

*Paved With Good Intentions: Venichka's Journey of Redemption in Moskva-Petushki
and its Relationship with Radishchev's Journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow,
Milton's Paradise Lost, and Dante's Divine Comedy.*

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the theme of redemption in Venedikt Erofeev's 1969 poema *Moskva-Petushki*. *Moskva-Petushki* is a major underground work of the late Soviet postmodern period, which narrates the physical and spiritual journey of the protagonist from Moscow to the small factory town of Petushki on an electric train. Although *Moskva-Petushki* is usually viewed as a satire, this dissertation takes a new approach, viewing the poema as a journey of spiritual redemption. It examines the relationship between *Moskva-Petushki* (translated as *Moscow to the End of the Line*) and other major journeys of redemption—Radishchev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

Understood as absolution from past sins, redemption opens new interpretative possibilities for *Moskva-Petushki*. Redemption is a valuable lens through which to interpret *Moskva-Petushki* because it allows the reader to question the motivations for Venichka's journey to Petushki and what drives his desire to go there. This dissertation argues that Venichka attempts to reach Petushki in order to alleviate the grief he feels over his past sins. However, Venichka the protagonist does not have a single vision of redemption and this lack of vision may help to

explain the failure of his previous twelve trips to bring him to Petushki as all previous trips have ended in a return to Moscow. Venichka is unable to find a path to redemption on his own, and this uncertainty causes him to stagger at the beginning of his thirteenth attempt. Since Venichka cannot find the correct path to his own redemption, and has met with continual failure on previous journeys, I contend that Erofeev engages with and parodies three pre-established paths to redemption to raise the issue of the possibility of redemption and what it might mean in soviet society. The overall goal of this dissertation is to examine how Erofeev responds to the theme of redemption in each work. It also seeks to show how the author Erofeev parodies the three previous paths to redemption in order to illustrate how these visions of redemption are not universally applicable to all who seek it, and offer a false hope to those who believe they have earned salvation.

Chapter 1 “From Moscow to Petushki: Redemption and Social Enlightenment in Venichka’s Journey” examines Erofeev’s response to Radishchev’s work and his use of parody to create a commentary on Russia’s journey to social enlightenment over the past two centuries. Radishchev’s vision of social enlightenment in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* means moving towards a society where all Russians are equal before the law, and thoughts can be expressed free from censorship. For Erofeev, social enlightenment means understanding the efforts of previous Russian reformers, but rejecting them for their inaction and inability to move Russia forward. In particular, Erofeev focuses his attention on the images of the narod (the nation; the people) and the intelligentsia, in the form of his fellow passengers, to show the stagnation of social enlightenment and social redemption in its final form as the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2, “Rebel Angels: Seeking the Satanic in *Moskva-Petushki*,” has two goals: to show how Erofeev appropriates images from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and to explain why Erofeev’s parody of Milton’s vision of redemption and longing for Paradise offers a sense of false hope to seekers who are uncertain of their own path. It posits that the essence of Venichka’s rebellion is metaphysical—he refuses to accept the Soviet atheist premise that the human spirit is merely a higher development of the physical world. He insists on his spiritual existence. This chapter

compares Venichka to the figure of Satan, and considers the similarities between Venichka's angels and the rebellious angels of *Paradise Lost*. Numerous times in the text Venichka appropriates the distinct characteristics of Milton's Satan in his quest to regain Petushki. Erofeev's creative response to *Paradise Lost* brings out the dual nature of Venichka's personality and motivation for his journey. In his creative appropriation of *Paradise Lost*, Erofeev examines the desire to seek salvation while wanting to rebel against an established system.

Chapter 3, "Venichka and La Diritta Via: Exploring the Dantean Path to Redemption in *Moskva-Petushki*" argues for Erofeev's creative response to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Erofeev's appropriation of themes and imagery creates a commentary on the idea of salvation and questions the possibility of redemption for people who seek it. Although Erofeev sends his protagonist on a journey that resembles Dante's divinely inspired path through the use of portals and the motif of the guide, Erofeev's protagonist meets with drastically different results than Dante's. By examining Erofeev's poema through the lens of *The Divine Comedy*, the reader must consider what it means to be redeemed in a society where redemption does not promise survival.

These three paths to redemption that Erofeev challenges in *Moskva-Petushki* are discussed in reverse chronological order because of the dialog that occurs between the four works rather than which author had the biggest impact on Erofeev's own definition of redemption. By challenging these three metanarratives on redemption, Erofeev constructs his own concept of redemption from these three predecessors but comes to a completely different and quite original conclusion about the possibility of salvation in Soviet society.

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Introduction

As Venichka nears the end of his journey to Petushki in the Voinovo-Usad segment of his journey, having abandoned his hallucinatory war and not yet arrived at his final destination, he tells his reader of his refusal to repent:

В моем сердце не было раскаяния. Я шел через луговины и пажити, через заросли шиповника и коровьи стада, мне в поле кланялись хлеба и улыбались васильки. Но, повторяю, в сердце не было раскаяния... Закатилось солнце, а я все шел.

"Царица Небесная, как далеко еще до Петушков"! - сказал я сам себе.¹

In my heart there is no repentance. I walked through the meadows and the pastures, through the briar patches and the herds of cattle, the grain fields bowed before me and the cornflowers smiled. But, I repeat, in my heart there is no repentance. The sun set, and I walked on.

Heavenly Queen, how far is it still to Petushki? I said to myself.

This passage shows the conflict that resides within Venichka, the protagonist of Venedikt Erofeev's 1969 poem *Moskva-Petushki*. He is terribly desperate to reach Petushki yet simultaneously unwilling and unaware of what he must do to reach that seemingly sacred space. At various times on his journey he seeks divine intervention yet is quick to dismiss the help that is offered to him. The duality of Venichka's character and the nature of his mission on the ill-fated train ride illustrate one of the many challenges of understanding Erofeev's complex poem. The purpose of this dissertation is not to provide a single and complete reading of *Moskva-Petushki*, but to investigate one of the central reasons why Venichka's journey to Petushki ends in his "death." While Petushki often seems to critics to be a

¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki*, (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 110.

land of cockaigne or a utopia of sorts, I argue that Petushki represents a sacred space to Venichka, and in seeking Petushki he is, in fact, seeking redemption. It serves as a place that can give him the redemption he seeks. Petushki is more than just a place of wantonness as Venichka initially describes it. It is a sacred space where he can be reunited with his son and escape the torment he feels in Moscow.

Review of Literature

Moskva-Petushki is one of the greatest underground works of the post-Thaw period, and existing research on the poema can be divided into several categories: satire, utopia, religion, Venichka's psychology and psyche, and the journey. In examining *Moskva-Petushki* as a work of satire critics have looked at such themes as utopia and postmodernism. Mark Lipovetsky's book *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* examines "the power of the influence of *Moscow to the End of the Line* on the entire subsequent development of Russian postmodernism and contemporary Russian literature."² He argues that Erofeev "did more than simply use the implicit postmodern artistic paradigm; rather, he gave it a truly original feel bringing it into the context of the Russian cultural tradition."³ In his article "Charms of Entropy and New Sentimentality: The Myth of Venichka Erofeev" Mikhail Epstein looks at Erofeev as myth, and examines that myth through the split between author and protagonist. Epstein compares what he calls "Erofeev's entropy" to the

² Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Post Modernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk: ME Sharpe Inc., 1999), 67.

³ Ibid.

“postmodern era,’ which marks the twentieth century’s fatigue with itself.”⁴ In his conclusion, Epstein links postmodernism with the theme of utopianism. He argues that like Erofeev’s rebirth after Venichka’s death, “This is the rebirth of utopia after its own death, after its subjection to postmodernism’s severe skepticism, relativism, and its anti- or postutopian consciousness.”⁵ Edith Clowes’s book *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology After Utopia* notes that Venichka’s journey is “pathological meta-utopia.”⁶ Pietro Zveteremich’s 1980 chapter “Il poema dell’emarginazione: Mosca sulla vodka” in his book *Fantastico grottesco assurdo e satira nella narrativa russa d’oggi* (*The Fantastic Grotesque and Absurd Satire in Russian Fiction Today 1956-1980*) examines Erofeev’s work as a commentary on the 20th century and marginalization.⁷ Critics using the lenses of satire, utopianism and postmodernism show Erofeev to be a writer disillusioned by the world around him, and discontent with his own place in it.

In trying to form an understanding of Venichka’s discontentment and his relationship with the silent God of *Moskva-Petushki*, critics have focused on the Christian eschatological subtext of the poem. I.A. Paperno’s and B.M. Gasparov’s 1981 article “Vstan’ i idi” remains the best known of all biblical interpretations of *Moskva-Petushki*. Focusing on the theme of resurrection that permeates the text, Paperno and Gasparov offer a comparison between Venichka and Christ. Looking

⁴ Mikhail Epstein, “Charms of Entropy and New Sentimentality: The Myth of Venichka Erofeev,” *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. Mikhail Epstein and Alexandr Genis (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 448.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁶ Edith Clowes, *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology After Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 12.

⁷ Pietro Zveteremich, “Il poema dell’emarginazione: *Mosca sulla vodka*,” *Fantastico grottesco assurdo e satira nella narrativa russa d’oggi* (1956-1980) (Messina: Peloritana Editrice, 1980), 47.

further at Venichka's character through a Christian lens, several scholars point to the image of the Holy Fool as a means to understanding Venichka's motivations in the poem. Mikhail Epstein's 1993 article "Posle karnavala ili vechnyi Venichka" argues that viewing Venichka as a Holy Fool allows for a breakdown of the myths surrounding Erofeev's real and literary biography. Irina Sluzhevskaja's 1991 article "Poslednii iurodivyi" further examines Venichka through the lens of the Holy Fool while Svetlana Kobets briefly references *Moskva-Petushki* in her article "From Fool to Mother to Savior: The Poetics of Russian Orthodox Christianity and Folklore in Svetlana Vasilenko's Novel-Vita 'Little Fool (Durochka)'" as an example of a connection between the Holy Fool and the question for salvation. She connects the thought expressed in 1:Corinthians 1:27 ("God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise") to Russian literary figures such as Avvakum, Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn and Erofeev who use the figure of the Holy Fool "to comment on the meaning of salvation."⁸ While these works address the variety of biblical allusions in *Moskva-Petushki*, there is still no single clear vision of what Venichka is seeking through his thirteen attempts to reach Petushki, nor an examination of Erofeev's definition of redemption. One of the reasons for this gap in knowledge may be the complexity of Venichka's personality and how it contradicts Venichka's Holy Fool image.

The existing research on Venichka's personality and psychology primarily examines Venichka's sense of self and the grief that accompanies him on his journey

⁸ Svetlana Kobets, "From Fool to Mother to Savior: The Poetics of Russian Orthodox Christianity and Folklore in Svetlana Vasilenko's Novel-Vita 'Little Fool (Durochka),' " *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 51, no. 1 (Spring, 2007), 104.

to Petushki. Nikita Blagoveshchenskii's 2006 book *Sluchai Veni E.:* *Psikhoanaliticheskoe issledovanie poëmy "Moskva-Petushki"* is an analysis of the psychopathological elements of Venichka's personality and his journey. Valentina's Baslyk's article "Venichka's Divided Self: The Sacred and the Monstrous" looks at Erofeev's troubled narrator and the division between self and society. Baslyk draws attention to two sides of Venichka's personality as both sympathetic and misanthropic. She argues, "Venichka is a schizophrenically divided narrator who continuously addresses the other: sometimes as an irritable self, more often than not as an imaginary audience, and occasionally as God and His angels."⁹ In looking at more specific aspects of Venichka's psychology, Venichka's sense of grief comes into focus in Karen Ryan's article "Erofeev's Grief: Inconsolable and Otherwise" and Konstantin Kustanovich's article "Venichka Erofeev'a Grief and Solitude: Existential Motifs in the *Poema*." Ryan-Hayes's article examines Venichka's grief as "a highly subjective personification of the authorial narrator's own spiritual condition."¹⁰ Ryan-Hayes argues that the portrayal of grief in other well-known Russian works such as Ivan Kramskoi's painting "Inconsolable Grief" ("Neuteshnoe gore") and "The Tale of Grief-Misfortune" ("Povest' o Gore-Zlochastii") shows that Erofeev incorporates these works into *Moskva-Petushki* to reflect the depth of Venichka's grief. Konstantin Kustanovich's article treats Venichka's grief as one of the existential motifs in the poem. He argues that the "main function of the comic in Erofeev's poem is a postmodernist downgrading of cultural and political idols. It

⁹ Valentina Baslyk, "Venichka's Divided Self: The Sacred and the Monstrous," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 58.

¹⁰ Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Erofeev's Grief: Inconsolable and Otherwise," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 101.

also has another function: it creates an environment in which the tragic could survive without inducing terrible boredom on the Soviet reader..."¹¹ Cynthia Simmons examines the dual nature of Venichka's personality in her chapter "Moscow-Petushki: A Transcendental Commute" in her book *Their Father's Voice: Vassily Aksyonov, Venedikt Erofeev and Sasha Sokolov*.¹² Simmons contends that the doubled characters in *Moskva-Petushki* serve as representations of the two sides of Venichka's personality: the sacred and the profane. The existing research on Venichka's psyche shows him to be a character at odds with himself. Through the focus on his grief and the duality of his psychology, which manifests in the form of the other characters on the train, Erofeev's protagonist is in existential conflict, and proves to be unable to resolve that conflict on his journey.

Venichka's internal discontent partially explains why he is searching for a resolution that will alleviate his current grief-filled state. Venichka's journey to Petushki and its subsequent failure has been the subject of much scholarship in Russia and the West. The criticism on his journey takes two approaches: examining the purpose of his journey and how his journey relates to other famous literary journeys. Katherine V. Moskver's 2000 article "Back on the Road: Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* and Traditions of Russian Literature" examines *Moskva-Petushki* as a literary travelogue that reflects numerous other Russian works such as Aleksandr Radishchev's *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. She argues, "The narrative of *Moskva-*

¹¹ Konstantin Kustanovich, "Venichka Erofeev's Grief and Solitude: Existential Motifs in the *Poema*," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 126.

¹² Cynthia Simmons, *Their Father's Voice: Vassily Aksyonov, Venedikt Erofeev and Sasha Sokolov* (Berne: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 71.

Petushki is another fold in the traditional forms of pilgrimage, voyage and tourism. The narrator quotes and parodies the devices of these forms and subsequently transforms travel literature."¹³ These works on *Moska-Petushki* seek to find meaning in Venichka's train ride to Petushki, and to place his journey in a larger literary conversation.

Mark Altshuller's "*Moskva-Petushki* Venedikt Erofeeva i traditsii klassicheskoi poemy" also examines Venichka's journey as a work of travel literature, but includes classical epics and other Western works such as Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and the works of Virgil and Voltaire in his analysis. As the afterword to the French edition of *Moskva-Petushki*, *Moscour-sur-vodka*, Michel Heller's article "Voyage vers bonheur dont parlent les journaux" examines the purpose of Venichka's train ride. The theme of the picaresque is also associated with *Moskva-Petushki*. Laura Beraha, in her article "Out of and Into the Void: Picaresque Absences and Annihilation" draws attention to Venichka's status as a marginal hero. Like Moskver, Beraha associates Venichka's journey with other famous quests (i.e. that of Radishchev, Gogol, and Sterne), and separates Erofeev's work from theirs by noting that "Erofeev combines this picaresque momentum with a postmodern focus on absence."¹⁴ Behara looks at various picaresque themes in *Moskva-Petushki* including negation, emptying and the cancellation of time in process. She argues, "...and from the novel's action: nothing moves, for this is a journey in nothing but non-existent in name." Karen Ryan-Hayes delves into the

¹³ Katherine V. Moskver, "Back on the Road: Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* and Traditions of Russian Literature," *Russian Literature XL-VIII* (2000): 196-197.

¹⁴ Laura Beraha, "Out of and Into the Void: Picaresque Absences and Annihilation," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 21.

picaresque and *Moskva-Petushki* in her book *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study*. She contends that the “disillusionment and doubt” of the period and the picaresque poetics in the work such as the first-person narration and episodic structure “allows for us to examine *Moskva-Petushki* against the picaresque theme or ‘myth.’”¹⁵ Although it is clear that Venichka’s journey is a pilgrimage that responds to previous literary pilgrimages, current research has not yet addressed what it is Venichka is seeking in Petushki beyond his own personal indulgence.

This dissertation argues that *Moskva-Petushki* can be read as a quest for redemption that challenges even the possibility of redemption in the Soviet Union. This claim is based on the background information the protagonist relays to his reader about his twelve unsuccessful attempts to reach Petushki and their subsequent failures. Venichka tries to reach Petushki to be reunited with his former lover and his child who appear to reside there. With the failure of each of his prior journeys Venichka finds himself back in Moscow, and unable to comprehend why he cannot reach Petushki or his son and lover. If Petushki is a meaningful place that is inaccessible to Venichka, then there must be a reason why Venichka cannot reach it. My claim that the space is closed off to Venichka is supported by the phrase *mene, tekkel, parsin*, which appears near the end of his journey: “Они, серьезные, этого не понимают, а я, легковесный, никогда не пойму... Мене, текел, фарес - то есть ты взвешен на весах и найден легковесным, то есть "текел"... Ну и пусть, пусть...” (“They are serious, they don’t understand this, but I am a lightweight, and I will never understand it...Mene, tekkel, parsin, that is you have been weighed upon

¹⁵ Karen Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 64.

the scales and found wanting, that is, tekkel. So it goes, so it goes”).¹⁶ The words reference Daniel 5:25 where the same words appear on the wall during the feast of Belshazzar, and are interpreted by Daniel to mean “you have been judged and found wanting.” If the same phrase applies to Venichka’s journey, then we must assume that at some point in the recent past Venichka has also been judged and found wanting, and that is the reason why he cannot enter the edenic space. Therefore, in order to enter Petushki, Venichka must become worthy of Petushki. Over the course of his thirteenth trip, he must undergo a change that makes him no longer wanting when he reaches Petushki. I argue that this process that Venichka undergoes is a journey of redemption as he seeks a path that will allow him to enter Petushki and be reunited with his lover and son.

If the electric train ride is a journey of redemption for Venichka the next question to ask then is: “What is Venichka’s definition of redemption?” I argue that Venichka does not have a single vision of redemption. In part this lack of vision explains why his twelve previous trips to Petushki end in his return to Moscow. Venichka is unable to find the correct path on his own, and this uncertainty is what causes him to stagger at the beginning of his thirteenth attempt. Since Venichka does not know the correct path to redemption, and has met with continued failure on previous journeys, I contend that Venichka tries three pre-established paths to redemption in hope that one will lead him to Petushki. I believe Erofeev looks to Aleksandr Radishchev’s 1790 work *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Путешествие из Петербурга в Москву*), John Milton’s 1667 poem *Paradise Lost*

¹⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 134.

and Dante Alighieri's 1308-1321 poem *The Divine Comedy (La Commedia)* as three possible routes to redemption. The overall goal of this dissertation is to examine the theme of redemption in each work, and to show how the author Erofeev responds to and parodies these three classical paths to redemption. I argue that Erofeev does so to prove how these visions of redemption are not universally applicable to all who seek redemption, and offer a false hope to seekers of it.

In examining the relationship between Erofeev's definition of redemption and that of Radishchev, Milton and Dante, it is helpful to look at the works through the lens of Tynianov's definition of parody. Tynianov's concept of parody allows for the "new," and for an author to articulate his or her characteristic voice and worldview. He defines the essence of parody as the mechanization of certain techniques, and suggests that parody is only evident if one knows the trick to that mechanization. Therefore, parody has two tasks. The first task is to show the mechanization of the method of the stylizing work, and the second task is to show the new organization of material.¹⁷ The new organization will show the mechanization of the old. In *Moskva-Petushki*, parody allows Erofeev to articulate his own path to redemption. Through stylization and common themes the works of Radishchev, Milton and Dante (among many others) serve as the first level that show through in *Moskva-Petushki*. This stylization allows Erofeev to reject the previous paths to promised redemption, and seek a new path that is applicable to his corrupted world.

¹⁷ Yu. N. Tynianov, "Istoriia literatury," *Poetika* (Moscow: Kino. M.: Nauka, 1977), 54.

Defining Erofeev's Vision of Redemption

Several critics and scholars have read *Moskva-Petushki* with the theme of redemption in mind, and moreover, that Venichka's journey to Petushki is a story of a failed redemption. As Karen Ryan-Hayes notes in *Contemporary Satire: A Genre Study*, "In Erofeev's depiction of Soviet reality of the *zastoi* period, there is no possibility of redemption, no escape from oblivion or death."¹⁸ Anna L. Komaromi in *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: The Life of Venichka* also argues that the ending of the poema shows that Venichka is "not redeemed by any redemption or renewal at the end of the narrative. The world at the end seems to be one of grotesque meaninglessness."¹⁹ Peter Krastzev also comments on the final scene of the book, and calls *Moskva-Petushki* an "idiosyncratic salvation story without resurrection or redemption in the end."²⁰ However, there is no discussion of the meaning redemption might hold for Erofeev or what serves as the basis for the path to redemption in the poema.

The most basic definition of redemption is forgiveness or absolution for past sins and mistakes. It implies that one is living in a state of moral turpitude, that one becomes aware of that state of immorality, and wants to return to a previous state of rightness.²¹ One then must make amends for one's wrongness and these attempts to

¹⁸ Karen Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 81.

¹⁹ Anna L. Komaromi, *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: The Life of Venichka* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 189.

²⁰ Peter Krastzev, "Quoting Instead of Living: Postmodern Literature Before and After the Changes in Central East Europe," *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 1, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope & John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 72.

²¹ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 255.

atone end in either success or failure. However, there are at least three more nuanced definitions of redemption that must be considered when attempting to define Erofeev's own vision of redemption: Russian Orthodox, Catholic, and Soviet. We must consider the Russian Orthodox definition of redemption because it informs the basic cultural understanding of redemption in Russia, and also look at the Catholic vision of redemption because Erofeev converted to Catholicism later in his life.²² Although Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity share a common origin, they differ significantly in how they define redemption. Vigen Guroian in his article "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment," breaks down the differences between the Orthodox vision of redemption and the Western Christian vision of redemption in terms of change within a person's psyche. He argues, "The Orthodox understanding of redemption contrasts sharply with the strongly juridical and legalistic understandings of redemption that have predominated in Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions."²³ He further asserts that the difference between the two visions of redemption is:

The physicalist Orthodox vision of redemption as a cure of sin and death that takes place within the creature or whether one adopts Western understandings of redemption as an earned or imputed righteousness in which an inward change is not as significant as the claim to change of the creature's position in relation to God.²⁴

This view of redemption as a cure of sin, Guroian notes, is supported by religious philosophers such as Nikolai Berdyaev who states, "Redemption is...not [first of all]

²² Constantin V. Ponomareff, *One Less Hope: Essays on Twentieth-Century Russian Poets* (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 2006), 193.

²³ Vigen Guroian, "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment," *Does Human Rights Need God?* ed. Elizabeth Bucar and Barbra Barrett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the reconciliation between God and man...[but rather the destruction] of the roots of sin and evil.”²⁵ Others have argued that closely tied to the Orthodox definition of redemption is the notion that redemption must come through the act of suffering. Peter J.S. Duncan in his book *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* points to figures like Ivan Aksakov and Fyodor Dostoevsky as figures who wrote extensively on the theme of redemption through suffering.²⁶ Father Aleksandr Men, a 20th century Russian priest and theologian, argued that in the Orthodox faith: “Repentance is not a sterile “grubbing around in one’s soul,” not some masochistic self-humiliation, but a re-evaluation leading to action, the action John the Baptist called the fruits of repentance.”²⁷ A. J. Wallace and R. D. Rusk in their book *Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation* note that the Orthodox Christian version of redemption calls for a moral transformation in order to obtain redemption.²⁸ Thus, the path to redemption in the Orthodox faith is an internal process through which the sinner must evaluate one’s life and then transform one’s morals in order to return to God’s graces.

Catholicism differs from Orthodox Christianity in its definition of redemption in that redemption is achieved through atonement and acts of reparation. Pope Pius

²⁵ Nikolai Berdyaev cited in Vigen Guroian, “Human Rights & Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment,” *Does Human Rights Need God?* ed. Elizabeth Bucar and Barbra Barrett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 45.

²⁶ Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (London: Routledge, 2014).

²⁷ Nikolai Berdyaev cited in Vigen Guroian, “Human Rights & Modern Western Faith: An Orthodox Christian Assessment,” *Does Human Rights Need God?* ed. Elizabeth Bucar and Barbra Barrett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 45.

²⁸ A. J. Wallace, R. D. Rusk, *Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation* (New Zealand: Bridgehead, 2011), 249-271.

IX focused specifically on these acts of atonement and reparation in his work

Miserentissimus Redemptor, which he issued 1928. He decreed:

The creature's love should be given in return for the love of the Creator, another thing follows from this at once, namely that to the same uncreated Love, if so be it has been neglected by forgetfulness or violated by offense, some sort of compensation must be rendered for the injury, and this debt is commonly called by the name of reparation.²⁹

Where the Orthodox Christian vision of redemption calls for an internal transformation, the Western Christianity, and more specifically Catholic, vision of atonement calls for an accounting of one's sins and acts of reparation to make up for those sins. The Catholic definition of redemption means that there are specific acts that a sinner can perform or undertake that will make the sinner worthy of God's grace once again. Pope Pius IX also insisted that Catholics have the obligation to seek redemption, stating: "We are holden to the duty of reparation and expiation by a certain more valid title of justice and of love." ... "Moreover this duty of expiation is laid upon the whole race of men."³⁰ This definition of redemption makes the process a requirement of the faith rather than a personal calling.

The final definition of redemption we must consider as informing Erofeev's personal vision of redemption is the Soviet definition. The official party definition of redemption comes from Karl Marx in 1834:

[A class], finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society without, therefore, emancipating all these other spheres, which is in short, a total loss of humanity and which can only redeem itself by a total redemption of

²⁹ Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (08/05/1928) [Accessed online November 17, 2014]

³⁰ Ibid.

humanity. This dissolution of society, as a particular class is the proletariat.³¹

Under the Soviets Marx's vision of redemption came to be interpreted as redemption through labor. Ilya Zemtsov in his *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life* draws attention to the idea that if a person was deemed to need redemption in the Soviet Union they were sent to labor camps: "This institution was rooted in the conviction that labor and labor alone was capable of redeeming the criminal."³² Steven A. Barnes in his book *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* discusses how closely the social definition of redemption the labor camps were tied together in the Soviet Union: "The Gulag served as a crossroads, continually redefining the line between those who could be reclaimed and for soviet society and those who would die at the camps."³³ This reinterpretation of redemption has elements of both the Orthodox and Catholic definitions of redemption. The moral transformation still must occur, however one must transform into a good Soviet citizen rather than spiritually good. The Catholic element of performing acts of atonement is replaced with physically punishing labor at the behest of the state, or as Zemtsov notes, "The humane idea of redemption by labor gave way to inhuman brutality."³⁴ The spiritual element of redemption was replaced by the idea that redemption could be a form of punishment.

³¹ Martin Malia, *Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia 1917-1991* (New York: Free Press Publishing, 1995), 39.

³² Ilya Zemtsov, "Colonies," *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life* (Livingston: Transaction Publishing Co., 1991), 58.

³³ Steven A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 255.

³⁴ Ilya Zemtsov, "Colonies," *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life* (Livingston: Transaction Publishing Co., 1991), 59.

Finally, in order to fully understand the nuances of redemption in the Soviet Union during Erofeev's lifetime we must also consider the Thaw (1956-1965) as a period of social redemption. As Barnes remarks, "The line between death and redemption shifted constantly throughout the Gulag history, as the defining features of the honest Soviet citizen and hence the most important categories of prisoner evaluation, were constantly reconfigured by the major events and turning points of Soviet history."³⁵ The Thaw was a period in which major figures of literature were rehabilitated and allowed to rejoin Soviet society after their release from prison camps. In some cases, they could publish. Figures, who just a few years earlier were considered officially unredeemable, were suddenly marked as redeemed. For example, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who had been arrested and imprisoned since 1945, was allowed back into Soviet society in 1956. However, we must also examine the period when censorship tightened after 1965, and the years leading up to 1969 when Erofeev wrote *Moskva-Petushki* to understand Erofeev's cynical view of redemption. As Soviet censorship once again became more rigid, topics being discussed in publications that had once been allowed during the Thaw were once again censored, and their writers punished in the form of hard labor or exile. This means that the redemption of the Thaw was not granted to everyone, nor did those who were marked as redeemed during it maintain that status. A path to publication for one author might end with a different author censored or arrested. While many writers saw a higher degree of freedom in the late 1950s, other writers remained unredeemable. Boris Pasternak's manuscript for *Dr. Zhivago* was announced and

³⁵ Steven A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 255.

then rejected by *Novyi Mir* in 1956, and he was expelled from the Writers' Union in 1958.³⁶ Although the Thaw offered fewer restrictions to many writers, it was not offered equally or permanently. The period of relative freedom came to an end in 1965 when Sinyavsky and Daniel were arrested, tried and sentenced to seven years of hard labor when they published their work in the West.

It is with all these definitions in mind that Erofeev constructs his own vision of redemption. The fluidity of this type of redemption and the dissimilar paths to redemption in Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism explains why neither Erofeev nor his namesake protagonist see a clear path to redemption. Moreover, these definitions of redemption do not give provide a singular set of instructions on how one can obtain redemption. In order to find a path to redemption, Erofeev turns to three literary models of redemption: *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*.

What makes these three writers stand out above all others mentioned in *Moskva-Petushki*, particularly when we consider that Radishchev, Dante and Milton are never specifically named in the poema?³⁷ Although Radishchev, Milton and Dante do not appear among the more than 80 explicit references to political, historical and literary figures that are mentioned in *Moskva-Petushki*, Erofeev engages these three works through allusion and the trajectory of Venichka's path to Petushki. Each work on its own tells a very specific story about redemption and the

³⁶ Thomas F. Rogers, "Trends in Soviet Prose of the "Thaw" Period," *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 22, no. 4 (Dec., 1968), 199.

³⁷ Erofeev hints at *The Divine Comedy*, but does so in reference to Ostrovskii at the Kilometer 43-Khrapunovo by stating: "Но теперь "довольно простоты", как сказал драматург Островский. И - финита ля комедия. Не всякая простота - святая. И не всякая комедия - божественная." Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 62.

quest for Paradise, and when we consider the conditions that each author wrote under the three works form a unique vision of what it means to seek redemption. These three paths to redemption that Erofeev references in *Moskva-Petushki* are discussed in reverse chronological order because of the dialog that occurs among the four works rather than which author had the biggest impact on Erofeev's own definition of redemption. Radishchev refers to Milton in the Tver' section *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, and several of Radishchev's ideas on social enlightenment and censorship derive from Milton's writings on those subjects. Therefore, the chapter dedicated to Radishchev's definition of redemption and how it relates to Erofeev's definition appears before Milton's to show how Radishchev incorporated the Miltonic vision of redemption into his own definition of it as well as to illustrate how Milton's definition of redemption was interpreted in the Russian context. Likewise, Milton's definition of redemption in several aspects is a response to Dante's writings on the same subject and therefore appears before the chapter on Dante to show how the idea of redemption and society evolved over the centuries, and became incorporated into *Paradise Lost*.

Each writer offers a different path to redemption that Erofeev then challenges and ultimately rejects as a way for his protagonist Venichka. For Radishchev redemption comes in the form of social enlightenment. *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* was Radishchev's call for awareness of the social ills plaguing Russia in the 18th century. His mission in writing *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* was to show the failings of Russia's social and justice systems by showing the everyday struggles most Russians suffered under serfdom and the

autocracy. He believed that if the upper echelons of Russian society understood how destructive these social constructs were to all of Russia they would understand the importance of social enlightenment, and how it would benefit all of Russia. For Radishchev redemption is not a personal journey, but a journey that all of Russia must undergo for the good of the entire country. Radishchev believed that if Russian embarked on this path of social redemption the result would be a more enlightened society in which rule of law, equality before the law, abolition of serfdom and censorship would benefit all Russians.

Milton's vision of redemption promises an alternative to Radishchev's path with a more personal outcome. Milton's path to redemption in *Paradise Lost* involves the fall of Man and places importance on individual redemption over social enlightenment. Man is born into his fallen state because of the sin of Adam and Eve, and must strive for redemption through a life of contrition and prayer in order to achieve absolution. Unlike the visions of redemption of Dante and Radishchev, the Miltonic redemption does not occur during the seeker's lifetime. Redemption is a reward only granted in death, and the seeker's status is only known in Heaven as a reward for his acts on earth. In contrast, Dante's vision of redemption is a status that one can achieve during the seeker's lifetime. Dante's path to redemption is deeply personal, and concerns neither the redemption of society nor all of humanity. While both Dante and Milton show redemption to be a process, the journey of the Dante-pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy* illustrates that a person can be redeemed in his lifetime. For Dante redemption occurs when the sinner follows the Catholic form of

redemption. He confronts his sin, atones for it with true remorse, purges himself of sin and then reconciles himself with God.

By parodying these three works Erofeev rejects the metanarratives that these three writers establish as promised ways to redemption. As a postmodern writer Erofeev shows what Jean-François Lyotard calls “an incredulity towards metanarratives.”³⁸ He rejects these large-scale and such well-established journeys as absolute truths for people who find themselves as lost as Venichka appears to be in *Moskva-Petushki*. While Erofeev’s protagonist might also be on the wrong path just like the Dante-pilgrim that does not mean that the right path will be the same for Venichka just because that path leads to redemption for the Dante’s protagonist. Through Venichka’s journey to Petushki and his belief that this journey will be different from the previous twelve attempts, Erofeev challenges the above-mentioned visions of redemption and shows how they are not universally applicable to all who seek redemption.

Chapter 1, “From Moscow to Petushki: Redemption and Social Enlightenment in Venichka’s Journey,” examines Erofeev’s response to Radishchev’s work and his use of parody to create a commentary on Russia’s journey to social enlightenment over the past two centuries. Radishchev’s vision of social enlightenment in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* means moving towards a society where all Russians are equal before the law, and thoughts can be expressed free from censorship. For Erofeev, social enlightenment means understanding the efforts of previous Russian reformers, but rejecting them for their inaction and inability to move Russia

³⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979), 7.

forward. In particular, Erofeev focuses his attention on the image of the narod (the nation; the people) and the intelligentsia, in the form of his fellow passengers, to show the stagnation of social enlightenment and social redemption in its final form as the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2, “Rebel Angels: Seeking the Satanic in *Moskva-Petushki*,” has two goals: to show how Erofeev appropriates images from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and to explain why Erofeev’s parody of Milton’s vision of redemption and longing for Paradise offers a sense of false hope to seekers who are uncertain of their own path. It posits the essence of Venichka’s rebellion as metaphysical—Venichka refuses to accept the Soviet atheist premise that the human spirit is merely a higher development of the physical world. He insists on his spiritual existence. This chapter compares Venichka to the figure of Satan, and considers the similarities between Venichka’s angels and Satan’s rebellious angels of *Paradise Lost*. Numerous times in the text Venichka appropriates the distinct characteristics of Milton’s Satan in his quest to regain Petushki. Erofeev’s creative response to *Paradise Lost* brings out the dual nature of Venichka’s personality and motivation for his journey. In his creative appropriation of *Paradise Lost*, Erofeev examines the desire to seek salvation while wanting to rebel against an established system.

Chapter 3, “Venichka and La Diritta Via: Exploring the Dantean Path to Redemption in *Moskva-Petushki*,” argues for Erofeev’s creative response to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Erofeev’s appropriation of themes and imagery creates a commentary on the idea of salvation and questions the possibility of redemption for people who seek it. Although Erofeev sends his protagonist on a journey that

resembles Dante's divinely inspired path through the use of portals and the motif of the guide, Erofeev's protagonist meets with results drastically different from Dante's. By examining Erofeev's poema through the lens of the *The Divine Comedy*, the reader must consider what it means to be redeemed in a society where redemption seems elusive.

The conclusion will explore why it is important for Venichka's thirteenth journey to Petushki to fail, and what purpose Venichka's "death" serves for the author. I argue that Erofeev kills off his protagonist so that as an author living in the Soviet Union he can survive beyond the page. Venichka's death at the hands of the four unnamed assailants serves as an example of negation and re-creation.³⁹ Erofeev kills off the fictional version of himself on his redemptive quest because Venichka seeks something beyond what the Soviet Union offers him. His journey from the heart of Moscow, the seat of Soviet power, to the edenic space of Petushki seems to push against Soviet ideals. Throughout his journey Venichka meets fellow passengers whose existence seem to mock the Soviet vision of the good citizen. Through these interactions Erofeev can criticize his country. However, by placing these criticisms in the hands of a drunkard, and then showing that Venichka is not only unable to reach Petushki, but also perishes, Erofeev is able to remove himself from the criticism that Venichka doles out during his train ride. Therefore, Venichka appears to be killed not by the Soviet system, but through his drinking and his drunkenness. This act of negation allows Erofeev to voice his denigration of the

³⁹ Gerard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2005), 261.

Soviet system, yet by placing the voice in the form of a drunken fool, Erofeev is able to outlive his character.

Chapter One

From Moscow to Petushki: Redemption and Social Enlightenment in

Venichka's Journey

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between Aleksandr Radishchev's 1790 work *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Путешествие из Петербурга в Москву*) and *Moskva-Petushki*. Although 160 years separate the two works both examine the idea of redemption in Russia. Radishchev studied the works of the French Enlightenment, and believed that Russia was far behind its Western counterparts. He was deeply concerned with Russia's system of serfdom, and the country's slow social progress. Radishchev believed that if educated Russians could see the peasants as human beings, then Russia could move towards a more egalitarian future. *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* was to serve as a guide to social enlightenment that showed the humanity of the narod, and how Russia could progress to a more just and enlightened future. Erofeev must have seen a struggle towards redemption in Radishchev's work that so closely mirrored his own struggles with the idea of redemption in Russia. The struggle with censorship and government oppression of Radishchev's time corresponds to Erofeev's struggle in the 20th century. Although the main focus of redemption differs for Erofeev, Radishchev's journey serves as a model of social redemption and shows the danger of trying to save all of Russia while living in a society that cannot see the benefits of such redemption. To comment on social redemption, Erofeev employs two

elements from *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*: the linear and circular structures of Radischev's journey, and the complicated relationship between the writer and the Russian "people" (hereafter called the "narod"). With these two elements Erofeev shows why Radishchev's path to redemption cannot work for a writer living in Soviet Russia as well as the dangers of following such a path.

Historical Context of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*

One of the main reasons for Erofeev's attraction to *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* may have been the fate of the book and its writer in both Radishchev's lifetime and during the early Soviet period. After the publication of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* Radishchev became a marked man. Although the book was published anonymously, Catherine II could easily trace the work to Radishchev. Catherine labeled Radishchev as "a rebel worse than Pugachev" and called for his immediate arrest.⁴⁰ As Catherine's fears for a revolution in Russia following the French Revolution of 1789 grew, her tolerance for criticism lessened. Her fear that people would read Radishchev's work as a call to rebellion meant that Catherine refused to see Radishchev's work as the call to reform that its author intended. Her punishment of Radishchev was swift and merciless: he was arrested and convicted of a host of charges, including treason and incitement of rebellion.⁴¹ Catherine sentenced Radishchev to death for his crimes. The condemnation to death was a shock to Radishchev who must have believed that Catherine would have followed

⁴⁰ Allen McConnell, "Pushkin's Literary Gamble." *American Slavic and East European Review* 19, no. 4 (Dec., 1960): 588.

⁴¹ Allen McConnell, "The Empress and her Protege: Catherine II and Radishchev," *The Journal of Modern History* 36, no. 1 (Mar., 1964): 14.

her own legal code, *The Nakaz*, for deciding his punishment. He saw Catherine as an enlightened ruler in many ways, so her initial barbaric death sentence was inconsistent with her image as an enlightened ruler. During his arrest and subsequent trial, Radishchev began to deny his work stating that it was “insane” and “deluded.”⁴² Catherine, appearing to come to her senses, converted Radishchev’s death sentence to exile for 10 years in Siberia.

Radishchev’s reception in Russia changed during the early part of the 20th century. Although Radishchev’s sentence was reduced to exile and he was eventually allowed back to European Russia, his work was banned from publication in Russia until 1906. However, early Soviet historians quickly dismissed *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as being a “misguided ‘bourgeois’” work due to the heavy western influence in the text. Later Soviet historians offered an alternative view of the role the text played in Russian history.⁴³ The new interpretation of Radishchev’s message came on the heels of the Russian Revolution as leaders such as the first People’s Commissar of Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii declared Radishchev a “revolutionary from head to foot, bearing in his heart the echo of rebellious and victorious Paris.”⁴⁴ Although not every early Soviet historian embraced Radishchev as a revolutionary, Marc Raeff in his article “Filling the Gaps Between Radishchev and the Decembrists” categorized that period of the 1920s as a

⁴² Allen McConnell, “The Empress and her Protégé: Catherine II and Radishchev,” *The Journal of Modern History* 36, no. 1 (Mar., 1964): 25.

⁴³ Allen McConnell, “Soviet Images of Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1963), 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

time of “an active search for the first genuinely revolutionary thinker in Russia.”⁴⁵ Soviet historians sought to find a writer that could act as an ancestor to the revolution, and Radishchev filled that role. Radishchev’s biggest advocate during the first half of the Soviet period was Vladimir Petrovich Semennikov. Semennikov’s *Radishchev: Ocherki i issledovaniia* was a key text in understanding the Soviet interpretation of Radishchev’s message and the Soviet idea of Radishchev as a revolutionary. As McConnell notes, the “duality of Radishchev’s personality” and his “political hesitation—the reluctance to resort to violence except as a desperate last resort” was ignored by Soviet historians in favor of a more revolutionary interpretation of Radishchev’s underlying message.⁴⁶

Although the idea of Radishchev as a revolutionary would shift back and forth between viewing Radishchev as an ancestor to the revolution and viewing him as a bourgeois, the image of Radishchev during Erofeev’s time was that of a revolutionary. After World War II and during the Thaw, Soviet historians such as Grigorii Gukovskii and Georgii Makogonenko reinforced the idea that Radishchev was a revolutionary. McConnell notes that Makogonenko even saw a political education theme in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as the protagonist undergoes a “steady social and political education.”⁴⁷ Just as Soviet historians sought kinship with historical figures to strengthen their message, in his article “Soviet Dissidents on the Russian Intelligentsia 1956-1985: The Search for the

⁴⁵ Marc Raeff, “Filling the Gaps between Radishchev and the Decembrists,” *Slavic Review* 26, no. 3 (Sept., 1967): 397.

⁴⁶ Allen McConnell, “Soviet Images of Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1963), 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

Usable Past,” Jay Bergman writes that many Soviet dissidents also sought kinship with writers and political figures from Russia’s past. For the dissidents, the members of the Russian intelligentsia stood for a source of “comfort and sustenance during their own trials, imprisonments, and petty humiliations.”⁴⁸ For dissidents Radishchev represented a model for “standing enduring persecution” and not a figure that showed “that Bolshevism and the Soviet state were not an outgrowth or a consequence of the intelligentsia but a betrayal of it.”⁴⁹ However, Erofeev saw an overreliance on previous writers. In a 1990 interview with Leonid Prudovskii, Erofeev mentions Radishchev twice. He first mentions him in comparison to Herzen:

Я когда читаю переписку Маркса с Энгельсом, всякое дурное слово об Александре Герцене мне прямо душу щекочет. Я уважаю его не за диссидентство, а за то, что он — блестящий мыслитель и блестящий человек, и его любят все, в этом сходятся все, начиная от Кайсарова до Аверинцева, от Айхенвальда до Эйхенбаума. Если в отношении Радищева есть маленький спор, то Александр Герцен не вызывает возражений.⁵⁰

I have read the correspondence of Marx and Engels, any bad word about Aleksandr Herzen tickles me straight to my soul. I respect him not for dissidence, but because he is a brilliant thinker and brilliant man and everyone loves him from Kaisarova to Averintsev, from Aihenval’d to Eikhenbaum. If there is a small dispute with regard to Radishev, then Alexander Herzen is unobjectionable.

Later in the same interview Erofeev criticizes writers of the past and specifically names Radishchev as one of the overly admired writers: “хотя бы взял в образец Радищева или Александра Грибоедова, Петра Чаадаева — неужели они настолько живучи, что набальзамированы?” (“at least take the example of

⁴⁸ Jay Bergman, “Soviet Dissidents on the Russian Intelligentsia 1956-1985: The Search for the Usable Past,” *Russian Review* 51, no. 1 (Jan., 1992), 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ Leonid Prudovskii, “Sudmasshedshim možno byt’ v lyuboe vremia,” *Kontinent* 1990, No. 65.

Radishchev or Aleksandr Griboedov or Peter Chaadaev—really, why are they so tenaciously embalmed?”).⁵¹ The following discussion examines Erofeev response to Radishchev’s ideas of social redemption through the use of circular and linear paths; the theme of the journey; and Venichka’s interactions with the narod and allows us to read *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as a subtext for *Moskva-Petushki*.

Circular & Linear Paths

Erofeev responds to *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* through the use of parallel narrative structures in *Moskva-Petushki*. His treatment of circular and linear paths in Venichka’s journey parodies the journey of Radishchev’s narrator and highlights the ineffectiveness and corruption of Russia’s officials and the country’s stagnation. At the beginning of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* the narrator’s journey initially appears to be a linear path: the trip starts in St. Petersburg and ends in Moscow with stops along the way for rest and provisions. At each stop along the linear journey, Radishchev’s narrator meets with various figures who, through the tales of their struggles and strife, illustrate the need for reform in Russia. For Radishchev the linear movement of his narrator is symbolic of the progressive movement Russia should follow towards a more enlightened future. He believes that the French model of Enlightenment is possible for Russia, and that this state of enlightenment could be reached through gradual reform. *A Journey from St. Petersburg from Moscow* mimics this progression towards a more enlightened

⁵¹ Ibid.

society by addressing each of the social ills that plagues Russia; one at each of the narrator's stops along the journey.

Even before the reign of Catherine the Great St. Petersburg was generally thought of as Russia's center of enlightened thought and government. However, the city's reputation as a center of learning grew through Catherine's epistolary relationship with philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot, and helped cement St. Petersburg's reputation as Russia's center of enlightened thought. However, in an ironic twist, Radishchev seems to suggest that it is Moscow, and not Petersburg that will serve as Russia's center for enlightenment. Radishchev seems to have designed the journey to be a simple linear route that has the end goal of enlightenment for the all of Russia. The narrator comments on the ills of Russian society during the progression of his trip with the final destination of the trip being Moscow. Through Radishchev's praise of Lomonosov and his contributions to Russian thought he implicitly sets Moscow up to become the Russian center of Enlightenment. In contrast, St. Petersburg, Russia's window to the West, becomes a place of stagnation and corruption.

In *Moskva-Petushki* Venichka's journey also appears to be a linear path as the train moves from Moscow to Petushki, although instead of being focused on social enlightenment, Venichka's end goal is one of personal fulfillment and spiritual redemption. The goal of Venichka's linear trip on the electric train is to reach the city of Petushki, a land of milk and honey, so that he can be reunited with his lover and his child. Like Radishchev's narrator, Venichka has hopes of reaching this final destination and a better life. As with *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, the

journey involves numerous stops along the way. Venichka's linear progression towards Petushki is apparent as the text moves through each of the stops along the train line. However, Venichka's linear progression becomes derailed when, at the end of the poem, Venichka finds himself once again on the train platform in Moscow rather than the train platform in Petushki. His expected linear journey has unexpectedly become a circular path, returning the narrator back to his starting point. Any progress that Venichka has made toward his end goal is completely undone.

In this manner, one must consider Venichka's circular journey as Erofeev's humorous response to Radishchev's narrator's seemingly linear journey. Erofeev sends Venichka on a journey that has initially the same linear trajectory as Radishchev's narrator, and both narrators end up in Moscow whether on purpose or by accident. This inversion of intention of the journey even appears in the title of *Moskva-Petushki* as Erofeev chooses two cities for Venichka's path that begin with "P" and "M" but in the reverse order of Radishchev's journey. Likewise, Venichka wants to reach a singular fixed point by the end of his journey, the opposite intention of Radishchev's journey. Venichka makes no mention of his return trip, and from the stories he relates to his reader, such as his dismissal from his job as a foreman, there seems to be no reason that he would return to Moscow. His trip has the terminal goal of Petushki so that he can be with his lover and his child in Petushki. Erofeev, however, has other plans for his narrator, and despite Venichka's intention, he is returned to Moscow without ever reaching his end goal. As readers, we know that Venichka has attempted this journey several times, which each

attempt resulting in a failure to reach his destination. If we read *Moskva-Petushki* as a response to Radishchev's plans for Russia's social redemption, Venichka's round trip points to the hopelessness of trying for redemption since it will just lead back to where the journey began.

Direction and Intention of the Journey

In comparing the movement of Radishchev's narrator and Venichka, one must also consider the intentions of their journeys. Although the title of Radishchev's work gives the reader the starting and ending location of the trip, Radishchev gives the reader little information about the purpose or the lasting significance of the trip. The narrative begins after Radishchev's narrator has already begun his journey, and gives no context for the narrator's trip to Moscow. Throughout the trip he makes no mention of the journey being a permanent relocation to Moscow, and at the end of the work declares that he and the reader will meet again on his return trip. As his linear journey seems to come to an end, Radishchev's narrator shows every intention of a return route. Just prior to his arrival in Moscow the narrator declares:

Но, любезный читатель, я с тобою закалякался... Вот уже Всесвятское... Если я тебе не наскучил, то подожди меня у околицы, мы повидаемся на возвратном пути. Теперь прости. - Ямщик, погоняй.⁵²

But, kind reader, I have already said too much... Here already we are in Vsesviatskoe--If I didn't bore you, wait for me at the crossroads, we will meet again on the return trip. Now forgive me. -Coachman, drive.

⁵² Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 222.

However, immediately after this promise of meeting again, the narrator lets out an ecstatic cry of “Москва! Москва!!!” (“Moscow! Moscow!!!”)⁵³ as the narrator shifts back from his anticipated circular journey to his linear one. Although the narrator is elated to have reached his destination, his journey is seemingly far from over. In contrast to Radishchev's achievement of his physical destination at the beginning of *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka has every intention of a one-way trip with a singular goal in mind. The goal of his trip is simple: to reach Petushki in order to rejoin his lover and child. He appears to have no intention of returning to Moscow. As with Radishchev's narrator, the intended trip is altered without the narrator being aware of the change in the destination. Venichka's trip becomes a round trip without his knowledge or consent.

The writers differ in the treatment of the stops along their linear paths. In *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, each town along the path to Moscow allows Radishchev to comment on the various problems in Russian society. The towns are not merely something for the narrator to pass through as he moves toward Moscow. Each town allows the narrator to interact with the local inhabitants or another traveler, and for Radishchev to expose their struggles to his readers. Each stop along the way permits the reader to acknowledge a social ill in Russia, and to reflect on needed civil improvements. For Radishchev's narrator the stops are necessary not only for rest and provisions, but as opportunities to expose social ills and their direct effect on ordinary Russians. Radishchev's treatment of the stops on his path stands in stark contrast to Erofeev's treatment of the stops along the journey to

⁵³ Ibid.

Petushki. As in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, the segments in *Moskva-Petushki* are noted as the narrator moves from point to point. The difference is the stops play no role in the text, and serve to parody Radishchev's text. The location markers in *Moskva-Petushki* act as a source of parody when viewed through the lens of Tynianov's two-part concept of parody. Tynianov defines his concept of parody as a two-tiered phenomenon: "behind the apparent structure of a work, its first level, lies a second level, that of the work which it stylizes or parodies."⁵⁴ Venichka undermines the basic narrative structure of the progress to enlightenment, which assumes that each stop or segment contains a key point exposing Russia's lack of enlightenment or promoting a key point to bring about Russian enlightenment. At times the stops even interrupt Venichka's narrative:

И есть душа, пока еще чуть приоткрытая для впечатлений бытия.
Раздели со мной трапезу, Господи!

Серп и Молот - Карачарово.

И немедленно выпил.

Карачарово - Чухлинка.

А выпив - сами видите, как долго я морщился и сдерживал тошноту, сколько чертыхался и сквернословил.⁵⁵

And I have a soul, until the present has been slightly opened to the impressions of life. Share with me my repast, Lord.

Hammer and Sickle-Karacharovo

And immediately I drank.

Karacharovo-Chukhlinka

I drank it all, you saw how long I screwed up my face and I constrained my nausea, how much I swore and talked shit.

⁵⁴ Yu. N. Tynianov, "Dostoevsky and Gogol: Towards a Theory of Parody," *Dostoevsky and Gogol: Texts and Criticisms*, ed. Priscilla Meyer and Stephen Rudy (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), 101-118.

⁵⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 16-19.

Erofeev gives the reader little information about the stops on the way to Petushki, at times reducing their locations to merely kilometer markers: 65-й километр (“kilometer 65”).

Unlike Radishchev’s narrator, Venichka has little concern for the people he meets along his journey. While Radishchev’s narrator is invested in exposing the struggles of the people he encountered, Venichka sees the people on the train as little more than drinking buddies. As J.J. van Baak points out the two texts are particularly linked in structure and through the “confrontations with people and circumstances that induce a variety of critical and revelatory contemplations of Russia and the state it is in.”⁵⁶ However, Venichka’s interest in his fellow passengers has little to do with their struggles, and seemingly more to do with their possession of alcohol. His fellow passengers only have merit when they are drinking with Venichka, although even then he is entirely unconcerned when they randomly disappear from the text. The irrelevance of the stops along the way to Petushki and Venichka’s fellow passengers demonstrates Venichka’s singular focus on this journey: reaching Petushki.

The Journeys’ Origins and Destinations

Saint Petersburg serves as the point of origin for the Radishchev’s journey, and the city represents one of the many complexities of the text. The city’s place in the journey is marked not only by being the point of origin, but for being one of two

⁵⁶ Joost van Baak, *The House in Russian Literature: A Mythopoetic Exploration* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2009), 447.

places in the text that are not titled by the segment's name.⁵⁷ While each segment of the narrator's journey is carefully marked by town names, St. Petersburg, the narrator's starting location is unmarked, but rather labeled as "ВЫЕЗД" ("departure") as though the only merit the city has is as a place to depart from.⁵⁸ Although St. Petersburg is often thought of as stereotypically Russia's "window to the West" in Russia, throughout the text, Radishchev shows St. Petersburg as having a dual nature. On his journey, the narrator meets several travelers and hears tales in which St. Petersburg emerges as a city of corruption. In the fourth segment of his journey, "Chudovo," the narrator encounters his friend Ch--- who tells the narrator his reasons for never returning to Saint Petersburg:

Теперь я прощусь с городом навеки. Не въеду николи в сие жилище тигров. Единое их веселие - грызть друг друга; отрада их - томить слабого до издыхания и раболепствовать власти. И ты хотел, чтоб я поселился в городе. - Нет, мой друг, - говорил мой повествователь, вскочив со стула, - заеду туда, куда люди не ходят, где не знают, что есть человек, где имя его неизвестно. Прости, - сел в кибитку и поскакал.⁵⁹

"Now I will say goodbye to this city forever. I will not enter this den of tigers. Their only joy is to gnaw at each other; their only pleasure - to harass the weak to their last breath and to grovel before the powers that be. And you wanted that I settle in the city. - No, my friend," - my storyteller said, having jumped up from his chair, "I will go where people don't go, where they don't know what man is, where a man's name is unknown. Forgive me," - he climbed into the carriage and rode off.

With this passage, Radishchev shows Petersburg not as an enlightened city, but as a city where the citizens are willing to betray each other. By linking the citizens with a

⁵⁷ The other is Moscow, which the narrator reaches at the end of his eulogy to Lomonosov.

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

“den of tigers” Radishchev makes the population of the city seem more savage than civilized.

In the very next segment of his journey, “Spasskaia Polest”, Radishchev’s narrator hears two more stories that paint St. Petersburg as a city of corruption, and as a place that does not represent the values of the Enlightenment. In one tale, a man is on the run from the law, having also fallen victim to both the pettiness of the aristocracy of St. Petersburg and the corruption of the courts. The fellow traveler trusted his business partner in leasing concessions, who had secretly hidden a large amount of debt. The partner goes into hiding, leaving the narrator’s fellow traveler responsible for the entire debt. When he is unable to pay the debt of his partner, he is found guilty, stripped of his rank and sentenced to prison. Although the fellow traveler has kept the verdict quiet in order not to upset his pregnant wife, one of their acquaintances relays the story at a dinner party so his wife can overhear it:

У меня был обед, и множество так называемых друзей, собравшись, насыщали праздный свой голод на мой счет. Один из бывших тут, который внутренне меня не любил, начал говорить с сидевшим подле него, хотя вполголоса, но довольно громко, чтобы говоренное жене моей и многим другим слышно было: "Неужели вы не знаете, что дело нашего хозяина в уголовной палате уже решено."⁶⁰

I gave dinner, and a great number of so-called friends, gathered, and sated their idle hunger on my dime. One of those present who secretly disdained me, started speaking to the person seated beside him though in a low voice, but loud enough so that to my wife and many other could hear his voice: "Really, don't you know that criminal matter of our host has already been decided."

