

The Turbin Family House

M. Bulgakov Literary Memorial Museum

In this house Mikhail Bulgakov lived from 1906 to 1919, and here he “lodged” his literary characters, the Turbin family.

*“Here I began to see... as if something colourful was coming out of the blank page. Peering and squinting at it, I realised that it was a picture. More than that, the picture was not flat, but three-dimensional. Like a box...”*M. Bulgakov

Dear reader!

This museum is a literary-plastic attempt to appreciate the works of the great Master. The exhibition works on two planes: one documentary, and one of figurative association, combining to accentuate Bulgakov's Kiev roots, and the deep thematic significance, in his work, of home, and family, and the history and culture of his native town. One of the distinctive features of the museum is the solution of the *inner space*. Like in Bulgakov's works – it is magical and achieved by forging new connections between objects.

Turbin's guest room

We are entering the house together with the characters of *The White Guard*, a novel dedicated to home, family, and native town, where a trembling melody of love, unity and family warmth gently permeate the blizzard of the Civil War. It is these delicate, seemingly unprotected, signs of humanity that will save this wrecked house and life in it. The guest room – front room of the apartment – leads into the idea: two families co-exist in the house – one is Bulgakov's, the other the family of his literary creation, Turbin. Bulgakov's narrative layer is represented by the commemorative objects (too few, alas, are preserved). Turbin's layer redresses the balance, but, as so often in art, in a special form. It is distanced and made “literary” – with white. This unreal world, seamlessly welded with the real world, creates a fuller scale of associations. It is alive, pulsating and anticipating. At any minute it is ready to accept an object of Bulgakov's, giving up one of Turbin's in exchange. Hence the continuous redistribution of energy in this pulsating, dual world: an attempt to convey the memory-based process of creativity through the medium of museum language. Here the logic of life and art confront one another, and common connections of reality are distorted for the sake of creating new links that exist solely in the dimension of art.

The guest room preserves memories of numerous jolly guests, adults and children. Even now, oak parquet squeaks under our feet, sending us sounds of life from the past.

Here in the spring of 1907 Varvara Bulgakova, mother of the future writer, will accept condolences on the early death of her husband – professor of divinity at Kiev Theological Academy. The eldest of their seven children, Mikhail, was not even 16 then...

In this domestic interior of an average income household, we recognise memorable objects of the Bulgakovs that were described in *The White Guard* (the piano with open scores, the father's portrait, the armchair, etc). Everything here exudes family history: the unpretentiously decorated box; the uncle's simple watercolour of a medieval landscape, birthplace of the parents; the Bible, obligatory in every house.

Elena's room

This room is “literary”, that is, imaginary. The Bulgakovs had this room for the youngsters – girls, four of them, or sometimes the boys. Bulgakov's sister Elena never lived here. She and her aunt lived in the corner room, with its balcony, which in 1918 was given to the “district doctor”, Mikhail Bulgakov. Like Alexey Turbin, Bulgakov runs a private medical practice in this small room. From 1917 the newlywed Karums (sister Varvara and brother-in-law) will occupy this room. Three rooms in this apartment have the same functions for the Bulgakovs and the Turbins: the guest room, the “doctor's surgery” and the dining room. The functions of the other four rooms differ. This is only natural: Bulgakov's family is three times larger than Turbin's. Elena's room is a family room. Bulgakov's heroine lives here with her husband Talberg. Here the romantic dreamland clashes with the external threat, breakdown, flight, and betrayal. Left by her husband at the moment of strife,

when man, the defender, should be dependable, Elena courageously fights for the life of her wounded and dying elder brother, taking all responsibilities upon herself. And when all hope seems lost, she turns to God with prayer and penance to plead for her brother's life. In other words here, in this room, the central miracle of the novel takes place: her prayer and its result – return to life.

This is why the family icon of the Blessed Virgin now takes pride of place amongst the mementoes in this room. It was returned from Moscow to its "rightful" place: the very hook it hung on, discovered during the restoration of the house. The miraculous icon makes the whole place alive and ready to be transformed. This space can expand and contract with sound, smell, warmth. Personal documents of the Bulgakov family shed light on the creative laboratory of the writer, and the main features of his style that emerge: penetrating lyrics and cosmic generalisations, drawn from a collage of vital experience.

Nikolka's corner room

Mikhail Bulgakov himself shared this room with his cousin Konstantin. Here, Nikolka and Larosik, his cousin from Zhytomir, would hide the precious box of guns in the narrow chink between the walls. You can still see this chink through the window ... and the box.

