

A Memorable Time: the prose of Vladimir Makanin, 1987-1995

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by

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Abstract

Spanning over three decades, the prose of Vladimir Makanin bears witness to the extraordinary changes Soviet/Russian society and literature have undergone, and to which he, as a writer, has been continually exposed.

The focus of the thesis is Makanin's abiding concern with the condition of man; man as individual and man as a collective term. The position of man in time (contemporaneity), out of time (the eternal memory of man), and through time (the past, present and future). Despite this apparent central concern, the author's prose is constantly changing, and what seemed previously to be absolutes are subverted. In this unstable environment the author continually expresses the reality in which he perceives man to be, until the concepts of 'reality' and the nature of 'man' are themselves destabilised.

Chapter 1 provides an introductory overview of Makanin's literary career and critical reception. The five core chapters examine different presentations of man's condition. Chapter 2 discusses the tension of the individual amongst the collective, with particular emphasis on the spatial representation of this dilemma. The third chapter is an examination of the incorporation of parables, myths and legends, revealing attempts to depict a 'higher reality' and also the author's means of overcoming socialist realism's censorship constraints. In Chapter 4, the author's concept of 'genetic memory' is considered as a temporal and spatial construct for examining man's individuality and condition in contemporary society. This chapter additionally highlights the author's move from his early social realist depictions revealed in the first two chapters, to his later interest in Russian postmodern theories found in the following two chapters. In Chapters 5 and 6 Makanin's ideas on narrative, history, and man's postmodern condition are analysed. The final text to be discussed, *Kavkazskii plennyi*, is examined as an innovation in Makanin's philosophy and postmodern prose.

Preface

Transliteration in the thesis follows the Library of Congress system without diacritics.

All quotations are in Russian, with the exception of those of two words or less in a sentence which are transliterated for ease of reading.

The titles of all authors' texts are italicised, except for individual narratives in a cycle of stories.

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CHAPTER 1

Introductory overview and critical reception

Vladimir Semenovich Makanin has, for many years, followed an isolated and turbulent literary path. Although his first work *Priamaia liniia* received moderate praise on its publication in 1965, Makanin then encountered many publishing difficulties and even periods of virtual obscurity.¹ Only from the late 1970s did the situation change: delayed recognition in Russia and more recent international acclaim introduced a positive turnaround in the author's career. The catalyst for his world-wide recognition was undoubtedly the 1993 Russian Booker Prize award for *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*, although this was not without controversy (an intrinsic part of the Russian as well, it would appear, as the British Booker awards!). Critics considered *Laz*, shortlisted for the 1992 prize, to have been of higher literary merit and hence the award in 1993 was in their eyes a compensatory gesture: more a reward for Makanin's reputation as a writer than for the quality of the text in question.²

¹ *Priamaia liniia*, *Moskva* (1965:8), 4-109. A review of this text by V. Akimov, for example, is an encouraging one (see bibliography). In an interview with Vitalii Amurskii, Makanin states that the chief editor at *Moskva* generously published his first work relatively swiftly. However, this was not the case with subsequent texts. See Vitalii Amurskii, "...Siiuminutnye temy menia malo volnuiut", *Russkaia mysl'*, 11 January 1991.

² *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*, *Znamia* (1993:1), 9-53; *Laz*, *Novyi mir* (1991:5), 92-133. There is one significant article devoted to the Booker Prize in

European recognition gradually increased throughout the 1980s, particularly towards the end of the decade, with the publication of various multi-faceted texts considered by critics and reviewers to have been written in the postmodernist vein,³ and has recently culminated in 1998 with the literary stir surrounding *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego*

general: Sally Dalton-Brown, 'Lucrative literature: the Booker Prize in Russia', *Europa*, 2 (1994), 23-33. There is, however, an overview of preceding awards in the introductory section of Arch Tait's article, 'The Awarding of the Third Russian Booker Prize', *Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), 660-77. Articles devoted to the 1993 prize include: Konstantin Kedrov, 'Premiia Bukera – Vladimiru Makaninu', *Izvestiia*, 16 December 1993, p. 6; Alla Latynina, 'The Russian Booker: Rewarding Reputation...', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 January 1994, p. 10. See also Dalton-Brown, 'Lucrative literature...', p. 27 for additional article references.

³ The numerous translations of these texts are a good indication of the interest surrounding them. European publishers, however, were quicker than their British counterparts to produce the translations, and some became best-sellers. For example, see Zuzana Stolz-Hladky, *Studien zur Poetik Vladimir S. Makanins "Odin i odna", "Otstavšij", "Utrata"* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 169-70. German translations of Makanin's texts began to appear as early as 1978. According to Makanin himself, the Booker Prize has been significant in that it has brought his prose to the attention of the British public. In Germany eight books had already been published by this time, and eleven in France. This information is from a video interview at Keele University with Makanin conducted by Valentina Polukhina during his visit to England, 24 October 1995.

vremeni, the first work which he himself terms a novel.⁴ His career well reflects the troubled times through which Soviet and Russian writers have been buffeted, times which the author has himself incorporated within his prose to both aesthetic and historical effect. However, to date there has been no full overview of Makanin's prose either in Russian or in Western criticism. In the light of this, the present chapter will examine Makanin's background and literary career, providing a brief overview of his work and the numerous ideas therein, particularly in the context of the Soviet and Russian governments' official attitudes to literature in the period in question. Critics have touched upon these areas to a greater or lesser degree in their articles, and then proceeded to publish extremely divergent opinions on all aspects of Makanin's prose. An examination of these opposing views and their implications, particularly concerning the application of literary labels such as *sorokaletnie*, will then provide the context for an assessment of the author's position in contemporary Russian literature. Finally, the chapter will establish the parameters and theory underpinning the present study.

The author's background and publications

⁴ *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*, *Znamia* (1998:1-4), 5-106; 32-96; 69-137; 53-116. Makanin claims that journal editors have designated earlier texts as novels, but that this has been a mistake. This was discussed in my interview with the author held in Moscow's *Dom literatorov* in December 1994.

Ironically, Makanin's first publication was not a literary one: after graduating in mechanical mathematics from Moscow University, he remained in this field for approximately five years, publishing a work on linear programming and weapons technology in his late twenties.⁵ Only then did he turn his attention to the arts, enrolling on a film-maker's and director's course and later adapting *Priamaia liniia* into an unsuccessful film.⁶ Since 1965, he has published over sixty works at more or

⁵ See 'On Reading Makanin', afterword in Mary Ann Szporluk, *Escape Hatch and The Long Road Ahead: Two Novellas by Vladimir Makanin* (Dana Point: Ardis, 1996), pp. 183-92 (p. 183). Alla Marchenko states that the author spent up to ten years in the mathematics field after graduation. Alla Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei tropy', afterword in V. Makanin, *Otstavshii: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), pp. 423-31 (p. 423). However, in his video interview at Sheffield University in 1995, Makanin declares that he spent 5-6 years in this area: interview conducted by Elena Chopchits, 27 October 1995. Additional biographical information can be found in Byron Lindsey, 'Translator's Preface', *The Loss: A Novella and Two Short Stories*, translated by Byron Lindsey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. ix-xvi.

⁶ See A. Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei...', pp. 423-4. There is disagreement amongst critics as to whether Makanin first wrote the film script and then adapted this into a *povest'*, or vice versa. Marchenko adheres to the former chronology; however, in the Amurskii interview Makanin clearly says that the *povest'* was written first.

less regular intervals, apart from a lengthy period of inactivity following a serious car accident in 1972.⁷

Priamaia liniia was successfully published in the journal *Moskva*, yet Makanin's subsequent prose was refused publication by journal editors and therefore the majority of this work first appeared in book form.⁸ This decreased his chances of gaining official recognition and explains the little attention accorded to him by Soviet critics in the first decade of his literary career, and in turn meant he was virtually unknown to the general reading public.⁹ When Makanin finally did catch the critics' attention from

⁷ The Amurskii interview contains further details of his accident and lengthy treatment.

⁸ Lev Anninskii provides some statistics to prove this: in twenty years of work that saw the publication of thirteen books, only half this number of texts were published in the literary journals. See Lev Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta: Vladimir Makanin i literatura "seredinnogo" cheloveka', foreword to V. Makanin, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 3-18 (p. 4). The article was published earlier in *Znamia* (1986:12), 218-26.

⁹ Makanin himself explains his late entry into the literary scene as partly due to the car crash and partly because his publications were primarily in book form. See Peter Rollberg, 'Interview mit Wladimir Makanin', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 33 (1987), 1659-74. The interview was also published as 'Interv'iu Petera Rolberga s Vladimirom Makaninym' in V. Makanin, *Odin i odna: kniga dlia chteniia s kommentariem na angliiskom iazyke* (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1991), pp. 259-77 (p. 262). All references will be taken from the latter publication.

the mid- to late 1970s onwards, he did so in an unusual way: many of the well-known critics attempted to define the nature of his creativity, but they could not agree on their analyses and produced (and continued producing for a number of years) greatly divergent reviews.

Critics, including Helena Goscilo, have tended to divide Makanin's literary output into three separate stages and this is a helpful context in which to examine his prose and the literary climate of the time:

his work falls roughly into three periods that reflect a steady process of maturation: that of apprenticeship until the early 1970s; of wide-ranging experimentation from the mid-70s until the mid-80s; of self-assured artistry since 1987.¹⁰

¹⁰ See 'About the Authors', in *Glasnost: An Anthology of Russian Literature under Gorbachev*, edited by Helena Goscilo and Byron Lindsey (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990), pp. 461-2 (p. 461). The Piskunovs, however, have a slightly different framework. They initially divide Makanin's work into two periods: the first from 1965 until 1978, and the second from 1979 onwards. However, they do state that there is a case for a middle phase from 1975-8. See S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee – literatura', *Voprosy literary* (1988:2), 38-77 (p. 42). Mariia Levina-Parker, for her part, simplifies matters by dividing the author's prose into that of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. However, her classification and theory, particularly when stating that some of the author's prose works are 'more Makanin-like' than others, and declaring that there is

Priamaia liniia appeared just after the end of the Khrushchev literary ‘thaw’ and was considered to be a text that conformed to the pattern of the ‘youth prose’ movement within socialist realism. The text describes a young mathematics graduate’s first steps in the working world, and the inspiration of an energetic and positive-thinking friend, who encourages him to progress professionally. This was later followed by *Bezottsovshchina*, a story about a group of fatherless youngsters, and *Soldat i soldatka* in 1971.¹¹ Numerous short stories and *povesti*, or short novels, appeared in the early to mid-1970s, all of which tended to comprise literary portraits of protagonists’ everyday lives at home and in the workplace.¹² None of these texts provoked much critical attention, and indeed are of no outstanding literary merit. They are, however, of interest in the way they reveal Makanin’s developing literary talent and ideas. The exception to this is the narrative *Povest’ o Starom Poselke* which, with its unusual perspective on the familiar ‘town versus country’ dilemma, did receive some critical attention.¹³ The Moscow-based protagonist, Kliucharev, increasingly experiences nostalgia for his native village and is spurred on to make a return visit. However, his desire to experience a sense of reunion with his roots

an ‘inner logic’ in his texts that allows such a classification do not stand up to close examination. Mariia Levina-Parker, ‘Smert’ geroia’, *Voprosy literatury* (1995:5), 63-78 (p. 64).

¹¹ *Bezottsovshchina – Soldat i soldatka: Povesti* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1971).

¹² See primary sources in the bibliography for monographic publication details.

¹³ *Povest’ o Starom Poselke: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1974).

proves elusive – a far cry from the typical narrative of ‘village prose’. According to the author Anatolii Kurchatkin, examining the rise of new prose in the 1970s, this is a text ‘необыкновенной серьезности и точности проникновения в ядро человеческой личности “образца” 70-х годов’.¹⁴

In the second period of the author’s creative output, i.e. from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the journals began to accept his work and he gradually gained further attention. Makanin’s prose began to diversify in two distinct ways: firstly, more amoral characters were gradually introduced, and secondly, his style changed as he moved away from typical third-person, chronological narratives to more experimental forms and motifs. In *Portret i vokrug* the writer Igor’ Petrovich makes his first appearance as he attempts to create a literary portrait of Starokhatov – a corrupt film producer.¹⁵ However, there is an unexpected twist in that Igor’’s final literary creation serving to reveal nothing more than his own character and authorial insufficiencies. Another text, *Otdushina*, details how the protagonist ceases to visit his lover so that a younger rival can have her attention. More importantly, in return the rival – a successful teacher – is to provide the protagonist’s sons with university admission

¹⁴ Anatolii Kurchatkin, ‘Bremia shtilia’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1980:1), 26-30 (p. 30).

¹⁵ *Portret i vokrug* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1978); he later reappears in *Pogonia*, in *V bol'shom gorode: Povesti* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1980).

tuition.¹⁶ Another form of exchange, the familiar Soviet agreement to exchange flats, occurs in *Polosa obmenov* and proves to be far more than just a material barter. In *Chelovek svity*, office politics and favouritism stir up high feelings amongst the workers who desire the approval of their seniors.¹⁷ Innovations in theme and form are particularly clear in the two works written in the late 1970s: *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*, and *Golosa*.¹⁸ The former concerns the increasing success of Kliucharev both at home and at work. Kliucharev is worried that his good fortune is at the expense of an acquaintance, Alimushkin, who is suffering much unhappiness. This unlikely exchange of fate appears to Kliucharev to be uncannily true when Alimushkin dies at the conclusion to the story. The latter tale, *Golosa*, comprises a plenitude of stories, legends and authorial comment on such literary phenomena as stereotypes and genre. The title of the work provides the key to this confusing and at first glance disparate text.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Otdushina*, in *Kliucharev i Alimushkin: Roman, rasskazy* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1979).

¹⁷ *Polosa obmenov* in *Starye knigi. Povesti, Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976); *Chelovek svity*, *Oktiabr'* (1982:3), 82-111.

¹⁸ *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*, *Nash sovremennik* (1977:4), 111-26; *Golosa* in *V bol'shom gorode: Povesti* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1980). The author gives the completion date of *Golosa* as 1977.

¹⁹ This function of the title is a common trait of Makanin. Other examples are: *Antilider*, *Grazhdanin ubegaiushchii*, *Utrata*, and *Otstavshii*, where all four titles provide the underlying key to the text. The name Kliucharev, based on the word

Makanin was not involved in the 1979 *Metropol'* affair, yet his prose of the early 1980s was also infused with the liberal and experimental spirit of the time, and reveals his own attempts to broaden his literary base and break free from the constraints imposed on literary production. It was only from the early 1980s that critics began seriously to take note of Makanin's literary output. This was a period of relative cultural leniency when a wider range of literary subject matter, such as drugs and serious crime, was permitted.²⁰ The publication of *Predtecha* in 1982 provoked

'key', speaks for itself. However, when Peter Rollberg suggested in his interview with Makanin that Kliucharev was the author's *alter ego*, this was denied. P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 267. Makanin stated that he wanted a protagonist who was familiar to his readers, and therefore reintroduced Kliucharev. As the reader would expect, Makanin continues, some of his traits and experiences have been drawn from his own life.

²⁰ Obviously, not only did the author's permitted subject base widen, but the role of the critic changed dramatically: '[в] борьбе за качество литературы большая и ответственная роль принадлежит критике. Она призвана давать объективную оценку произведениям вне зависимости от сложившейся репутации их авторов' ('Literator', 'Velenie vremeni', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7 August 1985, p. 2). See also Sh. Umerov, 'Chto mozhes' skazat' novogo?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 November 1986, p. 4.

widespread interest due to its unorthodox protagonist and topical subject matter.²¹ There was much debate over the controversial figure of Iakushkin, the faith-healer and herbalist, a protagonist who demanded that his patients repented of their sins before his healing hands would restore their health.²² Over the next two years further unusual literary figures came to light, not least Kurenkov in *Antilider* who physically attacks those of his peers who aggravatingly boast of material success.²³ Kurenkov becomes involved in a fight with an acquaintance whom he accuses of being a money dealer, and is then accidentally caught up in a street brawl. The sequence of events leads to a two-year jail sentence. Even whilst in prison Kurenkov is unable to control his anger, and attacks another proud inmate with dire consequences to his own personal safety. Next came the ‘grazhdanin ubegaiushchii’, the taiga pioneer who undercuts his heroic image by destroying all that is around him whether that is forests or the fragile

²¹ *Predtecha, Sever* (1982:3-4), 4-49; 2-54. It is approximately from this date that Makanin returned to publication firstly in the literary journals.

²² For a discussion of how Iakushkin differs from other depictions of healers at this time, see Alla Latynina, ‘Forma paradoksal’nogo’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1983:10), 32-6. Additional articles on this controversial text include: Igor’ Dedkov, ‘Ironiia vmesto analiza?’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 August 1982, p. 4; Viktor Kamianov, ‘Tselebnost’ edkogo slova’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 August 1982, p. 4; Aleksandr Kazintsev, ‘Igra na ponizhenie’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1983:10), 29-32; P. Kile, ‘O “paradoksal’nykh” geroiakh i taine ironii’, *Neva* (1984:11), 153-60; S. i V. Piskunovy, ‘V prostranstvakh novykh...’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1986:11-12), 13-19; 7-14.

²³ *Antilider, Ural* (1982:6), 56-75.

relationships he has with his estranged children.²⁴ Kostiukov's continual cry to move on further into the untouched taiga area is, ironically, only to ensure that his grasping children do not find him once more, rather than the cry of a committed Party worker. Also in 1984, in *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*, there appeared the aged Moscow-based composer Bashilov, a gifted musician who eventually becomes fully aware of the loss of the musical heritage in his native village.²⁵ As his music becomes more popular and his fame increases, he notices the apparently simultaneous collapse of the village choir whose melodies he has integrated into his music. The question of the contribution of official bureaucrats to the disintegration of village life, the beloved and endlessly debated subject of village prose, was turned on its head: Makanin was far more interested in the idea of fate and to what extent man could help change the course of life, as in his earlier text *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*, than in producing another diatribe on village life.²⁶ The narrative also reveals how the village workers are fully aware of their hazardous work at the local factory, and await the inevitable fire that will once more ravage the premises and take lives. There is a noticeable absence of the traditional depiction of innocent people having their livelihood unexpectedly and disastrously destroyed by fire. These were indeed new topics and controversial issues that were being raised.

²⁴ *Grazhdanin ubegaiushchii*, *Ural* (1984:9), 96-115.

²⁵ *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*, *Novyi mir* (1984:1), 68-102.

²⁶ In the Keele University video interview, Makanin states that he does not view fate as an objective force that pulls you from behind. Rather it is an expression of one's individuality, and is ultimately in one's own hands.

Makanin was suddenly thrown into the literary limelight: he was deemed to be fully aware of, and possibly even to have foreseen, the radical changes in Soviet society under Gorbachev's new government, to be able to depict vividly the uncertainty of existence and reveal the link between the time frames of the past, present and future. His perspicacity was keenly noted by critics only after the virtually simultaneous publication in 1987 of three works: *Odin i odna*, *Utrata* and *Otstavshii*.²⁷ In *Odin i odna*, the protagonist Igor' Petrovich makes a reappearance in his role as a writer of character portraits.²⁸ As the title implies, Igor' is occupied with a detailed depiction of two individual characters, both of whom provide insight into the Soviet intelligentsia's ultimately unfulfilled optimism of the 1960s. Both *Otstavshii* and *Utrata* comprise three or four separate yet linked narratives, one of which is a distinctive Ural legend that gives some insight into the creative process of writing. The former work is based around, firstly, the earlier student years of the now middle-aged narrator Gena and, secondly, the recurring nightmare of his father in the present who vividly dreams that he has been left behind a departing truck full of people. This is set against the legend of Lesha, a young boy who is able to 'hear' (i.e. discover the location of) gold with his crooked hands. *Utrata*, the more complicated of the two texts, contains the detailed legend of the madman Pekalov and his project to dig a tunnel under the Ural River. A

²⁷ *Odin i odna*, *Oktiabr'* (1987:2), 3-117; *Utrata*, *Novyi mir* (1987:2), 96-135; *Otstavshii*, *Znamia* (1987:9), 6-59. It should be noted that the years of publication are not the same as the years of completion by the author.

²⁸ See footnote 15.

first person narrator is, for the most part, delirious in a psychiatric hospital and, in contrast, the final section of the work concerns a middle-aged man's return to his native, but now deserted, village.

Thus a wide variety of themes, characters and narrative techniques gradually emerged, revealing the author to be of much contemporary relevance; a far cry from earlier accusations of being behind the times. The 1990s have provided further proof as to Makanin's talents with the publication of more challenging *povesti* and short stories. He has turned to futuristic, anti-utopian themes in the works *Dolog nash put'* and *Laz*.²⁹ The former text has the added dimension of several time frames (similar to the texts published in 1987): two characters in the present create a futuristic narrative of a young man's business trip to a factory that claims to produce 'vegetarian' meat; and a bizarre tale of a llama is unexpectedly introduced into the text. *Laz* finds the familiar protagonist Kliucharev dividing his time through the man-hole between the dangerous, murky streets of a futuristic Moscow, and the underground haven of the intelligentsia. Both texts provide a sober judgement on contemporary society and lack the optimism of those narratives published in the early years of the Gorbachev reforms. More graphically disturbing texts that aptly reflect the uncertainty and fear in post-Soviet society then emerged. *Tam byla para...* opens with a student's suicide and details a middle-aged man's ruminations on life and death, good and evil, and man's ability to distance himself from everyday life.³⁰ A cycle of three short stories entitled *Siur v*

²⁹ *Dolog nash put'*, *Znamia* (1991:4), 3-47; *Laz*, *Novyi mir* (1991:5), 92-133.

³⁰ *Tam byla para...*, *Novyi mir* (1991:5), 83-92.

proletarskom raione was also published in 1991. The first short story of the same name is a chilling yet humorously Gogolian account of Kolia's attempts to evade a gigantic hand that reaches down and attacks him from the sky.³¹ In the second narrative, 'Ieroglif', a huge hunk of frozen meat is surreptitiously dragged along the violent Moscow streets; and in 'Neshumnye', those politicians who do not agree to the motions under vote are murdered and their corpses dumped in a wood.

Makanin has turned his attention to postmodern philosophical and metafictional questions that emphasise a sense of the indeterminacy of life in the late twentieth century. These questions are reiterated on a structural level through the introduction of narratives of diverse genres within the one text and even, in certain works, through the inclusion of a form of literary criticism within its frame. The question of the role of the artist himself, found in his early works such as *Rasskaz o rasskaze*³² and *Portret i vokrug*, has been developed further and integrated with thoughts concerning creativity, stereotypes and history in works of the 1990s such as *Siuzhet usredneniia* and *Kvazi*.³³ Both these texts additionally expand on the author's recurrent ideas regarding the fate of the individual in relation to the collective. The Booker winner *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*, whilst highlighting with chilling realism the familiar

³¹ *Siur v proletarskom raione*, *Novyi mir* (1991:9), 111-28.

³² *Rasskaz o rasskaze* in *Starye knigi. Povesti, Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976).

³³ *Siuzhet usredneniia*, *Znamia* (1992:1), 107-26; *Kvazi: pochtii religiia*, *Novyi mir* (1993:7), 124-47.

inquiries faced by Soviet citizens concerning all aspects of their private lives, also integrates the historical nature of such interrogations. These later texts have several intertextual references to nineteenth-century Russian literature, and the titles of the most recent texts directly refer to famous classics. *Kavkazskii plennyi*, written just prior to the outbreak of the first war in Chechnia, follows the steps of two soldiers attempting to make some sense of their duty amidst their beautiful surroundings and whilst experiencing the enhanced emotions that their combat action arouses.³⁴ The most recent publication, *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*, contains many intertextual references and describes Petrovich's memories as he wanders in the *obshchaga* beneath a block of flats. A present-day reality in which drunks roam around, partners argue and corruption is rife is, however, not quite what it first appears, and several murders lead to questions regarding the precise nature of this reality. This huge array of subject matter, structural and temporal experimentation, and mix of genres place Makanin squarely at the forefront of contemporary Russian literature. There is little argument over his position by critics now, yet a whole legacy of disputes and controversy lies behind him.

³⁴ *Kavkazskii plennyi*, *Novyi mir* (1995:4), 3-19.

The initial critical response: 1965-1987

With a few exceptions, the majority of critics' articles up to 1987 prove to be unsatisfactory in assessing Makanin's prose. The mistake most of them make is to concentrate on one particular text or aspect of his prose without considering the effect and illumination of ideas that occurs when examining the range of the author's prose in totality. This results in the critics' partial understanding and the diverging opinions mentioned earlier. Lev Anninskii provides a concise summary of several opposing views held by critics in this period. Makanin's works are described as:

намекы или метафоры? (А. Ланциков), соблазны
бессюжетности (В. Кардин), игра на понижение (А.
Казинцев), банальные истории (Н. Иванова), – и среди
этих тактичных недоумений – А. Кондратович, как бы
врезавший правду-матку: *ясности!*³⁵

Particular debate surrounds the critics' repeated consideration of the character 'types' in Makanin's earlier works. The narratives evidently focus on the routine of everyday

³⁵ See Lev Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta...', p. 5. Subsequent references to this edition of the article will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses. A summary of critics' views can also be found in Sh. Umerov, 'Chto mozhesh' ...', and in Irina Rodnianskaia, 'Neznakomye znakomtsy. K sporam o geroiakh Vladimira Makanina', *Novyi mir* (1986:8), 230-47 (p. 231).

life – the use of *byt* is manifest – portraying home and work situations; and the characters have varied occupations, ranging from a composer, portrait-writer and poor quality poetess, to a book dealer, furniture-maker and faith-healer. The protagonists ruminate on the nature of human existence and are aware of a tension between the individual and the collective in society: those that are able to assert their individuality feel alienated from their family and friends. Anatolii Kurchatkin views their portrayals as ‘галерея портретов, галерея человеческих типов’ an opinion with which the critic Vladimir Bondarenko agrees,³⁶ yet Lev Anninskii believes that the reader does not so much remember the types of characters as the climate in which they were born (6).³⁷ According to Anninskii, Makanin does not provide a full description of his characters, simply an outline: ‘черета быстро сменяющихся штриховых силуэтов’ (6). He is a physiologist rather than a writer of literary portraits grounded in *byt*. Anninskii proposes the idea of the ‘seredinnyi chelovek’ (‘average man’) as an all-embracing term for the characters. The critic traces the *barak* roots of the protagonists, which crushes their soul and prevents expression of individuality, and shows how the characters are unable to control the unfolding events in their everyday lives (9). This, according to Anninskii, is where the author’s uniqueness lies: ‘Маканин видит то, чего не видят другие: внутреннюю логику этой новой

³⁶ Anatolii Kurchatkin, ‘Ostanovit’sia, oglianut’sia...’, *Nash sovremennik* (1977:8), 187-90 (p. 189). Vladimir Bondarenko, ‘Vremia nadezhd’, *Zvezda* (1986:8), 184-94 (p. 186).

реальности' (12). Where others only consider there to be a character's vacuous shell (the critic Igor' Dedkov for example),³⁸ Anninskii, on the contrary, hails Makanin's depictions of the totality of people's existence.

However, as Alla Marchenko makes clear in an article from 1988, though Makanin's characters are taken from the central strata of society, these types are all at the extreme in terms of their life events – the decisions they are making are not necessarily everyday, straightforward ones.³⁹ Marchenko also, in my opinion correctly, briefly reveals Makanin's characters not only to be Soviet but, more importantly, to be Russian types, who are closely linked to their predecessors of the previous century. This is contradicted by Anninskii, who states that Makanin's protagonists are not variations on the eternal types of Chekhov or Gogol', but are present-day types which have only just been revealed in their new reality: 'Маканин раскрыл в промежуточном человеке – новую норму' (16). Elena Gessen, however, looking back at the author's early prose, believes the characters to be eternal,

³⁷ Nikolai Samvelian agrees with Anninskii in 'O proze Vladimira Makanina', afterword in V. Makanin, *Reka s bystrym techeniem: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1983).

³⁸ Igor' Dedkov, 'Kogda rasseialsia liricheskii tuman', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1981:8), 21-32 (p. 29).

³⁹ A. Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei...', p. 428.

unconventional types who are not bound to any time frame.⁴⁰ Irina Rodnianskaia notes the eccentricity of the author's characters, and her opinion that the author is a social anthropologist is probably the most suitable term, in that it emphasises both the historical roots of the characters and their firm grounding in contemporary society.⁴¹ Rodnianskaia views the sense of movement within the author's prose of the 1980s as a reflection of this: 'пишет он не метафизическую формулу, а человека меняющегося от поколения к поколению в текущем социальном субстрате' (236).

Another area of conflict amongst critics can be found in their assessment of Makanin's attitude to his characters. There is a noticeable lack of comment from the author in the text and so critics, used to a strong authorial presence, have tended to assume that Makanin has a cold and calculating attitude towards his protagonists. Anatolii Zhukov, for example, believes the author to be merciless towards those of his characters who are petty and who could have acted differently. He declares that Makanin, in his silence, is expressing a desire for the little man to stand up and be responsible for himself and his times.⁴² Mark Lipovetskii has a similar view,

⁴⁰ Elena Gessen, 'Vokrug Makanina, ili shtrikhi k portretu', *Grani*, 161 (1991), 144-59 (p. 148).

⁴¹ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Neznakomye znakomtsy...', p. 235. Subsequent references to this article will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

⁴² Anatolii Zhukov, 'Mera otvetstvennosti', foreword in V. Makanin, *Mesto pod solntsem* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1984), pp. 3-7 (p. 7).

emphasising how Makanin seems to reveal the moral insufficiency of his characters by the very fact that they have become too engrossed in everyday concerns.⁴³ Natal'ia Ivanova stresses that the author is harsh towards his characters, figures who are desperately searching for whatever comfort they can obtain – physical, spiritual or moral.⁴⁴ Yet Anninskii writes that the author does not take the stance of an authorial judge above his characters, for he recognises the pain of their existence (10). Vera Mordvinova, on the other hand, believes the author to desire a sense of spirituality and moral concern in his characters, and that his irony reveals their lack of such qualities.⁴⁵ Rodnianskaia notes how the author's irony differentiates between characters, depending on their fundamental attitudes and whether or not they exhibit a philistine way of life (236-7), and both Vladimir Gusev and Nina Denisova assessed the author in the early stages of his literary career as a humanist.⁴⁶ In his interview with Peter Rollberg, Makanin states that he values his protagonists and does not judge them, believing that an author should not be quick to condemn his characters. Makanin

⁴³ Mark Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia. Avtorskaia pozitsiia v proze Vladimira Makanina', *Ural* (1985:12), 148-58 (p. 150).

⁴⁴ Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Ochen' predvaritel'nye itogi', *Literaturnaia ucება* (1981:1), 118-25 (p. 118).

⁴⁵ Vera Mordvinova, 'O dushe chelovecheskoi', *Oktiabr'* (1980:6), 220-1. V. Samoriga also views Makanin's texts as laden with moral strivings. See 'Kliucharev i Alimushkin' (Review), *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1980:8), 74-5.

expresses his feelings of compassion towards them despite their somewhat unlikeable quirks.⁴⁷

In an attempt to find an organising principle behind Makanin's prose, critics have turned to biographical details, particularly his love of music. Both Bondarenko and Lipovetskii emphasise the importance of music in the construction of the text, whereas Gusev denies this altogether.⁴⁸ Other biographical details have come under scrutiny too: the author's move from the Urals to Moscow is viewed as the basis for numerous texts in which protagonists experience nostalgia for their native village and attempt to come to terms with a radically different lifestyle. The tension between a fascination with the town and all it offers and feelings for one's native birthplace constantly informs his texts. In Rollberg's interview, the author acknowledges some instances where he has used autobiographical details when trying to portray his protagonists'

⁴⁶ Vladimir Gusev, 'Besprizornaia proza?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 May 1977, p. 4; Nina Denisova, 'K voprosu o priamoi, ili apologiia Valechki Chekinoi', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1975:9), 36-9 (p. 38).

⁴⁷ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 269.

⁴⁸ V. Bondarenko, 'Vremia nadezhd...', p. 187; M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 157; V. Gusev and Aleksandr Muliarchik, 'Slushat' drug druga', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 March 1987, p. 3. Rather than viewing the author's prose as musical and beautiful, Gusev describes it as graphic and professionally, but quietly, executed.

feelings and attitudes.⁴⁹ In the Amurskii interview, Makanin explains that his own experiences in the field of mathematics were the impetus for *Priamaia liniia*.⁵⁰

Hence critics have put forward many diverging views on the nature of Makanin's prose, opinions which on the whole fail to take into account his search for new ideas and themes. As Lipovetskii aptly assessed the author, he is 'исключительно переменчивый, мобильный художник... один из самых работающих, ищущих художников'.⁵¹ However, it was the critics' desire for categorisation that led to the most extensive disagreements over Makanin's prose in an attempt to pigeon-hole his works into one of the standard Soviet/Russian prose movements.

The emergence of the *sorokaletnie*

From the outset Makanin was considered to be behind the times: too late to be considered a writer of the so-called 'confessional prose' of the 1960s, and in content obviously not falling into the category of the 'war prose' of Bondarev and Bykov, nor that of the emerging school of 'village prose' as epitomised by Rasputin and Belov.⁵² Even Western critics have taken this view: David Lowe, for example, accuses him of

⁴⁹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', pp. 274-5.

⁵⁰ V. Amurskii, "...Siiuminutnye temy...".

⁵¹ M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 148.

⁵² L. Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta...', pp. 3-4.

being 'an uneven writer', as his early prose alternates between village and city locations.⁵³ Following her analysis of these various categories, Marchenko states that Makanin could have been included as one of the *shestidesiatniki* alongside his contemporaries Bitov and Akhmadulina, if not for the fact he began publishing so late.⁵⁴

As interest in Makanin's prose grew in the mid- to late 1970s, critics simultaneously concluded that there were a number of writers who had developed their talent outside of the literary establishment. These writers were all of the post-war generation, and many of them had suffered difficulties as a result of hardships experienced in the war's aftermath. Unlike members of the previous generation, there was some sense of stability in the lives of the new generation. However, the loss of family members and material possessions had painful consequences and hence there was a search for new ideals and aspirations that would provide comfort and distraction.⁵⁵ None of the accepted literary movements adequately described the prose of these writers and

⁵³ David Lowe, *Russian Writing since 1953: A Critical Survey* (New York: Ungar, 1987), p. 113.

⁵⁴ See A. Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei...', p. 423. (Bitov and Akhmadulina were born in the same year as Makanin, 1937).

⁵⁵ Anatolii Bocharov, 'Kak slovo nashe otzovetsia?...', *Voprosy literatury* (1985:11), 115-54 (p. 123). For an analysis of a constant search for new ideals throughout the Communist period, see Anatolii Bocharov and Mikhail Lobanov, 'Idealy i pokoleniia', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 September 1989, p. 2.

therefore there began a scramble to unify them under the name of a new movement. Makanin's name was included amongst those writers considered to be producing the newly termed 'urban prose' or 'neglected prose' and was also put forward as a member of the 'Moscow school of prose', the 'new wave' and also of the group of writers named the *sorokaletnie* ('the forty-year olds'). Considerable debate surrounds these various terms and their definitions, and even the validity of the application of such labels has been raised: 'что же объединяет этих авторов очень разных и по степени дарования, и по тематическим и стилевым привязанностям?'⁵⁶ The titles 'Moscow school of prose' and 'urban prose' are interchangeable, and were initially understood as a reference to those writers who were believed to be following the tradition of Trifonov in depicting urban heroes and settings.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the former title can be seen as simply a reference to the fact that these writers reside in Moscow (although none of them are native Muscovites).

⁵⁶ Evgenii Sidorov, 'Zhivaia voda i kriticheskaia zhazhda', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 December 1980, p. 5. See also A. Bocharov, 'Kak slovo...', pp. 120-2, and V. Gusev, 'V poiskakh vysshei zrelosti', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 September 1980, p. 4. It is worth noting that a similar debate arose over the term *shestidesiatniki* in its initial stages. For an overview of this movement see Svetlana Carsten, 'The Generation of the 1960s in Soviet Literature', *Slavonica*, 2 (1995-6), 59-70 (p. 39).

⁵⁷ Aleksandr Mikhailov, for example, states that: 'несмотря на внешнюю сухость и информативность маканинского письма, там есть скрытая поэзия города, есть тонкое ощущение его эстетики', in 'Ostorozhno: intelligent. Po

The most significant and controversial of all the above labels was *sorokaletnie*. This term originated in the late 1970s to early 1980s, and provoked much debate all through the latter decade. It gave rise to many articles that attempted to define the term, and offered arguments for and against such a distinct grouping of writers.⁵⁸ The catalyst for the designation was the gathering of a large number of writers of the post-war generation at *Dom literatorov* in Moscow on 24 November 1979. Discussion at this meeting centred around the participants' view of the writer's position in, and debt

stranitsam "gorodskoi" zhurnal'noi prozy', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1987:9), 18-22 (p. 21).

⁵⁸ The main articles include: A. Bocharov, 'Kak slovo...'; V. Bondarenko, 'Stolknoveniia dukha s materiei', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 5 November 1990, p. 4; V. Bondarenko, 'Avtoportret pokoleniia', *Voprosy literatury* (1985:11), 79-114; Sergei Chuprinin, 'Zhizn' vrasplokh', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 4 February 1981; I. Dedkov, 'Kogda rasseialsia...'; I. Dedkov, 'Skol'ko budet dvazhdy dva?', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1986:2), 38-44; V. El'chin, 'Byt' samim soboi', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 21 April 1982, p. 10; A. Klitko, 'Litso, kharakter, sud'ba. Zametki o sovremennom rasskaze', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1983:2), 21-6; A. Kurchatkin, 'Bremia shtilia...'; Anatolii Lanshchikov, 'Trevogi nashikh dnei...', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 13 May 1981, p. 4; P. Rollberg, 'Proza "sorokaletnikh" – izobretenie kritiki ili iavlenie literaturnogo protsessa?', *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* (1990:3), 388-94; D. Sidorov, 'Zhivaia voda...'; Igor' Zolotusskii, 'Oglianis' s liubov'iu', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1980:1), 30-4.

to, society. Makanin is named as one of those present at this gathering.⁵⁹ Bondarenko is convinced that this event was one of considerable importance, one that led to the attachment of the term *sorokaletnie* and then later 'Moscow school of prose' to this generation of writers.⁶⁰

The term *sorokaletnie* was coined to signify the age of many of this newly emerging group of writers who, according to critics, began their literary career or whose career came to fruition in their forties. However, this view is influenced by the fact that many of the authors were only recognised by critics much later, after they had been writing for at least ten years. For example, by 1979 Makanin, Ruslan Kireev and Iurii Arakcheev had all been writing for over fourteen years, their first works having been published as early as 1965. In contrast, the works of Liudmila Petrushevskaiia and Anatolii Kim were only accepted for publication in the literary journals in the second half of the 1980s.⁶¹ It is generally accepted that there are various reasons for their lack

⁵⁹ V. Bondarenko, 'Avtoportret pokoleniia...', pp. 82-3. The other writers present at the meeting were: G. Abramov, V. Alekseev, Iu. Antropov, Iu. Arakcheev, G. Bashkirova, G. Bazhenov, A. Gangnus, V. Gusev, A. Kim, L. Kokoulin, P. Krasnov, A. Kurchatkin, V. Mirnev, O. Poptsov, A. Prokhanov, V. Shugaev, A. Skalon.

⁶⁰ V. Bondarenko, 'Avtoportret pokoleniia...', pp. 83-4.

⁶¹ The names of those who make up the membership of this literary group varies according to different critics. Others included who were not present at the meeting in November 1979 are: A. Afanas'ev, R. Kireev, V. Krupin, V. Lichutin, V. Orlov, L.

of recognition. These include the marked difference in the content and style of their works, particularly in comparison to preceding Soviet literature (notably that of the village prose writers). Kurchatkin, for example, describes how their work differed:

выработанные предшествовавшими полутора десятилетиями методы, приемы, законы и прочая были выработаны для изображения и осмысления иного быта, иного сознания, иного типа человеческих отношений, а главное – иного типа жизненных ценностей.⁶²

In a dismissal of the literature of the preceding generation, Bondarenko succinctly summarises the main characteristics of this new prose: '[з]оркое и трезвое социальное наблюдение за нарождающимися характерами общества наших дней – вот что отличает реалистов “московской школы” от писателей, оперирующих стереотипами предыдущего времени’.⁶³ This literary grouping covers a large number of diverse writers who are, however, considered not only to differ from the preceding literary generation but also to have certain similar characteristics in their experimental literary presentation: '[и] сразу

Petrushevskaja, V. Popov and S. Rybas. See L. Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta...', p. 4, for example.

⁶² A. Kurchatkin, 'Bremia shtilia...', p. 27. For a response to this particular article, see: A. Bocharov, 'Rozhdeno sovremennost'iu', *Novyi mir* (1981:8), 227-46 (p. 241).

⁶³ V. Bondarenko, 'Avtoportret pokoleniia...', p. 89 (emphasis is Bondarenko's).

понятно, насколько социальны, насколько чутки к болевым точкам современной жизни “сорокалетние” по сравнению с более молодым собратом по профессии’.⁶⁴ There is a tendency to depict ordinary middle-aged protagonists who have typical questions concerning this stage of their life, such as their loss of youth and the approach of death. However, despite revealing an expression of ‘гражданск[ая] бол[ь] за свое время’,⁶⁵ these characters are quite sanguine, for they accept the stasis in their lives and believe that they are unable to change it. The ambivalence of the heroes is of note, as is the absence of the traditional authorial comment on the protagonists’ morals, which would often act as a guide to the reader. The lack of authorial comment is particularly noticeable when comparing Trifonov’s clear observations on his characters who, in middle-age, are often portrayed as betraying their colleagues and family for their own social advancement and prosperity. Again in relation to previous literature, the protagonists found in the literature of the *sorokaletnie* are more three-dimensional and believable: their multiple internal tensions and lack of absolute ideals are clearly portrayed, particularly in terms of their attempts to fit into collective society. These believable figures encourage a personal response on the part of the reader, and this response then becomes one of the dialogues within the work. As Rollberg explains:

“Проза сорокалетних” – диалогична по сути своей, причем не только в смысле одновременного равноправного

⁶⁴ A. Bocharov, ‘Kak slovo...’, p. 124.

⁶⁵ V. Bondarenko, ‘Avtoportret pokoleniia...’, p. 97.

присутствия двух или нескольких идейных комплексов, но и в открытости текстов для “диалога” разных оценок героев между собой и читателя по отношению к ним.⁶⁶

The historical perspective has also changed: the traditional depiction of history as a clear-cut, objective phenomenon taking place chronologically alongside the character’s life has now changed to intermittent references to history that are subjectively mixed into the inner personality of the hero. Within the text this is often solely portrayed through the protagonist’s consciousness, such as in childhood recollections of the war. Rollberg believes that this change of historical perspective is a reflection of the democratisation of society at the time.

Igor’ Dedkov’s articles from 1981 and 1986 are examples of key documents that reveal some of the adverse reaction to this literary generation.⁶⁷ Dedkov does not conceal his obvious adherence to the preceding generation of writers such as Semin, Shukshin and Trifonov, whom he considers to be superior authors who take a morally correct stance in their work. Dedkov criticises the use of *byt* in the works of Makanin’s generation, believing that the writers over-emphasise its importance. Where Bondarenko praises this microscopic view of everyday reality, Dedkov levels an accusation of descriptive shallowness and believes *byt* to engender too great a concentration on one aspect of life at the expense of others. This critic denies that the

⁶⁶ P. Rollberg, ‘Proza “sorokaletnikh”...’, p. 391.

⁶⁷ See footnote 58.

authors are reflecting the reality of all areas of life in Russia, for the majority of the texts have a town setting and ignore the countryside altogether.⁶⁸ According to Dedkov, the locale is itself featureless and of little importance to the characters, and thereby in turn not memorable to the reader. The lack of interest in their living quarters appears to extend also into other areas of the characters' lives, for example the workplace is only of significance in terms of advancement and one-upmanship. Dedkov also mourns the loss of authorial omnipotence familiar in typical socialist realist works, revealing his belief in an author who has complete control of, and gives clear guidance within, the work.⁶⁹ He is fervently against the lack of a distinction between good and evil characters and even goes so far as to declare that: 'жизнь и человек нуждаются в защите от... литературы. Скажем так: от литературы, не сознающей своей ответственности'.⁷⁰ In the later article Dedkov states his opinion on the author: 'Маканин – сильный писатель, очень наблюдательный. Я уважаю его последовательность. Но эта картотека, систематика людей... Пособие по психологии, и менее – по психологии

⁶⁸ However, with the mass migration of people from the countryside to the towns during the twentieth century, these writers can be seen to be reflecting both town and former country dwellers. Bondarenko believes Makanin to be the focus for the post-war generation of writers in terms of the depiction of city dwellers. See 'Avtoportret pokoleniia...', p. 81.

⁶⁹ Dedkov reiterates this in his article on *Predtecha*, in which he criticises Makanin for the lack of a moral stance and a weak authorial position in the text. See 'Ironiia vmesto...?'

социальной'.⁷¹ In the same article he reiterates his protests at the vacillating heroes, and is even affronted by the challenge the 'new prose' is posing towards his own concept of literature:

Но когда граница между добром и злом оказывается размытой не в жизни, а в литературе, когда моральная нечистоплотность выдается за одну из неперменных характеристик современного человека – что это, зачем? Меня стараются избавить от розовых очков? Внушить мне трезвые представления о жизни?⁷²

The lack of a clear moral stance appears to be abhorrent to Dedkov, and he contrasts this with what he believes is a clear delineation of what is good and evil in Trifonov's texts. The *sorokaletnie* writers, in Dedkov's opinion, complicate their texts with their lack of strict values and the *laissez-faire* attitude that they instil in their characters.

Having gained some long-awaited critical attention in the early 1980s, the so-called *sorokaletnie* were again overlooked by critics. However, the critic Igor' Zolotusskii at the time even disputed that there was any such significant recognition:

⁷⁰ I. Dedkov, 'Kogda rasseialsia...', p. 27.

⁷¹ I. Dedkov, 'Skol'ko budet...', p. 40.

⁷² I. Dedkov, 'Skol'ko budet...', p. 41.

Если б была “новая словесность”, то был бы и шум вокруг нее... Авторы эти пишут и печатаются, их романы и повести появляются в журналах – но где бум? Где синяки и шишки? Где гонения на правду?

Нет их.⁷³

In their short time of recognition these writers expressed their own dissatisfaction with the term *sorokaletnie*, describing it as too generalised a term and one that was opposed to the idea of the individual talent of each author. Those writers questioned in Bondarenko’s article all reject the term whilst, at the same time, admitting a certain sense of closeness and community amongst them.⁷⁴ The writers reveal a respectful attitude towards their critics and are interested in the reviews, but the writers acknowledge no influence on their work. Bondarenko does seem to have a need to categorise this literary generation, for in a later article he again attempts to find a new

⁷³ I. Zolotusskii, ‘Oglianis’ s liubov’iu...’, p. 31. Another critic, Vadim Kovskii, believes their differences to be greater than their similarities. Vadim Kovskii, ‘V masshtabe tselogo’, *Voprosy literatury* (1982:10), 70-109 (p. 86).