The shock of the verdict results in a miscarriage and the wife’s death. In this segment of the trip the traveler describes the glee his peers felt at his downfall just

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.

as the previous traveler did in the “Chudovo” segment of the journey. In this manner Radishchev shows St. Petersburg not only as a city of corruption, but also as a city where the inhabitants prey upon each other and revel in the downfall of their fellow Russians.

Radishchev associates St. Petersburg with circular motion rather than progressive movement. In “Spasskaia Polest’,” the narrator stops at the hut of a man who tells him the story of a government official in St. Petersburg who has an overwhelming desire for fresh oysters. His gluttony reaches such a level that he spends the city’s money sending employees out on small trips to collect as many oysters as he can consume.

Later that evening, Radishchev dreams that he is a monarch. In the dream he believes that everyone fawns over him and that every order he issues is obeyed. However, one character in the dream, the Lord Admiral, travels the world by boat in order to disburse the tsar’s ships across the globe. He describes his nautical adventures in flowery, overly dramatic style. At the end of the dream the reader learns that the Lord Admiral’s entire journey is a lie, and the Lord Admiral has merely been sailing around the harbor of St. Petersburg. Therefore, Radishchev’s dream becomes a story about the lies that the subjects tell to their monarch and the willingness of the monarch to believe them.

As Wiener notes in his foreword to his translation, these two stories are two of the very few instances of humor in Radishchev’s work.⁶¹ He argues that,

⁶¹ Aleksandr Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. Leo Weiner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 32.

“Radishchev was well aware of the possibilities of ridicule as a weapon.”⁶² These humorous stories serve as exaggerated examples of the gross corruption and blindness on the part of the monarch, both of which impede the progress to enlightenment. One of the more interesting aspects of the scene is that Radishchev chose to have both of these smaller tales begin and end in the same place his narrator’s journey begins and intends to end. Through this dream, Radishchev has made St. Petersburg a location of pointless and self-serving journeys. With these smaller circular fictions Radishchev creates a foil for his protagonist’s linear journey. The smaller tales show the unenlightened nature of people like the Lord Admiral in their self-serving and selfish journey versus the logical and enlightening purpose of Radishchev’s journey. He also criticizes the rulers who allow themselves to be flattered and do not check on their minions. By contrasting the two types of journeys in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* Radishchev makes his narrator’s journey seem more credible and selfless.

One of the complexities of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* is that St. Petersburg is associated with both linear and circular movement as well as both negative and positive social characteristics. Although Radishchev’s narrator meets numerous characters who reveal St. Petersburg as a place of corruption and the opposite of Enlightenment ideals, he also meets travelers who show the enlightened side of St. Petersburg society signifying that Radishchev himself is uncertain as to where Russia’s center of enlightenment really lies. In the “Torzhok” segment of his journey, Radishchev’s narrator meets a man on his way to St. Petersburg to present

⁶² Ibid., 33.

a petition seeking permission to establish a free printing press in Torzhok. This petitioner is traveling a path that is the exact opposite of the narrator's path. Here St. Petersburg is the perceived center of Russian enlightenment. During this segment of the journey, the narrator gives the history and origin of censorship in the western world from early Greek and Roman times. While Radishchev's narrator searches for Russian enlightenment in Russia's ancient capital city, Moscow, others in the text do see St. Petersburg as both the seat of power and as a chance for a more enlightened future.

As with St. Petersburg, the end goal of Moscow with its dual nature also illustrates some of the complications in the text. If the reader is to understand *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as Radishchev's effort to spread true enlightenment ideas, then Moscow, the narrator's ultimate destination, implicitly represents the ideals of a specifically Russian Enlightenment. As the narrator approaches Moscow, his focus shifts from the ills of Russian society, and becomes fixated on the figure of Mikhail Vasil'evich Lomonosov. Lomonosov is associated with both the city of Moscow and Russian thought. He was educated in Moscow at the Greco-Latin Academy, and founded Moscow University in 1755. Through his scientific work Lomonosov became the embodiment of the Enlightenment in Russia as his work demonstrated what Wachtel and Vinnitsky have called "his hopes to synthesize art, science, and technology in an aesthetic realization of the Enlightenment utopia."⁶³ For Radishchev, Moscow becomes Russia's seat of enlightenment because of its association with Lomonosov and the advances he

⁶³ Aleksandr Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg from Moscow*, ed. Leo Wiener (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 24.

made in Russian versification as well as the contributions he made to the Russian language:

Если бы силы мои достаточны были, представил бы я, как постепенно великий муж водворял в понятие свое понятия чуждые, кои, преобразовавшись в душе его и разуме, в новом виде явились в его творениях или родили совсем другие, уму человеческому доселе неведомые. Представил бы его, ищущего знания в древних рукописях своего училища и гонящегося за видом учения везде, где казалось быть его хранилище. Часто обманут бывал в ожидании своем, но частым чтением церковных книг он основание положил к изящности своего слога, какое чтение он предлагает всем желающим приобрести искусство русского слова.⁶⁴

If my powers were enough, I would show you how the great man gradually changed the ideas of others, which transformed in his soul and his mind, into a new form in his works, or have given rise to completely new creations hitherto unknown to the human mind. I would present him as a seeker of knowledge in the ancient writings of his school, and constantly seeking knowledge wherever it lay hidden. He was often deceived in his expectation, but by his constant reading of religious books he laid the foundation for the elegance of his style, and by his counsel, he invites such a reading to all who wish to master the art of the Russian word.

Radishchev admires the impact that Lomonosov has had on the Russian language.

With his narrator's arrival in Moscow, Radishchev suggests that Russia's path to enlightenment does not lie in St. Petersburg and its more Western version of Enlightenment, but with Moscow and embracing the way Lomonosov molded Western knowledge to create something new and uniquely Russian.

Radishchev also gives conflicting views of Moscow. In some interactions Moscow serves as a place of enlightenment, yet in others such as "Gorodnya" Radishchev shows the worst parts of Moscow through the narrator's interactions

⁶⁴ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 210.

with people along the way. In “Gorodnya,” the narrator hears the story of Van’ka, a serf-recruit who received an education and was sent abroad by his master. When the old master dies, his son makes the same promises to Van’ka, that he will be “equal to a free man.” However, the younger master meets a woman in Moscow who resists his progressive views. Van’ka informs the narrator that the Muscovite woman was both beautiful and cruel:

мой господин влюбился в изрядную лицом девицу, но которая с красотой телесною соединяла скареднейшую душу и сердце жестокое и суровое. Воспитанная в надменности своего происхождения, отличностию почитала только внешность, знатность, богатство.⁶⁵

my lord fell in love with a pretty maiden, but whose beauty of body was combined with a stingy heart and a cruel and harsh soul. She was reared on the arrogance of her birth, she only cared about external show, nobility, and wealth.

Through this tale, Radishchev shows that some Muscovites seem concerned only with status and external show. Van’ka’s story shows Moscow as a place that resists broad social equality before the law, the most basic tenet of the Enlightenment. Moscow as a place of anti-Enlightenment is reinforced in the “Peshki” section of the journey when the narrator interacts with serfs. When discussing the difficult work of the peasants and the profits of the landowners a serf declares, “Правда, что и бурмистр наш, когда ездит к Москве, то его покупает (сахар), но также на наши слезы” (“It’s true, when our steward goes to Moscow, he buys it (sugar), but he too pays for it with our tears”).⁶⁶ This indictment that Muscovites thrive on the forced labor of their countrymen further confirms that neither Moscow, nor St.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 203.

Petersburg, is the center of Russian enlightenment. Although Radishchev's journey is a linear progression through Russia's social problems, the destination does not seem to offer a final solution to these problems. Moscow does not seem to exemplify a gold standard for the rest of Russia to strive for, as it is plagued by many of the same ills as St. Petersburg. Although Moscow, with its bright lights like Lomonosov, serves as the narrator's final destination in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, it is the entirety of Russia, rural and capital cities alike, that begs for civil reform.

In *Moskva-Petushki*, the points of departure and destination have a more fixed symbolic meaning than in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. Venichka's Petushki is a parodistic location within Russia's borders:

“Петушки” - это место, где не умолкают птицы, ни днем, ни ночью, где ни зимой, ни летом не отцветает жасмин. Первородный грех - может, он и был - там никого не тяготит. Там даже у тех, кто не просыхает по неделям, взгляд бездонен и ясен”⁶⁷

Petushki-this place where the birds never cease their singing, not in the day and not in night, where the jasmine never ceases blooming, not in winter and not in summer. Original sin, maybe there is such a thing, but not there. There, even those who don't dry out for weeks have a clear unending look in their eyes.

Through its name and Venichka's vivid description, Petushki resembles a land of Cockaigne. The Petushki that Venichka describes is a fantastical location full of beautiful images and pleasures commonly associated with the Garden of Eden. At the same time, it is also a place where the residents are freed from the restrictions imposed upon them by society; one can indulge in the pleasures of life without fearing the consequences. Like Radishchev's St. Petersburg, Petushki is a place of

⁶⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 34.

indulgence; the jasmine blooms forever, and drunks can stay intoxicated for weeks on end without any physical or social consequences. Through Venichka's description of Petushki, it is evident that Petushki parodies aspects of Radishchev's St. Petersburg. The first level of parody is apparent in the phonemic association of Petushki with Petersburg. Although Petushki, the name of Venichka's destination, is alliteratively connected to St. Petersburg through the root sound "p-e-t." The similarity in names reminds the reader of Radishchev's work, and forces the reader to compare and contrast the two locations because Erofeev's Petushki bears little resemblance to Radishchev's St. Petersburg. The second level of parody displaces Radishchev's Enlightenment dreams for Russia with Erofeev's pre-Enlightenment edenic idyll that challenges the image of the capital as a leader in a just and egalitarian Enlightenment governance. Through these two levels of parody, Erofeev reinterprets Radishchev's vision of an edenic location within the boundaries of Russia.

Likewise, Moscow has a more fixed symbolic meaning in *Moskva-Petushki* than it does in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. Moscow is a place of ultimate and gross state violence, and a place from which to escape. Venichka needs to get away from Moscow because the city holds nothing for him, despite his continued search for the Kremlin. His lover and child are elsewhere, he has been fired from his job, and it is a place where he is repeatedly punished for his intoxication. In Moscow Venichka is an outsider. He cannot conform to the social standards the city requires of its citizens. From the first lines of the text the capitol is a place that Venichka cannot understand:

Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышал про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмельюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало - и ни разу не видел Кремля.⁶⁸

Everyone says, the Kremlin, the Kremlin. I have heard about it from everyone, but I have never seen it myself. How many times (thousands of times) I've walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow, from north to south, from east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, yet I have never seen the Kremlin.

Venichka fails to understand the layout of the very center of the city, and his confusion about the city's geography contributes to his inability to reach Petushki. His inability to find the Kremlin, the very center of the city geographically and politically, is symbolic of his failure to understand Moscow as a whole. Since he does not understand Moscow he fails to recognize that he has been returned to the city rather than arriving in his final destination.

Progressive Movement

The tension between linearity (progressive thinking) and circular movement (traditional thinking) is evident in both works. Radishchev intends *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* to be a polemic that shows the problems of eighteenth-century Russian society.⁶⁹ He believes that if Russian society could embrace the tenets of the enlightenment, then Russia's citizens as a whole could move towards being a just state for all of its citizens. *A Journey for St. Petersburg to Moscow* echoes this linear progression of Radishchev's hope for Russia's future. Radishchev's

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹ Allen, McConnell, "Radishchev's Political Thought," *American Slavic and East European Review* 17.4 (1958): 439-53.

narrator moves in a straight line as he ruminates on each of Russia's social issue. If Radishchev's goal is social Enlightenment in Russia, then this progression with an end goal and destination is expected. However, the path that Radishchev presents to his reader is a much more complex text with neither St. Petersburg nor Moscow representing an ideal place of enlightenment. The narrator's last comment to the reader, that they will meet again on the return trip, just prior to reaching Moscow seems to reflect Radishchev's concerns that neither city might be the location of an enlightened Russia.

In *Moskva-Petushki* the tension between circular and linear movement appears in Venichka's movement and in the shape of Moscow itself. Venichka's goal is linear as he embarks on a direct path to Petushki on the electric train. For Venichka, linear movement represents his hope for personal redemption. He desires to move from one point to another in the most direct way possible so that he can achieve his end goal. Unlike Radishchev, Venichka is completely unconcerned with the stops between Moscow and Petushki. While he is waiting in the Kursk station for the train, the stops are announced three times: “- Повторяю! В 8 часов 16 минут из четвертого тупика отправится поезд до Петушков. Остановки: Серп и Молот, Чухлинка, Реутово, Железнодорожная. Далее - по всем пунктам, кроме Есино” (“I repeat! At 8:16, leaving from the fourth row the train to Petushki. Stops: Hammer and Sickle, Chukhlinka, Reutovo, Zheleznodorozhanaya, and all points except Esino.”).⁷⁰ However, Venichka expresses no interest and offers no commentary on these locations. He is only interested in the end result: the straight path to Petushki

⁷⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 12.

where he expects to find his lover and his child. For Venichka, linearity represents hope, while circular movement and structures represent his current reality and his ultimate demise. This reflects the geographical layout of Moscow, the very city that Venichka is trying to escape. As Venichka rides the train out of Moscow, he is passing through the circles of the Moscow region, and actively removing himself from the place he does not understand.

The contrast between circular and linear movement in the text is further reflected in Venichka's former job as brigade foreman and his futile attempts to enlighten his coworkers. In the "Kuskovo-Novogireevo" section of the journey, Venichka describes his daily obligations as an endless cycle of playing blackjack, unwinding cable and drinking until Venichka and his fellow workers fell asleep:

Дело началось проще. До меня наш производственный процесс выглядел следующим образом: с утра мы садились и играли в сику, на деньги (вы умеете играть в сику?). Так. Потом вставляли, разматывали барабан с кабелем, и кабель укладывали под землю. А потом - известное дело: садились, и каждый по-своему убивал свой досуг, ведь все-таки у каждого своя мечта и свой темперамент: один - вермут пил, другой, кто попроще одеколон "Свежесть", а кто с претензией - пил коньяк в международном аэропорту Шереметьево. И ложились спать.

А наутро так: сначала садились и пили вермут. Потом вставляли и вчерашний кабель вытаскивали из-под земли и выбрасывали, потому что он уже весь мокрый был, конечно. А потом - что же? - потом садились играть в сику, на деньги. Так и ложились спать, не доиграв.

Рано утром уже будили друг друга: "Леха! Вставай в сику играть!" "Славик, вставай доигрывать вчерашнюю сику!" Вставляли, доигрывали в сику. А потом - ни свет, ни заря, ни "Свежести" не попив, ни вермуту, хватали барабан с кабелем и начинали его разматывать, чтобы он до завтра отмок и пришел в негодность. А

уж потом - каждый за свой досуг, потому что у каждого свои идеалы. И так все сначала.⁷¹

This is how it went. Before I was foreman our schedule looked like this: in the morning we would sit down and play blackjack for money (do you know how to play blackjack?). So. Then we'd get up and unwind the drum of cable and put the cable in the ground. And then we would sit and everyone would relax in their own way. Everyone after all has their own way of relaxing. One of us drank vermouth, someone else drank the eau de cologne "Freshen-up," and a more pretentious person would drink cognac at Sheremetievo International Airport. And then we'd all go to sleep.

First thing the next morning, we would sit and drink vermouth. Then we'd get up and pull yesterday's cable from the ground and throw it away, since it had gotten all wet. And then what? Then we'd sit around again playing blackjack for money. And we'd go to sleep with the game unfinished.

In the morning, we'd wake each other, "Lekha! Get up and let's play blackjack!" "Stasik, get up and let's finish last night's game." We'd get up and finish the game. And then-without light, without sunrise without having drunk Freshen-up or vermouth, we'd grab a drum of cable and start to lay it out. And by then each out be relaxing again because each had his own ideals. And then it would all start over again.

When Venichka is merely a worker equal in status to his coworkers, he is content with this pattern of booze, work and sleep. Prior to becoming foreman, Venichka and his coworkers lived in a harmonious cycle as expectations from their superiors were predictable, and they knew when they are supposed to drink, play games and work. It is interesting to note that while they worked in this relatively congenial state, Venichka noted: "А уж потом - каждый за свой досуг, потому что у каждого свои идеалы. И так все сначала" ("And then we would sit down and everyone would relax in his own way because everyone has his own ideals. That's

⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

how it all began.”).⁷² While Venichka and his coworkers are on equal footing, any differences between them in terms of ideals and beliefs are tolerated. However, when Venichka receives his promotion to foreman, the cycle is almost instantly broken and Venichka begins a linear progression to improve the lives of his coworkers. When he finds himself in the position of authority over his coworkers, and has responsibilities to both his coworkers and his superiors Venichka attempts a linear progression of improvement for his coworkers and himself.

As soon as Venichka moves into a position of authority, he feels as though it is his job to improve their general welfare. He states: “Став бригадиром, я упростил этот процесс до мыслимого предела” (“Having become the foreman, I simplified this process to an imaginable limit”).⁷³ With this idea Venichka demonstrates the immediacy of his actions, and his assumption that he can better the lives of those around him. He goes from being content with the work schedule, which prior to his promotion he had no objections to, to immediately attempting to change the situation. Venichka’s way of describing his ascension to power also signals the break in the circular work schedule: “...я упростил этот процесс до мыслимого предела.”⁷⁴ Unlike the previous daily work schedule Venichka as the foreman wants the schedule to have a linear structure. Not only does his use of the phrase “до мыслимого предела” reflect the key idea of the Enlightenment, that reason takes the upmost precedence, but the phrase also contrasts with the almost romantic state Venichka and his coworkers inhabited prior to his promotion.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

At first, Venichka's plans for his coworkers appear successful, and that he is leading them towards a more regulated and more enlightened state of employment and thinking. He changes little about their daily schedule, and his coworkers go along with his changes without complaint. At first his changes are not radical. He institutes a few changes such as regularizing their drinking without changing their daily schedules. The initial adjustments he implements do not require his coworkers to change. Unlike other reformers, Venichka seems aware that his coworkers will not take to his ideas automatically:

“Барабана мы, конечно, и пальцем не трогали, - да если бы я и предложил барабан тронуть, они все рассмеялись бы, как боги, а потом били бы меня кулаками по лицу, ну а потом разошлись бы: кто в сику играть, на деньги, кто вермут пить, а кто ‘Свежесть.’”⁷⁵

The drum, of course, we didn't even touch it, if I'd even suggested touching it, they would have then beaten my face with their fists, and then have continued on their way: playing blackjack for money, drinking vermouth and “Freshen-Up.”

The changes that he implements start slowly, regularizing the drinking schedule and reporting the work projections. However, like Radishchev and other reformers out of touch with the ones that they wish to help, Venichka quickly attempts to make too many changes too soon. The linear progress becomes too much for his coworkers.

Venichka makes the erroneous assumption that because he is one of the people he inherently understands what will improve the lives of his coworkers. With the success of the small changes, Venichka cries out: “О, свобода и равенство! О, братство и иждивенчество! О, сладость неподотчетности! О, блаженнейшее время в жизни моего народа - время от открытия и до закрытия магазинов!”

⁷⁵ Ibid., 27-28.

("Oh freedom and equality! Oh brotherhood and welfare! Oh the sweetness of unaccountability, oh that blessed time in life of my people-time from the opening to the closing of the liquor store!").⁷⁶ The contrasting images of Venichka's speech of "equality" and "dependency" offer a very different and hilarious interpretation of what social progression means to Venichka and his coworkers. Venichka's ideal work life is one that is equal for all, yet has no accountability. Venichka is so excited by the success of the small changes that he tries to educate his coworkers. He is unaware that his coworkers are satisfied with their cyclical life and certainty that that life provides. When the changes become too much for his coworkers, the linear progression breaks down, his coworkers return to the safety of their cyclical work schedule, and Venichka is fired for his failure to work within the established system.

The Narod

Erofeev not only uses circular and linear movement to respond to Radishchev's *A Journey From St. Petersburg to Moscow*, but also makes thematic references to the text within *Moskva-Petushki* as Venichka struggles on his path to personal redemption. Both works look at the idea of social and political enlightenment through its relationship with Russia's narod. With over 160 years between the two writers, Radishchev's and Erofeev's portrayals of the narod diverge in definition. This divergence is due to the long historical conversation about who the Russian people were and are and how they relate to the educated population. The narod in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* are the common people of Russia, a group of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 28.

people consisting mostly of peasant serfs. In the text Radishchev provides a cross section of the narod from house serfs to field workers to conscripted soldiers, and shows each person as having complex emotions and an existence beyond working for his superiors. Each has his own story that demonstrates the ills perpetrated against him by his particular master or the state. He offers to his reader his various encounters with the narod during his travels, and contrasts the people he meets with Russian society including the reader to consistently show that the narod is varied and unique when compared to Russian society. Through these interactions Radishchev defines the narod as good, earnest people who are abused by those with power. He shows the people as having no real means of protecting or defending themselves against the ills done to them.

Radishchev offers a multifaceted definition of the Russian people in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. Rather than offering a single definition of the varied narod, he shows the narod as people not belonging to the upper echelons of Russian society. While Radishchev shows crucial gentry shortcomings to be “Разврат, продажность, бескультурье, жестокость – свойства помещиков” (“Corruption, venality, incivility, cruelty – the characteristics of landowners..”)⁷⁷ he shows the narod to be “сильны духом, они здоровы морально и физически; им принадлежит будущее.” (“strong in spirit, they are healthy mentally and physically; the future belongs to them”).⁷⁸ This is evident in the “Erdrovo” section of

⁷⁷ Grigorii Gukovskii, “Pomeshchiki v «Puteshestvi»” *Russkaia literatura XVIII veka* (Khydozh: Lit-ra., 1937) [Accessed Online: <http://eura.pp.ru/txt/ruslit18/index.html>.]

⁷⁸ Grigorii Gukovskii, “Narod v «Puteshestvi»” *Russkaia literatura XVIII veka* (Khydozh: Lit-ra., 1937) [Accessed Online: <http://eura.pp.ru/txt/ruslit18/index.html>.]

his journey where he makes a direct comparison between how the narod and his reader live:

Толпа сия состояла более нежели из тридцати женщин. Все они были в праздничной одежде, шеи голые, ноги босые, локти наруже, платье заткнутое спереди за пояс, рубахи белые, взоры веселые, здоровье на щеках начертанное. Приятности, загрубевшие хотя от зноя и холода, но прелестны без покрова хитрости; красота юности в полном блеске, в устах улыбка или смех сердечный; а от него виден становился ряд зубов белее чистейшей слоновой кости. Зубы, которые бы щеголих с ума свели. Приезжайте сюда, любезные наши боярыньки московские и петербургские, посмотрите на их зубы, учитесь у них, как их содержать в чистоте. Зубного врача у них нет. Не сдирают они каждый день лоску с зубов своих ни щетками, ни порошками. Станьте, с которою из них вы хотите, рот со ртом; дыхание ни одной из них не заразит вашего легкого. А ваше, ваше, может быть, положит в них начало... болезни... боюсь сказать какой; хотя не покраснеетесь, но рассердитесь. Разве я говорю неправду?⁷⁹

And this crowd was more than thirty of the women. They were all in holiday attire, neck bare, bare legged, their arms stretched out, their dresses tucked up in the front of their belts, their shirts were white, their eyes were merry and their cheeks glowing with health. They had a natural charm although roughened against the heat and the cold but without the false charms of covering tricks; the beauty of youth in full splendor, in the mouth of a smile or a laugh heart; and from there became visible row of teeth whiter than the purest ivory. Teeth that would drive our fashionable ladies wild. Come here, my dear Moscow and Petersburg ladies, look at their teeth and learn from them how they are kept clean. They do not need a dentist. They do not scour away the shine of their teeth every day with tooth brushes and powder. Stand mouth to mouth with them, any one of them, not a single one of them will infect your lungs with her breath. While yours, maybe yours will infect them with an illness...I am afraid to say which disease because although you may not blush, you will become angry. Am I not telling the truth?

With this comparison from “Edrovo,” Radishchev not only shows the reader that ordinary Russians are human beings rather than a faceless workforce, but that the

⁷⁹ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 106.

narod may in fact have traits that the reader admires. Eventually in the 19th century the idea that the narod came to represent all that was good about the Russian people and “that the intelligentsia, while bringing enlightenment to the people should simultaneously ingest the people’s spirit.”⁸⁰ Although this new vision of the narod came after Radishchev, he seemed to be aware that the narod had something positive to offer Russia that could not be found in the elite and educated population.

Erofeev also portrays the narod as Russia’s masses, but his definition of the narod includes people from all stations of life in Soviet Russia rather than just the poorest members of society. Erofeev’s narod are not joined together because they are abused by those of a higher station in society, but they are united by the idea that they are a national community of Soviets. Erofeev sees the narod as more of a concept than as a singular unified group, however his portrayal of them shows none of the goodness that Radishchev and 19th century writers saw in the Russian masses. While Radishchev saw the narod as people who were abused by those with power, and needed to be heard as well as educated about their rights. In contrast, Erofeev’s narod are equally likely to abuse others as they are to be abused themselves. Erofeev’s narod have the additional burden of having been through two centuries of intelligentsia-guided attempts at enlightenment.

Just as Radishchev offers his reader a cross section of the people that make up the 18th century Russian masses, Erofeev does the same for 20th century Soviet society. Erofeev parodies Radishchev’s meetings with the narod through Venichka’s

⁸⁰ Alexei Miller, “Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost’ in Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 56, H. 3 (2008): 388.

meetings with various people along his purported trip to Petushki to show how unenlightened the Russian people still are. Where Radishchev's traveler describes overly sentimental encounters with members of the narod, Venichka's are hostile and cold. In his first encounter with one of the people in "Moscow-The Kursk Station Restaurant," Venichka's attempts to purchase alcohol from the restaurant are met with hostility from the doorman: "-Спиртного ничего нет, - сказал вышибала. И оглядел меня всего как дохлую птичку или грязный лютик" ("There's no alcohol,' the bouncer said. And he looked at me as if I were a dead little bird or a dirty buttercup.")).⁸¹ Erofeev's use of the phrase "dirty buttercup" plays with Radishchev's overly sentimental description of the interactions between his narrator and the various members of the narod. Despite the attempts at social progression over the two centuries since Radishchev, Erofeev shows that the people have not socially progressed, and in Erofeev's world are less enlightened than their predecessors.

The relationship between the narrator and the narod is introduced at the beginning of each work, and sets the tone for the relationship between the two throughout each text. In both works this relationship takes the form of the voice of the people. In the first stop along Radishchev's journey, "Sofia," he listens to his driver singing a folk song:

...извозчик мой затянул песню, по обыкновению заунывную. Кто знает голоса русских народных песен, тот признается, что есть в них нечто, скорбь душевную означающее. Все почти голоса таковых песен суть тону мягкого. На сем музыкальном

⁸¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 9.

расположении народного уха умеи учреждать бразды правления. В них найдешь образование души нашего народа.⁸²

The driver began a song which, as usual, was mournful. He who knows Russian folk songs will admit that there is something in them that speaks of the sadness of the soul. Nearly all such songs are in the minor key. In folk songs one may find a solution of the trend of his actions. In it one may discover the condition of our people's soul.

Radishchev's narrator sees the beauty in the voice of his driver as an expression of the soul of the Russian people. His use of "нашего" ("our") stands out in the description, making the people all-inclusive and breaking down the barrier between the narod, the narrator and the reader. In the "Moscow-The Kursk Station Restaurant," Venichka also focuses on the voices of the people when he hears the voice of Soviet opera star Ivan Kozlovsky:

А теперь - только музыка, да и музыка-то с какими-то песьими модуляциями. Это ведь и в самом деле Иван Козловский поет, я сразу узнал, мерзее этого голоса нет. Все голоса у всех певцов одинаково мерзкие, но мерзкие у каждого по-своему. Я потому их легко на слух различаю...⁸³

And now there's only music, and music with some kind of mangy harmonies. It's Ivan Kozlovsky singing. I recognize him immediately: there's no other voice that makes me nauseous. All singers have voices equally nauseous voices, but every one of them is nauseous in its own way. That's why I can easily identify them.

Instead of seeing beauty in the songs, Venichka feels nauseous at the voice of the singer. Lest the reader think that it is just the voice of Ivan Kozlovsky that makes him sick, Venichka informs the reader that is all singers that make him equally ill as

⁸²Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*. ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 11.

⁸³Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 9.

he parodies the opening sentence to *Anna Karenina*.⁸⁴ Where Radishchev's narrator finds the communal soul in the voices of the people, Venichka is sickened by every voice. The only communality he sees in the various voices of the singers is that they all make him ill. The songs that Radishchev's narrator saw as a way for people to find equal ground has been corrupted in Erofeev's work so that even the expression communal soul of the Russian people has been corrupted into something that inspires sickness.

In each work both writers struggle with portraying the narod in a way that the reader can relate to. Both Erofeev and Radishchev are aware of the intellectual distance between their audience and the narod. Prior to *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, the upper classes saw the narod as lazy, shiftless, drunk and undeserving of sympathy. Radishchev aimed to portray them in a way that was realistic, but would garner sympathy for their struggles and therefore lead to social reforms. For Radishchev, this opposition between the narod and the intellectuals meant first acknowledging the "uglier" side of the Russian people, which he does at the start of his journey. Since Radishchev is more akin to his reader than the narod, he must first acknowledge that the first impression of the narod might not be the most welcoming or relatable to the reader. At "Sofiia," the narrator lays out what the average member of the narod seems like to the reader:

Посмотри на русского человека; найдешь его задумчива. Если захочет разогнать скуку или, как то он сам называет, если захочет повеселиться, то идет в кабак. В веселии своем порывист, отважен, сварлив. Если что-либо случится не по нем, то скоро начинает спор или битву. Бурлак, идущий в кабак

⁸⁴ "Все счастливые семьи похожи друг на друга, каждая несчастливая семья несчастлива по-своему." ("All happy families are the same, every unhappy family is unhappy in their own way").

повеся голову ивозвращающийся обогранный кровию от оплеух, многое может решить доселегадательное в истории, российской.⁸⁵

Look at a Russian man; you will find him thoughtful. If he wishes to be rid of his melancholy, or, as he would say, to have a good time, he goes to a pub. In his delights, he is impulsive, brave, quarrelsome. If anything happens that displeases him, he will immediately begin an argument or a brawl. A bargehauler who goes to the pub with a melancholy head and returns blood-spattered from blows might solve much that seems confusing in Russian history.

Radishchev acknowledges that ordinary Russians can be argumentative, melancholy and impulsive, but through his narrator's interactions with them, shows them to be that way in part because the landowners have routinely taken advantage of them. He shows the narod as more than just a workforce for their masters, and that the individuals of the narod have unique emotions and personalities of their own. Ten segments into his journey in the "Krestsy" section of his journey, Radishchev meets a father sending his two sons off for mandatory military service. As the father recounts his family's struggles to Radishchev, his speech contrasts sharply with how Radishchev first described the average peasant. As his sons leave for service, the narrator describes their parting:

Слезы проникли сквозь очей его, грудь его воздымалася: он руки свои простирал вслед за отъезжающими; казалось, будто желает остановить стремление коней. Юноши, узрев издали родшего их в такой печали, возрыдали столь громко, что ветер доносил жалостный их стон до слуха нашего. Они простирали также руки к отцу своему; и казалось, будто его к себе звали.⁸⁶

Tears spilled from his eyes, his chest heaved: he stretched his arms out after his departing sons, as though he wanted to stop the movement of the horses. The boys, already far away saw their father's

⁸⁵ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 11-12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

sadness, and lamented so loudly that the wind carried their pitiful moaning to our ears. They stretched out their own arms to their father, and seemed to call out for him.

Radishchev's description of this parting paints an emotional portrait of a peasant with deep connections between family members, and shows them as being more than the drunken stereotype that the narrator previously acknowledged.

Radishchev's narrator further attempts to bridge the gap between the readers and the narod by using his own life as an example of problems in both groups. Midway through the text in the "Iazhelbitsy" section of his journey, the narrator comes across a funeral where a father mourns the loss of his son. As he watches the grief stricken father, the narrator confesses to the reader that he is responsible for the death of his own son. In his youth the narrator contracted a sexually transmitted disease, which then infected both his wife and child and caused their early deaths. After the narrator reflects on this part of his past, he asks his reader to reflect on the cause of this problem:

Но кто причиною, что сия смрадная болезнь во всех государствах делает столь великие опустошения, не токмо пожиная много настоящего поколения, но сокращая дни грядущих? Кто причиною, разве не правительство? Оно, дозволяя распутство мздоимное, отверзает не токмо путь ко многим порокам, но отравляет жизнь граждан. Публичные женщины находят защитников и в некоторых государствах состоят под покровительством начальства.⁸⁷

But who is the cause of this foul disease that causes such great devastation in all states, not only by reaping many from the current generation, but also by reducing the days of those to come? Who is the cause if not the government? By allowing prostitution it not only opens the way to many vices, but also poisons the lives of its citizens. Prostitutes have their defenders and in some countries are under the protection of the authorities.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 102-103.

By using an example from his own life, Radishchev's narrator attempts to show his reader that there are problems in Russia that affect all classes of people. This particular example of prostitution in Russia shows the need for reform and social enlightenment in a way that would benefit both his readers and the narod.

Radishchev shows his reader that social problems plaguing Russia are not exclusive to one class. While his readers may not relate to each of the encounters that the protagonist has while on the road, Radishchev has shown that there are problems in Russia that burden all Russians.

Erofeev's chronological distance from Radishchev's work adds to the complexity of his view of the Russia's masses. Venichka has experienced the results of various attempts to educate the people by both the populists and the Soviets, and with those attempts at education come a new way of viewing the masses in Russia. In contrast to Radishchev, Venichka views himself as one of the people, which makes his relationship with the narod more complex than Radishchev's relationship with them. At various points in the work, Venichka tells his audience of his humble background: "Я ведь... из Сибири, я сирота" ("I'm nothing, just from Siberia, an orphan...").⁸⁸ Through his drinking, his language and his behavior, Erofeev casts Venichka as one of the people to appeal to ordinary Russians. However, Venichka is a contradiction. Although he describes himself as a Siberian orphan, he admits that he is delicate: "Мне очень вредит моя деликатность, она исковеркала мне мою юность. Мое детство и отрочество" ("I'm hurting in my delicacy, it warped me

⁸⁸ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 11.

back in my youth. My childhood and adolescence.”).⁸⁹ Despite his humble origins, Venichka is set apart from the masses by his delicate nature, his intelligence and his inability to conform to society. He is one of the people in that he does not hail from the upper echelons of the state, but his rebellious nature combined with his intelligence keeps him from truly being one of the narod.

This conflict is felt at various times in the text as Venichka offers up ironic praise to the Russian people and then quickly disparaging them: “Мне нравится, что у народа моей страны глаза такие пустые и выпуклые. Это вселяет в меня чувство законной гордости.” (“I love that the people of my country's eyes are empty and bulging. This gives me a feeling of legitimate pride”).⁹⁰ His paean to the Russian people is a parody of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as Venichka ruminates on the eyes of the people:

Зато у моего народа - какие глаза! Они постоянно нависают, но никакого напряжения в них. Полное отсутствие всякого смысла - но зато какая мощь! (Какая духовная мощь!)... Мне нравится мой народ. Я счастлив, что родился и возмужал под взглядами этих глаз.⁹¹

But my people—they have such eyes! They’re always bulging but with no real force of any kind in them. There’s a complete absence of any sense—but what power! (What a spiritual power!) I like my people. I am happy that I was born and grew up under the gaze of such eyes.

Rutten views Erofeev’s focus on the eyes of his fellow countrymen as “an ironic revision of the populist wish to merge with the people.”⁹² However, that ability to merge with the people remains just out of Venichka’s grasp since he is never able to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Elizabeth Rutten, *Unattainable Bride Russia: Gendering Nation, State and Intelligentsia in Russian Intellectual Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 159.

fully understand the people around him. Erofeev sees a complexity in the narod that shows them to be neither wholly good nor bad, yet a group with which he cannot assimilate.

While Venichka's praise of the Russian people is ironic, there is also a sense of longing for the narod and their kinship. After he ironically praises the eyes of the Russian people, he watches two men drink together on the train and labels one as "Тупой-тупой" ("Stupid-Stupid") and the other as "умный-умный" ("Smart-Smart") without knowing anything about their backgrounds or professions.⁹³ Although he mocks their interactions as they drink and eat together, Venichka contemplates their interactions:

Поразительно! Я вошел в вагон и сижу, страдаю от мысли, за кого меня приняли - мавра или не мавра? Плохо обо мне подумали, хорошо ли? А эти - пьют горячо и открыто, как венцы творения, пьют с сознанием собственного превосходства над миром...⁹⁴

It's amazing. I return to the car, wondering, if they took me for a Moor or not a Moor? Do they think poorly or well of me? While these two drink hearty in the openly as the crowns of creation, drunk with a sense of superiority over the world.

Venichka's contemplation of Stupid-Stupid and Smart-Smart illustrates Venichka's personal alienation from both the intelligentsia and the Russian masses. His inability to fit in with either group is not a social issue as Stupid-Stupid and Smart-Smart are able to cohabit the same space without friction. Venichka's alienation is personal in that it is exclusive to him, not a commentary on class or station in Soviet society. Rutten declares that his inability to fit in with the narod stems from Venichka's

⁹³ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 21.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

identifying with “the whole thinking part of Russia’.”⁹⁵ Venichka’s alienation is more complex than simply being alienated from the narod since Venichka observes both Stupid-Stupid and Smart-Smart from a distance, not just Stupid-Stupid. Venichka is equally alienated from both groups, and is unable to overcome that alienation despite his capability of deep intellectual thought and his capability for great drunkenness. As he observes them he asks himself how they will think of him. He belongs with neither group, and keenly feels this separation from both sets.

Venichka even feels this distance in his personal sphere including his interactions with his housemates. When Venichka refuses to alert them to his trips to the bathroom, they mock him for his propriety:

Да известно какого дела. По ветру ты не ходишь - вот что. Мы сразу почувствовали: что-то неладно. С тех пор как ты поселился, мы никто ни разу не видели, чтобы ты в туалет пошел. Ну, ладно, по большой нужде еще ладно! Но ведь ни разу даже по малой... даже по малой!⁹⁶

You know what deed. You don’t go to the toilet, that’s what. We immediately felt that something was wrong. From the moment you moved in, we’ve never seen you go to the toilet once. Well, we’re not speaking about number two! Not even number one, not even number one!

By being unable to participate in this base function of his housemates, Venichka finds himself marked as different from the narod in his private life. When they confront him about his refusal to join them, they draw attention to this difference:

“Выходит, ты лучше нас! Мы грязные животные, а ты, как лилея!” (“So you’re

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Rutten, *Unattainable Bride Russia: Gendering Nation, State and Intelligentsia in Russian Intellectual Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 159.

⁹⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 23.

better than us! We're dirty animals, and you're like a lily!").⁹⁷ This description of how his housemates see themselves versus how they see Venichka also marks Venichka's separation from ordinary Russian people. The interaction between Venichka and his housemates inhabit a carnivalesque space, as Erofeev the author has the housemates revel in their scatological humor. Their jokes about Venichka's bathroom habits show the stereotypical corporeal popular humor, which embarrasses Venichka. His humiliation in this scene also contributes to Venichka's pietism. The housemates description of themselves as terrible animals and Venichka as a lily marks Venichka as holier and more innocent than his housemates. His inability to join in the baseness of his housemates sets Venichka apart as "cleaner" than the Russian people. This separation is not exclusively felt by Venichka, but also by those he closely associates with. Even if Venichka is unaware that he is not one of the people, those around him are aware that he is different from them.

Venichka and Social Enlightenment

Venichka's separation from the narod is also seen in the public sphere. One of the clearest examples of Venichka's conflicts with the narod is when Venichka, the foreman, first refers to his coworkers as "мой народ" ("my people").⁹⁸ While this phrase and his cries of brotherhood would seem to unite Venichka with his coworkers, in reality his use of these phrases does the very opposite of creating unity. Prior to assuming this position of power Venichka described the relationship

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 28.

between himself and his coworkers in terms of a collective “мы” (“we”).⁹⁹ Venichka and his coworkers performed activities as a group with Venichka being a part of the “мы.” Once he is promoted, Venichka the foreman immediately places himself above his coworkers. As with Radishchev, the reformers just after him and the populist movement, Venichka feels that he knows what is best for his people, and that he can improve their lives because he understands what is keeping his people from betterment.

In his zeal for improving the lives of his workers Venichka attempts to refine their sensibilities. However, his attempts are lost as his workers are content with their base wants and needs. Rather than allowing each man to have his ideals of drinking, sex and crudeness, the situation that existed prior to his promotion, Venichka begins to force his ideas on to his coworkers, parodying the Soviet practice of reading speeches by Marx and Lenin.¹⁰⁰ He begins to educate them on world matters and on literature, thinking that knowing these things will improve their lives. His last effort to improve their lives comes when he gives them Aleksandr Blok’s 1915 poem “Solov’inyi sad” (“Nightingale garden”):

... я дал им почитать "Соловьиный сад", поэму Александра Блока. Там в центре поэмы, если, конечно, отбросить в сторону все эти благоуханные плеча и незаренные туманы и розовые башни в дымных ризах, там в центре поэмы лирический персонаж, уволенный с работы за пьянку, блядки и прогулы."¹⁰¹

I gave them Aleksandr Blok’s poem “The Nightingale’s Garden,” to read. There in the center of the poem, if of course, you toss out all of the fragrant shoulders, unilluminated mists and rosy towers in smoky

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁰ Richard C. Borden, *The Art of Writing Badly: Valentin Kataev's Mauvism and the Rebirth of Russian Modernism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 276.

¹⁰¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 28.

vestments, there in the center of the poem is the lyrical hero, who was fired from his job for drunkenness, whoring around and absenteeism.

By giving them this poem to read Venichka has attempted to improve the lives of his coworkers. Since he occupies the same job as his coworkers he believes that they will read the poem exactly as he reads it, and be empowered by its message of a worker having a more contemplative and artistic life. He wrongly assumes that his people will understand the poem and be able to relate to the content just as he has. In Venichka's mind the poem at its core is about a worker who resembles Venichka's coworkers. Blok's poem tells of a worker that enters a garden and gains an otherworldly understanding of life and art, and examines the worker's capacity for an artistic and philosophical life. Erofeev the writer here works against his narrator and purposely misconstrues the meaning of Blok's poem so that it is on the level of Venichka's coworkers. Venichka tells the reader how one should read the poem:

Там в центре поэмы, если, конечно, отбросить в сторону все эти благоуханные плеча и незаренные туманы и розовые башни в дымных ризах, там в центре поэмы лирический персонаж, уволенный с работы за пьянку, блядки и прогулы.¹⁰²

There in the center of the poem, if, of course, you throw out all of the perfumed shoulders, the unilluminated mists, the rosy towers in smoky robes, there at the center of the poem you find the lyrical character, who was fired from his job for drunkenness, whoring and absenteeism.

In instructing his reader to ignore the "unilluminated mists" of "Solov'inyi sad" Venichka attempts to convince his coworkers to ignore the poem's focus on the worker's capacity for a more artistic life, and forces a misreading of the poem that his coworkers should relate to. In Erofeev's parodying the poem, Venichka once

¹⁰² Ibid.

again finds himself separated from the narod. While Venichka feels that his coworkers should be able to relate to the poem because of the purported “drunkenness and whoring,” his coworkers see a grimmer meaning in the poem as the worker returns from the garden to the same miserable, toiling life he had before entering the garden: “Размахнувшись движеньем знакомым/(Или всё ещё это во сне?)/Я ударил заржавленным ломом/По слоистому камню на дне...” (“The swinging motion is familiar/(Or is it all a dream?)/I hit a rusty spot/By the layered rocks on the bottom...”).¹⁰³ Venichka’s coworkers have a negative reaction to the poem as they see hopelessness and the worker’s inability to stay in the garden. Venichka has solidified his distance from his coworkers by attempting to impose his personal reading of “Solov'inyi sad.”

When Venichka’s attempts to educate his coworkers fail he turns on them as quickly as they turn on him while attempting to justify his actions:

“И вот тут-то меня озарило” да ты просто бестолочь, Веничка, ты круглый дурак; вспомни, ты читал у какого-то мудреца, что Господь Бог заботится только о судьбе принцев, предоставляя о судьбе народов заботиться принцам. А ведь ты бригадир и, стало быть, “маленький принц.”¹⁰⁴

And then suddenly it hit me, Venichka, you’re a blockhead; you’re just a fool. Remember, you read in some man of wisdom that the Lord God only cares about the fate of princes, making the princes care about the fate of the people. You’re a foreman, and therefore, a “little prince.”

In Venichka’s mind the problem is their refusal to embrace his path to betterment for them. His linear progression has gone from coworker to foreman to educator of the brigade to finally, in his own words, “a little prince.” Rather than accepting

¹⁰³ Aleksandr Blok, “Solov'inyi sad,” *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Litres, 2013), 232.

¹⁰⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 29.

failure Venichka steps further away from his “narod,” and blames them for the reason that his plans to educate them failed: “Где же твоя забота о судьбе твоих народов? Да смотрел ли ты в души этих паразитов, в потемки душ этих паразитов?” (“Where is your concern for the fate of your people? Have you looked into the souls of those parasites, into the dark soul of those parasites?”).¹⁰⁵ His disgust is apparent as he describes the people he once happily drank and played with as “эти паразиты” and “этих четверых мудаков.”¹⁰⁶ His cries of brotherhood are gone, and he has turned against those whose lives he sought to improve.

Erofeev’s use of “Solov’inyi sad” here is parodic in two distinct ways, if we take Tynianov’s definition of parody as a guide. The first way in which Erofeev parodies “Solov’inyi sad” is to use the poem as a model while deconstructing it to create something new. Venichka believes that his workers will embrace the poem because of its message of the common worker being capable of art and deeper consciousness. However, the workers serve as parodies of Blok’s worker. They have no deep inner life, nor do they aspire to have one. Where Blok sees the potential for that higher and more refined level of consciousness, Erofeev shows the workers as base and crude. The workers strong reaction to the poem illustrates Venichka’s separation from the masses in the public sphere as Venichka is incapable of understanding why the poem would offend them. As Blok’s worker leaves the garden he trips over his own crowbar. This moment in the poem must stand out to Venichka’s coworkers as an important reason why they are not capable of that loftier existence: that their labor will always stand in their way and inhibit that

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

higher consciousness. That Venichka misses the importance of this moment in the poem for his coworkers shows his distance from his coworkers. His anger at his coworkers over their rejection of the poem further illustrates how Venichka has moved out of their sphere, and into one where he is now unable to relate to them.

The second way in which *Moskva-Petushki* parodies “Solov’inyi sad” is in paralleling the poem and using it in what Tynianov calls a mask.¹⁰⁷ Erofeev takes the theme of the poem and uses it as a mask for Venichka’s journey in *Moskva-Petushki* as Venichka’s journey replaces Blok’s worker’s journey. This masking permits “Solov’inyi sad” to come through the background of *Moskva-Petushki*.¹⁰⁸ Rather than finding a deeper level of understanding in *Petushki*, Venichka never reaches his garden and is subsequently destroyed by his journey. Erofeev turns the order of events around in *Moskva-Petushki* so that Venichka has long since been fired from his job as a worker. While Venichka instructs his coworkers to read the poem, he is unaware that it parallels the journey that he will take, and that will ultimately be the cause of his own demise both in terms of his job as foreman and in his very existence.

With his dismissal Venichka’s predictions of taking the schedule to its logical conclusion have come true. Venichka, like other reformers before him, attempted to improve the situation of the narod (in the form of his co-workers) and without success. The experience has left both his coworkers and Venichka bitter. This section of his journey to *Petushki* parodies the 200 years of attempts of reform in Russia. Venichka has followed the models of reformers before him like Radishchev,

¹⁰⁷ Yu. N. Tynianov, “Istoriia literatury,” *Poetika* (Moscow: Kino. M.: Nauka, 1977), 54.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

and has followed the model to the only conclusion possible in this model: failure. Erofeev shows Venichka as another reformer who has failed to understand what his people truly want and need, and so his attempt to better them has failed.

Although Erofeev has Venichka fail as a reformer, he does not place the blame for the breakdown of the reforms solely on his protagonist. While Erofeev parodies reformers through Venichka's attempts at educating his coworkers, Erofeev also shows the narod as a group entirely incapable of betterment. His first charges against Russia's youth come in the "Chernoe-Kupavna" branch of his journey, which starts with Venichka contemplating his own loneliness. As Venichka recounts drunken adventures in his youth, he settles upon Russia's youth as one of the main puzzles in nature:

А эта пустоголовая юность, идущая нам на смену, словно бы и не замечает тайн бытия. Ей недостает размаха и инициативы, и я вообще сомневаюсь, есть ли у них у всех чего-нибудь в мозгах. Что может быть благороднее, например, чем экспериментировать на себе? Я в их годы делал так: вечером в четверг выпивал одним махом три с половиной литра ерша выпивал и ложился спать, не раздеваясь, с одной только мыслью: проснусь я утром в пятницу или не проснусь?¹⁰⁹

And the empty-headed youth coming after us to take our place doesn't seem to notice the mystery of existence. He lacks the scope and initiative, and I doubt that he-that any of them have any brains in their head at all. What could be nobler, for example, than to experiment on yourself? I did at their age: On Thursday evening I'd drink all in one fell swoop three and a half liters of booze, and then went to bed without getting undressed, and with only one thought in my head-will I wake up on Friday morning or not?

On first reading Venichka's criticism of Russian youth reads as nonsense as

Venichka charges that their main problem is that they do not experiment with

¹⁰⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 50.

drinking enough as he did in his youth. However, couched within Venichka's criticism is the author's true indictment against Russia's youth: that they "lack scope and initiative" and that Venichka doubts that "he [the youth] ---that any of them--- have any brains in their heads." When this charge is separated away from Venichka's denouncement of their drinking habits, it is more serious, and speaks to the larger problem that Erofeev sees in the younger generation of the narod. With this proclamation, he shows that any changes or reforms will not come from the next generation because they lack the vision and initiative that even the failed reformers had. While reformers like Radishchev, and even Venichka in his role as foreman, may have gone about their reforms in ways that proved to be futile for Russia, they at least had a vision of a better Russia and actively sought to improve conditions for the narod. Erofeev shows here that the upcoming generation is so "пустоголовая" that they it is totally beyond them to even think of a better way for themselves or the country.

Venichka's strongest indictment against the narod comes in the form of his attacks on the youth of Russian society. In the "Kupavna-Kilometer 33" segment of his journey, Venichka speaks out against the youth of Russia:

Нет, честное слово, я презираю поколение, идущее вслед за нами. Оно внушает мне отвращение и ужас. Максим Горький песен о них не споет, нечего и думать. Я не говорю, что мы в их годы волокли с собою целый груз святынь. Боже упаси!-святынь у нас было совсем чуть-чуть, но зато сколько вещей, на которые нам было не наплевать, а вот им-на все наплевать.

Почему бы им не заняться вот чем: я в их годы пил с большими антрактами попою попою перестану, попою попою опять перестану. Я не вправе судить поэтому одушевленное ли утренняя депрессия, если делается ежедневной привычкой, то-есть если с шестнадцати лет пить по четыреста пятьдесят грамм

в семь часов пополудни. Конечно, если бы мне вернуть мои годы и начать жизнь сначала, я, конечно попробовал бы,- но ведь они-то! Они!¹¹⁰

No, honestly, I despise this generation coming after us. It fills me with disgust and horror. And I don't think Maxim Gorky will sing songs about them or think about them. I'm not saying that at their age we dragged around with ourselves a whole lot that was holy. God no! Sacred things touched us softly, but then again there were so many things on which we did not give a damn about-but they-they don't care at all!

Why don't they do what I did at their age: I'd drink and drink and stop drinking and drink and drink and stop drinking again. I have no right to judge therefore whether morning depression is more lively if you make it a daily habit, if from age sixteen you drink 450 grams at seven o'clock in the evening. Of course, if I were to do my life over again, I would certainly try-but would they? Would they?

Once again Venichka's indictment of the youth of Russia comes amidst his rants about drinking. This masks his more politically dangerous condemnation of the Soviet youth in a way that allows the casual reader to dismiss his charges against the younger generation. I would argue here that Erofeev's disdain for the younger generation is so strong that the charges against the youth are solely those of Erofeev's and not the words of Venichka. In his notebooks, Erofeev reflected on his own disdain of the Russian masses: "Мне ненавистен простой человек, т.е. ненавистен постоянно и глубоко, протевен и в занятости и в радости и в слезах, в привязанности и в злости, и все его вкусы, и манеры, и вся его простота, наконец" ("I hate the "common man," i.e. I hate him consistently and deeply. He disgusts me in his work and his leisure, in his happiness and his tears, in his love and his anger, and all his taste and manners too, and all of his

¹¹⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 52-53.

“commonness” as well”).¹¹¹ Erofeev’s own disdain for the masses shines through Venichka’s drunkenness even in places of apparent drunken rambling. Just prior to this condemnation against the youth Venichka’s thoughts are nonsensical as he ponders how much he has to drink to get drunk:

А ведь все раскрылось так просто: оказывается, если вы уже выпили пятую, вам надо и шестую, и седьмую, и восьмую, и девятую выпить сразу, одним махом - но выпить идеально, то есть выпить только в воображении. Другими словами, вам надо одним волевым усилием, одним махом - не выпить ни шестой, ни седьмой, ни восьмой, ни девятой.¹¹²

But actually it was revealed to be simple: if you already drink a fifth, you need to drink a sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth immediately, all in one fell swoop, but drink them in the ideal sense—that is drink them only in your imagination. In other words, you must, by sheer will power, and at once not drink numbers six, seven, eight and nine.

The section becomes increasingly nonsensical until the diatribe against the youth, when the condemnation becomes lucid and singularly focused on one idea: the repulsion and terror the speaker feels about the youth. That the paragraph begins with the words “Нет, честное слово,”¹¹³ shows that separation between Venichka’s drunken ramblings, and the author’s serious concerns for future. This speaker’s words are much clearer and seem out of character for Venichka. The lucidity continues into the next paragraph with the phrase “Почему бы им не заняться вот чем?” (“Why do they do that?”).¹¹⁴ Once Venichka utters this phrase the rest of the sentence changes to the topic of drinking once again. The first part of that particular sentence compared to the second seems out of place as though Erofeev wants to

¹¹¹ Venedikt Erofeev, “Iz zapisnykh knizhek,” *Ostav’te moi dushu v pokoe* (Moscow: Kh.G.S., 1995), 297.

¹¹² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 52.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

suggest a plan of reform for the youth. However, Erofeev then seems to remember that there is no point in suggesting change and then allows Venichka's narrative to come through again as the rant quickly changes its focus back to drinking.

This failing of the younger generation and the disdain the writer feels for them is personified by the character of the younger Mitrich, who is introduced shortly after Venichka's indictment of Russian young people. The Mitrichi first appear in *Moskva-Petushki* midway through the "Kilometer 43-Khrapunovo" segment of the journey as Venichka attempts to figure out who stole his 100 grams of alcohol. At first Venichka focuses his suspicion on "Smart-Smart" and "Stupid-Stupid" but rules them out by declaring: "Но ведь один то спит, а другой в коверкотовом пальто, - значит, ни тот, ни другой украсть не могли" ("One is sleeping, and the other is in a worsted coat,-that means that neither of them could have stolen it").¹¹⁵ His suspicion then focuses on the male and female pair in opposing brown and black clothing. However, Venichka quickly rules them out because of the way that they look at each other: "Удивительная похожесть, и оба то и дело рассматривают друг дружку с интересом и гневом... Ясное дело, они не могли украсть" ("It's amazing how similar they look, and both treat each other with interest and anger...it's clear, neither of them could have stolen it").¹¹⁶ At last, Venichka notices the final strange pair of a grandfather and grandson, who had gone unnoticed in the train until this point. Here Venichka gives a vivid description of the pair:

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

Впереди то же самое странных только двое, дедушка и внучек. Внучек на две головы длиннее дедушки и от рождения слабоумен. Дедушка на две короче, но слабоумен тоже. Оба глядят мне прямо в глаза и облизываются.

