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# **THE EVOLUTION OF IURII TRIFONOV AS A WRITER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE EVOLUTION OF IURII TRIFONOV AS A WRITER**

**Lisa Caroline Bage**

The thesis chronologically examines the works of Iurii Trifonov (1925-81) to show his evolution as a writer, from his first novel, the Socialist Realist *Studenty*, awarded a Stalin Prize in 1950, to his works of the 1970s and 1980s, in which he truthfully portrayed contemporary Soviet society and questioned the residual Communist ethic of the Brezhnev era. Trifonov occupied an interesting position in Russian literary history, somewhere between the 'official' Soviet writers and the dissidents, trying to publish honest works under strict censorship in the USSR. I shall examine how under different political climates his works were republished and their content changed, while the final chapter covers post-humous works published thanks to glasnost, which show what he was forced to omit during his own lifetime. As he changes with time as a person, so do his works.

The first chapter looks at Trifonov's family background and the death of his father during Stalin's purges. This was to have a great influence on Trifonov's life and works, in many of which he tried to understand his father's fate and that of his nation. Throughout his often heavily autobiographical works, Trifonov examines his country's past and present while trying to understand himself too. He showed the roots of the degeneration of his society both before and after the Russian Revolution, but also showed the beginnings of the current consumerism of post-communist Russia. Trifonov speaks for many of his fellow countrymen in his works and shows the totality of the Soviet experience over six decades, and beyond.

*In memory of my father*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten to fifteen years there has been much critical reappraisal of the works of Iurii Trifonov. This began with Tatiana Patera's *Obzor tvorchestva i analiz moskovskikh povestei Iurii Trifonova*<sup>1</sup> and Natalia Ivanova's *Proza Iurii Trifonova*<sup>2</sup> in 1984, both comprehensive studies of Trifonov's works, followed by a number of books published in the West in the early 1990's.<sup>3</sup> De Maegd-Soep concentrates more on Trifonov's personal life and similarities with Chekhov; Woll treats in depth the way in which Soviet censorship affected his work; Kolesnikoff gives another detailed overview, while Gillespie examines Trifonov's works through the concept of *slitnost'*. My treatment of Trifonov will be to examine his evolution as a writer, and as a person, throughout his life, and the influence of time and the evolution of contemporary Russia and the changing political system on his works. Time was a very important concept for Trifonov, and as he said «Писатель должен изменяться и развиваться вместе со временем.»<sup>4</sup>

Trifonov, like his father, was a quiet man and also very truthful. Finding the truth in the Soviet Union was complex and commitment to truth-telling was difficult for a Soviet writer, leading to much illness and stress for Trifonov. His friends, such as the Novokhatkos<sup>5</sup> and Okliankys<sup>6</sup>, recall him as having a great sense of humour and being a great storyteller despite his often morose exterior. He was always somewhat unsure of himself as a writer due to his experiences after the publication of *Studenty*. This apparently contradictory combination of traits is not surprising considering his background and the loss of his parents at a young age, with his mother writing from the camps to her children telling them

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<sup>1</sup> *Obzor tvorchestva i analiz moskovskikh povestei Iurii Trifonova*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> *Proza Iurii Trifonova*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1984.

<sup>3</sup> These include Carolina De Maegd-Soep, *Trifonova and the Drama of the Russian Intelligentsia*, Ghent: Ghent State University Russian Institute, 1990; Colin Partridge, *Yuri Trifonov's The Moscow Cycle: A Critical Study*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990; Josephine Woll, *Invented Truth: The Soviet Reality and the Literary Imagination of Iurii Trifonov*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991; Nina Kolesnikoff, *Yury Trifonov: A Critical Study*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1991 and David Gillespie, *Iurii Trifonov: unity through time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> "Nравственные идеалы я не изобразил, но имею." Iz pisem Iurii Trifonova', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27 March 1991, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Novokhatko, editor for Politizdat, for whom Trifonov wrote *Neterpenie*. He and his wife Galia were witnesses at Trifonov's marriage to his second wife, Alla Pastukhova.

<sup>6</sup> Iurii Okliansky also wrote a critical work on Trifonov, *Iurii Trifonov: Portret-vospominanie*, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1987

never to lose their sense of humour. The death of Valentin greatly affected his son, and he tried to come to terms with all he, and Russia, had been through, and the reasons for his parents' disappearance. As his father had been a leading Bolshevik, he tried to understand Bolshevism and the society Valentin had helped to create. He admired his father's and others' idealism and high principles, but abhorred the terror preached and practised by some revolutionaries and the moral consequences. He is quoted as saying, while abroad in 1977, 'I accept the February Revolution, but not the October Revolution'.<sup>7</sup> His own experiences and those of his family provide much of the subject matter for Trifonov's books; he puts a lot of his own character and experiences into his characters, and most of his works have an autobiographical element. As he changes with time, so do his works, from the enthusiasm of his first novel *Studenty* compared with the pessimism and reflections of death of his last works. In part, of course, the change of tone was dictated by censorship and self-censorship, and I have tried throughout to detail the alterations and omissions imposed by the author himself or by his editors to later editions of earlier published works. Nevertheless, I believe the step by step chronological analysis of Trifonov's development as a writer shows much more than a man adapting to the requirements of his time. It shows a painstaking and fundamentally honest process of self-discovery and of the reassessment of society in the light of historical enquiry. By reflecting his time, however, Trifonov's writing shows the totality of the Soviet experience for himself and the families of those who made the Russian Revolution over six decades.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in H. Ermolaev, 'The Theme of Terror in Starik' in Arnold McMillin (ed.), *Aspects of Modern Russian and Czech Literature: Selected Papers of the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1989, p. 105: "The author said this during a visit to Oberlin College in 1977 in the presence of Professor John B. Dunlop."

## CHAPTER 1

### CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

Iurii Valentinovich Trifonov was born on 28th of August, 1925 in Moscow, the son of an old Bolshevik Valentin Andreevich and Zhenia Lurié, who was from a revolutionary family. Her mother, Tatiana Slovatinskaia, was an old revolutionary, a party member from 1904, acquainted with Lenin, Stalin, and Kalinin, amongst others, and had at one time been a secretary in the Politburo.

Valentin Trifonov was of Don Cossack descent, born the son of a teacher in 1888 in the village of Verkhne-Kundriuchenskii, in the Novocherkassk region. When he was seven years old his parents died, and so he and his elder brother Evgenii moved to the town of Maikop. In 1904 they joined the Social Democratic Party in Rostov and took part in the 1905 Revolution. When arrested in 1906, the brothers swapped names as Evgenii was old enough to be executed for his part in the 1905 revolution. In this way his life was saved.<sup>1</sup> From this time on the brothers spent many years in camps or exile, although they escaped from time to time.<sup>2</sup> Trifonov himself says that his father said or wrote little about his time in the camps, and when he did it was only in a jokey manner.<sup>3</sup> Thus as a child, Trifonov viewed his father's time in the camps in a rather unserious and romantic light. It was not until years later that he appreciated what his father had endured for the cause, along with many other revolutionaries with the same high principles and dedication to create a new society.

In 1917, Valentin was in Petrograd when Nicholas II abdicated. He was secretary of the Bolshevik group in the Petrograd Soviet, and in August, both brothers helped to set up and command the Red Guard there (although of course after the Purges, official history denied their role and said it was formed at a later date). With the approach of the Civil War, Evgenii went south with Valentin, who helped to build the Red Army in the Ukraine and Donbass regions. He next went to fight the White Czechs in the Urals, and in 1920, travelled back to his home town of Rostov; then on to the Caucasus, where in February 1921 Georgia finally fell to Soviet power. During these years, Valentin was also a delegate to the ninth and tenth Party Conferences.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Otblesk kostra*, p. 15, Volume 4.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the lives of Valentin and Evgenii Trifonov see Trifonov's 'Otblesk kostra', *Znamia*, 1965, no. 2, pp. 142-60; no. 3, pp. 152-77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

In 1921, he was demobilised. From the following month to December 1923, he was head of the All-Russian Oil Syndicate. From 1924-26, he was in charge of the war department of the USSR High Court and a member of the Presidium of Gosplan. In 1925, the year Iurii was born, he was sent to China on a military mission. He produced a critical report on this, and thus, somewhat out of favour, was sent to work in Finland as a commercial representative for the Soviet embassy in Helsinki. The family lived there from 1926-1928, during which time Trifonov's sister Tania was born. Trifonov recalled this time in the story 'Seroe nebo, machty, i ryzhaia loshad' <sup>4</sup> when he returned to Finland and met an old woman who remembered his father. He was, she told Trifonov, always very polite, well-mannered and pleasant to subordinates. He was also a silent, restrained man, an introvert like his son. He was selfless, a critical man of high moral principles not a docile henchman, and thus it was not surprising that, like many old idealist Bolsheviks, he was destined to disappear during Stalin's purges. Trifonov admired and loved his father greatly. Although he had his doubts about his allegiance to Bolshevism, he never doubted his father's courage, morals and selflessness. In 1973, Y. Taratuta bought a set of postcards called *Pod znamenem Oktiabria*. They included one of Valentin Trifonov and she rang Iurii to tell him about them. She recalls him being grateful and moved, and saying how very important it was for him.<sup>5</sup>

Trifonov's mother, Zhenia, was Jewish and sixteen years younger than his father. She was twenty one when Iurii was born. Although a very artistic woman who drew and wrote poetry, she graduated from the Moscow Timiriazev Agricultural Academy in 1932 as a zoological technician. This was probably due to Valentin's influence, who considered it to be a more 'useful' profession than the arts. She was often on trips to collective farms, and her professional qualifications were to prove useful in the camps, where she was allotted work on a collective farm after Valentin's arrest and execution. Trifonov's last wife, Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, has just published one of his mother's letters to her children when she was in the camps, where she tells them «главное - это никогда не терять чувства юмора.»<sup>6</sup> Trifonov had an excellent relationship with his mother. They were spiritually very close and he missed her a great deal after she died in 1975. To some extent Ksenia Fyodorovna, Dmitriev's mother

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<sup>4</sup>'Seroe nebo, machty, i ryzhaia loshchad' ' in 'Oprokinutyi dom. Rassказы', *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 58-87.

<sup>5</sup>Y. Taratuta, 'Avtografi', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1986, no. 1, pp. 97-112.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko's novel 'Popytka proshchaniia' in *Den' sobaki*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1992, p. 220.



in *Obmen*<sup>7</sup>, is based on Trifonov's mother. However, with the character of Ksenia Fyodorovna, Trifonov exaggerated the haughtiness characteristic of some people from revolutionary families. Ksenia Fyodorovna is extremely proud of her roots, to the point of looking down on those without the same old revolutionary background as herself. Zhenia's brother Pavel was the author of the diaries Trifonov used in *Otblesk kostra*, and the prototype for Pavel Letunov in *Starik*.<sup>8</sup>

In 1928, the family returned to Moscow, where they lived in a flat on Tverskoi boulevard, and Valentin became president of the All Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences. In 1930 they moved to the 'Government House' (*Dom pravitel'stva*), the 'house on the embankment' which Trifonov was later to immortalise in his novel of the same name.<sup>9</sup> Trifonov was the first to write about this house which was designed by the architect B M Iofan and constructed from 1927-1931. It contained all that its inhabitants required - post office, bank, shops, canteen, nursery, clinic, cinema and sports hall, and was the first multi-storey building of its kind in Moscow. Many politicians, military figures, artists, journalists, writers and academics lived there, including Krushchev, Rykov, Tikhonov. The writer Mikhail Shatrov spent some of his childhood there, as well as Trifonov, before the same common fate befell both their fathers. The building now houses a museum which is run by a few of its current residents and contains information on its construction, history, former tenants, including a list of all those killed during Stalin's purges. This, of course, was the original of the *Dom na naberezhnoi*, but Trifonov's childhood experiences in this house are also used in other works, for example *Studenty*<sup>10</sup>, *Vremia i mesto*<sup>11</sup>, and *Ischeznovenie*<sup>12</sup>. The characters of Anton Ovchinnikov (*Dom na naberezhnoi*) and Leni Krastinia (*Ischeznovenie*) are based on a friend who also lived there, Lev Fedotov. He was a very talented child, the "all-round person" that Trifonov talks of in 'Dobro, chelovechnost', talant'<sup>13</sup>. He died during the war in 1942 and his mother gave Trifonov his diaries. In 1986, a documentary film, *Solo trubi*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Obmen. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1969, no. 12, pp. 29-65.

<sup>8</sup> 'Starik. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no. 3, pp. 27-153.

<sup>9</sup> 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Povest' ', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167. See also Chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> 'Studenty. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1950, no. 10, pp. 56-175; no. 11, pp. 49-182.

<sup>11</sup> 'Vremia i mesto. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1981, no. 9, pp. 72-148, no. 10, pp. 22-108.

<sup>12</sup> 'Ischeznovenie. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 1, pp. 6-95.

<sup>13</sup> 'Dobro, chelovechnost', talant', in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, pp. 187-189.

was made of his life. As well as at the house on the embankment, Trifonov and his family spent time in their government dacha in *Serebryannii bor*, which also figures in his works.

From 1932-37, Valentin Trifonov was chairman of the Main Concessions Committee of the Council of People's Commissars, and a member of Sovnarkom and Gosplan. He was also a military expert and wrote a book *Konturi griadushchei voini* ('Aspects of the Next War') which described the dangers of ignoring fascism and forecast Hitler's *blitzkreig*. He sent copies to Stalin, Molotov and Kalinin, hoping perhaps, like the character Mikhail Baiukov in *Ischeznovenie*, that it would allow him to return to military, rather than commercial affairs. However it probably led to his downfall as it was not the official line taken at the time. Thus on the night of 21/22 June 1937, Valentin was arrested and taken from his dacha. Trifonov says of this in *Otblesk kostra* : «Мне было одиннадцать лет, когда ночью приехали люди в военном и на той же даче, где мы запускали змеев, арестовали отца и увезли. Мы с сестрой спали, отец не захотел будить нас. Так мы не попрощались. Это было в ночь на 22 июня 1937 года». <sup>14</sup>

Valentin Trifonov was executed on 15 March 1938, and a few months later Iurii's mother was arrested as the wife of an "enemy of the people" and given an eight year sentence in a labour camp in Kazakhstan. His uncle Evgenii Trifonov died of a heart attack in 1937 from the stress of waiting for the authorities to come for him, and his wife followed soon after.<sup>15</sup> (The number of heart attacks rose dramatically during the purges). Both became victims of the state they had worked so hard to create. He left behind a son of an earlier marriage, Georgii, who also became a writer, under the pseudonym Mikhail Demin. Evgenii himself was very artistic, as well as a military man. He wrote many stories and poetry and was a director at the Revolutionary Theatre. Demin eventually emigrated as he fell in love with his French cousin and decided to move to Paris in 1968. Trifonov was not very happy about this - how could he be a writer if he lived abroad:

«Нет, писатель, если хочет остаться писателем, должен жить в своей стране, здесь его корни, он знает проблемы своей страны, здесь его читатели, которым он нужен».<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Otblesk kostra*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> For his son's account of this time in Evgenii Trifonov's life, see the first book in Mikhail Demin's autobiography, *Blatnoi. Roman*, New York: Russica Publishers, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in E B Rafal'skaia 'Vstrechi s Iu. V. Trifonovym' contained in the Russian State Archives, Moscow. Unfortunately, I do not have the reference number.

This largely explains Trifonov's attitudes towards the Russian dissidents, and why, despite all the difficulties of being a writer in the Soviet Union, Trifonov never emigrated.<sup>17</sup>

After the arrest of their parents, Iurii and his sister were looked after by their grandmother Tatiana Slovatskaia, and thus avoided ending up in a children's home like so many others. Their cousin Georgii moved back with his natural mother after the death of his father's second wife. Trifonov was amazed that, despite the destruction of her daughter's family, his grandmother still supported Stalin throughout her life. She had sheltered Stalin once when he escaped from camp, and years later he gave her a signed copy of his *Kratkii kurs istorii VKP (b)*. She was probably one of the many people who thought that Stalin was not responsible for the scale of the purges, and that if he only knew about them, they would be stopped.

They continued to live in the house on the embankment, which was pervaded by an atmosphere of terror and fear.<sup>18</sup> In 1940 they were evicted and moved to a communal flat on the edge of Moscow, in Bolshaia Kaluzhskaia street. Trifonov's world had been turned upside down. Life became very difficult. As the son of an enemy of the people, a 'non person', someone «без прошлого» as his cousin described it<sup>19</sup>, he was in a way branded and no doubt avoided by many people, frightened of being arrested themselves. Another life (another recurrent theme in his works) had begun for Trifonov.

His father's death had a shattering, ineradicable effect on Trifonov. In a questionnaire in 1975, he answered the question «Какая потеря в шестнадцать лет самая страшная?» «Потеря родителей.»<sup>20</sup> The legacy of Valentin Trifonov generated many of his son's works. Primarily, there is the examination of the lives of Valentin and Evgenii in *Otblesk kostra*. Valentin Trifonov had intended to write his own account of the history of the Petrograd Red Guard. His son in a way fulfilled this.<sup>21</sup> Trifonov was always interested in

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<sup>17</sup> For a further discussion of Trifonov's relationship with dissident writers, see Chapter 6.

<sup>18</sup> For another account of living in the house on the embankment, especially at this fateful time, see Lydia Shatunovskaia, 'Dom na naberezhnoi', *Kontinent* 23(1980), pp. 235-54, and 'Chas rasplati', *Kontinent* 27(1981), pp. 325-41.

<sup>19</sup> See Mikhail Demin, *Taezhnyi brodiaga. Roman*, New York: Russicia Publishers, 1986, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> 'Zhguchie voprosy vzrosloму cheloveku. Otvet na anketu', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 25 October 1975; reprinted in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> Trifonov claims that he was first led to writing *Otblesk kostra* when he found many of his father's old documents in a trunk. (See *Otblesk kostra*, Vol.4, p. 8). Trifonov does not say exactly when and where he found them, although it is a wonder that they were not confiscated after his father's arrest. Once he had read these, he went on to consult various archives to

history; the historian I. I. Mints who knew Valentin Trifonov, recalls him as a child often asking his father questions when he told stories about the revolution and civil war.<sup>22</sup> This was not due just to a natural curiosity about his father but to his interest in the fate of the generation who made the revolution, in the whole epoch. The phenomenon of the revolution eating up its own children is examined not only in *Otblesk kostra*, but also later developed in *Starik*.<sup>23</sup> Trifonov also explores the roots of the revolutionaries in *Neterpenie*<sup>24</sup>, and he wrote many articles on history throughout his life.

Another recurrent theme in Trifonov's works, stemming from the death of his father, is that of the lost idyll of childhood. The setting of the idyll is often at a dacha and it is shattered by the loss of the father and/or orphanhood. In many lyrical, intimate passages, Trifonov shows the feelings of loss experienced by a child whose safe world has vanished, to be replaced by another harsher life. These feature in many of his works: *Utolenie zhazhdy*<sup>25</sup>, *Vremia i mesto*<sup>26</sup> and *Ischeznovenie*.<sup>27</sup> The last was much more explicit and Trifonov knew it would never be published in his lifetime. Although the characters are fictional, it is in a way his own diary of the time. Loss and disappearance formed the frame of childhood, not just for Trifonov but for many other children whose parents were killed or exiled during the purges. In speaking of his own loss, Trifonov is speaking of the experiences of many. In this sense he is like Anna Akhmatova; in her *Requiem* she speaks for the millions of wives and mothers who lost their loved ones. Trifonov in his works speaks for the children. Linked with this loss is the paradigm of a world turned upside-down, the topsy-turvy house (*oprokinutyi dom*), as expressed by Piotr Koryshev in *Utolenie zhazhdy*:

«Нет, настоящее было, но недолго, лет до одиннадцати, детство было настоящее, а потом все полетело кувыркком: отрочество ни к черту,

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enlarge on what he had just discovered, to find out more about his father and others who took part in the revolution.

<sup>22</sup> V. Ogrizko, 'Vtorzhenie v zhizn'. Interview with the historian I. Mints', *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, 16 August 1985, p.8.

<sup>23</sup> 'Starik. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no. 3, pp. 27-153.

<sup>24</sup> *Neterpenie. Povest' ob A. Zheliabov*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1973.

<sup>25</sup> 'Utolenie zhazhdy. Roman', *Znamia*, 1963, no. 4, pp. 81-118; no. 5, pp. 3-39; no. 6, pp. 3-68; no. 7, pp. 3-88.

<sup>26</sup> 'Vremia i mesto. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1981, no. 9, pp. 72-148; no. 10, pp. 22-108.

<sup>27</sup> 'Ischeznovenie. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 1, pp. 6-95.

юность искалечена войной, а потом непрерывная борьба за то, чтобы быть человеком, несмотря ни на что.» (I, 516)

Trifonov's personal biography, most of all his childhood, was very important material for his books. As he said in his last interview, he writes about his childhood memories because they still affect him.<sup>28</sup>

### **LITERARY BEGINNINGS**

After the death of his father and the exile of his mother, Trifonov found some consolation in literature. He had been fascinated with writing from an early age, and often wrote when he could not sleep. When he was thirteen, he attended a literary circle along with two school friends. In 'Uroki mastera'<sup>29</sup> he recalls the visit of the writer Konstantin Paustovsky (his future lecturer at the Literary Institute and one of his favourite authors) to the literary circle. He asked the children what they wrote about but, much to Trifonov's disappointment, showed no interest in his favourite subject, dinosaurs. Thus, when he returned home, Trifonov threw his notebooks full of stories away.

Trifonov, like his mother, had a talent for drawing (there are some of his childhood sketches on display in the museum in the house on the embankment). He did consider going to art school but his love of literature was stronger. He wrote anywhere, wrote while other children were playing volleyball or tennis. His favorite poets were Pushkin, Tyutchev and Blok, and his prose was greatly influenced by Chekhov. In 'Idushchim vosled'<sup>30</sup> he says that he always felt himself to be a writer, there was never any question of how to start being one.

In June 1941, Germany invaded the USSR, and by October Moscow was under seige. Due to his extreme myopia, Trifonov was not sent to the front, but evacuated to Tashkent with his grandmother and sister. The following year he returned to Moscow and worked in an aircraft factory throughout the war as a fitter, then shop controller and dispatcher. He joined the Komsomol, was elected editor of the factory paper and wrote satirical verses which were popular with the other workers. In 1944 he decided to fulfil his ambition to become a writer and applied to enter the Literary Institute.

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<sup>28</sup> S. Task, 'Otkrovenii razgovor. Poslednie interviiu Iurii Trifonova', *Literaturnaia Rossia*, 7 April 1981, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> 'Uroki mastera', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 31 May 1972, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> 'Idushchim vosled', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1974, no. 12, p. 88.

## CHAPTER 2

### STUDENT DAYS

In 1944 Trifonov entered the Moscow Literary Institute. He had intended to enrol in the poetry department and submitted some of his poems to the Institute's board, along with a short story 'Smert' geroia'. Convinced that he would definitely be accepted into the poetry department («Я стану поэтом. Да я уже и теперь поэт. В заводской газете я публиковал стихи на производственные темы, очень бойкие, сатирические, ядовитые, они имели успеха...»<sup>1</sup>) he was shocked to be told that his poems had not made any impression on the board, but that its president, Konstantin Fedin<sup>2</sup>, had liked the story. Thus Trifonov was admitted into the prose department instead, forgetting all about poetry - he never wrote another line.<sup>3</sup> It was certainly a brave decision on Trifonov's part to enrol at the Literary Institute rather than carry on working, as he had very little money and was dependent on his grandmother who had only her pension. However, he felt that the fact he was a worker helped him to gain admission:

«Я думаю, что был принят в Литинститут потому, что работал на авиационном заводе и ходил в сапогах и ватнике. И потому, конечно, что в конце сорок четвертого года было слишком мало поступающих.»<sup>4</sup>

The Literary Institute was opened on the 1st December 1933, to mark Maxim Gorky's forty years of literary activity. The course lasted for five years and the students attended seminars given by various established writers. Trifonov himself taught there in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Whether the course really could teach people how to write is another matter, but it provided the students with useful connections and certainly helped many literary careers. Trifonov himself

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<sup>1</sup> 'Vospominaniia o mukakh nemoty', *Druzhba narodov*, 1979, no. 10, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Konstantin Aleksandrovich Fedin, 1892-1977. Novelist, writer of short stories, war sketches, critical essays and literary reminiscences. Important official in Writers' Union. When First Secretary prevented the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*. As a result and for being, as Grigorii Svirski puts it, one of the Party's "hatchet men", he was hated by many. Trifonov however bore him no ill will. He recognised why others did, but still said he owed him thanks for the break.

<sup>3</sup> 'Vospominaniia o mukakh nemoty', p. 186: «Произошло странное: в следующую секунду я забыл о стихах и не писал их больше никогда в жизни!»

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> For one student's account of Trifonov's seminars at the Literary Institute see O. Koreneva, 'On podaril nam dorogu', *Moskovskii literator*, 26 January 1990, p. 3.

said «Когда меня спрашивают, нужен ли Литературный институт, я отвечаю: разумеется, нужен. Когда спрашивают, нужен ли, чтобы стать писателем, заканчивать институт, отвечаю: разумеется, не нужно.»<sup>6</sup> Fedin's opinion was that the Institute's purpose was not to make writers - the talent had to be there in the first place - but to help the young writers' creative growth and develop their abilities.<sup>7</sup> In his first year, Trifonov studied by correspondence as he was still working at the aircraft factory during the war. At that time he went with other workers to Osip Brik's<sup>8</sup> seminars. He recalls the cheerful and homely atmosphere there as everyone was tired after work.<sup>9</sup> However Brik died of a heart attack during Trifonov's second year and he was transferred to Fedin's seminars, where there was a completely different atmosphere. This course was usually for higher years and, as Trifonov was younger than the other students, they were quite hostile towards him. In one seminar he read out a story entitled 'Uriuk' about a lonely, young Turkmenian working in a Moscow factory; the title referring to the dried apricots he always carried round in his pockets to remind him of home. He did not think the story was too bad, but the others ripped it to pieces, including the title, and Trifonov could not bring himself to argue with them. Fedin however became very angry, slammed his fist on the table and roared "And I tell you that Trifonov will write!"<sup>10</sup> Thus, as Trifonov and others have noted, he became almost legendary round the institute as Fedin's favourite.<sup>11</sup> Fedin remembers this story and says of his impressions of Trifonov at the Literary Institute:

«...он показался мне недюжинным по своей зоркой наблюдательности и простоте. Он берет то, что видит. Представления его о жизни и о том, что надо, точны....стиль кое-где неуклюж. Впрочем, в самой неуклюжести Трифонова есть нечто примечательное: он органически серьезен, я бы сказал --не по возрасту.»<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'Vospominaniia o mukakh nemoty', p. 186.

<sup>7</sup> K. Fedin, 'Tropoiu v goru', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 28 November 1973, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Osip Maksimovich Brik, 1888-1945. Theorist of Russian formalism, co-founder of LEF and Novyi LEF, playwright. After the October revolution, Brik worked at the Commissariat for Education in the Department of Fine Arts, where he edited the journal *Iskusstvo kommuny*. Married to Lili Kagan, who later maintained a ménage à trois with him and Mayakovsky.

<sup>9</sup> 'Vospominaniia o mukakh nemoty'.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* and see also Irina Goff, 'Vodianye znaki. Zapiski o Iurii Trifonove', *Oktiabr'*, 1985, no. 8, pp. 94-106; Natalia Il'ina, *Dorogi i sud'by*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985, pp. 270-2.

Trifonov also attended the seminars of Konstantin Paustovsky<sup>13</sup> and was influenced by him, and, when a student, tried to imitate his style.<sup>14</sup> It was partly due to his love of Paustovsky's travel stories that he decided to visit Turkmenia in the 1950s.

In 1947 came Trifonov's first publication in the paper *Moskovskii komsomolets*, a short satirical tale, 'Shirokii diapazon'.<sup>15</sup> It tells of a student, Erudiktin, who believes that the only thing needed to pass exams is to memorised the "wide range" of facts suggested by the title. He doesn't read authors' works, but introductions and conclusions or encyclopaedias instead (somewhat reminiscent of Chekhov's Professor Serebriakov, who prefers criticism of Shakespeare to the works themselves<sup>16</sup>), and remembers lists of key dates and facts. In the end he comes a cropper in his exam when he confuses Schiller with Heine and recites the wrong list of information.

This was followed in 1948 by the stories 'Uzkie spetsialisty' in *Moskovskii komsomolets*<sup>17</sup> and 'Znakomye mesta' in the journal *Molodoi kolkhoznik*.<sup>18</sup> The hero of the latter story, Samartsev, is an engineer. On his way to discuss plans for the construction of a new factory, his truck becomes stuck. He walks to the nearest hut to ask about a tow, and it turns out to be a place where he stayed one night during the war in 1943. The old man who lives there recognises Samartsev, although the engineer himself can remember nothing about their previous meeting. They talk of the war and how the village, like many other areas, is now being reconstructed. The mood is very typical of the time, the whole nation united to rebuild their motherland after the wartime ravages. The omnipresence of the Party is there, in accordance with socialist realist literary principles. Trifonov later was to consider this story weak, as he says in 'Zapiski soseda':

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<sup>12</sup> K Fedin, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Konstantin Georgievich Paustovsky, 1892-1968. Author of short stories, novels, novellas, plays and reminiscences. Wrote impressionistic, lyrical prose in the tradition of Bunin, whom Trifonov came to love and be influenced by when Paustovsky introduced the writer to his pupils. He stood for honesty, moral values and the freedom of individual writers and in 1966 came out in defence of Sinyavsky and Daniel, which earned him the respect, admiration and love of many Russian writers.

<sup>14</sup> See 'Uroki mastera' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, pp. 174-181.

<sup>15</sup> 'Shirokii diapazon. Feleton.', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 12 April 1947.

<sup>16</sup> In *Predvaritel'nye itogi* Rita accuses her husband, Gemadii Sergeevich of being like Serebriakov.

<sup>17</sup> 'Uzkie spetsialisty', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 13 March 1948.

<sup>18</sup> 'Znakomye mesta. Rasskaz.', *Molodoi kolkhoznik*, 1948, no. 4, pp. 12-13.



«Я, кажется, был смущен, потому что наврал, напечатаны были два рассказа: в альманахе «Молодая гвардия» рассказ «В степи», о котором я упомянул, и ещё один, бесконечно слабый, в журнале «Молодой колхозник»».<sup>19</sup>

'V stepi' was also published in 1959 in Trifonov's first collection of short stories, *Pod solntsem*<sup>20</sup> (see also Chapter 3), and is a fairly standard work for the time, telling of Varia, a livestock specialist, who has just started work in Kazakhstan. At first she dislikes her life there, but after days of driving sheep across the steppe and proving her worth, she of course grows to love the place and its people. However, other stories written at the same time, but only later published in *Pod solntsem*, differ. The first, 'Zimnyi den' v garazhe' (written in 1946), describes one working day in Moscow during the Second World War. One worker, from Odessa, discovers that his house has been destroyed and his whole family killed. His reactions and that of the other workers are described, how they have all suffered and how children should not be caught up in the war. This is a somewhat different portrayal of the war, a universal, humanitarian tale, rather than just propaganda about how the great Soviet victories were made with massive sacrifices. Another different depiction of the war, from a child's point of view, is shown in *Belye vorota*, written from 1947 to 1952. The main character returns to the place where he stayed in a dacha during childhood, and remembers the time when war broke out. Then it was a very distant threat, and he and the other children treated it almost like a game, all taking turns to keep night watch on the look out for potential enemies and saboteurs. This story shares a number of common features with many of Trifonov's later works. Firstly, the narrator sees how the dachas and their inhabitants have changed, how Moscow is expanding to swallow up the countryside around it with rapid urbanisation, a theme which runs through almost all of Trifonov's works. Linked with this, and the very important theme of time, is how places bring back certain memories, as shown also in *Obmen* and *Dolgoe proshchanie*. The child's eye view is common to *Dom na naberezhnoi*, *Vremia i mesto* and *Ischeznoventie*, and in all these stories we see how external historical events, both war and Stalin's purges, destroy the idyll of childhood, represented by life at a dacha<sup>21</sup>. Despite other wooden, politically correct works, the roots of

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<sup>19</sup> 'Zapiski soseda', *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 144. The full version was later reprinted in *Druzhiba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, pp. 7-43.

<sup>20</sup> *Pod solntsem. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

<sup>21</sup> This stems from the loss of his own father, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Trifonov's creativity were already in evidence, although it would take time and a different political climate for them to fully evolve.

### *STUDENTY*

Fame came relatively quickly for Trifonov with the publication of his first novel *Studenty* <sup>22</sup>. Part of the novel formed the dissertation for his final year exams at the Literary Institute from which he graduated in 1949. In *Zapiski sosedya* he tells of how the novel came to be published. After leaving the Literary Institute he could not find work anywhere so he stayed at home and completed *Studenty*. Then came the problem of where to submit the manuscript for publication. He had already taken several stories to *Oktiabr'* but heard nothing from the editors, and so he decided to go and see Fedin who was on the editorial board at *Novyi mir*. Fedin had liked the two chapters of *Studenty* which Trifonov had read out at a seminar, but he doubted as to whether he would also approve the five hundred page book. However, much to Trifonov's amazement, Fedin had already been in touch with Tvardovsky <sup>23</sup>, the editor of *Novyi mir*, who was on the look out for new authors and wanted to read the manuscript. Within two weeks Tvardovsky called Trifonov to his office and told him the novel would be published, although it would first need editing. This was done over the summer of 1950 with the help of Tamara Gabbé, although exactly what she changed in the original text, and how, is unknown. Thus, in the October and November editions of *Novyi mir*, a shorter but deeper version of *Studenty* appeared, to much acclaim and overnight fame for Trifonov.

The novel is based on Trifonov's experiences at the Literary Institute, but is set instead in the Moscow Pedagogical Institute to give it a more general overview.<sup>24</sup> It is a standard socialist realist work written in the spirit of the times, a time when it was difficult to get anything published under Zhdanov's repressive cultural regime. The main characters are either positive or negative;

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<sup>22</sup> 'Studenty', *Novyi mir*, 1950, no. 10, pp. 56-175; no. 11, pp. 49-182.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Tvardovsky, 1910-1971. Poet and editor at *Novyi mir* (1950-54, 1958-70). During the Second World War, he published his popular poem *Vasily Tyorkin*, a folk hero loved by the Russians. Although a loyal Communist, he was dedicated to the truth. He was dismissed in 1954 after the publication of Pomerantsev's article *On Sincerity in Literature*, but reinstated in 1958. He transformed *Novyi mir* into the most liberal journal of the post-Stalin era, publishing Solzhenitsyn, Voinovich, Pasternak, Akhmatova and Babel amongst others. He was constantly harassed by the bureaucracy who forced him to resign in 1970. *Novyi mir* was his life work, and the loss of it may have hastened his death from cancer in 1971.

<sup>24</sup> See 'Tribuna chitatelia: Obsuzhdenie povesti Iu. Trifonova "Studenty"', *Novyi mir*, 1951, no. 2, pp. 221-28.

the collective is always victorious, leading the negative elements back on to the right path for new Soviet man (or woman) to build a glorious communist future.

The story starts with the main protagonist, and required positive hero, Vadim Belov, returning home to Moscow after the 'Great Fatherland War'. The mood is very patriotic, Vadim is drunk with happiness to be back in Moscow and starting life afresh. His joy is understandable, but little, if anything, is shown of the real hardships experienced after the Second World War. Socialist realism demanded from Trifonov an overly optimistic mood and was not interested in harsh realities. *Studenty* is partly autobiographical fiction, a genre in which Trifonov was to excel. Vadim is to some extent a figure for the author; his childhood and youth is similar to the writer's - he lived on Bersenevsky embankment and was evacuated to Tashkent during the war. Vadim's father, like Trifonov's, is dead but, unlike the author's, he died in battle rather than during Stalin's purges, unmentionable at the time. Another positive character, Andrei Sirikh, also bears some resemblance to Trifonov in his physical appearance, his myopia and timidity, and in the fact that he moves straight from a factory to the Institute. His sister Olga is similar to the writer's sister Tanya. Events in *Studenty*, such as the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign when many professors were dismissed, were witnessed by Trifonov while in his last year at the Literary Institute. The post-war period and Stalin's last years were a time of great repression, xenophobia and anti-capitalist, anti-western propaganda and passages illustrating this can be found in *Studenty*, as, for instance, statements in Chapter 2:

Он повидал за границу - не ту, о которой он читал в разных книгах, что была нарисована на красивых почтовых марках и глянцевиных открытках, - он увидел за границу вживе, потрогал её на ощупь, подышал её воздухом. И часто это бывал спёртый, нечистый воздух, к которому лёгкие Вадима не привыкли. Он видел нарядные, белоснежные виллы на берегу озера Балатон и чёрные, продымленные лачуги на окраине Будапешта; он видел упитанных, багровых от пива венских лавочников и ребятишек с голодными, серыми лицами, просивших у танкистов хлеба . . . Да, многое следовало переделать в этих странах, раскорчевать, вспахать, засеять; многому ещё предстояло научиться людям, живущим за чертой нашей границы». [I, 40]

The main action of the story centres round a six month period for Vadim's class at the Pedagogical Institute - exams, parties, New Year; the main character Vadim is contrasted with his old friend Sergei Palavin and Lena Medovskaia. Other supporting characters are the sailor Lagodenko and his wife

Raia, Andrei Sirikh and his sister Olga. Among the members of staff, Kozelsky and Sizov, like Palavin and Vadim, stand out as contrasting characters, whose 'good' and 'bad' traits are revealed gradually in the course of the narrative. Vadim's great desire is to follow in his father's footsteps and become a teacher, работать с людьми, быть всегда в большом, дружном коллективе. He is no genius, but works hard, and is somewhat shy in company. Palavin, on the other hand, is extremely talented and popular. As well as his studies, he is involved in the Student Research Society, is awarded the Griboyedov scholarship and writes a book. However, as the novel progresses, Vadim and Sergei are shown in increasingly positive and negative lights respectively. Their friendship wanes and Vadim turns to the other students, especially when his mother is ill. Unlike Vadim, Palavin has no sincere desire to be a teacher; he joined the Pedagogical Institute as a stepping stone to research, considering that he would do better there than at university. Underneath he is shown to be arrogant and self-absorbed; he uses people and has a complete lack of morals. It is soon apparent that nothing good is to come of this self-seeking individualist. And how could it be otherwise, considering the standard socialist realist formula, the battle of the collective versus the individual? A case in point is Sergei's failure to attend the *Voskresnik* (Sunday devoted to voluntary labour), saying he has to finish his paper for the SRS instead. His soul-mate Lena Medovskaia also makes her excuses and goes home with a sore throat. Vadim of course thoroughly enjoys his day along with the others:

«Разве не испытали они самую большую радость - радость дружбы, радость одного порыва и одних стремлений для каждого и для всех?» [I, 168]

Some of the students are also involved with a literary circle at the machine building factory where Spartak used to work, thus fulfilling the important task of keeping links with the working class. Vadim loves taking part in this and helping the workers, while Sergei only goes along to collect material for his book and Lena is not at all interested, her reason being that, as her father is head of a plant, she has visited factories many times before. It turns out that her father is made director of this particular machine building factory. He, on the contrary, is interested to find out about the literary circle, regrets the fact that it is not Lena who told him about it and reproaches her for her indifference. When there is no personal advantage to be found or they are not centre of attention, Sergei and Lena are not in the least interested.

Lena is part of the love story woven into *Studenty*. At the beginning Vadim falls for her beauty and charms, but soon discovers that she is self-centered and empty-headed; her main concerns are to sing, to dress well and to

look pretty. On a trip to the Tretyakov Gallery, a discussion arises about happiness. Lena says that an artist must be happy having created a painting for himself. Andrei and Vadim disagree, an artist can only be happy having created something for the people. After all, счастье (happiness) originally meant со-частье (sharing)! [I, 94-97]. Lena has no great aims or thoughts, for her it is sufficient to conform to official requirements:

«А нам-то зачем заводить эти абстрактные споры? Я такая же комсомолка, как и ты, у нас одна идеология. О чем нам спорить?» [I, 177]

Palavin in his arrogance is convinced that he can win Lena over, which he does, and they make a perfect couple. Both are intended as representatives of petty-bourgeois individualism, negative elements from the past, which must be overcome in the struggle towards communism. Palavin is eventually unmasked and appears in his true colours. To start with, his book about factory life is a flop and criticised as being unrealistic, boring and useless, by both his fellow students and the workers from the literary circle. Vadim discovers from an old girlfriend of Sergei's, a nurse at the hospital where his mother is being treated, how he used her to borrow her cousin's thesis on Turgenev which he plagiarised for his own essay and how, when she thought she was pregnant, Sergei abandoned her after earlier promises of marriage. This is all brought out at a Komsomol meeting and Sergei is given a severe reprimand and warning. He leaves the institute but is eventually persuaded to return to the collective fold. His family background is shown to have been the main problem. His father left his family, while his mother, a foolish, weak-willed woman, doted on Sergei, which badly affected his character. Vadim, reflecting on this, remembers a passage he feels he remembers from Chekhov:

«В семье, где женщина буржуазна, легко культивируются панамисты, пройдохи, безнадежные скоты». [I, 348]

Now the collective will help him; his rehabilitation initially comes through volleyball - *igra kollektivnaia* - but of course he must make more effort as "life does not only consist of volleyball" [I, 398]. Lena too changes during teaching practice; she is very popular with the children and thus Vadim thinks maybe she will make a good teacher after all. Here the collective may be seen to have triumphed, but in Trifonov's later works characters such as Sergei and Lena are shown to be the norm and do very well for themselves in Soviet society. In her book *In Stalin's Time*<sup>25</sup>, Vera Dunham discusses how Stalin encouraged

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<sup>25</sup> V. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

*meshchanstvo* in life and literature to keep his support. The stoicism and primitive conditions of the 1920's (represented by the old Bolsheviks) have gone, to be replaced by possessions and self-interest. In *Studenty* the *meshchane* are not victorious, but under Brezhnev, when the *Moscow Tales* were written, it was possible to show them in full bloom. By this time, for the majority of Trifonov's characters, the ideals of the revolution have finally been laid to rest.

The collective, and of course the Party, is also victorious in the case of Professor Kozelsky, an example of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign. Vadim admires Kozelsky at first, but we soon perceive that he is indifferent towards Soviet literature. He has gone against the flow by writing a book on Dostoyevsky (several of whose works were condemned to oblivion during Stalin's reign). Thus Kozelsky is another 'dangerous individualist' and must be punished. The charges made against Kozelsky, such as formalism, cosmopolitanism and fawning on the West, were mere rhetoric; no less typical Stalinist terms of abuse than 'Trotskyite', 'Bukharinist' and 'left-deviator'. The state found it difficult to cope with free-thinking intellectuals and in the last years of Stalin's dictatorship, they increased prison numbers. Kozelsky is given all the typical features of the so-called formalists. He likes the sound of his own voice and is well-dressed, smokes a pipe, has refined tastes and is also a bachelor - a serious defect reflecting inadequacy or selfishness, both harmful to Soviet society.<sup>26</sup>

As Vadim is the positive element to balance out Sergei's negative, so the Dean of the Institute, Sizov, acts as a foil to Kozelsky, the party man versus the individual scholar. They too, like Vadim and Sergei, have known each other since childhood, but their lives have followed different paths: Sizov chose a public career dedicated to the party, while Kozelsky retreated into scholarship and kept apart from political life. Thus, according to Sizov, Kozelsky has lived only for himself and not for the party and the good of society, and should be dismissed. Kozelsky's reply to this is rather interesting. A highly intelligent man, he says that he had always thought that Sizov, a mere administrator, was jealous of him. At this stage in Trifonov's writing and in the current political climate, such a supposition could not be depicted as justified - in denouncing Kozelsky and Palavin, Vadim and the Dean are working purely for the good of the cause, not out of petty jealousies. Yet under Stalin there were darker reasons why people denounced one other, including envy. These, however, Trifonov did

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 207.

not come to discuss until much later, when he treats a similar situation from a completely different angle in *Dom na naberezhnoi*.<sup>27</sup>

In *Studenty* all ends "happily" - the collective, and the Party, triumph over the individual, and negative elements are erased, as the dictates of "conflict-free" literature required. The usual socialist realist myths are all there: Vadim feels at one with the workers, as there are supposedly no rifts between workers and intellectuals. There are students from the other Soviet states and communist countries, such as Rashid from Uzbekistan and the Korean postgraduate Si Le Bon, all happy to take part in Soviet collective life. Everyone is united through Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology. The portrait of life in *Studenty* is naive and optimistic: everyone is enthusiastically building the communist future; Stalin's Russia is glorified. At this stage Trifonov could not have written otherwise and *Studenty* might have been a lot worse. It is enough to look at other books published at the time to see this. After Stalin's death and the start of the de-Stalinisation campaign, such overtly Stalinist passages as «Вадим попал на фронт в тот великий год, когда сокрушительные сталинские удары отбрасывали врага всё дальше на запад»<sup>28</sup>, «Сталин, ведущий это государство в солнечный край коммунизма»<sup>29</sup> were omitted. A passage in the last chapter, depicting the parade on Red Square and the emotion of the citizens at seeing their great leader Stalin, was also taken out; one example of how Trifonov 'evolved' due to censorship and the current political climate. The passage in question was anthologised in 1951 in a collection of stories and poems in praise of Stalin, *Pervomaiskaia demonstratsiia*.<sup>30</sup>

In later life, Trifonov was to disown his first novel, not uncommon amongst writers, and could not bring himself to read one word of it:

«Сейчас из романа «Студенты», которым набита целая полка в моем шкафу, я не могу прочесть ни строки. Даже страшновато взять в руки».<sup>31</sup>

It was traumatic for him to recall how he could have complied with Stalinist cultural policy. However, there was not much choice. Obedience and loyalty

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<sup>27</sup> 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Povest' ', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167. See Chapter 7.

<sup>28</sup> 'Studenty', *Novyi mir*, 1950, no. 10, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> 'Pervomaiskaia demonstratsiia', in *Studenty. Literaturno-repertuarnyi sbornik*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1951, pp. 76-81.

<sup>31</sup> 'Zapiski sosedai' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p.147.

were necessary for survival, especially for the son of an enemy of the people. Tvardovsky, himself the son of an enemy of the people, a kulak, expressed this in *Po pravu pamiati* as:

Ты здесь, сынок, но ты нездешний,  
Какой тебе еще резон,  
Когда родитель твой в кромешный,  
В тот самый список занесен.<sup>32</sup>

Sholokhov wrote in praise of Stalin while the Soviet leader was killing his beloved Cossacks on the Don; Ilya Erenburg also later hated his novel *Deviatyi val*, in which he described the same parade as Trifonov, presided over by a smiling Stalin. In order to get *Studenty* published, Trifonov had to write according to the given formula. In 1949 he wrote a play with I. Dik entitled *Chest' otriada*<sup>33</sup>, which, although much shorter, follows the same pattern as *Studenty*, depicting instead life on the level below the Komsomol, the Pioneer organisation. Here too the collective is always much more important than the individual, and the main character receives a box for his birthday inscribed with the words "The honour of the group is above everything". According to Trifonov's third wife, Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, such phrases were probably written 'in order to be like everyone else', and it may even have been that Tvardovsky told the young author that such conformism would ensure publication.<sup>34</sup> Although he later disliked *Studenty*, Trifonov knew that he could not escape from his first novel:

«Нельзя отрекаться от своих книг, но можно уходить от них далеко. Иногда очень далеко».<sup>35</sup>

Twenty five years later he tried perhaps to rid himself of this sin (as he says when talking of Socialist Realism's formula of the individual versus the collective: «Я, грешный, тоже отдал дань такой схеме»<sup>36</sup>) by writing *Dom na naberezhnoi* (see Chapter 7), somewhat in the same way that Tvardovsky wrote about his kulak father in *Po pravu pamiati*, a reconsideration of many

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<sup>32</sup> 'Po pravu pamiati' in A. Tvardovsky, *Poemy*, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1987, p. 321. The poem itself was written in 1969.

<sup>33</sup> I. Dik & Iu. Trifonov, 'Chest' otriada', in *Shkol'nyi prazdnik. Sbornik p'es dlia shkol'noi samodeiatel'nosti*, Moscow: Detgiz, 1955, pp. 193-206.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, 13 October 1993.

<sup>35</sup> 'Zapiski soseda', *Druzhiba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, p. 194.

<sup>36</sup> 'V kratkom - beskonechnoe', *Voprosy literatury*, 1974, no. 8, p. 184.



attitudes expressed earlier in the poem of 1936 *Strana Muraviia*. In the former poem, as Trifonov's first editor and mentor wrote:

Нет, все бывшие недомолвки  
Домолвить ныне долг велит.<sup>37</sup>

However *Studenty* does have features in common with Trifonov's later works, such as the descriptions of Moscow, which are considered some of the best passages in the novel. It also evokes everyday life and was criticised for being too бытовой, as were the Moscow Tales. One critic says the novel sometimes «пьянеет от бытовых мелочей».<sup>38</sup> The descriptions of the Students' Sports Festival in Chapter 29 are echoed in Trifonov's sport stories such as *Odinochestvo Klycha Durdy*.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, the autobiographical details, especially the loss of a father, are recurrent themes throughout Trifonov's works.<sup>40</sup> It was this loss that brought about the later investigations into Soviet history, in particular *Otblesk kostra*.<sup>41</sup> Connected with this is the theme of childhood as an idyll, lost as a result of historical events and/or a father's death. The effect of time on the characters is also explored, with the changes in Vadim and Sergei - their characters and their friendship, plus the changing lives and fates of Sizov and Kozelsky. The novel's time-scale, as in later works, is very concentrated. The style, though, is different - stiff formal prose with an omniscient third person narrator. Trifonov was inhibited by Socialist Realism, hence *Studenty* seems artificially optimistic, even wooden, although not consciously insincere. It was not until years after Stalin's death that Trifonov was able to find his true voice.

