

The Collectivization of Reality: The Social Vision of Valentin Rasputin

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*In his own mind Rasputin may well be answering some such summons to be his own people's
medicine man for the purposes of understanding and cleansing that part of the world he calls
home—Harry Walsh*

*It's the Devil, not the Central Committee, who has
sent you—Vasilli Belov, The Canons*

Soviet Marxism and Western Capitalism are nearly identical systems of rule. Where they differ is in the means of policy implementation. The USSR based its existence, clumsily, on a state apparatus. The west is far more sophisticated. It rules by a complex Regime: a matrix of private, state and semi-private capital, meshing together in advocating specific policies, appearing to be separate sources of power, but, in reality, offering a closed oligarchy of power, wealth and arrogance.

Nowhere is this identity of policy more obvious than in the realm of agriculture. Both capitalism and Soviet Marxism claim to be the bearers of Enlightenment values to mankind: modern Promethiuses, bringing the “transvaluation of all values” to a benighted herd. Both ideologies believe in progress and technology, which provides both with a distorted view of country and agrarian life. Both ideologies demand absolute conformity to its ideological dictates, even to the point of building global empires to impose such ideas. But insofar as the agrarian life is concerned, these ideologies are identical, considering this life “backward” and “inferior” to the technological paradise of urban living. Both ideologies demand, in short, either the eradication of country life (as in Lenin's case), or its radical transformation (as in Khrushchev's case).

In Soviet Russia, modernization meant the state's invasion of the agricultural sphere, demanding strict oversight and control of all agricultural programs, and encouraging migration to the cities. Urbanites were told to “enlighten” their “backward brethren” in rural areas into the socialist idea and the technological paradise that awaited them. Entire regions of arable land were annihilated through dam projects which flooded them, or nuclear fallout from tests, or environmental disasters responsible for the deaths of thousands.

In the west, as always, the policy is identical, the means very different. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Agriculture met with the two oligopolists of the agrarian life—Archer Daniels Midland of Kansas City, and ConAgra of Omaha. Their purpose was the final destruction of the family farm and the parceling out of the abandoned arable to their corporate interests. In the meantime, major media was spewing the typical stereotype of rustics as hicks and morons, with pickup trucks and southern accents, “spittin' tobacco” and killing non-whites. It was and is an acceptable stereotype, according to the apostles of diversity, and one encouraged by everything from sitcoms to stand up comics. If one wants to sound stupid, merely speak in a southern accent. Media and corporate finance worked hand and hand to destroy agrarianism, small towns and the family farm.

The reality, of course, is that, from a political and moral point of view, the agrarian life is a threat. It is a threat to the Regime and its obsession with social control and Pavlovian manipulation. In Russia, it was not the Soviets who depopulated the countryside, by rather the “democratic reformers,” so beloved of Beltway lawyers. And it is within this context that the prose of Valentin Rasputin (b. 1937) needs to be understood, and cannot be understood without it.

The defenders of agrarianism are few and far between: Jefferson, Emerson, de Bonald and Rasputin largely exhaust the names. The Green movement in America, though occasionally assisting this cause, is funded almost exclusively by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, and contain, equally exclusively, Volvo-driving urbanites and suburbanites who might want to defend the “family farm” in theory, but despise actual rural people in reality. What the SUV-environmentalist crowd is actually doing in the name of “saving the family farm” is attacking rural hunters and ranchers (occasionally with state-sanctioned violence).

Agrarianism and environmentalism have little in common. The environmentalists have made their central policy ideas the attacks on hunting, ranching and logging, three major occupations of rural America. Whether the soccer moms see the absurdity is a matter of speculation, but the board of the Rockefeller Brother’s Fund fully is aware of it. The attack on rural life is both an ideological, as well as a class, battle. In the early 1990s, a common sight was turtle-neck clad suburbanites attacking poor, rural hunters in the name of “animal rights.” While only a few specialized outlets would touch stories like that, the clear class lines of the confrontations were obvious.

In the prose of Valentin Rasputin (1937-2015), many of these struggles make their appearance. Rasputin is largely loathed and ignored by the denizens of American literary criticism, and the published literature in English on his work numbers a whopping four articles. These range from the simplistic but informative “Conflicts in the Soviet Countryside in the Novellas of Valentin Rasputin” (by Julian Laychuk, published in the Rocky Mountain Review), to the very well done “‘Live and Love’: The Spiritual Path of Valentin Rasputin” (by Margaret Winchell, published in Slavic and East European Journal). The nature of Rasputin’s social vision is at the root of this obvious hostility.

