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A RUSSIAN MUNCHAUSEN
Aesopian Translation

Tot samyj Mjunxgauzen [The Very Same Munchausen] was one of the most popular Soviet made-for-TV films of the late seventies. The tall tales of the 18th century German baron, which form the basis for the screenplay by Grigorij Gorin, are known and loved the world over. The prototype for the legend, Hieronymus Karl Friederich, Freiherr von Münchhausen, fought in the Russian service against the Turks before retiring to his estate, where he hunted and entertained. The legendary Munchausen was born through the publication in 1785 of Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia, which made the real baron something of a tourist attraction in his own lifetime. The original text, written in English by the German refugee Rudolf Erich Raspe, was soon translated into German by Gottfried August Bürger, and within two years it had gone through six English editions and been translated into French as well. New editions meant new additions to Raspe's original, and translators also felt free to embellish and edit as they saw fit.

We have then a work in Russian about a German character originally documented in English. For the English reader, additional interest is provided by the exotic settings of some of the adventures: Russia, Turkey, the Indies. But these apparently did not interest Gorin: he did not set his play about the baron in Russia, strangely enough, but at the baron's home in Germany, and the film was shot in the GDR. The film is not a mere screen adaptation of the baron's famous adventures. In fact, there is very little of the original Munchausen left in Gorin's version: the setting, the character of the baron, some of his tall tales. Most of his plot is invented. What made Gorin's Munchausen so popular? His Soviet version of the

Munchausen stories can be read as an Aesopian commentary on Soviet reality. In a sense, he translates the legend of Munchausen into Aesopian language, and the task of the audience is to translate that Aesopian language into the practical language of criticism.

Let us begin with a synopsis of Gorin's plot. Baron Karl Munchausen has been separated from his wife Jakobina and their son Theophilus for a number of years. Now he wants to marry his beautiful mistress Marta, but this requires the permission of the authorities -- the pastor and the Duke. The Baroness, who does not want a divorce, has her lover Ramkopf steal a page from the Baron's day book to prove to the authorities that Munchausen is insane. Among other things, the Baron has scheduled a war with England at 4:00 on that day. He is arrested for overstepping his authority, but released immediately when it transpires that the war will not take place, since England has freed the colonies, the condition set by the Baron for not declaring war. At the divorce proceedings all goes well until the Baron declares his new discovery -- an extra day in the year -- and signs the papers with the date May 32. This is construed as contempt of court, the divorce is off, Marta is upset, and pressure is put on the Baron to renounce all of his inventions and tall tales. The Baron consents out of love for Marta, but he apparently goes insane and shoots himself.

Part two picks up the story some years later. The once skeptical Jakobina, Ramkopf, and Theophilus now preside over a growing cult of Munchausen. They lead tours of his castle, describe his exploits, set up monuments, and publish his works. After his death Munchausen has become a national hero. But the Baron is not, in fact, dead: he is living quietly with Marta incognito as the gardener Müller. Bored of living as an ordinary man, he wants to come back to life, whereupon he is arrested as an impostor. All of the Baron's acquaintances testify that he is not himself. Since he will not renounce his identity, a public test is arranged to reenact one of the Baron's exploits, the flight to the moon from a cannon. The plan is to humiliate the Baron by shooting him a few feet: the cannon has been loaded with wet powder. But the Baron learns of this, and replaces the wet powder with dry. At the last minute the Duke

determines to avert a catastrophe by declaring the Baron himself, and a decree is made to the effect that the flight to the moon has been completed successfully. The Baron, whose motto throughout has been that he always tells only the truth, refuses to accept this false decree. After a few words of wisdom, he begins to climb the rope ladder into the cannon. The film ends as Munchausen continues climbing the now endless ladder into the sky.

Before we attempt to analyze Gorin's Munchausen as an Aesopian text, let us specify just what we mean by Aesopian. In his On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature, Lev Loseff comments on the similarity between the Aesopian utterance and the folk riddle[1]. Jurij Levin defines the riddle as "a text whose referent is an object not overtly named in the text itself."[2] "The pragmatic function of the text is to make the addressee name the object-referent."[3] Similarly, the function of an Aesopian text is to make the reader name, at least to himself, the Soviet realia to which the text does not overtly refer. While they do not name the riddle object directly, riddles can be guessed because they contain an "incomplete and/or distorted (transformed, metaphorical) description of the riddle object."[4] The same holds for Aesopian texts: while they do not refer to Soviet reality overtly, they could not function as Aesopian if they did not contain some transformed description of something that can be deciphered as a reference to Soviet realia.

