

Choosing a Different Example Would Mean Telling a Different Story: On Judgement in *Day of the Oprichnik*

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—Нет, батенка,—мягко этак, попуская, говорит Цезарь,—объективность требует признать, что Эйзенштейн гениален. «Иоанн Грозный»—разве это не гениально?

Пляска опричников с личиной! Сцена в соборе!

—Кривлянье! ложку перед ротом задержала, селится X-123.—Так много искусства, что уже и не искусство. Перец и мак вместо хлеба насущного! И потом же гнуснейшая политическая идея — оправдание единоличной тирании. Глумление над памятью трёх поколений русской интеллигенции!

Solzhenitsyn, *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha'*

Narration of the present

VLADIMIR Sorokin's *Den' oprichnika* (*Day of the Oprichnik*, 2006)² seems to be a satirical statement on Russian contemporary reality, comparing the Putin era and its policy to the reign of Ivan IV. The fact that the

- 1 “You’re wrong, pal,” Caesar was saying, and he was trying not to be hard on him. ‘One must say in all objectivity that Eisenstein is a genius. Now isn’t *Ivan the Terrible* a work of genius? The oprichniki dancing in masks! The scene in the cathedral!’ ‘All show-off!’ K-123 snapped. He was holding his spoon in front of his mouth. ‘Too much art is no art at all. Like candy instead of bread! And the politics of it is utterly vile—vindication of a one-man tyranny. An insult to the memory of three generations of Russian intellectuals!’ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 2007, “Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha,” *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow, p. 60; Eng. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 1963, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, transl. Thomas P. Whitney, New York et al., p. 97.
- 2 Vladimir Sorokin, 2006, *Den' oprichnika*, Moscow; Eng. Vladimir Sorokin, 2011, *Day of the Oprichnik*, transl. J. Gambrell, New York.

end of the reign of “the Gosudar,” as indicated in the work of prose which followed *Day of the Oprichnik, Sakharnyi Kreml’* (*Sugar Kremlin*, 2008), obviously neither leads to a *smuta* (“turmoil”), nor to the end of the world (as apocalyptic subtexts in the Ivan plot have it),³ nor even to some renegotiation of power or law, but into the deaf depths of the Russian winter and the Russian province, as proposed by the subsequent *Metel’*⁴ (*The Snowstorm*, 2010), renders the dystopian prognosis even darker.⁵ *The Snowstorm* moves us onwards by horse-drawn sleigh, tells us of the portraits of the two daughters of the “Gosudar”⁶ hanging in a provincial *izba* (“hut”)⁷ and serves tea in mugs that depict Peter the Great. Thus in *Snowstorm* we have arrived in a reality which is, when compared to *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin*, beyond history, situated in an eternal past, some loop of history,⁸ where the only way out leads straight into huge Chinese helping hands.⁹

3 The most recent examples of this are Pavel Lungin’s film *Tsar’* (*The Tsar*, 2009) and Aleksei Ivanov’s novelization of the film, *Letoischislenie ot Ioanna* (*The calendar since Ivan*, 2009).

4 Vladimir Sorokin, 2010, *Metel’*, Moscow.

5 Although Sorokin denied in Aarhus in 2012 that *Day of the Oprichnik*, *Sugar Kremlin* and *The Snowstorm* form a trilogy, I understand the three books as such—at least in terms of narrated worlds. The narrated reality in *The Snowstorm* is deeply connected to the one constructed in *Day of the Oprichnik*. Other critics agree with this claim, cf. for example an article by Pavel Basinskii, 2012, “Otmelilisia: vyshla novaia kniga Sorokina,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, <http://www.rg.ru/2010/04/13/metel.html>, accessed 26 December 2012. Sorokin’s denial of trilogy status may be due to the fact that he believes the use of the term “trilogy” (*trilogiia*) should be restricted to one specific title in his oeuvre: the *Ice*-series novels—*Led* (*Ice*, 2002), *Put’ Bro* (*Bro*, 2004), 23.000 (2005)—were finally published in one volume titled *Trilogiia* (*Ice Trilogy*, 2006).

6 Putin has two daughters.

7 Sorokin, 2010, p. 66.

8 Thus, wide-ranging historical data seem to be simultaneously present: the narrated world of *Day of the Oprichnik* as a background, the calendar reference to the year 2028, the portraits of the “Gosudar’s” daughters, Peter the Great on coffee mugs, the fairy-tale sujet—obstacles, dwarves, giants, reflections on present and past time that point in several directions, see for example: Странная семья... а может и не странная, а вполне обычная для нынешнего времени. “Strange family... maybe even not that strange, though, but completely normal for today’s reality.” Sorokin, 2010, p. 98. Or: Прадед доктора Гарина, бухгалтер, часто вспоминал далекую сталинскую эпоху [...]. “Doctor Garin’s great-grandfather, a book-keeper, often recalled the distant Stalin period [...].” Sorokin, 2010, p. 250. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

9 Sorokin, 2010, p. 301.

In the following, I will discuss why Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* is not confined to judgement on reality as facilitated by satirical narration. With reference to Hannah Arendt, I will unwrap the concept of judgement and show in what ways *Day of the Oprichnik* is more than a satirical comment on contemporary Russian life. Satirical narration has to help produce some area for debate, the possibility for the reader to compare norms (and as a consequence legal regulations) to those provided by the text. On the basis of such comparison, the reader is given the opportunity to decode the satirical text's statement on reality and subsequently to judge on his or her own terms. *Day of the Oprichnik* exceeds satire¹⁰ as it provides no space for judgement, no standpoint outside self-legitimizing narration and discourse. Rather than providing an opportunity for passing judgement on the reality described, *Day of the Oprichnik* discusses the boundaries of judgement based on a certain example from history and a certain realm of exemplary reality.

