

RESEARCH PAPER

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THE TRADITIONALIST DISCOURSE OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE: FROM NEO-TRADITIONALISM TO “NEW REALISM”

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The article analyses modern traditionalism and its main directions (classical traditionalism, neo-traditionalism and new realism). This analysis encompasses the reasons for a returning interest to the realistic principles of writing, and the dialogues between traditionalism and the avant-garde and the cosmos and chaos as key to the development of culture as a whole. It highlights the ways in which current literary studies and criticism reflect the shift of the cultural paradigm and the transition from the poetics of postmodernism to the realistic principles of writing, while preserving elements of postmodern aesthetics. Particular attention is paid to the increasingly controversial direction of “new realism”, which is represented by two key areas: patriotic and naturalistic. The “new realism” authors actively form their own mythology, participating in politics, and trying to reconcile Soviet and anti-Soviet discourses. They search for “avant-gardism in conservatism”, where conservatism is a treasury of Russian classic images, and avant-gardism is the innovations that reflect the current public realia. The article provides a detailed analysis of the literary work of Siberian author Mikhail Tarkovsky. Tarkovsky’s work combines elements of the poetics of “classical traditionalism” and “new realism” to present an original geopolitical project and a cultural character capable of bringing the country to a new level of civilisation.

Keywords: contemporary Russian prose, postmodernism, “classical traditionalism”, neo-traditionalism, “new realism”, geopolitical project, Zakhar Prilepin, Roman Senchin, Mikhail Tarkovsky

BREAKING THE CULTURAL PARADIGM AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: TRADITIONALISM AND THE AVANT-GARDE

The culture at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is characterised by a change in aesthetic codes and paradigms. The postmodernist project, with its irony and deconstructionism, is replaced by a nostalgia for the genuine, an ideal, and an interest in realistic forms of writing. Contemporary Russian literature questions the status of traditionalism, of the evolutionary possibilities of tradition, and of the prospects for succession corresponding to aesthetics. Traditionalism and the avant-garde exist in the history of culture, following the principle of complementarity, as mimetic and heuristic types of creative work. The origins of traditionalism are based in mythology; it is anthropocentric and stable, focused on the canonised forms of culture and the assertion of eternal meanings. Conversely, the avant-garde fights with tradition as with an inert and undeveloped dogma (Bausinger 1992: 9–19). The struggle between cosmos and chaos is the eternal plot of art. Vladimir Paperny describes their confrontation in twentieth-century culture as a cyclic change of egalitarian-entropic and imperial culture (Paperny 1996), each with its own system of characteristics (Plekhanova 2014: 44–60). The beginning of the century is characterised by a revolutionary breakthrough towards a change in the world order, changes to the language, a search for new forms of art, and a disregard for the living individual. By the 1930s, this will become a longing for stability, the world-order pathos of art, the adoption of regulations and canons (socialist realism), the rehabilitation of misinterpreted family values, and an interest in corporeality and the “quiet joys” of existence (Goldstein 1997: 153–175).

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At the aesthetic level, traditionalism is understood as the “aesthetics of identity”, oriented towards the traditional and repetitive: to topos or “common places” and prefigured forms, which is the predominant canon here (Tamarchenko 2004: 118). As a principle of creativity, traditionalism is a set of value-based symbols and recognisable patterns of behaviour, as well as a defense of higher truths and their affirmation in the form of a linear narrative. However, mythological origins, religious revelations and metaphysical secrets are often hidden behind the realistic worldview. As a rule, the author’s position is distinguished by monologism, originating from the perception of a moral code that must be followed. The origins of modern literary traditionalism are usually traced through Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s epic tales and the early texts of Vasily Belov. These texts revived interest in

the narrative form that gave rise to “village prose”, which became popular during the “long 70s” (Kovtun 2016: 8).

Depending on the ideological environment, traditionalist authors are seen either as representatives of an obsolete stagnant morality, or defenders of the lost “way” of the people, advocating for a return to the origins of national culture, the world of nature and the precepts of their ancestors. In the late 1950s they represented a frontier style whose popularity grew proportionally to the disappointment in the utopian socialist realism project. “The long 70s” were a time of recognition. According to modern research, “The era of socio-political stagnation was, in this sense, an era of deep concern about origins” (Averyanov 2000, trans. ours). Valentin Rasputin is convinced that “village prose” as it is now

... could not but appear and say its word of sorrow in the 1970s. Perhaps, these were not writers who created this prose, but literature, as a living and sensitive process created the writers for this prose by its will ... capable of precisely finding nerve endings on that huge body that we call “the people” (Rasputin 2007: 481–482, trans. ours).

The values of “peasant” Russia had to be rediscovered by its own people, preserving the archetypes of peasant culture in novels and stories, and in the principles of aesthetics that determined the retrospective nature of their literary work. Western Russian studies are of the opinion that “village prose” protects the country’s cultural prestige. The basis of the “neo-pochvennichestvo” program (Kovtun 2017a: 22) is formed by a moral and religious search that is in discord with the idea of a speculative and techno-aesthetic future, cultivated by a part of the Russian avant-garde. This pathos fits the official rhetoric of the authorities, which rejected the strategy of modernisation and the building of communism, and in turn motivated the transition to conservatism in the “long 70s” (Razuvalova 2012: 178–204). The nature of this convergence is formal, limited by a situational interest in certain values (relating to people, tradition, national classics, and cultural origins), although there are noticeable differences in its interpretation and functional use. This was already apparent during the period of perestroika, and when the authorities changed their rhetoric and tactics once again, the representatives of traditionalism found themselves in stiff opposition to the liberal-cosmopolitan forces that have acted as the country’s “saviour” since the 1990s. Traditionalism was equated with conservatism, and was practically excluded from university programs and school textbooks (Razuvalova 2015: 419–427).

