

## The Old New Russian: The Dual Nature of Style and Language in *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin*

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IN 2006 Vladimir Sorokin published a novel, *Den' oprichnika* (*Day of the Oprichnik*), which depicts Russia, in the year 2028, as a nationalist country ruled with an iron fist which has completely shut itself off from the West by constructing an impenetrable wall. The story, which has been read by many as a social commentary on current Russian politics and government, can be seen as a response to the revival in recent decades of Russian nationalist and Eurasianist movements.<sup>1</sup> The Russia of the novel is an authoritarian empire governed by a tsar with the help of a group of secret police, the *oprichnina*. In an interview with the German magazine *Spiegel*, Sorokin said: "I just imagined what would happen to Russia if it isolated itself completely from the Western world—that is, if it erected a new Iron Curtain. [...] This would mean that Russia would be overtaken by its past, and our past would be our future."<sup>2</sup>

In *Day of the Oprichnik* Sorokin adapted for a new Russian reality the classical utopias of nationalistic Eurasianism, in particular, the utopian novel *Za chertopolokhom* (*Behind the Thistle*, 1922) by the reactionary émigré novelist Petr Krasnov, as well as later, anti-nationalist anti-utopias such as Vladimir Voinovich's *Moskva 2042* (*Moscow 2042*, 1986).

1 As the Russian critic Leonid Parfenov recently mentioned: "Sorokin has taken an idea that was flying through the air and taken it to the extreme." (Сорокин довел до абсолюта идеи, носящиеся в воздухе.) Leonid Parfenov, 2006, "History comes back not only as a farce," *Russian Newsweek*, 26 December.

2 Vladimir Sorokin, 2007, "Russia is Slipping Back into an Authoritarian Empire," *Der Spiegel*, 2 February, transl. C. Sultan, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-author-vladimir-sorokin-russia-is-slipping-back-into-an-authoritarian-empire-a-463860.html>, accessed 31 July 2012.

Nevertheless, Sorokin's narrative differs significantly from both traditional nationalist utopian narratives and dissident anti-utopias of the stagnation period, mainly because it does not invite one particular ideological interpretation. Upon closing the book, the reader remains puzzled over whether the world he has just read about is, in fact, a utopia or a dystopia; and the author gives us no definite answer to that question, but rather leaves it to the reader to interpret. It is tempting to read the novel as a parody, but any intention to see the world presented by Sorokin as the appalling political future of a totalitarian Russia is challenged by the fact that the story makes extremely pleasant reading, with its sensual imagery, delightful technological conceits and larger-than-life heroes, especially the protagonist, the young *oprichnik* Andrei Komiaga.<sup>3</sup> There were even people in Russia who were misled by this visible sympathy—thus, the leader of the Union of Orthodox Oprichniks, Iosif Volotskii, commented: Наконец-то Владимир Сорокин написал правильную книгу. Там хорошо показано, как надо поступать с врагами России!<sup>4</sup>

In 2008, Sorokin published a sequel to *Day of the Oprichnik*, called *Sakharnyi Kreml'* (*Sugar Kremlin*, 2008). Most readers have been puzzled by the latter work's narrative form. The author himself called the book "a novel"; however, it is not a novel but rather a collection of fifteen short stories, not related to one another in any way except by a sugar candy in the form of the Kremlin that resurfaces in every story. As Anton Dolin said in his review of the book, «Сахарный кремль»—это ряд равноправных эпизодов, связанных не интригой, а общим пищеварительным ритуалом: добровольным облизыванием сахарных маковок кремля.<sup>5</sup> At some point each story's protagonists have to consume the sugar Kremlin, which they regard (either consciously or subconsciously) as the

3 See Marina Aptekman, 2009, "Forward to the Past or Two Radical Views on the Russian Nationalist Future: Pyotr Krasnov's *Behind the Thistle* and Vladimir Sorokin's *Day of an Oprichnik*," *Slavic and East European Journal* 53 (2), pp. 241–60.

4 "Finally Vladimir Sorokin has written a very good book. It will show everyone how we should treat the enemies of Russia!" Quoted in Boris Sokolov, 2006, "Staraiia novaia Rus'," *Agenstvo politicheskikh novostei*, 1 November, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article10805.htm>, accessed 31 July 2012. Where nothing else is noted, translations are mine.

