WOMEN IN THE WORK OF VALENTIN RASPUTIN

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© April C. O'Donoughue

Department of Russian and Slavic Studies

McGill University, Montreal

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Siberian writer Valentin Grigor'evich Rasputin has consistently chosen to portray peasant women as the protagonists of his stories, particularly of his major works of the 1970s.

His female protagonists are considered highly representative of the new type of heroine which emerged with the advent of "village prose". However, there is something that sets them apart from other "village prose" heroines. They are psychologically more complex and, while they are realistically portrayed, they play a crucial symbolic role in Rasputin's works, providing the key to an understanding of his poetic system and his worldview.

The following analysis of his female characters reveals that their spirituality and values are precisely what Rasputin fears is being lost in an increasingly materialistic world.

This study offers a unique interpretation of Rasputin's works according to which the female characters, together with nature's elements and the traditional Russian village, izba and mill, are viewed as symbolic representations of the Feminine Principle struggling for survival in a male-oriented, materialistic and utilitarian modern world. The Feminine Principle in this poetic system represents the pure spirituality and wholeness of being without which Man cannot live and yet is now threatening to destroy.

RESUME

L'écrivain contemporain sibérien Valentin Grigor'evich Rasputin a souvent choisi la simple paysanne comme personnage principal de ses oeuvres, notamment celles des années soixante-dix.

Ses protagonistes féminins illustrent bien la nouvelle classe d'héroïne qui est apparue avec la "prose villageoise". Elles sont psychologiquement plus complexes et, bien que dépeintes avec réalisme, elles jouent un rôle symbolique fondamental dans l'oeuvre de Rasputin, et se révèlent donc la clé de son système poétique et de sa weltanshchauung.

L'analyse des héroïnes de Rasputin qui suit reflète bien l'inquiétude que l'auteur ressent face à la disparition de la spiritualité et des valeurs morales que représentent ces femmes dans un monde de plus en plus matérialiste.

Cette étude offre une interprétation inusitée de l'oeuvre de Rasputin selon laquelle les personnages féminins, ainsi que les éléments de la nature, le village russe, l'isba, et le moulin, se perçoivent comme des représentations symboliques du Principe Féminin dans sa lutte contre le monde moderne, matérialiste et utilitaire, orienté vers le Principe Masculin. Le Principe Féminin, dans ce système poétique, représente la spiritualité pure et la plénitude de l'être, sans lesquelles l'Homme ne peut vivre, mais qu'il menace malgré lui de détruire.

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NOTE

The Library of Congress system of transliteration without diacritics is used in this thesis, with the exception of quotations of existing translations. In the case of names of well-known people or places for which a widely accepted spelling already exists, the most commonly used form is employed. For example, "Tolstoy" will be used rather than "Tolstoi", and "Dostoevsky" rather than "Dostoevskii".

All titles of novels and short stories are underlined in the text. In the notes and bibliography, however, only titles of books are underlined. Titles of short stories and articles which have been published in collections or journals carry the appropriate quotation marks and are not underlined.

Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Notes are located at the end of each chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Valentin Grigor'evich Rasputin is widely acclaimed both at home and in the West as one of the most gifted writers in the Soviet Union today. Not only are his works praised officially but they enjoy immense popularity among the Russian people themselves. In fact, some have gone as far as to allege that "there exists a cult of Rasputin in the Soviet Union".[1]

A native of Siberia, Rasputin was born of peasant stock on March 15th, 1937 in the regional capital of Ust'-Uda on the river Angara, about 300 kilometers from Irkutsk. In 1959, he graduated from Irkutsk University where he studied history and philology. Unable to obtain a stipend in his third year of university, he found temporary work on a local youth newspaper (Sovetskaia molodezh'). He continued to work there in the years following and was made a full-time employee of the paper while still a student. After graduation, he carried on in journalism in Irkutsk and eventually moved to Krasnoyarsk to work as a special correspondent for another youth newspaper. This last job allowed him to travel around Siberia covering territory from the Enisei to the Angara and the Lena and to report on every subject ranging from large-scale projects such as the Abakan-Taishet railway building project and the construction of the Krasnoyarsk hydro-electric power station, to the simple lives of the mountain people of Tofalariia in the Saiany mountain range.

In the course of his journalistic career, he established contact with young writers such as Aleksandr Vampilov, Gennadii Mashkin and Viacheslav Shugaev, and under their influence, developed an interest in the world of literary and social debate.

His original intention had been to become a teacher, but gradually he began to write literary sketches and short stories based on his early experiences and impressions. His transformation from journalist to a writer of literary fiction was gradual. He started with more factual, documentary-style sketches (ocherki) in Kostrovye novykh gorodov (Lights for Building New Cities) in 1966. This collection, in true socialist realist tradition, praises the achievements of construction workers in Siberia, particularly those working on the Abakan-Taishet railway line.

The laudatory tone of this book is not surprising because the construction of the railway must have been very impressive indeed. In eight years (1958-1965), 647 kilometres of railway were completed, extending over swamps and taiga, through mountains and across ravines and valleys. The project included nine tunnels of a combined length of ten miles, three viaducts and hundreds of bridges. Writes David Gillespie, author of the only monograph available in English which is devoted solely to Rasputin:

> The book, not surprisingly, is imbued with a sense of glory in this achievement and reflects an active political commitment to the cause.[2]

In the same year, Rasputin published another collection of sketches, Krai vozle samogo neba (A Land Close to Heaven). Although still semi-factual, these sketches are contemplative and lyrical. While the previous collection recorded his impressions of the large-scale construction projects, this second collection chronicles his perceptions of the small indigenous nation of the Tofalar. It is in these sketches that he reveals, for the first time, his deep attraction to the primitive life and the strong code of ethics of the simple people who live close to nature in remote areas of the country.

Although these two books are closer to documentary journalism than to fiction, they do deserve some attention in that the dominant themes of Rasputin's later works are clearly visible. In Kostroyye novykh gorodov, his interest in the theme of modern industrialism is evident. He appears optimistic and full of political idealism, confident in Man's ability to harness the elements. He treats the same theme again ten years later, however his optimism and idealism appear to have been totally shattered, as seen in his short novel Proshchanie s Materoi (Farewell to Matera, 1976). In Krai vozle samogo neba, the Rasputin we have come to know in his later works is clearly present. He describes with fascination and affection the traditions, culture and folklore of the Tofalar, stressing their moral values which are rooted in their closeness to nature. In these sketches, he laments the loss of the folk heritage and the impending disappearance of this tiny nation and its way of life.[3] In the sketch entitled Ot solntsa do solntsa (From Sun to Sun), the narrator, hearing the song of the Tofalar women, ponders:

> These low, monotonous sounds come from somewhere far,

> far away. They seem to carry some acute but forgotten sense, something to which we feel a debt, though we know not why, something with which we feel ill at ease, though we fail to see the reason, and we struggle to remember, but in no way do we succeed, and so we try to justify ourselves beforehand, not knowing that we ourselves are to blame.[4]

The sense of guilt and loss of memory will form an undercurrent in all of Rasputin's later works. In the same story, the narrator goes on to ask a Tofa what the song is about. He is told that it is about them, the people. He then asks why the song is so strange, as though we were guilty of something. The answer again reveals the guilt Man should feel, according to the author, for letting the spiritual legacy of his forefathers slowly disappear:

> Because we are deceivers. We are deceivers, because we are dying.[5]

Chelovek s etogo sveta (A Man from This World) was published in 1967. Rasputin considers it to be his first book, [6] although it probably should be called his first book of fiction. It consists of twelve short stories, the most well-known of which is Vasilii i Vasilisa (Vasili and Vasilisa). In the same year, Den'gi dlia Marii (Money for Maria), his first povest' or short novel (the genre which was to become Rasputin's favourite) was published in the literary journal Angara. It was so successful that, a year later, it appeared in book form in Moscow together with the best of his early short stories. By 1970, when his next short novel Poslednii srok (Borrowed Time) was published, he had attracted a wide readership in the Soviet Union. His popularity continued to increase with the publication of Zhivi i pomni (Live and Remember, 1974) [7] and Proshchanie s Materoi. From then on, his works began to appear in most of the languages of the various republics of the Soviet Union. They were soon followed with translations into Spanish, English, French and German by Soviet as well as Western publishing houses. By 1985, his major works had been translated into all the languages of the Soviet Union, as well as Hindi, Arabic, Danish, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian to name but a few. His best stories have also been adapted to the stage and screen.

Rasputin's other major publications up until then include Vniz po techeniiu (Going Downstream, 1972),[8] an ocherk in which he explores the subject-matter that will later be developed in Proshchanie s

Materoi, and Nechaiannye khlopoty (Unexpected Troubles, 1969). The latter, written jointly with Viacheslav Shugaev, would resemble the typical Soviet production novel were it not for the psychological approach to the lives of the protagonists. It has little artistic merit and tends to be ignored in the critical literature about Rasputin.

His literary output diminished somewhat in the 1980s. He produced only half a dozen short stories and one short novel, Pozhar (Fire, 1985). This can be explained partly by the fact that he was seriously injured in a vicious mugging [9] in 1980, which left him unable to write for over a year. His major collection of short stories during this period is Vek zhivi - vek liubi (You Live and Love, 1982). It includes his latest stories as well as a selection of his best stories of the 60s and 70s.

Although his productivity has declined, Rasputin continues to be one of the most popular and influential writers in the Soviet Union today. His stories and short novels have been republished numerous times, in very large editions, yet they continue to sell out.

Rasputin has always been regarded as a writer close to the village theme in Soviet literature and his works are generally discussed in the context of the so-called "village prose" movement (derevenskaia proza). In fact, he has been called the best representative of the younger generation of "village prose" writers. For this reason, it would contribute to a better understanding of his works to comment briefly on this movement.

"Village prose" is difficult to define. It is neither a genre, nor is it a school. The term "village prose" basically links, by certain unifying characteristics, many different writers with different styles favouring different genres. "Village prose" writers include Abramov, Mozhaev, Nosov, Belov, Soloukhin, Astaf'ev, Shukshin, Likhonosov and many more. From the October Revolution to Stalin's death, peasants had been portrayed as activists, innovators and fighters for a collectivized agriculture. Otherwise, they were depicted as negative characters, backward, superstitious and reactionary. After Stalin's death, rural literature changed dramatically. Deming Brown refers to the end of Stalin's rule as the beginning of an "era of unprecedented frankness in

rural literature".[10] And it is the rural literature which emerged from this point on which is commonly referred to as "village prose".

The early representatives of this new literary trend concerned themselves mainly with socio-economic and economic-organizational problems. Valentin Ovechkin, who is often cited as the father of the "village prose" movement, clearly blamed the government for the appalling social and economic conditions afflicting rural areas in his Raionnye budni (District Routine, 1952). His example was followed by the ocherkists of the mid-50s, the most well-known of whom are Zalygin, Tendriakov, Troepolskii, and Dorosh. These writers gave an honest picture of the terrible conditions of rural life. However, as "village prose" evolved, the concern of the younger generation shifted progressively to moral, ethical and even philosophical issues. By the late sixties, the questions it raised began to worry the authorities because they cast doubt on the moral health of the country. And in doing so, they seemed to challenge the very philosophy of the State. Indeed, the system of values in the Soviet Union was created in support of the image of the collective state striving for urbanization and technological progress. "Village prose" became the focus of heated debates. Its implications troubled the authorities all the more so because it was artistically superior to much of the literature which had been published in past decades and had become immensely popular among Soviet readers. This is the context in which Rasputin began his literary career.

"Village prose" has been classified as critical realism by some. Most works of this trend describe the difficult life of the post-war Russian village, stressing poverty, deprivation and discontent. Many expose the corruption and mismanagement of the bureaucrats. Some deplore the arbitrary takeovers of kolkhozes by sovkhozes. Others show the effects of the war on the villages. The most salient aspect of these works, however, is that they all explore the character of the peasant, usually portraying him as having preserved his inner purity and high moral values despite all the difficulties. The difference is that the peasant they describe is no longer the innovator or the activist, but rather the ordinary, simple, old-fashioned muzhik or baba.

Although Solzhenitsyn is not directly associated with the movement,

his story Matrenin dvor (Matrena's House, 1963) is acknowledged in the West as having given "village prose" "its focus, its direction, and its soul".[11] Matrena is one of the best examples of the new positive hero in village literature. Simple, uneducated, good-hearted, selfless, and honest, she could be compared to the malenkii chelovek in pre-revolutionary literature. This new type of hero, often speaking peasant dialect, is especially warmly portrayed by Shukshin, the best example of which is Chudik.[12] Whether the hero is shown suffering in silence (such as Matrena), or good-naturedly and naively stumbling against unfeeling bureaucrats (Chudik), the overall mood is one of sadness at what the world is becoming. "Village prose" works awaken the readers' feelings of indignation towards the bureaucrats and city-dwellers for their callous treatment of the peasants. One may well laugh while reading Shukshin's stories, but it is 'laughter through tears'.

The "village prose" writers generally believe that the peasant's strong qualities derive from his closeness to the soil and his living in harmony and in rhythm with the natural cycles. This is why they accord such an important role to Nature in their works. They affectionately extol the beauty and splendor of the Russian countryside. Their loving descriptions are all the more moving because they are often juxtaposed with scenes depicting the destruction of the natural environment by the encroaching city. Modern, industrialized society is viewed as a threat not only to the environment but to the traditional way of life of the peasant. And the "village prose" writers see this as the source of the deteriorating moral values which they observe around them. In keeping with these feelings, it is not surprising then that most of them are sympathetic to religious values.

Thematically, Rasputin has much in common with the "village prose" writers. He, too, shares the opinion that the simple peasant has preserved an inner purity through his closeness to the soil, specifically by working the land. Likewise, he is sympathetic to religious values. He also stresses the dichotomy between the city and the countryside and is particularly alarmed over the disruption of the natural environment. Most of all, he fears a future where moral values have been mislaid in the rush of technology, urbanization and so-called "progress".

Despite the similarities, however, Rasputin's art is unique. The problems he raises are of a more universal nature. Although the setting is the same, the Russian village is not of central interest for him. It is simply a familiar milieu in which to explore more general issues that transcend the confines of the Russian countryside.[13] Whereas some "village prose" writers make extensive use of regional peasant dialect, Rasputin prefers to write in classical Russian, using expressive, local phrases only in dialogue between the characters and only expressions which are also understandable to non-peasant readers, which makes his work more accessible to the universal audience. Unlike other "village prose" writers, Rasputin does not dwell upon the poverty, injustices and discontent prevailing in the countryside. He does not use his stories as a vehicle for social protest. In fact, his works make little mention of topical issues or historical facts. The only short novel that is set in a specific time frame is Zhivi i pomni which takes place in the last year of the War. But this is less important to the story than the effect the crisis has on the characters. Also, in the story, most references to time either allude to the religious calendar or simply to the seasons of the year. One might argue that Proshchanie s Materoi offers social commentary. However, any reference to the concrete is offset by a strong tendency toward symbolism and allegory. Chapter Four of this thesis will offer more on Rasputin's use of symbolism. Constance Ann Link, whose Ph.D. dissertation is devoted entirely to the symbolism in Rasputin's short novels of the seventies, remarks:

> All of the social issues touched upon in the novels, however, are subordinate to the symbolism and philosophy of the whole.[14]

In other words, although Rasputin does make reference to certain social issues such as alcoholism, the takeover of kolkhozes by sovkhozes, the destruction of the natural environment in the name of progress, the question of military deserters, and so on, they are not significant in themselves. They merely serve to represent universal human problems and contribute to the crises through which the author observes the individual psychologies and emotional relationships of his characters. And through these observations, he is led to the "eternal questions" such as the meaning of life, the mystery of death, the power of love, the nature of dreams and memory. As critics have pointed out, he is a

writer of philosophical cast. Some have compared him to Dostoevsky. Rasputin's profound knowledge of human nature, his treatment of his characters in extreme situations, his skillful use of dreams and symbolism, his preoccupation with the notion of guilt, all these point to Dostoevsky's influence.[15]

One last point to which one should call attention with regard to "village prose" is that, in many works, the protagonists are female. This is interesting and surprising in view of the fact that all the "village prose" writers are male, whereas "urban prose" counts many women writers. This is particularly evident in Rasputin's works.

Indeed, in reading the works of Rasputin, one is struck by the central place of Woman, the sense and presence of her. She seems to be the focal point of both his philosophy of life and his prose. The eighty-year-old baba, the middle-aged woman, the sixteen-year-old girl, the six-year-old child, they all figure in Rasputin's works. However, with the exception of Io in Rudol'fio (1966) and Lidia Mikhailovna in Uroki frantsuzskogo (French Lessons,1973), a sixteen-year-old girl and a young teacher respectively, the major protagonists in most of his stories are simple peasant women, usually old, almost always mothers. His most characteristic and memorable protagonists are the old peasant women created in the 1970s, Anna in Poslednii srok and Dar'ia in Proshchanie s Materoi. They seem to represent the last remaining keepers of the values, ethics and traditions of the past, that are fast disappearing in the modern world. Rasputin displays extraordinary insight into their psychology and, what is even more intriguing, he appears to identify with them.[16] Middle-aged and younger women, and children in his stories are generally secondary characters. The first two serve as contrasting figures to emphasize the differences between the generations. Children are usually depicted as kindred victims of circumstances over which they have no control, victims of middle-aged adults' lack of moral values. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, children and old women in Rasputin's works share a special bond in that they are both simple, pure and more whole than the generation that separates them, the generation that promotes 'material progress'. Nastena, in Zhivi i pomni is an exception. Although young, she fits into

the same category as the old peasant women. Because the story is set in 1945, she can be considered part of the same generation as the other old women.

Of Rasputin's five major works, the three that were published in the 1970s have female protagonists (Poslednii srok, Zhivi i pomni and Proshchanie s Materoi). Surprisingly, despite the title, Mariia of Den'gi dlia Marii is not the main character in that short novel. She is quite helpless and passive. It is her husband, Kuz'ma, who takes charge to help her out of the predicament in which she has found herself. She does, nevertheless, possess some of the qualities of Rasputin's other heroines, such as kind-heartedness and goodness (dobrota), which are most probably the reason she is in trouble. The most recent short novel, Pozhar, also has a male hero, Ivan Petrovich. His wife, Ale a, plays an important role, but is still a secondary character. She is of the same ilk as Anna and Dar'ia; a good, strong, peasant woman, a devoted wife of 32 years. To her husband, she is everything that a woman should be. But she is also the last of her kind. She stands out in marked contrast against a background of chaos, confusion, indifference and apathy.

As mentioned earlier, Rasputin reveals a strong tendency toward symbolism. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that, although Rasputin's female protagonists are realistically portrayed, more importantly they play a crucial symbolic role in his works. They provide the key to an understanding of Rasputin's poetic system and his worldview.

Through an analysis of his female characters, I intend to show that his works represent much more than a sociological study of traditional Siberian peasant women. Some critics may state that Rasputin's works bear witness to the disappearance of the old Russian baba and the values for which she stands. While this claim is not false it, nevertheless, ignores the undeniable symbolic aspect of Rasputin's works. There is a much stronger feminine presence in his stories than one might, at first glance, realize. The "women" in his stories include, on the symbolic level, elements of nature such as the river Angara, the animals and the island of Matera, as well as the village by the same name with its traditional Russian izbas and mills. Rasputin's heroines, together with

his allegorical representations of women, can all be seen as manifestations of the Feminine Principle. The Feminine Principle, for Rasputin, represents natural wisdom (mother wit) and instinctual powers as opposed to the rational and scientific "masculine" order. It represents the pure spirituality and wholeness of being without which Man cannot live, yet which is being threatened by him.

There appears to be a definite progression in his portrayal of female characters. For this reason, they are examined by decade: the heroines of the sixties are seen as the precursors of the more important heroines of the seventies. The absence of heroines such as those of the seventies in his works of the eighties leads to interesting conclusions.

When examining the characters of Rasputin's women, due attention will be accorded to his earliest stories and sketches. Despite the fact that they are artistically inferior to his later work, they do reveal his penchant for old women characters and contain a wealth of information on his image of woman. Furthermore, although this study will focus primarily on Rasputin's protagonists, minor female characters will be drawn upon to help illustrate what women represent for him.

Chapter One will discuss the role of the old female peasant character in Soviet literature, focusing mainly on her rise from secondary character to protagonist. The rise in importance of the old peasant woman will be examined in the context of the whole "village prose" movement. Chapter Two will examine the ethos of Rasputin's early female characters. Chapter Three will focus on the heroines of the seventies, Anna (Poslednii srok), Nastena (Zhivi i pomni) and Dar'ia (Proshchanie s Materoi). Chapter Four offers an analysis of what women seem to represent for Rasputin based on the previous chapters and recent short stories, in particular Natasha. It will examine the symbolic representation of Woman and will draw attention to Rasputin's penchant for mysticism.

Notes

[1] Elizabeth Tracy Rich, Women in the Prose of Valentin Rasputin, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1985), p.1.

Gerald Mikkelson in "Religious Symbolism in Valentin Rasputin's Tale Live and Remember" states that many consider Rasputin to be Russia's greatest writer living in the Soviet Union today. He reports that this opinion was "repeatedly expressed, for example, by Vladimir Solouxin during his visit to the United States in 1979."

[2] David C. Gillespie, Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose, (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1986), p.18.

[3] In 1979, the Tofalar numbered only 800. Before the October Revolution, according to the Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia (Moscow, 1979), the economy of the Tofalar was based on nomadic reindeer breeding and hunting in the taiga . Many vestiges of the primitive communal system remained. After the Revolution, the Tofalar made a complete changeover to a settled way of life. They currently reside in settlements equipped with all modern conveniences and work on cooperative fur farms.

[4] Valentin Rasputin, "Ot solntsa do solntsa", in Krai vozle samogo neba (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), p.22.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Valentin Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi", interview with Evgenii Osetrov in Voprosy literatury, 1976, no.9, p.143.

[7] In 1977, Rasputin was awarded a USSR State Prize for his short novel Zhivi i pomni.

[8] The title changed to Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu (Downstream, Upstream) in subsequent book editions.

[9] The incident took place in front of his apartment building. Five hoodlums beat him brutally with brass knuckles, demanding his blue jeans. They left him with a severe concussion and injuries that required several operations to repair.

[10] Deming Brown, Soviet Russian Literature Since Stalin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 219.

[11] David Gillespie, op. cit., p. 10.

Geoffrey Hosking also wrote that Solzhenitsyn "stated a set of moral values that were to serve as a paradigm for much subsequent rural fiction". (G. Hosking, Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction Since Ivan Denisovich, N.Y.: Holmes and Meier, 1980, p. 55)

[12] In the Soviet Union, it is apparently acceptable to refer to the naive and good-natured peasants in literature as 'chudiki'. The term was used by Professor Georgii Alekseevich Tsvetov of the Dept. of Soviet Literature of Leningrad State University during lectures and special seminars I attended in 1984.

[13] Soviet critics O. Salynskii and Vs.Surganov, for example, consider that Rasputin creates the universally human out of the concrete social and temporary situations he portrays (O. Salynskii, "Dom i dorogi", Voprosy literatury, 1977, no.2, p. 17).

Also, the popular Siberian writer, Sergei Zalygin holds Rasputin's heroes as generalized, typical and universal.(Literaturnye

zaboty, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1982, p. 245)

[14] Constance Ann Link, Symbolism of the Sacred: The Novels of Valentin Rasputin, (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1983), p.13.

[15] In an interview, Rasputin once said that Dostoevsky was his favourite writer. He spoke of both Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's "valiant efforts towards the moral purification of man" and said that: "They managed to pose eternal questions about life...". ("Valentin Rasputin: The Human Race is not Accidental", interviewer: A. Afanas'ev, Soviet Literature, 1983, no.7, p.162)

[16] In fact, he has been criticized in the Soviet press for identifying with Dar'ia. The editors of Voprosy literatury, at the end of the 1977 round-table discussion "Proza Valentina Rasputina" in which five leading critics took part, summarized the view of many: "It is as if the author's voice, at times, is dissolved in the general narrative, his position fuses with that of the heroine and becomes highly vulnerable".(Voprosy literatury, 1977, no.2, p.81) The most vocal on this issue were O. Salynskii and V. Oskotskii.

CHAPTER I

THE OLD PEASANT WOMAN IN SOVIET LITERATURE: FROM SECONDARY CHARACTER TO PROTAGONIST

The simple old peasant woman found in Rasputin's stories is not new to Soviet literature. However, her position as protagonist is. She stands out in marked contrast against female peasant protagonists of earlier Soviet literature.

Before the Revolution, peasant women were generally portrayed as secondary characters. With few exceptions, they served more as props or part of the background. With the anti-serfdom movement in the 19th century, their living conditions were granted more attention, though they themselves remained largely secondary characters. In reality, peasant women were generally downtrodden, poor, illiterate, overworked, and beaten and abused by their husbands and fathers. According to Yale University's Handbook of Russian Literature, the image of the 'long-suffering peasant woman' (mnogostradal'naia baba) was first presented by D.V. Grigorovich in his Derevnia (The Village, 1846) and by Turgenev in Zapiski okhotnika (A Sportsman's Sketches, 1847-52).[1] One who devoted particular attention to the mnogostradal'naia baba was Nikolai Nekrasov. In his famous poem, Moroz krasnyi nos (Frost the Red-Nosed, 1863), he wrote movingly about her tragic lot.

In short, peasant women received much sympathy in Russian literature and their lives were described, but they themselves were not portrayed in depth as interesting individuals. Writes Xenia Gasiorowska, the scholar who has been the most prolific on the theme of women in Soviet literature:

> the women themselves could not be remembered other than as representatives of a species, for they actually had no separate, individual existence. Their plight was so obvious, their feelings so predictable, that authors did not attempt to elaborate on them. Neither did they themselves speak out. They were martyrs: starved, beaten, abused, in need of help which was not forthcoming. So, like visitors at the bedside of an incurable patient, the writers - and the readers - sighed in sympathy, and chastened, tiptoed away.[2]

After the Revolution, the peasant woman was suddenly granted much attention in fiction. She became an ideal candidate for the role of

protagonist because the emancipation of women and the class struggle were basic parts of the Marxist program. However, it was the young peasant woman who was given the honour of being the protagonist. Old peasant women remained in the background.

In Soviet literature, until after the Second World War, the old peasant woman was usually portrayed as a negative secondary character. While not necessarily a villain, she was, nevertheless, negative in that she did not provide support and help in building the new Communist society.

Gasiorowska classifies the women of this period into three groups: the pioneers, the reactionaries and the weaklings (or victims). The old peasant women fit into the category of reactionaries or victims. Although only secondary characters, they were probably closest to representing the average peasant woman who, in reality, proved to be rather conservative and difficult to emancipate.

It was the pioneers who, though a minority in real life, played the important role of protagonist. The old peasant women and the young "pioneers of progress" in Soviet literature represented the two poles in peasant women's reactions to the changes brought on by the Revolution.

The pioneer of progress, the 'New Woman', although perhaps true to life in many respects, did not come across as a personality in her own right but more as an aggregate of the new peasant woman's essential characteristics. She was like a poster, created to awaken women to their newly acquired rights. The first example of this 'New Woman' was A. Neverov's Mar'ia-bol'shevichka (Maria the Bolshevik, 1921). Another example of the pioneer of progress is Ia. Korobov's Katia Dolga (1926).

The main characteristics of the pioneer of progress were rebellion against village customs and morals, a thirst for education, and active participation in village administration. In other words, it is not surprising to find her unmarried though living with a man, having his child and refusing to have it baptized; or if already married, refusing to bear children on principle. Physically, she is usually bigger and stronger than her husband; in some cases, she is slightly masculine; she tends to wear men's clothing, and so on.

Apart from the pioneers who all resembled one another, characters such as L. Seifullina's Virineia (1924) also appeared; they did not fit

perfectly in the pioneer's mold, for they were motivated solely by their emotions as "typical" females traditionally are in literature. Virineia does rebel against village traditions and morals but it is mainly to gain sexual freedom. Rather than fighting for women's emancipation in Soviet society as the "pioneer of progress" does, this type of protagonist fights for her own personal happiness (which, in its own way, is a form of emancipation). Gasiorowska calls this type of character a "mutinous soul". Another example of such a mutinous soul would be Sholokhov's Aksin'ia in Tikhii Don (Quiet Flows the Don, 1928-1940).

Opposing the pioneers were the reactionaries. They were obviously portrayed as negative characters. They defied the new regime and did everything in their power to disrupt the efforts of the builders of Communism. They were usually middle-aged or old women. It was much more common, however, to encounter old women portrayed as harmless and sad old mothers, victims of circumstances over which they had no control and to which they were incapable of adapting. Conservative and timid by nature, they were frightened by the cataclysmic changes occurring around them. For years, they had been taught that a humble wife was a good wife and that social and political matters were the domain of their husbands. Now they were being asked to adopt a new attitude, to behave like a Maria the Bolshevik. However, it was inconceivable for them to turn against religion and to abandon their old ways. Moreover, the emancipated woman seemed immoral to these old traditional women. So they hopelessly clung to what was left and tried to warn their sons and daughters of the spiritual ruin they were bringing upon themselves. Gasiorowska makes a very appropriate comparison, calling them:

> poor souls, clucking like frightened hens who have fostered ducklings.[3]

Examples of these pitiful old women are Ostrovnov's old mother in Sholokhov's Podniataia tselina (Virgin Soil Upturned, 1932-60), Vaska's mother in Seifullina's Virineia, Andron's mother in Neverov's Andron Neputevyi (Andron the No-Good, 1923), and Il'inichna in Sholokhov's Tikhii Don.

In the literature of this period (i.e. until the end of World War II), old women were also portrayed occasionally as figures reminiscent

of the witches in Macbeth. Though few in number, these characters made quite an impression. They were evil and lived alone on the outskirts of the village, in dirty old shacks where they brewed magic potions. They were surrounded by religious paraphernalia which gave off an aura of evil. For example, the icons in their shacks had a dark and sinister quality about them. This portrayal was clearly an effort to mock the piety of old women in real life, by turning their religious beliefs into nothing more than maleficent superstitions.[4] Generally, in Soviet literature, outward signs of religion were used as a characterization device for negative characters. In the case of the hag-like old women, the characterization is simply taken to an extreme.

During the 1930s, when the doctrine of Socialist Realism was imposed on literature, the village theme temporarily lost its popularity to the industrial theme. It was revived, however, in the decade following World War II. In 1946, Andrei Zhdanov, Secretary of the Central Committee and Stalin's right-hand man, spearheaded a campaign in which Socialist Realism was most rigorously enforced. The literature of this period was expected to be tendentious, rallying the people to the Communist cause, and writers who deviated from Zhdanov's program were dealt with harshly. The theory of beskonfliktnost' (non-conflict) was applied to literature, resulting in works in which suspense was eliminated and endings were standardized. Thus, negative characters such as the admonishing old mothers of earlier works disappeared altogether. The works on the village theme which emerged at this time are commonly known as the Zhdanovist kolkhoz novels. Keeping in mind that this was the reconstruction period, when the themes of work and duty were emphasized, it is only fitting that the protagonist be the ideal kolkhoz worker. Again, she resembled a poster. Besides being completely dedicated to her job, she was a perfect housewife, wife and mother, living up to the high standards of the new Soviet family's morals and values. Her depiction was quite unrealistic. Examples of these protagonists are Anna in F. Panferov's Volga matushka (Mother Volga, 1953), Grunia in E. Maltsev's Ot vsego serdtsa (With Heart and Soul, 1948), Mariia in G. Medynskii's Mariia (1946-49) and Avdotia in G. Nikolaeva's Zhatva (The Harvest, 1950). These novels embellished life, 'varnishing' reality (lakirovka), and were totally lacking in sincerity.

The tragic and sad old mothers of the earlier period were replaced by happy grandmothers. These old women, treated kindly by their children, helped where they could, usually in the home, though some continued to produce outstanding results in the kolkhoz. They praised the achievements of the Soviet regime and, reminding others of the bad old days, urged them to appreciate what they now had. Unlike their predecessors, they did not appear to value the traditions of the past and did not worry about the future.

