

**University of Alberta**

**Perfect Calendars in Chaotic Times**

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the literary and media texts pertaining to the calendar reform introduced by the Bolshevik government after the October Revolution in 1917, and the establishment of specifically Soviet calendar in 1917-1929. The careful examination of the texts reveals a particularly salient feature of the new calendar, namely, its chaotic nature. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative as an exclusively human method of comprehending reality, this study investigates the phenomenon of calendrical narrative in its social and private aspects. Chapter 1 reconstructs the political and ideological context of the historical period employing materials from the two leading Soviet newspapers, Pravda and Izvestiia, and, more specifically, those articles which promote the new Soviet vision of holidays and the ritual calendar as a whole. Chapter 2 deals with Vladimir Mayakovsky's vision of time as man's enemy and his construction of a "perfect" calendar for the future. Chapter 3 examines Mikhail Bulgakov's interpretation of the Christian ritual calendar as a message to ordinary people explaining the moral virtues of Christ, as well as those literary devices he employed highlighting the importance of this message to society and the individual.

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## Introduction

Calendars are bound to time and are, as clocks, an instrument of its measurement. The social sciences distinguish between two types of time: natural (cosmic, or universal) time, and lived time. Paul Ricoeur provides a useful explanation of the human perception of time: "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" (V. 2, 3). Calendars, in other words, lead to an appropriation of the mystic nature of time in people's daily life by "explaining" it in the form of a story. In order to make time more "livable," society creates stories with agents who act on the special days of the year; their actions therefore are bound by time. Society, then, lives in parallel with these stories and organizes social order according to these special days. The lives of Christ, or Mohammed, the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and many other narratives have all been placed within the context of the calendars of different societies and different historical periods. The chain of special celebratory days forms the calendar narrative, one of major narratives regulating societal and individual existence.

Ricoeur positions the calendar between the two kinds of time which mankind has to deal with:

[T]he unique way in which history responds to the aporias of the phenomenology of time consists in the elaboration of a third time -- properly historical time -- which mediates between lived time and cosmic time. To demonstrate this thesis, we shall call on the procedures of

connection, borrowed from historical practice itself, that assure the reinscription of lived time on cosmic time: the calendar, the succession of generations, archives, documents, and traces (V. 3, 99).

This theory explains why the calendar is turned into a place inhabited by characters and why it represents the stories of their lives. It also suggests an image of the calendar as a two-faced Janus whose rational, counting face looks at cosmic time, while its human, perceptive face looks at everyday, human existence. The human face of the calendar is a narrative, solely man's invention.

Calendars can be of different origins and functions, ranging from calendars of various religions and states to those of different social groups and private calendars.<sup>1</sup> The official state calendar of any country is the most institutionalized and publicized calendar, however. State calendars in particular provide the citizens of the state with a grand narrative, according to which the political regime expects people to live and in which it expects them to believe. J. M. Bernstein characterizes the grand narratives (or meta-narratives) as “second-order narratives which seek to narratively articulate and legitimate some concrete first-order practices and narratives” (102).<sup>2</sup>

Calendars penetrate all levels of life in a society, as well as the private life of every individual, in many ways governing their political, cultural and private actions. Although it may seem very sketchy, the calendar narrative provides a

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “private” instead of “personal” following Sania Perovic’s usage of this term in her unpublished dissertation “Untamable Time: A Literary and Historical Panorama of the French Revolutionary Calendar (1792-1805).”

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern condition “as incredulity toward metanarratives” (23). Lyotard, however, does not reject grand narratives altogether, but rather points to man’s greater possibility in postmodernity to choose among many narratives which govern his life.

great number of practical implications in the form of rituals, often very elaborate. The calendrical grand narrative reveals itself to some extent through the means of time-counting which depends mostly on the predominant religion of the state. It is represented, for example, in the number of months in a year or days in a week, or the day of starting the year according to religious belief. The greater imposition of the calendrical grand narrative on the state population happens through the system of ritual days which reinforces the moral, social and political values that the state defines as a basis for sustaining normal existence.<sup>3</sup> These special days construct the narrative which directs the daily life of citizens and becomes their primary instrument for understanding events, circumstances, human actions and the world in general.

An official calendar has the status of law, but initially any state calendar is the product of the individual endeavors of scientists, priests, or political rulers who measure universal time and appropriate it for the everyday life of society. Therefore, every particular state calendar contains, at some originating moment, a very private element of the individual(s), who believed that it was the perfect calendar for use in their society and who had enough power to impose this calendar over their people. When the Bolsheviks launched the calendar reform after the October Revolution of 1917 aimed at building a new calendar for a new socialist country, they followed to some extent the same traditional route. The unique feature of this reform, however, was its hectic introduction leading to the creation of a

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<sup>3</sup> See Etzioni 3.

chaotic state calendar which defined the social life of the country for the first decade following the Revolution.

This reform meant a change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. The political reasons for this change, however, were more imperative. The Bolsheviks hoped to create a rupture between the Old and New epochs. They wanted to undermine the Russian Orthodox Church by confusing the dates of religious festivities with the dates of the new calendar. The Church had not accepted the new calendar and continues to use the Julian calendar even to this day.<sup>4</sup> The Bolsheviks also began to aggressively impose a new concept of time on people. The main aim of the reform was to create an official Soviet calendar which could serve the ideological purposes of the new socialist state and function as a locus and instrument for legitimizing the communist grand narrative.

The earlier Soviet calendar of 1918-1929 was hastily created without little common sense and with no regard of its aftermath or for people's perceptions of new holidays.<sup>5</sup> It resulted in the creation of a calendar, whose main function was antipodal to the traditional calendar: instead of bringing order and union to the

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<sup>4</sup> In the "Определение Священного Собора Православной Российской Церкви" ("Statement of the Sacred Meeting of the Russian Orthodox Church") which was issued on December 2, 1917, during the Bolsheviks' preparation for the reform, it was written: "8. Во всех случаях государственной жизни, в которых государство обращается к религии, преимуществом пользуется Православная Церковь. 9. Православный календарь признается государственным календарем. 10. Дванадцатые праздники, воскресные и особо чтимые Православной Церковью дни признаются в государстве неприсутственными днями" (14). This position of the Church made it a real enemy for the new political regime.

<sup>5</sup> The new Bolshevik government discussed the calendar reform already on 16 November, 1917. (Декреты Советской власти (Decrees of the Soviet Power), том 1, 405). The urgency of the issue signals the importance they assigned to the state calendar. The Bolsheviks were not sure that they would remain in power for a long time. Nevertheless, in the period of such political unrest, the Consul of the People Commissars found time to radically change the calendar despite increasing political instability in the country.

nation, it brought chaos and confusion, because it displaced the pre-revolutionary calendrical grand narrative without providing a new one, cohesive and accepted by the population.

The Russian Imperial state calendar was based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and reflected a Christian perspective of time, morality and social norms. The life stories of the saints and plots of historic events were woven into the Christ story. Special days devoted to honoring the Tsar's family and the folk feast days (although very few) were included in the state calendar without destroying the religious calendar and its narrative -- indeed, they tended to strengthen it. Moreover, the significance of the religious calendar was that it never lost its dominant role in the structure of the Imperial state calendar. The new communist narrative sought to tell the story of the Bolshevik struggle for people's liberation from the power of capital and religion. The ritual year, consequently, had to consist of the days that marked the stages of this struggle and the names of revolutionaries had to replace the names of Christian martyrs. The Bolsheviks decided the transition from the old calendar to the new should be slow, giving people the opportunity to adapt to the new ritual year; and therefore they allowed ten religious feast days to be a part of the Soviet state ritual calendar.

The concurrent presence of the two calendar narratives in the Soviet state calendar (each of which negated the meaning of the other) created two independent and mutually exclusive time frames, into which the ordinary person had to include his personal events. The two opposing calendrical narratives defined people in their social interactions, forcing them to have some kind of

social double identity. In real life it took a constant switch from one social time to the other, where, for example, the communist-worker during the celebration of May Day had to participate at the workplace in a series of antireligious actions following the celebration of Easter at home. In other words, an individual had to accept two grand narratives which explained life from completely opposite perspectives.

Regarding the changes that occurred in the Soviet state calendar during the entire Soviet period, a few shorter periods in its development can be distinguished. Its first variation of 1917–1929 can be called the “Bolshevik calendar.” Its development can, in turn, be divided into three periods. The first began in February 1917, the month of the February Revolution in Russia, with its end marked by “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и праздничных днях” (“Regulations of the Weekly Rest and Holidays”) issued in December 1918. The second period spanned January 1919 to January 1925, at which point the date of Lenin’s death (January 21), called *День траура* (The Day of Grief) was added to the already considerably altered calendar. This date had immense ideological significance at the time as all holidays in 1924 were presented to the public under the unifying slogan “Нет Ленина!” (“We do not have Lenin!”). In subsequent years this slogan disappeared, but Lenin’s name was always used in discourse concerning Soviet holidays, tying them together. In 1924 another change was made: Christian holidays were scheduled according to the Gregorian calendar. The Soviet government based this on a decision made at the All-Russian Church Council in June 1923 concerning the acceptance of the Gregorian calendar by the

Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup> After few months, however, the Church reverted back to the Julian calendar, but the state calendar did not reflect this. As a result, almost all religious holidays became working days, and this became another weapon in the Bolshevik battle with the Russian Orthodox Church. The third period of the Bolshevik calendar spanned January 1925 to September 1929, when the new calendar took deeper root in Soviet society, though new special dates -- they remained working days -- were added almost every year.

In this study I examine the “Bolshevik” calendar’s development (1918-1929). During this period the base for the new Soviet calendar was formed and the Bolsheviks’ intentions in calendar change already became clear. The February Revolution can be seen as the beginning of this shaping, as it introduced the political freedoms that allowed the Bolsheviks to begin to organize and establish new special dates. The most important measures that provided these opportunities were the permission of newspaper publication and the organization of demonstrations.<sup>7</sup> On the day of the Bolshevik coup on October 25, 1917, the Bolshevik government already had a considerably long list of special dates which were instated in the following year, 1918. The reform of the ritual year in December 1918 was a result of these activities.

During the transitional period the new “Bolshevik” calendar gradually brought about the complete alteration of the ritual year in Russia. It was fully

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<sup>6</sup> Roslof, Edward E. Red Priests: Renovatism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution 121.

<sup>7</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii write about the period between February and October Revolution: “There was an explosion of newspapers, many with a circulation of millions, brochures, song books and dictionaries on political themes” (7).

established by 1928 when Stalin initiated the first Five-Year Plan. This decision marks the Soviet government's assurance of the possibility of what Mikhail Geller calls the "nationalization of time."<sup>8</sup> Then in October 1929, the Soviet government made a radical decision by introducing a five-day week, which excluded all religious holidays, and decreased the number of common rest days to five. The result was the "Stalin" calendar, which marked a new period of five-year plans. Although this decree introduced a five-day week, which was later changed to a six-day week, the reform proved unsuccessful, and in 1940 the seven-day week was brought back. A new system of holidays, which had been introduced in 1929, continued to exist until 1954. Then the Soviet calendar was gradually modified from 1954 to the 1970s and following this it functioned with only minor changes until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There are a variety of reasons for the destructive character of the new Soviet calendar of its "Bolshevik period" and many of them were reflected in post-revolutionary media. The Bolshevik newspapers provide strong evidence of the desperate attempts of the Bolshevik rulers to assemble the Soviet special calendar days and to create a new calendrical narrative. Despite the clear efforts of Bolshevik editors to enhance the texts with a sense of order and their alledged acceptance by the masses, the artificial character of the Soviet holidays is only too clear.

For more than twelve years an inconsistent state calendar existed in the Soviet Union forcing people to navigate between the calendrical systems and two

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<sup>8</sup> Geller, M. Gods in the Soviet Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man 65.

ritual narratives.<sup>9</sup> They were required to change the rhythm of everyday life and to accept the unfamiliar symbolic system of a new political regime with new special calendrical days. Moreover, this double temporality destroyed an individual's established cultural memory because the Bolshevik ritual calendar brought information promoting a new cultural vision. As a result, every member of Russian society experienced not only the confusion over the management of time and understanding of the meaning of the new holidays, but the feeling of loss of her/his cultural identity, triggered by the destruction of the traditional calendrical narrative that lies at the heart of everyday life.<sup>10</sup>

This dissertation assumes the major importance of calendrical grand narrative in the lives of people. It is a necessary support for individual and social identity, connecting an individual with other people, her/his nation, and past, historical or mythological. It reconciles man with the mystery and threat of Time, especially the inevitability of death. In this dissertation I argue that if an individual experiences instability, rupture, or gradual disappearance of a calendrical narrative (which usually happens when a change in the state calendar is made) he begins strengthening his own private calendar. A personal calendar by nature, however, cannot be absolutely private, because its special dates are based on stories. Henry Bergson observes, insightfully, that storytelling is "A fundamental demand of life" (quotation in Muldoon 112). Those people who create calendars strive for the

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<sup>9</sup> Psychiatric research shows that the individual experiences psychological trauma if his life stops being a coherent and continuant narrative for him. See Ridge, Damien. Recovery from Depression Using the Narrative Approach.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this is why calendar reforms are very rare occurrences in the history of the Western world and, when they happen, are rarely a complete success. Even the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in Europe took centuries and the Gregorian calendar is still unaccepted by almost all Orthodox Churches. See Holford-Strevens 62.

acceptance, at least in part, of their calendrical story as the “perfect” calendar for that society in which they live. This dissertation examines the resonance of the Bolshevik calendar reform in the writings of two prominent Russian authors, poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) and writer Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940), and more particularly, with the creation of the “perfect” calendars they offered to their reading public and Russian society as a whole.

We cannot deny that practically every individual has his own calendar which corresponds to his life narrative and which may in parts agree with the state calendar, and in other parts contradict or even completely reject it. In my study I explore the private calendars of Mayakovsky and Bulgakov who, due to their occupation as men of letters, were able to present their private calendars through their literary works, and who actively offered them to the public as examples of a perfect calendar. I made this choice for a few reasons. The first is that they both actively employed calendar dates in their fictional and non-fictional works, and demonstrated their concern with the Bolshevik calendar reform. The second is that they were contemporaries, living through the turmoil of the First World War, the Revolution, the Russian Civil War and their aftermaths. The third reason is that in real life they knew each other and demonstrated their different political attitudes to each other: Mayakovsky was a poet of the Revolution, who used his talent for the establishment of revolutionary reforms while Bulgakov considered the Revolution a national disaster and constantly, subtly or openly, criticized the Soviet political regime. The fourth, and most important reason, is the nature of their “perfect” calendars. While Mayakovsky was a tireless agitator for the new

Soviet calendar and new Soviet holidays, explicitly showing his negation of the pre-revolutionary Russian state calendar, Mikhail Bulgakov regarded the elimination of the pre-revolutionary religious calendar as a rejection of moral norms in society. Consequently, the former created a “perfect” calendar for the communist future without the traditional calendrical narrative of the circular year, while the latter tried to prove the necessity of returning to the old religious calendar based on the story of Jesus.

The writings of Mayakovsky and Bulgakov demonstrate that the special interest in the creation of a “perfect” calendar increases during political upheavals, when new political power changes the ritual year. Interpretations of calendar dates can be also found in the works of other authors such as Andrei Platonov and Boris Pasternak. The proletarian poets, in turn, actively condemned religious feast days and employed propaganda promoting the Soviet ones.<sup>11</sup>

Calendar reform forces creative individuals to pay attention to the calendar as a guiding factor of everyday existence. Mayakovsky and Bulgakov were not the first individuals who presented their private calendars to the reading public placing their importance on the same scale as the state calendar. As Sanja Perovic writes, as early as in 1788, the French playwright, Sylvain Maréchal, whose ideas were used for the calendar reform of the French Revolution, published *Almanach des honnêtes gens*, where he dismissed the church calendar and created a personal calendar including a large number of private dates, such as his and his father’s birthdays. He also “advises his readers that everyone should make their own

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<sup>11</sup> See Пролетарская поэзия первых лет советской эпохи (Proletarian Poetry of the First Years of the Soviet Epoch).

private calendar” (11). It is significant that writers, living in different centuries and cultures, shared the intentions of opposing the official calendar with the important dates of their private lives. They all lived in periods of political upheavals and this signals that the creation of private calendars becomes most necessary when political and cultural systems undergo radical changes, leaving individuals without the support of a sufficient calendrical narrative, normally provided by a well-established state calendar.

I define the state ritual calendar as a system of special days proposed or reinforced by the current government of a country and which can include any type of special days or holidays, usually obtained from unofficial calendars already in existence. These special days can be: memorial days that reflect and support the present or previous political power; a result of the presence of different religions which dominate the state territory; international special days; and those special days which support family, professional, community or any other values and are not directly connected with state policy. Special days can be non-working holidays, or those marked in the printed calendar<sup>12</sup> which still are working days. Working special days can be called, at least for the purposes of investigation, “half-holidays,” because during such days a certain period of time is devoted to usual business activities and a certain period for special activities characteristic of holiday time.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of holiday is essential for a definition of the ritual calendar.

“Holiday” is often used in scholarly works as a synonym of the word “ritual.”

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<sup>12</sup> In order to differentiate the calendar as a cultural phenomenon from the calendar as a text, I use the phrase “the printed calendar” when I indicate the later.

<sup>13</sup> The term *полупраздник* (half-holiday) is used by Т. А. Бернштам in her book Молодежь в обрядовой жизни русской общины 19 – начала 20 в. (Бернштам 214).

However, this approach almost always shifts the researchers' interest to the phenomenon of ritual as an act, while holiday as a calendar day remains largely uninvestigated. For my project, it is necessary to use a definition of holiday as a special calendar day, that is, as a time period. Tatiana Bernshtam's definition is one which is both based on the concept of time and points to the ritual activities that characterize these time periods:

Словами 'праздник/свят' у русских назывались воскресенье, общинные и семейные (например, семейный, 'заветный,' именины) торжества; термин 'свят' имел, однако, более широкое значение и закрепился также за особо значимыми в данной традиции ритуальными днями и циклами, в которые работа могла и не прекращаться ('свят-день' -- благовещенье, рождественские, весенние святки и др.) (Бернштам 214).

It is significant that this definition, written by a Soviet anthropologist and concerned mostly with the folk calendar, mirrors a definition given by Amitai Etzioni, an American sociologist:

Holidays are defined as days on which custom or the law dictates a suspension of general business activity in order to commemorate or celebrate a particular event. They are symbolic in the sense that their essential elements (activities, foods, rules) cannot be substantively explained – the connection between these elements and the holiday they belong to is arbitrary (6).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The essential feature of holiday is its symbolic character. Although not stated in the definition, it suggests that this feature is a result of an agreement between people, and calendar is a unique written document which reflects this agreement.

Both definitions are noteworthy in the field of cultural studies because they define the two main characteristics of all holidays of any time or culture: absence of work and the symbolic mode of activities undertaken during a period of holidays. In my dissertation, I will use Amitai Etzioni's definition to designate the concept of "*prazdnik*" (holiday).

The word *prazdnik* was used in Russian pre-revolutionary calendars to designate Christian Orthodox feasts as well as state celebrations of the Tsar's family members' birthdays, but in colloquial Russian this word had a much broader meaning. It meant a day of rest and a special working day; in other words, any special day or event for a community or an individual. In Dal's dictionary the meaning of the word *prazdnik* includes both working and rest days.<sup>15</sup> In the Bolshevik printed calendars of 1919-1925, this word was used only for the designation of religious feasts and New Year's Day. After 1926, they were called *бытовые праздники* ("holidays of everyday life"). The new Bolshevik holidays were not called *prazdniki*, but *годовщины* ("anniversaries"), *нерабочие дни* ("non-working days"), *дни отдыха* ("rest days"), and *красные дни* ("red days").

Rejection of the word *prazdnik* is particularly significant and can be explained by the fact that it was associated with the religious and imperial holidays of the pre-revolutionary calendar. The Bolsheviks wanted not only to change it, but to replace it by a new, completely different calendar. However, printed calendars often demonstrate their authors' difficulties in avoiding the use of the word *prazdnik*. They managed to avoid the word in the cells giving the days' numeral dates, but in articles devoted to the explanation of the new Soviet holidays'

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<sup>15</sup> See Даль, В. Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка. Том 3, 381.

meanings, they revert to *prazdnik* more often than using the new terms for special dates. We see the same practice in newspapers: in articles about new special dates, authors use *prazdnik* even for memorial days (for example, in articles about “Bloody Sunday”, the memorial day devoted to the commemoration of victims of the public massacre in Petrograd in 1905).<sup>16</sup> In this study, I will use *prazdnik* (*prazdniki* – plural) as an inclusive term for the designation of any holiday, feast, memorial day, rest day, family celebration or festival.<sup>17</sup>

The calendar as a cultural phenomenon and a cultural text has become a subject of more animated academic interest mainly in the last twenty years and mostly in the field of social science. Researchers recognize the calendar as an active social entity that controls human behavior and often influences the course of political and social events.<sup>18</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, a well-known expert in the area, investigates calendars of different countries from a sociological perspective. His work on the calendar of the French Republic is especially interesting because he offers an insightful interpretation of the goals its creators sought to attain by changing the French state calendar.<sup>19</sup> His other work, The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week, is a fundamental study not only of the origin and place of the weekly unit of the calendar, but also of the various calendars and calendrical traditions.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example: “Празднование 9 января” (“Celebration of January 9”).

<sup>17</sup> All these English words can be translated into Russian as *prazdnik*.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1945 the Soviet generals increased their assaults on German troops in order to win the war by May Day, the most important official holiday in the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands of human lives were sacrificed in order to make the holiday more cheerful than ever.

<sup>19</sup> See Zerubavel, Hidden Rhythms 82-96.

Amity Etziony provides a detailed analysis of contemporary American holidays, tracing the history of their emergence and the political and sociological reasons for their celebrations. He highlights one of the most important calendar functions in Western society to remind people of moral virtues which help sustain the current order and ethical basis of modern society. My analysis of the Bulgakov's "perfect" calendar was inspired by his notion of the ritual calendar as a reminder of moral virtues.

The history and development of the Russian state calendar is less studied. A. Pokrovsky, who tried to attract scholars to the research of the Russian calendar, wrote, as early as in 1913:

История календаря в России как памятника литературного до сих пор еще не была предметом научного исследования, нет даже решения многих отдельных вопросов, соприкасающихся с этой областью. Эта книга переживала различные стадии своего развития и прежде, чем дойти до нас, испытала на себе много изменений. Иноземная по своему происхождению, книга эта сохраняет в настоящее время только свое нерусское название, совершенно изменив свое содержание. Но многие стадии современного календаря становятся вполне ясными лишь тогда, когда мы ближе познакомимся с его историей.<sup>20</sup>

Jelena Pogosjan's works on the calendar reform of Peter the Great opened an interesting page in the investigation of the Russian calendar, not only regarding the topic itself, but also the use of the calendar as a unique tool for the explanation of

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<sup>20</sup> Pokrovsky, A. < <http://www.ualberta.ca/~pogosjan/projects/calendar/pokrovskij.html> >.

time and dates of political events. Surprisingly, social and political occurrences, such as the beginnings of wars and critical changes to state policy, were quite often assigned by state leaders to special dates of the state calendar in order to attain saints' blessings, or to add weight to a diminishing *prazdnik*, or, on the contrary, to overshadow an existing *prazdnik*.

Christopher Binns' work on the establishment of the Soviet calendar, "The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System" (1979), can be considered as the beginning of the study of the Soviet calendar and is still very important, notwithstanding the fact that it is largely a survey. He defines the main stages of the development of the state Soviet calendar starting from the October revolution using an anthropological approach and defines its functions in Soviet society. A more detailed picture of the establishment of the Soviet ritual year is given in a book by S. Iu.

Malysheva Советская праздничная культура в провинции: пространство, символы, исторические мифы (1917-1927) (Soviet Festive Culture in Province: Space, Symbols, Historical Myths (1917-1927)) (2005). She studied a broad range of sources in order to show the dynamics of the development of new Soviet holidays in the Autonomous Republic of Tataria during the post-revolutionary period and, having examined many case studies, she makes more general conclusions about the development of Soviet cultural myths.

In the last decade of post-perestroika Russia, a great number of books written for the general public were published regarding the Christian Orthodox calendar (Кислицына, Церковно-народный месяцевлов among others). These

books educate readers about traditional Russian religious and folk *prazdniki* and reflect revisions in the Soviet ritual calendar.<sup>21</sup> They provide more evidence of the people's wish to live under the governance of a grand calendrical narrative which functions to unite people into one nation. In other words, the reverse process is now in place reviving the pre-revolutionary Russian calendar and its basic Christian narrative. It is quite surprising that though living in the period of this reverse process, we do not clearly know what kinds of processes brought about the Soviet calendar in the first place because, to my knowledge, if we exclude Binn's and Malysheva's works, no investigation has been done on the calendrical ritual year of the Soviet Union of any period.

In my study, I analyze texts which belong to various types of cultural production such as official government documents, printed calendars, media texts, memoirs and fictional works. The variety of such texts requires an interdisciplinary approach. First of all, I examine the Soviet government's decrees pertinent to the Bolshevik calendar reform beginning of 1917, and Soviet and pre-revolutionary printed Russian calendars, using content analysis. I also scrutinize the texts of the two leading newspapers in Soviet Russia, Pravda (Правда) an organ of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party and Izvestiia (Известия) which represented the Soviet government, published in 1917-1930. I examine these texts in order to address the issue of Soviet media involvement in the establishment of a new calendar and propagandistic material which people were exposed to during that

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<sup>21</sup> A number of internet sources appeared in the post-perestroika period which covered the materials of the calendars not only of the Russian Federation, but also of other countries. Its active maintenance signals the population's deep interest in shaping the new state calendar under whose narrative new generations will live.

period. This helps to reconstruct the ideological context of the period and to highlight the Bolsheviks' ideological goals and their aim to convince people of the necessity of accepting a new system of holidays. I pay special attention to certain features of these publications such as their place in the edition, their position in relation to the other articles, types of background and font. My use of memoirs is only supplementary and is limited to those instances in research which demand an additional elucidation or confirmation of ideas.

The basic material of my investigation is the fictional works of the authors who were witnesses to this process, and who reflected and interpreted calendrical changes. While examining the fictional and non-fictional works of Mayakovsky, Bulgakov, and their contemporaries using a detailed textual analysis, I pay special attention to rhetorical devices in order to bring to light the "perfect" calendars they offered to the Russian people, and the calendrical narratives they believed best suited society. The nature of my investigation requires utilization of some procedures of biographical criticism because both authors were famous for writing quasi-autobiographical works. Creation of a "perfect" calendar involves the inclusion of the dates of the author's biographical events. To produce such a calendar requires the author to situate himself with regards to the calendrical grand narrative: to accept or reject it, or to write a completely new story, or to incorporate a personal story into the grand narrative, and precisely these are the objects of my investigation. Edward Brown writes about an inseparable nature of Mayakovsky's life and work:

Even the well-established dogma that the fact of a poet's biography must never be deduced from his poems is subject in [Mayakovsky's] case to radical modification. Indeed, the structure of his poetry as a whole – and by structure I mean the systematic organization of theme and image – was shaped by the events of his life . . . The critic may therefore deal with his life and his work as directly and systematically related, and move without embarrassment from one to the other (7).

The same could be said about Bulgakov: most of his works have autobiographical roots. Bulgakov often gave to his characters names which resembled his own, for example, Bomgard and Bormental, or made them, like himself, medical doctors, writers, or playwrights.<sup>22</sup> Mayakovsky went even further, making himself the protagonist in many of his works, the most well-known of which is a play entitled Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия (Vladimir Mayakovsky. A Tragedy) (1913).

The calendar is unique in the sense that it exists within many levels of societal and individual life and connects the author with the political currents in the country. This is why the interpretation of the calendrical narrative is an interpretation of political power. The calendar's features make it a unique instrument for political readings of the works of many authors. Its capacity to connect private and social, man's inner world with his outer performance, enables the reader to uncover the social and political antagonisms that surrounded the author. For example, Vladimir Mayakovsky openly rejected the calendar of the

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<sup>22</sup> Bulgakov is also known for his use of real people he knew as prototypes for his fictional works, often only slightly changing their names.

Russian Orthodox Church and was a propagandist in favour of Bolshevik ideas among the workers of Moscow. Still the figures of God and Christ appeared persistently in his earlier poetry, betraying his suppressed search for something to replace the Christian religion and its calendar.

My research is in accordance with the practices of the New Historicism since I follow some of its procedures, such as examination of different social and political tendencies converging on the pages of printed works and also pay special attention to the ideological and, consequently, historical context of the works under investigation. Stefan J. Greenblatt, a key figure in the New Historicism, perhaps anticipated the impossibility of strictly following all the methodological rules which he and his collaborators developed when he insisted that the New Historicism is more a set of practice than a doctrine (146). My project reflects this observation: I would like to draw an important distinction between fictional and non-fictional texts, a distinction which, I believe, is still essential for an examining any sort of cultural production.

In my study I argue that if the authors are concerned with change in the calendar, then the calendar dates used in their works obtain a different status. They acquire a special significance of their own and stop being merely a complimentary element of the story events. These special meanings allow them to have a variety of functions: to indicate, for example, a particular vision of time, which the author or the characters have or lack; to become a connecting element between the fictional world of the literary work and the real world of the author; or to signal the type of calendrical grand narrative which the writer wants to describe.

The calendar theme has a strong presence in the works of Mayakovsky and Bulgakov, that is, the events in the stories follow the precise dates of the calendar of the real world, but the emphasis is placed not on the historical events of that period, but on the chronology of the lives of the main heroes. The historical calendar dates become the personal dates of human lives and are freely mixed with the dates of private events. This device allows the authors to play with the dates of the official and their own private calendars creating a number of effects.

Paul Ricoeur stresses the importance of calendrical feast days for an individual as a means for elevating his everyday existence to a larger temporal framework: “Through its periodicity, a ritual expresses a time whose rhythms are broader than those of ordinary action. By punctuating action in this way, it sets ordinary time and each brief human life within a broader time” (105). Both authors do precisely that. They situate their characters into a timeframe where the rhythms are not mandate, but reflect the rhythms of history and the universe, and where the characters’ actions take a wider scope and consequently a more complex meaning. They do thus, however, in a way that is unique to each of them.

My dissertation consists of three chapters. The first chapter aims to reconstruct the political and cultural context of establishment of a new Soviet calendar during the post-revolutionary period. I limit my investigation to materials published in Pravda and Izvestiia during 1917-1930. I assume that these newspapers are an adequate reflection of the Communist Party’s and the Soviet government’s policy toward the building of a new ritual calendar.<sup>23</sup> Maykovsky and Bulgakov,

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<sup>23</sup> The newspaper Pravda started publication in 1912, as the “Daily Workers’ Newspaper,” but it was always an organ of the Bolshevik, later the Communist Party. As a result of the constant

undoubtedly, read these newspapers, and Mayakovsky often published his poems in these publications, especially in Izvestiia. Both newspapers have an abundance of the materials devoted to criticism of pre-revolutionary holidays and the promotion of the Soviet holidays. Moreover, their pages served as a fertile ground where the Soviet calendar was, to a large extent, shaped. I will follow the establishment of every new Soviet *prazdnik* on the pages of both newspapers and try to show that most of the Soviet *prazdniki* were created as Bolshevik propagandistic tools without any attention to the national or state traditions and people's needs for common holidays. I investigate the attempts of Pravda and Izvestiia to establish stories behind every proposed *prazdnik*, their manipulations of facts, and their use of communicative strategies for the creation of the Soviet calendrical narrative.

In the second chapter, I will explore Vladimir Mayakovsky's ideas of time, death and calendrical narrative. I will show that for Mayakovsky the notions of time and calendar were inseparable and his belief in conquering death resulted in his rejection of the traditional calendar as both a counting instrument and a text professing the future. I will turn to the "most complex of Mayakovsky's works" (Thomson 194), the narrative poem Про это (About That) (1923), in order to clarify his vision of religious *prazdniki* and how he judged their role in society's daily life. I will also demonstrate that during his entire poetic career, Mayakovsky persistently

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repressions from the Russian government and, after the February Revolution in February 1917, from the Provisional government, the newspaper was often closed or forced to change its title. The newspaper Izvestiia's first edition was published on 28 February, 1917, as an organ of the Petrograd Soviets, but after the October Revolution represented the Soviet Government. (Кузнецов, Е. 10-45).

It is significant that even during the period between the two Revolutions, the materials devoted to special dates were almost identical in both newspapers, notwithstanding the fact that the Petrograd Soviets were against the Bolsheviks' political strategy. This can be explained by the fact that V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, a prominent Bolshevik, was a member of the editorial office of Izvestiia and controlled this coverage.

promoted in his works a future calendar whose narrative had to be based on the law of brotherhood, the manifestation of which he found in the celebration of May Day in Soviet Russia.

The third chapter concerns the works of Mikhail Bulgakov, for whom the Bolshevik calendar reform became the major symbol of change in Russian society after the Revolution. His works drew attention to the basic feature of the calendrical Christian narrative – its function of providing moral rules to ordinary weak people. Time, as it is found in the Julian calendar, is presented in his works as the time of Jesus Christ: the story of Christ is a mirror in which the life of every individual can be reflected. In order to develop this idea, Bulgakov uses a unifying temporal plot connecting his major works, which is created by means of calendar dates and allusions to religious and Soviet *prazdniki*.

## Chapter I<sup>24</sup>

### The Chaotic Nature of the Bolshevik Calendar

The official calendar reform of the post-revolutionary period consisted of many steps, all of which were conducted in a hectic manner. The haste with which the reforms were implemented demonstrates the great importance the Bolsheviks assigned to the creation of a new state calendar. The Soviet ideological machine demanded the new calendrical narrative as soon as possible in order to use the great political power of a master narrative in controlling, suppressing and directing the masses into a prescribed way of living and working. The hectic way in which it was introduced contributed to the obviously artificial quality of the Soviet state calendar of 1918–1929. We can determine some of the reasons for the destructive nature of the Soviet calendar of its “Bolshevik” period by scrutinizing the texts of the official decrees, printed calendars and the newspapers Pravda and Izvestia of 1917–1930.

#### 1. The Bolshevik Reform: Definite Goals and Thoughtless Means

The Bolshevik calendar reform was preceded by the reform of the Provisional Government<sup>25</sup> that cancelled the holidays associated with the Russian

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<sup>24</sup> A version of this chapter has been published: Shilova, Irina. “Building the Bolshevik Calendar Through Pravda and Izvestiia.” Toronto Slavic Quarterly. 2007, 19.