“Подозрительно,” думал а. Отчего бы это им облизываться? Все ведь тоже глядят мне в глаза, но ведь никто не облизывается! Очень подозрительно...Я стал рассматривать их так же пристально, как они меня.

Нет, внучек совершенный кретин. У него и шея то не как всех, у него шея не вращается в торс, а как то вырастает из него, вздымаясь к затылку вместе с клюцами. И дышит он как то идиотически: вначале у него вдох, тогда как у всех людей наоборот: сначала вдох, а уж выдох, а потом выдох. И смотрит на меня, смотрит, разинув глаза и сощутив рот.

А дедушка - тот смотрит еще напряженнее, смотрит, как в дуло орудия. И такими синими, такими разбухшими глазами, что из обоих этих глаз, как из двух утопленников, влага течет ему прямо на сапоги. И весь он, как приговоренный к высшей мере, и на лысой голове его мертво. И вся физиономия в оспинах, как расстрелянная в упор. А посередине расстрелянной физии - распухший и посиневший нос, висит и качается, как старый удушенник...¹¹⁷

Ahead was another straining pair: a grandfather and his grandson. The grandson was two heads taller than the grandfather, and feebleminded since birth. The grandfather was two heads shorter but also feebleminded. They both looked me in the eye and licked.

Suspicious, I thought, Why are they licking their lips? Everyone else is looking me right in the eye as well, but no one else is licking his lips. Very suspicious. I began to examine them as intently as they were looking at me.

No, the grandson was an absolute cretin. Even his neck is unusual; it doesn't grow into his torso, it grows from it, rising toward the back of his head, together with his collarbone. He breathes like an idiot: first he exhales contrary to all other people who inhale first, and then he inhales. And he looks up at me, his eyes gaping and his mouth screwed up.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

And the grandfather-he looked at me even more intensely, as though he were looking into the barrel of a gun. And with such blue eyes, such swollen eyes, that from both of these eyes, like two drowned men, moisture flowed right on to his boots. And he was like a condemned man waiting to be shot, with a deathly pallor on his bald head. And his whole face was pock marked as if he'd been shot in the face. And in the middle of his shot face hung a swollen, bluish nose that swung like a hanging victim.

Venichka is initially repulsed by the physical appearances of the pair and suspicious of their motivation for being in the train car with him. However, his repulsion over their physical appearances does not stop him from interacting with the pair as he beckons them to join him: “Оба вскочили немедленно и бросились ко мне, не переставая облизываться. “Это тоже подозрительно, - подумал я, - они вскочили даже, по-моему, чуть раньше, чем я их поманил” (“They both jumped up and rushed towards me while licking their lips. “This is very suspicious also,” I thought, -they jumped up, in my opinion, even before I motioned to them.”).¹¹⁸ Venichka is aware of their peculiarity, yet is unafraid of the pair. Despite his previous attempts at interacting with the narod, he is able to interact easily with this odd duo as he asks, “Как звать тебя, папаша, и куда ты едешь?” (“What’s your name, gramps, and where are you going?”).¹¹⁹

As the older Mitrich introduces himself and his grandson “Митричем меня звать. А это мой внучек, он тоже Митрич... Едем в Орехово, в парк... в карусели покататься” (“I am called Mitrich. And this is my grandson, he is also Mitrich....We are going to Orekhovo, to ride the carousel”).¹²⁰ the status of the pair becomes marked in the text. The first way in which they are marked is when Venichka

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 64.

declares just two pages earlier that two suggestions something: “двое, правда, наталкивают на мысль” (“Two people, it’s true, does imply something”)¹²¹ without expressly stating what that ‘something’ is. The Mitrichi are also marked in that Venichka learns their name, making them the only pair on the train that Venichka to have that distinction. The mismatched male and female pair remain totally anonymous, and “Stupid-Stupid” and “Smart-Smart” are only known by that description. The naming of the Mitrichi also makes the two stand out from the other characters in the text that remain nameless throughout: Venichka’s lover, his child, his assailants and the angels that guide Venichka along his way.

The Mitrichi, particularly the younger Mitrichi with his repulsive and cretin-like appearance stand out in the text for their literary genealogy, and the characteristics associated with the name Mitrofan in Russian literature. Here Erofeev is not only referring to Fonvizin’s 1782 work *Nedorosl’*, but also a reference to *Nedorosl’* that Radishchev makes in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. Fonvizin’s satirical play tells the story of an uneducated noble family in the countryside, their petty troubles, and the havoc they bring into the lives of the serfs. The minor that the play is named after is Mitrofan, a spoiled young noble, and the name has become synonymous in Russian literature with those characteristics. In *Nedorosl’* Fonvizin employs the idea of the talking name (“Говорящие фамилии”) in which the name of the character is related to the dominating trait of that particular family. Although this idea normally applies to last names, Fonvizin applies it to Mitrofan’s first name. Mitrofan’s name is Greek in origin, coming from the name

¹²¹ Ibid., 62.

Metrophanes meaning “mother appearing.” The name is apropos as the character is entirely dependent on his parents who not only see none of their son’s flaws, and dote on him unconditionally. In their *History of Russian Theatre*, Robert Leach and Viktor Borovsky note Fonvizin’s motivation for creating such a character: “The comedy shows the petty tyranny and blindness of serf owners: during the period of enlightenment, when education and personal betterment were universally accepted values.”¹²² Fonvizin creates a criticism of the young nobility during his time through Mitofan by portraying him as uneducated, ignorant and unable to see the faults in his own personality. Leach and Borovsky draw attention to Mitrofan’s most famous line in the play: “His most famous line, which has entered colloquial speech, is: “I do not want to study, I want to get married.” These words are reminiscent of Peter the Great’s edict that prohibited young noblemen from marrying in order to avoid studying.”¹²³ Fonvizin saw the dangers of the young nobility’s mindset: “All of the countless Mitrofans were eventually to become serf-owners, officials and officers with catastrophic consequences for Russia, according to Fonvizin.”¹²⁴ Fonvizin feared for Russia’s future with a generation of Mitrofans in power.

Radishchev comments on this fear of a generation of Mitrofans in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* by drawing the reader’s attention to Fonvizin’s Mitrofan in the “Torzhok” section of the journey:

Но где есть няньки, то следует, что есть ребята, ходят на помочах, от чего нередко бывают кривые ноги; где есть опекуны, следует, что есть малолетные, незрелые разумы,

¹²² Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, *A History Of Russian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

которые собою править не могут. Если же всегда пребудут няньки и опекуны, то ребенок долго ходить будет на помочах и совершенный на возрасте будет каляка. Недоросль будет всегда Митрофанушка, без дядьки не ступит, без опекуна не может править своим наследием. Таковы бывают везде следствия обыкновенной цензуры, и чем она строже, тем следствия ее пагубнее. Послушаем Гердера.¹²⁵

But where there are nursemaids there are children and guardians that often lead to crooked legs; where there are guardians, there are minors and immature minds who cannot govern themselves. If we always abide the nannies and guardians, the child will always walk on braces. The minor will always be Mitrofanushka, he will not be able to take a step without a grandfather, and will not be able to govern his inheritance without a guardian. Such consequences are everywhere because of the usual censorship, the stricter it is, the more ruinous the consequences. Let's listen to Herder.

There are two matters of interest in Radishchev's description of Mitrofan, as it relates to *Moskva-Petushki*. The first is the fact that he refers to Mitrofan by the diminutive: Mitrofanushka. Radishchev sees Mitrofan and young Russians as perpetual children, as he remarks in the text. While Fonvizin spoke of fears of what life in Russia would be like with Mitrofans in power, Radishchev's fears are that not only will Mitrofanushkas exist, they will perpetually be childlike and increasingly reliant on those around them to be able to function. For Radishchev, this inability to function is directly tied to censorship in Russia, the subject of his "Torzhok" segment of the journey. He declares censorship as the nursemaid of everything great and enlightened, and places the blame directly on these nursemaids for the crippling of Russia's youth: "Цензура сделана нянькою рассудка, остроумия, воображения, всего великого и изящного" ("The censor has made a nursemaid of the mind, of

¹²⁵ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 143.

wit and the imagination, all that is great and graceful.”).¹²⁶ He blames the censorship of the older generation for this younger generation’s inability to think for themselves and for the perpetual immaturity of their minds.

The Mitrofanushka Radishchev describes in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* is not merely an ignorant juvenile but radically more infantilized than Fonvizin’s Mitrofan. This generation of Russia’s youth is one that is completely helpless, and totally dependent on his elders to make decisions for him. Radishchev reinforces Mitrofan’s helplessness and perpetual childlike status by using the diminutive when referring to Mitrofan. This nomenclature makes him more childlike than he appears in Fonvizin’s play. Radishchev’s decree that Mitrofanushka will always be a minor illustrates the hopelessness that Radishchev feel about the younger generation of Russians, and the culpability of the previous generations in creating this generation of Mitrofans. They are so dependent on other people around them that they are incapable of thinking for themselves to the point of being crippled.

Erofeev’s depiction of Mitrichi is more sinister, more repulsive and more radicalized than Radishchev’s Mitrofanushka. The regression in the Mitrofan type that Radishchev predicted is seen in Erofeev’s depiction of the younger Mitrich. Like his predecessor, Mitrich’s name shares the meaning of “mother.” However Erofeev goes one step further in making him dependent on his predecessors by calling him Mitrich, coming from Dmitrii, which comes from Demeter, the mother of the earth. By calling the character by his patronymic, Erofeev has made him even more

¹²⁶ Ibid.

dependent on others in that he has no first name or identity of his own. He is a character of his mother through the root of his name, of his father through his patronymic and led around by his grandfather. The younger Mitrich is completely and utterly dependent on those around him and older than him. The description of the younger Mitrich is one that inspires horror in the reader. He is not merely the lazy child of Fonvizin's age, or the helpless and hapless juvenile of Radishchev's time; instead he is a vulgar character in action and appearance.

Just as Radishchev's Mitrofanushka is dependent on his valet, Erofeev's younger Mitrich barely functions without his grandfather's intervention. Although the Mitrichi are paired together they are radically different in their physical appearance. The older one looks like a regular person though feeble-minded, according to Venichka. He stands out physically because of his eyes, which Venichka describes as:

И такими синими, такими разбухшими глазами, что из обоих этих глаз, как из двух утопленников, влага течет ему прямо на сапоги. И весь он, как приговоренный к высшей мере, и на лысой голове его мертво.¹²⁷

And with such blue eyes, such swollen eyes, that from both of these eyes, like two drowned men, moisture flowed right on to his boots. And he was like a condemned man waiting to be shot, with a deathly pallor on his bald head.

In contrast, the younger Mitrich looks inhuman according to Venichka's description of his distorted physical frame and inability to breathe like a normal human. Later, when group is drinking Venichka notes the unique way in which the younger Mitrich consumes his drink, drinking from his breast rather than his mouth:

¹²⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 63

“Молодому тоже подали стакан - он радостно прижал его к левому соску правым бедром, и из обеих ноздрей его хлынули слезы ” (“They also gave a full glass to the younger Mitrichi, who happily clutched it to his left breast with his right hip, tears rushed from both nostrils.”).¹²⁸ Through the younger Mitrichi’s physical description and his repulsive speech and behavior, he is the personification of the disdain that Venichka feels for the younger generation.

The younger Mitrich has become even more parasitic than Fonvizin’s Mitrofan and Radishchev’s Mitrofanushka. When the younger Mitrich does attempt to communicate it is in nonsensical sounds and phrases: “И-и-и-и-и-и, как мы быстро едем в Петушки, славные Петушки” (“Е-е-е-е-е-е, how quickly we are going to Petushki, the glorious Petushki”) and “И-и-и-и-и, какой пьяный дедушка, хороший дедушка” (“Е-е-е-е-е-, such a drunk grandfather, such a good grandfather.”).¹²⁹ The younger Mitrichi represents all that is bad about the younger generation of Russians. He is incapable of intellectually contributing to the conversations around him, instead only shouting nonsense or insulting his predecessors. He also consumes more alcohol than those around him, taking greedily what is not his: “Дед вынул пустую четвертинку, я сразу ее признал. А внучек - тот вынул даже целый ковш, и вынул откуда-то из-под лобка и диафрагмы” (“Gramps pulled out an empty quarter bottle, and I immediately recognized it. And the grandson-he pulled out an entire pitcher from somewhere beneath his pelvis and his diaphragm.”).¹³⁰ The younger Mitrichi is wholly reliant on

¹²⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 67.

everyone around him for resources and words, yet entirely incapable of contributing. This younger Mitrich is far more dangerous than Fonvizin's Mitrofan in that he is not only entirely useless, but also draining on the resources of those around him.

Erofeev departs from Radishchev's indictment of the older generation in that Venichka seems more inclined to forgive the older generation than Radishchev. Erofeev paints the older Mitrich as pathetic both with the physical description of the older Mitrich, and through his inability to fully tell a story without breaking down and crying. Twice Venichka offers him forgiveness, first in the Khrapunovo-Esino segment of the journey and then in "Kilometer 65-Pavlovo-Posad" segment of the journey. Venichka first forgives him for stealing Venichka's alcohol, and the second time Venichka offers him forgiveness is when the older Mitrich attempts to tell a Turgenev-esque story of love, and fails to do so. At both of these instances, Venichka states that he understands the older Mitrich, telling him first at Khrapunovo-Esino, "Я вас понимаю, да. Я все могу понять, если захочу простить... У меня душа, как у троянского коня пузо, многое вместит. Я все прощу, если захочу понять" ("I understand you, yes. I can understand everything, if I want to forgive you. I have a soul like a Trojan horse's gut, it will hold a lot.")¹³¹ And then repeating the sentiments of understanding and forgiveness when the older Mitrich fails to tell the final story of love: "А я сидел и понимал старого Митрича, понимал его слезы" ("And I sat and understood the Old Mitrich, understood his tears...").¹³² Venichka is

¹³¹ Ibid., 64.

¹³² Ibid., 80.

less inclined to hold the older generation at fault for Russia's youth than his predecessors.

Although Venichka is less inclined to hold the older generation responsible for the current generation, they do not escape his wrath entirely. At times Venichka expresses his disdain for the older Mitrich:

Представляю. - подумал я, - что это будет за чушь! что за несусветная чушь!" И я вдруг снова припомнил свою похвальбу в день знакомства с моей Царицей: "Еще выше нанесу окоlesiцы! Нанесу еще выше!" Что ж, пусть рассказывает, этот слезящийся Митрич. Надо чтить, повторяю, потемки чужой души, надо смотреть в них, пусть даже там и нет ничего, пусть там дрянь одна - все равно: смотри и чтить, смотри и не плюй.

I can imagine, I thought, what nonsense this will be, what complete nonsense. And I suddenly remembered my bragging the day I met my Tsarina: "I'll bring in even more garbage next time. Even more! So what? Let him tell his tale, this teary eyed Mitrich. We must honor, I repeat, the deepest reaches of another's soul. We must look into them even if there's nothing there, even if it's only stuff. It's all the same: look and honor it, look and don't spit.¹³³

Venichka still shows some disdain for Mitrich and his generation, and for the chaos they caused his generation. He is aware that Mitrich spews nonsense and garbage when he talks, yet Venichka seems to realize that by holding only Mitrich responsible for the problems of the current generation means a lack of progress. By placing the blame solely on the previous generations, and harboring disdain for that previous generation, the current generation refuses to acknowledge the problems in the present. Venichka's response to the older Mitrich's rambling seems to suggest how Erofeev feels the current generation should deal with reformers of the past: recognize their faults, recognize their contributions, but ultimately ignore them.

¹³³ Ibid., 79.

Venichka is more sympathetic to the older generation, whom he paints as pathetic and aware of their failings. The vileness and repulsiveness of the younger generation is completely absent in the older generation. Through the character of the older Mitrich, Erofeev shows the older Mitrich's generation as both responsible for vileness of the younger generation while still anguishing over their culpability in creating such a repulsive youth. Erofeev shows that all of the efforts of various reformers and enlighteners have been for naught. By incorporating the two Mitrichi into the story, Erofeev has shown that very little social progress has been made since the time of Catherine. The educated masses are still uneducated, and through the behavior of the Mitrichi, Erofeev implies that the Russian narod are regressing rather than progressing. Despite the various attempts to improve the narod through such means as education and social progress, the narod remains stuck in this almost primal, hedonistic state that no form of social progress can overcome.

Conclusion

As a portrayal of Russia's potential path to social enlightenment *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* does offer a framework for social redemption in tsarist Russia. Radishchev's main mission in the work was to show the failings of Russia's social and justice systems by showing the everyday struggles the general population of Russia suffered under serfdom and the autocracy. Radishchev believed that if members of the upper classes, particularly people in power, saw how ordinary Russians struggle in everyday life, they would understand that social enlightenment in Russia should be embraced. Ultimately, however, Radishchev's hopes that A

Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow would be the revolutionary text to start social enlightenment in Russia were instead met with outrage and criminal charges.

Although Radishchev was able to serve as an amateur doctor in Siberia, the work was ultimately unfulfilling for him as he saw no greater social good come from his amateur attempts. When Emperor Paul retracted Radishchev's sentence upon the death of Catherine II, Radishchev moved back to European Russia knowing that his work was being closely monitored by the Russian government.

Radishchev's hopes for a more socially enlightened Russia came in the form of Aleksandr I as the new emperor changed the laws so that peasants were forbidden to work more than three days a week on the master's lands. Radishchev saw this new law as one of the major steps towards better treatment of Russia's peasants. When Radishchev was appointed as a member of the Commission on the Revision of the Laws in 1801, he saw the commission as a real attempt to change the laws in Russia. However, his enthusiasm was short lived as Radishchev found himself at odds with the other members of the committee. As time went on, the committee accomplished very little despite Radishchev's attempts at meaningful legislation. One of his last attempts at meaningful legislation took the form of a document which he called a "Project of a Civil Code" which touched upon many of the same topics discussed in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* including the emancipation of serfs and making all classes equal before the law. His "Project" was not well received by his fellow members of the commission. Soon Radishchev began to fear that perhaps he had gotten carried away with his ideas and would once again be exiled to Siberia. The combination of hopelessness and the terror of being

arrested again was too much for Radishchev, and on September 12, 1802 he killed himself.

While Venichka's journey mimics that of Radishchev's narrator's in both structure and its relationship with Russia's narod, the two journeys ultimately differ in the paths of both the protagonist and the writer. Erofeev's parody of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* does not mock Radishchev for attempts at social enlightenment, nor his attempts at understanding the Russian people. The parody comes through *Moskva-Petushki* as Erofeev draws the reader's attention to what happens to a writer in a corrupt system who cannot or will not be a part of the government yet is still not one of the people.

Radishchev's narrator successfully completes his journey. He travels his linear path from St. Petersburg to Moscow and ultimately has positive and meaningful interactions with the people he meets along the way. His journey ends on a positive exclamation of: "Москва! Москва!" ("Moscow! Moscow!")¹³⁴ as though his journey has met a happy and successful conclusion. While this is true for the Radishchev of the text, it differs drastically from the fate of Radishchev the writer. His goals of social enlightenment and redemption in Russia instead served as the means to his destruction from his arrest in 1790 to his suicide in 1801. Radishchev's namesake may have survived his journey, but the publication of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, and the reaction Catherine II had to the work ultimately set Radishchev on a path to his own destruction. It is this destruction of the authorial self in the attempts social enlightenment and redemption through literature that

¹³⁴ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*, ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 222.

Erofeev uses in *Moskva-Petushki*. In the work, Erofeev shows that social redemption is not possible in a land where the government is corrupt and the Russian masses have no redeeming qualities. Like Radishchev, Erofeev sends his namesake on a journey in search of redemption, but Venichka has no interest in saving the masses, he is instead alienated from them, and sees no redeeming qualities in the now Soviet narod. When Venichka is killed at the end of the work, he is killed by demonic figures commonly accepted to be Marx, Lenin and Stalin.¹³⁵ However, Erofeev the writer survives his work. This implies that he did not suffer the same consequences as Radishchev did because he saw that attempting to write about social redemption in a corrupt system ultimately ends with the death of the authorial self. His namesake protagonist dies, but the Erofeev as the author of the text is allowed to live.

As Venichka ventures to Petushki the structure of his journey, the theme of travel and his interactions with the narod allow the trip to be read as a response to Radishchev's work. Erofeev uses the framework of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* to create a commentary on the possibility of social redemption in the Soviet Union. By using Radishchev's work as a framework and then parodying that framework, Erofeev draws attention to how little social enlightenment has occurred in Russia in the 160 years since Radishchev's work: the officials are still corrupt, the narod are grotesque and the journey is still bleak. Where Radishchev had hope of a better future, Erofeev sees no possibility for social enlightenment in his world, and his parody of Radishchev's journey shows his frustration with would-be reformers

¹³⁵ Paperno, & Gasparov argued for this interpretation of the four assailants in their article "Vstan' i idi" *Hierosolymitana*, V-VI. 1981.

who continue to look to previous examples for the answer. *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* cannot serve as a path to redemption for Venichka in *Moskva-Petushki* because the work shows that an author cannot survive the ramifications of an attempt at social redemption in a corrupted system. Erofeev now turns to other models of spiritual and personal redemption from the Western canon in an attempt to save his protagonist and himself.

Chapter Two

Rebel Angels: Seeking the Satanic in *Moskva-Petushki*

Introduction

When Venichka is asked to identify himself at the Kursk Station Restaurant portion of his journey, he remarks that he is “just an orphan from Siberia.” This one-dimensional description belies his multifaceted personality, and the purpose of his journey. His description of himself rings untrue for both the reader and for three figures in white at the bar who kick him out for his repeated requests for sherry. As Venichka’s journey continues it becomes obvious that there is much more to Venichka than a Siberian orphan seeking his next drink, and we must ask ourselves “Who is Venichka? What motivates his journey?” To understand Venichka’s character we must go beyond Radishchev’s model of social enlightenment as redemption, and turn to other models to which Erofeev refers as alternative means of exploring the complexities of Venichka’s personality and another path to his possible salvation. This chapter hypothesizes that one of the Western models that Erofeev engages in *Moskva-Petushki* is John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Although there is no written evidence that Erofeev read *Paradise Lost*, the reception of Milton’s poem in Russia before and during the Soviet era, the prevalence of the Miltonic Satan in Russian literature, the popularity of *Paradise Lost* in Russia, Radishchev’s references to Milton in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* all suggest that Erofeev would have been familiar with the work.

Moskva-Petushki's relationship with *Paradise Lost* is one of the keys to understanding Venichka's motivations for his journey, as well as its relationship with the other works that Erofeev parodies in his poem. Published in 1667, the twelve-book poem is a vivid account of not only the fall of man, but also the rebellion and fall of Satan. While the imagery and many themes in *Moskva-Petushki* at first glance appear to be ones commonly associated with the Bible, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the images presented do not match up precisely with the story of the fall of Adam and Eve as it appears in the Bible. This search for a lost paradise, the rebellious angels, the image of a humanized Satan, the dual nature of characters, as well as the appearance of angels whose loyalty cannot be determined recalls John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost*. In using these images commonly associated with Milton's interpretation of the fall of Man, Erofeev has created his own version of the fall in a setting that is uniquely Soviet. Through his reinterpretation and response to *Paradise Lost*, Erofeev has recreated the relationship between humanity and Satan while exploring the idea of what it means to seek Paradise.

Erofeev responds to *Paradise Lost* in *Moskva-Petushki* to offer another possibility of redemption to his protagonist. He challenges the validity of a redemption that can only be granted in death. *Paradise Lost* serves as a model of redemption in *Moskva-Petushki* through Venichka's Satan-like dual nature, the theme of exile and the angels that lead Venichka astray. Finally, *Paradise Lost* is important to the understanding of the theme of redemption in *Moskva-Petushki* because it serves as a bridge between Erofeev's creative response to the two other

journeys of redemption: Radishchev's *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Focusing on four elements from *Paradise Lost*, Erofeev enters into a dialogue with Milton and his vision of repentance and redemption. The most visible elements are the similarities in the theme of exile and the emotional and psychological impact exile has on each of the protagonists. The second connection between the two journeys is the idea of place and the effect of longing for home/nostos on each protagonist and the decisions he makes. The third connection is the satanic protagonist. I argue that at certain moments Venichka appears as a modern-day version of the Miltonic Satan, and that the more rebellious side of his personality keeps Venichka from achieving the redemption he seeks. The fourth connection between the two texts is Erofeev's use of the angels that offer Venichka advice on his journey. The dual nature of these angels, in my view, is similar to that of the rebellious angels of *Paradise Lost*. Through these four elements, Erofeev draws on Milton to question the possibility of redemption. While Milton, like Dante, offers a formulaic path to Paradise (contrition, recognition of sin and repentance), Erofeev shows the Miltonic model to be too simplistic. For Milton, redemption only comes in death, which means that those who seek it are never entirely sure if they are on the correct path. This chapter will explore the complex relationship between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* and the path each protagonist chooses. *Paradise Lost* serves as the second of the three maps I consider here in reading Venichka's journey as a journey of redemption.

What does it mean to seek redemption for a person who has transgressed? In *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* each author struggles with losing his status and

trying to regain that lost place. In the two works, Satan and Adam in *Paradise Lost* and Venichka in *Moskva-Petushki* each keenly feel that sense of nostos, the longing for home, and all three struggle with how to deal with that longing. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton maps redemption and the longing for a lost place. In order to return to that lost place, the seeker must recognize his sins, perform actions of contrition and hope that in death he will be returned to that desired space. In *Paradise Lost*, he offers up two different protagonists who are haunted by that feeling of nostos after falling from grace. Satan responds to his fall with anger and the desire for revenge against God, while Adam seeks to return to God's grace by performing acts of contrition in his new space—earth. In *Moskva-Petushki* we see both the Satanic and Adam-like characteristics of Venichka as he struggles to find his own path to redemption, and as we as readers must question if redemption is something the protagonist really desires.

By entering into a dialogue with *Paradise Lost*, Erofeev challenges the path to redemption as Milton defines it. Milton gives concrete examples of how a character reacts when Paradise has been lost. According to Milton's definition a person can react like Satan, mourn for what has been lost but refuse to repent. Satan blames God for his fall and seeks revenge. Both Satan and Venichka feel lost, are filled with grief and are trying to reach a place that has been closed off to them. Erofeev creates a character in Venichka that contains elements of both Satan and Adam. Venichka longs for Petushki and is desperate to reenter the now closed off space. However, he does not know how to reenter that space. Although throughout his journey he wants to reach Petushki, he refuses to undertake the steps necessary to be granted entry.

When he tells the reader in Voinovo-Usad that he refuses to repent, his refusal is reminiscent of the Miltonic Satan. Venichka is aware of the steps necessary for redemption, yet like Milton's Satan, he is unwilling to complete them. This acknowledgment and subsequent refusal makes Venichka's character more multifaceted than how he initially presents himself to the reader. These parallels between *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* gives Venichka's journey a Miltonic quality.

Through these elements, Erofeev forces his reader to question Venichka's motivation for seeking Petushki. Is his desire to reach Petushki about revenge for his exile? Or does he genuinely seek redemption and reentry to Petushki? Although Venichka claims that his search is about a reunion with his child, at numerous points in the poema Venichka refuses to do what is necessary to gain re-entry. Or is Venichka more like Adam, yet even more uncertain of his path back to Paradise?

Milton's Definition of Redemption:

Milton offers his definition of redemption in *Paradise Lost* after Adam and Eve have fallen. In Books XI and XII of the poem Milton defines redemption as a process already decreed by God even before the fall. God, as an all-knowing being, is aware that Man will fall, and has made provisions for how to return him to His grace. To be redeemed one must first fall, atone for one's sins through acts of contrition (i.e. prayer and penitence) and finally one must die in order to return to God's grace. Therefore, in Milton's world life can be a process in which one works toward redemption. Everyone is born into their fallen state because of original sin, and must then seek redemption through performing acts of contrition. Redemption is a

reward offered after death for living a life of grace and contrition. To understand how redemption is possible in Milton's world, we must consider two questions: How is redemption possible after Man has sinned? Who can be redeemed?

At the climax of *Paradise Lost* in Book IX Eve and then Adam eat the forbidden fruit. They have violated God's decree, and the punishment for doing so is irrevocable. They are cast out of Paradise, and will know sickness, hardship and pain in their new lives wandering on Earth. Jesus delivers God's punishments to them individually. In Book X he tell Eve:

Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply
 By thy Conception; Children thou shalt bring
 In sorrow forth, and to thy Husbands will
 Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule. (X.193-196)¹³⁶

Adam's punishment is equally harsh:

On *Adam* last thus judgement he pronounc'd.
 Because thou hast heark'nd to the voice of thy Wife,
 And eaten of the Tree concerning which
 I charg'd thee, saying: Thou shalt not eate thereof,
 Curs'd is the ground for thy sake, thou in sorrow
 Shalt eate thereof all the days of thy Life;
 Thorns also and Thistles it shall bring thee forth
 Unbid, and thou shalt eate th' Herb of th' Field,
 In the sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread,
 Till thou return unto the ground, for thou
 Out of the ground wast taken, know thy Birth,
 For dust thou art, and shalt to dust returne. (X.197-208)¹³⁷

The punishment is overwhelming for the pair, and causes Adam to scorn Eve for causing their Fall. However, God does not leave them without hope. Although they ate the fruit, He is aware they were tempted by Satan to do so, therefore the rebellious act did not originate with them, but from an outside force. In order for all

¹³⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 234.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

humankind to have the possibility of salvation God offers up his Son. This sacrifice makes redemption possible for Adam, Eve and their offspring. Adam, through a series of visions, sees the sacrifice of the Son, and realizes that although they have been cast out from the Garden of Eden and will suffer while on Earth, the Son's sacrifice has made redemption possible for humanity. Although humans will not be redeemed as a species because of their waywardness, individuals will be capable of obtaining redemption through their devotion to God. After his visions in Book XI, Adam refers to their fall as "felix culpa" a happy fault because good has come from his disobedience.¹³⁸ Even though they have fallen, through the sacrifice of the Son they have the possibility of being redeemed.

To understand Milton's definition of redemption in *Paradise Lost*, we must ask who has the possibility to be redeemed. That possibility is not offered to all of the characters in the poem. Although Satan, the rebel angels and Adam and Eve all have fallen from God's grace, Satan and his ilk are not offered the chance at redemption. According to Gábor Ittzés, the difference between Adam and Eve's possibility of redemption versus the inability of the fallen angels to be redeemed stems from shame and Satan's arrogance toward God.¹³⁹ As humans, Adam and Eve are capable of feeling shame for the act that led them to be exiled from the Garden of Eden. Ittzés argues that Adam and Eve exist in a similar state as the angels in the first stage of their fall, but they differ because the humans are ashamed of

¹³⁸ William H. Marshall, "Paradise Lost: Felix Culpa and the Problem of Structure," *Modern Language Notes* 76, no. 1 (Jan., 1961), 16.

¹³⁹ Gábor Ittzés, "Fall And Redemption," *Anachronist*, 11 (2005): 45.

themselves.¹⁴⁰ Like the fallen angels, Adam initially does feel anger towards God, as Michael Lieb notes in *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost*. Lieb points to Book X as evidence of Adam's anger after the Fall when he asks God: "Did I request Thee, Maker, from my Clay/To mould me Man?" (X.743-744)¹⁴¹ Although Adam feels anger that God has created him, he and Eve are still ashamed of their actions and their disloyalty to God. Adam is able to overcome his anger and seek forgiveness. The rebel angels feel no such remorse after they turn away from God. Their ability to feel shame for their actions means "shame flows from a recognition that the present is emptied of some significance that the past had."¹⁴² Shame causes Adam and Eve to want to return to God's grace, whereas the rebel angels never feel the desire to turn back towards God. Once the rebel angels fall, the idea of redemption never occurs to them. Ittzés also notes that the fallen humans are concerned with their redemption because they are aware of the future, both for themselves and for mankind. When Adam and Eve fall, not only are they cast out from the Garden of Eden, but so are all future generations of humans. Their desire to be redeemed is not merely a path to save their own souls, but the souls of all of their future offspring—a concern the rebel angels do not have.

Milton's vision of redemption shows that the seeker of redemption must take an active role in the process. The seeker must perform acts of contrition such as prayer and atonement for one's sins. In *Paradise Lost*, these acts of contrition are Adam and Eve's attempt to return to their pre-fallen state:

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, cited in Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 207.

¹⁴² Gábor Ittzés, "Fall And Redemption," *Anachronist*, 11(2005): 46.

What better can we do, than to the place
 Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
 Before him reverent, and there confess
 Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
 Watering the ground. . . (X.1087-1090)¹⁴³

Although their attempt to return to the pre-fallen state fails, Ittzés notes the importance of returning to the previous state in *Paradise Lost* by pointing out that Eve suggests to Adam that “they return to the place of their judgment and pray there. (XI.932-936)”¹⁴⁴ Both characters are aware of the importance of the acts of contrition, and how they tie into the concept of returning to that previous state:

See, Father, what fruits on Earth are sprung
 From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs
 And Prayers, which in this Golden Censer, mixt
 With Incense, I thy Priest before thee bring,
 Fruits of more pleasing savour from thy seed
 Sow'n with contrition on his heart, then those
 Which his own hand manuring all the Trees
 Of Paradise could have produc't ere fall'n

From innocence. (XI.22-30)¹⁴⁵

However, since they have disobeyed God, earthly redemption is impossible, yet God does not completely disown Adam and Eve. Through prayer and loyalty to God, there is the promise of a reward:

Accept me; and, in me, from these receive
 The smell of peace toward mankind: let him live
 Before thee reconciled, at least his days
 Numbered though sad; till death his doom (which I
 To mitigate thus plead, not to reverse,)
 To better life shall yield him: where with me
 All my redeemed may dwell in joy and bliss;
 Made one with me, as I with thee am one.” (XI.37-44)

¹⁴³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 257.

¹⁴⁴ Gábor Ittzés, “Fall And Redemption,” *Anachronist*, 11 (2005): 50.

¹⁴⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 259.

The reward for these acts of contrition is not immediate, but occurs after person has died. In Milton's world, redemption is not an earthly reward, and is instead something that is granted only in death.

Milton gives evidence of God's redemptive plan by including the death and resurrection of the Son in Book XII: "The Son dies/But soon revives, Death over him no power/Shall long usurp." (XII.419-421). God has a plan for redemption in *Paradise Lost*, and that plan is decided prior to Adam's and Eve's fall. Ittzés notes that Adam and Eve are made aware of God's plan by the angel Michael, who alludes to the fact that death is a part of God's redemptive plan for humanity.¹⁴⁶ Ittzés points to this line in the poem to show that Adam "has been taught not merely to recognize death in its varied shapes, but chiefly, to understand its true significance not only as punishment for his disobedience, but as a gateway to new life."¹⁴⁷ Lieb also notes that death plays a crucial role in the redemptive process because death serves as "a means of new birth."¹⁴⁸ He points to Book XI lines 62-66 as evidence of this:

and after Life
Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
By faith and faithful works, to second Life,
Wak't in the renovation of the just,
[Death] resignes him up with Heav'n and Earth renewd.¹⁴⁹

Lieb also points out that "those capable of redemption enact the creative return, and indeed the Redeemer himself in *Paradise Regain'd* will enact the same pattern when

¹⁴⁶ Gábor Ittzés, "Fall And Redemption," *Anachronist*, 11(2005): 55.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 213.

¹⁴⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, cited in Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 213.

he returns “home to his Mothers house” after his trial in the wilderness (IV, 639). Both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain’d*, then, culminate creatively in a movement towards home.”¹⁵⁰ Since Adam and Eve have broken their promise to God, the possibility of redemption during their earthly lives (and that of their progeny) is impossible. The impossibility of redemption before death means that a person seeking redemption can never be certain of their success. A person must live a penitent life in hopes that he is will receive redemption after death. However, one cannot know if he is successful in this quest because God only grants redemption after death.

Erofeev’s reception of *Paradise Lost* examines Milton’s idea that redemption can only be gained in death. In Milton’s world, the boundaries are clearly defined between the spaces in which the protagonists operate, especially after the exile of each protagonist. This contrasts with Erofeev’s one-dimensional world where humans create their own order and their own chaos. The train moves Venichka through spaces that seem to have concrete boundaries (i.e., the mile markers), yet he mistakes Petushki for Moscow and Petushki for paradise. Venichka’s “death” at the end of the poema shows neither damnation nor the promise of redemption. Although desire for redemption aligns him with Milton’s Adam, his death contains none of the promise of paradise.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 219.

Milton's Russian Reception

Before examining Erofeev's particular creative interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, it will be instructive to review Milton's Russian reception. In this reception history various themes emerge that play out in *Moskva-Petushki*. Milton's connection to Russian literature and culture started before the publication of *Paradise Lost*. Although the exact date is unknown, Milton worked on a prose piece entitled *A Brief History of Moscovia and of Other Less-Known Countries Lying Eastward of Russia as Far as Cathay ("A Brief History")* before starting *Paradise Lost*. *A Brief History* was Milton's attempt at understanding the geography and politics of "most northern region of Europe reputed civil."¹⁵¹ Although Milton had no personal connection to Russia, he loved geography and history, and Russia provided him with a treasure trove of facts to examine and analyze. Despite the lack of personal connection to the country, even after he stopped working on *A Brief History*, he would return to Russia through his poetry and his politics. Russia appears twice in *Paradise Lost*: once in Book X when Satan returns to Hell after sending Sin and Death to Earth: "As when the Tartar from his Russian foe,/By Astracan, over the snowy plains/Retires..."¹⁵² And again when Michael speaks to Adam after the Fall:

All earth's kingdoms, and their glory...
In Hispahan; or where the Russian Czar
In Moscow; or the Sultan in Bizanee
Turchestan born.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ D.S. Mirsky, "Introduction," John Milton, *A Brief History of Moscovia* (London: The Blackamore Press, 1929), 16.

¹⁵² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 268.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Beyond incorporating these references to Russia in *Paradise Lost*, Milton was briefly connected to Russia once again when Cromwell ruled over England. As Mirsky notes in his introduction to the 1929 edition of *A Brief History*: “when the secretary to the Protector, Milton had further occasion to be interested in Russia, and in his official capacity composed a letter from Cromwell to the Tsar.”¹⁵⁴ Although Milton never traveled to Russia, his work in *A Brief History* incorporates the work of explorers such as Paulus Jovius, and contributed to Britain’s understanding of Russia.¹⁵⁵

Russian scholarship on and interest in Milton spans a wide variety of subjects and themes. Of particular interest is Milton’s reception in Russian letters. Scholars and critics have addressed aspects of Milton’s Russian reception, ranging from the history of translating *Paradise Lost*, to the image of Milton’s Satan in Russian literature and the relationship between Milton and some of Russia’s most revered writers and artists. German scholar H. Mutschmann’s 1925 book *Milton in Russland* is an early 20th century study on the history and reception of Milton’s work in Russia before the 20th century. Valentin Boss is the foremost scholar on Milton and Russian literature. His book *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* gives a detailed account of the translation history of both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* in Russia up to the 1950s. Boss’s book focuses on the poems’ long-lived popularity among both writers and ordinary readers. Boss’s second volume on Milton and Russia is *Russian Popular Culture & John Milton* and examines the history of newly literate Russians reading Milton. The third volume, *Poet-Prophet: Milton’s Russian Image from the*

¹⁵⁴ D.S. Mirsky, introduction to *A Brief History of Moscovia* (London: The Blackamore Press, 1929), iii.

¹⁵⁵ John Milton, “Preface,” *A Brief History of Moscovia* (London: Printed by M. Flesher for Brabazon Aylmer, 1682), iii.

Enlightenment to Pushkin, investigates Milton's 18th century reception. Boss's *Milton & Russia* explores how Milton has been treated in Russian literature and popular culture from the earliest appearances of his work in Russia in 1780 to contemporary depictions of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* in Russian literature, art and music. Boss is also the author of the detailed "Milton's Influence on Russia" entry in the *Milton Encyclopedia* (vol 9, 1983), an all-encompassing history of the role Milton played in Russian poetry.¹⁵⁶

Other scholars have examined the relationship between Milton and Russia by examining his work *History of Moscovia*. One of the earliest criticisms of Milton and his *History of Moscovia* appeared in Russia in 1871. Iurii Tolstoi's "A Note on Mr. Poludenskii's Article 'Milton's Russian History'" ("Zametka po povodu stat'i gospodina Poludenskogo: 'Russkaia istoriia Mil'tona'").¹⁵⁷ While Boss is the leading scholar in the field of Milton's Russian reception, numerous other scholars have contributed to the subject. Harris Francis Fletcher's 1941 article "A Note on Two Words in Milton's *History of Moscovia*" looks at the philology behind the *History of Moscovia*. Fletcher's work focuses on areas of the work that scholars have deemed "unverifiable" or inaccurate in the *History of Moscovia*. This work was followed by George Park's 1943 article "The Occasion of Milton's *Moscovia*" which provides a brief history of the work. Likewise, John Gleason's 1964 "The Nature of Milton's *Moscovia*" is a study on why Milton was interested in Russia, and examines the

¹⁵⁶ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991)

¹⁵⁷ John B. Gleason, "The Nature of Milton's 'Moscovia,'" *Studies in Philology* 61, no. 4 (Oct., 1964): 640.

possibility that Milton originally had plans to create an epic that took place in Russia.¹⁵⁸

The history of the translation of *Paradise Lost* starts in the 18th century with Baron Aleksandr Grigor'evich Stroganov who published the first Russian translation of the poem in 1774 based on the 1729 French translation, *Le Paradis Perdu*, by Dupré de Saint-Maur.¹⁵⁹ Since Stroganov did not know English the resulting translation was stylistically uneven and was “already archaic” when new translations of the poem began to appear in the 1780s and 1790s.¹⁶⁰ Towards the end of the 19th century Evgenii Solov'ev wrote *Milton, his Life and Literary Work* (*Mil'ton, ego zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'*) (1894). This biography played an important role in renewing Russia's interest in Milton's works in the 20th century because Solov'ev portrayed Milton as a political figure standing against a corrupted government. Solov'ev's book was part of a multi-volume series of Western biographies which were inexpensive at twenty-five kopecks, and thus sold widely throughout Russia.¹⁶¹ K. Tiander's 1909 *John Milton (Dzhon Mil'ton)* was one of the last major biographical works on Milton published before the Russian Revolution.¹⁶²

The Soviet Miltonists viewed Milton's Satan as a “cosmic revolutionary.”¹⁶³ Lenin's Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, was the Soviet Union's leading promoter of Milton and favored this revolutionary view of Satan.

Vasiutinskii and Lavretskii, who took over the *Literary Encyclopedia (Literaturnaia*

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁶² Ibid., 140.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

entsiklopediia) upon Lunacharskii's death in 1933, shared his view of Satan, and this view is seen in the entry the pair wrote for *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia* in 1935. D. S. Mirsky also contributed to the Soviet understanding of Milton and *Paradise Lost*. He published an illustrated edition of *A Brief History of Muscovy* in 1929 as well a new translation of *Paradise Lost* that became known for its use of distinctly Soviet jargon.¹⁶⁴ The significance of the Soviet interpretation of Milton's work will be discussed later in this chapter. Although there was a lot of interest in Milton's work in Soviet Russia during the early part of the century, the interest seemed to decline after the late 1930s and then underwent a revival in Ukraine beginning in the mid 1960s. Boss gives only a few examples of scholarship on Milton in Russian during that gap. One such article was R.M. Samarin's "The Art of John Milton According to V.G. Belinskii" ("Tvorchestvo Dzh. Mil'tona v otsenke V.G. Belinskogo") which appeared in N.L. Brodskii's *Belinskii, Historian and Theorist of Literature: Collected Articles (Belinskii, istorik i teoretik literatury sbornik statei)* which was published in 1949.¹⁶⁵

Milton's Satan in the Soviet Union

The Soviet interpretation of Milton's Satan provides a context for Erofeev's treatment of Miltonesque moral rebellion. The Soviet vision of Satan in *Paradise Lost* found its roots in Evgenii Solov'ev's 1894 biography of Milton, *Mil'ton, ego zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'*. The biography was important for three reasons: in 1897 the poet Sluchevskii relied on the political message of this biography in his

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

translation of *Paradise Lost*; the edition was inexpensive and broadly available even to newly literate readers of modest means; and it would heavily influence Lunacharskii's interpretation of Milton's poems. As Boss notes, Solov'ev's biography of Milton revived the idea of a "Promethean parallel favoured by the Romantics...[because] he was a Legal Marxist interested in both the English Revolution and the condition of the Russian worker."¹⁶⁶ The result of this interpretation meant that both Milton and his Satan took on a more rebellious and political image in the Russian context. Since Solov'ev's biography was part of a series of biographies that were published cheaply, the biography was widely available and read throughout Russia. This new vision of Milton and Satan would be reinforced by Sluchevskii's 1897 translation of *Paradise Lost*, which was not intentionally focused on Milton's political beliefs, but "unwittingly underlined them."¹⁶⁷ Solov'ev's biography and Sluchevskii's translation would influence Soviet views of both *Paradise Lost* and Milton's Satan because: "This approach to *Paradise Lost*, adopted by Lunacharsky after the Bolshevik Revolution, would make the poem palatable to Russian socialists otherwise disposed to dismiss the epic as Christian—that is to say, reactionary-propaganda."¹⁶⁸

As Lenin's commissar of enlightenment, Lunacharskii played a critical part in promoting the idea of Milton's Satan as a revolutionary figure rather than a religious one. Lunacharskii, in his writing on Milton described the separation of Milton's work from its religious context as: "In relating Satan's rebellion against God, Milton

¹⁶⁶ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 127.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

writes an apologia of the English bourgeoisie.”¹⁶⁹ Maksim Gor’kii also supported the idea of Milton as a figure of rebellion, and went one step further than Lunacharskii by declaring in 1909 that *Paradise Lost* was not the work of one author but instead a “work of the masses.”¹⁷⁰ Denis Saurat’s 1925 work *Milton: Man and Thinker* asserted that: “Thought does not go from great man to great men, but flourishes on its own—and occasionally a great man establishes a connection with the people.”¹⁷¹ The image of Satan as the rebellious leader fighting for freedom would continue throughout the early decades of the Soviet Union. When literary critics Vasiutinskii and Lavretskii took over Lunacharskii’s role of editing *The Literary Encyclopedia (Literaturnaia entsiklopediia)*, they also viewed Milton’s Satan as the rebellious leader even though they each differed in their view of Satan’s role in *Paradise Lost*. According to Boss, the difference was that Lavretskii “accepts the more traditional view that the portrayal of Satan, being based in part on Cromwell, reflects Milton’s ambivalent attitude to the Lord Protector, whose love of freedom was corrupted by his lust for power....[this lust for power] makes Satan into a ‘truly demonic being, doomed to fail.’”¹⁷² In contrast to Lavretskii, Vasiutinskii views on Milton were less politically moderate. Boss notes that Lavretskii’s work on Milton “could be read as a reflection on what was happening in the Russia of Stalin after collectivization.”¹⁷³ Although their views on Milton differed, their contribution to the reception of Milton in Soviet Russia is important because, it meant that “...as far as *Paradise Lost* was

¹⁶⁹ A.V. Lunacharskii, *Istoriia evropeiskoi literatury*, Sobrание sochenii 4, Moscow: 1924.

¹⁷⁰ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 139.

¹⁷¹ Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (London: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 1925), 287.

¹⁷² Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 143.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

concerned, however, there seemed to be no actual taboos against its publication, its path having been paved by approval in the *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, the authority of which was then taken very seriously indeed.”¹⁷⁴

Although Vasiutinskii’s and Lavretskii’s interpretations of Satan differed, both agreed that Satan was more of a political rebel than a religious figure. Their entries on Milton in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia* became the correct Soviet view of Milton as an author and the figure as Satan as a literary type. What is interesting about the Soviet interpretation of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is that it remained fairly consistent throughout the 20th century. Even under the Brezhnev administration (1964-1982), *Paradise Lost* remained widely read throughout the Soviet Union. The religious themes of the poem were largely ignored in favor of the idea of Satan as a rebel. It is interesting to note that in 1977 the Ministry of Education in Kiev approved the publication of a book entitled *A Pedagogical Analysis of the Art of John Milton* (*Pedagogicheskaia razbotka po tvorchestvu Dzhona Miltona*), which led to *Paradise Lost* being widely read throughout the school systems in Kiev.¹⁷⁵ *A Pedagogical Analysis of the Art of John Milton* continued the tradition of viewing Satan as a rebellious figure, and also argued that: “The image of Satan in Milton’s poem represents not only the embodiment of the love of freedom, but of the ideas of humanism [and] truth.”¹⁷⁶ This Soviet interpretation of Satan and what he stands for in Milton’s poem would remain the dominant image of Milton’s Satan throughout

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷⁶ N.P. Klimov et al (eds), “Pedagogicheskaia razbotka po tvorchestvu Dzhona Miltona” (Kiev 1977) cited in Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 148.

the duration of the Soviet Union. This interpretation of Satan as a rebellious figure will become important in *Paradise Lost* because Erofeev uses the image of Satan to reflect on Venichka's duality as someone who wants redemption yet cannot achieve it within the given system.

The Soviet interpretation of Satan is important for understanding the nature of Erofeev's reading of Satan and the rebellious angels in *Moskva-Petushki*. The first reason is that the Soviet analysis of Satan meant that Satan could appear in literature without it automatically meaning the text had religious significance. When Satan appears to Venichka at the Usad-Kilometer 105 section of his journey, he is directly identified as Satan. The Soviet interpretation illustrates the idea that Satan has to rebel against God's order because it is a broken system. Soviet critics argue that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost* for precisely this reason. In *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka does protest against the system when he becomes the foreman at his job. While it would be easy to view him as a drunken ne'er-do-well in his new position, he does try to change a broken system. Prior to his promotion, the employees rarely work and spend their time boozing and gambling—hardly the Soviet ideal. Venichka does try to improve the quality of the workplace, albeit in a non-Soviet way, but like Satan, his attempts at changing the system fail. Venichka's army and attempts at war towards the end of his journey can be viewed in the same manner. Venichka's rebellion does not automatically have to read as a rebellion against the Soviet Union if one looks at the rebellion through the lens of *Paradise Lost*, which gives a rebel license to rebel if the current system is flawed. Since Erofeev never directly attacks, but rather indirectly challenges, the Soviet system in *Moskva-Petushki*, and in his

personal life and interviews had the good sense to declare that he loved his country, it is easy to see why Erofeev was able to escape some of the harsher punishments that his contemporaries received.

Radishchev and Milton

The relationship between *Paradise Lost* and Radishchev's *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* serves as another connection between Milton's work and *Moskva-Petushki*. As we know, parts of *Moskva-Petushki* act as a response to *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* as both writers grapple with the idea of social enlightenment in Russia. In examining the themes of the relationship between the social strata, censorship and political reform, *A Journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow* serves as a secondary reception of Miltonic ideas in *Moskva-Petushki*. Radishchev was an admirer of Milton's work, and refers both to Milton the author and *Paradise Lost* in his writings. Radishchev first heard of Milton's work when he studied abroad at the University of Leipzig.¹⁷⁷ However, his interest in Milton grew throughout his life, according to his son, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Radishchev, who wrote that his father learned English to work as a translator, but continued to study the language because of his fascination with English writers.¹⁷⁸ Milton, along with Raynal, Voltaire and Rousseau, would help Radishchev articulate his own stance on censorship and freedom.

Before he wrote *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, Radishchev channeled some of Milton's ideas of freedom into his 1783 ode "Liberty." In this ode,

¹⁷⁷ Haig A. Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland Press, 2012), 159.

¹⁷⁸ G.A. Gukovskii & B.A. Desnitskii, "A.N. Radishchev," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 3 (Leningrad: Izd-vo AN USSR, 1941), 388.

he praises the English Revolution, and much of the ode echoes Milton's own thoughts on freedom and liberty.¹⁷⁹ In his English language introduction to *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* Leo Wiener notes, "while much of Radishchev's factual data on censorship come from Johann Beckmann's *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Erfindungen*, it is quite possible that his (Radishchev's) inspiration came from Milton."¹⁸⁰ Wiener points out that, although Radishchev refers to a wide variety of writers from all over Europe and throughout time, his favorites of the writers referred to in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* are "Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Milton and Voltaire."¹⁸¹ Numerous scholars including both Leo Wiener and Haig A. Bosmajian have pointed out how closely Radishchev's statements on censorship and freedom mirror those statements of Milton's in his 1664 work *Areopagitica*: "For who knows not that Truth is strong next to the Almighty? She needs no strategies, no stratagems, nor licensing to make her victorious; those are the shifts and defenses that error uses against her power."¹⁸² Wiener argues: "In a great many details, both of fact and argument, it (*Journey*) is strongly reminiscent of Milton's *Areopagitica*."¹⁸³ Both Wiener and Bosmajian point to the "Torzhok" segment to show how Radishchev comments on Milton's ideas:

But if in these days of enlightenment one were to undertake to forbid or burn books that were to deal with divination or preach superstition, would it not be ridiculous for truth to lift the cudgel of

¹⁷⁹ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russia from Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 43.

¹⁸⁰ Aleksandr Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg from Moscow*, ed. Leo Wiener (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 24.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸² John Milton, *Areopagitica*, cited in Haig A. Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland Press, 2012), 159.

¹⁸³ Aleksandr Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg from Moscow*, ed. Leo Wiener (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 24.

persecution against superstition? Need truth seek the support of tyrannic might and the sword to overcome error, when the very sight of it is the most cruel scourge of error?¹⁸⁴

Radishchev was fascinated with both America and England, and admired the civil liberties that were afforded to their citizens—something he felt was sorely lacking in Russia. In the “Tver’” section Radishchev specifically names Milton twice when ruminating on prosody:

Теперь дать пример нового стихосложения очень трудно, ибо примеры в добром и худом стихосложении глубокий пустили корень. Парнас окружен ямбами, и рифмы стоят везде на карауле. Кто бы ни задумал писать дактилями, тому тотчас Тредиаковского приставят дядькою, и прекраснейшее дитя долго казаться будет уродом, доколе не родится Мильтона, Шекспира или Вольтера.¹⁸⁵

Now, to give an example of this new versification is difficult, because the old models of good and bad poetry have taken root. Parnassus is surrounded by iambs and rhymes that are always on guard. Whoever thought to write in dactyls, Trediakovsky will instantly set up as the mentor over him, and the most beautiful child will be declared a monster until a Milton, Shakespeare or Voltaire is born.

As Valentin Boss comments, Milton’s impact on Radishchev’s own thoughts on the topics was far-reaching and profound:

Milton’s influence on the *Journey* is twofold...From Milton Radishchev drew support for his theories on prosody—discussed in the chapter on Tver’. The other influence is political. The longest chapter in the *Journey*—which is like Karamzin’s *Letters* owes much to Sterne—

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 159.

“Но если бы во дни просвещения возмнили книги, учащие, гаданию или суеверие проповедующие, запрещать или жечь, не смешно ли бы было, чтобы истина приняла жезл гонения на суеверие? чтоб истина искала на поражение заблуждения опоры власти и меча, когда вид ее один есть наижесточайший бич на заблуждение?”

¹⁸⁵ Aleksandr Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*. ed. Marina Smelkova (Saint Petersburg: Lenizdat, 2013), 192.

Radishchev mentions Milton again just a few lines later as being among the writers that will be read until the human race dies out.

contains a historical account of the origin and development of censorship.¹⁸⁶

Radishchev's detailed account of censorship in Russia in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* is a response to Milton's work on censorship.¹⁸⁷ Radishchev believed that Russia could follow examples in the West like England. He looked to writers like Milton as an example of how to challenge authority on issues such as freedom of speech and press.

Radishchev's interest in Milton went beyond his political writings and views on censorship. He was fascinated with Milton's Satan, and like the Romantics saw Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*. In his unfinished historical novel *Ermak*, Radishchev includes a poem called "Angel t'my" ("Angel of Darkness"). The language and style of the poem is Miltonic and responds to the Russian images Milton included in *Paradise Lost*. The poem includes images of "вершиной Уральского хребта куда возлетает отец мятежа, ангел тьмы" ("from the top of the Ural mountain range, where flies the father of rebellion, the angel of darkness").¹⁸⁸ G.A. Gukovskii and B.A. Desnitskii in their chapter on "Angel of Darkness" note that Radishchev's poem shares the same sweeping landscapes as Milton and at times seems to even overlap some of Milton's verses.¹⁸⁹ Boss notes that even though "Angel t'my" is only a fragment of the intended poem, its contributions to the studying Milton in the Russian context is important because "Radishchev's

¹⁸⁶ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 78.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ G.A. Gukovskii & B.A. Desnitskii, "A.N. Radishchev," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* vol 3 (Lenigrad: Izdo AN USSR, 1941) 387.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 389.

evocation of Milton's Satan is the first such attempt in Russian prose."¹⁹⁰

Radishchev's Satan does not resemble the devils of Russian folklore. Like Milton's Satan, he is a striking figure with "obdurate pride and steadfast hate."¹⁹¹ Boss further hypothesizes that "if Radishchev's 'Angel of Darkness' is the first Miltonic devil in Russian literature in the sense that its author seems to anticipate the sympathy the Romantics felt for the hero of *Paradise Lost*."¹⁹² Although Radishchev never finished "Angel t'my," the poem still contributed to the history of the depiction of Satan in Russian literature.

