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**MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO'S "MICHEL SINIAGIN":  
A CRITICAL STUDY AND TRANSLATION**

PhD Thesis

Rose France

University of Glasgow: Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures

2001



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Rose France – University of Glasgow: Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures

PhD Thesis

Mikhail Zoshchenko's "Michel Siniagin": A Critical Study and Translation

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a critical study and translation into English of Mikhail Zoshchenko's long story "Michel Siniagin", including a critical analysis of the text of "Michel Siniagin" in relation to other work by the same writer, and a discussion of the specific problems raised by Zoshchenko's work for the English language translator.

The first chapter of the thesis is devoted to language and style in Zoshchenko's work. "Michel Siniagin" and the related cycle of "Sentimental Tales" are viewed in the context of the author's broader stylistic project. The chapter opens with a discussion of *skaz* in Zoshchenko's short stories as a reflection of early Soviet socio-linguistic reality and as an attempt to expand literary narrative beyond the discourse of the educated classes. It goes on to describe the emergence of a parodic semi-educated writer figure in the "Sentimental Tales", whose literary style parodies the democratisation of culture in post-revolutionary Russia and the attempts of those in authority to create a proletarian classical literature or "Red Lev Tolstoi". Some of the specific stylistic features of "Michel Siniagin" are then examined in greater detail.

The second chapter explores some of the more important thematic elements of "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales". It aims to show the thematic continuity of Zoshchenko's work and to emphasise intertextual connections with

contemporary literary developments and topical social and philosophical questions. This chapter also explores the autobiographical element in “Michel Siniagin” and looks at the significance for Zoshchenko of the real life beggar-poet Aleksandr Tiniakov, who served as the inspiration for the anti-hero Siniagin.

The third chapter is devoted to the problems of literary translation. It begins with a defence of practical, critically engaged models of translation theory, arguing that when theory becomes divorced from practice, it tends to stray into abstract and perfectionist discourse and to distort the reality of translation as it actually happens. The chapter summarises recent arguments in favour of free/dynamic versus literal/formal translation strategies. It then examines how the specific nature of Zoshchenko’s work affects the translator’s choice of strategy, comparing the effectivity of some previous translations of Zoshchenko’s short stories. The final part of this chapter looks at the problems posed by the deliberately clumsy prose style of Zoshchenko’s fictional “author” in “Michel Siniagin” and the “Sentimental Tales”, compares my own translation with existing translations. It is argued that interference from foreign cultural associations is more detrimental to the humour and spirit of Zoshchenko’s work than interference from so-called “translationese”.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis explores the impact of self-censorship and censorship on Zoshchenko’s work in general and on “Michel Siniagin” in particular, comparing different versions of the text of “Michel Siniagin” and describing amendments made to the text by Zoshchenko at manuscript stage and by editors at later stages in its history.

The thesis concludes with the full English translation of the text, supplemented with several notes on cultural and historical references and other points of interest.

## Acknowledgements

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**Appendix 1: Russian Text of "Michel Siniagin"**

**Appendix 2: Illustrations from the 1931 Version of "Michel Siniagin"**

## Note on Presentation

All titles of Russian works mentioned in the body of this thesis are provided in English. The first time a work is mentioned, the Russian title is also provided in transliterated form.

All direct quotes from literary works are given in Russian. Quotes from Russian language secondary sources (critical works, biography, reminiscences, letters etc.), if short, are included in the body of the text and translated into English for the sake of readability. Longer quotes of this sort are given in Russian and separated from the body of the text in indented paragraphs.

Titles of Russian newspapers and journals are given in transliterated form (Library of Congress system), in italics (e.g., *Pravda*). The same goes for any Russian words that are used in the text to refer to specific organisations (*Kuznitsa*) or to concepts (e.g., *skaz*, *meshchanstvo*), as opposed to direct quotes from literary sources.

All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

Page numbers given after quotes from "Michel Siniagin" refer to the first published version of the story, "M.P. Siniagin: Vospominaniia o Mishele Siniagine", in *Novyi mir*, 12, 1930, pp. 112-40. A full copy of this version of the Russian text is provided in Appendix 1.

All references to Russian works in the running footnotes and the bibliography are given in transliterated form.

In footnote references, a full bibliographical reference is given the first time a work is mentioned in each chapter. Any further references in the same chapter provide only the author, title and page number.

Although the Library of Congress system of transliteration is used throughout the thesis, in the translation of "Michel Siniagin" I have simplified the spelling of Russian names (i.e. Maria Arkadievna rather than Mariia Arkad'evna).

## Introduction

This thesis is a study of a single text, "Michel Siniagin" ("M. P. Siniagin: Vospominaniia o Mishele Siniagine"), a long story by Mikhail Zoshchenko. It covers two related disciplines - literary criticism and translation studies, and takes the form of a critical study, a translation of the story into English and a commentary on the specific problems raised in translation.

Zoshchenko's international reputation as a writer has languished because his work is considered well-nigh untranslatable. Despite his considerable fame at home, he is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, except to those involved in Slavonic studies. The difficulty of reading Zoshchenko's work in another language is partly to do with the fact that his fictional world is inextricably linked to a specific time and place - the Soviet Union in the 1920s, with its communal flats, workers' newspapers, crowded trams and bathhouses, its housing crisis and bedbugs. It is not only the situations and people he describes that are rooted in this cultural milieu: the very voice in which his stories are told is saturated in the period detail of the early Soviet era, a stylised brew of the words, intonations, slogans and concepts that were common currency during the years of War Communism and the NEP. Zoshchenko's work enters the reader's consciousness as much through the "mind's ear" as through the mind's eye and, inevitably, his work will not have the same impact when read by a foreign audience unable to "tune in" to this voice because they have no experience of life in the Soviet Union. As the writer Sergei Dovlatov argues, Zoshchenko presents the English language translator with apparently insurmountable problems, both as a stylist with his own special language and as a writer whose work reflects a way of life peculiar to the Soviet Union:

Как выразить на английском его гениальные языковые «погрешности»? Как, скажем, перевести эту реплику: «Понимаешь, кого ты обидел? Ты единоутробного дядю обидел!...»

Однако, главное даже не это. Когда американец переводит, например, француза, он имеет дело с реальностью более или менее ему знакомой. А как, например, перевести: «Иванову дали жилплощадь»? Или, скажем: «Петрову удалось достать банку растворимого

кофе». Или, допустим, «Сидоров лишился московской прописки?»<sup>1</sup>

Zoshchenko's reputation as a humorous writer has made his reception abroad doubly problematic. For many years, Zoshchenko was regarded in Russia simply as the author of comic stories. With the passing of time, and the accumulation of a large body of criticism and other secondary literature on Zoshchenko, he has begun to assume the reputation of an increasingly complex and enigmatic writer, whose status as a serious artist is assured, in Russia at least. Nevertheless, he is undeniably a very funny writer and is still regarded by many as a comedian first and foremost. Perhaps because of this reputation, collections of Zoshchenko's work in English translation have tended to concentrate on his most celebrated funny stories, such as "The Bathhouse" ("Bania"), "The Aristocrat" ("Aristokratka") and "Nervous People" ("Nervnye liudi"). Of all Zoshchenko's literary output, these short stories, with their culture-specific, condensed *skaz*, are probably the hardest to translate and the least likely to survive well in translation. It is possible that Zoshchenko has been done a disservice as a writer by the fact that he was initially marketed as a Soviet humourist, with the publishing of anthologies of his comic short stories, such as the collections translated by Elizaveta Fen and published in the 1940s. The concentration on those works that are particularly difficult to translate has probably encouraged a poor view of his writing in the English-speaking world. How badly Zoshchenko's funny stories travel is shown by the comment of a reviewer of a collection of stories translated by Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean, "Nervous People and Other Satires", in the early 1960s: "we cannot admire these works much as works of humour. Compared, say with the humour that has come to us from America in the past 40 years, Zoshchenko's seems thin and foolish".<sup>2</sup>

Translation of humour is fraught with obstacles, especially in the case of work like Zoshchenko's, in which superficial comedy masks considerable philosophical depth. Translations of literary works always distort and alter the original, illuminating certain aspects and obscuring others. The translation of humour entails particular risks, though, because the pragmatic

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<sup>1</sup>S. Dovlatov, "Perevodnye kartinki: v dzhungliakh amerikanskogo izdatel'skogo biznesa", in *Petropol*, 5, 1994, pp. 136-7.

<sup>2</sup>N. Dennis, "Soviet Satirist's Hard Times", in *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 October 1963.

aim of making the reader laugh encourages the translator to sacrifice the formal complexities of the original. Zoshchenko is not best served by translations that treat his humour as situational comedy and try to adapt it for a foreign audience. The formal structure of his writing and the specifically Soviet atmosphere of his stories are too integral to be sacrificed for the sake of the incidental humour of the plots. Stripped of these elements, what remains of his writing can indeed appear crude and unsubstantial - particularly in the case of his famous short stories. Zoshchenko's work can be successfully brought to the foreign reader only if that reader is also willing to go some way to meet him, by trying to understand the specific cultural situation reflected in his work, and by understanding the philosophical preoccupations that characterise his writing as a whole.

There is another problematic aspect of Zoshchenko's work for the English-speaking public, and that is his apparent capitulation to a regime widely regarded in the West as evil. Zoshchenko's political compromise is something of a moot point. Two recent English-language studies, by Linda Scatton and Gregory Carleton, have argued that Zoshchenko's work must be regarded as an organic whole, and that the elements of his work that are puzzling and contradictory should not be discarded simply because they fit inconveniently into the picture of Zoshchenko the persecuted satirist. Linda Scatton has turned her attention to works normally seen as tangential to the central canon of Zoshchenko's work, such as his series of stories about Lenin and his children's stories.<sup>3</sup> Carleton has concentrated on the reception of Zoshchenko's work, arguing that critics on both sides of the political divide have tended to throw out those aspects of Zoshchenko's work that least agree with their own ideology and simply ignore them.<sup>4</sup>

The questions of whether or not Zoshchenko gave in to the censor and of how heavily he censored his own work will be addressed throughout the first two chapters of this thesis, as well as in the fourth chapter, which discusses different versions of the text of "Michel Siniagin". It is certainly true that there are some points of correspondence between Zoshchenko's convictions and the political orthodoxy of the Stalin era. He was particularly disturbed

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<sup>3</sup> L. Scatton, *Mikhail Zoshchenko: Evolution of a Writer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>G. Carleton, *The Politics of Reception: Cultural Constructions of Mikhail Zoshchenko*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

by the question of artistic and moral decadence, and saw his own mental illness as a manifestation of that decadence. He felt guilty about his own class origins and was genuinely troubled by the need to challenge elitism in art and literature. At the same time, there is overwhelming evidence that Zoshchenko was obliged to exaggerate his loyalty to Party ideals in his later work in order to avoid the censor. In particular, there is a dramatic change discernable in his work between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s - a change that corresponds to the tightening of the cultural screws in the early 1930s, when Socialist Realism was prescribed as the single acceptable artistic method in the Soviet Union. Works by Zoshchenko such as "Wisdom" ("Mudrost") or "People" ("Liudi"), dating from the mid-1920s, are much more politically ambiguous than works published in the mid-1930s, such as *The Blue Book*, (*Golubaia kniga*), with its obligatory hymns of praise to the Soviet Union.

My view is that Zoshchenko did indeed "sell out" - and this is an obstacle to his assimilation in the Western canon of Russian classics. Soviet writers who are regarded to have compromised themselves ideologically are generally less attractive to Western readers than writers who wrote "for the desk drawer". Compromise of this nature is also problematic because party politics tend to have an adverse effect on art, making it narrow, specific and less likely to withstand the test of time. One reason why I chose to devote this study to "Michel Siniagin" is because I regard it as one of the last significant works by Zoshchenko that is not seriously tainted by self-censorship. The "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" were written before the need for serious political compromise set in. They are also, because of their more formal, literary character, more translatable than much of Zoshchenko's earlier work. Ideally, the entire cycle of the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" should be published together in translation. Such a collection might go some way towards establishing Zoshchenko's reputation in the West.

Zoshchenko's willingness to compromise was partly due to his desire to see his work read during his lifetime. He needed to publish his work for the sake of both his spiritual and his material wellbeing. Surviving letters from the last years of his life testify to the extreme moral decline, illness and poverty he experienced following the Party decree of 1946, which led to an effective

ban on publishing his work that continued almost up until his death.<sup>5</sup> But another reason for his willingness to submit to censorship was his belief in reaching and influencing a wide readership. He believed sincerely that civilisation, enlightenment and social progress were the only way forward for Russia. In this respect, Zoshchenko is a typical "Westerniser" - a Russian writer more opposed to Slavophile philosophy would be hard to find. In her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam portrayed this didactic impulse on Zoshchenko's part as a sign of his naive belief in progress:

Зощенко, моралист по природе, своими рассказами пытался образумить современников, помочь им стать людьми, а читатели принимали все за юмористику и ржали, как лошади. Зощенко сохранял иллюзии, начисто был лишен цинизма, все время размышлял, чуть наклонив голову набок, и жестоко за все расплатился. Глазом художника он иногда проникал в суть вещей, но осмыслить не мог, потому что свято верил в прогресс и все его красивые следствия. На войне его отравили газами, после войны, псевдо-философским варевом, материалистической настойкой для слабых душ. Где-то мерещилась гимназия с либерализмом и вольничаньем, а на нее наслылось все остальное. Кризис мысли и кризис образования. <sup>6</sup>

There is some truth in Mandelstam's judgement. Zoshchenko certainly regarded it as his duty to try to educate the masses whom he reached through his writing and thus to raise the general level of culture in the new Soviet Union. For instance, in the collection of correspondence published in 1929, *Letters to a Writer (Pis'ma k pisatel'iu)*, Zoshchenko advises an educated young woman dismayed at the crude behaviour of her fellow students at a factory college that if she considers herself above those who surround her, her business is not to complain but to try exert a good influence on them:

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<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, a letter written to Fedin in 1955 published in M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, ed. M. Dolinskii, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991, p.133.

<sup>6</sup>N. Mandel'shtam, *Vtoraia kniga*, Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990, p. 294.

"Even if you can make two or three people interested in literature or persuade them that cursing simply demeans them, it will be an achievement".<sup>7</sup> Yet he was not so naive and free of cynicism as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam argues, and his belief in progress was not so straightforward as she assumes. In his own writing, Zoshchenko repeatedly expressed the morbid conviction that human beings would never really change. His more optimistic pronouncements about progress are counterbalanced by the persistent depiction of atavistic human behaviour throughout his writing. The tension between these two positions - the one of naive optimism and the second of realistic pessimism - runs throughout Zoshchenko's work, giving it an ambiguous, "dialogic" character. Taken against the background of his work as a whole, the author's didactic impulse could be better explained as an attempt to salvage something positive from his harsh view of life.

Zoshchenko's susceptibility to what Nadezhda Mandel'shtam calls the "materialist concoction for feeble souls" - that is, the obsession with mental health and psychoanalysis expressed in his later work - is an aspect of Zoshchenko's writing that makes him an object of particular interest to the Western reader, because it reflects wider developments in early 20th-century thought that remain influential to this day. Zoshchenko's interest in psychoanalysis was a response to a "crisis of thought" - or rather, a crisis of faith - that is apparent even in his earliest works. The same crisis that eventually led Zoshchenko to write *Before Sunrise* - in which he attempted to find a cure for his neurasthenia by examining his memories and dreams - was also the catalyst behind "The Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin". In these works, Zoshchenko depicts a world in which the absence of faith extends beyond atheism to embrace a state of being in which the religious, spiritual, aesthetic or sentimental impulse is lacking altogether. The author's fictional world is without a "third dimension", as the critic Benedikt Sarnov puts it.<sup>8</sup> Zoshchenko's insistence on portraying a view of life in which nothing exists outside the physical realm, and the harsh and ugly terms he depicted it in, show that he was acutely aware of the tragedy of loss of faith. In this respect, Zoshchenko's artistic method is comparable to that of the

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<sup>7</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Pis'ma k pisatelii*, in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane, parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, p. 413.

<sup>8</sup>B. Sarnov, *Prishestviia kapitana Lebiadkina: sluchai Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Pik Rik Kul'tura, 1993.

German artist George Grosz, a contemporary of whom he wrote approvingly in 1937, arguing that his primitive "infantilism" was appropriate to the age in which he belonged.<sup>9</sup> Like Grosz, Zoshchenko relentlessly portrays ugliness as if to highlight its distance from an ideal about which he remains silent. The following judgement on Grosz's art by one of his acquaintances is strikingly appropriate to Zoshchenko's own work:

In its exclusive cult of the ugliness of the German philistine his whole art is, as it were, only the counterpart of some secret ideal of beauty that Grosz hides within himself, as it were, conceals out of shame. He draws and shows and persecutes with fanatical hatred the opposite of which he carries inside himself and conceals like a shrine from all eyes. His whole art is a war of annihilation against the opposite of his constantly hidden ideal, his secret "lady love". Instead of singing her praises like a minstrel, every day he fights like a possessed knight against her adversaries with merciless rage. A quite remarkable and singular case: the idealist with the polar opposites reversed.<sup>10</sup>

The aspects of Zoshchenko's work touched on here make him a fascinating subject for the critic and biographer. "Michel Siniagin" may be regarded by some as rather unrepresentative of Zoshchenko's writing, but in fact it shows a great deal of artistic and philosophical continuity with his earliest and latest work. Chapters one and two of this thesis are an attempt to contextualise "Michel Siniagin" in relation to the specific milieu in which it was written and to the rest of Zoshchenko's literary output. These chapters will act as a supplement to the translation, providing background knowledge necessary for a full appreciation of the text. They will also feed into the third chapter, by highlighting stylistic aspects of the text and intertextual references that have a direct impact on the translation.

The third chapter of the thesis is devoted to the practical problems of translating "Michel Siniagin" and to a discussion of previous translations of

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<sup>9</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O stikhakh N. Zabolotskogo" (1937), in "Literatura dolzhna byt' narodnoi", ed. Iu. Tomashevskii, in *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 9, 1984, p.106.

<sup>10</sup>H. Kassler, diary note from 7 July 1922, quoted in R. Jentsch, *George Grosz: The Berlin Years*, Milan: Electa, 1997, p. 104.

Zoshchenko's work. It will begin with a short overview of translation studies and a defence of my chosen approach - which can be described as a combination of the "critical" and "practical" models of translation theory. I start from the assumption that a literary translation springs from an individual reading of a text and is thus by its very nature a subjective and critical enterprise. I will discuss what I regard as the best way to translate Zoshchenko's work - and "Michel Siniagin" in particular - by drawing on my own reading of the author as outlined in chapters one and two, and assessing existing English translations of Zoshchenko's stories.

Although it is focussed on the specific task in hand, this chapter is also, in a small way, an attempt to engage with the wider field of translation studies and translation theory. I believe that the practical model of translation studies, which concentrates on a specific task and describes translation as it actually happens, is valuable as a counterbalance to some of the more extreme claims of recent theory. Whatever the translator's feelings about language or translation in the abstract, the actual process of translating forces him or her to focus on the primary activity of finding equivalents and to take on board all the practical limitations that are imposed by the immediate context. The practical approach to translation discourages the type of perfectionist or circular discourse characteristic of some theory, and emphasises the more creative and intuitive aspects of literary translation as it actually happens.

Chapter four discusses textual differences between the manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin" and subsequent published versions. The question of textual integrity is of some importance as regards Zoshchenko's work, given that many of his stories were extensively revised either by the author himself or by his editors. Manuscript evidence is used in this chapter to argue that the first published version of "Michel Siniagin" is the least artistically and politically compromised variant of the story and thus the preferred text for use in translation. Corrections made by author before publication offer some insight into Zoshchenko's creative process and his use of self-censorship. Corrections made to the text in subsequent versions show how Zoshchenko's work was subject to editorial interference.

The thesis ends with a full English translation of *Michel Siniagin* , supplemented with notes on specific textual, literary and historical points of

interest. A facsimile copy of the first published Russian version of the text is included at Appendix 1.

## Chapter 1: Stylistic Aspects of Zoshchenko's Work and "Michel Siniagin"

### Introduction

"Michel Siniagin" is closely related to Zoshchenko's cycle of long stories, the "Sentimental Tales" ("Sentimental'nye povesti"). These were written between 1923 and 1930, and were first published together in an incomplete collection in 1927, under the title *What the Nightingale Sang About* (*O chem pel solovei*).<sup>1</sup> Written a little after the last of the "Sentimental Tales", in 1930, "Michel Siniagin" was published separately, first in the journal *Novyi mir* and then in the form of a book illustrated with photographs. Despite its declared status as a spoof biography rather than fiction, "Michel Siniagin" is similar enough to the "Sentimental Tales" in style and plot to be regarded as a later addition to the cycle.

Stylistically, the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" marked a departure from the shorter comic stories and sketches that had made Zoshchenko a household name in the 1920s. The tales were greeted enthusiastically by Zoshchenko's fellow writers: Valentin Kaverin described "Wisdom" as "a wonderful story, incredibly subtle stylistically".<sup>2</sup> Maksim Gor'kii wrote to Mikhail Slonimskii that the story "A Terrible Night" encouraged him to expect great things from Zoshchenko in future: "...There is more irony in his humour than there is humour. He promises to become a master".<sup>3</sup> Kornei Chukovskii recalls "[Zoshchenko is very concerned] about the fate of his "Nightingale" and was overjoyed when I told him that I look on these stories as poetry, that despite their masterly blend of styles I sense a lofty biblical lyricism in this book".<sup>4</sup> The emigre critic P. Bitsilli wrote a glowing review of "Wisdom", comparing it to the work of Gogol'; another emigre

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<sup>1</sup>In its complete form the cycle includes the following stories: "The Goat" ("Koza") (1923), "Apollon and Tamara" ("Apollon i Tamara") (1923), "Wisdom" ("Mudrost'") (1924), "People" ("Liudi") (1924), "A Terrible Night" ("Strashnaia noch") (1925), "What the Nightingale Sang About" ("O chem pel solovei") (1925), "A Funny Adventure" ("Veseloie prikliuchenie") (1928) and "The Lilac is in Flower" (Siren' tsvetet) (1930).

<sup>2</sup>V. Kaverin, letter to L. Lunts, 1923, quoted in part in M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, ed. Mikhail Dolinskii, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>M. Gor'kii, letter to M. Slonimskii, March 1925, quoted in part in M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 409.

critic, G. Adamovich, regarded the "Sentimental Tales" as Zoshchenko's best works.<sup>5</sup> However, the Tales were not universally admired. They prompted hostile reviews from critics M. Ol'shevets and V. Veshnev, the main thrust of which was to attack Zoshchenko as a writer without a positive ideological stance.<sup>6</sup> The writer Marietta Shaginian compared the Tales unfavourably to Zoshchenko's short stories, comparing his style in the longer works to baked pie as opposed to fertile grain.<sup>7</sup> Readers who had become used to Zoshchenko's comic sketches were also puzzled by the tales: Zoshchenko complained to Chukovskii that his readers had not understood them.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their stylistic differences, both Zoshchenko's short stories and his "Sentimental Tales" can be viewed as a part of a broader literary project or "mission" by the author - the creation of a distinctive literary narrative voice. While he rose to popularity through his reputation as a humourist, Zoshchenko saw himself as a stylistic innovator, as the remarks of his contemporaries suggest. The writer's wife, Vera Zoshchenko, recorded a telling remark by the writer in a diary entry of 1923: "He says that all this time he has done a huge amount of work that has gone unnoticed by others, he has created a completely new and incredibly compressed, succinct language".<sup>9</sup> Fedin was to write of Zoshchenko that he was "one of the few Soviet writers who are trying to write in such a way that books might be written on 'so-and-so's literary contribution'".<sup>10</sup> Zoshchenko's own published statements (for instance, the 1929 article "About Myself, Critics and My Work" ("O sebe, o kritikakh i o svoei rabote")) and the commentary to *Letters to a Writer (Pis'ma k pisateliiu)*, published the same year, stress his contributory role to the development of the Russian literary language and reveal a strong desire for recognition on this score. In fact, by 1929 such recognition had already arrived in the form of a collection of critical articles

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<sup>5</sup> Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), "Neizvestnyi sovetskii grazhdanin, kotorogo zvali Zoshchenko", in *Druzhba narodov*, 8, 1993, pp. 200-16.

<sup>6</sup> M. Ol'shevets, "Obyvatel'skii nabat" (1927) and V. Veshnev, "Razgovor po dusham" (1928) in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Olimp, 1994, pp. 148-152.

<sup>7</sup> M. Shaginian, letter to Zoshchenko, 4 April 1928, in T. M. Vakhitova (ed.), "Ochen', ochen' liubliu, s godami vse bol'she i nezhnee": Pis'ma M. S. Shaginian k M. Zoshchenko, 1925-1958", in N.A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., p. 422.

<sup>9</sup> G. B. Filippov, "Lichnost' Zoshchenko po vospominaniiam ego zheny", in N. A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> K. Fedin, "Mikhail Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, St Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1995, p.113.

on Zoshchenko's work in the series "Masters of Contemporary Literature" ("Mastera sovremennoi literatury"), for which the article "About Myself, My Critics and My Work" was written. The book featured articles by, among others, the leading formalist critics V. Shklovskii and V. Vinogradov. Since then, Zoshchenko has attracted constant attention as a stylist. Other important commentaries on Zoshchenko's style by Russian critics include works by Tsezar' Volpe, M. Chudakova, Iu. Tomashevskii and B.Sarnov and, among emigre writers, I. R. Titunik, Mikhail Kreps, A. Zholkovskii and Iu. Shcheglov. Recent English language studies on Zoshchenko by Linda Scatton, Cathy Popkin and Gregory Carleton have also given prominence to stylistic aspects of the writer's work.

What makes Zoshchenko's stylistic innovation so interesting for the translator is that it is intimately bound up with the specific cultural, social and literary climate of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. This chapter will describe the development of a distinctive narrative voice in Zoshchenko's short stories and examine the relationship between that voice and the cultural climate surrounding the author. It will continue with a discussion of the style in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" which elaborates on and contrasts with the familiar narrative voice of the short stories, taking Zoshchenko's literary project in a new direction.

### Part 1: *Skaz* in Russian Literary Criticism

The style of the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" can be understood better when it is compared and contrasted with the style of the short stories generally considered more representative of the author's work. In describing the style of Zoshchenko's short stories, critics have often referred to a type of narrative known as *skaz*. *Skaz* first appeared as a stylistic concept just before Zoshchenko began his career as a writer, and became so strongly identified with him that the subject of *skaz* in Zoshchenko's work was suffering from critical overkill as early as 1928. In an article of that year Shklovskii wrote: "There are now two ways to write about this author: Either you write "The Problem of *Skaz*" and then say that *skaz* is an illusion of live speech. Analyse *skaz*. Or you write: "M. Zoshchenko and the Problem of Class Consciousness" and begin correcting his ideology".<sup>11</sup>

*Skaz* is a rather problematic concept, as it has not always been used consistently. While some have used the term loosely to mean any sort of first-person narrative by an

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<sup>11</sup>V. Shklovskii, "O Zoshchenke i bol'shoi literature", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, Leningrad: Priboi, 1928, p. 17.

unreliable narrator, others have approached *skaz* as a problem in its own right, formulating elaborate definitions based on stylistic or other criteria.<sup>12</sup> As a result there are now numerous definitions of *skaz* in existence, many of which contradict one another.

The debate on *skaz* has been shaped chiefly by the Russian formalist critics and by Mikhail Bakhtin. The formalists - who can be credited with introducing the concept of *skaz* to the terminology of Russian literary criticism - were primarily interested in *skaz* as a literary imitation of live, oral storytelling. Eikhenbaum defined *skaz* in 1925 as "that form of narrative prose which in its vocabulary, syntax and choice of intonation reveals an orientation towards the oral speech of a narrator".<sup>13</sup> As the formalists saw it, one of the principal functions of *skaz* was to draw the reader's attention away from the events or objects depicted to the act of storytelling itself. Eikhenbaum writes that *skaz* "foregrounds those elements of the language that generally fade into the background in descriptive or story-based genres".<sup>14</sup> Such, for instance, is Gogol's particular brand of comic narrative, in which "mimicry and articulation" play an important role, a type of narrative "behind which an actor is hiding, so that *skaz* assumes the character of play-acting".<sup>15</sup> Tynianov maintains that *skaz* makes the word "physically perceptible": "the whole story becomes a monologue, addressed to every reader, and the reader appears to enter the story, to begin to intonate, to gesticulate, to smile, he does not read, but acts the story".<sup>16</sup> The formalists stressed too the improvisatory nature of *skaz*, "the sense [in written narrative] that the narrator is not in control and that the work is being created "in process" and without revisions".<sup>17</sup> Vinogradov's definition of *skaz* emphasises this sense of immediacy. "*Skaz*," writes Vinogradov, "is a particular type of literary orientation towards an oral monologue of the narrative type, an artistic imitation of monologic speech which contains a narrative story and appears to be constructed as it is performed".<sup>18</sup> This links *skaz* nicely to the

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<sup>12</sup>One such attempt is the basis of a study by I.R. Titunik, "The Problem of *Skaz* in Russian Literature" (doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1963).

<sup>13</sup>B. Eikhenbaum, "Leskov i sovremennaia proza" (1925), in *Literatura, teoriia, kritika, polemika*, 2nd edn., Chicago: Russian Language Specialties, 1969, p. 214.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p. 219.

<sup>15</sup>B. Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana shinel' Gogolia" (1919), in *Skvoz' literaturu: voprosy poetiki*, 2nd edn., The Hague: Mouton, 1962, pp 171-95.

<sup>16</sup>Iu. Tynianov, "Literaturnoe segodnia" (1924), in *Poetika, istoriia, literatura, kino*, Moscow: Nauka, 1977, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup>C. Emerson and G. S. Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 153.

<sup>18</sup>V. Vinogradov, "Problema "skaza" v stilistike" (1925), in *Poetika 1-5*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970, p.33.

formalist approach to literary criticism, which laid much store on how literary works were "made".

*Skaz* also interested the formalists as a means of reviving the literary canon. It thus served as an illustration of their view of literary history, according to which canonised literary forms, when they are felt to be no longer viable, are succeeded by new forms.<sup>19</sup>

Eikhenbaum evidently sees the fashion for *skaz* among contemporary writers such as the Serapion Brothers (the group with which Zoshchenko was affiliated) as a reaction against the 19th-century novel, which he sees as a "bookish genre". "The novel", writes Eikhenbaum "is a mixed genre, the product of written culture. Novels are written, not "overheard", and written specifically to be read. The living word of the storyteller drowns in this huge mass - his voice is lost".<sup>20</sup> Vinogradov expresses a similar view when he writes that *skaz* allows authors to introduce uncanonised, extra-literary forms into the literary language: "When the dead words of canonised literary prose begin to "smell bad" like "bees in an empty hive" - then writers can begin to create new worlds with the help of alien verbal material".<sup>21</sup>

The most significant aspect of *skaz* discussed by the formalists from the point of view of subsequent definitions is its function in introducing foreign "verbal consciousnesses" into the work. In "Leskov and Contemporary Prose", Eikhenbaum writes that "dialogue may be seen as a step in the direction of *skaz* if it is constructed not on the basis of narrative action but on the basis of the speech characteristics of a given character".<sup>22</sup> Leskov's work, Eikhenbaum points out, reveals his fondness for this sort of "linguistic naturalism". Leskov stresses the importance of correctly rendering the voice of different characters: "my priests speak like priests and my peasants like peasants. They speak in their own way, not in a literary manner".<sup>23</sup> As an extension of naturalistic character speech *skaz* affects not only the language in which a story is told, but also the perspective from which the world is portrayed. *Skaz* may be a method of characterisation, whereby the reader perceives two things simultaneously: the story as the teller wants it to be heard and the teller as he is characterised by his own descriptive manner. Shklovskii writes: "*Skaz*

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<sup>19</sup>V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine*, The Hague: Mouton, 1955, pp. 70-1.

<sup>20</sup>B. Eikhenbaum, "Illuziia skaza" (1919), in *Skvoz' literaturu: voprosy poetiki*, p. 153.

<sup>21</sup>V. Vinogradov, "Problema "skaza" v stilistike", in *Poetika 1-5*, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup>B. Eikhenbaum, "Leskov i sovremennaia proza", in *Literatura, teoriia, kritika, polemika*, 2nd edn., p. 215.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. pp.215-6.

makes an artistic work more complex. It results in two planes 1) what somebody is saying and 2) what appears to slip out accidentally in his story".<sup>24</sup>

It is this rhetorical aspect of *skaz* that was to become the central focus for Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the subject. For Bakhtin *skaz* is a means of introducing an alien voice ("*chuzhoi golos*") into the narrative - one that cannot be fully identified with the voice of the author. Bakhtin makes a distinction between "author's discourse", which represents the ultimate authority within the work and which is focussed on its referential object, and types of "double-voiced" discourse (such as *skaz*, parody and stylisation) which reveal an orientation towards the voice of a character distinct from the author. In double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin argues, the narrative becomes the object of the author's portrayal: the narrative voice becomes depicted or made into an object. The narrative becomes more than a means for the author's expression, it becomes an object of the author's scrutiny, imitating the speech of a type or an individual who is the creation of the author and does not represent the ultimate authority within the work.

Bakhtin defines as *skaz* any type of "double-voiced" narrative where the narrator does not possess a literary style but simply an "individually or socially distinct manner of narration". In the majority of cases, he argues, *skaz* is used in order to introduce a *socially different* voice and hence a socially different perspective: "it seems to us that in the majority of cases, *skaz* is introduced for the sake of a foreign voice, a socially distinct voice that brings with it points of view and values that the author needs".<sup>25</sup>

Unlike the formalists, Bakhtin considers that the significant aspect of *skaz* is the identity - particularly the social identity - of the narrative voice, rather than the reflection of a particular storytelling manner. However, the two are linked. Bakhtin argues that the storyteller is generally a "man of the people" and brings with him oral speech.<sup>26</sup> When introducing an "unliterary narrator", an author is likely to endow him with an informal, apparently spontaneous, oral storytelling manner.

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<sup>24</sup>V. Shklovskii, "O Zoshchenke i bol'shoi literature", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 2nd edn., Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963. p. 256.

<sup>26</sup> Or, to be more precise, speech that is "oral by association", i.e., composed of "features associated with conversation, colloquial speech or speech outside the codification of the standard language". (I. R. Titunik, "Mikhail Zoshchenko and the Problem of "Skaz", *California Slavic Review*, 6, 1971, p.94.)

## Part 2: *Skaz* in Zoshchenko's Short Stories and the "Zoshchenko Type"

The narrative style in Zoshchenko's short stories serves as a good illustration for both the formalist and the Bakhtinian concepts of *skaz*. The stories are "oral" in presentation, creating the impression of rawness and spontaneity normally associated with live, spoken narrative. Secondly, they are told in a narrative voice that cannot be identified with the author's own: but is mimicked or portrayed as the speech of a particular type. Unlike Leskov, Zoshchenko does not use a series of individual narrators, each with their own narrative manner. His short stories all employ a similar narrative voice. Moreover, the speech of the narrator in Zoshchenko's short stories is, as a rule, barely distinguishable from the speech of characters, hence the generally accepted notion of a Zoshchenko "type".

The following is an extract from a fairly representative short story by Zoshchenko, "No Offence Meant" ("Dushevnaia prostota"), written in 1927:

Может, помните - негры к нам приезжали? В прошлом году.

Негритянская негрооперетта.

Так эти негры очень даже довольны остались нашим гостеприимством. Очень хвалили нашу культуру и вообще все начинания.

Единственно были недовольны уличным движением.

-Прямо, говорят, ходить трудно: пихаются и на ноги наступают.

Но, конечно, эти сами негры избалованы европейской цивилизацией, и им действительно, как бы сказать, с непривычки. А поживут год-два, обтешутся и сами будут шлепать по ногам. Факт.

А на ноги у нас действительно наступают. Ничего не скажешь. Есть грех.

Но только это происходит, пущай негры знают, по простоте душевной. Тут я вам скажу, злого умысла нету. Наступил и пошел дальше. Только и делов.

Вот давеча я сам наступил на ногу одному гражданину. Идет, представьте себе, гражданин по улице. Плечистый такой, здоровый парень.

Идет и идет. А я сзади его иду. А он впереди идет. Всего один шаг от меня.

И так мы, знаете, мило идем. Аккуратно. Друг другу на ногу не наступаем. Руками не швыряемся. Он идет. И я иду. И прямо, можно сказать, не трогаем друг друга. Одним словом, душа в душу идем. Сердце радуется.

Я еще подумал:

- Славно идет прохожий. Ровно. Не лягается. Другой бы под ногами путался, а этот спокойно ноги кладет.<sup>27</sup>

If analysed in the manner of formalist criticism, this passage can be found to contain a number of features that are generally identified with oral rather than written narrative. An illusion of intimacy and a sense of close identification between the narrator and his audience is immediately established in this story: in the first sentence the narrator makes a direct appeal to the audience ("может, помните"), and refers to recent events ("в прошлом году"). The sense of communality is reinforced by the first person plural - ("нашим гостеприимством", "нашу культуру"). The use of the first person plural in Russian to denote the native as opposed to the foreign is much more common than it is in English. The cadences of the text mimic spontaneous, impromptu storytelling: it is constructed like a well-told anecdote, built up piece by piece using short, simple sentences. There are several parenthetical remarks, whereby the narrator appears either to establish a rapport with the audience or to "fill in", as if speaking live: ("конечно", "действительно", "как бы сказать", "я вам скажу"). Repetition plays a particularly important role, exaggerated for comic effect, encouraging the kind of performative reading Tynianov describes as typical of *skaz*: "Идет и идет. А я сзади его иду. А он впереди идет." It will also be noted that character speech is rendered in speech identical to the narrator's own, even though it represents the speech of foreigners ("Прямо, говорят, ходить трудно: пихаются и на ноги наступают").

All these features - comradely, informal tone, foregrounding of the narrative participants and narrative situation, simple syntax, repetitive structure and the narrator's invasion of character speech - are typical of Zoshchenko's narrative style in the short stories. The impression of spontaneity in the stories is often enhanced by the narrator's use of imprecise detail or vague generalisation:

Нет, я никогда не был любитель работать в канцелярии! Мне всегда хочется найти более чего-нибудь грандиозное: какой-нибудь там простор полей, какие-нибудь леса, белки, звери,

<sup>27</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Dushevnaia prostota", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, ed. Iu. Tomashevskii, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986. vol. 1, pp. 392-3.

какой-нибудь там закат солнца. Хотелось ездить на велосипедах, на верблюдах, хотелось говорить разные слова, строить здания, сараи, железнодорожные пути, и так далее, и тому подобное.<sup>28</sup>

The unliterary impression created by the expository style of Zoshchenko's narrator is reinforced by his use of language. The language employed in the extract from "No Offence Meant" abounds in slangy, informal expressions ("им с непривычки", "шлепать", "есть грех", "давеча"), non-standard grammatical forms ("пущай", "только и делов"), and other solecisms: tautology ("негритянская негрооперетта") and misused expressions (a typically Zoshchenkovian feature being the misuse of the phrase "уличное движение" - here used to mean the behaviour of pedestrians). Notably, the narrator's language does not have a "folk" flavour, but is relatively urban and contemporary, including terms that have entered into general currency after the revolution, such as "начинания" (in the sense of social initiatives or ventures) and "гражданин" ("citizen" - widespread at the time as a term of address).

All these linguistic details must be grasped by a potential translator, but to analyse the story as a series of linguistical building blocks is to miss the main point. What leaps out at the reader from the story "No Offence Meant" is that the narrative reflects a particular type of speaker who, for better or worse, assumes a common bond with his audience. Zoshchenko's *skaz* can be grasped if it is understood in the Bakhtinian sense as the reflection of a distinctive voice. In Zoshchenko's case, this voice is not that of an individualised narrator but a more generic type whose speech reflects Soviet socio-linguistic reality. As Chukovskii notes, Zoshchenko's language was "taken by the author directly from life, from the life that surrounded us at the time that he wrote. It is not a Leskovian mosaic of antique, rare, curious and elaborate words, it is live, fresh, genuine language such as was beginning to be heard at that time in bars, in trams, in queues, in stations, in bathhouses".<sup>29</sup> In an account of how he worked, Zoshchenko described how he used notebooks in which he recorded phrases or words overheard on the street. "Almost every evening I write down a few words or a phrase or two in my notebooks...the entire "catch" for the day goes into my notebook...It might be some slang words or words I hear workers using in conversations."<sup>30</sup> He also claimed to gather

<sup>28</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Ispytanie geroev", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol.2, p. 223.

<sup>29</sup>К. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Kak ia rabotaiu", in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, pp. 555, 589.

material from other, written sources: "the letters of worker correspondents, official documents, newspaper articles."<sup>31</sup>

There was rich material for the satirist to be culled from the socio-linguistic situation in the Soviet Union in the years after the Revolution. The Russian language was in a state of flux brought about by social developments. Vocabulary, discourse patterns and speech etiquette were rapidly changing in step with the new society. Social and cultural change led to the introduction and rapid dissemination of new vocabulary relating to political, administrative, industrial and military activity - including many foreign borrowings. A process of linguistic blending and democratisation took place, due to the general social flux following the war years. V. Von Wiren describes this as a dual process - a combination of change from the "top down" and from the "bottom up". The speech of many people became more sophisticated than hitherto due to the spread of literacy and education and the rise of people from the working classes to positions of influence and authority. At the same time the politically motivated drive towards populism and "plain speaking" among the educated classes meant that speech that had been previously considered colloquial and officially unacceptable became common in the language of political speeches and in the press.<sup>32</sup>

Zoshchenko's narrative style in the short stories is a deliberate stylisation of certain aspects of the new Soviet language. It reflects the changes that took place from the "top down", capturing a moment when the newly empowered masses were beginning to acquire a new, sophisticated discourse imposed upon them from without by the press, at political meetings and in workers' newspapers. In the mouths of Zoshchenko's speakers, this ostensibly prestigious language is persistently debased. The most celebrated example of garbled language in Zoshchenko's work is the story "Monkey Language" ("Obez'ianii iazyk"). In this story the narrator records a conversation overheard at a political meeting in which the two speakers carry on a meaningless conversation using the discourse of Soviet politics:

- Вот вы, товарищ, небось не одобряете эти пленарные заседания. . . А мне как-то они ближе. Все как-то, знаете ли, выходит в них минимально по существу дня. . . Хотя я, прямо

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<sup>31</sup>Iu. Annenkov, *Dnevnik moikh vstrech, - tsikl tragedii*, v. 1, New York: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1966, pp. 311-2.

<sup>32</sup>See V. Von Wiren Garczynski, "The Russian Language in the Immediate Post-Revolutionary Period (1919-1928) and its Literary Stylization in the Fiction of Mikhail Zoshchenko" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New York, 1965).

скажу, последнее время отношусь довольно перманентно к этим собраниям. Так, знаете ли, индустрия из пустого в порожнее.

- Не всегда это - возразил первый. - Если, конечно, посмотреть с точки зрения. Вступить, так сказать, на точки зрения и отседа, с точки зрения, то - да, индустрия конкретно.

- Конкретно фактически, - строго поправил второй.<sup>33</sup>

Sarnov has argued that the image of "monkey language" can be extended to encompass the manner in which all the various narrators and characters speak in Zoshchenko's short stories. While his characters may be inventive and witty in their makeshift use of the language, they appear absolutely deaf to the spirit and the history of the language.<sup>34</sup> They mix sophisticated turns of phrase with slang, or garble and misuse them. Their speech abounds in misused words and expressions, both of foreign and Russian origin: A man refers to his neighbour's dog as a "poodle-type model" ("Собачонка системы пудель")<sup>35</sup>. A woman noticing that her husband looks ill says to him that he has an "unhealthy Bordeaux colour" ("Что-то, говорит, ты, Ваня, сегодня с лица будто такой серый. Нездоровый, говорит, такой у тебя цвет бордо").<sup>36</sup> A man defending his right to buy vodka from his neighbour, describes himself as a "free philistine" ("свободный обыватель").<sup>37</sup> The narrator of one story recounts how his boss lost "the meaning of life" due to the stink coming from a barrel of rotten cabbage ("заведующий наш. . . от этого духа прямо смысл жизни потерял").<sup>38</sup> Outraged passengers on a train, suspecting a man of exploiting an employee, exclaim "it's a downright violation of the criminal labour code" ("это форменное нарушение уголовного кодекса труда").<sup>39</sup>

In their inept use of the new language Zoshchenko's narrators and characters subvert the very discourse meant to represent and empower them. As C. Popkin writes of Zoshchenko's narrator:

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<sup>33</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Obez'ianii iazyk", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 264.

<sup>34</sup>В. Sarnov, "Razvivaia traditsii Prokrusta: Mikhail Zoshchenko i ego redaktory", in *Voprosy literatury*, 2, 1994, pp. 58-9.

<sup>35</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Chestnyi grazhdanin", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 161. (My italics here and below.)

<sup>36</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Chetyre dnia", *Ibid*, p. 333.

<sup>37</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Chestnyi grazhdanin", *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>38</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Bochka", *Ibid*, p. 338.

<sup>39</sup>М. Zoshchenko, "Grimasy NEPa", *Ibid*, p. 401.

...this illiterate, uncultured narrative voice, with its abominable grammar and absurd logic continues in a fairly direct way Zoshchenko's project of trivialization of what was held in official esteem. The damage dealt to the authoritative word - the slogans, the proclamations, the neologisms, the state's new vocabulary and chief propoganda tool, by this inarticulate narrator was immense.<sup>40</sup>

More importantly, though, Zoshchenko shows the potential of the new language to be put to corrupt use, satirizing the roots of the doublespeak that was to dominate Soviet society for almost a whole century. His speakers are capable of exploiting the ideological discourse of the Party to justify aggressive, mean or irresponsible behaviour. The story "The Honest Citizen" ("Chestnyi grazhdanin") takes the form of a written denunciation by a semi-literate Party member who declares that he is "on the platform" (of Socialism) and who condemns his neighbour as a "socially harmful element" ("вредная гражданка") for refusing to give him any of her bootleg vodka. The narrator of "The Aristocrat" ("Aristokratka"), recounting how his lady friend showed him up at the theatre by eating more cream cakes than he could afford to pay for, declares that in the theatre "she deployed her ideology to its full extent" ("В театре она и развернула свою идеологию во всем объеме").<sup>41</sup> In "A Petty Incident" ("Melkii sluchai") a man having a fight with a cloakroom attendant at the theatre because he cannot afford to pay twenty kopecks retorts, "Don't undermine my authority in the eyes of the bourgeoisie" ("не подрывай авторитета в глазах буржуазии").<sup>42</sup>

The Zoshchenko "type" in the short stories has not only a distinct manner of speaking, but a characteristic view of the world. The mentality of Zoshchenko's narrators and characters, like their speech, is remarkable for its uniformity. Thus Zoshchenko's *skaz* fulfils the rhetorical function stressed by Bakhtin of introducing not only an alien voice into the narrative but also an ideological perspective distinct from the author's own.

Much of what is characteristic of the Zoshchenko type as a fictional persona once again arises from the specific culture in which the stories were written. The Zoshchenko "type" is an exclusively Soviet type, an inhabitant of crowded communal flats and a frequenter of public bathhouses, preoccupied with the many drawbacks and discomforts of early Soviet life (bureaucracy, the housing crisis, rudeness from officials and neighbours, poor living

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<sup>40</sup>C. Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol'*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Aristokratka", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 170.

<sup>42</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Melkii sluchai", *Ibid.* p. 372.

standards, etc.) and with the various political initiatives of the day (the campaign against illiteracy, the five-year plans, etc.). Zoshchenko had a reputation as a talented writer of satirical sketches on everyday themes. His ability to sympathise with everyday cares and problems and to give a voice to those suffering because of them endeared him to many readers.

The typical traits of the Zoshchenko "type", however, are not confined to these shared external circumstances but are also seen in certain attitudes and expectations common to almost all his characters and narrators. The type is characterised not only by poverty, bad living conditions and miserable lives, but by a narrow view of the world, a tendency to interpret everything in material terms and a lack of either material, cultural or spiritual aspiration. "The life and morality of bedbugs" ("клопинный быт, клопинная мораль"), in Chukovskii's words,<sup>43</sup> "incredible inner and material poverty" ("неимоверная внутренняя и материальная бедность") according to V. Khodasevich.<sup>44</sup> The story "Happiness" (Schast'e") provides a good example of the Zoshchenko type. The hero of the story is a glazier who describes the one stroke of good fortune ever to have come his way: one day he happened to be sitting in a cafe when the window was broken and he received a well-paid commission on the spot which allowed him to drink for days on end. Apart from this one stroke of good fortune the hero considers the rest of his life - his wedding, the birth of his child and the death of his wife and child as "quiet and uneventful" and hardly worthy of comment:

Не заметил я, как и женился, и как на свадьбе с жениными  
родственниками подрался, и как жена после того дитя родила. И  
как жена в свое время скончилась. И как дитя тоже скончилось.  
Все шло тихо и гладко.<sup>45</sup>

Zoshchenko makes liberal use of the attitude displayed by the hero of "Happiness", building up a picture of existence where hardship and misfortune are considered normal. An attitude of resignation is common among Zoshchenko's narrators and characters.

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<sup>43</sup> K. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> V. Khodasevich, "Uvazhaemye grazhdane", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Schast'e", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 213.

They expect the worst, glossing over tragedy and misfortune or accepting it as the norm. As the narrator of "Cat and People" ("Koshka i liudi") remarks: "A man is not a flea: he can get used to anything" ("Человек не блоха - ко всему может привыкнуть") - in this case, talking about a stove that regularly gives all his family carbon monoxide poisoning.<sup>46</sup> The narrator of the story "How Much Does a Man Need?" ("Mnogo li cheloveku nuzhno?") talks of some minor repairs he needs to do at home, which include building the staircase so that it reaches his flat ("И ремонт не особо большой оказался. Входные двери поставить и стенки вывести. Да еще лестницу до своего этажа достроить.").<sup>47</sup> In "A Funny Story" ("Veselen'kaia istoriia") a soldier who has had his finger bitten by an old woman on the train is considered by the narrator to be making a lot of fuss about nothing, considering how little blood there is - "no more than half a glassful":

Ужасно тут закричал военный. Начал кричать и выражаться. Мол, палец ему почти начисто оттяпали. Тем более что палец совершенно не оттяпали, а просто немного захватили зубами. И крови-то почти не было. Не больше полстакана.<sup>48</sup>

By contrast, any small deviation from this norm, such as a minor courtesy or a piece of good fortune, provokes amazement. Hence the narrator's attitude in "No Offence Meant" in which the story of a passer-by who walked along in front of the narrator without hitting him or stepping on his toes, and who did not start a fight when the narrator accidentally stepped on his foot, is regarded as a small miracle.

Some critics and readers have regarded the protagonist/narrator of Zoshchenko's short stories as a sympathetic creation. Hugh MacLean says of Zoshchenko's "man-on-the-street narrator": "There is a satisfying down-to-earth humanness about him, a kind of philistine vigour which helps us to see things in their proper proportions. He is the voice of the philistine in all of us".<sup>49</sup> Tomashevskii considers that everything Zoshchenko wrote could be prefaced with the words "man is to be pitied" ("человека жалко").<sup>50</sup> The emigre critic Pil'skii considers that Zoshchenko depicts his stoical characters with

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<sup>46</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Koshka i liudi", *Ibid*, p. 408.

<sup>47</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Mnogo li cheloveku nuzhno?", *Ibid*, p. 382.

<sup>48</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Veselen'kaia istoriia", *Ibid*, p. 405.

<sup>49</sup>H. McLean (ed.), introduction to M. Zoshchenko, *Nervous People and Other Satires*, trans. H. McLean and M. Gordon, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1965, p. xiv.

<sup>50</sup>Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), introduction to M. Zoshchenko, *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, Moscow: Russlit, 1994, p. 15.

understanding and sympathy. According to Pil'skii, Zoshchenko's type has a "great and inexhaustible capacity to be contented with little" and "has reconciled himself to life, unafraid of misfortune, disaster and bad luck".<sup>51</sup> However, it is undeniable that Zoshchenko's creations not only suffer from the dirt, misery, violence and dishonesty that surround them, but contribute to it. They are equally capable of hitting or being hit, stealing or being stolen from. Their expectation of "unpleasantness" from others is a measure of their own nature. The fact that they frequently justify their drunken hooliganism, dishonesty, ignorance and violence using proud statements about socialism was an obvious embarrassment to Marxist critics. Marxist critics recognised in Zoshchenko's characters and narrators a potentially damaging picture of the "esteemed citizens" of the new Soviet society. While the emigre writer Khodasevich could comfortably describe the Zoshchenko creation as a lifelike depiction of the typical Soviet citizen,<sup>52</sup> Soviet critics were anxious to label the type as a caricature of inherited social evils that were being vigorously dealt with by the new regime.

Just as discussions of Zoshchenko's style have tended to centre on the cloudy concept of "skaz", discussions of his characters and narrators have revolved around the problematic concept of the *meshchanin* or the *obyvatel'* (both terms are usually translated as "philistine"). No other word crops up with such frequency in discussions of the Zoshchenko "type". The problem with these definitions is that they were used to indicate different things to different people. The *meshchanin*, for instance, was originally used to denote a person from a specific social class, a small property holder in Tsarist times - roughly equivalent to a "petty bourgeois". The concept of *meshchanstvo* was used figuratively as well as literally to refer to the moral capacities of narrow-mindedness, materialism, selfishness and affected gentility associated with that class. However, the term took on a particular political connotation after the revolution. For defenders of the Party, the *meshchanin* was distinguished by the fact that he belonged to an enemy class or had earned the distinction of being a class enemy by expressing either indifference or hostility to the building of communism. The chief characteristic of the *meshchanin* is his denial of collective responsibility and his exclusive concern for his own well-being. Chumandrin, for instance, defines the *meshchanin* and the *obyvatel'* together with the "petit bourgeois" as one who manages to "remain a bystander during any social upheaval" and "refuse to carry out a specific programme":

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<sup>51</sup>P. Pil'skii, "Prostoi smekh" (1928), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhail Zoshchenko*, p. 157.

<sup>52</sup>V. Khodasevich, "Uvazhaemye grazhdane" (1927), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 140-8.

Нам кажется, что мещанин, - это, прежде всего, человек, который ухитряется стоять в стороне от всяких социальных потрясений. Делается какое-то большое дело, проводится огромная работа, - но свойство мелкого буржуа, обывателя, таково, что он не может пойти и активно проводить определенную линию.<sup>53</sup>

Thus revised, the term *meshchanin /meshchanstvo* played an important role in the Soviet "doublespeak" satirized by Zoshchenko. The change in the meaning of the concept is the subject of a story by Zoshchenko, "Bourgeois Prejudice ("Meshchanstvo"). The story not only shows the meaningless way in which the concept of *meshchanstvo* came to be used, but also illustrates the gulf that separates the pre-revolutionary petty bourgeoisie and the Zoshchenko type, and the reversal of values that had taken place in the Soviet Union. The hero of the story uses the word *meshchanstvo* to refer to the "bourgeois prejudice" of those around him when he is thwarted or criticised in any way. His neighbour, who accuses him of spilling paraffin on his coat, is told to stop his "bourgeois tricks": "If it stinks hold your nose, It's time you stopped smelling smells like a bourgeois":

- Да брось, говорю, ты, Вася, свои мещанские стучки! Ну, залил и залил, сегодня я залил, завтра ты заливай. Я с этим не считаюсь. А если, говорю, воняет, - нос зажми. Пора бы, говорю, перестать запахи нюхать. Мещанство, говорю, какое.<sup>54</sup>

When a girl from work refuses the hero's invitation to the cinema, he retorts - "Hey, comrade, I know your bourgeois tricks. Are blond men are more your style, is that it? It's time to get rid of your bourgeois prejudice":

- Э, говорю, гражданка! Знаем мы эти мещанские штучки. Может, говорю, вам блондины эффективней, чем brunеты? Пора бы, говорю, отвыкнуть от мещанской разницы.<sup>55</sup>

Whereas *meshchanstvo* was once used pejoratively to refer to a lack of culture (morals, taste, refinement), it is used here to describe the presence of any sort of fastidiousness in relation to one's surroundings. The hero of this story is typical of Zoshchenko's

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<sup>53</sup>M. Chumandrin, "Chei pisatel' - Mikhail Zoshchenko?", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 163.

<sup>53</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Meshchanstvo", in *Sotsial'naiia grust'*, ed. by B. S. Ruben, Moscow: Shkola Press, 1996, p. 176.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 177.

narrators/heroes in general in his resistance to refinements of any sort. The hero of "Domestic Bliss" ("Semeinoe schast'e")<sup>56</sup> dispenses with his kitchen as an unnecessary luxury, and rejoices that he now has an excuse not to feed his guests. The narrator of "Chinese Formalities" ("Kitaiskaia tseremoniia") expresses the opinion that modern society is gradually abandoning anything that is not essential: "Все меняется", he writes, "все идет к простоте необыкновенной". He considers the custom of shaking hands a waste of time: "А мало того что смешно, а и не нужно и глупо. И драгоценное время отнимает, ежели встреченных людишек много. А в смысле заразы нехорошо, небезопасно."<sup>57</sup> The narrator of "The Delights of Culture" ("Prelesti kul'tury") objects to having to take his coat off in the theatre - in this respect, he considers the period of War Communism to have been a time of cultural achievement:

И действительно, при военном коммунизме куда как было свободно в отношении культуры и цивилизации. Скажем в театре можно было свободно даже не раздеваться - сиди в чем пришел. Это было достижение.<sup>58</sup>

Iu. Shcheglov has provided an ideal formula to describe the essence of the Zoshchenko type, and of Zoshchenko's fictional world, with the concept of "*nekul'turnost'*"<sup>59</sup>. The idea of *nekul'turnost'* is explained by Shcheglov as a system of values in which the informal takes precedence over the formal, the crude over the refined, the pragmatic over the idealistic, the mundane over the exalted, the material over the spiritual, etc. The accuracy of Shcheglov's formula is borne out not only by the behaviour of Zoshchenko's characters in the stories: shouting and swearing into a dictaphone, fighting over a wire-brush used to clean a primus stove, leaving out a barrel of rotten cabbage in the hope that it will be stolen, vomiting after riding too long on a roundabout because it is free; it is also seen in their extremely pragmatic, materialistic view of the world. In the story "Live Bait" ("Na zhivtsa"), the subject of wages is regarded as an "abstract philosophical

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<sup>56</sup>The title of this story, which is also the name of a long story by Tol'stoi, is one of many examples of ironic plagiarism in Zoshchenko's work ("Gore ot uma", "Skupoi rytsar", "Bednaia Liza", etc.) This tendency to use well-known titles is a symptomatic of the magpie-like appropriation of "old" culture by the Zoshchenko hero/narrator.

<sup>57</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Kitaiskaia tseremoniia", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 207.

<sup>58</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Prelesti kul'tury", *Ibid*, p. 357.

<sup>59</sup> Iu. Shcheglov, "Entsiklopediia nekul'turnosti", in Iu. Shcheglov and A. Zholkovskii, *Mir avtora i struktura teksta*, New Jersey: Hermitage, 1986, pp. 53-84.

subject": "Иногда там пассажиры разговаривают между собой на отвлеченные философские темы - о честности, например, или о заработной плате."<sup>60</sup> In "The Story About the Lady with the Flowers" ("Rasskaz pro damu s tsvetami") the heroine is described sitting staring into the distance, "as though there was something specific out there - like fruit or liver sausage" ("Одним словом, что была поэтическая особа, способная целый день нюхать цветки и настурции или сидеть на берегу и глядеть вдаль, как будто там что-нибудь имеется определенное - фрукты или ливерная колбаса")<sup>61</sup>

As Shcheglov has pointed out, Zoshchenko's narrator/character reveals no aspirations towards an elegant lifestyle and is fully satisfied with his almost prehistoric way of life. In this, the type is very different from the portraits of the *meshchanin* in the work of Maiakovskii or Il'f and Petrov:

В отличие от мещан, сатирически выведенных в стихах и комедиях Маяковского, [зощенковский герой-рассказчик] совершенно не стремится к изящной жизни и вполне удовлетворен своим, в сущности полупещерным бытом. Он не копает деньги, не гоняется за материальными приобретениями и далек от того, чтобы пускать кому-либо пыль в глаза атрибутами буржуазной респектабельности, подобно Эллочке Щукине, героине романа Ильфа и Петрова, «Двенадцать стульев».<sup>62</sup>

In the story "The Aristocrat" the difference between the Zoshchenko hero and the *meshchanin* is immediately apparent. The story begins with the narrator claiming that he doesn't like women who wear hats or have gold teeth and that "such an aristocrat, in my opinion, is not a woman at all, but just an empty space" ("такая аристократка, на мой взгляд, не баба вовсе, а гладкое место").<sup>63</sup> The heroine of this story, so elevated in the eyes of the narrator, blinded by her "trappings of bourgeois respectability" (her silk stockings, hat and gold tooth), is in fact a typical *meshchanka* like Ellochka Shchukina, with her mixture of vulgarity and pretension ("Мы привыкшие", "Довольно свинство с вашей стороны", etc.). The fact that she appears an "aristocrat" in the eyes of the narrator is, in a sense, the whole point of the story.

<sup>60</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Na zhivtsa", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 280.

<sup>61</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 3, p. 252.

<sup>62</sup>Iu. Shcheglov, "Entsiklopediia nekul'turnosti", in Iu. Shcheglov and A. Zholkovskii, *Mir avtora i struktura teksta*, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Aristokratka", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, pp. 170-3.

Zoshchenko himself described the type portrayed in his short stories as "a new type, one that has hardly ever figured in Russian literature"<sup>64</sup>. Shcheglov has argued that Zoshchenko's creations relate to another important fictional portrait in post-revolutionary literature, "the new man", "unhampered by the burden of civilisation or traditional morality...a stranger to rose-tinted idealism and intellectual subtleties, free from cultural constraints, apt to solve life's problems straightforwardly, using animal instinct and brute force".<sup>65</sup> Zoshchenko's narrators and characters represent a debased, comic version of this fictional type, but share the moral ruthlessness and primitive mentality of more serious literary counterparts, which include Blok's Red Army soldiers in "The Twelve" ("Dvenatsat") and Babel's cossacks in *Red Cavalry (Konarmii)*. The closest fictional relative of Zoshchenko's portrait of the "new man" is Poligraf Poligrafovich Sharikov in Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog (Sobach'e serdtse)*. Like Bulgakov's fictional creation, Zoshchenko's type is apt to regard signs of self-respect, order and etiquette as bourgeois prejudice. He is also likely to agitate for preferential treatment on account of his humble origins. The hero of "Westinghouse Brake" ("Tormoz Vestingauza") makes a scene in a train when he is drunk, confident that he is inviolate due to his flawless class origins.

Вот Володя сел в поезд и начал маленько проявлять себя.  
 Дескать, он это такой человек, что все ему можно. И даже  
 народный суд, в случае ежели чего, завсегда за него заступится.  
 Потому у него - пущай публика знает - происхождение очень  
 отлично. И родной дед его был коровьим пастухом, и мамаша его  
 была наипростая баба.<sup>66</sup>

The hero of "A Peasant Talent" (Krest'ianskii samorodok"), informed that his poems have not been accepted for publication, urges the narrator to assure potential editors of his pure peasant origin:

- Может, они, как бы сказать, в происхождении моем  
 сомневаются? То пущай не сомневаются - чистый крестьянин.  
 Можете редакторам так и сказать: от сохи, дескать. Потому

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<sup>64</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh i o svoei rabote", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup>Iu. Shcheglov, "Entsiklopediia nekul'turnosti", in Iu. Shcheglov and A. Zholkovskii, *Mir avtora i struktura teksta*, p. 54

<sup>66</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Tormoz Vestingauza", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 311.

кругом крестьянин. И дед крестьянин, и отец, и которые прадеды были - все насквозь крестьяне. <sup>67</sup>

Zoshchenko's narrator/hero and Bulgakov's Sharikov with their primitive, mob-rule mentality and their use of "doublespeak" contain the seeds of something altogether more sinister that came to fruition in the terror of the 1930s and 1940s. Dolinskii has recently written that Zoshchenko's stories conclusively dispel the myth of the carefree and culturally fertile 1920s and remind the present-day reader that "everything that we have inherited and that will for many years hang over us came into being and began growing at precisely that time, during the 1920s" <sup>68</sup> Vasilii Aksenov describes Zoshchenko's man in the bathhouse and Bulgakov's "Sharikov" as the forerunners of Zhdanov.

Зощенко и Булгаков открыли этот тип в двадцатые годы. Теперь коммунальный хам завершил свое развитие, обрел мечту своих кошмарных ночей - генеральские звезды, вооружился линзами здравого смысла, причислил себя к сонму телевизионных светил.

На предыдущей стадии своей развития он назывался Ждановым. Пройдя сквозь кровавую парилочку тридцатых, зощенковский банщик и булгаковский шарик стали Ждановым. . .

Вот, в сущности, главный конфликт времени, идеально короткая схема: «Зощенко - Жданов». <sup>69</sup>

### Part 3: The Real but Imaginary Proletarian Writer: Zoshchenko's Literary Project

According to the Bakhtinian view, the surrogate narrative voice employed in *skaz* is significant in being distinct from or even running counter to the implied voice of the author. The actual act of communication between author and reader is not made explicit, but implied in the discrepancy between the surrogate voice and the reader's interpretation of the author's own position. This brief examination of Zoshchenko's short stories has shown that they employ a distinctive narrative voice that mimics the speech manner and the outlook of a particular historically and socially concrete type. So far, it has been

<sup>67</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Krest'ianskii samorodok", *Ibid*, pp. 283-4.

<sup>68</sup>M. Dolinskii (ed.), introduction to M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, p.16.

<sup>69</sup>"Slovo o Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 11.

implicitly assumed that this voice is no more than an object of the author's satire. The speech of Zoshchenko's narrators and characters has been discussed in terms of how it deviates from a "normative" standard of speech of which both author and reader are presumed to be aware. This is a natural conclusion, given Zoshchenko's own intellectual credentials, his sensitivity to the misuse and abuse of language, and his satirical treatment of his narrator-protagonist in many of the short stories. Chukovskii, for one, clearly takes the view that Zoshchenko's main concern is to satirise the speech of the uneducated for the benefit of the educated reader:

Искусно пользуясь им для своих рассказов и очерков,  
Зощенко не забывал никогда, что сам по себе этот язык глуповат  
и что из него можно извлекать без конца множество комических  
и живописных эффектов именно потому, что он так уродлив,  
нелеп и смешон.

На каждой странице писатель готов отмечать вывихи его  
синтаксиса, опухоли его словаря, демонстрируя с веселым  
злорадством полную способность ненавистного ему слоя людей  
пользоваться разумной человеческой речью.<sup>70</sup>

Zoshchenko himself describes his purpose rather differently, however. In his own statements about his art he openly contradicts those critics who see him as a master of verbal buffoonery or a sophisticated writer satirising the speech of the uneducated masses. He does not openly criticise the "ugliness" of the language reflected in his short stories or any particular class of person that uses it. Instead, he reserves his criticism for those who wish to preserve the Russian literary language from the contaminating influence of the street. In two statements dating from the late 1920s, Zoshchenko insists that Russian literature must reflect the real language as it is actually spoken by most people, and that the language spreading through Soviet society must form the basis of that society's literary language. The first is from the book *Letters to a Writer*, published in 1929:

Обычно думают, что я искажаю «прекрасный русский язык».  
Что я ради смеха беру слова не в том значении, какое им  
отпущено жизнью, что я нарочно пишу ломаным языком для того,  
чтобы посмешить почтеннейшую публику.

Это неверно. Я почти ничего не искажаю. Я пишу на том  
языке, на котором сейчас говорит и думает улица.

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<sup>70</sup>K.Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, pp. 54-5.

Я сделал это (в маленьких рассказах) не ради курьезов и не для того, чтобы точнее копировать нашу жизнь. Я сделал это для того, чтобы заполнить хотя бы временно тот колоссальный разрыв, который произошел между литературой и улицей.

Я говорю - временно, так как я и в самом деле пишу так временно и пародийно.

А уж дело других (пролетарских) писателей в дальнейшем приблизить литературу к читателям, сделать ее удобочитаемой и понятной массам.

И как бы судьба нашей страны ни обернулась, все равно поправка на легкий «народный» язык уже будет. Уже никогда не будут писать и говорить тем невыносимым суконным интеллигентским языком, на котором многие еще пишут, вернее, дописывают. Дописывают так, как Леонид Андреев. Вот писатель, которого абсолютно нестерпимо сейчас читать!<sup>71</sup>

The second is from the 1928 article "About Myself, Critics and My Work":

Обо мне критики обычно говорят, как о юмористе, о писателе, который смешит и который ради самого смеха согласен сделать чорт знает что из родного русского языка.

Это, конечно, не так.

Если я искажаю иногда язык, то условно, поскольку мне хочется передать нужный мне тип, тип, который почти-что не фигурировал раньше в русской литературе.

(...)Я только хочу сделать одно признание. Может быть оно покажется странным и неожиданным. Дело в том, что я - пролетарский писатель. Вернее, я пародирую своими вещами того воображаемого, но подлинного пролетарского писателя, который существовал в теперешних условиях жизни и в теперешней среде. Конечно, такого писателя не может существовать, по крайней мере, сейчас. А когда будет существовать, то его общественность, его среда значительно повысятся во всех отношениях.

Я только пародирую. Я временно замещаю пролетарского писателя. Оттого темы моих рассказов проникнуты наивной философией, которая как раз по плечу моим читателям.

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<sup>71</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Pis'ma k pisateliu*, in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisateliu, odnoaktnye komedii*, pp. 370-1.

(...)

Еще я хотел сказать об языке. Мне просто трудно читать сейчас книги большинства современных писателей. Их язык для меня - почти карамзиновский. Их фразы - карамзиновские периоды.

Может быть какому-нибудь современнику Пушкина так же трудно было читать Карамзина, как сейчас мне читать современного писателя старой литературной школы.

Может быть единственный человек в русской литературе, который понял что, - Виктор Шкловский.

Он первый порвал старую форму литературного языка. Он укоротил фразу. Он «ввел воздух» в свои статьи. Стало удобно и легко читать.

Я сделал то же самое.

Я пишу очень сжато. Фраза у меня короткая. Доступно бедным.

Может быть поэтому у меня много читателей.<sup>72</sup>

These statements suggest that Zoshchenko's use of language is motivated not only by artistic but by ideological concerns. There is a clear correspondence between Zoshchenko's aim as he presents it here and the function of *skaz* stressed by Bakhtin - that of introducing socially different voices into the narrative. However, Zoshchenko's project appears to have broader implications than Bakhtin's view of *skaz* implies. Rather than simply introducing alternative voices into his fiction in the shape of narrators, Zoshchenko claims to want to transform the very face of "author speech" itself. Zoshchenko argues for effacing the voice of the intellectual that has dominated literary narrative up until the revolution and changing the very language and point of view of the author in fiction to reflect the language and the mentality of the class that is now at the forefront - the proletariat.

It is tempting to approach these statements of intent with some scepticism, given the critical atmosphere in which they were made. By 1928, Zoshchenko had already been targeted by some Marxist critics as an ideologically suspect "fellow-traveller". His repeated assurances of his populist sympathies and his desire to write for the new mass reader may have been calculated to appease his critics. Such statements certainly did him no harm in this respect: in a report given to members of the Federation of Organisations

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<sup>72</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh i o svoei rabote", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, pp. 7-11.

of Soviet Writers in 1930, M. Chumandrin declared that "Mikhail Zoshchenko sees his work, as is evident from a number of his comments, in terms of the creation of a literature for the masses".<sup>73</sup> And yet there is plenty of evidence in Zoshchenko's case to suggest that the populist stance adopted in the articles above reflects a personal conviction.

M.Slonimskii recalls that Zoshchenko spoke with scorn of "great literature" ("большая литература") and that he often talked of the need "to write for the masses, to create a people's literature, and these were not simply words".<sup>74</sup> In a letter to Gor'kii, Zoshchenko confessed that he always felt a sense of guilt when he sat down to write:

Меня всегда волновало одно обстоятельство. Я всегда, садясь за письменный стол, ощущал какую-то вину, какую-то, если можно так сказать, литературную вину. Я вспоминаю прежнюю литературу. Наши поэты писали стишки о цветках и птичках, а наряду с этим ходили дикие, неграмотные и даже страшные люди. И тут что-то такое страшно запущено.<sup>75</sup>

A populist bias is apparent in Zoshchenko's earliest critical essays, dating from his years as a member of Chukovskii's studio in the House of Arts. During this period Zoshchenko planned to write a book on Russian literature between 1910 and 1920, to be called "At the Turning Point" ("Na perelome"). The essays that survive from this project express literary sympathies that are remarkably consistent with Zoshchenko's later statements about his work. "At the Turning Point" was to address what Zoshchenko describes as the "morbid crisis" in Russian literature during the period of the Revolution. Planned chapters included "The Crisis of Individualism" - including a section on Boris Zaitsev and Zinaida Gippius entitled "The Poetry of Spinelessness" ("Poeziia bezvol'ia") and one on Vera Inber, Igor Severianin, Aleksandr Vertinskii and others called "Lifeless People" ("Nezhivnye liudi").<sup>76</sup> All the extant essays written for "At the Turning Point" attack the insipidity which the author regards as characteristic of Silver Age literature. In the article on Zaitsev, for instance, Zoshchenko writes:

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<sup>73</sup>M. Chumandrin, "Chei pisatel' - Mikhail Zoshchenko?", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 163.

<sup>74</sup>M. Slonimskii, "Mikhail Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p.92.

<sup>75</sup>M. Zoshchenko, letter to M. Gor'kii, 30 September, 1930, quoted in part in G. Belaia, "Ekzistentsial'naia problematika tvorchestva M. Zoshchenko", in *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1, 1995, pp. 5-6.

<sup>76</sup>A. Pavlovskii, "Stat'ia Mikhaila Zoshchenko o B. K. Zaitseve", in N. A. Groznova, (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: Materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii.*, pp. 38-40.

Вся почти литература наша современная о . . . безвольных, о неживых или придуманных. Гиппиус, Блок, Ал. Толстой, Ремизов, Ценский - все они рассказывают нам о неживых, призрачных, сонных людях. . . Жизнь окончательно ушла из литературы. <sup>77</sup>

However, Zoshchenko admits two exceptions. In the initial draft for the book, a separate chapter, entitled "Individualism Conquered" ("Pobezhdennyi individualizm"), was to be devoted to Blok's poem "The Twelve" and to the poetry of Maiakovskii. In the essay "About Vladimir Maiakovskii" ("O Vladimire Maiakovskom"), Zoshchenko praises the poet's enormous strength and his "will to destruction". ("Он заворожил меня огромной своей силой, волей к разрушению, идеей физической силой"). Maiakovskii is depicted by Zoshchenko as a huge, noble savage towering above his decadent contemporaries - among whom the "beautiful", "mannered" Severianin is singled out in particular.<sup>78</sup> The essay on Blok, "The Death of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance" ("Konets rytsaria Pechal'nogo Obraza"), is perhaps more interesting from the point of view of Zoshchenko's own work. In this essay Zoshchenko writes with admiration of "The Twelve", in which "everything is new, from ideas to words" and the voice of the poet is replaced by the voices of the street - in the words of political slogans, popular folk verses ("частушки") and the voices of the Red army soldiers. Zoshchenko welcomes Blok's poem as a move away from the decadent experimentation of the Silver Age, a healthy injection of "barbarism" to a literature in a state of crisis. According to him, "The Twelve" offers hopeful signs of a genuine proletarian art of the future that reflects the true voice of the masses:

Я совершенно был уверен, что такое «умирание» и всякие изысканные изломы в искусстве, в частности в литературе, какие были в последние годы, вообще не способны к продолжительной жизни. Рецептов оздоровления я не знаю, но зато я очень знаю и помню, что однажды от такого умирания, от литературной анемии мы уходили и уходили - к порнографии и пинкертоновщине.

А вот нынче мы уходим к поэзии варваров.

(...) Тут же новые слова, новое творчество, и не оттого, что устарели совершенно слова, и мысли, и идеи наши, нет, оттого

<sup>77</sup>Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>78</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O Vladimire Maiakovskom" (1919), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litsa i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 89-92.

что параллельно с нами, побочно, живет что-то иное, может быть и есть - пролетарское.<sup>79</sup>

Chudakova argues that this article on Blok marks a significant turning-point in Zoshchenko's art, offered the vision of a revolution in literary expression. "[Zoshchenko] saw in ["The Twelve"] decisive changes to the entire system of literature and the literary language. The foreign voices so decisively introduced into the fabric of the poem - voices that are not the author's own - shed new light on the possibilities of "skaz"... These voices are heard not only in dialogue, they replace the voice of the author himself."<sup>80</sup>

In "The Twelve" Zoshchenko recognises a successful example of an intellectual writer silencing his own voice and yielding authority to other, socially different voices that exist alongside him. The same preoccupation is evident in Zoshchenko's later articles about his own work in which he talks of "temporarily standing in for the proletarian writer". Zoshchenko claims to believe that the only appropriate response of the intellectual writer to the "social command" issued by the new society is to disown his own voice. The desire to disappear as author is evident in Zoshchenko's claim that in his stories there was "no writer" and "no belles-lettres".<sup>81</sup> It is perhaps apparent, too, in his love of anonymity and pseudonyms. Zoshchenko refused to have his name put on the cover of his first published book, *The Stories of Nazar Il'ich Sinebriukhov* (*Rasskazy Nazara Il'icha Sinibriukhova*),<sup>82</sup> and many of his short stories were published under pseudonyms, such as "Gavrilich", "Konoplianka", "Kolenkorov" and others.

Zoshchenko's idea of a "real but imaginary" proletarian writer is also an exercise in subversion, directed against attempts to dictate literature written by and for the people from above. It was Zoshchenko's premise that a proletarian literature could not be created by a non-proletarian class. Literature written by a member of the intelligentsia could never

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<sup>79</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Konets rytsaria Pechal'nogo Obraza" (1919), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 81. The reference to "pornography and Pinkertonitis" is an allusion to the literature that became popular at the turn of the century in Russia: notably the novels of Artsybashev and Verbitskaia and the Russian imitations of American detective stories featuring Nat Pinkerton.

<sup>80</sup>M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup>Iu. Annenkov, *Dnevnik moikh vstrech: - tsikl tragedii*, p. 312.

<sup>82</sup>M. Slonimskii, "Mikhail Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 92.

be more than "pseudo-proletarian" literature, "an attempt by one class to manipulate the psychology of another class in its own interests"<sup>83</sup>.

Soviet literary policy in the late 1920s showed an increasing tendency to try to create such a "pseudo-proletarian" literature - due partly to the influence of a militant lobby for proletarian culture in the form of organisations such as the All-Union Organisation of Proletarian Writers *VAPP*, and its successor, *RAPP*.<sup>84</sup> Official literary policy encouraged writers to adopt a strict ideological position and to imitate classical formal models. The regime required a classic of proletarian literature - traditional in form, monumental in scale, red in politics - that would lend prestige and weight to the new society's culture. It would preferably be a novel, for it was thought that the novel was best able to reproduce the "epic structure of the revolutionary age".<sup>85</sup> Editors and critics frequently held up Tolstoi as a model for new writers to emulate.<sup>86</sup> MacGuire writes of the editors of the journal *Krasnaia Nov'* that they were looking for literature that would possess "a leisurely, even rambling style, a sturdy sense of chronological time; involved plots with strong character portraiture and an explicit moral orientation".<sup>87</sup>

In "About Myself, Critics and My Work" Zoshchenko attacked the idea that the Soviet Union needed a "Red Lev Tolstoi":

Вот в литературе существует так называемый «социальный заказ». Предполагаю, что заказ этот в настоящее время сделан неверно.