However, if Trifonov was to later dislike *Studenty*, the novel was immensely popular at the time. This was because, as the writer himself says in *Zapiski sosedai*, people were fed up with stories about the war, and wanted instead something light and cheerful about contemporary city life. (For Vera Dunham, this is when middle-class careerism and materialism, in other words *meshchanstvo*, begin to take over from the old revolutionary values, reflected in both life and literature<sup>42</sup>). From amongst a number of works on student life - G.

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<sup>37</sup> *Poemy*, Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1987, p. 328.

<sup>38</sup> Iu. Karasev, 'Povest' o studentakh', *Ogonek*, 1951, no. 12, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> 'Odinochestvo Klycha Durdy' in 'Puti v pustyne. Rassказы', *Znamia*, 1959, no. 2, pp. 70-99.

<sup>40</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>41</sup> 'Otblesk kostra', *Znamia*, 1965, no. 2, pp. 142-60; no. 3, pp. 152-77.

<sup>42</sup> V. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time*.

Konovalov's *Universitet*<sup>43</sup>, V. Dobrovolsky *Tri v serykh shineliakh*<sup>44</sup> and Zhenia Maslova<sup>45</sup> and K. Lokotkov's *Vernost'*<sup>46</sup> - Trifonov's was considered the best by the critics.<sup>47</sup>

However it is only natural the novel should have attracted some adverse criticism, both from Western and Soviet critics, immediately after its publication and more recently. At a discussion held at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute in 1951<sup>48</sup>, students met, with Trifonov present, to discuss *Studenty*. There were some minor complaints and nit-picking. Trifonov, they said, had not correctly portrayed post-graduates and student-teachers, and for a literary faculty in a Pedagogical Institute there was insufficient discussion of literature or teaching, to which, of course, it could be said that the novel was intended to give a moral message not to record literary discussions. Naturally, the argument which leaps to mind for a Western reader that such discussions would not sell books, was not, of course, necessarily valid in a country where many books were published (usually political works or by those high up in the Writers' Union and the *nomenklatura*) only to be later pulped. More importantly, the students, in common with other readers and critics, found the portrayal of Vadim to be dull and wooden and much preferred Sergei and Lena. It is ironic that the worst characters turned out to be the most attractive and most memorable, but Trifonov's best works would also be about such people, and though he would still perceive them critically, it would not be from the point of view of a Socialist Realist stereotype. The outcome of the story for the negative characters was also found unsatisfactory. That Kozelsky could easily find work in another institute was seen as impossible as, according to the logic of the Socialist Realist ethos, he could never be of any use to society.<sup>49</sup> Sergei and Lena's quick transformations and rehabilitation were considered dubious and unconvincing. Sergei's happens far too quickly without any major internal

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<sup>43</sup> G. Konovalov, 'Universitet. Roman', *Oktiabr*, 1947, no. 6, pp. 3-42; no. 7, pp. 71-108; no. 8, pp. 3-68.

<sup>44</sup> V. Dobrovolsky, 'Troie v serykh shineliakh. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1948, no. 1, pp. 6-125.

<sup>45</sup> 'Zhenia Maslova. Roman', *Novyi mir*, 1950, no. 1, pp. 8-239.

<sup>46</sup> K. Lokotkov, *Vernost'. Roman*, Novosibirsk: Novosibirskoe oblastnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1949.

<sup>47</sup> See for example A. Lozhechko, 'Povest' o studentakh', *Oktiabr*, 1951, no. 1, pp. 185-8.

<sup>48</sup> 'Tribuna chitatelia: Obsuzhdenie povesti Iu. Trifonova "Studenty" ', *Novyi mir*, 1951, no. 2, pp. 221-28.

<sup>49</sup> See for example B. Galanov, 'Nachalo puti', *Znamia*, 1951, no. 1, pp. 171-4.

struggle. His experience of the team spirit at volleyball provides insufficient motivation for such radical reform and Lena is only loved by the children because of her beauty, which would not, it was argued, necessarily make her a good teacher. Some of the minor positive characters, such as Sizov and Olga, were mere sketches, which did not help to combat the readers' preference for Palavin and Lena.

Official criticism noted that the party does not play its required part in Palavin's rehabilitation. Not only is the portrayal of Sizov sketchy, but the other staff members too are not seen as sufficiently active. Other criticisms made were that there was not the required 90% of working class characters, nor were the students shown to be studying Marxism-Leninism enough!

The novel was nevertheless a huge success and in 1951 Trifonov became the youngest writer to receive the Stalin Prize, which included twenty five thousand roubles. Trifonov's life was changed overnight. Before he was a poor student dependent on his grandmother, now he was invited everywhere, recognised in the street and bought himself a flat and a car. He also married Nina Nelina, a singer at the Bolshoi Theatre, and in 1951 a daughter Olga was born.

His marriage to Nina Nelina was somewhat like a "Hollywood romance" - famous young writer meets beautiful singer. Nina was a quick-tempered, quarrelsome woman; Irina Goff, who lived near the couple for some time, recalls her as being a cantankerous character who fell out with everyone. However, although the relationship was a stormy one, they loved each other greatly. When Nina died suddenly in 1966, after fifteen years of marriage, Trifonov was devastated and could not work for a long time after her death.

*Studenty* was translated into many languages and, although Trifonov turned down a film adaptation, it was staged as the play *Molodye gody* at the Moscow Ermolova Theatre in 1952, under the direction of Lobanov. The play is more concentrated than the novel.<sup>50</sup> As the novel was adapted for the stage, most of the action takes place in the Institute and many parts were omitted, for example Vadim's return to Moscow, the *Voskresnik*, and the parade on Red Square, although the scenes about the visit to Andrei's family's dacha and Andrei's departure to Leningrad for the student literary congress were retained and extended. The play was not as successful as the novel because it lost such highlights as the descriptions of Moscow and gained nothing in return. It was

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<sup>50</sup> See 'Plemia molodoe. Stseny iz p'esi po povesti Iu. Trifonova "Studenty" ' in *Studenty*. *Literaturno-repertuarnyi sbornik*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1951, pp. 181-244.

described as a "weak repetition" by one critic,<sup>51</sup> although a lot of the blame for its failure was laid by the critics at Lobanov's door for not sufficiently guiding Trifonov to avoid the mistakes which were made in its adaptation.

### *KHUDOZHNIKI*

At Lobanov's suggestion <sup>52</sup>, Trifonov then went on to write another play *Zalog uspekha* <sup>53</sup>, which was also staged at the Ermolova Theatre in 1953. The four act comedy, originally called *Khudozhniki*, centres round the young artist Andrei Karpukhin, who has just finished Art Institute very successfully, due to his painting *Mayakovsky sredi molodezhi*. This brings him great fame; every art gallery in the provinces wants a copy of the painting. Initially Andrei wants to paint a series of works on Moscow, but he becomes bogged down with the copies. He is befriended by an older artist, Mukomolov, who has exhibited nothing for years, but makes a living from 'befriending' younger, fashionable artists. He advises Andrei that he should not paint what he wants, but what is easy and profitable, and helps him with numerous copies of *Mayakovsky sredi molodezhi*, much to the disgust of the young artist's wife Nina. Andrei eventually goes to Kuibyshev hydro-electric power station to paint a picture on the building of communism. He spends only two weeks with the workers there, not long enough to experience their life and hardships in order to produce a decent, genuine picture. He argues frequently with Nina, who puts forward a more difficult but honest way in art. Such a way is pursued by their friend Fyodor, who spends six months in Central Asia and, as a result, produces his best work. In the end, Andrei sees the error of his ways, renounces Mukomolov and all he stands for, and is reconciled with his wife.

*Zalog uspekha*, however, was also a flop. Inna Goff recalls Trifonov reading the play at the Writers' Union Komsomol organisation. She liked it and found it funny, but at the theatre it failed to hold the audience's interest.<sup>54</sup> The play was criticised for not being realistic.<sup>55</sup> It was felt the author had failed to

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<sup>51</sup> See V. Benderova, 'Ot zhizni k stsene', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 March 1952, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Trifonov once said that he was only glad that due to *Studenty* he got to know Tvardovsky and Lobanov, *Teatr*, 1979, no. 7, pp. 105-8.

<sup>53</sup> *Zalog uspekha: Komediiia v 4 deistviiakh*, Moscow: VUOAP, 1953.

<sup>54</sup> Irina Goff, 'Vodianye znaki. Zapiski o Iurii Trifonove', *Oktiabr'*, 1985, no. 8, pp. 94-106.

<sup>55</sup> See V. Zalessky, 'Zalog uspekha', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 2 December 1953, p. 4. and T. Chebotarevskaia, 'Sud'ba mladogo talanta', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 23 December 1953.

bring the characters to life. Andrei's rebirth, like that of Sergei Palavin and Lena Medovskaia in *Studenty*, was unbelievable and unrealistic as it happened far too easily, without any great moral and creative recovery being shown. The character of Andrei was seen as far too passive and lacking psychological motivation. Stronger characters and more optimism were needed to fight against Mukomolov's philistine attitude to life, which looked only for an easy way.<sup>56</sup>

*Zalog uspekha* was written as a comedy and has some humorous characters: Andrei's interfering aunt, the art critic who has made her living from repeating the same two words, and other sycophants who hang round established artists. However it does pose the serious question of how to live in art and thus in life. It has something in common with other Trifonov stories about art: *Neokonchannyi kholst*<sup>57</sup>, *Drugaiia zhizn'*<sup>58</sup> and *Poseshchenie Marka Shagala*<sup>59</sup>. Trifonov's father-in-law was an artist and, for part of his married life, he lived with his wife's parents on Maslovka in a block of flats and studios purpose-built for the Artists' Union. It was from here that he took the material for these works. His father-in-law, Amshei Markovich Niurenberg, was the prototype for Iona Aleksandrovich (*Poseshchenie Marka Shagala*) and Georgii Maksimovich (*Drugaiia zhizn'*). Under socialist realism, he had had to destroy all his early works and conceal his friendship with Chagall, and thus led a deformed and unsatisfactory artistic life, having betrayed his art. This was not necessarily an easy way out, but it was the only way to survive under Stalin's repressive regime; the alternative being to emigrate, as Chagall had done in 1922 after four years as Commissar of Art in Vitebsk. *Neokonchannyi kholst* also tells of early success, then failure, with the only way out being to leave Moscow. Muranov, the main protagonist of the story, has found success a few years before the story opens with his painting 'Urok fizkul'turi'. Since then he has toyed with many genres, but is never satisfied with his work; nothing is as good as 'Urok fizkul'turi'. He falls out of fashion, has little money and loses many friends. Only his girlfriend Vera believes in him. Due to his impoverished state, he accepts a state commission to do three sports pictures, but they turn out to be empty and repulsive. On Vera's advice, he goes to Tambov where his

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p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> V. Sappak, 'Zamysel obiazivaet', *Teatr*, 1954, no. 3, pp. 93-102.

<sup>57</sup> 'Neokonchennyi kholst. Rasskaz', *Neva*, 1957, no.3, pp. 87-94. Reprinted in *Pod solntsem*, 1959.

<sup>58</sup> 'Drugaiia zhizn'. Povest', *Novyi mir*, 1975, no. 8, pp. 7-99.

<sup>59</sup> 'Poseshchenie Marka Shagala' in 'Oprokinutyi dom. Rasskazy', *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 58-87.

inspiration is regenerated. Ironically, Vera becomes the sacrifice for this: he is so absorbed in his work that he no longer needs her. Here Trifonov the writer is clearly using the painter as a figure for any creative artist, including the author. Muranov's experience mirrors Trifonov's own dilemma: how to find an honest way to build on his early success. After a period of spiritual crisis, Trifonov also fled from Moscow but, like Fyodor in *Zalog uspekha*, went to Turkmenia to find himself, and to seek a way out of socialist realist compromises. He has discovered, as Andrei Karpukhin says, «Мне будет очень трудно писать вторую вещь»<sup>60</sup> and is ready to take the advice of one old artist in the story... «И не думаете после первой удачи, что вы уже законченный мастер».<sup>61</sup> After the failure of *Zalog uspekha*, Trifonov never wrote another play.<sup>62</sup> Due to this and other troubles in his life (see Chapter 3), he began to feel increasingly unsure of himself and his creative talent. He now understood Tvardovsky's warning, given to him after the initial success of *Studenty*: «Сейчас успех - опасность страшная!»<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Zalog uspekha*, Moscow: VUOAP, 1953, Act 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, Act 3.

<sup>62</sup> However, many of his major works were adapted for the stage, most notably *Obmen* and *Dom na naberezhnoi*, which were staged at the Taganka Theatre under the direction of Iurii Liubimov from the 1970s onwards.

<sup>63</sup> 'Zapiski soseda' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 154.

## CHAPTER 3

### FLIGHT TO TURKMENIA

The years from 1952 to 1964 represented a time of transition for Trifonov, as well as the rest of the country. Stalin's death in 1953 led to a more liberal period under Krushchev, culminating in the emergence of Solzhenitsyn and a new generation of talented, not necessarily "socialist" realist writers in Tvardovsky's *Novyi mir*. During this time, Trifonov was, as we have seen, unable to capitalise on his original success in the pages of this now trail-blazing journal. He was coming to terms with himself, the fate of his father<sup>1</sup>, his own private life and political position. In his work he found two metaphors for life - the desert and sport. These themes sometimes overlapped but, for the sake of clarity, this chapter will examine the theme of the Turkmenian desert and the following that of sport, which fascinated Trifonov throughout his life.

#### ***POST-STUDENTY***

Once the initial euphoria had died down, troubles lay head for Trifonov. When filling in official forms, he had always concealed the truth about his parentage. He rightly feared that, as the son of an "enemy of the people", he would never be admitted anywhere or have anything published. At first he put that his father had died of tuberculosis, which he considered only to be a deception of a deception. Later, he actually stated that his father had been "repressed" but failed to mention "as an enemy of the people". Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko said that Iurii continued to feel extremely guilty about this; he considered it a betrayal not to have told the whole truth about Valentin Trifonov's death.<sup>2</sup> The theme of betrayal is important throughout Trifonov's works, although it is not overtly stated because it so completely pervaded Soviet society of the writer's generation that it became almost the norm. However, after he was awarded the Stalin Prize for *Studenty*, the truth about his parentage was discovered. There was uproar in the Literary Institute's Komsomsol organisation of which Trifonov was still a member, and in *Zapiski sosedai*<sup>3</sup> he remembers the reactions of some of the other members. Mikhail Bubennov, Fyodor Panferov and Leonid Sobolev demanded he be punished, while Marietta Shaginian wanted his Stalin Prize

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<sup>1</sup> Resulting in the publication of 'Otblesk kostra', *Znamia*, 1965, no. 2, pp. 142-160; no. 3, pp. 152-177.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, 13 October 1993.

<sup>3</sup> *Druzhiba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, pp. 7-43.

withdrawn.<sup>4</sup> If Trifonov had been expelled from the Komsomol, it would have prevented him joining the Writers' Union and becoming a professional writer. In the end, he was only severely reprimanded. Bubennov<sup>5</sup> also mentioned in front of Stalin that Trifonov was the son of a *vrag naroda*, but the Soviet leader only asked if the book was good, to which Fedin replied that it was. Trifonov remarks on this in *Zapiski soseda* that these 'children' (meaning Fedin et al) were kissing the hands covered in their fathers' blood. Trifonov did feel guilty at the thought that he might have caused trouble for Tvardovsky and *Novyi mir*, and knew that few would help him due to the political climate. However, there were some who deliberately set out to compromise Trifonov still further with the authorities, probably out of envy of his success.

After *Studenty*, Trifonov suffered from writer's block, feeling that he had no more experiences about which to write. Tvardovsky advised against a sequel, such as 'Postgraduates', but instead encouraged him to visit new places, gain new experiences. In 1951 he went to see an example of the 'building of communism', *stroika kommunizma*, at the Kuibyshev Hydro-Electric Station on the Volga. The article he wrote as a result of this trip<sup>6</sup> pays lip service to the 'cult of personality', as do parts of *Studenty*. The mood is very patriotic, all the workers are happy and enthusiastic:

Это великая стройка потому, что строит весь народ и строит для всего народа. Это великая стройка потому, что это сталинская стройка, начатая и осуществляемая по начертаниям великого Сталина.

Such trips were encouraged by the Writers' Union who wanted their members to write of the building of socialism in far-away places.

Trifonov had been interested in the desert from childhood. This, as well as the influence of Paustovsky's stories and letters from his sister, who had just finished university in Moscow and was now working as a biologist in Turkmenia, prompted Trifonov to ask *Novyi mir* for a *komandirovka* to Central Asia. Trifonov himself says of this:

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<sup>4</sup>In 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp.118-24, Trifonov meets one of them, simply referred to as N., abroad years later. N's view of the whole event is completely different. He appears unaware of the harm he caused Trifonov. This is one example of memory being selective, common in many of Trifonov's fictional portrayals.

<sup>5</sup>According to E.R. Frankel, *Novy Mir: A Case Study in the Politics of Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, Bubennov was an abject conformist under Stalin and after his death.

<sup>6</sup>'Vstrechi na Volge', *Smena*, 1951, no. 21, pp. 9-11.



"Why Turkmenia? I find it hard to explain. Perhaps I wanted to see an altogether unfamiliar way of life, something poles apart from the subject-matter of my earlier novel, *Students* .... Perhaps I had retained from my childhood a longing for remote lands, for the mysterious East, for the desert, oases, caravans, for everything that little boys dream about of at an age when they are enthusiastic about foreign stamps and the tales of Jules Verne. Or perhaps pure chance was to blame - my sister, a graduate of the Moscow University Faculty of Biology, went to Turkmenia on an expedition and wrote some very entertaining letters home."<sup>7</sup>

Trifonov left for Turkmenia in April 1952. Here he visited another communist construction site, the Great Turkmenian Canal. He was in the middle of writing a novel on this, when, after Stalin's death, the project was judged unviable and work on the canal was halted. This left Trifonov in a quandary - how could he finish a book about an aborted project? Who would want to read it? In 1954, he went to discuss this with *Novyi mir* and ask for an advance for a new novel. Tvardovsky refused, telling him to write about what he had seen on his trip to the canal and why it had been closed down, and also suggested that he try writing short stories for a change. Possibly due to the poor reaction to his plays and the fact that they had waited so long for his next work *Novyi mir's* interest in Trifonov had waned and they felt that they had wasted money on him. For his part, he decided never to cross their threshold again. (Later Trifonov was to have his stories about Moscow life published in *Novyi mir*<sup>8</sup>, but it took twelve years before his relationship with Tvardovsky was renewed). This, along with the flop of his play *Zalog uspekha*, left Trifonov feeling unsure of himself and his creativity. He had believed *Studenty* to be the start of a glittering career but now it appeared that he had been mistaken.

Stalin's death in March 1953 provoked different reactions in different people. Trifonov's grandmother was very upset, as were millions of others, who could hardly believe that their leader had actually died, he who had built himself up to seeming almost god-like in their eyes. Tens of thousands filled the streets of Moscow to pay their last respects and many were crushed to death in the

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<sup>7</sup> Introduction to 'Thirst Aquenched' in *Soviet Literature*, 1964, no. 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> 'Dva rasskaza: Vera i Zoika; Byl letnij polden' ', *Novyi mir*, 1966, no. 12, pp.75-91. 'Dva rasskaza: Samyi malen'kii gorod; Golubinaia gibel' ', *Novyi mir*, 1968, no. 1, pp. 74-88. 'V gribnuiu osen'. Rasskaz', *Novyi mir*, 1968, no. 8, pp. 67-75. 'Obmen. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1969, no. 12, pp. 29-65. 'Predvaritel'nye itogi', *Novyi mir*, 1970, no.12, pp. 101-40. 'Dolgoe proshchanie. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1971, no. 8, pp. 53-107. 'Drugaia zhizn'. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1975, no. 8, pp. 7-99.

process. The day of Stalin's funeral is described in *Vremia i mesto*<sup>9</sup>, the mass hysteria, the heavy, oppressive atmosphere, the fear of what was to come. Trifonov's mother was worried that things would get worse. Trifonov himself, however, felt an unclear joy on hearing of Stalin's death, sensing the winds of change.<sup>10</sup> Life did indeed change for the better. In 1955, Valentin Trifonov was posthumously rehabilitated (a very important event for Iurii), and in the following year Krushchev denounced Stalin at the Twentieth Party Conference, which led to a policy of de-Stalinisation and the Thaw, a period of relative literary freedom. Although Trifonov's work was fairly cautious throughout the Thaw, the Stalinist clichés and tributes to the leader disappeared at this time and were omitted in all future editions of *Studenty*. He could now publish more honest stories written during the Stalinist period, such as *Belye vorota*<sup>11</sup> and *Zimnyi den' v garazhe*<sup>12</sup>, and embark on new works with growing confidence.

### **SHORT STORIES**

From 1953 to 1964, Trifonov worked as a sports journalist to make ends meet, often travelling abroad to various sporting events.<sup>13</sup> He also made several more trips to Turkmenia in search of creative stimuli, wishing to: «уехать подальше. Увидеть жизнь, не похожую на ту, о которой писал прежде».<sup>14</sup> The culmination of this was the novel *Utolenie zhazhdy*<sup>15</sup> and many short stories. Some of these short stories came out in various journals and newspapers<sup>16</sup>, while a large number were published together in 1959 in the periodical *Znamia*<sup>17</sup> and as a separate book under the title *Pod solntsem* later that year.<sup>18</sup> Trifonov saw this as the turning point in his literary career:

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<sup>9</sup> 'Vremia i mesto. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1981, no. 9, pp. 72-148; no. 10, pp. 22-108.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Zapiski soseda', *Druzhba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, pp. 7-43.

<sup>11</sup> Written 1947-52, published in *Pod solntsem. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Written in 1946, published in *Pod solntsem*.

<sup>13</sup> This will be expanded on further in the following chapter.

<sup>14</sup> 'Zapiski soseda', p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> 'Utolenie zhazhdy. Roman', *Znamia*, 1963, no. 4, pp. 81-118; no. 5, pp. 3-39; no. 6, pp. 3-68; no. 7, pp. 3-88.

<sup>16</sup> See bibliography for further information.

<sup>17</sup> 'Puti v pustyne. Rasskazy', *Znamia*, 1959, no.2, pp. 70-99.

« . . . в какой-то момент показалось, что не о чем писать, нет горючего, мотор отстоялся . . . »

Так или иначе был изнурительный период, каких-то метаний, писал пьесы, которые были неудачны, хотя и ставились в театрах, . . . Ездил в какие-то командировки . . .

Я считаю, что внутренний сдвиг к новой стилистике, новому подходу к литературе случился в 1959 году в 'туркменских рассказах'.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, these new stories were rejected for publication in *Novyi mir* by Zaks, on the grounds that they were about "eternal themes".<sup>20</sup> Though a curious reason for rejection, this was true enough. The stories do cover 'eternal themes' - life, death, time, history.

In an early 'Turkmenian' article, *Rozhdenie gorodov*<sup>21</sup>, written in 1955, Trifonov remarks on how there are now towns where before, on his last visit, there were only sand-dunes. Here we see a favourite theme of Trifonov's: the passage of time and its effect on the landscape. In his later Moscow stories, the city swallows up the surrounding countryside and the dachas. In these tales of Turkmenia, man is already battling with nature, trying to conquer the desert, and Trifonov conveys a sense of rapid urbanisation in both space and time.

At this stage, having only visited Turkmenia a couple of times, Trifonov says: «Я слишком недолго жил здесь, чтобы иметь смелость писать о людях». <sup>22</sup> He, like his character Fedor in *Zalog uspekha*, believes that the artist needs to spend a long period of time with people before he can realistically create an artistic work about them, be it a painting or a work of prose. However, this was achieved the following year with the story *Doktor, student i Mitia*.<sup>23</sup>

This story tells of three people travelling across the desert together, and contrasts their characters, outlooks and positions in life. Liakhov, the doctor, is weary of life and is cut off from other people. He has no desire to be in Turkmenia, he was sent there as part of his work. His wife could not endure the

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<sup>18</sup> *Pod solntsem. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

<sup>19</sup> 'V kratkom - beskonechnoe', *Voprosy literatury*, 1974, no. 8, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> For Trifonov's recollection of this see the story 'Vechnye temy', published as part of the *Oprokinutyi dom* cycle in, ironically, *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 58-87.

<sup>21</sup> 'Rozhdenie gorodov. Zametki pisatel'ia', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 21 June 1955, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> 'Doktor, student i Mitia. Rasskaz', first published in *Molodaia gvardiia*, 1956, no. 1, pp. 54-76.

conditions and left after six months. He envies the student, whom, he feels, is free to go where he wants and do what he wants, free of all the worries that besets him, Liakhov. At the end of the story he saves a shepherd's life. Although an unsympathetic character at first, this action suggests underlying worth and moral fibre. The student, young and naive, is fascinated by all the new things around him and is constantly taking notes. He is more interested in life than the doctor. The eternal problem of the generation gap is shown. The story was also interpreted by Soviet critics as showing the differences between the old psychology and the new, as a critique of old-style individualism, in that Liakhov worries about himself and is unaware of his position in the collective. Be that as it may, *Doktor, student i Mitya* is nevertheless much subtler than the "ideologically sound" *Studenty*. Trifonov goes deep inside his characters to give a psychological portrayal of how they react, in different conditions, to the hard life of the Turkmenian desert.

Another story which was written in 1956, the year of the Twentieth Party Conference, is *Posledniaia okhota*.<sup>24</sup> The main character, Sapar Meredovich, is head of a district department of culture, and is an unregenerate, self-serving party boss of the old kind who abuses his powers. He uses his work truck for his own purposes and hunts antelope illegally on a nature reserve. He is indifferent, haughty, a representative of the old Stalinist regime, of its cruelty and misuse of power. However, this is his last hunt thanks to the arrival of a new gamekeeper. Sapar's time has passed, a new epoch has arrived. The old is again contrasted with the new. The brutality of the unnecessary hunt is a figure for Stalinism, which is to be replaced by a new humanism under Krushchev.

There is a great difference in style between *Studenty* and the Turkmenian stories. The majority of those stories published in the collections 'Puti v pustyne' and *Pod solntsem* are written in the first person. The narrator is a journalist from Moscow (like Trifonov) on a *komandirovka* in Turkmenia, who gives his impressions of the people and places he encounters. One of the first of these stories is 'Polet', where the journalist-narrator gives his first aerial view of Turkmenia from the plane. He describes how he can see the boundlessness of the Kara Kum desert and feels human persistence in its battle against nature for the irrigation of the land and the construction of the canal in an attempt to bring water to the people living there.

In 'Piat' let nazad' we again feel the passage of time when the narrator recalls a trip to West Turkmenia five years before. Where once there was

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<sup>24</sup> *Pod solntsem. Rassказы*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

nothing, towns have sprung up. He is stopped by a man, with whom, on that previous trip, he had sheltered from a storm but can not recall his name or his face. Trifonov described a similar incident in the story 'Znakomye mesta'.<sup>25</sup>

The narrator meets many different people on his travels round Turkmenia with his local driver Achilov. There are many workers, such as the machine operators in 'Pod solntsem' (the title story), who basically only work or sleep, surrounded by the desert, which they scarcely notice. One of them, Evseiev, a casual worker, works during the heat of the day (impossible for most) not for enthusiasm but for money. This character was to be more fully developed in that of Nagaev in *Utolenie zhazhdy*. The narrator also meets some herpetologists ('Beseda s gerpetologami') who, in contrast to the torpidity and indifference of such characters, are alive to their environment in a changing and evolving world, completely wrapped up in their work, studying new lizards, snakes and tortoises which have been found in Turkmenia.

He also encounters many of the local people, such as the three old men in 'Stariki v Kaushute'. Their views on all the sweeping changes happening in Turkmenia and their own lives are explored in many of the stories. The shepherds in 'O vode' are extremely sceptical, but the arrival of water to the desert is vital to their flocks. Many of the Turkmenians in 'Festival' v Mary' see the changes as inevitable in the history of their country. New and old, ancient customs and modern methods are contrasted. 'Staraiia pesnia' tells of a man disturbed on the train by singing. Two Turkmenians are on their way to a competition; one sings an old love song, the other a modern folk song about the canal. Past and present exist side by side, but many are so tied up with the present that they have forgotten about the past. The poignancy of this is described in 'Pesochnie chasy', where Achilov and the narrator visit the grave of a former general of the Arab prince Omar. They ask the locals for information but no-one seems to know or care, although one day they too will be dust like the general. As David Gillespie pointed out: "This story more than any other of this time reveals Trifonov's growing interest in the connection of past and present: here the struggle with the everyday, the banal, prevents a true appreciation and understanding of the importance of the past."<sup>26</sup>

The style of these Turkmenian stories is laconic and documentary, as befits the narrator's occupation.<sup>27</sup> They are most often confined to a factual

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<sup>25</sup> 'Znakomye mesta', *Molodoi kolkhoznik*, 1948, no. 4, pp. 12-13. See Chapter Two.

<sup>26</sup> David Gillespie, *Iurii Trifonov: unity through time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.30.

description of one episode or character. 'Maki' and 'Ochki' on the other hand are much more lyrical, with an omniscient narrator and a small plot. 'Maki' centres around a meteorological station and a brief affair between two married people forced to live apart from their spouses - Grisha from Moscow and Olga from Leningrad. During their affair, the poppies flower around their huts. When they next meet, both they and the countryside have changed. They are tired and weary; the poppies have all died. Only the sand and the intense heat remain. The story shows how testing life can be in the desert, especially for people forced to work away from home and lead a celibate existence for which they are wholly unprepared.

'Ochki' is also about people adjusting to a different way of life. The main character, Galia from Moscow, misses her friends and the creature comforts of the capital and, amongst other things, has to overcome her fear of spiders. One day she loses her glasses and becomes lost in the desert for two days. After this experience and the relief when she is found, her view of life in Turkmenia completely changes. She now likes the people and the country around her, as did Varia in 'V stepi' after her trip across the Kazakhstan steppe.<sup>28</sup> In a way 'Ochki' is an allegory for Trifonov's new outlook on life. During the time he spent in Turkmenia he crossed his own spiritual desert and found not only new material, characters and ideas, but himself as a writer.

Trifonov did not, however, shake off his Socialist Realist training overnight. There are, in some cases, still divisions of positive and negative characters - those who are dedicated to their work (and the cause), and those who work only for personal gain, such as Evseev. However, the characters are no longer as black and white as they were in *Studenty* and *Zalog uspekha*. There is a new realism and psychological depths in their portrayal. These, we feel, are characters from real life. Trifonov sets them against a background rich in local color, without making it too exotic, a fault of many works on Central Asia. The combination of journalism and lyricism works well in the depiction of human character. Trifonov inherited his lyrical attention to detail from Paustovsky, while the influence of Chekhov lead him to delve deep into people and the complexities of their lives. With the new experiences and material gained in Turkmenia, he had developed a new understanding of people and shaken off the woodenness of some of his previous works. This was affirmed by

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<sup>27</sup> At this time Trifonov was writing articles for several newspapers on various sporting events, and his style in these stories reflects this.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Two. 'V stepi' was first published in *Molodaia gvardiia: Al'manakh molodykh pisatelei*. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1948, II, pp. 150-179. It was also published in *Pod solntsem*.

the critics of the time. Finitskaia described *Pod solntsem* as "bright, original impressions of life", "the new synthesis of psychological insight with an objective documentary, which leads to a fuller presentation of the human character."<sup>29</sup> Lazarev also praised Trifonov for realistically portraying life in the desert and avoiding overtly exotic descriptions.<sup>30</sup>

Trifonov had come a long way since his earlier orthodox Socialist Realist works. *Pod solntsem* is more alive and authentic, the characters less stereotyped. New themes, which he was later to develop more fully - history, time and the interweaving of past and present - begin to emerge.

### **UTOLENIE ZHAZHDY**

In 1958, work was resumed on the Great Turkmenian Canal, now under the name of the Kara-Kum canal. In the following year, Trifonov resumed work on the novel he had started writing in the early 1950's, and in 1963 *Utolenie zhazhdy* was published in *Znamia*.<sup>31</sup> The novel follows not only the construction of the canal but also the life of the journalist Petr Koryshev who has to come from Moscow to work in Turkmenia. These two lines are developed quite separately although they sometimes intersect: for instance the paper which Koryshev works for covers the construction of the canal and he sometimes attends meetings there. *Utolenie zhazhdy* opens with Koryshev travelling to Turkmenia. He and the other passengers on the train talk about the desert:

«Для меня это миллионы кубов сыпучего грунта, - сказал старший строитель, седой маленький человек, страдавший одышкой. - Я думаю о бульдозерах, которые подымут эти Гимали песка.

«Для меня нет дороже места на всей земле. Ведь я родился в здешних песках, в районе Артыка, - сказал другой строитель, туркмен.

«Я не видел эту землю шестнадцать лет. Шестнадцать лет, шестнадцать лет! - повторял человек, уничтожавший пиво. И глаза у него были красные. - Вы понимаете, что значит шестнадцать лет?

А я молчал. Я ехал в пустыню потому, что у меня не было

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<sup>29</sup> Z. Finitskaia, 'Pod iarkim solntsem', *Oktiabr*, 1960, no. 12, pp. 212-14.

<sup>30</sup> L. Lazarev, 'Bez ekzotiki', *Druzhba narodov*, 1959, no. 6, pp. 227-9.

<sup>31</sup> 'Utolenie zhazhdy', *Znamia*, 1963, no. 4, pp. 81-118; no. 5, pp. 3-39; no. 6, pp. 3-68; no. 7, pp. 3-88.

выхода. И я не любил её, и не думал о ней, и не вспоминал о ней. Я вспоминал о другом. И, кроме того, меня мучила жажда». [I, 409]

The thirst referred to in the title is not only for water, but also reflects hopes and desires for justice after the Twentieth Party Conference:

«Есть жажда не менее сильная, чем жажда воды - это жажда справедливости! Восстановления справедливости!» [I, 662]

The question of course arises as to how to achieve this justice, whether gradually or by sweeping changes, and with whom the responsibility lies - with the party or with the individual:

«Вы знаете, как туркмены утоляют жажду? . . . сначала утоляют «малую жажду», две-три пиалки, а потом, после ужина, - «большую жажду», когда поспеет большой чайник. А человеку, который пришёл из пустыни, никогда не дают много воды. Дают понемногу.»

«Да не будет никому плохо! Чепуха это! ... Как может быть чересчур много правды! Или чересчур много справедливости?» [I, 662]

Koryshev also strongly thirsts for justice. His father, like the author's, was arrested as an "enemy of the people" during the Purges and sentenced to death. Because of this injustice, Koryshev himself became an outcast and was expelled from university. He had to study on his own to gain his diploma. His mother is now dead while his father was posthumously rehabilitated two years before the action of the novel takes place, following the death of Stalin, but Koryshev still finds it difficult to find work. The old feelings are still with him and he is very unsure of himself:

«Я сижу долго, наслаждаюсь одиночеством. Беспокойство утихло, ушла куда-то вглубь, спряталось. Эти приступы мне знакомы. Мне кажется, они происходят от времени. Обычно мы времени не чувствуем, оно протекает сквозь нас незаметно, но иногда оно зацепляется за что-то внутри нас, и на миг становится страшно: похоже на приближение смерти.» [I, 485]

He has come to Turkmenia in some ways to make a new start. He eventually finds a job at a local paper, *Kopetdagskaia zaria*. He is inquisitive and impartial though he lacks strong will. For most of the novel he seems to drift. However, near the end, when a breach occurs in the dam and everyone is working flat out to stop the water, Koryshev feels жажду участия and helps out. Now, (as part of the collective, of course, but also, perhaps, as an outcast reintegrated into a society which had alienated him) he feels new purpose to his life and decides to stay on in Turkmenia and write a book about the canal. The novel concludes two years later when the canal itself has been finished and Koryshev has even



made a film about it. During his time in Turkmenia, Koryshev, like Trifonov, found real work and himself.

Thus Koryshev, like Vadim Belov in *Studenty* is partly an autobiographical character. When pondering the course of his life, he describes how it was turned upside down after his father's arrest:

«Нет, настоящее было, но недолго, лет до одиннадцати, детство было настоящее, а потом все полетело кувырком: отрочество ни к черту, юность искалечена войной, а потом непрерывная борьба за то, чтобы быть человеком, несмотря ни на что. Всю жизнь я изо всех сил старался поправить непоправимое. И тысячи других занимались тем же самым. Пока вдруг не сломалось время - неожиданно, как ломается нож. Вот куда ушли эти годы: в ненастоящую жизнь. Но настоящее будет! Оно не может не быть!» [I, 516]

This is very much how Trifonov felt after the death of his father - extremely bewildered as if he had entered another, unreal life. However, in this passage, republished during the time of Brezhnev, when Stalin and his excesses were merely brushed under the carpet and no ill could be written of him, the death of Koryshev's father is not mentioned and his arrest is understood but not actually recorded.<sup>32</sup> The following passage from the original version printed in *Znamia* is more explicit. It was printed in later versions, but the italicised words were omitted<sup>33</sup>:

«. . . в тридцать восьмом году в Москве было дождливое лето. Дождливое лето! Вдруг я вижу его, оно возникает с обыкновенной отчетливостью: сначала долгая поездка на трамвае на улицу Матросская тишина. Там давали справки и принимали передачи. *Отца арестовали в апреле.* Там были маленькие черные домишки, булыжная мостовая, заборы и толпы людей, *темные, молчаливые толпы*, которые выстраивались в бесконечные очереди--женщины, дети, старухи, все они стремились к окошечку. . . . Мне было двенадцать лет, я читал Вальтера Скотта. . . . Тогда было ужасно дождливое лето, я не разу не купался в реке, и не было никакой дачи, и никакого пионерлагеря, я жил у тети Оли на Остроженке и читал книги, как сумасшедший».<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I shall examine this in more detail at the end of the chapter.

<sup>33</sup> This has been noted by Tatiana Patera in *Obzor tvorchestva i analiz moskovskikh povestei Iurii Trifonova*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983, pp. 149-50.

<sup>34</sup> This passage is reminiscent of the heavy atmosphere of Akhmatova's *Requiem*, of the people standing in prison queues.

This is very much like Trifonov's own experience, even to his taking solace in literature, Walter Scott being one of his favourite authors. Koryshev, like Trifonov, is a journalist who flees to Turkmenia to escape Moscow life. He too writes a book and the scenario for a film on the canal, and Trifonov even gives his character one of his own stories 'Deti doktora Grishi'.<sup>35</sup>

As Koryshev resembles Belov, *Utolenie zhazhdy* has its own Palavin, in the shape of Sasha Zurabov. He too was a school friend of Koryshev's, and again we see the contrast between honest and self-seeking characters. Zurabov is a spiritual vacuum, an ethical cripple like Palavin. He lives only for himself and has many adulterous relationships. Thus he betrays and is unjust to his wife Lera. She eventually leaves him for Karabash, an engineer on the canal, one of the innovators and thus one of the "good guys" or, in Socialist Realist terms, a positive character. Tamara, the secretary from the paper, describes Sasha thus:

« . . . он слабый . . . он талантлив . . . Но он ужасно ленив душой, у него нет вкуса к работе и к жизни . . . » [I, 610]

Zurabov takes no responsibility for his actions and will not help others. He did not defend Koryshev when he was thrown out of the Komsomol and university for concealing the fact that his father was an "enemy of the people". But this betrayal has been conveniently forgotten. He has a completely different perception of their student days than Koryshev. He remembers only the fun he had, not the victims of Stalin's policies. He recalls how the others wanted to expell Koryshev, but sees his own role as passive: he did not stop them. Already a major theme of Trifonov's is appearing: - that of selective memory. As we have seen, the tale of Zurabov's meeting with Koryshev has echoes of the frankly autobiographical 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok'.<sup>36</sup> Zurabov takes no part in the discussions about the current problems, changes and the thirst for justice. He believes that nothing will change, that it is all hot air. Even as Palavin's negative traits are shown to have been left over from a time past, that of pre-revolutionary bourgeois materialism and individualism, so Zurabov, also a negative character and an "individualist", has residual features from the last epoch, Stalin's. He too, in some ways, is a conformist, comfortable in his old life. The type of Trifonov character who has a vested interest in keeping things the way they are will be discussed in more detail below. When Zurabov writes an article against the new innovative methods at the canal it is for

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<sup>35</sup> The plot of the story 'Deti doktora Grishi' is briefly mentioned in chapter 19 of *Utolenie zhazhdy*; it was later published in full in *Vokrug sveta*, 1964, no. 7, pp. 58-59.

<sup>36</sup> 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp. 118-24. See Footnote 4. Like N.'s, Zurabov's memory is selective.

personal reasons, a form of revenge because his wife Lera has left him for the engineer Karabash. He has no strong views on the construction of the canal, but it is natural for him to side with the conservatives, because his motivation, like theirs, is purely personal: revenge, money or career.

Zurabov's counterpart at the canal is Semion Nagaev. Nagaev is not a straightforward character; he seems to have positive traits, but he uses them in a negative manner (like Sergei Palavin). For instance, he is incredibly hard-working, even working throughout the intense heat when most are unable to so much as stir their tea, until, on one occasion, he passes out. Due to his production totals, he receives a prize and appears in the local paper. However, he is no "true" Stakhanovite; he is merely driven by greed. This "hero of labour" cannot be bothered with his media coverage; to him it is a waste of valuable time and his time means money. The other workers dislike him intensely, partly out of envy of his success (as happened with some "real-life" Stakhanovites), but mainly because they consider him to be a miser who cares only for money and himself. He will not teach Biashim, one of the young trainees, as it will take time. Thus Biashim eventually has to move to another site to receive his training. Karabash makes an example of Nagaev, saying he does not understand the importance of the collective, he works only for himself and will not help others. When there is a breach in the dam, the other workers immediately rush to help without question, but Nagaev sees the catastrophe purely in terms of how much emergency money he could demand. This is the final straw for his wife Marina, who, like Lera, seems in some way to embody the forces of nature, very different to the female characters in *Studenty*. Lera smells of nature and the desert, and is in some ways reminiscent of Aksinia, the heroine of Sholokov's *Tikhii Don* and one of Trifonov's favourite literary characters, whose hair smells of hay. They are both positive Mother Earth figures, and nature seems to tell them finally to leave their unsuitable partners. Marina had always felt sorry for Nagaev, cut off as he is from other people; she feels his tragedy, but after the incident with the dam, she sides with the other workers and Nagaev leaves the canal, although he does return months later and is taken on at a much lower grade.

The character of Nagaev received a lot of attention and criticism from the Soviet critics due to what they categorised as his negative individualism, considering him to be a harmful role-model, especially as society (and hence the party) does not show him the "correct" path at the end and bring about his full repentance and reformation. Trifonov could not understand all this attention as he had known many such people at the factory where he worked during the

Second World War, and had created Nagaev from his own experience rather than trying to typify a "social problem".<sup>37</sup>

All the other workers are committed to the construction of the canal. For many of the locals, like Beki, it means bringing the canal to his kolkhoz, quenching the land's thirst for water. Water is very important to Turkmenia and, as one of the locals says "Happy the people that have both desert and water".<sup>38</sup> As in the collection *Pod solntsem* nature forms an impressive backdrop to the novel and, as the critic Svetov remarked, Trifonov's lyrical descriptions of the desert are "wonderfully alive".<sup>39</sup>

One other character who stands out, and is neither negative nor positive, is Denis Kuznetsov. He, like Koryshev, suffered under Stalinism. He was a prisoner of war, lived abroad for several years, but dared not return home for sixteen years later, after Krushchev's amnesty. He comes back to Turkmenia only to find his wife has remarried and wants nothing to do with him:

«Он приехал в этот город не для того, чтобы поступить фотокором в газету, а для того, чтобы найти здесь потерянное: дом, сына, женщину, которую он когда-то любил. И не нашел ничего.

Все было на месте, и даже дом, как ни удивительно, уцелел - один из немногих домов в городе, но теперь все это было чужое. Во всем этом умерло то, что было когда-то частью его, Дениса Кузнецова, и место того, что умерло, заполнило чужое, беспощадное. И нельзя было ничего требовать, - что потребуешь у времени?

Сын по-прежнему думал, что его отца зовут Михаил Иванович. А у женщины была одна забота: как бы от вторжения «тогда» не нарушилось ее «теперь».» [I, 555]

Denis has lost everything through no fault of his own. Only Koryshev, a kindred spirit, helps him and gets him the job at the paper. Life has lost all meaning for Denis and he becomes an alcoholic. In the end he dies trying to save the project by stopping the breach in the dam single-handedly. Thus in death he becomes a hero, something he never achieved whilst alive. In some ways Denis echoes the "little man" in Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*, swallowed up by the elements when they fight back against man's attempt to

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<sup>37</sup> See Lev Anninsky's interview of Trifonov, 'Pisatel' za rabochim stolom' in *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 11 July 1964, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> 'Thirst Aquenched', *Soviet Literature*, 1964, no. 1, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> F. Svetov, 'Utolenie zhazhdy', *Novyi mir*, 1963, no. 11, pp. 235-240.

conquer them. In the portrayal of Denis, Trifonov explores life, fate and death as in later works.

In *Utolenie zhazhdy*, as in many of the short stories, we see the old Turkmenia contrasted with the new, the battle between nature and man, between the desert and the canal. Many of the older generation are sceptical of the canal, as in the story 'O vode'. However the younger generation flock to the construction site to learn something new. Biashim is there because his father wanted him to learn different skills while there was the opportunity. But there is a more traditional reason. He is there to earn a dowry to be able to marry the woman he loves. This illustrates the old Turkmenian customs which many of his fellow workers think Biashim should ignore, but others say should be respected. In the end Biashim is murdered by his wife's brothers, who wanted her to marry a richer man.

Another contrast of old and new is that between the conservatives and the innovators, both on the construction of the canal and the editorship of the *Kopetdagskaia zaria*. At the canal, the conservatives are represented by Khorev, Niazdudiyev and Baskakov, the innovators by Ermasov and Karabash. Karabash was the replacement for a man called Feflov, an old type boss. Feflov loved hunting (echoing Sapar Meredovich in *Posledniaia okhota*) and promised the workers all kinds of incentives, such as cars and huts, but never delivered. There are technical and economic arguments over the construction of the canal, but these involve wider moral issues. It is not just about как лучше вести канал but как жить. Ermasov and Karabash are men of the new Krushchevian era; men of principle who serve the collective and the best interests of society. Ermasov, after Stalin's death, asked for the Great Turkmenian Canal to be shut down as he believed it to be another one of Stalin's grandiose but impractical ideas and a waste of public money. However now that he realises the true importance of water for the desert and its people, he and Karabash do all they can and take risks to bring water to the region as quickly as possible. His first action, in calling for the end of the canal project, reflects the change in time, people now feel able and at ease to speak up for what they believe in, and to question events around them, without fear of prison or death. Trifonov too can now answer Tvardovsky's question as to why the canal project was stopped, and then started again.

Khorev and his cronies are old-fashioned careerists and bureaucrats, who will not take risks and are only interested in personal gain. Because Ermasov has his own opinion and does not stick to state orders but tries new ideas instead, Khorev accuses him of building up a "cult of personality". Ermasov is no Stalinist like Khorev though. He was arrested during the purges and imprisoned

for two years. Khorev has vested interests in supporting the old construction methods as they will keep him in a job. However, all these arguments about construction suggest wider issues at stake:

«И все же главные причины вражды Ермасова с проектировщиками, поддержанными Хоревым, были гораздо глубже: они отражали ту борьбу и ломку, которая происходила повсюду, иногда открыто, но большей частью замаскированно, скрытно и даже иной раз бессознательно. Люди спорили о крутизне откосов, о дамбах, о фгразах, о мелочах, но на самом деле это были споры о времени и о судьбе». [I, 449]

These arguments between the innovators and the conservatives are between the old and new eras, between Stalinism and the hopes for moral renewal. The conservatives are not adverse to compromise and betrayal, while the innovators are genuine and sincere with people (Koryshev likes Ermasov because he feels he has a candid face). They have their counterparts on the paper. Luzgin, the editor, represents the old conservative forces, he too is a careerist and a bureaucrat. Koryshev represents the new attitudes in journalism, the desire for more objectivity and honesty.

This battle between the collective and the individual is in some ways a continuation from that in *Studenty*. All the negative characters and the conservatives are individualists, only interested in themselves. Ermasov works for the collective, for a higher cause, as he says to Koryshev:

«...если нет дела, которое любишь, которое больше тебя, больше твоих радостей, больше твоих несчастий, тогда нет смысла жить» [I, 736]

At this stage in Trifonov's writing, the Party, the collective and the cause are still very important. Ermasov (who was arrested in 1937 and spent a couple of years in the camps) tells Koryshev that he should join the party, especially as his father was a communist. Koryshev replies that he could not have joined the party until his father was rehabilitated and now he feels that his conscience will not permit him to join as he has achieved nothing with his life. Under Krushchev, the Party was still the guiding force of society - it was Stalin's "excesses" that were in the wrong, not the Party itself. Although Trifonov was never a member of the CPSU, perhaps he shared these thoughts of Koryshev's. After all, his father meant a great deal to him and as he was a leading Bolshevik who spent all his life working for the higher communist cause, it must all mean something? Thus the Komsomol is depicted in a favourable light: it is the "Komsomol way" to help with the canal breach and it will re-educate a thief. Karabash (a positive character) talks of working for communism. Even Denis, a neutral character, talks of this mystical larger cause:

«Суть в том, что надо жить для дела, не для делишек. Дело больше человека, больше его жизни. Дело - это для всех.» [I, 725]. Although *Utolenie zhazhdy* is still a Socialist Realist work like *Studenty*, it takes a much deeper reformist view of characters and the time they live in, of people and time.