The relationship between Milton's and Radishchev's works is important in understanding the role of *Paradise Lost* in *Moskva-Petushki* because it exemplifies the masterful way in which Erofeev was able to layer literary references in his poema to create something new. Where Radishchev saw an example of freedom in Milton's work, Erofeev saw acts of defiance in both of his predecessors. Both Milton and Radishchev were compelled to speak out about the injustices they saw in their respective societies, and both were held accountable for their words. By including references and allusions to Milton and Radishchev in *Moskva-Petushki*, Erofeev is able to comment subtly on the same issues that Milton and Radishchev felt so passionately about, the same ones that Erofeev saw in his own society centuries later.

¹⁹⁰ Valentin Boss, *Milton & the Rise of Russian Satanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 74.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 69.

Narrative Structure

The functions of movement and structure in *Moskva-Petushki* as it compares to the structure and movement in *Paradise Lost* is equally important to our understanding of the interactions between the two poems. While both poems are filled with numerous references to various fixed locations, the movement of the protagonists in each poem is also worth investigating because both characters move between Hell-like places with the intent of reaching Paradise. As with *Moskva-Petushki*, *Paradise Lost* shows the contrast between linear movement and circular movement. In his book *The Mystical Design of Paradise Lost*, Galbraith Miller Crump focuses on the importance of movement and structure in *Paradise Lost*. Miller Crump also acknowledges that linear and circular movement can often appear in the same lines of the poem, and points to the opening stanza of *Paradise Lost* to show the tension between the two:

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit,
of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till One Greater Man,
Restore us and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of chaos.¹⁹³

Miller Crump notes that the tension of forward movement is established in the very first lines of the poem, and that Milton establishes a forward moving momentum

¹⁹³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, cited in Gailbraith Miller Crump, *The Mystical Design of Paradise Lost* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1975), 42.

that continues throughout the poem.¹⁹⁴ He argues that the verbs in this passage signal a forward motion while “Moving in towards the center, and then out from it is a pattern of clauses and phrases that describe historical and metahistorical cycles of loss and gain.”¹⁹⁵ Miller Crump further notes that the circular motion is primarily seen in the “rising and falling notions” of the poem which describe the “man’s fortunes through time.”¹⁹⁶ Likewise, Milton’s focus on regaining what was lost shows circular movement in the leaving of and returning to Eden. The overall effect of the tension between circular motion and linear motion in the poetics of *Paradise Lost* is that the reader feels the movement of the poem without being fully aware of it.

The first paragraph of Venichka’s journey also shows this tension between linear movement and circular motion:

Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышал про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмелюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало - и ни разу не видел Кремля.¹⁹⁷

Everyone says, the Kremlin, the Kremlin. I have heard about it from everyone, but I have never seen it myself. How many times (thousands of times) I’ve walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow, from north to south, from east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, yet I have never seen the Kremlin.

The poema begins with the theme of motion. Venichka is searching for the right direction to travel to find the Kremlin. His motion is linear and reflects the linear

¹⁹⁴ Gailbraith Miller Crump, *The Mystical Design of Paradise Lost* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1975), 41.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 4.

motion of his upcoming train journey. Even the title of this section “Москва. На пути к Курскому вокзалу” reflects linear motion. He is on the way to the train station: the movement is both linear and continuous. Erofeev also creates a sense of circularity in this paragraph by relying on two different factors. First, there is a cultural and geographical understanding that the Kremlin lies at the heart of Moscow’s rings. It is the very center of a series of concentric rings. Second, Venichka implies that this is not the first time he has tried to find the Kremlin. His multiple attempts create a circuit as he attempts to find the Kremlin and fails. Although Erofeev’s methods of doing so are different from Milton’s, the overall effect is the same. He gives the opening of *Moskva-Petushki* the same tension between circles and lines that appear in the first stanza of *Paradise Lost*.

Another area of overlap in *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* is the use of nonlinear narrative in both works. Many critics of *Paradise Lost* question reading it as a linear text. Critics such as Anthony Welch, Christopher Kendrick and Jonathon Shears argue that reading *Paradise Lost* in a purely linear manner oversimplifies the poem. Amy Boesky furthers this argument by asserting that: “even as the possibility that the poem can be understood sequentially is being established, the idea of sequence is tested and exposed as flawed.”¹⁹⁸ Likewise, Welch argues that “Milton imagines time here as movement without change, duration without sequence. As the devils “roll” on the burning lake they also roll backward and forward through time: tossed between remembered happiness and present torment.”¹⁹⁹ The results of

¹⁹⁸ Amy Boesky, “Paradise Lost and the Multiplicity of Time,” in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 381.

¹⁹⁹ Anthony Welch, “Reconsidering Chronology in *Paradise Lost*,” *MS*, 41 (2002): 13.

Milton's treatment of time are that "the dominant mood is one of loss indicating the past, but experienced by Satan in the present as mental anguish and physical pain."²⁰⁰

The narrative in *Moskva-Petushki* contains elements of Milton's treatment of time, especially in how Erofeev treats Venichka's memories of the past and his present grief-filled state. The timelines of both Venichka's trip and his own biographical timeline are difficult to follow in the poem as Venichka switches between the current train ride and recollections of the past. Venichka jumps between the distant past, the recent past and the present with little difference between the spaces. In "Karacharovo-Chukhlinka" Venichka begins to tell a story that took place ten years ago: "Помню, лет десять тому назад я поселился в Орехово-Зуево" ("I remember, about ten years ago I lived in Orekhovo-Zuevo").²⁰¹ Although the story is told in the middle of his present narrative when he observes two of his fellow passengers, the next segment of the journey is a retelling of what occurred ten years prior. As soon as Venichka finishes the story from ten years ago, he slips into the recent past with another story that took place just one week ago, and is about a job that he had five weeks earlier: "Неделю тому назад меня скинули с бригадирства, а пять недель тому назад - назначили" ("A week ago I was kicked out of my job as brigade foreman, which I'd gotten five weeks prior").²⁰² Before fully finishing that particular story, he is interrupted by the angels whose appearance forces him back into the present. Just as with *Paradise Lost*, the

²⁰⁰ Johnathon Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading Against the Grain* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co, 2009), 206.

²⁰¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 21.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 27.

sequence of events is difficult to discern in *Moskva-Petushki* as time is not a fixed concept in the poem. Venichka voices his concern over the tension between present torment and the future promise of happiness when he recalls past memories. He asks himself: “Мое завтра светло. Да. Наше завтра светлее, чем наше вчера и наше сегодня. Но кто поручится, что наше послезавтра не будет хуже нашего позавчера?” (“My tomorrow will be brighter. Yes. Our tomorrow will be brighter than our yesterday and our today. But who can promise that our day after will not be worse than our day before?”).²⁰³ Venichka’s hopes of a better tomorrow, a riff on the Soviet formulaic promise of a brighter future, are in part due to his current grief-stricken state. Erofeev pushes Milton’s timeline scheme by placing Venichka’s happiness entirely in the past and contrasting it with Venichka’s grief-filled present. This further aligns Venichka with Milton’s Satan, who has no hope of returning to a happier place, and less like Adam who still has a chance of returning.

Beyond the structure of the narrative and the poetics of both works, the trajectory of Venichka’s movement from Moscow to Petushki resembles the trajectory of Satan as he moves between the spaces of Hell and the Garden of Eden. Milton’s Hell exists somewhere beyond earth because as the David Lowenstein notes “our world had not yet been cursed.”²⁰⁴ The center of Hell is the center of political and military power for the denizens of Hell. Lowenstein describes Milton’s version of Hell as: “The infernal council of Satan and his grand peers which takes place within Pandemonium, especially focuses our attention on Hell as a realm of

²⁰³ Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁴ David Lowenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67.

worldly activities, politics and demagoguery.”²⁰⁵ This depiction of Hell as a center of politics and power for Satan and his fellow rebel angels gives Hell an internal structure. *Paradise Lost* shows Hell to be a circular space, and Satan resides in the center of the circular spaces. Book II, line 434 refers to the River Lethe as the “convex of fire”²⁰⁶ which places the River Lethe as the outer circular boundary that surrounds the lake of fire and Pandemonium. Eugene Cox’s 1928 *Map of Hell* shows the lake of fire to be at the very center of Milton’s circular Hell.

Venichka and Satan share a common trajectory in their attempts to leave the circular space. Both Milton’s Satan and Venichka move from the interior of the circle outward. Moreover, both Venichka and Satan, in their attempts to flee the circular space, expect a linear trajectory that ultimately proves to be a circular path as both parties are repeatedly returned to where they began. Although Satan claims that it is better to rule in Hell, it is a space that he continually leaves, and is subsequently banished back to when his various plans fail. This expected trajectory versus actual trajectory appears in Book IV when Satan first attempts to enter the Garden of Eden disguised as a cherub. His plan is thwarted when the angel Uriel discovers his ruse, and marks him as a fraud:

Each perturbation smooth'd with outward calme,
 Artificer of fraud; and was the first
 That practisd falshood under saintly shew,
 Deep malice to conceale, couch't with revenge:
 Yet not enough had practisd to deceive
 Uriel once warnd; whose eye pursu'd him down
 The way he went, and on th' Assyrian mount
 Saw him disfigur'd, more then could befall
 Spirit of happie sort: his gestures fierce

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁰⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 40.

He markd and mad demeanour, then alone,
As he suppos'd all unobserv'd, unseen. (IV.120-130)²⁰⁷

When the angels discover his ruse, Satan attempts to fight them, but ultimately must flee the Garden of Eden when he realizes he will not win a fight against them: “The Fiend lookt up and knew/His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled/Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night.” (IV.1013-1015).²⁰⁸ Furthermore, this trajectory occurs at the end of *Paradise Lost* as we consider Satan’s ultimate goal. Although he is successful in getting Adam and Eve exiled from the Garden of Eden, they were not the main focus of his war against God. Even though Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, Adam in particular remains hopeful in his role of helping humanity back to salvation. Satan’s first goal, even before *Paradise Lost* begins, was to reclaim Heaven, and in this he fails. Likewise, the Garden of Eden remains closed to him. Even though Adam and Eve no longer occupy that space, it is not in Satan’s control after their exile. Despite achieving his goal of getting Adam and Eve exiled, Satan remains in Hell. His journey ends where it began in *Paradise Lost*. His temptation of Adam and Eve does not change his status as a fallen angel who still longs for the status he once had.

This contrast between the expected trajectory and the actual trajectory appears in *Moskva-Petushki* as well. Venichka tells his reader that this is his thirteenth attempt to reach Petushki. This acknowledgment means that on the twelve previous attempts Venichka expected a linear trajectory: the train would take him from Moscow to Petushki for a reunion with his child. However, each of

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 83.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 108.

those twelve journeys proved unsuccessful so that Venichka was returned back to Moscow, thus making each previous journey circular instead of the expected linear trip. This trajectory is repeated on Venichka's final journey as he is once again returned to Moscow instead of reaching his child.

Place

The idea of place and misinterpretation of place becomes an important point in *Moskva-Petushki*. Ignat Avsey's Miltonist reading of *Brothers Karamazov* is important for understanding Erofeev's treatment of place and his reading of *Paradise Lost*: Avsey's reading shows how Dostoevsky brought both Dante and Milton back from the heavens to the human realm. Avsey argues that "The stupendous and eternal have been pushed to the background, and the foreground is filled with the temporal and the abject, in a sordid human drama."²⁰⁹ Avsey asserts that the drama instead occurs in a place "so remote and unprepossessing that the narrator is frankly embarrassed even to mention the place by name until the very end of the novel...The reduction in scale could not be greater."²¹⁰ In *Moskva-Petushki*, Erofeev takes Dostoevsky's treatment of the two epics, and pushes them even further into the mortal realm to the point of ridicule. Where Dostoevsky chooses to make his setting an imaginary town, Erofeev locates his destination in a rundown factory town, reimagining the town as an earthly paradise. To a Russian reader, Erofeev's description of the town of Petushki and its reality stand in stark

²⁰⁹ Ignat Avsey, "The Karamazovs: A Paradigm in Dysfunctionality," *Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Talent*, ed. John E Barnhart (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 111.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

contrast of each other. The results are comedic: the reader can laugh at the idea of a drunk envisioning the factory town as an earthly paradise. However, the humor belies Erofeev's reasons for turning Petushki into paradise. While Dostoevsky brings his epic down to earth, Erofeev mixes the sacred space of Paradise with the profane space of Petushki, effectively nullifying them both. If Hell can be mistaken for Paradise then in Erofeev's world neither space is marked. They become the "nothing" that Venichka focuses on at both the beginning and end of his journey so that both places lose their meaning in Erofeev's world.²¹¹

Moreover, the blurring of the real-life Petushki with Venichka's edenic description of it contrasts with the clearly marked boundaries that exist in Milton's poem where the borders between Heaven, Hell, and the Garden of Eden are precisely marked in Milton's world. As someone exiled from Heaven, Milton's Satan is all too aware of his location just as his Adam and Eve are keenly aware of their exile from the Garden of Eden. In *Paradise Lost*, the exiled party is instantly aware when he or she is no longer in a particular space. As the protagonist of *Moskva-Petushki* Venichka is never entirely certain where he is: Moscow can be Hell as easily as it can be Petushki in Venichka's mind. Venichka's journey then becomes the embodiment of one of the ideas that Milton puts forth in Book I of *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of Hell, a Hell of heaven" (I.253-255).²¹² Venichka's sense of being lost pervades *Moskva-Petushki*, from his inability to locate the Kremlin at the start of the poema to the fusion of Moscow-Red

²¹¹ Venichka tells himself, "Ничего...ничего" at the first segment of his journey, and repeats it twice on the platform of Petushki at the end of his journey.

²¹² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 12.

Square and Petushki at the end of the work. Venichka's inability to locate himself stands out against the structure of the poem.

As readers we anticipate the clear boundaries associated with Milton because Erofeev steadfastly notes the stations that the electric train car passes, as well as Venichka's own locomotion prior to boarding the train car. The journey itself has clearly marked boundaries: we as readers know where the train is at any given point on its journey to Petushki, and even which station the train will pass without stopping. Venichka's journey, totaling just 139 pages in the Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz edition is broken down into 46 different markers. As readers we know when Venichka is on the Kursk train platform versus when he is in the Kursk Station Restaurant. For the majority of his journey, the boundaries between places are clearly marked, and seem to appear independently of Venichka's actions and thoughts. The boundary between Moscow-Hammer & Sickle appears in the middle of Venichka's ranting:

Если уж вы хотите все знать,- я вам все расскажу, погодите только. Вот похмелюсь на Серпе и Молоте, и

Москва - Серп и Молот.

и тогда все, все расскажу. Потерпите. Ведь я-то терплю!²¹³

If you really want to know everything, I will tell you all, only wait. I'll tie one on by Hammer and Sickle and

Moscow-Hammer and Sickle.

Then I'll tell you all. Bear with me.

And then Hammer & Sickle-Karacharovo and Karacharovo-Chukhlinka appear when Venichka is in the middle of drinking:

²¹³ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 14-15.

И есть душа, пока еще чуть приоткрытая для впечатлений бытия.
Раздели со мной трапезу, Господи!

Серп и Молот - Карачарово.

И немедленно выпил.

Карачарово - Чухлинка.

А выпив - сами видите, как долго я морщился и сдерживал
тошноту, сколько чертыхался и сквернословил.²¹⁴

And I have a soul, until the present has been slightly opened to the
impressions of life. Share with me my repast, Lord.

Hammer and Sickle-Karacharovo

And immediately I drank.

Karacharovo-Chukhlinka

I drank it all, you saw how long I screwed up my face and I
constrained my nausea, how much I swore and talked shit.

Venichka as the protagonist has no control over where these markers appear. In *Paradise Lost* Satan is all too aware of his location, where he is allowed and from which spaces he has been exiled, while Venichka seemingly passes through these spaces under the volition of outside forces-the electric train. The stations arrive and pass by whether he is aware of them or not.

These clearly marked spaces create a sense of an anticipated structure that Erofeev contrasts with Venichka's inability to locate himself throughout his journey. This theme is apparent from the very first lines of the poem where Venichka cannot locate the most famous Russian landmark, and appears throughout his journey. At Voinovo-Usad, he questions his location several times, asking: "Где же Петушки?" - спросил я, подойдя к чьей-то освещенной веранде. Откуда она взялась, эта веранда? Может, это совсем не веранда, а терраса, мезонин или

²¹⁴ Ibid., 16-19.

флигель?" ("Where is Petushki?" I asked, approaching someone's lighted veranda. From where did this veranda come? Maybe it's not a veranda at all, but a terrace, a mezzanine or a wing?")²¹⁵ and "Вот как? Значит, я все еще еду?" ("So really? That means I'm still going?").²¹⁶ He then asks three times "Мы подъезжаем к Усаду?" ("We're still approaching Usad?").²¹⁷ Venichka's questions are humorous for nearly the same reason: they speak to Venichka's sense of being lost. Readers know he would only need to look at the next station to locate himself on his journey yet he proves unable to do so. To the reader his inability to locate himself on an assumed linear path is comical. The reader's reaction is mirrored in the reactions of his fellow passengers. When his fellow passengers smile at him "грязно улыбались" ("They smiled in a dirty way")²¹⁸ and "сжатый со всех сторон кольцом дурацких ухмылок. дурацких ухмылок" ("crammed in a ring of stupid smirks")²¹⁹ it seems as though the fellow passengers and the reader are joined in mocking the drunken Venichka for his cluelessness. It creates a sense of communality between the reader and those passengers witnessing Venichka's antics because they can all laugh at him together. However, this humor belies the Miltonic message of Venichka's journey:

Me miserable! which way shall I flie
 Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
 Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell; [75]
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatning to devour me opens wide,
 To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n. (IV.73-78)²²⁰

²¹⁵ Ibid., 110.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 111.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

²²⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 81-82.

Venichka's inability to locate himself on his assumed linear path results from the idea that it ultimately does not matter to him where he is on his journey. Like Satan he is so filled with despair that he feels as though he is in Hell no matter which direction he goes.

The conflict between the structure of the journey as an epic and Venichka's unawareness of place culminates at the end of *Moskva-Petushki* when Venichka believes he is in Petushki even when the markers indicate that he is somewhere else. When Venichka believes that the train is approaching Petushki, the markers seem to imply that he is reaching his goal. The markers locate Venichka at Leonovo-Petushki as he gets closer to his final destination. Here Erofeev plays with his reader as much as he does with his protagonist. Like Venichka, the reader anticipates that Venichka has reached the place he has longed to see. Venichka has not redeemed himself since he still feels the grief that plagued him at the beginning of his journey. He has also not changed in any significant way that would make him worthy of entering Petushki, however the fixed station markers make it seem as though he is going to enter the sacred space. At this point in his journey, we as readers can rationalize Venichka's seemingly expected entry into Petushki in two ways. First, that the story is Venichka's drunken fantasy and is nothing more than a story about a man riding a train from Moscow to Petushki. Therefore the religious subtext is nothing more than the writer playing with social constructs and the reader's sense of expectation. The second reading is that perhaps God is a forgiving God rather than a vengeful God, and Venichka is being allowed to enter Petushki despite his sins. Until this point in his journey, Venichka believes that divine forces have guided his

journey. He believes the angels have been helping him along the way, and that, even though God has remained silent, he has not incurred God's wrath. While he is on the train, Venichka believes that his journey will end in success.

This expectation changes when Venichka exits the train, and the next two markers are ambiguous in a manner that exemplifies the Miltonic notion of making a heaven of Hell. Their names, *Petushki-The Platform* [emphasis mine] and *Petushki-Station Square* [emphasis mine], seem to imply that Venichka has successfully reached both of those locations and is even closer to the reunion he craves. However, upon closer examination, we can see that the way the markers are named have changed from the beginning of the poem to the end in a way that is subtle yet important to understanding Venichka's confusion. At the beginning of Venichka's journey, the references to his location are more specific, such as "Moscow. The Kursk Station Restaurant" or "Moscow. Kursk Station Square." Yet at the end of his journey, before Venichka is aware that he has returned to Moscow, the markers are slightly more ambiguous: *Petushki. The Platform*. [emphasis mine] *Petushki. Station Square* [emphasis mine]. If Venichka really were in Petushki, the naming of the various points of stations should mimic the locations in the stations in Moscow (ie. "Petushki. Petushki Station Square").

At the end of his journey, the first part of the marker represents where Venichka believes he is, while the second more ambiguous marker serves as a clue that Venichka is unaware of his actual location. Only when Venichka slowly becomes aware that his journey has once again failed do the station markers become more specific again: *Petushki. Sadovy Ring*, and *Petushki. The Kremlin*. Through these

markers Erofeev juxtaposes where Venichka believes he is and where he actually is. By the end of the poema, the sacred and profane spaces have merged as evidenced by the final markers: Moscow/Petushki. Ultimately, Venichka's inability to locate himself despite the fixed markers of the journey plays a role in delivering Venichka to his death. Where Milton's characters are all too aware of their locations and the boundaries between the spaces, Venichka is unable to recognize the marked spaces and the precarious position he finds himself in. Without this sense of awareness Venichka does not realize that his path is incorrect and that he is moving further away from Petushki and the redemption he believes it contains.

Rejection, Exile and Nostos

Among the themes central to both *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* is the theme of exile and the subsequent feeling of *nostos*—the idea of homecoming after a long journey. Scholars like Konstantin Kustanovich have examined this theme in terms of Venichka's attitude toward God. Kustanovich argues that the three scenes of Venichka rejection: the restaurant at the Kursk Station and his rejection at both the Sorbonne and the British Library prefigure God's rejection of Venichka at the end of the poema.²²¹ However, Kustanovich's reading of these instances of rejection leave several questions unanswered: Which version of God is Erofeev reinterpreting for his reader, and if Venichka is the fool that he presents himself to be in *Moskva-Petushki*, why does God reject him so profoundly? Finally, what sins has Venichka committed that have led to total rejection and God's abandonment of Venichka even

²²¹ Konstantin Kustanovich, "Venichka Erofeev's Grief and Solitude: Existentialist Motifs in the Poema," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 134.

at the hour of his death? The vision of God presented in *Moskva-Petushki* is filtered through the lens of *Paradise Lost* rather than a strict Biblical reading of Venichka's silent God. Venichka's relationship with God in the poema reflects the relationship of Milton's two main protagonists with God: Satan and Adam. By comparing the instances of rejection and exile in the two poems, and the subsequent sense of nostos that all three protagonists feel for the place they have lost, one can see how Erofeev appropriates key scenes in *Paradise Lost* and reinterprets them in contemporary Russia.

These smaller instances of exile mirror both Venichka's inability to enter Petushki and the exiles of Satan and Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. The first instance of exile occurs at the start of *Moskva-Petushki* when Venichka is removed from the restaurant at the Kursk Station. The scene represents his removal from a place that he associates with pleasure. At this point in the work, Venichka has not yet described Petushki to the reader. However, the restaurant has elements to it that resemble Venichka's vision of Petushki—it is a place of drinking, something that Venichka associates with pleasure. As Venichka attempts to gain entry into the restaurant, he has to cross a space which is guarded by a bouncer, someone who has the ability to prevent entry which recalls the image of St. Peter at the holy gates: “- Спиртного ничего нет, - сказал вышибала. И оглядел меня всего как дохлую птичку или грязный лютик” (““There's no alcohol,” the bouncer said. And he looked at me as though I were a dead little bird or a filthy buttercup”).²²² It initially seems as though Venichka is deemed worthy to enter the restaurant, and he

²²² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 9.

proceeds to try to order alcohol. However, Venichka seems unaware of what is allowed in the bar, and challenges the status quo in the bar by asking for sherry. Despite his best efforts he is repeatedly told there is no sherry for him. After one final attempt to get sherry he is removed from the restaurant by a trinity of figures that appear to be lesser divinities; two women and a man dressed in white:

Зря я это опять про херес, зря! Он их сразу взорвал. Все трое подхватили меня под руки и через весь зал - о, боль такого позора! - через весь зал провели меня и вытолкнули на воздух.²²³

Pointlessly, I wondered about the sherry again. And that set all three of them off again. All three of them caught me by the arms and led me - oh, the pain of such a shame—across the entire station and pushed me outside!

The trinity in white both prevent Venichka from getting something that he desires (alcohol), and remove Venichka from a place that he associates with pleasure (a restaurant that serves alcohol). The three who remove Venichka from the restaurant stand in judgment of him, and have a degree of holiness associated with them based on Venichka's description of them:

Надо мной - две женщины и один мужчина, все трое в белом. Я поднял глаза на них - о, сколько, должно быть, в моих глазах сейчас всякого безобразия и смутности .

Я это понял по ним, по их глазам, потому что и в их глазах отразилась эта смутность и это безобразие... Я весь как-то сник и растерял душу.²²⁴

Above me—were two women and a man, all three in white. I looked up at them, and, oh, how much ugliness and and obscurity were reflected in their eyes.

²²³ Ibid., 11.

²²⁴ Ibid., 10.

I knew that just be looking at them, because my ugliness and obscurity were reflected in their eyes. I felt myself sinking somehow and losing a hold on my soul.

The trio in white have judged Venichka and found him wanting. This incident also highlights Venichka's sense of being "below" certain figures in the poema. The trinity stand above him, and he feels himself sinking under their gaze. Erofeev will use similar language in other instances where Venichka is removed from places. Due to this judgment his access to the restaurant has been revoked, and he is kicked out of the restaurant.

Erofeev also responds to Satan's sense of arrogance and the role it plays in his exile. In Book V of *Paradise Lost* Satan and Abdiel argue over how the angels were created:

Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
 We know no time when we were not as now;
 Know none before us, self begot and self raised
 By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
 Had circled his full orb, the birth mature
 Of this our native heav'n, ethereal sons.²²⁵ (V.858-863)

Satan describes his origin as "self-begot" and "self-raised" as though God played no role in his creation. This conversation shows the depth of Satan's rebellion; his belief that he can exist outside of God's creation. It also justifies God's exile of Satan because Satan refuses to accept God's dominion. In *Moskva-Petushki* Erofeev responds to this scene of arrogance and removal in the Nazarievo-Drezna section of his trip when Venichka recalls his supposed trips around Europe. After describing a trip to Italy, Erofeev quickly moves on to France. While in France he has a

²²⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 132.

confrontation with the director of the Sorbonne after describing himself as a self-expanding logos:

“Мне как феномену присущ *самовозрастающий логос*”: А ректор Сорбонны, пока я думал про умное, тихо подкрался ко мне сзади, да как хряснет меня по шее: “Дурак ты, - говорит, - а никакой не Логос! Вон, - кричит, - вон, Ерофеев из нашей Сорбонны!”²²⁶ [emphasis mine]

“The phenomenon inherent in me is my self-expanding logos.” But the director of the Sorbonne, while I was thinking of something intelligent, quietly snuck up behind me and slapped me on the back of my neck: “You fool!”-he said-“You are not any type of logos! Get out!”- he screamed, “Erofeev, get out of our Sorbonne!”

He describes the logos as self-motivated, which parallels Satan’s own description of his origins. In a similar manner Satan rejects the idea that they were created by God, and argues instead that they were “self-raised” and “self begot.” Venichka believes that his abilities come from himself, not from a source beyond him-not God and not the Soviet government.

Additionally, Venichka uses the word logos here in the nominative case should remind the reader of John 1:1: “God was the Word.”²²⁷ So not only does Venichka claim to be self-motivated, he also sets himself up as one who spreads the word, which goes even further than Satan’s claims of being self-created. Not only is Venichka self-expanding, by describing himself as a logos, he is also the Word. The director’s objections are very close to the objections that many critics have had about Satan’s proclamation on his origins. CS Lewis commented that: “If a creature is silly enough to try to prove that it was not created, what is more natural than for it to say, ‘Well, I wasn’t there to see it being done? Yet what more futile, since in thus

²²⁶ Ibid., 89.

²²⁷ John 1:1

admitting ignorance of its own beginning it proves that those beginnings lay outside itself?"²²⁸ Like Satan, Venichka's claims are over-inflated, and the director responds with the same indignation that critics have responded to Satan's claims in *Paradise Lost* of being self-created. Venichka's description of being a self-motivated logos challenges the prescribed role of the writer in the Soviet Union. This is the second time that Venichka is removed from a place for trying to spread knowledge (the first time is on the job as foreman, which will be discussed later in this chapter). Like Milton's Satan he is tempting his audience with knowledge. It is also interesting to note where the director hits Venichka it foreshadows Venichka's "murder" later in the poem. The director approaches from behind and strikes the back of his neck. This attack is the mirror image of the later deadly assault on Venichka by the four murderers. The director successfully stops what he believes is a false logos, and the four assailants will later permanently stop Venichka's from speaking by stabbing him in the throat. Both the director and the four murderers commit a violent assault on the same portion of Venichka's body, albeit from opposite sides, yet both serve to silence the Venichka's voice. His removal from the bar by the trinity of figures in white and the violent removal from the Sorbonne stand in for what will be his later, lethal experience when he tries to enter Petushki.

Nostos serves as a motivating force for Satan, Adam and Venichka as each man feels a longing for a place he once called home. Of the three protagonists it is Satan who feels *nostos* most keenly. Although he rebels against God and famously

²²⁸ CS Lewis quoted in Danielle A. St. Hillstaire, "The Satanic Question and the Poetics of Creation," *John Milton: "Reasoning Words,"* ed. Kristin Pruitt and Charles Durham (Susquehanna: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), 90.

declares, “it is better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven”(I.263)²²⁹ he still longs for the place that was once his home. The sense of longing for home appears twice in

Book I of *Paradise Lost*:

To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe
Confounded though immortal: But his doom
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate: (I.51-58)²³⁰

and again when Satan discusses what has been lost to him:

Too well I see and rue the dire event,
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath lost us Heav'n, and all this mighty Host
In horrible destruction laid thus low,
As far as Gods and Heav'nly Essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
Though all our Glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallow'd up in endless misery. (I.134-142)²³¹

Satan describes Heaven as being lost to him and to his fellow rebel angels, and part of his anger his banishment from his former home. Satan's longing for home shows the conflict in Satan. While he makes such declarations that the mind can make a Heaven of Hell, he still longs for Heaven. He may be the ruler of Hell, but he also knows what has been lost to him. Mary C. Fenton points out Satan's crimes that led to his exile: “Satan lost his place and his claims to his homeland, his happy fields, because of his treasonous rebellion against God, and also because during the war in heaven, he and the fallen angels abused and exploited—wasted the land of

²²⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 12.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Heaven."²³² While Satan may boast of being the leader of Hell, his lost happiness shows that while he may have power in Hell, it is not equivalent to what he once had in Heaven. Satan's *nostos* also plays a role in how he seeks revenge on God. By tempting Eve to eat the fruit, he is responsible for Adam and Eve becoming exiled from the Garden of Eden. His actions will cause that same sense of *nostos* in God's favorite creations. Once Paradise is lost to Adam and Eve, it is something they and their offspring will long for forever.

The theme of exile is so prominent in *Paradise Lost*, Michael Davies describes it as being the core of the epic, and that "exile and fallenness are synonymous; to be fallen is to be banished, be it from Heaven or from the more earthly paradise of Eden."²³³ Mary C. Fenton in her book *Milton's Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* uses Norman Habel's definition of exile to describe how Heaven has been closed to Satan: to be exiled means being "cut off with no way back."²³⁴ Satan and his fellow fallen angels are aware of their status as exiles and dwell on it throughout *Paradise Lost*:

For who can yet believe, though after loss,
That all those puissant Legions, whose exile
Hath emptied Heav'n, shall fall to re-ascend
Self-rai'd, and repossess their native seat (l.631-34)²³⁵

Satan will recall the exile again in Book IV when he remarks: "behold in stead/ Of us out-cast, exil'd, his new delight/Mankind created." (IV.105-107)²³⁶ Satan's exile is

²³² Mary C. Fenton, *Milton's Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 188.

²³³ Michael Davies, "Heaven's Fugitives," cited in Mary C. Fenton, *Milton's Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 188.

²³⁴ Norman C. Habel, cited in Mary C. Fenton, *Milton's Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 187.

²³⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 23.

one source of his anger towards God, which in turn causes Satan to want to punish Adam and Eve for replacing him in God's eyes. Fenton argues that "we know that Satan, alienated from God and exiled from Heaven aims to alienate Adam and Eve from Eden and God, and thereby "return/To claim our just inheritance of old. (II.37-38)."²³⁷ Satan's anger is not just because he lost the war against God, but also because God has created and favored Adam and Eve, which inspires jealousy in Satan. When he is successful in tempting Eve and they are exiled from the Garden of Eden, Satan will brag to his fellow fallen angels, "therein Man/Placed in a Paradise, by our exile/Made happy"(X.482-485).²³⁸ Satan views exile as not just the state that he lives in, but also how he will punish God's new favorite creations. Exile nullifies his claims that it is better to rule in Hell because it is the exact method of revenge that he will press on to Adam and Eve so that they too will share the pain of loss with him.

Venichka's exile and attempts at reaching Petushki are reminiscent of Satan's exile and journeys in *Paradise Lost* because of how each work treats exile and the attempts of the protagonists to reenter the place of banishment. In *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka experiences *nostos*, and has a similar reaction to Satan's once he realizes that Petushki is lost to him. At the Reutovo-Nikol'skoe section of his journey, Venichka first describes Petushki:

"Петушки" - это место, где не умолкают птицы, ни днем, ни ночью, где ни зимой, ни летом не отцветает жасмин.

²³⁶ Ibid., 82.

²³⁷ Mary C. Fenton, *Milton's Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 189.

²³⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 241.

Первородный грех - может, он и был - там никого не тяготит. Там даже у тех, кто не просыхает по неделям, взгляд бездонен и ясен.

Там каждую пятницу, ровно в одиннадцать, на вокзальном перроне, меня встречает эта девушка с глазами белого цвета, - белого, переходящего в белесый, - эта любимейшая из потаскух, эта белобрысая дьяволица. А сегодня пятница, и меньше чем через два часа будет ровно одиннадцать, и будет она, и будет вокзальный перрон, и этот белесый взгляд, в котором нет ни совести, ни стыда. Поезжайте со мной - о, вы такое увидите!²³⁹ [emphasis mine]

Petushki-this place where the birds never cease their singing, not in the day and not in night, where the jasmine never ceases blooming, not in winter and not in summer. Original sin, maybe there is such a thing, but not there. There, even those who don't dry out for weeks have a clear unending look in their eyes.

There, every Friday at precisely eleven o'clock, on the train platform, I met a girl with white eyes, white to off-white, that most beloved of whores, that red-haired she-devil. And today is Friday, and in less than two hours from now—precisely at eleven o'clock, she will be there on the train platform with that white gaze in which there is no conscience and no shame. Come with me-oh, what things you will see. [emphasis mine]

This passage is important for understanding Venichka's sense of nostos for two reasons: first, it is the first time that readers have a description of Petushki, and second, it suggests that at some point in his life Petushki was accessible to Venichka. Through Venichka's own account the reader knows that his arrival in Petushki was a regularly occurring event. Sometime in the past his arrival in Petushki occurred every Friday. As readers we know that Venichka's exile from Petushki is a relatively new development, and that twelve recent previous trips have all ended in failure. He can describe what Petushki looks like in all its edenic glory rather than what he hopes that Petushki will look like. The description and his past ability to enter

²³⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 34.

Petushki are then followed by his admission that Petushki has since been lost to him: “Помолитесь, ангелы, за меня. Да будет светел мой путь, да не преткнусь о камень, да увижу город, по которому столько томился” (“Pray for me, angels. Let my path be bright, let there be no stumbling block, let me see the city I have longed to see”).²⁴⁰ Within this one segment of the journey, Venichka not only reveals what Petushki looks like, but also that he was once allowed there, and now the city has been lost to him. As readers we are aware that Venichka has met his lover on the platform of Petushki every Friday. These past meetings show that at one time Petushki was open to him. At least one point in his life, Venichka was judged and not found wanting. Therefore, he must have done something that has closed Petushki off to him, and has made him unworthy of entry. Venichka had the ability to transgress the boundary of Petushki and be with his lover and child in this earthly paradise.

Since Venichka’s lover and child remain in Petushki, whatever Venichka’s sins have been that resulted in his removal from Petushki, we know that he is the only guilty party. Unlike Adam who was tempted by Eve to eat the fruit, Venichka is the only party who was judged and found wanting. He returns to the idea of having access to Petushki when he reaches Petushki. Station Square: “Был у тебя когда-то небесный рай, узнавал бы время в прошлую пятницу - а теперь небесного рая больше нет, зачем тебе время?” (“Once you had heavenly paradise, you could have recognized the time last Friday, but now your heavenly paradise is gone, so why do you need time?”).²⁴¹ His request to see the city that he longs to see is both Dantean and Miltonic, and links Venichka’s journey with these great epics. His journey is not

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 133.

simply just a trip to a city but a homecoming that for whatever reason has recently been denied to him.

Venichka's Duality

Venichka's identity in *Moskva-Petushki* is a complex issue as Venichka's personality contains aspects that liken him to both Adam and Satan. He feels two urges within his psyche: to earn redemption through his journey and to rebel against an established system. Erofeev creates this dichotomy in his protagonist by giving him characteristics of both Milton's Adam and Satan. Critics have long argued over the question of the hero in *Paradise Lost*. In the book *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970*, John Leonard recounts the history of the question of who is the hero of the poem.²⁴² He notes that critics such as "Sir Richard Blackmore ('An Essay on the Nature and Constitution of Epick Poetry' in *Essays on Several Subjects*, 1716) also pondered the identity of Milton's hero and concluded that it is 'Adam himself'" while other critics such as John Dryden argue that Satan is ultimately the hero of the epic poem.²⁴³ Erofeev challenges the belief that either of Milton's characters is the hero by giving Venichka attributes of both of Milton's characters.

Venichka's duality appears in his relationship with his nameless lover, and responds to Milton's treatment of Eve in *Paradise Lost*. When Venichka first describes his nameless lover in Reutovo-Nikol'skoe he describes her as:

²⁴² John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 275.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 275.

эта девушка с глазами белого цвета, - белого, переходящего в белесый, - эта любимейшая из потаскух, эта белобрысая дьяволица. А сегодня пятница, и меньше чем через два часа будет ровно одиннадцать, и будет она, и будет вокзальный перрон, и этот белесый взгляд, в котором нет ни совести, ни стыда.²⁴⁴

a girl with white eyes, white to off-white, that most beloved of whores, that red-haired she-devil. And today is Friday, and in less than two hours from now—precisely at eleven o'clock, she will be there on the train platform with that white gaze in which there is no conscience and no shame.

His initial description of his lover makes it appear as though she is demonic, and when he returns to a memory of her in Kuchino-Zheleznodorozhnaya he continues to describe her as a demonic figure: “Эта женщина, эта рыжая стервова - не женщина, а волхование! Вы спросите: да где ты, Веничка, ее откопал, и откуда она взялась, эта рыжая сука? И может ли в Петушках быть что-нибудь путное?” (This woman, this red haired bitch-not a woman, but a witch. You ask me, “Venichka, from where did you dig her up, where did you find her, this red haired bitch? How can there be anything worthwhile in Petushki?”).²⁴⁵ However, Venichka offers conflicting information about her. He also describes her as “О, невинные бельма! О, эта белизна, переходящая в белесость! О колдовские и голубинные крылья!” (“Oh, those innocent white eyes! Oh, that whiteness of whiteness! Oh, those bewitching dove-like wings!”).²⁴⁶ The nameless lover becomes associated with two images commonly associated with purity and heaven: the color white and a dove. As he reminisces about their first meeting he describes it as “смеется надо

²⁴⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 34.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

мною, как благодатное дитя.” (“laughing at me like a child of grace”).²⁴⁷

Moreover, his nameless lover becomes associated with images of Paradise through Venichka’s description of her. Venichka descriptions of their sexual encounter paints the nameless lover as more innocent than how Venichka initially portrays her: “Это - женщина, у которой никто до меня даже пульса не щупал. О, блаженный зуд и в душе и повсюду!” (“This is a woman, who, until me, no one had so much as felt the pulse of. Oh, what a blissful itch in the soul and all around”).²⁴⁸ He later describes their sex as “влажный и содрогающийся вход в Эдем и беспмятство, и рыжие ресницы” (“wet and shuddering, the entrance to Eden and unconsciousness and those red eyelashes”).²⁴⁹

After their first sexual experience, Venichka seems to fluctuate between these two views of his relationship with his lover. Immediately afterwards he seems to align himself closely with Adam by remarking, “А я, раздавленный желанием, ждал греха, задыхаясь” (“And I, crushed by desire, awaited sin, breathlessly”).²⁵⁰ In this instance it appears that Venichka believes himself to resemble Adam and that his nameless lover has taken on the role of Eve luring Adam to sin. In his article, “Venichka Erofeev’s Grief and Solitude: Existentialist Motifs in the *Poema*” Konstantin Kustanovich refers to their relationship as “Eden complete with Eve—an

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 46. It is also interesting to note that in H. William Tjalsma’s translation of *Moskva-Petushki* he translates this sentences as “And, crushed by desire, I awaited the fall, gasping for breath.” By translating “грех” as sin he aligns Venichka with Adam. Pg 54.

expert in sexual matters.”²⁵¹ Venichka goes on to describe his lover as venomous: “Случалось, конечно, случалось, что и она была ядовитой, но это все вздор, все это в целях самообороны и чего-то там такого женского - я в этом мало понимаю” (“It happened, of course, it happened that she could be venomous, but this was all nonsense, all if it in self defense and of something feminine,--I understand very little of these things”).²⁵² This description of his lover as “venomous” reaffirms his view of her as the one doing the seducing and himself as the Adam figure who is seduced by her.

This view of his lover changes almost immediately after he levels these charges against her. He admits that she is not venomous at her core: “Во всяком случае, когда я ее раскусил до конца, яду совсем не оказалось, там была малина со сливками.” (Anyway, when I saw it through to the end, there was no venom there, just raspberries and cream).²⁵³ Even after she seduces him, Venichka still associates the color white with his lover, and in fact her degree of whiteness intensifies despite her loss of virginity: “И потом эта мутная, эта сучья белизна в зрачках, белее, чем бред и седьмое небо!” (“And then, that cloudy, bitchy whiteness of her pupils, whiter than delirium, whiter than the seventh heaven”).²⁵⁴ Soon after Venichka begins to tempt her with promises: “Давай, давай всю нашу жизнь будем вместе! Я увезу тебя в Лобно, я облеку тебя в пурпур и крученный виссом, я подработаю на телефонных коробках, а ты будешь обонять что-

²⁵¹ Konstantin Kustanovich, “Venichka Erofeev’s Grief and Solitude: Existentialist Motifs in the Poema,” *Venedikt Erofeev’s Moscow-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 134.

²⁵² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 47.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

нибудь - лилии, допустим, будешь обонять. Поедем!" ("Come on, come one, for our whole lives let's be together. I'll take you away to Lobno, I'll clothe you in purple linen, and earn some money on telephone boxes, and you will be sniffing something, lilies, for example. Come on!").²⁵⁵

If this encounter takes place in Petushki as Venichka suggests it does, then Venichka now takes on the role of the seducer. He has gone from viewing himself as the Adam figure to placing himself in the position of Satan trying to seduce Eve into leaving Petushki. Although Venichka describes Petushki as a perfect place he suggests that he and his lover leave Petushki for Lobno. His lover's reaction to his request seems inexplicable at first:

А она - молча протянула мне шиш. Я в истоме поднес его к своим ноздрям, вздохнул и заплакал:

- Но почему?.. почему?..

Она мне - второй шиш. Я и его поднес, и зажмурился, и снова заплакал:

- Но почему? - заклинаю - ответь - почему???

Вот тогда-то и она разрыдалась, и обвисла на шее:

- Умалишенный! ты ведь сам знаешь, почему! сам - знаешь, почему, угорелый!²⁵⁶

And she—silently handed me a fig. I languidly brought it to my nose, inhaled and began to cry:

-But why? Why?

She made a second fig. I brought it to myself, frowned and began to cry again.

-But why? - I cried-answer me-why?

-And then she began to sob and sagged into my neck:

-Lunatic, you know why exactly. You know why, madman.

Although the word “шиш” (“fig”) has a double meaning as a rude gesture neither Venichka nor his lover seems to view it as such. If the fig is supposed to be offensive,

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 48.

Venichka's reaction and his lover's reaction make no sense. Why do they both start to cry? If we instead view the fig as representing the forbidden fruit that led to Adam and Eve being exiled from Eden then we can read the interaction as the fact that Venichka has done something that has led to his removal from Petushki.

Venichka seems to confirm this reading as he describes what has happened since that meeting: "И после того - почти каждую пятницу повторялось все то же: и эти слезы, и эти фиги. Но сегодня - сегодня что-то решится, потому что сегодняшняя пятница - тринадцатая по счету. И все ближе к Петушкам, Царица Небесная!" ("And after that, almost every Friday it repeated the same: all these tears and figs. But today-, today something will be decided because today is our thirteenth Friday. I am getting closer to Petushki. Heavenly Queen!").²⁵⁷ The fig then represents the reason that Venichka cannot enter Petushki again. Venichka has committed a nameless sin in which he is the only guilty party. His final words in the segment, "Царица Небесная," reaffirm that she still remains in Petushki while Venichka is unable to reenter the town. This then explains why Venichka's memories of his lover are tainted with resentment: she is allowed to stay in the place Venichka desperately wants to reach. Just as Milton's Satan resents and tries to tempt Adam and Eve for their ability to reside in the Garden of Eden Venichka resents his nameless lover for her ability to exist in a place that is inaccessible to him.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

Satanic Doubling

Erofeev sets up Satan as a double for Venichka long before the figure of Satan appears in the poema. There are twenty-one references to the devil or some variation of the devil in the poema. While Venichka appears to travel as a solitary figure on his journey, Satan acts as his double during his brief appearance in the Usad-Kilometer 105 segment of his trip. Satan's appearance on the train allows us to read *Moskva-Petushki* as a Miltonic work. In the Friazevo-Kilometer 61 segment of the journey Venichka has a conversation with the man with the black moustache and brown beret who says to Venichka, "Черт знает, что вы говорите" ("The devil knows what you are saying").²⁵⁸ Although the man's utterance is meant rhetorically, Venichka then goes on to clarify his argument to him.

His identification with the demonic intensifies as the poema goes on so that at times Venichka comments that "the devil knows or will know" and then answers said question or situation for himself. The man with the black moustache says the phrase "Черт знает" ("the devil knows") again in Kilometer 65-Pavolov-Posad when the older Mitrichi tries and subsequently fails to tell a story about love. When the older Mitrich falters, the man with the black moustache yells at him: "А тут черт знает что такое! Какой-то весь в чирьях! да еще вдобавок 'пысает!'" ("The devil knows what's happening. Someone covered in boils who pees, no less!").²⁵⁹ Another passenger attempts to explain the story but is unsuccessful. Once again Venichka provides the answer:

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 74.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 80.

А я сидел и понимал старого Митрича, понимал его слезы: ему просто все и всех было жалко: жалко председателя, за то, что ему дали такую позорную кличку, и стенку, которую он обмочил, и лодку, и чирьи - все жалко... Первая любовь или последняя жалость - какая разница? Бог, умирая на кресте, заповедовал нам жалость, а зубоскальства он нам не заповедовал. Жалость и любовь к мируедины. Любовь ко всякой персти, ко всякому чреву. И ко плоду всякого чрева - жалость.

- Давай, папаша, - сказал я ему, - давай я угощу тебя, ты заслужил! Ты хорошо рассказал про любовь!²⁶⁰

And I sat there and understood Old Mitrich, understood his tears: he was just sorry for everyone and everything: sorry for the chairman because he had been given a shameful nickname, and sorry for the wall on which he had peed, and sorry for the boats and the boils— sorry for everything. First love or final pity, what’s the difference? God, dying on the cross, commanded us to pity, and he did not preach scoffing. Pity and love for the world are one. Love to all of the dust, to every womb. And to all the fruits of the womb-pity.

Go ahead, Gramps, I told him, Go ahead, I’ll treat you, you deserve it. You spoke well about love.

Although Venichka’s response is not demonic in itself, he is the only one in the group who understands the older Mitrich’s attempt at storytelling. While the others mock and laugh at his pitiful attempt at telling the story Venichka is sympathetic to his effort and subsequent failure to get his message across.

Moreover, if we read “Черт знает” as a rhetorical question, his way of thinking then becomes even more like Milton’s Satan. Danielle A. St. Hillstaire notes that Milton’s Satan speaks rhetorically to the reader and other characters throughout *Paradise Lost*. One of the earliest examples of Satan’s rhetorical speech appears in Book I when he says: “and till then who knew/The force of those dire

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 80-82.

The phrase “Черт знает” appears twice more in the poem after Satan appears to Venichka. Once in immediately after his appearance in Usad-Kilometer 105 and then again right before Venichka reaches Petushki in Omutische-Leonvo.

arms?" (I.93-94)²⁶¹ Hillstaire explains: "Regardless of whether the question seems to be implying a specific answer, the fact remains that the question *could* be answered in many different ways. "Who knew?—No one knew." Or, perhaps if we stop to think about it, "God knew." or, even if Satan is being particular honest, 'Well, we probably knew.'"²⁶² The same can be said for Venichka's "Черт знает" in *Moskva-Petushki*. Although Venichka's "Черт знает" appears rhetorical there are numerous characters or figures that know the answer to the various questions that appear with "Черт знает". In discussing why Satan speaks in rhetorical questions, St. Hillstaire claims: "the medium of the question, which may imply an answer, but which nevertheless does not itself declare, opens up a gap in discursive logic wide enough for the Arch-fiend to slip through."²⁶³ Venichka's "Черт знает" mimics that gap in logic in *Moskva-Petushki*. The effects are comedic while also forcing the reader to consider what Venichka's motivations are both in declaring that only the devil knows, and in the overall purpose of the trip. In Nikol'skoe-Saltykovskaia, the eighth segment once Venichka is on the train, Venichka declares: "Отчего я и дурак, и демон, и пустомеля разом?" ("Why am I a fool, a demon, a chatterbox all at once?").²⁶⁴ Venichka's description of himself as a demon stands out as unusual. However, it is only one of many times that demons or the devil is alluded to in *Moskva-Petushki*. In Kilometer 43-Khrapunovo he wonders: "Черт знает, в каком жанре я доеду до Петушков... От самой Москвы все были философские эссе и

²⁶¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968),

²⁶² Danielle A. St. Hillstaire, "The Satanic Question and the Poetics of Creation," *John Milton: Reasoning Words*, eds. Kristin Pruitt and Charles Durham (Susquehanna: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), 92.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 38.

мемуары, все были стихотворения в прозе, как у Ивана Тургенева... Теперь начинается детективная повесть” (“The devil knows in which genre I’ll arrive in Petushki. All the way from Moscow it was memoirs and philosophical essays, it was all poems in prose, like Ivan Turgenev. Now the detective tale begins”).²⁶⁵

Venichka’s question has the same rhetorical value as Satan’s question in the first book of *Paradise Lost*. Venichka provides an immediate answer (i.e. that it is a detective story). His response answers a question that he claims only the devil would know, and solidifies his association with the devil. The second reason is that the reader is also aware of the subtitle of *Moskva-Petushki* as a poema, and how it contrasts with the work’s more novella-like form. Venichka could be poking fun at his own audience by insinuating that the reader is the devil.

Before Satan’s appearance in the poema, there are aspects of Venichka’s personality that are reminiscent of the Miltonic Satan. One of the earliest examples of his Satanic side appears after his dismissal as job foreman in the Novogireevo-Reutovo section of his journey. Venichka notes his dismissal as: “Неделю тому назад меня скинули с бригадирства, а пять недель тому назад - назначили” (“A week ago I was kicked out of my job as brigade foreman, which I’d gotten five weeks ago”).²⁶⁶ Erofeev’s use of the verb “скинули” is a small nod to Milton’s Satan being thrown down from heaven by God. Venichka begins his story of his dismissal in a similar manner to the beginning of *Paradise Lost* because the action has already taken place and Venichka, like Satan, is already suffering the consequences for his

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

actions that got him removed from his previous job. When describing his job prior to his promotion Venichka describes it almost as an inept worker's paradise:

Дело началось проще. До меня наш производственный процесс выглядел следующим образом: с утра мы садились и играли в сику, на деньги (вы умеете играть в сику?). Так. Потом вставляли, разматывали барабан с кабелем, и кабель укладывали под землю. А потом - известное дело: садились, и каждый по-своему убивал свой досуг, ведь все-таки у каждого своя мечта и свой темперамент: один - вермут пил, другой, кто попроще одеколон "Свежесть", а кто с претензией - пил коньяк в международном аэропорту Шереметьево. И ложились спать.²⁶⁷

This is how it went. Before I was foreman our schedule looked like this: in the morning we would sit down and play blackjack for money (do you know how to play blackjack?). So. Then we'd get up and unwind the drum of cable and put the cable in the ground. And then we would sit and everyone would relax in their own way. Everyone after all has their own way of relaxing. One of us drank vermouth, someone else drank the eau de cologne "Freshen-up," and a more pretentious person would drink cognac at Sheremetievo International Airport. And then we'd all go to sleep.

The conditions, as Venichka describes them, are ideal for Venichka and his fellow workers. However, once Venichka becomes foreman he becomes unhappy with the status quo. Much like Satan in *Paradise Lost* is unhappy following the rules of God, Venichka believes that he knows better than his superiors. Venichka erroneously believes that he can improve upon the status quo and that his way is better.

Once Venichka is fired from his job, the way that he views the event and the consequences of being fired show a strong relationship with how Satan views his removal from Heaven. As he reflects upon the incident that got him fired and his replacement, Venichka notes: "Короче, они меня разжаловали, а на место мое назначили Алексея Блиндыева, этого дряхлого придурка, члена КПСС с 1936 г"

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

("In short, they axed me and promoted that decrepit old fool Aleksei Blindiaev, member CPSU, 1936, in my place").²⁶⁸ Here Venichka shares much of the same bitterness that Satan and the rebel angels feel in *Paradise Lost* about Adam and Eve replacing them as God's favorites. Venichka's anger over this loss of status continues as he describes how he now relates to those who had power over him in the job:

И вот - я торжественно объявляю: до конца моих дней я не предприиму ничего, чтобы повторить мой печальный опыт возвышения. Я остаюсь *внизу*, и снизу плюю на всю вашу общественную лестницу. Да. На каждую ступеньку лестницы - по плевку. Чтобы по ней подыматься, надо быть пидорастом, выкованным из чистой стали с головы до пят. А я - не такой.

Как бы то ни было - меня поперли. Меня, вдумчивого принца аналитика, любовно перебирающего души своих людей, меня - снизу - сочли штрейкбрехером и коллаборационистом, а сверху - лоботрясом с неуравновешенной психикой.²⁶⁹ [emphasis mine]

And now - I solemnly declare: until the end of my days, I shall not undertake anything to repeat my sad experience of elevation. I will stay below, and from below spit right on your social ladder. Yes, I'll spit on each rung of the ladder. To climb it, you'll have to be forged in steel from head to toe. And this I am not.

Whatever it was, I was overwhelmed. Me, the thoughtful prince, the analyst lovingly inspecting the souls of his people—me, from below, a scab and a collaborator and from the top—a rascal with an unbalanced mind.

By focusing on his location below, Venichka attempts to elevate himself and his workers suggest the same placement as Satan vis-à-vis heaven. Venichka echoes many of Satan's feelings on the usurpation of his role in Book IX:

Determin'd to advance into our room
A creature form'd of Earth and him endow,
Exalted from so base original,

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 31-32.

With Heav'nly spoils, our spoils (IX.148-151)²⁷⁰

The bitterness both Venichka and Satan feel at the upset in their position is apparent. In Bernard J. Paris's *Heaven and Its Discontents*, he notes: "This speech may tell us more about Satan than it does about God; but, given his omniscience, God may well have understood that Satan would especially resent being supplanted by beings of a lower order."²⁷¹ It is interesting to note that Venichka associates himself with being "down below" in his relationship with the rest of the world and those that fired him. Despite feeling that he is down below, he still refers to himself as "принца аналитика" which places him in a position of power even in his "down below" world-the same location and position of power occupied by Satan.