<sup>25</sup> The Provisional Government was formed after the February Revolution of 1917 and was overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

Tsar and his family. The Provisional Government had also introduced a decree of Daylight saving time measure, clearly, aiming for greater economical benefits. The Bolshevik calendar reform truly began when the Council of the People's Commissars cancelled this decree on December 21, 1917. The text of the Bolshevik decree “Декрет о переводе стрелки часов” (“Decree of Changing the Clock Points”) betrays the ideological basis for the decision. There are no rational reasons given for the change, only that the new “summer time” had been instituted by the Provisional Government, and the new Soviet Government is reinstating the “right” time claiming:

Декретом коалиционного правительства было сделано распоряжение о введении с 1 июля летнего счета времени путем перевода часовой стрелки на один час вперед. Настоящим декретом предписывается вернуться к обычному счету времени (Декреты Советской власти, том 1, 280).

Already in this statement a new concept of time is being introduced: the “usual” time, whose defenders are the Bolsheviks. It also claims that the new political regime, in opposition to the Provisional Government, respects the universal idea of time and the traditional way it is usually counted. This concept, however, turned out to be inadequate because the claim of going back to the “usual” measurement of time contradicted the next decree which required change. No later than a month afterwards, January 24, 1918, a “Декрет о введении в Российской республике западно-европейского календаря” (“Decree of Inauguration of the Calendar of the Western Europe in the Soviet Republic”)

changing the official calendar from the Julian (Old Style) to the Gregorian (New Style) was issued. It reads:

В целях установления в России одинакового почти со всеми культурными народами исчисления времени Совет Народных Комиссаров постановляет ввести, по истечении января месяца сего года, в гражданский обиход новый календарь (Декреты Советской власти, том 1, 403).

If in the previous decree the Bolsheviks had claimed that their policy was consistent with tradition and the pre-Revolutionary concept of time, the January decree reversed this entirely, labeling the whole nation backwards in an attempt to justify the action and to demonstrate the Bolsheviks' commitment to progress.

Implementing the calendar reform, claiming it as a service to progress, the authors of the decree “forgot” about another progressive measure: dividing the country into separate time zones. In order to fix the mistake, they issued a “Декрет о введении счета времени в Российской Федеративной Советской Республике по международной системе часовых поясов” (“Decree of Introduction of the Calculation of Time in the Russian Federal Soviet Republic According to the International System of Time Zones”). This decree was issued on 25 January, 1919. The date coincides exactly with the date of the decree adopting the New Style calendar in 1918.<sup>26</sup> Such usage of dates was characteristic of the Bolshevik policy of manipulating the calendar and time since the beginning of their regime.

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<sup>26</sup> Декреты Советской власти. Том 3, 349.

In ten months the next step was taken: the new ritual calendar for the country was introduced in yet another decree on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1918: “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и о праздничных днях” (“Regulations of Weekly Rest and Holidays”). It reads:

Производство работы воспрещается в следующие праздничные дни, посвященные воспоминаниям об исторических и общественных событиях: а) 1 января – Новый год; б) 22 января – день 9 января 1905 года; в) 12 марта – низвержение самодержавия; г) 18 марта – день Парижской коммуны; д) 1 Мая – день Интернационала; е) 7 ноября – день Пролетарской революции (Декреты Советской власти. Том 4, 122).

In addition, the Bolshevik printed calendars also had a list of special working days, which were printed under the title “Годовщины (Рабочие дни)” (“Anniversaries (Working Days)”): the Day of the Red Army (February 23), the International Day of Working Women (March 8), the Day of the Lena Massacre (April 17), and the Day of the Press (May 5). According to this decree, local authorities were allowed to schedule another ten rest days in conformity with local traditions and religions. Thus, the Russian calendars indicated as *prazdniki* Рождество (Christmas), Крещение (Epiphany), Благовещение (Anunciation Day), Пасха (Easter), Духов день (Whit Monday), Вознесение (Ascension Day), Преображение (Transfiguration Day), and Успение (Feast of Dormition) (Советский календарь на 1919 г. (The Soviet Calendar for 1919) 4).

The text of this decree shows that the special discourse for promotion of the new *prazdniki* was not being developed after the Soviet ritual calendar had already been introduced. Instead of the word воскресенье (Sunday), for instance, the Bolsheviks carefully used the phrase еженедельный отдых (weekly rest): the Russian *воскресенье* has a religious connotation, almost literally (with the difference of one letter) meaning *Воскресение* (Resurrection). They could not avoid, however, the adjective *праздничный* (festal, festive) when they wrote about common holidays, devoted to *воспоминания* (remembrance) of historical and social events. This adjective, in turn, subverts the word *воспоминания* which means “remembering,” or “honoring,” and is close to the Russian word *поминки* (funeral repast). These inconsistencies paint a picture of the troubles people faced as they tried to comprehend the new ritual calendar.

“Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и о праздничных днях” became the official document inaugurating the first Soviet state calendar published for 1919.<sup>27</sup> It consists of a number of very different special dates and celebrations. New Year’s Day was included, although it was a very old civil *prazdnik* introduced by Peter the Great in the eighteenth century. May Day was also familiar to Russian people from before the Revolution. Two other holidays, the Day of Overthrowing the Autocracy and the Day of the October Revolution, were created to commemorate the very recent events of 1917. The Memorial Day of January 9, 1905 (“Bloody Sunday”) and the Day of the Paris Commune, which were associated with historical events, were included in the calendar because of the political situation during the post-revolutionary period. Those *prazdniki* which

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Советский календарь на 1919 год.

addressed a large number of people, on the other hand, such as the International Day of Working Women and the Day of the Red Army, were not chosen as rest days -- that is, they were perceived by the Party ideologists as being of secondary importance. The calendar also included ten non-working days for the celebration of religious feasts, incorporating a substantial part of the pre-revolutionary church calendar.

In the post-revolutionary years, different calendars were printed; among them were not only the traditional religious calendars, but also those published by people and organizations which were in opposition to the Bolshevik party. One such calendar, for example, was the Календарь Альманах на 1918 год. Сатира и юмор (Calendar-Almanac for 1918. Satire and Humor), in which we find scorching criticism of Bolshevik politics. In this study, however, I will examine the official calendars that were published by the state publishing houses. Among the best known were Календарь коммуниста (Calendar of a Communist), Календарь деревенского коммуниста (Calendar of the Country Communist), Календарь-справочник коммуниста (Calendar -- Reference Book of a Communist), Календарь деревенского работника (Calendar of the Country Worker), Советский календарь (The Soviet Calendar), and the simply entitled Календарь (Calendar). The most important of these for my investigation will be the Календарь коммуниста which was published regularly and in large editions beginning in 1923. It is a carefully constructed body of propagandistic texts, structurally formed around calendrical dates which could be used for many purposes. It could help a communist promote anti-religious ideas, or in self-

education, or be used as a complimentary textbook at school. (Illustration 1) It was written in a popular style for the general public, but its content covered a broad field of human knowledge, including, for example, general information in geography, statistics, history, and economics. All information was ideologically charged and carefully selected in order to provide the communist agitator with ready-made materials. The history of the Russian revolutionary movement and the Communist Party held a place of primary importance and was presented in considerable detail.

In most of the Soviet calendars up to 1929, a list of special dates was printed on the first page and was divided into three parts: in the first part, the six rest days, which were proclaimed state holidays in the “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и о праздничных днях” were listed; in the second part -- the religious holidays -- which were also rest days; and in the third part were the revolutionary anniversaries, that is, still working days but marked in the calendar as special ones.

The early Soviet calendar displayed its authors' intentions, which they wove throughout its narrative: the goal of rewriting history. They included the commemoration of a few historical events which were then made pillars of the Soviet version of history. The Day of the Paris Commune pointed to an historical precedent to the Soviet republic and stressed continuity with the European revolutionary movement. May Day provided the same sort of continuity with the American proletarian movement. The Memorial Day of January 9, 1905, marked the beginning of the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, a predecessor to the

October Revolution. The Day of the Lena Massacre suggested that the Russian proletariat was prepared to fight even during a comparatively peaceful period in Russian history (the event took place in 1912). The Day of the Overthrowing the Autocracy sought to create a current revolutionary context citing the “first stage” of the October Revolution. This narrative was later applied very successfully to creating the Soviet version of history in textbooks which were used at all levels of education. It was not very successful, however, in constituting new calendrical narrative. The calendrical narrative is a grand (master) narrative, and the historical narrative is only a part of it. Robert Fulford writes: “A master narrative that we find convincing and persuasive differs from other stories in an important way: it swallows us. It is not a play we can see performed, or a painting we can view, or a city we can visit. A master narrative is a dwelling place. We are intended to live in it” (32). The Soviet official calendar from the very beginning of its existence was a “play we can see performed,” not a “dwelling place.” Len Travers points out the crucial conditions for survival of a holiday: “Successful commemorations must meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of those who create and observe them, but to remain relevant and retain broad appeal, their vital directives must be capable of adapting to succeeding generations and shifting concerns” (2). The Soviet *prazdniki* were all commemorations with strictly organized, even military ceremonies, but they did not conform to any of the above criteria: even their creation was completely in the hands of the Party ideologists.

The decrees and calendars demonstrate that the goal of the calendar’s authors was to create a working ideological narrative, not a real festal year. This

policy is most obvious in the Bolsheviks' rejection of the folk calendar, with its festive mood, as a base for the Soviet one: they repeated the policy of the Russian Imperial calendar, diminishing as much as possible the presence of the carnival type of *prazdniki* in the calendar. This sort of ideological calendrical narrative, however, could not be relevant to the real life of people in which happy celebrations with a relaxing atmosphere are an integral part.

The Bolsheviks built the new ritual year on the legacy of the imperial state calendar which, in fact, consisted of the two calendars:<sup>28</sup> the imperial civic state calendar and the religious calendar. Each varied in the different areas of the Russian Empire and depended on predominant religion (the most predominant of which was Christian Orthodoxy<sup>29</sup>). The imperial state calendar was a symbol of political power and functioned as a bridge between the Russian monarchy and Christian Orthodox faith. The entries for the days of the most important Russian saints were mixed with the names of the Tsar's family members, visually bringing them together on the same level of sanctity: "The Russian monarchy had always based its power on divine authority. It was more than the 'divine right of kings.' In his propaganda -- and the minds of many of his peasant subjects -- the Tsar was more than a divinely ordained ruler: he was a god on earth" (Fidges 1). The religious calendar played the largest role in the ritual year. For example, in 1916, out of forty-four non-working feast days, thirty-three were religious *prazdniki*.

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<sup>28</sup> In 1916, for example, the system of official holidays, *неприсутственные дни* (non-working days) in addition to the religious feast days, included the name-days and birthdays of the Tsar's family, the Day of the Accession to the Throne and the Day of Coronation, New Year's Day, and the two days of *Масленица* (Shrovetide).

<sup>29</sup> For the purpose of my investigation I will explore only the religious calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Easter was celebrated for the longest period of time: three days before Easter Sunday and another week after, ten days in total. Christmas was celebrated only for three days. All the most important Christian feast days were non-working days, many of which were devoted to honoring *Богородица* (Mother of God). The narrative of the religious calendar, we can say with some assurance, set the real rhythm of life in the Russian Empire: the numerous texts, fictional and non-fictional, set in the pre-revolutionary time, demonstrate it.<sup>30</sup>

The new Bolshevik calendar, which was created to be devoid of religious meaning, was especially charged with atheistic ideology. It showed the units of time which inevitably led people to death. By contrast, the pre-revolutionary, essentially religious, state calendar showed that every day a few saints died, leaving the earthly life behind them, but they live on in heaven, more happily than on earth and participate actively in the lives of living people, at least by guarding and protecting them. This connection with the other world was one of the main features of the traditional religious calendar. This became the main impetus for creating a new calendar right after the Revolution similar to the traditional *святцы*,<sup>31</sup> where new saints could be introduced, that is, revolutionary “martyrs” who were supposed to replace the traditional saints. This information was supposed to help people create a second imaginary world, where the dead live on

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<sup>30</sup> I.S. Shmeliov (1873-1950) in his novel *Лето господне* (1933), for example, describes an ordinary man’s perception of the Christian calendar as the fundamental rhythm of everyday and spiritual life of the Russians.

<sup>31</sup> “The calendar of Russian Orthodox Saints. . . List assigning to specific days of the year the names of saints that the Russian Orthodox church honors by commemoration on the respective days often by special prayers and akathists recited in their honor. The calendar is used also in selecting names for infants and those who are baptized into the Orthodox faith in corresponding days” (*The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union* 39).

in the memories of the Soviet people. The calendars were a material manifestation of the slogans “Он(а,и) жив(а,ы) в нашей памяти” (“He/she/they live(s) in our memory”) and “Он(а,и) будут жить в наших сердцах” (“He/she/they will live in our hearts”), both common phrases in Soviet propagandistic texts during the entire period of the Soviet Union. The printed calendars supported these slogans by incorporating the names of dead revolutionaries into the everyday reality of the Soviet people.

The Russian pre-revolutionary state calendar reflected with astonishing precision the major political and social problem of the Russian Empire: the state’s policy of ignoring the real life of its people. It did not include the *prazdniki* of the folk calendar, with the exception of *Масленица*. This popular Slavic folk festival, I believe, was included in the state calendar – there were two non-working days – because it was celebrated in the country and cities alike with great participation. A. Ia. Alekseev-Iakovlev, a known organizer of public celebrations in the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, states that during the *Масленица* public celebrations, starting in the 1860s–1870s, there were performances staged eight times a day without break and that “В среднем каждую постановку смотрело около 60.000 зрителей, цифра громадная по тем временам” (Кузнецов, Е. 50).

The special feature of the folk calendar was that its *prazdniki*, almost without exception, were celebrated with a large amount of alcohol and were longer than one day:

Сроки больших праздников были различны, в зависимости от количества деревень, принимавших в них участие и составлявших общинное единство, но даже для одного села (деревни) минимальное время празднования составляло два-три дня (Бернштам 219).

This calendar, of course, was no less a threat to the socialist economic order than the religious calendar was a threat to communist ideology. Perhaps, it was one of the reasons why the Bolsheviks decided to ignore the folk festivities following the political tendency of the pre-revolutionary state calendar, although the folk ritual festivities were very popular among people of different social classes and groups. Russia was an agricultural country and with the majority of peasants being illiterate, the folk calendar defined their everyday life, and the folk *prazdniki* with their carnival features dominated their ritual year. Although some of them, by the very mode of their celebration, could not be widespread in cities,<sup>32</sup> the urban population, to some extent, lived according to the same ritual agrarian calendar.<sup>33</sup>

The three pre-revolutionary calendars had different cultural and symbolic functions in the lives of the Russian people, but they nevertheless existed in a certain balance in close connection to each other. The importance of the Christian ritual year for Russia, however, is difficult to overestimate. The Christian calendar organized the life of the whole country and embodied its major cultural values.

For the purpose of my investigation, however, I must point out the leading function of this calendar, namely, its organizing role. The other two calendars,

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<sup>32</sup> For many of the festivities of the folk ritual calendar country settings, such as fields and bushes, were an essential part, for example, the *prazdnik* of Ivan Kupala, celebrated on 24 July, required the banks of a river or a pond and bonfires.

<sup>33</sup> See Кузнецов, Е., Русские народные гулянья.

imperial and folk, were adjusted to the Christian one. This adjustment is evident, first of all, in the timing of the secular and folk *prazdniki*, which always fitted perfectly between the periods of religious celebrations. *Святки* (the Christmas season celebrations), for example, had to take place during the period between Christmas and Epiphany, and *Масленица* always ended before Great Lent. The same pattern is seen in the official imperial calendar: the Day of the Coronation of Nicolas II to the Throne, for example, was held on May 14<sup>th</sup>, that is, close to the Easter period, but not likely to coincide with any of the major religious *prazdniki*.<sup>34</sup> The very important *заветные prazdniki*, that is, those that were established by the peasant communities themselves, as Tatiana Bernhtam writes, were all dated 8–10 weeks after Easter and had qualities which corresponded to the features of the religious holidays (216). Official holidays also had a strong religious element.<sup>35</sup> The significance of the religious calendar was that while it was connected to the other two, it has never lost its independence and dominant role.

Notwithstanding the formal rejection of the Russian pre-revolutionary state calendar, this particular calendar became the one which the Bolsheviks actually intended to copy regarding its main functions. The new calendar should support Bolshevik political power and shape the new ideology which would grant that power a sacred nature.

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<sup>34</sup> The days of coronation were always chosen to be close to important religious holidays. For more about this, see Wortman, Scenarios of Power.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Wortman 434-500.

While designing the new calendar, the Bolsheviks took into account the experience of the calendar reform of the French Revolution: “The Leaders of 1917 consciously adopted the symbolic traditions of the French Revolution . . . They looked for precedents for their policies, and for models for their institutions, in the revolutionary history of France” (Figs 30). This experience perhaps accounts for the inclusion of the religious holidays in the new Soviet calendar. The French revolutionaries had completely excluded all religious traces from their calendar and this decision led to its unpopularity. After the immediate introduction of the French Republican calendar in France in 1792, the French people continued to observe religious holidays:

[T]he emphasis in secularization most probably undermined much of the potential success of the French Republican calendrical reform, and certainly ought to be regarded as one of the major factors that were responsible for its eventual failure. The reformers must have underestimated the depth to which religious sentiments were still rooted among the French people, many of whom probably found it quite impossible to depart so abruptly from a sacred symbolic order such as the traditional calendrical system (Zerubavel, Hidden Rhythms 87).

The French Republican calendar was an important precedent for its Bolshevik descendant, but not the chief model for the new state calendar. I believe that in creating such a calendar the Bolsheviks used as a model the Календарь Народной воли (The Calendar of the People’s Will). The revolutionary organization *Народная воля* (People’s Will) was established in 1879 and

declared terrorism as one of its means for fighting the Russian autocracy. In 1881 its members assassinated Tsar Alexander II, and a majority of them were arrested. Few groups which continued to associate themselves with *Народная воля* were still active during the 1880s, but gradually disappeared. This relatively small group left as its legacy the tradition of terrorism in the revolutionary movement in Russia.<sup>36</sup>

Their calendar was published in Geneva in 1883; only one thousand copies were printed. It is clear that it was made as a rival to the printed Russian Imperial State Calendar. Instead of the names of Christian saints, it provided information, for almost each day, on the actions which the members of *Народная Воля* and ordinary Russian people had undertaken to dismantle the Tsar and the monarchy as an institution. The second part of the Календарь Народной воли contained short stories about the heroic lives of its members, the program of its organization, and other major documents. They published information about political convicts and their trials, their violent fights with the police and escapes from prisons. This calendar we can, to some extent, view as the first revolutionary calendar, which later developed into the Bolshevik transitional calendar of 1918–1929.

By 1917 the Календарь Народной воли was hardly known to the general public, but its traditions were revived by the Календарь Русской революции (The Calendar of the Russian Revolution). This was less a document for practical use, than a propagandistic book. Originally published in 1907, it was banned

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<sup>36</sup> For an interesting and well-researched account of the complex interactions between the revolutionary movements in Russia in 1881-1894 see Naimark, Norman M. Terrorists and Social Democrats.

immediately, and then republished in 1917 before the October Revolution. Many well-known writers and artists were involved in its creation, among them the writers L. Andreev and A. Kuprin, and the artists I. Bilibin and B. Kustodiev. The book's enthusiastic founder, however, was none other than the famous Russian revolutionary and former member of *Народная воля*, V. L. Burtsev (1862-1942). The book stressed the theme of grieving over the victims who had died during the first Russian Revolution of 1905–1907. Every month was separated by a picture on the theme of mourning, for example, the picture of a mourning woman between two graves for January, with two urns, chains and prison bars as a background -- for December. (Illustration 2)

In the introductory note to the Календарь Русской революции of 1917, Burtsev explained that the main goal of the calendar was to convey the tasks of the current political struggle:

Составляя 'Календарь Русской Революции' в 1907 г., мы смотрели на него тогда не исключительно только, как на историческое издание . . . а как на такое строго объективное историческое издание, которое в то же самое время, при существовавших тогда политических условиях, имело в виду на своих страницах отразить, в возможно более ярких красках, задачи текущей политической борьбы, как мы понимали их и как их признавали (2).

Perhaps it provided the authors of the future revolutionary and Soviet calendars with the idea of creating a non-traditional state calendar concerned more with the present and future than the past.

The first “saints” in the Soviet calendar were the members of *Народная воля* and the Bolshevik party. The foreign revolutionaries, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who were killed on January 15, 1919, were also among the “saints.” This feature, however, gradually declined in importance during the first decade after the Revolution because its emphasis on terrorism was no longer advantageous to the Party and its policies. The Party created the myth that the working class was a victim of the oppressive Tsar’s regime and in 1917 the Bolsheviks helped the people escape from the “hell” of that oppression. Having admitted that the Tsar and his supporters were victims of terrorism, the communist leaders would have drained that myth of much of its romance.

The traditional form of the calendar, even with the new “saints,” nevertheless, reflected the division between the real world and the other world of the dead. Therefore, the official calendars printed in the USSR after 1929 were more concerned with current political and economic issues leaving most of the revolutionary heroes behind. Moreover, the numerous stories of assassinations of high officials of the Russian Empire by revolutionaries, which practically made up the entirety of printed Soviet calendars up until that point, could potentially serve as an example for fighting the existing Soviet regime. Thus in 1928 the members of *Народная воля* were still used as embodiments of a righteous life, for example, in the Календарь коммуниста на 1928 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1928) the entry for January 31 reads: “1906 -- За жестокую расправу с крестьянами в Полтаве убит крупный чиновник Филонов.” The entry for April 3: “Казнь Халтурина и Желвакова в Одессе. 1881.” This

information, however, vanished in the Календарь коммуниста на 1930 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1930) reflecting the introduction of the “Stalin” calendar.

The Bolshevik notion of a holiday was diametrically opposite to the traditional one: it is evident from the decrees, printed calendars, and other propagandistic texts which I will consider in the second part of this chapter. While the latter makes a clear distinction between the time of a regular day and the holiday period, the former imposed that a working day should be perceived by people as a celebration of liberated labor and a union with all working people on earth. Regular non-working days, according to this notion, are necessary only for recuperation from work and should not be considered holidays. As for the few common *prazdniki*, they are necessary in order to celebrate *работа как праздник* (work as celebration) by the entire country. One is marking the beginning of a “glorious era,” the second -- of “liberated labor,” and the third -- the memorial day of those who sacrificed their lives to make this “era” a reality. This particular ritual calendar was introduced in 1930.

The traditional division of the two kinds of days, sacred and profane, contradicted the communist ideology that accepted only one, material world. The sacred element of life had to be included in the real world. Therefore the most important task for the Bolsheviks was to make labor sacred by eliminating its profane character. This explains the continuous rejection of the word *prazdnik*: the real *prazdnik* had to be the work itself, and the celebration, in Russian

*торжество* or *празднование*, had to be a celebration of working achievements.<sup>37</sup>

The Soviet *prazdniki* had to reinforce the Communist policy of promoting labor without salary. Christel Lane, while pointing to the considerable change in the nature of the mass holidays in 1922–1927 in contrast to the period of the “war communism” of 1918–1921, states that during that period “[t]he official slogans for the mass holidays suggested a dual focus on an economic and a political theme for the demonstration” (167). He refers to statistical data which shows that in 1924 and 1925 the slogans that illustrated the theme of raising labor productivity comprised 44 and 46.6 percent respectively of all slogans. The slogans on political themes constituted only 15 and 24.5 percent. He points out that the most important characteristic of Soviet rituals was that they did not reflect an important goal of Marxism-Leninism, namely: “to gradually effect ‘a withering away of the State’ . . . . On the contrary, ritual has as one of its foremost tasks the legitimation or even sacralization of the present political structure. Soviet labor ritual is exclusively about the increase in the quantity and quality of labour effort on the part of the workers (24).

*Субботники* and *воскресники* are other examples of the policy of using mass holidays as reinforcement for promoting unpaid labor. These were Saturdays and Sundays on which citizens would work without pay and were presented as celebrations, not as regular work days. Their coverage in newspapers emphasized

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<sup>37</sup> This is one of explanations of those ongoing meetings after working hours which were held in the USSR. They had no other agenda except praising good workers, giving away bonuses and delivering propagandistic speeches. Such meetings were always organized as celebrations with their goal being to give to work a festive atmosphere.

both productivity and the holiday-like atmosphere of such events. The editorial “Коммунистические субботники” (“The Communist *Subbotniki*”), for example, in Pravda, on September 14, 1919, refers to Tomas Campanella’s description of work in the fictional City of the Future with that during *субботники* in 1919 in Russia:

Не напоминают ли эту картину наши ‘субботники,’ на которых передовые и сознательные рабочие и красноармейцы выходят для производства революционной работы, работы коммунистической, выходят с музыкой, с музыкой же и с пением ‘Интернационала’ заканчивают ее.

*Субботники* and *воскресники* more often were scheduled around Lenin’s birthday, April 22 (New Style), and it shows the political base of this tendency.

The Bolsheviks had to connect aggressive atheism with the reality of maintaining the normal existence and function of society. One of the problems that emerged was that the Soviet political and economic order took from people two very important reasons to live, both integral parts of the Russian pre-revolutionary capitalist society, based on the religious myth: the possibility to have more goods as a result of better work and faith in eternal life. The Russian calendar reflected these reasons by recalling the life of Christ, his death and resurrection, and eternal lives of numerous Christian saints. It also included a schedule of work within a capitalist economic order, which, to some extent, supported the idea of possible wealth. The ideological focus of the Soviet calendar, then, had to concentrate on two areas: diminishing fear of death and

presenting the printed calendar as an individual working schedule for every worker and peasant. The Bolsheviks used the Календарь Народной воли and Календарь Русской революции, with their overall mood of sacrificing, mourning, and glorifying death for the sake of an idea, as major models for the Soviet state calendar with the ideological aim of diminishing fear of death. The personalization of the calendar, on the other side, weakened its potential as social phenomenon, assigning responsibility for financial benefits to the worker himself. Such a calendar was introduced in 1930 allotting the five, or later six, day weeks where every working person had to find his “own” week. (Illustration 3) It was not a calendar *per se*, but a combination of a personal working schedule with information concerning current political struggles. There was also a very short historical report on the revolutionary movement before 1917.

The transitional Soviet calendar of 1918-1929 manifests all the goals which the communist leaders wanted to achieve by establishing it, but it also shows the desperate attempt of the new political power to publicize the new *prazdniki* at the expense of creating a coherent and acceptable calendrical narrative.

## **2. *Prazdniki* with Various Meanings**

The Soviet/Bolshevik calendar was a product of the Bolshevik efforts toward the creation of a new ritual year, first of all, through periodicals. The main goal of the coverage, devoted to special dates and *prazdniki*, was to demonstrate

that every *prazdnik* really happened: each one was announced, its meaning explained, and its celebration and outcome were subsequently covered as well. It was unimportant whether those *prazdniki* became popular or were supported by people, because according to the newspapers, they existed regardless.

In the following part of this chapter I will provide an examination of the process by which the new Soviet/Bolshevik calendar was built, analyzing information given in the two leading Soviet newspapers, Pravda and Izvestiia, in 1917-1930. These materials demonstrate that almost all the Soviet holidays, which were included in the state official calendar, did not, and could not, have any roots in Russian society because they were created in response to the current, often urgent, political needs in the communication of Bolshevik political ideas to the masses: in other words, they were the result of instrumental policy. This chaotic process produced extremely contradictory information, and a person living in Soviet Russia after the Revolution likely faced difficulty simply understanding the Soviet *prazdnik* that he had celebrated in the previous years. Newspapers often proposed slogans for celebrations completely opposite to those they had proposed earlier, or offered another way of celebrating them, or merely ignored them as if they had never existed. This happened even with the most established and well-known holiday such as May Day.

My analysis will begin with February 1917, when Izvestiia was first published and the Bolshevik began publishing Pravda again, and continue according to the cycle of calendrical year. My task is to demonstrate the ongoing change in semantics of the *prazdniki*, as they were presented to the readers, and

the general instability of the Soviet state ritual calendar during 1917 and the years that followed the Revolution.

Paul Ricoeur argues that one of the most important characteristics of any calendar is to provide a designation of “a founding event, which is taken as beginning a new era -- the birth of Christ or of the Buddha, the Hegira, the beginning of the reign of a certain monarch”(V.3, 106). Newspaper articles show that the Bolsheviks saw the establishing date of the “new era” as the seminal issue in the creation of their new calendar. This search, however, took quite a long time, and readers were misled as the title of the “first day of the new era” was assigned to various dates over time. The very first issues of both newspapers began with the search for this primary date. In the inaugural issue of Pravda on March 5, 1917, the editorial “К моменту” (“To the Moment”) begins with the statement: “23 февраля началась Великая Русская Революция.” Another article in the same issue, “Ход событий” (“Course of Events”), begins with a sentence exalting the events of the February Revolution almost as a miracle: “Как скоро все свершилось! Как сказка, как фантазия – красиво и торжественно. В день переживалось столько, как в другое время не переживалось в год, и несколько дней отделяют нас пропастью от прошлого.”<sup>38</sup> It presents the day of the Revolution as completely different from any other day in history: not only was it triumphant, fantastic, and fairy-tale-like, but time itself did not follow the laws of nature, the experience of a whole year being squeezed into one day. This

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<sup>38</sup> The image of the Revolution as a “miracle” seems to be a widespread at that time, but for Vladimir Mayakovsky, as I will show in the second chapter, it was not an image, but a fact.

sort of hyperbole helped building a more significant symbolic boundary between the new and old eras.

The same article emphasizes that the most important changes brought about by the mass uprising happened on International Women's Day:

23-го февраля, -- в Женский День, была объявлена стачка на большинстве фабрик и заводов. Женщины были настроены очень воинственно . . . Они являлись на фабрики и заводы и снимали с работ. Вообще женский день прошел ярко, и революционная температура начала подниматься.

The coincidence of one of the days of the Revolution with International Women's Day was so promising a candidate for the "first day of the new era" that the idea of connecting the beginning of the Revolution to this particular day was, obviously, very popular among the Bolsheviks. Many articles in Pravda repeat the notion. The idea's popularity likely stemmed from the two sources. First, the amalgamation of two *prazdniki* into one was a major Bolshevik policy in the creation of a new ritual year. This policy was not unique to the Bolsheviks, but rather another case of a general practice characteristic of any political regime, namely that "if an event coincides with a date already symbolically charged with meaning, it can often give a new twist to an old set of customs" (Aveni 86). Second, it was important to the Bolsheviks that their calendar in the first stage of its development be analogous to the traditional agricultural and religious calendars, where the beginning of the new era was associated with the birth of God (and, consequently, with female, who gives birth). Thus the celebration of

International Women's Day, when women symbolically gave birth to the Revolution, united the traditional Christian and new Bolshevik ideology.

The second issue of Pravda, of March 7, 1917, begins with the editorial "Великий день" ("The Great Day"), which is written largely in the form of slogans. This article explicitly states that the women's uprising defined the fate of the Revolution and that its first day was the Women's Day. The article "Приветствие работнице" ("Greeting to the Working Woman") in Pravda on March 10 again states that the real *prazdnik* of the Revolution happened on February 23:

Товарищи работницы! И над нами возшло яркое солнышко этой весной, и для нас засветила заря свободы. И занялась она как раз с нашего Женского дня, 23-го февраля. Мы первыя пошли снимать в этот день с работ наших товарищей-мужчин, мы первыя хлынули массаами на улицы, к городской думе, стали останавливать трамваи и звать всю публику присоединиться к нам. Наш праздник был первым днем всеобщей забастовки, которая так и не прекратилась до полного краха старой власти. Мы были счастливы, товарищи! С нашей, как говорится, легкой руки пошло все.

In reality, the first day of the February Revolution was difficult to pinpoint because public unrest in Petrograd took place over a long period. The Bolshevik press used this situation as an opportunity to appoint the International Women's Day the Day of the Revolution. However, they soon abandoned this idea naming February 27 and 28 (Old Style) the days of the February Revolution.

The special significance of the days of the Revolution is seen in many articles published in March and April of 1917. For example, in Pravda of March 10, 1917, the article “Революция в Москве” (“Revolution in Moscow”) informs the reader: “1 марта. Москва переживает великий в истории день. С утра улицы полны народа. Во главе с полками, с красными знаменами проходит народ по улицам.” In a short note “Солдатам-депутатам” (“To the Solders-Deputies”) in the same issue of Pravda, the editors ask all soldiers to fix the events of the days of the Revolution in writing:

Товарищи солдаты, представители в Совете Рабочих и Солдатских Депутатов! Надо навсегда сохранить в памяти народа то, что было сделано в эти великие дни рабочими и крестьянами, одетыми в серая солдатския шинели. Давайте в редакцию ‘Правды’ сведения, рассказы, описания событий, очевидцами которых вы были. Пусть выступления воинских частей в борьбе за свободу против Царскаго самодержавия, навсегда запечатлеются на страницах истории.

Before the October coup, the February Revolution was presented by the Bolshevik press as a great *prazdnik*, and even its six-month anniversary was a cause for celebration: a long list of meetings, published in Izvestia on August 26, 1917 demonstrates this. On August 27, 1917, the newspaper Рабочий (Worker) (a contemporary title for Pravda at that time) published the slogan “Сегодня полугодовщина нашей февральской революции” (“Today is the Half-Year Anniversary of Our February Revolution”). In fact, the entire issue was devoted to

this anniversary. Its editorial provides a day-by-day description of the February events in the form of a diary, with the dates marked in a bold font. Alongside the editorial is another long article also written in the form of a diary, “Дневник солдата” (“The Diary of a Soldier”). This article presents the same information as the first one, but is written from the point of view of an ordinary soldier who shares sentimental details about his confused emotions. Such a deliberately personal description of events contributed to illusion that this political event was brought about by the activities of one ordinary soldier and others like him, and thus deserving a mass celebration. Then on the November 7, 1917 issue of Pravda -- that is, only two weeks after the October Revolution -- in the article “Две революции” (“Two Revolutions”), I. Bezrabortnyi argues that the February Revolution was merely the first part of a larger proletarian revolution, the results of which were abused by the bourgeoisie: “Прежде чем пойти на штурм Зимнего дворца . . . массы должны были пережить уроки восьмимесячного революционного воспитания” (Безработный 1). Pravda and Izvestiia took the same position on the first year anniversary of the February Revolution: on March 12, 1918, Pravda published six slogans in large characters which assured readers that the importance of the February Revolution lay only in the fact that it was the first stage of the proletarian Revolution and that the working people had to defend its achievements:

Сегодня годовщина социалистической революции. Рабочие и крестьяне! Стойте на страже завоеваний революции, защищайте вашу Советскую власть, помните, что мало добыть мир, волю, землю,

необходимо защитить их от врага. Готовьтесь к защите Российской Социалистической Республики с оружием в руках от всех ее врагов, [и внутренних, и внешних]. Помните, что мировая революция не за горами, к нам спешит на помощь международный пролетариат!

Within a year of the February Revolution, when the event was still fresh in the memory of people who had made it happen, it was impossible to reject it as a lesser revolution and explicitly put the October coup above it. The Bolsheviks, however, drastically changed the semantics of the holiday using the anniversary of the February Revolution for organization of the Red Army, that is, for achieving instant political goals. The date was gradually diminished in importance and every year there were fewer and fewer materials published about that historical event.

