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**Exhumed from Asterisks: From Commomplace Russian Tyrannies to  
the Dark Spaces of Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog***

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

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Thomas J. Garza

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Karen Grumberg

**Exhumed from Asterisks: From Commomplace Russian Tyrannies to  
the Dark Spaces of Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog***

**by**

**Marina Flider, B.A.**

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## **Abstract**

### **Exhumed from Asterisks: From Commomplace Russian Tyrannies to the Dark Spaces of Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog***

Marina Flider, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Thomas J. Garza

Few spaces have been as tyrannically predetermined as St. Petersburg and Soviet Moscow. This paper aims to present a theoretical narrative delineating the tyranny of space through both Russian capitols by examining both Peter the Great's and Lenin's predetermined construction of Russian spaces. First will be an examination of the manner in which Peter the Great undercut authentic Russian tradition by replacing historical with European spatial consciousness. In the second chapter, a few case studies from the history of Russian letters will be provided so as to best demonstrate the continuing anxiety of spatial representation plaguing Russian writers through the nineteenth century. Chapter three concerns Lenin's spatial despotism. In contrast to Peter the Great, who opened Russia (and Russian consciousness) to the West, Lenin will compress space by reclaiming Russia's capital of old, Moscow. This compression of space is best embodied in the kitsch, micromanagement, and tyranny of the Soviet communal apartment. Finally,

the goal is to show the shift from the highly cerebral production of the place that is St. Petersburg to the unconscious social cues that constituted the mapping, reading, and minute control of Soviet spaces as evidenced in the works of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*. By defamiliarizing common spaces, Bulgakov points to Russia's inability to reconcile space with its national identity.

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**EXHUMED FROM ASTERISKS: FROM COMMOMPLACE  
RUSSIAN TYRANNIES TO THE DARK SPACES OF BULGAKOV'S  
*HEART OF A DOG***

Space and place are ever-fluctuating quotients of daily experience. Over the last thirty years, the study of space and place has transcended the academic borders of the hard sciences and has become of central interest to social scientists and cultural theorists alike. The manner in which space is mapped and place is marked is constantly changing. These changes speak to physical transformations—the industrialization of the countryside, the expansion of cities, the redistribution of neighborhoods; more importantly, every new map and navigational tool is imbued with and disseminates the “meaning” of a place.<sup>1</sup> A map is a “how to read” guide of a region and reflects a territory’s ideological power plays, cultural trends, and consumerists habits. Uncontestably, the plotters of a map are placed in a position of great power for it is they who determine not only the lay of the land, but also the possibilities of navigating the territory.<sup>2</sup> In other words, space is revealed and demarcated by the map, granting the knowledge and permission to explore a given place, but also designating the parameters of the knowledge and exploration.

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory, Derek. *Geographical Imaginations*. Oxford, Blackwell Press, 1993.

“Cultural criticism has unraveled the seam between text and context as a deliberate political gesture...so that the late twentieth century cannot separate from the political involvement of its “maps of meaning” in the diverse worlds which they seek to represent,” 312.

<sup>2</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-Colonial Transformation*. New York: Routledge, 2001. “Maps represented an ability to see the world as a whole, an ability which amounted to an ability to know the world. It is a very particular form of knowledge, a special exercise in the power of surveillance....The map maker had to ‘forget’ or erase earlier knowledges of the structure of the world, and he overlaid these erased knowledges with different ways of knowing the world in the commentary accompanying the map itself” 132.

Our experience of a space, especially of a city space, is prefabricated to varying degrees. The degree of conscription within a city is determined by the overt enforcement of ideologies represented on the map. Is there a curfew? Are certain areas of the map off limits? Is tourist travel relegated to officially proscribed paths? The answer to these questions could be readily used to determine the presence of an overt tyrannical regime regulating the movement of its citizens and visitors. However, latently, the tyranny of space results in the production of a regimented “reading” of a map by its inhabitants.

Few spaces have been as tyrannically predetermined as St. Petersburg and Soviet Moscow. This paper aims to trace the tyranny of space through both Russian capitals and arrive at the most kitschified, micromanaged, and tyrannized of all Russian spaces: the 1920s soviet apartment.<sup>3</sup>The first part of this paper will provide a theoretical rubric for conceptualizing Russia’s project of space formation from the time of Peter the Great. Starting in St. Petersburg, what Dostoevsky called the “most predetermined of all cities,” this project will analyze Peter the Great’s vision and desired construction of the city and manner in which its citizen read and had written about it. We will then relocate to Soviet Russia’s reclaimed 1918 capital, Moscow. Through the work of Mikhail Bulgakov, we will examine the reformulation of space under Soviet rule. Anchored by the critical writing of Svetlana Boym in her book *Common Places* and Joseph Brodsky’s literary

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<sup>3</sup> Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1994. “Since the late 1920s and especially during the Stalinist years the communal apartment had become a major soviet institution of social control and a form of constant surveillance,” 125.



essay “Guide to a Renamed City,”<sup>4</sup> the goal is to show the shift from the highly cerebral production of the place that is St. Petersburg to the unconscious social cues that constituted the mapping, reading, and minute control of Soviet spaces as evidenced in Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*. By defamiliarizing common spaces, Bulgakov asks his audience to read beyond the page, re-shifting their gaze to the banal messages being propagated by their places of dwelling, ultimately pointing to Russia’s inability to reconcile space with its national identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Brodsky, Joseph. “Guide to a Renamed City.” *Less Than One: Selected Essays*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

## **I. The Birth of Russian Spatial Consciousness: St. Peterburg and the Despotism of Overabundant Space**

Spanning one-sixth of the earth's landmass, Russia's expansiveness borders on the ineffable. Yet, over the last four hundred years, a central preoccupation of Russian arts and letters is the manner in which to best represent the nation. This preoccupation is deeply rooted in its need to be mapped, locatable and, thereby, recognizable to the Western world. Moscow, Russia's capital old and new, was sequestered thousands of miles from any European country and bred, what many would consider the spirit or *dukh* of the nation. However, the project of self-conscious space formation truly began under the hands of Peter the Great, fostering not only the physical construction of Russia's new capital, but also an aesthetic sensibility bent on obsession with spatial representation. While St. Petersburg was conceptualized by Peter the Great, the burden of both the physical construction and representation of the city was placed on the artists and writers—a burden that has constituted and plagued the core of Russian arts ever since.

Joseph Brodsky's 1979 essay, "Guide to a Renamed City" represents St. Petersburg as the vision of a despot obsessed with space:

Peter I had a vision of the city, and of more than the city: he saw Russia with her face turned to the world. In the context of this time, this meant the West, and the city was destined to become...a window to Europe. Actually, Peter wanted a gate, and he wanted it ajar...He regarded every country where he has set his

foot—his own included—as but a continuation of space. In a way geography was for him far more real than history.<sup>5</sup>

This final point is of central importance. Instead of palimpsestically trying to modernize Russia by overwriting traditional Russian culture rooted and cultivated in Moscow, Peter I regarded the expansive mass of Russia's territory as the place of modernization, of a new Russia, divorced from its history.<sup>6</sup> In his critical work, *Place in Literature*, Roberto Dainotto cautioned:

What have we lost by going back to place? What we have lost, to begin with, is a historical perspective. Place...is fundamentally a negation of history....The discourse of place, to put it differently, attempts to substitute a latently ideological tool of analysis—history—with an allegedly natural one—place.<sup>7</sup>

However, this was exactly Peter I's project, and his sensibility toward space could not have been more unnatural. It is not surprising that the monarch chose St. Petersburg, situated on the outer limits of the Russia's borders (where Russian roots were the weakest and European culture most accessible) to build his new empire. Here, the monarch was free to cut of the beard off the old Slavic order (literally and metaphorically) and present Russia with a fresh face to the world.