The traditionalists’ literary project aims to restore the unity of the nation, the integrity of national self-awareness, cultural memory, and the concepts of the Orthodox faith. Its supertask is to transform the peripheral into the central: to legitimise peasant culture as playing a determining role in the fate of Russia, and to preserve the memory of the “peasant civilisation”. The literary work and personal behaviour of the literary prophets model the transition to the world of tradition; texts by “village prose” authors are a hermeneutic experiment to actualise ancient meanings (hence the interest in the Russian Middle Ages and the Old Believers’ mythology) in a culture of the momentary. In this context, “neo-pochvennichestvo” literature defends the prophetic functions of the life-order. The traditionalist classics are labelled the prose of “social modeling” (Tatyana Rybal’chenko), and the literature of national identity (Irina Plekhanova), in a distinctive intonation. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn compares literature functionally to the church: “Such revelations, that rational thinking sometimes cannot develop, are sent us vaguely and shortly through art” (Solzhenitsyn 1991: 43, trans. ours). Viktor Astafyev (Astafyev 1997: 308), Valentin Rasputin and Mikhail Tarkovsky have the idea of the sacrilisation of literary work in common. The word of the literary prophets is monologic and didactic, correlating poorly with modernity, which has learned from postmodernism: it aims for dialogue and co-creation between the author and the reader, with the latter having unconditional priority.

“NEW REALISM” AS A FICTION PROJECT

By the early 2000s, authors with diverse views (Alexander Prokhanov and Valentin Rasputin, Mikhail Tarkovsky and Eduard Limonov) were appealing to traditional values. Representatives of neo-traditionalism (Boris Ekimov, Aleksey Varlamov, Vladimir Makanin to some extent, Eugene Vodolazkin and Alexander Chudakov [Bagration-Mukhraneli 2016: 299–317]) and those of “new realism” (including Sergei Shargunov, Alexander Karasyov, Arkady Babchenko, Herman Sadulayev, Zakhar Prilepin, Mikhail Elizarov, and Aleksandr Snegirev [Kovaleva 2010: 115–118]), which was formed by the authorities and “originated” in the Moscow suburb of Lipki, built up their ecumene from the semiotic arsenal of traditionalism, playing with the idea of succession. In response to these authors’ prose, Alisa Ganieva defines the phenomenon of “new realism” in general:

New realism is a literary movement that marks a crisis of a parodic attitude towards reality and combines the signs of postmodernism (“the world as chaos”, “crisis of authorities”, “emphasis on corporeality”), realism (typical character, typical circumstances) and romanticism (the discord of the ideal and reality, the opposition of “I” and society) with an orientation to an existential dead end, alienation, search, dissatisfaction and a tragic gesture. This is not so much a movement as a unity of writers’ individualities, a universal perception of the world reflected in literary works that are diverse in their literary and style decisions (Ganieva 2010: 140, trans. ours).

The term “new realism” provokes harsh and well-deserved criticism, but an equivalent replacement is yet to be found. Attempts to distinguish between “old” and “new” realism are usually reduced to aesthetics: “the method of one is vision, the method of the other one is insight. One is guided by visibility, the other one by essence” (Pustovaya 2012: 397). However, the principles of following fact and reality as they are advocated by “new realism”; they are evident in military texts by Alexander Karasev, Denis Gutsko and Zakhar Prilepin, as well as in the novels and stories of Roman Senchin. The statement “new realism” theorists make about the necessity of cultivating the present through the will of man is reminiscent of the doctrine of socialist realism; they demand to see modernity through the prism of a “bright future”. By the late twentieth century, nostalgia for an Empire that fell into oblivion, and the strong masculine principle occupies a significant place in the national culture, which corresponds to the pathos of “new realist” prose. Lev Danilkin directly correlates this mood with one that was developing at the time that the myth of peasant Russia was collapsing:

The virtually dissolved Empire became the same as the theme of the lost village thirty years ago. As the “village prose” authors were the products of the half-decay of one way of life, the generations that managed to catch the Empire became the products of another, more intense decay. In practice the “imperialists” inherited the theme, including if not style then intonation (Danilkin 2006: 296, trans. ours).

In this context, it is worth considering the protagonists’ statements about the creation of a “new country” through literature (Pustovaya 2012: 119). The success of the “new realists” is built on the youthful enthusiasm of the authors, their vital energy, the pathos of fighting with a disappearing postmodernism, the ability to address the mass readership’s tastes, to construct myths, movements and heroics, to anticipate the commercial effect of literary works, and to be able to orient themselves in an ideological

conjuncture (Kovtun 2016: 52–65). The “new prose” texts were sought out by people of different convictions and political affiliations. The authors’ poetics are linked to the development of the languages of violence, as demonstrated in Mark Lipovetsky’s analysis of Zakhar Prilepin’s novel *Sanka*, which compares the latter’s “lads” with characters in *The Young Guard*. Lipovetsky identifies their common craving for a heroic death, which is valuable in itself. Prilepin perceives violence “as the most powerful, painful and scary, but necessary manifestation of vitality” (Lipovetsky 2012). In doing so, he combines the role of the writer with that of an opinion maker who actively defends his convictions. As Sergei Shargunov, one of the movement’s leaders, states: “Ideally, a writer can rule a state. The writer has the main thing – the power of description” (Shargunov 2001: 180). “New realism” prose is meant to rely on a “human document”, to reconcile Soviet and anti-Soviet discourses, and to search for “avant-gardism in conservatism”, where conservatism is a treasury of images of Russian classics, and avant-gardism is innovations reflecting current public realia (Chernyak 2015: 85–93). According to Shargunov, if prepared in this way the “new Russian Renaissance” will provide leadership at “the forefront of the new process” for Russian literature.