Есть мнение, что сейчас заказан красный Лев Толстой.

Видимо, заказ этот сделан какой-нибудь неосторожным издателем. Ибо вся жизнь, общественность и все окружение, в котором живет сейчас писатель - заказывает конечно же не

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<sup>83</sup>"Pseudo-proletarian Literature" was to be the subject of another chapter of "At the Turning-Point" (see M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 15).

<sup>84</sup>Katerina Clark notes that not one of the leaders of *VAPP* actually came from the working classes - they were predominantly from the middle classes and the intelligentsia, but they demanded "exclusive hegemony as proletarians" (K. Clark, "The Quiet Revolution in Intellectual Life", in S. Fitzpatrick, A. Rabinowitch, R. Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 225.

<sup>85</sup>R. A. MacGuire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 277.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid*, pp.277-9.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid*, p. 281.

красного Льва Толстого. И если говорить о заказе, то заказана вещь в той неуважаемой мелкой форме, с которой, по крайней мере раньше, связывались самые плохие литературные традиции.

Я взял подряд за этот заказ.

Я предполагаю, что не ошибся.<sup>88</sup>

The 1929 book *Letters to a Writer* is particularly interesting in view of Zoshchenko's objection to the official attempts to create a proletarian literature by artificial means. *Letters to a Writer*, regarded by Zoshchenko as his most interesting work - is an annotated selection of letters sent to the author by his readers. In it, Zoshchenko succeeds in effacing himself as author more completely than in any other work, and hands over the spotlight to his wide reading public - a public drawn from all walks of life. In the introduction Zoshchenko argues that these letters offer a true glimpse of modern life - something that most literature is unable to offer. "Here", he argues, "is the breath of our life(...)In this book there is real tragedy, extraordinary intelligence, naive benevolence, pathetic babbling, stupidity, enthusiasm, narrow-mindedness, trickery and terrible ignorance". He adds that he had no wish to make fun of the writers of these letters in print, but that his aim in publishing *Letters to a Writer* is to "show life as it is - real and unadorned".<sup>89</sup>

What is particularly interesting about *Letters to a Writer* from the point of view of Zoshchenko's own literary project is that, besides letters, it includes literary attempts that readers have sent to Zoshchenko for approval and criticism. These attempts are all the work of literary novices, some of whom have only recently learnt to read and write. Zoshchenko notes that his readers show a predilection for poetry, which he sees as a hallmark of a "barbarian literature". Just as children begin by writing poems, argues Zoshchenko, so does every young, "barbaric" literature begin with verse and songs.<sup>90</sup> One poem in particular is interesting as it is, perhaps, the most primitive example included in the collection. Zoshchenko introduces this poem by describing in words that recall his letter to Gor'kii about the "wild, terrible and ignorant people walking about". He talks of a whole class of people who, before the revolution, lived like "walking plants" but who have now learnt to write:

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<sup>88</sup>Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh i o svoei rabote", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>89</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Pis'ma k pisatel'iu*, in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, p. 345.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid, p. 358.

Пролетарская революция подняла целый и громадный пласт новых, неопикуемых людей. Эти люди до революции жили, как ходячие растения. А сейчас они, худо ли, хорошо, - умеют писать и даже сочиняют стихи. И в этом самая большая и торжественная заслуга нашей эпохи.

Вот в чем у меня никогда не было сомнения!

В этих стихах есть энтузиазм.

Учитель Ленин.

Я пишу о вас тов. Ленин,  
 Что ты родной отец мой,  
 Что ты дал большое знанье  
 И научил читать меня

Я неграмотный мальчишка  
 До семнадцать лет ходил  
 И не знал я первой буквы  
 И не видел даже книг

А теперь я счастливый  
 Я читаю и пишу  
 И о вас товарищ Ленин  
 Я счинения [sic] пишу<sup>91</sup>

This extract from *Letters to a Writer* is illustrative of the ambiguous nature of the whole project. Zoshchenko claims not to have the slightest desire to laugh at his readers and yet, while he assumes the guise of a social historian giving serious consideration to genuine examples of popular literature, Zoshchenko insistently draws attention to their authors' "terrible ignorance" and lack of sophistication. Chukovskii remembers a remark that Zoshchenko made to him about the letters he received that is almost certainly a more honest response to his correspondents than the introduction to *Letters to a Writer*. "God, what idiotic letters people send me. It would be a good idea to publish a collection of genuine letters to me, with a short commentary. It would make a very funny book."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Ibid, pp. 357-8.

<sup>92</sup>K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., pp. 409-10.

Whether or not Zoshchenko really believed that "barbarian" literature had a future and should be left to develop at its own pace, one thing is certain: the real examples of popular literature by inexperienced writers included in *Letters to a Writer* challenge Party-propagated ideals of an artistically sophisticated, formally conservative proletarian literature by pointing insistently at the yawning gulf between literature and life. Stylistically speaking, the *Sentimental Tales* and "Michel Siniagin" represent a more complex approach to the same subject. In these works Zoshchenko further develops the idea of a new kind of author, exploring in greater depth the gap that separates the language of mainstream literature and the language of the street, between the voice of the "Red Lev Tolstoi" and his "real but imaginary" proletarian writer.

#### Part 4: A Red Lev Tolstoi: Style in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin"

In "About Myself, Critics and My Work" Zoshchenko describes the "Sentimental Tales" as "superficially closer to existing models of so-called great literature" than his short stories and admits that they contain "more traditional literary elements". He explains in the same article that the style of the tales is intended as a parody of the "Red Lev Tolstoi or Rabindranath Tagore":

В больших вещах я опять таки пародирую. Я пародирую и неуклюжий, громоздкий (Карамзиновский) стиль современного красного Льва Толстого или Рабиндранат Тагора, и сантиментальную тему, которая сейчас характерна. Я пародирую теперешнего интеллигентского писателя, которого, может быть, и нет сейчас, но который должен был бы существовать, если бы он точно выполнял социальный заказ не издательства, а той среды и той общественности, которая сейчас выдвинута на первый план...<sup>93</sup>

Zoshchenko actually gave the author of the "Sentimental Tales" a fictional identity. The putative author of the tales - I.V. Kolenkorov - was introduced in a series of prefaces written for each of the first four editions of the tales. A biography of Kolenkorov in the second preface provides a number of contradictory details regarding his family background, mixing aspects of petty bourgeois, peasant and aristocratic life:

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<sup>93</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh i o svoei rabote", in B.V. Kazanskii and Iu. Tynianov (eds.), *Mastera sovremennoi literatury: Mikhail Zoshchenko*, p.11.

Он родился в 1882 году ...в мелкобуржуазной семье дамского портного. Получил домашнее образование. В молодые годы был пастухом. Потом играл в театре. И наконец мечта его жизни воплотилась в действительность - он стал писать стихи и рассказы.<sup>94</sup>

A confusing picture of Kolenkorov's literary identity emerges from these prefaces. According to the second preface Kolenkorov is presently on the "right wing of the fellow travellers", but is reforming himself and is soon to be expected to occupy "a prominent place in the school of naturalist writers". Such a description could almost be applied to some of Zoshchenko's intellectual contemporaries - erstwhile members of the Serapion Brotherhood who became important figures in the Soviet literary establishment, such as Fedin. (Incidentally, Zoshchenko called Fedin "Rabindranath Tagore" and in so doing mortally offended him.)<sup>95</sup> However, there is also a running joke in the prefaces that Kolenkorov is a literary novice and protege of Zoshchenko. Zoshchenko is described as the head of the literary circle of which Kolenkorov is a member, and in the third preface we are told that "the author M. Zoshchenko" has had a hand in correcting Kolenkorov's spelling mistakes and his ideology. Only in the last preface does Zoshchenko admit that Kolenkorov is an imaginary figure: "the sort of average educated type who happened to live between two ages" ("средний интеллигентный тип, которому случилось жить на переломе двух эпох").<sup>96</sup>

The sense of confusion and paradox surrounding the fictional author of the Tales is echoed on a stylistic level in the tales themselves, which incorporate a number of disparate elements. The following passage from "Wisdom" ("Mudrost'") provides a typical illustration :

В молодые годы был Иван Алексеевич красивый, полный брюнет с определенно ярким темпераментом. При этом некоторая независимость в средствах позволяла Ивану Алесеевичу в достаточной мере пользоваться прелестью и утехами жизни.

И в разгульной своей жизни он сошелся по пьяной лавочке с одной пустынькой драматической актрисой, но связь эта,

<sup>94</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Sentimental'nye povesti: Predislovie ko vtoromu izdaniuu", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., p. 405.

<sup>96</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Sentimental'nye povesti: Predislovie ko vtoromu izdaniuu", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 8.

длившаяся с полгода, была несчастлива. Повздорив из-за своей дамы с одним лицеистом, который при многочисленных свидетелях обозвал ее шкурой, Иван Алексеевич ударил его по морде в фойе академического театра, при этом сбил с носа пенсне и разбил ухо. Результатом была дуэль, которая и состоялась на полях вблизи комендантского аэродрома.<sup>97</sup>

The style of this extract has none of the spontaneity or brevity of Zoshchenko's short stories. The sentences are long and their construction is complex. The whole is clearly intended to represent a premeditated literary narrative performance. There are signs that the narrator is making a concerted effort to act the part of the literary narrator - assuming a detached, impersonal stance and attempting some description and characterisation. However, these bookish features are juxtaposed with phrases quite uncharacteristic of classical literary narrative. Besides the literary expressions ("В молодые годы"; "полный брюнет с...ярким темпераментом") are bureaucratic turns of phrase ("при многочисленных свидетелях"; "в достаточной мере"; "при этом"; "результатом был"; "при том") and vulgar colloquialisms ("повздорив", "обозвал ее шкурой", "ударил его по морде"). The effect is of two linguistic worlds colliding - that of classical literature and Soviet reality. The effect of disharmony is not confined to the language but is also felt in relation to the action described, such as the punch-up in a theatre and the duel beside the airfield.

The narrative of "Michel Siniagin" creates a similar impression of stylistic disharmony, displaying a mix of classical and non-classical elements. The result is a narrative that is balanced between the "lifeless", "Karamzinian" prose style and a cruder and more prosaic Soviet discourse.

In "Michel Siniagin", as in the "Sentimental Tales", the presentation is more typically literary than that of the short stories: the narrator refers to himself as "the author" throughout, and the story is divided into chapters with chapter headings providing a synopsis of events. There are several stylistic elements that deliberately exaggerate the awkwardness and heaviness regarded by Zoshchenko as hallmarks of bad writing. The syntax is complex, using long sentences made up of innumerable subordinate clauses.

Обе молодые дамы, отвыкшие от ночных походов, в нижних юбках и с распущенными волосами, с тоской металась по комнате, и, заламывая руки, пытались уговорить и даже силой

<sup>97</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Mudrost", *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

уложить Мишеля в постель, считая нужным поставить ему компресс на сердце или смазать иодом бок и тем самым оттянуть кровь, бросившуюся в голову. (M.S. p.123)

Strings of words of the same grammatical category, generally nouns or adjectives, also contribute to the impression of heaviness ("она была до чрезвычайности *миленькая* и *симпатичная* девица, полная жизни, огня и темперамента" (p.119); "...скоро начнется другая жизнь, полная *славных радостей, восторгов, подвигов и начинаний*" (p.122); "*Скромный, мечтательный и деликатный* поэт..." (p.122), etc.), as do redundant words and phrases that add nothing but length to the narrative ("Вдова успокаивала его чем могла, говоря и *давая торжественные клятвы* о том, что она, несомненно, и скорей всего прыгнула бы..." (p. 125); "Слухи о вольном городе оставались *ни на чем необоснованными* слухами..."(p. 127); "...за 25 копеек давали отдельную койку, кружку чаю и мыло для *умывания*..." (p.136), etc.).

Besides this longwindedness, there is frequently a flavour of affected gentility in the narrative resulting from the abundant use of literary cliché ("оскорбленные в своих чувствах" (p.125); "в одно прекрасное утро" (p. 126); "Голод и разруха ... сжимали город в своих цепких объятиях" (p. 126); "Эта была прелестная молодая дама, рожденная для ... *беспечной жизни*" (p.128); "до боли сжимая свои руки" (p. 138); "дрожа всем телом" (p. 140); "она...мечтала связать свою жизнь с ним" (p.124); "он волен поступать так, как ему *заблагорассудится*" (p.124); "Она нашла свою тихую пристань и сейчас ничего не ищет" (p. 140), etc.).

These features of syntax and language suggest a backwards glance at classical prose. But incongruous elements intrude upon the narrative of "Michel Siniagin", creating the impression of a collision between two separate universes of discourse, just as in the extract from "Wisdom", above. Bureaucratic turns of phrase side by side with bookish expressions ("Это *злополучное именье* и было названо *соответствующим* образом: "Затишье" (p.118); "Его *поэтический гений* шел несколько *вразрез* с его *житейскими потребностями*" (p. 121)). Vulgar colloquialisms are used in sharp contrast with more formal elements : "только вдова М., *напудренная* и *подкрашенная*, *колбасилась* в своей вуали по церкви" (p.125); "И всякий раз *беспокойно* следила за его движениями во время визита, видимо, *побаиваясь*, как бы он чего не спер" (p.128) "...его *точили* тоска и мысли о том, что его все же...опутали, как *сукинова сына*" (p. 125). There are numerous

ungrammatical or non-standard forms ("пуцай читатель не принимает близко к сердцу" (p. 119), "ижнее прошлое" (p. 118), etc.).

Besides this stylistic inconsistency, the narrative of "Michel Siniagin" features a series of what appear to be deliberate "errors" and other features that suggest illiteracy, inexperience or carelessness on the part of the fictional author. The vocabulary is frequently repetitive, drawing regularly on certain words and expressions:

"взволнованный", "волноваться", "созерцательный", "интеллигентный", "возвышенный", "влюбленный", "радость", "поэтический", "переживания". The expression "смениться чем-то", used to describe a change in psychological state, is repeated no less than seven times in the text. The phrase "дрожа всем телом" appears several times in the space of a few pages. The chapter headings are particularly repetitive: "Новые планы.(...) Новая комната. Новая любовь. Неожиданная катастрофа. Серьезная болезнь тетки." "Неожиданная беда.(...). Нервная болезнь Мишеля. (...)" "Неожиданные мысли. Новое решение."(...) "Новые друзья. Новые мечты(...) Неожиданная болезнь".

The description of characters is also repetitive. Characters are described using constant epithets or associated objects or qualities. Simochka is "white-headed" ("белобрысенькая") and freckled. Michel's mother is generally associated with her samovar ("любящая сидеть у самовара" (p.119), "почти не вставая из-за самовара" (p. 124)). Isabella Efremovna's movements are birdlike ("как птичка, выпорхнула на лестницу" (p. 132); "хлопнув дверь, упорхнула" (p. 133)). Simochka's mother is always described as dark and pockmarked ("очень такая смуглая, несколько рябая дама" (p.122), "Смуглая и рябая дама" (p.122), "ее рябоватое лицо" (p.125)), but, most of all, energetic ("очень энергичной, живой вдовы" (p.121), довольно и энергично устраивала замуж" (p. 122), "энергичной дамы" (122), "вдова и любящая, энергичная мать" (p.122), "подавленным столь энергическим характером этой дамы" (p.122)).

More clearly deviant features include oddities in the punctuation and notation of the text. Character speech is not always divided from author speech ("Андреус, или там Теодор, - скажет она" (p. 113). Numbers are often written in numerals rather in their full form: "на что уж был беспокойный век, ну, скажем 16." (p. 115); "Но поскольку автор был моложе М. П. Синягина лет на 10". (p. 116)

Unusual collocations abound in "Michel Siniagin" ("прелестный шедевр" (p. 112); "рисовать на полотне" (p. 112); "сочное поколение" (p. 114); "воробьев кушали" (p. 115); "хмуря носик" (p.133), and so on). Other oddities of this sort

include the corruption of idioms and other stable collocations ("по его плечу" instead of "ему по плечу" (p.114); "одно прекрасное время" instead of "одно прекрасное утро" (p.121); "забивать сердце" instead of "забивать голову" (p. 121)). Sometimes two idioms are combined to produce a hybrid ("на чьей совести камень лежит" (p. 118) is a mixture of "камень лежит на душе" and "на чьей совести", for instance). Idioms are often used inappropriately ("тетка Марья при свете свечи марала бумагу" (p.121). Metaphors and similes are unconventional ("бархатная книга жизни" (p. 112); "он, как камень, уснул у себя наверху" (p. 139); "Мишель, как волк, бегал по своей комнате" (p. 134)). The text contains a number of oxymoronic constructions, where two parts of a single phrase contradict one another ("слишком достаточно" (p. 127); "довольно прекрасно, (p. 127); "не очень обезумели" (p.119); "несомненно, и скорей всего" (p.125)).

The syntax of "Michel Siniagin" is occasionally awkward ("Мишель все же дал ей понять разницу в их, если не положении, которое уравнилось революцией, то, во всяком случае, назначении в жизни" (p. 124). Sometimes muddled syntax affects the sense of the narrative, making it ambiguous or illogical. One sentence begins: "Поэтическая атмосфера в доме благодаря Мишелю несколько отозвалась и на наших дамах" (p.119). Here it is unclear whether "благодаря Мишелю" relates back to "поэтическая атмосфера" or forward to "отозвалась".

Besides these stylistic and grammatical oddities there are instances of logical or narrative inconsistency or incoherence. Statements may be connected using illogical links: "ему твердо было обещана отдельная комната, как только кто-нибудь из жильцов помрет. Но Мишель не торопился с этим..." (p.126); "Она презирала бедность и нищету и мечтала уехать за границу, подбивая на это Мишеля, с которым она мечтала перейти персидскую границу. И в силу этого Мишель не искал работы и жил, надеясь на какие-то неожиданные обстоятельства" (p.128) Description and detail are illogical at some points. For instance, when Simochka's mother argues with Michel, she begins to move the furniture around in order to "lend weight" to her argument: "Вдова М. сидела в кресле, но, разгорячившись, начала крупно шагать по комнате, двигая для большей убедительности стулья, этажерки и даже тяжелые сундуки" (p.122). When Michel takes to bed with a nervous fever we are told that his life is preserved by his "blooming health" ("молодость и цветущее здоровье сохранили ему жизнь" (p. 132).

The references to characters in "Michel Siniagin" are often inconsistent and in some cases inappropriate, given the type of narrative in which they occur. For instance, Simochka is first introduced not by her full christian name and patronymic, "Serafima Pavlovna", but

by her shortened name and initial "Simochka M.". Later in the text she is referred to more formally as "Serafima Pavlovna". Michel is sometimes "Michel", sometimes "Michel Siniagin" and sometimes "M.P. Siniagin". We find him referred to as "M.P. Siniagin" some way into the story, when the reader is already well acquainted with him: ("*М.П. СИНЯГИН* принялся хлопотать и несколько раз ходил на биржу труда..." (p. 133); "автор не хочет сказать, что человек, и в данном случае *М.П. СИНЯГИН*, стал деревянным..." (p. 135). Simochka's mother is referred to throughout by the strange epithet "вдова М." - "Widow M.", Michel's aunt sometimes as "Марья Аркадьевна" and sometimes using the familiar "тетка Марья"; in this case too, these names are alternated indiscriminately.

Finally, there are inconsistencies in the detail and the setting of the story. The flat in which Michel and his mother and aunt live in Pskov undergoes a metamorphosis between chapter four and chapter eleven. When Simochka's mother visits Michel in chapter four, we learn that it is a first-floor flat with windows overlooking a street. In the final chapter, in which Michel returns to Pskov, the flat has become a house surrounded by a "shady garden". At this point the narrator describes the garden as though the reader were familiar with it already: "Те же две высокие ели росли у заднего крыльца и та же собачья будка без собаки стояла возле сарайчика" (p.138). In fact this is the first time that these fir trees, this kennel and this shed have been mentioned.

All the stylistic and narrative features described above can be interpreted as a deliberate game on Zoshchenko's part, in the tradition of Laurence Sterne or Gogol': a deliberate violation of the rules that govern the invented world of narrative fiction. In Zoshchenko's case, the game is explicitly connected with the figure of the inexperienced or inept writer struggling to create a literary text. This game is made more explicit in the introductory chapter to "Michel Siniagin", in which the fictional author apologises for his carelessness, his lack of imagination and lack of confidence and even warns the reader to expect mistakes:

Это будет скромно прожитая жизнь, описанная к тому же несколько торопливо, небрежно и со многими погрешностями. Конечно, сколько возможно, автор старался, но для полного блеска описания не было у него такого, что ли, нужного спокойствия духа, уверенности и любви к разным мелким предметам и переживаниям. (p. 112)

Тут не будет красоты фраз, смелости оборотов и восхищения перед величием природы... (p. 113)

Что касается заглавия книги, то автор согласен признать, что заглавие сухое и академическое, мало чего-нибудь дает уму и сердцу(...)Автор хотел назвать эту книгу иначе, как-нибудь, например: «У жизни в лапах» или «Жизнь начинается послезавтра». Но и для этого у него нехватило уверенности и нахальства. К тому же, эти заглавия, вероятно, уже были в литературном обиходе, а для нового заглавия у автора не нашлось особого остроумия и изобретательности. (p. 113)

The figure of the fictional author is foregrounded not only in "Michel Siniagin" but in all the Sentimental Tales. All the tales (except "The Goat" and "Wisdom") include monologues by a narrator who stresses his identity as a writer, referring to himself consistently as "the author", and digresses on the subject of writing itself, on the process of composition, on readers and critics, on problems of character and plot, etc. The theme of literary inexperience is an important one in these digressions and introductions. The narrator complains of the technical difficulties of writing:

Фу! Трудно до чего писать в литературе! Потом весь изойдешь, покуда продерешься через непроходимые дебри.<sup>98</sup>

Ты вот, скажем, рукопись написал, с одной орфографией вконец намучился, не говоря уж про стиль...<sup>99</sup>

Автор имеет мужество сознаться, что у него нету дарования к так называемой художественной литературе. Кому что дано. Одному господь бог дал простой грубоватый язык, а у другого язык способен каждую минуту проделывать всякие тонкие художественные ритуурнели.<sup>100</sup>

It is noticeable that these introductory passages and digressions are stylistically rather different from the main body of the narrative. While not entirely lacking in self-consciousness, awkwardness, and literary posturing, they are on the whole more informal in both style and spirit. Features typical of the style of Zoshchenko's short stories - colloquial language, short sentences and frequent pauses, parenthetical remarks and

<sup>98</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei", *Ibid*, p. 108.

<sup>99</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Strashnaia noch", *Ibid*, p. 90.

<sup>100</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Siren' tsvetet", *Ibid*, p. 159.

deliberate vagueness - create an impression of ease and informality. In these passages the narrator appears to abandon his literary mask and speak in his own voice.

The voice of the "author" as heard in these digressions is not only close to the anti-literary style of Zoshchenko's short stories, it is close in spirit to the voice of the Zoshchenko type discussed above. However, the narrator of the Sentimental Tales and "Michel Siniagin" is cast as a literary man striving to achieve a measure of sophistication, and thus his voice is not straightforward like the voice of the typical narrator of the short stories, but combines affected gentility and philistinism. This can be illustrated by the following extract from "Michel Siniagin" in which the narrator discusses the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia:

В те годы было еще порядочное количество людей высокообразованных и интеллигентных, с тонкой душевной организацией и нежной любовью к красоте и к разным изобразительным искусствам.

Надо прямо сказать, что в нашей стране всегда была исключительная интеллигентская прослойка, к которой охотно прислушивалась вся Европа и даже весь мир.

И верно, это были очень такие тонкие ценители искусства и балета и авторы многих замечательных произведений, и вдохновители многих отличных дел и великих учений.

Это не были спецы с точки зрения нашего понимания. Это были просто интеллигентные возвышенные люди. Многие из них имели нежные души. А некоторые просто плакали при виде лишнего цветка на клумбе или прыгающего на навозной клумбе воробушка.

Дело прошлое но, конечно, надо сказать, что в этом была даже некоторая какая-то такая ненормальность.(p.117)

Here the narrator's attempts at sophistication (e.g., "это были очень такие тонкие ценители искусства и балета") are so primitive that they sound ironic - the impression of his alienation from the subject is heightened by expressions that reflect his Soviet perspective ("исключительная интеллигентская прослойка", "Это не были спецы с точки зрения нашего понимания"). Shcheglov describes this "love-hate" relationship with culture as an extension of the anti-cultural theme in Zoshchenko's writing, noting that Zoshchenko's narrators and heroes have a "enviously-reverential"

("завистливо-уважительное") attitude towards culture: "They curse it but are unable to tear away their envious gaze".<sup>101</sup>

This ambivalence in the voice and perspective of the "author" of "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" is particularly striking in those passages where he carries out imaginary arguments with his readers and critics. In these dialogues Zoshchenko parodies the aggressive rhetoric of Marxist criticism and some of the prevalent demands made on the Soviet writer. By 1930 Zoshchenko had already had first-hand experience of such criticism. He had been described as a "common, ordinary philistine who digs about and picks over the dregs of humanity with a sort of malicious glee".<sup>102</sup> and attacked for his "sniggering", his "tiresomeness, his "idiotism".<sup>103</sup> In engaging with his critics, the author of "The Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" employs typical critical language and concepts of the time. In doing so, he alternates between two opposing positions. Sometimes he rails against the implied voice of his critics and vigorously defends his own integrity as an artist:

Стремительность тут есть. А попробуй ее написать. Скажут - неверно. Неправильно, скажут. Научного, скажут, подхода нет к вопросу. Идеология, скажут, не ахти какая.<sup>104</sup>

Вот опять будут упрекать автора за это новое художественное произведение. Опять, скажут, грубая клевета на человека, отрыв от масс и так далее...и дескать, скажут, идейки взяты, безусловно, не так уж особенно крупные. И герои не горазд такие значительные как, конечно, хотелось бы. Социальная значимость в них, скажут, чего-то мало заметно.<sup>105</sup>

At other times the narrator adopts an attitude that accords with the critical orthodoxy of the time, using the same language that he imagines being directed against himself to attack others. The verses read by the imaginary future citizen in chapter two of "Michel

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<sup>101</sup>Iu. Shcheglov, "Entsiklopediia nekul'turnosti", Iu. Shcheglov and A. Zholkovskii, *Mir avtora i struktura teksta*, p. 81.

<sup>102</sup> M. Ol'shevets, "Obyvatel'skii nabat", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 150-1.

<sup>103</sup> A. Gorbunov, *Serapionovye brati'a i K. Fedin.*, Irkutsk: Vostochno-sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1976., pp.71-2.

<sup>104</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Strashnaia noch", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 89.

<sup>105</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Siren' tsvetet", *Ibid*, p. 145.

Siniagin" are described as "lousy lyric poems" ("паршивые лирические стишки"). And in "What the Nightingale was Singing About", for instance, the narrator comments, of a poem written by the hero:

С точки зрения формального метода, стишки эти как будто и ничего себе. Но вообще же стишки - довольно паршивые стихи и действительно несозвучны и несоритмичны с эпохой.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the significance of the style of "Michel Siniagin" by examining it in relation to other works by Zoshchenko. "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" have been viewed as part of a broader literary project - a response to the specific social, literary and historical situation in which Zoshchenko was writing.

The chapter began with a discussion of the concept of *skaz* in Russian literary criticism. Zoshchenko's short stories are good examples of *skaz* in the formalist sense as a literary imitation of oral narrative. If we accept the formalists' conception of *skaz*, we could argue that, superficially, "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" mark a shift away from *skaz*, as, unlike the short stories, they are presented as literary performances by a fictional author figure. However, Bakhtin's notion of *skaz* as an orientation towards an "alien voice" distinct from that of the author ("*chuzhoi golos*") is more relevant to Zoshchenko's narrative style than the "oral" definition. Zoshchenko's use of style in the short stories creates a distinctive narrative voice that is both a reflection of socio-linguistic reality and a rhetorical device that introduces a particular ideological perspective into the narrative.

Clearly, one of Zoshchenko's aims in his short stories is to free himself from the discourse and perspective of the classical (intellectual) literary narrator and to write in a way that represents the voice of the "street" : i.e., the newly empowered Soviet masses. He does not do this by creating individual narrator figures after the manner of Leskov, but by creating an entire fictional world in which the various characters and narrators speak and think as if with one voice and one mind. The "Zoshchenko type" is, to a certain extent, a depiction of a concrete social type - the Soviet man in the street of the 1920s. More broadly speaking, though, his type represents the spirit of an age that saw a revolution in speech, thought and behaviour. This was an age in which the Russian language became democratized and politicized and in which philistinism ("*nekul'turnost*") became a significant cultural force.

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<sup>106</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei", *Ibid*, p. 116.

Zoshchenko's attitude towards the narrators and other inhabitants of the fictional world of his short stories is ambiguous. He claims that he intends not to criticise, but to fill a temporary void in literature - to "stand in for the proletarian writer", as he puts it, in an attempt to bring literature closer to life. He suggests that he engages in parody by virtue of necessity, given his own class origins, but that nevertheless his work reflects the voice and mentality of the ordinary Soviet citizen more faithfully than "pseudo-proletarian" literature, which employs an ideologically corrected but essentially pre-revolutionary literary discourse and narrative point of view. Despite these statements, however, Zoshchenko's stories read more like a warning for the future than a celebration of the new society - a fact that did not escape Marxist critics of the day.

*Letters to a Writer* is a similarly ambiguous project. Here, Zoshchenko takes up the "life versus literature" argument again, giving a literary platform to various "voices from the crowd". Because these voices are genuine it is suggested that they are more valuable than what Zoshchenko refers to with apparent scorn as "so-called "artistic" works". And yet, as we have seen, Zoshchenko's real attitude to his correspondents, and to the semi-literate poetic novices whom he quotes, is quite possibly a lot less respectful than his commentary suggests.

The discrepancy between "real" voices and literary voices is the key to the style of the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin". This contrast is embodied in the parodic figure of a Red Lev Tolstoi - not the official version, but an unofficial version that makes explicit the oxymoronic character of that concept. Under the guise of a naive writer Zoshchenko brings two opposing discourses and perspectives into collision - the modern Soviet idiom and "philistine" mentality familiar from the short stories and the "awkward, unbearable language of the *intelligent*" - the sophisticated manner to which the author aspires.

As demonstrated above, the style of "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" can be read as a deliberate imitation of a raw, uneducated prose style that elaborates on the "unliterary" literary voice of Zoshchenko's short stories. The author of the tales resembles the familiar Zoshchenko narrator assuming the role of the serious writer. His lack of sophistication is revealed in his clumsy attempts at sophistication and by the various stylistic oddities and "howlers" in his prose. There is a sense of absence at the heart of the tales due to the all-pervasive irony. While exploiting the comic possibilities of combining the modern Soviet idiom with a trite prose style, Zoshchenko himself is silent and his own position impossible to determine. Chudakova describes the style of the tales as Zoshchenko's reaction to the impossibility, as he saw it, of authoritative narrative speech in

literature at the time he wrote, due to the colossal changes in the reading public and the social fabric of the country:

Зощенко, (начиная с середины 20-х годов) утверждает, что построить такое слово, с которым автор мог бы отождествить себя полностью, в настоящий момент невозможно, поскольку своего голоса, то есть целостной речевой культуры, нет у тех слоев, на которые должен, по его мнению, ориентироваться современный литератор <sup>107</sup>.

A rather different note is sounded in the colloquial digressions by the author which figure in "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales". The jocular, ironic tone adopted in these digressions - in which Zoshchenko's "author" discusses subjects close to the real author's heart, such as the predicament of the Soviet writer - resembles Zoshchenko's style in later works, such as *The Blue Book* and *Youth Restored*, which also use the persona of "the author" but abandon the fictional figure identified as Kolenkorov.

The invention of the naive Soviet author in "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" represents an important evolutionary stage in the development of Zoshchenko's style. In these works, Zoshchenko begins to develop the *skaz* persona of the short stories into an author figure. Under the narrative guise of the semi-fictional author, Zoshchenko conducts a dialogue between different voices and points of view. He is thus able to hide and reveal himself simultaneously, to address subjects close to his heart without openly declaring his own convictions. Zoshchenko's ambiguous relationship towards his narrative persona may be a means of avoiding the censor, but it is also indicative of a genuine ambivalence on Zoshchenko's part. Despite his populist sympathies, Zoshchenko is a formally complex writer with a sensitive ear for language and a keen satirical sense. The use of the figure of "the author" in "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" enables Zoshchenko to write widely accessible prose while at the same time remaining artistically aloof from his surrogate narrator.

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<sup>107</sup>M.Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 87.

## Chapter 2: Thematic and Ideological Aspects of Zoshchenko's Work and "Michel Siniagin"

### Introduction

The translator engaged in literary translation is not only presented with the task of conveying the stylistic intricacies of the original in a foreign medium, but must also bridge the cultural gap between the original and the target audience. Uprooted from its native soil and transplanted into an alien culture, the literary text loses many of the subtle connections that enrich it and make it meaningful - the "intertextual" associations with other works of literature and other texts. Part of the translator's task is to compensate for the damage done by cultural transplantation. The following chapter will examine in some detail the themes, characters and ideas in "Michel Siniagin" and in other works by Zoshchenko in an attempt to place the story in its proper context. It will attempt to elucidate some of the specific cultural and historical allusions in the story that may escape the foreign reader, and particularly, to elaborate on changes in the artistic and cultural climate in Russia between the pre-revolutionary era and what has become known as "the Great Turning Point" (1929-31) and how these are reflected in Zoshchenko's story. Besides this, it will also address more universal themes in "Michel Siniagin" which are typical of Zoshchenko's work as a whole: the role of the artist and of art and culture in general, the contrast between the decadent, sensitive *intelligent* and the healthy but cruel philistine, Zoshchenko's obsession with his own mental health and the predicament in which humanity is placed by materialism and loss of faith.

### Part 1: The Historical Theme in "Michel Siniagin".

When "Michel Siniagin" appeared in late 1930, Soviet literature was about to enter a long period of centralised Party control and rigid censorship. The NEP was a time of gradual but significant change during which the foundations of the Soviet literary establishment of the 1930s were laid. Throughout the 1920s the Communist Party had declared its support for proletarian writers and carried out a massive programme of education and material encouragement for worker and peasant writers under the auspices of *Proletkul't* and the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. As the ranks of new writers grew, so did the numbers of writers' organisations representing the working class, such as "The Smithy" ("*Kuznitsa*"), "On Guard" ("*Na postu*"), "October" ("*Oktiabr*") and others. There was a concerted effort by editors and critics to shape the new literature from above throughout this period by encouraging particular themes, styles and approaches to writing. While Socialist Realism had yet to be formulated as a doctrine, its principles were foreshadowed in the 1920s by many of the recommendations of influential editors such as A.

Voronskii.<sup>1</sup> Works such as Gladkov's *Cement (Tsement)* (1923) and Fadeev's *The Rout (Razgrom)* (1927), heralded as successes in the 1920s, were later to be regarded as classics of the genre. The Party continued to advocate forbearance towards "fellow travellers" such as Zoshchenko throughout the 1920s, but the mid-1920s was a time of growing literary conflict, with literary extremists, such as the group "On Guard", making strident attacks on fellow-travellers and urging the Party to provide stronger guidance.<sup>2</sup> In 1929 a stream of articles in *Pravda* heralded a new era of active political intervention in the arts. Apolitical literature was attacked as "individualistic insurrection" and declared to be as harmful as counter-revolutionary writing.<sup>3</sup> This development coincided with the rout of the literary critic Pereverzev by critics such as Shchukin, Gorbachev and Ermilov. The unmasking of "Pereverzevitis" ("*Pereverzevshchina*") was seen as a conclusive defeat of the Menshevik school of literary criticism, whose adherents argued that while artistic creation was inextricably bound up with social and economic factors, art should not be used as an active instrument of political influence. This view was denounced by its opponents as a pernicious "emasculatation" of the Bolshevik line, according to which literature was to be used as an ideological tool in the class struggle.<sup>4</sup>

By 1930, Zoshchenko had been personally touched by the stricter critical climate. Since early in the 1920s, certain critics had warned that Zoshchenko had too trivial a focus as a writer, concentrating exclusively on the petty and wretched aspects of Soviet life.<sup>5</sup> As time went on, the attacks on Zoshchenko's work became more prominent and more aggressive. In 1927 the critic V. Veshnev warned that Zoshchenko's failure to adopt a strong ideological stance meant that his work would be regarded as "bestial, satiated sniggering, the uncontrollable laughter of the self-satisfied philistine ("*meshchanin*") at life's details".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. A. MacGuire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s.*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 260-311.

<sup>2</sup>L. A. Pinegina, *Sovetskii rabochii klass i khudozhestvennaia kul'tura*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1984, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>B. Lafite, "Soviet "Literary Policy" on the Eve of the Great Turning-Point: Terms and Stakes (Results of a Study of 403 Articles on Art published by *Pravda* in 1929)", in *Sociocriticism*, No. 2 /1, 1986, pp. 173-93.

<sup>4</sup>*Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, Moscow: OGIZ RSFSR, 1934, v. 8, pp. 501-12.

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, A. Voronskii, in *Krasnaia nov'*, No. 6, 1922, and A. Sventinskii, "Oktiabr' v literature", November 1923, both quoted in M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, ed. M. Dolinskii, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup>V. Veshnev, "Razgovor po dusham" (1928), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Olimp, 1994, pp. 152-7.

Also in that year an issue of the journal *Begemot* was confiscated for carrying the "politically harmful" story "An Unpleasant Tale" and in August that year *Izvestiia* carried a long article by M. Ol'shevets which denounced the "Sentimental Tales" as an unworthy portrayal of Soviet society and described Zoshchenko as "a common, ordinary philistine ("obyvatel'") who digs about and picks over the dregs of humanity with a sort of malicious glee".<sup>7</sup> According to Chukovskii, Zoshchenko was deeply affected by this criticism.<sup>8</sup> In September 1929, Zoshchenko wrote in a letter to Mikhail Slonimskii: "They lay into me like hell. It's impossible to explain myself. It's only now I realise why they're laying into me - *meshchanstvo*. I protect and admire *meshchanstvo*... How the hell can I explain? They're mixing up the author with the subject. On the whole, things aren't looking good, Misha. It's not funny. They yell. And they yell. Try to shame you in some way. You feel like a crook or a swindler".<sup>9</sup> In 1930 *Zvezda* published a transcript of a writers' discussion chaired by M. Chumandrin on the subject of Zoshchenko's political loyalties. While Chumandrin's tone was fairly positive, he remarked that the ambiguity of Zoshchenko's works made the writer popular not only with workers but with class enemies and concluded with the warning that "Zoshchenko must make his ideological position clearer".<sup>10</sup>

In view of the contemporary literary climate, the apologies of Zoshchenko's fictional author for his choice of subject in "Michel Siniagin" may be seen not only as a facetious comment on the situation, but also as a serious attempt to placate critics. Zoshchenko knew that the story's central theme would have made it suspect in certain critical quarters. Not only is the hero of "Michel Siniagin" representative of the intellectual bourgeoisie "declassed" by the revolution, one of those who became known as "*byvshie*" ("former people", "survivals of the past"), he is also oblivious to the momentous events taking place around him. Rather than undergoing a dramatic conversion to Communism or fighting against it, he quietly sinks into destitution and after a short-lived conversion to the NEP business ethos, dies of pneumonia. Thus he serves neither as a positive hero nor as a recognisable villain, but as a weaker and shadowy version of the classical "superfluous

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<sup>7</sup> M Ol'shevets, "Obyvatel'skii nabat" (1927), in Iu. Tomashevskii, (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 148-52.

<sup>8</sup> K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*. 2nd edn., Moscow, Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 410.

<sup>9</sup> M. Zoshchenko, letter to M. Slonimskii, 17 September 1929, quoted in M. Slonimskii, "Mikhail Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> M. Chumandrin, "Chei pisatel' - Mikhail Zoshchenko?" (1930), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 161-78.

man" of Russian literature. At a time when the theme of the superfluous man was deemed no longer relevant and writers were being urged to portray the new man of the Soviet era "forging ahead step by step, scraping off the deposits of the past, obliterating its traces"<sup>11</sup>, the plot of "Michel Siniagin" would have struck many readers and critics as "out of step with the age".

In this respect, "Michel Siniagin" is typical of the "Sentimental Tales" as a whole. The heroes of the tales are (at least moderately) educated men and products of the old regime. In the third preface to the tales, written in 1928 and signed with the false initials "S.L.", Zoshchenko describes the heroes of the tales as "a whole gallery of disappearing types", adding, possibly for the benefit of his critics, that "it is vital for the new reader of today to know them, in order to see in all its manifestations the life that is now disappearing".<sup>12</sup>

The theme of the old-world *intelligent* unable to adapt to changing times is central not only to "Michel Siniagin" but to "People" and "Apollon and Tamara". "People" tells the story of Belokopytov, a liberal aristocrat who returns to Russia from self-imposed exile in Europe after the revolution only to find that he has no useful role to play in the new social order and cannot even support himself and his wife. Following a short-lived conversion to the ethics of self-preservation and a spell as a dishonest cooperative worker, Belokopytov gives up the struggle and drifts away from human society, first resorting to sleeping rough in the forest and eventually disappearing altogether. Apollon Perepunchik of "Apollon and Tamara" is a piano-player in a bar who goes off to fight in the First World War. On his return he finds that changing musical fashions have made him redundant. Apollon slides into poverty and despair and tries to commit suicide before being saved by a railway signalman who lectures him on the necessity of having some useful trade. The story ends with Apollon finding a new and peaceful life as a gravedigger.

Other stories in the cycle are variations on the theme of the superfluous individual and social instability. Boris Kotofeev, the hero of "A Terrible Night", is a triangle player in an orchestra who becomes obsessed with the thought that somebody will invent an electronic triangle and make him superfluous. When his fears reach crisis point he breaks into a mad dash through his town, pursued by a crowd, and climbs the church belltower to and begins to ring the bell, "as if trying to wake the whole town and all the people". In "The Goat" Zabezhkin, a clerk threatened with redundancy, seeks stability by ingratiating himself with

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<sup>11</sup>R. A. MacGuire, *Red Virgin Soil*, p. 276.

<sup>12</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Sentimental'nye povesti, Predislovie k tret'emu izdaniyu", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, ed. by Iu. Tomashevskii, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986, v. 2, p. 9.

a landlady who he thinks is the owner of a goat. (During the 1920s the goat was a common symbol of petty bourgeois enterprise<sup>13</sup>). The owner of the goat, however, turns out to be a telegraph engineer who is Zabezhkin's rival for the landlady's attentions. Zabezhkin is humiliated and crushed by his rival and eventually meets a sad end which echoes that of Gogol's Akakii Akakievich.

In some tales, the protagonists manage to adapt more or less successfully to the new society. Volodin ("The Lilac is in Bloom") builds up a successful photographic retouching business. Bylinkin ("What the Nightingale Sang About") finds himself a comfortable state position. Both these stories centre on love affairs and on the question of mercenary motives in love. In both stories the hero's success is presented as the result of good luck and self-interest rather than ideological conversion and revolutionary struggle. The most extreme example of this negative type of anti-hero is the central character of "A Funny Adventure", Sergei Petukhov. Petukhov's crisis takes the form of a few desperate hours in which he tries to find enough money to take a girl to the cinema. He is "saved" by the death of his aunt, who leaves him her inheritance.

Despite the diversity of the characters' fates in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin", the theme of the individual crushed and defeated by circumstance was a strong enough theme to be seen as a unifying thread by commentators in both political camps. Chukovskii describes the heroes of the Tales as "persecuted, desperately lonely people" who eventually meet a "disastrous and senseless end".<sup>14</sup> Ol'shevets says of them "It is rare for a hero to survive to the end of the story. All die of despair and terror".<sup>15</sup> This theme of the individual's inner crisis distinguishes the tales from Zoshchenko's short stories. In some cases the hero searches for the meaning of life ("Apollon and Tamara", "Wisdom", "People"); in others, the hero's crisis manifests itself only in feelings of vague dread ("A Terrible Night", "Michel Siniagin").

In giving his heroes some sort of inner dimension and placing them in serious rather than comic predicaments Zoshchenko is revisiting the psychological theme that dominates his earliest work. A serious treatment of the theme of individual emotional experience ("переживания") can be found in some of the earliest stories that Zoshchenko wrote,

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<sup>13</sup> K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> K. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii, (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> M. Ol'shevets, "Obyvatel'skii nabat", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 149.

such as "The Scoundrel" ("Podlets") (1918), "The Neighbour" ("Sosed") (1917) and "How Dare She?" ("Kak ona smeeet?") (1918). These are short psychological sketches on the theme of love, jealousy, desire, pride, etc. I. Slonimskaia has noted that these stories feature the same sort of characters who were later to become objects of satire for Zoshchenko, but argues that here Zoshchenko treats them as romantic heroes. Unlike his later characters they have more than one dimension ("разноплановые").<sup>16</sup> Likewise, a number of longer stories dating from around 1921, such as "The Fish's Mate" ("Ryb'ia samka"), "Old Mother Wrangel" ("Starushka Vrangel") and "Love" ("Liubov") display a serious, romantically ironic treatment of human dilemmas and personal tragedies. Zoshchenko talked of these stories as being written under the influence of Chekhov, and they share with Chekhov's stories a detached, tragi-comic view of human suffering and a narrative voice which acts as an extension of the characters' inner thoughts. The following is a passage from "Love":

В сумерках всегда острее печаль, и в сумерках Наталье было жаль себя.

А тихий звон часов и брошенная книга на полу вдруг стали невыносимы.

- Уйду, вдруг подумала Наталья Никаноровна.<sup>17</sup>

It is significant that in later years Zoshchenko consistently referred to these early stories as "mistakes", from the point of view both of language and treatment of theme. In the article "How I Write" ("Kak ia rabotaiu"), published in 1930, Zoshchenko declares, "In 1921, I wrote a few long stories: "Love", "War" ("Voina"), "The Fish's Mate". Later this type of long story, written in the old tradition, began to seem to me a Chekhovian genre, less suitable, less versatile for the modern reader, for whom I felt it would be better to give something smaller, precise and clear, the whole story in fifty lines, no blabbing on" ("никакой болтовни").<sup>18</sup> In an autobiographical note from approximately the same time he writes, "My first literary steps were mistaken. I began to write old stories in the old style in the old, half-worn-out language in which serious literature is still sometimes written to this day. It was only a year later that I understood my mistake and began to reconstruct myself on all fronts. The mistake was a natural one. I was born into an

<sup>16</sup> I. Slonimskaia, "Chto ia pomniu o Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liubov", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Kak ia rabotaiu" (1930), in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisateliiu, odnoaktnye komedii*, p. 590.

intellectual family. I was not, essentially, a new man or a new writer".<sup>19</sup> In a lecture given in 1946 Zoshchenko repeats that his first works, written about 25 years previously, were written in the manner of Chekhov and remarks, "the Chekhovian genre led me away from a contemporary treatment of theme and the contemporary language"<sup>20</sup>.

In returning to the psychological theme in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko treats his subject with much greater irony than in these earlier "mistaken attempts". There is so much narrative interference in the shape of the fictional author and his contradictory style that it is almost impossible for the reader to identify with the characters even when they are granted some emotional and intellectual life. The narrator sometimes expresses naive awe at his characters and sometimes appears bluntly unsympathetic to their plight. The narrative ambiguity characteristic of the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" puzzled even those who knew Zoshchenko well. Zoshchenko's colleague from Chukovskii's literary studio, Elizaveta Polonskaia, recalled much later that she did not like "Michel Siniagin" because she could not understand what Zoshchenko meant by it: "I said that you could never tell with Zoshchenko when he was joking and when he was being serious, and he took offence"<sup>21</sup>.

Because of Zoshchenko's ambiguous treatment of his subjects, readings of the "Sentimental Tales" have been more than usually influenced by the reader's own sympathies. In a recent study of the reception of Zoshchenko's work, Gregory Carleton argues that both Western and Soviet critics have used the ambiguity of the tales to fuel their own preconceived ideas about Zoshchenko's political agenda. Soviet critics of Zoshchenko's day argued that the "Sentimental Tales" were an indictment of the negative survivals of the past - as social documentary satirising the old regime. On the other hand emigre and foreign critics have tended to regard the portrayal of such victims of the post-revolutionary period as proof of Zoshchenko's anti-Soviet intentions.<sup>22</sup> The heavily politicised atmosphere of literary criticism in the late 1920s and early 1930s was such that critics were apt to stress the socio-historical aspects of literary works. The crucial question being asked about Zoshchenko at the time that "Michel Siniagin" was published is

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<sup>19</sup> Dictated autobiography dated at approximately 1930, quoted in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>M. Osovtsev, "Mikhail Zoshchenko pered zakhodom solntsa", in *Izvestiia*, 19 August 1999, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>G. Carleton, *The Politics of Reception: Cultural Constructions of Mikhail Zoshchenko*. Illinois: NW University Press, 1998, pp. 60-2.

summed up in the title given to the transcript of the discussion chaired by M. Chumandrin, "Whose Writer is Mikhail Zoshchenko?".

Soviet critics may have been unanimous in regarding the heroes of the "Sentimental Tales" as examples of the *meshchanin* - used in the sense of the apolitical individual concerned with his own wellbeing and hence the "class enemy" . But even so, they disagreed on Zoshchenko's attitude to his heroes. Chumandrin, anxious to portray Zoshchenko in a politically favourable light, cited the fact that Zoshchenko makes his heroes perish as evidence that he wanted to show their redundancy, whereas for Ol'shevets the fact that Zoshchenko portrays such characters at all shows that he is basically in sympathy with them and that their dilemmas mirror his own.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Chukovskii, writing in the 1960s, regards Kotofeev Belokopytov, Zabezhkin, Siniagin and others as "down-trodden, restless, ruined people". For Chukovskii it is not the heroes themselves who represent *meshchanstvo* but the world around them - "a world in which everyone has an unshakeable faith in material property as the basis of human happiness". He argues that Zoshchenko's dominant emotion in the tales is of pity, "a pity which he hides as if he were ashamed of it".<sup>24</sup>

The question of Zoshchenko's true intention in choosing to write about "disappearing types" is addressed in a rather oblique fashion in the introduction to "Michel Siniagin". The introduction centres on a discussion of history and individual fate. In the course of the introduction Zoshchenko's narrator deliberately confounds the expectations raised by the title of the work and its claim to be a memoir. "Michel Siniagin" is odd even for a spoof memoir, as it does not even pretend to commemorate a historically important individual. The narrator states in the first sentence that he wanted to write the story "not for the edification of posterity, but just for the hell of it" ("не в назидание потомства, а просто так") (M.S., p. 112). He goes on to apologise for his choice of such an insignificant subject. He does not even confer on Michel the historical distinction of being a victim of the revolution, arguing that Michel's story could have happened at any time:

Очень, знаете, странно, но тут дело не только в революции.  
Правда, революция сбила человека с позиции. Но тут, как бы  
сказать, во все времена возможна и вероятно такая жизнь.

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<sup>23</sup>M. Ol'shevets, "Obyvatel'skii nabat", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 150.

<sup>24</sup>K. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", Iu. Tomashevskii, (ed.) *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 73. Chukovskii uses the term *meshchanstvo* in a moral rather than political sense to mean narrowmindedness and greed.

Автор просит отметить это обстоятельство.

Вот у автора был сосед по комнате. Бывший учитель рисования. Он спился. И влачил жалкую и неподобающую жизнь. Так этот учитель всегда любил говорить:

- Меня, говорит, не революция подпилила. Если б и не было революции, я бы все равно спился бы или проворовался, или бы меня на войне подстрелили, или в плену морду свернули на сторону. Я, говорит, заранее знал, на что я иду и какая мне жизнь предстоит.

И это были золотые слова. (M.S., p.116)

The idea implied here, that the revolution is only one of many disasters that have the potential to upset individual lives, ties in with the narrator's earlier argument that life in every age has been "equally easy and equally difficult" ("одинаково легко и одинаково трудно жить") (M.S. , p. 115). Such comments encourage the reader to look at Michel's story as a recurring human tragedy, rather than one determined by a concrete historical situation. The point that is being made here takes on a particular resonance within the specific culture in which Zoshchenko was writing. The narrator's reluctance to categorise his hero as a victim of the revolution and his refusal to place the revolution centre stage as the decisive moment in Russian history challenge myths on both sides of the contemporary political divide.

In her history of Socialist Realism, Katerina Clark has compared the ontology of the Soviet Union of the 1930s to that of certain traditional societies and messianic religious movements, in which the present is looked on as a form of "profane time" that is made meaningful only in relation to a mythic Great Time, situated either in the past or in the future:

In Stalinist rhetoric of the thirties...the 1917 Revolution, The Civil war...became a kind of canonized Great Time that conferred an exalted status on all who played a major part in them...Likewise, the future, represented by the official version of history - History, functioned in rhetoric as another Great Time, a time when life would be qualitatively different from present-day reality.

There was an absolute cut-off between actual historical reality and the "reality" of these official Great Times. No event of the present time could transcend its profaneness unless it could be dignified by some identification

from a moment either from the official Heroic Age or from the Great and Glorious Future.<sup>25</sup>

For the myth-makers of the Soviet regime, the revolution was regarded as the crucial historical turning-point that represented the first step on the road towards the Radiant Future. On the other hand, opponents of the revolution tended to regard the revolution as a unique catastrophe that had ushered in a new dark age, a decisive catastrophe that had severed Russia from its own past and from Western civilisation. This is a view that is familiar from the writings of emigre writers such as Zinaida Gippius, Vladislav Khodasevich and Vladimir Nabokov, as well as from the memoirs of the period written by those who stayed, such as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam. Several years before Zoshchenko wrote "Michel Siniagin", Mandel'shtam's poem "The Age" ("Vek"), (1923, published in 1928), with its image of the age as an animal with a broken backbone, had provided a powerful expression of the view that the revolution marked a decisive break with Russia's own past and with European classical civilisation.

Both these points of view are based on historical narratives or myths that imbue the progression of time with significance: on the one hand, the myth of the Radiant Future, on the other hand, the myth of the idyllic past or Golden Age. In the introduction to "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko's narrator challenges both these myths, presenting a view of history without any sense of an underlying structure or logic. There are glimpses here of a theme that was later elaborated on in one of Zoshchenko's major works of the 1930s, *The Blue Book (Golubaia kniga)* (1935), in which history is depicted as a never-ending cycle of bloody and meaningless events, through which the ordinary man struggles to keep his head above water. Throughout the introduction to "Michel Siniagin" the narrator acts as an apologist for those who are forced to put up with history, rather than those who are generally regarded as shaping history. For these "smaller" people, the only goal is survival in order to have some sort of personal life:

Правда, надо прямо сказать, что многие не имели так называемой личной жизни - они отдавали все силы и всю волю для ради своих идей и для стремления к цели.

Ну, а которые помельче, те безусловно, ловчились, приспособлялись и старались попасть в ногу со временем для того, чтобы прилично прожить и поплотнее покушать. (M.S., p. 115)

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<sup>25</sup>K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, pp. 39-40.

The references to "personal life" ("личная жизнь") in the introduction to "Michel Siniagin" take on a particular significance in historical context. By the late 1920s the concept of individual needs was officially frowned upon to such an extent that the very word "личный" (personal, individual) had become something close to a term of abuse in certain quarters and contexts, as reviews of Zoshchenko's own work show. The word "приспосабливаться", used by Zoshchenko here, also has specific cultural connotations, as it recalls the closely related word "*prisposoblenets*". The word "*prisposoblenets*", an insult of the same order as "*obyvatel*", is usually translated as "time-server", and defined in the dictionary as "somebody capable of changing his ideas, tastes and convictions in order to use the given situation for his own selfish ends".<sup>26</sup> According to the argument of Zoshchenko's narrator, such a way of life is the only viable option for the majority of people. The cardinal rule of human existence is the survival of the fittest.

Так что в этом смысле человек очень великолепно устроен.  
Какая жизнь идет, в той он и прелестно живет. А которые не  
могут, те безусловно, отходят в сторону и не путаются под  
ногами. (M.S. pp.115-6)

This argument has a double edge, given the time when it was written. Zoshchenko appears to be defending the "little man" struggling against the historical tide to carve out some sort of life for himself (a reading that has some credibility when one remembers what ordinary Russians had lived through in the years of War Communism), but he could also be making a satirical point about the forces now at work in Russian society - an interpretation that is also feasible, given that "Michel Siniagin" was written after the NEP period, when the cultural and political elite in Soviet society had begun to consolidate itself.

In any case, the depiction of life as a continuing struggle for survival is clearly incompatible with the idea of the Radiant Future. The concept of the Radiant Future is treated with irony in the introduction to "Michel Siniagin" in the passage in which the narrator imagines what life will be like in a hundred years' time. First, the readers of the future are imagined as a fop with a little moustache and his wife, sitting beside him in an "exceptional peignoir". This vision is a parody of the dream of the *meshchanin*, reflecting personal aspirations to comfort, leisure and bourgeois culture. The second vision, in which the author imagines the readers of the future as "fine, bronzed, strapping great fellows, dressed modestly yet simply" ("Этакие будут загорелые здоровяки, одевающиеся

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<sup>26</sup>*Slovar' sinonimov russkogo iazyka v 2-kh tomakh*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1971, vol. 2, p.267.

скромно, но просто..."(M.S., p.114) parodies the official version of the Socialist utopia with its physically robust but enlightened workers and peasants. Side by side, the two illustrate the gulf between instinctive human desires and political ideals. There is a similar passage in "What the Nightingale Sang About", in which the "author's" vision of life 300 years in the future combines the utopian Communist vision of a society without money and the materialist's dream of unbelievable riches:

Может быть, даже денег не будет. Может быть, все будет бесплатно, даром. Скажем, даром будут навязывать какие-нибудь шубы или кашне на Гостином дворе.

- Возьмите, скажут, у нас, граждане, отличную шубу.

А ты мимо пройдешь. И сердце не забьется.

- Да нет, скажешь, уважаемые товарищи. На черт мне сдалась ваша шуба. У меня их шесть. <sup>27</sup>

But while the narrator of "Michel Siniagin" shows scepticism about the Radiant Future, he also challenges the nostalgic idealisation of the past. In the published version of the story this is illustrated by the passage describing the dangers of life in the 16th century and the nobleman going for a walk. Here, Zoshchenko uses a device that is common in *The Blue Book*, the depiction of events in the past using contemporary Soviet expressions and reference points. For instance, the 16th-century nobleman is referred to as a "феодальный сукин сын" (literally, "a feudal son-of-a-bitch") and is described using the epithet "бывший" as it came to be used only after the revolution. The deliberate updating of life at different historical periods is used throughout *The Blue Book*, in which scenes from history are described in the colloquial idiom of the Zoshchenko hero as if they were a part of Soviet reality and thus stripped of the romantic aura imbued by distance and the formalities of historical narrative.

A study of the manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin" shows that the link with *The Blue Book* was initially much stronger. Zoshchenko deleted a lengthy and more forceful denial of the myth of a past Golden Age at the manuscript stage, a passage which was very close to *The Blue Book* in both style and content. The deleted passage (which is reproduced in full in Chapter 4 of this thesis) is couched in an informal, *skaz*-like style. In it, the narrator takes issue with those "backward-looking" people who complain about the misfortunes of living in the present troubled times, arguing that "in the past they didn't make it so easy for you to sit warming yourself peacefully by the samovar, either" ("Раньше тоже не

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<sup>27</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 106.

слишком-то давали спокойно и мирно греться у самовара"). In 500 years of European history, argues the narrator in this excised passage, there has been little sign of a Golden Age:

Какой там к черту золотой век. Разные набеги устраивались. Разные налёты. Гунны и так далее. Бабушку и дедушку небось в каждом веке по несколжко раз вырезали вместе со своей семьёшкой. Разные народы с места на место передвигались как оглашённые по всей Европе. Только подумать. Вся Европа как на толкучке двигалась и тряслась целные пятьсот лет.<sup>28</sup>

The passage deleted from "Michel Siniagin" indicates that the central idea of *The Blue Book* had already taken shape in Zoshchenko's head in 1930. *The Blue Book*, envisaged by Zoshchenko as a "history of human relations", is a collection of barbaric scenes from history told in the same colloquial, off-hand manner as the deleted extract from "Michel Siniagin". "According to historians' descriptions, life in the past was really, in a manner of speaking, disgustingly horrible" ("Прошлая жизнь, согласно описанию историков, была уж очень, как бы сказать, отвратительно ужасная"),<sup>29</sup> says the narrator of *The Blue Book*, and the comment could stand as a summary of the book's message as a whole. Subjects treated in *The Blue Book* include the old criminal code in Russia with its ruthless punishments for petty crimes, the burning of heretics at the stake during the Spanish Inquisition and the political campaign of the Roman dictator Sulla who paid money for the severed heads of supporters of his political rival.

What distinguished the deleted passage from "Michel Siniagin" from similar passages in *The Blue Book* is that it makes a direct connection between the troubled times of the present ("Вот мол, дескать, какое наше поколение злополучное. Дескать попали мы в переплёте. Засыпались в какое беспокойное время. Кругом, мол, борьба, классовые бои и всякие такие тревожные дела") and those of the past ("То есть почему такое вы думаете что раньше всегда были какие то счастливые, незабываемые времена? Напротив"). In *The Blue Book*, written at a time of stricter censorship, this connection is everywhere implied - the work has been read as an Aesopian satire of the Stalinist regime - but is never overtly stated.

The deleted passage from "Michel Siniagin" also mentions the fate of writers, and here, once again, the narrator argues that things were just as bad, if not worse, in the past:

<sup>28</sup>M. Zoshchenko, Manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin", IRLI, f.501, p.21.

<sup>29</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh*, vol. 3, p. 278.

Или для примера литература. Писатели. Да для писателей уж если на то пошло, скорей всего сейчас золотой век, в сравнении с тем что было. Для примера такой крупный сочный сатирик - писатель попутчик Сервантес. Правую руку ему отрубили. Правда в плену, но отрубили. А потом приехал он на родину и жрать нечего было - поступил фининспектором. Ходил по деревням собирал налоги. А после левой рукой Дон - Кихота написал. И печатать не очень уж горели желанием. Пришлось почтительное вступление писать в пользу какого-то рыцаря.

Другой крупный попутчик Данте. Того из страны вышерли без правды въезда. А Вольтеру дома сожгли. Где уж там золотой век искать.<sup>30</sup>

A letter from Zoshchenko to Gor'kii in September 1930 repeats the references to Dante, Cervantes and Voltaire in the deleted manuscript version. The letter is written in a style almost indistinguishable from that used in the manuscript passage. In this, more private document there is no doubt that Zoshchenko is using the denial of a Golden Age to console himself for present troubles. He writes to Gor'kii that he has been reading the lives of great writers in order to comfort himself and that, in view of their triumphs over adversity, he has come to the conclusion that it is necessary to carry on writing "whatever the situation, in spite of everything":

Я нарочно, для собственного успокоения, прочел недавно чуть ли не все биографии сколько-нибудь знаменитых писателей.(...) ихняя жизнь на меня очень успокоительно действовала и привела в порядок. В сущности говоря, страшно плохо все жили. Например, Сервантесу отрубили руку. И потом он ходил по деревням и собирал налоги(...) Данте выгнали из страны, и он влачил жалкую жизнь. Вольтеру сожгли дом. (...) И тем не менее они писали замечательные и даже удивительные вещи и не слишком жаловались на свою судьбу. Так что, если все писатели дожидались золотого века, то, пожалуй, ничего не осталось. Все

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<sup>30</sup>M. Zoshchenko, Manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin", IRLI, f.501, p.23.

это привел меня в порядок и я понял, что надо работать при всех обстоятельствах и вопреки всему.<sup>31</sup>

In the introduction to "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko attempts to situate the post-revolutionary age in a broader context, explaining the unspoken principle of self-preservation and *prisposoblenchestvo* as a universal catalyst governing human behaviour throughout history. But Zoshchenko would probably never have been driven to address the subject at all were it not for the peculiar character of the era in which he wrote. "Michel Siniagin" was written at a time when the question of adaptation and survival loomed large for intellectuals and "fellow travellers" like Zoshchenko and when changing one's political colours was becoming increasingly necessary for one's personal survival. The 1930 letter to Gor'kii shows that Zoshchenko took comfort from the idea that life had been "equally easy and equally difficult" in every age. It also shows that he was encouraged by the example of great writers who had triumphed over adversity.

And yet, in "Michel Siniagin", Zoshchenko depicts a much less inspiring character of a writer. The story of Siniagin, a man bereft of talent and lacking the resourcefulness to survive, does nothing to contradict the statement in the introduction that those who cannot move in step with their age "move over and get out from under everybody's feet" ("отходят в сторону и не путаются под ногами.") (M.S., pp. 115-6). If Zoshchenko believed this, though, why did he bother to write "Michel Siniagin" at all? What compelled him to devote a whole story to the tragic life of such a negative hero?

In order to answer this question it is worth looking at a real-life event that almost certainly inspired Zoshchenko to write "Michel Siniagin". This was a meeting with Aleksandr Tiniakov, a poet who became a beggar and a familiar sight on the streets of Leningrad. With hindsight, Zoshchenko described the meeting with Tiniakov as the most horrible memory of his life. A description of the encounter was included in Zoshchenko's autobiographical novel *Before Sunrise (Pered voskhodom solntsa)*, written between 1935 and 1943. Echoes between this semi-fictionalised account and Zoshchenko's earlier fiction, including the "Sentimental Tales", indicate that the meeting with Tiniakov disturbed Zoshchenko because it confirmed fears that already preoccupied him.

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<sup>31</sup>M. Zoshchenko, letter to Gor'kii dated 30 September 1930, quoted in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, pp. 58-9.

## Part 2: "A Horrible Example": Zoshchenko's Encounter with the Poet Aleksandr Tiniakov

*Before Sunrise* is an unusual work, a mixture of autobiography, fiction and psychoanalysis. It concerns Zoshchenko's attempt to discover the reasons for his chronic depression and anxiety by recalling certain important experiences from his youth and childhood and by analysing his dreams. Zoshchenko spent eight years working on *Before Sunrise* (1935 to 1943), but never saw the whole work published. The first seven chapters of the book were serialised in the journal *Oktiabr'* in the summer and autumn of 1943, but serialisation was stopped in November that year.

*Before Sunrise* does not pretend to be an absolutely accurate record of the facts of Zoshchenko's life.<sup>32</sup> It is rather a subjective exploration of certain memories that have left a strong impression on the author and an attempt to conduct a psychoanalytical case study on the basis of this "evidence". Zoshchenko conducts the search through his memories as if it were a detective story, describing his most recent memories first and moving gradually back in time to eventually find the "solution" in his very earliest, subconscious memories from childhood. *Before Sunrise* is thus a document in which two modes of self-interpretation coexist side by side: the episodes from memory offer Zoshchenko's artistic interpretation of events, while the commentary provides insight into his conscious attempts to rationalise them.

Zoshchenko's account of the meeting with the poet-beggar Tiniakov appears in the seventh section of *Before Sunrise*, under the title "Shut the Doors" ("Zakryvaite dveri"), in which Zoshchenko analyses his dreams in order to reconstruct his earliest memories and fears. One of his recurring nightmares is a dream about beggars in filthy rags. The theme of beggars leads to a reminiscence of accompanying his mother on a humiliating visit to enquire about his father's pension, and the thought that the image of a beggar is connected with a fear of becoming destitute himself. There follows a loyal reminder to the reader that the revolution has abolished the poverty that made begging a necessity in the first place. Whether or not this was written with the censor in mind, it is quite out of context, given

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<sup>32</sup>Zoshchenko's wife, Vera, has questioned the reliability of a number of Zoshchenko's recollections in *Before Sunrise*. In a letter of November 1943 Zoshchenko defends himself against her criticism on the grounds that *Before Sunrise* is not "true biography" but "literature". (see G. Carleton, *The Politics of Reception: Cultural Constructions of Mikhail Zoshchenko*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998, p. 145 and p. 199, n17).

that immediately afterwards Zoshchenko suggests that his fear of beggars might stem from the scenes he witnessed at around the time of the revolution as the "fragile beauty, glitter and charm" of the old world "fell from its shoulders" and then goes on to describe his meeting with Tiniakov, who had become a beggar *after* the Revolution. It is worth quoting the passage in full here, as it is of such obvious relevance to "Michel Siniagin":

Я вспомнил одного поэта - А Тинякова.

Он имел несчастье прожить больше, чем ему надлежало.

Я вспомнил его еще до революции, в 1912 году. И потом я увидел его через десять лет.

Какую страшную перемену я наблюдал! Какой ужасный пример я увидел!

Вся мишура исчезла, ушла. Все возвышенные слова были позабыты. Все горделивые мысли были растеряны.

Передо мной было животное более страшное, чем какое-либо иное, ибо оно тащило за собой привычные профессиональные навыки поэта.

Я встретил его на улице. Я помнил его обычную улыбочку, скользившую по его губам, - чуть ироническую, загадочную. Теперь вместо улыбки был какой-то хищный оскал.

Порывшись в своем рваном портфеле, поэт вытащил тоненькую книжечку, только что отпечатанную. Сделав надпись на этой книжечке, поэт с церемонным поклоном подарил её мне.

Боже мой, что было в этой книжечке!

Ведь когда-то поэт писал:

Как девы в горький час измены,

Цветы хранили грустный вид.

И, словно слезы, капли пены

Текли с их матовых ланит...

Теперь, через десять лет, та же рука написала:

Пышны юбки, алы губки,

Лихо тренькает рояль,

Проституточки-голубки,

Ничего для вас не жаль...

Все на месте, все за делом,

И торгует всяк собой:  
 Проститутка - статным телом,  
 Я - талантом и душой.

В этой книжечке, напечатанной в издании автора (1922 г.) все стихи были необыкновенные. Они прежде всего были талантливо. Но при этом они были так ужасны, что нельзя было не содрогнуться, читая их.

В этой книжечке имелось одно стихотворение под названием «Моление о пище». Вот что было сказано в этом стихотворении:

Пищи сладкой, пищи вкусной,  
 Даруй мне, судьба моя, -  
 И любой поступок гнусный  
 Совершу за пищу я.

В сердце чистое нагажу,  
 Крылья мыслям остригу,  
 Совершу грабеж и кражу,  
 Пятки вылижу врагу!

Эти строчки написаны с необыкновенной силой. Это смердяковское вдохновенное стихотворение почти гениально. Вместе с тем история нашей литературы, должно быть, не знает сколько-нибудь равного цинизма, сколько-нибудь равного человеческого падения.

Впрочем, это не было падением, смертью при жизни, распадом, тлением. Поэт по-прежнему оставался здоровым, цветущим, сильным. С необыкновенным рвением он стремился к радостям жизни. Но он не пожелал больше врать. Он перестал притворяться. Перестал лепетать слова - ланиты, девы, перси. Он заменил эти слова иными, более близкими его духу. Он сбросил с себя всю мишуру, в которую он рядился до революции. Он стал таким, каким он и был на самом деле, - голым, нищим, омерзительным.

Этот поэт Т. действительно стал нищим. Он избрал себе путь, который он заслуживал.

Я увидел его однажды на углу Литейного. Он стоял с непокрытой головой. Низко кланялся всем, кто проходил мимо.

Он был красив. Его седящая голова была почти великолепна. Он был похож на Иисуса Христа. И только внимательный глаз мог увидеть в его облике, в его лице нечто ужасное, отвратительное - харю с застывшей улыбочкой человека, которому нечего больше терять.

Мне почему-то было совестно подойти к нему. Но он сам окликнул меня. Окликнул громко, по фамилии. Смеясь и хихикая, он стал говорить, сколько он зарабатывает в день. О, это гораздо больше, чем заработок литератора. Нет, он не жалеет о переменах. Не все ли равно, как прожить в этом мире, прежде чем околеть.

Я отдал поэту почти всё, что было в моих карманах. И за это он хотел поцеловать мою руку.

Я стал стыдить его за те унижения, которые он избрал для себя.

Поэт усмехнулся. Унижения? Что это такое. Унизительно не жрать. Унизительно околеть раньше положенного срока. Все остальное не унизительно. Все остальное идет вровень с той реальной жизнью, которую судьба ему дала в обмен за прошлое.

Через час я снова проходил по этой же улице. К моему удивлению, поэт по-прежнему стоял на углу и, кланяясь, просил милостыню. Оказывается, он даже не ушёл, хотя я дал ему значительные деньги. Я и до сих пор и не поминую - почему он не ушел.<sup>33</sup>

There are clearly differences between Tiniakov, as he is described here, and the hero of "Michel Siniagin". In particular, Tiniakov is distinguished from Michel by his energy and lust for life. But there is evidence here to suggest that Tiniakov was the initial inspiration for the character of Michel, apart from the obvious fact that both are poets from the provinces who become beggars. There is more than a passing similarity between the surnames Tiniakov and Siniagin (given that -ov and -in are both common suffixes to Russian surnames) and the description of Tiniakov the beggar is similar to that of Siniagin once he has become a beggar: both carry a tattered briefcase, both have long, greying hair, both have gruesome smiles (Tiniakov's is compared to an animal baring its teeth; in Michel's case we are told that "his features would twist into an affable grin" ("приветливая улыбка растягивала его лицо") (M.S., p. 134).

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<sup>33</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, vol. 3, pp. 596-8.

The meeting depicted here is also described by Chukovskii in his memoirs of Zoshchenko. The two accounts differ in a number of details and are worth comparing. Both were written long after the event, but Chukovskii's was written after Zoshchenko's account and is possibly intended to contrast with it. Chukovskii's version is as follows:

Жил тогда в Ленинграде один литератор, довольно способный, но гаденький. Звали его Тиняков. Когда-то он сочинял очень неплохие стихи в неоклассическом стиле, но потом стал сотрудничать в черносотенных листках. Потом ударился в похабщину и стал торговать из-под полы непристойными виршами.

Потом нашел себе новую профессию: повесил на шею плакат, начертал на нем крупными буквами слово ПИСАТЕЛЬ и встал на Литейном проспекте в позе стыдливого интеллигентного нищего.

Весь его облик был в полном соответствии с вывеской: волосы до плеч, борода клинышком, в глазах благородная гражданская скорбь. И в довершение типичности: фетровая мягкая шляпа да изодраный порьжелый портфель.

Деньги так и сыпались к писателю: сердобольные старушки, инвалиды, учителя и учительницы - люди, которые были гораздо беднее его - охотно отдавали ему свои последние деньги.

Было ему в то время лет тридцать семь, а пожалуй, и меньше. К вечеру, когда его рваный портфель был порядком отягощен медяками, он снимал свою бесстыжую вывеску и направлялся в закусочную, где услаждал себя дорогими питиями и яствами, недоступными для большинства ленинградцев. Это повторялось ежедневно из месяца в месяц.

Все мы видели этого нищего и брезгливо сторонились его.

Никто и не подумал о том, чтобы как-нибудь изменить его жизнь. Но вот по Литейному прошел Зощенко (кажется, вместе со Стеничем), и на глаза ему попался Тиняков.

- Сколько денег, - сурово спросил он у нищего, - вы добываете в месяц при помощи этой комедии?

Тот задумался:

- Сорок червонцев.

Вот вам двадцать за полумесяца вперед, - а сейчас же уходите отсюда! Не позорьте литературу...ступайте!.....

Нищий взял деньги, заулыбался, закланялся, снял с шеи свою вывеску и сказал деловито:

-За остальными я приду к вам в редакцию. Ровно через две недели...

Но едва только Зощенко ушел от него он снова напялил вывеску и вернулся на прежнее место.

Зощенко, увидев его на обратном пути, потребовал, чтобы он сейчас же ушел и не смел возвращаться сюда.

Нищий неохотно покорился.<sup>34</sup>

Chukovskii's account produces a very different overall impression of the incident from Zoshchenko's description. In Chukovskii's version of events, Zoshchenko is a stern figure of authority lecturing Tiniakov for "bringing literature into disgrace", whereas in his own version Zoshchenko makes very little mention of confronting Tiniakov. Instead, he is reduced to an almost silent, horrified observer. All the emphasis in Zoshchenko's account is on the figure of Tiniakov, who is drawn as an object of pity, horror and mystery. As far as Chukovskii is concerned, there is no mystery in Tiniakov's behaviour. The unshakeable moral equilibrium that is everywhere evident in Chukovskii's diaries is clearly apparent in his description of Tiniakov. For Chukovskii, the whole event is an incidental comedy and Tiniakov is a "rather revolting character" who is entirely responsible for his own unprincipled behaviour. By contrast, Zoshchenko's reaction to the poet-beggar reveals a much greater sensitivity to his plight and an excessive emotional involvement in the degradation he has undergone. He explains Tiniakov's fate not as a deliberate choice, as Chukovskii does, but instead calls the poet somebody who "had the misfortune to live longer than he should have done".

There is some confusion over the date of the meeting with Tiniakov in Zoshchenko's account: Zoshchenko suggests that the first meeting with Tiniakov took place in or soon after 1922, as he mentions that the poet gives him a "freshly published book" with this date. However, the poems Zoshchenko quotes here, "On a Spree" ("Ia guliaiu") and "Prayer About Food" ("Molitva o pishche") are from the collection *Ego sum qui sum* (*Azem' sushchii*), published in June 1924. Tomashevskii fixes the date of the meeting as 1 November 1924.<sup>35</sup> If we believe Zoshchenko, he met Tiniakov before he began the "Sentimental Tales", whereas if Tomashevskii is right, Zoshchenko had already written "Apollon and Tamara" and "People" - both stories which have strong thematic parallels with "Michel Siniagin" - before the meeting with Tiniakov. If this is the case, it seems

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<sup>34</sup> K. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", In Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>35</sup> Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Olimp, 1994, p. 345.

possible that the meeting with Tiniakov confirmed inner fears about the world - and particularly about the intellectual's place in the world - which had already begun to manifest themselves in Zoshchenko's work.

Throughout the rest of this chapter I will be returning to Zoshchenko's account of his meeting with Tiniakov in *Before Sunrise*, as his interpretation of the poet's plight and his comments on the changes that took place in Tiniakov's writing reveal some of the deep-seated preoccupations that lie at the root of "Michel Siniagin" and other thematically related stories from the "Sentimental Tales". This chapter will also compare Tiniakov's literary treatment of the theme of the poet-beggar and Zoshchenko's interpretation of the character in "Michel Siniagin". The disparity between the two reflects not only the radical difference between Zoshchenko and Tiniakov as writers and individuals but also the huge changes in attitudes to art and the artist that took place in Russia after the revolution.

### Part 3: "Poems about Flowers and Dickie Birds": The Literary Theme in "Michel Siniagin"

In Zoshchenko's account of his meeting with Tiniakov it comes as no surprise to find Zoshchenko speaking favourably of Tiniakov's later poems, which Chukovskii describes as "obscene doggerel", and dismissing the poet's early work (referred to by Chukovskii as "quite decent poems in the neo-Classical style") as the empty "babbling" of pretty words. The critical line taken by Zoshchenko here is quite consistent with his public statements about literature (in, for instance, "About Myself, Critics and My Work", "Letters to a Writer" and "How I Write"), which stress that literature should reflect the changes wrought by the revolution in form and language as well as in content. One of the clearest expressions of this "official version" of Zoshchenko's own literary programme is in his 1937 review of Zabolotskii's poetry, in which he argues that true art is never cut off from its own time:

У нас есть поэты, которые пишут так, как будто в нашей стране ничего не случилось. Они продолжают ту литературу, которая была начата до революции.