It is also worth noting that in the “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и о праздничных днях” the date March 12, 1917, (or February 28, 1917, according to the Old Style) is called not a day of the revolution, but rather *День низвержения самодержавия* (Day of Overthrowing the Autocracy). The date existed under this name in the list of new Soviet holidays up until 1929, at which point it lost its status as a rest day altogether.

The International Day of Working Women (the Soviet version of the “International Women’s Day”) came out from under the shadow of the February Revolution and became a prazdnik with its own independent semantics already in 1918. There were still some mention of its connection with the February Revolution, but the call to include women in political activities prevailed. It had

been established in 1910 at the Second International Women's Congress in Copenhagen, but in Russia it was not even known until 1917. General-Major A.P. Balk, the last *градоначальник* (governor) of Petrograd writes in his memoirs of February 23 to 28, 1917: "В публике много дам, еще больше баб, учащейся молодежи и сравнительно с прежними выступлениями мало рабочих" (26). He also admits that "красных флагов нигде не замечалось; агитаторов и руководителей беспорядков тоже не видно. В итоге дня, причина народного движения – непонятна" (27). At the end of his February 23 entry, he provides an opinion of another General: "Ген. Глобачев еще раз доложил мне, что для него совершенно непонятна сегодняшняя демонстрация и возможно, что завтра ничего и не будет" (28). Thus it seems that nobody among Petrograd's authorities knew about International Women's Day.

Political and social tendencies clashed during the period when the Day of Working Women was shaped and continued throughout the entire existence of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik goal was to make a day which marked women's involvement in political life, but people in general, and women in particular, wanted to see it as a celebration of femininity and motherhood. Pravda on March 6, 1924 in its editorial "8 марта" ("March 8") states:

Международный день работниц и крестьянок – общепролетарский праздник. Он имеет своей целью массовую агитацию среди трудящихся женщин для сплочения их рядов вокруг советской власти, для вовлечения лучших и активнейших работниц и крестьянок в ряды РКП. Но было бы ошибочно предполагать, что

день работниц является исключительно ‘женским’ днем в специфически феминистическом духе, [в направлении создания феминистических организаций]. Никаких женских организаций РКП не создает (3).

Despite the careful formulation of this holiday’s meaning, the Communist Party failed to make this *prazdnik* purely a political celebration. L. F. Tul’tseva, in her 1985 book Современные праздники и обряды народов СССР (Modern Holidays and Rituals of the Peoples in USSR), writes about this holiday’s establishment:

С течением времени празднование 8 Марта окрасилось и бытовыми чертами. В 1927 году работницы встречали этот день как свой праздник, делали уборку в домах, готовили праздничные обеды, надевали лучшие одежды. Семейные черты в праздновании 8 Марта продолжали развиваться и в последующие годы. Кроме общих собраний, митингов, демонстраций, на многих предприятиях устраивались вечеринки и посиделки с играми, плясками, песнями (Тульцева 34).

Even earlier, “бытовые черты” already characterized this holiday. Already in 1923, Pravda called it “веселый праздник” (“the happy holiday”) and the journalist describes how women were singing and dancing together with their communist leaders: “Тов. Петухова не выдержала, вылетела в круг и пошла в русскую . . . Надо было видеть . . . председателя укома, отплясывавшего

русскую с работницами.”<sup>39</sup> This particular day is the most notable example of those *prazdniki* whose semantics were changed not because of Bolshevik ideological policies, but because of the way people in the country perceived them. The main appeal of the *prazdnik* was its focus on femininity, a meaning both newspapers struggled against for nearly the entire period of existence of the Soviet Union.

The materials in Pravda and Izvestiia show that March, April and May were the three months which the Soviet government wanted to fill with the largest number of new *prazdniki* in order to replace the most important Christian Orthodox *prazdnik*, Easter. For example, they obviously attempted to turn the day of the funeral of the victims of the February Revolution on March 23, 1917, into a national commemorative day. In both newspapers the funeral is described as a grand demonstration.<sup>40</sup> Although in 1917 Pravda and Izvestiia marked this day as a potential special day in the ritual year, by 1918 the newspapers had already ceased to mention the funeral, perhaps due to the general rejection of the February Revolution as a “real revolution.”

In 1918 the newspapers organized an active propaganda campaign promoting the Day of the Paris Commune which was to be celebrated on March 18. This was the most artificial of the state holidays: not only did it lack roots in Russian cultural history, but the very fact of the existence of the Paris Commune was likely known only by professional revolutionaries. Even the authors of the

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<sup>39</sup> “Веселый праздник.” (“Happy *Prazdnik*’.) Правда 11 мар. 1923.

<sup>40</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii also write that Mars Field, where the bodies of the victims were buried, became a central location for great public gatherings of 1917. 47.

*prazdnik* did not know exactly when the Paris Commune was established. In the original text of the “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и праздничных днях” (and in Izvestiia, where it was published), the date of the *prazdnik* is March 10,<sup>41</sup> whereas in Собрание узаконений и распоряжений Рабочего и Крестьянского правительства (Compilation of Regulations and Instructions of the Government of Workers and Peasants) it is given as March 19 (qtd. in Декреты Советской власти, том 4, 123). This *prazdnik* was formed in order to establish a precedent for the creation of a republic similar to Soviet Russia, which would then help justify the Bolshevik policy of terror, making it look more reasonable in light of the events that took place in France in 1871. The violent acts of government suppression against the Paris rebels, served as a symbolic justification for the new Soviet government’s “red terror.”

On March 16, 1918, Pravda published an excerpt from Karl Marx's book The Civil War in France 1870-1871; it was, in fact, a short summary of Marx’s ideas about the Paris Commune. Here the reader learns about the organizational structure of the Paris Commune, its army, the communards’ struggle with the clergy, as well as the free education system the Commune introduced. All of these measures corresponded perfectly with the social and political changes recently made by the Bolsheviks. In 1919, articles in Pravda and Izvestiia expanded on the similarities: Izvestiia allotted a whole page to the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Paris Commune, with four articles devoted to it. The content and layout of these publications also demonstrated the Bolsheviks’ interest in establishing this *prazdnik*. The first article, “У федеральной стены”

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<sup>41</sup> Izvestiia. December 5, 1918.

(“By the Federal Wall”), is a short story about the events in Paris in 1870–1871. It describes in detail the rout of the Commune by the French government military forces, with special emphasis on the public massacres:

Двадцать пять тысяч мужчин, женщин и детей, павших в бою или убитых уже после боя; по меньшей мере, три тысячи человек, умерших в темницах, понтонах, фортах или от болезней, полученных в тюрьме; тринадцать тысяч осужденных, из коих большинство бессрочно; семьдесят тысяч женщин, детей и стариков, лишившихся своих кормильцев или изгнанных из Франции: в общем, не менее ста тысяч жертв.<sup>42</sup>

The author then suggests that the Russian Revolution is a continuation of the Paris Commune:

Сегодня, через 48 лет со дня начатой парижскими рабочими борьбы, дело Коммуны торжествует в Советской России. День 18-го марта является праздничным днем на всей территории социалистической Республики. Великая Октябрьская революция 1917 года является прямым продолжением классовой войны французских коммунаров.

The second article, “Парижская Коммуна и возможность революции в современной Франции” (“The Paris Commune and the Possibility of Revolution in Modern France”), provides an optimistic prognosis of the contemporary revolutionary movement in France. The third article, “Париж и Версаль, Москва и Париж” (“Paris and Versailles, Moscow and Paris”), suggests a parallel

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<sup>42</sup> This paragraph is printed in bold in the newspaper text.

between the political situation in Paris in 1871 and that of the post-revolutionary period in Russia. In this article, the author implicitly suggests that if the revolution in Russia should fail, a “Russian Versailles”, that is, the Russian bourgeoisie, would kill millions of people: “Если-б им удалось это, то мир содрогнулся бы от ужаса и гнева, ибо тогда Москва-река и Нева были бы на всем протяжении красны от рабочей крови.” The fourth article, “Рабочие в Парижской Коммуне” (“Workers in the Paris Commune”), once again emphasizes the number of victims among the working class after the rout. It also discusses the devastating economic effect the civil war had on France, and concludes that “[Т]аким образом, французская промышленность на годы была подорвана благодаря слепой ярости и злобе победителей.”

Together, these four articles suggested that if the Russian Revolution should fail, that the Russian economy would collapse, that millions of people would be killed by a vengeful bourgeoisie, and those who survived would only live to suffer the economic collapse. In his conclusion, the author articulates his hope that the Day of the Paris Commune will become an official commemorative day: “Мы боремся, мы победим: и это будет нашей лучшей мстью за смерть коммуны, и лучшим ознаменованием для следующей, 49-й годовщины ее основания.”

Despite the large number of special publications attempting to explain to ordinary Soviet citizens the meaning and significance of this special day, it clearly never became popular.<sup>43</sup> The Day of the Paris Commune ceased to be a rest day in

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<sup>43</sup> There were many different types of publications with texts written in a simple style, giving only schematic descriptions of the celebrated events and recommendations to the local propagandists

1930, and indeed it had failed the test of time even earlier than that: in 1923 it was combined with the day of Международной Организации помощи революционерам (МОПР) (International Organization of Help to Revolutionaries). The information provided about these *prazdniki* only added confusion: people likely failed to understand the new ritual year, because, in fact, these were illusory holidays, the importance of which the newspapers, nevertheless, constantly underlined.<sup>44</sup>

Lenin's return to Russia on 3 April, 1917, was also presented in Izvestiia as a *prazdnik* in the article "Приезд Ленина" ("Lenin's Arrival"). The description of the meeting at the Finland station in Petrograd is strikingly similar to those that later describe the processions that occurred on May Day, 1917. The names of the plants, factories and military regiments that sent their representatives to the meeting, as well as the descriptions of flags, speeches, and happy people, are all very similar, and it suggests the equal approaches to the two celebrations, namely, as potential future *prazdniki*. The particular significance of the date of Lenin's return was that Easter in 1917 was celebrated on April 2, which provided an opportunity of replacing the religious celebration. In 1918 Pravda attempted to remind its readers of the first anniversary of Lenin's return to Russia, but this short article was merely a summary of another article from a year ago. This feeble

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how to use them. Among such publications was, for example, Первомайская хрестоматия (Textbook of the 1 May), the compilation of articles, memoirs, short stories and poems with the theme of May Day and history of its celebration.

<sup>44</sup> In Pravda and Izvestiia, there were numerous attempts to "create" new special calendar dates by emphasizing the importance of events for the revolutionary movement in Russia and by constantly repeating the dates of these events. Such an attempt was made, for example, in June and July, 1917, when Pravda organized an active propaganda campaign promoting the day of July 18, when the Bolshevik party organized the demonstration against the policy of the Provisional Government.

attempt to create a prazdnik clearly associated with Lenin was obviously a failure. A holiday specifically celebrating Lenin would not appear until 1924 and this was to mark his death.

Another special date in April was included in the official state calendar as a half-holiday: it was the anniversary of the workers' massacre by the Russian military forces at the gold mines near the river Lena on 4 April, 1912. In April 1917, Pravda published a number of short notes about the meetings at the plants and factories. The cause for these meetings was supposedly the fifth anniversary of the Lena Massacre, but the workers at those meetings were talking about current events. For example, the article "День Лены. Резолюция" ("The Lena's Day. The Resolution") of April 6 reads:

Мы, рабочие и солдаты Вас. Остр. района, собравшись в количестве около 4000 человек на митинг в память разстрелянных товарищей на Ленских приисках 4-го апреля 1912 года, постановили: 1. Чтобы Совет Раб. и Сол. деп. потребовал от Временного Правительства привлечения к суду всех виновников Ленского расстрела. 2. По поводу распоряжения предс. Врем. Прав. [кн. Львова] о преобразовании уездной и сельской полиции в народную милицию постановили . . . обратиться через своих представителей в С.Р. и С. Д. об отмене данного распоряжения, ибо оно порождает ядро контрреволюции . . . в противовес чего подтверждаем необходимость создания народной милиции и . . . вооружения народа.

Following this is a list of requirements and suggestions to the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviets. On April 13, 1917, in the article “День Лены” (“Lena’s Day”), the author writes that the workers at the meeting were greeting Lenin’s arrival. In 1918 and the years that followed, the event’s coverage continued to emphasize present-day issues. It was offered as a “lesson” for the workers in their class struggle. The Lena massacre happened in April, the month in which Easter was most often celebrated. Thus the new Memorial Day placed the workers’ death alongside that of Christ. The second reason for its selection was -- and the Soviet press made this known to the public -- that Lenin chose his pseudonym from the river Lena, where he was in exile in 1897–1900. Lenin’s return to Russia from abroad on April 3, 1917, one day before the anniversary of the Lena massacre, provided the possibility of creating a new special day in the calendar which could help link the Bolshevik leader to the Russian workers.

Easter itself, however, had to be replaced by May Day, which was the most important *prazdnik* for the Russian revolutionaries, as it had been before and after the October Revolution. After the February Revolution it became possible to celebrate May Day openly. The Bolsheviks, obviously, hoped for an international workers’ strike on May Day, which might trigger a world revolution. Thus the new vision of this *prazdnik* was offered by Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич<sup>45</sup> in his article “Готовьтесь к первому мая” (“Be Prepared for May Day”), published

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<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruевич (1873-1955) was one of the editors of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* and often wrote in these newspapers on the subject of the new holidays. His wife, V. M. Velichkina (1869-1918), had collected literary works before the February Revolution, with the intention of using them in the new Soviet calendars: see *Песни революции*. The text of the “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и праздничных днях” was obviously Bonch-Bruевич’s work, the document having three signatures: those of V. I. Lenin, his secretary, and V. D. Bonch-Bruевич.

in Pravda on the front page on March 29, 1917. While pointing to the major significance of this *prazdnik* for revolutionary movements around the world, he outlines what should be done during its celebration, emphasizing one very important measure – not to work on this day:<sup>46</sup>

Праздник первого мая самый большой пролетарский всесветный праздник . . . К этому дню мы должны быть все готовы . . . Нигде работы в этот день производиться не должны . . . Необходимо выработать план общегородских демонстраций, митингов, собраний по кварталам, районам, заводам, фабрикам . . . До праздника остается всего три недели и медлить, товарищи, нельзя ни минуты.

In order to mark May 1<sup>st</sup> as the new chronological starting point, Pravda initiated an unauthorized reform to the calendar: the issue of Pravda of April 18, 1917, was dated “1 Мая (18 Апреля) 1917” (“1 May (18 April) 1917”) and this kind of “double dating” continued until the official calendar reform of January 24, 1918. The public demonstration devoted to May Day in 1917 was organized on April 18. In the poem “Первое Мая” (“May the First”), published in Pravda on April 18, 1917, Kuz’ma Terkin describes the spring celebration using the idiom “встретить Новый Год” (“to meet the New Year”): “С громкой песнею победной / Встретим новый Первый Май!” (Теркин, Правда 18 апр.1917: 3). The New Year celebration is traditionally connected with the rebirth of the sun

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<sup>46</sup> In 1920, when all the holidays were turned into *субботники* and *воскресники*, the slogans with the opposite meaning were published, and Vladimir Mayakovsky, with his acute feeling of political needs, wrote a number of propagandistic jingles on the theme, for example: “Чем ходить по улицам мостовые ломая, мостовые починим Первого мая” (“Чем ходить . . .” (“Instead of Walking . . .”), том 3, 438).

and nature in general, and the phrase “возрождение Интернационала” (“the rebirth of the International”) had been repeated numerous times in Pravda articles, paving the way for a new historical era, beginning on May Day.

Another important theme of this *prazdnik* was an appeal to stop the war, a further attempt to cast May Day as the dividing point between an old era of suffering and a new era of happiness:

Вот почему так велико значение первомайского празднества в нынешнем году. Торжественно празднуя этот день, русский рабочий класс снова подтвердит перед лицом всего мира свою твердую волю положить конец безумной войне, во всеуслышание выразить свой протест против кровавой бойни . . . Это совместное выступление социалистов всех стран в разгар мировой войны будет неслыханным торжеством идей.<sup>47</sup>

The articles covering the demonstrations emphasized only their great success. For example, in Izvestiia on April 20, 1917, the editorial “1 Мая в Петрограде” (“1 May in Petrograd”) states:

В день 1 мая глаза всех народов были обращены на Россию. И общенародное торжество в день пролетарского праздника 1 мая 1917 года доказало всему миру, что лозунги российского пролетариата к прекращению войны есть призыв не одного класса, а всей России.

The Bolsheviks placed a great deal of importance on the celebration of May Day in 1917: it was meant to show that a worldwide revolution was an inevitability,

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<sup>47</sup> “1 Мая и война” (“1 May and the War.”) Известия 29 апр.1917.

that the new International would be created, that the Bolshevik political platform was supported by the whole country, and that the main aim of the Bolshevik party was to stop the war. All these shades of interpretation fall under the heading of cardinal change, which has always been a characteristic of genuinely popular mass celebration. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes:

[T]hrough all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, or change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world” (9).

It seems, however, that the Bolsheviks did not completely appreciate the re-emergence of this popular *prazdnik* and continued to manipulate its semantics. Changes in its meanings were already being made in 1918, when on April 23 the editorial in Pravda stated that celebration of May Day in subsequent years should differ from the previous: the old slogans should be changed according to the new political situation. While the main slogan of the celebration in the previous year, 1917, was “Мир! Хлеб! Земля!” (“Peace! Bread! Land!”), the new main slogan would be “Кто не трудится, тот не ест!” (“The One Who Does Not Work – Does Not Eat!”). The editorial also argues that the slogan “Война – войне!” (“War to the War!”), which expressed the Bolsheviks’ determination to end the war with Germany, should be replaced by “Да здравствует справедливая война – в защиту социалистического отечества!” (“Glory to the Just War in Defense of the Socialist Fatherland!”). Likewise, instead of a call for the establishment of socialism, another slogan would read: “Да здравствует Советская республика,

проводящая социализм в жизнь!” (“Long Live the Soviet Republic That Brings Socialism to Life!”). These slogans were boldly ruthless and diametrically opposed to the slogans of May Day 1917, overturning completely the meaning of this *prazdnik* just one year ago.

The overwhelming coverage of May Day in Pravda and Izvestiia displays the continuing evolution of the Soviet calendar after its official introduction. In the first years after the revolution, the treatment of May Day by the Party ideologists reflected their hope for a world proletarian revolution: May Day was sometimes called the Day of the Communist International. The practice of changing holidays’ semantics, however, was so common that the new Soviet Government later turned the best-known *prazdnik* from a celebration of the Communist International to the celebration of labor. As hope for a world revolution gradually disappeared, the enthusiasm for its celebration decreased. In 1926, the most unexpected metamorphosis occurred: the propaganda promoting this *prazdnik* in Pravda was minimal, and was virtually replaced by propaganda for celebrating Lenin’s birthday. Perhaps an attempt was made to “forget” a holiday which remained from a long-expected world proletarian revolution. However, after 1926 the importance of May Day was reestablished in both newspapers.<sup>48</sup>

The Bolshevik goal on that particular day was obviously the consolidation of the workers’ power. They, however, did not conceal their hope that the first

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<sup>48</sup> The attractiveness of May Day can be explained by the fact that it was a popular pre-revolutionary civil holiday “встреча лета” (“meeting with Summer”) (Соколова 141-145).

anniversary of the October Revolution might also trigger a world revolution.

In Izvestiia on November 3, 1918, for example, the editorial states:

Рабочие и крестьяне России, готовясь к юбилею своей революции, имеют счастье готовиться также к всеобщему празднику трудящихся – мировой социалистической революции. Октябрьская революция делается мировой революцией. Октябрьская же – это красная дата в революционном календаре – дает начало новому летоисчислению не в одной России. Праздник октябрьских дней – праздник мировой. Мы – ‘накануне.’ Накануне не только Великого Юбилея Революционного Летоисчисления. Мы – накануне торжества пролетарского Интернационала (1).

The articles, covering the organization of a celebration in honor of the first anniversary of the October revolution in 1918, persistently repeat the idea of making it a “праздник единения и довольствия” (“holiday of unity and content”).<sup>49</sup> Many other articles announced that during the days of its celebration, people would receive free lunches and a larger daily ration. There are also many articles discussing the theatrical performances that ought to be staged during the celebration. Notably, the most important event was to be a symbolic burning of the old regime held in the evening:

Сообщается для сведения и руководства районам следующее: В первый день празднования вечером 6-го ноября никаких шествий не предполагается, будут происходить лишь митинги, лекции,

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, “К празднованию годовщины октябрьской революции” (“Toward the Celebration of the Anniversary of the October Revolution”).

концерты, спектакли, но после них вечером в первый день праздника предлагается закончить собраниями на главных площадях каждого района, при чем предметом этих вечерних собраний должно явиться символическое уничтожение Старого Строя и рождение Нового Строя третьего Интернационала.<sup>50</sup>

Straw men were actually burned even in Red Square:

В толпе движение к Лобному месту:

-- Сейчас деревенского кулака будут сжигать.

-- Гляди, гляди, вон он.

Над головами толпы мелькает какое-то чучело, которому один из членов Комитета бедноты подносит смоляной факел.<sup>51</sup>

The most explicit statement about the plan to make November 7 the first day of the New Year is expressed in the article “Обращение к учащейся молодежи” (“Address to the Young Students”), published in Izvestiia on November 2, 1918:

Сейчас совершается торжественный, трагический и радостный переворот, о котором Маркс говорил, что вся история человечества до него представляет собой простое вступление. И не удивляет нас мысль о том, чтобы летоисчисление впредь велось от знаменательного дня 25 октября (7 ноября), а не от Рождества Христова, потерявшее свое значение для нас. То, что не удалось

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<sup>50</sup> “К празднованию годовщины октябрьской революции.” (“Toward the Celebration of the Anniversary of the October Revolution”).

<sup>51</sup> “Праздник Октябрьской Революции. Москва. Иллюминация.” (“Celebration of the October Revolution. Moscow. Illumination”).

великой французской революции, полное обновление лица земли, то удастся великой русской революции.

This indicates that the anniversary of the October revolution in 1918 was actually intended as a rehearsal of the *prazdnik* which would replace the celebration of Christmas, New Year and *Масленица*. The birth of the New Regime had to replace the birth of Christ, and the dates November 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> perfectly corresponded to the dates in January on which the Orthodox Christmas was celebrated after the reform.<sup>52</sup> All of the traditional features of the New Year celebration were reported in the newspapers: a night carnival, striking of the clock, plenty of food, fireworks, a noisy, happy crowd, and a fully decorated city. The traditional burning of straw man on *Масленица*, which symbolized the end of cold season and rebirth of the sun, was replaced by the burning of the symbols of the old regime.<sup>53</sup>

The newspaper coverage of New Year's Day, January 1, shows that, in a clear opposition to May Day and the anniversaries of the October Revolution, the Bolshevik ideologists viewed this day as only a starting point for resetting the calendar year, that is, without any real significance as a holiday. This idea was later reflected in the calendars as well:

Праздник нового года . . . рабовладельческого происхождения и  
совсем даже не христианский . . . Новый год имеет значение лишь

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<sup>52</sup> Such coincidence, perhaps, inspired Mikhail Bulgakov to play with the dates of the Christian and Bolshevik calendars.

<sup>53</sup> In the articles of the pre-anniversary period there are persistent descriptions of the content of the daily ration for November 7. The contents are varied, but butter is included in all. During *Масленица* week the Russian Orthodox worshippers are permitted to eat a lot of butter.

для счета годов, но для этого можно выбрать и какой-нибудь другой день, например, день годовщины Октябрьской революции.<sup>54</sup>

In the “Правила об еженедельном отдыхе и праздничных днях” the first day of the New Year was designated a rest day. The issues of Pravda and Izvestiia from those early post-revolutionary years, however, make it obvious that creation of this rest day was merely a reaction to the political climate of the time, not unlike the state’s decision to allow the celebration of certain religious holidays. The new government simply did not dare erase all the traditional holidays in the new calendar until 1929, when New Year’s status as a rest day was finally cancelled. Logically, this popular holiday might have been used to replace Christmas and the Epiphany, but the utopian idea of starting the New Year on May 1 or November 7, and the beginning of the new era in 1917, was, apparently, popular until 1947, when the New Year day as a rest day was again reestablished. Official ideology could not change the population’s perception of New Year’s Day as a great feast, and it was celebrated privately in the Soviet Union even during the darkest period of Stalin’s purges. As to the symbolic beginning of the new socialist era, the date of November 7, 1917 was presented as such throughout the Soviet Union’s existence, especially in propagandistic and educational texts.

Another special calendrical date, the Memorial Day of January 9, 1905, was, obviously, created as a part of the Bolsheviks’ larger strategy of eliminating the Constitutional Assembly.<sup>55</sup> The Bolsheviks dissolved the Assembly on

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<sup>54</sup> Календарь коммуниста на 1925 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1925) 159.

<sup>55</sup> On 9 January, 1905, the peaceful march of the citizens of Petrograd headed towards the Winter Palace to deliver a petition to the tsar about the horrible conditions of the working class, and the

January 5, 1918, and, on the days that followed, their political opponents organized demonstrations and protests against the dissolution. The dates of all these events were very close to January 9, and the opposition doubtlessly used this in their accusation that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the ideals of the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907. In his “response” to those accusations, the author of the article “Тринадцатая годовщина” (“The Thirteen-Year Anniversary”), published in Pravda on January 9, 1918, attempted to justify why the Bolsheviks were apparently rejecting the goals of the First Russian Revolution:

Революция 1905 года была революцией буржуазной, несмотря на то, что она делалась руками рабочих и крестьян . . . [К]райним политическим требованием [рабочего класса] было тогда Учредительное Собрание . . . Тринадцатилетняя годовщина 9 января совпала с крахом Учредительного собрания, оставленного на задворках истории бешеным бегом новой революции. Рабочий класс уже вырос теперь из детских пеленок, в которые он был закутан даже в безумный пятый год. Он уже не ограничивается революционно-демократическими требованиями . . . Его прежний умеренный идеал – демократическая республика – уже не удовлетворяет запросам жизни (1).

In the same article the author articulates the reason why January 9<sup>th</sup> should be a new national *prazdnik* and a rest day: “Именно мы являемся продолжателями дела наших славных товарищей, погибших 9 января тринадцать лет тому

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military troops opened a fire. This day is considered to be the first day of the First Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 and was called the “Bloody Sunday.”

назад. Они погибли не даром. На их могилах вырос прекрасный цветок. Этот цветок – великая социалистическая революция.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it is entirely possible that in order to show people that the Bolshevik party followed the revolutionary program put in place during the First Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks decided to create a new annual Memorial Day, a rest day, on January 9 (January 22 according to the New Style). It is likely that the new government was afraid of the demonstrations that might take place on that day and that it might require military force to disperse them. Such events might in turn form an unfavorable association with the forced dispersal of protesters on January 9, 1905, an association the Bolshevik party clearly wished to avoid. This is likely the explanation behind the extreme actions of announcing January 9 to be a new *prazdnik*. In the January 9, 1918, issue of Pravda, we find a curious declaration:

Чрезвычайная комиссия по охране города Петрограда. 8-го января, 12 часов ночи. Петроградский Совет Рабочих и Солдатских Депутатов постановил: Предложить Совету Народных Комиссаров объявить день 9-го января Национальным праздником Рабочей и Крестьянской России.

The first peculiar element in this text is that the *prazdnik* is announced by the Special Committee for the Defense of the City of Petrograd -- that is, by a temporary military unit. It is also unusual that the exact hour the decision was made was released to the public. This suggests that the Bolsheviks were trying to

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<sup>56</sup> The words “именно мы” are printed in bold in the original text.

convince the reading public that the *prazdnik* was planned at least one day prior to the actual day of its celebration.

In the next issue of Pravda, on January 10, 1918, in the short article “День 9 января. Митинг в Кегсгольском полку” (“The Day of the 9<sup>th</sup> of January. The Meeting in the Kegsgol Regiment”) a journalist describes his own impressions of participating in the meetings devoted to the celebration of the new *prazdnik*. The most interesting detail from this description is that not one word is said about the events that took place on January 9, 1905. For example, the author states: “В этот день мне пришлось побывать на 4-х таких митингах. Всюду, всех волновал один вопрос – справится ли народная власть с возложенной на нее задачей?” He could not hide the fact that even the speaker at the meeting did not talk about the events of 1905.

This hastily created *prazdnik* would not likely have been included in the calendar if the first stage of the struggle with the Russian Orthodox Church had not occurred. In response to the decree on the separation of the Church and State, issued on January 20, 1918,<sup>57</sup> in Petrograd and in Moscow on January 28, large processions were organized, at which people read Patriarch Tikhon’s address to Russian Christians urging them to defend their faith and Church.<sup>58</sup> The new government was obviously concerned about the possibility that these processions might be repeated in subsequent years. In that context, the annual commemoration

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<sup>57</sup> Декреты Советской власти том 1, 373.

<sup>58</sup> See Русская Православная церковь и коммунистическое государство 23-25.

of those who died during the religious processions in 1905 can be seen as a strong counter-response to the Church policy.<sup>59</sup>

Lenin's death on January 21, 1924, breathed new life into the Memorial Day of January 9, 1905. A year after his death, on January 22, 1925, Pravda published two long articles. The first article, "Владимир Ильич Ленин и Гапон" ("Vladimir Ilich Lenin and Gapon")<sup>60</sup> was written by Nadezhda Krupskaja, Lenin's widow; the second, "Ленин и ленинградские рабочие" ("Lenin and the Workers of Leningrad"), was written by Grigorii Zinoviev. Reading these articles, it is clear that the Bolsheviks tried to link Lenin to the events of January 9, 1905. Both articles were carefully printed on the same page and both were devoted to the subject of Lenin's leadership of the Russian workers. Krupskaja's article implies that Gapon was not the real leader of the Petrograd workers at that time, and that he initially was not able to organize people to revolt. The suggestion was that if Lenin had been there, the massacre would not have happened and the Revolution of 1905 would have been a victory for the Russian proletariat. Zinoviev's article, meanwhile, argues that there was an almost supernatural connection between Lenin and the workers in Petrograd at the time of the First Russian Revolution. As he puts it, "как истинный пролетарский вождь, Владимир Ильич чувствовал рабочего и в Париже, и в Кракове, и в Цюрихе, и в Москве – всюду, где ни приходилось бы тов. Ленину жить." These

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<sup>59</sup> Moreover, in Russia, January 6 (January 19 according to the New Style) is a very important *prazdnik*, especially for peasants, the Day of Epiphany. The Bolshevik policy was to place the new holidays as closely as possible to the old religious ones.

<sup>60</sup> The priest Gapon was an organizer of the procession on 9 January 1905.

articles each offer the reader a connection between the two events. The printed calendars show that from 1926 onwards both Memorial Days were celebrated under Lenin's name. They followed the example of Easter, with one day of death and grieving, another of resurrection and joy, when resurrection by divine force was merely replaced by the resurrection through memory.

This particular Memorial Day of January 9, 1905, was special in that it helped counter the several religious dates in January, some traditional, some newly proposed by the Church, while at the same time emphasizing the significance of Lenin's death.<sup>61</sup> Later, after Stalin's death, this rest day was excluded from the list of state holidays and quickly forgotten. By that time, the anniversary of Lenin's death had also lost much of its ideological weight, while his birthday (April 22), which was associated with *ленинские субботники* (Lenin's *subbotniki*)<sup>62</sup> became more popular.

There is little doubt that the Bolsheviks had hoped to organize an important *prazdnik* commemorating the end of a devastating war which could then replace Christmas and New Year's Day. They placed a great amount of importance on a demonstration celebrating the peace agreement signed by Soviet Russia and Germany. A demonstration was planned for December 17, 1917, (December 30 according to the New Style) and was situated conveniently between the two targeted dates. According to repeated announcements in both newspapers, the groups of demonstrators had to follow each other in a strict but

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<sup>61</sup> This is one of many cases which give the early Soviet calendar the quality of an obituary.

<sup>62</sup> Lenin participated in some of the first *субботники*.

elaborate order. They even printed an evening issue of Pravda<sup>63</sup> which was completely devoted to propaganda promoting the demonstration. However, this highly desirable *prazdnik* turned out to be a complete failure. The Soviet delegation left for Brest-Litovsk for the peace negotiation with the German delegation on January 9, 1918, only to learn that Germany “demanded the transfer to German control of Poland, Lithuania, Livland, Kurland and part of the territory inhabited by Ukrainians and Belorussians.”<sup>64</sup> Although Leon Trotsky did not sign the agreement, the Soviet delegation was forced to do so later, on March 3, 1918, under worse conditions. Thus there was nothing to celebrate the next year on December 30<sup>th</sup>, and the potential *prazdnik* was deliberately “forgotten” by Soviet propaganda.

In Pravda and Izvestiia we find not only coverage of those *prazdniki* that constituted the new Soviet calendar, but also those that ultimately never became part of it. The press, however, tried to paint them as legitimate *prazdniki*. Along with the failed attempt to create the special days out of Lenin’s arrival to Russia on April 3, 1917, and the funeral of the victims of the February unrests, Izvestiia, for example, announced the Day of the Red Carnation on May 14, 1917. This was a fundraising effort for printing books for soldiers. A similar attempt to fix a new special date was made in Izvestiia on June 3, 1917, on the tenth anniversary of the dispersal of the Second State Duma in 1907. Such policy kept readers in a constant state of anticipation of new holidays and, after the Revolution, a state of fear lest they be

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<sup>63</sup> Pravda and Izvestiia usually had only one issue a day.

<sup>64</sup> White, The Russian Revolution 1917-1921 178.

called undutiful citizens for not participating in the political celebration. Taking into account that most of the promoted *prazdniki* were based on unknown events with unclear meaning, the coverage of “potential *prazdniki*” undoubtedly contributed to the instability of the Bolshevik calendar.

The inconsistencies of the Bolshevik calendar reflected not only the chaos of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, but also the way in which its creators regarded their own work, for they doubtlessly viewed the post-revolutionary calendar as a temporary phenomenon. In January 25, 1918 issue of Pravda, a note “Заметка к декрету о введении в Российской республике нового календаря” (“A Note on the Decree about Introduction of the New Calendar in the Russian Republic”), printed beside the text of the decree, reads:

Совершенно очевидно, что для России существенно необходимо перейти к принятому культурными народами стилю, разработка же наиболее точного, с точки зрения научной, календаря, должна быть предоставлена, если в этом возникнет потребность, будущему интернациональному конгрессу социалистов, который предложит выработанную им систему к единовременному проведению во всем мире.