⁷⁴ Those questioned are: Anatolii Afanas’ev, Iurii Arakcheev, Georgii Bazhenov, Anatolii Kim, Ruslan Kireev, Vladimir Krupin, Anatolii Kurchatkin, Vatslav Mikhal’skii, Aleksandr Prokhanov, Timur Pulatov, Sviatoslav Rybas, Viacheslav Shugaev. See V. Bondarenko, ‘Avtportret pokoleniia...’, pp. 90-4.

term for them, but with little success.⁷⁵ Bocharov, on the other hand, is sceptical that such diverse writers can be aligned under one term, particularly as it tends to diminish the role of their individual creativity, although he concedes that there are similarities in their outlook.

Rollberg's article of 1990 is a reflection of contemporary critical opinion, both in Russia and the West, on Makanin's generation of writers.⁷⁶ The general consensus on this literary generation is reduced to the notion that the writers have had some similar experiences – a natural outcome of the shared experience of a generation. To some extent the writers will have a common background of experience to fall back upon and to which they can relate, and this may partly explain the creative impulse to depict similar events in their works. Rollberg states that strictly speaking this literary generation did not appear as a literary group as defined by the term *sorokaletnie*. The struggle around this label led to it becoming obsolete, and the writers further continued their individual paths.

Turning to Makanin's position in this debate, for those critics who adhered to the term he is considered to be a key figure: 'В. Маканин – один из самых ярких и самых талантливых представителей "сорокалетних".'⁷⁷ The author's own

⁷⁵ V. Bondarenko, 'Vremia nadezhd...', pp. 189-90. Here he toys with the terms 'proza promezhutka' and 'pokolenie baraka'.

⁷⁶ P. Rollberg, 'Proza "sorokaletnikh" ...'.

⁷⁷ A. Lanshchikov, 'Nameki ili metafory?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6 June 1984, p. 5.

attitude to this whole debate is clear. Though he was present at the meeting at *Dom literatorov* in 1979, his absence from the discussion at the centre of Bondarenko's article indicates some distance from any discussion of the term *sorokaletnie* that was later ascribed to the group.⁷⁸ In Rollberg's interview with Makanin, the author states that he has no wish to take part in such literary discussions due to the inevitable arguments over one's literary persuasion that result from them.⁷⁹ In my interview with Makanin in December 1994, he again stated that he refused to give interviews and be involved in literary discussions with Russian critics.⁸⁰ When talking with Rollberg, the author stated that he is against such terms as *sorokaletnie*, but naturally perceives there to be similarities between writers of the same country. Makanin is keen to stress his belief that each writer's creative essence is unique.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See V. Bondarenko, 'Avtoportret pokoleniia...'

⁷⁹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera ...', pp. 259-60.

⁸⁰ Even when asked which of his contemporaries he is closest to in his prose, Makanin would not provide any names. The author has continued to abstain from interviews with critics. For example in 1996 when Basinskii tried to obtain a few words from Makanin at the Iaroslavl' Writers' Conference, he was sternly told: '[Т]е, кто дает интервью, видимо, считают, что они самовыражаются и прибавляют себе веса в глазах читателей. На самом деле они теряют остатки самих себя'. See Pavel Basinskii, 'Zhertvennaia korova', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 31 January 1996, p. 5.

⁸¹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', pp. 272-3.

Recent criticism and Makanin's position on the contemporary literary scene

The critics' divergent views on Makanin's prose noted above provide a clear indication of their reliance on the standard literary groupings and interpretative methods of the time to explain his texts. The unusual form of *Golosa* confounded those critics used to more traditional texts and, as Alla Latynina points out, resulted in them avoiding all mention of the work.⁸² The critic V. Kovskii takes issue with this absence of comment on an unconventional text, and uses the *sorokaletnie* debate as an example of what he views as the unfortunately widespread need amongst his peers to categorise literature. However, according to Kovskii, Makanin is 'один из немногих прозаиков, рискнувших изменить круг художественных пристрастий и повествовательную манеру, принесшую ему в свое время успех'.⁸³ It was only when critics began to accept that writers could exist outside of the groupings, as in the case of those authors who were initially termed the *sorokaletnie*, that critics then began to value and analyse further creative innovations.

Critics have discerned and discussed various themes in Makanin's texts including those of alienation, loss, memory, time, war, homosexuality, fate and salvation, and the intelligentsia and guilt. Myths and legends add extensively to the universality of his works and to their historical depth, and have enabled Makanin subtly to push the boundaries of literature without incurring censorship. Particularly in his works

⁸² A. Latynina, 'Forma paradoksal'nogo...', p. 32.

⁸³ V. Kovskii, 'V masshtabe...', p. 105.

published in the mid 1980s, diverse temporal and spatial phenomena abound: from a tunnel under the Ural River several centuries ago in one work, to life under the man-hole covers of a futuristic Moscow in another. Several of these later works contain numerous narrative planes and separate narratives that intersect according to the overall theme of the work, and some critics have, in recent years, investigated these innovations. Nadya Peterson, for example, applies the term ‘narrative polyphony’ to this form of textual construction.⁸⁴ As Konstantin Kedrov evaluated the author’s prose: ‘[е]го проза претерпела быструю эволюцию от легкодоступного реализма до нынешних запутанных лабиринтов распадающегося сознания’.⁸⁵

Comparisons with classical authors from the nineteenth and early twentieth century have naturally arisen, particularly when the author’s literary generation as a whole came under scrutiny. Bondarenko believes that the detailed depiction of life through *byt* is similar to that found in Chekhov’s works.⁸⁶ Kurchatkin also believed that the literature of the 1970s bore some resemblance to Tolstoi’s works and others of the Russian classical tradition in the apparent search for an ideal. Pavel Basinskii declares that Makanin has a similar moralising/preaching manner to Tolstoi, and enjoys digging

⁸⁴ Nadya L. Peterson, ‘Vladimir Makanin’s Solutions to the Loss of the Past’, *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 21 (1988), 349-56 (p. 352).

⁸⁵ K. Kedrov, ‘Premiia Bukera...’.

⁸⁶ V. Bondarenko, ‘Avtoportret pokoleniia...’, p. 101.

into the soul in the typical manner of writers of the last century.⁸⁷ On other occasions Makanin has been aligned with Dostoevskii, and in the Rollberg interview he has acknowledged his love of this famous writer's work.⁸⁸ A later chapter examines the links with nineteenth-century authors and the extent to which Makanin engages with their ideas.

Makanin has been compared with other writers who are either not of his literary generation, or who do not come under the now redundant term of *sorokaletnie*. Iurii Trifonov is the writer with whom Makanin is most frequently aligned due to their acknowledged acquaintance and similar urban heroes and panoramas. In Rollberg's interview, Makanin describes the true nature of their relationship on both a personal and literary level. They only met two years before Trifonov's death, by which time Makanin had long established himself as a writer (he states that he had already published eight monographs). There is some dependence on Trifonov as the older writer, but not to the extent critics would like to believe.⁸⁹ Where Trifonov's

⁸⁷ P. Basinskii, 'Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine' (Review), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 3 March 1993, p. 4.

⁸⁸ The Piskunovs believe that Makanin continues Dostoevskii's tradition by depicting indeterminate characters who are not psychological types. S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...', p. 70.

⁸⁹ Bocharov is one critic who has noted the difference in treatment of morals and fate in Makanin's work in comparison to that of Trifonov. A. Bocharov, 'Rozhdeno sovremennost'iu...', pp. 242-3.

characters face moral dilemmas, Makanin has taken his characters' situations past this point by underlining the role of fate as an inexplicable and uncontrollable law of life.⁹⁰ As Kazintsev points out, Makanin laughs at those who believe that love is sufficient to save a person.⁹¹

Vasilii Shukshin's career has some similarities to that of Makanin, events from which support an initial comparison between the two writers. Shukshin was also brought up in a village in the countryside (he depicts the *barak* settlement in detail), and at the age of twenty-five he left the navy due to ill health and entered upon a film director's course. However, comparisons between their works reveal greater diversity in style and content on the part of Makanin, while Shukshin's works bear the distinctive traits of writers of the village prose movement. Yet Kurchatkin, in his discussion of the new wave of 1970s prose, does declare that it was Shukshin who sensed and heralded the change between the prose of the 1950s and 1960s and that of the new generation.⁹² Anninskii, continuing his idea of the 'intermediate hero', states that Makanin was not the first to introduce such a type to literature, as Shukshin had already depicted similar

⁹⁰ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', pp. 262-3. Makanin explains how he wrote several works as a response to Trifonov's *Obmen*. He began to face this issue in *Klassika*, and moved on from this to *Polosa obmenov*, *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*, and through to *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*.

⁹¹ A. Kazintsev, 'Igra na ponizhenie...', p. 31.

⁹² A. Kurchatkin, 'Bremia shtilia...', p. 28. A. Klitko is in agreement with this. See 'Litso, kharakter...', p. 21.

characters. However, Anninskii observes, whereas for Shukshin such characters were eccentric and unusual, for Makanin they were the norm in the 'new reality' he was portraying (16). Anninskii also declares *Predtecha* to be the forerunner of other striking and unusual texts of the *glasnost'* period – Rasputin's *Pozhar* and Aitmatov's *Plakha*, to name but two (14). Chingiz Aitmatov is an author with whom Makanin can be compared in terms of the use of memory, narrative form and temporal phenomena, particularly in *Belyi parokhod* and *I dol'she veka dlitsia den'*. This will be examined further in a later chapter in relation to both writers' use of legend as an additional narrative layer.

Critics such as Inna Solov'eva and the writers Tat'iana Tolstaia and Ruslan Kireev have more recently revealed a closer understanding of Makanin's works. Kireev, who himself was aligned to the *sorokaletnie*, stated that 'Маканин как писатель не только сам по себе, но он как бы на отшибе, как бы на расстоянии, ... [он] пишет так, будто до него никто не занимался этим.'⁹³ In an attempt to summarise the three texts published in 1987, Solov'eva provided an apt analogy that could describe the intricate intertwining of ideas found in the majority of the author's prose since the mid 1980s: '[Г]лухая, волнующая энергия всякий раз рождается тем, как близко сдвинуты непересекающиеся и несоприкасающиеся плоскости повествования: между ними

⁹³ Ruslan Kireev, 'Obretenie cherez utratu', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1 April 1987, p. 4.

наэлектризованное поле, при перемещении в этом поле возникает ток.⁹⁴

In turn, Karen Stepanian and Tolstaia described his prose as holographic, emphasising the numerous ideas therein which are illuminated to a different degree and from a different angle depending on the text in question.⁹⁵ The consensus is now that Makanin's prose is 'constructed to resist categorisation', and that he 'remains an author whose overall originality locates him outside established trends.'⁹⁶

Viktor Erofeev's well-known article on the death of Soviet literature was influential in the heated debate on Soviet/Russian literature of the late 1980s and into the early 1990s.⁹⁷ Emphasising the social, economic and spiritual responsibilities demanded of the Soviet writer, Erofeev expressed his hope that in its 'wake' 'появится новая

⁹⁴ I. Solov'eva, 'Natiurmort s knigoi i zerkalom', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1988:4), 46-9 (p. 46).

⁹⁵ Tat'iana Tolstaia and Karen Stepanian, "...golos, letiashchii v kupol'", *Voprosy literatury* (1988:2), 78-105 (p. 85).

⁹⁶ Nadya L. Peterson, *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s-1990s* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 74-5. See also Deming Brown, *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Brown summarises thus: 'Makanin's writing is too many-sided, complex, and dynamically developing to belong in any of them. Makanin is unique, and is clearly his own man' (p. 102).

⁹⁷ Viktor Erofeev, 'Pominki po sovetskoj literature', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 4 July 1990, p. 8.

литература, которая будет не больше, но и не меньше, чем литература'. Discussions on the main new literary trend initially termed 'new prose', and then designated as 'alternative prose' with its emphasis on 'tough' or 'cruel' realism, provoked many reactions from critics and the public alike.⁹⁸ Whilst some welcomed the significant absence of a political or social comment in alternative prose and its parodic, explicit language, these attributes provoked horror in others. For example, V. Serdiuchenko, surveying the literary scene in 1995, found there to be only a handful of quality texts to his dismay 'не создающие нового литературного качества и не уравновешивающие собой потока сексуально-филологического инферно'.⁹⁹

The initial origins of alternative prose in firstly the 'underground' literature of the 1970s and 1980s, and secondly in emigrant literature, are obviously not those of Makanin's prose. Whilst elements of 'cruel' realism can be seen in certain of Makanin's texts such as *Siur v proletarskom raione*, they do not comprise the totality of his literature; in the same way that fantastic devices recur in his prose but he is not a

⁹⁸ For a comprehensive overview of these debates see Robert Porter, *Russia's Alternative Prose* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp. 1-19.

⁹⁹ V. Serdiuchenko, 'Progulka po sadam rossiiskoi slovesnosti', *Novyi mir* (1995:5), 222-31. Briefly mentioning the *sorokaletnie*, Serdiuchenko declares that Makanin and P'etsukh are possibly the only two members of this literary generation who have written anything of merit (p. 231).

writer solely of fantastic fiction.¹⁰⁰ Those critics who have delineated certain features of alternative prose, such as ‘irreverent’ comedy, ‘bawdiness’, ‘a grotesque or supernatural world’ and an aptitude for parody, have not considered Makanin as an obvious member of this movement.¹⁰¹ Those authors who are examined as representative of this trend have produced distinctly different prose. Makanin may write an alternative form of prose, yet it is far removed from the sadistic, sexually explicit prose of Eduard Limonov, or the erotic, self-indulgent texts of Viktor Erofeev. The loss of distinction between past, present and future in Tolstaia’s prose is an important issue also in Makanin’s narratives, but he does not employ the same sensuous and capricious language nor portray such indifferent characters. Liudmila Petrushevskaja, also named as a late member of the *sorokaletnie* at one time, has been compared to Makanin, with her similar interest in the guilt of the intelligentsia; yet her shocking and grim prose often depicting mentally and physically ill characters is not directly comparable.¹⁰² Other contemporary writers such as Leonid Latynin have only

¹⁰⁰ However, the use of the fantastic in postmodern literature is recognised as one of its hallmarks, and Peterson views some of Makanin’s prose as part of the ‘fantastic decade’ prior to the literature of the *glasnost*’ period. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁰¹ R. Porter, *Russia’s Alternative...*, p. 66.

¹⁰² S. Dalton-Brown categorises Makanin’s literature as ‘cruel realism’ and makes the comparison with Petrushevskaja in her article ‘Ineffectual Ideas, Violent Consequences: Vladimir Makanin’s Portrait of the Intelligentsia’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 72 (1994), 218-32. Her later article compares certain features of

tenuous similarities with Makanin. Latynin's incorporation of myth, legend and folk themes into his texts is similar to that of Makanin and both have a character who can move between different time zones, but Makanin's prose is far removed from the religious and archaic symbolism of Latynin. Hence the author's prose is grounded in contemporary literature yet very much engaged in a unique expression of present-day life. Pavel Basinskii believes that what Makanin has excelled in is 'в создании собственной художественной модели'.¹⁰³

Whilst some critics favoured the term alternative prose, others widened the debate over contemporary literature, questioning whether the exhaustive western term 'postmodernism' could be ascribed to Russian literature. Mikhail Epstein's influential articles and books have revealed how the collapse of Communism, bringing with it a loss of the future utopia and possible recourse to past ideals, has once more engendered the absence of contemporary time and tendency to exist in the postcontemporary; and this situation is similarly a feature of western postmodernism.¹⁰⁴ Establishing a circular model of Russian literary history, Epstein

Makanin's *Laz* with Petrushevskaja's *Novye Robinzony* in terms of dystopian fiction: see 'Signposting the Way to the City of Night: Recent Russian Dystopian Fiction', *Modern Language Review*, 90 (1995), 103-19.

¹⁰³ P. Basinskii, 'Stol, pokryti...'

¹⁰⁴ References here will be solely to the English monographic edition of these articles and will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses. Mikhail N. Epstein, *After the Future: the Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*,

delineates two separate strands of Russian postmodernism which ‘complement each other and present a more complicated and self-contradictory phenomenon than Western postmodernism, which is concentrated in a single historical period’ (210). The first strand is inherent in socialist realism, particularly in its production of a ‘simulacrum’ of reality as understood by Jean Baudrillard (190, 206). This forms the substance of postmodernism. The second strand is to be found in conceptualism, which is the conveying of ideas and is therefore ‘the interpretation of this substance in postmodern terms’ (208). Hence a specifically Russian postmodernism can be seen to have developed first in the 1930s to 1950s and later (in literature) in the 1970s. Whether Epstein’s categorisations will stand up to further critical analysis will be proven in time, and such a question is not within the remit of this dissertation. However, it is within the framework of a Russian postmodernism that it is constructive to assess Makanin’s late prose.¹⁰⁵

A fruitful basis for beginning to interpret Makanin’s individual creativity is to acknowledge the basic philosophical idea upon which he is musing, and then to examine the numerous presentations of this idea in several texts. The author describes

translated and with an introduction by Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Recent studies of Russian postmodernism recognise Makanin’s literature as ‘marked by postmodern narrative ambivalence’. Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), p. 487.

his method of writing as ‘improvisation’, and compares himself to a pianist sitting and improvising on a melody for hours.¹⁰⁶ Rollberg expresses this clearly: ‘the narratives of later works basically serve an exploratory function. The exploration of a certain philosophical problem... is primary and provides the aesthetic framework that shapes the text.’¹⁰⁷

Although not an Existentialist as such, Makanin does definitely reveal a keen interest in existential questions. Basinskii is hesitant in labelling the author thus, but concedes that: ‘[e]сли невнятное отношение Маканина ... к вопросу о Боге плюс безусловный социальный пессимизм – это и есть “русский” экзистенциализм, тогда – ладно’.¹⁰⁸ Makanin’s central concern appears to be the condition of man, understood here to signify man’s state or situation in relation to external influences and circumstances. Makanin is especially interested in the emotions that are aroused in man as a result of his position in society; for example, the fear, guilt or primordial bestiality that surface in difficult circumstances. For Makanin it is particularly the extreme situation which is the key, as man is at this point faced

¹⁰⁶ This was discussed in his video interviews at both Sheffield and Keele Universities in October 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Rollberg, ‘Invisible Transcendence: Vladimir Makanin’s Outsiders’, *Kennan Institute For Advanced Russian Studies – Occasional Paper*, no. 253, 1993, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ P. Basinskii, ‘*Stol, pokryti...*’. For additional discussions of the existential elements of his prose, see: T. Tolstaia and K. Stepanian, “‘...golos letiashchii...’”, pp. 94-5; I. Rodnianskaia, ‘*Neznakomye znakomtsy...*’, p. 245.

with a predicament which cannot be controlled and one that demands an immediate reaction and display of emotion. The tension of the individual within the collective is an important and recurring theme, and one that helps in the revelation of man's condition. Yet man's contemporary state is not the only concern, and the author repeatedly engages with other temporal dimensions of the past and future. Makanin appears to desire the expression of the totality of man's existence in, and throughout, time in order to fully consider man's condition at the end of the twentieth century. At the conclusion to the Rollberg interview, Makanin observes the following:

Мы видим себя в нынешнем времени, что означает для нас бывшее и будущее, но не видим связи времен, мы забываем о ней и каждый раз вновь выходим слепыми на берег...¹⁰⁹

It is as much the (past and future) memory of man's condition in time, out of time and through time which is of significance, as the contemporary expression in the 'here and now'. The texts reveal how man's knowledge of self in relation to others and the reality in which he finds himself are all influential. However, instability and indeterminacy are considered to be rife in the late twentieth century; in particular those theories and ideas that were once thought of as certainties, such as historical progress and liberation, have lost their credibility and the notions of 'self' and 'reality' against which man can assess his condition have been lost. The initial existential anguish, a

¹⁰⁹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 277.

typical feature of late modernism and, according to Epstein 'its last and most extreme variety', has now gone (97).

Scope of the present dissertation

The main Western overviews of late Soviet literature, such as that of Geoffrey Hosking¹¹⁰ and N.N. Shneidman's early work,¹¹¹ make no mention of Makanin, no doubt because of a lack of Soviet critical attention towards his texts.¹¹² On the other hand later criticism, for example in Goscilo's anthology of Russian writings¹¹³ and Deming Brown's book,¹¹⁴ now recognises Makanin as an author in his own right, not belonging to any particular grouping of literature. However, there is a lack of western analysis of Makanin's prose as a whole. Articles by Dalton-Brown and Rollberg have been mentioned, two articles by Colin Dowsett will be examined in the thesis, and the only major monograph to date is by Stolz-Hladky on *Odin i odna, Otstavshii* and

¹¹⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since 'Ivan Denisovich'* (London: Elek/Granada, 1980).

¹¹¹ N. N. Shneidman, *Soviet Literature in the 1970's: Artistic Diversity and Ideological Conformity* (London and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979). Shneidman's subsequent work, *Soviet Literature in the 1980's: Decade of Transition* (London and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) refers to Makanin in the section on the *sorokaletnie*. See pp. 52-8.

¹¹² Lowe's work briefly mentions Makanin, stating that he has a predilection for 'imitating other writers'. See David Lowe, *Russian Writing...*, p. 113-4.

¹¹³ H. Goscilo and B. Lindsey eds, *Glasnost...*

¹¹⁴ Deming Brown, *The Last Years...*

Utrata.¹¹⁵ The present study is an attempt to rectify this lack of analysis, and by focusing on what appears to be one of the author's major concerns, the condition of man, the study aims to reveal the multifaceted terms in which Makanin expresses this. The reasons for choosing to examine the author's prose from 1987 to 1995 are threefold.¹¹⁶ Firstly, it is from this date that the texts became more intricate, revealing not only intriguing ideas but a reflection of these ideas on various narrative planes. Secondly, critics so far have analysed only a few themes or texts and thereby lost the sense of connection and movement in the author's prose, which continually develops from one narrative to the next. And thirdly, the author has exhibited a radical change in thought and technique with the publication of *Kavkazskii plennyi* in 1995, which requires reference to the preceding body of prose, and the development of Russian postmodernist ideas.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Zuzana Stolz-Hladky, *Studien zur Poetik Vladimir S. Makanins "Odin i odna", "Otstavšij", "Utrata"* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995).

¹¹⁶ Where relevant to the ideas under discussion, earlier texts will be additionally examined in order to reveal the formation of the idea.

¹¹⁷ The author's most recent text, the novel *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*, will not be analysed. The majority of this study had been written when the text first appeared in print. Whilst this is unfortunate, the novel does not appear to contradict the findings of this study, and as the considerable interest in it confirms, is a significant contribution to Russian postmodernism.

The complicated form and achronology of the author's texts since 1987 does cause some difficulties when attempting to analyse his ideas. Yet an examination of each text individually would lose the progression of ideas between texts, and substantially reduce the philosophical ideas to their expression in the text in question. Therefore each chapter focuses on one of the author's means of representing man's condition in and throughout time, and the relevant aspects of each text are discussed in these separate chapters.

Makanin's texts from the early to mid phases of publication can be interpreted fundamentally as social realist works and this informs the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 5 and 6, however, examine his late texts as part of the body of Russian postmodern literature that is constructed to resist succinct interpretation; a literature that engenders feelings of indeterminacy and instability. The central chapter, Chapter 4, focuses on the point at which Makanin's introduction into his texts of several narratives on conflicting temporal planes invites multiple, inconclusive readings; interpretations that are several steps further forward from the straightforward social realism drawn in his early prose. Makanin's realist texts reveal questions regarding man's condition primarily in the time frame of the present, with particular emphasis on the tension between the individual and the collective, and the spatial representation of this tension. This forms the substance of Chapter 2. Through an examination of Makanin's incorporation of myths and legends into his texts on a separate narrative plane, Chapter 3 reveals the way in which the author brings into play the temporal representation of man's condition in the past and future. The extent to which myths and legends are an attempt to overcome the ideological restrictions of socialist realism

is also discussed, revealing the first intimations of his interest in a writer's control over his text. In Chapter 4, the author's metaphorical tool of the concept of 'genetic memory' is analysed, the means by which a person in one time frame (such as the present) is able to access a person in another time frame (such as the past). In this way the author attempts to unite both the spatial and temporal dimensions of man's condition. Yet one of the narratives in the central text *Utrata* reveals the loss of man's inheritance, and thereby reiterates the fragile state in which man can be found in contemporary society. In Chapter 5, this is reflected in an examination of the position of the writer towards his/her narrative which the author integrates into his texts, thereby subverting the text and encouraging the feelings of indeterminacy. Metafictional devices are examined as part of this process. Makanin's interest in the individual's fragile position amongst the collective reaches new heights as his essayistic texts debate the loss of individuality altogether in what he terms the subject of 'averaging out'. The main focus of Chapter 6 is the acknowledgement of the historical context in which texts are situated, and Makanin engages with Francis Fukuyama's idea of the end of history to illustrate the creative strength of the masses and their ability to create what he terms 'quasi-religions' such as Communism. The last text to be discussed, *Kavkazskii plennyi*, reveals a new turn in the Makanin's prose, in which man's condition in literature and society at the end of the twentieth century is both an extension of, and a direct contrast to, his irreversible heritage.

CHAPTER 2

‘Those who did not get into the choir’:

the tension of the individual facing the collective¹

The fate of the individual in a collective society is naturally a recurring literary theme in any totalitarian regime, and has been presented in Soviet and Russian literature in either a covert or open fashion depending on the literary climate and the writer’s political persuasion. A well-known example is Boris Pasternak’s *Doktor Zhivago*, in which the focus of the text is on the main character’s attempt to establish his own individuality and world outlook whilst continually facing external pressure to conform to society’s accepted standards of behaviour. Whilst this novel is an example of one that represents the more liberal and anti-establishment side of literature during the height of the Soviet period, the image of the individual hero is obviously not exclusively found therein. Indeed, socialist realism often depicted the individual hero striding forth, doggedly pursuing his goal; however in this case it was an ideological goal to which he had to drive forward those in the collective who were not so committed to the cause. Literature from the 1970s repeatedly focused on the depiction of an individual protagonist’s everyday life such as in Iurii Trifonov’s *Domna naberezhnoi*, particularly in relation to the main character’s professional position in

¹ This is a reference to one of the numerous narratives found in *Golosa*, in which individual youths fail to be accepted into the church choir. This key image will be examined further at a later point in the chapter.

society and moral stance.² Then from the end of the 1970s and through into the 1980s there appeared the alienated ‘anti-hero’: the protagonist who passively accepts his situation and has no desire to fight for or against it, and is often also an outsider to the community in which he uncomfortably resides. However, although there is a literary tradition of expressing the eternal problem of the survival of the individual, the critic Valerii Surikov considers that it is no longer at the forefront of contemporary Russian literature.³ According to Surikov, a heightened sense of individuality has been lost in late twentieth-century society. A person may come to question whether they can have a coherent sense of self when residing in a society full of instability and fear; a society in which reality in general is reduced to a patchwork of dislocated images.

Against this literary background, Makanin’s prose has, over the years, repeatedly examined the issue of the individual versus the collective on various levels, attempting to establish the individual’s position in and debt to contemporary society, and

² Kurchatkin believes the prose of the 1970s to be different from preceding prose precisely because it highlights the fate of the individual. See A. Kurchatkin, ‘Bremia shtilia...’, p. 26.

³ Valerii Surikov, “‘Sunduchok’ i “stol” – spasenie i gibel’ individual’nosti’, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1995:2), 32-7 (p. 32). Surikov examines the way in which Mark Kharitonov and Makanin have dealt quite differently with the issue of individuality in their recent Booker-winning texts.

examining this as part of a picture of man's condition in totality.⁴ In his later prose, this subject is extended further to portray a futuristic view of society where the notion of collective rule has been taken to the extreme. However, prior to the final dominance of the collective, the author depicts the existential anguish of man as he tries to hold on both to a sense of 'self' and to coherent relations with the world. The author portrays the conflicting desire of wanting to be both separate from and a part of any group, whether it be a geologists' *artel*' or a blood-thirsty crowd; and also examines the individual's responsibility to societies of the present, past and future. Both individual and collective memory of the historical and future state of mankind play their roles, informing the texts at different points, and revealing the fragile position in which the individual must fight or become overwhelmed by the collective.

As the critic Mikhail Tanfil'ev noted as early as 1978, the author 'стремится не рассказать о персонаже, а показать человека через его собственные действия'.⁵ For Makanin, it is the extreme and unexpected situation which reveals the essence of a person, particularly in the way they subsequently deal with their reaction to the situation. When separated from the collective, the individual's true nature is exposed and their subsequent actions are clearly visible to everyone. Yet, despite his obvious concern over the issue of individuality, his Booker-winning text

⁴ In an interview with Sally Laird, Makanin declares that he has always been concerned with the theme of the individual. Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 59.

⁵ Mikhail Tanfil'ev, 'Starye knigi' (Review), *Zvezda* (1978:1), 214-15 (p. 214).

depressingly and tortuously describes the death of the individual, and lies in direct contrast to the salvation of the individual that Surikov examines in Kharitonov's novel *Linii sud'by, ili Sunduchok Milashevicha*. Whether this is Makanin's summative statement on the state of mankind remains to be seen, and is one of the issues that will continue to be examined throughout the dissertation. The fate of the individual and the collective are repeatedly reflected and interlinked with other ideas throughout his texts and revealed on many different levels, particularly those of literary representation and history.⁶

However, it is important to note that Makanin is not highlighting the fate of the individual in order to criticise Soviet Russian society for its privileging of the collective, although this would be an easy path to follow and one which has formed the core of many literary works. In an interview in 1991, the author clearly states his aim: '[к]ак может личность проявиться в период тотального коллективизма?... процесс выявления личности и был моей целью'.⁷ It is the *tension* within each person resulting from these extreme situations, the way in which a person is able to recognise and express their individuality and deal with an immense desire to merge with the collective thus losing responsibility for their own actions, that is of paramount importance for the author. Hence, although Makanin is concerned with the individual

⁶ These will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Tolstaia's idea that the author holographically presents the 'коллектив – трагическая личность' motif bears witness to this. T. Tolstaia and K. Stepanian, "...golos letiashchii...", pp. 88-9.

⁷ V. Amurskii, "...Siiuminutnye temy..." .

and his fate, in the majority of his prose works he does not depict fully rounded personalities. Biographical information is often lacking and the reader is just presented with the bare situation and the individual's response. In those texts in which this symbolic 'everyman' appears, the ideas in the text can be interpreted as universally true rather than as common only to Russian/Soviet society.⁸ There are exceptions to this as familiar protagonists such as Igor' Petrovich and Kliucharev reappear in his texts. However, in later texts some protagonists are nameless, providing both a more universal character and the possibility that individuality has been practically lost altogether. In the Rollberg interview the author made the following revealing statement: '[д]остоверность является для меня настолько важным критерием, что я готов ради этого вначале даже принизить своего героя'.⁹ Makanin's belief in the ability to depict a lifelike illusion of a reality outside the text is the underlying motivation behind his prose. This belief informs his early narratives that are grounded in social realism, and it is as he begins to experiment with different forms of literary expression of the individual in the contemporary world that he also comes to display a questioning of the nature of reality itself.

⁸ Rodnianskaia notes how the author frequently uses common surnames, encouraging the idea of the 'everyman'. Irina Rodnianskaia, 'Neznakomye znakomtsy. K sporam o geroiakh Vladimira Makanina', *Novyi mir* (1986:8), 230-47 (p. 242). Further references to this article will appear in the text in parentheses.

⁹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 268.

The focus of the present chapter is on the representation of the individual in relation to the collective, initially examining the recurring images of the crying child and the *barak* in Makanin's earlier prose, and using these as a basis for the extension of his ideas concerning the fate of the individual as revealed in his texts of the 1990s. *Golosa*, in particular, provides several key images in the depiction of the tension the individual faces within the collective. The tension is emphasised in all the texts by the spatial dynamics and is additionally reflected through the unconscious of the protagonists. As discussed in the previous chapter, Makanin's work is distinguished by the expression of an idea on multiple planes. Therefore it should be noted that the nature and literary representation of individuality itself, particularly expressed on another plane in the idea of 'inner voices' in *Golosa*, will be discussed in Chapter 4. It is in this later chapter that the individual/collective representation on spatial levels revealed in this chapter, and the representation of man's condition on a temporal level which will be emphasised in Chapter 3, are interlinked with the concept of a genetic memory. This concept is also important as a revelation of the author's abiding interest in the structure of his texts, which is then discussed further in the subsequent chapters on the literary process and history.

The call of the child

A key to Makanin's ideas on the representation of the individual within the collective can be found in the image of the *barak* – a form of communal habitation. This image, like a number of others that the author repeatedly employs, provoked divergent responses from critics. Having been brought up in a *barak* himself, the author has a very clear idea of the influence such housing conditions have on people and the development of their sense of individuality.¹⁰ Rodnianskaia asserts that almost half of the post-war generation resided in this form of temporary accommodation, and therefore literature concerned with this habitation was extremely familiar and poignant to many readers (233). In his stories from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s Makanin rarely actually describes the physical shape of the buildings, but rather the more general sense of suffocation they arouse in their inhabitants. Rodnianskaia expresses this effectively: 'Маканин – не бытописатель; о барачно-поселковом слое жизни из его книг узнаем либо по резким и обрывистым зарубкам в памяти ... либо в форме философической стилизации' (234).

An example of this technique can be found in *Goluboe i krasnoe*. The text concerns the childhood of the main character Kliucharev, mostly describing his early years and

¹⁰ See the biographical details in the interview with Laird. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, pp. 54-5. The details of the *barak* in which the Makanins lived closely match the description of the housing in the first narrative of *Golosa*.

interspersed with commentary by the protagonist as an adult.¹¹ Kliucharev was brought up by his parents in a *barak* and was sent off to visit his grandmother in the country where he would be fed better during the famine. They are joined by his other grandmother from the town, a woman who embodies very different ideals and a different style of living. The two grandmothers are not on amicable terms, and the young Kliucharev is very much in the middle of their opposing strong personalities and the desire of each to outmanoeuvre the other. The opening paragraph contains Kliucharev's childhood recollection of the diametrically opposed characters of his parents and grandmothers: '[м]ать и отец, именно что слившиеся, ничем особенным и рознящим в детстве ему не запомнились... бабушки и были ему удивительны, а в память запали – разностью' (171). Kliucharev comes to realise, more so retrospectively, how the *barak* appears to deprive a person of their individuality amongst the crowded, bustling lives of its inhabitants. The theft of some sugar from one of the women's stores, for example, brings into sharp focus the lack of individuality in the *barak*, even amongst the children: 'кто-то; неважно кто; уже в детстве каждый мог сделать и каждый мог не сделать' (172).

Integrated with the depiction of the two strong individual characters of the grandmothers there is also the implied division of social class, a subtlety that is lost on the child, but one that becomes apparent as the protagonist matures:

¹¹ *Goluboe i krasnoe in Otstavshii: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), pp. 171-221. References in the main body of text are to this edition of the short story and will appear in parentheses.

Лишь с возрастом понял он разницу их отношений и притязаний, хотя уже тогда, в детстве, смутное чувство подсказывало ему о некоем имеющемся тут противоречии, а даже и парадоксе, так как по логике им бы, конечно, следовало говорить *обратное*. (211)

A further expression of Kliucharev's position within the collective is found on another level: that of the unconscious. He dreams that he loses his pen, and when questioning others as to whether they have seen it, he comes across another boy – his enemy – offering around some bread. To his horror he espies not his pen but his finger in the bread, reminiscent of a similar scene in Gogol's *Nos*. His grandmother, calming him down, has to tell him repeatedly that it means nothing, and that all his fingers are in place. This is perhaps one of the keys to the text: individuality can be expressed when a person is separate from the collective (i.e. a finger severed from a hand); but the person is aware of the collective's pressure to 'swallow up' anyone who tries to assert him/herself. In subsequent texts the adult Kliucharev reappears as a loner, continually struggling to survive and understand the collective pressure with which he must live. In *Goluboe i krasnoe* it is Kliucharev's memories of his grandmothers' distinct individual personalities, in comparison to the insignificant memories he retains of his parents, that reveal the loss of individuality that occurs in the *barak*.

Makanin does not wish to portray a wholly negative image of the *barak*; on the contrary it is a place where strong bonds develop and where an overwhelming sense of

belonging infuses the inhabitants' consciousness. It is a familiar, warm and comforting place and those who have long since moved away to the town enthuse over nostalgic memories of their upbringing in the *barak*. For example, the middle-aged Kliucharev in *Povest' o Starom Poselke* repeatedly remembers different events from his childhood there, and he contemplates a long overdue return visit. However, his nostalgic image is shattered as, on his return, Kliucharev finds only ruins rather than the warm, friendly place he imagines, and he is unable to connect emotionally with the village: 'Ключарев бродит и каждую минуту ловит себя на том, что никак не может совместиться с этим вымершим местом'.¹² In another text, *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*, the composer Bashilov returns from Moscow to visit the village *barak* – a place haunted by the memories of his parents and the neighbours who raised him after his parents' death in a fire at the local factory. The depiction of the *barak* in this text is particularly significant, for it clearly provides a spatial image of the habitation but without providing the physical detail that one would expect. As Anninskii points out, Makanin simply mentions the easily recognisable hum of a neighbour's sewing machine, and the sound of another couple's abusive argument.¹³ Even outside, the description of the communal eating area with the benches and table laid out in a horseshoe shape effectively underlines the close knit atmosphere and

¹² *Povest' o Starom Poselke* in *Odin i Odná: Povesti* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988), pp. 223-316 (p. 316). It is this text that Kurchatkin feels to be the one which accurately and seriously reveals the typical image of the individual found in the prose of the 1970s. A. Kurchatkin, 'Bremia shtilia...', p. 30.

¹³ L. Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta...', p. 8.

physical proximity of each inhabitant to their neighbour without actually focusing on the layout of the building. It is here that they have gathered for many years to sing their native songs, and this explains how Bashilov's musical gift developed. His now famous compositions are inspired by his memories of the folk melodies that formed the substance of the *barak* entertainment.

Despite its positive attributes, however, there is no ignoring the fact that the communal atmosphere of the *barak* overwhelms a person's sense of individuality.¹⁴ The crowded, claustrophobic, intense surroundings in which no-one has any privacy and every sound can be heard heighten one's feeling of being inextricably joined to one's friends and neighbours. Anninskii believes Makanin to be making a social comment by depicting the *barak* as what he, the critic, understands to be a type of Soviet housing that had a huge impact on Soviet mentality. Anninskii goes on to suggest that their upbringing in the *barak* explains the cold, grasping and resourceful nature of the author's protagonists.¹⁵ Deming Brown also adheres to Anninskii's view, writing that the *poselok*, in which the *barak* is located, is a Soviet institution first arising from the Five-Year Plans.¹⁶ The *barak* was instituted at this time to provide temporary housing until proper accommodation could be built. Yet in this the critics are surely mistaken. Makanin rather views the *barak* as a nineteenth-century

¹⁴ Gessen takes this further, stating that genuine humanity is only expressed outside of the *barak*. E. Gessen, 'Vokrug Makanina...', p. 152.

¹⁵ L. Anninskii, 'Struktura labirinta...', pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ D. Brown, *The Last Years...*, pp. 104-5.

institution (related to the *obshchina*) and is, in his own opinion, far from making a political or social comment in his texts.¹⁷ Marchenko, on the other hand, compares the building of temporary housing with the activities of the original nomadic invaders who gradually settled across the land: they only set up rough forms of housing before they moved on to their next location.¹⁸ However, the mistake made by all these critics is their emphasis on the habitation itself and its social implications, which is not what concerns Makanin in his writing. Ageev clearly notes how the author is more interested in the metaphysics of the *barak* than in the type of habitation.¹⁹ Makanin is not using literature as a vehicle for his own ideological beliefs, a point which distinguishes his writing from that of the village prose movement with which there are, at times, some similarities. His concerns are existential rather than political. For Makanin, as Rodnianskaia elucidates, the *barak* represents a whole historical layer, and one that is imbued with feelings of trauma and spiritual loss (234). The author is more concerned with man's condition, for example how an individual responds to collective pressure within the *barak* environment, and to what extent man can control this. Rodnianskaia aptly expresses this concern, pointing out the many

¹⁷ This was mentioned by Makanin in my interview with him in December 1994. He was keen to point out that his depiction of the *barak* is not to be viewed in political terms.

¹⁸ A. Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei...', pp. 430-1.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Ageev, 'Istina i svoboda. Vladimir Makanin: vzgliad iz 1990 goda', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1990:9), 25-33 (p. 27).

незримых, неформальных связей между людьми, которые складываются в страде, беде, нужде, но на этой чрезвычайной, временной и отрицательной основе не упрочиваются, а требуют для своего поддержания какого-то притока положительной энергии. (242)

A *barak* upbringing has had a huge impact on its inhabitants – one which is irreversible – and it is the way that a person subsequently deals with the feeling of suppression that is important. To summarise, the *barak* is the first main metaphor used in Makanin's prose to express the discomfort of the individual (particularly in childhood) as they begin to realise the demands of the collective; and is significant in its repeated use as a spatial metaphor to reiterate this feeling.

One of the early instances of the second motif linked to the expression of the individual within the collective, that of the crying child, is in the metafictional short story *Rasskaz o rasskaze*.²⁰ The text has two simultaneous and interlinked narrative levels that require some explanation. Firstly, the main character details recent events in his life as though they have just taken place a few moments earlier and, secondly, describes how he incorporated the details in the short story he composed when he was younger. In addition, the text includes commentary on the slight difference between

²⁰ *Rasskaz o rasskaze* in *Izbrannoe: Rasskazy i povest'* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 155-68. Further references to this edition of the short story will appear in the text in parentheses.

actual events and the manner in which his creative imagination has depicted them.²¹ However, although the main focus of the story appears to be the protagonist's developing relationship with the young woman Alia, the narrator declares that: 'главное в рассказе уже не любовь и не Аля, а этот необычный плач в три-четыре часа ночи среди разрозненных сонных голосов и звуков' (161). It is this change of focus that is of importance in the present discussion.

The narrator goes in pursuit of this crying child and finds the flat from which he believes the noise emanates, but is informed that no child lives there. However, as the door is closed on him, he espies a child's toy lying on the hallway floor. If this is not puzzling in itself, there is the additional spatial discrepancy: the flat is located some distance from the narrator's own. The crying appears, therefore, to be penetrating through several walls and flats, and is distinguishable from all other noises around, yet no-one else seems to hear it. The image of the crying child could be explained as the narrator's or even the author's whim – an attempt to add a little creative intrigue to the text – if not for the fact that the image is repeated in later works, and there are several passages which depict comparable spatial difficulties when a person responds to another's pleas.

In both *Predtecha* and *Utrata* there appears a similar if not identical occurrence. Firstly, in *Predtecha*, the faith-healer Iakushkin halts in the street and declares that a

²¹ See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of the metafictional content of this text.

child is crying nearby; however, there is no child in the vicinity. In the second text the image forms part of an extensive preoccupation in the entire narrative with physical efforts to reach a specific geographical point and to overcome obstacles encountered on the way. The hospitalised protagonist catches sight of a distraught young girl at the window of the building opposite. His own trauma is put aside as he painstakingly makes his way over to the building on his crutches. However, despite several heroic attempts, the protagonist fails to rescue or even locate the young girl. In these two texts, and also in the earlier text *Rasskaz o rasskaze*, the crying child represents the individual at odds with the collective. The individual expresses their discomfort by crying out, yet they are rarely heard. The crying child is always located at a distance, in a place difficult to find, and in this lies the spatial representation of an individual's first painful understanding: a keen individuality can be alienated from the collective. Additionally, to be revealed later on another narrative plane, it is the protagonists' ability to hear, recognise and respond to the crying child when others fail to take note that is of significance. The implication is that an ability to distinguish such a 'cry' marks a person out, setting them apart from the remainder of society: they are different in that they are receptive to the discomfort and pain of another individual at odds with the collective. More importantly, the attempt to overcome spatial and temporal difficulties and engage with others is indicative of an unusual and strong sense of individuality in comparison to the remainder of the collective.²²

²² This was noted by Gessen although she did not develop the idea further: 'может, тут важнее сама попытка, порыв дойти, дотянуться, достучаться, докричаться?' E. Gessen, 'Vokrug Makanina...', p. 158.

Expressing the individual tension

The crying child's distress as discussed above is developed further in Makanin's texts to become an adult's existential plea for help as they recognise their sense of complete alienation in contemporary society. The voice metaphor is continually used by the author to differentiate an individual from the collective, and the text *Golosa* in particular engages with this idea. It is in this text that the tension the individual faces comes to the fore as a person recognises their irresolvable desire to both merge with, and remain separate from, the collective.

One of the earliest references to the importance of voices is found in the short story *Poite im tikho* written in 1973, in which the male patients of one ward are mesmerised by the kind words and story-telling of a visitor.²³ An explanation of the plot provides the background to this first intimation of a key motif. The patients all have serious spinal injuries and are unlikely to walk again, yet the doctors try to inspire feelings of power and masculinity in them in order to give them the strength to carry on their limited recovery.²⁴ One patient, Shcherbina, is the doctors' hero as he is unfailingly

²³ *Poite im tikho* in *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), pp. 3-14. References to this edition of the short story will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

²⁴ P. Rollberg believes this short story to be autobiographical, based on Makanin's lengthy treatment following his car accident. See 'Invisible Transcendences...', p. 6.

cheerful, does muscle exercises and finally wills himself to move one of his toes. Yet when faced with an approaching operation, he crumbles and displays the same fear as the other patients (6). One young man, Petia, also has some emotional difficulties and it is only the words of his visiting aunt that can touch him. Her constant sympathy, tears and kind words have a comforting affect and help Petia first to express emotion and then later to recollect his accident. It is Shcherbina who realises how much effect the old woman has not only on her nephew, but also on the remainder of the ward. He tries to explain this to the doctor, but with limited success. The key issue is his recollection of her: 'он никак не мог вспомнить ее отекавшего лица, а голос помнил' (13). The doctors' words of encouragement and strength have little effect on the men, for they have seen at first hand how Shcherbina's earlier heroism had later evaporated. However, the old lady's simple words and stories have a greater healing power than any medical heroics. She reaches out to their suffering and acknowledges it, and this contrasts with the doctors' denial of the patients' pain.²⁵ In this instance, there are similarities with those who hear the crying child's pleas for comfort and help: the old woman is responsive to the patients and alleviates some of their suffering. Although a very contrived and simplistic narrative, *Poite im tikho* does give an early indication of Makanin's use of the voice metaphor in what become his persistent attempts to understand man's condition.

²⁵ Makanin is interested in those characters who do not conform to the expected 'norm', and the old woman is representative of this. P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 276.

Golosa is the key text in the development of the author's ideas concerning the expression of individuality, and is the work in which he first broaches the idea of inner 'voices' to be discussed in Chapter 4.²⁶ In the present discussion the voice metaphor will be examined on a separate yet interconnected level: its incorporation in a text to express the individual's tension at being separated from the collective. *Golosa* consists of numerous short stories and depictions of individual characters, interspersed and loosely linked with authorial comment on writing and creativity in general. The publication of a number of the texts as separate short stories illustrates their status as complete stories within themselves.²⁷ The fictional narratives vary greatly in subject matter, ranging from the opening tale of a young boy who is dying in a *barak* in the 'Yellow Hills', to a humorous tale of Achilles's difficult and drunken life prior to his move to Greece and subsequent fame. What the stories appear to have in common, on the whole, is unusual protagonists who act in an unconventional way and whose individuality amongst collective society is keenly felt: their clearly identified voices reverberate throughout the whole narrative.