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<sup>5</sup> Brodsky, 72.

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to St. Petersburg, pre-1713 Moscow was the embodiment of old Russ, which still functioned according to Medieval hierarchies of ordered stability. Benedict Anderson would dub such places to have an “unselfconscious coherence.” In such spaces, fundamental conceptions about “social groups” were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary—oriented and horizontal.” Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso Press, 1983), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Dainotto. *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities*. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2.

Peter discarded the Russian spirit so as to capitalize on Russian space. The irony of the city that was created on the possibility of space is evident: its inhabitants were not free to roam; this was not a capital of vagabonds. Instead, Peter the Great engaged all his subjects in the social production of space, through acts of tyranny both mental and physical, shackling them with Blakian “mind-forg’d manacles” of chartered streets. The “foreign... alienating atmosphere” of the architectural landscape of the city, with its “inexhaustible, maddening multiplicity of pillars, colonnades, and porticoes” borrowed from West, imposed a self-consciousness of space on its inhabitants that could be documented in literary representations of the city since Pushkin’s “Bronze Horseman.” Yet, the imported architectural aesthetics of St. Petersburg is only the ostensible reminder of the initial act of tyranny that willed the city into being:<sup>8</sup> The spatial violence of St. Petersburg can be traced to its very construction. A swampland, situated 59 degrees south of the North Pole and prone to floods, St. Petersburg is not the logical site upon which to build a city; rather, it is the expression of Peter the Great’s desire to built a city of the Enlightenment, “a center of reason, of sciences, of education, of knowledge.”<sup>9</sup> Not only the aesthetics, but the very construction of the city, are predicated on a monarch’s Enlightenment need to control nature. Inevitably, countless people lost their lives in the process. Hence, St. Petersburg is first and foremost a grave, a testimony to the tyranny of Enlightenment thought.

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<sup>8</sup> Brodsky, 77.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 73. “The methods of which Peter I resorted, to carry out his project, could be best defined as conscription. He taxed everything and everyone to force his subjects to fight the land.... The universal coercion exercised by the future project united the nation for the first time and gave birth to the Russian totalitarianism whose fruits taste no better than their seeds.”

The new ties to the land were, thus, not organic, but obligatory. Self-awareness exuded from the architectural landscape of St. Petersburg, reflecting one man's project of national modernization, "mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual *controls* about how that experience should be."<sup>10</sup> The instantaneousness of the conception and erection of the city spoke to, what E Relph would call its "inauthenticity." <sup>11</sup> The inhabitants were thus forced to understand the new language of the landscape whose origins were imported. St. Petersburg demanded that its citizen have an intellectual understanding of its layout and its *raison d'être* in juxtaposition to old Russ; at the very minimum, Petersburg demanded a self-conscious awe of its very existence from its citizen. Intellectualization and abstraction, ideas themselves borrow from the West, were key to survival in St. Petersburg, giving rise to the problem of representation. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Relph, E. *Place and Placelessness*. (London; Pion Limited, 1976), 64.

<sup>11</sup> "Unselfconscious place making cannot be considered a single, instantaneous occurrence. Even though the founding of a place may be its most dramatic and significant event, place-making is a continuous process. (Relph 7)

<sup>12</sup> "Intellegensia, a word that came from German into Russian, and then in its Russian version immigrated into other Western European languages, reflects once more the influence of German Romanticism and the idealist philosophy of Russian self-fashioning and illustrates the cross-cultural adventures of national(ist) identity." (Boym, 62)

## II. Demons of Infinity: The Plague of Space on the Russian Literary Imagination <sup>13</sup>

Thus, St. Petersburg, as a project of space, enforced an aesthetic consciousness of spatiality in city-dwellers, requiring that they find ways of speaking and theorizing their environment. “The depiction of the both the actual and mental interior of the city, of its impact on the people and their inner world, became the main subject of Russian literature....”<sup>14</sup> In turn, the “foreign “ elements of the city’s architecture permanently instilled the consciousness of an “otherness,” of spaces that were not Russian, of a Europe just beyond the nation’s borders that was slowly finding its way in. Inevitably, the question of national identity emerged. How was Russia to paint its spaces to the Western eye? Brodsky claims this event to mark the birth of Russian literature: “there is no other place in Russia where thoughts departed so willingly from reality. It is with the emergence of St. Petersburg that Russian literature came into existence. <sup>15</sup>

The question of a distinct Russian literature, of artistic representations of Russian space, began to be of concern at the point when Peter I was seeking to replace Slavic culture with the values of European Enlightenment. Forced to engage in a dialogue with Europe, the Russian intellectual was required to conceptualize, depict and translate their common places to the West. An inevitable crisis of identity ensued. Peter the Great had opened an infinite amount of space for writers and artist, but the cultural history that was supposed to fill these spaces was hailed to be meaningless. What was the writer to

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<sup>13</sup> This section by no means aims to provide a comprehensive overview of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature. Rather, the goal is to briefly defer to a few moments in St. Petersburg’s literary history that demonstrate the continued cerebral preoccupation with space since the founding of the city.

<sup>14</sup> Brodsky, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 76.

depict, and how was his method of representation to merit value? What Brodsky deems to be the nascence of Russian literature—and the incontestable problem of Russian literature for two hundred years— is predicated on the inability to reconcile space with identity.<sup>16</sup>

In 1846, over a century after Peter the Great relocated Russia’s capital to his imagined city, V. G Belinsky, amongst the most influential literary figures of his age, wrote a seminal essay on the state of Russian letters, “Thoughts and Notes on Russian Literature.” In his text, Belinsky (himself a citizen of St. Petersburg) expresses anxiety over the progress of Russian literature. At the heart of his anxiety lay Russia’s inability to enter into the European literary canon.<sup>17</sup> Entering the canon would require not just genius, but the ability to represent the unique quality of Russian life in universal terms. Ostensibly, “Thoughts and Notes” is a nationalistic text, lauding and propagating Russian exceptionalism; however, it is Europe that remains the ultimate judge of Russia’s artistic merit. Belinsky’s attitude toward Russian literature is a clear product of St. Petersburg:

In the context of the Russian life in those days, the emergence of St. Petersburg was similar to the discovery of the New World: it gave pensive men of the time a chance to look upon themselves and the nation as though from the outside.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the subject of linguistic representations of Russian identity and space, Boym notes, “until recently, many words used in the Western public and private spheres lacked Russian equivalents: among them are the words for “privacy,” “self,” “mentality,” and “identity.” 3

<sup>17</sup> Belinsky, V.G. “Thoughts and Notes on Russian Literature.” Trans. Ralph E. Matlaw. *Belinsky, Chényshevsky, and Dobrolyuber*. New York: Dutton, 1962. “We cannot say that we have poets who wen could hold up against the European poets of the first magnitude.” 14

<sup>18</sup> Brodsky, 79.

Unsurprisingly, Belinsky uses the vocabulary of space to depict the crisis of Russian letters:

Something in our literature, if not our literature itself, is beginning to rouse interest even in foreigners. The interest is still fairly one-sided, since foreigners are able to discover in the works of Russian poets only a local color, the picturesque manners and customs of a country so sharply contrasting to their own countries....<sup>19</sup>

In other words, Russian literature is unable to portray the distinct landscape of its national identity; however, the need to chart Russian identity (so as to allow for it to be represented on the map of the civilized world in the clearest of all possible terms) is urgent.