5 "*Sugar Kremlin* is made up of equally-treated episodes that are linked not by a plot but by a common digestive ritual: the voluntary licking of the sugar Kremlin towers." Anton Dolin, 2008, "Sugar Kremlin: Dolce Vita," *The New Times*, 4 August, <http://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/3804/>, accessed 31 July 2012.

sacred symbol of a regime which I intend to further define in this article as “Old New Russia.” In a very similar way to the Soviet *norm* of Sorokin’s early work (*Normal/The Norm*, 1979–83), consuming sugar Kremlin is a ritual that functions as a unification of the people and the state.<sup>6</sup>

*Sugar Kremlin* is set in the same reality and approximately the same time as *Day of the Oprichnik*, but the stories occur a few years after the events in the earlier work. *Sugar Kremlin* completely differs from its prequel in its narrative style, thus creating a completely different perspective. It is probably not a typical classical novel due to its lack of linear plot; but it can still be called a novel if we regard all the stories in the collection as chapters, each representing one facet of the reality of the country that Sorokin wants to present to his readers. In contrast to *Day of the Oprichnik*, which takes place almost entirely in Moscow, *Sugar Kremlin* shows the readers various corners of the future Russia, from a bedroom in the Kremlin to a labour camp in Siberia, from the Moscow suburbs to distant villages.

The narrators are constantly sharing with their readers multiple hints that the two narratives exist in approximately the same temporal and social realities. Both works take place in a future Orthodox authoritarian Russian empire, people speak generally the same language, although some expressions vary from the first book to the second (for example, in the first book a cell phone is called *mobilo*, from the stem *mobile*, and in the second *govorukha*, from the verb *to speak: govorit’*), and they share similar technological images, such as talking holograms, animated tooth brushes and self-born fur coats, all of which exist side by side with a striking level of poverty, the unchecked use of drugs, food rationing and a lack of basic necessities such as gas fuel.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the protagonist of the first book, Komiaga, appears briefly in the last story of *Sugar Kremlin* together with his supervisor, Batya (Father).

The last chapter of *Sugar Kremlin* also gives us an exact date for the events, October 23, 2028; we do not, however, know how much time has

6 For more on *The Norm* see David Gillespie, 2000, “Vladimir Sorokin and the Norm,” *Reconstructing the Canon: Russian Writing in the 1980s*, ed. A. McMillin, Amsterdam, pp. 299–309.

7 Sorokin still continues to explore the image of an Old New Russian regime further, for example, in the short piece “Otpusk” (“Holiday”), recently published in the popular magazine *Snob*. See *Snob*, April (4), 2012. Text available at <http://www.snob.ru/magazine/entry/47774>, accessed 31 July 2012.

passed between the first and the last chapter, or between each chapter story. The events described in the stories may either happen simultaneously or be divided by unknown time periods: some of them happen in winter, some in summer, and some in spring or in autumn. Yet all the events described most probably happen within a range of a few months or a year, as suggested by the presence of a similar sugar candy in each chapter.

Nonetheless, the development of language, more specifically, the linguistic changes that take place between the first book and the second, allow the readers to experience a broader perspective on this society, a society we can characterize as a technologically highly advanced yet at the same time socially primitive and reactionary Russian Empire of the future.

Both *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin* are characterized by their broad use of a particular type of everyday archaic language that utilizes folk and Old Russian morphological forms, aphorisms, and verbal expressions. In both works a house is a “terem,” “money” is called “tselkovye” and underwear is “ispodnee”; people dress in “kaftans” and drink “kvas” from a neo-techno version of “samovars” which via one pipe link all the apartments of a high-rise Moscow residential building. The narration exaggerates the tone of traditional Russian medieval folk narrative, sometimes brought to such absurdity that it starts to bear a resemblance to the speech of the Soviet cinema director Iakin, in his miserable attempts to converse with Ivan the Terrible in the famous comedy *Ivan Vasilievich meniaet professiiu* (*Ivan Vasilievich Changes his Occupation*, 1973) by Leonid Gaidai.

At a closer glance, however, the etymology of most of these Old New Russian words is contemporary. Discussing the language of François Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin defines the language of grotesque as the language at the edge of a linguistic change which appears at the border of two languages that belong to two different historical eras. Two languages represent two world views; and, as a result, their intersection forms a grotesque.<sup>8</sup> This can be directly applied to the language of both *Sugar Kremlin* and *Day of the Oprichnik*. Sorokin’s *Old New Church Slavonic* language exists at the border of linguistic cultures. The author replicates pseudo-folk narrative discourses from post-Soviet neo-patriotic literary

8 M. M. Bakhtin, 1965, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kultura srednevekov’ia i renessansa*, Moscow, p. 470.

works and media, while simultaneously combining them with mainly criminal *New Russian* (*novoruskii*) slang, post-Soviet concepts such as *kiberpanki*, and Soviet idioms; and this mixture largely presents us not only with the linguistic but also with the cultural and ideological background of the society discussed. It also presents us with the Eurasian nature of Old New Russian Society: the Russia of the future in both *Sugar Kremlin* and *Day of the Oprichnik* is closely linked to China, and, as a result of this, Chinese words have been deeply incorporated into Russian everyday speech. Russian children study Chinese, prisoners in labour camps use Chinese proverbs, students in a tavern greet each other with the Chinese expression “Van Shan Chao” instead of the Russian “Good Evening,” and Marfusha, a typical Russian schoolgirl, gives commands in Chinese to her digital “animate” toothbrush. Even the Tsar’s children converse in Chinese.