Тут кроются ошибки и большая беда, потому что прежний строй речи диктует старые формы, а в этих старых формах весьма трудно отражать современную жизнь (...)

Подлинное искусство не оторвано от своих дней, и его течение - не плавное течение тихой речи, оно кровью и сердцем связано с народом, и его дыхание сливается с дыханием страны.

И если читатель теперь иной, чем он был до революции, если синтаксис его речи иной, если надежды и интересы его иные, то искусство должно быть иным, не таким, каким оно было и не таким, как его создавали великие мастера прошлого.<sup>36</sup>

In the review Zoshchenko criticises Pasternak as a writer who perpetuates classical conventions in literature and defends Zabolotskii against accusations of "infantilism", comparing the poet's manner to the grotesque-naive style of the artist George Grosz. The analogy with Zoshchenko's own style (which he had described as "infantilism" the year before in *Youth Restored (Vozyrashchennaia molodost')*<sup>37</sup> is obvious. In this respect, the

<sup>36</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O stikhakh N. Zabolotskogo" (1937), in "Literatura dolzhna byt' narodnoi", ed. Iu. Tomashevskii, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 9, 1984, pp.100-8.

<sup>37</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Vozyrashchennaia molodost'*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 158.

essay is typical of Zoshchenko's literary commentary, which tends to show a high level of personal involvement and personal projection.<sup>38</sup>

Of all Zoshchenko's critical articles, the 1919 essay on Blok, "The Death of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance", is particularly rich in personal analogies. The essay repays study with respect to "Michel Siniagin", as Blok is an important sub-textual presence in the story. In this article Zoshchenko portrays Blok as a dreamer who has woken up to the ugliness and banality of the world about him. The permutations of Blok's muse, from the fantastical "Beautiful Lady" via the real but mysterious "Stranger" to the *meshchanka* Tekla/Fekla in "Above the Lake" ("Nad ozerom"), are described as the awakening of a Don Quixote to the fact that his Dulcinea is Aldonsa Lorenzo. In "The Twelve" the transformation of Blok's muse is complete in the figure of the murdered prostitute Katia, and the poet allows himself to become a vessel for "barbarian" voices.<sup>39</sup> Arguably, the figure of Blok depicted by Zoshchenko in this essay tells us more about Zoshchenko than it does about Blok. The image of the awakened Don Quixote is an appropriate one for Zoshchenko himself, as a passage in "The Lilac is in Flower" suggests. Here the semi-autobiographical author figure talks ironically but fondly of his youthful idealism:

В молодые, прекрасные годы, когда жизнь казалась утренней прогулкой, вроде по бульвару, автор не видел многих теневого сторон. Он просто не замечал этого...Его глаза глядели на разные веселые вещицы, на разные красивые предметы и переживания. И на то, как цветки растут и бутончики распускаются, и как облака

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<sup>38</sup>Another example of this is Zoshchenko's 1919 essay on the work of the comic writer Teffi, which praised her short, concise stories and her manner of using exaggerated caricature to depict "quasi-human" ("человекообразные") characters. This essay could, as Tomashevskii notes, serve as a prescription for Zoshchenko's own future direction (Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 76). Some twenty-five years later, in a talk prepared for the 40th anniversary of Chekhov's death, Zoshchenko described Chekhov as a misunderstood satirist, whose critics confused him with his fictional creations because they did not want to recognise themselves as the objects of his satire (M. Zoshchenko, "O komicheskom v proizvedeniiakh Chekhova" (1944), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 104). There is an obvious analogy between Zoshchenko's representation of Chekhov and how he saw himself, when he complained to Slonimskii that "they are mixing up the author with the theme".

<sup>39</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Konets rytsaria Pechal'nogo Obraza" (1919), in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp.78-84.

по небу плывут, и как люди друг дружку взаимно горячо любят.

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A similar passage on disappointed ideals from *The Blue Book* (1935) makes a direct comparison between the "author" and Blok, referred to anonymously by the narrator as "one of our splendid poets" but identified by the extract from his poem "Autumn Day" ("Osennii den")<sup>41</sup>. The passage opens the section "Misfortunes" ("Neudachi") and describes the optimism of youth ("какая прямо волшебная картина расстилалась тогда перед нашим невинным взором") and the pessimism that comes with the dawning of reason:

Так сказать, глазами разума мы имели неосторожность  
взглянуть на окружающий ландшафт. И вдруг, как в сказке, в  
одно мгновение исчезли все эти волшебные картинки. И поблекли  
пестрые краски. И пропало все, от которого мы пришли в такой  
неописуемый восторг.

Как сон все это исчезло, погасло и прекратилось (...)

И даже наш прекрасный, но лирический поэт того времени,  
хотевший видеть главным образом цветы, луну и букеты, однажды  
так воскликнул:

И низких нищих деревень  
не счесть, не смерить оком!...  
О нищая моя страна,  
Что ты для сердца значишь?  
О, бедная моя жена,  
О чем ты горько плачешь? <sup>42</sup>

Zoshchenko's account of his own early literary development also shows parallels with his description of Blok's artistic path in "The Death of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance". Zoshchenko always portrayed himself as one who had understood his youthful mistakes and changed his own literary course at a critical point in his life. One of

<sup>40</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Tsiren' tsvetet", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p.148.

<sup>41</sup>The same passage also contains a reference to Esenin's poem "I don't regret, don't call, don't weep" ("Ne zhaleiu, ne zovu, ne plachu") in the form of the "rosy steed" ("розовый конь") on which the "author" pictures himself galloping through the "flowering fields" of his youth.

<sup>42</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, pp. 330-1.

the reminiscences in *Before Sunrise* describes an event that may have been a decisive factor in this change: in 1918 a story written by Zoshchenko (using the pseudonym "Chirkov") was rejected by the newspaper *Krasnaia gazeta* with the comment, "we need rye bread, not brie cheese". As Zoshchenko tells it, the rejection affected him deeply: it has since become a well-quoted anecdote in the story of his literary development. This story has not survived, but existing early works show a striking difference between work written in 1917 and those written after he had established contact with literary circles in Petrograd. Three short stories from 1917 are quite unlike anything later associated with Zoshchenko's name: "The Marquise's Costume" ("Kostium markizy") is a monologue by the aging husband of a fading marquise in which he remembers the sentimental waltzes of their youth. "The King's Fancy" ("Kapriz korolia") is the story of a bored king who scours his kingdom for a woman who can give him something new. "And Only the Wind Whispered" ("I tol'ko veter shepnul") is a dialogue between a nameless man and a stranger about the search for happiness. All are uncharacteristically whimsical and resemble Oscar Wilde's fairytales in their use of archaic diction and conventional fairytale imagery.<sup>43</sup>

In his aborted work of literary criticism "At the Turning Point", conceived during his association with Chukovskii's literary studio, Zoshchenko attacked the decadent literary fashion to which he had succumbed two years earlier when he wrote these stories. In the 1919 essay "Lifeless People" ("Nezhivye liudi") Zoshchenko criticises the prose writer Boris Zaitsev as symptomatic of the general "crisis of individualism" in recent Russian literature which has led to a fascination with "made-up marquises" and "transparent strangers":

Тогда сначала быт, а потом и реальная жизнь ушли из литературы. Бред, измышления своего я родили какую-то удивительную ненастоящую сонную жизнь. Поэты придумали каких-то принцесс, маркизов и «принцев с Антильских островов». И мы полюбили их, мы нежно полюбили виденья, придуманных маркиз и призрачных чудесных Незнакомок. Жизнь окончательно ушла из литературы.<sup>44</sup>

It seems likely that Zoshchenko was thinking of his own "The Marquise's Costume" when he wrote this. The reference to "princes from the Antilles" in the essay probably alludes to

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<sup>43</sup> All three stories are published in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 43-7.

<sup>44</sup> A. I. Pavlovskii, "Stat'ia M. Zoshchenko o B. K. Zaitseve", in N. A. Groznova (ed.) *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997, p. 37.

Aleksandr Vertinskii's song of 1916, "The Little Creole Boy" ("Malen'kii kreol'chik") ("Ах где же мой маленький креольчик, мой смуглый принц с антильских островов"). Vertinskii was an early love of Zoshchenko's which he had outgrown. The singer was at the height of success in the years following the demise of Symbolism as the artistic mainstream in Russian poetry. Like the poet Igor Severianin - another of Zoshchenko's intended targets in the planned section on "Lifeless People" - Vertinskii is associated with vulgarised reworkings of popular Symbolist themes. He performed in a Pierrot's costume singing about unhappy love affairs, corrupt city life and the "sweet liberation" of death. Vera Zoshchenko remembers in her reminiscences that when she first met Zoshchenko he loved Russian popular romances of the sort popularised by Vertinskii. The following is a diary extract in which Vera describes their days together in May 1916:

Он часто заводил грамофон. Любимейшими его песнями были «не искушай» и «сомнение» Глинки...Часто ставил «Сердце мое болеет», потом «Дивно-прекрасные», в исполнении Морфесси [на полях]: «Дивно-прекрасные ласково властные, томные смотря глаза...В них наслаждение, горечь, забвение, в них и покой и гроза. Песенки Вертинского». <sup>45</sup>

Zoshchenko exorcised this youthful love in "At the Turning Point" and again in "Retribution" ("Vozmezdie"), a long story of 1936 to which he gave the title made famous by Blok's long historical poem. Vertinskii makes an appearance in "Retribution" as a symbol of the most tasteless aspects of the old world. The narrator, Anna Kas'ianova, describing her days as a cook in the household of a general Dubasov, remembers Vertinskii visited the general's wife one day and performed his songs. Through the eyes of the honest working girl Kas'ianova, Dubasova's entourage appears as a crude parody of *byvshie* - effete men like dolls who powder their faces, wear beauty patches and sing sad songs about death. Kas'ianova remembers how another guest, Iurii Anatol'ovich Bunakov, used to sing lines from a lyric by Blok, "A Night Like Any Other Night, The Street is Empty" ("Noch' - kak noch', i ulitsa pustynna"). The contempt felt for Bunakov by the healthy, strong, utterly unpleasant Kas'ianova, who bears all the hallmarks of a positive Socialist Realist heroine, is indicative of strong feelings of guilt and self-hatred on Zoshchenko's part.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> G. B. Fillipova, "Lichnost' Zoshchenko po vospominaniiam ego zheny (1916-1929)", in N. A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, p. 52.

<sup>46</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Vozmezdie", in *Rasskazy, fel'etony, povesti*, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958, p. 361. (The translation of the title of Blok's poem is A. Pyman's.)

Material recently published in a collection of archive material from the Institute of Russian Literature in St. Petersburg shows that Zoshchenko made a note on some separate sheets of quotes used for his essay on Zaitsev that seems to contradict the central argument of the essay "Lifeless People". In this note, Zoshchenko praised Zaitsev's book *Earthly Sadness* (*Zemnaia pechal'*) for its tender sadness and its melancholy ("книга прекрасная, нежная печаль во всем. Поражает грусть, и угрюмость, "умирание", покорность, рок, судьба"). This observation is proof of an ambivalent attitude to Zaitsev on Zoshchenko's part. According to Pavlovskii, who prepared a recent annotated version of the essay, the comment suggests that Zaitsev was deliberately "sacrificed" by Zoshchenko in a symbolic battle with his own nervous illness.<sup>47</sup>

The connection in Zoshchenko's mind between his illness and the decadent culture of his youth is made quite explicit in *Before Sunrise*. In the first chapter of his fictionalised autobiography, Zoshchenko writes of his own inability to "dance to the crude, vulgar music of life" and observes that when he was younger, melancholy was considered a sign of intelligence ("В мое время грусть считалась признаком мыслящего человека. В моей среде уважались люди задумчивые, меланхолические и даже как бы отрешенные от жизни"). *Before Sunrise* also includes the sketch "Vava the Bride, a description of an occasion when Zoshchenko read the poems of Blok and Vera Inber (another target in "Lifeless People") to a girl who later mortally offended him by telling him she had no interest in poetry. The account of the meeting with Aleksandr Tiniakov in *Before Sunrise* is followed by a discussion of what Zoshchenko calls "the poetry of my day", under which category he includes the work of Blok, Esenin, Akhmatova, Solov'ev, Bal'mont and Briusov, as well as popular romances. Zoshchenko begins by expressing nostalgia for the forgotten sounds of his youth ("Не скрою от вас, - у меня появились слёзы в глазах, когда я вдруг припомнил эти позабытые звуки"), but after quoting a couple of mediocre poems by Symbolist poets and a hysterical passage by Bal'mont on Edgar Allen Poe, Zoshchenko declares himself completely reconciled to the loss of that literature and the world it represents: "Слезы давно уже высохли на моих глазах. Нет, я ни о чём больше не жалею. Я не жалею о том мире, который я потерял". Once again Zoshchenko emphasises the cheap theatricality of Symbolism by employing the metaphor of "tinsel" ("мишура"), used in the description of Tiniakov:

У феи - глазки изумрудные

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<sup>47</sup> A. I. Pavlovskii, "Stat'ia M. Zoshchenko o B. K. Zaitseve", in N. A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, p. 48.

Всё на траву она глядит.  
 У ней - наряды дивно-чудные  
 Опал, топаз и хризолит. . .

Какой цветистый нищенский язык! Какая опереточная фантазия у  
 неплохого, в сущности, поэта!

У царицы моей есть высокий дворец,  
 О семи он столбах золотых,  
 У царицы моей семигранный венец,  
 В ней без счету камней дорогих.

Нет, неприятно читать эти стихи. Нестерпимо слышать эту  
 убогую инфантильную музыку. Отвратительно видеть эту мишуру,  
 эти жалкие манерные символы.<sup>48</sup>

In its didactic tone and its liberal use of insults, this piece of criticism resembles the Marxist diatribes about which Zoshchenko complained to Slonimskii and which he parodied in the "Sentimental Tales". *Before Sunrise* was written for publication in 1943, at a time when it was almost obligatory to condemn pre-revolutionary, elitist culture, and it is highly likely that Zoshchenko was exaggerating for the benefit of the censor, perhaps to compensate for the earlier admission of tearful nostalgia for his youth. The views on Symbolism expressed here are perfectly consistent with mainstream Marxist-Leninist criticism, which labelled the work of Bal'mont and Solov'ev as "the poetry of decadent decline" and attacked such poetry not only as "apolitical, antipopular and anarchic-individualistic" but as unhealthy, artificial and pessimistic. During the late Stalinist period realism was defended as the only appropriate artistic method with such fanaticism that any sort of literary artifice ("условность") was considered suspect. Bal'mont's "poetry of dreams and shadows and of hazy, intangible sensations and feelings" was criticised for "completely ignoring concrete objective reality". Even metaphors were frowned on for destroying the "logical and objective sense" of the word and thus encouraging the treatment of "subjective, irrational and metaphysical themes".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p.600. The poems quoted here are, respectively, Konstantin Bal'mont's "Nariady fei" (1905) and Vladimir Solov'ev's "U tsaritsy moei est' vysokii dvoret" (1876).

<sup>49</sup> All these comments are taken from the chapter entitled "The poetry of Bourgeois Decline: Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism" ("Poeziia burzhuznogo upadka: simvolizm,

Clearly there is some continuity of thought between Zoshchenko's earliest criticism and the comments on Symbolism in *Before Sunrise*, which lead to a wholesale denial of the old world. Together with many other public statements by Zoshchenko these works invite an interpretation of Zoshchenko as a committed Soviet writer, or at least as a "fellow-traveller" trying diligently to reform himself. The true picture is more complicated, however. Zoshchenko's early criticism of Silver Age literature is heartfelt, but even at this stage it appears that Zoshchenko was forcing himself to adopt a line of argument that was not a wholly honest reflection of his literary tastes in an early attempt to tackle his illness. The issue is complicated much further by the fact that the views Zoshchenko expressed in 1919 in "At the Turning Point" were later adopted by the Marxist critical lobby and distorted into a rigid creed based on a narrowly defined and officially described version of reality. How far Zoshchenko was from this critical mainstream is obvious from a passage in *The Blue Book* in which the narrator applies obtuse notions of reality to poetry, translating a poem "out of the language of proud poetry into democratic prose". The poem is one of Gumilev's translations of Chinese poems included in the book *The China Pavilion (Farforovyi pavil'on)* (1918) under the title "House" ("Dom"):

У этого поэта, надо сказать, однажды сгорел дом, в котором он родился и где он провел лучшие дни своего детства. И вот любопытно посмотреть, на чем этот поэт утешался после пожара.(...)

Казалось, все радости детства  
Сгорели в погибшем доме  
И мне умереть захотелось  
И я наклонился к воде,  
Но женщина в лодке скользнула  
Вторым отраженьем луны,  
И если она пожелает,  
И если позволит луна,  
Я дом себе новый построю  
В незаведомом сердце ее.

То есть, другими словами, делая вольный перевод с гордой поэзии на демократическую прозу, можно отчасти понять, что

поэт, обезумев от горя, хотел было кинуться в воду, но в этот самый критический момент он вдруг увидел катающуюся в лодке хорошую женщину. И вот он неожиданно влюбился в нее с первого взгляда, и эта любовь заслонила, так сказать, все его неимоверные страдания и даже временно отвлекла его от забот по приисканию себе новой квартиры. Тем более, что поэт, судя по стихотворению, по-видимому, попросту хочет как будто переехать к этой даме. Или он хочет какую-то пристройку сделать в ее доме, если она, как он туманно говорит, пожелает и если позволит луна и домоуправление.<sup>50</sup>

If we take the official version of Zoshchenko's literary programme at face value, "Michel Siniagin" can be read as straightforward parody of the literature of the recent past, regarded by Zoshchenko as hopelessly redundant. However, this is obviously an oversimplified view. "Michel Siniagin" was written at a historical watershed, the "Great Turning Point" between the period of NEP and relative artistic freedom and the era of collectivisation, five-year-plans and Socialist Realism. While the tale casts a critical eye on the past, it also reflects Zoshchenko's doubts and fears about the future of Russian literature. The literary parody in the story is double-edged, satirising the decadence of the past and the utilitarianism of the present.

A very visible sign of how far the literary climate had changed between the immediate pre-revolutionary years, when Zoshchenko first ventured into literary criticism, and the year 1930, in which he wrote "Michel Siniagin", is provided by the figure of Maiakovskii. Maiakovskii was one of the few contemporary writers regarded positively by Zoshchenko, whose essay "About Vladimir Maiakovskii" ("O Vladimire Maiakovskom") planned for "At the Turning Point" depicted the writer as an artist with an extraordinary strength and will, towering over his effete contemporaries. In the period between the composition of this piece and Maiakovskii's death, Maiakovskii had thrown himself dutifully into the role of the artist of the revolution. However, tensions between the poet and the representatives of literary power were becoming increasingly strained. Maiakovskii's formal experimentation and his satire of Party opportunism and bureaucracy did not go down well in the increasingly conservative climate. Maiakovskii committed suicide on 14th April 1930; Zoshchenko began work on "Michel Siniagin" in late April that same year. It is highly probable that personal problems were the main cause of Maiakovskii's suicide, but there had been a public dispute with the hard-left critic Ermilov just before his death, and Ermilov was addressed by name in Maiakovskii's suicide note. Unavoidably,

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<sup>50</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 224.

Maiakovskii's death drew attention to the increasingly stifling atmosphere in Soviet letters, which had contributed to the poet's other problems. That the man seen by Zoshchenko as an embodiment of life and strength should have destroyed himself at the age of 36 was an ominous sign of the gathering cultural gloom in Russia.

The most obvious literary allusion in "Michel Siniagin" is to Blok, who is described as the most important influence on Michel. There are parallels with Blok in the domestic idyll of the hero's youth, in his upbringing by female relatives, his marriage to a childhood sweetheart and "girl next door" and his romance with a more sophisticated woman and bohemian lifestyle in St Petersburg (Isabella Kriukova, with her guitar playing, foot stamping and gypsy romances, is perhaps meant to parody the opera singer Liubov' Del'mas, who inspired Blok's "Carmen" poems). The image of Blok evoked in "Michel Siniagin" is exclusively that of the poet in his pre-revolutionary period. This is also true of the references to Blok's poetry. Michel's poem "Storm" is actually an obscure early poem by Blok, clearly influenced by Fet, to which Zoshchenko made a few minor alterations. Michel's fantastical love of an unknown woman is an ironic reference to the famous theme of the "Beautiful Lady" in Blok's early work. "Ladies, Ladies", is a burlesque parody of the poem "The Stranger".

In the context of Zoshchenko's fictional world, the figure of Blok, in the shape of the dreamer described in "The Death of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance" is so incongruous as to be automatically comical. The humour of references to Blok in Zoshchenko's work is based on the gulf between him and the typical Zoshchenko protagonist/narrator. In "Michel Siniagin", this is seen in the narrator's literal understanding of the "Beautiful Lady" as a love object. ("Тем не менее, поэт увлекался одной определенной девушкой и в этом смысле его поэтический гений шел несколько вразрез с его житейскими потребностями") (M.S., p.121) Michel's poem "Ladies, Ladies" similarly reinterprets Blok's "The Stranger" in a narrowly sexual way: Blok's poem is about a search for meaning and beauty, whereas Michel's is about a womaniser looking for novelty. A similarly "blasphemous" reference to Blok is the basis of a joke in "A Romantic Story featuring a Budding Poet" ("Romanticheskaia istoriia s odnom nachinaiushchim poetom") published in *The Blue Book*. The girlfriend of the poet in the title suggests that he take her out to dinner at a private restaurant and adds that Blok "had also liked, in his day, to hang around in restaurants and sweetshops for no reason" ("в свое время тоже любил почём зря бывать в ресторанах и в кондитерских")<sup>51</sup>. Thus the hellish image of the restaurant or tavern as the sphere of worldly activity in Blok's poems is recast in the spirit of the NEP.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

Fet is mentioned alongside Blok as one of Michel's poetic influences and is another important presence in the story's literary sub-text. Afanasii Fet (1820-1892) is striking as perhaps the most uncompromising adherent to the principle of "art for art's sake" in the history of Russian literature. His poetry springs from contemplation of and emotional communion with nature, and the guiding principle of his art is beauty. Already in the 19th century Fet's name had become synonymous in some circles with elitist, socially irrelevant art. Belinskii wrote of Fet's poetry, "It's good, but shouldn't one be ashamed of wasting time and ink on such rubbish?".<sup>52</sup> Fet's famous poem beginning with the words "Whispers, Timid Breathing" ("Shepot, robkoe dykhanie") caused something of a furore when it was published, inspiring a debate on the moral responsibilities of the artist in which Dostoevskii joined, arguing that "it is unacceptable to surrender to the joys of life and admiration of nature's beauty when people's lives are full of suffering".<sup>53</sup>

The artistic tradition of Fet had a heavy influence on the Symbolists, and this tradition is parodied in "Michel Siniagin" in the portrayal of the young, contemplative hero gathering inspiration from the countryside and in the flower/tree theme running through the poetry. Lidia Ginzburg has talked of the "country-house" tendency in 19th-century lyric poetry<sup>54</sup> and the epithet is particularly appropriate to Fet's work, in which nature is often portrayed in the shape of the garden. Flowers or trees seen through the window are common in his poetry ("Печальная береза у моего окна"; "А за окошком в саду / между листьев сирени и липы"; "густая крапива / шумит под окном"). The same essentially docile view of nature is reflected in the poems in "Michel Siniagin". Two of the excerpts from Michel's poems - "Autumn" and "Storm" - feature flowers seen through a window: "Лепестки и незабудки / рассыпались за окном" (M.S. p. 120); .."ветки белых роз / в окно моё дышат ароматом" (M.S., p. 120). The first verse-parody in "Michel Siniagin" also uses the image of a flower at a window ("В моем окне качалась лилия" (M.S. p. 113). Poems written in the tradition of Fet were viewed with a certain hilarity in Zoshchenko's circle, as is shown Lev Lunts's remark to the poet Antokol'skii at a meeting in 1923: "You know, your poems are all beginning to sound the same. Full of branches, little beetles, soul and there's always something fluttering" ("знаешь, твои стихи начинают повторяться. Все веточки, букашки, душа, и непременно

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<sup>52</sup> D. Blagoi (ed.), *Mir kak krasota: o Vechernikh ogniakh A. Feta*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> S. Babin, B. Semibratova (eds.), *Sud'ba poetov serebriannogo veka*. Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> L. Ginzburg, "Kniga o lirike", in T. A. Bek (ed.), *Serebrianyi vek: poeziia*, Moscow: Olimp, 1996, p. 89.

что-нибудь колыхается").<sup>55</sup> Zoshchenko's preparatory notes for his article on Teffi include the following remark "On modern humour... Nature has disappeared altogether and if it hasn't it is funny" ("О современном юморе... Природа ушла вовсе, а если и есть, то смешная").<sup>56</sup> The remark holds true for Zoshchenko's own work, in which the theme of nature - as distinct from human nature - is either absent altogether or treated with irony, as in "People": "он ежедневно выезжал верхом на прогулку, любуясь красотами природы или журчащим говором какого-нибудь лесного ручейка".<sup>57</sup> The taming of nature to its superficially picturesque aspects in the poems in "Michel Siniagin" is a sign that the poet is protected from the uglier aspects of nature by culture. Only when the hero becomes a beggar does he face nature in its most immediate form, as a struggle to survive.

The official view of literature in "Michel Siniagin" is best represented by the narrator's comment about the class of "highly educated, intellectual people" with "delicate emotional constitutions" who would "start crying at the sight of an extra flower in a flower bed or a sparrow hopping about on a dungheap". Here, the romantic tendency in literature and the aesthetic contemplation of the world is reduced to a simple formula, "crying at sparrows". The formula is repeated again in the passage about three sons ("перед воробушками умиляться" (M.S. p. 117). This sort of comic distillation, reminiscent of Lunts's remark to Antokol'skii, is frequently used by Zoshchenko when referring to "old" literature. There is no sophisticated literary parody in "Michel Siniagin", but rather the sort of magnified caricatures that Zoshchenko praised in the work of Teffi ("1000 times more vulgar, 1000 times uglier").<sup>58</sup> Such caricatures abound in Zoshchenko's work: in "Michel Siniagin", apart from the repeated references to sparrows, there is the "lousy lyric poem" about the lily, and the imagined retort from the reader about "poems about flowers". "The Lilac is in Flower" contains a reference to "A Bird is Hopping on a Branch" ("птичка прыгает на ветке"), attributed by the narrator to Pushkin.<sup>59</sup> In *The Blue Book* poetry is blamed for misleading young ladies about the 16th century: "Розы, грезы, а насчет того, что за ноги вешает, об этом поэзия барышням ничего не подносила".<sup>60</sup> In the same

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<sup>55</sup> К. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "О Teffi", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liudi", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 61. (my italics)

<sup>58</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "О Teffi", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Siren' tsvetet", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 160.

<sup>60</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 335.

work the youthful idealism of Blok is described as a leaning towards "flowers, the moon and bouquets" ("цветы, луну и букеты") and in the passage already quoted from "The Lilac is in Flower" the narrator talks of his own early romanticism in similar terms: ("его глаза глядели... на то, как цветки растут, и бутончики распускаются, и как облака по небу плывут").

This image of the romantic poet looking at the clouds is repeated in "Michel Siniagin" in the portrayal of the youthful Michel wandering around Pskov composing poems. It also appears in the short story "A Peasant Talent" ("Krest'ianskii samorodok") written five years earlier. The story provides an interesting comparison with "Michel Siniagin" because of the difference in the narrative perspective of the two stories. The hero of "A Peasant Talent" is an aspiring poet, Ivan Filippovich, who approaches the editor of a journal to try to sell his poems. In an attempt to recommend some poems to the editor he describes his sensitive poetic nature:

К поэзии, уважаемый товарищ, имею склонность, прямо скажу, сыздетства. Сыздетства чувствую красоту и природу (. . .) Бывало, другие ребята хохочут, или рыбку удят, или в пяточок играют, а я увижу, например, бычка или тучку и переживаю...очень я эту красоту сильно понимал. И тучку понимал, ветерок, бычка...Это все я, уважаемый товарищ, очень сильно понимал.

In this story there is a clear distinction between the uneducated peasant and the character of the editor who acts as narrator. The editor, whose biography identifies him with Zoshchenko ("я, нервный и больной человек, отравленный газами в германскую войну..."), expresses despair at Ivan Filippovich's poems and at his crass ignorance but puts up with him out of respect for his class origins. Eventually, exasperated with the visits, he tells him to find another job. The hero eagerly jumps at what he thinks is an offer of work. When the editor asks him if he would not be sorry to give up poetry, Ivan Filippovich answers, in what the narrator describes as "the voice of a cockroach" ("тараканьим голосом"), "What poetry? A man has to eat!" ("Какая поэзия? Жрать надо - поэзия!").<sup>61</sup>

Ivan Filippovich is "objectified" as a character. In his description of himself as a sensitive romantic he becomes an object of humour, through the typical *skaz* device of the unreliable narrator given away by his own words. But the passage may well have another intention

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<sup>61</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Krest'ianskii samorodok", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 83.

too - to "defamiliarise" and thus satirise the image of the lyric poet by presenting it through the eyes of a naive narrator. A. Zholkovskii has compared this sort of defamiliarisation in Zoshchenko's work to passages by Tolstoi, such as the description of Natasha Rostova's visit to the opera in "War and Peace", in which forms of social and cultural artifice are subject to the ruthlessly honest gaze of a natural, unspoilt subject.<sup>62</sup> In Ivan Filippovich's description, the stock figure of the romantic poet seems a grotesque anomaly when transplanted into peasant life. The truth that "a man has to eat" would not be lost on the Russian reader in 1925, who would recently have lived through the revolution and civil war. In 1921 Chukovskii wrote the following note in his diary:

Читаю «Сокровище смиренных» Метерлинка, о звездах, судьбах, ангелах, тайнах, и невольно думаю: а все же, Метерлинк был сыт: а теперь мне нельзя читать ни о чем, я всегда думаю о пище.<sup>63</sup>

However, be this as it may, in "A Peasant Talent" there is a negative assessment of Ivan Filippovich implied in the comment about the "voice of a cockroach".

In "Michel Siniagin" this "voice of the cockroach" has become educated and assumes narrative authority in the voice of the fictional author. In the description of Michel drawing inspiration from nature there is the same sort of "defamiliarisation" as in Ivan Filippovich's description of himself (for instance, the reference to "various gnats" ("разные мошки") and the untranslatable pun of "тучные облака" (M.S., p. 117.)). This time, however, the speaker has more authority and it is now clearly the romantic poet who is intended as the butt of the humour. The "author" of "Michel Siniagin" shows the ambivalent attitude to culture so common among Zoshchenko's heroes. Just as Ivan Filippovich wants to project himself as a peasant Wordsworth, so Michel's biographer wants to show his erudition in his discussion of Michel's poetry, which has the character of a semi-literate school essay. The plot of "Michel Siniagin" could be reduced to Ivan Filippovich's simple formula, "Какая поэзия? Жрать надо - поэзия!". Food is highly visible in the final pages of the story and Michel's salvation is expressed in the solidly material terms of the meat he wolfs down and the bread he is chewing when he encounters Sima in the kitchen at night. There is no overt attempt to discredit the narrator of "Michel Siniagin" by likening him to a cockroach, but there is a deeply ambiguous relationship between the real and the surrogate author - a shadow of the mixture of distaste and respect with which the editor character in "A Peasant Talent" regards Ivan Filippovich.

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<sup>62</sup> A. K. Zholkovskii, "Zerkalo i zazerkal'e: Lev Tolstoi i Mikhail Zoshchenko, in *Bluzhdaiushchie sny: iz istorii russkogo modernizma*, Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1992.

<sup>63</sup> K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., p. 158.

The fact that the authoritative centre of "Michel Siniagin" is a Soviet author adds another dimension to the literary theme in the story. The "author" provides a contemporary foil to Michel and acts as a constant reminder of the distance that separates the poetic tradition with which the hero is identified and the literary reality of 1930. One of the significant changes that has taken place concerns the relationship between a writer and his art. The Blok sub-text is important here, as Blok represents a poetic ideal that is diametrically opposed to the literary mainstream of the post-NEP period. Like Michel's other poetic influences, Fet, Nadson and Esenin, Blok is a poet whose work reflects individual inner experience. Blok himself once wrote that the writer's duty is to "bare his soul before the spiritually hungry".<sup>64</sup> For Blok, poetry was a vocation rather than a profession, a path to be followed with scrupulous integrity. By 1913, the year of the Futurist and Acmeist manifestos, the view of the poet as a visionary had lost credibility with many of the leading younger poets, but the subsequent changes in the literary landscape were such that these earlier disagreements paled into insignificance. By the time "Michel Siniagin" was written, writers were coming to be seen as instruments for active propaganda - bourgeois specialists ("*spetsy*") who should be pressed into the service of the Party. *RAPP* was at its height as the self-appointed guardian of proletarian literary values. Zoshchenko himself had been invited to meet Averbakh in the autumn of 1929 and was urged to join the organisation. The vocabulary used to discuss literature had moved away from the mystical to the military and industrial. In an autobiography of 1930, Zoshchenko decried his work using the term "quality of production", "качество продукции", a phrase with heavy industrial overtones. The practice of coercing writers into state-run propaganda programmes (the most famous of which would be the trip by a group of writers to the White Sea Canal in 1933) had already begun in 1930. In the autumn of that year Zoshchenko had taken part in a trip to a ship-building factory on the Baltic to work on the factory newspaper. In an interview given in 1932 Zoshchenko talked cautiously of his reservations about such projects:

Я был отчасти сбит с толку кучей статей и статейек, чего только не требовало от писателя. Одни требовали, чтобы писатель писал, главным образом, о производстве, другие желали видеть писателя фельетонистом стенной газеты. Третьи говорили, что все «проклятые» вопросы уже решены или решаются

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<sup>64</sup> A. Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok, Vol. 2, The Release of Harmony: 1908-1921*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 358.

руководящими органами и писатель должен истолковывать распоряжения правительства. Это, конечно, не так. <sup>65</sup>

In "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko comments on this practice of demanding topical material from the writer in the reference to the "burning, desirable and vital" themes for literature: the collective farm, the campaign to stamp out illiteracy and the shortage of packaging.

In general, the figure of the writer in "Michel Siniagin" and other stories in the "Sentimental Tales" cycle (and particularly in "What the Nightingale Sang About", "The Lilac is in Flower", "Terrible Night" and "A Funny Story") is frequently used to refer to the real social pressures experienced by Soviet writers. There is a strong contrast drawn between Michel's idle, carefree existence in his early years as a poet and the worries and cares of his biographer. In the first few pages of the story the author apologises for the work he has written, warning that the work is written carelessly and hurriedly and talking of his restlessness ("беспокойство") and his lack of peace of mind ("спокойствие духа"). Later the narrator claims that "life, cares and woes" ("жизнь, заботы и огорчения") have driven Michel's poetry out of his head. The subject of the author's doubts and worries is elaborated in the monologues that introduce several of the "Sentimental Tales" and enhanced by the device of having the fictional author inhabit the same plane as his characters. In "Michel Siniagin" the "author" falls out with the hero after he steals a coat with a monkey collar. In "The Lilac is in Flower" the author stresses his proximity to the events he describes and mentions that he lives in a communal flat:

Автор описывает события не с планеты Марс, а с нашей уважаемой Земли, где как раз и находится в одном из домов коммунальная квартирка, в которой жительствоет автор и в которой он, так сказать, воочию видит людей. <sup>66</sup>

"What the Nightingale Sang About" includes a heartfelt plea to the reader not to see anything romantic in the description of the Rundukov family's humble household:

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<sup>65</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisateliiu, odnoaktnye komedii*, p. 592.

<sup>66</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Siren' tsvetet", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 147.

Нету в этих воспоминаниях ни сладости, ни романтизма. Знает автор и эти домики, и эти кухни. Заходил. И жил в них, и сейчас живет. Ничего в этом нету хорошего, так - жалкая жалость. <sup>67</sup>

Nor does Zoshchenko's author shy away from the taboo subject of money. In "A Terrible Night" the narrator admits that were it not for this "small mercenary motive" in writing he would smash his pen to smithereens.<sup>68</sup>

One of the biggest worries of the "author", of course, is his relationship with his readers and critics. Whereas Michel's audience is made up entirely of admiring female relatives who are already making his writing desk into a museum exhibit in the true Russian fashion, the "author" anticipates nothing but trouble from his public; hence the paralysing doubts which cause him to drop his pen in despair. In constant anticipation of "unpleasantness" the "author" enters literature as a gladiator enters the ring. In "What the Nightingale Sang About" the narrator conducts a dramatic dialogue with the heckling critics who are telling him that he is a redundant survivor of the past for believing in love ("Ваша, скажут, фигура несозвучна эпохе и вообще случайно дожила до наших дней")<sup>69</sup>. In the fictional world of Zoshchenko's author there is no distinction between the behaviour of writers and critics and the punch-ups immortalised in "Nervous People" and other stories. A typical example, from "A Funny Adventure", features Zoshchenko's favourite comic stooge among writers, Rabindranath Tagore:

Какой-нибудь там литературный критик, какой-нибудь писатель, какой-нибудь Рабиндранат Тагор, ужасно так обрадуется и всполощется. «Вот, скажет, потирая руки, взгляните, скажет, на сукинова сына - явно потрафляет читателю. Хватайте его и бейте по морде и по чем попало». <sup>70</sup>

In "Michel Siniagin" there are several references to possible "unpleasantness" from "young and inexperienced literary critics" or from the reader: ("Эва, скажет, - глядите, чего еще один пишет. Описывает, холера, переживания. Глядите, скажет, сейчас начнет про цветки поэмы наворачивать") (M. S., p. 114).

<sup>67</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei", *Ibid*, pp. 110-1.

<sup>68</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Strashnaia noch", *Ibid*, p.89.

<sup>69</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei" *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>70</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Veseloe prikliuchenie", *Ibid*, p. 126.

In a passage deleted from the manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin", Zoshchenko's narrator elaborates on the theme, imagining how, in the future, literary critics will treat authors with respect, thanking them for their work and, if making any criticisms, doing so politely: "И все так вежливо, неоскорбительно, достойно, без замечаний, мол, такого-то надо выкинуть к свиным собачьям за борт корабля".<sup>71</sup>

In "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko simultaneously parodies the literature of the recent past and the literature of the present day in a way that mirrors the style in which the story is written. Zoshchenko stands aloof, allowing the contrast between the two literary traditions, that of the Silver Age and that of the NEP, to reveal the enormous changes in attitudes towards art and the artist that have taken place in the space of one generation.

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<sup>71</sup> Manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin", IRLI, f. 501, p.25.

#### Part 4: "I Saw Before Me An Animal": The Theme of the "Beast" and the "Lifeless Man" in "Michel Siniagin" and Other Works by Zoshchenko

Another significant aspect of Zoshchenko's account of Tiniakov's metamorphosis from poet to beggar in *Before Sunrise* is the image of Tiniakov as an animal throwing off the disguise of a cultured man as if it were sloughing its skin. Tiniakov's early poetry is described as pretending ("притворяться"), his projection of himself as tinsel ("мишура") in which he has dressed himself up ("нарядился") and which he throws off to reveal himself as he really is: "naked, beggarly and vile" ("голым, нищим, омерзительным"). The image is strengthened by the use of animal-like metaphors to describe Tiniakov after his transformation: "Передо мной было животное (...)" "(...) оно тащило за собой привычные профессиональные навыки поэта", "Теперь вместо улыбки был какой-то хищный оскал." "И только внимательный глаз мог увидеть в его облике, в его лице, нечто ужасное, отвратительное - харю с застывшей улыбочкой человека, которому нечего больше терять".

The image of the cultured man jettisoning his lofty ideas and becoming like a naked animal is an important theme not only in "Michel Siniagin" - which was written under the influence of the meeting with Tiniakov - but also in the earlier tale "People", probably written before Zoshchenko's encounter with Tiniakov took place. Both stories feature a privileged man who loses his nobler qualities together with his money and his position in society. In both cases the hero's transformation is compared to a natural process, like an animal shedding part of itself. In "Michel Siniagin", after Michel has abandoned his former idea of himself and reconciled himself to his new life as a beggar, he is compared to a type of lizard that gets rid of part of its body in order to placate a predator. In "People" the attempt by the hero Belokopytov (his name means "white hoof" and is thus close to "white bone", the Russian equivalent of "blue blood") to transform himself into a beast is accompanied by a whole sequence of animal images. First the hero seeks to become a beast in the figurative sense by ditching the moral scruples that are preventing him from making a profitable living. With new-found enthusiasm, he talks to his wife of the laws of nature, the need to adapt to one's environment and of cruelty and cynicism as natural, healthy phenomena:

(...) каждый человек, имеющий право жить, непременно обязан, как и всякое живое существо, и как всякий зверь, менять свою шкуру, смотря по времени (...)

(...) цинизм, это вещь совершенно необходимая и в жизни нормальная, (...) без цинизма и жестокости ни один даже зверь не обходится (...)

This short-lived phase comes to an end when Belokopytov is sacked from his job at a cooperative for stealing. In despair, the hero begins to dream of becoming an animal in the real sense, living in a cave and crawling out of his lair on all fours to look for food:

Ему уже рисовались картины, как он живет в полузаваленной землянке, среди грязи и нечистот, и ползком, как животное, на четвереньках вылезает из своей норы и отыскивает пищу.

Eventually Belokopytov begins to sleep in a cave and withdraws completely from human society. Now he laughs about the life that he has abandoned, comparing himself to an animal that has shed its skin:

он вполне разумно и несколько даже иронически говорил о своей жизни. И потрясая лохмотьями своего заграничного костюма, громко смеялся, говоря, что всё это вздор, что всё слезает с человека, как осенью шкура животного.

Despite adopting a primitive way of life, Belokopytov is unable to turn himself into a satisfactory animal. At one point he thinks to himself that he is "the worst of all the animals", with his chronic sniffles and bronchitis. His decision to die a fitting death in a desperate struggle with another beast ends in a farcical scene in which he teases his neighbour's dog, provoking it and incurring the wrath of its owner.<sup>72</sup>

Both Belokopytov and Siniagin are representatives of a distinct type of protagonist in Zoshchenko's work, described by T. Kadash as the "lifeless man" ("неживой человек"). Kadash has traced the "lifeless man" and his opposite, the "beast" or the "brute" ("зверь"), back to Zoshchenko's earliest stories.<sup>73</sup> In Zoshchenko's early work the two types are generally distinct. Later, in the "Sentimental Tales" and *Youth Restored*, the boundaries between the two become less distinct, with the lifeless man starting to resemble the beast. This is either because he is placed in a situation that brings his animal nature to the surface (as in "Michel Siniagin"), because he deliberately cultivates this side of himself (as in *Youth Restored*), or for both these reasons (as in "People").

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<sup>72</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Liudi", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, pp. 77-83.

<sup>73</sup>T. Kadash, "'Zver'" i "nezhivoi chelovek" v mire rannego Zoshchenko", in *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1, 1995, pp.36-8.

The typical attributes of Zoshchenko's "lifeless" characters are self-absorption, lack of will and an inability to act, while his "beast" characters display health and strength, a strong will, a tendency to act rather than think and a complete absence of scruples. Several of Zoshchenko's earliest stories are concerned with the sexual dominance of the "beast" character over his "lifeless" counterpart. In a number of stories the "beast" attracts the wife of a "lifeless man" precisely because of his animal qualities, while the latter allows himself to be deceived because he lacks the will to fight. In "The Neighbour" (1917) Marina, the dissatisfied young wife of an older man, begins an affair with one of the tenants in her husband's house, a former hotel now made into communal lodgings. The neighbour in question is a young office worker whose virility is attributed not only to his youth but also to his background:

Это был их сосед по комнатам, молодой конторщик, будто отягощенный своим ростом, с выпуклой грудью и толстой бычачьей шеей. Он поразил ее своей силой. Это был настоящий деревенский парень с маленьким образованием, захотевший переменить соху на занятия в конторе. (...) в нем чувствовалась какая-то звериная сила и желание.<sup>74</sup>

In "Love" the heroine, Nataliia, leaves her husband, the "long-whiskered engineer", for the more virile Grisha Lovtsov, a forerunner of the archetypal Zoshchenko hero. At their wedding banquet, jealous of a student who seems to be impressing Nataliia, Grisha picks a fight with a professor, one of the guests ("Вы, говорит, профессор, за науку выпиваете, а между прочим - тфу ваша наука!"), and eventually attacks the student, shouting "Бей...их...рьжкую интеллигенцию!".<sup>75</sup> Grisha's "lifeless" counterpart, the long-whiskered engineer, threatens to kill himself when Nataliia leaves him, but his vanity takes a knock when, in a repetition of an earlier story by Zoshchenko, "How Dare She?", the heroine laughs at him, refusing to take his grand gesture seriously. Later in the story the engineer remembers how his wife accused him of being "lifeless":

Накануне вот приходит. «Что», спрашиваю. «Не могу, говорит, с тобой жить...Не могу, говорит, больше жить. Неживой ты! Ну, сделай что-нибудь человеческое. Убей меня, что-ли! Гришку, наконец, убей!»<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Sosed", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liubov", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 88.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

"The Fish's Mate" (1921) also centres on a cuckolded husband: a small, insignificant priest is deceived by his wife with a railway engineer. In this case the woman also takes on the role of the beast, compared by the priest to a fish which, according to Darwin, devours its mate ("Ой, рыба самка! Сожрала, матушка.")<sup>77</sup>.

These early stories by Zoshchenko reflect the Nietzschean idea that the only thing differentiating the honourable man from the scoundrel is the absence of healthy desire or the displacement of natural egoism into moral vanity. In "The Neighbour" the husband is brought to life by his wife's infidelity ("чужая страсть заразила его"), so that he eventually usurps her lover's place for a "whole week". In "Love" the spurned husband is portrayed above all as a cynical, emotionally cold man:

Мне, милостивые государи мои, на многое совершенно наплевать,  
мне, милостивые государи, смешны даже в некотором роде  
высокие чувства любви...<sup>78</sup>

The hero of "The Scoundrel" ("Подлец"), Boris, resists a woman's sexual advances out of moral pride, saying that there is no "beast" in him:

Он говорил, что он честен собой и что нету в нем зверя какого-то (...) и почувствовав в себе гордость, Борис понял, что не отступится от своего, казалось ему, красивого шага и верного.

But the hero's pride is portrayed as a wilful destruction of the life within him - following his "honourable" action he is left alone with a sense of deadly depression ("и тогда казалось, что нет личной жизни, что жизнь ушла, что всё умирает")<sup>79</sup>.

The theme of the beast and the lifeless man in these early stories was almost certainly inspired by Nietzschean philosophy and particularly by *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Vera Zoshchenko's reminiscences testify to the importance of Nietzsche to Zoshchenko in 1918-1920. Extracts from Zoshchenko's writings of the period reveal his preoccupation with Nietzschean ideas on love and passion. "Don't seek for love, believe in passion", he wrote in Vera's album. In the letter to Vera to which he gave the title "A Hymn to Invented

<sup>77</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Ryb'ia samka", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 99.

<sup>78</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liubov'", *Ibid*, p. 89.

<sup>79</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Podlets", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 56.

Love" ("Гимн придуманной любви") Zoshchenko writes, "we never believe in love as a sacred thing but speak, speak of it criminally and decorate our physical attraction, as if it were an otherworldly and extraordinary feeling...otherwise there is no way to a woman's body" ("Мы никогда не верим в любовь, как святыню, но говорим, преступно говорим и раскрашиваем свое влечение, как будто бы это чувство нездешнее и особенное... иначе нет дороги к женскому телу.")<sup>80</sup> This lack of faith in truly noble impulses goes hand in hand with the belief that people must deceive themselves about their true natures in order to remain human. In another piece of writing clearly inspired by Nietzsche, "The Gods Allow" ("Боги позволяют") (1918), Zoshchenko argues for the necessity of keeping up the illusion of humanity. "If there is a screaming beast within you, hide it deep down in your soul, adorn it with delicate invention, do everything you can to appear like a human being" ("А если зверь в тебе кричащий - спрячь его в подполье души своей, укрась его нежным вымыслом, делай все, чтоб казаться человеком")<sup>81</sup>. In the same essay Zoshchenko rejects the cult of strength, speaking of his love for the "tender mystery" of man and the "dying beast" and his fear of the "screaming beast that will conquer":

Я люблю человека и нежную тайну его.  
 Я люблю умирающего зверя ибо он будет побежден.  
 Я боюсь победы кричащего зверя, ибо он победит.  
 Я плачу о добродетели обрученной с пошлостью.<sup>82</sup>

The 1919 essay on Zaitsev, "Lifeless People", provides further evidence of the influence of Nietzsche on Zoshchenko and of the simultaneous attraction and disgust that Zoshchenko felt for Nietzschean ideas. The essay is headed with a quotation from the Russian translation of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* - "Если ты не птица - не отдыхай над пропастью" ("If you are not a bird, do not rest above the abyss"). The polemical orientation of the article as a whole is influenced by Nietzsche's command to "remain true to the earth", and the article refers to the Nietzschean concept of the Superman: the free, strong man to whom everything is permitted. In its condemnation of the fantastical and decadent aspects of contemporary literature, Zoshchenko's argument resembles the section

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<sup>80</sup> G. B. Filippov (ed.), "Lichnost' M. Zoshchenko po vospominaniiam ego zheny (1916-1929)" in N. A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, p. 52.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 59. This quotation appears in Vera Zoshchenko's memoirs: it does not appear in the version printed in V. Von Wiren (ed.), *Neizdannyi Zoshchenko* (see note below).

<sup>82</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Bogi pozvoliaut" (1918), in V. Von Wiren (ed.), *Neizdannyi Zoshchenko*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, (n.d.) p. 26.

of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* called "Of Poets", in which Zarathustra exclaims, "How weary I am of all the unattainable that is supposed to be reality. Alas, how weary I am of the poets (...) All their harp jangling is to me so much coughing and puffing of phantoms".<sup>83</sup>

The article draws a comparison of two extremes of the "crisis of individualism". On the one hand there are Zaitsev's characters, "in love with death", without desire or energy, whom Zoshchenko sees as symptomatic of a general spirit of lifelessness in Russian literature. On the other hand there is the character regarded by Zoshchenko as the only exception to this rule, the eponymous hero of Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin*, a portrait of a Nietzschean "god-man" unfettered by traditional morality. For Zoshchenko, Sanin stands out from the crowd of lifeless heroes by virtue of his strength and lust for life, despite the fact that he is "an absolute scoundrel and an egoist":

Итак, мне кажется, что все уже умерли, автор рассказывает нам об умерших, а жизнь идет лишь по инерции, без воли и желания неживых людей, сама собой (...)

(...) Какой-то закон земли заставляет что-то делать, куда-то идти, но нет своей воли, нет своих желаний. Все проходит, все плывет (...)

(...) И кажется, лишь один сильный человек во всей литературе - арцыбашевский Санин.

Как же странно и как болезненно преломилась в сердце русского писателя идея, созданная индивидуализмом о свободном и сильном человеке. Сильный человек, которому всё позволено, грядущий человек-Бог обратился в совершеннейшего подлеца и эгоиста. А радость его жизни - в искание утех и наслаждений. И его любовь - в культ тела. Но Санин - это меньшинство, это лишь одна крайность индивидуализма, другая страшнее, другая пустота, смертная тоска и смерть (...)

Арцыбашев и Зайцев - два русских интеллигента с двумя крайними большими идеями свободного от всякой морали человека.

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<sup>83</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1969, p. 151.

И первый создал подлого Санина, второй, влюбленного в смерть.<sup>84</sup>

In this article, as in "The Gods Allow", a troubled attitude to Nietzschean ideas is evident. Zoshchenko shows serious reservations about the "morbid" incarnation of the Nietzschean superman in the figure of Sanin. Sanin is, as far as Zoshchenko is concerned, a scoundrel and an egoist, but at the same time he is less terrible than the alternative - the lifeless man. The article indicates that the character of Sanin is a possible literary precursor of Zoshchenko's "beast" figures.

*Sanin* caused a literary scandal when it was published in 1907. Many regarded the novel as immoral and pornographic. It describes the conflict that arises when the hero, Vladimir Sanin, a man who has renounced Christian morality, returns from his travels to his home town in provincial Russia. Once there, he begins to influence a group of young, educated people with his belief in free love and freedom from moral constraints. The conflict centres on two positions, represented by Sanin on the one hand and by the student Iurii Svarozhich on the other. Sanin's philosophy is one of pure hedonism:

Я знаю одного: я живу и хочу, чтобы жизнь не была для меня мучением (...) Для этого надо прежде всего удовлетворить свои естественные желания (...) Желания - это всё! <sup>85</sup>

Sanin is frequently described using animal imagery: his sister shudders when he is near her, sensing the "approach of an invisible beast". His most significant amoral act is his seduction of the heroine Zinaida Karsavina, who is in love with another man, Iurii Svarozhich.

Svarozhich is Sanin's opposite in the novel, a man of conscience who tortures himself with questions about personal honour, virtue and the meaning of life, earning the nickname of "the knight of the rueful countenance" from his sister. For Svarozhich, philosophical and political questions are more important than anything else. He is treated with a certain amount of sarcasm by the author. For instance, we are told that he believes "it is better and cleverer to be unhappy than to be cheerful" ("скучать лучше и умнее, чем веселиться"). Svarozhich's code of honour does not allow him to satisfy his desires; he counters Sanin's philosophy with the argument that people are not "senseless beasts" ("

<sup>84</sup> A. I. Pavlovskii, "Stat'ia M. Zoshchenko o B. K. Zaitseve", in N.A. Groznova (ed.), *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> M. Artsybashev, *Sanin*, (1907), repr. Letchworth: Bradda, 1969, p. 88.

Люди не бессмысленные звери и должны направлять свои желания к добру и не давать им власти над собой").<sup>86</sup>

Whereas Sanin is self-assured and unshakeably confident throughout the novel, Iurii goes from crisis to crisis, constantly doubting his own beliefs and finding that his lofty demands of both himself and others cause suffering to everyone. Iurii falls in love with Karsavina, and his feelings are reciprocated, but Iurii, disgusted by the evidence of his own animal nature, is unwilling to consummate his love. He then has a premonition of what his future will be like if he continues to deny his own nature - "no light, no dark, pale, empty and deadly slow" ("и вдруг ясно видел Юрий бледный холодный день будущей жизни своей. Ни света, ни тьмы: пусто, бледно и медленно медленно!"), upon which he kills himself, deciding that it is better to die than to live such a life.

There are significant differences between Artsybashev's portrayal of the conflict between Sanin and Svarozhich and Zoshchenko's treatment of the theme of the "beast" and the "lifeless man" in his early work. Artsybashev's novel is primarily about ideological conflict. The drama of *Sanin* is played out entirely among educated, well-to-do people. Artsybashev takes pains to portray his hero not as an unthinking scoundrel but as an intelligent man with his own moral system, which he believes is the best for humanity as a whole. This is clear from the contrast between Sanin and another character in the book, the officer Zarudin, who is portrayed in a very different light. Though Zarudin is as much of a scoundrel ("мерзавец") as Sanin, he acts from instinct rather than from moral conviction: as a result he has less authority than the hero. Sanin shows compassion for the "ruined" Karsavina after he has seduced her, knowing that she will suffer because of her conscience, and makes utopian statements about the time when the whole of humanity will be free from its repressive yoke:

- Мне все грезится счастливое время, когда между человеком и счастьем не будет ничего, когда человек свободно и бесстрашно будет отдаваться всем доступным наслаждениям<sup>87</sup>.

The "beast" characters in Zoshchenko's early stories are distinguished from Sanin by the fact that such questions have never entered their heads. There is no attempt in his stories to ennoble the characters of Grisha in "Love" the hero of "the Neighbour" and the railway engineer in "The Fish's Mate", or to justify their actions by placing them within a different moral scheme. Zoshchenko simply depicts them as unscrupulous characters with no sense

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 276.

that any point of view exists besides their own. For instance, the engineer in "The Fish's Mate" not only cuckolds the priest but delights in taunting both him and his wife. Chatting to the priest, the engineer asks why it is that these days people make insulting gestures when they see a man of the cloth ("беседуя на разные темы, интересовался тонкостями, к примеру: как и отчего повелось в народе, что при встрече с духовным попом делает из пальцев шиш.")<sup>88</sup>. After amusing himself with the priest's wife, he calls her an "old granny" ("старая старуха").

Another important characteristic of Zoshchenko's "beasts" is their social identity. A distinction is made between the backgrounds of the "beast" and the "lifeless man", and the fact that their paths cross is explained largely by the revolution and by communal housing. Grisha in "Love" has become rich and has new-found confidence that enables him to approach Nataliia. In "The Neighbour" the action takes place in a shared house where the heroine Marina and her husband live together with the simple lad from the country, ("простой деревенский парень") who has decided to take an office job. In "The Fish's Mate" the railway engineer is a new tenant whom the priest is forced to house.

A story that marks a further development of the theme of the "beast" and "lifeless man" in Zoshchenko's work is the story "Madonna" ("Мадо́нна") (1923). "Madonna" takes the form of a diary by the civil servant Vinivit'kin, a hero who bears characteristics of both Zoshchenko's "types". The story is a loose reworking of the theme of Gogol's "Nevskii Prospekt". Like Piskarev in Gogol's story, Vinivit'kin falls in love with a woman he sees on the street and later finds out that she is a prostitute. Vinivit'kin wants to portray himself as a disappointed idealist like Piskarev, but beneath his romantic posturings beats the heart of Gogol's anti-hero Pirogov. This "beast" character who fancies himself as a "lifeless man", is, like Ivan Filippovich in "A Peasant Talent", a prototype of the "author" character in the "Sentimental Tales". Vinivit'kin shares the convictions of Artsybashev's Sanin that insolence is seductive to women and that conventional morality is hypocritical and frustrates natural human desires. In such matters Vinivit'kin quotes his friend Sergei Petukhov (the hero of "A Funny Adventure") as an authority. However, the language in which Vinivit'kin and Petukhov express their thoughts is a world away from the authoritative tone of Sanin, let alone the emotional transports of Nietzsche. Despite the fact that Zoshchenko took Nietzsche's ideas seriously, the choice of Vinivit'kin as a spokesperson for Nietzschean sentiments shows how different Zoshchenko's purpose is from that of Artsybashev before him:

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<sup>88</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Ryb'ia samka", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1 p. 97.

Да, нынче нравственность чересчур упала. Сережа Петухов говорит, что будто это всегда после революции. Ну да мне наплевать, прямо скажу, мне даже еще лучше. Да я думаю, что всем лучше, да только прикидываются, подлецы. <sup>89</sup>

Конечно, что касается любви, то я не того, не доверяю этому чувству, сомневаюсь, прямо скажу, в нем. Люди с высшим образованием, приват-доценты какие-нибудь, конечно, отрицать начнут, скажут, что любовь, точно, существует, однако, может она и точно существует, как отвлеченное явление, да только мне наплевать на это, прямо скажу. Я за пять лет революции, можно сказать, на опыте проследил: ежели питание, скажем, посредственное, неважное питание, то никакой любви не существует, будь хоть бы знакомы с наивеликолепнейшей дамой, а чуть питание улучшается, чуть, скажем, гуся с кашей съел, поросенка вкусил - а пожалуйста - поэзии хочется, звуков, любовное томление, одним словом. <sup>90</sup>

The theme of the beast and the lifeless man comes to the forefront of Zoshchenko's work again in the "Sentimental Tales", this time with a much greater emphasis on the figure of the lifeless *intelligent*. The central triangle of the beast, the lifeless man and the woman is found again in "The Goat", in which the hero Zabezhkin is routed by the railway engineer. The same pattern is seen again in "People", in which Belokopytov's wife leaves him for the brutish neighbour Egor Konstantinovich Iarkin, who exhibits the same rough virility of the early "beast" characters and the typical physical attribute of the bull neck ("широкая фигура с бычачьей шеей"). He takes a similar role in the development of events, too, becoming the lover of Belokopytov's wife Nina and finally the father of her child.

The "Sentimental Tales" show closer parallels with *Sanin* than Zoshchenko's earlier stories. Like Artsybashev's work, a number of the tales centre on the figure of an isolated, educated man questioning his most dearly held beliefs about his own humanity. Artsybashev's hero Iurii Svarozhich, with his inner struggles and his search for meaning, is a forerunner of "lifeless" heroes like such as Zotov/Zoshchenko from "Wisdom", Belokopytov from "People", Perepunchik from "Apollon and Tamara" and Kotofeev from "A Terrible Night". In the "Sentimental Tales", Zoshchenko reiterates some of the central points of Iurii's crisis in Artsybashev's novel. For instance, at one point in *Sanin* Iurii,

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<sup>89</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Madonna", *Ibid*, p. 119.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid*, p. 120.

upon accidentally stepping on a frog in the dark and killing it, suddenly feels that his own life is as meaningless as the frog's and that the complicated network of relations that he has imagined to exist between him and the world is in fact nonsense:

Для мира в его огромном целом, все его мучительнейшие и искреннейшие переживания так же и не существуют, как и эти неведомые страдания маленького животного. Воображая, что его страдания, его ум и его добро и зло ужасно важны кому-нибудь, кроме него самого, он нарочно и бессмысленно плел какую-то сложную сеть между собой и миром. <sup>91</sup>

In Zoshchenko's *Apollon and Tamara* Apollon Perepunchik embarks on a similar train of thought about the emptiness and uselessness of human life and the fabrications that are invented to give it meaning:

Он думал о человеческом существовании, и о том, что человек так же нелепо и ненужно существует, как жук или кукушка, и о том, что человечество, весь мир, должно изменить свою жизнь для того, чтоб найти покой и счастье и для того, чтобы не подвергаться таким страданиям, как произошло с ним...

Like Svarozhich, Apollon Perepunchik grows convinced that the complicated web ("сложная сеть") between himself and the world - the idea of the human soul - is a pointless fabrication. Like Svarozhich, he fails to see what differentiates a human life from that of a frog or a worm. In a conversation with his aunt he asks her if she thinks a monkey or a dog has a soul. If so, he asks, doesn't it follow that a worm has a soul? As his aunt protests "don't blaspheme", Apollon presses on with his argument, asking: if you cut a worm in half and both halves carry on living, what has happened? Are there two souls where once there was one?:

Нету, значит, никакой души. Человек - это кости и мясо. . . Он и помирает, как последняя тварь, и рождается, как тварь...Только что живет по-выдуманному. А ему нужно по-другому жить. <sup>92</sup>

In another scene from *Sanin*, Iurii remembers how the consumptive student Semenov was able to enjoy "trivial" pleasures such as boating on the river and girls' beautiful bodies

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<sup>91</sup> M. Artsybashev, *Sanin*, p. 105.

<sup>92</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Apollon i Tamara", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, pp.42-3.

("катанье на лодке и красивые тела девушек") while staring death in the face. Whereas he once found Semenov hard to understand, Svarozhich now has a flash of insight:

Теперь Юрий легко понял, что все эти пустяки...были жизнью - настоящей, полной захватывающих переживаний и влекущих наслаждений жизнью, а все великие понятия были лишь пустыми (...) комбинациями слов и мыслей.<sup>93</sup>

A similar moment of insight is experienced by the hero of "Wisdom", Ivan Zotov (whose name was changed to Zoshchenko in the 1931 editions of the story):

Ах, - говорил он, - как я был глуп! Как глуп! Ну кому радость оттого, что я небрит и волосы мои до плеч? Кому это нужно, чтобы я презирал людей и весь мир, и все существование? Да никому не нужно. Но я теперь знаю, как жить. Я смею теперь жить. Мудрость не в том, чтобы людей презирать, а в том, чтобы делать такие же пустяки, как они...ходить к парикмахеру, суетиться, целовать женщин, пить, покупать сахар. Вот мудрость.

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The inner struggles depicted in *Sanin* and the "Sentimental Tales" take place against a very different backdrop. Iurii is fighting with an idea suggested to him by one man, not with the entire atmosphere in which he lives. The heroes of "People" and other tales are struggling against a world in which there is no place for them. Whereas the drama between "beast" and lifeless man was played out in sexual terms in *Sanin* and in Zoshchenko's earliest stories, the sexual motif has become demoted in the "Sentimental Tales", and the arena of competition is that of work and money. The "lifeless man" in these stories feels his inadequacy due to his lack of an honest trade. In "People", for instance, Belokopytov's panic begins with a realisation that his fluent mastery of Spanish and basic knowledge of electricity will not help him to find a job. He then begins to feel that life is a deadly struggle for survival: "Ему казалось теперь, что жизнь, это какая-то смертельная борьба за право существовать на земле".<sup>95</sup> When his wife leaves him for Iarkin, he feels only relief that the financial burden of looking after her is no longer on his shoulders. Lack of an honest trade is similarly a cause of shame for

<sup>93</sup> M. Artsybashev, *Sanin*, p. 106.

<sup>94</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Mudrost'", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p.50.

<sup>95</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liudy", *Ibid*, p 73.

Perepunchik, who is chastised by the signalman who finds him lying on the railway line: "Как же это, брат, без ремесла-то жить? Это, я тебе скажу, немыслимо худо! Человеку нужно непременно понимать рукомерло".<sup>96</sup> Kotofeev becomes temporarily deranged at the thought that an electric triangle has been invented and he has effectively been made redundant. Siniagin is unable to find a good job because he has no particular skill and doesn't know how to do anything - "он не имел никакой специальности и, в сущности, не умел ничего делать" (M.S., p. 127). "Не умея ничего делать и не зная никакой специальности, он имел, конечно, мало шансов получить приличную работу" (M.S., p.133).

In connection with the demoting of the sexual theme in the "Sentimental Tales" marriage is seen primarily as a route to stability in the later stories. In several cases the hero is dependent on a woman for his home: landladies and their daughters are significant figures in a number of the tales. Zabezhkin seeks to marry his landlady for the sake of a goat that holds the promise of economic stability. Bylinkin's engagement to his landlady's daughter gives him a claim on the house in which he has been a lodger. Kotofeev has married his landlady, who constantly laments that she is saddled with him. In "The Lilac is in Flower" the hero's own mercenary marriage leads him to suspect everybody of the same selfish motives.

Whereas in early stories such as "The Neighbour" and "Love" the drama is between individuals, the dynamic of the "Sentimental Tales" is different: in these stories the hero tends to be a solitary character in a hostile world (though "Apollon and Tamara", "People" and "Wisdom" all feature a kind, older woman who takes on a maternal role in relation to the hero). The typical "beast" characteristics of cynicism and selfishness are more diffusely spread among various minor characters, creating a generally hostile atmosphere. One such character is the *muzhik* in the signalman's hut in "Apollon and Tamara" who says of the hero: "Из дворян (...) Кровь у них никакая....Жить не могут".<sup>97</sup> In "Wisdom" the hero dies on the eve of a party. His guests arrive and, hearing that the host is dead, leave one by one, but not before trying the food he had prepared. ("При этом, проходя мимо стола, дамы брали по одной груше или по яблоку, а мужчины кушали по куску семги или выпивали по рюмке малаги.") The last guest even gets angry with the host for dying on him after he has cancelled another engagement.<sup>98</sup> In the dramatic denouement of "A Terrible Night" Kotofeev falls on his knees and pleads with passers-by to take pity on him, but instead they turn on him:

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<sup>96</sup> M.Zoshchenko, "Apollon i Tamara", *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>98</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Mudrost'", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 57.

- Пьяный это - с удовольствием сказал кто-то в толпе. -  
 Нализался, черт, в буден день. Нет на них закона! (...)  
 - Крой его, робя! Хватай - Завыл кто-то истошным голосом (...)  
 Сзади дико улюлюкая и хлопая ногами по грязи, бежали люди. <sup>99</sup>

Most of all, though, the difference in the portrayal of the conflict between the thinking hero and indifferent world in *Sanin* and in the "Sentimental Tales" is apparent in the language in which the stories are written and the persona that acts as the narrative authority in each case.

Artsybashev's repetitive style, with its strings of nouns and adjectives and its constant repetition of words like "переживания", "страдания", "томление" and "наслаждения", is exactly the sort of writing that Zoshchenko referred to as the "half worn-out language of the intelligentsia". In the situations depicted by Artsybashev, gardens, nightingales and moonlit trips in boats feature heavily. By contrast, Zoshchenko's exposition of the same problems is couched in a voice that mixes a parody of this style with the down-to-earth tones of Vinivit'kin in "Madonna" or Ivan Filippovich in "A Peasant Talent". Whereas in *Sanin* romanticism is questioned against a backdrop that confirms the existence of beauty, in the "Sentimental Tales" the very words in which the heroes' stories are told reinforce the anti-romantic message and present a sober and prosaic view of the world as a foregone conclusion. This can be seen in a passage from "What the Nightingale Sang About", which is quite possibly a hidden allusion to a similar passage in *Sanin*. Both extracts describe how the heroine, as part of a romantic courtship, asks what a nightingale is singing about. A comparison of the two passages illustrates very clearly the enormous difference between Artsybashev's and Zoshchenko's artistic worlds. This is the passage from *Sanin*:

Свист соловья звонко наполнял лес, отдавался трелью над задумчивой рекой и несся над лугами, где в лунном тумане чутко застояли травы и цветы, в даль и вверх к холодному звездному небу.

- О чем он поет? - опять спросила Ляля (...)  
 - О любви конечно!, полушутливо, полусерьезно, ответил Рязанцев. <sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Strashnaia noch", *Ibid*, p. 103.

<sup>100</sup> M. Artsybashev, *Sanin*, pp. 48-9.

This is from Zoshchenko's story:

Это было в самый разгар, в самый наивысший момент ихнего чувства, когда Былинкин с барышней уходили за город и до ночи бродили по лесу. И там, слушая стрекот букашек или пение соловья, подолгу стояли в неподвижных позах. И тогда Лизочка, заламывая руки, не раз спрашивала:

- Вася, как вы думаете, о чем поет этот соловей?

На что Вася Былинкин обычно отвечал сдержанно: Жрать хочется, оттого и поет.

И только потом, несколько усвоившись ц психологией барышней, Былинкин отвечал более подробно и туманно. Он предполагал, что птица поет о какой-то будущей и прекрасной жизни. <sup>101</sup>

In *Sanin* Artsybashev hints that Svarozhich is unable to be happy because he is unable, ultimately, to rid himself of the "complex web" that he has "deliberately and senselessly" woven between himself and the world. Similarly, in the "Sentimental Tales", Zoshchenko's "lifeless" heroes become increasingly aware that they are excluded from the world because of a fatal flaw in their nature or their attitude to life. In the stories "People", "Apollon and Tamara" and "Wisdom" the central protagonist becomes aware at a critical moment that he has not lived as he should have done. Apollon Perepunchik feels that he would not be suffering if he had lived differently. In the throes of an unhappy love affair, he is visited by the thought that he has not lived as he ought to have done ("он погибает, в сущности, не от нее, а погибает оттого что он не так жил, как нужно")<sup>102</sup>. Ivan Zoshchenko, after living the life of a recluse for years, comes to realise that he has been mistaken in keeping aloof from those around him: "как я был глуп! Как глуп! (...) Но я теперь знаю, как жить". Belokopytov realises that none of the values he held dear before the revolution will help him to carve out a niche for himself in the new order ("...все, что он раньше считал идеалом: жалость, великодушие, нравственность - все это не стоит ломаного гроша и выеденного куриного яйца. Все это - жалкие побрякушки, достойные сентиментальной фальшивой эпохе.")<sup>103</sup>. In all three cases the hero's "flaw" is his emotional complexity, his idealism - in a word, his *intelligentnost'*. Each of the three comes to believe that the answer lies in simplifying his nature, in breaking the "complex web" that he has "deliberately and senselessly" woven between himself and the world. For Ivan Zoshchenko in "Wisdom"

<sup>101</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "O chem pel solovei", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 122.

<sup>102</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Apollon i Tamara", *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>103</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liudi", *Ibid*, p. 77.

the answer is to become like everyone else and to do the same "trivial" things that everybody does: ("Мудрость не в том, чтобы людей презирать, а в том, чтобы делать такие же пустяки, как они"). Perepunchik of "Apollon and Tamara" finds solace in becoming a gravedigger and forgetting his artistic aspirations. Most dramatically of all, Belokopytov in "People" tries to turn himself into an animal. Far from a metamorphosis into a hard-hearted "beast", Belokopytov's transformation is an act of total self-effacement. When he finally disappears, Belokopytov's vanishing is compared to the disappearance of an animal ashamed to leave a trace of itself behind.

Even a brief study of Zoshchenko is enough to convince the reader that the "lifeless" heroes in the early stories and in the "Sentimental Tales" are semi-autobiographical and that their dilemmas reflect struggles experienced by the author himself from his youth onwards. Two of the central protagonists in the "Sentimental Tales", Ivan Zoshchenko and Michel Siniagin, are referred to as "relatives" of the fictional author (and both, in fact, bear one of the real author's names). Zoshchenko's unhappiness at his own "lifeless" character are well chronicled in *Before Sunrise* and supported by letters and memoirs of his contemporaries. In one story in *Before Sunrise*, Zoshchenko remembers his mother telling him that he took after his father and grandfather and that he had a "closed heart".<sup>104</sup> The comment in "Love" that the heroine chastises her husband, "Неживой ты сделай что-нибудь", was actually a comment made to Zoshchenko by his wife Vera, and the story was partly based, according to Vera, on an episode from real life; the "courtship" of Vera by a young Commissar called Kolia Brykin, who apparently offered Zoshchenko money for her.<sup>105</sup> In one of his autobiographies Zoshchenko recalls the tendency towards hypochondria and melancholy that made it impossible for him to stay long in one place and drove him to volunteer to fight in the first world war. In a letter home from Arkhangel'sk, where he was posted in 1918, Zoshchenko wrote: "I have become a sort of Oblomov. No energy, No will. I feel that it is not myself, but fate that is pulling me on" ("Я стал какой-то Обломов. Нет ни энергии, ни воли. И не я, судьба тянет меня куда-то")<sup>106</sup>. The scorn for the common herd recalled in *Before Sunrise* and portrayed in the misanthropic hero of "Wisdom" is also clearly evident in the letters from Arkhangel'sk. In one letter Zoshchenko likens the local woman to affected monkeys:

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<sup>104</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, pp. 543-4.

<sup>105</sup> G.B. Filippov (ed.), "Lichnost' M. Zoshchenko po vospominaniiam ego zheny (1916-1929)", in N. A. Groznova (ed.) *Mikhail Zoshchenko: materialy k tvorcheskoi biografii*, St Petersburg: Nauka, 1997, p. 63.

<sup>106</sup> Zoshchenko, letter to O. Surina, 27 March 1918, in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 24.

"многие из них обезьяны с смешными ужимками и обезьяньими ласками". "How my soul laughed at their ugliness" ("О, как смеялась душа моя над их безобразием"), he writes.<sup>107</sup>

The period of the mid-twenties, when Zoshchenko was engaged on the "Sentimental Tales", also saw a dramatic worsening of his health, which reached a crisis in 1926. That year, Zoshchenko became acquainted with a book by Martsinovskii called *The Battle for Strong Nerves* (*Bor'ba za zdorovye nervy*) and became increasingly obsessed with the search for a cure for his depression and anxiety. Chukovskii saw Zoshchenko fairly often in the late 1920s and left several accounts which show how absorbed Zoshchenko was with his own health at the time. Zoshchenko vacillates between the euphoria of one who has discovered a sure road back to mental health and the bitterness of a confirmed misanthrope. On 5th August, 1927, Chukovskii describes Zoshchenko as looking "as though he had discovered a great truth" after having read Martsinovskii's book and regaling Chukovskii with advice from its pages ("нужно быть идеалистом, отказаться от честолюбивых желаний, подняться душою над дрязгами"). However, as Chukovskii describes it, despite this new-found enthusiasm it is clear that Zoshchenko still finds the people and the life that surround him unbearable ("люди ему по-прежнему противны, (...) весь окружающий быт вызывает в нем по-прежнему гадливость").<sup>108</sup> On the 23rd of August that same year Chukovskii records another depressing conversation with Zoshchenko, who told him that his sickness left him unable to do anything ("Я ничего не хочу"; "Эта тошнота не дает мне жить и, главное, писать").<sup>109</sup> Like his "lifeless" heroes, Zoshchenko appears convinced that the flaw lies in himself and that he must change himself and become like other people. The melancholy character of the "Sentimental Tales" obviously bothers him: "Я должен написать другую книгу, не такую, как Сентиментальные рассказы [*sic*]-жизнерадостную, полную любви к человеку, для этого я должен раньше всего переделать себя. Я должен стать, как человек, как другие люди".<sup>110</sup> Zoshchenko talks of his "aim to be a normal person" ("ставка на нормального человека"). The topic crops up again in conversation with Chukovskii in 1928. There are rather worrying echoes of Belokopytov's ideological conversion in Zoshchenko's assertion that one must live "like a good third-rate person" ("Надо жить хорошим третьим сортом . . . если плохой рассказ напишу, все равно печатаю. И водку пью".)

<sup>107</sup> Zoshchenko, letter to O. Surina, December 1917, in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 24.

<sup>108</sup> Kornei Chukovskii, *Dnevnik 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., p. 405.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p.409.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 409.

The conversation reminds Chukovskii of Leonid Andreev's claims about his wonderful health when he was mortally ill.<sup>111</sup> In November 1927 Zoshchenko confesses that he is as depressed as ever: "У меня такая тоска, что я уже третью неделю не прикасаюсь к перу. Лежу в постели и читаю письма Гоголя, и никого из людей видеть не могу". Given the inevitable return of his depression, Zoshchenko's occasional bursts of optimism are unconvincing: "His enthusiasm gave me the creeps" ("Его бодрость мне было жутко"), remarks Chukovskii glumly.<sup>112</sup>

The change in Zoshchenko's attitude towards his own nature and his "aim to become a normal person" is shown in notes from Zoshchenko's diary. A comparison of entries from the period between 1917-1921 and from the 1930s shows a radical transformation in Zoshchenko's convictions about the desirability of being like a "normal person". In a note from the earlier period, Zoshchenko identifies "abnormality" as a moral and artistic goal:

Люди делятся на человекоподобных и Человека.

Первых большинство, а потому они нормальны в жизни.

Человек - ненормален. Во Всем.

Идите к этой ненормальности. Это огромное, к чему должен подойти человек. Это не парадокс.

Нормальный умирает от несварения желудка. Ненормальный - от безумия. (...)

Разве может быть что-нибудь хуже нормального? <sup>113</sup>

In the 1930s there is no such cavalier attitude to physical health. Instead, the notes are almost all medical in character, concerning the relative longevity of men and women, the effects of drink and drugs on the human organism and on neurasthenia. Included in them is the comment "I myself am incorrectly "charged" (A human being is a rechargeable battery). ("Я лично заряжен неправильно (Человек - это аккумулятор).")<sup>114</sup>. Whereas before 1921 Zoshchenko had written that "the path of the brain is the path of the pitiful five senses which embrace life in its stupid and sad banality"<sup>115</sup>, by the 1930s he takes this path and attempts to look at all questions "through the eyes of reason" rather

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 421.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 424-5.

<sup>113</sup> М. Zoshchenko, "Iz zapisei 1917-1921", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> М. Zoshchenko, "Iz zapisei 1930-1940", *Ibid*, p. 118.