The differences in the attitudes of the old female characters and the younger protagonists toward the changes in the Soviet countryside thus vanished. They now worked together towards a common goal. The old peasant women remained secondary characters however.

The turning point in the portrayal of old peasant women in Soviet literature came with Stalin's death.

The most conservative writers continued to portray peasant women in much the same way as writers of the post-war decade, the only difference being that they were somewhat less perfect. The heroines were now permitted to make the occasional mistake. An example would be Zhuravushka in M. Alekseev's Khleb - imia sushchestvitel'noe (Bread Is a Noun, 1964). A respected middle-aged widow and skilled cowbarn worker, she suffers a momentary lapse of reason, drinks too much at a wedding and winds up sleeping with an old flame. As soon as she realizes that she is pregnant, she has an abortion and resumes her life where she had left off.

The advent of "village prose" meant some major changes to the character of the peasant woman protagonist. In the fifties, the ocherkists, with their critical realism, definitely stripped the "varnish" from the reality in which peasants lived but they still paid little attention to female characters. They did, nevertheless, prepare the way for the next generation by describing the conditions in which peasant women were forced to live and work. Husbands were portrayed as drinking excessively. Women's working conditions were shown to be worse than men's; men still held the positions of authority, and so on. Efim Dorosh was particularly troubled over the situation of peasant women. In Derevenskii dnevnik (Country Diary, 1956-1970), he depicted them as overworked, often the main support of their households, and old at

forty. He noted that, while kolkhoz work for men was largely mechanized, women still used pitchforks and scythes. Other ocherkists who focused their writing on the lot of women include Antonov, Zhestev, and Iashin.

In the sixties though, as mentioned in the introduction, the younger generation of "village prose" writers created a new type of positive hero: the traditional, simple, ordinary muzhik or baba. It is the baba's rise to the role of heroine which is of particular interest to us, especially since it is a first in the history of Soviet literature.

For forty years, the female peasant protagonist had been a supporter of the new ideology. She had fought against the old byt and worked to instill the new one. The word byt is difficult to explain. It encompasses almost everything that the new order had to fight against in order to effect the changes planned for the countryside. As the well-known writer Iurii Trifonov declared at the Sixth Writers' Congress in 1976:

> There is perhaps no more enigmatic, polysemantic and incomprehensible word in the Russian language.... It is not for nothing that this concept does not exist in any other language and that it is impossible to translate the word byt....[5]

Essentially, byt designates a way of life. It includes the concrete aspects of daily life, such as the way people run their households, their working methods and tools, their style of dress, and so on. The Slovar' russkogo literaturnogo iazyka defines it as the aggregate of customs and mores characteristic of a particular people, class, social milieu, stratum, etc. To Mayakovsky, byt was the enemy incarnate, the embodiment of everything routine and unchanging, of the enslavement of man to physical, biological and social necessity. Man had to liberate himself from byt. However, it can also be understood as a manifestation of man's beliefs and philosophy of life. In the struggle between the old byt and the new Soviet byt created by the new social structure, the questions underlying the outward dispute were questions of a deeper and more fundamental nature such as: How should man live? How should he behave towards his fellowman? What goals, beliefs, etc., should he have?

Up until Stalin's death, the female peasant protagonist, crusading against the old ways, had believed in building a new Communist society. She had reminded men of her rights and scoffed at village customs and

religious attitudes. Suddenly, for the first time in Soviet literature, the protagonist was an older woman, or if not old, then at least traditional, whose values and ideas did nothing to further the cause of the Communist Party. On the contrary, she stood for the old byt and admonished others to be wary of the new one.

Thus, the traditional, old-fashioned, religious peasant woman we encounter in the role of heroine in Rasputin's works is by no means a unique phenomenon in Soviet literature. She represents the new protagonist found in many works of the 1960s and 1970s.

The change in the orientation of rural literature after Stalin's death can be explained with the help of a little history.

The end of the Stalinist era and the accompanying 'relative' freedom of expression, permitted writers to take stock of all the changes that had affected Soviet society over the years. This period became known as a time of cultural reassessment. By 1953, the Russian people had experienced enormous upheavals in their way of life. The Stalinist period represented years of intense industrialization, collectivization and urbanization in Russia. Heavy industry, in particular, was greatly developed. Whole new branches of industry, such as chemical, automobile, agricultural machinery, aviation, machine tool, and electrical, emerged from modest beginnings, even growing out of nothing during the first Five-Year-Plan (1928-1932). After the War, the production of coal, electrical power, iron, steel, lumber, cement, agricultural machinery, and trucks, increased at a feverish pace. During the fifth Five-Year-Plan (1951-55), particularly impressive advances were made in the complex fields of aviation and the armament industry, as well as in atomic energy. Probably the greatest transformation, however, was observed in the countryside. Approximately 25 million individual farms had been replaced by slightly fewer than 250,000 kolkhozes by the time the war broke out. Huge virgin stretches of land, including the far north, began to enter the economic mainstream. Gigantic industrial complexes erected in the wilderness caused large cities to suddenly spring into existence.

These advances in the country's development brought its industry close to the level of the most advanced countries in the West. For

example, by 1937, the Soviet Union had advanced from fifteenth to third largest producer of electricity in the world. It was second only to the United States in machine building, tractors, trucks, and certain other lines of production. From 1928 to 1955, the annual industrial growth rate, as estimated by Western economists, averaged 12 to 14 per cent (ranging from higher rates in the late forties to much lower rates in the early fifties).

However, progress was achieved at a very high cost to the people. The authorities accomplished their aims by imposing great hardships on the people and mobilizing the country in quasi-military fashion. The concept of "socialist competition" was invoked to pressure the people into working extremely hard while being forced to endure desperate shortages of consumer goods and totally inadequate housing. Up until 1935, they had to put up with food rationing; despite the high level of industrialization, the country had one of the lowest standards of living in Europe. What is more, the people had to tolerate a top-heavy bureaucracy, excessive red tape and a regime that governed through fear.

Once again, the cost was highest in the countryside. Collectivization destroyed the bulk of the peasant way of life and forced almost half the population into the position of second-class citizens, deprived of all rights. This naturally met with serious resistance. Five million people disappeared at the time and it is assumed that they were either killed or sent to labour camps. Large numbers of people fled the countryside to live in the cities. Peasants slaughtered their livestock rather than give it to the kolkhoz. A famine swept the Ukraine. And to make matters worse, the country experienced droughts in 1931 and 1932. In addition to all of these hardships, the people had had to endure four years of war which killed an estimated twenty million.

Taking all of this into account, it is easy to understand the intellectual's feelings of confusion, dissatisfaction, or disappointment. With the 'thaw' in literature, writers began an intense soul-searching, a search for meaning in their lives.[6]

"Village prose" writers belong to the large class of Russians that was created when the tens of millions migrated to the towns from the countryside. These people, neither peasants nor townspeople, the first

generation to leave the village and the last to witness the vast changes that overtook the Russian countryside,[7] experienced an even deeper sense of emptiness or purposelessness. Soviet sociologists have written at great length about this class of people which they call 'marginal personalities'. 'Marginal personalities' allegedly have no clearly established urban or rural values. They experience feelings of "confused" nostalgia. Recalling their peasant origins, some feel guilty, guilty for having forgotten, for having left, or for having adopted a superior attitude to the village...

Therefore, in their effort to find a meaning for their existence, it is only natural that the "village prose" writers should remember the last system of values that they have known and trusted: that of the villages of their mothers. Having witnessed the changes that occurred in the countryside and not liking the results of these changes nor the effects they have had on the people, they turned to the past which offered an integrated system of beliefs and values.

Old women were the least affected by the changes and provided the ideal prototype for the new hero that was needed to express the sentiments of these authors. The reasons why they were less affected are simple. Since many of the changes related to work, they affected mainly the young, the educated and the male segments of society. The elderly, having already retired, were more isolated from the changes in public life and one can safely assume that there were more elderly women than men because the male population had been greatly reduced by the war. Moreover, old women, renowned for their conservatism, their strong religious beliefs and their fear of change, helped to preserve the values and traditions of the past more than anyone else in Soviet Russian society.

Seen in this light, it is no longer surprising to find the old peasant woman in the position of protagonist instead of the young pioneer struggling for the revolutionary transformation of society. The poster had worn out. The new heroine emerged in response to a serious need to deal with moral and ethical issues in this complex society. She offered an alternative system of values, one to which Russians had no difficulty relating. Recalling the pre-Soviet concept of the positive hero, the new heroine resembles the sad old mothers of the 1920s warning

their children against spiritual ruin far more than her emancipated predecessors. The main difference is that she is no longer frightened. She has inner strength and strong values. Like the sad old mothers, she does not participate in the public affairs of the village. She looks back nostalgically on the good old days and worries about the future of the village and her children. Instead of promoting progress and praising technological advances, she trusts neither science nor the plans of the state bureaucrats.

Examples of this new type include Matrena in Solzhenitsyn's Matrenin dvor, Natalia Semenovna in A. Iashin's Vologodskaia svad'ba (Vologda Wedding, 1962), Arsen'evna in V. Likhonosov's Rodnye (Relatives, 1967), Katerina in V. Belov's Privychnoe delo (That's How Things Are, 1967), Zhenia's grandmother in V. Likhonosov's Na ulitse Shirokoi (On Shirokaia Street, 1968), Pelageia in F. Abramov's Pelageia (1969), Katerina Petrovna in V. Astaf'ev's Poslednii poklon (Last Respects, 1968-78), and Milent'evna in F. Abramov's Dereviannye koni (Wooden Horses, 1970).

These new heroines share a number of attributes, making it possible to reduce them to a basic literary type. However, they do not deserve the label of stock character which implies a rigid, slightly hackneyed model. Unlike earlier heroines, they are neither perfect nor are they predictable. They are not poster-like, in the sense that they come across as real individuals, real human beings, rather than as mass-produced paper dolls. Needless to say, they are far more believable than the pioneer of progress or the model kolkhoz worker of the Zhdanovist period.

Hard work is an integral part of their lives. Although in some cases, this extremely hard work under difficult conditions actually kills them,[8] it plays a positive and fulfilling role for most. Solzhenitsyn's Matrena, for example, seems to delight in working outdoors, even if she receives nothing in return. On one occasion, returning from helping a neighbour dig up her potatoes, she says:

> Oh, she's got such large potatoes, Ignatich. It was a pleasure to dig them up, I didn't want to stop, honest.[9]

Indeed her days are full. Up by four or five a.m., she stokes the Russian stove, milks the goat, fetches water, brings potatoes up from

the cellar and makes breakfast. Besides cooking and housework, she digs potatoes in the garden, picks berries in the woods and bottles them for winter, gathers hay for her goat... Gathering hay is a problem given that she is not permitted to cut grass in the woods or on kolkhoz lands. She sets off with a sack and a sickle and scrounges grass where she can, by the roadside and along the boundary lines. She then drags it home and spreads it out to dry in her yard. One heavy sackful of fresh grass produces the equivalent of one pitchforkful of hay. Another back-breaking task is fetching peat for fuel. She carries extremely heavy sackfuls over three or four kilometers, from the peat-bog to her home, at the risk of getting caught, for it is illegal. One sackful weighs sixty pounds and is enough to fire the stove for only one day. Winter lasts two hundred days and two stoves have to be stoked every day (one in the daytime and another at night).

Despite the arduousness of her work, Matrena comes home beaming, thoroughly delighted. One day, speaking to the narrator about the peat she has dug, she says:

> Now I really know where to get the good stuff, Ignatich. (...) You should see the place - it's a treat. (p. 18)

This new type of heroine cannot understand the younger generation's attitude to work. They appear lazy and selfish to her. As Matrena says to Ignatich, the narrator of the story and her lodger, regarding the kolkhoz:

> (...) the way that place is run it's a wonder they ever get any work done - the women stand around leaning on their shovels just waiting till the factory hooter blows at twelve. And they waste time arguing about the hours they've worked, who's on and who's off. Now to my way of thinking, when you work, you work - no gossiping, but get on with the job, and before you know where you are it's supper time. (p. 21)

Work, for characters such as Matrena, is not just a chore. As Irina Corten, a professor of Russian at the University of Minnesota, points out, it seems to be a "channel for creative expression".[10] It is also their instinctive way of communing with nature. Once again Matrena is a good example to uphold this point. While she loves working outdoors, she completely neglects the inside of her izba. Work has a therapeutic effect on these old women. When Matrena becomes upset about the runaround she is given and all the red tape involved in trying to get

her pension, she throws herself into physical work to take her mind off of her problems. As Ignatich remarks:

> I noticed that she had an infallible means of restoring her good spirits: work. (p. 18)

When illness strikes and lays her low, again it is work which comes to her rescue. Forced to lie prone for a few days in severe pain,

> Her everyday chores were what summoned her back to life. (p. 22)

The new heroine is selfless, altruistic and kind to the point of self-abnegation. Matrena helps everyone and refuses payment. She digs up neighbours' potatoes and ploughs their gardens. She even lets her relatives tear down part of her house for the wood while she is still alive. In fact, she meets her death because of her altruism. She is hit by a train while helping her relatives transport this same wood. Abramov's old Milent'evna is another good example. Although she is ill and had been bedridden for days, she insists on walking to her son's house in the rain in order to be with her troubled and sensitive granddaughter.

These selfless old women are, at the same time, strong-willed, proud, independent and stoic. Matrena never groans or complains when her illness causes her pain. She never asks her lodger for anything. Similarly, the old grandmother in Likhonosov's Na ulitse Shirokoi dreads the thought of becoming a burden to those around her. Milent'evna displays her strong will when she determinedly leaves for her son's house in the rain despite the protests of her daughter-in-law.

In keeping with the orientation of "village prose", these new heroines have a close and harmonious relationship with animals and nature. Matrena adopts a lame old cat out of pity. When her house is overrun with cockroaches, she refuses to put down poison for fear it will kill the cat also. She refuses to keep a pig; she would never think of fattening an animal to kill it. And the nicest spot in her house, by the window, is reserved for her numerous exotic plants. In fact, at her death, the only possessions she leaves behind are a dirty white goat, a lame cat and her beloved plants.

The new heroine is compassionate and merciful. Matrena had been treated unfairly by the kolkhoz management. When she fell ill, they

dismissed her, but without certifying her as disabled. And after twenty-five years of service to the kolkhoz (but not directly in production), she was not entitled to a pension. Nevertheless, when they have the audacity to demand her help without pay to shift manure, she acquiesces. But it is not out of fear nor is it out of mere submissiveness. She is simply capable of forgiving and placing the interests of others ahead of her own. As she explains to Ignatich:

> What else can I do, Ignatich? Of course I'm bound to help them - what sort of harvest will they have if the muck doesn't get spread? (p. 21)

No one offers to spread some manure on her little garden, however. The largest potato it yields is the size of an egg because it has not been manured since before the war. Matrena, however, is not the kind of person to point this out to anyone.

Zhenia's grandmother in Na ulitse Shirokoi is another example of the compassionate and merciful old woman. After her death, Zhenia misses these qualities:

> (...) at times he felt empty and sad without the fairy-tale prayer which his grandmother had taught him. It was not a matter of words, as Zhenia realized later. What struck him was his grandmother's compassion and the secret of mercy by which she had lived.[11]

This compassion and mercy reflect Christian values. Believing in a turn-the-other-cheek code of ethics, she once stated:

> In all my days, I have never offended anyone. People have offended me, but I forgive them.[12]

These new heroines tend to be patient and accepting of their lot in life. This acceptance usually leans towards fatalism. As Zhenia's grandmother once again puts it: "Nothing on earth is determined by us".[13]

The "village prose" heroine is seen as a representative of the last generation to maintain the old traditions and rituals. For example, in Matrena's village, there are only a couple of hand-looms left that are still in working order. The narrator wants to photograph Matrena working at hers, as if to record on film one of the last Russians to be skilled in this old craft. It is significant that although Matrena is generally uneasy in front of a camera, she clearly likes the idea of being photographed working at her old loom. It is as if she also wants people

to remember the old ways.

Another old tradition which is dying but which can still be observed among the old women is the ancient ritual of mourning. The lament is referred to in Russian as prichitaniia, prichet', or plach. It was the role of the female relatives to lead the lament. The men stood silent and bareheaded while the women wailed. Each woman would have her turn to give vent to her own particular thoughts and emotions while the others wept in the background. The impression, as Solzhenitsyn wrote, was of a choir accompanying a solo singer. More often than not, however, the new heroine is the one who dies and there is no one left to mourn for her in the proper traditional way. When Matrena dies, the women wail for her but there is an element of 'politics' involved. The overall impression is one of cold calculation and not of real grief for the deceased. The two main clans, Matrena's and her husband's, in their wailing, blame each other for her death and stake their claim for her izba and meager belongings. It is significant that the mourners, her sisters and sisters-in-law, are all younger than she is. The one nearest her age, her brother-in-law's wife, also named Matrena, is the only one who wails in unaffected sincerity. The youngest generation is represented by Kira, Matrena's adopted daughter, who truly loves her. The old tradition has not survived in her. Her mourning, though sincere, lacks any hint of ritual. As the narrator says:

> She could only weep the natural, commonplace tears of our time (...). (p. 42)

The new heroine is usually pious as well. Her religion seems to be a blend of imported Russian Orthodoxy and the belief systems of the aboriginal peoples of Siberia. On the one hand, she appears superstitious and ritualistic. For example, Matrena bore six children, all of which died within the first three months of life. She and the other villagers are convinced that there is a curse on her. She is also superstitious. For example, if you go into the garden on St. John's day, it means the harvest will be bad next year; or if the snowflakes swirl round and round in a storm, it means that someone has hanged himself; or if you catch your foot in a door, it means a visitor, and so on. Similarly, Arsen'evna in Likhonosov's Rodnye believed that dreams were omens. On the other hand, these women often appear to be strict

observers of Russian Orthodox practices. They pray, cross themselves, attend church services and keep icons in their homes.

Once again, Matrena is a good example. The narrator, observing her, says:

> (...) she always asked for God's blessing before doing anything and she invariably said 'God bless you' to me whenever I set off for school in the morning. Perhaps she did say her prayers, but not ostentatiously, being embarrassed by my presence or afraid of disturbing me. There were ikons in the cottage. On ordinary days they were unlit, but on the eve of feast-days and on the feast-days themselves Matryona would light the ikon-lamp. (p. 24)

Once, for a christening in her family, she walked three miles to church for the blessing of the water, only to have her bowl stolen from among the bowls there. Sadly, she went home empty-handed.

An important feature of the new heroine in the literature of this period is that she is always at peace with herself. This is obvious in her attitude towards death which she calmly and serenely accepts as a natural part of life. Her clear conscience contrasts strongly with that of younger people who are affected by urbanization... The narrator in Solzhenitsyn's story remarks as he looks at Matrena:

> People who are at ease with their conscience always look happy. (p. 33)

The overall mood instilled in the reader by these old women is sadness, a nostalgia for the past, a sense of loss of a way of life. As Likhonosov puts it, in Na ulitse Shirokoi:

> Zhenia would look at his grandmother, enchanted. For him something special was hidden in the old person, like in the olden days of his homeland which would not be repeated in his generation.[14]

This 'something special' would disappear with the last of these old women. As Mitia, Arsen'evna's son, reflects on his way home:

> A whole generation is passing... A generation of Russian peasants. And I am not like that any more... not like them...[15]

There are certain questions that arise in connection with this new type of heroine. For example, how did a character who evokes nostalgia for past values instead of instilling principles of Communism in the reader, ever get accepted by the state censors? What happened to the writer's duty to educate readers ideologically? Are the "village prose"

writers the Poputchiki (Fellow Travelers) of the 60s and 70s? Unfortunately, for lack of space it is impossible to answer all these questions in depth in this thesis.

Basically, Rasputin's heroines share the general features of the other heroines in "village prose". The main difference is that they are more psychologically complex than the others and, therefore, even more intriguing. Rasputin is not afraid to explore the female mind. What is more, he does not simply have one or two stories with women protagonists; he has consistently chosen to portray peasant women as protagonists, particularly during the 1970s. What distinguishes him most of all, however, is the strong presence of symbolism in his works. This adds another possible dimension to the interpretation of his female characters as is shown in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Notes

[1] Handbook of Russian Literature, ed. by Victor Terras,(Printed in the U.S.A. by Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, N.Y.), Yale University, 1985, p. 519.

[2] Xenia Gasiorowska, Women in Soviet Fiction 1917-1964, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 32.

[3] Ibid., p. 50.

[4] An example of such a hag is to be found in Sholokhov's Tikhii Don.

[5] Iurii Trifonov, "Rech' Iu. Trifonova", Shestoi s''ezd pisatelei SSSR, 21 iiunia-25 iiunia 1976 g.: stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1978), p. 138.

[6] In all countries that have experienced the changes brought about by industrialization, there has been literature advocating a return to nature, to the simple life of the countryside. Whether it is called regionalism or primitivism, it is by no means a new theme. Culture shock pushes people to look for a means of escaping the alienating and disturbing changes accompanying industrialization. And the Russian had more contradictions to deal with than his Western counterpart, as already noted.

[7] As Sergei Zalygin observed: "Our generation is probably the last to see with its own eyes a thousand-year-old way of life out of which nearly all of us have grown. If we cannot describe it and the decisive changes that have transformed it in a very short time, then who can?" (S. Zalygin, Interv'iu u samogo sebia, Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1970, p. 10)

[8] Katerina Drynova in Belov's Privychnoe delo is a case in point. She and her husband, Ivan, have nine children and cannot earn enough on the kolkhoz to care for them adequately. Her brother from the town convinces Ivan to go back with him to earn more money, with the idea that perhaps he might even eventually relocate the whole family there. Ivan's trip is unsuccessful; he loses his train ticket and ends up returning home. However, in the short time he is away, Katerina, weakened by the strain of supporting nine children by herself so soon after childbirth, has a heart attack and dies. The separation from Ivan also contributes to her death. (Sever, no.1, 1966.)

[9] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House" in Stories and Prose Poems, translated by Michael Glenny,(Great Britain: The Bodley Head, 1971), p. 21. Hereafter, references to the text of "Matryona's House" will be included in the manuscript itself, rather than appearing in footnotes. This story was originally published in Novyi mir, no.1 (1962) as "Matrenin dvor".

[10] Irina Corten, "Solzenitsyn's Matrena and Rasputin's Darja: Two Studies in Russian Peasant Spirituality", Russian Language Journal,(Michigan), XXXIII, no. 114 (1979), p. 90.

[11] "Na ulitse Shirokoi", Novyi mir, no. 8 (1968), p. 22.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 21.

[15] "Rodnye", Novyi mir, no. 2 (1967), p. 159.

CHAPTER 2

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN RASPUTIN'S WORKS OF THE 1960s

CHARACTERS, ATTITUDES AND VALUES...

> I was always particularly drawn to female characters. The old women of the villages have an inner beauty and charm that is all their own. Their language is highly expressive and they seem to be full of wisdom. [1]
>
> Valentin Rasputin

Rasputin's partiality to old female characters became apparent early in his literary career. In Krai vozle samogo neba, five short stories have female protagonists.[2] The collection of short stories, Chelovek s etogo sveta, has an equal number of heroines.[3] War widows, mothers in mourning, solitary hunters roaming the taiga, they all share something in that they fatalistically bear all the hardships in their lives. Their lives are shown to be burdensome: endless chores without any modern amenities, continual childbearing, constant beatings and abuse by alcoholic husbands, total responsibility for the rearing of children. In some stories, Rasputin stresses the suffering caused by the War. In fact, the women's workload greatly increased in wartime. Besides their usual chores, they also had to do the men's work. In addition to this, they had to deal with loneliness and grief caused by the temporary or permanent loss of husbands and sons. In all of Rasputin's stories, his heroines are shown to be pure of heart and to possess strong values. Their worldview is deeply rooted in their close relationship with Nature. Just as Nature continually renews itself, most of his female characters see it as their primary duty to bear children and carry on the family name. In their concern to continue the line, they also find themselves perpetuating old traditions and ancient beliefs. In these early stories, the erosion of the old ways and beliefs already begins to be felt, and Rasputin's fear for a future without the age-old traditions and values begins to surface. Although these early stories are artistically inferior to his later works, the themes are significant and indicative of his later development.

Starukha (The Old Woman) offers a rudimentary portrayal of the old woman as a repository of tradition and an age-old spirituality that is

fast disappearing in the modern world. It is the story of an old shaman who is dying. She does not fear death. She feels that she has fulfilled her duty to humanity in that she is leaving behind a daughter and a granddaughter. She has carried on the family line, acting as a solid link in the chain of life. Her imminent death troubles her for one reason only, and it is no small worry to her. She will be taking with her into the earth the ancient property of her people, her shamanist legacy.

Shamanism is an ancient religious configuration of North Asiatic, Uralo-Altaic, and Paleo-Asiatic peoples. It is based on a belief in spirits with whom only shamans can communicate and which they can sometimes control. Shamans are believed, among other things, to have powers to heal the sick, to influence the future, and to help in the hunt by charming the animals. These powers, which are usually inherited, are achieved through the shaman's communication with the world of the spirits. Another important function of the shaman is to escort the souls of the dead to the world beyond. As healers, diviners, providers and psychopomps (conductors of souls to the place of the dead), they were the spiritual leaders of their communities. It is interesting to note that women were believed to make more powerful shamans than men. This may be a carry-over from the mother cult which was practised extensively in Siberia prior to the development of shamanism.[4]

There is an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Kansas which states that Siberians today, especially older women, are still influenced by beliefs and superstitions that modern man might consider backward or primitive and that these beliefs have an important place in the works of Rasputin. The entire dissertation focuses on Siberian mythology, folklore and tradition in Rasputin's short novels. As Chol-Kun Kwon, the author of that dissertation, stresses:

> A basic knowledge of shamanism is necessary for an understanding of certain images and characters in Valentin Rasputin's prose works, for example, the old women and their spiritual beliefs, attitudes toward the soul, death... [5]

The old shaman in Starukha long ago accepted the fact that times have changed and that her services are no longer needed. As the narrator of the story explains:

> She did not take offence: times had changed and what people used to go to the shaman for could now be obtained from the hospital, the store or the kolkhoz.[6]

What she cannot cope with is the knowledge that she is the last shaman; that the whole tradition will end with her death. She tries in vain to convey this to her daughter. Telling her that she would not actually have to practise shamanism, she pleads with her simply to accept the title of shaman, to accept the legacy. Her daughter, however, refuses to take the matter seriously. In fact, she becomes impatient with her and walks away. The old woman then places her hopes in her granddaughter. But these are soon crushed when the daughter refuses to let her influence the child. Lying on her deathbed, the old woman keeps warning them that trouble (beda) will come if there is no shaman. Nevertheless, her words fall on deaf ears and she dies that same night. At her funeral, the people praise her as a good person, a hard worker and a good citizen, but no mention is made of her having been a shaman. The granddaughter, however, surprised at this oversight, returns that evening and pronounces loudly and clearly over the grave that long, long ago, the old woman had been a shaman, but she had "reformed" (no potom ispravilas').

The old woman's otherwise calm acceptance of death, her feeling that a woman's duty is to reproduce and continue her line, and her fears for a future without the age-old traditions of her people are all themes which recur in Rasputin's later works. In this story, Rasputin uses shamanism as one example of an ancient tradition that is disappearing. In this sense, the old woman's warning could be interpreted as Rasputin's warning that Russia should not be stripped of its traditions or spiritual heritage. Otherwise, beda budet (Trouble will come). Rasputin points to one of the negative consequences of losing one's spiritual heritage by describing the attitude of the next generation towards death. Thus, the old woman's daughter is typical of her generation. Her lack of faith in something has left her defenseless in the face of death. Her attitude is clear from this one sentence:

> She came and stood by the bed, not venturing to sit next to the dying old woman, as if fearing the infection of death.[7]

Contrary to the old woman who sees death as the natural conclusion to

life and as a passage to another world, her daughter sees it as a sort of disease which she fears and tries to avoid.

The fact that the child will remember that her grandmother was a shaman offers some hope. However, she does not seem to understand what shamanism is. To her, it represents some old superstitious belief. The child is clearly the product of the Soviet educational system. She does not view her grandmother's death as the death of the last spiritual leader in her community (and maybe even in her country). Instead, she seems to be saying that, although the woman had once performed pagan rituals and believed in superstition, she had eventually given up her misguided ways.

Another element which emerges in Rasputin's early works is the close link between old women and Nature. The seventy-year-old woman in the short story Chelovek s etogo sveta (A Man* of This World) spent her whole life alone, hunting in the taiga. Now she tends reindeer in her old age. Her life is described as being in close harmony with the natural environment and in rhythm with the seasons, similarly to the life of a tree. Her perception of the world does not distinguish between Man and Nature. For example, she believes that where there is no Man, there is no wind; wind is born of Man's breathing when he climbs mountains and gets short of breath. All of the winds that she has created now live in her breast and beat as a second heart. These ontological beliefs concerning Man and Nature are common among Rasputin's characters.

This illiterate old woman, like most old women in Rasputin's works, is entirely a product of nature, unspoiled by civilization. During the narrative, the reader learns that she was once sent on a trip to Moscow as a reward for being one of the best hunters on the kolkhoz. Her impressions of the city and of Lenin's mausoleum reflect her way of thinking. The city appears cold and impersonal to her. She thinks to herself that as much as the mountains carefully watch over people, the city seems to do everything in its power not to notice them. All social structures are related, in her mind, to the kolkhoz. This is not surprising given that, before the Revolution, the Tofalar hunted for

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* In the sense of "human being", and not of "adult male human".

themselves and were unfamiliar with the regimentation that was imposed on their lives after the Revolution. Their first experience with government and a large bureaucracy was when they were forced into kolkhozes. Thus Lenin, to this old Tofa, is the kolkhoz chairman and Moscow, a large kolkhoz. Walking through the mausoleum, she thinks to herself that Lenin has a nice house and wonders if the Moscow kolkhoz built it for him. Her acquaintance with shamanistic rituals is also revealed in the story. When the people in the line-up near the figure of Lenin, they start taking wider steps sideways, maintaining the same pace, thus shortening their stride, in order to slow down so that they can see him for as long as possible. She sees this strange walk as some sort of rite, saying: "Evidently shamans were everywhere before".[8] She naively thinks it is an unfamiliar rite from some different tribe.[9] When people start pushing her from behind, she simply tells them to pass her, that she has to speak to Lenin, not realizing that she is not supposed to stop. "Ty idi, ia, odnako, malen'ko pobudu," she says. She proudly tells Lenin that she is a Tofa, and describes her land to him with its woods and its mountains. She concludes her "conversation" with him by giving him motherly advice.

This woman has many of the attributes of Rasputin's later heroines; she has a strong affinity with Nature; she is simple, honest, straightforward and strong; and she has a motherly streak.

A similar old woman appears in the story Prodolzhenie pesni sleduet (The Song Will Continue). Old Elena Andreevna is also a hunter in Tofalariia. She has spent her entire life hunting sable and squirrels, first for herself, then for the kolkhoz, when the Soviets took power. In the course of the narrative, the reader learns that she has raised many children and was later widowed in the War. She does not know whether she is sixty or seventy years old; her concept of time is related to the seasons and to Nature, not to Man's system of dividing time. For example, she says that, in old age, the years pass "like a flying squirrel". Because of her age, people try to persuade her to retire. Hunting in the taiga and the Saiany mountain range is, indeed, a feat for a person of her age. Fighting the bitter cold, piercing winds and deep snow, she has to climb steep, narrow paths to track the sable which is a cunning animal. Nevertheless, she refuses to retire. As she says,

pointing to her heart, "it will ache terribly if I don't go into the taiga". She seems to enjoy her solitude, hunting alone in the taiga for days, even months at a time.