“New realists” actively refer to the ideas of their traditionalist predecessors, using well-known themes, motifs and images in their own literary works (Ivanova 2016: 186–195). This is how parallels are drawn between *Farewell to Matyora* (1976) by Valentin Rasputin and *The Flood Zone* (2015) by Roman Senchin; “Ivan’s Daughter, Ivan’s Mother” (2003), Rasputin’s final story, and Senchin’s novel *The Eltyshevs* (2009); Solzhenitsyn’s labour camp texts and *Abode* (2014) by Prilepin; and the prose of Astafyev and Tarkovsky, and Belov and Shargunov. Senchin’s author’s statement in “*Stranger*” is illustrative in this respect:

It is quite possible to try to write such a piece, in its content it will be close to *Money for Maria* by Rasputin ... Yes, almost identical to it, but, of course, taking into account the present day. So ... And to show that after thirty years or more nothing has changed, but rather, it has become more terrible, more inhuman ... And it is good, good that it will be similar to the story by Rasputin, as remakes are in great fashion now, they attract more attention than an absolute, one hundred percent originality (Senchin 2004: 287–305, trans. ours).

Fears about “new realism” usually involve its internal contradictions: the writers’ desire to “please the audience” and, at the same time, to emerge as

prophets; and an orientation towards individualism and aggression, resulting in scenes of cruelty and explicit violence. Evgeny Ermolin condemns "new realism" for its monologic nature and provincialism, as "emphasizing the connection with the realistic tradition of the past"; it does not assist "the formation of the fundamental novelty of modern experience" (Ermolin 2015: 39). Natalia Tsvetova writes about the "de-eschatologization of the characters' consciousness", the destruction of the feeling of eternity, when the experience of the most important events of life and death is extremely formalised, as in Senchin's 2009 novel *Moscow Shadows*. Locked in "twin houses", the author's characters are pitiful, trivial, lonely, and crushed by a "longing for eternity" (Tsvetova 2011: 153). "New Realists" defend their right to write about reality, but they have remained captive to the momentary without attempting to penetrate the depths of the current processes of the present. The philological interpretations of traditionalism and, later, of neo-traditionalism, are stable. The term "traditionalist literature" first appears in the late 1980s, when it became evident

that traditionalism pushed the limits outlined by the old "village prose" and "quiet lyrics", as well as the current patriotic journalism. It represents an actual vector of ethnic self-awareness, an answer to globalisation and internal threats to the people and the state existence (Plekhanova 2012: 65, trans. ours).

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This literature is distinguished by its emphasis on the restoration of ties with the culture of the past, and the interpretation of its basic texts (folk tales, legends, spiritual verses and hagiography), whose ideas are comprehended in a different, modern context (Sokolova 2005). Summarising a variety of analytical material, it is possible to outline some of traditionalist literature's established research strategies. The direction created in reflections on the "long 70s" is seen in works by Vladimir Bondarenko, Vadim Kozhinov, Anatoly Lanshchikov and Yuriy Seleznev, who saw traditionalism as a triumph of "the common people", occurring at the intersection of a high noble and folk poetics tradition. Liberal analysts, however, talk tough about the deliberate vernacular style of traditionalism, its ideological dependence on the authorities, its conservatism, and its author's prophetic ambitions (Mikhail Berg, Dmitry Bykov, Denis Dragunsky). Ermolin states the general opinion definitively: modern "traditionalists" are characterised by a "secondariness and diminution to the great realistic tradition; there are no big ideas and philosophical understanding of life, they are replaced by a collapse of didactics" (Ermolin 2015: 39).

TRADITIONALISM AS THE FOCUS OF MODERN CRITICISM

By the 1970s, professional literary studies contrasted “village prose” authors with other movements of “confessional prose”. They did so on the basis of attention paid to Russian literature’s eternal themes (the fate of man on earth; “love for the graves of the fathers”; and catholicity), which enabled writing about continuity in culture, and emphasised the aesthetic rather than ideological context. The presence of an unhackneyed, genuine “Russianness” was felt both by readers and humanities specialists. After reading Belov’s “Habitual Thing”, historian Geoffrey Hosking wrote: “Belov turned out to be something new for me – the novel revealed non-Soviet Russian culture, generated not by the church or by highly educated anti-Marxist intellectuals, but by ordinary Russian people, peasants who have been silent for so long, or at least have not been heard” (Hosking 2012: 8). Interest in “village prose” authors allowed concentration on significant literary texts, and an escape from the cliché of orthodox Soviet literature. Other European authors (Gillespie 1997, Brudny 2000, Parthe 2004) attempted to separate ideology and poetics in the analysis of traditionalism. Without denying the harsh statements of traditionalist authors about the “Jewish question” and Eurocentrism in general, the researchers pay tribute to the literature’s aesthetic merits.

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The crisis in the 1990s, and disappointment in the globalisation project and postmodernism’s literary prospects gave rise to nostalgia for the values of the national. With it came a desire for stability, and for a strong character able to lead the way out of a historical dead-end, and prevent an ecological catastrophe. An appeal to traditionalism, with its focus on the “national world”, “the soul of Russia”, “the Russian character” and “the Russian myth” became inevitable in this situation, but the concept of its direction has different accents. The authors’ disappointment in history and the present, as well as their interest in metaphysics, actualises the research interest in “literary mythology”, and the mythologems and archetypes that unfold in traditionalist prose. In the 1990s, the methodology of the mythopoetic analysis of this literature became popular, allowing the demonstration of the reproducibility of tradition, and the richness of the literary nuances it embodied. “The mythopoetic manifests itself as the creative element of an entropic orientation, as a counterbalance to the threat of entropic immersion in wordlessness, dumbness and chaos” (Toporov 1995: 5).