Sorokin treats this judgement issue by referring to historical narratives. *Day of the Oprichnik* refers to a tight intertexture of Russian literature, opera, paintings, drama and film, addressing the crucial question of how to judge Ivan the Terrible. In Russian culture "Ivan IV" seems to be a historical master plot, being regenerated, re-emplotted or re-enacted whenever the question arises of whether and how terror and absolutism can legitimate the growth and wealth of the Russian empire. This question seems to be negotiated anew whenever Russia feels the need to redefine Russian History.¹¹ This very issue of the political redefinition of the

10 On changes in satirical narration in Russian Literature cf. Jochen Ulrich Peters, 2000, *Tendenz und Verfremdung: Studien zum Funktionswandel des russischen satirischen Romans im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bern & Berlin. Cf. the passage on satiric norm on pp. 20–24.

11 Here I refer to the example of Aleksei N. Tolstoi, who in 1943 was working on the drama trilogy "Ivan Groznyi" (Ivan the Terrible). Tolstoi—obviously under the influence of the Stalinist reevaluation of Ivan IV—explains his motivation to pick this topos as follows: Я работаю сейчас над драматической трилогией «Иван Грозный». Время Грозного, XVI век,—это эпоха создания русского государства. Личность и дела Ивана Грозного в силу ряда причин искажались историками. Только теперь, на основании недавно открытых документов, русская историография вернулась к этой эпохе, чтобы по-новому осветить ее. Эпоха Грозного—это эпоха русского ренессанса, которая, как же эпоха Петра Великого, отразила огромный подъем творческих сил русского народа. Почему я в наши дни занялся такой отдаленной эпохой? Потому что в личности Ивана Грозного и людей, его окружавших, с особенной яркостью отразилось все своеобразие,

Russian state and power as mediated by the Ivan plot seems to be topical in contemporary Russia, in Putin's Russia. Note that Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* was followed by Pavel Lungin's film *The Tsar* and a television series on Ivan the Terrible (*Ivan Groznyi*, 2009).¹²

It is the intention of my article, however, to show how *Day of the Oprichnik* exceeds the Ivan intertexture. *Day of the Oprichnik* is not the narrative of the "return" of Ivan the Terrible. Instead it deconstructs the Ivan plot as such: *Day of the Oprichnik* deconstructs the Russian/Soviet tradition of politically or morally legitimating terror and introducing a new Russian History, a new era, by retelling, revisioning the "Ivan-story."¹³ In referring to the "Ivan plot," Sorokin does not *compare* (in terms of producing a kind of *similitudo* or paradigm) contemporary reality to the issues of the sixteenth century, nor does he try to make use of the tragic potential of the plot. Such comparison, such exemplarity, is the case with most of his predecessors, from Nikolai Karamzin to Vladimir Tendriakov and Pavel Lungin (probably with the exception of Sergei Eisenstein, in the second part of his film *Ivan Groznii* (*Ivan the Terrible*, 1946)). Nor does Sorokin propose or discuss the legitimation of illegitimate practice, because there simply is none. Instead, Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* demonstrates that the Ivan plot is in fact about a sovereign power which decides on what is right and wrong, about rule and law.

весь размах русского характера. "Right now I am working on a dramatic trilogy entitled 'Ivan Groznyi'. Ivan the Terrible's time, the sixteenth century, is the founding era of the Russian state. For a number of reasons, Ivan's personality as well as his actions have been distorted by historians. Referring to documents that have recently been discovered, Russian historiography has only now revisited this era, in order to see it in a new light. The era of Ivan the Terrible is the era of a Russian Renaissance, it has produced, just as the era of Peter the Great did, an enormous growth of creative power within the Russian nation. So for what reason have I started work on such a distant era today? Because the individuality and the greatness of the Russian character are expressed with particular clarity in Ivan's personality and in the personality of the people around him." A.N. Tolstoi 1943, "Nad chem ia rabotaiu," *Ogonek* 3, 17 January, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol 9: *Dramaturgiia*, ed. Aleksei N. Tolstoi, p. 576.

- 12 Directed by Andrei Eshpai. Maybe it is no accident that Stalin is also present in popular culture, for example in the TV series *Stalin.live* (2007, directed by Grigorii Liubomirov, Boris Kazakov and Dmitrii Kuz'min).
- 13 The most outstanding example being the revisioning of history, and, above all, Ivan IV's reign in the Stalin period, between 1937–56. Cf. Kevin M.F. Platt & David Brandenberger, 2006, *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, Madison, Wisc. & London, pp. 143–92.

Thus, in fact, the “Russia trilogy,” and above all *Day of the Oprichnik*, is about the continuous “state of emergency” in which the Russian Empire has always found itself—at least in political terms. In using the notion of “state of emergency,” I am referring to Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the logics of inclusion and exclusion of life under some types of sovereign power, which legitimates itself in a zone where the execution of law and its transgression coincide: within the logics of a “state of emergency” transgressions of a law based on human rights principles may become legal.¹⁴ To sum up: if the Ivan plot has in one way or another always revised judgement on Ivan IV by legitimating violence in the interests of the wealth of the Russian Empire, *Day of the Oprichnik* holds that such legitimation is impossible and therefore non-negotiable. So, *Day of the Oprichnik* brings in central issues of time policies, of how to narrate categories such as “past” and “present.” *Day of the Oprichnik*, above all, treats the conflict between, on the one hand, propagandistic clusters perpetuating “Great Russian History” and, on the other, issues of the Russian and Soviet past that still call for differentiation in historical narrative. As I will show in this article, *Day of the Oprichnik* proposes alternative modes of how to tell the past.