Both the riddle and the Aesopian text point to their referents at the same time they point away from them. Devices which function to conceal the referent Loseff calls screens; those which function to draw attention to the referent he calls markers.[5] Screens and markers are really functions which many devices and elements of the text can perform.

In an article on Bulgakov's Master and Margarita, I used the term "masking device" to describe what Loseff means by screens.[6] Bulgakov takes full advantage of the grammatical, syntactic, and lexical devices at his disposal to mask reference to the secret police. He uses, for example, the passive voice and the indefinite-personal form without mentioning the agent or logical subject involved. Levin

refers to an incomplete, distorted, or metaphorical description of the riddle object; Bulgakov occasionally employs metonymy to avoid direct reference to the agents of the secret police. "Cars" come to pick people up and never return.[7] "The whole floor of a certain Moscow institution" was losing sleep over the case. (576) The clever reader knows how to decipher these references, filling in the gaps with the agents of the appropriate institution.

Metonymic distortion of the referent functions simultaneously as a screen -- since it does not name the referent itself -- and as a marker -- since it names something contiguous to the referent. Markers are hardly needed in The Master and Margarita because the text is set in the Soviet Union in the Soviet period and the agents of the secret police play such an active role in the plot. Even so, Bulgakov's masking devices are often designed to call attention to themselves. For example, the indefinite-personal form, which avoids reference to the agent of the action, is used with an excess of information about everything but the subject: "on the other side of the desk [they] raised [their] voices, hinted..."(577) We know where they are and can deduce their emotional state, but Bulgakov conceals their identity. This oddity functions to draw attention to the masking device and therefore to its Aesopian function.[8]

If Gorin's Munchausen is in fact an Aesopian text, what devices function as screens, drawing attention away from the covert referent of the text, the Soviet Union? The most obvious device is the shift in setting. Gorin sets his tale not in the 20th century and not on the territory of the Soviet Union: "The action takes place in one of the many German principalities in the 18th century."[9] The setting is removed both historically and geographically from modern Russia. Loseff cites Kostylev's trilogy Ivan the Terrible (as well as Eisenstein's film) and Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism as examples of Aesopian works in which temporal and geographical shifts function as screens for the covert text.[10] The parallels between Ivan the Terrible and Stalin were recognized by the latter dictator himself, and Lenin's work, while overtly describing the relations between Japan and Korea, is meant as a criticism of Russia and her colonies.

The genre and intended audience of Munchausen also act as screens. Munchausen clearly belongs to the genre of tall tales, fantastic hunting and war stories that have no real basis in fact. They are meant to be taken lightly, as amusement or entertainment. In the original text, the tales are apparently told in an inn or a pub to amuse the narrator's fellow drinkers: "Since we have time, gentlemen, to crack another bottle of wine, I will tell you of a very strange adventure..."[11] Traditionally the Munchausen tales have become a part of children's literature the world over. The covert references are of course to a very real Soviet Russia, and the covert audience is adult.

Another typical screening device Gorin employs is translation. As the title reassures us, Gorin's Munchausen is "the very same Munchausen" we know from the tradition. Perhaps the story is merely an adaptation for the stage or screen and a translation into Russian? There are several events and episodes which the reader will recall from the original Munchausen: the stag which grows a cherry tree between its antlers (opening scene in the film, 31-2 in the English Munchausen[12]); the horse which is cut in two by a falling portcullis (F, P: 171, E: 58-62); the episode in which the Baron lifts himself out of a swamp by his pig-tail (F, P: 169, E: 67); the episode in which the Baron kills a bear by holding its paws until it dies of hunger (F, P: 143-4, E: 212). These direct quotations from the tradition are meant to support the claim that Gorin's Munchausen is the "very same Munchausen" -- in other words, not Gorin's and not Soviet at all.

Translations and quasi-translations are a popular Aesopian screening device. Pushkin's "From Pindemonte," which purports to be a translation from the Italian, but is in fact an original appeal for freedom and Okudzhava's "Prayer of François Villon," which is also original provide examples of how this screen works. It is interesting to note that the title often plays a role in establishing the text as one not originating with the author. Gorin's Munchausen is at best a quasi-translation, since it does have at least some points of contact with the original version, as detailed above.

One of the central episodes, while not a perfect quotation from the original, is a conflation of several authentic Munchausen episodes: the Baron's journey to the moon. In the English original, the Baron makes two journeys to the moon, one by climbing a bean plant (E: 69), the other in a ship overtaken by a storm (E: 181-2). In Gorin's version he has made the journey by being shot out of a cannon (F, P: 189, 193). Gorin has conflated the journey to the moon with another episode in the original, in which the Baron is shot out of a cannon, but only to land in a large haystack (E: 166); in another he rides a cannonball to inspect an enemy town (E: 63).