The most important feature of this language is that not only does it create neologisms but that it also, more significantly, empowers everyday words with ritualized meanings, thus often altering them into specific ‘sacred’ slang terms. To be sure, slang has been used as terminology for ritualized reality for generations, yet only for a very small and very particular group of people, such as criminals. By contrast, Sorokin’s Old New Russian applies this ritualization to the entire country. For instance, *postavit’ na krug* means *group rape* in Russian criminal slang. In contemporary Russian youth slang group sex is called *gruppovukha*. From these two terms the narrator of *Day of the Oprichnik* creates the term *krugovukha*,<sup>9</sup> which denotes the group rape of the wife of a condemned official in a secret police raid, an act that, as Komiaga clearly states, is not a voluntary act but an obligatory ritual that serves as part of an established protocol for the destruction of the official’s property by *oprichniks*.<sup>10</sup>

The border between “New Russian” and “Old Russian” is actually very thin. In contemporary *New Russian* slang, the word for a cell phone is

9 Vladimir Sorokin, 2006, *Den’ Oprichnika*, Moscow, p. 33

10 For more on ritualization and violence in Sorokin’s narrative discourse, see Mark Lipovetskii, 2008, *Paralogii: transformatsiia (post)modernistskogo diskursa v kul’ture 1920–2000-kh godov*, Moscow, pp. 632–33, 792–99. Sorokin’s interpretation of the connection between ritualization, totalitarian ideology, male power and violent and competitive sexuality also reflects the ideas of masculine fantasies, explicitly presented in Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*: Klaus Theweleit, 1997, *Male Fantasies*, transl. S. Conway in collaboration with E. Carter & C. Turner, Minneapolis, Minn.

*mobila*. Sorokin changes just one letter—“the final “a” becomes “o”—and the word immediately starts looking pseudo-folk: Мое мобило будит меня: [...].<sup>11</sup> In *Sugar Kremlin*, nihilism is condemned by the government as a feature characteristic of “rotten” democratic societies, and is completely extinguished by a small change in morphology. Whereas the use of the internet is not prohibited but widely supported in Sorokin’s Russia, the average citizen is allowed to surf approved Russian websites only. Such limited web is called “Inter-DA” (Inter-YES) by contrast with the nihilist “Inter-NET” (Inter-NO) of the West, which is non-existent in the Russian empire. Sorokin pays special attention to various new names for drugs which are a necessary and everyday part of the Old New Russia, with a particular stress on cocaine, to which Russian lovingly apply the nickname *kokosha*, a name that originally belonged to a baby crocodile in the famous poem “Krokodil” (“Crocodile”) by the canonical Soviet-era children’s writer Kornei Chukovskii.<sup>12</sup> On occasion Sorokin does not even have to invent new words. The Russian programmer expression for a keyboard, *klava*, becomes a perfect official Slavonic term in *Sugar Kremlin*. In a way, this easy transformation of one term into another demonstrates to the reader how the same thin border that separates a slang phrase from an official term also separates the Russian past from the Russian future.

The combination of the old and the new in that fictional reality is demonstrated not only on the morphological and etymological levels but also through syntax. Throughout the text, old and new terms and customs are repeatedly combined and placed against each other in such a way that, in being placed in one syntactical unit, they semantically juxtapose each other, demonstrating the grotesque combinations which constitute the Old New Russian speech and consequently characterize the social structure of this Old New Russian society, which combines high levels of technological development with pre-Petrine traditions: В одиннадцать лет свои Марфуша умеет многое: [...] по-китайски уже много слов знает, маме помогает, вышивает крестом и бисером, [...] молитвы легко учит наизусть, пельмени лепит.<sup>13</sup>

11 Sorokin, 2006, p. 5.

12 See, for example, Kornei Chukovskii, 2004, *Krokodil*, Moscow, p. 11. Плачут Тотоса с Кокошей/папочка, ты нехороший. “Kokosha and Totosha are crying/Daddy, you are mean.”