A key image in the text that explains the differentiation of the individual from the collective can be found in the aforementioned first story, that of the dying boy. The

²⁶ *Golosa* in *Otstavshii: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), pp. 4-116. References in the main body of text are to this edition of the *povest'* and will appear in parentheses.

²⁷ See *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremmenik, 1990), pp. 229-89, in which a selection of the stories appear.

first-person narrator, who subsequently becomes a writer and uses these memories in his stories, recalls how he and his grandfather once went out for a walk in the hills. His grandfather called into a church and left the narrator outside. Some considerable time later the old man emerged accompanied by a group of forlorn lads who then proceed to make their own way home: 'на перекрестке они пошли кто куда, и пыльные дороги и белое марево поглощали их теперь каждого в отдельности. Это были голоса, не попавшие в хор' (17). Those who have a strong sense of individuality, emphasised spatially in the text by the fact that they disappear *one at a time* into the dusty road, are unable to become part of the indistinguishable mass of the choir. The strength of their individual voices is not conducive to the harmony and equality of voices demanded by the collective, and hence they are excluded. The lads are disappointed, however, and in this lies the tension of the individual: a person may desire to become part of the collective, but is constrained by strong individual traits. Yet the members of the collective do not always reject the individual and often, on the contrary, actively seek to include a person into the collective, but at the expense of his/her individuality. The image of the *zhar-ptitsa*, found in a short narrative in the same text, is a case in point: those who love you – your closest family – are ultimately shown to be your persecutors (23-5). This is depicted allegorically by the image of the bird (representing the individual) surrounded by people plucking out the feathers one by one, until finally the bird stands there naked before them. However, the torture does not end here: the bird stands there cold beside a pile of feathers and suddenly finds it gradually more difficult to breathe. Not only has the bird been plucked clean, but it has been decapitated too: the final loss of individuality and life itself. As Ageev points out: '[р]одовая любовь не

личностна, она функциональна. Яркие перья индивидуальности мспеают исполнять функцию, их необходимо безжалостно обрывать'.²⁸

Towards the end of *Golosa*, one passage develops the voice metaphor in a partial explanation by the first-person narrator of the aims of this and subsequent texts:

Потеряв на миг равновесие человек обнаруживался, выявляясь, очерчиваясь индивидуально, тут же и мигом выделяясь из массы, казалось бы, таких же, как он. Голос выбивался из хора или, точнее сказать, отбивался от остальных голосов, и – пусть даже слабый – был слышен в ста и более шагах, а сам хор, мощный и правильно расставленный, делался рядом с ним как бы фоном, как бы тишиной или молчанием. (93) [emphasis in the original]

Hence, as Makanin stated in the Amurskii interview, it is the revelation of individuality from amongst the collective which is the aim of his prose and the voice metaphor is a literary 'expression' of this. Individuality is revealed in the extreme situation, at the point where there is a suspension between thought and action, between the unconscious and the conscious; it is here that a person reveals their essence through

²⁸ A. Ageev, 'Istina i svoboda' ..., p. 28.

the tension of their situation.²⁹ The voice metaphor emphasises this on a spatial level too: it can be heard at a distance from the uniform voice of the collective choir who only form the background harmony. The 'laying bare' of the individual is mirrored in the laying bare of the text itself, for Makanin continually refers to the creative process of writing in this text. In his attempts to elucidate the nature of individuality, the author is simultaneously 'revealing' his awareness of the nature and limitations of realist prose itself.³⁰ The devices involved in the creation of an illusion of an external reality are coming under scrutiny.

The choir image is not just restricted to the one text, but is developed in other ways. In the narrative *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*, we find a clear juxtaposition between the individual (in the form of the composer) and the collective (the village choir), and additionally a concern with their links to creativity. This text caused much consternation amongst critics, who were used to a more clear-cut narrative in which the ideal of the village is elevated above that of the town and its bureaucratic impositions. The narrative follows the public success of the adult composer Bashilov. Neighbours and relatives from his native settlement are initially very proud of his achievements, but later he becomes the focus for some discontent amongst them and

²⁹ The Piskunovs point out the similarity with Dostoevskii's depiction of the dilemma of the 'chelovek na poroge' as noted by Bakhtin. S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...', p. 70.

³⁰ This application of the Russian Formalists' theory of 'laying bare' of the structure of the text itself will be examined further in Chapter 5.

he is eventually ignored by the younger generation.³¹ In the past the villagers often gathered in front of the *barak* to sing their folk songs, and the young Bashilov's talented voice was soon singled out as worthy of some attention.³² Other common themes that Makanin employs occur in this text alongside the dilemma of the individual in the collective; in particular, that of man's fate and cultural inheritance. For example, Bashilov was sent to study music in the capital, at the villagers' expense, and was accompanied there by one of the mature singers from the village, Akhtynskii. However, in an intriguing twist to the story, Akhtynskii takes to drink during his stay in Moscow and loses his voice. Bashilov's tutor explains this to his perplexed pupil as a necessary payment for Bashilov's education and talent – a case of one person's happiness at the expense of another's – reminiscent of the short story *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*. Bashilov later becomes a famous composer incorporating the underlying musical themes of the village, the '*melos*', within his popular music. In later years he returns to visit, and an old woman accuses him of having stolen their songs: 'У, пьявка... высосал из нас соки! ...Души наши высосал!' (401). At first Bashilov is unclear what the woman is referring to, and either forgets or consciously ignores her accusations. Yet later, as an old man, he becomes racked with guilt: 'композитор чувствует себя виноватым за то, что в поселке, откуда он

³¹ *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami* in V. Makanin, *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), pp. 390-445. References in the main body of text are to this edition of the short story and will appear in parentheses.

³² Lipovetskii points out how the singing takes place at 'threshold' moments such as births, deaths and marriages. M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 155.

родом, в некоем далеком поселке за тысячу километров отсюда, люди, то бишь его земляки, совсем не поют' (391). It appears that the more famous his music becomes, the less frequently the villagers gather to sing their music, until they eventually cease altogether.

The protagonist is not depicted as an unfeeling character; on the contrary he attempts to reverse or at least redress the situation. The composer is unable to rid himself of his guilty feelings, and is often overwhelmed by them.³³ In one incident he hears a drunkard singing as he passes under his window in the street, and for the remainder of the day he is obsessed with this sound, unable even to talk properly to his visiting son. Bashilov eventually returns to the settlement with the idea of establishing and teaching a village children's choir, yet the present generation have no interest whatsoever: they are content to listen to the music blaring out of a transistor radio. The conclusion to the text, however, has a distinct note of optimism. Bashilov sits on the communal benches outside and begins to sing. The village fool, whom he remembers from his childhood, joins in in his own clumsy voice. Their voices are then unexpectedly joined by a third: '[М]инута, когда прозвучал высокий чистый голос ребенка, приближалась в тишине и в темноте неслышно, сама собой' (445). Despite the apparent loss of music in the settlement, there is still hope for regeneration. Whether it is Bashilov's attempt to rekindle the music that is the key is unclear, yet ultimately an individual's voice can be heard independently and unprovoked by others.

³³ For a discussion of the motif of guilt in this text, see A. Bocharov, 'Kak slovo...', pp. 146-7.

Critics disagree as to the significance of this final section: Bocharov, for example, suggests that this is a dream or mirage which is distinctly out of place in the text.³⁴ On the other hand, Riabchuk declares that the author has introduced pathos with this ending in order to reveal how the problem of creative inspiration and its regeneration is an unresolvable one.³⁵ Whatever the reasoning behind the concluding scene, it does introduce a feeling of hope for continuation of the village's traditions, and the possibility for the expression of the creative spirit again in the collective atmosphere. There may be the implication that the creative power of the individual always has the capacity to overcome collective pressure.³⁶ It is during an unexpected and unprovoked moment, between the rough voice of the untrained village idiot and the musical voice of the composer, that the possibility of something great can be born. Another critic, Ageev, believes the musical *melos* to be a material or biological metaphor for the creative life strength, rather than a spiritual phenomenon. This interpretation explains its regeneration, as the *melos* is not owned by the villagers, just

³⁴ A. Bocharov, 'Kak slovo...', p. 148. For Bocharov, the text as a whole represents the sense of alarm rife in pre-*glasnost*' society in the early 1980s.

³⁵ Mikhail Riabchuk, 'Sindrom Bashilova', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1984:11), 43-5 (p. 45).

³⁶ The fact that the singing comes only from the village idiot and the child indicates the author's belief in the power of the pure and naive, untainted by the rationality and corruption of society. The author holds the traditional opinion of the child as a pure, naive but 'open' individual, who expresses the essence of humanity and possibly holds the key to salvation.

inherited by them.³⁷ The title of the work itself is of interest, possibly metaphorically referring to the undefined point at which two contrasting phenomena meet: artistic creativity and man's conscious actions. In the text, the point at which Bashilov examines the horizon is immediately followed by his realisation that another inevitable fire has started in the factory.³⁸ Reality and ideals cannot co-habit peacefully and tragedy is unavoidable, in the same way that the expression of individual creativity demands a high price, and one which the collective cannot control or produce at will. Yet in the space between the two demands there is the potential for something powerful to emerge.

Turning to the texts published in 1987, the depiction of the individual in relation to the collective is expressed on many levels, with the motif of voices only one small part of this. The emphasis is placed instead on the individual's external relations with the collective as a reflection of their existential state. The critic Inna Solov'eva, in her article on *Odin i odna*, *Utrata* and *Otstavshii*, noted how all three texts are 'полны этих окликаний, которые не доходят до тех, к кому обращены, и мучительно доходят до того, кто физически не может прийти на помощь'.³⁹ There is a strong sense of being 'stuck' and trapped in time in these texts, and this is also revealed spatially in the hopeless situations from which pleas for

³⁷ A. Ageev, 'Istina i svoboda...', p. 29.

³⁸ For a discussion of the many metaphors in the text, such as the fire, see A. Lanshchikov, 'Nameki ili ...' .

³⁹ I. Solov'eva, 'Natiurmort s knigoi...', p. 47.

help are heard. For example, right at the beginning of *Utrata*, in the legend narrative, Pekalov calls out for help with his tunnel project yet he is ignored by his neighbours, who consider him to be a good-for-nothing. In the same narrative, the blind men call out for help as they drown in the swamp, and in the present-day narrative the birds call out expressing their hunger after the desertion of the village. In the legend in *Otstavshii*, Lesha continually chases after the members of the *artel*, begging them to wait for him, and he mistakenly dogs the footsteps of some robbers, crying out for them to let him catch up. In the same text the protagonist's father in the present-day narrative shouts after the departing truck as he is left behind in his recurring nightmare. The protagonist, Gena, finds himself to be a link between the pleading voice of his daughter from the future generation, and the distressed voice of his father from the past generation. All of these brief examples reveal how repetitive is the call for help within the texts, a reflection of the fragile state of mankind in contemporary society. The lack of response to this cry reveals the sense of entrapment and isolation of the contemporary individual in an almost hopeless situation. These last two texts in particular have many narrative planes, and both spatial and temporal dimensions, and these will be discussed in later chapters in more detail. They are the key texts in Makanin's search for a full literary expression of man's contemporary condition.

The texts published after *Golosa* all emphasise the importance of a person's understanding of their position in relation to others, an extension of the two earlier images of the *barak* and the crying child. The publication of this text marked a turning point in his literary career as it brought to a close the traditional social realist narratives that he had been producing for many years. Instead of the single narrative

plane that depicts one individual's tense conflict within the collective, Makanin began to develop his ideas on multiple narrative planes and to include a number of different genres that engaged with his main ideas. The loss of a straightforward and coherent text is the author's attempt to express his opinion on the lack of absolutes and the instability of life, and hence of the extent to which literature should produce its own illusion of an external, stable reality. This middle phase of Makanin's literary development will be examined in the next two chapters, where the other narrative planes of his prose will be analysed before a full picture of the change in his depiction of man's condition in late twentieth century society can be realised. The remainder of this chapter will examine primarily his later prose, in which the acknowledged uncertainty of contemporary life is powerfully drawn in his images of the increasingly overwhelming strength of the collective.

Facing the collective pressure

There are numerous examples of protagonists facing a real or imagined collective pressure to conform, one which often seems to be overwhelming or is unavoidable when in an extreme situation. Those works published during the mid- to late 1980s and into the early 1990s, reflect the sense of unease bordering on fear that was a familiar part of everyday life. Critics have noted the recurrence of the fate of the individual and the collective and have analysed it in various ways. Dalton-Brown pays particular attention to the relationship between the intelligentsia and the *narod*; Alla Latynina and Rollberg examine the dynamic in terms of 'outsiders' and 'insiders'; and

Ageev concentrates on the notions of freedom and dependency between the individual and the group.⁴⁰ The more general focus examined here allows the inclusion of characters who are not members of the intelligentsia, and also facilitates an examination of the tension between, rather than the composition of, the two groups.

It will have become clear in the first half of this chapter that Makanin's later works incorporate a wealth of ideas and motifs that are not only expressed through characterisation and situations, but also in terms of their spatial and temporal dynamics. Although the concepts of space and time are closely aligned, the following examples of representation of the sense of individual isolation from the collective will emphasise the spatial element.

Rising collective pressure can be seen in several of the earlier texts. In *Che lovek svity*, the protagonist finds himself at a loss and extremely worried about his position when, apparently for no reason, he ceases to be invited to tea with his superior's secretary: the possibility of being an outsider is highly unattractive. As we have seen, Kurenkov in *Antilider* attacks those who behave as though they are better than others.

In more recent texts, we find a continual preoccupation with collective pressure which reaches greater heights and extremes. In *Odin i odna*, the title of which immediately

⁴⁰ S. Dalton-Brown, 'Ineffectual Ideas...'; Alla Latynina, 'Autsaidery: Spor vokrug "lishnikh liudei" sovremennosti', *Oktiabr'* (1987:7), 174-84; P. Rollberg, 'Invisible Transcendences...'; A. Ageev, 'Istina i svoboda...'

isolates two individual protagonists, Gennadii Pavlovich and Ninel' Nikolaevna now live lonely existences in comparison to the hectic days of their youth during the intellectual excitement of the 1960s. Gennadii wishes to lose his sense of self and desires to become part of the collective, or the 'swarm' as he terms it.⁴¹ In essence, every person has a wish to be part of a group of people, yet in order to do so has to accept the loss of individuality. Gennadii suffers intermittently from a form of suicidal depression, and admits his extreme loneliness and desire to be part of society:

Он говорит, что страдает и тоскует по рою. Он говорит, что хочет слиться с людской массой, он устал, он, наконец, хочет настолько слиться и раствориться, чтобы совсем лишиться индивидуальности. Он хочет, чтобы не стало его "я" . (132)

For most people, the feeling of 'belonging' outweighs the fact that the *roi* has sucked away any individual strength. As Gena expresses it in *Otstavshii*, everyone wishes to belong: 'Есть известное самодовольство – считать себя принадлежащим к отряду, к колонне, к артели, которые, внутри себя притираясь, шагают правильно и в меру быстро. А вот этих, иных, считать отставшими'.⁴² However, Makanin appears to be saying that there are some who still struggle and feel

⁴¹ *Один и одна: Повести* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988). Further references to this edition will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

⁴² *Otstavshii*, *Znamia* (1987:9), 6-59 (p. 42).

the tension between the individual and the group, and it is within this tension that the potential for something great, even something unusual is born. This was shown in the discussion of *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami*, and in a similar way the young boy Lesha in the legend in *Otstavshii* has been given a gift for finding gold: it is only when he has been left behind by the group that the gift can materialise. Makanin is again taking the standard depiction of the individual versus collective dilemma several steps further by emphasising the tension as the key issue. From this point the author can then move from the microcosm of a particular individual in a collective setting to the macrocosm of man in general, not only in the present, but in the future also. Part of man's existential dilemma is the fact that he wishes to be an individual, yet at the same time he wants to be part of a collective group such as society.

In *Odin i odna*, the feeling of having been left behind is taken further: there is an actual physical removal from one space to another. On two separate occasions, Gennadii is ejected from a moving vehicle and abandoned, a direct representation of his inability to adapt to the times. The unsavoury character Olzhys, who opens beer bottles with his steel-capped teeth, throws Gennadii out of the taxi into the snow-covered, nocturnal streets of Moscow even though Gennadii has initially come to his rescue. Later, whilst on a moving train, Gennadii is verbally abused and thrown out into the snow by a couple of youths, and is fortunately taken to hospital by a passing old woman. Gennadii himself equates his ejection from the train with the fact that life has passed him by: 'Жизнь вдруг ушла без меня, все было так быстро!' (187). Intriguingly, in direct contrast to his isolated existence in the present, as a young man Gennadii was a brilliant speaker and propounder of contemporary ideas. He had a

close-knit group of admirers, the *staika*, who attentively listened to his lectures and occasionally approached him individually for advice. However, recalling those days, Gennadii admits to Igor' that he only viewed his admirers as a whole unit: 'Он их, в общем, не различал... даже не отличал именем... Он знал их *вместе*' (34, 36).

The text includes an example of an unconscious spatial depiction of an individual at odds with the collective. Ninel' Nikolaevna relates a significant dream to Igor' which aptly reflects her inability to relate to others or find a partner: 'она, нагая – для снов это обычно – движется по какому-то лабиринту комнат и квартир, коммунальных или отдельных, но между собой как-то соединенных, сблокированных, и ищет там людей' (68). As the narrator Igor' points out, this has similarities with Gennadii's behaviour at the party in the sculpture workshop: he wanders around examining the statues which are modelled on some of the young girls present. He is more interested, however, in examining the statues than talking to their human counterparts. Gennadii wants to engage in conversation with the prize-winning sculptor but is also too scared. As he takes a step towards the group he inadvertently moves further away from them: 'увы, не приближался, а как бы все больше отдалялся, отчуждался от Н.' (7). He is isolated and unable to communicate with people, in the same way as Ninel' searches for people in places where there would in reality be an abundance, but is also unable to engage with them. They are both alienated from the remainder of society, and the spatial reflection of this in the text continually reiterates their isolation.

Additional representations of the individual facing collective pressure are found in the two futuristic works *Dolog nash put'* and *Laz*. In the former, the protagonist initially appears to be a conscientious worker whose strength of character is tested when he learns that his work is part of a huge deception. The young man has invented a time-saving manufacturing device and visits the secretly located factory to observe its installation. The factory produces, it claims, vegetarian 'meat' and is one of the government's proclaimed technological achievements. As he gradually becomes more involved in the work at the factory, he eventually discovers that cows are slaughtered for this process as in the past. However, he is unable to withstand the pressure of those around him and does not speak out against the deception, and his lack of action signifies his acquiescence. In an attempt to show his disagreement, he builds himself a camp-fire at night to attract any aircraft that could possibly be in the vicinity and that might pick him up. Yet he soon espies other camp-fires and speaks to workers who also wish to leave but have been unable to make their escape. No-one in actual fact is defying the authorities and each obtains comfort from the others' camp-fires and knowledge that they are acting together. He learns that the others believe that they are unlikely to be rescued, but this does not leave them feeling distraught: the fact that they have hope is more important.⁴³ The hero becomes as one with the collective in the factory and the nation at large – he is physically unable to leave the steppe and he mentally acquiesces in the deception practised by the collective.

⁴³ The obvious subversion of the socialist realist hero in the text will be examined in Chapter 4.

A second narrative plane in *Dolog nash put'* also deals with the issue of an individual's attempt to remain firm in his convictions against the pressure to conform to the collective's norm of behaviour. The futuristic narrative, the reader learns, is the creation of two characters in the present-day narrative in the text, one of whom – Il'ia Ivanovich – is passionately concerned about the care of animals. Il'ia is disturbed by any act of cruelty to animals, and becomes so upset that he gradually withdraws from society, refuses to watch television and will not leave his house. When his suffering becomes unbearable, he takes himself off to a psychiatric hospital to recover, to a separate place of safety: 'Илья Иванович хочет, чтобы его растревоженное "я" было защищено и ограждено за этими крепостными стенами, а также за стенами лекарств и квалифицированных врачей и режима'.⁴⁴ This statement, combined with Il'ia's later heart attack, indicates the difficulties the author perceives in retaining a sense of individuality and concern in present-day society, for the general consensus is to ignore issues. The number of canine killings in contemporary society is discussed in the text, as well as the way in which people turn a blind eye to these actions. On one level the futuristic narrative is obviously a reflection of the contemporary cruelty and evil in society, in the same way that the young man's trip to the fortified secret factory is a repetition of Il'ia's confinement in the psychiatric hospital. However, where the futuristic young man at first proudly believes in his technological accomplishment and imagines his success in society's eyes, Il'ia acknowledges the evil in society and knows he is unable to change this. By spending time in the hospital he is also acquiescing to society, revealing the virtual impossibility

⁴⁴ *Dolog nash put'*, *Znamia* (1991:4), 3-47 (p. 33).

of living within the tension of his beliefs. Yet the hospital also provides comfort and the possibility of salvaging some sense of individuality. Like the workers by their camp-fires, he has to have some sense of hope and belief in change.

The second futuristic text, *Laz*, takes the idea of the physical separation of the individual from the collective further, and presents the collective pressure as a terrifying force. The text is engulfed in a nightmarish veil, with the protagonist Kliucharev dividing his time between the dangerous, half-lit streets of a futuristic Moscow, and the underground residence of his intelligentsia friends reached through the man-hole.⁴⁵ Critics have understood the two separate worlds depicted in *Laz* in different ways: a representation of good and evil, of the metropolitan and emigration worlds, of the inner and outer worlds of the intelligentsia.⁴⁶ However, although the spatial representation of the two worlds is an important part of the text's dynamics, it is the man-hole, the narrow space between them, that is of greater significance. This is

⁴⁵ Rodnianskaia believes there to be similarities between this text and H. G. Wells's *Time Machine*. I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi: Makanin pod znakom "novoi zhestokosti"', *Novyi mir* (1997:4), 200-12 (p. 201).

⁴⁶ Bartashevich believes the two worlds to be closer to the inner and outer worlds of the intelligentsia. L. Bartashevich, '*Laz*' (Review), *Oktiabr*' (1992:2), 199-200 (p. 199). Zarnowski debates the polarisation of society and the varied interpretations, concluding that the two worlds represent the two halves of realistic contemporary life in Russia. Lila Zarnowski, 'Makaninskii laz v dushu', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 10 (1996), 181-6 (p. 183).

indicated not only by the title of the work, but also in the first paragraph of the text: '[н]ерешительная кошка у дверей. То есть она у самых дверей. Ни туда, ни сюда. И конечно, мешает ему прикрыть дверь'.⁴⁷ Kliucharev's ability to remain engaged with both worlds is extremely fragile, as the man-hole keeps narrowing. Once more, it is the point between two ideas that has the potential for something great, however it is diminishing rapidly.⁴⁸

Not only is Kliucharev separate from the underground crowd comprising the intelligentsia, but he is also trying to avoid the frightening *tolpa* who roam the streets, wreaking destruction: '[з]вук особый. Звуки ударные и звуки вразяг, сливающиеся в единый скрежет и шорох, вполне узнаваемый всяким человеческим ухом издалека: толпа' (116). The *tolpa* comprises separate distinguishable faces, yet each one displays the same anger and menace, and in this they are united. Individuality is becoming collectivity:

Лица толпы жестки, угрюмы. Монолита нет – внутри себя толпа разная, и все же это толпа, с ее непредсказуемой готовностью, с ее повышенной внушаемостью. Лица вдруг белы от гнева, от злобы,

⁴⁷ *Laz, Novyi Mir* (1991: 5), 92-133 (p. 92). Further references to this edition will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

⁴⁸ The temporal dimensions of this text will be explored further in relation to genetic memory in Chapter 4.

задеревеневшие кулаки наготове и тычки кулаком свирепы, прямо в глаз. Люди теснимы, и они же – теснят.

(118)

In their safe haven the intelligentsia debate philosophical ideas, revealing some knowledge of life above ground, but mostly failing to understand the implications for future existence. Kliucharev gains his own intellectual and spiritual renewal from his visits below, and in turn the intelligentsia obtain information from him on the state of life on the streets. They debate the nature of their communal life below, knowing they are cut off from life above and try, in a traditional fashion, to imagine how they can love the *tolpa* and bring it under control:

следует сейчас любить толпу, чтобы понять ее интересы [...] и тогда толпу нужно попросту обмануть [...] Но как задействовать ресурсы личности, растворенные в толпе? [...] можно ли считать, что человек – существо, пересоздающее жизнь? меняет ли человек жизнь и себя?.. или это существо, которое дергается туда-сюда в своих поисках потому только, что не вполне нашло свою биологическую нишу? огромный биологический отряд, который ищет нишу? разумеется, ищет на ошибках и в своих пределах, – это ли и есть люди? Туда нам нельзя. И туда нам тоже нельзя. И стало быть, в этих “нельзя” определяются наши границы. (128-30)

The intelligentsia are ironically expressing what is already happening – life is becoming an existence propelled by a biological, indistinguishable mass over which they have no control whatsoever.⁴⁹ Retaining a sense of individuality and an ability to effect change are proving almost impossible against the immense pressure of the collective: the tension, represented by the man-hole, is being eroded. Yet despite this dystopian depiction of the current issues facing Soviet society in the early 1990s, and despite the author's realisation of the difficulties he faces in attempting to depict such a crumbling reality, the text concludes with an element of hope. Exhausted by his exertions, Kliucharev rests on the street and dreams of the imminent crumbling of the man-hole. He imagines how the intelligentsia will send him a blind man's cane to enable him, in their opinion, to exist on the half-lit streets. His horror at this thought is suddenly interrupted, as a passer-by shakes him and wakes him from the nightmare. The individual's existence apart from the group has not only become more difficult, it is life-threatening and takes an enormous amount of courage and determination to continue. Yet there is humanity on the streets, and the passer-by warns Kliucharev that he must hurry home. As Dalton-Brown summarises it, the action of the passer-by 'suggests that the darkness of this Moscow of the future is not yet complete.'⁵⁰ Mankind has not yet lost its humanity, a few individuals are still able to express compassion, and in this there is still hope.

⁴⁹ Mankanin returns to this idea of society as a biological mass in *Kvazi*. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

⁵⁰ S. Dalton-Brown, 'Signposting the Way...', p. 115.

The submersion of the individual into the collective

More recent texts, however, reveal a debilitating terror which cannot be absolutely defined, and in this state of extreme uncertainty the individual gradually loses his own footing. The faceless angry mass of the *tolpa*, a repeated image of the collective in these works, is overpowering. The *tolpa* can be seen in part as an extension of the *barak* image, the collective's ability to draw any sense of individual existence into its own suffocating embrace.

In the next text under discussion humanity and hope have virtually disappeared, and the tension between the individual and collective is being eroded further as the collective gains the upper hand. An almost overwhelming sense of persecution of the individual by the collective arises from the three short stories entitled *Siur v proletarskom raione*.⁵¹ In the first text, bearing the same name as the collection, a metalworker, Kolia Shuvaev, is attacked and pursued by a giant hand reaching down from the sky. This occurs when he is walking alone along a deserted street or about to cross over the threshold of the entrance to his building, and at night through the open window as he lies beside his sleeping girlfriend. This is significant in that his personal 'space', his home, is also under attack. No-one else, apart from him, sees or is attacked by the hand, and at the conclusion to the story Kolia is finally caught by the

⁵¹ *Siur v proletarskom raione*, *Novyi mir* (1991: 9), 111-28. References to this cycle of short stories will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

hand and violently crushed to death. In this instance, several interpretations suggest themselves, the first of which can be examined in terms of the individual/collective dichotomy. Obviously, the hand can be taken as analogous to the 'big brother' images the Communist Party plastered psychologically and physically across the Soviet Union: Kolia's death at the end indicates the suffocation of the individual by the collective. However, there is a slight complication, in that Kolia appears to be the only one to be persecuted by the hand, and this therefore invites a different reading. Kolia's friend gives an 'explanation' of this fantastic phenomenon, and in this interpretation of '*siur*' the text is subverted. (This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.) Plausible interpretations are becoming invalid when the internal and external 'realities' of the text and life itself have been exposed. '*Siur v proletarskom raione*' is both a poignant and an ironic narrative which emphasises the unaccountable feelings of persecution rife in Soviet society, and the uncertainty of everyday life.

In the second story, '*Ieroglif*', additional unnerving occurrences are depicted. The text centres on a drunken man who has found a frozen leg of meat on the streets and proceeds to drag it along trying to decide on his next course of action. He ponders over the potential reaction of the *tolpa* to this illegal acquisition of meat, and how they would lynch the shopkeepers who had initially appropriated it:

И если их не будут рвать на части прямо на перекрестах,
их будут судить, сажать и пришедших им на смену снова
судить и снова сажать – толпа же будет стоять на
улицах, требуя новых расправ. (121)

The protagonist, admittedly in an intoxicated state, then takes upon himself a sense of responsibility for disposing of the meat in order not to incur the wrath of the *tolpa* which would have dire consequences not only for shopkeepers but for everyone in the vicinity: ‘ярость всех против всех’ (120). He believes that the *tolpa* is, by its very nature, unable to distinguish between individual and collective guilt in the same way that they do not recognise an individual’s separate existence. He even takes his fearful thoughts to the extent of imagining the number of imprisonments and camp internments that would result, surmising that: ‘[в]торой раз нам не выдержать’ (121). An editorial note explains that the protagonist is the familiar figure of Igor’ Petrovich, who, as a member of the intelligentsia, has a recurring and historical sense of responsibility towards the masses. Igor’ himself explains the tumultuous relationship between them:

Трудовая масса, вульгарная в наш век прежде всего из-за грубо потревоженного в ней социального инстинкта, готова плевать на интеллигента, как бы не делающего никакого дела, но потому-то любовь российского интеллигента к народу и прекрасна, и плодоносна. (123)

As mentioned above, Dalton-Brown has researched this subject, noting how the intelligentsia must come to terms with the fact that ‘its liberalism, or its love for the *narod*, has been a useless emotion... The intelligentsia, by reason of its passivity, is as

guilty as the actual perpetrators of brutality'.⁵² Igor's sense of guilt weighs him down, and in this text it is both a metaphorical and physical weight – that of the huge hunk of meat. Towards the end of the narrative, as he makes his way home, Igor espies a drunkard freezing by the roadside. Ironically, however, because of the weight he is carrying he is unable to help the man to shelter, and his guilt urges him to hurry on:

Объятый все тем же космическим страхом и все той же любовью, я стал объяснить ему, как дорого время, так дорого, что даже помочь ему и оттащить его, бедолагу, до ближайшего дома, до теплого парадного, я никак не могу. (123)

Not only is it the fear that drives the man to assess the feasibility of keeping the meat, but the fluidity of that fear – i.e. its changing shape – which ultimately makes him act. The meaning of the title of this text and the way it illuminates the indeterminate nature of the protagonist's fear will be examined in Chapter 5. Suffice to say here that the individual member of the intelligentsia is unable fully to comprehend his fear of the masses, let alone contemplate negotiation with the collective. Mass rule is illogical, unstable and terrifying in the picture of contemporary society portrayed in Makanin's texts.

⁵² S. Dalton-Brown, 'Ineffectual Ideas...', p. 228.

In the final story of the cycle, 'Neshumnye', the individual's submersion into the collective is quickly executed: those who are unable to agree with the vote during an organised meeting are taken off by two hired men, 'masters of death'⁵³, and mercilessly killed in the woods. Even those citizens who would normally be considered to be people in a position of trust, the medics, collude through their actions. If they act quickly, they can illegally appropriate the organs for transplant and turn a blind eye to the cause of death. At first the organised meeting is presented as an almost democratic voting session, in which people take it in turn to speak and explain their ideas. Those who are popular have their supporters and all sit towards the front of the meeting, others await their fall from grace so that they can move forward out of the semi-darkness and take their seats. The victors are full of their own sense of power and the possibilities their position engenders with the masses: '[б]ок о бок с ними тысячи неотличимых, усредненно тщеславных, пробирающихся вперед во сне и наяву, то равнодушных, то цепляющихся за передние кресла пальчиками так, что обламываются ногти' (125). The power of the collective is all-consuming and addictive. Ironically, the whole voting system is shown to be a normal procedure, almost part of the life cycle (which is later revealed to be horrifically true): '[р]азумеется, людские судьбы повязаны с переменами; у лидера есть свита, деловое его окружение, сподвижники, вся его живая аура должна теперь переместиться назад (если они не перебежчики) или, напротив, продвинуться' (124).

⁵³ My translation of Rodnianskaia's term for the two men. I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 202.

Yet the scene is shrouded in a pungent atmosphere of the fight-to-the-death between hunter and prey, and is revealed to be far from natural or fair. Lack of agreement with the collective no longer leads to incessant questioning or even persecution by a mock trial – just a quick, violent death. Interestingly, the victims offer no resistance when they are escorted out of the building into the waiting minibus; they accept their fate unquestioningly and seemingly fearlessly. The two killers are depicted as quite normal people, both struggling to survive in a harsh economic climate and both inhabiting the familiar, crowded housing. They execute the job they are hired to do, a job that brings in the much-needed wages: '[о]ни бедны... Они честно выполняют порученное им, а большего, чем выполнять, увы, не умеют' (127). The irony in this statement cannot be ignored – what more can they do than kill someone?! The earlier statement regarding the unending nature of the meetings takes on sinister overtones:

Собрание, в сущности, и не может кончиться, так как люди не могут и просто не в силах, да и не в обычае прийти к чему-то раз и навсегда единому; люди как люди. (124)

Their work appears to be required in order for society to run smoothly. This is an ironic subversion of the democracy promised and envisaged by politicians. Power is in the hands of those who are quick to abuse it, and it constantly changes hands. The victors appear to be in control, but so are the killers who appease their hunger by

committing sexual acts with the corpses before them.⁵⁴ The fact that the killers are called *neshumnye* is of some significance. In contrast to those who are voting, these two characters are quiet and do not make themselves heard or express their opinions. Ironically, they are part of the ‘silent majority’ who take the law into their own hands. This short narrative coldly and almost blandly emphasises the loss of any legal or moral codes in a society that has turned primitive and hostile. Society has taken human degradation further than that experienced during the Soviet period: although justice then was farcical, at least there was at times some semblance of justice. In contemporary society base instinct and cold-bloodedness rule, and the individual has no resistance or ability to take stock of the situation. This is indeed a macabre and chilling depiction of post-Soviet society, and as a group these three stories are a fearful testament to (and apocalyptic warning of?) the power of the collective.

The power of the collective in the next text, however, takes the paradoxical mix of individual and collective responsibility further. The protagonist in *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine* is hounded by his fear of the inquiry before which he has been called. The juxtaposition of the individual and the collective is established within the first few pages of the text, when the person being questioned is no longer

⁵⁴ An act of necrophilia takes place in *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine* also, and emphasises the need those in power have to extend their control to the end, and over the whole life process itself: they are playing god. As Rodnianskaia points out, individual man, in ‘Neshumnye’, is no longer in control of his own life. I. Rodnianskaia, ‘Siuzhety trevogi...’, p. 202.

referred to as 'you', but becomes 'I'. As the protagonist wrestles with his sense of his own self against the barrage of the collective, so the narrative switches between the first and second person. He alone must face their questions and knows that his guilt has already been established and anything he has to say will be twisted to add to that guilt. Small misdemeanours from as far back as childhood are open to discussion, and even though they are typical of almost anyone, these events take on added meaning and increase the feelings of guilt for just being alive. There is no escape from this sense of guilt; for example the protagonist's innocent words regarding queues are twisted so that he is even fearful of admitting that he eats bread and butter. Guilt itself has existed in him since childhood, and therefore the inquiries have become a way of releasing those feelings. A person's sense of their own individuality is under threat as they have to: '[р]аскрыть, раздернуть, открыть твое "я" до дна, до чистого листа, до подноготной, до распада личности...'.⁵⁵ A sense of self changes day by day as the inquiry continues. These gatherings become such an intrinsic part of the protagonist's existence that he has no life without them: 'Я ведь не могу уже без суда. Я уже не могу быть один на один с своей душой. Она уже не моя. Возьмите ее. Пожалуйста, возьмите' (27). Yet it is not simply punishment or death that the members of the inquiry want to achieve: 'они хотят твоей жизни, теплой, живой, с бляками, с заблуждениями, с ошибками и непременно с признанием вины' (19).

⁵⁵ *Stol, pokryti suknom i s grafynom poseredine, Znamia* (1993:1), 9-53 (p. 37).

Further references to this publication will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

In stark contrast to the individual's sense of 'I' is the judges' use of 'we' with which they continually refer to themselves. This is reflected spatially in the setting of the chairs around the table, with the individual alone on one side and the judges all together on the opposite side. Only two judges are referred to by their surnames on just two separate occasions, but for the remainder of the text the judges are not identified individually. Instead, each is given a descriptive title by the protagonist, such as VOLK and SOTSIAL'NO IAROSTNYI. This highlights the fact that the committee members could be anyone at all – anyone could slip into the role, and thus merge with the collective prosecution. Additionally, at each different type of inquiry, whether it be a student, workers' or doctors' gathering, the same types of people serve on the committee. Yet the individual himself will at one time in his life be on the other side of the table with the judges, and it is this twist which underlines the complete fixation and obsession of the protagonist and society itself with these gatherings:

Но в том и суть, что неделимы они, как неделим сам стол. Они – только тогда и ОНИ, когда *они вместе*. Каждый из них порознь так же обычен, как и я, так же обременен заботами и жизнью... Завтра, когда будут спрашивать меня, он будет “они”; а послезавтра или, может быть, завтра же, но только попозже вечером, когда на другое судилище и по другому поводу позовут его – он будет “я”. (46)

The totalitarian state has such power that a person can be both accused and accuser, as Andrei Nemzer points out: 'жертвы – те же палачи'.⁵⁶ This paradoxically destructive intimacy has an extremely disturbing effect on both the individual and society. A sense of 'self', of a unified individuality from which inner strength emerges has now disappeared. In this way images of power, such as the table, have the greater strength.

Even the physical placing of objects in the court reinforces the power of the collective: 'Стаканы на столе расставлены вдоль и объединяют сидящих и всю картину в целое... графин все равно будет стоять и как бы цементировать людей и предметы вокруг' (10). The symmetry gives a sense of unity to the collective and their questions give them added strength.

It is the repeated image of the table which inspires unspeakable fear, yet in another passage a group of young boys find an old table and turn it upside down to make it into a boat:

Стол валялся и помаленьку мокнул под дождями и вороньим пометом, пока мы, мальчишки, перевернув, не спустили его на воду как необычный четырехмачтовый корабль. Мы подгребали руками, и, забавное корыто, он плыл по заливу. Мы нашли также свалывшуюся скатерку

⁵⁶ Andrei Nemzer, 'Videnie korolia', *Segodnia*, 16 March 1993, p. 13.

(все с той же гулянки) из нее, конечно, сделай парус, а из ее обрывка, на одну из ножек впереди, флаг, конечно же, красный! (39)

This literal and physical upturning of the image reveals how the table can be both a symbol of freedom and a symbol of repression, in the same way that the individual could also be part of the collective gathering of judges on a different day. Interestingly, it is children, shown earlier as often representing naivety and openness, who are able to completely subvert the table's powerful image and turn it into a boat, an image of freedom and boundless possibilities. However, the protagonist is unable to fight the crushing fear and the related desire to lose his individuality. He attempts to diminish his fear by surreptitiously visiting the court at night, but appears to suffer a heart attack as he lies prostrate across the very same table. The collective, of which he is paradoxically and inextricably a part, has the ultimate power.

Another work, *Siuzhet usredneniia*, contains two parallel ideas on separate levels in the text: that of the 'averaging out' of the individual so that he merges to become indistinguishable in the collective, and secondly, the animation of this subject in the text so that it enters into dialogue with the protagonist. The latter subversion of the text will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Thoughts on the nature of individuality and collectivity have reached new dimensions in this text. The author-narrator of the cycle of essayistic texts is the familiar figure of Igor' Petrovich, who is standing in a queue philosophising about the way in which a

person tries to lose his individuality: ‘человек сливается с другими людьми, и его индивидуальные боли перестают болеть, перестают быть’.⁵⁷ Yet although a person has lost his or her identity, separate groups and professions can still take different forms within the collective. For example, that of the chauffeurs he passes by and observes outside the war office:

насколько сложнее (или насколько проще?) их общность, чем уличная общность очереди или толпы. Если подсчитывать, шоферов здесь много, но и многочисленность их совсем особая – во-первых, четкая отделенность каждого от каждого (в машине только один), отсутствие прикосновений, трений плечо о плечо; подталкиванье, отталкиванье, выпихиванье вон не для них... (108)

Hence there is a superficial sense of individuality that paradoxically emphasises their unity as a profession, and through this confusion the power of the collective is strengthened: there can be no accusations of dismissal of individual traits.

⁵⁷ *Siuzhet usredneniia, Znamia* (1992:1), 107-26 (p. 107). Further references to this publication will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

In the same way, the collective cannot be accused of having deceived the masses, or having enforced the establishment of collective subjugation. Igor' takes issue with those he considered to be the visionaries of their time, people such as Zamiatin and Orwell, who 'никак не успевали предположить, что и без усилий системы люди могут хотеть усредняться, растворяться, прятаться в массе – и тем быть счастливы' (112). Mistakenly, these great writers believed that only a deception of the masses could bring this about, rather than the masses desiring a loss of individuality for themselves. The tension between the individual and the collective, a driving force in Makanin's previous texts, has been lost altogether.

Yet despite Igor's knowledge and apparent acceptance of the inevitable, almost pre-programmed fact that individuality is lost in contemporary society, he has a fear of disclosure:

боюсь, что толпа и люди этой толпящейся очереди
каким-то образом узнают *меня вообще*: они как бы
выявят код и план личности, считав изнутри мои мысли.
Не просто узнают – опознают ... (113)

This irrational fear – for surely it is irrational if he is already one of the crowd – inspires him to join in vociferously against a member of a queue who is being awkward. This instinct, a paradoxical display of both a survival and a herd instinct, empowers the mass further. *Siuzhet usredneniia* appears to present a crushing culmination and deadening in the 1990s of the faint hope of regeneration of the

individual found in Makanin's texts through to the late 1980s. There is no longer even, it seems, a desire for the retention of individuality amongst the collective, and with the loss of this tension comes the loss of individuality itself. All former concrete ideas and knowledge have been subverted, and man is left in a void to exist in any way possible.

Conclusion

The position of the individual in relation to the collective is one of great uncertainty and instability in Makanin's texts of the 1990s. The power of the collective lies precisely in their number, and against such a force the individual feels overwhelmed and appears to have little influence. The protagonist in *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine* does not survive, dying before the imminent inquiry can even take place. In *Siur v proletarskom raione* the collective is the ruling body, and strong individuals who assert themselves and their beliefs have, apart from in a few isolated cases, disappeared altogether. This loss of individuality and the ability to comprehend man's contemporary condition, and connected to this the ability to describe them in literature, are later combined with additional philosophical and historical ideas in *Siuzhet usredneniia* and *Kvazi* which are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

However, the author's texts from 1987 up to the publication of *Laz* in 1991 continually reiterate the importance of retaining a sense of self, and encourage and foster a belief that the individual does have the inner strength to withstand the collective pressure. Early texts portray a certain strength of character in those protagonists who can understand their *barak* upbringing, or in those who can hear and respond to the crying child. Yet a sense of existential alienation appears to be on the increase, even in the early texts. Makanin's prose repeatedly reveals the harsh, cruel and depressing symptoms of contemporary life, and demands that the individual faces up to his actions and decisions. A person's true nature is then exposed. There appears to be the implication that those who can live within the tension of their

existence apart from the collective are the ones that can at times rise above the restrictions society can place upon its citizens and provide some hope for the future. It is this aim of transcending the limitations of one's contemporary existence, and of socialist realist prose, that informs Mukanin's incorporation of myths and legends in his texts.

CHAPTER 3

Mythical man in a legendary world

'I don't believe that literature should have a didactic or educational function, but I recognise in it a divination of things not accessible to the majority of people, to the public domain. Things that are hidden and not always confirmed by the facts... A writer must step outside the system. Then he can see, and be useful perhaps.'¹

The memories of bygone days, of significant people, events and discoveries are recorded in the collective memory of peoples and nations in the form of narratives. Familiar narrative types in any culture include myth, legend, folk-tale and parable. In centuries past, these narratives were the backbone of a community's identity, encompassing their beliefs, behavioural code and daily routines. They were passed

¹ Makanin's own words in an interview during the 'New Beginnings Critics' Forum'.

Irena Maryniak, 'Writers and Seers: Vladimir Lakshin, Igor Vinogradov and Vladimir Makanin', *Index on Censorship* (1990:6), 4-5 (p. 5).

down from one generation to the next, firstly in oral and later in written form, and were unavoidably subject to change as a result.²

In comparison to history – which has until recently been considered an objective non-fictional narrative – myths, and legends in particular, are expected to contain both fictional and factual elements. Another feature common to myths and legends is the inclusion of non-rational elements when there is an attempt to depict suprahuman individuals and their achievements. As a body of narrative which reflects the culture from which they emanate, myths and legends form part of a particular nation's collective memory, but the recognised inclusion of archetypal images also endows them with a universal aspect. A similar paradox is evident in the way they focus on an individual hero who is a representative of the belief system of the collective from which he arose. This paradox can be seen to be at the root of the two opposing psychoanalytic interpretations of myths: firstly, Freud strove to analyse the unconscious subjective material that underlay myths, finding recurrent typical symbols in various cultures and their people. Carl Jung, on the other hand, addressed what he believed to be universal archetypal images that recurred in myth, unrelated to individuals and culture. However, both interpretations have their problems. The

² The fact that they are in a written form does not negate the possibility of change and misinterpretation. The question of the degree to which any text is subject to a number of rewritings, one of the issues Makani incorporates in his work, is discussed in the later chapter on the writer and his narrative.

objectivity which archetypal criticism claims, found in the theories of Jung, Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye, 'exclude[s] the operations of intersubjectivity at the start of the enterprise'.³ The structuralist French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss also defined myths in similar terms – as an 'absolute object', able to be objectively analysed. Yet the loss of a cultural framework within which to examine such symbols exposes this early criticism to serious question. If such symbols exist, then at an early point in their evolution they were bound to a particular culture and people, but whether they hide repressed desires as Freud would have us believe is extremely hard to prove.

This present chapter examines the use of parable, myth and legend in Makanin's prose – three forms of recorded memories which are introduced in sufficient numbers to justify an analysis of their function. It is important to stress that the focus of the chapter is not the question of the generic authenticity of these narratives, nor the analysis of a mythological construct against which the content of the author's narratives can be compared. Instead the discussion will centre on the three main interlinking functions of their incorporation within Makanin's narratives. The first is as a means of overcoming the restrictive literary demands of socialist realism in order to try to avoid working with literary stereotypes. The incorporation of parables is examined as the main example of this first function. Secondly, these narrative types

³ Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 76.

feature not only as representative of what Peterson has termed the ‘fantastic decade’ of late Soviet literature, but also as one of the elements in Makanin’s representation of man’s condition, in this instance on a temporal level. Closely linked with a desire to overcome the closed nature of socialist realist texts, this second function is part of the author’s attempt to depict a ‘higher reality’, to transcend the limitations of contemporary life in order to reveal a more accurate and authentic picture of man’s condition by presenting it in and through past time. This is developed further in the next chapter when the concept of genetic memory provides a physical means of engaging with legendary people through time and space, and reveals man’s loss of his cultural heritage. Thirdly, the narrative types reveal the author’s interest in the writer’s influence and control over his text, which will be mentioned in this chapter and discussed further in Chapter 5.