I will deploy my argument in four stages. I will first propose some general philosophical criteria for judgement, with reference to Hannah Arendt. As a next step I will transfer Arendt’s insight to instances of judgement in the literary text: above all, in the historical novel. Here, comparing passages from *Day of the Oprichnik* to one of its central precursor texts, Aleksei K. Tolstoi’s historical novel *Kniaz’ Serebriannyi* (*Prince Serebriannyi*, 1862/63), I will introduce the concept of “paradigmatic” historical narration as opposed to “syntagmatic” narration, each having specific implications for opposite modes of judgement. I propose to further elaborate the “syntagmatic mode” into what I will call a “temporalized mode” of judgement. I will demonstrate this mode by pointing out in which respect Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha* (*A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1962) forms a central intertextual trace in *Day of the Oprichnik*.

14 Giorgio Agamben, 2002, *Homo sacer: Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben*, transl. Hubert Thüring, Frankfurt/M., p. 68.

'Day of the Oprichnik' and its position in Vladimir Sorokin's oeuvre

The very fact that Sorokin's texts have a specific relationship to *contemporary* reality has to be highlighted. Sorokin's postmodern texts, the texts before *Goluboe salo (Blue Lard, 1999)*, were referential to a discursive reality structured by Socialist Realism and collective Soviet speech culture. Sorokin's main strategy in reference to the Soviet discursive reality was described by Igor Smirnov with the term самоуничтожение дискурса¹⁵ ("self-annihilation of discourse"). "Self-annihilation of discourse" describes how narration dissolves into its ideological other—as is the case in *Tridtsataia liubov' Mariny (Marina's Thirtieth Love, 1982–84)*, where the story of a young woman close to the domain of Soviet subculture dissolves into a socialist realism production novel which ends in a montage of forty pages of official Pravda discourse. In other words: in *Marina's Thirtieth Love* the narrative of the bisexual Marina is extinguished by the monstrous matrix of heterosexual Soviet speech culture. This type of narrative dynamics of fatal inner discursive conflicts disappears in Sorokin's texts after *Blue Lard*. The strategy of self-annihilation of discourse has become obsolete by then, because art and literature no longer deal with a "loss of reality," with the decline of Soviet culture,¹⁶ but instead with the very "monopole"¹⁷ of (a new) reality. Rather than a "loss of reality" which is a matter of monstrous, dysfunctional sign systems that arrive at their final performance in the "auto-annihilating" discourse, in the situation of a "monopole of reality" we have a highly productive hyperactivity of designation and nomination, the spheres of reality and its beyond being constantly negotiated anew. The enormous re-territorializing flow of capital in contemporary Russia most probably plays a decisive role in the

15 I.P. Smirnov, 1997, "Vidimyi i nevidimyi miru iumor Sorokina," *Mesto pechati* 10, pp. 60–76; p. 62.

16 Cf. "Conceptualism plays with perverted ideas that have lost their real-life content, or with vulgar *realia*, whose idea has been lost or distorted. [...] Conceptualism is a poetics of denuded notions and self-sufficient signs that has been deliberately detached from the reality it is supposed to designate." Mikhail Epstein, 1999, "Theses on Metarealism and Conceptualism," *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, eds. M.K. Epstein, A.A. Genis & S.M. Vladiv-Glover, New York & Oxford, pp. 105–12; p. 106.

17 "Monopole of reality" is a term which Jacques Rancière used at a seminar on realistic tendencies in contemporary culture and art held in Berlin, in September 2009. Amongst others Rancière used this term in connection with the issue of reality as observed in popular culture (reality shows etc.).

semiological scenario of the aforementioned highly productive hyperactivity of designation and nomination in contemporary Russia, which is framed and structured by political restoration accompanied by a specific claim on a great Past, a History with capital letters.¹⁸ Thus, Sorokin's texts are now "powered" by the dynamics of such a "monopole of reality," wherefore it is a narrative *of* the present, rather than *on* the present. Instead of postmodern self-annihilation of discourse, we now have what I will refer to below as a "syntagmatic continuation" of certain discursive dynamics. Sorokin's "new" texts are no longer destroyed or annihilated by referential discourses (e.g. Soviet text), in terms of "syntagmatic continuation": they are now *told* by their referential discourses. Thus, Sorokin's "new" texts are political in a specific sense. If *Blue Lard* can be read as a phenomenon of interval, of passage,¹⁹ *Ice Trilogy* opened a new paradigm in Sorokin's oeuvre.²⁰ The novels forming the *Ice Trilogy*—*Bro, Ice* and *23.000*—can be read as texts interfering with esoteric tendencies in Russian popular culture at the beginning of the millennium. At the same time *Ice Trilogy* highlights the ideological impact of elite pro-Putin youth organizations such as *Nashi (Ours)* or *Idushchie vmeste (Walking Together)*. The device of syntagmatic continuation (with specific impact on the judgement issue) may be regarded as the actual link between *Ice Trilogy* and "The Russia Trilogy."

Judgement as the "faculty of thinking the particular"

So far, the claim on "judgement" in this article has been twofold. On the one hand I have stated that Sorokin's novel says something about reality: in other words, it judges contemporary reality. On the other hand, I have introduced the hypothesis that Sorokin's novel is about judgement as such, about judgement in the specific sense of legitimation of a policy, of self-legitimation of the reign of a certain sovereign power in its "illegitimate" practice.

18 Cf. Brigitte Obermayr, 2010, "Das Überzählige: Versuch zum Realismus in der Lyrik," *Realismus in den Künsten der Gegenwart*, eds. D. Linck, M. Lüthy, B. Obermayr & M. Vöhler, Berlin, pp. 191–214.

19 Cf. Iurii Tynianov, 1977, "O literaturnoi evoliutsii," *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, Moscow, pp. 270–81.

20 Cf. Brigitte Obermayr, 2006, "Verfemte Teile eines Werkes: Sorokin zwischen Sub- und Pop(ulär)kultur," *Gabe und Opfer in der russischen Literatur und Kultur der Moderne*, eds. R. Grübel & G. Kohler, Oldenburg, pp. 519–52.