*Utolenie zhazhdy* follows in the tradition of the industrial novels which were written in the 1930's. As Nina Kolesnikoff has pointed out <sup>40</sup>, at that time they were a direct response to the first Five Year Plan, showing the collective struggling against nature, political enemies and a capitalist attitude to labour. Under Krushchev, similar novels reflected the huge industrial and agricultural schemes in Siberia, the Urals and Central Asia. Other works of this genre include V. Kozhevnikov's *Znakomtes'*, *Baluev* <sup>41</sup>, B. Polevii *Na dikom brege* <sup>42</sup>, G. Vladimov's *Bol'shaia ruda* <sup>43</sup> and G. Nikolaeva's *Bitva v puty* <sup>44</sup>. Many Turkmenian writers and poets had works published about the canal as it was such an important event for their country, such as the novels *Nebit-Dag* and *Vetry nad Chelekenom* by B. Kerbabaev and B. Purshev respectively and poems by B. Khudainazarova such as *Goriachaia step'* and *Sormovo-27*. *Utolenie zhazhdy* has all the standard themes of industrial/construction novels: the romantic enthusiasm of the mass effort to conquer nature; the self-sacrificing devotion to the collective against the desire for personal advantage. An anti-Stalinist slant is introduced with the problem of individual initiative at the risk of criminal prosecution <sup>45</sup>, and the reflection of not only technical and construction problems and different attitudes to labour but the complimentary theme of moral renewal. The choice of Krushchev's new schemes, far from Moscow, as the setting of such novels, reflects the fact that Moscow was no longer the awe-inspiring capital it was considered at the time Trifonov wrote *Studenty*, but associated with careerism, cynicism and oppressive bureaucracy. It was Khrushchev's aim, frustrated at every turn by the "old guard", to decentralise the bureaucracy, so there was a hidden political agenda behind this new theme.

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<sup>40</sup> Nina Kolesnikoff, *Yuri Trifonov: A Critical Study*. Ann Arbor: Arbis, 1991, pp. 33-34.

<sup>41</sup> Moscow, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> Moscow, 1962.

<sup>43</sup> *Novyi mir*, 1961, no. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Moscow, 1957.

<sup>45</sup> See Deming Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature since Stalin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 167-169.

Only by leaving the capital could moral renewal be found<sup>46</sup>, hence Koryshev's (and perhaps in part Trifonov's) flight to Turkmenia.

As I have already mentioned, the narrative of *Utolenie zhazhdy* follows two separate but intertwining lines, written in different styles and almost as two separate novels.<sup>47</sup> The line following the construction of the canal is written in the third person by an omniscient narrator. The other half of the novel is written in the first person, the narrator being the journalist Petr Koryshev. It is much more personal and emotional than the industrial part; Koryshev often opens his heart and in many ways speaks for Trifonov. There are many narrative shifts between the two, but both are equally important. However there is no single or central hero or protagonist, the collective is still the most important focus of the novel.

In 1964 the novel was adapted into a play and staged at the Askhabad Russian Theatre, Sverdlovsk Drama Theatre and the Gorky Theatre in Moscow. A film was made in Turkmenia under the direction of B. Mansurov in 1965-1966 and was more successful than the novel. *Utolenie zhazhdy* was nominated for a Lenin Prize in 1965. However it was not particularly well received by the critics or the public. *Novyi mir* did not particularly like it and their critic Svetov, although complimentary about the style, accused Trifonov of toning down the subject matter.<sup>48</sup> Tatiana Patera suggests that *Novyi mir* took this position because they supported Solzhenitsyn who put the individual person first, not the collective and the cause like Trifonov.<sup>49</sup> Trifonov himself described his novel as being of a higher level of prose than his earlier works but recognised that its serious subject-matter failed to capture the readers' interest as *Studenty* had.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, *Utolenie zhazhdy* is a landmark in Trifonov's literary career and marks the second stage of his evolution as a writer. Trifonov described the novel thus:

«роман отражал время в том, чем люди тогда болели, о чем думали, спорили.»<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This theme culminated in the *derevenskaia proza* of the 1960s.

<sup>47</sup> The part of the novel concerned with the construction of the canal was even published separately in *Soviet Literature*, 1964, no.1.

<sup>48</sup> F. Svetov, 'Utolenie zhazhdy', *Novyi mir*, 1963, no. 11, pp. 235-240.

<sup>49</sup> Tatiana Patera, *Obzor tvorchestva Trifonova*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983, pp. 158-60.

<sup>50</sup> See 'V kratkom - beskonechnoe', *Voprosy literatury*, 1974, no. 8, pp. 171-94.



It shows the problems of the times, and man in the flow, the pulse of time. Thus, as in his later works, time has become a very important theme. Time (and thus history) leaves its mark on all people as people leave their mark on history.<sup>52</sup> Koryshev and Denis are formed by their experiences of Stalinism. Koryshev himself feels time in people rather than in buildings and believes that everyone is linked to a certain year:

«При виде некоторых я вижу годы, десятилетия и даже иногда века. . . . Мой отец всю жизнь пронес на себе печать семнадцатого года. А есть люди конца двадцатых годов, середины тридцатых, и люди начала войны, и они, как и мой отец, остаются такими до конца своих жизней». (I, 715-6)<sup>53</sup>

Also present in *Utolenie zhazhdy* as in later works, is the symbolism of the flux of time: «Время идет, как вода, тихо-тихо и незаметно, но попробуй останови его!» (I, 747)<sup>54</sup>

Thus *Utolenie zhazhdy* follows on in some ways from *Studenty* - the autobiographical details, collective versus individual, old in contrast to new - but also adumbrates many of the themes in Trifonov's later works, such as history and time. Already there are the descriptions of everyday life or *byt* . We see the everyday lives of a wide range of Soviet characters - journalists, editors, workers, bosses, biologists, drivers, shepherds - of all ages and nationalities. The wrestling match in Chapter sixteen also introduces another topic dear to Trifonov, that of sport.

Memory and morality and the way in which one influences the other, a predominant theme in Trifonov's later works, are first explored in *Utolenie zhazhdy*. Zurabov and Koryshev have completely different memories of their university days. Koryshev would like to forget the more unpleasant times in his life, as would Glebov (*Dom na naberezhnoi*)<sup>55</sup> and Pavel Letunov (*Starik*)<sup>56</sup>. Also, Trifonov said in an interview in 1964, he was becoming more interested in characters such characters as Sasha Zurabov:

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> This key concept opens Trifonov's next novel *Otblek kostra*: «На каждом человеке лежит отблеск истории. . . .История полыхает, как громадный костер, и каждый из нас бросает в него свой хворост». (IV, 7).

<sup>53</sup> This echoes Trifonov's own feeling that his own father bore the mark of 1917.

<sup>54</sup> For an excellent discussion of the symbolism of time in Trifonov's works, see S. Eremina & V. Piskunov 'Vremia i mesto prozy Iu. Trifonova', *Voprosy literatury*, 1982, no. 5, pp. 34-65.

<sup>55</sup> 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Povest' ', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167.

<sup>56</sup> 'Starik. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no. 3, pp. 27-153.

«Эта фигура меня и сейчас чрезвычайно занимает, и я буду писать о таком человеке дальше. Только надо найти Сашу Зурабова не на экзотическом фоне туркменской пустыни, а у него дома, скажем, в Москве, в каком-нибудь научном учреждении. Он будет филологом или, допустим, историком. . .».<sup>57</sup>

Sasha Zurabov is the forerunner to many of Trifonov's selfseeking characters in the Moscow Tales such as Gartvig (*Predvaritel'nye itogi* <sup>58</sup>) and Klimuk (*Drugaiia zhizn'* <sup>59</sup>), and foreshadows a time when Trifonov finally abandoned, in the words of Sasha Zurabov himself, the "mystical, idealistic tosh, based on the secular fight between good and evil"<sup>60</sup>. *Utolenie zhazhdy* represents Trifonov's coming of age as a writer, the turning point in his evolution, when he started to abandon socialist realist stereotypes and create realistic characters, no longer just positive or negative, black or white, but the grey blur between.

### ***THE QUESTION OF CENSORSHIP***

As with many of Trifonov's works, *Utolenie zhazhdy* and the Turkmenian stories "evolved" due to censorship and the current political climate. When these Turkmenian works were reprinted during the Brezhnev era, Trifonov was powerless to prevent those phrases relating to de-Stalinisation being omitted, just as passages glorifying Stalin had been removed from his earlier work. For instance, the hopeful lines at the end of *Poslednaia okhota*:

«Ага Низя больше не инспектор. Значит, не все по-прежнему. И знакомое чувство тревоги вдруг схватило Сапара Мередовича с прежней силой. . .»<sup>61</sup>

There were also omissions of phrases relating to what Brezhnev later dismissed as Khrushchev's "hare-brained schemes", such as his virgin lands campaign and great construction drives in Turkmenia and other republics, for instance in the following examples:

«Здесь я чувствую, как полезно моя работа, как я нужна людям - всем, всем. . .»<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> L. Anninsky, 'Pisatel' za rabochim stolom', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 11 July 1964, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> 'Predvaritel'nye itogi', *Novyi mir*, 1970, no. 12, pp. 101-40.

<sup>59</sup> 'Drugaiia zhizn'. Povesť', *Novyi mir*, 1975, no. 8, pp. 7-99.

<sup>60</sup> 'Thirst Aquenched', *Soviet Literature*, 1964, no. 1, p. 67.

<sup>61</sup> 'Poslednaia okhota' in *Pod solntsem: Rasskazy*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

«И нам кажется вдруг, что великая работа завершилась, ушли строители, упорные люди, которых не смогли одолеть ни жара, ни бураны, ни тоска по родным домам, ушли на новые стройки и увезли грохочущие свои машины - и осталась вода, осталась тихая, осчастливленная земля и новая жизнь на этой земле. . . »<sup>63</sup>

As with the short stories, once *Utolenie zhazhdy* was republished during the time of Brezhnev, passages relating to Krushev and de-Stalinisation were removed. The passage about the arrest of Koryshev's father was toned down, and the fact that Ermasov had been arrested during the purges was also omitted. Under Brezhnev, no further admissions of Stalin's crimes could be made for fear of this undermining the legitimacy of the Communist Party and its right to power.

It is unclear how much say, if any, Trifonov had concerning later omissions and censorship of his work. (The same could be said for any writer in the Soviet Union at that time). He was probably relieved to see the Stalinist clichés disappear from *Studenty*, a work which he could not bear to read in later life. However, it is doubtful that he approved of the aforementioned omissions in the passage relating to the arrest of Koryshev's father, as the arrest of a father was a theme to which he was to return in many other works. Under Brezhnev, there was no longer this great drive and enthusiasm to build communism; everything, including ideals and morals, "stagnate" and it is possible that some alterations emanated from the author himself, who may have felt genuine optimism but then came to the conclusion that it had not been quite justified. His 'Moscow Tales' show the effects of stagnation in Brezhnev's time, not so much on the economy but on people's morality, and Trifonov was at this time deeply pessimistic about the way his society was going.

There is no doubt that the pressure of censorship, the rules of which changed almost from year to year depending on the current political scene, were exceedingly burdensome. Rather than write always as though someone were watching over his shoulder, Trifonov preferred to work on his highly autobiographical *Ischeznovenie*, a novel describing the Purges, for twenty years purely for the desk drawer. It was finally published six years after his death, with the advent of *glasnost*. In some ways it is not then surprising that for publication he wrote so much on the theme of sport, one of his great loves. Sport was ideologically neutral ground, although as we shall see in the

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<sup>62</sup> 'Maki', *Pod solntsem*.

<sup>63</sup> 'Staraiia pesnia', *Pod solntsem*.

following chapter, it - like the desert - also served as a paradigm for many problems of personal concern to Trifonov.

## CHAPTER 4

### SPORT - ANOTHER METAPHOR FOR LIFE

Trifonov's sports stories reflect his evolution as a writer, with his themes of time and Turkmenia, to history and the *Moscow Tales*. In 'Dva slova o sportivnykh rasskazakh' he says:

«не начинайте с банальных сюжетов. Не идите в литературу от литературы. Рассказывайте простые истории, которые случились с вами, вашими друзьями, дальними родственниками, соперниками, соседями по лестничной клетке. Плохие спортивные рассказы образовали жанр спортивных рассказов. Хорошие спортивные рассказы принадлежат к великому жанру, в котором работали Гоголь, Чехов, Мопассан. Надо описывать характеры, страсти и чувства людей...»<sup>1</sup>

As seen in Chapter 3, the 1950's were difficult years for Trifonov, and at the same time as his trips to Turkmenia, he turned to sports journalism as a further source of income, which, moreover, offered the rare privilege of trips abroad, invaluable to a man trying to understand his time. Working as a correspondent for various publications, such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Literaturnaia Rossia* and *Sovetskii sport*, he travelled across Europe to attend many different sporting events such as the Winter and Summer Olympics and the World Cup. As a result, he produced many reviews and articles, which were published in several Russian newspapers and journals<sup>2</sup> and also translated for publication in the other republics of the Soviet Union, as well as serving as the basis for a number of award-winning screen plays and films.<sup>3</sup> Many of the articles were published in different collections throughout his life, such as *Pod*

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<sup>1</sup> *Beskonechnye igry*, Moscow, Fizkul'tura i sport, 1989, p. 255. Written in 1969. Most of the stories examined in this chapter will be taken from the versions published in this collection, often taken from the writer's archive by his third wife, Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko. Thus I have not included references to all the original publications mentioned in the footnotes to this chapter in my bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> These include *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Literaturnaia Rossia*, *Sovetskii sport*, *Ogonek*, *Fizkul'tura i sport*, *Iskusstvo kino*, *Futbol* and *Novoe Vremia*.

<sup>3</sup> These include the films 'Khokkeisty', 'O chem ne znali tribuni', and the documentaries 'Startuet molodost'!', 'My byli na Spartakiade', 'Lovkost', krasota, zdorov'e'.

*solntsem*<sup>4</sup>, *V kontse sezona*<sup>5</sup>, *Kostry i dozhd'*<sup>6</sup>, *Fakely na Flaminio*<sup>7</sup>, and *Igry v sumerkakh*<sup>8</sup>. A further collection of his work on sport, *Beskonechnye igry* was published posthumously in 1989<sup>9</sup>.

Due to his myopia, Trifonov could not actually participate to any great extent, but he started to write on the theme of sport as a child. Unknown to Trifonov, his mother kept his exercise books, in which his first literary attempts are preserved. In these, amongst other things, he attempted to gather material on the theme of "Sport in the life of great people" such as Lomonosov, Swift and Cervantes. His father exercised daily and this influenced Trifonov. His childhood friend Lev Fedotov, who also tried his hand at writing, exercised every day. He grew up with two passions. One was painting, due to his mother's influence, and the other was sport.<sup>10</sup> These both gave Trifonov an understanding of the beautiful and wonderful in life, and his love of sport makes his stories warm and alive.

Trifonov's sports stories do not merely describe sporting events, but look at the psychology and philosophy of the world of sport, its links with time and history and, ultimately, at sport as an allegory for life itself. In 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie' he writes:

«Что же это такое - спорт, спорт, спорт? Игра? Развлечение? Может быть, работа? Изнурительный труд? Искусство? Что-то вроде театра, цирка? А может быть, вот что - могучее средство воспитания молодежи? Пожалуй, да. Этого не отнимешь. Но почему же из-за этого средства воспитания миллионы людей как бы сходят с ума, делаются безумцами, возникают крупные межгосударственные конфликты и даже войны (Гондурас - Сальвадор)? Может быть, спорт, спорт, спорт - это всего лишь наваждение двадцатого века? Нечто вроде всемирного психического заболевания? Недаром же понятие «болезнь» входит в слова: болельщик, фан, тифози...»<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Pod solntsem. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959.

<sup>5</sup> *V kontse sezona. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1961.

<sup>6</sup> *Kostry i dozhd'*. *Rasskazy*, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> *Fakely na Flaminio. Rasskazy, ocherki*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1965.

<sup>8</sup> *Igry v sumerkakh. Rasskazy i ocherki*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> *Beskonechnye igry*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> See the footnotes to 'Vospominania o Dzhentsano' in *BI*, p. 474.

As explored by Trifonov in his many works, sport is all these and more. It, like life, brings with it a range of emotions, from tragedy to ecstasy:

«О, здесь будет и беды, и радости, и неожиданные повороты судьбы - как в жизни...»<sup>12</sup>

There is the joy of winning, and the sadness of losing, but there is a greater tragedy for the sportsmen himself when his career comes to an end. There is also the misery of injuries, even more so as no-one is interested in an injured sportsmen. People are, however, interested in watching programmes full of clips of sporting accidents. Because the timescale is so tight, a sporting event takes on the mood of a dramatic performance. Sport is a form of entertainment, a diversion from the stresses and strains of daily life. Some sports are like a holiday, giving thousands joy, such as football, ice-hockey and ice-skating. Others are low key, solitary events, for instance cross-country skiing and the marathon, more like work than play. All marathon runners experience "the wall", a point when they feel they can run no more. Such moments of weakness also occur in life. In fact, sport is a microcosm.

To Trifonov, the nature of sport leans more towards aesthetics, for instance, to the theatre, or as an art form in itself. As Trifonov says, both art and sport are planetary passions, humanity could not exist without them.<sup>13</sup> He is at pains to argue against the increasing tendency to treat sport as a science. From Trifonov's time sport had started to become more serious, more technical, but he feels that it is too unpredictable and essentially light-hearted for this. The world of sport is always changing, methods and psychology are never constant, and, more importantly, results can never be forecast. As he says in 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', «Настоящий ответ дает время».<sup>14</sup> In 'О футболе'<sup>15</sup>, Trifonov says everything is always changing in football and he loves it, a game he can not even play himself, for the very reason that one never knows what will happen next. If one did and one's team always won, the sport, any sport, would soon become extremely boring. He examines how it is that unknowns can beat giants.<sup>16</sup> The ability of sportsmen does not always mean that they will win.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie', *BI*, p. 267.

<sup>12</sup> 'Polchasa, kotorye potriasli stadion', *BI*, p. 225.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie', *BI*, pp. 267-79.

<sup>14</sup> *BI*, pp. 361-71. Trifonov's treatment of sport in respect to time is discussed further in the chapter.

<sup>15</sup> *BI*, pp. 315-19.

<sup>16</sup> See for example 'Truden put' k Olimpu', *BI*, pp. 249-53.

Sometimes victory is due to sheer hard work, or to their mental attitude, their will to win, or their love of their country or team. In 'O taine uspekha'<sup>17</sup> Trifonov feels that teams need the following to achieve success:

«. . . слитность индивидуальностей, которые все вместе создают живое целое.»<sup>18</sup>

Here again we see that important theme of *slitnost'*, recurrent throughout most of Trifonov's works. Trifonov discusses how he once saw the Brazilians, with many star players, play an extremely bad and tedious games because the individuals could not fuse themselves into a team. Their opponents, the Danes, won without any big names because they pulled together, became a «живое целое».<sup>19</sup> Their victory had something spiritual, something unexplainable behind it. Sport can not be explained by formulae; there are too many psychological aspects .

Part of the psychology and ever-changing nature of sport has to do with how world records are being broken all the time, how the human body is achieving more and more. This can partly be explained by improved equipment and facilities, but a lot has to do with the sportsman himself. He needs high psychological preparations to succeed, as well as endurance and courage, discipline and intuition. This applies to all sports, from marathons to football and even to chess. In 'Stimul'<sup>20</sup> one of the characters, who is not a sportsman nor very interested in sport, describes how he managed to run a great distance in a very short time due to fear. The argument is that any person, regardless of whether he is a sportsman or not, can break a record so long as he has the right conditions, namely certain psychological stimuli. It is something in the mind which drives people on to achieve exceptional feats.

Trifonov also describes sport as a disease, as madness, as "the hallucination of the twentieth century"<sup>21</sup>. For many sport becomes an addiction, both for the fans and for the participants who burn out their bodies with too much exertion. To some it becomes a matter of life or death, not just medals. People have died as a result of running marathons, and even fans have been known to die of heart attacks while sitting on the benches. Sport has an

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<sup>17</sup> 'O taine uspekha i o moskovskoi komande "Torpedo" ', *BI*, pp. 289-94.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 293.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> 'Stimul', *BI*, pp. 93-9.

<sup>21</sup> As described in the above quote (8).



element of danger and can be bad for the health. As Trifonov says above, two words for 'fan', болельщик and тифози, come from the words for 'illness' and 'typhoid' respectively. Two stories actually contain the word illness in the title - 'Istoriia bolezni'<sup>22</sup> and 'Belaia bolezni'<sup>23</sup>. In the latter, Trifonov describes ice-hockey as an epidemic, a fever which is sweeping Czechoslovakia as the country plays host to the world championship. As we see in 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie'<sup>24</sup>, Trifonov is aware that some sports, football in particular, have resulted in hooliganism. No doubt if Trifonov had been alive today, he would have been greatly shocked, though perhaps not too surprised, at the way this has developed in recent years. He knew that with sport, emotions sometimes run (dangerously) high. Trifonov felt that sport should remain a game and only a game.

Hence there are negative aspects. Sport can breed intolerance, a concept which Trifonov detested and thought of as madness. However, there are many positive aspects. Sport unites people, both as fans and as members of a team. In 'Klub... bolel'shchikov'<sup>25</sup> Trifonov describes how football brings people together. Football fans are naturally gregarious, and they are all part of an unofficial club, much larger than the club they support, which is "closed" out of season. As he says: «Нет, это не шутка и не красное словцо - футбол в самом деле сближает народы».<sup>26</sup>

On a wider, more general scale, Trifonov, in the story 'Podobno muzyke', describes sport as being like music, loved the world over and understood by all.<sup>27</sup> He has witnessed occasions when world records have been broken and everyone rejoices together at the capabilities of man who can jump impossible heights, go into space, do anything in fact.<sup>28</sup> He has also seen nations united in awe at the bravery of the ski-jumper.<sup>29</sup> Trifonov himself made many new friends as a result of sport on his trips abroad. His stories illustrate the concept

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<sup>22</sup> 'Istoriia bolezni' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1985, pp. 198 - 202.

<sup>23</sup> 'Belaia bolezni', *Fakely na Flaminio*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1965.

<sup>24</sup> See *Beskonechnye igry*, pp. 219-30.

<sup>25</sup> *BI*, pp. 287-89.

<sup>26</sup> 'Podobno muzyke', *BI*, p. 299.

<sup>27</sup> *BI*, pp. 297-99.

<sup>28</sup> See 'Chelovek mozhet', *BI*, pp. 242-45.

<sup>29</sup> 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie', *BI*, pp. 267-79.

of *slitnost*', showing how sport unites nations and, like history, weaves the threads that join many different people together.

Trifonov explores this theme from many different angles. We see the world of sport through the eyes of the sportsmen, their trainers, managers and fans, which include sports journalists such as Trifonov. In his scenario for the film 'Khokkeisty', Trifonov showed the tension under which sportsmen live.<sup>30</sup> The action centres around a Moscow ice-hockey team. Its captain Duganov and the trainer Lashkov represent two different attitudes to sport and life. Duganov believes that: «спорт - это игра, это развлечение и это здоровье!». The trainer however wants victory at any price and ends up wearing the players out and weakening the team's unity. The conflict comes to a head when Lashkov removes Duganov as captain for a crucial match. However, one of the players collapses through exhaustion from over-training, and Lashkov has to ask Duganov to come in and save the game, which the team is losing badly. Duganov's contribution wins the match in its last thirty seconds, and this victory illustrates the correctness of his attitude.

'Konets sezona' shows events from a manager's point of view.<sup>31</sup> The story is loosely based on an actual meeting when Trifonov shared a hotel room in Saratov with Ermasov, the former goalkeeper of the Stalingrad football team 'Traktor'. The protagonist of the story is Malakhov, a famous footballer turned manager. He has come to a provincial town to poach the team's best player, Buritsky, but in the end he can not bring himself to do it. Meeting Buritsky reminds Malakhov of his life as a footballer, of his past glories which time has taken away from him. The two characters are contrasted, as are their lives, personalities, expectations and attitudes. Thus the story administrates deeper, universal themes such as time, fate, and hard moral choices, which are developed more fully in his later works.

Many of Trifonov's tales are told from the point of view of the fans. We feel the atmosphere of the crowd of onlookers, the tension, joy and sadness. When fans become bored with watching, lively discussions start up - everyone has their own ideas as to what they would do if they were the trainer.<sup>32</sup> People are transformed while watching sport, they forget all about outside concerns. The central protagonist of 'Beskonechnye igry', a sports journalist in Moscow,

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<sup>30</sup> 'Khokkeisty', Mosfilm, 1964. The hero of the film, Duganov, is taken from an earlier story 'Pobeditel' shvedov', written in 1957 and first published in *Sovetskii sport*, 1958, March 29 & 30.

<sup>31</sup> Written in 1956 and first published under the title of 'Sluchainyi sosed' in *Ogonek*, 1956, no. 32, pp. 9-12.

<sup>32</sup> See 'Razmyshleniia vo vremia skuchnogo matcha', *BI*, pp. 313-15.

remarks that even his boss is friendly at football matches.<sup>33</sup> The huge crowds of fans are described as 'volcanic lava', 'locusts' and 'lemmings', a huge mass which nothing can stop, not even forecasts of the end of the world.<sup>34</sup> The sportsman may be alone while preparing for the high jump but there are thousands of eyes concentrated upon him.<sup>35</sup> The fans are sometimes just as much the heroes of Trifonov's stories as the sportsmen themselves.

Trifonov, as a great fan of sport himself, could easily describe the psychology and lives of such people. In 'Glazami bolet'shchika' ('Through a fan's eyes')<sup>36</sup> Trifonov describes the day of an Olympic tourist in Italy. A similar picture is given of a day full of different sports at the Third Friendly Youth Games in Moscow and the resulting hunger and tiredness of a fan in 'Nebyvalye stradaniia bolet'shchikov'.<sup>37</sup> The life of a (football) fan is one full of expectation, always waiting for the start of the season (which to him is like Spring to the poet), the next match, the World Cup.<sup>38</sup> Fans are filled with the desire to see 'the match of the century'<sup>39</sup>. As Trifonov says, sport:

«...проявляет человека во всей его сложности, многослойности его души, спорт не льстит человеку, не жалеет его болельвых ощущений».<sup>40</sup>

Many people need a focus for hero-worship in their life, be it a singer or a sportsman. One such person is the twelve year old Alyosha in the story 'Pobeditel' shvedov'<sup>41</sup> who is obsessed with his local ice-hockey team, especially its star player Duganov. We see the sport through Alyosha's somewhat naive child's eyes. Duganov is his idol and he is extremely shocked when he discovers that the player is going out with one of his neighbours, Maika. To him, this is incomprehensible - how can this great star from the world of ice-hockey be the boyfriend of an ordinary woman from Alyosha's everyday existence? He

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<sup>33</sup> 'Beskonechye igry', *BI*, pp. 141-220.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>35</sup> 'Vместo grozy', *BI*, pp. 235-38.

<sup>36</sup> 'Glazami bolet'shchika', *V konets sezona. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1961.

<sup>37</sup> 'Nebyvalye stradaniia bolet'shchikov', *Sovetskii sport*, 15 August 1957.

<sup>38</sup> 'Ispolnenia nadezhd', *Futbol!*, 7 October 1963.

<sup>39</sup> 'Polchasa, kotorye potriasli stadion', *Beskonechnye igry*, p. 223.

<sup>40</sup> See introduction to *Beskonechnye igry*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> 'Pobeditel' shvedov', *Sovetskii sport*, 19 & 20 March 1958.

becomes even more distressed when he realises that problems with the relationship are putting Duganov off his game in the crucial match against the Swedes and he, Alyosha, is the only one to know. The story shows how even idolised sportsmen are basically human.

Trifonov shows a different perspective on sport, again from a child's point of view, in 'Odinochestvo Klycha Durdy'.<sup>42</sup> Klych Durda is a successful Turkmenian wrestler who has become unpopular because he has won so many matches, an example of the fickleness of public opinion. Gossip surrounds him, rumours are rife that he squanders his prize money on drink. The only person who still supports him is his small son. The narrator (the same Muscovite journalist from the Turkmenian cycle of stories of which this is a part) recalls how he saw Klych Durda fight three years before and how he has aged. He is shown wrestling and then asleep with his son the next day, and we are made to feel sympathy for this great wrestler, hated by the public, but strong in his son's love, which is of much more importance than the intolerance of the crowd. Trifonov disliked intolerance and felt that to judge people is easy. Understanding is more difficult.

'Daleko v gorakh'<sup>43</sup> is another story from Trifonov's Turkmenian cycle and is his one and only tale concerning the sport of boxing. It centres on the young Turkmenian boxer Alyosha who lives in the mountains, and we see the different attitudes of those around him to boxing. His girlfriend Valia is against the sport, his grandfather thinks it's a fool's game, while his trainer pushes him to win, even to the detriment of his school work. Although this story is only about boxing, the conflicting attitudes are typical of sport as a whole, life as a whole.

In his many travels abroad, Trifonov saw how sports can reveal something about national character. Ice-hockey, he felt, was too nervy and rowdy a game for the Swiss, a nation that likes peace and disapproves of a noisy sport which sometimes is reduced to fighting.<sup>44</sup> When Trifonov attended an ice-hockey championship in Sweden in 1963, he was surprised how no-one spoke on the metro, unlike in Moscow. He felt that the atmosphere was more suited to a funeral than to a match.<sup>45</sup> In Grenoble to watch the Olympics in

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<sup>42</sup> 'Odinochestvo Klycha Durdy', *Znamia*, 1959, no. 2 (as part of collection 'Puti v pustyne').

<sup>43</sup> 'Daleko v gorakh. Rasskaz', *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 1957, no. 11, pp. 37-40.

<sup>44</sup> 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', *BI*, pp. 361-71.

<sup>45</sup> 'I dolia sportivnogo schast'ia', *Fakely na Flaminio. Rassказы, ocherki*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1965.

1964, he deplored the prevalence of the rich.<sup>46</sup> Some countries, such as Austria, seemed to him only interested in watching sports they knew they would win; and often a country becomes keen on a sport only when they achieve an unexpected victory. When the Czechoslovakian team left home to compete in the ice-hockey championship in Switzerland in 1961, no-one was interested as they were not expected to do well. However, when the team returned home as world champions, they were mobbed at the airport.<sup>47</sup> Countries also tend to lose interest in a sporting event when their country is knocked out, although some react more than others. When Italy and Brazil lose football matches, it is seen as a national disgrace which has implications for the nation's political and economic situation.

Different countries love different sports - for example the French love ice-skating because of its beauty. It is a test of national character. Different countries also produce sportsmen and teams with their own styles. Australian tennis players were a complete surprise to the Russians when they saw them play at the Third Friendly Youth Games in Moscow in 1957 as they brought comedy to the court.<sup>48</sup> In the 1960's the Brazilian football team introduced a new system or "formula" which changed the nature of the sport and made it more "intellectual". Even chess has different styles and Trifonov compares players to Wagner and Faust.<sup>49</sup>

In his works Trifonov explores the theme of winners and losers. Alyosha, the protagonist of 'Daleko v gorakh', misses an important boxing match, but gains a different kind of victory when he apprehends some criminals who killed the driver of the bus which should have taken him to the town for his fight. In the story 'Pobeditel' ('The Winner')<sup>50</sup> while in France the narrator meets an old man who competed in the 1900 Olympics. He did not win his event, but now considers himself to be the winner because he has outlived all the other competitors. The story ends with a picture of nature, which is eternal, unlike humans, however long they live. 'Prozrachnoe solntse oseni'<sup>51</sup> centres

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<sup>46</sup> 'Sotvorenii kumirov', *BI*, pp. 427-43.

<sup>47</sup> 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov'.

<sup>48</sup> 'Nebyvalye stradanii boiel'shchikov', *Sovetskii sport*, 15 August 1957.

<sup>49</sup> See 'Istoriia bolezni' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, pp. 198-202.

<sup>50</sup> 'Pobeditel'. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1968, no. 7, pp. 122-5. Also appeared in some editions under the title of 'Bazil'.

<sup>51</sup> The story was first published under the title of 'V bufete aeroporta' in *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 1959, no. 7, pp. 36-8. In later reprints it appeared as 'Prozrachnoe solntse oseni'.

round two old school friends who accidentally meet at an airport after a twenty year interval. They have both completely changed and are bound only by past memories. Velichkin is now the manager of a volleyball team, lives in Moscow and travels abroad. Galetsky, on the other hand, is a PE teacher in the Siberian taiga, and is extremely proud of his college football team who are regional champions. Each is satisfied with his lot and pities the other. Velichkin pities Galetsky for having ended up as a mere teacher in the middle of nowhere. Galetsky, however, does not envy Velichkin's life in the capital, and remembers how Velichkin was once in love with his wife, but it was he, Galetsky, who won her heart. They each see the other as a loser. Trifonov's sympathies probably lie with Galetsky. His life is shown as a more happy and honest one. Connected with this is the fact that Galetsky left for Siberia, a continuation of the literary (and political) trend seen in *Utolenie zhazhdy* and the rest of the Turkmenian cycle - the escape to the country as a source of moral renewal. However, the mood at the end of this story is as of 'Pobeditel', indicating that the only real winners in life are nature and time. In death, life's victories become immaterial. In his stories, Trifonov aims to show that there is no such thing as clear winners and losers in real life. Instead, a person needs to understand himself and those around him. Trifonov had thought he was a "winner" with *Studenty* but he had been mistaken.

Trifonov also deals with one of his most predominant themes, time, in his sport stories. The effect of time on the nature of sport is seen in many different ways. Firstly, as already shown, the effect time has on sportsmen, as it has on all people, that of ageing. Sooner or later their bodies begin to slow down and ultimately they have to retire from competitive sport. The generation gap also has an effect on sport. Different generations have different attitudes, different styles, different lives, as shown in 'Konets sezona', where the manager Malakhov is contrasted with the up and coming footballer Buritsky.

The continual breaking of records also means that no-one's success is eternal. One person's record is eventually broken, one team's victories are brought to end, one country achieves prominence now in one sport, then another. Nothing remains the same. Every dog has its day. One disturbing change that Trifonov witnessed was the growth of football hooliganism, and he felt that the sport needed a renewal of politeness.<sup>52</sup> Stadiums also changed with time, developing with the changes in art and sculpture. Trifonov ponders the connections between sport and art at the Olympics in Italy and in Grenoble,

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<sup>52</sup> See 'Novaia estetika futbola' in *BI*, pp. 300-305.

where a Salvador Dali exhibition and examples of modern art were shown at the same time as the Games.<sup>53</sup>

Time has also brought about the evolution of another medium for modern art - the cinema (and, ultimately, television), and these too change the face of sport. Trifonov felt that cinema and television were good in that they brought sport to the masses, widened its public and gave a better view than that of the spectators. It also enabled people to see sport in other countries to which they normally could not travel, thus bringing the world together. However televising sport has its drawbacks. Trifonov disliked the commentators he had met on his travels, feeling that they had little respect for the viewers and preferred to sit in the comfort of a TV lounge than among the crowds, thus missing the real atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> Another effect of television is that sport has become increasingly more money-orientated, another development which Trifonov disliked. Sportsmen began to turn into money machines, and in some sports, such as boxing, money could be won even if the boxer lost. In 'Travnichek i khokkei', he describes the match between Cassius Clay and Folley which he has just watched on television.<sup>55</sup> Folley lost but earned more money than ever before. This kind of thing, in his opinion, made sport less honorable, opening the way for possible corruption and fixing of results.

In stories such as 'Odinochestvo Klycha Durdy' and 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', we see how transient is the idolisation of any one sportsman or team. The flow of time is felt very strongly, as the many sporting events provide a convincing setting for one-off meetings and one-off events, such as with the Austrian sports fan Kristian in 'Iz avstriiskogo dnevnika'.<sup>56</sup> Even the titles often have some reference to seasons or times, the first, the end, half an hour, one evening, autumn, twilight. In 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', Trifonov says he has never felt the weight of time so strongly as when he visited Switzerland, the land of clocks, where he misses connections and sees how timetables are dictating his life.

Connected with time is another of Trifonov's important themes, history, which is explored in his works on sport. This, with the interlinked discussion of politics, helps to put sport into a wider context. Alyosha, for instance, in 'Daleko v gorakh' still lives in the mountains, although many of his fellow

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<sup>53</sup> 'Sotvorenie kumirov', *BI*, pp. 427-43.

<sup>54</sup> 'V pervye chasy tvoren'ia', *BI*, pp. 255-67.

<sup>55</sup> 'Travnichek i khokkei', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 1967, 7& 14 April.

<sup>56</sup> *BI*, pp. 405-408.

Turkmenians have moved to the town, their lives following the general patterns of urbanisation.

Memories of the Second World War arise in many of Trifonov's sports stories. In his travels across Europe, attending various sporting events and meeting many different people, Trifonov was often reminded of his links with other nations, especially those of Eastern Europe, in resistance to fascism. In 'Pervaia zagranitsa'<sup>57</sup> to the ex-enemy country Hungary, his interpreter turns out to have been in the anti-fascist movement. One of Trifonov's favourite countries was Bulgaria, where whole civilisations had come and gone and all that remained were the monuments and the literature. There he meets people who preserve the country's history and others who, as a result of urbanisation, are themselves becoming part of its flux.<sup>58</sup> In 'Ispanskaia Odisseia'<sup>59</sup> he describes the life of a Spanish football fan whom he met at a football match in Moscow. This man fought against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War, was interned in France, then escaped to the Soviet Union. However, for the love of his homeland («родина есть родина - a view shared by Trifonov), he had returned to Spain but spent thirteen years in prison under Franco's regime. There, the only reading material the prisoners were allowed was sports papers and he had spent his time memorising football statistics. Now, back in the Soviet Union again, he has been advised to go to football matches for fresh air for his health, shattered by the brutal conditions in prison. Against the background of football, the story explores the sufferings of many Spaniards who resisted their country's political regime and suggests a paradigm with returned prisoners from nearer home. The criticism of aspects of Russian history often implied in Trifonov's meditations on the past of other countries with whom he came in contact in the course of his career as a sports reporter was, however, a natural corollary of the broadening of his horizons afforded by travel and chance meetings, not a laboured allegory. His passion for football was quite genuine and in these stories we see a different side to Trifonov. that of the more cheerful, light-hearted fan. His friend and former editor Vladimir Novokhatko recalls how they watched many football matches together and how the writer's third

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<sup>57</sup> See *BI*, pp. 333-42. The story is a reworking of other sketches: 'Svidanie s Vengriey', *Novoe vremia*, 1955, no. 47; 'V stolitse futbola', *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 1955, no. 11.

<sup>58</sup> See 'Gde pel Orfei', *BI*, pp. 379-86. In the next chapter I shall examine other stories concerning history and set in Bulgaria, as well as Trifonov's first historical novel *Otblesk kostra* which was published during the same period, in 1965.

<sup>59</sup> 'Ispanskaia Odisseia', *Fizkul'tura i sport*, 1963, no. 1.



wife Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko became an enthusiastic fan too, which probably helped their relationship.<sup>60</sup>

Other reminders of the Second World War on Trifonov's travels were the findings of war-time verses in the book in his Austrian hotel room<sup>61</sup>, and on another trip to Austria in 1967, hearing that the Nazi Martin Borman was still alive and living in Brazil. He also visits a former prison camp, and reflects on how the war affected his generation and how history, all history «слиплось, как конфеты в кульке». Already, at this stage in Trifonov's evolution as a writer and in his seemingly more lighted-hearted works on sport, the theme of history as part of the concept of *slitnost'* is emerging.<sup>62</sup> Yet he keeps his subject firmly in place.

In the story, 'Travnichek i khokkei', in the same context of the Second World War, Trifonov says that he does not like sportsmen being described as heroic. Such words belong to warriors and are out of place in sport. In a set of stories in the collection *V kontse sezona*<sup>63</sup>, Trifonov examines the role of sport in the lives of soldiers. The fitness and strength they gain from sport helps, but for service they also need courage and heroism everyday. In this sense, Trifonov feels that sport is too often taken out of context. In the story 'Beskonechnye igry'<sup>64</sup> the narrator, a sports journalist, attends a school reunion. There, all the famous ex-pupils are congratulated, but most applause is for the two who have become an actor and a footballer, their achievements are blown out of all proportion. However, one of the narrator's friends has just witnessed him save a child's life, and in her speech she says this is a feat of real heroism, a real achievement. Trifonov saw sport to some extent as a metaphor for life but he felt that, although some sports do require great effort and often carry some danger, the sportsmen practise self-discipline and take risks purely for themselves. If they do die as a result of their sport (and some sports are

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Vladimir Grigorevich Novokhatko, 30 September 1993. Novokhatko first met Trifonov when he worked at *Fizkul'tura i sport*, and later was the editor of Politizdat's 'Plamennye revoliutsioneri' series, which included *Neterpenie*.

<sup>61</sup> 'Iz avstriiskogo dnevnika', *Fakely na Flaminio*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i Sport, 1965.

<sup>62</sup> See 'Travnichek i khokkei', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 1967, 7 & 14 April. The visit to the camp and its torture chamber in this story evolved many years later into 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp. 118-24.

<sup>63</sup> 'Gonki s gandikapom', 'Surovaia, geroicheskaia sluzhba' and 'Pro bitsepsi', *V kontse sezona. Rasskazy*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1961.

<sup>64</sup> 'Beskonechnye igry', *Prostor*, 1970, no. 7, pp. 52-82. The story was also developed into a film at Mosfilm's suggestion, and later into a play by Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko (See *Teatr pisatel'ia*, Sovetskaia Rossiia: Moscow, 1982.)

dangerous), it has not been for the sake of others. That is true heroism, and the juxtaposition shows sport in its true perspective.

Trifonov also disliked the way politics often encroached on sport, for example, in the story 'Vremia i voleybol'<sup>65</sup>, he comments how different the last volleyball championship held in Moscow was as it happened during the time of Stalin, "the best friend of Soviet volleyball". There were many spys present and the Russians were not allowed to talk to foreigners. Politics has nothing to do with sport but it still influences it. At this same volleyball championship, for instance, the Egyptian team refuses to play Israel. On a wider scale, Trifonov comments on how war interrupted the Olympics<sup>66</sup>, and how the Cold War led to USA and USSR boycotting the Olympics held in each others' countries. It also led to a very small number of Eastern European spectators attending Olympics in the West, where Trifonov experienced a definite anti-Soviet feeling.<sup>67</sup> He recalls how the 1936 Olympics held in Germany were used by Hitler to show the rest of the world his country's strength. The Fuhrer's treatment of the black athlete Jesse Owens also pointed to his racist policies. Sporting events bring peoples together but episodes such as these divide them, exacerbating jingoistic, rather than patriotic feelings.<sup>68</sup> In the same story Trifonov ironically says how the 1966 World Cup final brought about what World War Two never did - a German invasion of London.

Trifonov's works on sport covered a period of around fifteen years (1955-1971) and the style of his stories often differed. As we have seen, some of the works on Turkmenia and sport were written over the same period and published in the same collections such as 'Pod solntsem' and 'V kontse sezona'. The narrator of 'Oдиночество Klycha Durdy' is the Moscow journalist who figures in many Turkmenian stories. 'Daleko v gorakh' is also set in Turkmenia, but is written in the third person and in the same style as 'Konets sezona', 'Prozrachnoe solntse oseni' and 'Pobeditel' shvedov'.which are set in Russia: a laconic, often lyrical style, allowing for digressions on life, death and time.

Many of the articles which Trifonov wrote for publication when employed as a sports journalist are first person accounts of the various events he attended. However, they are illuminative essays rather than straightforward

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<sup>65</sup> Written in 1962 and first published in shortened form under the title of 'Vokrug myacha', *Literaturnaiia gazeta*, 30 October 1962. Later extended for the collection *Fakely na Flaminio*.

<sup>66</sup> See 'Sotvorenie kumirov'.

<sup>67</sup> See 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', *BI*, pp. 361-71.

<sup>68</sup> 'Planetarnoe uvlechenie', *BI*, pp. 267-79.

journalistic records; Trifonov discusses the psychology and philosophy of sport, as seen above. He also discusses themes which were important throughout his works, such as time and history. All these were important to Trifonov as part of the concept of *slitnost'*. As he remarks in 'Travnichek i khokkei':

«Все переплелось в нашем мире, все связано, одно воздействует на другое, одно вытекает из другого.»<sup>69</sup>

During this period Trifonov became increasingly interested in history, writing various short stories on the way in which it effects our lives, as well as the documentary tale *Otblek kostra*, a history of his father's life and participation in the Bolshevik party, and the novel *Neterpenie* about the People's Will terrorist Andrei Zhelyabov.<sup>70</sup> A discussion of these works follows in Chapter 5.

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<sup>69</sup> 'Travnichek i khokkei', *Beskonechnye igry*, pp. 426.

<sup>70</sup> *Otblek kostra* was published in 1965 after months of research in various archives, while *Neterpenie* was published in 1973 as part of the series 'Plamennye revoliutsioneri'.

## CHAPTER 5

### TRIFONOV AS HISTORIAN

During the mid 1950's, Trifonov became increasingly interested in history. He was brought up in a family who were closely involved, on whom «лежит отблеск истории».<sup>1</sup> As a child, he had heard his father's stories about his revolutionary activities and often asked questions.

In 1955, Valentin Trifonov was posthumously rehabilitated which was a very important event for his son. The following year Krushchev brought to light some of Stalin's crimes in the Twentieth Party Conference and commenced a policy of de-Stalinisation. There also followed a period of relative freedom in the arts, 'the Thaw', and writers began to examine their own and Russia's past. In 1957, Trifonov wrote a short story entitled 'Odnazhdy dushnoi noch'iu'. It was part of the Turkmenian cycle, with the same journalist-narrator on his travels round Turkmenia with the local driver Achilov. However, it was not published along with his other Turkmenian collections, but in his former teacher, Paustovsky's almanac *Tarusskie stranitsy* in 1961<sup>2</sup>. The story tells of how the narrator and Achilov meet a Spaniard late one night in Ashkhabad. He is locked out of his flat and asks if they have an axe with which he could break down the door. None of them have, but they begin to chat and ask how the Spaniard came to Turkmenia. As they thought, he came over to escape the Fascists after Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War and relates the events as if 'it was yesterday' - an important observation, as to Trifonov history lives on within the individual. However, this story differs from the sports stories examined in the previous chapter, which often mentioned meeting communist brethren in far-flung corners of the globe<sup>3</sup>. Instead the Spaniard's words cause the narrator to think explicitly of his own history; how their lives were connected and how life under a dictator in Spain could easily parallel Stalin's Russia:

«Тридцать седьмой год, война, победа гигантской ценой, смерть Сталина и вновь победы, потрясения и надежды.»<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The opening lines to Trifonov's first major historical work 'Otblesk kostra', *Znamia*, 1965, no. 2, pp. 142-60; no. 3, pp. 152-77 and one of his major concepts of the relationship between man and history.

<sup>2</sup>*Tarusskie stranitsy . Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi illiustrirovannyi sbornik*, Kaluga: Kaluzhskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961, pp. 202-3.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 4, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> 'Odnazhdy dushnoi noch'iu', *Tarusskie stranitsy*, p. 202.

This passage, omitted in later publications of the story<sup>5</sup>, accurately summed up the mood of the times and the almanac itself. *Taruskie stranitsy* contained works by Bulat Okudzhava, Zabolotsky and Tsvetaeva and reminiscences of Vsevolod Meierhol'd. It was a one-off publication which broke new ground and caused a scandal. All the works in it were said to have been written in Tarusa, a provincial town where many writers came to work, the nearest point where those still forbidden residence in the capitals were allowed to live around a favourite 'dachnoe mesto' long before the Revolution. The introduction to the journal spoke of the new hopes brought about by the 22nd Party Conference, indicating that the desire was still there to build communism but in a new, truthful way. Although this is one of the few times Trifonov actually openly allied himself with the liberals, it is understandable as *Taruskie stranitsy* reflected the general mood of the time and thus Trifonov probably felt he was not really putting his neck out. He criticised Soviet society in later works but did it very carefully so as not to cause any great trouble for himself. Life as the son of "an enemy of the people" had taught him to be cautious for fear of repercussions in a society pervaded by terror.

Trifonov's move towards history is further shown in 'Kostrы i dozhd' <sup>6</sup> and 'Vospominaniia o Dzhentsano'.<sup>7</sup> These stories, along with other works written at the same time describing his travels abroad, recount experiences and historical memories of the countries visited, in this case Bulgaria and Italy. Trifonov felt that it was very important for an individual and a country to remember its history, and hoped that the memory of wars and fascism would prevent them happening again. However, he was already moving towards studies of his own country's history which culminated in the publication of the novel *Otblek kostra*, an account of his father's and uncle's participation in the revolutionary movement and the building of the Soviet state.

*Otblek kostra* was first serialised in the journal *Znamia* in 1965<sup>8</sup> and was expanded and printed in book form the following year after letters from many of the relatives and acquaintances of the people mentioned in it.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the second volume of an edition of Trifonov's collected works, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Written in 1961 and first published under the title of 'A koster gorit...' in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 19 December 1961, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> 'Vospominaniia o Dzhentsano. Rasskaz', *Molodaia gvardiia*, 1964, no. 4, pp. 114-19.

<sup>8</sup> 'Otblek kostra', *Znamia*, 1965, no. 2, pp. 142-60; no.3, pp. 152-77.

<sup>9</sup> *Otblek kostra*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1966.

novel was based on Trifonov's own research in various archives, including in Rostov. It was here that his friend, the future editor of *Neterpenie*, Vladimir Novokhatko first met Trifonov, and he considers that the writer was very lucky to have been admitted to those particular archives even during these more liberal times.<sup>10</sup> Trifonov also uses the diaries of his uncle, Pavel Lurie (his mother's brother), and his father's letters in the novel and, or so he claims, notes on the formation of the Petrograd Red Guard, from which Valentin had intended to write his memoirs. These he found in an old trunk and it was this find that in fact proved the catalyst which led Trifonov to delve into archives and produce *Otblesk kostra*. There is, however, no record of how his family managed to preserve them after his father's arrest and execution. Trifonov does mention in the novel (IV, 132) how he was surprised and overjoyed to find so much material on his father in the Soviet Army archives which had not been destroyed after 1937.