However, distinctions between all three generic terms are not always clear, and therefore definitions are required before the discussion can proceed. Firstly, parables are not in such common use as in previous generations and tend to have biblical associations. A parable is defined as:

a fictitious narrative or allegory (usually something that might naturally occur), by which moral or spiritual relations are typically figured or set forth, as the parables of the New Testament.

In comparison, myth and legend do not embody such a didactic approach and are often applied interchangeably. To a western reader, the word ‘myth’ immediately conjures up images of the Greek and Roman gods and the panoply of narrative, pictorial design and architecture from those empires. For clarification, myth is described as:

a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena. Properly distinguished from *allegory* and from *legend* (which implies a nucleus of fact) but often used vaguely to include any narrative having fictitious elements.

Legend has various definitions including ‘a collection of saints’ lives or of stories of a similar character’, and ‘an unauthentic or non-historical story, especially one handed down by tradition from early times and properly regarded as historical’.⁴

It is interesting to note that another common narrative type – the fairy tale – is absent from Makanin’s prose, yet some of its features are in fact present. In an examination

⁴ All three definitions are from *The Oxford English Dictionary*, CD-ROM, Oxford OUP, 1992.

of fairy tales⁵, Bruno Bettelheim states that one characteristic feature of this narrative type, in contrast to that of myth, is that characters in fairy tales are either nameless – ‘a poor fisherman’, ‘a stepmother’ – or are given common names – ‘Jack’, ‘Hansel and Gretel’.⁶ Bettelheim believes that this enables the characters to be endowed with the child’s desired names, thus facilitating their psychological development. Myths, however, depict suprahuman, named heroes with whom it is not so easy to identify: these become ideals to which a child can strive, but are humanly unattainable.⁷

Some links can be made here with Makanin’s prose. The frequent appearance of the writer Igor’ Petrovich and of Kliucharev, noted in Chapter 2, reveals the author’s desire to present familiar characters to whom the readers can relate. Indeed, this has been taken to the extreme in *Stol, pokrytyi suknom, i s grafinom poseredine* where we encounter social types whose names have been replaced by descriptive tags: ‘STARIK’ and ‘SOTSIAL’NO IAROSTNYI’ to name but two. However, in the case of this text, the absence of particular names reveals the ease with which the victim can become the persecutor (although this is also a concept with which the Soviet reader

⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976). This is a classical ego-psychological analysis of recurring images and characters in fairy tales, and of their importance in a child’s development and experience of existential dilemmas.

⁶ Examples taken from B. Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment...*, p. 40.

⁷ B. Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment...*, p. 41.

can identify), and additionally emphasises the issue of the loss of individuality in Makanin's later texts. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Makanin would rather diminish the importance of his heroes if this was required in order to write a believable text with which the reader can identify. The author would appear to prefer the incorporation of parable, myth and legend, as they have a deeper grounding in everyday life and historical time than fairy tales, and can therefore help to convey his questions concerning man's condition to greater effect.

These three narrative types have featured in Makanin's works for many years, yet with a gradually changing emphasis. Early texts include parables solely as a means of highlighting the main theme of the work, and bringing into play the opposing beliefs of good and evil, moral and immoral, and right and wrong. Yet these pairs of beliefs limited the possibility of depicting more complex characters and eventually only culminated in the incorporation of stereotypical forms, as is revealed clearly in *Portret i vokrug* and *Pustynnoe mesto*. Makanin's interest in man's condition from the beginning of time demanded reference to the past, and this resulted in the need to depict the memory of man through and in time, and an engagement with more overtly temporal dimensions. Thus *Utrata* and *Ostavshii* both contain Ural legends that form a substantial component of the text, developing the main theme of the text on an additional narrative plane.⁸ The legends also provide information on the creative

⁸ The fact that the more substantial legends are those from Makanin's native region reveals both a need to connect with his birthplace and its culture, and also the richness of the Ural region itself.

process, particularly in *Otstavshii* in which the legend is the subject of the protagonist's first literary creation. The author's most recent texts, however, do not incorporate these three narrative types to the same extent, and the possible reasons behind this will be discussed at the end of the chapter and continued in the following chapter.

The use of parables in the texts

Initially, little critical attention focused on the manifestation of parable, myth and legend in Makanin's prose. Lev Anninskii in 1978 referred to the parable in *Portret i vokrug* only in so far as it enabled him to realise why he disliked the novel itself.⁹ However, two major articles, one by Natal'ia Ivanova and a second by the Piskunovs in response, provide a more sustained analysis of the parable.¹⁰ Ivanova's article will be discussed in some detail, as it charts the development of the use of parable in Makanin's early texts. Ivanova elucidates the romantic idealism of the main hero in

⁹ Anninskii believed the parable to be an example of the minor details that he found more intriguing in the text than what he deemed to be the main thrust of the story – the illusion of the successful cinematographer. In his well-known statement that he only liked 'все, что вокруг', Anninskii had unwittingly declared the essence of the story: the parable reveals the futility of Igor's literary attempts. Lev Anninskii, 'IL-LIU-ZI-ON!', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 22 November 1978, p. 5.

¹⁰ Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Ochen' predvaritel'nye...'. V. i S. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...'

Priamaia liniia, which is clearly absent from the author's subsequent works.¹¹ These new characters are divided 'не на "положительных" и "отрицательных" и даже не на нравственных и безнравственных, ... а на *сильных и слабых*' where the strong ones naturally improve their own material situation, for example in *Pogonia* and *Otdushina*.¹² The universality of the heroes' aspirations is lost, and replaced by subjective, everyday concerns. The question of morality and good has become more complicated and, according to Ivanova, mixed with a fantastical and grotesque use of 'быт' like a laboratory experiment. Makanin, in the critic's opinion, turns to the structure of the anecdote 'свой *городской вариант притчи*' to portray these tortured questions.¹³ Ivanova believes the anecdote to be a parable of *byt* situations, more dramatic than humorous in form, and representing the folklore of the town. For Ivanova the anecdote is the key form in Makanin's prose: '[он] строит на анекдоте практически всю свою прозу', for the anecdote represents the 'konfuznaia situatsiia' – this is, in the critic's opinion, the fact that 'truth' or 'god' (i.e. the author) is looking on from the side but taking no part in events (122). This, however, is where Makanin is struggling: Ivanova feels that his text construction is weak, and his attempts to move away from stereotypical characters to live 'voices'

¹¹ Rollberg also states that the moral linearity of Makanin's first text is later lost. P. Rollberg, 'Invisible Transcendences...', pp. 8-9.

¹² N. Ivanova, 'Ochen' predvaritel'nye ...', p. 119. (Ivanova's italics.)

¹³ N. Ivanova, 'Ochen' predvaritel'nye...', p. 122. (Ivanova's italics.)

(i.e. believable, immediate figures) in *Golosa* is an attempt to break free from the constraints of an organised theory of ‘weak versus strong’.

Ivanova’s argument has some valid points, in particular the change in Makanin’s perspective following the fresh naivety of his first text, *Priamaia liniia*. Ivanova’s discussion of the anecdotal form of his prose is more problematical for, as the Piskunovs point out, anecdotes and parables are different. The two-dimensional aspect of parables is used by Makanin to highlight the insufficiencies of the literary portrait itself: the whole narrative is then revealed to be too reductive.¹⁴ As the following examination of *Portret i vokrug* and *Pustynnoe mesto* will show, Makanin reveals the weakness of parables in the former text, and discusses the way in which they have become stereotypical forms in the latter one. Therefore *Golosa* reiterates and then develops his earlier findings, and discusses the writer’s role in further detail.

In *Portret i vokrug*, the first-person narrator Igor’ Petrovich renarrates a parable his friend wrote entitled ‘How a Person Searched for Truth’. This parable echoes Igor’’s investigation of Starokhatov, the suspected dishonest head of a Film School, and therefore merits some closer attention. The parable is set in the Stone Age, where a man chose to move from a warm cave in which he dwelt with his family and relatives to a secluded cold cave in order to search for truth more effectively. Despite the

¹⁴ S. i V. Piskunovy, ‘Vse prochee...’, p. 55. Kazintsev also notes the difference between these two genres, analysing *Predtecha* as representative of a text with anecdotal form. A. Kazintsev, ‘Igra na ponizhenie’..., p. 29.

remonstrances of his family and pleas to lend them a hand to help them survive, he continued to shiver alone in his cave. Following the isolation from his family and his realisation of the imminence of his own demise, the man beseeches his god to tell him whether truth exists. The god replies that certainly truth exists, yet he is not the man destined to find it. Rummaging around in his pockets, the god fishes out some used tram tickets and receipts, finally drawing forth a pocket notebook in which is written the description of the predestined finder of truth:

Если считать с этого момента, истину найдут через 126 лет 3 месяца и 8 дней. Приметы: найдет ее человек из племени уку-аку. Левое ухо чуть больше правого. Большое родимое пятно под правым соском. Колени заметно внутрь...¹⁵

The god hurries off as he is afraid that he will miss the final train before the Underground shuts for the night. The god is revealed as knowing that he will then arrive home late and wonders how his loved one will greet him when he returns. The stone-age man is devastated by the news that he has wasted his whole life in a vain search for a truth that he is destined not to find. Igor', the narrator, then declares this to be his fate too in the literary portrait of Starokhatov. The hours spent musing over

¹⁵ *Portret i vokrug* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1978), p. 168.

the portrait, the conversations he has had and the hours spent transcribing from tapes, are all deemed to be futile.

This parable has several points of interest. Its humour is derived from a mixture of the bizarre and tragic: there is a present-day god who is unperturbed by the man's distress. Although the god is portrayed as omnipotent, he is comically disorganised and scatty. This depiction indicates an ironic attitude towards religious doctrine, and a stronger belief in the need to accept the state of things and live as best one can. (This ties in with Makanin's later short story *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*, in which having good or bad luck is a random occurrence and not subject to a person's moral stance or faith, and therefore each person should accept their lot.)¹⁶ In terms of the writer Igor's position, the parable highlights the impossibility of subsuming ideas in definitive categories of 'right' and 'wrong', and that an author as 'god' is also subject to external demands.¹⁷ This challenging of the previously omnipotent authorial position is an intimation of Makanin's later intertextual debate (with himself) on the role of the

¹⁶ Bocharov notes the parable-like form of both *Kliucharev i Alimushkin* and *Polosa obmenov*, pointing out how there is not enough truth or good luck to be divided amongst each member of society and therefore not everyone is destined to find it. A. Bocharov, 'Rozhdeno sovremennost'iu...', p. 243.

¹⁷ Lipovetskii views the loss of neat categories of 'right' and 'wrong' as an example of the way Makanin reveals how man has lost control of his environment. M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 150.

author and his narrative. In the context of this story, it reveals both the limited nature of parables and the problems surrounding clear-cut character portrayals. The fact that Igor' had rewritten the parable emphasises his own rewriting of what he sees to be the 'truth'.¹⁸

The intersection of different time periods is an early example of later more complicated texts where Makanin bases the work on a juxtaposition of lengthy past and present narratives. Here, however, within one short narrative there is a story set in the Stone Age, yet the god flicks through a notebook and disappears off to catch the metro. This may refer to the belief in a god as a transcendent being, but at the same time this god is ridiculed. By juxtaposing the present and the distant past within a few short paragraphs, the parable does emphasise the traditionally closed nature of most socialist realist narratives with their strict temporal framework set firmly in the future, and one that has little reference to the real state of the present, never mind the past. The use of the parable in *Portret i vokrug* is, however, primarily to emphasise the futility of the portrait-writer's attempt to depict the rights and wrongs of the complex life of a real person, and in so doing subverts the role of the parable within Makanin's texts.

As mentioned above, *Pustynnoe mesto*, first published in 1976, is in many ways the precursor of *Golosa*: it has a similar construction and intimates some of the ideas found in that multi-faceted narrative. This earlier story, through the inclusion of several parables, introduces the idea of 'an empty place' where a person can be at one

¹⁸ The metafictional content of this text will be discussed in Chapter 5.

with him/herself. Yet the idea is presented by means of a more unorthodox definition of parable that is closer to what is commonly understood to be myth. In this way, Makanin's own ideas of the function of parable and myth are shown to be changing.

The short story begins with what is described as a *povest'-pritcha*. In this short composition the appearance of three people is followed by a comparison between them and the flight of three meteorites through the night sky. These three fates are revealed against the background of sand on a deserted seashore. There is no comment on the passage's meaning, and an initial understanding is that this is a type of creation story: man's desire to understand the natural world and his place within it is realised in a tale of the phenomena surrounding man's first appearance on earth. The use of the word 'fate' in the description of the three people, however, could also indicate that the tale concerns man's inability to control his own life and events.

A second parable appears in the next paragraph, and this is more understandable. It is claimed to be a well-known Japanese parable of a town-dweller who became lost in the sand and was taken in by the people of a local settlement. In return for food and shelter, the man had to engage in their work of raking the sand. Desiring to escape but unable to do so, the man continued this arduous labour until he eventually realised that in fact the meaning of life lay precisely in the act of raking sand.

The narrator muses on how people often have this desire to escape from the bustle of everyday life, and find a deserted place in which to be quite alone (both parables refer

to 'sand', thereby emphasising the deserted nature of the place). A cleansing of the soul can occur if such a moment can be found. The parable rests upon this idea:

В притче, как правило, удивляет не финал, не вывод, всегда лишний, и не мораль. Важно пустынное место и некая расстановка сил и чувств в вакуумной той пустоте. Побывать очищенным – для этого и пишется притчи... Притча очищает, такая вот ее служба и такой вот старый фокус. Искусство.¹⁹

Hence the narrator appears to be disrupting what has become the traditional didactic, moralising role of the parable. Instead, the narrator discusses what he believes to be the original intent and use of parable: to indicate the existence of a more non-rational, transcendental form of life without declaring its pre-eminence as the only way to live. In this way the tale has more in common with myth than parable as, according to the narrator, the original meaning of parable has been lost. The concept of being cleansed in the 'empty place' has become an ideal, a stereotype, and one which people

¹⁹ *Pustynnoe mesto* in *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), pp. 14-21 (p. 15).

Further references to this publication of the short story will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

mistakenly believe can be attained by running away from a situation.²⁰ A person craves some solitude amongst the bustle of everyday life, and believes that by disappearing off they can attain some form of purification. However, the narrator is keen to point out that the act of running away does not in itself allow a sense of cleansing: '[о]чищения в побеге нет – есть только тяга, как бы притяжение длительное к пустынному месту, и ни граммом более' (16-17).²¹ Another example is given in the text: having become dissatisfied with society and realised that people are not as kind as previously thought, a person decides to go off in search of friendlier people. Settling down in another place, the person does feel that people are more pleasant here. However, according to the narrator, it is just:

само состояние смены и есть суть этой смены. Как мгновение меж вдохом и выдохом. Этот миг мал и как бы даже бессмыслен; однако же человек дорожил и всегда будет дорожить этим мигом... Это как таинство секунды,

²⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the author discusses the meaning of stereotypes in relation to a writer's work in *Golosa* and this will be developed fully in Chapter 5.

²¹ Bondarenko points out how Makanin's irony in this short story is directed at those writers who have excessively used such stereotypical parable forms. V. Bondarenko, 'Vremia nadezhd...', p. 187.

магия краткого тик-так, у которого не было прошлого и не будет будущего. Лишь оно само. Настоящее. (16)

What is of significance here is the fact that time has stopped. There is no 'higher reality' in running away, as time remains locked in the present. The idea of the 'empty place' has become a stereotypical image that only reveals itself: it is a moment, a pause, and in this there is no lasting sense of purification. Once more, the idea of the 'laying bare' of a construct, discussed in the previous chapter, is used to reveal its essence.

A third narrative, set in Tsarist times, describes an army officer's escape from punishment to the heart of the Urals. This provides additional material on the true feeling of cleansing in a deserted place; therefore the narrator clearly states that this story is not a parable but, we are told, it does have a parable-like happy ending. The officer stumbles upon a father and daughter in their home, where the daughter is in labour and about to give birth to twins. Without hesitation the officer helps deliver the babies and whilst he is thus engaged the search party fails to find him. He then lives with the woman and they have a happy life together. This unsatisfactory fairy-tale ending, one which the narrator describes as typical of a parable, is partially off-set by the description of the officer's premonition of happiness as he came upon the deserted place near to the family's dwelling. The empty place is said to entice people, yet not everyone reaches it successfully; and a rational, conscious desire to attain it is often

met with disappointment. In this tale, it appears to be the officer's involvement in another person's life, his decision not to continue his flight and to help, that saves him.

The final narrative in this short story once more reiterates the unexpected overturning of conventional wisdom, what is considered to be the right and wrong way to behave, which leads to an inner fleeting purification. This narrative is not designated as a parable, but does also concern itself with the idea of purification and cleansing the 'self'. The narrator describes his early arrival at a small house in the countryside which he and his family have taken for the summer. The landlady leaves him to look around while she potters in the garden. In the loft he discovers an old rubber cape which he dons, and espying a small ball on the roof he proceeds to throw various objects at it in a vain attempt to dislodge it. One by one, he removes springs from the camp-bed he later learns he is to sleep upon, and throws them at the ball. The landlady finally appears to find out what he is doing, and he sheepishly turns to address her, still ensconced in the ancient cape. This episode, in which the narrator reveals the childish side of his nature, is the only point during the summer at which the narrator is able to experience the sensation of the 'empty place', for as soon as his family arrives he completely loses any sense of 'self'. This indicates that a sense of purification, of being able to distance oneself from the immediate situation, is linked with a person's understanding of 'self'; and this forms part of the discussion of the concept of genetic memory in the following chapter. For Lipovetskii, who views Makanin's prose of this

middle period as concerning itself with man's inability to retain a sense of 'self', the tale is a prime example of this idea.²²

These various comments upon parables and their functions provide an indication of Makanin's subsequent move from incorporating parables in his texts to his use of myths and legends. In *Pustynnoe mesto* the moralising impact of parables is shown to be the stereotypical form they have assumed, rather than being revealed in their original form, in which they refer to a non-rational higher plane of existence. In this respect the parable-stories presented in the text in their so-called 'original' form have a content and message that is closer to the suprahuman content and message of myths.²³ The development of Makanin's own ideas regarding the universal state of man's condition and the questioning of the role of the author has meant that a didactic, stereotypical literary genre is redundant for his purposes. The need to engage with and present ideas on both an unconscious and suprahuman level engendered the use of mythical and legendary texts. As the Piskunovs declared, after *Golosa* the author 'приступает к разрушению притчи, к "деметафоризации" ее, возвращению

²² M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 148.

²³ In his discussion of Makanin's search for individual freedom, Ageev notes how the legends in the author's texts are linked to parables: 'легенду как романтизированный, фантастический, вывернутый наизнанку вариант все той же притчи'. A. Ageev, 'Istina i svoboda...', p. 27.

к “изначальной почве” – к истории, легенде, житию²⁴. The Piskunovs acknowledge, however, that these too can become canonised.

The allegorical use of myth and legend

Although, as revealed above, myth and legend do not employ the same didactic tone found in parables, they are by no means radically different: all three are to varying degrees fictitious narratives and part of the same oral tradition. In the same way, although Makanin may be attempting to distance himself from the preceding body of Soviet prose, attempting to dismantle stereotypical images and produce a more accurate representation of man's condition, his prose is still engaging with, and responsive to, his literary heritage.

Myth and legend are often used as a means of introducing important material by allegorical rather than direct representative means, and this was obviously of particular relevance in the Soviet Union under the strict literary censorship. Hence it could be suggested that the use of myth and legend within Makanin's prose was a direct result of the author's perceived need to incorporate other literary phenomena that enabled him to engage with more radical ideas whilst still being permitted publication. The more didactic approach inherent in the traditional understanding of parable and anecdote was closer in nature to the forceful teachings of socialist realism, yet socialist

²⁴ V. i S. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...', p. 56.

realism itself was a mythological construct, and hence the author can be seen to be still working within the same system when he incorporates myths and legends into his prose. Here three recent studies by Irena Maryniak, Boris Groys and Nadya Peterson prove particularly useful.

There have been numerous analyses of the way in which late Soviet literature has attempted to break free from socialist realist literary restraints. Irena Maryniak focuses her attention on the use of religious and mythical imagery in the pre-glasnost' period as an attempt to move forward without overstepping the demands of censorship.²⁵ Makanin's prose therefore lies within the remit of her study, although she does not refer to his work directly. Maryniak's analysis is framed by a debate over the origins and form of religion, and myths are examined within this religious model:

Religion and mythical (or traditional) fictional narratives have in common a linguistic base and their role as modelling systems for information about linkages between man and his world ... But because they pertain to imagination, not experience, they can transcend the limitations of knowledge, conditioning, and temporality. (5)

²⁵ Irena Maryniak, *Spirit of the Totem: Religion and Myth in Soviet Fiction 1964-1988* (Leeds: W.S. Maney for the MHRA, 1995). References to this monograph will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

By aligning religious imagery with traditional myth criticism to establish its universality and objectivity, and by contentiously elevating religious dogma over ideological dogma, Maryniak's critical analysis is still very much engaged within the same system as socialist realism: both constructs advocate the 'true' objective method.²⁶ There are, however, some points of interest here in relation to Makanin's prose. Maryniak asserts that from the 1960s onwards, prose began to reveal a more open structure as it moved away from a strict ideological base. Ideas and beliefs from the past became incorporated into the text, and religious imagery became commonplace. Within prose 'the Marxist principle of dialectical struggle' continued, as writers revealed the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity, the human and suprahuman, the individual and the collective (10). Although such clear-cut distinctions are too reductive, the discussion above of Makanin's move from the rigid two-dimensional structure of parable to the incorporation of myths and legends bears some resemblance to Maryniak's ideas.

Maryniak assesses the work of Chingiz Aitmatov, with its embedded legends, as representative of prose that contains both the animistic and totemistic ideas revealed in her religious model. Aitmatov's prose includes many myths and legends that not only

²⁶ The *shestidesiatniki* undertook a similar plan when they tried to expel, didactically, Stalinist dogma and revert to 'pure' Marxist-Leninist ideals. S. Carsten, 'The generation...', p. 61.

illuminate the nature of his native Kyrgyz people, but additionally allow the questioning of Soviet ideology to co-exist with the text and rouse the reader to draw their own conclusions. Two texts of particular significance in relation to Makanin's prose are *Belyi parokhod* and *I dol'she veka dlitsia den'*.

Belyi parokhod, the earlier text, contains the famous Kyrgyz myth of the mother-deer which is narrated to a young boy by the grandfather with whom he lives. The boy's father is absent, and the lad continually dreams of his return and imagines that the steamboat which crosses the lake actually has his father on board. The grandfather is a simple man who tries to preserve the customs of his tribe and to instil them in the boy. The boy's uncle, on the other hand, is immune to traditions, and only concerned with brutality and making money. Old customs are shown to be on the wane as a result of the moral laxity of contemporary society, which shows no respect whatsoever towards the grandfather's heritage. In comparison to Makanin's texts, Aitmatov's narrative is far more moralistic and judgmental, and is therefore closer to the stereotypical parable form Makanin wishes to avoid when incorporating myths and legends into his texts.

The second Aitmatov text under discussion, *I dol'she veka dlitsia den'*, contains two allegorical tales, one with a futuristic setting and the other set in the past. In the former, American and Soviet astronauts embark on a joint mission to the planet *Lesnaia grud'*, where they make contact with the technologically advanced life forms and discover that they have used up the natural resources of the planet. The knowledge the astronauts have gained is feared by their controllers, however, and so

they are prevented from returning to earth. The astronauts remain doomed to circle the earth forever in their space shuttle.

The second narrative is a disturbing myth about the zombified slaves called 'mankurts'. In an allegorical account of the communists' desire to wipe out any other form of thought, the mankurts have had their memory destroyed in an extremely inhumane manner. They are forced to wear across their skull animals skins which dry out in the heat of the sun and thereby destroy the wearer's memory. The mother of one young man who has been subjected to this torture is unable to engage emotionally with her son – he has become an automated being, unable to think or communicate for himself and he kills her without remorse.

The inclusion of both an old, local myth and a futuristic narrative within one text is a familiar feature in Makanin's later works (*Dolog nash put'* in particular). Both Makanin and Aitmatov are keen to depict myths of cultural significance to a particular region, and myths which are often under threat in the climate of contemporary society. Of the two authors, however, Aitmatov has the greater political agenda, with a heavily allegorical depiction of Soviet policy. In addition, Aitmatov includes ecological issues which are significantly absent from Makanin's prose. Aitmatov's work, like much of the village prose writers' works, is still engaged in a similar literary tradition to that of socialist realist prose: the foregrounding of one particular time period to the exclusion of others. In Aitmatov's case, the honourable traditions and customs of the past are idealised as the time of greater humanity and closeness to man's natural habitat. In

order to avoid a similar textual construct to socialist realism that elevates one ideal above another, another approach needs to be considered.

Although Groys's attempt to shift the blame for socialist realism from nineteenth-century radicals to the avant-garde appears to be overstated, his treatment of the place of myth within the socialist realist tradition provides a useful model.²⁷ Groys describes how Malevich's ideas in 1919 concerning the accuracy of the subconscious in comparison to that of consciousness provided a basis for the work of the avant-garde. In order to build their new world and new social individual that was beyond the technological yet chaotic present, the avant-gardists believed that by determining this subconscious artistic system, by 'laying it bare', they could manipulate it for their own ends. Their aesthetic project became inextricably linked with politics and, when socialist realism became dominant, the avant-garde's belief in monolithic control was realised in the Communist Party's control of all institutions. Socialist realism differs from the work of the avant-garde in several respects: it had a similar desire to shape the subconscious, but without revealing its mechanism of doing so; it did not negate the past, but used what it could for its own ends; and socialist realism eventually acknowledged the need to engage with human subjectivity by referring to socialism

²⁷ Groys views both socialist realism and the avant-garde as having a similar 'will to power' inherent in their systems. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 12. Further references to the monograph will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

through the use of psychological language (58). Ultimately, however, according to Groys: 'the Stalin era satisfied the fundamental avant-garde demand that art cease representing life and begin transforming it by means of a total aesthetico-political project' (36).

Socialist realism made radical use of the classical heritage in its employment of material (whether from Greek mythology or Tolstoi's novels) that would enhance the legitimacy of a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (46-7). According to Groys, the use of mythological and traditional imagery in socialist realism is not, as previously thought, a result of occasional lapses in form, but rather a continuation of the avant-garde's ideas. Their belief in a demiurge, a new creator of reality, became embodied in human form – that of Stalin, thereby unifying the human and suprahuman planes. The use of suprahuman, almost mythical imagery in the portrayal of 'positive heroes' of the 'great socialist state' was correctly decoded by readers as a necessary entreaty to engage in irrational attempts to bring this state into being.

Socialist realism advocated the reflection of reality through art, however the artist was to submit to Stalin's idea of reality: that of the utopian state. All artists were to be involved in a collective attempt to depict this future reality. The myth of the demiurge was placed at the centre of social life, as the inspiration to create the utopian state. Hence a new creation myth of that time drove society on until Stalin's death and the realisation of the destructiveness of the period. Any new systems that followed socialist realism and strove to establish a new ideal, such as the writers of 'village

prose', were simply repeating the utopian ideals of Stalinism and therefore still trapped within the same mythology. Groys explains that in order to move on from socialist realism, artists have to engage with this mythology, constructing and deconstructing it to be able to establish new ground:

Revealed in this frivolous, irreverent play is the colossal potential of desire and the unconscious that was inherent in the Russian avant-garde but was insufficiently recognised because it was encoded in a rationalistic, geometric, technical, constructive form. (119)

Therefore, according to Groys's theory, in order not to continue within the same mythological system as socialist realist literature, Makanin's prose needs to 'lay bare' the incorporation of myths and legends as had been done previously with parables. Only by doing this can the author possibly present a transcendental picture of man's condition that is not part of the same myth-making construct as socialist realism.

Makanin's prose as representative of late Soviet literature

In her examination of Soviet literature from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, Peterson focuses on the use of the fantastic, understood here as any phenomena in a variety of genres that cannot be rationally explained. In Peterson's opinion the fantastic is used

by writers 'primarily as a reaction to and a departure from the socialist realist dogma'.²⁸ According to the critic, such narrative types as myth and legend are 'an admissible form' of representation in a time of government literary censorship (2). Peterson proposes four separate strands of fantastic prose which have their base in different literary movements of the time – socialist realist novels, village prose, *byt* prose, and urban prose – and views Makanin's fantastic prose as a development of the latter movement (14). Noting how, in his literature and in that of Kim and Anar, the 'fantastic is a thematic and philosophical concern', Peterson proceeds to examine some of Makanin's texts in the light of her ideas (63). Peterson views Makanin as a writer of alternative literature in the pre-glasnost' period who then paved the way for the more radical texts of the late 1980s. In the same way, it is possible to view those of the author's texts which incorporate myth and legend as the impetus for later works, such as *Siuzhet usredneniia*, in which he incorporates other literary phenomena.

Although in his texts from the mid- to late 1980s the author is definitely engaging with socialist realist literature, his main concern still remains the condition of man. Undoubtedly the state of late Soviet man is a necessary part of this picture, but this is not the sole focus. His words in the Maryniak interview quoted at the beginning of this chapter emphasise his belief in a 'higher reality', and the same idea had been

²⁸ N. L. Peterson, *Subversive imaginations...*, p. 3. Further references to the monograph will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

explained by the author in the Rollberg interview.²⁹ The incorporation of myths and legends allows Makanin to pursue the temporal dimension of man's condition which could otherwise not be discussed – a search for an 'eternal truth' – but at the same time they are, on another level, part of his own development as a writer. In his attempt to provide a believable and keen portrayal of man's condition, the author incorporates various different genres within his prose in his search for archetypal, 'live' depictions. These genres provide a further reflection of the main philosophical idea behind the texts, particularly in *Utrata* and *Otstavshii*, where they form part of the author's comment on contemporary man's loss of links with his cultural heritage (to be discussed in the next chapter). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, myths and legends are also part of Makanin's interest in the position of the writer in relation to his text, which later becomes another level of narrative within the text. Hence it should be reiterated that the incorporation of myths and legends is a multi-faceted technique. Here the discussion will examine the extent to which the incorporation of these narrative types engages with socialist realism, enabling the writer to portray a transcendental picture of man's condition.

²⁹ P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', pp. 265-7.

Myths and legends in the texts

The various tales and legends that comprise *Golosa* can be seen as the expression of striking individuals who stand out from the crowd, breaking through stereotypical images and becoming 'alive' on the page. Sevka, for example, is the legendary Ural brigand, first described as a 'поселковый бездельник и почти дурачок'.³⁰ Although he later commits a murder, to begin with he is just involved in petty crime in his neighbourhood. He passes off his thieving exploits by weaving a fantastic story of how he obtained some jewels from a mermaid in the nearby river. Despite their obvious scepticism, the authorities are unable to prove his guilt. However, when Sevka murders a deaf caretaker who disturbed him in the act of robbing the local church, he does not rely on his silver tongue to save him. One of the longest narratives in the text, much detail is provided of his escape and wanderings through the countryside. His accomplice, who only aided in the theft and not the murder, is finally accused and lynched by the village crowd. Sevka returns to the village and is declared innocent, and is even presented with a horse in recompense by the local official. However, despite the numerous well-wishers who beg for his forgiveness for speaking ill of him, he soon disappears and immediately begins to steal once more. The villagers then start to consider that maybe he did have a part to play in the murder. His unorthodox behaviour leads to his notoriety and reveals that the question of being 'good' or 'bad' is unimportant: it is whether a person is eternally remembered that

³⁰ *Golosa in Otstavshii...*, p. 57.

counts. This is where parables are shown to be redundant – Sevka could only have been shown in a positive or negative light, and nothing more. His striking individuality and daring manner makes him unusual material for a legend as he overturns the conventional depiction of the worthy and honourable hero. The atmosphere of a legend, with its mysterious aspect, is heightened by the presence of the elusive figure of the mermaid.

In a similar fashion, the tribe member who declares he will die in a more fitting manner than the tribe leader is condemned to death for his blasphemous words. This man is also described as a *'bezdel'nik'*, one who does little work and sells off his numerous wives for financial benefit. Even this action humorously arouses the envy of the remaining polygamists in the tribe; yet it is his boasting of an honourable death that leads to his infamy. By secretly arranging a less painful death for himself and having pots and pans beaten at his death, he becomes famous and the drum is invented. Since this time drums have been used to signal important events world-wide.

These two characters are the precursors to *Utrata's* Pekalov, the obsessed lout who, as will be discussed below, hires hard-drinking criminals and blind men to dig his underground tunnel. All three are legendary characters, involved in irrational activities and revered because of this. *Ostavshii* and *Utrata* engage with these ideas further and, as will be shown later in the chapter, indicate that it is often the unorthodox 'holy fool' who does not sink into oblivion but is hallowed in the collective memory. Unlike the socialist realist hero who epitomises suprahuman achievements, these characters

are unconventional but very human, and thereby subvert the idealised view of the typical literary hero.

Sections of the next two texts under discussion both contain narratorial comment on the nature of legends, and thus overtly engage with this form of narrative in order to portray a more comprehensive view of man's condition. *Utrata* is a complex text comprising three separate but intersecting narratives which require some elucidation before proceeding any further. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, a large proportion of the text concerns the legend of Pekalov, a loutish rogue driven by an inexplicable obsession to dig a tunnel under the Ural River. The time period is uncertain – it is set decades or more likely centuries ago – with the workers using pick-axes and shovels by candlelight. Pekalov hires various vodka-swilling criminals for his project and as these gradually desert him, he engages some blind men who complete the tunnel and then slowly drown in the swamp at the exit. In the second narrative, the Pekalov legend intrigues a first-person narrator in the present who has suffered some sort of accident and is in a trauma ward. The narrator also has childhood recollections of a summer vacation spent at a blind people's home by the Ural River, which obviously adds further dimensions to the work in the way it is linked to the blind men in the legend. The third narrative concerns a forty-year-old's return to his native, deserted village, where he muses over the nature of death, remembrance and eternity. The reactions of the middle-aged man to the ruins he finds provides a comment on contemporary man's attitude to life.

The legend of Pekalov in *Utrata* has several functions within the text as a whole. As the title makes abundantly clear, loss is the primary concern of the text, and the legend provides examples of this.³¹ Within the entire text, the legend provides the narrator and the forty-year-old man with a link to the past, to their heritage and roots. This is expressed in various ways: physically – when the latter sits on the ruins of the chapel upon whose walls there had been a painting of Pekalov; and psychologically and mentally – as the narrator attempts to access Pekalov through genetic memory whilst in a delirious state, in a bid to preserve his own ancestry.

The Pekalov legend is the first narrative in the text, and it is only towards the end of this narrative that its legendary status becomes clear. An unexpected meeting with the blind men, at a time when he has only one worker left on the tunnel project prompts Pekalov to ask them to help him. They begin their task, working hard and only

³¹ Kireev refers to the legend in *Utrata* when discussing what he deems to be a ‘mood’ of loss reverberating throughout the text: according to him the old legend ‘оживает под пером современного писателя, прошедшего через катарсис утраты’. Natal’ia Ivanova’s article in response to Kireev only refers to the legend in *Utrata* in order to substantiate her lengthy defence of the portrayal of the ‘shestidesiatniki’ in *Odin i odna*. Yet she mistakenly designates it as a parable, revealing her lack of interest in the question of form for the purpose of her present discussion. R. Kireev, ‘Obretenie cherez...’. Natal’ia Ivanova, ‘Illuziia obreteniia’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1 April 1987, p. 4.

stopping now and again to offer prayers heavenwards. A description of how they worked diligently and dislodged a final boulder in the tunnel is abruptly interrupted:

В старой уральской легенде это особенно удивляло: слепые лучше и надежнее других завершают дело.

В варианте история подкопа под Урал заканчивалась тем, что отец и процветающий брат хватали Пекалова и, дабы не ронял имя, упрятывали его навсегда в какую-то хибарку с надзирающей старухой – вид ссылки. Если не вид лечения.³²

Hence the reader is clearly faced with the knowledge of the fictional, legendary status of the narrative. Not only that, but the traditional belief that blindness is a disability that often impairs a person's sense of direction is shown to be misplaced in this case. The legend emphasises an unorthodox turn of events and in this lies the means by which the legend will be remembered. Unusual occurrences capture the imagination and easily become incorporated into popular narratives of a community. In this way a story becomes transformed into a legend that is transmitted from one generation to the next; legends then transcend the time frame in which they were born. The first

³² *Utrata* in *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), 290-351 (p. 307). Further references to this publication of the story will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

variation of the conclusion to the legend, in contrast, emphasises how a sense of closure can be a distinct part of a narrative – past time remains firmly at a distance and sinks into oblivion. The closure is reflected on a spatial level by the exile of Pekalov in a small hut at a distance from his home.

There is an important description of how Pekalov became a saint, including one significant comment, directly referring to Soviet ideology. The narrator muses over the process of how sainthood was achieved: '(Как сказали бы сейчас, “за волю к победе”)' (307). This passage then ends with the following statement on legends: 'и сам по себе был Пекалов вполне живым и грешным, и лишь в финале легенды обнаруживается литература, делающая попытку, каких много: слепить *образ святого*, вдруг, мол, приживется' (307).

This next variant of the conclusion to the legend, in which Pekalov becomes a saint, prevents the closure of the text in one time frame, for he has overcome time by becoming a legendary figure. Not only does this variant reveal the ease with which narratives change as they are communicated from one generation to the next, but also once more highlights the typical nature of literary stereotypes. In comparison to socialist realist texts in which the narrative remains purely in future time, by having an unorthodox but understandable character who is fully engaged in his life in the present, the story can 'перекричать век, а также век другой, и третий, и пятый' (307). Although the socialist realist hero is also given '*образ sviatogo*', this type of hero has

unobtainable, suprahuman characteristics that are far removed from the present day, and therefore the hero remains just an image without eternal characteristics.

The reasons behind the incorporation of the legend in *Ostavshii* are diverse, ranging from a heightened expression of Gena's feeling of being left behind the times, to a form of commentary on the nature of legends themselves in an extension of the discussion in *Utrata*. As examples from the different narrative levels of the text will be looked at in some detail, an outline of the text is required: firstly, in the present-day narrative the protagonist's father repeatedly tells his recurring nightmare to his son Gena; secondly, the Ural legend of Little Lesha – the boy who had the gift of finding gold – is retold intermittently and with varied interpretations and embellishments; and finally the protagonist, Gena, himself describes how in his student days he reworked the legend, endowing it with his own tortured feelings and experiences.

Gena's life in the present is significantly absent from the narrative, emphasising the fact that he is locked in the past. The only reference to the present is when he answers the telephone calls made by his daughter and by his father who both appeal for his help and sympathy, as mentioned in Chapter 2. He does his best to provide some consolation from his position in the present:

Звонок отца (из поколения до меня) и звонок дочери (из поколения после), накатываясь, встречными волнами они гасят друг друга. Но на какую-то секунду обе трели

звучат в моих ушах одновременно, совпав и замкнувшись на моем “я”, словно бы даты превыше заключенной меж ними жизни и потому затмевают и словно бы “я” и есть простенькое замыкание двух взаимовстречных сигналов прошлого и будущего. (7)

The way in which Gena’s sense of ‘self’ is extinguished by the calls from the past and the future generations highlights the extent to which a depiction of his own personal life in the present is absent from the text. The time frame of the narrative is firmly based in Gena’s youth, and also in the legend of Lesha as an expression of Gena’s emotions. In turn this absence reveals how fragile Gena’s sense of self actually is, and the reason for this may be his fixation on his past to the detriment of his engagement with the present. On this level Gena is a closed character, diametrically opposed to the eternal legendary character.

Yet on another level, the legend of Lesha keenly reflects the feeling of both Gena and his father that they have been left behind by the times. In his youth, Gena was too late in handing over his manuscript to Tvardovskii at the *Novyi mir* offices, and thereby lost his chance of joining the ranks of well-known writers of the time as, by the time he was ready to submit the manuscript, the editor had already been ousted from his position. Gena’s father’s dream is evidently an unconscious manifestation of his feeling that he has been left behind the times: the truck full of people departs, leaving him alone, attempting futilely to dress and chase after them. This feeling is reflected in

the legend – the gold-digging *artel'* need Lesha to be left alone as, when he is alone, he intuitively sleeps where gold is lying underground. Yet Lesha is desperate to catch up with the *artel'* members for some human comfort:

Егор Федяич охотно брал его в артель... и даже помогали ему идти, если крутизна или брод реки. Но ранним утром сомлевшего в тепле... они бросали его и уходили вперед. Он, бедный, ужасался, просыпаясь, ведь он им теперь свой, ведь они вроде бы ладят, говорят с ним теперь куда ласковее – да как же они снова его бросают? за что?! (231)

Unlike in *Utrata*, in which the legendary nature of Pekalov's life is only discussed towards the end of that first narrative, in *Otstavshii* the legend is introduced early on and its status is continually reiterated in the text. Lesha's gripping fear when left behind by the group is understandable, and renders him a hero to be pitied. The harshness of his life is epitomised in the cruel breaking of his hands by two rogues and the subsequent lack of attention he receives to help mend them, resulting in their permanent disfigurement. However, a form of compensation is given: 'а потом оказалось, что бог дал ему необыкновенный дар – умение находить золото' (10). This inexplicable phenomenon transforms his life to an extent, in that he is treated and fed more humanely by the *artel'*. In this way, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Lesha lives in the tension of his present life: on the one hand he craves the warmth and attention of the *artel'*; and on the other, he only gains their

approval when he is away from them locating gold. Yet the outcome is tragic: from greedy motives, a rival group have him killed (according to one version of the legend.) The explanation for Lesha's new-found gift introduces the expected supernatural phenomenon into the legend, yet is disputed by other conclusions that occur throughout the text. The various conclusions to the legend are significant on several levels.

In one variant, the men who killed Lesha are turned to stone, and grandmothers are said to threaten their children with their figures on the hillside when they misbehave. Uncertainty surrounds whether Lesha was really able to 'hear' (find) gold with his crooked hands, or whether in fact he had found gold before his hands were damaged. Other conclusions to the legend either said Lesha's hands were broken once more and he lost his gold-finding gift, or ended with Lesha being left behind by the *artel'* for ever. Emphasising Lesha's habit of being left behind by the gold-diggers, one story has him mistakenly follow some church robbers thinking that they are the *artel'*. The robbers become frightened by their persistent pursuer, eventually believing him to be an avenging angel. They climb down a steep rock-face to escape, but slip and suffer a slow, tortured death suspended on the rock face. Aircraft pilots occasionally point out the skeletons to their passengers, yet modify the story slightly. The two skeletons are said to belong to a man and woman whose romance ended drastically. The reason for the change of emphasis, we are told, is that '(л)егенды о любви самые живучие, хотя и не самые сильные' (41).

However, then a more prosaic variant is offered. Lesha mistakenly follows one robber and his horse, and when he eventually catches up with him, the robber threatens to kill him. However, Lesha's look of innocence saves him. The robber's murderous feelings are then turned on to his horse in a brutal slaughtering reminiscent of Raskol'nikov's dream in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*. These examples of the possible variations of the legend can be examined in a number of ways. Firstly, as the protagonist is a writer, the different conclusions keenly indicate a writer's manipulation of his material to suit his ideas and what he deems to be popular taste, such as the romantic tale about the skeletons. In this way literary stereotypes are reworked and present a transformed, new revision of the same text. On a second level, it is only when an attempt to overcome literary stereotypes is undertaken – when the demands and reality of the present are acknowledged, revealed and then put aside – that an 'eternal truth' can possibly be evoked. Hence it is only by engaging with current socialist realist literature that its stereotypical form can be overcome. This is also revealed in terms of characterisation. Gena can constantly rework the Ural legend in many different forms, but his loss of contact with his present life and refusal to live within its tensions engenders a closed, circular and purely 'unreal' life. The author appears to be suggesting that a person has to acknowledge their present-day reality and only then can they possibly gain an understanding of an 'eternal truth' about man's condition. In the next chapter, the concept of genetic memory provides a theoretical concept by which the past can be physically realised in the reality of the present on both spatial and temporal planes.

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The Holy Fool

As noted above, Makanin depicts various individuals who have a touch of insanity, naive innocence or general quirkiness corresponding to some extent with the image of the holy fool. This phenomenon has been examined in many literary studies on Dostoevskii.³³ The holy fool behaves in an unorthodox fashion, challenging the rules and language of society: for example, wandering around naked or mixing foods together in an unsavoury manner. Many of the holy fool's actions are at first believed to be acts of folly, for they run counter to what man considers to be rationally acceptable. Yet with hindsight the holy fool is often said to have acted wisely, for some of the non-rational acts are seen as the most appropriate. A succinct definition of what constitutes a holy fool is unattainable – a fact that reinforces his/her position as disturber of stable, conventional forms. A distinction between madness, foolery and holiness is likewise uncertain, as can be seen in Makanin's texts. For example, Little Lesha in *Otstavshii* is a backward, traumatised boy with mesmerising blue eyes: 'в глазах его временами становилась необычная голубизна, детский голубой туман, про который говорили – тихая дурь' (224). There is the

³³ I mention just two: Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and The Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

intimation that he is a holy fool, one who is gifted and used by the members of the *artel*' because of this.

As revealed above, *Utrata* contains various characters whose nature lies somewhere between the boundaries of mad, holy and foolish. Pekalov's obsessive drive to dig the tunnel under the Urals is a prime example. The tunnel itself has no purpose, but it is precisely this that contributes to his subsequent saintly status. At the beginning of this story Pekalov admits his low worth in comparison to his brother and father's success: 'ему, пустельге, даже подкоп не дается' (100). If there is any reason behind the project, then it appears to be Pekalov's desire to prove himself to his family. Pekalov's behaviour indicates that he is slightly mad: he sells his house to pay for material to shore up the tunnel roof and to fund his hired criminals' alcohol binges. The blind men he hires are confusing characters too. They agree to work for him once he has convinced them that they will be doing 'God's work'. Pekalov cunningly declares that divine inspiration is not required for work that appears to most people to be logical and worthwhile. Ironically, although they are blind it is precisely this disability that makes them the best workers, for they are unaware of their dark, dangerous working conditions. However, the narrative states that although they were hard workers they had no sense of direction, and erroneously keep digging in an upwards direction perilously close to the riverbed. One of the blind men then 'sees' a vision of the Virgin Mother's face in the earth, inspiring them to dig vertically, much to the consternation of Pekalov and his last remaining able-bodied worker. Yet the blind men are correct, for the tunnel has indeed reached the far side of the river. The blind men have what could be considered a saintly demise – one is crushed by a

boulder in the tunnel and the others drown horribly in the bog at the far shore. They call out for help but are not heard by earthly or even heavenly bodies. Pekaľov, on the other hand, in one variant of the legend, is said to have ascended to heaven in the arms of two angels. This image is then immortalised on the wall of a chapel built by the entrance to the tunnel. Years later this mural can still be seen, and the legend of Pekaľov is still narrated.