<sup>115</sup> М. Zoshchenko, "Iz zapisei 1917-1921", *Ibid*, p. 114.

than instinct or emotion. This leads to grotesque quasi-scientific pronouncements like the following: "Love. A sensual (erotic) state is communicated over a distance, by the eyes" ("Любовь. Передается состояние чувственное (эротическое) на расстояние, глазами").<sup>116</sup>

The theme of the "lifeless" hero modelling himself after the normal, healthy "beast" in Zoshchenko's fiction reaches its peak in the story *Youth Restored* (1936), in which Zoshchenko gives free rein to his obsession with his own illness. The story of an elderly professor, Volosatov, who throws away all his moral principles and embarks on a love affair with his neighbour's daughter Tula, a brainless, selfish but young and sexy girl, is accompanied by lengthy notes in which Zoshchenko expounds his own theory of mental health. In principle, the commentary of *Youth Restored* propagates the idea that a man's health and happiness is in his own hands and apparently supports the professor's attempt to regain his youthful vitality. However, the story itself has a different impact. The hero is felled by a stroke after discovering that his mistress has been unfaithful. This calamity allows him to be reunited with the wife and daughter he neglected in his quest for lost youth. Volosatov comes closest to his daughter at the point when his morale is lowest following the stroke: "Слезы покатились из глаз Василька и он, взяв здоровой рукой ее руку, поцеловал, как бы прося прощение".<sup>117</sup> In Volosatov's failure to successfully break with his own past and his emotional ties there is confirmation of his own humanity. In "People", too, the hero's failure to succeed in his quest to become first a scoundrel and then an animal is a sign of something innately human in him. Belokopytov finds himself incapable of fighting his rival or of hating his wife. His plan to die in a struggle to the death first with the neighbour's dog and then with Iarkin, his rival, comes to nothing ("(он) думал, что у него нет ни злобы, ни ненависти к этому человеку. Он не мог и не хотел к нему подойти и ударить. И сидел на стул и чувствовал себя усталым и нездоровым").<sup>118</sup> The absence of jealousy or the desire for revenge may not have been regarded as "healthy" by Zoshchenko, but Belokopytov's "unhealthiness" is actually very touching. He is distinguished from Iarkin and Nina Osipovna by his essential kindness, which makes him rare among Zoshchenko's protagonists.

The same is not true of the hero of "Michel Siniagin", who is revealed by his actions as something of a scoundrel. Siniagin's treatment of his aunt and his wife and child are

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<sup>116</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Iz zapisei 1930-1940", *Ibid*, p. 118.

<sup>117</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Vozvrashchennaia molodost'*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v.3 p.75

<sup>118</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Liudi", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 87.

particularly "beastly". Whereas Belokopytov's lifelessness is indicative of his humanity, Siniagin is portrayed as a hollow man. In this respect he resembles Tiniakov in Zoshchenko's description - the "naked, beggarly, vile" animal who has covered himself with "tinsel". Siniagin is not the only apparently sensitive, cultured hero with feet of clay in Zoshchenko's work. The type appears very early in the story "Old Mother Wrangel" (1921). This story features a shallow, treacherous actor who describes himself as being "in the emotions business since I was a boy" ("с детских лет по переживаниям")<sup>119</sup> and who denies his relationship with the old lady who has been like a mother to him when she falls under political suspicion. Another forerunner of Siniagin is the engineer in the 1929 story "The Lady with the Flowers" ("Dama so tsvetami"), published in *The Blue Book* as "Rasskaz pro damu so tsvetami". The story features as its hero an engineer Gorbatov, who claims that he is above the crude Soviet reality that surround him:

Я, говорит, человек глубоко интеллигентный, мне, говорит, доступно понимаю многих мистических и отвлеченных картин моего детства. И я, говорит, не могу удовлетворяться той грубой действительностью, бедностью, сокращением, квартирной платой и так далее.<sup>120</sup>

The lady with the flowers in the title is Gorbatov's girlfriend and is drowned in an accident. In his treatment of her after death the hero reveals his true colours: he squeamishly refuses to touch her face except with his shoe. Soon after the incident he leaves and takes up with another woman. The character of the engineer was clearly based on a real-life character who is described in *Before Sunrise* in an episode entitled "The Student with the Riding Crop". The sketch tells the story of a student, Oleg, and his girlfriend, who drowns herself. Oleg's indifferent reaction to her death makes him a target for victimisation from the local boys, including Zoshchenko:

(...) этот студент Олег очень легко отнесся к ее смерти. Он по-прежнему ходил на пристани со своим стеклом. Смеялся. Шутил с товарищами. И даже стал ухаживать за одной курсисткой Симочкой.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Starushka Vrangel", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh* v. 1, p. 105.

<sup>120</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh* v. 3, p. 252.

<sup>121</sup> M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 555.

Two details link Oleg with the hero of "Michel Siniagin", the riding crop and the girlfriend Simochka, and it seems likely that both Gorbатов and Siniagin were partly inspired by Oleg. Gorbатов and Siniagin are linked by Slonimskii, who describes "The Lady with the Flowers" and "Michel Siniagin" as the most scathing and satirical pieces that Zoshchenko ever wrote:

В повестях своих Зощенко осмеивает тех, кто ничего не умеет делать, но зато полон никчемных, отвлеченных рассуждений. Эти люди живут у Зощенко в совершенной оторванности от реальной жизни. В «Мудрости» фигурирует философствующий бездельник, отделившийся от людей (...) он умирает от удара в тот день, когда решил вернуться в жизнь.

Позднее Зощенко написал «Воспоминания о М. П. Синягине». По страницам этой повести гуляет задумчивая «благородная» личность, не имеющая никакой реальной цели в жизни и лишенная какой-нибудь определенной профессии. Это не человек, а пародия, собирательный тип бездельника, приобретшего этаким интеллигентский облик и в дореволюционной беллетристике выставлявшийся иногда даже как тип положительный. Это, пожалуй, самая резкая, самая издевательская из повестей Зощенко. С ней может оспорить в этом отношении только рассказ «Дама с цветами» где в самом отвратительном виде показана фальшь выпренных «переживаний» существующих у мещанина только для самолюбования и умиления перед самим собой.<sup>122</sup>

Such an interpretation of Zoshchenko's "Michel Siniagin" initially appears perfectly acceptable, given that the character of the cold-hearted but pretentious idler appears more than once in Zoshchenko's work. Stories like "Michel Siniagin", invite a narrow reading according to which they could be regarded as attacks on acceptable political and moral targets, an interpretation that Zoshchenko himself was probably happy to promote. A still more blatant example of the negative portrayal of the Siniagin "type" can be found in *Before Sunrise* in the passage entitled "We Listen to a Poem" ("Мы слушаем поэму"). The sketch is one of several that precede the passage about Tiniakov; all of them are designed to show the ruling classes in pre-revolutionary Russia in an exclusively negative light. In "We Listen to a Poem", as in "The Lady with the Flowers", the immorality of representatives of the bourgeois intelligentsia is shown by a simple device: their coarse

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<sup>122</sup>M. Slonimskii, "Mikhail Zoshchenko", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 100.

actions are shown to belie their fine words. This passage is an example of the type of crude propaganda that becomes quite common in Zoshchenko's later work:

Изящная гостиная. Шелковая мебель. Кружева. Тюль.

Фарфоровые безделушки. Французская речь.

Хозяин - бледный, томный, усталый. Нечто декадентское в его лице.

Плавно жестикулируя, он читает свои стихи. Он читает поэму о какой-то «первоначальной» красоте, к которой должны стремиться люди, об утонченной страдающей душе, блуждающей в грубом мире (...)

The remainder of the small tale concerns a quarrel that breaks out between the poet and his aunt about money that he is meant to give her on a regular basis. The poet says that the matter should be settled in court, and the aunt unexpectedly faints. When the aunt is carried out, one of the guests remarks how nice it is that one can escape from the "vulgar world" of such episodes into poetry ("Какой грубый мир! И какое счастье, что его можно избежать, отгородиться от него поэзией")<sup>123</sup>.

The requirement for the literature of the unambiguous political statement that prevailed in the 1940s may have encouraged Zoshchenko to exaggerate the moral message of this story. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Zoshchenko was seriously troubled by the idea that culture is based on social inequality and that beautiful things have no right to exist side by side with misery, still less at the expense of others. Again, shame at his own past "mistakes" seems to be a driving force. For anyone acquainted with Zoshchenko's manuscript period it is not difficult to discern elements of his own youthful personality in the figure of the poet satirised in "We Listen to a Poem". It is clear from Zoshchenko's early letters and from *Before Sunrise* that Zoshchenko's own self-image was precisely that of a "refined and suffering soul wandering in a crude and ugly world". The portrait of the poet in "We Listen to a Poem" and the vicious portrayal in "Retribution" of the effete aristocrats in Mrs. Dubasova's entourage through the eyes of Kas'ianova could both be regarded as acts of self-criticism by Zoshchenko.

The figure of the unprincipled, pretentious idler and dilettante was clearly a bugbear for Zoshchenko. He takes pains to dissociate himself from the image of the artist and writer as a romantic cavalier, and adopts an air of studied humility and craftsmanship when he talks

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<sup>123</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, pp. 594 - 5.

of himself as a writer. He concentrates mainly on discussing the mistakes, the difficulties, the practical problems he encounters and his sense of duty to the reader. In the autobiography appended to *Youth Restored* he says very little about his artistic activity but describes at great length the many jobs at which he had tried his hand, including those of an instructor in rabbit and poultry breeding and a police inspector. He makes particular mention of his experience as a cobbler - evidently proud that he, unlike Apollon Perepunchik, can boast mastery of an honest trade. The amount of information that Zoshchenko supplies about his other jobs shows an intense desire to prove his "normality". Together with his army service, which he also takes pains to mention, the jobs give Zoshchenko credibility as a man who has seen the world. By contrast, he is fond of adopting an ironic attitude to his profession as writer which reveals the "literary guilt" he once wrote of to Gor'kii. For instance, in the same autobiography he jokes that his life has become boring since he became a writer: "С тех пор началась моя литературная судьба. И с тех пор меркнет разнообразие моей жизни".<sup>124</sup>

In the question of his attitude to work, Zoshchenko projects himself as quite the opposite of his creation Michel Siniagin, who is appalled at the thought that he might have to do work that he considers beneath him, such as digging turf. However, in other respects the two are much closer. Siniagin is an embodiment of the "lifelessness" referred to in the essay on Zaitsev: the "emptiness, deadly depression and death" ("пустота, смертная тоска и смерть") which Zoshchenko felt in himself and with which he fought all his life. There is a striking similarity in the words Zoshchenko uses to describe Zaitsev's lifeless heroes ("жизнь идет лишь по инерции, без воли и желания"), Siniagin ("он шел теперь, двигаясь по инерции, не имея на это ни воли, ни особой охоты") (M.S. p. 137) and himself during his time in Arkhangel'sk ("Нет ни энергии, ни воли. И не я, судьба тянет меня куда-то"). The hero of "Michel Siniagin" sits by passively while life strips him of everything. Like the lizard referred to by the narrator that sheds part of itself to remain alive, he "sheds" his wife, his child, his aunt, his dreams for the future, his view of himself as a poet, his home and his self-respect. We are constantly told that he did nothing to avert the catastrophe ahead of him: "И понимая, что он катится под гору, Мишель старался все же не думать об этом и сколько возможно оттягивать решительный момент"; "Понимая, что ему не выбраться из создавшегося положения, Мишель вдруг успокоился и поплыл по течению, мало заботясь о том, что будет" (M.S. p. 133). "Дни шли за днями и Мишель ничего не предпринимал" (M.S. 134)". Michel Siniagin's death, like that of Zoshchenko in "Wisdom", comes immediately after his will to live returns.

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<sup>124</sup>M. Zoshchenko, autobiography from *Vozvrashchennaia molodost'*, in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, pp. 14-5.

Such a fate may be intended as a warning against the conviction expressed in one of the rejected titles for "Michel Siniagin": "Life Begins the Day After Tomorrow". Siniagin and Zoshchenko wake up at the last moment to find that they have sleepwalked through their own lives.

In the face of this overwhelming lifelessness, Michel's moral transgressions fade into insignificance - they are merely a consequence of his general deadness to the world about him. In this respect "Michel Siniagin" marks a new development in the treatment of the "lifeless hero", which is clearly shown by a comparison with "People", written six years earlier. While Belokopytov is shown to be engaged in an active struggle to survive and an attempt to make sense of the world around him, Michel sinks into destitution with barely a sign of emotion except for a moment or two of panic. The commentary drives this point home with the following remark in which the narrator criticises the Sentimental and psychological tendencies in Russian literature:

Автору кажется, что это форменная брехня и вздор, когда многие и даже знаменитые писатели описывают разные трогательные мучения и переживания отдельных граждан, попавших в беду, или, скажем, не жалея красок, описывают душевное состояние уличной женщины, накручивая на нее чорт знает чего и удивляются тому, чего у них получается.

Автор думает, что ничего этого по большей части не бывает.

Жизнь устроена гораздо, как бы сказать, проще, лучше и пригодней. И беллетристам от нее совершенно мало проку.

Нищий перестает беспокоиться, как только он становится нищим. Миллионер, привыкнув к своим миллионам, также не думает о том, что он миллионер. И крыса, по мнению автора, не слишком страдает от того, что она крыса. (M.S. p. 134.)

Whether or not this statement reflects Zoshchenko's own beliefs, this is one of the most crucial statements in "Michel Siniagin", one of the philosophical pegs on which the story hangs, and an indication that Slonimskii's reading of the story as a moral tale is very limiting. It is almost certain that the idea that "a rat doesn't suffer because it is a rat" was prompted by the meeting with Tiniakov, who particularly horrified Zoshchenko because he appeared to accept his fate with equanimity.

It is worth returning to the figure of Tiniakov at this point, in order to look at the particular slant that Zoshchenko put on his portrayal of the poet-beggar figure, both in his account of the meeting in *Before Sunrise* and in "Michel Siniagin". Zoshchenko's fictional reworking

of the character differs substantially from Tiniakov's own treatment of his predicament. This disparity is illustrative of one the central problems addressed in the "Sentimental Tales" and in "Michel Siniagin" in particular.

## Part 5: "From Proud Poetry to Democratic Prose": The Theme of the Poet-Beggar in Tiniakov's Work and in "Michel Siniagin"

Aleksandr Tiniakov was born in the provincial town of Orel in 1886. He left Orel for Moscow in 1905 and arrived in Petersburg in 1912, where he became acquainted with several important cultural figures of the day, including Merezhkovskii, Gippius - of whom he became a fervent disciple - and Blok. He published three collections of verses: *Navis Nigra* (1912), *Triangle (Treugolnik)* (1922) and *Ego sum qui sum (Az esm' sushchii)* (1925). Meanwhile, he kept himself alive by journalistic hack work. The poet was frequently led into trouble by his personal and ideological adventurism and became the centre of a scandal in 1916 when he was discovered to be working for both liberal and nationalist papers under different pseudonyms. Following his exposure he further fuelled his notoriety by publishing "Confessions of an Antisemite" ("Ispoved' antisemita") in the Petersburg paper *Zhurnal zhurnalov*. In his own autobiography Tiniakov blames this scandal, rather than the revolution, for his subsequent poverty, because it meant that he was ostracised by writers and journalists and could not publish his work anywhere. Soon after, in 1918, he returned to Orel and began to write socialist pamphlets and other propaganda. After returning to Petersburg in 1920 he continued to write poetry and criticism. According to Khodasevich, Tiniakov joined the Cheka as a "cultural worker" in the early 1920s.<sup>125</sup> At around that time, he began to beg on the corner of Liteinyi Prospekt and Nevskii Prospekt with a sign around his neck saying "writer". He married in 1928 but continued to beg. As a "declassed element" he was sent to a labour camp in 1929 but returned to Leningrad in the thirties, where he died in 1934.

Now almost forgotten, Tiniakov appears to be notable chiefly for the fact that he was a writer who achieved neither popularity nor particular critical acclaim. Described in his own biography and in Khodasevich's obituary as one of life's "unfortunates"<sup>126</sup>, Tiniakov was a decadent when decadence was no longer fashionable. He has recently attracted renewed interest in Russia, but hardly on the grounds of his artistic merits. Gumilev described him as "one of the feeble intellectuals crushed by Briusov's armour"<sup>127</sup>. N. Bogomolov, the editor of a recent collection of his poems, presents Tiniakov as a mediocre artist whose work "only occasionally awakens in the reader a sensation of painful awkwardness", but whose work, for the most part, "can be rated with "the good second-rate poetry of his

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<sup>125</sup>V. Khodasevich, "Neudachniki" (1935), in A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed N. A. Bogomolov, Tomsk: Vodolei, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup>V. Khodasevich, "Neudachniki" and A. Tiniakov, "Otryvki iz moei biografii" (1925), *Ibid*, pp. 7-9 and pp.10-6.

<sup>127</sup>N. S. Gumilev, *Pis'ma o russkoi poezii*, Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990, p. 162.

day". "Of course", Bogomolov adds, "it is another matter that Tiniakov could never raise himself above this level, no matter how he tried".

..чтение его текстов лишь изредка вызывает ощущение мучительной неловкости, по большей же части стихи эти вполне грамотны и находятся на уровне хорошего второго ряда для его времени. Другое дело, что Тиняков из этого ряда не мог вырваться, как ни пытался....<sup>128</sup>

Tiniakov is commended to the reader less as a poet than as a historical curiosity, precisely because he failed to coincide with the spirit of his age:

Литературная судьба Тинякова не совпала по фазе с общим направлением литературы его времени, и это несовпадение, как кажется, обнажает некоторые особенности, характерные для поэзии двадцатого века, резче и сильнее, чем судьбы знаменитых писателей, на которых Тиняков смотрел снизу вверх....<sup>129</sup>

Contrary to Zoshchenko's assertion in *Before Sunrise*, there is not a very clear thematic, aesthetic or ideological break between the poet's pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary work.<sup>130</sup> Zoshchenko cites the poem "On the Lake" ("Na Ozere") as typical of the poet's early work, but many of Tiniakov's poems from before the revolution, such as the cycle "Flowers from the Wasteland" ("Tsvetochki s pustyria") (1908-1910), bear little resemblance to it. Zoshchenko calls Tiniakov's later verse "Smerdiakovian", and interestingly enough Tiniakov links "Flowers from the Wasteland" with another amoral character from *The Brothers Karamazov*: the cycle is dedicated "to the shade of F.P. Karamazov". The poems in this cycle are self-conscious, macabre monologues written from the point of view of a skeleton, a reptile, a bone, a spider, etc.: "Влюбленными глазами, смотрю на гниль свою" ("Prayer of a Reptile") ("Molitva gada"); "во мне таится злость, как паук во мраке" - ("Bone") ("Kost"). Another poem, "An Honest Song" "Iskrenniaia pesenka" again from before the revolution (1914), is as "Smerdiakovian" as anything Tiniakov wrote in the 1920s:

<sup>128</sup>N. A Bogomolov (ed.), foreword to A.Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 6.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup>Chukovskii also remarks on a process of degradation in Tiniakov's work, although he, unlike Zoshchenko, does not attribute it to the revolution. While motifs of debauchery and corruption are not confined to the poet's post-revolutionary work, they do become more prevalent in Tiniakov's later collections.

Я до конца презираю  
Истину, совесть и честь  
Только всего и желаю  
Бражничать блудно да есть

Только бы льнули девчонки,  
К черту пославшие стыд,  
Только б водились деньжонки  
Да не слабел аппетит!<sup>131</sup>

A number of Tiniakov's poems suggest happiness in poverty, destitution and alienation: One of the poems from "Flowers from the Wasteland", "Spit" ("Plevochek") (1907) describes the happiness of a drop of spittle as it runs down a dirty ditch ("Любо мне плевку плевочку - По канавке грязной мчатся")<sup>132</sup>. A recurring theme in the 1912-1919 cycle "Oneness" ("Edinoe") is the idea that in renouncing worldly goods and dignity it is possible to be at one with the universe: the outcast leper who narrates the poem "In the Leper Hospital" ("V Leprozorii") (1912) talks of living in a "dear, sweet abyss":

Пусть догнивает тело от болезни,  
Но духом я постиг давно,  
Что я живу в родимой, в милой бездне,  
Что Макрокосм и Я - Одно.<sup>133</sup>

In the poem "The Vagabond" ("Brodiaga") (1913) the narrator addresses the "dear blizzard":

И тебе, метель родная,  
Не страшась и не грустя,  
Сном последним засыпая,  
Улыбнусь я, как дитя.<sup>134</sup>

The 1915 poem "Commandment to a Poor Man" ("Zavet bedniaku") argues that "this life cannot be repeated" and advises "love your unhappy days and your hungry song":

<sup>131</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Iskrenniaia pesenka", in A. Tiniakov (Odnokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 82.

<sup>132</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Plevochek", *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>133</sup>A. Tiniakov, "V leprozorii", *Ibid*, p. 89.

<sup>134</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Brodiaga", *Ibid*, p. 90.

И лохмотья и язвы земные,  
 Слаще ангельских песен в раю, -  
 Так люби ж твои дни горевые  
 И голодную песню твою!<sup>135</sup>

Tiniakov's work suggests that there was an element of deliberate decision in his eventual fate as a beggar. A short story from 1914, "The Old Editor" ("Staryi redaktor") has at its centre a contrast between the complacent, socially respectable editor of the title and his rebellious, fascinating daughter who describes herself as "one of nature's beggars":

- Прирожденный нищий может родиться и вырасти в самой богатой и культурной среде а все-таки постоянно доходить до крайних пределов нищеты и тоски. Я очень хорошо обеспечена отцом, но - поверите ли - я чувствую, какая это сладость вернуться откуда-нибудь на рассвете, захотеть курить и - после долгих поисков, найти где-нибудь под креслом невымеченный, измызганный окуроч!...думаю, что можно так же инстинктивно, как люди ищут сытости, богатства и покоя, искать нищеты, падения и позора....<sup>136</sup>

Tiniakov's clear admiration of his heroine in the story reflects his own love of exploring moral extremes and testing the limits of experience, expressed to the point of parody in a letter written by Tiniakov to Briusov in 1905:

За год, прошедший с того времени, я почти ничего не печатал, но я много жил, много брал от жизни и много своих чувств положил на ее алтарь. Я - то разъезжал по России в качестве революционного поэта: то сжигал себя на медленном огне Сладострастия и любви к женщинам: то кружился в вихре бешеных дней отчаянного пьянства: то бросал все и всех и среди бесконечных деревенских равнин прислушивался, как лед одиночества окутывал мою душу, как голос безграничного Безмолвия и Безлюдия сладостной болью терзал мое сердце, а потом опять бросался в Море Жизни с надеждой, что мне еще

<sup>135</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Zavet Bedniaku", *Ibid*, p.78.

<sup>136</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Staryi redaktor", in *Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh*, 3, 1914, p. 16.

удастся забыть о тоске, которая всегда томит меня и властно зовет меня куда-то, к чему-то»<sup>137</sup>.

The deliberate, feverish pursuit of emotional experience and the self-dramatisation apparent in these words are not simply a reflection of Tiniakov's personal philosophy - they express a view of life and art that was typical of Russian Symbolism. In his reminiscences of the artist of the Silver Age, Khodasevich identifies the desire to attain a total fusion of one's art and one's life as a crucial aspect of the spirit of the age. As a literary bystander, Khodasevich speaks of the phenomenon with dry detachment :

Жили в неистовом напряжении, в вечном возбуждении, в обостренности, в лихорадке....Провозгласив культ личности, символизм не ставил перед нею никаких задач, кроме саморазвития. (...) От каждого вступавшего в орден (...) требовалось лишь непрестанное горение, движение - безразлично во имя чего. Все пути были открыты с одной лишь обязанностью - идти как можно быстрее и как можно дальше. (...) Можно было прославлять и Бога, и Дьявола. Разрешалось быть одержимым чем угодно: требовалась лишь полнота одержимости.

Отсюда, лихорадочная погоня за эмоциями, безразлично за какими. Все «переживания» почитались благом, лишь бы их было много и они были сильны.<sup>138</sup>

Tiniakov's lack of genius combined with the enthusiasm with which he threw himself into the spirit of the times makes him a textbook case by which to study the artistic philosophy of Symbolism. Bogomolov argues that perhaps this is the reason for the recent revival of scholarly interest in Tiniakov:

Слишком уж выразительная его фигура даже на том роскошном фоне, который представляет собой серебряный век. Человек ограниченного таланта, воспринявший все соблазны и искушения своей эпохи как неукоснительное руководство к действию, тем самым становится не просто одним из, но и тем образцом, по

<sup>137</sup> A. Tiniakov, letter to V. Briusov, 31 January 1905, quoted in part in N. A. Bogomolov (ed.), foreword to A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> V. Khodasevich, "Konets renaty" (1928), in *Nekropol', Literatura i vlasti, Pis'ma B. A. Sadovskomu*, ed. N. A. Bogomolov, Moscow: S.S., 1996, pp. 21-2.

которому можно изучать сами каноны, принципы и неписанные законы символизма.<sup>139</sup>

Tiniakov was particularly drawn to the image of the "damned poet" ("проклятый поэт") the debauched and downtrodden visionary. Despite the note of self-pity in his autobiography, in which he describes himself as an "unfortunate", the recurrence of the theme of the "bared, beggared soul" ("обнаженная нищая душа")<sup>140</sup> and the joyful welcoming of disaster suggest that the poet deliberately sought life on the edge.

"Everything is Sweet and Sacred" ("Vse milo i sviato") is typical of Tiniakov's work in its celebration of a drunken, chaotic way of life, described as both "sinful" and "sacred". The poem declares that "everything on earth is sweet to the wise man and everything is sacred to the pure man" ("Все мило для мудрого в мире, Все свято для чистого в нем"), including lying on dirty sheets with a prostitute and "losing oneself in animal passions" ("Иль с девкой публичной, распутной, На грязных возлечь простынях, И грезе отдавшись минутной, Забыться в животных страстях"), walking through the fields listening to the hum of the bumblebees and composing melodious lines about God and eternal beauty ("Слагая певучие строки, о бже, о вечной красе") and returning to collect one's fee from a publisher and once again drinking oneself into a daze.<sup>141</sup>

The image of the "damned poet" was espoused by some of Tiniakov's most illustrious contemporaries, in particular Blok and Esenin. Several of Esenin's poems from the early 1920s portray the poet in the "hell" of taverns, among prostitutes and down-and-outs. For instance, the 1922-3 poem "Yes! Now it's decided. No Way Back" ("Da! Teper' resheno. Bez vozvrata") includes the following lines:

Шум и гам в этом логове жутком,  
Но всю ночь напролет до зари  
Я читаю стихи проституткам  
И с бандитами жарю спирт.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup>N. A. Bogomolov (ed.), foreword to A. Tiniakov (Odinokii): *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 6.

<sup>140</sup>K. D. Muratova and G. M. Shevelova (eds.), *Pisateli orlovskogo kraia*, Orel: orlovskoe otdelenie priokskogo knizhnogo izdatel'stva, 1981, pp. 162-6.

<sup>141</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Vse milo i sviato", in *Aleksandr Tiniakov (Odinokii): Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>142</sup>S. Esenin, "Da, teper' resheno. Bez vozvrata" (1922-3), in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961, v. 2, pp. 121-2.

Other poems in the same key include "Pox, Harmonica, Boredom...Boredom..." "Syp', garmonika, skuka... skuka..." (1923) and "Sing then, Sing. On the Damned Guitar" ("Poi zhe poi. Na prokliatoi gitare") (1923) ("наша жизнь - простыня и кровать, Наша жизнь - поцелуй да в омут").<sup>143</sup> The image appears in Blok's work, too, in poems such as "I am Nailed to the Tavern Bar" ("Ia prigvozhden k traktirnoi stoike") ("Я пригвожден к трактирной стойке. Я пьян давно. Мне все - равно") (1908).<sup>144</sup> A poem by Blok of 1908, "The Poets" ("Poety"), provides a particularly interesting parallel with the image of the poet in Tiniakov's work. In the poem, Blok draws an ironic portrait of the debauched life of the cynical city poet but ends by affirming the glory of the poet's calling and his ability to appreciate the beauty of the world. The poets in Blok's poem quarrel, drink until they are sick, dream about the Golden Age and - in another image reminiscent of "Michel Siniagin", cry over little flowers and clouds:

Разнежась, мечтали о веке золотом,  
 Ругали издателей дружно.  
 И плакали горько над малым цветком,  
 Над маленькой тучкой жемчужной...

Despite the irony of these lines, the real "enemy" in the poem is the imaginary reader, the complacent philistine ("*obyvateľ*"), content with his "wife and his bob-tailed constitution", who sees himself as morally superior to the poets:

Так жили поэты. Читатель и друг!  
 Ты думаешь, может быть, - хуже  
 Твоих ежедневных бессильных потуг,  
 Твоей обывательской лужи?

Нет, милый читатель, мой критик слепой!  
 По крайности, есть у поэта  
 И косы, и тучки и век золотой,  
 Тебе ж недоступно все это!..

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<sup>143</sup>S. Esenin, "Poi zhe poi. Na prokliatoi gitare" (1923), in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 127.

<sup>144</sup>A. Blok, "Ia prigvozhden k traktirnoi stoike", in *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii i pisem v 20 tomakh*, Moscow: Nauka, 1997, v.3, p.116.

Ты будешь доволен собой и женой,  
 Своей конституцией куцой,  
 А вот у поэта - всемирный запой,  
 И мало ему конституций!

The final image of the poem, with its image of the poet dying under a fence like a dog, but happy in the knowledge that he has been "kissed by the blizzard", is reminiscent of Tiniakov's hymns to destitution, such as "The Vagabond" with its address to the "dear snowstorm":

Пускай я умру под забором, как пес,  
 Пусть жизнь меня в землю втоптала -  
 Я верю - то Бог меня снегом занес  
 То вьюга меня целовала!<sup>145</sup>

Both Blok and Esenin, however, by virtue of their talent and their personal integrity, managed to pull off the role of the "damned poet" while at the same time retaining an air of purity and beauty, something that Tiniakov did not manage to do. In the work of Blok and Esenin the motif of the poet's descent into an earthly hell is accompanied by a mood of loss and loneliness, whereas in Tiniakov's poems there is a sense of joyful relish in debauchery. In work and in life Tiniakov was something of a dual personality, combining mysticism and idealism with a healthy streak of self-preservation and animal appetite. Zoshchenko notes this double nature when he compared the poet-beggar to Jesus Christ and to an animal simultaneously. In his memoir of Tiniakov, Khodasevich remarks on the mixture of romanticism and coarseness in Tiniakov's person. Recalling Tiniakov's first appearance in Petersburg literary salons, Khodasevich remembers that although he made a rather striking impression at first as a pale-faced "Florentine youth" this was quickly overtaken by the impression that "something plebian showed itself through his romantic exterior":

Однако, если всмотреться пристальней, можно было заметить, что тонкость его уж не так тонка, что лицо, пожалуй, у него грубовато, голос деревенский, а выговор семинарский, что ноги в стоптанных сапогах он ставит носками внутрь. Словом, сквозь романтическую наружность сквозило что-то плебейское.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup>A. Blok, "Poety", in *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii i pisem v 20 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 89.

<sup>146</sup>V. Khodasevich, "Neudachniki", in A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 7.

The same blend of high-mindedness and coarseness is apparent in a letter that Tiniakov wrote to the writer Boris Sadovskoi, following the "*Zemshchina*" scandal, when it was revealed that Tiniakov had been writing for the ultra-right press and the liberal press under different pseudonyms. In the letter, Tiniakov declares loftily that he is "organically higher than the Party and press barriers" and at the same time, warns Sadovskoi: "when you take away my bread and butter I will fight like a beast, a rat and a devil all at once" ("А когда вы у меня будете хлеб отнимать, я буду бороться, как зверь, как гад и как дьявол - вместе!").<sup>147</sup> Tiniakov's double nature is even commented on by the poet himself in his autobiography, and attributed to the incompatible characters of his parents. Tiniakov writes of his mother that she "should have gone to a nunnery... and sewn scarlet roses on silk and dreamed and prayed", but she was given in marriage to a "coarse, worldly... man". He professes to hate his mother as the parent responsible for his artistic nature and his miserable fate, arguing that if his father had married a healthy peasant woman he would never have been a despised literary "unfortunate", but instead would have a "tasty, plump wench" and pockets full of jingling coins:

Я до сих пор ненавижу мою мать, хотя я знаю, что никто в жизни не любил меня так глубоко...как любила меня она. Но я знаю также, что если бы мой отец женился бы на здоровой деревенской девке, я не был бы литератором неудачником, издыхающим от голода и от всевозможных унижений, а заведовал бы теперь где-нибудь Откомхозом, а была бы у меня смачная, мясистая баба, а в кармане хрустели червонцы и позвякивали полтинники...<sup>148</sup>

The streak of coarseness in Tiniakov's nature is perhaps behind some of the more "Smerdiakovian" poems in *Ego sum qui sum* that so horrified Zoshchenko. These poems present a more cynical image of destitution, in which the demand to survive has eclipsed moral and aesthetic considerations. The narrator of "Prayer About Food" ("Molenie o pishche") (which is quoted by Zoshchenko in *Before Sunrise*) offers to "lick the boots of his enemy" in return for food. "Homo Sapiens", declares that "nothing beyond the physical realm is worth a damn":

В свои лишь мускулы я верую

<sup>147</sup>A. Tiniakov, letter to B. Sadovskoi, 6 June 1915, repr. in V. Khodasevich, *Nekropol', Literatura i vlasti, Pis'ma B. A. Sadovskomu* (ed. N. A. Bogomolov), p. 416.

<sup>148</sup>A. Tiniakov, "Otryvki iz moei biografii", in A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 11.

И знаю, сладостно пожрать!  
 На все что за телесной сферой,  
 Мне совершенно наплевать.<sup>149</sup>

These poems horrified Zoshchenko when he read *Ego sum qui sum* because they portray a "beast's eye view" of the world (Zoshchenko, clearly, saw the poems as a sign of Tiniakov's honesty and his confrontation of the reality of destitution, and not, as Chukovskii did, as a deliberate piece of "nasty" posturing), the lyrical outpourings of a human being who has become barely distinguishable from an animal. B. Sarnov has compared Tiniakov's poems to those of the versifier Captain Lebiadkin from *The Possessed*, arguing that the most striking thing about Tiniakov's poems is that they are lyric poems by somebody who is "obviously incapable of a lyrical attitude to the world" ("это - лирические стихи, вылившиеся из души человека, заведомо не способного на лирическое отношение к миру").<sup>150</sup>

And yet, for all Tiniakov's coarseness, his unprincipled behaviour and his love of scandalous material, when his poems are read together it is clear that he *does* have a lyrical attitude to the world. His poems are, almost without exception, outpourings of individual emotion. In his work, the poet is the centre of the artistic world: all his inner experience is seen as important and sacred, whatever its relationship to conventional morality. Tiniakov, like his mentor Briusov, clearly believes in the artist's freedom from moral imperatives and the virtues of unlimited spiritual exploration. In the introduction to *Ego sum qui sum* he argues that "the artist at the moment of creativity is, essentially free from any morals and free to depict any manifestation of life - the "good" together with the "bad", the "revolting" together with the "beautiful".<sup>151</sup> Tiniakov's poems, however much they gravitate towards the "disgusting" are firmly in the lyric tradition in that they express a firm belief in the value of personal experience.

Zoshchenko, in his treatment of the character of the poet-beggar, retains the view of the world expressed in Tiniakov's more "Smerdiakovian" poems, but removes the lyrical element entirely. While Tiniakov's poems describe a "beast's" view of the world in the form of a lyrical monologue, Zoshchenko expresses the same view of things using the mouthpiece of his surrogate author. The centre of authority is moved away from the poet-beggar himself to a detached commentator who, as already noted, argues that "a beggar

<sup>149</sup>A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), "Homo Sapiens", in *Stikhotvoreniia*, p.95.

<sup>150</sup>B. Sarnov, *Prishestviia kapitana Lebiadkina: Sluchai Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Pik Rik, Kul'tura, 1993, p. 18.

<sup>151</sup>A. Tiniakov (Odinokii), "Predislovie", *Ego sum qui sum*, in *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 91.

stops worrying as soon as he becomes a beggar...And a rat...doesn't suffer too much from being a rat". The hero's journey into destitution, rather than being portrayed as an inner journey, as it is in Tiniakov's work, is portrayed in "Michel Siniagin" as a process of spiritual atrophy seen from a distance - with the poet displaced from the centre of the artistic universe by a philistine narrator akin to the "obyvatel'" of Blok's "The Poets", who measures the world in his own terms. Stripped of its lyrical component, the image of the "damned poet", seen not only in the work of Tiniakov but in those poems of Esenin and Blok that draw on the tradition of Dante's *Inferno*, becomes no more than the antics of a spoilt loafer:

А Мишель, этот довольно грусноватый молодой человек,  
склонный к неопределенной меланхолии и несколько утомленный  
своей поэтической работой и шумом столичной жизни с ее  
ресторанами и певцами, и мордобоем, также хотел некоторое  
время спокойно жить в тиши для того, чтоб набраться сил и  
снова пуститься во все тяжкие (M.S., p. 119).

Everywhere in "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko plays on this shift of narrative focus, so that what is normally expressed in lyric poetry as a view from within is "objectified", seen from without, and thus stripped of its personal meaning. The poet's feelings of communion with nature are described as "crying at sparrows". His nervous crisis on the eve of his marriage to Simochka is described in farcical terms: Michel is depicted running about in his drawers. The poet's sufferings, his "переживания", are described in the language of medicine rather than the language of poetry ("Сердцебиение продолжалось, но было более умеренно, и головокружение сменилось полной сонливостью и апатией") (M.S., p.121).

In "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales", the demonic cynicism of Tiniakov's "amoral" poems is stripped of its sensationalism and its individual nature and elevated to the status of an all-pervading moral atmosphere. Self-preservation and materialism is accepted as the moral norm by Zoshchenko's narrator and by almost all his characters (with a few exceptions, most of whom are old ladies: in the case of "Michel Siniagin", the exception is Simochka). One way in which the utilitarian spirit of the world depicted in the "Sentimental Tales" is expressed is in the excessive importance assigned by both narrator and characters to items of furniture and household objects, as opposed to human beings. This is seen in several scenes in "Michel Siniagin": when Michel's mother shows his writing desk to visitors as a symbolic cultural artefact, they see it as a piece of furniture and some ask how much it cost ("некоторые же меркантильные души тут же спрашивали за сколько куплен этот стол...") (M.S. p. 120). In the description of

the letter received by Michel from his landlord in Pskov, the death of Michel and Simochka's child and Simochka's remarriage are mentioned in a subordinate clause while we hear at greater length about the fate of their furniture ("...его жена, потеряв ребенка и выйдя замуж, уехала из квартиры, задолжав ему значительную сумму. Она оставила ему кое-какую мебель, которую арендатор и считает своей, если Мишель не пришлет ему денег в ближайший месяц") (M.S., p. 130). During the account of Aunt Mariia's madness, the fate of her furniture and her possessions takes centre stage. Michel's salvation at the end of the story is expressed in solidly material terms, in the shape of some furniture, a lustrine suit and a dinner of boiled beef that Michel is given by his benefactors.

The furniture theme is also important elsewhere in the "Sentimental Tales", forming the denouement of "What the Nightingale Sang About", where the hero's love affair founders over the fate of a chest of drawers. In "People", a primus stove which belongs to the hero, but is appropriated by his wife and her new lover, takes on an extraordinary importance in the plot: the story ends with an account of what happens to the primus stove, whereas Belokopytov himself has vanished from view. A meat mincer similarly takes on a centre-stage role in "A Funny Adventure". This story is perhaps more shocking than any other in the cycle in the way it expresses the precedence of objects over people. The hero, Sergei Petukhov, who has tried unsuccessfully to sell a meat-mincer to raise the money to take his girlfriend to the cinema, is "saved" by the death of his aunt (an event brought on by his own bungled attempt to burgle her). During the *panikhida*, the hero looks down at her body happily: "Тетка, тетка - думал он. -экая ты, брат, тетка. Подохла-таки". He sneaks away during the service to calculate the value of the possessions in his aunt's room, "и насчитав до кругленькой суммы - сто рублей, тихонько улыбнулся..."<sup>152</sup>

Chukovskii saw the "Sentimental Tales" as an expression of Zoshchenko's horror at a world based on mercenary principles. According to Chukovskii there is one reason for the downfall of the heroes of all the tales: a passionate and unshakeable belief in property as the only basis for happiness.<sup>153</sup> There are, as Chukovskii noted, moments of "Biblical lyricism" in the tales that support such an interpretation. In both "Apollon and Tamara" and "A Terrible Night" the heroes address the world in general with pleas that resemble the cries of beggars, and it is quite probable here that Zoshchenko is suggesting that the

<sup>152</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Veseloie prikluchenie", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 143.

<sup>153</sup>K. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 73.

plight of a beggar is a moral touchstone by which the humanity of a society is measured. Kotofeev, in "A Terrible Night", falls on his knees in the street and calls out "Граждане! Милости прошу...На мое несчастье...на мою беду...подайте кто сколько может".<sup>154</sup> He is met by accusations of drunkenness and, eventually, angry pursuit by a baying crowd. Another thing particularly worth mentioning with regard to Chukovskii's remark about "Biblical lyricism" in the "Sentimental Tales" is the role played by old ladies in the stories. Zoshchenko has an ambivalent attitude to old ladies. In an early autobiography, "About Myself, Ideology and A Few Other Things" ("O sebe, ob ideologii i eshche кое o chem") (1922) he linked old ladies specifically with religious superstition and professed to dislike them:

Я «в Бога не верю». Мне смешно даже, непостижимо, как это интеллигентный человек идет в церковь Параскевы Пятницы и там молится раскрашенной картине.

Я не мистик. Старух не люблю. Кровного родства не признаю. И Россию люблю мужицкую.<sup>155</sup>

Zoshchenko often appears to make fun of old ladies in a rather brutal way, rather in the spirit of Daniil Kharms - the account of Aunt Maria's illness in "Michel Siniagin" is a good example. At the same time, old ladies, particularly in the "Sentimental Tales", with all their religious "superstition" and their love of ritual, function as the sole guardians of a view of the world that extends beyond the "physical realm" and that retains some continuity with older traditions. This is less apparent, perhaps, in "Michel Siniagin" than in other tales in the cycle proper, though there are nevertheless signs of it, such as the hero's mother and aunt making the sign of the cross over him, or the comment on the old ladies' belief that marriage "was a single and final step, hallowed by sacrament". Old ladies take a more significant role in "People" and "Wisdom". For example. In "People" Belokopytov's only ally is his landlady Katerina Vasil'evna, who continues to feed him when he is sleeping rough in the woods. In "Wisdom", following the departure of the hero's guests, who do not let his unexpected death prevent them from trying the food he has prepared, the hero's elderly landlady, left alone, carries out a mourning ritual for him:

И когда ушел пятнадцатый гость, старуха вошла в соседнюю комнату и, достав из комода простыню, завесила ею зеркало.

<sup>154</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Strashnaia noch", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 103.

<sup>155</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "O sebe, ob ideologii, i eshche кое o chem" (1922), in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatelii, odnoaktnye komedii*, pp. 579.

Потом, достав с полки евангелие, принялась вслух читать,  
покачиваясь всем корпусом, как от зубной боли.

И голос ее, негромкий и глухой, прерывался и дрожал.<sup>156</sup>

There is some evidence, then, to support Chukovskii's basically Christian/humanist reading of the Tales. However, in my opinion, the message of "Michel Siniagin", in particular, relates less to ethical concerns than to the realm "beyond good and evil" that increasingly fascinated Zoshchenko in connection with his own mental illness. In "Michel Siniagin" Zoshchenko expresses a fear that lies even deeper than the fear of a world in which humans are incapable of humanity towards one another. This fear can be summed up in the narrator's words that life doesn't offer much for the novelist ("беллетристам от нее совершенно мало проку") (M.S. p. 134). The "message" of "Michel Siniagin" is, in my opinion, bound up with the hero's character as a poet. "Michel Siniagin" depicts a world in which there is no place for the artist or for art in general. This is partly a reaction to the immediate cultural climate surrounding the author. As a warning about the redundancy of the artist, "Michel Siniagin" is thoroughly "in step" with the age in which it was written. The fact that "Michel Siniagin" was written at a critical point in Soviet cultural history following the declaration of a strong Party line on literature, the "exposure" of Pereverzev and the suicide of Maiakovskii no doubt has something to do with the bleak picture that Zoshchenko draws in the story. However, as a study of Zoshchenko's literary output shows, the essential plot of "Michel Siniagin" springs from a deeper source. Seen in the context of the "Sentimental Tales", *Youth Restored*, *Before Sunrise* and Zoshchenko's manuscript period and early work, it seems probable that, with the figure of Michel, Zoshchenko is once again giving voice to and doing battle with his own malaise, which made him incapable of seeing the beauty and joy of existence. "Michel Siniagin" portrays a world in which the only reality is the down-to-earth gaze of the philistine, and any aspirations toward beauty and lyricism are a "beautiful lie" invented to varnish the ugly truth of human existence. The real message of "Michel Siniagin" lies not in the condemnation of outdated literary conventions or in the portrait of the artist as an unprincipled idler, but in the depiction of a world without beauty or meaning. The hero of "Michel Siniagin" is a microcosm for the world outside. Michel's emotional deadness mirrors the deadpan representation of the world in the tale. Michel's poetry, like Tiniakov's poetry, in Zoshchenko's view, is a "beautiful lie" adorning the ugly truth within him and without him.

The idea that beauty and truth are irreconcilable opposites is characteristic of Zoshchenko's work throughout his career and is seen in his earliest writings. In the early

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<sup>156</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Mudrost'", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, p. 57.

essay, "The Gods Allow", Zoshchenko wrote of the need to believe in the "beautiful, tender, mysterious" lie to avoid facing the "dry, boring and often ugly" truth:

Мы часто верим только лжи, ибо как можем мы говорить правду, если правда всегда безнадежно суха и скучна и часто уродлива, а ложь красива, нежна и таинственна?<sup>157</sup>

As time went on, Zoshchenko found himself unable to speak of the "beautiful", "tender" and "mysterious" in any other way than by keeping expressively silent on the matter.

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<sup>157</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Bogi pozvoliait", in Vera von Wiren (ed.) *Neizdannyyi Zoshchenko*, p. 24.

## Chapter 3

### Translating Zoshchenko's "Michel Siniagin": Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Problems

#### Part 1: In Defence of Critical and Practical Models of Translation Studies

The rapid growth in the study of translation over the last thirty years has led to a situation of increasing specialisation and diversity. Today, various models of translation theory and translation studies exist side by side, each reflecting different objects of study and different "research parameters". These different research parameters give rise to conflicts between various models, which, as Neubert and Shreve observe, may be more imagined than real: two divergent views of translation may not really be in opposition, but may simply focus on different aspects of a larger phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> One particular "imaginary" area of conflict has arisen between writing about translation that is critical and practical, written from the point of view of a reader or translator of a specific text "here and now", and writing that is more general and descriptive, looking at translation in historical context and describing the various external, cultural factors that affect translation.

It is no exaggeration to say that pre-20th century translation theory was almost entirely anecdotal in character and closely linked with the practical experience of literary translators.<sup>2</sup> In 1975 George Steiner argued that for some two thousand years translation theory had consisted of variations on a single question: "in what ways can or ought fidelity to be achieved?"<sup>3</sup> Developments in linguistics in the twentieth century brought some changes to the discipline and resulted in attempts to formulate a more systematic approach to translation, such as Eugene Nida's influential work on Bible translation, *Towards a Science of Translating*. However, the most significant recent developments in the discipline took place in the 1970s. At this time, translation studies began to overlap with cultural studies, as a number of scholars in Europe and Israel attempted to look beyond the eternal question of the translation's fidelity to the original. "Polysystem theory", developed in the 1970s by Itamar Even-Zohar and

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<sup>1</sup>A. Neubert and G. M. Shreve, *Translation as Text*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>See J. Biguenet and R. Schulte (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>3</sup>G. Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 261.

Gideon Toury, advocated the diachronic, descriptive study of translations and their relationship to other cultural systems. A similar approach was adopted in the new discipline of Translation Studies, represented by Andre Lefevere, James Holmes and Susan Bassnett. Translation Studies scholars tried to move away from the traditional, valoristic approach to translation which depended on a direct comparison of the source and target text. Instead they compared translations of different eras, studying the external (cultural and political) factors that influence translation norms at various points in history. <sup>4</sup>

More recent work in Translation Studies has drawn on post-structuralist theory, arguing that translation provides an ideal illustration of deconstructionist theory and reader response theory. According to reader response theory there is no fixed meaning present in a text, but only the potential to mean, which is realised when an individual reader engages with it. Translations, being "re-writings" of original texts, make explicit the process of interpretation that happens when a reader opens a book and reads it silently. According to the Translation Studies approach, it is pointless to evaluate the translation against a non-existent core of meaning or value in the original text. A far more fruitful approach is to study the process of re-writing and the external factors that influence the construction of meaning from the original text. Lefevere argues that such a method "involves asking questions which are - theoretically at least - answerable once again".<sup>5</sup>

According to Lefevere and Bassnett, post-structuralist theory and reader-response theory have discredited the notion of faithfulness to the original which was so central to translation theory for centuries: ". . .deconstruction severely questioned the hierarchical relationship. . . originally based on the sacred character of the original - between original and translation, thereby undermining the last vestiges of the concept of accuracy".<sup>6</sup> Research into translation at different historical periods has revealed that the standards of accurate or good translation are culturally and historically relative and subject to constant change. "With the demise of the notion of equivalence as sameness, and recognition of the fact that literary conventions change continuously, the old

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<sup>4</sup>E. Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 74-143.

<sup>5</sup>A. Lefevere, "That Structure in the Dialect of Men Interpreted", in *Comparative Criticism*, 6, 1984, pp. 87-100.

<sup>6</sup>A. Lefevere, "Introduction", in *Comparative Literature and Translation*, 47, 1, 1995, p. 9.

evaluative norms of "good" and "bad", "faithful" and "unfaithful" are disappearing." <sup>7</sup> As a result, the long-standing argument about how best to achieve fidelity or equivalence was pronounced sterile and unproductive.

How can the practising translator respond to the statement that post-structuralist criticism has "destroyed the last vestiges of the concept of accuracy" or that the old evaluative norms of "good" and "bad", "faithful" and "unfaithful" are disappearing? In the current theoretical climate, concepts like "good", "bad" and "correct" have become something of an embarrassment. And yet, for the practising translator engaged in a specific task, the concepts of "good" and "bad", "right" and "wrong" are indispensable. Lefevere as good as admits this when he writes, "There is one level at which translation remains a prescriptive operation: translators would be well advised to bow to the dictates of the dictionary".<sup>8</sup> Bassnett argues that "the idea of the reader as translator...must be handled responsibly" and that the reader "should not treat the text as his or her own property and upset the balance of power".<sup>9</sup>

These more cautious statements contradict the more sweeping pronouncements about the "demise of the concept of accuracy" already cited above and inject a more pragmatic note into the Translation Studies argument. They indicate that there is a profound contradiction between abstract (i.e. theoretical) and pragmatic (i.e. practical) models of translation. It is all a matter of the level of focus. The translator's attitude to notions of equivalence and accuracy depends on what task he/she is engaged in at the time. A translator faced with a real translation task is forced to accept these notions as working concepts, subjective and mutable though they may be. The same translator, attempting to formulate an objective, generally applicable argument about translation, may dismiss these "tools of the trade" as theoretically untenable.

From the point of view of the socio-cultural model of translation, the immediate, practical problems of translation are seen as less academically respectable than the study of translation in a wider, cultural context. As Toury has it, the "actual concerns of the source text and language, of equivalence, text, text type, etc" are no more than the "laboratory techniques" of translation. Investigation into these matters, according to

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<sup>7</sup>S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere. "Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights", in *Translation, History, Culture*, London: Pinter Publishers, 1990, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup>A. Lefevere, *Translating, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup>S. Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (revised edn.), London: Routledge, 1992, p. 79.

Toury, "should not be regarded as tantamount to research into translational phenomena ... It is at best a technique, a research method".<sup>10</sup> Toury's statement is a good example of the problem remarked on by Neubert and Shreve, where two divergent approaches to translation are seen as being incompatible, rather than being allowed to exist side by side. There is no reason why broader commentaries on translation practice should render practical concerns unimportant. Translation theory and translation studies exist only by virtue of the subject they describe - translation in practice. There is no justification for a theoretical approach that turns its back on practice completely or tries to distort practice in the name of some general abstraction.

A striking example of the latter tendency is the argument expounded by Lawrence Venuti, who declares that post-structuralist theory necessitates fundamental changes in translation practice. Venuti bases his argument on Derrida's view of language, arguing that every text is a chain of "signifiers" with an endless semantic potential. The meaning of the text is not present in the words themselves but is always created by the recipient. Each time a text is translated, its meaning is fixed "only provisionally...on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretative choices". It is, argues Venuti, an "act of violence" done to the original. Smooth, readable translations conceal this fact by creating the illusion of an authorial presence: the provisional reading masquerades as the original itself. If a translation is made palatable to a target audience, Venuti argues that, by definition, it will conform to literary and ideological norms within the target culture. In response to this problem, Venuti argues that translators should deliberately try to challenge conventions within the receiving culture by resisting fluency, in order to draw attention to the opaque nature of language and to the "violence" implicit in any reading. He even suggests that resistant translation, by opposing domestication, might serve as a "cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others".<sup>11</sup>

The politicised nature of Venuti's arguments is typical of much recent writing on language and translation. This tendency, it seems to me, is a legacy of the attempts to impose scientific discourse on translation theory and linguistics. Such "pseudo-scientism" is now less fashionable than it was, but it has left in its wake a sense of frustration at subjectivity, partiality and, as Lefevere has it, "unanswerable questions".

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<sup>10</sup>G. Toury, "Translation, Literary Translation and Pseudotranslation", in *Comparative Criticism*, 6, 1984, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, New York: Routledge, 1995.

In the attempt to get around the "problem" of subjectivity, the answer seems to have been to make subjectivity a subject of study in its own right: the neatest way of doing this is to simplify the subject so that it can be explained purely in terms of the social and political factors. Venuti's argument relies on a very black-and-white view of language: either a text has an absolute, fixed meaning or it is a random collection of signs to be interpreted at will by the reader. But meaning is neither fixed nor dependent on individual whim - it is collectively decided and collectively constrained to an enormous extent. Were this not the case it would be impossible to use language. The existence of divergent readings is not so problematic in practice as it may appear to be in theory. Differences in literary translation are like performances: individual interpretations of a written play or a musical score. There is always room for creativity in any performance, but the result will still be strictly circumscribed by the original. It is simplistic to suggest that such interpretations will, as a matter of course, bear the imprint of the dominant ideology of the receiving culture. Style, taste and opinion are complex, personal matters.

Venuti's argument in defence of "foreignising" translations has some relevance if it is divorced from the sweeping theoretical claims made in its name. In some cases, there is a good case for sacrificing the fluency of a translation in the interests of other features of an original text. But the same argument makes no sense as a universal basis for translation practice. Venuti replaces one dubious "rule" (a translation is good if it reads well in the target language) with another even more dubious one (a translation is good if it doesn't read well in the target language). As far as fruitful translation practice is concerned, this is a dead-end road.

Translation theory is not irrelevant to practice. It provides a "metalanguage", with the help of which the translator is better informed and better equipped to discuss his or her approach to a translation. Behind every act of translation there is a conscious or unconscious rationale. It may be haphazard or relatively systematic. Every translator makes choices which imply certain attitudes to both the original text and the intended audience. Theory makes these choices and attitudes explicit. It provides the translator with the necessary vocabulary to discuss his or her work. But theory should not lose sight of practice, nor ignore the hierarchical relationship between the two mentioned above. It must be accepted that the practical model of translation based in the "here and now" has a right to exist and may even inform theory.

This study of the theoretical implications and practical problems of translating Zoshchenko's "Michel Siniagin" is a combination of what Neubert and Shreve refer to as the "critical" and the "practical" models of translation. The critical model of

translation assesses existing translations in terms of their acceptability. The practical model draws on observations made during the actual process of translation and aims to provide a better understanding of the processes that lead to an acceptable translation.<sup>12</sup> Both approaches are by their very nature subjective and critical.

The question "how to translate" is by no means an irrelevant one to practising translators, and this chapter will begin with a discussion of various arguments about the merits of dynamic/free or formal/literal translation. The second section of the chapter will relate these arguments to the specific task in hand, discussing the peculiarities of Zoshchenko's style and the effectiveness of various translation strategies in conveying his style and his humour. This will involve a comparison of existing translations of Zoshchenko's short stories. The final sections will recount my own experience in translating "Michel Siniagin" and discuss the particular problems that this work presents for the translator, also with reference to existing translations.

I hope that the blend of theoretical discussion and practical evidence will give this study a wider relevance than may at first be apparent. Besides being a supplement to the translation itself - a "case history" that elucidates some of the choices made during the translation process, this study also aims to provide some insight into the relationship between practice and theory. In this respect it is a small step on the way to integrating abstract and pragmatic models of translation.

## **Part 2: The Polarities of Translation: The "Literal" Versus "Free" Debate in Translation Theory**

The translation process proper begins with the reading of the original. The reading process is a balancing act between individual creativity (and fallibility) and collective consensus. It would be a false representation of reality to suggest that reading is a systematic and exhaustive process. It is, rather, an intuitive process informed by the translator's own history of language use, fund of knowledge and emotional or intellectual prejudices concerning language use, style, etc. On the other hand, the reading process is not such a private matter as this suggests, especially in the case of a literary text with a fairly high profile in the source culture, as in this case. A translator does not, generally, come to a text "cold", but with a good idea of when it was written, by whom, for whom, and in what cultural and historical conditions. There are several secondary sources (literary criticism history, encyclopedias, dictionaries, other works

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<sup>12</sup>A. Neubert and G. M. Shreve, *Translation as Text*, pp. 16-19.

by the author, native speakers, existing translations of the original) that enable the translator to verify his/her thoughts against a "collective" reading of the original.

Most translators and writers on translation assume that it is possible for the translator to interpret what the intended effect of a text is upon the audience for which it was produced. The notion can be expressed in very different ways. Among literary translators the "hermeneutic process" has often been described in intuitive, creative terms - particularly in the days when translation was done mainly by writers of note. In England in the 17th and 18th centuries, literary translators generally considered it necessary to achieve spiritual empathy with the author of the original. In 1744, Thomas Gordon wrote that "the great point in translating is to pursue, or rather to assume and possess the spirit and character of the author". It was due to this belief in total identification with the original author's intention that a translator could claim, as Dryden did, that he had tried to make his author "speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England and in this present age". Denham wrote of his translations of Virgil that "where [my expressions] are fuller than his, they are but the impressions which the often reading of him, hath left upon my thoughts, so that if they are not his own conceptions, they are at least the results of them".<sup>13</sup>

Contemporary Russian translation theory has, incidentally, perpetuated the emphasis on the creative, intuitive nature of the reading process, as is apparent from the opinions of such writers as K. Chukovskii, V. Rossel's, S. Petrov, I. Kashkin and others.<sup>14</sup> Typical examples are Chukovskii's statement that translation should aim to emulate "what the original author would have written had he written in Russian", his praise of Marshak for supposedly capturing the "essence of Burns' character and spirit" in his translation of Robert Burns' ballads,<sup>15</sup> and Rossel's approval of Rita Rait-Kovaleva's translation of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, which he argues has grasped the "deepest laws of construction" of the original novel.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> T. R. Steiner, *English Translation Theory, 1650-1800*, Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975, pp. 63-85.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of 20th-century Russian translation theory see Lauren Leighton, *Two Worlds, One Art: Literary Translation in Russia and America*, Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991.

<sup>15</sup>K. Chukovskii, *Vysokoe iskusstvo: o printsipakh khudozhestvennogo perevoda*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1969, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup>V. Rossel's, "V masterskoi perevodchika", in *Tetradi perevodchika*, 3, 1966, pp. 3-16.

In the field of linguistics there have been attempts to describe the hermeneutic process in more scientific - or at least, more methodical terms. One such attempt is the concept of "exegesis" in Eugene Nida's theory of "dynamic equivalence". For Nida, a text is a record of a communicative event that is meant to be understood in a certain way by the audience for whom it is intended. When a translator deals with a text from another time or culture, ambiguities arise because of the distance between the translator and the original communicative event. In Nida's view, the translator must try to reconstruct the context (linguistic and cultural) which gave the original communicative event meaning. The translator must seek to understand "how [the author's] message impressed those who first heard it". Nida breaks down the stage of analysis of the original into analysis of grammatical meaning, referential meaning and connotative meaning. His approach to grammatical meaning is grounded in Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar which, he argues, has shown that "in all languages there are half a dozen basic structures out of which the more elaborate functions are constructed by means of so-called transformations".<sup>17</sup> Nida suggests that any statement can be analysed by means of "back-translation" into an underlying "kernel" that reveals the semantic relationships underlying the surface structure. Transfer, he argues, must take place at the deep level of this kernel rather than at the superficial level. The referential meaning of a word can be discovered not only by reference to its grammatical status, but to the immediate linguistic context and, in some cases, the external cultural context. Nida's use of Chomsky's theory has been discredited as "facile universalism" by Steiner.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, Chomsky's transformational grammar is of less use in determining wider contextual factors. It has also been noted that Nida misappropriated Chomsky's model, which has a much narrower application than he suggests and describes underlying syntactical structures rather than semantic structures.<sup>19</sup>

Recently, Nida's "exegesis" has been more rigorously formulated by specialists in the field of applied linguistics, such as Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, Mona Baker and Roger Bell. Hatim and Mason have drawn on the fields of pragmatics and speech act theory to provide a possible solution to the problem of the "intentional fallacy" (as the hermeneutic process has been termed by its detractors). They argue that language users are able to process texts by reference to a shared "pragmatic langue" which makes them aware of conventions of discourse beyond the level of grammar and

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<sup>17</sup>E. A. Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to the Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translation*, Leiden: A.J. Brill, 1964, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup>G. Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 104.

<sup>19</sup>E. Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories*, pp. 43-60.

vocabulary and enables them to relate texts to conventionalised occasions of language use and recognise the attitudinal meanings reflected in types of discourse.<sup>20</sup> The translator must be aware of different ways of organising discourse in the source culture and how these may differ from the conventions of language use in the target culture, so as to be able to understand the "illocutionary force" (i.e., the intended effect) of the original on its audience.

Ultimately, Hatim and Mason's model presents the same problems as Nida's concept of exegesis when it is applied to texts that were written in distant historical periods, drawing on "universes of discourse" about which the translator has little information. It is all very well to argue that the translator must be aware of this or that way of organising discourse in the source culture, or of the intention signalled by the use of certain rhetorical devices, but where the distance between translator and text is very great, this is easier said than done. There will always be those who argue that the intended effect of a text on its receptors is ultimately impossible to quantify and that all models of "hermeneutics" or "exegesis" are examples of the "intentional fallacy". This is a particularly understandable approach for the translator of ancient or classical texts, for whom there may be scant evidence of the socio-linguistic context surrounding the production of the original. Commenting on the translation of Greek and Roman classics, Geoffrey Martindale has argued that the effect of a text on its original audience is neither monolithic nor recoverable, and that the translator is best advised to stick to the text itself as "texts are more real than contexts".

Post-structuralism has boosted the argument against the so-called "intentional fallacy". As mentioned above, Venuti has called for a new attitude to translation on the grounds that the intended meaning of a text's author is unrecoverable. He is not alone in suggesting that practice should reflect the absence of finite meaning or value in the original text. Edwin Gentzler, throughout his recent overview of contemporary translation theory, implicitly supports a deconstructionist approach, whereby the original text is deliberately distorted for specific ideological ends. Gentzler sees the "cannibalistic" theory of translation - described as "a liberating form that eats, digests and frees itself from the original" - as a positive way forward.<sup>21</sup> Douglas Robinson, too, argues that the subjective nature of meaning and value justifies greater freedom and creativity in translation. Robinson argues that translations should be seen as roads leading away from the translation, rather than as bridges between it and the target culture, and

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<sup>20</sup>B. Hatim, "Text Strategy": A Constant Shuttle Between the Static and the Dynamic, *turjuman*, 3/2, 1994, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>E. Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories*, pp. 192-3.

calls on translators to conduct two-way dialogues with original authors, in the hope that their translations will add to the original.<sup>22</sup>

There may be some debate about the possibility of reading the original text correctly, but it is in relation to the next stage of translation, the restructuring or rewriting process, that there is most disagreement. The disagreement concerns the extent to which a translator should depart from the letter of the original in the interests of the integrity of the finished translation and its acceptability in the receiving culture.

In 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that there were only two true paths open to the translator: "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader towards the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer towards the reader".<sup>23</sup> Schleiermacher's words represent one of many attempts to encapsulate the "free" versus "literal" debate which is perhaps the most persistent refrain in prescriptive writing on translation. Generally speaking, the debate concerns the level at which semantic equivalence is sought: at word, phrase, sentence or text level. Schleiermacher's formulation of the problem has become particularly popular in recent years as it suggests a choice between two cultures, a notion that corresponds with the Translation Studies "socio-cultural" model. Rosengrant argues that Schleiermacher's two paths are "the two poles of all translation, between which it ineluctably moves".and adds that "the whole history of translation may be described as a culturally determined oscillation between these principles, as an alternation between leaving the quiddities of the original intact and stretching or deforming the receiving language and culture to accommodate them, or leaving the new reader and his values undisturbed and refashioning the original to permit its easy introduction and assimilation".<sup>24</sup>

Schleiermacher considers that the translator should adhere as strictly as possible to the path he has chosen, as to mix one approach with the other might result in the author

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<sup>22</sup>D. Robinson, *The Translator's Turn*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. 254-5.

<sup>23</sup>F. Schleiermacher (1813), "On the Different Methods of Translating", trans. by Waltraud Bartscht, in J. Biguenet and R. Scholte (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup>J. Rosengrant, "Polarities of Translation", *Slavic and East European Journal*, 38, 1, 1994, p. 2.

and the reader not coming together at all <sup>25</sup> This is neat, but ignores the reality of translation. Schleiermacher's alternative paths are polarities at opposite ends of a continuum and all translations oscillate between the two. The distance between free and literal methods is not so great in practice as theory would suggest. In the end, it is in the grey area in the middle of the continuum that most decisions are made. The question is, how much interference from the source language - in the form of unfamiliar word combinations, idioms, rhetorical structures or poetics - can be tolerated at the expense of ease of expression.

Different views on the subject reflect different ideas about the purpose and status of translation, a fact apparent in the metaphors chosen by the adherents of one or other method. Advocates of free translation are more likely to compare their efforts to portraits, musical performances, or other living likenesses. In the field of Russian translation theory, which is dominated by the communicative, "dynamic" approach and by a dislike of formalism, translators are particularly prone to talk of the need to retain the life of the original. <sup>26</sup> Supporters of the literal approach tend to liken translation to dissection for the purposes of scientific study. Vladimir Nabokov, commenting on his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, argues that translation should not function as a literary work: "shorn of its primary verbal existence, the original text will not be able to soar or sing, but it can be very nicely dissected and mounted and studied in all its organic details".<sup>27</sup> The metaphor of dead bird and singing bird is echoed by Charles Martindale in his defence of literal translation: in reply to Edward Fitzgerald, translator of Omar Khayyam, who declares, "better a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle", Martindale answers that "if you want to study eagles...sparrows, however much alive, will not really serve".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>F. Schleiermacher, "On the Different Methods of Translating", in J. Biguenet and R. Scholte (eds.) *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup>See, for instance, comments on the "dead" language of formal translation by Nora Gal' in *Slovo zhivoe i mertvoe: iz opyta redaktora i perevodchika*, 2nd edn. Moscow, Kniga, 1975 and by Rita Rait-Kovaleva, in "Nit' Ariadny", in *Redaktor i perevod*, Moscow: Kniga, 1965, pp. 5-22; or N. Demurova's comparison of translation to musical arrangement in "Golos i skripka", *Masterstvo perevoda*, 1970, pp. 150-85.

<sup>27</sup>V. Nabokov, (1955), Problems of Translation: Onegin in English", in J. Biguenet and R. Scholte (eds.), *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, p. 135.

<sup>28</sup>C. Martindale, "Unlocking the Word-hoard: In Praise of Metaphrase", in *Comparative Criticism*, 6, 1984, p. 62.

Nida is probably the most influential apologist for free translation in recent years. In Nida's opinion, a good translation is one that achieves "equivalence of effect" - the response of the new audience to the translation will be substantially similar to the response of the source language audience to the original text. For Nida, the translation must convey the message of the original clearly and with maximum effect. Therefore the target language used for translation must be natural and intelligible. It must not mislead, it must correspond to widespread contemporary use and it must not sound awkward or strange. Any "interference" from the source is condemned by Nida as "translationese". Translationese results when the translator ignores the function of linguistic forms in context in favour of lexical consistency, concentrating on the word instead of the sentence, paragraph or "total discourse". Nida considers that the translator must not only observe acceptable standards of word combination and sentence structure in the target language but also conventions of discourse structure.

One of Nida's basic principles is that contextual consistency should take priority over lexical consistency. A word should be translated according to the function it is made to fulfil in context. Nida argues that idioms should be treated as "dead". He considers the primary meaning of a figurative expression to be of secondary importance if not redundant altogether. Set expressions should be treated as single semantic units, not as the sum of their parts. A second principle of Nida's is that translators should avoid anachronisms. This rule is again founded on the notion of equivalence of effect. Deliberate archaism will not create the response that the author intended. A text which sounds archaic today did not sound archaic for the audience to whom it was originally addressed. Excessive modernisms (e.g., the use of "mentally distressed" to translate "demon possessed") should also be avoided, as they "falsify life at historically different periods".

Nida's ideas about translation are quite acceptable with regard to many translation tasks. His model of "dynamic equivalence" constitutes the mainstream of translation theory not only in America but in Europe and Russia. However, given that Nida's own specialist area, Bible translation, deals with an ancient, authoritative and culturally significant text, rather than a more ephemeral text, such as a contemporary best-selling detective novel or economic report, it is not surprising that he has come in for a fair amount of criticism. Nida's critics have argued that his approach is tendentious and displays an arrogant disregard for the source text. By stressing function rather than form, and intention rather than the words, as Nida does, it is possible to justify bypassing the intricacies of the text and rewriting the original as one sees fit. Dynamic equivalence encourages the obliteration of oddities in the original and tends to over-

explain the original in order to avoid ambiguity. *The New English Bible* - a translation which follows Nida's principles, has been criticised on the grounds that it "destroys the openness of the original with tendentious glosses" and "confuses the role of translator with that of commentator".<sup>29</sup>

Defenders of literalism are generally motivated by a concern for the particular character of the source text and culture which overruns consideration of contemporary target culture norms. Nabokov is one of the few recent apologists for literalism, and one of the few prominent commentators who defends literal translation as the most faithful and accurate method of translation. Nabokov considers that "the person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language has one duty to perform and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text and nothing but the text".

Nabokov, with his inflexible attitude toward other translators and his insistence that he alone has a stake in the source text, is an easy target for criticism. Robinson has characterised literalism like Nabokov's as "aversion": "...aversionary translation inherits and intensifies the medieval hierarchy of loathing according to which readers of translations are more loathsome than translators, translators as readers more loathsome than original writers".<sup>30</sup> However, setting aside the emotive issue of "loathing", there is something to be said for this hierarchy and, indeed, who is to decide that readers may not actually be happy with their place at the bottom? A reader may well prefer to read a literal rendering of the words of a worldwide literary classic than to read an interpretation of them aimed at some imaginary idea of the average reader by a translator of considerably less talent than the original author.

German writers of the 19th and 20th century who have advocated foreign sounding translation, such as Schleiermacher, Humboldt Goethe and Walter Benjamin offer a different perspective on the problem from that of Nabokov. The basic premise of these writers is that the target language will be enriched if it is made to bear the imprint of the source language (i.e. "translationese"). By deliberately conveying the impression of foreignness, the translator will be able to convey the essential alien quality of the text which he - as a non-native speaker - is able to appreciate.

Schleiermacher advocates that the language of translation be "bent towards an alien kindness". He objects to the idea that the translator might be able to turn his author into a German, imagining how he would write "if he were writing in this country today", on the grounds that thought and style cannot be separated from language: "Can

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup>D. Robinson, *The Translator's Turn*, p. 245.

[the translator] separate a man from his native language and believe that he, or even only his chain of thoughts, could be one and the same in two languages? Can [the translator] presume to deconstruct the discourse to its very core, to exclude the part that language itself contributes? Evidently, in order to solve this problem, it would be necessary to remove completely from a man's written work everything that is, even in the remotest way, the effect of anything he has said or heard in his mother tongue from childhood on".<sup>31</sup> Benjamin argues that the purpose of translation is not to transmit content but to reveal the "central reciprocal relationship between languages".<sup>32</sup> The essential quality of a literary work, in Benjamin's view, is not to impart information. A translation which sets out to convey information will only convey what is least essential in a text. Literal translation is seen by Benjamin as a way of coming to terms with the difference between languages, revealing a "longing for linguistic unity".<sup>33</sup>

There are obviously practical limitations to this approach, depending on the text for translation, but Schleiermacher and Benjamin present a good defence for translation which sounds like translation. There is, indeed, a "reciprocal relationship between languages". Languages are able to absorb foreign modes of expression because of their relationship to common points of reference. Individual readers are likely to have different ideas of how much the target language can accommodate foreign sounding words and expressions in the interests of retaining the unique colour and character of the original. A certain amount of interference from the source language need not make a translation meaningless. Idiomatic and figurative expressions can travel between languages as calques, because they relate to shared points of reference. One of the idioms cited by Nida in his discussion of "translationese", "to heap coals of fire on somebody's head", is a good example. Nida's principles express an overriding concern for intelligibility and ease of expression. In the end, such an approach will always favour what is predictable and conventional over what is original, if slightly awkward and unusual.

### **Part 3: Specific Properties of Zoshchenko's Style and the Problems of Translating "Skaz"**

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<sup>31</sup>F. Schleiermacher, "On the Different Methods of Translating", in J. Biguenet and R. Scholte (eds.) *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup>W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923), trans. by Harry Zohn, *Ibid*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*. p. 77.

As with so many other arguments in translation theory, the debate about "free versus literal" is really meaningful only when applied to specific examples. The strategy used depends on the character of the text to be translated, its status in the source culture, the reputation of its author and the style in which it is written, which may be rather banal and simple or extremely complex and inventive. In the case of Zoshchenko, the author's status as a respected author in the source culture will predispose the translator to treat the word of the original with respect. Beyond this, it is the question of his use of style that will have the most impact on the translator's choice of strategy.

As a starting point in discussing how style affects the position adopted by the translator in relation to the free/literal debate, it is worth mentioning a rather useful distinction made by Mary Snell-Hornby between "transparent" and "opaque" style in literature. According to Snell-Hornby's definition, "transparent style" is the use of language that adheres to the "unmarked dictionary norm" - that is, style in which collocation rules are faithfully applied and where the meaning of individual words may be elucidated without difficulty from the context. By way of example, Snell-Hornby quotes a passage from a Christopher Isherwood novel:

He was *extremely nervous*. His delicate white hand *fiddled incessantly* with the signet ring on his little finger; his *uneasy* blue eyes kept *squinting rapid glances* into the corridor.

As she comments of this extract: "Here the general picture of extreme anxiety is constantly reinforced; *extremely nervous* by *fiddled incessantly*, *uneasy blue eyes* and *squinting rapid glances*. Semantic congruence is observed for verb and participants; *hand* and *fiddle*; *eye*, *squint* and *glance*; and the objects described are in perfect compatibility with each other: *delicate white hand*, *signet ring*, *little finger*..."<sup>34</sup>

Opaque style, on the other hand, does not coincide with accepted usage in this way but represents "the creative extension of the norm through the subtle exploitation of the language potential". That is to say it is a style in which words are deliberately used in a strange way for expressive effect, so that their actual meanings cannot easily be elucidated from the context. In order to fully appreciate the impact of the author's use of a word in "opaque style" the reader may have to be familiar with all its semantic implications. Snell-Hornby illustrates her concept of "opaque style" by using a passage from Lawrence Durrell's *Balthazar*:

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<sup>34</sup>M. Snell-Hornby, *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 1988, p.122.

Soon the cicadas will bring in their *crackling music*, background to the shepherd's dry flute among the rocks. The *scrambling tortoise* and the lizard are our only companions.

Of this, she comments: "Normally *crackle* describes the sounds made by dry twigs or fire, not that made by a live creature and it does not collocate with music. The focal element, a rapid succession of dry brittle sounds, is however retained here. Similarly, *scramble* typically takes a human agent...in the above example the focal elements of effort and hasty disorganised movement are however retained."<sup>35</sup>

This distinction between "transparent" and "opaque" style may be a little rough and ready - the concept of "normative usage", in particular, is one about which literary critics and linguists are liable to quibble. However, it describes the type of rule of thumb which the practising translator is constantly having to apply in assessing the character of a source text. The argument about free/dynamic versus literal/formal translation hinges very much on the question of how "natural-sounding" the original text is to the native reader. Where a writer is using a "transparent style" that conforms more or less to the "unmarked dictionary norm" (something intuitively recognised by literate readers) then the translator is not risking the integrity of the source text by giving priority to fluency in translation, so that the result sounds natural to the target-language reader. "Opaque style" - the more creative, idiosyncratic use of language - clearly presents more potential pitfalls for the translator. It is, above all, in relation to such "opaque" language use that "dynamic equivalence" can appear crude and even give rise to the accusations that the translator is trying to "colonise" the text. As Snell-Hornby points out, translators tend to gravitate towards the most natural-sounding equivalents and thus opaque style often becomes banal in translation, losing elements of depth and subtlety. The result is what Germans call "Verflachung" (lack of stylistic contour).<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, Russians also have a name for this "smoothed-out" style: "гладкопись" ("blandscript").<sup>37</sup>

Zoshchenko's style, with its density and its attention to surface form, is certainly closer to Snell-Hornby's definition of opaque style than it is to transparent style. However, there is an additional complication introduced by the use of "double-voiced" narrative

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p.123.

<sup>37</sup>L. Leighton, *Two Worlds, One Art: Literary Translation in Russia and America*, p. 212.

or *skaz* in Zoshchenko's work. Snell-Hornby's definition of opaque style relates to what Bakhtin describes as "single-voiced" discourse in literary fiction, rather than to "double-voiced" forms such as *skaz* and parody. She assumes that opaque style is a reflection of the author's desire to use unusual and striking expressions - something close to what the Formalist critics described as "defamiliarisation" (*ostranenie*). In the case of *skaz*, however, unusual lexical features do not simply represent the creative impulse of the author to stretch the language for expressive or picturesque purposes. Rather, they are intended to imitate a particular type of speech act and - more often than not - a particular type of speaker who is the object of the author's scrutiny. *Skaz* therefore depends largely on the reader connecting individual features of the narrative to real-life experience. As Mikhail Kreps has pointed out, this requires a certain amount of background knowledge on the part of the reader and complicates the task of the translator:

Элементы сказовой техники важны не сами по себе, а как совокупность отдельных языковых сигналов, вызывающих в читателе целостное представление о герое-рассказчике и его мировоззрении. При сказовой технике повествования «свой» читатель оказывается намного чувствительнее «чужого», ибо для «чужого» читателя, сказовая техника начинается и остается набором странных, неправильных, вычурных форм выражения, которые только раздражает и совсем не ведут к целостному представлению «типа» рассказчика, ибо чужой читатель никогда в жизни с ним не встречался, поэтому перевод сказовых вещей крайне сложен, так как в переводе они теряют самое главное - человека как типа<sup>38</sup>

This aspect of *skaz* presents the translator with a problem similar to that posed by stylistically marked dialogue which uses colloquialisms and dialect.