But these few parallels in episodes only help point up the fact that Gorin's Munchausen is in fact very different from the original in plot. Instead of a collection of short, more or less unrelated stories with a great variety of setting and character, we have a unified story set in one principality with a limited cast. And aside from the peripheral episodes mentioned above, there is only a little authentic fantasy to the Soviet plot. The Baron shoots through the chimney at a duck, which falls into a platter in the fireplace cooked and ready to serve (F, P: 147); when it is not needed, he throws it out the window and it flies away (F, P: 150).

A number of the Baron's eccentricities in Gorin's version seem to be connected with time. In the original the Baron owned and used the sling with which David killed Goliath, but only because he inherited it from a Biblical ancestor (E: 155). Likewise another ancestor was familiar with Shakespeare and had him released from prison by Queen Elizabeth (E: 156). But the Baron himself was present in neither case: he travels widely geographically, but not chronologically. Gorin's Baron, however, lived in ancient Greece and has an autographed manuscript of Oedipus Rex from Sophocles and another of the Bible dedicated by Matthew (P: 146, 175). He apparently controls the time of day by adding gunshots to the chimes of his clocks (P: 144, 150). And the stumbling block at the divorce proceedings is the Baron's signature with his newly discovered date, 32 May (P: 163). Against the background of the screening parallels, divergences from the original story act instead as markers, alerting the reader to the possibility that Gorin's work has

an Aesopian reading. Perhaps Gorin's fascination with time serves to relativize the category of chronology, thus in a sense annulling the shift in time in the setting. Abuladze uses a similar device in Repentance. The court scene is attended by knights in armor and judges in medieval robes, but the defendant and plaintiffs are in modern dress, and one of the judges plays with a Rubik's cube: the setting is thus everywhere and nowhere (or rather at all times and at no time). But the audience is not allowed to relegate the action comfortably to a time fixed and closed off from the present.

Other markers in Gorin's Munchausen function to direct attention not only away from the overt referent of the text, but to a specifically Russian context. When the Baron invites Jakobina, Ramkopf, and the Burgomaster to announce his decision to come back to life, he introduces his announcement with the following phrase: Итак, господа, я пригласил вас, чтобы сообщить пренеприятное известие (So, gentlemen, I have invited you in order to inform you of a most unpleasant bit of news), and himself comments that it would be an excellent phrase to begin a play (F, P: 181). In fact it is the Mayor's opening line in Gogol's Inspector General.[13] The quotation is doubly humorous, since the hero of Gogol's play Xlestakov is himself an inveterate plagiarist, ascribing to his own authorship operas The Marriage of Figaro, Robert le Diable, Norma, the works of "Baron Brambeus" (O. I. Senkovskij), Zagoskin's Jurij Miloslavskij, and even entire journals like Moskovskij telegraf.[14]

There are at least four allusions to Bulgakov's Master and Margarita. In the film when the Baron renounces his exploits we see him in his office burning his manuscripts, a scene strongly reminiscent of the Master burning his novel in Bulgakov's work (and indirectly of Gogol's destruction of his work, 563). Here too it turns out that "manuscripts do not burn,"[15] since the complete works of the Baron are published after his "death" (P: 172, 182). When the Burgomaster refuses to call him Miller, Munchausen suggests that he add покойный or усопший (late) to his name (P: 179); in Bulgakov, Ivan Bezdomny puzzles over wording his statement about coming "to Patriarch's Ponds with the late (покойный) Misha Berlioz yesterday

evening."[16] When the Baron is about to repeat his flight to the moon, the sergeant-major expresses his concern that the moon is invisible because of the clouds. Tomas responds that any fool can make it when it's visible, the Baron likes things to be more difficult (P: 192). This response is very close to Korov'ev's remark to Margarita about Azazello hitting a hidden card.[17] Finally, in the play, but not in the film, the Baron and Marta make their exit along a moonbeam road (P: 196) just as Pilat, the Master, and Margarita do in Bulgakov's novel.[18]

Quotations from Russian writers like Gogol act as markers to direct the reader's attention to Russia, and allusions to Bulgakov's work about Stalinist Moscow direct their attention to Russia in the Soviet period. What other devices act as markers or can be interpreted as veiled allusions to Soviet reality?