There are other examples of the way in which unorthodox behaviour promotes a person's legendary status. In the same work, Alexander the Great's fame is mentioned. However, this has resulted not from expected quarters – such as victory in war – but is due to his attitude to memory and the past. Instead of taking some beautiful possessions with him on his travels, he destroys them so that there is no possibility of accidental damage. Earlier, at the beginning of Chapter 2, there is a description of how a Chinese doctor in roughly the seventh century eventually became legendary. He treated various people and was eventually called to cure the emperor of his headaches. He only became legendary, however, when he attempted to perform a lobotomy on the emperor without his prior consent.

In the grim, fearful pages of *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine* there are also a couple of characters who display unacceptable and almost obscene traits when they are before the inquiry. One old man becomes engrossed in picking his nose to the enormous disgust of the judges, and an invalid continually lets out piercing shrieks throughout the proceedings. Interestingly, both are dismissed and their inquiries are

summed up in an unusual manner: ‘*обсуждение пошло по неправильному пути*’ (44). In addition to providing some much needed humour in the dark text, these characters are contemporary ‘holy fools’ who overturn convention and subvert the work of the inquiry.³⁴

The most important part of the holy fool image is precisely that: it is an image. Yet the socialist realist hero is also an image, but does not become an eternal figure hallowed through time. The difference, as mentioned above, appears to be that the socialist realist hero is only revealed in the closed time frame of the future and has no reference to the present day. The futuristic hero has suprahuman attributes that are far removed from contemporary time. In contrast, the holy fool is all too human and reveals this by his subversion of contemporary conventions. In Makanin’s texts the legendary figures are ‘laid bare’ as subversions of the typical heroic figure, but in this lies the possibility of transcending the limits of historical time to portray the temporal dimension of man’s condition. Man in the present has to engage with contemporary time fully in order to understand his condition.

³⁴ Rodnianskaia has also noted a similar figure in *Laz* – Kliucharev’s mentally retarded son. I. Rodnianskaia, ‘Siuzhety trevogi...’, p. 206.

Man's contemporary state

Myths and legends do not form such a distinctive part of Makanin's narratives in his texts of the 1990s, which in part confirms Peterson's theory that they are constructs used primarily to overcome the literary constraints of socialist realism. There are two texts, however, which still engage with these genres, but with a different emphasis: they are contemporary legends and hence reveal the way in which the author's ideas have progressed in his attempt to present man's condition fully. One of the later texts that discusses myths and legends is the essayistic narrative *Kvazi*. This work brings together many of the ideas discussed in the dissertation: the collective pressure, history and the creative process, and hence it will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The short story *Tam byla para...* incorporates a contemporary myth that gives a possible indication of a change in Makanin's ideas. The text concerns a probably middle-aged man's frequent visits to a group of young students in what appears to be an attempt to preserve his youth.³⁵ He sits quietly listening to their conversations about pop music, religion and the question of good and evil. The title evokes the fairy-tale genre, but the story is very much concerned with present-day reality. It refers to a young couple in the group who are separated by the boy's suicide.

³⁵ *Tam byla para...*, *Novyi mir* (1991:5), 83-92. References to this publication will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

The narrator, the older man ('muzhik' as they call him), has taken the place of another man who used to frequent the group, and who is now a legendary figure amongst them. He was a spy involved in espionage for several countries, and finally ended his days living outside Moscow with a religious old woman. Previously he had lived near to where the young people gathered and would call round, drink a lot of strong wine and then proceed to forget where he was. Yet he would become extremely nervous at his disorientation, believing that any small slip on his part could lead him into danger.

Again the legendary figure, although previously of some significance as a spy, is reduced to a babbling fool and lives with an old woman in a similar fashion to Pecalov in his legend. The main difference, however, is that the spy is a contemporary figure and thus is not incorporated into the text as a means of connection with a distant, historical past. The inclusion of the spy reiterates the process of how a society or group establishes a legendary figure: an unusual person disappears from a group setting and is recalled by those who remain. His distinguishing characteristics are remembered and become the focus of the recollection:

Живого они его скоро забыли. Но образ его все усиливали и укрупняли, дотягивая до легенды.

– А видно, матерый был шпион! А как портвейн пил в свои восемьдесят! (85)

Hence, as discussed in the previous section, it is the *image* of the person that is important, and this cannot be realised whilst the person is still alive. Therefore a problem is revealed at the heart of Makanin's desire to depict a complete picture of man's condition. By incorporating myths and legends into his texts, the author is engaging with temporal dimensions to present a fuller picture of man in and through time. Yet although his legendary figures introduce an image which represents human characteristics for that specific past time period, the image is by its very nature disengaged from the 'here-and-now'. All that the legendary characters can do is inspire contemporary man to engage with his life in the present as they did in past time. Only then is there the possibility of man understanding his heritage and the full implications of his actions for the future.

However, the student suicide reveals that contemporary time has its own hardships in which a person can become totally immersed. By incorporating a legendary character from the very recent past, this text may be implying that man in the present has almost lost all links with his distant heritage; he can only engage with the difficulties before him. His understanding of the present, let alone the past, is becoming fainter. Everyday concerns are overwhelming and cannot always be resolved.

Conclusion

There is a noticeable change in Makanin's prose as he moves from incorporating parable to the inclusion of myths and legends as a separate narrative level within his texts. The author attempts to overcome the socialist realist canon by 'laying bare' the use of myths and legends so as to reveal a transcendental picture of man's condition through and in time. However, this proves to be a more difficult task than expected, as man in his contemporary life cannot fully engage with the image of man depicted in myths and legends. The image of the holy fool may provide the impetus for understanding man's condition, but it can do no more than reveal the necessity of living fully in one's own contemporary time period. The time frames of the past, present and future may be placed side-by-side within the one text in order to depict a fuller picture of man's condition through time, yet each time frame ultimately remains separate from the other. The concept of genetic memory, however, attempts to unite them more closely, and in so doing reveals man's condition in the present to be more fragile than originally thought. Bondarenko stresses how, in his use of myth and parable, Makanin reveals the 'gologo cheloveka' with the earth firmly beneath his feet.³⁶ Although, as will be shown in the next chapter, the earth is itself beginning to shift: contemporary life is no longer the stable reality man believes he can comprehend.

³⁶ V. Bondarenko, 'Vremia nadezhd...', p. 192.

CHAPTER 4

'Through the Looking Glass': a reflective view of the concept of genetic memory

“Living backwards!” Alice repeated in great astonishment. “I’ve never heard of such a thing!”

“— but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.”

“I’m sure *mine* only works one way,” Alice remarked. “I can’t remember things before they happen.”

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,” the Queen remarked.¹

In Makanin’s aim to present a full and realistic picture of man’s condition, to combine the essence of man revealed through the tension the individual feels within the collective and the transcendental nature of man expressed in myths and legends, the concept of genetic memory emerges as a unifying construct. Yet the construct itself begins to question, and is questioned by, the reality it is trying to define.

Memory, as a repository of past events, is inextricably linked with our conceptual and rigid time frames of the past, present and future. Both an emphasis on and a denial of memory have long played an important role in Russian and Soviet society under various guises. Tainted by political, ideological and nationalistic interests, memory has been used in turn by the Slavophiles, the Communists and, more recently, by the

¹ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice found there* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 87-8.

extreme, unofficial society *Pamiat'*. Whether those concerned advocate a return to the heritage and traditions of the past, or a denial of the past through striving to attain an ideal future, each group has failed to visualise what Epstein termed the 'trinary system of time' – the interlinking nature of past, present and future.² Literature has followed suit, failing to recognise these temporal connections; as shown in the previous chapter, works written in the socialist realist vein either falsely glorified past events, such as the Revolution, or depicted utopian societies. The 'village prose' movement idolised past communities and traditions in its opposition to technological progress and the destruction of the countryside. However, a less rigid approach to memory and time has made its gradual appearance in literature alongside a more truthful and less politically oriented portrayal of Soviet society. Iurii Trifonov, for example, is a well-known author whose concern with memory is interconnected with the nature of guilt and compromise in Soviet society. In *Drugaiia zhizn'*, Sergei's widow recalls her husband's interest as a historian in making a connection between the different time periods: '[о]н искал нити, соединявшие прошлое с еще более далеким прошлым и с будущим'.³ Recent Russian postmodernist prose, however, reveals a highly fragmented world in which the loss of any sense of historical time engenders a tumultuous and illogical existence in the postcontemporary, in which a concept of memory has little meaning.

² M. N. Epstein, *After the Future...*, p. xii.

³ Iurii Trifonov, *Drugaiia zhizn'* in *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), II, 219-360 (p. 300).

Makanin's prose up to 1987 reveals an early interest in historical time and the way man has no control over its forward progression. The recurring image of time as a fast-running river sweeping man along in its current is a forceful, if somewhat traditional, metaphor. Georgii Bazhenov notes its frequent appearance in such works as *Otdushina*, *Reka s bystryim techeniem* and *Portret i vokrug*, in which fate's cold hand unites with time in an often destructive union: "Герой – время" здесь борьба страстей и характеров, из которой, увы, время вышло победителем'.⁴ Kurchatkin also notes an interest in a sense of time in the Makanin's collection *Starye knigi*, which the critic deems to be unusual in prose of that time.⁵ As shown in the previous chapter, Makanin's later, more intricate prose takes his ideas beyond these stereotypes, reflecting the difficulty contemporary man has in recognising the links between past, present and future – a theme that is of particular resonance in the stasis of late Soviet society. The recurrent form of the concept of genetic memory, discussed in some detail in *Utrata*, develops the analysis of the connection between the time frames. The term itself implies a genetic code that is passed down to the members of a particular socio-cultural body from generation to generation; a form of cultural memory. This code allows the accessing of one time frame by someone in another – for example, a person in the present can access another person in the past.

⁴ Georgii Bazhenov, 'Reka po imeni Vremia', *Pod'em* (1981:3), 153-6. This article is a review of the three monographs *Portret i vokrug*, *Kliucharev i Alimushkin* and *Na zimnei doroge* – see bibliography for details.

⁵ A. Kurchatkin, 'Ostanovit'sia, oglianut'sia...', p. 190.

A more unusual angle noted in Makanin's prose is the idea that memory does not just work backwards but can be projected into the future too. Lewis Carroll's White Queen humorously questions our preconception of memory only working backwards, and the way we have rigidly organised the structure of time. The Queen's recollection of events in reverse overturns our conventional chronological ordering from the cause through to the effect, and thereby questions whether the concept of time itself is invariable. Genetic memory reflects this questioning and is the means – the metaphorical instrument – used to gain entry to other time spheres. This has a spatial analogue on another level in Makanin's prolific use of tunnels, man-holes and labyrinths which enable the characters to reach another physical place and a metaphorical past and future. It is through the concept of genetic memory that we see the full correlation of spatial dimensions, emphasised previously in the relations between the individual and the collective, and temporal dimensions, revealed in the incorporation of myths and legends, into the same idea: the portrayal of the contemporary condition of man.

Returning briefly to Trifonov's *Drugaiia zhizn'*, the protagonist Sergei is portrayed as researching a similar idea: 'закодированное, передающееся с генами ощущение причастности к бесконечному ряду'.⁶ Trifonov's historical narratives chronicle the Stalinist years, placing before the reader the morally compromised man who turned his back and consciously forgot the principles he advocated as a young man. However, there are several important points at which

⁶ I. Trifonov, *Drugaiia zhizn'* ..., p. 300.

Makanin's works differ from those of his predecessor. The younger author is not concerned with morals and judgement of man's adherence to them, nor – to the same extent as Trifonov – with a covert portrayal of the injustices of the Soviet period. Neither, as revealed in Chapter 2, is he following the fervour of the 'village prose' writers in promoting all traditional beliefs regardless of any benefit to economic or social progress. It is also important to note that although it is termed 'genetic', Makanin does not stress or appear to give much attention to the implied understanding that this type of memory is passed through the genes from one family member to the next. In the quotation from Trifonov's text above, it is obvious that this author is keen to stress the historical connection from one generation to the next – an idea that appeared in other works of the same period. For example, in Valentin Kataev's *Klodbishche v Skulianakh*,⁷ the protagonist is not only interested in the similarities between himself and his forefathers, he is actually transformed into them in a past time period. Such topics were of considerable interest to writers during the Soviet period, for allowing the protagonist to travel physically through time enabled the writer to engage with ideas from the past that were not always condoned by the authorities. However, for Makanin, genetic memory is more a theoretical concept that plays a broader thematic and structural role in his texts: it is a point of contact for several ideas that reverberate throughout his texts, and the means by which a more open and universal depiction of life can be posited.

⁷ Valentin Kataev, *Klodbishche v Skulianakh* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1976).

The fact that the concept of a genetic memory only appears in Makanin's later works indicates a progression towards the development of such an idea. Makanin has stated that genetic memory provides a means of describing human values and experiences that existed before the repression of individuality that took place under communism. These had been difficult to express in recent times due to the fact that the required feelings and thoughts of the collective were elevated and made more prominent than those of the individual. Genetic memory is a tool by which Makanin can refer back to past events and values when his own memory is insufficient⁸. The concept provides a way of visualising and theoretically living through the 'trinary system of time', a way of partially comprehending our heritage and future existence from our position in contemporary time. Genetic memory is an attempt to unite the increasingly fragmented nature of mankind throughout time, and by so doing reveals the approaching collapse of a coherent picture of man's condition altogether.

Critics have paid little attention to genetic memory, only referring to it when discussing the separate narratives in the texts, and their references to the concept will be included when the relevant section of the text is under discussion. This overview of genetic memory will examine the specific literary references to the concept, examining them as reflections of temporal concerns – with reference to the past and the future from the set point of the present – and spatial concerns, i.e. the way in which the author presents their physical manifestation. Then in the second part of the chapter,

⁸ These are all points made by Makanin when I questioned him as to the meaning of 'genetic memory' in his texts. Interview held in Moscow in December 1994.

genetic memory will be taken as a metaphorical mirror for expressing several of Makanin's recurrent concerns: the nature of the individual 'self' (in an extension of the discussion in Chapter 2) and the function of narrative.

Forward to the past

Utrata provides the most comprehensive account of genetic memory, with significant sections of the narrative devoted to the idea.⁹ The concept of genetic memory is introduced towards the end of the description of the Pekalov legend. It follows the last variant of Pekalov's demise and subsequent ascension to heaven, as discussed in the previous chapter. Chapter 4 of the text begins with the narrator's own understanding of genetic memory:

Есть мнение, что состояние бреда исключительно, но не интимно, а даже и ценно как раз тем, что человеческое знание самого себя тут обнажается (высвобождается) чуть ли не до самых глубинных ходов генетической памяти: ты вмещаешь больше чем вместил. Есть мнение,

⁹ *Utrata* in *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), 290-351. Page numbers refer to this edition and will be placed in parentheses after the quotation.

что в состоянии бреда, освобожденный, мол, от цензуры
своего века, ты способен воспринимать и способен
слышать прошлое, мало того – жить им. (318)

Therefore, it is when the mind is in a state of delirium, when it has freed itself from everyday concerns and from consciousness that it is claimed to be possible to access genetic memory and thereby live in another time frame. As noted before in Chapter 2, it is the suspended point between two ideas/situations/concepts – here between consciousness and unconsciousness – that is, according to the author, the most creative moment for an individual. Genetic memory is essentially another ‘laying bare’ technique, but one which allows the fullest expression of man’s state throughout time. Imagining the presentation of the concept in the form of a cross, it is the point at which the suspended spatial point on a horizontal plane, when time stands still, intersects with the vertical plane of progressing historical time. Hence it fully unites the time frames of past, present and future which were shown in the previous chapter to remain isolated. However, not everyone is able to free themselves from consciousness sufficiently to be able to access genetic memory: ‘настоящее не отпускает человека так просто; настоящее – цепко’ (318). The hospitalised first-person narrator encounters two fellow patients in the trauma ward: firstly, the pill-popping ‘tabletochnik’ who consistently imagines himself to be a lightning conductor, thereby revealing no interest in accessing the past or future and encountering other people. A second patient, we are informed, has ‘вполне современный и довольно распространенный сдвиг: он считал, что все

часы испортились и что их надо уничтожить, ибо они показывают неверное время' (326). To prevent him from systematically destroying all clocks in the vicinity, the first-person narrator draws pictures of clock faces on paper for the second man to rip up, which he does with immense satisfaction. This second patient is fully absorbed in his paper clocks, and although his acknowledgement of time-pieces as a fallible, human construct could be seen as a prerequisite to accessing genetic memory, he is not sufficiently free from his activity in the 'here-and-now' to do so. Such action denies the person access to genetic memory, keeps him firmly locked in contemporary time (and spatially confined in a mental hospital), and therefore he is unable to engage with the past or future.

The first person narrator tells of his own wish to connect with the legendary Pekaľov from the past – someone he remembers learning about since childhood. The narrator makes several attempts, but unfortunately genetic memory is silent:

тогда-то, восстав, [легенда] и взялась меня манить, преследовать. Я хотел в нее вжиться, я хотел туда, в тот мир, к тем простецким людям (генетика пыталась врачевать!), но тут же сбивался, не попадал и вновь воображал себя кружащим однообразно, воинственным 'Яком'. (320)

Genetic memory appears to be an unstable entity which is difficult for the narrator to access, and instead he imagines himself to be a Yak-77 fighter plane with a shot-through wing.¹⁰ Unlike the two other patients, the narrator was able at least to begin to access genetic memory, yet on this occasion he was unable to meet Pekalov. Several of the prerequisites to access the past, as understood in this text, then become clearer. The narrator states ‘что оно, прошлое, замолчало во мне куда раньше, чем я это осознал’ (321), thereby indicating that a person needs to retain a continuous sense of, and connection with, the past. Secondly, in a further link with the title of the text, the narrator finally understands that he must make his feelings of pain and loss universal by informing those around him of his condition. It is these flashes of knowledge that then allow the past to come closer and he eventually finds himself in a tunnel, with Pekalov digging furiously in front of him. The latter character appears quite dismissive, declaring that he has no time and rhetorically asking what the narrator wants from him. Pekalov then turns away and continues his work. It is not clear why the narrator accessed the legendary figure at this point in the construction of the tunnel rather than when it has been completed; the reasons for Pekalov’s lack of interest also remain unclear. A feasible interpretation is that both characters are still in the *process* of tunnelling/trying to access other time periods, without having completed/successfully engaged with their project/the past. Pekalov’s lack of desire to

¹⁰ A link can be seen here between the damaged wing of the plane and the arm that Pekalov loses after the collapse of the tunnel. Possibly, in attempting to unite with Pekalov through genetic memory, the narrator is only able to attain partial communion with him, in the form of a similar physical loss.

talk could indicate his own complete absorption in his work, an activity that generates legends around him. However, the two prerequisites to accessing genetic memory – retaining a sense of connection with the past and accepting feelings of loss in the present – are the significant part, and need to be examined further due to the number of times they are reiterated through the presentation of associated images in the text.

The first prerequisite to accessing genetic memory to be examined is the acknowledgement of a feeling of loss. In relation to the previous chapter, man must first engage with the feelings of loss in the present, in order to then be able to distance himself from the present and relate fully to other time periods. As expected from the title, the whole text reverberates with instances of loss which exist on different levels – for example physical, spiritual, material and mental. For Kireev, its expression is of a particular nature: ‘это лишь настроение утраты, но не ее идея’.¹¹ On a basic level there are cases of a physical loss: for example, Pekalov loses an arm when removing the final boulder at the exit to the tunnel. On a different narrative plane, there is a description of a family gathering which introduces Uncle Kesha, who lost his arm in the war. The blind men symbolise the greatest degree of physical loss yet have learnt to overcome their loss of sight. In terms of material loss, Pekalov sells his home and possessions in order to fund his project. A first-person narrator meets with a childhood friend and although they do not wish to discuss the present, they both have similar tastes and express various examples of loss in the form of abstinence: neither drinks alcohol or coffee, and instead both only partake of mineral water. Another

¹¹ R. Kireev, ‘Obretenie cherez utratu...’.

example of a loss of sustenance is found in the final section when the forty-year-old man returns to the ruins of his native village: when the villagers deserted their homes, the birds struggled to find food, and even the former abundance of insects in the houses began to wane. The birds' shrieks at their loss were apparently heard for some time.

Spiritual loss is portrayed too: the boy-guide mocks the blind men's spirituality when he mischievously leads them to a convent when they need a secluded place in which to relieve themselves; Pekalov uses spirituality to his own ends when hiring the blind men by deceit, thereby revealing his loss of belief; the chapel which celebrates Pekalov's ascension to heaven lies in ruins; and Pekalov's sanctification is itself a mockery, for he is essentially an obsessive rogue.¹² There are numerous examples of mental loss such as madness (the tunnel worker Timka) and delirium (the ward patients), loss of senses due to alcoholic consumption (the forty-year-old man and the tunnel workers) and of course loss of memory – those at the family gathering are desperately trying to prevent their relatives from forgetting them once they have died. Indeed, an ironic example is presented: Uncle Serezha's widow does in fact forget him, for she fondly recalls a husband with the same name, but one who is not evil and unkind as Serezha was in his lifetime. It is this final loss which is one of the most important and the one which resounds throughout the text: man's inherent desire to avoid being lost to

¹² On the other hand, Pekalov can be taken to represent a 'holy fool' as revealed in the previous chapter.

oblivion. Only through memory can man overcome the transience of life and be remembered eternally.

Turning to the second prerequisite for accessing genetic memory, various images appear in the text to reveal how man can deal with the past, and these highlight the importance of respect and preservation of our cultural heritage. Firstly, there is a short passage concerning Alexander the Great and his journeys. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a parable describes how the great man would rather smash some valuable vases to pieces than have them damaged upon his travels. This is commented upon in the text: ‘мы именно так живем, отбрасывая, а то и разбирая прошлое, – легкие, мы ходим в свои походы, едим, пьем, пока не хватимся и не завопим: утрата, ах, утрата!’ (326). In contrast to this, the narrator introduces a man who comments on a second way of dealing with the past: ‘[п]рошлое должно вспархивать само собой, как птица’ (327). Following this declaration, there is a description of an old man who takes out a bird from his pocket. Although the bird has no damage to its wings, it refuses to fly away when put down on the ground. A possible interpretation is that those who are unable to retain a sense of connection with the past are unable to rise up above the present time period and access the past or future. The birds that search for food amongst the ruins in the final section of the text also have the same verb ‘vsparkhivat’ describing their movements: they are calling out to express their feelings of loss.¹³ It is important to

¹³ Bird imagery can be found in other texts too, and appears to represent spontaneity and freedom of the spirit. For example, in *Stol, pokryti suknom i s grafinom*

be open to engagement with the past, whatever the issues and difficulties a person faces in contemporary life. Otherwise one remains fixed in the time frame of the present, gradually losing a sense of historical existence.

Although the middle-aged man is attempting to connect with the past by visiting the village, he expresses his feelings of loss through artificial means.¹⁴ His way of losing consciousness (the necessary state to access genetic memory) is through heavy alcohol consumption, and therefore he is unable to experience feelings from the past and gain any sense of 'roots'. The fact that he has no name, noted previously as a common feature in Makanin's texts, indicates that he is a typical example of contemporary man and could represent anyone at all. Neglect of the past, as seen in the village ruins and the dilapidated state of the headstones, leads to oblivion.¹⁵ As the Piskunovs point

poseredine the young students subjected to drug treatment in the psychiatric hospital express a hatred of birds which, we are informed, is a common reaction to their state of mind.

¹⁴ For an assessment of the forty-year-old man as a disillusioned representative of the *shestidesiatniki* whose ideals do not match those of contemporary society, see Ivanova's response to Kireev's article: 'Illuziia obreteniie...'

¹⁵ Images of ruins appear in several texts. Zarnowski has pointed out how the emptiness of the once bustling halls of *Dom kino* in *Portret i vokrug* is compared to that of a ruined building. The dangerous streets of a futuristic Moscow depicted in

out, genetic memory can be found in the ruins, it is where contact with the past can be made, yet this contemporary man is not sufficiently aware to be able to engage with his heritage.¹⁶

What is important is the information that a person needs to recognise that he must keep the past and its associated feelings 'alive' within himself. Kireev phrases this in spiritual terms: it is only through the 'редкой интенсивности духовное зрение' that man can change.¹⁷ When this happens, he can access the past and legendary figures and thereby engage with his heritage and have a greater understanding of the human condition. To summarise, in this instance genetic memory functions as a possible means by which the narrator could physically meet with a legendary character from his childhood, and provides a point of contact between the many themes of memory, the past, digging, 'roots' and eternity. Although the narrator fails to make lasting contact with the past, the fact that he made an attempt to do so is the significant point; and this will be examined further in the second half of the chapter.

Laz have many dilapidated buildings and vandalised telephone kiosks. See L. Zarnowski, 'Makaninskii laz ...', p. 181.

¹⁶ S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee ...', p. 46. Like Zarnowski after them, they point out the motif of ruins in other texts such as *Povest' o Starom poselke* and *Portret i vokrug*.

¹⁷ R. Kireev, 'Obretnie cherez utratu...'. (This is the closest he comes to discussing the concept of genetic memory.)

Those who fail to keep close ties with their cultural heritage, such as the forty-year-old man, are doomed to a limited, closed existence in the present.

Back to the future

Makanin's two futuristic texts have been examined in terms of dystopian fiction, emphasising the spatial and temporal displacement in which the hope for a radiant future, a 'paradise', is revealed to be a regressive return to the savage past, a form of 'hell'.¹⁸ Both texts, *Dolog nash put'* and *Laz*, are relevant to the current discussion as they have references, albeit short ones, to the concept of genetic memory.¹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, the former begins with a futuristic narrative that comprises most of the text and follows a young man's trip to a synthetic meat factory in the steppe. This is the invention of a narrator and his friend Il'ia Ivanovich, two men who live in the present and have a common concern for the treatment of animals.

¹⁸ See Sally Dalton-Brown's discussions of *Laz* and *Dolog nash put'* in her article 'Signposting the Way ...'.

¹⁹ *Dolog nash put'*, *Znamia* (1991:4), 3-47; *Laz*, *Novyi mir* (1991:5), 92-133. Further references to these publications will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

Genetic memory is referred to twice at an early stage in the futuristic narrative, and is then decidedly absent from the remainder of the text. In the first instance, the young man is described as excited at the prospect of his trip to the factory. A sense of adventure awakens in him and also: 'быть может, просто (по генетической памяти) пробуждал в нем молодого человека былых времен, с его состоянием повышенной готовности' (3). The time frames here are complicated: a person in the future can engage with a person in *his* past, and this story is the invention of two people in the present.

The second reference to genetic memory appears soon after. The young man is familiarising himself with his surroundings and has the feeling that maybe something dangerous could occur. A feeling of *déjà vu* is interpreted by him as genetic memory at work, a memory of someone in the past coming through into his (future) time frame. The young man 'улыбнулся, удивляясь цепкости генетической памяти. Нет-нет, и прошлое оживает' (5).

As the text progresses the reader gradually realises the extent of the author's ironic treatment of the protagonist, in a clear subversion of the familiar socialist realist hero. The possibility of the young man accessing genetic memory, according to the earlier prerequisites, is highly improbable: he is revealed to be completely naive and lacking in any intuitive or historical sense.

The young man is full of his own importance and on being told the need for secrecy surrounding his trip, he quickly deduces that this is a reflection of his own merits:

Значит, его ценят. Значит – важно. Он испытывал подъем. А как иначе?.. Жизнь есть жизнь, и вот он, молодой человек, работающий в Москве, талантливый, честолюбивый, летит в командировку на испытательный полигон, расположенный где-то в южных степях... (3)

The secrecy surrounding his trip and that of the location of the factory fail to register with the young man – he is too full of his own importance. The protagonist even imagines the possibility of fitting in a sexual liaison whilst he is busy conquering the land and inspiring the workers, all within the three days he is away:

он ждет, возможно, встречи с женщиной – да, да! здесь, у них, в силу секретности региона, люди несколько оторваны от мира, и местные женщины, к примеру, невольно окажутся старомодны, не слишком развиты в сексе (это его возбуждало!), и чудесный старый говор – кто знает, всякая поездка в незнакомые края как рождение. (3)

Even once he has begun his work and encounters the overwhelming stench of slaughtered cattle, the young man amusingly attributes the smell to hormones emanating from the men working together in close quarters. The horror the protagonist expresses once he learns of the real meat content in the 'vegetarian meat' is very entertaining. At no point does the young man think back to the past to recall the propaganda and deception of the masses during the Soviet period. His only reference to the past is in relation to the old-fashioned ways of the women, belying his belief in the progressive state he is helping to construct. He, like his Soviet forebears, is far too busy perfecting technology for the radiant future to be concerned with the present or the past.

In terms of the spatial dynamics, the location of the factory in the steppe serves two purposes. Firstly, it parodies Soviet secret institutions, always located deep in the interior or in 'closed cities'. Secondly it emphasises the closed nature on a temporal level of Soviet and dystopian fiction which remains firmly locked in one time frame, as discussed in the previous chapter. There is no 'long road' out of the situation, only a continuation of the deceit and animal slaughter.²⁰ This is not a flowing narrative, propelled forward by its own momentum: the text is hesitant and full of staccatos. In the same way, the component the young man has invented is a time-saving device, and he meticulously counts off the seconds one by one that he has saved in the whole

²⁰ Dalton-Brown pays particular attention to the 'long road' metaphor, in the way its retrograde nature in dystopian fiction contrasts with the forward progression of utopian texts. See 'Signposting the Way ...', pp. 107-8.

production process. He even spends time watching videos of the process, halting the frames and finding 'lost' minutes. The sense of a new birth that the young man feels before he travels to the steppe is another temporal anomaly. In an attempt to hide his revulsion at the video images of the cows' slaughter, he rewinds the tape and watches them being 'reborn'. The natural cycle of life cannot be reversed, despite utopian ideas to the contrary.

There are several possible interpretations of the inclusion of the genetic memory concept in this text. Firstly, as a literary construct, genetic memory reiterates the text's parody of socialist realist texts. The concept emphasises the loss of understanding of the 'trinary system of time': like the Soviet state, the time frame of the dystopian state is in a closed world that can only degenerate. The protagonist is too full of self-importance about the job before him, unable to entertain the thought that he is part of a huge deception on the same scale as in previous centuries. Additionally, the futuristic narrative reveals that the two characters in the present are concerned with the interlinking nature of the time periods, and are sufficiently aware of the need to remain engaged with one's heritage and the implications of contemporary life for future generations. Secondly, as a dystopian text, it is a warning: if future generations continue the same dismissal of historical time as the present generation, then there is likely to be a repeat of the totalitarian state and loss of individuality. However, the optimistic ending discussed in Chapter 2 possibly reveals that, in the author's opinion, there is still some hope for the future of mankind.

Laz contains one specific reference to genetic memory which is of significance in its clear linking of both spatial and temporal dimensions. Kliucharev, as detailed in Chapter 2, makes intermittent forays down the man-hole to visit the intellectuals who live underground, and to buy necessary equipment. He lives with his wife and retarded son Denis in a flat in the dangerous, murky streets of Moscow. In the relevant episode, having obtained some tools from the shops underground, he makes his way home only to find that his wife has left their son alone in the house. She has set off to continue digging the cave Kliucharev has devised as a future safe-haven for the family. Having reproached her and watched her return home safely, he then goes to the man-hole again. This time, however, the man-hole has narrowed considerably: 'Но зато Ключарев может ощупывать землю впереди себя рукой, может втискивать и изгибать отсыревшее тело, используя на все сто процентов опыт ползущих, генетическую память всякого гнущегося позвоночного столба' (112).

The narrowing of the man-hole indicates the uncertain state in which Kliucharev lives in the present, both in terms of the danger on the streets above and the possible loss of comfort from the underground haven. He is the link between these worlds, providing information to the intellectuals on the state of life above ground, and obtaining much needed medical and building supplies from below to make his life on the dangerous streets easier.

Kliucharev's concern for his friends, particularly the need to help a pregnant widow bury her husband, reveals his humanity and need to preserve the traditions of the past by remembering the dead. Kliucharev himself views his actions as being the result of unconscious urges outside of his present state, in a passage clearly linking the three time periods from his position in the future:

Что поделать, не столько интуитивное, сколько подинтуитивное, *земляное* мышление, которое вбирает чужой опыт, даже не доложив своему собственному сознанию, – вот что его ведет. Колея веков. Ползучие движения, как и ободранность (оглаженность) плеч и коленей, усвоены лишь на дальнем стыке с опытом тысячелетий; тех тысячелетий, когда не было еще опыта чужого или опыта своего и был лишь один опыт – сиюминутный. (101)

In this respect the protagonist is a successor to the trauma patient in *Utrata*, who is concerned enough about others' discomfort to put aside his own difficulties and try to help. Kliucharev represents one of the last remaining individuals to exhibit human compassion and respond to calls for help, and to express extreme anxiety at the contemporary state of mankind. In this way he is man's final hope, and therefore carries the weight of the centuries on his shoulders. As noted by Dalton-Brown, the numerous journeys in the text only lead to a confined space such as the cave the

protagonist is digging, or the bunker his friends inhabit.²¹ However, the reference to genetic memory emphasises his links with other people, who in times past have struggled against enormous physical difficulties. Again, as is the case with *Dolog nash put*, there is an optimistic ending: the passer-by arouses Kliucharev from his slumbers and urges him to hasten home.

These specific references to the concept of genetic memory in *Utrata*, *Dolog nash put*, and *Laz* provide detail concerning its nature and role within Makanin's prose. Theoretically speaking, genetic memory is the ability to move from one time period to another, living that time as if it were the present. This is possible when the mind is in a free state such as in delirium, and a person is conscious of the interlinking nature of time periods. In terms of its function, it provides a notion which contrasts and connects the three time frames, allowing Makanin wider possibilities of experimentation with existential themes and ideas. Man's position in one time frame such as the present is inextricably linked with man in the past and future. To understand man's condition to the best of one's ability, one needs to engage fully with the present and recognise the cumulative effect of past and future centuries of existence. Despite the frightening depiction of futuristic states, however, man's ability to recognise historical time and to attempt to remain in contact with it gives hope.

²¹ S. Dalton-Brown, 'Signposting the Way ...', p. 113.

Digging into the depths of past and future time

The importance of the temporal and spatial dynamics revealed in *Laz* is also clearly highlighted in *Utrata*, particularly in terms of ‘digging’ from one point to another and from one time frame to another.²² Obviously, Pekalov’s tunnel in the first instance is an active attempt to move from one side of the river to the other within a constricted space. This act leads to his eternal memory in local legend and therefore prevents him being lost in oblivion. Another example is the first-person narrator’s description of his childhood stay at a blind people’s home, which begins with the words: ‘Если копать еще – мне одиннадцать лет’ (330).²³ The narrator is recalling his past, and through the use of the verb *kopat*’ emphasises the effort involved in retaining links with the past, and links the memory to the blind men in the legend.

²² The Piskunovs assess the digging motif as a further ‘laying bare’ technique. See S. i V. Piskunovy, ‘Vse prochee ...’, p. 50.

²³ Colin Dowsett specifically refers to genetic memory only in linking the blind people in the legend with the narrator’s early visit to the blind people’s home (p. 27). He implies the use of the concept when discussing the narrator’s state of delirium as a means by which he moves into the time frame of the past (p. 24). See ‘Postmodernist Allegory in Contemporary Soviet Literature: Vladimir Makanin’s *Utrata*’, *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 4 (1990), 21-35.

A sharply nightmarish episode is described by the first-person narrator, one which reflects his attempt to meet Pekalov and which unites several other episodes in the text.²⁴ He is walking on crutches along the hospital corridor at night with the rain falling outside. His attention is arrested by the anguished face of a young girl in the window of the block of flats opposite (the 'crying child' discussed in Chapter 2). The narrator realises that he is the only person who can see and help her, so he carefully makes his way down the stairs and out of the hospital to the flats. However, on entering the building and climbing up the stairs, he finds that the arrangement of the floors is irregular, with half-floors and unexpected turns in the corridor that lead him to a strange place: an underground tunnel. This episode is then dismissed as an aberration and he begins his mission again, only to end up in a tunnel with the sound of water rushing above his head. This very bizarre episode, which seems to find the narrator in the necessary delirious state to access genetic memory, unites him with the Pekalov legend in two ways. Firstly, in its spatial dimensions: the corridors in both the hospital and the block of flats are enclosed spaces that are analogous to the tunnel in the legend. Effort is required in the corridors and the tunnel to yield the desired result and end point. Secondly, one of the blind men in Pekalov's tunnel believes he can 'see' a vision of the Virgin Mother, inspiring him to dig upwards and eventually come out on the other side of the river. The narrator in a similar fashion is inspired by a face: that of the girl in the flat opposite. This spurs him on to a concerted effort to

²⁴ Stepanian views Makanin's whole prose as: 'будто это твои собственные сны тебе рассказывают. Как на приеме у психоаналитика.' Т. Tolstaia and К. Stepanian, "...golos letiashchii...", p. 80.

reach her that actually leads to him accessing genetic memory, which he had earlier failed to achieve.²⁵ He therefore overcomes the spatial and temporal restrictions of his life in the present.

A further recurring image that links with the digging metaphor is that of the worm. *Golosa* is one of the earliest texts to introduce this image, and in this instance a short narrative describes how a man is abandoned in the hills, sinks down into the earth like a worm and comes face to face with God. Despite the man's protestations that he has led a blameless life, God reveals all his wrong-doings. The man writhes around as he faces his guilt and is dismissively kicked by God as he walks off. The worm image here firmly places man as an insignificant creature on a world-scale, trying to avoid his feelings of guilt. In later texts, the worm image is introduced to represent those who are trying to overcome the temporal and spatial restrictions of their life in the present. In *Laz*, Kliucharev's movements as he wriggles and crawls through the constricting man-hole to reach the underground haven are contrasted with those of a worm: 'и не может же Ключарев и точно ползти как червь; у человека тело прямое' (112). Kliucharev, like the trauma patient in *Utrata*, is attempting to overcome spatial difficulties in his desire to help others. Obviously in *Utrata*, Pekalov and his men continually crawl in and out of the tunnel which in places is only just wide enough for

²⁵ There is a strong emphasis in the text on the ability to 'see': there is the blind man's holy vision in the tunnel; the blind men's ability to dig the tunnel in the dark, when others are too scared and cannot see; the narrator's awareness of the anguished girl; and the erasure of the inscription on the tombstones.

one man to pass through.²⁶ The worm metaphor indicates the overwhelming spatial difficulties encountered by a person who tries to engage with different time zones. Yet some, like Kliucharev, are not deterred by the physical impossibility or by the temporal constraints of their time.

²⁶ The Piskunovs also note the worm image in *Utrata* and *Golosa* in their discussions of the motifs of 'ruins', 'digging' and 'loss'. See S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee – literatura...', p. 49.

The imperfect present

The concluding section of *Utrata*, in which the forty-year-old man visits the now-ruined remains of his childhood village, is the only lengthy part of the whole text to be concerned with the present. Viewing the village from the distance as his forebears would have done when they first came to settle in the area, he imagines that he is like someone from beyond the grave, a 'zagrobnik' (337). His visit can be viewed as a conscious attempt not to forget the past by means of physical contact with objects belonging to that past – he proceeds to find and touch the sunken iron bedframe in a ruined house and the gravestones in the local cemetery. However, such physical contact can be illusory. On his visit to the cemetery he tries to read the inscriptions on the various headstones. Yet some of the words and figures have been worn away and lost, and one inscription in particular stands out: 'Ни имени. Ни дат. На жестяном листочке сохранилось нестертым только дпящееся тире... и больше ничего; сама вечность' (350). He is too late to attempt a connection with the past for it has already sunk into eternal oblivion. He is not a 'zagrobnik', death cannot be defeated; he is a man firmly stuck in contemporary time.

He then appears to come to his senses and dismisses his attempt to unite with the past as 'заигрывание с вечностью' (351). He has experienced no sense of cleansing nor felt any connections with his forebears and so hurries off to catch his train: 'длительность времени уже не занимает приезжего человека' (351). The train represents another means of movement between points in time and space, here

juxtaposing the past of his native settlement and the present of his own life, and thus concludes the whole text. Natal'ia Ivanova assesses this concluding section as: 'россыпь экзистенциальных знаков' in which man's loss of love and sense of emptiness is clearly revealed.²⁷

Deming Brown's assessment of *Utrata* emphasises the bleak side of the text: 'a sombre, brooding Makanin in what seem to be the depths of pessimism.'²⁸ The author's later prose reveals a *desire* to unite with the past and future in a mutually beneficial encounter, providing a sense of wholeness with the eternal nature of life and human existence. However, this is shown to be extremely difficult and an ideal which is practically impossible to realise. In this text the narrator eventually manages to meet Pekalov through genetic memory, but they fail to communicate fully. Colin Dowsett in his article on *Utrata* expresses this clearly:

the central theme... is the existential anxiety generated in the individual as a result of the unbridgeable gap between past and present and the consequent loss of the sense of the integrality of life which only a full grasp of the past can bring.²⁹

²⁷ N. Ivanova, 'Illiuziia obreteniia...'

²⁸ D. Brown, *The Last Years...*, p. 107.

²⁹ C. Dowsett, 'Postmodernist Allegory...', p. 22.

Dowsett suggests that *Utrata* provides a 'cynical indictment of truthseeking through communion with the past'. This view seems to me to be mistaken, for although the narrator is not able to commune fully with the past through genetic memory, this still remains an ideal that Makanin would strive to realise. The author can certainly be seen to be criticising the 'village prose' movement's idealisation of the past, for in this they fail to engage with the present and simply desire to return to past values. In the same way socialist realist texts depicted the perfect future ideal, and also failed to engage with contemporary time. As the quotation from the Rollberg interview in Chapter 1 showed, the author is keen for people to understand the links between the different time frames. Therefore any attempt to understand the present and then take a step towards another age, here revealed through the concept of genetic memory, is to be commended. This reveals a sense of continuity with the past and future, and a better understanding of man's condition in the present.

The inclusion of the concept in the dystopian texts aids an understanding of Makanin's ideas. Despite the extreme uncertainty of life for Kliucharev, and despite the continuation of animal slaughter, both texts end with an element of hope. There is a sense of pessimism and foreboding in these texts, but it is not the final comment on the state of mankind. Makanin's protagonists have to acknowledge their inability to unite completely with the past and future – this is the nature of their anguished existence in the present – yet this does not preclude any attempt to do so. The fact that anguish can still be expressed, and the fact that man understands his precarious contemporary condition and is still trying to change it, implies that the complete loss of a sense of 'reality' and 'history' has not yet occurred. In this way, man is just moving closer to

an abandonment to the knowledge that life is becoming a fragmented existence with no unifying philosophy to which one can adhere.

Genetic memory, to summarise, is the means by which Makanin is able to link people in the past and future with those in the present, to try to overcome temporal restrictions. This is compounded and reiterated by a spatial analogy which provides a physical means of contacting individuals. Up to this point, the examination of genetic memory has centred around its use as a tool to present views of the present, past and future. It has provided a means by which all three time periods can be viewed as mutually affected and linked phenomena. However, simply to leave this intriguing concept here would be to disregard the extent to which other ideas of the author's also engage with this concept. Genetic memory is a point at which several main themes and structural forms unite, particularly the nature of individuality which, as revealed in Chapter 2, is lost altogether in later texts.

The placing of the mirror

In their major article on the author, the Piskunovs stated the following:

Маканин – против зеркала, против рамы, которой зеркало ограничено. Он – “а-литературен”, и все его тавтологические уподобления (“жизнь как жизнь”, “люди как люди”, “провода как провода”...) как раз демонстрируют нежелание писателя удваивать, умножать, “зеркализировать” жизнь в художественном тропе.³⁰

The Piskunovs then continue their discussion with a further analysis of how the author has tried to turn from stereotypical descriptions to archetypal ones. Whilst not wishing to detract from the good points made in this article, I believe it is precisely the image of the mirror which can aid a continuation of the discussion of genetic memory in relation to the image of the individual begun in Chapter 2.

Taken further, genetic memory can be equated with a mirror that stands in the present and reflects into the past on one side, and into the future on the other. As in *Through the Looking Glass*, a person can step through the mirror into another time frame.

³⁰ S. i V. Piskunovy, ‘Vse prochee ...’, p. 52.

Hence the mirror can be seen, as can the concept of genetic memory, as both a spatial and a temporal construct. However, it also provides a clear 'reflection' of the author's ideas concerning characterisation, the way in which he has turned from stereotypical images to a depiction of 'live' characters. The mirror, in this instance, has changed from being an object that reflects two-dimensional, static images of people locked in one time frame, to an object that reflects three-dimensional images of people who engage with the contemporary reality before them and with the fullness of man's existence in and through time. Yet the mirror is revealing the author's fragmenting but still comprehensive image of a reality, a 'simulacrum', in which literary images of man still strive to engage with issues concerning man's condition. Looking at this in the author's familiar terms of a point between two ideas or conditions, the mirror is the suspended point between what can be interpreted as a fundamentally social realist and what can be understood as a postmodernist depiction of man's condition. This second half of the chapter will examine the issue of individuality, of the characters' understanding of 'self', and then move to the issue of the contemporary reality in which the 'self' can be realised.

The question of a person's individuality appears, in Makanin's early prose, to be inextricably linked with, and partly a result of, childhood experiences. Even in his first works, there appear childhood reminiscences which attempt to reveal, in a psychologically naive manner, some reason for the protagonists' adult decisions and actions. In *Priamaia liniia*, for example, Volodia's hesitancy and lack of self-confidence is shown alongside flashbacks to his hungry childhood and father's death in the war: 'Помню, в тот голод... первоклассник... да, так и было... я нарвал

тогда на пригорках дикого чеснока.³¹ The reader is not surprised, therefore, when Volodia takes upon himself the blame for the fatal accident at the factory where their mathematical formulae are sent. *Bezottsovshchina* has ample opportunity to reveal the psychological damage the youths experienced prior to and during the years in the orphanage: 'у него были свои счёты с детством... Бышев до двенадцатилетнего возраста не мог засыпать ночью спокойно, если в доме не было хлеба.'³² Another frightened and insecure youth, Serezha, witnessed the attack and rape of his mother by a group of soldiers in a wood. The focus of the author's prose still remains, at this early stage, on the nature of individuality as expressed through his main protagonists and their personal experiences.

Interestingly, in *Odin i odna*, Ninel' Nikolaevna denies the influence of childhood and constantly idealises her youth during the liberal Khrushchev period: 'Нина ответила мне, что есть только юность и что ей согласиться с чьим-либо детством – значит себя уступить или приуменьшить'.³³ Ninel' is obsessed with her initial popularity and the fervour for ideals she experienced as a young woman, which

³¹ *Priamaia liniia* in *Kliucharev i Alimushkin: Roman, rasskazy* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1979), p. 165.

³² *Bezottsovshchina, Moskva* (1971:12), 31-94 (p. 53).

³³ *Odin i odna: Povesti* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988), p. 195. All quotations will refer to this monograph and subsequent page numbers will appear in the text in parentheses.

explains her isolated existence and inability to relate to people in the present, particularly as the new generation have substantially different ideals. Ninel' was once part of a collective atmosphere in the heady days of the 1960s, but now remains locked and isolated in the past of her youth.³⁴ Ninel' is physically unable to make contact with others; she would not understand their individual anguish, not recalling having even expressed this in her own childhood, never mind be able to respond to it in others.