At the beginning of the novel there is a familiar autobiographical scene from the time Trifonov spent as a boy at the family's dacha in Moscow's *Serebryannii bor*, of the paper kites his father made for him out of Tsarist cards - even his childhood toys are marked by history. However this idyll soon ended:

«Высоки в синем небе плавал и трещал змей, сделанный из карты Восточного фронта, где отец провел такие тяжелые месяцы с лета 1918 до лета 1919 года...

Но об этом я узнал позже. Мне было одиннадцать лет, когда ночью приехали люди в военном и на той же даче, где мы запускали змеев, арестовали отца и увезли.» [IV, 8]

Throughout the novel, Trifonov gives an account of his father and uncle's revolutionary and party activities. They were both of Don Cossack origin and orphaned at an early age. They joined the party in Rostov in 1904, and then took part in the uprisings there in 1905. From then till the 1917 revolutions, their lives were spent in and out of Tsarist prison camps. Their involvement in the revolution and Civil War is chronicled, and their untimely deaths during the Great Purge. Trifonov had always believed in his father's innocence, but now the revelations about the Stalin era and the opportunity to study official documents in connection with Valentin's rehabilitation gave him proof. The novel in a sense was a purifying process to try to come to terms with all that had happened to him and his family, to lay bad memories to rest.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Vladimir Novokhatko, 30 September 1993.

However, the novel is not a simple biography of Trifonov's father, but is also about the many others involved in this huge and complicated epoch of Russia's history which moulded their fate and that of their children. As Trifonov says:

«Я пишу книгу не о жизни, а о судьбе. И не только о своем отце, а с многих, многих, о ком я даже не упомянул. Их было очень много, знавших отца, работавших рядом, похожих на него.»

Valentin and Evgenii Trifonov were merely two of the many who "stood close to the fire of history". In analysing their lives, Trifonov wanted to put the record straight - not only to show their innocence but to depict the truth about this period of his country's history, a time when: «...все начиналось. Когда начинались мы.» [IV, 93]. Showing the truth about this period of history would enable a true understanding of the times, an understanding of his forefathers, his own generation and ultimately himself.

In *Otblesk kostra* Trifonov depicts historical events somewhat differently to the way in which they had been previously chronicled, and mentions people whose names had rarely been uttered since their executions. Despite the political climate, Trifonov still had difficulty persuading some people of the genuineness of his father's archives:

«...как медленно, с каким трудом будет разрушаться заматерелая неправда и как много людей будут её защищать, защищая себе.» [IV, 66]

Under Stalin, Soviet history had been perverted due to the cult of personality, and it is not surprising how important finding the truth was for Trifonov. By searching through the archives he had seen how fragile historical evidence was. He had been used to the official stories of the Civil War, of Stalin leading the Red Army from victory to victory, but in the archives he was surprised to read of the muddles in the military [IV, 120]. In the above quotation, he touches on how people defended the official version of history as a means of self-preservation. Even Krushchev did not tell the whole story of Stalin's crimes, as in doing so he would have implicated himself and the whole system. The party's political legitimacy was upheld by the falsification of history. When Mikhail Gorbachev told the whole truth of the nation's history in his policy of *glasnost*, this shook the Communist Party's legitimacy and contributed to its fall from power.

Thus, as Trifonov himself had believed it would<sup>11</sup>, time eventually brought about the historical justice he strove for, but in his own day he

attempted cautiously and patiently to sift historical fact from political fiction. He brought to light the forgotten names of those who were sacrificed by the revolution, some posthumously rehabilitated as a result of de-Stalinisation. He was, for instance, the first to publically mention the Civil War hero Dumenko, executed in 1920. More important is his examination of the Cossack leader Philip Mironov and the whole Cossack question. Mironov, a very popular leader among his fellow Cossacks, had joined the Bolsheviks later in the Civil War and thus was distrusted by many. This eventually led to his downfall and execution in 1921, and he was not rehabilitated until 1960. He had launched his own offensive against orders from headquarters, in what he believed to be the best interests of the Red Army, but others thought he was about to go over to the Whites, and he was shot without trial. Trifonov was to examine Mironov's case in more detail in the novel *Starik*<sup>12</sup> over twenty years later. In *Otblesk kostra* he mentions the policy of de-Cossackisation, which of course his father had been very much against.

At the end of the novel, Trifonov moves very quickly from the end of the Civil War to his father's arrest, which he puts down to the fact that he submitted his book on the dangers of fascism, *Kontury griadushchei voiny*, to the Politburo. Unfortunately, it did not agree with Stalin's thinking at that time. Ordzhonikidze's suicide is mentioned as a dangerous portent to the Purges, an ending similar to that described in the posthumously published *Ischeznovenie*.<sup>13</sup> *Otblesk kostra* is a lament for the "children" which the revolution devoured, for their heroism, their selfless devotion to the revolutionary cause and for the old ideals which were lost under Stalinism. Trifonov did not so much disagree with his father's revolutionary ideals as with the world which emerged from them, which he blames on Stalin and terror. The cause was more important than life itself to Valentin Trifonov and other old Bolsheviks, but Stalin used "for the good of the revolution" as an excuse to liquidate many people who were, as he perceived, a threat to himself. The changes under Krushchev allowed Trifonov to try to examine his country's history and the roots of his own generation. They also led to a change in the mood of the party. It was full of new hope and many, affected by this, joined the party after 1956. Trifonov, however, did not.

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<sup>11</sup> «Наверное, ничто не добывается с таким трудом, как историческая справедливость. Это то, что добывают не раскопки в архивах, не кипы бумаг, не споры, а годы» [IV, 140].

<sup>12</sup> First published in *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no. 3, pp. 27-153. The main character in the novel Pavel Letunov is partly based on his uncle Pavel Lurie.

<sup>13</sup> *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 1, pp. 6-95. Written for the bottom drawer as due to the more open nature of the novel, Trifonov knew he would never see it in print in his lifetime.



Other works of the time, besides Trifonov's, examined the problems of socialist humanism during the Civil War: notably P. Nilin's *Zhestokost'* (1956) and Sergei Zalygin's *Solenaia pad'* (1967-68). However, many books dealing with the party purges, such as Lydia Ginzburg's accounts of her arrest and time spent in the camps, 'Through the Whirlwind' and 'Beyond the Whirlwind', were not published during the Thaw. Nevertheless, *Otblesk kostra* represents an important and unique phase in Trifonov's evolution as a writer, and one which was made possible by the political climate.<sup>14</sup> It was his first novel since *Utolenie zhazhdy*, with which he had not been altogether satisfied, having written it while still labouring under Socialist Realist formulae. The novel also represented his first major historical work, touching on themes which he would later return to and discuss in greater depth in works such as *Starik* and *Ischeznovenie*. The style of *Otblesk kostra* is that of a documentary tale, a genre popular at that time, using official papers and family material, as well as Trifonov's own stream-of-consciousness style narration. There, Trifonov first begins to experiment with time montages which he was to use to such effect in later works - *Dom na naberezhnoi*, *Starik* and *Vremia i mesto*, switching between various times from 1904 to 1937. He also makes use of multiple narrative voice - official documents, his father's notes, grandmother's memoirs and Pavel's diary. The latter shows a fourteen year old boy's perception of the revolution, the emotions and enthusiasm aroused at the time by such things as Lenin's April Theses, which some years later were to become empty, overused phrases. Trifonov himself has two voices, that of the son and that of the narrator as the voice of history.

As well as experimenting with literary devices which were to feature in his maturer works, *Otblesk kostra* is Trifonov's first sustained endeavour to discover historical truth, an obsession which was to become more evident in *Starik*. In *Otblesk kostra* he is trying to find historical truth in the light of Khrushchev's policies, and this applies to all aspects of the novel. Despite his love for his father, he does not romanticise the revolutionary movement, especially when the description of his father's trial after his involvement in the 1905/6 uprisings is compared with Gorky's treatment of a similar subject in his novel *Mother*. He does not convey post factum omniscience on his family but includes part of his grandmother's memoirs, a passage on her acquaintance with Stalin. In these memoirs, written in 1957, Tatiana Slovatinskaia, wrote nothing

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<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to note that Trifonov's *Otblesk kostra* was not reprinted between 1966 and 1987, as the kind of criticism possible during the Khrushchev thaw was not permitted under Brezhnev's regime.

of how Stalin destroyed her family. Thus Trifonov did not know whether to include them, but decided to do so in the end as they too were true as far as they went and part of his country's and family's history. Her very reticence was part of that history. Linked with the search for truth is the importance of conscience and memory. To Trifonov, both Mironov and his father had a conscience, and the latter was greatly influenced by his friend and fellow Bolshevik Aaron Solts who was called "the conscience of the Party".<sup>15</sup> Within *Otblesk kostra*, memory is very important. It was other people's memoirs and the letters he received which helped Trifonov re-write the work into a novel and put together the truth. In later works, Trifonov was to continue exploring the subjectiveness of memory, how people at first only remember what they want to, but how it is necessary to remember everything in order to re-establish the truth, however unpleasant this may be. To Trifonov, memory should be a tool for self-knowledge, not self-deception.

In *Otblesk kostra* Trifonov is trying for maximum authenticity:

«Отблеск костра» я стремился писать как можно суше, дать слово тех лет, бумаги тех лет». <sup>16</sup>

One of Trifonov's main thoughts on history was that it lived in everyone, and he opens *Otblesk kostra* with the following words:

«На каждом человеке лежит отблеск истории. Одних он опалает жарким и грозным светом, на других едва заметен, чуть теплится, но он существует на всех. История полыхает, как громадный костер, и каждый из нас бросает в него свой хвост.» [IV, 7]

Some people like the author's father and uncle made their mark on history more than others, but everyone carried in them the threads of time gone before, all are shaped by history. The concept of the threads of history was an important one in Trifonov's later works, and in *Otblesk kostra* he is moving tentatively towards it, in so much as he feels that he must understand Russia's past in order to fully understand himself. The years covered in the novel formed the roots of Trifonov's own generation; he looks at the origins of the revolution, its victory and then, briefly, its degradation. Trifonov also intended to make his reader think, feel and worry about the events of the novel, posing moral questions such as the price of human life in conditions of historical upheaval such as revolution and civil war. Some were surprised by the publication of the novel, but it is not a side-step in his evolution as a writer, rather part of this process. The interest in

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<sup>15</sup> Aaron Solts also features in *Starik* as a fictionalised character, and by name in *Ischeznovenie*.

<sup>16</sup> 'Sovremennost' - splav istorii i budushchego' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 233.

history here foregrounded for the first time was to continue throughout his literary life, and the interest in morality was also to develop.

In October 1966, Trifonov's wife Nina died while convalescing on the Baltic Sea. She had left the theatre some time before, her singing career at an end, and had gone to a health resort in Lithuania on her own as she was feeling tired and unwell. She phoned Trifonov to ask him to join her, but she died before he got there, from a weak heart. Trifonov was greatly upset by her death and spent several days just lying on his bed staring at the wall.<sup>17</sup> As the arrest and death of his father had brought about 'another life' for Trifonov, so did the death of his wife:

«Я знаю, что пройдет время, и, возможно, я снова женюсь.... Но эта жизнь кончилась. То будет уже другая жизнь.»<sup>18</sup>

His fourteen year old daughter Olga was also extremely upset by her mother's death as they had been very close, and Trifonov took her to Bulgaria on the invitation of his friend there. He produced very little work for some time after his wife's death, but this trip produced the autobiographical story 'Samyi malen'kii gorod'<sup>19</sup> which is dedicated to Nina. The story shows Trifonov trying to cope with his bereavement. The protagonists have come to stay in a Bulgarian hotel at New Year, and his/the narrator's daughter does not know why they have come. Neither does Trifonov/the narrator, but «Надо была куда-то поехать». He recalls his last trip to Bulgaria four years ago, and what time has brought them all since then. They have all experienced death; his friend, in relating his country's history, says «Человек может пережить все». Trifonov knows that life must go on, but he does not know how. The story tells of Bulgaria's history and time is again an important theme, especially its influence on man's life. Trifonov seems not only to be trying to understand the inevitability of death, but also that the passage of time brings this to everyone as it also brings about old age, shown in the many descriptions of old men, including one who can not believe he has outlived his son.

Trifonov finally shook off his grief, and in time he married again. This was in 1972 to Alla Pastukhova, an editor at Politizdat. A strong-willed,

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<sup>17</sup> See Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko's 'Popytka proshchaniia' in *Den' sobaki*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1992, p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Irina Goff's article 'Vodiane znaki: Zapiski o Iurii Trifonove', *Oktiabr'*, 1985, no. 8, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Written in 1967 and first published in *Novyi mir*, 1968, no.1. I shall discuss Trifonov's return to *Novyi mir* in the following chapter.

energetic and sometimes hysterical woman, she refused to move into Trifonov's flat, although hers was too small for all of them, because she did not want to live in a place where Iurii's former wife had lived and her presence was still to be felt. *Drugaiia zhizn'* is dedicated to her, as the protagonist in the novel is also a woman who wanted to guide her husband's development. They had many arguments and the marriage ended somewhat messily with stormy scenes and threats of suicide. To this day, Alla Pastukhova declines to discuss Trifonov.

It was for Politizdat that Trifonov wrote his historical novel *Neterpenie* as part of the series 'Plamennye revoliutsionery' (Ardent Revolutionaries). Novokhatko, the main editor, and good friend of Trifonov (he and his wife Galya were witnesses at Trifonov's marriage to Alla) sought out respected authors for the series such as Bulat Okhudzava, Vladimir Voinovich and Vasilii Aksenov. Some suggest that Trifonov only wrote the novel because of his wife's involvement at Politizdat or, like many others, such as Aksenov, for the money.<sup>20</sup> Trifonov however was genuinely interested in history, and at first wanted to write about German Lopatin, a well-known revolutionary whose life fascinated him.<sup>21</sup> However, another writer, Iurii Davydov was already writing on this<sup>22</sup>, and Trifonov, feeling that Davydov would write a better novel, decided on the subject of the terrorist group *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will), and its leader Andrei Zheliabov, which he described as a «драматическая история в русском революционном движении прошлого века».<sup>23</sup> In *Otblesk kostra* Trifonov researched the roots of the Bolsheviks, and in *Neterpenie* he digs deeper, examining the forefathers of his father's generation of revolutionaries, and a time which would later be «определена как название революционной ситуации» [III, 8].

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<sup>20</sup> Aksenov openly admitted that he only wrote his novel *Lyubov' k elektrichestvu* for this reason, in his answer to the question: «Говорят; писатели шли в эту серию (Пламенные революционеры), в основном, из-за денег?» «Да, там жадные до денег люди собрались: Войнович, Трифонов, Гладиллин, Окуджава, Ефимов, Аksenov. Конечно, все, не исключая меня, хотели заработать. Хотя бы для того, чтобы следующий год не батрачить, а писать "для души". Впрочем, я был даже увлечен по мере проникновения в материал.», 'Beseda s pisatelem Vasiliem Aksenovym', *Kontinent*, 27 (1981), p. 437.

<sup>21</sup> German Lopatin, born Nizhny Novgorod, 1845, died Petrograd, 1918. Member of General Council of First International, first translated Marx's *Das Kapital* into Russian. In 1867 went to Italy to help Garibaldi, arrested in Russia, escaped abroad where became friends with Marx. Returned to Russia in 1870 to free Chernyshevsky from prison in Siberia. Spent life in jail, escaping, living abroad. Wrote many articles on revolution and Tsarism.

<sup>22</sup> See the novel *Dve sviazki pisem. Povest' o Germane Lopatine*, published later by Politizdat in 1982.

<sup>23</sup> 'V kratkom - beskonechnoe' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 266.

The novel opens with a picture of a sick Russian society. The reasons for this sickness are unclear to people at the time, although later it is explained as the start of a revolutionary situation. The picture then shifts to the book's main protagonist, Andrei Zheliabov, who is about to leave his wife and child. The main part of *Neterpenie* centres around the years 1878-1881 and Zheliabov's activities with the People's Will, the various attempts on Alexander II's life, finally resulting in his murder in St Petersburg in 1881. However, unlike other writers who studied Zheliabov, Trifonov spends time looking at the early part of his life in order to understand what made him turn to terror. Zheliabov, born in 1850, was from Cossack peasant stock, and had seen injustice from an early age, first to his family and then to others around him; he was led to join the revolutionary movement to avenge this brutality. He was expelled from university in 1871 for boycotting lectures after a fellow-student was thrown out of class. After this, he became a tutor to the children of middle-class families. His wife Olga was one of his pupils. Throughout the first chapter, the young revolutionary's life with his family is gradually sacrificed to his increasing involvement with radical groups and his eventual move towards terrorism. After the failure of the 'Going to the People' movement, the *Narodniki*, when many were arrested as the peasants failed to grasp the revolutionary message but instead reported them to the police, did not know which way to turn. Olga's father-in-law suggests one way of reform, which he desires as much as Andrei. He believes in the extension of self-government and the *Zemstvo*, but through peaceful means, by working with the system. However, Andrei no longer believes in talking, and the example of Vera Zasulich's attempt on the life of the St. Petersburg governor to avenge the maltreatment of a revolutionary (and her later acquittal) sows the seeds which lead him and *Narodnaia Volia* to embrace terrorism:

«Все слилось: освобождение, впервые в жизни Петербург, свобода пахла сырой угольной гарью, . . . и одновременно - восторг перед неведомой девушкой, чувство почти блаженства. Она не смогла вытерпеть надругательства над другим. О, если бы все, если бы каждый так страдал! . . . И одновременно с чувством радости и острого торжества - а все-таки есть высший суд, наперсники разврата, помните и трепещите! - было какое-то смутное ожидание. Этот выстрел был не концом, а началом. Началось нечто неизведанное. Андрей еще не знал, как к этому новому относиться, но отчетливо ощущал его приход.» [III, 43-44].

It is this belief in a "higher justice" that leads him, though not without some hesitation as to the philosophy of "the means justifies the ends", to the path

of terrorism. He says when in court on trial for the assassination of Alexander II:

«Итак, мы, переиспытав разные способы действовать на пользу народа, в начале семидесятых годов избрали одно из средств: положение рабочего человека... мирную пропаганду социалистических идей... Движение совершенно бескровное, отвергавшее насилие, не революционное, а мирное - было подавлено. Целью моей жизни была служить общему благу. Долгое время я работал для этой цели путем мирным и только затем был вынужден перейти к насилию. Я сказал бы так: от террористической деятельности я, например, отказался бы, если бы изменились внешние условия.» [III, 404].

As one of his acquaintances, Pimen Semenuta, says: «человек начал с того, что хотел учиться у народа, а пришел к тому, чтобы учить историю». It is because of this change in direction that Zheliabov decides to break with his wife and son forever, especially as, like so many wives of revolutionaries, she did not understand his cause. Trifonov spends time on the split with Olga because it also reflects the change in Zheliabov, the change in his morality. People mean little to him now, he can leave his family, he can also now kill another person for the sake of the cause. He, like so many other terrorists is convinced of his own righteousness. He knows that the path of terrorism will lead to execution and he often pictures his own death. He has begun another life, going against himself. Trifonov disliked his hero because in his impatience and desire to give history a push through terrorism in defiance of ethical principles, he saw egoism. To Trifonov this was one of the greatest evils - «в эгоизме заключена неправда мира». Zheliabov, after the break with his family, now believes he has no moral accountability, all bloodshed will be for the cause and the choice of terror is blamed on the times. Many of Trifonov's contemporary characters blamed their acts of egoism on the times.

Zheliabov's desire for glory can be seen at an early stage, when Frolenko, another acquaintance says:

«Он любил покрасоваться, малость побахвалиться: характер-то рыцарский, а рыцарство это всегда некоторая похвальба». [III, 115]

The reader sees Zheliabov from many different angles which sheds more light on his character, especially on the traits of self-glorification and voluntarism, as remembered by his acquaintance Sitsianko:

«Однажды он говорил о воле. О том, что человек, обладающий волей, неуязвим. Волею можно победить смерть, даже самую природу, а не то что такие человеческие установления, как государства,

правительства. Входило какое-то обоготворение личной воли. Я спросил: нет ли тут высочайшего эгоизма? Он говорил, что разумно направленная воля не может быть эгоистичной, ибо ее конечная цель - благо всех». [III, 200-1].

However, Trifonov does not concentrate solely on one protagonist. As well as the portrayals of the many other revolutionaries Zheliabov meets in the first chapter and beyond, in Chapter 2, Trifonov introduces another important member of the *Narodnaia Volia*, Nikolai Kletochnikov. He is an altogether different type of man than Zheliabov and clearly interests Trifonov from the point of view of psychology. A government official who moves from the Crimea to St. Petersburg for a change of scenery, he hears of the *Narodnaia Volna* through friends in Petersburg, students he had met in Yalta, and wants to help the movement in order to put some purpose into an empty, lonely life. He takes a position in the Third Section, the Tsarist secret police, whose representatives are described not unlike the KGB characters in Trifonov's contemporary works, with bloodless, grey, deathly faces and glassy stares, and reports back to the terrorists about forthcoming searches, spies and other information. He is a quiet, modest man, but most valuable to the movement, and, like other members, is motivated by a complex mixture of egoism and idealism.

One who is fuelled purely by egoism is Grisha Goldenburg. He is recruited to the main branch of *Narodnaia Volia* after assassinating the Governor of Kharkov. Following this he sees himself as a hero and is forever bragging about his exploits. He is not interested in the hard work which needs to be done such as digging tunnels, which shows some lack of dedication, especially when compared to the strength and modesty of his fellow conspirator Mikhailov. Due to his carelessness he is eventually picked up by the authorities and, by flattering his vanity, the chief of police Loris-Melnikov leads him to confess and list all the other members of the People's Will in the mistaken belief that in doing so he is saving Russia. However, when he tells this to a fellow revolutionary in prison, to his immense surprise he is called a traitor. Vain to the last, he cannot live with this and takes his own life.

Trifonov describes well the psychology of the various terrorists. One other well-differentiated member of the People's Will is Okladsky. He joins the People's Will as a lively, happy boy, running errands for them, but his underlying desire to please and unreliability of character eventually destroys them all. After being arrested and sentenced to death, he co-operates with the police and becomes an agent provocateur, in which capacity he in fact continued to serve, as we learn from the 'Clio' chapters, right up until the revolution. After

that he disappeared but eventually gave himself up and was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in 1925, aged sixty five:

«Всю жизнь выдавать, выдавать, выдавать, и напоследок, когда уж никого не осталось - выдать себя! . . .

От страха смерти он превратился в пожирателя жизни: он глотал дни, годы, десятилетия, поедая их вместе с костями, высасывал сок, пожирал все, что попадало в эту пьяную похлебку, ради которой колотилось его сердце, сжимались пальцы и даже теперь, на краю могилы, вдруг сверкали - под вспышками магния - пустые нечеловеческие глаза. И седенькая старушка, давая свои показания, не смотрела в его сторону. Он получил десять лет лишения свободы. Второй раз в своей жизни сгинул, на этот раз навсегда». [III, 322-323].

The theme of betrayal is important in the works of Trifonov, and here it is seen in various forms, from the vanity of Grisha Goldenberg to the desire of Rysakov and Okladsky to save their own skins. Okladsky hardens and feels no remorse but Rysakov, who, legs trembling, threw the first bomb at the tsar, is manipulated into betraying his colleagues and believes he will be pardoned right until his execution. He dies knowing that he has destroyed his soul. Thus terrorism is seen to distort the morality of its advocates in many ways.

The novel does not, however, concentrate solely on the terrorists. Trifonov, with all the thoroughness and skill at his command, shows a wide panorama of Russian life at that time. The extensive historical research the author put into *Neterpenie* makes it exceptionally authentic. Not only do we see the life of everyday nineteenth century Russians, their *byt* (an aspect which featured heavily in his *Moscow Tales* written at the same time), but the action also moves from the People's Will to their ultimate target, Alexander II, his family and court life. Alexander is portrayed in a new light. He is shown with his mistress, whom he finally marries after the death of his wife, and he and his associates appear weak compared to the iron will of Zheliabov and the revolutionaries. Ironically, when the *Narodnaia Volnya* finally do kill the Tsar, it only brings about the destruction of the group and not the great revolution from below its members had hoped for. The populace was not moved to uphold their cause - they had not, after all, imposed their will. The assassination of his father led the heir to the throne, Alexander III, under the guidance of the arch-conservative Pobedonostsev, to be extremely reactionary, and he did not put into effect the decree which his father had just signed to create a form of representative assembly and constitution. The assassination of Alexander II did



not give history the push the People's Will had naively hoped. Indeed they had probably forced it backwards.

In this study of the People's Will, Trifonov was not only investigating the roots of twentieth century Russian revolutionaries, but was also reflecting on the phenomenon of modern-day terrorism (in Ireland, South America and Germany):

«И конечно, в этой теме были какие-то переключки со многими волнующими нас сегодня проблемами. Да и сама идея экстремизма, терроризма - все еще живая и большая для современного зарубежного мира, для современной истории. Так что тут был комплекс причин, которые потянули меня к этому роману.»<sup>24</sup>

Trifonov is interested in what leads people to terrorism, which he is wholly against, and in the outcome of their actions. Terrorism is the undoing of the People's Will. They are discredited by it and break up, having deceived themselves and failed to understand the value of human life. Trifonov's study of *Narodnaia Volia* is an ethical rejection of terrorism, showing that it achieves nothing:

«В своем романе я хотел показать, что с помощью террора нельзя достичь истинных общественных целей».<sup>25</sup>

In *Neterpenie*, the threads of history and terrorism of the 1870's are not only traced to the twentieth century Russian revolutionaries and further to the modern day, but also back in Russian history. The shadow of another Russian revolutionary, Nechaev, hangs over the novel. Sergei Nechaev (1847-1882), a follower of Machiavellian principles, the belief that the end justifies the means, wrote a "Revolutionary's Catechism" which proposed murder, amongst other things, as a legitimate means to further revolution and categorised people according to their importance as targets. The People's Will disliked Nechaev and rejected his unprincipled, immoral ideas but, ironically, came very close to him in the end. Nechaev himself was fuelled purely by egoism, by a despotic yearning for power rooted in pride and total contempt for others. The People's Will did believe that their actions were for the good of the Russian people and targeted those in power - Trifonov shows Zheliabov as limiting the amount of gunpower used in the Winter Palace in one of the attempts to blow up Alexander II so that innocent people should not be killed, whereas Nechaev even had one

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 267. Kirill Sokolov, who illustrated the first (Politizdat) edition of *Neterpenie*, also recalls that Trifonov said his interest in modern-day terrorists led him to write the novel. Interview, 1 December 1994.

<sup>25</sup> 'Roman s istoriei' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 322.

of his own conspirators, the student Ivanov, murdered. It is in this question of damage limitation that modern-day terrorists have more connection with Nechaev's so-called pseudo-revolutionary behaviour, than with *Narodnaia Volia*. The Baader-Meinhof gang, for instance also had one of their members, Ulrich Schminker, killed on a false charge of treachery. However, Trifonov shows the similarities to be much wider than this. Modern terrorists will blow up anyone - planes, shops, people out walking. They are completely without moral principle. In the article *Nechaev, Verkhovenskii i drugie*<sup>26</sup> Trifonov sees the aim of modern terrorism to be to achieve notoriety for their cause through the mass media and was one of the first to advocate denying them "the oxygen of publicity". To block the reporting of terrorist attacks would also stop the public becoming immune to such horrors. It is their egoism that desires this publicity, and this too links them with Nechaev:

«Поэтому история столетней давности Нечаева и всей нечаевщины представляется мне такой важной для сегодняшнего мира, для понимания событий, которые только внешне кажутся революционными, а в действительности являются выражением самого большого человеческого эгоизма.»<sup>27</sup>

In writing about Zheliabov, Trifonov did not want to tell his story so much as an exemplary revolutionary legend, but as a lesson. The influence of Dostoevsky on the novel is apparent here. Not only does Dostoevsky appear as an actual character in *Neterpenie*, as well as Tolstoy, giving the novel a literary, as well as historical, focus, but it is clear that Trifonov was also influenced by Dostoevsky's *Besy* ('The Devils').<sup>28</sup> The characters in this novel were directly inspired by Nechaev and his associates. *Besy* was banned during Stalin's time as anti-revolutionary and even at the time Trifonov wrote *Neterpenie* it was seen as a bold subtext. Zheliabov is, in his rejection of absolute morality and in his calculated publicity-seeking, not unlike one of Dostoevsky's "devils".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> First published in *Novyi mir*, no. 11, 1981 to commemorate 100 years since the death of Dostoevsky (the links with Dostoevsky will be examined later in the chapter) and also in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*.

<sup>27</sup> 'Roman s istoriei' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 322.

<sup>28</sup> See the article 'Nechaev, Verkhovenskii i drugie'.

<sup>29</sup> In one of his illustrations to the first edition of Trifonov's book, on which he worked with the author, Kirill Sokolov showed the contrast in Dostoevsky and Zheliabov's reactions to witnessing a public execution. Trifonov himself found the pale blue and silver of the book's cover, which imbues the figure of Zheliabov with a flickering "now you see him, now you don't" quality, particularly suitable to precisely this fiendish aspect of his character. Interview with Kirill Sokolov, 1 December 1994.

Trifonov saw *Besy* as being relevant to modern-day terrorism, and the moral aspect of both novels is valid today. The influence of Dostoevsky continues in Trifonov's later works, especially of *Crime and Punishment* in *Dom na naberezhnoi*.

Thus the threads of history extend from Nechaev, through to the People's Will, to the Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries («А те, кто пришел в начале XX века на смену народолюбцам (это были эсеры), уже очень много усвоили из нечаевских принципов»<sup>30</sup>), and further to modern-day terrorists outside Russia. Here in *Neterpenie* many of Trifonov's major themes are present, and it is not just a story written to order to commemorate famous "ardent revolutionaries". Here Trifonov is further developing his thoughts on history and the concept of *slitnost'*. The style of the novel reflects this. It is quite complex, and it is told from three main viewpoints - those of the author objectively retelling the story; of other characters giving a first person view of events through document and flashback; and of Clio, the muse of history, looking on from the present day. By using Clio to comment on the events from the vantage point of 1972, Trifonov shows the subsequent fate of the various characters as well as giving an objective, contemporary view of these events. The device also gives a feeling of the flow of time, of the inevitability, sooner or later, of individual death. Clio herself says «все исчезает в моем потоке...» [III, 89]. Yet the threads of history are carried on within every person. Trifonov actually said to a relative of a member of the People's Will:

«Меня очень обрадовало то, что Вы - живая нить, соединяющая наше время с замечательными людьми прошлого».<sup>31</sup> (Italics mine - L.B.)

Trifonov tried to use very little invention in *Neterpenie*, to be as factual as possible in his desire to show historical truth, as in *Otblesk kostra*. He attempts to make the reader think about history and morality, but does not give overt judgements. This tolerance was very important to him and is also his attitude in the *Moscow Tales*. He agreed with Chekhov that «мы не врачи - мы боль», and, by making the reader think about the past, he ensures that the memory of it is not lost but helps towards an understanding of the present. He uses contemporary language to stress the connection between past, present and future, to convey the unity of time.

The novel was criticised for being uneven and confusing with too many characters and locations, yet this also helps to immerse the reader in the spirit of

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<sup>30</sup> Roman s istoriei' p. 324.

<sup>31</sup> See ' "Sopriazhenie istorii s sovremennost'iu" (Iz pisem ob istorii)', *Voprosy literatury*, 1987, no. 7, pp. 180.

the time. The reader is caught up in the swirl of events, feels the bustle and the impatience of *Narodnaia Volia*. The flashbacks and switches between the three styles are like the time montages increasingly used by Trifonov in his later works. In *Starik* these techniques are used again to great effect. In *Neterpenie* they highlight the inner worlds of the characters, their true natures, caught up in the flux of time, while bridging the gap between the two eras, Clio shows the final outcome for each character, but gives no conclusions and passes no judgement.

*Neterpenie* was staged as a play and was also translated into many languages, giving Trifonov international fame, and even a nomination for the Nobel Prize from the German Heinrich Böll. Its popularity was partly due to the epidemic of terrorism in the world at that time and to the interest of the Russian youth in the People's Will, the romanticisation of the underground struggle. It also, unusually, gave a balanced, critical view of some of the fathers of Bolshevism, and this interested readers jaded by standard Soviet praise. The writing of the novel took only ten months, although it was well researched. Some were surprised at its publication in the middle of Trifonov's novellas on contemporary Moscow life, but in these are common features. There is the all pervading concern for time, history and morality. Indeed, figures from *Neterpenie* are mentioned in the story *Dolgoe proshchanie*. The hero Grisha, a historian, is, like Trifonov his creator, interested in both Nechaev and Kletochnikov. Trifonov believed that history was always with everyone, and each needed to understand their own past in order to understand themselves. In his historical works he subjects the morality of revolutionaries to intense scrutiny because they are, in a sense, responsible for him and the world he and his readers inhabit, but with the *Moscow Tales*, which I shall examine in the following chapter, Trifonov begins to look at morality in everyday life, *byl*, not so much the morals of the great historical conflagrations, but rather the revolution's dying embers in Brezhnev's stagnating Russian society.

## CHAPTER 6

### MOSCOW LIFE

1966 onwards heralded a period of artistic maturity for Trifonov, and a return to publishing in *Novyi mir*, under the editorship of Alexander Tvardovsky, after an absence of 16 years. In 1954, after being refused an advance for a new novel by Tvardovsky, Trifonov had vowed never to return to *Novyi mir*. His Turkmenian works and *Otblesk kostra* had all been published in *Znamia*. He did not see Tvardovsky again until the funeral of Gabbe (his editor on *Studenty*) in 1960. Since then Tvardovsky had temporarily lost his editorship in 1954 due to the publication of Pomerantsev's article on "Sincerity in Literature", but in 1958 he returned as editor due to public pressure. The journal however was still heavily censored and Tvardovsky was often harrassed by the bureaucracy, but *Novyi mir* remained Russia's leading literary monthly. In 1964, Trifonov and Tvardovsky acquired neighbouring dachas in *Krasnaia Pakhra*. In *Zapiski sosedai*<sup>1</sup> Trifonov recalls how at first they were distant, then only talked of gardening matters and finally began to discuss literature. Tvardovsky then asked Trifonov to submit some of his work to *Novyi mir*: «Почему вы нам ничего не приносите? Приносите! Нам интересна каждая ваша страница!».<sup>2</sup> At first Trifonov was hesitant, fearing rejection and thus spoiling his new-found friendship with Tvardovsky. In the end, he began to publish again in the journal, starting at the end of 1966 with two short stories, *Vera i Zoika* and *Byl letnii polden'*.<sup>3</sup>

*Vera i Zoika* tells the story of two friends cleaning a dacha belonging to the middle-aged Lidiia Aleksandrovna, outside Moscow. The three women are from different social groups but share much in common where fate is concerned. Lidiia Aleksandrovna tells Vera and Zoika her life story while waiting for her husband and son to arrive with the money to pay them for their work. She has had difficulties in her life but feels that «женщина никогда не должна терять надежды». Her family does not turn up and eventually the two women leave one after another. Zoika takes seven roubles with her - all that Lidiia Aleksandrovna has on her, while Vera follows later, leaving Lidiia some

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<sup>1</sup> 'Zapiski sosedai', appeared in the novel 'Prodolzhitelnie uroki', republished without omissions in *Druzhiba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, pp. 7-43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> 'Dva rasskaza: Vera i Zoika; Byl letnii polden' ', *Novyi mir*, 1966, no. 12, pp. 75-91. 'Dva rasskaza: Samyi malen'kii gorod; Golubinaia gibel' ', *Novyi mir*, 1968, no. 1, pp. 74-88. 'V gribnuiu osen'. Rasskaz', *Novyi mir*, 1968, no. 8, pp. 67-75.

money. It ends with Vera walking through meadows to the station, a picture of eternal nature.

The story is fairly simple and compact, with little dialogue and covering a short period of time. However, it shows the complexities of human relationships and how all three react differently to life. Against the backdrop of a changing, expanding Moscow, we see the erosion of traditional family ideals, the unhappy and lonely lives of many Muscovites. This was characteristic of all Trifonov's so-called "Moscow tales"<sup>4</sup>, where he had started to concentrate on the lives of ordinary people.<sup>5</sup>

*Vera i Zoika* was published with the story *Byl letnii polden'*. This tells of an old woman, Olga, returning to her homeland in the Baltic after an absence of many years. The visit has been arranged by Nikul'shin, a man who is writing a book and film about Olga's late husband's participation in the 1905 revolution - presumably the reason why they had to leave the area. We see her saying farewell to her family on a railway platform in Moscow, and the tensions and everyday problems of life in the capital are apparent. She is fond of her granddaughter, but dislikes her daughter-in-law and her husband (her son, the woman's first husband, committed suicide in 1939 while in a labour camp in the Far East). She is unable to live with her other children, one daughter being in Baku which is too hot, while the other lives with her husband and his large family elsewhere in Moscow. Arriving on the Baltic, she feels that 1905 now means little to her and has difficulty remembering the place - only the smell finally brings it all back. She returns to the hut where she lived with two friends and meets one of them, Marta, who promised to write but never did. They now feel as if they had never parted, as though the changes had been purely external. Now the memories of her life and husband come flooding back, they seem more real than her current life, showing the fate and tragedy of a woman alone. Then she was the wife of a dedicated revolutionary, now she is just a little old lady, similar to the descriptions of the old revolutionaries who attended Dmitriev's grandfather's funeral in *Obmen*. However, on return to Moscow, *byt* takes over

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<sup>4</sup>Including the longer works which followed these initial short stories - 'Obmen. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1969, no. 12, pp. 29-65. 'Predvaritel'nye itogi', *Novyi mir*, 1970, no. 12, pp. 101-140. 'Dolgoe proshchaniye. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1971, no. 8, pp. 53-107. 'Drugaiia zhizn', *Novyi mir*, 1975, no. 8, pp. 7-99, and also 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Povest"', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167.

<sup>5</sup>T. Patera, in her book *Obzor tvorchestva i analiz moskovskikh povestei Iuriiia Trifonova*. Ann Arbor.: Ardis, 1983, sees this story as an answer to what some critics had perceived as an anti-Solzhenitsyn stance, showing the importance of 'little'people, as in Solzhenitsyn's *Matrenin dvor*.

the revolutionary past. Asked about her trip, her only comment is about the weather:

«А в понедельник утром Ольга Робертовна стояла в очереди за молоком в «гастрономе» и рассказывала одной знакомой женщине из соседнего подъезда, какая погода в Прибалтике: все пять дней почти сплошь дожди.»<sup>6</sup>

Thus in *Byl letnii polden'*, life in contemporary Moscow is juxtapositioned with that of Russia's revolutionary history, but it is the former which is present and thus seems to overcome the latter at the end of the story (although of course the two are inseparably linked). As in all of the Moscow Tales, everyday life, or *byt*, and its trivialities are becoming much more important to people than their own history. Trifonov was to join the past and the present in many of his future works, most notably *Starik*,<sup>7</sup> and thus this short story is the start of a new, more mature style. The tale was actually based on a true story, that of E.A., the widow of a famous revolutionary who returned to the hut where she used to live in Estonia after fifty years. Trifonov had forgotten about this until he began to write about 1905 in *Otblesk kostra*, and felt that the time was right to write a story about it, for he now had a feel for that time.<sup>8</sup>

*Golubinaia gibel'* also depicts the life of the older generation in Moscow.<sup>9</sup> An old couple feed the doves which land on their balcony, but a neighbour, whose son spends his time shooting at the birds with a catapult instead of doing his homework, complains to the housekeeper, who tells them that flat-dwellers are not allowed to keep pets and they must get rid of them. The neighbour, an elegant, arrogant woman represents the new versus the old in Moscow society, as in the Luk'ianovs versus the Dmitrievs in *Obmen*, while the officious housekeeper creates an aura of fear among the tenants, reminiscent of the old KGB house wardens in Stalin's time. The old couple try all sorts of methods, putting nails on the window sills, taking the doves miles away outside Moscow, but in the end the old man is forced to kill them, much to his distress. The story is extremely gloomy, made worse because of its ordinariness, as are

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<sup>6</sup> In *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978; volume 1, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> 'Starik. Roman.', *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no. 3, pp. 27-153.

<sup>8</sup> See the article 'Vozvrashchenie k "prosus"' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1985, pp. 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> Published in *Novyi mir* in 1968, along with the story 'Samyi malen'kii gorod', which is examined in Chapter 5.

the other stories of the Moscow cycle. Even Tvardovsky asked him to change the end:

« . . . Он лежал у меня на столе, Мария Илларионовна прочитала, - сказал Александр Трифонович. - Хороший, говорит, рассказ, но почему конец такой грустный? Прямо, говорит, жить не хочется. Вы там что-нибудь сделайте с концом...»<sup>10</sup>

However Trifonov did not change the ending, and the tragic destruction of life is made even more ironic and meaningless by the fact that Muscovites are later encouraged to keep as many doves as possible for the International Youth Festival in 1957.

This change in the law represents the change in the regime at that time, from Stalinism to the relatively more liberal period under Krushchev. The doves are symbols of victims of the regime. At the time when Trifonov wrote the story, the doves were also an allegory for the growing repression under Brezhnev and the fear of many, including the author, of a return to Stalinism. After replacing Krushchev in 1964, Brezhnev had started a campaign against liberal writers, mostly notably Solzhenitsyn who was used as a scapegoat. This all had repercussions for Tvardovsky, who had published Solzhenitsyn's work in *Novyi mir*. The January edition of *Novyi mir* which included *Golubinaia gibel'* did not actually come out until March 1968 because Tvardovsky was trying to publish the end chapters of *Cancer Ward*. The previous year had also seen the trial of two writers, Sinyavsky and Daniel, who were imprisoned for five and seven years for having their work published in the West. This fear of further repression hangs heavy on *Golubinaia gibel'* and even affected the story itself. The above events are not of course directly referred to, the reader has to deduce these himself from the Aesopian language of *Golubinaia gibel'*. The story was actually submitted to *Novyi mir* at the same time as *Vera i Zoika* and *Byl letnii polden'*, and when republished in 1971<sup>11</sup> and 1978<sup>12</sup> there were some changes to the text, namely alterations and omissions in the 1971 edition. As Tatiana Patera has shown<sup>13</sup>, allusions to the 1956 amnesty of prisoners and the anti-Semitism of the early 1950s were cut out, as was the description of the arrest of the

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<sup>10</sup> 'Zapiski sosedai', in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 171.

<sup>11</sup> In *Rasskazy i povesti*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> In *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978; volume 1, pp. 186-198.

<sup>13</sup> For an indepth discussion of *Golubinaia gibel'*, see Tatiana Patera, *Obzor tvorchestva i analiz moskovskikh povestei Iuriiia Trifonova*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983, pp. 41-84.



couple's Jewish neighbour, Boris Evgenevich, which happens at the same time as the doves are removed. His family is evicted from their flat and resettled elsewhere, but this is changed in later editions to that they had simply "moved".

Human nature is also explored in *V gribnuiu osen'*, in the reaction of Nadia and those around her to the death of her mother. She finds her mother dead at their dacha, but it seems that she only sees the loss in terms of her mother's uses, such as doing the housework, rather than of any real love. She is, however, disgusted by the attitudes of the others, who quickly get on with life again and talk about trivialities, such as the mushrooms of the title. *Byt*, everyday concerns seem to overcome death. One workmate of her mother's even hints at swapping flats, a theme which Trifonov was to expand in *Obmen*. The whole pathos of this story is also lowered by the concentration on *byt*, but as with Chekhov, this makes the impression stronger as the characters are so ordinary.

The influence of Chekhov on Trifonov's style became increasingly evident at this stage in the writer's life. As he says in *Vozvrashchenie k "prosus"*:

«Чехов однажды сказал: «Надо писать просто: о том, как Петр Семенович женился на Марье Ивановне. Вот и все». Мне кажется, в этой фразе - ответ на проблему сюжета. Писать о простых вещах».<sup>14</sup> The brief, impressionistic feel of these short stories also have the feel of another of Trifonov's favourite writers, Bunin:

«Бунин оказал огромное влияние на большинство современных молодых прозаиков - в основном в области стиля, пластики слова».<sup>15</sup>

As other articles of this time show, Trifonov was moving more towards realism, to characters who would depict the current times.

«Я рассчитывал в какой-то степени выявить меру плодотворности разных литературных направлений, установить, что в наше время наиболее результативно и действенно реалистическое направление».<sup>16</sup> Inherent in this is the growing importance of the question of morality in contemporary Moscow, which Trifonov was to explore in greater detail in his subsequent novellas. Although he does examine modern-day morality and knows people's weaknesses and shortcomings, he does not condemn his

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<sup>14</sup> 'Vozvrashchenie k "prosus" ' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> 'I.A.Bunin' in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, pp. 26-27. Originally written in 1969 for a collection of works dedicated to Bunin.

<sup>16</sup> 'Personazh v sovremennoi literature', written in 1965 and published in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*. See also 'Khudozhnik i revoliutsiia', *Voprosy literatury*, 1967, no. 11, pp. 101-2.

characters, but instead strives to understand them and make the reader do so too, unlike much of the official literature of the time. Trifonov had now finally broken with socialist realism. These characters were real people with real, everyday problems, no longer merely positive or negative stereotypes.

The style of these stories, the indirect reported speech, close attention to detail and the time shifts show a more mature Trifonov, and continue in his later, larger works. They act as snapshots of his subsequent *povesti* and novels. As the Turkmenian stories set the scene for *Utolenie zhazhdy*, these have the same role for his *Moscow Tales*. He has now entered what can be seen as the third stage of his evolution, from clichéd socialist realism and the second, Turkmenian phase. Because of the increasingly repressive climate of the time, Trifonov is using what has been referred to as his "Aesopian" language; it is not so much what is said as what is unsaid, which the mature Soviet reader could detect between the lines.

The last short story from this transition to the novellistic genre of the *Moscow Tales* is *Puteshestvie*<sup>17</sup>, which holds the key to Trifonov's new outlook. It opens with the narrator, a Moscow journalist, who feels (as Trifonov once did) that he needs to go away to produce decent material:

«Однажды в апреле я вдруг понял, что меня может спасти только одно: путешествие. Надо было уехать.» [IV, 189]

However, throughout the course of the story he realises that Moscow herself holds so much that he knows nothing about, including the people around him and ultimately himself:

«Через полчаса я вышел из троллейбуса возле своего дома. На углу Второй Песчаной, где находится диетический «Гастроном», я остановился и поглядел кругом: я увидел сквер с нагими деревьями, сырые ветви которых искрились на солнце. На скамейках, расставленных кольцом вокруг фонтана, сидели, подставив солнцу лица, десятка четыре пенсионеров, стариков и старух. Они сидели тесно, по пятеро на скамейке. Я не знал никого из них. . . .

Я открыл дверь своим ключом и вошел в квартиру. . . . В зеркале мелькнуло на мгновение серое, чужое лицо: я подумал о том, как я мало себя знаю.» [IV, 191-2].

Thus he decides to stay and focus on his contemporaries, to journey into people and not places. Trifonov too now moves from external portrayals to the inner world of Muscovites.

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<sup>17</sup> Written in 1969 and first published in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978; volume 1, pp. 23-26.

## THE EXCHANGE

The first of Trifonov's so-called *moskovskie povesti*, *Obmen* ('The Exchange'), was published in *Novyi mir* in December 1969. It centres on Viktor Dimitriev, a middle-aged Muscovite, and the conflict between his own family, especially his mother, and that of his wife Lena, the Luk'ianovs, as he ponders at the opening of the novella:

«Почему две интеллигентные, всеми уважаемые женщины - почему две хорошие женщины, горячо любившие Дмитриева, тоже хорошего человека, и его дочь Наташку, упорно лелеяли в себе твердевшую с годами взаимную неприязнь?» [II, 8].

This animosity has built up over the years, but at the beginning of *Obmen* Dimitriev's mother is terminally ill with cancer, and Lena sees this as an ideal opportunity to improve their own cramped living conditions by asking her to move in with them. Thus on Kseniia Fedorovna's death they would inherit her flat and be able to swap this and their own flat for one larger place. This practice, although not strictly legal, was fairly common-place in Soviet Russia. Dimitriev is horrified by Lena's callousness, especially in light of the fact that Lena never wanted to live with his mother in the past and his family will see through this and guess Lena's true motives. However, in the end he gives in, and the '*obmen*' of the title represents not only an exchange of property but of values too. As his mother says when he asks her to live with them: «Ты уже обменялся, Витя. Обмен произошёл . . . Это было очень давно. И бывает всегда, каждый день, так что ты не удивляйся, Витя. И не сердись. Просто так незаметно...». [II, 62].

Dimitriev's ultimate betrayal of his mother opens *Obmen*, but there then follows a number of flashbacks showing a series of moral choices and compromises throughout his life which culminates in his being fully 'Luk'ianovised'. Dimitriev's family are of old revolutionary stock, his uncles were Red Partisans, his grandfather spent time in Tsarist camps. His mother, Kseniia Fedorovna, is also a representative of the old, revolutionary generation, but Trifonov's characterization runs much deeper than a simple stereotype. On the surface, she seems a good person, constantly helping those less fortunate than herself, as Dimitriev's father also did, in a seemingly selfless manner:

«Верно, Ксению Федоровну любят друзья, уважают сослуживицы, ценят соседи по квартире и по павлиновской даче, потому что она доброжелательна, уступчива, готова прийти на помощь и принять участие....

Все правда, истинная правда: мать постоянно окружают люди, в судьбе которых она принимает участие. . . . Всем мать старается помогать совершенно бескорыстно. Хотя где там - помогать! Связи давно порастеряны, и сил нет. Но все-таки - кровом, советом, сочувствием. Очень любит помогать бескорыстно. Пожалуй, точнее так: любит помогать таким образом, чтобы, не дай бог, не вышло никакой корысти. Но в этом-то и была корысть: делая добрые дела, все время сознавать себя хорошим человеком.» [II, 35-36].

