Valentin Kataev: The Past in *Uzhe napisan Verter, Spiashchii* and *Sukhoi liman*

Mark Conliffe
Department of Russian and Slavic Studies
McGill University, Montréal
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The Past in Three Later Works of Valentin Kataev

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Abstract

In the works published by Valentin Kataev after 1966, his own past is reflected consistently [illegible] accepts the reader and critic to interpret them as memoirs. However, such [illegible] too narrow and thus inaccurate. For Kataev, the past stimulates his imagination, and memory is the relentless, uncontrollable retriever of previous time. Rather than a factual resurrection of Kataev's past, his prose of this [illegible] is an adorned recreation. The critical "thaw", that followed Stalin's [illegible] permitted the expression of sincere emotion in Soviet literature, [illegible] sense that suffering that resulted from the implementation [illegible] could be revealed in prose and poetry. Kataev accepted the opportunity. In the stories that this study examines, *Uzhe napisan Verter, Spiashchii*, and *Sukhoi liman*, Kataev expresses how life from the past can remain and change for survivors in the present.

Résumé

Les ouvrages publiés par Valentin Kataev après 1966, reflètent régulièrement le passé de l'auteur. Ceci tente lecteurs et critiques de les interpréter comme des mémoires. Cependant une telle étiquette est trop restrictive et donc inexacte. Pour Kataev le passé stimule l'imagination et la mémoire recouvre de manière implacable et incontrolable les choses d'antan. Plutôt qu'une résurrection des faits du passé de Kataev, sa prose de cette période est une nouvelle création embellie. Le "dégel" critique qui suivit la mort de Staline permit l'expression de l'émotion sincère dans la littérature soviétique; sincère en ce sens que la souffrance provenant de la mise en oeuvre du nouveau plan pouvait être révélée dans la prose et la poésie. Kataev accepta cette opportunité. Dans les histoires que cette étude examine, *Uzhe napisan Verter*, *Spiashchii* et *Sukhoi liman*, Kataev exprime comment la vie du passé peut subsister et changer pour les survivants dans le présent.

Preface

For all but the final five years of the life of the Soviet state, Valentin Kataev donated consistently to Soviet literature as an author, critic, editor and newspaper contributor in various genres--prose and drama, poetry and journalism. Born in 1897, his first publication was a poem published in an Odessa newspaper in 1910. He continued writing and publishing until his death in 1986. This staying power distinguished him from many authors in the Soviet Union. His extended presence in the world of Soviet literature produced many noteworthy contributions. Kataev's most acclaimed literary recognition resulted from works that he published in the first thirty-five years and the final twenty-five years of his life. This study concentrates on the latter period.

More specifically, the purpose of this thesis is to examine Kataev's treatment of the past in the three prose works: *Uzhe napisan Verter* (1980), *Spiashchii* (1985), and *Sukhoi liman* (1986). These works represent three of the last four stories that completed Kataev's contribution to Soviet literature.[1] With the benefit of the entire collection before it, this thesis enjoys the advantage of looking back on a complete picture and drawing from it. However, my tendency has been to limit that reaching for guidance no further than to works including and following the appearance of *Sviatoi kolodets (The Holy Well;* 1966). It was with this story that trends that would hallmark his literature until his death, became most noticeable in Kataev's prose; previous experiments with the creative ornamentation of the past, with a narrative expressed by indirect communication, and with his self as the central theme of his stories, come to the surface in this work in a unified collage of noteworthy

[1] *Iunosheskii roman moego starogo druga Sashi Pchelkina, rasskazannyi im samim,* in *Novyi mir* 10 (1982), 9-105 and 11 (1982), 162-227 is the fourth story which Kataev published in the 1980s.

achievement. Kataev dubbed the consolidation of these characteristics in his work as *mauvisme*.

As far as I know, in western English criticism, these stories have only received attention in the work of Professor N.N. Shneidman.[2] In Russian criticism, I have encountered only a short review by Aleksandr Bakhrakh on *Uzhe napisan Veter* and another by A. Chernov on *Sukhoi Liman*.[3] It is hoped that this study will help to fill this void, supplementing the already published findings by bringing to light some new angles by which to approach Kataev's writing about the past.

This is neither a comparative study (i.e., to other literature, Soviet or non-Soviet) nor an evaluation of Kataev's development as a writer. Rather, in an effort to define some elements of Kataev's personal and artistic commitment to the past, I have accessed the works as my investigations demanded, often without regard for chronological order of publication. Effectively, I have treated the past as a pliable substance and have looked at how Kataev has moulded it, slowly moving around these three specimens of his craft to see what interpretations different perspectives provide.

These stories have an initial attraction for sentimental reasons; they are the final writings of a respected author, revered in his own right. As well though, it is unavoidable that the writings are curious for what they are--discussions on the past created by a man stepping through the ninth decade of his life. This raises an enormous interest if only because one wonders how and what the final creations of an artist will be--especially an artist whose consciousness has sampled tsarist regimes, revolutions, and the ensuing

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2 See N.N. Shneidman, *Soviet Literature in the 1980s. Decade of Transition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) and his "Valentin Kataev in His Eighties," *SEEJ* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 52-62.

3 See Aleksandr Bakhrakh, "Voskresshii Kataev," *Posev* 1 (1981), 58-60 and A. Chernov, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* 7 (1986), 76-7.

products of ambition and change

The long first chapter of this paper examines the theme of memory It discusses the accession of the past by the author and characters, and explores what they see and how they bring the other time into their daily lives It is a subject one must approach carefully when reading Kataev; how he brings forward his own past does not always parallel the similar retrievals of his characters. Inevitably this becomes a look at personal travels and discoveries, the involuntary abundance of memory and its selective application.

Chapter Two explores the narrative techniques that relay the past to the individual. It organises, to some degree, the dissembled pieces of existences provided by "free association" and discusses the peculiarities of such presentations in each work, marking connections between scenes where associations exist and noting ambiguous jumps in time and space when they occur.

The final chapter is a glimpse of how the past presents the characters The first chapters have explored how the characters treat the past, and how the narration reveals the past To complete a circle around these stories, a third angle should include the past as bestower of information This section looks at the inevitability of change with time, and the ongoing search for harmony among individuals and collectives.

Not a detailed analysis, this study represents an approach sympathetic to my needs for understanding Kataev in these works Yet even following this lead, it would have been difficult not to notice that points recur The most noteworthy one describes the personal truth which the past produces in each individual, presented both through objective comparison and subjective sensation. The result is often a sacred knowledge and truly individual emotion. However, among the rewarding potential is the possibility of

negative reminders and painful revivals. The past and memory are often not selective and the picture that opens up before our mind's eye need not always be our preferred choice

I am grateful to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for a summer bursary, that allowed me to channel my energies toward the completion of this thesis I would especially like to thank Professor Tatiana Patera, who patiently and enthusiastically provided me with insight into a society and literature to which I will always be a foreigner. As well, I am indebted to Professors P. Austin, A. Fodor and S Roll for their helpful advice I am most grateful for the assistance of Ms Lynda Bastien, who helped me to organise all administrative necessities and to meet deadlines. Special thanks also goes to Ms Helen Anderson, the Soviet and East European Bibliographer, who pointed out corners of the library previously not visited by me Lastly I would like to thank Professor C Barnes and Dr. O. Bakich at the University of Toronto for their assistance in locating satisfying translations of the poem of Boris Pasternak, included in the Appendix of this paper.

In transliterating Russian, I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system, unless referring to names and words which already have been attributed more common English spellings (i e., Tolstoy instead of Tolstoi or Dostoevsky instead of Dostoevskii) As well, the soft signs have been distinguished as ' and the hard signs as " to ease transliteration back into Russian

Unless mentioned, all translations are my own. Therefore, all mistakes remain my own. Although the titles of these three works, like others, can be associated with a title translated into English, I have chosen to keep them in

their Russian transliterated form since to this point no formal or official translations exist For all other works I note the Russian title and introduce the English variant that is most common in Western criticism

When not referring to the reader or character by name, title or designated noun, I have chosen to use the personal pronoun 'he' in favour of the more clumsy 'he or she' or 'he/she'. This selection is based solely on my ambitions for brevity and ease of reading. It is my hope that I have achieved this and done so without causing offence to others

Kataev often uses ellipsis to introduce and complete spoken or internal dialogue. In situations where confusion may occur I have discerned between those used by Kataev by referring to his with three regularly spaced ellipsis dots (...). However, in places where I have chosen to use an ellipsis to indicate an omitted part from a quotation, I have employed three increased spaced dots (. .)

In a couple of places in the text where I have referred to characters from different works within comparative examples, I have bracketed the titles of the works, which each character is taken from, and represented the titles as follows: *Uzhe napisan Verter (unv), Spashchii (sp) and Sukhoi Iuman (si).* This will, I hope, maintain clarity and save the reader from the unexciting task of repeatedly reading titles in their entirety

Mark Conliffe

Introduction

The "new" Kataev

It is agreed, generally, that the appearance of Valentin Kataev's *Sviatoi kolodets (The Holy Well;* 1966)[4] marked the presentation of a "new" Kataev in Soviet literature; reactions were both positive and negative, but there was consensus that this literature was separate from his previous work.[5] Despite the transition, consistencies, such as the lyrical structure of his language and the use of the past as the setting for his works, remained in Kataev's writings. These characteristics are as visible in *Beleet parus odinokii* (1936)[6] as in a work of the "new" period.

For instance, *Beleet parus odinokii* is set in Odessa during the 1905 revolution. The action and interpretation are seen and considered through a child's eyes; reactions are often gentle, as both past time and youth places a

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[4] *Sviatoi kolodets* was first published in *Novyi mir* 5 (1966), 3-66. It has most recently been included in Kataev's *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983-86) (hereafter *SS*), vol. 6, 143-242. It appeared in English translation as: *The Holy Well*, Max Hayward and Harold Shukman, trans. (New York: Walker & Company and London: The Harvill Press, 1967). All further references will be to this English edition.

[5] In English criticism, Robert Russell, the foremost western chronicler of Kataev's work, makes this distinction in his "The Problem of Self-expression in the Later Works of Valentin Kataev," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 11, no. 4 (October 1975), 366-79 and in his *Valentin Kataev*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 109-10; Dodona Kiziria gives passing mention to the transition in her "Four Demons of Valentin Kataev," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1985), 647-662 (see note 2), and Ireneusz Szarycz notes the change by explaining the subsequent links and unity of the works of this period in his *Poetics of Valentin Kataev's Prose of the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 64. In Russian criticism, to name just a few, Z. Vatnikova-Prizel, in her work on Russian memoir literature of the past two decades,*O russkoi memuarnoi literature* (East Lansing: Russian Language Journal, 1978), refers to "some new, innovative varieties of autobiographical epopees," when she speaks of Kataev's works, as well as those of V. Soloukhin, A. Kuznetsov and Iu. Olesha, see page 23; N. Krymova, although writing particularly on Kataev's *Almaznyi moi venets (My Diamond Crown; 1978)*, explains that the appearance of *The Holy Well* "forced many to believe that a best known author can experience unexpected, unforeseen self-renewal." See the first paragraph of her article "Ne sviatoi kolodets," *Druzhba narodov* 9 (1979), 232-42, Aleksandr Gladkov referring to *The Holy Well* and *The Grass of Oblivion (Trava zabvenia; 1967)*, suggests that "[t]he world in which we live had still nowhere in our literature been described as freshly and with such talent as in the last books of Kataev *Pozdnie vechera. Vospominania, stat'i, zametki* (Moskva: Sovietskii pisatel', 1986), 326.

[6] Valentin Kataev, *Beleet parus odinokii* in *SS*, vol. 4, 5-252. In English translation, this story appeared as *Peace is Where the Tempests Blow* (New York. Liberty Book Club, Inc., 1937).

buffer between the harsh adult world of real events and the innocent, honest senses of children. Likewise *Uzhe napisan Verter* (1980)[7] is also set back in time--in Odessa during the Civil War. Kataev recounts events through a dream, thereby allowing him to fuse fact and the sub-conscious creative process of dreaming.

The use of the past and the fluidity with which Kataev blends past and present, fact and "creative fact", remains throughout both his old and new writings. The difference in the two periods is evident in his approach to the past, his view of the use of this different time. The subjective, consciously affected interpretation of the past of the character or narrator of the "early" stories has given way to an unconscious intimate view of times that were.

During his "new" period, Kataev's past life provided the facts for his writings as he recounted much of his past actions and relationships. Days shared with Olesha, Mayakovsky or Bunin, were fond memories renewed with perpetual life, in his writing. So, certainly there is a difference in the uses of the past--the emotion of the story is less governed by ideological awareness and is influenced more by personal commitment -but the past remains an integral part of Kataev's writing throughout his life.

It is Kataev's uses of the past in his "new" period works, *Uzhe napisan Verter, Spiashchii* (1985) and *Sukhoi liman* (1986),[8] that I will focus on in this paper.

Employing the past in the later works (of the "new" period) caused Kataev to endeavour to make the past relevant to the present or to explain the presence of the wars and revolution in stories written in the 1980s. One way to accomplish this was to make his characters of the present dream or recall in

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7 *Uzhe napisan Verter* first appeared in the journal *Novyi mir* 6 (1980), 122-56.

8 *Spiashchii* first appeared in *Novyi mir* 1 (1985), 83-96 and *Sukhoi liman* first appeared in *Novyi mir* 1 (1986), 8-42. As well, *Spiashchii* was included in *SS*, vol. 10, 677-97. References to the three stories will be from the *Novyi mir* editions.

order to relocate their consciousness. Subsequently, this has resulted, in many cases, in the employment of an indirect communication narrative technique. Although not an innovative technique, the freedom of Kataev's narrative, differently from the directed, chronologically ordered narrative of previous works, is a new statement of sorts by the author that expounds the authority that he, the creator of these works, holds. This is important because this control counteracts those things that Kataev, or any individual, cannot master--his recollections, accessibility to the past, ever present reminders of the past, and personal conscience. These traits are foremost in the characters of his stories. It seems to me that in this coexistence of what he wants to remember and to forget, and his artistic impulses, the products of Kataev's moral and creative struggles were bred, and as a result, begot the "new" writings. To define exactly what Kataev is writing remains, it seems, elusive, if only because the action of creating these works appears initiated by emotion and not by a finely tailored plan.

Background

Choosing to acknowledge and accept the conditions defined as "Socialist Realism", the expression of Kataev's personality was less revealed in his earlier writings. This is not to say that personal experience did not provide a foundation for his writing, but that subjective or emotional individuality was subordinate to using past experience as the basis to build historically accurate, general descriptions of characters. This is consistent, for the most part, with the literary trend of the 1920s and 30s that Katerina Clark describes in her work on Soviet literature. "In these novels the author's own life was deindividualized as he patterned it to recapitulate the great legends

of the revolutionary hero."[9] Conversely, it appears that in the later works, one sees Kataev striving to establish a personal and literary integrity, in which the individual retains his past. For example, the subjective collection, *Razbitaia zhizn', ili volshebnyi rog oberona (A Mosaic of Life or the Magic Horn of Oberon;* 1976)[10] appears as a huge compilation of emotionally spirited pieces of personal time. It is a collage of snippets united by Kataev's flowing style, the spontaneity of childhood and the centrality of the actions around his own being.

His later works present a view of personal experience and existence, choreographed by Kataev's creative imagination, producing individual struggles and successes, rather than trials of the group to meet or to applaud goals sanctioned by revolutionary spirit. Because of this transition, I think Max Hayward was accurate in his description of Kataev's works of the later period, suggesting that, "[l]ike Ehrenburg, both Leonov and Katayev have published novels in which they seem to take issue with their earlier attitudes and rationalizations."[11] That the authors do *take issue*, presupposes a disruption or contrast of ties between two moods of creative work. Yet, the appearance of later works does not mark a decisive break with the state or with Soviet literary traditions. Rather, these works represent a renewal of personal position and priority; accuracy of historical fact becomes subordinate, as Geoffrey Hosking has suggested, to relating "experience, with

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9 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel History as Ritual* (Chicago. The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 44

10 *Razbitaia zhizn', ili volshebnyi rog Oberona* first appeared in *Novyi mir* 7 (1972), 3-139 and 8 (1972), 8-202 It is also in *SS*, vol. 8, 7-508 An English translation appeared as *A Mosaic of Life or the Magic Horn of Oberon*, Moira Budberg and Gordon Latta, trans (Chicago. J. Philip O'Hara, Inc., 1976). All further references will be to this English translation.

11 Max Hayward, *Writers in Russia 1917-1978*, Patricia Blake, ed (London Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), 70

close even loving attention to things and people."[12] Thus, although Kataev may lean on the walls surrounding the traditional expectations of Soviet literature, he does not break away completely from the compound.[13]

Kataev admits that he has not abandoned the ever-modified expectations of socialist realism, but rather, has built on them, suggesting that he has maintained a position within the Soviet literary guidelines, albeit on the edge. In his writings, this is understood from two sources. Firstly, a patriotic tone of his descriptions suggests thankfulness and responsibility to his homeland.