Some markers work on the level of the lexicon, in the area of what the Russians are now calling lingvostranovedenie. When he determines to renounce his exploits, Munchausen says that Baron Munchausen will cease to exist in five minutes, «можете почтить его память вставанием» (P: 170) "You may honor his memory by standing." Rising for a minute of silence to respect the memory of the dead is recognizable as a Soviet ritual, and the very expression used to refer to it is ritually fixed in the language. Loseff discusses such stylistic markers as they are used by Shvarts in The Dragon: "in the context of a 'Grimm Brothers' tale a specifically Russian turn of phrase, a typically Soviet word, expression, plot situation, or a term linked to the mind-set of the twentieth century will be perceived as a linguistic or cultural malapropism, as a shift into another style."[19] Later the Baroness refers to the Baron's «светлая память и всеобщая любовь сограждан» (P: 174) "shining memory and the general love of his fellow-citizens" -- another Soviet cliché. Such shifts in style to Sovietisms function as markers, directing the audience to place the entire work in a Soviet context.

Other markers allude to situations that the audience should recognize as Soviet. When the pastor arrives at Munchausen's castle in the first scene, he attempts to ring the bell and the pull comes off in his hand. Shoddiness of material goods is associated by Russians

not with Germany, but rather with their own country. That the episode is meant as a marker is substantiated by Tomas's reaction: he comes out, chides the miscreant pastor in a kind of peasant patter, replaces the pull, and goes back in, telling the visitor to try again more lightly. Perhaps it is not the case that the Soviet Union is the only place where one is regularly reprimanded by strangers, especially by those who guard doors, but the Soviet viewer would surely view this scene as one familiar from his own experience. These ubiquitous door-guarders make the experience of simply entering any Soviet building something one undertakes with anxiety.

Yet another scene in the film also involves the problem of entrance, this time to a theatrical performance:

> Рамкопф: Господа, господа, повторяю: закрытый судебный эксперимент. Вход только по специальному разрешению.
>
> Томас: Господин Рамкопф!
>
> Рамкопф: Нет, нет, нет, ничего сегодня делать не могу. В следующий раз: ничего сегодня делать не могу.
>
> Ramkopf: Ladies and gentlemen, I repeat: it's a closed judicial experiment. Entry only by special permission.
>
> Tomas: Mr. Ramkopf!
>
> Ramkopf: No, no, no, I can't do anything for you today. Next time. I can't do anything for you today.

Again, anyone who has attempted to go to a theater the day of a performance in the Soviet Union recognizes the scene. Anything worth seeing is invariably sold out, and those responsible are adamant that they can "do nothing" about it.

Tipped off by these markers, the audience begins to look more closely at the whole plot as a potential Aesopian comment on Soviet life. In spite of the screening quotations from the original, this Munchausen turns out to be substantially new. Gorin emphasizes the conflict between Munchausen, the private citizen who wants to marry his beloved Marta, and the authorities, who refuse to divorce

him from his wife. Munchausen always tells the truth, as he repeats again and again, while the authorities force him to subscribe to lies.

The original Adventures of Baron Munchausen are narrated for the most part in first person by the Baron himself. True, he does present the stories as authentic: "It is not to be wondered at that readers and listeners should be at times disposed to incredulity. But if, in the company that I have the honour of addressing, any one should be tempted to doubt the truth of the statements I make, I should be deeply pained by this want of confidence." (E: 78) The keeper of the museum at Amsterdam "tells my story to all strangers... he adds to it several details of his own invention, which do grievous harm to the truth and authenticity of the narrative." (E: 92) And in one of the later sections, where the narrative is in third person: "Now gentlemen, you know Baron Munchausen thoroughly, and I hope you can have no further doubts about his truthfulness." (E: 138) No matter how much the Baron protests his veracity, however, the reader is still at liberty to doubt the Baron's fantastic adventures.

Not so in the film. The film opens at a campfire as the Baron tells his story of pulling himself out of the swamp by his pigtail to a small group of skeptical hunters. When he recounts the episode of the deer with the cherry tree between its antlers, one of the others says,

> Дерево? Скажите лучше вишневый сад!
>
> Мюнхгаузен: Если бы вырос сад, я бы сказал сад, а поскольку выросло дерево, зачем же мне врать? Я всегда говорю только правду.
>
> охотник: Правду? (все смеются)
>
> A tree? You may as well say a cherry orchard!
>
> Munchausen: If an orchard had grown up, I would have said orchard, but since it was a tree, why should I lie? I always tell the truth and only the truth.
>
> Hunter: The truth?! (all laugh)