13 “At age 11, Marfusha has already learned a lot: [...] she has learned many Chinese

This combination of archaic activities such as hand-making meat dumplings or beading and embroidering, typical of peasant women of the past, which goes hand in hand with the technologically advanced concepts of mastering a computer (introduced by a pseudo-Slavic term, *smart machine*,) presented to readers in one long sentence, allows them to visualize the world of a teenage girl in the Moscow of *Sugar Kremlin*. Long syntactic units constructed on repetitive semantic parallels (such as dumpling-making and prayer memorization) and oppositions (beading and embroidering versus computer proficiency) are also broadly exploited in *Day of the Oprichnik*: programmed Jacuzzi's are surrounded by bathroom walls painted with folk motifs; food, ordered in a restaurant, materializes from inside the table in an imitation of the Russian folk image of *skatert'-samobranka*, a magical tablecloth that whisks the desired food out of thin air; every house is equipped with a laser videophone, a "news bubble" which, however, broadcasts only daily news and the tsar's speeches; houses are equally equipped with hi-tech stoves and traditional Russian ovens that use clay pots. Such a mixture of past and future, folk and hi-tech and technologically advanced and socially reactionary images enables the readers to fully comprehend the nature of the reality inhabited by Andrei Komiaga and his friends and enemies.

No analysis of Sorokin's Old New Russian language and society would be complete without a brief study of the strong Chinese influence on the future Russian society as represented through changes in the language. A future Chinese-Russian political alliance and, as a result, a complete linguistic merger, is not a novelty for Sorokin, who started to exploit this subject about a decade prior to the appearance of *Day of the Oprichnik*, in works such as *Goluboe salo (Blue Lard, 1999)* or *Pir (The Feast, 2000)*.<sup>14</sup>

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words; she helps her mother; she beads and embroiders; [...] she recites all the prayers by heart and hand-makes meat dumplings." Vladimir Sorokin, 2008, *Sakharnyi Krem'*, Moscow, p. 13.

14 Sorokin's own response to this subject can be seen in his interview with Il'ia Kormil'tsev. Text available at the author's website at <http://www.srkn.ru/interview/kormiltsev.shtml>, accessed 31 July 2012. Sorokin also said in a recent interview for the *Liberation* newspaper: "Ten years from now people will speak a mix of Russian and Chinese languages in Siberia. There will be many mixed Russian-Chinese marriages, which will produce very beautiful children. I don't see anything bad in this, quite the opposite, Chinese energy might have a life-giving effect on our cold Siberia. If only Russia and China might agree." See <http://www.liberation.fr/transversales/week-end/219247.FR.php>, accessed 31 July 2012. Russian translation is available at <http://>

Moreover, during the years leading up to and following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Russian nationalists supported the ideas of Neo-Eurasianism, which considered Russia to be culturally and ethnically closer to Central Asia than to Western Europe. The most prolific of Neo-Eurasianist authors, Aleksandr Dugin, emphasized the opposition between a mystical nationalistic empire spread across united Eurasia and the transatlantic West, and believed that Russia should separate itself from Europe and the United States and embrace China and Mongolia.<sup>15</sup>

The growing popularization of such political views has produced a number of literary works, often written by the followers of neo-Eurasianism and largely influenced by Dugin's works.<sup>16</sup> For example, in an important fantasy project by Holm van Zaichik, *The Eurasian Symphony*, the Russian empire, known as *Ordus*, is tied to the East, primarily China and Mongolia, by a new religion based on the principles of Buddhism and Orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> However, whereas authors such as van Zaichik analysed mostly the social and religious consequences of the Chinese-Russian alliance, Sorokin seems to be interested mostly in the linguistic game that results from this coalition. In the Old New Russian society, Chinese words are used hand in hand with folk and Old Church Slavonic vocabulary; and learning Chinese is placed on a par with making meat dumplings and mastering a computer keyboard—as an everyday necessity.

In both *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin*, the surprising juxtaposition of archaic verbal forms with modern technology and social phenomena alerts the aware reader to the game that is taking place, and provides much of the pleasure of the text. In each of the two works, however, Sorokin uses completely different narrative structures and, as a result, his Old New language is very different in each work. *Day of the Oprichnik* is a first-person narrative, told by the main protagonist of the

*sorokin-news.livejournal.com/37439.html*, accessed 31 July 2012.

15 See Aleksandr Dugin, 1991, *Misterii Evrazii*, Moscow.

16 Such views can be seen clearly in a relatively recent statement by a Russian follower of nationalist Eurasianism, Egor Kholmogorov: "Russia has only two options—it can either unite with the West and die as a result of this union, or embrace Eurasianism, which would lead it to its—although quite specific—glory. There is no other choice." See <http://www.livejournal.com/talkread.bml?journal=holmogor&itemid=276693>, accessed 6 June 2007.