Much attention in the story is directed to the song which Elena carries with her wherever she goes. It is always the same song, a song in which she dreams, reminisces and relates stories. The passage describing this song and its relation to the taiga is imbued with an element of unreality. Though she sings in a low voice, her song seems to carry for across mountains and taiga. It actually seems to be an intrinsic part of the taiga. It flutters in the snow and lingers by the trees. It slowly drifts through the mountains. Described as a long, soft and monotonous song, it can both lull and arouse simultaneously. The narrator indirectly likens Elena's song to the heart of the taiga, saying that the taiga listens to it in the same way that a sick person listens carefully and attentively to his own heart. This comparison together with the uncertainty about Elena's age lends an impression of timelessness or eternity to her and her song. Elena's life is inherently linked with Nature. In fact, she is in such harmony with her natural surroundings that her singing, unlike that of an intruder, does not disturb Nature's creatures. On the contrary, it seems to lull them. For example, it entices the sable down to the stream where it is easier to hunt it.

Reminiscing by her campfire with a cup of tea, she puzzles over Mankind. She fails to understand today's world. People have tried to tell her stories about how women live in the city. They say that they are sickly and weak and keep house pets because they are bored. In many cases, they do not even work. If their husbands have good salaries, all they do is go shopping and spend the money. She just laughs, not believing such nonsense. These stories are inconceivable to her. The contrast between city women and the tough, old peasant women is a constant theme in Rasputin's later works. Another of Mankind's creations which eludes Elena's understanding is war. She asks why they took her husband away. Although people try to explain, and she tries desperately to understand, she cannot comprehend why men kill men. Her persistent questions begin to exasperate everyone around her to the extent that they start avoiding her. She sees hunting for food and clothing as

natural. But in her value system, Man must not kill Man. She wonders if men hunt each other because they think that there are no more animals in the taiga. Her naïveté conceals the profound natural wisdom that Rasputin accords his old female characters.

When Elena hears the news of her husband's death, she goes out hunting once again, alone and close to Nature. She spends days and days deep in the taiga, singing mournful laments by night:

> Her songs were like the howl of a hungry animal on a long winter's night.[10]

As the years pass, her pain diminishes, returning only at night. For this reason, she finds the nights very long compared to the days. Once again linking time with Nature and the hunt, she says:

> Living through the day is like killing a squirrel; getting through the night is like tackling a bear.[11]

The story ends as it begins, with Elena Andreevna out hunting in the taiga, singing her song. There is a sense of continuity. One is left with the impression that she will be out there as long as the taiga will, as the heart or soul of the land. As the title of the story states, the song continues...

> (...) endless, like life. It is varied and complex, like life. It is about everything that happens in life. [12]

The majestic power of Nature that draws Man to it is described in V Saiany priezzhaiut s riukzakami (In the Saiany they come with knapsacks). The story basically relates how anyone who has been to Tofalariia returns a second time. It is about the wild and quiet beauty of the mountains and the taiga, that makes you forget everything else, that makes you yearn to return in spite of the danger it conceals. The story begins with a mother flying to Tofalariia to claim the body of her son. He had died on a geological expedition and was buried out in the taiga, a good 100 kilometres from the village. She feels that he should be brought home to be near her. As his mother, she wants to "plant flowers on his grave and water them with her tears". It takes a week for the villagers to bring his body back to her. During that week, she roams the mountains and the taiga, deep in thought. Sitting for hours near the river, staring at the mountains with her sad and grieving eyes, she is soothed by the gentle murmur of the water. She then wanders through the

mountains, looking down at the village. When the villagers finally return with her son's body, she sits alone with him for a long time. In the end, she emerges, her eyes drenched in tears and quietly says: "Let him stay with you. It's nice here. And I will come and visit him." Despite her need to be near her dead son, she cannot take him away from such a beautiful resting place. Also, the mountains soothe her and make her want to return there herself.

Motherhood is perhaps the most important motif in Rasputin's works. The mother-figure generally represents sadness and tragedy for Rasputin. In fact, most of his women have lost at least one child during their lifetime. Many have lost sons to the War. However, the harsh conditions of life in the taiga are often the cause of their children's deaths as well. An extreme example of such a mother-figure is the old woman in I desiat' mogil v taige (And There Are Ten Graves in the Taiga). Out of this mother's fourteen children, only two are still alive; two lie in the village cemetery while the ten others are buried all over the taiga. In the story, the old woman is sitting in the taiga, by one of her children's graves, trying in vain to remember his name.

As her mind casts back to each of the children who died out here, the reader is made aware of the extremely harsh conditions and poverty in which these people lived. Some of her children fell off cliffs; one baby froze to death in her arms; still others died of malnutrition. Recalling the time she took one of them to a shaman for help, not realizing that the child was dying of malnutrition, she deeply regrets her mistake. She and her husband paid for the shaman's services with two of their best reindeer. In exchange, he invoked spirits, chanted and danced. Needless to say, the child died. She later learned that he had lacked certain foods. They had fed him nothing but meat because it was all they had. They might have tried to trade the reindeer for other types of food had they known. This episode, in contrast with the story, Starukha, definitely stresses the advantages of progress rather than the value of tradition.

In the course of the narrative, the reader begins to realize that the old woman spends her days going from grave to grave, telling her children that life has improved in Tofalariia, as though apologizing to them. They were born fifty years too soon. They missed out on the

comforts that exist today. Children now do not have to die as they did in the past, she tells them. All of her one living daughter's children have survived and are happy. People now have "salt and bread, light and warmth, and sun, and comfort". In the story, the reason why she is at that particular grave, trying to remember the child's name, is that her daughter went into labour that day with her tenth child, making her a 'Mother-Hero' (Mat'-geroinia). The old woman had named all her daughter's children after the children who had died, in a way giving them the life they never had.

Rasputin seems to want to honour the mothers of the past who lived through extreme hardship but were never called 'Mother-Heroes'. This time, instead of pointing out the negative side of progress, he is admitting that the quality of life has improved in some respects. Generally speaking, he holds all mothers in very high esteem. As he comments in the story:

> Fathers do not give birth, fathers do not breast-feed, fathers sleep at night - that is why fathers do not weep and do not cry out, they merely sigh, sigh heavily and keep silent. But mothers feel the cry of lost blood, of milk spent, and love crushed.[13]

He points out that no one remembers the children in those graves except for their mother. She visits them, sits by their graves and whispers things to them as only a mother could. Their mother remains their mother, their eternal mother, forever.

All of the important women protagonists in Rasputin's early stories are mothers, or have motherly qualities. Besides those already described, Vasilisa (Vasilii i Vasilisa) and Mariia (Den'gi dlia Marii) are mothers, and even Anna in Vstrecha (The Meeting) is a mother although this point is not stressed.

Another sad mother in Rasputin's early stories is the woman in Tam, na kraiu ovraga (Over There, at the Edge of the Ravine). She loses her only son, a ten-year-old boy, to an unexploded mine left over from the war. Her loss is all the more tragic, in that her sad life has been summarized in the preceding pages. First, she loses her young husband in the war. This causes her to withdraw within herself, "sealing up her soul", as the author puts it. She feels that no one will ever penetrate her soul again. She lives a lonely and miserable life. Yet, ten years later, she does open up a little. She has a short-lived affair but, when

it ends and the man leaves as he came, she finds herself feeling just as empty and lonely as ever. Then, she discovers that she is pregnant. People gossip and she retreats even further into herself. The birth of her son, however, changes her life. It gives meaning to it. She is reborn and once again discovers the world that she had pushed away. The old wounds begin to heal. But Fate will not permit her to remain happy forever. Ten years later, the War, though long past, takes her son away as it did her husband.

Lonely women, either widowed or divorced, have their place in other works of Rasputin as well. Kak-to raz v seredine zimy (Once in the Middle of Winter) which was subsequently retitled Vstrecha, is the story of a chance meeting between Anna, a forty-eight-year-old milkmaid on a kolkhoz, and Nikolai, a fifty-year-old mechanic. They were once engaged, but she broke off the engagement when she fell in love with his best friend, Ivan. They have not seen each other in years. He is now a happily married man while she, once widowed and divorced the second time, lives alone. He invites her to his hotel room for a few drinks and some reminiscing. They have a good visit and share some laughs, but eventually the truth comes out about their feelings for each other.

In this story, Rasputin demonstrates his talent for conveying fine shades of feeling and emotion. Anna reveals that her marriage to Ivan was shortlived because he was killed in action in the War. Her second marriage was a failure. She married an invalid, more out of pity than love. Eventually, he began drinking heavily, brawling, and creating scandals. His insecurity regarding his wife gave rise to jealousy and suspicions that were entirely unfounded. She worked day and night and patiently put up with his irrational behaviour until the day he raised his hand against her. She divorced him, then, feeling that it was better to live without a man than with that kind of man. After these two marriages, she gave up on relationships. A firm believer in Fate, it was her understanding that if you are not immediately lucky, you should not wait for your luck to turn. You must accept life as it is and not tempt Fate.

It becomes clear as the evening progresses and the level of alcohol in their blood increases, that Anna is deeply unhappy though she tries to conceal it. She still thinks about her first husband, and feels that

she has nothing more to expect from life. It also becomes clear that Nikolai still loves her. When he attempts to embrace her, she pushes him away, reminding him that he has a wife. Jealous of Ivan and hurt by her rebuff, he shatters her memories of Ivan by telling her that he was unfaithful during their brief marriage. Realizing the damage he has done, he tries to take back what he said. But she no longer believes him. The doubt remains. Her life has been a sad one and now, the one good memory she had left has been destroyed.

In this story, Rasputin shows his understanding of human relationships. He describes a woman whose life has been miserable, partly due to fate and partly out of male selfishness. She is a mother, a hardworking and patient woman who is capable of marrying a man out of compassion, yet independent enough not to stay in a hopeless marriage.

Rasputin's best portrayal of a peasant woman in his early prose is that of Vasilisa in Vasilii i Vasilisa. She represents the strong, hardworking, selfless peasant woman who would become the distinguishing feature of Rasputin's short novels of the 1970s. The first sentence of the story, "Vasilisa wakes up early", is indicative of her industrious nature. The author goes on to say that, in winter, she does not trust the roosters; they sometimes oversleep and she cannot permit herself to do that. Like all Rasputin's peasant women, Vasilisa's work is never-ending. By the time she wakes the others (her son, Petr; his pregnant wife, Tania; and Vasilii, her husband), she has done many chores:

> The day has just begun. Vasilisa sighs - the whole day still lies ahead.[14]

In contrast, the men sleep in, have a cup of tea (prepared and served by Vasilisa), and then go off to eat and drink vodka elsewhere. Vasilii works at times, though not consistently.

The reader soon discovers that the couple no longer lives together. Vasilii was banished to the barn nearly thirty years ago. He had been a heavy drinker and beat his wife regularly. But the last straw was when he scared her half to death with an axe one day, while she was pregnant, causing a miscarriage. She would not forgive him for that and threw him out of the house. Once again, Rasputin is describing an unhappy man/woman relationship. Husband and wife still live in each other's presence, he in the barn, she in the house, but they do not talk

to each other. They were married for nearly twenty years before the incident, and had seven children. Nevertheless, Vasilii's sin was such that Vasilisa cannot forgive him. Even when he comes home from the War, she refuses to let him move back into the house, in spite of her children's pleas. In fact, when one son dies at the Front, she irrationally blames Vasilii for not having died instead.

A few years after their separation, Vasilii marries a young woman named Aleksandra. It is never stated in the story that he and Vasilisa are divorced. It therefore comes as a surprise to the reader. He tells his son that he is marrying because he is fed up with doing his own washing and housework; he needs a housekeeper. Vasilisa does not react very well to the marriage. Obviously jealous, she treats Aleksandra with contempt. She even goes so far as to mock her infirmity (she is lame). This is an indication that she still has feelings for Vasilii although she refuses to acknowledge them.

An important aspect of Vasilisa's character is unveiled in the same chapter: the strong sympathy and understanding she feels for her fellow woman. The first evidence of this is her attitude toward Tania, her daughter-in-law who is often ill. She consoles her, saying:

> Go ahead, be ill.(...) Later you'll have children and there won't be time to be ill. And life is long. Your life won't be a sweet one either, you haven't picked a gem of a husband.[15]

Rather than taking her son's part, she sympathizes with his wife, knowing her son's weaknesses only too well. She sees Woman's lot as harsh and often unfair. This compassion is also evident in her relationship with Aleksandra. While Aleksandra's presence upsets her emotionally, Vasilisa finds she can still feel sorry for her when she sees her crying one day. She invites her in for tea and a chat. Thus, it is her empathy for her fellow woman that breaks the barrier between them. As Vasilisa explains to Tania who cannot believe her eyes:

> I can't stand it when women cry. It's like a dagger in my heart. Life's like a five-kopek coin, one side is heads and the other is tails, and everyone wants it to come up heads. But what they don't realize is that whatever side comes up, it's still only worth five kopeks. Oh, women, women...[16]

She sees no use in women crying. Believing in Fate, as all of Rasputin's heroines do, she knows that crying will not change anything in their

lives. After talking to Aleksandra and learning that she too has lost a son (she lost contact with him during the War and is still looking for him), Vasilisa feels even more sympathy for her; she understands her mother's pain. When Aleksandra leaves Vasilii to resume her search for her son, Vasilisa wishes her well, saying that she will pray for her. By this time, a genuine bond of warm, human feeling exists between the two women.

The one character to whom Vasilisa really relates is an old woman, her seventy-year-old friend, Avdot'ia. In all of Rasputin's stories, old women seem to relate best with other old women or children. The generation of middle-aged adults has nothing in common with the old people.

Vasilisa is the first of Rasputin's early characters to invoke the name of God. In contrast to the more purely shamanistic beliefs of some of the other characters, she comes across as more of a Christian. For example, when three of her children go off to the Front, she makes the sign of the cross. And when Aleksandra leaves, she says "May God be with you" and promises to pray for her. Other than these, there are no other outward signs of her religiousness. Yet it is apparent in the values she holds dear.

In the final chapter, Vasilii falls ill. As his condition worsens, he begins to worry about death. Afraid of dying at night, alone with no one to comfort him, he asks Petr:

> Tell me, why is it that people more often than not are born and die at night? [17]

His fear of dying contrasts sharply with the calm attitude of the old women in Rasputin's works. Realizing that he is dying, Vasilisa overcomes her hurt and indignation and enters the barn to sit at the edge of his bed. Vasilii apologizes for making her life miserable. While it is true that her life was unhappy because of him, she rises above it and reassures him that her life has not been so bad; after all, their children have grown up and are doing well. Like a true Christian, or rather a human being in the best sense of the word, she forgives him before he dies. Causing the death of her unborn child was unforgivable in her eyes. Nevertheless, she is compassionate and merciful towards him. She lightens his burden of guilt so that he can die at peace. And

she leaves him with a smile on his face.

In this story as in his later stories, Rasputin is reminding us that a way of life is dying. In a conversation between Vasilii and Petr, Vasilii expresses his disappointment that his son has no respect for the taiga. He tells him that their family have always been taezhniki (inhabitants of the taiga). It was a way of life. Now, he imagines that his son will probably sell the family gun, which symbolizes the old ways, when they survived by hunting. Petr argues feebly with his father, but deep down he knows that his father is right: things have changed. As a last attempt to preserve something of the past, Vasilii suddenly says in a strict tone of voice: "Don't sell the gun".

With the publication of Vasilii i Vasilisa, Rasputin proved himself capable of developing psychologically complex and believable characters. Although his heroines are morally superior to other characters, they are shown to have their shortcomings as well. And his negative characters, such as Vasilii, are not all villains. They also have their share of virtues. One exception would be Stepanida in Den'gi dlia Marii. She is definitely a negative character. A miserly old woman, she refuses to give a cent to help Mariia. She comes across as the archetypal miser, the very embodiment of avarice.

Den'gi dlia Marii is Rasputin's first major short novel. As already mentioned, Mariia is not the main protagonist. Vladimir Shaposhnikov, author of one of six Soviet monographs devoted entirely to the works of Valentin Rasputin,[18] is correct when he states that:

> Mariia is not so much a character as she is a circumstance in relation to which all of the other characters in the novel are revealed.[19]

She provides the plot for the story. She manages the local store in a small village. When an inspector comes to check the books, he finds that one thousand rubles are missing. Everyone knows that Mariia is not guilty. The store has always lost money that way. Yet previous managers have gone to prison. This is why no one in the village wanted to run the store. Mariia has a good heart; it therefore was easy to persuade her to do it. Now, she has five days to recover the money, or face the consequences. The story thus focuses on her husband Kuz'ma's efforts to collect the sum. It is a study of human relationships and values. In this crisis situation, the question is whether man is willing to help

his fellow man in modern Russia. A whole gallery of characters are presented, together with their attitudes towards money.

Besides Stepanida, who was mentioned earlier, there are two other secondary female characters of interest in this novel. Aunt Natal'ia, a friend's mother, is the complete opposite of Stepanida. Ill and bedridden, she donates the money she has saved up for her funeral which is probably not far off. She represents the typical selfless, kindly peasant woman. Her saving the money is characteristic of Rasputin's independent old women who do not want to become burdens on their loved ones. The other female character is Komarikha. Komarikha is a fortune-teller. Her beliefs are influenced by both Shamanism and Christianity. The villagers mock her and treat her as a social outcast. To them, she is just a superstitious old woman. In her own way, however, she tries to lend moral support and spiritual help to Mariia. Her role in the story is more significant than it appears at first glance. When the outcome of Mariia's predicament looks particularly gloomy, it is her fortune-telling that renews Mariia's hope. When Kuz'ma addresses Komarikha in a derisive tone one day, she responds with a telling remark about those who scorn that which they cannot see or touch:

> So long as life is peaceful they don't believe. But when trouble comes, and not just little upsets but serious trouble, then straight away they remember the Lord God and His servants, the ones they spat on before.[20]

Kuz'ma fails to collect the amount he needs from the village. He is forced to turn to his brother who lives in the town and whom he has not seen in seven years. He takes the train to town (a ride that illustrates the dichotomy between town and country). Rasputin deliberately offers no ending to the story. The last scene depicts Kuz'ma walking up to his brother's door and knocking, leaving the reader to speculate on the outcome.

The women in Rasputin's early stories are perhaps less skillfully portrayed than those in his later works. At times, they seem rather one-dimensional. However, Rasputin's understanding of the hardships endured by women in rural Russia and his admiration for these women is clear. The themes of his later works are present in embryonic form. In the short story, Ot solntsa do solntsa (From Sun to Sun), while women do not play any major roles, Rasputin hints at the meaning he assigns to old

women in his writing. The story's narrator, sitting around a campfire with a group of Tofalar, is observing one particular old woman. Her motionless face stands out against all the others as the firelight plays over her features. She is obviously old, her wrinkles resembling cracks on the face of a wax figure. Suddenly, she lifts her eyes from the fire and shares a piece of her life with the others. She is a calf-herder by the name of Irina Semenovna Tokueva, and clearly a woman of few words. She speaks quietly, slowly, proudly. She tells of a Russian who loved her. He took a photograph of her to the Front with him, saying that he would return. That was more than twenty years ago, and she is still waiting. The author compares her motionless face, full of "mute significance", to a book that must be read carefully. Taking his comparison a bit further, the narrator suggests that the book would be entitled "Hope". Irina Semenovna embodies a living hope, which is stronger than any rational argument. As the narrator says:

> We look at the face of this woman, at this unfinished book that perhaps might yet have a happy ending, and we are clearly aware, we have absolutely solid and obvious proof: there is, in man, an immortal spirit, an immortal soul. And this spirit is called hope!
> How did we materialists ever forget hope? [21]

Notes

[1] Valentin Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi", Voprosy literatury, no.9 (1976), p. 146.

[2] Old Elena Andreevna in "Prodolzhenie pesni sleduet"; the old mother in "I desiat' mogil v taige"; the old shaman in "Ekh, starukha"; the seventy-year-old woman in "Chelovek s etogo sveta". In "V Saiany priezzhaiut s riukzakami", the old mother is not exactly the protagonist; out of 4 pages, only the first is devoted to her. However, the main point of the story is made in that first page.

[3] The old shaman in "Starukha" (Reprint of "Ekh, starukha"); the old woman in "Chelovek s etogo sveta"; the mother in "Tam, na kraiu ovraga"; Anna in "Kak-to raz v seredine zimy" (subsequently entitled "Vstrecha"); Vasilisa in "Vasilii i Vasilisa". Admittedly, the first two stories had been published previously. However, the character of Vasilisa would become the most important female character in Rasputin's early period and the precursor of his later renowned heroines.

[4] For more information on the mother cult in Siberia see O. Nahodil, "Mother Cult in Siberia", in Popular Belief in Siberia, V. Dioszegi, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp.459-477; Iu. B. Simchenko, "Mother Cult Among the North Eurasian Peoples", in Shamanism in Siberia, trans. S. Simon, eds. V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1978), pp.503-513.

[5] Chol-Kun Kwon, Siberian Mythology, Folklore, and Tradition in Valentin Rasputin's Novellas, Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1986, p.7.

[6] Valentin Rasputin, "Ekh, starukha", Krai vozle samogo neba (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1966), p.54.

[7] Ibid., p. 55.

[8] Valentin Rasputin, "Chelovek s etogo sveta", Krai vozle samogo neba, op. cit., p. 63.

[9] It was still possible to witness collective sacrificial rites, funeral rites, etc. in the sixties in Siberia, according to the editors of Shamanism in Siberia (op. cit.).

[10] Valentin Rasputin, "Prodolzhenie pesni sleduet", Krai vozle samogo neba, op. cit., p. 14.

[11] Ibid., p. 13.

[12] Ibid., p. 14.

[13] Valentin Rasputin, "I desiat' mogil v taige", Krai vozle samogo neba, op. cit., p. 36.

[14] Valentin Rasputin, "Vasilii i Vasilisa", Chelovek s etogo sveta (Krasnoiarsk: Krasnoiarskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1967), p. 75.

[15] Ibid., p. 90.

[16] Ibid., p. 91.

[17] Ibid., p. 94.

[18] The others are N. S. Tenditnik's Otvetstvennost' talanta (O tvorchestve Valentina Rasputina) (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1978); E. P. Safronova's Povest' Valentina Rasputina 'Zhivi i pomni' (Vil'niusskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1980); B. M. Iudalevich's Svet talanta, Tvorcheskii put' Valentina Rasputina (Novosibirskaia

oblastnaia organizatsiia obshchestva 'Znanie', 1982); S. G. Semenova's Valentin Rasputin (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1987); and N. N. Kotenko's Valentin Rasputin. Ocherk tvorchestva (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988).

[19] Vladimir Shaposhnikov, Valentin Rasputin (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1978), p. 15.

[20] Valentin Rasputin, "Den'gi dlia Marii", Chetyre povesti (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1982), p. 561.

[21] Valentin Rasputin, "Ot solntsa do solntsa", Krai vozle samogo neba, op. cit., p. 24.

CHAPTER 3

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN RASPUTIN'S WORKS OF THE 1970s CHARACTERS, ATTITUDES AND VALUES...

The themes which were only hinted at in Rasputin's early stories developed into important ones in his works of the seventies. His fears about the future of his country (or of the world) had obviously been heightened. The loss of tradition and old values had become a serious concern and the urgency of the situation is felt throughout the novels of the seventies.

One major difference between the stories of the sixties and those of the seventies is that, in the later stories, the contrast between the old and the younger generations receives more attention. As before, the heroines are of the old generation. They are shown to be pure of heart and to possess strong values. The younger generation, on the other hand, with the exception of small children, is generally presented as seriously lacking in moral substance.

By reason of the fact that, in his view, the traditions and values of the past seem to be in far graver danger of extinction, the author completely ignores the improvements brought by technological progress. He now dwells on what is lost and not on what is gained. Whereas the advantages of progress are emphasized in a few stories of the sixties, such as *I desiat' mogil v taige* and *Na snegu ostaiutsia sledy* [1], Rasputin's positive characters of the seventies have nothing good whatsoever to say about progress and urbanization. The trend began in the sixties but only became a major issue in the later stories.

The peasant women in the stories of the seventies not only lead the same difficult lives as they did in the sixties, they are shown to be abused and betrayed by their children, by society, and by fate. Instead of being presented in everyday situations, they are portrayed in life-threatening ones. In fact, all of Rasputin's heroines in this period die.[2] Because they are seen as keepers of tradition and values of the past, their deaths point to the inevitability of the disappearance of those traditions and values.

The tendency to depict them as abused was touched upon in the

sixties with Den'gi dlia Marii. Mariia is a kind of scapegoat for her community. Someone had to run the store and she was easy to persuade. The difference between this story and the later ones is that Rasputin leaves the reader guessing as to the final outcome, giving reason to hope. In the seventies, however, there is no hope whatsoever of the heroines being saved. The outcome is clear almost from the beginning. The endings are inevitable. What is important is that we, the readers, witness what is happening. The titles are ominous: Poslednii srok (Borrowed Time), Zhivi i pomni (Live and Remember) and Proshchanie s Materoi (Farewell to Matera). They all point to the end of something. Zhivi i pomni sends an additional message to the reader, that one must remember that which is disappearing. It would be an appropriate title for almost any of Rasputin's works.

The bulk of Rasputin's writing in the seventies took the form of short novels (povesti) as opposed to short stories. This longer form permitted him to portray his heroines in more detail and depth. The heroines which emerged from these works were psychologically more complex and thus much more realistic and believable.

The major heroines of the seventies are Anna of Poslednii srok, Nastena of Zhivi i pomni, and Dar'ia of Proshchanie s Materoi. As mentioned in the introduction, Nastena, unlike the others, is a young woman. However, she embodies the same values as they do. Whereas the other short novels are set in contemporary Russia, Zhivi i pomni is set during the War. Rasputin has turned the clock back to portray his old women in their youth. Similarly, in the short story, Uroki frantsuzskogo (French Lessons, 1973), the heroine, Lidia Mikhailovna, is a young woman. This story is also set during the War. Her values are similar to those of the old women though her lifestyle is quite different. Rather than being a peasant woman, raising children and working on the land, she is a career woman, and a very dedicated one at that.

According to Rasputin, the prototype for Anna was his own grandmother, Mariia Gerasimovna Rasputina. Nastena had no prototype. And Dar'ia's prototype was his concept of the Russian woman, "what she was like and the kind of person he would like to know her as being, not just from recollections".[3] In a different interview,[4] he states

that Anna was a prototype for Dar'ia. Anna and Dar'ia are one and the same character, only placed in different circumstances.

Poslednii srok centers on the last days in the life of Anna, an old Siberian villager. Four of her five living children come to her deathbed. Encouraged by the sight of her children, and waiting for the arrival of Tan'chora, her youngest, her condition improves temporarily. On the third day, her impatient children, believing that she has recovered, leave despite her pleas for them to stay one more night. It becomes clear that they did not come to comfort her, but to bury her. That night, she dies.

Zhivi i pomni recounts the story of a deserter, Andrei Gus'kov, who, in the last winter of the war, returns to his native Siberian village on the banks of the Angara. He makes his presence known only to his wife, Nastena. Hiding in an old hut across the Angara, he is completely dependent on her for supplies and human companionship. Forced into a choice between betraying her country or betraying her husband, Nastena chooses to remain loyal to Andrei. She therefore becomes an accessory to his crime and bears the whole burden of keeping the secret from his family and the community. This becomes increasingly difficult when she gets pregnant. Exhausted by the double life she is leading, tormented by guilt, fear and shame, and yet attempting to protect her husband from discovery, she commits suicide.

Proshchanie s Materoi describes the last summer of Matera. Matera is an island settlement on the Angara which has existed for at least three hundred years. It is now doomed. It is to be flooded because of the dam being built to supply a hydroelectric station. The people are being moved to a large urban-type settlement. The story focuses on the old people who refuse to leave until the last possible moment. They sit and reminisce about the past. They help bring in the last wheat harvest. They watch the last haying. They dig the last potatoes. Worst of all, they see the land being cleared of its buildings and trees by a special brigade. Everything around them is eventually put to the torch. The central figure is an eighty-year-old woman, Dar'ia, to whom everyone comes for advice and support. She and a handful of old women (Nastasia, Katerina and Sima) together with an interesting old man (Bogodul) actually never leave the island. The outcome is unclear, but it appears

that the old people die in the end.

As in the earlier stories, the heroines of these short novels are extremely hard workers. As Anna lies waiting for death, memories flash through her mind one at a time. Remembering all the work she has done in her lifetime, the thing that stands out in her recollections is the feeling that no matter how hard she tried, she never managed to get everything done.

> "Faster, faster," she would urge herself on, flinging herself at one task, then the next, and however much she accomplished she could never see any end. That was the way her whole life had flown by.[5]

Nastena has also worked hard all her life. Orphaned as a child, and left to fend for herself and for her little sister, she learns to work for their food. The year is 1933, a year of famine, following the droughts of 1931 and 1932. The two children wander from village to village, barely managing to feed themselves, until they reach the village where their aunt lives. Reluctantly the aunt takes them in. Shortly afterwards, Nastena joins the kolkhoz. Besides working hard at the kolkhoz, Nastena lives like a servant in her aunt's home. Two years later, tired of breaking her back for virtual strangers, she impulsively decides to marry Andrei Gus'kov whom she has just met, and moves to another village. However, she has merely gone from being a servant to her aunt to being a servant to the Gus'kov family. Their home is larger and greater demands are made of her. The men of the household, Andrei and his father, Mikheich, bother themselves only with chopping wood and storing hay. Nastena's mother-in-law, Semenovna, is not well physically and can barely walk. This means that the entire burden of the housework, feeding the animals, milking the cows, cleaning out stalls and hauling water from the Angara falls on her shoulders. In addition to all of this, she works in the kolkhoz. With time, her hands grow thicker and heavier from the strenuous chores. However, Nastena never complains about the work. In fact, she is depicted as loving her work, as feeling protected and in her element when working. She particularly loves haying:

> the soul lights up with a merry, itchy passion - and you go on forgetting yourself, mowing the grass with a playful urge, and it feels like you're delving deeper, screwing yourself into some forgotten, secretly familiar place with every swing.[6]

Regardless of the sometimes deadly heat, she loves wielding the scythe, raking, stacking the hay...

> She loved it all from beginning to end, from the first day to the last. (L.211)

When Nastena reaches the end of her rope, exhausted by the double life she is forced to lead after Andrei's desertion, she places all her hopes, a kind of inexplicable blind faith, in the haymaking, as though it will bring some saving grace. She waits for haying time as though her whole fate depends on it. However, she never lives long enough to find out how it could have helped her. The night before the haying is to begin, she attempts to cross the Angara one last time in order to warn her husband that people are beginning to suspect his presence. When she realizes that she has been followed, she throws herself into the Angara.

Dar'ia also comes from a family of hard workers. In the course of the story, she describes how both of her parents died working, and how her relative Ivan was, according to her, the "best bricklayer for a stove in the whole world. People came to ask him to do their stoves from a hundred versts around."[7] The way she talks about them reflects the pride she feels and the value she accords to work. She herself has always worked hard. Her hands, "dry, large-knuckled, and weathered with hard work", bear witness to this. Even in her eighties, she is still strong and able to do her share of the chores. Her son Pavel and his wife have already moved to the new settlement, leaving her to look after the house and garden and livestock. They have a cow and calf, a young bull, a piglet, chickens and a dog. She manages to do the work without asking her neighbours for help. Her fondest memories are associated with work. It is not surprising that the part of Matera she is most attached to are the fields that her family always mowed for its personal use. It is here that, year after year, she has worked the hardest and sweated the most. And this labour of love has brought her joy and happy memories each and every time.

The heroines of the seventies, like many of the heroines of the sixties, have problems with husbands who have physically or mentally abused them. Anna's husband did not drink, but he made her life all but unbearable by constantly criticizing her.

> Nothing was to his liking. Whatever she did displeased him. She herself was surprised that she found the

> patience to endure the reproaches which he rained on her day and night. And when his mania would take a different tack: he would sulk, and he was capable of saying nothing for six months. It was just as well he wasn't at home much. (B.335)

In their four years of marriage, Nastena had to put up with unprovoked shouting and beatings at the hands of her husband. He wrongfully blamed her for their childlessness. Her subsequent pregnancy, when Andrei deserts and is in hiding, proves that she was not barren. In one of their conversations in the old shack where he is hiding, Andrei expresses his regret that they never really communicated with each other in the past the way they have since his return. Recalling how he used to raise his hand to her, he feels remorse for his behaviour. At this point, she declares that it is not true, that he never raised his hand to her. She prefers to remember only the good in their life together.