However for this reason, Lena, much to Dmitriev's annoyance, sees her mother-in-law as a hypocrite who believes herself to be morally superior to everyone else, and with her background, superior to petty-bourgeois such as the Luk'ianovs. Dmitriev's sister also looks down on Lena's family, they both believe he has betrayed the family by marrying into a family whose outlook on life is so alien to them. Kseniia Fedorovna is not the usual shining example (or stereotype) of an old revolutionary, but is shown with all her human faults.

Dmitriev's grandfather is more like the old revolutionaries previously seen in Trifonov's work, such as his father, embodying the great ideals of their time. However, having returned from a spell in the Soviet camps, he is completely out of touch with modern life:

«Старик был настолько чужд всякого лукьяноподобия - просто не понимал многих вещей . . . .

Дед говорил, изумляясь, Дмитриеву: «Сегодня приходил какой-то рабочий перетягивать кушетку, и твоя прекрасная Елена и не менее прекрасная теща дружно говорили ему «ты». Что это значит? Это так теперь принято? . . . . И Дмитриев ничего не мог деду объяснять. Лена, смеясь, говорила: «Федор Николаевич, вы монстр!» Дед был не монстр, просто был очень стар - семьдесят девять, - таких стариков осталось в России немного, а юристов, окончивших Петербургский университет, еще меньше, а тех из них, кто занимался в молодости революционными делами, сидел в крепости, ссылался, бежал за границу, работал в Швейцарии, в Бельгии, был знаком с Верой Засулич, - вовсе раз-два - и обчелся. Может быть, в каком-то смысле дед и был монстр.» [II, 44-45].

Dmitriev's grandfather is more like a dinosaur, a rapidly dying out breed in this new stagnating society, based on materialism and all the values which the Luk'ianovs represent. However, this does not make him intolerant of it or the new people around him, as he says - « Презрение - это глупость. Не нужно никого презирать.» [II, 46]. Instead he tries to accept contemporary values rather than living in the past:

«Дед говорил о том, что все, что позади, вся его бесконечно длинная жизнь, его не занимает. Нет глупее, как искать идеалы в прошлом. С интересом он смотрит только вперед, но, к сожалению, он увидит немного.» [II, 47].

Trifonov, like Dmitriev's grandfather, did not believe in being contemptuous and intolerant of others, however much one may dislike their character, but at this stage in life he too was somewhat pessimistic of the way in which the society around him was moving.

The Luk'ianovs are a completely different breed to the Dmitrievs - those who "know who to live". They are not from the revolutionary intelligentsia, but are a new type of Russian, who use their connections to get on in life. Ivan Vasilievich is a party member, which he has used to help him along, but the Stalinist times have taken their toll on him. Having continually had to be on his guard in the past to prevent his downfall, he and his wife are now suspicious of everything and everyone, including each other, to the point of absurdity. Dmitriev's family, as they are from the intelligentsia, look down on the Luk'ianovs, whom they class as 'petty bourgeois'. However this does not stop them letting the Luk'ianovs arrange the mending of the cesspit at their dacha. The Luk'ianovs' main drive in life is for material possessions. They are not "bad" people, but in attaining their goals they break the moral codes which the Dmitrievs hold so dear. They are representative of the new type of person in Russian society, highly practical, ambitious, using the system to satisfy their own needs. In comparison, the Dmitrievs seem outdated. They will not compromise their principles to get what they desire. The Luk'ianovs are the latest phenomenon in Russian life as Oblomov was a century before them.

Lena herself is an intelligent woman, a translator of technical texts, but is a chip off the Luk'ianov block who does everything possible to get what she wants. As her husband describes her:

«Ибо она вгрызалась в свои желания, как бульдог. Такая миловидная женщина-бульдог с короткой стрижкой соломенного цвета и всегда приятно загорелым, слегка смуглым лицом. Она не отпускала до тех пор, пока желания - прямо у нее в зубах - не превращались в плоть.» [II, 50] Everything she does is for her family, and although the bulldog simile is rather unpleasant, she does look after her family and their interests with the ferociousness of a guard dog. Dmitriev accuses her of insensitivity, of having «какой-то душевный дефект. Какая-то недоразвитость чувств.» [II, 10]. However, in comparison with those around her, she is fairly typical in securing what she wants in life. One of Dmitriev's colleagues tries to force him to go on a business trip to Siberia, well aware that Kseniia Fedorovna is dying,

because he wants to make sure that his daughter gets a place in a special music school. Each is for their own in this modern materialistic Moscow society:

«Но, боже мой, разве можно сравнивать - умирает человек и девочка поступает в музыкальную школу? Да, да. Можно. Это шляпы примерно одинакового размера - если умирает чужой человек, а в музыкальную школу поступает своя собственная, родная дочка.» [II, 19].

Lena may be calculating and heartless, but she is extremely practical and clever and gets what she wants. Trifonov does not wholly condemn her because she is indicative of modern society, which he is trying to understand, warts and all. As he says of Lena in response to the criticism directed against her:

Почему Лена, жена Дмитриева, отрицательный персонаж? Что она - ребенка бьет? Ворует деньги в кассе взаимопомощи? Пьянствует с мужчинами? Никудашный работник? Ничего подобного. ребенка любит, вина не пьет, семью свою обожает, работает прекрасно и успешно, даже составила какой-то учебник для технического вуза. Она - человек на своем месте, приносит безусловную пользу обществу. Ну, есть у нее какие-то недостатки в характере, а у кого их нет? У вас, что ли, ангельский характер?<sup>18</sup>

Dmitriev himself is stuck somewhere between these two worlds of his family and his wife and in-laws. He very much appears the hen-pecked husband of such a forceful woman. His marriage to Lena seems to be based on physical desire rather than love, but even in their sexual relations, Dmitriev is passive. When they marry, Dmitriev knows that they are not compatible but he tries to justify it as bringing new blood to the family:

«Ну что ж, не так плохо породниться с людьми другой породы. Впрыснуть свежую кровь. Попользоваться чужим умением. Не умеющие жить при долгом совместном житье-бытье начинают немного тяготить друг друга - как раз этим своим благородным неумением, которым втайне гордятся.» [II, 39].

Dmitriev has certainly profited in many ways by his wife and her family "knowing how to live", but at the price of the moral values of his own family. He lets Lena get her own way, even when he knows it is wrong, just for a quiet life. If Lena is a bulldog, then Dmitriev is most definitely an ostrich, forever burrowing his head in the sand. Although he knows that some things are morally wrong, he tries to negate all responsibility for his own actions and

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<sup>18</sup> 'Vybirat, reshat'sia, zhertvovat', *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 86.

decisions (or lack of them) by believing that such is life, that that is the way it should be or even that with Lena he is under the spell of a witch, rather than just the whims of a bulldog.<sup>19</sup> He becomes a master of self-deception in trying to justify everything to himself.

One example of Dmitriev's moral weakness is his affair with Tania, a colleague from work, and his subsequent treatment of her. The affair started while Lena was away on holiday with their daughter, and upon her return it gradually fizzled out. Dmitriev often thinks that Tania is the wife he should have had, sensitive unlike Lena (even his mother liked her), but of course he is too weak to do anything about it. Tania herself left her husband over Dmitriev and has aged considerably as a result of the affair, but still loves him. He is completely passive with her too, and lets her caress him while they are travelling in a taxi together to her flat as he is about to borrow money from her to pay for the exchange. Even though he knows her feelings for him, he is not particularly bothered about asking her to finance him to move into a larger flat with his family, thus indicating that he does not want to be with her. This shows a distinct lack of sensitivity on his part, the fault he accuses Lena of at the beginning of *Obmen*.

Throughout the course of the story Dmitriev looks back on his life and the reader sees how he has abandoned so many things, never having the strength of will to carry them through. In his youth he had been very artistic and hoped to go to art school. However, on failing the first exam, he threw himself into the first mundane job that came along, rather than persevering with what was then the great love of his life. After marrying Lena, he turned down many interesting business trips around the USSR at her command. He also started a PhD in order to earn more money at the institute where he worked, but, lacking motivation, soon gave it up.

His current job at the Institute of Oil and Gas Apparatus was also obtained by compromising his moral principles. The job was originally intended for a friend of Dmitriev's family, Leva Bubrik, who having returned from Turkmenia, had been unable to find work for some time. Through his connections, Lena's father can ensure that Bubrik obtains the job which he would like at this institute. However, Lena, upon hearing of the job, decides that Dmitriev should have it instead as it is better than his current one. Dmitriev at first does not want this, but of course he eventually reconciles himself to it, sacrificing friendship for a comfy job:

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<sup>19</sup> As Dmitriev describes Lena «И, обняв, смотрела ему в глаза синими ласковыми глазами ведьмы» [II, 50].

«Мысль пришла ей первой, когда Иван Васильевич приехал и рассказал, что за место. И Дмитриев действительно не хотел. Три ночи не спал, колебался и мучился, но постепенно то, о чем нельзя было и подумать, не то что сделать, превратилось в нечто незначительное, миниатюрное, хорошо упакованное, вроде облатки, которую следовало - даже необходимо для здоровья - проглотить, несмотря на гадость, содержащуюся внутри. Этой гадости никто ведь не замечает. Но все глотают облатки.» [II, 52].

Dmitriev's family are not at all happy with his behaviour towards Bubrik, which leads his grandfather to say «Мы с Ксеньей ожидали, что из тебя получится что-то другое. Ничего страшного, разумеется, не произошло. Ты человек не скверный. Но и не удивительный». [II, 49].

Dmitriev is precisely that - not a bad man, but not wonderful either, and with time he becomes more and more Luk'ianovised . Even his sister Lora remarks «Витька, как же ты олухьянился!». [II, 36]. The death of his grandfather finally severs all ties with his family's values. After the funeral he is asked by Lora if he is going to Aunt Zhenia's where there will be a gathering of his grandfather's friends and relatives. He reacts thus:

«До той минуты Дмитриев считал, что поедет к тете Жене непременно, но теперь заколебался: в самом вопросе Лоры заключалась возможность выбора. Значит, и Лора, и мать полагали, что он, если захочет, может не ехать, то есть что ему ехать не обязательно, ибо - он вдруг это понял - в их глазах он уже не существовал как частица семьи Дмитриевых, а существовал как нечто другое, объединенное с Леной и, может быть, даже с теми в черных пальто, с черными зонтами, и его надо было спрашивать, как постороннего.

... Чувство непоправимости, отрезанности, которое бывает на похоронах - одно безвозвратно ушло, отрезалось навсегда, а продолжается то, да не то, что-то уже новое, в других комбинациях, - было самой томящей болью, даже сильнее, чем печаль о дед. Дед был ведь стар, должен был угаснуть, но вместе с ним исчезало что-то, прямо с ним не связанное, существовавшее отдельно: какие-то нити между Дмитриевым, и матерью, и сестрой.» [II, 48-9].

He is now fully Luk'ianovised, and this is further displayed when he forgets his briefcase. On the way to the funeral he had managed to purchase some tins of Lena's favourite fish, and puts them in his briefcase. He hides the briefcase behind a pillar in the crematorium, and spends most of the funeral trying to remember not to leave it there. However, he does forget the briefcase and has to



walk in on the next funeral to retrieve it. Fish now seems more important than the death of his grandfather, material things mean more to him than his family and their values, which have died along with his grandfather. When he goes to ask his mother if she will move in with them, it is ironic that she is reading *Doctor Faustus*, about a man who sold his soul to the Devil. Dmitriev's moral fall is now complete.

Throughout *Obmen*, Dmitriev takes no responsibility for his own actions and seems completely passive, almost inanimate, such is his weakness of will. The only time he does do anything of his own accord is when an alsatian jumps onto his trolleybus. After some of his usual hesitation, he manages to make the dog jump out of the bus, fearing that otherwise it would become lost. This happens just after Kseniia Fedorovna has turned down his offer to move in with them, but it does not mark the start of Dmitriev taking decisions in life. Three days later his mother agrees to live with them and thus they eventually get her flat. However, at the end of *Obmen*, the death of his mother and all the moral compromises take their toll on Dmitriev:

«После смерти Ксении Федоровны у Дмитриева сделался гипертонический криз, и он пролежал три недели дома в строгом постельном режиме.

... Он как-то сразу сдал, посерел. Еще не старик, но уже пожилой, с обмякшими щечками дяденька». [II, 63-4].

He may have won the flat, but he has lost spiritually and physically. A lifetime of compromise has sapped his strength, he is morally grey and flabby. After a gradual moral degeneration the exchange is now complete.

Dmitriev is fairly typical of Russians at that time and, in *Obmen*, Trifonov paints a picture of society where everything is becoming Luk'ianovised, the landscape, Moscow itself:

«Все «олукьянилось». Каждый год менялось что-то в подробностях, но, когда прошло четырнадцать лет, оказалось, что все олукиянилось - окончательно и безнадежно. Но, может быть, это не так уж плохо? И если это происходит со всем - даже с берегом, с рекой и с травой, - значит, может быть, это естественно и так и должно быть?» [II, 35]

Dmitriev may try to deceive himself thus, but Trifonov himself is not convinced that that is the way things should be. He portrays real life at that time. The rapid urbanisation of Moscow, recurrent in so many of his previous works, is again prevalent, and it is on that note that the novel ends:

«Дмитриевскую дачу в Павлинове, так же, как все окружающие дачи, недавно снесли и построили там стадион «Буревестник» и гостиницу

для спортсменов, а Лора со своим Феликсом переехала в Зюзино, в девятиэтажный дом.» [II, 64].

Everything is becoming grey, Dmitriev, the concrete city and Trifonov's portrayal of his characters is no longer in black and white terms.

*Obmen* depicts a society in flux, old is juxtapositioned against new, the old revolutionaries and their values against that of the new materialist middle-classes. The old revolutionary values, embodied in Dmitriev's grandfather are dying out and being replaced by egoism, consumerism and the desire for a comfortable life at any price. This is hardly what Dmitriev's grandfather or Trifonov's father for that matter, struggled so hard to achieve, but this does not stop Trifonov trying to truthfully portray the life of his contemporaries. Trifonov would probably be more on the side of the Dmitrievs, but he still shows all the characters with all their faults. He does not glorify Kseniia Fedorovna, but shows the negative traits of her character too. He does not make judgements or give easy answers. These are not the socialist realist stereotypes of the past, showing, with the help of the Party the right path to follow. Dmitriev feels he has taken the wrong path in life, but does nothing about it. *Obmen* shows real life with all its problems. Housing was a great problem in the Soviet Union. The revolutionaries of the 1920's and 1930's may have been happy to live in cramped conditions while building socialism, but people in modern-day Moscow want a more comfortable way of life. *Obmen* shows one way of how this is achieved but at a price. Beneath the story of exchanging flats lies deeper moral issues, and Trifonov hoped that in showing life he would make the reader think twice about doing the same thing himself. In *Prodolzhitel'nye uroki* <sup>20</sup>, he recounts how an acquaintance was planning to move in with her mother to look after her, but her son, having read *Obmen*, could not bring himself to do so. He is happy if his works make the reader reflect on his actions, listen to his conscience and hopefully take the right moral path.

*Obmen* shows a growing maturity in Trifonov's works. The realism of characterisation is coupled with a more complex narrative style. Throughout the novel, Dmitriev, in a series of flashbacks and reflections, reveals his true character over a very compact time span. However, at the end it is shown that the narrative voice was not a third-person omniscient author retelling Dmitriev's life, but actually in the first person, an acquaintance of Dmitriev's, who has just been telling him all that has been happening to him. Thus Dmitriev is seen from the level of a contemporary, rather than by a distant author, which makes the

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<sup>20</sup> *Prodolzhitel'nye uroki. Ocherki*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel, 1976.

novel even more realistic. These flashbacks and hidden narrators were to become a growing feature of Trifonov's works, and *Starik* marks the culmination of the technique.

Many of Trifonov's common themes are predominant in *Obmen*: urbanisation, especially in comparison with life at the dacha, the idyll of youth; old compared with the new, and how the old values and landscapes are dying. Connected with this is his portrayal of time, and the symbolism of the river, which flows on, grey like Dmitriev, now with concrete shores rather than the beaches of old. Another one of Trifonov's important concepts when examining time is that of the threads which link each person with their past. Trifonov starts to touch on this in *Obmen* with the death of Dmitriev's grandfather:

«Дед был ведь стар, должен был угаснуть, но вместе с ним исчезало что-то, прямо с ним не связанное, существовавшее отдельно: какие-то нити между Дмитриевым, и матерью, и сестрой». [II, 49].

This was to be further explored in later works such as *Drugaia zhizn'*, which I shall examine later in this chapter. Morals in everyday life were the subject of most of his works from this time on. Trifonov was now middle-aged, and his works at this time have that middle-aged feel about them, about looking back and reflecting on one's life. He shows the world around him; his descriptions of Moscow are as alive as they were in his first novel *Studenty*, but the treatment of society is dramatically different as a result of time and developments in the history of his country. Then he was a young man, writing the kind of novel which had to be written under Stalin. Now he is older and wiser, in the stagnation of Brezhnev's Russia, where the shadow of Stalin still hangs over society. This is shown in *Obmen* - Dmitriev's father had died of a stroke, probably brought on by life under Stalin and his grandfather had been in the Soviet camps.

*Obmen* was very much seen by the critics as showing the battle between the intelligentsia and *meshchanstvo*, philistinism (or rather the Dmitrievs and the Luk'ianovs), especially in light of the arguments between Lena and Dmitriev's cousin Marina. Marina is intolerant of philistines such as Lena because she does not appreciate modern art or poetry, whereas Lena regards Marina as an intellectual snob.<sup>21</sup> The critics perceived *Obmen* as showing the triumph of the intelligentsia over *meshchantsvo*, but this was not what Trifonov himself had in mind:

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<sup>21</sup> See 'Obmen' in Volume Two of *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986, pp. 53-55.

«Ни о каких мещанах я писать не собирался. Меня интересуют характеры».<sup>22</sup>

Some of the more orthodox critics complained that Trifonov had not shown the Party showing Dmitriev the way out of his move towards philistinism and that he had not been hard enough on *meshchanstvo*. However, this was not Trifonov's aim in *Obmen*. The Luk'ianovs may be alien to him but he is not intolerant of them or the Dmitrievs (whose faults are shown too) because that is exactly what he believes people should not practice in life - intolerance. He shows real life, real people, all with their weaknesses, and tries to understand them and society around him. This may not have been attractive, but it existed, and Trifonov felt it was his duty as a writer to portray life truthfully, however bitter this truth may be. He no longer sees people in black and white, negative and positive terms. With time he has come to appreciate his own weaknesses and shortcomings as a human being, as well as those around him, and aims to show this and the complexities of modern life and people. Dmitriev is typical of Soviet man at that point in history, the compromises made by him have been made by society as a whole. He is the hero of his time. Lermontov's Pechorin may have been more a master of his own destiny than Dmitriev and somewhat more dashing, but both have their faults and are not wonderful people. In portraying his characters, Trifonov makes no overt judgements but leaves it up to the reader to make his own mind up.

The novel was a success, one of his most popular works, and was adapted into a play staged at the Taganka Theatre under the direction of Iurii Liubimov in 1977, which was a sell-out. Liubimov's aim was to make the play as compact as possible, to say the most in the least time. Lena's desire to move and their current situation were created with lots of furniture on stage to show their cramped conditions. Dmitriev spent most of his time at the front of the stage, with the memories and flashbacks taking place behind him. The 'fixer' who helps arrange the exchange becomes an actual character in the play, a pervasive presence in the background. The programme was even in the form of a housing form. Liubimov and his theatre had a lot of trouble with the censors in their history together, and he was forced to make his own exchanges too, both with his productions and eventually in the country where he lived. With his adaptation of *Obmen* no ready answers were given either, and it had the same effect on people as the novel. One critic, Klaus Mehnert, related the following after seeing a performance, "As I was waiting in line with hundreds of others to

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in V. Samoriga's interview with Trifonov, 'Tsel' tvorchestva - samootdacha. Beseda s Iuriem Trifonovym', *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, 28 June 1974, p.8.

get my coat from the theatre's overcrowded checkroom, I overheard a woman in front of me, probably in her thirties, say to her companion: "Let's stick together for a while. If I go home now, I shall go to bed and weep. What we just saw on the stage is not a play. It's our life."<sup>23</sup>

### **PRELIMINARY STOCKTAKINGS**

Trifonov's portrayal of contemporary Moscow life continued in his next work, *Predvaritel'nye itogi*.<sup>24</sup> In this novella, another middle-aged frustrated intellectual, Gennadii Sergeevich, looks back on his life and his twenty-year marriage to his second wife, Rita. Gennadii Sergeevich is a translator and is currently working in Turkmenia, on the works of a popular local poet, Mansur. A family crisis has led him to escape to Turkmenia and in a series of flashbacks he takes stock of his life, and like Dmitriev, finds it and himself lacking. His thoughts on his marriage are thus:

«Не надо было жить вместе двадцать лет. Also, sprach Zarathustra: это слишком долго. Двадцать лет, шутка ли! За двадцать лет редуют леса, оскудевает почва. Самый лучший дом требует ремонт. Турбины выходят из строя. А каких гигантических успехов достигает наука за двадцать лет, страшно подумать! Происходят перевороты во всех областях научных знаний. Перестраиваются города. Октябрьская площадь, рядом с которой мы жили когда-то, совершенно изменила облик. Не говоря уж о том, что возникли новые африканские государства. Двадцать лет! Срок, не оставляющий надежд.» [II, 81]

Like that of Dmitriev, over the years Gennadii's life has become one of compromise, «Всю жизнь делал не то, что хотелось, а то, что делалось, что позволяло жить» [II, 73]. During his marriage, he has not been happy with some of his family's actions but has done nothing to prevent them. Instead he has become accustomed to them to the point where he no longer really cares. He keeps quiet for a peaceful life. Rita is very similar to Dmitriev's Lena, another bulldog type of woman. She too is determined, insensitive, obsessed with material possessions, not so much for her family's sake as with Lena, but for her own. She follows the latest fads and her most recent one is collecting old

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Richard L. Chapple, 'Yury Trifonov and the Maturation of Soviet Literature', *Midwest Quarterly - Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 29, 1, (1987), pp. 40-54. For further discussion of the staging of *Obmen* see M. McLain, 'Trifonov's *The Exchange* at Lyubimov's Taganka', *Slavic & East European Arts*, 3,1 (1985), pp. 159-69.

<sup>24</sup> 'Predvaritel'nye itogi', *Novyi mir*, 1970, no. 12, pp. 101-40.

religious books and icons. Gennadii, in response, calls her a hypocrite saying that her behaviour is not at all like the major teaching of all religions in that she does not love her neighbours. Gennadii disapproves of her friends, or rather her contacts, such as Larisa with her network of connections, "the Larisa bureau" as he calls her, who can procure almost anything, concert tickets, holidays to exclusive seaside resorts, et cetera. Gennadii is against this system of connections but inevitably becomes tied up in its all-pervading influence in modern society. It certainly does not stop him letting Rafik, from whom he receives translations, help his son pass examinations, as he is friendly with one of the examiners.

Rita's latest companion is Gartvig, an academic, who accompanies her on her various religious outings to Suzdal, Zagorsk and the like. This does not seem to bother Gennadii Sergeevich, even though he suspects that they might be having an affair. He simply describes him thus:

«главная гартвиговская черта - его циническое стремление приобретать, поглощать, ничего не давая. Делиться своими мыслями и знаниями с людьми, которых он считал ниже себя и бесполезными для себя, он не желал, не умел, не хотел только обогащаться». [II, 93].

He is however highly jealous and contemptuous of the pseudo-intellectual Gartvig and is greatly satisfied when Gartvig says that Pechorin and Grushnitsky are characters from one of Turgenev's works, when, as any Russian would know, they are actually from Lermontov's "A Hero of Our Time".

As a contrast to the morally vacuous Gartvig is Niura, the family's housekeeper. Niura is about the same age as Rita, but has a completely different way of life. Her parents died in the 1930s when she was a child, and she was then thrown out of her home by one of her aunts at the age of eleven. She has suffered from ill-health since the war, but despite all her misfortunes never complains about her lot. This semi-illiterate, religious peasant woman follows in the Russian literary traditions of the holy fool and Mother Earth type figure, in contrast to the grasping Rita. The family went through many cleaners before Niura, who has been the only one to stay and has worked for them for ten years. Her warmth and selflessness has kept the family together, bringing to their home what has been so sadly missing. When she takes ill and goes to hospital, diagnosed as having schizophrenia, Gennadii comments on her absence:

»И вот ушло это существо, которое так странно цементировало дом. Ведь все мы расползались в разные стороны, каждый в свою комнату, к своим делам и тайнам, своему молчанию, и только она была подлинным домом, хранительницей плиты, очага». [II, 103]

The hospital ask Gennadii and Rita if they will look after Niura, as she has looked after them, but they refuse. Gennadii feels that as a matter of conscience they should look after her, but Rita, despite reading so many religious works, does not want to and he makes no great effort to persuade her otherwise, silencing his own conscience as Dmitriev so often does. Both blame the other for their own selfishness and wash their hands of the matter. To make matters worse, while in hospital Niura asks them to bring her aunt's icon to help her recovery. Rita is most unwilling to give her the icon. She would prefer it to decorate her own home, but finally asks their son Kirill to take it to the hospital. He in turn sells it on the black market and is caught by the police. This is the family crisis that has led Gennadii Sergeevich to escape to Turkmenia. He blames himself for not having brought Kirill up properly but again makes no attempt to try to put things right. Instead he leaves things up to Rita, who is only concerned about ensuring that their son is not thrown out of college, and takes no thought for Niura's feelings or for attempting to get the icon back. Gennadii Sergeevich even tries to make himself feel better by thinking that Kirill could be worse, he might have been physically aggressive to his father like some of his colleagues' sons. Kirill is the product of his parents and the times, a materialist, an egoist, who uses people for his own ends. He is usually after money from his parents, or from other relatives and even Niura. After that he turns to black market activities, a common practice in the 1960's.

Gennadii and Rita's relationship is fairly loveless, and each member of the family is tied up with their own concerns, not each others. As Rita says, «Когда три эгоиста живут вместе, ничего хорошего быть не может.» [II, 115]. All they have in common is their egotistical behaviour and lack of basic moral values. Their lack of love or understanding for one another leads to constant arguments. However, divorce, which Gennadii Sergeevich knows is there like an emergency exit, is not used, probably because they could not be bothered with the hassle of separating and having to find new accomodation, not an easy task in Moscow as *Obmen* had shown. Instead they barely tolerate each other and lead separate lives, although Gennadii Sergeevich constantly teases Rita and her friends. He talks much of needing to be close to someone, of loving one's neighbour, even criticising Rita for not doing this. Yet he himself makes little attempt to be loving and readily admits that he no longer loves his wife. While in Turkmenia he thinks of phoning home and saying what he really feels, but cannot bring himself to do so, and instead waits for Rita to ring him.

Like Dmitriev, Gennadii Sergeevich has an unhappy personal life. He suffers a recurring dream, which is a reflection of how he feels life is suffocating him:



«Будто поднимаюсь по каким-то бесконечным ступеням, каждый шаг был тяжелей, все невозможней, не хватает дыхания - и когда уж, кажется, конец, асфиксия, - вдруг просыпаюсь.» [II, 82].

Despite all this, he, like Dmitriev, makes no attempt to change his life, even though he seems less malleable in the face of his wife than the protagonist of *Obmen*. He is much more self-critical than Dmitriev, but in a sense is thus much more of an egoist - his self-criticism does not force him to change things, rather it is a sign of his egoism, he spends so long on self-examination and self-absorption. As a result of moral compromise, he also suffers from ill-health and high blood pressure, continuing where *Obmen* left off. Along the way he has compromised his professional life too; rather than become a writer he sticks to translating third-rate poets instead and in the words of his son, «производишь какую-то муру, а твоя совесть молчит». [II, 73]. However Gennadii Sergeevich is a few steps further on than Dmitriev in that his exchange happened years ago, he is not wrestling with his conscience as Dmitriev does in *Obmen*, he has already betrayed former values. He knows he has not done what he wanted in life, rather what he 'had to do' (like Dmitriev) but now believes that it is no good fretting about how his life could have been. He has resigned himself to fate, thus taking no responsibility for his actions or his family, and is now almost indifferent to them.

While in Turkmenia he reflects on his life and compares that of his family to that of his host's Atabaly. Atabaly has a large family, and thus to Gennadii Sergeevich he can not possibly be an egoist with eleven children:

«Однако может ли человек, у которого одиннадцать детей, быть эгоистом? Немыслимо же! При всем желании, при любых врожденных качествах это было бы невыполнимо.» [II, 119-120]

The contrast of Atabaly and his family to that of Gennadii Sergeevich's, shows how he is lacking as a father. As well as their own eleven, Atabaly and his wife adopted a Ukrainian orphan, Valia. Gennadii Sergeevich, on the other hand, has a stormy relationship with his only child from his second marriage and rarely sees the son from his first. Atabaly and his wife's calm and natural life is a breath of fresh air compared to the suffocation of materialistic Moscow. Gennadii Sergeevich finds comfort in the arms of Valia and his memories drift to happier times with Rita, swimming in the river when she was pregnant. The river again symbolises the flow of time in this elegiac passage near the closing of the novella. As in *Utolenie zhazhdy*, Turkmenia is represented as an oasis, a place to escape to, somewhere to find oneself. However, unlike for Koryshev in the 1950's, it does not lead Gennadii Sergeevich to do anything positive with his life. He returns to Moscow, goes on holiday with Rita to the Baltic Sea where



his breathing begins to improve. However, although his health has changed for the better, it is doubtful whether he will also experience spiritual rejuvenation given the picture of moral paralysis Trifonov has painted during the novella. Trifonov had previously planned to have his hero die at the end of *Predvaritel'nye itogi*, but instead left him to live with the burden of his existence; there would be no escape from his life through death in this work.

As with *Obmen*, the characters unfold through the prism of memory and thought patterns, with the interweaving of past and present. However in *Predvaritel'nye itogi*, the narrative is in the first-person, rather than told by an omniscient narrator, allowing Gennadii Sergeevich to reveal his character, with both humour and biting sarcasm in self-critical monologues reminiscent of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*.<sup>25</sup> However, Trifonov's stance towards his characters should not be confused with that of the narrator. Gennadii Sergeevich is blind to his own weaknesses, despite his self-condemnation. The subtleties of the narrative allow the reader to see the failings of the characters, but Trifonov is not condemning them, rather portraying the society which surrounded him. This however led the critics to wrongly accuse him of indifference. *Predvaritel'nye itogi* is bleaker than *Obmen*, showing someone who has compromised his conscience for a long time, typical of the morality of contemporary Soviet society. The novella is also deeper than *Obmen*, with the literary and biblical references scattered around the text. The many references to icons and religious works show how Moscow in comparison has become a spiritual wasteland. There are few good people such as Niura left, and Rita's interest in religion is not for its moral teaching. As well as the influence of Dostoyevsky, Gennadii Sergeevich himself makes frequent reference to Nietzsche and the insect imagery is reminiscent of Kafka. Without love and understanding, Gennadii Sergeevich is not in control of his life like some Nietzschean superman, but rather dehumanised to the level of an insect. *Predvaritel'nye itogi* is a further portrayal of a morally flabby Muscovite, trapped in a way of life he has not the strength to escape from; and, on a more general, universal level, of the fate of an individual in modern society.

### **THE LONG GOODBYE**

The third novella in Trifonov's *Moscow Tales*, *Dolgoe proshchanie*, is set

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<sup>25</sup> Dostoevsky was beginning to become a stronger influence in Trifonov's work. The imprint of *Besy*, for instance, in *Neterpenie* which was written at around the same time, and there are more specific parallels with *Crime and Punishment* in the later work *Dom na naberezhnoi*.

mainly in the early 1950's, the background to the time of *Obmen* and *Predvaritel'nye itogi*, the roots of the characters' values and lives.<sup>26</sup> The story revolves round Lialia, one of the story's narrators (and Trifonov's first female one) as she looks back on her life twenty years ago when she was an actress living with her family and common-law husband Grisha Rebrov at her family's home in Moscow. The narrative switches between her and an omniscient narrator to show the other characters, Lialia's family, Grisha, and the playwright Smolianov with again the backdrop of *byt*.

Lialia is unlike Trifonov's other female characters, neither bulldog nor old revolutionary nor holy peasant woman. Her main feature seems to be pity for others:

«От этой мысли была смутная радость и чувство превосходства: таинственное что-то, нужно для счастья, казалось Ляле, у нее есть. Она не могла бы твердо объяснить, что это была, но уверенно знала: у нее есть. Потому что, когда другие были несчастны, ей хотелось жалеть и облегчать, делиться чем-то...» [II, 143].

This has given her a penchant for weak men throughout her life, crippled poets, orphans, anyone whom she feels sorry for. This leads her at the start of the novel to an affair with Smolianov, whose second-rate but politically correct plays are staged by her theatre company. The tormenting he suffers from the rest of the actors and the fact that he has a mentally disabled daughter and an unstable wife rouse Lialia's pity for him while they are on tour in Saratov, Smolianov's home town. The affair continues when they return to Moscow, and as a result Lialia's career begins to flourish and brings her fame and fortune as she receives the main roles in Smolianov's plays. Trifonov draws upon his own experience to show Russian theatre in the 1950's, a time of great repression when only sycophantic, officially approved plays such as Smolianov's dull work on forest conservation could be staged rather than works of playwrights with any talent. The politics within the theatre are also shown, the scheming between the directors to achieve each others' positions and stay in favour with the current political climate.

Lialia herself is rather a complex character, made up of good and bad points like any typical person. She has a love-hate relationship with her interfering mother, who is constantly trying to find her another boyfriend and forcing her to have numerous abortions, but she cannot leave her and her home. She has numerous affairs during her relationship with Grisha, whom she has no

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<sup>26</sup> 'Dolgoe proshchanie. Povest' ', *Novyi mir*, 1971, no.8, pp. 53-107.

wish to hurt, but they stem from pity, and also the attentions of others seem to boost her own ego. However, she does not merely sleep with Smolianov to further her career, although she later admits to Grisha that perhaps deep down that was one of the reasons. In the past she has had such opportunities; when she was eighteen the man who was organising a theatre studio she desperately wanted to get into, made advances but she hit him and ran away. Smurnyi, one of the theatre's directors has also made overtures to her, and rejecting him had blighted her career for some time, as she was allotted only bit parts. She did however get into this theatre without any formal training and there is the hint that there has been some relationship between her and the other director, Sergei Leonidovich, to achieve this end. The practice of sleeping one's way to the top seems to be fairly rife, but with Lialia it is not a conscious desire, but stems rather from pity towards the individual concerned. She finally breaks with Smolianov when he tries to advance his own career by offering Lialia to one of his friends, Agabekov. He is Smolianov's main 'connection', and his glassy lifeless stare is typical of Trifonov's characterisation of the KGB.<sup>27</sup> However Lialia is not so careerist as to take him up on his offer of a better job and various privileges, realising she loves Grisha. They split up, however, when Grisha's suspicions of her affair with Smolianov are confirmed. Lialia eventually leaves the theatre and settles down as the wife of a military man.

Grisha himself is a frustrated, out-of-work intellectual whose plays have been rejected as, unlike Smolianov, he has not the right connections. As Lialia's father says:

«Да ведь жизнь несладкая: какой год бьется, а толку нет. Никто его пьес не берет, киносценариев тоже. А пишет неплохо, замечательно, талант большой. Не хуже, чем у других-то....Видимо, связей не хватает. Там ведь без этого никуда. Сто лет будешь биться - все впустую, даже не думай...» [II, 165]

Thus deflated, Grisha spends his days at the Lenin Library, delving into Russia's past. This reflects Trifonov's own experience. After the failure of his own plays in the early 1950's, he began to concentrate on his country's history in a search for historical truth, producing works such as *Otblesk kostra* and later *Neterpenie* and *Starik*. At the time of writing *Dolgoe proshchanie*, Trifonov was working on *Neterpenie*, and Grisha Rebrov himself mentions some of the members of the People's Will and writing a play on Kletochnikov. He shares the writer's beliefs

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<sup>27</sup> Trifonov is also drawing on experience of the times here as his first wife Nina, whom it was rumoured had an affair with Beria, probably the safest option at the time. Some believe that Lialia is based on Nina, although their characters are somewhat different (see Chapter 2).

in the importance of history and conscience to his own life: «Моя почва - это опыт истории, все то, чем Россия перестрадала!» [II, 172]

Grisha's family, like that of Trifonov, has been closely involved with Russia's history: one grandmother was a Polish political exile, one grandfather was banished to Siberia for his part in student uprisings, and his father took part in the First World War and the Civil War. His father was an economist but unable to get work and he died in 1942 from pneumonia. Rebrov too, like Trifonov, has lost his father as a result of Stalin's repressions. All his family perished during the Second World War and he now has no-one, which is probably the reason for Lialia's attraction to him. He follows on in the tradition of Trifonov's *неудачники*. He, like Dmitriev and Gennadii Sergeevich before him, does not know how to live, does not have the right connections to get on in life. His partner, like Lena and Rita, does have connections, but Rebrov is too proud to use them. He finds Lialia's fame and wealth awkward and their relationship is a complex one. Lialia had suggested that they marry several years ago but he has never brought the subject up for fear of rejection due to his own insecurities or perhaps for fear of being trapped. In another water metaphor, he describes that he feels he loves Lialia too much, «... чересчур тесно, лодка перевернется, есть страх - в открытое море.» [II, 186].

He lives with Lialia's family but still has his own flat. However the couple do not live there together because Lialia will not leave her mother, and he does not try to persuade her otherwise. Instead he goes back there now and again when they have an argument. He is constantly suspicious of Lialia and knows she has affairs out of kindness for people. It is the affair with Smolianov that finally breaks their relationship. As Gartvig was to Gennadii Sergeevich, so Smolianov is to Rebrov. He, like Gennadii Sergeevich, also sees himself as getting one up on the uncultured Smolianov, when he whispers to Piotr Alexandrovich that he believes the playwright has not even read Dostoyevsky.

Rebrov's lack of steady work brings him problems as he needs an employment certificate for the right to stay on in Moscow and in his flat. Again, as in *Golubinaia gibel'*, the repressive atmosphere of the time can be felt through the depiction of his neighbour Kanunov, who pesters him for the certificate in the hope of acquiring sole possession of the flat. Kanunov has the police round at the flat one day when Rebrov walks past, a warning echo of the totalitarian state in Stalin's Russia, when people were forced to spy on each other. Rebrov takes the point and begins to look for work, or at least the certificate, and one of his friends offers to find him a teaching job. However, another acquaintance, the fixer Shakhov, comes out with a more seductive offer. He can, he tells Rebrov, get his work published, so long as he agrees to have some one else's

name on the cover as co-author. The proposed co-author turns out to be Smolianov as Rebrov himself suspects, but he masochistically goes to see him and confirms this and also his suspicions about the affair with Lialia. Despite being offered a job as literary consultant at Lialia's theatre, Rebrov finally decides to break with his current life and leaves Moscow to begin a new one elsewhere.

«Одна жизнь кончилась, другая начинается. Собственно, человек - любой, даже вот этот геологоразведочный Модест Петрович, - живет не одну, а несколько жизней. Умирает и возрождается, присутствует на собственных похоронах и наблюдает собственное рождение: опять та же медлительность, те же надежды. И можно после смерти оглядывать всю прожитую жизнь. Этим и занимался Ребров, пока поезд тащил его на восток...» [II, 214] <sup>28</sup>

Although Rebrov has freed himself from a life he was unhappy in, twenty years later he too has compromised his intellectual values. He is now materially better off, a rich, successful scriptwriter, with two failed marriages behind him, but as Lialia wonders:

«... и ему кажется, что те времена, когда он бедствовал, тосковал, завидовал, ненавидел, страдал и почти нищенствовал, были лучшие годы его жизни, потому что для счастья нужно столько же...» [II, 215].

Rebrov is another such type as Dmitriev and Gennadii Sergeevich. He has past his best times, his hopes and dreams have been missed in a life of compromise. The legacy of Stalin has caused stagnation, both moral and economic in Brezhnev's time.

The lilac bushes which open *Dolgoe proshchanie* and the towerblocks which eventually replace them at the end symbolise the change in Rebrov and society as a whole, and the recurrent theme of the urbanisation of Moscow. The lilacs in question belong to Lialia's father, Piotr Aleksandrovich, who for three years has been fighting a losing battle to save his garden and his prize flowers being swallowed up by urbanisation. The garden in a way represents all he has been through in his life, before, during and after the Second World War. He sends letters and petitions to the authorities to prevent the construction of the tower blocks, much to the annoyance of his neighbours and the local policeman who cause trouble for him, as Rebrov had trouble with his neighbours. This eventually destroys him, bringing ill-health and several heart attacks, and he

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<sup>28</sup> The theme of the new beginning is an important one to Trifonov, and was developed further in his next work, symbolically entitled *Drugaiia zhizn'*.

ends his life in a hospital. The flowers, hopes and ideals of the past have been replaced by concrete and grey, dull lives full of compromise:

«А Москва катит все дальше, через линию окружной, через овраги, поля, громоздит башни за башнями, каменные горы в миллионы горящих окон, вскрывает древние глины, вбивает туда исполинские цементные трубы, засыпает котлованы, сносит, возносит, заливает асфальтом, уничтожает без следа, и по утрам на перронах метро и на остановках автобусов народу - гибель, с каждым годом все гуще. Ляля удивляется. «И откуда столько людей? То ли приезжие понаехали, то ли дети повзростали?»» [II, 214].

The style of *Dolgoe proshchanie* is slightly different to the two preceding novellas, but many of the themes are the same. With *Obmen* and *Predvaritel'nie itogi*, the action switched back and forth from past and present through a series of flashbacks. In *Dolgoe proshchanie* past and present are completely separate, and the old hopes and values of Dmitriev and Gennadii Sergeevich are clearly shown in Lialia and Rebrov's early lives. The narrative voice switches between Lialia and the objective third person narrator who also gives Rebrov's and Smolianov's viewpoints. Smolianov is seen through both Lialia's and Rebrov's eyes. All of the characters are human beings, rather than heroes. Rebrov and Lialia have both good and bad points. Lialia's mother may interfere in other people's lives but she is devoted to looking after her ill husband. Smolianov is another Gartvig, as Lialia's aunt is another Niura, who has lost all her family during the war and puts up with the dreadful way her sister treats her. Trifonov, as elsewhere, does not directly condemn his characters, letting the reader make his own mind up. Many of the Soviet critics misunderstood Trifonov's non-judgemental moral concern and accused him of amoralism.

Trifonov has much in common with Rebrov, the dead father, the interest in history, and *Dolgoe proshchanie* echoes many of the author's thoughts on time and history. Rebrov is looking for his own beginnings as did Trifonov, he understands the importance of looking at time, at history as a whole, its importance in modern life. The conversation with Sergei Leonidovich sums up Trifonov's thoughts on history and time:

«Понимаете ли, какая шутка: для вас восьмидесятый год - это Клеточников, Третье отделение, бомбы, охота на царя, а для меня - Островский, «Невольницы» в Малом, Ермолова в роли Евлалии, Садовский, Музиль... Да, да, да! Господи, как все это жестоко переплелось! Понимаете ли, история страны - это многожильный провод, и когда мы вырываем одну жилу... Нет, так не годится!

Правда во времени - это слитность, все вместе: Клеточников, Музиль... Ах, если бы изобразить на сцене это течение времени, несущее всех, все!» [II, 195-196].

*Dolgoe proshchanie* continues some of the themes already seen in Trifonov's earlier works, such as *byt*, the dacha as an idyll of childhood, urbanisation of Moscow, the water imagery. It shows the times when the compromises of the characters in the previous two novellas began to be shaped. It also develops concepts which were becoming increasingly important to Trifonov at this stage in his work. Rebrov is the first of his historian-heroes, who looks at time and history within *slitnost'*. He sees himself as having many different lives and that is the title of Trifonov's next work, *Drugaia zhizn'*.

## ANOTHER LIFE

*Drugaia zhizn'*<sup>29</sup>, like *Dolgoe proshchanie*, is told through a female narrator, Olga, a middle-aged biologist who has recently suffered the loss of her husband. Throughout the course of the novel she looks back on her relationship with Sergei, their families, friends and colleagues, interdispersed with her present-day life, and tries to come to terms with his death.

The loss of Sergei has been devastating for Olga, who for many years has lived only for her husband, has needed only him; her work, her friends and even the rest of her family have taken second place. Their marriage was not altogether a happy one, as the two were completely different. As Trifonov says, «Всякий брак - не соединение двух людей, как думают, а соединение или сшибка двух кланов, двух миров. Всякий брак - двоемирие. Встретились две системы в космосе и сшибаются намертво, на всегда. Кто кого? Кто для чего? Кто чем?» [II, 246].

Their marriage has not been so much a clash of clans as in *Obmen*, but rather «сталкивались два эгоизма».<sup>30</sup> Olga, a domineering, possessive insecure woman, has spent most of her married life trying to get Sergei to do what she wants, which has led to many difficulties in their marriage:

«... возникла в ее сознании модель, что в течение долгих лет представлялась единственной благодатью, к которой следовало стремиться всеми силами, а он, хитрец, делал вид, что подчиняется,

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<sup>29</sup> 'Drugaia zhizn'. Povest' ', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167.

<sup>30</sup> 'Drugaia zhizn' ', p. 274.

но на деле был далек и безучастен: вести его за руку и получать с болью, с сокрушением сердца.» [II, 233-4]

From the start she was jealous of his previous girlfriends, then she imagined that Sergei was having an affair every time he wanted to go away or do something without her, and used various means to keep him at home, pleading, shouting, feigning illness, even threatening divorce. When Sergei tried to escape from his problems by going to the dacha for a few days, she interpreted it as meaning that she was no support to him. Her love has been extremely egotistical, and her chief torment has been her failure to understand him. The marriage has been harmful to both of them.

Sergei himself was a historian, his family were involved closely with the revolution and, unlike Olga, he was absorbed in his work. He died of a heart attack prematurely at the age of 42, and during the novel the causes for this are shown, through his wife's eyes, as she tries to come to terms with her own guilt while also blaming others around her. Firstly, he and Olga are completely different and he tried very hard to keep his independence. At first Sergei worked at a museum, but then for many years at an institute where he embarked on a dissertation about the 1917 revolution and informers in the Tsarist secret police, a subject his father was once involved in, which led to Sergei's own interest in the subject. Like Trifonov, Sergei was brought to history by memories of his father. This has caused him a lot of difficulties, as he can not bring himself to take part in the politics of the institute which would advance his job and secure the publication of his dissertation. It is against his morals, he is incapable of intrigue which angers and disgusts him. He, unlike many others, will not compromise his conscience. This makes him many enemies at the institute, including his old school friend Klimuk, and eventually forces him to resign.

Klimuk is all that Sergei is not, a careerist, one of those who "knows how to live". Along with another old friend Fedia, all three had once worked together at the same institute. However after the death of Fedia in a car accident, Klimuk takes over his job as academic secretary and the relationship between the two begins to change, as Klimuk starts to distance himself from Sergei and Olga, and work his way to the top, to 'play the game and wangle goodies', as Olga puts it. He is typical of the mediocrities, the moral vacuums, who superceded men of real talent and principles in the so-called "period of staganation". He ingratiates himself with the deputy director, Kislovsky, and sometimes tries to involve Sergei in his plans. At one point he brings Kislovsky and his mistress to the dacha Sergei and Olga rent from a relation, Aunt Pasha, having promised them they will be able to stay the night there. Sergei, even



though he knows it will affect his career, will not go along with this, nor will he later give Kislovsky his list of Tsarist informers, as Klimuk asks. Yet when Klimuk later conspires to oust Kislovsky from his position at the institute and take the job himself, Sergei will have no part in it. This uncompromising attitude eventually leads to his own downfall. Klimuk forces him to resign from the institute. Unlike the other Muscovites before him, Sergei cannot compromise his morals even though this leads to a premature death.

Another reason for Sergei's difficulties were his unorthodox views of history, very similar to Trifonov's own, which he calls 'grave robbery':

«Он искал нити, соединявшие прошлое с еще более даленким прошлым и с будущим.

... человек есть нить, протянувшаяся сквозь время, тончайший нерв истории, который можно отщепить и выделить и - по нему определить многое. Человек, говорил он, никогда не примирится со смертью, потому что в нем заложено ощущение бесконечности нити, часть которой он сам. Не бог награждает человека бессмертием и не религия внушает ему идею, а вот это закондирование, передающееся с генами ощущение причастности к бесконечному ряду...

У него это началось - то, что он называл «разрыванием могил», а на самом деле было прикосновением к нити, - с его собственной жизни, с той нити, частицей которой был он сам. Он начал с отца.» [II, 300-301]

This is very similar to Trifonov's views on *slitnost'*, and *Drugaiia zhizn'* is the first of his works where he really examines the theme in great depth. He had touched on it in previous works, and the character of Sergei has been developed further from that of another restless, unsuccessful historian, Grisha Rebrov, although their fates are vastly different. Sergei believes that his failures in life are because his threads with the past are fraught.

