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*Valentin Rasputin and
Soviet Russian
Village Prose*

DAVID C. GILLESPIE

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VALENTIN RASPUTIN

and

SOVIET RUSSIAN VILLAGE PROSE

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PROSE

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PREFACE

This monograph attempts to analyse the work of Valentin Rasputin, and to place him within the modern Soviet literary and social context. It is with this in mind that I categorize him in the title as a 'village writer', though he himself regards such labelling as 'relative'.

Some of the ideas expressed are developed from two of my articles: 'Women from Town and Village in Recent Soviet Russian Prose', *Journal of Russian Studies*, 48 (1984), 36–43, and 'Childhood and the Adult World in the Writing of Valentin Rasputin', *Modern Language Review*, 80, 2 (April 1985), 387–95.

Transliteration throughout is according to the system employed in *MLR* and *SEER*. In the Notes and Bibliography Moscow and Leningrad are abbreviated to M and L respectively; the Bibliography also contains details of the publishers as well as place of publication of Soviet books.

Much of the work for this monograph was carried out in the various libraries of Moscow and Leningrad, and I should like to thank (for their active support) in particular G. A. Tsvetov and A. P. Gerasimenko of Leningrad and Moscow universities respectively. I would also like to thank Robert Porter of the University of Bristol for checking parts of the manuscript so thoroughly, and Professor Arnold McMillin for his constant advice and encouragement. All views expressed in the course of this monograph are, of course, my own, and do not reflect on those people who have helped me through the years.

It is to my continuing chagrin that I have never met Rasputin, despite strenuous efforts to do so. I hope that this anomaly does not detract from the validity of my interpretation of his work as a whole.

CHAPTER I

THE LITERARY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Valentin Rasputin is regarded both in the Soviet Union and abroad as a writer with a keen interest in the social and psychological drama of crisis and change. He is one of the foremost literary figures in the Soviet Union, and, still relatively young, offers much for the future. This is especially so given his recent return to literary production following a prolonged silence and serious injury. Indeed, the time would seem right for an appraisal of his literary career to date, the four major *povesti* and handful of short stories on which his almost universal acclaim is based. (Rasputin is not a prolific writer; in 1984 Molodaya gvardiya managed to issue his major fiction, written over twenty years, in two slim volumes.)¹ It is not enough merely to give an outline, however detailed, of Rasputin's *œuvre*. As a writer with many thematic links and affinities with the 'village prose' movement in modern Soviet Russian literature, he must be viewed not in isolation, but as a representative, and perhaps even the best, of the social and cultural conscience of his generation. (Here I do not take into account those of his peers who have emigrated or been forced out of Russia.) Indeed, the questions broached in Rasputin's fiction transcend national boundaries, as I shall hope to show in the course of this monograph.

Enough has been said in the West of village prose to establish that the 'rediscovery of the Russian peasant' and the 'search for new values' indicate a rejection of the political and the rational, of the teleological vision of human progress, and offer an alternative set of values based on emotional experience, man's spiritual links with the natural world, and the culture and traditions formed thereby. Village prose, in this respect, reflects the tradition of 'man and nature' in classical, pre-revolutionary Russian literature. The village as the 'soul' of Russia is a strong theme in the work of many nineteenth-century Russian writers, such as Pushkin, Gogol', Turgenev, Leskov, Gleb Uspensky, Chekhov, and others. Tolstoy's question 'How should men live?' is invariably accompanied by a return to rural roots and a human type embodying natural, elemental wisdom and morality. It is not hard here to see nature as an Eden inhabited by man of childlike spiritual purity and beauty. Indeed, Lermontov was quick to point to this preoccupation in *Geroy nashego vremeni* ('A Hero of our Time') when the narrator sentimentally reflects on the majesty of the Caucasus:

As we are removed from society and move closer to the natural world, we involuntarily become children: everything we have gained in life falls away, and the soul reverts to its previous, and no doubt future, state.²

The nineteenth-century Slavophiles greatly influenced Gogol' and Dostoyevsky, viewing the peasant as inherently religious, unsullied by modern, Western-inspired thought, and their rejection of industrialism finds echoes, as we shall see, in the nationalist leanings of some of the *derevenshchiki* and their supporters. The Russian populists, adapting the ideas of the Slavophiles to their own political ideals, saw the elemental Russian peasant and the collective rural community as ready-made prototypes for a socialist society. In short, the Russian peasant occupied a central place in the social and artistic debates of the nineteenth century.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a school of writers, the best representatives of which were the poets Klyuyev and Yesenin, who resisted the tide of industrial progress by praising and idealizing the Russian man of the soil and the village. With the October Revolution, and especially with the establishment of a planned economy and the increased industrialization drive, the figure of the peasant as a repository of moral absolutes and spiritual dignity became increasingly superseded by that of the politically alert revolutionary, a man intent on doing away with the old order and establishing the new. The country had to be modernized, and the backward peasant made literate and civilized. The *muzhik* was to be guided by the Party in the socialist transformation of the countryside, as exemplified in such works as Sholokhov's *Podnyataya tselina* ('Virgin Soil Uplifted', 1932–60), and Fyodor Panfyorov's *Bruski* (1928–37). 'Positive' heroes in the early years of Soviet literature, whether they lived in the countryside or the town, were primarily political functionaries, devoted to the realization of a political goal, and without the self-doubt, the questioning, and the alienation from a society in flux that are features of West European literature at this time. With the end of the War and victory over fascism, the huge effort and sacrifices of the Soviet people were sanctified by the country's leaders, although the post-war period saw much falsification and idealization in literature. Nowhere was this more evident than in works dealing with the collectivized village, with physical conditions distorted to hide the perilous state of agriculture under Stalin. This 'varnishing of reality' reached its apogee in Semyon Babayevsky's now notorious *Kavaler zolotoy zvezdy* ('Knight of the Golden Star', 1947).

Even before the death of Stalin, however, writers were able to breathe more freely, and the successive 'Thaws' which began in 1952 and which were brought to an end in 1957 allowed the re-emergence of broadly humanist values, and a less militant approach to life.³ The 'youth prose' of the late 1950s and early 1960s had its roots in the social and moral enquiry of this time. The writers of 'youth prose' were themselves young, and they expressed the revolt of the new

generation against that of their fathers, which had supported or had acquiesced in Stalinism. (The rise of youth culture in the West at this time was also greatly admired by these writers.) Theirs was not a political protest, merely a questioning of values and a redefinition of the role of the individual in history. However, in Soviet conditions the two are closely linked, for writers of 'youth prose' such as Aksyonov, Gladilin, Anatoly Kuznetsov, and Voynovich subsequently became disillusioned with the capacity of Soviet society for self-regeneration, and emigrated to the West.⁴

De-Stalinization of society in the early 1960s led to a broad cultural reassessment, and national consciousness, seeking revitalization, turned inwards, and away from international and universal problems. Urbanization, and, from the 1950s onwards, the spread of higher education, had uprooted millions from their rural roots, and communities were also displaced and families separated as a result of collectivization, dekulakization, famine, and war. Industrialization had irretrievably altered the basis of economic and social relations. The 1960s offered the Soviet people time to take stock and analyse the great changes which had taken place and which had moulded their lives, and in the cultural arena a major issue was the modern relationship between the city and the countryside.

The city and the village represent two poles of Soviet society and Soviet ideological thinking. On the one hand the city symbolizes the future; the industrial proletariat is seen as the natural ally of the Party in its programme of Communist construction. The village, on the other hand, provides a constant reminder of Russia's past, the home of the nation's traditions, folklore, and spirituality. The 'city' theme in classical Russian literature — the St Petersburg of Gogol' and Dostoyevsky — shows the impersonal urban conglomerate as a dehumanizing force, and today too, as in the nineteenth century, many writers see the city as morally inferior to the village. It is not surprising, then, that at this decisive stage in Russian history — the economic shift from agriculture and the countryside to industry and the factory — more attention was paid to the disappearing village community, the man of the soil, and his values. Indeed, in the search for absolutes in Soviet society after Stalin, the peasant, unsullied by modern industrial life, was accorded more respect in literature than at any other time since before the Revolution. With the erosion of political determinism in much Soviet literature, the 'little man' had made a comeback in Russia.⁵

With the emergence of 'ordinary' human characters in the past two decades, official Soviet literature, for all its tendentiousness, has perhaps never been so honest in looking at the problems faced by society. This is true not only of village prose, but also of so-called urban prose and works dealing with the War, the other two most significant areas of literary investigation of the 1960s and 1970s. Although socialist realism and the Writers' Union still enforce on writers and artists the Zhdanovist interpretation of reality and historical forces,

the very fact of an issue being raised can be of more interest and significance than its necessarily hidebound resolution. So, apart from the debunking of the great Soviet myth by the likes of Solzhenitsyn, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Amal'rik, and Zinov'yev, Soviet writers themselves have offered considerable insight into the turbulent undercurrents beneath the seemingly calm surface of Soviet society, and particularly into the relationship between the two extremes, town and village.

It suits the purpose of this monograph to give some background for an understanding of the scale of Soviet social change over the past two decades. Rapid urbanization, of course, took place in the USSR in the Stalinist industrialization drive, so that whereas in 1917 the urban population of Russia was 18% of the whole population, by 1959 48% of the population of the USSR lived in towns and cities. By 1970 this figure was 56%.⁶ Between 1926 and 1970, 109.7 million people joined the urban population. Interestingly, the national village population has not suffered accordingly, mainly because of the natural rate of population increase in the countryside. Between 1959 and 1970, the rural population fell by only 3.1 million, though from 1970 to 1979 it fell by 6.9 million.⁷ It has, moreover, fallen in only six republics of the USSR, and has risen in the Central Asian republics and Transcaucasia, as well as in some non-Russian autonomous areas of the RSFSR. The RSFSR and the Ukraine registered the biggest drops, 12% and 5.6% respectively between 1959 and 1970. The sharpest drop occurred in the non-black-earth regions of Central and North-West Russia, which lost 25% or more of their rural population in these years.⁸ Basile Kerblay notes that the rural exodus claims 60% of the massive increase in the urban population of the whole country between 1926 and 1970, and between 1959 and 1970 the numbers of people working in agriculture in the Soviet Union fell by 25%.⁹

It is the young who have largely left the village (especially with the spread of higher education), a natural phenomenon in any developing country. Between 1959 and 1970 the number of people between the ages of 20 and 24 in the rural population of the RSFSR fell by almost 50%, that of those between 25 and 29 by more than 50%, and the number of those between 30 and 34 by about 20%. The Russian village is now, by and large, the domain of the old and the infirm.¹⁰

Soviet literature's driving force remains works which exalt the political cause and trumpet the achievements of socialist construction, nowhere more evident or more highly charged than in descriptions of the sufferings of the Soviet people in the last War (especially in the weighty tomes of Ivan Stadnyuk and Aleksandr Chakovsky). Its real merit in the last two decades, however, stems from the attention paid to social tensions, dramas of personal relationships, and moral dilemma. All these are viewed in the context of social change. In

socialist realist terms, the focus is on social processes and relations at a given historical moment; we are shown time on the move as it affects the destinies and fortunes of literary characters.

The role and status of professional women is a favourite theme of I. Grekova (especially 'Khozyayka gostinitsy' ('The Hotel Proprietress', 1976) and 'Vdoviy parokhod' ('Ship of Widows', 1981)), and Natal'ya Baranskaya ('Nedelya kak nedelya' ('A Week Like Any Other', 1969)). The emotional and personal experiences of women in the apparently masculine ethos of the modern Soviet city are also points of sympathetic focus in these works, as well as in works by Irina Velembovskaya ('Sladkaya zhenshchina' ('A Sweet Woman', 1973)), Daniil Granin ('Dozhd' v chuzhom gorode' ('Rain in a Strange Town', 1973)), and Sergey Zalygin ('Yuzhno-amerikanskiy variant' ('The South American Variant', 1973)). The difficulties and pressures faced by industrial managers in achieving centrally planned targets form the basis of Yury Skop's *Tekhnika bezopasnosti* ('Safety Devices', 1977). Class consciousness among the Soviet élite is ridiculed in Viktor Rozov's 'Gnezdo glukharya' ('The Nest of the Wood-Grouse', 1978), a play reminiscent of some early Thaw works with its denunciation of cynical careerism and its pivotal fathers-and-sons conflict. Crime and the black economy have been graphically portrayed in Lazar' Karelin's *Zmeyelov* ('The Snake-Catcher', 1982). Marital problems and the high divorce rate among urban families are critically examined in Vasily Belov's cycle of stories *Vospitaniye po doktoru Spoku* ('Bringing Up Children according to Dr Spock', 1974–79), which also looks at drunkenness in the home and at work. Academic life, still a popular subject in the West thirty years after *Lucky Jim*, is the subject of Grekova's warm and compassionate 'Kafedra' ('The Academic Department', 1978) and Venyamin Kaverin's starker 'Dvukh-chasovaya progulka' ('A Two-Hour Stroll', 1978). Most outspoken of all these works is Boris Mozhayev's 'Poltora kvadratnykh metra' ('One and a Half Square Metres', 1982), apparently based on real events, which shows the plight of an individual, an invalid at that, who lives in a distant provincial town and who is harrassed by the corrupt local police and Party bureaucracy, and denounced in the no less corrupt press.¹¹

None of these works, it must be stressed, suggests dissatisfaction with the existing political order. They simply reflect the topical issues of the day, and, because they have appeared in print, presumably have the blessing of the Party. They provide us above all with socio-political insights, and do not, in effect, go beyond the immediate context. But there is also a historical inquiry going on, which penetrates to all aspects of Soviet society and of which village prose is an integral part. Restoring the nation's memory — *pamyat'* — is in fact the primary concern of Russian writers of all persuasions, both inside and outside the Soviet Union (indeed, the Russian word forms the name of a new and well-received *samizdat* journal which sets itself exactly this task). Russian

writers, both official and unofficial, are trying, in their very different ways, to re-establish Russia's national identity after decades of neglect.

Granin's *Kartina* ('The Picture', 1980) voices anxiety at urban renewal which destroys the heritage of the past. The need to come to terms with the more recent past lies behind two recent novels, Aleksandr Kron's *Bessonitsa* ('Insomnia', 1977) and Yury Trifonov's *Dom na naberezhnoy* ('The House on the Embankment', 1976), which both examine the destructive effects of Stalinism on academic institutions. *Pamyat'* is at its most emotive, naturally enough, in works dealing with the War, in accordance with the official slogan 'No-one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten'. As long as we do not forget the War and the cruelties, hardships, and casualties we endured, say Soviet spokesmen, then we ensure that such horrors will not be repeated. (Notably, however, the Stalinist terror and purges, which wrought as much, if not more, misery throughout the country, are officially regarded as having been adequately re-evaluated by the Party and now best forgotten as a past aberration.) Vasil' Bykov's powerful war stories are exceptional, raising moral and ethical issues which have a particular resonance in Soviet society today, by showing that cowardice, betrayal, and deceit are as much part of the Soviet present as of the past.¹²

Trifonov's other major works of the 1970s revolve around a search for truth and justice in the historical past, a desire to find out what lies hidden beneath decades of secrecy and suppression.¹³ The foundations and very moral legitimacy of the collectivization of agriculture in the late 1920s and early 1930s are questioned in outspoken (though, or perhaps hence, as yet incomplete) novels by Belov (*Kanuny* ('Eves', 1972-)) and Mozhayev (*Muzhiki i baby* ('Rural Folk', 1976-)).¹⁴

The issue of collectivization brings into focus village prose, where past and present are inseparably linked and where today's social and historical debate in the USSR is, perhaps, at its most pointed.

Village prose is generally considered to have developed from Valentin Ovechkin's essays on the serious economic and cultural deficiencies of the collectivized village, published in the early 1950s. His example was followed by the *ocherkisty* of the mid-1950s, among whose most famous representatives are Zalygin, Vladimir Tendryakov, Gavriil Troyepol'sky, and Yefim Dorosh.¹⁵ From these publicistic beginnings village prose in the 1960s and 1970s acquired, in the works of Belov, Mozhayev, Fyodor Abramov, Viktor Astaf'yev, Yevgeny Nosov, Viktor Likhonosov, Vladimir Lichutin, and many others, not only value as a social chronicle, but also genuine artistic merit.

However, the observations of Amal'rik on the deep psychological consequences of the 'socialist transformation of the countryside' offer a useful starting point:

The 'proletarianization' of the countryside has created an 'alien class' — neither peasant nor working class. They have the dual psychology of the owners of tiny homesteads and of farm hands working on gigantic and anonymous farms. How this class views itself, and what it wants, is known, I think, to nobody. Furthermore, the mass exodus of peasants to the city has created a new type of city dweller: a person who has broken with his old environment, way of life, and culture, and who is finding it very difficult to discover his place in his new environment and feels ill at ease in it. He is both frightened and aggressive. He no longer has any idea of what level of society he belongs.¹⁶

Village prose tells of the individual trapped in history, caught in a changing environment when the rural past gives way to the machine age and the countryside becomes more mechanized. A vivid and dramatic victim of historical progress in its broadest sense is Vasily Shukshin's Yegor Prokudin (*Kalina krasnaya* ('Snowball Berry Red', 1973)). Separated from his family during collectivization when still a boy, he has spent his adult life among criminals and in and out of prison camps. When the narrative opens he is released from prison and decides to make a new beginning in life, breaking with his criminal past and working on a collective farm. His former gang catch up with him, however, and kill him. Prokudin's life is a tragedy, moulded and destroyed by the cataclysmic times he has lived through. The enormous success in the USSR of the film, with Shukshin himself directing and playing the part of Prokudin, testifies to the deeply-rooted emotional appeal Prokudin's fate has for a vast section of the Soviet population.¹⁷

Soviet sociologists have echoed, albeit in veiled terms, Amal'rik's analysis of society when looking at the psychological and spiritual make-up of the newly-urbanized Soviet citizen. The still rapid pace of urbanization has brought into existence the 'marginal personality' (*promezhutochnaya lichnost'*), thus defined by the prominent demographer V. I. Perevedentsev:

A person is torn from one social environment and does not have adequate time to enter another. This is a difficult period in a person's life and is usually accompanied by a certain amount of demoralization.¹⁸

Part of this same social drama are the characters of some of Shukshin's popular shorter fiction (Kol'ka in 'Zhena muzha v Parizh provozhala' ('A Wife Saw Her Husband off to Paris', 1971)), and Ivan in 'V profil' i anfas' ('In Profile and Full Face', 1967)), Velemboskaya's Anna, in 'Sladkaya zhenshchina', and Abramov's Al'ka, in his story of the same name (1971). All these characters are removed from their rural roots and are lost and bewildered when trying to adjust to urban mores. They attempt to struggle against an impersonal environment or against destructive personal relationships, but they never achieve integration or happiness.¹⁹

On these social and psychological foundations village prose has developed three main strands: historical, lyrical, and ecological.²⁰ The historical strand is

evident in works about collectivization (such as Zalygin's *Na Irtysh'e* ('On the Irtysh', 1964)), but writers have travelled further afield in their search for the roots of the national character. Zalygin, for example, has written three novels on the Revolution and Civil War periods as experienced in the countryside (*Solyonaya Pad'* ('Salt Valley', 1967), *Kommissiya* ('The Commission', 1975), and *Posle buri* ('After the Storm', 1982)), and Shukshin goes back to the eighteenth-century peasant revolts led by Stepan Razin in his novel *Ya prishol dat' vam volyu* ('I Have Come to Give You Freedom', 1971). Fyodor Abramov traces the history of the Soviet village from the war years to the present in his series of four novels under the general title *Brat'ya i syostry* ('Brothers and Sisters', 1959–78). His epic history of the village of Pekashino in the Russian North shows us in harsh and unrelenting images the immense difficulties and hardships of the War and post-war years, and its economic and spiritual development to the present, relatively prosperous, day. Abramov was also the author of the 1954 article 'Lyudi kolkhoznoy derevni i poslevoynennaya literatura', published in *Novyy mir*, which attacked the 'varnishing' of rural reality in several highly regarded works of post-war Soviet kolkhoz fiction (most notably in Babayevsky's *Kavaler zolotoy zvezdy*), and called for greater realism and authenticity in describing rural life and the lot of the agricultural worker. His article was subsequently severely criticized by the Party and contributed to the dismissal of Tvardovsky as editor later that year.²¹

The ecological aspect of village prose is traced by Soviet commentators to the publication in 1953 of Leonid Leonov's novel *Russkiy les* ('The Russian Forest'). Authors today lament not only destruction of the natural environment (a recent *Times* leader sharply criticized 'the unprecedented damage done to one sixth of the earth's surface in sixty years of Soviet rule'²² — though no Soviet writer would publicly acknowledge this, of course), and also call for the conservation of ancient buildings and monuments (including churches), as well as for wider study of icons, church music, and ecclesiastical literature and history. Vladimir Soloukhin and Vasily Belov have been particularly vociferous in their defence of the historical, cultural, and even religious heritage (Soloukhin's 'Pis'ma iz Russkogo muzeya' ('Letters from the Russian Museum', 1966) and 'Chornyye doski' ('Black Boards', 1969), and Belov's series of 'essays on folk aesthetics', *Lad* ('Harmony', 1979–81)).²³

One work which explores disquietingly Soviet man's morality through his attitude to the natural world, and in particular the wildlife of Siberia, is Boris Vasil'yev's 'Ne strelyayte v belykh lebedey' ('Don't Shoot the White Swans', 1973). Yegor, the central character, is killed by poachers who destroy the swans he has brought to the local lake. The allegory is clear: those who plunder nature for their own selfish purposes care nothing for human life. An important work, and one where this allegory is further developed, is Astaf'yev's *Tsar'-ryba* ('The King Fish', 1976), where the actions of poachers who exploit the

Siberian taiga purely for commercial profit are equated with the policies of the State, which sponsors industrialization and spoliation of the natural environment on a massive scale, as embodied in the final picture of man's conquest of nature: a hydro-electric station triumphantly straddles the Yenisey, a once-great river now tamed and subdued. Astaf'yev's work is permeated with a sense of spiritual unease at man's ravages that is not far from a Christian appeal to repentance and humility.²⁴ Significantly, the areas of Russia most frequently visited by the village writers, and not just the 'ecologists', are the North-West of European Russia (Vologda and Arkhangel'sk regions) and Siberia. These are places where old peasant traditions and the natural world had remained relatively undisturbed until the 1960s, and where modern technology had only a minor foothold. Belov, Abramov, and Lichutin write about the Russian North; Siberia is the concern of Zalygin, Astaf'yev, and, of course, Rasputin.

The lyrical strain of village prose is the least tied to publicistic and tendentious concerns, and also has the greater artistic force. In Belov's *Privychnoye delo* ('That's How It Is', 1966), man, child, and nature are united, as in the following passage:

Ivan Afrikanovich wandered for some time over the frozen, frost-encrusted fields. His legs carried him of their own accord, he ceased to be aware of himself, and merged with the snow and the sun, with the blue and desperately distant sky, and with all the sounds and smells of eternal spring.

The sun was shining, it was icy cold, and the world stretched far away. In the distance smoke was calmly rising from the village chimneys, cocks were crowing, black grouse were voicing their grumbles, and the white snow, packed down with a coating of frost, sparkled. Ivan Afrikanovich walked on and on, crunching the snowy crust, and for him time ceased to move. He thought of nothing, just like his little child lying smiling in his cradle, for whom the difference between sleeping and waking did not yet exist.