17 For more on van Zaichik see Irina Rodnianskaia, 2002, "Lovtsy prodvinytkh chelovekov," *Russkii Zhurnal*, 18 July, [http://old.russ.ru/krug/20020717\\_rodn.html](http://old.russ.ru/krug/20020717_rodn.html), accessed 31 July 2012.



novel, the oprichnik Andrei Komiaga, and is constructed as a rigorously maintained *skaz*. Komiaga's personal narrative perspective (as one different from that of the author) is represented by the inner monologues of the oprichnik, expressed in a highly stylized folk language and style, which fill Sorokin's text from start to finish and demonstrate the protagonist's strong Old New Russian mentality, his world view, in which ancient and contemporary are not separated from one another. Komiaga lives in a highly advanced technological world, but his narrative style is that of a medieval folk epic (*bylina*). For example, in his monologues Komiaga always places predicates ahead of subjects and adjectives after nouns, a characteristic feature of a folk epic tale: Заворочался Батя в кресле кожаном, нахмурил брови, захрустел пальцами крепкими. [...] Дает команду Бутурлин, опускаются шторы на окнах кабинета. [...] поднимают–повисают слова, из Сети Русской вытянутые.<sup>18</sup>

This sort of narrative technique allows readers to look at Komiaga's society through his own eyes. Sorokin's narrator perceives his reality as truly ideal, and the author leaves the answer to the reader: we can either follow Komiaga's perspective or step outside of its boundaries and look at Komiaga's world from an exterior perspective. In the first case, Komiaga's world is certainly a utopian society; in the second case, it turns to be truly dystopian. The implied author gives us no definite answer to this question, but rather leaves it to the reader to interpret; and, in our view, this sort of narrative style prevented *Day of the Oprichnik* from becoming a pure social pamphlet. The use of the *skaz* form also enables Sorokin to link his character with national-patriotic and Soviet mythology, Socialist Realism and Soviet ritualized reality. It helps us to see the protagonist not just as an individual but as a symbolic representative of a particular social class, of a collective subconscious "us."<sup>19</sup>

The effect of *Sugar Kremlin* is quite different. Rather than presenting the Old New Russian reality through the eyes and inner monologues of

18 "Batya turns in the leather armchair, frowns and cracks his large knuckles. [...] Buturlin gives a command and the blinds on the office windows are lowered. [...] Words are pulled up from the Russian Network; they hang in the dim light." Sorokin, 2006, p. 45; Eng. Vladimir Sorokin, 2011, *Day of the Oprichnik*, transl. J. Gambrell, New York, p. 37.

19 For more on *skaz* in Soviet literature see Evgenii Dobrenko, 1997, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, Stanford, Cal.

one privileged person, Sorokin demonstrates to his readers a large social picture of the entire country, from high-rise Moscow suburban residential buildings in which people are using high-tech programmed Chinese toothbrushes (while apartments are warmed by Russian stoves to save “precious gas”) to distant villages and labour camps. In a recent interview for a Polish newspaper, Sorokin said the following:

Одним взглядом опричника Комяги Россию 2028 всю не охватишь, нужны и другие ракурсы. «День опричника» был своего рода магическим заговором, чтобы Россия не пошла в сторону возрождения феодальных форм бытия. Когда я два года спустя писал «Сахарный Кремль», я чувствовал, к сожалению, что мой вымысел имеет шансы превратиться в реальность. В книге 15 новелл, которые в плане фабулы не связаны друг с другом, но все они касаются сути русского государства в XXI веке. Мы живем в эпоху высоких технологий, но с советскими мозгами. Россия никак не может изжить в себе советизм и ищет для него все новые и новые формы.<sup>20</sup>

The narrative structure of the stories in *Sugar Kremlin* varies from one story to another. Some stories are third-person, others are first-person narrations; some are monologues, others are dialogues. Yet each of the stories in *Sugar Kremlin* is a stylization of either a canonical Soviet author, a literary work or a style, including Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1959/1962), and, in a neo-techno-folk version, Sorokin's own early work *Ochered'* (*The*

<sup>20</sup> “One look from the oprichnik Komiaga is not enough grasp the whole of Russia in 2028. To see the whole picture we also need new perspectives. I wrote *Day of the Oprichnik* as a kind of magical spell that I hoped could prevent Russia from returning towards the revival of feudal forms of life. When, two years later, I wrote *Sugar Kremlin*, I felt, unfortunately, that my fiction stood a chance of becoming reality. The book contains 15 short stories which, in terms of the plot, are not related to each other; but they all relate to the essence of the Russian state in the XXI century. We live in an era of new technologies, but our ‘brains’ are still Soviet. Russia still hasn't been able to rid itself of its Soviet mentality, and, as a result, is constantly searching for new forms that will help it to keep itself within the borders of its Soviet past.” Anna Zhebrowska, 2011, “Mne kazhetsia, chto vo vremia griadushchego narodnogo bunta trup Lenina razorvut na suveniry: srednevekov'e v mersedese. (Beseda s Vladimirom Sorokinym),” *Livejournal blog* 21 February, <http://khanka.livejournal.com/48067.html> accessed 13 June 2013.