At this point the deer appears in the woods nearby with a small cherry tree growing between his antlers. This episode, which comes as a prologue before the titles, sets up the audience for the fantasy

world of the film, a world in which the incredible adventures of the Baron must be taken as authentic, which means that anyone who impugns their veracity is wrong. Further episodes, such as the duck shot through the chimney which falls fully cooked and sauced into a platter and flies away when thrown out the window, confirm for the audience the Baron's claim that he always tells the truth. The medium of film allows Gorin and Zakharov to show the split between words and reality directly. Only occasionally are the Baron's words at odds with the reality we see on the screen, such as when he declares night during broad daylight. Most of the time the Baron's claims, fantastic as they may be, are substantiated, while those of his enemies are shown to be false.

The turning point in the plot of the first part comes when the Baron is prevailed upon to lie:

> Мюнхгаузен: Но я же сказал правду!
>
> Бургомистр: Да черт с ней, с правдой, иногда нужно и соврать, понимай это -- соврать. Господи! Такие элементарные вещи мне приходится объяснять барону Мюнхгаузену!(P: 168)
>
> Munchausen: But I told the truth!
>
> Burgomaster: To hell with the truth, sometimes you have to lie, get it, to lie. God, to imagine I have to explain such simple things to Baron Munchausen!

He agrees that the date is not 32 May, but 1 June. In the film he is made to stand like a schoolboy in front of the Duke to repent and recant his discovery. When the Baron is asked what day it is, the Burgomaster holds up one finger. "The first of June." "Louder, please, for all," prompts the Duke. He repeats his statement. The Duke (the Burgomaster in the play, 169) consoles Munchausen that "even Galileo recanted," to which he replies, "That's why I always preferred Bruno." The weight of this comparison establishes the potential seriousness of the Baron's denial, and broadening the historical reference again raises the possibility that an eternal pattern is intended, one applicable even in the present.

The pastor agrees to marry the Baron and Marta only if he renounces all his adventures as well. The Burgomaster suggests that

in secret he can continue to believe, but the Baron objects, «Я не умею втайне. Я могу только открыто.» (Film only) "I can't do it in secret, I can only be open." The split implied is not only between the individual and society or authority, which forces him to conform, but also within the individual himself if he betrays his individuality by giving in to pressure.

Part II contains even more allusions to situations recognizably Soviet. According to the stage directions in the play, three years have passed (P: 171). The Baron has become a legend and a national hero. His castle is a museum, through which tourists from abroad are led, a statue of the horse cut in two by the portcullis is to be set up, Jakobina has published the complete edition of his adventures (P: 171-72). Even the Baron's new date, the 32nd of May, is to be used at the trial (P: 193). What has happened? With the Baron safely dead, the state has found it useful to take advantage of his adventures for its own glorification. But this is safe only so long as the Baron is dead, which is why the authorities do everything they can to prevent him from returning to life.

This situation is familiar to Soviet audiences from such figures as Pasternak, Nabokov, and Tarkovsky. Pasternak was several times officially chided and finally expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union in 1958 for the scandal over Doctor Zhivago. His relatives were evicted from the Peredelkino dacha in 1984. In early 1987 the 1958 expulsion was rescinded, and plans were announced to set up a Pasternak museum in the dacha and to publish Doctor Zhivago in 1988.[20] Nabokov too, who was persona non grata as an emigré while he lived, can now be discussed and printed in the Soviet Union. Tarkovsky, whose films were never widely distributed or highly praised in the official press, was nearly forgotten after he failed to return from the West. But no sooner did he die than an obituary was published[21] and the authorities promised a retrospective of his films and even showings of the two films he made abroad.[22] But none of the works of living emigrés were shown or published in their homeland until the late 1980s.

When he attempts to come back to life, the Baron is arrested and tried as a pretender. Though the defendant seems to have

acquired the Baron's gait, voice, and even his fingerprints, Ramkopf presents the following "facts" as proof that the Baron's claims are false: "the notice of the Baron's death, an extract from a church book, the receipt for the coffin." (P: 185) As I have argued elsewhere, it is characteristic of Soviet culture to take the document (the sign) as the primary test of truth.[23] While reality is taken as primary in the West, it is the word that is hierarchically more significant in the East. This is why Bulgakov can write «Раз нет документа, нету и человека»[24] -- "No document, no person!" The reverse also holds true -- a document is even better than the reality it describes (the sign is more important than its referent or, as Lotman and Uspensky would have it, the expression is more important than the content[25]). Shvarts takes similar humorous advantage of the Soviet fascination with the document in The Dragon. Instead of a spear, the Burgomaster hands Lancelot a piece of paper:

> Это удостоверение дается вам в том, что копье действительно находится в ремонте, что подписью и приложением печати удостоверяется. Вы предъявите его во время боя господину дракону, и все кончится отлично.[26]
>
> This certificate attests that the spear is really being repaired, which is certified by the signature and the seal affixed. Present it during the battle to Lord Dragon and everything will end splendidly.