And for both of them at that moment there was neither an end nor a beginning.²⁵

Critics, both Soviet and Western, have been quick to notice in the lyricism of the *derevenshchiki* a continuation of the evocative rural landscapes and portraits of resilient and hard-working peasants that are a feature of classical Russian literature. These writers rejoice in nature and the folk traditions and crafts of the peasantry which they know at first-hand, admiring the simplicity and natural rhythms of peasant labour. They view with anguish the shift from the countryside and the erosion of the simple but profound values of the man of the soil. They fear that the very soul of Russia is being taken away in the modern world, and their tone is elegiac and mournful, as in the short story 'Bobrishnyy ugor' ('Bobrishnyy Hill', 1967), again by Belov:

The pine trees of Bobrishnyy ugor rustled quietly behind us as we made our way back along the forest road. . . . It is probably quiet there now, the snow will be down, the river packed with ice, the flowers in the vase long since dead, the wind whistling in the cold stove. The cottage waits for the spring, but will never see it.

And I belatedly say thank you. Thank you for your friendship, the last of our rural hideaways: we see, as we must, that we cannot go back there, we see that this is the judgment of irreversible time.²⁶

Theirs is more than a lament for the passing of a way of life, however. It is also a yearning for stability in a world of flux and change, a search for roots and innocence. The past is often used as a buffer against the uncomfortable present, as in the following passage from Astaf'yev's elegiac 'Oda russkomu ogorodu' ('Ode to the Russian Kitchen Garden', 1972):

Oh, memory, perform another miracle and relieve my soul of its anxiety and of that dull weariness that brings out my sullenness and the poisonous sweetness of solitude. And, do you hear, resurrect in me the boy, let me soothe and cleanse myself beside him. I will entreat you, if need be, as an atheist, just as I did when, blinded and deafened by war, I prayed to be lifted from the depths of deadly torment, I prayed for something, anything, in my murky, stultified core. And I remembered what it was they tried to kill in me, and I brought the boy back to life, and the void was again filled with sounds, colours, and smells.²⁷

If many in the USSR today look back to Stalin's rule as a time when society was well ordered and everyone knew their place, so, too, the village writers see in the tightly-knit rural community 'a symbolic panacea for the evils of modern life, and especially the greatest evil of all: alienation'.²⁸ The juxtaposition of those who would like to see a return to the austerity (and, presumably, the terror) of Stalinism on the one hand and the *derevenshchiki* on the other is not fortuitous: both groups are guided by conservatism and chauvinism in their cultural tastes and political ideals, and it is significant that, unlike their more adventurous and questioning fellow-writers of the 'youth prose' movement, none of them have forsaken their native land. Village prose, like neo-Stalinism, is not only a social document, but also an emotional indicator.²⁹

It is therefore somewhat ironic that the village writers are fierce realists when describing the sufferings of the village during the War and immediately after it, and at the same time idealize the peasant. In fact, the idealization of character is a logical consequence of the realistic, almost naturalistic depiction of circumstance. In Belov's *Privychnoye delo* and *Plotnitskiye rasskazy*, as well as many of his short stories, we encounter a peasant who passively endures hardship and suffering, yet holds no malice, and who is saintlike in his acceptance of fate. His is a childlike spiritual innocence. A similar figure recurs in many works of village prose, and is usually of the older generation (Belov's Ivan Afrikanovich is a notable exception), such as Nosov's Savonya ('I uplyvayut parokhody, i ostayutsya berega . . .') ('And the Steamers Depart, and the Riverbanks Remain', 1970) and, most significant of all, Solzhenitsyn's Matryona in the short story 'Matryonin dvor' ('Matryona's Home', 1963), a work acknowledged in the West as having given village prose its focus, its direction, and its soul. All of these characters are explicitly associated with Christianity and achieve saintliness through suffering.³⁰

Of a similar cast are the rugged and unbowed peasants who have not suffered the vicissitudes of fate passively. They embody the age-old peasant virtues of resourcefulness, fortitude in the face of adversity, and great spiritual resilience. Among them are Mozhayev's Fyodor Kuz'kin ('Iz zhizni Fyodora Kuz'kina' ('From the Life of Fyodor Kuz'kin', 1966)), Abramov's Pelageya ('Pelageya', 1969), and Astaf'yev's Katerina Petrovna (*Posledniy poklon* ('The Last Bow', 1968–78)).³¹ They, too, are intuitively aware of their place in the natural world, their lives and morality are conditioned by it, and they are consistently associated with natural images and concepts. They fight against life's knocks, and are constantly pitted against hostile circumstances or forces. Abramov, at the Sixth Writers' Conference in 1976, explained why these staunch types were of interest to writers:

And so today, when the old village is living out its last days, we look with particular rapt attention at the type of person created by it, we look at our fathers and our mothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers . . . The extensive discussion in our literature about people of the preceding generations is an attempt to appreciate and retain their moral experience, the moral potential, the moral forces, that brought Russia back from the brink during its gravest ordeals.³²

By far the most successful of the village writers, in terms of popular appeal, has been Vasily Shukshin (although he straddles a number of categories, writing, as has been noted, historical novels and devoting many of his short stories to depictions of urban life). Apart from Prokudin and the other characters so far mentioned, his short stories contain a gallery of types, most of whom, like Shukshin himself, belong to neither town nor village and whom Perevedentsev would categorize as 'marginal'. These characters have an urgency and a zest for life which removes them from the mainstream of quintessential peasant types. Many of them are in spiritual turmoil, they crave for a 'festival of the soul' (*prazdnik dushi*). They are dreamers and idealists frustrated, and almost always defeated, by prosaic reality. They can commit acts which are pointless, cruel, or stupid ('Styopka' (1964), 'Okhota zhit'' ('I Want to Live', 1966), 'Svatovstvo' ('Matchmaking', 1970)), 'Srezal' ('Cut Him Short', 1970)), or are themselves the innocent victims of an arbitrary fate ('Obida' ('The Insult', 1971)). They are regarded as foolish even by their loved ones because their perception of the world and human relationships is fundamentally different from accepted norms ('Chudik' ('The Crank', 1967)). Through the comic, the surreal, and the tragic Shukshin expressed the yearning of the Russian soul for peace and justice, its spirituality, and its violence and self-destructiveness. He created a composite picture of the Russian character as it has evolved over decades, indeed centuries, of suffering and oppression.³³

This is the context for the present discussion of the work of Valentin Rasputin. His themes are those of the village writers: a return to childhood and the past, poignant observation of the changing environment, lyrical

appreciation of the beauty of nature, and a questioning of the values of the modern world. Rasputin's prose revolves around a crisis in which relationships are put to the severest test, and ideals have to face actuality. His works embrace all of Soviet reality: the town-village dichotomy, the War and its after-effects, Russian history, social and personal relationships, fears for the future. Indeed, Rasputin offers a particular picture of Soviet and Russian historical evolution as experienced by the ordinary man (or, more often, woman), and in effect redefines the relationship between the individual and his society, the artist and reality.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY APPRENTICESHIP

Valentin Grigor'yevich Rasputin was born of peasant stock on 15 March 1937 in Ust'-Uda, a regional capital on the banks of the Angara river, about half-way between Irkutsk and Bratsk. Here he spent his early childhood, and moved to Irkutsk for school and university studies, and where he lives to this day. He, like the writers of 'youth prose', is of the Soviet middle generation: too young to fight in the War, their youth coincided with the Thaw and de-Stalinization. However, unlike them, he does not seem to have been fired by the new optimism of that time. Indeed, the hardships of a wartime childhood are of more lasting value as a period of unfettered freedom in the natural world:

My childhood coincided with the War and lean post-war years . . . It was a hard, but, as I realise now, a happy one. Where I grew up children had complete freedom in their day-to-day lives. We had only just learned to walk when we would totter down to the river on our spindly little legs and cast in our fishing lines. Not yet firm in body we would be drawn to the taiga, which began right outside our village, to collect berries and mushrooms. At an early age we would take up the oars and row out to the islands to watch the hay-making, and then be off into the forest again. Most of our joys and pursuits were bound up with the river and the taiga.¹

Rasputin, curiously, does not return to his wartime childhood in any great detail, apart from in two short stories: 'My s Dimkoy' ('Dimka and Me') and the much later 'Uroki frantsuzskogo' ('French Lessons'), both of which are tinged with sadness. However, the dominant and contrasting images in his later work of the 1970s are those of land and water, and a major theme of his writing as a whole is reminiscent of the Romantic preoccupation with what the individual takes with him from childhood into the adult world.

The Thaw saw considerable publication of foreign and Western literature in the Soviet Union, and Rasputin admits that as a student he was an avid reader of Faulkner.² Before completing his studies he did some work on an Irkutsk youth newspaper (*Sovetskaya molodyozh'*), and the milieu in which he found himself served as an introduction to the world of literary and social debate in the late 1950s. On graduating in 1959 he worked in television journalism before moving to an Irkutsk newspaper and then to Krasnoyarsk. It was as a journalist that he met and worked with the other future literary figures of his generation such as Aleksandr Vampilov and Vyacheslav Shugayev. His assignments

included reporting on the Abakan-Tayshet railway project and the construction of the Krasnoyarsk hydro-electric station. He also paid visits to the small mountain people of Tofalariya in the Sayany mountain range. These assignments were to form the basis of his first documentary books, and they still have profound echoes in his work two decades later.

As early as the beginning of the 1960s Rasputin was writing fiction. His first short stories appeared in Irkutsk in 1961, and the next few years saw his increasing though still modest output appearing at regular intervals, first in Siberian and then in national periodicals. In 1965 he attended a literary seminar in Chita, where he came under the supervision of Vladimir Chivilikhin, a Soviet writer of the older generation to whose advice and encouragement he still feels a strong debt. Chivilikhin was impressed with the short stories Rasputin brought to the seminar, and he recommended that the young writer be accepted into the Writers' Union the same year, a rare honour, since normally a writer needs to have at least one book published before becoming a member of the Union. In 1966 Rasputin's first two books appeared, one published in Irkutsk, the other in Krasnoyarsk, both based on his experiences as a journalist in Siberia. He became a full-time writer in 1967 with the success of his first long prose work *Den'gi dlya Marii* ('Money for Maria'). The same year saw his first book of fiction published in Krasnoyarsk — a collection of his short stories of the 1960s.

A year later *Den'gi dlya Marii* appeared in book form in Moscow, along with the best of his early short stories, and in 1969 Rasputin published 'Nechayan-nyye khlopoty' ('Unexpected Troubles'), co-authored with Vyacheslav Shugayev. This story was the result of a trip both writers made when still journalists to the Ust'-Ilim man-made 'sea', a reservoir forming part of the Bratsk hydro-electric complex. In 1970 *Posledniy srok* ('Time Running Out'), which he still considers his major work, appeared, marking the beginning of his mature period. This was followed in 1972 by 'Vniz po techeniyu' ('Downstream'), whose title soon changed to 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu' ('Downstream, Upstream') when it appeared in book editions. 1974 saw the appearance of *Zhivi i pomni* ('Live and Remember'), for which Rasputin was in 1977 awarded a USSR State Prize, and 1976 saw the publication of the last of his four *povesti*, for which he has become famous, *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy* ('Farewell to Matyora'). The controversial subject-matter of this latter work has made it the focus of much discussion both in the Soviet Union and abroad to this day. Rasputin seemed to indicate a change of direction in the short stories he published in 1982, but his latest *povest'*, 'Pozhar', published in mid-1985, suggests that he has not yet exhausted the themes and motifs of his earlier work. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Rasputin has lent his pen more to publicistic statements on those ecological, cultural, and historical issues which reflect the concerns of his fiction.³

Rasputin's major themes can be discerned in the very infancy of his literary career. His first published short story, 'Ya zabył sprosit' u Lyoshki' ('I Forgot to Ask Lyoshka'), is written in the spirit of much Thaw literature, with its attack on bureaucratic narrowness and its call to broadly 'humanist' values. Lyoshka is a young, idealistic *komsomolets* helping lay a railway track in Siberia, a willing participant in the construction of Communism. Clearing a path for the railway through a forest, he is injured in a tree-felling accident and needs urgent hospital treatment. The nearest hospital is fifty kilometres away, but the foreman in charge of the operation refuses to release the only tractor available, and his two friends (one of whom is the narrator, from whose viewpoint events are related) have to carry him all the way on a makeshift stretcher. Lyoshka dies as they approach the town. The foreman's blind adherence to industrial priorities turns an accident into a tragedy, and the question is thus implicit: can Communism be achieved if people who control the lives and destinies of others lose sight of its human meaning? In the words of the adolescent narrator: 'Above all I wanted to know if in Communism people will remember Lyosha, who was in this world a little more than seventeen years and spent a mere two and a half months trying to build it.'⁴ The clash of the political and the personal is central to Rasputin's most important later fiction, and, indeed, is a factor determining the artistic merit of his work as a whole.

A strikingly similar tale from the same period is Vladimir Tendryakov's 'Ukhaby' ('Potholes'), published in the troublesome year of 1956, a year of literary ferment and reaction in the Soviet Union and, indeed, elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In this work, too, a young man is injured in an accident and needs urgent medical treatment. The head of the local machine and tractor station (MTS) refuses to release a vehicle to convey the man to the nearest hospital, and the injured man eventually dies. Again, moral atrophy, the human consequence of Stalinism, is decried as incompatible with the post-Stalin march toward Communism, and morality is seen as not being tied to production norms and class conflict.⁵

In his first work of fiction Rasputin is clearly influenced by the anti-Stalinist mood of the time. In the stories that follow he shows the influence of another climate, that of the linguistic and stylistic experimentation that characterized the 'youth prose' of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

'Vstrecha' ('A Meeting'), for all its seeming mawkishness, is a bold attempt by a young author to handle complex adult emotions. At first glance the story relates a banal episode in the lives of two former sweethearts who meet again quite by chance. Anna and Nikolay are now middle-aged, and see each other for the first time in twenty years when they both attend an agricultural conference. Nikolay is happily married, and Anna, having been married twice, now lives alone. She has accepted her fate stoically and without outward resentment. Her first husband was Ivan, a friend of Nikolay's, and it was for

him that she turned down Nikolay's offer of marriage. He was killed during the War. Her second husband was an invalid who became a violent drunkard, and she left him. Anna's personal life is a sad one for which only fate itself is to blame.

As the two celebrate their reunion in Nikolay's hotel room with a couple of bottles of wine, Nikolay's sense of injury resurfaces, and, inspired by alcohol, he makes a bold attempt at seduction. When spurned, he proceeds to tell her that Ivan had been no saint when they served together in the Army, and had been with other women, a fact of which Anna had been ignorant. She breaks down in tears and he immediately regrets his crassness. The damage has been done, however, and Nikolay has taken away what little past Anna had to treasure, the only happiness in her life. The story demonstrates Rasputin's ability to convey fine nuances of feeling and emotion, and to express them in short, compact snatches of dialogue. The end of the story shows his understanding of the unpredictability of human relationships: Nikolay accompanies Anna back to her hotel, and they link hands in tacit recognition that their memories of a past love are still alive.

Io, in 'Rudol'fio', is sixteen years old when she becomes friendly with Rudol'f, a married man almost twice her age. He regards their attachment as nothing more than amusing and casual, although her feeling for him, however absurd and childish, is genuine. The relationship is brought abruptly to an end by Rudol'f, who begins to feel threatened by her earnestness. Io is hurt and bewildered by her first experience of adult life. The story is sober and unsentimental, told mainly in dialogue and short, broken phrases and sentences. It is an account of the clash of youthful idealism and adult pragmatism, although Io does not suffer as tragically as Lyoshka, the other victim of an uncaring, impersonal world.

The most successful of Rasputin's short stories of the 1960s is 'Vasily i Vasilisa' ('Vasily and Vasilisa'), whose unity and sparseness foreshadow Rasputin's major works of the 1970s. It, too, examines the failure of individuals to establish communication and meaning in their relationships, this time set against the grim background of the contemporary Soviet village. The demands of rural life are conveyed in the story's opening lines: 'Vasilisa wakes up early. In the summer the cocks wake her up, but during the winter she doesn't trust them: the cold might make them oversleep, and oversleep she mustn't.'⁶ Even before we are introduced to the characters or the village itself, we are aware of the hard and unrelenting nature of Soviet rural life.

Vasily and Vasilisa, well into middle age when we meet them, are married but live apart, she in their peasant hut, he in the barn opposite. Vasily comes into the house only to drink tea in the morning, and makes his own meals in the barn. Theirs is an attitude of utter estrangement:

She sits at one end of the table, he at the other. They are silent, not once has a word passed between them, as if they did not see each other, and only because of the one glass in the middle of the tables does the one know of the other's presence. They are silent, but their silence is not a strained one, indeed, it is not even a silence, but rather

a habitual physical condition without words, when no-one expects words to be spoken and they are in any case unnecessary.⁷

This state of affairs has existed since before the War. Vasily would drink heavily, and often the violent side of his nature would come to the surface. Once, when Vasilisa was pregnant, he turned on her with an axe, and as a result of the severe shock Vasilisa miscarried. Since then she has refused to allow him to live with the family, and Vasily has made his home in the barn. He and the two elder sons fought in the War, and one son was killed. Even when Vasily returned in one piece, with medals and military decorations, Vasilisa did not forgive him — indeed, even blamed him for the death of their son at the front — and they continued to live separate lives. Only with her friend Avdot'ya, who is the same age, can Vasilisa achieve any deep understanding and communication.

Vasily lives for a short while with Aleksandra, a younger woman and a cripple, who has come to Siberia from the Ukraine in search of her son, with whom she lost contact during the War. She eventually leaves him to continue her lonely search. Vasilisa, who at first treats Aleksandra with undisguised contempt, becomes reconciled with her when she discovers that she, too, is a mother who has lost her child. When Aleksandra leaves, they part sharing a common bond. As Vasily lies dying towards the end of the narrative, Vasilisa comes to him and the past is forgiven. Reconciliation takes place as people prepare to part forever.

This story is the first in which Rasputin interweaves past and present against a rural backdrop. The two main characters, though vivid and individual in their own right, have a symbolic function. Vasilisa represents the hard-working, selfless, and resilient peasant woman already mentioned with reference to Abramov and Astaf'yev. She embodies the indomitable spirit of Mother Russia. In Vasily we see the destructive and aggressive masculine ethos which increasingly comes to threaten the peace and stability founded and nurtured by Vasilisa. The relationship of these two characters can thus be seen as a microcosm of the fate of rural Russia in the modern world, where disruption and chaos threatens the order and harmony of centuries.

Rasputin's other early short stories show these themes to be consistent. The mother-figure is one of sadness and tragedy, such as the unnamed mother in 'Tam, na krayu ovraga' ('Over There, on the Edge of the Ravine'), whose only son is killed by an unexploded mine left over from the War. Feelings of estrangement and the failure of individuals to establish communication lie at the heart of such stories as 'V obshchem vagone' ('In the Communal Carriage'), a brief description of an overnight train journey and the people pushed uncomfortably together who share it, and 'Den' rozhdeniya' ('Birthday'), where a young man returns home after three months to celebrate his birthday only to find his friends out of town and his girlfriend initially unwilling

to join him. The old woman of 'Chelovek s etogo sveta' ('A Person from This World'), who still hunts alone in the taiga, is inseparably linked with the natural world, and derives her spiritual strength from it. The old woman as a repository of tradition and centuries-old spirituality, disappearing in the modern world, finds embodiment in the dying shaman of 'Starukha' ('The Old Woman').

Rasputin's awareness of the subtleties of style and technique can also be discerned in these early stories. 'Vasily i Vasilisa', 'Rudol'fio', and 'Vstrecha' are all marked by concise presentation and minimal authorial presence. His ability to describe character from the inside, and to suggest from within individual thought-patterns and frames of reference, is apparent in 'Chelovek s etogo sveta' and 'Mama kuda-to ushla' ('Mummy has Gone Out Somewhere'), in the latter of which we are taken into the uncomprehending mind of a young child left alone for a few hours. Only in two of these early works, 'My s Dimkoj' and 'Ya zabyl sprosit' u Lyoshki', does Rasputin conduct the narrative in the first person, through the viewpoint of a young child or adolescent, although he returns to this mode in his later works.

The two poles of modern Soviet society — the town and the countryside — are evident in Rasputin's first two books. *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov* ('Lights for Building New Cities') is a collection of essays in praise of construction work in Siberia, especially on the Abakan-Tayshet railway line. Work was begun on this line in early 1958 and was completed in late 1965, the railway stretching 647 kilometres over swamps and taiga, through mountains and across ravines. Nine tunnels of a total length of ten miles, three viaducts and hundreds of smaller bridges were also built. The book, not surprisingly, is imbued with a sense of glory in this achievement and reflects an active political commitment to the cause.

We see, in true socialist realist tradition, the sons carrying on the work of their fathers, and devoting all their energies to building what Soviet ideologues call 'the material foundation of Communism'. Volodya Stofato, for example, is not only fired by political idealism to build the future, but also by personal pride: his father died as one of the pioneers of the railway. Similarly, the famous war hero Aleksandr Matrosov is of the older generation and returns to the construction site to inspire the younger generation with his tireless zeal and self-abnegation. The harmony and continuity of the passage of the generations, an essential part of Soviet collectivist ideals, is thus emphasized. The construction effort provides the common bond and purpose for everyone:

Completely different personalities and absolute strangers to one another, they suddenly became bound by fellowship. They had been brought together by the railway track. Now they were all involved in the same work — the railway line. Whether they chose to or not they all thought and dreamed of the line completed. They assumed responsibility for its construction — each as much as he was able and everyone, absolutely everyone, in it together. If someone turned his back on his share of responsibility a gap would open which had to be closed. And new boys and girls would come to fill it.⁸

In these essays the railway is a positive symbol of social dynamism and is the focus of the collective effort. Katerina Clark, quoting Stalin, shows how the train in early Soviet literature is a metaphor for Soviet society itself and the ideals of the Revolution, inexorably pressing forward towards the goal of Communism.⁹ Rasputin is here working within a stock Soviet literary tradition.