For Rasputin, the dividing line of the 20th century is clear: it is between civilization and country; urban and rural; artificial and natural. Such a dividing line is common enough. His major works proceed in a basic and predictable style, more aimed at approaching an audience than explicating a genre. But this dividing line is always present, and it is what provides this writer with his strength and consistency.

The artificial world is that of civilization: regimented and fake. It is the world of ideology and power. The world of civilization is that of geometry, it is the Tower of Babel, where the worship of dead matter is the official religion. It recognizes only materiality, for materiality can be easily manipulated and controlled. It is elite by definition, for only an elite can even begin to understand the feats of engineering and mathematics that must be understood before the “marvels” civilization are manifest to the world. Reason is reserved to the elites, while the herd is controlled through their passions. The herd is accepting of technology because their “needs” are easily met by it, but at the price of their freedom and independence. But even more significantly, at the price of their identity.

But as the urban/civilizational life is based upon matter, the rural/rustic life is based on spirit. This is a rather complex notion in Rasputin, but is a notion that has a rather long history behind it. Spirit is not the opposite of matter, but is something hidden behind it, in the literal meaning of “metaphysics,” as something “behind” appearance. What science/urbanism can

understand is solely what it can quantify, whether it be heat or velocity; votes or rubles. Matter is by its constitution quantifiable, and therefore controllable. Spirit is another matter, and is that aspect of material life that is non-quantifiable. Orthodox Christians can in no manner posit a radical opposition between spirit and matter, for it is precisely this confrontation that made up the “practical” backbone of the Synod of Chalcedon in 451. It is this distinction, that, at least at the time, made up the confrontation between Christian and Monophysite heresy. Matter and Spirit are two very different sides of the same thing. As vulgar Orthodox scholars like to reduce Chalcedon to a “quibble over language,” the reality is rather different, and goes to the heart of a Christian metaphysics.

In 18th century Ukraine, a now largely unread philosopher and metaphysician was active, Gregory Skovoroda. His mind was set to develop a Christian metaphysics, one that would do justice to the powerful insights of Chalcedon. Skovoroda is significant in understanding the nature of Spirit as manifest in the writings of Rasputin, and is able to distinguish Christian spirit from both the vulgar spiritualism of western “religion” and the materialism of the western economic world. One sentence might make sense of this: “This one is the outer frame, that one the body, this—the shadow, that—the tree, this—matter and that—the essence; that is the foundation sustaining the material mud just as the picture sustains its paint.” Though Skovoroda is distinct from Aristotle as he writes: “The universe consists of two essences: one visible, the other invisible. The invisible is called God. This invisible nature or God penetrates and sustains all creation and is and will be present everywhere and at all times.”

While far from “materializing God,” such ideas (and they are difficult to being out in English) speaks of God as the Law of Law, or the Essence of Essence. Regularity and Law exist in the universe, and the ground of this regularity is God. Regularity and Law cannot exist without a Lawgiver by definition. While the Essence exists, the appearance, or the “material” side of this, is regularly changing. However, God is not purely imminent, but is so insofar as human beings can approach him. Objects the way out fallen and vulgar understanding picture them, are merely “shadows” cast by the Primal essence, or the Law of Law.

Objects partake of Law and Regularity, and that is the “divine” in them, object sub specie aeternis. Only the advanced ascetic can see objects in this manner. An object as it is, rather than as it appears. In the fallen world, objects/material are things for manipulation. They become objects, as Locke will argue, only to the extent that they are expropriated from their natural state. Humans too, can exist in either a natural or “expropriated” state. Objects exist to the extent to which man has rejected his empirical state of fallenness, and though the Orthodox life, through fasting and silence, can the Reality of being make an appearance. Objects do not them excite lusts, but rather joy and contemplation.

Natural objects are “paths” to God, here. For they hide the reality of the Creator under their “accidents,” qualities that primarily strike the observer for only the fallen mind can appropriate these things. From this falseness, objects appear in a distorted way, as mere means for the domination of the Gnostic elite over all nature through geometry. Ultimately, this is the genesis of empiricism and later capitalist democracy. Objects appear thus through the jaundiced lens of sin and fear of death. While Hegel argued that objects appear differently to different historical epochs, conditioned by specific ideas relative to such ears, Orthodoxy views the material world as changing through the specific “rung on the ladder” the ascetic finds himself on.

