To my parents Barbara and Mike Daly

Contents

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]

This passage exemplifies the conflict that resides within Venichka, the protagonist of Venedikt Erofeev's 1969 *poema Moskva-Petushki*.[2] He is desperate to reach Petushki yet simultaneously unwilling and unaware of what he must do to reach that seemingly sacred space. He seeks divine intervention at various times on his journey yet is quick to dismiss the help offered to him. The duality of Venichka's character and the nature of his mission on the ill-fated train ride illustrates one of the many challenges of understanding Erofeev's complex *poema*.

Moskva-Petushki is one of the greatest underground works of the post-Thaw period. The large body of research existing on the *poema* can be

1 Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom "Soiuz," 2012), 110. 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.

2 Although *Moskva-Petushki* is written in prose, it has been commonly referred to as an epic poem (*poema*) as well as a novel. The designation of *poema* links it to another "poem in prose," Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842), which has a stable place in Russian literature canon.

divided into several categories: works examining elements of satire, utopia, religion, Venichka's psychology, and psyche, and the journey. In examining *Moskva-Petushki* as a work of satire, critics have examined the text as a big, postmodern joke comprised of smaller, sharper jokes. 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."[3] 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."[4] 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 "'postmodern era,' which marks the twentieth century's fatigue with itself."[5] 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 post-utopian consciousness."[6] Edith Clowes's book *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology after Utopia* notes that Venichka's journey is a "pathological meta-utopia."[7] 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 twentieth-century social situation, including social marginalization.[8] 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 place in it. Finally, a well-developed

3 Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1999), 67.

4 Ibid.

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

6 Ibid., 460.

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

8 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.

body of scholarship looks at Venichka as a satirical response to the traditional Russian figure of *iurodivyi* (holy fool). Studies by Oliver Ready, Ivan Esaulov, Mark Lipovetsky, and Mikhail Epstein have all extensively examined Venichka as an ironic interpretation of the religious figure wherein his foolish or sinful behavior "parodies the dominant norms of one cultural system or another."[9]

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 *poema*. I. A. Paperno and B. M. Gasparov's 1981 article "Vstan' i idi" remains the best known of all biblical interpretations of *Moskva-Petushki*. Focusing on the resurrection theme that permeates the text, Paperno and Gasparov offer a comparison between Venichka and Christ. Looking further at Venichka's character through a Christian lens, several scholars point to the holy fool image as a means of understanding Venichka's motivations in the *poema*. 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 Sluzhevskaia'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 quest 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."[10] 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.

9 Ivan Esaulov, "Two Facets of Comedic Space in Russian Literature of the Modern Period: Holy Foolishness and Buffonery," in *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of Humour in Russian Culture*, ed. Lesley Milne (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 73.

10 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.

One of the reasons for this knowledge gap 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 to Petushki. Nikita Blagoveshchenskii's 2006 book *Sluchai Veni E.: Psikhoanaliticheskoe issledovanie poėmy "Moskva-Petushki"* is an analysis of the psychopathological elements of Venichka's personality and his journey. Valentina Baslyk's article "Venichka's Divided Self: The Sacred and the Monstrous" looks at Erofeev's troubled narrator who represents the division between self and society. Baslyk draws attention to two sides of Venichka's personality: a sympathetic and a misanthropic one. 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."[11] 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's 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."[12] 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 *poema*. He argues that the "main function of the comic in Erofeev's *poema* is a postmodernist downgrading of cultural and political idols. It also has another function: it creates an environment in which the tragic could survive without inducing terrible boredom on the Soviet reader."[13] Cynthia Simmons also 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*

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

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

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

Sasha Sokolov.[14] 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. By focusing 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 to 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-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."[15] These works on *Moskva-Petushki* seek to find meaning in Venichka's train ride to Petushki and place his journey in a larger literary conversation.

Mark Al'tshuller's "*Moskva-Petushki* Venedikta 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, Moscou-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.

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

15 Katherine V. Moskver, "Back on the Road: Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* and Traditions of Russian Literature," *Russian Literature* 48 (2000): 196–197.

Like Moskver, Beraha associates Venichka's journey with other famous quests (those 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."[16] Behara looks at various picaresque themes in *Moskva-Petushki*, including negation, emptying, and the cancellation of time in the 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 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.'"[17] 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.