For Belinsky, the national poet who would best represent Russian literature to Europe had to be the poet of the “everyday,” or the common place. According to the critic, this writer was unquestionably Gogol.<sup>20</sup> Belinsky’s choice of poet laureate may seem unorthodox since Gogol’s writing hinges on the absurd, turning the most fantastical and disturbing situations into commonplace events and asking the reader to question the very seams that hold reality together. However, marked by depictions of spatial instability and disorder, Gogol’s writing represents the phenomenology of daily life in the capital city.<sup>21</sup> Here “rooms widen and continue to infinity” (*The Portrait*), “myriads of

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<sup>19</sup> Belinsky, 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Graffy, Julian. “The Devil is in the Detail: Demonic Features of Gogol’s Petersburg.” *Russian Literature and Its Demons*. Ed. Pamela Davidson. (New York, Berghahn Books, 2000), 224.



carriages fall from bridges,” and “some demon has shredded the whole world into a large number of small pieces and mixed these pieces up together without sense or meaning.” (Nevsky Prospect) Meanwhile, the human body is physically deconstructed, disembodied, and alienated from itself.<sup>22</sup> Understood from this perspective, Belinsky’s evaluation of the writer’s project is correct; Gogol grapples with the most fundamental and ineffable element of life in St. Petersburg: estrangement from the self fostered by European spatial -consciousness of the city.

By 1913, Bely confronts the irreconcilable crisis of Russian identity propagated by its European capital in the first two pages of his modernist novel, *Petersburg*:

Nevsky Prospect is rectilinear (just between us), because it is a European prospect; and any European prospect is not merely a prospect, but (as I have already said) a prospect that is European....

Nevsky Prospect is a prospect of no small importance in this un-Russian—but nonetheless—capital city. Other Russian cities are a wooden heap of hovels.<sup>23</sup>

The irony of the nation’s capital being “un-Russian” is fully brought to light in Bely’s prologue. The fractured nature of Bely’s modernist writing captures the two-century old anxiety of representing St. Petersburg: the Russian writer cannot depict a prospect that is European with any genuineness, let alone cohesion. Yet, the writer’s compulsion for

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<sup>22</sup> This is the theme of countless Gogol short stories including, “Nevsky Prospect,” “The Nose,” “The Portrait,” and “The Overcoat.”

<sup>23</sup> Bely, Andrie. *Petersburg*. Trans. Robert A. Maguire and John. E Malmstad. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 1978), 2.

representation is bred by the same Western elements that alienate him from the city.<sup>24</sup> Bely's novel testifies to the climax of tension between the despotism of Petersburg's European spatial-construction and the ever-present cerebral demand of representing such an architectural landscape from a purely Russian perspective. *Petersburg* forebodingly paints the old order of the city to be a ticking time bomb waiting to explode in the hands of revolutionaries. Bely's novel is partially prophetic, but before the governing structures of the city are completely destroyed, Lenin abandons Peter the Great's vision altogether, re-locating the capital back to Moscow.

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<sup>24</sup> In their introduction to the English translation, Maguire and Malmstad further underscore, "it was Petersburg, with its uneasy coexistence of "west" and "east," that appealed to the Russian mind as being the emblematic of the larger problem of national identity. Readers of Gogol and Dostoevsky are familiar with this double view. It characterizes Bely's novel too." (xv)

### III. The Cure to the Disease

St. Petersburg haunted the Russian consciousness. Instead of opening a space for the development of Russian culture, it presented a space of an “always already” intrusion of another, foreign, European culture that imposed itself on the Russian sensibility. Peter the Great’s capital forced Russia to become other than itself, forever fracturing the Russian identity. Thus, Russian tradition devolved into a neurotic grappling with the expansiveness of space embodied in its capital city. The Bolshevik’s rise to power capitalized on this weakness. No one since Peter I had a clearer understanding of the importance of space than Lenin. In 1918, Lenin officially moved Russia’s capital back to Moscow, the nest of Russia tradition, closing the nation’s window to the West, and alleviating its citizens of its unmanageable anxiety. If Peter the Great was Russia’s first despot of space, then Lenin was not only his inheritor, but the greater of the tyrants.

Lenin engaged in the project of undoing the work of Peter I. The revolutionary, (who, like the monarch, had spent a significant portion of his life in Europe), returned to Russia with a clear notion that political change could not occur with the nation’s eyes cast to the West.<sup>25</sup> St. Petersburg’s intimation of spatial possibilities, its insistence on a cerebral, hyper-awareness from its citizens did not lend itself for control over the masses:

“For Petersburg was merely the seat of imperial rule, and not the mental or political locus of the nation—since the national will can’t be localized by

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<sup>25</sup> As Brodsky put it “Lenin was one of the first men for whom geography was a political science.” (86) Much like Peter the Great, Lenin was an intellectual. It is interesting to note that while Peter the Great was involved in the Enlightenment project of space as science, which was just being recognized as a discipline, Lenin’s preoccupation with Marxist ideology and geography as political science was also predicated on its growing academic integrity. Before engaging in the project of physically appropriating space, both men had mentally conquered space through abstracted ideologies.

definition. An organic entity, society generates the forms of its organization the way trees generate their distance from one another, and a passerby calls a “forest.” The concept of power, alias state control over the social fabric, is a contradiction in terms and reveals the woodcutter...Had Lenin stayed very long in [St. Petersburg], his idea of statehood might have grown a bit more humble.”<sup>26</sup> Lenin’s Marxist ideology, by definition, required the re-institution of a national historical perspective (even if the ultimate goal was to break away from history). Lenin realized that the new government must seize control by providing its citizen with a mythos, accomplishing the task the nation’s intellectuals could not for two hundred years: inscribing a narrative of a purely Russian culture. St. Petersburg “happened to be too young for a soothing mythology”<sup>27</sup>; the heart of the country had to be relocated to the formally unconscious birthplace of Slavic tradition, Moscow. By the time Lenin return from Europe in 1917, the revolutionary was equipped with the theoretical tools to provide Russia with a shift from spatial to historical consciousness.

Paradoxically, the successful relocation to Russia’s old capital required, not the eradication, but compression of space (and spatial possibilities). A government centered in Moscow—“ womblike, claustrophobic, xenophonic” —was symbolically easier to micromanage than that situated in St.Petersburg, a city connoting Russia’s unruly “overabundance of space.”<sup>28</sup> Thus is born the communal apartment (*kommunalka*). As we

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<sup>26</sup> Brodsky, 86.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 74

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 88, 77; In the writing of St. Petersburg authors, the trope of space is undoubtedly linked to madness; nevertheless, there is a want for space. Gogol’s labyrinth of Petersburg streets, Bely’s palatial

will see in the writings of Bulgakov, the Soviet apartment becomes the ironic manifestation of Lenin's spatial control:

The communal apartment was conceived in Lenin's head. The "rich apartment" is defined by Lenin as "the apartment where the number of rooms equals or surpasses the number of residents who permanently inhabit the apartment." A minimum living space of about 10 square meters per person and 13 square meters per family was established. What appears striking in Lenin's decree is that it suggests a different understanding of home and space than the one used to in Western Europe or United States. A person, or rather a statistical unit, was not entitled to a room or a private space, but only to a number of square meters.<sup>29</sup>

Attempting to rid the Slavic psyche of its spatial hyper-awareness, Lenin first had to redefine space by un-Westernizing it.<sup>30</sup> The communal apartment, thus, represented the official divorce from the European conceptualization of spatiality; however, neither was the *kommunalka* an echo of old Russ. The communal apartment was a Soviet fabrication, intimating that Russian tradition was indelibly tainted with its history of spatial tyranny.