Moreover, Venichka's experience as foreman and his dismissal from that position also serves as a link between *Paradise Lost* and *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. As noted in the discussion of Radishchev's work, Venichka attempts to enlighten his coworkers by introducing them to Blok's poem "Solov'inyi sad." By making his coworkers read the poem, Venichka hopes that they will see the chance at a higher creative existence beyond their daily struggles, which is an idea that Radishchev also promotes for the narod in *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. However, this scene is also reminiscent of Book IX of *Paradise Lost* where Satan as the serpent encourages Eve to eat the forbidden fruit:

And what are Gods that Man may not become
As they, participating God-like food?
The Gods are first, and that advantage use
On our belief, that all from them proceeds;

²⁷⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 200.

²⁷¹ Bernard J. Paris, *Heaven and Its Discontents: Milton's Characters in Paradise Lost* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 39.

I question it, for this fair Earth I see,
 Warm'd by the Sun, producing every kind,
 Them nothing: If they all things, who enclos'd
 Knowledge of Good and Evil in this Tree,
 That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains
 Wisdom without their leave? and wherein lies
 Th' offence, that Man should thus attain to know?
 What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
 Impart against his will if all be his?
 Or is it envie, and can envie dwell
 In Heav'nly breasts? these, these and many more
 Causes import your need of this fair Fruit.
 Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste.²⁷² (IX.716-732)

The forbidden fruit in both the Bible and *Paradise Lost* is the fruit of knowledge.

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they gain an awareness of the world and the idea of sin. When they eat the fruit and gain the knowledge they instantly understand that they have lost Paradise. They have experience Eden and now they have been cut off from it forever and will instead toil and feel pain.

Venichka and his relationship with his coworkers once he is made foreman resembles the interaction between Satan as the serpent and Adam and Eve. Both Venichka and Satan promise their intended audience enlightenment if they do what is asked of them. Venichka, who at times presents himself as a Satanic figure is offering his coworkers knowledge in the form of Blok's poem. There is irony in Venichka's offering of knowledge since everyone, including Venichka and his coworkers are already officially in "the workers' Paradise" according to Soviet doctrine. Venichka's presentation of the poem to his coworkers makes the poem seem less harmful than it is, just as the serpent promises that the fruit, which Milton

²⁷² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 214-215.

calls “this intellectual food” (IX.768) offers no real danger.²⁷³ Venichka, in describing the poem to them, presents the poem as being harmless:

Там в центре поэмы, если, конечно, отбросить в сторону все эти благоуханные плеча и незаренные туманы и розовые башни в дымных ризах, там в центре поэмы лирический персонаж, уволенный с работы за пьянку, блядки и прогулы. Я сказал им: "Очень своевременная книга, - сказал, - вы прочтете ее с большой пользой для себя".²⁷⁴

There in the center of the poem, if of course, you toss out all of the fragrant shoulders, unilluminated mists and rosy towers in smoky vestments, there in the center of the poem is the lyrical hero, who was fired from his job for drunkenness, whoring around and absenteeism. I told them, “It’s a very timely book. If you read it, it will benefit you greatly.”

Venichka’s choice of poems is also interesting because he is offering his coworkers knowledge. On one level the poem is about a worker just like his coworkers entering an edenic space and gaining enlightenment in the form of understanding that there is a higher calling to art and learning. Like Adam and Eve, this worker is aware of this Paradise and then the sensation and horror of losing it. By giving his coworkers this forbidden knowledge in the form of the poem, he has opened their eyes to this edenic existence and the knowledge that it is forever lost to them. Venichka is placed in the position of tempter, and by giving his coworkers the poem he has made them keenly aware of what is lost to them forever. Their reaction to reading “Solov'inyi sad” shows that awareness: “Что ж? они прочли. Но, вопреки всему, она на них сказалась удручающе: во всех магазинах вермут был забыт, международный аэропорт Шереметьево был забыт” (“And what of it? They read it. But, despite everything, it depressed them—vermouth vanished from all stores,

²⁷³ Ibid., 216.

²⁷⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 28.

Sheremetievo International Airport was forgotten”).²⁷⁵ Their reaction echoes that of the worker in the poem and that of Adam and Eve. Milton notes that once Adam ate from the fruit, both he and Eve felt intoxicated, “As with new Wine intoxicated both” (IX.1008).²⁷⁶ It is only once the intoxication wears off that the pair realize that Paradise is now lost to them forever:

Would thou hadst heark'nd to my words, and stai'd
 With me, as I besought thee, when that strange
 Desire of wandring this unhappie Morn,
 I know not whence possessd thee; we had then
 Remaind still happie, not as now, despoild
 Of all our good, sham'd, naked, miserable. (IX.1134-1139)²⁷⁷

In *Moskva-Petushki* Venichka's coworkers are instantaneously aware of their new knowledge and must go out and drink in order to cope with this new knowledge. Richard Allen Shoaf describes this new knowledge in Milton's world as a type of veil that had previously shadowed Adam and Eve. Once the veil is removed, figures such as Adam and Eve or Venichka's coworkers are forced into the light: “In other words they had known ill (V.117-119), but innocence had shadowed them from any harmful effects of knowledge.”²⁷⁸ For Venichka's coworkers the hopelessness of their lives was constantly there, however, it is only once Venichka removes the veil by making them read Blok's poem that they can see their harsh reality. They have gained new and forbidden knowledge, and have had their eyes opened to a world that they did not know existed.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 222.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 225.

²⁷⁸ Richard Allen Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and Prose* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 34.

However, Venichka's plan backfires. Although the poem makes his coworkers aware of the harshness of their lives, they ultimately reject his knowledge. This rejection parallels Satan's first effort to tempt Eve in the Garden of Eden. Venichka's dismissal from his job is a response to Satan's removal from the Garden of Eden, and the anger that Satan feels over Adam and Eve being God's new favorite creations. Venichka responds to the dismissal with rage because he feels that a lackey (i.e. Aleksei Blindiaev) has taken over his position. This instance of Venichka as tempter in *Moskva-Petushki* serves as a bridge between Radishchev's and Milton's ideas of redemption in the poem, as it shows both the promise of enlightenment and the dangers of it. While Radishchev was an admirer of Milton's work and particularly his ideas on censorship and the spread of knowledge, Erofeev seems aware that there is a conflict to offering knowledge to the masses. While granting the people knowledge and enlightenment can empower them and show them a better life, when that knowledge comes from the wrong source such as the serpent or those intoxicated on their own power (i.e. Venichka as foreman, Soviet officials, etc.) it can corrupt the recipients forever. Venichka's attempts to enlighten his coworkers show that knowledge can equally save or damn a person depending on its source.

The Quest for Power

Although Venichka appears to be a mild mannered if hapless drunk throughout *Moskva-Petushki*, he does try to assert his power in his delusions. Venichka seemingly wants to help his coworkers when he offers them knowledge, however at times he does have aspirations for power as Satan does. Michael Bryson in his book

The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King argues: "Paradise Lost forces its reader to stare directly into the face of a God conceived in terms of military might and kingly power."²⁷⁹ Satan is not content to be a soldier in God's army nor live under his tyranny. In challenging God, Satan wages war against the established order. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is described as a warrior "who that day/Prodigious power had shown, and met in Arms/No equal" (VI.246-248).²⁸⁰ Bryson contends: "Satan aspires to that very monarchial and military model of divinity. He is both ruler and a leader of troops."²⁸¹ These aspirations are apparent as Venichka has delusions of creating an army in the Orekhovo-Zuevo—Krutoe segment of the journey. Venichka's delusions of power are comical given his hapless personality and his previous failure as a foreman, yet they also show Venichka's rebellious nature. During this segment of his journey, Venichka's aspirations shift with the wind and are both fragmentary and disparate. At this marker and the ones that follow, Venichka believes that he is involved in a rebellion. Venichka describes the event:

Чтобы восстановить хозяйство, разрушенное войной, надо сначала его разрушить, а для этого нужна гражданская или хоть какая-нибудь война, нужно как минимум двенадцать фронтов...²⁸²

In order to restore an economy destroyed by war, we must start by destroying it, and for that you need a civil war, at least some type of war...you need a minimum of twelve fronts.

²⁷⁹ Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 25.

²⁸⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 141.

²⁸¹ Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 25.

²⁸² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 104.

By describing the upcoming battle as a civil war, the reader is no doubt reminded of the Russian Civil War. However, one can also understand the civil war as a reference to the war that Satan wages in Heaven before the fall because as numerous critics have discussed Milton's poem and its relationship with the English Civil War.²⁸³ In Orekhovo-Zuevo—Krutoe Oliver Cromwell appears on the list of people Venichka declares were drunk while delivering speeches: “Все выступавшие были в лоскут пьяны, все молили одно и то же: Максимилиан Робеспьер, Оливер Кромвель, Соня Перовская, Вера Засулич, карательные отряды из Петушков, война с Норвегией, и опять Соня Перовская и Вера Засулич” (“Everyone who gave a speech was stinking drunk: they all dragged on about the exact same thing: Maxmillian, Robespierre, Oliver Cromwell, Sonia Perovskaia and Vera Zaslulich, punitive detachments from the Petushki, the war with Norway and again Sonia Perovskaia and Vera Zaslulich”).²⁸⁴ Erofeev includes Oliver Cromwell in the list of drunken revolutionaries as a nod to *Paradise Lost*.²⁸⁵

Venichka's more Satanic personality and his desire to challenge the established order emerge as the war planning continues and Venichka is elected president. His decrees are more tyrannical than democratic. One of the decrees that Venichka issues deals with the spelling of the word черт (devil): Потом: слово "черт" надо принудить снова писать чрез "о", а какую-нибудь букву вообще упразднить, только надо подумать, какую” (“Then demanding that the word

²⁸³ These works include Stella Revard's *The War in Heaven: Paradise Lost and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) and Robert Fallon, *Captain or Colonel: The Soldier in Milton's Life and Art* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984).

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁸⁵ Steve Davies, *Images of Kingship in Paradise Lost* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 4.

“Devil” be spelled with a capital D, or just abolishing the letter all together—just needed to think about which”).²⁸⁶ As the war planning continues Venichka alternates between his desire for power and his desire to be one of the people. Venichka’s oscillation reflects Satan’s desire to rule and his longing to return to Paradise and the favored status. Initially he declares that a president is not necessary in their new government: “Ну, так вот, - продолжал я. - Обойдемся без президента” (“Well then,” I continued, “We can do without a president”).²⁸⁷ Yet, he quickly changes his mind and starts to set himself up as president again: “Если и завтра нас не начнут бомбить, я снова сажусь в президентское кресло - и тогда увидишь, что будет!” (“If tomorrow they don’t start bombing us again I will again take up the President’s seat, and then you’ll see what will happen”).²⁸⁸ His threat soon becomes a reality when Venichka declares himself president again with absolute power:

...я беру в свои руки всю полноту власти; то есть кто дурак и не понимает, тому я объясню: я ввожу комендантский час. Мало того - полномочия президента я объявляю чрезвычайными, и заодно становлюсь президентом. То есть "личностью, стоящей над законом и пророками."²⁸⁹

I will take absolute power into my own hands, that is something a fool cannot understand and I will explain: I will introduce a curfew. And if that’s not enough, I declare the powers of presidency absolute and at the same time take on the Presidency. That is “ a person above the law and the prophets.”

The phrase “личностью, стоящей над законом и пророками” is a reference to Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time,

²⁸⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 104.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it.”²⁹⁰ The phrase and its biblical allusion show Venichka’s desire to take what he has not earned by force. The phrase also shows a brief shift in how Venichka views himself. While he often views himself as being “below” in *Moskva-Petushki*, here in this passage he views himself as being above the law. In one of the final scenes of Venichka’s war against Norway, he is surrounded by his fellow members of the Plenum who are celebrating their revolution in a field that is surrounded by fire. However, Venichka does not share in their celebration, and instead is more contemplative about the situation. He wonders why the world is silent in the face of their revolution.

Repentance

Venichka’s reaction to losing his power is similar to Satan’s reaction after he is cast out of Hell. Satan’s refusal to repent is one of his defining characteristics in *Paradise Lost*. Although Venichka does eventually give up the presidency in the Voinovo-Usad segment of his journey, his parting thoughts show his refusal to repent:

В моем сердце не было раскаяния. Я шел через луговины и пажити, через заросли шиповника и коровьи стада, мне в поле кланялись хлеба и улыбались васильки. Но, повторяю, в сердце не было раскаяния... Закатилось солнце, а я все шел.²⁹¹

In my heart there is no repentance. I walked through the meadows and the pastures, through the briar patches and the herds of cattle, the grain fields bowed before me and the cornflowers smiled. But, I repeat, in my heart there is no repentance. The sun set, and I walked on.

²⁹⁰ Luke 16:16

²⁹¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 110.

Satan's insistence that it is "better to reign in Hell" illustrates his lack of remorse for his actions even though it has resulted in his banishment from a place that he still longs for. Furthermore, contrition is one of the key elements in Milton's definition of redemption. In order to be redeemed the seeker must be sorry for his/her actions. This contrition is what separates Adam and Eve from Satan and his ilk. Adam and Eve are contrite after they have disobeyed God, where Satan and the rebel angels feel no remorse for their actions. Although Venichka appears to want redemption on his journey his admission that he feels no repentance aligns him more with Satan than with Adam.

Venichka's refusal to repent is not the only time he appears to resist an action that will grant him admission to Petushki. In Kilometer 105-Pokrov, he encounters the Sphinx²⁹² who offers him admittance into Petushki if Venichka can solve five riddles. The scene mirrors Venichka's encounter with the trio in white who remove him from the Kursk Station Restaurant at the beginning of his journey:

"Там хуже, чем дочь и язва. Мне лучше знать, что там. Но я сказал тебе - не пуцу, значит не пуцу. Вернее, пуцу при одном условии: ты разгадаешь мне пять моих загадок."

"Для чего ему, подлюке, загадки?" - подумал я про себя. А вслух сказал:

Ну, так не томи, давай свои загадки. Убери свой кулачище, в поддых не бей, а давай загадки.²⁹³

"It's worse than a daughter or pestilence. I know better what's there. But I told you, I will not let you in, so I won't let you in. Rather, I'll let you in on one condition: that you guess at my five riddles."

²⁹² Erofeev seems to confuse the characteristics of the Egyptian Sphinx and the Greek Sphinx. The Greek Sphinx is female and famous in legends for asking riddles of people who pass by her. The Egyptian Sphinx is typically male, but does not ask riddles.

²⁹³ Ibid., 117.

For what reason does he need riddles, the viper, I thought to myself. But outloud I said: "Well, don't exhaust me, give me your riddles. Put your fists in the pit of my stomach, and don't hit, but give me your riddles."

Although it seems, from Venichka's point of view, that the Sphinx is blocking Venichka from Petushki, he is also offering Venichka a way into the closed off space. What the Sphinx appears to offer Venichka is an alternative path to Petushki. The Sphinx makes the conditions of entry clear: if Venichka can answer the five questions correctly, he will be admitted to Petushki. One would assume that if Venichka wanted to enter Petushki (and had been previously denied entry twelve times) that he would try to answer the riddles. However, Venichka's reaction is anger and hesitation to play along. Venichka refuses to answer the first four questions, thereby eliminating even the possibility that he could enter Petushki by this method. The Sphinx asks the first riddle:

"Знаменитый ударник Алексей Стаханов два раза в день ходил по малой нужде, и один раз в два дня - по большой. Когда же с ним случался запой, он четыре раза в день ходил по малой нужде и ни разу - по большой. Подсчитай, сколько раз в год ударник Алексей Стаханов сходил по малой нужде и сколько по большой нужде, если учесть, что у него триста двенадцать дней в году был запой."²⁹⁴

The famous worker Aleksei Stakhanov went to the bathroom to do number one twice a day and once every two days for number two. But when he was drunk, he went four times a day to do number one and not a single time for number two. Calculate how many times a year drum worker Aleksei Stakhanov went number one and number two if you consider that he was drunk three hundred and twelve days in a year.

After the first riddle, he responds to the Sphinx: "Это плохая загадка, Сфинкс, эта загадка с поросычьим подтекстом. Я не буду разгадывать эту плохую загадку"

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

("That's a bad riddle, Sphinx, that's a riddle with piggish overtones. I will not attempt to answer a riddle that bad.")²⁹⁵ As readers, we can sympathize with Venichka. The riddles are ridiculous, and we can understand Venichka's anger at such ridiculous questions. Moreover, the riddles are vulgar. They deal with the bathroom habits of workers and the rape of young girls. Erofeev creates a situation where the reader is likely to view Venichka as the wronged party, and the Sphinx as the aggressor/tormentor. However, Venichka's total refusal to humor the Sphinx shows that his unwillingness to perform the actions required for entering Petushki.²⁹⁶ As readers, we may even agree with Venichka's decision to refuse to answer the questions based on how vulgar and absurd they are and Venichka's immediate disdain of the Sphinx. However, if we move beyond the absurdity and vulgarity of the questions, we can see that once again Venichka is given a way into Petushki, but he refuses to take this path. The only question that Venichka tries to answer is the final question, however at that point it is already too late. The conditions of the Sphinx required him to answer all five questions correctly. It is interesting to note that the question that he does answer involves Minin and Pozharsky traveling in the wrong direction:

"Вот: идет Минин, а навстречу ему - Пожарский. "Ты какой-то странный, сегодня, Минин, - говорит Пожарский, - как будто много выпил сегодня." "Да и ты тоже странный, Пожарский, идешь и на ходу спишь." "Скажи мне по совести, Минин, сколько ты сегодня выпил?" "Сейчас скажу: сначала 150 грамм российской, потом 580 кубанской, 150 столичной, 125 перцовой и семьсот грамм ерша. А ты?" "А я ровно столько же, Минин." "Так

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ The Sphinx appears in Book IV of *Paradise Regained*. Milton refers to her as the "Theban monster." In lines 572-575, Milton reflects upon the riddle of the Sphinx, and how once the riddle is solved the Sphinx kills herself out of grief and spite.

куда же ты теперь идешь, Пожарский?" "Как куда? В Петушки, конечно. А ты, Минин?" "Так ведь я тоже в Петушки. Ты ведь, князь, совсем идешь не в ту сторону!" "Нет, это ты идешь не туда, Минин." Короче, они убедили друг дружку в том, что надо поворачивать обратно. Пожарский пошел туда, куда шел Минин, а Минин - туда, куда шел Пожарский. И оба попали на Курский вокзал."²⁹⁷

"Here: Minin and coming at him is Pozharsky. 'You're a bit strange today, Minin,' Pozharsky says, 'Like you've had a lot of drink,' 'Yeah, you're strange too, Pozharsky, it's like you're sleep walking.' 'Tell me sincerely, Minin, how much did you drink today?' 'I'll tell you directly: I started with 150 grams of Rossiiskaya, then 580 grams of Kubanskaya, then 150 of Stolichnaya, then 125 grams of pepper vodka and 700 gram of rough. How about you?' 'I drank exactly the same, Minin.' 'So now where are you going, Pozharsky?' 'To Petushki, of course. And what about you, Minin?' 'Me too. I'm going to Petushki as well.' 'The thing is, Prince, you're going in the wrong direction!' 'No, you're the one going in the wrong direction, Minin.' In short, they were convinced each other that it was necessary to turn around. Pozharsky set off in the direction Minin had been headed, and Minin in Pozharsky's direction. And they both ended up in the Kursk Station."

Venichka answers hopefully that they are headed to Petushki, but his answer is incorrect. Even if he answered correctly, his refusal to answer the first four questions has doomed him. As readers we know that this interaction is just one more example of Venichka's failure to realize that he is headed in the wrong direction. Venichka has failed to answer the questions, and will not be allowed entry into Petushki through the Sphinx. Like Milton's Satan, Venichka is given ways back to the place he longs for, but he refuses to do what he must do in order to reach Petushki. Although this method of getting back to Petushki is absurd, he is also aware that he must somehow gain redemption, but is unsure of how to reach it.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 119.

Venichka's confusion about how to reach Petushki causes him to doubt everything, which further hinders his chances of entering Petushki.

Satan in *Moskva-Petushki*

When Satan finally does appear in person in the Usad-Kilometer 105 segment of the journey Satan and Venichka are immediately aware of each other even without introduction or seeing each other:

- А! Это ты! - кто-то сказал у меня за спиной таким приятным голосом, таким злорадным, что я даже и поворачиваться не стал. Я сразу понял, кто стоит у меня за спиной. "Искушать сейчас начнет, тупая морда! Нашел же ведь время - искушать!"
- Так это ты, Ерофеев? - спросил Сатана.
- Конечно, я. Кто же еще?..
- Тяжело тебе, Ерофеев?²⁹⁸

"Ah! It is you!" someone said from behind my back in such a pleasant and mean voice that I didn't even need to face him. I understood already who was standing there behind me. "He'll try to tempt me now, the blunt nosed snout. He's been waiting for the right time to tempt me."

"Is that you, Erofeev?" Satan asked

"Of course it's me. Who else?"

"Hard for you, Erofeev, is it?"

Satan's first words to Venichka suggest that he already knows whom he is approaching. Likewise, Venichka is already aware of who is behind him without turning around. When Satan questions Venichka's identity his use of the informal you ("ты") suggests a familiar relationship between the two characters, as does Venichka's awareness of who is asking about his identity. Venichka already knows it is Satan who is asking him to identify himself as Erofeev. When Venichka's describes

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 112.

Satan's voice he describes it as both malicious and pleasant, establishing both the duality of Satan's personality and this Satan as a Miltonic Satan. Erofeev's Satan is not Dante's inert Satan nor Lermontov's Romantic Devil. He approaches Venichka with an offer, and does so in a way that is tempting.

At first, Satan attempts to conjoin Venichka into not finishing his journey: “А раз тяжело, - продолжал Сатана, - смири свой порыв. Смири свой духовный порыв - легче будет” (“Well, if it’s hard,” Satan continued, “slow down. Slow down your spiritual transport and it’ll be easier”).²⁹⁹ Satan identifies Venichka’s trip as spiritual, and by encouraging Venichka to not finish his journey he tries to cut Venichka off from the edenic Petushki. While Milton’s Satan takes action to remove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, Venichka’s Satan does not want others to enter that sacred space that is denied to him. When Venichka refuses to stop his journey, Erofeev includes a humorous nod to the pairing of the two figures when Satan tells Venichka: “- Ну и дурак” (“Such a fool”) and Venichka responds- От дурака слышу” (“From a fool’s mouth”).³⁰⁰ However, not all of Satan’s advice is bad advice. Although Satan appears antagonistic towards Venichka, he does offer him good advice before he disappears: “Ну ладно, ладно... уж и слова не скажи! Ты лучше вот чего: возьми и на ходу из электрички выпрыгни. Вдруг да и не разобьешься” (“Well, okay okay. Then don’t say a word. You’re better off doing this: Jump out of this moving train. Do it quickly and you might not even get hurt”).³⁰¹ The advice that Satan gives Venichka is sound advice if Venichka wants to reach

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Petushki, although on a surface reading it appears as though Satan is encouraging Venichka to commit suicide. At this point in his journey Venichka was already on his way back to Moscow. If he follows Satan's advice and jumps off the train he will not be returned to Moscow and, therefore, will not meet his attackers. At least some part of Venichka's psyche is aware that he is headed in the wrong direction, and has some sense of self-preservation. However, Venichka dismisses Satan's advice and continues down his doomed path.

Satanic Symbolism-The Scales

The idea of being judged and found wanting appears in *Moskva-Petushki, Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*. Although the relationship between the phrase "Mene, tekel, parsin" in the *Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki* will be discussed in the next chapter, this concept is also crucial for understanding the connection between *Moskva-Petushki* and *Paradise Lost*. These words appear in Daniel 5:25 on the wall during the feast of Belshazzar and are interpreted by Daniel to mean "you have been judged and found wanting." In *The Divine Comedy* this phrase has been transformed into the famous line "Abandon all hope, you who enter here" and serves to warn the Dante pilgrim that those in Hell have been judged and found wanting. Its appearance cautions Dante not to end up like the sinners he is about to meet on his journey. In *Paradise Lost*, this judgment of being found wanting appears in the character of Satan when he first tries to tempt Adam and Eve in Book IV:

Hung forth in Heav'n his golden Scales, yet seen
Betwixt Astrea and the Scorpion signe,
Wherein all things created first he weighd,
The pendulous round Earth with balanc't Aire
In counterpoise, now ponders all events,

Battels and Realms: in these he put two weights
 The sequel each of parting and of fight;
 The latter quick up flew, and kickt the beam;
 Which Gabriel spying, thus bespake the Fiend.
 Satan, I know thy strength, and thou know'st mine,
 Neither our own but giv'n; what follie then
 To boast what Arms can doe, since thine no more
 Then Heav'n permits, nor mine, though doubld now
 To trample thee as mire: for proof look up,
 And read thy Lot in yon celestial Sign
 Where thou art weigh'd, and shown how light, how weak,
 If thou resist. The Fiend lookt up and knew
 His mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled
 Murmuring, and with him fled the shades of night. (IV.997-1015)³⁰²

The theme of “mene, tekел, parsin” in *Moskva-Petushki* relies on both Milton’s and Dante’s interpretation of the golden scales. In *Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic* David Quint notes that by placing the scales in the sky Milton “conflates Virgilian and Homeric models with the judgment of Belshazzar on God’s scales in Daniel 5:27.”³⁰³ Quint also comments on why Milton chose to use the image of the scales during the particular scene, noting that: “He does so in order to stop the impending duel, and Satan gets the message and flees the scene. Had they fought, Milton’s epic may have come to an end then and there, as Virgil’s concluded with a final duel.”³⁰⁴ When Venichka talks of scales in *Moskva-Petushki*, the meaning of the scales is an amalgamation of both *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*: “Они, серьезные, этого не понимают, а я, легковесный, никогда не пойму... Мене, текел, фарес - то есть ты взвешен на весах и найден легковесным, то есть "текел"... Ну и пусть, пусть” (“They are serious, they don’t understand this, but I

³⁰² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 107.

³⁰³ David Quint, *Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 143.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

am a lightweight, and I will never understand it...Mene, tekkel, parsin, that is you have been weighed upon the scales and found wanting, that is, tekkel. So it goes, so it goes").³⁰⁵ Venichka sees the writing on the wall, yet like Milton's Satan, who also is aware of his lightness on the scales, knows that he has been judged and he has been found wanting and resents that judgment. Venichka goes on to challenge the authority of the scales: "Но есть ли там весы или нет - все равно - на тех весах вздох и слеза перевесят расчет и умысел. Я это знаю тверже, чем вы что-нибудь знаете. Я много прожил, много перепил и продумал - и знаю, что говорю" ("But if there are scales or not, all the same, on these scales breath and tears outweigh calculation and intent. I know this more than you know anything. I've spent many nights drunk and thought about it a lot- and I know what I'm saying").³⁰⁶ While Milton's Satan is aware of why exactly he was judged and punished, Venichka is seemingly oblivious, not understanding how this fate could have befallen him. Nonetheless, he still challenges the idea of the judgment placed on him. He is simultaneously both keenly aware that he is wanting, yet unsure of the reasons why he has been judged unworthy.

As Venichka moves closer to his "death," his Satanic side becomes more apparent in the poema. Nancy Rosenfeld in her book *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* notes that once Satan falls there is a jealousy in his tone as he realizes he will never reach Paradise.³⁰⁷ Venichka displays this sense of jealous and anger at the end of the poema. As he gets closer to Petushki his

³⁰⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 134.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Nancy Rosenfeld, *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 28.

association with Satan and the rebel angels grows stronger. Immediately after the images of the scales the narrator mentions that he is shaking from the cold, and then a little while later he then declares that he knows why the Apostle betrayed Christ before the third cock crowed. He states:

Ночью никто не может быть уверен в себе, то есть я имею в виду; холодной ночью. И апостол предал Христа, покуда третий петух не пропел. Вернее, не так; и апостол предал Христа трижды, пока не продел петух. Я знаю, почему он предал,--потому что дрожал от холода, да. Он еще грелся у костра, вместе с этими. А у меня и костра нет, и я с недельного похмелья. И если б испытвали теперь меня, я предал бы его до семижды семидесяти раз, и больше бы предал...³⁰⁸

At night, no one can be sure of himself, that is I mean, on a cold night. And the apostle betrayed Christ as long as the third cock crowed. Rather, the apostle betrayed Christ betrayed Christ three times before the cock crowed. I know why he betrayed him: because he was shivering from the cold. He had warmed himself by the fire together with them. But I don't have a fire, and I've been hungover all week. And if they were to torture me right now, I would betray him to the seven times seventieth and more...

The reader is now faced with a new more sinister image of Venichka: one who is willing to betray God. This new image of Venichka as a betrayer is a mirror of Adam in *Paradise Lost* after he falls from Paradise. In his chapter entitled "Collapse and Consolation: The Postlapsarian Environment" Mattison indicates that in Book X of *Paradise Lost*, "Adam's logic bears a noticeable similarity to some of Satan's casuistry from earlier in the poem."³⁰⁹ The characters of Satan, Adam and Venichka become further blurred together (with both Adam and Venichka becoming increasingly like Satan) when one applies Nancy Rosenfeld's idea that: "By the end

³⁰⁸ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 135.

³⁰⁹ Andrew Mattison, *Milton's Uncertain Eden: Understanding Place in Paradise Lost* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 116.

of *Paradise Lost*, Satan too, is no longer an archangel, but rather a human(ized) exile from Paradise, doomed to wander the world bearing much of the same burden as did the First Parents.³¹⁰ This humanization of Satan further reinforces the link between Adam and Venichka and their slow descent into becoming more like Satan. Both characters initially seemed to be closely associated with Paradise, and yet slowly through the text begin to become associated with Satan.

Venichka's similarity to Satan leads the reader to the ending of the work, where Venichka is lying on the ground: "О, ничего, ничего сердце через час утихнет, кровь отмоется, лежи, Веничка, лежи до рассвета" ("Oh, it's nothing, it's nothing, your heart will lay quiet in an hour, you'll wash off the blood, lie down, Venichka, lie down till morning").³¹¹ This image of Venichka lying stricken on the ground is a replication of Book I of *Paradise Lost* where Satan has been driven from Heaven with his rebellious angels. In Book I, Satan lies stricken on the ground in a lake of fire surrounded by the angels that have fallen with him:

Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquish'd, rowling in the fiery Gulfe
Confounded though immortal: But his doom
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain [55]
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate; (I.50-58)³¹²

The first image the reader encounters in *Paradise Lost* is that of Satan opening his eyes to find himself lying on the bottom of a lake of fire and torment surrounded by

³¹⁰ Nancy Rosenfeld, *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 29.

³¹¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 138.

³¹² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 6.

rebel angels. In this clear parallel, the last image the reader gets in *Moskva-Petushki* is that of Venichka lying on the ground surrounded by pain, torment and rebel angels and closing his eyes: “И ангелы - рассмеялись. Вы знаете, как смеются ангелы? Эти позорные твари, теперь я знаю - вам сказать, как они сейчас рассмеялись?” (“And the angels burst out laughing. Do you know how angels laugh? They are awful creatures, and now I know—shall I tell you how they laughed now?”).³¹³ In this manner, Erofeev’s search for Paradise ends.

What Erofeev accomplishes by addressing Venichka’s Satanic side is that Venichka’s choice to ignore Satan’s advice is a reinterpretation of the events that lead to the fall of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost* Eve listens to Satan’s tempting words and trusts that his false advice is good. This trust in Satan causes the fall of Man, cuts humans off from Paradise, and sends them into a world of suffering and pain. Venichka, as though he has learned from the mistakes of Adam and Eve, ignores the advice of Satan and chooses to stay on the train rather than follow Satan’s suggestion of jumping off the train. On the surface, Satan’s advice seems terrible, as though he were encouraging Venichhka to commit suicide. However, his advice is actually quite reasonable. Had Venichka jumped off the train where Satan suggested, he never would have returned to Moscow. He would have avoided the gang of murderers, and potentially could have made a fourteenth trip to Petushki. If Venichka had listened to his Satanic inclinations, he potentially could have corrected his path and tried once again to reach the edenic Petushki. The advice that Satan gives is not always bad advice, and had Venichka listened to this

³¹³ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 138.

part of his psyche he may not have met such a gruesome fate that kept him from his reunion with his beloved child.

Rebel Angels

One of the most interesting parallels between *Paradise Lost* and *Moskva-Petushki* is the appearance of the Venichka's angels. In Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton portrays those who go to war with God as rebel angels:

Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?
Th' infernal Serpent, he it was whose guile
Stir'd up with Envy and Revenge deceiv'd
The Mother of Mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his Host
of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Gold above his Peers...(I.33-39)³¹⁴

Further in *Book I* Milton further describes the angels and their rebellion against God and heaven:

To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
Th' associates and copartners of our loss
Lye thus astonisht on th' oblivious Pool,
And call them not to share with us their part
in this unhappy Mansion, or once more
With rallied Arms to try what may be yet
Regain'd in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell? (I.262-270)³¹⁵

What makes these creatures and Milton's description of them interesting is that Milton still refers to them as angels. He avoids describing them as demons or devils, and allows them to keep the attributes normally associated with angels. This contradicts the image one normally has of beings associated with Hell, and causes

³¹⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 6.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

the reader of *Moskva-Petushki* to question if the angels that Venichka comes into contact with are actually angels. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, the image of the deceptive rebel angel is further strengthened when Satan manages to get into Paradise to tempt Adam and Eve by disguising himself as a good angel. Satan, the ultimate tempter, who will eventually be the cause of the fall for Adam and Eve, takes on a form that is not only common, but also a comfort to Adam and Eve, as it is a form that they associate with protection (i.e. Gabriel).

In *Moskva-Petushki*, the reader has no way of knowing where the loyalties of the angels lie. The angels are not the first to identify themselves as angels from Heaven. As we learned from Books I and IV of *Paradise Lost*, not all angels reside in heaven, and not all angels offer comfort. It is Venichka who first declares that they are angels from God. He declares, “О! Узнаю! Это опять они! Ангелы Господни!” (“Oh! I recognize them! It’s them again. The Angels of God!”).³¹⁶ Even when the angels identify themselves at this point, they only say, “Ну, конечно, мы ” (“Of course it’s us”).³¹⁷ There is a sense of ambiguity and false identification in their response in that the angels never say that they come from God or heaven. This relates back to Book IV of *Paradise Lost* where Milton writes of Adam and Eve, “So passed they naked on, nor shunned the sight of God or angel, for they thought no ill” (IV.319-320).³¹⁸ Venichka, at this point, like Adam and Eve prior to their fall, assumes all angels are good and work on behalf of God. In Valentina Baslyk’s article “Venichka’s Divided Self: The Sacred and the Monstrous” the author discusses the

³¹⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 7.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 88.

idea of Erofeev's angels reflect the Sacred/ Monstrous dichotomy within the narrator as the angels in the novel act at times with unfailing kindness and at other times horrible cruelty.³¹⁹ Baslyk confirms that the image of the angels in *Moskva-Petushki* become problematic because "the angels' vicious laughter in the last segment of the poema is problematic because it is so blatantly demonic."³²⁰ Like Milton's rebel angels, the angels of *Moskva-Petushki* are evil yet keep their angelic form.

Throughout the poema the angels appear to be more devious than Venichka believes them to be. Several times in *Moskva-Petushki*, the narrator has conversations with the angels in which their motives should be questioned. At the end of the Novogireevo-Reutovo, the tenth segment of Venichka's journey, and the beginning of the Reutovo-Nikol'skoe section of the poema, the angels first reprimand the narrator for cursing and then tell him they understand him. As Venichka's thoughts turn to Petushki and his child, he begins to beg the angels to pray for him. Just when the reader would expect the angels to answer and soothe him again, the angels are silent, as though they do not have the ability to pray for him.

Just a short while later during the Saltykovskaia-Kuchino section of his journey, Venichka is again thinking about Petushki and the angels reappear to him. He asks the angels: "А вы скажите, ангелы, вы будете со мной до самых Петушков? Да? Вы не отлетите?" ("But tell me, angels, you'll be with me to

³¹⁹ Valentina Baslyk, "Venichka's Divided Self: The Sacred and the Monstrous," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 75.

³²⁰ Ibid.

Petushki? Right? You won't fly away?").³²¹ They respond "О нет, до самых Петушков мы не можем...Мы отлетим, как только улыбнешся" ("Oh, no, we can't be with you in Petushki...We'll fly off as soon as you smile").³²² If Petushki symbolizes Paradise, as readers we must then ask ourselves why angels, creatures commonly associated with heaven, would not be able to enter a sacred space? As in *Paradise Lost*, the angels are no longer God's messengers out to watch over and offer comfort to Venichka as they had been throughout the text. At times they seem to comfort him, but they do not help him or act as an emissary between the narrator and God when he seems most desperate for help from God.

The place where the parallel between Milton's angels and Venichka's angels is most obvious in the poema occurs when Venichka's angels reveal their true form. In Book X of *Paradise Lost* Satan returns to Pandemonium, and expects to hear applause from his army of rebel angels. However, he is greeted by hissing instead as the former angels have been transformed into snakes:

So having said, a while he stood, expecting
 Their universal shout and high applause [505]
 To fill his eare, when contrary he hears
 On all sides, from innumerable tongues
 A dismal universal hiss, the sound
 Of public scorn; he wonderd, but not long
 Had leasure, wondring at himself now more; [510]
 His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
 His Armes clung to his Ribs, his Leggs entwining
 Each other, till supplanted down he fell
 A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,
 Reluctant, but in vaine: a greater power [515]
 Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sin'd,
 According to his doom: he would have spoke,
 But hiss for hiss returnd with forked tongue

³²¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 39.

³²² *Ibid.*, 39.

To forked tongue, for now were all transform'd
 Alike, to Serpents all as accessories [520]
 To his bold Riot: dreadful was the din
 Of hissing through the Hall, thick swarming now
 With complicated monsters head and taile,³²³

The once beautiful angels have been turned into something horrifying, and Milton acknowledges this change as “Of ugly Serpents; horror on them fell”³²⁴ In *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka calls on the angels for help as the assailants make their final approach. He begs both God and the angels to help him. This scene is the only time in the poem where the angels appear immediately after the narrator has asked God for help. However, when they appear they are not the angels that soothe the narrator, nor are they the angels that mislead and tease him. The image of the angels becomes horrifying to Venichka and to the reader. He describes the new image of the angels:

И ангелы—рассмеялись. Вы знаете, как смеются ангелы? Это позорные твари, теперь я знаю, --вам сказать, как они сейчас рассмеялись? Когда-то, очень давно, в Лобне, у вокзала, зарезало поездом человека, и непостижимо зарезало: всю его нижнюю половину измололо в мелкие дребезги и расшвыряло по полотну, а верхняя половина, от пояса, осталась как бы живую, и стояла у рельсов, как стоят на постаментах бюсты разной сволочи. Поезд ушел, а он, эта половина, так и остался стоять, и на лице у него была какая-то озадаченность, и рот полуоткрыт. Многие не могли на это глядеть, отворачивались, побледнев и со смертной истомой в сердце. А дети подбежали к нему, трое или четверо детей, где-то подобрали дымящийся окурок и вставили его в мертвый полуоткрытый рот. И окурок все дымился, а дети сказал вокруг и хохотал над этой забавностью.

Вот так и теперь небесные ангелы надо мной смеялись. Они смеялись и Бог молчал...³²⁵

³²³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Signet Classics, 1968), 242.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

And the angels burst out laughing. Do you know how angels laugh? They are awful creatures, and now I know—shall I tell you how they laughed now? Once upon a time, a long time ago, in Lobna, at the station, a man was sliced up by a train, run over in an incomprehensible way: his entire lower half was crushed to smithereens and scattered over the along the roadway, but his top half from the belt up was in tact as if alive, and stood by the tracks, the way busts on a pedestal do. The train left, but he—that half of him remained sitting there, and his face there was a type of confusion and his mouth was half opened. Many people couldn't bear to look at him and turned away, pale, with deathly languor in their hearts. But some of the children ran up to him, three or four children, they had picked up a lit cigarette butt from somewhere and stuck it in the deceased's half-opened mouth. And the cigarette continued to smoke and the children ran around roaring with laughter.

That's how the angels now laughed at me. They laughed and God was silent.

The shift in how Venichka describes the angels stands in stark contrast to how they were presented prior to Venichka's arrival on the platform. Before this confrontation the angels alternated between being mischievous and kind toward Venichka, yet at the platform of Petushki the anecdote Venichka tells is horrifying and grotesque as well as absurd and dehumanized. These angels are crueler and more like the rebel angels of *Paradise Lost*. They do not act on behalf of God, instead they are evil and out to cause and laugh at pain. In this manner, the angels serve as reflector characters for the duality that exists within Venichka. Like the protagonists the angels are not what they appear to be when they first appear in the poema. They are identified as something holy and prove to be more malignant as the poema continues.

Conclusion

In Soviet society the “correct path” for the Soviet citizen was elusive and ever-changing. Those citizens who were in favor at one point in time could find themselves falling out of Party “grace” at another. Being favored in Soviet society was not a permanent position, and many writers and artists found themselves in a dangerous position once that status was lost. These elements in *Moskva-Petushki* allow Erofeev to challenge the Miltonic mode of redemption, and force the reader to question what it means to be redeemed, as well as whether redemption is something that every fallen person seeks. Rather than following Milton’s path exactly, Erofeev uses humor to challenge Milton’s belief that every seeker of redemption will be successful. In the places in *Moskva-Petushki* where Venichka’s journey parallels Adam’s or Satan’s journey, Erofeev mocks Milton’s vision of redemption as something universally attainable.

Venichka’s “death” at the end of *Moskva-Petushki* challenges Milton’s position that redemption is offered to those who seek and even then only in death. When Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden of Eden, their punishment and chance at salvation comes from a lifetime of trying to return to God’s good grace. They and their future progeny must toil with no earthly salvation. The success of their acts of contrition and repentance only comes in death. Venichka’s train trip is a redemptive quest as he seeks the edenic place from which he was exiled.

Erofeev responds to Milton’s implication that the seeker must die in order to gain redemption by killing his protagonist at the end. Venichka’s fear leading up to the confrontation with the four murderers and his subsequent brutal death at the

end of *Moskva-Petushki* denies the promise of redemption that Milton claims is waiting for seekers. Even a reading of the poema as a story about a drunk who cannot find a factory town Venichka death is horrifying for its violence and inconclusiveness. Where Milton promises salvation at the end of one's life in exchange for a lifetime of seeking redemption, Erofeev forces the reader to face the idea that death fulfills no such promises.

Venichka and La Diritta Via: Exploring the Dantean Path to Redemption in *Moskva-Petushki*

Introduction

When we first encounter Venichka at the beginning of *Moskva-Petushki*, he is a man in the middle of his life, grief-filled and inexplicably lost. While working his way to the Kursk Station, he asks himself: “Что это за подъезд? я до сих пор не имею понятия; но так и надо. Все так. Все на свете должно происходить медленно и неправильно, чтобы не сумел загордиться человек, чтобы человек был грустен и растерян” (“What type of entrance is this? I haven’t the foggiest idea even now, and it ought to be that way. Everything should. Everything should happen slowly and incorrectly so that a man doesn’t get a chance to start feeling proud, so that man is sad and perplexed”).³²⁶ As Venichka tries to make his way out of the unknown hallway at the beginning of *Moskva-Petushki*, we as readers encounter more questions than answers: Where is Venichka trying to go? Why is he grieving? and why does the Kremlin, the easily located center of Moscow, matter and why is it so elusive?

Venichka’s journey and his inner turmoil call to mind the journey of the Dante pilgrim in Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*. The two poets share the same sense of being lost and are filled with inexplicable grief as they make their way to a place that they are seemingly incapable of finding. In addition to his other personae—enlightener, the journey motivated by grief suggests that Venichka might be a pilgrim like Dante’s protagonist-- a parallel that adds to the new interpretation

³²⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 6.

of *Moskva-Petushki* offered in this dissertation. Venichka clarifies the Dantean connection in his own journey in the poem when he declares: ““И finita ля комедия. Не всякая простота – святая. И не всякая комедия - божественная” (“And finita la comedia. Not all foolishness is holy. And not every comedy is divine.”).³²⁷ For Dante, the purpose of his journey is to find personal redemption so that he can return to the right path in his earthly life. Venichka is aware of the Dantean path to redemption, but is uncertain if that path will lead him away from his grief that weighs on him.

A superficial reading of *Moskva-Petushki* like that of critic Yurii Aikhenval'd suggests that Venichka is merely a drunk trying to find his way to the factory town of Petushki, a town that Venichka views as paradise on earth.³²⁸ However, the grief that plagues him at the start of his journey suggests that Venichka is looking for more than just a town at the end of a train line. His inability to find Petushki despite twelve failed attempts hints that the right path to Petushki has eluded him. Venichka knows that he must do something different in order to reach Petushki, and therefore tries to find redemption along the train ride. This chapter argues that Venichka tries to reach Petushki in order to resolve his grief, and to find redemption along the way. However, Venichka is unable to find the correct path on his own, and this uncertainty is what causes him to stagger at the beginning of his thirteenth attempt. Since Venichka cannot find the right path to his own redemption, and has met with continual failure on previous journeys, he mimics Dante's pre-established path in the hope that one will lead him to Petushki.

³²⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 62.

³²⁸ Nina Frolova et al, “Neskol'ko monologov o Venedikte Erofeeve,” *Teatr*, no. 9 (1991): 74-122.

Venichka's journey through Moscow may be viewed as a creative response to Dante's journey through Hell. It will be helpful once again to invoke the concept of parody as defined by Iurii Tynianov in order to understand Erofeev's response to Dante. Erofeev's restructuring of Dante's journey in *Moskva-Petushki* reflects Tynianov's definition of parody, which states: "beyond the plane of one work there lies another plane which is being stylized or parodied."³²⁹ Venichka's experience crossing through Moscow's rings towards Petushki is one of the first clues that Venichka's journey is a parody and reconstruction of the Dantean model of redemption. Venichka's path through Hell begins where Dante's journey ended. Dante passes through the nine circles of Hell moving from the outside and going inward and downward, encounters Satan and then passes through the dark corridor to emerge into the light of stars. Erofeev reveals the structure and function of Dante's work as Venichka reverses Dante's redemptive journey. Venichka starts near the center of Moscow and move outward rather than journeying inward.

Venichka's sense of being lost at the beginning of the poema parallels Dante's frame of mind at the beginning of *Inferno*. From the very beginning of his journey, Dante is aware that he has lost the right path in life. The opening stanza of *Inferno* reflects his inability to find the correct path: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,/ ché la diritta, via era smarrita." ("In the middle of the journey of our life/I found myself within a forest dark, /For the correct path was lost to me").³³⁰ Dante's recognition of his current state implies that he believes that

³²⁹ Iurii Tynianov, "Dostoevskii i Gogol: k teorii parodii" (Petrograd: Opoiiaz, 1921)

³³⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 2.

there is a “diritta via” (a correct path) in life that one should follow. His travels through *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradisio* serve as a series of directives for Dante so that he can return to the diritta via in his earthly life. Through his journey he learns how he came to be on the wrong path and how he can redeem himself so that he can once more find himself on the path he wants to be on. Venichka finds himself on the wrong path (неправилен путь), however, from the first steps of his journey in *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka is unsure in which direction to travel.

Erofeev employs three elements from *The Divine Comedy* in his creative dialogue with Dante and his vision of personal journey toward redemption. The most visible element is the similarities in the physical linear and circular narrative structure of Venichka’s journey and Dante’s journey through Hell. The second connection between the two journeys is the images of portals and passageways that appear to link various crucial spaces in both works. The complex relationship between the protagonist and their perceived guides, Virgil for Dante and the angels for Venichka also seem to speak to a relationship between the two works. Through these three elements Erofeev shows the repercussions of blindly following the Dantean path to personal salvation. Where Dante offers a formulaic path to Paradise (confrontation, recognition and repentance), Erofeev shows the Dantean model to be too simplistic and not universally applicable to all seekers. This chapter will explore the complex relationship between Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki*, and the path each protagonist takes in an attempt to gain redemption. This chapter will also explore the figures of the author and the guide in both works as a means of understanding why Dante was successfully able to navigate through Hell

while Venichka finds himself continually returning to Hell despite numerous attempts at reaching Petushki.

Background & Dante's Definition of Redemption

It is from Erofeev's personal acquaintances that we know that he read *The Divine Comedy* right around the time he was developing *Moskva-Petushki*. In Olga Kuchkina's 2010 article about Erofeev's final days Natalia Shmelkova recalled bringing to Erofeev specific Western works at his request:

...Гомер - «Илиада» и «Одиссея», «Божественная комедия» Данте, все трагедии Эсхила, все трагедии Софокла, сочинения Плутарха, «Метаморфозы» Овидия, Цицерон, Геродот, Фукидид, Юлий Цезарь, Тацит, Шекспир, Монтень, «Гаргантюа и Пантагрюэль» Рабле, «Фауст» Гете, «Сентиментальное путешествие» Стерна, толстый синий том Фета в Большой библиотеке поэта, два тома «Мифов народов мира», «Католичество» Карсавина, все – Аверинцева.³³¹

... Homer -*Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, all of Aeschylus, all of Sophocles, the works of Plutarch, "Metamorphoses" by Ovid, Cicero, Herodotus, Thucydides, Julius Caesar, Tacitus, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Faust* by Goethe, *A Sentimental Journey* by Stern, a thick blue volume of Fet's in a large library of the poet, the two volumes of *Myths of the Peoples of the World*, Karsavin's *Catholicism*, and all of Averintsev.

The marks of Homer, Dante, Goethe and Rabelais appear throughout *Moskva-Petushki* as Erofeev weaves Venichka's chaotic journey from Moscow to Petushki.

However, for the purpose of examining Venichka's path to redemption the work that stands out the most in this list is Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Erofeev takes the image

³³¹Olga Kuchkina, "I angely nebesnie otvechait: 'Skoro!'" *Komsomol'skaia pravda* 10 (May 2010): http://kp.ua/Default.aspx?page_id=3&city_id=-1&date=130510&news_id=227141 [Accessed online September 19, 2013]

of the journey through Hell in search of redemption and Paradise and sets the journey in 1960s Soviet Union. As Venichka attempts to escape Moscow and reach the edenic town of Petushki, his quest to reach Paradise, at first glance, seems to mirror the quest that Dante the pilgrim struggled with centuries before. The path to Paradise that Dante takes in *The Divine Comedy* becomes a model of redemption that is appropriated and parodied in *Moskva-Petushki*. While literary critics and scholars are quick to point out that Venichka's journey is Dantean, few have further explored what aspects of *The Divine Comedy* had an impact on *Moskva-Petushki*, and why Venichka fails so spectacularly, while Dante succeeds in reaching both Paradise and personal redemption.

Dante frames redemption as both a process and state of mind (in which the sinner is an active participant) rather than an end point granted to the sinner by a higher power. In *The Divine Comedy* redemption occurs when the sinner confronts his sin, atones with true remorse, purges himself of sin, and then reconciles himself with God. Dante begins his journey of redemption by showing his protagonist to be lost both physically and morally. The Dante pilgrim desires to overcome despair, but is uncertain of how to do so. Although the source of his despair is debated by Dante scholars with the reasons ranging from his exile from Florence, his sinful life, to his lack of faith, the Dante pilgrim knows that his current state of despair has put him on the wrong path. With the assistance of Virgil as his guide Dante begins his journey to redemption by passing through the circles of Hell and witnessing the consequences of a sinful and unredeemed life on earth. As Dante progresses through these circles he observes the consequences of a sinful and unrepentant life. As Dante

journeys through these circles he confronts shades who demonstrate what happens when one does not atone for one's sins. To leave the Inferno Dante must recognize his own sins (denying God and living in a state of despair) and be willing to atone for them.³³² As Amilcare A. Iannucci argues in his article, "Dante's Inferno, Canto IV," Dante alters the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, which traces Christ's descent into Hell and his ascension, which in the Western world is conceived as "Christ's victory over death and Satan."³³³ While Dante follows this trajectory of descending into Hell and then going from Hell back to Earth, and then to Heaven, he must take an active part in his salvation by confronting the sinners in Hell, atoning for his own sins in Purgatory, and finally embracing the Christian love of God in Paradise in order to be redeemed in his earthly life.³³⁴ Unlike Christ's journey into Hell, Dante's definition of redemption is not a victory over Satan, but instead a personal and contemplative journey.

The next step in the process of attaining personal salvation occurs in *Purgatorio* where Dante sees firsthand what happens when one lives a life where one turns away from God and commits sins without repenting. The inhabitants of Purgatory are not the sinful people of the Inferno, but they have not embraced God and spiritual salvation either by choice in their earthly life or because of the circumstances of their birth (for example, the pagan Virgil who was born before the time of Christ). Iannucci describes the difference between the inhabitants of the

³³² Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 255.

³³³ Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Dante's Inferno, Canto IV," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 302.

³³⁴ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 255.

Inferno and the inhabitants of Purgatory: “From a Christian perspective, the condition of these souls [the souls in Purgatory]—their state of perpetual longing without hope of spiritual fulfillment—reflects the existential plight of man before redemption.”³³⁵ The figures that Dante meets in Purgatory including his own guide, whom Dante admires, are tragic figures who live in a state of hopelessness that “evokes pity and compassion” in both Dante and the reader.³³⁶ Therefore, they are doomed to this hopeless state with no promise of redemption. John Sinclair in his “Notes” to his translation of *Purgatorio* draws attention to the difference in how Dante relates to these shades when he sees a ship of shades in Canto II of

Purgatorio:

The ship of souls coming over the ocean is plainly meant to contrast with the ferry of Acheron (Inf. iii), the shining angel-pilot with Charon, ‘with eyes of burning coal,’ the chanting of the psalm of redemption by the redeemed with the howling blasphemies of Charon’s passengers.³³⁷

Rather than fearing these shades as he did in *Inferno*, Dante can relate to their struggle and perpetually longing. When the shade Casella, a Florentine singer, approaches Dante, the two embrace and Dante realizes they share his feeling of being lost. While Dante has Virgil as a guide in *Inferno* his journey is mostly a personal experience. He confronts the shades and their sins, but did not identify with their experience. In Purgatory Dante experiences a sense of community with the souls there as he relates to their desire to be redeemed. In Canto IX he

³³⁵ Amilcare A. Iannucci, “Dante’s Inferno, Canto IV,” *Dante’s Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 307.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Volume 2*, ed. John Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 41.

experiences that sense of community when the souls there sing and rejoice that another soul [Dante] has joined “their fellowship of repentance and redemption”.³³⁸ Unlike the first portion of his journey, the process of redemption in Purgatory is not an insular experience for Dante.

In the shades Dante recognizes some of the great minds in history, and in his current state he could be a resident there because of his own spiritual despair. Dante’s pity for the residents of Purgatory causes him actively to want to atone for his sins,³³⁹ which are represented by the 7 Ps carved on his forehead by the angel guarding the gate to Purgatory in Canto IX. The same angel that carves the Ps into Dante’s forehead holds the two keys of Saint Peter--a silver key that represents remorse and a gold key that represents reconciliation. Dorothy Sayers notes that in Dante’s world, these two keys are crucial to a successful redemption and salvation. The angel uses these two keys together to open the gates to Purgatory so that Dante can continue his journey towards redemption.³⁴⁰

As Dante travels through Purgatory on an upward linear path, he atones for each sin, and each one of the Ps is removed from his head meaning that particular sin has been atoned for and forgiven. Dante’s definition of redemption in Purgatory means that he has not only confronted sin, but that he has also atoned for that sin with true remorse. Dante’s decision to turn away from hopelessness is equally important to his redemption since hopelessness is a grave sin in Catholic doctrine. When he passes through the river Lethe in Purgatory he is fully washed clean of the

³³⁸ Ibid., 129.

³³⁹ peccatum in Italian

³⁴⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatory*, trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2002)

memories of his past sins, and when he drinks from the river Eunoë his good memories are restored. His hope, therefore, is restored. It is after this process that he is ready to move on to Paradise. At this point Dante has obtained redemption: he is sinless and no longer filled with despair. His journey to Paradise and his reunion with Beatrice serve as his reward for his successful journey through Inferno and Purgatory. In Paradise Dante sees that Heaven is desirable and something to strive for when he returns back to earth.

As he prepares to leave Paradise at the end of *Paradisio*, Dante prays that he will remember his time in Paradise so that he can convey his experience to others. Redemption is not simply going through this process, but also remembering the experience and living a life deserving of Paradise. Throughout *The Divine Comedy* Dante defines redemption to be a struggle that the sinner must actively take part in. The sinner must confront the notion of sin, recognize it in himself, and then purge himself of those sins in order to be redeemed. Moreover, while Dante's journey is personal it is also meant to be exemplary for his readers. As Lawrence Baldassaro points out in his article "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," the opening canto places Dante on "the journey of our life" making it a unifying experience rather than solely a personal experience.³⁴¹

In *Moskva-Petushki* Erofeev appropriates Dante's definition of redemption by placing his protagonist on a similar path. Like Dante, Venichka finds himself lost and uncertain of how to reach the place he wants to reach. However, Erofeev sets Venichka's journey apart from Dante's journey in two critical ways. First, Venichka

³⁴¹ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 255.

is passive in his own journey. Second, he is moved towards his end goal of Petushki by means outside of his control—the electric train. The reader is forced ask the question: even if Venichka were to go through the process that Dante “prescribes” in *The Divine Comedy*, and successfully be redeemed, what benefit would come from this new status in a place where personal salvation inherently stands against the existing state with its atheist ideology?