The importance of the document is brought out again at the end of Munchausen, when the Baron is declared to have completed a trip to the moon:

> Рамкопф: Поздравляю вас, барон!
>
> Мюнхгаузен: С чем?
>
> Рамкопф: С успешным возвращением с луны.
>
> Мюнхгаузен: Я не был на луне.
>
> Рамкопф: Как это -- не был, когда есть решение, что был?(P: 195)
>
> Ramkopf: Congratulations Baron!
>
> Munchausen: For what?
>
> Ramkopf: On your successful return from the moon.

Munchausen: I wasn't on the moon.

Ramkopf: What do you mean, you weren't there, when there is a decision that you were?

So long as there is a written document to that effect, whether or not the journey actually took place is immaterial.

At the trial, no one is allowed to recognize the Baron as himself: he is now the gardener Müller (Miller in the play). That this situation is unnatural is shown even by the reaction of those commanded to arrest the Baron:

Фельдфебель: Господи, да ведь это...

Бургомистр: Кто?!

Фельдфебель: Да ведь это...

Бургомистр: Кто?!

Фельдфебель: Не могу знать!(P: 184)

Sergeant-major: My god, but it's...

Burgomaster: Who?!

Sergeant-major: But it's...

Burgomaster: Who?!

Sergeant-major: I have no idea!

The split between the official version and reality is felt most strongly by the Burgomaster, who is the Baron's friend, and who therefore tries not to testify that he is not himself:

Бургомистр: Господин судья, я старый человек. Избавьте меня от этой муки... У меня слабые глаза и совершенно ненадежная память. Я могу ошибиться...

Судья: Но вы узнаете в подсудимом барона или нет?

Бургомистр: Не знаю... Честное слово... Иногда мне кажется, что это он, иногда -- нет... Могу ли я полагаться на свои личные ощущения в таком важном деле? .. Полностью доверяю суду. Как решите, так и будет!(P: 188)

Burgomaster: Your honor, I am an old man. Relieve me of this torment... I have weak eyes and a completely unreliable memory. I may make a mistake...

Judge: But do you recognize the defendant as the Baron or not?

Burgomaster: I don't know... Honestly... Sometimes it seems to me that it is him, sometimes not... Can I rely on my personal feelings in such an important case?... I trust the court completely. As you decide, so be it!

The language itself breaks down when Marta says she will tell the truth, that the Baron is himself:

Марта: Я скажу правду!

Рамкопф: Тогда мы и вас привлечем к ответственности как лжесвидетеля!

Баронесса: Успокойся, Генрих! Если человек хочет сказать правду, он имеет на это право. Мне бы только хотелось знать, какую правду вы имеете в виду?

Марта: Правда одна.

Баронесса: Правды вообще не бывает. Правда -- это то, что в данный момент считается правдой. (P: 189)

Marta: I will tell the truth!

Ramkopf: Then we will bring you to trial for perjury [lit. as a false witness]!

Baroness: Calm down, Henrich! If a person wants to tell the truth, he has the right to. but I would just like to know what truth you have in mind?

Marta: There is one truth.

Baroness: There is no truth at all. Truth is what is considered truth at the moment.

A society which promotes such statements is surely morally bankrupt by most standards.

The final scene in the film is depicted as a show trial, with the accent on the show. As the scene opens, the orchestra is tuning up.

Бургомистр: Все пойдет по плану: после увертюры, допросы. Потом последнее слово подсудимого, залпы, общее веселье, танцы.

Рамкопф: Фрау Марта, прошу вас, точно по тексту!

Burgomaster: Everything follows the plan: after the overture comes the interrogation. Then the defendant's last words, a salute, general merriment, dancing.

Ramkopf: Frau Marta, please, follow the text exactly!

Not only is there a text to follow and an orchestra to accompany the proceedings, but there remain in the film some hints that Marta has been drugged to induce her to comply with the plan. All these details are meant to direct the audience to the show trials of the '30s in the Soviet Union.