The despotism of Soviet spaces did not, however, preclude a self-conscious anxiety. Lenin's move to Moscow assisted in the sublimation of spatial sensibility. The ideal of communal living would be difficult to realize in St Petersburg, which, with its

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tesseract, and even Dostoevsky's room of one's own allotted to his destitute underground man all connote the luxury of a private space for their characters to go insane.

<sup>29</sup> Boym, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Along with the eradication of the Western notion of space, Lenin attempted to dispose of Western sensibilities and fashions, most of them linked to bourgeois aesthetics. "In 1929, the State Academy of Arts planned to organize an exhibit an exhibit of petit-bourgeois in art and anti-aesthetic element of the workers' everyday life. Moreover, exhibit was not so much about degenerate art about degenerate everyday life. The campaign "Down with Domestic Trash" was launched by the newspaper *Komsomol Truth*. (Boym, 8)

myriad of canals, constituted a city of mirrors.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the *kommunalka* created a place that was “neither reflective nor self-reflective: people and objects hardly cast any shadow here, and there is no mirror hidden in the corner.” Thus, the communal apartment, whose very existence is predicated on the un-reflectiveness of its habitants, successfully implemented a system of control by creating, what Bourdieu would call, a *sense of limits* or *doxa*.<sup>32</sup>

Rather than reclaiming Russian identity, 1918 Moscow, the site of Lenin’s self-conscious construction of myth, intimated its “inauthenticity.”<sup>33</sup> In order to alleviate the illness of spatial obsession, Lenin tried to eradicate the consciousness of space altogether by relegating its complete control to the government. Lenin’s return and re-appropriation of the city entailed the tyranny of space, belying his desire to reinstate historical consciousness:

Inauthenticity is expressed especially through the “dictatorship of the ‘They’ .”...

This involves the leveling down the possibilities of being, a cover-up of genuine responses and experiences by the adoption of fashionable mass attitudes toward

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<sup>31</sup> Brodsky, 77.

<sup>32</sup> Boym 7. Tim Cresswell, in his discussion of hegemony and social control defers to the vocabulary of Bourdieu who has “attempted to theorize the importance of common sense as a mechanism of domination. He describes common sense as a *sense of limit* or as *doxa*. The core of his argument is that agents have permanent *dispositions* embedded in their very bodies. A disposition is a preferred and unselfconscious mode of acting reflected in a multitude of actions from bodily posture to modes of speech. Bourdieu is arguing that an established order, if it is successful, must make its world seem to be the natural world—the commonsense world.” Cresswell, Tim. *In Place/ Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 18-9. An important point must be extracted: based on conceptual structure of St. Petersburg a *sense of limits* was more difficult to enforce in a capital city that constantly pointed to space beyond itself.

<sup>33</sup> “Mythologies are cultural common places, recurrent narratives that are perceived to as natural in a given culture but in fact were naturalized and their historical, political, or literary origins forgotten or disguised...Myths are sites of shared cultural memory, of communal identification and affection; and while they shaped the national imagination, they did not always correspond to actual everyday practices.” (Boym, 5)

action...Here objects are manipulated for the public interest and decisions are taken in a world of assumed, homogeneous space and time.”<sup>34</sup>

Once upon a time, Moscow had generated an unselfconscious culture, bearing the “aura “ of the Russian *dukh*. This culture, however, was eradicated under the hands of Peter the Great. Lenin’s attempt to reinstitute tradition speaks only of its falseness and ultimately, its absence. The result is the Soviet kitschification of tradition through its reproducibility.

<sup>35</sup> Because kitsch constantly points away from the real to a human condition that was or never was, but never toward one that is, the Soviet totalitarian regime was quick to exploit the stagnation and reproducibility of sentiments and traditions, targeting them to the lowest common denominator. The kitschification of tradition was used to pacify the people by proliferating a false sense of universalism and collective stability.<sup>36</sup>

Walter Benjamin, too, warns that the reproduction of tradition through the desire to re-insert its aura is the tool of totalitarianism: “ Neutralization of a number of traditional concepts...which, used in an uncontrolled way, allow the factual material to be manipulated in the interest of fascism.”<sup>37</sup> Moscow became the canvas of a new Soviet tradition, one that relied on the very presences of the city to support a fabricated collective memory and the re-writing of a national mythos. Boym adds on that “in his

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<sup>34</sup> Relp, E. *Place and Placelessness*, (London; Pion Limited, 1976), 80.

<sup>35</sup> Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but always stays the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. (Greenburg 10)

<sup>36</sup> “Kitsch was described as ‘the dabased and academic simulacra of the genuine culture’ (Greenbug), ‘ a parody of catharsis’ (Theodor Adorno) and a sentimentalization of the finite ad infinitum’ (Hermann Broch). In this view kitsch is not merely bad art, but an unethical act, an act of mass manipulation. (Boym, 15)

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin, Walter. “Work of Art In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illumination: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 225.

essay “Moscow” (1927) Walter Benjamin made a provocative and laconic statement: ‘Bolshevism has abolished private life.’”<sup>38</sup>Russia’s reclaimed capital allowed Slavic tradition to be transformed into the Soviet disposition of sentimentality toward tradition, spawning the proliferation of kitsch. Capitalizing on the notion of the Russian *dukh*, the Russian “spirit” was repackaged as the collective spirit, “ making the “‘Russian soul’ and ‘private life’ incompatible.” <sup>39</sup>

Representation of space was, perforce, no longer the task of artists and writers. Artistic genius no longer bore the burden of representing the state; it was now the state that represented the artist. Soviet conceptualizations and depictions of space were canned and dictated by powers of authority, as evidenced by Bulgakov’s MASSOLIT house in *Master and Margarita*. The artist was merely asked to assist in the reproduction of the Soviet vision. Artists were indoctrinated into an art of the state, underscored by an ethos of collectivization rather than ingenuity. <sup>40</sup> Socialist Realist art

by no means intended to lay bare the rhetorical devices in the avant-garde manner by creating bold new metaphors. Rather, commonplaces of Socialist Realist art... programmatically aroused a certain predictable emotion, even behavioral, quasi-Pavlovian response.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Boym, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Boym, 84.

<sup>40</sup> The school of Socialist Realist art, newly instituted by the Soviet by the Soviet state, in no way fell in line with Greenburg’s definition of the avant-garde, which battled against the proliferation of kitsch and was the expression of progressive ideology and social reform. Greenburg, Clement. “Avante-Garde and Kitsch.” *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Street Press, 1961. 3-21),18.

<sup>41</sup> Boym,112.



Inculcation into a jargon of Soviet imagery was key to breeding the citizens' complacency with space.

The Russian school of Formalism saw its rise contemporaneously with Socialist Realism. Formalism, founded by Boris Eichenbaum in Moscow and Viktor Shklovsky in St. Peterburg, spearheaded the aesthetics of defamiliarization. While, Eichenbaum and Shklovsky were ostensibly of one critical school of thought, their subtle divergent sensibility within the framework of Formalism must be marked. In the "Formalist Method,"<sup>42</sup> Eichenbaum asserted the need for a scientific study of literature, one that could be analytically measured, in a similar manner to that which Lenin used to measure space. The Moscow branch of Formalism conceived of literary analysis as a science that should be studied objectively by dissecting its linguistic components. In contrast, St. Petersburg Formalists, Shklovsky amongst them, placed more emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of literature. Shklovsky's theory, as delineated in his 1925 essay "Art as Technique,"<sup>43</sup> rests on literature's power to "defamiliarize" (*ostranenie*), directly suggesting that literature has the power to heighten the reader's sense of being-in-the-world and consciousness. It is, therefore, difficult to approach Shklovsky's theory without seeing it as direct response to the rise of Socialist Realist art.