Of the possible solutions to translating such marked *skaz* or dialogue, each has its disadvantages. If the translator glosses over the peculiar features of the original in favour of neutral equivalents, the result will be "lack of stylistic contour" - a smoothed-out, bland translation. The use of literal strategies in an attempt to retain the oddities intact is also problematic. Generally speaking, the "oddities" of *skaz* narrative relate to the culture-specific sphere of the language and thus it can be difficult to find target

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<sup>38</sup>M. Kreps, *Tekhnika komicheskogo u Zoshchenko*, Vermont: Chalidze, 1986, pp.114-5.

language equivalents. To do so, the translator will have to bend the target language to accommodate the peculiarities of the source language - a strategy that may be totally unsuitable for some texts. Besides this, there is the risk of the translation "falling on deaf ears", the situation described by Kreps above. At the other end of the spectrum there is the possibility of choosing some existing target language idiom to translate *skaz* - compensating for the Russian *prostorechie* by using some form of non-standard dialect in the language of translation. Here, there is a risk that the chosen idiom will set up undesirable cultural associations of its own that will disturb the integrity and coherence of the text as a whole. A translator who renders the speech of a Russian peasant in one of Chekhov's short stories by using a British West Country dialect or the speech mannerisms of an American Southerner may be able to signal something approximate about the speaker's social origin, but in so doing he/she is liable to destroy the character's identity as a Russian.

A further solution to the problem is to exercise some sort of creative "damage limitation" - to try to convey the colloquial nature of the *skaz* or dialogue using more neutral devices that communicate the right mood without setting up undesirable associations. This latter approach is favoured by Russian translators, who tend to agree that the solution to translating such dialogue or *skaz* lies in using features of colloquial speech, such as ellipsis, disjointed syntax, repetition, unfinished sentences, "filler" words, etc, which impart a feel of informality without creating excessive friction.<sup>39</sup> Rait-Kovaleva, the author of a successful translation of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (a sustained example of *skaz* by a fictional narrator) has argued convincingly for a dynamic strategy in translating individualised monologue. Rait-Kovaleva warns that by dissecting such a style into its various components, the translator risks turning the narrator into a "dead soul". She argues that it is possible, by careful reading, to establish a biography for the narrator, to become aware of the rhythms of his speech, his movements and appearance, so that he or she will automatically "begin to speak in Russian". On the other hand, a bad translator risks killing the original by using "rare words dug out of Dal', fake-colloquial intonations with inversions and clownish slang, which bear no relation to living speech"<sup>40</sup>.

At this point it is worth looking at some of the English-language translations of Zoshchenko's short stories, in order to provide an insight into how different

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<sup>39</sup>For instance, see G. Turover, "O perevode dialektizmov", in *Tetradi perevodchika*, 3 (1966), pp. 94-7 and V. Rossel's, "v masterskoi perevochika" in *Tetradi perevodchika*, 3, (1966), pp. 3-16.

<sup>40</sup>R. Rait-Kovaleva, "Nit' Ariadny", in *Redaktor i perevod*, pp. 5-22.

approaches to translating his *skaz* actually work in practice. There are at least five collections of Zoshchenko's stories translated into English: *The Woman Who Could Not Read and Other Tales*, translated by Elizaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1940); *The Wonderful Dog and Other Tales*, also translated by Elizaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1942); *Scenes from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*, translated by Sydney Monas (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961); *Nervous People and Other Satires*, translated by Hugh McLean and Maria Gordon, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963); and *A Man is Not A Flea*, translated by Serge Shishkoff (Ardis: Ann Arbor, 1989). Beyond this, several stories are published in translation, for instance, in the collections *Azure Cities: Stories of New Russia*, ed. J. Kunitz, trans. J.J. Robbins (USA: International Publishers, 1929) and *Russian Literature Tri-Quarterly, 14 (1986): The Serapion Brothers* (translations by Martin Rice).

Among the translators of collections of Zoshchenko's short stories, the following general tendencies can be seen. Fen and McLean/Gordon take the path of "damage limitation", trying to signal the oddities of the original by using occasional colloquialisms but generally respecting target language norms. As a result, their translations tend to be rather bland and lacking in humour. Where they do use colloquialisms, these are often rather badly judged. Fen's translation of the first line of Zoshchenko's "The Aristocrat" ("Aristokratka") reveals a lack of attention to the associative capacities of English. Where Zoshchenko has "я, братья мои, не люблю баб, которые в шляпах", <sup>41</sup> Fen has "To tell you the truth, chaps, I don't like a girl what wears a hat."<sup>42</sup>. The combination of the rather upper-class "chaps" with the ungrammatical "girl what wears a hat" immediately makes it difficult to place the speaker. The McLean/Gordon translation shows something similar, using "fellows" and "dames" in the opening sentence ("Fellows, I don't like dames who wear hats"<sup>43</sup>).

The translations by Shishkoff are bolder than either Fen's or McLean and Gordon's. Shishkoff is attentive to intricacies of the originals and picks up on comic touches that escape some of the other translators. For instance, in his translation of "The Aristocrat" he is the only translator who conveys the strange way the narrator speaks of the interval at the theatre as though it were a place: ("Гляжу - антракт - а она в

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<sup>41</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Aristokratka", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, ed. by Iu. Tomashevskii, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986, v. 1, pp. 170.

<sup>42</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "An Aristocrat" in *The Woman who could not Read and Other Tales*, trans. E. Fen, London: Methuen, 1940, pp. 113-9.

<sup>43</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "The Lady Aristocrat", in *Nervous People and Other Satires*, trans. H. McLean and M. Gordon, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963, p. 127.

антракте ходит") (...intermission was in full swing. And there she was, walking about in the midst of it"). Shishkoff is the most dynamic of all the translators: his versions are more colloquial than any of the others and adapt the humour of the original in the interests of a sustained voice, replacing the actual images and wordplay of the original with foreign equivalents. For instance, in "The Aristocrat", where the original has "волочусь, как щука", Shishkoff translates this as "shuffling along like a penguin", whereas all the other translators keep the fish image. However, despite the inventiveness of some of Shishkoff's solutions, the overall result is disappointing because it feels as though Zoshchenko's own voice has been thoroughly drowned out by that of the translator. Besides this, the decision to use American slang results in a serious problem of friction. To take the example of "The Aristocrat" again, Shishkoff's translation begins as follows:

Friends, I don't like broads who wear hats. If a broad has a hat on, if she wears silk stockings, or totes a pooch in her arms, or else sports a gold tooth, an aristocratic lady like that is, as far as I'm concerned, not a broad at all, but a featureless landscape. <sup>44</sup>

Here, the word "broad" sets up a chain of associations with American gangsters that becomes even more pronounced with the expression "toting a pooch in her arms". The effect becomes quite surreal when the narrator begins to use expressions like "этаким буржуем недорезанным" (translated by Shishkoff as "like an unreconstructed capitalist") - the narrator comes across as an Al Capone character who is, inexplicably, a communist. The expression "featureless landscape" is a good example of how this translator tends to swamp the original: there is an eloquence in his solution that is lacking in the original "гладкое место", "a smooth space" or "an empty space".

Monas's translations are the hardest to pin down as far as translation strategies are concerned. I would describe them as "quirky". They are rather uneven and contain a number of inaccuracies, but they have a liveliness and humour that is missing from both Fen's and McLean/Gordon's cautious versions and Shishkoff's more farcical adaptations. In my opinion, they are the only translations of the collected stories that come close to the humour of Zoshchenko's originals. Monas is not averse to stretching the English language considerably to convey the humour of the use of language in the original. For instance, in his version of "The Aristocrat" he translates "Довольно свинство с вашей стороны" as "enough swinery on your part" and "ни хрена не

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<sup>44</sup>M. Zoshchenko "An Aristocratic Lady", in *A Man is Not a Flea*, trans. S. Shishkoff, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989, p. 36.

**вижу**" as "I can't see a horseradish".<sup>45</sup> These translations render the literal meanings of the words rather than their pragmatic function - a Russian would probably not hear the "horseradish" association in the common hidden obscenity "**ни хрена**" - but that does not stop them being funny for the English-language reader. A particular merit of Monas's translations is their economy and their disjointed rhythm, which echoes the choppy rhythm of Zoshchenko's writing. Monas tends to retain all Zoshchenko's interjections, e.g., "**говорю**", "**говорит**" in the same order as they occur in the originals and this helps him retain the distinctive feel of Zoshchenko's *skaz*.

The effect of the various strategies used by the translators can be seen by comparing translations of a passage from the story "Cat and People" ("**Кoshka i liudi**"), which has been translated by everyone except McLean/Gordon. The extract is a typical example of the speech of one of Zoshchenko's officials - the treasurer of a housing committee investigating a stove that is making everybody sick:

- Казначей, жаба, говорит:

Вполне отличная атмосфера. И нюхать ее можно. Голова через это не ослабевает. У меня, говорит, в квартире атмосфера хуже воняет, и я, говорит, не скулю понапрасну. А тут совершенно дух ровный.<sup>46</sup>

Fen translates the story as "The Stove". This is her version of the passage above:

The treasurer, the toad, added:

An excellent atmosphere, as a matter of fact. One can breathe it with pleasure. It does not affect the head. In my flat the atmosphere is much more smelly, and yet I never make complaints. Here, the air is perfectly normal.<sup>47</sup>

This is not a bad translation. However, it is clearly "smoothed out". Particularly worth noting is the substitution of "breathe" for "sniff" ("**нюхать**"), the addition of "with pleasure" (not in the original), the neutral "make complaints" for "**скулить**" and the

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<sup>45</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "The Aristocrat", in *Tales from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*, trans. S. Monas, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961, pp.21-22.

<sup>46</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Koshka i liudi", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 407.

<sup>47</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "The Stove", in *The Woman Who Could Not Read and Other Tales*, trans. E.Fen, p. 40.

bland "the air is perfectly normal" for the comic "тут совершенно дух ровный". Fen has also got rid of Zoshchenko's repeated use of the interjection "говорит".

This is Shishkoff's version:

The treasurer, that toad, added,  
 "An altogether excellent atmosphere. You can sniff it to your heart's content. No loss of efficiency in the head. In my apartment", he said, "the atmosphere stinks worse than this and still", he said, "I don't go around bellyaching about it. These emanations are well within normal parameters."<sup>48</sup>

Shishkoff, like Fen, amplifies the original "нюхать можно" by adding "to your heart's content". There are some very good compensatory equivalents to render the tone of officialese in the original ("no loss of efficiency in the head" and "these emanations are well within normal parameters"). He retains the disjointed effect from the use of "говорит" ("he said"). On the other hand, there is a very strong sense of interference from the translator, leading to a loss of subtlety, which is characteristic of Shishkoff's translations in general.

Monas has the following:

The treasurer, that plague, says,  
 The air's quite excellent. And one can sniff it. From this, one doesn't get dizzy. In my apartment, he says, the air stinks much worse and yet I, he says, don't go around whimpering about nothing. But here the air is quite smooth.<sup>49</sup>

"Plague" is rather an odd choice here and less good than Fen's and Shishkoff's "toad". "Plague" is used elsewhere by Monas to translate "холера". Monas has also neglected the deliberately odd "атмосфера" and translated it as "air". In general, however, Monas's translation is pleasing, due to a slight foreignness that he has retained in the wording and rhythm of his translation. He is the only one who retains the curt form of the original "и нюхать ее можно" ("And one can sniff it"). "The air

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<sup>48</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Of Cats and Men", in *A Man is Not a Flea*, trans. S. Shishkoff, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Kitten and People" in *Tales from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*, trans. S. Monas, p. 45.

is quite smooth" is a good rendering of the original "совершенно дух ровный"; "smooth" is just strange enough to communicate the faintly official tone of the original. "Whimpering" is also good - an example of Monas actively resisting the temptation to make the translation more natural and thus enhancing the comedy of the original.

It is difficult to analyse exactly why Monas, in my opinion, succeeds better than other translators of Zoshchenko's work: I am tempted to explain it as an instinctive ability to hit the right comic tone by retaining small, apparently unimportant aspects of the original, such as word order, combined with small inventive touches in the use of English. The difference between success and failure in translating Zoshchenko can depend on tiny details. I hope that a comparison between the translations by Monas and McLean/Gordon of an extract from the story "The History of an Illness" ("Istoriia bolezni") will make this point clearer. This is the original:

Откровенно говоря, я предпочитаю хворать дома.

Конечно, слов нет, в больнице, может быть, светлей и культурней. И калорийность пищи, может быть, у них более предусмотрена. Но, как говорится, дома и солома едома.

А в больницу меня привезли с брюшным тифом. Домашние думал этим облегчить мои невероятные страдания.

Но только этим они не достигли цели, поскольку мне попала какая-то особенная больница, где мне не все понравилось.

Все-таки только больного привезли, записывают его в книгу, и вдруг он читает на стене плакат, «Выдача трупов от 3-х до 4-х.»

Не знаю как другие больные, но я прямо закачался на ногах, когда прочел это воззвание. Главное, у меня высокая температура, и вообще жизнь, может быть, еле теплится в моем организме, может быть, она на волоске висит - вдруг приходится читать такие слова.

Я сказал мужчине, который меня записывал:

- Что вы, говорю, товарищ фельдшер, такие пошлые надписи вывешиваете? Все-таки, говорю, больным не доставляет интерес это читать.

Фельдшер, или как его, лекпом, удивился, что я ему так сказал, и говорит:

-Глядите, больной, и еле он ходит, и чуть у него пар изо рта не идет от жара, и тоже, говорит, наводит на все самокритику. Если, говорит, вы поправитесь, что вряд ли, тогда и критикуете, а не то мы действительно от трех до четырех выдадим вас в виде того, что тут написано, вот тогда будете знать.

Хотел я с этим лекпомом схлестнуться, но поскольку у меня была высокая температура, 39 и 8, то я с ним спорить не стал. Я только ему сказал,

-Вот погоди, медицинская трубка, я поправлюсь, так ты мне отвечаешь за свое нахальство. Разве, говорю, можно больным такие речи слушать? <sup>50</sup>

This is the version by McLean and Gordon. I have marked some places in italics for the purposes of comparison with Monas's translation:

Frankly, I prefer to be ill at home.

Of course, it goes without saying that the hospital may be brighter and *more civilized*. And perhaps the calorific value of the food is more carefully supervised there. *But, as they say, there's no place like home.*

I was taken into hospital suffering from typhus. The members of my household thought that this would *alleviate my incredible sufferings*. But they did not accomplish their purpose, since I happened to get into some special kind of hospital *where not everything pleased me*.

Anyhow, no sooner did they bring in the patient and register him than suddenly he sees a notice on the wall: "Delivery of corpses from 3.00 to 4.00."

I don't know about other patients, but *I just got weak at the knees* when I read that announcement. The main thing was that I had a high fever and really, my *constitution might have been barely hanging onto life*, maybe just by a hair, and all of a sudden I had to read words like that.

I said to the man who was registering me, "*Why, comrade medical assistant*", I say, "do you hang up such vulgar notices? Somehow", I say, "*it's not so interesting for patients to read that*".

The medical assistant or what do you call him, medaide - was surprised that I talked to him like that and he says "will you look at that, a sick man,

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<sup>50</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Istoriia bolezni", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 2, pp. 267-8.

he can hardly walk, he's got such a fever *he almost breathes out steam* and still he's throwing his criticism around. If", he says, "you get better, which is unlikely, then go ahead and criticize. Otherwise, we'll really deliver you between three and four in the form it says here, and then you'll know".

I wanted to have it out with this medical aide, but *since* I had a high temperature, 38.9, *I didn't feel like arguing with him*. I just said to him, "*You look here, stethoscope*, when I get better you'll have to answer for your *insolence*. Should sick people have to listen to *that talk*?"<sup>51</sup>

This is Monas's version:

Frankly speaking, I prefer to be ill at home.

Oh, I wouldn't say that it isn't brighter in hospital and *more cultivated*. And perhaps they do watch the calories of your diet more closely. *But you know how the saying goes: Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home*.

But they took me to hospital with typhoid fever. The people at home thought that in this way they'd *lighten my unbelievable sufferings*. Only they did not achieve their goal, *inasmuch* as I got stuck into some kind of special hospital, where *everything did not entirely please me*.

In any case, they carted off the sick man, they are writing his name down in a book, when suddenly he reads a sign on the wall: "Corpses distributed from 3 to 4".

I don't know how the other patients felt about it, but *I jumped straight back on my feet* when I read that sign. The important thing is, I have high temperature, and in all, it may be that *life is just barely keeping itself warm in my organism*, and maybe it's hanging by a hair - and suddenly I happen to read a sign like that.

I said to the man who was registering me, "*Why*", I say, "*comrade orderly*, do you go around hanging up such vulgar signs". "In any case", I say, *patients don't find it attractive to read such things*".

The orderly, or intern, or whatever he was, was surprised to hear me speak to him like that and he says "Look: a patient, he can hardly walk, his fever's so high, *steam is practically coming out of his mouth*, and still", he says, "he's going around making criticisms. You get better, then you'll have

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<sup>51</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "The History of an Illness", in *Nervous People and Other Satires*, trans. H. McLean and M. Gordon, pp. 257-8.

the chance to criticise. And if not, we'll distribute you from three to four, as the sign says, and then you'll know what it's all about".

I wanted to lash out at this orderly, but *inasmuch as* I had a high temperature, 103.8, *I didn't pick a fight with him*. I only said to him, "As you please, you enema pipe. I'll get better, so you'll answer me for your *loutishness*. Is it proper, I say, for a patient to hear *such speeches*?"<sup>52</sup>

The differences between the two translations are numerous and slight, but significant. The Monas version strikes a more lively note immediately with the strange use of "cultivated" rather than "cultured" or "civilised" and with the translation "But you know how the saying goes: Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home" (as compared to the McLean/Gordon "But, as they say, there's no place like home"). The phrase "lighten my unbelievable sufferings" is more effective than the more standard collocation "alleviate my incredible sufferings" for "облегчить мои невероятные страдания", and the formal "inasmuch as" is used twice to good effect by Monas where the original has "поскольку". This use of "inasmuch as" adds a typical unevenness of register to the text (particularly the second time, when it clashes well with "pick a fight with"). Monas also renders "жизнь...еле теплится в моем организме" literally as "life is just barely keeping itself warm in my organism", a good choice, as the word "организм" is a particularly important part of Zoshchenko's stylistic battery. "Jumped back on my feet" is a rather good translation of "зашагался на ногах" (literally, "began swaying on my feet"), more comic than McLean/Gordon's "went weak at the knees", because it creates a vivid image of the patient physically recoiling from the notice about corpses, whereas "went weak at the knees" is a "dead" expression that fails to create such a picture. Monas, importantly, retains the characteristic broken rhythm of speech in the original ("Why, I say, "comrade orderly") even where the result is unnatural in English, whereas the McLean/Gordon translation changes this to detrimental effect. "Steam is practically coming out of his mouth" is closer to live speech than "he almost breathes out steam". "Loutishness" is more expressive for "нахальство" than "insolence" and "such speeches" is better than "that talk", given the character of the "speech" referred to.

Incidentally, some of the lively features of Monas's translation are, strictly speaking, less accurate renderings of the original than the alternatives in the McLean/Gordon version. Monas has "everything did not entirely please me", whereas McLean/Gordon, closer to the original, have "not everything pleased me". However, the note of

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<sup>52</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "The Story of My Illness", in *Tales from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*, trans. S. Monas, p. 151.

euphemism in Monas's version is very apt in the circumstances. "Enema pipe" is a mistranslation of "медицинская труба", which McLean/Gordon translate accurately as "stethoscope", but Monas's version is very funny and retains the "pipe/tube" imagery of the original. "As you please" is less accurate than "look here" for "Вот погоди", which has a threatening sound in Russian, but the effect of "as you please" together with "enema pipe" is very successful. Monas has "patients don't find it attractive to read such things", whereas McLean and Gordon have "it's not so interesting for patients to read that", which is closer to the original ("больным не доставляет интерес это читать"), but less expressive than Monas's version. Incidentally, Monas also adds a slight foreignism here, the Russian sounding "such things" instead of "that", also to good effect.

If anything can be concluded from my instinctive reaction to translations of Zoshchenko, it is that what works in practice may not be what looks good in theory. Monas is probably the least consistent of all the translators in applying an identifiable translation strategy - he is equally capable of departing some way from the original, of using startlingly literal equivalents and of importing foreignisms that do not even exist in the original. It is not at all obvious why he has made certain choices, and several of the good things in his translations have the appearance of happy accidents. However, for all the inconsistencies and "mistakes" in Monas's translations, they made me laugh out loud, whereas none of the other versions raised even a smile.

There is another conclusion to be drawn from these observations on the translation of *skaz* in Zoshchenko's short stories: that "dynamic" and "damage limiting" strategies are unsuitable approaches for this particular author, whereas quirkier, foreignising strategies are more successful. The failure of strategies which either seek to normalise Zoshchenko's style as far as possible or to adapt his humour for a foreign audience seems to support the view that the comedy in his writing is stylistic rather than situational, and depends on the comic exploitation of the possibilities of the Russian language. The translator can quite successfully communicate the peculiar flavour of the original by using rather literal strategies. One of the most successful translations of Zoshchenko that I have read is a very literal translation of the story "Social Melancholy" ("Sotsial'naia grust") by J.J. Robbins, which is included in the collection *Azure Cities* under the title "Gold Teeth". The story concerns a young man and member of the Komsomol who loses three front teeth and has some gold false teeth fitted. The following is an extract of the original:

И парень молодой. Всесторонний. Неинтересно ему, знаете,  
бывать без трех зубов. Какая же жизнь с таким отсутствием?

Свистеть нельзя. Жрать худо. И папироску держать ничем.  
Опять же шипит при разговоре. И чай выливается.<sup>53</sup>

This is the Robbins translation:

And he a young fellow too! Many-sided! It isn't interesting for him, you understand, to pass his time without the three teeth. What is his life in their absence? He can't whistle. It's hard to eat. And there's nothing to hold a cigarette with. And then, there's a hiss when he speaks! And tea runs out of his mouth.<sup>54</sup>

There are a number of clear temptations that have been resisted by the translator in the interest of retaining the brevity, the rhythm and the peculiar verbal humour of the original Russian. For instance, it would have been easy to include a verb in the first sentence ("he's a young fellow") and to extend the second sentence ("A many-sided/well-rounded character", for instance), but the result would have been less effective. Details of the original which reflect the comic possibilities of Russian, such as "неинтересно" and "с таким отсутствием" have been retained in as literal a form as possible ("it's not interesting", "in their absence"). "To pass his time" communicates the humour of the verb "бывать" in the original. It is noticeable that the translation sounds like a monologue by a foreigner. One can imagine it being read out with a Russian accent. As a result, the parody of communist jargon that follows (when the members of the Komsomol begin to look askance at the gold teeth) is well integrated into the whole:

Почему такие мещанские настроения? Неужели же нельзя простому комсомольцу дыркой жевать и кушать?

...И вообще постановили:

...Признать имение золотых зубов явлением, ведущим к отказу от социализма и его идей, и мы, члены ВЛКСМ Семеновской ячейки, объявляем против ихних носителей борьбу, как с явлением, разрушающим комсомольские идеи...<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Sotsial'naia grust", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 500.

<sup>54</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Gold Teeth", in *Azure Cities: Stories of New Russia*, ed. J. Kunitz, trans. J.J. Robbins, USA: International Publishers, 1929, p. 231.

<sup>55</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Sotsial'naia grust", in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 1, p. 501.

Why such a bourgeois strain? Can't an ordinary Komsomolets chew and eat with a hole in his mouth?

...And they decided in principle "to acknowledge the possession of gold teeth as a phenomenon leading to the denial of Socialism and its ideas and we members of the Semyonovsky nucleus declare war on their owners, as a phenomenon tending to destroy the ideas of the Komsomol..."<sup>56</sup>

In his translation, Robbins has not sought to reduce friction from unnatural sounding English and, in so doing, he has avoided friction of the most damaging sort - cultural friction that detracts from the Soviet character of the original.

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<sup>56</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Gold Teeth", in *Azure Cities: Stories of New Russia*, ed. J. Kunitz, trans. J.J. Robbins, p. 232.

#### Part 4: "Michel Siniagin": Implications for the Translator

So far, this chapter has discussed the translation of Zoshchenko's style in the short stories, where he uses an abbreviated *skaz* which imitates spontaneous oral monologue. It is this style that Osip Mandel'shtam was referring to when he described Zoshchenko's work as "Brussels lace":

Настоящий труд, это брюссельское кружево. В нем главное то, на чем держится узор: воздух, проколы, прогулы...

У нас есть библия труда, но мы ее не ценим. Это рассказы Зоценки. ... Вот у кого прогулы дышат, вот у кого брюссельское кружево живет!<sup>57</sup>

As the discussion in Chapter 1 of this thesis has shown, the literary style of the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin" poses rather different problems for the translator. The expository style of the "author" in these works imitates a pre-meditated literary performance and blends literary parody with more *skaz*-like elements. It is, once again, an example of "opaque style", but here the idiosyncracies of the text perform yet another function - to mimic a clumsy literary performance, to show, as Chudakova puts it, "how not to write".<sup>58</sup>

As regards the dynamic/formal debate in translation studies, the style in which "Michel Siniagin" is written is an interesting paradox, because the original bears some of the typical traits of "bad" translation. Adherents of the dynamic approach to translation generally consider that a good translation must adhere to the conventions of textuality in the target language, such as collocation, word order, cohesion and coherence. Teachers of translation are aware that inexperienced translators can produce texts of a unique clumsiness because, in adhering too closely to the original, they violate these textual conventions in their own language (translationese). Mona Baker calls texts that display deficiencies in relation to norms of discourse "non-texts".<sup>59</sup> The Russian editor Nora Gal' uses the phrase "dead language" to describe the same phenomenon in her book *Living and Dead Language: From the Experience of a Translator and Editor (Slovo zhivoe i mertvoe: iz opyta perevodchika i redaktora)*. However, as I showed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Zoshchenko's style in "Michel Siniagin" plays

<sup>57</sup>O. Mandel'shtam "Chetvertaia proza", in *Proza*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983, pp 176-7.

<sup>58</sup>M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p.82

<sup>59</sup>M. Baker, *In Other Words: A Casebook on Translation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 111.

games with conventions of literary narrative in Russian and deliberately violates the conventions of textuality normally considered to govern good writing. In this case, the fluency considered so crucial to translation by the defenders of dynamic equivalence does not exist in the original text.

The fact that the question of "voice" in "Michel Siniagin" relates to the mimicry of a premeditated and clumsy literary performance rather than a spontaneous oral monologue should predispose the translator towards a more literal translation strategy. Indeed, at some points in "Michel Siniagin" language is used in such an opaque manner that it is impossible to penetrate the surface form of the words themselves to reach a visual image beneath them. It is generally thought that a good translator must try to get beneath the words to the underlying image or idea, rather than approaching the language at a superficial level. In the case of "Michel Siniagin" it is not always possible to do this. For instance, in the description of Simochka's mother standing on the window-sill she is described using the verb "мота́ться" - "to dangle" (M. S., p.122), a description better suited to a piece of cloth than to a person. Elsewhere, Michel's aunt Maria is described as "sighing and squatting" - or "sighing and curtseying" (...иной раз охала и приседала...(M. S., p. 119). The confusion may be due to the fact that the verb "присаживаться" meaning "to sit down for a while" and the verb "присесть", which means either to curtsey or to sink down bending one's legs, both form the same perfective, "присесть". Be that as it may, the image is a very strange one here.

There are two existing translations of the story "Michel Siniagin", one of which is incomplete. The full translation, by McLean and Gordon, is included in the collection *Nervous People and Other Stories*. The incomplete translation is by Monas, in *Tales from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*. Generally speaking, both translations show the same characteristics as the translations of the short stories by the same translators. The McLean/Gordon version is capable but shows a tendency to smooth over the oddities of the text, finding natural and unexceptionable equivalents in English where there is a deliberately strange use of Russian in the original. This is exacerbated by the fact that the version that these translators follow is itself a cleaned-up version of the text dating from 1936 (see Chapter 4 of this thesis). For instance, in the McLean/Gordon version "движущиеся тучные облака" (M.S., p. 117) is rendered simply as "moving clouds"; "На пальцах ее были напизаны разные кольца и караты" (M. S., p. 127) is reduced to "There were various rings on her

fingers" and "Тетка Мария сдвинулась в своем уме" (M. S., p. 129) becomes "Aunt Maria had gone out of her mind".<sup>60</sup>

Monas's translation, like his translations of the short stories, tends to retain more of the quirks of the original. He sometimes goes to extremes, translating "колбасилась по церкви" as "sausaged her way along through the church". However, there are a number of inaccuracies in Monas's translation and these, oddly enough, are more distracting in "Michel Siniagin" than they are in his translations of the short stories, perhaps because "Michel Siniagin" is a more translatable work than the short stories, with a less condensed use of linguistic humour. The translation "sausaged" for "колбасилась" was obviously deliberate, but other apparent errors are more annoying: "на ночь глядя" (M. S., p. 113) is translated by Monas as "staring at the night", the interjection "там" is translated in various different ways that show that it is not understood as a more or less meaningless "filler word"; "с ее ресторанами, и певичками, и мордобоем" (M. S., p. 119) is translated as "with its restaurants, chorus girls and jawing noise"; "В этом смысле на ней сказались ее бывшая профессия" (p. 119) is rendered as "in this respect they would speak of her former profession".<sup>61</sup>

In order to illustrate my own translation strategies and choices, I will first look at a number of individual stylistic points in the text, comparing my own solutions with those of previous translators. Then I will consider the problems posed by the translation of longer passages in the text and by the translation of the poems in Michel Siniagin. This will enable me to give a more detailed account of the translation process and of how my translation decisions relate to my own interpretation of "Michel Siniagin", described in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

### **Part 5: Translating "Michel Siniagin" : Some Typical Examples of Individual Stylistic Points**

Monas's translation of "Michel Siniagin" only goes as far as the end of Chapter 5, so all the following examples are taken from the first five chapters of "Michel Siniagin" in order to enable me to compare them with both previous translations. I have divided my comments into two sections: first I will examine points in the text that I thought

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<sup>60</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Michel Siniagin", in *Nervous People and Other Stories*, trans. by Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean, pp. 69-123.

<sup>61</sup> M. Zoshchenko, "Michel Siniagin", in *Tales from the Bathhouse and Other Stories of Soviet Russia*, trans. by Sydney Monas, pp. ??

needed to be rendered literally. Then I will look at instances where I decided to use more "dynamic strategies" to bring out some associative aspect of the original.

*...не нарисовал на полотне какой-нибудь прелестный шедевр  
...(M. S. , p.112)*

*...never...drew some delightful masterpiece on a canvas...*

This is a good example of the features of Zoshchenko's style and its deviation from the literary norm. The adjective "прелестный" ("charming, delightful") is a stylistically inappropriate word to qualify "шедевр" - "masterpiece". The use of the verb "нарисовать" - to draw, instead of "написать" - to paint, is odd in combination with both "шедевр" and "полотно" - "canvas". This can be rendered literally with no loss to the original. Both Monas and McLean/Gordon have the more ordinary verb "paint" for "нарисовать". They also both use "chef d'oeuvre" instead of "masterpiece", a choice that is well-motivated, given Zoshchenko's love of foreignisms of this sort, but which I decided not to follow as it seemed more rarified than its Russian equivalent.

*...скромно, но просто...(M. S., p. 114)*

*...modestly, but simply...*

This is a typical example of an illogical feature of the original that the translator should resist trying to make sense of and leave as it is. Both the previous translators also retained this oddity.

*...прозаические книжки...(M. S. p. 114)*

*...prosaic books...*

There is a slight comic touch in the Russian. The adjective "прозаический" has the meaning of "prosaic" (in the sense of "humdrum"), but it is also possible in Russian to say "прозаическое произведение" to mean a work of prose fiction. Monas brings this out with his translation: "prosaic little books", whereas McLean and Gordon have "prose works".

*...новых грядущих поколений...(M. S., p. 114)*

*...future, coming generations...*

A tautology in Russian here. Tautology and repetition of various kinds are a common stylistic feature in Michel Siniagin. Monas has "new generations that are growing" which keeps the tautology but gets rid of the

repetitive syntax. McLean and Gordon simply have "the generations to come".

*...растратил мозги...(M. S., p. 114)*

*...wasted his brains...*

This is an odd collocation in Russian. "Растратить" is more commonly found in combinations where the English equivalent is "wasted" (i.e., time, money, etc.). Previous translators erased this feature of the original: McLean and Gordon render it as "wasted his talent", whereas Monas has "corrupted his brain".

*...по причинам, не от себя зависящим. (M. S., p. 118)*

*...for reasons not dependent on themselves.*

The syntax of the original here is muddled and it sounds as if "себя" refers to "причины" and not to the subjects of the sentence (i.e., Michel and his mother and aunt). The McLean/Gordon translation smooths this out and translates as "because of events beyond their control". Monas's translation ("for reasons quite independent of their own wills") conveys the clumsiness of the original well.

*...обе старушки не очень обезумели...(M. S., p. 119)*

*...the two old ladies did not become too hysterical*

There is a jarring combination in Russian here: the moderating "не очень" (not very much) is juxtaposed with the very expressive verb "обезуметь" ("to go out of one's mind", "to become crazed"). The McLean/Gordon translation smooths out this irregularity to "the sisters did not lose their senses". The Monas version retains it with "neither of the elderly ladies lost their heads very much".

*...она была балерина и работала в кордебалете Мариинского театра. (M. S., p. 119)*

*She had been a ballerina and had worked in the corps de ballet of the Mariinskii Theatre.*

The Gordon /McLean version gets rid of the slightly odd use of the verb "работать" (rather than, for instance, "танцевать") in the original and translates this as "she...had been a member of the corps de ballet in the Marinsky Theater", whereas the Monas translation retains it ("she...had worked in the corps de ballet of the Marinsky Theater.) In fact, this barely noticeable oddity is of some significance. Zoshchenko's narrator tends to

characterise his characters' occupations as jobs - even in cases where the occupation is not generally thought of as a job in the normal sense. For instance, elsewhere he refers to Michel's "poetic work" ("поэтическая работа") (p.119). It is typical of Zoshchenko's narrator to define his characters by their professions - see, for instance, the description of the tenants of Michel's communal apartment: Там...жил портной Елкин со своей супругой и ребенком, фабричная работница, бухгалтер Госцветмета Р. и почтовый служащий Н.С... (M. S. p. 129). The same is true even if the character in question has no occupation: Isabella Efremovna, for instance is described as "a beautiful, even elegant woman of absolutely indeterminate profession and not even, it seems, a member of any trade union" ("очень красивая, элегантная женщина, совершенно неопределенной профессии и даже, кажется, не член профсоюза") (M. S. p.128). This quirk of Zoshchenko's narrator reflects an aspect of contemporary mentality, and is also possibly meant to parody the type of superficial characterisation that was typical of inexperienced Soviet writers. In 1928, the editor Voronskii found it necessary to warn writers against this tendency and remind them that "actions, class position, job, ideology do not sum up a man".<sup>62</sup> For this reason I decided, like Monas, to translate literally here.

*...скорей безобразная, чем красивая...(M. S., p. 119)*

*...ugly rather than beautiful...*

The use of "скорей...чем" with the direct antonyms "безобразная" and "красивая" is illogical: the reader expects a subtler distinction. It has been slightly overlooked by previous translators. Monas has "more featureless than beautiful" and McLean/Gordon have "nearer to ugly than to beautiful".

*Но начатая карьера ее была сделана. (M. S., p. 119)*

*But her budding career was already established.*

The Russian here is rather illogical: it would be more appropriate to say "карьера началась" or "карьера была сделана". For this reason I tried to make my translation mirror the original by using the superfluous word "budding". Both previous translators smooth out this inconsistency.

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<sup>62</sup> R.A. MacGuire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s*. Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 274.

McLean and Gordon have "but the career she had begun was now assured" and Monas has "But her career had been launched".

*Поэт отдавал внимание и женщинам... (М. С., р. 120)*

*The poet also gave his attention to women...*

The verb "отдать" is not generally used with the object "внимание": which usually needs the verb "обращать" or "уделять". Hence the oddness of the English here. Previous translations had "The poet was also interested in women" (McLean/Gordon) and "The poet devoted his attention to women" (Monas),

*...он не бросал свои чувства какой-нибудь отдельной женщине.  
(М. С., р. 120)*

*he did not just toss his feelings at one particular woman*

The Russian here - "бросать чувства" - literally "to throw one's feelings" - is another unusual combination. Both previous translations smooth out the original here: Monas has "he did not concentrate his feelings on any particular woman" and McLean/Gordon have "he did not throw away his feelings on any particular woman".

*...он ей, провинциальной девушке, не пара. (М. С., р. 121)*

*...he was no match for her, a simple, provincial girl.*

The expression in the original here "он ей не пара" suggests that the man is not worthy of the woman, whereas everything in the context suggests that Simochka considers herself beneath Michel. "Она ему не пара" - "she was no match for him" would have been more appropriate here. Both previous translations render this as "she was no match for him".

*...она моталась на подоконнике...(М. С., р. 122)*

*...she flapped hither and thither on the window sill...*

It is difficult to construct a picture of the scene from the description offered here: the verb "мотаться" can mean to rush to and fro - generally across a large distance - a city for example, or to flap or dangle (of an inanimate object). Neither is particularly appropriate in the context. Of the other translators, the McLean/Gordon version tries to make sense of this with "she rocked back and forth on the window sill", while Monas sticks with a literal translation, to give the funnier version "she dangled on the sill".

*...революционную грозу, которая все более и более разгоралась. (M. S., p. 125)*

*...the revolutionary whirlwind, which was burning more furiously every day*

There is a mixed metaphor in the Russian here: : literally, "the revolutionary storm which was burning higher each day". Both McLean and Gordon and Monas make the original less remarkable: Monas has "...the revolutionary threat which was indeed becoming more and more menacing" and Gorodn/McLean have "...the revolutionary storm, which was becoming more and more violent".

*...она с радостью отзовется на его приглашение. (M. S., p. 126)*

*...she would joyfully come running at his invitation.*

The Russian "приглашение" ("invitation") is oddly prosaic here. The reader expects something else in the context: "она с радостью отзовется на его зов" for instance, which would translate as "she would joyfully come running to his call". The manuscript version initially had "зов" here, but Zoshchenko amended it to "приглашение". The McLean/Gordon version substitutes "call" for "invitation" ("she would gladly answer his call") whereas the Monas translation stays closer to the original ("She would respond with joy to his invitation").

The following are examples of slightly more "dynamic" solutions to problems posed by the Russian text:

*Он приляжет на сафьяновую кушетку... (M. S., p. 113)*

*He'll lie down on a morocco leather chaise-longue....*

The terms for items of furniture in this passage - "кушетка", "козетка", "мягкий пуфик" are all rather unusual and belong to the world of pre-revolutionary literature.<sup>63</sup> It seemed to me that the translation needed to

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<sup>63</sup>Incidentally, a "soft pouffe" ("мягкий пуф") is one of the items of furniture in the rooms of Mark Steinbach, a character in Anastasiia Verbitskaia's romantic blockbuster "The Keys of Happiness", a work which Zoshchenko enjoyed in his youth and later viewed with irony. V. Kaverin recalls that Zoshchenko once told him that in his youth he had read "The Keys of Happiness" with avid enjoyment, and that three or four years later he had returned to the book and found that the book had become a "parody" for him. The event was described by Zoshchenko as "something akin to a literary

emphasise the connotative value of these words - their exotic sound and their associations with a world quite unconnected with Soviet reality. Thus in translating I did not follow the dictionary definitions - according to which both "кушетка" and "козетка" should be translated as "couch" or sofa, but chose equivalents in English with similar associative qualities: "ottoman" and "chaise-longue". Monas has "couch" and "armchair" and McLean/Gordon (presumably following the same principle as I did) have "sofa" and "chaise-longue". Incidentally, both previous translations unaccountably fail to render "пуфик" as "pouffe" - a word which retains both the foreignness and the humour of the original. Monas translates it as "hassock" and McLean/Gordon as "causeuse".

*...про цветки поэмы...(M. S., p. 114)*

*...poems about daisies...*

Here Zoshchenko uses a diminutive form for "flowers", "цветки". Diminutives are used extensively in this introductory chapter. They can be used to impart a rather vulgar-genteel tone to the narrative and also to express irony, as here. English does not usually have the option of forming diminutives, and in order to get the tone across I resorted to different solutions. In the description of the future citizen I compensated for the use of the diminutive "костюмчик" by using "nice little suit". Here I used a more specific word in English which I felt matched the general tone of the narrator, daisies being to flowers more or less what sparrows are to birds. I used the same method of replacing a Russian diminutive with a more specific word in English when I translated "конфетка" ("кушая конфетки") (p. 113) as "toffee".

*...такая скромная работа как раз по его плечу...(M. S., p. 114)*

*...humble work of this sort is even cut out for the author...*

The translation here is an attempt to mirror the stylistic oddity in the Russian. "По его плечу" is an unusual variation on "ему по плечу" - "just his size", "just right for him". In English it is possible to "have your work cut out for you" - but this means to have a daunting task ahead. However, the expression also suggests something that is "made to

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discovery": "I imagined the type of person who would read "The Keys of Happiness" absolutely seriously", he told Kaverin. (V. Kaverin, "Molodoi Zoshchenko", in *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, St. Petersburg, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1995, p. 123).

measure". The McLean/Gordon translation does not emphasise the strangeness here and has "modest work of this kind is even to his taste". Monas's solution is good: his translation is "such modest work suits him once and for all", which suggests a corruption of the expression "suits him down to the ground".

*...любовь к разным изобразительным искусствам...(M. S., p. 117)*

*...love of various pictorial arts...*

The usual translation for "изобразительные искусства" is actually "Fine Arts", but given the broad meaning of the word "fine" this translation seemed to diminish the humour of the original, in which the adjective "изобразительные" is quite superfluous and over-specific. Therefore I settled for "pictorial arts". Both previous translators did something similar: McLean/Gordon have "various decorative arts" and Monas has "the depictive arts".

*...как и чего, и на чьей совести камень лежит. (p. 118)*

*...what is what, and which of us has a weight on his conscience.*

The Russian here mixes two idioms: "камень на душе лежит": literally "a stone on one's soul", roughly equivalent to "a weight on one's mind" in English: and "на совести", "on (one's) conscience". Thus I translated it using a corruption of the English "weight on one's mind". Both the McLean/Gordon and the Monas translations are rather good here: McLean and Gordon have "what's what and who is to blame for what", which is pleasingly clumsy in its repetition and Monas has "how and why and on whom the burden of conscience lies", which also strikes a slightly jarring note.

*Ихнее прошлое. (M. S., p. 118)*

*Their Past and Stuff.*

This translation is an attempt to compensate for the use of the word "ихнее" in the original. "Ихний", is a common vernacular form of "their" in Russian and is unacceptable in the literary language. It is frequently used by Zoshchenko's narrator.

*...которой и не следовало бы забивать своего сердца. (M. S., p. 121)*

*...not something it would do to bother one's heart over*

The Russian here, "забивать...сердце", is a corruption of a set expression: "забивать голову" (to "stuff one's head" - with unnecessary facts, etc.). I decided to corrupt a similar English expression, "bother one's head over", in the same way. The previous translators did not attempt to render this solecism. McLean and Gordon have "...with which it would have been wrong to occupy one's heart completely", whereas Monas has "to which the heart need not be committed".

### Translating "Michel Siniagin": The Author's Literary Style

The discussion of various points in the text and comparison with previous translations does not give a very good impression of the translation process as it happens. A better impression of this can be provided by a more detailed discussion of the translation of longer passages in the text. I have selected the following passage - the first description of the hero - as a fairly representative example of the spoof literary style in which the main body of the text is couched:

М. П. Синягин не был на фронте по случаю ущемления гръжи. И в конце европейской войны он слонялся по городу в своем штатском макинтоше, имея цветок в петлице и изящный, со слоновой ручкой, стек в руках.

Он ходил по улицам всегда несколько печальный и томный, в полном одиночестве, бормоча про себя стишки, которые он в изобилии сочинял, имея все же порядочное дарование, вкус и тонкое чутье ко всему красивому и изящному.

Его восхищали картины печальной и однообразной псковской природы, березки, речки и разные мошки, кружащиеся над цветочными клумбами.

Он уходил за городом и, сняв шляпу, с тонкой и понимающей улыбкой следил за игрой птичек и комариков.

Или глядел на движущиеся тучные облака и, закинув голову, тут же сочинял на них соответствующие рифмы и стихи. (М. С., р. 117)

This is quite a straightforward passage to translate, given that the tone is fairly consistent. The passage is a pseudo-naive, "poetic" description, interlarded with occasional notes of irony. In the first paragraph there are a number of stylistic oddities to be taken into account, such as the formal use of Michel's initials rather than his first name (presumably intended as a nod towards the genre of biography and a sign that

the author is striving to play the role of an objective chronicler), the connective "по случаю", which gives a slight tone of formality, and the odd "европейская война" used to refer to World War 1 - an invention of Zoshchenko's, and a symptom of the narrator's historical "deafness" (significantly there is a deliberate avoidance here of any mention of the Revolution). There is also the formal and rather out of place use of the gerund in "имея цветок в петлице" rather than the more normal "с цветком в петлице". In the next paragraph there are a number of ironic notes: the word "стишки" is a rather pejorative one ("doggerel", "jingles"); "в изобилии" suggests an abundance or even an excess of poems. "Все же" sounds a defensive note and suggests that the narrator anticipates doubts about Michel's talent. The phrase "порядочное дарование" ("a reasonable/passable talent") is a contradiction in terms - rather like Bulgakov's famous fish "of second-class freshness" ("второй свежести") in *The Master and Margarita*. All these features can be retained more or less literally. The next two paragraphs are self-explanatory. There are a couple of comic features in the last paragraph: the word "тучный" with reference to a cloud is a "mistake" that is typical of the style of Zoshchenko's narrator: "тучный" literally means "fat" or "stout" and can be used of a person or an animal; the connection with clouds comes with the association with the word "туча" ("raincloud"). Here I found myself divided between a more dynamic strategy which would render the description in a way that was just slightly off-balance (i.e., "stormy clouds" or "billowy clouds"), and a literal rendering of the meaning of "тучный" that gave precedence to the humour of the image ("fat clouds") I opted for the latter in the end because it was more comical (Monas did the same before me: he has "fat clouds", whereas McLean/Gordon leave out the adjective altogether). "Движущиеся" is rather prosaic and I deliberately kept the verb "moving" rather than changing it to the more poetic "floating". Another strange feature of the style of the original here is the preposition "на" in the phrase "сочинять на них". I thought this should be rendered literally as "compose (poems) on them" (rather than compose (poems) about them"), given that the original is also unusual. The end result of my translation is as follows:

M.P. Siniagin did not fight at the front on account of a strangulated hernia. And at the end of the European war he could be seen mooching about town in his civilian mackintosh, carrying a flower in his buttonhole and an elegant, ivory-handled riding-crop in his hands.

He would walk the streets, always somewhat melancholy and languid, in utter solitude, muttering little rhymes to himself, which he composed in profusion, having, as a matter of fact, quite a passable talent, good taste and a delicate feel for beautiful and elegant things.

He was enchanted by the melancholy and monotonous Pskov scenery, the birches, the brooks and the various gnats dancing above the flower-beds.

He would walk out of town, take off his hat and, with a delicate, knowing smile, observe the little birds and mosquitoes at play .

Or watch the fat clouds moving by and, flinging back his head, compose appropriate rhymes and poems on them right there on the spot.

It is already clear from this paragraph that the use of repetition in Zoshchenko's work presents the translator with a dilemma. As discussed above, one of the general principles of dynamic translation is that contextual consistency is valued above lexical consistency. That is, the translator should not strive to render a word consistently, using the same equivalent wherever it appears in the text, but should translate according to context. In Zoshchenko's work, however, repetition is used highly deliberately, as an artistic device. The passage introducing Michel is followed by a digression about the Russian intelligentsia:

В те годы было еще порядочное количество людей высокообразных и интеллигентных, с тонкой душевной организацией и нежной любовью к красоте и к разным изобразительным искусствам.

Надо сказать, что в нашей стране всегда была исключительная интеллигентская прослойка, к которой охотно прислушивалась вся Европа и даже весь мир.

И верно, это были очень такие тонкие ценители искусство и балета и авторы многих отличных дел и великих учений. (M. S. p. 117)

This passage, taken together with the passage quoted earlier, sets up a number of chains of repetition: "изящный, со слоновой ручкой, стек в руках", "всему красивому и изящному"; "тонкое чутье", "с тонкой и понимающей улыбкой", "с тонкой душевной организацией", "тонкие ценители искусства и балета"; "людей высокообразованных и интеллигентных", "интеллигентская прослойка", "интеллигентные возвышенные люди", etc. The narrator's fondness for certain words in "Michel Siniagin" contributes to the rawness of the style and can be interpreted as a sign of his lack of imagination and his meagre vocabulary. The translator who diligently uses different translations depending on the context disrupts the stylistic balance and spoils the chains of repetition. In the case of "изящный", used twice in the passage above, there is no problem in translating

it consistently as "elegant". It is tempting to translate "тонкий" differently each time it occurs: "a *subtle* understanding smile", "a *fine* feel for beautiful and elegant things, "*discerning* connoisseurs of art and ballet" and "*delicate* emotional constitutions". But I came to the conclusion that it was worth risking a slight clumsiness in English to keep the repetition and to translate the word as "delicate" in every case.

Repetition used in "Michel Siniagin" is more than just a feature of the narrator's style. Certain words take on an iconic status in Zoshchenko's personal use of language: behind certain favourite words lie whole chains of association or "intertextuality" which stretch throughout Zoshchenko's work, including his essays, letters and commentaries, and which interact with the discourse of the era in which he wrote. A good example of this is the word "переживания", which is a key word in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin". The word appears seven times in the first chapter of "Michel Siniagin" alone. It refers to something "lived through" or suffered, an emotional reaction to some experience. In "Michel Siniagin" it sets off associations with both the past and the present, with 19th-century literature and with Marxist critical discourse. Ten years previously, in a diary entry from before 1922 Zoshchenko had marked this word out as a stylistic banality: "Some words die completely. Among those that have died I include the following, грезы, излом, надрыв, переживание. They give off a smell of decay and incredible banality".<sup>64</sup> Almost certainly the word is a target of Zoshchenko's irony, not simply because of its stylistic connotations, but also due to the prominent role assigned to emotional experience in 19th-century Russian literary culture, from the psychological novel to the solipsism of Silver Age poetry. In the 1920s the Serapion Brothers had championed the adventure novel as opposed to the psychological novel. In 1936, in the essay "Literature Should Be for the People" ("Литература должна быть народной") Zoshchenko reiterated these sentiments in a tone reflecting the political climate of the times: "To this day, the tradition of the old literature of the intelligentsia is still perpetuated, with the emotional experiences ("переживания") of the intellectual as the the main subject of art. We must destroy this tradition, because it is wrong to write as if nothing had happened in this country".<sup>65</sup> It is part of the confusing profile of the narrator of "Michel Siniagin" that he is both drawn to the concept of "переживания" and wary of it. He apologises: "возможно, что просто нетактично писать, так себе, о переживаниях людей, которые, в сущности говоря, даже и не играют роли в сложном механизме наших дней" (M. S., p.114). In this context, "переживания" becomes part of a group of concepts that includes "мелкий", "личный", etc., qualities that are

<sup>64</sup>Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 113.

<sup>65</sup>M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, p. 70.

considered to be out of place in the current political climate and "out of step with the epoch". An example can be found in Zhdanov's denunciation of Zoshchenko and Akhmatova in his speech on the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* in August 1946, in which he characterises the poetry of the immediate pre-revolutionary period as an attempt by the poets and ideologues of the ruling classes to hide from reality in "wretched personal emotions and digging about in their own grubby little souls" "мизерные личные переживания и копанье в своих мелких душонках".<sup>66</sup>

Depending on context, the word "переживания" can be rendered in English as "emotions", "experiences", "sufferings" or even "emotional upheavals" or "inner experience", a fact that causes problems for the translator wanting to recreate the repetitiveness of Zoshchenko's style. The associations that the word has gathered in Zoshchenko's work mean that it expresses more than these equivalents can do, but it is not possible to "gloss" the word without losing its almost hypnotic repetition in the text. My solution was to choose "emotions" wherever possible, rather than "experiences", so as to emphasise that the word refers above all to inner experience rather than concrete events. Even so, in one place I had to resort to "experiences and emotions".

### Translating "Michel Siniagin": *Skaz*-like Digressions

I have selected another passage from the story - the point at which the narrator imagines a 16th-century nobleman out for a walk - to illustrate a slightly different aspect of Zoshchenko's style, in "Michel Siniagin". Here, the narrative voice breaks free of its literary pretensions and shows greater spontaneity. This passage, like several other passages in the text, exhibits the sort of features more typical of Zoshchenko's "*skaz*" in the short stories, such as slangy expressions and a familiar, informal tone. It is also (as I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis) a good example of what Shcheglov has called "the extrapolation of philistinism", a device used throughout *The Blue Book*, whereby scenes from history are told in the laconic tones of Zoshchenko's Soviet author. Thus it presents some problems in rendering culture-specific elements that identify the narrator as a Soviet citizen.

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<sup>66</sup> A. Zhdanov, "Doklad t. Zhdanova o zhurnalakh Zvezda i Leningrad", in *The Central Committee Resolution and Zhdanov's Speech on the Journals Zvezda and Leningrad*, bilingual edition, trans F. Ashbee and I. Tidmarsh, Royal Oak, Michigan; Strathcona, 1978, p 15.

Так сказать, каждая эпоха имеет свою психику. И в каждую эпоху, пока что, было одинаково легко и одинаково трудно жить.

Для примера, на что уж был беспокойный век, ну, скажем, 16. Нам издали поглядеть, так прямо невыносимым кажется. Чуть не каждый день в то время на дуэлях дрались. Гостей с башен сбрасывали почему зря. И ничего. Все в порядке вещей было.

Нам-то, с нашей психикой, прямо боязно представить себе подобную ихнюю жизнь. Для примера, какой-нибудь там ихний феодальный сукин сын, какой-нибудь там виконт или там бывший граф идет, для примера, погулять.

Вот идет он погулять и, значит, шпагу сбоку прищипливает. Мало ли кто-нибудь его сейчас, боже сохрани, плечом пихнет или обругает трехэтажно - сразу надо драться. И ничего.

Идет на прогулку и даже на морде никакой грусти или паники не написано. Напротив того, идет и даже, может быть, улыбается и посвистывает.

Ну, жену небрежно на прощанье поцелует. Ну, скажет, машер, я того...пошел прогуляться.

И та - хоть бы хны. Ладно, скажет, не опоздай, скажет, к обеду.

Да в наше время жена бы рыдала и за ноги бы цеплялась, умоляя не выходить на улицу или, в крайнем случае, просила бы обеспечить ей безбедное существование. А тут просто и безмятежно. Взял шпажонку, поточил ее, если она затупилась от прежней стычки, и пошел побродить до обеда, имея почти все шансы на дуэль или столкновение.

Надо сказать, если б автор жил в ту эпоху, его бы силой из дому не выкурили. Так бы всю жизнь и прожил бы взаперти вплоть до нашего времени.

Да, с нашей точки зрения неинтересная была жизнь! А там этого не замечали и жили поплеывая. А даже ездили в гости, к имеющим башни.

In translating this passage, a balance has to be struck between the impression of "skaz", the more formal elements and other textual features such as repetition, word order, etc. The original is informal in tone (the result of features such as the interjections "так сказать", "скажем", ungrammatical forms ("для примеру") and colloquialisms ("боязно", "прямо", "ихний", "морда"), and yet it is also concise and stylised. As with Zoshchenko's short stories, to prioritise the colloquial nature of

the style above everything else will lead the translator to compromise other elements that are equally vital to the overall effect of this passage.

The passage begins with "так сказать" and this is important in setting the tone. Because "so to speak" cannot be used in this way, I began with "You see", but included "so to speak" too, as this is such an integral part of Zoshchenko's style. The word "психика" lends a formal note that jars ever so slightly with the informal beginning. Strictly speaking this word should be translated as "mentality" or "psyche", but I thought that "psychology" here struck the right note of false erudition. The next sentence was translated bearing in mind the fact that the original ends comically on the number 16. This seemed to me the most important feature of the sentence and worth making some sacrifices for, so that the result departs a little from the original ("For instance, take a really troubled century like, say, the 16th"). "И ничего" links to other points later in the passage and so I felt it was important to keep a continuity going through ("and it was nothing"; "and it's nothing to him").

The next paragraph includes "ихнюю жизнь", which is difficult to translate: I decided that by adding "back then" ("their lives back then") would give a note of informality. ("Back then" is used a few times in the translation.) It continues with the description of the "feudal son-of-a-bitch", which I made a "feudal bastard" to compensate for the fact that the translation in general is less colloquial than the original, and also because it worked well rhythmically with what followed. The play on the word "бывший" in this next sentence poses a problem for the translator. "Бывший" is another important word in Zoshchenko's work and one with a long history of intertextual references. The joke is that "бывший" was used in Soviet times to reveal to the "former" aristocratic class that no longer existed: here it is used incorrectly by the narrator in talking about the distant past. It could, perhaps, be rendered as an aristocratic "has-been", "survival", "fossil" or "relic". However, I decided that to depart from the original too far to accommodate the joke would be stretching the point, and that a similar sort of redundancy and historical "tone-deafness" could be achieved by having "old viscount" and "bygone count" (after all, we know the narrator is talking about the past).

An important element of repetition in the text starts up at this point: the repetition of "идет". ("идет, для примеру"... "Вот идет он..." "Идет на прогулку...", "идет и даже". This is a device that is often used in Zoshchenko's short stories and it is reminiscent of joke-telling. In my translation I retained the repetition using "off" ("off, for instance, for a stroll"; "Well, off he goes"; "off he goes"; "he goes off"). I translated "Пришпиливает" as "pins on", given that it is an odd verb in context. The expression "обругать трехэтажно" is another example of the "Sovietisation" of

history: it is derived from the modern expression "трехэтажный мат" - literally, "three-storey swearing". The equivalents in English ("effing and blinding", "swearing blue murder") are not very good equivalents here as it is necessary to get across the idea of somebody being insulted. I chose to use a euphemism ("call him an interesting name"). This is a device that, I have already noted of Monas's translation of "The History of an Illness", works well in translating Zoshchenko. "Морда" is a common Zoshchenko word, which I decided to translate as "fat face" rather than attempting to find one suitable colloquial word in English, such as "mug". The conversation between the nobleman and his wife, like the conversation between the future citizen and his wife, is remarkable for its lack of punctuation and its contemporary feel, both of which I tried to retain in translation. As in the passage about the future citizen, I rendered "говорит" - a very characteristic feature of Zoshchenko's writing as "goes", in order to make the result more colloquial and apparently spontaneous. Here it has the additional advantage of increasing the repetition in translation, as "идет" is rendered as "goes off". The phrase "обеспечивать безбедное существование" is a legal-sounding expression and an ironic comment on modern life. Initially I translated it by using what I felt was the most natural sounding equivalent in English is "guarantee to keep her comfortably provided for", but on reflection I thought that it was important to retain the use of nouns here and translated the phrase as "guarantee her a decent livelihood". In the next paragraph, I changed my initially more fluent translation "the author has to admit that if he had lived in that era", to the more literal and clumsy "it has to be said that if the author had lived in that era". I also retained the redundancy of the original, translating "силой из дому не выкурили", as "you could not have smoked him out of the house *by force*". I also used "not attractive" as a translation for "неинтересная" (following Monas's example in his translation of "The History of an Illness"). The euphemism seemed to me to be more expressive of Zoshchenko's general style than my initial, more colloquial translation, "not so hot".

You see, every age, so to speak, has its own psychology. And in every age, so far, life has been equally easy and equally difficult.

For instance, take some really troubled century like, say, the 16th. For us, looking at it from a distance - it's downright unthinkable. Back then, they fought duels almost every day. They threw visitors off towers, for no reason. And it was nothing. All in a day's work.

For us now, with our psychology, it's downright scary even thinking about their life back then. For instance, imagine some feudal bastard, some old viscount, say, or some bygone count, off, for instance, for a stroll.

Well, off he goes for a stroll, and so, of course, he pins on his sword. Any minute, god forbid, someone might shove into him in the street or call

him an interesting name - he'll have to fight right there on the spot. And it's nothing to him.

Off he goes, without a trace of sadness or panic written on his fat face. Far from it, he goes off smiling and even, maybe, whistling a little tune.

Well maybe he gives his wife a careless peck goodbye. Well, he goes, *ma cheree*, I'm off, like, for a stroll.

And she doesn't bat an eyelid.

"Alright", she goes, "Mind", she goes, don't be late for your dinner".

In our day and age a wife would sob and cling to her husband's legs and beg him not to go out, or at least to guarantee her a decent livelihood. But back then things were calmer and simpler. You took your little old sword, sharpened it if it was blunt from your last skirmish, and off you went for a stroll before dinner, with every chance of a duel or a confrontation.

It has to be said that if the author had lived in that era you could not have smoked him out of the house by force. He would have just sat at home all his life, right up until the present day.

Yes, from our point of view, life back then was not so attractive. But back then they didn't even notice and just laughed it off. And even went out visiting, to people with towers.

### **Translating "Michel Siniagin": Poetry**

There are a few examples of poetry in "Michel Siniagin", all of which are parodic in intent. The translation of such spoof poetry is probably one of the most enjoyable tasks for the translator and a chance to show off a little. In view of this it is worth noting that the verse parodies in "Michel Siniagin" are rather low-key, and the translator should avoid trying to make them too funny. What Zoshchenko offers are a few rather unremarkable lines (supposedly from the poem "Autumn"), a near-citation of an actual poem by Blok, and a piece of quite unpoetic doggerel ("Ladies, Ladies,") which does not even attempt to parody the stylistic cliches of the Silver Age.

The first verse parody in "Michel Siniagin" is the poem that the narrator imagines being read in the future:

В моем окне качалась лилия  
 Я весь в бреду  
 Любовь, любовь моя идиллия  
 Я к вам приду

This poem, unlike Michel's poems, is supposed to be purely in the imagination of the narrator and thus is a double parody, both of a specific type of banal love lyric and of the narrator himself. In Chapter 2 I have already described this "lousy lyric poem" as typical of the sort of comic distillation or magnified caricature frequently used by Zoshchenko when referring to "old" literature. There are elements in the poem that relate to clichés of decadent poetry: the lily, the delirious poet ("в бреду"). The whole thing has a feel of doggerel about it, particularly in the line "я весь в бреду". I felt that it was important to retain the rhyme and the infantile quality of the original in translation:

A lily swayed on my window-sill  
 I am all a-dither  
 Oh Love! Oh Love! Oh my Idyll,  
 I am going thither.

Both Monas and McLean/Gordon stayed closer to the original, tried to retain the "lily/idyll" rhyme as best they could and were able to keep the simple last line "I will come to you". Both versions retain the mixture of cliché and clumsiness in the original rather well. This is the McLean/Gordon version:

Outside my window swayed a lily  
 A fever burns me through.  
 Love, o love, it's so idyllic  
 Now I'll come to you

Monas's translation is characteristically funny and unconcerned with correct English:

In my window swung a lily  
 I am all astew  
 O love, o love, o my idilly  
 I will come to you

The first of Siniagin's poems quoted in the story is "Autumn". The title itself has resonance in Russian that it perhaps doesn't have in English, as Russian 19th- and 20th-century lyric poetry positively swarms with poems called "Autumn". Poems by Fet, Gippius, Balmont and Esenin bear that title; there is an "Autumn Leaves" among Merezhkovskii's works. The real-life inspiration for Siniagin, Aleksandr Tiniakov, included a whole series of autumn poems in the collection *Navis Nigra* - "Autumn

Scene", "Autumn Liturgy", "Autumn Melody", "September" and "Death of Flowers". Zoshchenko's narrator claims not to remember Michel's poems very well, ("Автор не помнит этих стихов. Жизнь, заботы и огорчения изгнали из памяти изящные строчки и поэтические рифмы..." (M. S., p. 120)) and from the first lines of this poem there are signs that the narrator's own fantasy is intruding. Quite apart from the incongruity of scattered flowers in autumn, "petals and forget-me nots" is a typical comic device of Zoshchenko's, like "flowers and nasturtiums" in "The Story about the Lady with the Flowers" ("Rasskaz pro damu so tsvetami") ("это была поэтическая особа, способна целый день нюхать цветки и настурции").<sup>67</sup> There is nothing particularly problematic for the translator here: I translated as "Petals and forget-me-nots/Scattered 'neath my window lie". I was pleased to have the opportunity of putting in the verb "lie" just to make the line scan, as it is quite characteristic of bad poetry in English. McLean/Gordon and Monas used "windowpane" to make up the line. Their versions are, respectively, "Petals and forget-me-nots/Strewn behind the windowpane" and; "Petals and forget-me-nots, Drifted by the windowpane". The second half of the quote from "Autumn" could be intended to parody Nadson, famous for his "civic grief" and his pessimism, but it could equally well be a more general parody of youthful melancholy.

Ах, скажите же зачем,  
 Отчего в природе  
 Так устроено? И тем  
 Счастья в жизни нет совсем...

This verse, too, exhibits the same childishness as in the "lousy lyric poem". It has a slight hiccup in the middle, due to the repetition (with "зачем" followed by "отчего") and the uneven rhythm.

McLean/Gordon rather improve on the original:

Oh please tell me why and how  
 Nature was created so  
 Ordered sternly, so that now,  
 There's no happiness to know

Monas is perhaps closer in spirit, but neglects to translate the rhyme, presumably to stay closer to the original:

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<sup>67</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. ?

Ah tell me, tell me why  
 And why in nature  
 Things are so? And why  
 Life holds no happiness at all

I thought the rhyme was important. Initially my translation was rather more fluent (ending on "nothing but grief and misery". I then thought it needed to be a little more awkward so I changed it to "nothing but sadness and misery"

Ah tell me why, why should it be,  
 That everything in nature is  
 The way it is? and why we see  
 Nothing but sadness and misery...

The next poem, "Storm", is, as I have already mentioned, not a parody at all, but a poem by Blok presumably picked out by Zoshchenko for its banality:

### **Гроза**

Гроза прошла  
 И ветки белых роз  
 В окно мне дышат  
 Дивным ароматом.  
 Еще трава полна  
 Прозрачных слез  
 А гром гремит вдали  
 Раскатом...

The slight changes that Zoshchenko made to the poem make it a little more trite and whimsical than Blok's original. The word "дивный" (a rather corny word, like "чудный") was added, and the arrangement of the lines was changed: they are broken up into groups of two, so that the poem ends on a single word: this was a poetic conceit rather common in Fet's poetry, as well as in early Blok and other poets of the day, such as Vera Inber. Zoshchenko also altered "ветка" to "ветки" and changed the word order of the original to give the rather clumsy "гром гремит". My translation perhaps does Blok an injustice, as I felt that the most important things to be retained in the translation were the rhyme and the rather banal quality of the imagery. Of the three translations, mine is the most "jingly":

The storm has passed -  
 the white rose unfurls  
 Breathing in at my window  
 A fresh scent of wonder.  
 Tears in the grass,  
 Lie scattered like pearls  
 And away in the distance a rumble  
 Of thunder. . .

Both Monas and McLean/Gordon provide rather more poetic translations. Monas manages to retain both the "branches" ("ветки" of the original and the tautology of "гром гремит"):

The storm has passed  
 Through the window  
 white rose branches  
 Exude for me a wondrous smell  
 And still the grass is thick  
 With transparent tears  
 And thunder thunders from afar  
 Like a bell

McLean and Gordon have the following:

The storm has passed  
 A white rose branch appears -  
 My window is ajar -  
 Exhaling scent  
 The grass has now amassed  
 Transparent tears  
 the thunder booms afar  
 Its power spent

"Ladies, Ladies," is perhaps the most interesting poem in the story. Its title "Дамы, дамы, отчего же мне на вас глядеть приятно?", is ridiculously prosaic as the title of a poem - I translated it as "Ladies, Ladies, Why Are You So Nice To Look At?". Monas, similarly, has, "Ladies, Ladies, What Makes it Nice to Look at You?". McLean/Gordon's translation, "Ladies, Ladies, Why Do I Love to Gaze at You",

romanticises the original a little. The poem is a "Lebiadkinish" interpretation of Blok's theme of "The Stranger":

Оттого-то я люблюсь незнакомкой. А когда  
 Эта наша незнакомка познакомится со мной -  
 Неохота мне глядеть в знакомое лицо  
 И противно ей давать обручальное кольцо

Literally, the poem reads as follows: "So that's why I admire (i.e. like looking at) a stranger and when / This stranger of ours gets to know me / I won't want to look at her familiar face /And it will be horrible to give her a ring of betrothal". The prosaic content of the poem is echoed in the colloquial language: "эта наша незнакомка", "this stranger of ours"; "неохота" "I won't feel like" ; "противно" "it'll be horrible".

The repetition of "незнакомка"/ "познакомится"/"знакомое" was seen as a key feature of the poem by previous translators, who translated "незнакомка" as "unknown lady" or "unknown woman". McLean/Gordon have:

That is why I worship an unknown woman  
 And when the woman unknown becomes known to me  
 I'll be reluctant to gaze on a face that is known  
 Reluctant to give her the ring of betrothal

Monas has :

Therefore I am in love with an unknown lady  
 And when this unknown lady gets to know me  
 I lose desire to gaze at a known face  
 To give her a wedding ring I lose desire.

Unlike McLean/Gordon and Monas, I decided to sacrifice the repetition for the sake of the use of the word "stranger". Initially I departed much further than either translator from the original, and came up rather a free adaptation of the original:

My love is a stranger, I don't know her yet  
 And that is as close as I want it to get  
 For familiar girls and their charms leave me cold  
 And familiar hands I do not wish to hold

However, I felt that this was taking liberties with the original. My translation was more crudely comic than the original. The poems in "Michel Siniagin" that are attributed to the hero never descend to this level of comic doggerel, but are more subtle "near-misses". In the end, I decided to translate it more literally, but to keep the final rhyme, which the other translators deemed unimportant but which, I think, is a crucial feature of the poem's "Lebiadkinish" style:

So that's why I admire a stranger. But when  
This stranger of mine is no longer so strange,  
I shan't want to look at her familiar face,  
Or on her hand an engagement ring to place...

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by defending a model of translation study that focusses on the practical process of translation, rather than attempting to formulate general, abstract principles about the subject. I argued that a translator engaged in the practical business of translation is operating at a different level of focus from a scholar attempting a broader, diachronic and descriptive study of translation norms. This has a dramatic impact on how he/she approaches questions such as quality and equivalence. When actually translating, the translator must be focussed on problem-solving. He/she must be critically engaged and constantly prepared to make value judgements. This subjective, critically engaged position is what makes a translation an individual and creative work.

The descriptive approach to translation studies dismisses the question of "how best to translate" as irrelevant, but it is still a meaningful one for the practising translator engaged in a specific task. Broadly speaking, translators tend to follow the rule of "dynamic equivalence", but there is a convincing argument that, in certain instances, translations which "bend" the target language to accommodate the source text are more appropriate. In the case of "opaque" style, in particular, the translator is well advised to respect the form of the original in order to avoid banal translations.

While *skaz* is a sort of opaque style, it is also a "double-voiced" style that attempts to mimic a particular voice. Thus, *skaz* pulls the translator in two directions - the stylised, marked nature of the narrative alerts the translator to the importance of the superficial form of the text, whereas the imitative aspect appears to demand a more dynamic strategy. There is the additional problem that target language equivalents of colloquial or socially marked speech cause excessive "friction" that detract from the work's specific national character - another important consideration in Zoshchenko's work.

I found in my assessment of English translations of Zoshchenko's short stories that, despite the mimetic aspect of his *skaz*, "dynamic" strategies were more damaging to the integral character of the originals than more literal and "quirky" approaches that distorted the target language in order to reflect the idiosyncracies of the original Russian. I instinctively preferred Monas's translations to all the others, despite the fact that his translations include several inaccuracies and do not show a consistent theoretical approach. My conviction of the superiority of Monas's translations did not readily submit to analysis and did not yield any very clear theoretical conclusions. I can only conclude that in the case of writing like Zoshchenko's, in which verbal humour is paramount, the usual standards applied to judging translations, such as

accuracy and a sensitivity to conventions of discourse in the target language, are less important than an intuitive sense of tact and humour on the part of the translator.

In discussing the translation of "Michel Siniagin", I argued that the "opaque" character of the style and its function of depicting the literary performance of an unreliable author figure once again encourage a cautious approach to the formal idiosyncracies of the original. It is important in translating Zoshchenko's style in this work to avoid a "lack of stylistic contour" in translation. Given that the Russian text consistently violates conventions of textuality, it is particularly vital for the translator to avoid unwittingly smoothing out the language and creating fluency that is lacking in original. Certain deliberate stylistic features of the text, such as excessive repetition and clumsy collocations, are the sort of features that can easily be overlooked and effaced in translation. However, superficial strategies are not always the best solution: in translating "Michel Siniagin", the translator should also be aware of associative aspects of the text, such as plays on set expressions, intertextual references, etc., which may require a more dynamic approach.

The idea of the "polarities of translation" may provide a useful starting point in discussing different translation strategies, but it is only a very rough and partial description of the translator's concerns. The free-literal continuum is a theoretical abstraction that leads to a misleading representation of the process of translation. In practice, the translator does not adopt a position on the continuum at the outset and stick to it: rather he/she batters out a translation by trial and error, constantly assessing the effect of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs, integrating them with what comes before and after, and considering the aspects of rhythm, repetition, intertextuality, etc., that the text throws up.

## Chapter 4: Different Versions of the Text of "Michel Siniagin"

### Introduction

The decision as to what constitutes the definitive version of a literary text - the earliest existing version or the final revision approved for publication by the author - depends to a large extent on the circumstances surrounding its publication and also, to a certain extent, on the author's method of working. In the case of Zoshchenko, there is evidence to show that revisions made to his works in later editions were not made freely by the author, but were due to ideological pressure and editorial interference. In a letter of 1935 to the critic Evgeniia Zhurbina, Zoshchenko complained about censorship of *The Blue Book*, claiming that the editor had "cramped him terribly" and "rouged his cheeks":

«Голубая книга» наконец вышла, по крайней мере один (контрольный) экземпляр у меня. Снова и не без огорчения увидел, что редактор ужасно меня «потеснил». Тут все вместе - и я был сам довольно строг к себе, и редактор...В общем, получилось, что мне подрумянили щеки, выкинув все мои словечки: может быть, пожалуй, возможно и т.д. Например, у меня сказано: «Неудачи будут исчезать» - исправлено «Неудачи исчезают». Очень досадно. Общий тон несколько сместился. Возможно, что читатель так резко не заметит, но я чувствую это не без боли. В общем, смешно думать о настоящей сатире. Недаром я (посмотрите) написал, что меняю курс литературного корабля...<sup>1</sup>

*The Blue Book* had to undergo much more rigorous censorship than "Michel Siniagin". By 1935, when *The Blue Book* was published, the Soviet Union had entered the era of intensified censorship that was to peak in 1946-1953. The censor's corrections to *The Blue Book* are the subject of a detailed study by S. Pecherskii, who points out that the changes made reflect both official Party decrees on various issues and unwritten taboos of which the perceptive censor would be aware. Thus they help to build up a general picture of the ideological climate of the period.<sup>2</sup> However, the

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<sup>1</sup>E. Zhurbina, "Put' isteleniia", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, St Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>S. Pecherskii, "Tsenzorskaia pravka "Goluboi knigi" M.M. Zoshchenko", *Minuvshee, Istoricheskii almanakh*, 3, 1987, p. 355-91.

practice of "rouging the cheeks" of writers had begun many years earlier than this. The central censorship body for printed works, *Glavlit*, was established in 1922 and all items intended for publication, with the exception of certain publications by Party bodies and some scholarly work, had to pass through its doors.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1920s, as already discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Soviet literature was on the threshold of an era of rigid state control, and a tightening of the screws was apparent in the literary press. In response to the worsening political climate the process of self-censorship by authors, who were well aware that everything they wrote had to pass the censor, would have become more rigorous.

Zoshchenko's comments to Zhurbina mention both these aspects of censorship - censorship from without by the editor ("редактор меня ужасно «потеснил»") and self-censorship with the editor in mind ("я был сам довольно строг к себе"). He also mentions that the *Blue Book* is not the first work of his to suffer from censorship ("Снова и не без огорчения увидел..."). A comparison of the manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin" with the first published version and later published editions reveals evidence that that work was also subject to a certain amount of ideological retouching, both from the author himself and from his editors.

Most of the corrections made to "Michel Siniagin" are in the order of editorial tidying-up. The impact of this should not be underestimated, however. As the letter to Zhurbina shows, Zoshchenko believed that by removing some of his "little words" ("словечки") and making minor changes, it was possible to change the tone of the entire work. The revisions made by Zoshchenko at manuscript stage suggest that certain features of the text that were "corrected" in later editions were actually deliberate literary devices. It can safely be assumed that their disappearance would have been a source of annoyance for Zoshchenko. An anecdote by Chukovskii suggests that Zoshchenko did not feel it necessary to follow other people's advice about correct Russian usage. Chukovskii remembers that on reading Zoshchenko's article "About Myself, Critics and My Work", he pointed out that the adjective "Karamzinovian" ("карамзиновский") was incorrect and should be "Karamzinian" ("карамзинский"). Zoshchenko thanked him but then thought a little and said, "No, I think that for this style, "Karamzinovian" is better".<sup>4</sup> If Zoshchenko regarded such "mistakes" as an integral part of his informal style in this article, there is still more reason to think that

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<sup>3</sup>H. Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik 1901-1929*, 2nd edn., Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 410.

when he used the surrogate author figure in "Michel Siniagin" he would have wanted the "numerous mistakes and errors" that he refers to in the introduction to remain in place.

A manuscript version of "Michel Siniagin" is held in the Institute of Russian Literature (IRLI) in the Pushkin House in St. Petersburg (f. 501). The script is in Zoshchenko's handwriting, written in ink and pencil in an ordinary exercise book and dated September 1930. Numerous corrections have been made during and after composition in ink, pencil and blue pencil. Also in the same archive is a typescript version of the story. This too is dated September 1930, but it differs substantially from the corrected manuscript version. There is no indication as to where the changes between manuscript and typescript originated: the typescript is clean and there are only a few minor corrections that look like the work of an editor (for instance in the phrase "город Ленинград отойдет к Финляндии или к Англии и будет объявлен вольным городом", the reference to Finland and England is crossed out with a question mark in the margin beside it).