So far we have dealt with general allusions to Soviet reality. There is also one character in the film who may be intended as a parody of a specific person. The character of the Duke appears only in the film, not in the play, and it stands to reason that the ruler of a world which covertly represents the Soviet Union should covertly represent its leader at the time -- Brezhnev. The film portrays the Duke as inept and disinterested in politics. He is more concerned with fashion: indeed, he seems to be an amateur dressmaker. He describes all state problems in terms of what one should wear and judges people by their clothes. When he learns of the possible war with England he goes to the globe and asks, "Where is it, where, I ask you." "Here." "And where are we?" "We are here" He then takes his tape-measure to the globe and declares, "But it's so close!"

The Duke in the film is both protected and controlled by those around him. When we are introduced to the Duke, his steward attempts to prevent entry to his rooms while he is indulging in his hobby:

Его высочество занят важнейшими государственными делами. Он проводит экстренное совещание. Его вообще там нет.

His highness is busy with state affairs of the utmost importance. He is holding an emergency meeting. He's not there at all.

In fact, he is there, in his office, which doubles as a dressmaking salon.

The Burgomaster acts both as prompter and as translator for the inarticulate and inept Duke. Jakobina arrives to ask about the divorce decree:

Якобина: Вы подписали прошение барона Мюнхгаузена о разводе?

Герцог: Кто подписал? Я подписал?

(Бургомистр кивает)

Герцог: Да, я подписал.

Якобина: Значит, он может жениться на Марте?

Герцог: Почему жениться?

(Бургомистр кивает)

Герцог: Да, он может жениться.

Jakobina: Did you sign Baron Munchausen's request for a divorce?

Duke: Who signed it? Did I sign it?

(Burgomaster nods)

Duke: Yes, I signed it.

Jakobina: So he can marry Marta?

Duke: Why marry?

(Burgomaster nods)

Duke: Yes, he can marry.

The Burgomaster's role as front man and interpreter for the Duke is even clearer in the last scene, where the Duke's inarticulate mutterings are translated into legalese:

Герцог: Ну вот что: наверное мы тут все были в чем-то неправы. .

Бургомистр: Господа! Решением ганноверского суда, в связи с успешным завершением эксперимента. . .

Герцог: Раз что так все сложилось, так пусть все идет, как идет.

Бургомистр: Приказано, высочайшим повелением приказано считать подсудимого бароном Мюнхгаузеном.

Duke: Well here, then: probably we've all been somehow wrong...

Burgomaster: Ladies and gentlemen! By decision of the court of Hannover, in connection with the successful completion of the experiment...

Duke: So long as it's turned out that way, let things go as they're going.

Burgomaster: You are commanded, commanded by the highest injunction to consider the defendant Baron Munchausen.

This satire is biting enough if we can safely deduce that the ruler of a state which represents the Soviet Union in Aesopian translation represents Brezhnev. But is there any evidence for such a satiric version?

Most of the anecdotes about Brezhnev in his last years dealt with his senility. He and other politburo members were portrayed playing with toy soldiers or putting on mismatched socks, then sending each other home only to find that "the pair there doesn't match either." But the most consistent theme of the Brezhnev anecdotes was prompting: the invariant motif was that Brezhnev could do nothing without a text. One anecdote has him addressing a foreign visitor:

"Dear Indira Gandhi!"

"Comrade Brezhnev, it's Margaret Thatcher!"

"Dear Indira Gandhi!"

"Comrade Brezhnev, it's Margaret Thatcher!"

"Dear Indira Gandhi!"

"Comrade Brezhnev, it's Margaret Thatcher!"

"I know it's Margaret Thatcher, but here it says 'Dear Indira Gandhi!'"

At the opening of the Moscow Olympics he five times reads "O" followed by stormy and lengthy applause. By the head gestures of the joke-teller, the listener understands that he is reading the logo of

the Olympics at the top of the page. In another anecdote Suslov comes to the door three times and knocks. Each time Brezhnev gets up, puts on his glasses, and reads from a piece of paper "Who's there?" Suslov does not answer because he "forgot his glasses at home" or "forgot his note." All these anecdotes show a leader who is not in control, who relies on texts provided by others -- precisely the image presented by the Duke in Gorin's Munchausen.

There are no other specific details that refer to Brezhnev's anecdotal quirks: his eyebrows, his accent, his medals, his aspirations as a writer. But Zakharov may be taking advantage of his visual medium in casting Leonid Bronevoj as the count. Bronevoj's demeanor and expression of combined Weltschmertz and indifference (or is it stupidity?) do seem to recall Brezhnev.