In Chapter 2, the focus of the depiction of the individual was on a child's external vocalisation of their existential state in relation to the collective: their crying out to others for help. In *Golosa*, there is a separate, but interlinked, idea – that of inner 'voices'. In this instance, inner voices appear to represent an amalgamation of intuitive, unconscious and spiritual strivings which are inherent in every person, but are not always permitted expression. It is the ability to recognise and hear one's own inner voices 'возникает ощущение неслышимых голосов'³⁵ which is the sign of a strong sense of 'self', and is the point at which a higher level of

³⁴ The Piskunovs see a loss of childhood as a reflection of a loss of old age too, which they believe Makanin views as the point at which a person gains their true essence of being. S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...', p. 60.

³⁵ *Golosa* in *Otstavshii: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), pp. 4-116 (p. 37). All subsequent references to this edition will be included in the main body of the text in parentheses.

consciousness can be achieved. Particularly for the creative individual, this ability is most desirable if the writer is to avoid the common usage of stereotypical images and instead is to strive to depict that which is 'alive'.³⁶ Returning once more to the image of the child, it is in one's younger years that a person is aware of, and receptive to, these inner voices, and this recognition is linked clearly to one's awareness of 'self':

это была добрая минута; еще позже он назовет такую или подобную ей яркую минуту из детства – голосом или первым услышанным голосом, или даже первым словом, и поймет, что минута вовсе не обязательно связана с осознанием смерти. Она связана с осознанием самого себя. (40)

The main idea here appears to be that the purity and openness of the child enables the child to hear, and in later life to understand, these voices. The child is the ideal recipient: 'этот первый голос случается в детстве, чаще в отрочестве, а всего чаще на стыке детства и уже не детства – пространство там очищенное и голоса слышнее' (40). Once more, it is the space between two

³⁶ The connection between voices, a writer's inspiration and the depiction of individual characters will be examined further in the next chapter.

temporal points, here the periods of childhood and adolescence, which is the most creative time.

Another short story in *Golosa* concerning a pioneer's wanderings in the woods with the camp drum also bears witness to this. Leaving his friends behind, the boy disappears, and is only later able to account for his actions by saying he was responding to the voice of nature: 'я как бы услышал голос природы, голос леса' (57). Unable to comprehend this, his seniors strip him of the privilege of beating the drum. This child is receptive to non-rational voices whilst others deny their existence. However, on another level, it is important, we are told, to distinguish these inner voices from those that are harmful. An ironic anecdote follows of a man who heard his inner voice telling him to call on his neighbour in order first to be fed by the neighbour and second to be loved by her. There appears to be here a distinction between voices that are demands for self-gratification (for the body and emotions) and those that are of a more spiritual nature and on a higher plane than one's simple desires for oneself.

The discussion of 'inner voices' in the text is developed further. Whether a person recognises the voices or not does not affirm or negate their existence. On the contrary, voices live on:

Голос существует и тогда, когда он неслышен: он притих,
не более того. С точки зрения вбирания в себя голос

достаточно широк и несет в себе все и всякое; и если кто-то захочет найти в нем свою исключительность или даже свою болезнь, он ее там найдет.

Голоса имеют свою жизнь во времени: от и до. (49)

In this way, voices heard by our ancestors can be passed down through the generations, and hence the voices can be read on one level as a reference to a Jungian 'collective unconscious'. However, by naming them in terms of human expression, the author is reiterating their animated status and link with a sense of 'self'.³⁷ Makanin is also keen to posit the motif in everyday life, amongst the typical recurring existential difficulties a person faces. There is a paradox here at the heart of the individual/collective dichotomy: according to Makanin, the individual has to use values which are contained in the collective in order to retain his sense of self.³⁸

The final narrative in *Golosa* unites various ideas in the texts, particularly those pertaining to a sense of 'self', and additionally places man firmly in the natural order and reveals his transient state. Returning to his native village, a young man joins the

³⁷ The Piskunovs view the voices as linked to archetypes, whereas Tolstaia emphasises their reference to specific individual traits separate from archetypal motifs. S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee...', p. 72; T. Tolstaia and K. Stepanian, "...golos letiashchii...", p. 83.

³⁸ Makanin expresses this in the Laird interview. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 60.

local old men in the *bania* for their weekly ablutions. At first the young man keenly feels the age difference between himself and them, and even happily recalls the idiom that to be amongst a group of men signifies that you will have a long life. Eventually distinguishing the men as individuals, the young man watches one man in particular: ‘я счел его за один из возможных вариантов моей будущей старости’ (110). However, it is precisely his thoughts on the transience of life that soon disturb him. The nakedness of the men, a physical ‘laying bare’, is the state in which they are both born and will die. These men are all close to death, and while some of them are kind-hearted and pleasant, one particular man has quite an evil streak. The young man watches the old men as they help each other to wash, and talk and joke amongst themselves. The thought that he could become like the nasty old man is abhorrent to him, and he is filled with an overwhelming urge to be ‘медленно растворяясь и теряя свое “я” во всех и всем’ (110). Despite their close proximity to him, however, the young man is overcome by a strong sensation:

Мигом и разом они улетели от меня на космическое расстояние, я был щедр, я был переполнен, я был живой, а они нет. Не шесть шагов в пространстве была дистанция и даже не шестьдесят лет во времени (мне было двадцать), расстояние было куда большим, они были от меня за стертыми миллионами лет, в том времени, когда земля была из голого камня, кремнистая, без кислорода,

без суеты множащихся клеток и уж, конечно, без единого
на ветру листика. (111)

The fact that the inevitability of death has been part of man's life since the beginning of time hits the young man with extreme force. The men reveal the decrepitude of old age – a stage of life which the young man will unavoidably reach. His desire to merge with the old men proves to be impossible, for he is young and they are soon to die. In this the old men are united and cannot be distinguished one from the other: even the evil-natured man cannot reverse this law of life. Yet their individuality does remain in an image reminiscent of the choir boys who disappear in the road: '[в]ода, пар и жаркая тьма дверного проема поглощали их одного за одним' (116). They remain at a distance from the young man in space, time and the proximity of death. He is unable to engage with them fully, he can only view them as a possible representation of the future that lies ahead of him.

Returning to the equation of the mirror with the concept of genetic memory, a person is able to step through the mirror to engage with the past or future. However, this can only take place when the person has an understanding firstly of their 'self' in the present, and secondly of the historical nature of time. An examination of *Odin i odna* provides a clear picture against which this requirement of genetic memory can be evaluated, particularly in terms of the text's spatial and temporal dynamics. For, as Kireev has indicated, both of the main characters have experienced many forms of loss,

yet react in a certain way.³⁹ Firstly, in terms of time periods, though *Odin i odna* is set in the present with the narrator making intermittent visits to the protagonists once or twice a year, the bulk of the narrative concerns the past. As shown in Chapter 2, Gennadii Pavlovich and Ninel' Nikolaevna were enthusiastic proponents of change in the 1960s, and the narrative keeps returning to this period and reflecting on it in its refusal to move forward just as the protagonists stubbornly remain fixed in their youths: 'Геннадий Павлович сделал шаг (шажок) в их сторону, но, в сущности, остался на месте' (11). This immobility paradoxically forms a circularity in the text with the addition of repetitions and recollections of events from the more recent past. The protagonists' nostalgic view of the past emphasises their isolated position away from the 'swarm', as Gennadii terms collective society. A time period for the whole narrative cannot be determined, and even the presence of the narrator Igor' as the representative of contemporary society fails fully to propel the protagonists into the present. Genetic memory is not a component of their lives due to a lack of any sense of the present and the integrality of time. The characters are all static – there is no sense of movement in the text or in their lives, and hence the mirror purely reflects their two-dimensional images.

Ninel' and Gennadii were separately at the forefront of the liberal intellectual movement in their youths, and are now lonely individuals who are unable to relate to the younger generation and even to each other. Igor' arranges a meeting between them, but they fail to develop a relationship. This failure is revealed on a second level

³⁹ R. Kireev, 'Obretenie cherez utratu...'

in a parallel detective story which follows a male and female spy on their separate missions. Yet, not only are they involved in searches and dramatic chases within their work, but they also are trying to meet up with their 'soul-mate' on a romantic level. Each detective carries a symbolic half fish made of metal which should join to make a whole and thereby unite them together. However, when they finally meet and retrieve the fish halves from their pockets, they are too worn away and do not quite match: 'Рука приближается к руке, и луна освещает сближающиеся две серебристые полурыбки... Увы! Половинки одной и той же рыбки не сходятся. Совпадают, но не вполне' (174). The reader's desire for a romantic ending is thwarted. As Kamianov indicates, the spy story reveals another reality where things do not quite work out as expected.⁴⁰ The isolated individual remains completely alone, and the closed timeless world of the romance is a reflection of the closed world of Gennadii and Ninel'. Time has stood still in their past of the 1960s, and hence they also live in a circular existence left behind in a particular space by historical time.

The static nature of the protagonists' lives is highlighted by the numerous reflections and lifeless images that pervade the text. Ninel' Nikolaevna frequently invents suitable admirers, and also fantasises about a handsome nineteenth-century Cossack officer gallantly courting her: 'Ей не хочется человека. Ей хочется образа'(99). Gennadii Pavlovich immerses himself in his books, conducting a dialogue with words rather than with living people. In one solitary moment he picks up the telephone in

⁴⁰ V. Kamianov, 'Zadacha na slozhenie...', p. 255.

order to hear some live voices. He listens in on a conversation, later puts down the receiver but then regrets not having spoken. He picks up the receiver again to try and converse, believing he can connect with the speakers once more. He is unable to hear them conversing: they are not fictional characters whose conversation can be picked up at will – they are living people whose lives have moved on since his first contact with them. As the Piskunovs point out, Gennadii's conversation is monologic: he is unable to engage with others in a proper 'dialogue'.⁴¹ This sense of being closed off from the world is heightened by the spatial and temporal dynamics. Gennadii, however, does have some sense of the need to move away from superficial images; he tells Igor' that portrait-writing 'как всякий жанр – заблуждение. Игра с собой. Но и хуже – игра с читателем' (50).

The sense of alienation from others, of not being in touch with reality, is established from the very beginning when Gennadii happens upon the party in the sculptor's workshop.⁴² As mentioned previously, there is a confusing mingling of statues and the models upon whom they were based. Significantly, when questioned as to which statue she modelled for, one girl mistakenly points to the wrong one – *she cannot recognise herself* despite being surrounded by the statues. She makes the excuse that the statues have been moved around since the previous evening. In a similar fashion,

⁴¹ S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee ...', p. 67.

⁴² Ivanova notes a link between the labyrinthal basement workshop and Pekalov's tunnel. See 'Illiuziia obretenia...'.

the solitary figures of Gennadii Pavlovich and Ninel' Nikolaevna have cut themselves off not only from the present and society, *but from their own selves*. They are unable or unwilling to recognise each other as similar people from the same era. They can be compared to Igor's childhood recollection of the man run over by a cart: he lies in a stream surrounded by water, yet calls out for something to drink. They are blind to those around them as well as to their own selves, something maybe Gennadii only realises on his death bed when he keeps repeating the word 'vidiniaet'. They have flashes of insight such as Ninel's confession of her 'склонности к мелодраме' (111), and Gennadii's glum understanding that to help another person 'надо что-то собой значить' (162). However, these are rare. Kireev evaluates this in terms of a final and all-consuming loss: 'словом теряют себя – и это, пожалуй, единственная окончательная утрата'.⁴³

The extent of their non-recognition can be seen in the numerous references to visual reflections of their own selves from windows and mirrors.⁴⁴ Ninel' in *Odin i odna*, for example, has various such encounters. The first occurs following the advance of unwanted attention by an old married friend in his empty flat. Ninel' slaps him across the face and flees out into the street:

⁴³ R. Kireev, 'Obretenie cherez utratu...'

⁴⁴ For Alla Latynina, the motif of non-recognition is one of the most powerful in this text. See: 'Autsaidery: Spor...', p. 271.

Витрина отражала: по асфальту одновременно с Нинелью Николаевной шла женщина с ее лицом. И тут ее кольнуло: да почему же она думает про покрой юбки, про цвета одежды, почему именно эти ее мысли – первые?

(19)

Ninel' is so closed off from the outside world that she does not recognise herself. This is emphasised in a stronger manner when she later fails to realise that time has passed her by: 'Нинель Николаевна повернулась в прихожей к зеркалу и увидела там стройную женщину с лицом почти старушки' (113). Again, the mirror remains a reflection of a temporal reality with which Ninel' fails to engage. The clearest example of this appears in her acquisition of several mirrors for her flat: 'я увеличиваю пустоту своих комнат и, ха-ха-ха-ха, количество собственных отражений (внося в дом, она словно бы *выносила*, так как не уменьшала, а увеличивала, удваивала зеркалами жилую пустоту)' (152). Again, Ninel' reveals here her predilection for images rather than real people. Coupled with this is the fact that her idea of a collective gathering of people to occupy her room involves *a collection of people who are exact copies of each other*. There is no room for individuality in terms of both space and her concept of people. Time does not move forward in such a life; the Piskunovs note how this is reflected in the way their deaths are detailed earlier on in the narrative, so that they remain alive at the end of the text, trapped in their closed existence.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ S. i V. Piskunovy, 'Vse prochee ...', pp. 67-8.

In this text the mirrors do not provide a way through to another time frame – Gennadii and Ninel’ have forced their stasis of life upon themselves through their preoccupation with the past – but are a constant reflection of the characters’ mundane lives, where reflections and images of self are not even recognised.⁴⁶

An ability to understand and recognise oneself individually in the present as distinct from one’s membership of the collective – be it society, the workplace or a particular organisation – can be seen as a necessary prerequisite to access genetic memory and, ideally, to come face to face with individuals from the past. Hence, an understanding of ‘self’ is required. Anatolii Karpov succinctly summarises this:

Отношения человека с временем у В. Маканина конфликтны, и для разрешения этого конфликта “вовсе не обязательно спешить и догонять” – нужно найти свое собственное место в потоке дней, живя во времени, уметь взглянуть на него с определенной дистанции: тогда переживаемое человеком может быть измерено и “более

⁴⁶ I. Solov’eva draws attention to the numerous references to mirrors in *Odin i odna*. She understands the mirror and book as signifying self-knowledge. See ‘Natiurmort s knigoi ...’, p. 49.

высокой меркой, более общей, что ли, общечеловеческой”.⁴⁷

The protagonist in *Utrata*, on the other hand, is markedly different from those in *Odin i odna* who have difficulty understanding and even recognising themselves. Before setting off to help the distressed girl, the hospitalised narrator is made aware of the nature of his position: ‘Окна коридора отсвечивали, и я видел себя ковыляющего: параллельно, в отраженном коридоре, шел отраженный больной на костылях с моим лицом’ (116). Here again, an image of self is presented to the character as if from outside himself. This time, though, the character recognises that the reflection is of *himself*, rather than of someone else. It is this self recognition in time and space that then enables him to access genetic memory in order to move into another time frame and to meet another individual.

A sense of self, of one’s own uniqueness and position in society, appears to be the necessary prerequisite for entering society’s collective whilst remaining true to oneself. Without the prior knowledge of self, a person eventually becomes a sort of ‘non-person’, another indistinguishable face in the crowd, failing to act, speak or live as an individual and hence unable to make any ripple in the ‘река с быстрым течением’.

⁴⁷ Anatolii Karpov, ‘Preodolenie ochevidnosti, ili real’noe v irreal’nom: O novykh proizvedeniiakh N. Evdokimova, A. Zhitinskogo, M. Kuraeva i V. Makanina’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 November 1987, p. 4.

Recognition of one's reflection in the mirror empowers the individual with sufficient strength to step through the mirror of time and attempt to unite with a collective past or future through genetic memory.

However, the concept of genetic memory does not appear again in any texts after the publication of *Laz* in 1995. These later texts are all fully occupied with the unstable and harsh conditions of contemporary life that suffocate the individual and encourage his immersion into the collective. This indicates that as the contemporary reality faced by man loses its coherence, man in turn loses a sense of his own 'self' and is unable to engage with his heritage.

A similar labyrinthal construct to the one found in *Utrata* is discussed in *Tam byla para...* One of the young lads, among the group visited by 'muzhik', discusses the nature of good and evil, comparing it to a labyrinth:

сложность добра и зла (или их простота) такова, что, сколько ни иди по бесконечным комнатам, не выйдешь. А если вдруг выйдешь, то как раз к тому памяtnому изначальному месту, откуда пускался в путь, огибая углы. Но скорее всего в лабиринте ты не запутаешься до полной потерянности, а попросту устанешь идти и махнешь рукой: хватит!.. махнешь обеими руками (тут Сашук улыбнулся, подверстывая уже подвернувшийся образ), взмахнешь и... как птица вдруг

взлетишь и сделаешь круг и еще круг, видя уже сверху все
многообразие комнат и переходов. (86)

Therefore, it is the conscious decision to distance oneself mentally from the situation that then encourages the physical distance to be actualised. This implies a need to accept whatever happens in life rather than attempting to rationalise and understand it. The acceptance allows a greater freedom and insight, and enables a person to rise above situations onto a higher plane. Yet unlike in *Utrata*, although there is the possibility of rising above spatial restrictions, the temporal dimension is not mentioned. Again, as discussed in the previous chapter, man in the present is becoming so immersed in his own life and difficulties, that he is unable to engage with the temporal dimensions of life. The possibility of accessing genetic memory has diminished considerably, and man is revealed in his contemporary condition to be gradually becoming distanced from the whole, integrated person fully in control of his nature and destiny that he once believed himself to be.

In a similar way, Makanin's ability to depict comprehensively the intricate nature of man in and through time is being questioned. If one expectation of literature is for it to reflect clearly man's contemporary state and an external reality, then it has to reveal the disintegrating figure of man and society at the end of the twentieth century. In order to reflect contemporary life 'realistically', literature must itself become a fragmented text that in turn leads to a recognition of itself as another simulacrum of reality. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Genetic memory is a tool for depicting the interlinking nature of the time frames of the past, present and future. By allowing a person in the present to engage physically with a person from the past or future, the concept emphasises the cumulation of centuries of existence and thereby realises man's whole condition in and through time. Yet contemporary man is prone to becoming immersed in one time frame to the exclusion of others, rendering his understanding of 'self' and of his condition as incomplete. In this way, he loses his grip on the reality which is simultaneously being revealed as illusory, and man and contemporary time are fragmenting.

In terms of the development of Makanin's work, the concept of genetic memory is itself a link between his earlier, more traditional narratives and his later works where he has turned to first-person narrative and the essay genre. Genetic memory is the transitional point at which Makanin has become more aware of the nature of literature and the role of the author; moving from a chronological, social realist text to a fragmented and incoherent text that displays the uncertainties of life found in recent Russian postmodern literature. Returning to the mirror image again, Makanin has become a self-conscious writer who reflects his own professional dilemmas in his texts. The metafictional content of a number of his texts extends this further, with

discussions about the inherent difficulties in the literary process as a component of the text itself.

CHAPTER 5

The position of writer and narrative

The position of the writer in Russian/Soviet society has always been a demanding and highly politicised one. Valued as guardian of the nation's moral voice and conscience, the writer has not only the burden of expressing his own ideas succinctly but also the responsibility of social pressure and influence:

Писатель соединяет в себе два основных мифических представления: с одной стороны, – великого пророка и учителя, и с другой стороны, – мученика, который готов отдать жизнь за свои убеждения. Все это создавало писателю общественный престиж и авторитет, и писатель выполнял множество нормативных функций в обществе.¹

The writer's gradual awareness of his position and influence over his texts, on the other hand, is a consciousness that often facilitates a richer and deeper understanding of literature on the part of both the general reader and the writer him/herself. Makanin has moved from an interest in parables, myths and legends as keepers of the past and as intriguing narrative types within themselves, to metafictional texts with protagonists who are professional writers, and further on to those that lie on the border between essays, meditations and short stories. Within one text itself he occasionally alternates

¹ Kristina Engel', 'Proshchanie s mifom', *Znamia* (1992:1), 205-8 (p. 206).

between these different genres, creating a complicated array of experimental forms and ideas. Whether Makanin is depicting the difficulties of contemporary man as he goes about his daily life, or expressing the problems a writer encounters in his work, the central issue of man's condition and how to express it succinctly is at the fore.

As will have become clear in the preceding chapters, the amount of material pertinent to the question of the position of the writer and narrative within Makanin's prose is considerable; therefore this chapter will concentrate on six key texts. Three of these texts were completed prior to 1987 (*Portret i vokrug*, *Rasskaz o rasskaze* and *Golosa*), and each illuminates the more developed ideas of the writer's difficulties revealed in *Otstavshii*, and the far more intricate form and theoretical ideas behind *Siur v proletarskom raione* and *Siuzhet usredneniia*. Other references to the creative act in the author's texts are more sporadic and less developed, but will be included where relevant. Since the increase of interest in his works in the past fifteen years, Makanin has gradually expressed his own views on writing in interviews, and some of these views will form the initial study of the position of writer and narrative. However, the bulk of the chapter will examine the numerous and diverse statements and discussions attributed to the fictional authorial or narratorial voices. Such ideas include the literary devices of stereotypes and their relation to the internal 'voices' discussed in the preceding chapter, and references to the metafictional status of the text itself: a consciousness of its construction and artificiality.

It is worth noting here that the primary focus of the chapter is on the author and the text. In the earlier works, the role of the reader is only explicitly mentioned by

Makanin on a few occasions and these will be included in the relevant sections. However, the reader's function as a co-producer of meaning in and alongside the text has to be acknowledged (as does my own within the chapter and the whole dissertation). In his later works, Makanin's narratives are closer to critical than purely literary texts, thereby further acknowledging the reader's interaction with the text. The next chapter with its emphasis on the extraliterary dimension of history considers the context of the reader and text in more detail.

Throughout his literary career critics have noted the frequency with which Makanin refers to the creative process, yet there has been little sustained examination. Colin Dowsett's recent article has provided more detailed and illuminating discussions of this phenomenon; however although it refers to the publications of the 1990s in which Makanin's ideas on the creative process have been developed further, it only sketches a brief overview.² What is of particular interest in Dowsett's article is his introductory examination of Makanin's terminology to designate the writer (29-30). Noting the term '*pishushchii*' or '*pishushchii chelovek*' instead of the common term *pisatel*', the critic provides two important insights into the author's perception of his role. Firstly there is the 'implication of the "working" writer rather than the writer of professional studies' (29), which Dowsett understands as deriving from the author's own position in relation to literary officialdom and the many difficulties he has faced over the years.

² Colin Dowsett, 'The Writer and Writing in the Fiction of Vladimir Makanin', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 10 (1996), 29-36. References to this article will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

Of more interest, particularly in the way it is linked to the author's existential ideas, is Dowsett's understanding of the terms as:

a perception of the writer as a man for whom writing is an inherent 'condition' and who continually explores the possibilities of literary creativity for elucidating the relationship between different aspects of the self both within and across time. (29-30)

This is keenly noted in the texts published from 1987 onwards, once Makanin's initial attempts to depict the act of writing have been established. It is from this date that Makanin's texts begin to reveal the same uncertainty and inability to subsume the intricacies of life and existence to one coherent theory that is characteristic of Russian postmodernist literature at the end of the twentieth century.

Makanin's extraliterary comments

As discussed in Chapter 1, the author was well known for his refusal to give interviews to Soviet critics, desiring to avoid any misinterpretation of his opinions and to refrain from fuelling the debates between different literary groups. Bondarenko goes as far as stating that: '[л]итературную дискуссию он ведет изнутри прозы'³, thereby emphasising the extent to which Makanin incorporates his own literary struggles and

³ V. Bondarenko, 'Vremia nadezhd...', p. 192.

ideas into his texts. Exception was made for foreign visitors, and several published interviews provide some information on his views of creativity. An interview with a Russian journalist in 1991, however, provides detail on the author's perceptions of literature as a young writer. When he began his literary career he naively believed in the possibility of bringing about social change through his works, and he had no doubt as to the form he would use to express his opinions:

Воспитанный на классике, я считал, что “крик” может быть стихом, как “На смерть поэта”, или повестью, как “Отцы и дети”. Высокие образцы вполне соответствовали высокому волнению. Но никак не статья. Документалистика в те годы у нас считалась исключительно “обслуживающим” жанром.⁴

Hence the traditionally strong belief in the influential nature of fictional prose, in particular that of the nineteenth century, informed Makanin's work.⁵ However, the author believes that a more naive and immature prose in the form of the 'kinopovest'

⁴ V. Amurskii, “...Siiuminutnye temy...”.

⁵ Lindsey explains the extent to which literature was a part of the young Makanin's lives although they studied science and mathematics at university. B. Lindsey, ‘Translator's Preface...’, p. x.

was the more powerful and widespread medium at that time.⁶ According to the author, some writers – himself included – were unable to overcome the naive character depictions and chronological narratives of this genre, which he considered to be comparable to the rapidly changing camera shots of a film. His decision to become a writer, despite having completed a screenplay course, was based on a belief that fewer compromises had to be made by an independent prose writer than by screen writers and producers: they were additionally subject to a greater degree of external control. The author considered that unlike the visual arts, music, drama and the literary word, the cinema did not develop independently, being a hybrid of other artistic forms and one that was strictly censored. Therefore in his own literary career, he strove to overcome such naive cinematic representation: ‘я изо всех сил пытался уйти в сторону и, делая сильный крен в направлении живописи, взял за основу так называемую “повесть-портрет”’.⁷ This genre is found in several of his early works until he concludes, in the words of one of his protagonists in *Portret i vokrug*, that the genre is simply a game that the writer plays with himself and with the reader.⁸ The genre fails to engage with the full reality in which the subject of the

⁶ V. Amurskii, “...Siiuminutnye temy...’. Makanin has in mind the fact that whereas prose demands the reader’s ability to conjure up the images described, film provides those visual images.

⁷ V. Amurskii, “...Siiuminutnye temy...’.

⁸ The same words are used by Petrushevskiaia to describe literature itself: ‘[у] каждого пишущего, видимо, своя игра... Искусство вообще есть игра,

portrait is situated, as revealed in Chapter 3. The portrait-story concerns itself only with categories of good and evil, right and wrong.

Thus Makanin's ideas on artistic creativity as expressed in this interview are grounded in nineteenth-century literature, and he reveals a consciousness of a writer's control over his text. However, Makanin incorporates some of the techniques he learnt on his screenplay course into his texts as an additional means of acknowledging the degree of control that a writer holds. His cinematic experience enables him to be aware of the various possibilities of expression, occasionally describing a scene as a journalist or screen writer would, or including a parallel narrative such as that of the male and female spies in *Odin i odna*.⁹ The text *Kavkazskii plennyi* can at times appear to hold the two soldiers in a camera shot, quickly moving from one scene to the next as the men engage with the enemy. In this text, however, the use of cinematic images could be taken as a reflection of the state of contemporary society in which media images abound in a new simulacrum of reality. This text is a synthesis of the author's love of nineteenth-century literature (but realisation of the extent to which it is a reflection of

причем игра с самим собой.' Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, 'Bessmertnaia liubov'' (interview), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 23 November 1983, p. 6.

⁹ Makanin mentions this in another interview: '[и]ногда рассказываю ту или иную сцену так, как увидел бы ее кинематографист... избыток вариантов меня не пугают'. P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 261.

the values of that time), and use of cinematic devices; and hence his literary career has developed considerably since his first perception of cinema as an inferior medium.¹⁰

Metafiction

A discussion of the author's understanding of the creative process within and alongside his texts cannot proceed without reference to the theory of metafiction. Though not a new theory, as early manifestations of the form in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* will testify, metafiction has had to be reassessed by critics who initially understood the theory simply as a self-reflexive, narcissistic practice. Of particular relevance to discussions of postmodernism, metafiction questions the border between fiction and reality, often destabilising the traditional distinctions between 'reality', 'fiction', 'criticism' and 'history'. The abundance of critical texts examining American and European metafictional literature has been joined by articles and monographs providing examples from Russia and the Soviet Union.¹¹ The nineteenth-century Russian novelistic tradition contains a similar

¹⁰ In the Laird interview, Makanin explains that he is now able to use the 'power of the cinema... its brightness, its immediacy' to his own ends. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 67.

¹¹ David Shepherd, *Beyond Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in Soviet Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). See Chapter 1 for an analysis of recent attempts to elucidate the development of a literary history of metafictional texts in Russian.

interest in the reflection of the artistic process, mostly, but not exclusively, as a result of Sterne's works. Sporadic examples of metafictional strategies can be found in Soviet prose first of the 1920s and early 1930s, and then again later in prose of the 1960s and 1970s. Russian prose from the post-glasnost' period through to the present day makes abundant use of metafictional techniques.

Mark Currie's definition of metafiction will be the starting point of this discussion. He defines it as: 'a borderline discourse, as a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject.'¹² The term 'self-consciousness' has its problems, but it will be used here to refer to the text's awareness of its own status as fiction, whether it is a fictional or critical narrative. Makanin's prose reveals a gradually increasing interest in the literary process which later constitutes a significant proportion of the text. The technique of 'laying bare' the tension between the individual and the collective discussed in Chapter 2, the discussion of the incorporation of legends and myths in Chapter 3, and the use of the concept of 'genetic memory', are developed further to a depiction of the literary attempts of a writer-protagonist and a serious questioning of the border between reality and fiction. In more recent texts the objectivity of criticism and history, too, have come under scrutiny, marking a huge paradigm shift in the author's perception of his ability to depict man's condition in and through time.

¹² Mark Currie, *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 2.

The writer's condition

The question of how to be a writer occurs frequently in Makanin's texts and is one of the devices through which the fictional status of a text and the author's control over his work are brought to the attention of the reader. The portrait-writer protagonist in Makanin's early texts, Igor' Petrovich, is revealed to be striving towards literary realism and various literary devices and concepts are foregrounded to this end. The questioning of truth and reality extends only as far as the specific genre or device under discussion in the text. There still exists the implied understanding that there is a coherent external reality to be shaped by ideas and comprehensive theories, and one which the medium of literature can convey.

In *Portret i vokrug Igor'* attempts to write a literary portrait of Starokhatov, a seemingly dishonest but renowned screen writer. Igor' experiences periods of non-creativity and even depression, and often resorts to writing journal articles to support his family. Not only does the narrative contain Igor''s creative efforts, but also those of several of his peers and the attempts of a young novice. Discussions of genre, truth and objectivity form the substance of the narrative.

The first mention of genre appears in Igor''s statement that his writing involves the depiction of his friends in what he terms a 'portrait-story genre'. Igor' also discusses the question of genre when Vitalik, a young writer, visits Igor''s flat: they decide that the psychological novel should only have three heroes at the most to retain its stability. Having studied at Starokhatov's screen-writing school, Igor' is apparently well versed

in various narrative skills and helps Vitalik construct a short story from the notes he made whilst on a journey into the countryside. The content of a play also comes under discussion in the text, and this play represents what Igor' considers to be the tensions within Starokhatov's own character. Several different conclusions to the play are considered: one pessimistic, another more optimistic ending and a third so-called 'supermodern' conclusion, a twentieth-century 'Tower of Babel' version. Hence considerable emphasis is placed on an author's control over his text in the area of genre and structural form of his fictional narrative.

The literary-portrait genre demands the truthful depiction of a non-fictional person, and this immediately brings the distinction between reality and fiction to the fore. In the narrative this is soon highlighted by an ironic portrayal of Igor's attempts to gather evidence of Starokhatov's dishonesty: at one time the screen writer allowed himself to be credited as the co-author of a number of scripts. Igor' begins to collect material for his portrait of Starokhatov, building up what he terms a 'mosaic' of information. He interviews various people who have taken their scripts to Starokhatov, but Igor' is then troubled by the difficulty he encounters as he transcribes the taped material. He spends hours continually stopping and starting the machine, and yet the written conversation is still different to the live discussion on tape.¹³ He later begins to edit the dialogues, piecing together those sentences which he considers to be the most suitable. Igor' then further distorts the material: he dictates memorised conversations with people on to the tape and thus blatantly falsifies facts which could

¹³ This first reference to the problems of presenting live 'voices' can be seen as a prelude to the debate in *Golosa* discussed later in the chapter.

have initially been accepted as truth. It is noticeable that Igor' does not acknowledge his own guilt in distorting his material, yet happily sees Starokhatov as culpable in his rewriting of sections of other peoples' scripts.¹⁴ The man Igor' dubs the 'Quiet Engineer' is one of the writers whom Starokhatov helped without self interest in mind: the engineer wrote a script based on his unfortunate life story, and Starokhatov improved the text. Igor''s portrait similarly unfolds as a reworking of material, an amalgamation of various unrelated and fragmented facts, memories, ideas and half-truths.

This question of the objectivity of narrative material is briefly touched on in relation to history, an area more extensively discussed in Makanin's later text *Kvazi*. In *Portret i vokrug*, in order to understand Starokhatov more fully, Igor' recalls other significant figures who also had a contradictory nature: sometimes they showed acts of generosity to others, and at other times they were happy to steal from them. Menshikov is chosen as one example, yet Igor' later dismisses him as irrelevant due to his historical status. Igor' believes he is attempting to write a portrait of a live, contemporary person, and considers that history has possibly subverted Menshikov's real character. Yet Igor' later refers to history for his own ends: Starokhatov's earlier career as a war correspondent is included in Igor''s portrait with suitable, fictional embellishments. The narrator here is exposed as hypocritically acknowledging the influence of subjective interpretations only when it serves his own purposes.

¹⁴ In her discussion of the intelligentsia and guilt, Dalton-Brown notes how Igor' and Starokhatov are similar characters in that they are both unable to recognise their own guilt. S. Dalton-Brown, 'Ineffectual Ideas...', p. 224.

To summarise, *Portret i vokrug* examines, through the figure of a literary narrator, some of the difficulties a young writer encounters in his profession. The parody of the naive writer foregrounds the fictional status of the text. Although the question of the distinction between reality and fiction is broached, it is not examined in sufficient depth to question the aim and role of fiction in general. However, the metafictional work does indicate an interest in the distortion of reality by fiction, and the acknowledgement that a writer's creative work is inevitably subject to this.

A few years later, in 1979, *Rasskaz o rasskaze* was published – Makanin's first short story to deal with the question of the creative process.¹⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 2, the first-person narrator describes the content of a short story he wrote and which he subsequently lost. The insertion of an inner text and the explicit criticism of it by the narrator indicates that the text incorporates a closer analysis of the literary process than that portrayed in *Portret i vokrug*. The role of the reader is, for the first time, explicitly mentioned, and with the inclusion of references to the social aspect of narrative, the context in which literature is firmly ensconced is recognised as an intrinsic part of its construction and one that informs the reader's interpretation of the text. Dowsett views the narrative as emblematic of Makanin's desire to reveal the 'notion of writing as existential communication'.¹⁶ Although he does not explicitly

¹⁵ *Rasskaz o rasskaze* in *Izbrannoe: Rasskazy i povest'* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 155-68. References to this edition of the short story will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

¹⁶ C. Dowsett, 'The Writer...', p. 31.

discuss it, Dowsett's view does link in with the crying child image revealed in Chapter 2, whereby the individual's pain at separation from the collective is clearly vocalised.

From the outset the narrator provides an objective critique of the text. He relates how he developed a friendship with his neighbour and concurrently comments on the way he treated this in his short story: '[н]ачиналось так: я сидел дома и гонял пластинки (в рассказе это подавалось более тепло и лирично: "Было тихо. Я слушал музыку")' (155). Immediately the aesthetic nature of literature is emphasised, and the distinction between reality and fiction is foregrounded.¹⁷ The narrator's retelling of the written story is another rewriting of the text, so in actual fact the story has changed once again and has receded further from an external reality. In another example, the writer briefly mentions that his wife and children had departed to the countryside; however the description of this, he informs the reader, filled eight to ten pages in his short story.¹⁸

The role of creative inspiration is discussed by the narrator and is then ironically subverted by being linked to the condition of Soviet housing. The short story

¹⁷ Dowsett believes the narrator to be expressing 'nostalgia for the underlying idealism of his creation'. C. Dowsett, 'The Writer...', p. 31.

¹⁸ In his discussion of the story, Charles Isenberg believes that the narrator is: 'making fun of self-conscious literarity by showing how the verisimilitudinous detail, which is supposed to produce the effect of the real, is in fact purely artificial'. Charles Isenberg, *Telling Silence: Russian Frame Narratives of Renunciation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 137.

concerns the author's gradual acquaintance with his neighbours Alia and Viktor, and the way he is able to learn of this couple's troubles through the thin walls of their flat: '[в] рассказе ненавязчиво и сама собой появлялась мысль о прекрасной слышимости сквозь наши стены' (156). The narrator initially presents ideas as unconsciously occurring to the artist. However, this is then juxtaposed to the narrator's self-irony at his earlier thoughts on the social role of literature. Once more reiterating the narrative's status, he declares ironically: '[в] то давнее время я искренне считал, что мой рассказ может помочь строить дома' (157). With this direct reference to social conditions, the influence of the narrative's extraliterary context is acknowledged. The purely aesthetic function of literature is once more subverted. Continual reiteration of the fictional status of the narrative takes place throughout the text. For example, the narrator muses that if the idea of the audibility of voices through the walls had been developed to its full potential, then the story would have been more interesting, an observation on the part of the narrator which is both ironic and critical. The brief introduction of the motif of the crying child is considered by the narrator to be one which could comprise a completely separate story.

The reader is often referred to in the text, emphasising the writer's awareness of the reader's ideas and expectations. At one point, after having described his lunch-hour trip to visit a friend in hospital, the narrator states that if the chronological details are required, then he first went to the shops prior to visiting the hospital. The narrator also comments on the existence of a blunder in the text that the attentive reader would detect, once more showing awareness of the reader's expectations. The narrator

clearly states that he considers the reader to be an accomplice in the text. These repeated references to the reader reveal an understanding of the degree to which a text is determined by its reader in his/her social context. Fiction is not a fixed, pre-determined narrative that can only be interpreted and understood in one way.

However, this text does contain numerous references to an external, contemporary reality and on one level this can be seen as an attempt to disguise the fictional status of the framing narrative. The distinction between fiction and reality in this work is at the fore through the narrator's critique, yet does still remain very blurred. The focus on the fictional status of the inner text deceives the reader into believing that the outer text which frames it is reality:

У каждого был в молодости такой рассказ про Алю, даже если человек не пишет рассказы и даже если их никогда не читает. И он тоже не переспал с ней, пусть хоть сотню раз напишет, что это было.(159)

The narrator relates the conclusion to the short story, but then tells how the event really ended, revealing the requirement that the story should end on an unrealistically romantic note. The conclusion to the story is then subverted by the narrator in his presentation of a painful, more 'realistic' ending. This final twist coerces the reader into believing that the framing narrative does refer to an external reality without questioning as to how this can occur or revealing the devices used to create this illusion.

Rasskaz o rasskaze develops Makanin's ideas on the creative process one step further than those tentatively posed in *Portret i vokrug*. The fictional status of the narrative is acknowledged from the outset by the title and by placing a complete story, plus a critique of it, within the framework of the narrative. This self-conscious device further emphasises the role of the reader in creating the text and therefore acknowledges the existence of critical discussion of the narrative. However, the framing device of the outer text continues paradoxically to draw the reader, for a time, into a believably 'realistic' world, and prevents a logical progression to the questioning of the fictional status of the criticism too.

Retelling and rewriting

As previously discussed, *Golosa* consists of a large number of short texts varying in theme, form and even genre. In contrast to the previous two texts discussed, the full loss of a structured chronological or framing narrative immediately foregrounds the border between fiction, reality and criticism. According to Dowsett: '[t]he random distribution of the texts of "Golosa" is a challenge to the reader to "rewrite" in terms of his own experience and to share in the work's overall communicative endeavour'.¹⁹

¹⁹ C. Dowsett, 'The Writer...', p. 33.

The first of the fourteen chapters opens with a description of the distant, unattainable 'Yellow Hills', which despite one's proximity to them are always out of reach.²⁰ The author-narrator of the text is almost immediately introduced: the first-person narrator's memory of the hills is the basis for his first short story. There follow some details on the writer's professional difficulties which are additional to those revealed in the previous two texts. The hills filled the writer with a feeling of freedom and attainment, yet his delight was impossible to convey in written form: '[в]осторг и умелой-то руке передать трудно или даже невозможно. Восторг чаще всего сфера устной речи, автор этого не знал'.²¹ The writer finds that the written word has limitations, particularly when he is trying to convey his personal feelings. In this way, the link between inner 'voices', individuality and creativity is initially proposed: a writer can draw upon his inner resources and individual perceptions but this is not necessarily conveyed satisfactorily in written form.

²⁰ This first image is a key not only to the problems of creativity discussed in the work, but also, according to Gessen, aptly describe the difficulties critics have when attempting to understand Makanin's prose as a whole. E. Gessen, 'Vokrug Makanina...', p. 159.

²¹ *Golosa in Otstavshii: Povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), pp. 4-116 (p. 7). Further references to this edition will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

The text additionally reveals the publishing difficulties of a young writer, once more reiterating the fictional status of the narrative.²² Taking his story to the publishers, the young man is told that it is not suitable material. Yet the acknowledgement of the two separate moments he has experienced – the memory of the hills, and the approach to the editor’s office – drives him to become a writer. He decides that the strong sensations aroused in him by the hills are for him alone, and cannot be expressed directly in his literary work:

не смешиваясь, как белок и желток в яйце, во мне жили
теперь две эти противоположные по сути и знаку минуты.
Минута Желтых гор. И минута приближения к
редакции... Дверь была как дверь, и прямая связь этих
противоположных минут обнаружилась незамедлительно
– автор поверил, что Желтые горы это слишком пышно, и
что это слишком громко, и что это звучит музыкой лишь
для него одного. Увидеть, мол, можно, а рукой не взять.
(7)

Once more, the ‘threshold’ moment is evoked, indicating that this is part of the creative process. A person’s ability to engage in the space between two points or feelings is the position from which creativity can be expressed. In this case, however,

²² Several critics view this short story as autobiographical. For example, see V. Bondarenko, ‘Vremia nadezhd...’, p. 184.

the door over the literal and metaphorical threshold is shut: the publisher rejects the text that is inspired by a creative spirit.

Undeterred by the editor's rejection, the narrator rewrites his story in the vein of youth prose, for: '[с]традания молодого – это не только целый жанр, но и путь всякого или почти всякого пишущего' (8). The subject of the Yellow Hills still remains in his text, for this is what the narrator knows, but in a more disguised form. Again, although the character portrayals are praised by the editor, the depiction of the hills is criticised. This rejection of the inspired and personal part of his story highlights the writer's need to trim his work to the publisher's requirements; as well as the fact that the oblique and deeply personal nature of inspiration is not always encouraged.

The juxtaposition of reality and fiction, already brought to mind by the discussion of the writer's creative difficulties, is further emphasised in the text by the first mention of stereotypes. The writer states that the character of Kol'ka is similar to that of the real-life prototype – a childhood friend. Kol'ka's mother, however, is not fully developed as a character and, it is explained, will instead be infused with the reader's own stereotypical image of a protective mother. This reference to the reader immediately highlights, once more, the fictional nature of the story and also introduces the problem of literary stereotypes, a problem that will form a substantial theme in the text as a whole.

Chapter 6 is a key point in the text with its discussion of literature, stereotypes, and voices, written more in the vein of a critical essay than as part of a *povest'*. This will

be referred to in detail because of the amount of material pertinent to the question of the writer and narrative. The essayistic style of this section indicates that these ideas are those of Makanin himself.²³

Examining the link between literature and stereotypes first, it is stated that: ‘литература отчасти и возникла, чтобы работать с существовавшими уже стереотипами, либо разрушая их, либо создавая новые’(36).²⁴ A young writer believes that he is able to create a ‘live’ person on paper simply by describing a few character traits or stereotypical impressions and letting the reader invent the rest. However, the writer soon realises that: ‘тот изображенный на бумаге человек, который как *живой* ходил по комнатам, смеялся, болел, кашлял, – вовсе не живой’(37). Fortunately, in a link between creativity and the expression of individuality through live ‘voices’, as discussed in the previous chapter, a person may suddenly hear a voice in him that has penetrated through time, and enables a writer to portray a live person on paper. These voices are from ancestors within us, an inherited form of individual creativity.

²³ Laird declares that these are ‘openly self-reflective, authorial passages’. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 51.

²⁴ According to Lipovetskii, stereotypes are created by those who are too involved in everyday life. Such writers can only reveal the ‘samotechnost’ zhizn’. M. Lipovetskii, ‘Protiv techeniia...’, p. 151. Yet Bondarenko believes that Makanin is creating ‘стереотипы сегодняшнего дня’. V. Bondarenko, ‘Vremia nadezhd...’, p. 188.

The voices are said to be of particular importance to writers: '[е]сли человек из породы пишущих, голоса имеют к нему особое отношение' (41). Yet, we are informed, this is not just because they stand in opposition to eternal stereotypes, but also because they aid creativity. They are at their strongest in a writer's first work, as his intellect is not developed sufficiently to combat them. The first-person narrator continues: '[я] бы издавал только первые книги авторов' (41). A clear comment concerning publishers is being made: the writer does not value publishers' discernment; on the contrary, he finds them to be lacking in creative judgement. This, if taken on a wider level, indicates a criticism of Soviet publishers who imposed their criteria on writers and crushed those who had talent. Yet after the ease with which his first text was published, Makanin's own publishing difficulties extended for a substantial period during the 1970s and 1980s – hence the irony of this statement cannot be ignored. Indeed his later texts are informed with greater creative freedom than his earlier social realist and stereotypical narratives, and hence this statement is a paradoxical one. Inspiration and censorship are revealed to be part of a more complicated process than simply the oppression of creativity by the authorities.

Chapter 8 returns to the discussion of 'voices', in a clear distinction between inner voices and inspiration: '[г]олоса не надо путать с вдохновением; вдохновение это состояние пишущего, голос же, говоря грубо, материален... Голос существует и тогда, когда он неслышен' (49). Voices have a life in time – they can arise, reach maturity and die without having been heard. The narrator declares that in this way each person has a graveyard of voices within, i.e. those voices which have died without being allowed expression.

In order to clarify this, the narrator introduces a new metaphor in which he compares these inner, quiet voices to falling leaves. This device, we are informed, can be modernised a little – on the cinema screen it is autumn and the trees are shedding their leaves:

И вот кинолента прокручивается обратным ходом (у режиссера есть такой прием), лист отделяется от вороха, отделяется от массы ржавых и старых и кучно лежащих собратьев, – с земли лист начинает медленно подниматься кверху. (50)

The leaf moves upwards, finds the branch and twig on which it grew, and lives once more. The metaphor is then developed further. Leaves lying on the ground that fell not this year, but the previous year, or even two years ago are sent back up towards the tree by the rewinding of the film. However when they move in to take their former places on the branches, they find that new leaves are there: there is no place for them, and so they remain suspended in the air. These are compared to inner voices of the past, of our forefathers, which remain in a person yet do not have their own rightful place.²⁵ The writer often fails to access his inner creativity and incorporate all its manifestations into his work.

²⁵ The rewinding of film, it will be recalled, recurs later in *Dolog nash put'* when the young man attempts to resurrect the slaughtered cows from the meat production line.