Shklovsky's opposition to Socialist Realist art is directly evidence in his body of theoretical work, which bears a politically reactionary tinge. According to his Formalist

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<sup>42</sup> Eichenbaum, Boris. "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'." *Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reiss. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965.

approach, the “literariness” of a text is unadulterated by political systems, making true literature immune to the influence of Communism. Furthermore, the concept of “defamiliarization” is predicated on the idea of reader response: it is a text’s ability to reconstruct an individual reader’s perception that deems it “literary.” Shklovsky intimates the importance of a personal, and ultimately transformative, encounter between reader and literary work. Leo Tolstoy’s “Kholstomer” stands as Shklovsky’s paradigm of literary defamiliarization. Narrated from the perspective of a horse, Tolstoy’s short story aims to alienate the reader from the comfort of his daily perspective and confront him with the cruelty of his habitual actions as experienced by the horse. In much the same way as Tolstoy, Mikhail Bulgakov, a contemporary of Shklovsky, takes on the task of defamiliarization. In *Heart of a Dog*, Bulgakov tries to reinstitute a Russian consciousness of space and reveal that the crisis of Russian identity lies in its diametrically opposed, previously cerebral and now unreflective, understanding of space.

### **III. Revealing Spaces: Bulgakov's Estranged, In Betweenness of Place in *Heart of a Dog***

Svetlana Boym writes that "the history of Russian private life remains unwritten."

<sup>44</sup> This section of my report argues against Boym's claim, asserting that the history of Russian private life was narrated in the difficult- to- control liminal spaces of the psychological schism between Imperial and Soviet Russia's construction of space. Since these limits express the borders of knowledge and power, an exploration of this schism was never approved by the Soviet government. Nevertheless, marginality becomes a central theme in the novels of Bulgakov. Bulgakov did not solve the tension between Russian identity and space-consciousness; rather, his novels expose the discrepancy between two conceptualization of space (that of Imperial and Soviet Russia), which were never able to come to terms with the Russian *dukh*. In doing so, Bulgakov's literary representation of both constructions of spaces reveals their tyranny. While parodying the communal apartment of Soviet Russia through realism, Bulgakov is also critical the infinite Russian space envisioned by Peter the Great dubbing it to be fiction.

The importance of space is impossible to ignore in the writing of Bulgakov. As Haber notes:

All readers of *Master and Margarita* are aware of the importance of living spaces in the novel: the "cursed apartment" No. 50 (V: 76);<sup>1</sup> Griboedov's, home to Massolit; the underground flat of the Master and the spacious upper story of a "Gothic" town house (210) where the privileged Margarita dwells; the Dramlit

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<sup>44</sup> Boym, 73.

house, where Margarita-as-witch wreaks destruction; Stravinskij's clinic, refuge to the homeless Master and Ivan Homeless; Herod's palace in the novel within the novel; even the "eternal home" (372) granted the Master and his beloved in the other world.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, these spaces should not be clumped together in one indiscriminating list.

Bulgakov's representation of space is not singular. Amongst the novelist's most famous works, *Heart of a Dog* forces the reader to encounter the coexistence of two distinct living spaces, those of pre- and post- revolutionary Russia. The depiction of the simultaneity of these spaces provides an alternate map of the Russian psyche, charting what Nicolas Entrikin calls the "in betweenness of place;"<sup>46</sup> a place whose fractured reality could never fit the neat framework of Socialist Realist art.<sup>47</sup>

*Heart of Dog*, censored during Bulgakov's lifetime, is the Soviet iteration of the *Frankenstein* story. The novel is written in 1925, three years after Stalin came to power and seven years after Lenin began the reorganization of the Russian living space under the new National Economic Policy (NEP). The plot, partially narrated from the

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<sup>45</sup> Haber, Edyth C. "Dwellings and Devils in Early Bulgakov." *The Slavic and East European Journal*. Vol. 37, No.3 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 326- 338.

<sup>46</sup> Entrikin, Nicolas J. *The Betweenness of Place: Toward a Geography of Modernity*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990.

<sup>47</sup> Though not discussed in this report, it is worth noting that a similar theoretical framework could be used to analyze Bulgakov's spatial construction in *Master and Margarita*. Satan's ball is a prime example. Woland's ambiguous European genealogy is more frightening to the Soviet citizen than his diabolical nature. The Soviet government had more successfully eradicated religious ties than the ghostly presence of a European otherness. When Woland, the embodiment of Peter the Great's Westernization, takes over apartment 50 at Sadovaya, the cramped corners of the apartment magically transform into an infinitely expansive space. At Satan's ball, it seems that there is space enough to house everyone in hell. However much the reader wants to revel in this seemingly rebellious, anti-communist reclamation of space, we must remember that this Petersburgian attitude toward space is also a fantasy. Once the devil leaves, so do all the European objects that he has materialized. Just like in *Heart of a Dog*, *Master and Margarita* works to expose the tension between old and new constructions of space, neither one more real than the other.

perspective of a stray dog, Sharik, tells the story of professor Filip Filippovich Preobrazhensky, who implants Sharik with human parts<sup>48</sup>, including a human pituitary gland and testes. As a dog, Sharik is most loyal to his adopted owner; invested with human parts, Sharik(ov) is transformed into a man, but of criminal character. The reason for this, as the reader finds out late in the novel, is that Sharik's human organs were extracted from the deceased prisoner, Klim.

Within the first chapter of the novel, the reader finds that the central tension of the text rests around Filip Filippovich's abundance of living space. With the exception of the scientist, the majority of tenants in the apartment building on Obukhov Lane live in evermore-cramped quarters. Upon returning back to his apartment with Sharik, Filip Filippovich is informed by the doorman, "'They'll be moving additional tenants into all the apartments, except for yours.'"<sup>49</sup> Performing dubious clandestine operations on leaders of the Communist party, the professor is immune to the space ordinances of the NEP, and is permitted to live and work within his pre-revolutionary seven-room apartment. Filip Filippovich's apartment underscores his readily proclaimed anti-Communist ethos—"you are right, I do not like the proletariat."<sup>50</sup>

Consequentially, Filip Filippovich battles against the vindictive housing committee, whose representatives, with Shvonder at their head, claim that the professor occupies "excessive space." Countering Lenin's scientific allotment of ten by thirteen square meters of space per family, the bachelor explains his need for all seven rooms:

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<sup>48</sup> Though the boundaries of human body as a space (and by extension of gendered space) is certainly a theme of importance to the novel, it will not be central to my critical reading of the text.

<sup>49</sup> Bulgakov, Mikhail. *Heart of a Dog*. Trans. Mirra Ginsburg. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

I have a waiting room, which please note is also a library; a dining room; and my office. That makes three. The examination room makes four, the operating room, five. My bedroom, six, and my servant's room, seven. And I haven't enough space.<sup>51</sup>

His sprawling flat, with its abundance of "mirrors in the waiting room and office" and glass in the examination room, speaks to the preservation of a Petersburg-esque spatial-consciousness.<sup>52</sup> This is not an apartment that has fallen to the hands of canned, unreflective, Soviet aesthetics.