By the 2000s, "ontologically oriented" literary studies fundamentally distanced themselves from ideological and sociological problematics. Instead they emphasised an interest in the "naked man", a man as a particle of natural existence, called to become not the master, but the "voice" of the surrounding world. This "ontological" approach gradually became contaminated by the analysis of religious orientations in the authors' texts; important observations were consequently made that influenced the historiosophy and aesthetics of the traditionalism of the Old Believers' ideology and mythology (Kovtun 2009).

For those who see themselves as successors of traditionalism in twenty-first-century culture, the following themes are of greatest interest: man and nature (Mikhail Tarkovsky, Roman Senchin); culture and civilization (Boris Ekimov, Vladimir Lichutin, Oleg Pavlov, Mikhail Tarkovsky, Roman Senchin); and memory and the search for faith (Eugene Vodolazkin, Aleksey Varlamov, Aleksey Ivanov). Such themes were crucial to "village prose", but are now discussed using current material. In this context, Prilepin, Senchin and Tarkovsky are iconic authors, whose texts are associated with certain movements within "new realism", such as naturalistic (Senchin) and patriotic (Prilepin, late Tarkovsky) (Timofeev 2017: 86). The inclusion of Tarkovsky's works (Bondarenko 2003) here is confirmed by the author's references to the "village prose" authors' experience. Prilepin (2008: 251) claims that "Mikhail Tarkovsky will be inscribed, separated by a comma, in the same line after Valentin Rasputin and Vasily Belov", due to his image of a brutal character endowed with a belief in the potential of a new Empire, to be created on the basis of the Neo-Eurasianism doctrine (Kovtun 2017: 33–44, trans. ours).

MIKHAIL TARKOVSKY'S PROSE IN TRADITIONALIST DISCOURSE

Tarkovsky's most recent geopolitical novel is *Toyota Cresta* (2016). It is saturated with Orthodox symbols, and Eurasian schemes about Russia's need to move eastwards, where it will bring the light of Christianity and be strengthened by its friendly ties with Japan, a country with a "communal" origin and respect for tradition and the earth. Its protagonist is driver Yevgeny, or "Zheka/Zhenya", who rides an iron "horse" – a white Toyota Cresta. This is an image reminiscent of Saint George the Victorious, and

by legendary river pirate Ermak. Yevgeny is endowed with a masculine charisma, and a will to bring his people prosperity, despite the unreasonable policies of the authorities, which hold European values. The essence of the image is obvious: Yevgeny is well-informed in the sphere of fiction, he visits conferences, is religious, sings in the choir and often gives his friends instructions and sermons. At the same time, his language is a mixture of advanced vocabulary and specific drivers' slang, as the author represents it, and as a result he is unmistakably recognised as an "insider": "Although only the devil knows the language they speak, they speak one language ..." Zhenya was silent for a while. "Only the devil knows what language, but the main thing is that it is their language ..." (Tarkovsky 2016: 231, trans. ours). The publication of this novel is evidence that Tarkovsky is closer to the patriots than to the authors who continue along the line of ontological prose, a group he belonged to at the beginning of his literary path.

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Tarkovsky's early texts declared a character fundamentally new to traditionalist literature: one whose path leads not from village to city, but from city to village. Both city and village are described without exaltation; the comfort of urban life does not cause a sense of guilt towards rural people (a trait particular to the Russian intelligentsia), and the village is neither utopianised nor mourned. The narrator seems to freeze at the crossroads, and the road becomes a steady topos: "as if for ages". It is in this chosen space that the establishment of a new cultural hero takes place. The prose of the writer in general is full of movement, and descriptions of roads. The author and his characters travel to the limits of Siberia, to the taiga, to the "clean land". According to Solzhenitsyn, this is dictated not by political escapism, but by an inner impulse, a desire to re-discover the principles of existence. In *Yenisei, Let Me Go* (2009), protagonist Prokopich concludes after coming to the city that the rationality and pragmatism of local life constantly "demanded support, but any of them compared to the Yenisei seemed artificial and needed constant strengthening. And compared to the rural life, the density of this life seemed excessive [...] This uncomfortable closeness suppressed some important parts of the soul, and something in it was dying, declining and fading away" (Tarkovsky 2014: 278, trans. ours). The resolution is given in the words of the character Old Believer, who returns to Siberia from prosperous Canada: "There is more God here" (Tarkovsky 2014: 279, trans. ours). The description of the banks of the Yenisei in the story "*Foundation*" describes the motif of the first creation: "The mammoth's pelvic bone that dried under a clay steep wet bank of the Yenisei River was like a rusty propeller from an antediluvian steamer",

(Tarkovsky 2014: 85, trans. ours) and the village itself resembles the *Ark*: "In spring for three or four days the village turned out to be absolutely vulnerable to nature, as if staying on the spot too long, it suddenly turned on its heel and went on its cruise" (Tarkovsky 2014: 86, trans. ours). However, the author's enthusiasm for the harsh region lacks a shade of "literariness"; his belonging to high culture allowed literary critics to compare Tarkovsky's texts with the philosophising "literature of nobility" (Remizova 2007: 142).