Andrei obviously never shows her much affection. The smallest token of fondness towards her, on his part, she treasures as God-given. For example, their second winter together, Andrei is sent by the kolkhoz to take courses in the district capital. He is away for a long period. When Nastena pays him a short visit and he shows that he is glad that she has come, she melts with happiness. At the end of her stay, he asks her to remain one more day. This brings tears of joy to her eyes. Remembering her feelings at that moment, she says:

> you asked me to stay on your own, it was your idea. My heart wanted to leap out for joy.(L.108)

Dar'ia's husband, Miron, is mentioned just once in the entire novel (Proshchanie s Materoi). The type of relationship they had remains a mystery. His memory is appropriately brought to mind as Dar'ia reflects on how quickly people forget those who are dear to them once they are parted. The only information the reader is given on the man is that he disappeared without a trace some thirty years ago. He left for the taiga with two dogs, supposedly to hunt, and never returned. Whether some serious misfortune befell him or he abandoned his wife is unknown.

The heroines of Rasputin's novels of the seventies, similarly to his previous heroines, are mothers, or if not actual mothers, they show strong motherly tendencies. Anna had thirteen children of which only five were still living. Dar'ia had six and three were alive. Nastena is

the only one not to have any children. Her supposed inability to conceive a child is, in fact, an important issue in the story, as already implied. It permits the author to express just how important he feels it is to a woman and to society to produce offspring. Nastena's inopportune pregnancy also reveals the irony and injustice of fate. The fact that Nastena never gives birth, however, does not detract from her being viewed as a woman with strong motherly instincts. Orphaned as a child, she single-handedly looks after her little sister until she finds an adult to take over the task. Later, she acts as a mother to her husband who is completely dependent on her while he is in hiding. Not only in her caring for his material needs is her attitude toward him motherly. She reacts to his aggressive outbursts with the patience and understanding only a mother could have with her child.[8] He also relates to her, at times, as to a mother. When she sleeps near him, her deep and rhythmic breathing soothes him, as a mother's heartbeat soothes her newborn, and "gives off a warm milky smell". When he is upset and anxious, he cuddles up to her, burrowing his head into her breasts. She, in her sleep, reacts almost automatically, caressing his hair. Her touch seems to awaken unconscious memories of the womb, bringing back the safe and protective feeling associated with it:

> He closed his eyes, and, feeling Nastena's saving hand on his shoulder and imagining how, slowly turning, he was burrowing into a soft and roomy expanse - that always helped him fall asleep - he soon slipped off. (L.46)

Lidia Mikhailovna in Uroki frantsuzskogo, similarly, is not a mother. However, in her role of teacher, she acts as mother to a whole classroom of children. Her motherly instincts single out the one little boy in particular who, far from his home and mother, seems to need her help the most. She sees in him a promising student as well as a child who can barely feed himself. Also, she understands that, although he is poor, he has his pride and will not accept charity. Her insight into the psychology of the boy helps her find a way to break the barrier between them and to provide the financial assistance he needs. She plays a gambling game with him, risking her position at the school. It is a game of skill which involves throwing coins against a wall so that they land in a specific way and which is played for money. At first, she tries to let him win. However, he refuses to play under those conditions. It is

not clear whether she continues to let him win though more subtly, or whether he is simply more dexterous than she is. Nevertheless, the boy manages to win enough money to buy himself the bottle of milk per day that the doctor prescribed to counter his anemia. They are eventually caught and she is expelled. Rasputin, in this ending, demonstrates the lack of flexibility of the school administration's rules. Instead of seeing Lidia Mikhailovna as a perceptive psychologist and caring teacher, all the principal can understand is that one of his teachers has violated a rule.

Rasputin's heroines of the seventies, like those of the sixties, keep old traditions alive. Anna tries to pass on the tradition of wailing over the deceased to her eldest daughter, Varvara. As she had done for her mother, she wants Varvara to wail over her when she dies.

> Wail over me. The others won't. These days nobody even knows how to rock a baby to sleep, let alone lay somebody in the grave. They can't do nothing. You're my only hope. I'll teach you how. You're pretty good at crying, and all you've got to do is cry and sing a mourning-song...(...) I saw my mother out this way, and you can do the same for me. Nothing to be ashamed of. (B.367)

In the Russia of bygone days, songs had an important role to play in people's lives. Rasputin refers to the mourning-song as "those age-old, half-forgotten words that nobody used any longer". Not only were they a part of the mourning rituals, they were sung on many different momentous occasions: the birth of a child, a wedding, the setting out of a young man to serve his country, harvest time, and so on. However, this tradition is dying out and it is a rare occasion when people get together to sing. One such rare occasion in Rasputin's writings is in Proshchanie s Materoi, when the villagers return from a hard day's work in the fields. It is the last haying season for Matera, and the villagers spontaneously mark the occasion with a song.

> The mowers came back from work slowly, wearily, and with pomp. In front came the horses hitched to the carts, heads bobbing in unison, seeming to bow as they entered the village, with two or three people in the carts, and several people on horseback around them, and the rest singing and walking behind the carts. They sang one song or another, an old one, then a new one, but most often it was an old, farewell-reminiscing song, which it turned out the people knew and remembered, saving it within themselves just for this occasion. (F.98)

Anna misses the days when people would express themselves in song.

In her old age, she is reconciled to listening to traditional songs on her radio with her old friend, Mironikha.

> It wasn't often they played those songs. Mostly they played some jangling sound. But when she heard those old, lingering songs she felt as if she was soaring up above the earth and wheeling in big, sweeping circles, secretly weeping for herself and all those souls who had not yet found peace. (B.269)

Another important function of the old women is the handing down of stories linked to the history of the village. For example, Dar'ia remembers the story of how the church came to be built on Matera. Supposedly, a rich merchant who used to carry merchandise on the Angara was so taken by the beauty of the island that he offered to build a church on it, on the condition that the villagers promise to bury him high on a hill there when he died. When Dar'ia relates the story, she begins with "There is a grave on this island ... They say a merchant lies in it ...". It is not only the transmission of oral history that is important in these stories. It is also the magic in the way they are told, the mysterious element which cannot be replaced by a textbook. Another story which Dar'ia recalls is linked to the high promontory from which boys would dive into the dark water. According to the legend, one summer long ago, a boy named Pronia never climbed back up, and has been wandering there at night ever since. People say that he became a merman and can be heard calling softly, almost imperceptibly.

Rasputin deeply values the story-telling and the relating of fairy tales which have traditionally been perpetuated by old women. He is sorry to observe that this custom is slowly disappearing with the babushkas. Nowadays, he notes, parents try to explain everything about life and death to their children in clear and rational terms. However, as he says in an interview,

> But to understand these questions a whole lifetime is not enough. A child looks at a star and what does he think about ? About nothing, he is wondering what is the quickest way to get to it... It is a pity that we are so eager to deprive children of romance and teach them to be practical and shrewd, to calculate rather than imagine things. There is altogether too little time allowed for fairy-tales... [9]

Another ancient tradition which is kept alive by the old women in Rasputin's novels is the use of the samovar and the slow savouring of their tea. As Dar'ia remarks: "It's not tea without a samovar". She is

referring to the original coal-burning samovar which supposedly gives a special flavour to the tea brewed in it. For these women, the samovar is not simply an urn in which you make tea. The old women of Matera, forced to move to urban-type settlements, are especially concerned about whether they will be able to use their samovars there. They need charcoal and a secure place to set the samovar down, both of which are difficult to find in a modern apartment in the city. Nastasia brings hers with her to the city and uses it twice, boiling the water outdoors while passers-by laugh at her. Katerina's samovar is destroyed in the fire that razes her house, leaving her feeling "truly alone". She cannot imagine a house without a samovar. A table without a samovar at the head of it is no table at all, according to her. It is merely a feeding place that birds or animals have. As the narrator of the story explains,

> There were always three masters honored in a household - the one who was head of the family, the Russian stove, and the samovar. The rest tried to suit them, respected them, and usually they didn't start a new day without them, and it was on their orders and whims that things got done. (F.87)

Dar'ia declares with determination that regardless of the conditions in the new settlement, she will not give up her samovar. For these old women, drinking tea is not just a way to quench their thirst. They sip it slowly, savouring the tea as though it were a precious nectar.

> Dar'ia kept pouring from the samovar into her glass, from her glass into the saucer, sipping gently and carefully, savoring the tea, not swallowing right away, neatly licking her lips and slowly, dreamily talking... (F.30)

They drink it as though they were performing a careful, timely ritual.

> After a rest and some preparation, wiping away the sweat on their faces, they started another round, bowing, creaking, blowing on their saucers, sipping carefully with outstretched lips. (F.13)

Most of the old women in Rasputin's stories sleep on the traditional Russian stove. Though the surface is hard, it is the warmest place to sleep on a cold Siberian night and it is considered the place of honour in the home. It is there that Nastena's mother-in-law, Semenovna, spends all of her time. Dar'ia also has the privileged place in her home. In the final days of Matera, when Katerina and Sima move in with her because their homes have burned, one sleeps in the bed and the other takes the cot. The stove remains Dar'ia's niche.

The Russian stove is one item that definitely cannot be moved. Thus, in Proshchanie s Materoi, the blackened stoves that remain standing after the houses have been razed offer a sad and tragic tableau. In addition to the fact that they are impossible to move, it is clear that they are not the most practical type of stove to cook on, the heat of the more modern stoves being much easier to control. They also demand much more work in that they must be stoked continually. Thus, the popular Russian stove, so closely associated with the old Russian village, is doomed to extinction in the new age that aims to make people's lives easier. Nevertheless, to the old generation, it is like parting with an old and trusted friend that has worked hard all its life to serving both them and their ancestors. The "horrible, deathlike" figures of the stoves, the only objects that did not burn in the fires, stand like tombstones in an abandoned graveyard...

The main emphasis in Rasputin's short novels of the 1970s is on the system of beliefs of the old women. He takes a psychological approach to these women, delving deep into their inner world and exploring their spirituality. By confronting them with a serious crisis and/or imminent death, he creates an atmosphere in which they must look back at their lives, and at the meaning of these lives. Their beliefs and attitudes concerning life and death, love and duty, God and Nature, the past and the future, are unveiled through their dialogues and, particularly, through their inner monologues.

These heroines are intuitively aware of their place in the natural world. Their lives and morality are conditioned by it. They live according to the rules of nature because they live off the land. Nature dictates what work must be done and when. There is a time to sow and a time to reap, a time to gather berries, a time to milk the cow, a time to feed the animals, a time to gather nuts, a time to hunt and a time to fish... These tasks cannot be postponed. A rainfall, for example, permits them to take a break:

> The rain was handy: they could sit and chat without rushing; they didn't dare take a break on their own, so God sent one along for them.(F.103)

Rasputin shows members of the younger generation who no longer live as close to nature as their parents and grandparents did to be less

confident in their surroundings and less certain of themselves. Old people, on the other hand, who have always lived close to nature, have an unfailing sense of harmony and oneness with all life.

The religious beliefs of Rasputin's heroines correspond to these feelings about their place in nature. Indeed, God and Nature are inseparably linked in their minds. In pre-Christian Russia, as in the history of most countries of the world, God was to be found everywhere in nature.[10] Researchers have traced the origin of religion to either totemism or animism. In other words, people worshipped spirits (or souls) which took the form of animals, plants, and sometimes even inanimate objects. In Siberia, totemism and animism existed as well. These beliefs later developed into an even more complex religious configuration, that of shamanism (which was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter), and included ancestor worship. The religious beliefs of Rasputin's heroines, which reflect those of the Siberian people, are a unique blend of Russian Orthodox beliefs and shamanistic beliefs. In fact, according to some scholars, it is not an even blend. It has been said that Siberian shamanism was so strong that Christianity, rather than weaken the shamanistic beliefs, actually helped to enrich them.[11]

In the last three days of Anna's life, we learn much about her belief system. The influence of shamanism is clearly felt in many of her beliefs. Anna tells her children that she has already died and that it is their arrival that brought her back. She believes that she is living on borrowed time.

> I was already there, you know. I was, I know it. And then you arrived, and I came back. Dead or not dead, back I came, back to you.(B.187)

In shamanist belief, the soul of a dead person can travel in this world, and appear to the living in the shape of a bird. Shamans traditionally wear bird robes and feathers during their rites to help them on their mediumistic journeys. Anna seems to share this belief. At one point, she beseeches her children to stay in touch with each other after her death, not to forget their home, and to visit her grave from time to time. She tells them that she will contact them from the grave:

> I'll still be here. I won't go nowhere. Sit by my grave, and I'll give you some sign, to say I know you're there. I'll send a little bird to tell you.(B.201)

The bird representing the soul or a spirit is actually a universal belief. According to ancient Egyptian beliefs, the soul (the Ka) leaves the body at death in the shape of a bird. Indeed in papyrus drawings dating as far back as the thirteenth century B.C., human-headed birds representing the soul are shown hovering over mummies before beginning their flight to the afterlife. In Scandinavian mythology, the bird also represents the spirit freed from the body. Similarly in Christian mythology, birds represent the spiritual, winged souls, or souls in Paradise. The Christ Child is often depicted holding a bird. Birds also symbolize the souls of the faithful living in the Tree of Life in Islamic belief. Souls of infidels are thought by Islamics to inhabit birds of prey after death.

Allusions to birds frequently recur in Poslednii srok. For example, Anna's description makes her resemble a bird. Her shoulder-blades are like wings of a bird and she looks as if she will fly away with them. In another passage, unable to contain her joy at the sight of her children, she says:

> I could fly up and sail away on the wind, like a bird, and tell everybody...(B.192)

Another mention of a bird is heard in the mourning song that Anna teaches Varvara. It begins thus: "Oh, my darling Mother, my white swan...". The swan has much meaning both in shamanist and in Christian symbolism.

Anna believes that everybody has his or her own death. It is an exact copy of the person it is attached to, coming into the world and leaving it at the same time.

> Each pair were like twins, always the same age. (...) Death would wait for its man and take him to itself, and they would never again be parted from each other.(B.332)

This belief is clearly related to shamanistic beliefs about one of the souls being a twin copy of the body. In keeping with her beliefs, Anna describes her own death as she sees it. She would meet her twin at the bottom of a staircase. The twin would reach out her hand toward her. As she would take her hand, she would see a vast expanse, clean, as if recently washed by rain, and bathed in bright light. She would hear bells ringing... Then her twin would disappear. She would feel somebody

watching her with the old lady's eyes as she walked away. This corresponds to shamanistic beliefs where each person has three souls. One remains in the body, even after death. One can leave the body, in the form of a flying thing, and almost lead a life of its own. After death, it wanders the earth. The third is called on by Death and goes to the afterlife. Thus, the soul that dwells in Anna's body watches the other one leave for the afterworld. This world beyond is described as a land like the one she had left, where her soul would live as it had before.

> The land would level itself out, and morning would come - a new, living morning.(B.337)

This conception of the realm of the dead corresponds to shamanistic belief.

Another interesting facet to her beliefs is that she feels as though she has lived before. In parts of Siberia, the influence of Buddhism or Lamaism was quite prevalent.[12]

> In what form, whether crawling, walking, or flying, she could not remember, nor even guess, but something told her that she was not seeing the world for the first time. If birds were born twice, once as eggs, and once when the eggs hatched, such miracles were not impossible, and she was not blaspheming.(B.349-350)

Moreover, death does not worry her. She knows full well how she will die.

> She knew this as if she had experienced death several times over.(B.336)

These preceding passages express the belief in reincarnation or transmigration of the soul.

Despite these influences, Anna is also a Christian. She keeps an icon in her house, she makes the sign of the cross, she frequently invokes the name of God, she prays. She consoles herself with the words, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away", when thinking of her children who had died. Concerning suffering, she would remember, "Our Lord bore His suffering, and told us to bear ours".

All of Rasputin's old women reveal outward signs of their religious faith. Viktor's grandmother in Vniz po techeniiu makes the sign of the cross over him when he leaves them to go back to the city. Semenovna, Nastena's mother-in-law, often faces the icon and prays. Nastasia in

Proshchanie s Materoi frequently prays and crosses herself. For example, when she makes a little blasphemous remark about Bogodul and his swearing, she immediately crosses herself facing the icon in the corner and asks the Lord for forgiveness. Dar'ia also blesses herself in front of the icon and begs God for forgiveness for Bogodul when he swears. When Nastasia leaves Matera and the other old women see her off, Dar'ia rises and "majestically crosses herself in front of the empty corner". Katerina also blesses herself. The night before Dar'ia vacates her house, she prays all night. The next morning, she makes the sign of the cross over the front corner for the last time and leaves...

Dar'ia's belief system is also closely linked to shamanism, or to be more specific, to ancestor worship. She most probably inherited some of her beliefs from her mother who was a Buriat. Ancestor worship is based on the belief that the souls of dead ancestors maintain relations with the world of the living. They protect the family and are venerated by their living descendants. For this reason, Dar'ia has a deep-rooted sense of continuity of life. As her ancestors have given life to her, so she must give life to others. Looking at her son and grandson, sitting side by side, she reflects:

> There it is, one thread with knots. It seemed that there were so many years between knots... where are they ? My knot is going to be stretched out and smoothed over, they'll let the smooth end go so that it'll be invisible... so that they can tie a new one on the other end. (F.105)

In other words, she is but a link in a chain, a part of an unbroken, coherent whole. This conviction leads to a strong sense of responsibility to her family, her rod.

Keeping in mind that Rasputin's heroines are instinctively aware of their place in the natural world, a world which perpetuates itself in cycles, and that they feel a responsibility towards their ancestors to continue the family line, it is entirely expected that they would consider a woman's principal duty to be the bearing of children.

Anna has fulfilled her duty. Her children are the product and meaning of her life. For this reason, her only wish before dying is to see them all together. This would permit her to look back on her life as a whole. Therefore, when she seems on the verge of death, unable to

speak or move, the sight of them gathered at her bedside makes her do the impossible.

> This was more than she could bear in silence, and a series of dry, feeble sounds broke from her chest, like a hen clucking.(B.175)

She wants to burst into tears but cannot. And with an incredible effort, she miraculously manages to pronounce their names. Having seen them, she feels satisfied and ready to die. Laying quietly in her last moments of joy and suffering, she begins to sink further and further from them. However, she is suddenly brought back by the realization that her Tan'chora (little Tania), the youngest, is not there. The presence of her children whom she has not seen in years, together with her need to see her youngest, brings temporary life back to her, giving the false impression that she is recovering.

The fact that her children behave in a thoughtless and selfish manner does not seem to deter her from loving and being proud of them. She seems almost grateful to them for being born, for permitting her to fulfill her duty. There seems to be nothing they could do that would change her feelings towards them. Anna's attitude is typical of these heroines. If anything, in Rasputin's stories, a peasant mother would feel guilty rather than blame her child for his inadequacies. A perfect example of this is the relationship between Katerina and her son, Petrukha.

Petrukha is notorious in the village for his shiftlessness and villainy. He drinks excessively and treats his old mother disrespectfully. Unlike Katerina, he is glad to see the changes occurring in their lives and does not hide it. He does not care about his home. The only thing that is important to him is the money he is to receive for the house. Eventually, he forces his mother to move out and sets fire to their house. He then disappears, leaving her without shelter or money. Later, she learns that he has found work burning people's homes in a nearby community which is also fated to be flooded. Katerina, like Anna, forgives her son. His actions cause her to feel ashamed, bitter, and sad. She cannot understand how he can feel no guilt for his actions. Nevertheless, she does not blame him. On the one hand, she blames herself, for she is his mother. On the other, she blames fate. It is Petrukha's fate to be Petrukha, and it is her fate to be his

mother. She has to "bear it wordlessly, accept it, and not complain". When Katerina admits to Dar'ia that her son is worthless, the narrator of the story comments:

> And there was no anger or bitterness in those brief words against her son, (...) only a defensive, all-forgiving meaning: that's the way he was born to me, what can you expect from him ? (F.87)

Dar'ia's feeling of being a link in a chain, part of an unbroken, coherent whole also causes her to consider the bearing of children to be a woman's sacred duty. As she says to Katerina:

> God gave you life so that you would do your duty, leave children behind - and then into the ground with you... so that the soil stays rich. (F.93)

For example, when Dar'ia meets Mila, a young woman who comes from the new settlement with Sonia, Dar'ia's daughter-in-law, to help dig potatoes, her first impression of her is antipathetic. Mila seems extremely frivolous to her, laughing at everything, even when nothing is funny. However, her opinion of Mila changes completely when she finds out that the woman is married and has a child. A woman's status and the manner in which she is perceived in the Russian countryside is greatly influenced when she gives birth to a child.

The opinion that a woman's duty is to bear children is evident throughout Rasputin's works. It especially causes Nastena a great deal of suffering. From childhood, she had been taught that a childless woman was only half a woman. Therefore, thinking that she is barren, she bears her mother-in-law's grumbling, the backbreaking work she must do all by herself, and her husband's beatings as though she deserved them. She feels as though she is deceiving everybody: the people who gave birth to her, the man who married her, the people who gave birth to him. Her mother-in-law, though grumpy and critical of Nastena at first, learns to appreciate her as a hard-worker. However, the one thing she can never forgive is that Nastena has no children. On one occasion, Nastena is visiting her friend Nadia. Nadia, a widow with three children to feed, starts bragging about her fertility. Nastena thinks to herself that, indeed, Nadia has "fulfilled her womanly duty"; that much must be granted her.

Nastena also feels like a link in a family chain. When she becomes pregnant, she is convinced that the child is a boy and this frightens

her a little. According to her frame of reference, a girl would feel the same obligation to fulfill her duty as she feels. A boy, however, could choose to remain alone...

> ...if it were a girl, there was hope that there would be more children, related by mother and father, but a boy might remain alone. (L.171)

Rasputin, significantly, allows some of his male characters to feel this need to perpetuate the line. This is most clearly evident in the character of Andrei. He is the only living child in his family. And he is doomed to be executed for desertion. Therefore, he is forced to think about the meaning of his life and what his legacy will be. When Nastena reveals to Andrei that she may be pregnant, he becomes almost delirious with happiness. He says:

> It's my blood living on. It hasn't ended or dried up. And I thought, I thought: I'm the last one, it's over, I've killed off the line. But he'll live, he'll continue the thread. (L.86)

He feels that the birth of a child would justify his life. It would be his and Nastena's salvation. He appears to have no understanding of the difficult position this pregnancy places Nastena in.

Anna's son, Mikhail, after the birth of his first child, is filled with amazement at the fact that he has taken part in the perpetuation of the human race. He says to his mother:

> There it is, Mother: you made me, I've made him, and he'll make somebody else. (...) That's what keeps the world going. (B.340-341)

The narrator, once again comparing man to a link in a chain, remarks:

> It had only struck him now that this simple truth, from which nobody was exempt, had hitched onto him a new link in its endless chain. (B.341)

The mothers in Rasputin's stories, grateful to their children for being born, clearly do not expect anything in return from these children for all of their caring. Instead, they all worry about becoming burdens, about outliving their usefulness in life. When Anna's visiting children criticize her son and daughter-in-law for the way they look after her, she retorts: "You ought to live with me for a while. It's sheer misery for them." During one of her sleepless nights, she feels particularly useless and unwanted. Personifying the night, she thinks to herself that even it is tired of her. Whereas the night is usually never

short of sleep to hand out to those who need it, this time it is withholding sleep from her. She tells herself that "everybody was sick of her, nobody wanted her".

The character who concerns herself the most with this problem is Dar'ia. She cannot understand why man must bear old age. She sees no purpose in it.

> It seemed to Darya there was nothing more unfair in the world than when something, be it tree or man, lived on to uselessness, to the point when it became a burden; that of the multitude of sins let loose upon the world to be prayed away and redeemed, this was the only one that was unbearable. (F.39)

Her friends, at least, have reasons to live. Sima has to raise her grandson who was abandoned by his mother. Katerina has to worry about her worthless son. But Dar'ia's children are all doing well in life. She no longer feels needed. She compares herself to a tree; at least a tree falls, rots, and fertilizes the earth... The thought that she serves no purpose in her old age bothers her considerably. In a conversation with Katerina, she even loses her temper over this topic. She wonders if people who live to be very old are being punished for past sins:

> Is it for one's sins that God keeps you alive beyond your time ? Oh, they must be terrible sins for that... (F.92)

One of the most characteristic features of Rasputin's heroines is their constant feeling of guilt for everything that happens around them. In fact, Rasputin states in an interview that his concept of a Russian woman is:

> of a woman who, by her very understanding of life, was incapable of saying: 'You are guilty, and I not'; of a woman in whom this consciousness of guilt for what happens to another, as for what happens to oneself, is always there.[13]

When Anna's husband, who had not been good to her, dies, she prays: "Oh Lord, forgive us our sins...". The narrator of the story emphasizes the fact that she says "our sins", and not "his". She takes on his guilt. Similarly, when Tania, her youngest daughter, leaves home and never returns, Anna blames herself. A mother should not be separated from her daughter for so long. Not for one moment does she think of blaming Tania for neglecting her. Instead, she asks herself what effort she has made to see her daughter again. None, she reasons. She has

simply waited for Tania to come to her. For this reason, she needs to see her before she dies, to allay her guilt at not having done something more. As the narrator explains, seeing her little Tania one last time would permit her to:

> lift from her own soul the sin of not seeing her for so long, to cleanse herself in the sight of God and calmly, joyfully, stand up for him to judge her: "Here I stand, Anna, servant of God, and I bring no uncleanliness with me." (B.314-315)

Anna also believes that it was through some sort of negligence on her part that three of her sons died in the War.

> To this day she had no idea what she ought to have done to keep them, but she felt sure she should have done something, and not just sat twiddling her thumbs and waiting for the sun to shine. (B.334)

Now that Matera, the land of her ancestors, is to be flooded, Dar'ia inevitably feels a profound sense of remorse before them. She is the living family member (together with her children) who should have prevented this tragedy from occuring. As she says to her grandson, Andrei:

> Your elders entrusted you with it so that you would spend your life on it and pass it on to the younger ones.(F.120)

One of the most heart-rending episodes in Proshchanie s Materoi takes place in Chapter Three. In early summer, a "sanitary brigade", on orders of the flood zone department, clears the cemetery of all its ancient wooden headstones, beds, and crosses, and prepares to burn them. Reasoning objectively, it must be done, for, once the island becomes part of the floor of the reservoir, wooden objects such as these would float to the surface. Similarly, trees must be burned because their tops would jut out of the water. As soon as the old women learn of what is happening, they head over there to confront the two men and to put a stop to it. Led by Dar'ia, who is so angry that she actually dares to hit one of the men with a stick, they stir up such an uproar that eventually the men abandon their efforts. The contrast between the strength of the convictions of the old people and the cowardice of the able-bodied men is apparent. The men are young and strong. One even brandishes an axe. However, they are genuinely daunted by the old people and try to avoid responsibility for their actions by saying that they

are simply following orders. To their relief, they are joined by the chairman of the village soviet, Vorontsov, and Zhuk, an official representative of the flood zone department. Zhuk is portrayed in a way which makes him appear like a foreign invader. Physically, he does not look Russian; he resembles more a gypsy with his dark curly hair. The language he speaks ("bureaucratese") is incomprehensible and thus intimidating to the old people. He knows the power of such words as "resolution", "decree", "sanepidstation" (sanepidstantsiia), "citizens-about-to-be-flooded" (grazhdane zatopliaemye), and so on. He tries to point out how it would look to tourists and intourists (foreign tourists), travelling by on ships, if they suddenly saw crosses floating by. Despite his explanations, he fails to calm the old people who are incensed at the callous act. As Vera Nosareva, one of the old women, reasonably argues, they could have waited until after the island had been evacuated to carry out the cleanup so as not to offend the people. By destroying the most sacred place on the island in front of the old people, the authorities reveal a shallow disregard for the feelings of these people and a lack of respect. Old Egor, Nastasia's husband, angrily reveals what he thinks of this "official personage":

> A personage must have respect for people and not just a hat. (F.22)

Discouraged by the uncooperative reaction of the people, Zhuk turns to Vorontsov and asks: "What's the matter with them ?".

The emotions experienced by the old women range from fear and sorrow to a choking rage at this act which, to them, is nothing less than a crime. They call the men "evil spirits", "herods", and "godless ones". They cannot fathom how a human being could do such a thing. They ask the Lord to have no mercy on the men and to damn their souls. As Sima asks: "Is there nothing holy left in the world ?". Dar'ia exclaims that they will have to answer to the whole world, and especially to the dead, for this. Looking at the mutilated graves, the photographs of loved ones strewn on the ground, the crosses thrown into a pile, she tries to grasp the enormity of the deed. She asks the men gravely: "What have you done ?". Gradually she falls into a depression which leaves her feeling listless and numb.

That night she cannot sleep. She fears that something is going to

happen, that they will all be punished. She goes out into the middle of the garden and waits "for heavenly lightning to strike and destroy us because we're evil people". She blames herself for not stopping the destruction in the cemetery, and even feels that she bears part of the responsibility for the oncoming flooding of her ancestral homeland. The following day, she starts off towards the cemetery but changes her mind when she realizes that her ancestors will want an explanation and she has nothing soothing to say to them.

Months later, near the end, she goes back to see her parents for the last time. She has tried to get her son to move their remains to dry land, but he just never seems to have the time. Confessing her guilt to them, she says:

> I can't die in peace knowing that I turned from you, that it was my generation and no other that cut off our family and swept it away. (F.177)

She feels especially accountable to her son, Senka, who is buried in that cemetery. Since she will not be buried with her family, she believes that Senka will wander without a connection to his kin. The family chain will be broken. She imagines that, at her death, all of her ancestors will gather to judge her. She sees herself standing alone, her ancestors in an endless formation before her, "a spreading wedge - all with grim, stern, and demanding faces". She is convinced that she will not be forgiven. The crime for which she will be most severely castigated is her leaving them without hope or a future. She is certain that hope is as important to the dead as it is to the living.

When the villagers of Matera are in the midst of the last haying, they are interrupted by a long spell of rain. This delay prevents them from having enough time to mow for themselves. They manage only to finish the mowing for the sovkhoz. Dar'ia criticizes herself for not urging the men to mow despite the rain. She asks herself:

> Ah, what was the point of living eighty and more years if she couldn't even have thought of that !? (F.144)

All of the old women of Matera feel qualmish at abandoning their houses. The house, the traditional izba, is more than a roof over their heads. Having sheltered generations of ancestors, it holds memories within its walls. They tend to personify it in their minds. To them, it breathes, feels pain and fear, grows old. It even has a soul.

Nastasia, sitting in her empty house as she and her husband are about to leave, feels uncomfortably guilty and bitter. Their packed belongings look like a "robber's booty" to her. In her mind, they have robbed the house and are now leaving it to its death. In a similar way, all of the old women, standing and silently watching Katerina's house burn, feel guilty at not trying to save it.

Dar'ia suffers from a similar feeling of compunction as she bids farewell to her house. However, she, unlike the others, has prepared her house for its end. As one would wash a person and dress him in his best before putting him in his coffin, she feels that she must do the same for her house. As she reflects:

> How could she send off her own house, out of which her father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, were carried and in which she had spent her entire life, except for what was left, and deny it the same dressing up ? (F.191)

So she proceeds to whitewash the entire house, having made her own lime from white rocks. She washes the windows and floors. Then, in accordance with custom, she places grass on the floor and fir boughs in the corners and in the windows, giving the house a funereal look.

> The fir released the sorrowful aroma of final farewell, reminding her of lit candles and sweet, sad singing. (F.197)

She is certain that she is doing the right thing. In fact, she believes that her ancestors have told her to prepare the house this way. However, she still cannot rid herself of the guilt she feels before her house. Looking around in fear and humility, she thinks to herself:

> It can tell, oh, it can, what I'm dressing it up for. (F.197)

Nastena manages to take on guilt for almost anything that happens to her. For instance, she reproaches herself for not reacting in a proper way when she first sees Andrei after his desertion. She is so taken aback by this first clandestine meeting in their bath-house that she sits in complete numbness as if in a dream. She feels that she should have at least embraced him and welcomed him home. She does not try to justify herself by taking into account Andrei's strange behaviour towards her. First, he threatens to kill her if she lets anyone know of his presence. Then, he uses her for his sexual gratification without so

much as a loving word or a tender caress. And finally, he orders her to wash his back. He does not waste kind gestures on her. She hardly recognizes him in the darkness because his hair is long and he is unshaven. He is filthy and smells of sheep. Not given enough time to assimilate the fact that the man before her is indeed her husband, the sexual act leaves her feeling ashamed and uncomfortable.