Yet, as Eric Laursen has argued, the conflict between Filip Filippovich and Shvonder is not a battle between good and evil, but rather a tension born of incongruent despotic ideologies.<sup>53</sup> While Bulgakov's satire of the banality of Soviet spaces seems all too obvious, his subtle depictions of the remnants of pre-revolutionary spatial tyranny is important to delineate. The representatives of the new housing order are mindless puppets of the Soviet regime. They constitute a "commune very far from a genuine community. Guided by antagonism and mutual suspicion rather than unselfish concern for others, all are out for themselves."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Bulgakov does not portray Filip Filippovich to be a model of free thought and moral uprightness. Overlooking the immediate living conditions of the other tenants who are packed into overpopulated communal apartments, the professor is committed to maintaining his old world order, a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 17, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Laursen, Eric. "Bad Words Are Not Allowed!: Language and Transformation in Mikhail Bulgakov's "Heart of a Dog." *The Slavic and East European Journal*. Vol. 51, No.3 (Fall 2007), pp. 491-513: 492.

<sup>54</sup> Haber, 329.

combination of European Positivist thought and bourgeois aesthetics.<sup>55</sup> In the name of science, Filip Filippovich domineers over his space and is hungry for more, echoing a 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial sensibility. His tyranny of space is the first indicator of the falsity of his Enlightened fight against terror:” by terror you cannot get anywhere with an animal, no matter his stage of development. I’ve always asserted this, I assert it today, and I shall go on asserting it.<sup>56</sup>” Understanding human beings to be developed animals, Filip Filippovich bears the “White Man’s Burden” of civilizing society; any nobility of character his words bear is negated by his actions, culminated in the blatant disrespect of all life, as evidence in brutal dissection of Sharik(ov)’s body. Thus, in this initial conflict, Bulgakov sets up the dichotomy between two modes of spatial tyranny, old and new.

In his rebellion against proletarian sensibility, the professor engages in the cerebral construction of the self and of his assistant, Ivan Arnoldovich Bormenthal—a preoccupation characteristic of the nation’s former capital, St. Petersburg.<sup>57</sup> Yet, as has already been explicated, the constitution of such an identity never belonged to the Russian people in the first place. For this reason, the professor’s name deserves a critical dissection. Bulgakov’s portrayal of Filip Filippovich, evidenced by the absurdity of his European name, speaks of a foreign genealogy, one that the scientist never possessed and

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<sup>55</sup> To further underscore influence of Positivist thought, Filip Filippovich later reveals that his primary interest was in “eugenics, the improvement of the species.” (Bulgakov,105) Those deemed as a danger to society, madmen and criminals (such as Klim), were the primary subjects of Postivist scientific studies.

<sup>56</sup> Bulgakov, 16.

<sup>57</sup> The construction of the name of the professor and his assistant differ and should be noted. Filip is a European name with French origins. In contrast, Ivan is a Slavic name, representing the Soviet government’s attempt revived old Russian traditions. As second juxtaposition is also worthy of note. In contrast to Filip Filippovich’s self-fashioning persona are the representatives of the housing committee who, as Bulgakov describes, have become so featureless that the scientist cannot immediately designate their gender. (Bulgakov, 24)

could never return to, try as he might: “the Russian letter “Ф“ that begins the professor’s first name and patronymic, is “letter used mainly in words of non-Slavic origin.”<sup>58</sup> His patronymic, a mere repetition of his given name, intimates a re-conscription into the previous generation’s Imperial sensibility; his father, too, was a fictionalized product of European culture. Finally, the Professor’s surname, Preobrazhensky, Slavic in origin (albeit an unorthodox last name), is a derivative of the Russian word for transformation (*preobrazhenie*). The surname not only foreshadows the transformation of Sharik(ov), but also reflects the scientist’s vigilant self-imposed transformation into a European intellectual.

Bulgakov’s use of bird imagery to represent the protagonist provides another textual clue belying Filip Filippovich’s faux- freedom from Soviet spatial tyranny. On multiple instances, the scientist is depicted “spreading the tails of his smock,” and flaring the “nostrils of his hawklike nose.”<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, this metaphor is immediately problematized by Bulgakov’s inscription of a taxidermy owl within the landscape of Filip Filippovich’s apartment. Taxidermy abounds in Filip Filippovich’s flat and is fitting with the scientist’s bourgeois need to demonstrate control over nature (and to do so in the tackiest way possible). The owl, however, stands apart from the other useless bric-a-brac consuming the flat. The bird serves as an unconscious mirror in the most self-conscious of spaces. While Filip Filippovich’s regards it as yet another object in his kingdom of kitsch, the owl points back to its owner, intimating the true condition of his existence: the scientist is a preserved relic of 19<sup>th</sup> century pre-revolutionary Russia. Though baring the

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<sup>58</sup> Laursen, 497.

<sup>59</sup> Bulgakov, 17, 23.



potential for flight, Filip Filippovich traps himself within the spatial confines of an expired Russian order that was most “un-Russian” to begin with. Rather than connoting freedom, the professor’s expansive apartment is nothing more than an ornate aviary.

Filip Filippovich’s surrounds himself with material objects characterizing the very petit-bourgeois aesthetic that Socialist Realist art tried to eradicate. Persian rugs, Moroccan slippers, and cabinets of curiosities litter the professor’s seven rooms. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European artists began to categorize these bourgeois objects as “kitsch in good taste,’ which opposed the vulgarity of the grotesque and of low class entertainment.”<sup>60</sup> This aesthetic is surely appealing to Filip Filippovich’s anti-proletariat sentiment, and his accumulation of exotic memorabilia not only designates an affiliation with the European middle class, but also unconsciously documents the history of Western colonization and orientalism.<sup>61</sup> Laursen dubbs Filip Filippovich’s apartment, “the last enclave of bourgeois dining in Moscow.”<sup>62</sup> The professor’s dining room is a bourgeois Eden; “Plates adorned with paradisiac flowers” and gothic furniture<sup>63</sup> are what Anderson calls the European ‘tropical gothic’ ‘made possible by the overwhelming power high capitalism had given to the metropole—a power so great that it could be kept, so to speak, in the wings.”<sup>64</sup> In Europe, these objects would hold a degree of nationalistic cultural capital speaking to a country’s physical and material domination of global space. Filip Filippovich’s accumulation of these objects bears a two-fold irony: first, Sharikov is

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<sup>60</sup> Boym, 17.

<sup>61</sup> “Kitsch tries to cover up history, its cultural mythology and its contexts” Ibid, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Laursen, 494.

<sup>63</sup> Bulgakov, 31, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Anderson, 151.

quick to point out that these objects emblemize the tyranny of space characterizing Imperial Russia: “Napkin here, tie there, and ‘pardon me’ and ‘please’ and ‘merci’ —but for the real thing, it isn’t there. Torturing your own selves, just like in Tsarist times.”<sup>65</sup> Second, placed in the professor’s apartment, these objects lose all symbolic status, for they negatively assert Russia’s lack of global presence; as Sharikov had already pointed out, “the real thing, it isn’t there.” These objects of otherness literally and metaphorically reduce the dimensions of the professor’s living space by intimating the impossibility of accessing the larger world outside. A slave to material objects, Filip Filippovich becomes imprisoned in his own apartment.

