsomol girls feature as the naïve "children" of society. They are doing their ideological homework while dreaming of a better future and subsequently disappearing into a flow of propagandistic discourse orchestrated by Rumiantsev—a fate similar to that of the children in *Krysolov*.

In addition to these general parallels, there are some intriguing coincidences on the level of details. For example, there is the recollection of a dead rat that was found in a pot of jam, which Marina interprets, retrospectively, as a sign that foreshadowed the arrival of the mother's lover, i.e. the beginning of the decay of morals. The turtle-necked sweat-shirt—*водолазка* (water-plunger)—that Marina decides to wear as she leaves for the factory, also seems to be an appropriate dress for the forthcoming metaphorical plunge into the flow of politic discourse.

There are also formal similarities. In *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny* Sorokin has made social heteroglossia and the conflict between monologism and dialogism a structuring element, just like Tsvetaeva in *Krysolov*. The novel begins with a description of a multitude of social languages and Marina's painful sense of being invaded and abused by them. From this she finds a relieving escape into the single-voiced world of the believing communists, where the individual characters' voices are gradually lost in a monologic flow of propagandistic discourse. This has its counterpart in *Krysolov*, as the disputing voices of the poetic narrative are replaced in "The Children's Paradise" by a more uniform rendition of the children's enthusiastic and visionary exclamations, finally silenced by their drowning, with bubbles as the last trace of them.

The parallels to Tsvetaeva open up for an allegorical interpretation also of *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny*. What at first glance appears to be a story of the triumph of repressive, political discourse over individuality could actually be read in the opposite way—as an allegory for the victory of the poet's truth over the truths of the "market square," just like *Krysolov*.<sup>24</sup> Such an interpretation makes Sorokin's social criticism more explicit. If Greta, according to Suni and other interpreters, serves to some extent as an *alter ego* for Tsvetaeva, Marina's experiences likewise say something about Sorokin as a naïve "child of the seventies," discontented

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24 Ciepiela, 1994b, p. 1023.

and disillusioned with Soviet society—official as well as unofficial—and its compromising attitudes when it came to artistic values.<sup>25</sup>

The Tsvetaeva connection also helps to articulate Sorokin's non-negotiative standpoint, when it comes to his aestheticist concept of art. In his critique of the *shestidesiatniki* (the generation of the sixties) and their use of the language of art as an instrument for political struggle, Sorokin has argued that such practices are corrupting for art as well as society.<sup>26</sup> But this does not mean that he regards art as devoid of power to remould the world. In his attitude to language as the medium of his craft, Sorokin rather seems to embrace the idea that guided Tsvetaeva as she wrote *Krysolov*: Текст—это очень мощное оружие. Он гипнотизирует, а иногда—просто парализует.<sup>27</sup>

Like *Krysolov*, *Tritsataia liubov' Mariny* could thus be read as a social satire, and at the same time as an illustration of the finalizing action of the artist's language, staged by discursive as well as allegorical means. By making Marina's political conversion and the disappearance of the protagonist's voice into repressive, political discourse appear symbolic for the lyric exodus taking place in *Krysolov*, Sorokin in *Tritsataia liubov' Mariny* makes an established genre serve his artistic purposes, altering its semantics and changing its position in the hierarchy of speech genres established by society and by his older colleagues. By dismantling the monopolised discourse of political propaganda from its social conventions, Sorokin thus demonstrates how the enactment of a non-negotiative monologic striving could be subversive in any linguistic context, just like the Ratcatcher's melody.

25 On Greta as Tsvetaeva's alter ego, see Suni, 1996, p. 149.

26 Cf. the interviews quoted in: Boris Sokolov, 2005, *Moia kniga o Vladimire Sorokine*, Moscow, pp. 18–19.

27 Sokolov, 2005, p. 95. "Text is a very powerful weapon. It is hypnotizing, and sometimes even paralyzing." (My translation.)