Nastena takes on her husband's culpability, convincing herself that he deserted the army in order to see her.

> Maybe she was also responsible for his being here - not at fault, but responsible. Wasn't it because of her that he wanted to come home ? Wasn't he afraid of never seeing her again, of not saying a final word to her ? He didn't reveal himself to his father and mother but he revealed himself to her. And maybe he had brought on his death, just to spend some time with her. (L.54)

When her father-in-law becomes suspicious and asks her direct questions about Andrei's whereabouts, she feels guilty. She blames herself for not successfully hiding what needed careful hiding, for not being convincing enough in her lies. She also reprehends herself for not paying much attention to Nadia's children in recent weeks. She has always felt sorry for them because, although Nadia does her best to cope, they seldom have enough to eat. They are fearful and quiet children, and it seems to Nastena that they do not believe they will survive the War. She usually tries to spoil them in some way or other as often as she can. However, with all of her recent worries concerning Andrei, she has neglected them.

Half of the time, the women in these stories are not even sure why they feel guilty. As Dar'ia, her heart aching as if it were on fire, reflects:

> I guess I'm very guilty. I know that I'm guilty, but I wish someone would tell me what I'm guilty of, what I must repent for, sinner that I am. (F.165)

By the same token, Dar'ia, Sima, and Katerina all apologize to Nastasia when she leaves,

> but what they were guilty of and what they were explaining away they didn't know - an unknown sin needs all the more expiation. (F.66)

Nastena is certain that Nadia somehow feels remorse over her husband's death. Observing her at one point, Nastena reflects:

> she felt her guilt - she didn't know what this guilt was, she didn't understand how she could have helped Vitya, but she felt it and she felt bad. Did she pray less than she should have, or suffer too little, think about him too little ? (L.75)

Nastena deems, that in some way, women share the responsibility with their husbands for the latter's fates. According to her, from time immemorial, women must have struggled in vain with this mystery. Not knowing how, they either managed, through luck or instincts, to influence their husbands' fates, or, when they failed, they were overcome by the same old guilt. In this sense, she feels that perhaps Andrei's destiny is the result of her egoism. She fears that she has lived thinking only about herself and, by the same token, she believes that she has waited and longed for Andrei's arrival for selfish reasons. Thus, destiny has ironically answered her wish; she is the only person to have access to him. She says to Andrei: "I didn't guard you well". When he tries to tell her that she would be better off without him, she cries: "Don't you refuse my guilt".

Nastena hopes until the very last moment that everything will somehow turn out well. She remembers her mother saying that there is no guilt that cannot be forgiven. Therefore, she hopes that the military authorities will pardon Andrei. Her hope is probably a vain one bearing in mind that Stalinist Russia dealt harshly and mercilessly with deserters.

Rasputin shows the reader how this capacity for guilt is dying out in the younger generation. Liusia, wandering around the countryside of her childhood and remembering the amalgamation of the kolkhozes and the serious problems it engendered, feels a "sudden twinge of guilt, as if she ought to have done something to help, and had not". However, her remorse is short-lived, to say the least. She almost immediately dismisses the thought, saying to herself:

> What nonsense! It's nothing to do with me. I left long before any of these changes. It's not my business. (B.249)

Rasputin seems to consider a person's attitude toward death as the ideal gauge by which to assess a person's spiritual health. As he revealed once in an interview, he is impressed with the calmness with which old women face death.

> What strikes me most is the serenity with which old women look upon death, which they seem to accept as a matter of course. This composure may be the result of everything they have seen in their lives as they watched the seasons come and go, the sowing and the reaping, the birth and death of nature...[14]

Dar'ia is not afraid of death. As she says: "You die once. What's there to be afraid of ?". However, the thought of dying away from her family, her ancestors, with the guilt she carries within her, causes her great heartache.

The narrator of Proshchanie s Materoi, expressing Dar'ia's general viewpoint on death, comments that:

> Death seems terrible, but it sows the most kind and useful harvest in the souls of the living and from the seed of mystery and decay develops the seed of life and understanding. (F.116)

It is significant that Poslednii srok which deals specifically with the theme of death and the differing attitudes toward it is, in Rasputin's opinion, his most important work.

Anna's calm attitude toward death is not due simply to the fact that she feels as though she has experienced it before. What is more important is her clear conscience. If woman's duty is to bear children, to assure the continuity of mankind, then she has fulfilled that duty.

> And suddenly it seemed to her that her life had been kind, meek, and successful. Unusually successful. She could hardly complain about devoting it all to her children, if man's business in the world was to see that it was never empty of people, and that it did not grow old without children.(B.340)

This feeling of duty fulfilled, as a prerequisite to facing death, reveals a belief in future retribution. Anna has no fear and no regrets. Also, her closeness to nature enables her to welcome death as the natural culmination of life. Like a tree in the forest that has outlived its time, she feels that she has expended all that she had within her. As she says, "Everything has its place". Nature always takes its course.

Dar'ia, after trying everything within her power to stop the destruction of Matera and failing, participates in what appears to be a collective suicide. She refuses to leave the island and stays behind when it is flooded. This is not stated outright. However, the final scene leads one to believe that this is the case. Dar'ia is huddled in an old shack with Katerina, Sima, the child Kolia, Nastasia, and

Bogodul. They are in total darkness, surrounded by mist and shadowy forms. Meanwhile, Pavel, Vorontsov, Petrukha, and a cutter pilot go round and round in circles on the Angara, lost in heavy fog, trying unsuccessfully to find the island. The old people, waking up from what appears to have been a nap, are not sure whether they are alive or dead. In the window, a hazy damp light makes things look "like under water". One of them feels that she has flown off somewhere, but does not remember where. Their surroundings seem unfamiliar to them. They hear a lonely howl which the narrator claims is the Khoziain's final voice. The Khoziain (Master) is the spirit of the island. Invisible to humans, he is observed in different parts of the novel making his rounds of the island. He sees all, carries memories of the past, and knows the future. Earlier in the story, the narrator explains that the Khoziain will disappear when Matera no longer exists. An indication that the old people have died is that, in the end, after hearing the Khoziain's final voice wash away, they seem to find themselves closer to his voice. Also, they now hear the "faint, barely audible hum of a motor", probably the motor of the cutter, "coming from somewhere below".

Dar'ia's death creates a different mood to that of Anna's. While Anna's death is the natural culmination of her long life and is unavoidable, Dar'ia's is an act of defiance. She refuses to give in. Their deaths are similar, however, in that both women are ready to die and have faith in God and in life after death.

In the course of the narrative of Poslednii srok, the author describes the character of each of Anna's children. As always with Rasputin, there is no black and white. Characters have their good side and their bad. However, the overall picture of these children, now grown up, is not a flattering one. The four that are with her now lead very different lives from one another. She lives with one son, Mikhail, and his wife and daughter. Her eldest daughter, Varvara, lives in a village fifty kilometers away with her family. Her son, Il'ia, lives in a town in northern Russia with a domineering wife. And her daughter, Liusia, lives in the city and has no children. The youngest, Tat'iana, moved all the way to Kiev. She never shows up at her mother's bedside. She doesn't even answer the telegram that was sent to her.

Whether from the country or the city, this younger generation is

shown to be far removed from their mother's generation.[15] They are selfish, petty and tactless. They envy each other. The men drink heavily in the bathhouse while the women concern themselves with decorum. They argue violently in front of their mother about who has done more for her. In one particularly heated discussion, she is almost compared to a cow who must be looked after.

> Mikhail suddenly flew into a rage: "What do you mean? Maybe one of you will take her, eh? Go ahead. You can have her. I'll give my cow to the one who takes her. Well? (...) Mother doesn't need much. You can see she hardly eats anything.(B.327-328)

It is clear that the children do not share the values of their mother's generation. Their pettiness and hostilities are in great contrast to the dignity and wisdom of their dying mother.

The difference between them and Anna is most obvious in their attitudes toward death. Contrary to Anna, they are deprived of a comforting spiritual belief. Liusia denies her mother's death, asserting that she will live another ten years. While Varvara surrounds it with exaggerated respect and drama. Just as the daughter of the old woman in Starukha, they fear death as though it was some kind of disease:

> At the mention of death a watchful hush came over them, so that they thought twice before drawing breath, as if the air were tainted with corrosive vapours from beyond the grave, which the living must not breathe.(B.171)

They also personify it as some sort of powerful person that they do not want to displease:

> The fear that they now felt was quite unlike any fear they had ever known before, because it was more terrible, and its cause was death. It was as if death had seen and noticed all their faces, never to forget them again. And it was frightening to watch this happening: some day it would happen to them, and it would be just like this, and they did not want to look, so as not to have this scene constantly before them in the future, and yet they could neither leave nor turn away. And something else held them there - the thought that death, now busy with their mother, might be displeased if they left the room, and none of them wanted to attract its attention more often than necessary. So they stayed, and stood still.(B.174-175)

This personification of death as an object of fear is diametrically opposed to Anna's personification as seen in the following:

> In the last few years they had become good friends. She would often talk to death, which would find itself a seat in a corner and listen with occasional sympathetic sighs to her whispered, sensible thoughts. They had agreed that the old lady should depart by night: she

> would first fall asleep, like everybody else, so as not to scare death away with her open eyes, and death would then come softly, press up against her, lift away the short sleep of life and give her eternal rest.(B.331)

Of all the heroines in Rasputin's works, Dar'ia is the one who stands out most for her strength of character. All of the old women of Matera go to her for advice, comfort, or just to sit and drink tea. She is more confident than the others. Though she lives with the same fear they do concerning their fate, she helps them feel stronger and braver by her attitude. As the narrator explains:

> In every village of ours there always was and is one, or sometimes two, old woman with a temper to whom the weak and suffering come for protection. (F.70)

This is almost word for word the same statement that Rasputin himself made in an interview. He said:

> In the Siberian villages I'm always meeting women with strong characters. They're well known to their fellow villagers, who go to them for advice and support and occasionally for a good grumble.[16]

It is Dar'ia who leads the others to confront the sanitary workers in the cemetery, brandishing a stick which she is not afraid to use. It is to her that they all go when they are afraid to be alone. The old women spend their last days in Dar'ia's house. It is no coincidence that hers is the last to be burned. She orders the "arsonists" to stay away until she has finished cleaning it. She is not afraid to stand up for herself and for others. For example, she defends Katerina from her son, Petrukha, on the night their house burns down. Petrukha, who deliberately set the fire, walks up to his mother and makes mocking remarks, causing her more pain. Dar'ia immediately pushes him back with threats. After the fire, she comforts her friend, reminding her that everyone will have to experience the same pain, that the worst is over for her.

The heroines of the other novels are not as weak or passive as they may appear either. They stand up for what they believe in or to protect those who are weaker than they. For example Anna, on one occasion, fires a shotgun at the man who hurt her son. The man had taken the skin off of the boy's back with a charge of salt from his shotgun as punishment for something minor. In revenge, Anna does the same to him, only at closer

range and with more salt.

Nastena is quiet and meek. However, it is clear that she is strong. Otherwise, she would not have been able to keep such a secret from her in-laws and friends. At times, it seems as if she will not be able to stand it any longer. However, she manages to pull herself together. One day, when she lies to Mikheich to cover up the fact that she has taken the rifle to Andrei, she feels particularly wretched, for she cares deeply for her father-in-law. She realizes that he does not believe her, and that their relationship will never be the same. Nonetheless, she does not let her feelings show:

> And suddenly, with an unconscious and vague hurt, she felt so alone, so damned miserable, destroyed for no reason, deceived and lost, that her throat constricted and she wanted to cry - bitterly, drainingly, unabashedly. But she controlled herself: she couldn't cry, even that bit of naturalness and sincerity was forbidden her. (L.145-146)

The Russian verb zhalet' means to feel compassion, pity, or sympathy for another. It is impossible to speak of Raspu n's heroines without drawing attention to their capacity for zhalost'. They feel sorry for everyone and everything except themselves.

Nastena sympathizes deeply with Andrei. In fact, when he sits quietly and looks lost and doomed, her feelings become so intense that it takes a great effort on her part not to start crying. When the news breaks out that the War is over and she cannot celebrate with the others, she fleetingly feels angry and bitter towards Andrei for having deserted. However, the compassion she feels for him far outweighs the anger. She imagines how he will feel when he hears the news and immediately yearns to be near him in order to bring him comfort. In a similar way, she is able to put herself in the place of Mikheich, her father-in-law. On the day that she lies to him about what she has done with Andrei's gun, she also has the urge to tell Mikheich that she is pregnant (without revealing that Andrei is the father) so as to lighten her burden. However, she knows Mikheich well and foresees how this news will hurt him:

> She foresaw him freezing in fear, bowing his head with its heavy and gloomy thoughts, unable to ask what must be known in such cases.(L. 140)

Taking pity on him, she decides to carry the secret within herself as

long as possible so as to temporarily spare his feelings.

Other women in Zhivi i pomni are also depicted as compassionate people. Tania, for instance, the deaf-mute woman who lodges Andrei for a short while on his way home, is a paragon of charity. When he is brought to her by another woman who found him wandering in a daze at the railroad station, she generously takes him in and lets him stay as long as he wishes. Described as "an extremely gentle and caring woman", she feeds him bread and kasha or soup which she brings home from the hospital where she works as a cleaning woman. Her poverty does not prevent her from deriving great pleasure from watching him eat. Knowing nothing of his desertion, she seems to pity him as she would a poor lost orphan. It seems that even if she did know about his crime, she would still feel for him. Andrei cannot rid himself of the feeling that she knows everything about him, "knows and pities him"...

The women of Atamanovka, Nastena's village, are also able to commiserate with others. They all know that Nastena has sinned one way or another; some think she committed adultery; others guess that she protected Andrei, a deserter. As Christians, they also consider the taking of one's own life to be a sin. Nevertheless, when Nastena is about to be buried in the special cemetery for the drowned, they intervene on her behalf and have her put to rest among her own. Gathered for a simple wake after the funeral, they cry over her death. The last words of the novel are: "they were sorry for Nastena".

Anna in Poslednii srok sympathizes with her children. Her son Il'ia has changed since he left the village. Looking at him, neither townsman nor peasant, she feels pity; he seems to have no identity. Similarly, she has trouble holding back her tears as she watches Varvara. All she wishes her is peace in her old age -- "the only happiness still within her reach". However, in her heart, Anna knows that Varvara will not get it. She also imagines that Liusia, her educated city daughter, must feel ashamed of her old, ugly, uneducated peasant mother. Although Anna cannot identify with her, she does empathize with her daughter. Anna feels sorry for her youngest son Mikhail and his wife, Nadia who have the burden of caring for her in her old age. This is particularly evident in the episode where Liusia creates a scandal over Anna's dirty sheets, embarrassing Nadia. Coming to her defense, Anna declares that

she is to blame for the condition the sheets are in because she tells Nadia that she does not want to be moved. She identifies with Nadia who, feeling uncomfortable, quietly slips out of the room. She tells the others that:

> Without Nadia I'd have been in the grave long ago -- that I know. (B.198)

In Proshchanie s Materoi, Dar'ia feels pity for others: particularly for the younger generation and the direction their lives are taking. This will be examined in more detail further in this chapter.

In the short story Uroki frantsuzskogo, Lidia Mikhailovna is also depicted as a compassionate woman. Realizing the hunger her proud young pupil has to bear, she finds a way to alleviate his suffering as was explained in the beginning of this chapter.

Zhalost' is such an intrinsic part of the personality of Rasputin's female characters that it is sometimes closely intertwined with their feelings of love. As the narrator of Zhivi i pomni comments concerning Nastena:

> She loved him as she pitied him and pitied him as she loved him - the two feelings had been fused into one for her. (L.171)

In fact, their capacity for zhalost', at times, approaches selflessness. Rasputin, speaking about traditional peasant women, once stated in an interview:

> I was always interested in portraying those ordinary women, who stand out for their selflessness, kindness and understanding.[17]

This quality of devoting oneself entirely to the welfare of others, so typical of mothers with regard to their children, can be observed in the relationships of Rasputin's heroines with their husbands and friends as well as their children. Dar'ia, for example, dispirited after the incident at the cemetery and languishing in inactivity atypical of her, is roused out of her depression by consideration for Bogodul who comes to visit her. Despite the fact that she is experiencing what is probably one of the worst days of her life, she cannot ignore him.

Anna and Dar'ia have both devoted their whole life to their families. However, of all Rasputin's heroines, Nastena is the apotheosis

of selflessness. Rasputin, speaking of Zhivi i pomni, has said:

> That is why I started writing that story, to show exactly that type of woman, a woman who is selfless, ready for self-sacrifice, a kind woman...[18]

Nastena eats little so that her husband will have more. She braves a blizzard to see him and bring him provisions, nearly losing herself in the storm. Later, when the ice melts on the Angara, she overcomes her fear of water in order to cross the river to bring him more supplies. She lies to protect him, an act which is extremely difficult for her. Her lies range from little ones which serve to explain the disappearance of certain items from the house, to more serious ones such as who has impregnated her. Even when her mother-in-law ousts her from their home, believing she has committed adultery, she still does not reveal the truth. Finally, she gives up her life and the life of her unborn child to protect Andrei. As she tells her husband:

> I don't count -- I'm strong, and I'll do what must be done. (L. 85)

The capacity for compassion of these women extends to animals as well as people. For instance, on one occasion, Nastena has to spend a night in the district capital where she has gone to buy supplies. She has come by horse-drawn sled borrowed from the kolkhoz. Through the wall of the room she is staying in, she can hear Kar'ka, the horse, shivering in the cold and pawing the ground. She feels so sorry for him that she is unable to sleep. She gets up, hitches the horse, and leaves in the middle of the night.

Another example can be seen in chapter six of Poslednii srok. Liusia, one of Anna's daughters, is strolling in the country reminiscing about her childhood. One particular memory stands out clearly. It is the memory of how she once harrowed a field with an old, half-starved horse named Igrenia. The incident takes place in 1946 or 47 when food was scarce. Unthinkingly, she makes the poor thing pull the harrow up and down the hill rather than across it. When the exhausted horse finally collapses and is unable to get up again, Liusia runs for her mother's help. The scene that follows is extremely moving. Anna kneels down and speaks to her "Igren'ka" as to an old friend, attributing supposedly human feelings to the horse. She first calms him by speaking in a soft voice. She encourages him not to give up, reminding him that together,

they had pulled through the whole war. She strokes his neck. When he stretches his head towards her hands, she guiltily apologizes for forgetting to bring him a treat. She remembers how, two years before, when he broke his leg and the kolkhoz wanted to kill him, he ran away to heal by himself in the woods. She remembers how she protected him upon his return, not letting others overwork him. She continues to affectionately rub his nose and tug at his forelock, giving him time to calm down and regain some strength. She senses his fear and impatience at his own weakness. After he tries and fails to stand up, she perceives his despair and soothes him with encouraging and comforting words. When, after a brief rest, he finally succeeds in raising himself, she does not hide her joy. The image of this woman, supporting this old unsteady horse with an arm around its shoulders, as they slowly make their way home is an unforgettable one.

Anna's old friend, Mironikha, also cares about animals. During Anna's last days, Mironikha is out searching high and low for her cow. Her legs can hardly carry her but she is determined to find the cow. When Anna tells her to forget about the old cow for she no longer produces much milk, Mironikha answers that it is not the milk she is concerned about. She simply wants to be reassured that her cow is safe, that she has not been attacked by a bear.

Dar'ia, the morning after the incident in the cemetery, forces herself to milk her cow. She is extremely depressed and tired that morning to the extent that she neglects all of her other chores. However, knowing that cows experience discomfort when their udders are full, she is unable to ignore hers. As she tells Bogodul, "the poor thing had been crying".

Similarly, Nastasia, packing and preparing to move, finds the time to worry about her cat. One of the favours she asks of Dar'ia before leaving for the city is that she look after her Nunia. She is obviously sad to have to part with her. As she tells Dar'ia:

> I'd never leave her in my life, but Egor says they won't let her on the ship. And if they don't then Nunya will be lost. (F.64)

She fondly describes her as "a gentle cat", "such a smart cat", and adds that Nunia will not be any trouble. Not really knowing if she will ever return to Matera, Nastasia nevertheless promises to take her back upon

her return. (In the end, she does return to spend her last days with the others, her husband having died in the city.)

All of Rasputin's heroines have a deep-seated belief in fate. They are convinced that a person's life is predetermined, and that one must humbly accept it as it is. Anna, for instance, looking back at her life, has no complaints. As she reasons,

> How could you complain about something that was all your own, given to you alone ? (B.339)

She never envies others. Wanting somebody else's life seems as senseless to her as wanting somebody else's mother to be hers, or somebody else's child to be hers. Life for her is both a joy and a torment, but it is her own. Reminiscing, she comes to the conclusion that:

> Everybody's life has its own beauty. She had known her bright, joyful moments, which were dear to her and were hers alone, and she had had her moments of grief, which were equally dear to her and with the passing of time became even dearer, more a part of her. (B.339)

Nastena's destiny is much more difficult to reconcile oneself to. Nevertheless, she resigns herself to her reality and does not argue with fate. These women believe that not only is a person's life mapped out beforehand, but there is a reason behind this predetermination. There is an unfathomed meaning, an unknown aim guiding Fate's decisions.

> Whether by fate or something higher, Nastena felt that she had been singled out from the rest - otherwise so much would not have befallen her at once. (L.97)

She is convinced that there is a reason for her suffering. If suffering gives meaning to her life, if it leads to her salvation, then it is better than idling her life away on a path that leads nowhere and offers no hope.

> She would be patient, bear it all, whatever came to be her lot, but she refused to be a worthless woman polluting the air for nothing. (L.97)

In a similar vein, Dar'ia, trying to understand why her eldest son died so young in a tree-felling accident, thinks to herself:

> Who had pointed at him and why him ? She couldn't believe that these things just happened blindly: that whomever it fell on, blindly, would fall; no, there was a predetermined aim and meaning to the falling tree, it knew whom it was after. And there was an incomprehensible and terrible truth in it (...) (F.42)

Nastena, reflecting upon her fate and happiness, wonders who divides things up, who apportions happiness, and why was she born if she was not to be given the chance to fulfill her duty and achieve happiness. Shortly before her death, she asks herself:

> Where were you, what games were you playing, when your fate was being decided ? Why did you agree to it ? Why did you let them chop off your wings, without thinking, just when you needed them most, when you need to fly and not crawl from disaster ? (L.214)

This belief in fate is the underlying factor in these women's all-forgiving approach to their children. For example, Anna believes that she was fated to live out her last years with Mikhail. This belief enables her to drive away any feelings of resentment she may have towards her other children for their moving away. Similarly, Katerina forgives Petrukha, as was demonstrated previously. Nastena feels that she has no right whatsoever to criticize others:

> ... no man, no animal, no bird, because each lived his own life, which was not in his control and which he could not change. (L.177)

These women's belief in fate also forms the basis for their patience and endurance. For example, Dar'ia, depressed after the incident in the cemetery, and wishing her life would end before the flood, suddenly regains hold of herself, saying with resolve: "No, I have to, it's my lot. Mine.". She remembers her father telling her that, good or bad, she must live out her life.

Nastena also holds the belief that, regardless of the difficulties or pain in life, one must accept one's lot. As she tells herself:

> What there is is all yours, and it's wrong to refuse any of it, even the very worst. (L.98)

One could argue that her suicide is a refusal to live out her fate until the very end, as Dar'ia's father exhorts one to do. However, in her case, suicide is her fate. She does not plan it in advance. She realizes that it is her fate only seconds before she carefully lets herself fall into the water. It comes to her as a long-awaited revelation:

> Here it was, finally, the desired happiness, earned by her suffering - why hadn't she believed in it before ? What had she been seeking ? It was in vain, all in vain. (L.215)

Rasputin's old women have little understanding of the city and

modern way of life. For example, when Anna shares her worries with her friend, Mironikha, over the whereabouts of Tania, Mironikha tries to reassure her. She brings forth the idea that perhaps the sky where Tania lives is not right for airplanes. Therefore, she may need more time to find another way home from such a distant place. Whether it be airplanes, telephones, water faucets, electric stoves, or indoor bathrooms, they are not accustomed to these "new" inventions.

Of the old women who remain on Matera, Dar'ia is supposed to join her son in the new settlement, Nastasia has to move to the city with her husband, Katerina probably will follow her useless son wherever he goes, and Sima with her little grandson has no place to go. Sima, under normal circumstances, would be able to live in an old people's home. However, they will not take her in with a child. She does not own a house on Matera, so she is not entitled to an apartment in the city.

Thus, their conception of life in the city, or the new settlement, is revealed mainly through the thoughts of the two who know where they are supposed to go (Dar'ia and Nastasia). Dar'ia has been to the city to visit her daughter. She relates her impressions to Nastasia, trying to encourage her by pointing out the advantages:

> it's amazing: you have the Angara and the forest right there, and a toilet-bath. You don't have to come out on the street for a year if you don't want to. There's a faucet, like that one on the samovar, and you turn it and water comes out; one has cold, the other hot. And you don't have to throw logs in the stove, it also has a faucet you turn and the heat comes. Cook and fry. There's so much - it spoils a woman ! And the bread doesn't come from your stove, no, it comes from the store. (...) And so you'll live like a lady, Nastasya, lying around; everything is in the house, you won't have to lift a finger. And there's also that ... tephelone. It says 'ring-ring', you say 'lo-'lo', talk, and then back you lie down. (F.11)

However, she does mention a negative aspect. The fact that the toilet is near the kitchen ("just the way heathens have it") disturbs her. She also finds the bath tub strange and small, being accustomed to the Russian bath-house.

Dar'ia's words do not soothe Nastasia. On the contrary, there are simply too many differences for her to adapt to. The most distressful thought for Nastasia to bear is that of living among strangers, of leaving her friends and community behind. This sense of community is important to these old women. As it is difficult for Nastena in Zhivi i

pomni to mislead her community and to isolate herself from it, it torments Nastasia to have to leave. On the day she and Egor leave Matera, one is again reminded of the fact that they will not have this community support in the city. They cannot lift the trunk they have packed. This is not a problem in Matera. As the narrator says:

> it was all right here, here they could get help, but what would they do there ? (F.61)

Nastasia would rather be in Dar'ia's situation. Most of the inhabitants of Matera will be in the new settlement (together with people from twelve other villages !). However, as the story progresses and more and more details become known about living conditions in the new settlement, it becomes evident that Dar'ia will not be able to adapt to the changes any more than Nastasia will in the city.

The new sovkhoz settlement is composed of two-storey apartments with a steep and narrow staircase which old people cannot climb. People from Matera are used to walking on flat ground. There is no Russian stove and only one steambath for the whole settlement instead of one per household. The apartments have the same indoor toilet as in the city; in other words, near the kitchen. Each family has a tiny garden; however, it lies in a bed of stones and clay. Soil has to be hauled in to grow anything. There is no stall for a cow and no place to set one up. There is also no place to get hay. There are cellars where they can keep their potatoes in the winter; however, they are full of water and the floors must be raised.

Owing to the fact that people do not own their apartments in the settlement, as they used to own their houses in the villages, there is a risk that it will eventually fall into disrepair and neglect. As the narrator comments in regard to a particular building on Matera that was never owned by one family:

> Things thrown together in a hurry age quickly. Matyora had buildings that had stood two hundred years and more and didn't show their wear, and this one hadn't served half a century. And all because it never had a single owner, because everyone who lived there only hid from the cold and rain and planned to move as soon as possible to somewhere better. (F.52-53)

Pavel, Dar'ia's son, is certain that his mother will not be able to handle these changes. In Chapter 22 of the novel, the reader follows him to his new home in the settlement. The impression one is given of the

settlement in this chapter is even worse than the one built up until then. It is compared to an "apiary". There is a steady whine of motorcycles, this having become the most popular method of transportation. The buildings and earth give off a smell of paint and gasoline. The dogs are all chained up on the order of the chairman of the sovkhoz; half of them were shot by the local militiaman before their owners agreed to chain them.

Pavel is right in thinking that his mother will be unable to adjust to the new life. The old women in Rasputin's works share a common feeling of not belonging to this world. Speaking about their children, Anna and Mironikha both agree that things have changed. In the olden days, people lived out their whole lives in one place. Now, they keep moving from place to place. They both feel out of place in the world of today. As Anna says to Mironikha:

> We're the last old-time old women left in the world, you and me. There ain't any more like us. The old women who come after us will be different - brainy, educated, able to understand what goes on in the world and why. We've got left behind, you and me. It's a new age now, not ours. (B.359)

Dar'ia also feels lost in the modern world. She feels that she has outlived her time, that she lives in limbo between the present and the past. In a prayer, she begs God to take her away from the present life:

> I feel bad. And you won't let me leave. I don't walk the earth anymore and I'm not in the sky, I'm suspended between heaven and earth; I see everything, but I can't understand what's what. (...) It's time... Send for me, Lord, I'm begging you. I'm a stranger to everyone here. Take me to my kin... the ones that I'm closer to. (F.147)

In another passage, she tells Bogodul that she belongs to the world of her ancestors. She points out that life is changing. As she unhappily remarks:

> It's been so long since I've lived my own life, my way, I don't understand anymore where I'm going, or why. (...) The world is going to crack in half (...). And it'll break across us, the old people... we don't belong here or there. (F.30)

The contrast between the values and attitudes of the old generation and those of the younger one is most explicit in the conversation between Dar'ia and her grandson, Andrei. Andrei's attitudes reflect the values of modern man who fervently believes in social progress. Andrei

is on his way to work at the very hydroelectric construction project that will destroy his grandmother's village. The conflict between his values and Dar'ia's represents, in more specific terms, the general conflict of the entire novel.

Andrei believes that Man must not give in to fate; he has to rule it. He sees Man as all-powerful, the "king of Nature" who can do whatever he wants. Dar'ia, on the other hand, considers Man to be frail. According to her, Man has not changed over the centuries; he still falls to the ground and not to the sky. He cannot step out of his human skin. He is just as mortal as the men of times past. Yet, "people have forgotten their place under God", she says. She feels sorry for Man. He thinks that he is master over his own life. However, he long ago lost control of his life. It is now life that makes demands on him, makes him run around like mad. He just barely keeps up. As far as she can see, Man is overstrained and will not last long. When Andrei argues that Man cannot overstrain himself anymore because everything is mechanized, Dar'ia retorts that she is talking about spiritual strain:

> You don't strain your belly-button nowadays - that goes without saying! You take care of it. But you've wasted your soul and you don't care about that. Have you at least heard that man has a soul ? (F.131)

The main opposition between the Dar'ia and Andrei is that between spiritual and materialistic values. It is not a conflict between the city and the village as such, as some critics have tried to claim. Rasputin himself has stated that the issue in Proshchanie s Materoj is not electrification, but moral values. He has pointed out that he is not against progress. However, he is concerned about the changes in moral values taking place today.

> I'm not out to preserve the village life of the past.(...) What I'm talking about is the spiritual world of millions of people, which is being transformed and which tomorrow will no longer be what it was today.[19]

Dar'ia goes on to tell Andrei that whether he believes it or not, he has a soul and God is in his soul. She remarks that modern man has taught himself that if he cannot see or touch something, it does not exist. She is sorry to note that Man is killing off his soul. She appears to merge the concept of soul with that of conscience, saying that it is easier to live without a soul. Having observed man all of

her life, she has come to the conclusion that he has no power over himself. He is confused. He does not do what he truly wants to do:

> He doesn't feel like laughing at all, maybe he needs to cry, but he laughs and laughs... And talks... he's clever at every turn, that's not what he meant to say... And what needs to be said, he won't say, he'll keep quiet. He has to go one way, so he'll turn in the other direction. He'll realize it later and be ashamed and angry with himself... and if he's mad at himself, then he's mad at the whole wide world. And there's nothing more miserable than that. (F.133)

In other words, Man does not follow his conscience, thus making it difficult for him to live at peace with himself. Only those who have no conscience do not suffer. She realizes that even her own son, Pavel, is not his own master. Thinking of his way of life and that of his coevals, she notes: "There weren't many who set their own pace".