The “Stalin” calendar of 1930 differed radically from the Bolshevik calendar of 1918–1929. The ten rest days that people could use as religious holidays were excluded entirely. Three *prazdniki* -- New Year’s Day, the Day of Overthrowing the Autocracy, and the Day of the Paris Commune -- also lost their status as rest days. Only the Memorial Day of January 9, 1905, May Day, and the Day of the

Proletarian (October) Revolution were left as rest days.<sup>65</sup> The explanatory note to the “Постановление СНК от 24 сентября 1929 г. о рабочем времени и времени отдыха в предприятиях и учреждениях, переходящих на непрерывную производственную неделю” (“Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of September 24, 1929, about Working Time and Resting Time in the Enterprises and Institutions That Accept a Non-stopping Week of Production”) was an attempt to legitimize this new “Stalin” calendar, and it stated that the religious and old *prazdniki* had lost their historical meaning of common days of rest and celebration for the most people, and that they should be erased from the state calendar. Thus, the preliminary calendar of 1918–1929 had played its role and had to disappear.

The process of shaping the Soviet calendar had its own logic, however, one which was defined by Bolshevik policy. This logic can be understood by comparing the calendars of 1918–1929 with the Календарь коммуниста на 1930 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1930) and Календарь коммуниста на 1931 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1931). These were the Soviet state calendars created at the beginning of the new Stalinist period. In the 1930 calendar, the five-day week is introduced, while only five revolutionary common holidays remain. In the 1931 calendar, even greater changes are made: the majority of the special historical dates are omitted, while only the dates associated with the history of the Communist Party, the Young Communist League, the Communist International, the International of the Trade Unions, and the Soviet Congresses are presented in

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<sup>65</sup> Beginning 1930, May Day and the Anniversary of the October Revolution were celebrated for two days each.

detail. Each year was represented by different numbers: the first number counted the years from Christ's birth, and the second from the establishment of Soviet power. For example, the year 1931 was also recorded as "Четырнадцатый год Пролетарской Революции" ("The Fourteenth Year of the Proletarian Revolution").

Thus this new "Stalin" calendar was similar to the traditional one only in the numbers of the days and months. The symbolic function of the calendar, meanwhile, became completely different, and even traditional calendar units, which were originally based on the natural change of seasons and rotations of the moon and the sun, were replaced by units created by the communists. These units were the dates of congresses of the various communist organizations. Moreover, all the holidays, rest days, and working days were united by the same exclusive semantics of the development of the revolutionary movement in Russia and the whole world in general. There were only five common holidays. A rigid schedule for living in the socialist state was created and this schedule existed until Nikita Khrushchev came to power in 1953. All these show that the Bolsheviks, consciously or unconsciously, created not a calendrical narrative, but a liturgical rhythm for the new socialist country. Ronald L. Grimes defines liturgy as a ritual action which is, at the same time, a "spiritual exercise" (43). During special days of the Soviet state calendar Soviet citizens were expected not only to worship the Communist Party, its policy and leaders, but also to experience almost transcended dialogical connections with them and those who died for communist ideas. Communist theorists were unable, however, to suggest a unifying

calendrical narrative: even the lives of Lenin or Stalin failed to form such binding stories. The authors of the new Soviet calendar did not take into account people's quest for a coherent narrative which would tie all the holidays together. The works of both Vladimir Mayakovsky's and Mikhail Bulgakov's are a manifestation of this quest.

## Chapter II

### Calendar, Time and Immortality in Mayakovsky's Works

Vladimir Mayakovsky was a vocal advocate of the new Soviet *prazdniki*, his approach to them almost perfectly mirrored the state's policy toward its new ritual calendar which was regularly presented in Soviet newspapers. Edward Brown writes about the poet's later works:

The poems he produced successfully versify editorial policies and political campaigns of the day . . . Though necessarily ephemeral considered as poetry, it has genuine historical interest in that it reflects with extraordinary faithfulness the principal concerns of party organs during the late twenties. And it is quite clear that Mayakovsky himself shared many of these concerns (305).

In fact, these words can be applied to the most of Mayakovsky's works dealing with the calendar theme regardless of the period of his poetic career.

His aggressive rejection of the state calendar of the Russian Empire dates back to his adolescence when he first became a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1908 and a campaigner of Bolshevik ideals: according to the memoirs of his contemporary, he was preoccupied with reading and explaining to the workers A Calendar of a Marxist (Марксистский календарь).<sup>66</sup> In his early literary career, in the play Vladimir Mayakovsky. A Tragedy (Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия), for instance, he positioned himself as no less than a new

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<sup>66</sup> See Медведев 71. Sergei Medvedev recalls his work with Mayakovsky as a Bolshevik agitator and writes about his fondness for this particular calendar. Unfortunately, I was not able to find it in Russian or North American libraries.

messiah, and in his poem Man (Человек) (1916) he replaced Christ in the calendrical narrative of the Christian ritual year with himself. In that same poem, he argues the inseparability of the themes of the calendar and the origins of life:

Тише, философы!  
Я знаю – не спорьте –  
зачем источник жизни дарен им.  
Затем, чтоб рвать,  
затем, чтоб портить  
дни листкам календарным. (Том 1, 266)

Mayakovsky had a clear, albeit utopian, picture of the “perfect” communist calendar. It is a unique calendar of a blissful future whose most important function is to provide a measurement of the lives of immortal human beings.

## **1. Time and the Future in Works of Futurists and Mayakovsky**

The interest of an author in the phenomenon of calendar is often a part of his interest in the phenomenon of time in general, and this is the case with Mayakovsky. Laurence Stalberger rightly notes the prevalent theme in Mayakovsky’s works: “If any single theme has a right to precedence over the others, in the sense it encompasses all the others, it is that of time” (113).

Mayakovsky researchers have thoroughly examined Mayakovsky’s approaches to time. Roman Jakobson, pointing to Mayakovsky’s active work on the theme, pays special attention to the role the poet assigns himself -- closing the

gap between future and present: “Я поэта – это таран, тарахтящий в запретное Будущее, это ‘брошенная за последний предел’ воля к воплощению Будущего, к абсолютной полноте бытия: надо вырвать радость у грядущих дней” (Якобсон 12). Laurence Stalberger states that the poet sees time as an obstacle to future’s arrival: “Majakovskij’s desire is to accelerate the ‘flow’ of time so that the future will arrive sooner. Anticipation of the future and fear and hatred of time are intermingled” (115). Kristina Pomorska is concerned with Mayakovsky’s interest in time within the context of the dominating intellectual ideas in Russia at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. She finds that poet’s interest in the topic was not only personal, but that it was also inspired by scientific discoveries made during that historical period, and national Slavic traditions as well (171).

Vladimir Mayakovsky belonged to the group of the Russian Futurists, or *будетляне*, as Velimir Khlebnikov preferred to call them, and the very name of this group indicates the major concern of its members: the nature of the future. Its most faithful members, besides Vladimir Mayakovsky, were David Burliuk, Nikolai Burliuk, Vasilii Kamensky, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Aleksei Kruchonykh. Each of them employed very diverse literary methods and held very different ideas about art, poetry, the future and their roles in building that future. That diversity of personality is revealed in their surprisingly different visions of the future, whose prophets they considered themselves to be.

Velimir Khlebnikov was, undoubtedly, the Futurists’ poetic leader. During his lifetime, Mayakovsky called Khlebnikov his teacher. He wrote in his article

“В. В. Хлебников” (“В. В. Хлебников”) (1922) that he and his fellow Futurists “считали его и считаем одним из наших поэтических учителей и великолепнейшим и честнейшим рыцарем в нашей поэтической борьбе” (28). Mayakovsky’s model of the future, however, differed greatly from Khlebnikov’s, and Mayakovsky, I believe, intentionally developed his model in opposition to that of his mentor. Therefore, in order to better understand Mayakovsky’s notion of time and the perfect calendar, I provide a short overview of Khlebnikov’s writings on time and future.

Khlebnikov devoted his life to the discovery of a law of time, by which people could then conquer it, changing the world and eliminating the divisions between past, present and future. From the very beginning of his literary career, he was certain of his prophetic role in leading mankind to this happy future and he never strayed from that conviction, continuing to write works about the ultimate victory of Futurists’ ideas throughout his life.<sup>67</sup> In a letter to his sister Vera Khlebnikova on 14 April 1921, he writes:

Я, старый охотник за предвидением будущего . . . все-таки добился своего: нашел великий закон времени, под которым подписываюсь всем своим прошлым и будущим, а для этого я перечислил все войны земного шара, в который я верю и заставляю верить других  
  
(Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 320).

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<sup>67</sup> A number of researchers have studied Khlebnikov’s “law of time.” In his article “Время в пространстве: Хлебников и ‘философия гиперпространства’” M. Vermig provides an excellent analysis of this “law” (Бермиг, 1996). R. V. Duganov in his book Велимир Хлебников: природа творчества, also carefully explains it (Дуганов, 1990).

A pacifist, Khlebnikov desperately wanted to free the world from war and he believed that he possessed the ability to foresee the dates of future military conflicts, the knowledge of which then could help the world avoid those conflicts:

Если я обращу человечество в часы  
И покажу как стрелка столетия движется,  
Неужели из нашей времен полосы  
Не вылетит война, как ненужная ижица?

(Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 469)

He tried to find a magic number in order to foresee all future events. At first it was the number 317, and then a combination of the numbers 2 and 3. This “law” was not, of course, the result of traditional scientific research, but of a somewhat special “experience” which Khlebnikov placed above science. With these numbers, he also hoped to teach mankind to live in a new dimension, without the divisions between past, present and future, where people could move freely through time, in any direction, as they move through space. Khlebnikov wrote about the possibility of ruling the natural world with the help of magic numbers in his article “Наша основа” (“Our Fundamentals”) (1919) where he compared the real world with a ray, in which people live, but cannot control. He offered a new science, which would be able to measure the “огромные лучи человеческой судьбы” the same way a scientist measures light waves (Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 239). His goal was to give the human mind reign over the oscillations of human destinies, and then: “Тогда люди сразу будут и народом, населяющим волну луча, и ученым, управляющим ходом этих лучей,

изменяя их путь по произволу” (Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 240). His aim was to discover this natural law, similar to Mendeleev’s laws of chemistry. Consequently, a poet’s main goal must be the creation of a special language because “языкознание идет впереди естественных наук и пытается измерить нравственный мир, сделав его главой учения о луче” (Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 232). Khlebnikov therefore created a calendar, which would reflect the future not as a blank dimension, but as one filled with predicted events, just as Mendeleev’s periodic table reflects chemical elements not yet discovered by scientists.

The characters in his poems do not belong to any particular historical period, but shift in space and time as they wish.<sup>68</sup> This shifting is the organizing structural element in his many works. For example, in the *сверхповесть* (supersaga) Дети Выдры (Otter’s Children) (1913) in the Sixth Sail (this is how the poet titled the chapters of the *сверхповесть*), Hannibal, Prince Sviatoslav, Jan Hus, Copernicus and other historical figures all have a conversation together, despite the fact that they all lived in different historic times. Only Khlebnikov is able to unite the best people:

Вопль духов  
На острове вы. Зовется он Хлебников.  
Среди разъяренных учебников  
Стоит, как остров, храбрый Хлебников –

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<sup>68</sup> In 1910 Khlebnikov writes in a letter to V. V. Kamensky: “Задумал сложное произведение ‘Поперек времен,’ где права логики времени и пространства нарушались бы столько раз, сколько пьяница в час прикладывается к рюмке” (Том 5, 291).

Остров высокого звездного духа.

Только на поприще острова сухо –

Он омывается морем ничтожеств. (Творения  
453)

The poet tried to prove in his works that it was quite possible to manipulate time and, in fact, necessary to do so in order to conquer death and attain a shared happiness.

Khlebnikov saw the tower as a symbol of time and this image appears in many of his works. As early as 1916, he writes: “Три осады занимали мой мозг. Башня толп, башня времени, башня слова” (Ка 2 (Ка 2) Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 132). These three “towers” have a common purpose: they are the only means of achieving the new, “Khlebnikov” time. The author believed that a transformation into a new time-space with its own physical laws was possible. He also believed that this transformation would bring about the wonderful future for which the *будетляне* strove.

Not long before his death, Khlebnikov wrote the poem “Кто он, Воронихин столетий?” (“Who is He, Voronichin of Centuries?”) (1922) in which he expressed his strong faith in his law of time. In the poem, he uses the Sukharev Tower in Moscow to represent historical time. The image of the time-tower was also quite popular among many representatives of the Russian avant-garde. We find a number of projects, mostly unfinished, in the pre- and post-revolutionary periods with allusions to towers or cones. The most famous of these is the Memorial of the Third International, created by Vladimir Tatlin in 1919. Tatlin’s

innovation manifested itself in the tower's parts, each of which moved: the lowest section – once a year; the middle -- once a month, and the third -- once a day. The sections had the forms of a cube, prism, cone and cylinder. The final product is visually very strange, resembling a giant screw rising into the sky. (Illustration 4)

The Monument still raises many questions. Christina Lodder, for instance, while conclusively demonstrating the connection between Khlebnikov's ideas and Tatlin's project, admits that she cannot explain the reason for the monument's form. She rightly notes that the dynamic of the Revolution is reflected in it, but the overall symbolic meaning of the monument is much more complex. First, the architect did not name his work a monument to the Revolution, but precisely a “Памятник III Интернационала.” And second, it is not a monument to the International, but a monument of the International. The word “International” is used in the genitive case and it implies that the International itself has left the memorial, having moved somewhere higher in space, somewhere loftier. The Tower has been left behind as a marker commemorating the achievement of that higher goal. Here we can see the strong influence of Khlebnikov, who urged mankind to move to some other dimension, capitalizing on the experience and superhuman powers of outstanding historical figures, including Stepan Razin<sup>69</sup> and, of course, Khlebnikov himself. This idea is clearly expressed in “Кто он, Воронихин столетий?” in which the tower's base is compared to Razin's fight

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<sup>69</sup> Stepan Razin (1630-1671) – a leader of the peasant uprising of 1670-1671 and a popular figure in Russian folklore. Khlebnikov transferred the story of Christ's suffering and death to Razin. In the poem, the Sukharev tower rises symbolically from the *лоб* (forehead) of Razin, who was beheaded. It is an allusion to the legend of the cross on Golgotha where Noah buried Adam: “And this place was named ‘the place of skulls,’ because the head of all mankind was laid there” (Qtd. Biedermann 82).

for freedom from oppression, and its spear – to the Futurists’ fight for freedom from space.<sup>70</sup> Vladimir Tatlin himself explained the ideas underlying his monument’s form in similar terms:

I placed in its basis the screw, as the most dynamic form -- a symbol of time: energy, lucidity, striving. The transparent construction from metallic forms has the form of a spiral – inclined at the angle of the earth. The inclined forms to the angle of the earth are the most stable, soft forms (Lodder 65).

Notwithstanding the novelty of the idea and its structural materialization, elements of the traditional calendar also helped define the project’s form. The Western calendar is an amalgamation of circular and linear perceptions of time. Circular time expresses itself mostly in the year, with its changes of seasons, and in the 24 hour cycle of night and day. The linear flow of time is seen in the one-way direction of multiple years, one following the other. Thus, Tatlin’s tower is a sculptural incarnation of the calendar, where its spiral parts, in spite of their circular nature, combine to form a linear structure. Even more innovative was the purpose of the monument – it was intended as a kind of government office building. The institutions and organizations it was supposed to house, however, were, in fact, imaginary, all a part of the non-existent Government of the Earth, about which Khlebnikov wrote in abundance. The monument preaches to the masses that they can control time. Its gigantic moving parts may be representative of the natural rhythm of time, but that rhythm has been brought to bear -- they

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<sup>70</sup> Khlebnikov viewed the domination of space over man as an obstacle to living in the space-time dimension and therefore advocated a kind of war with space.

twist and turn according to the will of the proletariat. People themselves can turn the Earth, claiming victory over time.<sup>71</sup>

Vladimir Mayakovsky did not share Khlebnikov's belief in a space-time dimension. He wanted to conquer time in the real world. The elaborate theories of his teacher were for him only poetry. He writes clearly about it: “Я намеренно не останавливаюсь на огромнейших фантастико-исторических работах Хлебникова, так как в основе своей – это поэзия” (“В.В. Хлебников,” том 12, 26). He subtly opposes Khlebnikov's model of space-time in his poem Про это also using the image of the tower, not as a triumphal site of victory over time, but as the place of the Futurist poet's death.

Keeping in mind Khlebnikov's theories of time, we can conclude that those parts of Про это in which the protagonist travels in space and time are, in fact, a dialogue with Mayakovsky's fellow Futurist and, moreover, a rejection of the possibility of escaping into some new dimension, where one might be freed of one's everyday problems. Mayakovsky uses the Moscow Kremlin's bell tower to mark the site on which the Futurist poet is executed by the philistines. That choice, I believe, was not arbitrary: it recalls Khlebnikov's use of Moscow's Sukharev tower in “Кто он, Воронихин столетий?” as a place of Futurist triumph.

In Mayakovsky's works, time is a living creature which takes on different images, but always maintains some stable features. In the pre-revolutionary

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<sup>71</sup> Although the Russian avant-garde movement did not have the support of the Bolshevik leaders, Bolsheviks obviously used some avant-garde's ideas for their propaganda. Paradoxically, the so called *высотные здания* (high-rise buildings) in Moscow suspiciously recall the form of the Tatlin's monument. The idea of striving higher, to the unknown, but wonderful goal, was at the base of all the communist ideology, and this particular architectural form reflected it most fully.

period, it is an ancient creature whose power is unlimited and whose hostility to humans is open. In one of his first poems “Несколько слов обо мне самом” (“A Few Words about Myself”) (1913), time is called “хромой богомаз” (limping icon-dauber) (Том 1, 49), and the protagonist refers to it as the last hope for recognition and understanding:

Время!  
Хоть ты, хромой богомаз,  
лик намалюй мой  
в божницу уродца века!  
Я одинок, как последний глаз  
у идущего к слепым человека! (Том 1, 49)

Traditionally, the last hope for a man is God, but here time has replaced him. This suggests that time creates its own gods, itself remaining the ultimate world power. Time’s limping is a reference to Saturn-Chronos, who was often portrayed in paintings as a bold old man with a wooden leg and a scythe. The planet Saturn in Greek Mythology is a symbol of old age, but also a patron of measurement and the calendar. Mayakovsky had some formal training as an artist and was likely familiar with these images and understood the calendar as a means of establishing the power of time over men.

This notion of time is opposite to that of Christian teachings, in which time is genuinely revered:

Christianity . . . attributes the maximum potentiality to time. Christian history is not in time despite time. It conceives of time as a liberation.

Thus the past always appears as a possibility of the future and what takes place is always in expectation of its 'afterwards' as a real possibility (Pattaro 172).

In Christianity, time is one of the necessary components in Christ's second coming and, consequently, the revelation of God's glory, while in Mayakovsky's view it is a cruel enemy of man. In his play Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия, time is referred to pejoratively as *старуха* (old woman): the notion of time is outdated, yet mankind still cannot change it or free itself from its oppression and revenge:

Человек без глаза и ноги.

Стойте!

На улицах,

где лица –

как бремя,

у всех одни и те ж,

сейчас родила

старуха-время

огромный

криворотый мятеж! (Том 1, 162)

This metaphor only worsens the already ominous image of time: it will give birth to the new enemies of man, in this particular case, inanimate objects that have revolted against people. Also, the traditional image of death in Russian culture was that of an ugly old woman. Thus, Mayakovsky relates time to a whole series

of horrifying cultural images. The image of time as an old woman, also hints at the possibility of its eventually dying, that it is mortal, a possibility which most people cannot see because they lack the proper perspective.<sup>72</sup> Time is doomed; it will disappear despite its attempts to incite revolt against man. In Mayakovsky's narrative poem Война и мир (War and the Universe) (1915), the notion of time's mortality is also present:

А может быть,  
больше  
у времени-хамелеона  
и красок никаких не осталось.  
Дернется еще  
и ляжет,  
бездыхан и угловат. (Том 1, 233)

Depiction of time as a "chameleon," a fundamentally deceptive creature, is noteworthy. It is false and, as a result, it is a danger to all people. Time is akin to the Ruler of All, which in the poem Человек takes different forms, always usurping the place of the king of souls: "То в виде идеи, / То черта вроде, / То богом сияет, за облако канув" (Том 1, 266). The battle between man and time is the battle for human life, and only man's victory will provide his own immortality. To laugh at Old Woman Time is to laugh at death, and this will be possible in the future when the dead soldiers will be resurrected: "В старушьё лицо твое / смеемся, / время!" (Война и мир 236).

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<sup>72</sup> All the characters in the play Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия, except the protagonist and an Ordinary Man, are deprived of some human ability, for example, sight or hearing.

As early as in 1913, the poet expresses his belief in electrical energy as basis for a thriving society of the future. His play Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия contains a hymn to electricity. The oddly named hero, Старик с черными и сухими кошками (Old Man with Black and Dry Cats), has lived a thousand years, apparently due to his connection with cats. The existence of electrical energy is only visible while stroking a cat, and only when people find the means to capture that energy, to contain it, will they change their lives and be happy. In a monologue, the Old Man speaks with assurance:

Лишь в кошках,  
где шерсти вороньей отливы,  
наловите глаз электрических вспышек.  
Весь лов этих вспышек  
(он будет обилен!)  
вольем в провода,  
в эти мускулы тяги, --  
заскачут трамваи,  
пламя светилен  
зарееет в ночах, как победные стяги.  
Мир зашевелится в радостном гриме,  
цветы испавлинятся в каждом окошке,  
по рельсам потащат людей,  
а за ними  
все кошки, кошки, черные кошки!

Мы солнца приколем любимым на  
платье,  
из звезд накуем серебрящихся брошек.

(Том 1, 157)

This monologue is the only optimistic part of the play and, significantly, it focuses on the future. It “prophesizes” a day when the potential of natural energy, in this case electricity, will be captured. Thus, Mayakovsky unites the themes of immortality and a bright future already in his first major work. After the Revolution, the poet turned to a somewhat more mysterious energy or force -- time. The image of time here is no longer a mythical figure, but a part of the real physical world, which can be made to serve practical ends, not unlike electricity:

Довольно

Ползало

Время-гад,

Копалось

Время-крот!

Рабочий напор

Ударных бригад

Время рвани вперед. (“Застрельщики.”

(“Leaders.”) Том 10, 87)

Mayakovsky clearly articulates his idea of the most effective use of time in his post-revolutionary poem “Кемп ‘Нит Гедайге’” (“Camp ‘Nitgedige’”) (1925). What is particularly significant about this poem is that it was written during the

poet's trip to the United States. Though Mayakovsky wrote many poems criticizing the American life style and the capitalist exploitation of the working class, he was impressed by the technological level the United States had achieved. In many ways his vision of a bright future reflected something America had already attained: tall buildings, advanced machinery, a high level of individual comfort. He could not accept, however, the means by which this technological level had been reached, namely, the exploitation of workers, and instantly set about dreaming up some other source of energy that would help the Soviet Union create a better life for its citizens. He tells his readers his thoughts in the camp Nitgedige, while lying on the ground, looking up at the dark sky:

Прямо  
перед мордой  
пролетает вечность –  
бесконечночасый распустила хвост.  
Были б все одеты,  
и в белье, конечно,  
если б время ткало  
не часы,  
а холст.  
Впречь бы это  
время  
в приводной бы ремень, --  
спустят

с холостого  
и чеши и сыпь!  
Чтобы  
не часы показывали время,  
а чтоб время  
честно  
двигало  
часы. (Том 7, 88)

This, of course, is a utopian vision of reality, to which most of the Soviet writers – supporters of socialist political power in the Soviet Union – succumbed, but the biographical context and literary tradition, made evident by the text of the poem, enhance the seemingly primitive dream of a “perpetuum mobile.” The camp in which Mayakovsky stayed was made up mostly of workers in the clothing industry, and they certainly told the poet of their hard and monotonous work. It explains why he refers to холст (linen) in his meditation on the theme of new energy forms and their discovery. In addition, холст and холостой (idle) is also likely an allusion to Leo Tolstoy’s novella Холстомер (Kholstomer) (1886). That sad story of a horse, abused and exploited by people around him, serves as background to the poem, bringing to it an element of profound humanism.

The same humanism manifests itself in Mayakovsky’s treatment of the theme of immortality for all people in the world. It is closely connected to the theme of a bright future in which the recipe for eternal life will be discovered. Mayakovsky imagined two possible futures. The first, while separated from the

present by a number of years, does not, in fact, differ from it. It is rather a continuation of that overall, everyday routine which kills human feelings and relationships. Such a future is presented in Человек. When the protagonist returns to Earth after millions of years, he sees that nothing had changed. He meets the same kind of people, witnesses the same city, and confronts the same Ruler of All, who has always controlled life on the Earth.

The other possible future is radically different from the present and is defined by the perfect organization of human society and perfect people. This future might be brought to pass at any time, requiring only changes in the individual and modern society. Mayakovsky called this future “изумительная жизнь” and, it seems, he sincerely believed that he might live in it, when he wrote Про это: “Кажется, / Вот с этой рифмой развяжись, / И вбежишь по строчке в изумительную жизнь” (Том 4, 185). In the poem’s first draft, he points to a particular period of time, a year, over which this might take place, displaying his belief in the possibility of almost instant shift from a terrible present to a beautiful future:

До того,

что кажется --

вот только с этой рифмой

развяжись,

вот только (с этим

годом)

развяжись

и вбежишь

по строчке

(и вбежишь

вот в эту)

в изумительную жизнь.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the future is attainable and should even be expected quite soon. In other works, he anticipates the time when children will be grown up and the wonderful new world they will occupy:

Наша

жизнь

в грядущее рваться,

оббивать

его порог,

вы ж

грядущее это

в двадцать

расшагаете

громом ног. (“Красная зависть” (“Red

Envy”) (1925) Том 6, 119)

His future is not separated from present by a period of time, but by a change in life, when people will live in his cherished commune, becoming perfect and happy. In his play Мистерия Буфф (Mystery-Bouffe) (1918) that future is

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<sup>73</sup> Маяковский, В. В. Про это. (About That.) Первый черновой список. Полное собрание сочинений под общей редакцией Л. Ю. Брик. Том 5, 175.

depicted symbolically as the victory the workers win over those who have exploited them and the union they then form with their instruments and machines. In the poem Летающий пролетариат (Flying Proletariat) (1925) Mayakovsky provides a more detailed depiction of the future worker's everyday routine and daily schedule, and the most specific "formula" of the happy future is given in his play Баня (Bathhouse) (1929):

Будущее примет всех, у кого найдется хотя бы одна черта, роднящая  
с коллективом коммуны, -- радость работать, жажда жертвовать,  
неутомимость изобретать, выгода отдавать<sup>74</sup> гордость человечностью  
(Том 11, 345).

These words are said by the Phosphoric Woman, a representative of the commune of 2030. She is the "real witness" of the future, and her "formula" is a guide for understanding Mayakovsky's imaginary future. Another "formula" with the revealing title "Марш времени" ("March of Time") is given in the same play and presents people as masters of time:

Шагай, страна,  
быстрей, моя.  
Коммуна –  
у ворот!  
Впе-  
ред,  
вре-  
мя!

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<sup>74</sup> Comma is absent in the text.

Вре-  
мя,  
вперед!  
На пятилетке  
премией  
мы –  
сэкономим год!  
Впе-  
ред,  
вре-  
мя!  
Вре-  
мя,  
вперед! (Том 11, 339).

In the play Клоп (Bedbug) (1929), the happy future is presented most vividly, and less schematically, than in any other works, with a soft irony that underlines the fact that people thriving in a new society will always remain merely human, with their typical, often whimsical, characteristics and features.

The fact that the Mayakovsky willingly became an active propagandist for the Communist Party has fascinated his contemporaries and later readers alike.

Edward J. Brown writes:

Mayakovsky during the last years of his life devoted a major part of his activity to the production of poetry on topical matters for the Soviet press

. . . [H]e placed his unusual talents at the disposal of the Soviet state . . .  
(303).

During the perestroika period, some even ascribed this phenomenon to the poet's mundane financial interest.<sup>75</sup> I would argue, however, that, quite to the contrary, Mayakovsky sincerely believed in a communist future and that a carefully directed, properly organized workforce was a key to that future. This is why he wrote propagandistic verses and this is why those verses praised the economic achievements of the Soviet Union.

For Mayakovsky, the October Revolution became a demarcation point in the course of historical time: a new chronology should begin starting 7 November, 1917. He writes about this in many of his poems, but with particular insistence in his autobiography "Я сам" ("I Myself") (1922, 1928). At the very beginning of his autobiography, he decides to abandon dates as the foundation of its formal structure and "свободно плавать по своей хронологии" (Том 1, 9). In fact, he abandons the pre-revolutionary calendar entirely, structuring his autobiography around his own private calendar. Instead of calendar dates, he names the events and feelings which dominated that period of his life: "1-е воспоминание. . . 2-е воспоминание . . . Первая книга . . . Социализм . . . Гимназия" (Том 1, 10). For example, he records the date which decided the greatest part of his professional and private life, the first time he has met Lili and Osip Brik, only approximately: "Июль 915-го года" (Том 1, 23). It is difficult to believe that he did not remember the exact date of that meeting and this likely reflects a

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<sup>75</sup> Mayakovsky's negative image as a person and poet is given in the book of U. Karabichevsky Воскресение Маяковского ("Mayakovsky's Resurrection").

conscious decision made by the author, because he emphasizes the event itself and its critical influence on him: “Радостнейшая дата”(Том 1, 23). His private calendar is the one which is built around the changes in his private life and it dominates, even excludes, the pre-revolutionary state calendar.

He maintains this particular structure of his autobiography until 1915. Starting from 1916, however, the dates of the civil state calendar begin to prevail. Following the entry “16-й год,” there are two exact dates: “26 февраля, 17-й год” and “25 октября 1918 год.” All of the entries that follow are given clearly according to the new Soviet calendar: “24-й год,” “1926-год;” “Октябрь,” “Январь.” Moreover, beginning 1919, he records only years. Thus, the “real” calendar, with its “real” chronology and history emerged only after the Russian Proletarian Revolution. In other words, beginning with the pre-revolutionary 1916, the poet stopped resisting the state calendar and started living his life according to years. As we can see, Mayakovsky’s private calendar has a clear beginning, but not, significantly, a clear end.

The fact that Vladimir Mayakovsky saw the October Revolution of 1917 as the most important event in his life and in the Russian history is well known. His contemporaries often point to it and he writes of it as well. For example, in his poem Владимир Ильич Ленин (Vladimir Il'ich Lenin) (1924) he states:

Когда я  
итожу  
то, что прожил,  
и роюсь в днях –

ярчайший где.  
Одно и то же –  
двадцать пятое,  
первый день. (Том 6, 281)

V. V. Kamensky remembers that the poet escaped the depths of his depression only after the Revolution:

Твердой поступью шагал Маяковский по дороге социалистической революции . . . И вдохновенно предлагал:

Трудом любовным  
Приникнем к земле  
Все.  
Дорога кому она.  
Хлебьтесь, поля!  
Дымитесь, фабрики!  
Славься!  
Сияй,  
Солнечная наша  
Коммуна!

Именно в эти дни началось формирование нового Маяковского – большевистского поэта-трибуна.

Он весь горел будущим.

.....

Отныне он стал как-то по-особому подтянутым, мужественным,  
целеустремленным (212).

He took the Revolution personally, seeing it as “his” Revolution. It captivated his imagination: in an almost miraculous way the entire social order of the country had been changed. That Ruler of All, an embodiment of bourgeois ideals and life style, whom the poet hated so much, and who had deprived him of his happiness, was destroyed, and it seems that it was for the poet, to some extent, a surprise. Человек and Война и мир, two of his most tragic poems, were both written on the eve of the Revolution, indicating that he had not expected that the change or “miracle” would happen so soon. In Человек, which takes place in the distant future, the protagonist arrives back to the Earth only to discover that little at all has changed. Even in Война и мир, the possibility of a wonderful future is still shown as something far off.

The Revolution became for Mayakovsky a hope of still other wonderful, almost miraculous events. His poems about the possible proletariat achievements are loaded with hyperbole, betraying a fanatical belief in miracles, and reveal an unquestioned trust in the proletariat’s ability to conquer the lethal power of time. For example, in the poem 150000000 (1920), he writes: “В стремя фантазии / ногу вденем, / дней оседлаем порох, / и сами / за этим блестящим виденьем / пойдем излучаться в несметных просторах” (Том 2, 128). The changes the Bolsheviks made to the calendar were visual proof that the life of the country itself was changing radically. And, indeed, the road had already been paved for these changes: Mayakovsky, an opponent of religion, had tried to change the

narrative of the Orthodox ritual calendar even before the Revolution. In Человек, he replaced Christ with himself, entitling the chapters “Рождество Маяковского” (“The Christmas of Mayakovsky”), “Жизнь Маяковского” (“The Life of Mayakovsky”), “Страсти Маяковского” (“The Passion of Mayakovsky”) and “Вознесение Маяковского” (“The Resurrection of Mayakovsky”).

One piece of propaganda Mayakovsky used, when he was a Bolshevik agitator, was Марксистский календарь (The Calendar of a Marxist) which he even learned by heart:

Основой для занятий [с рабочими] . . . служили популярные книги и брошюры, в том числе так называемый ‘Марксистский календарь.’ Это была небольшая книжечка с большим количеством статистических сведений: о количестве рабочих, занятых в такой-то отрасли . . . Маяковский, по его словам, прочитал этот ‘Календарь’ один или два раза, но он знал его буквально наизусть (Медведев 71).

This calendar functioned as an alternative to the traditional religious calendars, and its title and content suggested that the calendar was not a perfect instrument that nature itself had handed to people, but the result of a relative point of view. It seems that this book, now unfortunately lost to us, played a great role in Mayakovsky’s vision of the “perfect” calendar of the “perfect” communist future, and that it also led him to the conclusion that the construction of this calendar was his responsibility -- again he assigned himself a messianic position in the best traditions of Futurists.

While Mayakovsky does accept the calendar as a mathematical instrument of measuring time, numbering the years of many of his own texts, he, in fact, demonstrates in his works that one day, people will stop caring about these numbers – when man becomes immortal, he will no longer need them. Only scientists will refer to them for the sake of historical accuracy, while ordinary individuals will neglect them entirely. The necessity of a common calendar will disappear and man will live in an endless sequence of days.

Roman Jacobson insists that Mayakovsky's continued interest in immortality displays the poet's belief in the ultimate victory of humanity over death:

Его [Маяковского] видение грядущего воскрешения мертвых во плоти конвергентно материалистической мистике философа Федорова. Весной 1920 г. я вернулся в закупоренную блокадой Москву. Привез новые европейские книги, сведения о научной работе Запада. М. заставил меня повторить несколько раз мой сбивчивый рассказ об общей теории относительности и о ширившейся вокруг нее в то время дискуссии. Освобождение энергии, проблематика времени, вопрос о том, не является ли скорость, обгоняющая световой луч, обратным движением во времени – все это захватывало М-го. Я редко видел его таким внимательным и увлеченным. – А ты не думаешь, спросил он вдруг, что так будет завоевано бессмертие? . . . А я совершенно убежден, что смерти не будет. Будут воскрешать мертвых. Я найду физика,

который мне по пунктам растолкует книгу Эйнштейна. . . . Для меня в ту минуту открылся совершенно другой М.: требование победы над смертью владело им” (Якобсон 20).