Olga however, as a scientist, does not understand Sergei's views at all, and thinks at times that he has gone somewhat mad. To her everything is merely particles, it begins and ends with chemistry and no more. Her interpretation of history is very different:

«История представлялась Ольге Васильевне бесконечно громадной очередью, в которой стояли в затылок друг к другу эпохи, государства, великие люди, короли, полководцы, революционеры, и задачей историка было нечто похожее на задачу милиционера, который в дни премьер приходит в кассу кинотеатра «Прогресс» и наблюдает за порядком, - следит за тем, чтобы эпохи и государства не путались и не менялись местами, чтобы великие люди не забежали

вперед, не ссорились и не норовили получить билет в бессмертие без очереди...» [II, 297]

Olga cannot understand the difficulties Sergei encounters with his dissertation, in simply 'writing up what has already happened', thus overlooking the crucial point that at this time under Soviet power, history had to be changed to whatever the authorities desired to try and create a basis for their political legitimacy. Historical truth was very hard to attain, especially in the Brezhnev years, as Trifonov himself well knew. Thus Sergei would have problems writing honestly, and he does not believe in the historical expediency which is practiced at the institute by Klimuk and others. Others also do not understand his interest in history, such as Koshelov's grandson, a peasant whose family has probably suffered as a result of this expediency, who declares:

«Да мы в школе эту историю читали. Зна-аем! Чего вы мне мозги пудрите? История, история... Хватит, есть одна история, а больше не нужно.» [II, 325]

Koshelov is one of the names on Sergei's list of Tsarist informers whom he has managed to track down in the hope of confirming the authenticity of this list and obtaining some more information about the time. However, the old man is most reluctant to divulge anything from this time, a time that now seems to him like another life, whether from a desire to repress memories (common in Trifonov's characters who do not want to face up to less pleasant parts of their past) or from old age. He can remember however how he managed to avoid being picked up by the police and survive to this day, which he is proud of. The rest of his family are more interested in Olga's suede jacket than history, and Koshelkov dozes peacefully while Pantiussha argues with Sergei.

During the course of the novel, a picture of another mid-life crisis is painted. Sergei becomes more uneasy and restless, he feels as though he is losing his aim in life. His difficulties at the institute and his quest to find the threads of history and ultimately himself, lead him to an interest in parapsychology, which eventually is used against him to force him to resign from work. By 'talking' to dead historical figures, such as Herzen and Pobedonostsev, he hopes to find the answers which have long alluded him. Olga thinks it is simply escapist rubbish, and in typical fashion, believes his main interest in it is due to the fact he is having an affair with Daria Mamedovna, a well-known medium, who she suspects is casting a spell over her husband. This happens in the final months of Sergei's life and demonstrates how Olga and Sergei are drifting apart, how Sergei «отходит, отплывает, как корабль от

пристани, подняв все паруса и флаги.»<sup>31</sup> The stress of a nagging wife, problems at work eventually wear him down, but unlike his predecessors he cannot compromise, «он гнул, слабел, но какой-то стержень внутри его оставался нетронутым - наподобие тоненького стального прута, - пружинил, но не ломался. И это было бедой. Он не хотел меняться в своей сердцевине...».<sup>32</sup> Sergei, a man from a family full of dissenters and non-conformists, no longer has the strength to carry on and death overcomes him with a fatal heart attack.

Sergei bears an almost autobiographical resemblance to his creator. Both engaged in an examination of the same periods in history and their family's involvement in it. Trifonov himself even intended to write a book on Asef, one of the Tsarist secret police's most famous double-agents, and was working on this when he died. Sergei, like Trifonov, is trying to find his roots in the past, examining the history of his family and his country in a bid to understand himself. Trifonov gives Sergei many of his own thoughts and experiences. Sergei's father-in-law, Georgii Maksimovich, is based on the father of Trifonov's first wife, Amshei Markovich Niurenberg. He too was an artist who had spent time in Paris in his youth, and had known Chagall<sup>33</sup>, but during Soviet times had been forced to burn his best works and conform to the constraints demanded by Socialist Realist art. In the story, Georgii Maksimovich is arrested and 're-educated', forced to compromise his art and to lead 'another life' under the Soviet regime. He is frequently ill and eventually dies, a broken man. An old friend remarks at his funeral:

«...лучшее Георгий Максимович сжег собственными руками в тридцатых годах, такая дурость, минута слабости, и жизнь раскололась, как этот гипс, ни собрать, ни склеить, пошла какая-то труха, заседания, комиссии, заказы.» [II, 344].

Trifonov's picture of life at an artists' cooperative apartment is based on his own experience, living with his in-laws when first married to Nina and reflects how the majority of artists had to change their work to fit in with the times and the system. Vasin, for instance, earns his money by official portraits but spends all his free time painting the landscapes he loves, 'real painting' as opposed to 'pot boiling'.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Drugaiia zhizn', p. 352.

<sup>32</sup> 'Drugaiia zhizn', p. 260.

<sup>33</sup> Iona Aleksandrovich, a character in *Poseshchanie Marka Shagala* (in 'Oprokinutyi dom. Rasskazy', *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7) is also based on Amshei Niurenberg.

Trifonov also understands from his own disorientation after Nina's death Olga's grief in losing a spouse, but although his imagination is rooted in his own experience, his stories are by no means straightforward autobiography. Olga is not based on Nina, for instance, but on his second wife Alla to whom the novel is dedicated.

*Drugaia zhizn* mixes *byt* with historical analysis, but at times it seems that *byt* outweighs the past. As well as the incident with Koshelov, Olga remembers the time Sergei and she went to visit the grandson of a famous poet, in whom Sergei had hoped to find a living link with the past, as with Koshelov. However, the poet's grandson is more concerned with discussing the exchange of his flat than his grandfather, and has to leave early to referee a football match to boost the meagre salary, on which he supports a sick wife and two children. Sergei seems to be the only one who is not only interested in everyday concerns. Yet eventually *byt* overcomes him too; the pressure of daily life kills him.

Olga's memories of Sergei are interwoven with scenes of her daily reality, her difficult life with her family in Moscow. She lives with her teenage daughter Irinka and her mother-in-law, Aleksandra Prokofievna. The two women have never seen eye to eye, and Sergei's death has not brought them any closer as Olga feels Sergei's mother blames her for her son's death. Aleksandra Prokofievna is a somewhat overbearing and self-righteous old woman. She is from the old generation of revolutionaries, a lawyer by profession, who, having once worked as a typist in the Red Army Political Department, is referred to as having "made history". Trifonov's portrayal of her is much harsher than that of Kseniia Fedorovna, another old revolutionary. Aleksandra Prokofievna is depicted as comical and at times mockingly. She often dresses up in her Civil War garb and bosses others around like a commissar. She is a relic from the 1920's who has refused to change with the times. Her revolutionary background does not, as she seems to think, automatically make her superior to others, morally or otherwise. The scene where Georgii Maksimovich tries to explain Picasso's *Guernica* to her has echoes of *Obmen*, and her refusal to try to understand modern art is just another example of her inability to see how times have changed.

The title *Drugaia zhizn'* has several meanings. Firstly, there is Olga trying to cope with *another life* without her husband. At the end of the novel she has a new relationship and «другая жизнь была вокруг.»<sup>34</sup> Throughout their marriage, Sergei's life has been incomprehensible to Olga, as have the

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<sup>34</sup> *Drugaia zhizn'*, p. 359.

*other lives* around her, such as that of her daughter Irinka, with whom she experiences the usual problems between mothers and teenage daughters. All the characters fail to understand one another, and it is only Sergei who sees the importance of trying to understand not only others, but oneself. He, too, often talks of starting *another life*, especially when he is forced to resign from the institute - «надо начинать другую жизнь.»<sup>35</sup> Other characters also have begun *other lives*: Georgii Maksimovich as an artist during Soviet times as compared to his earlier life in Paris; Koshelkov, once a Tsarist informer, now lapsing peacefully into old age in the Moscow suburbs. This theme was an important one for Trifonov who believed that a person *led many different lives* within one lifetime.

In *Drugaiia zhizn'* Trifonov succeeds in showing his own generation and the complexity of their human relationships. His characters are again real people with all their faults and weaknesses, but as ever he does not condemn them but tries to understand and sympathise. He was disillusioned with the way society was stagnating, both politically and morally, but he hoped to help by making people look at themselves and try to understand one another as in the other Moscow Tales.

*Drugaiia zhizn'* continues many themes of the previous Moscow Tales: the expansion of Moscow, the dacha as a haven, an escape from the drudgery of daily life. It is significant, for instance, that in the last year of their life together, Sergei and Olga did not manage to spend summer at the dacha, showing their relationship to be incapable of recreation. The effect of time is also mentioned, like a river into which people disappear, a paradigm for memory. Sergei is the only character who faces up to his past, who is actually interested in it and stays true to his conscience and principles. Yet this does him no good. Those who choose to suppress memories and conscience usually suffer ill-health in Trifonov's stories, but Sergei's only reward for doing the opposite is premature death. The critics, as usual, found the novella too depressing, too concentrated on the "small world".

*Drugaiia zhizn'* does, however, develop all these familiar themes much more deeply than in previous works, introducing the important concepts of 'another life' and of the threads of history. It continues the intermingling of past and present through Olga's stream of consciousness narration, a more psychological narrative method which the author was to use again in later works. Death provides a stimulus for self-analysis, and as Trifonov got older he began

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<sup>35</sup> *Drugaiia zhizn'*, p. 356.

to see life more and more in the light of death. *Drugaia zhizn'* represents a turning point in Trifonov's work, bringing together the themes of *byt* and history. History is seen from the perspective of the present, and Trifonov feels something should be learned from it. It is, as Josephine Woll says, "the prism through which he (Sergei) understands the world."<sup>36</sup> This historical perspective continues to be important in Trifonov's later works, such as *Dom na naberezhnoi* and *Starik* which are examined in Chapter 7.

The *Moscow Tales* represent a maturation in Trifonov's evolution as a writer, a complete break with Socialist Realism. The author has finally left behind him the old black and white stereotypes: - "A human being is combined of many subtle threads, and not a piece of wire switched on to a negative or positive current."<sup>37</sup> He depicts Soviet urban life as it actually was and begins to examine the ethical foundations of Soviet society. As a result, the *Moscow Tales* have been extensively studied and sparked off great debate.

There is a growing complexity of style in the *Moscow Tales*. The purely omniscient author has been replaced by a combination of first person narrative or concealed third-person narrators. As a result, the reader sees the characters from many points of view, sees them x-rayed, enabling him to deduce their true character. Each represents a psychological puzzle and the reader sees them from the inside rather than the outside, with all their mental states and inner struggles. Place and time, too, have become more complex, with time montages, shifts between the past and present.

Because of the greater severity of censorship of literature in Soviet Russia under Brezhnev, Trifonov was increasingly having to use what has been referred to as Aesopian language, or *пунктир*, and leaving it up to the reader to see between the lines. As Abram Tertz (Siniavsky) himself said, literature in the USSR was not so simple as the writer writes and the reader reads.<sup>38</sup> There was an element of risk and this of course affected Trifonov's work and played a part in its evolution. As *Studenty* could only have been written under Stalin, and *Utolenie zhazhdy* during Krushchev's thaw, so the political climate played its part in his *Moscow Tales*. The first three novellas were published in *Novyi mir* but, during this time, Tvardovsky had been removed from his post, though later

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<sup>36</sup> Josephine Woll, *Invented Truth: Soviet Reality and the Literary Imagination of Iurii Trifonov*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in N. Kolesnikoff, 'Jurij Trifonov as a Novella Writer', *Russian Language Journal*, 118, 34, (Spring 1980), pp. 137-43.

<sup>38</sup> See 'Literaturnii protsess v Rossii', *Kontinent*, No. 1, 1974, pp. 143-190.

reinstated; caution was in order. The reader has to look between the lines, at references, at what is not said, to glean Trifonov's true meaning. Akchurin, a writer whom Trifonov helped by reading and commenting on his stories, remembers Iurii telling him not to write for everyone to understand, but only for those who want to understand.<sup>39</sup> This helped Trifonov get his work past the censors, but it led to a criticism, mainly from the dissidents abroad, such as Mal'tsev and Zinoviev, that his work was not daring enough, that it did not address Russia's problems. In their eyes, if the censors were letting Trifonov's work be published, he must be somehow pandying to the regime, especially as he had never been in a camp or forced to flee abroad.<sup>40</sup> Mal'tsev thought that Trifonov had only been published because he was of use to the party, in that he was improving the image of the Soviet Union at home and abroad, but it is hard to see how any of Trifonov's later works, showing as they did the moral degradation of Muscovites, could be so exploited. If anything, the censors may have allowed Trifonov's work to be published as a kind of safety valve so that Soviet readers would be content with reading them, rather than wanting emigrée works. Some dissidents thought writers should speak out, even if that meant they had to move to the West to do so, as writing under restrictions seemed pointless. To Trifonov, the publication of one honest work in Russia was much more important than the publication of even the most blistering critique of the Soviet State abroad. Trifonov himself thought that emigrée literature was of limited use as most Soviet citizens would not be able to read it. Also, by staying in one's own country, a writer was in a better position to comment on it.<sup>41</sup> Trifonov said that he could never leave Moscow:

«Нет, я не *исчезну* (italics mine - LB), не уеду отсюда ни за что! Я могу жить только в Москве.»<sup>42</sup>

Thus he had very strong opinions on writers who did leave, including his cousin Mikhail Demin. Demin moved to France in 1968, having fallen in love with a French relative. He had no desire to return to Russia as he had had such unpleasant times there, including a spell in prison in Siberia, and did not think

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<sup>39</sup> S. Akchurin, 'Zvonite v liuboe vremia (Iz vospominanii o Iu. V. Trifonove)', *Literaturnaia ucheba*, 1982, no. 6, pp. 230-3.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Iurii Mal'tsev, 'Promezhutochnaia literatura i kriterii podlinnosti.' *Kontinent*, 25 (1980), pp. 285-321.

<sup>41</sup> See Footnote 16, Chapter 1.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Iurii Shcheglov, 'Drugaia zhizn', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6 September 1995, p.6. Shcheglov saw Trifonov as being almost obsessive about this, and it adds another dimension to his concept of 'disappearance', in that emigrees disappear from the life of Russia, their homeland when they live abroad.

the Writers' Union would accept him. Trifonov eventually met his cousin many years later while in France with his third wife, Olga Romanovna. She recalls how shocked Iurii was when Demin answered the telephone in French.<sup>43</sup> He could not believe his cousin, a Russian writer, could stop using his native language, despite living in another country!

Since Trifonov chose to stay in Russia to pursue his art, he had to be careful. He had seen first-hand what the regime could do to dissenters; the fate of his parents had made an indelible mark on his life, both emotionally and in that, having been the son of "an enemy of the people", he had the habit of caution. He was not, however, a coward. He still had the courage, along with only six other members of the Writers' Union, including Okudzhava, Tendriakov and Bakhlanov (out of a total of 6790), to ask the Union to reconsider their decision to expell Solzhenitsyn in 1969, and hence had the respect of his contemporaries, including Solzhenitsyn himself.

The art of having honest works published in Russia was a subtle and difficult one. Trifonov was balanced somewhere between the acknowledged dissidents and the official sycophantic writers, who accused him of not adhering to the party line. Such criticism from the old party hacks, however, only served to make him more popular with the younger generation of writers, and also with the reading public - subscription to *Novyi mir* increased by 40 000 after the publication of *Obmen*. Trifonov called himself a "critic of society". Unlike many of his peers, he was not a party member and kept his independence, even though membership of the Party entailed many advantages. Trifonov would not compromise his conscience in this way, but his independent stance took toll on his life and health.

Trifonov's work was often criticised for its concentration on *byt*, a word, in his opinion, much overworked by the critics. It is difficult to give a literal English translation of the word, as it is more a concept, meaning 'everyday life' or living, with all the personal problems inherent in this. In Trifonov's *Moscow Tales*, the action does not take place on the construction of some great project as in *Utolenie zhazhdy*, nor during some great epoch of Russian history. Instead it centres around the everyday lives of ordinary town-dwellers and the eternal moral choices within their lives, as the works of the *derevenshchiki*.<sup>44</sup> The flashbacks to the past and old ideals serve to amplify the

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<sup>43</sup> See Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, 'Popytka proshchaniia' in *Den' sobaki*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1992, p. 278.

<sup>44</sup> Trifonov's urban prose was of course compared to the so-called "village prose" of the same time, of Rasputin, Shukshin and Belov. However, it was not Trifonov's continuation of their



mundaneness of the present. Trifonov stressed the importance of *byt* in people's life, calling it «обыкновенная жизнь, испытание жизнью, где проявляется и проверяется новая, сегодняшняя нравственность»<sup>45</sup>, but stressed that "I do not write about "byt" but about people's lives."<sup>46</sup> Reducing *byt* to a mere indicator of literary style, as the critics did, was to move away from the reality of the human condition. Human life was very precious to Trifonov, and in chronicalling their lives, Trifonov spoke for millions of his fellow countrymen, as did Anna Akhmatova in *Requiem*, albeit in very different circumstances.

Many Soviet critics reproached Trifonov for his supposed concentration on *byt*, on trivialities, on a *zamknutii mir*, rather than the world (and the party) outside.<sup>47</sup> Since Stalin's time, the idea that literature should not be allowed to look at mere everyday life, but should address the party and its projects at the time, had not altogether died away, at least as far as the critics were concerned. Trifonov was accused of not showing the party helping people out of their problems and how to live better lives. He was not being an "engineer of human souls". The reality of the situation was that if people did use the party to help them, it was usually because it was the acknowledged channel towards all sorts of connections and benefits. Ironically, the closer the party saw itself to achieving communism, the further society in reality had lapsed from this concept. The old revolutionary ideals of the past were now virtually dead and buried, replaced by materialism and egoism. Unlike the student Trifonov of the 1950's, the disillusioned author of the 1970's no longer had visions of a shining future; neither did the characters in his novellas or in the society around him. This however was not what the party ideologists wanted to hear, and his works were accused of being too pessimistic. The 'negative' characters were not punished, nor the 'positive' ones rewarded. As one woman said:

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work, with the city superceding the countryside, but what seemed comparable was rather the way both parties reacted to the life around them, be it urban or rural.

<sup>45</sup> 'Vybirat', reshat'sia, zhertvovat' ', in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted by Carolina De Maegd-Soëp from a conversation she had with Trifonov. See *Trifonov and the Drama of the Russian Intelligentsia*, Ghent State University, Russian Institute, 1990, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> For criticism of Trifonov's *Moscow Tales* see, for example, articles by V. Sokolov, 'Rasshcheplenie obydenosti', *Voprosy literatury*, 1972, no. 2, pp. 31-45; Mikhail Sinel'nikov, 'Ispytanie povsednevnost'iu: nekotorye itogi', *Voprosy literatury*, 1972, no. 2, pp. 46-62; V. Ozerov, 'Literaturno-khodozhestvennaia kritika i sovremennost'', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 2 February 1972, pp. 2-3; G. Brovman, 'Izmerenia malogo mira', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 8 March 1972, p. 5; and Iu. Andreev, 'V zamknutom mirke', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 3 March 1971, p. 5.

«С детских лет учили, что советские люди красивы, мужественны, смели и добры. А вы показываете нам советских людей с недостатками, слабостями, совершающих ошибки и т.д.»<sup>48</sup>

To Trifonov however, such criticism was naïve:

«Как нет абсолютно здоровых людей - это знает каждый врач, так и нет абсолютно хороших - это должен знать каждый писатель. Мы пишем не о дурных людях, а о дурных качествах.»<sup>49</sup>

Life was far too complex for such stereotypes and communism could not change man's basic egoistic desires. Trifonov did not condemn such 'bad qualities', but instead hoped readers would recognise some of their own shortcomings in his works and attempt to do something about them, a first step towards moral regeneration. As he had no clear authorial stance, the critics accused him of amoralism. Some interpreted the *Moscow Tales* to be a portrayal of the battle between true Moscow intellectuals and philistinism, *meshchantsvo*, but this, also, was to simplify Trifonov's message. *Obmen* does have at its centre the differences between the old intellectuals, the Dmitrievs, and the new middle-class Luk'ianovs, with their materialist petty-bourgeois mentality, but although Trifonov did examine this trend in contemporary Russian society, his works do not centre on this concept only. As he himself said in response to such critics:

«Но вот что, по-моему, я знаю точно: о чем я не хотел писать. Не хотел я писать об интеллигенции и о мещанстве. Ничего подобного даже в уме не держал... Я имел в виду людей самых простых, обыкновенных...ни о каких мещанах я писать не собирался. Меня интересуют характеры. А каждый характер - уникальность, единственность, неповторимое сочетание черт и черточек.»<sup>50</sup>

His aim was to look at contemporary people, at how society was developing, to show the whole «феномен жизни» rather than to battle against philistine elements within it. He shared the same opinion as Lermontov in his foreword to "A Hero of Our Time", which he quotes to the critics in 'Vybirat', *reshat'sia, zhertvovat'* :

«...не думайте, однако, после этого, чтоб автор этой книги имел когда-нибудь гордую мечту сделаться исправителем людских пороков. Боже его избави от такого невежества! Ему просто было весело рисовать современного человека, каким он его понимает, и, к

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in R. Shröder, ' "Moi god eshche ne nastupil..." ', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1987, no. 8, pp. 96-8.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in *Beskonechnye igry*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1989.

<sup>50</sup> 'Vybirat', *reshat'sia, zhertvovat'* ', *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 85.

его и вашему несчастью, слишком часто встречал. Будет и того, что болезнь указана, а как излечить - это уже бог знает!»<sup>51</sup>

Due to his concentration on the daily lives of weak-willed people inclined to moral compromise, the influence of Chekhov on Trifonov's work has often been noted.<sup>52</sup> Like Chekhov, Trifonov did not pass judgement on his characters but left it up to the reader to draw his own conclusions, often by reading between the lines of what seemed like simple portrayals of everyday life. Both writers have compassion and understanding for their characters, condemning traits rather than the people themselves. Trifonov strove to follow Chekhov's style in his *Moscow Tales*, striving to say as much as possible in a few words and by means of psychological sketches. We have seen how another great Russian writer, Dostoevsky, was increasingly an influence on Trifonov's work, both from the links between *Neterpenie* and *Besy*, and from certain motifs in the Moscow novellas. Trifonov was also to study a modern-day Raskolnikov in the protagonist of *Dom na naberezhnoi*, even as he had examined the 'hero of his time' in *Obmen*.

Many contemporary critics failed to notice Trifonov's gradual but steady evolution away from works like *Studenty*, but to us who have an overview of his development, it is clear that such characters as Zuriabov in *Utolenie zhazhdy* and the short stories of the mid-sixties onwards lead up to the Moscow novellas. That they are an integral part of his work is also shown by the reprises of themes and images which are often developed further in the *Moscow Tales*. Firstly, the theme of the dacha as a childhood idyll, symbolising a lost youth, peace and idealism, contrasted with the urbanisation of Moscow, is present in all these novellas, echoing the change in society's values. The past and all its ideals are swept away like the lilac bushes and dacha in *Dolgoe proshchanie*. The dacha motif has been present since Trifonov's very earliest works, but from the *Moscow Tales* onwards, the home - "dom" - becomes an important symbol. Housing, as seen in *Obmen*, was a problem in Moscow. The difficulty of finding and establishing a home stands for many other difficulties. Many places where people live are not homes, they do not represent security and love. Some hold memories of past times, and this is further developed in his

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Carolina De Maegd-Soëp, *Trifonov and the Drama of the Russian Intelligentsia*, Ghent State University, Russian Institute, 1990; Andrew Durkin, 'Trifonov's "Taking Stock": The Role of Çexovian Subtext', *Slavic & East European Journal*, 28, 1 (1984), pp. 32-41.

next novel, *Dom na naberezhnoi*, where the history of the house of the title is the history of Stalin's purges.

Egoism is the key motivating factor for most of Trifonov's characters, and it was a trait he abhorred in his fellow man; «В эгоизме заключена неправда мира...Эгоизм - это то, что труднее всего победить в человеке.»<sup>53</sup> He continues to study morality, moral betrayal as a result of egoism. Here again, it is not the egoists he condemns, but rather the egoism itself, the trait not the person. Trifonov is a moralist only in so far that the inner logic of his stories show how a person should take responsibility for his or her actions and not try to silence conscience. Conscience, one of Trifonov's most important themes, is more clearly developed in the *Moscow Tales*, and continues to feature in all his major works thereafter. Many of the characters such as Dmitriev and Gennadii Sergeevich, try to exorcise unpleasant memories and silence their consciences. The effects of doing this are more clearly shown in later works, such as *Dom na naberezhnoi* and *Starik*.

Time and memory are also beginning to feature more in Trifonov's works. Time fascinated Trifonov, the way it changed people and places, even in the course of one day, and of course it played a part in his own evolution as a writer - «писатель должен изменяться и развиваться - вместе со временем».<sup>54</sup> Significantly his last major work is entitled *Vremia i mesto*, showing the full development of these themes. Within the *Moscow Tales*, the movement of time can be increasingly felt, with the switches from past to present, the process of change in Moscow and the characters. Trifonov is not only interested in the individual within time, but in time within the individual. With the *Moscow Tales* he shows how the current times, Brezhnev's Russia, has affected his contemporaries. They are an unheroic generation, they are too young to have fought in World War Two, who have not preserved the revolutionary ideals of their fathers and forefathers, now buried in the past and overlaid by repression. Instead they live the life of moral compromise, the results of which are further demonstrated in Trifonov's next novel, *Dom na naberezhnoi*. As Evgenii Evtushenko, a younger contemporary wrote, everyone gave in to comrade Kompromis Kompromisovich, who:

Все на счетах высчитывая  
нас,

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in R. Shröder, 'Moi god eshche ne nastupil...', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1987, no. 8, pp. 96-8.

<sup>54</sup> In letter to L. Voronkova, 24 May 1977, quoted in ' "Nravstvennye idealy ia ne izobrazhaiu no imeiu" Iz pisem Iurii Trifonova', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27 March 1991, p. 13.

как деток больших,  
покупает вещичками  
компромисс-вербовщик.  
Покупает квартирами,  
мебелишкой,  
тряпьем,  
и уже не задиры мы,  
а шумим -  
если пьем! <sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Evgenii Evtushenko, *Sobranie sochinenii. V trekh tomakh. Tom 2.* Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984, p. 452. My thanks to Brian Moynahan who brought this poem to my attention in his book *The Russian Century*. Great Britain, Random House, Inc., 1994, p. 258.

## CHAPTER 7

### HISTORY RE-EXAMINED

In *Dom na naberezhnoi*<sup>1</sup> Trifonov returns to the period he covered in his first novel *Studenty* and re-examines similar events from the perspective of over thirty years later. The novel opens with the main protagonist, Vadim Glebov, looking for furniture for his family's new flat in the oppressive heat of the summer of 1972.<sup>2</sup> As in *Obmen*, there is again the theme of moving flats, Glebov's moral 'exchange', but here does not involve a betrayal of principles. As the novel progresses it is shown how Glebov's moral exchange took place many years before and how he betrayed the people around him to reach his current position in life. He has a comfortable job in a literary institute, all the advantages which go with it, and useful connections, who have, among other things, recommended the particular furniture store where we first encounter him. He is slightly older than the chief protagonists of the *Moscow Tales*. His early life in Moscow during the 1930s and 1940s is shown, whereas in the other Moscow novellas we hear very little of the characters' childhood. On the other hand, very little is seen of Glebov's family and present day life. The formation of his character is traced to a time when the early days of revolutionary fervour were over and the first seeds of materialism were being sown during the Stalinist years.<sup>3</sup> The novel is both a psychological study of life under a regime of terror and an analysis of the root causes of the moral decline of Soviet society.

At the furniture store Glebov comes face to face with an old school friend, Lev Shulepnikov, who is working as a porter there. Lev - or Shulepa as his friends used to call him - refuses to recognise Glebov and it is this which forces him to look back into his past, to times which he would rather forget. Glebov was brought up in a small house by the Moscow river with his parents and grandmother, under the shadow of the so-called house on the embankment where various high-ranking party members lived. It is here where Shulepa and several other of Glebov's friends live (Trifonov had lived in the prototype of the house from 1930 to 1936)<sup>4</sup> and this is a source of envy to Vadim. His father

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dom na naberezhnoi. Povest' ', *Druzhba narodov*, 1976, no. 1, pp. 83-167.

<sup>2</sup> Oppressively hot weather is also present in *Starik*, when the main character Letunov is also forced to recall his past.

<sup>3</sup> For an indepth study of Stalin's effect on the values of his nation, see Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> This novel too has traces of autobiography, but as shown, Trifonov is nearer to the character of the shadowy narrator rather than Glebov.

does not approve of his son's friendship with the children from the 'big house', as they belong to a different class (proof that there is still a class system very much in evidence, in stark contradiction to the original aims of communism and the Bolsheviks). However, when Shulepa visits Vadim, he is highly embarrassed by the stories his father tells to amuse the boy and keep in his favour. Glebov's father is typical of many people in Stalin's time. His main advice to his son is to keep his head down and out of trouble. Fear is the main reason for this, as one wrong move could mean death, and Glebov inherits his father's caution and determined desire for self-preservation. His parents are not intellectuals or party functionaries like those in the house on the embankment. His father works in a factory and his mother has had a variety of jobs. One was in a cinema, and Vadim used this to his best advantage, taking other school children there to make himself more popular or curry favours, such as a kiss from the girl Dina. Even though Vadim does not particularly like Dina, he relishes the fact that she is then «в его власти».<sup>5</sup> Thus any sympathy the reader may have felt for Glebov as the poor relation soon disappears as it is shown how, from an early age, he has used any power available to him for his own advantage. Glebov's own account of his life is interdispersed with that of a shadowy first person narrator, also an inhabitant of the house on the embankment, who refers to him as 'Baton'. This is because at school Vadim would bring in a French loaf and hand it out in return for favours from the other children. He manages to get on with most people by such exchange of favours, which is also how he manages to appease the local bullies. The narrator describes him in a way which gives an idea as to why he has gone so far in life:

«Он был совершенно никакой, Вадик Батон. Но это, как я понял впоследствии, редкий дар: быть никаким. Люди, умеющие быть гениальнейшим образом никакими, продвигаются далеко.» [II, 433].

The arrival of Shulepa at the house on the embankment erodes any power Vadim might have had amongst its other inhabitants. Shulepa has all sorts of expensive clothes and toys which Vadim envies. He even takes several of the children round to his flat to show them a well-known film on his own projector, the very film which Vadim had taken others to see at the cinema. As revenge, Vadim goads some of the other children into beating up Shulepa, but he overcomes them by producing a toy gun. Vadim himself takes no part in the ambush, preferring others to do his dirty work, something which continues

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<sup>5</sup> *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986, Volume 2, p. 378. All other references to the text are from this edition.

throughout his life.<sup>6</sup> Shulepa's stepfather, probably a KGB officer from his description (he has a bloodless face with protruding eyes, and wears a Caucasian tunic like Stalin) tries to find out which children attacked his stepson, at first without much success. However, when Vadim's uncle is arrested, his parents plead with him to enlist Shulepnikov's help. To do this, Vadim feels he must reveal which children attacked Shulepa. He does not admit his own involvement but instead names two boys whom he dislikes (and probably are of no use to him), and these boys and their families soon have to leave the house. He is troubled by his action for a few days but justifies it by assuming that they were 'bad boys' anyway. At an early age he has made his first betrayal.

Various incidents from Vadim's childhood are shown through his memories and those of the first person narrator. Some of these are based on Trifonov's own childhood in this now legendary building. For instance, one of the children in the novel, Anton Ovchinnikov, is based on Trifonov's friend Lev Fedotov, the "all round person" who features in other Trifonov works.<sup>7</sup> Lev Fedotov, like the fictional Ovchinnikov, dies in the Second World War, and Anton's mother gives the narrator his diaries as Lev Fedotov's mother gave her son's to Trifonov. The narrator recounts many episodes from his childhood days which are taken from those of Trifonov, such as Anton practising jujitsu, wearing shorts in winter to make himself more self-disciplined, and creating 'The Society for the Testing of the Will', whose members have to carry out such deeds as walking along the narrow embankment wall and climbing across the balconies.

In the novel, the society, to which the narrator and his friends belong, serves further to characterise Glebov. When asked to join, he agrees but only on condition that he can leave the society whenever he wants, thus proving he has ultimate power over his actions. Glebov is never seen having to fulfil one of the society's dares. Instead he has the climbing from one parapet to another stopped by telling an outsider of their plans, probably for fear of having to do it himself. The narrator, who, it transpires, is one of the two boys (possibly the Bear) whom Glebov reported to Shulepa's father and who were then evicted from the house, dislikes Glebov even more for this cowardly action. The narrator recalls the day

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<sup>6</sup> Shulepnikov even comments on this aspect of Glebov's character in later life when Glebov has been asked to denounce Ganchuk: «Ишь ты, какая чистюля! Другие пусть мажутся, а я в стороне постою, а? Так, что ли? Хорош гусь!» [II, 463].

<sup>7</sup> See also Chapter 1. In the museum at the 'House on the Embankment' there is a display dedicated to Lev Fedotov.



he left the house, and how smug Glebov was when he learnt there would be fewer rooms in the flat he was moving to than in his own home.

Another reason for the narrator's dislike of Glebov is his love for Sonia, also a child from the house on the embankment, who, however, had eyes only for the nonentity Vadim Baton. She is very kind and sympathetic to all around her, and is sorry for Vadim and his old patched coat. Vadim himself takes little notice of her affection until others mention it and he gradually becomes interested, not so much in her, but in her family's possessions - their large flat overlooking the Kremlin, their dacha and all the other privileges. Sonia's father, Professor Ganchuk, a Civil War veteran, lectures in literature at the Institute which Glebov enters after the war, along with Lev Shulepnikov. Shulepa is still the same, loud and arrogant, and living a life of opulence as in pre-war days. He now has a different stepfather - the man who investigated the mysterious death of the last one. Glebov's family, however, has fallen apart. His mother was killed during the war, his father suffered brain damage and is living in poverty in the same little house as before but now with Glebov's aunt, the one whose husband was sent to prison despite Glebov's efforts with Shulepnikov Senior. Glebov, it appears, is not particularly bothered by all this. He spends his time round at Sonia's family's flat, as good relations with his lecturer and supervisor will undoubtedly help his marks and future career. He starts a relationship with Sonia because he equates the possession of her body with all that her family owns.<sup>8</sup> Sonia, on the other hand, who has been in love with Glebov since childhood, suspects nothing of his real motives. They decide to marry but then events at the Institute change everything.

*Dom na naberezhnoi*, as did *Studenty*, features the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign of the late 1940s but Trifonov's perception and portrayal of the event is completely different. In *Studenty*, it is depicted as the right and proper thing to denounce the supposedly 'pro-Western, decadent' lecturer Kozelsky. In *Dom na naberezhnoi* the whole stupidity of the campaign is shown. Ganchuk speaks in defence of another lecturer, Astrug, one of his former students, expelled for 'admiring bourgeois scholars', and so is eventually himself forced out, under accusations of Menshevism. The staff who are behind this, the Dean, Dorodnov, and his cronies, Druziaev, a former military prosecutor, and Shereiko, are seen to be using ideology for their own gains, as part of a power struggle within the institute. This is very different to the Dean, Sizov, in *Studenty*, who was apparently motivated by the good of the party. Now, forty

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Glebov's thoughts on p. 421.

years later, Trifonov can see what he suspected, that such denunciations were mainly initiated for people's own ends, not the supposed good of the party (or even to pander to Stalin's megalomania). Dorodnov's gang have all the characteristics of the other KGB officers in Trifonov's works. Shereiko, it is said, «буравил стальным оком».<sup>9</sup> They draw Glebov into their schemes by gradually edging him into a position where it is a matter of his survival as a writer to denounce Ganchuk. He is first recommended to change supervisor, as Ganchuk is his future father-in-law. The impression that Ganchuk and his family are becoming more of a hindrance than a help in his life is backed up by remarks from Shulepa, who advises Glebov to ditch them. Little by little, Ganchuk is forced out of the institute and Glebov does nothing to stop it, preferring to stick his head in the sand and try not to think about it. However, he is finally called to give evidence at a meeting against Ganchuk, with both sides asking for his support. He is thus faced with a decision whether to support Ganchuk, through loyalty to his girlfriend's family and other students, or denounce him on the promise of a scholarship from Dorodnov. He sees himself at the crossroads, unsure of which path to take.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately for Glebov, his grandmother dies<sup>11</sup> and he cannot make the meeting, but it is already fairly clear which way he would have voted:

«Старался рассуждать спокойно: ну хорошо, четыре варианта, их и продумать. Вариант первый: прийти и выступить в защиту. . . . Что этот вариант даст? Озлобление администрации. Прости-прощай стипендия Грибоедова, аспирантура и все прочее. . . . Каков же выигрыш от этого варианта? Благодарность Ганчука и всего ганчуковского семейства. Еще более безмерная любовь Сони. . . . Проигрыш сокрушительный, выигрыш слабоват.» [II, 474].

Although excused attendance at the crucial meeting, it transpires that Glebov failed to support Ganchuk on another occasion. He sees the whole thing as almost comical because Dorodnov and the others ask apparently trivial questions about such things as the busts of philosophers which Ganchuk has had in his study for years. The information Glebov gives them, however, serves as a basis

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<sup>9</sup> P. 457, Trifonov as before concentrates on the eyes, as with Shulepnikov Senior and similar characters in other works.

<sup>10</sup> See p. 297.

<sup>11</sup> Glebov's grandmother Nila follows on in the mould of simple, selfless, devoted old women such as Niura. Glebov tells her about his problems and her advice is that it will sort itself out. When she dies, as with the death of other old people, the lynchpin that was holding the family together has gone, along with any remaining moral values.

for an ideological denunciation. The whole anti-cosmopolitanism campaign did border on the ridiculous, but nevertheless people's lives were at stake and Glebov only cares about his own. He allows himself to be used, moulded like plasticine by Dorodnov and the others, deceiving himself when he knows what he is doing is wrong. The professor is forced out of the institute, his wife dies of a stroke not long after and Sonia is eventually confined to a mental institute and later dies. Glebov would rather not remember his part in this, let alone repent. He has virtually no qualms about his inevitable split with Sonia and even wonders why her mother, Iulia Mikhailovna, is so unpleasant to him after he denounces her husband! She is the only one to notice his materialism and how he covets her family's possessions. Glebov is a typical product of Stalinism, a careerist and opportunist, driven by a mixture of cupidity, envy, resentment, cowardice and fear, as were so many others. This led to the snowballing of purges when, out of their mixture of feelings, people denounced others and so abetted the abuses of Stalinism. The house on the embankment had been an object of envy from childhood, and Glebov even takes malicious pleasure in Ganchuk's family's downfall and their eviction from the house. When Ganchuk used to ask him to accompany him on cold midnight walks he had resented this and envied Ganchuk's fur coat, as he did Shulepa's leather jacket. Now there would be no more walks and the world of warm coats was within his, Glebov's, reach. Knowing that he has betrayed his lover's family, that he has traded in his integrity for his own advancement, for the thirty pieces of silver represented by the Griboiedov scholarship, Glebov does not care in the least so long as his actions have helped his career, which is far more important than any moral principles, or what anyone else thinks:

«На все это можно наплевать. Потому что он получит вдруг такое ускорение, что отлетит далеко-далеко, те исчезнут с его горизонта, сгинут навеки со своими улыбочками, презрением, своими прекрасными шорами на глазах.» [II, 475-6].

In a sense, Glebov and Ganchuk are two of a kind. Ganchuk is not unduly disadvantaged by his dismissal, as Glebov remembers seeing him eating a cake in a cafe on ulitsa Gorkogo shortly afterwards.<sup>12</sup> He has the will to live and, compared with others in the past, he has come off relatively lightly, having only lost his job rather than his life. Like many old Bolsheviks, he and his wife are self-righteous and look down on those who they perceive as materialist petty-bourgeois, as did Dmitriev's family in *Obmen*, though they are of course

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<sup>12</sup> This is also indicative of the kind of trivia which Glebov remembers rather than the fact that he did actually speak out against Ganchuk.

better than their successors, Dorodnov and Shireiko. A former member of the Cheka and involved in the literary battles of the 1920s, where he first came across Dorodnov, Ganchuk rues the fact he did not kill him while he had the chance and sees his current problems as part of his failure to do this. At the end of his life Ganchuk, like Glebov, does not want to remember his past life. The narrator visits him in connection with his own research on the literary movements of the 1920's. However, Ganchuk does not want to talk about his past and is more concerned about being home in time for his favourite television programme. This is how the novel ends, as the narrator and Ganchuk symbolically leave the cemetery where Sonia - the one innocent victim of a world for which they are all in part responsible - is buried. In their failure to remember their past or face up to their consciences, such characters as Ganchuk and Glebov are the living dead. Indeed, Ganchuk even forgives Glebov for his part in his dismissal. He compares him to a modern day Raskolnikov:

«Нынешние Раскольниковы не убивают старух процентщиц топором, но терзаются перед той же чертой: переступить? И ведь, по существу, какая разница, топором или как-то иначе? Убивать или же ткнуть слегка, лишь бы освободилось место?» [II, 488].

Like Raskolnikov, Glebov has crossed over some moral limits but there is nothing experimental or philosophical about his motivation and he fails to recognise his crimes. Sonia is just like her namesake in *Crime and Punishment*, innocent and compassionate, the insulted and the injured, but has not the moral strength to bring her beloved face to face with his own guilt. With Glebov, Trifonov is continuing the theme of moral compromise but this is the worst example yet. Under Stalinism, in a society pervaded by secrecy and fear, many stopped questioning what was right or wrong, preferring to believe what they were told 'from above'. Glebov has no sense of morality either and like everyone else he is afraid, but he does not merely keep his head down, he procures his own advancement at the expense of others' misfortune. He cannot understand why Shulepa will not speak to him:

«Уж кому-кому, а Левке нечего было обижаться на Глебова. Не Глебов виноват и не люди, а времена. Вот пусть с временами и не здороваются». [II, 365].

Like many other Trifonov characters, Glebov tries to blame his actions on the times and take no responsibility himself. However, as Eugenia Ginzburg points out in her autobiographical novel about her life under Stalinism, the purges and her time in the camps, *Within The Whirlwind*:

"People may reply that it is more common to come across cases of those who loudly protest their innocence while seeking to put the blame on the era they live

in, on their neighbours, or on their own youthfulness and inexperience. . . . And that is so. Yet, I am all but convinced that the very loudness of these protestations is meant to drown the quiet and inexorable inner voice that keeps reminding a man of his guilt."<sup>13</sup>

Through life Glebov too has tried to "drown the quiet and inexorable inner voice" and, like many other Trifonov protagonists, has paid for it by becoming flabby, suffering from ill health and addiction to sleeping pills. He recalls his former health and vitality, which were lost when he betrayed moral principles. Like Dmitriev and Gennadii Sergeevich, he is a spiritual vacuum, despite his outward success. The nonentity who crept up the career ladder (rather like Stalin himself on his rise to power), is now «непохожий на себя и невзрачный, как гусеница.» [II, 370].

The chronotope in *Dom na naberezhnoi* is exactly the same as in *Studenty* but Trifonov's treatment of similar events is completely different. In the time between writing the two novels, Trifonov has evolved as a person and writer and realised that life is not as black and white as Socialist Realism would like to portray it, that people's characters are much more complex and most are driven by personal ambition, not the good of society. Careerists such as Palavin in *Studenty* and Glebov in *Dom na naberezhnoi* are the norm, rather than the exception to the rule. Glebov, in fact, is very much a Sergei Palavin who has made it. He bears little resemblance to the hero of *Studenty*, Vadim Belov, but is more like Palavin in that he only cares about himself. On the other hand, the relationship between Glebov and Shulepnikov is similar to that between Belov and Palavin, in that Belov also envies his friend's popularity. However, Belov knows that Palavin is following the 'wrong' path, whereas with Glebov, envy obscures moral judgement. It has reached huge proportions and rules his life. Trifonov distances himself from Glebov, whereas he allots Belov some biographical details from his own life, most importantly the loss of a father. Also there is no parallel to Sonia in *Studenty*, where the main female character is an egoist, not a victim, and uses the hero rather than being used by him. Ganchuk and Kozelsky share several things in common, right down to the busts of philosophers in their studies. Both are in charge of a student society. However, in the battle for power within the institute, perceived as proceeding under cover of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign, Trifonov's attitude to the characters and to the campaign have changed. In *Studenty*, the Dean was portrayed as a decent man and the suggestion that his campaign against

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<sup>13</sup> Eugenia Ginzburg, *Within the Whirlwind*, Collins & Harvill Press, London, 1981, p. 152.

Kozelsky may have been motivated by envy emanates from Kozelsky himself. With Dorodnov and his sinister KGB cronies, the action is initiated purely for personal gain and Ganchuk emerges as the better person. In many ways, *Dom na naberezhnoi* was written as a cleansing process, an attempt to put right the errors Trifonov felt he had made in his first, naive novel, which by then he could not even bear to open.

At the same time, with *Dom na naberezhnoi*, Trifonov's style has also greatly matured to reflect his increased perception of historical events and people. The narrative and temporal structure of the novel is much more complex. Trifonov switches between different narrative voices and times (the novel covers a period of forty years), lapsing into memories, highlighting the link between past and present, how one has influenced the other. These time montages were also used in the *Moscow Tales* and Trifonov continued to use them in later works such as *Starik* and *Vremia i mesto*. Unlike the third person omniscient narrator of *Studenty*, there is in *Dom na naberezhnoi* a 'polyphony of narratorial voices', a Dostoevskian influence which featured in Trifonov's maturer works. This narrative method also allows Trifonov not to take a didactic tone and judge his characters, but to let Glebov condemn himself in his own words, while distancing himself from the characters through the use of another, concealed first person narrator. This shifting narratorial stance and the subtle, Aesopian language of *Dom na naberezhnoi* made its publication possible. Once more, Trifonov depends on the collaboration of the reader to see between the lines and find his true message, and in doing so to reflect on his own and his country's past and escape from the spiritual wasteland that for so many was the Soviet Union of the 1970s.

Although Trifonov's style has matured almost out of recognition from his first novel, many of his own eternal themes, вечные темы, are again evident. Firstly there are the autobiographical elements taken from Trifonov's own childhood and youth: like Trifonov, for example, the narrator worked in civil defence during the Second World War, firefighting in Moscow, and images of the city he loved run throughout *Dom na naberezhnoi*, as they did through his earliest works. More importantly, the narrator lived in the very house where Trifonov and his family lived from 1930 to 1936 and from which he was himself evicted when Valentin Trifonov was arrested and executed during the Great Purges and his mother exiled to Kazakhstan as the wife of "an enemy of the people". The house was designed by the architect Boris Iofan for the party hierarchy and was the first high-rise building in Moscow. After the years of hardship, it came to symbolise all the privileges, power and opulence of the Bolshevik party in the 1930s. In the novel, the house on the embankment is the

prime source of Glebov's feelings of envy and represents the summit of his ambitions. He loves to visit the house, look across to the Kremlin, down at the 'ants' below, and dream that one day such a life would be his. Its inhabitants are completely different to those in his small house, which it overshadows. All seem to have a certain degree of arrogance, down to the lift operators and even the dogs. A hierarchy soon establishes itself in the house, which, as shown in the novel, had its own class system. One section of the house, the twelfth staircase, was actually reserved for NKVD officials, and Beria lived there at one time. Envy was rife and by the 1930s very little of the revolutionaries' old comradeship remained. The house serves in the novel as and was in fact a microcosm for the changes in Soviet politics and society; as the old Bolsheviks disappeared one by one during the night, they were replaced by a different set of people loyal to Stalin and his regime. The house has now fallen into a state of disrepair and many of the windows are boarded up. Some of the descendants of the old Bolsheviks, who set up the house's museum, still remain, but many other residents are of the new breed of rich Russians.

As the narrator noticed, when a person was evicted from the house, they ceased to exist:

«А еще помню, как уезжали из того дома на набережной. . . . Какой-то человек спрашивает у лифтера: «Это чья такая худра-мудра?» Лифтер отвечает: «Да это с пятого». Он не называет фамилии, не кивает на меня, хотя я стою рядом, он знает меня прекрасно, просто так: «С пятого». - «А куда их?» - «Да кто знает. Вроде, говорят, куда-то к заставе». И опять мог бы спросить у меня, я бы ему ответил, но не спрашивает. Я для него уже как бы не существую. Те, кто уезжает из этого дома, перестают существовать». [II, 449].

This is how Trifonov must have felt when he was forced to leave the house, shunned by former friends and neighbours for fear of reprisals, and about to start 'another life'. To Iurii Lotman, such places are 'anti-homes', people do not live in them, but disappear from them. Flats in Soviet times were often not homes, not a place of safety and security, but a synonym for something sinister, and the housing shortage, especially in Stalin's time, brought about many denunciations.<sup>14</sup> The house on the embankment is in this way the antipode of the dacha in Trifonov's work. It was originally known as Дом правительства and then, because of the tragic end of so many of its first inhabitants, was nicknamed братская могила. It became immortalised as 'the house on the

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<sup>14</sup> Yuri Lotman, 'The home in Bulgakov's *Master & Margerita*' in *Universe of the Mind - A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, London: I B Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1990, pp. 185-191.

embankment' due to Trifonov's work. In *Ischeznovenie*<sup>15</sup> he compares it to a ship sailing without course, as Mandelstam described the revolution in *Sumerki svoboda*. The image of the house continued to feature in Trifonov's work, especially in *Oprokinutyi dom*, the topsy-turvy house, a paradigm for his own life after the death of his father.

Other symbolism recurrent in Trifonov's work also features in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, such as the opening evocation as the flow of time, perceived as a river which swallows people up:

«Никого из этих мальчиков нет теперь на белом свете. Кто погиб на войне, кто умер от болезни, иные пропали безвестно. А некоторые, хотя и живут, превратились в других людей. И если бы эти другие люди встретили бы каким-нибудь колдовским образом тех, исчезнувших, в бумазейных рубашонках, в полотняных туфлях на резиновом ходу, они не знали бы, о чем с ними говорить. Боюсь, не догадились бы даже, что встретили самих себя. Ну и бог с ними, с недогадливыми! Им некогда, они летят, плывут, несутся в потоке, загребают руками, все дальше и дальше, все скорей и скорей, день за днем, год за годом, меняются берега, отступают горы, редуют и облетают леса, темнеет небо, надвигается холод, надо спешить, спешить - и нет сил оглянуться назад, на то, что остановилось и замерло, как облако на краю небосклона.» [II, 363].