The room with its strange corner, like the prow of a ship, protrudes into space. Youthful dreams of travelling, faraway countries, dreams of a glittering career, first literary experiments... All these are here. The green light from Bulgakov's lamp illuminates the desktop – the launch pad for anticipating situations in life and future plots. Thoughts about the future... This is why, beside the chronologically precise succession of family objects up to 1919, there is a picture of Nikolay Bulgakov from 1929 – a grown up, world-renowned scientist, then participant in the French Resistance, prisoner of Compiègne. This, however, will only happen after Mikhail's death. For now, Mikhail is living in Kiev. The young, elegant doctor who graduated with honours from St Vladimir University is working as a volunteer in the Red Cross hospitals (it's the time of the First World War). Looking just like we see him in the famous photo, he would leave his native town forever. But his characters would return to his house and occupy "their" rooms in it. Nikolka would "inhabit" this room.

The dining room

This is a small and cosy room with its door and window opening onto a veranda, and through the veranda, onto a sloping yard. This yard is also a character in *The White Guard*.

Cream-coloured curtains give a warm tone to the dining area. The famous Saardam stove, that was bequeathed in the novel, is still here, "standing like a rock" greeting the visitor with the writing on its tiles. The tablecloth is "white and starched". It has the monogram of Varvara Mikhailovna's family – Pokrovsky (By the way, her mother's maiden name was Turbin!) There is a tall, narrow vase on the tablecloth (was not this the one described in *The White Guard*?) Bulgakov's crockery is in the sideboard. The biscuit dish served as a gift tray during Mikhail and Tatiana's wedding. Their wedding was celebrated at home in 1913. The holidays were joyful and bustling occasions, as is evident from the surviving picture of the Easter table spread of 1914. The family confessor, Alexander Glagolev, usually consecrated the table. In the hardship and hunger of the post-revolutionary period, the young people live in a commune, arranging evening gatherings, writing and theatrical improvisations. Mikhail was the instigator, organiser and author. Luckily, the earlier programmes, playbills and photographs survived from the first experience, in 1910, on the summer stage in Bucha village. Mikhail (Agarin) and his sister Vera (Neverova) were actors in G. Georgiev's troupe. But the hero of Bulgakov's first novel is not an actor yet, neither is he an author. He does not write, he reads the Bible, Pushkin, Dostoevsky... The characters of the great books come to Aleksey Turbin in his dreams, they co-exist and debate with each other. These odd dialogues from his feverish dreams and deathly visions turn out to be prophetic for the family, the house, the City and the World. High in the sky, stars from the dark gulf of dreams draw nearer to us, shining and shimmering with the light of Eternity.



The Bulgakov Literary Memorial Museum was founded in February 1989 as a branch of the State Museum of Kiev's History. The address is well known to anyone who appreciates the works of the Great Master. It was mentioned in *The White Guard* novel: 13 Alekseevsky Rise, Town (read: 13 Andreyevsky Descent, Kiev). Victor Nekrasov, whose essay "The Turbins' House" was published in *Novy Mir* magazine in 1967, took the first steps back towards this house. Since then this humble house is known as the Turbin Family House. It became a new legend of the ancient city.

Officially, Bulgakov "returned" to his house 70 years after he had left the city of his childhood, youth and first profession. However, unofficially, a group of people who dreamt of creating a writer's museum in his very own city, have, over 20 years, accumulated a collection of personal belongings, photographs and books, recorded recollections of former residents and friends, searched the archives, and taken pictures of "Bulgakov's places". Among them are: the Konchakovskys, owners of house № 13, Kiev engineer A.P. Konchakovsky, Kiev historians T. Rogozovskaya, A. Yershov, M. Kalnitsky, a scientist M. Petrovsky and many, many more. To commemorate the centenary of Bulgakov's birthday, the house was renovated (restoration project by I. Malakov), and the first International Bulgakov readings were held in it. Acquisition was conducted meticulously according to a scientific concept (of K. Peetoeva).

The current exposition of the Turbins' House (apt. 2 on the 1st floor) has been open since 1993, and the ground floor hosts temporary exhibitions. The legendary exhibition "What is truth?" – based on the "Faces of Jesus Christ in images" collection by Professor V. Exemplyarsky – opened here in 1998 and consisted of about 10 thousand images. The museum managed to find 1200 pieces from the collection that were considered lost... The main part of the museum, besides its extensive educational, scientific, consultative and publishing activities, is the exhibition. A. Kryzhopolsky, author of the artistic project, is laureate of the T. Shevchenko State Prize. During the museum's lifetime its collection has increased tenfold, and the displayed materials by 20 times. Today the collection accounts for 2800 exhibits, including up to 500 of Bulgakov's own. Many people take an active part in replenishing the collection: the writer's nieces, E. Zemskaya, I. Karum, V. Svetlaeva, I. Gooseva; a circle of descendants of Bulgakov's friends – Glagolevs, Konchakovskys, Ushakovs, Panfilovs. The Museum's Patrons include C. Bobrov and V. Dymenko.

Many Kievans and visitors to the city come to the Museum. Among them, VIPs on official visits to Ukraine, figures of stage and screen, literati, philologists, students and schoolchildren, readers and admirers of the works of the Master. General and specialised excursions are available in Russian, Ukrainian, English, German and French.

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