Jacobson also argues that the possibility of resurrection of every individual is a constant theme in Mayakovsky’s poetry (Якобсон 20-24). Undoubtedly, the government’s decision and, more importantly, its achievement in keeping Lenin’s body preserved after his death, inspired Mayakovsky and other believers in a communist future to expect the discovery of infinite life.

The overwhelming desire to live forever is most passionately expressed in Про это:

Крикну я

вот с этой,

с нынешней страницы:

-- Не листай страницы!

Воскреси!

Сердце мне вложи!

Кровищу –

до последних

жил.

В череп мысль вдолби!

Я свое, земное, не дожил,

на земле

свое не долюбил. (Том 4, 182)

The most important barrier to acquiring the scientific formula for eternal life had been the power of time over man, but the Revolution with its first miracle -- rejection of the Ruler of All -- promised a second: man's victory over time.

## 2. Traditional *Prazdniki* as Obstacles to a Wonderful Life

Mayakovsky differentiated between three kinds of *prazdniki*. The first were the old traditional *prazdniki* of the pre-revolutionary calendar, which the poet actively opposed. The second were the new Soviet celebrations, of which he was a tireless proponent (in accordance with Party policy, these were not technically *prazdniki*, but anniversaries and memorial days). The third kind were the *prazdniki* of the future, an amalgamation of *субботник* and May Day, when people celebrate their happy life in the commune after working hours.

Mayakovsky opposed traditional *prazdniki* throughout his entire life, especially after the Revolution. He depicted them as entirely backward and even dangerous because they prevented the establishment of a new life. He made no allowance for the holiday season, writing a number of poems, criticizing people's behavior -- especially drinking -- during religious holidays:

Были  
дни Рождества,  
Нового года,  
праздников  
и торжества пива и водок

.....

На битву с бытом осклизлым,

сила комсомольская

швабру взять

и с бытом грязненьким

вымести б

и эти праздники. (“Итоги” (“Results”).

Том 10, 12)

The traditional *prazdnik* is a ritual that hinders progress and fails to contribute to the perfection of humanity. In the traditional *prazdnik* everything is superficial, there is no real joy, it exists only as a reason for meaningless ritual, prayer, dress, and, of course, drinking. In the play Владимир Маяковский. Трагедия, which takes place during the “праздник нищих” (“holiday of beggars”), the poet chooses two seemingly opposite elements of religious celebration -- prayer and the vanity of fashion -- and places them side by side as special and inseparable features of the traditional *prazdnik*: “Город, / весь в празднике, / возносил в соборах аллилуя, /люди выходили красивое надеть” (Том 1, 168).

Mayakovsky even opposed Sundays by presenting them as a legacy of the old calendar and was dismayed that they continued to exist in the new Soviet version:

Воскресный город

Избит

И испит,

Спит под листком красненьким.

И это

У нас назывлось ‘быт’

И называлось – праздником. (“Голосуем  
за непрерывку” (Vote for *Nepreryvka*)”)

(1929) Том 10, 77)<sup>76</sup>

In the play Баня, *prazdniki* are also depicted as obstacles to building the future.

The Phosphoric Woman, checking the time-machine, says:

Товарищ Двойкин! Проверьте рессоры. Смотрите, чтобы не трясло на  
ухабах праздников. Непрерывка избаловала плавным ходом.

Двойкин

Пройдем плавно, только б не валялись водочные бутылки на дороге  
(Том 11, 337).

His poem “Не для нас поповские праздники” (“Not for Us the Priests’  
*Prazdniki*”) (1923) clearly reflects the Party’s policy of suppressing people’s  
memories of important religious *prazdniki*, including Christmas and Easter. He  
suggests replacing Christmas with the Day of the Paris Commune, and Easter  
with the Day of the October Revolution, thus rewriting the narrative of the ritual  
year, replacing Jesus with the Proletarian Revolution:

Коммунистово рождество –

День Парижской Коммуны

.....

Коммуны воскресенье –

25 октября. (Том 5, 34)

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<sup>76</sup> *Непрерывка* – non-stop working week.

The *prazdniki* of the pre-revolutionary ritual year were a part of Mayakovsky's hated bourgeois *byt* (*быт*) (everyday routine) and he devoted himself to educating the masses about the new Soviet holidays. By 1920, he had already written three short plays with the primary purpose of persuading their audience that the old *prazdniki* were the dangerous fantasies of priests and the bourgeoisie. In the play А что, если? . . . Первомайские грезы в буржуазном кресле (What if? . . . May Day Dreams in a Bourgeois Armchair) May Day is personified, walking about with the poster "Первое мая. Всеобщий трудовой субботник" ("May the First. Collective *Subbotnik*"). In Пьеска для попов, кои не понимают, праздник что такое (A Little Play for Priests Who Do Not Know What a *Prazdnik* Is, the communists make the priest work on *субботник* and he is then transformed into a better person. In Как кто проводит время, праздники празднует (Who and How Some Spend Time Celebrating *Prazdniki*) the poet attacks the celebration of the New Year and Christmas and again agitates for *субботники*. All these plays are connected by the imposition of a new concept of holiday on the population of the former Russian Empire. In each case, the characters attempt to carry the meanings of the traditional *prazdniki* over to their new Soviet parallels. The protagonists of each play are representatives of the "old regime" and during the special days of the Soviet calendar they indulge in the same sorts of activities they practiced during the pre-revolutionary *prazdniki*: excessive eating, drinking and sleeping. Avoiding any work, they dream of their comfortable pre-revolutionary lives and start thinking up new ways to exploit the working class. The fact that these plays were almost never staged, cannot be simply explained by their poor artistic

quality. Their unusually strong insistence on radical change in the very essence of *prazdnik*, namely, absence of work, likely struck the readers in those first post-revolutionary years as being suspicious.

Mayakovsky felt Christmas to be the most meaningless *prazdnik*. The events of the poem Про это all take place during Christmas season and the protagonist feels himself imprisoned:

При чем тюрьма?

Рождество.

Кутерьма.

Без решеток окошки домика!

Это вас не касается.

Говорю – тюрьма. (Том 4,

141)

Про это is the work in which Mayakovsky's ideas about time, the ritual year and the perfect new calendar manifest themselves more than in any other. The corrupting nature of religious *prazdniki* is fundamental to this work and it is inseparable from his condemnation of the traditional concept of time.

Mayakovsky rejects the circular and linear notions of time altogether, portraying them as traps that limit men to the miserable existence of the everyday. There are allusions to Velimir Khlebnikov and his theories of space-time in the poem, but Mayakovsky rejects those theories, offering his own vision of time with its perfect calendar reflecting human immortality.

The period in which Mayakovsky wrote Про это coincides with the period of the narrative it contains: Christmas of 1922. The exact dates over which the poem was written are hinted at in its epigraph and again they correspond to important dates in the life of its protagonist, who is, really, a version of Mayakovsky himself:

Стоял – вспоминаю.

Был этот блеск.

И это тогда называлось Невойю.

Маяковский, ‘Человек’

(13 лет работы, т. 2, стр. 77). (Про это,  
том 4, 135)

The seven years which followed the publication of the poem Человек are also mentioned in it: “Семь лет я стою./ Я смотрю в эти воды, / К перилам прикручен канатами строк” (Том 4, 151). The insistence on the importance of time in the work, the time in which its author, hero and all its characters live suggest that this is an “anti-anti-Christmas” story.

E. V. Dushechkina writes that the “Christmas tale” as a genre appeared in Russia in 1826, when the journal Московский телеграф (Moscow Telegraph) published in its December issue:

[П]роизведение, принадлежащее перу издателя этого журнала Н.А. Полевого. Оно называется ‘Святочные рассказы’ . . . Судя по всему, именно это произведение Н. Полевого ввело в культурный и

литературный оборот термин ‘святочный рассказ,’ ставший столь популярным несколько десятилетий спустя (Душечкина 5).

These stories were each concerned with events, often strange or unexplainable, occurring in the Christmas season. Dushechkina suggests that this genre derived from several folklore genres, primarily the Christmas *былички* (real stories), “которые рассказывались зимними праздничными вечерами и, как правило, были посвящены тем критическим ситуациям, в которых оказывался в это время человек, встретившийся с ‘нечистой силой’” (Душечкина 29). The most important feature of *былички* was that they could only be told during certain time of the year or day, because “[В]ремя существенно влияет на ту мистическую силу, которая содержится в повествовании” (Душечкина 6).<sup>77</sup> The plots of the *святочные рассказы* were limited, the most traditional being an abandoned child dying in the street alone, looking into the windows of rich houses, dreaming of that better life inside, playing around with other children. This particular plot became so popular, Dushechkina explains, that it began appearing in widely published newspapers and magazines. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the genre was largely parodied, as authors lampooned their sentimental nature and the idealization of their characters. The anti-Christmas stories appeared in the press with their inverse relations of child and benefactor, the former showing no gratitude to the latter who has foolishly

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<sup>77</sup> Dushechkina brings to our attention the words of V. N. Charuzin on the function of particular time of reading or telling a story: “Известное время содействует, очевидно, сгущению в рассказе этой мистической силы, придает действенность рассказу в определенном направлении. Другое время разряжает эту силу, обезвреживает ее, отнимает у рассказа ее действенность, делает это обыденным явлением, с которым соприкасаться, входить в отношения безопасно” (6).

taken him into his home. The child harasses the benefactor rather than showing any sign of appreciation. Mayakovsky's poem, though, is written in such a way that it serves not only as an anti-Christmas story, but also somewhat of anti-anti-Christmas story. The protagonist is warmly welcomed to every Christmas party except the one being held by his beloved, but the warm reception he receives at those parties only makes him more miserable. He calls each Christmas celebration "рождественский ужас," and at the end of the story his relatives and friends allow the killers to shoot him instead of saving him. Its doubly twisted plot with its unconventional conclusion distinguishes the poem both from the initial *святочный рассказ* and its parodies as well.

In almost every scene of the poem, there is a reminder of the Christmas season. The celebration of Christmas is a symbol of circular time, reflecting a constant return of society to its beginning and the forces that dominate it, and the individual -- to the basic myths and concepts by which society functions. The theme of circular time and that constant return is present even in the poem's first lines:

В этой теме,  
и личной  
и мелкой,  
перепетой не раз  
и не пять,  
я кружил поэтической белкой  
и хочу кружиться опять. (Том 4, 137)

In that introduction, the space ranges from a communal kitchen to Kazbek, to Mars, and the Sun, giving the narration a universal scope of presentation, and the time in which the protagonist lives differs from the time in which the country lives. Throughout the poem there is the overarching metaphor of the protagonist's double frozen on a bridge while ordinary life passes by like the currents of a river. The different times of life each flow according to a different calendar and the double is left out of the Christmas celebration encompassing the city. In each episode, the poet expresses feelings at odds with happy celebration, demonstrating that there is no *prazdnik* in his private calendar. To celebrate Christmas means to live according to the religious calendar, and this is a terrible mistake. The hero's discontent and dissatisfaction with *prazdnik* are understandable: during a supposedly merry holiday, he finds himself alone and terrified. Moreover, on the day when, according to Christian teaching, the world should be governed by people's love for one another, a crowd of friends and enemies executes the hero-prophet. In the chapter "Ночь под Рождество" ("Night before Christmas"), Jesus, having taken the form of young *комсомолец* (the protagonist's double),<sup>78</sup> commits suicide -- the day of the birth of the son of God is rendered a day of death.

In his travels about Moscow on Christmas Eve, Mayakovsky's autobiographical hero visits the homes of his relatives and friends, all of whom are drinking, dancing and feeling merry. He, though, is unable to find happiness

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<sup>78</sup> *Комсомолец* – a member of the Young Communist League.

anywhere: his eternal enemy, *byt*, rules over all, in every house, causing even Marx to agree with Christ:

Исус,  
приподняв  
веночек тернистый,  
любезно кланяется.  
Маркс,  
впряженный в алую рамку,  
и то таскал обывательства ляжку. (Том 4,  
161)

People fail to discriminate between pre-revolutionary *prazdnik* and post-revolutionary celebration. For them, *prazdniki* are identified primarily by the absence of work. For the poem's hero, they are not happy days because people achieve nothing at the holiday gatherings and they again are engaged in pre-revolutionary activities. The greetings are repeated like the words of a madman:

-- С праздничком!  
С праздничком!  
С праздничком!  
С праздничком!  
С празд-  
нич-  
ком! (Том 4, 162)

The repetition of ritual, events, and words is a regression, a blockade on the road to the future, hindering progress.

The protagonist of the poem Человек lived alone according to his “seven years” calendar, while the world celebrates Christmas not only in their homes, but also in the streets. The snow-covered Miasnitskaia street becomes a symbol of all the streets in the world:

А между –  
такая,  
какая не снится,  
какая-то гордая белой обновой,  
через вселенную  
легла Мясницкая  
миниатюрой кости слоновой. (Том 4, 145)

The symbolic river of time becomes uneasy during this *prazdnik*:

В ущелья кремлевы волна ударяла:  
то песня,  
то звона рождественский вал.  
С семи холмов,  
низвергаясь Дарьялом,  
бросала Тереком праздник Москва. (Том  
4, 174)

The protagonist meets his double, a boy, in the street, and then another double walking to his relatives with Christmas gifts. He finds yet another double at a

friend's house, who behaves just like everyone else. While traveling on the ice floe on the river, he meets still another double, the Man, the protagonist of Человек who would not succumb to bourgeois *byt*, the Man from the past.

(Illustration 5) He accuses the poet:

Ты, может, к ихней примазался касте?

Целуешь?

Ешь?

Отпускаешь брюшко?

Сам

В ихний быт,

в их семейное

счастье

намереваешься пролезть петушком?!

(Том 4, 151)

The protagonist sees the flow of the river as a trap, one which he cannot fight:

Прости, Нева!

Не прощает,

гонит.

Сжался!

Не сжалился бешеный бег! (Том

4, 150)

.....

Стой, подушка!

Напрасное тщенье.

Лапой гребу –

плохое весло. (Том 4, 152)

Finally, the river current is explicitly called the current of time:

Уже я далеко.

Я, может быть, за день.

За день

от тени моей с моста. (Том 4, 152)

The poet's double – “человек из-за семи лет” – is frozen in a different dimension, where time flows differently. He can stay there forever, waiting for a moment when people will be ready to save him by coming together and accepting his teachings, but the poet himself moves according to the traditional flow of time, ceasing even to be human, becoming a performing bear in the carnival of the everyday. The carnival in Mayakovsky's works is always an ominous sign. In his antimilitary poem “Великолепные нелепости” (“Wonderful Absurdities”) (1915), for instance, the war is called a carnival:

Бросьте!

Конечно, это не смерть.

Чего ей ради ходить по крепости?

Как вам не стыдно верить

нелепости?!

Просто именинник устроил карнавал,

выдумал для шума стрельбу и тир,

а сам, по-жабьи присев на вал,  
вымаргивается, как из мортир. (Том 1, 92)

In another poem everyday vanity is also presented as a carnival, separating the poet from his beloved:

Завтра забудешь,  
кто тебя короновал,  
что душу цветущую любовью выжог,  
и суетных дней взметенный карнавал  
растреплет страницы моих книжек . . .  
("Лиличка! Вместо письма" ("Lili-mine:  
Instead of a Letter") (1916) Том 1, 108)

The double on the bridge is secluded, but the protagonist is torn by an everyday life he hates and his inability to change anything. The choice is between two time-dimensions, between two calendars.

By 1922, the new calendar of Soviet rituals had existed for four years, but, according to a great deal of written documentation, religious holidays alone remained almost exclusively popular. This year marked a significant change in the economic situation of the country, and of Moscow especially.<sup>79</sup> The New Economic Policy began to achieve some success. The Christmas season of 1922 in Moscow was obviously more joyful than in previous years, which had been marred by the civil war and a severe lack of food and living conditions. The

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<sup>79</sup> Khlebnikov, for example, wrote on 14 January, 1922, in the letter to his family: "С Новым годом. Я в Москве. В Москве дороговизна. И поворот в прошлое + будущее, деленные пополам . . . Давно не было чисто славянского разгула, как эти святки" ("Письмо Е. Н. и В. В. Хлебниковым." Собрание сочинений III. Том 5, 323).

prazdniki of the Christian ritual calendar had returned, and, perhaps, Mayakovsky felt as if the Revolution had never taken place. Про это is an expression of the poet's revolt against a return to pre-revolutionary life, the essence of which is represented by the old *prazdniki* with their emphasis on a circular concept of time.

If Christmas then is an embodiment of circular time, we might expect that linear time would be the focus of Mayakovsky's perfect calendar. However, Про это is equally devoted to a rejection of traditional Christian linear time. It dwells on a number of symbolic images traditionally used in art to designate linear time, for example, a river, a road, a street, and simply movement in one direction. In Mayakovsky's poem, however, they are employed in such a way that their usual meaning is destroyed and they too become symbols of circular time.

In Про это, linear time is symbolized by the dominant image of a river, which appears at the very beginning of the epigraph. This epigraph alludes to an earlier poem, Человек, and, of course to the Neva river itself, from which it takes its name. In both poems, the river is a place for suicide and a symbol of boundaries. There are, in fact, many rivers named in the text of Про это: Neva, Oder, Seine, Darial, Terek, and they all are hostile to the poet:

Река.

Вдали берега.

Как пусто!

Как ветер воет в догонку с Ладogi!

Река.

Большая река.

Холодина.

Прости, Нева!

Не прощает,

Гонит.

Сжался!

Не сжалился бешеный бег. (Том 4, 145)

The hero unsuccessfully attempts suicide on the bridge over the Neva, while his double in Paris is removed dead from the Seine by the police, making the French river a place of half-death. Lethe is also hinted in the poem, when the hero looks at Becklin's picture "Остров мертвых" ("Island of the Dead") in the apartment of his friends:<sup>80</sup>

Со стенки

На город разросшийся

Беклин

Москвой расставил "Остров мертвых."

(Том 4, 166).

All the rivers in the poem become some version of Lethe, and the entire Earth -- an island of the dead, on which the protagonist has landed:

Что ж –

ступлю!

И сразу

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<sup>80</sup> Arnold Becklin's painting "Island of the Dead" was very popular in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and was almost considered a necessary part of any home decor. See Асварищ, Б. И. "“Остров мертвых” Арнольда и Карло Беклиных."



The hero's journey to the world of death begins with a flood in his room, which was caused by his own tears, and Neva becomes a "river of tears." The traditional Christian vision of time as a river, the impossibility of going back, a single destination lying ahead, is rejected in the poem. The "river of tears" does not flow into the ocean, but circles back to Moscow: linear time is deadly, becoming, in the end, circular. The second image of linear time in the poem is a street, which should lead the hero to his beloved, to his family and friends, but ultimately distances him from them. Miasnitskaia Street is the street which in a real life led from Mayakovsky's home to the apartment of Lili Brik, Mayakovsky's beloved, to whom this poem and many other love poems are devoted. In this work, it is white as a bone, and Tverskaia Street is white as a bed-sheet. The color is, of course, one of winter, but it is also that of bones and sheets, giving it a more ghoulish, more complex aspect. In the poem Человек the streets are also nonlinear, and, like rivers, they create a vicious circle, threatening to entrap all free life on Earth: "Заприте небо в провода! / Скрутите землю в улицы!" (Том 1, 150). Basically, all linear images in Про это are connected to the ideas of parting, loss and death: there is a phone cord, through which a killing word-bullet travels; a thread, by which the life of the hero hangs; and a horizon, which transforms into a hangman's rope. The time-doctor treats the wounds with endless bandage and even his loved ones turn into "человечьи ленты" easily allowing killers to stay nearby:

Любимых,

друзей

человечьи ленты  
со всей вселенной сигналом  
созвало.

Спешат рассчитаться,  
Идут дуэлянты.  
Щетинясь,  
щерясь  
еще и еще там. (Том 4,  
175)

Even the lines of his verses become ropes which only aggravate his suffering:

Семь лет я стою.  
Я смотрю в эти воды,  
к перилам прикручен канатами строк.  
(Том 4, 151)

At the beginning of his journey, the hero approaches the ocean, but he can never reach it, always ending up in Moscow again. This part of the poem is called “Ночь под Рождество.” It is, of course, an allusion to Nikolai Gogol’s novella Ночь перед Рождеством (The Night before Christmas) (1830) whose hero also has a miraculous journey through the air, combining the real and the fantastic. However, as it is so often with Mayakovsky’s works, there is still another, hidden allusion, whose meaning is far-reaching and more complex, in this case another of Gogol’s work “Заколдованное место” (“Charmed Place”) (1830). In it, a grandfather tells his grandchildren about a magic spot in his

backyard. When a person stops into this charmed place, he finds himself in another time and space. There is a similar narrative in the poem: after one hundred years, the grandfather tells his grandchildren about a fantastic event, an earthquake, which took place near the post office on Miasnitskaia in Moscow. The hero of Mayakovsky's poem always returns to Moscow, to that modern "charmed place."<sup>81</sup> The river always brings him back to Moscow. His journey with his mother ends there as well. A flight to Paris lands in Moscow thwarting the hero's intention to go "прощаться к странам Востока" (Том 4, 174). He cannot escape the "charmed place": he is pulled back by the Kremlin's bell tower. His life is a vicious circle and so are the lives of all the people for whom *byt* is convenient, the only imaginable form of existence. The seemingly linear, progressive flow of the Time-river is actually circular, constant repetition without change. Everything in Moscow, or the "island of the dead," and, indeed, the entire world, is always repeated.

This circular line is a model of the traditional calendar year. During the year, the perception of time as linear is quite strong, but at the end of that year, when counting starts again from the beginning, the sense of circular time is more

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<sup>81</sup> In an earlier variation of the poem, where the personal theme dominated, the home of his beloved was the bewitched place:

Уйди! Надежду из черепа выбей.  
 Уйди в Лубянский проезд или в гроб.  
 Но только:  
     -- назад --  
                                 надрывается рот,  
 А сердце ногам приказало:  
                                 вперед. (Про это. Полное  
 собрание сочинений под общей редакцией  
 Л. Ю. Брик. Том 5, 157)

evident. Thus the two most accepted models of time, circular and linear, are presented in the poem as virtual synonyms, leftovers from the old *byt*, the old world.

Besides these two traditional concepts of time, Mayakovsky had an opportunity to study Velimir Khlebnikov's concept of space-time, about which I wrote above. Reading the poem Про это in the context of other Futurist writings, Khlebnikov's in particular, we see that the protagonist's journey through space and time is actually a dialogue with Khlebnikov, a rejection of his hypotheses. Mayakovsky cannot accept the possibility of escaping everyday problems in some alternate dimension. His reference to the Kremlin bell-tower, the site in his poem on which the Futurist poet is executed by the philistines, is evidence of this. This choice is not arbitrary. Khlebnikov uses the image of the Moscow Sukharev tower as a place of Futurist's triumph in his poems "Кто он, Воронихин столетий?"<sup>82</sup> Khlebnikov sees himself as the architect of the new future and compares himself to the Russian architect A.N. Voronikhin, famous for building the Kazan Cathedral in Saint Petersburg in the nineteenth century. Khlebnikov points to prominent historical figures, those who have created something outstanding, without, in his view, materialistic goals. These are the people who will live forever, who have the "ticket" to that special, new dimension. The names of these figures are important: "Voronikhin," for instance, derives from the Russian word *ворон* (a crow), which was considered in Russian folklore as harbinger of the

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<sup>82</sup> One variation of the poem was titled "Кто он, строгий зодчий времен?" ("Who is He, the Stern Architect of Times?") РГАЛИ. Фонд 527. Ед. хр. 56, оп. 1.

future and a mediator between Heaven and Earth.<sup>83</sup> The poet employs a crow image towards a similar end in the poem Война в мышеловке (War in the Mousetrap) (1917), in which he describes his conversation with God. The crow again lives somewhere between Heaven and Earth:

Так я кричу, и на моем каменеющем  
крике  
Ворон священный и дикий  
Совет гнездо, и вырастут ворона дети,  
А на руке, протянутой к звездам,  
Проползет улитка столетий. (Творения  
463)

In “Кто он, Воронихин столетий?” he compares the Futurists and their artistic movement to a crow because they are those “chosen ones” who will lead the people to the kingdom of happiness and immortality:

О башня Сухарева над головою Разина  
На острие высокой башни,  
Где он был основание и мы игла  
вершины,  
На ней то голубем, то вороном садились  
мы,  
И каркали утонченно на пашни,

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<sup>83</sup> See Шуклин, Владимир. Мифы русского народа. Том 1, 245.

Речи утонченно вещая. (Собрание сочинений III. Том 3, 105)

Mayakovsky's works, and especially Про это, betray his understanding of the Futurist program as utopian. Even after the Revolution, which he had held as the greatest hope for changing human beings and the world, people continued to seek material and spiritual comfort. The introduction of the New Economic Policy underlined and even legitimized this drive. That wonderful life, about which the Futurists dreamt and which their works depicted, never seems to come to pass and the poem reflects this stand.

For Khlebnikov, the Revolution of 1917 was of secondary importance in acquiring power over time. He believed primarily in the magical power of a language he had discovered, and that mankind would be able to control time when it also learned this language. This was the motive behind his enthusiastic and constant propaganda in support of the Futurist movement and his deeply held faith in their first manifesto Пощечина общественному вкусу (Slap to the Face of the Public Taste) (1912). For Mayakovsky, on the other hand, the immense collective labor of all people is a necessary condition for bringing the future closer, while the creative activity of the poet only provides support and guidance for the collective effort. Mayakovsky, then, was concerned with a disregard for revolutionary ideals, a return to the old *byt*, the pre-revolutionary calendar and traditional feasts, as a serious obstacle, even a crisis, to the futurist agenda and its signal for change.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Perhaps, already in 1923 he had his first reservations about the Futurist movement, which eventually led to his break with the group in 1929.

Khlebnikov's image of a tower marking the way to a happy future is transformed in Mayakovsky's poem; there it marks the end of the Futurist poet's flight and his eventual execution.<sup>85</sup> That transformation is, at least, consistent with Muscovite folklore, which called the Sukharev Tower the "bride" of the Kremlin bell-tower, which was then *Иван Великий* (Ivan the Great). In Про это the image of the tower is more important than most Mayakovsky researchers realize. It is on the bell-tower that the earthly life of the poet-prophet ends and the afterlife begins. That flight to the other dimension, however, is stopped abruptly. The protagonist wakes up in his room at his desk, seeing the Earth not from space, but only in the form of a globe and map:

Солнце

ночь потопа высушило жаром.

У окна

в жару встречаю день я.

Только с глобуса – гора Килиманджаро.

Только с карты африканской – Кения.

Голой головою глобус.

Я над глобусом

От горя горблюсь. (Том 4, 178)

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<sup>85</sup> The tower as a symbol marking the way to the future was also used by Mayakovsky in an earlier cycle of stories, Париж (Paris) (1922), where he advocated the radio (or the radio tower) as a means for uniting people. At that time, however, the tower fulfilled its role in uniting people in the battle against the old regime and reflected the poet's optimistic view of the Futurist movement.

The transcendent time-space, about which Khlebnikov wrote so extensively, for Mayakovsky is not only a dream, but a nightmare. The boundary between the part where he is awake in the chapter “Размедвежье” (“Out of Being Bear”), and the chapter “Протекающая комната” (“Leaky Room”), where he is already asleep, is blurred because “Размедвежье” is devoted to a detailed description of the poet-turned-bear cry, and this chapter-long metaphor makes fantastic even the description of reality. The protagonist finds himself in a state of constant emotional devastation, both in reality and in the dream, and this blurs the boundary between sleep and consciousness. The style of writing, however, between those two states changes dramatically. The chapter “Размедвежье” is mostly written in traditional amphibrach with its elegiac, lyrical rhythm: “Ему лишь взмедведится может такое / Сквозь слезы и шерсть, бахромящую глаз . . .” (Том 4, 148). The next chapter, “Протекающая комната,” is more contradictory. It possesses a short, jagged style, with its blunt nominative sentences creating a sense of anxiety and confusion:<sup>86</sup>

Кровать.

Железки.

Барахло одеяло.

Лежит в железках.

Тихо.

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<sup>86</sup>The description of surroundings conveys the typical feelings of a man who is dreaming: he sees what disturbs him most; strange scenes change unexpectedly; objects take strange forms making it difficult to recognize people and things; he feels frightened and helpless and wishes to flee. Such descriptions are characteristic of Nikolai Gogol, for example, in his fantastic story Вий (Vii) (1835). See also the contemporary research on dreams: Wolman, Benjamin B. Handbook of Dreams 112-125.

Вяло.

Трепет пришел.

Пошел по железкам.

Простынь постельная треплется плеском.

(Том 4, 148)

The poet's familiar room suddenly seems strange and the objects -- bizarre, as they might be in dreams:

Камин. . .

Окорок. . .

Сам кинул.

Пойти потушить.

Петушится.

Страх. (Том

4, 148)

The trip along the river that follows happens on a pillow-ice-flow, also demonstrating that the hero's journey through space and time is anything but reality. The events in the dream are depicted from a very subjective point of view, one consistent with Russian literary tradition, about which Iuri Mann writes:

Собственно, события сна и выделяются не количеством участников, но единством субъективного плана. Литературный сон организован . . . аналогично сну действительному, снящемуся (несмотря на любую пестроту лиц и событий) одному, а не нескольким” (Манн, Юрий 85).

At the end of the segment “Ночь под Рождество” the hero has a single moment of happiness as he ascends to space and finds there a flood with the Great Bear playing the role of Noah’s ark: “Большая, / неси по векам-Араратам / сквозь небо потопа / ковчегом-ковшом! (Том 4, 177). He anticipates a mooring in that wonderland where days of happiness await him:

Скоро!

Скоро!

Скоро!

В пространство!

Пристальной!

Солнце блестит горы.

Дни улыбаются с пристани. (Том 4, 177)

All who live in the icy land of the dead are left behind, and he is the only one who reaches the future. The future is defined by an endless number of days and constant sunshine, as Mayakovsky described it in the poem 150000000: “Толодая и ноя, / города расступаются, / и над пылью проспектовой / солнцем встает бытие иное” (Том 2, 161). But he awakes to find the burden of the present still weighing on his shoulders:

Пристает ковчег.

Сюда лучами!

Пристань.

Эй!

Кидай канат ко мне!

И сейчас же

ощутил плечами

тяжесть подоконничьих камней. (Том 4,  
178)

The play Мистерия-Буфф, written in 1918 to celebrate the first anniversary of the October Revolution, employs a global flood as an act of cleansing. The flood allows the workers to begin a new life, but in Про это, the Revolution has changed nothing; it was an unsuccessful Judgment Day. The ultimate power of *byt* is so overwhelming, that its defenders, the philistines, manage to survive it:

Октябрь прогремел,

карающий,

судный.

Вы

под его огнеперым крылом

расставились,

разложили посудыны. (Том

4, 159)

In Про это, the Futurist poet finds himself in a space-time, similar to Khlebnikov's, but only in a terrible dream. For Mayakovsky the Marxist, eternal life should be built in a real, palpable world:

Верить бы в загробь!

Легко прогулку

пробную.

Стоит  
Только руку протянуть –  
пуля  
мигом  
в жизнь загробную  
начертит гремящий путь.  
Что мне делать,  
если я  
вовсю,  
всей сердечной мерою,  
в жизнь сию,  
сей  
мир  
верил,  
верую. (Том 4, 181)

He believes in science, which should work in concert with all people and not for the purposes of “carnival” entertainment. His hope is a future chemist will create an endless row of days and nights, when the poet promises his beloved: “Нынче недолюбленное наверстаем / звездностью бесчисленных ночей” (Том 4, 181). His “Tower of Time” is indefinite, because he does not know how it will look, yet he still believes in it unswervingly:

Вижу,  
вижу ясно, до деталей.



were written specifically to glorify the calendar's *prazdniki*. Taking into account that there were 16 celebratory non-working days in the calendar of 1929, he wrote poems for half of them, most of which were published in Izvestiia and other Soviet newspapers.

Mayakovsky adopted the new Bolshevik calendar as his own, and promoted its acceptance throughout his entire literary career. He praised it as a guide designed to help people to understand the new life style of the commune. His high expectations of its influence demonstrate the poet's appreciation of the crucial role which the calendar plays in the everyday life of the individual. The short poem "Забудьте календари" ("Forget the Calendars") (1921) is a key work illustrating his vision of the Soviet post-revolutionary calendar with its slogan-like style and easy rhyme: "Забудьте календари, / висевшие встарь, / читайте / новый наш календарь" (Том 3, 406). He tells his readers what they have to do every day: the activities that everyone has to perform in order to help those suffering from famine. On Monday, he suggests donating some money, on Tuesday – half a daily ration, etc. Mayakovsky, the revolutionary, rejects the traditional week and its traditional daily occupations: each day should be devoted to actions relevant to political ends. Sunday, in this scheme, loses not only its status as a rest day, but even its status as a day of the week -- Monday's business should be performed on Sunday: "В воскресенье / времени немало, /-- возьми и повтори все сначала" (Том 3, 407).

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these weeks, they urged the Russian population to volunteer their time and labour to various new Soviet institutions. In September 1920, for example, the Government launched "неделя ремонта" ("The Week of Remodeling"). Pravda wrote about it: "Неделя ремонта имеет своей целью привести в порядок к зиме железнодорожные мастерские, депо и их оборудование" (Qt. in Mayakovsky Полное собрание сочинений в тринадцати томах. Том 3, 513).

The Soviet government's decision to introduce a five-day week was met enthusiastically by Mayakovsky. In the poem "Понедельник-субботник" ("Monday-subbotnik") (1927), for example, he calls for celebrating *субботники* every working day. Work for free, without counting the working hours, for a better life, for reaching that life faster – for a Soviet citizen this is the only correct way of living of one's everyday life. As a result, the work week, as a measurement of labor, disappears. The division of working days and holidays disappears as well; every day something is to be done for the benefit of the future:

И воскресенье  
и суббота  
понедельничная работа.

.....