The first published version of "Michel Siniagin" appeared in the journal *Novyi mir*, in December 1930 (pp. 112-40), under the title "M. P. Siniagin: Reminiscences of Michel Siniagin" ("M.P. Siniagin: Vospominaniia o Mishele Siniagine"). The chief editor of *Novyi mir* at that time was Viacheslav Polonskii.<sup>5</sup> The version of the story published in *Novyi Mir* corresponds closely with the corrected manuscript version. A book version of "Michel Siniagin" was published in 1930 by Petropolis, Berlin. The same edition was republished by a Russian publishing house in the following year, illustrated with photographs which purported to show the main characters (*M.P. Siniagin: Vospominaniia o Mishele Siniagine*, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisateley v

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<sup>5</sup>Max Eastman describes Polonskii as one of the few editors of the time who "struggled heroically...to hold up some genuine thought of art and culture out of (the) Stalinist swamp". (M. Eastman, *Artists in Uniform: A Study of Literature and Bureaucratism*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1934, p. 158). Polonskii was opposed to the idea of the "social command" ("социальный заказ") referred to by Zoshchenko in his article "About Myself, Critics and My Work". He defended so-called "fellow-travellers" like Zoshchenko, arguing that it was not always possible for bourgeois/intellectual writers to rid themselves of the spiritual heritage of their class upbringing. However, he takes it as understood that the ultimate goal of every writer is to create works that are "in harmony with the age" and that reflect the interests of the working classes. (see V. Polonskii, "Kriticheskie zametki: khudozhnik i klass (O teorii sotsial'nogo zakaza)", in *Novyi mir*, 9, 1927, pp. 169-76).

Leningrad, 1931). The texts of both are very close to the *Novyi Mir* version, with a few minor changes relating to matters of punctuation and inconsistencies in the text. The story appeared again under the title "Michel Siniagin" ("Mishel' Siniagin") in *Selected Tales (Izbrannye povesti)*, published by Goslitizdat in Leningrad in 1936. This 1936 version, which has formed the basis of most subsequent versions of the story, is more or less identical with the typescript version held in IRLI. The 1936 version was reprinted almost unchanged in the three-volume edition of *Collected Works (Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh)*, edited by Iu. V. Tomashevskii. (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986). Given that both the manuscript and the typescript held in IRLI bear the same date, it is a mystery why earlier published versions of the story correspond with the corrected manuscript and later editions with the typescript.

I chose to consider the earliest printed version of the text - the 1930 *Novyi mir* version, as the most reliable, as it corresponds with the corrected draft in Zoshchenko's own handwriting, and as it is not clear who revised the text for the typescript. Analysis of the different versions suggests that this is the least artistically and politically compromised version of the story. Some of the differences in the successive versions of "Michel Siniagin" will be discussed below, together with possible reasons for these changes.

Not only is there evidence of external censorship on "Michel Siniagin", there is also good evidence of Zoshchenko's own self-censorship. An examination of a manuscript of "Michel Siniagin" shows that Zoshchenko made numerous revisions to the text at the manuscript stage, before the editor even saw the story. Many of these corrections are purely stylistic and provide some insight into Zoshchenko's creative process. There are also several corrections - and, notably, omissions, which are almost certainly prompted by the need to pass the censor: it is noticeable that several deleted words and passages relate to negative phenomena of the recent past (starvation during the civil war) to politically risky subjects (literary censorship, imprisonment of innocent people, and so on).

We do not need Zoshchenko's comments to Zhurbina to tell us that Zoshchenko engaged in self-censorship - there is striking evidence of it in *The Blue Book*. Zoshchenko included in *The Blue Book* revised versions of several well-known short stories that had already been published. In most cases, the endings had been altered in such a way as to soften the criticism of the new Soviet regime in the original works. A vivid example is the adaptation of the story "Electrification" ("Elektrifikatsiia"), also known as "Poverty" ("Bednost'"), which was published in *Krasnaia gazeta* in 1924

and re-published eleven years later in *The Blue Book* as "The Final Story" ("Poslednii rasskaz"). The story is about a group of tenants who become fed up with using paraffin lamps and introduce electricity to their communal home. In the harsh light of the electric lightbulbs the sorry state of their lodgings becomes blindingly apparent:

То бывало, утром на работу уйдешь, вечером явишься, чай попьешь - и спать. И ничего такого при керосине не видно было

А теперь зажгли - смотрим - Тут туфля чья-то рваная валяется, тут обои отодраны и клочком торчат, тут клоп рысью бежит - от света спасается, тут тряпица неизвестно какая, тут плевок, тут окурок, тут блоха прыгает.

In the earlier versions the story ends with the narrator lamenting about the new challenges that electrification has brought with it:

Эх, братцы, и свет хорошо, да и со светом плохо! Всю свою жизнь должны мы теперь перевернуть заново. Чтоб чистота была и порядка. Чтоб гниль и гнусь убрать окончательно. Все, что в темноте хорошо, то при свете плохо! Так ли я говорю, братишки?<sup>6</sup>

In the new, retouched version, the tenants take up this challenge and redecorate the house. A new era begins, people start to clean the rooms regularly after work, some even begin to behave more civilly, one starts learning French, others take up reading.<sup>7</sup> The description of the new idyllic lifestyle under the electric lightbulbs is not without its own ironic humour, but nevertheless it is clear that Zoshchenko drastically altered his tale in order to introduce the necessary optimistic note. If the story is read as an allegory about the state of the young Soviet Union at a time when electrification was seen as the answer to the country's problems, the moral of the story has become quite different in the revised version. Whereas the earlier story finished on a note of challenge and a rather pessimistic prognosis of the future, the new version suggests that almost all the necessary work has already been done. This is typical of all the

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<sup>6</sup>M. Zoshchenko, "Elektrifikatsiia", in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, ed. Mikhail Dolinskii, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991, p. 220-1.

<sup>7</sup>M. Zoshchenko, *Golubaia kniga*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh*, ed. Iu. Tomashevskii, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986, p.439.

changes made to the old stories re-published *The Blue Book* and, as Sarnov comments, it is remarkable how Zoshchenko managed, under editorial pressure, to achieve such destructive results with such efficiency.<sup>8</sup>

### Part 1: Corrections made by Zoshchenko to "Michel Siniagin" at the Manuscript Stage

As already mentioned, many of the corrections made to "Michel Siniagin" at the manuscript stage are artistically motivated and unrelated to censorship. A study of the changes made to the handwritten draft shows that on many occasions Zoshchenko deliberately introduced superfluous "little words" ("словечки") or alterations that made the text more longwinded, and illogical than in the first rough draft. This fact has already been commented on by Chudakova, who writes: "...in the manuscript of the story "Michel Siniagin" we can see a mass of corrections by the author, probably carried out during a single sitting. Here is none of the usual editing out and cutting down typical of writers' manuscripts; there is no evidence of the author striving to achieve a laconic style. On the contrary, there are many insertions, each of which serves one of two purposes (or both at once): firstly, to increase the length of a phrase, to make it more longwinded; secondly, to produce tautology, repetitions and other confusions ("несообразность")."<sup>9</sup>

Among the many examples of semantically "empty" words added at manuscript stage are the following: "какого-нибудь там знаменитого поэта";<sup>10</sup> "даже некоторая какая-то такая ненормальность"; "эта была серьезная и, так сказать, черновая любовь"; "голод и разруха, так сказать, сжимали город в своих...объятиях"; "и какие, собственно говоря, выгоды он может снять с этого дела"; "тут, между прочим, жил"; "не желая тем самым

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<sup>8</sup>B. Sarnov, "Razvivaia traditsii Prokrusta: Mikhail Zoshchenko i ego redaktory", in *Voprosy literatury*, 2, 1994, p. 89. The article discusses several examples of such self-censorship in *The Blue Book*.

<sup>9</sup>M. Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, pp. 67-8.

<sup>10</sup> Where it is not clear from my own commentary, the following system of transcription has been used in quotes taken from the manuscript: words inserted at a later stage are shown in italics. Words which were deleted are shown in brackets and italics. Words which are unclear in the manuscript are shown in italics followed by a question mark or, if the original is completely undecipherable, by the abbreviation (*ind.*). Irregular spellings are followed by "(sic)". The incomplete punctuation of the manuscript is reproduced uncorrected.

пропустить тетку дальше"; "но это, собственно, были последние волнения". For the most part these superfluous words emphasise the narrator's uncertainty and lack of eloquence. In some cases, they add a rather bureaucratic feel to the narrative.

Other changes introduce tautology, redundancy and longwindedness to the text, an important feature of the style of "Michel Siniagin" and the "Sentimental Tales" already discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis: "очень исключительной тонкой скифской работы"; "таких прекрасных, отличных поэтов..."; "и к его изящным движениям, исполненной грации, достоинства и чувства ритма"; "говоря и давая торжественные клятвы о том"; "и новое, неиспытанное отцовское чувство несколько захватила Мишеля"; он сошелся с очень такой исключительной, красивой женщиной"; назвав ее гадиной и корыстной канальей"; "поскандалив и поругавшись на разные темы"; "кусая и грызя свои ногти"; "в любую погоду поминутно снимать шапку, застуживая этим свою голову"; "бросить такую исключительную и достойную даму".

In some cases, words and phrases added to the manuscript not only create repetition but disturb the logic or grammaticality of the original phrase or construction by adding a more incongruous word or phrase to what is already there: "таких прекрасных, отличных поэтов и прозаиков как Фет, Блок, Надсон и Есенин "; "она будто бы два раза видела Л.Н. Толстого, Надсона, Кони, Переверзева и других знаменитых людей"; "и даже могла подолгу поглядеть на его лицо"; "она несомненно и скорей всего прыгнула бы"; "на пальцах ее были нанизаны разные кольца и караты"; "мечтала перейти персидскую границу"; "со своей бывшей Симочкой"; "но молодость и цветущее здоровье сохранили ему жизнь". Some words and phrases were amended so that the result is clumsier or more incongruous. For instance, the original "автор не делает из этого драмы" became "автор не делает из этого мелодрамы", which skews the fixed expression slightly and makes it more comical; "нежно любил" (of Michel's love of Fet, Blok and other poets) was altered to "сильно любил" - an even less apt choice in the circumstances. When Simochka is portrayed declaring that she will help Michel if he ever needs her, the text originally had "она с радостью отзывается на его зов". This became the more prosaic and less appropriate "она с радостью отзывается на его приглашение". Elsewhere, "довольно сносно" was altered to the oxymoronic "довольно прекрасно"; "сошла с ума" was changed to the colloquial and ungrammatical "сдвинулась в своем уме"; Michel's "servile smile" ("подобострастная улыбка") during his

period of begging on the street became the incongruous "friendly smile" ("приветливая улыбка") in the corrected manuscript draft.

Beyond these changes, Zoshchenko made several corrections which affect the theme, plot or characterisation of the story rather than the stylistic character of the narrative. Some of these were apparently motivated by artistic concerns and they are unlikely to be connected to censorship. One observation that can be made about these changes is that many of them seem to have been made for the purpose of reducing the emotional impact of the text. On several occasions, emotionally charged expressions were removed in favour of neutral or even rather cynical alternatives. In the description of the madhouse on the Priazhka, "желтый и отвратительный дом" was corrected to "желтый и малокрасивый дом"; "вспоминая про свою несчастную тетку" was amended to "вспоминая про свою тетку" (line 1006). Where the manuscript originally read "автор не хочет сказать, что человек...стал деревянным и перестал иметь чувства и желания, любовь и так далее", "любовь" was changed to the more cynical "любовь хорошо кушать".

Several changes made relate to the description of Aunt Maria's madness. Whereas originally her illness was described in terms of paranoia and fear of losing her possessions, changes made in the manuscript make her mental decline seem less connected to actual events and less coherent. In the first stage of her illness, she was described initially as "пугливая и созерцательная", this was altered to "дрябловатой и нелюбопытной", "с трясущейся челюстью" - was amended to "с отвисшей челюстью". A short passage describing Aunt Maria's paranoid behaviour during her first spell of madness was also changed to similar effect. In the original draft, Aunt Maria became alarmed and started to wrap up some bottles and "other rubbish" in a handkerchief ("то вдруг стала испуганной и заворачивала в байковый платок какое-то барахло и бутылки"); in the corrected version she blows kisses to some unknown person ("посылая неизвестно кому воздушные поцелуи"). In the description of Aunt Maria during Michel's visit to the Priazhka madhouse, "испуганно" was corrected to "странно и хитро". It seems probable that these changes were made in order to reduce the coherence of the description of Aunt Maria's madness and to lessen the impression that she is a victim. Without the link between fear, loss of possessions and madness, Aunt Maria's decline loses some of its pathos.

Evidence of Michel's suffering was also removed at the manuscript stage: "Мишель чувствовал свое падение и сила этого падения увлекла его все глубже и глубже" was amended to the more neutral and rather bald statement "Мишель

понимал свое критическое положение". A description of Michel's contemplations of suicide was also omitted at this stage. The passage would have followed the description of Michel biting his fingernails (M. S., p. 134):

А (в такие минуты) он даже подумывал о расчетах с жизнью. И думая об этом в страхе и ужасе метался по комнате. Раз он даже пошел в аптеку и сам не зная почему и не отдавая себя никакого отчета спросил у стоящего за конторкой (какие меры надо принять) дескать сейчас повесился один знакомый и какие меры надо принять, чтоб спасти его.

And at moments like this he would even think about ending his life. And thinking about this, he would rush around the room in fear and anguish. Once he even went to a chemist's and, without knowing why and without giving any account of himself, he said to the assistant behind the counter (*what could be done*) that somebody he knew had just hanged himself, and asked what could be done to save him.

There are also several instances where phrases that elucidated some aspect of the text are deleted, with the effect that the reader has to read between the lines rather than having things spelled out by the author. For instance, when Isabella goes to visit Michel on his sick bed, the first draft made it clear that her relations to him had changed because his aunt's money had been spent and now his aunt has unexpectedly reappeared: "она еле разговаривала с больным, (инстинктивно) отлично понимая, что он для нее (кончен) (конченный субъект) более неинтересен". This was replaced with "она еле разговаривала с больным, пикируясь и капризничая". An explanatory phrase was also deleted in the account of the tenants' changing relations with Michel: "жильцы, поняв все дело, судачили о всяких превратностях судьбы". The phrase "поняв все дело" was deleted.

One of the more significant omissions at the manuscript stage was the complete removal of a minor character, an example of the "beast" type in Zoshchenko's work. In the original draft there was a passage describing a drunkard and down-and-out with whom Michel becomes friendly during his time at the doss-house, a former Guards captain, Khladovskii. The passage would have followed the sentence that describes Michel's altered behaviour, ending "и даже участвуя в драках":

В это время в этом ночлежном доме особенно свирепствовал знаменитый, всегда пьяный и опустившийся человек, бывший гвардейский капитан Хладовский.

Это был такой небольшого роста рыжеватый субъект, сифилитик и сукин сын. Самые невозможные вещи он учинял с ночлежками. То он бросал кусок мыла в чай, то предлагал кому-нибудь папироску начиненную спичечными головками.

При этом он страшно хохотал, тряс всем телом и видимо получал огромное удовольствие.

Он нищенствовал, вернее, он пел на улицах совершенно устрашающим голосом разные народные песни.

При чем, не имел ни слуха ни голоса и его пенье было похоже скорее на рев какого-то допотопного чудовища.

Прохожие кидали ему деньги и, конфузясь за столь необычную профессию, старались поскорее смыться с его глаз.

Этот гвардеец подружился с Мицелем, но в пьяном виде нещадно его бил и учинял над ним всевозможные вещи.

At that time, a notorious figure ran amuck in the same dosshouse, a drunk and down-and-out and a former Captain of the Guards, Khladovskii.

He was a smallish, red-haired character, a syphilitic and son of a bitch. He would do the most horrible things to the other dossers. Now he would put soap in their tea, now he would offer them cigarettes stuffed with match-heads.

At this he would guffaw terribly, shaking all over and evidently deriving great satisfaction from the joke.

He begged, or rather, he sang various folk-songs on the street in an absolutely terrifying voice.

Moreover, he had no ear for music and no voice, and his singing was more like the bellowing of a prehistoric monster.

Passers-by would toss him coins and, rather disconcerted by such an unusual profession, they would try to run away out of his sight as soon as possible.

This guardsman made friends with Michel, but when he was drunk he would beat Michel mercilessly and do all sorts of horrible things to him.

Whether this passage was removed in view of the censor - given that it describes the degeneracy of a "victim of the revolution" - is not clear. Perhaps Zoshchenko felt that it

described the realities of his hero's sordid decline too vividly and removed it for this reason, or perhaps he was simply dissatisfied with the character of Khladovskii.

Another group of changes to the manuscript draft were quite probably made with the censor in mind. Several phrases that could be construed as ironic at the expense of the Soviet regime or critical of some aspect of the present time or the recent past were removed during this early stage of revision.

In the passage about the Radiant Future a note of scepticism about the robust future generation of readers was deleted from the manuscript. Originally the line read, "И напротив того, если жизнь идет, как задумано, будет очень такое, что ли, здоровое, сочное поколение...". The qualification "если жизнь идет, как задумано" ("if life goes as planned") was removed. After the passage which describes how normal life carries on even in adverse circumstances ("И мы ходили с девушками в кино. И катались на лодках. И пели под гитару. И кушали вафли с кремом..." (etc.), a few words were omitted: "и воробьев не трогали. Овес один год ели, но воробьев не трогали" ("and we never touched sparrows. One year we ate oats, but we never touched sparrows"). This refers back to the narrator's picture of how the future citizen will imagine the present age ("он наверное, будет думать, что мы все время в землянках сидели, воробьев кушали и вели какую-то немислимую дикую жизнь"). It is possible that the reference to sparrows and oats was omitted due to fear of the censor, as it would have punctured the optimistic tone of the narrator's argument by directly referring to the hardship of the civil war years. In the passage about the 16th century, when the narrator describes how people used to fight duels almost every day ("Чуть не каждый день на дуэлях дрались"), the manuscript originally included the words: "И ничего. В тюрьму бросали безо всякой вины. И ничего" ("and it was nothing to them. They threw innocent people into prison. And it was nothing"). This reference to the jailing of innocent people would have been construed as politically risky even in 1930, before the escalation of the Terror later that decade.

The narrator's comments about the tendency of certain authors to exaggerate the sufferings of people who have fallen on hard times and his assertions that life is simpler also looked different in the first draft of the manuscript. In the corrected version, the text reads:

Автор думает, что ничего этого по большей части не бывает.

Жизнь устроена гораздо, как бы сказать, проще, лучше и пригодней. И беллетристам от нее совершенно мало проку. (М. S. p. 134)

Several sentences were deleted from this passage at manuscript stage and several changes made. The original version would have read as follows:

Автор думает, что ничего этого по большей части не бывает.

Повидимому это интеллигентская брехня, склонность к лирическим моментам и желание растрогать до слез своих читателей, в том знаете и дело что жизнь устроена гораздо проще и лучше, умнее и оригинальнее. Если так можно выразиться, гуманней. Нам и старость не тягость. И ногу оттяпают - привыкнем. И морду кислотой обожгут - ничего, и даже находим *утешение*? что бывает хуже.

"Clearly this is intellectual rubbish, a weakness for lyrical moments and a desire to move one's readers to tears, but, you know, the thing is that actually life is arranged much more simply, much better, more sensibly and more cleverly than this. More humanely, if we can put it that way. Old age is no big deal for us. And if we have a leg chopped off we'll get used to it. And if we get an eyeful of vitriol *we can comfort ourselves?* that it could have been worse".

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, this argument is a pivotal one around which "Michel Siniagin" is constructed. The comments deleted at the manuscript stage would have injected an obvious note of irony into the argument that "a rat doesn't suffer because it is a rat". After the changes were made, the general tone of the argument is more positive, and it is more probable that the reader will take the narrator's views as Zoshchenko's own, without any irony intended.

By far the most significant change made at the manuscript level was the deletion of a lengthy passage about the Golden Age. The passage has already been discussed in the introduction to Chapter 2 of this thesis. The passage pre-empted the subject matter and the general argument of *The Blue Book* in its presentation of history as an unending series of calamities and its refutation of the concept of the Golden Age. The following is a full transcript and translation of the deleted extract, which would have come at the beginning of Chapter 2 (M. S., p. 116):

Хвостистские настроения. О Золотом веке. О французском лавочнике. Писатель попугчик Сервантес. Золотой век литературы. Рождение героя. (...)

А может действительно пролог истории. Может быть через 700 лет про наши века скажут: древнее время. А которые были древние времена те скажут - пещерный быт или слоновая эпоха. А про пещерную жизнь ученые прямо небось побасеньки будут сочинять.

Ну да не в этом дело. Там разберутся. Тут у нас пока другие счета - со своими гражданами.

Вот сейчас довольно часто приходится слышать разные рассуждения, идущие конечно главным образом от людей, плетущихся в хвосте жизни.

Вот мол, дескать, какое наше поколение злополучное. Дескать попали мы в переплете. Засыпались в какое беспокойное время. Кругом, мол, борьба, классовые бои и всякие такие тревожные дела. Мол от этого становится скучно жить и приходится позавидовать нашим счастливым предкам, живущим в другие века.

Автора всегда удивляют подобные глупые (и мещанские) слова.

То есть почему такое вы думаете что раньше всегда были какие-то счастливые, незабываемые времена? Напротив. Раньше тоже не слишком-то давали спокойно и мирно греться у самовара.

Ну может, предположим, какой-нибудь там ваш дедушка спокойно прожил или там приобрел дачку на побережье и со спокойной совестью лежал у моря кверху брюхом. И может быть счастливый помер, окруженный внуками, любовно смотревшими, когда наконец закроет глаза старый пес, чтоб поскорей поделить его имущество и эту самую дачку на побережье.

Может быть не спорим и прадед ваш, не отличаясь большими умственными запросами безпечно (*sic*) танцевал кадрили и возил в Ниццу дамочек в дэлижансах. Все может быть. Но только автор подозревает, что золотого века еще не

было. Он безусловно будет, но пока скорей всего его никогда и не было.

Конечно какой-нибудь иностранец или там какой-нибудь французский лавочник, прочитав эти незабываемые строчки полезет на стену. А мы, скажет? А наша жизнь? А наша ровная, спокойн(ая)-енькая жизнь? Чем, скажет, у нас не золотой век наблюдается? Это, скажет, у вас революция и беспокойство и оттого вы на все криво смотрите.

Автор к сожалению не был за границей и не имел счастья поглядеть на иностранную жизнь. Но автор не очень доверяет таким словам. Прекрасно живут? Вряд ли. Не знаю. Не думаю. Ну ходят наверное разные чистые господинчики в манжетах. Ну, сигары курят и розы нюхают. Ну транспорт налажен? и водопровод. *Может выше пятого этажа воду подают?* А про общее благополучие вряд ли. Нет, автор не думает чтоб у них все было хорошо. Ну а если предположим хорошо. Ладно. Пущай. Пес с ними. *Хорошо.* Предположим на одну (минуту) секунду что у них хорошо и трудящиеся у них тоже розы нюхают. То давно у них хорошо? Давно ли у них золотой век расцвел? *Ach? (sic).*

Автор чего то такое читал, чего то такое в свое время перелистывал и никак не выходит что у них счастливая жизнь наблюда(-ется) -лась. Напротив того особо грубые и даже зверские страницы отводит безпристрастная (sic) история под ихнюю жизнь.

И знаете? на кострах жгли живьем. И руки рубали. И какая то у них Железная Дева была, сжимала в своих объятиях до потери сознания. И горячими щипцами за язык хватили. И за волосы к потолку подвешивали. И не тыщу лет назад это было, а весьма недавно. И только только в прошлом веке закончилось. Да и неизвестно закончилось ли. Может будущие историки копнут и еще что-нибудь (sic) такое незаконное обнаружат.

И главное за что все это было. За то что скажем в бога не так верил(и?) Или крест (не туда клали) не на то место пуза клали куда полагалось. Вот вам и золотой век.

У нас если чего и бывает и если какиенибудь наказания случаются так у нас хотя идея хороша, идея очень такая

*стоящая, привлекательная идея - равенство. А там ну! форменные пустышки.*

Так что не им упрекать и не им указывать, и не им говорить что мы криво смотрим. *Криво!*

Автор извиняется конечно, что он грубо говорит, но уж очень знаете обидно. Несправедливо. Каждый будет помыкать и указывать - что же так работать нельзя. Криво смотрим! Золотой век!

Какой там к черту золотой век. Разные набеги устраивались. Разные налёты. Гунны и так далее. Бабушку и дедушку небось в каждом веке *по несколько раз* вырезали вместе со своей семьёй. Разные народы с места на место передвигались как оглашенные по всей Европе. Только подумать. Вся Европа как на толкучке двигалась и тряслась целные пятьсот лет. (С места) небось от сладкой жизни (*не двигались бы*) этого не случилось бы

Нет какой там к черту золотой век!

Или для примера литература. Писатели. Да для писателей *уж если на то пошло* скорей всего сейчас золотой век, в сравнении с тем что было. Для примера такой крупный сочный сатирик - писатель попутчик Сервантес. Правую руку ему отрубили. Правда в плену, но отрубили. А потом приехал он на родину и жрать нечего было - поступил фининспектором. Ходил по деревням собирал налоги. А после левой рукой Дон-Кихота написал. И печатать не очень уж горели желанием. Пришлось почтительное вступление писать в пользу какого-то рыцаря.

Другой крупный попутчик Данте. Того из страны выперли без правды въезда. А Вольтеру дома сожгли. Где уж там золотой век искать.

А в прежнее время, если писатели золотого века (*ждали*) дожидались так во всей литературе кроме Евангелия от Луки ничего бы и не было. Ну может Бернард Шоу и (*Рабиндранат Тагор*) Мультиатули победно пришли бы к своим намеченным идеалам, а другие так бы и просидели, ожидая у моря погоды более счастливых времен.

Вот вам и Европа. Вот вам и красота и любовь к человечеству.

Безусловно прекрасная жизнь не за горами. Автор в этом твердо убежден.

Как в сказке развернется жизнь. И как в сказке засверкает улучшенная жизнь писателя.

Захочешь - пиши. Захочешь - не пиши. За все благодарить будут. Может даже особую благодарность будут в газетах печатать. Скажем накропал человек повестушку. На утро встал - благодарность в газете. В рамочке. Мол вот, такому по мерси. Мол вот спасибо, разуважил. Ни ругани, ни брани. Ничего такого оскорбительно. Ну там может какойнибудь безпокойный [*sic*] листок какиенибудь там левые загибщики и крикуны отметят в своем органе, мол, повестушка то собственно говоря неважнецкая, не в обиду будут сказано литератору и не следовали бы ее печатать. Но уж раз напечатано то ни хрена не поделать, приходится мириться.

И все так вежливо, неоскорбительно, достойно, без замечаний, мол, такого то надо выкинуть к свиньям собачьим за борт корабля. Очень заманчивые перспективы рисуются автору.

Автор сердечно извиняется за то что он все еще не мог приступить к делу и начать обещанные воспоминания.

Но сейчас собравшийся с мыслями и отбросив свои мечтания, автор приступит к своим запискам о М. П. Синягине.

Или вотэтот М. П. Синягин. В будущей жизни - розами был бы (*ind.*) усыпан его путь, конечно при условии что будущая жизнь исправила бы все его крупные недостатки и мещанские наклонности. И имея такие недостатки, он естественно что пришелся сейчас не ко двору, со своей нежной поэтической душой. И в этом смысле автор за него не заступает.

В этом смысле автор, как безстрастный [*sic*] (спокойный) летописец будет нести свои обязанности.

Rearguard Attitudes. The Golden Age. A French Shopkeeper. Cervantes: Writer and Fellow-Traveller. The Golden Age of Literature. (Our Hero is Born., etc.)

Who knows, maybe this really is just a prologue to the story. Maybe in 700 years time people will call our time ancient history. And what used to

be ancient history they'll call the Stone Age or the Elephantine Era. And as for the real Stone Age, historians will just make up fairy-tales about it.

Still, that's not the point. They can sort it out for themselves.

Meanwhile, we have another bone to pick. With our own citizens, today.

These days one often hears various remarks, coming mainly, it has to be said, from those people who tag along in the rearguard of life. "Just look at our unfortunate generation", they say. "We copped it all right," they say. "landing in troubled times like these. All around, struggles, class fights and all sorts of worrying things. Thanks to which," they say, "it is not much fun to be alive and we can only envy our ancestors who had the luck to live in other ages".

The author has always been amazed by stupid, (*bourgeois*) comments like this.

Excuse me, but what makes you think that days gone by were always such happy, unforgettable times? Far from it. In days gone by, it wasn't always so easy to sit warming yourself by the samovar.

All right, perhaps some grandfather of yours lived peacefully maybe, or acquired a dacha by the seaside and lay around on the beach with a clear conscience, sunning his belly. And maybe he died happy, surrounded by his grandsons, who stood fondly watching for when the old dog would croak, and they could get on with the business of sharing out his property, including the aforementioned dacha by the seaside, as soon as possible.

And we don't deny that perhaps your great-grandfather, too, not being a man of massive intellectual needs, merrily danced the quadrille and took young ladies off to Nice in cabriolets. All that's as may be. But nevertheless the author suspects that there has never yet been a Golden Age. There will definitely be one at some point, but so far it has probably never happened yet.

Of course, on reading these unforgettable words some foreigner or other, some French shopkeeper or other, will probably start climbing the walls.

"And what about us?" he'll say. "What about our life? What about our nice, peaceful little old life? What makes you think we aren't witnessing a Golden Age over here? It's your country," he'll say "that has a revolution and unrest and all that, that's why you look at everything back to front".

Unfortunately the author has never been abroad and has not had the pleasure of having a look at life in foreign parts. But the author is not inclined to believe all this. So life is wonderful over there, is it? Not likely. The author doesn't know, but he doubts it somehow. All right, maybe there

are lots of nice clean little gents walking about in cuffs. Smoking cigars, maybe. Sniffing roses. And maybe the public transport works. And the plumbing. *Maybe you can get water higher up than the fourth floor?* But universal wellbeing? Not likely. No, the author does not imagine for a moment that everything over there is lovely. But even if we say it is lovely. All right. Fine. What the hell. Fine! Imagine for a moment that everything over there is lovely and even the workers go around sniffing roses. Then how long has everything been so lovely over there? How long ago did the Golden Age blossom over there, eh? Answer me that.

The author has read a thing or two in his time, and leafed through this and that, and as it turns out, you could hardly say that life has always been so jolly over there. On the contrary, impartial history devotes particularly rough and even brutal pages to that life.

They used to burn people alive at the stake, *you know?* And cut off their hands. And they had something called an Iron Maiden which clasped you in its embrace until you passed out. And they grabbed people by the tongue with hot pincers. And hung them by the scalp from the ceiling. And all this wasn't a thousand years ago but quite recently. And it only just stopped in the last century. And it's not even clear if it did stop. Maybe in the future, historians will rake around and turn up something else unlawful.

And all this for what? For not believing in god quite the way you should. Or for crossing yourself (*the wrong way*) on the wrong part of the belly. There's the Golden Age for you.

*(Over here, if anything goes on and if punishments sometimes happen, at least our idea is a good one. A very worthwhile and attractive idea indeed. Equality. But what do they have over there? Stuff and nonsense, that's what.)*

So it's not for them to condemn and not for them to give orders and not for them to say that we look at everything back to front. Back to front indeed!

The author apologises, of course, for these harsh words, but it really is very vexing. The injustice of it. Everyone bossing you about and giving orders - how are you expected to work? Looking at things back to front indeed! Golden Age indeed!

What sort of a lousy Golden Age do you call that? Attacks going on all the time. Raids. Huns and things. Most likely, in any other century your granny and grandad would have been carved up several times over *along with their family*. Different peoples went roaming about all over Europe

like nutcases. Just think, for a good 5 hundred years the whole of Europe was moving and jostling about like one big scrum. Why was that, you think - because life was so sweet?

What sort of a lousy Golden Age do you call that?

Or take literature for example. Writers. Actually, come to that, there is more of a Golden Age now compared to what it used to be like.

Take Cervantes for instance, that great, juicy satirist, writer and fellow-traveller. They chopped off his right hand. Granted, he was a prisoner of war at the time, but they still chopped it off. And then he went back home to Spain. And there he was, starving. So he started work as a taxman. He travelled about the villages collecting taxes. And then he wrote Don Quixote with his left hand. And nobody was exactly queuing up to publish it. So he had to write a deferential introduction on behalf of some knight.

Take Dante - another great fellow traveller. They booted him out of the country with no right of entry. And they burnt Voltaire's house down.

Where's your Golden Age now?

And if writers had all hung about waiting for a Golden Age, there would be no literature at all apart from the Gospel according to St. Luke. All right, maybe Bernard Shaw or (*Rabindranath Tagore*) Multatuli would have marched triumphantly to their appointed goal. But the rest would have sat about, *twiddling their thumbs*, waiting for happier times to *turn up*.

There's Europe for you. There's beauty and love of humanity for you.

Needless to say, the life of our dreams is waiting just around the corner. The author is firmly convinced of that fact.

Life unfolds before our eyes like a dream and like a dream, an improved life for writers sparkles on the horizon.

Write if you feel like it, don't if you don't. But whatever you do you'll get thanks for it. They might even print special acknowledgements in the papers. Imagine someone throws together a little story. Just think, he gets up the next morning and what does he see - acknowledgements in the paper. In a little box. Saying, merci and thank you kindly, you've made our day. No abuse. No insults. Nothing wounding. Well, all right, perhaps some provocative pamphlet or other, some radical loudmouths and gasbags might make a comment in their organ: "Actually", they might say, "This story isn't a masterpiece and it would have been better not to print it in the first place. But seeing as it has been printed there is sod all we can do about it and we'll just have to put up with it". And all this said politely,

decently, considerately, you know, without any comments like "This one should be thrown overboard the ship of culture to the pig's dogs".

Yes, the author sees very tempting prospects on the horizon.

The author excuses himself profusely for still not having got down to business and begun his promised memoir. But now, having put aside his day-dreams and gathered his thoughts, the author will make a start on his reminiscences of M. P. Siniagin.

Or take M. P. Siniagin, *for instance?* In some future life, his path might have been strewn with roses, (*ind.*) granted, on condition that that future life would have corrected all his major shortcomings and bourgeois tendencies. And thanks to those shortcomings he would hardly, of course, have found favour nowadays, with his sensitive poetic soul. And in this sense the author is not trying to defend him in any way. In this sense the author will perform his duties as an impartial chronicler.

There is a good case for arguing that this extract was dropped for censorship reasons. The general impression given by the extract is that it is an unsuccessful attempt by Zoshchenko's narrator to console himself with the thought that life has always been bad - both for ordinary people and for writers. The passage may be presented as an attack on the rearguard critics of Communism and lovers of Western European culture, but it is not optimistic - the pivotal section of the argument, which Zoshchenko crossed out separately before he decided to get rid of the whole passage, is the most politically risky of all: this is where the narrator attempts to justify "punishments" carried out in the name of social equality in the Soviet Union: "У нас если чего и бывает и если какие нибудь наказания случаются так у нас хотя идея хороша, идея очень такая стоящая, привлекательная идея - равенство." ("Over here, if anything should go on and if punishments should sometimes happen, at least our idea is a good one. A very worthwhile and attractive idea indeed - equality.") These words, following on immediately from a description of torture in Europe in previous centuries, could hardly have been expected to pass the censor.

The comments on the fate of writers in this extract would also probably have caused censorship problems, had they remained. While there are several allusions to the adverse critical climate for writers both in the published version of "Michel Siniagin" and in "The Sentimental Tales", the remarks here are rather more personal and have a more serious import than anything that remained in print. In Chapter 2 it was mentioned that lines from this passage were quoted almost verbatim in a letter to Gor'kii dating from the same year. In the letter to Gor'kii, Zoshchenko remarked that his study of writers at different periods had convinced him that he should continue to

work no matter what the circumstances. In the deleted passage from the manuscript, as in the letter to Gor'kii, the link between the treatment of Cervantes, Voltaire etc. and the latter-day treatment of Soviet authors like Zoshchenko himself is made explicit. The identification of Cervantes and Dante as "fellow travellers" makes this even more obvious. When the comments on Cervantes, etc., reappear in *The Blue Book* there is no such direct link with present-day "fellow-travellers". There is also a suggestion in the deleted extract from the manuscript that a writer might be seriously tempted to give up writing in the present circumstances. ("And if writers had all hung about waiting for a Golden Age, there would be no literature at all apart from the Gospel according to St. Luke.")

It is interesting to note that, had this passage made it into the published version of "Michel Siniagin", the narrator's attitude to his hero would have appeared more sympathetic. The words "Или...этот М. П. СИНЯГИН. В будущей жизни - розами был бы ...усыпан его путь" would have strengthened the argument for reading "Michel Siniagin" as the story of a victim of history rather than one who is doomed to failure because of his own inner qualities. The phrase "он естественно что пришлось сейчас не ко двору, со своей нежной поэтической душой" is particularly interesting, given that the phrase "не ко двору" ("out of place", "unwanted") has associations with the word "двор" - "court". The words are possibly a deliberate allusion to the autocratic character of Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union.

Another interesting point about the manuscript version is that when Michel's apartment in Leningrad is first mentioned, the name of the Moika river was changed to the Fontanka. Further on in the text, there is the letter "М" crossed out before the name of the Fontanka: it seems that the Moika was on Zoshchenko's mind. The original location of Michel's apartment - on the corner of Nevskii Prospekt and the Moika river, would have corresponded with the position of the Leningrad House of Arts where Zoshchenko himself lived from 1922 onwards. The house was, thanks to the activities of Gor'kii, provided as a shelter and working space for artists and writers in the city. Among the many famous writers who lived there were Osip Mandel'shtam, Nikolai Gumilev, Vladislav Khodasevich, Viktor Shklovskii, Mikhail Slonimskii, Olga Forsh and Lev Lunts.<sup>11</sup> (The situation described is in O. Forsh's *The Mad Ship* (*Сумасшедший корабль*). Khodasevich recalls that Aleksandr Tiniakov also lived in this house, in a part of the building reserved for the less presentable tenants. Khodasevich's reminiscences suggest a further link between Tiniakov and the hero of

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<sup>11</sup>К. Chukovskii, "Iz vospominanii", in Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.) *Vospominania o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, p. 46.

"Michel Siniagin" in the character of an old lady, a former actress from the Mariinskii Theatre, who shared a room with Tiniakov: just as Aunt Maria, a former dancer in the Mariinskii Theatre corps de ballet, shares her room with Michel. Khodasevich writes of Tiniakov:

Его поселили в том же Доме Искусств, в той части, которая была предназначена для неопрятных жильцов. Там он пьянствовал и скандалил. По ночам приводил к себе тех десяти-двенадцатилетних девочек, которые днем продавали на Невском махорку и папиросы. Его соседка по комнате, старушка, бывшая артистка Мариинского театра, жаловалась, что он стучит к ней в тонкую дощатую перегородку и ругается:

- Скоро ты, старая ведьма, угомонишься? Перестань ворочаться, дьяволица, не мешай! <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>V. Khodasevich, "Neudachniki", in Aleksandr Tiniakov (Odinokii), *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. N. Bogomolov, Tomsk: Vodolei, 1998, p. 9.

### Differences between Published Versions of "Michel Siniagin"

In between the first and second printed editions of "Michel Siniagin" some fairly extensive editorial polishing took place which tidied up several of the more unliturgical, illogical and ungrammatical features of the original. For instance, one of the features of the original, *Novyi mir* version is that numbers are written in digit form with rather comic results. For instance: "Для примера, на что уж был беспокойный век, ну, скажем, 16". This was amended in the 1931 version to "Для примера, на что уж был беспокойный век, ну, скажем, шестнадцатый". The same thing is done in the passage about the Scythian vase: the original "Смотрит в каталог - вазе 2,000 лет" becomes "Смотрит в каталог - вазе две тысячи лет". Apart from this, the only changes were changes in punctuation and spelling: the addition of a comma here and there and the separation of one word into two (for instance "нехватит" becomes "не хватает").

Much more extensive corrections are discernable in the 1936 edition, which in most respects follows the corrected typescript held in the archive of the Institute of Russian Literature. A correction made throughout this version is the amendment of "Leningrad" in the original to "Petrograd". This looks like the work of a responsible editor - after, all, the period referred to is the time immediately after the revolution, when the city was called Petrograd. However, in making this correction the editor unwittingly destroys a typical Zoshchenkovian device. Sarnov has commented that this anachronism is not only an artistic detail but an important characteristic of the typical mentality of the Zoshchenko hero-narrator. Zoshchenko's characters, according to Sarnov, live "outside history", untouched by even its most groundbreaking events. By way of illustration, he quotes from the story "Victim of the Revolution" ("Zhertva revoliutsii"). The story concerns a trivial incident with a watch that takes on much greater importance for the hero/narrator than the revolution itself. The story contains another typical Zoshchenko anachronism whereby, in the words of the hero, people running along the street on the day following the revolution tell him "Yesterday the October Revolution took place!" ("Вчера произошла октябрьская революция!")<sup>13</sup> As Sarnov points out, this official historical name is hardly likely to have been used in this way so soon after the event. Shcheglov has also noted that one of the deliberately "unrefined" features of Zoshchenko's style is "the transferral of the subjective, historically specific position of

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<sup>13</sup>B. Sarnov, "Razvivaia traditsii Prokrusta: Mikhail Zoshchenko i ego redaktory", in *Voprosy literatury*, 2, 1994, pp. 71-2.

the author into the reconstruction of the past."<sup>14</sup> Other examples of such historical "tone-deafness" in "Michel Siniagin" are the reference to the 16th-century nobleman with the Soviet "бывший", the non-standard reference to what is normally called the First World War ("Первая мировая война") as the "European War" ("европейская война"), and the description of what is normally called the October Revolution ("октябрьская революция") as "the revolutionary coup" ("революционный переворот"). Incidentally, a passage in the manuscript version that drew specific attention to the story's historical context was deleted by Zoshchenko. Soon after Michel's arrival in "Leningrad" he is pictured at a window watching Red Army soldiers down on the street below: "Он сидел по большей части у окна и, глядя на замерзшую реку, неопределенно думал о своей судьбе. Внизу ходили красноармейцы с винтовками и матросы раз'езжали (*sic*) в грузовиках, распевая революционные песни и гимны". The omission of this passage is perhaps another indication that Zoshchenko wanted to preserve the historically neutral character of the text and to detract from the importance of the revolution.

Many of the corrections in the 1936 edition were clearly made with the aim of making the tone of the original less coarse. The word "колбасилась" in the description of Simochka's mother was changed to the more neutral "носила" in the 1936 version. "Колбасилась", a favourite word of Zoshchenko's, is formed from the word "колбаса" - sausage/salami. It is a very colloquial word still in use today, meaning to hang around or to mess around. In this context its main function is to violate the literary tone of the rest of the sentence. The expression "арапская женщина" (also of Simochka's mother), was changed to "крайне энергичная женщина" in later editions, a much less offensive and neutral description. The word "спер" was amended to the less colloquial "стянул из ее имущества" in the 1936 version. Where the original printed version had "обзывая ее скупердяйкой, держимордой и сволочью", the 1936 edition had "обзывая ее скупердяйкой и держимордой", omitting the cruder "сволочь".

Most changes made at this stage elaborate on or explicate the text to make it both more intelligible and more involving. Points that are made elliptically in the original printed version are expanded on in the later redaction so that there is an impression of greater control and more moral interference from the narrator. For instance, in the 1936 version the point of the narrator's digression on the Scythian vase is explicitly spelled

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<sup>14</sup>Iu. Shcheglov, "Entsiklopediia nekul'turnosti", in A. K. Zholkovskii and Iu. K. Shcheglov, *Mir avtora i struktura teksta*, New Jersey: Hermitage, 1986, p. 77.

out in a couple of sentences that were added on at a later stage. In the original version, the narrator simply makes the point that the Scythian peasants depicted on the vase are almost identical to pre-revolutionary Russian peasants, concluding that smocks and bast shoes must have stayed the same from Scythian times right up to the revolution. In the 1936 version, the following remarks were added: "А если это так, стало быть, за полторы тысячи лет не имелось возможности получше придется. Поскольку заняты были. Работали на других" ("And if that's the case, it means that for one and a half thousand years there was no opportunity for them to dress better. Because they were busy. Working for other people"). This version makes the narrator's argument clearer, but to my mind it is rather heavy-handed. The impression in the earlier version is that the narrator has not fully clarified his point, but this incoherence is part of the narrator's general style. It contributes to the general ambiguity and openness of the story and makes his voice less authoritative.

Several changes were made to the final chapters of the story, the purpose of which seems to have been to increase the drama of the original and to make the end of the story more satisfying for the reader by adding a touch of emotional colour. These additions amplify points that are hinted at in the original. Again they result in the impression of greater narratorial interference and control and an attempt to direct the reader's thoughts and emotions. For instance, after Michel decides to return to Simochka, the 1936 version included an additional passage:

И вот теперь это случилось. Он больной, старый, уставший. Он нищий и бродяга, потерявший все в своей жизни. Вот теперь он придет и, став на коленях, попросит прощенья за все, что он сделал ей. Ведь это она, его Симочка, сказала, что она пойдет за ним и в тюрьму, и на каторгу.

And now it had happened. He was sick, old and tired. He was a beggar and a tramp who had lost everything in life. He would go to her now, fall on his knees and ask her forgiveness for everything he had done to her. After all, it was she, his Simochka, who had said that she would follow him to prison or to hard labour.

After the sentence "Несколько минут стоял Мишель неподвижно... созерцая эти старые и милые вещи" the phrase "Сердце его тревожно и часто билось" ("his heart beat quickly and excitedly") was added in the later edition. When Michel has been taken in by Simochka and her husband, a few phrases were added to sum up his train of thought: "Ну, что же, кажется, все хорошо. Кажется,

снова начнется покой и счастье. И думая так, он вдруг почувствовал голод...."- ("So everything was all right, then, it seemed. It seemed that life would be peaceful and happy again. And thinking thus, he suddenly felt hungry...").

Most significantly, the scene in which Michel and Simochka meet in the kitchen at night was changed. In the new version, the narrator mildly rebukes Michel for not understanding "some sort of unspoken question, some sort of longing and anxiety" in Simochka's voice: "Мишель, по простоте душевной, не услышав в ее словах какого-то полувопроса, какой-то тоски и тревоги, тотчас ответил". The point was expanded further by the inclusion of a short paragraph in which the pathos of Simochka's situation is made clear:

Поговорив так около часу, они разошлись, он, спокойный и почти радостный, а она, взволнованная, потрясенная и даже убитая. Она неясно на что-то рассчитывала. И она ожидала слышать не те слова, которые она услышала. И, вернувшись к себе, она долго плакала о своем прошлом, и о всей своей жизни, и о том, что все проходит, кроме смерти.

After talking thus for about an hour, they parted: he calm and almost joyful, she disturbed, shaken and even crushed. She had been vaguely hoping for something. And she had not expected to hear the words that she had heard. And, returning to her room, she sat for a long time weeping over the past, over her entire life and over the fact that everything passes except death.

There is nothing about this rather touching ending that Zoshchenko himself could not have written: in fact it is rather similar to the ending of "Wisdom" where the hero's sole companion weeps over his death. It is also consistent with Simochka's general role in the story as an unnoticed victim. It is rather strange, though, that the nature of these changes to the 1936 version is at odds with the alterations made at the manuscript stage. Whereas Zoshchenko's corrections to the manuscript reveal a desire to tone down the emotional colour of the story, here the pathos has been deliberately amplified. Whether this was Zoshchenko's own decision or one imposed on his work it is impossible to tell.

The last group of corrections made to the 1936 version of "Michel Siniagin" to be considered here are those that relate to politically sensitive subjects. There are not many of these - certainly far fewer than were made to *The Blue Book*. The reference to

Esenin was dropped in the 1936 version, so that the text reads "он сильно любил таких прекрасных, отличных поэтов и прозаиков как Фет, Блок, Надсон". Esenin had attracted adverse attention near the end of his life by making public attacks on Soviet Russia. As a result of his controversial political posturings, his work gradually disappeared from the public view after his death. Another omission of this nature was the reference to collective farms, which was dropped in the 1936 version so that the text reads "В настоящее время, когда самая...необходимая тема - отсутствие тары или устройство силосов". This was probably due to disapproval at the ironic tone adopted here towards such a serious subject. A further passage in which the narrator praises those who refuse to "live the life that is going" was also removed from the later editions. The original read: "Человек очень даже великолепно устроен и охотно живет такую жизнь, какой живется. Ну, а которые не согласны, те, безусловно, идут на борьбу, и ихнее мужество и смелость всегда вызвали у автора изумление и чувство неподдельного восторга" (M. S., p. 135). The new version reads simply "Человек очень даже великолепно устроен и охотно живет такую жизнь, какой живется". The reason for this omission is obvious - it might have been interpreted as a statement of support for counter-revolutionary activities. Finally, though the reference to the writer Isaak Babel appeared in the 1936 edition, ("она не была ученая девица, способная с легкостью поговорить о Канте или Бабеле или о теории вероятности") it disappeared from editions published after Babel's arrest and execution. This, like the omitted reference to Esenin, is clearly an attempt to obliterate all references to a "non-person".

## Chapter 5: English Translation

M.P. Siniagin

### Recollections of Michel Siniagin

This book is a recollection about a certain man, about a certain, as it were, small, obscure poet whom the author happened to run across over the course of a number of years.

The fate of this man made a great impression on the author and on the strength of this the author decided to write this, as it were, memoir, this, as it were, biographical story, not for the edification of posterity, but just for the hell of it.

We can't always write biographies and memoirs about great and distinguished people, about their instructive lives and about their brilliant thoughts and achievements.

Someone has to respond to the emotions of other, say, more average people, who go unrecorded, so to speak, in the Velvet Book of Life.

Especially as the lives of such people may, in the opinion of the author, themselves prove to be interesting and instructive to a sufficient degree. All the mistakes, blunders, sufferings and joys in a person's life are not at all diminished in size just because that person never, say, for instance, drew some delightful masterpiece on a canvas, called "Girl with a Jug", or never learnt to bang piano keys very fast, or never, for instance, located some extra star or comet in the firmament for the comfort and joy of the human race.

Not at all. The lives of such ordinary people are even more mystifying and even more worthy of astonishment than, for instance, the exceptional, unusual exploits and eccentricities of some brilliant artist, pianist or piano tuner.<sup>1</sup>

The lives of such simple people are even more interesting and even less difficult for us to fathom.

The author doesn't mean to say by this that right now you are about to witness something really exceptionally interesting - remarkable in the strength of its emotions and passions.

No, this will be an account of a modest life, and a rather hurriedly and carelessly written account at that, with a great many errors and mistakes. The author tried his best, of course, but he didn't have the, well, peace of mind, confidence, and love of various little objects and emotions necessary for a fully brilliant description. Here you will not find the calm breath of a carefree, confident man, the breath of an author whose fate is cosseted and cradled by a Golden Age.

Here you will not find beautiful phrases, daring figures of speech and wonder at the magnificence of nature.

No - you will find here only an honest account of a life. Besides, the rather fussy character of the author, his anxiety and his interest in various little details has forced him now and again to neglect the smooth flow of his story in order to sort out this or that topical issue or this or that uncertainty.

As far as the title of the book is concerned, the author is prepared to admit that it is a dry, academic title that does little for the heart or mind. But the author has left the title as it stands for now. The author wanted to call this book something else, something like, for instance, "In Life's Clutches" or "Life Begins the Day After Tomorrow". However, he didn't have the confidence or the cheek to do so. Besides, these titles were probably already in literary use and the author was unable to think of a new one, being rather short on wit and imagination.

It is also necessary to point out that at some point in the future the author will probably publish these memoirs as a separate book, illustrated with photographs of the main characters - that is to say, M.P. Siniagin, his wife, mother and aunt.<sup>2</sup>

1.

A Hundred Years From Now. About Our Day and Age. About Adaptability.

About Duels. About Stockings. Prologue To The Story.<sup>3</sup>

You know, in the future - in, say, for instance, a hundred years from now or maybe a bit less, when things have finally settled themselves down and sorted themselves out, and life shines with fantastic brilliance, one of our citizens - you know, one of our future citizens with a little moustache, in a nice little sort of beige suede suit, or, say, for instance, silk evening-pyjamas - might, who knows, pick up this humble little book of ours and lie down with it on his chaise-longue.

He'll lie down on a morocco leather chaise-longue, or, say, for instance, some kind of ottoman or soft pouffe, prop his perfumed head on his clean hands and, after meditating slightly on beautiful things, open the book.

"I wonder," he'll go, partaking of a toffee, "how they used to live back then, in their day?"

And his beautiful young spouse, or, let's say, his, for instance, lady wife, will be sitting right next to him in a sort of exceptional peignoir.

"Andreas, or Theodore or whatever", she'll go, wrapping her peignoir tighter, "D'you really need," she'll go, "to read that sort of crap? You'll only get yourself all worked up," she'll go, "just before bedtime".

And then maybe she'll go over to the bookcase and take down some little book in a coloured satin binding - poems by some sort of famous poet - and start reading aloud:

A lily swayed on my window-sill

I am all a-dither

Oh Love! Oh Love! My sweet Idyll,

I am going thither.

No sooner does the author imagine for a moment this watercolour tableau than the pen drops from his hands - he just doesn't feel like writing, and that's that.

Of course, the author isn't claiming that scenes of this sort will definitely be witnessed in the future. No, in fact it's quite unlikely. This is just the imagining of a moment. You could only count on it about half a percent. And we're more likely to see something completely different, a really sort of healthy, juicy new race. You know, great big, bronzed, strapping fellows, dressed modestly, but simply, without any particular pretensions to luxury or finery.

Besides, maybe they won't read poxy little lyric poems like that at all, or at least they will only read them in exceptional circumstances, preferring our honest, prosaic little books which they will take up with fully trembling hearts and with full esteem for their authors.

However, no sooner does the author start to imagine these genuine future readers than he once again runs into difficulties, and once more the pen drops out of his hands.

Well, what can the author hope to give such wonderful readers?

While offering heartfelt acknowledgements for the full magnificence of our day and age, the author is nevertheless unable to provide an appropriate literary work depicting our epoch in its entirety. Maybe the author has wasted his brains on petty, everyday, bourgeois matters<sup>4</sup> and various personal troubles and cares, but he is just not equal to the sort of vast work that might even slightly interest the esteemed readers of the future.

No, it's better to close our eyes to the future and stop thinking about new, coming generations. We had better write for our own tried and tested readers.

But here, once again, doubts come forth and once again the pen drops from the author's hands. At the present time, when the most burning, necessary and even vital theme is the collective farm or, say, for instance, the packaging shortage, or silage methods - it might be just plain tactless to write just some old stuff, you know, about the emotions of people, which, essentially speaking, do not even play a role in the complex mechanism of our age.

The reader may just call the author a swine.

"Oi!", he'll say. "We've got another one here," he'll say. "Describing, emotions, the bastard. Just wait," he'll say, "Next minute he'll be churning out poems about daisies".

But no, the author is not going to start writing about daisies. The author is going to write a story, in his opinion, a highly necessary story, which, so to speak, takes stock of the past, a story about a certain insignificant poet who happened to live in our day and age.

Of course, the author expects to receive some harsh criticism in this respect on the part of young and frivolous critics who take a superficial view of literary facts such as these.

However, the author's conscience is clear. The author has not neglected the other literary front and is not above writing about absenteeism, about silage and about the abolition of illiteracy. And, in fact, humble work of this sort is just cut out for the author.

And yet, having said this, the author nevertheless possesses the most extraordinary desire to write down as quick as possibly his reminiscences about this man, for, in years to come, life will stride on past him, everything will be forgotten and grass will grow over the paths along which he strayed - our modest hero, our friend and, let's admit it, our relative, M. Siniagin.

And this last circumstance has made it possible for the author to observe all our hero's life, all the little things in that life and all the events that unfolded in the last few years.

All his personal life played itself out before the author's eyes like a drama on the stage.

At this point, our friend with the little moustache in the nice suede suit - if, god forbid, he makes it into the next century, will probably raise his eyebrows and shoogle about a bit on his leather sofa.

"I say, poppet," he'll go, stroking his little moustache, "That's interesting", he'll go. "It seems they had some sort of a personal life back then".

"Oh, Andreus," she'll go in a deep, thrilling voice. "Stop bothering me, for goodness' sake, I'm reading poetry..."

But you know, reader, in fact some character like that, with his little moustache, in the comfort of his untroubled age won't have the faintest clue about our lives. He'll probably think we sat around in caves all day, nibbled on sparrows and led a mad, barbaric existence full of daily catastrophes and horrors.

Of course, it must be said that many people had no so-called personal lives to speak of, but gave all their strength and will towards the sake of their ideas and the desire to achieve their goals.

But the smaller ones among us did their best to adapt, to adjust themselves and to fall into step with the times, in order to live a little more comfortably and eat a little better.

And life went on. There was love and jealousy, and there was child-birth, and various great maternal feelings and various other wonderful emotions of that type. And we went out with girls to the pictures. And rowed about in boats. And sang to the guitar. And ate wafers with cream filling. And wore fashionable socks with ribbing. And danced the foxtrot to the old grand piano at home. . .

Yes, life went on in its own quiet way, just as it always does in all circumstances.

And those who loved that life adapted to it and settled into it as well as they could.

You see, every age, so to speak, has its own psychology. And in every age, so far, life has been equally easy and equally difficult.

For instance, take some really troubled century like, say, the 16th. For us, looking at it from a distance - it's downright unthinkable. Back then, they fought duels almost every day. They threw visitors off towers, for no reason. And it was nothing. All in a day's work.

For us now, with our psychology, it's downright scary even thinking about their life back then. For instance, imagine some feudal bastard, some old viscount, say, or some bygone count, going off, for instance, for a stroll.

Well, he's going off for a stroll, and so, of course, he pins on his sword. Any minute, god forbid,<sup>5</sup> someone might shove into him in the street or call him an interesting name - he'll have to fight right there on the spot. And it's nothing to him.

Off he goes, without a trace of sadness or panic written on his fat face. Far from it, maybe he even goes off smiling and whistling a little tune.

Well maybe he gives his wife a careless peck goodbye. Well, he goes, *ma cheree*, I'm off, like, for a stroll.

And she doesn't bat an eyelid.

"All right", she goes, "Mind", she goes, don't be late for your dinner".

In our day and age a wife would sob and cling to her husband's legs and beg him not to go out, or at least to guarantee her a decent livelihood. But back then things were calmer and simpler. You took your little old sword, sharpened it if it was blunt from your last skirmish, and off you went for a stroll before dinner, with every chance of a duel or a confrontation.

It has to be said that if the author had lived in that era you could not have smoked him out of the house by force. He would have just sat at home all his life, right up until the present day.

Yes, from our point of view, life back then was not so attractive. But back then they didn't even notice and just laughed it off. And even went out visiting - to people with towers.

So in this sense, human beings are very wonderfully designed. They live beautifully whatever life is on offer. And those who can't, of course, move over and get out from under everybody's feet. In this sense, life has very strict laws and we can't all lie down in its path and beg to differ.

So anyway let us now turn to the main account, which, let's face it, is the reason why this book began in the first place. The author excuses himself if he has said

something he shouldn't or gone wandering off beside the point. You see, these are all really very vital issues and questions requiring immediate solutions.

And as for psychology, this is very true indeed. And history has fully verified that fact.

So anyway, now, with a clear conscience, we begin our reminiscences of a man who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the course of his narrative the author will be obliged to write about a variety of painful things, sad emotions, hardship and poverty.

But the author begs the reader not to come to any hasty conclusions in view of this.

Some snivellers are liable to blame every ill purely on the revolution that occurred at the time.

You know, it's a funny thing, but it's not just a question of the revolution. True, the revolution swept this particular man from his perch. And yet, in a way, such a life would have been possible and conceivable in any day and age.

The author suspects that reminiscences like these could quite easily have been written about some other man who lived in some other epoch.

The author would like to draw attention to this fact.

You know, the author once had a room-mate. A former drawing teacher. He took to drink. And led a sad and unbecoming life. And this teacher was fond of saying: "It wasn't the revolution that did for me". "Even without the revolution," he'd say, "I'd still have become a drunkard or a thief, or got shot in the war, or had my face rearranged in a prisoner of war camp. I knew from the start", he'd say, "just where I was heading and what life held in store for me."

And these were precious words.

The author does not mean to make a melodrama out of all this. No. The author is confident that life's triumphant march forward will make it possible for us to live a life of ease. A great many people, after all, are busy thinking about this, racking their brains in an effort to satisfy the needs of mankind in this sense.

Of course, this is still just a sort of prologue to the story, so to speak. Life has not sorted itself out properly yet. After all, they say it was two hundred years ago that people first started to wear stockings.

So everything is all right. The good life is getting closer.

2.

Our Hero is Born. Youth. A Contemplative Mood. Love of Beauty. About Tender Hearts. About a Visit to the Hermitage and a Remarkable Scythian Vase.

Mikhail Polikarpovich Siniagin was born in 1887<sup>6</sup> on the estate of Pan'kovo in the Smolensk District.<sup>7</sup>

His mother was of noble birth and his father was an honourable citizen.<sup>8</sup>

However, the author - being some ten years younger than M. P. Siniagin - is unable to say anything particularly sensible about our hero's younger years right up until 1916.

Nevertheless, as our hero was always called "Michel", even when he was forty years old, we can well imagine that he received a gentle childhood, care, love and tender affection.

He was called Michel - and probably it would have been impossible to have called him by any other name. Other, cruder appellations would not have suited his face, his slender figure and his exquisite movements, full of grace, dignity and a sense of rhythm.

Apparently he graduated from grammar school and then apparently studied somewhere else for another two or three years. At any rate, his schooling was quite exceptional.

In 1916 the author - with 18 years of experience behind him was living in the same town as Michel Siniagin and thus happened, quite unintentionally, to observe the latter's life, becoming, so to speak, an eyewitness to many significant changes and events.

M.P. Siniagin did not fight at the front on account of a strangulated hernia. And at the end of the European War he could be seen mooching about town in his civilian mackintosh, carrying a flower in his button hole and an elegant, ivory-handled riding-crop in his hands.

He would walk the streets, always somewhat melancholy and languid, in utter solitude, muttering little verses to himself, which he composed in profusion, having, as a matter of fact, quite a passable talent, good taste and a delicate feel for everything beautiful and elegant .

He was enchanted by the melancholy and monotonous Pskov scenery, the birches, the brooks and the various gnats dancing above the flower beds.

He would walk out of town, take off his hat and, with a delicate, knowing smile, observe the little birds and mosquitoes at play .

Or watch the fat clouds moving by and, flinging back his head, compose appropriate rhymes and poems on them right there on the spot.

In those days there was still a fair amount of highly educated, intellectual people who had delicate emotional constitutions and a tender love of beauty and various pictorial arts.

It has to be said that our country has always had an exceptional intellectual class which was eagerly listened to by Europe and even the rest of the world.

And it's true, these people really were very delicate connoisseurs of art and ballet, the authors of lots of outstanding works of literature, and the originators of lots of excellent things and great teachings.

These people were not bourgeois-specialists<sup>9</sup> from the point of view of our understanding of the term.

No, they were just lofty, intellectual souls. Many of them had tender hearts. And some of them would even start crying at the sight of an extra flower in a flower bed or a sparrow hopping about on a dunghill.

It is all in the past now, of course, but it must be said that actually, in a way, there was even something, well, sort of not quite normal about all this. And without a

doubt, this magnificent flowering took place kind of at the expense of something else of some sort.

The author is not fluent in the art of dialectics and unacquainted with various learned theories and tendencies, and so he is not about to start looking for causes and effects in this sense. Nevertheless, roughly reckoning, it is, of course, possible to work a thing or two out for yourself.

Say that in a certain family we have three sons. And say we take one of these sons and teach him things out of books, and feed him on bread and butter, and give him cocoa, and wash him in a bath every day and comb his hair with brilliantine, and meanwhile we give the other sons next to nothing and deny them their basic requirements - then our first son might very well go a long way both in his education and in his spiritual capacities. He'll start thinking up little poems and getting sentimental over sparrows and talking about various lofty things.

You know, not long ago the author was in the Hermitage. Taking a look at the Scythian section.<sup>10</sup> And they have this really remarkable, durable Scythian vase there. And this vase is supposed to be something in the region of, if they are not having us on, more than two thousand years old. A very classy, gold vase. Very exceptional, fine Scythian handiwork. Actually, nobody knows why the Scythians produced it. For milk, maybe, or to put wild flowers in it for the Scythian king to smell. Nobody knows, the experts haven't been able to find out. And they found this vase in a burial mound.

So anyway, the author is looking at this vase when suddenly he sees this picture on it - a bunch of Scythian peasants sitting around. One old middle-category peasant<sup>11</sup> is sitting there while another one tries to pull his tooth out with his fingers, and a third guy is sitting there mending his bast sandals.

The author looked a bit closer - good god! But they were just the spit of our pre-revolutionary peasants. From 1913, say. Even their clothes were just the same - the same baggy smocks, cord belts. Long, tangled beards.

The author even began to feel a bit strange. What the devil. Take a look in the catalogue - 2,000 years old, it says. Take a look at the picture - one and a half thousand years less. Either the academic staff at the Hermitage are playing a dirty trick on us, or those smocks and sandals stayed exactly the same right up to the revolution.

With all this talk the author, of course, has no wish to denigrate the now extinct intellectual class he mentioned earlier. No, he simply wishes to make it clear what's what, and which of us has a weight on his conscience.

And it must be confessed, that class was really a very fine one, no offence and all credit to it.

As for M. P. Siniagin, the author, of course, has no wish to class him together with those people we have been discussing. But all the same he was himself, to a sufficient degree, an intellectual and lofty person. He understood many things, loved beautiful knick-knacks and took a constant delight in the poetic language. He deeply loved such wonderful, excellent writers of poetry and prose as Fet,<sup>12</sup> Blok,<sup>13</sup> Nadson<sup>14</sup> and Esenin.<sup>15</sup>

And his own work, which was not distinguished by exceptional originality, was also heavily influenced by these splendid poets.

And particularly, of course, by that exceptionally brilliant poet of the day -

A. A. Blok.

3.

M.P. Siniagin's Mother and Auntie. Their Past and Stuff. They Purchase an Estate. Life in Pskov. Storm Clouds Gather. Aunt M.A. Ar - va- Her Character and Inclinations. A Meeting with L. Tolstoi. The Poet's Poems. His Emotional State of Mind. An Infatuation.

Michel Siniagin lived with his mum, Anna Arkadievna Siniagina and her sister, Maria Arkadievna, about whom we shall hear in more detail presently, and who will

form the subject of a detailed characterisation and profile, as that worthy lady and widow of General Ar -v, will play no small part in our narrative.

Anyway, in 1917 all three of them were resident in Pskov, accidental guests of that splendid little town, stuck there for reasons not dependent on themselves.

They had come to Pskov during the war in order to move in with their respective sister and aunt Maria Arkadievna, who had acquired a small estate not far from Pskov at a knock-down price.

Both the old ladies hoped to live out their years on this estate, close to nature, in absolute peace and quiet after their rather wildly and gaily spent lives.

The ill-fated estate was even named in an appropriate fashion "The Haven".<sup>16</sup>

And Michel, that somewhat saddish young man, given to vague melancholy and rather exhausted by his work as a poet, and by the hustle and bustle of life in the capital with its restaurants, singers and punches in the gob, also wished to spend some time in seclusion in order to get his strength back before once again letting his hair down.

Everything, however, did not work out as planned

"The Haven" was purchased just before the revolution - about two months beforehand or thereabouts - so the family did not even have time to move in with their luggage and trunks. And so all their trunks, bolsters, sofas and beds were hastily and for the time being packed away into an apartment in Pskov belonging to some friends. And it was in this apartment that Michel and his ageing mum and auntie were subsequently to live for several years to come.

The two old ladies, being free-thinkers and having something of a propensity and a fondness for revolutions, did not become too hysterical at the revolutionary coup and the confiscation of the landed estates off the gentry. However, Maria Arkadievna, the younger of the two sisters, having sunk almost 60 thousand roubles into the business would sometimes groan and squat down and say the devil only knew what was going on as you could not even move onto the estate you had bought with your own hard-earned money.

Anna Arkadievna, Michel's mother, was a rather inconspicuous lady. She had done nothing to distinguish herself in her life besides giving birth to the poet.

She was a rather quiet, unargumentative old lady who liked to sit by the samovar partaking of coffee and cream.

As for Maria Arkadievna, she was a different category of lady altogether.

The author did not have the pleasure of seeing her in her youth. However, she was said to have been an inordinately sweet and pretty young girl, full of life, fire and spirit.

But at the time to which our story relates she was already a shapeless old woman, ugly rather than beautiful, but still very lively and energetic.

In this sense, her former profession had left its mark on her. She had been a ballerina and had worked in the corps de ballet of the Mariinskii Theatre.

She was even something of a celebrity, having attracted the attention of the former Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich.<sup>17</sup> True, he had abandoned her soon after, having made her a present of some special sort of moleskin tippet, some beads and something else of some sort. But her budding career was already established.

Both these ladies will, in the years to come, play a fairly prominent role in the life of Michel Siniagin, so the reader is please asked not to take it to heart or to get annoyed with the author for pausing for a moment on the description of these perhaps rather, well, decrepit and faded old heroines.

Our two old ladies also felt the effect of the poetic atmosphere in the house owing to Michel. And Maria Arkadievna was fond of saying that one day soon she would start on her memoirs.

Her stormy youth and her encounters with numerous famous people was well worth the telling.

She had apparently twice seen with her own eyes L. N. Tolstoi, Nadson, Koni,<sup>18</sup> Pereverzev<sup>19</sup> and other famous people, and she was eager to share her opinions on them with the rest of the world.

So, anyway, the family had come to Pskov before the beginning of the revolution and remained stuck there for three years.

M.P. Siniagin would say each day that he had absolutely no intention of hanging around in Pskov and that he would leave for Moscow or Leningrad at the first opportunity. However, subsequent events and changes in life were to postpone that departure for a considerable period of time.

And so our Michel Siniagin continued to dwell beneath a Pskov sky, occupying himself for the time being with his poetry and with a temporary infatuation with a local girl, to whom he dedicated his poems in abundance.

Of course, these poems were not remarkable for their brilliance, they were not even original to a sufficient degree, but the freshness of their sentiments and their artless, uncomplicated style marked them out from the general run of the poetic mill at the time.

The author does not remember these poems. Life, cares and troubles have driven the exquisite lines and poetic rhymes clean out of his head, but some excerpts and separate stanzas do remain in his memory due to the genuine sincerity of their sentiments:

"Petals and forget-me-nots  
Scattered neath my window lie. . . "

The author cannot remember all of this poem, "Autumn", but he does remember that the concluding lines were full of civic sadness:

"Ah, tell me why, why should it be,  
That everything in nature is  
The way it is? And why we see  
Nothing but sadness and misery..."

Another poem by Michel reveals his love of nature and the tempestuous displays of her elements:

### Storm

The storm has passed -  
 The white rose unfurls  
 Breathing in at my window  
 A fresh scent of wonder.  
 Tears in the grass,  
 Lie scattered like pearls  
 And away in the distance a rumble  
 Of thunder. . .<sup>20</sup>

The whole family learned this poem off by heart and the old ladies would repeat it daily in sing-song voices, thus affording its author the keenest pleasure.

When the family had visitors, Anna Arkadievna would drag them into Michel's room and, showing them his writing desk of fine Karelian birch, she would say, her eyes wet with tears,

"It was at this desk that Michel wrote his very finest works: "Storm", "Petals and Forget-me-nots" and "Ladies, Ladies".

"Mum", Michel would say, blushing. "Stop it!"

The visitors would shake their heads and, possibly impressed, possibly annoyed, they would run their fingers over the desk and mutter - "h'm, not bad".

Some mercantile souls would even ask then and there how much the desk had cost, thereby giving the conversation a new turn, less pleasing to Michel and his mother.

The poet also gave his attention to women. However, being heavily under the influence of the popular poets of the day, he did not just toss his feelings at one

particular woman. Instead he fantastically loved some kind of unknown woman, dazzling in her beauty and mysteriousness.

One delightful poem, "Ladies, Ladies, Why are You So Nice to Look at?" beautifully illustrates the poet's attitude. This poem concludes with the following lines:

"So that's why I admire a stranger. But when  
This stranger's no longer a stranger to me,  
I shan't want to look at her familiar face,  
Or on her familiar hand an engagement ring to place..."

Nevertheless, the poet did take a fancy to a certain concrete girl and in this sense his poetic genius was somewhat at odds with his day-to-day requirements.

However, in all fairness it must be said that this worldly infatuation was something of an encumbrance to Michel, who felt it to be rather vulgar and trivial. Uppermost in his mind was the fear that he might be trapped and forced into marriage, and thus reduced to ordinary, everyday behaviour.

Michel was counting on an altogether different, more exceptional fate. And when he dreamed about his future wife he imagined her as some sort of extraordinary lady, not at all like the girls from Pskov.

He had never pictured his future wife precisely, but when he thought of her he would imagine various lapdogs and various furs, harnesses and carriages. He pictured her stepping from a carriage as a footman held the doors open for her, bowing respectfully.

However, the girl Michel had taken a fancy to was a more ordinary sort of girl than this: Her name was Simochka M. and she had graduated from the Pskov grammar school earlier that year.

An Infatuation. Short-lived Happiness. The Poet is Passionately Loved. Widow M. and her Characteristic Features. An Unexpected Visit. An Ugly Scene. Consent is Given to a Marriage.

Although he may have been somewhat off-hand in his relations with Simochka, Michel was still fairly stuck on her, not, however, entertaining the thought for a moment that he might marry her.

No, this was only a simple infatuation, a love affair of no consequence, a love in rough draft, if you like - not something it would do to bother one's heart over.

Simochka was a sweet and even lovely little thing whose face, unfortunately, was excessively covered with freckles.

But as Simochka did not go too deeply into his life, Michel had no complaints about this and even found it very sweet and not out of place.

Together they would walk off into the forest or into the fields where they could recite poems together in sing-song voices, or chase after one another like children, frolicking and delighting in the sun and fragrance.

Nevertheless, one fine day Simochka felt that she was soon to be a mother, and duly relayed the news to her boy-friend. She loved him with a youthful, girlish passion and could even gaze at his face for hours without tearing herself away.

She loved him passionately and touchingly, while she understood perfectly that he was no match for her - a simple, provincial girl.

The news communicated by Simochka devastated and even scared Michel. He was not so much afraid of Simochka as he was of her mother, Mrs. M., a very energetic and lively widow burdened with a large family and notorious throughout the town. Mrs. M. had something in the region of six daughters and spent her time quite successfully and energetically organising husbands for them, stooping to all manner of tricks, threats and even assault and battery to achieve her goal.

She was this very dark, swarthy sort of lady with a somewhat pockmarked complexion. Despite this, all her daughters had flaxen - or even, to be more precise,

white-blond hair, probably taking after their father, who had died two years previously of glanders.

In those days, there was no alimony or marriage benefits and Michel imagined with horror what the possible outcome might be.

He could never marry her, that was for sure. This was not the life he had dreamed of and this provincial life was not what he had reckoned on.

It seemed to him that all this was temporary, incidental and transitional. And that soon he would embark on a new life, full of splendid joys and excitements, triumphs and achievements.

And as he looked at his girlfriend, he thought to himself that under no circumstances could he marry this white-headed, freckle-faced girl. Besides, he knew her older sisters: all of them had aged and faded very soon after marrying and this was not to the poet's liking either.

He was thinking of upping sticks and running off to Leningrad but subsequent events were to force him to stay in Pskov.

Widow M., that swarthy, pockmarked lady, came to Michel's house and demanded that he marry her daughter.

She came on a day and at an hour when nobody else was at home and, like it or not, Michel was forced to bear the brunt of her visit singlehandedly.

She entered the room and - somewhat timidly and bashfully at first - communicated to him the purpose of her visit.

Just as politely at first, the modest, delicate and dreamy poet tried to protest, but his words were unconvincing and failed to make an impression on his energetic visitor.

Soon the polite tone of the conversation became more energetic. Gestures ensued, and even ugly words and yells. Both Michel and the widow shouted at once, each trying to drown each other out and thus morally crush each other's spirit and energy.

Widow M. had been seated in an armchair, but on becoming agitated she began to take large strides around the room, moving chairs, bookstands and even heavy trunks about for greater conviction. Like a drowning man, Michel attempted to extricate himself from the depths, and refusing to surrender, he continued to yell and even attempted to force the widow physically out into the neighbouring room and into the corridor.

But the widow and loving, energetic mother suddenly without warning leapt onto the window-sill, declaring in a solemn voice that if he did not give his consent to the marriage she would, right this very minute, jump out of the window onto Cathedral Street and die like a dog.

And opening the window, she flapped hither and thither on the window sill, at risk of plunging to the ground at any minute.

Michel stood aghast and unable to think what to do, he ran to and fro, now to the window, now to the table, now, clutching at his head, into the corridor to fetch help.

Already a crowd of people had begun to gather in the street below, pointing and making all manner of daring speculations on the subject of the screaming, hopping lady in the window.

Transfixed by anger, outrage, horror and fear of a scene, Michel now simply stood, crushed by widow M.'s energetic character.

He stood at his desk and looked on horrified at his visitor, who was squawking shrilly like a fishwife and demanding a positive answer.

Her feet slithered about on the window-sill and the slightest careless movement threatened to bring about her fall from the first-floor window.

It was a beautiful August day. The sun sparkled down from the blue sky. A spot of light from the open window danced on the wall. Everything about the scene was familiar and sweet in its delightful normality, and only the screaming, squawking lady disturbed the usual order of things.

And greatly disturbed, begging the old lady to stop her yells, Michel gave his consent to the marriage.

At this, her ladyship promptly and readily stepped down from the window and, in a soft voice, begged forgiveness for her perhaps somewhat rowdy behaviour, adding a few words about her maternal feelings and sensations.

She kissed Michel on the cheek, called him her son and began to sob so as to demonstrate the genuine sincerity of her feelings towards him.

Michel stood crushed, unable to think what to say or do or how to get out of this new predicament.

He showed the widow to the door. Overwhelmed by the force of her character, he even surprised himself by kissing her hand and, already in complete confusion, bid her goodbye until they met again, blurting out a few disconnected words which had little to do with anything.

Solemn, silent and radiant, the widow took her leave, after initially powdering her face and redoing her eyebrows, which had been knocked to one side during the course of events.

5.

A Nervous Breakdown. The Poet's Literary Legacy. A Rendezvous. The Wedding. Aunt Maria's Departure. The Demise of the Poet's Mother. The Birth of the Poet's Child. Michel's Departure.

On the evening of that fateful day, after the departure of his unbidden guest, Michel wrote his famous poem, later set to music, "Pine Trees, Pine Trees, Answer Me..."

This helped to calm him down somewhat, but the shock to his system had been so serious and so considerable that that evening he began to experience palpitations, uncontrollable fear, nausea and dizziness.

Thinking that he was dying, the poet jumped out of bed with trembling hands, in nothing but his drawers, and in fear and anguish, clutching at his heart, he woke his mum and aunt who were as yet uninitiated into events. And without explaining

anything he began to babble something about death and about how he intended to give out his final instructions regarding his manuscripts.

Staggering to his desk, Michel began to pull out piles of manuscripts, leafing through them, sorting them into piles and indicating which he thought should be published and which should be set aside for a later date.

Long since unaccustomed to nocturnal adventures, the two elderly ladies bustled about the room in anguish, clad only in their petticoats, their hair loose, wringing their hands and attempting to persuade and even force Michel back into bed, thinking it necessary to apply a compress to his heart and to rub his side with iodine and thus draw off the blood that had rushed to his head.

But Michel, asking them not to bother themselves over his essentially worthless life, bade them consider instead what he was saying as regards his literary legacy.