In general censorship varies in the Soviet Union according to the medium and the size of the audience. Among the dramatic media, theater is the freest, since it reaches the smallest audience. Theatrical performances can also change from night to night, which makes them harder to control: once a play is approved for production, subtle changes may still be introduced. It was because of this freedom that Ljubimov's productions at the Taganka theater became so popular. But on a national scale, only the elite few ever saw a Taganka production. Not so film and television, both of which potentially reach millions of viewers. The Soviet state early on recognized the importance of film as a propaganda tool, and film became, alongside the socialist realist novel, the dominant genre in Soviet culture. With the advent of television, the new medium was enlisted in the struggle to engineer human souls. Television is potentially even more influential, and therefore more dangerous than film. A film can be tested in front of small audiences, then given closed runs, with the number of copies controlling the size of the audience. It can always be pulled from distribution if it is perceived as dangerous. A television program, however, reaches millions of viewers at once. This explains the notoriously tight security at Gosteleradio and the general lack (until recently) of live broadcasts. The changes in Soviet television introduced by Gorbachev's glasnost' campaign only show how important the

medium is in Soviet propaganda. But Gorin's Munchausen was written, produced, and shown in the days before glasnost'. Perhaps this is why it enjoyed such popularity: at the time it must have shown daring contrast to the usual television fare.

For those who are able to translate the Aesopian language of Gorin's Munchausen, the story undergoes a remarkable transformation in crossing the border from England and Germany to the Soviet Union and from fantastic tale to drama on stage and film. In the imaginary world of the film, the fantastic adventures of the Baron become reality. In the original adventures the Baron's claims of authenticity are taken of a piece with the adventures themselves as fictional, while in the film they are shown to be true. The result is a reversal of the hierarchy of truth and fiction, in which those who question the Baron's veracity and urge him to recant his adventures appear not as spokesmen for reason, but as dictators who enforce conformity even when it means ignoring the truth. It is the authorities and Munchausen's opponents who, in the film, place more store in the power of language (the document) than in the reality they see before their eyes. As they cannot recognize the Baron, they cannot recognize the truth unless it is asserted in a document. Ironically, it is precisely this importance of the document in Soviet culture that leads to the role of censorship, which requires the author to translate his story about truth and fiction into Aesopian language. Munchausen says he cannot do it "in secret;" his author, however, is forced to do exactly that: but Aesopian language allows him to reveal his message to the initiates.

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[1]Lev Loseff, On the Beneficence of Censorship (München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1984), 29.

[2]Ju. I. Levin, "Semanticheskaja struktura russkoj zagadki," Trudy po znakovym sistemam, Vol. 6, No. 308 (1973), 166.

[3]ibid.

[4]op. cit., 167.

[5]Loseff, 51.

[6]Kevin Moss, "Bulgakov's Master and Margarita: Masking the Supernatural and the Secret Police," RLJ, Vol. 38, Nos. 129-30 (1984), 115-31.

[7] M. A. Bulgakov, Master i Margarita, in Belaja gvardija, Teatral'nyj roman, Master i Margarita (L: Xudozhestvennaja literatura, 1973), 492. Further references are to this edition.

[8] Loseff's discussion of structuredness and oddity as a marker in the context of Levin's structuredness and unreality as features which create the internal point of the riddle is unconvincing.

[9] Grigorij Gorin, "Tot samyj Mjunxgauzen...," Komicheskie fantazii(M:Sovetskij pisatel', 1986), 141.

[10] Loseff, 63-5.

[11] The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (NY: Pantheon, 1944), 110.

[12] Henceforth the film will be designated F, the Soviet play P, and the English text E.

[13] N. V. Gogol', Revizor (M: Detskaja literatura, 1974), 29.

[14] Gogol', 64.

[15] «Рукописи не горят.» Bulgakov, 703.

[16] Bulgakov, 530.

[17] «в том-то и штука, что закрыты! В этом-то вся и соль! А в открытый предмет может попасть каждый!» Bulgakov, 695.

[18] Bulgakov, 798, 811-12.

[19] Loseff, 135.

[20] Literaturnaja gazeta, 19 Feb., p. 6.

[21] Literaturnaja gazeta, 7 Jan., p. 8.

[22] Literaturnaja gazeta, 8 Apr., p. 8.

[23] Kevin Moss, "Bulgakov's Master and Margarita: Masking the Supernatural and the Secret Police," RLJ, Vol. 38, Nos. 129-30 (1984), 115-31.

[24] Bulgakov, 706.

[25] Yu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," New Literary History, vol. IX, No. 9 (Winter, 1978), 211-32.

[26] Evgenij Shvarts, "Drakon" in P'esy, (L: Sovetskij pisatel', 1972), 307.