Time changes the characters around it and many live different, *drugie zhizni*. Shulepa, from a privileged child and an influential, well-connected youth, changes in the course of the novel to an alcoholic, working as a porter, then finally the warden of a crematorium, a symbol of the living dead. Even his name is different; he reverts to his mother's surname of Prokhorov. At the end of the novel, he, one of the original children of Stalinism, looks at the house, longing for the old days, hoping that perhaps his luck will change again for the better. Trifonov examines how Stalinism produced such people, totally estranged from their former selves through fear and envy:

«Многое заваяно песком, запорошено намертво. Но то, что казалось тогда очевидностью и простотой, теперь открывается вдруг новому взору, виден скелет поступков, его костяной рисунок - это рисунок страха.» [II, 452].

The only way to restore integrity and exorcise fear is through memory, through facing up to the past, but characters like Glebov, typical of a whole generation,

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<sup>15</sup> 'Ischeznovenie. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 1, pp. 6-95.



prefer to avoid confronting their own former selves. Indeed Glebov almost strangles Kuno, one of Ganchuk's loyal students, when he reminds him of the past in 1952, on the eve of the Doctors' Plot, a time which was also heavy with fear, and says that «память - сеть, которую не следует чересчур напрягать, чтобы удерживать тяжелые грузы.» [II, 482]). Shulepnikov is the catalyst who precipitates the reluctant process of recall which is the subject of the novel. In Glebov, Trifonov depicted a typical materialist of the late 1930's, analysing the effect of Stalinism on the everyday life of Soviet citizens as well as the history of his country. Against this background we see more clearly the on-going effect of the Terror on society of the 1970s, as shown in his *Moscow Tales*. It is what Solzhenitsyn describes as "the results of a Soviet upbringing - mutton-headed conformism, a combination of cowardice and sycophancy: all that matters is to rebuff the enemy without running into danger."<sup>16</sup>

Without the painful process of reawakening memory and conscience, Trifonov clearly felt there could be no renewal of truth nor ethics in modern Soviet life. This belief that only by remembering the past can the present be truly understood runs through the novel. The only character who succeeds in bringing the past to life is the narrator, for he is one of the few who has lived according to his moral principles and kept his integrity intact, probably because he has been a victim of the regime rather than someone who profited by it. He is depicted as actively engaged on research into the 1920s. Trifonov knew that man was essentially imperfect, but in *Dom na naberezhnoi* he gives us a specifically communist slant on the eternal problem of evil. As a philosophy, communism was economically based on the belief that everyone would be happy to be equal and build a new society. As early as 1864, Dostoevsky, in his *Zapiski iz podpol'ia*, a response to Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done*, had pointed out that such happiness was not within man's nature. Envy and other vices would not simply vanish away with the establishment of material equality. However, under Stalin, the communist regime went further than such naive optimism as to the expendability of moral guidelines and actively manipulated the baser aspects of human nature for the leader's own ends.

The fact that in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, Trifonov was one of the very few writers to openly examine Stalinism at a time when it had again, under Brezhnev, become almost a taboo subject, raises the question as to how the

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, London: Collins/Harvill Press, 1980, p. 209, in describing some of the staff of *Novyi mir*.

novel was ever published.<sup>17</sup> Various explanations have been put forward. Firstly, it was published in *Druzhba narodov*, a hitherto more conservative and less controversial journal than *Novyi mir*, and hence subject to less scrutiny from the censors. At the time its editor, Baruzdin was seriously ill and thus did not care too much about the consequences of publishing such a work. The journal had wanted to publish another novel, *Vaska*, by Sergei Antonov, which also examined Stalinism, in particular the construction of the Moscow metro and the horrors of collectivisation, but this had been quashed at the very top. It has been suggested that permission to publish *Dom na naberezhnoi* instead was a gesture to appease the journal.<sup>18</sup> Also, as Grigory Svirsky has pointed out, the authorities may have preferred their citizens to read Trifonov rather than illegal 'dissident' literature: «Пусть уже лучше советский читатель рвет из рук Трифонова, а не Солженицына или, не дай Бог, Зиновьева!»<sup>19</sup> Many prominent writers had left for abroad and those responsible for ideology in the USSR were sensitive to the adverse impression this produced, so did occasionally practice a modicum of tolerance and liberalism towards established authors. Then again, if there was had been a backlash, the authorities could have blamed Trifonov and used it as an excuse for further literary constraints and censorship. It has also been mentioned, mainly by dissident writers such as Alexander Zinoviev, that the fact Trifonov was a former Stalin Prize winner helped further publications, but this is doubtful in the case of *Dom na naberezhnoi*, which in many ways is a rewriting of the novel for which he was awarded the prize. Trifonov himself, as always, was astute about what could be written openly and what needed to be conveyed through the Aesopian language he had developed so skillfully over the years. This becomes clear when comparing the works published in his lifetime with *Ischeznoenie*.

However, the novel managed to get past the censor and some Soviet critics were outraged by *Dom na naberezhnoi*. It came too close to the bone for many of the literary hierarchy. Stalinist stalwarts accused Trifonov and his novel of the usual shortcomings - failure to show the Party leading the way to a radiant future, failure to depict any positive characters or solutions, too much concentration on *byt*. For them, Trifonov had concentrated too much on the

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<sup>17</sup> The novel, however, was omitted from a two volume collected works published in 1978 and there was no new publication until 1986.

<sup>18</sup> See John & Carol Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*, New York: Free Press, 1990, p. 182.

<sup>19</sup> Grigory Svirsky, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981, p. 433.

Realism and not enough on the Socialist. Many, including Dudintsev, criticised Trifonov for concealing his position and not making open judgements. The novel was publicly criticised at the 6th Congress of Soviet Writers, held in 1976, by Markov and Ozerov, and Trifonov then had to appear before a commission from the Writers' Union to answer their criticism. In his defence, he said that he expected the reader to make his own judgements and that he wrote about "life in all its complexities".<sup>20</sup>

Trifonov's later novels also received some adverse criticism from dissident writers abroad, such as Mal'tsev and Zinoviev.<sup>21</sup> They accused him of not portraying the whole truth about Soviet society, disregarding the realities of Trifonov's position as a writer who wanted his books to reach the Soviet reader.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in the West, however, his works had been well received, especially in the States, and hence their comments could have been out of jealousy. It was also, of course, very popular with the Soviet reading public and *Dom na naberezhnoi* was the literary sensation of 1976. It sold out almost instantly, and copies were passed from hand to hand. The novel was also produced as a play at the Taganka Theatre and the production was a sell-out.

As with *Obmen*, the play was again produced as a result of co-operation between Trifonov and the theatre's director Iurii Liubimov. It featured as part of Liubimov's cycle on Russian history which included productions of John Reed's *Ten Days which shook the World* on the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and Bulgakov's *Master and Margerita* representing the 1920s, as well as Gorky's *Mat*, Esenin's *Pugachev* and Chernyshevsky's *Chto delat*?. Liubimov, like Trifonov, strove to depict the truth and show the connection between the past and the present, and the two became close friends, as Trifonov sat quietly at the front, watching the production attentively with Liubimov.

*Dom na naberezhnoi*, then, was a dramatic advance on the early works, yet one which preserved a profound continuity of concern with morality, history and time. As Trifonov grew older, he began understandably to reflect more on his past and think of old age and death, and these are the themes of his next novel, *Starik*.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Literaturnaia Rossia*, 2 July 1976.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Mal'tsev's article 'Promezhutochnaia literatura i kriterii podlinnosti', *Kontinent*, 1980, No. 25, pp. 285-321 and Zinoviev's novel *The Radiant Future* (Светлое будущее), London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1981 (translation Gordon Clough), where he alludes to Trifonov in talking of a writer named Tikshin, and says life in the Soviet Union is not how he portrays it.

<sup>22</sup> Mal'tsev also levelled the same criticism at *Starik* in his article 'Roman Trifonova', *Russkaia mysl*, 19 October 1978, pp. 10-11.

## **STARIK**

Even as *Dom na naberezhnoi* can be seen as a re-working of *Studenty*, so *Starik*<sup>23</sup> covers the same period as *Otblesk kostra*, and Trifonov now looks at the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War with greater knowledge and understanding. *Otblesk kostra* was Trifonov's own personal examination of this stormy period in an attempt to discover the historical truth about Russia's past, and to clear the name of his recently rehabilitated father, as well as some others, such as the Cossack leader Philip Mironov. In *Starik*, the main protagonist, Pavel Letunov, a retired engineer and Civil War veteran, is also attempting to unravel the truth about the Civil War, especially that surrounding Migulin, a fictional figure based on Mironov. The novel is set during the heatwave of 1973, as Letunov is spending the summer with his family at their dacha at Sokoliny Bor, just outside Moscow. They are pre-occupied with trying to obtain a dacha left vacant by the death of an old woman, who was distantly related to one of them; while Letunov, scornful of such petty intrigues and lost at the death of his wife who had held the family together, escapes into memories of his past and tries to come to terms with it. The novel switches from the past to the present, perceived through Letunov's 'stream of consciousness', as events in the present awaken memories from the past. *Starik* was the result of two originally separate novels, one on Mironov and the other about a contemporary struggle for an empty dacha; Letunov and his memories are the thread that links the two together.

A letter from an old childhood friend, Asia, opens *Starik*, and brings Letunov's memories flooding back. He was originally from Petersburg, and it was from here he witnessed the revolutions. His mother and uncle Shura were revolutionaries, while his father, an engineer whose commitment to socialist aims did not match those of his mother, had long since moved to Finland. Pavel helps his mother by distributing revolutionary leaflets, but his main concern is not bringing about world revolution but his unrequited love for Asia, whom his mother somewhat disapproves of as the girl is from a bourgeois family. Asia and her cousin Volodia help Pavel distribute the leaflets, much to the consternation of her family. The picture is one of children caught up in the historical events around them, and their ways divide when Asia's family leaves Petersburg. Pavel is swept up in the Civil War on the Don with his uncle Shura, and it is there he again meets Volodia and Asia who are working for Migulin, an

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<sup>23</sup> 'Starik. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1978, no.3, pp. 27-153.

acquaintance of Volodia's revolutionary father. Volodia is killed and Asia later becomes Migulin's wife, much to Pavel's disappointment.

The complex figure of Migulin fascinated the young Pavel Letunov and still interests him now he is an 'old man'. Migulin had served in the Tsarist army, was decorated for his bravery on numerous occasions, but hated the regime and its treatment of his fellow Cossacks, who did compulsory military service, providing their own horses and acting as riot police for the Tsarist government (hence the revolutionaries' hatred of them). In his desire for freedom, justice and equality, Mironov was attracted to the socialist parties and joined the Reds in the Civil War. The Whites had slaughtered his family, so his old ties with the Tsarist army were effectively broken, but this is known only by Asia. Very much an idealist, he had little political education, and his enemies among the Bolsheviks manipulated his naivety. Completely guileless, he was incapable of being devious like some of the Bolsheviks, whom, mistakenly, he tended to trust. He was however very popular with the Cossacks, recruited many to the Red Army, and helped defeat the Whites on the Don. Due to his popularity and success, many Bolsheviks envied Migulin and were highly suspicious of him. He was often sent away from the Don, much to his consternation, because of this lack of trust, and because, like his prototype Mironov, he was opposed to de-Cossackisation and would have tried to prevent unnecessary violence and terror. He did not hesitate to tell the Bolsheviks when he did not agree with their policies, so rumours were rife as to his true political sympathies, which, ultimately, lay with the good of the Cossacks. His life was not made easy by the Bolsheviks, who gave him a badly equipped division and gave him collaborators instructed to keep an eye on him, such as Shigontsev, with whom he simply could not work.

The Bolsheviks were extremely suspicious of the Cossacks as a whole, many believing that they should be completely liquidated, and initiated a policy of 'de-Cossackisation', which Migulin (like Trifonov's Cossack father) wholly opposed.<sup>24</sup> In *Starik*, as in Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don*, the atrocities committed by both the Reds and the Whites on the Don are shown. Trifonov paints a picture of the more extremist Bolsheviks, such as Shigontsev and Braslavskii, who believe that the Cossacks should be exterminated if it serves the good of the revolution. They frequently cite the example of the French Revolution as justification for such terror:

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<sup>24</sup> Parts of the directive against the Cossacks can be found on page 473, Volume 3.

«Постановление Конвента гласило - на развалинах Лиона воздвигнуть колонну с надписью: «Лион протестовал против свободы, Лиона больше не существует». Если казачество выступает врагом, оно будет уничтожено, как Лион, и на развалинах Донской области мы напишем: «Казачество протестовало против революции, казачества больше не существует!»

[III, 469].

Like Nechaev and Dostoevsky's 'Besy', these fanatics believe that the only thing that matters is the triumph of the revolution, at any price, and all emotions should also be annihilated. They are contemptuous towards revolutionaries such as Volodia and Letunov, who will not murder people without proper trial. This was an attitude common to many Bolsheviks during the Civil War, usually from working class backgrounds, who disliked the educated revolutionaries and labelled them 'soft' *intelligentsia*. As in descriptions of their KGB counterparts in other books, to whom they passed down their lack of ethics, Trifonov often dwells on the blank eyes of these implementors of Soviet terror, describing their gaze as «сонный, стоячий» (Braslavskii) or the eyes themselves as «белых, неподкупных, свинец» (Bychin)<sup>25</sup>. The character of Shigontsev is similar to that of Grisha Goldenburg in *Neterpenie*, a chatterbox who will turn against his former friends. When the Bolshevik terror causes uprisings among the Cossacks, the lower ranks such as Braslavskii are executed as scapegoats. Shigontsev, however, not only escapes thanks to his higher position, but continues to justify his actions, feeling that the Cossacks had mutinied because he had not been harsh enough in the first place. He eventually is found murdered in a gully, and no attempt is made to find his murderer. Other fanatics include Orlik, who categorises people as though they were chemical compounds: it is Orlik's perception that Migulin had too high a percentage of Cossack nationalism which eventually leads to his downfall. Bychin, another latter-day Nechaev, uses his influence in the Revkom to settle old scores with his neighbours, such as Slaboserdov, who had once had Bychin's brother beaten up for harrasing his daughter. It was such misuse of power for personal vendetta or advantage, as we have seen in relation to the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in the Literary Institute described in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, that was eventually to cause the snowballing effect of the Purges. The 1930s were a time when, as with the French Revolution, the revolution in Russia did devour its own children, those principled old Bolsheviks such as Pavel Letunov's uncle Shura

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 470 and p. 462.

and Trifonov's father, Valentin, upon whom the character of Shura is based. The purging of such old Bolsheviks left behind a much depleted party of opportunists or intellectually and morally underequipped "new men and women" drafted in to fill the ranks with compliant puppets.

Shura, whom Letunov follows to work on the Don, understands that the Cossacks are not all counter-revolutionary and that harsh treatment will only lead to future rebellion, whereas Shigontsev and Braslavskii have no such understanding or a long-term policy. Shura tries to temper their brutality, but does not always succeed. For instance, he falls ill when Bychin is trying to have Slaboserdov arrested, and leaves Migulin's trial in disgust when he realises he can do nothing to stop his execution. Shura is a long-standing revolutionary, who has served time in the Tsarist camps. He possesses integrity and honesty and does not seem to have been blinded by what Letunov often describes as the heat and the smoke of the lava of those times, but in this he stands virtually alone.

As Denikin starts to advance on the Don, Migulin becomes increasingly frustrated by the enforced inaction inflicted on him as a punishment for his supposed ideological deviations. Eventually he can take no more and decides to lead his soldiers to the front without authorisation. Labelled a traitor by the Bolsheviks, he is arrested and sentenced to death, only to be pardoned at the last minute. He is demoted, but later given a regiment in 1919. However, in February 1921, he is again arrested on concocted charges of 'participation in a counter-revolutionary conspiracy'. Trifonov does not say exactly how he dies, only that «своей судьбы не избег».<sup>26</sup> Migulin's historical counterpart, Mironov, was shot exercising in the yard of Butyrskaiia Prison in Moscow while awaiting trial, and his name was then wiped from the history books until his rehabilitation in 1960.

In the novella *Starik*, the hero Letunov is responsible for the rehabilitation of Migulin, spending many weeks and years in state archives, trying to clear the Cossack's name. When Asia discovers Letunov's part in her husband's rehabilitation, it brings her to write to him over fifty years after their last meeting. The fact that Asia says it came as a surprise to her that Letunov personally was responsible for clearing Migulin's name annoys the old man, and indicates the reason he became involved in the rehabilitation. Asia's expressed belief that Letunov, like so many others, had actually believed in Migulin's guilt at that time hits a raw nerve.<sup>27</sup> Letunov admits that «может, и верил, но не

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.605.

так, как другие. Совсем не верить было нельзя.»<sup>28</sup> However, as is revealed on the last page of the novel, Letunov, always ready to berate others for the selectiveness of their memories, has failed to recall one important fact about his behaviour during Mironov's trial:

«Истина в том, что добрейший Павел Евграфович в двадцать первом на вопрос следователя, допускает ли он возможность участия Мигулина в контрреволюционном восстании, ответил искренне «Допускаю.» [III, 605 - 606].

It is the unacknowledged guilt of his participation in the death of Migulin that still racks Letunov years later, prompting his mission to clear the Cossack's name. Yet he has still, in 1973, failed to solve one question- why *did* Migulin lead his troops without orders against Denikin in 1919? He asks Asia this when he finally meets her over fifty years later, but receives no reply, only that she never loved anyone as much as Migulin. Asia's picture of Migulin is quite apolitical. To her he is simply the man she loved and who loved her. She understood him better than the others, but after his death had to conceal the fact that she had been his wife for fear of reprisals to her and her family. In some ways, Letunov's perception of Migulin is tainted by jealousy, not of his military success and popularity, but of his success with Asia. At the time, he had in some ways hoped that, without Migulin, Asia would grow to love him instead. Not surprisingly, then, Asia's letter again stirs his conscience, and he renews his efforts to analyse his own actions and those of others in those turbulent times of the Civil War, in an attempt to understand himself and the world around him.

When Letunov looks back on these times, he often mentions the heat of history's fire which led to the blurring of focus and judgement:

«Когда течешь в лаве, не замечаешь жара. И как увидеть время, если ты в нем? Прошли годы, прошла жизнь, начинаешь разбираться: как да что, почему было то и это... Редко кто видел и понимал все это издали, умом и глазами другого времени. . . . Бог ты мой, и как мало людей ужаснулись и крикнули! Потому что лава слепит глаза. Нечем дышать в багряной мгле. Пылает земля, не только наша, везде и всюду . . . . И я не ужаснулся, не крикнул! И мне красная пена застилает глаза.» [III, 473-4].

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<sup>27</sup> Even Valentin Trifonov, commissar of the Special Corps of which Mironov was commander, called Mironov an 'adventurist' because of the rumours about him; as with Migulin, many believed there was no smoke without fire. See Sergei Starikov & Roy Medvedev, *Philip Mironov and the Russian Civil War*, New York. A. A. Knopf, 1978, p.143.

<sup>28</sup> *Starik*, p. 563.



He feels that only from the distance of the present day can he attempt to make sense of what happened and form an accurate picture of the past, which is crucial for the future. At the time he was only «мальчишка, опьяненный могучим временем...радостно быть в потоке».<sup>29</sup> He was just eighteen when he was appointed Chairman of the Tribunal, which «Ни за что не хотел. Совсем не мое: приговоры, казни.»<sup>30</sup> He feels that he, Volodia, Asia and all the others were swept along by the force of these times, which hardened and numbed their feelings so that virtually no-one was horrified or cried out at the atrocities committed on the Don. *Starik* shows how a particular time can change people, creating 'another life' for them. The terror of that far time cowed people, taught them to keep their heads down and go with the flow, something that was to last through most of the Soviet era and which goes far to explain the condition of the old man's contemporary Russian society of the 1970s. By such reasoning, Letunov is also trying to justify his own actions, his cowardice in failing to defend Migulin, his ready belief in his guilt. However, he remembers how Asia's father once said: «Ну как же, хотя бы суд собственной совести. Ведь момент трусости может быть пожизненной казнью.»<sup>31</sup> As in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, Trifonov here seems to be saying that things can not be blamed wholly on the times, that each individual is responsible for his actions. Letunov seems to recognise this, and he is the only character who has actually been led to do something about it. He was at least responsible for Migulin's rehabilitation, even though he may not have been able to face up to one particular unpleasant memory. Letunov has been both victim and servant of his time; he, amongst many others, was responsible for Migulin's death, but a later terror also claimed him when, accused of industrial sabotage in the 1930s, he was condemned for several years to the camps. Unlike Glebov, who is of a later generation, he has not given in to cowardice and lost his ideals.<sup>32</sup>

Letunov seems to lead two different lives, one in the present day and another life, that of his memories, which in many ways seems more real to him. His relationship with his family is rather fraught, and he feels increasingly old and unwanted by his children who describe him as «такой старенький, такой

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 445.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 474.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 435.

<sup>32</sup> During the novel, Letunov remembers how he once met a former priest who gave him a lump of sugar in gratitude for Letunov saving him from execution twenty years earlier in 1919. Letunov tried to avoid killing people despite the pressure to do otherwise during the Civil War.

жалкий, чудной».<sup>33</sup> Their generation has no interest in history and the ideals he holds dear. Kandaurov, one of the other residents, sees Letunov as «из той породы полувыверших обалдуев, кому ничего не надо, кроме воспоминаний, принципов и уважения...».<sup>34</sup> Like their contemporaries in the *Moscow Tales*, the children's interests centre on improving their standard of living. The relationships between the younger members of the family also remind us of those depicted in the *Moscow Tales*: the usual *bytovie* problems between spouses and neighbours contrasting with the love between Letunov and his late wife. The range of situations and characters are fairly typical, the particularly obnoxious careerist types in the tradition of the Lukyanovs, Gartvig and Klimuk, being represented in *Starik* by Kandaurov and Prikhodko.

Kandaurov is the usual self-made, big-wheel careerist, with all the inherent status symbols: wealth, a big car, mistress and foreign trips. He is currently trying to arrange to work in Mexico for two years, for which he intends to take his wife while leaving his daughter behind, either with his mother-in-law or in a boarding school. Though seemingly respectable in his profession, underneath he is totally amoral, and represents the cynical egoism and materialism of the period of stagnation. Like Shigontsev, he lives only for the present and has no sense of his country's past. He is at first involved in the battle to win ownership of the dacha, using his various connections. However fate wins this particular battle. Kandaurov is diagnosed as having cancer and drops out of the bid for the house. No connections can help this seemingly 'iron man' against a terminal illness. In the end no-one gets the dacha as it transpires that they are all to be knocked down to make room for new government property development, again echoing the theme of urbanisation, common to so many of Trifonov's works.

Prikhodko is an altogether more sinister figure. Letunov remembers him from the past, when in 1925 he voted for his expulsion from the Party for concealing his Cadet background. It is distasteful to Letunov that this former White, whom he describes as a petty liar and having 'a fawning and cunning smile', is now the chairman of the dacha co-operative who will ultimately make the decision as to who will inherit the disputed dacha. He too remembers his past contact with Letunov and never hesitates to remind him of it. Letunov himself tries to keep out of his way, but, like Bychin, Prikhodko uses his power whenever possible to exact his petty revenge.. In 1941 he reported Letunov for

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 568.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.504.

visiting his family in Moscow from the Urals, and he is behind the incident in the hot summer of 1973 when all the stray dogs are ordered to be shot. The whole village runs round trying to catch any dog to shot, including Letunov's grandson, and the old man's own dog is very nearly killed. Herman Ermolaev points out that, as Trifonov was unable to directly discuss present-day repression in the Soviet Union, this incident shows how easily people can be initiated to serve as tools of terror, how they can quickly form a mob with basic instincts to kill innocent victims.<sup>35</sup> Prihodkho and Kandaurov are both careerists, and they, together with Letunov's family, albeit to a lesser extent, show the moral deterioration of contemporary society.

Unlike Letunov, very few of these contemporary characters, with the possible exception of his alcoholic son Ruslan, are at all interested in the past. Like the revolutionaries Braslavskii and Shigontsev, Kandaurov and Prikhodko live only for the present and for their own short-term goals, whether these be 'world revolution' or material possessions and status symbols. They have lost the continuity of ideals and principles upon which people such as the fictional Shura and Trifonov's father had founded their hopes for a better society. Trifonov saw this lack of memory as a lack of accountability, which ultimately leads to a lack of conscience and thus to the conclusion that "everything is permitted". Life without memories is empty, a moral vacuum. It is memory which helps link the present with the past, part of the thread of history which runs through everyone.

Many of the present day characters in *Starik* reinvent the past for their own personal gain. Polina, Letunov's sister-in-law, asks him for a reference stating she was involved in revolutionary activities during the Civil War in order to gain admittance to an exclusive veterans' home. Prikhodko, on the contrary, hides his past deliberately, while people such as Izvarin, a former resident of the Stormy Petrel dacha community, who lost both his parents during the Purges, simply cannot face up to the memory of this period when his life crumbled around him. Even Asia remarks how elementary caution has forced her to try to forget Migulin:

«я издавна старалась об этом забыть, еще с тех пор, когда Сергей Кириллович был объявлен врагом, никому ничего не рассказывала и тем более не писала. И сама поражена, сколько всего осталось в

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<sup>35</sup> Herman Ermolaev, 'The Theme of Terror in *Starik*', in Arnold McMillin (ed.), *Aspects of Modern Russian and Czech Literature: Selected Papers of the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers Inc., 1989, pp. 103-104.

памяти. Ведь прошло больше пятидесяти лет. Нет, наша память человеческая - поистине чудо природы.» [III, 558].

Asia's remembers Migulin as the man she loved, and emotion sometimes makes memory unreliable. Letunov often complains that she only remembers certain parts of their past, but he too is guilty of this in failing to remember that he gave evidence against Migulin at his trial. Emotions play a part in this too, and as Letunov himself says, «наша человеческая память - еще более чудо потому, что умеет поразительным образом одно отсеивать, а другое сохранять!».<sup>36</sup>

Now an old man, Letunov's memories, both of his country's past and his wife, are increasingly important to him, but he cannot decide whether they are a pain or a comfort to him:

«Дни мои все более переливаются в память. И жизнь превращается в нечто странное, двойное: есть одна, всамделишная, и другая, призрачная, изделие памяти, и они существуют рядом. . . . И вот задумываюсь: что же есть память? Благо или мука? Для чего нам дана? После смерти Галя казалось, что нет лютее страдания, чем страдание памяти. . . и я решил, что память назначена нам как негасимый, опаляющий нас самосуд или, лучше сказать, самоказнь, но через какое-то время, . . . я почувствовал, что в страданиях памяти есть отрада. . . . Тогда подумал, память - это оплата за самое дорогое, что отнимают у человека. Памятью природа расквитывается с нами за смерть.» [III, 417-418]

He sifts through his memories as if tidying out an attic, trying to «разъять, отделить одно от другого»<sup>37</sup> in order, albeit sometimes painfully, to find out the truth about Migulin and the Civil War, but as he and others show, «память - штука ненадежная».<sup>38</sup> When he starts his research to clear Migulin's name, many people paint different pictures of the Cossack, but all believe their memories to be correct, «Каждый считает, что только он знает истину».<sup>39</sup> One old man even became very annoyed at the suggestion that Migulin was a revolutionary.

In *Starik*, Letunov's memories and those of other eyewitnesses, interspersed with historical documents, are used to reconstruct an account of the

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<sup>36</sup> *Starik*, p.565.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 476.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.565.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 451.

Civil War. Both are needed to help find something approaching objective truth. Letunov's version is of course somewhat biased, and is balanced by Asia's memories in her letters and meeting with Letunov, as well as by both Kandaurov's and Izvarin's account of the old man, which on the whole seems to be a respectful one. The picture of the Civil War given in *Starik* is not the usual Soviet glorification; it shows as F. Eberstadt says "the black skies of socialism".<sup>40</sup> Like Sholokhov in *Tikhii Don*, Trifonov shows the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks while implementing their policy of de-Cossackisation, atrocities of which those at the very top of the Central Committee must have been aware. He goes further, tentatively showing the links between this terror and the later terror under Stalin. To do this before *glasnost*, when Soviet historians finally began to examine the link between Leninism and Stalinism, a link which had previously been denied or simply ignored under Krushchev's de-Stalinisation, as it was a threat to the Party's political legitimacy, shows Trifonov's formidable independence of mind.

Further depths of historical perspective is conveyed by the debates between Letunov's family on Ivan the Terrible, madman or Russia's saviour, and whether his brutality was really necessary, whether indeed there had ever been a time when "all was permitted", could easily be a discussion on Stalin.<sup>41</sup> Similarly pregnant with meaning is the incident with the rat at Pavel's school. The rat is due to be dissected in a science lesson, but the children debate on whether to spare its life: «рассуждают о науке, об истории, о гильотине, о Парижской коммуне. «Великие цели требуют жертв! Но жертвы на это не согласны!»» [III, 431]. Ironically, upon its release, the rat is caught by a cat.

That the novel could be published at all was probably due to the fact that Trotsky is often blamed for the policies described and this was in agreement with the current party line.<sup>42</sup> Trifonov could not openly blame Lenin. On the contrary, Lenin is shown as sympathetic towards Migulin when he meets him. The historical documents in the novel, which do not appear to show the complicity of the whole Party hierarchy, are not given any specific reference. Thus the reader can take his choice as to whether he is reading history or fiction.

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<sup>40</sup> F. Eberstadt, 'Out of the Drawer and into the West', *Commentary*, 1985, no. 1, pp. 36-44.

<sup>41</sup> This has echoes of Anatolii Rybakov's novel *Deti Arbata*, which also features Stalin's tendency to compare himself to Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great as justification for his brutality.

<sup>42</sup> Like *Dom na naberezhnoi*, *Starik* was first published in the journal *Druzhiba narodov*, without any major difficulties

The directive on de-Cossackisation, for instance, is toned down considerably in the book when compared with the actual one. As always, Trifonov went as far as was possible under the circumstances to encourage his readers to rethink history without actually overstepping the bounds, which did not, of course, save him from critical disapproval.

Trifonov does not give any clear-cut answers either on the Civil War or on Mironov (Migulin). As he often stated, his task as a writer was not to judge but to understand. Instead he examines how people reacted under difficult circumstances, showing the state of flux which existed in Russia at this time and restating the importance of individual responsibility. The Bolsheviks' dehumanisation of people by lumping them into categories, according to which their very right to existence was brought into question by the blind implementation of generalising directives, demonstrated a complete lack of tolerance and compassion (traits which Trifonov strongly opposed). This unquestioning acceptance of the efficacy of terror is subtly shown to have led to the moral vacuum present in Trifonov's contemporary society.

Letunov, like Sergei and Grisha Rebrov before him, is striving to put right the falsification of history and making their society one of *беспамятства*. Letunov, like his creator, believes that the past has to be honestly reassessed in order to understand the present and build a decent society for the future. The truth «ведь только тогда драгоценность, когда для всех».<sup>43</sup>

In *Starik* Trifonov, as well as examining further his important themes of memory, history and truth, takes a personal look at the phenomenon of time, concluding: «старость - время, когда времени нет».<sup>44</sup> As in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, the past and the present intersect, and Trifonov analyses how the two relate to one another. In one interview, he says:

«Время - таинственный феномен, понять и вообразить бесконечность. Старинные мастера, средневековые допустим, рисовали такие картины, триптихи: младенец, человек зрелого возраста, старик. Но ведь время - это то, в чем мы купаемся ежедневно, ежеминутно... Я хочу, чтобы читатель понял: эта таинственная «времен связующая нить» через нас с вами происходит, что это и есть нерв истории.»<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Starik*, p. 598.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 594.

<sup>45</sup> 'Книги, которые выбирают нас', in *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, p. 288.

This sums up Trifonov's concept of *slitnost'*, of time and history, the threads which run through every person and connects people together: «жизнь - такая система, где все загадочным образом и по какому-то высшему плану закольцовано, ничто не существует отдельно, в клочках, все тянется и тянется, переплетаясь одно с другим, не исчезая совсем».<sup>46</sup>

However, it is one thing to state a principal and another to make it work in terms of a work of art, as Trifonov does in both *Dom na naberezhnoi* and *Starik*. The latter novel covers overall a period from 1914 to 1974, with the memories of Letunov connecting the two, as he lives two lives, one actual and one of remembrance. The action moves from one to the other in no particular order, only in the framework of Letunov's consciousness, in a series of flashbacks and memories triggered by present-day incidents. Yet we are not confined to Letunov's mind. Objectivity is achieved by the use of three narrative voices, that of Letunov, Kandaurov and Izvarin, as well as of Asia's voice in her letters (which open the novel) and by the interpolation of various historical documents and letters connected with the Civil War. There is a wide range of characters, both past and contemporary. Trifonov is developing his mature style of a polyphony of voices, following on from his last major work, *Dom na naberezhnoi*. The lack of temporal continuity is compensated for by associative imagery. The heat of the summer of 1973 causes Letunov to recall the explosive events of the revolution of the Civil War, the fires of history, echoing the theme of *Otblesk kostra*. Fire symbolism is often used in *Starik* to describe these times, for example:

«Сви́реп год, сви́реп час над Россией... Вулканической лавой течет, затопляя, погребая огнем, сви́репое время... » [III, 473]

Characters such as Shigontsev no longer exist, «время пережгло их дотла...»<sup>47</sup>, very few «пробурил насквозь эти годы, набитые раскаленными угольями и полыхавшие жаром, и вынырнул безувечно из огня в прохладу глубокой старости и новых времен.»<sup>48</sup> Water symbolism has much the same function. Time is often compared to a river, «поток времени» sweeping the characters up and carrying them off downstream.<sup>49</sup> Much, of course, is seen to have disappeared in the flood,

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<sup>46</sup> *Starik*, p. 521.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 456.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 518.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, p. 468, p. 518 and p. 521.

«СМЫЛО, УНЕСЛО, УТОПИЛО, УГРОХАЛО...»<sup>50</sup> echoing the opening of *Dom na naberezhnoi*.

One change in the symbolism of *Starik* is that the dacha no longer symbolises a childhood idyll, a place of peace and harmony, as in previous works. Instead, it has already been invaded by Letunov's family bickering and is under threat from urban development. The old man only has peace there when he remains there alone and this is felt as a present respite rather than a lost Eden.

Novels on old age and memory were popular at this time in Soviet fiction, such as those by Rasputin, Belov, and Kataev.<sup>51</sup> Trifonov, a sick man and no longer young, could sympathise with his protagonist, and he continued to examine old age and death in the collection of short stories, *Oprokinutyi dom*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 518.

<sup>51</sup> In his article 'O neterpimosti', Trifonov defends Kataev's novel *Sviatoi kolodets* against previous criticism from Dudintsev, and argues that sympathy and understanding should be shown towards the old man in this work. See *Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia*, pp. 67-75.

<sup>52</sup> 'Oprokinutyi dom. Rasskazy', *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 58-87.



## CHAPTER 8

### RETROSPECTIVE WORKS

In 1979 Trifonov got married for the third time to the writer Olga Miroshnichenko. She too had been previously married to Berezko, a writer of official war novels. They first met when Olga attended Trifonov's seminars at the Literary Institute. Trifonov was fairly scathing towards her, accusing her of only trying to write because her husband was a writer and of wasting time at his seminars when she was already being published. He gave her a lift home from the seminar on occasion and by the third time began to talk to her, asking her about her love-life and from then romance started. A son, Valentin, was born prematurely in April 1979 and hung between life and death for a few months, which caused a great deal of torment and grief for Trifonov. Trifonov, it seems, was happy with Olga; they shared a very warm relationship and she shared his interest in sport and watched Spartak football matches with him.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***OPROKINUTYI DOM***

Trifonov's next work after his marriage was a collection of seven short stories, *Oprokinutyi dom*. (*The Topsy Turvy House*)<sup>2</sup>, which deal with his travels abroad. When these first appeared in 1981, only six stories were published. The other, 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok', ('A Short Stay in the Torture Chamber') only came out thanks to glasnost in 1986.<sup>3</sup>

The first story in the cycle, 'Koshki ili zaitzy' ('Cats or Hares'), is set in Rome. Here Trifonov again deploys the device of a temporal double-take by recalling a visit to the same place 18 years earlier and how he has changed since then:

«Тогда мне было тридцать пять, я бегал, прыгал, играл в теннис, страстно курил, мог работать ночами, теперь мне пятьдесят три, я не бегаю, не прыгаю, не играю в теннис, не курю и не могу работать ночами. Тогда приехал в Рим в толпе туристов, теперь я здесь один.»  
[IV, 193]

Many things have changed since his first visit, not just his health. Then he was a poor, struggling writer, now he is richer and can afford to stay in hotels and take

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<sup>1</sup> As Vladimir Novokhatko recalled in an interview, 30 September 1993.

<sup>2</sup> 'Oprokinutyi dom. Rassказы', *Novyi mir*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 58-87.

<sup>3</sup> 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp. 118-24.

taxis. His writing and his attitudes have changed too; time has made him somewhat world-weary:

«Тогда меня все ошеломляло, я все хотел заметить, запомнить, мучился желанием написать что-нибудь лирическое обо всем этом, а теперь ничто не ошеломляет и не слишком хочется писать.» [IV, 194]

On a second visit to the town of Genzano, Trifonov recalls a story he wrote all those years ago, 'Vospominaniia o Dzhentsano'.<sup>4</sup> This short story tells of the Italian love for football, but also of the universality of the experience of fascism, under which both his own nation and Italy had suffered, albeit on opposing sides.<sup>5</sup> His style of writing has also changed in this period over which he published his best works. Time has changed many things, but Genzano, it seems at first, remains untouched, exactly the same as it was nearly twenty years ago. However, when he asks about the restaurant where he dined during his last visit and ate roasted hare, it turns out the owner sold up when it was discovered he served cats instead of hares. This shocks Trifonov, and leads him to wonder whether it makes his story untrue and whether he should re-write it, to incorporate the new-found reality of the situation. He always felt he should write the truth, however unpleasant it may be, from eating cat instead of hare to his grandmother's approval of Stalin in *Otblesk kostra*. Indeed, this is precisely what distinguishes Trifonov from many other writers who preferred to keep to the socialist version of realism. He realises, though, that there is no point in rewriting old work as he too has changed. He cannot bring those times back. Some of his companions on his first trip to Italy are now dead

The concept of time continues to fascinate him. During a visit to Switzerland, Trifonov noted how strongly he felt the weight of time.<sup>6</sup> In Italy however, it is completely different. There the people have no sense of time and are continually running late and Trifonov feels this is because:

«Здесь, в Риме, перемешаны тысячелетия, перепутаны времена, и точное время трудно определить. Оно здесь не нужно. Ведь это Вечный город, а для вечности опоздание не имеет значения. Вы живете в доме XIX века, спускается по лестнице XVIII, выходите на улицу XV и садитесь в автомобиль XXI века.» [IV, 193]

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<sup>4</sup> Written in 1960, first published in *Molodaia gvardiia*, 1964, no. 4, pp. 114-119. See also Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> See also Chapter 5, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> See 'Puteshestvie v stranu chasov', in *Beskonechnye igry*, Moscow: Fizkul'tura i Sport, 1989, pp. 361-71.

From eternal cities, Trifonov moves to eternal themes in the next story, 'Vechnye temy'. Again in Italy, Trifonov meets up with up with a former editor of a Soviet journal, based on Boris Zaks, a former editor at *Novyi mir*, who, as Trifonov recalls, had turned down some of his short stories many years before because they dealt only with 'eternal themes'. This was at the time when Trifonov had been suffering from writer's block and he had been naturally upset by this dismissal of his work, especially when the editor would not expand on the exact meaning of what he meant by 'eternal themes'. Now, 22 years later and hardly a word passed since, this man has left Trifonov a note at the hotel, saying he wants to see him. Trifonov is somewhat surprised, and when he says so, it transpires that the editor has a completely different perception of the past:

«Мы знакомы. Я помню, мы отдыхали вместе в Ялте. Потом встречались как-то у Градовых. Я знал бывшего мужа вашей жены. Кстати, передайте ей большой привет.» [IV, 200]

Again, Trifonov demonstrates the subjectiveness of memory, especially from person to person, and this is further illustrated in 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok', when an old student acquaintance is shown to have a completely different view of the time he tried to have the writer thrown out of the Komsomol for concealing that his father was an 'enemy of the people'. In the story *Vechnye temy*, Trifonov's wife objects to him meeting the editor, as she claims something unpleasant had always happened when she had met him herself. Her forebodings come true, although through no fault of the person in question; an explosion, put down to a neo-fascist group, interrupts her husband's meal with him. When the train on which Olga Romanovna and Trifonov are travelling stops the next day and fills with an acrid burning smell, she says:

«Я говорила: сразу начнутся неприятности. Не надо было с ним встречаться.» [IV, 201]

However, as always Trifonov, interested in the development of the inner man rather than in external events, replies, «самые большие неприятности у него». The positions of the two men have now changed completely. The editor has become a bitter old man, though not too different to how Trifonov remembered him, with the same face of a "sad executioner". Much to his annoyance, he has had to leave Russia and his old father behind as his third wife (the first two, grotesquely, both died of blood poisoning) wants to join her family in America. His displeasure at having to leave Russia and now Europe explodes in his vehement questions to Trifonov as to why he continues to write, as he himself now has no purpose in life, let alone readers. Trifonov, knowing he can return to his homeland, pities the reluctant emigré, and his last thoughts in this story are of the weather at home. As already shown, Trifonov had very

strong personal views on emigration, but these were indeed personal views and did not, as Natalia Gross has suggested, stem from Soviet patriotism or any desire to continue living under totalitarianism.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of Russian emigres is further explored in the next story, 'Smert' v Sitsilii'. In recalling a visit to Sicily, Trifonov opens the story by posing the question «Что можно понять за несколько дней в чужой стране? Можно ли догадаться о том, как люди живут? И как умирают?» [IV, 211]. He has come to Sicily to attend a literary event, the yearly award of the Mondello prize for best foreign writer. He discusses the whole event in a light-hearted way, commenting on how when writers get together, they only talk in generalisations, keeping their more perceptive thoughts for their novels. He himself admits to making bland generalisations in the debate on the 'death of the novel'. However, the discussion of the "horizontal of prose" inspires the statement «что меня интересуют не горизонты прозы, а ее вертикали.» [IV, 212], a preference excellently illustrated in these stories and in his next novel *Vremia i mesto*. What really does interest Trifonov about Sicily is its most infamous inhabitants, the mafia, but he finds that most Sicilians do not want to discuss them. All that Mauro, a Sicilian journalist will say is that:

«Она (мафия) как эти горы. Вы сейчас их не видите, они скрыты темнотой, но вы знаете, что они есть. Они окружают город.» [IV, 215] This omnipresence suggests a parallel with the Soviet KGB, who in the current political climate, appear to have formed a mafia of their own.

Mauro does, however, help Trifonov meeting the widow of a notable Mafieri, the novelist Margarita Maddaloni, who writes thrillers about precious stones. A rich woman living all alone in a castle, she had begun writing to assuage her loneliness after the death of her husband, eleven years before the writer's visit. It turns out that she too is Russian and throughout the course of the story, Trifonov learns more about her background, as she enjoys reminiscing with a fellow Russian speaker. Like Trifonov's family, she too once lived on the Don, but his memories of this time are completely different to hers:

«Я слушаю в ошеломлении - Ростов? Новочеркасск? Двадцатый год? Миронов? Думенко? Генерал Гнилорыбов? Это как раз то, чем я теперь живу. Что было моим - прамоим - прошлым.» [IV, 218]<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Josephine Woll, *Inner Migrations: Iurii Trifonov's Last Stories*, Washington: The Wilson Centre, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Occasional Papers, 221, 1987, pp. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> This echoes Sergei Leonidovich's words to Rebrov in *The Long Goodbye*: «Понимаете ли, какая шутка: для вас восьмидесятый год - это Клеточников, Третье отделение,

Maddaloni's father, it transpires, was a Cossack, her mother an actress. Her father died in 1918 and she left Russia at the age of 17, two years later. After travelling throughout Europe, she finally settled in Sicily after the Second World War. She recites Cossack poetry and it turns out that she went to school with the nephew of the architect who owned the house where Trifonov's aunt lived in Novocherkassk. Maddaloni's family were Whites and she reflects that Trifonov's uncle may well have prosecuted her brother. Now however, in times of peace, all this is recalled without rancour, their common language and nationality unites them, as does their awareness of approaching death. To her the most dreadful thing in life is 'death in Sicily'. She cannot go back to her homeland, while Trifonov can always return to Moscow and it is never far from his thoughts. The smell of fish in Sicily brings back memories of food shops in Moscow.

Despite all her wealth, Maddaloni is to die a lonely old woman in a foreign land. At the end of the story it transpires that her husband, a mafia boss, is probably buried under one of Sicily's roads. Thus, in a week, Trifonov has succeeded beyond expectation in seeing 'how people live and die' in a foreign land.

In *Oprokinutyi dom* Trifonov continues to study the lives of other countries, as he recalls a lecture tour in the United States in the 1970s. Las Vegas occupies pride of place in the description of America and this in turn leads him to recollections of times spent in Russia, at dachas at Repikhovo, when he and his friends used to gamble, always in an attempt to change fate. Again the preoccupation with time and death surface from beneath the placid travelogue. One of the author's gambling friends, Boria, has just died, and he reflects on this. Boria tried to change fate by gambling, but fate has now been changed for him by death, and Trifonov recalls various other people he knew at the dacha who also have died and their attitudes towards death.

Trifonov's parallel observations on the USA have prompted American critics, such as Josephine Woll, to suspect him of going along with Soviet anti-American propaganda in order to have the stories published, for he comments on the stranger things he has witnessed, thus portraying Americans as "virtually all freaks".<sup>9</sup> However, in my opinion it would be truer to say that Trifonov is

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бомбы, охота на царя, а для меня - Островский, «Невольницы» в Малом, Ермолова в роли Евлалии, Садовский, Музиль...» [II, 195-6].

<sup>9</sup> See Josephine Woll, *Inner Migrations: Iurii Trifonov's Last Stories*, Washington: The Wilson Centre, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Occasional Papers, 221, 1987, pp. 10-12.

merely describing what has caught his eye, as no doubt a foreigner visiting Russia would do. Even though the Americans may seem to him somewhat more eccentric than his fellow countrymen, Trifonov believes that the problems and lives of the two nations are essentially the same, as they are for human beings the world over. America gave him a new perspective on his own country:

«Я вижу свой дом, но в перевернутом виде . . . Всегда, когда уезжаю далеко, я вижу свой опрокинутый, раздробленный дом.» [IV, 223]

As the portraits of his American acquaintances show, they have the same emotions, the same бытовые problems and relationships with their families. These people have brought him to see Las Vegas, but the city is no surprise to him as the world is the same all over; a thread connects it all:

«какая-то нить - я чувствовал - соединяла эти два местечка. . . . нить, которая соединяет два таких непохожих местечка, очень простая: она состоит из любви, смерти, надежд, разочарований, отчаяния и счастья, краткого, как порыв ветра.» [IV, 229, 230]

Although Trifonov's American editor may say that he does not think the writer's *Moscow Tales* will be popular with American readers as they prefer to read about successful, optimistic people, the lives of these readers - the Russian author muses - are still quintessentially the same as those of his Soviet public. The Americans Trifonov meets on his travels are not overly successful or optimistic people. They may try to outdo fate, but in the end she will catch up with them in death, that «вихрь, действующий молиниеносно» [IV, 225], in whose orbit all men become equal. In the light of such thoughts, the words of the old man in the casino ring true «Все в этом мире мои родственники».

The next story, *Poseshchenie Marka Shagala*, revolves around a visit Trifonov made to the artist's home in France, but again it leads to reminiscences about Moscow and his past life there with his first wife and her parents. The father-in-law mentioned in the story, Iona Aleksandrovich, is based on Nina's father, Amshei Markovich Niurenberg, who had been friends with Chagall in his youth, spending time with him in Paris in the 1910's and 1920's. While Chagall emigrated from Russia in 1922 in order to preserve his artistic freedom, Iona Aleksandrovich chose to stay and had to sacrifice his. Communal flats were built on Maslovka for Soviet artists, where it was thought they would all live happily together, and it was here that Trifonov and his wife lived with her parents in the early 1950's. Trifonov's visit to Chagall thus brings back memories of a past life long forgotten. He remembers how highly Iona Aleksandrovich thought of Chagall, although this was something he had to conceal from the authorities as Chagall, having enjoyed a brief period of

influence and popularity in the early twenties, had emigrated and was condemned as a mystic and formalist during the period of obligatory Socialist Realism. Iona Aleksandrovich had destroyed many of his earlier works which were perceived as being too influenced by 'bourgeois Chagallism' and had had to conform to the official Socialist Realist line. His favourite picture was an early self-portrait Chagall gave him, but when a neighbour, Afanasy, stole it, there was little he could do to retrieve it - contacting the authorities would only have drawn attention to the 'negative influences' in his own art. The picture was only returned by Afanasy's wife upon her husband's death in the mid 1950's, during a more liberal period.

The Iona Aleksandrovich of the story is depicted as the last link with the period of Trifonov's first marriage and he has died, aged 92, two years before the writer's visit to Chagall. Chagall himself is now 93 and is used to everyone from his past life having died. His usual question when asking about someone, including Iona Aleksandrovich is «Он умер?». He asks Trifonov and Olga Romanovna lots of questions about Russia, about Moscow and about his hometown Vitebsk. Trifonov is almost afraid to ask Chagall if he remembers his father-in-law: «Почему-то казалось, это будет все равно что спросить: существовала ли моя прежняя, навсегда исчезнувшая жизнь?» [IV, 240]. He wonders if Chagall has any idea how much Iona Aleksandrovich had suffered because of him, and wants to tell the artist all about his life, and how in his old age he had wanted to marry his 24 year old nurse, who was quite happy to accommodate him in order to inherit a flat in Moscow. The portraits of Chagall and Iona Aleksandrovich again show how similar people can have completely different fates. Yet Chagall's impressive house and world fame does not mean that he did not lose out on something too; on looking at a print of one of his paintings they have bought, he comments:

«Каким надо быть несчастным, чтобы это написать...» [IV, 239]

Trifonov feels that the painter has essentially summed up art and literature with these words and, in the next story, he shows how the roots of many of his works can be traced to his own grief.