In an earlier conversation Dar'ia has with Bogodul, she expresses her views on the concept of conscience. Her father taught her that the most important thing in life is to have a conscience and not to be bothered by it. She asserts that in the old days, conscience was very important. It was immediately obvious who had one and who did not. Nowadays, she feels, the word "conscience" has been overused and has lost its meaning.

> And now only the devil can tell, everything is mixed up in one pile. They bring it up needlessly with every word, mauling the poor thing so much it's barely alive. (...) now it's not for yourself, not for asking questions of, it's just for show. (F.33)

She compares it to an old woman, saying it is getting old and "no one looks at it anymore".

Dar'ia's views concerning "conscience" correspond exactly to Rasputin's. When asked by an interviewer which were the qualities he valued most in people, he answered:

> Goodness, calm, conscience, and a feeling of involuntary guilt and responsibility for everything that happens in the world. Many of our vices derive from the fact that we lack that guilt feeling.[20]

And concerning the misuse of the word "conscience", he says:

> we often misconstrue the word "conscience". We use it frequently and misuse it even more frequently. Conscience is sometimes understood as duty. And what is duty ? It is responsibility to others. Conscience is guilt. Responsibility to oneself.[21]

In the communist world, one is constantly reminded that one must have a

"socialist conscience". If conscience, as Rasputin claims, is responsibility to oneself, it goes counter to the meaning of the word "socialist" which implies responsibility to society. In this particular case, the word "conscience" should be replaced by the word "duty". As Rasputin remarks, "we use notions as old as the world and often read a new and almost opposite meaning into them".

Rasputin portrays his simple old heroines as understanding life far better than the younger generation. Their wisdom is based on life experience, on information which was passed down from their ancestors, on their knowledge of their place in the scheme of things. It is an instinctual wisdom, a common sense. The association of common sense and the mother figure is by no means peculiar to Rasputin. The expression 'mother wit' which refers to native intelligence or common sense testifies to its origins.

Dar'ia knows that wisdom comes with hindsight. Having observed people all of her life, she has come to certain conclusions about mankind. One of those conclusions is that Man's justice is often indiscriminate. As she says:

> whoever they point at is the one they blame and try, and human guilt is often assigned blindly. (F.141)

Still thinking about mankind, she remarks:

> Ah, how kind and good we all are when considered separately, and what senseless and great evil we create together - almost as if on purpose. (F.194)

Another conclusion she has reached about people is that when they are young and know nothing about life, they dream. Later, when they realize what kind of life they will have, they hope. And finally, in old age, they are left with memories.

Rasputin's heroines ask themselves a great deal of questions. Although they know their place in the world and feel that they have a duty to mankind to procreate, they still wonder about the meaning of life. For example, Dar'ia ponders:

> She had to live a long and wretched life to admit to herself at its end that she hadn't understood anything about it. While she had been moving toward old age, her human life had disappeared somewhere too. Let others chase after it now. But they wouldn't catch it either. They only imagine that they'll catch up - no, they too will have to watch it disappear sadly and impotently, the way she was watching it recede now.(F.40)

Nastena, analysing her own emotions, comes to the conclusion that a person does not know anything about himself, let alone about life. She realizes through her own experience that one does not know one's own soul. She feels as though there is more than one person inside each human being, tearing him apart until his death.

Dar'ia wonders if circumstances make a person the way he is, or is he born with a certain character. She looks at Sima and Katerina and asks herself if, put in their shoes, she would react and act the way they do. She also wonders if there is another reason why people live other than to procreate. Sitting by the graves of her ancestors, she asks herself questions...

> And who knows the truth about man, why he lives ? For the sake of life itself, the sake of children, so that his children leave children, and the children's children leave children, or for the sake of something else ? Would this movement be eternal ? And if it's for children, the movement, this eternal pull, then why come to these graves ? (F.180)

She even briefly questions whether man does, in fact, discover the truth after death, whether his questions are answered...

Anna asks herself similar questions. During one of her sleepless nights, she wonders why she has lived:

> She would have liked to know why and for what purpose she had lived, trodden this earth in a fever of activity, carrying the heaviest of burdens on her back. Why ? Only for her own sake, or for some other purpose as well ? (B.349)

Anna is certain that when she dies she will learn:

> many secrets which had not been hers to know in life, and which would finally explain the age-old mystery of all that had happened to her in the past, and all that would be in the future. (B.276)

Notes

[1] "Na snegu ostaiutsia sledy" from Krai vozle samogo neba is a story which deals with the issue of illiteracy in rural areas and the efforts of the state to eliminate it.

[2] The one exception is Lidia Mikhailovna of "Uroki frantsuzskogo". She does not die. However, she is banished from the school where she teaches.

[3] Valentin Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi", Interview, Literaturnaia gazeta, March 16th, 1977, p.3

[4] Valentin Rasputin, "Eto stanovitsia traditsiei", Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriia filologiia, no.3, 1977, p. 84.

[5] Valentin Rasputin, "Borrowed Time", Money for Maria and Borrowed Time, Two Village Tales, Translated by K. Windle and M. Wettlin (London: Quartet Books, 1981), p. 338. All future references to Poslednii srok are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'B' and the page number.

[6] Valentin Rasputin, Live and Remember, Translated by Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), p. 211. All future references to Zhivi i pomni are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'L' and the page number.

[7] Valentin Rasputin, Farewell to Matyora, Translated by Antonina W. Bouis (N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1979), p. 32. All future references to Proshchanie s Materoi are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'F' and the page number.

[8] For an interesting study of the mother theme in Rasputin's works, see Robert Porter's "The Mother Theme in Valentin Rasputin", (Canadian Slavonic Papers, Sept. 1986, Vol. 28, No. 3. pp. 287-303).

[9] Valentin Rasputin, "Valentin Rasputin: The Human Race Is Not Accidental", Interview, Soviet Literature, 1983 (7), p.159.

[10] As Freud has pointed out, man saw the forces of nature as gods. Being an atheist himself, he sees religion as originating from man's need to defend himself against the forces of nature. Humanizing nature in order to establish a relationship with it was the first step. Making the forces of nature into gods did justice to the overpowering impression which they made on man.(The Future of an Illusion, London: The Hogarth Press, 1973.)

[11] Chol-Kun Kwon, Siberian Mythology, Folklore, and Tradition in Valentin Rasputin's Novellas, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1986, p. 67.

[12] Ibid., p. 44.

[13] Valentin Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi", op. cit.

[14] Valentin Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi", Interview, Voprosy literatury, 1976, No.9, p. 147.

[15] Many critics are of the opinion that, of the four children, those who have moved furthest away from their native village have the least values. See Boris Pankin, "Proshchaniia i vstrechi s Materoi i zametki o proze Valentina Rasputina", Druzhba narodov, No.2 (1978), pp. 238-39; F. Kuznetsov, Za vse v otvete. Nravstvennye iskaniia v sovremennoi proze, (Moscow, 1975), p. 112; N. N. Shneidman, Soviet Literature in the 1970s: Artistic Diversity and Ideological Conformity (Toronto:

University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 78. In other words, they see the work as a commentary on the city/village dichotomy. However, this opinion does not hold. The children who have remained closest to the village are not at all shown in a favourable light. And Liusia, the most citified, is the most sympathetically drawn character. She is seen walking through the countryside, reminiscing about her childhood. She is the most complex of the children, asking herself the most questions.

[16] Valentin Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi", op. cit..

[17] Ibid, p. 146-147.

[18] Valentin Rasputin, "Eto stanovitsia traditsiei", op. cit., p. 84.

[19] Valentin Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi", op. cit., p. 146.

[20] Valentin Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi", op. cit..

[21] Valentin Rasputin, "Valentin Rasputin: The Human Race Is Not Accidental", op. cit., p. 160.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION OF RASPUTIN'S CONCEPT OF WOMAN

It has been demonstrated that female characters play a crucial role in Rasputin's works. His portrayal of women can be interpreted on many different levels. In some aspects, he portrays them realistically; in others, nostalgically. However, more importantly, as will be demonstrated further in this chapter, he uses them as part of a whole symbolic structure which can be discerned in all of his writings.

On one level, Rasputin's female characters are portrayed realistically. This is the level where their difficult living conditions are exposed. These include the poverty and lack of modern amenities in the rural areas, the physical or psychological abuse inflicted upon them by their husbands, as well as the added workload and responsibilities incurred during the War. Rasputin does not stop there, however. He also points out men's unwillingness or inability to change their attitudes toward women. For example, as seen in Chapter Two, Vasilii uses the following words to explain to his son why he is marrying Aleksandra:

> I'm sick of doing my own washing, boiling up my own porridge. I live like a convict. I need a housekeeper - that's what.[1]

In Poslednii srok, Stepan Kharchevnikov, an old friend of Ilia's, Anna's son, who joins the men in their drinking bout in the bath-house, provides an ideal example of the "macho" attitude of the old-fashioned muzhik. Speaking of his wife, he says:

> She's well trained, and she never forgets who wears the trousers, not even in her sleep. And it's up to the man to keep the upper hand.[2]

When Mikhail argues that women are human beings and have rights, reminding him that a woman can take her husband to court if she wants to, Stepan answers that he too reads the papers. He knows that "officially" wives are human and have rights. This, in itself, implies that if he did not read newspapers, he would not know that wives are human and have rights of their own. He is typical of the sexist male in

that he considers women to be inferior to men intellectually. He believes that while men have a variety of interests besides women, women's lives are focused entirely on their husbands. Another of his beliefs is that women need men more than men need women. In other words, women are totally dependent on men.

Another example indicating the superior attitude of men towards women is when Andrei in Zhivi i pomni, coming across a fence which was sloppily erected, assumes that it was put up by women.

In one scene in Zhivi i pomni, Nastena reproaches herself for not feeding Andrei the minute she entered the shack. Her way of thinking has obviously been influenced by these male attitudes. She says:

> Why aren't I feeding my man ? That's what happens when there's been no one to keep me in line.[3]

These attitudes are not uncommon among Russian men even to this day. Solzhenitsyn provides a good case in point. Though an educated and highly intelligent man, he appears to hold similar opinions. His approach to his female characters betrays his views on women. In his works, as Xenia Gasiorowska points out in an article devoted to Solzhenitsyn's female characters, the women generally follow their instincts and emotions while the men are guided by intellect and ethics. For Solzhenitsyn's female characters, according to Gasiorowska,

> the men they love are more important than ideals, however noble.[4]

One of the examples she provides of these differences between men and women in Solzhenitsyn's works, is a comparison between the female patients in Rakovyi korpus (Cancer Ward) and the male patients. The women come across as "extras", "a faceless crowd, unruly and chattering, a nuisance for nurse Zoia, and a challenge for Doctor Vera Gangart". The male patients, on the other hand, spend their time "discussing politics, medicine, and the mysteries of life and death".[5] A similar attitude toward women can be observed in more recent writings as well. In an article entitled "Na pepelishche" (At the Hearth) about the emergence of a new type of heroine in recent Soviet literature, the Soviet critic Vladimir Bondarenko expresses his fears at the significance of this new character type.[6] He describes the heroine of recent prose as a young woman who rebels against the traditional role attributed to women. She

wants to be independent at all costs, even if it means remaining single and lonely. He sees her going from one relationship to the next, not letting herself become too attached to anyone. He considers her sexual relationships immoral. The gist of the article is that he is concerned that this new type of heroine is but a reflection of the woman of today in reality. Bondarenko's comments and analysis of these female characters provide valuable insight into his beliefs concerning women. They reflect his preconceived notions about "feminine" behaviour and mentality, myths which date back to antiquity. Women were believed to have weaker intellects than men and to be less capable of controlling their emotions. They yearned for stability and had an innate desire to obey, to submit to another. Like children, they were thought to need a protector to take care of them. Their life's purpose was to bear children and serve their families. In fact, not only was it their purpose, it was their prerequisite for happiness. They were driven by a biological instinct. Bondarenko feels that the woman of today is making herself miserable by denying her biological urges, by trying to go against Nature.

These attitudes towards women are confirmed in Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union (1982),[7] a collection of articles drawn entirely from Soviet publications and edited by Gail Warshofsky Lapidus. It gives a balanced picture of current thinking on the "woman question", examining problems such as the "double shift" that most women work (which adds an average of 28 hours/a week of housework to their paid work), job segregation, the low number of women in managerial positions, etc., as well as describing the impressive gains which have been made since the Revolution. Many of the contributors in this collection still put some of the blame for the problems on the failure of males to rid themselves of old stereotypes.

Despite the existence of a whole body of information on male inactivity in the Soviet home (one of the symptoms of sexist attitudes), the press remains unwilling to attack sexist attitudes in anything other than a cursory and apathetic manner. The reason for this, according to Susan Allott, author of "Soviet Rural Women: Employment and Family Life" [8] is that, at present, the government's top priority is to boost the birthrate. Thus, the press has been emphasizing motherhood as a woman's

most important function. In attempts to help couples avoid marital discord, articles urge women to be indulgent towards their husbands, supportive of them in their work, to feed them well, and to pay attention to their own appearance. Men, on the other hand, are encouraged to pay their wives compliments, buy them presents and thank them for their help. As Susan Allott writes:

> Such a prescription for marital bliss - pretending that women have no concerns outside the home and relying heavily on male condescension and female deference - cannot but reinforce the traditional village view of 'a woman's place'.[9]

More recently, having adopted a more subtle approach, the stress is more on femininity in women. However, the highest expression of that femininity, as defined by government propagandists, is still motherhood. This image of the ideal feminine woman whose natural inclination is to want to be a mother and to remain in the home hence reinforces the preconceived notions of the sexist male. As long as boosting the birthrate remains the government's top priority, therefore, it seems doubtful that women's situation will improve.

Rasputin, as a true realist, presents these persistent male attitudes to the reader. However, he clearly does not share these views. His heroines are not driven by biological urges. Their feelings towards childbearing are related to their religious beliefs, to their veneration of ancestors, and to their knowing their place in the natural world. It is a conscious choice, not an instinct. Also, as has already been shown, his female characters philosophize about life and death, question the decisions of Party officials and are intellectually as or more developed than his male characters. They are independent women who have managed extremely well without the help of husbands or other males. Rasputin's portrayal of women discloses his deep understanding and sympathy for their unfair "unofficial" status in society.

It is possible that Rasputin is given so much official recognition partly because he aids the state, though unintentionally, in its pro-natalist campaign. The high esteem in which he holds the mother figure, indeed, inspires positive emotions towards motherhood.

A second level at which Rasputin's works can be interpreted is the level where his nostalgia for the good old days can be detected, where

he seems to miss the good old-fashioned girls of the past. This can be observed in his portrayal of certain spoiled city-type women as opposed to his description of the slightly naive, shy, wholesome Russian peasant girls.

The young bride that Viktor observes from the steamer in Vniz po techeniiu is an example of the immodest and brazen type of woman Rasputin deplores. She is dressed in a short and narrow dress (far above the knees). She drinks "like a man", not even waiting for her new husband. At one point, when the crowd shouts gor'ko!*, she suddenly grabs him with surprising strength and passion, pulls his head toward her and gives him a long and unrestrained kiss. Her forwardness and shamelessness in displaying her desires are sadly observed by the narrator. The whole scene is tasteless, vulgar and cheap. Instead of a young, innocent couple, hopelessly in love and wanting nothing more but to be alone for their honeymoon, perhaps on a romantic cruise, we are presented with a couple getting drunk and behaving in a very unromantic way.

It is as if Rasputin is asking where the romance has gone. He seems to yearn for the kind of romance he describes in Ot solntsa do solntsa. The narrator of this early story recalls how Stepan, a Tofa, goes off to meet his beloved. He travels 180 kilometres over mountains as easily as if he were crossing town to meet her in a park. As he is making his way, his thoughts are entirely on her. He imagines what she must be doing at every moment. He sees her braiding her black hair, going to the store... He hurries his step... His impatience is almost tangible. When he finally arrives at her door, the two of them go for a walk along the river. He starts to sing to her and she joins in. As the narrator says, "It is a song of love". Rasputin seems to feel that this kind of love does not exist anymore.

Again in Vniz po techeniiu, Viktor notices what appears to him to be the ideal happy couple. They dance and gaze at each other in a way that makes Viktor envious. The following day, he overhears a bad argument and realizes that it is his "ideal" couple who are arguing. He is disappointed and, at the same time, angry with them for destroying

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* At Russian weddings, the guests shout gor'ko (bitter), meaning that the wine is bitter and the couple should kiss to sweeten it.

his illusions. His belief in an undying love in this one "human nest" is shattered. As Viktor sadly remarks, it is proof once again that happiness is short-lived.

Rasputin's description of Natasha in the short story that bears the same name, once again shows his longing for the girls of a time past. As the narrator points out, girls do not blush anymore:

> This capacity for blushing, nowadays almost extinct among girls, was so sweet and natural in her and suited so well with her large face and frame, that after the initial surprise it was hard to visualize Natasha any other way. Just to watch her was sheer pleasure, as if the soul within you warmed into a joyous reciprocal embarrassment.[10]

Natasha, furthermore, is described as quiet, shy and submissive. She would never think of complaining about anything. This kind of passivity also seems to be, for Rasputin, a quality of the ideal woman of the past. It is not a sign of weakness in his eyes; it is simply a sign of modesty and humility.

In Poslednii srok, Stepan Kharchevnikov expresses his views on women. In his opinion, a real woman is one who is hard-working and capable of handling any chore without the help of her man. She is also patient and does not complain about her husband's behaviour. He contrasts real women with city women which he had the opportunity of observing the year before when he visited a friend in town.

> Had a good look at the women there, and it was all I could do to find one who was what I'd call a woman. Made of flesh and blood, not springs and a motor. When I did see one it warmed my heart to know they weren't extinct yet, because soon we'll have to dig for 'em, like them prehistoric mammoths. But when one came along, you could see she'd had a mother and a grandmother, and that she'd got her place in life, because those city women these days, specially the younger ones, they're like clockwork dolls. All look alike, so you can't tell 'em apart. They're not born, they come off assembly lines...(B. 295)

He considers city women to be vain and overly concerned with their appearance. He even asserts that their only aim in life is to show themselves off. He finds them lacking in modesty in the sense that they expose too much of their bodies.

They are also lazy. They have no idea of the concept of work and duty. They blame their lethargy on weak nerves. Stepan goes as far as to exclaim that women will soon forget how to perform their most basic duty

in life, that of having children. Worrying about a future without the "real woman" of the good old days, he asks:

> What if there's a war? What could you expect these women to do? Shed tears and die? The last war was half won by women, but real women, the kind you don't see nowadays.(B.296)

He feels that Anna represents a "real woman". She is a true baba, the kind that other women should try to emulate. This opinion is shared by Rasputin himself. Although Rasputin does not share Kharchevnikov's sexist views on women, he does feel that women have changed. He looks nostalgically back at the women of the generation of his grandmother. It is no wonder that he admires those women. Having grown up during the war, he lived in a small Siberian village which was most probably run entirely by women while the men were at war. Women had to be strong emotionally and physically to manage the farms, raise the children, and deal with the grief of losing the men in the family. Under those trying circumstances, their best qualities emerged. Standing in sad contrast with these heroic women, the urban women of today with their modern appliances, daycare centers and jobs where they punch in and out, appear spoiled and lazy. It is an established fact that in crisis situations people band together, providing help and support to each other. Who has not heard members of the older generation speak of the heartwarming qualities which surfaced among people during the Depression, of the good deeds performed by total strangers during the war, and other such phenomena ?... After witnessing such an intense demonstration of human virtues, it is not surprising that Rasputin yearns for the "good old days". Moreover, the easy life of today does seem to encourage a certain amount of laziness, greed, and selfishness.

Thus, Rasputin, like his character, Kharchevnikov, worries about the spiritual health of the modern woman. However, his worries do not end there; he is concerned about the moral and spiritual well-being of all people today, not just of women. While his male characters feel that women have changed, so do his female characters feel that men have changed. As the old lady in Kuz'ma's compartment states: "You'll not find men like my husband nowadays". Similarly, Anna and Mironikha agree that men have changed. Refering to men's drinking, Anna remarks: "In the olden days at least they knew when to stop". And Mironikha adds: "In the olden days they had some shame as well". Dar'ia notices that her

grandson, Andrei, doesn't work well. Generally speaking, the old women are of the opinion that people have changed. The younger generation no longer recognizes the importance of work, and their values are based on different principles.

Most critics, particularly in the Soviet Union, take a sociological approach to Rasputin's works. As already mentioned, many, if not most, critics see his works as a statement on the value of the village as opposed to the city. Others state that Rasputin is simply an objective witness of the difficulties faced by Russians who have left the countryside to live in the city. They demonstrate that he does not portray recently citified Russians in a clear-cut negative way. On the contrary, he seems to commiserate with them by showing their human frailties and confused state of mind. They appear more as unhappy individuals than as bad ones.[11]

The Soviet critic, A. F. Lapchenko, looks at the question of family morals. He sees a distinctive trend in village prose whereby the woman-mother is portrayed as the continuer of the family line, the rod, and the custodian of family principles or moral values. He claims that the reason for this peculiar attitude to the woman-mother is the increasing recognition of the social value of family morals. Lapchenko states that for Rasputin, the attitude towards the family and the woman is the criterion for individual morals and at the same time an indicator of the social maturity, reliability and civic-mindedness of man.[12] In this sense, Lapchenko claims that the heroes of contemporary Soviet literature prove themselves morally through their attitude to woman-mother and not, as in Russian classical literature, through love for a spouse or lover. This can be observed in the works of Viktor Astaf'ev (Poslednii poklon, Tsar'-ryba), Sergei Zalygin (Na Irtyshe, Komissiia), Vasilii Shukshin (Kalina krasnaia) and Evgenii Nosov (Domoi za mater'iu).

David Gillespie, discussing urban women in Soviet literature of the seventies, voices a related thought. He recalls how women in nineteenth-century Russian literature were often the "touchstone of a man's moral worth". Symbols of beauty and purity, they served to highlight the lack of moral values of "superfluous men" such as Evgenii Onegin or

Pechorin. He goes on to prove that, in urban prose of the seventies, all the women share a common fate in the rough treatment they receive at the hands of men. Men tend to be portrayed either as egoistical and unscrupulous or weak and dispirited. Though Gillespie does not blame immoral men for all the sufferings of urban women in contemporary prose, he does see a contrast similar to that between the morally weak men and virtuous women of 19th-century works in certain contemporary works of urban prose. As he writes:

> Modern Soviet literature (...) seems to have resurrected this moral dimension as writers try to achieve a composite picture of Soviet man's spiritual world in the period of 'scientific and technological revolution'.[13]

The main difference between urban prose and village prose is that, in urban prose, the virtuous female character is not necessarily a mother, whereas in Rasputin's works and in those of other village prose writers, the stress is definitely on the image-idea of the mother, the family and the home, as Lapchenko rightly states.

However, he and others who take a sociological approach, do not take their idea far enough. They miss the depth of the symbolism in Rasputin's works. It is not only the actual woman, the mother of the household, but the Feminine Principle itself that is dealt with by Rasputin. Rasputin once stated that:

> In a book, as in an iceberg, nine tenths is hidden beneath the surface. A book has a subtext, which people are simply incapable of grasping if they read quickly. [14]

The most important level at which one can interpret Rasputin's works is the one where his heroines are seen as symbols of the Feminine Principle, embodying the emotional, the instinctual, the human, and the compassionate as opposed to the cold and rational which is attributed to the Masculine Principle.

Recently, scholars have been giving thought to the symbolic aspect of Rasputin's works.[15] For example, Gerald Mikkelson has written an interesting article on the religious symbolism in Zhivi i pomni. He sees the novel as a modern-day Christian parable with Nastena as a suffering saint. Constance Ann Link, in her Ph.D. dissertation entitled Symbolism of the Sacred: the Novels of Valentin Rasputin, examines, among other things, what she calls the symbolism of the boundary in

Poslednii srok, the boundary being that between this world and the world "beyond".

The novel which has attracted the most attention for its symbolic imagery, however, is Proshchanie s Materoi. The Khoziain, the King Larch, and Bogodul stand out as obvious symbols. The Khoziain, a small animal-like creature, is seen almost unanimously by critics as representing the spirit of the island, the island's equivalent of a domovoi. The King Larch, an extremely large tree which seems to be as old as the island and which proves to be indestructible, has been interpreted by some as the symbol of the superiority of nature over man, by others as the symbol of the Cosmic Tree or axis mundi, joining the three worlds, and by still others as a symbol of the Cross. Bogodul, a man so old that no one can remember when he first came to Matera, has been called a symbol of Christ. After the publication of this novel, Soviet critics began debating Rasputin's use of symbolism. V. Oskotskii stated that mythology and symbolism were not within the grasp of Rasputin's talent.[16] Ovcharenko considered the image of the Khoziain unsuccessful and lacking in concreteness, and objected to the character of Bogodul whom he regarded as colourful but superfluous.[17] Iu. Seleznev defended Rasputin's use of symbolism, saying that it was justified by his worldview and by the universality of the questions he raised.[18]

Despite the attention that has been granted to Rasputin's use of symbolism, little mention of the feminine presence has been made. Other than the viewing of Matera (and sometimes Dar'ia) as the symbol of Mother-Russia or Mother-Earth, no serious consideration has been aimed at the female symbols scattered throughout Rasputin's works.

The Feminine Principle is universally identified as the passive principle of nature, bearer of the egg of life. It is personified in mythology by the virgin-mothers of the world (or Great Mothers) such as Aphrodite, Isis, Hathor, Cybele, Ishtar, Lakshmi, Parvati, Tara, Kwan-yin, Demeter, Sophia, Mary, and Io, to name just a few. The Great Mother, or universal Mother, is represented by a myriad of symbols. These include all waters; the earth; the moon; all that is sheltering, protecting and enclosing such as a cave, church, house, village, etc.; all food-producing animals such as a cow, sow, goat, deer; as well as

many kinds of trees and birds.

The Great Mother is the archetypal feminine, the origin of all life. She is that which gives life, nourishes, protects and preserves. Spiritually, she is archetypal wholeness and the mother of all wisdom. She is referred to as sovereign of all things spiritual. Writes J.C. Cooper in his An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols:

> Spiritually she is archetypal wholeness; the self-sustaining and self-sufficient; (...); she is the mother of all wisdom, self-mastery and redemption through illumination and transformation, 'she who leads out beyond darkness and bondage' and, as wisdom, encompasses the transformation of man from the most elementary to the highest level. She is the ultimate mystery: 'I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my veil no mortal has yet lifted.'[19]

The Feminine Principle representing that which guides Man to a spiritual level, that which illuminates him and helps transform him into a more complete being, is embodied to varying degrees in Rasputin's heroines and in elements of Nature.

Though the women in Rasputin's works do not immediately strike the reader as symbols, there are certain clues which indicate that they are more than they appear. If a symbol is characterized by "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal" as S.T. Coleridge stated,[20] then the portrayal of these old women qualifies them as such.

One such clue which suggests that they have a symbolic function is the fact that they are never sure of their age. This gives them a timeless quality. Also, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, they possess many of the qualities which are associated with the Great Mother, the most important ones for this thesis being their spiritual wholeness and their wisdom.

As the Feminine Principle, Rasputin's female protagonists seem to provide a link with a mystical reality, a reality which includes the world of the spirits. Indeed, in his novels of the seventies, the old women are shown to be closer to this spiritual world than the other characters. It is almost as though they have special powers. They often seem to see and know something more than the average person. This knowledge is neither of the type learned in books, nor is it knowledge gained through experience (though, on a realistic level, these old women are full of wisdom and common sense). At times, they seem to be able to

see into another dimension. Even Tania, the deaf-mute who lodges Andrei for a while on his way home from the front, gives him the impression that she knows everything about him.

Anna, for example, lying quietly in her bed, gives the impression of having special vision into another dimension, or world:

> everything about her suggested that she was frozen under a spell of almost impossible calm, as if it had been given to her alone to see and commit to memory things that nobody else could possibly understand. (B.190)

Her feeling of having already died and come back to life and the clarity with which she describes what a person experiences as he crosses over into the "other" world, her lack of fear in the face of death, her feeling that she has experienced death many times before, all these facts and others hint at her familiarity with the spiritual world.

In a similar way, Dar'ia has what may be referred to as mystical experiences. The night after the incident in the cemetery, upset and unable to sleep, she has a strange dreamlike experience. Standing in the garden, she seems to lose consciousness. When she awakens, she is in the same place as before, only it is getting lighter. The following day, she relates that she was taken somewhere. The experience leaves her feeling relieved as though she has been to the spiritual world for consolation:

> And I felt so good, so comfortable, as though light had been shed in my soul.[21]

The fact that she communicates with the spiritual world is stated clearly in the novel. Near the end of the story, when she is in the cemetery for her last farewell, Dar'ia receives an order from her ancestors to prepare the house for its demise. She understands what she must do:

> as though a barely perceptible whisper reached her from somewhere far, far away. (F.178)

The day she spends wandering all over the island after bidding farewell to her house, she can actually see the Khoziain. This is significant for he is generally invisible to humans.

> and some small animal she had never seen before kept running alongside, trying to peer into her eyes. (F.198)

Of the critics who consider Rasputin's heroines to be symbols, N.

D. Khmeliuk, assistant professor at the University of Kiev, for instance, considers Dar'ia to be "the poetic image of the maternal source of life, the image of Mother-Earth".[22] Mikkelson, as already stated, views Nastena as a symbol of the Christian martyr. David Gillespie sees the three heroines of the seventies (Anna, Dar'ia and Nastena) as "symbols of beauty, self-abnegation, and kindness". As demonstrated in Chapter Three, they are definitely selfless and kind; however, nowhere are they described as physically beautiful. Physical traits are mentionned only if they help emphasize an inner quality of the character. For example, Dar'ia's "stern bloodless face" and "firmly set lips" indicate her determination and strength of character. Nastena's thick and heavy hands indicate her industriousness. Anna's emaciated appearance and "wing-like" shoulder blades point to her approaching death and the release of her soul from its bodily confines. In fact, the lack of concrete physical descriptions for the heroines is another characteristic which differentiates them from the other characters who are described in comparatively more physical detail. This contrast is particularly evident in Poslednii srok. Whereas Anna is not given a physical description (other than the fact that she looks emaciated), her children, in comparison, are described in detail. Varvara is stout and looks old for her age; Il'ia is short and almost bald; Liusia has smooth skin, dresses fashionably and looks much younger than her age; and Mikhail has thick, curly, gypsy locks and a beard that curls into ringlets as well as a dark complexion.

Gillespie goes on to state that all three of Rasputin's heroines are symbols of pure motherhood and of Mother Russia herself. In this respect, he adds, however, that:

> Such an approach is blatant idealization, where image becomes divorced from reality, and is much removed from the essentially realistic portrayals of women in 'urban prose'.[23]

Nevertheless, it would appear that Gillespie is wrong, for Rasputin's heroines are realistically portrayed. They are shown to have faults, to behave irrationally at times, even to appear harsh or selfish on certain occasions. For example, Anna is jealous that Mironikha is still strong enough to look after a cow. Nastena experiences anger and bitter feelings towards Andrei when the village celebrates the end of the war.

Dar'ia is sometimes too critical of others to the point of hurting or offending them. She denigrates the hopes of her old friends in her ever-pragmatic way. In other words, Rasputin's female protagonists are definitely portrayed as human beings. The author himself states that he is incapable of painting his heroes all in black or all in white, concealing and glossing over the faults of some and casting slurs upon others. He explains in an interview:

> I think that it is impossible to have purely positive and purely negative characters. The most important thing for me is that they are living people.[24]

It is precisely his success in portraying his heroines, on the one plane realistically, and at the same time, on another plane, as symbols, that is so fascinating.