> Amid the fields, meadows, and woods there was a hint of chemical factories, rocket-launching sites and the catapults of high-voltage power lines traversing in every direction the unique, thrice-blessed country of my soul which had given me so many delights, so much inspiration, so many disappointments, so much happiness, so many sublime thoughts, so many great and small achievements, so much love and hatred (and sometimes despair), poetry, music, crude intoxication and divinely subtle dreams which came to me so sweetly and softly at dawn to the timid singing of the first nightingale--in a word, so much of everything that has made me what I am, . [14]

And secondly, his position is alluded to in his commitment to a continued definition of his own school of literary creation, *mauvisme*. In the introduction to his translation of *The Grass of Oblivion*,[15] Robert Daglish relates how Kataev explained to him that:

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[12] Professor Hosking suggests this of the "best Soviet fiction today." See his *Beyond Socialist Realism Soviet Fiction Since Ivan Denisovich* (New York Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), 40

[13] It appears that Kataev was testing the limits of literary allowance when he first submitte d *The Holy Well* Robert Russell explains that the manuscript of *The Holy Well* was first forwarded to the journal *Moskva* Publication was stopped at the last minute due to "many cryptic references to Stalin and to the servility of writers and others in the Stalin era." (118) Following modification the novel appeared in *Novyi mir* in 1966. See Russell, *Valentin Kataev*, 117-18

[14] *The Holy Well*, 145

[15] *Trava zabvenia* was first published in *Novyi mir* 3 (1967), 3-129. It is included in *SS*, vol 6, 245-444 It appeared in English translation as. *The Grass of Oblivion*, Robert Daglish, trans (London: Macmillan, 1969) All further references will be to this English edition.

> No, *mauvisme* was not just a joke. In a sense it could even be described as a higher stage of socialist realism. For ten years, during the period of Stalin worship, Soviet aesthetics remained at a complete standstill, and even today critics and writers are hampered by patterns of thought that are essentially idealistic. They are guided by the intellect rather than the senses. They may acknowledge materialism, the primacy of matter in theory, but in practice they no longer trust the evidence of their senses. *Mauvisme* offers release from the straight-jacket of old-fashioned concepts and a return to immediacy of feeling without which art cannot live.[16]

It appears that Kataev is not taking issue with greater forces, but that he sees priority in the need to alert, awaken or recall the senses of people to material happenings and achievements, by showing first of all that he has undergone a renewal or rebirth. He explained that, "...we have passed through exceptionally cruel and bloody wars and revolution, we have survived, .."; Daglish summarises, "What Soviet people feel and think cannot, and should not be forced into preconceived patterns; but they themselves must learn to trust their immediate reactions."[17] One is unsure if Daglish would be less accurate to explain that the people must *relearn* this confidence. In either case, such a transition anticipates one of rebirth and searching for self-- principal themes of the works that disclosed the "new" Kataev, *The Holy Well* and *The Grass of Oblivion*.

The theme of rebirth or resurrection confronts the reader of *The Holy Well* from the outset, and continues throughout the remainder of the text. The opening lines, describing the moments before the main character's operation, both explain the cause of his falling into unconsciousness and suggest a procedure that is going to repair an ailing being, restoring him anew. As well, the imagery of such a revival is sensed in the continued interjections and references to Pushkin's poem *Prorok* (*The Prophet*, 1826)[18] in which the image

16 *The Grass of Oblivion*, iii.

17 *Ibid*, iv.

18 See *Appendix A* for full text.

of the patient on the operating table, at the mercy of the surgeons, parallel the hero of Pushkin's poem who "lay like a corpse in the desert."[19] Resurrection is also discussed at a human level in the story, as the main character undergoes a growth of sorts, with his first love, appropriately at an Easter celebration

Yet why does renewal or resurrection of a past-Kataev take place? Why did a change in his literature occur? Is his incentive solely idealistic, in that he, with the aid of *mauvisme* will break the chains from writers, critics and others? Answers to these questions are not clear, since it is difficult to distinguish whether the transformation is something that the individual realises, or conversely, is it something that finds the individual? (Is he the "chosen one" as lines from *The Prophet* suggest--"Arise, O prophet, see and hear, be filled with My will, go forth over land and sea, and set the hearts of men on fire with your Word,"?) It seems to me that there are a few possibilities that may explain this exercise of new direction, the most obvious of which are to exorcise himself of the uncontrollable need to materialise stimulants and irritants of his inner being, and to perpetuate his personality, or his individual being through the chronicle of his literature, in a manner true to his own self In accordance with Max Hayward's earlier quoted reference to Kataev's confrontation with earlier work, rebirth, or at least a reworking of previous actions may very well have been a priority of his exercise through writing.

A process toward rebirth suggests a cleansing of self or of conscience--to start anew or, at least, to channel one's energies in a direction previously not pursued. It follows, that to realise a need "to cleanse" presupposes the existence of something unwanted, or that warrants alteration. Such a

[19] This is the sixth last line of the poem.

discomfort may be internal, like conscience or memory, and can be exhibited in an author's writings--through his voice of expression--requiring a return or a look at the past, that one wants to keep or to change for the present and the future.

Often in *The Holy Well*, the narrator explains that he is troubled by the uncontrollable force of memory. Early in the novel he mentions to his wife, "You know, I think they've [household items] triggered off all sorts of unwanted recollections, painful associations, things that have already been dreamt;" or the embodiment of his alter ego comes back to him as his "frequently recurring nightmare;" at a less than sober moment, he describes how "I wept for Osip Mandelshtam and for the gypsies, for my past, for my first love,.. ;" and as a hint to stories that would follow, the narrator explains that, "My sleep was full of passionate anticipation for my forthcoming meeting, and of disturbing dreams which it was impossible to reconstruct later...."[20] It is these memories--aspects of his past--that have tried on his soul and that cause him to admit that, like his once clean shoes, now "duller than they had been in their youth," his "so-called spirit was ageing. It, too, was covered with the scratches of time, "[21] And like buffing and cleaning one's shoes to bring them to their material and aesthetic potential, Kataev examines the exercise that both pained and excited the souls of his self-proclaimed greatest influences, Bunin and Mayakovsky--their writing

The story that followed *The Holy Well, The Grass of Oblivion*, confirmed Kataev's transformation, and as well, was a target for criticism and acclaim. However, like a statement of intent, he followed the work in which he strived to explain and justify the direction of his writing by presenting a story about the admired poets, Bunin and Mayakovsky, contrasting their choices and

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20 *The Holy Well*, 39, 44, 55 and 130

21 *Ibid.*, 68.

abilities, and comparing their individuality and talent.

Kataev's narrator and characters suggest that his design is not to change popular opinion of the authors that he writes about or of himself. Speaking of what he refers to as Bunin's self-censorship, the narrator explains that, "What is written is written. What is said cannot be unsaid."[22] There is a strength and eternal nature to words shared with others, and a single opinion lacks the force to alter this. The words always exist, regardless of how they are conditioned over the time that follows. This possibility of ongoing existence of a part of one's self is significant to the narrator and the parallel is encountered in happier circumstances later in the text:

> The poems, to tell the truth, were as bad as ever, but the bits of paper on which they were scratched had retained the traces of my not quite formed handwriting, rather as the cortex retains traces of all the impressions of life, safely guarded by the mechanism of memory, the key to which science has not yet discovered...
>
> The I that used to be is no more: I have not survived. The pencil has worn down. But the bad verses, scratched on that ash-flimsy paper--here they are! They have survived.[23]

Personal and artistic qualities stand out as dominant ones in this quote. The personal explanation exceeds the simple possibility of a troubled soul, a point reemphasised in this story when he shares: "But what happiness it is when the soul is possessed by an idea, by the passionate desire to incarnate it, to give it a name . . . ."[24] The narrator suggests that the force of this feeling leaves him with no alternative but to give life to the idea. Happiness results from making something a material reality, that will survive or be exposed to more than his individual soul--making a vision in space into a material thing--rather than inventing something from nothing except a goal or quota. "My soul is continually being influenced from without by millions of perceptible and

22 *The Grass of Oblivion*, 45.

23 *Ibid*., 103.

24 *Ibid*., 136.

imperceptible irritants, which suddenly begin to demand with terrible persistence that I should incarnate them in something material and three-dimensional."[25]

It would be pretentious to suggest that Kataev hopes for the same following of Mayakovsky, who, as a character in *The Grass of Oblivion* explains, "For long he had existed in some different dimension while I continued to move in time and space, as usual "[26] However, Mayakovsky's honesty with himself and with his art, could represent the product of a desired ambition of this author.

Some have questioned Kataev's need to materialise the trivialities or *byt* of such renowned people as Bunin and Mayakovsky.[27] Yet, while voicing displeasure that Kataev has "downplayed" the achieved stature and reasons for the early deaths, sufferings or immigration of these writers, these critics ignore the possibility that such an account of daily lives brings these figures closer to the reader Such inabilities recall the words of Roman Jakobson, who, considering a monograph on Mayakovsky, asked aloud in his 1930 essay "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets", "But how it is possible to write about Majakovskij's poetry now, when the paramount subject is not the rhythm but the death of the poet, when (if I may resort to Majakovskij's own poetic phrase) "sudden grief" is not ready to give in to "a clearly realized pain"?[28] Have comparable hindrances remained tied to the emotions of those who now speak only of the poetry and suicide of Mayakovsky, suggesting

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25 *Ibid*, 137.

26 *Ibid*, 208

27 See, for example, V Smirnova, "No zachem," *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 11 July 1969

28 "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets," in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, ed, (Cambridge, Massachusetts The Belknap Press, 1987), 273-300 This essay was written in May-June 1930 and was published in the volume *Smert' Vladimira Maiakovskogo* (Berlin, 1931) and subsequently was reprinted by Mouton (The Hague, 1975) In Russian it can also be found in Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. 5 "On Verse, Its Masters and Explorers," (The Hague Mouton, 1979) as "O pokolenii, rasmatrivshem svoikh poetov," 355-81

anything less than reverence or regret as blasphemy and inciting a feeling that does not permit objective regard for Kataev's work? Their criticism does not suggest the possibility that Kataev is not reducing their greatness, but on the contrary, that he is emphasising how these poets sought their potential and rose above others Does the title of Olesha's work *Ne dnia bez strochki (Not a Day Without a Line;* 1965) or the suggestions of the narrator of *The Grass of Oblivion* that Bunin believed, "One must write poetry every day, just as a violinist or a pianist must play every day on his instrument for several hours without fail If not, your talent will stagnate and run dry, like a well from which no water is drawn,"[29] and that Mayakovsky, stressing the importance of the artist's focus, claimed, "A writer's desk should be absolutely empty! To hell with all this fiddle-faddle! It distracts you,"[30] suggest that these writers were born talented, or groomed as a select group of individuals? It is here, in the "new" works that Kataev's writing, consistently set in the second, third and fourth decade of this century, in part holds relevance for the present. There seems to be an underlying question in these works that asks if people can rise above the crowd as others did in the earlier part of the century. This significance is weighed evenly in the later works, as the heroes are less seen as poets, and more often as people outside the arts. Could times be harder now? In these stories there are not solutions to problems, but experiences that result from the all-pervading "solution" Rooted in this are messages and events that the narrator wants to remember and others that he cannot help but recall.

29 *The Grass of Oblivion*, 26

30 *Ibid* , 152

Still, fidelity to historical reality is a secondary matter as regards the value of the novel. The novelist is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence.

Milan Kundera
The Art of the Novel

But for the knowledge of phenomena, man has besides abstract reasoning another instrument--experience--by which he verifies the results of reasoning.

L. Tolstoy
War and Peace

Chapter One

The places of memory

Kataev's writings of his later period, although reflecting much that resembles his life in earlier years, do not explain openly the motivation for his art. Certainly this is not a prerequisite for the works, but because of this, determining the role of themes in the stories becomes a bit of a quandary for the reader. For example, are they a Proustian search for lost time, or maybe a creative glimpse of life as it exists in Kataev's imagination, based on a time that was? Essentially, this uncertainty exists because there is not a primary function for memory in the stories and thus, the author's intention in wandering through the past is difficult to pinpoint. This is not to suggest that memory is not important to Kataev's writings and therefore is an ambiguous element in the works. It is just the opposite. Memory plays a (if not the) fundamental role in his works from two important perspectives: Kataev uses his memory as a base from which to create his literature, and he incorporates memory as a feature that defines his characters and consequently, his stories.[31]

Based on his writings, one confidently can conclude that Kataev would find it difficult to dissociate what one remembers from what one wants to create. Emphasising the importance of the combination of one's own being with art, he clarifies his understanding that poetry is an integral and available part of life for those that are willing to feel it, in *The Grass of Oblivion:* "There was no need to seek it, to dig it up from somewhere. It was there, right at hand--one had only to be inwardly aware of its presence. And this inward awareness of life as poetry now took complete possession of me."[32] Of

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[31] How Kataev uses his memory, in my opinion, has been consistent through most of his works since the 1960s. For this reason the following remarks about Kataev's employment of his own memory are applicable to all these works, this includes the relevance they hold also for the three stories on which this paper focuses.

[32] *The Grass of Oblivion*, 30

course, taking from the personal experiences of one's past to create the basis of a poem or story is not a modern device Yet creating from fact is often the target of subjective criticism [33] Many critics have spoken for and against the use of actuality as the foundation for creation. One train of thought comparable to that of Kataev, it seems to me, is that of Oscar Wilde, who saw artistic importance in the creation of detail, not in the recreation of it, the challenge lay in being able to create from the real

In his essay "The Decay of Lying," Wilde proposes that, "[t]he justification of a character in a novel is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is." [34] For Wilde, the beauty of the work was the characteristic which determined its distinction as art, he was not concerned with what the artist took from his memory, but how he presented the picture that existed in his mind's eye; beauty resulted from the artist's proficiency in creating life, not from his ability to mirror life This special internal vision is the basis from which imagination is stirred or inspired, as Vladimir Nabokov has explained:

> The passage from the dissociative stage to the associative one is thus marked by a kind of spiritual thrill which in English is very loosely termed *inspiration*. A passerby whistles a tune at the exact momen that you [a writer] notice the reflection of a branch in a puddle which in its turn, and simultaneously, recalls a combination of damp green leaves and excited birds in some old garden, and the old friend, long dead, suddenly steps out of the past, smiling and closing his dripping umbrella The whole thing lasts one radiant second and the motion of impressions and images is so swift that you cannot check the exact laws which attend their recognition, formation, and fusion--why this pool and not any pool, why this sound and not another--and how exactly are all those parts correlated, it is like a jigsaw puzzle that instantly comes together in your brain with the brain itself unable to observe how and why the pieces fit, and you experience a shuddering sensation of wild magic, of some inner

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[33] Kataev's use of his own past and that of others, especially the well known poets of the early part of the century, has received reproaches For example see V Smirnova

[34] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" in *"De Profundis" and Other Writings* (London Penguin Books, 1986), 63.

> resurrection, as if a dead man were revived by a sparkling drug which has been rapidly mixed in your presence. This feeling is at the base of what is called inspiration...[35]

Whether an idea is novel or borrowed from daily life, imagination is both the internal picture and the instrument that gives it a second life. In this way art is a means to place on paper, in clay or to music the beauty that exists in one's mind to produce something that will reactivate a feeling similar to one's original experience; as Nabokov explains, and rightly so I think, the reestablishment of past sensory perception alerts the memory, sparking emotion and creating a new or similar feeling. Therefore the creator's art is a product of his imagination and an attempt to reproduce an inner sensation. However, is this applicable to Kataev? By consistently writing of the past, is his goal to strive to recover what is hidden in memory or to create from it? I suggest that both possibilities are valid interpretations. This can be best examined by exploring both how Kataev employes his own past into the stories and how he incorporates the past into the lives of his characters.

I

Kataev has been writing about his own past, in what certainly appears to be an ongoing effort to construct a single completed collage. This endeavour suggests a personal search for continuity of actions, or perhaps more correctly, an ambition to show how, although he may appear to be a "self-indulgent political weathervane"[36] to some, he has always made his own

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[35] Fredson Bowers, ed *Vladimir Nabokov Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 377. The italics are Nabokov's.

[36] John Garrard attributed this distinction to Kataev in his review of Professor Shneidman's book *Soviet Literature in the 1980s Decade of Transition.* See *Russian Review* 50, no. 3 (July 1991), 352-53.

decisions and in this way has retained control of his own being.[37] More importantly, Kataev has gone to his memory as a resource, as if it were a well, from which to draw creative incentive or to supplement his inspiration, providing the foundation for his writing.

Robert Russell points out that "Kataev recreates rather than recalling."[38] Kataev does not pretend to replicate the past in all perfection of detail; he explains in *The Grass of Oblivion* that he does not have a 'magic power' with which to mirror previous happenings:

> That young man--of still quite boyish appearance--was I. Or to be more exact, he could be I, if only I had the power to resurrect that young self of so long ago....But since I possess no such magic power, I can now, as I write these lines, consider him only as a likeness, an imperfect embodiment of my present conception of myself at that time ..[39]

Like Wilde, the importance of Kataev's prose lies less in factual accuracy, and more in attaining the creative ideal--the realisation of his conception--if only because he is unable to reincarnate past details. The work of art should be evaluated for artistic quality, not for historical precision. Because of this, when Kataev explains that he writes the truth, he refers not to an historical or natural truth (the outcome of which, most likely, would be beyond his control), but a conceptual or personal truth.[40] The priority of the creation is the subjective truth attached to the work. As Hans Meyerhoff explains, "what

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[37] Judgment of the kind of man that resulted from these choices is outside the focus of this paper.

[38] Robert Russell, "Oberon's Magic Horn," in *Russian Literature and Criticism Selected Papers from the Second World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, Evelyn Bristol, ed. (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1982), 178. Likewise, Ireneusz Szaryez, in his recent study of Kataev's works of the 1960s and 70s, notes that "Kataev does not reconstruct his past, but,.. , with the help of certain autobiographical fragments constructs a new model of the world enriched by the experience of the past and by his great creative imagination." See his *Poetics of Valentin Kataev's Prose of the 1960s and 1970s*, 64.