For both aspects we have to take into consideration that Sorokin's literary treatment of judgement in contemporary Russian reality is presented in the realm of historical narration. This, on the one hand, brings in the question of how historical narration can judge contemporary reality at all, which in turn has to do with the question of references to reality in fictional discourse. Such reference to reality can be denied in its entirety—as was Käte Hamburger's point when she stated that fictional discourse is devoid of any reference to "real"—which is: calendar—time.²¹ Nevertheless, Hamburger's harsh denial of any relationship fictional discourse may have with real time at least indicates that references to reality facilitated by fictional discourse seem to be a matter of the temporal qualities of a specific fictional discourse, given that fictional discourse does display "real" time and factual time experience.²² For my understanding of judgement and, above all, for what I will call "temporalized judgement," such an intersection of real time with the temporality of fictional discourse is crucial.

After having reflected on the issue of references to reality in fictional discourse, we still need to clarify the issue of judgement itself. What judgement is seems quite clear: it is basically no more than an utterance, a statement on a situation or subject, it can further be understood as a statement on quality, as a position of agreement or disagreement, as a decision between right and wrong. But what are the cognitive steps that enable us to "judge" at all?

According to Hannah Arendt's reading of Kant, judgement is "the faculty of thinking the particular."²³ But to think the particular, we need

21 I am referring to Käte Hamburger's concept of "Vergegenwärtigung"—Käte Hamburger, 1977, *Die Logik der Dichtung*, Stuttgart, p. 60.

22 Ricœur has introduced three levels of mimetic formation of time in narration: the level of "figuration" ("mimesis I") as the basic level of understanding within a temporal precondition, the level of "configuration" (mimesis II) concerning any practice of communication, narration and fictionalization based on the temporal precondition of the world, and the level of "refiguration" ("mimesis III"), which is the realm of returning narrated worlds to life practice. Paul Ricœur, 1983, *Temps et récit 1* (L'intrigue et le récit historique), Paris, p. 181. It is due to this principal intersection between calendar and narrated time that Ricœur speaks of "crossed reference" between history and fictional discourse ("reference croisée"). Cf. the third volume of *Temps et récit* (Le temps raconté), chapter 12: "Poétique du récit: histoire, fiction, temps." Paul Ricœur 1985, *Temps et récit* (Le temps raconté), Paris, p. 181.

23 Arendt directly quotes from Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* here: Immanuel Kant, 1790, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Introduction, part IV: "Urtheilskraft ist überhaupt das

some realm of comparison; we need the power of imagination. “[T]o *think* means to generalize,” Arendt says. If to think means to generalize, to judge, Arendt continues, “is the faculty of mysteriously combining the particular and the general, the criteria for judgement.” “This is relatively easy,” Arendt says (in close reference to Kant), “if the general is given—as a rule, a principle, a law—so that the judgment merely subsumes the particular under it.” But as judgement’s key issue seems always to be the realm of comparison, the “general,” “the difficulty becomes great ‘if only the particular be given for which the general has to be found.’”²⁴

This “difficulty” of finding a general realm of judgement for a particular example is especially valid in any case of historical narration, as such narration would always imply that it does not merely tell the past but above all says something about and “judges” the present. Historical narration mainly uses the past as an example, a proof for some argument or moral. In historical narration the past events are the very particular that asks for (proposes or implies) some general. This mode of judgement is traditionally known as the “paradigmatic” mode and is opposed to the “syntagmatic” mode.²⁵ The paradigmatic mode, as has been sketched out above, uses “history as an example” for some general, the historical narrative leads to or ends in a certain moral-philosophical system. Thus, we assume, the same moral could very well be told by a different story. This mode, we may add, implies fictionalized distance from the narrated facts and *fictae*, as narrated reality seems to serve “but as an example” for some “general,” for certain rules in a moral system.

The syntagmatic mode, on the contrary, unfolds the “example as history,” *temporalizing* the narrated reality and the pre-given judgement, turning the straight paradigmatic “fabula” or moral at least into a “kasus” (*case*). A *case* questions our general criteria, the narrated world thus intersecting with the reality of the reader, temporalizing it. In the syntag-

Vermögen, das Besondere als enthalten unter dem Allgemeinen zu denken. Ist das Allgemeine (die Regel, das Princip, das Gesetz) gegeben, so ist die Urtheilskraft, welche das Besondere subsumirt [...] bestimmend. Ist aber nur das Besondere gegeben, wozu sie das Allgemeine finden soll, so ist die Urtheilskraft bloß reflectirend.”

24 Hannah Arendt, 1982, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Chicago, Ill., p. 76.

25 I follow Stierle's distinction here: Karlheinz Stierle, 1973, “Geschichte als Exemplum. Exemplum als Geschichte. Zur Pragmatik und Poetik narrativer Texte,” *Geschichte—Ereignis und Erzählung*, eds. R. Koselleck & W.-D. Stempel, Munich, pp. 347–76.

matic mode, history displays an endless particularity of stories instead of reproducing some general moral.²⁶ The ending of syntagmatic narration does not consist of a final moral, but of unexpected continuations. While the paradigmatic mode offers a cosily horrifying fictional framing of an “*as if now*,” the syntagmatic mode loosens that framing, insisting on the question “*when*”? The syntagmatic mode seems to interfere with the fictional “making present” of past events,²⁷ it alters our experience of presence itself. The “general,” which, according to Kant and Arendt, is so crucial for judgement, is itself temporalized in the syntagmatic mode. It is temporalized, because the syntagmatic mode may be said to expose the very ‘artificial singularity’ of the particular, the very criteria for the particular to serve as an example.²⁸ Here, the example appears to be more than an example, it regains singularity. The syntagmatic mode shows that to choose a different example would mean to tell a different story.²⁹