All the while, these objects keep the Professor’s mental gaze neurotically fixated on the West. Compulsively, he alternates between two phrases: “From Seville and to Granada” (Tchaikovsky’s *Don Juan*), and “Toward the sacred banks of the Nile...” (Verdi’s *Aida*). Both these phrases not only point to an unattainable and mythologized foreign land, but also noticeably lack verbs: movement toward these “othered” lands is only suggested. Even in his mind’s eye, the professor is forever approaching the countries beyond, yet the act of arrival is strictly outside the bonds of his imagination. Filip Filippovich’s psychic landscape places him no man’s land. Privileged with immunity to the laws of Soviet spatial construction but unable to physically tour any other nation, Filip Filippovich is dually alienated from both his immediate and forged environments, floating somewhere between the Moscow and his imagined globe. Brodsky would diagnose this sensibility to be symptomatic of a St. Petersburg citizen.

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<sup>65</sup> Bulgakov, 87.

Physically and mentality, the farthest terra Filip Filippovich could reach is the borders of his country.

Bormenthal is inculcated into Filip Filippovich's cult of the West. When speaking of the professor's accomplishments in science, Dr. Bormenthal states that Filip Filippovich has "no equal in Europe!"<sup>66</sup> Again, this statement is loaded with irony. First, Filip Filippovich is a prototypical European literary protagonist. His accomplishments are equaled, if not superseded by those of Prometheus, and then again by Frankenstein. In other words, the professor is a literary cliché. The doctor's statement merely reveals his ignorance of the very culture he is attempting to emulate. At the same time, by negatively exposing Filip Filippovich's cliché existence, we begin to understand the doctor's admiration of and devotion to the scientist, for "clichés protect us from facing the catastrophe, the unbearable, the ineffable."<sup>67</sup> Thus, the mythological scope of the scientist's experiments is keeping his assistance from dealing with the harsh reality of Soviet communal life.

In addition, Bormenthal's statement expresses the same anxiety as Belinsky's essay some seventy-five years prior. In order for Filip Filippovich's work to bear any merit, it must be deemed worthy within a European context. Most ironic is that no one in Europe knows of the scientist's experiment, and, due to Soviet systems of information control, probably never will. At best, news of Sharikov's transformation simply arouses the curiosity of the neighbor who, in blatant disregard to the professor's demand for privacy,

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<sup>66</sup> Bulgakov, 54.

<sup>67</sup> Boym, 15.

invites herself in to “take a little peek at the talking dog.”<sup>68</sup>

The neighbors do not have to physically encroach on Filip Filippovich’s space in order for the scientist to feel their intrusion on his privacy. Through the walls of his apartment, the professor persistently hears the music of the Balalaik, an instrument that he disdainfully regards as proletarian (a sharp contrast to his refined predilection for Verdi operas<sup>69</sup>):

The very persistent sound of the balalaika, played with reckless ease, came from behind two walls, and the nimble, complicated variations of “The Moon is Shining” created a loathsome hodgepodge in Filip Filippovich’s head.<sup>70</sup>

Boym notes that during the Stalinist era “such songs were not meant to be read but only to be memorized and repeated as an incantation of fairy-tale magic....arous[ing] a certain predictable emotional response.”<sup>71</sup> The ubiquitous music, a product of Socialist Realist art, destroys any semblance of control Filip Filippovich has over his space. While able to keep the housing committee at bay, Filip Filippovich, whose European tastes prefers *Aida*, is not immune to the aesthetic violence of the Soviet government propagated through music. The borders of the professor’s apartment become the battlegrounds between pre-and post-revolutionary kitsch. It is in these places of collision that we find Sharik.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>69</sup> Performances of Verdi’s opera are still sanctioned by the government; “there’s *Aida* at the Bolshoi tonight” (39). Thus, while under the impression that he is the preserver of civilized European aesthetics, Filip Filippovich is still functioning within the system of Soviet censorship. His preference for *Aida* as opposed to the music of the proletariat is not an act of institutional rebellion.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>71</sup> Boym, 112

Sharik(ov) dwells in the liminal places of the novel. In the first lines of the text we find him “perishing in the gateway.”<sup>72</sup> His emplacement is significant for “the black entrance to the communal apartment leads to the dark corner of the Soviet consciousness.”<sup>73</sup> Tracing Sharik(ov)’s evolution through *Heart of a Dog*, we note that his character is perpetually in physical and ideological flux. As a dog, his human traits are extenuated; as a human, we note his animal nature. As Sharik, the protagonist is able to comply with Filip Filippovich’s spatial despotism without ever conforming to it. As Sharikov, he adopts Shvonder’s Soviet sensibility, only to the extent that it will grant him a great degree of freedom within the professor’s household. Never fully human or animal, European or Soviet, martyr of vagrant, the protagonist is constituted of incongruous parts, making his personality difficult to map. Unlike the two canned personas of Filip Filippovich and Shvonder, Sharikov’s identity is the product and reformulation of a dual despotism, old and new. Through Sharik(ov), Bulgakov is able to defamiliarize two models of spatial tyranny and show that true nature of Russian private life can only be found in the irreconcilable fracture between Imperial and Soviet space.

Before Filip Filippovich takes him in, Sharik is a stray dog without ties to any spatial order. He finds proletariat and bourgeois aesthetics to be equally banal, and is impervious to their societal affiliations: “somebody was playing on the accordion, which is not much better than the ‘Celeste Aida....’<sup>74</sup> Sharik’s disregard for both forms of music does not imply that he lacks all aesthetic predilections. His highly developed sense of

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<sup>72</sup> Bulgakov, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Boym, 141.

<sup>74</sup> Bulgakov, 12.

taste is associated with a classic definition of aesthetics. “‘Taste’ itself, used primarily as a metaphor, is taken directly from numerous culinary treatise of the seventeenth century, suggesting an important connection between the art of cooking and the arts of thinking.”<sup>75</sup> Sharik’s discriminating palette is not proscribed; it arises organically from the basic need to survive. It is not surprising that Filip Filippovich lures Sharik to his apartment and gains his fidelity by buying him high quality sausages.

Once inside Filip Filippovich’s apartment, Sharik quickly grows complacent and finds his fidelity to the professor growing. Though confined to the apartment for most of the day, and forced to wear a collar when taken for walks, Sharik learns that there is much benefit to being a “gentleman’s dog,” and is happy to trade a degree of freedom for the advantages of living in a bourgeois paradise: “what is freedom anyway? Nothing but a puff of smoke....”<sup>76</sup> Laursen argues that Sharik “accepts this symbol of servitude in exchange for elevated status and the ability to cross boundaries previously closed to him.”<sup>77</sup> Though shackled, Sharik is granted access to the space of middle-class decadence. Sharik, however, is never fully inscribed in the cult of the West; the dog’s natural instincts disturb the order of Filip Filippovich’s apartment. Chewing apart the taxidermy owl, Sharik shows the borders of the scientist’s control over life and death. After his operation, Sharikov begins to spend more time with Shvonder and the members of the housing committee. This does not, by any means, imply that Sharikov has been inculcated into Soviet ideology. Rather, he enters the system of power so as to manipulate

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<sup>75</sup> Boym, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Bulgakov, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Laursen, 498.

it for his own end. In such a way, Sharikov is able to traverse both Filip Filippovich's and Shvonder's spatial orderings without being obliged to either one of them. Having been granted access to the bourgeois comforts of the professor's apartment, the protagonist now demands Filip Filippovich to provide him with official identification documents. For Filip Filippovich, registering Sharikov means resigning ownership over his experiment and acknowledging Sharikov's existence as a separate entity; even worse, it means relinquishing control of his creation to the hands of the Soviet government. Denying Sharikov his documents would put the Professor's Lockian ethos of free will (part and parcel of his mental framework as a European intellectual) under question before by all the tenants of the apartment building. Sharikov plays on the Professor's need to maintain a semblance of moral superiority. Thus is the protagonist is able to officially assert his being in the world. The documents grant him liberty to move between two ideologically opposed spaces without conscribing to the social rules of either. Sharikov asserts, "I am no bourgeois, no-NEP man."<sup>78</sup>