Seleznev is right when he suggests that the development of the image-idea of mother binds the short novels Poslednii srok, Zhivi i pomni and Proshchanie s Materoi together into a single, though perhaps unintended, trilogy.[25] Characters are first seen in relation to Anna, a real mother, then in relation to Nastena, a mother-to-be (Seleznev calls her a symbolic mother), and finally in relation to Matera - the symbolic image of Mother-Earth and Mother-Russia (The island of Matera as a female symbol will be given more attention further on in this chapter).

However, it is not only in the characters and in Matera that the feminine presence is felt. It is carried throughout Rasputin's short novels by other female symbols, particularly symbols of Nature. As will be shown in this chapter, the Feminine Principle is symbolized by the Angara, by trees and by animals. It is also represented by houses and mills (the latter being traditional symbols of fertility).

Throughout Rasputin's works of the 1970s, one can sense an on-going struggle between the Feminine and Masculine Principles.

The Masculine Principle is identified as the active principle in nature. For this reason, progress and change belong in its realm. Also, knowledge, intelligence (as opposed to natural wisdom) and strength are attributed to the Masculine Principle. It is personified in mythology by gods of war such as Ares and Mars, gods of wine and revelry such as Dionysus and Bacchus, chief gods such as Jupiter, Zeus, Woden and Odin, fertility gods such as Baal-Peor, Cronus and Saturn, and, of course, by

Priapus, the god in Greek and Roman mythology that personifies the male procreative power. One of the most characteristic symbols of the Masculine Principle is fire.

In Rasputin's works, the Masculine Principle is symbolized by male characters, by war, by fire, and by all that is related to progress such as the hydroelectric project, the city, the train, and the younger generation (with the exception of children) who generally advocates progress. Young women who support progress and represent modern materialistic values are hence symbols of the Masculine Principle in Rasputin's poetic system.

The Masculine and Feminine Principles represent the two great principles of the Universe, the active and the passive. Represented by fire and water, and all the opposites in the elemental world, they are always in conflict. However, as heat and moisture, they are both necessary for all life. The struggle between them in Rasputin's writings is the struggle between past and future, between tradition and progress, emotion and reason, intuition and logic. Most importantly, however, it is the struggle between the soul and the power of reason, between the inner spiritual world of Man and the world of materialism and rational argument. And instead of a balance being maintained, it is the Masculine Principle, the world of materialism and rational argument which is emerging victorious. In all three novels of the 1970s, the mother-figure dies. It is significant that Rasputin considers his most successful and most important short novel to be Poslednii srok. Everything else he has written is, according to him, more or less a continuation of the same theme. This statement seems to confirm the fact that the death of the mother-figure is his most important theme. The mother-figure not only dies, however, she is also betrayed, neglected and mistreated by the younger generation, by society, or by other male symbols. In Poslednii srok, as was stated in Chapter Three, old Anna is betrayed and callously abandoned in her time of need by her children, hence by the younger generation. In Zhivi i pomni, Andrei causes Nastena's death as well as that of her unborn child. In Proshchanie s Materoi, modern Man's utilitarian attitude to the land destroys Matera, and thus virtually brings about the end of the world for the old women of the village (Dar'ia, Katerina, Nastasia, and Sima

with her little grandson).

After reading each of these short novels, one is left with the feeling of having just witnessed a matricide. In fact, some Western critics, referring to Proshchanie s Materoi, have suggested this. Irina Corten, a professor of Russian at the University of Minnesota, writes that "the annihilation of Matera is ... a profanation and a crime tantamount to matricide."[26] And John B. Dunlop of Oberlin College states that:

> The flooding of Matera, a place name deriving from the root mat' (mother), will climax a process of national matricide.[27]

The most important allegorical representation of woman in Rasputin's works is the island and village called Matera. In an interview, Rasputin directly linked the old Russian village with the mother-figure:

> The old village is our old mother who is inevitably leaving, but whom we must see off, and understand why she lived and what she left us.[28]

The word "Matera" derives from the Russian mat' (mother). Indeed, Matera with her lush vegetation and fertile soil has nourished and protected generations for over three hundred years. When her children die, she always receives them back into her bosom. It thus brings to mind the idea of Mother-Earth, who is known as the Nourisher and Nurse.

The island is described as having the "plump shape of an iron". This simile also calls forth notions of domesticity, traditionally associated with the woman.

Above all, the village of Matera is described in a way which likens it to the old women in Rasputin's works. Just as they lived simple and sedentary lives never leaving the island, Matera

> lived on in its lean and simple way, clinging to its spot on the bluff by the left bank, greeting and seeing off the years...(F.4)

In the same way that the women have a timeless quality about them, Matera "seemed ageless". Similarly to the women who had to bear hardships, Matera "lived on, through hard times and troubles". Finally, Matera is abandoned by everyone in the same way that Anna in Poslednii srok and the old women in Proshchanie s Materoi are.

> And quietly, without a single light or sound, abandoned

> by absolutely everyone, miserable Matyora lay alone, keeping watch with its last few houses. (F.181)

Matera may also be associated with the Russian word materik (mainland). This association draws a parallel between the island and the mainland. If the mainland is land surrounded on all sides by ocean, Matera can be seen as a miniature "materik". The Soviet critic, Iurii Seleznev, indeed, writes of Matera as a Biblical, apocalyptic image, as a metaphor for our entire planet.

> Rasputin in his short novel paints an "apocalyptical" picture of the "eve of the deluge".(...) it is no mere chance that the image of our planet - Earth, as a "little island" in the Great cosmic ocean enters the mind of contemporary man...[29]

Salynskii makes a similar comparison, saying that the flooding of Matera is likened to "the Deluge, the end of the world".[30] The island is certainly described as self-sufficient and gives the impression of a microcosm of Russia or even of the planet itself. Like a continent, it is described as having "enough of everything, standing alone away from the mainland". When Dar'ia looks out over the island from a knoll at one end, the "island's lands stretched almost to the horizon".

Another interesting comparison is implied in the following excerpt:

> from edge to edge, from shore to shore, there was enough space, and wealth, and beauty, and wildlife, and animals in pairs...(F.37)

Here the island resembles Noah's ark which must survive the Flood. According to J.C. Cooper, the ark symbolizes the following:

> the feminine principle; bearer of life; the womb; regeneration; the ship of destiny; a vehicle for carrying and transmitting the life principle; preservation. The ark on the waters is the earth swimming in the ocean of space.[31]

In Christian mythology, the ark stands for the salvation of Mankind. And in Egyptian mythology, the ark of Isis (the Mother Goddess) is the womb of the Mother, the life-bearer.

One of the beliefs held by the old women merits attention as well. They see Matera as a floating island which is anchored to the bottom of the Angara by the King Larch. Floating islands, according to the Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols,[32] represent celestial paradises or utopias. In most traditions, Paradise symbolizes primordial perfection, pristine innocence, perfect communion between Man, God, and

all living things. It also represents "the innermost soul, the abode of immortality".

Whether Matera is taken to represent Mother-Russia or Mother-Earth, or an ark, it is definitely a symbol of the Feminine Principle and represents a place where age-old spiritual values and traditions as well as the natural world in all its splendour have flourished and been preserved. And this symbol is destroyed in the name of progress and electricity. The flooding of Matera, the symbol of the planet, of Salvation, of the Womb, or of Paradise, can thus be interpreted as the destruction of the world, the end of all life, the loss of hope in salvation, the death of the soul, the loss of immortality, or Paradise Lost.

As previously mentionned, fire is a universal symbol of the Masculine Principle. It is used by the men who come to clear Matera for the oncoming flood. Called the "arsonists" by the old women of the village, these men burn down all buildings and vegetation on the island.

The old izbas (traditional peasant houses) are female symbols in these works. Providers of shelter and warmth, they symbolize the universal Mother. As ancestral homes, they represent stability and ancient values linked with the institution of the family. Rasputin seems to identify them with his old female protagonists. For example, Anna and her house in Poslednii srok are almost described as one. Reporting the children's thoughts concerning their mother and the house, the author writes:

> It was hard to believe that the house could outlive the old lady, and remain standing when she was gone. They seemed to have reached exactly the same old age, the utmost limit of life, and each clung on only thanks to the other. You had to tread carefully on the floor, so as not to hurt Mother, and everything you said to her was trapped and held in the walls, the corners, everywhere.(B. 193)

Personified as "patient and silent" old women, the houses in Proshchanie s Materoi know and accept their fate:

> The houses with cataract eyes stood silently... but when the Master (Khoziain) approached (one), it sighed its own long sigh, showing that it knew all, felt all, and was prepared for anything. There were young houses among them... but they too stood docilely in their rows, knowing their fate, taking another step toward it in the short summer night.(F. 54)

Dar'ia's house, as was already demonstrated, understands why she is

cleaning it and laying out fir branches.

Just as the old women of Matera press close to each other and provide mutual support in their final days, so do the houses:

> in the evening, it seemed that the houses moved closer together and swayed, humming in a single, interior voice. (F. 100)

The old izbas which are razed by fire one by one in Proshchanie s Materoi, arouse the reader's sympathy as innocent victims. For example, when Petrukha lights the first match to set fire to his mother's house, the latter:

> immediately discerned and sensed; it stretched taut and sank, creaking painfully. (F. 76)

Adding dramatic emphasis to the already foreboding atmosphere, the Khoziain runs over to the house, pressing himself close to show that he is there and will remain with the house to the very end. Petrukha, despite the fact that he was raised in this house, has no remorse at the sight of his home engulfed in flames. His act is presented as cold and calculated; he even has the presence of mind to time the burning to estimate how long it takes to reduce a good, strong izba to ashes. The fire itself is personified in a way which makes it look like a ruthless accomplice:

> the flame rested, catching its breath and belching, then redirected itself with new strength. (F. 74)

Another female symbol which is destroyed by Fire is the mill in Proshchanie s Materoi. The mill is a universal symbol of fertility. When Dar'ia and Katerina realize that their beloved mill is being set on fire, they run to be with it in its final hour. As Dar'ia says to Katerina:

> Let's go say good-bye to it. Otherwise it's all strangers there. Think how it is among strangers - no one will say a kind word...(F. 151)

Remembering how good it had been to them, she adds:

> Think how much bread it milled for us. Come on, at least we'll be there. Let it see us as it goes down. (F. 151)

They hide behind some bushes in such a way as to be seen only by the mill, and not by the strangers who are burning it. The scene that they witness very much resembles an orgiastic sacrifice held by a

Satanic coven. The victim burns alive "with a horrible howl that came from inside"(F.152) while the crazed people (newcomers to the island) squeal and dance around it. There is an aura of madness surrounding these people. Their faces seem "incorporeal" as they run into the heat, wrestling with each other, laughing and rolling on the ground. One man "made crazy by the fire" climbs a tree and sings at the top of his lungs while a little dog, "also mad", barks uncontrollably at him. The comparison becomes unmistakable when the author refers to them as "the people who were celebrating their satanic pleasures"(F.152).

In Zhivi i pomni, another mill narrowly escapes a similar fate. Andrei, visiting the empty Atamanovka mill, is warmed by happy memories which seem to comfort his soul. The mother-image is strongly implied in the following words which describe Andrei's memories of the mill:

> the millstones went round and round with a satisfied grumble, and the warm, milky flour spilled into the waiting sacks. (L. 131)

Suddenly, he is seized by a wild desire to burn it down. Again, there is a suggestion of evil in this scene:

> He knew what he was thinking, and knew that it was wrong..., but the devil's inducement was so strong... that no longer trusting himself, he got up and left in a hurry, leaving sin behind. (L. 131)

If the Feminine Principle represents all things spiritual and links Man to a mystical reality, to the world of spirits, then the cemetery in Proshchanie s Materoi where the ancestral spirits dwell must also be viewed as a symbol of the Feminine Principle. It provides the setting for a symbolic struggle between the two universal principles. The men who are assigned the job of clearing it for the flood represent the agents of Progress, the Masculine Principle. One is described as a "huge bearlike man"; the other is smaller and younger, but "not a good-looking man". They are joined by Vorontsov, the chairman of the village Soviet, and Comrade Zhuk from the Flood Zone Department. Vorontsov is aggressive and shouts at the old people, barrelling out his chest. He resembles a self-important rooster (another male symbol), described earlier in the story. Zhuk, the cold, official bureaucrat represents the power of reason and the materialistic interests of modern society which belong to the realm of the Masculine Principle. His name translates as "beetle". In Egyptian mythology, the beetle (or scarab), thought to be all males,

represented virility. It is also the symbol of the sun which in most traditions is male, the universal Father. The beetle is used at another point in the novel in a comparison with a motorboat, another male symbol in the sense that it represents speed, and is associated with the fast pace of modern life.

> a motorboat buzzed across the expanse of the Angara ... like a beetle. (F. 36)

The men, speaking in the name of Progress, try to destroy the cemetery. Two of them pull up all of the wooden crosses and headstones and prepare to burn them. The old women, upset and emotional over the defacement of a place which they hold as sacred, represent the soul of the people, the spiritual world. Rationally speaking, the men have a good argument. However, the old women, following their intuition, win a temporary victory; they prevent the Fire from being set. In the end, nevertheless, the cemetery, like everything else, does not escape the Fire. Thus, this sacred place where the villagers have always venerated their ancestor's spirits is eventually obliterated. Another link with the spiritual world is severed. It is interesting to note that the cross is a universal symbol from the most remote times denoting a world centre, "a point of communication between heaven and earth".[33]

All of the trees on Matera are also burned to the ground as part of the clean-up of the territory. Trees, particularly birch trees, are personified as females in Rasputin's works. Constance Ann Link, viewing them as old women, writes that:

> The birch tree is described on several occasions in anthropomorphic terms that remind us of Dar'ia: it is a feminine image of mortality and old age.[34]

Trees are universal symbols of the Feminine Principle, "the nourishing, sheltering, protecting, supporting aspect of the Great Mother".[35] It is thus not surprising that the old women of Matera are compared in the beginning of the story to old trees that are being transplanted.

Of the numerous tree images in Rasputin's works, the most prominent is a huge larch tree which the inhabitants of Matera call the King Larch (tsarskij listven'). It has a long and interesting history. Long ago, it was venerated by the people who would bring it offerings. Later, people

were hanged from it. It survived storms and winds. Superstitious beliefs surround it. For example, it is regarded as the island's anchor. The most intriguing aspect of this tree, however, is that the author deliberately states that it is a male figure, unlike the other trees:

> But no one, no matter how literate, ever used the feminine about the larch; no, it was a he, the tsar larch - it stood so eternal, powerful, and mighty on the hill a half verst from the village, visible from almost every point and known by everyone. (F. 182)

Whereas all the trees on the island are destroyed, the King Larch defies all efforts to bring it down. The "arsonists" try fire and kerosene, an axe, and a chain saw. One of them keeps repeating that "two times two equals four" and "five times five equals twenty-five" meaning that logically and rationally speaking, the tree must fall. However, nothing affects this supernatural tree. As one of the men resignedly remarks: "If it were only a tree...". Another compares the King Larch to Bogodul, saying "he's just as abnormal". This tree seems to represent a world axis, linking the three worlds, and its survival offers a glimmer of hope to an otherwise extremely pessimistic novel.

Next to the King Larch grows an old birch tree. When the "arsonists" fail to destroy the larch, they turn angrily on the birch "whose only fault was that it stood next to the mighty and powerful tsar larch that refused to submit to man"(F.188). John B. Dunlop, referring to this birch tree puts forth the idea that it may be intended to represent Russia. The image of the birch tree as a symbol of Mother-Russia is not a novelty in Russian literature. Such images abound, particularly in poetry. If the birch tree represents Russia, then it may be of significance that Rasputin's young birch trees are sad, as the following excerpt reveals:

> Three young birch trees played sadly close by, as if telling fortunes in the fallen leaves.[36]

The Angara is probably the most prominent female nature symbol in all of Rasputin's works. In one story, the comparison is clear when it is described as "ripening like a woman, playfully". It possesses motherly attributes, reminding one of the folkloric notion of Mat'-reka (Mother-river). In Proshchanie s Materoi, the Angara will eventually flood the island, causing its complete annihilation. In spite of this, it is never viewed as a hostile force by the inhabitants of Matera. On

the contrary, for centuries it has provided the island with motherly protection. The people associate it with happy childhood memories.

According to J. C. Cooper, water is the symbol of the source of life:

> All waters are symbolic of the Great Mother and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the universal womb, the prima materia, the waters of fertility and refreshment and the fountain of life.[37]

As a universal poetic symbol, it suggests fecundity, timelessness, continual change and purity leading to spirituality. In the same way that Rasputin's heroines are close to the spiritual world, so does the Angara serve as a link to this other world. For example, the sound of its flowing water links the Khoziain, a spirit that dwells on the island, to eternity:

> It carried him up to eternity, to the order of the universe. (F. 55)

The Angara also seems to provide the entrance to the other world for Nastena. As she leans overboard, the splashes of the water sound like "dozens, hundreds, thousands of bells (ringing) in them". These bells remind one of the bells Anna hears as she crosses over to the other world in a vision. Staring into the depths, Nastena sees a a match flare up at the very bottom. Just then, she lets herself fall in. The sounds of the Angara for Nastena are clear, gentle, and encouraging, and they draw her away from her torment and into the other world.

Another example of flowing water linking man with the spiritual world is the spring in Chto peredat' vorone ?. Near the end of the story, it carries the "incoherent, wordless voices of (the narrator's) dead friends, desperately struggling to tell (him) something...",[38] as he sits by it on a log.

Like the cemetery, the Angara represents another link to the other world, a link which will also be severed when the dam is completed. It seems that it is the flowing of the river which is important in Rasputin's works. The Khoziain who has the power to foresee the future, knows that, when the Angara at this level becomes a reservoir and the water no longer flows as a river, the sound will break off, and "only the wind (will) howl over the silenced water".

In a similar vein, Dar'ia, who has always felt that the Angara

flows as time flows, believes that time will end once the Angara stops flowing. Indeed, if one believes that the Angara is the link with eternity, then when it no longer flows, this link will be severed. Eternity will no longer be within the grasp of Man.

Animals are often depicted as female in Rasputin's works and have a symbolic meaning. The crow in Chto peredat' vorone? is a mother. Like the Angara, she also provides a link to the other world. The narrator of the story shares his thoughts with the reader:

> I don't know and won't be able to explain why, but for a long time I've had an inner conviction that if there is a link between this world and the not-this, then it's she, the crow, that flies between them.[39]

One could compare the crow to Rasputin's old women; they are all ordinary, simple earthly beings, however, they all share in that they seem to link this world with the spiritual world.

> Our crow was of course a perfectly ordinary earthly bird with no sort of commerce with the world beyond; she was good-natured and talkative with an instinct for what we call clairvoyance.[40]

This link is not destroyed in the story. However, in Rasputin's view, it appears that links such as these are being severed as Man kills the environment.

Andrei in Zhivi i pomni represents the Masculine Principle in its destructive and aggressive aspects. He kills animals for no reason other than to satisfy a strange sort of fascination. Unlike the Feminine Principle, the Masculine Principle, for Rasputin, is capable of deliberately inflicting pain. In universal symbolism, the Great Mother can be either beneficent and protective or malefic and destructive. She represents the total complexity of nature. However, Rasputin's notion of the Feminine Principle seems to ignore the destructive side.

The wild goat that Andrei kills in Zhivi i pomni is female. He originally kills her for the food. However, when he realizes that she is not dead, he chooses not to deal her the coup de grace to end her suffering. An innocent victim of his morbid curiosity, she is forced to die a slow and agonizing death while he watches her every convulsion. This is a symbolic torturing of the Feminine Principle, the goat being a food-producing animal.

A particularly heartrending episode is one where Andrei cruelly

slays a small calf in the presence of its mother. He finds the two strays wandering far from any village. Observing them for a while he becomes possessed with an evil thought. With a switch in his hand he leads them away towards the river. At first the cow obediently listens to him. She is described in a way that arouses the reader's pity.

> with her big watery eyes, so watery and innocent that tears came to Andrei's eyes. (L.154)

When she realizes that he is not taking her home, she struggles against him. They tire each other out until Andrei has the idea of tying his belt around the calf's neck to lead it away. As he leads the calf to the river, the cow, mooing, runs after them. At one point, he takes a rest and ties the calf to a tree. The scene of the mother comforting her young one is touching. She sniffs it, and licks it. The calf cuddles up to her, trembling in fear. It seems to sense that something is wrong. When they reach the river, Andrei is sure that the cow will stay behind out of fear of the ice. However, he is wrong. The cow does not even consider abandoning her calf. She slips, slides, and ends up crawling to the other side, but she succeeds. When they are far enough away from the village, Andrei kills the calf with the mother watching. When she cries out, he turns on her with the axe, but changes his mind, seeing that she is standing her ground. While he skins the calf and cuts off pieces to put in his sack, she never takes her eyes off of him. She makes him feel extremely uncomfortable, compelling him to hurriedly leave. The look in her eyes is described as "unbovine".

> Her head bent, she stared at him with the same intense immobility and he saw a threat in her eyes, an alien, unbovine threat, one that might come to pass. (L.156)

The cow in mythology symbolizes the Great Mother. It is universally known as a symbol of procreation and the maternal instinct. Specifically however, a cow with her calf is the universal symbol for a mother and child. Therefore, it is significant that Andrei chooses to harm a cow.

Indeed, he seems to be obsessed with the Mother figure. For example, the mare in foal that Andrei sees with his father on the day he sneaks into town to get a glimpse of his parents, has a profound effect on him. It is not clear whether it is a good effect or a negative one; nevertheless, it awakens a strong feeling in him. Similarly, Andrei finds himself drawn to a cave he stumbles across while hunting. Some

critics have likened the cave to the womb, another symbol of the Great Mother.

> It lured him with a special, mysterious, forbidden power, and beckoned him for a mystery which might open itself to him or which he could cover up there. (L.151)

Indeed, if the womb is symbolized by all that is enclosing, Andrei seems to be seeking the warmth and protective environment of the womb, as seen in the following excerpt:

> He was drawn in general lately to all secluded nooks, wherever he ran across them in the woods, even the smallest and most useless ones. He would stop in front of mouse holes and dig around them with a stick, trying to figure out a use for them, would go into small pits and lie in them to see if they would hide him; he couldn't tear himself away from the really deep pits, still filled with snow swimming in water, gazing at their beauty and measuring their depth; he peeked under the roots of upturned trees, hoping to find an empty bear lair; he liked to walk around ravines (...), to climb into a dense thicket - he loved to hide in woodlands and valleys, here and there, hoping to make himself invisible. (L.151)

In Proshchanie s Materoi, there is another symbolic scene involving cows. Dar'ia watches one day as the men drag the reluctant, obstinate cows and their calves onto a large, fenced-in raft, tie them to the crampons, and take them across to the mainland. These unhappy cows bring to mind the old women who refuse to leave Matera; it appears that the old women will put up a similar struggle.

The younger generation, influenced by new values imported from the cities, also represents the Masculine Principle. They are generally portrayed by Rasputin in a negative light. This has already been seen in the characters of Anna's children in Poslednii srok, in Katerina's son Petrukha in Proshchanie s Materoi, and in the vulgar bride in Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu. When thirty young men come to Matera to help in the wheat harvest, the locals live in fear because the men are usually drunk and start fights among themselves. A couple of young women, with the same group, also behave in a similar way, drinking and wrestling with the men. They are described as "saucy and loud, dressed in men's trousers". Dar'ia's grandson Andrei, though well-intentioned, is portrayed as having no feelings of attachment to his home (a negative trait according to Rasputin's moral framework). Dar'ia's daughter-in-law Sonia changes so much when she moved to the new settlement that Dar'ia

hardly recognizes her:

> she got fat and fleshy, cut her hair in the city style and curled it, which made her face look bigger and rounder, and her eyes were closed by fat and seemed squinty and small. She learned to be interested in diseases and spoke of them with great knowledge...(F. 173)

The female ethos with its emphasis on the family, the community and a closeness to Nature offers a sense of belonging, of continuity and of purpose. The male ethos, on the other hand, with its emphasis on progress and the future leads to feelings of loneliness, uncertainty and alienation. In other words, the female ethos leads to spiritual wholeness while the male, to spiritual bewilderment.

The train, a well-recognized symbol of progress in Soviet literature, is also used by Rasputin. In Kostrovye novykh gorodov, the railway is a positive symbol. Katerina Clark in her book, The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual,[41] shows how the train in early Soviet literature is a metaphor for Soviet society itself and the ideals of the Revolution. However, this symbol of progress, symbol of the Masculine Principle, becomes a negative symbol, a symbol of disruption and isolation, in Rasputin's writings. In some stories, it even leads man to his destruction. The train provides the setting for the short story, V obshchem vagone (In the Communal Car, 1967) which describes an overnight journey, focusing on a man in his thirties. The car is crowded and uncomfortable. On one side of the man is an older man drinking himself into oblivion. On the other is a sixteen-year-old girl. When everyone falls asleep, the young man and the girl end up leaning close to each other. She holds his arm and rests her head on his shoulder and he dreams happily, soothed by her regular breathing. In the morning, the girl, obviously embarrassed, refuses to speak to him. The dream-like world in which the man had found himself because of the physical proximity of the girl had reminded him of feelings he had experienced before. When, in the morning, he is faced with the coldness and loneliness of a reality where people fail to establish communication, a feeling of emptiness invades his soul.

In Den'gi dlia Marii, Kuz'ma's train ride to the city has a pessimistic quality to it. Although this trip represents his last hope to save Mariia, it takes him away from his roots and into a cold,

unfamiliar world, accompanied by fellow passengers who treat him with condescension.

In Zhivi i pomni, it is a train which takes Andrei away from the Front. It is almost as if the train makes the decision for him. He just sits there and lets himself be taken further and further away. In Vek zhivi - vek liubi, young Sania takes a train to the place where he discovers evil for the first time. Similarly, the narrative of Ne mogu-u, one of Rasputin's most pessimistic stories, takes place on a train. These last two stories will be discussed further in this chapter. The negative aura surrounding the train also brings to mind Matrena's compulsive fear of locomotives and her tragic death by one.

Children in Rasputin's works also represent the Feminine Principle. In Poslednii srok, the only genuine relationship Anna has with a member of her family is the one between her and her granddaughter Ninka. They show each other kindness and affection. Ninka's presence alleviates the pain Anna suffers in her final days. When Anna feels especially bad one day, and little Ninka comes up to her, she starts to feel better as she strokes the child's shoulders. The touch of the child's body warms her heart.

Anna is particularly grateful to see her granddaughter during the last few days of her life.

> so thankful was she that another of life's pleasures had not been taken away from her. (B.207)

It is no accident that Anna finds spiritual kinship with Ninka. Children in Rasputin's works, similarly to the old women, are shown to be more whole than middle-aged and young adults. They possess a natural goodness and unthinking wisdom. Simple and pure, they perceive life through their emotions. As Rasputin writes in Poslednii srok:

> It was true that only the very old and the very young were alert to the wonder of their existence, and sensitive to the things that surrounded them at every step. (B.347)

For Rasputin, the guileless behaviour of children raises them morally above adults whose duplicity and inauthenticity indicate ailing moral health. In Chto peredat' vorone? for example, the narrator observes that his daughter does not bother to hide, as we (adults) do, "those

pointless things you can't avoid saddling yourself with; life was easier that way."[42] Ninka is representative of children in that, unlike her aunts and uncles, she does not have the inhibitions concerning death that adults acquire with time. She speaks openly about Anna's forthcoming death, telling her grandmother that when she dies, she will always sleep in her bed. This thought warms Anna's heart and comforts her.

David Gillespie considers Rasputin's treatment of children to be neo-Romantic. He writes:

> The theme of childhood in Rasputin's works has developed from a neo-Romantic view of the child as the embodiment of innocence and spontaneity which is lost in the adult world of change and flux.[43]

In keeping with the Romantic view of children, Rasputin has the narrator in Chto peredat' vorone? say:

> like many people I am inclined to think that it's not we who play with children, amusing them as best we can; it's they, as purer and more rational beings, who are playing with us and trying to deaden within us the pain of existence.[44]

Instead of the child representing the young of the species, the as yet not fully developed human being, he is viewed as the embodiment of archetypal wholeness. As symbols of wholeness, instinctual powers and unthinking wisdom, hence of the Feminine Principle, children are caused suffering by the Masculine Principle in Rasputin's works. Many are victims of war: for example in Zhivi i pomni, Nadia's children, starving and fatherless, and Nastena's unborn child; the young boys in My s Dimkoi and Uroki frantsuzskogo whose fathers are fighting at the front; the young boy in Tam, na kraiu ovraga who is blown up by an unexploded mine after the war has ended; and many others. Children in Rasputin's writings are also victims of the negative changes brought on by material progress, including the loss of moral values in many adults and their consequent selfishness. Most of these children share ir that they are victims of circumstances over which they have no control. Sima's grandson, Kolia, in Proshchanie s Materoi, for example, is fearful and mute. Abandoned by his promiscuous mother, he ends up sharing the fate of the old women of Matera. Kuz'ma and Mariia's four children in Den'gi dlia Marii are faced with being deprived of a mother and having to endure the stigma of their mother's being branded a criminal. The

narrator's five-year-old daughter in Chto peredat' vorone?, who is visited only occasionally by her father, and fifteen-year-old Sania in Vek zhivi - vek liubi, who has his first experience with the premeditated malice and treachery of the adult world, are both victims who will be given more attention further on.

Io in Rudol'fio, a short story which was first published in the journal Angara in 1966, merits special attention. She is a sixteen-year-old girl who becomes naively infatuated with Rudol'f, a married man who is nearly twice her age. She is portrayed as an extremely bright and sensitive girl. For example, her comments after reading a book by Saint-Exupery reveal unusual insight for a girl of her age. She feels that Saint-Exupery is so wise that it is frightening. When Rudol'f asks her if she read about Bonnafous "who robbed the Arabs and they hated him and loved him at the same time", she replies that they loved and hated him at the same time because "without him the desert would have seemed common or garden; he made it dangerous and romantic".[45] In an effort to give expression to the special bond she feels that exists between her and Rudol'f, Io combines their two names into Rudol'fio and announces that they will both go by the same name. She is genuine in her affection towards him. He, on the other hand, regards her as little more than a casual if not annoying distraction. When one day, he finds himself becoming attracted to her physically, and she asks him to kiss her on the lips, he rejects her by saying that "You only kiss people on the lips if they're really close to you". The revelation that he does not share her feelings towards him destroys her. Io is deeply hurt and confused. She runs away from home for twenty-four hours. When she returns, she is no longer the same person. At the request of Io's mother who is concerned about her, Rudol'f visits Io to see how she is. Without looking at him, Io tells him that he is not Rudol'fio; he is nothing but a common Rudol'f. In other words, he is not the special person she thought he was. This reminds one of another comment Io made earlier in regards to Saint-Exupery's stories. Speaking of the Little Prince, she remarked:

> it's a good thing he kept on being the Little Prince. It would have been awful if he'd become really ordinary afterwards. We've got too many ordinary people as it is.[46]

When Rudol'f tries to continue the conversation, Io tells him to go to hell. After this incident, Io is obviously a changed person. She would never have told anyone to "go to hell" before. She is no longer energetic and optimistic. She is weary and disillusioned.

Gillespie calls this relationship the "clash of youthful idealism and adult pragmatism".[47] B. Iudalevich views it as the confrontation between "the rich inner world of an exceptional young nature" and "sobriety and harsh reality".[48]

The names chosen by the author for this story are significant. Rudol'f is a name which derives from the Germanic and means "famous wolf". Io is the name of the Virgin Goddess in Greek mythology (the equivalent of Isis in Egyptian mythology) which is represented by a cow. The pain Rudol'f causes Io brings to mind the pain Andrei (who is described as a wolf) causes the cow in Zhivi i pomni.