[39] *The Grass of Oblivion*, 104.

[40] See Albert Plutnik's interview with Kataev "We must look life straight in the face," *Soviet Literature* no. 6 (1984), 101. In response to the statement, "Your books have provoked much controversy among critics and readers, and you have been accused of disrespectful portrayals of the friends of your youth," Kataev responds. "I wrote the truth."

is called 'true' seems to belong only, or primarily, to the experiences, feelings, actions, and situations evoked by the literary work, or to the unique way of rendering these aspects of reality in the poetic creation."[41] What is of significance then, is that Kataev has been true to himself as an artist, that *the author is what he is.*[42] Seeking fulfilment of aesthetic priorities, real life experiences provided the soil from which his ideas grew and not merely the field which he has tried to reproduce.

Nabokov's explanation shows how from experiences, something sparks imagination and leads to art; as if it was the seed of the final fruit. This *it* or *something* is a blend of memory and imagination. The significance of this mix is clear when one considers the importance of this combination in the formation of personality, individuality and knowledge. Kataev receives his creative inspiration from the real, or from the shape which an actual event has taken in his memory over time, and from his imagination; and for him, the two worlds exist in his one being. He emphasised this importance in *The Holy Well:*

> Maurois says that one cannot live simultaneously in two worlds--the real world and the world of the imagination, and that everyone who tries to do so is doomed to failure. I am sure that Maurois is wrong: it is the person who tries to live in only one of them who is doomed to failure, since he is cheating himself, denying himself half of life's beauty and wisdom. I have always lived in two dimensions. For me the one was inconceivable without the other and to separate them would have meant turning art either into an abstraction or into an insipid process of registration. Only the blending of the two elements can create an art which is truly beautiful. This perhaps is the essence of *mauvisme*.[43]

In this sense, it is important to appreciate how Kataev has incorporated this

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[41] Hans Meyerhoff, *Time in Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), 124.

[42] See the quote of Oscar Wilde in note 34.

[43] *The Holy Well*, 101. The emphasis is Kataev's.

foundation for creation into his entire process of literary construction, and what is the result of this application.

Reality must pass through imagination, as if it were a stage of stimulation, before it can become art, otherwise, it is merely a report or a description of an event--*an insipid process of registration*. In his stories of the past three decades Kataev is not a reporter, but a creator; he takes the private from the popular. Yet, the fact that some creative process has taken place, voluntarily or involuntarily, is neither unnatural nor surprising. The past to which Kataev relates in his writing is a period approximately seventy-five years ago. Such a lengthy gestation period for impressions, ideas and feelings is bound to produce transformations in the original perceptions

If we accept that present memory is a development of an interpretation of the past, rather than a perfect copy of that experience when the sensation was first perceived, then we presuppose some change in that original appreciation over time (creative or destructive, conscious or unconscious). The period of 'rest' in one's memory provides for this. We also acknowledge that the actual past can only exist at its original time In memory a fragment of the past returns to us, but it is always attached to its original space in time.[44] The memory, the specific section of storage space in our mind, attempts to reflect the initial sensation, but does not relocate it. Although closer to the original feeling, it is not recurring in its completeness In this way, memory is something we once saw with our eye, but now only see in our mind's eye; it is a vision within us and not in front of us. Therefore, regardless of change, even from the conception of the original thought in his mind, Kataev's memories remain personal interpretations from a specific time, each human is an original being with perceptions that are peculiar to him The memories are an

44 For discussion on separate spaces of existence I have referred to Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, Elliott Coleman, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

embodiment of what Kataev understands that he felt at the first realisation of the stimulus which was to become the memory, and thus, they are an individual, personal creation. It follows that if one considers Kataev's literature to be taken from his memory and based on the past, as literature rather than a systematic registration of events, it can only reflect what has taken place unconsciously over years blended with a conscious readjustment of events. The result is an art form that Kataev could refer to as an original recreation of time based on his own expectations. A.N. Wilson captured the essence of this relationship in his biography of Tolstoy: "Memory--with all its rich powers to distort and to save--is the mother of the muses."[45] Memory and the muse seem to reach inside the artist and guide him in his creation, blending the real with the imagined in search of a special representation of the author's inner world. In Kataev's prose, the product becomes a reflection of his entire person, with characters that seem like many different experimental selves.

The suggested role of Kataev's self in these works emphasises how he has chosen to develop his writing around his life experiences.[46] If we think of memory as a personal privacy--as an individual realm of freedom--then Kataev's use of memory as the basis for his writing is also a response to impersonal treatments of the past (i e., as opposed to collective history, that avoids the difficulties and uncertainties faced by the individual and therefore does not need to justify events which take place at a personal level--family difficulties, for example). He is placing his own interpretation within a collective historical context and is allowing the reader to take part in dreams and recollections--to have the reader enter his own interpretation or creation

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45 A N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 271.

46 Kataev appears to be the narrator in *Uzhe napisan Verter*, to be participant and narrator in *Spasibin*, and to share most personal happenings from his past with Sasha in *Sukhoi liman*.

of another time. This special world takes root in the early history of the Soviet state. His stories evolve from a time when people were faced with new challenges, losses and decisions, and he chronicles their reactions

In an effort to recapture lost time and reestablish a specific identity by relating individual pasts, Kataev takes the reader's imagination back to the periods of war and revolutionary fervour in Odessa and shows how that short period affected small circles of people, often separate unto themselves, but joined by events of the time. Kataev had remained in Odessa until 1922, when he, like other writers from Odessa, left for Moscow [47] It was from these years that he drew on memories of his native city to create settings for his stories from the First World War, Revolution and Civil War.

Even though many points can be traced to Kataev's own past, or more accurately, to previous works which have been accredited as autobiographical, Kataev has removed himself slightly from the stories. Either the main characters have names other than Valentin (Dima in *Uzhe napisan Verter* and Sasha in *Sukhoi liman*) or his role receives less attention than the central figures (as in *Spiashchii*) As well, the stories are presented through the filters of dreams and reminiscences. By distancing himself, he also makes themes and topics more universal, or at least more applicable to pasts that other citizens of Odessa may have encountered during this time, awakening the feelings of his readers, while letting them enter these exclusive mediums of expressing tales

Although the dreams are from the personal subconscious and the reminiscences are conscious forms of retrieval from one's own past, the main thrust of the themes and events are universal; the reader sees personal interpretations of general events. By not making himself the main characters,

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47 B. Galanov, *Valentin Kataev: Razmyshlenia o Mastere i dialogi s nim* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), 16.

Kataev removes himself in order to be as objective as possible within subjective mediums of recall In doing this he is able to explain what he has observed with his artist's eye as well as expressing what he has felt with his human soul, retaining an individual perspective on the happenings.

The lives which Kataev presents are framed within dreams and recollections. Although the narrators relate the pictures of a previous time as their past, we still cannot call the dream Kataev's own real past. One must consider the inevitable changes taking place in his mind over time, and allow for the difficulty which Kataev encountered discerning between dream and reality. As he explains in *The Holy Well*, a dilemma arose when he tried to distinguish between a dispassionate factual account of the past and a subjective personal interpretation of events, between reality and dream, and even between memory and dream--between a triggered conscious reaction and an unconscious escape to an imaginary world:

> To tell you the truth, I didn't dream this at all, it actually happened, but all so painfully long ago that it came to me now in the form of a distant, occasionally recurring dream that would carry me back.. And what had once been not quite a dream, but rather a recollection, has now become a genuine dream, remarkable for its closeness to reality.[48]

Kataev is aware that changes take place in an image when the medium of the perception shifts from reality to dream. Thus he admits the existence of a distinction between memory and dream; one may not be aware of changes that content has undergone in memory, yet the dream remains discernible from reality.

The *closeness to reality* which Kataev refers to in the quote is somewhat nebulous. Is the dream to reflect the actual happening as a visible image in his mind, or is the reality to be found in the feelings the dream evokes? Dream interpretation is a topic that has provided many volumes of research

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[48] *The Holy Well*, 41.

and theory, and to attempt to expound precisely Kataev's intent would most likely remain as such, an attempt However, it is safe to assume that in these three stories the latter suggestion is more accurate, there is greater possibility that the dreams are a symbolic representations of the real. Such an interpretation suggests that, with the reader in mind, it was in quest of recreating and conveying feelings through symbolic or comparable creations that Kataev built and completed these works. The most obvious results of these efforts are seen in the recurring themes of choice and isolation Kataev works these themes into the stories in different scenarios, but attains similar results.

In *Uzhe napisan Verter* for instance, the older Dima in the northern camp is not the narrator (at Peredelkino), but the pains and removal from their pasts makes their situations of isolation seem kindred and the scene in the story acquires symbolic applicability. It is here that the narrator permits the reader into his personal deliberation and his presence is as real as life, contrasting the horror and terror of the past time of the dreamer (Dima) with the supposed normality of the morning in Peredelkino; yet, within the contrast, there is a parallel between the pained man of the dream, who is creating as best he can within the isolation of his confinement, and the narrator in the writers' village outside Moscow.

A second example results in the reader's understanding of the difficulty and uncertainty that existed for the characters and the choices that resulted from this. There were difficult options for people at turbulent times and Kataev parallells the intensity of the resultant contrasts in their final selections. Often a character with a vague or all-accepting position, undefined because of a lack of commitment, is surrounded by characters with particular devotion to ideals. This is a theme that Kataev brought to the fore

in *The Grass of Oblivion;* one sees the reality of the choices of Bunin, clinging to pre-Revolutionary Russia, to leave the Soviet state, of Mayakovsky, accepting and working for the Revolution with all his soul, to take his own life, and of Kataev, who felt for both men, to stay in the Soviet Union.[49] These preferences are not unlike those of Dima's family in *Uzhe napisan Verter:* his father, who left to the east, Larisa Germanovna, who committed suicide, and Dima, who leaves the country but returns again. And, such a parallel of three varying threads of decision continues in *Sukhoi liman* with the three brothers--the uncles and fathers of the main characters: Nikolai, who devoutly lives by traditional beliefs, extolling these feelings passively through his own example, Iakov, who with similar heartfelt devotion must take action to be satisfied with his life and subsequently dies because of his efforts, and Nikanor, who accepts all that is available to him from both the material and the spiritual world, without providing commitment to one over the other.[50] In these three presentations Kataev stresses the dilemma of the decisions as much as he underlines the final directions of the characters. Although the situation of Bunin, Mayakovsky and Kataev is not a symbolic representation, it is always a returning point for these parallel dilemmas of choice. It is a real occurrence that not only strengthens the reality and likelihood of the recurring theme, but more importantly, because of the pained and special places held in memory for Bunin and Mayakovsky, it emphasises the hurt and proximity of the events and their results. Kataev tries to bring the past and the creative as close as possible to the present and the real. Something is shared and it overcomes time.

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[49] The relevance of the theme of "choices" in *The Grass of Oblivion* is discussed by Dodona Kiziria in "Four Demons of Valentin Kataev," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1985), 647-62.

[50] Kataev hints at the stereotype which Iakov embodies--salvation through suffering and self-deprivation--when he describes the character's face as a "Dostoevskiian face" *(dostoevskoe litso). Sukhoi liman,* 15

The character distinction's that result from choices is emphasised in *Spiashchii;* by the end of the story, characters (Len'ka and Manfred) who have chosen to act in a manner other than the carefree attitude of the rest of the young crowd, no longer take part in the daily boat trips. Metaphorically speaking, the flow of their consciousness has taken them away from the collective body of water. A deliberate choice to step outside their circle and to speed up time, tragically distinguishes these characters from the others.

In these examples, the *closeness to reality* is sensed best because from each of these scenes is emitted a bit more uncertainty, a bit more loneliness, a bit more loss of self. The art does not strain to imitate reality by using words to describe it, but through efforts to express feeling and to awaken imagination, it strives to explain and to convey pictures of life. An introduction to the stories will aid to illustrate more clearly other shared characteristics and how the influence of memory functions to define the work.

II

Since Kataev's stories maintain a familiarity with his self and, as some emotions, ideas and themes overflow into successive stories, it is neither surprising nor difficult to draw comparisons between the author and his characters. For instance, in *Uzhe napisan Verter,* some traits of the main character may be considered biographical; yet, Kataev does not claim to be Dima. The protagonist is perhaps even the same person about whom Kataev, the character in *The Grass of Oblivion,* had started to write:

> I went out for a walk to think in freedom of what I should make my young hero. Almost at once I noticed a theatre bill with a black lyre at the top announcing the first night of some opera or other, on which among other things were printed the words: 'scene-painter Dmitriyev.' Splendid, I thought, my young hero

shall be a scene-painter.[51]

Essentially, the dream of the narrator (who seems to be Kataev), which along with his few waking moments create the main or principal narration of *Uzhe napisan Verter*, relates the life of a young man, Dima, caught up in the revolutionary fervour of the Civil War. Curious of the excitement of the time, he moves from his comfortable home to be closer to the activities. By chance, he attends a meeting of counter-revolutionaries. A young revolutionary known as Inga, befriends Dima with the intention of spying on him, thinking that he is against the revolution. Inga's powerful presence overwhelms Dima and the couple is soon married. One day at lunch two men arrive and take Dima away. Neither Inga nor Dima's colleagues try to dissuade the two men. Inga has submitted a report about Dima to the Cheka.

Dima's father fled from Odessa to the east, but his mother, Larisa Germanovna, is still nearby. By chance she learns of Dima's arrest. She approaches an old friend of the family, Los', who is in a position of authority, for assistance in arranging for Dima's release. He is able to have Dima freed; the execution is arranged so that the firing squad misfires and Dima flees. On his return to Inga, she is surprised to see him and her first reaction is one of concern for the revolution; her conclusion is that if Dima is free, there must be a counter-revolutionary among their forces. Unsettled by Inga's priorities, Dima returns to his mother's home He finds her dead; she has taken her life. In the newspapers posted throughout the city Dima's name had been placed on the list of those executed, even though he was saved. Assuming her son had been killed, Larisa Germanovna felt she had no other reason to live. Dima, uncertain of his future, leaves the country with a neighbouring doctor, who, in preparation for the worst, had already planned an escape from the

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51 *The Grass of Oblivion*, 68.

new Soviet state. Inga and three others are accused of conspiracy since a counter-revolutionary, Dima, was allowed to go free. They are sentenced to death.

In the west, Dima paints stage sets. During the Second World War he returns to Russia, is captured as the enemy, and is sent to a northern camp.

The presentation of *Spiashchii* is not unlike the pattern followed in *Uzhe napisan Verter*. However, *Spiashchii*, a much shorter story, places greater emphasis on the present in the sense that it adheres more closely to linear time movement, supplemented by the omnipresent narrator's references to the past and future, with relation to the lives of the young people. Unlike *Uzhe napisan Verter*, in which both the first and second narrator play a conscious role (i.e., they are not always sleeping and narrating as part of a dream, but wake as well), the reader does not know whether the sleepers wake in *Spiashchii*.

The focus of *Spiashchii* is life in Odessa during World War I while the city was occupied by the Austrian army. Although also mentioning the lives of the rich and the peasantry and drawing attention to how wealth had changed hands, the story focuses on a group of young people. Their time together is usually spent on Vasia's yacht. Vasia loves Nelli, one of the daughters of a previously rich procurator. Generally indifferent to the world around her, she enjoys the attention shown to her by Vasia and Manfred. Manfred, an occasional worker on the yacht, also loves Nelli and has ambitions of taking her away from Odessa to a place where they will enjoy life and she will be famous. Another hired hand for the boat trips, Len'ka, has aspirations for being rich, but enjoys no luck in robbery attempts. Nelli's sister Masha, also joins the group for their trips. Younger than Nelli, she is attracted to the narrator. The narrator enjoys Masha's company, yet, despite

being charmed with her will make no commitment to her outside of the present.

Apart from the blissful time spent on the boat, another intrigue takes place when the yacht has docked [52] With Len'ka, Manfred tries to rob a jewellery store in order to acquire the money to attain his dream with Nelli. He is killed during the effort. Concerned with herself foremost and oblivious to Manfred's efforts, Nelli does not learn of his death. When he does not return to the boat, she discards his promises as idle and forgets him, confirming her indifference to life outside her own. For the young people, life continues as before.

Of Kataev's inclusion of his own being in the third story, *Sukhoi liman*, Professor Shneidman points out that, "[t]he eighty-eight-year-old Kataev tells a story that is, perhaps, the fiction of his imagination, but he identifies closely with its main protagonist. Kataev is a realist in life, but his last story could also be read as a premonition of his own impending death."[53] However, although Kataev certainly can share the emotions and sense of the future that this main character, Mikhail Sinaiskii expresses, the biographical account of the second central figure, Aleksandr Sinaiskii, Mikhail's cousin, in many ways mirrors that of Kataev.[54] This supports the consistent pattern indicating the central position of Kataev's self in many of his characters; Kataev incorporates not only his own realist attitudes, but as well, perhaps somewhat wistfully, depicts a character based on his own remembrances.

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[52] "My God, how blissful it was!" In this instance, the Russian *eto*, which I have translated simply as "it" refers collectively to the outings on the yacht. *Spiashchii*, 84.

[53] N N Shneidman, *Soviet Literature in the 1980s Decade of Transition*, 73.

