

Title: Socialist Realism in Circles: The Toilet in Venedikt Erofeev's Moskva-Petushki
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Abstract:

Venedikt Erofeev's 1969 prose poem *Moskva-Petushki* is considered by many to be the first work of Russian postmodernism. The metaphysical train journey in the quest for the utopian Petushki is wrought with not only references to Soviet culture, but also references to the toilet. In one instance, the protagonist recalls his roommates confronting him about his complete lack of flatulence and toilet use. (31) The toilet appears again when during a hallucination a Sphinx appears and asks him to solve a riddle regarding Stakhanov's toilet use. (136) Furthermore, the theme of the toilet is present in the protagonist's final moments, as he sees the eyes of his murderers as the "reddish-brown piss-water that splashes and glitters" in the toilet of the Petushki Station. (158)

Using Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque and theorizations of postmodernism by Groys, Epstein, and others, this paper will argue that toilet themes within the text contribute to the overturning the official literary genre of Soviet Realism. The toilet, in its connection to lower body extremities and digestion, contributes to a carnivalesque narrative, which, as Bakhtin writes, creates "a world turned on its head." Thus, the tropes, metaphors, and other elements of Soviet Realism that appear within the prose poem, are present only to be manipulated and to act as a challenge the readymade literary style of Socialist Realism. Similar to other instances of famous "toilets," such as Duchamp's *Fountain*, the carnivalesque nature of the toilet in Erofeev's text directly contributes in the making of "unofficial" or counter-official art.