Similarly, the hydro-electric station in Soviet literature and ideology is an optimistic symbol of man's ability to harness the elements, of the subjugation of nature to the will of man. Rasputin, too, joins in the ebullient political chorus in the essays of this collection dealing with the construction of the Bratsk hydro-electric station. His workers assert: 'We will tame you, Angara!', a rationalistic belief in the power of man to shape the world in his own image.¹⁰

By contrast, his sketches in *Kray vozle samogo neba* ('The Land at the Top of the World'), describing the life-style and values of the Tofalariyans, are contemplative and lyrical. (The Tofalariyans are indeed a tiny nation: in 1959 they numbered 586 and in 1970, 620.)¹¹ The lives of these simple and hard-working people are governed and conditioned by the natural world around them, especially the mountains and the taiga where they hunt. They live according to a primitive but immutable code of ethics: 'When Tofalariyans hunt together they always share out their meat equally. This is an unwritten law to which they all adhere. They are very simple, spontaneous, and kind people.'¹² A Soviet critic reviewing these essays remarked that Rasputin's overall concern was 'for people to behave in their worldly dealings as do the Tofalariyans after a successful hunt, where everyone gets an equal share'.¹³

Rasputin also describes the traditions, culture, and folklore of Tofalariya, all bound up with the seasons and the rugged landscape, and the moral foundation of which is firmly rooted in the Tofalariyans' own closeness to nature:

When hunting they would sing songs, and in the evenings would relate to each other folk-tales in their tents. They sang of the high, cheerless mountains and the dense taiga, which the sun could not warm, of the energetic reindeer and the moss they fed on, of evil winter and hospitable summer — everything the Tofalariyans encountered in life. All this would often be contained in one song, because that song had no end. If there were wicked men in their stories they did not last long and would come to a sticky end, because in the mountains, which stretched over many hundreds of kilometres, there were very few paths, and there was no room on them for good and evil to pass one another.¹⁴

As another Soviet critic noted: 'man and nature are here inseparable, a united and single entity'.¹⁵ The contact the Tofalariyans have with the spiritual and cultural legacy of their forefathers, and their harmonious relationship with the natural world, give them a firm basis for living in the present. Rasputin laments the loss of the folk heritage by modern industrial civilization, as he reflects on the Tofalariyans' songs:

These low, monotonous sounds come from somewhere far, far away. They seem to bring a keen but now forgotten sense, something to which we feel a debt, though we

know not why, and although we try desperately to remember, recollection does not come, and so we seek to justify ourselves beforehand without realising that we ourselves are to blame.¹⁶

The motif of motherhood is also strong in these sketches. In 'I desyat' mogil v tayge' ('And There Are Ten Graves in the Taiga') Rasputin takes us into the mind of a mother who has raised ten children, ten of whom have died before their time. The author comments:

Fathers do not give birth, fathers do not breast-feed, fathers sleep at night, and therefore fathers do not weep or cry out, they merely sigh, sigh deeply and fall silent. But mothers feel the cry of blood lost, of milk spent, and love crushed.¹⁷

The figure of the tough old peasant woman is featured in 'Prodolzheniye pesni sleduyet' ('The Song Will Continue'), where the central character is not a native of Tofalariya, but rather someone who arrived in the 1920s, stayed, and still hunts alone in the taiga. She is as distant from the city psychologically as she is geographically.

Even though the artistic level of these two books does not rise above that of documentary journalism, they juxtapose the twin themes that are to remain dominant in Rasputin's writing: the opposition of urban and rural values, tradition, heritage, and modern industrialism. These are, of course, the pet themes of village prose. Rasputin's artistic power can, however, be discerned in his first full-length *povest'*, *Den'gi dlya Marii*.

The story is set in a small village in Siberia, where an inspector has arrived to check the accounts of the only local store. He discovers a deficit of one thousand roubles, and Mariya, the manageress, is in the eyes of the law responsible. She is a kind-hearted but semi-literate woman who, the inspector realizes, has obviously not embezzled the money, but rather frittered it away through carelessness and misplaced trust and credit. Indeed, we learn that the store has always lost money in this way, earning its successive managers prison sentences. Mariya was persuaded to run the store as no-one else in the village would do it, given its ill-starred history. The inspector gives her five days to recover the full amount, before he returns from his rounds, and the bulk of the narrative focuses on the efforts of her husband, Kuz'ma, a driver on the kolkhoz, to collect the sum, first of all in the village, and then in the town. The town is the home of his brother Aleksey, whom he has not seen for seven years. The story is thus both a realistic study of human and social bonds at a time of crisis, and an allegory: will brother help brother in the new social relationships of modern Russia? In the larger 'family' of society, will town help village? The strength and integrity of collectivist values on a communal and national scale are tested through the fate of an individual.

Rasputin, then, examines the individual and collective moral response to danger and disruption. In his own words, his interest is in a character 'when he

“opens up”, when he tells about himself not so much by what he says as by what he does and how he does it’.¹⁸ Characters reflect or are contrasted with one another in their reactions, and the moral touchstone by which they are judged is their attitude to money. Old Gordey, for example, is tireless in his attempts to help the couple, but he manages to collect a pitifully small amount. Vasily, once Kuz’ma’s close friend but distant in recent years, recaptures his former warmth and accompanies Kuz’ma on his visits to the various villagers. Vasily’s mother, Natal’ya, is in the Russian literary tradition of the selfless and kind peasant woman. Although ill and confined to her bed, she gives Kuz’ma the money she had set aside for her funeral (which is evidently not far away). Such willing help as this suggests that spiritual and moral bonds between people are still intact in the Russian village.

On the other hand, a direct contrast with Natal’ya is Stepanida, a miser who refuses to give Kuz’ma any money at all, although it is understood that she has a considerable sum stashed away. She is isolated from the community by her avarice, and in some ways has more in common with Komarikha, who comforts Mariya with quasi-religion and superstition, and who is mocked and despised by the rest of the village. Also, Gordey’s unassuming willingness to help provides a sharp comment on the socially conscious Yevgeny Nikolayevich, the school headmaster eager to give Kuz’ma a hundred roubles solely in order to raise his esteem among the rest of the community. He has much more money in his savings account: affluence generates *meshchanstvo* (a word suggesting philistinism and moral atrophy). Money, the urban means of measuring worth and value, is a corrupting influence, threatening the simple rural values. Indeed, the story opens with Kuz’ma dreaming that everyone on the kolkhoz donates five roubles, thus bringing Mariya’s troubles decisively to an end. This ideal solution, however, is only a dream; the reality proves that it is impracticable.

Kuz’ma has never before set much store by money, and has been able to live reasonably comfortably, even with a wife, and four children, without needing much. The crisis is Kuz’ma’s crude and bitter introduction to the workings of the modern world. Here, too, is a clash of past and present values, summed up by old Gordey in an impassioned and indignant speech which doubtless reflects the author’s own anxiety at the spiritual malaise of modern society:

‘You can’t get enough of shops nowadays. In the old days we’d pop along to the store maybe twice a year. Everything we had was our own. And we survived, nobody perished. But these days you can’t do anything if you haven’t got money. Wherever you turn it’s money. People are wrapped up in it. They’ve forgotten how to make things themselves, and why should they bother when they can get everything they want in a shop if they have the money? . . . When was the time village folk would help each other for money? When you wanted a house put up or a stove put in, you just said it was helping someone out, friendly like. If the owner had some home-brew he’d put it out on the table; if not, well, it didn’t matter, next

time he'd come and give you a hand with something. But now everything's for money . . . People work for money and live for money. They'll try all ways to make a profit — it's shameful, that's what it is.'¹⁹

Gordey himself has never needed to rely on money in order to live: he can rig up a still to produce his own vodka, he has worked since he was a child, he is self-sufficient in food, and can even make his own clothes. Kuz'ma is unable to raise the money in the village alone, and he has to set off for the town in the hope that his brother will help.

In contrast to the spiritual and moral impoverishment of today's village, however, we learn through Kuz'ma's reminiscences of an incident in the recent past when the kolkhoz stood firm in its defence of an individual in distress. This was in the immediate post-war years, which, as has already been noted, were harsh times for agriculture and the rural community. Thus, towards the close of autumn in 1947, the collective farm chairman was sent to prison for illegally buying fuel. The villagers rose to his defence, representatives travelled to administrative centres and the regional capital to plead his case and petitions were sent to Moscow. All these efforts were to no avail, however, and the chairman spent seven years in prison. Nevertheless, by obtaining the necessary fuel he had enabled the tractor and combine-harvester to operate, and the harvest to be gathered in before the onset of winter. He had, in fact, saved the kolkhoz from disaster. The same chairman (we are not given his name) fifteen years later gives his monthly salary to Kuz'ma, as well as that of his better-paid technical staff (some of whom later privately ask Kuz'ma for it back). But it is still not enough, even though he arranges a sizeable loan for Kuz'ma to be able to pay off his debts later. The collective farm chairman is thus not only the centre of social and production forces in the countryside, but its moral centre, too.

Kuz'ma's train journey to the town reveals that the tensions in the countryside are endemic in society as a whole. Town and countryside are separated by a huge gulf in understanding, the fabric of society is split. The train here is not, as in *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*, a positive symbol of forward movement and progress, but rather of disruption and isolation. It takes Kuz'ma away from his roots and into a cold, unfamiliar world, accompanied by facetious and downright hostile companions.

Kuz'ma has to share a compartment with three city-dwellers, who treat him with varying degrees of condescension, mockery, and contempt. They eventually ask him to change places with someone who can play preference. It is a symbolic scene: town and village are unable to understand and accommodate each other. This dichotomy is well expressed in the argument put forward by the self-important Gennady Ivanovich, a broadcasting executive:

Gennady Ivanovich gave him a condescending smile. 'But you would not deny that our village is in something of a privileged position? We sell it machinery with discount and buy bread from it at inflated prices, and with its rural slyness and sense of what's

in its own interest it has long since realized that it has nothing to gain by solving all its problems by its own efforts. Although it could obviously do so. It knows very well that machinery and people will be sent from the town to help gather in the harvest and, if need be, the state will again provide it with money.' (1, 55)

The Soviet critic Yekaterina Starikova remarked that 'the old village and the new town are indeed of one family, one tree, whose branches are widely, perhaps too widely, spread apart'.²⁰

The end of the story is deliberately vague: Kuz'ma reaches the town and finds his brother's apartment. He approaches the door and knocks — and there the narrative is brought to a close. We do not know the outcome of Kuz'ma's journey. Will brother help brother, or are ties of blood no longer respected in the modern, dislocated world? The story can be seen as a re-working of the myth of the unified Soviet family Rasputin treats positively in *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*. Indeed, just how far Aleksey has been drawn from his roots is a reflection of the division of the country through urbanization:

In the end his brother must realize what's what, he isn't a child. He and the village understand each other perfectly: the brother has gradually forgotten his native village and, consequently, his childhood, and the village has gradually forgotten that it once reared such a person. (1, 77)

The end of the story intimates that man's future is uncertain if he leaves his childhood and his past behind. Mariya has similar thoughts:

So the time had come, as she sat down and realized that she now bore no resemblance to what she was as a little girl, there was nothing left except the name and some memories; everything else, as in war, had gone missing in action. It was frightening to think about what tomorrow would bring. (1, 112)

The loss of childhood occasions the loss of innocence and absolute values. The allegory of brother helping brother, town helping village, can also be seen as a modern version of the Cain and Abel dilemma. Furthermore, the name Mariya has strong biblical associations, especially significant given the fact that she is innocent of any crime and approaches martyrdom, and the name Kuz'ma is also that of a Russian saint whose name-day is 17 October (the action of the story is set in murky autumn). Significantly, throughout the narrative light and darkness alternate, suggesting the fluctuations of fortune in Kuz'ma's battle with good and evil in men's hearts. Komarikha, the social outcast, makes perhaps the most telling contribution to the work's religious underpinning by pointing to the inherent weakness of materialist collectivism:

'People lose their faith when they live in peace, but as soon as there's any trouble, and not just any old bother but real trouble, with tears and sadness, then they're quick to remember God and his servants, who they used to treat worse than dirt.' (1, 48)

The role of nature heightens the allegorical aspect. On his journey to the town Kuz'ma is accompanied by a howling wind which rocks and buffets the bus as he

travels to the railway station and can be clearly heard outside the train as it moves. The story, as has been mentioned, takes place in autumn, the season of the kolkhoz chairman's sentence and imprisonment in 1947. Autumn in Russian literature is traditionally a time of decay and death, and a dark grey sky predominates as Kuz'ma actually reaches the town. When there, the sky clears, the wind abates, and the first snow is lying on the ground, a harbinger of the wintry tomorrow. Human destiny thus corresponds to the passage of the seasons, and is inseparable from the workings of nature.

This is not to suggest that Rasputin is a religious believer or mystic. Rather, at a time of uncertainty, when future relationships are as yet undefined, it is understandable for a writer to return to traditional frames of reference and notions of morality and the nature of life. It is, moreover, of interest to note how far Rasputin is from a conscious adoption of the Christian ethic, by comparing Soviet collectivism with the Orthodox *sobornost'*, as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam sees them:

Sobornost' is the brotherhood of people who are part of the *sobor* and see themselves as children of the same Father. A 'collective', on the other hand, is a mechanical association of individuals who have banded together for self-defence, or to define their position in an alien and terrifying world. People are driven into a 'collective' by fear, bewilderment, the need of a ration card. Here there is not a trace of brotherhood, and the most one can hope for is an occasional exception to the rule *homo homini lupus*. The collective, while demanding subordination, at the same time rids a man of any sense of responsibility . . . A man enslaved by the collective inevitably becomes an individualist; *sobornost'*, on the contrary, is unthinkable without full freedom of the personality.²¹

Nature and religion, however, become more prominent in Rasputin's later writing.

Den'gi dlya Marii shows that Rasputin as a writer had come of age. Stylistically, the piece contains much of the narrative experimentation of his earlier works, but achieves a much greater synthesis. For example, the narrative moves forward not chronologically, but, as in 'Ya zabyt sprosyt' u Lyoshki', events are filtered through the viewpoints of the central character, in this case Kuz'ma (and also, to a lesser extent, Mariya). Consequently, we know of their fears, their joys, their anxiety, from the inside. Similarly, the use of dream to suggest psychological states and the use of flash-backs to disrupt the narrative flow owe much to 'youth prose' and its borrowing of cinematic devices. As Rasputin's first large-scale work of fiction, *Den'gi dlya Marii* is an impressive attempt to put in literary form the contemporary spiritual and moral condition of Soviet man and his society. His characters are vivid, individualized, and comprise a gallery of diverse types. The authorial presence is minimal throughout, Rasputin choosing to provide commentary by the interaction of character and to concentrate tension by compressing time and events.

Before leaving *Den'gi dlya Marii* it is of interest to take a brief look at the stage version, adapted by Rasputin himself. There are several points of

departure from the original text which offer a clearer perspective on the work. For example, the inspector gives Kuz'ma and Mariya three days, not five, in which to recover the money, so compressing events still further and intensifying the significance of individual reactions to Kuz'ma's requests. Vasily and Mariya are also more rounded characters than in the original, and fulfil a more integral role in the resolution of the situation. Mariya is more sympathetic, stronger, and less self-pitying than in the *povest'*. Vasily is decisive, resourceful, and attentive, and it is he who sounds out the work's underlying concern, words not in the original text:

'You think that this misfortune of yours concerns only you? You're wrong there. It's a trial for all of us. All of us here are undergoing no small test, I can tell you, and we won't be worth a brass farthing if we don't pass it. The whole village would be in disgrace, and wouldn't be fit to live in any longer.'²²

Rasputin also introduces here more overtly the motif of *pamyat'*, when Mariya remembers the fate of Marusya, the store's previous manageress:

People had, after all, now forgotten about Marusya, you'd never know there had been such a person. Only very rarely would her name crop up, when someone would vaguely remember her and she would be mentioned in passing. But not as a person who used to live here among us, who knew her share of sorrow and raised a family, but as last year's snow which was tramped on in the winter and dispersed come the spring — and so much the better.²³

It is but a short step to Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's warning of the 'murk of non-being',²⁴ when a community or nation refuses to remember the victims of past injustice. Moreover, Mariya's thoughts echo those of Solzhenitsyn in *Arkhipelag GULag* ('The Gulag Archipelago'), when he says: 'no-one in our country ever remembers anything, for memory is the Russians' weak spot, especially memory of the bad'.²⁵

If Marusya can be consigned to collective oblivion, the very presence in the village of the kolkhoz chairman is a constant reminder of the past. Kuz'ma remarks: 'The past is the past, but it still hurts'.²⁶ Here is evidence of the duality of the Soviet community: willingness to help someone in distress who had risked all for their sake, and the ability to forget someone for whom they could do nothing.

Other points of difference concern the change in circumstances and character interpretation. Although the opportunity to describe the course of action in dialogue enables the author to vary speech patterns to suggest states of mind, and to differentiate characters linguistically and psychologically to reveal hidden depths and currents beneath the surface, there is no recompense for such a drastic re-moulding of a character like old Gordey. On stage he comes across as a comic and cantankerous old fool, and his important sentiments on the state of today's village thus lose much of their import (perhaps deliberately

so). Also, and more fundamentally, because the action takes only three days, Kuz'ma does not travel to the town, but confines his search for the missing thousand roubles to the village. There is no mention of a brother, and no train journey. Thus, there is also no broad social dimension to the plot, and in Kuz'ma's dream sequence at the end, he manages to get all the money together in time, so providing the ideal socialist realist happy ending on collectivist lines. All in all, the play illuminates the original work's concern for the durability of bonds between people, but removes the wider social and allegorical significance. It is, however, the most successful of Rasputin's stage adaptations of his own work.

Rasputin's last work of the 1960s is 'Nechayannyye khlopoty', co-written with his former journalist colleague Vyacheslav Shugayev and published in 1969, though it was actually begun in 1967.²⁷ The story is a limited one of Communist construction on the banks of the Angara river, and has little artistic merit. Misha Sukhov looks for purpose and identity in the collective following the break-up of his marriage. This he achieves not so much in his work, in his contribution to the future well-being of mankind, as in the selfless help he gives to old Grigory Stepanovich in building a wooden house for a friend and his family. His friendship with Nadya, a girl also suffering from emotional upset, gives him further stability in his life, and we are led to believe that he will settle down permanently with her. It is not hard to detect here the typical features of the Soviet production novel as immortalized in the axiom 'Boy gets tractor', with or without girl.²⁸ Only the attention paid to the personal unhappiness of Misha and Nadya, and the exploration of their private thoughts and feelings bring a light human light to the otherwise lack-lustre subject-matter.

The much-vaunted socialist cause of construction and material progress is, briefly, seen here from a point of view that is to become dominant in Rasputin's later work. We see mechanization and man's spoliation of the environment through the suffering of the natural world:

The foundation pit sank its square jaw into the left-hand bank, and the pain and its hampered current made the river bristle with sharp, white ridges, settling down only beyond the distant gates. It did not stop trying to scrape and chip away the dam stretching across it, persisting with a relentless but noiseless strength, and Misha even thought that the dam would not withstand its onslaught — it looked far too thin. But the compressors calmly chattered away, and the pump wheezed with efficiency, pumping water out of one pool in the pit and into another. Men clutching surveying poles jumped from boulder to boulder, and the drilling machines chattered away with the gusto of frenzied woodpeckers.²⁹

CHAPTER III

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Rasputin's mature period begins in earnest with the publication of *Posledniy srok*. It is the work he considers to be his most successful, a judgement no doubt coloured by the fact that Anna, the eighty-year-old peasant woman who is the story's central character, is modelled on his own grandmother, Mariya Gerasimovna Rasputina. The work also marks the blossoming of the author's talent for psychological exploration and character interplay.

Anna is dying, and her reflections on the world around her, her family, and her friends give the story a superficial resemblance to Tolstoy's 'Smert' Ivana Il'icha' ('The Death of Ivan Il'ich'). Also, her natural perception and acceptance of death links this story with Tolstoy's 'Tri smerti' ('Three Deaths') in which the peasant Fyodor calmly sees his approaching death as the culmination of nature's processes. Furthermore, if the conflict of *Den'gi dlya Marii* is external, in this story it unfolds in the hearts and minds of the main characters, Anna and her children. The action, though, is similarly restricted in time: the narrative spans a mere three days.

Four of Anna's children come to her bedside from various parts of the country to be with her in what they suppose to be her final hours. They have not been together for several years. Varvara is the eldest, and lives in a village fifty kilometres away — by no means a great distance in Siberia. Il'ya, the elder son, lives far away in the North, and Lyusya, Anna's younger daughter, lives in a city many kilometres distant. Only Mikhail, the younger son, has stayed on in the village, and with his wife and daughter lives with his mother. Thus, the family is neatly split into 'urban' and 'rural' elements. This division is stressed at the very beginning of the narrative, when Il'ya and Lyusya arrive by river steamer: Mikhail meets them on the quayside, and, as they make their way into the village, the two city dwellers keep to the makeshift wooden pavement, leaving no room on it for Mikhail, who walks alongside in the mud.

The dichotomy is not merely social, but also psychological. We are quickly introduced to the children's contrasting speech mannerisms and personal characteristics. Varvara's speech is colloquial and recognizably rural; Lyusya's is correct, impersonal, urbane. Varvara is simple-minded and gullible; Lyusya has a stock of ready-made phrases with which to express every shade of indignation and vexation, even with her dying mother. Varvara is fat and looks

prematurely old; Lyusya, less than ten years younger, is still slim and looks younger than she is. Varvara has many children; Lyusya has none — a clear, symbolic reference to the sterility of urban life. Anna later remarks on their dissimilarity: ‘You’d never think they were sisters, they’ve got nothing in common now.’¹

The same is true for Il’ya and Mikhail. Il’ya is bald; Mikhail has a bush of shaggy hair. Il’ya hides his weak character and lack of will behind a façade of buffoonery, and is easily swayed in his opinions by others; Mikhail is the overbearing head of the household, by turns aggressive and threatening, we are told, when drunk. The narrator states of all of them, as if summing up: ‘Having lived apart, they all now bore little resemblance to one another’ (I, 134).

When the four are at first together, Anna is still asleep and does not know of their arrival. Their only moments of harmony are when they share memories about their rural childhood and early youth, such as of collecting mushrooms and berries. When Anna wakes up and opens her eyes, they feel themselves unified as a family, and we see from the inside their collective fears and uncertainty, and their subconscious feeling of guilt:

They waited feeling particularly united in that they were sons and daughters of this old woman, pitying both her and themselves, because after her death they would be left with the sadness of loss, which would take a long time to heal. And each of them individually felt a new and bitter satisfaction in being there, with their mother in her final hour, as a son and daughter should be, and so had thereby earned her forgiveness — forgiveness not of the usual kind, of one person for another, but one bearing little relation to their mother, but still necessary in life. It was fear and pain together, and what frightened them most of all was that looking down on their dying mother they seemed to see something that people should not look on, and, having no faith in themselves, they wished it to be all over and done with quickly. (I, 151–52)

They also share a coldness and indifference to the imminent death of their mother. Lyusya on arriving sets about making herself a black dress for the inevitable funeral with material she has brought with her. Varvara’s tears of grief are forced and verge on the hysterical, and she prefers to cry at the table, ‘where it was more comfortable’ (I, 132). Also, she has an eye on Lyusya’s black dress for her daughter after the funeral, when Lyusya has returned home. Mikhail, we learn, in his drunken moments would frighten his mother as well as the rest of the household, inferring all the while that she had lived too long and that it was indeed time for her to die. Furthermore, Il’ya and Mikhail buy a crate of vodka in anticipation of the wake. In short, Rasputin presents a series of subtle and telling psychological details to show the distance these children have travelled from their roots, and how much they have betrayed their childhood and their mother.

The four children, then, are recognizable as members of the same family and as individuals. Throughout the narrative, we see various events,

circumstances, emotions, and dreams as experienced or perceived by each of them. Moreover, beyond their early reminiscences they have nothing to say to one another except in their frequent disagreements and recriminations. Il'ya and Mikhail find a common language only when they retire to the bath-house to make inroads into the vodka, and reflect drunkenly on the quality of life. When Anna regains consciousness and sees them together for the first time in many years, she is able to judge just how much they differ from the picture she retains of them as children.