In the aspiration for truth and verity, which is peculiar for these characters, it is not the relatively simple plot that is important, but the intonation of the eyewitness, giving rise to trust. Thus, in the author's early prose a hidden character appears – a professional hunter, whose hunting trails lead into another space. An outsider cannot enter the exotic limits of the untouched taiga, hence the uniqueness of the characters' life experience, a fact that they do not think about during the usual course of their affairs. Spiritual discoveries take place at a time when the established order of existence is broken, and the inexplicable beauty of the surrounding world, which deprives one of peace, breaks through the routine of everyday life. After this moment, the character can no longer remain the same: the image is complemented by the features of a dreamer, a poet and an eccentric (in Vasily Shukshin's tradition), striving to share the "feast of the soul" with the others ("*Tanya*", "*Eternal*", "*Foundation*", "*Yenisei*", "*Let Me Go*", "*Frozen Time*"). For those who are bound to the land and the village, this same yearning for beauty and the genuine finds a way out in drunken courage, after which springs a love and pity for the whole world ("*A Spoonful of Soup*", "*Grandfather*"). The combination of contradictory impulses and spiritual aspirations, melancholy and the "feast of life" endow Tarkovsky's characters with ambiguity and elusiveness, despite the seeming simplicity and brevity of their lives. The author's restraint draws particular attention to those features and details of his descriptions that indicate a departure from the momentary and an acquisition of meaning. Thus, a spoonful of soup in the story of the same name manifests the reconciliation of the mother and her drunkard son, who recalls his childhood as a lost paradise.

The mobility of the hidden hunter characters, whose experience is of fundamental importance to the author, affects the literary model of the world. Sacralised by the works of the "village prose" authors, the peasant house-temple is marginalised, and moves to the periphery. The village is a transitional space in which expeditions to the taiga are prepared. The dual model of existence (village-city, good-evil, sacred-infernal) is replaced by a ternary one: city-village-taiga, where the taiga is often described in

pastoral tones and associated with the genuine and the secret (Stepanova 2017: 216–222). In the village, along with strong, everlasting homesteads, similar to Ivanych's possessions from the story "Construction of a Banya", or Sergeich from the story "*Foundation*", the characters settle down in temporary shelters: small banyas ("There lived a Guy near the mother's house in the timber banya, one of those that are built for washing, and then become a permanent home", trans. ours) boiler rooms ("Petrovich finally relaxed, he moved from the tractor to the school boiler room, put the emery wheel there and brought some tools. It was warm and calm in the boiler room, it was possible to do something for home", trans. ours), or half-ruined constructions with an earthen floor:

Stradivarii and Petya's "apartment" was a timber house with an earthen floor and a biting tobacco-alcohol smell. There were several iron bunks with padded jackets thrown on them with different shapes to their sleeves, as if they were discussing something with a passion, and a stool with a mug of water and a full can of cigarette ends. The apartment was locked with a piece of wood (Tarkovsky 2014: 101, trans. ours).

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In the literary work of Shukshin, banyas and boiler rooms are associated with the motifs of imprisonment and drunkenness, in addition to their basic functions; it is as though they have been "taken out" from within the boundaries of ordinary life, and are closer to the boundaries of otherness (Kulyapin 2016: 30).

The motif for the marginalisation and disappearance of the village under the pressure of civilisational transformations is outlined in the late literary works of "classical" traditionalism, in works by Vasily Shukshin ("*At Night in the Boiler Room*", "*Before the Cock Crows Thrice*", 1975), Valentin Rasputin ("*Farewell to Matyora*", *Ivan's Daughter*, *Ivan's Mother*) and Viktor Astafyev ("*The Last Bow*", 1968). The hidden characters here go to the city cellars that, according to Archpriest Avvakum, are better than churches ("*At Night in the Boiler Room*"); get lost in forests (*Ivan's Daughter*, *Ivan's Mother*); and push the limits of the present towards death (Rasputin's later stories) (Kovtun 2013: 77–87). In Tarkovsky's prose, the process of modern nomadism is not dramatised. Even if the author does not accept the present state of affairs, he is fully aware of the futility of confronting the logic of history and the changing of formations ("*Ice Flow*"). It is important for him to preserve the memory of the village people, and the old ties between them. This outlines the motif of shelter and preparing for a journey in a way that contextually refers to the ideology of the Old Believer sect of "runners", whose members

were forced to either hide from the authority of the antichrist state, or to shelter those who fled (Chistov 1967: 130). The master Sergeich abandons his work to help a person in need prepare for a journey: "To send a man on a journey was as important to him as to construct a banya, dig up potatoes or deliver firewood". The helpless passerby, thrown to this place by the wind and not knowing anyone in the village, was changed beyond recognition under Sergeich's guidance. He "seemed to be packed with Sergeich's care, as a parcel [...] And his further way was the same as what he got from them" (Tarkovsky 2014: 89–90, trans. ours). Fedor, for whom poor Ivan helped to build a house ("*Foundation*") helped prepare the tramp for his final path, as though sending him to the limits of death.

It is notable that Tarkovsky's contemporary Roman Senchin centralises the theme of resettlement, making it a sensitive political issue in *The Flood Zone* (Kovtun 2017: 81–87). Early in his writing, Tarkovsky still believes in the moral efforts of the characters, who are able to build homes in the old traditions of hospitality, kindness and remembrance in the new place (Valyanov 2017: 174–179). Thus, old aunt Nadia from the story "*Ice Flow*", who survived the war, the death of her daughter and the death of the village, arranged everything "in the same order" in her new house, and when people came to visit her, "there was a feeling that this was her old home, in that way she managed to transfer all the previous setting here" (Tarkovsky 2014: 26, trans. ours). Tarkovsky pays tribute to the theme of land flooding and forced resettlement in his most recent novel ("*Ice Flow*"), in which the chapter "Ready for Burning" is dedicated to Valentin Rasputin. It is indicative that in Rasputin and Senchin's texts, the destruction of villages before flooding is inflicted either by "rogues", or by outlanders alien to the Russian land and memory ("inhumans", in the words of old mother Darya). In Tarkovsky's novel, "some sort of scumbags from somewhere in Moscow, as they should be aliens and not know anybody" are sent for the same purpose (Tarkovsky 2016: 371, trans. ours). The confrontation between the centre and the periphery, the West and the East, reaches the height of its intensity. And if in the early prose the character goes to the taiga to avoid the contradictions of civilisation, he later tries to understand the essence of the conflict, to find a basis for dialogue in historical experience and the Orthodox faith, inheriting the mission of the philosophising wanderer whose home is the road.