General criteria for a (particular?) day: syntagmatic vs. paradigmatic narration

At first glance, Sorokin’s *Day of the Oprichnik* seems to be highly paradigmatic. We have a “particular” day in the life of a “particular” oprichnik, we have a single oprichnik in his weird reality, performing his cruel schedule while all the time self-legitimizing himself. The criteria for his performance, the “general law,” seems to be given in such general exten-

26 I am referring to Jolles’ definition of the *Kasus* (“case”) here: André Jolles, 1958, *Ein-fache Formen*, Darmstadt, pp. 171–99. According to Jolles, the form of the “Kasus” asks for the criteria of norm and judgement, but never decides the “case”: “Die Entscheidung war gefallen—damit hörte der Kasus auf, Kasus zu sein.” Stierle draws on Jolles as well. Stierle’s definition of syntagmatic historical narration is as follows: the researcher holds that in the syntagmatic mode history exceeds the moral-philosophical horizon and enters a syntagmatic one, a horizon characterized by “unüberschaubare Verflochtenheiten, [die] sich immer weiter aufdecken und doch nie abschließend erkennen lassen. Erst hier erscheint *die* Geschichte als Inbegriff aller möglichen Geschichten, deren Elemente das Faktische berühren.” Stierle, 1973, p. 360.

27 Hamburger, 1977, p. 60. According to Hamburger, this “making present” (“Vergegenwärtigung”) by fictional narration, by a narrative instance that cannot be dated or located in real time or space, stands outside calendar time or geographic space, see Hamburger, 1977, pp. 82 and 93–94.

28 Mirjam Schaub, 2010, *Das Singuläre und das Exemplarische: Zu Logik und Praxis der Beispiele in Philosophie und Ästhetik*, Berlin, p. 213.

29 Cf. “This exemplar is and remains a particular that in its very particularity reveals the generality that otherwise could not be defined.” Arendt, 1982, p. 77.

sions that there is hardly anything which would differentiate it from the particular. Throughout the oprichnik's particular day, all he does is execute "the law." Significantly, many a deed performed by the oprichnik, at least almost each chapter in his schedule, concludes with phrases such as *Важное дело*, *Нужное дело*, *Хорошее дело* ("important work," "necessary work," "good work")—or some legitimization of this kind.³⁰

The phrases quoted above are uttered while the oprichnik fulfils his first task at the very start of his day: they are uttered while the oprichniks rape a nobleman's wife before brutally exterminating his family and the whole of his property. The cruel mission is concluded with an absolution referring to some absolute "Gosudar'-Truth." I give an extensive quotation of the passage in order to demonstrate the self-legitimizing dynamics—especially the rhythm!—and its lexical material.

Выезжаю на Рублевый тракт. [...] Это—наша полоса. Государственная. Покуда жив и при деле государевом—буду по ней ездить.

Расступаются машины, завидя красный «мерин» опричника с собачьей головой. [...]

Гойда! Гойда!—бормочут опричники, отворачиваясь.

Важное дело.

Нужное дело.

Хорошее дело.

Без этого дела *наезд* все одно, кто конь без наездника... без узды... конь белый, конь... красивый... умный... замороженный... конь... нежный... конь-огонь... сладкий... сахарный конек без наездника... и без узды... бес узды... с бесом белым...

30 The oprichnik's night-party with *bania* ("sauna") and *akvarium* (some synthetic drug) to celebrate his "profitable" day ("prikhodnyi", / "in the black" Sorokin, 2006, p. 188, Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 161) has a specific impact on the realm of self-legitimation. This chapter provides an insight into the brotherhood, with clear reference to Eisenstein's travesty oprichnik feat in *Ivan the Terrible* part two. In Sorokin the feat celebrates corporeal self-legitimation, symbolized as a verbal chain of sado-masochist erections and perversions (the oprichniks forming a circle to penetrate each other). Above all the verbal transformation of the phallic symbols in Eisenstein into the big act of "brother fucking" (with monstrous synthetic organs) has to be mentioned here. Eisenstein's symbolic language with regards to the scenes concerning the dance of the oprichnina is extensively analyzed in: Yuri Tsivian, 2002, *Ivan the Terrible*, London, pp. 52–63.

through the eyes of the “mediocre” as well as mediating hero,³⁴ Prince Serebriannyi himself, whose personal fate is interlinked with great history, thus providing the reader with a “human” view on those historical events. Nevertheless, Sorokin is the first writer of fiction who has the oprichnik as the protagonist—the hero. Thus, with the oprichnik being the hero, in Sorokin, there is no instance, no figure, that would communicate or qualify the oprichnik’s performance. In Tolstoi, meanwhile, we do have such a figure, in Prince Serebriannyi. In Tolstoi’s novel we initially encounter the oprichnina and their dreadful performance through Serebriannyj’s naive eyes, at this point completely convinced of the justice of Ivan’s reign.³⁵ The issues of arbitrary violence and conflicts within the leading class, especially those between noblemen and oprichnina, are presented within the moral frame of this conviction. Prince Serebriannyj represents the instance of some “general” in the sense mentioned above. Prince Serebriannyi, who, after several years on duty in Poland, returns to Russia in 1565, the year the oprichnina was founded, becomes an eyewitness to what he judges to be crimes committed by the oprichnina.

Thanks to heterodiegetic narration (and due to the fact that the Prince has spent some time abroad and is therefore not informed about Russia’s actual reality), in Tolstoi’s text the protagonist represents a critical view on what he is told is the execution of (new) law and order:

—Какая опричнина? Что это за опричники?—спросил князь.
—Да провал их знает! Называют себя царскими людьми. Мы-

34 Cf., Georg Lukács, 1955, *Der historische Roman*, Berlin, pp. 25–26: “Der ‘Held’ der Scottschen Romane ist stets ein mittelmäßiger, durchschnittlicher englischer Gentleman.” This type of hero is a go-between figure—in terms of mediating between “great History” and the average private life.