[54] I suggest this, but also draw attention to Professor Shneidman's note that, "According to Kataev, his last story, *Sukhoi liman*, is 'a free variation on the theme on a family chronicle,'* which is based on someone else's rather than his own life" See *Soviet Literature in the 1980s*, 73

* The note from the quoted text is note 34 in Professor Shneidman's work and originally is from *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7 Nov 1984, 4

The story *Sukhoi liman* is about the meeting of two cousins after a separation of many years. Mikhail Nikanorovich Sinaiskii, a retired doctor is recovering in hospital after his second heart attack when his cousin, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Sinaiskii, visiting the city as part of a research group from the Academy of Sciences, stops in to see him.[55] Unable to talk without attracting a crowd from other patients who, trying to escape the monotony of the hospital life, seem to be congregating around the cousins as they chat, they set off outside the hospital grounds to stroll along the boulevard. With the hospital wall as their guide, they walk, recalling the years and family members that have passed, the celebrations and difficulties. Their thoughts reach back two generations and they bring grandparents and people that married into the family, as well as their own siblings and parents to the present. This presentation is sketched against a background coloured with the affection of their childhood. It is apparent that these aging cousins are the remaining family members and the significance of the title becomes clear as the story nears its close. Sukhoi liman (literally, the dry estuary) is not only a name for a special swimming spot from the past, associated with family happiness, but it also has symbolic applications for both the diminishing Sinaiskii family and for the emptying hourglass, that represents the cousins' earthly time; both have almost gone.

The mediums for relating the three stories--dream and recollection--provide for memory to play an important role. Dreaming is an unconscious

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55 It should be noted that adulthood and childhood are distinguished in the text by adjusting the names of the cousins to the diminutive forms of Misha and Sasha when the narrator presents their reminiscences, that is, when the narrator takes the reader back to past times. This device separates time settings, and therefore draws attention to any distinction of consciousness in the characters, as if, from an observer's vantage-point, or from an objective view, deviation from a past self did take place and therefore, new names, or more accurately, new labels to personalities are required. The diminutive forms are also seen in the dialogue between the cousins, suggesting that their attitudes to each other have not changed. Kataev appears to be implying that it is more difficult to recognise variation in matters of personal interest. For examples of the change in usage from formal to diminutive forms of the names, see quotes in the following text, referred to by the notes 61 and 75.

plunge into the past, and reminiscing is a conscious effort to retrieve the past. Neither of these manners of recovery discern between what is and what is not a preferred past. In these stories memory is neither wholly good nor wholly bad. Yet little significance is placed on quality, because the unalterable truth is that the past continues to exist within both conscious awareness and the subconscious. The personalities at all levels--sleepers, reminiscers and characters of the dreams and recollections--realise that unlike photographs, certain aspects of one's past cannot be tossed away. Interpretation of memories can be modified, simplified or justified, but something uncontrollable determines what remains accessible and what does not.

Memory is an indiscriminate provider and exploiter; it brings pleasure and pain and taxes the emotional and spiritual defences one tries to keep raised in the face of pangs from the past and the present. One need only look at the older Dima in *Uzhe napisan Verter*, for evidence of the dual role of memory. It allows him the luxury of still being able to picture his family, but causes sadness from the reaffirmation of their suffering He enjoys an escape from the present, but also must weather the anguish of the past. He has a means to better his current conditions, but also must be content with its reality. Yet, what would the old man be without his memories? Would he be anything but an empty soul? His remembrances are not only an example of what memory can tolerate, but his past is what opens a second life for him. It permits him to paint the sets, to arrange plays in the camp and, to some extent, to recapture parts of his being. In many ways, it is the foundation for his life because it enables him to escape or to alter the present to a more endurable state. To achieve this, he must reach inside his self to seek refuge. This is akin to Milan Kundera's observation, that when Emma Bovary was trapped in the present because the future was hidden behind barriers of social convention,

"[t]he lost infinity of the outside world is replaced by the infinity of the soul."[56] Different from his mother, who was unable to endure the demands of the time, remembrances provide Dima with what he needs to survive the formidable present. He knows she is dead, yet is able to live with memories of a previous time.

> He thought of his mother all the time....Sometimes he saw her off in the distance, inaccessible, running to the city in high boots worn at the heels, with apricots in her string bag, her, his poor mother, the grave, which he never found when he returned to his home town with the foreign troops....Sometimes his father appeared.[57]

Not unlike Shukhov, the main character in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, who intuitively knows: "we'll survive. We'll stick it out, God grant, till it's over,"[58] so much of Dima's will power must be derived from his past, in that it provides hope for a better future. In what appears as a no-win situation at times, memory both defends him from the current time, while dragging him through the sadness of the past. Dima and Shukhov cannot and do not live for the present, but ensure that they live through or in spite of it, retrieving what is needed from a past that functions as a safety valve and a builder of expectations.

Random recoveries deem memory both a hidden oasis and a forgotten torture chamber to which riches or pain-inducing instruments are concealed until those times when it is searched out by choice, or when the right or wrong "password" is found or accidentally muttered. To borrow from Nabokov's earlier quoted explanation, such a "password" often takes the form of something that signals a perception, resembling a similar sensation or a

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56 Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, Linda Asher, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988) 8.

57 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 145.

58 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Ralph Parker, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 121

concept that was stimulated or considered sometime in the past--a smell, a sight, a sound, a taste, the special texture of an item. A noteworthy example of the strength of the link between event and provoking agent is presented when the stalwart revolutionary Inga succumbs, albeit slightly, to the unanticipated force of memory. Near the end of *Uzhe napisan Verter*, it is explained that Inga is walking along a street, preoccupied with her assumption that Dima is most likely dead, when she hears a sound:

> Somewhere a truck set off with a clamour, forcing the panes of glass to quiver. She had a notion that it was them taking the dead bodies out of the city. They were covered with a tarp, from under which a white knee could be seen. Perhaps it was even his knee.
>
> She leaned up against the dry trunk of an acacia and bit the crackling bark.
>
> She mourned her perished love, mourned her Mitia, still not knowing that he was alive, and her consciousness grew dim...[59]

Granted, her state seems sympathetic toward Dima, but this feeling appears to evolve from her loss, not from Dima's or from that of any other individual who may care for him. This is a personal sadness. Combining her present state with the chain of sounds, the awareness of a once enjoyed sensation comes rushing into her memory and jolts her body, awakening a section of her soul, so far concealed to the reader and, perhaps, to herself as well. A feeling has entered Inga's consciousness without voluntary effort. Until stirred by the right impetus it rests in her mind untapped. The memory is not appalling to her. She accepts it and mourns her loss as something natural. Kataev is suggesting that deep in one's memory are many experiences, wonderful and terrible, only obtainable by the proper combination of observation (by any of the senses) and reassociation. This technique that Kataev has employed involves a force not unlike the power held in Proust's *petites madeleines*. The password, once revealed, brings a past world forward for the individual to

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59 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 153.

revisit or reevaluate. In a comparable manner, Marcel expresses this association after biting into the tiny cake in *Swann's Way*, "Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, is trying to follow it into my conscious mind."[60] However, Kataev is asking for more from his reader; he does not acknowledge such links. Note the narrator's query and the connection in the following passages from *Sukhoi liman*.

> They continued to the corner and turned onto Pirovskaia Street, along which stretched the same hospital wall.
> "Do you, Sasha, remember Uncle Iasha?" by some strange association of ideas, inquired Mikhail Nikanorovich, slowly striding alongside the hospital wall. "I almost don't remember him."[61]

Yet the "strange association" is explained a paragraph later. Most of their memories of this uncle are of him suffering at home or in the hospital. It follows that the connection is not to be made with what the cousins were describing and recalling previously (paintings they saw as boys during trips from the gymnasium to the municipal picture gallery), but with what is appearing in full view in front of Misha as he rounds the corner. The fact that they are reminiscing already places his stream of thought in the past. And it is the connection with what is seen--the hospital wall--and with what this can be associated foremost from the past--the ailing Iakov--that creates the connection.

Comparably, in most situations, sensibly noted specifics lead to associations. This is obvious when the cousins focus on recollections; their visions are coloured by detail. They are rarely without vivid reminiscences of smells and sightings; particular aromas and a melange of colours fill their impressions. Sasha's thoughts of the hospital where his father once took him

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60 From *Swann's Way* in Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 1, C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, trans (London Penguin Books, 1989), 49

61 *Sukhoi liman*, 15.

to visit his suffering uncle is not an uncommon example of the clarity of past events made more graphic by specific attributes (it is also the paragraph that clarifies the "strange association").

> I saw the enormous *yellow* building with the *white* pillars. Right away, for some reason, I didn't like this building, it even frightened me. In this building that had become permeated with the smell of all *hospital smells*, in a very large *grey* room, filled with iron beds, on which were lying and sitting the patients in *dark* dressing-gowns, I saw Uncle Iasha, also in a dressing-gown of *earthy colour*, from under which hung down his calico underwear with little braids.[62]

In the same way that Misha and Sasha never focus their attention on the hospital wall--it is there, it prompts recollection--throughout the works, conscious awareness of an object occurs rarely for it simply to be noticed as part of the setting or so that it can be utilised. Kataev adjusts the functions from articles of rational application to catalysts toward contemplation. It is only fitting that the narrator of *Sukhoi liman* observes, "And still the whole time some visions accompanied the cousins, as if springing up from the hospital wall."[63] Like the wall, other items also often become keepers of past times, presently inaccessible to consciousness. Later, the narrator confirms this role: "...The hospital wall continued and continued, it was endlessly long, as if leading the cousins into the dark past, into the onerous time,..."[64] The dual role of the wall is clear; not only does it separate Misha from his existing life, but it also takes the cousins to another time, leading and accompanying them in their walk and thoughts. This device is successfully employed to lead characters to various ideas and conclusions, as if lifting a blindfold from their eyes. For example in *Uzhe napisan Verter*, a crest on a pillow case reveals Dima's mother to his consciousness:

> From the pillow case of the pillow, that he was pressing to

62 *Ibid.*, 15 The emphasis is mine

63 *Sukhoi liman*, 18

64 *Ibid*, 24

> himself, was the smell of the cold cream that Lazareva would smear on her face at night. He saw the family crest embroidered in satin stitch and only then remembered that he had a mother, who was probably worrying He loved her very much, but she had fallen from his memory [65]

Again, in *Sukhoi liman*, new, smart buildings uncover days when the cousins as youngsters would catch frogs, with Sasha's little brother Zhorochka tagging along.[66] Common articles of everyday life trigger memory and open doors to expose a previously veiled or unconsciously forgotten time. Even Nelli's nail polish will be but a means to alert others of her past existence from good society, in the event that she perishes in a boating accident.[67]

Not only unpredictable or even independent, memory is applicable and available; Kataev's characters are not only visited by involuntary memory, but also make conscious efforts to retrieve or to deny the past.[68] This provides another view of their beings because distinction of characters is made not simply by their past, but by how they employ or ignore their past (i.e., Mr. X is individual not because he has a set of paints and brushes, but because of what he decides to do or not to do with his supplies) Portrayal of the actions of the individuals reveals how characters utilise their faculty of memory to evaluate present situations and this in turn expresses how memory stimulates other feelings and recollections In this way it is shown that there is an actual storage vat from which options can be debated, while maintaining that for each individual, memory is an element unto itself and functions to form the individual as a particular being. Memory acts to create a specific personality; many of the character's actions are based on what is remembered

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65 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 149.

66 *Sukhoi liman*, 28.

67 *Spiashchii*, 85

68 "Involuntary memory" is the description given to unanticipated recollections or memories that appear without conscious effort to retrieve them. By using this term, I have followed the lead of Esther Salaman, who applies it widely in her work *A Collection of Moments: A study of involuntary memories* (London Longman, 1970)

or on what has been learned and how it is applied to the present.

Kataev elaborates on the creative powers of memory to form a personality in *Uzhe napisan Verter* by comparing the separate manners in which characters apply common pasts For example, both Los' and the Cheka agent who interrogates Dima, had been to Dima's home years before, perhaps even on the same day, and have similar memories of those surroundings. Kataev provides the link for the reader by having the recollections of both characters include the painting "The Feast in the Gardens of Gamil'kar".[69] At that time Los' was a writer and the agent was painting the terrace to earn money to continue art school; one was a guest and the other was a labourer. These memories produce opposite results in Los' and the young agent when they are confronted with Dima or his mother in the present--when they revive the past to determine the present.

To the interrogator, the past is negative; the Revolution places hope in the present and the future. But for personal reasons it seems especially that this past, where a young man with less talent, Dima, was able to continue his efforts at art because he had a "rich papa,"[70] while he, now the young interrogator, in quest of fulfilling a dream, was denied this opportunity because he lacked finances, defines his actions of the present. He cannot see past these "injustices" and regardless of the status of Dima's current innocence, he has already decided Dima's fate, based on past "guilt". Consequently, the past is the justification for his current actions and Dima is charged as guilty.[71]

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69 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 133 and 139.

70 *Ibid*, 133.

71 One questions whether Kataev is not also suggesting that the xenophobic state had given too much flexibility to the Cheka and those working for it by allowing the organisation to "deal with whomever it chose to define as 'counter-revolutionaries'."*

* See Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (Middlesex: Peregrine Books, 1977), 317.

Ironically, it is Los's memory of the same place, at most likely the same time as that of the interrogator, that provides incentive for him to assist Dima. If not for the connection, Larisa Germanovna would not have been able to free Dima. For Los', although physical existence is in the present, real life is in the past. His freedom to write and to act in a manner that would reflect his self has been removed and like the older Dima in the camp, life is improved by reliving the past.[72] His past attachment is sufficient reason for him to act for Dima's life. This action counteracts that of the Cheka agent. A common past, distinguished by personal times, settles Dima's fate and defines two separate beings.

This particular story is very much a statement on the individuality of memory and individual utilisation of it. Kataev offers examples of common times or common pasts interpreted in each character's own way, thus extolling the personal nature of experiential retrieval and application. For instance, Los' and his superior, Markin, share a common past, but Markin has almost entirely relinquished it, surrendering emotional inclinations to his current life as well as to his former life. The past is what gives Los' incentive to act, but it is what offends and discourages Markin.[73] Likewise, both Dima's landlady and the doctor, who lives near Dima's mother, know Dima and are aware that he was on the list of those executed. Yet, the landlady throws out his things and sends him off when he appears at her door, frightened of harbouring somebody who is supposed to be dead, while the doctor helps him. For the landlady, the fear and terror of the present overpower any

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[72] Note that this is not a pattern that Kataev is trying to draw attention to. A different appreciation of memory is seen in the actions of Larisa Germanovna. For her, memory is not the special characteristic that creates a life worth living. The power to remember is not enough to overcome the difficulties of life all the time. When opportunity for serving is no more, her life force is removed and she destroys the remaining physical shell.

[73] *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 140

emotional attachment that she may have had to earlier times, but it is this attachment that allows the doctor to feel safe with who he is aiding, in light of the horrors of the present. Los' and the doctor consider the past as grounds for assisting another in need, whereas Markin and the landlady feel the past to be reason for washing their hands of any involvement.

One can see similarities, but not sameness in the choices of some characters. Larisa Germanovna, Los' and the doctor are not intimidated enough to worry about risking their lives to allow the past to exist or to be repeated. Their efforts to free Dima reveal this. Either from dedication or fear, the revolutionaries and frightened citizens live in the present and work toward the future. If there is a connection with the past, the conditions resulting from the Revolution and the Civil War shroud it, overriding or ignoring accessibility to it, and allowing the Revolution to maintain momentum. Amid both groups, uncertain of his direction, is Dima, who does not deny the past to influence his actions, but who is also not adverse to partaking in the excitement and 'romanticism' of the revolution. The present removes him from his past life: "It was so new that he felt not only revived, but as if he was born again He hadn't thought that he had left his mother alone "[74] Yet, when faced with the reality of the events of the period, proximity to death instigates a need for him to find sanctuary in a better life and he thinks of the past, comparing it to the present Dima's choice to acknowledge the past and the self-denying character that this decision affiliates him with, seems to suggest Kataev's position on the value of the past.

To discount the emotional ties which the past provides would remove an important element of memory in *Uzhe napisan Verter*. The feelings produced by these recollections in Dima, Larisa Germanovna and Inga bear

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74 *Ibid*, 144

witness to this. However, in these situations, emotion tends to result from involuntary memories. This changes in *Sukhoi liman*, where concentrated efforts are made to recall, and emotions and digressions, caused by the revived visions, are spontaneous. In this story, the availability of past times is confirmed not only by the vividness of detail which memory conveys, but also by the power and sincerity of emotion that results.

What is remarkable about the recollections of the two cousins is that Misha and Sasha often appear to be catching up on unfulfilled emotions. As children, the magnitude of celebrations and sadness was not felt, or at least was not revealed. Yet, recalling these situations troubles both the ailing Misha and Sasha. For instance, Sasha's mention of his younger brother who was killed during the Second World War reveals an unconscious mix of emotions, prompted by a voluntary recollection.

> "Well, now I'm okay," he [Misha] said, trying to appear cheerful, "we can walk further But Sasha, once you recalled Zhora, you upset me. . . ."
>
> "Yes," claimed Aleksandr Nikolaevich, "I also remember [Zhora's baptism]. . . I was terribly frightened that my little brother would choke, but everything turned out alright..."
>
> "...unless you consider," pointed out Mikhail Nikanorovich, "that Zhorochka let loose a stream on the satin dress of his godmother."
>
> The cousins laughed a little Aleksandr Nikolaevich recalled, "And then there was a breakfast for the friends and clergy ." Aleksandr Nikolaevich sadly rocked his head "And now Zhora lies in a common grave, and his name and family name are stamped on a white marble slab with the other names ..And you and I, Misha, remain." Mikhail Nikanorovich fixed his pince-nez on his Gallic nose. . . .[75]

The cousins make no reference to feeling any sadness or to enjoying any laughter at the times these events originally took place The emotions that result show that not only have memories negotiated time, but they have done so with such clarity, that these visions are rewarded by sincere emotion.