The taiga space – which in the early texts unites the chosen ones and becomes the basis of male fraternity, resembling Plato's school (with all its pragmatics of the life skills received) – is partially duplicated in the final novel by the space of the road, within which genuine risk, courage and love

exist: "And, having saturated with the road, the guys no longer imagined themselves without it, and no dangers could stop them and only added persistence – so much did they want strength and male work" (Tarkovsky 2016: 371, trans. ours). The exclusivity of both the taiga and the road is determined primarily by the prospect of self-fulfillment and freedom. The character becomes the master of his own destiny: "if something happens here, it is only due to their own foolishness", he concludes in the story "Hunting" (Tarkovsky 2014: 67, trans. ours). Mikhail Tarkovsky's characters form a circle of chosen ones with a code of honour, and this circle is not easy to enter. In the story "Eternal", skillful hunter Mishka Shlyakhov asks an old hunter for forgiveness for an involuntary sin, to be given as a blessing. As a result, "not only this ill-fated mink, but all the sins of his life were given absolution from with a movement of uncle Tolya's hand" (Tarkovsky 2014: 16, trans. ours). The image of the forest as a symbol of the new mankind in modern Russian literature is stable, from Leonid Leonov's *The Russian Forest*, to Viktor Astafyev's *The Old Oak*, Vasily Shukshin's "Before the Cock Crows Thrice", and late texts by Valentin Rasputin.

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THE SYSTEM OF CHARACTERS: FROM CHARACTER-HUNTER TO TRICKSTER

The theme of the new Russia, which is cultivated by a character who is strong, loyal to the "bro" laws and able to take responsibility, is a leading one in "new realism" texts. This differs markedly from the ideology of classical "village prose" authors, who perceive Russia through the prism of the female, Holy Virgin principle (Kovtun 2015: 58–75). In images of hunters and, in later works, of delivery drivers, as archetypically masculine, Tarkovsky emphasises the heroic nature, the daring, and the reliability of the model of the national hero. The main virtues of a young man in Russian folk tales "were physical strength, power, endurance, firmness of character, determination, courage and enterprise" (Boguslavsky 1994: 104, trans. ours). Among other symbols, the invariable beard of the hunters references the history of the Kerzhak development of Siberia. The author testifies with irony that a shaggy beard "grows on all the Old Believers' faces with woeful privilege", and because of it "they are unmistakably recognized" (Tarkovsky 2016: 379, trans. ours). In the novel *Toyota Cresta* the motif of the *bogatyr* is key, shaping the story of three brothers: a driver, a "strong master",

and a city dweller, living in the capital. Each of them is tested by love (for woman and native land), by road, and by a battle with a foe. The return of the brothers to their small native land symbolises the gathering of Russia under the banner of a national state centered in Siberia, as Solzhenitsyn and Rasputin dreamed.

The marginalisation and flooding of peasant farms make the experience of living in taiga huts, which hunters perceive as real homes, particularly valuable (Mitrofanova 2009: 432–438). Life here has a particular atmosphere of sincerity, warmth, friendship and mutual assistance already lost in the city. When leaving, each hunter leaves food in his hut, in case an unexpected traveller turns up. Hunters have a solid technical arsenal: guns, walkie-talkies, and snowmobiles (known as “bros”) are permanent attributes in their lives, and exclude a tolerant attitude towards progress. A reliable, serviceable vehicle is a component of professional success, and sometimes saves lives:

At night the fed dogs laid in the dog houses, the boat darkened upside down near the fence, and damaged by the cedars the “snowmobile” with caterpillars to be worn on the ice, stood like a brother covered with a tarpaulin – everything it was not possible to live without was finally near the house (Tarkovsky 2014: 138, trans. ours).

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The idea of space forms the basis of the typology of Tarkovsky’s characters, who are engaged in the search for the “pure land”, and for shelter. Here it is possible to distinguish hidden “doer” characters, intended for the road/feat (professional hunters, delivery drivers); patriarchal characters (“golden masters”, in Ekimov’s words) embedded in space and bounded by the limits of their house/village (Petrovich in “*Construction of a Banya*”; Sergeich and Fedor in “*Foundation*”); and marginals, who include derelicts, alienated alcoholics (the “crowd” of Stradivarii), and wanderers who seek a better fate and the meaning of their own existence. The latter expand the space, but without a clear purpose they can be absorbed by it. The character of the intellectual is in a special position: he, as a rule, is endowed with autobiographical features and often acts as narrator, with the opportunity to evaluate events “from above”. Such a character can move freely, connecting the spaces of the taiga, village and civilisations, while being an “insider” in each of them.

Among the marginal characters, the derelicts are noteworthy. This is a relatively new type, outlined in Russian literature by Vladimir Makanin and Venedikt Yerofeyev. Tarkovsky describes it without deliberate condemnation or didactics, but rather with surprise and, sometimes, sympathy, when the

soul of a fallen person is resurrected, as happens with Vanka in "*Foundation*". The character's fate is formed as a "landmark set": prison, expedition, alcoholism, homelessness, "abyss". Sick, lost and reminiscent of a "wood goblin", Vanka is transformed by an unexpected gesture of compassion. Consequently, he refuses money for his work, and plans a journey. The aforementioned features acquire a different context – foolishness, which is associated with the Holy Unmercenaries, barefootedness, homelessness, and humility (Panchenko 2005: 26–42). Iconographic features appear in the image: thinness ("There was a strange combination of old attrition and boyish thinness", trans. ours) to the point of transparency ("there seemed to be an empty space between the shoulders and the bony pelvis", trans. ours), an elongated face ("the face was long", "the forehead very straight and high", trans. ours) and a look turned inward. The character's sudden decision to depart is described as enlightenment and preparation for death: after bathing Ivan leaves his old clothes (as if reborn), puts on clean clothes, "brightens from within", and takes on the appearance of a baby. In this freedom from the hustle and bustle of the world, characteristic of the marginal characters (the jester/derelict) of the post-modern era, Tatyana Goricheva sees the prospect of gaining the sacred (Goricheva 1990: 49–61).