35 Cf.: Без лести и кривды радел Никита Романович к юному Иаонну. Твердо держал он свое крестное целование, и ничто не пошатнуло бы его крепкого стоятельства за государя. [...] Впрочем, он не один так мыслил. Все русские люди любили Ионна всею землею. Казалось, с его праведным царством настал на Руси новый золотой век, и монахи, перечитывая летописи, не находили в них государя, равного Ионна. “Nikita Romanovich was truly convinced and sincerely devoted to the young Tsar Ivan. He kept firmly to the oath he had taken on the cross and nothing could have shaken his unyielding loyalty towards the sovereign. [...] But then, he was not the only one who felt like this. All the Russian people, all the country loved Ivan. It seemed that, with his righteous reign, a new golden age had come to Russia, and the monks, poring over their chronicles did not find in them a sovereign equal to Ivan.” A.K. Tolstoi, 1993, *Kniaz’ Serebriannyi*, Moscow, p. 8, Eng. A.K. Tolstoy, 2007, *The Silver Prince*, Bloomington, Ind., pp. 2–3.

де люди царские, опричники! А вы-де земщина! Нам-де вас грабить да одирать, а вам-де терпеть да кланяться. Так-де царь указал!

Князь Серебрянный вспыхнул.

—Царь указал обижать народ! Ах они окаянные! Так кто они такие? Как вы их, разбойников, не перевяжете!³⁶

Besides the protagonist's perspective we have a reflecting and variably focusing narrator in Tolstoi's novel. He has insight not only into his hero's reflections, but also into the Tsar's, whose inner conflicts are reported in great detail.

After passing judgement on Prince Serebriannyi's attack on the oprichniks, an attack which Serebriannyi regards as execution of the law, the Tsar is reported to kneel down and pray. Our narrator has insight into this scene and is able to tell us what the Tsar is praying for. In his prayer he asks for legitimation for his decision: he asks for God's help in what he defines as his mission:

Слобода покрылась мраком, месяц зарождался за лесом. Страшен сказался темный дворец [...] Одно незакрытое окно светилось, словно окно чудовища. То была царская опочивальня. Там усердно молился царь.

Молился он о тишине на святой Руси, молился о том, что дал ему Господь побороть измену и непокорность, чтобы благословил его окончить дело великого поту, сравнять сильных со слабыми, чтобы не было на Руси одного выше другого, чтобы все были в равенстве, а он бы стоял один над всеми, аки дуб во чистом поле.³⁷

36 "What do you mean? Who are those oprichniki?" asked the Prince. "The devil take them! They call themselves the Tsar's people. We are the tsar's people, the oprichniki", they tell us. 'And you are the outsiders', they say. 'It is for us to strip and fleece you, it is for you to suffer and to bow. That's how the Tsar has ordered it'. Serebriannyi flared up. 'The Tsar has ordered them to oppress the people. The devils! Who are they? Why don't you bind them like the outlaws that they are?'" Tolstoi, 1993, p. 9; Eng. Tolstoy, 2007, p. 4.

37 "Night settled on the village. The darkened palace seemed terrifying [...] Only one open window was lit up, like the monster's eye. It was the imperial bedroom. In there, the Tsar was praying fervently. He was praying for peace in holy Russia, praying for the Lord to give him victory over treason and sedition, so that he could finish the

After having reported the Tsar's prayers, the narrator's focus pans from the Christian heaven to the nightly sky—and beyond: he allows the “stars,” as representatives of cosmic time (aeon), to pass judgement on the outcome of the Tsar's actions. The cosmic evaluation of the Tsar's deed is the very instance when the narrator allows for some criticism of the Tsar's decision, letting “the stars” say that the Tsar has acted without asking them, without their permission:

Молится царь и кладет земные поклоны. Смотрят на него звезды в окно косящатое, смотрят светлые, притуманившись, притуманившись, будто думая: «Ах, ты гой еси, царь Иван Васильевич! Ты затеял дело не в добрый час, ты затеял, нас не спрашаючи [...]».³⁸

In Sorokin's novel, the omnipresent word and phrases of the “Gosudar” (a name that may refer to Tsar, Majesty or President³⁹) in the oprichnik's world is the final instance of absolution. In contrast to Tolstoi, these phrases are immediately present and not mediated by any narrative instance that could be traced back to any other source but the oprichnik's mental and moral horizon. Phrases quoting the “Gosudar” absorb any doubts about law and order, and, above all, they neutralize one of the central conflicts in the Ivan plot: the conflict between state power and the church. It is only in the continuation of his apocalyptic morning dream at the end of his particular day that we have some indication of a separation of powers, some conflict between the oprichnina and the Gosudar'. In his final dream, the oprichnik places Russia's fate in the hands of his brotherhood, and refers to “God” rather than the “Gosudar”:⁴⁰

great struggle of levelling the strong and the weak, so that in Russia there would be none higher than the next one, but only himself remaining aloof, above all others, like an oak in a wide-open field.” Tolstoi, 1993, p. 74; Eng. Tolstoy, 2007, p. 73–74.

- 38 “The Tsar prays and makes prostrations. The stars look down upon him through the mullioned window, bright yet dimmed – dimmed, it seems, as if they are thinking: ‘Oh you Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich! You have contrived an ill-timed task, you have contrived it without asking us [...]’” Tolstoi, 1993, p. 74; Eng. Tolstoy, 2007, p. 74.
- 39 “Gosudar” is the name of a symbolic void, a law-giving instance which is omnipresent but excluded from any discursive spheres, nor to be put in charge in any way.
- 40 This may be the nucleus for the conflict executed in the final story of *Sugar Kremlin*, when “Komiaga” (the same name as the oprichnik in *Day of the Oprichnik*) is shot by his comrade, to whom the Tsar is said to have offered the crown. The killing of

Поживем, поживем. Да и другим дадим пожить. [...] Конь мой белый, погоди... не убегай... [...] живы, ох, живы... живы кони, живы люди... все живы покуда... все... вся опричнина... вся опричнина родная. А покуда жива опричнина, жива и Россия. И слава Богу.⁴¹

We have seen that the non-negotiable, even apparently absent and as such omnipresent “general law” in Sorokin is based on homodiegetic narration: the I-narrator is not only the eyewitness but also an incapacitated, though totally authorized, instance of execution of what is “sacred law,” the Gosudar’s will or word. Significantly, there is therefore no level where the execution of law could be questioned or negotiated in Sorokin. Lacking any “general” that would actively enable us to reach such a level within the text, judgement seems to be totally abolished within the realm of the text.