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75 *Sukhoi liman*, 17.

From these reminiscences, two points explain the present from the past. Firstly, for Misha and Sasha, in the past, their joyful attitudes as children understandably lack the perspective of the present. They cannot fully comprehend the personal and familial losses caused by death because their lives are immersed in the present They live for new excitement and to avoid boredom. Secondly, as Sasha notes, the presence or lack of familial support separates the two periods As children, they shared the company of many, but now they are all that remain and have only each other to share with. These two ideas--the appreciation of a past time and the role of the family--echo throughout the story.

The reality that accompanies these ideas is that sadness and happiness do exist and that death eventually comes to everybody. However, memory pervades to prove how the beings or their personalities do not die when their earthly body does. These live on and maintain an existence that in many cases is eternal, continually being passed from person to person, like letters or art, outliving the source. In different cases, this is how memories have been made available to the cousins For instance, "The cousins pictured their grandfather, whom they had seen only in a small provincial daguerreotype "[76] And this picture has remained in their minds, in the same way that the words about the early life of their uncle Iakov had lingered on: "Then, the cousins were not in the world, and rumours of this reached them much later "[77] In the same way that brass crosses and ribbons representing special orders, given to Misha's grandfather and great grandfather for service in wars, still existed and reminded the cousins of their ancestors, so memories recall lives and survive the earthly life of the experience or being to whom

76 *Ibid.*, 12.

77 *Ibid* , 14.

they have been attached. Like some of these crosses, "blackened from time,"[78] memories also have changed or have become less clear over the years. Yet, different from memories, objects and mementos can be taken from their keeper. Memories can be attached to items, but do not leave with the object, merely because it is stolen or no longer can be used. As with people, memories connected with an object, continue to outlive the object In this story, apart from the cousins' directed search into the past, the finest example of availing oneself of that which cannot be stripped from you, is Nikolai Nikanorovich (Sasha's father) who, without the wife he loved so much and even after his apartment has been requisitioned, continues to live because his heart and memory continue to live. He has access to the life he requires, because it is embodied in his memory, while no longer in his living reality.

In what appears to be an effort to draw attention to the importance of memory, Kataev contrasts situations in which people are free to use their memory or to exhibit their personality within opposite settings--settings in which such expression is denied or that are isolated from development or novelty. His pictures of revolutionary changes and war suggests that part of the process involves taking away the people's past to weaken their independent soul as much as possible Symbolically, those accused as counter-revolutionaries, from whom individualist tendencies cannot be nullified, have all that externally distinguishes them from others removed before they are executed. The punishment for maintaining a memory is death. Outside the execution garage in *Uzhe napisan Verter*, hang the braids of hair from the shaven heads of the accused. "Sheared braids--this is the harvest of reform."[79] Those who are to be executed are not permitted to wear their own clothes--a reflection of their individuality: "The four naked people walked

78 *Ibid* , 19

79 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 124.

into the garage one after the other. . "[80] They are stripped and made to resemble each other as much as possible, negating any individuality that may exist. Unable to claim the inner being, the revolutionaries try to claim the external being.

Not only have attempts been made to change individuals but, as well, their surroundings are altered by the Revolution. Entranced by the revolution, Dima notices that the city has changed: "The appearance of a trading city devoid of the trading soul--of scales, of shop windows, of banks, of money-changing offices--stripped, without a strolling public on the shady streets and boulevards, struck him. In its chaste nakedness the city seemed new and beautiful to him "[81] The whole environment is made to be sterile and to lack creativity in an attempt to channel imagination toward thinking only about the revolutionary cause or the repercussions of the enforcement of it--terror, fear Negation of surroundings is a threat to remind people of the possible negation of oneself if he does not conform Therefore, there is no room for innovation or personality A similar setting is echoed in the hospital scenes of *Sukhoi Iman;* there is a certain understanding of isolation there.[82] When Sasha first enters the hospital compound, he does not notice people, but instead, "Here and there in the alleys the grey dressing-gowns of the walking patients could be seen."[83] And later, when the cousins are talking, their thoughtful conversation, or perhaps more accurately, their somewhat intellectual debate, peaks the curiosity of other patients who are out walking. The narrator explains that, "They wanted to know who had come to visit

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80 *Ibid*, 124

81 *Ibid*, 143

82 The fact that this could be a place chosen for isolation is confirmed by Misha at the end of the story He prefers to be on his own and has selected this place to live the remainder of his life "And, as well, if it [dying or death] happens to me and they send you a corresponding telegram, please, don't come I don't like these ceremonies and do not advise them to you " See *Sukhoi Iman*, 41

83 *Ibid*, 10.

General Sinaiskii and what they were discussing; did they happen to know any interesting news "from the outside"?[84] This is important in Kataev's presentation of the individual. Memory is like a life force, an indicator of the existence of a soul--a soul in which it is important to have emotion as well as reason to help the person decide his direction in life, but even more importantly, to have control over and present oneself as he or she wishes. Without memory the characters are like hollow beings, lacking internal significance; their being is communal, no longer individual and they become followers or actors.

There is an intangible quality to these stories that suffuses the context, content and movement. This is, for lack of a better word, the atmosphere, that creeps from the pages out to the reader. Kataev creates this sensation above the feelings of familial love, revolutionary fervour and ever-present terror. That this is accomplished, justifies the inconsistent and sometimes unrelated chains of dreams and recollections. What is difficult to comprehend, yet well related, is Kataev's ability to capture completely irrational, unmeditated actions of the characters and present them to the reader so that he also can feel the dream pattern or the spontaneity of recollections. In this way the reader detects that dreams and recollections can capture characters, that the memories are the controllers of the story. This may be close to what Kataev wants to convey, implying that essentially memories, and thus, the past, can influence strongly the actions of individuals--of their actions, thoughts, dialogue or art.

By using these devices--dreams and recollections--Kataev dissociates himself from the possible misinterpretation that everything in the stories is factual. If we treat the stories as personal and subjective interpretations of the

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84 *Ibid*, 11. It is interesting that Kataev incorporated the Russian phrase, "from the outside" *(s voli)* which often is used with reference to prison.

past, then Kataev is telling us, by explaining his recollections as dreams or the reminiscences of others, that although memory transcends time, exception must be made for personal interpretation, loss of memory and selective recall.

Occasionally Kataev hints at the strength and creativity of art in its ability to reflect a personality or to exist as a separate entity years after its creation. For instance, there are references to Nietzsche, Pasternak, Mayakovsky and Pushkin, among others, inserted throughout these works. By doing this he shows that there is a parallel between personalities and art because both can outlive the person who shared or experienced it. This is proven when others capture parts of these experiences and 'refeel' them. Memory is a means to traverse distance in order to bring the past, a former existence or experience, as close to the present as possible. To bring it directly to the present suggests perfect replication of the significant event. However, as Georges Poulet explains, it is "a presence at once regained and lost."[85] Although it seems that time has been overcome by memory or art, it cannot be completely annulled.

For Kataev memory has a direct effect on the art, but as well, the intention of the art determines what is taken from memory. Kataev is not merely writing as he remembers, but is editing and being selective with how the final product takes shape Although his artistic inclination is to produce a story that suggests spontaneous recreation of how memories and ideas come to his mind, he consciously creates this. In this sense, as a work of art, he is forming that which he chooses and not exactly what was. He is in control. What makes his accounts of interest to read is not that Kataev relates the difficulties and fear of those historical times--the reader knows what was--but how he blends the factual with the conjectured.

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85 Poulet, 45.

Northrop Frye explains that: "Art...begins with the world we construct, not with the world we see It starts with the imagination, and then works towards ordinary experience .."[86] This construction starts as soon as the perception occurs. Imagination is like a vehicle transporting the individual from that place where he is to that place where he wants to be. The distance between what is real and what is imagined is almost insurmountable in actual life; however, art allows for near attainment of this space of separation. By taking the picture of his imagination and attempting to create a tangible representation of it, Kataev stretches across this distance and comes closer to reaching lost time, lost memory and lost imagination.

86 Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination (The Massey Lectures--Second series)* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1983), 6.

Chapter Two

The paths of indirect communication

In *The Holy Well*, Kataev elaborated on the essence of the new school of writing which he "founded", *mauvisme:*

> ...the main point of which is that, since everybody writes so well nowadays, one must write badly, as badly as possible, and only then will one attract attention. Of course it's not so easy to learn to write badly because there is such a devil of a lot of competition, but it's well worth the effort and if you can really learn to write lousily, worse than anybody else, then world fame is guaranteed.[87]

Writing badly is a feature that suggests writing in a manner other than that dictated by convention, and that presents a creation reflecting the artist's individuality.[88] The goal of writing badly is not merely to convey the author as a unique being to the reader, but more importantly, to write in a manner that assists the writer in bringing his characters "completely to life" for his audience.[89] Among other qualities of Kataev's mauvisme, the most noteworthy ones are the embellishment of historical fact and the freedom from chronological order, which often governs the narrative of the works. These attributes have been visible consistently in his work since the appearance of The *Holy Well*.[90]

Attention has been given generally to Kataev's earlier works of this period, in which these characteristics openly, and controversially, accentuate

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87 *The Holy Well*, 129.

88 As Robert Russell has pointed out, this was not a new concern for Soviet writing. Professor Russell explains that at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Isaac Babel noted that with the suggestion of "social realist" guidelines for art, the Party and government had "taken away only one right--the right to write badly." See *Valentin Kataev*, 115.

89 See Northrop Frye's explanation of how Dickens would often *write badly*. Frye, 37

90 This is not to say that these characteristics do not exist in Kataev's earlier writings. For instance, he admitted that *Vremia, vpered! (Time, Forward!; 1932)* "is a free cinema-style montage, which you find also in *The Holy Well* and subsequent books." See "We must look life straight in the face," *Soviet Literature* 6 (1984), 97.

his prose writing, instead of merely flavouring it.[91] However, these properties are also significant in the three stories that this study is concerned with. In these later works the more remarkable of the two traits is Kataev's creative manipulation of chronology. With the masks of dreams and spontaneous reminiscences the narrator uses the device of free association to deliver the stories to the reader.[92]

Kataev openly explained such a narrative presentation in his works, while at the same time implementing the device. For instance, in the story *Kubik* (1969), Kataev expresses this idea by sharing the following words attributed to Bunin, the Teacher (*Uchitel'*): "I never write what I would like to or how I would like to. I do not dare. I would like to write without any form, not agreeing with any literary methods."[93] And, as well, borrowing from Tolstoy's diary, Kataev offered the following quote as part of a letter to his granddaughter in the collection of reminiscences *A Mosaic of Life or The Magic Horn of Oberon* (hereafter *A Mosaic of Life*):

> "...if you have enough time and strength in the evening, note down what you remember, just as it comes, without bothering about chronological order...I've started remembering so vividly."
>
> These are reminiscences of 1904. You will certainly read them one day. I very much recommend them to you. And this, from the diaries of 1893, is even more astounding and fearless:
>
> "Art, they say, cannot stand mediocrity. It also cannot stand selfconsciousness." This entirely accords with my present ideas, so I will try to concentrate on memories in exactly the way that Tolstoy advised: in no particular order, just as they come, as I remember them, never forgetting, however, that art does not tolerate selfconsciousness.[94]

Although difficult to pinpoint the primary influence for Kataev's selection of

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[91] I am thinking especially of *The Holy Well*, *The Grass of Oblivion* and *My Diamond Crown*.

[92] Hans Meyerhoff speaks of the free association method as a "striking expression of the fragmentization of time in the consciousness of modern man." Meyerhoff, 118.

[93] See *Kubik* in *SS*, vol. 6, 451.

[94] *A Mosaic of Life*, 15.

free association as his narrative expression, he incorporated the method continually and in conjunction with other thematic and structural devices he created a style that he could very well call his own In this chapter, results of this technique will be examined; this style of narration permits him to achieve a certain closeness with the reader and to make a statement on order in people's lives and art

The fact that direct communication between the author and the reader is missing suggests more openly than other forms of narration that Kataev hopes to relate more than words to his audience; much more should result from increased reader participation. Not only ought the reader to comprehend the words, but also to sense some intimacy--he is viewing the dreams and reminiscences of others--and to feel the message. Certainly this distinction between the reading of the text and the feeling it evokes must exist to render any literature moving in some way for the reader, be it to anger, grief or excitement. The feeling will exist and will be an individual one, conditioned by each person's imagination; the reader takes an active part in order for the literature to attain the greatest potential. Remarking on the importance of reader participation in literature, with reference to Laurence Sterne's comments in *Tristam Shandy* on halving the role of thinking about a work of literature between the author and reader, Wolfgang Iser explains that: "If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us."[95] Such is the necessity as well with these works.

In these stories, Kataev asks more of his reader than to picture images in his head, to hear sounds, to smell fragrances and to taste and touch various

95 Wolfgang Iser, "The reading process. a phenomenological approach," in *Modern Criticism and Theory A Reader*, David Lodge, ed (London: Longman, 1988), 213.

objects (not that these duties of the reader are any less important!); he invites the reader to take part in dream patterns and spontaneous reminiscences. This invitation is difficult to decline because the narrative pattern has been developed to mirror the sensations of such actions. Instead of becoming confused, if the reader is willing to accept Kataev's invitation and immerse himself in the text, he will comprehend the essence of the narrative technique; he will feel the jumps of focus in the dream stories and the reminiscences as such, instead of as stumbling blocks with the potential to appear to begin and to end indiscriminately. Thus, Kataev does not request only that you take part in creating your own pictures, and seeing things with your mind's eye, but also that you enter the self of the sleeper and searcher. Within these beings, one senses the intimacy that Kataev is striving to attain.

The narrative pattern differs in the three works Although in each story Kataev incorporates a similar method of story-telling, in the sense that chronology generally is disrupted--in *Uzhe napisan Verter* and *Sukhoi Iiman* the past is brought forward with little regard for natural time (versus personal time or the personal flow of consciousness), and in *Spiashchii* each individual stream of consciousness is presented in chunks--each narrative pattern is particular.

Of the three stories, *Uzhe napisan Verter* is the most overt example of a free association narrative technique, and in consequence, is perhaps the most difficult of the works for the reader to piece together. The story is supposed to be the dream of Kataev the narrator (not Kataev the author), at the end of which he wakes. The narration retells his dream experience of another dreamer. Yet, differently from *Spiashchii*, in this dream Kataev gives almost the complete story to the sleeper to tell; the narrator, tends more to comment on the direction which time follows in the dream (that is, whether the setting

of the dream moves back or forward in time).

Two points are important to realise for a clearer understanding of the dream pattern. Initially the story seems unorganised. Location, time, day and year are brought forward incongruously in the dream. But, this is so because, secondly, order is sacrificed for aesthetic ambitions. Kataev has aimed to create the dream for the reader, to bring him into the mind of the sleeping man. The reader is prepared for this jumbling of order on the second page of the story when a vision of the dreamer seeing himself stranded on a "train of time" changes without warning into a vision of him walking.[96] Both figments represent the direction of the dream--toward the past, backwards--and its unpredictability.[97] In the second fragment we learn that, "But now he was already walking, having once and for all lost any notion of time and place," and by introducing this idea, Kataev suggests the structure of the remaining story; it is a framework in which the reader cannot rely on the natural progression of time to unveil the tale. In this way the reader feels that he is also swirling in the spiral-like experience of the sleeper's visions.[98] And subsequently, the force of order in the story is the dream. It is the spiral, this image of independent spinning, that unpredictably picks up fragments of time from every rotation through this section of Dima's past. As if swirling a vacuum nozzle over a dissembled puzzle, the reader sits in the vacuum bag trying to piece together the puzzle as the various segments, often separate

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96 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 123

97 The significance of the "train of time" and the direction in which it heads is emphasised by the role it plays by opening the story. It starts, "The rails were running off backwards and the train was taking him in the return direction, not there, where he would have liked, but there, where uncertainty, disorder, loneliness, destruction waited for him--further and further and further." See *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 122

98 *Ibid*, 123 Kataev explains the pattern as, "The space of the dream, in which he was located, had the structure of a spiral, so that while moving away, he would draw near, and while drawing near, he would move away from his goal," and emphasises the description with the image of, "A snail of space," giving the reader both a definition and picture of the way time appears to flow in the dream

unto themselves but joined by a common setting, fly toward him. While likeness of detail hints at the probable location of pieces, only as the last few ingredients are retrieved can the full picture be revealed. Unlike *Spiashchii* and *Sukhoi liman*, where hints to the links to the construction of the past exist, the location of chunks of time or pieces of the puzzle only becomes clearer as time progresses and the entire picture unfolds.

The shortest story, *Spiashchii*, presents the likelihood of free association as a narrative technique from the outset. The story essentially is a dream expressed in the third and first person. The unpredictability of dream patterns presupposes inconsistent chronological development of plot and narrative when this approach is used in story telling. Kataev entangles this device even more into his narrative by using not one, but two dreams to relate his tale.