Anna feels sorry for Il'ya. She sees that as a person he is weak and amorphous: 'He looked like neither a city man nor a villager, neither a stranger nor himself' (I, 156). When she looks at his face, she thinks in Gogolian terms: 'it was as if Il'ya had sold it or lost it at cards to someone' (I, 156). Varvara strikes her as old and worn down by her many daily cares, with nothing in life, not even a peaceful old age, to look forward to. It is Lyusya, however, who makes the greatest impression on her. Anna is ashamed to look at her, she sees how far Lyusya has moved from her home, how different she is in speech, dress, and outlook, from the others. The children, indeed, are held together as a family only by the presence of their mother, they have no other links with each other. Anna realizes this, and hers is a plea to them to maintain contact with each other and their homeland after she has gone:

'I will die, but you have your whole lives still ahead of you. So keep in touch, go and visit each other. You're not strangers, you know, you have the same mother and father. But go and see each other a bit more often, brother shouldn't forget sister, nor sister brother. And come back here, too, once in a while, this is where your roots lie.' (I, 169)

In *Den'gi dlya Marii* Rasputin dissects Soviet society by showing the social tension between town and countryside and within the village community itself. The conflict of *Posledniy srok* is similarly social, but takes place entirely within the minds of members of a single family, and a not untypical one in the modern Soviet context. Rasputin shows us the death of the Soviet family. In the course of the story none of Anna's children does anything practical to help their mother or contribute to her well-being. Only Nadya, Mikhail's wife, feeds her and makes her comfortable in bed, and is on one occasion sternly rebuked by Lyusya for not being assiduous enough. (Her full name, Nadezhda, means, symbolically, 'hope'.)

The final disintegration of bonds comes about at the end, when Mikhail, exasperated by three days of self-righteous criticism by his sisters (and especially Lyusya), and emboldened by vodka, offers to give away his mother to any of the others who has room to spare. To make the bargain worthwhile, he offers a cow in addition. Neither Il'ya nor his sisters take up the offer (although the foolish Varvara asserts that she has room for the cow). As Mikhail says to Anna: 'Just stay here, mother. They love you more when you're

lying on your back here' (1, 258). Il'ya, Lyusya, and Varvara leave the same day for their respective homes, thinking that Anna is about to recover. She dies, however, that night.

In fact, the family had ceased to exist as a unit long before. The story's title refers not only to Anna's last three days, but also to the death-throes of this most fundamental social unit. There is a fifth child, Tanya, the youngest of them all and Anna's favourite. Even the letters she wrote home affected her mother more than those of the other children. Tanya lives in faraway Kiev and does not arrive, despite Anna's constant expectation. Her absence is never explained, but requires no comment.

Given the social context of village prose, it is not hard to see both Anna and her children as victims of change and readjustment. Theirs is a situation common to people in all developing societies. Il'ya and Lyusya, indeed, are just those 'marginal' personalities characterized by Perevedentsev and Amal'rik in Chapter I. Mikhail is also affected, but by changes in the countryside itself, changes that have contributed to his demoralization and to his yearning for drink, as he remarks to Il'ya:

'Life is all totally different now — look around you, everything's changed, and these changes have demanded something extra from us men. We've become tired, and not, I tell you, from work, but from God only knows what.' (1, 186)

Mikhail feels divorced from his home environment, now populated by people he does not know and with whom he has nothing in common. His disquiet echoes that of old Gordey in *Den'gi dlya Marii*:

'Remember how we used to live on the collective farm? I don't mean how much we earned. There were times we'd get sod all. I mean that we all lived on good terms, we took everything that came along together — both the good and the bad. A collective farm, the name says it all. But now it's every man for himself.' (1, 188)

Mikhail's neighbour Stepan Kharchevnikov pays a visit to the two men in the bath-house and joins their vodka-drinking session. He voices his opinions on how modern society has changed the image of women. His reflections offer a useful juxtaposition to Gennady Ivanovich's view of rural reality in *Den'gi dlya Marii*:

'I took a trip to the town last summer . . . And there I had a good look at these city women. And true enough, city-bred women all over the place. I would stare long and hard to try and get a glimpse of at least one living country wench, with a bit of meat on her, and not all skin and bone. When I saw one I would be glad in my heart that she had survived, for we'll soon be looking for them as we do prehistoric mammoths. There she goes walking along and you can see where her mother and grandmother came from, you can see what goes into making up someone's life, but these younger city women, well, they're all like wind-up dolls, they're all so much alike you can't tell one from the other. They weren't born, they were made in a factory.' (1, 234)

Lyusya, the most urbanized and supercilious of the four children we are shown, is subjected to particularly close scrutiny. She it is, self-conscious and with a refined, if exaggerated, dress-sense, who embodies the condescending superiority of town over village, all the more ironic given her own rural upbringing. It is through her feelings and thoughts that we see the trauma of losing family links and filial responsibility:

With family, close family, one should behave somewhat differently than with others, but she did not feel any such particular and intimate kinship with them, and she knew about them rather with her mind, which made her annoyed with herself — because she could not converge emotionally with them and be suffused with the same binding joy of meeting — and with them, and even with her mother, because of whom she had had to come here, and all for nothing — exactly because it was all for nothing. (I, 196–97)

Lyusya briefly rediscovers, like other ‘prodigals’ of village prose, the joys and excitement of her rural childhood and youth when she decides to take a walk in the forest. As she remembers the happiness and innocent pleasure of that time, she realizes that paradise is lost:

It seemed that the clock had been turned back because she, Lyusya, had forgotten something here, she had lost something very precious and necessary, without which life cannot be lived. But now that it had come back, the distant past was not disappearing, it was merely moving off to one side, to see what would become of her when she was confronted with it again, to see if she would gain or lose, to see if any echoes would be stirred or if there was, indeed, nothing left . . . (I, 213)

Confused and upset by the associations around her, she desires only to escape, to turn away from everything that reminds her of the past, to erase her memory of them, and to return to the comfort of her urban existence. In ‘Vstrecha’ Nikolay unwittingly takes away what little past Anna had; here Lyusya consciously and deliberately turns away from her former life.

Social progress and its attendant effects on human psychology are accompanied in this story by corresponding changes in nature. Summer and autumn seem to have changed places, with much rain in the summer because, people say, rivers have now become artificial ‘seas’ with the building of huge hydroelectric stations and reservoirs to service them. With the seasons topsy-turvy, agriculture and the calendar plan of planting and harvesting becomes upset. Lyusya, too, notices nature in neglect on her walk through the forest. Fields once ploughed by the kolkhoz are now wild and overgrown, and the earth itself seems to breathe decay. This picture of nature battered and plundered by man, like that in ‘Nechayannye khlopoty’, is a fleeting one, but one which corresponds to the inner disarray of Anna’s children:

Nearby, the cluster of bird-cherry bushes turned out to be greatly ravaged. Withered shrubbery had been cut away and lay scattered on the ground, and those bushes still alive, barely green in places and covered in cobwebs, had a wretched

look about them: the best and strongest branches had been torn off. Only the sparse shoots to one side had been left, and you could reach them with your hand: the heart had been removed, and the only things which stuck out now were the tall, bare stumps, chest-high, which made the surviving bushes bend to one side. (I, 210)

Nature and man are both downtrodden in the name of the scientific and rationalistic future. This theme connects the work with Astaf'yev's *Tsar' - ryba*, and leads logically to *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*.

The passage of time in *Posledniy srok* is marked in the story's very title, and the passing of Anna is much more than a poignant human drama. She embodies the traditions of the rural way of life and the values of the Russian peasantry as they have been formed and nurtured through centuries of work on the land, in harmony with the seasons and the natural rhythms of life. She has a fundamental relationship with the natural world, and so views death not as the termination of life, but as its culmination. Lyusya remembers the barren post-war years when Igrenya, their old and tired horse, collapsed from exhaustion while harrowing the fields, but Anna, with affectionate words and caresses, coaxed it to its feet and led it home.² Her life is conditioned by the passage of the seasons: she has been ill for some time, but recovered somewhat in the summer, only to relapse and take to her bed with the onset of autumn, the time of year associated with misfortune and sorrow in *Den'gi dlya Marii*. She has an unthinking and spontaneous awareness of being an integral part of the natural scheme of things:

Nevertheless, in recent years she had thought more and more of the sun, the earth, the grass, the little birds, the trees, the rain and the snow — everything that lives alongside man, giving him joy, and which prepares him for the end, promising its help and comfort, and because all this would remain after her, the old woman was calmed: she didn't have to be here to hear their voices, incessant and calling to her — incessant so as not to lose their beauty and faith, and calling her equally to life and to death. (I, 221–22)

Not surprisingly, nature imagery throughout the story is used almost exclusively in relation to Anna. When Varvara, Lyusya, and Il'ya arrive, a thick and impenetrable fog descends on the village, as if in anticipation of the old woman's death. However, the gloom is later dispersed by 'some kind of force' (I, 142), the sun shines, and Anna begins to come round. It is Mikhail who observes the symbolism in this act of nature: "Our mother, you see, wasn't a bad woman . . . You see what a nice day she's been given. It isn't everyone who gets that kind of day" (I, 146). Three days later, when Anna has seemingly recovered and the children prepare to leave, in an otherwise cloudless sky there hangs suspended 'a single dark and transparent cloud', nature's mourning for Anna's death later that night.

Anna's own spiritual purity is heightened by her continual association with sunlight. The sun shines throughout the three days of the narrative, even though it is early autumn. Indeed, it shines right over the old woman's house and, as she

lies with her head near the window, falls on her legs and feet. The sun seems to fill her with life as she watches it playing on the walls of her room. Only on the last day does it fill the room so that she is able to reach out and touch it. The contrast of light and darkness is not only symbolic of the gap between the town, representing culture and enlightenment, and the village, the home of poverty and ignorance. There is a distinct religious aspect to Anna's inner purity, for during her last night alive she dreams of church bells ringing for her. (This aspect is made more explicit in the play's theatrical adaptation, where a female chorus brings both acts to an end with religious chanting. This is a sense not of death, but Assumption.)

Anna has done much hard work on the land, in the forests, and on the kolkhoz, often working almost to exhaustion, and has not moved outside the village in which she was born. She has not read any books, and what she knows about life has been gained through hard and often bitter experience. But she has a spiritual contentment which arises from the very simplicity of her life. Thus she reflects, as she waits for death to claim her:

And her past life suddenly seemed to her good, dutiful, and happy. Happier than anyone else's. Could she really grumble because she had given it all to her children, so that a person could come into the world and the world would therefore never be short of people or grow old because of a lack of children? (I, 265)

Anna is, like so many older peasants of village prose, a symbol of the old village itself and the spiritual and moral roots of Mother Russia. Her death, thus, is also the death of the Russian village, its values, customs, traditions — everything it has created over hundreds of years. Unlike her children, Anna is aware of history in the making, of the passing of an age, as she remarks to Mironikha, her friend:

'Me and you, we're the last of the old women from the old world. There's no more. When we're gone there'll be old women of a different sort — more literate, more sensible, and with more understanding of what goes on in the world. Me and you, we've lost our way. This is another age, not ours.' (I, 278)

There is thus a poignant symbolism in Anna's abandonment by her children. Tradition and the spiritual heritage of the past die with her, as in Rasputin's earlier short story 'Starukha'. Anna teaches Varvara to chant the song that, in a bygone era, would be sung when people are about to die:

'A iz matushki bozhey tserkvi
V matushku syryuyu zemlyu
Ko svojemu rodu plemeni . . .'
(I, 284)

When Anna dies, she returns to the earth and to her ancestors.

In Rasputin, the feminine ethos can be easily equated with the past, if it embraces devotion to the family, spiritual purity, and inner resolution. He

considers modern emancipated women to be traitors to their sex, as he revealed in an interview with a Western researcher:

It is not true that I have a limited attitude towards women. I glorify them, and it is right that I should do so . . . But it is true that a woman should put her home, the bringing-up of her children and the domestic duties first. After all, an awful lot of problems arise nowadays from the fact that the woman has left the home. Emancipation makes life very difficult for her, although it has its own attraction, makes her the legal equal of men, but she finds it difficult to cope with her new role. And yet she doesn't want to return to her former way of life, she has abandoned her basic role in life. And, after all, what kind of freedom can she really have when she has liberated herself from precisely those obligations that nature herself has placed upon her? . . . It is more like desertion than liberation.³

It is not difficult to find common ground here with the views of Stepan Kharchevnikov, which, though expressed in a more pithy manner, are similarly negative in their appraisal of the modern, urbanized female.

The masculine ethos, on the other hand, is aggressive and disruptive — witness Vasily's treatment of his wife in 'Vasily i Vasilisa' and Nikolay's of Anna in 'Vstrecha'. On a national scale, this ethos represents progress and change. This schematic opposition of the sexes, and their correspondence to a social function, is not new in Russian literature. Mother Russia and the image of woman as spiritual and ethereal is a feature of the works of Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Nekrasov, Tolstoy, through, in the Soviet period, to Pil'nyak and Pasternak. Russian heroes, the 'superfluous men' of classical Russian literature, have seldom been equal to them in spiritual or moral terms, and these women have invariably suffered emotionally as a result. Rasputin is again undoubtedly aware of this strong Russian literary tradition, which it is interesting to juxtapose with the realistic portraits of emancipated women (and many by women writers) in 'urban' prose, as outlined in Chapter I.

Il'ya and Lyusya represent the 'prodigal son' motif, an emotional indicator of change and dislocation, so popular in village prose from its very beginnings. Works such as, for example, Yury Kazakov's short story 'Zapakh khleba' ('The Smell of Bread', 1961) and Nikolay Zhdanov's even earlier 'Poyezdka na rodinu' ('A Trip Home', 1956) show people long since removed to an urban environment returning to their rural roots following the death of a parent, who, like Lyusya, confront their memories of childhood and early life. Like Lyusya, too, they are upset by the experience and desire only to hurry back to the town as soon as possible.⁴

A different approach to this motif is in the work of Vasily Belov. In his stories 'Za tremya volokami' ('Beyond Three Portages', 1965) and 'Plotnitskiye rasskazy' the central character who longs to get back to his rural roots and establish his identity is ultimately unable to do so. In the former story, the army major travels considerable distances only to discover that his home village of Karavayka is no longer standing; it has been swept away by the winds of

history. In the latter story, the central character, no matter how hard he tries, can establish no firm contact with the two old villagers he befriends, nor can he penetrate their psychological world. He has irrevocably lost his past.⁵

The journey into the past is one of discovery, of coming to terms with oneself and with the external forces that have moulded the personality. It is thus also an attempt to understand subjectively society's historical and social development. With regard to Lyusya and Il'ya, Rasputin's purpose is to show in human terms the breakdown of social and filial bonds in the wake of the country's massive upheavals. However, in his next published work, 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu', Viktor, the central character, corresponds to the central characters of Belov's two works mentioned above. He returns to his native village by river-boat to search for his roots, to establish the human meaning of progress, and to find himself.

Viktor is visiting his village for the first time in five years. On the eve of his departure then the village was due to be flooded to form the bed of a huge reservoir for the Bratsk hydro-electric station, and the inhabitants, including his family, were preparing to move to another village down-river. Viktor remembers the village in ruins. Stoves, which for Russians are a particularly emotive symbol of the rural hearth and the warmth and security of the home and family unity, were lying abandoned because they were too cumbersome to transport. Such reminiscences clash with the reality that greets him on the river as he approaches the village's new site. The destruction of man's roots goes hand in hand with the destruction of the natural world as, grotesquely, trees that used to be on dry land now protrude out of the water and seem to Viktor to groan as they are rocked by the waves caused by the steamer's wake. This is Viktor's discovery of the physical and social contours of the land he passes through, a journey into the heart of darkness of modern materialism.

Memories of his childhood come back to him as he continues up river. He remembers as a boy waiting for the Angara to thaw in Spring-time, and when, at night, a storm cracks the ice, the liberation of the river brings about the awakening of his spirit to the majesty and power of the natural world. In a description of childhood that parallels the author's own (see note 1 to Chapter II), he recalls his childhood pursuits with the other village boys, pursuits which gave him 'a keen and secret happiness'. Like the author's, his childhood, though spent during the War, is to him an idyllic and carefree time spent in the bosom of nature.

The victory of water over land is symbolic: land is finite, representing human life itself, but water flows on and on, eternal like time. The river, thinks Viktor, 'will be flowing tomorrow just as it flowed yesterday and the day before',⁶ but its banks are 'despondent and monotonous' (p. 256), little touched by the sun, the life-giving force of *Posledniy srok*. The water seems motionless to him, like a vast plain which pushes the distant banks out still further, so that in his

imagination there is no boundary between water and land: 'the one starts before the other finishes' (p. 256). Time and history, to Viktor's troubled consciousness, are not abstract infinitude; rather, the creation of an artificial 'sea' is to him the epitome of man's conquest of nature. Harmony and integration are supplanted by the triumph of reason and science. Viktor is blind to the greater perspective of the hydro-electric power station and the undoubted benefits it brings to millions of people (a fact noted disapprovingly by most Soviet critics who reviewed the story). Viktor is a writer, though, and, as Rasputin's alter ego, is aware of the duality of his being and of his time.

Viktor's sense of alienation is heightened when he reaches the village, for he does not immediately recognize the parental home. He is unable to establish any contact with his family, and does not feel at ease in the village or the unfamiliar surrounding countryside. For him, the family no longer exists as a unit, and he realizes that the villagers no longer regard him as one of their own: 'He guessed that for many in the village he had evidently become an outcast (*izгой*) who had nowhere else to go, a failure in life who had come here to lick his wounds, or someone of that ilk.'⁷ Viktor is unable to reconcile the picture of the village he has retained in his memory with the actual reality that confronts him:

Two or three times, deep in thought, he would stop in the middle of the village in confusion and surprise: where was he? where had he wandered to? He was surrounded by unfamiliar houses and unfamiliar faces which had no connection with him whatsoever, and it took some effort to remember why he was here, and even when he did remember, when he came to and got his bearings, he still experienced some vague bewilderment: well, all right, now he knew what was here and how he had got to it, but he was still not clear as to why he had made his journey at all and what he wanted from it. And hurrying his step he would turn back. He would tell himself that he just needed a few more days to get used to it, to feel at home in these surroundings, to understand them and feel close to them, to reconcile the idea of the village he had kept alive inside him all these years with the picture he saw here before him, but the days passed and nothing changed. He knew that he himself was to blame, but he was powerless to do anything about it. (p. 282)

Not only does he feel rejected by the human community, but also by the natural world. The sky, the land, the horizons are all 'different', 'alien', and 'unclear' (p. 280), and even the forest does not arouse in him associations of childhood. All his experiences are without a 'unifying centre' (p. 281) to give significance and importance to his journey. Unable to find any meaning or comfort, Viktor leaves after five days.

Viktor's estrangement is deepened by his troubled fortunes as a writer, and it is interesting to speculate if Rasputin is here replying to his own critics. We learn that Viktor has been criticized for failing to uphold some of the standard tenets of socialist art, as he muses ironically:

Can one really take seriously reproaches for excessive psychological analysis, for too much delving into the souls of people, and for having in one's short stories no clearly

delineated positive and negative heroes, but rather characters with rather a diffuse philosophy of life, about whom people would think twice before choosing as their friends? (p. 269)

Rasputin himself has made no secret of his disdain for black-and-white character types, and has asserted the need for greater realism in psychological portrayal. This statement, indeed, could be his rebuff to conservative-minded critics who dislike the post-Thaw de-politicization of character and circumstance.

Viktor also contemplates the dilemma of the modern Soviet writer as a whole, hemmed in by past strictures and striving toward some truthfulness in his art. 'It is difficult to hide anything in a book', he declares (p. 259), as if summing up the following:

How simple things used to be and how difficult they are now — it is as if you're constantly on the watch for, and despite yourself can't help noticing, a misplaced word fidgetting and thrashing about in tortuous convulsions; people during a serious discussion tittering and shouting out hollow and superfluous phrases because they can find nothing else to interest them; a positive hero telling lies and going from one falsehood to another with the sweetness of a nightingale, wallowing in fine-sounding and respected words as if in a foam bath, at the same time as he should, according to the author, be speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (p. 258)

To Rasputin art and literature have an absolute value; they provide a link between past and present, and still bind man to the natural world in the modern, technological age. 'Art', he has said, 'as was very correctly observed long ago, flows out of nature'.⁸ Both are immutable and resist change:

Nature and art are, perhaps, the only things capable of resisting today's pace of life, and, happily, just like a hundred and two hundred years ago, can instil purely human, and not just professional, emotions and qualities.⁹

Consequently, nature has not only an aesthetic, but also a political function. It embodies resistance to accepted and official norms. A logical progression from this work is *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, where art and nature again unite to oppose the relentless march of the twentieth century.

Proshchaniye s Matyoroy is concerned with industrialization and the Communist ideological precept of 'electrification of the country'. Before looking at this work in detail, however, it is of interest to establish a literary and historical context, and to examine how this theme has been treated by earlier Soviet writers. To be sure, the issue of industrialization has given Soviet literature its socialist realist backbone, in classics such as Gladkov's *Tsement* ('Cement', 1925) and Ostrovsky's *Kak zakalyalas' stal'* ('How the Steel was Tempered', 1934). The introduction of a planned economy in the Soviet Union particularly increased the scope for writers to laud the national effort, and works such as

Katayev's *Vremya, vperyod!* ('Time, Forward!', 1932), Leonov's *Skutarevsky* (1932), Shaginyan's *Gidrotsentral'* ('Hydrocentral', 1931), and Gladkov's *Energiya* ('Energy', 1932) were among the most significant to trumpet the cause, and are still regarded in the Soviet Union today as literary classics. However, Leonov's other Five Year Plan novel, *Sot'* ('The River Sot', 1930) provides perhaps the most interesting comparison to Rasputin's work.

The novel is set in the Russian North, between Arkhangel'sk and Moscow, a backward and undeveloped region, as has been noted, much beloved by the later *derevenshchiki*. The plot revolves around the construction of a paper factory on the river Sot', whose name the factory is to take when completed. Considerable space is given to the existing factory's pre-revolutionary history and the personalities involved with it. Furthermore, the construction site is not far from a monastery housing about a dozen monks, *skital'tsy*, religious wanderers who have retreated from the world of men to devote themselves to God. Thus the stage is set for the confrontation of the old with the new. A new spirituality is being forged; indeed, the builders are the *skital'tsy* of the new world, coming to desolate and uninhabited areas to bring light and progress. In the ensuing ideological struggle some of the younger monks reject the stifling rigidity of religious worship and join the life-affirming construction effort.

The central character in *Sot'* is Uvad'yev, an engineer totally immersed in his work, who, indeed, even leaves his family to be able to devote himself fully to it. To him, beauty lies in construction and manufacture, he does not believe that man has a 'soul' because it is intangible, not grasped by man's reasoning powers. In short, he has no life beyond the factory, and is purely a functionary of the collective will. He is aware of this, and he pictures himself being thus upbraided by a colleague: 'You don't live, you merely fulfil functions.'¹⁰ A committed Communist, he lives only for the cause of socialist construction, and is not interested in anything other than industrial priorities: he rejects all attentions and crude attempts at seduction from women working on the site.

His female counterpart is Suzanna, a chemical engineer, enlightened, emancipated and well-educated (of the type so deplored by Rasputin), who fought with the Reds in the Civil War. She is the woman of the socialist future, of the same mould as Dasha Chumalova. Her father, Renne, is an engineer and an *intelligent* of the old school who embodies the values and thinking of the past, and who is despised by Suzanna. As she says to him: "'Yes, you're out of time. In ten years people will need explanatory notes to know who you are'".¹¹ Renne later kills himself following the death of a young woman on the site: undoubtedly, he could be classed as a 'wrecker' and 'capitalist survival', to fit the mood of the early Plan years. Suzanna's relationship with her father reflects the standard early Soviet treatment of the generation conflict, when the young looked to the future and the old held on to outmoded beliefs and values.