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Alienated alcoholics, fallen people who have forgotten themselves, occupy a special place among the outcasts in Tarkovsky's texts. Their destinies are evidence of the destructive influence of civilisation on the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the North, thus, historical transformations receive an existential dimension:

During the winter five people perished from drinking, mostly frozen to death or from diseases, some had tuberculosis, others something else, but being smoothed by vodka, the end came under its cover, and death developed in the heat of alcohol, letting a person die without sobering up (Tarkovsky 2014: 250, trans. ours).

The most striking images of Ostyak Stradivarii and his contemporaries are found in certain details. The author shows the extraordinary nature of the character and, at the same time, the doomedness of his fate: "Stradivarii was respected for his eagerness, for the desperate bravery of the laborer", he was like a "small hawk" with eyes that "trembled with horror". Everything that the "crowd" earns is spent on luxuries and booze: "The crowd ran – small creatures, either dwarfs, or devils. They quarreled, showering each other with filthy language, cracked jokes immediately, laughed and, in a frightening passion, moved heaven and earth" (Tarkovsky 2014: 102–103,

trans. ours). In this way, the classic traditionalist theme of the death of a craftsman, a master turned into a jester and a fool is developed (Kovtun 2011: 132–154). The reader no longer worries about the derelicts and alcoholics as “fallen” people, when “because of a hangover the soul is taken away”, a person becomes “like a corpse, terrible”, but rather about the children “growing up among shouts and drinking” (Tarkovsky 2014: 253, trans. ours). The author’s attention to the images of Ostyak, who lost themselves in drink, comes from an understanding of the ancestral tragedy. The aboriginal population of the North has lost its sacral foundations of existence, language, faith and culture, to become “strangers” and jesters on their own land. The author warns: those Russians who accept European values easily, and follow a metropolitan, thoroughly false life, also run the risk of losing their way, their history and their language. Nowadays, the life of the northern peasant is perceived as purely exotic by Muscovites. It becomes a plot for a film, depicted as something strange; hence it forms the plot of the novel *Toyota Cresta*.

Images of women in Tarkovsky’s works are described more sparingly, often associated with urban culture and temptation. Often, female characters are not prepared to sacrifice their lifestyles and comforts for love (“*Nine Letters*”, “*The Wind*”, “*Shyshtyndyr*”, “*Yenisei, Let Me Go*”). In this respect, the author is close in poetics to Shukshin. Young women in Tarkovsky’s literary works usually have a mercantile spirit and a lack of spirituality. The only exception is images of mothers leading a peasant’s way of life, full of compassion, love and wisdom, which their children do not need any more (Kovtun 2012: 74–94). The image of Grandmother is central in Tarkovsky’s best stories: “*A Spoonful of Soup*” and “*Grandma’s Alcohol*”. It is no accident that the author writes the word with a capital letter. In the character’s creation are features of Astafyev’s famous grandmother from *The Last Bow* (1957–1991) and, contextually, Solzhenitsyn’s Matryona and the old woman Anna from Rasputin’s novel *The Last Term* (1970). The grandmother from Tarkovsky’s stories is constantly concerned about light-minded children, neighbours and the runaway cat. She combines features of the passion-bearer and the sinner, as she decides to trade moonshine – “the infernal potion” because of the “miserable poverty and negligence of loved ones” (trans. ours) that it causes. The themes of poverty and the death of the Russian province are pivotal for “new realism” authors.

The Grandmother image has some of the features of the Holy Virgin: humility (“Grandmother could neither ask, nor even demand”, trans. ours); and all-encompassing love for people (“She lived by her love, depended

332 on it in the most pitiful way and could do nothing", trans. ours); and a constant sense of guilt for their sins ("Grandmother always felt herself guilty towards the whole world", trans. ours). When she was young she worked in a bakery, and found in it "something of a celebration, of a miracle". Now her daughter – drunk, lost Galka – does this work. The latter leaves briefly to freshen the nip and returns to burnt loaves, "covered with an ugly black layer". Neglecting bread in peasant cultural traditions, as well as in Christian ones, denotes a deadly sin, renunciation of the soul and faith. After this incident, Grandmother lost her ability to walk, and goes into a steep decline. The whole village takes care of the dying woman, and villagers pay their last respects. This leads to an enlightenment among them, when they understand that "although it is not a burden, everybody needs to touch, receive communion and carry Grandmother's thin body" (Tarkovsky 2014: 268, trans. ours). The female character's autonomy, and her care and forgiveness, keep the world in its last throngs. This is similar to the life of Solzhenitsyn's Matryona, Abramov's Evdokia (the Great Martyr from his novel *The House*), and the old woman Anna from Rasputin's *The Last Term*. Tarkovsky's story ends with a symbolic scene: "a helicopter with flashing headlights", carrying the body of the deceased, disappears into a "white cloud". It manages to land on its third attempt, "as if the blackened and furious skies did not want to give Grandmother's body to the ground" (Tarkovsky 2014: 269, trans. ours). During the funeral people sit sternly and quietly, and at the wake afterwards even derelict Stradivarii ate like "a king of a holy manner". They "sat at the table not as people who had only vodka on their minds, but as men whose despondency had lost a discernible limit" (Tarkovsky 2014: 270, trans. ours) These details and the discreet manner of the description form the "inner plot", revealing the true meaning of what is happening:

Mikhail Tarkovsky's prose, according to the correct criticism, establishes a very important experiment for all modern culture – overcoming the general "civilizational fatigue" by intuitively moving towards the natural foundations of life (Remizova 2007: 147, trans. ours).