Сегодня  
новый  
кладешь  
камень  
в здание  
будущего. (Том 8, 211)

In numerous other poems he explicitly names the goal of labor in a new socialist society: the future, as soon as possible. He considers his work as a poet a part of this struggle. For example, the poem "Божественная картинка" ("Heavenly Picture") (1928) describes the perfect calendar as a chain of working days:

По-новому

Перестраивай жизнь –  
Будни и праздники  
Выровняй.  
День ко дню  
Как цепочка нижись,  
Непрерывней  
И дисциплинированной. (Том 9, 393)

For Mayakovsky, the perfect *prazdnik* of the future has very stable features differing in some respect from the current revolutionary celebrations. It should first be a spontaneous celebration, something which might happen on any day. It should not be planned by a calendar, but arise from the excitement of the crowd: this is the vital quality of the “perfect” calendar. Mayakovsky, though, provides more of a sketch, than a complete picture, of the perfect *prazdnik*, pointing to its main features:

А кругом!  
Мимо.  
Смеяться.  
Флаги.  
Стоцветное.  
Вздыбились.  
Тысячи. (Война и мир (War and the  
Universe). (Том 1, 239)

These features can be traced throughout his works. *Prazdnik* is always defined by a happy, laughing, singing crowd, marching along the street, carrying flags. The feeling of unity amongst them and their connection to each other through a common idea are what defines Mayakovsky's *prazdnik* of the future. Depicting the festival in Paris, he primarily criticizes people's lack of unity during the celebrations. Even the unity of the group is not sufficient for a real *prazdnik*: "Веселие Парижа старое, патриархальное, по салонам, по квартирам, по излюбленным маленьким кабачкам, куда, конечно, идут только свои, только посвященные" (Париж. Том 4, 223). The parades are not at all sufficient either: "Уличное веселие тоже старое, патриархальное. В день моего отъезда был, напр., своеобразный Парижский карнавал – день святой Екатерины, когда все оставшиеся в девушках до 30 лет раздеваются в венки и в цветы, демонстрируясь, поя и поплясывая по улочкам" (Париж. Том 4, 223). In this parade he sees not only an outdated carnival, but also the separation of people because each girl identifies herself with a highly personal goal -- getting married - - showing only a desire for individual happiness. It is the tradition that draws them, not the pursuit of real unity.

In the poem 150000000, written in the early post-revolutionary years, Mayakovsky's ideal *prazdnik* is described in some detail:

Год с нескончаемыми нулями.

Праздник, в святцах

не имеющий чина.

Выфлажено все.



Mayakovsky wrote even more poems dedicated to May Day -- more than he had written in any other year. He even supplied a program outlining the different activities that people should perform during this day. His poem “Стой, гражданин, РОСТЕ внимая! Что надо сделать Первого Мая?” (“Stay, Citizen, Listening ROSTA! What Do You Have to Do on May Day?”) (1920) is one example, listing nine types of activities to be performed, including mending roads, and only after to come out for a public demonstration: “И только к вечеру, / устав стараться, / на улицы выйдем / для демонстраций” (Том 3, 88).

Mayakovsky may have picked up his appreciation of May Day during the time he spent in Georgia, where he actively participated in the political uprising in Bagdadi in 1905. At that time, the proclamation of the Russian Social Democratic (Bolshevik) Party promoting the celebration of May Day was distributed there. The text of this proclamation includes all the themes, concepts and key words which we later find in Mayakovsky’s texts on the ideal *prazdnik* of the future:<sup>88</sup>

Близок день первого мая, великий день рабочего праздника! Сам рабочий люд установил его, как знак своей веры в светлое будущее, своей веры в радостное царство социализма. В этот день миллионы наших братьев-товарищей во всех странах света, как один человек, бросают работу и толпами, дружной сплоченной семьей высыпают на улицы, на площади. Нога в ногу, плечо в плечо, крепко-на-крепко взявшись за руки, идет рабочая рать . . . А над ними высоко и мощно вздымается красное знамя пролетариев, красное знамя всесветной

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<sup>88</sup> This is not to say that this text was unique. On the contrary, all the propagandistic texts were generally very formulaic, and these words about May Day are found in a great number of ideological texts up until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

социальдемократии . . . А кругом могучим отзвуком несется  
отовсюду: Вставай, подымайся, рабочий народ!<sup>89</sup>

In his descriptions of the future *prazdnik*, there is always a crowd of workers,  
united by common goals, marching through streets with red flags, singing  
revolutionary songs:

Теперь  
на земле,  
должно быть, ново.  
Пахучие весны развесили в селах.  
Город каждый, должно быть,  
иллюминирован.  
Поет семья краснощеких и веселых.  
(Человек. Том 1, 263)

Свети!  
Вовсю, небес солнцеглазье!  
Долой –  
толпу облаков белоручек!  
Радуйтесь, звезды, на митинг вылазя!  
Рассейтесь буржуями, тучные тучи! (“1-е  
мая” (“Свети!”) (“1 May.” (“Shine!”))  
(1923) Том 5, 40)

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<sup>89</sup> Макаров 288.

The play Клоп is set in what was then the future: 1979. In that future, happy, carefree crowds sing constantly, with even the “town’s fathers” taking part as they march to work. The townspeople’s solution to the problem of hardship and boredom inherent in physical labor is also raised. Zoia Beriozkina offers Prisyarkin the chance to participate in the *prazdnik* of labor: “Я возьму тебя завтра на танец десяти тысяч рабочих и работниц, будут двигаться по площади. Это будет веселая репетиция новой системы полевых работ” (Том 11, 264). The concept of May Day, its themes, slogans, the general goodwill of the crowd, corresponded perfectly to Mayakovsky’s concept of communal happiness, and this *prazdnik* in particular became a model for every daylife as it might be lived in the future.

After writing Про это at the beginning of 1923, having attacked the notion of Christmas, Mayakovsky began preaching the new *prazdnik*, May Day, with even greater energy and enthusiasm. He and his friends founded a new journal ЛЕФ (Left Front of Arts) where they clearly stated their hope of making the journal a headquarters for the organization of the world’s proletarian revolution. To them, May Day was the perfect day to promote the revolution and the day on which it would most likely occur. More specifically, in the program of its second edition, May-April 1923, “К 1-му мая, дню демонстрации единого фронта пролетариата” (“To May 1<sup>st</sup>, the Day of the Demonstration of the United Front of Proletariat”), they write:

Левые мира! Мы плохо знаем ваши имена, имена ваших школ, но знаем твердо – вы растете везде, где нарастает революция. Мы

зовем вас установить единый фронт левого искусства – ‘Красный  
Искинтерн.’ Ведите левым искусством в Европе, подготовку в С. С.С.  
Р. – укрепление революции. Держите постоянную связь с нашим  
штабом в Москве. (Москва, Никитский бульвар 8, Журнал ‘ЛЕФ’)  
(4).<sup>90</sup>

In this issue they published a selection of poems by Futurist poets on the single theme of May Day. There were the poems by N.N. Aseev, V. V. Kamensky, A. E. Kruchonich, V. V. Mayakovsky, P. Neznamov, B. L. Pasternak, I. Terentiev, and S. Tretiakov. With the exception of Mayakovsky and Pasternak’s contributions, this small compilation is marred by an overwhelming number of clichés, arid language, and poor imagery, which can be explained by its commission-like nature, but also by the abyss that existed even between Mayakovsky and his most faithful followers. It is clear, that his collaborators wrote these works out of necessity. They wanted simply to be in line with the LEF’s policy of “literature of fact,” and to be seen celebrating the most important day of the new Soviet calendar.<sup>91</sup> Vladimir Kamensky, for example, writes:

Май – рукотворная сила,  
Строй жизнедательства,

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<sup>90</sup> Researchers often overlook the political aim Mayakovsky brought to the journal ЛЕФ. He saw it as a means of bringing about the next proletarian revolution, one without bloody battles. He hoped to spread revolutionary art forms and artistic propaganda among the people of the U.S.S.R. and to the world in general.

<sup>91</sup> “Literature of fact” was a theory founded by the futurist theoretician Osip Brik (1888-1945) which promoted the author’s active role in social and political events: “This program favored prose over poetry, and among prose genres, sketches, travel notes, and diaries – in other words, nonfiction genres based on documentary materials” (Lawton 47).

Сила, которая всех вонзила

В единое шествие братства. (9)

Nikolai Aseev's lines are in a similar vein:

Брызнув искрами гроз из России,

Рокоча электричеством туч,

Мы тревогой весь мир заразили,

Мы везде разметали мечту. (10)

All these works treat May Day as a special *prazdnik*, but not as a model for the entirety of some future life. These authors see it as a day with all the conventions of the traditional holiday, such as the absence of work and certain, though new, rituals. Mayakovsky's poem stands apart because, at first, he seemingly argues the exact opposite, that May Day should not be celebrated:

1 Мая

да здоровствует декабрь!

Маем

нам

еще не мягчиться.

Да здоровствует мороз и Сибирь! (Том 5,

43)

The poet does not glorify May Day, which may seem unusual, if not downright illogical. Understanding, however, Mayakovsky's quest for immortality and his insistence on abolishing the division between holidays and workdays, helps explain his negation of May Day as differing from other days in the year. If it

remains a unique day, it is doomed to transform into yet another, traditional, *prazdnik*. Mayakovsky insists on the creation of a new life, the seeds of which lie within the concept of May Day, the concept of the unity of the proletariat. In his poem, his argument is printed desperately in bold:

Вечным

единым маем размайся –

1-го Мая,

2-го

и 100-го! (Том 5, 41)

The poem also outlines an agenda for the creation of the future life as one eternal May Day. Daily effort is needed to bring this future about:

Да здравствует деланье мая –

Искусственный май футуристов.

Скажешь просто,

Скажешь коряво –

И снова в паре поэтических шор.

Трудно с будущим.

За край его

Выдернешь –

И то хорошо. (Том 5, 44)

Mayakovsky saw the creation of a new Soviet calendar not only as a way of replacing old *prazdniki* with new ones, but also changing the very theme of the calendar to one primarily concerned with shared labor. Working together, the

population of the entire country, and, possibly, the entire world, would see themselves as one great collective, and their celebration, taking the form of common labor, would be for the sake of the commune. The *prazdnik* itself must unite people in the search for new sources of energies, including the energy of time.

There were no days off in Mayakovsky's "perfect" calendar: people would acquire fulfillment not from leisure time, but because they worked together to achieve a better life. The historical narrative of the Communist Party would replace the old calendrical narrative entirely with its size and grandeur. In the play Баня, the future generation, living in complete happiness, is obsessed with the revolutionary period and the proletarian victory over the bourgeoisie.

In his works, Mayakovsky tried, often unsuccessfully, to avoid the word *prazdnik*. He called the new Soviet holidays as the Soviet calendars did, either *годовщины* (anniversaries) or *памятные дни* (memorial dates). These special dates served as commemorative roadmarks to the future. Mayakovsky's "perfect" calendar reflected a vectorial concept of time, according to which the life of the individual never ends, and this era of happiness began with the October Revolution. This is contrary to the Christian concept of time, though it partly coincides with the Christian notion of that eternal life that will follow Judgment Day. This, however, is an existence devoid of time. Lawrence Osborn explains: "[E]ternity is whatever time is not. The answer to the problem of time is its negation. The quest for redemption becomes a quest for a realm that is immune from the ravages of time" (22). In the future depicted by Mayakovsky, though,

time does not stop nor does it disappear. It simply becomes irrelevant to human life, as the passage of time is of no importance to immortal beings. In such a model of life, the traditional narrative disappears as well because without closure it can no longer exist. It is not surprising that the traditional calendar with its uncanny function of “knowing” the date of death of every person frightened Mayakovsky. The poet, undoubtedly, strove to eliminate the deterministic nature of the traditional calendar.

Many researchers have noted that Osip and Lili Brik were key figures in elevating Mayakovsky’s legacy, crowning him the Soviet state’s “first poet.” Edward J. Brown observes correctly that “that famous Stalinist evaluation of Mayakovsky, which until Stalin’s own disgrace in the mid-fifties was repeated ad nauseam in books and articles about the poet, was actually the joint product of Stalin and Osip Brik” (370). In addition, the position of the Soviet Union’s greatest poet was still vacant and needed to be filled, and Mayakovsky’s sincere devotion to the Revolution and the Communist party made him a logical choice. I would like to add, however, another, equally important, reason for the decision. Mayakovsky’s belief in the possibility of conquering death, his concept of time, calendar, and free labor as a celebration, coincided perfectly with those concepts which the communist ideological machine tried to reinforce into the minds of the Soviet people. The propaganda in Mayakovsky’s works was similar to propaganda which the Soviet regime held as vital and was presented in simple words and easy-to-remember rhymes, such as: “Смотри, / чтоб праздник перешел в будни, / чтоб шли на работу праздника многолюдней” (“Смотри. .

.” (“Look . . .”). Том 6, 175). Mayakovsky’s verses were an inextinguishable source of impeccably articulated ideological slogans, many of which convincingly justified the weakest points in the theory of socialism and the great communist narrative. They called for free labor and the sacrifice of human life for the sake of an ideal.

Even after their condemnation of Stalin’s cult of the personality, the Party’s ideologists continued to praise Mayakovsky. His works, in fact, were made even more accessible; complete collections were published from 1955 to 1961, and again in the years 1973 and 1978. The critics paid more attention to his lyrical manuscripts, and the school curriculum included most of his major works. All this indicates that Mayakovsky’s ideas, especially concerning time, calendar and labor, were essential parts of communist ideology, not only during Stalin’s time, but during the entire period of the socialist regime in general.

## Chapter III<sup>92</sup>

### Bulgakov's "Perfect" Calendar as a Reminder of Moral Virtues

On December 23, 1924, Mikhail Bulgakov writes in his diary: "Сегодня по новому стилю 23, значит, завтра сочельник. У Храма Христа продаются зеленые елки" (Лосев, 74). In this note, he expresses his awareness of the changes made to the Russian calendar and the confusion these changes have brought to the life of the Orthodox Christians. There is some irony here: Christmas trees are being sold on the eve of Catholic and Protestant Christmas, just outside a key Orthodox site -- Christ the Savior Cathedral. The Christmas tree may symbolize the celebration of Christmas, but Christmas itself has been changed; the Soviet calendar allows two days for its celebration, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December, but the Russian Orthodox Church demands that it be celebrated on 7<sup>th</sup> of January of this new calendar. Bulgakov is concerned with the peculiar relationships between the date and the day it designates, the calendar and the events it schedules, as well as the calendar's roles as a means of the time measurement and as a "storyteller." Reviewing the writer's notes in his diary and his more formal works, we can conclude that Bulgakov saw calendar reform as a source of chaos, not only on the level of everyday life, but also in a much larger sense: on the level of ethics and philosophy.

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<sup>92</sup> Versions of this chapter have been published. Shilova, Irina. "Календарный сюжет повести Михаила Булгакова Собачье сердце." Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. 2006, 51, 269-285. And: Shilova, Irina. "Reflections of Soviet Reality in 'Heart of a Dog' as Bulgakov's Way of Discussion with the Proletarian Writers." New Zealand Slavonic Journal. 2005, 39, 107-120.

Bulgakov lived in a period when discussions about the nature of time were popular with communist ideology presented something considerably different from the traditional notion of time. He obviously responded to these discussions: in his works he used a number of literary devices, very similar to those employed by the Futurists, which helped foreground the role which time plays in human destinies. He created the time machine in the play Иван Васильевич (Ivan Vasilievich) (1936) with people travelling back and forth in time, and set the actions of some of his stories in the future, as for example, in the novella Роковые яйца (The Fatal Eggs) (1924). His description of worlds in which time flows differently is, of course, fantastic. Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic can be perfectly applied to Bulgakov's works: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). The world of the supernatural in Bulgakov's works, for instance, in his novel Мастер и Маргарита (The Master and Margarita) (1940), exists side-by-side with the real world, functioning as a mirror reflection of the moral, social and political distortions of Soviet society in the 1930s. While the Futurists, especially Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky, sincerely believed in their own "recipe" for reaching a wonderful time-space or happy future, Bulgakov avoided such pseudo-scientific speculations never presenting his vision of alternate timescape as anything more than imaginative. The fantastic is employed towards the purpose of illuminating events and characters of the real world and suggesting a new interpretation of those events and characters.

Bulgakov refers extensively to calendar dates in his works, suggesting that the calendar in general as a cultural phenomenon and the Bolshevik calendar in particular were subjects of deep interest and interpretation for him. The calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church was, obviously, for him the “true” calendar, which had to be used in Russian society as the calendar of everyday life, in order for its narrative constantly to remind people of the moral virtues of Christ.

Bulgakov not only refers to the dates of religious feasts and celebrations, but also to seemingly unimportant ones. These are, in fact, the dates of his personal calendar. His birthday, 2(15) May, and the day he deserted the Petliura army,<sup>93</sup> 2 February (New Style), are among them. They are evidence of the writer’s preoccupation with the importance of an individual calendar story, and the necessity of its being integrated into the common religious calendar, essentially allowing every man to become a part of Christ’s life story.

In this chapter, I analyze a selection of Bulgakov’s works written from 1922 to 1940, or rather, those works whose dates fail to correspond exactly to the first period of development of the Soviet calendar. We should note, however, that even the writer’s last works demonstrate an ongoing interest in the major symbolic meanings of the Bolshevik calendar reform.

My goal is to reconstruct Bulgakov’s private calendar using his fictional works, autobiographical writings, and relevant extra-literary materials. I attempt to explain the writer’s interpretation of the two opposite calendar narratives, which were presented by the Soviet government as a single state ritual calendar,

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<sup>93</sup> Symon Petliura (1879-1926) was the commander-in-chief of the Army of Ukrainian People’s Republic (1917-1921).

and his use of a number of literary devices highlighting his meditation on the themes of time and calendar. I will demonstrate that Bulgakov's "perfect" calendar is the one that unites an individual with society, that unites him with other individuals, and, most importantly, with that world of moral values that define man as a human being.

It is difficult not to notice the abundance of calendar dates and presence of multiple temporal dimensions in the works of Bulgakov, and this could not escape the attention of the critics. Marietta Chudakova's meticulous work Жизнеописание Михаила Булгакова (Description of Mikhail Bulgakov's Life) (1988) is an excellent reconstruction of the diverse and often rapidly changing historical and literary environments in which the writer worked at different stages of his life. She points insightfully to the dates of particular importance to Bulgakov, for instance, the night of February the 3<sup>rd</sup> "которая многократно всплывает в его творчестве" (85). Her observations inspired me to recreate his private calendar.

In his book Художественный мир Михаила Булгакова (The Artistic World of Mikhail Bulgakov) (2001), Evgenii Iablokov investigates the temporal motifs at play in Bulgakov's works and suggests an impressive number of textual allusions. His goal is no less than to investigate all Bulgakov's works and "прояснить, казалось бы, простой вопрос: о чем писал этот автор на протяжении двух десятилетий и как относился к описываемой им реальности?" (Яблоков 10). His approach, unfortunately, is extremely wide and

leads to some very broad conclusions which add little to our understanding of the writer's work.

Some critics choose to scrutinize a single Bulgakov work and they often find a variety of meanings behind the calendar dates given. Diana Burgin argues that in the novella Собачье сердце (Heart of a Dog) (1925) the calendar dates imply that "Filipp Filippovič's relationship to Šarikov (the unintentional anti-creation) is a reverse parody of the Christian relationship between God and Christ," because Professor creates Sharikov during the Christmas season (Burgin 501). Notwithstanding the researcher's apt interpretation of the links between the calendar dates and the stages through which the dog Sharik turns into a man, Poligraph Poligraphovich Sharikov, she concludes that this hints of something demonic in the Professor's nature. If we look at Bulgakov's body of work as a whole, however, we find that he often positions events during various *prazdniki* not to characterize the Russian intelligentsia as diabolical, but rather to display the Soviet practice of *prazdniki* without Christian ethical norms. The Professor, then, should be seen as an unintentional student or plagiarist of the Soviet method, not a demonic character.

Many critics have paid special attention to the representation of time in the novel Мастер и Маргарита reflecting its undeniable importance to the novel's central theme. However, their decision to pursue that novel's specific chronology alone and not within the context of Bulgakov's other works is unfortunately limiting. For instance, L. B. Menglinova articulates the opinion of many Bulgakov scholars that "события в древнем Ершалаиме и в современной

Москве происходят весной, накануне праздника Пасхи, в течение пяти дней Страстной недели, со среды до воскресенья” (Менглинова 57). If we accept, however, that Bulgakov used one calendar for all his works, as I will attempt to demonstrate, we come to a somewhat different conclusion: the “Moscow” chapters do not take place during Holy Week, but rather around Walpurgis Night and 1 May, a very “unholy” time period.

The uniqueness of my approach lies in its investigation of Bulgakov’s presentation of both pre-revolutionary and Soviet state calendars, his interpretation of both calendrical narratives and the influence these narratives have on the individual. I try to address all the Bulgakov texts in which the theme of calendar is present in order to demonstrate that his use of the private/perfect calendar is an overarching element in his work as a whole.

## **1. Truth in Literature and the “True Calendar”**

Mikhail Bulgakov is well-known for his use of the names and places of real cities, linking the imaginary worlds of his literary works to the real world, and his use of calendar dates achieves a similar end. As Boris Gasparov puts it: “[У Булгакова] граница между ‘жизнью’ и ‘творчеством’ часто стирается” (Гаспаров 112). The calendar likewise becomes a phenomenon which belongs to the both worlds, fictional and real. The dates tempt the reader to forget that the story is a product of the author’s imagination. The calendar channels the truth of real life into a fictional work. Even Bulgakov’s most fantastic novellas are

grounded in the very familiar reality of Soviet life. The narrative of his novella Дьяволиада (Diaboliada) (1922), for instance, begins on September 22, 1921, in a period of particular economic and social disorder in Moscow. In the novella, the petty Soviet clerk Korotkov has lost his job and, while trying to find some justice, insisting on his reinstatement, is gradually driven insane by his close encounters with the even more “insane” Soviet bureaucratic machine. The date on which this “madness” begins is anything but arbitrary: Bulgakov’s own struggle with Moscow bureaucracy began around September 22, 1921 as he sought employment having returned from the Caucasus. Moreover, the Calendar of the French Republic declared the first day of the new, secular era on September 22, 1792. The French revolutionaries, like the Bolsheviks, introduced a new calendar, rejecting a religious one, an act which was shortly followed by a period of bloodshed and chaos. As part of the story line, the calendar dates serve as a stable, “palpable” grid, organizing all the events, giving them a somewhat more realistic status, however, fantastic the events may be. The novella Дьяволиада begins with real dates, and this strong connection to reality makes it more difficult to determine when exactly this story is taken over by a point of view of a madman. Bulgakov achieves the same effect in the novella Собачье сердце making the transformation of a dog into a man seem almost plausible. The powerful force of the fantastic is alienating, enhancing the satiric power of Bulgakov’s works; the calendar dates, along with the use of real Moscow addresses, on the other hand, helps orientate the satire toward the current, very real, political situation in Soviet Russia.<sup>94</sup> I suggest that the frequent use of dates from real calendars was

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<sup>94</sup> By employing the calendar dates in his works, Bulgakov often uses a form of medical case

Bulgakov's way of defending what he believed to be the main principle of literature: reflection of truth. Throughout his entire literary career, he fought for this principle, seeing its distortion as the main and most disturbing problem of post-revolutionary Russian literature.

While visiting the editor N. Angarsky on December 26, 1924, Bulgakov unwillingly participated in a heated discussion on the distinction between the "writer's truth" and the "lie." That day he wrote in his diary:

Только что вернулся с вечера у Ангарского – редактора 'Недр.' Было одно, что теперь всюду: разговоры о цензуре, нападки на нее, разговоры о писательской 'правде' и 'лжи' . . . Я не удержался, чтобы несколько раз не встрять с речью о том, что в нынешнее время работать трудно, с нападками на цензуру и прочим, чего вообще говорить не следует. Ляшко (пролетарский писатель), чувствующий ко мне непреодолимую антипатию (инстинкт), возражал мне с худо скрытым раздражением: -- Я не понимаю, о какой 'правде' говорит т. Булгаков? Нужно давать 'чересполосицу' и т. д. (Лосев 78).

Bulgakov's concept of the author's truth is not some pretence of reaching an absolute truth, but an expression of her/his subjective vision of the world. Corruption of truth happens when the external factors influence the literary production of the author, among which censorship is the most aggressive type. He openly states it in his letter to Stalin:

Борьба с цензурой, какая бы она ни была и при какой бы власти она ни существовала, мой писательский долг, также как и призывы к

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history for his short stories and novellas. This also provides a certain anchor into real life.

свободе печати. Я горячий поклонник этой свободы и полагаю, что, если кто-нибудь из писателей задумал бы доказывать, что она ему не нужна, он уподобился бы рыбе, публично уверяющей, что ей не нужна вода” (Лосев 224).

In a letter to the Soviet Government written on March 28, 1930, Bulgakov states that his duty as a writer is to fight for the freedom of publication and that he will not write a communist play in order to preserve his status as a literary figure (Лосев 223). Instead, he wants to do the opposite: to speak the truth: “Созревшее во мне желание прекратить мои писательские мучения заставляет меня обратиться к Правительству СССР с письмом правдивым” (Лосев 223). The very fact that he used the word *правда* (truth) in its denotative meaning, when it was mandated that it be used only in the new sense of *правда коммунистов* (truth of communists), was a genuine act of courage. Moreover, this happened in 1930 after his long, exhausting battle against the Party’s literary policy and its proponents, who vastly outnumbered him.

The author’s wish to be faithful to this principle of depicting the truth was, perhaps, the reason why he employed materials from the contemporary press in his fictional works. There is evidence that Bulgakov used newspaper articles as starting points for his creative works. Liubov Belozerskaya-Bulgakova writes in her memoirs:

[П]росматривая как-то отдел происшествий в вечерней ‘Красной газете’ . . . М. А. натолкнулся на заметку о том, как милиция раскрыла карточный притон, действующий под видом пошивочной

мастерской в квартире некой Зои Буяльской. Так возникла отправная идея комедии ‘Зойкина квартира’ (Белозерская-Булгакова 107).

The novella Собачье сердце, for example, is concerned with the new law which deems that citizens with a proletarian background will be spared prosecution should they commit a crime. It is obvious that information used for exploring this issue was, to some extent, obtained by Bulgakov from newspaper Pravda. The title of the article is “‘Суд. Собачья этика’”(“The Trial. Canine Ethics”).<sup>95</sup> It reports about a woman who left her baby in the street because she simply did not have the money to support it. Though she was initially sentenced to two years in prison, the judge took into account her proletarian origins and shortened her sentence to six months. In Собачье сердце the organs transplanted into the dog are taken from a man who had been charged and tried three times (the last for murder), but he too was set free because of his proletarian origin.

It is also possible that the plot elements of his short story “Ханский огонь” (“The Fire of the Khans”) (1924) were borrowed by Bulgakov from a short story written by the peasant writer Semeon Podiachev, “Сон Калистрата Степановича” (“Kalistrat Stepanovich’s Dream”) and published in Izvestiia, January 1, 1924. In Podiachev’s story, the former caregiver of a rich count, Kalistrat Stepanovich, dreams that his beloved master has come back from exile abroad because the old political regime has been restored. The count orders the execution of his peasants, including Kalistrat Stepanovich himself, punishing them for usurping his estate for their needs. Many of Bulgakov's details

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<sup>95</sup> Правда 18 дек. 1924, 8.

correspond to those in Podiachev's story, and those readers having read both works would immediately recognize the connection between them. However, the relationship between the prince and the caregiver Iona in Bulgakov's story is exactly the opposite: the master loves and respects his servant dearly. He is, in fact, a great and tragic figure. In other words, Bulgakov adopts the same situation as Podiachev, but applies the opposite meaning.

In his works, Bulgakov chooses a single event or action, selecting it from the Soviet reality around him, and interprets it according to common sense and Christian moral norms; that is, he takes a decidedly non-communist approach. As a result, the reader sees murder as murder, sees theft as theft, and not a part of proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie. Bulgakov's writings were not opposed to the post-revolutionary ideal of depicting real life in literature, whether it can be called the "literature of fact" or "proletarian literature." Instead, he took that ideal at face value, producing works with unique literary devices, devoid of fashionable political influence.

There is a great deal of evidence of the writer's disdain, sometimes even disgust, at the post-revolutionary Soviet press. In his diary, he writes: "Сегодня вышла 'Богема' в 'К[расной] ниве' № 1. Это мой первый выход в специфически-советской тонко-журнальной клоаке" (Лосев 84). In Собачьё сердце Professor Preobrazhensky has the same idea:

Если вы заботитесь о своем пищеварении, вот добрый совет: не говорите за обедом о большевизме и о медицине. И, боже вас сохрани, не читайте до обеда советских газет! . . . Пациенты, не

читающие газет, чувствовали себя превосходно. Те же, которых я специально заставлял читать 'Правду,' теряли в весе! (Том 2, 224).

The Soviet calendar belongs to the same publishing "poison," and this fact is reflected in Собачье сердце. When the Professor learns that Sharikov chose his ridiculous name from the new Soviet calendar, he demands it be burnt. He does the same with a book Sharikov reads in order to understand communist politics. Soviet publications are entirely forbidden in the secluded world of the Professor's apartment, a place where the Bolshevik chaos is seen as an enemy.

The new Soviet media provided Bulgakov with the necessary inspiration for his most fantastic plots and comic prototypes without little need for change. In Собачье сердце he shows that a dog's transformation into a man is no less fantastic than real life in the new socialist state. Bulgakov views Soviet media as mechanisms whose purpose is to convince people that this new way of life is normal and logical. The Soviet media routinely present ridiculous and even horrifying situations as the norm, but for an individual with common sense and good logic these situations are absurd and comical, and they need little embellishment from a satirist. Having "borrowed" typical facts and situations from newspapers and magazines, practically without any alteration, Bulgakov clearly wanted his readers to recognize them. A contemporary reader would have seen that the author had invented almost nothing, that he had merely reflected a Soviet reality. Thus the fictional work became a key part of the dialogue concerning the writer's "truth" and "lie."

The Moscow literary scene in the 1920s was characterized by the dynamic coexistence of diverse literary movements. The proponents of “proletarian literature” felt very confident due to their belief that the Revolution gave them the right to publish truthful works. Sheila Fitzpatrick characterizes one of the proletarian writers’ associations, VAPP (Всероссийская Ассоциация пролетарских писателей), with admirable laconism: “It was young, brash, aggressive, self-consciously Communist, and ‘proletarian’ in the sense that it was hostile to the old literary intelligentsia” (104). They were particularly concerned with methods of presenting everyday life in works of fiction and claimed that only authors of proletarian origin were able to provide a truthful account of it. In many of his short stories, but especially in Собачье сердце and the novel Мастер и Маргарита, Bulgakov painted a picture of the terrifying new reality of post-revolutionary life in Soviet Russia. While loyal proletarian writers saw life in the new Soviet state as a triumphal movement toward common happiness, for Bulgakov it was all a sinister phantasmagoria.

Reading those works that oppose the old calendar to the new one, we can see that the former symbolized for Bulgakov the truth, and the latter – the madness of everyday Soviet life. On the surface, Bulgakov’s notion of literary truth contradicts his insistence on the necessity of maintaining the religious calendar as a state, that is, common calendar, whose narrative delivers the universal truth, but for Bulgakov a creative man’s right to an individual interpretation of reality does not contradict his duty to observe moral law.

## 2. Christ's Life Story as a Message of Moral Law

Amitai Etzioni points out that the holidays given in state calendars function as reminders of moral and social virtues (3). No doubt Bulgakov viewed the pre-revolutionary state calendar as the one which perfectly served that function. He consistently presents the religious *prazdniki* of the Russian pre-revolutionary calendar as the real holy days, when time itself keeps people from those darker forces. It is during the holy times that miracles can happen: in Белая гвардия (White Guard) (1922) an ordinary man, Alexei Turbin, is “resurrected” at Christmas. In Роковые яйца, the freezing temperatures experienced on August 19 (New Style), the Christian *prazdnik* of Transfiguration, saves Moscow from a plague of snakes.

Given the fact that the writer's father was a Professor in the Kiev Theological Academy, we can presume that the happy Bulgakov family followed the rhythm of the Christian ritual year and celebrated together the religious holidays, as is so beautifully expressed in the autobiographical novel Белая гвардия. Marietta Chudakova quotes Bulgakov's first wife, Tatiana Lappa, who reminisced:

Вообще у Булгаковых последнюю неделю перед Пасхой всегда был пост, а мы с Михаилом пообедаем у них, а потом идем в ресторан . . . у них всегда был пасхальный стол, о. Александр приходил, освящал (Чудакова 46).

The everyday life of the Bulgakovs was literally included in the calendar narrative, but without the strict observance of ritual. The writer tried to maintain the joyful spirit of religious holidays throughout all his life, even at times when it was dangerous to do so. Lubov Evgenievna Belozerskaia recalls:

Во второй половине двадцатых годов Михаил Афанасьевич вместе с близкими и друзьями всегда ходил в Зачатьевский монастырь на Остоженке на Рождественскую и Пасхальную службы. А затем все садились за праздничный стол, как было заведено с детства. Знакомые недоумевали — годы-то какие, а Михаил Афанасьевич, разводя гостеприимно руками, шутил: ‘Мы же русские люди!’ (Лосев 99).

The figure of Jesus Christ was of great interest and appeal to Bulgakov: in Белая гвардия he is shown as Savior and Protector, Мастер и Маргарита is concerned mostly with an interpretation of Christ as a living person and social phenomenon.<sup>96</sup> In all his works, Christ is an ultimate example of perfect moral values and an embodiment of humanism. In his diary, while working on the novella Собачье сердце, Bulgakov writes perhaps his most emotional words on Christ and the Bolshevik interpretation of his personality, reflecting on the atheistic journal Безбожник (Atheist):

Когда я бегло проглядел у себя дома вечером номера ‘Безбожника,’ был потрясен. Соль не в кощунстве, хотя оно, конечно, безмерно, если говорить о внешней стороне. Соль в идее, ее можно доказать документально: Иисуса Христа изображают в виде негодяя и

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<sup>96</sup> Christ in the novel has a name Yeshua Ha-Notsri.

мошенника, именно его. Нетрудно понять, чья это работа. Этому преступлению нет цены (Лосев 87).

Bulgakov's interpretation of the calendar reform was defined by his belief that the Bolsheviks were building their new society on immoral principles opposite to those taught by Christ. This may explain the writer's repeated use of antichrist figures in his literature and heightening the notion of the evil spirit.

In Дьяволиада, written very early in his career, he already established the motif of those diabolical forces which govern the lives of people in the new Soviet state.

In Записки покойника. (Театральный роман) (Notes of a Dead Man. A Theatrical Novel) (1938, published in 1965), the dark supernatural forces appear over and over again in many scenes, and Мастер и Маргарита, likewise, was conceived as a novel about the Devil. Rejecting the pre-revolutionary calendar meant accepting the Antichrist calendar: a theme Bulgakov employed in the most of his larger works.

This idea, though, was by no means limited to Bulgakov. Maximilian Voloshin (1877-1932), for example, Bulgakov's contemporary and acquaintance, reflected on this in his poetry as well. In the poem "Красная пасха" ("Red Easter"), for instance, written in 1921, he juxtaposes the Christian Easter and the Bolshevik May Day:

Зимой вдоль дорог валялись трупы  
Людей и лошадей. И стаи псов  
Вьедались им в живот и рвали мясо.

.....

Весна пришла

Зловещая, голодная, больная.

Глядело солнце в мир незрячим оком.

Из сжатых чресл рождались недоноски

Безрукие, безглазые... Не грязь,

А сукровица поползла по скатам.

.....