Leonov's novel, though, is a better-than-average tale of construction. The building of the factory is, of course, but a microcosm of the larger construction going on in the county, with corresponding conflicts and priorities. The birth of the new goes hand in hand with the death of the old, and the legitimacy of the new regime is measured in the frequent references to how bad life was before the Revolution — a time span of less than twenty years. The spirit of *Sot'*, in short, is the same as that of *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*.

Leonov's attitude to nature, however, is ambivalent. On the one hand, the river has to be tamed and use made of the surrounding forest for roads to be laid and scaffolding to be erected. Thus, the dominant images in the early part of the story are iron, alabaster, glass, and concrete. The unknown depths of the forest, the terrors it may hold, and the mysticism of the monks are clearly linked, and the duty of the man of the future lies in bringing rationality and order to such chaos. Even when human enemies are vanquished — monks, wreckers, and brigands, for example — nature remains a force to be reckoned with, the chief dangers being the harsh winter, floods in spring, silt, and shifting sands. But even as the natural world succumbs and bends to the iron will of man, Leonov makes us aware of it as a living and organic entity, and man as an integral part of it. Men are equated with animals and birds, and animals are given human characteristics. The river has 'a body' and the trees shed 'blood' when they are felled. At the end, as the factory nears completion, man is reconciled with nature and the seasons. Spring approaches, nature prepares for the revival of life, as does the country as a whole. Man's ravages are forgiven as necessary and expedient, and nature gives its blessing. Nature changes, the river *Sot'* changes, man changes in an organic and mutually dependent cycle.¹²

Matyora is an island settlement on the Angara living out its last summer and autumn before being razed by fire and then put under water, to serve as the reservoir bed for the Bratsk hydro-electric station. Rasputin is therefore returning to the subject-matter of 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu', but is showing us the last rites of the doomed village. Furthermore, there is no autobiographical narrator between the author and the narrative, although events are still given a highly subjective interpretation. This time the author presents a gallery of fictional characters and concentrates on their reactions to the approaching cataclysm, so giving an artistic framework to a publicistic issue which is evidently of profound importance to him.

The role of nature is nowhere in Rasputin's fiction as dominant as in this story. Nature is again, as in the work of Leonov and his contemporaries, to be conquered and harnessed to man's needs, but the focus here is different: we see progress not from the standpoint of those who build the future, but from the point of view of those who have to make way for it, both in the human world and in nature. Man and nature are part of the same harmonious community:

'Matyora had many times been in the midst of changes in the natural world, neither falling behind nor running ahead of each passing day.'¹³ So also, when the harvest is to be gathered in for the last time:

The day was fading, and with it the thankful life all around: sounds and colours blended into a bounteous and drowsy, lilting feeling which was neither intense nor calm; and human emotions would correspondingly merge in an unstable, indiscriminating response. (II, 285)

As the summer passes and autumn approaches, nature assumes an attitude of mourning, and the impending death of Matyora is like an immense upheaval in the unity of the natural world:

The sky was losing its flourish, and on sunny days looked oppressive and mushy. The weather was no longer up to its tricks, it remained windy and dry, but the season had now announced its presence: at nights it was freezing cold; . . . the mornings, after particularly clear nights, would see murky grey clouds hover over the banks of the river without ever obscuring it; and the days, now noticeably shorter, but with the same vitality and power, seemed full and taut, taking in more than they could hold.

And indeed, it seemed that there was some kind of a blockage, for two or three times towards evening, somewhere far beyond the sky, thunder threatened angrily, but only threatened, for it did not resort to unleashing its rain and its violence. (II, 320-21)

The profligate Petrukha burns down his house so as to receive a sizeable sum of money from the State in compensation, and this despite the fact that his house has been marked as being of major cultural significance and earmarked by the Academy of Sciences for removal to an ethnographic and folk museum. After the fire the island is swept by torrential rain in a symbolic act of cleansing: the rain 'burned and raged in a solid wave', and later, when darkness has descended during the day, the rain 'lashed like a madman' (II, 300). When the house is ablaze, nature feels the pain of loss and the river 'was lit up and there gaped an open wound with pulsating flesh' (II, 265). The opposition of fire and water and light and darkness serves to show in microcosm the coming fate of Matyora, and, to extend the allegory, of Russia itself.

The island has its own folklore, derived from the world of nature. A symbol of Matyora's unyielding spirit and resistance to change is the giant larch tree, the *tsarskiy listven'*, which towers over the rest of the island, and whose roots, according to local belief, are so deep that they anchor the island to the river bed. When lightning removes the top of the tree, it looks even more powerful and majestic. It refuses to be chopped, hacked, or sawn, and has played its own role in the country's history: Kolchak's men used it as a gallows. Standing on a hillside and exposed to the elements, it has lost some of its branches, but its core and its roots are as strong as ever.

It resists the attempts of the men appointed by the State to fell it, using axes, saws, fire, and a chainsaw. These men speak in the rationalist language of

Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man*: “‘With us two times two is four, . . . and five times five is twenty-five’” (II, 354), but despite their tools and logic, the tree remains standing even when all the others around it have been brought down: ‘Only the *tsarskiy listven*’, unconquered and unbowed, continued to rule over the surrounding countryside. But all around was emptiness’ (II, 358). As with the water-bound trees in ‘*Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu*’, we are left with a grotesque, cinematic image of post-apocalypse Russia: smoke-blackened tree stumps, and yellow stubble where once there were cornfields.

The men who try to chop it down liken it to Bogodul, the solitary and profane old man who walks barefoot, and whose skin is so tough it cannot be pierced even by a snake-bite. (His name derives from the Russian word *bogokhul*, meaning ‘blasphemer’.) He is treated as a ‘holy fool’ (*yurodivyy*) by the old women of the village, he is ‘as a God, come down to the suffering earth and testing their humanity with his sinful and beggar-like appearance’ (II, 228). He belongs to the Russia of old, and is out of place in the modern world. It is stated that he will not live long enough to make the move from Matyora, a clear symbolic reference to the death of the old spirituality.

The larch and Bogodul in their own way resist the onslaught of the modern world, although their efforts are, ultimately, doomed. The larch’s supposed anchorage of the island to the river bed is symbolic: it suggests Russia in miniature tied to the flow of time, the forces of history. Matyora is to Russia as is Noah’s Ark to the biblical world: the last refuge of God’s world before the Flood. This symbolism is made explicit:

And the island lay quietly in repose, all the more beloved and tragic in that its borders were clearly defined, and beyond which the earth ended and the water began. But from end to end, from one bank to another it had enough expanse, and wealth, and beauty, and wilderness, and two apiece of every creature — set apart from the mainland (*materik*), it had everything in abundance, and was that not the reason why it had the high-sounding name Matyora? (II, 237)

The life-force of Nature is personified in the story by the Khozyain (Master), a small, nocturnal animal little larger than a cat. It knows everyone and everything on the island, it can sense the breathing of plants and feel the pain of trees as they are cut down. It can also see into the future and read dreams: ‘He was the Master because he saw and knew everything, but did not interfere. And he could remain the Master only if he was seen by no-one and no-one suspected his existence’ (II, 247). For the Khozyain there is no boundary between past and present, life and death, animate and inanimate. Matyora also has a mystical dimension:

Only at night, casting off from the firm river-bank, do the living and the dead come together — the dead come in flesh and word, and ask to be told the truth in order to pass it on further, to those they have remembered. (II, 250–51)

This is the world of ancestral spirits, a world not accepted by the rational mind but one which is inseparable from the historical experience and reality of Matyora.

The rational mind is represented by those who destroy the island and its culture, such as the tree-fellers, representatives of the materialist State. Others include the men sent to ‘cleanse the territory’ of the cemetery, that is, remove the crosses, an action which is vigorously denounced by the villagers as an insult to the memory of the dead. These representatives of the State do not regard the villagers as living beings, but as merely ‘citizens from the flooding zone’ (*grazhdane zatoplyayemye*) (II, 220), a cold and sterile political formula. They are led by the cold-blooded bureaucrat Zhuk (whose name means ‘beetle’), who has a similarly patronizing manner with the villagers. To him their land is merely ‘territory’, their river is ‘the reservoir bed’, and the island simply ‘the flooding zone’. He is aided by Vorontsov, the collective farm chairman, who is responsible for clearing the village of its inhabitants. He, likewise, does not care how this is done; it is merely a task to be carried out with little thought of the human consequences. He has only recently been appointed and is not a local man. He has no common ground with the villagers, and harangues them in bullying and belligerent terms: “‘Are we going to listen or what?’” (II, 223); “‘Are we going to understand what’s going on or what?’” (II, 223); “‘Are we going to make jokes or what?’” (II, 379). His speech is characterized by the pejorative and abusive language of Stalinist demogogy, such as his denunciation of the villagers’ reluctance to leave as ‘wilful delaying tactics’ (*samovol'naya zaderzhka*) and his attacks on those who defend them as ‘connivance’ (*popustitel'stvo*) (II, 380–81). When he exhorts the villagers to complete Matyora’s last harvest ‘at an accelerated tempo’ (*po-udarnomu*), the peasants look at him in utter bewilderment, ‘as if he had dropped from the moon’ (II, 307): there is a torrential downpour outside, which makes agriculture impossible. An enormous gap thus separates the rulers from the ruled. With these men rationalism is equated with destructive cynicism, for the very basis of life itself is threatened.

The figure of Vorontsov is in stark contrast to that of the kolkhoz chairman in *Den'gi dlya Marii*, who, as elsewhere in works of village prose, represents the moral heart of the rural community. For Vorontsov, however, this morality is inseparable from State priorities. Similarly, Nestor, in *Zhivii pomni*, exhorts the old men, women, and war widows of the village to buy war bonds, and puts them down for more than they can actually afford. Nestor is not as despicable as Vorontsov, but his patriotic zeal is misplaced. The kolkhoz chairman in *Den'gi dlya Marii* himself has bitter experience of State priorities, and is more concerned with the well-being of the villagers. Vorontsov is an inhuman agent of an inhuman policy.

Dar'ya Pinigina is the village’s most active defender of the ancestral heritage, and she is the story’s central character. She is an old woman of about eighty, the same age as Anna in *Posledniy srok* and, indeed, very much her ‘continuation’,

as Rasputin has asserted.¹⁴ Other villagers include Bogodul, Sima, Katerina (mother of Petrukha), Nastas'ya and her husband Yegor (who dies soon after leaving Matyora), all of the older generation, and Petrukha, Klava Strigunova, and Vera Nosareva of the younger generation. Just as characters had been judged by their response to Mariya's crisis in *Den'gi dlya Marii*, so too, here the various villagers reveal their true essence in their reaction to the island's fate. Petrukha and Bogodul for example, are exact opposites, *yurodivyye* of different generations: Bogodul of the past, Petrukha of the destructive and vacuous present. Vera is kind-hearted, hard-working, and loves Matyora; Klava welcomes the island's destruction and looks forward to the urban amenities of the new settlement to which they will be moved. She is held in contempt by the older generation for her easy morals and casual attitude to work (Rasputin, too, given his patriarchal views, undoubtedly supports them). There is also a young child, Kolyanya, abandoned by his mother Val'ka, who is looked after by Sima, his grand-mother. Val'ka left Matyora some time ago and has not returned.

There are thus three generations on the island, and it is within the three generations of the Pinigin family that the fundamental philosophical debate on the price of progress is carried out. Furthermore, Rasputin is not, like Leonov in his novel, on the side of the young builders of a new world, as he had been in *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*. The concept of time has moved backward since Leonov's work; moral legitimacy is here judged not on how better things are since the Revolution, but on how they reflect and advance Russian culture and tradition, in Matyora's case spanning three hundred years.

Dar'ya's son Pavel no longer lives in the village but has already moved to the urban-type settlement further down-river where the other inhabitants of Matyora will have to resettle. His son is Andrey, barely out of school, who has come to Matyora to assist in the last harvest gathering and to help the flooding project. In the conflict between father and son the harmonious collaboration of the generations in *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov* is refuted, and we are given an inverse variant of the relationship between Suzanna and her father in *Sot'*. Andrey, like Suzanna, is idealistic and committed, eager, as he says, to get to the 'front line' of Communist construction. His father is not a 'capitalist survival' like Renne, but is a product of the Soviet system. Nevertheless, he questions the wisdom and necessity of destroying people's homes and identity for the sake of progress. 'Isn't the price too high?', he asks himself. 'Couldn't we be paying too much?' (II, 271).

Pavel's deliberations go deeper, however. His anxiety is not only at the loss of his roots, but also at the plight of the individual in a society where destinies are decided not by the people themselves, but by planners and faceless decision-makers. For Pavel the individual must make the best of it, he cannot challenge the system, he must simply get used to the demands made of him. He is aware, though, that there must be a better reality:

‘Where is the truth, why is it that it has been stretched so far and so wide in all directions that you can’t see where it begins and where it ends? There must, after all, be a single, fundamental truth. But why can’t I find it?’ (II, 305)

Pavel, like the ‘superfluous men’ of an earlier age, questions the values of his time, and, like them, senses the corruption of the times he is living in, but is unable to do anything about it.

Pavel is caught between past and present, but his son Andrey sees himself as a man of the future. His torch-bearing spirit represents the political element in man, the desire for change and forward movement. Dar’ya embodies the past, and it is she who crosses swords with Andrey, and their discussion is in essence a moral debate on the historical path and destiny of Russia. The confrontation of the feminine and the masculine here reaches its apogee. Andrey begins the debate:

‘While you’re young, grandmother, you have to see everything, go everywhere. What good is there in you having lived all your life here without moving from one spot? You shouldn’t give in to fate, you should hold it in your hands. . . . Man can do so much now that there aren’t words enough to express it. He has so much power at his disposal it fair takes your breath away. He can do just what he wants.’ (II, 288)

Dar’ya’s view of man is one steeped in history and centuries-old spirituality, one based on experience, love, and natural wisdom:

‘I’ve had a good look at people, son, and I can tell you that they’re like little children. No matter how much they pretend otherwise, they’re like little children. I feel sorry for them. You don’t feel sorry for yourself because you’re still young. You still have strength in your bones, you think you’re powerful and the sky’s the limit. But you’re wrong there. I never knew one person I didn’t feel sorry for. Be he a Solomon. At a distance he might look like he’s not afraid of anything and would take on the devil himself, but that’s all just for show. Take a closer look and he’s just like you and me, no better. You want to jump out of your human skin. It’s never been done, lad. You’ll only tear yourself to bits and wear yourself out for nothing. And you won’t manage what you set out to do. While you’re huffing and puffing yourself up to make your great leap, death will creep up and won’t let you out of its grip. People have forgotten their place under God—that’s what I’m saying. We’re no better than those who went before us.’ (II, 289)

Echoing the lament of old Gordey and Anna and Mironikha, she asserts that people have lost their sense of right and wrong, they have no conscience. Modern man, she says, deifies the machine so much that he has lost sight of his own human frailty. Andrey, in the spirit of Uvad’yev and the builders of *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*, proclaims that ‘man is the ruler of nature’ (II, 302), and that man has no soul because it cannot be seen or touched. To Dar’ya, man has become a slave to the machine in the spiritual and ethical vacuum of materialism:

‘Whoever has a soul has God, son. Believe it or not, but he’s there inside you. Not up in heaven. And more than that, it’s him who holds you in check so that once you are born good you stay good, and have his inner blessing. But whoever destroys his soul is

no longer a man, and he'll not stop at anything to get his way. That's not so hard when you haven't got a soul. Like travelling light. You can do just what you want, with no pain or ache inside, and no questions asked. Machines, you say. Machines do your work for you. Oh, no. For a long time now it's been the other way round — you're working for them.' (II, 311)

Dar'ya's view of man is a comprehensive rejection of modern attempts to build a paradise on earth without spiritual or moral absolutes. Hers is the voice of Mother Russia, warning her sons to turn back before the final catastrophe. When Andrey leaves, he does not say farewell to the island that was his home once and which he now sees for the last time. The following comment is added: 'Goodbye, Andrey. Goodbye. God forbid that your life ever be an easy one' (II, 320). It is not clear whether this is the reflection of Dar'ya, the author himself, or, indeed, Matyora.

On the eve of the island's destruction, Dar'ya visits the cemetery where her ancestors and family are buried to beg their forgiveness for having failed to defend them from oblivion. She hears their voices calling her and, surrounded by smoke and fumes, and with the stench of burning all around, she expresses the work's central theme: 'Truth is in remembering. He who has no memory has no life' (II, 351). Later, she makes contact with the Khozyain:

She left the village. And she could not remember where she had been all day. She could only remember that she walked and walked, without ever stumbling, as far as her strength would take her, and she felt that all the time some small creature she had never seen before was running alongside and trying to look into her eyes. (II, 365)

Like *Den'gi dlya Marii*, the story ends with time suspended. Only a few hours before the flooding operation is to commence, Vorontsov, Pavel, and Petrukha — three men who have lost their 'soul' — set off in a boat to take the last of the old people from the island. Only Dar'ya, Nastas'ya, Bogodul, Sima, Kolyanya, and Katerina remain, sheltering in the barrack-hut that serves as Bogodul's dwelling, the only structure left on the island. A fog descends on the river, the craft gets lost and drifts hopelessly off course. Past and present come together, Mother Nature and Mother Russia join forces as the Khozyain wails and the island prepares to meet its doom. Dar'ya says: 'For us there will be no more day' (II, 387), and outside 'in a dim, blurred, and flickering movement, outlines moved past, large, shaggy, and cloud-like, as during a powerful movement of the heavens' (II, 388). The material and the immaterial, the world of ancestral spirits and the human world come together as darkness is about to descend on Matyora forever.

This apocalyptic vision is in evidence in Rasputin's earlier fiction. In his short story 'Globus', for instance, the globe of the title falls and smashes on the floor: 'The past, flowing downwards, had formed the basis of the globe's stability, and the future froze within it, like an undiscovered, mysterious substance.'¹⁵ The

world, in Rasputin's fiction, thus hangs in the balance, caught between stability and catastrophe.

From the town-village confrontation of his earlier works, Rasputin has developed a metaphysical and philosophical standpoint on the whole issue of progress, the future of Russia, and the role of the individual. In his first published work of fiction he had questioned the human price of Communism. The argument is one of ends and means, not an unusual one in recent Soviet literature, and here it serves as a useful buffer against adverse criticism. It can be argued (as Soviet critics favourably disposed to the work have done) that because the destruction of Matyora has been decided from above, it is not the 'what' that is open to question, but the 'how' — the way policies are implemented by the likes of Zhuk and Vorontsov. The conflict thus becomes reduced to the standard Soviet one of 'negative' and 'positive' types, and the burning issue at the root of the work is conveniently ignored.

Proshchaniye s Matyoroy is not, though, another Soviet production novel. Indeed, it can be regarded as a reworking of, and perhaps even a polemic against, a novel like *Sot'*: Andrey, like Uvad'yev, sees himself as the man of the future, but is defeated in the philosophical arena by Dar'ya, the custodian of past values. Not so Uvad'yev, who roundly beats the *skital'tsy* in ideas and even recruits from their number. Also, Dar'ya, the simple, uneducated but wise peasant woman, is a reversal of the woman of the future, Suzanna.¹⁶ Furthermore, where is the spirit of construction and transformation? Where is the defeat, both real and moral, of those who cling to outmoded notions? The 'radiant future' is markedly absent in this work; indeed, the past has more legitimacy for Russia's development.

In these three works of the 1970s Rasputin speaks out against the destruction of the home, the feminine ethos, roots, and personal identity in the technological age. The Soviet critic Seleznyov says that the break with Nature is the 'displaced centre' in Rasputin's work.¹⁷ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Rasputin has devoted many of his public statements to deploring environmental pollution and spoliation of the national heritage, be it the result of tourists' ravages of Lake Baykal or the construction of high-rise blocks around the Troitskiy church in Irkutsk which, he asserts, will destroy the aesthetic integrity of this example of late Siberian baroque.¹⁸

Rasputin accepts that Siberia is changing, but he calls for a measured and rational exploitation of its vast natural resources. What the future holds depends on how man uses the power at his disposal:

We have only one Siberia. Every land is unique, and Siberia is no exception. It is exceptional in that it is young, and was, until recently, a protected region, but feeling today the enormous and hitherto unprecedented impact of man's economic activity. Here is the test of what man has become today, and what we can expect of him in the future.¹⁹

Rasputin feels that it is important to maintain an emotional, subconscious awareness of one's heritage and roots, both for the individual's and the nation's identity. These were his thoughts in 1980 on the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo Field:

We require special heartfelt and propitious moments not to grasp with our minds, but to feel and understand in our hearts and with our memories the eternal and the primordial, that of which our flesh and spirit are composed, and any reference to or awareness of which we regard, out of some kind of exterior false modesty, as high-flown and excessive.²⁰

Indeed, a man's life only has meaning if he has this inner, non-rational contact with history and tradition:

And a man cannot stand firmly on his feet, cannot live in confidence if he does not intimately feel the deeds and fortunes of his forebears, if he does not appreciate inside the responsibility he has for the place granted to him in the huge and general rank-and-file to be who he is. The epic source of strength we have from our mother, our native land, is no longer given to just a select few, the *bogatyri*, but has for all of us immense importance and healing power, it has the same magical water of life to enable man to return to his own image, spirit, and meaning, to his own immutable purpose.²¹

Such a statement is a conscious identification with the truth Dar'ya discovers in the village cemetery of Matyora.

To Rasputin, the Russian is still a man of the soil, and his soul is destroyed by the machine. 'Scientific and technological progress', he said recently, 'has lately become, as was only to be expected, the scientific and technological yoke'.²² The Russian is intuitively aware of the beauty of the natural world, and his links with it are more active than those of other nationalities:

We . . . are too dependent on the beauty of our native land. We do not merely feel pleasure in a meadow, a forest, or by a stream — we are part of them, we are their source, because our sight and hearing are extremely well-developed, as are our innate sense of being at one with nature, our sense of being hand in hand with it both at work and play. In our attitude to the world and the natural environment we are still pagans.²³

Rasputin identifies the Russian soul with a pre-industrial (and consequently pre-ideological) state, similar to the ideal of the Russian peasant held by the nineteenth-century Slavophiles. Rasputin retreats in time, and it is little wonder that his fiction following *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, a series of short stories published in 1982, explores the experiences and sensations of childhood.

Children are a significant feature of Rasputin's earlier fiction, and, indeed, play a major role in the fiction of some of the USSR's leading contemporary writers, in particular Aytmatov, Bitov, and Nagibin.²⁴ In 'My s Dimkoy' Rasputin

shows the War as it affects the lives of two small boys living thousands of miles from the front. In 'Mama kuda-to ushla' he depicts the anxiety and loneliness of a small child left alone for a few hours. Io and Lyoshka, teenagers about to enter the adult world, suffer in very different ways from the callousness of that world, as does the young boy in 'Tam, na krayu ovraga'. Because we see reality from the point of view of these youngsters, adult interpretations of it are shown to be illusory and misleading. We are given an added perspective; there is no single, monolithic truth.