*Queue*, 1983). In contrast to his earlier writings, such as *Blue Lard*, in *Sugar Kremlin* the author does not *clone* particular authors; rather, he adopts various Soviet literary styles and cultural myths into the new regime. For example, in the story “Petrushka,” the narrator resurrects the language of famous Soviet actors’ recollections of their performances at Stalin’s private concerts.<sup>21</sup> The chapter “Khliupino” imitates village prose; “Kino” (“Cinema”) brings back to life popular Soviet anti-American cinema scripts about foreign espionage, such as the famous TV series *TASS upolnomochen zaiavit’* (*The Central News Agency Wants to Make a Statement*); and “Na zavode” (“At a Plant”) is a parody of a Socialist Realist factory production novel.

The relics of Soviet language play a considerable role in *Day of the Oprichnik*. Soviet clichés, excerpts from and parodies of Soviet texts fill the linguistic space of the novel. To give just a few examples, Lenin’s State Library becomes Nestor’s State Library, now named after the medieval Russian monk; and a famous children song from the 1980s, *Prekrasnoe daleko* (*A Beautiful Faraway Tomorrow*) provides the ending to an official state play. Most of the pleasure of reading the text stems from the fact that nearly all of the stock expressions, phrases and images used in the official ideological discourse of the future Russian government have their origins in Soviet ideological discourse. A similar technique is also used in *Sugar Kremlin*. However, the dual linguistic nature of the textual reality in *Sugar Kremlin* is not linked to a psychological study of a single character, as it is in *Day of the Oprichnik*, but rather to a social study of the whole society. By applying various styles of the Soviet literary canon to the Russian reality of the future and by re-writing this canon, using the Old New Russian style, the author demonstrates how easily one totalitarian reality can adapt to another.

Sorokin already demonstrated the ease of such change in *Day of the Oprichnik*, when he shared with his readers the literature of the Old New Russian regime. Similarly to Soviet times, all books published in future Russia are standardized, approved by the Tsar and the official censors, the Literary Chamber. At first glance, all these books are reactionary and patriotic, inspired by state ideology and Orthodox Church. The literature of the future is dominated by titles such as *Rossia—rodina moia* (*Russia is my Motherland*), *Rodnye prostory* (*The Motherland’s Expanses*),

21 See, for example, Leonid Utesov, 1996, *Vospominaniia*, Moscow, pp. 97–98.

and *Rossii vernye syny* (*We are Russia's Loyal Sons*).<sup>22</sup> Yet Sorokin's reader easily deciphers the parody in his depiction of literary affairs in the oprichniks' Russia, by easily decoding the author's implied criticism of contemporary Russian literature. The names of most of the writers, such as Daria Adashkova and Oksana Podrobskaya, are derived from popular present-day Russian authors (in this case, Dar'ia Dontsova and Oksana Robski), who adapt so easily to any regime.

In *Sugar Kremlin* Sorokin develops this technique even further. He broadly employs the so-called materialization of metaphors, thus returning literal corporeal meanings to established metaphoric expressions. This device, widely used in Sorokin's early conceptualist works in order to mock the meaningless Soviet *lingua franca*, thus finds new practical application in the neo-totalitarian society of *Sugar Kremlin*.<sup>23</sup> Foreign words and metaphors are interpreted literally, and, as a result, obtain a corporeal meaning. The cocktail *Bloody Mary*, which has long since lost its literal semantic effect in English, translates into Russian as *Krovavaia Masha*, a cocktail favoured by future Moscow executioners. As the author commented during a private conversation, the Russian version is most probably made from real blood. Similarly, a small gilded scoop, *sovok* in Russian, represents *sovok*, a popular yet somewhat offensive argot expression for *the Soviet Union*. In this newly obtained corporeal interpretation, the scoop, *sovok*, symbolizes the embodiment of the Soviet past. Placed on a person's chest next to a picture of Iurii Gagarin, it is worn as a magical amulet by a communist holy fool, Parkhanovna, who should be viewed as a clear parody of the zealot and communist writer Aleksandr Prokhanov.