Existing Research

Existing research on the relationship between *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki* can be divided into two categories: research that looks at the structure of Venichka’s journey and the ways in which that structure relates to the work of previous Russian and Western writers, and research that focuses on the relationship between Christian philosophy and both texts. Mark Lipovetsky in his 1999 book *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* argues that Erofeev’s decision to subtitle *Moskva-Petushki* poema links the text with the poems of Dante, Gogol and Homer.³⁴² Mark Altshuller describes Venichka’s journey as “[the] journey between Moscow and Petushki is the soul’s symbolic journey from darkness into light, the journey that Gogol had in mind for Chichikov, and which Dante carried out.”³⁴³ In *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study*, Karen Ryan-Hayes further comments on the Gogolian and Dantean journey that Venichka undertakes, noting that the genre of poema links *Moskva-Petushki* with these two predecessors and uses the

³⁴² Mark Lipovetsky, “From an Otherworldly Point of View,” *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 66-67.

³⁴³ Ibid.

same “dual structural nature of the *poema*--its linearity and its circularity--to express philosophical criticism.”³⁴⁴ In the introduction to Erofeev’s collected works published in Italy in 2004, *Mosca-Petushki e altre opere*, Gario Zappi describes the structure of the text as a Soviet *Dead Souls* in which Erofeev presents: “a lifeless world, where every motion and every human being moves in a vicious circle, the grip of alcohol and madness.”³⁴⁵ Other scholars such as Oliver Ready point to evidence from Erofeev’s personal life, such as Erofeev’s conversations with the poet Olga Sedakova as Erofeev’s reasons for referring to Dante in the text: “For him Christian civilization was embodied in Dante, in Pascal, in Aquinas, in Chesterton and not here [in Russia].”³⁴⁶ While this research acknowledges the connection between Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki*, no scholar has yet offered a close reading of *Moskva-Petushki* that examines the numerous references to *The Divine Comedy* or why Erofeev creates a dialogue between his *poema* and *The Divine Comedy*.³⁴⁷

Russian language scholarship on Dante and Erofeev appears to follow the same pattern as Western scholarship. Although scholars point out that *Moskva-Petushki* is Dantean, they do not specifically examine the Dantean elements in the *poema* or include an analysis of why Erofeev would enter into a conversation with

³⁴⁴ Karen Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76.

³⁴⁵ “un mondo asfittico, in cui ogni moto e apparente e ogni essere umano si muove in un circolo vizioso, preda dell'alcol e della follia”

Zappi, Gario. “Il Vangelo Apocrifo di Venicka Erofeev,” *Mosca-Petushki e altre opere*, By Venedikt Erofeev (Milan: Giangiaco Feltrinelle Editore. 2004), 12.

³⁴⁶ Oliver Ready, “In Praise of Booze: “Moskva-Petushki” and Erasmian Irony,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 3 (July 2010): 437.

³⁴⁷ Wilfried Potthoff’s *Dante in Russland* explores the relationship between Dante’s texts and Russian literature, but concludes with the Symbolists of the 1920s. Wilfried Potthoff, *Dante in Russland: Zur Italienrezeption der russischen Literatur von der Romantik zum Symbolismus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991).

Dante's work. Svetlana Geisser-Schnittmann's *Venedikt Erofeev: Moskva-Petushki ili The Rest is Silence* mentions Dante as one of the textual references in *Moskva-Petushki*, but does not specifically delve into a close reading of the relationship between the two works.³⁴⁸

Why Dante?

To understand why Erofeev might have felt a kinship with Dante, one has only to look at Erofeev's biography. Erofeev, already an outcast from Soviet society from the time he was a university student, was aware of the fact that censors would be nipping at his heels looking for a subversive message in anything he wrote. While Erofeev never identified himself as a dissident writer, he certainly was not viewed as a dutiful citizen. Even as a child he had a habit of rebelling against authority, and as a small schoolboy refused to join either the Pioneers or the Komsomol organizations in his school.³⁴⁹ As a young man, he was expelled from numerous universities and institutes for reasons unknown. Venichka's refusal to conform with social expectations continued into adulthood as Erofeev worked numerous menial jobs throughout the Moscow, and rarely stayed in any one position for a long time.³⁵⁰ Despite two marriages, he rarely stayed in one place for long, and moved numerous times throughout his life.³⁵¹ Due to his lack of steady employment and

³⁴⁸ Svetlana Geisser-Schnittmann, *Venedikt Erofeev: Moskva-Petushki ili The Rest is Silence* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 27.

³⁴⁹ Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Introduction," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 2.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵¹ In his introduction to his translation of *Inferno*, Robert Hollander draws attention to the fact that after Dante's exile from Florence he "lived a mainly itinerant life in northern Italy, with two longish stays in Verona and a final one in Ravenna." xxiv

steady address, he lived on the fringes of society. Although he was lucky enough to avoid arrest or exile, a feat in and of itself, he was certainly aware that either of these could happen at any time. These factors would have caused even the most naïve of censors to pay careful attention to Erofeev's work for any sign of treachery.

Erofeev understood this fact well and was not one openly to oppose the government. As a child he had seen his own father arrested under the infamous Article 58, and he himself had been sent to an orphanage after his father's arrest. Through his father's arrest Erofeev had seen what happened to those who spoke out against the government. While it is easy to argue that Erofeev's haphazard lifestyle would lead one to believe that he had very little concern for his own safety, one must also consider that he had a child for whom he cared deeply according to the recollection of the author's friend and relatives.³⁵² In *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka's child (whom we never encounter) is the one character in *Moskva-Petushki* who remains pure throughout the work. While the child's mother stands in stark contrast to the pure Beatrice, it is the child in Erofeev's poema that is the representation of innocence. Looking specifically at Dante's punishment, there are many aspects of it that would have seem familiar to a Russian writer in the 20th century. Dante was given a death sentence in 1315 in absentia that was not lifted until after his death.³⁵³ Moreover, his son Pietro Alighieri was also included in this death sentence for his

³⁵² Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Introduction," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 5.

³⁵³ David Wallace, "Alighieri, Pietro," *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 20.

father's alleged crimes in Florence.³⁵⁴ It is then understandable that Erofeev would seek to protect his child rather than do anything that could potentially harm him.

Dante's reception in Russian literature focused on his work as a poet, his exile from Florence and his status as an outsider. Nikolai Minskii examined the similarities between Dante's life and exile from Florence and the life of writers and artists in 20th century Russia. In his 1921 article, "Ot Dante k Bloku," Nikolai Minskii explores Dante's banishment from Florence due to his political beliefs: "Может показаться непонятным, каким образом Данте осуществил свое обожествление перед лицом церкви и всего католического мира, не будучи обвинен в ереси и предан костру" ("It may seem incomprehensible how Dante realized deification by the Church and the whole Catholic world, avoiding accusation of heresy and trial by the fire").³⁵⁵ Later, Osip Mandel'stam would comment on Dante's kinship with Russian writers, and those how lived on the fringes of society. He described Dante as a fellow "raznochinets" and outsider in society because of Dante's exile from Florence.³⁵⁶ After his exile from Florence, Dante became resentful of his own countrymen, and this disdain emerges in *The Divine Comedy*. This sense of disdain appears in Dante's textual interactions in the eighth canto of *Inferno* with Filippo Argenti, a 13th century Florentine politician who supposedly slighted Dante. In the text the reader feels Dante's deep hatred for Argenti as an individual and for his political affiliation. Kleinhenz describes Dante's disdain for the class Argenti

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Nikolai Minskii, "Ot Dante k Bloku," *Sovermennye zapiski*, VII. (1921) [accessed online November 11, 2013].

³⁵⁶ Clare Cavanaugh, *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 211.

represents as “Filippo serves here as a representative of that new class of Florentines, those whom Dante held responsible for the new social and political problems of his native city. And the Pilgrim’s reaction here would have been directed more toward the social class than toward the individual.”³⁵⁷ Erofeev, like other Russian writers in the 20th century, surely was able to relate to Dante’s struggles as a writer in a city that seemed to be hostile to him.³⁵⁸

Both Dante and Erofeev draw upon previous works of literature and timeless themes, and use a purposeful misreading of the previous works to add a new interpretation to them. This deliberate misreading of previous works of literature allows both writers to reconstruct and explore the themes of quest, repentance, and death. In examining these themes *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki* enter into a dialogue with previous works of classic literature. Dante, for example, engages with works by such writers as Virgil, Ovid, Aquinas, Statius and Lucan, among others. Erofeev pushes this dialogue further by incorporating not only works of writers like Dante and his predecessors, but combining them with references to Russian writers, music, art, political and historical figures both from Russia and the Western world. This inclusion of a wide variety of references and a misreading of them serve multiple purposes in the two poems. In Dante’s work, William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman call attention to the author’s ability to engage a variety of texts in *The Divine Comedy*, and to use them in such a “complementary way” that offered a reflection on the previous works and yet contributed a new understanding

³⁵⁷ Christopher Kleinhenz, “Dante and the Bible: Intertextual Approaches to *The Divine Comedy*,” *Italica* 63, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 231.

³⁵⁸ Erofeev’s reaction to and complicated relationship with his own countrymen has received attention in the first chapter of this dissertation.

to those timeless themes.³⁵⁹ George Santayana notes several of the sources that Dante appropriates to create his protagonist's journey: "With Aristotle's *Ethics* open before him, with a supplementary hint here and there drawn from catechism, and with an ingrained preference (pious and almost philosophic) for the numbers three and its multiples, he needed not to voyage without a chart."³⁶⁰ With works such as Aristotle's *Ethics* examining similar themes, Dante had older works of literature to look to as guidance for his creation. Beyond providing guidance for the Dante pilgrim's journey, this relationship between the works serves to enhance both the pilgrim's and reader's experience. By incorporating both the Bible and works by such writers as Virgil, Dante gives his pilgrim's journey a path to follow as Dante the pilgrim seeks redemption. The protagonist often finds himself in situations or confronting figures where the figure or situation is a weakened form of itself or how such a figure was seen either in literature or in history. When Dante approaches the figure of Satan at the very center of Hell, he finds a weakened and inert version of Satan compared to the image of Satan presented in the Bible. Rather than the rebel angel that appears in Milton, Dante sees a muted and frozen Satan as trapped in Hell like any of its other citizens.³⁶¹ Dante's Satan is not the fearful prince of the underworld, but a figure held accountable for his crimes against God. Dante strips Satan of his power in *Inferno*, and shows his readers that Satan is as grotesque and pathetic as the other sinners that the pilgrim has encountered. Although the figure

³⁵⁹ William R Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, "Inferno XXXIII: The Past and the Present in Dante's Imagery of Betrayal," *Italica* 56, no. 4, Dante (Winter, 1979): 377

³⁶⁰ George Santayana, "Dante." *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante & Goethe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1910), 75.

³⁶¹ Allison Cornish, "Angels," *Dante Encyclopedia*, Ed: Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 44.

of Satan in *Inferno* is grotesque, and Dante's vivid description inspires revulsion, he offers no challenge to the Dante pilgrim.

Dante's inclusion of references from the classical world also allows him to reinterpret the older works. This new interpretation appears in Dante's treatment of *The Aeneid*. Dante's deliberate misreading of *The Aeneid* is another reason that Erofeev may have been drawn to *The Divine Comedy* as a purposeful misreading that allows the author to insert his own meaning into the work. Robert Hollander looks at the places in *Inferno* where Dante forces a misreading of the *Aeneid* and the poet's reasons for doing so. Dante's misreading of the *Aeneid* is interesting because he "treats the text with respect, yet alludes to it with a slipperiness that surely might offend a lover of *The Aeneid*."³⁶² Hollander's definition of misreading here refers to places in *The Divine Comedy* where Dante misquotes Virgil, and by doing so, gives Virgil's words new meaning. However, Dante's reasons for doing so are not to mock *The Aeneid* or its creator but comment on and rework the themes of *The Aeneid* so that "when Dante distorts the plain sense of Virgil's verses, however, the situation is both more disturbing and more interesting."³⁶³ When Dante offers a different reading of Virgil's words it does act in many ways as a criticism of Virgil as a guide and author in Dante's world, but it also shows a different side of Dante the poet. By including an intentional misreading of Virgil's work, Dante shows "to be capable,

³⁶² Robert Hollander, "Dante's Misreading of the Aeneid in Inferno 20," *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's The Divine Comedy*, ed. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Thompson Schnapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 77.

³⁶³ Ibid.

even in the midst of a poem of high seriousness, of a playful and ironic distancing.”³⁶⁴

In the Russian context, Zinaida Gippius employs the concept of misreading in her poetry to give new meaning to Dante’s quest.³⁶⁵ Gippius’s poem “The Last Circle” (“Poslednii krug”) shows a purposeful misreading of Dante’s words and his journey. Jennifer Presto draws attention to Gippius’s new interpretation of Canto I of *The Inferno* and the start of Dante’s journey in “The Last Circle.” Presto cites Gippius’s version of Dante, and his inability to tell whether he has stepped on a frog or a baby on the first steps of his journey:

Вдруг что-то запищало у него
Под правую ногу. “На кого
Я наступил? –И Данте рассердился—
Вот не было напасти! Лягушонка
Я раздавил, а то еще ребенка? (Stikh, 394)³⁶⁶

Suddenly, something let out a squeak
From beneath his right foot. “On who have
I stepped?” And Dante was irritated—
A frog, have I crushed, or else a baby? (Poem, 3924)

Presto cites this stanza as an example of how Gippius misreads Dante’s journey by noting that: “The Modern Dante’s ‘misstep’ on what he feels to be a frog or a baby may be read as a misreading of the ironic representation of souls as live bodies in

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 88.

³⁶⁵ Presto notes that Gippius was nicknamed “the white she-devil.” Jennifer Presto, *Beyond the Flesh: Aleksandr Blok, Zinaida Gippius and the Symbolist Sublimation of Sex* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 230.

Combined with her red hair, the description of Gippius seems close to the description of Venickha’s lover whom he describes as “...эта девушка с глазами белого цвета,-- белого, переходящего в белесый, -- эта любимейшая, и меньше, чем через белобрысая дьяволица.” Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki*, (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012) 34.

³⁶⁶ Zinaida Gippius, “Poslednii krug” quoted in Jennifer Presto, *Beyond the Flesh: Aleksandr Blok, Zinaida Gippius and the Symbolist Sublimation of Sex* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 233.

Inferno.³⁶⁷ Gippius's misreading of Dante's journey and reworking of the beginning of his journey allows for the poet to examine the relationship between the soul and the body on her own terms.

Like Gippius, Erofeev employs a purposeful misreading of *The Divine Comedy*. The misreading comes in the form of Venichka's reflections on his trip Petushki. Erofeev forces his protagonist into a misreading of *The Divine Comedy*, which causes Venichka to believe his trip to have a loftier purpose than merely reaching the small factory town of Petushki. Venichka's misreading of Dante's work is apparent in how Venichka attempts to reach Petushki by blindly following Dante's path without ever questioning if Dante's method of redemption can work in Soviet Russia. Venichka wrongly assumes that his path is the same as Dante's. He erroneously assumes that he will reach his end goal of Petushki if he follows Dante's well-established way to redemption, but Venichka never plays an active role in redeeming himself. In the same manner, Erofeev also employs a deliberate misreading of previous texts in *Moskva-Petushki* to show how Western models of redemption cannot apply to modern Russia.

Dante in 19th and 20th C. Russian Literature

The relationship between *The Divine Comedy* and 19th century Russian literature often focuses on Gogol's *Dead Souls* as a key creative appropriation of Dante's work. Writers such as Gogol found in *The Divine Comedy* both structure and key themes.

³⁶⁷ Jennifer Presto, *Beyond the Flesh: Aleksandr Blok, Zinaida Gippius and the Symbolist Sublimation of Sex* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 233.

While themes such as redemption, salvation and suffering are not uniquely Dantean, 19th century Russian authors such as Gogol and Dostoevsky looked to Dante's work as a depiction of one of the many ways in which a man can sin and be redeemed. Structurally, Gogol seemed to parallel *The Divine Comedy* in choosing the form of poema, which recalls Dante's epic poem through its generic emblem, which serves as a shorthand linking Erofeev to Gogol and Dante. The intended overall structure of *Dead Souls* as a tripartite, as Aleksandr Veselovskii pointed out, also gives the work a particular Dantean feel.³⁶⁸ John Kopper notes that Gogol used *The Divine Comedy* as a guiding metaphor in *Dead Souls*, and that Gogol felt a "deep sympathy with the ethical impulse of the *The Divine Comedy*."³⁶⁹

Although critics such as Donald Fanger argue *Dead Souls* is Dantean only on a superficial structural level and the "centrality of the narrator," other critics have shown that the relationship between *The Divine Comedy* and *Dead Souls* is more complex than a mere structural parallel. As Marianne Shapiro illustrates in her essay "Gogol and Dante," Gogol builds upon Dante's work rather than copying it.³⁷⁰ This building and reworking of Dante's texts in Gogol's occurs on both the structural and thematic levels. For Shapiro, *Dead Souls* is not a reinterpretation of *The Divine Comedy*, but a study in how Gogol was transformed by Dante's work. She notes:

Gogol absorbed the ethical content and the mystical longing, and most of all the will of the poem to redemption. For *Dead Souls*, like *Inferno*, is an anti-world, and Gogol was also aware, as he shows in Volume II, of the suspended state of shades in *Purgatorio* before their ultimate life is obtained.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Marianne Shapiro, "Gogol and Dante," *Modern Language Studies* 17, no. 2 (Spring, 1987): 37.

³⁶⁹ John M. Kopper, "Dante in Russian Symbolist Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, no. 1 (1994): 27.

³⁷⁰ Marianne Shapiro, "Gogol and Dante," *Modern Language Studies* 17, no. 2 (Spring, 1987): 39.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Shapiro's focus on the concept of the shades in both texts shows an interesting correlation between the two works. In Dante's world the shades are the figures that Dante meets along his journey through the Inferno. They were once human, but their sins and suffering in Hell have reduced them to an altered state that is inhuman. In *Dead Souls*, the shade comes in the form of the people that his narrator meets. As Shapiro points out the characters exist in a "wholly verbal world" where the characters that Chichikov meets are insubstantial and without depth.³⁷² The idea of shades and the movement from darkness the shades inhabit to light reflects on both the structure of the journeys and the idea of redemption in both *The Divine Comedy* and *Dead Souls*.

Although *Dead Souls* may be nineteenth-century Russia's most famous response to *The Divine Comedy* based on its themes and structure, it is not the only work of the time to do so. Dostoevsky was another Russian writer who was interested in Dante's approach to God and faith. Milton was, for Dostoevsky, too awkward in his approach to God.³⁷³ Ignat Avsey in his essay "The Karamazovs: A Paradigm in Dysfunctionality" illustrates why Dostoevsky was drawn to Dante's vision of God over Milton's: "Dante in his treatment of the unimaginable and unapproachable, the unfathomable, in other words—the Deity—deftly sidesteps all the traps Milton fell into."³⁷⁴ Avsey notes that Dostoevsky's approach to God is closer to Dante's vision rather than Milton's in that "this policy of fearing to tread

³⁷² Marianne Shapiro, "Gogol and Dante," *Modern Language Studies* 17, no. 2 (Spring, 1987): 41.

³⁷³ Ignat Avsey, "The Karamazovs: A Paradigm in Dysfunctionality," *Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Talent*. ed. John E Barnhart (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 110.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

where others might be inclined to rush in, to let silence speak where words would be too crude and might offend our sensibilities that Dostoevsky in turn followed in Dante's, rather than Milton's footsteps."³⁷⁵ This Dantean approach to God appears in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* with its "blueprint for sin-to-salvation trilogy."³⁷⁶ Dostoevsky would use Dante's work as one of the maps for redemption through darkness to light in *The Brothers Karamazov* as the brothers struggle with their identities and the idea of God and salvation. Yu. Levin's article "Klassicheskie traditsii v 'drugoi' literature: Venedikt Erofeev i Feodor Dostoevskii" shows the stylistic and thematic ways (i.e., exile, the descent into Hell and the subsequent ascension, etc.) in which Erofeev uses Dostoevsky's works in *Moskva-Petushki*.³⁷⁷ *Moskva-Petushki* with its allusions to both *Dead Souls* and Dostoevsky's body of work shows that Erofeev was aware of how other Russian writers examined and appropriated *The Divine Comedy* in their contemplation of the work.

The beginning of the 20th century saw a surge of interest in Dante's work in Russia. Although Dante and *Inferno* were known in Russia in the 19th century, the first complete Russian translation of *The Divine Comedy* by N. Golovanov appeared in Russia only in 1907.³⁷⁸ Poets' interest in Dante became cultlike in Russia before the turn of the century. The Symbolists' interpretation of Dante was split into two camps led by Briusov and Belyi. Briusov emphasized the symbolic nature of the work while Belyi took more of a historical approach to Dante and *The Divine*

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁷⁶ John M. Kopper, "Dante in Russian Symbolist Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, no. 1 (1994): 27.

³⁷⁷ Yuri Levin, "Klassicheskie traditsii v 'drugoi' literature: Venedikt Erofeev i Feodor Dostoevskii," *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 2 (1992): 45-50.

³⁷⁸ Lucy Vogel, "A Symbolist's Inferno: Blok & Dante," *Russian Review* 29, no. 1 (Jan., 1970): 39.

Comedy.³⁷⁹ It was Briusov who, according to John Kopper, gave Russian culture its first nuanced reading of Dante's work.³⁸⁰ His poems such as "Dante" (1898) and "Dante in Venice" ("Dante v Venetsii") (1900) showed Dante as a moral authority and as Kopper states a "statue of dogmatic conviction" when referring to Dante's ethics and morality.³⁸¹ Kopper notes that in "Dante v Venetsii" Briusov "disassembles existing Dante constructs and freely uses their component parts to create a new image of the poet."³⁸² Additionally, Briusov also used the image of the journey through Hell in his poetry and transposed it onto physical locations on earth. In "Dante v Venetsii" Venice has replaced the Inferno as the place the poet must traverse. In turning Venice into a Hell on earth, Briusov has shown that "traits such as unchangeability or the topography of Hell may be separated and reattached to other semantic units of the text."³⁸³ This play with the topography of Dante's Hell is something that later writers such as Mandel'stam and Erofeev will later use in their works.

In contrast, Belyi in his unpublished "The Basis of My Worldview" saw Dante as the embodiment of a culture in crisis:

There were many poets and mystics before Dante, but Dante stands for us as the forerunner of the Renaissance, not Ruysbroeck or Brunetto Latini. Why? Because Dante is characterized by a diversity of aspirations, because he is not just a mystic or a poet or a politician, but all three, wrapped up in one whole. This "whole" is culture. Dante is the creator of culture.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ John M. Kopper, "Dante in Russian Symbolist Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, No. 1 (1994): 28.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² John M. Kopper, "Dante in Russian Symbolist Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, no. 1 (1994): 28.

³⁸³ Ibid., 29.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 33.

Although Belyi's reading of Dante's work created a new image of Dante in Russian literature, his particular reading did not completely displace Briusov's reading of Dante. Poets such as Ivanov furthered the relationship between Dante and the Symbolists by combining Belyi's and Briusov's visions of Dante, and creating a new reading of Dante for poets like Ivanov and Blok. Proclaiming in "Kop'e Afiny" that Dante was not only a symbolist, but a Symbolist, for Dante's "vertical metaphor of *The Divine Comedy* [that] symbolizes for Ivanov the passage of artists out of and back into themselves in their transcription of spiritual events."³⁸⁵ References to Dante and *The Divine Comedy* became one of the major themes in Russian Symbolist writings during the early part of the century, and the appearance of Dante in Russian works only grew as time went on.

Aleksandr Blok was one of the first writers to break from this esoteric reading of Dante in 20th century Russia. Blok's initial reading of Dante's work came from Briusov's reading of Dante as a "fellow ageless poet", and as an "exemplary artist-moralist."³⁸⁶ After a trip to Italy in 1908-1909, Blok developed his own reading of Dante that differed from Briusov's and other Symbolists' reading of Dante. Although at first his interpretation of Dante's poetry seemed a combination of the ideas of Briusov, Belyi and Ivanov, Blok began to identify more with the biographical Dante rather than just seeing the poet as a source of inspiration. Kopper calls Blok's identification with Dante as one of the extremes of the Dante cult that developed in Russia during the early part of the 20th century. The

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 36.

³⁸⁶ John M. Kopper, "Dante in Russian Symbolist Discourse," *Comparative Literature Studies* 31, no. 1 (1994): 39.

“Dantification” of Blok, as Kopper calls it, refers not only to Blok’s own self-perception but also to other poets’ view of Blok. Poets such as Nadezhda Pavlovich, Sergei Gorodetskii and Nikolai Minskii would all note this turn toward Dante in Blok’s work and personal life. In *Ot Dante k Bloku* Minskii noted: “Both [Blok and Dante] stand like two giants at the frontier of two enormous historical worlds. Blok marks the end of the epoch, at the beginning, which stood Dante. He...is the last poet of the “old terrible world” and the first poet of the new socialist Russia.”³⁸⁷

In his poetry, Blok interpreted Dante’s work by reexamining the themes of redemption and personal damnation. While the poets of the early 20th century saw Dante as a mystic and prophet, Blok saw themes in Dante’s work that were much more damning, especially for the artist. Blok’s poetry and his reflections on Dante show that for modern man the idea of salvation was not a possibility.³⁸⁸ His 1909 poem “Canto of Hell” (“Pesn’ ada”) is an example of Blok’s interpretation of Dante and his bleaker view of the world and the artist. In “Pesn’ ada” speaker finds himself lost on a trail in the night surrounded by corpses. As he tries to navigate his way out of the hopelessness and misery that surrounds him, the speaker finds himself confronted with scenes of pain and ultimately views himself as being doomed rather than saved. At one point, he asks, “Скажи, за что томиться должен ты/И по кругам скитаться невозвратным?” (“Say, what do you have to languish about/And wander in irrevocable circles”).³⁸⁹ “Pesn’ ada” resembles Dante’s *Inferno* in name

³⁸⁷ R. Minsky, cited in Vogel, Lucy, “A Symbolist’s Inferno: Blok & Dante,” *Russian Review* 29, no. 1 (Jan., 1970): 44.

³⁸⁸ Lucy Vogel, “A Symbolist’s Inferno: Blok & Dante,” *Russian Review* 29, no. 1 (Jan., 1970): 44.

³⁸⁹ Aleksandr Blok, “Pesn’ ada,” *Stikhi—Zolotaya poeziia*, www.goldpoetry.ru [accessed online: February 24, 2014]

and in the speaker's encounters with the sinners, however Blok does not offer his hero the same chance at redemption that Dante does. Vogel notes that apparently "Blok has lost sight of his model and becomes, as it were, trapped in his own personal inferno."³⁹⁰ In contrast, Blok's poetry shows the poet's horror at the human condition and delves into the poet's feelings of guilt and regret at how he spent his own life.³⁹¹ In doing so, Blok shows that salvation and redemption are not promised even if past models offer paths to salvation.

Of all the Russian writers to incorporate Dantean themes into their works, it is Osip Mandel'stam, whose vision of a Dantean Hell seems closest to Erofeev's interpretation of Hell in the Russian context. Mandel'stam wrote extensively on Dante in both his creative and nonfiction works. His 1933 essay "A Conversation about Dante" ("Razgovor o Dante") examined the philosophy of *The Divine Comedy*, while his poetry commented on many of the same themes that Dante used in his work. As Marina Glazova remarks, "Although there are hardly any direct quotations from Dante in Mandel'stam's poetry, and only a few mentions of his name, traces of Mandel'stam's reading of *The Divine Comedy* are abundant."³⁹² In his poetic meditations on Dante and Hell, Mandel'stam paints a grim picture of Hell and the role of the poet in a Hell-like atmosphere. While Symbolists focused on Dante as esoteric, Mandel'stam's interpretation brought Dante back down to earth.³⁹³ Irish poet Seamus Heaney praised Mandel'stam's treatment of Dante in his poetry for

³⁹⁰ Lucy Vogel, "A Symbolist's Inferno: Blok & Dante," *Russian Review* 29, no. 1 (Jan., 1970): 50.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 282.

³⁹³ Charles Isenberg, "Dante in Russia," *Dante Encyclopedia*, Ed: Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 278.

Mandel'stam's ability to "bring Dante 'back from the Pantheon and back to the palate.'"³⁹⁴ Rather than seeing Dante as a lofty figure, Mandel'stam's description of Dante included words such as "bedniak" showing him to be more man than prophet.³⁹⁵ Cavanaugh highlights the similarities between Dante and the Jewish poet of Mandel'stam's 1930 poem "The Fourth Prose" as: "They are homeless. They are outcasts. They are forever on the move."³⁹⁶

Mandel'stam's creative relationship with Dante differs from that of the Symbolists in that Dante is not just a source of poetic inspiration. Instead Mandel'stam examines the bleaker themes of confusion and fear in *The Divine Comedy*, and gives those themes a decidedly Russian interpretation by placing them in the Soviet context. Clare Cavanaugh describes Mandel'stam's interpretation of Dante: "Dante implicitly becomes the patron saint of the poet-pariahs, the outcast whose writing catalyzes the unsanctioned tradition that generates true culture."³⁹⁷ Glazova notes that for Mandel'stam "ideas are never simply borrowed" meaning that Mandel'stam preferred to view his work as a conversation with Dante rather than a strict imitation of the former's work.³⁹⁸

Mandel'stam saw something Hell-like about Moscow and its structure. He saw Moscow, and in particular Red Square, as the 'central symbol of embodying

³⁹⁴ Stephanie Schwerter, "Heaney's Passion for Osip Mandel'stam." *Northern Irish Poetry and the Russian Turn: Intertextuality in the work of Seamus Heaney*, Tom Paulin & Medbh McGuckian (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 28.

³⁹⁵ Jane Gary Harris, *Osip Mandelstam: The Complete Critical Prose and Letters* (New York: Ardis Publishing, 1979), 405.

³⁹⁶ Clare Cavanaugh, *Osip Mandelstam and the Modernist Creation of Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 211.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁹⁸ Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 287.

power and control.”³⁹⁹ For Mandel’stam, in Glazova’s view, Hell means “the loss of Paradise and the parody of it.”⁴⁰⁰ As Glazova puts it, Hell is a place of “not only physical execution, but also the destruction of all civilization is exercised in this infernal reign. Art and culture are to be destroyed or frozen like sinners.”⁴⁰¹ Glazova points out that in his poetry, Mandel’stam likens Moscow to Dante’s vision of Hell by calling Moscow “kurva-Moscow”, a whore city, and notes Moscow’s own red walls that resemble the walls of the city of Dis although he never directly cites *Inferno*.⁴⁰² In much of his poetry of the 1930s, Mandel’stam superimposes Hell’s topography onto Moscow’s topography creating a frozen city that is full of pits containing the damned. Clare Cavanaugh notes the similarities between Mandel’stam’s Moscow and Erofeev’s Moscow: “The Moscow that Mandel’stam inhabits in these poems is as nightmarish and surreal as Gogol’s Petersburg or the Brezhnev-era Moscow of Benedikt Erofeev’s *Moscow Circles (Moskva-Petushki [1974])*.”⁴⁰³ She further notes the importance of motion and direction in both writers’ works: “As in Erofeev’s novel, the public transportation of Mandel’stam’s “bitch Moscow” (kurva-Moskva) guarantees passage only to perdition: “You and I will take the “A” to the “B’ line/To see which of us dies first.” (1931, #232).”⁴⁰⁴ Moreover, Mandel’stam’s version of

³⁹⁹ Stephanie Schwerter, “Heaney’s Passion for Osip Mandel’stam.” *Northern Irish Poetry and the Russian Turn: Intertextuality in the work of Seamus Heaney*, Tom Paulin & Medbh McGuckian (New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2013), 28.

⁴⁰⁰ Marina Glazova, “Mandel’stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel’stam’s Poetry of the 1930s,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 295.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Clare Cavanaugh, *Osip Mandelstam & The Modernist Creation of Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1994), 242.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Hell is ruled over by an easily recognizable Stalin who has forgotten his humanity and is just as cannibalistic as Dante's Lucifer.⁴⁰⁵

Mandel'stam's treatment of the poet and how the poet traverses Hell stands apart from Blok and Akhmatova in the way he sees the poet's role in the world. In Mandel'stam's poetry of the 1930s, Mandel'stam shows that artists are homeless vagabonds and thieves who are condemned to Hell:

Уж эти мне говоруны,
Бродяги-флорентийцы:
Отъявленные все лгуны
Наемные убийцы.⁴⁰⁶ (Новеллино 256)

Oh these bigmouths,
The Florentine vagrants
All Shameless liars
Hired killers.

Mandel'stam's poetry removes the artist from a higher level of morality or standard in society, and places him in the category of the poet-outlaw.⁴⁰⁷ He believes that an outstanding artist needed to escape from Dante's circles in order to stand apart from the crowd.

Но всех других опередит
Тот самый, тот, который
Из песни Данта убежит
Ведя по кругу споры.⁴⁰⁸ (Новеллино 257)

But he who will pass all others
Will be the one who
Runs out of Dante's circles

⁴⁰⁵ Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 298.

⁴⁰⁶ Osip Mandelstam "Novellino" quoted in Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 313

⁴⁰⁷ Charles Isenberg, "Dante in Russia," *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed: Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 278.

⁴⁰⁸ Osip Mandelstam "Novellino" quoted in Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4, (Nov., 1984): 285.

By continuing on arguments around the circle

His idea that the artist needs to escape from Dante's circles offers a different path to redemption for the artist. Mandel'stam's interpretation of *The Divine Comedy* paints a grimmer picture of the poet's path journey out of Hell than that of Blok or the Symbolists. It is this new Russian interpretation of Dante's journey that Erofeev further develops in *Moskva-Petushki*. His pilgrim resembles Mandel'stam's interpretation of the artist more so than it does that of the Symbolists' timeless guide version or even Dante's original pilgrim. *Moskva-Petushki* is, therefore, not simply a retelling of *The Divine Comedy* in the Russian context, but an exploration of what happens to a confused and fearful poet as he travels through this Soviet version of Hell on earth.

Finally, Anna Akhmatova's writings on Dante offer a different perspective on his work compared to the works of the Symbolists or her fellow Acmeist Mandel'stam. Rather than seeing Dante as a timeless guide or moral authority, Akhmatova's Dantean poems focus on Dante the pilgrim's experience traversing Hell, and the ability to describe that experience. Like Briusov and Mandel'stam, the topography of the Hell imposed on a city (Saint Petersburg for Akhmatova) plays an important role in her poetry. Susan Amert's book, *In a Shattered Mirror: The Later Poetry of Anna Akhmatova*, explores the relationship between Dante's *Inferno* and *Requiem*. Amert focuses on the Hellish nature of Akhmatova's time and compares it to Dante's experiences while traveling through Hell. She notes how both poets describe their missions as poets similarly, citing that both Dante and Akhmatova wished to preserve the memories of the dead through their works, and the

responsibility that comes with that mission.⁴⁰⁹ David Welles calls attention to other similar themes in both writers' poems, noting Dante's exile and humiliation are the focuses of Akhmatova's 1936 poem "Dante," and how Akhmatova saw herself in a similar position. Welles compares the similarity in treatment: "The persecution of Dante by the Florentine authorities thus becomes an allegory for the attacks on Akhmatova and others, and more broadly on Russian culture as a whole made by the Soviet state."⁴¹⁰ It is these themes that Erofeev will continue to comment on in *Moskva-Petushki* as his protagonist makes his way through Moscow's Hellish circles.

The reception of Dante in 20th century Russian poetry allowed for poets to explore both Dante as a poet and his poetry. As an historical figure, Dante represented a guide and a moral authority for the Symbolist poets. The ideas that Dante struggled with such as damnation and redemption were ideas that the Symbolists struggled with as well. Poets like Briusov and Mandel'stam played with the image of the Hell imposed on a real geographical location—Venice for Briusov and Moscow for Mandel'stam. It is these themes that Erofeev will appropriate and transfigure in *Moskva-Petushki*, as his protagonist makes his way through Erofeev's version of Russian Hell on his way to the edenic Petushki.

The Author as Protagonist

Venichka is on some level aware of the similarity between his path to Petushki and that of Dante's path to Paradise. At one point in the poem, Venichka alludes to the

⁴⁰⁹ Susan Amert, *In a Shattered Mirror: The Later Poetry of Anna Akhmatova* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 36.

⁴¹⁰ David Welles, *Anna Akhmatova: Her Poetry* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1996), 79.

similarity between his journey and that of Dante's: “не всякая комедия — божественная” (“not all comedies are divine”)⁴¹¹- using the Russian word “божественная” (divine) to describe his journey to the town of Petushki. His use of the word “божественная” forces the reader to note the similarity between the two works. It is interesting to note that Venichka describe his journey as “not all comedies are divine.” He is aware of the previous journeys to redemption before his own, but even as he acknowledges that his path to redemption is not divine nor is it like other journeys before his, Venichka fails to see that his relationship with his creator might be different than that of author-Dante and his protagonist. Venichka has erroneously assumed that his relationship with the author Venedikt Erofeev is the equivalent of Dante's relationship with Dante Alighieri.

Deborah Parker and Mark Parker note that Dante changed one of the conventions of the epic poem by making himself the hero of his poem. They argue that Dante “reorients the world of the epic by drawing his contemporaries and near contemporaries into roles previously filled by mythological figures or revered historical personages.”⁴¹² Dante has several reasons for breaking from the tradition of epics and making himself the hero of his own epic: it shows his intense interest in his own world, it creates mystery around those contemporary figures who he includes in his poem and it shows his own fears and apprehension.⁴¹³ From the very first lines of *Inferno*, the reader knows that the journey is personal. It is Dante who feels lost, and it is his physical and spiritual journey that will be the focus of the

⁴¹¹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 62.

⁴¹² Deborah and Mark Parker, *Inferno Revealed: From Dante to Dan Brown* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 28.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

poem. However, there are numerous distinctions between the Dante poet and the Dante pilgrim in *The Divine Comedy* that complicate the poem. Lawrence Baldassaro notes that:

Even in a retrospective narrative such as *The Divine Comedy*, which recounts the protagonist's conversion from a former self to a new, different self, the protagonist cannot be completely "other" than the author. Whatever corrective vision the author applies to his past, the duality of the writer and the protagonist remains relative, not absolute.⁴¹⁴

This duality means that at times it is difficult distinguish between the two voices, and can cause the reader to confuse the poet's biography with the pilgrim's journey.

The relationship between the writer and the protagonist is equally complicated in *Moskva-Petushki*. While Venedikt Erofeev is the creator, his creation Venichka bears his name just as the Dante pilgrim bears the name of his creator Dante Alighieri. As in *The Divine Comedy*, Venichka's journey is personal from the very start of his journey:

Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышал про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмельюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как *попало* - и ни разу не видел Кремля.⁴¹⁵ [emphasis mine]

Everyone says, the Kremlin, the Kremlin. I have heard about it from everyone, but I have never seen it myself. How many times (thousands of times) I've walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow, from north to south, from east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, yet I have never seen the Kremlin.

Similar to the first stanza of Dante's journey, the focus is on the protagonist and his struggle. The first segment of his journey, a total of two pages, contains forty first-

⁴¹⁴ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 253.

⁴¹⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 4.

person singular verbs, which serves to emphasize the personal nature of this journey. Even the brief bits of dialog that appear in the first segment of Venichka's journey are dialogs the character has with himself so that the protagonist is both the "I" and "you" in the conversation. Erofeev goes one step further than Dante, whose name is not spoken in *The Divine Comedy* until he reunites with Beatrice at the end of *Purgatorio*, by identifying his protagonist as Venichka on the first page of *Moskva-Petushki*. Erofeev's use of the diminutive form of his first name suggests an attempt at authorial distance between the creator and protagonist, but Erofeev undermines that idea throughout the poema by referring to his protagonist as Erofeev, Venedikt and Venia. Rather than creating distance between the author and protagonist this merges the two together: the protagonist has the author's first name, last name and his nicknames.

The connection between the author and the protagonist offers another complication in *Moskva-Petushki* when we consider the poema's ending. Lawrence Baldassaro points out that Dante's journey has taken place in the past, and he narrates the poem as someone who has already been redeemed:

Dante would have us believe that the protagonist is what he, the poet, once was but no longer is, thanks to the redemptive journey depicted in the poem. The poet has been to the mountain top and has been shown the truth; his vision has been clarified by knowledge and divine grace.⁴¹⁶

The outcome of the journey in *The Divine Comedy* contrasts with the outcome of *Moskva-Petushki*, which ends in the "death" of the protagonist. Dante writes from the position of someone who has successfully completed his journey, while Erofeev

⁴¹⁶ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 254.

offers a confusing and darkly humorous puzzle: How can the author write about his own murder? This serves as one of the ways in which we can distinguish between Erofeev the author and Venichka the protagonist. Erofeev is capable of surviving the outcome of *Moskva-Petushki* even if his character cannot. Venichka has naively assumed that his creator has the same goal of protecting the fictional Dante and leading him to redemption as that of Dante Alighieri. Venichka makes the error in assuming that his path, like Dante's path, will lead to Paradise and a reunion with his beloved because as the protagonist he is less informed than the author. Just as the reader can confuse the author for the protagonist, Venichka too makes this error. Baldassaro points to this confusion in *The Divine Comedy*:

Unless we are aware that there are two voices speaking in the poem, and unless we pay attention to the difference, we are likely to confuse fiction and biography. In doing so, we confuse the voice of the protagonist, who is caught up in the immediate drama of his journey, with that of the poet, who creates and orders the whole aesthetic and structural strategies that lead the pilgrim and perhaps the reader to the desired end.⁴¹⁷

This confusion is one of the crucial mistakes that Venichka makes on his journey. The blurring of lines between the protagonist and the author is problematic for Venichka because in relying on *The Divine Comedy* as a model of redemption, Venichka assumes that Erofeev, as his creator, will protect and guide him to redemption just as Dante successfully guides his protagonist to Paradise.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

Separation from the Author

Venichka's inability to distinguish his journey from the journey of the Dante pilgrim plays a critical role in the events immediately leading to his death. When Venichka reaches what he believes to be Petushki (really the Garden Ring and then the Kremlin), he begins to feel afraid as everything seems unfamiliar to him. Signs of his failure to reach Petushki and of his abandonment by his guide and his creator are already appearing around him, although Venichka does not seem fully aware of their abandonment. In his misidentified Petushki, Venichka stands at the door, knocking and hoping to be let in. However, this door, symbolic of the gates of Paradise, refuses to open for Venichka. He himself notes: "Мене, текел, фарес - то есть ты взвешен на весах и найден легковесным, то есть "текел"... Ну и пусть, пусть..." (Mene, tekkel, parsin, that means you have been weighed upon the scales and found wanting—this is, tekkel..So let it be, let it be...").⁴¹⁸ This phrase is a reference to the Book of Daniel. In this biblical story, the phrase "Mene, Tekel, Epharsin" ("Thou hast been weighed and found wanting") appears on the wall during the feast of Belshazzar. As no one at the feast can read the words, the king sends for Daniel to interpret them. Daniel reveals the meaning of the words, but the warning is too late for the king. He is killed that same night.

This phrase plays an important role in the attempts at redemption for both Dante and Venichka. Dante has gone through Hell, and has been redeemed ("That perfect pardon which is perfect peace").⁴¹⁹ Venichka has been found unworthy and

⁴¹⁸ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 134.

⁴¹⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 47.

denied entry to his edenic Petushki. However, these doors have a dual meaning that Venichka is not yet aware of. While Venichka believes the doors to be the gates to Paradise, they are in reality the gates of Hell. John Freccero in his book *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* notes the similarity between the famous inscription on Dante's gates of Hell "Abandon all hope, you who enter here"⁴²⁰ and Daniel's ability to read the phrase "Mene, Tekel Epharsin," by stating that Dante's bewilderment at seeing that phrase on the gates of Hell shows "the interpretive power of the prophet is contrasted with the incomprehension of the sinners who see the writing on the wall."⁴²¹ As Venichka wanders around Moscow, he is unable to read the writing on the wall. He has not been redeemed, and remains a sinner who cannot read his own fate. Venichka, still unaware of his return to Moscow, cannot yet tell that he has been judged and found wanting. Erofeev's citing of "Mene, tekel, parsin" and Venichka's focus on the scales not only shows how far Venichka is from Dante's model of redemption, but also clues the reader into Venichka's fate, even if the character has not come to terms with his fate yet.

The signs of Venichka's separation from Erofeev continue as Venichka's notes: "Все ваши путеводные звезды катятся к закату, и если и не катятся, то едва мерцают" ("All of your guiding stars are rolling towards the horizon, and if they aren't rolling, they're barely flickering").⁴²² The imagery of the guiding star barely glimmering hints at Venichka's abandonment by his creator. However, Venichka appears to remain unaware of this abandonment. As Venichka wanders

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversation* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 97.

⁴²² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 134.

around his false Petushki, fear begins to creep into him as he begins to realize that the situation is wrong: ““Не плачь, Ерофеев, не плачь... Ну зачем? И почему ты так дрожишь? от холода или еще отчего?.. не надо” (“Don’t cry, Erofeev, don’t cry...Why are you? And why are you trembling so much? From the cold and from something else, too? You don’t need to”).⁴²³ It is interesting to note that this is one of only a handful of times that Venichka refers to himself as “Erofeev” rather than “Venichka” or “Venia” in the text as he reassure himself of his identity and his relationship to his creator. He views himself as not merely Venichka, the comical protagonist of Erofeev’s tale, but a representation of Erofeev himself. The author should have a vested interest to protect his protagonist since he is Erofeev’s literary representation in *Moskva-Petushki*. Venichka wrongly assumes that his redemption and ability to reach Petushki reflects Erofeev’s own search for redemption. This assumption proves fatal for Venichka.

The parallel relationship between the author and protagonist in both journeys falls apart as soon as Erofeev the author casts off his character and allows him to die. Venichka’s separation from his creator grows as he nears the “end of his life.” As the four assailants approach Venichka, images of Judas’s betrayal of Christ fill Venichka’s mind: “И если б испытывали теперь меня, я предал бы его до семижды семидесяти раз, и больше бы предал” (“And if they were to torture me right now, I would betray him to the seven times sevenieth time and then some”).⁴²⁴ This image of betrayal takes on a special significance in the Soviet context. Venichka admits that he would readily betray Christ if he were tortured. Given the

⁴²³ Ibid., 135.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 134.

punishments that some of the 20th century's greatest Russian writers received for their art, Venichka's admission that he is capable of betrayal increases his creator's need to destroy him.

Venichka's separation from his creator continues to grow even as Venichka moves closer to what he believes is Petushki while providing another connection between Venichka's journey and Dante's journey. When Venichka finally realizes he is in fact not in Petushki but at the Kremlin, he says to himself: "Неисповедимы твои пути" ("Inscrutable are you ways").⁴²⁵ This phrase is significant for several reasons. The phrase is close to Romans 11:33-36 "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"⁴²⁶ The use of "пути" echoes the image of "путеводные звезды" ("guiding stars") from the previous segment of his journey, and relates Venichka's journey to that of Dante's through the images of the star. The image of the star appears in the Canto I lines 37-39 of *Inferno* just after Dante encounters the panther that blocks his path and just before Dante encounters Virgil:

It was the hour of morning
when the sun mounts with those stars
that shone with it when God's own love⁴²⁷

Dante has realized, at this point, that he is not on the right path in his life, but he is unsure of what to do to correct his path. He is looking for the stars that will guide him to "God's love." The image of the star and a guiding light is also associated with Virgil as Dante identifies Virgil on his path in Canto I lines 79-84:

⁴²⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 137.

⁴²⁶ Romans 11:33-36.

⁴²⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 5.

'Are you then Virgil, the fountainhead
that pours so full a stream of speech?'
I answered him, my head bent low in shame

'O glory and light of all other poets,
let my long study and great love avail
that made me delve so deep in your volume.'⁴²⁸

Dante identifies Virgil as a source of light. As Virgil explains his mission to Dante, Virgil becomes Dante's guiding light: the one that will lead him away from his dark path to the light. The stars are also the subject of the last line, line 139 of Canto XXXIV, of *Inferno* as Dante and Virgil leave the very center of Hell: "Thence we came forth, to see the stars again."⁴²⁹ They stand as a symbol of Dante's successful journey through Hell and his ability to reach the next stage of his redemption. Venichka's search for both his path and his guiding search is evidence of both his awareness of the Dantean model and his inability to see that his path is wrong.

Although he is currently unaware of it, Venichka has lost both his path and his guides. Venichka's path is inscrutable or unknown, and should remind the reader of the famous opening lines of *Inferno*. While both protagonists start out being lost their respective work by being lost, only Venichka's path remains unknown at the end of his journey. Although Venichka acknowledges that his path is lost, he seems incapable of interpreting this condition as a warning sign that his path to redemption does not follow the other models. His state of being lost also ties in with his horror at finding himself at the Kremlin rather than Petushki or Kursk Station:

Не Петушки это, нет! Кремль сиял передо мною во всем
великолепии. Я хоть и слышал уже сзади топот погони, - я успел
подумать: "Я, исходивший всю Москву вдоль и поперек, трезвый

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 635.

и с похмелюги, - я ни разу не видел Кремля, а в поисках Кремля всегда попадал на Курский вокзал. И вот теперь увидел - когда Курский вокзал мне нужнее всего на свете!"⁴³⁰

No, this is not Petushki. The Kremlin shone before me in all its glory. Although I heard the clattering of the chase behind me, I had time to think: "I, who have traveled, the entire length and width of Moscow, both sober and hung over, I've never seen the Kremlin, and I went searching for it, yet always ended up at the Kursk Station. And there now I see-when the Kursk Station is more necessary to me than anything on earth.

Venichka's desire to return to the Kursk Station if he is not in Petushki once again separates him from the Dantean path. Although Dante travels through the circles of Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise, his trajectory is linear with a definitive end goal (i.e., Paradise). Venichka's desire here is to now complete the circuit so that he can begin his journey again. He is once again moving further away from the model without being aware of it.

Venichka's separation from his creator and from the Dantean model of redemption becomes more physical in this penultimate segment of his journey. As the quartet of henchmen attack Venichka he describes the pain as: "Мне показалось, что я раскололся от боли, кровь стекала по лицу и за шиворот" ("It seemed to me that I split in two from the pain, blood streamed down my face and under my collar").⁴³¹ Venichka feels as though he is being split in two from the pain of the attack, creating a physical representation of the act of separation. Although the attack continues, Venichka is eventually able to get away, noting that he "я вырвался и побежал" ("I broke away and ran").⁴³² This images of "splitting" and

⁴³⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 137.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

“breaking” hint at Venichka’s separation from his creator and the models of redemption he has been following. Venichka separation from the author takes on a doubling aspect as Venichka notes that he stops for “На два мгновения я остановился” (“I stopped for two minutes”)⁴³³ even though he is aware that time and speed are of the essence if he is to survive the attack. The doubling theme here is reinforced as Venichka asks himself twice which way he should run before deciding:

...чтобы лучше видеть сначала посмотрел на Минина, потом на Пожарского, потом опять на Минина куда? в какую сторону бежать? Где Курский вокзал и куда бежать? раздумывать было некогда - я побежал в ту сторону, куда смотрел князь Дмитрий Пожарский...”⁴³⁴

...in order to better see. First I looked at Minin and then at Pozharskii and then again at Mini—where? In which direction should I run? Where is the Kursk Station and where should I run? There was no time to think about it: I started to run in the direction that Prince Dmitrii Pozharskii was looking.

As Venichka approaches his final destination he is split from both his creator, guideless and uncertain of his path. He is as far away from the Dantean model of redemption at this point as he could possibly be as he finds himself without a guide and on the wrong path.

The final segment of Venichka’s fatal journey titled “Moscow/Petushki. An Unidentified Front Hallway” begins with an insight into the creator/creation relationship: “Все-таки до самого последнего мгновения, я еще рассчитывал от них спастись” (“Still, until the last moment, I was still counting on saving

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

myself").⁴³⁵ Venichka's certainty that he will be able to save himself is interesting in that he, up until this point, has been relatively passive in his journey to Petushki. From his inability to find the very center of Moscow to traveling to Petushki on a train, a form of mass transportation, Venichka has not been an active participant in his own redemption. Venichka's confidence that he will be able to save himself comes from his reliance on *The Divine Comedy* as a model. In Canto XXIII lines 37-42 of *Inferno*, Dante is pursued by demons and Virgil steps in to save Dante from his pursuers:

My Leader in a moment snatched me up
Like a mother who, awakened by the hubbub
Before she sees the flames that burn right near her,

snatches up her child and flees,
and, more concerned for him than for herself,
does not delay to put a shift on.⁴³⁶

Virgil is invested in saving the Dante pilgrim not only because he is tasked with guiding Dante through Hell by Beatrice, but because the Dante poet is invested in seeing his literary representation be redeemed. As readers, we see Dante grow spiritually throughout his journey. This growth allows Dante to become his new redeemed self; a more contemplative version of himself. Erofeev the author has no such qualms. His survival on the written page does not guarantee his survival in the Soviet state. In fact, as Venichka notes earlier on, he could very well be seen as a traitor to his creator if he survives and reaches Petushki. As Erofeev's artistic representation of himself in *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka is certain that he will reach

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴³⁶ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 421.

redemption just as previous models like *The Divine Comedy* set forth as precedence. Stewart Farnell in *The Political Ideas of The Divine Comedy* comments on the distinction between the two Dantes in the text—“Dante-author” and “Dante-protagonist” and the role each plays in the text. Farnell shows that the Dante-author is responsible for narrating the text and offering both warning and encouragement to his reader while the Dante-pilgrim is the one that experiences the redemptive journey.⁴³⁷ Farnell states: “This Dante-Author looks down from his perch at the actions of the other Dante, Dante-Pilgrim, as the latter makes his way imperfectly along his course.”⁴³⁸ In *The Divine Comedy* these two versions of Dante coexist without inhibiting each other.

In contrast, Venichka, the protagonist of Venedikt Erofeev's story, is unable to feel the distinction between the two Dantes, and therefore cannot separate himself from his creator. Based upon Dante's journey to redemption, and the similarities that even Venichka can feel, he has the reasonable expectation that he too will reach Paradise. As he approaches the Pokrov station, he tells himself: “Покров! Город Петушинского района! Три остановки, а потом-- Петушки! Ты на верном пути, Венедикт Ерофеев” (“Pokrov! A city in the Petushki region. Three stops and then—Petushki! You’re on the right path, Venedikt Erofeev”).⁴³⁹ His Dantean vocabulary here speaks to his belief that his journey is like Dante’s journey. Venichka firmly believes that he will reach Petushki even when the physical

⁴³⁷ Stewart Farnell, *The Political Ideas of The Divine Comedy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 24.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 121.

evidence shows otherwise. Just after he assures himself that he is on the “right path” he begins to see proof that he is not headed in the right direction:

Вот - я сейчас отъезжал от станции Покров. Я видел надпись "Покров" и яркие огни. Все это хорошо - и "Покров", и яркие огни. Но почему же они оказались справа по ходу поезда?.. Я допускаю: мой рассудок в некотором затмении, но ведь я не мальчик, я же знаю, если станция Покров оказалась справа, значит - я еду из Петушков в Москву, а не из Москвы в Петушки!.. О, паршивый Сфинкс!

Я онемел и заметался по всему вагону, благо в нем уже не было ни души. "Постой, Веничка, не торопись. Глупое сердце, не бейся. Может, просто ты немного перепутал: может, Покров был все-таки слева, а не справа? Ты выйди опять в тамбур, посмотри получше, с какой стороны по ходу поезда на стекле написано "..."⁴⁴⁰

Here I am now, pulling out of the Pokrov Station. I saw the word “Pokrov” and the bright lights. All of this is good, both “Pokrov” and the bright lights. But why did they appear on the right side of the train? I admit that my mind is in a certain eclipse, but I’m not a boy, I do realize that if the Pokrov Station appears on the right side it means I’m going from Petushki to Moscow and not from Moscow to Petushki! Oh, trickster Sphinx!

I was dumbfounded and darted around the car, but as luck would have it there was not a soul on it. “Hold on, Venichka, don’t be in such a hurry. Stupid heart, don’t beat. Just maybe you’re a little a confused: maybe Pokrov was on the left instead of the right?” Go out into the hallway again and get a better look t which side of the train the glass was marked on.