Similarly, the adult and the child are spiritually linked, if the adult has not lost contact with his or her past and childhood. The relationship between Anna and Ninka in *Posledniy srok*, for example, is defined in the following terms: 'True enough, the very old and the very young are the only people who are properly able to show at every turn a sensitive and keen wonder at life and the surrounding world' (I, 270).

In the context of village prose, the child's spiritual affinity with people of the older generation is not restricted to Rasputin's work, but recurs in the short stories and *povesti* of Belov, Nosov, Lichutin, and others. Rural types have a child-like innocence and spiritual purity that are reminiscent of the Romantic preoccupation with the child, as explained by J. B. Priestley:

Now the young child is only struggling into full consciousness and still enjoys a profoundly satisfying relation, through the unconscious, with Nature . . . So to the Romantics . . . the child is no longer a half-grown man or woman, the young of our species, but the archetypal holy innocent, whose joy and unthinking wisdom we should try to recapture, if only for a moment, whose happiness irradiates a lost world.²⁵

Viktor, in 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu', remembers at length his rural childhood as he tries to bridge the gap between subjective memory and objective reality. More significant, however, for Rasputin's overall thematic direction, are the words of Lidiya Mikhaylovna, the wronged school-teacher in 'Uroki frantsuzskogo': "A person grows old not when he reaches old age, but when he ceases to be a child".²⁶ Human evil is a consequence of losing one's childhood, and one's memories of it. Thus, in his more recent public statements he consistently bemoans the erosion in society of such fundamental qualities as kindness and spontaneity, and calls upon teachers and educational theorists to make more use of traditional folk *skazki* in teaching children the difference between good and evil, right and wrong.²⁷ On a broader plane, it is easy to spot in this concern a longing for the simple values and way of life of the Tofalariyans; society as a whole becomes more inherently evil as it moves away from its roots and its period of pastoral innocence. The village, says Rasputin, is 'our old mother',²⁸ from whom we have to learn our lessons before entering the adult world.

The mystical plane of reality, the world of ancestral spirits intuitively felt by Dar'ya and those who are aware of the past, is also felt by children and, in the later short stories, by an adult narrator or character. The fifteen-year-old Sanya in 'Vek zhivi — vek lyubi' ('You Live and Love') remembers something his father once told him:

'We think that we are alive when we have perhaps been dead and buried a long time, but we can't remember anything. We bustle about and strain every muscle in this life, like circus acrobats. But we don't realise that we are no longer living, that someone has merely gathered together our sins and passions so as to see what kind of people we were.'²⁸

Sanya is left alone with his grandmother when his parents go on holiday, but she falls ill and he has to look after himself. Like Io, his introduction into the adult world is a painful one. He goes berry picking with old Mityay and a character known as 'uncle Volodya'. They travel by train round Baykal, and pass a deserted village, the houses still standing as grotesque and ghostly reminders of the civilization that was once there. The train as the agent of travel and disruption introduces Sanya to the realities of the country's rapid development, the uprooting of whole communities.

The social and the personal are correlated when they arrive at their destination and spend the rest of the day collecting berries, spending the night in the forest. As they are about to leave the next day with their substantial haul, Volodya casually announces that Sanya's berries are all poisoned because they have lain overnight in a zinc-coated container. Sanya's efforts have been for nothing but, more importantly, Volodya had known this all along, even while the berries were being picked. There is no rational explanation for such malice other than callousness and spiritual stagnation: Volodya has, in Dar'ya's words, 'destroyed his soul'. It is Sanya's first experience of the malice and treachery of the adult world. His awareness of it is compounded when he later dreams of voices angry, bewildered, and worried, and one obscene voice which he does not recognize, but realizes has become part of him.

The narrator of 'Chto peredat' vorone?' ('What Shall We Tell the Crow?') is separated from his wife and sees her and his five-year-old daughter only occasionally. In his spiritual turmoil he comes into contact through feeling and emotional experience with a deeper, immaterial reality, and merges, like Ivan Afrikanovich, with the natural world:

It was as if I became one with an all-embracing emotion and remained inside it. I saw neither sky, nor water, nor earth, and in the empty world where light begins there hung suspended an invisible road moving away into the distance, which bore along voices, some quickly, some quietly.³⁰

The narrator experiences the same anguish as Sanya when he, too, is visited by voices at night — the voices of his deceased friends. He is unable to understand

them, and in despair he exclaims: 'Lord, believe in us, for we are alone.'³¹ The next day he discovers that his young daughter has fallen ill. His communion with nature has enriched his soul and made him aware of another reality in which he can share his child's suffering.

Dream is a favourite device of Rasputin for suggesting states of mind. We have seen Kuz'ma's dream on his train journey to the town, which offers him an ideal but unattainable solution to his crisis. Varvara in *Posledniy srok* dreams of making *pel'meni* with mud, among strangers. This dream suggests that she is alienated from her fellows, and from her immediate family, but not totally alienated from the land. A Freudian analysis of the dreams of Volkov in the early story 'V obshchem vagone' and of the narrator of 'Natasha' would suggest an erotic attraction: both are flying through the air, looking down on the earth below, accompanied by a girl (moreover, in the latter story, the girl is wearing a tight, clinging dress). In 'Natasha', the narrator is led to an awareness of a metaphysical state and a greater truth: 'I see and hear everything and feel able to grasp the main mystery which unites and determines everything, and in which is held the whole of life from beginning to end.'³²

The 'mystery' is withheld; he realizes that he has merely tapped an emotional source within himself of which he was not previously aware: 'having flown and looked down on the earth from above, I have finally learned the true measure of anxiety, sadness, and pain.'³³ Any further contact is also withheld, as Natasha vanishes from his life as mysteriously as she had appeared: she is a nurse, he a hospital patient, and both experience the same dream. The narrator is able to remember it only after his operation, when he recovers from the anaesthetic. He wakes up, though, to find that she has left the hospital and moved to another town. No reason is given, but her goodness and purity are emphasized throughout: she is like an angel come down from heaven to bring spiritual light to men and lighten their suffering.

The adult narrators of these latter two short stories discover the irrational and intangible in man's soul that unite him with the natural world and its hidden powers. To achieve contact with it they endure severe physical or emotional discomfort. Salvation in the modern world is in the form of mystical awareness, and is achieved through suffering, in the true Orthodox tradition.

One of Rasputin's most recent pictures of a man who has lost his roots and his place in the natural world, who has no identity or sense of self is that of the alcoholic Gerol'd in the short story 'Ne mogu-u . . .' ('I Can't . . .'). The very title is a cry for help from a man who has nothing left inside him, and whom we meet, significantly, on a train. He says very little, but sits in a drunken daze, weeping with self-pity. Gerol'd's self-induced demoralization can be seen as the logical culmination of the alcoholic violence shown by Vasily in 'Vasily i Vasilisa', and the vodka-induced moroseness of Mikhail in *Posledniy srok*. All of these characters become estranged from their family, and, by implication,

from their Motherland. Drunkenness, a collective evil in the Soviet Union, is for Rasputin a metaphor for the collective soul in distress, torn from its roots and struggling for identity in the modern, alienating world.³⁴

CHAPTER IV

LIVE AND REMEMBER

Zhivi i pomni at first glance stands somewhat apart from Rasputin's other writings in that it is his only major work not set in the contemporary period. Also, the author's attention here is on the Russian peasant woman not as a custodian of past values dying out in the modern world, but as an embodiment of sublime spiritual beauty and goodness. Such a figure has antecedents in his work; for example, the lonely schoolteacher Lidiya Mikhaylovna in 'Uroki frantsuzskogo'. She acts as a substitute mother for the young boy Vitya, but is eventually dismissed when discovered gambling with him by the school's headmaster. She is thus very close to the mother-figure so dominant in Rasputin's fiction as a whole, and shares the same fate as Anna in 'Vstrecha' and Aleksandra in 'Vasily i Vasilisa'.

The heroine of *Zhivi i pomni* is Nastyona, innocent herself of any crime, but, like Mariya, guilty in the eyes of the law and, unlike her, ultimately tragic. The story is set in the last months of the War, when Andrey Gus'kov, Nastyona's husband, deserts from the army and returns surreptitiously to his native village Atamanovka in Siberia. He announces himself only to his wife, and together they resume some semblance of their relationship before it was cut short by the War. Within the broad canvas of war, Rasputin thus concentrates on a tiny, seemingly inconsequential pocket of human drama, but creates in it a situation of profound and universal significance.

The author is also true to his fundamental concern: he explores the human response to a drastic change in circumstances, and the individual's relationship to the community within these events. However, it is useful to look at this work in the context of the usual Soviet socialist realist treatment of the deserter theme, an example of which is Chingiz Aytmatov's short story 'Litsom k litsu' ('Face to Face', 1958).

In this work Seyde, a Kirghiz peasant woman, hides and protects her husband Ismail, who has deserted from the Red Army on his way to the front in the first days of the War. Ismail feels no spiritual bond with 'the people', and feels no commitment to the common cause: his act of desertion is born of cowardice and a desire to save his own skin at any cost. He is an individualist, in socialist realist typology, and hence his defiance of the collective is ultimately doomed. Seyde's civic conscience is aroused when she discovers that he has

killed a neighbour's cow. The neighbour is a widow with three young children, who had been dependent on the cow for its milk. Seyde is appalled at Ismail's unthinking brutality, and leads the authorities to his place of hiding, denouncing him as they stand face to face. Thus she asserts her unity with the people and the common cause, and she subordinates her own happiness to the interests of the State.

Andrey Gus'kov, however, is no coward, nor does he desert in the early stages of the War. He has fought for three years, has been wounded, suffered shell-shock, and has received medals for bravery. In one battle with enemy tanks he was the sole survivor from his detachment. He has fought on all the major Soviet fronts: Smolensk, Moscow, and Stalingrad, and, before his desertion, had been with the Red Army on the offensive. In the summer of 1944 he is seriously wounded and spends three months in hospital, undergoing two major operations. Not unreasonably, he expects to be given at least a few days' convalescent leave to visit his family, and these hopes are encouraged by his fellow soldiers in the hospital, and by the doctors. Indeed, with this in mind he dissuades Nastyona from visiting him. His hopes are dashed, though, when he is told to rejoin his unit immediately. Andrey decides to go home for a few days, thinking that in the confusion of war-torn Russia no-one will notice his absence, and he boards a train for Siberia.

The further and longer he travels, however, the clearer the light becomes in which he sees the consequences of his action, and the less likely becomes the possibility of rejoining his unit. After travelling more than a month, he arrives in the vicinity of Atamanovka, and sets himself up in a deserted hut on the other side of the Angara. Andrey's action of desertion is substantially different from Ismail's: he is no coward; indeed, in other circumstances he would be hailed as a war hero. He is, rather, driven to this reckless step by the demands of an uncaring State, which requires unflinching obedience and relentless effort. Andrey has simply had enough.

Rasputin's hero, therefore, at first elicits not scorn, but sympathy. In the context of war, though, and especially the State's view of it as a struggle of the two ideologies, Andrew, like Ismail, goes over to the enemy. His act of individualism is a strike against the collective struggle. The theme of Aytmatov's story applies equally to Andrey: 'He who forsakes his people in their hour of need becomes their enemy whether he wills it or not.'¹

The *narod* in *Zhivi i pomni* is represented by the various peasants of Atamanovka, including Andrey's parents Mikheich and Semyonovna. Others include Nestor, the collective farm chairman, Innokenty Ivanovich, the old men Yefim and Stepan, and the women whose menfolk are at the front or have been killed: Nad'ka, Liza Vologzhina, Vera, Agaf'ya, Vasilisa, Katerina, and Kapitolina.

Nastyona's reaction to her husband's desertion differs from that of Seyde. She stands by him to the last, cutting herself off from the State, the community,

and her family. Nastyona is thus not a social or political functionary, but a human being with weaknesses and ordinary human needs. She is a wife first and a citizen second. Rasputin has stated that in this story he was striving above all for psychological authenticity:

The reader was prepared for a situation where she would either turn in her husband herself or make him give himself up. But Nastyona does neither of these things. And I had to demonstrate it so that the reader would not doubt that what she does is both necessary and plausible.²

Nastyona, in short, represents Rasputin's ideal of womanhood. She is a person 'who, by her understanding of life, cannot say: you are guilty and I am not, and who will always accept the guilt of another as her own'.³ Given the hopelessness of the situation, Nastyona, like Andrey, is doomed.

Andrey and Nastyona see each other only rarely. After their first meeting, when he appears to her at night in the Gus'kovs' bath-house, Andrey, obviously, cannot make his presence known in the village. Nastyona has to travel to see him, and she makes the hazardous journey across the frozen Angara and through the snow-bound forest to reach his refuge. As a result of one of these clandestine meetings she becomes pregnant.

As their relationship develops Andrey descends into inhumanity and Nastyona rises to saintly martyrdom. Andrey is consistently associated with demonic and grotesque concepts. When he first arrives and reaches his hut, he is 'like a dead man'.⁴ Pursued and overwhelmed by a 'feeling of bewilderment and emptiness' (II, 111), he learns to live by night and sleep by day, hunting for food and himself feeling hunted in return:

In these hours of darkness he lived by scent alone and thought of nothing, and as morning approached it was scent that led him back to his hut and plunged him into sleep. . . . In such moments it was as if his memory went blank, he refused to believe that he had been in a war and had lived among people, it seemed that he had always roamed alone like this, with nothing to do and no debt to pay, and that such a fate had been prepared for him from the very outset. (II, 141-42)

It is significant that here, too, loss of humanity is linked with loss of memory.

When he looks into the eyes of a she-goat he has mortally wounded, he sees reflected his own head with the horns of a devil. Furthermore, he is at one stage seized with a desire to burn down the old village mill; his association with fire increases the satanic aspect.

Nastyona sees him in terms conditioned by peasant superstition and folklore, in her own highly impressionable frame of reference. When he first approaches her, in the gloom of the bath-house at night, he is as 'something large and unkempt' looming darkly before her (II, 17) and 'a gnarled, barely distinguishable figure' (II, 19). In those first moments together after three-and-a-half years apart, his shaggy appearance reminds her of a

'werewolf' (*oboroten'*) (II, 21). When she visits him on the other side of the river for the first time, she is struck by his resemblance to images from peasant demonology: '*leshii*' and '*nechistaya sila*' (II, 41). She sees reflected in his dingy surroundings the desolation of his soul:

Everything here troubled and at the same time frightened Nastyona — the deserted winter hut, devoid of any spirit of life, its makeshift floor merely boards thrown on the ground any old how, with part of its ceiling sagging and its walls blackened, unevenly hewn and covered in withered cobwebs; and the snow outside, brilliant in the sunshine and undisturbed by tracks, billowing down from the mountain in thick flakes; and Andrey here beside her, now that she recognised him in the light of day . . . and, finally, she herself, not understanding how or why she was here in this distant, neglected spot. (II, 42)

Other Russian literary illustrations of the proverb 'A house is the same as the person who lives in it' (*Kakov dom, takov i khozyain*) include Yevgeny Onegin's house in Tat'yana's dream, inhabited by demons and grotesque creatures, and the homes of the various landowners visited by Chichikov in Gogol's *Myortvyye dushi* ('Dead Souls'). Rasputin is obviously well aware of this folkloric heritage in classical Russian literature.

Andrey is isolated not only from the human community, but also from the natural world. He learns to howl like a wolf and frightens away all the wildlife living nearby. As the months pass and winter comes to an end, the snow and ice melt and nature revives. Although the air becomes increasingly fresh and the forest becomes brighter and freer, Andrey desperately seeks out the last traces of snow in the dark reaches of the forest where the sun does not penetrate. Nastyona, when she sets out on her increasingly arduous journeys to visit him, is invariably accompanied by darkness, rain, wind, or storm. Andrey turns from the sunlight and the life-giving force — the sunlight that sustains Anna in *Posledniy srok* — and sinks deeper into his own purgatory.

The Angara, as has been seen in 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu' and *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, represents the flow of time and historical progress. In this story it acts also as the natural boundary, separating Andrey from the human community, and it is this boundary Nastyona has to cross as she moves from one world to the other. As Andrey points out to her:

'Before only one side of the river existed for you: the side where people were. On the right-hand bank of the Angara. But now there are two: where there are people and where there is me. You can't ever bring the two together — The Angara would have to dry up for that.' (II, 87)

The Angara symbolizes a psychological barrier for Nastyona. In winter, at the beginning of the narrative and when she was still excited by her husband's return, the river is frozen and easy to cross on foot. But when the ice thaws, and when her conscience begins to trouble her, it becomes increasingly difficult. It is also a metaphysical boundary between Andrey's world of oblivion and

degradation, and normal human society. Nastyona is ultimately unable to cross this boundary, and she perishes in it.

Whereas Andrey comes from a hard-working and conscientious rural community, which he rejects, Nastyona has no such stability to which she can turn. Her father was killed during collectivization and her mother died in the famine that followed. As a young girl during the famine she kept herself and her younger sister alive until they made their way to the home of a relative who took them in. Even when she was married she had to endure the petty domestic tyranny of her mother-in-law and physical beatings from her husband. (One particularly brutal attack occurred when she suggested that their childlessness might be a result not of any defect on her part, but on his.) All in all, she has known in the course of her life little happiness, but much deprivation, fear, and cruelty. Nevertheless, her sense of loyalty and devotion is strong, stronger than Andrey's, even if it clashes eventually with her innate sense of good.

In her suffering and ultimate tragedy she is associated with images suggesting spiritual beauty and religious absolution. When she realizes that she is pregnant, for example, she stands naked before the window of her room one night and the moon casts the shadow of the window-frame over her breast in the shape of a cross. When Andrey learns that she is carrying his child, he is overjoyed: it is the expiation of his sin, the extension of his being into the future. Nastyona becomes for him his 'Holy Mother' (*Bogoroditsa*) (II, 82); 'Save my soul', he implores her (II, 86).⁵

Similarly, when she first visits Andrey, she brings him some candles obtained from a church to light up 'the darkness of his isolation and despair'. It is Russian Orthodox practice to light candles and pray for the souls of departed or loved ones. Also, as G. E. Mikkelson points out, Andrey and Nastyona, when they are apart, pray for each other.⁶

Such religious symbolism is heightened by the resemblance of the relationship between Andrey and Nastyona to that of Raskol'nikov and Sonya Marmeladova in Dostoyevsky's *Prestupleniye i nakazaniye* ('Crime and Punishment'). Towards the end of the story Nastyona calls Andrey to repentance in terms strikingly similar to those used by Sonya with Raskol'nikov:

'Andrey, maybe all this isn't necessary? Maybe we shouldn't go on like this, maybe we can stop? I'd follow you anywhere, to hard labour even. Wherever they sent you I'd go, too. I just can't go on like this, and neither can you — just look at yourself, at what you've become, what you've done to yourself.' (II, 182)

Sonya says to Raskol'nikov: "'What — what have you done to yourself? . . . I'll go with you, I'll go anywhere with you . . . I'll join you in hard labour'"⁷. With the current interest in Dostoyevsky in the Soviet Union after decades of suppression, Soviet critics have attempted to establish parallels between the malevolent and individualistic Andrey and Raskol'nikov and the Underground Man.⁸ Andrey, however, is not acting according to any abstract theory; he is

simply losing his humanity. Moreover, Raskol'nikov is redeemed through his religious impulse; Soviet socialist realist ethics would not allow the traitor Andrey to re-enter the human community: he is by necessity damned.

To continue their clandestine relationship becomes increasingly hazardous for Nastyona. Although she has to lie and steal to keep Andrey hidden and still the suspicions of an increasingly suspicious community, deception goes against her very nature. When, early in the narrative, Maksim Vologzhin returns home from the War to a hero's welcome, with his arm in a sling but otherwise in one piece, Nastyona's sense of guilt prevents her from taking part in the celebration, in which the whole village is involved. She feels ashamed before everyone: Vologzhin, her friend Nad'ka, widowed with three small children, and Andrey's mother and father: 'She was now a stranger, an outsider, not daring to respond to their tears and joys and not bringing herself to join in their conversations and songs' (II, 71).

When the end of the War is announced, she is similarly unable to share the communal rejoicing, realizing that 'this was not her day or her victory, and she could have nothing to do with it' (II, 151). Her pregnancy in the course of time is noticed and commented upon, and, claiming that the father was a casual acquaintance from outside the village and denying all knowledge of Andrey's whereabouts, she is driven from her adopted home by Semyonovna and ostracized by the community. The moment of her discovery is described as 'the threshold of her sacred path' (II, 186) — her path to martyrdom. Nastyona's movements are now watched, as suspicion grows that Andrey, long known to have deserted, is in the vicinity. She sets off in a boat (it is now summer) across the Angara to warn him that the authorities are closing in and the police have arrived in the village. She is followed, and, as her pursuers catch her up, finally broken by the twin burden of guilt and duplicity, she throws herself in the swift-running waters of the river. As she prepares to die, she hears thousands of church-bells, and a large shadow creeps across the water. Nastyona's death is, in the words of G. E. Mikkelson, 'a release from torment, a resolution, and a martyrdom, in the traditional Christian sense'.⁹ She is reunited with the community after her body is washed up, four days later, when the women in the village arrange to have her buried in the village cemetery, and not on the piece of land set aside for suicides. The women, mothers all, realize that she died for love, they understand and are deeply affected by her tragedy.

It is a sign of Rasputin's considerable success in making this story not simply a religious parable but also a compelling psychological drama that, as well as charting the essential opposition of Nastyona and Andrey, he also brings out the links that bind them, just as he stresses the family characteristics of Anna's apparently disparate children in *Posledniy srok*. For example, it is precisely in his isolation that Andrey joins the human community with the prospect of becoming a father. Andrey and Nastyona also experience the same dream

when Andrey is at the front and they are thousands of kilometres apart. Nastyona appears to him as she was before she was married, but surrounded by children — their as yet unborn children — and standing against a background of birch trees, symbols of rural Russia. She upbraids Andrey for leaving her alone for so long and with so many children to look after, and thus provides a subconscious spur for Andrey's decision to desert. Also, on her return home from her first visit to Andrey, the guilt she feels is described in the same frame of reference in which she had first observed Andrey's home:

Nastyona felt her soul to be pained and troubled, and at the same time full of space and width — as in a house from which things have been removed. Now she could do exactly as she pleased. And this emptiness made her shiver, it lured her and drew her in, laying bare all those corners where every thought rang with a resonant and questioning echo. (II, 51)

Andrey soon glimpses the duality of his personality in his changed circumstances; “‘It's as if it's not my life, it's as if someone else has crept under my skin and is ordering me about. Whenever I want to turn to the right — he turns to the left’” (II, 48). Nastyona reciprocates this awareness towards the end, seeing Andrey's descent into darkness and her own double existence: ‘Every person has arms and legs enough for one, but there's more than one of him inside — there's several, and all of them pulling in different directions and tearing him to pieces’ (II, 175).

Just as Andrey is isolated from the natural world, so, too, Nastyona sees herself judged by nature after she has denied to Mikheich knowing where Andrey is.