Thus Sorokin’s homodiegetic I-narrator, using present-tense narration, is clearly opposed to Tolstoi’s heterodiegetic narrator and the novel’s hero. While heterodiegetic, past-tense narration is widely used in historical narratives, since it is able to simulate factual discourse,⁴² we do not have any “objective” focalization in Sorokin, just the unmediated, unreflected first-person narrator, who is immediately performing what he is telling. This is a clear perversion of the first-person narrator in the Scottian version of historical narration, as the observer and narrator implode in one instance. Tolstoi’s narrator differs from the Scottian paradigm as well, though moving in a different, almost metafictional dimension, when reflecting on the fact that he is just reconstructing, im-

Komiaga is followed by the symbolic shooting of a/the Sugar Kremlin. The Russian version of *Sugar Kremlin* ends in “gosudarc” type (imitating medieval script) and the double eagle, as depicted on the standard of Russia’s president. Sorokin, 2008, pp. 347–48.

41 “We’ll live, we’ll live. And we’ll let others live as well. [...] My white stallion, wait... don’t run away... [...] oh yes, we’re alive... stallions are alive, people alive... all alive till now... everyone... the entire oprichnina... our entire kindred oprichnina. And as long as the oprichniks are alive, Russia will be alive./And thank God.” Sorokin, 2006, p. 223; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 191.

42 Gérard Genette, 1990, “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative,” *Poetics Today* 11 (4), pp. 755–74.

aging.⁴³ Nevertheless, such devices of focalization, switching the level of discourse, intensify the reader's experience of a fictional "as if (now)."

Since the first-person narrator in Sorokin is stripped of such framing and immediately transmits an absolute instance, the safety distance of fictional framing breaks down. The temporal reality of fictional discourse here switches from "as if (now)?" to "when?" The reader cannot but share the intermediacy of the I-narrator, with the position of an eyewitness to some hyperreal. The rare indications of a heterodiegetic narrator which we have in Sorokin bring the events even closer to some temporal reality, a temporality that is even dated. We have an indication for a heterodiegetic narrator in some of the footnotes, one of them explaining the meaning of a computer game, which is said to have become popular "in new Russia after the well-known events of November 2027."⁴⁴ This calendar indication of an object from the narrated world dates the burning of passports "eighteen years ago,"⁴⁵ in 2009, a future quite close to the present as experienced by the reader of a "utopian" novel from 2006. Such an indication further presses the question of "when?"

The multi-dimensioned lack of distance as described above, together with the insistence on the question of "when," produce a fictitious factuality, some symptomatic temporal hyperreality. This temporal "real" is symptomatic for the History-Hype in Putin's Russia.

This is the basis for what I propose to call the *syntagmatic temporalization of judgement*. Refraining from a re-evaluation or revising of history (History) or the present with reference to the historical paradigm, syntagmatic temporalization dissolves both the endings and the conclusion, but temporalizes the historical narrative itself. Temporalized judgement thus produces narrations of the present, of present-day issues (rather than *on* the present, using the past only as an example). Temporalized

43 Cf.: Таков ты ли был, князь Никита Романович, каким воображаю тебя,—про то знают лишь стены кремлевские да древние дубы подмосковные! "Were you really as I imagined you, Prince Nikita Romanovich? Only the Kremlin walls and the ancient Moscow oaks can tell!" Tolstoi, 1993, p. 103; Eng. Tolstoy, 2007, p. 106.

44 Гоцзе (Государственная граница)—китайская 4-D игра, ставшая популярной в Новой России после известных событий ноября 2027 года. "A Chinese 4-D game that became popular in New Russia after the well-known events of November 2027." Sorokin, 2006, p. 160; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 137.

45 Sorokin, 2006, p. 137; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 116.

judgement reveals the actual issues of the present day, it syntagmatically continues the story.

Today's issues—temporalized judgement

In this chain of syntagmatic continuation, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* plays a key role in Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik*. Here we must, of course, not forget that Sorokin has always been interested in deconstructing the Solzhenitsyn-topos.⁴⁶ In addition, Vladimir Voinovich's *Moskva 2042* (*Moscow 2042*, 1986)—with Solzhenitsyn as the author Karnavalov, who, in Voinovich's utopian narrative, returns to Moscow as a new Tsar' (sic)—seems to constitute another hypertextual layer here.

In order to illustrate one (crucial) link in the chain of syntagmatic continuation, I will, however, confine myself to two very obvious references to Solzhenitsyn, in order to show that with this continuation of the Ivan plot Sorokin radicalizes his statement on a contemporary "state of emergency," substituting the victim of the totalitarian Stalin regime (Ivan Denisovich) with the criminal protagonist of some (retro)future totalitarian instance (Komiaga, the oprichnik). Thus, Sorokin addresses the re-evaluation of the Stalin era that can be observed in Putin's Russia in close connection with the popularization of the great Russian Past and History. Sorokin's substitution of "Ivan Denisovich" with "Komiaga, an oprichnik" is more than a travesty of victim and torturer in state duty. This substitution seems to state that there *are* past issues in contemporary Russian culture, there are issues that call for discussion and narration—other than the official policy would have it. Above all, this substitution explores literary modes of narration of past events and their possible references to some contemporary reality.