The purpose of this book is not to provide a single and complete reading of *Moskva-Petushki* and all of its varied allusions to Russian and Western culture but to investigate one of the main reasons why Venichka's journey to Petushki ends in his "death." While Petushki often seems to critics to be a 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. Petushki is more than just a place of earthly delights, 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. This book also seeks to situate *Moskva-Petushki* in the tradition of travelogues within Russian and Western literature. While Moskver and Al'tshuller examine *Moskva-Petushki* as a literary travelogue, they approach *Moskva-Petushki* through a narrow lens and does not place Erofeev's work within the larger conversation in global literature. This book seeks to place *Moskva-Petushki* within the overall trend of how writers across cultures have used travel in their works as a means of coming to terms with oppressive political systems that have labeled writers as "outsiders" within their own countries.

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

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

Therefore, the aim of *Wandering in Circles* is to show that *Moskva-Petushki* can be read as a quest for redemption that challenges even the possibility of redemption in the Soviet Union 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 each failure of his journey, 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 this space is closed off to Venichka is supported by the phrase *mene, tekel, 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."[18] 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, 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 cannot find the correct path on his own, and this uncertainty causes him to stagger at the beginning of his thirteenth attempt. At that point, since Venichka does not know the correct path, he tries three pre-established paths to redemption, hoping that one will lead him to Petushki. I contend that Erofeev looks to Aleksandr Radishchev's 1790

18 Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki*, 134. "They are serious, they don't understand this, but I am a lightweight, and I will never understand it…Mene, tekel, parsin, that is you have been weighed upon the scales and found wanting, that is, tekel. So it goes, so it goes."

work *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (*Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu*), John Milton's 1667 poem *Paradise Lost*, and Dante Alighieri's 1308–1321 poem *The Divine Comedy* (*La Commedia*) as three possible routes to redemption. This book's overall goal is to examine the redemption theme in each work and 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 redemption visions are not universally applicable and offer false hope to those who seek redemption.

Parody

Moskva-Petushki belongs to the Brezhnev-era (1965–1981) culture of irony. While there was some opportunity for individual writers to publish during the Khrushchev Thaw (1956–1965), a period of social and political "stagnation" followed. Even if not every writer was able to publish under the Thaw, the return to increased censorship and repression under Brezhnev seemed to negate the earlier cultural gains.[19] During the so-called "stagnation," writers, artists, and musicians responded to the increased harshness of the regime and expressed their disillusionment following the state's negation of the liberal course through a body of works rich in irony. Anatoly Vishevsky's 1993 book *Soviet Literary Culture in the 1970s: The Politics of Irony* discusses how the repression of this period and the Thaw's failed hope led to an ironic worldview in literature across the Soviet Union. The cultural and political shifts of this period, argues Alexei Yurchak, led to the further developed aesthetic or absurd irony known as *steb*, which is "different from sarcasm and derision because it requires a degree of such overidentification with the object, person, or idea that it is often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule or a peculiar mixture of the two."[20] In the Soviet Union, *steb* emerged in response to the circular, predictable discourse of the late Soviet period and created a "paradoxical culture, social and psychic effect" that ultimately led to the peculiar humor of the absurd.[21]

19 Emily Lygo, "Between Ideology and Literature: Translation in the USSR during the Brezhnev Period," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 24, no. 1 (March 2016): 48.

20 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 250 and 289.

21 Ibid., 243.

If we apply Yurchak's *steb* to *Moskva-Petushki*, then Erofeev's use of parody is not merely poking fun at a singular system or institution in the *poema*. Nor is it merely a reaction to the increased repression of the time; it is a much more cynical examination of what it means to survive in a broken system. Through the numerous allusions to other works, places, and people that Erofeev satirizes during Venichka's journey, he unanchors them from their constative meaning and renders them open-ended and irrelevant.[22]

In examining the relationship between Erofeev's definition of redemption and that of Radishchev, Milton, and Dante, it is helpful to narrow the lens of parody to look at the works through Yuri Tynianov's definition of parody. Tynianov's concept of parody allows for the introduction of "new" elements, that is, for an author to articulate his or her characteristic voice and worldview. He defines the essence of parody as creativity based upon mechanization of specific 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 stylized work, and the second task is to show the new organization of material.[23] The new organization will show the mechanization of the old. In *Moskva-Petushki*, parody allows Erofeev to articulate his own path to redemption. Through their stylization and common themes, the works of Radishchev, Milton, and Dante (among many others) serve as the first level that shows through in *Moskva-Petushki*. This stylization allows Erofeev to reject the previous paths to promised redemption and seek a new path that applies to his corrupted world.