After sorting out his manuscripts, Michel, running about the room in his drawers, began to dictate aloud to his aunt a new version of "Petals and Forget-me-nots" that he had not had time to put to paper.

Aunt Maria, weeping and choking on her tears, scrawled away by candlelight, muddling and garbling the stanzas and rhymes.

This feverish activity distracted Michel somewhat from his malady. The palpitations continued but became milder, and the poet's dizziness subsided, giving way to complete drowsiness and apathy. And to everyone's surprise, Michel fell quietly asleep, curling up in an armchair.

Covering him with a tartan blanket and making the sign of the cross over him, the two ladies retired, fearful for the poet's excessively nervous organism and his unbalanced psyche.

The following day Michel rose, refreshed and cheerful. But the fear of the previous day had not left him and he communicated the story of yesterday's upheavals to his relatives.

The dramas and tears were at their height when a note arrived from Simochka, begging Michel for a rendezvous.

Cool and haughty, Michel went to keep this appointment, not dreaming, incidentally, of bunking off or wriggling out of his promise, due to a measure of decency on his part.

The doting girl begged him to forgive her mother's undignified behaviour, saying that, although she dreamed of travelling through life at his side, she would never have stooped to such impudent demands.

Michel answered coolly that he would do as he had promised, but that he could not provide her with any guarantee concerning their future conjugal life together. He might stay in Pskov for a year or two, but eventually, in all likelihood, he would leave for Moscow or Leningrad, where it was his intention to continue his career, or at any rate to seek out a more appropriate way of life, adequate to his needs.

While he did not verbally abuse the girl, Michel nevertheless made her appreciate what a difference there was in - if not their social standing, which the revolution had made equal - then at least their appointed destinies.

The doting young lady, agreeing to everything, looked ardently at his face and said that she did not wish to tie him down in any way and that he was at liberty to act as he saw fit.

Somewhat relieved in this sense, Michel even began to say himself that the wedding was a sure thing, although he could not say yet when it would happen.

They parted as of old - on friendly rather than hostile terms - and Michel wandered home at a quiet pace, although the wound in his heart could never have healed so quickly.

Michel married Simochka M. approximately six months later, in winter, in January.

The impending marriage had a profound effect on Michel's mother's health. She began to complain of boredom with life and emptiness and sank and faded by the hour, all but confined to her samovar.

People had rather different ideas about marriage in those days,<sup>21</sup> and as far as the two old ladies were concerned, it was a single and final step, hallowed by sacrament.

Aunt Maria was also shaken. In fact she even seemed somehow offended in consequence of such a turn of events and began saying more and more frequently that this was no place for her and that she would leave for Leningrad in the near future and begin her memoirs and accounts of her various encounters.

Somewhat disconcerted by all these goings-on, Michel paced grimly about the apartment, saying that if only he hadn't given his word he would just forget the whole thing and take off wherever he fancied. But in any case, he wanted everybody to know that this marriage was not binding, that he was the master of his fate, that he would not give up his plans, and that, in a year or so, he would probably follow his aunt to Leningrad.

The wedding was a quiet, modest affair.

They registered the marriage at the Commissariat after which a modest service was held at the Church of the Transfiguration.

All the relatives on both sides behaved coolly towards one another, each side apparently offended for reasons of its own. Only Widow M., all powdered and painted, swanked about in her veil around the church and Michel's apartment, where the reception was held.

She alone spoke on behalf of everyone at the table, proclaiming toasts and speeches, heaping compliments on the old ladies and sustaining the cheerful disposition and polite tone of the wedding in every way possible.

The young bride sat at her place at the table with her head bowed, blushing for her mother, her pockmarked complexion and her shrill, relentless voice.

Michel maintained his cool exterior all evening. But deep down inside he was tormented by misery and by the thought that whatever anyone said, he had been trapped like a son of a bitch. And that this old gypsy of a widow had frightened him

into it , especially as she would probably never have jumped out of the window anyway.

And as the reception drew to an end, with a wry little grin, Michel leant towards the widow and, after the usual congratulations and pleasantries, asked her about it:

"You wouldn't really have jumped out of the window at all, would you, Elena Borisovna?", he asked.

The widow did what she could to put his mind at rest, telling him and even giving him her solemn word that without a doubt and quite probably she would have jumped, had he not given his consent to the marriage. But eventually, exasperated by his wry little smiles, she said angrily that she had six daughters, and there weren't even enough windows on the premises for her to go jumping out of the window for every one of them.

Michel looked fearfully at her angry, indignant face and moved away in confusion.

"It's all a pack of lies, pure selfishness and deceit," he muttered, colour rising in his face as he remembered various details.

However, the evening went off pleasantly and inoffensively for the guests, and then normal life resumed again, with all the usual talk of leaving town and finding a better life and of how it was absolutely impossible to build a decent future for oneself in Pskov, in view of the revolutionary whirlwind, which was now burning more furiously every day.

That spring, after packing her bags, Maria Arkadievna finally left for Leningrad, not long afterwards sending her family a desperately unhappy letter, in which she notified them that she had been robbed during the journey - her sac-de-voyage had been taken with some of her jewellery.

The letter was muddled and incoherent - clearly the shock had had a profound effect on the elderly lady.

By this time, Michel's mother had passed away quietly and suddenly, without time to say her last goodbyes or to give out her final instructions.

All this had a profound effect on Michel, who became a bit quiet, shy and even fearful.

Tears were shed, but this event was quickly eclipsed by another: Simochka gave birth to a feeble but sweet little child and Michel was somewhat overwhelmed by new and unfamiliar paternal feelings .

However, this did not last long and soon Michel began to talk once again of leaving, this time more realistically and decisively.

And that autumn, after receiving another letter from Aunt Maria, which he did not show to anyone, Michel quickly began packing his bags, saying that he would guarantee his wife and child possession of all his movables,<sup>22</sup> which would henceforth be entirely at their disposal.

The young lady, still as enamoured as previously with her husband, if not more so, listened to these words in horror but did not dare to oppose him, saying that he was at liberty to do as he wished.

She loved him as she had before and in spite of everything, and she wanted him to know that here in Pskov there was somebody who would always be faithful to him and who would willingly follow on his heels wherever he went - be it to Leningrad or into exile.

Afraid that she might try to tag along with him to Leningrad, Michel hurriedly changed the subject of the conversation but, sobbing, the young lady continued to speak of her love and self-sacrifice.

Yes, she was no match for him, she had always known it, but if some day he was ever old or lost his legs or went blind or was exiled to Siberia, then he could always turn to her and she would joyfully come running at his invitation.

She even wished trouble and misfortune on him, as that would make them equal in life.

Racked by pity for her, cursing himself for his faint-heartedness and for conversations like this one, Michel began to make haste to be gone.

During this time of explanations and tears Michel wrote a new poem, "Pray do not keep me, young maid", and began quickly and hastily packing his suitcases.

Michel had had only a brief taste of domestic bliss, and one fine morning, having obtained a permit to leave Pskov, he departed for Leningrad, taking with him two small suitcases and a basket.

6.

New Plans. Aunt Maria's Troubles. Michel Finds Employment. A New Room.  
A New Love. An Unexpected Catastrophe. Aunt Maria's Illness.

Michel arrived in Leningrad and moved into his aunt's apartment beside the Fontanka river on the corner of Nevskii Prospect.

For the time being he moved into his aunt's room, behind a screen. However, he was promised a separate room just as soon as one of the other tenants died.

But Michel was in no particular hurry over this. His head swarmed with other plans and ideas.

He arrived in Leningrad about a year or two before the beginning of the N.E.P. The revolution was at its height. Hunger and devastation gripped the city in a deadly embrace, so to speak.<sup>23</sup> It seemed a strange time to come to the city and seek out a better life and a career for oneself. But Michel had his reasons.

In the letter she had written, Aunt Maria had notified Michel in her careless way that some time in the next few months Leningrad would most probably pass over to Finland or England and be declared a free city. At that time, rumours of this sort were rife among the population and Michel, excited by this communication, had made haste to go to Leningrad.

Aunt Maria had, moreover, notified Michel that she had by no means renounced her liberal views and was not opposed to the revolution. But seeing as the revolution seemed to be going on for such a long time, and she had been waiting three years now to get her estate back, well it was just an absolute disgrace and it was high time they took decisive action themselves.

And so on these grounds, Michel came to Leningrad and moved into the apartment on the Fontanka.

He found his aunt terribly altered. She was simply unrecognisable. He saw before him a much wizened old lady with a slack jaw and a wandering gaze.

His aunt informed him that she had been cleaned out twice since she had seen him last - first on the train and then here, in the apartment. Some out-and-out hoodlums had come with a fake warrant and pretended to conduct a search, carrying off almost all her remaining valuables.

The once lively lady had become a quiet, somewhat decrepit and apathetic old woman. She now lay around in bed almost all the time, reluctant to make conversation even with Michel. When she did begin talking, she would generally bring the conversation round to her robberies, becoming agitated and talking a load of absolute guff.

Nevertheless, Aunt Maria was not hard up. Around her neck she wore a beautiful heavy chain with a gold pince-nez. She had rings and carats of all sorts strung on her fingers and more possessions than she could spare in her room.

From time to time Aunt Maria would flog some item at the market and live rather splendidly for a while, helping Michel out into the bargain, as he neither had nor intended to have anything of his own.

The rumours about Leningrad becoming a free city remained unsubstantiated by anything whatsoever and in view of this, Michel was forced to think about a more settled lifestyle and about his future. And after registering at the labour exchange, he received an appointment.

He was appointed to a position in the Palace of Labour. And in view of the fact that he had no profession to his name and basically did not know how to do anything, he was given a pointless little job at the information desk. Needless to say, a job of this sort could not satisfy Michel's emotional and poetic needs. He was even somewhat abashed and even insulted by the job, which would have been more suitable for a carefree young girl. It was simply ridiculous for him to sit giving directions

about what room was where and where such and such a comrade might be found. It was a joke and a downright insult to his masculine pride.

Still, in those days it was impossible to be too choosy and so Michel shouldered his duties, vaguely hoping for some changes and improvements to come along.

By this time Michel had been given a separate room in the apartment which had been unexpectedly vacated when a certain famous poet Kh. had emigrated abroad.<sup>24</sup>

It was a delightful little room, also with a view out over the Fontanka and Nevskii Prospect.

This circumstance gave Michel fresh inspiration, breathing the ebbing creativity back into his veins.

After receiving his food ration from work<sup>25</sup> and a little extra help from his aunt, he felt in reasonable spirits and began to go visiting, looking up old friends and comrades in town.

That winter Michel was the recipient of two letters from Simochka.

Michel was disturbed by these letters but, while racked by pity for Simochka, he decided not to answer them, considering it better not to harrass the girl or to encourage any vague hopes on her part.

And so he went on with his life, seeking out new delights in it.

At about this time Michel formed an attachment to a really extraordinary, beautiful lady - admittedly somewhat vulgar in her movements and her behaviour.

This lady was Isabella Efremovna Kriukova - a very beautiful, even elegant woman of absolutely indeterminate profession and apparently not even a member of any trade union.

This liaison was to be the source of many new anxieties and tribulations for Michel.

Not having the means to afford a decent lifestyle, Michel now squeezed as much as he could out of his aunt, who was becoming more sullen and brusque every day and was now reluctant to let Michel into her room.

And during each visit from her nephew she would nervously follow his every movement, evidently worried in case he pinched something. She would give Michel only trifling pittances, and he would be forced to argue, shout and even swear at her, calling her a skinflint, a flatfoot<sup>26</sup> and a bastard.

This unsettled time continued for about a year.

Michel's beautiful sweetheart would come to see him on her French heels and demand greater and greater expenditure. And the poet was forced to rack his brains and stoop to all manner of schemes and ruses in search of the necessary income.

Michel continued to carry out his job, though his attitude was growing more and more careless and sloppy. Now he gave out information grudgingly, shouting at visitors and even stamping his feet angrily at them, telling particularly tiresome customers to go to hell and boil their heads.

He particularly hated the dirty, clumsy peasants who came asking for information, confusing and muddling everything and failing to make their meaning clear.

Michel would shout at them rudely, calling them bluefooted boobies and screwing up his face at their smell of poverty, their ugly faces and their crude clothes.

Needless to say, this state of affairs could not last long, and after a series of complaints Michel lost his job and, with it, his food ration.

In actual fact this was a serious blow and an absolute catastrophe, but the enamoured poet failed to see the storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

Isabella Efremovna would come to visit him almost every day and sing him various gypsy romances in a deep, thrilling voice, accompanying herself on the guitar and giving little stamps of her feet while doing so.

She was a delightful young lady, born for better things and a carefree existence. She detested poverty and hardship and dreamed of going abroad, something

she tried to talk Michel into too, as she dreamed of crossing the Persian border with him.

And on the strength of this, Michel did not bother looking for work but went on living in the hope of some unexpected eventuality.

And such an eventuality was indeed to follow soon after.

One cold, inclement morning, as Michel, prepared for battle, went to his aunt's room to ask her for money which he desperately needed, he was shocked to find the room in disarray, with everything moved from from its usual position. Aunt Maria was sitting in an armchair, fiddling with some tiny bottles, vials and boxes. On Michel's entrance, she became agitated and, hiding her bottles under a handkerchief, she began squawking and throwing whatever she was able to find at Michel.

Michel stood aghast in the doorway, afraid to go any nearer and unable to grasp what, in actual fact, was going on. A few seconds later, Aunt Maria appeared to forget about Michel and began to whirl about the room, humming snatches of ballads and flinging her legs about.

Then Michel realised that his Aunt Maria had gone quite batty in the head.

And shocked, agitated and fearful of what she might do, he pulled the door to and watched the mindless old lady through a chink.

She had suddenly begun making quite extraordinary, youthful movements. The habitual immobility of the last year had been replaced by a sort of mad gaiety, bustle and movement. Michel's aunt was literally flitting about the room. Tripping up to the looking glass, she began pulling faces and striking various attitudes, blowing kisses to some invisible person.

Michel stood amazed behind the door, mentally calculating what he should do, what action he should take and how, in actual fact, he might be able to profit from the situation.

Then, closing the door firmly behind him, Michel ran off to find the tenants' representative and inform him of the misfortune.

7.

Aunt Maria is Sent Away for Treatment. The Mad House. Happy Days. A Visit to Aunt Maria. The Definitive Disposal of Aunt Maria's Belongings.

The apartment in which Michel resided was a communal apartment with ten rooms and thirty or more tenants.

Michel did not have any relationship with these people. He even avoided them and did not attempt to strike up an acquaintance with any of them.

By the way, among the apartment's tenants were Mr. Elkin, a tailor, and his wife and child; R. - a factory accountant and employee of GOSTSVETMET<sup>27</sup> and N. S., a post-office employee, who was also the tenants' representative.

It was a Sunday, and all the tenants were at home in their rooms.

Trying not to make a noise and speaking in an agitated whisper, Michel warned the tenants' representative about his aunt's violent madness.

It was decided to call for an ambulance and pack Michel's aunt off to a madhouse as quickly as possible, as she posed a considerable danger to the other tenants.

Gasping, Michel rushed downstairs to a neighbouring apartment to telephone for an ambulance, which arrived with all due haste.

Two men in white overalls, accompanied by Michel, entered the old lady's room.

Aunt Maria, backed into a corner, refused to let them come near her, hurling things at them and swearing like a man.

The neighbours crowded behind the open door, volunteering advice and plans for the capture of the old lady.

Everybody talked in whispers, following the deranged old woman's movements with intense, undisguised curiosity .

The Brothers of Mercy in their white overalls, more experienced in such matters, both stepped towards the old woman simultaneously and, grabbing her by the wrists, clasped her in a firm embrace.

The old lady tried to bite their hands, but then, as is often the case, her violent energy subsided, to be replaced by a calm, even lifeless state of apathy. She allowed them to put her into a waterproof. A headscarf was tied about her head and, led by the hand, with Michel pushing from behind, she was successfully lowered downstairs and put into the ambulance, into which Michel, glancing fearfully at his crazed relative, also found a space for himself.

During the journey, Aunt Maria barely showed any signs of life and it was only when the ambulance arrived at the Priazhka river<sup>28</sup> and drew up beside a yellow building that she began to exhibit rampant behaviour, struggling and refusing to leave the ambulance for some time, swearing and shouting ugly words.

However, she was finally successfully brought out and led by the hand through a garden as far as the entrance to the building.

The guard at the gate, used to such goings-on, observed the scene impassively. Rising from his bench he silently pointed out which way to go.

They led the old lady along a dark passage and handed her in at reception. Michel filled out a form and left the building in a state of some agitation, having being handed his aunt's jewellery - her golden chain and pince-nez, rings and brooch.

He walked out through the garden. Once out on the street, he hesitated. Then he walked up and down the street for some time, looking up at the madhouse with fear and even horror, listening to the screams and yells issuing from the open windows.

He was about to set off homewards but stopping on the wooden bridge over the Priazhka, he turned back again.

Now the entire building, with its peeling dirty plaster, was in full view. Now and again white figures could be glimpsed behind the barred windows. Some stood motionless at the windows staring down at the street below. Others clutched at the bars, trying to shift them from their position.

In the street below, along the banks of the Priazhka, ordinary people stood craning their necks and peered up at the mad people with undisguised curiosity.

Michel hastily set off homewards without a backward glance, clutching his aunt's valuables in his hands.

The first few days of the upheaval passed, things settled down again, and life, as it usually does in the circumstances, went on.

Now unemployed and not bothering to look for work, Michel continued to lead a carefree existence. Still meeting with his sweetheart, he lived off his aunt's possessions which he had so unexpectedly inherited.

At that time, the N.E.P. was at its full height.<sup>29</sup> Shops, theatres and cinemas were open again. Fancy cabs had appeared on the streets. And Michel and his young lady were swept up in the mad whirl. They would appear together arm in arm in every restaurant and bar in town. They would dance the foxtrot and then, exhausted and almost happy, take a cab home in order to fall fast asleep, only to resume their gay, carefree existence all over again the next morning.

But sometimes, remembering his aunt as he frittered away her belongings, Michel would feel a pang of conscience. And each time he would promise himself to pay a visit to the invalid in order to take her some sweets and other goodies and thereby implicate her in his expenditure.

But the days passed, and Michel kept putting off his visit.

During that winter of dancing and merriment Michel received a communication from Pskov from the former owner of his apartment, now its tenant, informing him that his wife, after losing her child and remarrying, had moved out of the apartment leaving considerable debts behind her. She had left some items of furniture behind which the landlord would appropriate as his own if Michel did not send him the money owed within a month.

On reading this letter the morning after a drinking bout, Michel screwed it up angrily and threw it under the bed, in order not to be reminded of his past life.

And so winter went on, and one day in February, having flogged the last of the remaining valuables, Michel set off to pay a visit to his aunt.

He bought various comestibles and set off for the Priazhka with a heavy heart and a vague feeling of anxiety.

His aunt was led into the reception room and the two of them were left together.

Aunt Maria's violent madness had now subsided, giving way to a state of subdued melancholy. And she stood before Michel in her white linen smock stealing strange, crafty glances at her nephew and failing to recognise him.

After saying a few vague words, making a few energetic gestures of the sort mad people understand, Michel bowed silently and left the building with no intention of returning.

Michel went home with a light heart. And now he began to dispose of his inheritance with a clear conscience.

He was enthusiastically helped in this by Isabella Efremovna, who persuaded him to be less prudish and scrupulous over the definitive disposal of Aunt Maria's belongings

8.

An Unexpected Disaster. A Terrible Scandal. Michel's Nervous Illness. A Lover's Quarrel. Decline.

In April 1925 there was a spell of remarkably fine, clear weather. Michel, in his light overcoat, arm in arm with Isabella Efremovna, was leaving his room to go for a walk along the banks of the Neva and watch the ice floating down the river.

As he locked the door of his room, humming "Bananas, Bananas" to himself, he glanced at his young lady.

She was monkeying about there in the corridor, performing little dance steps with her shapely legs and doing the Charleston.

She was gloriously pretty in her light, spring suit, with her delightful profile and the tendrils of hair curling out from under her hat.

Michel looked at her lovingly, delighted by her beauty, youth and joie de vivre.

Of course, she was not the sort of educated lass who could talk freely on the subject of Kant or Babel<sup>30</sup> or the theory of probability and relativity. Needless to say she knew nothing about all that and had no particular talent for cognitive pursuits, preferring the simple, easy life. Her brow was clear and unfurrowed by the lines of thought.

Michel loved her with a passion and, comparing her to his old Simochka, was horrified to think how low he had sunk in marrying such a little hick from the provinces.

So, doing the Charleston and fooling about, they set off down the corridor and out into the hall, holding hands. Here they stopped to let by a couple who had just entered the apartment.

The first of these was a messenger with a book. Beside him stood a woman wrapped in a winter waterproof with a woollen headscarf tied around her head.

It was none other than Aunt Maria.

The messenger asked in a crude, boisterous manner if this was the former residence of the now fully recovered Mrs. A. and if so, would those concerned like to take the lady back, please.

Everything swam before Michel's eyes. He stood rooted to the spot, speechless with fear.

After somehow managing to scrawl a little squiggle in the messenger's book, Michel turned to look at his aunt, who, giving a bashful smile, gestured to her nephew in greeting.

Michel began to babble incomprehensibly and, backing towards the door, he tried to block the way, not wishing to let his aunt go any further.

Aunt Maria took a step towards him and began to make herself fairly clear, saying that although she had been seriously off colour for a while she was now almost fully recovered and that all she required now was absolute peace and quiet.

Realising the full gravity of the situation and not wishing to get in the way of the relatives' little talk, Isabella Efremovna, promising to call the next day, flitted, birdlike, out onto the stairs and was gone.

Michel, taking his aunt by the arm and attempting to stop her from entering the room, where nothing now remained except for some pitiful junk, pulled her towards his room saying, well wasn't this a lovely surprise and how marvellous and now they would sit in Michel's room and have a nice cup of tea.

His aunt, however, declining the offer of tea, kept persistently on in the direction of her room, retaining a clear memory of the layout of the rooms in her unsteady mind.

She entered her room and stopped, amazed and brimming with rage.

However, the author, sparing his readers' nerves, finds it impossible to go on with this account of the ensuing scandal and the dramatic scenes that followed for the next half hour.

The bare room gaped emptily. In one corner stood a marble washstand - as yet untouched - and a few chairs which had not been sold owing to their considerable dilapidation.

For the duration of half an hour Aunt Maria laid into Michel once more, swearing like a man and shouting words at which the other tenants, who had seen a thing or two in their time, shied away in horror.

Aunt Maria's nervous abandon soon subsided, to give way to quiet sobs. Michel took advantage of this circumstance to slip off to his room and collapse, exhausted, onto his bed.

By evening it became evident that Aunt Maria had gone quite batty in the head once again, and was once again making some sort of jumps and movements about her room.

On his last legs, Michel confirmed that this was indeed the case and, after issuing the appropriate instructions, returned to his room.

That evening Aunt Maria was once again taken off to the psychiatric hospital.

The neighbours talked among themselves of the vagaries of fortune and of the need to instigate criminal proceedings against Michel, as he had sent his aunt back round the bend by availing himself of her last remaining armchairs.

However, on the following day Michel took to his bed with a nervous fever and this put an end to the gossip.

For three weeks he lay in bed, thinking that his end and his final reckoning was upon him. But his life was preserved due to his youth and blooming health.

Isabella Efremovna still came to see him once in a while. A tenseness and stiffness had taken the place of her former high spirits and now she would sit barely making conversation with the invalid, carping and playing up.

Michel's illness wrought a considerable change in him. All his *joie de vivre* left him and once more he became the melancholy, contemplative character of his Pskov days.

He was forced again to think about his own survival and his daily bread and butter.

M. P. Siniagin began to take action, going several times to the labour exchange to register and to sign on.

Needless to say, as he did not know how to do anything and had no profession to his name, he had little chance of getting any decent work.

Admittedly, he was immediately offered work digging peat and told that he would be lucky to get anything better without a profession to his name.

This proposition shocked and even scared Michel. What, was he supposed to go off somewhere, something like 60 versts away, and dig up muck and clay and stuff with a shovel? He could not believe his ears and, after angrily calling the young lady at the desk a pig, he went home.

He began to sell off his belongings - acquired during his period of prosperity - and lived reasonably well for six months or so without seriously wanting for anything.

However, this could not go on for ever, of course, and something more substantial was called for.

And realising that things were going downhill, Michel tried not to think about it and to put off the moment of truth for as long as possible.

By this time he had fallen out with Isabella Efremovna, who was still calling on him from time to time and asking, with a frown of her little nose, just what he was intending to do.

He had quarrelled with her, calling her a snake and a nasty, greedy piece of work, and this rift actually alleviated his existence somewhat.

Isabella Efremovna had happily risen to the quarrel and, slamming the door behind her, she had flitted out of the room after first, of course, shouting and bickering for a while on the subject of various things.

Michel realised now that his situation was critical, and sometimes he felt that life was all around and that maybe he really should go off and dig peat. But having made a scene at the labour exchange and torn up his card, he did not have the courage to go back there again.

9.

A Pleasant Encounter. A New Job. Bleak Thoughts. Destitution. Peace of Mind.  
Nature the Benefactor. The Author Helps Out. Theft of a Coat with a Monkey Collar.

Without regret, Michel now parted with almost all his possessions, keeping only a grey jacket and a light overcoat.

His remaining clothes rapidly wore themselves to shreds, however, which only hastened his decline.

Realising that there was no way out of his present situation, Michel suddenly stopped worrying and began to drift, with little thought for the future.

One day, running into a friend of his who had made good during the N.E.P., the owner of a small factory producing soft drinks, Michel jokingly asked if he could help him out in some way.

Michel's friend promised to get him a job in his factory, but warned him that the work would not be too suitable for a poet and Michel was hardly likely to agree to it. He would have to wash out the empty bottles that were brought into the factory from all over the place, even out of rubbish bins, and which were then restored to decency by rinsing and washing them with sand and some other muck.

Michel took up the job and for a few months he went off to work at the Apraksin Market until his reckless businessman friend went bust.

Michel did not lose his calm and untroubled state of mind. It was as if he no longer thought of himself as he once had. And on arriving home he would go to bed, untroubled by any thoughts or memories of the past.

Even when his friend the businessman went bust and he lost his wage, Michel did not feel that this was a great misfortune.

Admittedly, from time to time, very rarely, a thoughtful mood would come upon Michel, and then he would run about his room like a wolf, chewing and biting his nails, something he had got into the habit of doing over the past year.

But these were actually the last ripples of disturbance, and afterwards life flowed on again, as steadily, easily and carelessly as it had before.

All Michel's neighbours could already see for themselves how his affairs stood and avoided him, afraid that he might start sponging off them.

And before he knew it, Michel found himself confined to a corner of what had been his own room by a new tenant, an unemployed man who went out to sell sunflower seeds on the street now and again.

Thus almost a year passed and life dragged Michel down still deeper and deeper.

By now, Egor Elkin, the tailor, had taken to calling in on Michel and asking in a drunken voice if Michel would mind looking after his baby as he had to pop out for a minute and his wife was gadding about god knows where, on account of her youth and good looks.

And Michel would go to the tailor's room and look on without interest as the little nipper slid about the floor half naked, romping, playing and eating cockroaches.

The days passed and still Michel did nothing.

From time to time he began to beg. Leaving his house he would stop on the corner of Nevskii Prospect and the Fontanka and stand there quietly waiting for charity.

And when they saw his face and his once decent suit, passers-by would quite readily drop him the odd five or even ten copeck piece.

At this Michel would bow low and his features would twist into an affable grin. And as he bowed he would peer after the coin, trying then and there to determine its value.

He did not notice any change in himself. He felt at peace, as before and he no longer sensed any pain inside.

The author thinks that it is pure stuff and nonsense when many authors, even famous ones, describe the touching ordeals and emotions of certain citizens who have fallen on hard times, or, for instance, laying it on as thick as possible, describe in bold brushstrokes the innermost feelings of a woman of the streets, dressing her up in the devil only knows what and even surprising themselves with what they end up with.

The author thinks that as a rule, this is not the way of things at all.<sup>31</sup>

Life, as it were, is arranged much better, much more simply and much more suitably than this. And there is actually not much in it for novelists.

A beggar stops worrying as soon as he becomes a beggar. A millionaire accustomed to his millions also doesn't think about being a millionaire. And a rat, in the opinion of the author, doesn't suffer too much from being a rat.

Well, perhaps the author got a bit carried away with the millionaire there. The author is not making any claims where the millionaire is concerned. Especially as the lives of millionaires are sort of shrouded in mist from where the author is standing.

But this does not change matters. And this magnificent portrait of our lives still holds good.

And at this point there comes to mind the circumstance that the author has already had the pleasure of mentioning in his preface. Human beings really are quite wonderfully designed organisms and happily live whatever life is going. And, of course, those who are not satisfied take up arms, and the courage and bravery of these latter people has always inspired in the author feelings of amazement and genuine admiration.

Of course, the author does not wish to say that someone - M. P. Siniagin, in this case - just turned into wood and lost his feelings, desires, love of good food, and so on.

No, all these things remained, but in a different form and, so to speak, on a different scale, in keeping with his situation.

Really, the author has no words to describe his wonder at the magnificence of nature!

The author should also add that he, too, was very hard up in those days and was unable to offer his relative any very substantial help. However, on many occasions the author gave Michel as much as he could.

But one day, in the author's absence, Michel took a coat that did not belong to him from the coat-rack, a coat with a monkey collar - and flogged it for literally next to nothing. After which he stopped calling and even stopped acknowledging the author in the street.

Of course, the author appreciated Michel's rather sorry plight and never breathed a word about the theft, but Michel, conscious of his guilt, would just turn away from the author, not wishing to enter into any conversation with him.

The author touches on this episode with a quite extraordinary feeling of embarrassment and even, so to speak, some consciousness of guilt on his part, whereas in actual fact there is no reason for him to feel guilty whatsoever .

10.

Life Begins Tomorrow. A Day's Earnings. The Dosshouse. Forty. Unexpected Thoughts. A New Decision.

The author feels it necessary to warn readers that our tale has a happy ending and that fortune will once again smile on our friend Michel Siniagin.

But for the time being we are forced to talk of various unpleasant experiences and emotions for a little while longer.

The months and years passed. Michel Siniagin lived by begging and set off every day to the Gostinyi Dvor or the Passazh shopping arcades to work. He would take up his position next to the wall and stand there, straight and motionless, not holding out his hand but bowing on the appearance of suitable passers-by.

He would collect about three roubles a day - sometimes even more - and this sum enabled him to live tolerably and even comfortably, occasionally partaking of sausage, brawn and other merchandise.

He was behind with the rent, however, which he had not paid for almost 2 years, and now this debt hung over him like the sword of Damocles.

People had already begun calling into his room and asking when he was planning on vacating the premises.

Michel would say various vague things in reply, and give them various vague promises and dates.

But one day, in order to avoid facing yet more explanations and yet more pressure, he did not go home but went to stay at a dosshouse - or a "flophouse", as it is also sometimes otherwise known - on Liteinyi Prospect.

At that time there was a dosshouse on Liteinyi Prospect not far from Kirochnaia Street, where for the price of 25 kopecks one could get a bed for the night, a mug of tea and a piece of soap for washing.

Michel stayed there several times and eventually moved in there with his few remaining possessions.

And then there began a measured, peaceful period of existence for Michel, without hope of any miracles or opportunities.

Of course, collecting money on the street was not the easiest of occupations. It meant standing outside and taking off one's hat in all weathers, thereby exposing one's head to the cold and catching chills.

But for the time being there was no alternative and Michel did not look for any other solution.

However, the dosshouse, with its rather vulgar inhabitants and its harsh ways, wrought a considerable change in Michel's modest character.

Modesty and a quiet, retiring nature were of no value whatsoever here and even, so to speak, completely beside the point.

The rough, raucous voices, the swearing, thieving and punches in the gob - all these either drove quiet people away or forced them to change their behaviour accordingly.

And so Michel began to utter crude expressions in his hoarse voice and, defending himself against jibes and sneers, he attacked others in his turn, swearing horribly and even participating in brawls.

In the morning Michel would make his bed, drink his tea and, often without stopping to wash, he would hurry off to work, sometimes taking a mangy old briefcase with him which marked him out clearly as an intellectual and hinted at his former background and potential.

The bad habit of biting his nails, recently acquired, had by now become quite obsessive, and Michel nibbled his nails down to the quick, unaware that he was doing so and making no attempt to shake off the habit.

Thus another year passed, almost nine years in total since Michel had first come to Leningrad. Michel was 42 years old, but his long, greying locks made him look older and seedier.

In May, 1929, as he was sitting on a bench in the Summer Gardens enjoying the spring sunshine, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, with a sort of feverish, even fearful haste, Michel began to think about his past life in Pskov, about his wife Simochka and about those bygone days, which now seemed quite incredible and even like something from a fairytale.

He began to think about all this for the first time in several years. And, thinking about it, he felt that same old nervous shiver of excitement that he had long forgotten and that he used to feel when he wrote poetry or thought about lofty subjects.

And that past life - which had once appeared beneath his dignity - now seemed to shine with heavenly purity. That life on which he had turned his back seemed to him now the best that he had known throughout his existence.

Terribly agitated, Michel began to run about the park, waving his arms about and dashing up and down the paths.

And suddenly a clear and lucid thought made him tremble all over.

Of course, right now, this minute, he would go to Pskov, and there he would see his former wife again, his beloved Simochka with her dear freckles. He would go to his wife and spend the rest of his days with her in perfect harmony, love and fond companionship.

And as he thought of this he suddenly burst into tears, overcome by a thousand emotions and by the intense joy that overwhelmed him.

And remembering those pitiful and fortunate words of Simochka's of 9 years ago, Michel was stunned to think how he could have been so downright bastardly as to abandon such an exceptional and deserving young lady.

Now he remembered every word she had said. Yes, she really had said all those things to him and she had prayed that one day he would be old, sick and lame, assuming that he would come back to her in the circumstances.

And, still more excited by these thoughts, Michel began to run, without any idea where he was heading.

The brisk walk calmed him down somewhat and then, in a feverish haste, not wishing to lose a minute, Michel set off in the direction of the station to ask what time and from what platform the train left.

But remembering suddenly that he had no more money than a rouble on him, Michel began to shiver again and asked how much a ticket to Pskov cost.

The fare to Pskov was more than he could afford, so Michel brought a ticket to Luga, deciding to make his way onward from there to his fairytale city.

He arrived in Luga during the night and fell fast asleep on a pile of sleepers beside the railway line.

And, at first light, trembling all over from excitement and the morning chill, Michel, after a bite of bread, set off in the direction of Pskov.

## 11.

Homecoming to Pskov. Familiar Places. Reunion with Simochka. New Friends. Employment. New Dreams. An Unexpected Illness.

Michel set off along the path that ran alongside the railway line, proceeding at first rather tentatively and hesitantly. Then, setting himself a brisker pace, he walked for several hours without stopping and without thinking about anything.

His excitement and joy of the day before had now subsided, giving way to a feeling of dull indifference and even apathy. And now as he walked on he moved out of inertia, having neither the will nor any particular desire to do so.

It was a beautiful May morning. All around, birds chirruped, flying noisily out of the bushes adjacent to Michel's path.

The sun beat down more and more fiercely on his shoulders, and his feet, clad in galoshes, grew sore and blistered from the unaccustomed exercise.

At midday, exhausted, Michel sat down beside a ditch, clasped his arms about his knees and sat thus for a long while, neither moving nor changing his position.

The white motionless clouds on the horizon, the tiny new leaves on the trees and the first yellow flowers of the dandelion all reminded Michel of the best days of his life and once again made him feel a pang of excitement at the thought of the opportunities that lay waiting for him.

Michel stretched out on the grass and, gazing up at the blue sky above, he felt once more a sort of joyful tranquillity.

However, the joy he felt now was a moderate joy. It was not that joy and delight that he had used to feel in his youth.

No, Michel was now a changed man with a changed heart and a changed mind.

There may not be much truth in it, but the author was told by a girl who finished a college course in shorthand last year that apparently, in Africa, there is a sort of animal of the lizard type which, in the event of being attacked by a larger creature, throws out part of its insides and runs off in order to collapse in some secure location in a state of unconsciousness and lie there in the sun until it grows back some new organs. And the attacking animal abandons the chase, quite happy with what it has already got.

If this is really true, then the author's wonder at nature's phenomena fills him with a new tremble of excitement and lust for life.

Michel was not like one of these lizards, he himself had been known to attack others and to grab his enemies by the throat, and yet in the struggle he, too, had evidently lost part of his paraphernalia and now he lay, empty and almost indifferent, without any idea, in fact, why he had set out in the first place and whether or not he had done the right thing.

The following day, taking a rest every hour and sleeping in the bushes at night, Michel reached Pskov, the sight of which made his heart beat faster.

He walked along the familiar streets and suddenly found himself outside his old house, gazing at the windows with misery and longing, and wringing his hands until they hurt.

Shouldering open the wicket gate he went into the garden, that small, shady garden where once upon a time he had written his poems and once upon a time his mum, Aunt Maria and Simochka had all sat together.

Everything was just as it had been 9 years ago - save only that the garden paths were neglected and overgrown with grass.

The same two tall fir trees stood at the back porch, and there was the same old kennel without a dog next to the shed.

Michel stood motionless for a few minutes contemplating all these dear, familiar things. Then suddenly a voice startled him from his thoughts .

An elderly old lady swathed in a white headscarf, eyeing him nervously, asked him what he was doing there and what he wanted.

Muddling his words and fearfully naming one or two surnames, Michel began to enquire after the house's former occupants, the landlord and Serafima Pavlovna, his ex-wife.

The old lady, who was new to the neighbourhood, could not satisfy Michel's curiosity. However, she supplied him with the address of the house where Simochka now lived.

Half an hour later Michel stood before a house on Basmannaya Street, trying to calm the beating of his heart.

He knocked and, without waiting for an answer, opened the door and stepped into the kitchen.

At the stove stood a young woman in an apron, She held a plate in one hand and with the other hand, armed with a fork, she was in the the act of taking a lump of meat out of a steaming pan.

The woman looked up at him angrily and, frowning, she prepared to shout at the intruder, when suddenly the words died on her lips.

It was Serafima Pavlovna, it was Simochka, much aged and much altered. But oh, how thin she had grown! Her once plump little figure and round little face were strange and unrecognisable now.

Her face was sallow and lined and her hair was short and closely cropped.

"Serafima Pavlovna," said Michel quietly, taking a step towards her.

She gave a horrible shriek, the metal plate fell out of her hands and rolled, clattering and crashing, across the floor. And the boiled meat fell back into the saucepan, splashing boiling broth in all directions.

"Oh lord," she said, unable to think what to do and what to say.

She picked up the plate, and muttering, "Just a minute", disappeared through a door.

A moment later she came back into the kitchen and, with a timid gesture of her hand, asked Michel to sit down.

Not daring to approach her, ashamed of his appearance, Michel sat down on a stool and said, that, well, here he was and this was the sorry state he was in.

He spoke in a quiet voice, and giving a hopeless shrug, sighed and became embarrassed.

"Oh lord, oh lord," muttered the young woman, wringing her hands.

She looked at Michel's puffy features and the grimy rags of his suit and wept noiselessly, unable to think what to do.

But at that moment Serafima Pavlovna's husband came out of the other room and, clearly already aware of the situation, he shook Michel silently by the hand and then went to sit down on another stool beside the window.

This was a certain N., the director of a cooperative, a gentleman already in middle-age, not to say advanced in years, rather stout and rather pale.

Quickly grasping what was happening and immediately taking stock of the situation and of his unexpected rival, he began to speak in a solid, persuasive manner, advising Serafima Pavlovna to help Michel out and to do what she could for him.

He offered to let Michel use their summer room upstairs for the time being, given that it was already warm to a sufficient degree.

The three of them dined together at table, partaking of boiled meat and horseradish, exchanging the odd word from time to time concerning what steps they should take in the future.

Serafima Pavlovna's husband said that these days it was extremely easy to find work, that there were fewer and fewer unemployed at the labour exchange every day and that he did not foresee any difficulty in that respect. And, given the present situation, Michel might even be able to chose one out of several positions offered. In any case there was no cause for concern; Michel would stay with them for the time being and as for the future, time would tell.

Michel, not daring to look up at Simochka, thanked her husband and greedily attacked his bread and meat, stuffing great chunks into his mouth.

Simochka did not look at Michel either, only daring to shoot him the occasional glance, muttering from time to time "Oh lord, Oh lord".

They organised the upstairs room for Michel, installing a canvas-covered couch and a small dressing table.

Michel was given some underwear and an old lustrine suit<sup>32</sup> and after washing and shaving his cheeks, he decked himself out in his new things and, feeling somehow joyful, examined his reflection joyfully in the mirror, offering up constant thanks to his benefactor.

His recent tribulations and walk had exhausted him terribly and he fell fast asleep like a stone upstairs in his room.

At about eleven o'clock that night, without any idea where he was, Michel woke up and leapt from his place of slumber.

Then, remembering what had happened, he sat down at the window and began to recollect all that had been said in the course of the day.

And after sitting thus for about half an hour, he suddenly felt hungry.

Recalling the filling, nutritious meal that he had so greedily and indiscriminately wolfed down that evening, Michel stole furtively downstairs to the kitchen in order to have a poke around and to fortify himself once more.

He entered the kitchen, treading cautiously over the creaking floorboards and, without turning on the light, he began to fumble around on the stove, searching for any sort of food.

At this point, Serafima Pavlovna came into the kitchen trembling all over. Imagining that Michel had come down in order to talk to her and say all the things that had been left unsaid, she went up to him, took his hand and began to babble away in an agitated whisper.

Horribly startled at first, Michel soon realised what was happening and listened wordlessly to his former sweetheart, clutching a piece of bread in his hand.

Simochka was saying that now everything was different, and everything was over; that she had continued to think about him and to love him, but that now she did not see any point or sense in making any new decisions or changes. She had found her own quiet haven and did not wish for anything more.

Michel, in his innocence, answered promptly that he was not expecting any such changes but that he would be glad and happy if she would allow him to reside temporarily in their home. And, chewing his bread, he clasped her hand gratefully, telling her not to worry too much about him and not to be too anxious on his behalf.

A few days later, once he had eaten himself back into health and tidied himself up, Michel was given a job on a directorate in charge of cooperatives.

Michel regained his flagging spirits and at the supper table he would recount the day's experiences and make various plans concerning future opportunities, saying that now he had begun a new life, and that now he understood all his mistakes and all his naive fantasies and that he wanted to work and toil and build a new life for himself.

Serafima Pavlovna and her husband would chat affectionately with Michel, sincerely delighted at his progress and his renaissance.

And so the days and months passed and no cloud appeared in Michel's life.

But in February 1930, following an unexpected bout of flu which became complicated by pneumonia, Michel died, almost in the arms of his friends and benefactors.

Simochka wept awfully and felt utterly lost for some time, cursing herself for not having said to Michel all she had wanted to say and all she had thought.

Michel was buried in the graveyard of the former monastery. His grave is adorned with fresh flowers to this day.

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<sup>1</sup>...even more mystifying and even more worthy of astonishment ...

The translation here retains an inconsistency in the 1930 version of the text. The narrator says that the lives of ordinary people may be "even more mysterious" ("еще более непонятно") than those of the famous, yet below in the next paragraph he contradicts himself, saying that the lives of simple people are "even less difficult to fathom" ("еще более доступно пониманию"). In the 1936 version, "еще более непонятно" - (even harder to understand) was changed to "еще более понятно" ("even easier to understand"), which makes the text more coherent. It is quite probable that this is a mistake, but given the many deliberate mistakes in the text I have left it.

<sup>2</sup>...the author will probably publish these memoirs as a separate book, illustrated with photographs of the main characters...

The first separate edition of "Michel Siniagin" (*M. P. Siniagin*, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1931) did indeed contain photographs of the main characters: Michel, his mother, Simochka and Isabella Kriukova (See Appendix 2).

<sup>3</sup>*Prologue to the Story.*

The Russian here ("пролог истории") means both "prologue to the story" and "prologue to history". Initially, "prologue to the story" seems the most likely interpretation. However, bearing in mind the context in which the expression appears, it seems that Zoshchenko's narrator is talking about the prologue to history, in the sense of an early stage in the march of historical progress ("Конечно еще, так сказать, пролог истории. Еще жизнь не утряслась"). This meaning becomes even clearer in the deleted section from the following chapter which begins ("А может, действительно пролог истории. Может быть через 700 лет про наши века скажут - пещерный быт или слоновая эпоха"). However, "prologue to the story" seemed to me a better translation as it can be understood both literally, in relation to the story of Michel Siniagin, and figuratively, in relation to the "story" of human civilisation.

<sup>4</sup>...petty, everyday, bourgeois matters...

The translation of the word "мещанский" as "bourgeois" perhaps needs some justification, given that it is common practice to translate it as either "philistine" or "petty bourgeois". As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the Russian concept of "meshchanstvo" took on new overtones in the Soviet era: whereas earlier it had referred to vulgarity and lack of true gentility, it was later used to criticise elitism and political apathy, and its application extended until it became almost meaningless. It

seemed to me that "bourgeois" is the word in current English usage that best reflects the range of meaning and the derogatory tone of "мещанский". Left-wing political discourse has never been the voice of the mainstream in the English speaking world as it has in Russia, but it exists nonetheless. Within this discourse "bourgeois" is the only widely used term of its sort. "Philistine" seems quite an inappropriate translation for "мещанский" in the post-revolutionary sense, when one takes into account the fact that in contemporary English "philistine" is generally a term of abuse directed at the "ignorant masses" by the elitist.

<sup>5</sup> *...god forbid...*

It was conventional to spell the Russian "Бог" ("God") with a small letter rather than a capital during the Soviet period, as a mark of the fact that religion was considered an outdated superstition.

<sup>6</sup> *...was born in 1887...*

Michel's date of birth is significant: born in the late 1880s, he would be one of those writers who reached maturity well before the revolution, like Aleksandr Tiniakov, who was born in 1886. Zoshchenko himself, who was born in 1895, belonged to a slightly later generation who were to become the first generation of Soviet writers. The fictional author of "Michel Siniagin" is ten years younger than Michel, and thus a member of Zoshchenko's generation.

<sup>7</sup> *...on the estate of Pan'kovo" in the Smolensk District.*

Zoshchenko spent December 1918 -January 1919 working as an instructor in poultry and rabbit breeding on a farm on the former estate of Man'kovo in the Smolensk district (Iu. Tomashevskii (ed.), *Litso i maska Mikhaila Zoshchenko, Moscow: Olimp, 1994, p. 342*). While he was there, an episode took place which he later described in *Before Sunrise*: and which may have been on his mind while he was writing "Michel Siniagin" (see below, note 15).

<sup>8</sup> *..his father was an honourable citizen*

The term used in the original, "почетный гражданин", was a pre-revolutionary mark of distinction that could be conferred on somebody for their services to society.

<sup>9</sup> *...bourgeois specialists...*

The original here uses the Soviet term "спецы". *Spetsy* ("technological intelligentsia" or "bourgeois specialists") were members of the former nobility and intelligentsia who

were employed in industry and in the army after the revolution, providing technical skills and expertise.

<sup>10</sup>...*Scythian section.*

The Scythians were a people who inhabited the southern steppe of Russia along the Black Sea coast from 500BC onwards. In the period just after the revolution, the image of the Scythians had specific literary associations: Blok's poem of 1918 "Scythians" ("Skify") invokes the image as a symbol of Russia's latent barbarism - its Asiatic nature - that may awaken and crush the complacent West. Certain writers of the period who were attracted to the notion of Russia's spontaneous but savage Asiatic side identified themselves as "Scythians". They included R. Ivanov-Razumnik, A. Bely, S. Esenin and N. Kliuev. Zoshchenko's digression on the Scythians in "Michel Siniagin" contrasts sharply with these literary associations. Zoshchenko's narrator not only "Sovietises" them ("один мужичонко середняк сидит"; "третий лаптишки себе поправляет") but emphasises their material standard of living, rather than their spiritual capacities.

<sup>11</sup>...*middle-category peasant...*

The original here is "мужичонко-середняк".- another Sovietism. "*Seredniak*" was a term coined by the Bolsheviks after the revolution to describe those peasants who could neither be defined as *kulaks* (the rich class of peasants regarded as exploiters) or "poor peasants" (regarded as class sympathisers because of their oppression).

<sup>12</sup>*Fet*

Afanasii Afanas'evich Fet (1820-1892). Fet was one of the foremost lyric poets of the 19th century and he had a strong influence on poets of the Silver Age, particularly Aleksandr Blok. For a further discussion of Fet and literary parody in "Michel Siniagin" see part 3 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup>*Blok*

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok (1880-1921). Blok is the most celebrated poet of the Silver Age in Russian literature and attained an almost mythic status in the eyes of the Russian public. Blok was an important figure for Zoshchenko: there is evidence that Zoshchenko both identified with and sought to distance himself from Blok, recognising in the great poet the same world-weariness that he sensed in himself. This is particularly clear from a passage in *Before Sunrise*, where Zoshchenko describes meeting Blok at the House of Arts shortly before Blok's death and notes the poet's "dead, empty eyes" and his terrible melancholy and indifference. Zoshchenko recalls: "Меня душит какое-то волнение. Теперь я почти вижу свою судьбу. Я

вижу финал своей жизни. Я вижу тоску, которая меня непременно задушит" (M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 503). Blok is the most important figure in the literary sub-text to "Michel Siniagin", and Michel himself is a sort of debased version of Blok. (See part 3 of Chapter 2 of this thesis).

#### <sup>14</sup> *Nadson*

Semen Iakovlevich Nadson (1862-1887) was a lyric poet who was famous in Russia in the 1880s. Nadson enjoyed huge popularity during his lifetime and after his early death from tuberculosis, appealing mainly to a youthful audience, and especially to women. Some critics attribute his popularity, at least in part, to his early death. In retrospect, Nadson appears almost a parody of the figure of the romantic poet. He is also strongly associated with a particularly "willless" spirit that permeated 19th-century poetry. Writing soon after his death, one critic wrote of Nadson as "a typical man of the 1880s": "a dreamer and idealist turned pessimist after the collapse of his youthful ideals: "Nadson "never lifted a finger", he "only talked"...By the 1870s he had already become "a-weary, a-weary", "a corpse long since"...To read all of Nadson's work together is unbelievably tedious and, by virtue of its sparse subject matter, uninteresting. His lamentations appear as systematic whining" (N. N. Trubitsyn, *Odin iz vos'midesiatnikov: Nadson*, Warsaw, 1908. pp. 22, 26). Nadson's poetry exerted an influence on some of the poets of the Silver Age, such as Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii.

#### <sup>15</sup> *Esenin*

Sergei Esenin (1895-1925) is the youngest of the poets mentioned among Michel's literary influences. Like Blok before him, Esenin is a good example of a poet around whom there grew a "cult of personality". His life often overshadowed his work. Zinaida Gippius gives a fairly representative account of the image that grew up around the poet in his later years "in a red fog, in a particular, Russian sort of drunkenness he writes, yells, marries a "famous" foreigner - old Duncan, [Isadora Duncan] runs riot in Paris, runs riot in America, everywhere the same fog, the same riotousness, the obligatory fighting, with whomsoever happens to cross his path" (quoted from Z. Gippius "Sud'ba Eseninykh", in T. A. Bek (ed.), *Serebrianyi vek: poezii*, Moscow: Olimp, 1996. p. 103). Zoshchenko was acquainted with Esenin and included two accounts of his meetings with the poet in *Before Sunrise*. In "In the "Twelve" Cafe" ("V Kafe Dvenadsat") Esenin cuts a rather tragic figure with his painted face and his querulous behaviour. The other reference to Esenin in Zoshchenko's autobiography, "In the Bar" ("V kabake") is an account of the poet reading his poem "The Black

Man" ("Chernyi Chelovek") in a bar shortly before his suicide in 1925. The main impression left by these sketches is one of pity at the doomed poet (at one point in "In the "Twelve Cafe"", Zoshchenko describes stroking Esenin's hand to calm him down) and of admiration of him as an artist (Zoshchenko describes Esenin reading "with such feeling and such pain that everybody is impressed", and declares that Esenin inspires feelings of warmth from his audience such as he has never seen before towards a poet.). Esenin provides a vivid example of the type of self-destructive romantic artist whose life is inseparable from his art: a peculiarly Russian tradition and an important literary sub-text in "Michel Siniagin" (See Chapter 2, section 5).

<sup>16</sup> "The Haven"

The name of Aunt Maria's estate, "Zatish'e", links her with a character described in *Before Sunrise* in the sketch entitled "A Game of Cards" ("My igraem v karty"). The incident described dates back to Zoshchenko's time in the winter of 1918-9 as an instructor in poultry and rabbit breeding on a farm in the Smolensk district. It describes a card game with former landowners from neighbouring regions, "a fat lady", Ol'ga Pavlovna, "a man with rotten teeth" and his daughter Veronika. Ol'ga Pavlovna, who is winning, exclaims that she has always been lucky in everything and that in a few months she is sure to get her estate - also called "Zatish'e" - back again. She and the man with the rotten teeth then discuss how they will punish the peasants for the revolution: Ol'ga Pavlovna says that she will just "give them a thrashing" ("немного попорю своих мужиков") while the man with the rotten teeth says that he will hang a couple. At this point, Zoshchenko stands up, scattering his cards, and says to them "You scoundrels, you criminals...All the troubles, the darkness, the terrible ignorance in the countryside - it's all thanks to your lot". ("негодяи, преступники...Это из-за вас такая беда, такая темнота в деревне, такой мрак" (M. Zoshchenko, *Pered voskhodom solntsa*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, v. 3, p. 496). Aunt Maria, though a free thinker, shows much the same attitude to the revolution as Olga Pavlovna, seeing it as a temporary aberration that will not affect her in the long term. ("Тетка...извещала, что она отнюдь не переменила своих либеральных убеждений и не идет против революции, но поскольку революция продолжается так долго, и вот уже третий год как ей не отдают имения, то это просто ни на что не похоже") (M.S. p. 126).

<sup>17</sup> ...the former Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich

Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich the elder (1831-1891) - the son of Nicholas I, or his son, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich the younger (1856-1929). The manuscript version originally had the non-existent "Grand Duke Boris Nikolaevich" here.

<sup>18</sup> *Koni*

Anatolii Fedorovich Koni (1844-1927) a lawyer, senator and member of the State Council. He became famous for his part in the trial of the terrorist Vera Zasulich, which earned him a reputation as a liberal among the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. Koni was a prominent figure in literary circles, a friend of Tolstoi, Turgenev, Goncharov and Chekhov.

<sup>19</sup> *Pereverzev*

Valerian Fedorovich Pereverzev (1882 - ?). A literary critic who became the subject of a concerted attack by the Soviet literary establishment in 1929, just before "Michel Siniagin" was written. Pereverzev's defeat at the hands of critics and press was seen as a victory over the Menshevik tendency in literary criticism and heralded the beginning of an era in which the Communist Party began to take a much more interventionist role in literature and art than hitherto. From the point of view of Pereverzev's detractors, the most pernicious aspects of Pereverzev's teachings were his beliefs that the conscious adoption of a political line in literature was harmful to creativity, and that a writer's ideological stance was determined by the social class to which he belonged, so that it was not possible for a non-proletarian writer to remake himself as a proletarian writer. (*Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, Moscow: OGIZ RSFSR, 1934, v. 8, pp. 506-7). This passing reference to Pereverzev is perhaps a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the implicit warning in "Michel Siniagin" about the future of art and culture in the Soviet Union.

<sup>20</sup> *Storm*

"Storm" is a slightly altered version of a Blok poem dated 20 May 1899. The original reads as follows: "Гроза прошла, и ветка белых роз/ В окно мне дышит ароматом./Еще трава полна прозрачных слез,/ И гром вдали гремит раскатом" (A Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvatsati tomakh*, Moscow, St Petersburg: Nauka, 1994, v. 4, p. 78). In the 1936 edition of "Michel Siniagin" and other later editions, the following passage was added after the poem "Storm":

"Впрочем, это стихотворение настолько хорошо написано, что есть подозрение, уж не списано ли оно откуда-нибудь начинающим поэтом.

Во всяком случае, Мишель Синягин выдавал его за свое, и мы не считаем себя вправе навязывать читателю наши на этот счет соображения.

Во всяком случае, это стихотворение было разучено всей семьей..." (etc.)

"Actually, this poem is so well written that we have a suspicion that the budding poet may have copied it from somewhere else.

In any case, Michel Siniagin passed it off as his own, and we do not feel justified in foisting our opinions on the matter on the reader.

In any case, the whole family learnt the poem off by heart..." (etc.)

<sup>21</sup> *People had rather different ideas about marriage in those days...*

The social change of revolution and civil war and the Bolsheviks' policy on marriage and divorce resulted in a sharp shift in behaviour and attitudes in Russia in the 1920s. Marriage laws were revolutionised in 1918 and it became much easier to obtain divorces. This encouraged a less serious attitude towards marriage. Party spokeswoman Aleksandra Kollantai declared in 1918 that "the old kind of family - closed, strong, recognising that the marriage which the priest had blessed was indissoluble forever - was once necessary...But since the last century...the traditional family is being destroyed" (W. Rosenberg (ed.) *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*. 2nd edn. Ann Arbor, Michigan: 1990.p. 67). The transformation of marriage from a sacrament to a bureaucratic "act of civic status" is satirised in Il'f and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs (Dvenadstat' stul'ev)* (1927). The hero, Ippolit Matveevich, works in the registry office, where a notice reads "Сделай свое дело, и уходи" ("Do your business and go").

<sup>22</sup> *...possession of all his movables...*

The original here, "движимое имущество" ("moveable property") is rarer than "недвижимое имущество": literally: "immoveable property", i.e. real estate. In Zoshchenko's "Story of how Semen Semenych Kurochkin Lost a Spoon" ("Rasskaz o tom, kak u Semen Semenycha Kurochkina lozhka propala") (1923), the narrator uses the terms literally to refer to light and heavy objects ("Недвижимого имущества у меня нету. А что комод стоит в моей комнате, то, прямо скажу, не мой этот комод, а хозяйский. Кровать тоже хозяйская. А из движимого имущества только у меня у есть, что серебряная ложка" (M. Zoshchenko, "Rasskaz o tom, kak u Semen Semenycha kurochkina lozhka propala", in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisateliu, odnoaktnye komedii*, ed. M. Dolinskii, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1991, p. 177)

<sup>23</sup> *Hunger and devastation gripped the city in a deadly embrace, so to speak*

A reference to the lean years of War Communism: inflation was soaring and there were severe food and fuel shortages.

<sup>24</sup> *...a certain famous poet Kh ...*

As it is usual in Russian in confidential references of this sort to use an initial letter, it is probable that this is a reference to V. Khodasevich, who left Petersburg for Paris in 1922.

<sup>25</sup> *...his food ration from work...*

During the period of War Communism, due to hyper-inflation, wages were less important than the ration of food and other goods issued at the workplace. The "раек" or food ration was described by a visiting foreigner in 1920 as "the symbol of Soviet existence" (R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924*. London: Harvill, 1994, p.447). Chukovskii, writing in 1920, describes how in order to get the ingredients for a pie, it was "necessary to work in five institutions" ("...raisins from the Studio, the cinnamon from Gorokhra, the syrup from Baltflot") (K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn. Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 143).

<sup>26</sup> *...flatfoot...*

In the original, "держиморда" - "mug-grabber", the name of one of the policemen in Gogol's *The Government Inspector (Revizor)*.

<sup>27</sup> *GOSTSVETMET*

One of the many ugly so-called "stump compounds" that appeared in the Soviet period. "Gostsevtmet" was the name of the State non-ferrous metallurgical industry.

<sup>28</sup> *The Priazhka River*

The hospital referred to here still exists: the Hospital of Nikolai the Miracle-Worker on the banks of the Priazhka. Psychiatric hospitals in Russia are traditionally painted yellow, and "Желтый дом" means both "yellow building" and "madhouse".

<sup>29</sup> *The NEP was at its full height.*

The era of the New Economic Policy, (NEP), is the period with which Zoshchenko's stories have become inextricably associated. The NEP reinstated private trade on a small scale, which resulted in a small explosion of consumer culture and a new class of businessmen - the "Nepmen", who frequented the newly opened bars and restaurants.

The description of Michel and Izabella's gay, carefree existence is a typical picture of life during the NEP. Chukovskii describes the new spirit of materialism thus:

"Men are happy that there are cards, races, wine and women; women with drunk, voluptuous faces press their breasts up against the shop windows in Kuznetskii Street where silk and diamonds are sold. There are truckloadsful of handsome female flesh wherever one turns - a desire for things and a terrible complacency - dances are so popular that I know families where people gather from seven in the evening until two at night without even finding time to drink their fill of tea, their feet are working non-stop. The Dixie, the foxtrot, the onestep...everyone's lives are dominated by the zoological and the physiological" (K. Chukovskii, *Dnevnik, 1901-1929*, 2nd edn. Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1997, p. 218)

### <sup>30</sup>*Babel'*"

Isaak Babel' (1894-1939) keeps strange company with Kant here. A Soviet writer most famous for his brutal but romantic depiction of Cossack soldiers in the Red Army in *The Red Cavalry (Konarmia.)*, Babel' was arrested in 1939 and sentenced to death on a charge of spying. For many years after his death his name was officially taboo in the Soviet Union.

### <sup>31</sup>*The author thinks that as a rule, this is not the way of things at all.*

Perhaps the most obvious literary target here is Dostoevskii, and those of his works, such as *Poor Folk (Bednye liudi)*, *Notes from Underground (Zapiski iz podpol'ia)* or *Crime and Punishment (Prestuplenie i nakazanie)* which portray the plight of people who have fallen on hard times. The character of Sonia Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*, the saintly prostitute who sells her body to save her family, is a good example of what Zoshchenko's narrator here calls "stuff and nonsense". A story by Zoshchenko called "A Strong Woman". ("Krepkaia zhenshchina") (1924) offers a very different treatment of the theme of prostitution - one that matches the hard-boiled attitude of the narrator here. The heroine of "A Strong Woman" loses her job and decides to become a prostitute, but finds that whenever a man approaches her she cannot help instinctively protecting herself and repulsing his advances. Finally, deciding that she is simply not able to debase herself in this way, she sets up a small business on her own. (M. Zoshchenko, "Krepkaia zhenshchina", in *Uvazhaemye grazhdane: parodii, rasskazy, fel'etony, satiricheskie zametki, Pis'ma k pisatel'iu, odnoaktnye komedii*, pp. 214-5). However, notwithstanding the message of "A Strong Woman", Zoshchenko himself was far from espousing the ruthless attitude to suffering shown in the comments by the narrator of "Michel Siniagin" here. This is shown by the story behind *The Blue Book*, which is said to have been a response to an

idea from Gor'kii for a satire on human suffering. Gor'kii wrote to Zoshchenko: "it would be a good thing to make a laughing stock of professional sufferers, dear Mikhail Mikhailovich... to laugh at all those who become hostile to the world as a result of idiotic trifles and inconveniences...Suffering is the disgrace of the world, and it is enough to hate it to destroy it". G. Munblit, who met Zoshchenko around 1930, recalls how he told Zoshchenko of a project he had in mind - an article on "the aesthetisation of suffering as a motif in pre-revolutionary Russian literature". Zoshchenko was very interested in the project and later sent Munblit a copy of Gor'kii's letter, together with his own thoughts on the subject. In his letter to Mundblit, Zoshchenko expressed the thought that in the fight against suffering "it is not enough to change one's philosophy, because the root of evil here is not in the attitude to suffering of philosophers or writers, but in the conditions that engender suffering". He also told Munblit that he intended to respond to Gor'kii's letter in the book which he was now working. (G. Munblit, "Slezy skvoz' smekh", in Iu. Tomashevskii, (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Mikhaile Zoshchenko*, St Petersburg: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1995, pp. 225-6.). *The Blue Book* may be an "answer" to Gor'kii but it is far from an affirmation of Gor'kii's views on suffering: rather it is a catalogue of cruelty and injustice, portraying a world in which it is impossible not to suffer. In Zoshchenko's world, "idiotic trifles and inconveniences" are far from insignificant - as Cathy Popkin convincingly shows in her recent study of Zoshchenko (C. Popkin, *The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol*". Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). On the contrary, these shortcomings - both material and moral, make up the very fabric of his world. For instance, in "The Suffering of Young Werther" ("Stradanie molodogo Vertera") (1932) the narrator's joyous feelings and dreams of a bright future ("Рисуется замечательная жизнь. Милые, понимающие люди. Уважение к личности. И мягкость нравов...И отсутствие брани и грубости") are immediately shattered by the ubiquitous "nekul'turnost'" of the aggressive crowd around him. The story ends with the heartfelt plea: "Давайте все-таки как-нибудь уважать друг друга" (M. Zoshchenko, "Stradanie molodovo Vertera", in *Sotsial'naia grust'*, ed. B.S. Ruben, Moscow: Shkola Press, 1996, p.284). To return to "Michel Siniagin", the manuscript version of the story shows that the narrator's words at this point initially read differently. Zoshchenko deleted a line or two that would have made the whole passage more ironic in tone (See Chapter 4 of this thesis, p. 204).

<sup>32</sup>...an old lustrine suit...

Lustrine is a shiny, stiff woollen material which enjoyed popularity in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s and 30s "the man's lustrine jacket became a particular type of

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status symbol - distinguishing minor bureaucrats with petty bourgeois aspirations towards sophistication: the uniform of an entire social class described by Zoshchenko" (R. M. Kirsanova, *Kostium v russkoi khudozhestvennoi kul'ture*. Moscow: Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 1995, p 161).

## Conclusion

This thesis has adopted a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on literary criticism, translation theory and translation practice. I chose to concentrate this study on a single text because I am convinced that the study of translation is of greater value when it is related to a specific example. The thesis includes a large literary component, which reflects my belief that in-depth literary analysis and background research form a vital part of literary translation.

The first two chapters are devoted to style and theme in Zoshchenko's work. They are intended to serve as a supplement to the translation by establishing the literary, historical and biographical context to the story "Michel Siniagin". These chapters also feed into the discussion of translation in the third chapter, as they elucidate the problems posed for the translator by Zoshchenko's work and set out the interpretive position on which my translation is based.

The first chapter concludes that Zoshchenko's narrative style in the "Sentimental Tales" is a halfway stage between the informal *skaz* of his short stories and the creation of a populist author figure in his later works. The style of the "Sentimental Tales" combines elements of literary parody with elements of *skaz* in a deliberately clumsy manner intended to parody the style of the "Red Lev Tolstoi" - the inexperienced Soviet imitating classical literary models. This chapter explains the historical significance of the "Red Lev Tolstoi" by giving an account of the growing pressure on Soviet writers to produce appropriately grandiose works of proletarian literature for the new reading public - a situation that was to end with the prescription of Socialist Realism in the early 1930s. The chapter also underlines Zoshchenko's ambiguous and often contradictory views regarding proletarian ("barbarian") literature, with reference to his work *Letters to a Writer*. This ambiguity is an important element in the "Sentimental Tales" and "Michel Siniagin".

The second chapter is devoted to thematic concerns. "Michel Siniagin" is placed in the context of other works by Zoshchenko and against the background of the age of NEP and the "Silver Age" of Russian literature. Throughout this chapter, reference is made to Aleksandr Tiniakov, the real-life poet and beggar who served as the model for Zoshchenko's Siniagin. The chapter discusses Zoshchenko's critical position with regard to the literature of the past and relates it to the increasingly stifling cultural climate of the NEP period. It goes on to discuss the author's fascination with the ideas of Nietzsche and his use of two contrasting fictional types, described by T. Kadash as the "beast" and the "lifeless man". The "Sentimental Tales" are compared to Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin*, a work which centres on the conflict between Christian morality and the ethical egoist who seeks to satisfy his own immediate desires. This section of the thesis also includes an account of Zoshchenko's battle with his own depression and nervous illness, described in the autobiographical tale *Before Sunrise*.

This chapter is an essential supplement to the translation, given that the barrier between source and target audience is not simply a matter of language but of cultural heritage and historical perspective. It may not be immediately obvious to a contemporary Western reader that the apparently flimsy tale of "Michel Siniagin" actually poses serious questions about the future of art and the existence of a higher nature in man. In his youth, Zoshchenko had been drawn to the idea of the poet as a contemplative soul and man apart from the common herd- the ideal of which for Russians of his generation was undoubtedly Aleksandr Blok. He forced himself to detach himself from this ideal when he began to see it not only as a source of embarrassment but as a contributory factor to his own depression. However, by 1930, when Zoshchenko wrote "Michel Siniagin", the age of Blok and his imitators was over: the notion of the poet as seer or visionary had been replaced by that of the writer as state-sponsored propoganda machine. Given the context in which it was written, it is hard to accept that Zoshchenko's story is a social satire on the sort of idle dilettante who could no longer be seen as culturally important, still less a threat. More threatening by far was the idea of the artist reduced both literally and spiritually to the level of a beggar - something which Zoshchenko felt he had encountered in the flesh in the person of Aleksandr Tiniakov. I concluded this chapter by arguing that "Michel Siniagin" is both a gloomy prophecy about the future of Russian art in the 1930s and an uneasy expression of Zoshchenko's own spiritual malaise. Zoshchenko himself saw Tiniakov as living proof that "art for art's sake" was a "beautiful lie", but his portrayal of the unvarnished truth portrays a world in which existence is almost unbearable.

The next part of the thesis is devoted to problems of translation. A study of recent work in translation studies convinced me that when translation theory becomes divorced from practice, it encourages modes of thinking that falsely represent the activity of translation as it actually happens. It is not unusual to find descriptions of literary translation as ideological "rewriting". I prefer to see it as an individual performance strictly circumscribed by the nature of the text in question and by the relationship between the two languages and cultures involved. My decision to give a detailed account of a specific example of translation was a response to my own frustration at the abstract discourse engendered by translation theory.

I based my discussion of translation theory on Friedrich Schleiermacher's formula of "bringing the reader to the writer" or "bringing the writer to the reader". From a general overview of the arguments concerning formal and dynamic equivalence I argued that dynamic equivalence is appropriate for many translation tasks, but that in some cases the translator may be justified in bending the target language in order to reflect the expressive capacity of the original. Whether or not the translator decides to use "foreignising" translation depends on the nature of the task in hand. In the case of Zoshchenko the "opaque" nature of his style pulls in the direction of literal translation, while the mimicry inherent in *skaz* suggests the need for a more dynamic approach. After comparing existing translations of Zoshchenko's short stories I concluded that

the most successful translations were those that did not place too much importance on “natural-sounding” English usage but let the verbal humour of the original speak for itself. I went on to argue that the style of the "Sentimental Tales" deliberately violates rules of fluency which translators are normally expected to observe. The translator must be careful to avoid smoothing out the inconsistencies in the original, as these are an essential part of Zoshchenko's style. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that all the “deviant” features of the text are intended to reflect a specific persona – the struggling author poised between two ages. I showed how my own translation used both literal and dynamic strategies as a response to this. I also included a discussion of two representative passages in the text to show how the literary analysis set out in the first two chapters of this thesis was brought to bear on the process of translation.

Before moving on to the text of the translation itself, I discussed the different published versions of the text of "Michel Siniagin" and compared them with the surviving manuscript version. My main conclusion here is that the text was changed - possibly by Zoshchenko himself - following the publication of the first version in 1930, and that these changes compromised the integrity of the original text. Analysis of Zoshchenko's own corrections to the manuscript show that he intended to increase the awkwardness of the original and detract from any pathos. Later amendments show the opposite tendency, with sentimental passages added and awkward or crude words erased or softened. My decision to use the first published version of the text was based on the fact that it is the closest to the corrected manuscript version. In this chapter, I also discussed a number of passages excised during revision of the manuscript. The most important of these is a lengthy digression by the "author" on the Golden Age which contains the kernel of a future major work by Zoshchenko. The deleted passage reveals that the idea of history as an endless, violent struggle shaped not by destiny or progress but by basic human instincts – a view expounded at length in *The Blue Book* - was already in Zoshchenko's mind when he wrote "Michel Siniagin". It also suggests that this view of history was closely linked to the age in which Zoshchenko lived and worked and that this view was, at least in part, an attempt to make sense of the misfortunes suffered by the author and by his own generation.

The thesis concludes with the translation of "Michel Siniagin" into English. The translation represents both the result of and the starting point for the research contained in the previous chapters. I recorded the process of reading and discussing the text with native speakers in detail in a translation diary. Some of the resulting material has been included in the form of annotations to the translation, but the vast bulk of this material fed back into the earlier chapters on literary criticism and translation. The translation attempts to strike a balance between the polarities of "bringing the writer to the reader" and "bringing the reader to the writer". I attempted to convey the humour of the original and to get across the flavour of "author's" narrative manner, while retaining features of the original, such as rhythm and repetition, which raise it above mere parody.

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## APPENDIX 1

Russian Text of "Michel Siniagin".

Reproduced from *Novyi mir*, December 1930, pp. 112-40.

# М. П. Синягин

(Воспоминания о Мишеле Синягине)

МИХ. ЗОЩЕНКО

## Предисловие

Эта книга есть воспоминание об одном человеке, об одном, что ли, малоизвестном небольшом поэте, с которым автор сталкивался в течение целого ряда лет.

Судьба этого человека автора чрезвычайно поразила, и в силу этого автор решил написать такие, что ли, о нем воспоминания, такую, что ли, биографическую повесть, не в назидание потомству, а просто так.

Не все же писать биографии и мемуары о замечательных и великих людях, об их поучительной жизни и об их гениальных мыслях и достижениях.

Кому-нибудь надо откликнуться и на переживания других, скажем, более средних людей, так сказать, не записанных в бархатную книгу жизни.

При чем жизнь таких людей, по мнению автора, тоже в достаточной мере бывает поучительна и любопытна. Все ошибки, промахи, страдания и радости ничуть не уменьшаются в своем размере оттого, что человек, ну, скажем, не нарисовал на полотне какой-нибудь прелестный шедевр—«Девушка с кувшином», или не научился быстро ударять по рояльным клавишам, или, скажем, не отыскал для блага и спокойствия человечества какую-нибудь лишнюю звезду или комету на небосводе.

Напротив, жизнь таких обыкновенных людей еще более непонятна, еще более достойна удивления, чем, скажем, какие-нибудь исключительные и необыкновенные поступки и чудачества гениального художника, пианиста или настройщика.

Жизнь таких простых людей еще более интересна и еще более доступна пониманию.

Автор не хочет этим сказать, что вот сейчас вы увидите чего-то такое исключительно интересное, поразительное по силе переживаний и страстям.

Нет, это будет скромно прожитая жизнь, описанная к тому же несколько торопливо, небрежно и со многими погрешностями. Конечно, сколько возможно, автор старался, но для полного блеска описания не было у него такого, что ли, нужного спокойствия духа, уверенности и любви к разным мелким предметам и переживаниям. Тут не будет спокойного дыхания человека, уверенного и развязного дыхания автора, судьба которого оберегается и лелеется золотым веком.

Тут не будет красоты фраз, смелости оборотов и восхищения перед величием природы.

Тут будет просто правдиво изложенная жизнь. К тому же несколько суетливый характер автора, его беспокойство и внимание к другим мелочам заставляют его иной раз пренебречь плавным повествованием для того, чтобы разрешить тот или иной злободневный вопрос или то или иное сомнение.

Что касается заглавия книги, то автор согласен признать, что заглавие, сухое и академическое, мало чего-нибудь дает уму и сердцу. Но автор оставляет это заглавие временно. Автор хотел назвать эту книгу иначе, как-нибудь, например: «У жизни в лапах» или «Жизнь начинается послезавтра». Но и для этого у него нехватило уверенности и нахальства. К тому же эти заглавия, вероятно, уже были в литературном обиходе, а для нового заглавия у автора не нашлось особого остроумия и изобретательности.

Необходимо еще отметить, что автор, вероятно, в дальнейшем издаст эти воспоминания отдельной книжкой, в которой будут напечатаны фотографии главных действующих лиц, а именно: М. П. Синягина, его жены, матери и тетки.

3 сентября 1930 г.

## 1

### Через сто лет. О нашем времени. О приспособляемости. О дуэлях. О чулках. Пролог истории

Вот в дальнейшем, лет этак, скажем, через сто или там немного меньше, когда все окончательно утрясется, установится, когда жизнь засияет несказанным блеском, какой-нибудь гражданин, какой-нибудь этакий гражданин с усиками, в этакое, что ли, замшевом песочном костюмчике, или там, скажем, в вечерней шелковой пижаме, возьмет, предположим, нашу скромную книжку и приляжет с ней на кушетку.

Он приляжет на сафьяновую кушетку или там, скажем, на какой-нибудь мягкий пufик или козетку, обопрет свою душистую голову на чистые руки и, слегка задумавшись о прекрасных вещах, раскроет книгу.

— Интересно,—скажет он, кушая конфетки,—как это они там жили в свое время.

А его красивая, молодая супруга или там, скажем, подруга его жизни, тут же рядом сидит в своем каком-нибудь исключительном пенюаре.

— Андреус, или там Теодор,—скажет она, запахивая свой пенюар,—охота тебе, скажет, читать разную муру. Только, скажет, перны себе треплешь на ночь глядя.

И сама, может, возьмет с полки какой-нибудь томик в пестром атласном переплете—стихи какого-нибудь там знаменитого поэта—и начнет читать:

В моем окне качалась лилия.  
Я весь в бреду...  
Любовь, любовь! Мой, Идиллия,  
Я к вам приду.

Вот как представит себе автор на минутку такую акварельную картину, так и перо у него валится из рук—неохота писать да и только.

Конечно, автор не утверждает, что именно такие сценки будут наблюдаться в будущей жизни. Нет, это как раз мало вероятно. Это только минутное предположение. На это только полпроцента можно

положить. А скорей всего, напротив того, будет очень такое, что ли, здоровое, сочное поколение. Этакie будут загорелые здоровяки, одевающиеся скромно, но просто, без особой претензии на роскошь и шегольство

К тому же, может, такие паршивые лирические стишки они и читать-то вовсе не будут или будут их читать в исключительных случаях, предпочитая им наши прозаические книжки, которые будут брать в руки с полным душевным трепетом и с полным почтением к их авторам.

Однако, как подумает автор о таких настоящих читателях, так опять появляются затруднения, и снова перо вываливается из рук.

Ну, что автор может дать таким прекрасным читателям?

Сердечно признавая все величие нашего времени, автор, тем не менее, не в силах дать соответствующее произведение, полностью рисуящее нашу эпоху. Может быть, автор растратил свои мозги на мелкие повседневные мещанские дела, на разные личные огорчения и заботы, но только ему не по силам такое обширное произведение, которое сколько-нибудь заинтересует будущих уважаемых читателей.

Нет, уж лучше закрыть глаза на будущее и не думать о новых грядущих поколениях. Лучше уж писать для наших испытанных читателей.

Но тут опять являются сомнения, и перо валится из рук. В настоящее время, когда самая острая, нужная и даже необходимая тема — это колхоз или там, скажем, отсутствие тары или устройство силосов, возможно, что просто нетактично писать как себе, вообще, о переживаниях людей, которые, в сущности говоря, даже и не играют роли в сложном механизме наших дней.

Читатель может просто обругать автора свиньей.

— Эва,—скажет,—глядите, чего еще один пишет. Описывает, холера, переживания. Глядите, скажет, сейчас начнет про цветки поэмы гаворачивать.