Such literariness is probably the main reason why obscene vocabulary (*mat*) is strictly forbidden in the Neo-Orthodox Russian future of Sorokin's novels. Partially allowed, although yet not encouraged, among some professions, such as federal criminal investigators, army officials and executioners, obscene vocabulary was criminalized in Sorokin's Russia by "a famous Decree 37," and, since then, especially after its use

22 Sorokin, 2006, p. 104.

23 Consider, for example, *The Norm*, where a handy boy's "golden" hands are cut off to be traded to the West as real gold. For more on Sorokin's treatment of Soviet linguistic clichés, see Serafima Roll, 1996, "Stripping Socialist Realism of Its Seamless Dress: Vladimir Sorokin's Deconstruction of Soviet Utopia and the Art of Representation," *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature* 39 (1), pp. 65–78.

had started to be punished by public whipping on main squares, it gradually disappeared from everyday speech. As the narrator of *Day of the Oprichnik* shares with readers, obscene vocabulary is regarded in New Old Russia as a foreign liberal invasion, “forced on Russian speakers by foreigners in bygone days.”<sup>24</sup> *Mat* has always been considered blasphemy by the Orthodox Church; therefore, in a society ruled by Orthodox ideology, its prohibition seems absolutely logical. We should, however, also recall that words that signify reproductive organs have been originally associated with pagan magical rituals and, as believed by ancient Slavs, could possess destructive powers.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, we can argue that in a reality where words re-obtain their literal meanings, *mat* might be regarded as a force that repossesses its original occult destructiveness and, consequently, is generally forbidden, except for those rare occasions mentioned above.

Besides a corporeal actualization of metaphors, Sorokin also widely employs Viktor Shklovskii’s device of de-familiarization by showing his readers how easily essentially meaningless but stable Soviet and post-Soviet expressions and abbreviations can be transferred to another social and linguistic reality where they acquire new meanings, meanings which are, however, equally meaningless as soon as they are taken beyond the boundaries of the ritualized reality they were used to describe. A popular yet rather obscure term from contemporary Russian business language, *menedzher srednego zvena*, a mid-ranking manager, effortlessly converts into *chekist srednego zvena* (mid-ranking chekist).

The ease of Soviet vocabulary’s transformation into the neo-totalitarian vocabulary of a future Russian Empire is most evident in the story “Kharchevanie” (“A Feeding”), one of the strongest stories in the book and a clear parody of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The plot mostly revolved around a lunch conversation among prisoners building a border wall in a labour camp in the north of Russia. One of the prisoners, San Sanych, is a relatively old man who still broadly uses Soviet expressions. His younger listeners are puzzled by most of the terms he uses.

24 Sorokin, 2006, p. 80; Eng. Sorokin, 2011, p. 67.

25 For the mythological and ritual etymological origins of Russian obscene vocabulary, see A.K. Baiburin, A.L. Toporkov, 1990, *U istokov etiketa*, Leningrad, pp. 105–07; B.A. Uspenskii, 1988, “Religiozno-mifologicheskii aspekt russkoi ekspressivnoi frazeologii,” *Semiotics and the History of Culture*, Ann Arbor, Mich., pp. 197–302.

They are completely unaware of the meanings of either the *Communist* party or of *profkom*, the abbreviation for a communist factory committee. To explain the terms that confuse his labour pals, San Sanych has to define them by using words from the new reality that would convey similar meanings. Asked кто такой партпр? (“who is the “Head of the Party Committee”), by a puzzled young criminal called Petrov, San Sanych instantly answers, “Chun Guang,” which, according to the author’s footnote, means *boss* in Chinese.<sup>26</sup> The essence of the confusing term *partorg*, which is a literary abbreviation for a head of the party organization at a plant or a factory, is easily explained by the general meaning of the word. *Partorg* is a boss, analogous to a Chinese camp boss in the new totalitarian Russian society. A new totalitarian regime can bring a new idiom, a new abbreviation, or a new linguistic term that would replace its predecessors; yet it will not change its totalitarian semantic essence.

Due to the large variety of styles used, a linguistic game founded on morphological, etymological and syntactic structures is more obvious in *Sugar Kremlin* than in *Day of the Oprichnik*. The second novel in the series is thus not an implied, but evident satire of a contemporary Russian society. In a famous Russian bar (*piteinyi dom*) in the story “Kabak” (“The Pub”), written as a stylization of Vladimir Giliarovskii’s memoir devoted to late imperial Moscow, *Moskva i moskvichi* (*Moscow and Muscovites*, 1926), the reader meets the two comics Ziuga and Zhiria, the dark magician Pu I Tun, and the sad clown Grishka Vetz, all of whom represent the political and cultural society of the early 2000s, rather than that of 2028. Two people, Ziuga and Zhiria, represent the high-profile politicians Gennadii Ziuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskii; the diminutive name, Grishka, which, when used about an adult, could be possibly applied to a person of low status, probably a beggar or a drunkard, refers to a famous playwright, Grishkovets, and the dark magician is, of course, Vladimir Putin.