In the context of the typology of female characters, the final novel, in which the images of three young women are presented, acquires special significance: Mary (the soul), Anastasia (revival) and Irina, are each associated with a certain type of space, and symbolize the stage of the main character's inner formation. Yevgeny's beloved, who has the name of the Virgin Mary, is a classic Russian beauty who lives in the capital. She is well known, well

off and well connected in advertising and the fashion industry. Her image is that of a successful business woman. Her behaviour, manners and language are designed for a civilised existence: she can be sharp and demanding, and interacts easily with people. Meeting a sincere, passionate Siberian man changes her idea of the world, and of a woman's destiny, but she can't give up her lifestyle to go to the her beloved's homeland. He stays in the capital, but this leads to the alienation of the lovers: Yevgeny sees Masha as if in a mirror, not her true self, but rather a shadow: "... she exchanged glances with the mirror. ... Harsh, strange, full of electric intoxication, all in its agony" (Tarkovsky 2016: 89, trans. ours). Only within the Moscow temple, which resembles the temple in Yeniseisk, does the authentic Masha appear, her look resembling the image of the Virgin.

The story of the girl is an implementation of the mythologem archetypal to Russian traditionalism: the captivity of the soul of Russia by strangers, "filthy" people. It dates back to archpriest Avvakum's famous phrase: "Satan sought the light of Russia from God ...". In Tarkovsky's transcription, modern Moscovia (the Third Rome) is combined with abroad, where piety has fallen, life is formalised, and genuine spiritual landmarks are lost. Moscow is called "complacent and pro-European", turned from the Russian capital into the city of world philistinism and "bluffs that no one needs" (Tarkovsky 2016: 289, trans. ours). Masha's denial of her beloved and her return to her hateful but powerful husband is equal to falling/capturing. In accordance with Vladimir Toporov's concept, this is projected on the Babylonian fate of the city as a whole: "A cursed, damned, fallen and corrupted city, the city above the abyss and the city-abyss waiting for the visitation" (Toporov 1987: 122, trans. ours). Nastya, the image of a resident of ancient Yeniseisk, is a kind, modest and deeply religious girl, associated with characters of the patriarchal type:

Nastya lived openly and lonely ... inside she was like the spring, and the light haze of a desire to help flowed from there, the desire to be needed, and in the fog, it seemed to her that everything was like her, and there were no deeds of excess forces and desires. And there was so much light in this little woman that Zhenya trusted her and felt himself multifaceted and sinful in her close proximity (Tarkovsky 2016: 122, trans. ours).

It is important that the mission of postwoman Nastya, as well as that of Yevgeny is to connect people and spaces. Nastya is endowed with a higher power; she not only delivers letters, but writes instructions and sermons for her relatives. The description of her is reminiscent of that of Alena, the

female character in Valentin Rasputin's "*The Fire*" which conveys the model of the woman as keeper. The literary embodiment of Tarkovsky's female character, however, remains conditional and subordinate to the author's supertask. Nastya constantly turns to the protagonist with her instructional letters, one day urging him to return to his homeland, another to repent of his sins. Only at the end of the novel is her affair with a married man (Yevgeny's brother, whose family is destroyed) finally revealed.

Perhaps one of the most interesting images, although it is mentioned only occasionally, is the image of the "woman as hauler": the new Amazon Irina, whose space is the road. This character is mystified and mythologised, seen by almost nobody; this fuels male interest, becoming a ground for fantastic stories. The main character accidentally meets the beauty on the road, and is struck by her independence, fearlessness and professionalism. This is the only woman in the novel who is recognised as equal to men, sometimes even exceeding them in the independence of her positions. Functionally, Tarkovsky's Amazon is similar to the female *bogatyr*s in Rasputin's later works: strong, strong-willed, adaptable, free from male influence, and performing masculine functions to protect the ancestral land. In Tarkovsky's novel the images of metropolitan women – Masha and the models she works with – are ironically developed in the direction of Irina. While the "woman hauler" achieves the aforementioned characteristics easily and naturally, women from Moscow must rehearse them for a long time to convey the image of the new Amazon on the podium. The attitude of the author and the chosen characters to the models themselves ("In general, I'm a kind of ... ashamed ... of their faces ...", trans. ours) recalls Shukshin's style, whose characters, although they have fun, are too embarrassed to look at the half-naked girls walking around during a fashion show at a rural club. The villagers feel the impracticability of the situation, which has nothing to do with their life.

In general, Tarkovsky's prose solves several key issues of contemporary literature. It demonstrates the prospect of harmonising the national culture, within which it is still possible to find common paths for the fearless peasant hunters, village masters and intellectuals that the Russian world is based on. At the same time, the author is deprived of the socio-political ambitions of both classical "village prose" authors and "new realists", admitting that even the greatest literature is not capable of "stopping the destructive energy of a person". This, however, does not remove responsibility from the one who writes. According to Tarkovsky, the author must treat his lot with humility, "to be a chronicler, a mourner and a protector of his native

land” (Tarkovsky 2014a: 28, trans. ours). Author’s statements, including that of Solzhenitsyn, sometimes differ from their poetics (Kovtun 2012: 72–79). In Tarkovsky’s final novel, the calls for Siberia’s independence and the gathering of a new army under the banner of Neo-Eurasianism are obvious. It is of fundamental importance that everything the author writes about finds support in his personal destiny: from hunting to resettlement in a harsh land. Mikhail Tarkovsky’s prose is occupied with the legitimisation of such experience, as one way to survive in “loud civilization”.

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