The reference to Solzhenitsyn's *povest'* in Sorokin is already made obvious by the title. Here, too, the paradigmatic meets the syntagmatic: with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn's approach unfolds its paradigmatic claim in the very title; the text is meant to depict "one day" (*odin den'*) which shall serve as an *example* for all the "three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days" plus "the three extra ones [...]"

46 Just think of the dissident issue in *Tridtsataia Liubov' Mariny* (*Marina's Thirtieth Love*, 1982–84).

because of the leap years....⁴⁷ of Ivan Denisovich's time in the GULAG, and represent life in GULAG as such:⁴⁸

Засыпал Шухов вполне довольный. На дню у него выдалось сегодня много удач. [...] Прошёл день, ничем не омрачённый, почти счастливый. Таких дней в его сроке от звонка до звонка было три тысячи шестьсот пятьдесят три. Из-за високосных годов—три дня лишних набавляюсь.⁴⁹

Sorokin's title most obviously alludes to Solzhenitsyn, leaving out the "One," and thus the claim of a representative particularity, a particularity that has been accidentally picked out. The storylines of the two texts are, however, quite similar: both Shukhov and Komiaga perform their agenda, ordered and directed by a higher instance, according to certain strict rules, the very beginning of *Day of the Oprichnik* and its reference to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* prove the syntagmatic chain rather than some interchangeability of protagonists. The oprichnik's awakening interrupts a dream often dreamt by him. It is a dream of the apocalyptic white horse which the dreamer tries to capture, since it is the "horse of the horses."⁵⁰ Instead of the apocalyptic showdown, the oprichnik's day begins with the mobile phone ringing, an acoustic signal that, as I will show beneath, seems to originate in Solzhenitsyn.

47 Solzhenitsyn, 2007, p. 114; Eng. Solzhenitsyn, 1963, p. 210.

48 Such a claim was made in Aleksandr Tvardovskii's foreword to the povest' when first published in the journal *Novyi mir*. Tvardovskii points out that Solzhenitsyn has chosen "a very ordinary day" for his *povest'*. Solzhenitsyn, 1963, p. xxiii.

49 "Shukhov went to sleep, and he was very happy. He'd had a lot of luck today. [...] Nothing had spoiled the day and it had been almost happy." Solzhenitsyn, 2007, p. 114; Eng. Solzhenitsyn, 1963, pp. 209–10.

50 Remarkably enough, the apocalyptic narration is interrupted in Sorokin's novel (Komiaga continues this dream when falling asleep), while it is part of the preface to Aleksei Ivanov's *Letoischislenie ot Ioanna*, thus paradigmatically framing it. Cf. Ivanov, 2009, p. 5–7: В подвальной камере дворца монах читал о конце света. [...]—И я услышал одно из четырех животных, говорящее громовым голосом: иди и смотри! Я взглянул, и вот конь белый, и на нем всадник, имеющий лук и дан был ему венец... "A monk was reading about the end of the world in a cellar chamber. [...] Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come and see!' I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown..."

Мое мобило будит меня:

Удар кнута—вскрик.

Снова удар—стон.

Третий удар—хрип.

Поярок записал это в Тайном Приказе, когда пытали дальневосточного воеводу. Это музыка разбудит мертвого.

—Комяга слушает,—прикладываю *холодное* мобило к сонно-теплому уху.⁵¹

The macabre ring of the mobile phone—the screaming of some tortured person—seems to be some echo from the world of Solzhenitsyn’s *Ivan Denisovich* (where we have but implicit violence), whose day, also begins with an acoustic signal, a signal which dies away in the icy world of the camp:

В пять часов утра, как всегда, пробило подъём—молотком об рельс у штабного барака. Перерывистый звон слабо прошёл сквозь стёкла, *намёрзшие* в два пальца, и скоро затих, *холодно* было, и надзирателю неохота была долго рукой махать.⁵²

“I put the *cold* mobilov to my warm, sleepy ear.” We might read this first action of Sorokin’s awakened oprichnik as some *verbal* link to Solzhenitsyn, a provocative short-cut in the chain of syntagmatic continuation. Radically continuing the story of Ivan Denisovich, the Stalin victim story, with Komiaga’s, the executor of Ivan’s “law,” Sorokin opens a new chapter on the question of how literature can treat historical realities, of how to narrate certain layers of the past that are beyond official paradigms of “History.” Syntagmatic narration sticks with the very temporal reality of the “example.” In our case, it sticks with the issue

51 “My mobilov awakens me: One crack of the whip—a scream. Two—a moan. Three—the death rattle. Poiarok recorded it in the Secret Department, when they were torturing the Far Eastern general. It could even wake a corpse. I put the *cold* mobilov to my warm, sleepy ear.” Sorokin, 2006, pp. 5-6; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 3, my emphasis.

52 “Reveille was sounded, as always, at 5 a.m.—a hammer pounding on a rail outside camp HQ. The ringing noise came faintly on and off through the windowpanes covered with ice more than an inch thick, and died away fast. It was *cold* and the warder didn’t feel like going on banging.” Solzhenitsyn, 2007, p. 15; Eng. Solzhenitsyn, 1963, p. 1.

of legitimation of state terror for the sake of the country. Instead of recalling the paradigmatic absolution, which the Ivan plot would provide, Sorokin seems to pinpoint another issue that comes with the temporal reality of the “oprichnina-example,” the issue of Stalin terror. Sorokin thus radically highlights the implications of Putin’s policy, which tends to interpret the Stalin era above all as a time of greatness for the Russian state. While Ivan and Stalin have long been interchangeable in Russian/Soviet historical narration, with “Ivan” legitimizing “Stalin,” Sorokin stops paradigmatic substitution but instead continues the chain with another name: Putin.