However, the use of folk and archaic Russian stylistic and lexical borrowings in *Sugar Kremlin* is not as straightforward as in *Day of the Oprichnik*, and not identically treated in all the stories. Significantly, the degree of its usage varies according to the geographical placement of the characters. Pseudo-traditional folk linguistic elements are generally widespread in the capital and in the labour camp, both of which can be

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26 Sorokin, 2008, p. 150.

seen as pillars of government power. By contrast, in the stories that take place on the outskirts of the empire, the spoken language is different. It imitates not so much the Old New Russian official style but rather the everyday speech of characters from nineteenth-century Russian literature. As noted by Boris Sokolov, however, as soon as any of the characters comes into close contact with either government or its symbolic manifestation, the sugar candy Kremlin, their narrative voice immediately changes.<sup>27</sup> The use of pseudo-old folk vocabulary escalates, the sentences become longer and more pathetic, and the rules of punctuation gradually become non-existent.

This sort of transformation, for example, is clearly seen in the story “Pis'mo” (“A Letter”), written as a first-person narrative, initially reminiscent of a typical epistolary tale from the Russian Golden Age, yet it soon transforms into a trance-influenced hysterical stream of consciousness. Such diglossia allows the reader to understand that, while the changes that occurred in Russian in the twenty-first century have turned Russia back into its past, the seat of the country's government is still very different from the rest of Russia. While life in the capital, as presented in, for example, the story “Marfushina radost” (“Marfusha's Joy”), is dominated by a most reactionary traditional Orthodox Russian ideology, the rest of the country has gradually descended into a slow stagnation that most of all resembles provincial nineteenth-century Russia.

As wonderful as some of the linguistic experiments in *Sugar Kremlin* look, some readers found this book less interesting and less powerful than its prequel, *Day of the Oprichnik*, and complained that the author, rather than inventing any new ideas or images, was just borrowing on his previous success, further developing, clarifying and expanding the successful characteristics of *Day of the Oprichnik*. As one of the reviews said, никаких новых реалий в этой новой книге Сорокин больше не создает—он лишь уточняет, утверждает, то что было найдено в предыдущей книге.<sup>28</sup> *Day of the Oprichnik*, although certainly a cultural game and a post-modern work, is also an experiment in describing

27 Boris Sokolov, 2008, “Kak rastaiat Sakharnyi Krem'l,” *Russkii Zhurnal*, 11 August, <http://russ.ru/Kniga-nedeli/Kak-rastayal-Saharnyj-Kreml>, accessed 31 July 2012.

28 “Sorokin does not create any new realia in this new book—he only specifies, consolidates what was found in his previous book.” Kirill Reshetnikov, 2008, “Vsem lizat' ‘Sakharnyi Krem'l!’,” *Stringer News*, 24 August, <http://www.stringer.ru/publication.mhtml?Part=49&PubID=9852>, accessed 03 March 2013.

the transformation of an individual's moral and psychological nature in a neo-totalitarian society. Therefore, the language and style of this book, although they provide the reader with great pleasure, serve mostly as a background to reinforce the reader's comprehension of the social origins of that transformation. Although it might be easy and tempting for a scholar to regard the novel as a political pamphlet, and, although in *Day of the Oprichnik* we do learn a great deal about a possible future Russian society, it is still the story of an individual, and not that of a society, although certainly one cannot be separated from the other. In *Sugar Kremlin*, by contrast, characters lack individual psychologies and generally serve simply as social types, whereas the duality of language and style plays a central role in this book. *Sugar Kremlin* is primarily a linguistic and stylistic game, and certainly not psychological prose. What the reader enjoys in the book is, first of all, its brilliant stylizations. This makes *Sugar Kremlin* a stronger political pamphlet; yet simultaneously such straightforward social criticism, achieved through a chain of parodies, somehow reduces the book to the genre of a *stengazeta*, a comic Soviet poster newspaper, usually consisting of funny poems, stories and editorials, cartoons, and parodies, used, on the one hand, to entertain the reader, and, on the other hand, to provide a critical social commentary.

Through his depiction of the role of language in *Day of the Oprichnik* and *Sugar Kremlin*, Vladimir Sorokin demonstrates the essential role of language in the creation of both psychological personality and social ideology. A prolific post-modern writer who has always regarded language as a creative force, Sorokin has been able to prove not only that language is shaped and constructed by society, but that also it is at the same time very capable of influencing and forming one's personality. The *Old New Church Slavonic* Russian of the Russian empire of the near future allows the readers to perceive the transformations experienced by Sorokin's fictitious Russia and its inhabitants, and to visualize a country of *the future in the past*, where people video-connect with each other, make robots brush their hair and grow their own fur coats, but still lack toilet paper.