Not only does Filip Filippovich agree to register Sharikov, but he also begrudgingly allows the protagonist to pick the official name that will appear on his documentation. Sharikov is given the opportunity to create his own persona. As a reflection of his being in the world, Sharikov's full name, "Polygraph Polygraphovich Sharikov," deserves examination. Unlike the name Filip Filippovich, Sharikov's given name connotes meaning rather than genealogy. Although a Western name, its etymological breakup is more striking than its place of origin. "Polygraph" literally means "many writings". The

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<sup>78</sup> Bulgakov, 76.

name not only textually embodies Sharikov being in the world, its multiplicity of meanings speaks to Sharikov's identity, which does not neatly conform to any proscribed doctrine of existence. First, the word polygraph points to the confluence of the various bodies that constitute the person that is the protagonist. Physically, his canine anatomy was partially overwritten with Klim's human parts (and behavioral history). The synthesis of these two bodily narratives produced a third, one that is uniquely Sharikov's.

By adopting "polygraph" as his patronymic, Sharikov creates a name that, in its construction, mimics Filip Filippovich's. Yet, the likeness in name only serves to underscore Sharikov's blatant dismissal of any familial ties between him and his creator. Rather than taking on "Filippovich" as his patronymic, Sharikov doubly asserts that words and not the professor had given him life. Sharikov's name, therefore, implies an entrance into a literary canon that Filip Filippovich had tried to outdo. Unlike the professor, who stereotypically suffers under the anxiety of Western influence, Sharikov chooses a name that volitionally pays tribute to the presence of a literary mythology preceding him. Rather than being indoctrinated into the Western canon, he chooses to take part in it, demonstrating a degree of control that Filip Filippovich never had. It is no surprise that Sharikov insists that Filip Filippovich use his patronymic when addressing him: "be kind enough to call me by both my name and patronymic."<sup>79</sup> The use of both name and patronymic is a Soviet convention bound to annoy the professor. At the same time, it reminds the scientist of the limits of control over his own experiment.

With his newfound freedom to roam, Sharikov becomes evermore difficult to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 95. Here, Sharikov can also be assumed to be satirizing Filip Filippovich's sermon on kindness discussed earlier.



locate. Rather than entering Soviet society as an upright citizen, Sharikov prefers to inhabit the undocumented liminal spaces between Filip Filippovich's private flat and Soviet public places. In these transitional places, neither the Imperial nor Soviet system of power retains any bearing of control. These are "space of fear...usually inhabited by old drunks, local fools, youth gangs, and teenagers in love. Here all sort of unofficial initiations take place."<sup>80</sup>When Sharikov returns to the flat after one of these outings, proclaiming some fragment of socialist ideology, the professor immediately tries to reinstitute control over his creation: "you know I forbade you to hang around the stairways."<sup>81</sup> Filip Filippovich's command should be read as a lament, for it comes post factum. What he actually asserts is that, try as he might, he cannot enforce the movements of the protagonists. Because he cannot know what happens in these marginal spaces, Filip Filippovich mythologizes them in the same manner as do his Soviet counterparts: "The black staircases' inhabited by ghosts of fear...are spaces governed neither by official decorum, nor by the unwritten rules of intimacy...[They] are the spaces on the outskirts of Soviet typography."<sup>82</sup>

For Sharikov, these liminal spaces are those closest to home, for in both his previous lives as Sharik and Klim, the protagonist had lived on the fringes of society. As a stray dog, he had roamed through the places that society did not want see. To ensure that he had food for survival, Sharik rummaged through corners of city streets where he might find the remnants of another person's dinner. These are the places to which the

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<sup>80</sup> Boym, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Bulgakov, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Boym, 141-2.

citizens turned a blind eye for they signified lack of hygiene, the potential for disease and the general lack of order beyond the control of even the strictest spatial despotism. No one could map these places as well as Sharik could. At the same time, his counterpart, Klim, was living in an institution relegated to those unable to be controlled by societal codes. Sequestered from society, Klim died in the most marginal of places, a prison. In these two previously separated bodies, Sharikov had learned to function outside the spatial tyranny that had been endemic of Russian life since Peter the Great.

Using his protagonist, Bulgakov is able to re-present Russian space by defamiliarizing it. In the opening pages of the novel, the reader is made to see Moscow from the liminal perspective of a marginalized creature, a stray dog. It is important that Bulgakov depicts these spaces from a canine perspective. The human reader is much too mired in constructed iterations of space to ever notice these places; however, Sharik's estranging vantage point is free from both Imperial and Soviet spatial despotism.<sup>83</sup> It is in this space where fractured, previously un-representable Russian life can truly be documented in its full discord, suffering and pettiness—a depiction of the everyday that Soviet Realist art would never allow. Boym remarks that “Formalist theorists dreamed of a space created by a montage of perspectives, a truly revolutionary prospect that would open new dimensions of living free from the bourgeois realist illusion of three-dimensionality.”<sup>84</sup> This very “montage of perspectives” defines the basic structure of *Heart of a Dog*. Any objective imposition of spatial order is immediately destroyed

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<sup>83</sup> It is also important to note that once Sharik turns into the partially-human Sharikov, his defamiliarizing narrative disappears from the text.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 131.

using the perspective of Sharik. Furthermore, the novel is narrated through multiple voices, those of Sharik, the omniscient narrator, and Bormethal (in his journals). The confluence of literary genres perform the act of defamiliarization at the level of text, forcing the reader to piece together the story of *Heart of a Dog* through the varying perspectives of the narrators. No single truth of reality holds. Bulgakov constantly leaves the seams of his text open for the reader to sew together. In doing so, the novel loosens the controls over textual space. We are placed in the same position as Sharik, who, upon entering the professor's apartment, attempts to discern the meaning of the gold letters inscribed on Filip Filippovich's door. As we transition between narratives, our expectation of a comfortable, unified, representation of space is constantly undone. Such fragmentation of the text is the only authentic way for Bulgakov to depict the nature of Russian identity.

Bulgakov steers away from a holistic depiction of space both at the level of narrative and of text. The writer is aware that any representation of space that claims its totality speaks of a totalitarian's need to prefabricate experience so as to be able to predict the behavior of the masses. Instead, Bulgakov makes use of the "in between" spaces where control is difficult to exercise. These are places of authentic narrative. As Entrikin points out, "explicit in narrative is the fact that it is from a point of view. Its relative centeredness is what allows it to incorporate elements of both objective and subjective reality without collapsing this basic polarity between the two views."<sup>85</sup> Thus, Bulgakov does not claim to provide any exacting definition of Russian identity. Rather,

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<sup>85</sup> Entrikin, 25-6.

he confronts the read with clutters of objects, at once fragile and ponderous, that are in themselves alienating and consuming. These objects do not embody Russian tradition; instead, they constitute self-perpetuating cycles of nostalgia for tradition, ultimately speaking of its absence. In such a way, the novel estranges readers from what they know themselves to be. *Heart of a Dog* is a novel about dark spaces where the ever-present collision of ideologies, old and new, makes it difficult to paint a neat picture of the Russian people. For Bulgakov, the Russian *dukh* is constituted of this tension, which can be intimated, but never fully expressed.

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