This projection of ideas onto the screen both adds another means of representation to the text and once more emphasises the fictional status of the work. Inner voices play a creative role for writers and, although they do not replace inspiration, do guide a writer when allowed expression. They enable the writer to overcome stereotypes and create a higher quality work by introducing vibrant, more believable characters. For Dowsett, Makanin is creating 'the textual space where an authentic communication between author, hero and reader takes place.'²⁶ Yet this introduces a new question: 'кто сильнее – человек или голос?' (75). The narrator proceeds to underline the equality of both, concluding that it is their joint impact – i.e. the quality of the text – which is more significant. It is the writer's ability to allow the independent and individual 'voice' of his characters to come forth that engenders a more believable text.

In a continuation of the questioning of the objectivity of history begun in *Portret i vokrug, Golosa* introduces several short stories that mix myth, history and fiction and thereby foreground their narrative status. The most interesting and humorous one is a bizarre story concerning the ancient Greek Achilles. This famous figure, we are told, was originally of Scythian descent and only later moved to Greece. A friend continually deceived him and led him astray, firstly by plying him with drink, and secondly by sleeping with Achilles's wives. This awkward state of affairs continued

As Szporluk aptly states: 'art and technology can only create the illusion of resurrection.' M. A. Szporluk, 'On Reading...', p. 191.

²⁶ C. Dowsett, 'The Writer...', p. 33.

until Achilles finally protested at the number of his children who had the same physical appearance as his friend. The friend brushed this aside, and continued to ply Achilles with alcohol despite the latter's doctor's warning of the damage to his health. It was only when Achilles and his family moved to Greece that Achilles's health improved, and he became the famous hero everyone knows. Various conclusions can be drawn from this story. The narrative emphasises how a famous person is as susceptible to disastrous situations as anyone else, but in the same way reveals how a second person is equally unable to nullify the first person's potential – implying that fate will take its course. Yet the narrator's final comment indicates the aim behind this narrative: '[и]менно оптимистический финал и вывод, какой может извлечь отсюда молодежь, дают мне моральное право присоединиться к ... гипотезе' (97). Whether the writer can be considered to have a legitimate moral right to mix fiction and fact in a rewriting of events is questionable; however, this point does emphasise the personal interpretation that the author brings to his material. The reader is greatly mistaken in assuming the objectivity of any narrative, whether it is fiction, history or myth. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Golosa, like *Rasskaz o rasskaze*, also contains the detailed description and criticism of a short story by the protagonist-writer, but extends the discussion to include an analysis of formal constructs. The story concerns two young girls who visit and pair off with two young men in an empty flat. Such a situation, the narrator declares, was expected in stories of those years, for there were empty flats like these in everyday life. In Bakhtinian terms, the narrator continues, it was a change of chronotope, with the

space and time of reality intersecting with that of fiction.²⁷ Not only are the writer's devices discussed, but the reader's expectations are also stated.

The narrator explains that the short story follows the natural path of that genre, with both girls preferring one of the lads to the other. This difficulty, however, is eventually resolved: 'в рамках квартиры и всего лишь двух парней девицам некуда было деться, как и мне в рамках рассказа: они поладили' (78). Both girls excuse their amorous hesitation by each telling how she was betrothed to a pilot who was killed before their marriage. The narrator states that these conversations were the essence of the short story. The author's irony is soon left behind, as, switching from one room to another: 'я добивался сильного эффекта, однако повествование вдруг двинулось в иную и неожиданную для меня сторону' (80). Hence authorial control is nullified, and the creative process is seen to move along of its own volition. The cinema stereotype has been lost, and the two girls, though beginning with the same story of the pilot, imbue their stories with their own separate desires. The individual 'voices' of the girls come to the fore in what can now be considered to be a polyphonic narrative.

Concerning the conclusion of the short story, the narrator refers to the usual ending of this genre whereby the youngsters would all depart. A critic's reception of the text is

²⁷ Stolz-Hladky questioned Makanin as to the extent to which he adheres to Bakhtin's theories. In reply, the author expressed his strong interest in Bakhtin's ideas, yet states that he does not incorporate them directly. Z. Stolz-Hladky, *Studien zur...*, p. 154.

imagined and inserted: the young ladies are not particularly moral, yet the author manages to gain the reader's sympathy. However, according to a critic, a more contemporary ending to the story would find the flat owner returning and throwing the youngsters out onto the streets. The story would then be considered complete and, by implication, worthy of publication. This short story of the two girls is then confusingly described as having been 'killed' in the narrator by an old woman who lived in his block of flats. She lied so convincingly to all her neighbours about her non-existent family, that the narrator could not forget her voice. Her oral narration was of a better standard than the narrator's attempts – or in other words, she was able to create 'live', believable people in comparison to the writer's stereotypes and use of formal constructs.

Chapter 12 is another critical narrative, this time examining some of Gogol's prose. The use and nature of what is termed the 'confused situation' in Gogol's texts is the theory under discussion. This device is simply the intrusion of an insignificant person into the busy life of an important person, leading to a state of confusion in the character of lower rank.²⁸ In two of his texts, *Shinel'* and *Koliaska*, Gogol laid bare the device of the 'confused situation', a method absent in his other works. However, this method was one that was taken up in the twentieth century, so, according to the narrator, Gogol was in fact ahead of his time. The difference between characters in nineteenth- and twentieth-century prose is that the former has literary types that the

²⁸ Lipovetskii points out the similar scenario in Makanin's text *Chelovek svity*, in which Mitia is unexpectedly ignored by his superiors. M. Lipovetskii, 'Protiv techeniia...', p. 152.

reader recognises, i.e. stereotypes, and the latter has 'live' characters. Gogol' was able to avoid literary types in the depiction of more believable individuals, who can similarly be found in Chekhov's plays. All the character has to do is to disturb the balance of life and the person is laid bare – he becomes an individual at odds with the crowds. The discussion of the laying bare of the character involves a similar laying bare of the text's fictional status, and the inclusion of intertextual references to Gogol' and Chekhov has the same function. Other references in *Golosa* include mention of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and a reference to Molière and Shakespeare. This adds to the self-consciousness of the text and demands the readers' recollection of knowledge of literature of the past to be incorporated into their reading of the text before them. This device is used extensively in Makanin's most recent texts. As Gessen points out, this *povest'*: 'как бы подводила некоторые итоги десятилетней работы автора и устанавливала правила на будущее.'²⁹

To summarise, *Golosa* is an intricate work that provides much comment on the creative process, revealing a writer's propensity for using literary stereotypes and ignoring the possibility of the depiction of live 'voices' of individual people to create a more vibrant, believable text. The role of any author, reader and publisher in the production of a text is discussed, yet social, historical and literary fields are recognised as also playing their role in the formation of the completed work. These have been important considerations in more recent discussions of metafiction, as the earlier inward-looking self-reflective nature of these texts has been seen to then turn outwards to the socio-historical context in which they are produced. Makanin's

²⁹ E. Gessen, 'Vokrug Makanina...', p. 149.

interest in the numerous different literary methods discussed in *Golosa* is moving towards the recognition of the fact that literature and history are both discourse, and as such are both informed with hidden determinants and assumptions. The rewriting of historical incidents by Makanin is only another rewriting that is as subjective as what we formerly believed to be 'objective history'.

Ostavshii, as discussed previously, comprises several differing yet interlinked narratives, all reflecting the central theme of having been 'left behind'. What is of particular interest is the detailed comment on the nature and function of a legend as it is retold and rewritten within the text.

The retelling of the legend is naturally of great significance to the narrator, Gena, and is used by him to alleviate his and others' emotions. Gena refers to the legend of Little Lesha when attempting to calm his father following the latter's nightmare of being left behind. Hence Gena uses the legend in order to placate his relative by means of a familiar story of someone else's hardships. Gena also used the legend as a means of enticing Lera, a fellow student, with tales of the romantic beauty and appeal of the Urals. He also narrates the tale to her mother when invited to their flat for tea. Lera becomes his girlfriend and they spend much of their time together until she departs to the Urals to visit her father's grave. Gena eventually follows her there, and his early attempt to inscribe the legend that was begun as a student in Moscow continues after

his return from the Urals.³⁰ Here the legend is used as a means of alleviating his own grief at Lera's infatuation with Vasili, a former Gulag inmate:

Чувство потери (и своей потерянности) монотонно, тупо мучило меня день за днем. Леша-маленький сделался вдруг в моей тетрадке куда большим, чем просто отстававший подросток. Я жил им. Я писал, дело пошло; и вот я гнал страницу за страницей, как одержимый. (284)

Hence Gena's creative impetus stemmed from his grief at the loss of Lera's love. He rewrites the legend, instilling in it his feelings of loss and the sense of having been left behind the times, and provides various different interpretations of this feeling.³¹ Solov'eva views the inclusion of several interpretations of the same event in the text as an expression of the fallibility of memory.³² However, on another level it can be

³⁰ Peterson notes how all the main characters share 'a "fused" space', having a connection of varying degrees with the same small area of the Urals. N. L. Peterson, *Subversive Imaginations...*, p. 145.

³¹ Several critics view Gena's position as a reflection of Makanin's own difficulties as a writer who did not quite fit into the established literary trends of the time. A. Marchenko, 'Zapakh svoei...', p. 424. N. L. Peterson, *Subversive Imaginations...*, p. 147.

³² I. Solov'eva, 'Natiurmort s knigoi...', p. 47.

viewed as representing the closed nature of Gena's present life which is stuck in a circular pattern with no forward progression. In this way, he can only repeat the past.

Yet *Otstavshii* is not simply concerned with the narrator's renarration of events and the legend; the juxtaposition of reality and fiction is also foregrounded by other characters within the work. Gena's father continually narrates and renarrates his recurring nightmare; Lera relates the circumstances surrounding her acquaintance with Vasiliï to Gena; Vasiliï tells of his experiences in the camps to an enthralled Lera and Vasiliï; and Lera and Gena discuss Vasiliï's words and invent possible scenarios in the camps based upon the former inmate's descriptions. The clamour of voices reverberates throughout the text, each independently expressing its own fictional story.

A writer's choice of material for his literary work is revealed in *Otstavshii* to be highly subjective, confirming to some extent the influence of inner 'voices' described in *Golosa*. Gena's alignment of his own fate with that of his creation is extended right back to his childhood. A description of the movement of bushes on one of the mountains is linked with Lesha's travels, and Gena concludes that Lesha's feeling of having been left behind had entered him earlier than he realised. His upbringing in the Urals ensured the knowledge of the legend, and on his move to study in Moscow, Gena states that he wanted sympathy for himself and his hero. As events with Lera take her off to the Urals, so Gena compares his dogged steps with those of Lesha

following the *artel*'. When he lies down to rest, so he pictures Lesha amidst the *artel*' once more.³³

Gena is desiring the unification of reality and fiction, possibly as a way of coming to terms with what he is experiencing. By distancing himself from events and placing them upon a fictional character, he can attempt to overcome them. Yet the evidence indicates that he has become stuck in the past, unable to move with the times; indeed, 'left behind'. For example, before leaving Lera and her mother in the Urals and returning to Moscow, Gena drinks tea with them. It reminds him of similar occasions in Moscow at their flat, yet in 'reality' things are very different. Lera and her mother have both changed considerably in their physical circumstances – moving out to the Urals – and also mentally: Lera is obsessed with Vasilii and her mother spends her time talking to her husband's grave. Gena, however, remains the same in the same state of being 'left behind'. Ironically, he at first only comments that the sole difference is in the sort of biscuits offered at tea: he is unable to accept that the times have changed.

Otstavshii contains some observations and criticism concerning the reasons behind literary creations, which are again revealed to be highly subjective. Gena hopes that the publication of his story will relieve his sense of loss over Lera: he will meet new people and soon forget about her. He has a social aim too: 'я пытался поднять

³³ Tolstaia views these actions in terms of a 'pull' from one person/feeling to another, similar to the expression of the tension discussed in Chapter 2. T. Tolstaia and K. Stepanian, "...golos letiashchii...", p. 91.

свое отставание в любви на высоту, которая теперь могла быть измерена заведомо более высокой меркой, более общей, что ли, общечеловеческой' (299). However, this is driven by his need and desire to be part of a group, to lessen his sense of alienation. Yet, it is not to a group of failed lovers that he wishes to belong; instead, he wants to be numbered amongst those whose first novels have failed. Once more, the distinction between reality and fiction is brought to the fore, and the writer-protagonist's concern with his own position in relation to society is the impetus for his creativity.

Otstavshii, with its inclusion not only of an old legend but also a discussion of the writer's use of this narrative form, engages in a closer analysis of the reworking and rewriting of narrative both orally and on paper. This emphasises the distinction between reality and fiction, and additionally reveals the closely subjective interpretation of events in any narrative form. Revealed in the previous chapter was the tension between the artist and ideology, with the use of myths and legends presented as an attempt to overcome the party restrictions on literature. For Makanin, the position of the individual writer in relation to society is an additional tension to the problems he encounters in producing his works. Hence the tension between the individual and collective which has continually appeared in his prose has now evolved into an external dilemma of dramatic proportions for the writer also.

Fantastic realism, or realistic fantasy

Although *Siur v proletarskom raione* does not have a writer-protagonist at the centre of the text, the attempts by the protagonist to understand his 'reality' mirror those of the writer as he tries to depict the contemporary condition of man comprehensively in his narratives. The border between reality, fantasy and criticism is continually evoked, encouraging the feelings of indeterminacy and instability characteristic of Russian postmodernist prose.

Two of the three short stories in the text *Siur v proletarskom raione* are of interest in the way images in the text, and ultimately the text itself, are subverted. In the first short story of the same name, the strange appearance of the pursuing hand demands some attention. An attempt to explain this surreal phenomenon is put forward by Kolia himself: he surmises that when he sat in the canteen he must have surely noticed that one of the workers had a particularly large and muscular right hand. Additionally, he had passed by a large street advertisement of a hand encouraging people to enter the construction industry. Adjacent to the sign, Kolia explains, was a crane and a huge building on which two men were working. Whilst he was watching, one of them began to fall from a great height, and just as he was about to hit the ground he was caught up by an oversized hand and safely put down without injury. However, this (equally fantastic) theory is then immediately subverted by Kolia, who is unsure of the exact 'reality' of what he has seen: '(или, может быть, позади плаката висел еще один большой плакат, где строительный кран был нарисован? – в этом Коля сомневается, он уже не помнит)'.³⁴ The lack of a definite meaning renders

³⁴ *Siur v proletarskom raione*, *Novyi mir* (1991:9), 111-28 (p. 114). Further references will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

not only Kolia's experiences questionable, but the whole text itself. This reinforces the writer's attempts to define his work clearly, to present comprehensive, believable depictions. The instabilities of man's contemporary condition are brought to the fore; but so-called fictional 'reality' can only question itself and can find no coherent answers.

The definition of the word '*siur*' in the title is explained in the text by Kolia's friend Valera: 'у каждого в жизни бывает момент, когда его потрясает. Р-раз – и человек шизанулся' (115). According to Valera, a person can experience persecution either horizontally, from those around him or vertically, from God, depending on the way a person lives his life (based on a material or spiritual outlook). Kolia is intrigued by this explanation, and drunkenly imagines that maybe the persecuting hand is actually trying to help rather than hurt him. His initial worry that his friend will not comprehend what he is describing is allayed: 'можно и про такое поговорить. И не пугающее слово нашлось: сюр' (115). Ironically, however, Kolia feels that he has become accustomed to the hand, even without an explanation for it:

Он, в общем, уже привык к огромной руке, привык и даже приспособился к преследованию: он сможет прожить и сам по себе, без объяснений, но все же лучше, когда есть такие слова (когда эти слова расставят твои заботы на известные или понятные места). (116)

Hence the power of the word, its ability to determine phenomena and make them understandable, is its expected function. Yet by subverting the meaning of the 'realistic' interpretation of fantasy and providing an equally fantastic understanding of it, Makanin is foregrounding his own acknowledgement of his fictional works and their limited possibility of portraying an external reality.

In the second story, 'Ieroglif', the title represents the illusory and changing nature of the fear which haunts the protagonist, Igor' Petrovich, once he has taken possession of the frozen joint of meat. The illusory nature of life and the instability which he finds in contemporary society has reached such extremes that the nature of fear itself is illusory and thereby all-encompassing:

Чувство страха, в общем, бесформенно и более похоже на меняющийся иероглиф, нежели на понятную и читаемую букву. (Не знаю, не угадаю его природы – вдруг ближе к ночи прорывается, выскакивает, затем прогорает и столь же быстро сворачивается. И уже сильно потускнев, прячется в свои глубины. В наши глубины.) (120)

There is no direct action to counteract the fear, for the fear cannot be elucidated. The eternal nature of the fear links it to primordial feelings in man; it is an archetypal fear that will remain in the present and live on into the future. Once more, words are insufficient to explain the phenomena experienced by an individual, and this adds to the

terrifying instability of his situation. What cannot be named cannot be grasped fully and therefore cannot be brought under control. The fear then takes on a life of its own, independent of the protagonist: ‘ – [с]трах ищет себе метафору, – объяснял я (объяснял себе себя), ... и чем из большей глубины вырывался волна за волной накатывающийся испуг, тем старательнее тащил я эту мороженую коровью ляжку’ (122).

Despite attempts to calm himself, Igor’s inner fragile state is quickly revealed and the fragility is then extended to his outer form. As he walks along the street Igor’ spots a couple standing by an empty taxi rank. In comparison to their state of inertia, Igor’ feels stronger: ‘ я был богаче – я был в движении: движущийся, меняющийся силуэт’ (123). Yet he is like a shadow of his former self; he frighteningly loses his own human form as he imagines how he must appear to the couple:

(Пляшущий человек. Иероглиф.) Но тонкая с одной стороны и сильно утолщенная с другой мороженая коровья нога, которую этот человек, пошатываясь, несет то на правом плече, то на левом, а то и прижав к груди, усиливает асимметрию и именно схожесть с меняющимся во времени иероглифом. Облик человечка напуганного (и одновременно пытающегося спасти не себя). Иероглиф страха, если не иероглиф боли. (123)

In a further twist and transformation of the hieroglyph, as discussed in the chapter on individuality, the protagonist muses that the symbol could also represent love – the love of the intelligentsia towards the masses. All sense of determinacy, logic and even humanity have bizarrely been lost now and made redundant. The protagonist has lost his identity and a sense of being in a society ruled by the illusory fear of the masses. The reader has lost a coherent understanding of the protagonist and, by extension, of the text itself. The use of the word ‘hieroglyph’, the pictorial image which represents a word, once more reiterates the difficulties of the writer’s fictional depiction of an external reality. Translating images into words, making a determinate meaning out of an indeterminate state, is impossible. Words can only defer meaning, presenting a simulacrum of the reality they are trying to depict, thereby creating a barrier between reality and fiction. The readers’ attempts to understand the text, to create meaning, is a further barrier between reality and fiction. However, late twentieth-century society is itself a simulacrum, an existence in the postcontemporary in which meaning and existence are part of a continual deferment of images and their definition. In this sense, *Siur v proletarskom raione* is an apt depiction of man’s contemporary state.

The writer-critic’s criticism

Siuzhet usredneniia comprises a cycle of four short narratives under the one heading, each of which can be taken separately but which together illuminate the same ideas. These four narratives deal not only with the individual/collective dichotomy as

revealed in Chapter 2, but also provide much information on the literary process – literary criticism in particular. The use of the word *siuzhet* in the title plays on its meaning as a reference to a person as well as to the topic or theme of a narrative. Dowsett views the *siuzhet* as: ‘a part of the creative individual’s self which strives *outwards* towards mass existence’.³⁵

The first narrative, entitled ‘Skuchaiushchie shofera’, introduces the first-person narrator as he stands in a queue – an activity which he feels constitutes a large part of his life. Although we soon learn that the narrator is the familiar writer Igor’ Petrovich, this text does not follow his literary attempts and struggles to write a story as portrayed in previous texts. Rather, in a more philosophical and critical vein, Igor’ discusses the *siuzhet*, the subject or topic of his writing in general. This, as revealed in Chapter 2, is the idea of the person ‘averaging out’ or becoming like everyone else: the desire ‘раствориться и затеряться, как в свалке, в общей массе окружающих его людей’.³⁶ This topic, apparently, has tormented the narrator for years and, according to Igor’, is considered to be inherent in the Russian character as a result of the nation’s history:

революции + репрессии + эмиграции + коллективизации и
лагеря – все эти виды усреднения народа были у нас в
ходу много лет, и кто сказал, что они закончились. Мы

³⁵ C. Dowsett, ‘The Writer...’, p. 35.

³⁶ *Siuzhet usredneniia, Znamia* (1992:1), 107-26 (p. 107). Further references will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

ведь в этом смысле не остановились и по инерции
продолжаем усредняться. Мы непрерывны. И
растворение всякой индивидуальности в средней массе
тем или иным способом – это даже не тема, это само
наше бытие. (107)

These details indicate that the narrator wishes to discuss objectively a literary topic of interest to him, to analyse it critically, yet the fact that it is an intrinsic element of his life immediately subverts this. The remainder of the cycle *Siuzhet usredneniia* can be seen on this level as a writer's attempt to analyse his work objectively, whilst he paradoxically finds himself immersed in it and involved in the subversion of the text (and ultimately of himself). According to Laird: 'the impulse is suicidal, self-castrating'.³⁷ This does cause difficulties in comprehension of the work, for the reader himself becomes involved in the analysis, also unable to stand aside from the text, yet also realising the fictional status of the material before him. The queue is the only framing device in the cycle of narratives, as the text keeps returning to this present-day situation, yet this is also subverted at times rendering the whole text unstable. The queue is, as Rodnianskaia points out: 'идиллическая модель "усреднения"'.³⁸

In an attempt to distance himself from the topic under discussion, the narrator splits off the topic from himself, with schizophrenic precision, and animates it:

³⁷ S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 53.

³⁸ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 205.

как всякий живущий, я полагаю, что мы вровень – я и мой сюжет. Мы с ним подходим друг другу по самым разным соображениям. Мы в *отношениях*... Мне подчас кажется, что он, как живой, тоже чувствует и тоже знает про отношения со мной – мол, да, да, есть такой человек (или человечек), мол, знаю про него, мы с ним повязаны.

(107-8)

Once more the narrator tries to show that he is no slave to his topic, or perhaps now more appropriately termed 'subject' (due to its animate form): 'у меня достаточно других сюжетов, которыми я занимаюсь подолгу и с удовольствием' (108). Yet it is as if the narrator feels some guilt at putting aside this subject, it is a subject of much greater significance than any other – it is life, we recall – and he worries that this animated subject has become ill and has died. There follows an ironically romanticised image where the narrator learns of the subject's death within him as he stands in the snow near five fir trees by the side of the road. The narrator's half-hearted response to this death is: '[у]мер и умер. Есть и другие' (108).

In a similar fashion, the queue in which Igor' is standing and thinking is also animated, and not only desires a person to express an outer appearance of having merged with the queue, but an inner acquiescence too:

очередь меня не оскорбит и симпатизирует мне, и даже лобит, растворяя меня в себе и усредняя. Но, как и

вообще толпе, очереди мало усреднения внешнего, она желает полного совпадения, и потому тут следует хоть сколько-то идти ей навстречу и свое внутреннее лицо тоже чутко уподоблять, мимикрировать... Очередь не зла – очередь раздражительна. (110)

Returning to his thoughts on the other animated phenomenon – the *siuzhet usredneniia* – Igor' considers that the subject is probably thinking about him also; and maybe even regretting having come out into the open. Emphasising the fact that this subject is not a new one, Igor' describes it as grey in colour and lacking in the requisite social spirit as it makes its appearance from the depths of time. Igor' is unhappy that the subject made its own decision to come out into the open; and the narrator appears almost hurt, petulantly declaring that the subject does not always understand his (Igor''s) psychological state.

In the second narrative, 'V teni gory', the narrative once more returns to a picture of Igor' standing in the queue, musing as he moves forward to the counter. In order to quell his irritation at the lengthy wait, Igor' believes it is necessary to conjure up a pleasant image to distract his mind. He is able to alleviate his discomfort by imagining people gathering around a fire, and this, we are informed, is the subject of this short story. First, however, Igor' describes how in the past he wrote an unfinished piece entitled 'V TENI GORY', in which he depicts a huge hill with paths diverging up to the summit. This image is a key to the cycle of stories and the discussion of creativity, and will therefore be discussed in some detail.

The hill represents the nineteenth century and the wood growing on one side is analogous to the literature of that century. People in the twentieth century are in the shadow of the hill, and not visible. Various writers are compared to trees in the wood, including Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and Turgenev, and there are several paths diverging in different directions around the hill. The image is gradually developed by the narrator, with the introduction of new ideas and metaphors. The reader is informed that this is an old piece of writing, one which Igor' now terms a small essay. The numerous paths around the hill cannot be navigated without a guide, and so:

там (в том небольшом эссе) появлялись провожающие люди и возникал некий литературовед у самого подножия горы (мол, дальше вверх он пойдет рядом с тобой, одного проводника вполне хватит; он из местных).
(114)

In a change of time frame, the narrator envisions himself climbing up this nineteenth-century hill accompanied by the guide, yet when he examines the guide's face it is very familiar: it is his own face, and therefore he is able to guide himself up to the summit. Confused as to the meaning of this, the narrator asks the guide to explain and is told: 'ведь уже новая реальность' (114). The guide then informs him that a guide always has similar looks to the person he is accompanying. The essay is brought to a halt as Igor' declares that it was unfinished: the main idea in it was lost. However, the

most important image that gradually took up all his subsequent thoughts was not the hill but the path that climbed upwards.

Igor' considers that the path represents the merging of the individual into the collective and that this thought: 'перескакивала из повести одного автора в роман другого автора, а из этого романа – в новую повесть писателя уже следующего поколения' (115). Igor' proceeds to give examples of the familiar nineteenth-century hero who goes off to war in order to lose himself, or disappears into the interior to marry a simple peasant girl and to lose his individuality among the locals. The 'сюжет о муках индивидуальности, о муках "я", которое жаждет и ищет раствориться в основной массе людей' (115), is developed further in the next section (and also in another story Igor' created). However, bringing himself back into his present-day situation, Igor' notes how he had first conjured up the picture of people gathered around a fire in order not to be tormented by his waiting in the queue. On looking around, however, he realises that the queue has dispersed, and he is one of a few people just left standing there. His present-day reality has been lost. In a similar way, people try to write narratives or to reach scientific conclusions, yet in reality they are just standing in the queue and are no different from anyone else. Present-day reality, Igor' appears to be saying, is illusory, and no-one is able to overcome this, however hard they try to ignore it and by whatever means.

Yet concluding this second section 'V teni gory' is an important addition. Igor' mentions that there was one memorable moment towards the conclusion of his earlier

essay as the guide takes the narrator up the hill. Gradually laying claim to the narrator's money, watch and even clothes, the guide begins to speak in exactly the narrator's tone of voice. Then:

когда, склонившись пить к зеркалу родниковой воды, ты видишь себя, – тебя там уже нет, ты – тень. А он – как освещенный солнцем. Он сияет. В новой реальности он, сопровождающий, живет тебя, в то время как ты, живой, все только тускнеешь: тело твое тает и похоже на слабеющее рентгеновское изображение, теряющее контуры. Видны, пока еще более или менее отчетливо, в глубине рта скрытые до поры металлические коронки зубов (твои, ты их помнишь) – все, что у тебя осталось от твоего века. (117)

The idea of the guide is an intriguing one that yields some possible interpretative insights into the nature of literature and literary criticism. Firstly, the literature of the previous century cannot be fully understood in our century as we impose present-day ideas onto our interpretation. Therefore we are reliant on the guide (the *literature* of the previous century) for our interpretation; yet although we believe that we in the present-day are objectively analysing the text (we have the same face as the guide), in actual fact this proves to be false. The guide, who is paradoxically both familiar and at the same time different from us, gradually assimilates us until we do not exist. In other

words, what we deem to be objective criticism is simply another fictional narrative, and so we are no different to interpreters from any time period.

On a second level, the critical analysis becomes of greater significance than the text itself, not only because of its immediacy, but also a result of the 'averaging out' process to which the texts and life itself have been subjected, leaving the analysis as the only constant among them. However, any summative statements are then subverted, as the image changes in the following section: a paradigm shift has occurred. This could be taken as indication of the fragile nature of critical analysis itself, which in the post postmodern period has, to some extent, become redundant. 'Reality' is asserting itself.

The image of the hill and its path is extended in the third narrative entitled 'Siuzhet usredneniia', which is obviously the key narrative as the cycle of narratives bears the same name. Igor' notes how nineteenth-century literature began to give equal weight to the image of the pure young girl and the wise old woman, to whom the male protagonist is irresistibly drawn. The more battles he fights in, the greater the tension he feels as he pictures the idealised woman. The intelligentsia, of which the protagonist is a member, had an overwhelming desire to debase themselves, to merge with the masses and attempt to appease their guilt. Igor' cites Tolstoi as an example of a writer engaged in depicting the loss of individuality whilst Dostoevskii, he claims, was not enticed along a similar route. However, the image of the writer itself is then subverted in the text:

Покончить с “я” – это ведь еще и отказаться от авторства, отказавшись, в частности, от оплаты за свой труд. В книгах и есть сама безымянность. Книги – общие и ничьи, ведь всякому видно, что книги (и с ними вместе “я” автора) должны быть растворены в духовной жизни народа, как растворены в его материальной жизни никем не считаемые вода и воздух. (Может ли вообще человек с совестью быть автором? – самоубийственный вопрос. “Я” уже не существует. Не белый ли пик?..) (118)

Returning to the image of the hill, whereas the narrator earlier thought of the twentieth century as standing in the shadow of the nineteenth-century hill, he now imagines the other side of the hill to represent the present. Thus we have a hill which on one side represents the last century, with the sunny wood representing nineteenth-century literature and the many paths, analogous to different subjects, running through it. The main path, however, the one that eventually reaches the summit, is that of the subject of a person’s attempt to lose his individuality – *siuzhet usredneniia*. On the other side of the hill is the twentieth century, a shady, darker area, also with a wood representing the literature of this period. The main path also runs down this side of the hill to its foot. Hence the subject of ‘averaging out’ is the chief concern of the literature of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: ‘живем мы уже не в тени горы, а на теневой стороне этой огромной горы’ (120). In this respect, contemporary literature can be seen as a re-working of the literature of the previous century.

The descending path, however, is much smoother, for the prose of the twentieth century has been influenced by the political beliefs of Russian society in that period, and so revolution, civil war, emigration and collectivisation have all found their place in its literature. The meeting of the former camp inmates with the remainder of society is the final culmination of the ‘averaging out’ process.³⁹ In the same way the path has gradually widened, forming a road, then a highway and finally levelling out into a field at the foot of the hill. The widening of the road also symbolises the broadening of the idea: ‘сюжет, оформившись, становился все более массовым’ (122). A footnote explains that ‘siuzhet literary’ has also become the subject of life. In this way, Igor’s position in the queue is an embodiment of the same process, linked to the previous century but also very much part of his own century and the events therein. Having worked through the *siuzhet*, it now disappears into the depths, and the queue is simply a queue.

Igor’ once more considers the position of the author, expressing the desire most writers have to compose one great historical novel. Yet their approach, in Igor’s opinion, is incorrect:

Российский литератор наших дней не в силах понять прерванной мысли вне оставшихся ему произведений искусства. Он все только глядит назад, на оставленную

³⁹ In the Laird interview, Makanin describes how his father, who was unjustly imprisoned for a time in the 1940s, had a ‘desire not to stand out, to blend in with everybody else’. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 56.

там высокую гору, уже, кажется, и неспособный оторвать
глаз от солнечной ее половины. (122)

In this way, the writer is often unable to produce a work that is aware of its literary inheritance from the previous century, but also fully grounded in its own time.⁴⁰

The final narrative in the cycle of narratives, entitled 'Vorone kak-to bog...' differs considerably from the previous narratives in its short-story presentation and lack of objective criticism from the narrator Igor'. Though it is concerned with a queue and people's attitude to the arrival of a handicapped boy at its head, the absence of narratorial comment on this story indicates a radical revision of ideas on the part of Makanin.⁴¹ The struggle to objectify the text has been lost, and the questioning of the border between reality and fiction has ceased. This indicates that the self-consciousness of narrative and also of criticism necessitates the acceptance of its inability to express anything other than its own form and medium, discourse and language. The whole text of *Siuzhet usredneniia* can be taken as the summation of Makanin's thoughts on the literary process, revealing how any discourse is reliant on its social, historical and in this case literary context, all of which influence an understanding of the ideas therein. Language itself is not an objective tool to be

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that this is precisely what Makanin appears to achieve in *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*.

⁴¹ For Rodnianskaia, the boy is another simpleton, similar to the 'holy fool' image of Lesha in *Otstavshii* and Kliucharev's son in *Laz*. I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 206.

manipulated as required by the writer, for it carries some fixed referents that relate to the society from which it comes. Criticism, too, cannot claim to lie outside of this, when it is also reliant upon the same medium, language.

Conclusion

Makanin's interest in the function of narrative has evolved from tentative expressions of a writer's compositional struggles in *Portret i vokrug*, through to a discussion of literary devices and forms, such as stereotypes and myths and legends in *Golosa*. Creative inspiration and the ability to express 'voices' of believable characters are considered to appear of their own volition, and yet they are paradoxically dependent upon the receptiveness of a writer to them. An interest in the nature of discourse in general and its medium, language, in particular, has informed Makanin's texts of the 1990s. *Siur v proletarskom raione* reveals how fluid is the meaning of the word, which can at no time be understood as having one single determined meaning. Instead, the instability of language, and the fragmentation of man's hold on any sense of reality, are the abiding senses in the postmodern world of the late twentieth century. The final text considered here, *Siuzhet usredneniia*, is one of Makanin's last works to place a self-conscious criticism of narrative within the text itself. *Kvazi*, published in 1993 is possibly an exception to this, yet in form it is more essayistic and does not include a writer-protagonist as a means of distancing Makanin himself as the author of the narrative.

The degree to which any discourse is able to claim objectivity, including historical and critical discourse, is shown to be problematic. The author is subservient to the content of both literature and language, and to his and the reader's subjective interpretations based on the social and historical context in which they reside.

CHAPTER 6

Soviet and Russian History: the memorable past

'Deprived of our memories we are deprived of our very selves. Without our histories we are vacated. We may walk and talk and eat and sleep but, in truth, we are nobody.'¹

In addition to examining the authenticity of the fictional realities he is depicting in his narratives, Makanin, as we have seen, turned his attention to the debate over the status of history. His earlier texts incorporated certain historical events in pursuit of literary realism, and this gradually progressed to a recent questioning of the objectivity of history and the extent to which it can be viewed as purely another fictional narrative.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of a nation's sense of its own identity, a sense of existing as a unified and established body to which its members can proudly

¹ Mick Jackson, *The Underground Man* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 34. The protagonist of this Booker-shortlisted narrative is an eccentric but erudite Duke who digs a series of tunnels which lead from his house through the gardens to the edge of his estate. The title immediately evokes Dostoevskii's work, and the tunnel digging is reminiscent of Pekalov's project and the idea of digging back into the past found in *Utrata*.

refer by name and which outsiders can acknowledge and respect. The rise of nationalism in the former republics of the Soviet Union bears witness to their great need to establish their own identity after years of submission to a foreign power. Undoubtedly, a country's collective memory embodied within oral and historical accounts provides the backbone for national identity and affirmation of a nation's position in the world. In the words of Milan Kundera:

The first step in liquidating a people... is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster.²

² Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 159. The opening scene describes the balcony appearance of the Communist leader Gottwald and his comrades, one of whom (Clementis) takes off his own hat and places it on the leader's head for warmth. There follows the humorous but painfully poignant description of how Clementis was later air-brushed out of the picture after his fall from grace, and all that remains of him is his hat on his beloved leader's head. This is one of a vast quantity of all-too-familiar descriptions that portray the abuses of history in the Eastern bloc without requiring exegesis.

A sense of history and its importance in the nation's identity has always been a dominant force in Russian culture, particularly amongst the intelligentsia. In Andrew Wachtel's incisive analysis of the topic, there are three inherent ideas behind this 'Russian obsession with history'.³ Firstly, there is the belief that Russian history is markedly different from that of other countries; linked to this is the idea that Russia can avoid going through certain historical phases; and thirdly there exists the belief that Russia will have a messianic role in world history. Fictional narrative has consistently been party to these beliefs and has been one of the media through which history has been expressed. As noted in the previous chapter, Russian writers believed themselves to be 'the chroniclers and conscience of the nation', and felt morally obliged to speak out against injustice and to debate politically sensitive matters.⁴ In the twentieth century, Russian writers inherited an accepted tradition from their nineteenth-century predecessors of writing both works of history and literary prose, in comparison to the strict segregation of these genres in the West.⁵ For example, Wachtel reveals how

³ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 155.

⁴ Rosalind Marsh, *History and Literature in Contemporary Russia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 1.

⁵ Obviously, historical fiction – such as that of Antonia Fraser – has its followers, and western films in particular are permitted much historical licence in their portrayal of events. Interestingly, there seems to have been a recent revival of historical films

Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* is a text that can be read as both history and fiction, and Pushkin wrote one fictional and one non-fictional text describing the Pugachev rebellion.⁶

There is no need to reiterate the lengths to which the Party went during the Soviet period to expunge huge areas of the nation's history, and repeated purges of the history profession further pressurised its members into acquiescence and silence. For Soviet readers, therefore, literature had been a prime vehicle for veiled historical discussions that historians were too wary to initiate. Yet what at first seemed to be a welcome policy change in the 1980s when Gorbachev advocated the principles of *glasnost*' and *perestroika* was not as innocent as it appeared. Rather than being an acknowledgement of the need for historical truth, the real motive behind the policy was the government's desire to introduce their rigid programme of reform, yet once it was set in motion they could not control the huge avalanche of material concerned with many periods of Russian and Soviet history. As the range of issues that could be openly discussed widened, so pluralistic debates over the past began to emerge. Tentatively beginning with further attacks on Stalin (which had previously been undertaken in the Khrushchev 'thaw' period), these debates later delved further into questions concerning Stalin's terror, the Second World War, the purges and collectivisation, and then to Lenin's policies themselves.

aimed at the mass market such as 'Rob Roy', 'Braveheart' and 'Michael Collins', in which there is a combination of historical fact and fiction.

⁶ A. Wachtel, *An Obsession...*, Chapters 3 and 4.

In the light of Wachtel's analysis of a tradition of historical fiction, it is not surprising that this genre has been used in the re-evaluation of history since Gorbachev's ascent to power in 1985. Rosalind Marsh's monograph has evaluated this fiction as an inevitable occurrence:

A society's representation of its past is central to that society's understanding and definition of itself; and literature set in a historical context is one of the aesthetic forms best suited to an exploration of the complexities of past experience and to conveying these perceptions to a wide audience.⁷

Once this seemingly cathartic process lost some of its earlier passion and the profusion of literature and *publitsistika* began to abate, the Russian people appeared to lose their intense desire for re-evaluation of the past.⁸ Widespread disillusionment with history

⁷ R. Marsh, *History and Literature...*, p. 1 .

⁸ The definition of *publitsistika* which is understood here is: 'Social and political journalism; writing on current affairs'. Marcus Wheeler, *The Oxford Russian -English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The question of whether *glasnost*' and *perestroika* were part of a cathartic process is obviously open to debate, and was a key issue for the conservatives when they pointed out the ensuing implications for society, for example, the soaring crime rate and excessive drug-taking.

and historical fiction was an immediate reaction after the excesses and dishonesty it had revealed. The mass media also became more prominent and western literature, alternative religions and television soaps were, and still are, extremely popular. The present, with its very pressing concerns of inflation, wages and organised crime has ousted a reappraisal of the past from its prime position.

From previous chapters it will be clear that Makanin does *not* write historical fiction in the manner of Anatolii Rybakov's *Deti Arbata* or the popular stories of Valentin Pikul'. However, the author has an abiding interest in the interlinked concepts of history, time, and memory, and these are an intrinsic part of a depiction of man's condition. The concept of genetic memory was earlier shown to be a literary construct applied to emphasise the connections the present and future have with the past. Memories of historical events revealed in Makanin's texts include those from the post-war period in *Bezotsovshchina*, recollections of the intellectual high points of the 1960s in *Odin i odna*, and a (fictional) war in the Caucasus in *Kavkazskii plennyi*. Whilst the early references placed his narratives firmly in the known historical reality of his readers, later texts reveal how, for contemporary society, the concepts of 'reality' and 'history' have lost their finite meanings. Literature cannot be separated from its socio-historical context, and in aiming to produce a believable text the author has to be aware of the external meaning attributed to it by the readers in their own social context. If, as Rodnianskaia expresses it, Makanin is to reveal the 'бытовые, затрапезные, необъявленные цвета времени'⁹, then his texts will be informed with current

⁹ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Neznakomye znakomtsy...', p. 236.

questions regarding the objectivity of history. *Kvazi* debates the postmodern idea of the end of history and a reason behind the desire of the masses to create or ‘fabricate’ heroes and demi-gods for their own spiritual needs.

Publishing his first work in the shadow of socialist realism, Makanin moved towards a more independent and grim depiction of Soviet life. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the numerous attempts to align his prose with that of Iurii Trifonov reflect Makanin’s similar early interest in the mundane lives of his protagonists. *Byt*, the everyday details of Soviet life, are all too familiar to Soviet/Russian readers and to others who know Russia well. This *real’nost’* is, however, not only a means of indicating that the text is written in the tradition of realism as opposed to that of fantasy or science fiction, but also a recognised means of social comment in a time of government censorship. This chapter will briefly examine some of the uses of *byt* in the writer’s prose as an initial step towards his later interest in man’s attitude to his past and nation’s history. The intergeneric dialogue which Wachtel exposes as informing a series of nineteenth- and later twentieth-century texts is *not* a feature of Makanin’s works. The author does not use the traditional ‘strategy of inscribing the same history in multiple genres, both fictional and nonfictional’, either within the same text or in separate texts.¹⁰ Yet there are similarities: he does continually demand intertextual reference, particularly in his later works, and this is part of the same tradition, in that he expects the reader to be bringing informed ideas and knowledge of other texts to his/her reading. Although Western scholars now accept intertextuality as a fundamental part of narrative, this has

¹⁰ A. Wachtel, *An Obsession...*, p. 150.

always been an expected feature of Russian texts with the exception of the majority of those written during the Soviet period. In Makanin's works a communicative link is established between the author's own ideas and the multigeneric texts to which he refers, including Russian, Asian and Western fictional, philosophical and historical narratives.

The huge changes brought about since the advent of *glasnost*' have completely overturned the traditional and ideological prerequisites of literature in particular. In this context Makanin's prose, spanning as it does more than three decades, is a good witness to many historical changes. As a writer initially on the edge of officially sanctioned work, he has, perhaps more than most, been able to clearly document these events. As Makanin does not write historical novels he is not subject to the rigorous scrutiny of historians in terms of the historical accuracy of his prose. Yet the frequency with which references to specific historical events occur, the numerous depictions of common social institutions, and his later engagement with the status of history itself do demand attention.

Makanin's consistent desire to remain outside the political debates in which literature has continually been embroiled is reflected in the way in which he has not turned to historical fiction at a time when it was being passionately manipulated by differing political factions. Yet, as Marsh points out, Makanin was co-opted onto the editorial board of *Znamia* in 1986.¹¹ This appointment, therefore, does bring into question his

¹¹ R. Marsh, *History and Literature* ..., p. 13.

declared intention to stand aside from political debate. The journals during the late 1980s proved to be a battleground for polarised liberal and conservative views, with *Znamia* firmly ensconced in the liberal camp. However, as his prose of the 1980s reflects, he has always had an interest in the value of history in any culture and is keen to reflect such debates about Russian and Soviet history in his works.

The use of *byt*

One of the frequent accusations against writers of Makanin's generation during the *sorokaletnie* debate was the repeated use of, and emphasis on, *byt* in their prose. Dedkov strongly criticised what he deemed to be too great an emphasis on the mundane hardships of everyday life.¹² Yet other critics keenly believed *byt* to be a necessary part of realistic portrayals of the time.¹³ Particularly in his prose from the

¹² I. Dedkov, 'Kogda rasseialsia...', p. 30.

¹³ 'Рассказ способен сегодня ассимилировать документальные, очерковые, публицистические вкрапления, если в фокусе авторского внимания ... *характеры* в их нерасторжимых связях с бытовым окружением, с их социально-нравственной, общественной атмосферой.'

See A. Klitko, 'Litso, kharakter...', p. 21. There are numerous articles which discuss the use of *byt*, including: Alla Latynina, 'Forma paradoksal'nogo...'; and V.

early 1970s to mid-1980s, Makanin relied heavily on *byt* and this was commended by certain critics for the way it grounded his texts in contemporary reality.¹⁴

There is no need to go into any great detail about the uses of *byt*, examples include the following: exchanging flats in *Polosa obmenov*; obtaining furniture in *Portret i vokrug* despite a very high demand; organising the services of a good surgeon and obtaining a Crimean holiday for a girlfriend and her convalescing mother in *Prostaia istina*; and visiting a younger brother at a summer Pioneer camp in *Strazh*.¹⁵ Characters stand in long shop queues (*Prostaia istina*), talk of the lack of medicines in the pharmacy (*Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*) and offer bribes in order to obtain a quick divorce (*Reka s bystrym techeniem*). Some protagonists are brought up in the stifling atmosphere of the *barak* (*Goluboe i krasnoe*), communal flats provide little privacy to their residents (*Prostaia istina*), and parents are aware of their children's need for their own private room (*Polosa obmenov*). Convicted prisoners are sent off to a remote location, and their families only have restricted visits which require formal documentation and sanction (*Antilider*). Student friends have parties in a relative's flat (*Tam byla para...*), neighbours go to the *bania* (*Golosa*) and friends take a trip to the woods to pick mushrooms (*Antilider*). More recent texts, too, contain vivid examples

Bondarenko, 'Stolknoveniia dukha...'. The latter writer/critic supports his hypothesis with examples of *byt* in Bulgakov and even Pushkin's texts.

¹⁴ For example, see V. Mordvinova, 'O dushe...', p. 220.

¹⁵ See bibliography for publication details of the texts referred to here.

of contemporary reality: there is a student suicide (*Tam byla para...*), crowds turn nasty against an individual (*Laz*) and the dead bodies of those who refuse to conform are dumped in the forest (*Neshumnye*). These are just a few examples of the many situations and events depicted by the author throughout his literary career, which provide a familiar background and bring a desired authenticity to his texts. The reader is in no doubt that the depiction in the texts is typical of the Soviet Union/the new Russia in its harsh reality and with its many injustices.

The majority of these examples are from texts written in the middle period of the author's literary output prior to his experimentation in form and style. As discussed in Chapter 1, Makanin is keen to portray a protagonist with whom the reader can easily associate and therefore a familiar setting and daily routine are paramount. Yet it is the extreme situation in which he finds himself that is the clear reflection of the protagonist's character, and the presentation of *byt* is just a backdrop against which man's condition can be depicted.¹⁶ Once the author became interested in a more diverse panorama in which the presentation of the different time periods demands a more complicated text to reflect a disintegrating, contemporary picture of life, the use of *byt* became less frequent. *Utrata*, *Otstavshii* and *Dolog nash put'* are examples of

¹⁶ Makanin emphasised this in an interview: '[Т]рагедия обыкновенного человека волнует меня куда больше, а "бытовизация" здесь является ничем иным, как попыткой таким способом сделать героя узнаваемым и обычным.' See P. Rollberg, 'Interv'iu Petera...', p. 268.

texts which rely little on *byt* due to their heavy preoccupation with other time periods and their protagonists' attitude towards them.