The narrator visualises the sleeper dreaming of a time in Odessa during World War I, while the city was under the control of the Austrians; as in *Uzhe napisan Verter*, the narrator is not the sleeper. In his work on Soviet literature of the 1980s, Professor Shneidman explained that *Spiashchii* "is a story told...by a narrator who is asleep and sees a dream in a dream."[99] This is a valid and most probable conclusion. The other possibility, that the narrator is retelling his own dream (i.e., the narrator is the only sleeper and therefore the dreamer as well) seems less plausible on closer examination of two points. First, the narrator notes that the sleeper sees himself early in the dream,[100] yet the sleeper does not specify his existence in the rest of the dream. Even this scene is treated in the third person, obviously by the narrator. Secondly, the narrator often spots himself in the sleeper's dream or refers to himself as part of a larger group in this dream. On these occasions the narrative changes to

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99 Shneidman, 72.

100 *Spiashchii*, 83

the first person from the collective "our" *(nash)* or "we" *(my)*.[101] In this way, the narrator distinguishes between the sleeper's person and his own. This suggests that the narrator and sleeper are two different people. If the narrator was retelling a dream, one would expect it to be his own memory of it; any glimpse by the sleeper of himself, would also be the narrator seeing himself within a dream, and appropriately, he would refer to himself in the first person, as he does in other places in the story. Lacking these double references to the same self, the possibility that the narrator is supposed to be retelling a dream (and not dreaming a dream) does not seem likely.

It is obvious then, that there are three levels to the story: the sleeping narrator, the sleeper/dreamer, and, the characters of his dream, which form the focus of the story. The mix of the narrator's observations of the sleeper with the dream of the sleeper forms a narrative which freely moves between the day in Odessa (an approximate twenty-four hour period), in which the main dream is set, to suggested outcomes of events, clarifying notes from the pasts of the characters, and observations of the sleeper's subconscious actions and reactions in the dream of the narrator.

Not unlike the setting of *Uzhe napisan Verter*, in which the difficulties of the time create the context in which the more individual or personal story progresses, in *Spiashchii*, soldiers or war ships are presented to the reader to remind him of the closeness of war and its resultant repercussions on individuals. Within the dream, the narration takes the reader back and forth between the two perspectives of life, between the reminders of the military presence and the livelihood of the group of young acquaintances.

The voice of the narrator expresses his "all seeing" perspective, reflecting his omnipresence as the original dreamer. His report forms a

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101 See for example, *Spiashchii*, 88.

collage of events in which each fragment often shares the time of its existence and, occasionally, the space of its being with other fragments. When not sharing segments of time, the scenes jump past intermediate events, leaving unsaid information for the reader to imagine. This creates a chain of happenings joined by shared situations or symbols, but without any direction toward the logical creation of a single, linear story line. Instead, the reader feels that that specific time in that specific place creates a hub, from which run many spokes, representing individual times (the particular time of an individual's consciousness). Occasionally these spokes are joined by supporting or common lines--recurring themes or events--which couple the different dream segments, spirited by the individual consciousnesses. For instance, the reader is never sure why Len'ka, a minor character, is a robber; yet, it is his actions that join the following three successive scenes in the dream. Firstly, we are told how, "Badly worn out, he darted out into the street, flew down a lane,..."[102] and that he continued to try and avoid any kind of search posse following his foiled robbery attempt. The next paragraph tells us that:

> Meanwhile, in the lodgings of the gambling house, two lackeys in liveries, hired at the wardrobe of the operetta theatre, crawled along a carpet, picking up gold tens and foreign currency, as well as paper karbovantsy* on which was a beautiful youth with a "bowl" haircut.[103]

And the third paragraph in the series, skipping a time frame in the dream explains how:

> And suddenly everything came to order and was covered by a long sea wave with the slantingly flying puffed out sail of the yacht, on the deck of which all the young crowd had taken seats. Strangely enough, in this group was Len'ka Grek. fairly often

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102 *Ibid.*, 84.

103 *Ibid.*, 84. **Karbovanets (pl. karbovantsy)* is Ukrainian currency, like Ukrainian rubles.

they took him on as a seaman.[104]

Thus, we see the narration following Len'ka's time spoke in the first paragraph, before it crosses over to the line of the two lackeys, along which it continues before crossing back to Len'ka's. The dream does not make up for the gaps in time that have been omitted in Len'ka's line while focussing on the successful thieves

Kataev fills the quick dream segment with an abundance of emotions, all playing, it seems, in the dreamer's mind at once. The sadly absurd robbery attempt and Len'ka's escape is followed by and immediately compared to the ironic picture of a successful theft, before dropping Len'ka into a picture of peaceful happiness, surrounding him with people that have no comprehension of his existence, suspended, it seems, in their own bliss. Thus, we can picture two individual time lines, Len'ka's and the lackeys', pushing out from the hub, but joined at different times by the themes of robbery and then happiness.

Perhaps a clearer example of how one concept grabs the movement of the dreamer's mental process is how the following paragraphs are joined; they are congruent because of a common instigator of thoughts for the dreamer--cutlets. Remarking on the activities taking place in the Odessa market during the war, and noting especially the upper hand which the peasants held because of the value of their home-grown foodstuffs, the narrator opens the chain of ideas by elaborating on the trade taking place between the different social groups.

> The sheets went best of all. Since so many had accumulated over the lifetime, they could always serve cutlets for supper.
>
> The sleeper especially distinctly saw the dish of hot cutlets swimming past, sprinkled with dill--so lacy, so green, that can only be dreamed in a coloured dream
>
> The evening's cutlets especially attracted the young crowd

104 *Ibid*, 84

after the prolonged sail on the yacht....[105]

The reader is taken from an Odessa market, to the sleeper's personal sensations, and back to the young group, that includes Kataev. By integrating the pattern, the cutlets serve as a secondary impulse from which other lines of thought emerge (or which join other existing lines). Here the sleeper sees the cutlets joining the lines of the market traders and young people, whereas in the scenes surrounding Len'ka the bonds (theft and happiness) are not revealed in the dream. By this I mean, the dreamer does not comment on the theft or happiness; there is not a subjective statement or personal comment.

Sukhoi Inman is the story least governed by "free association". But, this makes sense. Inspired series of reminiscences are easily triggered and more predictably entered into for a seeker of the past, than the often spontaneous flashes of imagination that occur for a dreamer. In the story, two cousins reaffirm their mutual past; a past in which the narrator plays a greater role, elaborating on the mental images of the recollections of the cousins, than does the dialogue of the main characters. The narrator reaches inside the minds of the cousins, sketching pictures of the recollections that their conversations do not recount and placing the reader inside their minds as well.

Their recollections take place during a walk down a boulevard, along which stands the wall surrounding the hospital grounds. This stroll is spaced by occasional stops. During this walk the cousins question each other on their ability to recall parts of their past, providing mixes of free childhood bliss with family deaths, of celebrations with funerals and of births and baptisms with war and disruption.

The style and focus of the story is revealed immediately at the beginning of the tale. It begins set in the past (the early part of the twentieth

105 *Ibid*, 87

century), explaining the relationship of the cousins as boys, and introduces their families. Kataev then takes the reader to the present, acquainting him with the cousins at an older age. Similar patterns of introduction followed by leaps in time continue throughout the story; a name is mentioned and the place of the individual in the family is briefly touched on, making references to the character in later recollections clear. For example, first mention of the generation before the two main characters and the family's move to Odessa are quickly presented in four brief paragraphs that provide the foundation for most of the recollections throughout the work.[106] In many instances, such brief notes prepare the imagination of the reader for subsequent events. Two examples of this are the early references to Sasha's mother and brother, which suggest sadness that the reader will confirm only later in the story: "And when Papa would leave for lessons, Mama, *who was then still alive*, would look after uncle Iasha."[107] "And during the few months before her death my brother, and your cousin, Zhorzhik was born--that same Georgii Nikolaevich Sinaiskii, who *perished* at Sevastopol during the Great Patriotic War..."[108] Such early hints alert the reader and release the narrative for free association.

Once released, each recollection resembles a snapshot or slide picture. The whole story reminds one of a somewhat unorganised (chronologically) slide show that is occasionally disrupted by comparisons to and pauses of reflection in the present. This lack of sequential progression is not concealed from the reader: as referred to earlier, the narrator explains, "And yet the whole time some visions accompanied the cousins, as if springing up from the hospital wall."[109] This is not a specific, ongoing vision, but various visions. The memories more often follow thematic ties rather than

106 *Sukhoi Iiman*, 13

107 *Ibid*., 16. The emphasis is mine.

108 *Ibid*., 17. The emphasis is mine.

109 *Ibid*., 18

chronological ones; mention or sense (sight or sound, for example) of a person, event or place stimulates and introduces a related recollection regardless of chronology. Yet, the story is free from confusion because Kataev has been quick to provide briefly the necessary information, such as birth death or family relationship of characters who may be referred to later in the work. From this, the reader is able to clarify the role of individuals in the later reminiscences of the cousins.

In the same way that the force of the narration of *Uzhe napisan Verter* and *Spiashchii* is dictated by the dreams, for the majority of their walk, although the cousins make conscious efforts to extract fragments of the past, their adjusted stream of consciousness allows hints of the past from objects along the route to relocate them This is so because, like putting on head phones and listening to songs that recall one's childhood, or perhaps like stepping into the house where one grew up after many years, a subconscious blanket of another time covers the individual, relocating his being in a way that while under the blanket, most items that come into contact with his senses become associated with that other time. In a like manner the shared presence of the cousins, especially after so many years, relocates them--as before, time shared was time enjoyed.

The distinctions of narrative in each story, regardless of the magnitude of each differentiating detail relative to the other stories, distinguish each as individual. The peculiarities provide for different views of the past, in the sense that the reader receives different angles and viewpoints to observe that time and the experiences of that period as portrayed in Kataev's work. This creates the possibility of Kataev's stories reaching a larger audience Perhaps a result of Kataev's efforts may be that others recognise comparable experiences. This is a plausible possibility since differing angles would allow

Kataev's depiction of the past commonality with the past of as many other people as possible This seems more probable when one considers that although information is readily available for most readers, there are distinct details that are more available to certain readers, concealed behind hours of searching for others I am particularly thinking of the fragments of verse that Kataev chooses from other poets, weaving their lines through his prose, often without introduction and rarely denoted as verse. The awareness of these lines is connected with the past of those who recognise them. The provision of differing angles to the past and the inclusion of phrases special to a certain period, suggest these stories are in part intended to alert or remind others of a past. In this case it is the importance of having a past, of not having that time removed that makes an individual, thing or experience special. (Is a simple piece of grey concrete any more remarkable after one knows that it is a piece from the Berlin wall? It is the past of that chunk of stone that deems it special) One byproduct of Kataev's stories is to awaken this past or reunite it with its keeper by stimulating the recollection in a way comparable to the way the past is resurrected for the characters in the stories. In this way, Kataev's stories are not unlike Dima's pillow case or the space where the Sinaiskiis' school once stood. Not only is the past special, but so is the entire process of how it is recalled This is not only what Kataev has tried to capture, but also, what he has tried to create.

An obvious result of this narrative technique is that the stories are presented in chunks; yet, each story is a completed whole unto itself. Not surprisingly, the characters are presented in chunks as well. However this does not mean we do not see complete characters; but instead, that they are not revealed in a systematic chronological order. Each one is full unto himself. By this I mean we are not left asking why a character does or does not

act in a certain way. Although the reader is not given a causally related progression of each character's development, their actions at a given moment are plausible for that individual creation And, their actions are specific to them. For example, Dima is no less himself when he is running off with Inga, trying to paint, or searching for his mother Likewise, whether looking forward to supper or relaxing on the deck of the ship, the young people of *Spiashchii* are still recognisable And, the reader is surprised neither when the young cousins are hiding under the table after a family supper nor when they are embracing and crying after a death in Misha's family. This is because order of presentation is not the defining prerequisite for unity or consistency of character.

Kataev's concern for highlighting the insignificance of order is emphasised by the central role that he gives to characters embodying an attitude of life that reduces the importance of order He draws attention to the happiness and the contentment--to two positive attributes--of the characters who neither incorporate nor search for order in their lives--Dima, the young people on the boat and the Sinaiskii cousins as children. These attributes create a peculiar juxtaposition with other individuals in the works because Dima, the boating group, and the Sinaiskiis are the characters who are preoccupied with the present, with their own being, with observing and following. They have no reason to remember or to dwell on the past. For the most part, their view on life is of "the now" and "the future". Previous times have no relevance for such happy characters, ironically, in these stories about the past. However Kataev's point, with regard to the happiness of these characters, is not one of stressing the past or its exclusion in these lives at this time, but is one of showing a carefree stage of personal development and of noting the most positive method of self-preservation or simple existence,

whether adopted consciously or not, during difficult historical times. The personalities of Dima and the young people reveal very little depth and to look for established individuality in the actions of the Sinaiskii children is to deceive oneself. As well, they are not the most positive characters of the works. They are catalysts or fifth business in the activities of the stories, not the characters emitting the most affirmative characteristics. It is the positiveness of the lack of order in the actions of these beings that is significant. These characters are not to be epitomised, their inertia confirms this, but their beings accentuate Kataev's position.

The idea of order creates a meeting place where the narrative, the subsequent presentation of the characters and the visual image of this theme in Dima, the young people and the cousins cross paths. Kataev appears to be suggesting that at a given moment, one's being is not the product of an orderly, systematic chain of events, but is a collage from which at any instant only a certain collection of fragments of past life come forward and present the being, much like the presentation of his stories and their characters.

If a life can be compared to a motor or train journey, one can consider regaining lost time as a means to recall the buildings, stops or places along the route. Kataev uses such trip or excursion imagery to emphasise his point. I am thinking especially of the "train of time" that introduces *Uzhe napisan Verter* and reappears throughout the story. It is this train that starts the narrator off on his dream journey. More obvious than this train is the walk that the Sinaiskii cousins set out on along the hospital wall in *Sukhoi liman*. This stroll is a collection of stops along the wall, revealing two journeys. There is the objective journey that follows natural time, taking the cousins from the exit of the hospital, along the boulevard, and back to their point of departure But, as well, there is the collection of stops, each of which is taken

over by personal time; the cousins step fifty or sixty years back from the present into their childhoods. It is the difference between looking at a trip and retracing the route on a map, and reminiscing about the excitement and hardship encountered enroute. Order of recall is not important. All the experiences together bring the person to the being that they are The separate peregrinations or day trips, although complete unto themselves, create the full experience of the trip and it is the past that takes one back along the specific road or rail track. In the stories, the resultant actions of the characters are often based on what memory provides for them or from what they remember from the trip. From this resource they acquire knowledge and beliefs--intimate qualities Such roots or lack of roots, or memories of day trips, help define the individual and create his personality. Yet, the order by which these experiences are collected is less important than the fact that they can be retrieved

The reader senses intimacy within the mind of the dreamers and reminiscers. This view of the characters crosses the walls of simply observing dialogue and enters the yard of the character's minds, Kataev has opened the gate and allowed the reader to hide behind trees and eavesdrop on the characters. Such a view reveals deliberation and emotion and permits the reader to sense the joy and difficulty. This narration creates a full picture because it shows how dreams and recollections are not created only with words, but also with images

Kataev captures irrational, unmeditated actions of the characters and presents them to the reader so that he also can feel the dream patterns and reminiscences. In this way the reader detects that the dreams and recollections have captured the main characters; that the dream is the controller of the story. By producing this understanding, Kataev dissociates

himself from the possible misinterpretation that everything in the story is factual. If we treat the stories as personal interpretations of the past, then Kataev is telling us, by explaining recall as a dream, that although memory transcends time, exception must be made for personal interpretation, loss of memory and selective recall. This justifies Kataev's account.

Chapter Three

Being: the past as detail and description

To this point, this paper has looked at how the past exists as a reminder to the present life of Kataev's characters, suggesting that at the extremes of interpretation, the past can be a refuge for some and torment for others. And as well, it has been suggested that the past is a source from which to retrieve knowledge, a means to judge, as Tolstoy has written, by experience,[110] examining how characters employ their memory, or more clearly, how they bring forward the past to contend with the present This study has examined how the narrative techniques, exhibiting different manners by which the past is retrieved, present the various players. However, the past is also a relevant means of characterisation, because it substantiates and elucidates the actions of the beings in the present. It is the intent of this chapter to analyse challenges of the past that shed light on the individuality of the choices of the characters, and to see how individual traits contend with change; that is to say, what or how distinct human qualities, generally unacknowledged by the character, continue in their lives, revealing individuality rather than products of influence or conditioning, within a changing environment This brief examination, not surprisingly, also discusses the concern for harmony--a reflection of compatibility with change.

That change is a concern is accentuated in the opening paragraphs of each story. Transition from one interpretation of being to another is expressed, priming the reader's imagination for later alterations, and each description is concluded with reflections of settled existence. Compare the following:

> The rails were running off backwards and the train was taking him in the return direction, not there, where he would have

[110] See epigraph and discussion in chapter one

> liked, but there, where uncertainty, disorder, loneliness, destruction waited for him--further and further and further.
>
> But it wasn't known by what manner he ended up fully at the safe, small, local station, on the somewhat familiar boarded platform.
>
> Who was he? I can't imagine. I know only that he lives and acts in a dream He is sleeping. He is a sleeper.
>
> He was glad that it no longer carried him off into uncertainty and he firmly stood on the local platform. Now everything was in order. But, there's still one complication. The fact of the matter is that he has to cross the tracks to the opposite side.[111]

A primary role of the opening pages of *Uzhe napisan Verter* is to present the two sleepers who relate the story. One reads of inner disarray, as the swirling power of the dream pattern takes over the reader (as it has the sleeper) even before the presentation of the time setting--the Civil War. Yet, the agitation is quickly followed up by gladness, or a sense of calm, like moments of cease fire or peace among shelling and turmoil. Expressing the controlling strength of the narrative technique, the undefined route of the dream pattern produces the adjustment that settles the character, suggesting not only the power of change, but lauding also the tranquillity from contentment or lack of disharmony, before another challenge arises.