*Seroe nebo, machty i ryzhaia loshad'* ('Grey sky, masts and a chestnut horse') deals with the time Trifonov spent in Finland as a child and the symbols enumerated in the title are almost all he remembers of this period in his life. A trip to Finland to visit his publishers brings these memories back, and again the narrative switches from past to present, often following Trifonov's thought patterns. Trifonov's family moved to Finland in 1926 when his father was made trade representative at the Russian Embassy in Helsinki.

Trifonov also remembers three knives his father brought back from Finland which he was not allowed to touch. This of course made him want all the more to show them to his friends. He recalls his reaction to his father's arrest during the Purges, . Being only eleven and having no real concept of grief, he only has «одна постыдная мысль - вместе с ужасным предчувствием» [IV, 243]: he can now play with the knives. However, his father's death turned his world, and his home, upside down. He had to move from the house on the embankment, change schools, and of course had no desire to show the new children he met in these circumstances his father's Finnish knives. The knives themselves disappeared with time, as did his father, other relatives, including his cousin, the writer Mikhail Demin, who emigrated to France, with the result that Trifonov lost touch with him for many years. The skis which his father brought back from Finland also disappeared during the war, as Trifonov discovered when he returned to the family dacha after being evacuated to the south. The picture conjured up by memory of the messy, abandoned dacha also has the feel of an *oprokinutyi dom*, a house turned upside down after another catastrophic change in Trifonov's circumstances.

The Finland of his memories is not at all like the country as it is now, for time has brought with it commercialisation, and he thinks how similar but yet different it is to Russia. So, when asked by his publishers what he wants to see in Finland, he replies:

«Стариков. . . . Меня интересуют старики лишь потому, что они обладают памятью. Говоря точнее - меня интересуется память.» [IV, 245]

He meets some old people and hears one woman's tales of the communist uprising in Finland, a time when Finnish revolutionaries of the generation of the writer's father, dreamed and strove for world revolution. At a book signing, a woman approaches him to say that her mother knew his father, and he goes to meet her. However, all she can remember about Valentin is that he was a very pleasant man, polite, even to his subordinates. She keeps repeating this phrase, again illustrating how memory is selective in various ways, whether it be through conscious choice or simply the effects of old age. «Память, как художник, отбирает подробности» [IV, 246] She does however confirm one of his childhood memories of Finland, that of the chestnut horse, which it transpires belonged to a Mr Anderson who worked at the embassy and often let children ride on it. This leads Trifonov to reflect at the end of the story:

«Вот что странно: все умещается внутри кольца. Вначале была лошадь, потом возникла опять совершенно неожиданно. А все остальное - в середине.» [IV, 250]



As in the previous story, Trifonov has again looked for confirmation of the continuing existence of his past lives. *Seroe nebo, machty i ryzhaia loshad'* echoes many of Trifonov's themes, that of different lives, of events which bring about 'another life', such as the death of a father or the war. The symbol of a 'topsy-turvy' house resounds through this story too. Here it is not the reversed image of his homeland as in the story of the same title, but instead his life turned upside down after his father's disappearance. The word 'disappearance' also features strongly, used of family, friends and possessions, and forms the title of the novel examined in the next chapter, *Ischeznovenie*.

The concept of *slitnost'* and intertwining threads is also present. Trifonov is on the look out for the threads, the roots of his early life, although he is aware that a deliberate attempt to discover them can lead to distortion. He writes: «не надо заботиться отыскивать нити, из которых все это сплетено: пусть они возникают внезапно, как ледяной перрон Лахти.» [IV, 243]. So although he has examined his own memory and that of other people, the results, as shown in the remaining story of the cycle, are often open to question.

*Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok* was published after the other stories in 1986<sup>10</sup> at the same time as other stories which also dealt with the effects of Stalinism such as Bulat Okhudzhava's 'Girl of My Dreams'.<sup>11</sup> The setting switches between Moscow in 1950, Austria in 1964 and the 'present day' when Trifonov wrote the story in 1980. In 1964 he had gone to Innsbruck to cover the Winter Olympics as a sports journalist. Now he has changed both as a person and a writer and so has his attitude towards that period:

«Ранней весной 1964 года, когда я еще болел неизжитой любовью к спорту, . . . когда я только что выпустил легендарный фильм о хоккее и не испытывал никакого стыда. . . . Кто там выигрывал, кто проигрывал, я не помню. Вся это ерунда забылась.» [IV, 201]

All he remembers of this time is the place and the hotel visitors book, all the entries which, even throughout the war, commented on the weather, scenery and girls. All, that is, except one German entry about beating England, to which someone had added that England had won after all, and someone else had remarked that all armies were idiotic. The events of the past, even of only

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<sup>10</sup> 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp. 118-24, and then with the other stories in the 4 volume collected works, Volume 4, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> The posthumous publication of other works by Trifonov will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

twenty years ago, almost seem as if they never happened, both in the lives of the whole world and in his own.

Trifonov also remembers the one thing that spoiled his time in the Tyrol, the presence of N. of whom he had an 'icy memory'. N., it transpires, was an old acquaintance of his from the Literary Institute. At one point they had been good friends and had gone on a field trip together to Armenia with Nadia, a girl whom they both liked. However, they fell out during the trip, partly due to the fact that N. began dating Nadia. For the next four years they had kept their distance from each other, but Trifonov did not mind as he was busy writing *Studenty*:

«Моя слабая книга получила известность, глаза мои застилал туман, и тут на меня обрушилась гора.» [IV, 207]

Trifonov's world threatened to collapse about his ears when one evening N. came round to his room, under orders from Nadia, who felt that he should tell Iurii that he was going to speak out against him at a meeting to decide whether Trifonov should be expelled from the Komsomol for concealing the fact that his father was an 'enemy of the people', which had paradoxically come to light precisely because *Studenty* was such a success. Trifonov recalls N.'s behaviour during this meeting and how he recalled all sorts of insignificant details to back up the belief that Trifonov was a 'bad apple' in the Komsomol's basket, «гнилой внутри». As a result of N.'s testimony, Trifonov had been expelled from the Komsomol, though later reinstated with a severe reprimand.

Now, in 1964, Trifonov can hardly believe that all this really happened to him, it is all just like a bad dream:

«Может, кто-нибудь нарасказал небылиц, а в моем уме все переверотилось и опрокинулось на меня? Кто-то сказал: писатель в России должен жить долго. И правда, можно застать многие нечаянности и чудеса. Время затмевает прошлое все густеющей пеленой, сквозь нее не проглянешь, хоть глаз выколи. Потому что пелена - в нас. А нечаянности уходят туда же, за пелену.» [IV, 208]

Time, it seems, has spread its veil over N.'s memory also. Fourteen years later, in 1964, he had acted in a very friendly manner towards Trifonov, as if nothing had happened. This had angered Trifonov, who finally decided to have it out with N. and ask him why he had behaved as he did. Time had passed and it would, the writer thought, be easy for him to answer. On a visit to a mediaeval torture chamber, he felt the appropriate time had come. He thought he knew what the answer would be and rehearsed the scene in his mind, even imagining disposing of N. into a well, one of the former torture devices, in return for the torment he had caused him. The answer, when it came, took him completely by surprise. N. stressed that Trifonov was not expelled as a result of his testimony,

but rather re-instated; that he had saved him and suffered for this. Like many of Trifonov's characters, such as Glebov, N. had edited his memories so he could feel that he behaved honourably. This makes Trifonov wonder about his own memory:

«Да я забыл, не помнил, перепутал, все ушло во мглу. . . . Я подумал о толстых книгах в отеле «Штубенталь»: в самом деле, нет ничего в этом мире, кроме снега, солнца, музыки, девушек и мглы, которая наступает со временем. Ведь после прибывания в камере пыток прошло пятнадцать лет, и оно тоже - во мгле. Н. умер от болезни сердца восемь лет назад.» [IV, 211]

Again Trifonov is stressing the fallibility, but at the same time, the cathartic importance of memory. By association, Trifonov thinks of Chekhov as he might have been had he lived another twenty or forty years:

«Чехов мог бы дожить до войны, сидел бы стариком в эвакуации в Чистополе, читал бы газеты, слушал радио, питался бы кое-как, по карточкам, писал бы слабеющей рукой что-нибудь важное и нужное для той минуты, отозвался бы на освобождение Таганрога, но каким бы видел свое прошлое, оставшееся за сумраком дней? Своего дядю Ваню? Свой вырубленный сад?»

Hence, with the passage of many years, Trifonov looks differently, often with embarrassment at earlier works, which seem no longer to have any meaning in his present life.

In *Oprokinutyi dom*, various journeys around the world have made the mature Trifonov reflect on his present life and on his earlier trips abroad as a sports journalist. He examines the role of literature and art in a changing world. The advent of old age has naturally also made him reflect more on time and death, continuing the theme he started with his last novel *Starik*. Like Marc Chagall (even though he is nearly forty years younger than the artist), Trifonov accepts death as a fact of life rather than regarding it with any morbid fascination. Possibly he was so aware of mortality because of his own failing health. He was to die within a year of completing these stories.

The essays continue many of the themes examined in Trifonov's previous works, such as memory, time and history. His travels around the world have shown him how even if countries have different, sometimes conflicting cultures, problems of *byt* are common to them all and all are affected by the eternal themes of love, death and fate, even as all are joined by the threads of *slitnost*.

The title of the cycle, *Oprokinutyi dom*, the 'topsy-turvy house', expands on Trifonov's previous 'house' symbolism. None of his 'houses' have proved

stable, secure places, all are threatened by historical factors such as the Purges and the war. These upturned the lives of many Russian citizens such as Trifonov and his family, leaving them homeless and scattered around the country and abroad. Some stayed in the Soviet Union, like Trifonov and his family, and his experiences are similar to those of the vast majority of such people. Others chose or were forced to leave their country for various reasons and Trifonov, with his new-found freedom to travel, now has the opportunity to examine their lives also. Some seem to be quite comfortable abroad, such as Chagall, but others suffer alienation, like Senora Maddaloni who is extremely lonely, or have found no life outside Russia, such as the former editor of *Novyi mir*. All, he feels, have lost a part of themselves in leaving their homeland.

The tales in *Oprokinutyi dom* are similar to his earlier stories of his travels as a sports writer, but here the author has perfected his sophisticated handling of time and brings to his travelogue the experience of a lifetime and a greater mastery of the stream of consciousness style which allows for switches from the past to the present, often as a result of thought patterns. The narration is in the first person, and *Oprokinutyi dom* is the most openly autobiographical of Trifonov's works. It is much clearer that the narrator and Trifonov are one and the same person, and Trifonov used this almost confessional form to express his own views on life and the world around him. His analysis of other countries leads to self-analysis as an essential step towards a more perceptive relationship with the world around him. This is what he means by his interest in the 'verticals' of prose, which was continued in his next novel, *Vremia i mesto*.

### **VREMIA I MESTO**

*Vremia i mesto*<sup>12</sup> is Trifonov's final novel,<sup>13</sup> and in it, he examines the life of a writer, from childhood to the present day. As we have seen, there was an element of autobiography in most of his previous work and *Vremia i mesto* is no exception. The novel opens with a chapter entitled 'Beaches of the 30s', and draws directly on the time Trifonov spent as a child at his family's dacha in *Serebyannyi bor*. However, in *Vremia i mesto*, the influence of Stalinism is felt much more strongly. Sasha and his friends are swimming in the river, playing the usual childhood games. Through these games, Stalinism is shown to have pervaded even the lives of children. The "enemies" in these games are "spies",

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<sup>12</sup> 'Vremia i mesto. Roman', *Druzhiba narodov*, 1981, no. 9, pp. 72-148; no. 10, pp. 22-108.

<sup>13</sup> The novel had just been finished when he died in hospital.

reflecting the horror of mutual distrust in the grown-up world. The children also recall seeing the parents of one of their friends burning documents at their dacha, which brings a strange sense of worry to Sasha. Already, at what was once the idyll of childhood symbolised by the dacha, the Purges are beginning to cast a dark shadow. Moreover, it transpires at the very start of the novel that Sasha, like Trifonov, is fatherless. He has been told his father went to Kiev, never to return.

In a series of thirteen alternately following two separate narrative strands, yet skilfully interlinked, chapters, the novel then follows the lives of two characters, Sasha Antipov and the shadowy first person narrator. However, in contrast to the narrator in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, this narrator does not fulfil a judgemental function, pointing out and thus disassociating himself from the chief protagonist's unethical behaviour. Instead, the characters are complimentary and serve as two halves of a whole person, that is of their creator, Iurii Trifonov. Both Antipov and the narrator in *Vremia i mesto* are much more principled people than Glebov, and this can be seen in the fact that each is consciously aware of his own past throughout the novel. Memory and truth are important to them. The novel opens with Antipov asking himself if he needs to remember incidents from his childhood and past, and deciding he cannot do otherwise:

«Надо ли вспоминать? Бог ты мой, так же глупо, как: надо ли жить? Ведь вспоминать и жить - это цельно, слитно, не уничтожаемо одно без другого и составляет некий глагол, которому названия нет.» [IV, 260].

The second chapter focuses on the narrator's reminiscences of his childhood in Moscow. He lived with his grandmother, as his parents, like Antipov's father, no doubt disappeared during the Purges. The narrative structure of *Vremia i mesto* is more complex than that of previous works, switching from the present to various points in the past in no particular order from the point of view of two main characters and, on occasion, of some minor ones. In the second and subsequent chapters, the Antipov and the narrator look back on their lives and the effect on them of major events, such as the Second World War. The catastrophic impact of the Second World War on Soviet people is shown from Chapter 2 onwards, when the narrator recalls his acquaintances' subsequent fate showing how the huge number of casualties brought tragedy for virtually every family and changed the course of their lives. However, neither the narrator, nor Antipov were called up as, like Trifonov himself, they suffered from myopia.

Antipov recalls the wartime years, when he worked in an aviation factory but, like Trifonov and the narrator, longed to go to the Literary Institute and become a writer. In 1946, his mother returns home from exile, and Antipov's recollection of their reunion is no doubt based on Trifonov's own experience. The novel then follows Antipov's youth, student days and first attempts to become a professional writer, recreating the atmosphere of fear during the Stalinist era which hangs over his life and over the whole of Russia. Even during the seeming unity of the 'Great Fatherland War', workers at his factory see plot and conspiracy everywhere. As in those childhood games, accusations of spying are rife, but this time it is not a game. One colleague, Terentich, believes the management have sent Antipov to spy on the workers. On the other hand, when caught with black market tobacco, he is accused by another worker of being part of an anti-Soviet conspiracy to bring down the army. After over two decades of being ordered by the state to look out for 'spies' and 'saboteurs', "vigilance" had become a way of life. One of Antipov's neighbours reports him to the institute for reading Bunin, an emigré (and one of Trifonov's favourite writers), and also mentions that his mother is living illegally in Moscow. As in many of Trifonov's works, such as *Dolgoe proshchanie* and *Golubinaia gibel'*, neighbours often denounce one another or threaten to do so as a form of blackmail, another result of totalitarian society.

Stalin's death is seen through the eyes of Antipov. He watches the crowds making their way to the funeral on a bitterly cold day, when many were killed in the crush, as he waits for the doctor to carry out an illegal abortion on his wife Tania. However, they decide not to go ahead with the abortion, and new life and hope comes into his life, as well as that of the whole Soviet population with the death of Stalin. Antipov also recalls the Thaw and its effect on those around him. For some it is shown as a somewhat unwelcome and difficult period. One such is Boris Kiianov, one of Antipov's lecturers at the Literary Institute, a character loosely based on one of Trifonov's own tutors there. As a writer, Kiianov's success has been due to writing (and re-writing) his works strictly in accordance with the dictates of *partiinosť*. As a result of de-Stalinisation, one of Kiianov's old friends, Mikhail Teterin returns from the camps but has no desire to see him. It transpires that they wrote a play together in 1934, but after Teterin's arrest, Kiianov removed his friend's name and published it as his own work. Of course it would not have been published otherwise, but Teterin has no recollection of asking Kiianov to remove his name, nor will his wife comment on whether Kiianov actually did send her any of the play's royalties. Kiianov believes, like so many of Trifonov's characters, that he acted honourably, no better nor worse than others, but the suspicion and the

guilt that he used Teterin's arrest to further his own career still hangs over him and as a result he commits suicide. This partly echoes the fate of the writer Fadeev - as a leading figure in the Writers' Union, he was in a sense responsible for the arrests of many fellow writers, and when they began to return from the camps in the 1950s, he could not cope with the guilt and shot himself. Antipov is put in charge of finding out the truth about Kiianov, but this proves impossible. Again, he has only people's memories to go on, and memory is, as ever, selective and differs from person to person.

Antipov also undertakes a similar search for the 'truth' when asked to be an expert witness in a litigation case. A writer, Dvoynikov, is accused by his deputy Saiasov of plagiarism when he publishes a series of classical texts (such trials were common during the post-war anti-cosmopolitanism campaign), and Antipov is engaged by Dvoynikov's lawyer to compare the texts and offered a fee to come out in his client's favour. Antipov is, however, made aware that Saiasov's brother is an editor at the publishing house to which he has just submitted his first novel, and is told that it will only be published if he finds in favour of Saiasov. Under pressure from both sides, he decides nevertheless to try for a just decision, but again this is difficult. Both characters have their bad sides, but Dvoynikov (literally his name means 'double') has a split personality. He both uses people and also helps them out. In the end, Antipov decides thus: «И оттого, что отступать некуда, и жалеть не о чем, и трусить не к лицу, понял он, что выход один - узнать правду. И он ее узнает. И была она вот такая: Двойников и верно норовил подзаработать за чужой счет, но он же и помогал людям щедро. Как же соединялось это в одном человеке? Да вот соединялось как-то? Все в нем было.» [IV, 409].

Dvoynikov, like Kiiasov, is a complex character. Life is never black or white. Antipov, however, unlike most of Trifonov's earlier characters keeps his integrity and, as a result, sacrifices the publication of his first novel, but also refuses to take the extra money promised by Dvoynikov and his lawyer. In his final work, Trifonov at last has a character who sticks to his principles and puts morals and the truth above personal gain.

However, Trifonov does not idealise Antipov. He too has his faults and weaknesses. He has affairs, leaves his wife and goes through a series of spiritual crises. At the end, he has started another life with a new wife and baby, not dissimilar to Trifonov's own position at that time. In this situation, too, nothing is black and white, and as none of Trifonov's previous characters had the strength to escape from unhappy relationships, this decisive action shows courage on Antipov's part. Trifonov tells us not only about Antipov's personal

life but about his progress as a writer. Antipov is always looking for material for his stories. When reunited with his mother, he even tries to compose a story based on this but cannot think of a suitable title which has not been used before. Trifonov treats his character's literary beginnings with wry amusement. He does not romanticise the role of the writer but shows its practical side. With such characters as Kiianov, Teterin and Dvoynikov, Trifonov gives a whole picture of literature under state control in the Soviet Union. He shows the real difficulties of trying to keep honesty and integrity intact while managing to publish. So many of Trifonov's other characters were unsuccessful in this, but Antipov, like Trifonov, though not without difficulty, is successful. Many of the characters see literature as страдание, as did Trifonov himself, and feel that, to really be able to write, you need to have suffered:

«Литература - это страдание....

- Мне кажется, ты не совсем прав, - сказал Григорий Наумович. - Литература не страдание, а скорее, может быть, сострадание.

- Это одно и то же. Милые, ничего, кроме мысли и страдания, нет на земле достойного литературы.» [IV, 287]

Antipov, despite his family background, does not at this stage feel he has suffered enough to be a writer (perhaps because his experiences were fairly universal at the time) and burns his early works. *Vremia i mesto* also contains an extract from a later novel of Antipov's, 'The Nikiforov Syndrome'. The idea is similar to that of Nabokov's novel within a novel *The Gift*, where the main character Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev is writing about Chernyshevsky, but develops the concept further within the surrounding text. It is not merely an extract from Antipov's book that we are presented with. We see him at work trying to write 'The Nikiforov Syndrome', thinking of plot development, of word structure, being interrupted by trips out with his wife and friends and disturbed by his daughter's music. His novel is about a writer writing about a writer, who in turn is writing about another writer, and so on, in a series of mirrors. Nikiforov is writing about Vsevolodov, a sailor and terrorist who died in 1919. Vsevolodov himself wrote a novel about Syromiatnikov, a writer for the journal *Sovremmenik*, who in his turn created the character of Klembovskii, an author engaged in writing about the Freemason Ryndich. These writers, as Antipov himself explains, fit one into another like a matryoshka, with Antipov as the second largest doll, and of course, to follow the sequence through, Trifonov as the largest who houses them all. All the fictional characters have had unfulfilled lives and died before their time, whether by suicide, alcohol, murder or madness. This, and the literary process, is the thread that unites them through the verticals of time, through two centuries of history.



The extracts from 'The Nikiforov Syndrome' mainly concern Nikiforov himself, whose character, Antipov says, is based on Kiianov, whereas others see him as Antipov's alter-ego, i.e. as Antipov is to Trifonov. Antipov examines Nikiforov's relationship with his wife, Goga, in greatest detail and, as in the case of Dvoynikov and Kiianov, has to try to balance differing views, this time concerning her role in her husband's life. Some believe she destroyed Nikiforov as a writer; others that she helped him through his darkest days and took good care of his literary heritage. What does emerge clearly is that Goga had an affair with Nikiforov's interrogator Yarbor in order to save her husband's life, another example of what Stalin's terror led people to do.

Having worked on this novel for 3 years, Antipov has still failed to create a work that can be successfully published. This is in part due to the opinions of his publishers' readers:

«Рецензенты не понимали: что хотел сказать автор романа «Синдром Никифорова»? Если Никифоров малоталантлив и малоудачлив, писать о нем неинтересно. Если талантлив, но малоудачлив, надо показать социальные корни на фоне жизни страны. Антипову казалось, что у него есть корни и фон. Но говорили, что фон не тот, что это вчерашний день.» [IV, 468]

The novel does not fit into the required Socialist Realist formula of the moment, a difficulty with which Trifonov himself was too familiar from critical reactions to his own works, especially those concerning characters with unsuccessful, unfulfilled lives. He had to change *Vremia i mesto* at the request of the censor (although fuller versions were printed abroad in Germany and Italy<sup>14</sup>, whereas the original Soviet edition was censored even further when reprinted in 1984). Trifonov had originally intended twelve chapters, finishing with Antipov's death, but was told that this would be too "pessimistic" an ending and so allowed him to live on. The 'Nikiforov Syndrome' was written during a time of crisis, but at the end of the novel Antipov has found happiness again with a new wife and child, having been told by an old woman «...человек должен любить. И быть любимым. Все остальное не имеет смысла» [IV, 502]. It is at the end that the narrator and Antipov meet up again. They had encountered one another previously during the war when they both worked in the same factory, and at this point the narrator remarks that he does not particularly like Antipov as they are too similar. Both had wanted to be writers, but the narrator has gone

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<sup>14</sup> See J. Venturi's article 'Kakim byl roman Trifonova do tsenzury', *Russkaia myst'*, 2 May 1986, p.10, for an examination of the Italian version of *Vremia i mesto*, published in 1983, which kept the more political and sexual passages of Trifonov's original text.

into science instead. Now Antipov's son Stepan is the doctor in charge of the narrator's daughter, who has had a nervous breakdown. Life and time move on, but the two characters they have come full circle. In a sense, as reflections of their author, they are reunited at the end of the book. Antipov has been suffering from ill-health, and on being carried out to the ambulance, he reflects that he is happy because he has found his time and place:

«не было времени лучше, чем то, которое он прожил. И нет места лучше, чем эта лестница с растрескавшейся краской на стенах, ... с распахнутым окном, за которым шевелился огненный ночной город.» [IV, 507]

He has recognised that he cannot run away from himself or his fate, but instead has to face up to them. The themes of time and place have always been important throughout Trifonov's works, and in this novel their intersections are plotted once again as Trifonov looks back on his life through the medium of a fictional character and a narrator. All the titles of the chapters relate to a time or a place, or both - the 1930s, winter, Tverskoi boulevard, Gorky Park. The penultimate chapter is simply entitled, like the novel itself, *Vremia i mesto*, and it is here that Antipov states Trifonov's belief: «Все имеет свое время и место.» [IV, 500]. As already noted, Trifonov felt that his father bore the mark of 1917, and is always aware of the effect of time on his characters. He himself, in creating Antipov, is creating himself in his own generation and in his own space. The novel does not end on a overtly pessimistic personal note, but with Moscow itself, the main setting as so many of Trifonov's works, the most important place in his life. The characters may not be able to bring the old times back but they still have Moscow, their city, which, perhaps because it is capable of change and development in time, has always been a more stable factor in their lives than individual houses or dachas.

Antipov does not merely serve as an alter ego for his creator, he is a representative of his country as a whole. The reader sees the backdrop of Soviet history, the Second World War and the Purges, events which touched the whole of society, against Antipov's own life, as the backdrop of the 1905 Revolution and Civil War are seen against the private life of Zhivago. Against the backdrop of such events, the individual's difficulty in sticking to his or her principles, at least at such a time and in such a place, stands out in stark relief. Trifonov's last novel covers an extended timeframe, from 1937 to 1980, as its hero changes from small boy to mature adult writer, but deals primarily with the 1940s, the 1950s and the present day. There are many gaps within the temporal framework; it is again a «роман пунктиров». Roughly three quarters of the text is devoted to Antipov, while the narrator's reminiscences of childhood,

youth and then his present life complete the story. Essentially, this is a polyphonic novel, and it is not always clear which character is speaking, but the two main characters' lives reflect and enhance one another and bring all the narrative threads together at the end. Each of the thirteen chapters could stand on its own as a separate story, but the novel's apparently fragmented nature is unified by the overall pattern of interconnected images of space and time. The narrative structure of *Vremia i mesto* is similar to that of *Obmen* and *Dom na naberezhnoi*, which also contain a third person main character with a shadowy first person narrator, but it is much more complex. Trifonov as usual does not judge, but because the two main characters are based so closely on himself, his own life and feelings, there is not the usual detachment. Instead Trifonov examines as it were his own life and the actual literary process, and develops the concept of time and place at a much deeper level. Time may have deformed many of his other characters, but it is fitting that his last major character should emerge from the testing process as a man of principle like his creator. From the height of his own hard-won experience, the author is able to show that integrity is, after all, compatible with some success, and does not necessarily entail premature death, as it was seen to do for Sergei in *Drugaia zhizn'*, although the fact that Antipov was only preserved from a similar fate at the insistence of the censors does suggest that Trifonov was aware he would not live to see all his work published or even completed.

## CHAPTER 9

### POSTHUMOUS WORKS

Iurii Trifonov died on 28 March 1981 in hospital. He had undergone a routine kidney operation but then died a few days later from a heart attack. He had recently finished *Vremia i mesto*, which was published after his death. He had also been working on a number of themes before his death. His widow, Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, has said that he intended to write his next a book on a person in prison, on how a person lives alone.<sup>1</sup> He was still interested in writing a novel on the revolutionary Lopatin, possibly as a comparison with Nechaev. Alternatively, as the theme of betrayal was always important to him, he was also considering a work on the double agent, Asef.<sup>2</sup> She also told me that Trifonov had always wanted to write the truth about Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but this would have been impossible to publish in his lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

However, with *glasnost*, many books were published which their creators had thought would never be seen in print in the Soviet Union. These included some by Trifonov, such as the seventh story in his *Oprokinutyi dom* cycle<sup>4</sup>, as well as the complete version of 'Zapiski soseda', which dealt with his relationship with Tvardovsky.<sup>5</sup> Trifonov's main work to be published during this period was the unfinished novel which had been written purely for the desk drawer, *Ischeznoenie*.<sup>6</sup>

Like Anatolii Rybakov's *Deti Arbata*<sup>7</sup>, Trifonov's work deals with Stalin's purges in the 1930s. The beginning of the novel had already been published separately as a short story entitled *Vozvrashenie Igoria* and dated

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<sup>1</sup> See her 'Popytka proshchaniia' in *Den' sobaki*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> See also interviews with Trifonov before his death: R. Schröder, ' "Moi god eshche ne nastupil..." Iz besed s Iuriem Trifonovym', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1987, no. 8, pp. 96-8; S. Task, ' "Otkrovyennii razgovor." Poslednie interviiu Iuriiia Trifonova', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 7 April 1981, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Olga Trifonova-Miroshnichenko, 13 October 1993.

<sup>4</sup> 'Nedolgoe prebyvanie v kamere pytok. Rasskaz', *Znamia*, 1986, no. 12, pp. 118-24.

<sup>5</sup> 'Zapiski soseda', *Druzhba narodov*, 1989, no. 10, pp. 7-43. This more critical portrayal of Tvardovsky, his true character and his alcoholism, was also printed as 'Vspominanie Tvardovskogo', *Ogonyok*, 1986, no. 44, as well as in a collection of articles *Iadro pravdy: Stat'i, interv'iu, esse*, Moscow: Pravda, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> 'Ischeznoenie. Roman', *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 1, pp. 6-95.

<sup>7</sup> Published in the same year and journal, *Druzhba narodov*, 1987, no. 4, pp. 3-133; no. 5, pp. 67-163; no. 6, pp. 23-151. For a comparison of the two novels see G. Egorenkova, 'Vechnoe vremia', *Moskva*, 1988, no. 8, pp. 182-95.

1973<sup>8</sup>, but the rest could only be published later because of its open discussion of previously taboo subjects. Trifonov had spent many years working on the novel, probably from the late 1950s to the 1970s. The autobiographical element is less disguised than in his other works, as he never expected to have it published. The novel opens during the Second World War with the main character Igor (or Gorik as he is called in childhood) returning to Moscow to work in a munitions factory from evacuation in Tashkent, where his maternal grandmother and sister are still living. The narrative switches from his wartime life in Moscow and the strained relations between his surviving relatives to memories of his childhood during the 1930s at the height of the purges. Trifonov gives Igor his own myopia and a similar family background: such details as his father being connected to the Finnish Embassy and their dacha in the *Serebriannyi bor*. Igor, like his creator, conceals that his father was executed as an 'enemy of the people' in order to obtain a job in the factory and return to the city he loves, realising, just as Trifonov did, that:

«... та правда, которую требовалось написать, не была правдой. И обман, значит, не был настоящим обманом. Был всего-навсего обманом обмана. Это никому пока не известно, и, может быть, еще долго не будет известно, и ему самому известно не окончательно, но он чуял, что правда тут не простая, какая-то двойная, секретная.»<sup>9</sup>

Like Trifonov's, part of Igor's childhood has been spent in the house on the embankment, and *Ischeznovenie* contains many episodes similar to those recounted in *Dom na naberezhnoi*. The children have a secret society and Lonia Krastyn, like Anton Ovchinnikov in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, is based on Trifonov's friend Lev Fedotov, although Gorik's dependence on him is somewhat like that of Glebov on Lev Shulepnikov. However, this time the autobiographical character Gorik is inside the house, whereas Glebov was looking in from the outside. Also, he is essentially a different character - helpful, studious and fair with none of Glebov's egoism nor envy. The effects of Stalinism are seen through a child's eyes. Gorik is too young to understand the snippets of overheard conversations between members of his family relating to the political events around them, but Stalinism has permeated his world too, which makes it all the more poignant. As in *Vremia i mesto*, the children discuss their friends whose parents have been arrested. Lonia feels that they should

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<sup>8</sup> See *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura. 1978, volume 1, pp. 234-53.

<sup>9</sup> *Otblek kostra; Ischeznovenie*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988, p. 176.

expell one such boy, Sapog, from the secret society as his father has been arrested on the charge of being a German spy, a reflection of how adults would shun those whose relatives had disappeared. He also believes another boy should be thrown out for being a "corrupting element" just because he has become besotted with a girl. Gorik does not understand all this jargon but it disturbs him. Lonia also quotes revolutionary slogans to get Gorik to steal his brother's torch for his secret society, simply saying that "all revolutionaries made expropriations", overriding a basic sense of right and wrong. At school, there is an exhibition to commemorate the centenary of Pushkin's death, and Gorik hopes to win a prize. However, the award goes to the child who conforms to the current cult of personality by making a figurine depicting "Young Comrade Stalin reading Pushkin", while the exhibit of another pupil disappears when he has to leave the school as the son of an "enemy of the people".

The adults in the novel also try to make sense of the whole situation but at times seem to understand it less than their children. Gorik's family, the Baiukovs, are clearly based on Trifonov's. His mother should have been a poet, but instead her husband sent her to become a livestock expert at the Timiriazev Academy, just like Zhenia Trifonova. His father and uncle are both old Bolsheviks, who fought in the Civil War, and between them share characteristics of both Valentin and Yevgeny Trifonov. Gorik's uncle has written a manuscript about a future war entitled 'Waiting for the Battle', comparable to Valentin Trifonov's book *Konturi griadushchei voini*. Uncle Misha wants his brother to give this manuscript to Ordzhonikidze, in the hope that it will be published, and that he will be allowed to return to the Military Academy and then go to study the Civil War in Spain. Maybe Valentin Trifonov had also hoped his book would enable him to return to military work. Instead, both in real life and in the novel, the attempt to regain former status only hastened arrest and execution.

The events of the 1930s are also seen through the eyes of Nikolai Grigorevich Baiukov, Gorik's father, and show how the old Bolsheviks tried to comprehend what was happening. Like his children, he watches as friends and colleagues begin to disappear around him, but at first he and his family believe they must be guilty otherwise they would not be arrested. These attempts to justify the situation and deliberate insensitivity merely accelerated the process. As one of his old friend says: «Все мы толстокожие, пока не коснется нашей шкуры.»<sup>10</sup> Nikolai Grigorevich has also come to the conclusion that people «Слишком легко верят в виновность других, в то, что «что-то

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 284.

есть», и чересчур спокойны за собственную персону.»<sup>11</sup> It is only when events touch his own family that he begins to try to work out why it is happening. He and his brother discuss a number of possible reasons, believing, like many of the old revolutionaries, that the mass arrests must either stem from fear of fascism and an imminent war, or are perhaps even the work of Hitler's own secret service, which would explain the purge of the officer class; alternatively the terror is rooted in the Russian tradition for dictatorship, for power consolidated in one person's hands, a theory which would also explain Stalin's almost unbelievable rise to power. Eventually, as those close to him are arrested, Nikolai Grigorevich realises that his time will come soon, but is concerned about what will happen to his family rather than himself. However the scene when he thinks they have come to arrest him when there is a knock at the door in the middle of the night shows the fear that so many others went through. The psychological effects of Stalinism causes the adults to become nervous (the number of heart attacks and suicides increased dramatically), and even the children to sleepwalk. The underplayed episode when the family see one old woman fall past the window having thrown herself off a balcony after the arrest of her husband is enough to exemplify the whole horror of the times through which the characters have to live.

Stalinism is shown more explicitly than in any of Trifonov's previous works; the epidemic of fear and suspicion throughout the whole population reaches at times ridiculous proportions. A cameraman who cut out a section of film where the shadow was on Stalin's face is accused of subversive activity, a tennis player who loses a match must be a saboteur. The atmosphere of fear is much heavier in *Ischeznovenie* than in *Dom na naberezhnoi*. A Rolls-Royce outside the house on the embankment is described as being «черный, как гроб»<sup>12</sup>, as is the house itself. Even as the old Bolsheviks try to cope with the Terror by ignoring it, they are being succeeded by a new breed of men without their idealism, prepared to exploit it in their own favour. Trifonov's other works have always shown characters who flourished as a result of Stalinism, and such a character in *Ischeznovenie* is Florinskii. Florinskii has risen rapidly through the ranks and now lives in the house on the embankment, as well as recently having acquired an OGPU dacha at *Serebriannyi bor*, just like the old revolutionaries. He dislikes the old guard intellectuals such as the Baiukovs, having come from a poor, uneducated family, and thus has the same envy

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 284.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

towards them as Glebov. Having attained power, he plans to exploit it and takes pleasure in doing so. Florinskii has known Nikolai Grigorevich since the Civil War and still bears a grudge for his having sentenced a cousin of his to death for extortion and plundering while working for the Cheka. He uses his position to discredit Baiukov, unearths a document on which it is possible to base an accusation of Trotskyism, and knows the day is fast approaching when he will be able to settle his score. As with other such characters, Florinskii's eyes reveal his true character: «как блеснули департаментским холодом».<sup>13</sup> Nikolai Grigorevich wonders who is responsible for promoting him, as in the old days he would merely have been a clerk. He fails to see that the idealistic, principled revolutionaries are now being everywhere replaced by unprincipled, power-hungry men loyal to Stalin.

Once such idealistic revolutionary is David Shvarts, a Jewish old Bolshevik and once a well-known judge, who has now been pushed out of the State Prosecutor's Office into retirement. He too was involved in the Civil War, where he saved many from the firing squad but was also responsible for many executions. Like Ganchuk in *Dom na naberezhnoi*, his day has now passed, and people such as him are no longer important to the Party. He tries to understand and justify events but, by 1942, he is a sick, half-crazed old man, always scribbling notes and hiding them under his pillow, a shadow of his former self. He may have kept his life during the Purges, but not his sanity. Shvarts is based on Trifonov's father friend, Aaron Sol'ts, who features in *Otblesk kostra*, but the portrayal is completely different as in this book Trifonov is writing quite openly of the effects of the Stalinist regime on old Bolsheviks.

In *Ischeznovenie*, Trifonov portrays other types of revolutionaries, many of which have prototypes in previous works, not so explicitly shown. Again, there are the dogmatic old revolutionaries such as Gorik's grandmother, no doubt based on Trifonov's own grandmother who never denounces Stalin despite all the grief he brought to her own family. She believes without question that the arrests must be correct, and self-righteously says that she never committed "mistakes against the party" as so many others have done. She has no compassion for those who are executed, including the husband of Gorik's other grandmother. Another example is Siniakova, an old woman evacuated to

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202. There are other examples of this with other workers from the NKVD - the doorman at the house on the embankment is described with «театрально-пристальным» gaze (p. 266), while the officials who come to arrest Volodovik with «таким же бледным, ничего не выражающим лицом» (p.274). However, the NKVD workers who make the arrests and house searches are seen as being just ordinary people with their own job to do as they talk about getting back to see their families. One is described washing his hands, as if symbolically trying to wash away the guilt.



Uzbekistan with Gorik's grandmother. She lords it over the others, makes spiteful remarks to his grandmother about the fate of her children, Gorik's parents, and is forever bragging about her pure revolutionary record, using it at every opportunity to get what she wants. These portrayals are more derogatory than those of their prototypes in Trifonov's previous works, such as Dmitriev's mother in *Obmen* and Sergei's in *Drugaia zhizn'*.

Events of the 1930s are interdispersed with those of 1942, to show the further effects of Stalinism on everyday Russians. Igor returns to Moscow from evacuation in Uzbekistan and lives with his other grandmother, aunt and cousin while working at the munitions factory. The war has affected all their lives, and some, such as the orphans from Vitebsk who lost their counsellors when their orphanage was bombed, even feel as though they have lost their parents for the second time. A sense of fear still pervades their lives, and not just fear of being invaded by the Germans. Igor is continually worried that his employers will find out about his true background, and is terrified he will be arrested for sabotage when he spells a word wrong on a banner. It is also shown how Igor hears new of his mother, exiled to a camp in Kazakhstan (as Trifonov's own mother was): she is allowed to write to her family once a month, and Igor's grandmother always refers to her as 'Vasia' in letters to her grandson.

However, although Igor is glad to be back in Moscow, he does not consider it to be home:

«Если бы он мог домой! Но там, куда он придет через час, там нет его дома. Там - добрые люди, сердечные люди, там их дом, а его дом где-то в другом месте. Нет, и не там, где стоит под замком нежилая комната с замороженными книгами, и не там, за четыре тысячи километров, где в обмазанном глиной бараке живут старушка и девочка . . . Есть ли у него дом на земле?»<sup>14</sup>

The arrest of his parents had completely turned Igor's world upside down, and from then on he has had no home. The source of stability and security, of his family and their love, has been shattered. Gorik had everything, Igor has nothing. Again, Trifonov shows the image of the *oprokinutyi dom*. Igor has recurrent dreams about his past life, including one rather sinister one where he is with his father, who then disappears and is replaced by a woman dressed in a military uniform with a beard and moustache. The end of the passages on the 1930s revolves around Gorik attending the May Day parade with his father which, deep down, he feels will be their last outing together. The atmosphere is

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 235.

heavy with portents; a mirror falls from the wall near the beginning of the novel; the house on the embankment is described as a prison, the Rolls-Royce outside as a coffin; Gorik is uneasy at the adults' conversations and all that is happening around him. Much is unsaid, but the experience of a whole generation is nevertheless graphically conveyed. The opening quote from Dostoyevsky «Знаете ли, я скажу вам секрет: все это, быть может, было вовсе не сон!» in some ways echoes Anna Akhmatova's comment in *Requiem*, «Нет, это не я, это кто-то другой страдает», and conveys the feeling that all that has happened is almost unreal. *Ischeznovenie* is Trifonov's own Requiem, from the child's rather than the parent's viewpoint. It is his tribute to the experience of his fellow Russians during Stalin's purges, a whole lost generation, to the loss of their families and of the ideals they represented.

In *Ischeznovenie*, Trifonov is examining the history of his country and his family and trying to work out why things happened as they did. This was an important theme throughout Trifonov's work as it had such a profound effect on his own life. The novel goes further than just relating what happened to his parents. It portrays the effects of Stalinism on a whole society, both on agents and victims. The full force of the "cult of personality" is felt at the end of the novel when Stalin's portrait hangs ominously above the Kremlin for the parade.<sup>15</sup> Yet Trifonov does not make Stalin a scapegoat for Soviet society. The Purges were on such a huge scale that many could not comprehend what was happening, why so many people were being executed, and either believed the official story or tried to block it out. Fear for their own lives and those of their families led people to lose all sense of reason, honesty and trust, resulting in what Gorik's father describes as a state of "temporary insanity". In *Ischeznovenie*, Trifonov tried openly to work out some of the questions his father's execution posed: were his father's ideals right? Why did he not recognise or try to stop what was happening? What happened to his society as a result of Stalinism?

*Ischeznovenie* is thus the most personal and openly autobiographical of all Trifonov's works, almost like a documentary of those difficult times in his life. As in other works, he deploys such devices as overlapping temporal levels and the use of different narrators - an omniscient one recounts Igor's participation in events, but we also hear the narrative voice of his father. Some critics found the stylistic level of the novel lower than that of other works,

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<sup>15</sup> The atmosphere is completely different to the happy, cheerful one of the parade in *Studenty*. The balloon with Stalin's portrait in Nikita Mikhailov's film *Burnt by the Sun* has the same menacing feel.

disregarding the essential point that Trifonov assumed it would not be published and therefore did not polish the text or resort to the sophisticated Aesopian language which had perhaps been part of the fascination of earlier novels in which he handled similar themes. From the opposite point of view, as it were, he was criticised for not adding anything significantly new to what he had succeeded in expressing in his other works. Yet in a sense Trifonov is here writing a final, uninhibited version of events which had tormented him all his life and which are described with more circumspection in *Vremia i mesto*, *Dom na naberezhnoi* and elsewhere. Also, as already shown, the beginning of the novel concerning Igor's return to Moscow had in fact been published as a short story, while the character of Uriuk, the lonely Uzbek working in the same factory as Igor, had also been used in a short story, simply entitled 'Uriuk', which Trifonov wrote as part of his course work for Fedin at the Literary Institute. This story was sharply criticised by his fellow students at the time, and maybe Trifonov enjoyed developing the character further as a maturer writer.

*Ischeznovenie* shares not only incidents and characters but many of the same themes as his other works. In describing this time when there existed what Ellendea Proffer has called an "atmosphere of imposed amnesia"<sup>16</sup>, memory was all-important. Yet the novel ends with the strange comment:

«- Главное, чтобы ты сам забыл.  
Но прошло много лет...»<sup>17</sup>

Some themes are not as developed as in his other novels, but the basic concepts are there. Gorik and Igor lead different lives, *drugie zhizni*. Igor's father and uncle are, like Trifonov's, marked by the revolution and Civil War, showing how history lives on in people and in their descendents. The flow of time and how it changes people is also felt, as when Nikolai Grigorevich thinks on meeting an old friend:

«Странные манипуляции производит с людьми время. Нет, не старение самое удивительное, не одряхление плоти, а перемены, которые происходят в составе души.»<sup>18</sup>

The house imagery is also strong in *Ischeznovenie*. The loss of a home and dacha again symbolises the loss of a childhood idyll, love and security. The house on the embankment stands for the historical moment and Stalinism, the

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<sup>16</sup> Introduction to Yury Trifonov, *Disappearance* (translated by David Lowe), Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Otblek kostra; Ischeznovenie*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988, p. 300.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 283.

loss of his parents and their ideals. Yet at first it seems indestructible and permanent. The description that the narrator gives of the house in the opening of the novel is reminiscent of Mandelshtam's image of the revolution as a ship, which the people onboard cannot steer, taking them to an unknown future, in *Sumerki svobody*:

«Он стоял на острове и был похож на корабль, тяжеловесный и несуразный, без мачт, без руля и без труб, громоздкий ящик, ковчег, набитый людьми, готовый к отплытию. Куда? Никто не знал, никто не догадывался об этом.»<sup>19</sup>

As time passes and the Purges gain momentum, darkness seems to hang over the house and for many it becomes like a prison or grave. What had once seemed stable is no more:

«- но вдруг показалось с мгновенной и сумасшедшей силой, что и эта светящаяся в ночи пирамида уюта, вавилонская башня из абажуров тоже временна, тоже летит, как прах по ветру...»<sup>20</sup>

The house of Gorik's life is soon turned upside down, and his past life disappears. '*Ischeznovenie*' is, if not a completely new, a much more powerfully expressed, indeed a key concept in this work. It runs throughout the novel: the disappearance of buildings, of people, of Igor's father at the end of the recurrent dream. It does not merely relate to the disappearance of the house and dacha from Gorik's life, but to that of his father, his mother, their friends and colleagues, as well as of millions of other people from all walks of life who disappeared during the Purges and the Second World War, (or emigrated) taking the old ideals with them to leave a society based on egoism and conformism, the society examined in Trifonov's *Moscow Tales*.

*Ischeznovenie* contains many of the themes from Trifonov's published novels and thus acts as a key to his other works. Trifonov devoted a lifetime to trying to understand how what happened to his parents had affected his own life and generation. With time and the more liberal political climate under Gorbachev, this most mature and least encoded account of this personal and great tragedy could finally be made known. It is a great shame that Trifonov did not live to see this. "The truth" had, in a sense, been known since the rehabilitations, yet in another had remained unattainable. What matters is Trifonov's attempts to get closer to the truth.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen how Trifonov changed with time, and his works with him. Although Trifonov's unpublished works appeared thanks to *glasnost*, together with other previously banned books, a Collected Works was published between 1985 and 1987 which contained *Otblesk kostra*, *Dom na naberezhnoi* and passages omitted from editions printed under Brezhnev. By the beginning of the 1990s, Russians were beginning to buy pulp fiction, and the early excitement of reading banned literary works turned to a desire to buy other previously unobtainable literature - thrillers, romances, erotica. Journals, such as *Novyi mir*, *Druzhba narodov* and *Znamia*, in which Trifonov published, began to find times very hard. Interest waned, subscriptions fell, state funding was cut and the cost of paper also rose. Thus readership dropped dramatically. For the first time in history, Russian literature was becoming affected by market forces. Many writers, such as Andrei Bitov, have found it hard to adjust to all this<sup>1</sup>, to adapt to consumer demand and to the fact that now, relieved of the necessity of bamboozling a watchful censor while conveying their version of truth to an alert public, authors are no longer the conscience of the nation. Literature is diminished and the unspoken understanding between the writer and the reading public severed.

As freedom after the fall of communism allowed writers and critics to speak out so much more openly, there was a backlash against the *шестидесятники*, 'the men of the 60s', such as Evtushenko, who were now accused of having conformed and been mere tools of the Soviet state, "the official opposition". Trifonov does not really come under the blanket of this group, being slightly older, but the perception of them affects the current perception and unpopularity of his work. At present, under a different political regime, his novels are no longer thought of as controversial, and the questions they raise appear to many to have lost their urgency.

However, there is evidence that Russian readers are now tiring of pulp fiction and turning again to more subtle works with more direct relevance to the present state of their society. Trifonov would no doubt have been fascinated by these changes in his nation's choice of reading material, especially by the breed of 'New Russians', whose consumerism far outclasses that of his characters from the 1970s, the 'dead souls' of their time. To speculate on whether or not he would have seen the emergence of this class as confirmation of his own

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance 'Writers without communism: Standing by a shallow grave', *The Economist*, 14 October 1995, pp. 153-6; 'Literary scene faces new age of anonymity', *The Moscow Times*, 10 December 1996, p. 9.

diagnosis of tendencies in Brezhnev's Russia is not necessary. Others are already becoming aware that the materialism of characters like the Lukianovs form the roots of the current generation's behaviour, to which it is linked by many threads. With time, therefore, the view of Trifonov will no doubt change again for the better, especially when the need for a reassessment of Russia's past and understanding of the present is more generally felt. Critics, such as Natalia Ivanova<sup>2</sup> and Iurii Shcheglov<sup>3</sup>, believe that, when the current situation calms down, Trifonov will reappear and the greatness of his achievement in researching the verticals of history and the convolutions of memory under difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances will be fully understood.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Natalia Ivanova, 14 October 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Drugaiia zhizn' ', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6 September 1995, p. 6

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