Although Venichka sees evidence that his path is incorrect, he refuses to consider that he is headed in the wrong direction. He convinces himself that he is remembering previous journeys incorrectly, and that he is still on the right path despite all evidence to the contrary.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

When he tries to calm himself later on the Petushki Platform, and reassert his certainty of survival, he speaks to himself in the second person: "О, ничего, ничего, сердце через час утихнет, кровь отмоется, лежи, Веничка, лежи до рассвета, а там на Курский вокзал и... Не надо так дрожать, я же тебе говорил, не надо" ("Oh, it's nothing, nothing, your heart will be quiet in an hour, and you will wash off the blood, like down Venichka, lie down until dawn, and then you'll go to there to the Kursk Station and...You don't need to tremble like that, I've already told you, you don't have to...").⁴⁴¹ However, Venichka quickly comes to the realization that he has been abandoned by both the angels and his creator as he hears the approaching murderers, and he once again invokes the *Talife cumi*:

"Талифе куми, то есть, встань и приготовься к кончине... Это уже не талифе куми, я все чувствую, это лама савахфани, как сказал Спаситель... То есть: "Для чего, Господь, Ты меня оставил?" Для чего же все-таки, Господь, ты меня оставил?⁴⁴²

Talife cumi, that is, arise and get ready for death...This isn't talife cumi, I feel that it is lama savahfani, as the Savior said....That is... "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

Venichka's change in how he views his situation from the *Talife cumi* to that of the lama savahfani⁴⁴³ reinforces this idea of abandonment by the paternal/creator figure. In desperation Venichka cries out for the angels, whom he believes to be the guides that his creator has placed in text to guide him to Petushki: "Ангелы небесные, они подымаются! что мне делать? что мне сейчас сделать, чтобы не умереть? ангелы!" ("Heavenly angels, they're coming for me, what do I do? What

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark 15:34

should I do now in order to not die? Angels!”).⁴⁴⁴ Despite his pleas for help, and the angels’ subsequent laughter, Venichka does not seem surprised by their betrayal. Instead in his final moments he recalls the story of a man cut in half by a train and the upper half of his body continues to live for a few brief moments. This image of the half man combined with Venichka’s previous feeling of being split in two from the pain reinforces the idea of the creation being separated from the creator.

Venichka’s supposed surprise at his fate comes from his inability to separate himself from his models, both his parody of *The Divine Comedy* and his status as a picaresque character. As Karen Ryan notes in *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study*: “a picaresque text is characteristically left open and death is usually excluded as a possible ending since the picaro himself usually narrates his life story.”⁴⁴⁵ On one level Venichka’s realization that he is going to die comes as a complete surprise to him even after he has been pursued by the four assailants since his return to Moscow:

А когда я их увидел, сильнее всякого страха (честное слово, сильнее) было удивление: они, все четверо, подымались босые и обувь держали в руках - для чего это надо было? чтобы не шуметь в подъезде или чтобы незаметнее ко мне подкрасться? не знаю, но это было последнее, что я вспомнил. То есть вот это удивление.⁴⁴⁶

But when I saw them, stronger than any fear, was surprise. All four of them were barefoot as they climbed the stairs. Why did they need to do this? As so not to make any noise in the hallway or in order to they sneak up on me unnoticed? I don’t know, but this is the last thing I recall. That is the surprise of it.

⁴⁴⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 138.

⁴⁴⁵ Karen Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 139.

However, Venichka also tells his reader that his surprise partially comes from the four murderers sneaking up on him. It is the last thing he can remember before his murder and suggests that despite the direness of his situation, he still expected to survive the encounter.

In discussions about the ending of *Moskva-Petushki*, the identities of Venichka's four killers have been an area of differing opinions. David Bethea suggests that four killers represent the four horsemen of the Apocalypse coming for Venichka at the end of his days.⁴⁴⁷ In contrast, Paperno and Gasparov hypothesize that the four murderers are an allusion to Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.⁴⁴⁸ While evidence for both arguments have a strong basis in *Moskva-Petushki*, as readers we do know the identity of one of Venichka's murderers: his own creator. This recognition might be why Venichka has such a strong reaction to the fourth murderer in particular. The fourth murderer is marked in the text because he is only one that Venichka is able to identify. When Venichka first encounters the four at Petushki/Sadovy Circle, he says: "А четвертый был похож... впрочем, я потом скажу, на кого он был похож" ("But the fourth one looked like...well, later I'll tell you who the fourth one resembled").⁴⁴⁹ Venichka seems to know whom the fourth one resembles, based on his remark, "на кого он был похож," but seems either too surprised by the identity of the fourth person, or in denial that the identity of the fourth murderer is his own creator.

⁴⁴⁷ David Bethea, *The Shape of the Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton: University of Princeton, 1989), 275.

⁴⁴⁸ I.A. Paperno and B.M. Gasparov, "Vstan' i idi," *Hierosolymitana* (Vol V-VI. 1981): 390.

⁴⁴⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 135.

When Venichka can no longer outrun the four henchmen, he again pays special attention to the fourth killer: “И вот тут случилось самое ужасное один из них, с самым свирепым и классическим профилем, вытащил из кармана громадное шило с деревянной рукояткой; может быть, даже не шило, а отвертку или что-то еще - я не знаю” (“And then the worst thing of all happened: the one with the most ferocious and classic profile pulled out a huge awl with a wooden handle; maybe not even an awl, but a screwdriver or something else, I don’t know”).⁴⁵⁰ Ryan and Geisser-Schnittmann both suggest that this particular murderer could in fact be Stalin based on the evidence that the awl is a reference to Stalin’s shoemaker father.⁴⁵¹ However, Venichka admits that he is not sure what the precise murder weapon is and that it could very well be a screwdriver or something else entirely. What makes this more interesting is the site at which Erofeev chooses to end the poem: “На кабельных работах в Шереметьево, осенью 69 года” (“On cable work in Sheremetievo, Autumn, 1969”).⁴⁵² This is Erofeev’s way of reminding the reader of his background as a manual laborer, someone who would be familiar with the tool that killed his creation. The inclusion of the unknown tool also refers back to Venichka’s prediction of how he would enter Petushki in the Reutovo-Nikol’skoe section of his journey:

"Да и что я оставил - там, откуда уехал и еду? Парудохлых
 портянок и казенные брюки, плоскогубцы и рашпиль, аванс и
 накладные расходы, - вот что оставил! А что впереди? что в
 Петушках на перроне? - а на перроне рыжие ресницы,
 опущенные ниц, и колыхание форм, и коса от затылка до попы. А

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁵¹ Karen Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire: A Genre Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 83.

⁴⁵² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 139.

после перрона - зверобой и портвейн, блаженства и корчи, восторги и судороги. Царица небесная, как далеко еще до Петушков!"⁴⁵³

And what did I leave behind there when I left? A pair of mangy socks, a pair of work pants, pliers and a rasp, advanced pay and overhead spent—that's what I left behind. And what's ahead? What's in Petushki on the platform? Red lashes, lowered, and swaying forms and a braid from top to bottom. And after the platform, St. John's wort, and port and bliss and cramps, convulsions and delights. Heavenly Queen, how far is it still to Petushki!

Venichka previously believed when he entered Petushki all that he would leave behind is a pair of pliers and a rasp.⁴⁵⁴ This vision of entering Petushki contrasts with Venichka's brutal death in an unknown hallway in the center of Erofeev's Russian Hell by the unknown tool. What he believed he would be leaving behind serves as the instrument of his own death. An almost rapture-like experience has been exchanged for a violent and terrifying death. If Erofeev inserted himself into the text as Venichka's murderer, that would explain why Venichka found the one henchman in particular to be the fiercest, and why Venichka was easily able to recognize that particular killer.

Despite his apparent surprise at the appearance of the four murderers, Venichka has already predicted that his death would be soon when he reached Petushki-Station Square: "И если я когда-нибудь умру - а я очень скоро умру, я знаю - умру, так и не приняв этого мира, постигнув его вблизи и издали, снаружи и изнутри, постигнув, но не приняв"⁴⁵⁵ ("And if I'm ever going to die and I'm going to die very soon, I know I'll die as I am, not accepting this world,

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵⁴ a long pointed file with a handle much like a screwdriver

⁴⁵⁵ This line also is a reference to Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

perceiving it close and from a distance, inside and out, comprehended but not accepting it").⁴⁵⁶ In predicting his own impending death, Venichka has unconsciously revealed the reason that he, as Erofeev's literary representation must die. In *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, Mark Lipovetsky notes that the death of the author in *Moskva-Petushki* is significant because: "it contrasts Venichka with his double, the author-creator with the relativistic world around him."⁴⁵⁷ Tumanov notes that Erofeev is emphatic in expressing the fact that Venichka is truly dead and that "his death appears an ultimate end: a point where everything including time and consciousness stops."⁴⁵⁸ This idea has a Dantean quality to it. Christine O'Connell Baur notes that one must decide how his future self will be different from his current self if he wants to survive.⁴⁵⁹ Failing to make this decision, O'Connell Baur reasons, means that the pilgrim remains trapped in his current inferno mindset rather than completing his journey: "The pilgrim must die, in part, to his old self in order for the poet to be born."⁴⁶⁰ Venichka, unable to change or learn from his past mistakes and journeys, must die so that Erofeev the author can live.

⁴⁵⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 139.

⁴⁵⁷ Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Post Modernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk: ME Sharpe Inc., 1999), 81.

⁴⁵⁸ Vladimir Tumanov, "The End of V. Erofeev's *Moscow-Petushki*," *Russian Literature*, 39, no 1. (1996): 96.

⁴⁵⁹ Christine O'Connell Baur, *Dante's Hermeneutics: Passages to Freedom in The Divine Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 110.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

The False Guide

The motif of the guide in both *Inferno* and *Moskva-Petushki* illustrates why Dante is able successfully to navigate through Hell while Venichka is unable to leave Moscow. Each protagonist encounters his guide early on in the text. When Dante first encounters Virgil in Canto I lines 64-66 of *Inferno*, he does not automatically assume the approaching stranger is approaching to offer him aid: "When I saw him in that vast desert,/Have mercy on me, whatever you are'/I cried, 'whether shade or living man!"⁴⁶¹ Dante does not assume that the approaching figure is there to help him on his journey, and reacts first with mistrust. As Virgil approaches in lines 67-69, he does not state his identity immediately, instead he gives Dante pieces of his biography: "He answered: 'Not a man though once I was./My parents were from Lombardy--/Mantua was their homeland."⁴⁶² It is Dante who guesses that the approaching figure is Virgil: "Are you then Virgil, the fountainhead/that pours so full a stream of speech?'/I answered him, my head bent low in shame."⁴⁶³ Once Virgil's identity is confirmed, Dante's faith in Virgil's ability to guide and counsel him never waivers throughout the entire journey. In Canto III lines 19-21, this trust appears as Dante and Virgil begin to make their descent: "And after he had put his hand on mine/with a reassuring look that gave me comfort,/he led me toward things unknown to man."⁴⁶⁴ In his essay "The Wrath of Dante" G. A. Borghese notes Dante's naivety in trusting Virgil so completely. He notes that Dante exhibits

⁴⁶¹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 7.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

“... [a] no less childlike confidence in Virgil.”⁴⁶⁵ In turn, we as readers of *The Divine Comedy*, also have no reason to doubt Virgil’s motives or his intentions on their journey. Even when Virgil has failures as a guide, such as his initial inability to gain entry to Dis in Canto VIII, Dante does not lose faith in him. Once identified, Virgil is treated with respect and affection in the poem, as Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Thompson Schnapp note: “As a character Virgil is accorded homage and treated with tender affection in scenes of increasing intensity: as father, mother, pedagogue and guide, he is granted sufficient authority to have been read as a personification of Reason by centuries of commentators.”⁴⁶⁶ Virgil as the personification of guidance and Reason proves himself to be steadfast and true to his mission of guiding Dante out of the Inferno and through Purgatory.

One way in which the two encounters resemble each other is the familiarity each protagonist has with his guide. Although Dante has no personal history with Virgil, who lived well before Dante’s time, he knows Virgil as the writer of *The Aeneid*, and admires him as a master of their shared craft. His familiarity with his guide comes through his admiration of him as a writer. Venichka’s familiarity with his guide is hinted at in his interactions with the angels. Although Venichka provides no background information on his angels, his repetition of the word “опять” (“again”) suggests that he has contact with the angels before. His familiarity with and his willingness to trust them as guides come from his previous contact with the angels prior to this journey. The second way in which these two initial encounters in

⁴⁶⁵ G.A. Borghese, “The Wrath of Dante,” *Speculum* 13, no. 2 (Apr., 1938): 184.

⁴⁶⁶ Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Thompson Schnapp, “Introduction,” *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante’s The Divine Comedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 2.

the text resemble each other is the implied divinity of the guide. Dante's admiration for Virgil, his appearance at a crisis point in Dante's life, and that his mission comes from Paradise, gives Virgil an implied sense of divinity. His mission to guide Dante through the Inferno and Purgatory is a divine mission as it comes from a source higher than Virgil himself. In his life on earth, he was a heathen, and cannot enter Paradise in his current state. Although Beatrice does promise that by guiding Dante, Virgil will be one step closer to obtaining Paradise, in his current form, Virgil is not actually divine. His mission in guiding Dante is divine, and Virgil is unwavering to his mission and a source of goodness to Dante. Venichka's angels also have an implied divinity to them that is placed upon them by Venichka. By labeling them as "angels" Venichka forces his audience to recognize their divinity, and the spirituality associated with such a label. However, like Virgil, the angels occupy a space of semi-divinity in the text. They are divine because Venichka grants them divinity in naming them, however Venichka, like his audience, learns that they are not actually divine when he encounters them and their terrible laughter at the end of his journey. Just as with Virgil, their divinity and status as guides is granted by the one that follows them (i.e., Dante and Venichka) rather than coming from an outside source.

This first meeting of Dante with his guide and the absolute trust that Dante has in Virgil as his guide is the subtext when the angels first appear to Venichka at Kursk Station Square where Venichka is coping with a particularly nasty hangover. Weakened and in pain from his hangover, Venichka's reaction to the angels mimics

that childlike trust seen in the relationship between Dante and Virgil. When Venickha begins to feel ill the voices of the angels first appear to offer advice:

Конечно, Веничка, конечно- кто-то запел в высоте так тихо, так ласково- ласково – зажмурься, чтобы не так тошнило. О! Узнаю! Это опять, они! Ангелы Господни! Это вы опять. Ну, конечно, мы, - и опять так ласково!...⁴⁶⁷

Of course, Venichka, of course, someone sang out on high, so softly so tenderly, tenderly – Squint so you won't feel so sick. Oh! I recognize them! It's them again! The angels of God! It's you again. Well, of course it's us, --and again so tenderly.

It is Venichka who identifies the voices as the angels of God, which coincides with Dante's first encounter with Virgil. Dante identifies Virgil as Virgil approaches him on the dark path just as Venichka is the one who identifies the voices as angels. The use of "опять" suggests that Venichka has prior knowledge of the voices, and are therefore familiar to him. It is his assurance that it is the angels "again" that encourages the reader to accept that the voices are not only angels sent from God, but that Venichka knows them through previous encounters and therefore trusts them. Although the reader knows that Venichka is a drunk and therefore not a reliable narrator, the reader can accept Venichka's assertion that these are kind and tender angels based on Venichka's familiarity with them and the Dantean subtext. Moreover, the angels do appear to serve as a moral force in the poem as they admonish some of Venichka's loutish behavior. As Venichka becomes more intoxicated and begins to go on angry tirades during the Novogireevo-Reutovo segment of his journey, the angels scold his behavior:

-Фффу!

⁴⁶⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 7.

-Кто сказал “Ффффу”? Это вы, ангелы, сказал “Ффффу! ”?
 -Да, это мы сказали. Ффффу, Веня, как ты ругаешься!!⁴⁶⁸

-Phew!
 -Who said “Phew!” Was it you, angels, who said “Phew!”?
 -Yes, it was us who said it. Phew, Venia, how you swear!!”

Their gentle admonishing of Venichka’s poor behavior reinforces the idea that the angels are supposed to guide Venichka to his paradise-like Petushki. However, upon closer examination of Erofeev’s word choice, it becomes clear that Venichka’s angels are not spiritual guides like Virgil, but instead are forces working to keep Venichka in his Hell and from his beloved Petushki. Almost immediately after the angels appear, they begin to offer Venichka advice on drinking. When Venichka laments that he cannot find alcohol the angels tell him:

-Да, мы знаем, что тяжело, -пропели ангелы. –А ты походи, легче будет, а через полчаса магазин откроется: водка там с девяти, правда, а красненького сразу дадут...

-Красненького?
 -Красненького, - нараспев повторили ангелы Господни.
 -Холодненького?
 -Холодненького, конечно...
 О, как я стал взволнован!⁴⁶⁹

-Yes, we know that it’s tough, -sang out the angels. –But once you get moving, you’ll feel better, and in a half hour the stores will be open: there’s vodka there after nine, it’s true, but they’ll give you red wine immediately.

-Red wine?
 -Yes, red wine-intoned the angels of the Lord.
 -Cold?
 -Of course, cold...
 Oh, how excited I became!

Venichka is certain that the angels are there to guide him on his journey to Petushki, however their role in Venichka’s journey is more sinister than he realizes. While

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

Virgil offers Dante spiritual counseling and a clear path out of Hell, these angels admonish Venichka's behavior as much as they offer advice to Venichka on how to continue his state of perpetual inebriation. The duality again shows the semi-divine state the angels have in the poema. They simultaneously tell him that he is drinking too much, yet they alert him to what time the store opens and what type of alcohol he can find there. One would assume that divine guides would not permit Venichka to drink, let alone provide him the relevant information needed to do so. This discrepancy should be a hint to both Venichka and the reader that the angels are not what they appear to be. Both Venichka and the reader should have doubts about the angels' ability to guide if this is the type of guidance they provide Venichka.

While Venichka finds the advice to be sound and useful, it should cause some hesitation in the reader. It should strike the reader as paradoxical that the God's messengers would encourage Venichka to pursue something that is actively destroying his life. However, Venichka's familiarity with the angels and his assertion that they are God's angels encourages the reader to trust in them as he does. When Venichka seeks the guidance of God and his angels as he considers purchasing a bottle of rosé at Moscow-Hammer & Sickle, he seeks advice:

Ну, раз желанно, Веничка, так и пей, - тихо подумал я, но все медпил. Скажет мне Господь еще что-нибудь или не скажет? Господь мочал.
Ну, хорошо.⁴⁷⁰

Well, if you wish, Venichka, drink---I quietly thought, but I took my time. To see if the Lord had anything else to say
But the Lord was silent.
Well, okay then.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

When Venichka seeks divine guidance both the angels and God remain silent. Venichka takes their silence to mean that they agree with his decision to purchase the wine. As readers we must ask ourselves why the angels have made the decision to remain quiet in this instance. As we see from their previous interactions the angels are not opposed to Venichka's alcohol consumption as they just encouraged it as a remedy for Venichka's hangover. Erofeev's choice to keep the angels silent keeps his readers oblivious to the true nature of the angels. Had the angels counseled Venichka here to take drink once again, the reader might question why the angels are giving him such disastrous advice. The silence of the angels allows Venichka to continue his descent into inebriation without causing the reader to consider the nature of the angels. At Nikol'skoe-Saltykovskaya, Venichka questions why the angels are silent as they do not answer Venichka when he implores them to: "Но почему же смущаются ангелы, чуть только ты заговоришь о радостях на петушинском перроне и после" ("But why do the angels hesitate as soon as you talk about the joys of the Petushki platform and after").⁴⁷¹ Yet, rather than placing the blame on his angelic guides or questioning why the angels do not provide guidance when he needs it, Venichka assumes their silence is because the angels are concerned for him:

Что ж они думают? - Что меня там никто не встретит? или поезд повалится под откос? или в Купавне высадят контролеры? или где-нибудь у 105-го километра я задремлю от вина, и меня, сонного, удавят, как мальчика? или зарежут, как девочку? Почему же ангелы смущаются и молчат? Мое завтра светло. Да. Наше завтра светлее, чем наше вчера и наше сегодня. Но кто

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 36.

поручится, что наше послезавтра не будет хуже нашего позавчера?⁴⁷²

What are they thinking? That there's no one there to meet me? Or that the train will jump the rail? Or that the ticket inspector will toss me off in Kupavna? Or that somewhere around kilometer 105 I'll get sleepy from the wine and doze off and be strangled like a young boy or slaughtered like a little girl? Is that why the angels are bothered and silent? My tomorrow is bright. Our future is brighter than our yesterday and our today. But who can guarantee that our day after tomorrow will not be worse than our day before yesterday?

It never occurs to Venichka that the angels might not be what they appear to be, and so his doubts center around his own faults rather than the dubious nature of his guides. The angels once again hint at their duplicitous nature at the Saltykovskaya-Kuchino marker. The angels question the amount of alcohol that Venichka has consumed since their last meeting:

-Зачем ты все допил, Веня? Это слишком много...

Я от удушья едва сумел им ответить:

-Во всей земле...во всей земле, от самой Москвы и до самых Петушков нет ничего такого, что было бы для меня слишком многим...И чего вам бояться за меня, небесные ангелы?

-Мы боимся что ты опять...

-Что я опять начну выражаться? О, нет, нет...⁴⁷³

-Why did you drink it all, Venia? It's too much.

I was hardly able to gasp out an answer to them.

-In the whole world...in the whole world all the way from Moscow to Petushki there is nothing that would be too much for me...And what are you afraid of for me, heavenly angels?

We are afraid that you will once again...

-That I'll once again start cursing? Oh, no, no...

The entire scene is one of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Venichka never allows the angels to explain themselves, and assumes that he knows how they

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 39.

are going to finish their sentences. Each time he guesses incorrectly, yet he never insists on further clarification nor does he doubt the angels' motives. Venichka believes their fear to be that he will start cursing again, yet he is incorrect. The angels correct him, and explain that they are afraid that he will not reach "there" again: "-Нет, мы не глупые, мы просто боимся, что ты опять не доедешь" ("No, we are not foolish, we're just afraid that once again you won't get there.").⁴⁷⁴ Again a miscommunication occurs. Venichka assumes that the angels are talking about Petushki when they express concern that he will not get "there." The angels go on to finish their thoughts a few lines later, confessing that they are afraid that he will not get to him, and he won't get any nuts. Their concern might strike the reader as confusing. Who is the "he" the angels fear he will not reach? However, Venichka continues his rambling without asking for clarification from the angels despite being aware on some level that it is strange for the angels to become troubled when he talks about Petushki.

Within this same interaction the unholy nature of the angels begins to reveal itself. Venichka is well on his way to Petushki at this point in his journey, and he asks the angels if they will follow him into Petushki:

А вы скажите, ангелы, вы будете со мной до самых Петушков?
Да? Вы не отлетите?"
О нет, до самых Петушков мы не можем...Мы отлетим, как только ты улыбнешься...Ты еще ни разу сегодня не улыбнулся, как только улыбнешься в первый раз – мы отлетим... и уже будет покойны за тебя.⁴⁷⁵

But tell me, angels, you'll be with me right up to Petushki? Right? You won't fly off?

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

Oh, no, we cannot go right up to Petushki...We'll fly off as soon as you smile...you still haven't smiled once today, as soon as you smile for the first time we'll be off.

At first glance it appears as though the angels are good-natured guides to Venichka. They only want to see their unhappy charge smile, but the interaction should cause concern in both Venichka and the reader. If the angels are angels of God, as Venichka calls them (and which the angels do not openly deny) then why can they not enter Paradise, and why does Venichka not question this?

Venichka never truly questions the role of the angels on his path to Petushki because the relationship between Venichka and his angels mimics that of Dante and Virgil. If Venichka believes that his path to redemption is like Dante's journey, then it would strike neither Venichka nor the reader as odd that the angels cannot enter Petushki since Virgil, as a pagan who died before the birth of Christ, cannot enter Paradise. That role is reserved for the sinless Beatrice who resides in Paradise just as Venichka's lover resides in Petushki. Venichka's naivety in not questioning the angels as to why they cannot enter Petushki then is not without precedence. If Venichka is following *The Divine Comedy* as a model of redemption then he is aware of the fact that Virgil was incapable of accompanying Dante. Therefore, when the angels reveal that they can only go as far as the platform, he never suspects that the angels are less than the holy guides that they appear to be.

Venichka's faith in the angels' ability to guide him as Virgil guided Dante through Hell is not without basis even as the angels encourage unholy activities such as Venichka's drinking. Borghese points out that even when Dante acts in ways

that are less than heavenly, Virgil supports and counsels him rather than admonishing him. He points to three particular acts where Virgil indulges Dante:

...Virgil, the sweet master, indulges three times successively in the condemned passion: first when he thrusts back Argenti, cries, 'Away there with the other dogs!'; second, when he enthusiastically approves Dante's violent heart and promptly grants him the pleasure of contemplating the torture of Argenti; third, when he self-complacently admits that the resistance of the devils at the entrance of the city of Dis has made him angry.⁴⁷⁶

Venichka has no reasons to doubt the angels and their role as his stewards to Petushki even when they offer him what we perceive as bad advice because he has the ingrained knowledge that even Virgil has ignored Dante's unholy acts when guiding Dante. Who is Venichka to question the angels when Virgil encouraged Dante's violence on a journey Venichka admits was more divine than his?

Finally, Venichka has no reason to question why angels would guide him on his journey despite his less than noble lifestyle. Throughout *Inferno* Dante takes pleasure in seeing the torture of those who were against him in life. Borgese notes Dante's particularly savage instincts when he comes upon two of Hell's inhabitants:

...Dante, a traitor among traitors, thumbs his nose, so to speak, at friar Alberigo whom he cheated, or when shortly before, he has actually struck at Bocca degli Abati, pulling some locks of hair from his eternally frozen head. Rightly, another inmate of the penitentiary, hearing Bocca's howling, and unaware of the traveling poet, asks him: 'Who is the devil tormenting thee?'⁴⁷⁷

Based on the relationship between the traveler and the guide developed in *Inferno*, Venichka has no reason to think that he, a drunkard and vagrant is any less likely to be guided to paradise. He wrongly assumes that he is equally likely to gain access to

⁴⁷⁶ G.A. Borgese, "The Wrath of Dante," *Speculum* 13, no. 2 (Apr., 1938): 185.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

Petushki with the help of these angels as Dante was with Virgil as his guide. For Venichka this assumption proves fatal.

The Theme of Being Lost

One of the crucial ways that *Moskva-Petushki* can be read as a Dantean text is through its incorporation of the theme of being lost. Dante's quest for Paradise begins in *Inferno* with the stanza: "Midway in the journey of our life/I came to myself in a dark wood,/for the straight way was lost."⁴⁷⁸ Dante starts his journey uncertain of his way on both his physical and spiritual path. He is uncertain of how he came to be where he is, admitting to his reader: "How I came there I cannot really tell/I was so full of sleep/when I forsook the one true way."⁴⁷⁹ Erofeev's very first paragraph evokes that same sense of being lost:

Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышал про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмельюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало - и ни разу не видел Кремля.⁴⁸⁰

Everyone says, The Kremlin, the Kremlin. I have heard about it from everyone, but I have never seen it myself. How many times (thousands of times) I've walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow, from north to south, from east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, yet I have never seen the Kremlin.

Although this first paragraph sets up the humorous aspect of *Moskva-Petushki*, that someone living in Moscow would not be able to find the city's most famous

⁴⁷⁸ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 4.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁸⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 4.

landmark, it also foreshadows Venichka's similar inability to find his way both physically and spiritually throughout the trip.

One of the reasons that Dante is lost is his doubt in his faith. It is his journey through Hell to heaven, as well as his meetings along the way that realigns Dante to the right path and removes those doubts from his system of beliefs.⁴⁸¹ Venichka often finds himself unsure of the direction in which he should be traveling, despite being a passenger, and therefore a passive traveler for most of his journey. Several times in the poem Venichka attempts to orient himself, and confirm that the way he is going is the correct path. His attempts at reorientation occur several times in the first segment of his journey as Venichka tries to navigate through Moscow to the Kursk Station. As Venichka tries to find the station he tells himself: "Ну вот и успокойся. Все идет как следует. Если хочешь идти налево, Веничка, иди налево, я тебя не принуждаю ни к чему. Если хочешь идти направо - иди направо" ("Calm down. Everything is going as it should. If you want to go left, Venichka, go left, I'm not forcing you to do anything. If you want to go right, go right.").⁴⁸² And then shortly thereafter: "И куда-нибудь да иди. Все равно куда. Если даже ты пойдешь налево попадешь на Курский вокзал; если прямо - все равно на Курский вокзал; если направо - все равно на Курский вокзал. Поэтому иди направо, чтобы уж наверняка туда попасть. - О тщета" ("Go on- anywhere. It's all goes the same place. If you want to go left, you'll wind up at the Kursk Station; if you you straight-it's all the same-the Kursk Station; if you go

⁴⁸¹ Marina Glazova, "Mandel'stam and Dante: *The Divine Comedy* in Mandel'stam's Poetry of the 1930s," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 28, no. 4 (Nov., 1984): 318.

⁴⁸² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 6.

straight-same place—the Kursk Station. Therefore, go to the right so that you’ll wind up there for sure. Oh vanity!”).⁴⁸³

The two protagonists differ in their ability and willingness to orient themselves to the right path. Although Dante quickly comes up against challenges on his path such as the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf, he finds the correct path as soon as he meets Virgil. Once Dante is under Virgil’s protection, his path is clear and Dante no longer fears being on the wrong path or moving in the wrong direction. Unlike Venichka, Dante is certain that his journey is divinely ordained as Virgil explains to him at the beginning of his journey, so he moves with confidence and with absolute trust in his mission and his guide. Venichka, in contrast, is never entirely certain that he’s headed in the right direction because he has failed to reach Petushki on previous trips. Despite having his “angelic” guides in whom he seems unwaveringly to trust, Venichka often asks himself “Где Петушки?” (“Where is Petushki?”).

One of the reasons why Venichka is unable to orient himself to the correct path to Petushki can be explained through Dante’s treatment of sleep and waking in *The Divine Comedy*. The sleep helps move Dante forward in his journey through *The Divine Comedy*, while in *Moskva-Petushki* it reinforces Venichka’s sense of being lost. The themes of sleep and waking appear in both *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki*, and play a crucial role in each protagonists’ journeys from perdition to redemption. For Dante, sleep seems to reaffirm his faith in Virgil as a guide, while for Venichka sleep is what causes him to lose the right path on his way

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

to Petushki. Sleep functions in the opposite way in *Moskva-Petushki*. Rather than guiding or carrying Venichka closer to his version of paradise, Venichka blames sleep for the reason why he never reaches Petushki and is one of the reasons why he remains unaware that the train is headed back to Moscow. Venichka has an imagined conversation with God in the Orekhovo-Zuevo segment of his journey that reflects upon the role sleep has played in Venichka's erroneous path to Petushki:

И если там Господь меня спросит: "Неужели, Веня, ты больше не помнишь ничего? Неужели ты сразу погрузился в тот сон, с которого начались все твои бедствия...?" - и я скажу ему: "Нет, Господь, не сразу..." Краешком сознания, все тем же самым краешком, я еще запомнил, что сумел, наконец, совладать со стихиями и вырваться в пустые пространства вагона и опрокинуться на чью-то лавочку, первую от дверей...⁴⁸⁴

And if God should ask me: "Really, Venia, you don't remember anything more? Really, did you at once sink into that sleep in which all of your troubles began?" and I would say to him, "No, God, not immediately. At the very same corner of consciousness, I was also aware that I was able, at last, to get the better of the elements and to break through into the empty parts of the train and to fall on to somebody's bench, the one closest to the door.

In this imagined conversation with God, Venichka seems to have a subconscious awareness that his journey will be ill fated, and that he will not reach Petushki as planned. Sleep becomes the pervasive image of this segment of the journey and the beginning of the next segment. As the conversation with God continues in the next paragraph it has a decidedly Dantean feel to it:

А когда я опрокинулся, Господь, я сразу отдался мощному потоку грез и ленивой дремоты - о нет! Я лгу опять! я снова лгу перед лицом Твоим, Господь! Это лгу не я, это лжет моя ослабевшая память! - я не сразу отдался потоку, я нащупал в кармане непочатую бутылку кубанской и глотнул из нее раз пять или

⁴⁸⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 100.

шесть, - а уж потом, сложа весла, отдался мощному потоку грез и ленивой дремоты...⁴⁸⁵

And when I tipped over, Lord, I immediately gave myself over to the mighty flow of dreams and lazy slumber—oh, no. I'm lying again. I'm once again lying to thy face, Lord. This lie is not me, it's my weakened memory that lies. I did not immediately surrender to the flow, I felt around in my pocket for a bottle of Kubanskaia and took a sip five or six times—and only then, the shipping oars, did I give myself over to the mighty flow of dreams and lazy naps.

The two images of the “мощному потоку грез” (“mighty flow of dreams”) and “сложив весла” (“shipping oars”) link this portion of Venichka's journey to the end of Canto III lines 109-111 of *Inferno* where Charon takes Virgil and Dante across the River Styx as the image of the oars also appears in this stanza:

Charon the demon, with the eyes of glowing coals,
beckons to them, herds them all aboard,
striking anyone who slackens with his oar.⁴⁸⁶

This is also the first canto where Dante enters a sleep-like state as he passes out from fear after hearing the screams of the people in Hell: “And I dropped like a man pulled down by sleep”⁴⁸⁷ (line 136). When Dante awakens at the start of Canto IV, lines 1-15, he finds himself moved further along in his journey with his guide ready to once again lead the way:

A heavy thunderclap broke my deep sleep
So that I started up like one
shaken awake by force.

With rested eyes, I stood
and looked about me, then fixed my gaze
to make out where I was.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 53.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 67.

I found myself upon the brink
of an abyss of suffering
filled with the roar of endless woe.

It was full of vapor, dark and deep.
Straining my eyes toward the bottom,
I could see nothing.

'Now let us descend into the blind world
down there,' began the poet gone pale.
'I will be first and you come after.'⁴⁸⁸

This image of Dante being protected while he sleeps and arriving safely in a new location under the guidance of Virgil plays against the beginning of the next segment of Venichka's journey- Orekhovo-Zuevo-Krutoe. As Venichka is once again describes Petushki, he notes that "из кустов жасмина выходит заспанный Тихонов и щурится, от меня и от солнца. - Что ты здесь делаешь, Тихонов?" ("From the branches of jasmine emerges a sleepy Tikhonov, squinting from me and from the sun. - "What are you doing here, Tikhonov?").⁴⁸⁹ Tikhonov, Venichka's jester-like comrade bursting through the branches of jasmine seems to imply that Tikhonov is bursting through Venichka's dream, forcing Venichka into the waking world once again. While Venichka sleeps and dreams of revolution through the Krutoe-Voinovo and Voinovo-Usad segments of the train trip, he is moved forward in his journey, just not in the direction that he expects.

Conductor Semenych, as the ticket inspector on the train, is at least in part responsible for moving Venichka from one location to the next, just as Charon with his boat moves Dante from one circle of Hell to the next even when Dante is asleep and vulnerable. That briefly appearing Semenych is a corrupt figure, who takes

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 101.

vodka in place of a ticket, seems to imply that he is faulty guide rather than the watchful guardian of sleeping Venichka that Charon and Virgil are to the sleeping Dante. Unlike Dante, who is continually moved forward and in the right direction while he sleeps, Venichka's sleep moves Venichka in the wrong direction and prevents him from realizing that he is headed away from Petushki. As Venichka awakes from his dreams of revolution he exists in a liminal space: in his mind he is on a veranda looking for Petushki, while his waking self is still on the train. When Venichka fully wakes, he is disoriented, he asks his fellow passengers where they are, but is met with derision. This situation contrasts sharply with the reactions Dante has when he wakes from his various sleeps in *The Divine Comedy*. Dante's journey takes place in Hell as he views various horrors and suffering, yet Dante is not greeted as harshly as Venichka is upon waking.

The content of the dreams of Dante and Venichka provide a reason why Dante continually moves forward in his journey while Venichka moves in reverse. For Dante, sleep is a contemplative state that is associated with visions of the divine. When Dante does describe his dreams in *The Divine Comedy*, they are often scenes of Paradise and visions of his ascent towards Paradise. When Venichka dreams in the Orekhovo-Zuevo-Krutoe segment of his journey, his dream is one of war and revolution. While Dante's dreams are prophetic and move him closer to the divine, Venichka's dreams are about destruction and chaos.

The theme of sleep and movement appears again in *Moskva-Petushki* as Venichka nears the end of his journey. When he is confronted by the four murderers at Petushki/Sadovy Circle, he tells them: "я просто не доехал до девушки... ехал и

не доехал... я просто проспал, у меня украли чемоданчик, пока я спал" ("I just didn't reach my girl...I was going but didn't get there...I just overslept, they stole my suitcase while I was sleeping").⁴⁹⁰ He once again blames sleep for his inability to get to Petushki. As he moves closer to his demise in the unidentified hallway, he tells himself: "О, ничего, ничего, сердце через час утихнет, кровь отмоется, лежи, Веничка, лежи до рассвета, а там на Курский вокзал и... Не надо так дрожать, я же тебе говорил, не надо." ("Oh, it's nothing, nothing, your heart will be quiet in an hour, and you will wash off the blood, lie, Venichka, lie until dawn, and then you'll go to the Kursk Station and...You don't need to tremble like that, I've already told you, you don't have to...").⁴⁹¹ Venichka's idea that if he lies down and sleeps he will be transported to a better place is reminiscent of Canto IX of *Purgatorio* when Dante is transported in his sleep to the gates of *Purgatorio* by St. Lucia:

Whilom at dawn, which doth precede the day,
When inwardly thy spirit was asleep
Upon the flowers that deck the land below,

There came a Lady and said: 'I am Lucia;
Let me take this one up, who is asleep;
So will I make his journey easier for him.'⁴⁹²

St. Lucia has transported Dante in his sleep to the gates of Purgatory so that his journey through Purgatory can begin since he must go through Purgatory to be purified of his sins before he can enter Paradise. As Venichka nears the end of his life and journey, he tells himself to wash off the blood, which is essentially what Dante must do before being allowed to enter Paradise. It is also interesting to note

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁹² Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed. Matthew Pearl (New York: Modern Library, 2003) [online]

that Venichka does not say that he will lie down and then go to Petushki, but instead says that he will go to Kursk Station. For Venichka, Kursk Station is very much a liminal space between the hell of Moscow and the paradise of Petushki. He wishes to be transported to the safety of that in-between space to begin much as St. Lucia transported Dante to the gates of Purgatory.

Moscow as a Dantean Hell

Dante's vision of Hell and Erofeev's description of Moscow share several similarities in their physical structure and topography. Both places share a structure composed of rings: in *Inferno* the various levels of Hell and in Moscow the rings that make up the topography of the city. Dante's depiction of the inner circles of Hell in *The Divine Comedy* has the shape and structure of a city. In *The Divine Comedy*, the outer circles of Hell "[occupy] a 'moral' space completely lacking in geographical points of reference."⁴⁹³ Cantos I-VII show Hell to be a formless space, differentiated in space and geography only by the concentric circles. As the pilgrims move closer to the inner circles of Hell, the geography takes on a more concrete topography with features and attributes of a functioning city.⁴⁹⁴ By mirroring the topography of Dante's Hell Erofeev creates a version of Moscow that reflects the punishment that Dante envisioned for the worst sinners.

In *Moskva-Petushki* Erofeev further develops this new Russian interpretation of Dante's journey. *Moskva-Petushki* is, therefore, not simply a retelling of *The Divine*

⁴⁹³ Denis Heilbronn, "Dante's Gates of Dis & Heavenly Jerusalem," *Studies in Philology* 72, no. 2 (Apr., 1975): 168-169.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

Comedy in the Russian context, but an exploration of what happens to a confused and grief-filled poet as he travels through this Soviet version of Hell on earth. Erofeev superimposes the topography of Dante's depiction of the red walled city of Dis onto Moscow so that Moscow is a place of confusion for Venichka. He cannot successfully navigate the city, and continually finds himself in the wrong spot; mistaking the Kursk Station for the Kremlin and vice-versa. Although Erofeev gives very little in the way of description of Moscow in *Moskva-Petushki*, noting only a few marked places-the Kremlin, Chekhov Street and the Kursk Station, the city takes on a Hell-like dimension as it is a place that Venichka cannot escape from and ultimately is the place of his untimely demise. His journey begins somewhere in Moscow on the way to the Kursk Station, or as Venichka notes "Москва. На пути к Курскому вокзалу" ("Moscow. On the way to the Kursk Train Station").⁴⁹⁵ This vague location places him somewhere near the Sadovy Circle (Sadovoe kol'tso). Moscow's rings give the city an unintentional Dantean structure. Moscow's ring structure is reinforced at the end of the poem when Venichka finds himself on the Garden Ring. He finds himself returning to the rings of the place he tried to flee at the start of his journey. While Dante is able to move through the circles and break free of them as he lets go of the grief which plagues him, Venichka is trapped in the Hell-like Moscow.

⁴⁹⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 10.

Circles and Lines in the Narrative Structure

The specifics of Venichka's travel in terms of his linear and circular movement are detailed in the discussion of Radishchev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. However, there are aspects of Venichka's travels that pertain exclusively to *The Divine Comedy*, for example, how Venichka travels and in what direction. *The Divine Comedy* provides Dante's clear and distinct map for attaining moral redemption. As various maps of the *Inferno* show, not only do each of the three realms that the travelers pass through have a detailed topography, *The Divine Comedy* acts as a road map for a successful redemption. To be redeemed one must descend through Hell from the outer circles to the inner, ascend purgatory from the base to the top and finally paradise is the reverse of the path to Hell. This path parallels the inner journey a sinner must take: the acknowledgement of one's bad acts and sins, repentance/determination to change, and the resolve to change and lead a good life. The travelers must travel from the inside to the outer levels of paradise. The path for someone trying to model Dante's path to redemption is therefore rather simple to follow. However, Venichka resists following Dante's model from his very first steps in *Moskva-Petushki*.

As readers we can see that Venichka's first mistake is implicitly believing his journey has the same end goal as Dante's. Moscow is Venichka's Hell on Earth. His movement from Moscow to Petushki is his own Russian journey from Hell to Paradise. However, rather than following Dante's trajectory of moving from the outside rings of the circle inward and downward, Venichka starts very near the

center of Moscow and travels outward.⁴⁹⁶ As the opening of *Moskva-Petushki* shows, Venichka has tried to find the very center of Moscow, but is unable to do so. This mistake sets Venichka up for failure even before his journey begins. This means that from the very beginning of his journey, Venichka, as a character, is traveling in the wrong direction if his intention is to model Dante's journey. By starting near the center of the Moscow, he starts just beyond the center of Hell, and must move outward instead of inward. He has essentially reversed the Dantean model. This idea is important for understanding Venichka's failure in the Dantean context. In *Inferno*, the epicenter of Hell, where Satan resides, is the zero-point of the text. John Freccero notes the importance of this centrality for Dante's journey "Satan is a point of departure, the zero-point in the ascesis of a pilgrim who began from a topsy-turvy world of negative transcendence and is now ready to ascend to the light."⁴⁹⁷ Although the very center of the *Inferno* is the zero-point for reaching heaven, it is important that Dante pass through all of the circles of Hell before he reaches that zero-point. By passing through each circle and interacting with the residents of each circle, Dante experiences the horrors and sins of the world and can then move on from them both spiritually and physically. In contrast, Venichka never finds that zero-point, and moves outwards. Freccero notes: "The Christian does not begin from a zero point on his journey, but rather from the world of generation and corruption."⁴⁹⁸ This error in trajectory explains why Venichka is able to interact

⁴⁹⁶ The trajectory of Purgatorio is upwards. Dante moves from the lowest level of Purgatorio upwards to the earthly paradise. In *Paradiso* his trajectory is both upward and outward as he moves closer to God.

⁴⁹⁷ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversation* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 167.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

intimately with even the most repulsive people on the train (i.e. the Mitrofans) without judgment where Dante grows more repulsed and horrified as his journey goes on. Venichka has doomed himself to failure even before his journey begins.

The first section of Venichka's journey emphasizes one of Venichka's fatal errors. As Venichka tries to make his way to the station, he says to himself:

Если хочешь идти налево, Веничка, иди налево, я тебя не принуждаю ни к чему. Если хочешь идти направо - иди направо. Я пошел направо, чуть покачиваясь от холода и от горя, да, от холода и от горя. О, эта утренняя ноша в сердце!⁴⁹⁹

If you want to go left, Venichka, go left, I'm not forcing you to do anything. If you want to turn right—then go right. I went to the right, staggering a bit from the cold and from. Oh, that morning burden in the heart!

and

И куда-нибудь да иди. Все равно куда. Если даже ты пойдешь налево попадешь на Курский вокзал; если прямо - все равно на Курский вокзал; если направо - все равно на Курский вокзал. Поэтому иди направо, чтобы уж наверняка туда попасть. - О тщета!⁵⁰⁰

And let's go anywhere. It's all goes the same place. If you want to go left, you'll wind up at the Kursk Station; if you you straight-it's all the same-the Kursk Station; if you go straight-same place—the Kursk Station. Therefore, go to the right so that you'll wind up there for sure. Oh vanity!

Venichka's choice to go right or left, and his ultimate decision to go to the right is important because he chooses to go in the opposite direction that Dante travels. For the bulk of his journey, Dante moves through Hell by traveling to the left. Freccero notes this choice: "It appears from the text, particularly from the flight of Geryon in Canto XVII of the *Inferno* that the descent into Hell is accomplished by a clockwise

⁴⁹⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

spiral.”⁵⁰¹ With few exceptions in *Inferno*, Dante continuously moves to the right on his journey to the center of Hell. This proves to be an interesting insight into Venichka’s frame of mind as Dante’s movement through Purgatory is to the right as he ascends. Perhaps Venichka believes that because he cannot find the Kremlin, the very center of Moscow, he is not meant to travel through Hell. Perhaps Venichka believes that his journey is akin to that of Dante’s path in purgatory. This reading would mean that Venichka’s journey is based on an entire misreading of his own path in life, and his own place in Moscow’s topography.

When Venichka returns to Moscow in the “Petushki. Station Square” segment of the journey, he repeats his indecision concerning the right direction: “Если хочешь идти налево, Веничка, - иди налево. Если хочешь направо - иди направо. Все равно тебе куда идти. Так что уж лучше иди вперед, куда глаза глядят” (“If you want to go left, Venichka, go to the left. If you want to go right then go right. It’s all the same, so it’s better to go ahead aimlessly”).⁵⁰² The powerful “иди” at the beginning of *Moskva-Petushki*, when Venichka was certain of the purpose of his journey, has been replaced by one of uncertainty. Venichka, returned to the very start of his journey, is trying now to correct his path. Just a few pages later in the Petushki/The Kremlin segment of his journey, Venichka attempts to correct his navigation error:

На два мгновения я остановился у памятника - смахнул кровь с бровей, чтобы лучше видеть сначала посмотрел на Минина, потом на Пожарского, потом опять на Минина куда? в какую сторону бежать? Где Курский вокзал и куда бежать?

⁵⁰¹ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversation* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 71.

⁵⁰² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 132.

раздумывать было некогда - я побежал в ту сторону, куда смотрел князь Дмитрий Пожарский...⁵⁰³

For two moments I stopped in front of the monuments and wiped the blood from my brow in order to better see. First I looked at Minin and then at Pozharskii and then again at Mini—where? In which direction should I run? Where is the Kursk Station and where should I run? There was no time to think about it: I started to run in the direction that Prince Dmitrii Pozharskii was looking.

Venichka's decision to head towards the Prince Dmitri Pozharskii statue is important because the statue looks to the left. In his attempt to correct his initial mistake of going to the right at the beginning, Venichka now chooses to travel to the left unaware that it is too late for him to start over again.

Venichka's second mistake is his implicit assumption that the path from Hell to heaven is a direct linear path, suggested by a train trip, as the title of the poem implies. Venichka believes that the path has two points: Moscow as the start of his redemption and Petushki as the endpoint of the journey. Dante's journey to redemption is a lengthy journey, and is filled with people and situations that challenge the pilgrim. Christopher Kleinhenz notes:

The education of the pilgrim is a long and laborious one, accomplished gradually in the course of his journey through the three realms of the afterlife. To expect him to be this knowledgeable so soon after a series of failures is unrealistic and ignores the basic logical premise of the poem: that knowledge is gained gradually, and only after full experience can the pilgrim react to a sinner in the proper way.⁵⁰⁴

Venichka assumes that merely by being on a journey, he will instantaneously receive this knowledge that Dante has worked for and earned. It is interesting to note, that Venichka is not the first Russian to make this mistake. Mandel'stam's poetry also

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 137.

⁵⁰⁴ Christopher Kleinhenz, "Dante and the Bible: Intertextual Approaches to *The Divine Comedy*," *Italica* 63, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 233-234.

implies that there is a direct linear path to Dante's journey in the Russian context: "You and I will take the "A" to the "B" line/To see which of us dies first" (1931).⁵⁰⁵ However, Venichka's assumption is incorrect. Dante's journey is a combination of circles and lines, not merely a straight path that bisects the circles as Venichka's does.

This misreading of Dante's path creates an interesting transition between spaces on the train ride as it gets closer to Petushki. John Freccero notes the difference between Inferno and Purgatory:

The vision represented in Inferno is clearly corporeal: the souls of the sinners are to be seen and even touched by the pilgrim...The Purgatorio, on the other hand, is a realm of fantasia. The focus of our attention is not on the pilgrim's surroundings, but rather on his mental state...The journey is punctuated by his dreams and his imagination is moved by his visions.⁵⁰⁶

Venichka's journey also has this division of states. For the first part of his journey, Venichka interacts with his fellow passengers through conversations and communal drinking. He learns the sins of his fellow countrymen as they progress on their journey. However, a clear division happens at "Orekhovo-Zuevo" which even the drunken Venichka perceives. Right before the marker for "Orekhovo-Zuevo" Venichka notes: "Я не успел ответить. Поезд, как вкопанный, остановился на станции Орехово-Зуево, и дверь автоматически растворилась" ("I had no time to answer. The train, as though it were transfixed, stopped at the station in

⁵⁰⁵ Clare Cavanaugh, *Osip Mandelstam & The Modernist Creation of Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 242.

⁵⁰⁶ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversation* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 94.

Orekhovo-Zuevo, and the doors slid open automatically”).⁵⁰⁷ This episode is important to the plot of *Moskva-Petushki* for two reasons: first, it is where Venichka in his drunken stupor appears to get off the train and mistakenly gets on one bound for Moscow, and second, it marks a clear division from a seemingly realistic interaction with fellow passengers to a seemingly dream-world vision. This shift mirrors the change that Freccero claims happens to Dante in his movement from *Inferno* to Purgatory. If Venichka believes that he is correctly following Dante’s model of redemption, then this shift in his journey would be expected. He has seen the worst traits in his fellow countrymen while on his trip, and has successfully moved to the realm of visions and dreams.

The final difference in Venichka’s journey to Petushki is his own lack of control over his journey. While it is true that other characters occasionally help move Dante forward while he travels, Dante is mostly in control of his own motion with Virgil’s assistance. At times Dante is forwarded in his travels via boat, such as when he crosses the River Styx or by being carried such as his interactions with St. Lucia. However, for the vast majority of his journey, Dante is an active participant in his own journey. This active participation allows Dante to take an active role in his own redemption and salvation. Freccero sums up the movement in *The Divine Comedy* as: “In the prologue scene of *Inferno*, we are presented with the figure of a man whose circles are surely disrupted. He undertakes a longer journey to set them right.”⁵⁰⁸ As Dante interacts with the citizens of Hell, he changes and becomes ready

⁵⁰⁷ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 99.

⁵⁰⁸ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversation* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 78.

to purify himself in purgatory. In contrast, Venichka is mostly passive in his journey to Petushki and rarely undertakes any actions that set his own path right. The train is responsible for moving him from one marker to another. Venichka is barely aware of the train's progress because he is too busy getting drunk. Venichka's inability or refusal to take an active role in his own redemption prevents him from reaching Petushki because "unfortunately, for man in his fallen state, the soul's powers are not equal to the task of moving toward God."⁵⁰⁹ While Dante makes progress spiritually and physically, Venichka mistakes physical progression towards Petushki for spiritual progression. Vladimir Tumanov notes that "the key element in Venja's 'put'" is the train which acts as a spatio-temporal vehicle bringing the hero and the story to The End."⁵¹⁰ However, the train is more than just a way to bring the passive protagonist to The End. The train is a space for corrective measure in the poema. Venichka, unable to reform and redeem himself, is not worthy of Petushki or of Paradise. Unlike Dante, Venichka is still the same broken man with his disrupted circles that he was at the beginning of his journey. The train not only plays an active role in moving Venichka first towards Petushki, but also in delivering Venicka to a place he claims he could never find-The Kremlin.

Dante's motivation for his journey through the Inferno may have served as inspiration for Venichka's journey to Petushki. The opening canto to *The Divine Comedy* shows Dante to be a man in the middle of his life, lost on his life's path. Dante finds himself full of despair, and uncertain of what his path is suppose to be.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁵¹⁰ Vladimir Tumanov, "The End of V. Erofeev's *Moscow-Petushki*," *Russian Literature* 39, no 1. (1996): 106.

The source of Dante's despair comes from his exile from his homeland and his uncertainty of his future. In Canto I, lines 1-12, Dante tells his reader that his uncertainty stems from fear and not knowing which way to turn in life:

Midway in the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood,
for the straight way was lost.

Ah, how hard it is to tell
the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh—
the very thought of it renews my fear!
It is so bitter death is hardly more so.
But to set forth the good I found
I will recount the other things I saw.

How I came there I cannot really tell,
I was so full of sleep
when I forsook the one true way.⁵¹¹

When Virgil appears shortly after Dante's admission of his despair, Virgil helps Dante find the *diritta via*, the right way; a path away from his despair and back towards God. This turn away from despair is important in his journey because in the Roman Catholic Church doctrine despair is a "voluntary and complete abandoning of all hope of saving one's soul and of having the means required for that end."⁵¹² In Roman Catholic teaching despair means that the person has turned away from God as well as the hope of achieving salvation, and has instead turned toward "worldly objects as the preeminent good."⁵¹³ When Dante turns away from the dark forest and goes with Virgil he moves away from the despair and back towards God.

⁵¹¹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 3.

⁵¹² Joseph Delany, "Despair," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 20 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04755a.htm>>

⁵¹³ William Wilson, "Despair," *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed: Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 299.

The theme of despair is further represented by the gate that Dante and Virgil must pass through in order to begin their journey through the Inferno. The gate's inscription "Abandon all hope, you who enter here" illustrates the idea that connects all the inhabitants of the circles of Hell—they have all given up hope. William Wilson notes that "Despair is the exact opposite of Christian hope," and Dante's vision of Hell shows what happens to those that give up hope.⁵¹⁴ The sinner becomes trapped in a cycle of indulging in mundane and temporary forms of satisfaction (i.e., gluttony, lust, etc.) rather than finding a way out of that cycle. The dwellers of Hell, therefore, are not only trapped for eternity in their particular circle of Hell, but also in a loop of seeking hope in false forms. The sinners "attempt to find over and over again, a lasting good in what is only temporary... and constantly return to the object of their false hope."⁵¹⁵ When Dante passes through each circle of Hell and witnesses the suffering of the denizens of each circle, he is witnessing what happens when all hope has been lost. The sinners are punished not only for their sins but also for giving up hope and turning away from God.

One of Venichka's motivations for his journey from Moscow to Petushki is grief, an emotion closely associated with despair. In the first segment of his journey, Venichka tells himself: "Я пошел направо, чуть покачиваясь от холода и от горя" ("I went to the right, swaying from the cold and from grief").⁵¹⁶ Here it is grief that causes Venia to move, and guides the beginning of his journey. The theme of grief and the cause of Venichka's grief have been previously discussed by Paperno and

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 6.

Gasparov who viewed Venichka's spiritual wanderings as a parody of the medieval story "The Tale of Grief-Misfortune."⁵¹⁷ Other scholars such as Karen Ryan link Venichka's grief to the impossibility of being spiritually redeemed in Soviet society.⁵¹⁸ Acquaintances of the author, such as Ol'ga Sedakova, have attributed Venichka's grief to Erofeev's own obsession with grief.⁵¹⁹ Venichka experiences a profound sense of grief on his journey because his creator Venedikt Erofeev felt that grief in his own life and projected upon his namesake character. These three readings of Venichka's grief in *Moskva-Petushki* show Venichka's ruminations on grief to be an abstract idea that he struggles with during his journey.