Like *Uzhe napisan Verter, Spiashchii* also presents the dreamer and the unpredictable movement within the dream.

> He dreamt about the yacht. It stood nearby the moorage with its sails, darkened from the dawn's dew, taken in. Her slender mast rocked slightly like a metronome.
>
> The sleeper saw our entire group, who made their way on the damp deck one after the other, balancing along the unreliable plank in single file . .
>
> All this could be seen so distinctly and materially that the dream was agonising. The sleeper understood that he was asleep, but didn't have the strength to break off the dream and force himself to wake--to surface out of the unfathomable depth of the dream. . . .He saw himself on a familiar curb of pavement near the arrival platform that was filled with Austrian soldiers, who had just disembarked from a troop train.
>
> The city had been surrendered without a challenge, by some

111 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 122.

kind of peace treaty or armistice.

Residents of the city looked at their vanquishers in grey-green dress-coats and steel helmets with curiosity. . . .

All in all, the picture was entirely peaceful

The conquerors soon lunched, formed up in columns and were led somewhere from the square. The citizens dispersed, and the square emptied.

Such was how the new, strange life in the city started [112]

These first lines alternate between images of calm and challenge, again, like volleys between two opposing sides. The peaceful vision of the boat rocking on the water emphasises the presupposed calm of sleep, yet this stirs up the unsettled sleeper. Comparing this with the scene that presents the soldiers in the city, creates a slightly awkward parallel between the sleeper and his dream on one hand, and the implication of war, but quietly settled life in Odessa on the other. The big picture and probable assumption are not necessarily representative of the smaller glimpses The sleeper fights to wake while all in the dream is calm, and the war, an active suggestion of disruption and conflict, wages on while the citizens of Odessa and the new arrivals unobtrusively acquaint themselves with each other's presence.

The stage for *Sukhoi Liman*, a tale at once different from the first two because it does not rely on dreams to relay the story, is set by opening in the past, when the cousins were children Immediately, the movement of time, the change of consciousness, and the resultant unease of this knowledge is presented.

> At the end of the nineteenth century, some time after his birth, the young lad Misha began to become acquainted with the surrounding world. He found out that besides the name Misha, he had still a family name, Sinaiskii. At first he didn't like it, but later became used to it. The surname Sinaiskii was also the surname of his father and mother and all his brothers and sisters, who were so much older than Misha, that in comparison with them, it was as if the young lad didn't exist .
>
> Soon, it turned out, that aside from them, there were still some other Sinaiskiis in the city. This struck the young lad as

112 *Spiashchii*, 83.

unpleasant.

However, when it turned out that "those other" Sinaiskiis were their close relatives, Misha reconciled himself: . . . The other Sinaiskiis--his uncle and aunt--also had a son, a young boy like him, only who was called Sasha. But he was a year and a half younger than Misha and, as was the custom of that time, until the age of three, they dressed him like a young girl, in a dress, while Misha was already wearing shorts; so, Sasha was not fit to be his friend

Little Sasha soon grew, and they began to dress him in a way befitting a young boy This equalised him fully with his cousin Misha Sinaiskii, who, however, until the end of his life, looked upon Sasha a bit critically, as his junior.[113]

From the outset, the focus of the story is revealed--family years that have passed. It is already noticeable how recounting the past will chronicle change, as a primary element of the family history. Even when examining Misha alone, and not the entire family, the narrator acknowledges the boy's changing perception of the world as he ages, the boy's new found understanding for example, that the family label, the surname, is something that is shared. With every new awareness that time delivers, there is an interim of uncertainty and disquieted stepping on untested ice, that represents change and the challenge of coming to terms with it and feeling secure. In the larger picture--the picture of the whole group--these intervals separate the sections of family happiness and rise up as challenges to the established unity of the group Interestingly, as the story progresses, not only do the hurdles assume the mask of death, but they appear also when new membership is offered to those outside the unified whole, when new people marry into the family and subsequently, change the substance of the whole by adding to it instead of taking away These openings are significant because conditions of being are juxtaposed--what can be controlled is confronted with what cannot be controlled.

By encapsulating the personal stories within bubbles of conflict, Kataev

113 *Sukhoi Iiman*, 8

draws our attention to the reality that continuation or consistency of character is challenged and highlighted by the dynamic change taking place around it. When it is shown how Dima is swayed by the fervour of the Civil War spirit, how Manfred wants to grab the moment and run off with Nelli, and how Nikolai Nikanorovich, Misha's father, tries to enjoy the best of whatever world he can partake in, the reader senses that description of the power of change has been expanding from the outset of the stories. Thus a juxtaposition of actions is suggested--the wars or Revolution, that create the settings of the stories placed around the more limited focus, the individual.

Regarding the past with the present reveals not only contrasts of character, but consistencies as well. From the readers vantage-point, viewing the periods under some scrutiny, and from the author's favourable position as creator, these contrasts and consistencies of character bear up under the movement of time and change, suggesting that time is not all-claiming in its progression; although a keeper of consistency, it can also be an arena for change. Kataev seems to suggest that time is a medium in which individuals grow, move and react. It is not merely an agent that dictates their actions. Therefore, the role of time, as a force, is to reveal the living of beings--past and present. In one of his last articles, Kataev attests to the movement of time and the passage of individuals through it, aware of time's accompanying force--change, while explaining his own ability to cope with time Writing enthusiastically on Soviet literature, he explains, " ., recollections overcome me quite often. Recollection, this is a sort of travel in time, and I consider myself an experienced traveller. Time does not have power over me,..."[114] *Recollections* is a plural noun, in the first usage, because every piece of the past

114 "Puteshestvie vo vremeni," *Pravda*, 17 August 1984, 3. The last part of this quote reiterates words that Kataev attributed to Dostoevsky in *Almaznyi moi venets (My Diamond Crown): "Time does not have power over me,* even if because it does not exist, affirmed Dostoevsky." See *SS*, vol 7, 12. My italics

is particular, every segment of time produces a different picture; as time moves, change takes place Since comparison is immediate, change and consistency are unavoidable topics when speaking of the past. The openings to these stories are true to this

Among the changes and consistencies taking place as time moves forward, or in the process of regaining past time, there is often an ongoing accompanying battle for harmony within the self and between groups, at other social or political levels In these stories, the wars and Revolution, that effect so much change, are the most overt picture of transition; essentially, these conflicts also are a concerted effort to accomplish harmony, albeit according to one interpretation of how the goal is to be maintained or attained. However, within the ever-present shadow of war, the abutting themes of change and harmony often walk arm in arm through the pages at more personal levels so that neither state of existence is denied its possibility of being For example, although the dream patterns and recollections provide rapid change of scene, and the military and revolutionaries make appearances in the stories here and there, bits of harmony sneak through, suggesting coexistence. In *Uzhe napisan Verter,* as already mentioned, Dima and Inga share happiness, betraying a barrier of emotion that Inga assumed was firmly in place; in *Spiashchii,* happiness seems to be an indirect goal or unconscious result of being, even during the cohabitation of the enforcers and residents. A glimpse of this is evident when it is explained that one day at the beach, the Austrian soldiers "[b]ehaved modestly and quite courteously for victors, not offending the swimmers and, carefully entering the water up to their waists, washing under their arms with government issue soap. They were also in a blissful mood ..."[115]; and in *Sukhoi Iman,* we are shown Sasha's father, Nikolai

115 *Spiashchii,* 94.

Nikanorovich, a proclaimer of passive existence as a means to allow disparate forces to coexist. In response to the inquiry of a young delegate of the Red Army whether he sympathises with them, we read that.

> "No," Nikolai Nikanorovich answered severely. "I am not a sympathiser, because I cannot sympathise with any kind of violence But it pains me to think that simple Russian people should be sleeping in a cold barn on bare boards, without even a pillow under their heads. We are all brothers you know "[116]

The greater struggles of coordinated forces are merely the backdrop and overture for the personal battles waged in an effort to reach individual or interpersonal harmony.

Realistically, the ideal of complete harmony remains unobtainable. Kataev would likely have agreed with Vaclav Havel, who remarked recently, "A heaven on earth in which people all love each other and everyone is hard-working, well-mannered, and virtuous, in which the land flourishes and everything is sweetness and light, working harmoniously to the satisfaction of God: this will never be."[117] That this goal remains out of reach is reiterated by the consistent presence of armed conflicts in the stories However, the presence of the revolution and the war, although details that colour the setting, serve also for Kataev to accentuate the existence of parallel fervour within the lives of the characters Appropriately, this dualism is notable in the source of the title of the earliest of these three works Professor Barnes explains this presence in the verse which Kataev quotes from Pasternak for his title *Uzhe napisan Verter*, [118] "The motifs of death and suicide in Pasternak's evocation of frustrated love were a partly objective reflection of current realities. These included not just the afflictions of cold, hunger and disease,

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116 *Sukhoi liman*, 38.

117 Vaclav Havel, *Summer Meditations*, Paul Wilson, trans (Toronto. Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1992), 16

118 The title is taken from the final quatrain of the ninth part of the *Razryv (The Break)* cycle of the collection entitled *Temy i variatsii (Themes and Variations)*. See *Appendix B* for the complete poem

but also those of political terror and coercion."[119] While the poetry has direct relevance to the physical setting, much of its inspiration results from personal awareness Like Pasternak, Kataev also is presenting the struggle of the individual within the greater context of the consolidated or "group" conflict, be it the family or a force of troops Through the presentation of selective detail, he creates the pertinent pasts and presents that document the encounters, some of which are more extensive than others.

Not all Kataev's characters receive an equal past, in terms of amount or type of description. Such an illustration is offered on an "at-need" basis, in which need is determined by the importance of the past to complete the being of any character in the present. Characters use their past differently from each other, therefore criteria for a past is very much part of the creation of the individual.

For the creations of Markin *(unv)* and Manfred and Len'ka *(sp)* the past is non-existent and is seldom, if ever touched on by Kataev. Their beings or existences are consumed by the present The past of these three is an enigma, in large part because it provides very little to define the present character. Yet, in this way, even the lack of a past reveals something of a character--that he has recanted his past, that he is immersed in the present

For Los' *(unv)* the past seems too far away to recapture and he is too weak to attempt a committed effort to that time or other being, without the aid of others Memories are sporadic reminders and confirmation of another time. They are utilised as a means to reconfirm his presence or to take him from the immediate time Accordingly, Kataev offers more of his past than the three characters previously described, but less than of his sketches of Larisa Germanovna or Misha Smaivskii. The small spots that we see provide

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119 Christopher Barnes, *Boris Pasternak A Literary Biography Volume 1 1890-1928* (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1989), 250

all the connections and consistency that Kataev has determined are necessary. To complete the character and the story, all that is required from the past is confirmation of his shared existences with Dima's family and his times with Markin. Yet there are subtle consistencies that exist and that make Los's eventual actions less surprising. First that he was a guest at Dima's family home, creating a common link, and second, and I think more revealing, that he helped Markin.[120] For the file to be so important, suggests that a risk to the life of Los' was likely involved, in perhaps much the same way that he jeapordised his life for Dima. His desire to have some control over the outcome of an event, especially when someone else receives value from it, overrules the dormant life he is spending, unable to write and removed from the life he preferred, because of the decisions of others. Kataev presents his past so that the party at Dima's home and the scene explaining his aid to Markin are highlighted as consistencies that transcend the movement of time and changes of events.

A more detailed past is provided for the characterisation of Larisa Germanovna and the Sinaiskii cousins. Their's is often a past that is vital and moving. The present shows Larisa Germanovna as solely devoted to ensuring the longevity of Dima's life. The obvious parallel of the past is her role as hostess and keeper of the the family home, nurturer and protector of the estate. However, the past shows her as the guard of harmony as well. The present offers only one view of her reaction to Dima's impending troubles--save him at whatever the cost to herself. The past confirms her devotion. Her harmony with herself results from the visible happiness of others and the knowledge that all her actions have been correct ones. The latter point deserves closer attention.

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120 See *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 140, where Los' reminds Markin, "Remember the file. Do you dare to deny that I took the file?"

The best examples of her self-evaluation are seen when comparing her thoughts of Dima and his art with her feelings of Inga. "The guests focused on the painting Larisa Germanovna also looked through her fist to focus on the painting. Everything was a delight for Dima. But, it seems, Larisa Germanovna felt awkward. Nevertheless it was a child's work of a young realist who had read *Salambo.*"[121] Her awkwardness with the situation is due, most likely, to the realisation that objective evaluation of Dima's painting may be more helpful to him as an aspiring artist. But, it would be offered at the cost of disrupting his state of contentment. So, she chose reticence over voicing an opinion, as she did also when first meeting Inga with Dima. "From the first glance, Larisa Germanovna didn't like this young woman. . . She seemed to her too alluring. . . No, it wasn't the usual motherly jealousy, although jealousy also was felt. No, she felt something unexplainably dangerous in this friend of her son's."[122] Yet, these glimpses explain her endless efforts to help Dima; these labours are in large part because of her critical inactivity. For not criticising his art and not speaking of her feelings about Inga, Larisa Germanovna is in part to blame for the direction of his subsequent actions. This passive and subjective concern for her boy's immediate happiness over his development and understanding of his actions, demands that she clear away many of the obstacles that he encounters in life. She has not asked him to change, and subsequently tries to protect or alleviate his walk through time. Only through a glimpse of her past does one fully understand the vigour of her actions and the necessity of their fulfilment that is demanded by her conscience.

Less defined than Larisa Germanova's past, mainly because of the

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121 *Ibid*, 126.

* *Salambo* (1862) is a work for which Flaubert received criticism because of the meticulous attention he paid to historical detail

122 *Ibid*, 144,

distance between the past and the time to which it usually relates, is that of Misha.[123] Yet, one sees how, in comparison to Los' or Markin for example, more detail of Misha's past is offered. From childhood, his self-concern, his sense of superiority over Sasha and his assertion that he or his interpretation of matters is always most correct, survives his entire life. The narrator explains this early in the story,[124] and Sasha points out to Misha before their walk, "You have always underestimated me Misha."[125] If we were to see this only in the present of the story, as Sasha retorts, it could be deemed a natural trait or stereotypical characteristic of an older cousin or an assertion based solely on the topic of their discussion. Yet its continued existence through Misha's life reveals this evidence of his past more as an element of insecurity and as a lack of desire for equality, emerging immediately from the time he realised that he would have to share his name with another.

As a means of characterisation, the uncontrollable continuation of the past life in the present being exhibits how some characters continue to live a life that is an extension of various challenges from previous times in their life. Inside the naturally evolving shell are challenges which the character has not met. Not unlike the distinction made earlier between natural and personal time, in which the personal scale does not take on the linear direction or adherence to chronometric measure that the natural scale does, so the inner traits of an individual are more difficult to escape from, following a scale of their own, while one can still walk away or run past other, external, natural experiences. In the beings of those without a detailed past, there are not elements from the past that continue as a part of the characters' larger

123 The difference between the past and the present in *Uzhe napisn Verter* is never more than ten years (and is most likely closer to five), whereas in *Sukhoi liman* the difference approaches sixty years.

124 See note 113.

125 *Sukhoi liman*, 10.

experiential situation These beings are challenged only by the present and consequently, their existence is very much of the present. In these ways, the needs of each character's being determine the detail and past that Kataev awards them

Kataev is not concerned with painting a background if it in no way serves to highlight the focus of his picture. And, the picture is of all the characters--the entire group of experiences. Therefore, the past has to be an essential part of how the being is presented--how he presents his self--in order for it to be a functioning and requisite detail of the entire work. However, in some situations (like those of Inga and Markin), the only way that some people function in the present is by negating their past, completely. This negation is an effort to eliminate a conscience or connection. Then, the past is not brought into the present. Alternatively, for example, Dima's past is important because it reveals the influences on his life But, as well, much like the quieted feelings of Larisa Germanovna and the undefeated insecurity of Misha, the past of Dima shows that much of his present life is merely a rolling along of time. For this reason, his character is the chief example of a past character still embodied in the present

Dima never had to be his own person. Much of *Uzhe napisan Verter* is concerned with Dima failing to realise his own self He is a follower and acceptor, not an initiator or giver. His father was a provider, a material influence on his life, who created a home and an opportunity for Dima to study art. Dima, actually, created very little on his own. It is not surprising that Dima's recollections of his father are underlined by his white waistcoat, wedding ring and gold cuftlinks--physical, external, material objects.[126] Dima's mother nurtured him and provided spiritual warmth by the

126 *Uzhe napisan Verter*, 126 and 145.

benevolent nature of her being. In many ways this explains his unquestioning acceptance of Inga in his life; she fulfils roles that his mother once did. This exchange is noted by the narrator as Dima steps into his new life; the present removes him from his past "It was so new that he felt not only revived, but as if he was born again....He hadn't thought that he had left his mother alone."[127] In much of what the characters do, they are faced with the challenge of continuing life as it was or striving to create or to find an alternative. Dima's attempts are just one episode of this. Simplified, these attempts can be seen as a search for harmony of either the self or the larger group, or perhaps even of all. It is a situation in which the characters feel they are looking out for what they think is right or for what they feel is best, often placing emotion or determination over moral reasoning. In doing this, they sometimes forget about themselves and others.