As Bocharov points out, contemporary writers also have their own present transitional reality to depict, and one which is full of instability, fear and alarm:

Тревог[а], которая возникла в обществе в связи с некоторыми процессами нашей жизни и которую столь веско и убедительно сформулировал в своих выступлениях 1985 года М. С. Горбачев, объясняя необходимость многих назревших перемен в жизни нашего государства.¹⁷

In his own way, Makanin evokes the fearful and unstable atmosphere of late twentieth-century society more through the disjointed structure and subversion of ideas than through the incorporation of *byt*.

Having stated that the use of *byt* is less frequent in the author's later texts, there is, however, one striking exception – *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*. The apotheosis of examples of *byt* is the inquiry: the very familiar backbone of society, whether it be a student, workers', or doctors' collective meeting to which the

¹⁷ A. Bocharov, 'Kak slovo...', p. 149.

individual has been summoned. This text not only reflects the fearful reality of life in Soviet society, but also reveals how the inquiry is a feature of Russian life and has historical roots world-wide. This is a prime example of the way in which Makanin takes an everyday phenomenon, and not only evokes the images and feelings surrounding it, but also portrays its roots deep in the past and implications for the present.

Soviet history

The Soviet critic E. Sidorov proudly declared that: '[н]аша проза дает немало примеров глубокого художественного постижения неразрывной связи современной обыденной жизни с национальной историей'.¹⁸ Makanin is no exception to this, with many references to individual but momentous events that took place during the Soviet years that are clearly recognisable and meaningful to any Soviet reader. However, the references do not purely provide authenticity to the texts; they have varied roles depending on the main idea behind the text. These depictions have been alluded to in previous chapters where relevant; for example, in *Otstavshii* the student Gena takes his manuscript to Tvardovskii's office but is too late: the editor has already been removed (for the first time) from his position. Gena also offers his fervent

¹⁸ E. Sidorov, 'Zhivaia voda...'

opinion on the official acknowledgement of Stalin's 'Cult of the Personality', and the same text includes descriptions of political prisoners.

Makanin's texts contain many examples of the political and social climate of Soviet life, although he refrains from explicit authorial comment. In *Otstavshii*, Gena's daughter asks her father to try and use his influence to help a student friend in trouble with the authorities. In another example, Gena's father tries to understand whether the work culture in which he spent his adult life has affected him deeply and may account for his tortured nightmares. He worked in the building industry and was consumed by the Party spirit behind it:

Они строили и строили, потеряв уже, кажется, и цель и соотнесенное значение строительства. Они готовы были все потерять, но не способность строить. Они только и держались за свои стройки – эта последовательность стала теперь и главной, и самой заметной чертой. (36)

Gena's father is upset, however, when he encounters an old work acquaintance who is oblivious to his own corrupt past and is spending his retirement happily. Gena's father knows he was always honest in his work, yet he is now tormented with bad dreams. The fervour which he exhibited as a young man during the Soviet heyday would be familiar to many Russian readers. In this text, the allusions reiterate the characters' feeling of having been left behind the times as discussed previously.

In *Grazhdanin ubegaiushchii*, however, the work ethos is subverted: the typical heroic image of the Soviet taiga worker is ironically portrayed. Instead of the brave individual who withstands all weather conditions and who marches through natural obstacles to conquer the land in the name of progress, there is the depiction of a destroyer of both the earth and family lives. Pavel Alekseevich Kostiukov continually moves further east in his work, consciously trying to keep ahead of his sons, who search him out for money, and away from letters sent by women he has deserted. The narrative has one character, Apollinar'ich, who epitomises the familiar heroic figure, battling enthusiastically against nature: ' – Быстрее! Ты бабник и лентяй! Надо копать, копать – планета ждет, черт бы тебя побрал!' (379).¹⁹

There is one passage which brings a historical element to the fore, and reveals that the narrative is not simply to be understood as a subversion of the Soviet hero. Despite acknowledging his destructive nature, Kostiukov is unable to stand and watch explosions at work. Trees are ripped up from the earth and sent flying through the air, with earth stuck to their roots. This can be taken as a metaphor for his own treatment of his offspring. However, although Kostiukov's sons present themselves as abandoned children, they are certainly not endearing characters: they love to drink and womanise, and use their father's position solely to their own advantage. At least Kostiukov works honestly and well – the same cannot be said of his sons. The

¹⁹ *Grazhdanin ubegaiushchii* in *Rasskazy* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990), pp. 351-90 (p. 379).

narrative continues with a description of how the earth is expecting the arrival of a naive and passionate man, but unfortunately, we are told, those times are over. Hence this is not a criticism of Soviet man in particular – although such an attack is one of the undercurrents and Kostiukov's lack of genuine fervour is noted – but a revelation of the indisputably destructive nature of man in general. Man has been destroying the land for centuries, but with different motives: some believe in the ideas of progress and civilisation, whereas others are just escaping from the unpleasant consequences of their previous actions. This unexpected idea caused confusion amongst Soviet critics.

As mentioned above, the inquiry in *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine* is a very familiar feature of everyday Soviet life, one that most families could comprehend from their own experiences.²⁰ Although the text centres on the one inquiry the protagonist is facing, it soon becomes clear that this is one of a number of inquiries that he has attended over the course of his life – the narrative is as full of his nocturnal thoughts and memories of past gatherings as it is of the present inquiry. Other common features of Soviet society are also mentioned. The protagonist recalls a street brawl in which he was simply a bystander; the fight was broken up by the police, who then rounded up a group of people for questioning. The protagonist was caught up amongst them and describes how he came before a police inquiry with the same types of characters around a table. Such methods of street control were a familiar event in the Soviet period and add to the feeling of fear the protagonist experiences.

²⁰ *Stol, pokrytyi suknom i s grafinom poseredine*, *Znamia* (1993:1), 9-53. Further references to this publication will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

The protagonist realises that he has known the inquiries 'с незапамятных времен, с самого нежного и юного возраста' (12). Whether a person consciously remembers a specific inquiry or not, there is an implied subconscious knowledge of it which infiltrates a person and continues to exist within him/her as a result of collective pressure:

Ты можешь и не знать о времени *подвалов* или о времени *белых халатов*, но в том-то и дело, что и не зная – ты знаешь. (Метафизическое давление коллективного ума как раз и питается обязательностью нашего раскрытия.)
И удивительно, что мы не раскрываемся до конца. (25)

It would be tempting to consider the discussion to be a diatribe against the collective psychological pressures inherent in Soviet society; however, in addition to his own memories the protagonist also imagines inquiries that occurred at earlier periods. Not only are there references to events and people from the Soviet period, but also references to the Russian past. Geoffrey Hosking, one of the 1993 Booker panellists, notes that the roots of the Soviet inquiry are to be found in the pre-revolutionary peasant commune.²¹ The critic Konstantin Kedrov also believes there to be similarities

²¹ Geoffrey Hosking, '... or a final reckoning?', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 January 1994, p. 10.

with nineteenth-century texts in which the protagonists are questioned by interrogators and also internally judge themselves with severity: '[з]десь продолжается извечная русская судебная драма от "Преступления и наказания" Достоевского до "Воскресения" Льва Толстого.'²² This stands in contrast to the numerous associations with Kafka's *Trial* which continuously arise on a first reading of *Stol*. However, as Hosking points out, unlike Kafka's mysterious characters, Makanin's judges are neighbours and acquaintances, and the first-person narrative style emphasises the 'destructive intimacy' of this phenomenon of Soviet life.²³ Kedrov also indicates the absurdity of the Soviet situation: it demands that the individual does not try to understand the inquiry as Kafka's protagonist does, but, conversely, is to seek to bare his soul completely to his interrogators. Yet the associations do not end just with reference to Russian history or literature, there are more universal elements too. Latynina believes that: 'the fact that the story is open to several philosophical interpretations makes it an outstanding work of Russian prose'.²⁴ The inquiry, and the table in particular as a symbol thereof, is part of a historical chain reaching back through the Soviet period with its Party Committees and everyday inquiries, to the time of revolutionary tribunals and even to the days when medieval punishments took place

²² K. Kedrov, 'Premiia Bukera...'.

²³ G. Hosking, '... or a final...'. Irina Murav'eva discusses similarities to Kafka in Makanin's early prose *Predtecha* and *Kliucharev i Alimushkin*. Irina Murav'eva, 'Sloisty pirog vremeni', *Kontinent*, 61 (1989), 353-66 (pp. 358 and 362).

²⁴ Alla Latynina, 'The Russian Booker...'.

in cellars. It is the table that links all such collective gatherings before which the individual is judged, and to heighten the sense of fear it inspires the table is given human attributes. The table can feel the pain of the needle when injections were given to the accused during the 'time of the white coats', and it is even attributed with a memory: '[с]тарый стол различает знакомые интонации спроса' (25).

The reference to the 'time of the white coats' is developed further in the text, as several passages follow the cases of a male and female student who undergo psychiatric treatment which eventually leads to their death.²⁵ The reason for treating these people is contrasted to earlier times such as 1937 when there were accusations that certain persons were 'enemies of the people'. Instead, the patients are considered to be ill and are given injections to reduce them to a dehumanised state. Patients normally become sullen, withdrawn and unable to communicate on any level apart from showing inexplicable anger whenever they see birds through the windows of the hospital. The

²⁵ Soviet psychological abuse was known abroad as well as at home and would be familiar to a non-Russian reader. International attention was drawn to the case of Zhores Medvedev, a Soviet scientist admitted to a mental hospital without due cause. It is interesting to note that prominent members of the intelligentsia from all disciplines rallied in support of Medvedev and sent messages of disapproval to the authorities and government. Trifonov and Tvardovskii are both named as giving active support, and this emphasises the way in which literary figures in Russia viewed themselves as prominent and influential citizens. See Zhores and Roy Medvedev, *A Question of Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

young man proves more resistant to the drugs, retaining his intellectual capacity until just before his death. The young woman, on the other hand, easily succumbs and soon dies. A very unpleasant scene is then described in which one of the doctor-judges commits an act of necrophilia with her body and is subsequently interrogated about this. However, the protagonist does not consider this to be a solely contemporary phenomenon:

Секс, я думаю, не однажды был связан с судилищем ритуально – связь уходит в глубину веков, в нравы племен. (Меня колотит, когда думаю об этом; в двух шагах от спросного стола – бездна.) (29)

Therefore not only are there links between the inquiries and both the recent and the distant past, the inquiries are also linked with primordial, basic instincts that have existed in man from the very beginning of time. There is the additional sense of the judges still wanting control over an individual even in death, as their degradation knows no bounds. The references and comparisons between the earthly court and a heavenly court is also compounded by the act of necrophilia: the judges attempt to extend their power beyond death itself. This again heightens the sense of fear and the fact that man cannot extricate himself from this phenomenon of existence, and additionally burdens him with guilt for allowing himself to be subject to earthly rather than heavenly judgement. Ultimately man's condition, particularly his basic instincts and his desire for knowledge and control of his environment, remains the same

throughout time. In this, as in the death of the protagonist, lies a fearful pronouncement on the contemporary state of mankind.

Pre- and post-Soviet Russian history

Many references to the nineteenth century are to be found in Makanin's work, and are primarily part of his wish to emphasise the interlinking nature of our existence in the present with that of the past and future. As we have seen, there are no historical novels as such, and the only lengthy section of text set in an earlier century is that of the Pekalov legend in *Utrata* which, as already shown, is interlinked with the idea of memory, self, roots, and digging into the past. Some of the short references to earlier times are for the purpose of revealing the state of the characters' mind and their relation to contemporary and past societies. Ninel' Nikolaevna in *Odin i odna* for example, wishes to fall in love with a Cossack soldier, and this emphasises her inability to relate to the present and those around her. Her romantic, but bookish approach to life proves to be inadequate and is not sufficient to prevent her from attempting suicide. On the other hand, in *Pustynnoe mesto* there is the parable of the soldier who deserts the Czar's army following a serious incident in the barracks. As shown in Chapter 3, this inserted story is part of the author's comment on the stereotypical form of parable that was in common use in literature in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Other references, the majority of which can be found in the later text *Siuzhet usredneniia*,

have been revealed as providing comment on the creative process and the recurring theme of 'averaging out'.

Makanin's recent texts include references to nineteenth-century literature and he thereby demands that the reader must bring their acquired knowledge of the older text to their understanding of the text before them. This intertextual approach is considered to be one of the features of postmodern prose and does appear with some frequency in contemporary Russian prose. For example, in Makanin's texts, it was earlier noted how in *Laz* the intellectuals underground discuss ideas of Dostoevskii and other nineteenth-century thinkers.²⁶ As mentioned in Chapter 1, two of the titles of the author's texts refer directly to Russian classics, and the first of these, *Kavkazskii plennyi*, will be discussed here.²⁷

²⁶ Szporluk notes the similarity between those ideas discussed by the intellectuals in *Laz* and Ivan's idea of 'returning the ticket' in Dostoevskii's *Brat'ia Karamazovy*. M. A. Szporluk, 'On Reading...', p. 189. This is also mentioned by Galina Luk'ianina. See: 'Moment istiny?', *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (1992:3-4), 58-61 (p. 58).

²⁷ The second text, *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*, does not come under discussion in this dissertation. The title similarly expects the reader's own knowledge of Lermontov's text to inform his or her reading, and many of the chapter headings refer to other literary works.

Even before its publication, as Pavel Basinskii observes²⁸, there was much interest in the text due to what was deemed to be its prophetic subject matter of a Caucasian war.²⁹ However, without events in Chechnia the text would have been understood differently and, according to the critic Dmitrii Baviľ'skii, it is wrong to associate the text solely with this war. The fact that Makanin wrote the text prior to its outbreak is of greater significance ('это должно свидетельствовать о чистоте и качестве эксперимента') and therefore does not place the text amongst the usually subjective and schematised prose concerning the war that is written after the event.³⁰ Alla Latynina, for her part, also believes that the text demands a deeper reading than simply a political one:

²⁸ Pavel Basinskii, 'Igra v klassiki na chuzhoi krovi', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7 June 1995, p. 4. Despite being advertised as a discussion of Makanin's text, almost half of the article examines Georgii Vladimov's novel *General i ego armia*, which was published at roughly the same time but concerns the Great Patriotic War. Vladimov's text, for Basinskii, is also "игра в классики", от которой в нашей литературе давно смердит'.

²⁹ For example, see Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Russkaia literatura kak Kassandra', *Druzhba narodov* (1995:1), 150-1.

³⁰ Dmitrii Baviľ'skii, 'Zony mertsaniia: sukhie grozy', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 November 1995. Familiar texts dealing with the war theme include Oleg Ermakov's novel of the Afghan War *Znak zveria* and Viktor Astaf'ev's *Prokliaty i ubity*, which

Если бы чеченская война не наложилась на рассказ, он бы воспринимался совершенно иначе. Но она наложилась. И теперь особенно видно, что маканинский рассказ объясняет саму войну... куда глубже, чем иные политологические исследования.³¹

One of the deeper levels of interest that lies in contrast to the prophetic nature of the text is the obvious reference to the works entitled *Kavkazskii plennik* written by three of the great writers of the last century: Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoi.³² The title of

describes the 1940s army camps in which the soldiers reside before being sent to the front.

³¹ Alla Latynina, 'Ne igra, a prognoz khudozhnika', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7th June 1995, p. 4.

³² Note that in Makanin's title he takes the contemporary adjectival form of the word 'captive' which is used as a noun, and not the now obsolete noun form '*plennik*' as in the nineteenth-century texts. Interestingly, this obsession with classical literature can also be found in film: 1996 saw the release of the co-produced Russian/Kazakh film entitled '*Kavkazskii plennik*' which later won several Russian film awards. Set in Dagestan, Sergei Bodrov's film follows the developing relationships between the two detained Russian soldiers (who are given the same names as Tolstoi's protagonists) and their captors. As in Makanin's text, ultimately the demands of war prove stronger

Makanin's work immediately evokes the Russian literary tradition and reveals its engagement with literature of the past, but with its subtle title change additionally emphasises how literature at the end of the twentieth century is markedly different. Taking up this debate, Basinskii is far from happy with the way many contemporary authors are 'playing with the classics':

В литературе идет какое-то темное брожение, быстро ветшают не только старые, но и вроде бы совсем новые ценности, а возвращение старых часто оборачивается фальшью и разочарованием. Мне кажется, что новый рассказ Маканина характерен именно для этой зыбкой ситуации.³³

than human affinity. For further information see Julian Graffy's article 'The Prisoner of the Mountains', *Sight and Sound*, March 1998. The film has been released with English subtitles by Tartan Video, 1998. In 1997 Leonid Gaidai's comedy 'Kavkazskaia plennitsa ili priklucheniia Shurika' was released (Delta Video, 1997). Of poorer quality, this film is also loosely based on the classical story: it follows a foolish journalist trying to research local customs and legends, who suddenly finds himself caught up in a bureaucratic conspiracy to marry off a local sporting heroine.

³³ P. Basinskii, 'Igra v klassiki...'

In this instance it is the classical theme of the 'noble savage' that has been subverted – Latynina stresses how the classical portrayal is of a romantic and unrealisable love between a Russian captive and his Caucasian hosts. In Makanin's text there is a more believable and contemporary portrayal of a lengthy encounter between a Russian and the youthful Caucasian soldier he has captured. Although the Caucasian stirs up hitherto unfelt homosexual emotions in the Russian, these feelings have no ultimate influence on his actions as a soldier. Basinskii views the relationship between the two nationalities as an imperialist one, yet states that the author has achieved a good balance of aesthetic and moral representation and has used a non-traditional means of expressing imperialism by introducing homosexual feelings.³⁴ However, according to this critic, Makanin has written an uncharacteristically beautiful text in comparison to his recent cold and abstract works, and there is a troubling reason behind this. For Basinskii this text is only good because it has been written in others' blood: i.e. through the real deaths of soldiers in the old and new Caucasian wars. Latynina, however, asks which character is actually the captive, and additionally takes issue with the idea of imperialism. According to Latynina, perhaps Makanin himself can be accused of being undemocratic and imperialist, for he ultimately is responsible for what he has written and published.

The beauty of the Caucasian countryside is consistently reiterated despite several violent and harsh scenes, including the depiction of Rubakhin and his companion stumbling upon the dead body of a colleague. As Latynina points out, the disturbing

³⁴ P. Basinskii, 'Igra v klassiki...'

effect this has on Rubakhin is not overtly stated, yet whenever he recalls the scene of the murder the soldier attempts to prevent a mental image arising of how the death would have happened. Rubakhin repeatedly remembers the beautiful sunny place where they found the body, but immediately his thoughts turn to how the enemy would have attacked his colleague. The juxtaposition of beauty and cruelty is compounded by the fact that the text includes the famous words of Dostoevskii ‘мир спасет красота’, revealing how such words prove to be irrelevant when wars are taking place. The young captive is handsome and irresistible to the soldier Rubakhin, yet when circumstances arise the soldier has no choice but to kill him without remorse – the captive’s beauty cannot save him. The charge of inhumanity and brutality which has been levied against the author, particularly in these character portrayals, is one that he fiercely disputes. Makanin declares that to a soldier there is no choice when it comes to killing, as he must follow orders and fight the enemy.³⁵ Despite links with the recent war in Chechnia and nineteenth-century Russian literature, there is, as with many of the author’s works, a universal element. At the conclusion to the narrative Rubakhin sits and mulls over events:

и что интересного в самих горах? – думал он с досадой.

Он хотел добавить: мол, уже который год! Но вместо этого сказал: “Уже который век..!” – он словно бы

³⁵ Valentina Polukhina put this question to the author in her video interview at Keele University, October 1995.

проговорился; слова выпрыгнули из тени, и удивленный солдат додумывал теперь эту тихую, залежавшуюся в глубине сознания мысль... Горы. Горы. Горы... но что, собственно, красота их хотела ему сказать? зачем окликала? (19)

Although somewhat laboured, this reference to past events (and narratives thereof) in the Caucasus does leave the reader with no doubt as to the author's intentions. Makanin implies that a sense of beauty and altruistic feelings are ultimately no competition for war and brutality. War was, is, and always will be man's response when threatened by outsiders, and extreme and brutal acts are the outcome of such a situation. Russian history provides an example of man's attitudes and inherent condition that are true for the present and the future. This is particularly poignant in the light of the way Ivanova and other critics have subsequently read the text as a prophetic work of the Chechen war – man is continuing to follow the same historical pattern. There is an immediacy to the text which the author could not have foreseen, and this provides a striking example of the interlinking nature of history and man's existence.

This text demands that the reader not only engages with prose of the past, but also brings into play the contemporary events taking place in Chechnia. Hence both Russian history of the previous century and, unintentionally, contemporary 'history in the making' converge in the text. The author's control over these intertextual debates

and resulting interpretations, therefore, is clearly revealed to be limited, and this emphasises how literature can at no point be severed from the context in which it is written and read. The reader will always bring unexpected ideas and views into their understanding and interpretation of a text, and these views are grounded within the society of the reader.

The status of history

As revealed above in relation to *Kavkazskii plennyi*, in his later works Makanin has continued to include references to historical events but has extended and widened his sphere of interest considerably. In the slightly earlier text *Kvazi*, he wishes to engage with the contemporary postmodern ideas surrounding society and the end of history, those of Francis Fukuyama in particular, and by subverting these ideas to present another side to the argument. What intrigues Makanin, and has been intriguing him for many years, is the relationship between the individual and society and the way their actions affect the course of events and history itself. In *Kvazi* he brings together a number of the ideas examined in this dissertation – the individual amongst the collective, the use of myths, and the nature of creativity – to provide a contemporary picture of man's condition and in so doing to question the presentation of this in any narrative form. The postmodern condition is revealed to be able only to express itself and nothing more: man in late twentieth-century society is living in a society full of images that only reflect off each other. History has disappeared and a sense of

individuality has gone also; man is existing in a 'reality' that comprises only images of reality.

Great debate has been stimulated by Fukuyama's article and later book entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*, and these need to be looked at in some detail in order to understand Makanin's philosophical theory.³⁶ Translated into many languages including Russian, Fukuyama's book has become the centre of fierce argument surrounding the state of contemporary civilisation, forms of government and the 'merit' of liberal democracy. Relying heavily on Hegel's theories, Fukuyama explains what he believes are the reasons for the downfall of Left- and Right-wing governments and the establishment in many countries of more liberal governments. Fukuyama believes that what has come to an end is the dialectical understanding of history as 'a single, coherent, evolutionary process' such as that proposed by Marx and Hegel (xii). Instead, Fukuyama reasserts a nineteenth-century understanding of a Universal History based on two different desires in man. A desire for technological advances in military equipment and economic systems is not sufficient to explain the move to democracy; Fukuyama believes that man's need for *thymos* or recognition is also intrinsic to this change. Earlier forms of government such as monarchies and master/slave societies proved to be unsatisfactory in terms of personal recognition for both the ruler and the ruled. This, according to Fukuyama, inevitably led to a more widespread recognition of personal rights and then rights of whole nations to be accepted as equal. However,

³⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992). References to this edition will appear in the text in parentheses.

with the emergence of highly democratised, prosperous societies, Fukuyama raises the question of whether the 'Last Man' has emerged: a materially wealthy person who, in similar terms to Nietzsche's image, is bereft of any desire to be recognised individually and to fight for this. Perhaps this is a new breed of man, and one which can only be partly termed human because of his loss of a fighting spirit. On the other hand, there is the contention that dissatisfaction with a peaceful and prosperous world will lead to uprisings against the very fair, democratic principles towards which people formerly strove.

Makanin's essayistic text *Kvazi* is based upon a subversion of Fukuyama's idea that totalitarian states are 'dead ends', instead positing the notion that the Russian masses chose to create this form of government to satisfy their own spiritual desires. The examination of Makanin's ideas will follow the sequence of the narrative as it unfolds, finally looking at the short stories he includes towards the end of the text as examples of the main issues raised in the essayistic section of *Kvazi*. Throughout this section of the chapter some initial conclusions will be drawn as to the extent to which the author's ideas presented in other chapters have been developed and brought into play with his theory of history.

Kvazi begins with an image of the little path that always runs alongside a railway track as representing the primordial creative spirit within man.³⁷ The path (spirit) is

³⁷ The text begins with the words "ТРОПИНКА связана с детством" (p. 124).

Once again, childhood is linked to a sense of human purity, in this case that of the

unnoticed yet ever present, sometimes with a solitary individual strolling along it, or maybe a small group of five or six people with rucksacks.³⁸ When looking out from a train window (and in parallel when taking an overview of the historical process), it is often the main road with its speeding traffic (or the major uprisings and events in history) that catch one's attention, rather than the little path, the creative spirit, which is the backbone of history. This short paragraph appears to represent part of Makanin's own thoughts on history: it is a creative process that often proceeds unseen by man, who prefers to concentrate on the larger events. It is these larger events that Fukuyama is discussing and which are open to subversion.

In *Kvazi*, the narrator (Makanin, we presume) proceeds by outlining and agreeing with some of Fukuyama's above-mentioned ideas and then subverting them. For example, the universal adoption of Western ideas and economic lifestyle has influenced and

unfettered creative spirit. The author consistently refers to childhood as a time when man is closer to his natural state, as yet untouched by the pressures encountered by an adult.

³⁸ It is interesting that it is only a solitary individual or at most a small group of people who can be found on this path (pp. 124 and 128). The solitary individual represents the genius who independently invents ideas or objects that affect the course of history. The small group of people represents those few creative individuals who are not geniuses but are equally not part of the 'averaged out' mass whose choice of hero, demi-god or quasi-religion is not always worthy of the praise with which they are exalted.

changed life in Russia, particularly with the popularity of mass media: 'мы живем (и живем не тяготясь, а уже с привычкой) на этой глянцевой меняющейся поверхности фактов' (124). Yet the author is not laying blame solely on the West, as this is 'внутренний процесс, *наш* процесс прежде всего' (124). Russians have quickly appropriated this new superficial lifestyle, but ironically cannot fail to be aggrieved by its effect on the Russian depth of character: '[p]усские обрели наконец быстро движущуюся поверхность жизни. Русские обрели наконец безобъемную меру. А с ней и известную горечь. (Ах, где она, наша глубина!..)' (124). The loss of a distinction between good and evil, and the ease with which Hitler committed unspeakable horrors has led to the rejection of all theories, a common feature of postmodern thought: 'человеку и нельзя доверить никакую, хотя бы и самую замечательную, серьезную идею. (И – вообще говоря – никакую серьезную мысль.)' (125). This final statement highlights Makanin's aim: accepting either Fukuyama's idea of the end of history or Makanin's ideas in this text is equally impossible. All ideas are apparently discredited and can therefore all be subverted *ad infinitum*.

The text then continues by referring to other ideas. Instead of adhering to belief systems such as those of Nietzsche and Freud, man is now forced to take one step at a time, trying not to be defined in those terms. In the post-historical period man only exists as part of a pulsating, biological mass, whilst 'reality' continues its own path at a distance:

Реальность, к которой ты (он, я, кто угодно...) обращаешься для исследования, как бы исчезает. Ход твоей мысли весь из шажков, из предыдущих шагов общечеловеческого процесса, в которых уже загодя закодирован наш перманентный страх. Ты погружаешься не в факты, а в книги прошлого. Ты не можешь повлиять, ты весь из цитат. А реальность меж тем продолжает идти своим путем. Все это и называется теперь в европейской мысли – *концом истории*. (125)

There are no ideas to believe in, not even faith. Although slower than the West in adopting this theory, Russia has now apparently taken it up with great fervour.

Makanin then returns to his ideas of the averaging out of society as earlier expressed in *Siuzhet usrednennia* and revealed in the previous chapter. Rather than seeing totalitarianism as the major force repressing the individual, Makanin here advocates assessing totalitarianism as only one aspect of a universal process of averaging out, particularly evident in Western, civilised societies. The averaged-out mass can be seen to be the ones creating the monstrous regimes. Rodnianskaia, ignoring Makanin's irony in the text, believes their support for totalitarianism is the 'однозначная жесткая связь' which leads to its realisation in Soviet society.³⁹

³⁹ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 203.

Having put forward this equally 'monstrous' theory, the author continues to subvert the idea of the end of history. Makanin's prime contention lies in questioning Fukuyama's dismissal of totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century as 'dead ends'⁴⁰: 'а что, если эти свершения среднего человека, эти ужасающие нас тоталитарные режимы XX века, были не тупиками, а попытками?'(127). For once a person has been down a dead end he does not return there; yet totalitarian regimes are continually established and upheld.⁴¹ According to Makanin's ironic theory expressed here, the essence of these terrible regimes lies in their attempt to create a new religion, replacing faith with a quasi-religion (hence the title of the text). The long-established religions are unable to cope with crises of the people and so the masses create or fabricate their own:

Эту способность к творческому усилию неорганизованной массы людей (необязательно организованной) я называю ММ, нацеливаясь как бы

⁴⁰ This can be found in *The End of History...*, p. 127: 'At the end of the twentieth century, Hitler and Stalin appear to be by-paths of history that led to dead ends, rather than real alternatives for human social organisation.'

⁴¹ In the Laird interview, Makanin clearly states that communism was a dead end, thereby confirming that his views in *Kvazi* are put forward as a means of subverting Fukuyama's ideas. S. Laird, *Voices of Russian...*, p. 64.

обнаружить заново примитивно-цельное *мифологическое*
мышление (128)

However, the original creative spirit, the little path mentioned earlier, has not disappeared. One manifestation of the creative strength of the masses is to make a person into a saintly figure, one who is hailed by the people as great despite any character flaws he may really have. In earlier times such chosen people were often believed to manifest the highly-respected attributes of Goodness, Truth and Beauty. Yet any person, whether a saintly monk named Amvrosii or a vodka-swilling blacksmith, can be chosen and once he has been hailed a great figure in the new religion everyone accepts this.⁴² What is important in the present day is his *name* and what he represents to the masses, rather than any gift or attribute he may possess: '[р]ечь, разумеется, идет не о письменном или устном создании легенд о человеке (легенды могут участвовать, пожалуйста). Речь идет о непосредственном создании из человека – имени, знака, иероглифа' (128). Vladimir Vysotskii, deemed by the narrator to be a poor song-writer, was hailed by the masses as the great musician *Vysotskii*. In a similar fashion El'tsin was chosen by the masses, after he was heard to mumble 'Mm-mm', thereby calling on their creative strength to adopt him!

⁴² Once more we have the image of the 'holy fool' as epitomised by Pekalov in *Utrata*.

The references to legends and hieroglyphs recall several of Makanin's earlier texts. In Chapter 3, the use of legends and myths in the author's texts was revealed on one level to be a means of engaging with an 'eternal truth'. In *Kvazi*, however, the contemporary adoption of legendary figures by the masses has lost this historical dimension as truth is deemed to no longer exist in the postmodern era – man is cut off from his heritage, and instead only superficial signs are elevated. In a postmodern understanding of the world, 'reality' is a pastiche of dislocated signs or images. Man is only hailed as great by his name: there is no substance to his greatness as it is purely another image, another name. In a similar way, history is purely a fictional narrative open to subversion and change; no 'true' history can be accepted unquestionably and the term 'history' is purely a name

A comparison between those heroes and gods created in past centuries and those of the present day is, we are told, impossible: it is better simply to let MM define itself. In a similar undetermined fashion, MM can have various meaning: 'мышления масс ... [М]ифотворчество масс ... масс-медиа' (130). (Again, the loss of a signified, a substance behind the name, is reiterated.) What is important, the text continues, is that the creative work stems not only from the individual but also from the collective, whereby no-one and everyone was responsible for creating the hero. Such is the case with political figures like Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, de Gaulle and Kennedy, where despite some horrific anti-humanitarian policies these leaders were greatly revered. Other universally popular figures created by the masses include Marilyn Monroe and John Lennon. Specifically Russian characters include Pavlik Morozov, who informed on his parents to the Soviet authorities, and further back in history Stepan Razin, the

Cossack who became a cult figure. This last example is, however, one in which the creative strength of the masses was correctly directed at a truly worthy cause: '[о]ттого и остался он не только в истории, но и в текущей жизни, удерживаемый нами в памяти как миф и как миф помогающий нечто осмыслить' (130).

Having in the past created true heroes and idols, the masses, however, turned to the creation of gods and quasi-religion, resulting in the seventy years of communism in the Soviet Union. Yet once it was seen to have failed, the faith was dropped. The adoption of a quasi-religion in Russia, as with that in Germany, was essentially initiated from a desire to create a new order. This analogue of faith is ironically analysed on various levels in the text. The arrival of the messiah Lenin was prepared for by his prophets – ranging from much earlier socialist figures like Thomas More and Feuerbach to Kropotkin and Plekhanov. The twelve apostles are represented by such people as Sverdlov, Stalin and Kalinin, and Trotskii is seen as the traitor Judas. The analogy extends even to Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaja, who is seen in a mysterious duality of mother of, and wife of, god. The masses' attempt to create their own religion is compared to the building of towers reaching up to the sky, obviously a reference to the biblical Tower of Babel. Huge sacrifices were involved, yet it ultimately failed. However, the masses are undeterred, and already society is in a pre-religious condition, preparing to create a new religion. The masses declare:

Ваше время на исходе, господа сочинители и господа мыслители, – сумерки, ночь. А вот мы, массы, только начинаем. (Если надо, мы прихватим и ваши идеи.) И весь XX век – это *наше утро...* (135).

Despite questions over the poor assessment of a person's worth and suitability as a heroic figure, it is the masses' ability to create the hero that is of greater significance.⁴³ Their creativity is at times highly commendable; for example great technological advances are achieved and lauded (such as heart transplants) and true geniuses are recognised by the masses. In this way, the creative spirit continues along its little path whilst the larger events of history are more often recognised and given greater status.

It is this emphasis on creativity that is, perhaps, one of the underlying aims of Makanin's text. Having put forward Fukuyama's controversial ideas, and having emphasised the reason behind their adoption in the West and in Russia, Makanin has then used the same postmodern ideas to subvert the idea of the end of history. In so doing, he acknowledges the logical extension of this subversion to his own theory. With the loss of absolutes and determined meanings in contemporary society comes the continual subversion of any proposed narrative, whether it is a literary, historical or

⁴³ Dowsett, also failing to note Makanin's irony, mistakenly believes the author to be saying that 'individual creativity is irrelevant and redundant'. C. Dowsett, 'The Writer...', p. 35.

critical text. All are creative works which perhaps have elements of 'truth', 'reality' or 'authenticity' within them, but according to postmodernist theories none can be adopted as an ultimate way of living. These narratives are creative texts which are to be assessed and valued as such. In this way, Mukanin appears to be proposing the idea that although postmodernist theories are of interest in the way they question our perceived ideas, and destabilise what are often falsely seen as 'objective truths', postmodernist theories themselves reveal their own fallibility and should not be understood as the final comment on man's contemporary condition. They are purely another creative act which can be reworked against any theory, as he has done with Fukuyama's ideas.

The inclusion of several short stories at the end of the essayistic section of *Kvazi* demands attention and a comparison of their content with the preceding ideas. The first of these, entitled *A zhizn' mezhdu tem idet...*, relates how the narrator's friend S. popped in to see some friends and ended up locked in the flat alone with the murdered wife. The matter-of-fact tone and flat style of the story is reminiscent of contemporary urban myths where a 'friend of a friend's family' or an 'uncle's mate from the bookie's' finds himself in the midst of an unusual and often macabre incident.⁴⁴ Several references to the fact that the friend S. had a wide circle of friends to whom he related various versions of the event does invite comparison with this genre. However, rather than this story forming the basic outline of the urban myth and one that the reader

⁴⁴ These two examples are taken from: Phil Healey and Rick Glanvill, *Urban Myths* (London: Virgin Books, 1992), pp. 26 and 72.

would presume is constantly retold, it is presented through the interrelationships involved and its actual retellings. Hence its relative length in comparison to the usual brief anecdotal form of the urban myth as presented by an unidentified third person, and hence the inclusion of the various different versions that become widespread. In this respect the tale *A zhizn' mezhdu tem idet...* continues Makanin's earlier keen interest in the multifaceted versions of a tale, as in the case of Lesha in *Otstavshii*. Petrushevskaiia's cycle of urban myths entitled *Pesni vostochnykh slavian* reveals that interest in this genre came to the fore in the late 1980s to early 1990s.⁴⁵ This collection is subtitled 'moskovskie sluchai' and is introduced by an explanation of this genre:

Случай – это особенный жанр городского фольклора, начинающийся обычно словами: “Вот был такой случай”.

Случаи рассказываются в пионерских лагерях, в больницах, в транспорте – там, где у человека есть пока что время. (7)

The stories in Petrushevskaiia's cycle comprise a variety of gruesome episodes concerning the ghostly appearance of dead relations, murdering neighbours, and the reincarnation of a dead wife as a cat. In her article on Petrushevskaiia's urban myths,

⁴⁵ Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, *Pesni vostochnykh slavian*, *Novyi mir* (1990:8), 7-18.

These urban myths have similarities with the tales of Daniil Kharms which were republished in a new collection during the *glasnost'* period.

Nina Kolesnikoff reveals them to be closer to the folklore subgenre of 'bylichka', which she defines as:

a folk belief story about supernatural creatures and phenomena... an oral folk story about man's encounters with supernatural beings, primarily from the pantheon of Slavic mythology... the combination of the supernatural and the realistic.⁴⁶

The main way in which Petrushevskaja's collection differs from the 'bylichka' is in its sophisticated use of language (226), and this, according to Kolesnikoff, ensures that the author creates 'a modern tale of horror' (228).

This final definition is a suitable term for *A zhizn' mezhdur tem idet...* In Makanin's 'modern tale of horror', the friend S. becomes fixated with the door to the flat: when he first calls round he could easily have turned and walked away without ringing the bell. However, the fact that he ended up locked behind the door with no means of escape from the dead body completely changes his life. As revealed in earlier chapters, it is the 'threshold' moment that is extremely decisive in a person's life, here revealing the horror of contemporary life. In relation to the previous philosophical ideas, *A*

⁴⁶ Nina Kolesnikoff, 'The Generic Structure of Ljudmila Petruševskaja's *Pesni vostočnyx slavjan*', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 37 (1993), 220-30 (pp. 222-3). Further references will appear in the main body of the text in parentheses.

zhizn' mezhdu tem idet... represents the twentieth-century version of the folk tale genre that manifests one aspect of the averaging out process – for instead of revealing the character traits or essence of a particular individual, we have a mysterious protagonist who is someone's friend but could be anyone.

A second very brief story entitled *Trizna* describes a rough thirty-year-old, Kindiurov, who brutally murders his neighbour whilst they are in mid-conversation. Again, this is similar to the urban myth in which horrific occurrences happen with unnatural ease. The neighbour is simply being friendly – he suggests that they get together from time to time to play cards and drink tea. Having been found guilty, Kindiurov is imprisoned and his mother tries to atone for her son's guilt, but she soon dies. The young widow then takes over the whole house and plot that she once shared with her neighbours. She places a lamp on the spot where her husband died, which inexplicably attracts many insects, in particular white butterflies. The supernatural element is incorporated into the short story in this way.

The third story, *Nashe utro*, is preceded by a short passage evidently from a first-person narrator who describes how he occasionally likes to brag that he has kept his individuality intact. In describing how a frog thrashes around in a jug of cream until it eventually manages to jump clear, the narrator then muses on how in actual fact the frog was not saved by its own efforts, simply by the cream turning sour with time. This is compared to the lives of Soviet people who were finally freed of communism when the ideology went sour. Obviously linked to the ideas concerning the adoption of the

quasi-religion in Russia, this passage also reiterates man's insignificance and lack of influence as an individual in time and history.

Nashe utro itself is a rather repulsive piece with its depiction of a power-hungry boss who takes on outsiders requiring permanent residency documents to work cheaply for him in Moscow. The boss, Strekalov, receives immense satisfaction from watching his men at work, and enjoys his drink and sex with the workers' wives in the hostels. This is not, however, a picture of innocent people being exploited, but rather a collusion between all sides in a grim life no-one is prepared to change. Man is revealed in his bestial nature, far from the altruistic person once imagined. Rodnianskaia reflects on this story as a microcosmic depiction of Soviet life: 'тоталитаризм в одной отдельно взятой общаге'.⁴⁷

The final short passages return to the philosophical ideas once more. The communist quasi-religion is compared to the seventy-year life span of a human, and an imaginary conversation is set up between the Russian people's refusal to compare their totalitarian state to that of Germany and the narrator's insistence that there are similarities. There is always a need to believe that one's own ideology is better, and this is reiterated in an anecdote of a husband and wife at a work party. The husband informs his wife of the names of those present at the gathering, including the mistresses of his workmates. Overcome by curiosity, the wife then asks who is her husband's mistress. Knocking back his drink, he plucks up the courage and points her out;

⁴⁷ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 203.

whereupon, after some hesitation, his wife declares: “Вань, а Вань... Наша-то лучше всех!..” (146). The absurdity of this situation is highly entertaining, yet appears to hold elements of truth. Despite her husband’s infidelity, the fact that he – like the majority of his colleagues – has a mistress, still appears to demand a sense of superiority.

In the final section the support of Maiakovskii and Pasternak for the communist regime is compared to the attraction of a young man to a woman. Initially the quasi-religion was adorable, but once she aged and her wrinkles began to show, Maiakovskii was unable to reconcile this with his romantic idealism, and so he committed suicide. Pasternak, on the other hand, gradually came to an understanding of her, and like an old man he eventually looked at her without any trace of his former love. Similarly, the imperfections and weaknesses of any form of narrative have to be acknowledged, whether it is understood to be fiction or non-fiction. Attempts to search for a finite, infallible understanding or body of knowledge, whether in the form of a history, truth or reality, prove ultimately to be futile quests. Instead, it is suggested that man does better to accept circumstances and events, to glean any partial understandings and to contribute small creative acts; in this way man is expressing his contemporary condition to the full within the limitations of his own unquestionably subjective viewpoint.

Conclusion

Through his incorporation of *byt* and historical events familiar to a Soviet reader in his earlier texts, Makanin was attempting to reinforce the realist status of his texts as authentic narratives that reflected an external reality. The grounding of his texts in their socio-historical context, however, demands that the uncertainties of contemporary Russian life also pervade and destabilise the fundamental coherence of the text.

Kvazi incorporates and brings to a preliminary conclusion many of the ideas in this dissertation. The individual/collective dichotomy, the use of myths, and the creative spirit of man are all discussed and provide a picture of man and contemporary society which can be presented as being at odds with the popular idea of the end of history. Although man has become increasingly and frighteningly overwhelmed by collective rule, the fear should not be understood as the final statement on man's condition. Contemporary urban myths are a suitable genre through which the extreme uncertainties of modern-day life can be expressed, without resorting to the mostly distant and unreachable characters of past legends and myths. In distinction to Fukuyama's theory, Makanin understands history as the small creative acts that proceed mostly unseen, and these continue their path whatever the circumstances. Man's nature, his warring spirit and determination as revealed in *Kavkazskii plennyi*, continue to force issues of imperialism and demand a sense of satisfaction for his efforts.

In terms of the question of history as objective truth, the author recognises the indisputable fallibility of any narrative form and the way in which it can easily be

subverted. No single theory or belief can possibly encompass all angles and detail of life; reductive formulae are too prescriptive and belie the nature and complexity of man. Hence, although there is much discussion of the 'averaging out' of man, Makani still appears to hold a belief in the fundamental creative potential of mankind which can be submerged but does not disappear entirely. In this, perhaps, lies his own creative strength to continue producing forceful and thought-provoking narratives.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Makanin's prose from 1987 to 1995 expresses extreme uncertainties about the condition of man as the new millennium approaches. A marked difference in content, style and philosophy indicates the enormous changes with which he, as a writer and as a member of Soviet and post-Soviet society, has undergone and incorporated within his texts since his literary debut. The radical change in critics' reception of his prose additionally bears witness to the author's constant search for a more accurate and representative depiction of man despite pressure to conform to a standard literary tradition.

There is little doubt that a concern with the human condition is central to Makanin's work. In spite of accusations to the contrary in early critics' articles, Makanin has proved that man in his past, present and future state is an abiding concern and a source of creative tension within him. Whatever the current issue in society, be it mystical healing powers, the loss of individuality, or the end of history, the author is at pains to express in many forms and on many levels the effect this has on man. Makanin's initial preoccupation with the individual's existential anguish at his isolation from the collective, such as in *Ostavshii*, is gradually developed, particularly through the incorporation of spatial and temporal motifs, and undergoes further change: man now appears to live a confusing and disparate existence in the unstable postcontemporary period. Man may search for a 'higher reality' through myth and legend, yet he is forced to reside in the tension of his everyday life, attempting to salvage some sense of

his individuality whilst the masses continually try to engulf him within their power. However, it is precisely man's contemporary situation in a violent society, hauntingly revealed in *Siur v proletarskom raione*, which encourages further feelings of instability and shakes the ground under his feet. In the same way, Makanin's literature is self-conscious of its own attempts to concretise existence, unable to render fully determinate answers from a shifting mass of signifiers, unable to distinguish fantasy from either fiction or reality with any clarity.

Makanin is keen to avoid reductive answers and solutions to the dilemmas raised, fulfilling Lipovetskii's hope that he will produce a new adogmatic aesthetics of realism.¹ Instead, he proffers his philosophical thoughts and multi-faceted depictions to which the reader is expected to bring his/her own knowledge and interpretation. The boundaries between fiction, reality and criticism are made visible, and this technique reinforces the acknowledgement of the fictional status of all narrative forms despite attempts to create the illusion of their 'truth' or 'reality'. Yet after the intricate and exhaustive essayistic texts *Siuzhet usredneniia* and *Kvazi*, it is possibly with some relief that the reader turns to the fictional narrative form of *Kavkazskii plennyi* and *Andegraund, ili Geroi nashego vremeni*, Makanin's first novel proper. The author appears to have allowed his philosophical, theoretical, mythological and historical ideas to reach their conclusion in a process that may be as cathartic to him as it is demanding of the reader and expressive of the recent upheavals in Soviet and post-Soviet society. Makanin seems to be questioning the continuous indeterminacies found in postmodernist narratives; indeterminacies which often provide little more than a further

¹ M. Lipovetskii, 'Paradoks o goré...'

subversion of previous ideas in an unending and futile spiral. However, whether his most recent texts follow similar lines to Colin Falck's hope for a 'true post-modernist literature', in which the 'concern for truth or reality has been preserved', is questionable. Falck finds the majority of postmodernist literature to be for the most part a clever and 'self-congratulator[y]' game.² Makanin would probably be reluctant to adhere closely to another literary theory that could possibly inhibit his own creative endeavours. However, *Kavkazskii plennyi*, with its many references to its nineteenth-century literary heritage and simultaneous revelation of the extent to which those altruistic ideals are irrelevant in the context of the present day, can be understood as an attempt to produce a more comprehensive literature which engages with its own fictional status and yet also incorporates recognisable events and situations from everyday life.

Makanin's later narratives examined in this thesis contain a diverse panorama of ideas for such a short space of time. However, it has proved to be indeed a memorable time for Russian history, its people and their many spheres of interest. Further studies of his recent novel and the context in which it was written, will determine whether in his new literary phase he is possibly, as Rodnianskaia describes him: 'из породы вестников'.³

² Colin Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), second edition, pp. 162-3.

³ I. Rodnianskaia, 'Siuzhety trevogi...', p. 200.

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