However, Venichka gives several clues in the poema about the particular type of grief that he is experiencing on this thirteenth attempt to reach Petushki. The first clue comes at the Nikol'skoe-Saltykovskaya segment of this trip when Venichka tells his reader about the source of his grief:

И я смотрю и вижу, и поэтому скорбен. И я верю, чтобы кто-нибудь еще из вас таскал в себе это горчайшее месиво -из чего это месиво сказать затруднительно, да вы все равно не поймете-но больше всего в нем «скорби» и «страха». Назовем хоть так. Вот: «скроби» и «страха» больше всего, и еще немоты. И каждый день, с утра, «мое прекрасное сердце» источает этот настой и купается в нем до вчера. У других, я знаю, у других это случается, если кто-нибудь вдруг умрет, если самое необходимое существо на свете вдруг умрет. Но у меня-то ведь это вечно!-хоть это-то поймите!⁵²⁰

And I look and I see and therefore I am sorrowful. And I don't believe that any of you has carried around within him this bitter mush. I am unable to say what this mush is made of, and all the same, you would

⁵¹⁷ Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Erofeev's Grief: Inconsolable and Otherwise," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 103.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 37.

never understand, but it's mostly sorrow and fear in it. There it is: sorrow and fear and most of all muteness. And every day, from the very first thing in the morning my 'beautiful heart' exudes this infusion and bathes in it until night. For others, I know, for others this happens if someone dies suddenly, if the most important being on earth dies suddenly. However, for me, this is an eternal state. At least understand this!

The last part of this particular musing on grief gives us insight into the cause of Venichka's grief. This line moves the source of Venichka's grief away from just the abstract to a more concrete object that he is grieving. Venichka begins to identify with those who mourn a sudden death.

It would be easy to take Venichka at his word here, that his grief is different from that of someone who has suddenly lost a loved one. However, Venichka quickly narrows his focus to Kramskoi's 1884 painting *Inconsolable Grief*. Borrowing from Dmitri Bosnak's description of the work, Kramskoi's painting shows: "The stilled figure of a woman dressed in a black mourning dress. Her face is shown from the side, red-eyed and with an aloof gaze and a handkerchief pressed to her mouth."⁵²¹ The mourning of a child was a familiar subject for Kramskoi who had lost two of his own sons, and described his own state of mind while painting the work as "sincerely sympathized with maternal grief."⁵²² Venichka's focus on the grief the mother feels is indicative of Venichka's own state of mind. When Venichka thinks about the painting, he wonders why the subject of the painting is not storming about or flailing from the grief she's experiencing. Venichka's identification with the painting shows the depths of his grief. Karen Ryan-Hayes describes Venichka in *Moskva-*

⁵²¹ Dimitri Bosnak, "Kartina I. Kramskogo "Neuteshnoe gore" v khudozhestvennoi sisteme poe'mu *Moskva-Petushki*." *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1, (2013): 32.

⁵²² Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Erofeev's Grief: Inconsolable and Otherwise," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 103.

Petushki as the “personification of inconsolable grief” as Erofeev “consistently trains his unflattering lens on his authorial narrator.”⁵²³ That Venichka sees his own grief as inconsolable puts him very close to the state of despair that Dante finds himself in at the beginning of his journey. Venichka’s grief cannot be assuaged even as he tries to drown his sorrows in alcohol. He is in danger of reaching the hopeless state that marks the sinners of Dante’s circles of Hell.

It is through Venichka’s thoughts and his focus on this painting that we as readers get a better insight into the cause of Venichka’s grief. We can ask ourselves, to a parent, who is the most important person on earth? The answer is, of course, your child. As the train approaches the next station, Venichka once again places himself in the same position as the grieving mother of Kramskoi’s painting and reinforces this kinship to the reader: “Вот так и я. Теперь вы поняли, отчего я грустнее всех забулдыг? Отчего я легковеснее всех идиотов, но и мрачнее всякого дерьма? Отчего я и дурак, и демон, и пустомеля разом?” (That’s how I am. Now you understand, why I’m the saddest of sacks. A lightweight among all idiots, and darker than any shit? Why I’m a fool and a demon and a chatterbox all at the same time”).⁵²⁴ He praises the reader for understanding his grief: “Вот и прекрасно, что вы все поняли” (“It’s great that you understand everything”),⁵²⁵ as though he cannot bring himself to say the reason for his grief out loud.

Venichka later reaffirms his connection to this figure when a physical manifestation of the grieving mother appears on the train later at Kilometer 113.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 38.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

When she appears he again tells his reader that he and the grieving mother are alike “Ни дать, ни взять—копия с 'Неутешного горя,' копия с тебя, Ерофеев” (“Neither give nor take—a copy of *Inconsolable Grief*, a copy of Erofeev”).⁵²⁶ In his reflections on the female figure’s grief, we get a sense that Venichka deeply understands her particular sort of grief. Venichka tells his reader that everything else that is happening in the subject’s life is unimportant compared to that grief that she is feeling over the death of her child. That same sense of hopelessness and joylessness pervades Venichka’s journey to Petushki, and explains why Venichka never reaches that state of joyful intoxication on his journey.

In the next segment of the journey entitled “Saltykovskaia-Kuchino,” the abstract child that the female figure in Kramskoi’s painting is mourning is replaced by references to Venichka’s own son. Venichka moves from the idea of the death of a child in Kramskoi’s painting to the image of his own child during an illness. Bosnak notes that this jump from the grieving mother to the focus on Venichka’s own son serves as a “tragic guess” as to the fate of Venichka’s son.⁵²⁷ When the angels say “Бедный мальчик” (“Poor boy”),⁵²⁸ Venichka asks three times why they refer to his son as “Бедный мальчик” and quickly explains to them that the child is fine. Although Venichka initially insists that the child is fine, he then admits that, yes, the child was in fact sick and that everyone there was afraid for him and his health. We see here that although Venichka has just asked the reader to understand him, he is

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁵²⁷ Dimitri Bosnak, “Kartina I. Kramskogo “Neuteshnoe gore” v Khudozhestvennoi sisteme poe’mu *Moskva-Petushki*.” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1, (2013): 32.

⁵²⁸ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 39.

not being entirely honest with himself or the reader about the reality of the child's health.

He again insists that the child got better, but then immediately begins to pray that the child will always be okay. He asks: "Ну, допустим, он болен был в позапрошлую пятницу, и все там были за него в тревоге... Но ведь он тут же пошел на поправку - как только меня увидел!.. Да, да... Боже милостивый, сделай так, чтобы с ним ничего не случилось и ничего никогда не случилось!" ("Well, let's say that he's been sick since the Friday before last and everyone there was worried about him. But then he immediately went on the mend as soon as he saw me! Yes, yes...Gracious God, make it so, that nothing has happened to him and so that nothing ever will").⁵²⁹ Immediately after invoking God to protect his child Venichka gives ways that a child could be hurt in various ways, again ending on the image of the sick child. Almost immediately after assuring himself that the child is fine, Venichka begins to insist that the child not die. The child has gone from being healthy, to being sick, to being on the verge of death. Venichka twice insists that the child not die saying first: Ты... знаешь что, мальчик? ты не умирай... ты сам подумай (ты ведь уже рисуешь буквы, значит можешь думать сам): очень глупо умереть, зная только одну букву "ю" и ничего больше не зная... Ты хоть сам понимаешь, что это глупо?" ("You...you know what, kid, don't die...think about it (after all, you already can draw letters, so you can think for yourself): it's pretty stupid to die, knowing only the one letter "ю" and not knowing anything else...You

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 40.

understand that it's stupid, right?").⁵³⁰ After the child tells Venichka that he loves him, Venichka insists again, "Ну вот и не умирай... Когда ты не умрешь и поправишься, ты мне снова чего-нибудь спляшешь" ("There, don't die...When you're not dying and you get better, you can once again dance something for me")⁵³¹ and "Когда тебя нет, мальчик, я совсем одинок... Ты понимаешь?" ("When you're not here, kid, I'm completely alone...you understand?").⁵³² Here, if we look at the people that Venichka meets on the train—Smart-Smart and Stupid-Stupid, Grandfather Mitrich and Grandson Mitrich, Man with a Moustache and Woman with a Moustache, it is only Venichka that travels without an immediate double. He is the only person we see making the journey by himself. When compared with the other passengers he is alone.

The combination of the grieving parent of the previous segment of his journey combined with Venichka's own recollection of his son's sickness suggest that the real reason that Venichka cannot reach his son is because his son has died. Petushki, with its paradise-like description is a stand-in for Paradise, a place that the still-living Venichka cannot reach. As readers we know now that in the past Venichka was able to reach his child, yet his previous twelve attempts to reach Petushki have failed. He gives his reader concrete examples of interactions with his son such as reading and talking to him so we know that his son has not always lived somewhere inaccessible to Venichka. It is only recently that Venichka's attempts to be with his child are unsuccessful.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 41.

⁵³² Ibid.

At the beginning of his journey Venichka is aware of his grief, but he has not lost all of his hope. He still believes that he has ability to enter Petushki. While his grief is overpowering at times, causing him to stagger under its weight, Venichka still believes that Petushki is open to him, despite that his twelve previous trips have failed. However, Venichka shares as much in common with the sinners of Dante's Hell as he does with the Dante pilgrim. While Dante is able to travel through the circles of Hell by learning from the mistakes of its citizens, Venichka gets trapped in his own circles because he consistently chooses alcohol over hope. Ryan-Hayes attributes Venichka's drinking to "a symptom of the endemic spiritual illness that is grief."⁵³³ This vision of Venichka's grief that Ryan-Hayes describes closely resembles the despair of Dante's *Inferno*. Venichka's indulgence in alcohol also exhibits the despair that traps the sinners of Dante's Hell as Venichka attempts to find relief in a physical object—the various forms of alcohol he consumes on his journey. His grief is overwhelming at times, so he consumes alcohol in hopes that it will numb the pain. Although the sheer variety and amounts of alcohol he consumes adds to the dark humor of the text, the gluttony of his consumption also makes it seem as though Venichka is seeking relief in any form he can get it. He consumes alcohol indiscriminately, without much care for the form it takes or even the taste. He does not seem to get any real pleasure from drinking the various concoctions. This dissatisfaction can be seen after Venichka's musing on *Inconsolable Grief*. After describing the grief the maternal figure in the painting is feeling, and then identifying with it, Venichka concludes the segment with: "Смотрите, как это

⁵³³ Karen Ryan-Hayes, "Erofeev's Grief: Inconsolable and Otherwise," *Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ryan-Hayes (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 110.

делается!" ("Look, that's how it's done!").⁵³⁴ Venichka drinks here to deal with his grief, placing him firmly in the cycle that dooms the sinners of Dante's Hell. Where Dante turns towards God and the guides that God sends to him to lead him to hope, Venichka seeks his hope from a bottle. The consistency to which Venichka drinks on his journey, the sheer number of references to booze in the text aligns Venichka's location in the text more closely to the sinners' circles than to Dante's path.

Venichka admits that he has tried to make the journey to Petushki twelve times, and each prior attempt has failed. Unlike Dante, who learns from his mistakes, Venichka, like a Dantean sinner, continues to make the same mistake of seeking false hope.

By the time Venichka returns to Moscow and before he realizes that he has returned to Moscow rather than reaching Petushki, Venichka's mental state more closely resembles despair rather than grief. At the start of "Petushki. Station Square" Venichka says to himself: "Если хочешь идти налево, Веничка, - иди налево. Если хочешь направо - иди направо. Все равно тебе куда идти. Так что уж лучше иди вперед, куда глаза глядят" ("If you want to go left, Venichka, go to the left. If you want to go right then go right. It's all the same, so it's better to go ahead aimlessly").⁵³⁵ Venichka has ceased to care about the direction he travels in. His emotions here more closely resemble despair rather than just grief. This despair is reinforced later in the same segment when he asks himself:

А я - что я? я много вкусил, а никакого действия, я даже ни разу как следует не рассмеялся, и меня не стошнило ни разу. Я, вкусивший в этом мире столько, что теряю счет и последовательность, - я трезвее всех в этом мире; на меня просто туго действует... "Почему же ты молчишь?" - спросит меня

⁵³⁴ Vendikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 38.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

Господь, весь в синих молниях. Ну, что я ему отвечу? Так и буду: молчать, молчать...⁵³⁶

And me-what about me? I have partaken in much, but no action. I haven't even laughed properly, not even once, and I've never thrown up. I have tasted so much in this world that I've lost count and the sequence of it all, I am the soberest person in the world; it's simply that nothing works much on me. "Why are you silent?" the Lord, all in blue lighting, asks me. So how shall I answer him? I'll just be silent, silent...

Venichka's grief has shifted to despair. He has abandoned all hope, and by doing so has aligned himself with the sinners rather than with Dante-pilgrim. While Dante moves from despair to hope as he moves through the circles of Hell, Venichka moves from grief to despair over the course of his journey.

The Image of the Corridor and Portal in *Inferno* and *Moskva-Petushki*

The most important spatial feature that Erofeev incorporates into *Moskva-Petushki* that makes the text Dantean is the use of corridors and portals. In *Inferno*, the travelers pass through four portals. The first two portals are the Gate of Hell and the Gate of Dis, both of which move Dante further into the depths of Hell yet closer to his ultimate goal of redemption. Dante's entry into the pit that contains Satan serves as a metaphorical gate as Dante is once again forwarded in his journey and his next stage of reaching Beatrice.⁵³⁷ By contrast, Erofeev develops his own ending to *Moskva-Petushki* that differed from the conclusion of Dante's journey. Venichka is incapable of reaching Petushki because he has not actively taken part in his own redemption. He has not overcome the obstacles placed before him in order to be

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 132.

⁵³⁷ Anthony K. Cassell, "The Tomb, The Tower & The Pit: Dante's Satan," *Italica* 56, no. 4, Dante (Winter, 1979): 340.

redeemed, and instead has allowed himself to be moved passively (both via the train and alcohol) to what he takes to be Petushki. Where Dante has confronted his fears, and the darkness that plagued him before he began his journey, Venichka still wallows in the very same grief that began his journey. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante makes it clear that redemption and reaching Paradise is a journey that the participant must actively travel through in order to reach one's desired goal.

Throughout *The Divine Comedy* Dante evolves as a character. Although it is a struggle for him at times as he travels through the Inferno, he eventually lets go of the feelings and attitude that make him a sinner. As he reaches Purgatory he is ready to be cleansed of his sins and to be redeemed so that he may reach Paradise. At the end of the trilogy Dante notes that he will never forget what he has learned on his journey and will live his life on earth so he will continue to be worthy of the final vision of Paradise that he sees before returning to earth. In contrast, Venichka remains Venichka throughout his entire journey. His concerns at the beginning of his adventure (i.e., drinking, grief, reaching Petushki, etc.) remain consistent throughout the train ride. He never stops to wonder why his previous twelve journeys have failed to deliver him to Petushki and his son.

Satan's corporeal form serves as the final portal in *Inferno*. In order to leave the very center of the Inferno, Virgil must lead Dante down Satan's body, which serves as the portal that will lead Dante out of the Inferno. Under Virgil's instructions, Dante holds on to Virgil and his guide carries him up Satan, but then Virgil reverses his path, turning them both upside down and goes towards Satan's head as they have reached the very center of the earth which is situated at Satan's

midsection. Dante is confused by this reversal and asks Virgil to explain how this has happened:

I raised my eyes, thinking I would see
Lucifer still the same as I had left him,
But saw him with his legs upward.

And I became confused, let those dull minds
Who fail to see what point I'd passed
Comprehend what I felt then.⁵³⁸

Virgil explains to Dante that Satan's midsection serves as the very center of the earth, and they have now passed through the place that leads them to the next stage of their journey. Wallace Fowlie notes that this reversal of their path serves as "... [not only] a physical turning point but also a spiritual transition."⁵³⁹ The travelers have reached the point on Satan's body that will allow them to begin their ascension out of Hell, and Dante has spiritually progressed in his journey so that he will now be able to enter Purgatory. The connection between the two works also appears in the portals that the protagonists travel through to their final destinations. Dante passes through numerous unnamed structures to reach the base of Purgatory while Venichka passes through his unknown hallway. Virgil and Dante pass through a cavern in line 128 ("la tomba si distende"), a hidden passageway in line 133 ("cammino ascoso") and round opening in line 138 ("un pertugio tondo").⁵⁴⁰

Venichka's confusion about his return to Moscow is a response to Dante's confusion about how they are to emerge from Hell. Dante's journey down Satan's

⁵³⁸ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 634.

⁵³⁹ Wallace Fowlie, *A Reading of Dante's Inferno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 212.

⁵⁴⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 635.

back and then back up again confuses Dante as he believes he is being returned to where his journey down Satan's form began. However, as Virgil explains to Dante, their journey is indeed moving in the intended direction because they are at the center of the Earth, and thus able to move out of the Inferno by once again climbing up Satan's back. In *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka's path is reversed when gets off the train intended for Petushki at the Orekhovo-Zuevo segment of the journey, and accidentally gets on the train heading back to Moscow. In his sleepy, drunken state he unintentionally performs the same action as Dante in attempting to get out of Hell, but unlike Dante his path leads him back into Hell rather than to Petushki. Both protagonist move up and down set rigid linear structures: for Dante the spine of Satan and for Venichka the track of the train in hopes of leaving the Hell they are currently inhabiting.

The first book of *The Divine Comedy* ends when Dante and Virgil emerge from a corridor to reach Purgatorio in Canto XXXIV lines 130-139:

But by the sounds of the narrow stream that trickles
through a channel it has cut into the rock
in its meandering, making a gentle slope.

Into that hidden passage my guide and I
entered, to find again the world of light,
and, without thinking of a moment's rest,

we climbed up, he first and I behind him,
far enough to see, through a round opening,
a few of those fair things the heavens bear.
Then we came forth, to see again the stars.⁵⁴¹

When Dante and Virgil emerge from the caverns they are greeted by the sight of the stars, which signifies that their journey through Hell is over and they have emerged

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 635.

renewed from their travels. With Virgil as his guide, Dante has successfully traversed the first portion of his journey to redemption. Erofeev employs this image in *Moskva-Petushki* as Venichka searches for redemption. As Venichka makes his way to the Kursk Station in the first segment of his journey, the image of the corridor or hallway appears four times in Venichka's trip to the Kursk Station. Although Dante is able to successfully navigate these portals and corridors, they serve as a foil to Venichka's trips. He finds himself stuck in these hallways after each attempt at reaching Petushki. First when Venichka confesses that he attempted to get to the Kursk Station on the previous day, but failed: "И уж, конечно, не потому, что проснулся утром в чьем-то неведомом подъезде" ("Of course, not because I woke up this morning in some unknown entrance")⁵⁴² and again a few lines later when he discusses emerging from that entrance: "Что это за подъезд? я до сих пор не имею понятия; но так и надо. Все так. Все на свете должно происходить медленно и неправильно, чтобы не сумел загордиться человек, чтобы человек был грустен и растерян" ("What type of entrance was it? I haven't the foggiest idea even now, and it out to be that way. Everything should. Everything should happen slowly and incorrectly so that a man doesn't get a chance to start feeling proud, so that man is sad and perplexed.")⁵⁴³ While Dante makes progress towards his redemption and out of the inferno, Venichka finds himself trapped and unable to make progress towards his destination. When Venichka mentions the hallway for the third time, it reinforces the idea of confusion for Venichka as he has no memory

⁵⁴² Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 4.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

of how he got there nor what hallway he is actually in, and reflects Dante's confusion at the beginning of *Inferno*:

Обидно вот почему: я только что подсчитал, что с улицы Чехова и до этого подъезда я выпил еще на шесть рублей - а что и где я пил? и в какой последовательности? во благо ли себе я пил или во зло?⁵⁴⁴

It's a shame, and that why I just calculated that from Chekhov Street to this entrance I already drank six rubles-but what and where did I drink? And in what order? Did I drink for good or for evil purposes?

It is interesting to note that Venichka does not know the reason why he is in the hallway, whether for good or evil. Venichka goes on to describe his experience emerging from that entrance into the outside world:

Я вышел на воздух, когда уже рассвело. Все знают - все, кто в беспамятстве попадал в подъезд, а на рассвете выходил из него - все знают, какую тяжесть в сердце пронес я по этим сорока ступеням чужого подъезда и какую тяжесть вынес на воздух.⁵⁴⁵

I went into the fresh air when the sun was rising. Everyone knows—everyone who has wound up passed out in an entryway and left at sunrise—everyone knows what a heavy heart I carried down those forty steps in a strange hallway, and what a weight I bore outside.

This experience is one of the first clues that Venichka's journey is a parody and reconstruction of the Dantean model of redemption: Venichka's path to redemption through Hell begins where Dante's journey ended. Dante passes through the nine circles of Hell, encounters Satan and then passes through the dark corridor to emerge into the light of stars. Venichka has reversed Dante's journey in that he is attempting to start at the very center of Moscow and move outward rather than journeying inward.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

This particularly hallway is also important for its duality, and for the role it plays in establishing the way that Venichka views his journey. The hallway is unknown to Venichka yet according to Venichka it is known to others. He asks himself what sort of hallway is it, and admits to his reader that he does not know where the hallway is. However, he then goes on to say that it is a hallway and situation familiar to everyone. Although Venichka and his reader quickly learn that this particular hallway leads to the Kursk Station in terms of its physical location in Moscow and its role in the progression of Venichka's journey, Venichka believes that the hallway has a bigger significance than merely being an entrance to the Kursk Station. This bigger significance means that Venichka believes that his journey too has a bigger significance than just being a journey to Petushki.

Venichka's belief that his journey is significant and has greater meaning than just a train ride to the town of Petushki is reinforced when the hallway takes on a biblical significance as Venichka remarks that he has taken forty steps down the hallway. With the number forty, Venichka has aligned his journey with other biblical journeys that have ended successfully and have tested the traveler; Noah's time on the ark lasts forty days, Moses and his people wander the desert for forty years and Jesus remains on earth for forty days after reaching resurrection. As Venichka aligns his journey with these biblical and famous journeys of literature, Venichka builds the momentum of his journey in his speech:

О, эфемерность! О, самое бессильное и позорное время в жизни моего народа - время от рассвета до открытия магазинов! Сколько лишних седин оно вплело во всех нас, в бездомных и тоскующих шатенов! Иди, Веничка, иди.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

Oh, ephemeral! Oh, the most powerless and shameful times in the life of my people, the time from sunrise to when the stores open! How many gray hairs has it caused us homeless and grieving brunets. Go, Venichka, go!

Venichka's speech here shows that Venichka views his journey as being lofty and of long duration. The exclamation of "О, эфемерность" shows the grandiose way in which Venichka sometimes views his journey and his role in this quest. For Venichka it has more meaning that a man going to visit his son in Petushki. Paperno and Gasparov remarked on the of biblical elements of Erofeev's use of "иди" (go)⁵⁴⁷ in *Moskva-Petushki* in their paper "Vstan' i idi," ("Arise and Go") and Venichka's use of it here gives the reader a hint that Venichka views his journey as something bigger than simply a train ride to visit his son.

The result of Venichka placing an exaggerated importance on his journey is twofold. First, it shows the dynamic between the author and his creation. This separation of the author from his creation, who bears his name is seen in the way that Venichka views his journey. The way Venichka describes his journey adds levity to his quest, although Venichka is unaware of this. While the character Venichka views his journey as almost holy, Erofeev the writer pokes fun at his creation's grandiose vision of his journey. As the author of *Moskva-Petushki* he knows the location of the hallway and that his character will soon emerge from the hallway to the Kursk Station to begin his journey. However, Venichka, his creation, very much believes that his journey has an end goal that is greater than just reaching Petushki. He speaks of his journey and movement in terms that are both lofty and ironic. It is

⁵⁴⁷ Mark 5:41

Venichka who follows the various models of redemption, while Erofeev the author challenges the idea of following the lead of others. By reconstructing a Dantean Hell in Moscow for Venichka to traverse, Erofeev is able to criticize the Hell that he is living in while showing the folly of believing there are established paths to escape that Hell.

The second significance of Venichka's exaggerated importance and his aligning himself with various famous journeys of the past is that it shows Venichka's lack of intention on his journey. While in this liminal space of the corridor, Venichka aligns his journey with various journeys of Dante, Noah, Moses, Jesus, among others. Venichka's goal is to reach the little hamlet of Petushki. He is aware that others such as Dante and the prominent figures of the Bible have reached their destinations before him so he is willing to try means similar to theirs to complete his journey. However Venichka's journey shows that he believes there are numerous ways to reach Petushki and that all are viable options for him. From the beginning of his journey, Venichka is aware that his journey is Dantean. This awareness is why his journey starts out with a focus on the Kremlin, the very heart of Moscow. Venichka knows that Dante had to cross through the very bottom of Hell to be able to ascend to Paradise. Dante and Virgil exit their Hell through the center of it and leave that realm through Satan's navel. Venichka, who is already so near the center of his Russian Hell assumes that by finding the Kremlin, he too will be able to pass through his Hell into Paradise. When finding the actual location of the Kremlin, the very center of Moscow, proves to be a stumbling block to Venichka, he chooses to arrive in Paradise through other means-the train. Venichka, as a character, is unwilling to

stick with one means of reaching Paradise, so he chooses to try several of methods in hopes that one of them will work. Venichka's inability to stick with just one method of arriving in Petushki shows that Venichka is not willing to follow all the steps it takes to be redeemed. He sees the entry to Paradise as a single point rather than a process that one needs to go through to earn admittance. He is looking for the quickest way to reach Petushki rather than a sincere attempt at reaching it as Dante does on his journey.

This insincerity is one of the reasons why each method of entry fails for Venichka, and he finds himself in the liminal spaces of portals and entryways that turn out to be deadends for him. If Venichka believes that his journey is akin to Dante's journey, then his attempts at reaching Petushki via Dante's methods would also have to show an attempt at saving himself as Dante does on his journey. Venichka's attempts at the journey, at redeeming himself are half-hearted inasmuch as Venichka never truly dedicates himself to his redemption the way that Dante does. When he is close to the center of Moscow and near the Kremlin, he gives up before he genuinely tries to find the Kremlin telling himself that it does not matter which direction he goes in. His lack of direction reflects his lack of dedication to finding the right way. Similarly, Venichka's train ride also shows his lack of sincerity for completing the journey and arriving in Petushki. Venichka is passive on the journey, and lets someone else choose his course (i.e., the train conductor and the train itself). Although this method worked for Dante who trusted implicitly in Virgil, Dante's interactions with the citizens of Hell and his growing awareness of sin and redemption means that Dante played an active role in his redemption. In contrast,

Venichka learns little from his interactions with his fellow passengers, and ends up falling asleep on the train, which makes him completely passive in his journey.

Similar to Dante, Venichka's journey also ends with the image of the corridor. The final segment of Venichka's travels is entitled: "Moskva-Petushki: Unknown corridor"⁵⁴⁸ and Venichka once again finds himself in an unknown corridor that turns into to a deadend for his journey. Like the beginning of his travels, Venichka is confused, uncertain of where he is and where he is going next. His heavenly guides are now with him unlike the beginning of his journey where Venichka found himself alone and uncertain of his path. However it has now become obvious to Venichka that their motives are not heavenly. Like Dante, Venichka has not found himself in the Kremlin, the very center of this Soviet Hell, but since Venichka has failed to be an active participant in his own search for redemption he cannot reach the place he so desperately seeks. His "death" in this corridor shows that Venichka has chosen the wrong way of entering Petushki. In *Inferno*, Dante's passage from the very center of Hell to the plains of Purgatory happens quickly without much fuss. Dante does not remain confused for long because of Virgil and Dante's success in navigating through the inferno. Venichka's death happens in this liminal space to show that he is neither condemned fully to Hell as he has not crossed back into the Kremlin. However, he is not redeemed and has not reached Paradise, so Venichka must remain eternally in that unknown hallway.

Purgatory and Petushki

⁵⁴⁸ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 138.

As Venichka gets closer to Petushki, the segments of his journey show his anticipation of redemption contrasted with evidence that his journey will ultimately be unsuccessful. In *The Divine Comedy* the Earthly Paradise is effectively the end of Dante's journey to redemption. When he reaches the Garden of Eden at the very top of Purgatory, he has already atoned for his sins and soon they will be washed away in the River Lethe. Although Dante's story will continue in *Paradisio*, he is no longer filled with the fear and grief that plagued him at the beginning of his journey. The Garden of Eden marks an important transition point in *The Divine Comedy* because it marks the pilgrim Dante's change from a man seeking redemption to a redeemed man after he bathes in the River Lethe. The Garden of Eden serves as the point of departure for Virgil, a pagan, who cannot accompany Dante on the next part of his journey. It also serves as the place of reunion of Dante with Beatrice, who will act as his guide for the rest of his journey. While Paradise⁵⁴⁹ will be a place to witness the glory of God, something Dante will strive to be worthy of when he returns to earth, the Garden of Eden is a place of joy and light.

Venichka anticipates this joyful Dantean experience for his arrival in Petushki. He expects a reunion with his beloved son, which he believes will put an end to his despair. Through his description of Petushki as a place where the birds never stop singing, the jasmine is always in bloom, and he can stay drunk forever, Venichka anticipates Petushki to be a garden of joy and delight—albeit, Venichka's version of joy is drastically different from Dante's. His anticipations are not without merit based upon Dante's description of the Earthly Paradise, although just as Dante

⁵⁴⁹ The Garden of Eden is the earthly paradise in *The Divine Comedy*. Paradise is the celestial heaven consisting of nine spheres.

“misreads” the *Aeneid*, Venichka misreads the Dantean vision of the Garden of Eden. Upon meeting Mathilda, the woman who acts as his guide between Virgil and Beatrice, Dante is reminded of three female figures from the classical world: Venus, Persephone and Ceres. In Canto XXVIII he says to her: “You have reminded me of where and what—/Persephone just when her mother was deprived of her/ and she deprived of spring— Persephone was.”⁵⁵⁰ Venichka believes that a Matilda-like figure is awaiting him on the platform in Petushki. When she is not there upon his arrival, he says to himself, “Утеха рода человеческого, лилия долины - не пришла и не встретила” (“The joy of humankind, the lily of the valley, did not come to meet you”).⁵⁵¹ His description of the woman as a lily recalls Canto XXVII and Dante’s first encounter with Mathilda as he and Virgil come upon her collecting flowers: “I saw a solitary woman moving,/singing and gathering up flower upon flower--/the flowers that colored all of her pathways.”⁵⁵² The lily that Venichka associates with the woman waiting for him on the platform is one of the flowers named in the processional that Dante witnesses in the Garden of Eden: the twenty-four men that walk past him are wearing crowns of lilies.

Venichka’s expectation that he has reached Petushki contrasts with his admission that his grief is still with him. When he reaches Petushki-Station Square, he says: “Да ведь у кого узнать, если на площади ни единой души, то есть решительно ни единой? Да если б и встретилась живая душа - смог бы ты разве разомкнуть уста, от холода и от горя? Да, от горя и от холода... О,

⁵⁵⁰Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Dorothy Sayers, (New York: Penguin, 1955)

⁵⁵¹Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 133.

⁵⁵² Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Dorothy Sayers, (New York: Penguin, 1955)

немота!" ("But who would know if there's not a single living soul in the square, that is decidedly not even a single one? Yes, even if I met a living soul, could you even get your mouth open with the cold and the grief? Yes, from the grief and the cold. Oh, the muteness!").⁵⁵³ Not only does his description of the platform recall Dante's experience in *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, a living soul among souls, he confirms that he is still holding on to his grief. The very sin that doomed Dante to the dark woods is what prevents Venichka from entering *Petushki*. He cannot let go of his grief so he cannot obtain redemption.

Moreover, Venichka's ruminations on his own death reveal another connection to Dante's experience in the Garden of Eden, and why his experience is different. One of the important features of the Garden of Eden is its two rivers: Eunoë with its power to restore good memories and Lethe with its power to erase the memory of sin. In *Canto XXVIII* Mathilda describes the waters that flow through the garden:

With twofold powers it runs a twofold course;
This side blots all man's sins from memory;
That side to memory all good deeds restores.

Lethe this side, and that side Eunoë;
We name it; and to make its work complete;
This must be tasted first; that, secondly:

Lo there a taste beyond all savours sweet!
Now, through perchance thy thirst has drunk full measure,
Even should I now reveal no more to it,⁵⁵⁴

When Dante drinks from both rivers, his sins are washed away and he is left with only the good memories of his life. Dante's experience contrasts with Venichka's

⁵⁵³ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 132.

⁵⁵⁴ Alighieri, Dante. *Purgatorio*. trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Penguin, 1955), 292.

experience on the platform of Petushki where he confesses that he is sober: “Я, вкусивший в этом мире столько, что теряю счет и последовательность, - я трезвее всех в этом мире; на меня просто туго действует” (“I have tasted so much in this world that I’ve lost count and the sequence of it all, I am the soberest person in the world; it’s simply that nothing works much on me”).⁵⁵⁵ If ever there were a place that Venichka should drink, it would be in his version of Petushki because it would erase his sins, and yet it is the one place in his journey where he is entirely sober.

Contrapasso and Venichka’s Death

The ability to change is crucial to the author’s survival beyond the text, for when Venichka dies, all of his subversive and anti-Soviet views die along with him. The finality of his death means that his views will not live on. Venichka’s death and his refusal to accept the world as it is allow Erofeev to show the ills of Soviet society. Venichka can die without accepting the world around him, but Erofeev as author can live because, by killing off his literary self, he has divorced himself from Venichka’s inability to accept this world. The creation that cannot function in this broken Soviet world has been given the ultimate punishment so the author can survive.

Venichka’s manner of “death” at the end of *Moskva-Petushki* has several Dantean elements to it. The number four is a significant number in *Purgatorio* when Dante enters the Garden of Eden. In Canto XXIX the processional contains several figures that approach Dante in fours or multiple of fours. Twenty-four elders, an

⁵⁵⁵ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 132.

allusion to Revelations 4:4 approach Dante: “Under a sky adorned as I have said/came four and twenty elders, twain by twain/each with a crown of lilies on his head.”⁵⁵⁶ Included in the processional are four animals who have “six wings as plumage,” a reference to Revelations 4:6-8 and the four evangelists:

Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

Four women are also included in the processional: “Upon the left, four other women, dressed/ in crimson, danced, depending on the cadence/ of one of them, with three eyes in her head.” According to Barbara Reynolds, these four women represent the four virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice.⁵⁵⁷ Finally, Dante is approached by four others described as being “of humble mien” and are a physical manifestation of the four gospels.⁵⁵⁸

The prevalence of the number four in the Garden of Eden in *Purgatorio* may explain why Venichka is approached by four murderers in what he believes to be Petushki. In the last moments of his life, Venichka is pinned down by three of his four assailants and is then stabbed in the throat through a collective effort: “Они вонзили свое шило в самое горло” (“They plunged their awl into my very

⁵⁵⁶ Alighieri, Dante. *Purgatorio*. trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Penguin, 1955), 300.

Revelations 4:4 “Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.”

⁵⁵⁷ Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The Poet, The Political Thinker, the Man* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 322.

⁵⁵⁸ Alighieri, Dante. *Purgatorio*. trans. Dorothy Sayers (New York: Penguin, 1955), 302.

throat”).⁵⁵⁹ Venichka’s pinned down position has led many scholars to see the relationship between Venichka’s death and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Venichka’s final moments, however, are reminiscent of the fates of several of the damned in Dante’s world. In Canto XXIII, one of the last shades that Dante and Virgil encounter in the eighth circle of Dis is one of Dante’s countrymen, a Tuscan named Caiaphas who was the high priest under Pontius Pilate. Caiaphas resides in the sixth pouch of the eighth circle, which is reserved for hypocrites. His eternal punishment is crucifixion, the same manner of death to which he doomed Jesus. Venichka’s crucifixion more closely resembles that of Caiaphas than it does that of Jesus’s as Dante and Virgil find Caiaphas crucified to the bottom of the pit of his circle: the fate for those who called for Jesus’ crucifixion. Like Caiaphas in Canto XXIII of *Inferno*, Venichka is murdered on the ground rather than upright. Both are placed in pathways. Venichka’s death occurs in a corridor, a place to get from one location to another while Caiaphas lies on the pathway, and must be trampled over to get to the next part of Hell. Dante and Virgil come across Caiaphas at an important point in their journey to the ninth circle. It is right after Caiaphas’s placement the travelers learned that Malacoda has in fact lied to them and set them on the wrong path. The pair then set out on the right path once more. Their recognition of their mistake and their ability to correct it contrasts with Venichka’s revelation that he has taken the wrong path and his inability to find the right one.

Venichka’s manner of death, an awl in the throat, is a particularly Dantean death both for the image of the throat, and that the manner of his death acts as a

⁵⁵⁹ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 139.

contrapasso “a retributive principle whereby everyone must suffer in the afterlife according to the sin he or she committed on earth.”⁵⁶⁰ The image of the throat is a recurring image in *The Divine Comedy*.⁵⁶¹ In Canto XXIII lines 88-90, Dante is marked as different from the residents of the eighth circle by the movement of his throat. He is approached by two shades who say to him:

‘The way his throat moves, this one must be alive.
And if they are dead, what gives them the right
to go uncovered by the heavy stole?’⁵⁶²

The shades can tell that Dante does not belong in Hell for this reason, and it marks him as an outsider. The image of the throat appears two more times as the travelers make their way to the center of Hell. In Canto XXVIII lines 64-66 and lines 100-102, in the ninth pit of the Sowers of Schism and Scandal, they encounter two unknown shades with sliced throats:

Another, with his throat pierced through,
And nose hacked off just where the brows begin,
And only one ear left upon his head⁵⁶³

Ah, how distressed he seemed to me,
With his tongue sliced off so deep in his throat
Curio, who had been so bold in speech!⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ Lino Pertile, “Trecento,” *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Lino Pertile et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 63.

⁵⁶¹ The image of the throat occurs twice earlier in *Inferno*. In Canto VI, Dante and Virgil encounter Cerberus and note his three throats. It occurs again in Canto VII as the travelers note shades in a pit in the fourth circle of Hell attempting to sing a hymn. However, the singers gurgle the hymn in their throats, unable to fully articulate the words. Dante also references a throat injury in *Purgatorio* Canto V Buonconte da Montefeltro (A resident of Purgatory) tells Dante that he died from a throat injury while running for his life. After death he was taken to heaven by angels, but it was the demons from Hell that fought the angels over his place so he ends up in purgatory.

⁵⁶² Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 425.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 519.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 521.

These shades reside in this pit are doomed to walk around the pit in a circular pattern. As they go through their motions, their injuries heal and reopen as they make their way around the circle. They are trapped in an endless cycle of injury and pain. That Erofeev sentences his protagonist to a death that Dante associated with hypocrites and sowers of scandal and schisms is telling of the author's relationship with his namesake. Erofeev keeps Venichka oblivious to his fate throughout *Moskva-Petushki*. While Venichka has endless faith that he will be guided in the right direction at the hands of his creator, Erofeev views his creation as something that could ultimately betray him.

Venichka's death is a contrapasso. Although the idea of the contrapasso was not unique to Dante, it is a principle that Dante uses throughout *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* to punish sinners. This method of punishment appears throughout the nine circles of *Inferno* where the sinners are either punished in the same way that they sinned or punished in a way that reflects their sin. Canto V is an example of contrapasso where the punishment matches the crime; the lustful are tormented by a whirlwind that represents the passion they gave into during their lives. In Canto XX of *Inferno*, the fortune-tellers and soothsayers are punished in a way that reflects their crime: their heads are turned 180 degrees and they forced to walk backwards. By being forced to walk backwards with their heads turned around, their punishment is a contrapasso where the sinners suffer in a way that is opposite to the manner of their sinning. Dante's use of contrapasso means that the punishments given to the sinners are never arbitrary and "suffuse his text with a sense of God's

order and justice.”⁵⁶⁵ Venichka is punished through the principle of contrapasso as his manner of death illustrates. Venichka, the fictional representation of the writer, is murdered by being stabbed in the throat with a tool. His death silences him, effectively taking away the tool of the writer. Venichka’s voice in *Moskva-Petushki* is what endangers his creator. Through his very existence Venichka gives voice to Erofeev’s criticism of his own culture and time, just as the Dante pilgrim did for Dante. By sentencing Venichka to be stabbed in the throat, Erofeev punishes his creation in the same manner that Venichka has sinned against his creator.

Conclusion

What does it mean to be redeemed in Soviet society? In *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki* the two author struggles with the question of spiritual redemption. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante maps redemption as a journey in which the protagonist must be an active participant. In order to find himself again on the right path, the *diritta via*, that Dante pilgrim must descend to the *Inferno* in order to see the repercussions of living a life of sin, and then recognize those sins within himself. Once he has accomplished those two tasks, he is able to move beyond the *Inferno* to Purgatory where he must then atone for his sins. His ascent up Mount Purgatory shows his progress both physically and morally. Finally, when Dante the pilgrim has atoned for his sins and he is forgiven, he can ascend to Paradise. Through this redemptive journey, Dante offers his reader a way out of the dark woods and a way back to the right path.

⁵⁶⁵ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 108.

By entering into a dialogue with *The Divine Comedy*, Erofeev challenges the path to redemption as Dante defines it. At the beginning of *Moskva-Petushki*, Venichka finds himself at nearly the same point as Dante when he began his journey to redemption. Both characters feel lost, are filled with grief and are trying to get to a place that has been closed off to them. Not only is Venichka's inner struggle Dantean, his journey contains elements of *The Divine Comedy* such as its circular and linear structure, its use of portals and gateways to connect key spaces and the relationship between the protagonist and his perceived guide. Moscow's circular structure and the linear path of the train mimic the structure of Dante's journey. Both protagonists move through their versions of Hell with the goal of leaving Hell behind. As both protagonists travel through the levels of Hell, they come across portals and gateways that mark the key spaces in their journeys. Finally, both protagonists are accompanied on their journeys by guides who they believe are leading them out of Hell and on to the correct path. These parallels between *The Divine Comedy* and *Moskva-Petushki* gives Venichka's journey a Dantean quality.

Through these elements, Erofeev creates an expectation of redemption in both his protagonist and his reader. If Venichka's journey is Dantean, then he too will successfully achieve redemption just as Dante did before him. However, Venichka's journey is different from Dante's journey despite its similarities in structure and theme. Venichka is unable to escape the hell of Moscow despite thirteen attempts to reach his paradise of Petushki. No matter what direction he travels in, he finds himself repeatedly returning to the city. The portals and gateways that mark success on Dante's journey serve as deadends, spaces of

confusion and represent the unknown on Venichka's trip. When Dante is uncertain of his path on his journey he is aided by Virgil, who serves as his spiritual guide through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. The angels who Venichka believes to be his guides to Petushki mislead Venichka as he makes his way out of Moscow and toward Petushki. These elements in *Moskva-Petushki* allow Erofeev to challenge the Dantean mode of redemption, and show it to be an ineffectual path in the Soviet system.

While Dante believes that there is a correct path in life, Erofeev shows that there is no correct path. His belief that everything in this world is incorrect begins in the first segment of his journey when he declares, "Что это за подъезд? я до сих пор не имею понятия; но так и надо. Все так. Все на свете должно происходить медленно и неправильно, чтобы не сумел загордиться человек, чтобы человек был грустен и растерян" ("What type of hallway was it? I haven't the foggiest idea even now, and it out to be that way. Everything should. Everything should happen slowly and incorrectly so that a man doesn't get a chance to start feeling proud, so that man is sad and perplexed").⁵⁶⁶ Venichka's choice to describe the path as slow no doubt refers to the fact that Dante's journey through the *Inferno* takes place over just three days; from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. In Dante's world, redemption is achieved during a long weekend, as though it is something anyone can obtain if given a holiday weekend. Rather than following Dante's path exactly, Erofeev uses humor to challenge Dante's belief that there is a single correct path to redemption.

In the places in *Moskva-Petushki* where Venichka's journey parallels Dante's journey, Erofeev humorously shows that Dante's vision of redemption is not

⁵⁶⁶ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 6.

universally applicable. Through the use of cultural and contemporary images of his own world, the Soviet Union in the 1960s, and depictions of the daily absurdities of that time period, Erofeev subverts the ease and “rightness” of Dante’s journey. Venichka’s drunkness, the people he meets on his journey and his trajectory from Moscow to Petushki all undermine Dante’s message that redemption is a possibility for everyone who seeks it. The path is slow and incorrect because redemption is not obtainable for all who seek it. Venichka’s feeling that everything will be wrong explains why it does not matter whether he goes left or goes right to begin his journey. No matter which way Venichka travels it will be wrong way, and will ultimately lead him to the same end point-his own “death”.

Conclusion

Erofeev parodies the paths of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, *Paradise Lost* and *The Divine Comedy* to show the conventions of the previous works and to challenge their definitions of redemption. Venichka's repeated attempts to reach Petushki demonstrate his belief that redemption is possible even though each previous attempt has failed. Erofeev paints Petushki as a superficial utopian "land of Cockaigne," and more substantially as a place one attains through seeking redemption. The town is both familiar to Venichka and yet just out of his reach. As an author Erofeev was most likely sympathetic to the struggle of each author and their quests for redemption. Each redemptive journey has its own very specific vision of redemption and the quest for Paradise, and the three works form a unique vision of what it means to desire and seek redemption. In parodying the three paths of redemption set out by Radishchev, Milton and Dante, Erofeev questions the idea of a single definition of redemption, and forces his reader to question what it means to be redeemed both socially and spiritually. The overall goal of this dissertation is to examine the theme of redemption in each work, and to show how the author Erofeev responds to and parodies the three classical paths to redemption. It also argues that Erofeev creates a new vision of what it means to be redeemed in Soviet society.

Erofeev, as the author of *Moskva-Petushki*, puts himself in a group with three exiled authors who faced death for their literary journey of salvation and redemption. Each of the three writers that he parodies used their work as a means of seeking redemption for either himself or the society in which he lived. In aligning

his journey to redemption with the previous journeys to redemption, Erofeev challenges the idea of redemption in its social and spiritual forms. *Moskva-Petushki* parodies each of these classical works because they promise redemption to the seeker, and Erofeev adds his voice to this conversation by creating a new journey to redemption that ultimately remains unfulfilled.

In *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* Radishchev offers his readers a path to redemption through the idea of social enlightenment. While Radishchev believed that Russian society could be redeemed, Erofeev sees no possibility for social enlightenment in his world, and his parody of Radishchev's journey shows his disdain for the would-be reformers who continue to look to previous examples for the answer. In *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* Radishchev shows social redemption to be a simple linear path that can be reached through steady social progress. Even the title of Radishchev's work seems to suggest that his ideas of social progress are as easy to achieve as a trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow. Through the images of circles and lines in the journey's structure Erofeev parodies Radishchev's narrator's journey to show the uselessness of continually going in circles with no hope of forward or progressive trajectory. Through his use of the figures of the Mitrichi, Erofeev shows the failures of the previous generations of reformers and the effect that has had on the current generation. Erofeev's treatment of the Mitrichi in *Moskva-Petushki* shows that the social problems in Russia are long-reaching, and that Radishchev's hope for social enlightenment has not been achieved. By using Radishchev's work as a framework and then parodying that framework, Erofeev suggests how little social enlightenment has occurred in Russia

in the 160 years since Radishchev's work: officials are still corrupt, the narod are still grotesque, and the journey is still bleak.

In Radishchev's work redemption is the promise of a better future for society, but in Milton's work redemption is the promise of a better tomorrow for one's soul. Milton's model shows redemption to be the promise of something in the future that may never come to fruition. While Radishchev saw redemption as something to achieve on a social scale, Milton believed that the redemption of mankind is an individual act that is gained through a life of repentance and toil on Earth. Erofeev parodies *Paradise Lost* to show the absurdity of striving for a distant goal that offers no certainty of success. This uncertainty applies to both social and spiritual redemption as Erofeev shows in *Moskva-Petushki*.

Paradise Lost reflects Milton's desire that humankind should be redeemed for his sins. *Paradise Lost* contains two different narratives on the path to redemption. Satan's path shows that not everyone wants redemption or has the possibility of gaining it. Although Milton's version of Satan feels great grief for what he has lost after being exiled from Heaven, he is unwilling to change the course he is on. Satan's nostos, his longing for home, reflects not just Satan's desire to return to a place that he loved, but his refusal to accept what God has decreed. In contrast, Adam sins against God, and is exiled for doing so, yet he is willing to spend his life toiling and suffering in order to make amends for his sins. Despite his status as an outcast and the pain that he will suffer, Adam wants to be back in God's grace. Erofeev challenges Milton's idea that redemption is something that can only be earned in the afterlife. Erofeev uses the duality of Venichka's devilish and human characteristics

to show the two impulses he feels towards redemption: the need for it and yet the desire to rebel against the established order. He also uses the idea of *nostos*, or the longing for home, to show Venichka's desire to return to a place that he has lost. These elements of Venichka's journey allow Erofeev to challenge the Miltonic mode of redemption, and then forces the reader to question the meaning of redemption and the possibility of redemption, as well as whether redemption is something that mankind should desire.

Dante's journey to redemption is set apart from that of Radishchev's journey and Milton's journeys because Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* when he was already in exile. After being banished from his native Florence in 1302, Dante found himself in a position where he wanted what has been denied to him—a chance of redeeming himself in the eyes of his countrymen. Dante had the opportunity to redeem himself through his writing. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante sets his protagonist, the Dante-pilgrim, on a journey that will take him through the very depths of Hell in order to confront his own sins and to eventually ascend to Paradise. Although Dante admits that he found himself on the wrong path in his life, the Dante-poet leads his literary persona through the harrowing journey in the capable hands of his guide Virgil so that the way is always safe and secure for the Dante-pilgrim. While Dante follows the path of descending into Hell and reaching Purgatory, and then finally ascending to Paradise, he must take an active role in his redemption by confronting the sinners in Hell, atoning for his own sins in Purgatory, and finally embracing the Christian

love of God in Paradise in order to reach salvation in his earthly life.⁵⁶⁷ Despite his initial wrong path, once he meets Virgil, the Dante-pilgrim does not falter in his journey and his redemption is all but guaranteed even when he is confronted with figures or situations that challenge him. Dante was invested in the salvation of his literary self, and wanted his protagonist to achieve what he so desperately wanted and what was denied to him in his homeland. Dante's exile from Florence and the subsequent death sentence in 1315 in absentia meant that Dante could never return to the place that he longed for.⁵⁶⁸ The death sentence, which also was given to his son Pietro Alighieri for his father's alleged crimes, meant that Dante would never be able to redeem himself politically during his lifetime or even through the actions of his children.⁵⁶⁹ Through *The Divine Comedy*, Dante is able to offer himself a chance at redemption through the undertakings of his literary self. He sets the Dante-pilgrim on a journey where the protagonist must admit to and atone for his sins in order to begin the process of redemption. By doing so, Dante shows that he was not without sin in his life, and at times gave in to one of the worst sins of despair, but through the pilgrim's journey he shows that redemption is a possibility even for those who have sinned. While *The Divine Comedy* did not redeem Dante during his lifetime, in the sense that he was never allowed to Florence, it gave him the redemption that he desired through the Dante-pilgrim's salvation.

⁵⁶⁷ Lawrence Baldassaro, "Read It and (Don't) Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*," *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 255.

⁵⁶⁸ David Wallace, "Alighieri, Pietro," *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 2000), 20.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

By parodying *The Divine Comedy*, Erofeev challenges the path to spiritual redemption. While Venichka's journey initially seems similar to Dante's, and his expectations of reaching redemption and inner turmoil appear to mirror Dante's, the end result is different. Erofeev shows that redemption is not possible for all who seek it, and the journey offers no promises to the author. Throughout Venichka's journey to Petushki Erofeev subverts the ease and "rightness" of Dante's journey. Dante's message that redemption is a possibility for everyone who seeks it is consistently undermined on Venichka's journey through his drunkenness, the people he meets on his journey and his trajectory from Moscow to Petushki. Ultimately, Erofeev shows that Dante's path is slow and incorrect because redemption is not obtainable for all who seek it.

It is not surprising that Erofeev would have no hesitation in killing off the literary representation of himself as an act of Juvenalian satire. Venichka's "death" is a bitter condemnation of the constrictions of free speech in the Soviet Union. In the works of writers such as Dante, Milton, Radishchev and the writers of his own century, he saw that literature had the power to betray its creator while exposing social and spiritual ills in his society. At first glance, it seems humorous and absurd that Venichka "dies" at the end of *Moskva-Petushki*. The reader must ask: "How can the writer die in his own story, and yet still keep living?" The death of Venichka may be viewed as a protective measure for Erofeev. In his protagonist he places all of his commentary about the corrupt Soviet government, and all the negative traits that stand in opposition of what a good Soviet citizen should be. By naming the protagonist after himself, Erofeev creates the correlation that he and his protagonist

are one in the same, with the same bad habits. Venichka the drunkard then becomes an effective mouthpiece of Erofeev to criticize the Soviet state, its citizens and all the little absurdities of daily life in the Soviet Union. In looking at his death through the lens of a Soviet official, Venichka gets what he deserves, so to speak. As a drunkard, as someone who complains at the system and shows its worst aspects, his death is an appropriate punishment/ending. This method of literary suicide is a form of self-negation for Erofeev. In killing off his protagonist, Erofeev can outlive Venichka despite sharing his same views. Erofeev punishes his creation so that he can outlive his work.

Each of the three works that Erofeev parodies has a tension in the narrative between linear and circular structures. In *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* the tension between the two means of travel serve to highlight the lack of social progress in 18th century Russia. Radishchev uses circular motion to show the ineffectiveness of the monarchy and the corrupt petty officials in the capital cities. In *Paradise Lost*, the tension between circles and lines and in the narrative appears in repeated journeys of Satan to tempt Adam and Eve. Although Satan succeeds in his temptation of the pair, he ultimately returns to Hell, ending his journey where *Paradise Lost* began. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's moves in a linear path through a series of circles on his journey away from grief and towards redemption. In *The Divine Comedy* the circles are traps for the shades who never atoned for their sins. Dante is able to successfully navigate through the circles under Virgil's guidance and continue his trajectory through Purgatory to reach Paradise. In parodying the circular and linear narrative structures of each of these works, Erofeev undermines

the search for both social and spiritual redemption. In *Moscow-Petushki* even seemingly linear journeys end up being circles that offer no hope of escape.

The structure of Venichka's journey also allows Erofeev to challenge the idea of a Soviet Paradise. Erofeev shows that he is beyond believing in the promise of a better tomorrow for himself and his people when Venichka states: "Мое завтра светло. Да. Наше завтра светлее, чем наше вчера и наше сегодня. Но кто поручится, что наше послезавтра не будет хуже нашего позавчера?" ("My tomorrow is bright. Our future is brighter than our yesterday and our today. But who can guarantee that our day after tomorrow will not be worse than our day before yesterday?").⁵⁷⁰ Although each previous work has a different vision of redemption, each has the promise of a better tomorrow. Erofeev rejects the promise of better tomorrow and leaves his protagonist and reader trapped in a liminal space with no promises or visions of anything beyond his current condition.

Erofeev questions the desire for social and spiritual redemption, and what the possibility of redemption means for the seeker in his given society. The lives of these three writers stand in contrast to the paths that they set out in their work. Each story of redemption seems to promise that if a person seeking redemption follow the path as directed, then that person will be rewarded with redemption; whether in life as promised by Dante or in death as promised by Milton. In parodying the three previous paths, Erofeev draws attention to the false promises laid out in these narratives. Erofeev addresses the failure and false promise of narratives when Venichka compares his journey to that of Dante's:

⁵⁷⁰ Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Soyuz, 2012), 36.

Но теперь "довольно простоты", как сказал драматург Островский. И - финита ля комедия. Не всякая простота - святая. И не всякая комедия - божественная... Довольно в мутной воде рыбку ловить, - пора ловить человекoв!

Но как ловить и кого ловить?⁵⁷¹

But now, "enough of this foolishness," like the dramatist Ostrovskii said. And finita la comedia. Not all foolishness is holy. And not every comedy is divine. Enough of this fishing in murky water, -it's time to be the fisher of men!

But how to fish and whom to fish?

By asserting that not every comedy is divine, Erofeev rejects the idea that every path will result in the same success as Dante's, and that each journey has a higher or more spiritual purpose. Although the paths may share some similarities (for example, their trajectories, the desire to end up in an edenic space, the presence of a guiding force), the journeys are not the same, and should not be treated as such. Venichka's mistake of believing that he has the same possibility of reaching Petushki because of this similarity or the likeness of his path to that of Milton's or Radishchev is ultimately what dooms him. Venichka never considers that his own path to redemption might be different from those before his. Instead these narratives offer a false hope that every person who struggles with redemption can be redeemed if only they do what the protagonist did. Venichka's assumption that he will reach Petushki is based on the success of others before him, and he never considers that this may be why his twelve previous attempts failed. Venichka does not take his own advice, that he should stop fishing in murky water and be a fisher of men, and keeps to the murky area because others have "fished" there before. Venichka's trust

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 62.

in the narratives of Dante, Milton and Radishchev it means that he never considers his own path, and therefore will never reach the place he seeks.

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