Зима в тот год была Страстной неделей,

И красный май сплелся с кровавой

Пасхой,

Но в ту весну Христос не воскресал. (172)

Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) also notes the inverse meaning Lenin brought to the Holy Week when the Bolshevik leader returned to Russia in April 1917:

И еще одно торжество случилось тогда в Петербурге – приезд  
Ленина . . . В мире была тогда Пасха, весна, и удивительная весна,  
даже в Петербурге стояли такие прекрасные дни, каких не  
запомнишь . . . Весна, пасхальные колокола звали к чувствам  
радостным, воскресным. Но зияла в мире необъятная могила. Смерть  
была в этой весне, последнее целование . . . (Бунин 324).

For Mikhail Bulgakov the loss of everyday moral guidance brought about by the rejection of the Christ narrative was a major concern both as a writer and a

citizen. Ellendia Proffer states: “Bulgakov is a moral absolutist – for him the standards of good and evil remain the same, whether the context is that of the Roman or Soviet empires” (532). Bulgakov’s moral standards remain unchanged regardless of time or space. His works present the Bolshevik calendar reform as a symbolic blasphemous break in the tissue of time, something that was created against natural law and the laws of God. By eliminating 13 days from the calendar, the reform produced a “time abyss,” swallowing the lives of humans and the values of human society. The writer unveils a dichotomy of the two calendar stories, one religious, the other sacrilegious, highlighting the traditional opposition of good and evil. The novella Морфий (Morphine) (1927) and the novel Мастер и Маргарита are the best examples of this dichotomy.

Морфий is based on actual events in the writer’s own life when he had become addicted to morphine while living in the village of Nikolskoie. The events of the novella are set between 1917 and 1918. One year of the two heroes’ lives is under investigation and the story begins January 20, 1917, one year before the Bolshevik calendar reform was introduced to public. The protagonist, Dr. Poliakov, commits suicide on the eve of February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918. Another character, Dr. Vomgard, also a medical doctor, reads Poliakov’s diary that very night and notes: “На рассвете 14 февраля 1918 года в далеком маленьком городке я прочитал эти записки Сергея Полякова” (Том 1, 175).

The novella is written in the form of frame-story -- both narratives have first person narrators.<sup>97</sup> This undermines the reader's ability to sharply distinguish between the two characters, the shared features of their lives, even their movement in space: Dr. Poliakov arrives in the very same remote village, Gorelovo, in which Bomgard had worked, and his next move, we might conclude, may be to the same "далекий маленький городок" (Том 1, 175), which offered Bomgard a far richer cultural experience. Nevertheless, though the characters follow similar paths in space, internally their journeys are opposite. Poliakov falls into a devilish abyss of madness and death, while Bomgard acquires experience and, ultimately, happiness.

The two first person narrations, together with the frequent use of interior monologues, and their focus on the "inner journey" of both character, are all part of the novella's organizing element: the juxtaposition of the two types of events -- the political and the personal. The story is set in the historical period of the public unrest in Russia which eventually led to the February Revolution and then the October Revolution. Those events, however, are rarely mentioned in either of the two narratives, except in short passages: "Там происходит революция. День стал длиннее" (Том 1, 160), or: "Стрельбу и переворот я пережил еще в больнице" (Том 1, 166), or "В будке торговали вчерашними московскими газетами, содержащими в себе потрясающие известия" (Том 1, 148). The lack of attention paid to political affairs is reflected in the use of the Julian, or pre-revolutionary, calendar by both heroes. Dr. Poliakov is likely unaware of the

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<sup>97</sup> Referring to the frame story, I use Jeremy Hawthorn's definition of it as "either a 'narrative within a narrative' . . . or any narrative containing different narrative levels" (128), that is, in its broadest sense.

calendar reform, because the Moscow newspapers are delivered to the village two weeks after the publication date, and Dr. Bomgard does not seem to take the reform seriously.

Dr. Poliakov dates the last entries in his diary February 1, 3, 11, 12 and 13 of 1918, despite the fact that those dates simply did not exist: January 31, according to the reform, was followed immediately by February 14<sup>th</sup>. The novella's most tragic event, Poliakov's suicide, however, happens on February 14, a date which did exist in the new calendar. He receives his first shot of morphine on February 14, 1917, and exactly one year later he shoots himself; his disease roughly parallels the national disease consuming Russia as a whole. That parallel between Poliakov's and Russia's descent into "madness" culminates in the creation of the new calendar. Though nothing is said explicitly about the reform, and the dates point to it only implicitly, it remains significant: it is the beginning of a new "Bolshevik" time. Dr. Poliakov writes: "Черт в склянке. Кокаин – черт в склянке!" (Том 1, 163). Having "sold his soul to the devil," he disappears into the "time abyss" created by the Bolshevik calendar reform; he is swallowed by the "devil." The "madness" of everyday Soviet life was legitimated also on February 14, 1918, when the new calendar was introduced.

Notwithstanding Bomgard's loyalty to the pre-revolutionary calendar and his personal rejection of the reform, he wisely says: "И ежели революция подхватит меня на свое крыло – придется, возможно, еще поездить" (Том 1, 149). Bomgard, with his common sense and ability to appreciate life in all its revelations, finds a remarkable means of escape from the "corrupted" time of the

Revolution and its new calendar: he focuses on space, and more particularly, on moving through space.<sup>98</sup> He plans to go to Moscow without any fear, ready to meet the new challenges there. In contrast, Poliakov, while being in Moscow, his “dream” city, “escapes” back to his remote village. The circle of his movement is closed not only in time, but also in space. The motif of a “cursed place” is used by the writer to create, together with vivid descriptions of the hero’s hallucinations, an atmosphere of desperation and madness.

The same theme of madness, a break in one’s normal perception of life and time, exists in the novella of Nikolai Gogol Записки сумасшедшего (Notes of a Madman) (1834). In this novella, the petty clerk Poprishchin gradually loses his connection with reality and that loss is reflected in his diary. The more his disease progresses, the less the dates of each diary entry reflect those of the real calendar. He records the date when he first discovered that he is the King of Spain as “Год 2000 апреля 43 числа” (207); and later: “Никоторого числа. День был без числа” (210). There is a similar passage in Bulgakov’s novella: Poliakov writes only an incomplete number to mark the year in his diary, “. . . 7 года” (Том 1, 156), which Bomgard corrects: “Несомненно, 1917 год. – Д-р Бомгард” (Том 1, 156).

Морфий brings another Gogol's novella to mind, Невский проспект (Nevsky Prospect) (1834). Dr. Bomgard describes the small town that saved him from depression with gentle humor:

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<sup>98</sup> This is also an autobiographical element: Bulgakov himself “erased” his life as a medical doctor, when he came to Moscow in 1921, and began a new life as a writer in the new place.

И вот я увидел их вновь наконец, обольстительные электрические лампочки! Главная улица городка, хорошо укатанная крестьянскими санями, улица, на которой, чаруя взор, висели – вывеска с сапогами, золотой крендель, красные флаги . . . На перекрестке стоял живой милиционер, в запыленной витрине смутно виднелись железные листы с тесными рядами пирожных с рыжим кремом, сено устилало площадь, и шли, и ехали, и разговаривали . . . Словом, это была цивилизация, Вавилон, Невский проспект” (Том 1, 148).

In Невский проспект, another central street, Petersburg’s famous prospect, is described. Gogol employs a different kind of irony: Nevsky Prospect, the center of the false dimension of the real world, is lit up by the devil: “[В]се дышит обманом. Он лжет во всякое время, этот Невский проспект, но более всего тогда, когда ночь сгущенною массою наляжет на него . . . и когда сам демон зажигает лампы для того только, чтобы показать все не в настоящем виде” (Том 3, 46). Bulgakov, quite the opposite, portrays the irony of a realistic man, Dr. Bomgard, and his ability to enjoy the happiness of everyday life:

По вечерам я стал читать . . . и оценил вполне и лампу над столом, и седые угольки на подносе самовара, и стынувший чай, и сон, после бессонных полутора лет . . . Так я был счастлив в 17-ом году зимой, получив перевод в уездный город с глухого вьюжного участка (Том 1, 149).

The narrative of the frame story is rich with irony about man’s weakness and predisposition to illusions and his neglect of healthy reality. Bomgard’s “hymn”

to his provincial town, however, acquires full significance only in comparison with Poliakov's ill perception and weakening ties with the outside world.

G. A. Gukovsky's words about Gogol's Невский проспект, can be easily applied to Bulgakov's Морфий, suggesting that the writer consciously created a parallel with Gogol's works emphasizing the theme of madness:

Эта грандиозная картина лжи, обмана, некоего массового безумия, замыкающая повесть, есть обобщение того, что в самой повести показано в двух частных случаях – в истории Пискарева и Пирогова. В этом отношении 'Невский проспект' построен так же, как 'Портрет,' -- в двух видах раскрытия той же темы: особо – в частном отдельном случае одного человека, и затем в огромном обобщении, влекущем символические фигуры антихриста или 'самого демона' (Гуковский 336).

The novella Морфий is the most revealing of Bulgakov's works that include calendar dates. First, it demonstrates his perception of the Bolshevik calendar reform as a boundary between very different time periods and two opposing narratives. Two doctors take two different paths in life in spite of the shared conditions in which they live. Second, it shows that Bulgakov saw the calendar as inseparable from his own life: he casts both doctors as his fictional doubles. He has them repeat the same journey through hardship as he did and even sets them to work in a Russian countryside similar to the one he lived in, but then he "divides" them, because Bulgakov, in fact, experienced both lives. He, like

Dr. Poliakov, was addicted to morphine, but managed to overcome this addiction and ultimately won his battle with the harsh reality just like Dr. Bomgard. The third, and the most significant feature of the novella, is its notion of individual strength and independence from surrounding social and political oppressions -- a necessity in preserving one's own identity, and, consequently, one's own private calendar.

The novella has the structure of a frame-story -- a great number of Bulgakov's works are frame-stories -- and the persistent theme of eternal moral rules requires a corresponding structural form. Returning to the beginning of a work in its closure allows the writer to underline the main idea of that work and to outline for the reader the scope of its interpretation. If we carefully read the beginning and the end of Bulgakov's works, we find that the majority of them are concerned with issues of time. The novella Морфий has the time span of Dr. Bomgard's life which includes within itself the life-story of Dr. Poliakov, found in the latter's diary. The ending also concerns the life of its first narrator, Dr. Bomgard, who decides to publish the diary after ten years. Though Bomgard is deeply saddened while talking about his dead colleague, his words do not betray any personal insecurity. He is a man certain about what is right and what is wrong. Poliakov's life, governed by the devil-morphine, is a small closed circle, but Dr. Bomgard's life, governed by common sense, moves forward representing linear time.

In the novel Белая гвардия time is also presented simultaneously as linear and circular. The linear time frame begins with the precise year of the described

events, pointing to the dual temporal coding of those events: “Велик был год и страшен год по Рождестве Христовом 1918, от начала же революции второй” (Том 1, 179). This signals that the novel’s main narrative will be cast against the life, teaching and death of Jesus Christ. The time is linear in the sense that the author carefully preserves a succession of cause and effect, and its ending brings profound changes to the City and to the lives of its heroes. It begins on December 12, 1918, and ends on February 2, 1919. But it is also circular, because the same kind of events keep repeating: a new military power again comes to the City; Alexei Turbin again looks out of the window; the Turbins and circle of their friends again gather around the table for supper: “И было все по-прежнему, кроме одного – не стояли на столе мрачные, знойные розы . . . Не было и погон ни на одном из сидевших за столом” (Том 1, 418). The frame suggests a new spiral coil in time of ordinary human lives, but these coils are a part of eternal, universal time. The novel both begins and ends with a reminder of a broader time frame than a short human life: “Последняя ночь расцвела. Во второй половине ее вся тяжелая синева, занавес бога, облекающий мир, покрылась звездами. Похоже было, что в неизмеримой высоте за этим синим пологом у царских врат служили всеобщую” (Том 1, 427).

The short story “Я убил” (“I Have Killed”) (1926) also has a timing frame: the protagonist-narrator tells his colleagues about his horrible experience during the civil war in Kiev when he killed an officer who tortured people. The main story, that of the murder, covers only one day, February 2, 1918, during which the atrocious circle of the protagonist’s life is closed, but there is also a

much wider time frame, again of a linear nature. The hero has returned from the war and is already enjoying normal civil life with a good job and regular visits to the theater.

Among Bulgakov's many frame-stories the short story "Красная корона" ("The Red Crown") (1922) has a special place. The frame here does not suggest the flow of time, but rather its complete absence. The unnamed narrator of the story recalls the event which drove him insane and led him to the asylum. He is sent by his mother to convince his younger brother, Kolia, to return home from the civil war. The older brother finds Kolia on the battle-field and waits for it to end. Kolia, however, is brought back mortally wounded. Time flows forward only in the main story, hinting at the period of civil war in Russia after the Revolution of 1917. The frame story, however, does not suggest any progress in time: the description of the asylum includes no indication of political change in the country. The protagonist exists outside of historical time. He lacks a name, and his sense of individual time, in fact, has stopped; every evening he is haunted by his dead brother. Life according to linear or circular time is normal, but living outside of time means madness or death. The younger brother may be dead but he exists forever for the older because of his feelings of love and guilt. The two then are inseparable and this robs the older, living brother, of his normal perception of time.

The tragic lives of the Master and his beloved in the novel Мастер и Маргарита end with their deaths, which closes the circle of their lives. It is embedded in the time frame of Ivan Bezdomny's life, who is the Master's

disciple. All the events in the novel, in their turn, are framed by the eternal drama of Christ. These two frames are skillfully intertwined at the very beginning, when Ivan first hears the Christ story, and at the end, when he sees the episode of Christ's and Pilat's reunion in his dream. The Master's life story, with his truthful account of Christ, his terrible battle for a writer's freedom, and his bitter but beautiful love for Margarita, ends when the novel ends, but the life of his disciple continues, suggesting a more optimistic linear time flow.

The interpretation of the Soviet calendar as a symbol of time of madness is also evident in Мастер и Маргарита. I believe that all the dates in the "Moscow" chapters are given according to the Soviet calendar (New Style), and that we have to subtract thirteen days in order to find the dates according to the Julian calendar. In the earlier variations of the novel we can see that the author tried to situate the story in a significant time period of the Christian calendar.

In the first variations of 1928-1929, Черный маг (Black Magician) and Копыто инженера (Engineer's Hoof), the events take place around 10 – 14 June (New Style), that is, according to the Old Style -- close to the Christian *prazdnik* *Пятидесятница* (Pentecost). The date of *Пятидесятница* depends on the date of Easter, since it is always celebrated fifty days after that holiday. *Пятидесятница* also coincides with the folk *prazdnik* "Троица," marking the beginning of summer. *Пятидесятница*, a very popular Russian Christian *prazdnik*, celebrates the full union of the three hypostases of God. According to the Gospels, exactly on this day the Holy Spirit came down to the apostles, and they began preaching in different languages, converting many people to

Christianity. It was also the day when the Russian Tsar traditionally appeared before people: “Троицын день во времена московских царей вся Русь сопровождался особой торжественностью в царском обиходе. Царь-государь в этот великий праздник ‘являлся народу’” (Коринфский). In the folk Russian calendar, however, it was also a “mermaid week,” when the mermaids all come out from the rivers, luring people into the bush and tickling them to death.

D. K. Zelenin, specialist in Slavic folklore and mythology, writes on his finding:

Праздники в честь русалок падают на то весеннее время, когда русалки, по народным поверьям, особенно близки к человеку, т.е. легко могут встретиться с человеком и весьма опасны для него. В это время русалки ходят повсюду; они на это время ‘выпускаются’ -- по одним сообщениям, из воды, по другим -- из заключения. Сроком этого выхода русалок народ обыкновенно считает время перед Троицей, около так называемой Русальной недели (Зеленин 238).

Zelenin also points to a very important folk ritual which had practically disappeared in the twentieth century, though it was still well-known -- the ritual of burying the victims of violent death at a particular time of the year. The so-called *заложные покойники* (the covered dead) are dangerous to the living and “находятся в полном распоряжении у нечистой силы; они по самому роду своей смерти делаются как бы работниками и подручными дьявола и чертей” (Зеленин 40) an ancient belief among the Slavic peoples that mother-earth does not accept them. The Church sought a compromise for this belief and organized the funerals of *заложные покойники* once a year: “Заложных и не

отпевали, но и не закапывали в свое время в землю, а оставляли на поверхности земли (вплоть до Семика,<sup>99</sup> т. е. иногда почти в продолжение целого года), как того и требовал народный обычай” (Зеленин 95). Although the ritual of burying the victims of violent death only once a year had disappeared by the eighteenth century, the ritual of remembering all *заложные покойники* on the *prazdnik* of Семик survived until the twentieth century. It was not a typical funeral repast, because a mood of relaxed celebration existed along side of sadness. Zelenin explains it: “Заложные покойники, сохраняя свой земной нрав, испытывают весной потребность в обычных весенних увеселениях деревенской молодежи; если им этих увеселений не предложить, то они будут тосковать и, пожалуй, мстить” (Зеленин 137).

The religious and folk stories coincide over these days, placing light and dark forces together, creating yet another narrative, but with opposite heroes. Although later Bulgakov decided not to use these dates, the elements of the religious and folk *prazdniki* did find their places in the novel’s final version: instead of the Holy Spirit, the Dark Spirit comes to Moscow, and the Prince of Darkness appears before the Muscovites. *Заложные покойники* also appear, and Woland’s retinue carefully adheres to the tradition of entertaining them.

In a version, Великий канцлер (The Grand Kanzler) (1931-1936), the events take place over the first days of July. According to the Old Style, it is a

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<sup>99</sup> *Семик* is a folk *prazdnik* which was celebrated on Thursday (in some places during few days) of the seventh week after Easter. It was a celebration of vegetation and was the most important, along with *масленица*, folk feast day.

period around the Day of the Birth of John the Baptist, June 24.<sup>100</sup> According to the folk calendar the night before 24 June was the prazdnik of Ivan Kupala. The Russian Church in the middle ages fought against this pagan celebration vigorously; its celebration involved young people bathing and making love in a river, having burnt an image of the sun. Eventually, the ritual disappeared entirely, but a number of popular legends about magical transformations of nature on that night continued to circulate:

Рассказывали и о чудесных явлениях, происходивших в ивановскую ночь с растениями. Широко бытовало поверье, что деревья в эту ночь разговаривают и даже переходят с места на место. Повсеместно русские, украинцы и белорусы утверждали, что в эту ночь расцветает чудесным огненным цветком папортник, и счастливцу, сумевшему достать цветок, откроются все клады, он будет сильным, будет понимать язык животных и птиц и пр. (Соколова 229).

This date is most clearly an allusion to Nikolai Gogol's novella Вечер накануне Ивана Купала (Evening on the Eve of Ivan Kupala) (1830) in which the hero sells his soul to the devil in order to find a treasure, only to die without ever having enjoyed the money.

In a later version of Великий канцлер, the writer already uses the dates of May 7-8, and in the 1934-1935 draft he merely refers to the month of May, and this time period remains in the final text. The development of the writer's idea is quite significant. The final text of the novel shows that Bulgakov found the

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<sup>100</sup> Perhaps Berlioz's beheading has its roots in the Gospel's story of the beheading of John the Baptist. Berlioz, however, preaches sacrilege and the non-existence of Christ.

perfect time period for his narrative: immediately before and after May 1<sup>st</sup>, according to the Julian calendar. The most important event in the Moscow scenes of the novel is Satan's ball, which takes place on a Friday night, obviously April 30<sup>th</sup>, according to the Old Style. Alluding to the date, Bulgakov provides a detailed description of Margarita's flight to the river where she participates in the witches' "Sabbath" as a "queen": "Нагие ведьмы, выскочив из-за верб, выстроились в ряд и стали приседать и кланяться придворными поклонами" (Том 5, 239). This scene does not seem necessary to the story and it is difficult to explain, without taking into account Bulgakov's careful orchestration of the story around this particular date. Walpurgis Night on the eve of May 1<sup>st</sup> has its own narrative. Its description was given in the Энциклопедический словарь под редакцией И. Е. Андреевского (Encyclopedic Dictionary. Editor I. E. Andreevskii) (1890-1907),<sup>101</sup> the dictionary which was known as the "dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron" and which Bulgakov used as a reference: "Вальпургиева ночь, под 1 мая, по германскому народному поверью, годичный праздник ведьм, собирающихся на горе Брокен, в Гарце." Although this date in the Julian calendar corresponds to May 14<sup>th</sup> of the Gregorian calendar used in Europe, where the Walpurgis Night was mostly known, I believe that for Bulgakov it was not important. May 1<sup>st</sup> was a symbol: for the Christians it was a night of devilish celebration, for the Bolsheviks – the most important day in their calendar, and Bulgakov highlighted this opposition.

Thus, according to the above calculation, Woland and his retinue arrive in Moscow on Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, according to the Julian calendar, and leave

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<sup>101</sup> <<http://slovari.yandex.ru/dict/brokminor/article/8/8739.html>>

early Sunday morning, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. According to the Soviet calendar, he arrives on May 11 and leaves on May 15. This is why the evening of Satan's appearance on Patriarch Ponds is described as a May evening. Here again we see the involvement of Bulgakov's private calendar: the day of Pilate's liberation from his long "imprisonment" and Satan's departure from Moscow is actually Bulgakov's birthday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, according to the Soviet calendar.

Perhaps Bulgakov's interest in time's capacity to play an important, often fatal, role in man's destiny was a motivation for a greater interest in his own private time frame and for integrating it into his life and works. The importance he placed on it, in fact, was so immense, that his private calendar became the structural element that connected the total text of all his works, helping him accentuate the ideas he hoped to convey. Segments of his real life created a rhythm for his fictional works, enhancing them by amalgamating real and fictional worlds. This interest likely sprung from his observation of the Bolsheviks' policy and their manipulation of the calendrical concept of time. The private calendar, however, is only a part of a larger calendrical canvas, which serves as the background to Bulgakov's *oeuvre*. The dates of the official calendars, religious and Soviet, were incorporated into his works, creating multiple layers of meaning and possible interpretations.

The Moscow scenes of the novel are easier to understand, knowing one of the main rituals performed during the all major religious holidays: the "tsar's gates" are opened in all Orthodox Christian churches.<sup>102</sup> It symbolizes the special

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<sup>102</sup> The middle door in the iconostasis which divides the altar from the rest of the space in the Christian Orthodox churches.

closeness of earthly life to heavenly life during the holidays and the possibility of every religious person reaching heaven. May 1<sup>st</sup>, on the other hand, is a diabolic *prazdnik*, when the witches celebrate their “festival” and the gates of hell are opened. By choosing May 1<sup>st</sup> as their most important Soviet *prazdnik*, the Bolsheviks rejected the well-known myth of Walpurgis Night, dismissing it as a prejudice of the ignorant working masses. In the novel, however, the nights of April 30<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup> of the Old Style, that is, of the truthful calendar, is shown as a night of the debauchery of diabolic forces, which exist in spite of the Soviet government’s atheistic policy. Bulgakov creates two parallel worlds: the one, in which God, Jesus, Satan and other Gospel figures live; and the other, where these figures are rejected. The first one unfolds according to the religious Julian calendar, and the second – to the Soviet calendar. The Bolshevik world is less durable than the one which may seem mythical or supernatural. The Russian religious calendar reflects the real world, while the Soviet calendar reflects a distorted world of false morality.

The gradual changes in the writer’s intentions towards time in Мастер и Маргарита manifest themselves in his move from concrete dates to more generally the rhythms of nature and traditional calendrical units, such as days of weeks or months. The Master, for example, recollects his first meeting with Margarita as: “Но внезапно наступила весна” (Том 5, 135), and the year of their relationships is recounted according to seasonal changes. After Ivan Bezdomny’s meetings with Woland and the Master, his life unfolds according to the rhythm of the yearly spring full moon. The Soviet calendar is meaningless because real life

goes on according to the rhythm of nature and units of traditional calendar where Christ does exist.

The only concrete date preserved in the novel is the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan: “В белом плаще с кровавым подбоем, шаркающей кавалерийской походкой, ранним утром четырнадцатого числа весеннего месяца нисана в крытую колоннаду между двумя крыльями дворца Ирода Великого вышел прокуратор Иудеи Понтий Пилат” (Том 5, 19). This is the date given by the Jewish calendar which the Christian Churches refuse to accept as the date of Easter, relying instead on the rhythm of nature (Easter is celebrated after the spring equinox before the first full moon). Perhaps the coincidence of the number of a date of Christ’s crucifixion and the “beginning of the Bolshevik time” on 14 February, 1918, was quite important to Bulgakov, becoming a symbol of the time boundaries that designate the beginning and the end of Russian society’s life with Christ. The pre-revolutionary religious calendar, which takes on so much meaning in Bulgakov’s works, acquired and maintained the deepest human meaning because of Christ, and when Christ was erased from the calendar story, society was left without humanistic ideals. In such a context the private calendar of an individual, where Christ’s rules are still preserved, obtains even greater weight. This idea is strongly present in the novella Морфий: Dr. Bomgard resists the revolutionary environment around him, living according to his “own” time, while Dr. Poliakov dies. The latter’s time comes to an end because he is not able to

build his own, private time frame. February 14<sup>th</sup> 1918 is a date imposed on him by the social world, and he has nothing to confront its negative weight.<sup>103</sup>

Bulgakov himself actively created his own private calendar, which he used in his works and juxtaposed to the new Bolshevik calendar in both his life and works. We can presume that it was his response to the instability of calendar dates after the Revolution and a firm rejection of a new calendrical narrative which did not offer strong moral guidance. He took a long time adapting to the new Soviet calendar. In his diary he still occasionally used dates according to the old calendar up to January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1924, and only after this did he consistently follow the new calendar. Bulgakov's private calendar is a calendar consisting of dates special to him. Perhaps it was in those days that the most crucial events of his life occurred or maybe something changed in his inner life. The meaning of the dates in his private calendar was no less important to him than the meaning of state or religious holidays. I suggest that the insistence on the right to have and to live according to your own private calendar was Bulgakov's reaction to the Bolshevik calendar reform in which he saw the most concentrated embodiment of their intentions to annihilate the individuality of man. Though originally the Bolsheviks kept ten religious holidays from the pre-revolutionary calendar in their first Soviet calendar, the writer somehow "predicted" the creation of its 1930's variant, where the religious holidays were wiped out and whose minimal number of the common state holidays reduced men to working machines in need only of maintenance.

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<sup>103</sup> The number "14" in *Морфий* is foregrounded: in his last entry Dr. Poliakov writes: "Могу себя поздравить: я без укола уже четырнадцать часов! Четырнадцать! Это немислимая цифра" (Том 1, 175). The reader is confused because the protagonist clearly lived through the 13 days which were erased from the calendar.

Although he attributed an essential meaning to the individual private calendar, Bulgakov did not see it as detached from the “true” calendar, which was for him the calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church. The meaning of the religious calendar was enhanced by the meanings of the special dates of his private calendar. The “perfect” calendar for Bulgakov then was one which served a person as an individual and at the same time as a member of society. In his diary in September 1922, during the most terrible period of his life, when he lived in poverty in Moscow desperately looking for any job merely to buy food, he writes:

Всегда в старые праздники меня влечет к дневнику. Как жаль, что я не помню, в какое именно число сентября я приехал два года тому назад в Москву. Два года! Много ли изменилось за это время?

Конечно, многое. Но все же вторая годовщина меня застаёт все в той же комнате и все тем же изнутри (Лосев 55).

This entry reveals the interconnection of Bulgakov’s private and the Russian pre-revolutionary calendars. He looks for the coincidence of the special dates of his private calendar with the special dates of the Orthodox Christian calendar, because the “old” *prazdniki*, filled with meanings, memories and a feeling of unity with people, living and dead, inspire him to evaluate and judge his inner and external states.

For Bulgakov, the holidays offered by the official state calendar become real holidays only when an individual accepts them as his own. It happens in the Turbin family in Белая гвардия. The Turbins wait for Christmas and the Epiphany with the anticipation of children. The religious holidays force them to

remember past events and see them through the prism of Christian values.

Turbins' mother hands the holiday tradition down to her children, emphasizing, first of all, unity among the members of the family's younger generation, their great love for each other, and their ability to sacrifice for the sake of other people – everything which they will really cherish and keep. For them to continue to celebrate the holidays means to preserve the spirit of family and moral virtues in spite of a terrible time when people are tempted to forget those things in order to survive. An early variation of the last chapter reads:

Пусть стены еще пахнут формалином, пусть из-за этого чертова формалина провалилась первая елка в сочельник, не провалится вторая, и последняя, сегодня – в крещенский сочельник. Она будет, она есть, и вот он, Турбин, встал вчера, желтый. И рана его заживает чудесно. Сверхъестественно (525).

Religious holidays for the Turbins are a sacred time, when close contact with heavenly figures becomes possible and they are able to help the unhappy and weak. Such help, however, can only be received by those with a clear understanding of good and evil and who are willing to sacrifice their own happiness for others. When Elena prays, she believes that the mother of God can hear her because there is a Christmas season: “Мать-заступница, -- бормотала в огне Елена, -- упроси его. Вон он. Что же тебе стоит. Пожалей нас. Пожалей. Идут твои дни, твой праздник (Том 1, 411). It is during this season, from Christmas Eve to Epiphany Eve, that Alexei Turbin is cured in the most miraculous way. All *prazdniki* in Bulgakov's works are a time of potential contact

with a “moral universe where Yeshua . . . reigns supreme” (Milne, 242).

### **3. Unifying Temporal Plot**

Bulgakov uses in his works a special structural form which helps him foreground the necessity of calendrical narratives based on a set of moral virtues. This is what I would call the “unifying plot.” The unifying plot can be viewed as a variation of the master plot or subplot. The unifying plot, however, is a second plot tying many different works together, with each individual story having its own, individual plot. Bulgakov “borrows” his second plots from the Bible and alludes to them using calendar dates and the hours of events.

While the semantics of the new Soviet *prazdniki* during those first years after they were introduced were likely unintelligible, the traditional religious *prazdniki* and special days were still very much known and accepted. They had very stable meanings which were handed down from one generation to another. All those special dates had their own narratives with their own heroes and with their own ethical topics, that is, they were parables which helped people to sustain ethical norms in everyday life. When Bulgakov situated the events of his stories using the dates of the New Style, the readers could refer to the dates of the pre-revolutionary calendar, simply by subtracting thirteen days. The plots of Bulgakov’s stories were then projected onto the stories of the Orthodox Christian calendar of the Russian Empire. If the reader compares these two narratives, he may discover how similar events and actions were usually interpreted according

to the Christian norms. The calendrical Christian narrative, by means of precise dates, functions as a background for the literary narrative. This master plot becomes the unifying plot of Bulgakov's larger works uniting them through the calendrical narrative. This connection is most apparent in Белая гвардия and Собачье сердце. The two works, so different in theme, genre, style and other literary elements are similar in their relation to the calendar.

Собачье сердце provides a great number of calendar dates. They are given in Sharik's medical history, included in dialogues, and are used by the narrator in the creation of the story's chronology. The printed Soviet calendar appears in the novella as an object, which is discussed, used and even destroyed. The time the novella was written is given at the end of the text: "Январь -- март 1925 года" (Том 2, 208). These dates almost completely coincide with the period in which the narrative takes place. As with the case of Mayakovsky's poem Про это, the time of "production" and time of the story coincide. We can say that this work is another *антисвяточный рассказ*, given its dystopian character and its main plot: a prosperous man "adopts" an unhappy creature from the street during Christmas and greatly suffers afterward. Finally, the man kills the "adopted child" in order to save the life of his pupil.

From the very first page it is, in effect, clear that Bulgakov intends the reader to pay special attention to the time in which the novella's events unfold. It begins with a description of a cold winter evening in the post-revolutionary Moscow where the stray dog Sharik, having been burned with boiling water by a vicious cook, prepares himself for an inevitable death and thinks philosophically

about life. Then, however, a “Christmas miracle” takes place when the rich and famous Professor Preobrazhensky takes him to his warm beautiful apartment.

Some Bulgakov scholars believe that this happens on 15 December, 1924 (Лосев 114) according to the New Style. They refer to the narrator’s words: “[В] течение недели пес сожрал столько же, сколько в полтора голодных месяца на улице” (Том 2, 147). They then count back from December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the day of the transplant surgery, and come to December 16<sup>th</sup>. December 16<sup>th</sup> 1924, however, was a Tuesday, contradicting the dog’s later “statement”, when he boasts about his familiarity with the Professor’s working schedule: “[К]ак известно, во вторник приема не бывает” (Том 2, 151). On the day Professor Preobrazhensky brings the dog home, however, his patients visit him during evening hours. Taking this into account, the scholars subtract from those seven days another one and agree on December 15<sup>th</sup>, Monday. But the narrator describes the dog’s comfortable life before the Professor puts a collar on the dog and before Sharik “сделал первый визит в то главное отделение рая ... -- в царство поварихи Дарьи Петровны” (Том 2, 149). After these events, Sharik lies down in the kitchen and observes a love scene between Daria Petrovna and the Firefighter. Thus the author gives us two numbers: seven and two and from them we can conclude that Sharik lived in Preobrazhensky’s apartment nine days before the operation, having entered it on Sunday December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1924 (according to the New Style). The exact time of day we can learn from Sharik’s words: “В полдень угостил меня колпак кипятком, а сейчас стемнело, часа четыре приблизительно пополудни” (Том 2, 119). The date and time coincide with the

date and time of Petliura's troops reaching the beautiful City, described in Белая гвардия. The last battles for the City stopped around noon December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918, (according to the Old Style) and the troops come to the City around four o'clock. The calendars, however, are different.

The narrative of Белая гвардия begins on 12 December, 1918, but the writer provides a careful description of the military actions which occur two days later, on 14 December, 1918. The actions of Hetman Skoropadsky's troops, who defended the City, and Petliura's troops, who attempted to seize the City, are described hour by hour. The second part of the novel begins exactly with a description of a foggy morning on that fateful day, with special attention to the cross, a part of the monument to Prince Vladimir, a constant reminder of the universal meaning of human actions: "За городом в даях маковки синих, усеянных сусальными звездами церковей и не потухающий до рассвета, приходящего с московского берега Днепра, в бездонной высоте над городом Владимирский крест" (Том 1, 276).

The reader, taken from one military position to the other, is able to observe the battles and mood of soldiers and officers, and is constantly informed of the time when some changes occur in the military situation. For example, the events in Captain Pleshko's division are described as starting on December 13<sup>th</sup>, but the most critical event, Shpoliansky sneaking into the warehouse, sabotaging the machinery, happens not on the night of December 13<sup>th</sup>, but on the eve of December 14<sup>th</sup>: "Накануне четырнадцатого декабря ... [Шполянский] явился в сарай, имея при себе большой пакет в оберточной бумаге" (Том 1, 293).

The resulting turmoil is then described practically by hour: at eight o'clock in the morning the mechanic disappeared, at eight thirty – Shpoliansky, then “в десять часов утра бледность Плешко стала неизменной. Бесследно исчезли два наводчика, два шофера и один пулеметчик” (Том 1, 294). But the last and most important event happens at noon: “А в полдень, в полдень исчез сам командир дивизиона капитан Плешко” (Том 1, 295). Twelve o'clock is the last moment of the City's organized defense.