Rasputin's short stories of the 1980s are Vek zhivi - vek liubi, Natasha, Chto peredat' vorone ?, and Ne mogu-u.... In these stories, the old woman protagonist which readers had come to associate with Rasputin, completely disappears. Other than as stereotyped secondary characters such as the old women on the train in Ne mogu-u (one, a typical old granny who recommends chicken soup for the drunk; the other, a spiteful old woman who whines about men's drinking), actual women no longer have a significant role to play in Rasputin's works. The Feminine Principle is still present but it is no longer embodied in the old peasant women. It lives on in a more abstract way, in Nature and children, and in ethereal Natasha. Rasputin focuses directly on the mystical element in Man in these stories. The struggle between the Masculine and Feminine Principles is not given as much attention though its effects are implied, particularly in Chto peredat' vorone ? and Ne mogu-u.... The Soviet critic who wrote the afterword for Rasputin's latest collection of stories and author of numerous critical articles on Rasputin, I. Dedkov, feels that Rasputin has always been somewhat of a "mystical" writer in the sense that for him, life contains an element "that does not lend itself to concrete logical explanations".[49] Rasputin himself admits that "In Siberia it is easy to fall into a mystical mood."[50] For him, to spend a day at Lake Baikal, for example, means to communicate with one's ancestors, to stop and examine

oneself, after being lost in the rush of life, and to verge upon the solution to great and eternal questions.[51]

Like Io in Rudol'fio, fifteen-year-old Sania in Vek zhivi - vek liubi is changed by an encounter with a cruel adult. He takes a train with two men to a distant place in the taiga to pick blueberries. He knows one of the men, Mitiai, but the other, Uncle Volodia, is a new acquaintance. They pick berries all day and spend the night in a cabin in the taiga. The next day, Sania, feeling ecstatic about everything, continues picking the fat and juicy berries.

> From sheer happiness, Sanya sighed deeply; it was so marvellous, so radiant and peaceful within himself and the world around him, whose boundless, fierce plenty he had never until now suspected... This day was too great, too wilful and exalted to submit to any sort of mental abstraction of itself. It could only be savoured, wondered at, absorbed; the incoherent feelings it aroused only confirmed its own vast ineffability.[52]

Sania's state of mind amongst the mighty untouched treescapes reaches a mystical level. His communion with Nature leads him close to the answers to questions that normally are withheld from Man:

> As never before, he really had been close to that 'something', he really had felt the warmth and excitement inside him, sensed its breathing and trembled at its touch, had lain open in readiness and stayed stock-still in its auspicious presence.[53]

However, the answers are not revealed. Something prevents him from attaining this understanding.

When the three head back to the train that evening, exhausted and backs aching, Uncle Volodia finally announces to Sania that his berries are poisonous because he has been putting them in a galvanized bucket. He deliberately waited until the very end to tell the boy this. Sania is left bewildered by this man's unprovoked and cruel behaviour. That night, he has a strange dream in which he hears voices. They are all his own voice repeating things he might say when bewildered, alarmed or angry. The effect of his first encounter with the malice of the adult world is sensed in this dream:

> He recognized, too, things he might say in many years' time. And one voice enunciated filthy, crude words in a blase and confident tone that he had never possessed and never would. He woke in horror...[54]

The Feminine Principle is present on two different levels in the

story: first, as the trusting and innocent child who becomes the victim of adult treachery; and secondly, as Nature who leads the boy to a mystical reality.

Throughout Rasputin's literary development, his heroines can be viewed as symbols of the Great Mother as already pointed out. However, the comparison becomes most obvious in his 1982 story, Natasha. The definition of the Great Mother appears to have been written about Natasha. Natasha appears in the story as a nurse. Though she is of flesh and bone, there is something distinctive about her. Like old Anna, she seems to have special vision into another dimension:

> At times, she would stare thoughtfully through the window in the corridor, somewhere out above the street and the houses, and something she saw there was so pleasant that her face lit up, not with embarrassment but with the excitement of an emotion to which she alone had access.[55]

The patients and doctors also perceived her as someone different, "not wholly of this world":

> They looked on her, if you like, as someone not wholly of this world, as one of those people, without whose eccentricity, freakishness and artless eyes, we, the denizens of this world, would have long ago gone crazy in our mighty getting and spending, or wrung one another's neck if their mild incomprehension did not restrain us.[56]

The narrator, a patient on her ward waiting for an important operation, feels that he knows her from somewhere, but he cannot remember from where. The thought torments him until the day of his operation. While he is anaesthetized, he has something like a dream in which he recognizes Natasha.

In the dream, he is in a clearing near Lake Baikal waiting for something. Then Natasha comes to him, with a smile. She is wearing a simple little summer dress and is barefoot. Her hair falls loosely to her shoulders. She takes his hand and together they fly. Floating above the Angara and Lake Baikal, he can make out in the sky:

> shadowy pathways, sagging, melting paths leading in all directions.(...) they heave, almost as if breathing, and flicker here and there with a vague, intermittent glow.[57]

Guided by Natasha, the narrator nearly discovers the meaning of life:

> I see and hear everything and feel myself capable of

> attaining the great thing, that all-uniting, all-reconciling secret in which life is harmonized once and for all...[58]

However, in spite of his protests, she does not let him go all the way. As the ideal representation of the Feminine Principle, Natasha thus leads the narrator toward contact with another reality, a higher truth. Through her, he discovers the irrational, intangible element of man's soul that unites him with the natural world. As a Great Mother, she leads him "out beyond darkness and bondage" and through her, he is transformed "from the most elementary to the highest level". It is interesting to remember that Mother-Earth (or the Great Mother) is sometimes referred to as the Nurse.

The narrator's "dream" could be interpreted as a near-death experience. As he slowly wakes up, he sees Natasha at his bedside. There is definitely something unreal about her at that moment:

> In the dusk, her figure seemed to me taller and less substantial, as if she were floating in the air. [59]

And that is the last he sees of her. In the days that follow, he watches for her but she does not come to work anymore. When he finally asks someone what has become of her, he is told that she resigned and left town. The last sentence is: "It seemed she had not worked at the hospital very long". She is shrouded in mystery. Her arrival at the hospital and her departure coincide strangely with the duration of the narrator's illness.

In Chto peredat' vorone?, the narrator has a similar experience. This time, it is not a woman who leads him to a greater reality, but communion with Nature, the Feminine Principle in its purest form (as in Vek zhivi - vek liubi).

The story centers around two days in the life of the narrator, a writer who lives in the countryside near Lake Baikal. He has a five-year-old daughter who lives with her mother three hours away in the town. The reason the couple live apart is never specified in the story.

The narrator leaves his work behind and goes into town one day to do some errands, planning to visit his daughter afterwards. Hating to interrupt the flow of his thoughts for too long at a time, he promises himself to be back home by evening. His affairs take longer than

expected, so that little time is left for his daughter. When he finally sees her, she is obviously overjoyed at his visit. She has much to tell him and he realizes that she misses him dearly. They go for a walk along the river for an hour or so and discuss various things.

The reader learns that some time ago, the father and daughter created an imaginary link between themselves; the narrator told his daughter that the crow that lives near his house flies to town regularly and brings him news of her. The crow, as that which keeps them together, is dear to the girl and she sends good wishes to it through her father when he visits. She asks him how the crow is and he tells her what it told him...

During their walk, the narrator senses that his daughter missed him more than usual. She hardly lets go of his hand, which is unusual for her, for she regards herself as grown up and normally refuses to hold hands. When he tells her he has to leave, her hand trembles and she asks him to stay. Her request sounds like a desperate, but controlled plea:

> This was a prayer, uttered with restraint and dignity, but at the same time heartfelt, cautiously asserting legitimate claims upon me, neither knowing nor wishing to know the normal conventions in such matters.[60]

Nevertheless, inflexible in his self-imposed rules, the narrator insists he must leave. He admits to himself in the story that it would not have affected his work had he spent the night there and taken the first bus home in the morning. The little girl, hurt by her father's decision, withdraws into herself. As the narrator leaves, he asks her, as he always does, what shall he tell the crow. Breaking tradition, she replies: "Nothing". Her voice betrays a transformation within her:

> She spoke indifferently and rapidly in a voice she was too young to possess.[61]

This child, like Io and Sania, loses some of her innocence through her relationship with a selfish and insensitive adult.

Thus the narrator leaves. However, as if being punished by Fate, he encounters nothing but obstacles which hamper his efforts to get home and which prevent him from working on his manuscript once there. His bus is late, causing him to miss the ferry which takes him across Lake Baikal. He has to take a different, smaller boat with a drunken crew. They experience bad weather and rough waters on their crossing. By the

time he gets home, he is so tired that he collapses in his bed, forgetting to draw the curtains. The next morning, the sun torments him, not letting him sleep. After tossing and turning, he rises, but is in no state to work. Racked by guilt and self-loathing, he wanders around the house, then out along the shores of the lake. He climbs the hillside to a clearing. The light breeze, the smell of grass, the sight of the sky reflected in the lake, all this seems to cause him to undergo a mystical experience. Losing himself in a strange feeling, at first of confusion, then of release, he grows calmer and calmer as peace grows within him. He no longer feels himself, nor does he know or care where he is:

> I had become one with the unifying principle of the senses and remained within it. I saw neither heaven nor water nor earth; I was suspended in an empty light-bearing world. An unseen roadway hung there and led away into the horizontal distance; along this road, now quickly, now slowly, came voices.(...) There was something in me that did not meet with their approval, they were objecting to something.[62]

It is as though he is in contact with the world of the spirits. The disapproving voices are possibly those of his ancestors, if one takes into account similar encounters with ancestors in Rasputin's other works. When he "awakens" from this experience, he is a good distance from where he was before and it has become dark. He walks home and sits outside by a stream for a little while. Again, from the stream he hears voices desperately trying to tell him something. That night he dreams of the crow pecking at the shutters of his window as if trying to tell him something. He is awakened in the morning by the real cawing of the crow. He gets up and goes to the post office to phone his daughter. After some difficulty getting through, he finally learns that his daughter has been in bed with a high temperature since the previous day.

In Rasputin's works, the old women who represented the values of the past, the soul of their people, and who thus had an emotional capacity to perceive reality, have died or are dying. The mystical reality, which is the spiritual dimension and represents that which is eternal, can be reached only through the soul. Rasputin seems to be warning man that as he loses contact with his past, with Nature and thus with his soul, he will also lose contact with this other dimension. Man, for whom this link with the spiritual dimension is severed, cannot feel

whole. As Violetta Iverni states,

> Rasputin wants to demonstrate that the depth of human wisdom depends neither upon formal knowledge (which includes technological progress), nor upon the level of man's experience in matters of culture, philosophy and history. Rather, it lies in the capacity not to forget about the fourth dimension.[63]

The narrator of Chto peredat' vorone? is a perfect example of someone who suffers deeply from this loss of "wholeness" of being. He says:

> I don't know how it is with other people, but I don't have the feeling of being properly fused with myself. I don't have the normal sense that every last thing inside me coincides and fits together in all particulars to form a unified whole, with nothing loose or sticking out anywhere.[64]

He compares himself to a freak or a changeling. He has no sense of identity. During his mystical experience, he sees himself in two different places at once; then, the experience helps him to merge with himself.

> And so here, completely united with myself, I thought again of home.[65]

Rasputin seems to be telling us that only through our ties with the spiritual, the magical, the mystical, can we feel whole. If Man suppresses or destroys the Feminine Principle in himself and his surroundings, he becomes incomplete and experiences a void in his life. The Feminine Principle, representing wholeness of being, natural wisdom and spiritual purity, and embodied in old women, children and Nature, is needed to counterbalance the male-oriented, materialistic present.

Another example of a person who suffers from this loss of wholeness is the wretched and hopeless drunk in the short story Ne mogu-u.... The story focuses on this pathetic train passenger wallowing in misery and swimming in an alcoholic stupor, and the reactions of the other passengers to him. He is described as a man of good peasant stock with a truly Russian face. The narrator contends that he is of the lineage of those who fought bravely in Russia's wars. Blond and blue-eyed, his round face and turned up nose enhance his already guileless and sincere appearance.

The man keeps crying "I can't stand it" (Ne mogu), and the reactions he inspires among the other passengers are varied. The

narrator and two other men try to find out what is wrong with him so as to help, while others react either with disapproval, disgust, mild curiosity or indifference. The one who reacts the strongest to him is a middle-aged man dressed in a track-suit; he wants him thrown off the train. The "track-suit" (triko), as he is referred to, represents the educated and pompous city type. He has an aristocratic face, a balding head and a neat little belly. Right from the beginning of the story, he is described in a negative light. For example, he is the type of person who looks suspiciously at people who are cheerful. When one man states that the drunk will die if not given a little more alcohol and asks the others if they want to be responsible for his death, the "track-suit" replies that this is all the more reason to throw him off the train. He is simply unable to feel compassion for the miserable man.

Throughout the narrative, the reader is able to piece together some of the drunk's thoughts through fragments offered in his more lucid moments. For instance, it is learned that he was a hard worker, that his father fought in the war, that he is married but that he was thrown out of the house by his wife, that since then she has also been drinking, and that they have a son. The most significant fact disclosed, however, is the man's feelings towards people like the "track-suit". It is not explained why but it appears that these self-important characters provoke feelings of bitter rage in this unhappy man. He calls them "empty truck" (porozhniak). While people like himself and his father work hard and honestly, "empty trucks" rattle away. He seems to blame this type of person, these pontificators who accomplish nothing, for the state his country is in. He says:

> I can see - it's him. It's him, him ! I'm a hobo, I'm nobody, rubbish, but I did ten years' honest work. My father was in the war. That one... he's done a lifetime of honest rattle. It's him, him ! [66]

His despair is total and clearly irreversible. Indeed, he affirms that his son will also be a drunk. His torment is heart-rending. He is contradicted by one of the men who tells him that he should not speak in such a way about his son, for it is the children who "have to straighten out our line" and "Somebody's got to clean up the mess after you, after us!". However, despite the hope this other man pins on the next generation, the tone of the story is extremely pessimistic. The

inclusive "our" and "us" in the two above-quoted remarks confirm the impression one gets in the story that this man's despair and raging suffering are not due to something personal to him, that they are testimony to what is happening to contemporary man. In the penultimate paragraph, the reader, through the eyes of the narrator, looks out at Mother-Russia (Matushka-Rossiia) through the window of the train, beyond the endless play of wires. In the final paragraph, we are looking in through the same window at the frightful, anguished, tear-streamed face which is looking out in our direction:

> As we passed by outside our carriage, we glimpsed at the window a frightful face, smeared by the glass, turned in our direction; tears were streaming down it and the lips were moving. It wasn't difficult to guess what those lips were saying in a tortured groan dragged from deep inside:
> 'I can't st-a-and it!' [67]

Extrapolating, one could conclude that this expression on the man's face is the result of his looking out onto his homeland. Whether this was intended by Rasputin or not, the scene is quite alarming and can even provoke a shudder.

Rasputin's most recent short novel, Pozhar, continues in a pessimistic tone. It is written almost as a sequel to Proshchanie s Materoi. The story takes place in Sosnovka, an urban-type settlement like the one where the people of Matera were relocated. The commonality between the two stories becomes quite obvious when one discovers that Egorovka, the village from which the central character of Pozhar has moved, had the same fate as Matera; it was also flooded as part of a hydroelectric project. In Pozhar, Rasputin shows what happens to people who have lost their sense of home. The settlement which gathers people from six different villages has existed now for twenty years. However, it is described as "naked", "repulsive and nondescript". The inhabitants who, back in their respective villages, could not have imagined life without some greenery under their windows, do not keep gardens or plant trees. Whereas in their old villages, they rarely locked doors, here they are afraid to leave their houses unlocked even for a short while. They are shown to have lost their sense of belonging and of community, the collective spirit which used to bind them together in the past. Rasputin seems to attribute this change in attitude to the fact that these people have no roots, no ties to this land. They no longer own

their houses. Furthermore, instead of farming the land, helping it produce abundant harvests, the occupations of the people of Sosnovka are related to the timber industry which decimates the forests of the taiga. These inhabitants look upon Sosnovka more as a temporary shelter than as a home. As the Soviet critic, F. Chapchakhov, states:

> In the twenty years of existence of the timber settlement Sosnovka, ... many of its inhabitants have lost a feeling of home. The uninviting and dirty appearance of this "bivouac-type" settlement, of this "temporary shelter", bears witness to this.[68]

The central character is Ivan Petrovich, an outspoken, socially aware and morally upstanding citizen. His wife, Alena, has an important role in the story. She is of the same stock as Vasilisa, Anna, Dar'ia and Nastena. She represents the last of her kind. Her relationship with her husband is one of mutual understanding and complete devotion to each other. Chol-Kun Kwon states that they are "the simplest but most idealistic couple in all of Rasputin's works".[69] The caring and affection witnessed in their household serves to set off the cold indifference and selfish greed of the outside world. When a huge warehouse fire breaks out, the inhabitants are put to a moral test. They must work together to bring the blaze under control and save the stock. The result is total chaos. Many react with apathy and indifference, getting drunk, while others pillage the warehouses. Fights break out, savage beatings are inflicted upon those who interfere in the pillaging, and in the end the settlement is left with two dead bodies.

The scene could be likened to the Conflagration, the end of the world. Indeed, in some parts of the world, it is believed that a great conflagration rather than a flood will destroy life on earth. If fire is taken as the symbol of the Masculine Principle, then the latter can be viewed as the agent of destruction of this world. In Sosnovka, as well as in many other parts of the world, the values of the past and the concern for spiritual matters have been forgotten in the name of material progress and the scientific and technological revolution. As Ivan Petrovich, losing his temper, yells at his supervisor:

> It would be better if we introduced a different plan - one measured not just in cubic meters, but in souls.[70]

Rasputin seems to be trying to show where Man's actions are leading

him. Now that Man has turned his back on his past and his traditions, which were represented by the old women in Rasputin's novels, he is directing his abuse at Mother-Nature, the last medium through which one can feel closer to the spiritual world. Rasputin believes that it is his duty as a writer to make Man stop and think. As he says:

> In the present accelerated pace of life, there remain, perhaps, two forces which are capable of countervailing this tempo, and compelling man to think - they are nature and literature.[71]

In the constant rushing around of modern Man, he tends to lose touch with his humanity. He loses sight of the real values, remembering them only when faced with death. Rasputin believes that literature as well as Nature can revive long-forgotten emotions and feelings in Man. As he once said in an interview, one of the problems created by the scientific and technological revolution is a lack of feelings:

> Feelings are what we now seem to be missing.[72]

Rasputin has conveyed in many of his stories his feeling that the utilitarian, scientific attitude to the world is destroying the spiritual side of man. Science tries to unravel and explain everything in life. In Rasputin's opinion, there are things that Man should leave alone and not try to take apart and understand. In "Natasha", the narrator states in the beginning of the story that:

> Everything can't be unravelled and one shouldn't try: what is resolved soon becomes unwanted and dies; having, in this fashion, destroyed a good deal of what was truly remarkable in our world with no corresponding gain or enrichment, we reach out once more for premonitions and such-like things with a child-like directness and insouciance.[73]

A similar point is made by the narrator in "Chto peredat' vorone?":

> After immense struggle, we can only stand helplessly before the inexplicable nature of our concepts and the inaccessibility of the limits which hem them in, for it is forbidden to transgress these and send back even the weakest and most random voice. We are to know our place.[74]

Also, in the same story, when the narrator asks himself questions about the secret of the world, he reiterates the same thoughts:

> Of course, these questions were pointless. Not only were there no answers, the questions themselves were inappropriate. For questions too have boundaries not to be crossed.[75]

The secret of genuine art, in Rasputin's view, is in seeing man not only as a physically active force, but as a source of immense spiritual reserves, and in seeing Nature not only as a base for the economic activities of man, but above all as a miraculous and lofty organization. In other words, he does not like to see Man and Nature reduced to physical objects, to simple matter. The old women of the villages seemed to him the obvious choice to represent the source of spiritual reserves for they carry on the traditions of the past, passing on the songs, memories and beliefs to their children. Most importantly, they have a sense of history and continuity. Unlike the younger generations, they know and care about who their ancestors were and what they believed in.

> Without the past, without continuing life-giving memory, we will very quickly drive ourselves mad, there is already no need to prove this. These people forget or do not suspect that life activity is useless, even harmful without spiritual orientation, without direction, without a historical awareness of one's place in the string of generations.[76]

Notes

[1] Valentin Rasputin, "Vasili and Vasilisa", You Live and Love, Translated by Alan Myers, (London: Granada Publishing, 1985), p. 160.

[2] Valentin Rasputin, "Borrowed Time", Money for Maria and Borrowed Time, Two Village Tales, Translated by K. Windle and M. Wettlin (London: Quartet Books, 1981), p.291. All future references to Poslednii srok are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'B' and the page number.

[3] Valentin Rasputin, Live and Remember, Translated by Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1979), p.42. All future references to Zhivi i pomni are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'L' and the page number.

[4] Xenia Gasiorowska, "Solzhenitsyn's Women", Alexander Solzhenitsyn - Critical Essays and Documentary Materials, ed. by J.B. Dunlop, (Nordland: R. Haugh and A. Klimoff, 1973), p.121.

[5] Ibid. p. 122.

[6] Vladimir Bondarenko, "Na pepelishche", Literaturnaia gazeta, no. 48 (25 November, 1987), p. 3

[7] Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, ed., Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1982).

[8] Susan Allott, "Soviet Rural Women: Employment and Family Life" in Soviet Sisterhood, B. Holland, ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 177-203.

[9] Ibid., p. 196.

[10] Valentin Rasputin, "Natasha", You Live and Love, op. cit., p. 120.

[11] In chapter 3 of his monograph entitled Valentin Rasputin (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1978), Vladimir Shaposhnikov analyzes the novel Poslednii srok. Calling Rasputin a writer-psychologist who has beautifully mastered the traditions of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov, he does not share other critics opinions concerning Anna's children. Whereas most critics see only their negative sides, he sees them as portrayed with sensitive and probing insight. According to him, they suffer more than anyone else because of their faults.

[12] A.F. Lapchenko, "Problemy sem'i i semeinoi morali v sovetskoi literature semidesiatykh godov", Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta, 1979, no. 20, p.37.

[13] David Gillespie, "Women from Town and Village in Recent Soviet Russian Prose", Journal of Russian Studies, no 48 (1984),p. 38.

[14] Valentin Rasputin, "Prezhde vsego vospitanie chuvstv", Literaturnaia gazeta, No. 13, (March 26, 1980), p. 4.

[15] See Gerald E. Mikkelson, "Religious Symbolism in Valentin Rasputin's Tale Live and Remember" in Studies in Honor of Xenia Gasiorowska, Lauren G. Leighton, ed., Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1982, pp. 172-87.

Chol-Kun Kwon, Siberian Mythology, Folklore, and Tradition in Valentin Rasputin's Novellas, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1986.

Constance Ann Link, Symbolism of the Sacred: the Novels of Valentin

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[16] V. Oskotskii, "Ne slishkom li dolgoe eto proshchanie ?". Voprosy literatury, no.2 (1977), p. 44.

[17] A. Ovcharenko, "Vernost' svoei probleme". Voprosy literatury, no.2 (1977), p. 69.

[18] Iurii Seleznev, "Zemlia ili territoriia ?". Voprosy literatury, no.2 (1977), p. 57.

[19] J. C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 108-109.

[20] S. T. Coleridge, The Statesman's Manual; Complete Works, ed. Shedd, (New York, 1853), Vol. 1, p. 438.

[21] Valentin Rasputin, Farewell to Matyora, Translated by Antonina Bouis (N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1979), p. 34. All future references to Proshchanie s Materoi are taken from this translation and will hereafter be referred to simply by the letter 'F' and the page number.

[22] N.D. Khmeliuk, "Kharaktery i obstoiatel'stva v povestiakh V. Rasputina". Voprosy russkoi literatury, no.36 (1980), p.71.

[23] David Gillespie, op. cit., p. 40.

[24] Valentin Rasputin, "Eto stanovitsia traditsiei", Interview at MGU, Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriia filologiia, no. 3, 1977, p.80.

[25] Iu. Seleznev, Sozidaiushchaia pamiat' (Moscow: Pravda, 1978), p. 45.

[26] Irina Corten, "Solzhenitsyn's Matrena and Rasputin's Dar'ja: Two Studies in Russian Peasant Spirituality", Russian Language Journal, Michigan, (1979), No. 114, p. 95.

[27] John B. Dunlop, "Valentin Rasputin's Proshchanie s Materoi", Russian Literature and Criticism, Selected Papers from the Second World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies.(Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1982), p.66.

[28] Valentin Rasputin, "Eto stanovitsia traditsiei", op. cit., p. 85.

[29] Iurii Seleznev, "Zemlia ili territoriia?", op. cit., p. 56.

[30] O. Salynskii, "Dom i dorogi", Voprosy literatury, no.2 (1977), p. 31.

[31] J.C. Cooper, op. cit., p. 14

[32] Gertrude Jobes, Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols (N.Y.: The Scarecrow Press, 1962).

[33] J.C. Cooper, op. cit., p.45.

[34] Constance Ann Link, op. cit., p. 149.

[35] J.C. Cooper, op. cit., p.176.

[36] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", You Live and Love, op. cit., p. 91.

[37] J. C. Cooper, op.cit., p. 188.

[38] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p. 92.

[39] Ibid., p. 75.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Katerina Clark, The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.94.

[42] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p.76.

[43] David Gillespie, "Childhood and the Adult World in the Writing of Valentin Rasputin", Modern Language Review, no.80 (April, 1985), p.394.

[44] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p. 75.

[45] Valentin Rasputin, "Rudol'fio", You Live and Love, op. cit., p. 103.

[46] Ibid., p. 102-103.

[47] David Gillespie, "Childhood and the Adult World in the Writing of Valentin Rasputin", op. cit., p. 389.

[48] B. Iudalevich, ""Dialektika dushi" v rannikh proizvedeniiakh Valentina Rasputina", in Ocherki literatury i kritiki Sibiri (XIX-XX vv.), edited by Iu. S. Postnov, (Novosibirsk, 1976), p.262.

[49] I. Dedkov, "Prodlennyi svet", Afterword to Vek zhivi - vek liubi, Povesti, rasskazy. (Moscow: Izvestiia, 1985), p. 538.

[50] V. Rasputin, "Vse moshchno i vol'no", Sovetskaia kul'tura, 7 June, 1983.

[51] Valentin Rasputin, "Veruiu, veruiu v Rodinu!", Interview, Literaturnoe obozrenie, no. 9 (1985), p.18.

[52] Valentin Rasputin, "You Live and Love", You Live and Love, op. cit., p. 32-33.

[53] Ibid., p. 34.

[54] Ibid., p. 39.

[55] Valentin Rasputin, "Natasha", op. cit., p. 122.

[56] Ibid., p. 121.

[57] Ibid., p. 127.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., p. 124.

[60] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p. 76.

[61] Ibid., p. 77.

[62] Ibid., p. 90.

[63] Violetta Iverni, "Smert'iu - o zhizni", Kontinent, no.15 (1978), Munich: Kontinent, p. 296.

[64] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p. 82.

[65] Ibid., p. 91.

[66] Valentin Rasputin, "I Can't Sta-and It...", You Live and Love, op. cit., p. 117.

[67] Ibid., p. 118.

[68] F. Charchakhov, "Dom ili pristanishche ? , Zametki o povesti Valentina Rasputina Pozhar", Literaturnaia gazeta, 7 August, 1985, p.4.

[69] Chol-Kun Kwon, op. cit., p. 172.

[70] Valentin Rasputin, "Pozhar", Nash sovremennik, no. 7 (1985), p. 17.

[71] Valentin Rasputin, "Eto stanovitsia traditsiei", op. cit., p.80

[72] Ibid.

[73] Valentin Rasputin, "Natasha", op. cit., p. 119.

[74] Valentin Rasputin, "What Shall I Tell the Crow ?", op. cit., p. 90.

[75] Ibid., p. 89.

[76] Valentin Rasputin, "Veruiu, veruiu v Rodinu !", op. cit., p. 15.

CONCLUSION

Rasputin's traditional, old-fashioned, peasant woman is representative of the new type of heroine that emerged, with the advent of "village prose", in response to the pressing need to deal with the moral and ethical issues inherent in the changes wrought by progress. This heroine, however, stands apart from the other heroines of "village prose". Not only is she psychologically more complex, she provides the key to understanding Rasputin's worldview.

Her spirituality and her value system represent precisely that which Rasputin fears is being lost in our increasingly materialistic world. Her capacity for compassion and mercy, her belief in fate and in life after death, her respect for her ancestors and tradition, her natural wisdom, her closeness to nature, her sense of responsibility for what happens around her, her acceptance of the fact that there are things in this world which cannot be explained, that Man is but a grain of sand in the Universe, these are all qualities which Rasputin fears are disappearing. Without them, Man will lose his wholeness of being, his sense of identity. He will forget his place in the world.

Although Rasputin's female protagonists are realistically portrayed, it becomes evident upon closer examination that they are part of a whole symbolic structure. They, together with Nature, children, old villages, ancient izbas and mills, symbolize the Feminine Principle struggling for survival in a world which is increasingly dominated by the Masculine Principle, a male-oriented, materialistic and utilitarian modern world.

Some critics have compared Rasputin's works to Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago; both show Russia in transition; both show that with revolution comes catastrophe. The difference is that Pasternak is referring to the October Revolution and Rasputin, to the scientific and technological revolution. It thus appears that Rasputin is concerned with more than just Russia's fate. The revolution he is dealing with is affecting the entire world. He has moved beyond the barriers of politics to voice his concern for the future of Mankind.

The symbolic struggle in Rasputin's works between the two principles of life -- the Feminine and the Masculine -- reflects the

more universal struggle between the soul and the power of reason, between the inner spiritual world of man and the more aggressive world of materialism and rational argument, which is occurring in most advanced industrialized societies today.

A definite progression can be observed in Rasputin's writings. In his earliest stories, the struggle between the two principles is merely hinted at; war as a masculine symbol is the main culprit, causing grief and hardship for the female characters. In the stories of the seventies, however, the symbolic struggle reaches its peak, as the Feminine Principle is repeatedly mistreated and abused. Finally, in the stories of the eighties, Nature stands as almost the sole remaining symbol of the Feminine Principle, of Man's soul. Except for children, the other feminine symbols have virtually disappeared. Yet, as seen in Pozhar, the struggle continues; Man, now devoid of spiritual values, is destroying the environment, Mother Nature.

If this world is to survive, both universal principles must co-exist in perfect balance. Man needs to temper his drive for material progress with his intuition. He must listen to his conscience. He must combine his rationalism and logic with his feelings and emotions. Rasputin has stated that he is not against progress. Nevertheless, he seems to feel that, in advanced industrialized societies, Man is living more and more according to material values. Rasputin is warning us that "not by bread alone" can Man live. Aside from material comforts and well-being, he needs spiritual nourishment. He thirsts for transcendence. Whether it be religion, superstitions, fairy-tales or myths, Man needs a 'mythology' in the sense of an integrated system of beliefs and values. All peoples everywhere have always had their 'mythologies' to explain such things as the Creation, the rising and setting of the sun, birth, death, the nature of dreams and memory, and so on.

Science can successfully explain many phenomena in this world, but it cannot answer all of Man's questions. Man needs to know why he lives, he needs to believe that there is more to life than mere earthly existence, he craves immortality in the sense of a belief in some sort of continuity after death. In fact, the efforts of science to clarify and explain everything in the world actually rob the world of its magic,

its mystery, and its immortality. As Mallarmé once stated: "to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create."

The Feminine Principle represents Rasputin's concept of the 'mythology', the spiritual that the world needs but is losing. He seems to feel that without a spiritual focus, Man will eventually destroy the planet.

The pessimism of Rasputin's works offers some indication of the degree of his apprehension regarding the future of the planet and of Mankind. As already stated, Rasputin believes that there are only two forces capable of compelling Man to stop and think -- literature and nature. As a writer, he has made a valiant effort in this direction. Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that his last work of fiction was published in 1985, as he has chosen to devote most of his time to the fight for environmental protection and the preservation of his cultural heritage.

Rasputin's writings can be interpreted as an apocalyptic warning; if Man does not safeguard the Feminine Principle -- his soul, his spiritual heritage, and the natural environment -- the necessary balance between the two universal yet opposing principles will be destroyed and, eventually, so will the world as we know it.

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