Early in *Uzhe napisan Verter* the reader is presented with the idea that one being, because of powers bestowed upon him, can feel that he has complete control over the life of another man.[128] In this specific instance such a power is divined upon the individual by the mandate of the Revolution; yet, this scene is part of an introduction and lays the groundwork for a story in which this focus is as much a personal one as an ideological situation. Symbolically, the personal nature is juxtaposed with the ideological one in the story by the contrast between subjective and objective relationships, between the emotional and the rational. The personal, the subjective, or the emotional is what denotes characters as positive beings. They are those who do not allow the external controls, wrought by the Revolution, over their lives, or who do not try to control others, not out of indifference or personal

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127 *Ibid*, 144

128 See the description of Naum Besstrashnyi (the last name means "fearless"). *Ibid.*, 124.

protection, but to protect what is individual to them. What is most correct for them is the preconceived appreciation of harmony at all levels of the social pyramid, not simply at the apex, in order that the largest possible number of people may enjoy the results.

Such a righteous distinction would seem to be the planned result of a story with a moral message; yet, in creating the distinction between what is positive or negative the story is not didactic. The results are more a product of striving for verisimilitude than of judging subjectively. Kataev does not discount the possibility of attraction between different "elements"; that Dima and Inga can have some true moments of happiness (as reflected in his belief in the strength and truth of their relationship and confirmed by his return to her after his release, and in her tears of loss, following Dima's supposed death) hints at the possibility of harmony among those with different personal ideologies. However, eventually here and throughout the story, there is a distinction from which the groups remain at their separate poles. There is harmony between Larisa Germanovna and Los', but not between Larisa and Markin or Los' and Markin. This discrepancy exists, it seems, between characters willing, on the one hand to extend their past into the present and those that are not. Larisa Germanovna and Los' are not intimidated enough to worry about risking their lives to allow the past to exist or to be repeated as much as is possible. Their efforts to free Dima reveal this commitment. In contrast to this, either from dedication or fear, Inga and Markin live in the present and work toward the future. If there is a connection with the past, the conditions resulting from the Revolution and the Civil War conceal it, overriding or ignoring accessibility to it, to allow the Revolution to maintain momentum They believe they are sacrificing the personal for the collective. Yet like others who feel that one is entitled to take the destiny of another into

his own hands, this alternative--this supposed sacrifice--allows for no dialogue or mutual agreement. This directed movement bursts through as the most correct truth presenting itself more as the seed of conflict that results from a desire for change, rather than as the reward of harmony, conceived by a passion for change. It is the fruit of assumption and leaves the results to force and chance, rather than a product of mutual effort and decisions.

Hints of the possible existence of harmony are explored in a slightly different manner in *Spashchi*, where Kataev shows how background, wealth or gender are not reasons to segregate people. Of course there is less detail and comparison in this story since instead of piecing together a past time with various glimpses, this story is more a single section of time. In large part this is because the duration of the story is approximately twenty-four to thirty-six hours, surrounding habitual or spontaneous actions--nothing that resembles a premeditated directive, based on a past experience. We read of the fathers of Vasia and Nelli, but this information lends itself more to explaining the difficult economic situation in Odessa. What it reflects of these characters is their indifference to lack of money, but it shares no information than more fully presents them. Essentially, power or freedom can be the individual's to control. Certainly, differences exist, but that does not exclude the possibility of compatibility. By comparing the young people on the boat with each other and by looking at how the economic problems affected the people of Odessa, one sees how characters can share space happily until one attempts to reach out for what is not his, or for what one character has no more entitlement to than another. There is an unsaid "law" renouncing the unexplained appropriation of things that are the property of another or of the collective. Trying to satisfy such an attempt, Len'ka and Manfred are bound to fail; their attempts to reach above the crowd proves fatal.

Comparison between those who move and adjust with time and those who want to control time or who challenge an established calm is discussed also in *Sukhoi liman*, however, of greater significance in this story is the truth that all men are equal in that each is born, each has an earthly existence, and each dies. This is a common enough understanding of life, perhaps most creatively captured by Vladimir Nabokov in the first sentence of his autobiographical work *Speak Memory*, "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness."[129] What distinguishes one man from another is the space between birth and death, Nabokov's brief crack of light, peculiar to that individual, and the manner by which this gap is governed by his choices in life.

Within this description of life, Kataev presents the different generations of the Sinaiskii family. The success and failure of certain actions suggests that no matter what the conditions, one can try to be true to one's self and follow the lead of his reason or his heart. However, the result of one's actions does not determine longevity. The many deaths from their happy family establish this fact. It is not for mortal man to seek vengeance on those that he thinks have done wrong (hence the death of Iakov, but the almost immortal stature of Nikolai Nikanorovich--Sasha's father). Mortality is brought to the fore as the short duration of natural time in *Spiashchii* stretches to include lifetimes in *Sukhoi liman*. In the first story the focal point is the passing of one day. In the latter, the discussion is of the passing of an entire family.

This understanding of what one is entitled to do to others or to do without regard for others in many instances is at the base of the question: How, for Kataev's characters, do the expectations of the present or the future

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129 Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1970), 19.

dictate their actions? The significance of attaining immediate or future goals determines the direction of their behaviour. And these decisions often explain how and why characters interact in certain manners with others. Both the perceptions of the situation ahead and the choices that condition these actions are individual ones, because the individual acts upon them, and essentially they are what define the characters. Such actions are the consistent means of character definition that Kataev incorporates, names, internal monologue and less than pertinent background are used less frequently and inconsistently. Yet all characters are equally important for the completion of the stories. The continual confrontation of challenges and how these struggles evolve serve better Kataev's means for illustrating the characters.

Conclusion

Nearing the end of *Sukhoi liman*, the last work which Kataev would complete before his death, the narrator interjects into a description of Nikolai Nikanorovich crossing the steppe, that recalls an image of Christ in the wilderness. The narrator proclaims, "Oh how long ago it was and how good it is now to remember everything "[130] It seems to me that this is as near a verdict as one can expect on Kataev's feelings for the past. It is not a clear statement, but a realisation. "Everything" (the Russian *vse*) is a bit nebulous here; it refers not to recalling one's entire past--this is impossible--but to sensing all that creates the recollection. The past, as a separate piece of time and feeling will always exist, but it most likely never will be readily or consistently available. Not only can its reappearance be an involuntary occurrence, but its message can be sad. There is an ambiguous answer because of an indefinite reality. As a reminder, the past tells one that time moves and change occurs, and as a power, the past is remarkable in its ability to produce emotion and reveal past time.

These three stories bear witness to change over time. But Kataev, as well as comparing the different spaces in time, also acknowledges the framework that produced what was and what created his being--another time and past people. Time changes, options change, people change; yet, in many instances, the basis of the original beings remain. In *Uzhe napisan Verter* Dima never really loses the influence of his parents, in *Spiashchii* Vasia and Nelli are continuing to live on what the previous generation provided for them, and in *Sukhoi liman* the Smaiskii cousins live lives in which the personality of their grandfather still exists. Much of what has been discussed of these three stories involves realising that the present is able to rekindle the past, to spark the

130 *Sukhoi liman*, 40

memories and brighten the present, to reveal the evolution from what was. These different angles of looking at the past and the different uses of past times show how time changes what was, but does not completely steal it Like an eroding rock cut, the original slowly has its edges rounded and begins to look different. Yet the foundations remain the same

Kataev presents the past in a not unfamiliar manner. His past is not something he tries to recapture or recreate, but rather it is the source for his prose--the remembered events that inspire his writing. His construction blends real events with the created ones. Jose Ortega y Gasset, writing on the unique manner in which Proust incorporated the past into his work, makes this distinction between writers who involve previous times in their creations,

> Before Proust, writers had commonly taken memory as the material with which to reconstruct the past Since the data of memory are incomplete and retain of the prior reality only an arbitrary extract, the traditional novelist fills them out with observations drawn from the present, together with chance hypotheses and conventional ideas. In other words, he unites fraudulent elements with the authentic materials of memory . Proust represses all interest in restoration and limits himself to describing what he sees as it arises out of his memory Instead of reconstructing lost time, he contents himself with making an edifice of its ruins [131]

In the three stories that this study concentrates on, Kataev follows the non-Proustian lead, blending what he has retained in memory with what his imagination develops.

The presence of factual information, not simply of similar events, and of embellished fact in these three stories expresses how Kataev recovered what was hidden in his memory and created from it. Memory is unpredictable and independent, but also is applicable and available The select segments from his own past that find their way into the stories and the battles of his

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[131] Jose Ortega y Gasset, "Time, distance and form in Proust," in *Aspects of time*, C A. Patrides, ed. (Manchester. Manchester University Press, 1976), 137

characters to hold onto or to fight off reminders of the past attest to this.

As a result, the stories become both a personal and a general account of these years in Odessa Personal memories are blended with observations that many others shared, and subsequently, Kataev subjectively offers an account, while not extinguishing the possibility, due to the candid representation of some facts, of his objectivity He allows for discrepancies and personal interpretation of the same past, which protects him from having to create either an historical report or a complete fabrication. Consistency in the stories is found not in recalled material being true to fact, but in that the past conditions all his characters through its absence or influence.

In many instances, Kataev shows that the past cannot be escaped. Details of life all around the characters become catalysts initiating recall and providing both joy and pain. However, this continued existence of time is not always perfect or complete. Events take on new emphasis, sometimes stimulating new emotions or creating sensations of a force in excess of the original

These catalysts recall the past indiscriminately, binding dreams and recollections together with diverse threads with ends that appear in the present and extending many years back in time The threads follow different directions in the stories, but are linked by the common incorporation of free association as the underlying narrative pattern. Variety of narrative provides an assortment of story presentation and demands reader participation, placing the reader within the deliberations and process of recall of the characters and therefore he has to organise the events as location and time are brought forward incongruously from passed years. Seemingly, order is forfeited for aesthetic ambitions. This participation and the personal nature of taking part in an individual's processes of recall creates intimacy between

the reader and the text, drawing the reader into the work and perhaps, sharing or alerting thoughts of a similar past.

The full characterisation that results after the piecing together of the stories, suggests that a character, or individual, is not the product of a linear progression toward the present, but at any one time is a reflection of any characteristic that makes up the culmination of the past; life is a collection of pieces of past time, the accumulation of which places little importance on chronology.

How these characteristics are reflected in the present is what identifies an individual personality The consistencies of character in the presence of changes which accompany the movement of time express how Kataev's characters contend with the challenges around them, and what qualities continue in their lives. For some this reflects strength of self, while others prove to be the outcome of another's conditioning. In both cases, the past proves to be the measure to which the present is compared or the gauge of character development. Often the development of a character's past by the narrator proves to be the manner by which his being in the present is defined The past presents those characteristics that bear up under the movement of time, exposing time as a medium in which characters grow, react or remain the same.

In these stories, comparison is available for some characters, but not for all. For example, consistently, those who have given themselves fully to the Revolutionary cause receive no or very little past Details of their past rarely are necessary because they have given up the knowledge and experience they have acquired to follow another lead This contrasts such characters with those who wish to bring the past into the present to confront what is around them, or with those who unconsciously carry the past with them in their

innate actions and reactions In each of the situations, Kataev is using the past differently to present and to craft the beings in his stories.

Kataev incorporates and moulds different aspects of the past, not only as the foundation for his creation, but as well, as the product, presenting and examining various understandings and relationships with the past. Inescapable, the consistent reminders enhance and plague his characters, making their stories stronger or sadder, but always giving the characters claim to a self.

Appendices

Translation of poetry from one language to another is never a simple task. Certainly, much of the imagery, acoustic value and internal worth is, in many cases, never fully appreciated in the efforts to provide the verse for a different culture. Because of this, I have offered two translations of each of the following poems, hoping that where one is weak, the other will help substantiate, if not rectify, the inadequacy.

Appendix A

Пророк

Духовной жаждою томим,
В пустыне мрачной я влачился,--
И шестикрылый серафим
На перепутье мне явился.
Перстами легкими как сон
Моих зениц коснулся он.
Отверзлись вещие зеницы,
Как у испуганной орлицы.
Моих ушей коснулся он,
И их наполнил шум и звон:
И внял я неба содроганье,
И горний ангелов полет,
И гад морских подводный ход,
И дольней лозы прозябанье.
И он к устам моим приник,
И вырвал грешный мой язык,
И празднословный и лукавый,
И жало мудрыя змеи
В уста замерзшие мои
Вложил десницею кровавой.
И он мне грудь рассек мечом,
И сердце трепетное вынул
И угль, пылающий огнем,
Во грудь отверстую водвинул.
Как труп в пустыне я лежал,
И Бога глас ко мне воззвал:
"Восстань, пророк, и вижль, и внемли,
Исполнись волею моей,
И, обходя моря и земли,
Глаголом жги сердца людей".

1826

The Prophet

Tormented by spiritual thirst I dragged myself through a sombre desert. And a six-wing seraph appeared to me at the crossing of the ways. He touched my eyes with fingers as light as a dream: and my prophetic eyes opened like those of a frightened eagle. He touched my ears and they were filled with noise and ringing: and I heard the shuddering of the heavens, and the flight of the angels in the heights, and the movement of the beasts of the sea under the waters, and the sound of the vine growing in the valley. He bent down to my mouth and tore out my tongue, sinful, deceitful, and given to idle talk; and with his right hand steeped in blood he inserted the forked tongue of a wise

serpent into my benumbed mouth He clove my breast with a sword, and plucked out my quivering heart, and thrust a coal of live fire into my gaping breast Like a corpse I lay in the desert. And the voice of God called out to me: "Arise, O prophet, see and hear, be filled with My will, go forth over land and sea, and set the hearts of men on fire with your Word."

The Prophet

Athirst in spirit, through the gloom
Of an unpeopled waste I blundered,
And saw a six-winged seraph loom
Where the two pathways met and sundered.
He laid his fingers on my eyes:
His touch lay soft as slumber lies,--
And like an eagle's, his crag shaken,
Did my prophetic eyes awaken.
Upon my ears his fingers fell
And sound rose--stormy swell on swell:
I heard the spheres revolving, chiming,
The angels in their soaring sweep,
The monsters moving in the deep,
The green vine in the valley climbing.
And from my mouth the seraph wrung
Forth by its roots my sinful tongue;
The evil things and vain it babbled
His hand drew forth and so effaced,
And the wise serpant's tongue he placed
Between my lips with hand blood dabbled;
And with a sword he clove my breast,
Plucked out the heart he made beat higher,
And in my stricken bosom pressed
Instead a coal of living fire
Upon the wastes, a lifeless clod,
I lay, and heard the voice of God:
"Arise, oh, prophet, watch and hearken,
And with my Will thy soul engild,
Roam the gray seas, the roads that darken,
And burn men's hearts with this, my Word."[132]

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132 The Russian is taken from *Pushkin. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk, 1937-49), vol. 3, 30-1. The English plain prose translation is from Dimitri Obolensky, ed. *The Heritage of Russian Verse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 92 and the poetic translation is from Avrahm Yarmolinsky, ed. *The Works of Alexander Pushkin* (New York: Random House, 1936), 61

Appendix B

The title *Uzhe napisan Verter* is from Pasternak's verse. It is taken from the final quatrain of the ninth part of the *Razryv (The Break)* cycle of the collection entitled *Temy i variatsii (Themes and Variations).*

Рояль дрожащий пену с губ оближет.
Тебя сорвет, подкосит этот бред,
Ты скажешь: -- милый! -- Нет, -- вскричу я, -- нет!
При музыке?! -- Но можно ли быть ближе,

Чем в полутьме, аккорды, как дневник,
Меча в камин комплектами, погодно?
О пониманье дивное, кивни,
Кивни, и изумишься! -- ты свободна.

Я не держу. Иди, благотвори.
Ступай к другим. Уже написан Вертер,
А в наши дни и воздух пахнет смертью:
Открыть окно что жизнь отворить.

1918[133]

133 Boris Pasternak, *Stikhi i poety 1912-1932* (Ann Arbor. The University of Michigan Press, 1961), 82.

i) The trembling piano will lick foam from its mouth:
Delirium -- which makes your knees give way
Will lift you You'll say "Darling", and "No", I'll shout,
"While playing music?" But can we be, say,

Closer than in twilight throwing chords
Into the fireplace like a diary
Set, year on year Oh, great awareness, nod,
Nod and you'll be astonished! -- You are free.

I won't hold you Go Do your charity.
Go elsewhere *Werther* can't be written again:
In our times even air smells death to me.
Opening a window is like opening a vein.

ii) The shiv'ring piano, foaming at the mouth,
Will wrench you by its ravings, discompose you.
"My darling," you will murmur "No!" I'll shout.
"To music?!" Yet can two be ever closer

Than in the dusk, while tossing vibrant chords
Into the fireplace, like journals, tome by tome?
Oh, understanding wonderful, just nod,
And you will know I do not claim to own

Your soul and body. You may go where'er
You want. To others. Werther has been written
Already Death these days is in the air.
One opens up one's veins much like a window.[134]

134 The first translation is taken from Vladimir Markov and Merrill Sparks, ed. and trans., *Modern Russian Poetry* (Alva, Scotland: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), 599, and the second was translated by Raissa Bobrova and is part of the collection: Boris Pasternak, *Poems*, Evgeny Pasternak, ed. (Moscow Raduga Publishers, 1990)

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