What occurs in Colonel Nai-Turs' detachment is also depicted in greatest detail on December the 14<sup>th</sup>, starting with the night before and ending at four o'clock in the afternoon. At this time, Nikolka Turbin with his group of cadets comes to an intersection, observes the retreat of Nai-Turs' detachment and decides to stay with him until every cadet is able to leave the place of the battle safely. Nikolka finally leaves the dead colonel, when “одиночество погнало [его] с перекрестка” (Том 1, 313). When he reaches home, he draws a cross and writes the day and hour of Colonel Nai-Turs' death on the door: “п. Турс, 14-го дек. 1918 г. 4 ч. дня” (Том 1, 323). In Собачье сердце, the vicious cook burns Sharik with boiling water at noon, and at four the dog is not able to move from the gateway where Professor Preobrazhensky finds him. There is no doubt that Bulgakov intended to connect the time frames of the two works.

In Собачье сердце the exact calendar dates are given in Sharik's medical history which begins on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. This date is to some extent a puzzle: on the 22<sup>nd</sup> it was impossible to know if a donor would be available the next day. Therefore, it would have been more reasonable to begin writing Sharik's medical

history on the day of his arrival at the Preobrazhensky's apartment, or on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, when the transplant surgery took place. We can presume that this date was meaningful to the writer himself given the fact that he chose it as the beginning of "Sharikov's chronology." In Белая гвардия this date is also the day of "death" and "resurrection" of Alexei Turbin: "Турбин стал умирать днем двадцать второго декабря" (Том 1, 407). After a few hours, however, during which Turbin's sister Elena prays for him, he is "resurrected." Some explanation of this date and its importance is found in the text when Bulgakov writes: "Из года в год, сколько помнили себя Турбины, лампадки зажигались у них двадцать четвертого декабря в сумерки . . . Но теперь коварная огнестрельная рана, хрипящий тиф все сбили и спутали, ускорили жизнь и появление света лампадки" (Том 1, 410). The words "все сбили и спутали, ускорили жизнь" shed some light on the matter: misfortune made time speed up, mixed the dates, and brought earlier a ritual which had been a symbol of happiness, but became a symbol of tragedy.

December 22<sup>nd</sup> might also be a special date in Bulgakov's private calendar. His diary entry on 22 December, 1924, to some extent points to this: "В ночь с 20 на 21 декабря. Около двух месяцев я уже живу в Обуховом переулке в двух шагах от квартиры К., с которой у меня связаны такие важные, такие прекрасные воспоминания моей юности: и 16-ый год и начало 17-го" (Лосев 74). Unfortunately, we do not know much about the years Bulgakov spent in Nikolskoie, where he worked as a country doctor in 1916-17, but Marietta Chudakova has introduced some evidence that the life of the young

doctor there was not very secluded. Perhaps this date was connected to some very private event in his life.

According to Sharik's medical history, the transplant surgery is performed on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Sharik hovers between life and death for two days that follow. After the operation Sharik's condition becomes worse on two occasions. The first time it happens right after the surgery, which is very natural given that the operation was major one. The second time, however, it happens on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Sharik almost dies, but then he comes back to life and is better by the following day: "26 декабря. Некоторое улучшение. Пульс 180, дыхание 92" (Том 2, 159). The first peculiarity of this recovery is that the transformation happens during the Christmas season, not according to the Orthodox, but rather the Gregorian calendar. Technically, Sharikov is born during the Catholic Christmas. This hardly reflects Bulgakov's vision of the Catholic Church, because Sharikov is born in an atheistic country where the Gregorian calendar was adopted not as a religious calendar, but as the calendar of "Western Europe," in its civic sense. Moreover, the Soviet government named December 25 and December 26, according to the New Style, non-working days of 1923.

The next date in Sharik's medical history that coincides with a special date of the Russian civil calendar is New Year's Day. It is on this day the creature laughs for the first time. Father Sergei Bulgakov writes in his Настольная книга для священно-церковно-служителей:

По верованиям римлян-язычников, первый момент нового года имел роковое влияние на весь годовой период времени: кто весело

встретит и проведет первый день нового года, тот в течение целого нового года будет жить весело; поэтому каждый старался встретить и проводить первый день нового года как можно веселее и разгульнее (Булгаков, Сергей 1).

Sergei Bulgakov, making references to church authorities, insists that real Christians should not participate in wild celebrations during the *святки* period and should not wear masks because “12 дней после Рождества Христова называются Святками, т. е. Святыми днями, потому что они освящены великими событиями Рождества Христова и Богоявления . . . Святки -- это святые дни по преимуществу, а потому все несоответствующее их святости должно быть искореняемо” (Булгаков, Сергей 44). In Soviet Russia, however, all the dates are mixed up, and *святки* are, consequently, situated in the period before Orthodox Christmas. The unnatural transformation of a dog into a man, thus, happens during the “communist” *святки*, when masks are literally on, but again in the carnivalesque sense of opposition: the “mask” of the terrible man on the face of the sweet dog.

Real life in post-revolutionary Russia provided the impulse for a plot twist when a campaign for the Komsomol “Christmas,” “Easter” and other newly invented anti-religious celebrations were introduced. It is clear that the blasphemous “Komsomol Christmas” and “Komsomol Easter,” organized by the young communists after the Revolution -- about which the Soviet newspapers wrote enthusiastic reports -- were noticed by the writer. He was in Moscow in 1923, when the most widely organized *комсомольское Рождество* (the

Komsomol Christmas) took place. Izvestiia wrote: “[Г]игантский плакат: “1922  
раза Мария рождала Иисуса, на 1923 г. родила ‘комсомольца’ и тут же  
рядом на руках Марии младенец в красноармейском шлеме. Иосиф в ужасе  
шарахается” (“Комсомольское Рождество” (“The Komsomol Chirstmas”)).

This hubristic masquerade of young people, obviously, shocked many  
Muscovites, as even Izvestiia admitted in the same article: “Некоторые  
хмурятся, многие сдаются. ‘Попов – это они верно, ну, а бога зачем же?’”  
 (“Комсомольское Рождество”). The novella, in turn, parodies the inverse  
communist presentation of Christmas.

Although Dr. Bormental finishes writing Sharik’s medical history on  
January 17<sup>th</sup>, normal life in the Professor’s apartment comes to a halt on January  
6<sup>th</sup>, when Professor Preobrazhensky cancels all his patients’ appointments. On  
January 7<sup>th</sup> the creature already looks like a man: “Вид его странен. Шерсть  
осталась только на голове, на подбородке и на груди. В остальном он лыс, с  
дрябловатой кожей. В области половых органов -- формирующийся  
мужчина. Череп увеличился значительно, лоб скошен и низок” (Том 2, 161).  
The January 7<sup>th</sup> entry reads that the whole of Moscow has learnt of the man-dog:  
“По городу расплылся слух. Последствия неисчислимы. Сегодня днем весь  
переулок был полон какими-то бездельниками и старухами. Зеваки стоят и  
сейчас под окнами” (Том 2, 161). This suggests that Sharikov “comes out” to  
the social world on exactly January 7<sup>th</sup>. A radical change in plot occurs on this  
day: the events stop belonging exclusively to the closed space of the apartment,

becoming more societal. This change is also accompanied by the appearance of a new, very active, very dominant character.

The date of January 7<sup>th</sup> is the most important in the Christian calendar during winter. It is on this day that the “multiplication” of the calendar becomes most obvious. According to the New Style, it is January 1925, but according to the Old Style it is still December 1924. New Year’s day signals this disturbing multiplication of calendars, which was at its worst on 7 January 1925, according to the New Style. It is the day of Orthodox Christmas, but according to the Orthodox calendar it falls on December 25, and in the Soviet calendars it is dismissed as a “made up” or “so-called” holiday. According to the New Style, it is the date of celebration of Orthodox Christmas, which the new government offers to celebrate according to the Catholic calendar, at the same time rejecting the Catholic faith. According to the Gregorian calendar, this is January 7<sup>th</sup>, an ordinary working day. As a result of the crossing of all these dates, the social order, which is, first of all, the order of relationships between people, crumbles. Time becomes “times,” with the date of Christmas more than any other date symbolizing the chaos wrought by the Bolshevik reform.

This chaos is reflected in the entry in which Bormental writes of mixing up the doctors’ pictures and the rumors that Martians have appeared in Moscow, and that a child who plays violin was born in the Professor’s apartment (Том 2, 161). In the same entry, we find two notes about insanity as a result of disorder and insecurity. In the first Doctor Bormental writes about his own feelings: “Ей-богу, я с ума сойду!” (Том 2, 161). Then he points to the agitation amongst the

Professor's patients: "Что творится во время приема!! Сегодня было 82 звонка. Телефон выключен. Бездетные дамы с ума сошли и идут" (Том 2, 162). In general, the entry of January the 7<sup>th</sup> is the most chaotic and the most anxious note in Sharik's medical history.

Starting from January the 7<sup>th</sup>, the descriptions in this medical history take a very different character: the creature's behavior becomes its main topic. The chaos in the previously very ordered apartment becomes uncontrollable. The doctors feel helpless and even the normally optimistic Bormental writes in desperation: "Такой кабак мы сделали с этим гипофизом, что хоть вон беги из квартиры" (Том 2, 265). The representative of the Bolshevik chaos, born according to the dates of the Soviet calendar, appears in a perfectly organized world of the traditional Russian intelligentsia and destroys it, putting a stop to any productive activity and shattering normal human relationships.

The entry of January 12 includes the medical history of the donor, Klim Chugunkin, which is written on a separate page without a date, that is, against all the rules of writing medical documents. Klim Chugunkin seems to have appeared from nowhere, from a place where time does not exist, the temporal abyss created by the Bolshevik calendar reform. Sharik's medical history ends on January 17<sup>th</sup>, one day before Epiphany Eve (New Style). Knowing the importance Bulgakov puts on dates, it demands our attention. In this last entry Dr. Bormental suggests a medical history be written describing a completely new living creature: "Этим я историю болезни заканчиваю. Перед нами новый организм, и наблюдать его нужно с начала" (Том 2, 169). Thus one period of normality in the apartment

ends, and starting from January 18, 1925, a new, tragic one, has begun. In Белая гвардия, January 18 (but according to Old Style) is marked by a tragic event as well. On 18 January, 1918, a year before the events described, Nikolka almost dies:

Николка, получив из рук Василия Ивановича сахарную карточку восемнадцатого января восемнадцатого года, вместо сахара получил страшный удар камнем в спину на Крещатике и два дня плевал кровью. (Снаряд лопнул как раз над сахарной очередью, состоящей из бесстрашных людей) (Том 1, 201).

Here is a clear image of a “baptism by gunpowder and blood”: again the numbers play an important role in Bulgakov’s symbolic structure of calendar presentation. The numbers are the same, but the calendars’ messages are different, and the “first message” of the new calendar is a bloody one.

This idea of human existence as a constant arrival of new, often unexpected, periods of life, when normal interpretation of events and actions is all of a sudden thrown into question, is very salient in Собачье сердце. The sixth chapter begins with the words: “Был зимний вечер. Конец января” (Том 2, 166), indicating the next period in the life of the novella’s heroes. Is it possible to determine the exact date of this day? Yes, if we pay attention to the main events, which occur on that day: Sharikov takes a name, Poligraph Poligraphovich, which he has picked up from the printed Soviet calendar, and then floods the apartment. In other words, he orchestrates a “Soviet baptism” on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1925, according to the New Style. Starting this day, the writer invites his reader to guess

the dates of the events in Собачье сердце, by comparing them with the semantics of the Orthodox Christian calendar, the new Soviet calendar, and the calendar of Белая гвардия. To this end, he constantly points out how many days go by between each event of the novella. He also supplies details or “key words” important to understanding the dates. For example, on the day of Sharik’s “Soviet baptism,” in the Professor’s study “зеркальные стекла были заклеены косым крестом от одной фасетки до другой” (Том 2, 167). The Russian word for “baptism” “*крещение*,” derives from “*крест*,” and the presence of a cross here is key to recognizing the date.

Counting the days from this date of the “baptism,” we can recreate the chronology of the novella. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, Sharikov insists on his “theory” of social justice at dinner: “Взять все да и поделить” (Том 2, 183). On January 25, he receives his documents: “Дней через шесть после истории с водой и котом из домкома к Шарикову явился молодой человек, оказавшийся женщиной, и вручил ему документы” (Том 2, 187). On January 26<sup>th</sup>, the very next day, Sharikov brings two unknown drunk men to the apartment and harasses the women. The next morning, January 27<sup>th</sup>, Poligraph Poligraphovich disappears. He does not come home for two days, and exactly “на третий день вплотную встал в кабинете вопрос о том, что нужно дать знать в милицию” (Том 2, 198). But Sharikov does come home on January 29<sup>th</sup> and informs everyone he has found a job. Doctor Bormental almost suffocates him because of an incident in the women’s quarters, and the hooligan falls silent for some time: “[В] квартире настала тишина и продолжалась двое суток” (Том 2, 200). Then Bulgakov

writes: “Дня через два в квартире появилась . . . барышня” (Том 2, 200). We might conclude that she appears on January 31<sup>st</sup> or February 1<sup>st</sup>. After that “ночь и половина следующего дня в квартире висела туча, как перед грозой” (Том 2, 202). Then, the next day, according to this calculation, February 1<sup>st</sup>, Sharikov comes home, implying some new bad turn in his life: “[С] сосущим, нехорошим сердцем вернулся в грузовике Полиграф Полиграфович” (Том 2, 203). Earlier on the same day, Professor Preobrazhensky meets a powerful man, who informs him that Sharikov has written a denunciation of the doctors and thus, when Sharikov arrives, Philipp Philippovich demands he leave the apartment. Sharikov is outraged and threatens doctor Bormental with a gun, but the doctor almost kills Sharikov during the subsequent struggle. Professor Preobrazhensky now has no choice but to perform a reverse operation. This may have happened on February 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>: the operation then may have occurred on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, or the night of the third.

The events in the novel Белая гвардия also end on the night of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, but of 1919, when Petliura’s army leave the city, and Trotsky’s troops begin fighting for it. Most Bulgakov researchers note that he moved the historical date of the Bolsheviks’ taking of Kiev from February 5<sup>th</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup> (New Style). I believe that the Turbins family lives according to the Julian calendar and in both works the crucial events happen exactly on February 2<sup>nd</sup> because this is the most important date in the writer’s private calendar. Marietta Chudakova rightly notes that Bulgakov uses this date in many of his works because it is the date when he encountered real evil. He perhaps experienced had the most terrifying minutes of

his life when he was mobilized to Petliura's Army at the beginning of February 1919: "Потрясения этих дней -- главным образом, по-видимому, вынужденное присутствие при убийствах, которым он не мог помешать, оказали огромное воздействие на построение существенных опор художественного мира Булгакова" (Чудакова 85). Bulgakov's first wife remembers his escape from that army:

В час ночи -- звонок. Мы с Варей побежали, открываем: стоит весь бледный ... Он прибежал совершенно невменяемый, весь дрожал. Рассказывал: его уводили со всеми из города, прошли мост, там дальше столбы или колонны ... Он отстал, кинулся за столб -- и его не заметили ... После этого заболел, не мог вставать (Чудакова 84).

The death of the writer's mother, Varvara Michailovna, which occurred on 1 February, 1922 (New Style), adds a tragic significance to the date as well. Victor Losev provides a note written by Nadezhda Afanasievna Bulgakova (Zemskaja), the writer's sister, concerning the profound affect his mother's death had on him:

М. А. смертью матери был потрясен. Письмо [к матери] . . . -- вылитая в словах скорбь: обращаясь к матери на Ты (с большой буквы), он пишет ей о том, чем она была в жизни детей; пишет о необходимости сохранить дружбу всех детей во имя памяти матери (Лосев 35).

February 2<sup>nd</sup> also appears, as noted, in the short autobiographical story "Я убил." The protagonist, medical doctor Jashvin, confesses to his colleagues that he killed an officer on February 2<sup>nd</sup> because the officer and his soldiers had tortured people:

“Видите ли, ровно семь лет, ночь в ночь, да пожалуй, и . . . час в час почти, в ночь с 1-го на 2-ое февраля я убил его” (Том 2, 649). Dr. Jashvin is unable to forget that day; the action was not only against his moral obligations, but also against his professional duty as a doctor: the officer was his patient. The same motif is present in Собачьё сердце, where Doctor Bormental makes several attempts to kill his own patient, Sharikov, and finally, transforms him back into a dog on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Both fictional characters, Dr. Jashvin and Dr. Bormental, have autobiographical features of Bulgakov contributing to the quasi-biographical nature of the two stories.

The parallels between Собачьё сердце, Белая гвардия, and “Я убил” highlight the tragic overtones of the seemingly humorous events in Собачьё сердце (Белая гвардия and “Я убил” are more somber narratives). There is a parallel between the universal evil, embodied in war, which enters the beautiful City, with Sharikov, who enters Preobrazhensky’s apartment. In this context Sharikov’s actions become much more ominous than they seemed on the surface. These parallels are made possible by Bulgakov’s use of the device of a unifying temporal plot, which is, in turn, possible because of his use of calendar dates and the hours of events. Bulgakov’s point of reference for ethical norms exists not outside the real world on a transcendental plane outside of time, but firmly within human history and the life span of every man. These rules are inseparably intertwined with everyday existence and time itself makes them apparent.

The time of day in Bulgakov’s works often echoes the important hours of Christ’s life and his sacrifice. The day of Christ’s crucifixion in Мастер и

Маргарита is carefully set within certain hours of that day of Nisan the 14<sup>th</sup>: Pilat interrogates Ha-Notsri in the morning, then has a discussion with Kaifa, and “около десяти часов утра” (Том 5, 43) announces the decision about execution. The procession of the convicted arrives on Bold Mountain around noon and the execution takes place over more than four hours; Yeshua dies sometime after four o’clock. Bulgakov did not depart from Biblical fact: the events of the most important day in the history of Christianity took place approximately in the time period he indicates. Most interesting, however, is that the critical events of life and death tend to happen at the same time of a day in many of his works, whether they be of ordinary people, outlaws, or dogs. In Белая гвардия the crucial day in the life of the Turbins and the City is December 14. On that day, Colonel Nai-Turs dies at four o’clock and Alexei Turbin is wounded at the same hour. The time of their troubles, however, begins somewhat earlier, around noon, when Nai-Turs marches his cadets to the fatal intersection. Alexei Turbin walks out on the street sometime after one o’clock: the writer carefully orchestrates this particular time of his “entrance” having him oversleep. Nikolka, a faithful disciple of Nai-Turs, acts much like Mathew Levi in Мастер и Маргарита: he writes his own scripture -- the note on the door -- about the time of death of his hero. Moreover, the note serves not only as a memorial, but also prediction of the future; the last name Nai-Turs shares the same capital letters as Nikolas Turbin.

Another critical day in their life is December 22 and crucial changes again occur at the same hours: “Турбин стал умирать днем двадцать второго декабря . . . Елена вышла около полудня из двери турбинской комнаты”

(Том 1, 407). Elena prays to the Mother of God for few hours: “День исчез в квадратах окон . . . неслышим прошел плещущий гавот в три часа дня, и совершенно неслышным пришел тот, к кому через заступничество смуглой девы взывала Елена. Он появился рядом у развороченной гробницы, совершенно воскресший, и благостный, и босой” (Том 1, 411). Shortly after this Alexei Turbin is also “resurrected.” In Роковые яйца, amongst all the disasters plaguing Russia after the Revolution, the time of noon is also mentioned: “20-й год вышел еще хуже 19-го. Произошли события, и притом одно за другим . . . Затем часы, врезанные в стену дома на углу Герцена и Моховой, остановились на 11 с 1/4” (Том 2, 46). The same critical hours rule the lives of the characters in Собачье сердце. On 14 December, in the most crucial day of Sharik’s life -- his “execution” -- begins at noon: “В полдень угостил меня колпак кипятком, а сейчас стемнело, часа четыре приблизительно пополудни, судя по тому, как луком пахнет из пожарной Пречистенской команды” (Том 2, 119). It is four o’clock when Professor takes him home and performs the first operation on his burned side. During this, the dog is given a general anesthetic, which induces a sense of death, followed by a “resurrection” to a new life: “И тут он окончательно завалился на бок и издох . . . Когда он воскрес, у него легонько кружилась голова” (Том 2, 129). The same pattern of time occurs on December 23<sup>rd</sup>: the donor, Klim Chugunkin, is killed shortly after four o’clock in the afternoon and is also “resurrected” by Professor Preobrazhensky.

The precise hours of suffering, praying, death and resurrection constitute a unifying temporal plot which elevates mundane human actions to those of Christ, creating a single means of measuring by which the reader can judge the characters' acts and intentions. At the same time of day, however, opposite, immoral deeds, can also be performed, but Bulgakov still emphasizes that time has only one origin despite people's intent to manipulate it, change the notion of it, or create a brand new narrative for it. Segments of time and the calendar have their origins in the life of Christ because they are the segments of the life of the best human being, and the Christian calendar and clock, then, cannot be changed by any political means.

The Bolsheviks did not hide their rejection of the Christian concept of time, which, according to the Bible, has a divine origin. In their propaganda of the new notion of time, time that could be controlled, they left no place for God or Christ. The words of Woland in Мастер и Маргарита "Каждому будет дано по его вере" (Том 5, 265) embody this central idea. This new notion of time rejects the existence of Satan as well. As a result, the mad, unreal communist world is so corrupted that even the actions of the Prince of Darkness pale in comparison. The writer conveys this idea by purely literary means: the unifying second plot creates a moral distinction between two calendars and two temporal frameworks, one created by Christ, and the other one -- by the Bolsheviks. Time in Bulgakov's works reveals the rhythm of the "eternal Easter," and the unifying temporal plot provides the backdrop of the everlasting narrative of the life and death of Christ.

This then illuminates lives of ordinary people, heroes and villains, providing a means to interpret the moral implications of their actions.

Bulgakov's perfect calendar was always the religious calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church, but when the Soviet regime took power, it assumed an added urgency. The Bolsheviks proceeded to destroy the earlier calendar immediately after the Revolution, intensifying the writer's interest in the very essence of the Christian calendar, namely, the narrative of Christ's life and death. By creating his own, certainly unconventional, image of Christ, he tried to answer a very difficult question: "Why would the postresurrection believers worship Christ unless there was something about his preresurrection life that warranted that adoration?" (Barnett 7). The writer offered his own version of this "something," granting Yeshua Ha-Notsri those profoundly human qualities which forced even Satan himself to acknowledge his superiority. Thus the narrative of the Christian calendar is presented in Bulgakov's works as the strongest link between ordinary people and humanity's best representative.

## Conclusion

In this study, I have attempted to show that changes to the official calendar, which the Bolsheviks inaugurated during their fight for power in 1917 and after the October Revolution, had a substantial resonance in the writings of two major Russian authors -- Vladimir Mayakovsky and Mikhail Bulgakov -- of the first part of the twentieth century. My research is based on the assumption that the official calendar plays a great role in different aspects of human lives and society. I also believe that, although not widely acknowledged, private calendars not only exist in lives and minds of people, but are of an essential part of their identity.

Chapter One deals with the ideological context concerning the establishment of the new Soviet calendar which was created by the Bolsheviks to a great extent through their major media organs Pravda and Izvestiia in 1917-1930. In addition, an analysis of Soviet government decrees helps elucidate the role it assigned to the calendar in the new Soviet country. It shows that the special discourse promoting the Soviet *prazdniki* was not yet shaped and this produced noticeable discrepancies even between the texts of the decrees. The newspaper articles, in their turn, expressed the constant shift in the holidays' meanings assigned to them by the Bolshevik/Soviet ideological machine. Such manipulations of meanings could not provide people with a consistent picture of the new calendrical narrative and, as I argue in this dissertation, forced everyone to choose between the different holidays and, actually, to create their own private

calendars. The works of creative men, such as Mayakovsky and Bulgakov, revealed this phenomenon to the public.

Although I limited my research to a consideration of only the beginning phase of development of the Soviet calendar, it nevertheless shows that even later, with the emergence of the “Stalin” calendar, the narrative which official Soviet ideology offered to people, was not accepted by the majority of the population as a grand calendrical narrative. It existed as one of the narratives which constituted the Soviet myth. The Soviet calendar, after its transitional period of 1917-1929, played the role of a liturgical rhythm, that is, a rhythm of Soviet political and social lives. If, in Germano Pattaro’s words, for the Christian community “the liturgical times . . . are the very rhythm of a community which, in celebrating *Mysteria Christi*, manifests itself to mankind by living and showing forth the transformation which Christ brings about in it” (190), the communist leaders organized for a socialist community a timetable for “showing forth” their commitment to communist ideas. The action of individual communication with sacred mystery,<sup>104</sup> performed with a rigid rhythm, essential for any liturgy, was the highest goal of the communist ideological system, but, as the history and culture of the Soviet Union show, it was not achieved.

In the second and third chapters I turned to an investigation of the private/perfect calendars of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Mikhail Bulgakov respectively, showing their strategies toward the creations of their own calendars. The calendar is a canvas with certain time-related boundaries, but is also an inexhaustible source of information and power. Mayakovsky and Bulgakov

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<sup>104</sup> See Ronald Grimes’ book [Beginnings in Ritual Studies](#) for a typography of religious rituals.

viewed it differently. This difference is obvious, first of all, in their attitude to the pre-revolutionary calendar of the Russian Empire. Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary writings remarkably demonstrate how, while explicitly fighting the Russian monarchy's political regime and bourgeois *byt*, he implicitly fought the Christian calendar with no less consistency and eagerness. It was a simple substitution of the figure of Christ with his own, that is, merely replacing one religion with another, but Mayakovsky -- and his fellow Futurists as well -- believed in the conceptual novelty of their enterprise. He viewed the pre-revolutionary calendar as a force imposed on every individual by society, by the Russian Orthodox Church and by the Government, and attempted to liberate himself and his readers from this instrument of oppression. This vision of the calendar governed Mayakovsky's writings after the Revolution as well: it was a tool which, as he presented it, must be used for the organization and education of people.

Bulgakov's writings on the calendar theme reveal his perception of it as a social entity which can be used in completely different ways. He presented in his works the Christian ritual year with the story of Christ at its core as a directing guide in the mundane life of a weak man, and as a message which should be protected against any political or societal changes. I suggest that it was precisely the Bolshevik calendar reform that was for Bulgakov a cause for renewing an interpretation of the familiar figure of Christ. His idea of the necessity of only one measurement of all things and actions, of moral law, was supported by a temporal unifying plot in his fictional works. Cancellation of the Christian calendar is

presented in them as a cancellation of the most important message for people to live like human beings.

The two authors had opposite visions of the calendar, and it reflected their opposite visions of time. Mayakovsky's life-long battle with Time-killer drove him to discover different facets of his enemy and seemingly to find a means to conquer it. The poet became a herald of his discoveries through propaganda of the Revolution and, though much less noticeably, the herald of a new calendar with an endless number of days. Bulgakov, renouncing completely a utopian vision, seeing in it a dangerous deceit of people, made his characters look for a spiritual connection with other people, living or dead. He presented the time of the Christian *prazdniki* as special periods for such connections and, ultimately, for connecting and understanding the mystery of eternity.

As we see, both authors, in spite of their inclinations to different solutions, tried to resolve man's internal enigma – the enigma of death. Vladimir Mayakovsky poses to all of humanity to unite and gather its collected energy against death, and in so doing, to destroy the traditional calendrical grand narrative, taking away its necessary part, the end. Making Time his own and humanity's greatest enemy, he presented himself as a proponent of a new way of conquering it: to create a World Revolution which would concentrate mankind's energy on resolving the problem of death. Vector time, not traditional circular or linear, should be the time of the future. This removes from the calendar its foreboding feature: an ability to show the day of one's death, while at the same time keeping it a secret.

Mikhail Bulgakov offers an opposite line of attack on death, strengthening the calendrical narrative of Christ's life as an ultimate point of moral virtues and humanism. The stronger Christ's story is, the clearer his image for people -- the more everyone's life story becomes similar to his. There is no way to escape the elements of Christ's life: either a person believes in his existence or not. Bulgakov demonstrates the inescapability of measuring time and life according to the grand narrative of Christ's life, providing a timeframe, which is common for his all major works. He sees the Christian calendar as a basic symbol of Christian virtues due to the calendar's ability to exist in the daily lives of people and unite them during religious feasts.

Robert Poole writes that study of calendrical changes, especially in periods of political and social upheavals and revolutions, "can bring spectacular results" (7). My study has a number of implications for research in literary criticism and related disciplines. First of all, it can stimulate other case studies with attention to representations of state calendars, their changes and the social impacts on individuals in other fictional and non-fictional works. Usually researchers pay great attention to the treatment of time in works of art, but overlook the fact that every author views time through the lens of her/his current cluster of official, group and private calendars.

The current interest in the cultural context of literary works demands that we pay attention to the calendrical situation at the time when those works were written. Knowledge of the more popular and meaningful holidays in the periods under investigation enables viewing fictional and non-fictional works through

different perspectives, and perhaps even changing traditional interpretations of the canonical works.

My dissertation deals exclusively with those texts that are the final products of the processes which influenced the formation of the Soviet state calendar. The published calendars, the articles which support them, the writers' interpretations of them – all these texts came to existence as a result of the state reform of the calendar and they, in turn, are reflected in numerous documents, non-fictional and fictional manuscripts. There are notes on protocols, proposals, minor decrees, temporary regulations, official and private letters and memoirs, all of which set the groundwork for materialization of ideas concerning the Soviet calendar. All of them can shed a considerable light on its development and still wait for investigation.

Amitai Etzioni rightly notes: “Holidays have a special methodological merit that makes them particularly attractive to students of societies: They provide indicators that help us to ascertain the attributes of large collectives” (8). Holidays, however, do not exist in isolation. They create a complex social structure with mutual dependence and influence. Their interaction brings into existence a calendrical grand narrative that is usually specific to every country and which remains a strong regulator of social life even in Western societies. This too demands greater recognition of the cultural texts of calendars which remain, to this day, largely marginalized.



2. Month of February in Календарь Русской революции  
 (Calendar of the Russian Revolution)



### 3. Календарь коммуниста на 1931 год (Calendar of a Communist for 1931). A page with working schedule

**ТАБЕЛЬ-КАЛЕНДАРЬ на 1931 год**  
по ПЯТНДЕВКАМ  
(непрерывной рабочей недели)

XIV год революции

I полугодие

**ЯНВАРЬ**

I	Чт.	1	Вт.	6	Вт.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Чт.	27
II	Пт.	2	Сб.	7	Сб.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	23	Сб.	28
III	Сб.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	24	Ср.	29
IV	Сб.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	25	Ср.	30
V	Сб.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	26	Ср.	31

Рабочие дни: 27. День памяти В. И. Ленина в 9 января 1931 г.  
Праздничные дни: 21 - День счастья В. И. Ленин.

**ФЕВРАЛЬ**

I	Сб.	1	Ср.	6	Ср.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Чт.	26
II	Сб.	2	Ср.	7	Ср.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	22	Чт.	27
III	Сб.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	23	Сб.	28
IV	Сб.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	24	Ср.	
V	Сб.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	25	Ср.	

Праздничные дни: 21 - День Красной армии.

**МАРТ**

I	Сб.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	23	Сб.	28
II	Сб.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	24	Ср.	29
III	Сб.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	25	Ср.	30
IV	Сб.	1	Ср.	6	Ср.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Ср.	31
V	Сб.	2	Ср.	7	Ср.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	22	Ср.	27

Праздничные дни: 3 - Международный женский день; 12 - Международный день солидарности; 18 - День Партийной организации и МОПРА.

**АПРЕЛЬ**

I	Ср.	2	Ср.	7	Ср.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	22	Ср.	27
II	Ср.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	23	Ср.	28
III	Ср.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	24	Ср.	29
IV	Ср.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	25	Ср.	30
V	Ср.	1	Ср.	6	Ср.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Ср.	26

Праздничные дни: 11 - День победы Ленинской революции; 22 - День рождения В. И. Ленина.

**МАЙ**

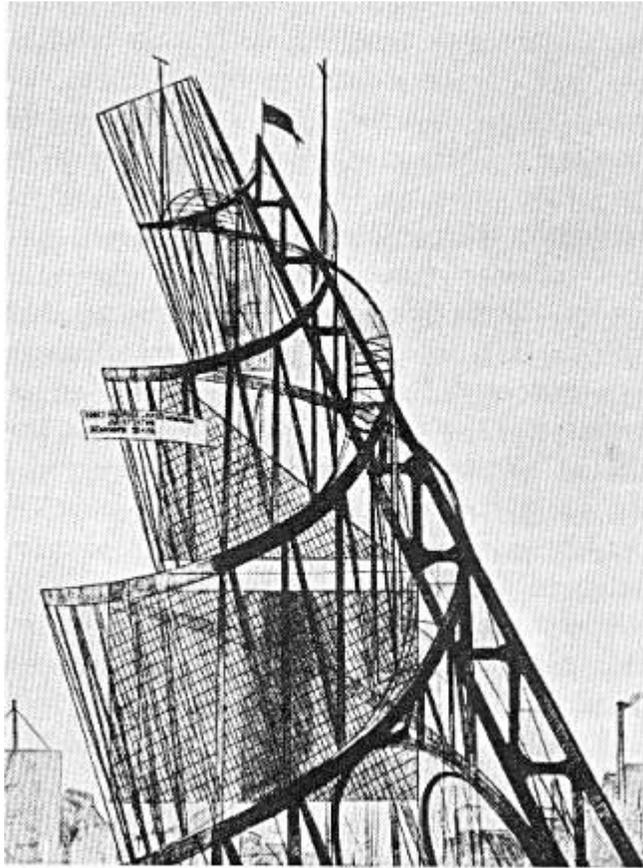
I	Ср.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	24	Ср.	29
II	Ср.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	25	Ср.	30
III	Ср.	6	Ср.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Ср.	26	Ср.	31
IV	Ср.	7	Ср.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	22	Ср.	27	Ср.	
V	Ср.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	23	Ср.	28

Рабочие дни: 1 и 2 - День Интернационала.  
Праздничные дни: 5 - День молодежи; 15 - День Красного флага.

**ИЮНЬ**

I	Ср.	3	Ср.	8	Ср.	13	Ср.	18	Ср.	23	Ср.	28
II	Ср.	4	Ср.	9	Ср.	14	Ср.	19	Ср.	24	Ср.	29
III	Ср.	5	Ср.	10	Ср.	15	Ср.	20	Ср.	25	Ср.	30
IV	Ср.	1	Ср.	6	Ср.	11	Ср.	16	Ср.	21	Ср.	26
V	Ср.	2	Ср.	7	Ср.	12	Ср.	17	Ср.	22	Ср.	27

#### 4. V. Tatlin. Memorial of the Third International



**5. M. Rodchenko's illustration to the first edition of  
V. Mayakovsky's poem Про это. Photomontage. 1923**



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