Нет, про цветки автор писать не станет. Автор напишет повесть, по его мнению, даже весьма необходимую повесть, так сказать, подводящую итоги прошлой жизни, повесть про одного незначительного поэта, который жил в наше время.

Конечно, автор предвидит жесткую критику в этом смысле со стороны молодых и легкомысленных критиков, поверхностно глядящих на такие литературные факты.

Однако, совесть у автора чиста. Автор не забывает и другой фронт и не гнушается писать о прогулах, о силосовании и о ликвидации неграмотности. И даже, напротив, такая скромная работа как раз по его плечу.

Но на ряду с этим у автора имеется чрезвычайное стремление как ни можно скорей написать свои воспоминания об этом человеке, ибо в дальнейшем жизнь перешагнет его, все забудется, и травой зарастет та тропинка, по которой прошел наш скромный герой, наш знакомый и, прямо скажем, наш родственник М. П. Сивигин.

И это последнее обстоятельство позволило автору видеть всю его жизнь, все мелочи его жизни и все события, развернувшиеся в последние годы.

Вся личная его жизнь прошла, как на сцене, перед глазами автора.

Вот тут который с усиками и в замшевом костюмчике, если, не дай бог, он проскользнет в будущее столетие, наверно, слегка удивится и заполощется на своей сафьяновой козетке.

— Милуша,—скажет он, поглаживая свои усички,—интересно, скажет. У них, скажет, какая-то личная жизнь была.

— Андреус,—скажет она грудным голосом,—не мешай, скажет, за ради бога, я стихи читаю...

А в самом деле, читатель, какой-нибудь этакий с усиками в его спокойное время прямо нипочем правильно не представит нашей жизни. Он, наверное, будет думать, что мы все время в землянках сидели, воробьев кушали и вели какую-нибудь невысказанную дикую жизнь, полную ежедневных катастроф и ужасов.

Правда, надо прямо сказать, что многие и не имели так называемой личной жизни—они отдавали все силы и всю волю для ради своих идей и для стремления к цели.

Ну, а которые помельче, те, безусловно, ловчились, приспособлялись и старались попасть в ногу со временем для того, чтобы прилично прожить и поплотнее покушать.

И жизнь шла своим чередом. Происходила любовь и ревность, и деторождение, и разные великие материнские чувства, и разные тому подобные прекрасные переживания. И мы ходили с девушками в кино. И катались на лодках. И пели под гитару. И кушали вафлы с кремом. И носили модные носочки с прожилками. И танцевали фоксгрот под домашний рояль...

Нет, жизнь шла понемножку, как она и всегда и при всех любых обстоятельствах идет.

И любители такой жизни по мере своих сил приспособлялись и приисравлялись.

Так сказать, каждая эпоха имеет свою психику. И в каждую эпоху, пока что, было одинаково легко и одинаково трудно жить.

Для примера, на что уж был беспокойный век, ну, скажем, 16. Нам издали поглядеть, так прямо невысказанным кажется. Чуть не каждый день в то время на дуэлях дрались. Гостей с башен сбрасывали почему зря. И ничего. Все в порядке вещей было.

Нам-то, с нашей психикой, прямо боязно представить себе подобную ихнюю жизнь. Для примера, какой-нибудь там ихний феодалный сукин сын, какой-нибудь там виконт или там бывший граф идет, для примера, погулять.

Бот идет он погулять и, значит, шпагу сбоку прищипливает. Мало ли кто-нибудь его сейчас, боже сохрани, плечом пихнет или обругает трехэтажно—сразу надо драться. И ничего.

Идет на прогулку и даже на морде никакой грусти или паники не написано. Напротив того, идет и даже, может быть, улыбается и посылывает.

Ну, жену небрежно на прощанье поцелует. Ну, скажет, машер. Я того... пошел погуляться.

И та—хоть бы хны. Ладно, скажет, не опоздай, скажет, к обеду.

Да в наше время жена бы рыдала и за ноги бы цеплялась, умоляя не выходить на улицу или, в крайнем случае, просила бы обеспечить ей безбедное существование. А тут просто и безмятежно. Взял шпажонку, поточил ее, если она затупилась от прежней стучки, и пошел побродить до обеда, имея почти все шансы на дуэль или столкновение.

Надо сказать, если б автор жил в ту эпоху, его бы силой из дому не выкурили. Так бы всю жизнь и прожил бы взаперти вплоть до нашего времени.

Да, с нашей точки зрения неинтересная была жизнь! А там этого не замечали и жили поплеывая. И даже ездили в гости, к имеющим башни.

Так что в этом смысле человек очень великолепно устроен. Какая жизнь идет—в той он и прелестно живет. А которые не могут,

те, безусловно, отходят в сторону и не путаются под ногами. В этом смысле жизнь имеет очень строгие законы, и не всякий может поперек пути ложиться и иметь разногласия.

Так вот, сейчас перейдем к главному описанию, из-за чего, собственно, и началась эта книга. Автор извиняется, если он чего-нибудь лишнее сболтнул, не идущее к делу. Уж очень все такие нужные моменты и вопросы, требующие немедленного разрешения.

А что до психики, так это очень верно. Это вполне историей проверено.

Так вот, сейчас со спокойной совестью мы перейдем к воспоминаниям о человеке, который жил в начале двадцатого века.

По ходу повествования автор принужден будет касаться многих тяжелых вещей, грустных переживаний, лишений и нужды.

Но автор просит не выносить об этом поспешного заключения.

Некоторые нытики способны будут все невзгоды приписать только революции, которая происходила в то время.

Очень, знаете, странно, но тут дело не только в революции. Правда, революция сбила этого человека с позиции. Но тут, как бы сказать, во все времена возможна и вероятна такая жизнь.

Автор подозревает, что такие именно воспоминания могли быть написаны о каком-нибудь другом человеке, жившем в другую эпоху.

Автор просит отметить это обстоятельство.

Вот у автора был сосед по комнате. Бывший учитель рисования. Он спился. И влачил жалкую и неподобающую жизнь. Так этот учитель всегда любил говорить:

— Меня, говорит, не революция подпилила. Если б и не было революции, я бы все равно спился бы или бы проворовался, или бы меня на войне подстрелили, или бы в плену морду свернули на сторону. Я, говорит, заранее знал, на что иду и какая мне жизнь предстоит.

И это были золотые слова.

Автор не делает из этого мелодрамы. Нет. Автор уверен в победном шествии жизни, вполне годной для того, чтобы прожить припеваючи. Уж очень много людей об этом думает и ломает себе головы, стараясь потрафить человеку в этом смысле.

Конечно, еще, так сказать, пролог истории. Еще жизнь не утряслась. Говорят люди, двести лет назад чулки-то впервые стали носить.

Так что все в порядке. Хорошая жизнь приближается.

## 2

**Рождение героя. Молодость. Созерцательное настроение. Любовь к красоте. О нежных душах. Об Эрмитаже и о замечательной скифской вазе**

Михаил Поликарпович Синягин родился в 1887 году в имении «Паньково», Смоленской губернии.

Мать его была дворянка, а отец почетный гражданин.

Но поскольку автор был моложе М. П. Синягина лет на 10, то ничего такого путного автор и не может сказать об его молодых годах вплоть до 1916 года.

Но, поскольку его всегда и даже в сорок лет называли Мишелем, было видно, что он имел нежное детство, внимание, любовь и душевную ласку.

Его называли Мишелем—и верно, его нельзя было назвать иначе. Все другие грубые наименования мало шли к его лицу, к его

тонкой фигуре и к его изящным движениям, исполненным грации, достоинства и чувства ритма.

Кажется, что он окончил гимназию и, кажется, два или три года он еще где-то такое проучился. Образование у него было во всяком случае самое незаурядное.

В 1916 году автор с высоты своих 18 лет, находясь с ним в одном и том же городе, невольно наблюдал его жизнь и был, так сказать, очевидцем многих важных и значительных перемен и событий.

М. П. Синягин не был на фронте по случаю ущемления грыжи. И в конце европейской войны он слонялся по городу в своем штатском макинтоше, имея цветок в петлице и изящный, со слоновой ручкой, стек в руках.

Он ходил по улицам всегда несколько печальный и томный, в полном одиночестве, бормоча про себя стишки, которые он в изобилии сочинял, имея все же порядочное дарование, вкус и тонкое чутье ко всему красивому и изящному.

Его восхищали картины печальной и однообразной псковской природы, березки, речки и разные мошки, кружащиеся над цветочными клумбами.

Он уходил за город и, сняв шляпу, с тонкой и понимающей улыбкой следил за игрой птичек и комариков.

Или глядел на движущиеся тучные облака и, закинув голову, тут же сочинял на них соответствующие рифмы и стихи.

В те годы было еще порядочное количество людей высокообразованных и интеллигентных, с тонкой душевной организацией и нежной любовью к красоте и к разным изобразительным искусствам.

Надо прямо сказать, что в нашей стране всегда была исключительная интеллигентская прослойка, к которой охотно прислушивалась вся Европа и даже весь мир.

И верно, это были очень такие тонкие ценители искусства и балета и авторы многих замечательных произведений, и вдохновители многих отличных дел и великих учений.

Это не были спецы с точки зрения нашего понимания.

Это были просто интеллигентные возвышенные люди. Многие из них имели нежные души. А некоторые просто даже плакали при виде лишнего цветка на клумбе или прыгающего на навозной куче воробушка.

Дело прошлое, но, конечно, надо сказать, что в этом была даже некоторая какая-то такая ненормальность. И такой пышный расцвет безусловно был за счет чего-то такого другого.

Автор не владеет искусством диалектики и не знаком с разными научными теориями и течениями, так что не берется в этом смысле отыскивать причины и следствия. Но, грубо рассуждая, можно, конечно, кое до чего докопаться.

Если, предположим, в одной семье три сына. И если, предположим, одного сына обучать, кормить бутербродами с маслом, давать какао, мыть ежедневно в ванне и бриллиантом голову причесывать, а другим братьям давать пустышки и урезывать их во всех ихних потребностях, то первый сын очень свободно может далеко шагнуть и в своем образовании, и в своих душевных качествах. Он и стишки начнет загибать, и перед воробушками умиляться, и говорить о разных возвышенных предметах.

Вот автор недавно был в Эрмитаже. Глядел скифский отдел. И там есть одна такая замечательная прочная ваза. И лет ей, говорят, этой вазе, чего-то такое, если не врут, больше как две тысячи. Такая

шикарная золотая ваза. Очень исключительной тонкой скифской работы. Неизвестно, собственно, для чего ее скифы изготовили. Может, там для молока или полевые цветы туда ставить, чтоб скифский король нюхал. Неизвестно, ученые не выяснили. А нашли эту вазу в кургане.

Так вот, на этой вазе автор вдруг увидел рисунки—сидят скифские мужики. Один мужичонко-средняк сидит, другой ему зуб пальцами выковыривает, третий лаптишки себе поправляет.

Автор поглядел поближе—батюшки-светы. Ну, прямо наши до-революционные мужики. Ну, скажем, 1913 года. Даже костюмы те же—такие широкие рубахи, подпояски. Длинные спутанные бороды.

Автору даже как-то не по себе стало. Что за чорт. Смотрит в каталог—вазе 2 000 лет. На рисунки поглядишь—лет на полторы тысячи поменьше. Либо, значит, сплошное жульничество со стороны научных работников Эрмитажа, либо такие костюмчики и лапти так и сохранились вплоть до нашей революции.

Всеми этими разговорами автор, конечно, нисколько не хочет унижить бывшую интеллигентскую прослойку, о которой шла речь. Нет, тут просто выяснить хочется, как и чего, и на чьей совести камень лежит.

А прослойка, надо сознаться, была просто хороша, ничего против не скажешь.

Что касается М. П. Синягина, то автор, конечно, и не хочет его равнять с теми, о ком говорилось. Но все-таки, это был человек тоже в достаточной степени интеллигентный и возвышенный. Он многое понимал, любил красивые безделушки и поминутно восторгался художественным словом. Он сильно любил таких прекрасных, отличных поэтов и прозаиков, как Фет, Блок, Надсон и Есенин.

И в своем собственном творчестве, не отличаясь исключительной оригинальностью, он был под сильным влиянием этих славных поэтов. И в особенности, конечно, под влиянием исключительно гениального поэта тех лет А. А. Блока.

### 3

**Мать и тетка М. П. Синягина. Ихнее прошлое. Покупка имения. Жизнь в Пскове. Тучи собираются. Характер и склонности тетки М. А. Ара—вой. Встреча с Л. Н. Толстым. Стихи поэта. Его душевное настроение. Увлечение.**

Мишель Синягин жил со своей мамашей Анной Аркадьевной Синягиной и с ее сестрицей Марьей Аркадьевной, о которой в дальнейшем будет особая речь, особое описание и характеристика в силу того, что эта почтенная дама и вдова генерала Ар—ва играет немало-важную роль в нашем повествовании.

Итак, в 1917 году они втроем проживали в Пскове как случайные гости, застрявшие в этом небольшом славном городишке по причинам, не от себя зависящим.

Во время войны они приехали сюда для того, чтобы поселиться у своей сестры и тетки Марьи Аркадьевны, которая по случаю приобрела неподалеку от Пскова небольшое имение.

В этом имении обе старушки и хотели скоротать свой век вблизи с природой, в полной тишине и покое после довольно бурно и весело проведенной жизни.

Это злополучное имение и было названо соответствующим образом: «Затишье».

А Мишель, этот довольно грустноватый молодой человек, склонный к неопределенной меланхолии и несколько утомленный своей поэтической работой и шумом столичной жизни с ее ресторанами и певицами, и мордобоем, также хотел некоторое время спокойно пожить в тиши для того, чтоб набраться сил и снова пуститься во все тяжкие.

Все, однако, сложилось иначе, чем был задумано.

«Затишье» было куплено перед самой революцией, что-то месяца за два, так что семейство не успело даже туда перебраться со своими вещами и сундуками. И эти сундуки, перины, диваны и кровати временно и наспех были сложены на городской квартире у псковских знакомых. И именно в этой квартире в дальнейшем и пришлось прожить несколько лет Мишелю со своей престарелой мамашей и теткой.

Отличаясь свободомыслием и имея некоторую, что ли, тенденцию и любовь к революциям, обе старушки не очень обезумели по случаю революционного переворота и изъятия имений от помещиков. Однако, младшая сестрица, Марья Аркадьевна, всадившая в это дело около 60 тысяч капитала, все же иной раз охала и приседала, и говорила, что это чорт знает что такое, поскольку нельзя в'ехать в имение, купленное на собственные кровные деньги.

Анна Аркадьевна, мать Мишеля, была довольно незаметная дама. Она ничем таким особенным не проявила себя в своей жизни, исключая рождения поэта.

Это была довольно тихая, мало сварливая старушка, любящая сидеть у самовара и кушать кофе со сливками.

Что касается Марьи Аркадьевны, то эта дама была уже в другом роде.

Автор не имел удовольствия видеть ее в молодые годы, однако, было известно, что она была до чрезвычайности миленькая и симпатичная девица, полная жизни, огня и темперамента.

Но в те годы, о которых идет речь, это была уже бесформенная старушка, скорей безобразная, чем красивая, однако, еще очень подвижная и энергичная.

В этом смысле на ней сказалась ее бывшая профессия. В молодые годы она была балериной и работала в кордебалете Мариинского театра.

Она была в некотором роде даже знаменитостью, поскольку ею увлекался бывший великий князь Николай Николаевич. Правда, он вскоре ее оставил, подарив ей какой-то особый кротовый палантин, бусы и еще чего-то такое. Но начатая карьера ее была сделана.

Обе эти старушки в дальнейшем будут играть довольно видную роль в жизни Мишеля Синягина, так что пускай читатель не принимает близко к сердцу и не сердится, что автор останавливается на описании таких, что ли, дряхловатых и отцветших героинь.

Поэтическая атмосфера в доме благодаря Мишелю несколько отозвалась и на наших дамах. И Марья Аркадьевна любила говорить, что она вскоре приступит к своим мемуарам.

Ее бурная жизнь и встреча со многими известными людьми стоила того.

Она самолично будто бы два раза видела Л. Н. Толстого, Надсона, Кони, Переверзева и других знаменитых людей, о которых она и хотела поведать миру свои соображения.

Итак, перед началом революции семья приехала в Псков и там застряла на три года.

М. П. Синягин всякий день говорил, что он ни за что не намерен торчать здесь и что при первой возможности он уедет в Москву или Ленинград. Однако, последующие события и перемены жизни значительно отдалили этот отъезд.

И наш Мишель Синягин продолжал свою жизнь под псковским небом, занимаясь пока что своими стихами и своим временным увлечением одной местной девушкой, которой он в изобилии посвящал свои стихи.

Конечно, эти стихи не были отмечены гениальностью, они не были даже в достаточной мере оригинальны, но свежесть чувств и бесхитростный несложный стиль делали их заметными в общем котле стихов того времени.

Автор не помнит этих стихов. Жизнь, заботы и огорчения изгнали из памяти изящные строчки и поэтические рифмы, но какие-то отрывки и отдельные строфы запомнились в силу их неподдельного чувства.

Лепестки и незабудки  
Осыпались за окном...

Автор не запомнил всего этого стихотворения «Осень», но помнится, что конец его был полон гражданской грусти:

Ах, скажите же зачем,  
Отчего в природе  
Так устроено? И тем  
Счастья в жизни нет совсем...

Другое стихотворение Мишеля говорило о его любви к природе и ее бурным стихийным проявлениям:

Гроза  
Гроза прошла  
И ветки белых роз  
В окно мне дышат  
Дивным ароматом.  
Еще трава полна  
Прозрачных слез,  
А гром гремит вдали  
Раскатом...

Это стихотворение было разучено всей семьей, и старые дамы ежедневно нараспев повторяли его, чем доставляли живейшую радость автору.

А когда приходили гости, Анна Аркадьевна Синягина волокла их в комнату Мишеля и там, показывая на письменный стол карельской березы, вздыхала и с увлажненными глазами говорила:

— Вот за этим столом Мишель написал свои лучшие вещи «Гроза», «Лепестки и незабудки» и «Дамы, дамы».

— Мамаша, — говорил, вспыхивая, Мишель, — бросьте.

Гости покачивали головами и, не то одобряя, не то огорчаясь, трогали пальцами стол и неопределенно говорили: «И-да, ничего себе».

Некоторые же меркантильные души тут же спрашивали, за сколько куплен этот стол, и тем самым переводили разговор на другие рельсы, менее приятные для матери и Мишеля.

Поэт отдавал внимание и женщинам, однако, находясь под сильным влиянием знаменитых поэтов того времени, он не бросал свои чувства какой-нибудь отдельной женщине. Он любил нереально какую-то неизвестную женщину, блестящую в своей красоте и таинственности.

Одно прелестное стихотворение «Дамы, дамы, отчего мне на вас глядеть приятно» отлично раскрывало это отношение. Это стихотворение заканчивалось так:

Оттого-то незнакомкой я люблюсь. А когда  
Эта наша незнакомка познакомится со мной —  
Неохота мне глядеть на знакомое лицо  
И противно ей давать обручальное кольцо...

Тем не менее, поэт увлекся одной определенной девушкой и в этом смысле его поэтический гений шел несколько вразрез с его житейскими потребностями.

Однако, справедливость требует отметить, что Мишель тяготился своим земным увлечением, находя его несколько вульгарным и мелким. Его главным образом пугало, как бы его не окрутили и как бы его не заставили жениться и тем самым не снизили бы его до простых повседневных поступков.

Мишель рассчитывал на другую, более исключительную судьбу. И о своей будущей жене он мечтал как о какой-то удивительной даме, вовсе не похожей на псковских девушек.

Он не представлял в точности, какая у него будет жена, но, думая об этом, он мысленно видел каких-то собачек, какие-то меха, сбруи и экипажи. Она выходит из экипажа, и лакей, почтительно кланяясь, открывает дверцы.

Девушка же, которой он увлекался, была более простенькая девушка. Это была Симочка М., окончившая в тот год псковскую гимназию.

#### 4

**Увлечение. Короткое счастье. Страстная любовь к поэту. Вдова М. и ее характеристика. Неожиданный визит. Некрасивая сцена. Согласие на брак**

Относясь несколько небрежно к Симочке, Мишель все же порядочно был увлечен ею, ни на минуту, впрочем, не допуская мысли, что он может жениться на ней.

Это было простое увлечение, это была несерьезная и, так сказать, черновая любовь, которой и не следовало бы забивать своего сердца.

Симочка была миленькая и даже славненькая девушка, личико которой, к сожалению, чрезмерно было осыпано веснушками.

Но поскольку она не входила глубоко в жизнь Мишеля, он и не протестовал против этого и даже находил это весьма милым и не лишним.

Они оба уходили в лес или в поле и там нараспев читали стихи или бегали взапуски, как дети, резвясь и восторгаясь солнцем и ароматом.

Тем не менее, в одно прекрасное время Симочка почувствовала себя матерью, о чем и сообщила своему другу. Она любила его первым девичьим чувством и даже могла подолгу глядеть на его лицо не отрываясь.

Она страстно и трогательно любила его, отлично понимая, что он ей, провинциальной девушке, не пара.

Известие, сообщенное Симочкой, глубоко ошеломило и даже напугало Мишеля. Он не столько боялся Симочки, сколько он боялся ее матери, известной в городе г. М., очень энергичной, живой вдовы, отягченной большой семьей. У нее было что-то около шести

дочерей, которых она довольно успешно и энергично устраивала замуж, идя ради этого на всевозможные хитрости, угрозы и даже оскорбления действием.

Это была очень такая смуглая, несколько рябая дама. Несмотря на это, все девочки у нее были белокурые и даже скорей белобрысенькие, похожие, вероятно, на отца, умершего два года назад от сапа.

В то время не было еще алиментов и брачных льгот, и Мишель с ужасом думал о возможных последствиях.

Он решительно не мог жениться на ней. Он не о такой мечтал жизни и не на такую провинциальную жизнь он рассчитывал.

Ему казалось все это временным, случайным и проходящим. И что вскоре начнется другая жизнь, полная славных радостей, восторгов, подвигов и начинаний.

И, глядя на свою подругу, он думал, что она ни в каком случае не должна быть его женой—эта белобрысенькая девушка с веснушками. Кроме того, он знал ее старших сестер—все они, выходя замуж, быстро увядали и старели, и это также было не по душе поэту.

Он уже хотел смотать удочки и выехать в Ленинград, но последующие события задержали его в Пскове.

Смуглая и рябая дама, вдова М., пришла к нему на квартиру и потребовала, чтоб он женился на ее дочери.

Она пришла в тот день и в тот час, когда в квартире никого не было, и Мишель волей-неволей должен был единолично принять на себя весь удар.

Она пришла к нему в комнату и сначала даже несколько сконфуженно и робко поведала о цели своего посещения.

Скромный, мечтательный и деликатный поэт сначала так же вежливо пытался возражать ей, но все слова его были малоубедительны и не доходили до сознания энергичной дамы.

Вскоре вежливый тон сменился на более энергичный. Последовали жесты и даже безобразные слова и крики. Оба кричали одновременно, стараясь заглушить друг друга и тем самым морально подавить волю и энергию.

Вдова М. сидела в кресле, но, разгорячившись, начала крупно шагать по комнате, двигая для большей убедительности стулья, этажерки и даже тяжелые сундуки. Мишель, как утопающий, старался выбраться из пучины и, не сдаваясь, орал и старался даже физически оттеснить вдову в другую комнату и в прихожую.

Но вдова и любящая энергичная мать неожиданно вдруг вскочила на подоконник и торжественным голосом сказала, что вот сейчас она выпрыгнет из окна на Соборную улицу и погибнет, как собака, если он не даст своего согласия на этот брак.

И, раскрыв окно, она моталась на подоконнике, рискуя каждую минуту свалиться вниз.

Мишель стоял ошеломленный и, не зная, что делать, то подбегал к ней, то к столу, то бросался, схватившись за голову, в коридор, чтоб позвать на помощь.

Уже внизу, на улице, стали собираться люди, показывая пальцами и высказывая самые смелые предположения по поводу кричащей и прыгающей на окне дамы.

Гнев, оскорбление, страх скандала и ужас сковали Мишеля, и он стоял теперь, подавленный столь энергическим характером этой дамы.

Он стоял у стола и с ужасом наблюдал за своей гостьей, которая пронзительно, как торговка, визжала и требовала положительного ответа.

Ее ноги скользили по подоконнику, и каждое неосторожное движение могло вызвать ее падение со второго этажа.

Была чудная августовская погода. Солнце блестело с синего неба. Зайчик на стене прыгал от раскрытого окна. Все было знакомо и прекрасно в своей милой повседневности, и только кричащая и визжащая дама нарушала обычный ход вещей.

И волнуясь, и умоляя прекратить выкрики, Мишель дал свое согласие на брак с Симочкой.

Мадам немедленно и охотно сошла тогда с окна и тихим голосом просила его извинить за ее несколько, может быть, шумное поведение, говоря при этом о своих материнских чувствах и ощущениях.

Она поцеловала Мишеля в щеку и, назвав его своим сыном, всхлипнула при этом от неподдельности своих чувств.

Мишель стоял, как в воду опущенный, не зная, что сказать и что сделать и как выпутаться из беды.

Он проводил вдову до дверей и, подавленный ее волей, поцеловал даже неожиданно для себя ее руку и, окончательно смешавшись, попрощался до скорого свидания, лепеча какие-то отдельные слова, мало идущие к делу.

Вдова молча, торжественно и сияя покинула дом, предварительно попудрившись и подрисовав сбитые на сторону брови.

## 5

### **Нервное потрясение. Литературное наследство. Свидание. Свадьба. Отъезд тетки Марьи. Кончина матери. Рождение ребенка. Отъезд Мишеля**

В тот злосчастный день вечером после ухода незваной гостьи Мишель написал свое известное стихотворение, впоследствии переложенное на музыку: «Сосны, сосны, ответьте мне...»

Это его несколько успокоило, однако, потрясение было настолько значительное и серьезное, что ночью Мишель почувствовал сильное сердцебиение, безотчетный страх, тошноту и головокружение.

Думая, что помирает, с трясущимися руками, в одних подштанниках, поэт вскочил с кровати и, хватаясь за сердце, с тоской и страхом разбудил свою мамашу и тетку, которые не были еще посвящены в эту историю. И, ничего не объясняя, он начал лепетать о смерти и о том, что он хочет отдать свои последние распоряжения по поводу его рукописей.

Он, качаясь, подошел к столу и начал вытаскивать груды рукописей, перебирая их, сортируя и указывая, что, по его мнению, следовало бы издать и что следует отложить на будущие времена.

Обе немолодые дамы, отвыкшие от ночных походов, в нижних юбках и с распущенными волосами, с тоской металась по комнате и, заламывая руки, пытались уговорить и даже силой уложить Мишеля в постель, считая нужным поставить ему компресс на сердце или смазать иодом бок и тем самым оттянуть кровь, бросившуюся в голову.

Но Мишель, прося не тревожиться за его, в сущности, ничтожную жизнь, велел лучше запомнить то, что он говорит по поводу своего литературного наследства.

Разобрав рукописи, Мишель, бегая по комнате в своих подштанниках, начал диктовать тетке Марье Аркадьевне новый вариант

«Лепестков и незабудок», который он не успел еще переложить на бумагу.

Плача и захлебываясь слезами, тетка Марья при свете свечи марала бумагу, путая и перевирая строфы и рифмы.

Лихорадочная работа несколько отвлекла Мишеля от его заболевания. Сердцебиение продолжалось, но было более умеренно, и головокружение сменилось полной сонливостью и апатией. И Мишель, неожиданно для всех, тихо заснул, прикурнув в кресле.

Прикрыв его пледом и перекрестив, старые дамы удалились, страшась за столь нервный организм и неуравновешенную психику поэта.

На другой день Мишель встал, освеженный и бодрый. Но вчерашний страх не покидал его, и он поведал о своих потрясениях своим родственникам.

Драмы и слезы были в полном разгаре, когда пришла записка от Симочки, умолявшей его о свидании.

Он пошел на это свидание надменный и сдержанный, не думая, впрочем, в силу некоторой своей порядочности, ловчиться и отлынивать от обещаний.

Влюбленная женщина умоляла его простить недостойное поведение ее матери, говоря, что она лично хотя и мечтала связать свою жизнь с ним, но никогда не рискнула бы пойти на такие нахальные требования.

Мишель сдержанно сказал, что он сделает то, что обещано, но что на дальнейшую совместную жизнь он не дает гарантии. Может, он проживет в Пскове год или два, но в конце концов он, скорей всего, уедет в Москву или Ленинград, где он и намерен продолжать свою карьеру или, во всяком случае, будет там искать соответствующей жизни, удовлетворяющей его потребностям.

Не оскорбляя девушку словами, Мишель все же дал ей понять разницу в их, если и не положении, которое уравнилось революцией, то, во всяком случае, назначении в жизни.

Влюбленная молодая дама, соглашаясь во всем, восторженно глядела на его лицо и говорила, что она ничем не хочет связывать его жизни, что он волен поступать так, как ему заблагорассудится.

Несколько успокоенный в этом смысле, Мишель сам даже стал говорить, что брак этот решенное дело, но что когда он произойдет, он еще не может сказать.

Они расстались, как и прежде, скорее дружески, чем враждебно, и Мишель спокойным шагом побрел домой, несмотря на то, что рана в его душе не могла зажить так скоро.

Мишель женился на Симочке М. примерно через полгода, зимой, в январе.

Предстоящий брак чрезвычайно подействовал на здоровье матери Мишеля. Она начала жаловаться на скуку жизни и пустоту, и на глазах чахла и хирела, почти не вставая из-за самовара.

Понятие о браке было в то время несколько иное, чем теперь, и это был шаг, по мнению старых женщин, единственный, решительный и освященный таинством.

Тетка Марья также была потрясена. При чем она как-то даже оскорбилась подобным ходом дела и уже все более часто говорила, что ей здесь не место, что она в ближайшее время поедет в Ленинград, где и приступит к своим мемуарам и описаниям встреч.

Мишель, несколько сконфуженный всеми делами, угрюмый ходил по комнатам, говоря, что если б не данное слово, он наплевал бы на все и уехал бы, куда глаза глядят. Но, во всяком случае, пусть

все знают, что этот брак не связывает его, он хозяин своей жизни, он не отступает от своих планов и, вероятно, через полгода или год поедет вслед за теткой.

Свадьба была сыграна скромно и просто.

Они записались в комиссариате, после чего в церкви Преображения было устроено скромное венчание.

Все родственники с обеих сторон ходили сдержанные и как бы по-разному оскорбленные в своих чувствах. И только вдова М., напудренная и подкрашенная, колбасилась в своей вуали по церкви и по квартире Мишеля, в которой и был устроен свадебный ужин.

Вдова одна за всех говорила за столом, провозглашала тосты и спичи и осыпала старух комплиментами, всячески поддерживая этим веселое расположение духа и приличный тон свадьбы.

Молодая краснела за свою мать и за ее рябоватое лицо, и за ее пронзительный, не дававший никому спуску голос и, опустив голову, сидела за своим прибором.

Мишель за весь вечер не терял своей сдержанности, однако, его точила тоска и мысли о том, что его все же, чего бы там ни говорили, опутали, как сукинова сына. И что эта арапская женщина взяла его на испуг, тем более, что навряд ли она кинулась бы из окна.

И в конце ужина, криво усмехаясь, он после поздравлений и любезностей спросил вдову об этом, наклонившись к ее уху:

— А ведь вы бы не прыгнули из окна, Елена Борисовна, — сказал он.

Вдова успокаивала его, как могла, говоря и давая торжественные клятвы в том, что она, несомненно, и скорей всего прыгнула бы, если б он не дал своего согласия. Но под конец, разозленная его кривыми улыбочками, сердито сказала, что у ней шесть дочерей и если из-за каждой она начнет из окон прыгать, то и окон для этого нехватит в помещении.

Мишель пугливо смотрел на ее злое, оскорбленное лицо и, смешавшись, отошел в сторону.

— Все ложь, 'форменный эгоизм и обман, — бормотал Мишель с краской в лице, вспоминая подробности.

Вечер все же прошел прилично и не оскорбительно для гостей, и началась повседневная жизнь с разговорами об отъезде, о лучшей жизни и о том, что в этом городе невозможно сколько-нибудь прилично устроить свою судьбу, принимая во внимание революционную грозу, которая все более и более разгоралась.

В ту весну, наконец, собравшись, уехала в Ленинград тетка Марья Аркадьевна и вскоре оттуда прислала отчаянное письмо, в котором извещала, что в дороге ее обокрали, унеся ее саквояж с частью драгоценностей.

Письмо было несвязное и запутанное—видимо, это потрясение сильно подействовало на немолодую даму.

К этому времени тихо и неожиданно скончалась мать Мишеля, не успев даже ни с кем проститься и отдать свои последние распоряжения.

Все это сильно подействовало на Мишеля, который стал какой-то тихий, робкий и даже пугливый.

Были пролиты слезы, но это событие вскоре заслонилось другим. У Симочки родился шупленький, но милый ребенок, и новое, неиспытанное отцовское чувство несколько захватило Мишеля.

Однако, это не долго продолжалось, и он снова начал поговаривать об отъезде, уже более реально и решительно.

И осенью, получив от тетки Марьи новое письмо, которое он никому не показал, Мишель быстро стал собираться, говоря, что он обеспечивает свою жену и ребенка всем движимым имуществом, оставляя его в их полную собственность.

Молодая дама попрежнему, а может, даже и более влюбленная в своего супруга, с ужасом слушала его слова, но не смела его удерживать, говоря, что он волен поступать, как ему хочется.

Она его любит попрежнему и несмотря ни на что, и пусть он знает, что тут, в Пскове, остается верный ему человек, готовый следовать за ним по пятам и в Ленинград, и в ссылку.

Пугаясь, как бы она не увязалась за ним в Ленинград, Мишель переводил разговор на другие темы, но молодая дама, рыдая, продолжала говорить о своей любви и самопожертвовании.

Да, она ему не пара, она всегда это знала, но если когда-нибудь он будет старый, безногий, если когда-нибудь он ослепнет или будет сослан в Сибирь,—тогда он может позвать ее, и она с радостью отзовется на его приглашение.

Да, она даже хотела бы для него беды и несчастья—это их уравнило бы в жизни.

Мучаясь от жалости и проклиная себя за малодушие и такие разговоры, Мишель стал поторапливаться с отъездом.

В эту пору объяснений и слез Мишель написал новое стихотворение: «Нет, не удерживай меня, младая дева» и стал быстро и торопливо укладывать все чемоданы.

Он недолго вкушал семейное счастье и в одно прекрасное утро, достав разрешение на выезд, отбыл в Ленинград с двумя большими чемоданами и корзинкой.

## 6

**Новые планы. Несчастье тетки Марьи. Мишель поступает на службу. Новая комната. Новая любовь. Неожиданная катастрофа. Серьезная болезнь тетки**

Мишель приехал в Ленинград и поселился на Фонтанке, угол Невского.

Он временно поселился в теткиной комнате за ширмой. Однако, ему твердо была обещана отдельная комната, как только кто-нибудь из жильцов помрет.

Но Мишель не очень торопился с этим. Другие идеи и планы теснились в его голове.

Он приехал в Ленинград примерно за год или за два до рева. Революция была в полном разгаре. Голод и разруха, так сказать, сжимали город в своих цепких объятиях. И, казалось, было странным приезжать в эту пору и искать лучшей жизни и карьеры. Но на это были свои причины.

В присланном письме тетка Марья со своей беспечностью извещала Мишеля, что, вероятно, в ближайшие месяцы город Ленинград отойдет к Финляндии или к Англии и будет объявлен вольным городом. В ту пору такие слухи ходили среди населения, и Мишель, взволнованный этим извещением, поторопился приехать.

Тетка, кроме того, извещала, что она отнюдь не переменяла своих либеральных убеждений и не идет против революции, но поскольку революция продолжается так долго, и вот уже третий год как ей не отдают имущества, то это просто ни на что не похоже, и в таком случае им самим необходимо предпринять решительные шаги.

Итак, в силу этого Мишель прибыл в Ленинград и поселился на Фонтанке.

Он нашел тетку чрезвычайно изменившейся. Он просто не узнал ее.

Это была весьма похудевшая старуха с отвисшей челюстью и блуждающим взором.

Тетка поведала ему, что ее за это время дважды обчистили. Первый раз в поезде и второй раз здесь на квартире. К ней под видом облыска пришли просто какие-то мазурики и, предъявив фальшивый мандат, унесли почти все оставшиеся драгоценности.

Когда-то веселая и живая дама стала тихой, дрябловатой и не любопытной старухой. Она по большей части лежала теперь на своей кровати и неохотно вступала в разговор даже с Мишелем. А если и начинала говорить, то сводила разговор главным образом на свои кражи, волнуясь при этом и неся какую-то явную околесицу.

Однако, тетка не была в нужде. На ее шее была прекрасная массивная цепь с золотым лорнетом. На пальцах ее были нанизаны разные кольца и караты, и имущества в комнате было слишком достаточно.

Время от времени тетка Марья продавала на базаре ту или иную вещь и жила довольно прекрасно, помогая при этом Мишелю, который ничего не имел и не предполагал иметь.

Слухи о вольном городе оставались ни на чем необоснованными слухами. И в силу этого приходилось подумать о более оседлой жизни и о будущей судьбе.

И Мишель, записавшись на биржу труда, вскоре получил назначение на работу.

Он получил назначение во Дворец Труда. И в силу того, что он не имел никакой специальности и, в сущности, не умел ничего делать, ему дали мелкую бестолковую работу в справочном отделении.

Такая работа, конечно, не могла удовлетворить духовных и поэтических запросов Мишеля. Больше того, он был несколько даже сконфужен и даже обижен такой работой, более пригодной для молодой беспечной девицы. Давать справки и указания, где какая комната расположена и где какой работает товарищ,—это было просто смешно, несерьезно и даже форменным образом оскорбительно для его мужского достоинства.

Однако, в ту пору нельзя было быть слишком разборчивым, и Мишель нес свои обязанности, неясно надеясь на какие-то перемены и улучшения.

К этому времени Мишель получил в квартире комнату, которая неожиданно очистилась благодаря отъезду за границу одного известного поэта Х.

Это была прелестная небольшая комната, тоже с видом на Фонтанку и Невский.

Это обстоятельство окрылило Мишеля и вдохнуло в него угасавшее творчество.

Получая паек и небольшую помощь от тетки, он уже довольно прилично себя чувствовал и стал ходить по гостям, найдя в городе кое-каких бывших своих знакомых и товарищей.

В эту зиму было получено два письма от Симочки.

Эти письма взволновали Мишеля, но, мучась от жалости к ней, он все же решил не отвечать на них, более правильным, не морочить голову молодой женщине и не давать ей неопределенных надежд.

И он продолжал свою жизнь, отыскивая в ней новые радости.

В ту пору он сошелся с очень такой исключительной, красивой женщиной, несколько, правда, развязной в своих движениях и поступках.

Это была некая Изабелла Ефремовна Крюкова—очень красивая, даже элегантная женщина, совершенно неопределенной профессии и даже, кажется, не член профсоюза.

Эта связь доставила Мишелю много новых беспокойств и тревожений.

Не имея средств для приличной жизни, Мишель сколько возможно тянул со своей теткой, которая с каждым днем делалась все более угрюмой, пелубезной и неохотно пускала в комнату Мишеля. И всякий раз беспокойно следила за его движениями во время визита, видимо, побаиваясь, как бы он чего не спер.

Она давала ему незначительные подачки, и Мишелю приходилось убеждать, кричать, даже ругать тетку, обзывая ее скупердяйкой, держимордой и сволочью.

Около года продолжалась такая беспокойная жизнь.

Красивая возлюбленная приходила к Мишелю на своих французских каблучках и требовала все новых и новых расходов. Поэту приходилось изворачиваться и ломать себе голову в поисках доходов.

Мишель продолжал нести свою службу, к которой он относился все более небрежно и халатно. Он неохотно давал теперь справки, кричал на посетителей и даже в раздражении иной раз топал на них ногами, посылая более назойливых к чертям собачьим и дальше.

Он особенно не любил грязных и неуклюжих мужиков, которые приходили за справками, путая, перевирая и неточно излагая свои мысли.

Мишель грубо орал на них, называя их сиволапыми олухами, и морщился от запаха нищеты, некрасивых лиц и грубой одежды.

Конечно, так не могло долго продолжаться, и после целого ряда жалоб Мишель потерял службу, лишившись пайка и кое-каких доходов.

Это был, в сущности говоря, серьезный удар и форменная катастрофа, но влюбленный поэт не замечал, что тучи над его головой сгущаются.

Изабелла Ефремовна приходила к нему почти что всякий день и пела грудным низким голосом разные цыганские романсы, прихотывая при этом ногами и аккомпанируя себе на гитаре.

Это была прелестная молодая дама, рожденная для лучшей судьбы и беспечной жизни. Она презирала бедность и нищету и мечтала уехать за границу, подбивая на это и Мишеля, с которым она мечтала перейти персидскую границу.

И в силу этого Мишель не искал работы и жил, надеясь на какие-то неожиданные обстоятельства.

И эти обстоятельства вскоре последовали.

В одно ненастное утро, придя в комнату тетки для того, чтобы попросить у нее необходимых ему денег, и приготовившись к стычке, Мишель поражен был беспорядком и сдвинутыми с места вещами.

Тетка Марья сидела в кресле, перебирая в руках какие-то бутылки, пузырьки и коробочки.

Она взволновалась, когда Мишель вошел в комнату, и, пряча под платок свои склянки, начала визжать и бросать в Мишеля что попадет под руку.

Мишель стоял остолбеневший около двери, не смея шагнуть дальше и не понимая, чего, собственно, тут происходит.

Через несколько секунд тетка, позабыв о Мишеле, начала кружиться по комнате, напевая при этом шансонетки и вскидывая ногами.

Тогда Мишель понял, что тетка Марья свихнулась в своем уме.

И, пугаясь ее, взволнованный и потрясенный, он прикрыл дверь и в щелку начал следить за безумной старухой.

У нее появились совершенно необычайные молодые движения. Ее обычная за последний год неподвижность сменилась каким-то бурным весельем, движениями и суетой.

Тетка буквально порхала по комнате и, подбегая к зеркалу, гримасничала и кривлялась, посылая неизвестно кому воздушные поцелуи.

Мишель пораженный стоял за дверью, прикидывая в уме, как ему поступить и что делать и какие, собственно говоря, выгоды он может снять с этого дела.

Затем, прикрыв плотно дверь, Мишель кинулся к уполномоченному квартирой, чтоб сообщить о несчастье.

## 7

### Тетку отправляют в лечебницу. Желтый дом. Веселая жизнь. Свидание с теткой. Окончательная распродажа имущества

Квартира, в которой проживал Мишель, была коммунальная. В ней было десять комнат с тридцатью слишком жильцами.

Мишель не имел отношения к этим людям, он даже чуждался их и не заводил знакомства.

Тут, между прочим, жил портной Елкин со своей супругой и ребенком, фабричная работница, бухгалтер Госцветмета Р. и почтовый служащий Н. С., который и являлся уполномоченным квартиры.

Было воскресенье, и все жильцы находились дома в своих комнатах.

Стараясь не шуметь и говоря взволнованным шопотом, Мишель предупредил уполномоченного о буйном сумасшествии своей тетки.

Было решено вызвать карету скорой помощи и поскорей сплавить старуху в сумасшедший дом, поскольку это представляло значительную опасность для жильцов.

Мишель, ахая, бросился в нижнюю квартиру и по телефону вызвал карету скорой помощи, которая и прибыла незамедлительно.

Два человека в белых балахонах в сопровождении Мишеля вошли в комнату старухи.

Тетка Марья, забившись в угол, не подпускала к себе никого, бросаясь вещами и ругаясь, как мужчина.

Позади раскрытых дверей теснились жильцы, помогая советами и планами захвата старухи.

Все говорили шопотом и с нескрываемым диким любопытством следили за движениями безумной старухи.

Братья милосердия в своих халатах, как более опытные, одновременно шагнули к больной и, схватив ее за руки, сжали ее в своих объятиях.

Старуха старалась укусить их за руки, но, как это и всегда бывает, бурная энергия сменилась спокойствием и даже безжизненной апатией.

Старуха позволила надеть на себя ватерпруф. Голову ей обвязали платком и, подталкиваемая сзади Мишелем, она была благо-

получно под руки спущена вниз и посажена в автомобиль, в который уместился и Мишель, со страхом поглядывая на свою обезумевшую родственницу.

Всю дорогу тетка почти не проявляла признаков жизни, и только когда автомобиль приехал на Пряжку и остановился у желтого дома, тетка Марья снова проявила буйство и, сопротивляясь, долго не хотела вылезать из автомобиля, снова ругаясь безобразными словами.

Однако, ее благополучно вывели и под руки через сад повели в под'езд.

Сторож у ворот, привыкший к таким делам, без любопытства наблюдал за этой сценой и, привстав со своей скамейки, молча пальцем указал, куда двигаться.

Старуху провели через темный коридор и сдали в распределитель.

Мишель заполнил анкету и, получив на руки тетчины драгоценности—ее золотую цепочку с лорнетом, кольца и брошь, вышел взволнованный из приемной комнаты.

Он прошел сад и, очутившись на улице, остановился в нерешительности. Потом долго ходил по улице и со страхом и даже с ужасом поглядывал на желтый дом, прислушиваясь к крикам и воплям, доносившимся из открытых окон.

Он пошел было домой, но, остановившись на деревянном мосту через Пряжку, обернулся назад.

Желтый дом с облезлой, грязной штукатуркой был теперь весь на виду. В окнах за решетками мелькали белые фигуры. Некоторые неподвижно стояли у окон и смотрели на улицу. Другие, ухватившись за решетки, старались сдвинуть их с места.

Внизу на улице, на берегу Пряжки, стояли нормальные люди и с нескрываемым любопытством глядели на сумасшедших, задрвав кверху свои головы.

Мишель быстро и не оглядываясь пошел домой, неся в своих руках тетчины драгоценности.

Первые дни потрясения прошли, все улеглось, и жизнь, как обычно, пошла дальше.

Не имея службы и не ища ее, Мишель продолжал беспечно существовать и, встречаясь со своей возлюбленной, жил на тетчино имущество, которое так неожиданно досталось ему.

В то время был уже нэп во всем своем разгаре. Снова были открыты магазины, театры и кино. Появились извозчики и лихачи. И Мишель со своей дамой окунулся в водоворот жизни.

Они под руку появлялись во всех ресторанах и кабаках. Танцевали фокстрот и утомленные, почти счастливые, возвращались на лихаче домой с тем, чтобы заснуть крепким сном и утром снова начать веселое, беспечное существование.

Но иной раз, вспоминая про свою тетку и тратя ее имущество, Мишель чувствовал угрызение совести и тогда, всякий раз, давал себе слово навестить больную для того, чтоб снести ей кой-каких конфет и гостинцев и тем самым сделать ее участницей в расходах.

Но дни шли за днями, и Мишель откладывал свое посещение.

В эту зиму веселья и танцев Мишель получил извещение из Пскова от своего владельца дома и теперь арендатора о том, что его жена, потеряв ребенка и выйдя замуж, уехала из квартиры, задожав ему значительную сумму. Она оставила ему кое-какую мебель, которую арендатор и считает своей, если Мишель не пришлет ему денег в ближайший месяц.

Прочтя это письмо утром после попойки, Мишель сердито скомкал его и бросил под кровать с тем, чтобы не вспоминать о своей прошлой жизни.

Так проходила зима, и в один из февральских дней, после того, как были проданы последние драгоценности, Мишель отправился к тетке на свидание.

Он купил разной снеди и с тяжелым сердцем и неопределенным страхом отправился на Пряжку.

Тетку привели в приемную комнату и оставили ее вместе с Мишелем.

Буйное сумасшествие сменилось тихой меланхолией, и теперь тетка Марья в своей белой полотняной кофте стояла перед Мишелем и, странно и хитро поглядывая на него, не узнавала своего племянника.

Сказав несколько неопределенных слов и делая руками энергичные жесты, понятные сумасшедшим, Мишель молча поклонился и вышел из помещения с тем, чтобы сюда никогда не возвращаться.

С легким сердцем Мишель вернулся домой и уже со спокойной совестью стал распоряжаться своим наследством.

Изабелла Ефремовна ревностно помогала ему в этом, уговаривая его поменьше церемониться и стесняться в смысле окончательной распродажи всего имущества.

## 8

### Неожиданная беда. Ужасный скандал. Нервная болезнь Мишеля. Ссора с возлюбленной. Падение

В апреле 1925 года стояла исключительно хорошая и ясная погода.

Мишель в легком своем пальто, под руку с Изабеллой Ефремовной, выходил из своей комнаты, желая пойти погулять на Набережной и посмотреть на ледоход.

И, закрывая дверь на ключ и напевая «Бананы, бананы», он поглядывал на свою даму.

Она тут же колбасилась в коридоре, делая своими стройными ножками разные па и танцуя чарльстон.

Она была чудно хороша в своем светлом весеннем костюме, со своим прелестным профилем и завитушками из-под шляпы.

Мишель любовно глядел на нее, восхищаясь ее красотой, молодостью и беспечностью.

Да, конечно, она не была слишком ученая девица, способная с легкостью поговорить о Канте или Бабеле или о теории вероятности и относительности. Безусловно, она этого ничего не знала и не имела склонности к умозрительным наукам, предпочитая им легкую, простую жизнь. Морщины раздумья не бороздили ее лба.

Мишель любил ее со всей страстью и, мысленно сравнивая ее со своей бывшей Симочкой, приходил в ужас,—как он мог так низко пасть, женившись на такой провинциальной курочке.

Итак, танцуя чарльстон и дурачась и взявшись за руки, они пошли по коридору и, выйдя в прихожую, остановились, чтоб прогустить вошедшую пару.

Это был рассыльный с книжкой и рядом с ним старая женщина, завернутая в зимний ватерпруф, с головой, повязанной шерстяным платком.

Это была не кто иная, как тетка Марья.

Грубым, шутливым тоном рассыльный спросил, здесь ли проживала выздоровевшая гражданка А. и если здесь, то вот, не угодно ли принять кого следует.

Все помутилось в глазах Мишеля. Ноги приросли к полу, и страх отнял у него дар речи.

Кое-как поставив небольшую каракулю в рассыльной книге, Мишель перевел глаза на тетку, которая, сконфуженно улыбаясь, ручкой приветствовала своего племянника.

Мишель начал лепетать непонятные слова и, пятась к двери, старался заслонить проход, не желая тем самым пропустить тетку дальше.

Тетка Марья шагнула к нему и начала довольно понятно изъясняться, говоря, что она сильно прихворнула, но теперь почти что оправилась и в дальнейшем нуждается только в полной тишине и спокойствии.

Понимая всю серьезность дела и не желая мешать объяснению родственников, Изабелла Ефремовна, сказав, что она зайдет завтра, как птичка, выпорхнула на лестницу и исчезла.

А тетка Марья в сопровождении Мишеля пошла по коридору, направляясь к своей двери.

Мишель, взяв тетку под руку и стараясь не допустить ее в комнату, в которой оставалась лишь какая-то жалкая дребедень, тянул ее к себе, говоря, что, ну вот, и отлично, и прекрасно, вот сейчас они присядут у Мишеля на диване и попьют чайку.

Однако, тетка, не пожелав чаю, настойчиво шла к своей комнате, твердо сохранив в своем непрочном уме расположение комнат. Она вошла в комнату и остановилась, пораженная и полная гнева.

Автор, щадя нервы читателей, не считает возможным продолжать свое описание скандала и драматических сцен, происшедших в первые полчаса.

Оголенная комната зияла своей пустотой. В углу стоял нетронутый мраморный умывальник и несколько стульев, не проданных в силу значительной изношенности.

По прошествии получаса тетка набросилась на Мишеля снова, по-мужски ругаясь и выкрикивая такие слова, от которых шарахались в сторону издававшие виды жильцы.

Нервный подъем сменился тихими слезами, чем воспользовался Мишель. Он проскользнул в свою комнату и, обессиленный, рухнул на кровать.

К вечеру стало известно, что тетка вновь свихнулась в своем уме и вновь делает по своей комнате какие-то прыжки и движения.

Еле волоча ноги, Мишель убедился в этом и, сделав соответствующие распоряжения, вернулся к себе.

К ночи тетку Марью вновь отвезли в психиатрическую лечебницу.

Жильцы судачили о всяких превратностях судьбы и говорили о необходимости показательного суда над Мишелем, который обратно свел тетку с ума, решив воспользоваться ее последними креслами.

Однако, Мишель на другой день слег в постель в нервной горячке и этим прекратил пересуды.

Три недели он пролежал, думая, что пришел ему конец и расплата, но молодость и цветущее здоровье сохранили ему жизнь.

Изабелла Ефремовна изредка посещала его. Ее веселость сменилась натянутостью, и она еле разговаривала с больным, пикируясь и капризная.

Болезнь значительно изменила Мишеля. Вся его беспечность ушла, и он снова был таким же, как в Пскове — меланхоличным и созерцательным субъектом.

Вновь приходилось подумать о существовании и о куске насущного хлеба.

М. П. Синягин принялся хлопотать и несколько раз ходил на биржу труда, регистрируясь и отмечаясь.

Не умея ничего делать и не зная никакой специальности, он имел, конечно, мало шансов получить приличную работу.

Правда, ему сразу предложили поехать на торфяные разработки, говоря, что, не имея специальности, он навряд ли получит сейчас что-либо другое.

Это предложение страшно поразило Мишеля и даже напугало. Как, он должен поехать куда-то там такое за 60 верст и там копать лопатой разную дрянь и глину! Это никак не укладывалось в его голове, и он, сердито обругав барышню свиньей, ушел домой.

Он стал продавать свои вещи, приобретенные за время своего благополучия, и полгода жил довольно прилично, не имея сильной нужды.

Но так, конечно, не могло вечно продолжаться, и надо было подумать о чем-то существенном.

И, понимая, что он катится под гору, Мишель старался все же не думать об этом и сколько возможно оттягивать решительный момент.

К этому времени он поругался с Изабеллой Ефремовной, которая все иногда заходила к нему и, хмурия носик, спрашивала, что он намерен делать.

Он поссорился с ней, назвав ее гадиной и корыстной канальей, и этот разрыв несколько даже облегчил его существование.

Изабелла Ефремовна охотно пошла на ссору и, хлопнув дверью, упорхнула, предварительно, конечно, поскандалив и поругавшись на разные темы.

Мишель понимал свое критическое положение, и ему временами казалось, что всюду жизнь, и, может, действительно стоит ему поехать на разработки. Однако, поругавшись на бирже и порвав свой листок, Мишель уже не имел мужества пойти туда вновь.

## 9

**Приятная встреча. Новая работа. Мрачные мысли. Нищета. Душевное спокойствие. Благодетельная природа. Помощь автора. Кража пальто с обезьянковым воротником**

Оставив себе серый пиджачок и осеннее пальто, Мишель без жалости расстался почти со всем своим имуществом.

Но оставленные вещи чрезвычайно быстро приходили в ветхость, и это обстоятельство только усиливало падение.

Понимая, что ему не выбраться из создавшегося положения, Мишель вдруг успокоился и поплыл по течению, мало заботясь о том, что будет.

Однажды, встретив одного знакомого нэпмана и владельца маленькой фабрички минеральных и фруктовых вод, Мишель шутливо попросил каким-нибудь образом помочь ему.

Тот обещал устроить его на свою фабричку, однако, предупредил, что работа будет не слишком подходящая для поэта и вряд ли Мишель на нее согласится. Надо было мыть бутылки, которые во

множестве с разных сторон, и даже из помоек, поступали на фабрику, где их и приводили в христианский вид, полоща и моя с песком и еще с какой-то дрянью.

Мишель взял эту работу и несколько месяцев ходил в Апраксин рынок на производство, пока не прогорел зарвавшийся нэпман. Спокойствие и ровное душевное состояние не покидало Мишеля. Он как бы потерял старое представление о себе. И приходя домой, ложился спать, не думая ни о чем и ни о чем не вспоминая.

Когда нэпман прогорел и заработок был потерян, Мишель и тут не почувствовал большой беды.

Правда, временами, очень редко находило на него раздумье, и тогда Мишель, как волк, бегал по своей комнате, кусая и грызя свои ногти, к чему он получил привычку за последний год.

Но это, собственно, были последние волнения, после чего жизнь потекла попрежнему ровно, легко и бездумно.

Уже все жильцы в квартире видели и знали, как обстоят дела Мишеля и сторонились его, побаиваясь, как бы он не сел им на шею.

И, незаметно для себя, Мишель из владельца комнаты стал угловым жильцом, поскольку в его комнату вселился один безработный, который по временам ходил торговать семечками.

Так прошел почти год, и жизнь увлекала Мишеля все глубже и глубже.

Уже портной Егор Елкин, заходя в комнату Мишеля, пьяным голосом иной раз просил его присмотреть за своим младенцем, так как надо было портному отлучиться, а супруга нивесть где бродит по случаю своей красоты и молодости.

И Мишель заходил в комнату к портному и без интереса глядел, как полуголый ребенок скользит по полу, шаяля, забавляясь и поедая тараканов.

Дни шли за днями, и Мишель ничего не предпринимал.

Он стал иногда просить милостыню. И, выходя на улицу, иной раз останавливался на углу Невского и Фонтанки и стоял там, спокойно поджидая подавня.

И, глядя на его лицо и на бывший приличный костюм, прохожие довольно охотно подавали ему гривенники и даже двугривенные.

При этом Мишель низко кланялся, и приветливая улыбка растягивала его лицо. И, низко кланяясь, он следил глазами за монетой, стараясь поскорей угадать ее достоинство.

Он не замечал в себе перемены, его душа была попрежнему спокойна, и никакого горя он более не ощущал в себе.

Автору кажется, что это форменная брехня и вздор, когда многие и даже знаменитые писатели описывают разные трогательные мучения и переживания отдельных граждан, попавших в беду, или, скажем, не жалея никаких красок, сильными мазками описывают душевное состояние уличной женщины, накручивая на нее чорт знает чего, и сами удивляются тому, чего у них получается.

Автор думает, что ничего этого по большей части не бывает.

Жизнь устроена гораздо, как бы сказать, проще, лучше и пригодней. И беллетристам от нее совершенно мало проку.

Нищий перестает беспокоиться, как только он становится нищим. Миллионер, привыкнув к своим миллионам, также не думает о том, что он миллионер. И крыса, по мнению автора, не слишком страдает от того, что она крыса.

Ну, насчет миллионера автор, возможно, что и прихватил

лишнее. Насчет миллионера автор не утверждает, тем более, что жизнь миллионеров проходил для автора как в тумане.

Но это дела не меняет, и величественная картина нашей жизни остается в силе.

Вот тут-то и приходит на ум то обстоятельство, о котором автор уже имел удовольствие сообщить в своем предисловии. Человек очень даже великолепно устроен и охотно живет такой жизнью, какой живется. Ну, а которые не согласны, те, безусловно, идут на борьбу, и ихнее мужество и смелость всегда вызывали у автора изумление и чувство неподдельного восторга.

Конечно, автор не хочет сказать, что человек, и в данном случае М. П. Синягин, стал деревянным и перестал иметь чувства, желания, любовь хорошо покушать и так далее.

Нет, это все у него было, но это было уже в другом виде, и так сказать, в другом масштабе, вровень с его возможностями.

Чувства автора перед величием природы не поддаются описанию!

Автор должен еще сказать, что он сам находился в те годы в сильной нужде, и помощь с его стороны своему родственнику была незначительная. Однако, автор много раз давал ему сколько было возможно.

Но однажды, в отсутствие автора, Мишель снял с вешалки чужое пальто с обезьянковым воротником и загнал его буквально за гроши. После чего он вовсе перестал ходить и даже перестал раскладываться с автором.

Конечно, автор понимал его грустное положение и даже ни одним словом не заикнулся о краже, но Мишель, чувствуя свою вину, попросту отворачивался от автора и не хотел вступать с ним ни в какие разговоры.

Об этом автору приходится говорить с чрезвычайно, так сказать, стесненным чувством и даже с сознанием какой-то своей вины, в то время как никакой вины, в сущности, не было.

## 10

**Жизнь начинается завтра. Выручка за день. Ночлежный дом. Сорок лет. Неожиданные мысли. Новое решение**

Автор считает нужным предупредить читателя о том, что наше повествование окончится благополучно и в конце концов счастье вновь коснется крыльями нашего друга Мишеля Синягина.

Но пока что нам придется еще немного коснуться кое-каких неприятных переживаний.

Так проходили месяцы и годы. Мишель Синягин побирался и почти всякий день отправлялся на эту свою работу либо к Гостиному Двору, либо к Пассажу.

Он становился к стенке и стоял, прямой и неподвижный, не протягивая руки, но кланяясь по мере того, как проходили подходящие для него люди.

Он собирал около трех рублей за день, а иногда и больше, и вел сносную и даже сытную жизнь, кушая иной раз колбасу, студень и другие товары.

Однако, он задолжал за квартиру, не платя за нее почти два года, и этот долг висел теперь над ним, как Дамоклов меч.

Уже к нему в комнату заходили люди и откровенно спрашивали об его отъезде.

Мишель говорил какие-то неопределенные вещи и давал какие-то неясные обещания и сроки.

Но однажды вечером, не желая новых объяснений и новых натисков, он не вернулся домой, а пошел ночевать в ночлежку, или, как еще иначе говорят, на гопу, на Литейный проспект.

В ту пору на Литейном, недалеко от Кировной, был ночлежный дом, где за 25 копеек давали отдельную койку, кружку чаю и мыло для умывания.

Мишель несколько раз оставался здесь ночевать и в конце концов вовсе сюда перебрался со своим небольшим скарбом.

И тогда началась совсем размеренная и спокойная жизнь, без ожидания каких-то чудес и возможностей.

Конечно, собирать деньги не было занятием слишком легким. Надо было стоять на улице и в любую погоду поминутно снимать шапку, застуживая этим свою голову и простужаясь.

Но другого ничего пока не было и другого выхода Мишель не искал.

Ночлежка с ее грубоватыми обитателями и резкими правами, однако, значительно изменила скромный характер Мишеля.

Здесь тихий характер и робость не представляли никакой ценности и были даже, как бы сказать, ни к чему.

Грубые и крикливые голоса, ругань, кражи и мордобой выжидали тихих людей или заставляли их соответственным образом менять свое поведение.

И Мишель стал говорить грубоватые фразы своим сильным голосом и, защищаясь от ругани и насмешек, нападал в свою очередь сам, безобразно ругаясь и даже участвуя в драках.

Утром Мишель убирал свою койку, пил чай и, часто не мывшись, торопливо шел на работу, иногда беря с собой замызганный парусиновый портфель, который, как бы сказать, придавал ему особенно четкий, интеллигентный вид и указывал на его бывшее происхождение и возможности.

Дурная привычка последних лет — прысть свои ногти — стала совершенно неотвязчивой, и Мишель обкусывал свои ногти до крови, не замечая этого и не стараясь от этого отвыкнуть.

Так прошел еще год, итого почти девять лет со дня приезда в Ленинград. Мишелю было 42 года, но длинные и седоватые волосы придавали ему еще более старый и опустившийся вид.

В мае 1929 года, сидя на скамейке Летнего сада и греясь на весеннем солнце, Мишель незаметно и неожиданно для себя с каким-то даже страхом и торопливостью стал думать о своей прошлой жизни, о Пскове, о жене Симочке и о тех прошлых днях, которые казались ему теперь удивительными и даже сказочными.

Он стал думать об этом в первый раз за несколько лет. И, думая об этом, почувствовал тот старый и нервный озноб и волнение, которое давно оставило его и которое бывало, когда он сочинял стихи или думал о возвышенных предметах.

И та жизнь, которая ему казалась унижительной для его достоинства, теперь сняла своей небесной чистотой. Та жизнь, от которой он ушел, казалась ему теперь наилучшей жизнью за все время его существования.

Страшно взволнованный, Мишель стал мотаться по саду, махая руками и бегая по дорожкам.

И вдруг ясная и понятная мысль заставила его задрожать всем телом.

Да, вот сейчас и сию минуту он посдет в Псков, там встретит свою бывшую жену, свою любящую Симочку, с ее миленькими веснушками. Он встретит свою жену и проведет с ней остаток своей жизни в полном согласии, любви и нежной дружбе.

И, думая об этом, он вдруг заплакал от всевозможных чувств и восторга, охватившего его.

И, вспоминая те жалкие и счастливые слова, которые она ему говорила 9 лет назад, Мишель поражался теперь, как он мог ею пренебречь и как он мог учинить такое явное сукин-сынство—бросить такую исключительную и достойную даму.

Он вспоминал теперь каждое слово, сказанное ею. Да, это она ему сказала и она молила судьбу, чтоб он был больной, старый и хромой, предполагая, что тогда он вернется к ней.

И еще более взволновавшись от этих мыслей, Мишель побежал, сам не зная куда.

Быстрая ходьба несколько утихомирила его волнение, и тогда, торопясь и не желая терять ни одной минуты, Мишель отправился на вокзал и там начал расспрашивать, когда и с какой платформы отправляется поезд.

Но, вспомнив, что у него было не больше одного рубля денег, Мишель снова задрожал и стал спрашивать о цене билета.

Проезд до Пскова стоил дороже, и Мишель, взяв билет до Луги, решил оттуда как-нибудь добраться до своего сказочного города.

Он приехал в Лугу ночью и крепко заснул на сложенных возле полотна шпалах.

А чуть свет, дрожа всем телом от утренней прохлады и волнения, Мишель вскочил на ноги и, покушав хлеба, пошел в сторону Пскова.

## !!

### Возвращение. Родные места. Свидание с женой. Обед. Новые друзья. Служба. Новые мечты. Неожиданная болезнь

Мишель пошел по тропинке вдоль полотна железной дороги, шагая сначала в какой-то нерешительности и неуверенности.

Потом он прибавил шагу, и несколько часов под ряд шел, не останавливаясь и ни о чем не думая.

Вчерашнее его волнение и радость сменились тупым безразличием и даже апатией. И он шел теперь, двигаясь по инерции, не имея на это ни воли, ни особой охоты.

Было прелестное майское утро. Птички чиркали, с шумом вылетая из кустов, около которых проходил Мишель.

Солнце все больше и больше пекло ему плечи, и ноги, обутые в сапоги, стерлись и устали от непривычной ходьбы.

В полдень Мишель, утомившись, присел на край канавы и, облокотив свои колени, долго сидел не двигаясь и не меняя позы.

Белые неподвижные облака на горизонте, молодые листочки черешнев, первые желтые цветы одуванчика напомнили Мишелю его детские дни и снова заставили его на минуту взволноваться о тех возможностях, которым он шел навстречу.

Мишель растянулся на траве и, глядя в синеву неба, снова почувствовал какую-то радость успокоения.

Но эта радость была умеренная. Это не была та радость и тот восторг, которые охватывали Мишеля в дни его молодости.

Нет, он был другим человеком, с другим сердцем и с другими

Неизвестно, правда ли это, но автору одна девушка, окончившая в прошлом году стенографические курсы, рассказала, что будто в Африке есть какие-то животные, в роде ящериц, которые при падении более крупного существа, выбрасывают часть своих внутренних органов и убегают с тем, чтобы в безопасном месте свалиться в бессознательном состоянии и лежать на солнце, покуда не нарастут новые органы. А нападающий зверек прекращает погоню, довольствуясь тем, что ему дали.

Если это так, то восхищение автора перед явлениями природы наполняет его новым трепетом и жаждой жить.

Мишель не был похож на такую ящерицу, он сам нападал и сам хватал своих врагов за загривок, но в схватке он, видимо, тоже растерял часть своего добра и сейчас лежал пустой и почти безразличный, не зная, собственно, зачем он пошел и хорошо ли это он сделал.

На другой день, отдыхая почти каждый час и ночуя в кустах, Мишель пришел в Псков, вид которого засгавил забиться его сердце.

Мишель прошел по знакомым улицам и вдруг очутился у своего дома, с тоской заглядывая в его окна и до боли сжимая свои руки.

И, открыв плечом калитку ворот, он вошел в сад, в тот небольшой тенистый сад, в котором когда-то писались стихи и в котором когда-то сидела тетка Марья, мамаша и Симочка.

Все было так же, как и 9 лет назад, только дорожки сада были запущены и заросли травой.

Те же две высокие ели росли у заднего крыльца и та же собачья будка без собаки стояла возле сарайчика.

Несколько минут стоял Мишель неподвижно, как изваяние, созерцая эти старые и милые вещи. Но вдруг чей-то голос вернул его к действительности.

Старая, завернутая в белую косынку старуха, беспокойно глядя на него, спросила, зачем он сюда пришел и что ему нужно.

Путаясь в словах и со страхом называя фамилии, Мишель стал расспрашивать о бывших жильцах, об арендаторе дома и о Серафиме Павловне, его бывшей жене.

Старуха, приехавшая сюда недавно, не могла удовлетворить его любопытства, однако, указала адрес, где теперь проживала Симочка.

Через полчаса Мишель, унимая сердцебиение, стоял у дома на Басманной улице.

Он постучал и, не дожидаясь ответа, открыл дверь и шагнул на порог кухни.

Молодая женщина в переднике стояла у плиты, держа в одной руке тарелку, другой рукой, вооруженной вилкой, она доставала вареное мясо из кипящей кастрюльки.

Женщина сердито посмотрела и, нахмурившись, приготовилась закричать на вошедшего, но вдруг слова замерли на ее губах.

Это была Серафима Павловна, это была Симочка, сильно изменившаяся и постаревшая.

Ах, она очень похудела! Когда-то полненький ее стан и круглое личико были неузнаваемые и чужие.

У нее было желтоватое увядшее лицо и короткие обстриженные волосы.

— Серафима Павловна,— тихо сказал Мишель и шагнул к ней.

Она страшно закричала, металлическая тарелка выпала из ее рук и со звоном и грохотом покатила по полу. И вареное мясо упало в кастрюлю, разбрызгивая кипящий суп.

— Боже мой,—сказала она, не зная, что сделать и что сказать. Она подняла тарелку и, пробормотав «сейчас», скрылась за дверь.

Через минуту она снова вернулась в кухню и, робко протянув руку, попросила Мишеля сесть.

Не смея к ней подойти и страшась своего вида, Мишель сел на табурет и сказал, что вот он, наконец, пришел и что вот у него какое печальное положение.

Он говорил тихим голосом и, разводя руками, вздыхал и конфузился.

— Боже мой, боже мой,—бормотала молодая женщина, с тоской ломая свои руки.

Она смотрела на его одутловатое лицо и на грязное тряпье его костюма и беззвучно плакала, не соображая, что делать.

Но вдруг из комнаты вышел муж Серафимы Павловны и, видимо, уже зная, в чем дело, молча пожал Мишелю руку и, отойдя в сторону, присел на другую табуретку, возле окна.

Это был гр. Н., заведывающий кооперативом, немолодой уже и скорей пожилой человек, толстоватый и бледный.

Сразу поняв в чем дело и сразу оценив положение и своего неожиданного соперника, он стал говорить веским и вразумительным тоном, советуя Серафиме Павловне позаботиться о Мишеле и принять в нем участие.

Он предложил Мишелю временно поселиться у них в доме, в верхней летней комнатке, поскольку уже в достаточной мере тепло.

Они обедали втроем за столом и, кушая вареное мясо с хреном, изредка перекидывались словами относительно дальнейших шагов.

Муж Серафимы Павловны сказал, что службу сейчас найти крайне легко и что безработных сейчас все меньше и меньше на бирже труда, так что в этом он не видит никакого затруднения. И это обстоятельство позволит, вероятно, Мишелю даже выбирать себе службу из нескольких предложений. Во всяком случае, об этом тревожиться не надо. Временно он будет проживать у них, а там, в дальнейшем, будет видно.

Мишель, не смея поднять глаз на Симочку, благодарил и жадно пожирал мясо и хлеб, запихивая в рот большие куски.

Симочка также не смела на него смотреть и только изредка бросала взгляды, по временам бормоча: «Боже мой, боже мой».

Мишелю устроили верхнюю комнату, поставив туда парусниковую кушетку и небольшой туалетный стол.

Мишель получил кое-какое белье и старый люстриновый пиджак и, умывшись и побрив свои щеки, с какой-то радостью облачился во все свежее и с радостью долго разглядывал себя в зеркало, поминутно благодаря своего благодетеля.

Сильные тревожения и ходьба страшно его утомили, и он как камень заснул у себя наверху.

Ночью, часов в 11, ничего не понимая и не соображая, где он находится, Мишель проснулся и вскочил со своего ложа.

Потом, вспомнив о случившемся, он присел у окна и стал вспоминать о всех словах, сказанных за день.

И, просидев около часу, он вдруг почувствовал голод.

Вспоминая сытный питательный обед, который он жадно и без разбора проглотил, Мишель тихой и вороватой походкой спустился вниз, в кухню с тем, чтобы пошарить там и снова подкрепить свои силы.

Он осторожно по скрипучим половицам вошел в кухню и, не зажигая света, стал шарить рукой по плите, отыскивая какую-нибудь еду.

Серафима Павловна вышла на кухню, дрожа всем телом и думая, что Мишель пришел с ней поговорить, объясниться и сказать то, чего не было сказано, подошла к нему и, взяв его за руку, начала что-то лепетать взволнованным шопотом.

Сначала страшно испугавшись, Мишель понял, в чем дело, и, держа в руке кусок хлеба, безмолвно слушал слова своей бывшей возлюбленной.

Она говорила ему, что все изменилось и все прошло, что вспоминая о нем, она, правда, продолжала его любить, но что сейчас ей кажутся ненужными и лишними какие-либо новые шаги и перемены. Она нашла свою тихую пристань и больше ничего не ищет.

Мишель, по простоте душевной, тотчас ответил, что этих перемен он и не ожидает, но что он будет рад и счастлив, если она позволит ему временно проживать в ихнем доме.

И жуя хлеб, Мишель благодарно пожимал ее ручки, прося не очень за него беспокоиться и не очень волноваться.

Через несколько дней, от'евшись и приведя себя в порядок, Мишель получил работу в управлении кооперативов.

Угасавшая жизнь снова вернулась к Мишелю, и, сидя за обедом, он делился своими впечатлениями за день и строил разные планы о будущих возможностях, говоря, что теперь он начал новую жизнь и что теперь он понял все свои ошибки и все свои наивные фантазии и что он хочет работать, бороться и делать новую жизнь.

Серафима Павловна с мужем дружески беседовали с ним, сердечно радуясь его успехам и возрождению.

Так проходили дни и месяцы, и ничто не омрачало жизни Мишеля.

Но в феврале 1930 года Мишель, неожиданно заболев гриппом, который осложнился воспалением легких, умер, почти на руках у своих друзей и благодетелей.

Симочка страшно плакала и долго не находила себе места, проклиная себя за то, что она не сказала Мишелю всего, что хотела и что думала.

Мишель был похоронен на б. монастырском кладбище. Могила его и посейчас убирается живыми цветами.

Сентябрь 1930 года.

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## **APPENDIX 2**

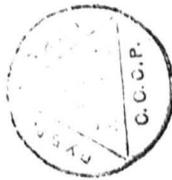
Illustrations from the first book publication of "Michel Siniagin"  
(Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1931)

М И Х О З О Щ Е Н К О

М. П. С И Н Я Г И Н

(ВОСПОМИНАНИЯ О МИШЛЕ СИНЯГИНЕ)

31-12999.



И

Государственное издательство в Ленинграде



М. П. СИНЯГИН  
1916 г.

лантин, бусы и еще чего-то такое. Но начатая карьера ее была сделана.

Обе эти старушки в дальнейшем будут играть довольно видную роль в жизни Мишеля Сиягина, так что пушай читатель не принимает близко к сердцу и не сердится, что автор останавливается на описании таких, что ли, дряхловатых и отцветших героинь.

Поэтическая атмосфера в доме благодаря Мишелю несколько отозвалась и на наших дамах. И Марья Аркадьевна любила говорить, что она вскоре приступит к своим мемуарам.

Ее бурная жизнь и встреча со многими известными людьми стоила того.

Она самолично будто бы два раза видела Л. Н. Толстого, Надсона, Кони, Переверзева и других знаменитых людей, о которых она и хотела поведать миру свои соображения.

Итак, перед началом революции семья приехала в Псков и там застряла на три года.

М. П. Сиягин всякий день говорил, что он ни за что не намерен торчать здесь и что при первой возможности он уедет в Москву или Ленинград. Однако последующие события и перемены жизни значительно отдалили этот отъезд.

И наш Мишель Сиягин продолжал свою жизнь под псковским небом, занимаясь пока что своими стихами и своим временным увлечением одной



СИМОЧКА М.  
В ГОД ОКОНЧАНИЯ ГИМНАЗИИ

1916 г.

В ту весну, наконец, собравшись, уехала в Ленинград тетка Марья Аркадьевна и вскоре оттуда прислала отчаянное письмо, в котором извещала, что в дороге ее обокрали, унеся ее саквояж с частью драгоценностей.

Письмо было несвязное и запутанное — видимо, это потрясение сильно подействовало на молодую даму.

К этому времени тихо и неожиданно скончалась мать Мишеля, не успев даже ни с кем проститься и отдать свои последние распоряжения.

Все это сильно подействовало на Мишеля, который стал какой-то тихий, робкий и даже пугливый. Были пролиты слезы, но это событие вскоре закончилось другим. У Симочки родился щупленький, но милый ребенок, и новое, не испытанное отцовское чувство несколько захватило Мишеля.

Однако это не долго продолжалось, и он снова начал поговаривать об отъезде, уже более реально и решительно.

И осенью, получив от тетки Марьи новое письмо, которое он никому не показал, Мишель быстро стал собираться, говоря, что он обеспечивает свою жену и ребенка всем движимым имуществом, оставляя его в их полную собственность.

Молодая дама попрежнему, а может даже и более, влюбленная в своего супруга, с ужасом слушала



АННА АРКАДЬЕВНА СИНЯГИНА

1908 г.

НЕОЖИДААННАЯ БЕДА. УЖАСНЫЙ СКАН-  
ДАЛ. ПЕРВАЯ БОЛЕЗНЬ МИШЕ-  
ЛЯ. ССОРА С ВОЗЛЮБ-  
ЛЕННОЙ. ПА-  
ДЕНИЕ.

**В** апреле тысяча девять-  
сот двадцать пятого года стояла исключительно  
хорошая и ясная погода.

Мишель в легком своем пальто, под руку с Гза-  
беллой Ефремовной, выходил из своей комнаты,  
желая пойти погулять по набережной и посмотреть  
на ледоход.

И, закрывая дверь на ключ и напевая «Бананы,  
бананы», он поглядывал на свою даму.

Она тут же колбасилась в коридоре, делая своими  
стройными ножками разные па и танцуя чарльстон.  
Она была чудесно хороша в своем светлом весен-  
нем костюме, со своим прелестным профилем и  
завитушками из-под шляпы.

Мишель любовно глядел на нее, восхищаясь ее  
красотой, молодостью и беспечностью.

Да, конечно, она не была слишком ученая девица,  
способная с легкостью поговорить о Канте, или  
Бабеле, или о теории вероятности и относитель-  
ности. Безусловно, она этого ничего не знала и  
не имела склонности к умозрительным наукам,  
предпочитая им легкую, простую жизнь. Мор-  
щины раздумья не бороздили ее лба.



ИЗАБЕЛЛА ЕФРЕМОВНА КРЮКОВА

1924 г.