Defining Erofeev's Vision of Redemption

Several critics and scholars have read *Moskva-Petushki* with the theme of redemption in mind, and 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."[24] 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

22 Ibid., 290.

23 Yuri. N. Tynianov, "Istoriia literatury," in his *Poetika* (Moscow: Kino and Nauka, 1977), 54.

24 Ryan-Hayes, *Contemporary Russian Satire*, 81.

"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."[25] Peter Krastzev also comments on the book's final scene and calls *Moskva-Petushki* an "idiosyncratic salvation story without resurrection or redemption in the end."[26] 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.[27] One then must make amends for one's wrongness, and these attempts to atone end in either success or failure. However, at least three more nuanced definitions of redemption must be considered when defining Erofeev's 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 of the Dantean elements of *Moskva-Petushki* and because of Erofeev's conversion to Catholicism later in his life.[28] 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

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

26 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*, vol. 1, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 72.

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

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

traditions."[29] 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.[30]

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] the reconciliation between God and man . . . [but rather the destruction] of the roots of sin and evil."[31] 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.[32] Father Aleksandr Men, a twentieth-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."[33] In their book *Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation*, A. J. Wallace and R. D. Rusk note that the Orthodox Christian version of redemption calls for a moral transformation to obtain redemption.[34] 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 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

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

30 Ibid.

31 Nikolai Berdyaev, cited in Guroian, "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith," 45.

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

33 Nikolai Berdyaev, cited in Guroian, "Human Rights and Modern Western Faith," 45.

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

reparation. Pope Pius IX focused explicitly on these acts of atonement and reparation in his work *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, which he issued in 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.[35]

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 had an 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."[36] 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 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 humanity. This dissolution of society, as a particular class is the proletariat.[37]

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

35 Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, May 08, 1928, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280508_miserentissimus-redemptor.html, accessed November 17, 2019.

36 Ibid.

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

in the Soviet Union, they were sent to labor camps to contribute to the country via economic production: "This institution was rooted in the conviction that labor and labor alone was capable of redeeming the criminal."[38] 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 was 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."[39] 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."[40] The spiritual element of redemption was replaced by the idea that redemption could be a form of punishment.

Finally, 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 constantly shifted 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."[41] The Thaw was when prominent literary figures 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. Yet, the redemption the Thaw offered was an incomplete and contradictory form of redemption from its very beginning. It was not granted unilaterally and required, what Kevin Platt argues, was an "observance of a rule of silence concerning

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

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

40 Ibid., 59.

41 Ibid., 255.

legacies of collective trauma at the price of social belonging," meaning that even those who could publish did so through "a narrative of what was left unsaid."[42] Moreover, 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 Thaw's redemption 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 then rejected by *Novyi Mir* in 1956, and he was expelled from the Writers' Union in 1958.[43] The period of relative freedom came to an end in 1965 when Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel were arrested, tried, and sentenced to seven years of hard labor when they published their work in the West.[44] Although the Thaw offered fewer restrictions to many writers, its redemption was not offered equally or permanently.

It is with all these definitions in mind that Erofeev constructs his vision of redemption. The fluidity of this vision, oscillating between the different 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 provide a singular set of instructions on how one can obtain redemption. To find a path to redemption, Erofeev turns to three literary models of redemption that suggest that redemption is a quest: *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, *Paradise Lost*, and the *Divine Comedy*.

---

42 Kevin Platt, "'Secret Speech': Wounding, Disavowal, and Social Belonging in the USSR," *Critical Inquiry* 42 (Spring 2016): 651, 656.

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

44 Andrei Sinyavsky (1925–1997) and Yuli Daniel (1925-1988) were writers who were arrested and tried on charges of anti-Soviet propaganda as part of the show trials of 1966. The pair were found guilty and sentenced to seven years and five years of hard labor in the GULAG system. Their arrests, trial, and conviction mark the end of the Thaw period.

Radishchev, Dante, and Milton

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*?[45] Although these names do not appear among the more than eighty explicit references to political, historical, and literary figures mentioned in *Moskva-Petushki*, Erofeev engages their works through allusion and the trajectory of Venichka's path to Petushki. Each work on its own tells a particular story about redemption and the 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, which sheds light on the dialogue that occurs among the four works. This is a more preferable approach than ranging them according to the importance of these works' impact on Erofeev's definition of redemption.

Radishchev refers to Milton in the Tver section of his book *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 responds to Dante's writings on the same subject. Therefore, it 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 eighteenth century. His mission in writing *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* was to highlight the

45 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 комедиа. Не всякая простота—святая. И не всякая комедия—божественная." Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki*, 62.

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 Russia embarked on this path of social redemption, the result would be a more enlightened society in which rule of law, equality before the law, the 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 to achieve absolution. Unlike the visions of redemption construed by 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 profoundly 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 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 genuine 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 paths to redemption. As a postmodern writer Erofeev shows what Jean-François Lyotard calls "an incredulity towards metanarratives."[46] He rejects these large-scale and such well-established journeys as absolute truths for people who find themselves

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