The day was already well on the wane and sinking downwards, and the sun and the moon had appeared at different ends of the same sky; the thin, pointed crescent of the moon flickered, evil and assertive, while the sun shone pale. Nastyona always felt afraid when she saw them together, and she could not understand why they did not go their separate, time-ordained ways. And now she also became uneasy. Without screwing up her eyes she looked full at the sun, and she thought that she could feel the cold, stinging rays of the moon reaching her. (II, 133)

These links serve to heighten the tragedy, and increase the sense of Andrey's sin, for Andrey is not so much rebelling against the State in his actions, as striking against the hallowed concept of motherhood. Throughout the story he seeks to destroy this concept. On his journey home to Atamanovka he spends a month with Tanya, a deaf mute, who provides for him without expecting anything from him in return, feeling very happy with even the slightest sign of gratitude or affection. She teaches him to understand her sign language ‘with the same love and patience as when teaching a child to speak’ (II, 29). Tanya is like a mother to him, and Andrey leaves her callously and without warning. As he later sinks into degradation, he remembers Tanya and again yearns to be with her, not, however, for pity and sympathy, but to mock and pity her

alternately, to exercise total power over her, to use her body as he pleases, and to satisfy his ever-increasing egocentricity. She had offered him maternal warmth and understanding, but he responds with cruelty and sadism.

Similarly, Nastyona, when she first visits him, feeds him by hand 'like a child' (II, 42), but he turns away, a symbolic rejection of the maternal instinct which is later to have a tragic culmination. (Nastyona has a presentiment of her death when, towards the end of the narrative, she accidentally wanders into the graveyard of suicides and stumbles into a grave. Furthermore, she cannot swim and has a morbid fear of water. It is two days after this incident that she drowns.)

Andrey's treatment of Mother Nature is similarly cruel. He wounds a she-goat and watches its lingering death in twisted fascination.

He did not kill it as he should have done, but stood and watched, trying not to miss a single movement, the suffering of the dying animal, its intermittent convulsions, and its head lolling to and fro on the snow. (II, 55)

He later kills a four-month-old calf in full view of its mother, standing on the opposite bank of the river. The child in Nastyona's womb is also four months old at the time, and Nastyona and Andrey similarly belong to opposing banks of the Angara. He kills the calf not merely for the meat, but 'to please something that had taken a firm and unrelenting hold of him' (II, 149). Nastyona's fate is implied here, for she at one stage dreams of talking to a cow, an unconscious awareness of her organic oneness with the natural world. Andrey tries to destroy the beauty and the very basis of life.

Zhivi i pomni, therefore, far from marking a thematic departure, reflects Rasputin's consistent anxiety for the relationship of the individual to his or her society, and the bonds that tie him or her to it. This work, moreover, shows the author's confidence to transfer this basic conflict to another period and within it to increase the scope for tragedy. *Zhivi i pomni*, like *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, spans several months, whereas his earlier two *povesti* embraced only a few days. Rasputin proves that he can sustain tightness of form and subject-matter in whatever time-scale he chooses.

The links of *Zhivi i pomni* with the mainstream of Rasputin's writings are deeper, however. Like the tree-fellers who try to cut down the *tsarskiy listven'* and the authorities they represent, Andrey's assault is on Mother Nature. Like Anna's children, he forsakes his roots and betrays the spiritual and moral heritage of his native land. Like them, too, he turns his back on the concept of motherhood. Andrey is thus judged in terms of his relationship to the natural world, the unspoilt Eden Rasputin identifies with Russia before the Fall.

Rasputin's collective hero is not an individual woman of any particular generation, but Mother Russia herself, personified, symbolized and deified in the various female characters in his works. His major conflicts can be reduced

to Soviet man's denial of his roots, resulting in an upset in the balance of the feminine and masculine in human society. Consequently, the masculine ethos becomes more assertive, and the feminine is continuously and increasingly under threat.

Andrey escapes retribution, but morally he dies. He hears the commotion on the Angara, guesses rightly that the authorities are on his trail, and escapes to a cave in the taiga he has prepared for just such an eventuality. His degradation is complete: he reverts to a pre-historic state, living like an animal in a material and spiritual wilderness. Andrey has no past, present, or future. The story's title could serve as a central motif for all of Rasputin's writing: it is a warning to society that the past, the community's roots and the sources of its identity, and the lessons the individual learns in childhood, are only to be forsaken at the peril of man losing his humanity, his soul.

CONCLUSION

Rasputin's work reflects and develops the three main strands of village prose observed in the first chapter of this monograph. The historical takes in the three-hundred-year-old history of doomed Matyora, a symbol of Russia's being flooded by the ethics of materialist progress. The ecological debate is closely tied to this. His lyricism focuses on the inseparability of man and nature, the Russian soul and its natural environment. Since *Posledniy srok*, however, his fiction has been marked by probing psychological analysis of the individual confronted by change and crisis, and by the early 1980s Rasputin had developed a mystical vision of modern Soviet man's spiritual world.

Like Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago*, Rasputin's works show Russia in transition, where revolution is accompanied by catastrophe. Death corresponds to winter, and water — the flow of time and history — causes change and disruption. Rasputin's heroines, like Lara, are Mother Russia personified. Rasputin's portrayal of women, moreover, is a hymn of praise to that section of the population who have suffered most in Soviet history. He is concerned not with external sexual relationships, as are the Soviet 'urban' writers, but with the inner world of woman. Women embody love, warmth, stability, and fortitude in an uncertain age.

Rasputin has transferred the themes of village prose to a higher plane, where the struggle of good and evil is no longer played out between classes, but in the soul of man. His works are built on a metaphysical clash of the human with the inhuman and the anti-human, the spirit against cold logic, man against the beast.

In July 1985 Rasputin published his first long work for nine years, a *povest'* entitled 'Pozhar' ('The Fire'). In many ways it returns him to the mainstream of his earlier work, before his preoccupation with inner states and the depths of personality in the early 1980s.

The fire of the title takes place in the village of Sosnovka, which is the home of people from the former village Yegorovka, now lying under the Angara as a result of flooding. The story could thus be a sequel to *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, especially as one of the inhabitants of Sosnovka is a certain Klava Strigunova.

It is the month of March, signalling the end of winter and the coming of spring, and a fire breaks out in the village's food stores, quickly spreading from one to the other. The attempts of the villagers to put out the fire and save the village's supplies are seen through the eyes of Ivan Petrovich, a character

unhappy in his new environment and longing to join his son who lives near Khabarovsk. Also, he is dying, though whether from physical disability or spiritual demoralization we do not know.

Thus, as in *Den'gi dlya Marii*, the collective efforts of the villagers are required in order to prevent a catastrophe. However, to Ivan Petrovich's intense consternation, the villagers are more concerned with individual pilfering and getting hold of goods they could not otherwise have obtained than with actually helping to put out the blaze. Even an old woman gathers up bottles of vodka, and one old man, Misha Khampo, is murdered when he tries to stop the thieving. The fire can be seen as a symbolic conflagration which destroys the already tenuous bonds between people who have lost their past and their roots, and brings out their innate savagery. There is little difference between the degradation of these people and that of Andrey Gus'kov: every man is out for himself, the common cause is neglected and spurned.

Ivan Petrovich realizes that people have changed. His wife, Alyona, is to him a symbol of perfect spiritual beauty, but her type is no more. She is one of the last of a dying breed. The end of the story sees him reject the human world as he leaves the village and walks out into the taiga, to become one with the earth and nature. The story can be seen as a continuation of Rasputin's previous themes and concerns, but the tone is surprisingly pessimistic and there is no alleviating socialist realist perspective.

The politics of change are, of course, evident in all national literatures. Much of English literature in the nineteenth century, when English society was experiencing profound upheavals in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, was given to depicting with sadness the passing of a rural way of life. The Romantic poets, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, through to D.H. Lawrence in the early twentieth century — all reacted vigorously to the moral and psychological implications of the deracination of the peasantry, and the loss of innocence and self. All looked back to a time when man still enjoyed an instinctive communion with the natural world and was taught by it. Indeed, the evils of the new city are graphically depicted in the novels of Dickens, where the contrast of the grey, murky industrial landscape and the homely countryside is often striking.¹ In Hardy and Lawrence, especially, a new morality is being forged, following on from the social criticism of the nineteenth century, based on the individual's relationship with the natural world.

So, too, the village writers take their lead from the humanist revival of the Thaw and its aftermath, and its rejection of Stalinist rigidity and terror. They redefine the individual's relationship with his environment and his society, and attempt to offer guidelines for the future. Logic and reason are eschewed, and the values, even the language of the humble folk of the soil are seen as prerequisites for the revitalization of a dislocated society. The world of the

spirit and the irrational are seen as more reliable indicators of goodness and morality. Nature and landscape, as in the naturist writers of English nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, are 'an outer correlative for an inner state of awareness'.²

Rasputin's preoccupation with social change and its consequences brings his work close to recent works of Western fiction documenting the convulsions of developing countries. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), for example, tries to preserve India's history since Independence from 'the corruption of the clocks',³ drawing attention especially to the spiritual and moral atrophy that accompanies modernization. V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) shows what can go wrong when past and present come into conflict as an emerging African country tries to establish its identity in the modern world.⁴ Both these works are marked by a vision of chaos more violent than that in *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*, but all three show the social fabric torn, the world of the past threatened and inevitably crushed. Like *Doktor Zhivago*, these works present an eschatological picture of human history.

In his 1982 short stories, Rasputin explored his characters' inner awareness divorced from any concrete background. Mind is divorced from physical reality, and we are shown mystical, transcendental images of human crisis. These stories were a logical progression from the preoccupation with the irrational and the unconscious evident in his earlier work. Dream, oneness with the natural world and the opposition of land and water, water and fire, and darkness and light reveal his exploration of the human psyche and its interaction with the environment. In 1985 Rasputin turned back to a specific environment and chain of events. Matyora/Yegorovka is destroyed, the social and psychological roots of Sosnovka do not run very deep. Rasputin has yet to offer a hopeful and optimistic picture of man's ability to cope with the flux and the pressures of modern Soviet life.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. It must be noted that this collection does not contain his story 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu'.
2. M. Yu. Lermontov, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy v pyati tomakh* (M-L: Academia, 1935-37), v (1937), 205.
3. For analyses of the Thaw, see George Gibian, *Interval of Freedom: Soviet Literature during the Thaw* (Minneapolis, 1960), and Walter N. Vickery, *The Cult of Optimism: Political and Ideological Problems of Recent Soviet Literature* (Bloomington, 1963).
4. For an account of this movement, see especially Anatoly Gladilin, *The Making and Unmaking of a Soviet Writer: My Story of the 'Young Prose' of the Sixties and After*, translated by David Lapeza (Ann Arbor, 1979), and Edward J. Brown, "'Young Prose' and What Became of It', in his *Russian Literature since the Revolution*, revised and enlarged edition (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1982), pp. 358-70.
5. Amal'rik, for instance, paints this apocalyptic picture of the town-village dialectic: 'Mao Tse-tung talks about the encircling of the "city" — meaning the economically developed countries — by the "village" — meaning the undeveloped countries. In fact, the economically developed countries constitute only a small part of the total world population. But what is more, even in the developed countries the "city" is encircled by the "village" — the village in the literal sense of the word or former village dwellers who have only recently moved to the city. And even in the cities the people who direct modern civilization and benefit from it are an insignificant minority.
'Finally, in our inner world, too, the "city" is encircled by the "village" — the "village" of the subconscious — and at the first disruption of our customary values we immediately feel it. Is not, in fact, this gap between city and village the greatest potential threat to our civilization?
'The threat to the "city" from the "village" is all the greater in view of the fact that in the "city" there exists a noticeable tendency towards the ever greater isolation of the individual, while the "village" is aspiring to organization and unity. This gladdens the heart of Mao Tse-tung, but the inhabitants of the world's cities have reason, as I see it, to worry about their future' (*Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*, edited by Hilary Sternberg (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 62-63).
6. B. S. Khorev, *Problemy gorodov* (M: Mysl', 1975), p. 9. In 1970 the total urban population of the USSR was 136 million, compared to 26.3 million in 1926. See also V.I. Perevedentsev, 'Urbanizatsiya i nekotoryye aspekty migratsii naseleniya v SSSR', in *Problemy sovremennoy urbanizatsii*, edited by Yu. L. Pivovarov (M: Statistika, 1972), pp. 125-41 (p. 126).
7. Basile Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society*, translated by Rupert Swyer (London, 1983), p. 75. The 1970 census (complete figures for the 1979 census are as yet unavailable) shows the change in the country's rural population as follows: 1913, 130.7 million; 1939, 130.2 million; 1959, 108.8 million; 1970, 105.7 million. See *Itogi Vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya 1970 goda*, 7 vols (M: Statistika, 1972-74), I (1972), 9.
8. The following *oblasti* were worst hit: Kalininskaya, Kirovskaya, Kostromskaya, Novgorodskaya, Pskovskaya, Ryazanskaya, Smolenskaya, Tul'skaya, and Yaroslavskaya. For further figures pertaining to the RSFSR, see *Itogi*, I, 9-14; for the Union republics, 14-21.
9. Kerblay, pp. 56, 76.
10. Furthermore, the huge losses sustained in the War can still be felt in the countryside: in 1970 women aged between 55 and 79 outnumbered men of the same age-group by 2:1. For a breakdown of the age-groups in towns and villages, see *Itogi*, II (1972), 18-19.
11. I. Grekova, 'Khozyayka gostinitsy', *Zvezda*, 9 (1976), 7-123; 'Vdoviy parokhod', *Novyy mir*, 5 (1981), 66-147; Natal'ya Baranskaya, 'Nedelya kak nedelya', *Novyy mir*, 11 (1969), 23-35; I. Velebovskaya, 'Sladkaya zhenshchina', *Znamya*, 3 (1973), 58-128; Daniil Granin, 'Dozhd' v chuzhom gorode', *Neva*, 1 (1973), 140-69; Sergey Zalygin, 'Yuzhno-amerikanskiy variant', *Nash sovremennik*, 1-2 (1973), 2-79, 80-139; Yury Skop, 'Tekhnika

- bezopasnosti', *Novyy mir*, 2-3 (1977), 14-127, 27-108; Viktor Rozov, 'Gnezdo glukharya', *Teatr*, 2 (1979), 131-59; Lazar' Karelin, 'Zmeyelov', *Moskva*, 4 (1982), 22-115. Vasily Belov's cycle of stories entitled *Vospitaniye po doktoru Spoku* are as follows: 'Moya zhizn' ('My Life'); 'Vospitaniye po doktoru Spoku', *Sever*, 7 (1974), 2-36; 'Chok-poluchok' ('Click-Half-click'), *Druzhiba narodov*, 10 (1976), 102-17; 'Svidaniya po utram' ('Morning Meetings'), *Nash sovremennik*, 1 (1977), 95-102; 'Dnevnik narkologa' ('Diary of an Addiction Specialist'), *Aurora*, 12 (1979), 16-27. The subsequent book editions preface these stories with 'Plotnitskiye rasskazy' ('Carpenters' Tales'), a story of village life (for publication details, see note 29 of this chapter). See V. Belov, *Vospitaniye po doktoru Spoku. Sbornik prozy* (M: Sovremennik, 1978), and the same author's *Povesti i rasskazy* (M: Izvestiya, 1980). I. Grekova, 'Kafedra', *Novyy mir*, 9 (1978), 10-168; V. Kaverin, 'Dvukhchasovaya progulka', *Novyy mir*, 11 (1978), 63-155; B. Mozhayev, 'Poltora kvadratnykh metra', *Druzhiba narodov*, 4 (1982), 105-57.
12. Daniil Granin, 'Kartina', *Novyy mir*, 1-2 (1980), 3-132, 85-176; Aleksandr Kron, 'Bessonitsa', *Novyy mir*, 4-6 (1977), 7-80, 21-105, 8-127; Yury Trifonov, 'Dom na naberezhnoy', *Druzhiba narodov*, 1 (1976), 83-167. On the contemporary relevance of Bykov's work, see A. B. McMillin, 'War and Peace in the Prose of Vasil Bykaŭ', *Die Welt der Slaven*, 28, 1 (1983), 110-21.
 13. See especially his 'Drugaya zhizn'' ('Another Life'), *Novyy mir*, 8 (1975), 7-98, and 'Starik' ('The Old Man'), *Druzhiba narodov*, 3 (1978), 27-153.
 14. Part I of *Kanuny* was published in abridged form in *Sever*, 4-5 (1972), 3-48, 3-56. Parts I and II were published in book form (with the omissions not restored), M: Sovremennik, 1976 (re-printed 1979). *Muzhiki i baby* was published in book form, M: Sovremennik, 1976.
 15. For an account of the *ocherkisty*, especially Dorosh and Ovechkin, see Gleb Zekulin, 'Aspects of Peasant Life as Portrayed in Contemporary Soviet Literature', *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 1, 4 (Winter, 1967), 552-61. See also P. Carden, 'Reassessing Ovechkin', in *Russian and Slavic Literature*, edited by Richard Freeborn, R. R. Milner-Gulland, and Charles A. Ward (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 407-24, and Gleb Zekulin, 'Efim Dorosh', in *Russian and Slavic Literature*, pp. 425-48. For a broad survey of the *ocherkisty*, see L. Terakopyan, *Pafos preobrazheniya*, second edition, revised and enlarged (M: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1978), pp. 254-315.
 16. *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?*, p. 36.
 17. V. Shukshin, 'Kalina krasnaya', *Nash sovremennik*, 4 (1973), 86-133. See also Donald M. Fiene, 'Vasily Shukshin's *Kalina krasnaia*: Translator's Notes', in Vasily Shukshin, *Snowball Berry Red and other Stories*, edited by Donald M. Fiene (Ann Arbor, 1979), pp. 200-12; Robert Mann, 'St. George in Vasilij Šukšin's "Kalina krasnaja"', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 28, 4 (Winter, 1984), 445-54.
 18. V. Perevedentsev, 'Nauchnyy podkhod? Neobkholdim!', *Literaturnoye obozreniye*, 5 (1978), 21-23 (p. 22).
 19. V. Shukshin, 'Zhena muzha v Parizh provozhala', *Nash sovremennik*, 9 (1971), 73-77; 'V profil' i anfas', *Novyy mir*, 9 (1967), 88-94; F. Abramov, 'Al'ka', *Nash sovremennik*, 1 (1972), 2-39.
 20. For further analysis of village prose see the chapter in Deming Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 218-52; Gleb Zekulin, 'The Contemporary Countryside in Soviet Literature: A Search for New Values', in *The Soviet Rural Community*, edited by James R. Millar (Urbana, 1971), pp. 376-404; Geoffrey Hosking, 'The Russian Peasant Re-discovered: "Village Prose" of the 1960s', *Slavic Review*, 32, 4 (December 1973), 705-24; Philippa Lewis, 'Peasant Nostalgia in Contemporary Russian Literature', *Soviet Studies*, 28, 4 (October 1976), 548-69; N. Richards, 'The Town-Country Dichotomy in Some Recent Soviet Fiction and the Literary Press', *Co-Existence*, 18, 1 (1981), 65-79. See also F. Kuznetsov, *Samaya krovnyaya svyaz'. Sud'by derevni v sovremennoy proze* (M: Prosveshcheniye, 1977); M. V. Minokin, *Sovremennaya sovetskaya proza o kolhoznoy derevne* (M: Prosveshcheniye, 1977); L. Terakopyan, *Pafos preobrazheniya; Vs. Surganov, Chelovek na zemle. Tema derevni v russkoy sovetskoy proze 50-70-kh godov. Istoki. Problemy. Kharaktery*, second edition, enlarged (M: Sovetskiiy pisatel', 1981).
 21. S. Zalygin, 'Na Irtyshe', *Novyy mir*, 2 (1964), 3-80; 'Solyonaya Pad'', *Novyy mir*, 4-6 (1967), 3-94, 22-89, 5-116; 'Komissiya', *Nash sovremennik*, 9-11 (1975), 11-111, 44-121, 13-105; 'Posle buri', *Druzhiba narodov*, 5 (1982), 7-115; V. Shukshin, 'Ya prishol dat' vam volyu', *Sibirskiy ogn', 1-2* (1971), 3-95, 3-122. Abramov's *Brat'ya i syostry* consists of the following: *Brat'ya i syostry* (L: Lenizdat, 1959); 'Dve zimy i tri leta' ('Two Winters and Three Summers'), *Novyy mir*, 1-3 (1968), 3-67, 10-69, 68-132; 'Puti-pereput'ya' ('Roads and Crossroads'), *Novyy mir*, 1-2 (1973), 3-114, 5-58; 'Dom' ('The House'), *Novyy mir*, 12

- (1978), 3–164. F. Abramov, 'Lyudi kolkhoznoy derevni v poslevoyennoy proze', *Novyy mir*, 4 (1954), 210–31. For an account of this article and the chain of events it helped set in motion, see Edith Rogovin Frankel, *Novyy mir: A Case Study in the Politics of Literature, 1952–1958* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 42–45, and Dina R. Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novyy Mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York, 1982), pp. 21–27.
22. 'Scorched Earth, Soviet Style', *The Times*, 20 July 1983, p. 13.
23. V. Soloukhin, 'Pis'ma iz Russkogo muzeya', *Molodaya gvardiya*, 9–10 (1966), 236–78, 245–87; 'Chornyye doski', *Moskva*, 1 (1969), 129–87; V. Belov, 'Lad (Ocherki o narodnoy estetike)', *Nash sovremennik*, 10, 12 (1979), 117–58, 85–96; 3 (1980), 60–84; 1 (1981), 160–74; 5–7 (1981), 145–71, 143–53, 125–64. See also the 'Discussion' in *Slavic Review* consisting of the following articles: Jack V. Haney, 'The Revival of Interest in the Russian Past in the Soviet Union'; Thomas E. Bird, 'New Interest in Old Russian Things: Literary Ferment, Religious Perspectives, and National Self-Assertion'; George L. Kline, 'Religion, National Character, and the "Rediscovery of Russian Roots"'; Jack V. Haney, 'Reply', *Slavic Review*, 32, 1 (January 1973), 2–44.
- Just how close these concerns are to the limits of the permissible is demonstrated by the publication in 1982 in Paris of an article by Belov which had apparently been circulating in *samizdat* for some time. In it he deplors the plan to divert the flow of the Northern Russian rivers Dvina, Pechora, and Sukhona to irrigate the deserts of Kazakhstan, pointing out the ecological dangers, but particularly the attendant cultural aspect: the destruction of ancient monuments such as the monasteries on the Solovetsky archipelago, which date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, hundreds of old villages in the North, and even Vologda itself. See V. Belov, 'Spasut li Kaspiy Vozhe i Lacha?', *Russkaya mysl'*, 15 July 1982, pp. 10–11.
24. B. Vasil'yev, 'Ne strelyayte v belykh lebedey', *Yunost'*, 6–7 (1973), 4–37, 29–55; V. Astaf'yev, 'Tsar'-ryba: povestvovaniye v rasskazakh', *Nash sovremennik*, 4–6 (1976), 3–81, 22–91, 6–78. See also N. N. Shneidman, 'Viktor Astaf'ev: The Soviet Bard of Siberia', *Russian Language Journal*, 114 (1979), 99–107. For an analysis of the religious underpinning of 'Tsar'-ryba', see Zhorzh Niva (Georges Nivat), 'K voprosu o "novom pochvennichestve": Moral'nyy i religioznyy podteksty "Tsarya-ryby" Viktora Astaf'yeva', in *Odna ili dve russkikh literatury?*, edited by Georges Nivat (Lausanne, 1981), pp. 136–44. These works by Vasil'yev and Astaf'yev are among those discussed by Shneidman in his survey of this ecological trend, 'Man, Nature, and the Roots in Recent Soviet Russian Prose', in *Studies in Honour of Louis Shein*, edited by S. D. Cioran and others (McMaster University, 1983), pp. 125–33.
25. V. Belov, 'Privychnoye delo', *Sever*, 1 (1966), 7–92. The quotation is taken from V. Belov, *Povesti, Roman-gazeta*, 947, 948 (13–14, 1982), p. 15.
26. V. Belov, 'Bobrishnyy ugor', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 19 May 1967, pp. 6–7. The quotation is cited from V. Belov, *Gudyat provoda. Rasskazy* (M: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1978), pp. 175–76.
27. V. Astaf'yev, 'Oda russkomu ogorodu', *Nash sovremennik*, 12 (1972), 47–72. The quotation is cited from V. P. Astaf'yev, *Sobraniye sochineniy v chetyryokh tomakh* (M: Molodaya gvardiya, 1979–81), 1, 442.
28. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago and London, 1982), p. 245. For a sociological analysis of the Soviet countryside, see B. Kerblay, 'Les problèmes de la socialisation dans le milieu rural soviétique', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 21, 3–4 (1980), 249–77.
29. Witness, for example, the recent monograph on Belov by the late Yuri Seleznyov, where Israel's occupation of the West Bank is equated with Trotskyism (*Vasily Belov: Razdum'ya o tvorcheskoy sud'be pisatelya* (M: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1983, p. 106). Also of interest in this respect is Andropov's warning against nationalism and chauvinism made soon after he became General Secretary in 1982: 'It is important, however, that natural pride in our achievements does not turn into national arrogance and conceit, or give rise to an isolationist tendency or disrespectful attitude towards other nations and nationalities. For we still come across similar negative phenomena. And it would be incorrect to explain them away as merely survivals of the past. They are sometimes even sustained by our own miscalculations' (*Pravda*, 22 December 1982, p. 2). For further discussion of the political conservatism of village prose, see Deming Brown, 'Ruralism and Nationalism in Recent Soviet Russian Literature', *Review of National Literatures*, 3, 1 (Spring, 1972), 183–209.
30. V. Belov, 'Plotnitskiye rasskazy', *Novyy mir*, 7 (1968), 7–56; Ye. Nosov, 'I uplyvayut parokhody, i ostayutsya berega . . .', *Nash sovremennik*, 6 (1970), 6–43; A. Solzhenitsyn, 'Matryonin dvor', *Novyy mir*, 1 (1963), 42–63.
31. B. Mozhayev, 'Iz zhizni Fyodora Kuz'kina', *Novyy mir*, 7 (1966), 42–118; F. Abramov, 'Pelageya', *Novyy mir*, 6 (1969), 31–71; V. Astaf'yev, *Posledniy poklon* (Permskoye

- knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1968). Further chapters of this latter work were published in *Nash sovremennik*, 5–6 (1974), 15–58, 18–69, and 1 (1978), 3–105.
32. *Shestoy s' yezd pisateley SSSR. 21–24 iyunya 1976g. Stenograficheskiy otchot* (M: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976), pp. 574–75.
 33. V. Shukshin, 'Styopka', *Novyy mir*, 11 (1964), 64–72; 'Okhota zhit', *Nedelya*, 28 (1966), pp. 6–9; 'Svatovstvo', *Novyy mir*, 7 (1970), 42–48; 'Srezal', *Novyy mir*, 7 (1970), 55–60; 'Chudik', *Novyy mir*, 9 (1967), 103–08; 'Obida', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 12 February 1971, pp. 18–19. See also the chapter on Shukshin in Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich* (London and New York, 1979), pp. 162–79, and his 'The Fiction of Vasily Shukshin', in Vasily Shukshin, *Snowball Berry Red*, pp. 3–20; Michel Heller, 'Vasily Shukshin: In Search of Freedom', translated by George Gutsche, in Vasily Shukshin, *Snowball Berry Red*, pp. 213–34; Stephen Le Fleming, 'Vasily Shukshin: A Contemporary Scythian', in *Russian and Slavic Literature*, pp. 449–66.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. *Nedelya*, 6–12 October 1980, p. 6.
2. For further details of Rasputin's formative period, see the published account of his meeting with Moscow University students in 1976, in *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya 9, Filologiya*, 3 (1977), pp. 79–86.
3. All publications and biographical details, as well as full publication details of Rasputin's works and criticism of him, are contained in the Bibliography at the end of this monograph. Also, on Rasputin's latest (1985) *povest'*, see the Conclusion.
4. 'Ya zabyl sposit' u Lyoshki', in V. Rasputin, *Chelovek s etogo sveta* (Krasnoyarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1967), p. 13.
5. V. Tendryakov, 'Ukhaby', *Nash sovremennik*, 2 (1956), 43–69.
6. 'Vasily i Vasilisa', in *Chelovek s etogo sveta*, p. 73.
7. *Chelovek s etogo sveta*, p. 75.
8. *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov* (Krasnoyarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1966), pp. 37–38.
9. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 94. See also, in this respect, Venedikt Yerofeyev's very different railway 'trip', *Moskva-Petushki* ('Moscow to the End of the Line'), second edition (Paris, 1977).
10. *Kostrovyye novykh gorodov*, p. 66.
11. *Itogi*, iv (1973), 11.
12. *Kray vozle samogo neba* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1966), p. 6.
13. V. Turbin, 'Puteshestviye v Tofalariyu', *Druzhba narodov*, 12 (1967), 274.
14. *Kray vozle samogo neba*, p. 5.
15. V. Trushkin, 'Poeziya prozy', *Angara*, 1 (1968), 61.
16. *Kray vozle samogo neba*, p. 22.
17. *Kray vozle samogo neba*, p. 36.
18. As stated in his interview in *Voprosy literatury*, 9 (1976), 144.
19. V. Rasputin, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya v dvukh tomakh* (M: Molodaya gvardiya, 1984), 1, 72–73. All further references to this work in the text are taken from this edition, with volume and page numbers shown.
20. Ye. Starikova, 'Zhit' i pomnit'. Zametki o proze V. Rasputina', *Novyy mir*, 11 (1977), 239.
21. Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, translated by Max Hayward (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 459–60.
22. *Den'gi dlya Marii* (M: VAAP, 1978), pp. 48–49.
23. *Den'gi dlya Marii* (M: VAAP, 1978), p. 52.
24. *Hope Abandoned*, p. 135.
25. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 3 vols (London, 1974–78), II (translated by T. P. Whitney) (1976), 107.
26. *Den'gi dlya Marii* (M: VAAP, 1978), p. 72.
27. See V. Shugayev, 'Soavtory (Istoriya sozdaniya povesti "Nechayannyye khlopoty")', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 20 April 1979, pp. 16–17.
28. See, for example, Katerina Clark, "'Boy Gets Tractor'" and All That: the Parable Structure of the Soviet Novel', in *Russian and Slavic Literature*, pp. 359–75.
29. *Nash sovremennik*, 5 (1969), 23.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. V. Rasputin, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya v dvukh tomakh*, I, 245. All further references to this work in the text are taken from this edition, with volume and page numbers shown.
2. In the 1981 Mosfil'm production *Vasily i Vasilisa*, this episode is used with reference to Vasilisa, thus showing her clear spiritual affinity with Anna.
3. Interview published in *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, 43, 2 (Spring, 1983), 14.
4. N. Zhdanov, 'Poyezdka na rodinu', in *Literaturnaya Moskva. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyy sbornik moskovskikh pisateley. Sbornik vtoroy*, edited by M. I. Aliger and others (M: Goslitizdat, 1956), pp. 404-14; Yu. Kazakov, 'Zapakh khleba', in *Tarusskiye stranitsy. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyy illyustrirovannyi sbornik*, edited by V. Koblikov and others (Kaluzhskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1961), pp. 76-78.
5. V. Belov, 'Za tremya volokami', *Sever*, 2 (1965), 62-80; for publication details of 'Plotnitskiye rasskazy', see note 30 to Chapter I.
6. 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu', in V. Rasputin, *Vek zhivi — vek lyubi. Rasskazy* (M: Molodaya gvardiya, 1982), p. 229. All page references to this work in the text are taken from this edition, unless otherwise stated.
7. This passage is omitted from the 1982 edition. It is included in V. Rasputin, *Den' gi dlya Marii. Povesti* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 324.
8. Introduction to G. Semyonov, *Vol'naya nataska, Roman-gazeta*, 871, 9 (1979), 3.
9. Introduction to S. Ol'shansky, *Sto pyatyy kilometr* (M: Sovremennik, 1977), p. 3. See also, from his meeting with MGU students: 'In the pace at which life is lived today there are perhaps two forces left which are capable of resisting the speed of progress and of making a man stop and think — nature and literature. I don't know if it is possible to resist today's rapid changes, but it seems to me that you have to do exactly that, because if you slavishly obey them, if you are always in a rush to get somewhere, then you become feckless, you never get to the end of "Anna Karenina", "The Brothers Karamazov", or "Yevgeny Onegin", and it is literature like this that should be read thoughtfully and intelligently by someone worthy of it' (*Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*. Seriya 9, *Filologiya*, 3 (1977), 80).
10. Quoted from L. Leonov, *Sobraniye sochineniy v pyati tomakh* (M-L: 'Zemlya i fabrika', 1930), v. 266.
11. 'Sot', p. 191.
12. By contrast, the narrator of Daniil Granin's recent 'Obratnyy bilet' ('A Return Ticket') remembers no such compassion for the natural world when socialist construction was under way in the 1930s: 'At that time other specializations were in vogue, and I sorted through what I thought were the most needed and with the best prospects: electrical engineering, automation, hydro-electric power stations. We were fascinated by figures, range, and terminology: head-water, peak loads, cavitation, explosive capacity, circuits, and systems. Generator power and turbine size! We were faced with the prospect of flooding hundreds and thousands of square kilometres of land for reservoirs, flooding villages, forests, and settlements, and transferring them somewhere else, we changed the face of the earth, we created seas, we dammed up rivers with thousands and hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of concrete. We were ready to clear hundreds of kilometres of forest land to electrify the country . . . Trees, after all, were plain, monotonous things and did not cost anything. Rivers we had to conquer, control, tame, and harness. The river and the forest had but one purpose and one purpose only — to serve man. We didn't suspect that they might be there for any other purpose, and didn't take any into our calculations. And our silver-haired, highly erudite professor, a good-looking man and a lover of music, taught us not to take nature, for which nobody paid anything, into account, all we had to make allowances for were the spring floods and similar machinations of the elements. We engineers were mankind's benefactors, our job was to light up the world and supply its energy. And this we did, by blowing up and hacking to pieces, by transforming rivers into quiet, lazy backwaters. It couldn't have been done otherwise. The only thing we did wrong was that we spared nothing . . . It is sad that the forest held no other meaning for us, as if it could have had a meaning, a purpose of its own' (*Novyy mir*, 8 (1976), 3-48 (p. 43)). Granin's story, in which the means, not the end, are open to question, is a useful companion work to *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy*.
13. V. Rasputin, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya v dvukh tomakh*, II, 208. All further references in the text are taken from this edition, with volume and page numbers shown.
14. *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 23 December 1977, p. 6.
15. 'Globus', in *Chelovek s etogo sveta*, p. 42.
16. Rasputin's Dar'ya has a clear spiritual affinity with Solzhenitsyn's Matryona. Compare, for

example, the following passages: 'In each of our rural settlements there have been and still are one or two old women whose characters defend and pull together the weak and the suffering, and so it must be: when one such woman reaches the end of her life, her place is immediately taken by another of the same age who has already established her strictness and love of justice' (*Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, II, 262). Matryona is just such a 'weak and suffering' woman: 'Misunderstood and abandoned even by her husband, having lost six children but not her friendly disposition, and rejected by her sisters and sisters-in-law, she was a laughing stock who would foolishly do work for others without payment—when she died she had nothing she could call her own. Save for a dirty-white goat, a lame cat, and some rubber plants.

'We all lived alongside her and failed to realise that she was the possessor of that righteousness of character without which, so the proverb goes, a village cannot stand.

'Nor a city.

'Nor our whole land' (*Novyy mir*, 1 (1963), 42–63 (p. 63)). They are spiritual sisters and represent opposing sides of the spectrum of the Russian soul. It is on them that the moral foundation of the Russian village and Mother Russia rests. See also Irina Corten, 'Solženicyn's Matrena and Rasputin's Dar'ja: Two Studies in Russian Peasant Spirituality', *Russian Language Journal*, 114 (1979), 85–98.

17. Yu. Seleznyov, 'Proza Valentina Rasputina poslednikh let', in V. Rasputin, *Vek zhivi — vek lyubi*, *Roman-gazeta*, 999, 17 (1984), 78.
18. See *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 16 September 1980, p. 3; 7 June 1983, p. 8; 12 July 1983, p. 3; and 21 April 1984, p. 8.
19. Introduction to his *Povesti* (Khabarovskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1984), p. 11.
20. *Mezh Nepryadvoy i Donom*, compiled by V. Krupin (M: Sovremennik, 1980), pp. 14, 17.
21. *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 14 September 1979, p. 6.
22. Introduction to I. Yevseyenko, *Krik korostelya* (M: Molodaya gvardiya, 1982), p. 317.
23. *Krik korostelya*, pp. 318–19.
24. See N. Kolesnikoff, 'The Child Narrator in the Novellas of Chingiz Aitmatov', in *Selected Papers*, pp. 101–10; Harold K. Schefski, 'Yury Nagibin: Children and the Retreat from Collective Identity', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 4 (Spring, 1985), pp. 99–106; Olga Hassanoff Bakich, 'A New Type of Character in the Soviet Literature of the 1960s: the Early Works of Andrei Bitov', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 23, 2 (June 1981), 125–33.
25. J. B. Priestley, *Literature and Western Man* (London, 1980), p. 126.
26. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 313.
27. See *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 8 August 1982, p. 4; Introduction to *Russkiye skazki Zabaykal'ya* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskaya knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1983), pp. 3–8; *Uchitel'skaya gazeta*, 31 December 1983, p. 4; and *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 November 1983, p. 2.
28. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*. Seriya 9, *Filologiya*, 3 (1977), 85.
29. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 348.
30. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 385.
31. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 386.
32. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 395–96.
33. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, I, 396.
34. Furthermore, the loss of self through dependence on alcohol is not an isolated occurrence, but is widespread and on the increase. Anna in *Posledniy srok* could be echoing the current Party strictures on alcohol abuse when she says: 'The man who drinks but doesn't lose his mind is worth his weight in gold these days. And if there's one who doesn't drink at all, he should be put up on show for people to pay and look at, like the eighth wonder of the world' (I, 168).

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. *Oktyabr'*, 3 (1958), 131–55 (p. 154).
2. *Nedelya*, 5–11 September 1977, p. 4.
3. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 16 March 1977, p. 3.
4. V. Rasputin, *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya*, II, 30. All further references to this work in the text are taken from this edition, with volume and page numbers shown.
5. G. E. Mikkelson observes that Nastyona informs Andrey of her pregnancy in late March, 'not long before the Annunciation (*Blagoveščenje Presvjatyja Bogorodicy*, April 7, N.S.)'. See 'Religious Symbolism in Valentin Rasputin's Tale *Live and Remember*', in *Studies in Honor of Xenia Gąsiorowska*, edited by Lauren G. Leighton (Columbus, Ohio, 1983), p. 176.
6. Mikkelson, pp. 182, 176–77. Mikkelson notes that the names of the main characters are similarly significant: 'Andrey is associated most vividly in the Russian historical

consciousness with St. Andrew, the “first-called” disciple of Christ’, who, legend has it, visited Russia. This legend was to lay the foundation of ‘the later-developed theory of Russia as the guardian of the Orthodox faith’ (p. 180). ‘Nastyon’a’ is a diminutive of the name Anastasia, which, as Mikkelson points out, is associated with the concept of resurrection (p. 181).

7. F. M. Dostoyevsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy v tridsati tomakh* (L: Nauka, 1972–), vi (1973), 316.
8. Yekaterina Starikova, for example, likens Andrey’s slaughter of the calf to Raskol’nikov’s killing of the money-lender’s sister: ‘No matter how different the reasons for the crime in either of these works, they are both equated with the individual egotistically placing on a pinnacle his own personality in the guise of his “service” to the future’ (*Novyy mir*, 11 (1977), 243) Rasputin himself, when asked what he considered in Dostoyevsky’s thought most relevant today, enigmatically replied: ‘Spirituality. The main, the fundamental ingredient of human life which, as the century since Dostoyevsky’s death has shown, does not recognize even the finest and most expedient imitations, and which exacts a severe revenge for them’ (in *Dostoyevsky: Materialy i issledovaniya*, edited by G. M. Fridlender (L: Nauka, 1983), v, 67.
9. Mikkelson, p. 182.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. For an analysis of the town–village dialectic in English literature of this time see Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Harmondsworth, 1985), especially pp. 41–80.
2. John Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence* (London, 1977), p. 122.
3. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (London, 1981).
4. V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (Harmondsworth, 1982). This work ends with a premonition of holocaust in an Africa which fears that it is losing its identity in the modern world. The book’s central character, Salim, is thus warned by a government official with whom he is on friendly terms: “‘It’s going to be bad here, Salim. You don’t know what they’re talking about outside. It’s going to be very bad when the President comes. At first they were only going to kill government people. Now the Liberation Army says that isn’t enough. They say they have to do what they did the last time, but they have to do it better this time. At first they were going to have people’s courts and shoot people in the squares. Now they say they have to do a lot more killing, and everybody will have to dip their hands in the blood. They’re going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie, everybody who put on a “jacket de boy”. They’re going to kill all the masters and all the servants. When they’re finished nobody will know there was a place like this here. They’re going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way, to go back to the beginning before it’s too late. The killing will last for days. They say it is better to kill for days than die forever. It is going to be terrible when the President comes”’ (p. 284).

VALENTIN RASPUTIN: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE

It is as well to preface this Bibliography with a short résumé of Soviet and Western critical responses to Rasputin's work over the years. It comes as no surprise that his work has, on the whole, been treated with the same equivocation as village prose. This was especially so before the publication of *Zhivi i pomni*.

His first works did little more than earn light praise for their lyricism, but *Den'gi dlya Marii*, especially the second, enlarged, edition published in *Sibirskiye ogni*, was acclaimed by critics across the country. 'A writer is born' is the title of Feliks Kuznetsov's 1968 appraisal. With *Posledniy srok*, though, critics were more guarded. Whereas the work's literary craftsmanship—unobtrusive narration, vivid characterization, subtle psychological exploration—was upheld, some were wary of the 'naive' schematic opposition of Anna and her children, town and country values, past and present (see Lunin, Grinberg, Roshchin, Pankov, Chirov, F. Kuznetsov). Others, though, defended the author's identification with the village (Dedkov, Vasil'yev, Kotenko), and, not surprisingly, the familiar note of chauvinism was sounded, as in the following statement by Zabelin: 'Soviet man has become good and progressive because of the upbringing and way of life inherited from the best features of the Russian national soul and its culture.'

'Vniz i vverkh po techeniyu' did nothing to dispel the doubts, and critics such as Aleksandrov, Seleznyov, Vasil'yev, and Kochetkov argued that the work's social focus was awry, and that the author had written himself into a dead-end by operating from too narrow a thematic base.

In view of the propagandistic element in *Zhivi i pomni*, it is not surprising that Soviet critics were whole-hearted in their approval. However, some saw it as merely another treatment of the well-worn deserter/traitor theme (Sidorov, Litvinov, Bocharov), ignoring or playing down the role of the heroine. Rasputin was now being accorded the trappings of a major literary figure: his use of folklore and nature imagery was analysed (Krivoshchapova), as was his early work and literary evolution (Yudalevich). Zalygin placed him within the classical socialist realist tradition, and praised the 'completeness' of his characters and narrative method. Rasputin's gift for psychological exploration was studied by many, as was his treatment of plot and circumstance in general. His links with the classical Russian heritage were examined, especially his links with Dostoyevsky (Kuznetsov, Kotenko, Starikova), and this aspect has continued to interest Soviet scholars into the 1980s (Dvoryashin, Yermakova).

The publication of *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy* again divided Soviet literary opinion, as demonstrated in the 1977 *Voprosy literatury* symposium. Following Feliks Kuznetsov's 1973 definition of village prose, Salynsky emphasized the opposition of stability and disruption in this work, and was critical of Rasputin's identification with his heroine, as was Oskotsky. Seleznyov tried to deflect these arguments by vigorously defending the work's feeling for nature and the Motherland, its patriotic element. He was in a minority, however, and the opinion of the editors was that the authorial voice was 'eroded' and the work lacked social objectivity.

Indeed, the majority of Soviet critics were displeased with Rasputin's stance in this work, but could only admire its considerable artistic accomplishments. Pankin, for example, in 1977 rebuked Rasputin in *Pravda* for his 'one-sidedness', but tempered his criticism a year later (when not writing in the Party press), and found much to recommend in the work. *Proshchaniye s Matyoroy* encouraged further analysis of Rasputin's use of nature and folklore (Slabkovskaya, Krivoshchapova), and the ecological and philosophical debate aroused comment and controversy (Sidorov, Timofeyeva, Yanovsky). By the end of the 1970s, there were several monographs and dissertations on Rasputin, and the last few years have seen work published in the Soviet Union on widely differing aspects of his work: the role of the narrative voice (Maymin and Slinina, Sigov, Balandina); the passage of time (Pal'gova, Daylidenene, Dyrdin); his affinity with Faulkner (Belaya); poetic and structural features (Plekhanova, Vladimirtsev, Budagov, Shakherova); his use of language and dialogue (Vaulina, Zudina, Zuyeva, Ryabova, Kromer).

The publication of his short stories in 1982 met with a largely muted, and somewhat bewildered, response. Although only Adamovich expressed any real enthusiasm, others at least appreciated the author's heightened exploration into the hidden recesses of the souls of isolated or spiritually disorientated characters. Zolotusky said that this was a 'new' Rasputin.

In the West, Rasputin has been received favourably, with all commentators noting his gift for psychological analysis and subtle exposition. Furthermore, all his major writings (except, to date, 'Pozhar') are now available in English, including, in a 1985 translation, his major short stories. Deming Brown was struck by 'the enormous range of his talent', and Geoffrey Hosking and N. N. Shneidman have both written positively and at length on his major works. Of particular interest to Western scholars are the religious and spiritual nuances in Rasputin (Corten, Mikkelson), and the anti-Soviet émigré press has found in him elements with which to berate socialist realism and the Soviet system generally (see Shneyerson and Iverni).

Soviet criticism has the following overall conception of Rasputin's work: his method and characters are vivid and original, although his artistic focus is 'in the traditionally Russian manner' (Belaya); his work is of undoubted artistic

power and depth, and he is possibly the best writer still working in the USSR. He is a socialist realist writer because he captures Soviet man and his social relations at a decisive historical moment. The doubts that still lie at the heart of his portrayal of material progress, and particularly his fears for its effects on the individual, preclude any positive assessment of the *partiynost'* of his work. Curiously, the dangers inherent in Rasputin's preoccupation with the past have perhaps been most succinctly expressed by a Western critic, Lewis Bagby:

One needs to face forward as well, for an *exclusive* retrospective view is, in psychological terms, an immature mode of envisaging the present and the future. Posterior thinking of this extreme type does not recognize that in time everything changes, that the past is forever lost. Thus, when the persistent direction of observation and of experience is backward, the past becomes a trap; both personality development and socialist dialects are betrayed.

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