Skovoroda does not really require a “space” that is “beyond” the appearance of objects. Vulgar western religion has posited God “up, above” our material existence, existing in “heaven” that is “out,” somewhere “in space.” God then is a purely transcendent being, someone radically separate from his creation, and thus needs to be petitioned like a feudal lord. Of course, the

patristic reality is different. God's person is found as the eternal "idea" in creation, a part of it but far from identical with it. He is imminent in this sense, and is manifest to only the Orthodox ascetic through a life of self-denial, the slow emergence of the spirit struggle through the prison of false images cast by sin and fear. After the various western schisms, these religious bodies quickly lose this specifically imminent aspect of God. The papacy, then, in Protestantism, the individual will, was to take its place, until God became a mere philosopher's phantom, without real being, without presence.

Once men begin the Christian struggle and receive "adopted sonship" through baptism, they become a living, empirical aspect of the Spirit's activity on earth. Men do not pray in the sense they renew their driver's license (the Protestant view), but the Spirit communicates with Christ through their/our material agency. In other words, this metaphysics posits man/creation not radically separated from God, but simply unable to see His presence under the layers of filth caused by sin, the world and the Regime's science.

The Regime posits a globe of dead matter (including the cowans, i.e. non-initiated people, the herd) ripe for manipulation. Orthodoxy posits a material world that is bi-composite: one, comprising the qualities that Locke is convinced exhaust the matter of matter, and, two, the spirit, the Law of Law, or that aspect that permits matter to partake of Law and Regularity (without which there could be no science, good or bad). The life of asceticism permits the ascetic to begin to see and focus on the Law, rather than its quality, though Law through quality, rather than opposed to it.

Whether or not Rasputin regularly reads this great Ukrainian writer is another story, but in reading these novels, one can easily see the influence of the Chalcedonian metaphysics. For Rasputin, the urbanite cannot see the spirit underlying matter (so to speak). Everything in urban life, as all is conditioned by will, appears artificial, to be merely a bundle of qualities (i.e. substance-less). Men are no different, for to reduce them to a bundle of qualities is the only means of controlling them. Freedom, properly understood, derives solely through Orthodox asceticism; urbanism, therefore, must be based on indulgence, for indulgence, by building up the passions and their demands for satisfaction, permits for those who control access to such fulfillment full control over "human" or semi-human faculties. Urbanism destroys humanity; it destroys freedom by its very constitution and organization.

For Rasputin, particularly in his more recent labors, the purpose of life is to struggle to see, at least in outline, the basic spirit structures of the world. This can only be done in nature, outside of the distorted elite lens of urbanism. His characters experience mystical visions when in the outlands of Siberia, suggesting a knowledge that is beyond logic; a strange form of communication between Law and the psyche, one completely bypassed by modern geometry/logic. Such experience radically change these characters, bringing them to a knowledge of their identity and therefore, purpose. Rasputin's epistemology is mystical, in that the mind is illumined through participation, a participation in Law, or a Reality that is only in a small way explicable through logic.

Modernity is based on quantification, and this quantification is only understandable as a part of matter. It is materialist by definition. This matter of course, is not free, but totally determined. To the extent that modernity is based on materialism, it is unfree. The converse of this is that non-material things cannot be quantified and hence, from the positivist point of view, non-logical.

Because of the nature of "participation," (in the Platonic sense) Rasputin's heroes/heroines, often are not specifically educated formally. They are people who have, so to speak, absorbed, through participation, the Reality of life. These are often older women, our

babas or yayas, who, simply through experience outside of the logical/mathematical world of urban life, receive a great deal of wisdom, a wisdom outside of the experience of the urban life, a life that cannot absorb anything that is not based on the behavior of matter.

This is the vision of Rasputin. The elderly country woman as the ignored, spat upon bearer of wisdom. The spitter? The urbanite who abandoned the ancestral life for urbanism, the chance for power and money. The urbanite believes that formal education is the “magic elixir” that will transmogrify him or her from an ignorant bumpkin to a civilized member of the New Soviet Experiment, the 21st Century, or whatever. Returning to the village, smug and arrogant, the baba is simply considered an “old, pious fool,” but, as always, a fool who is far wiser than any urban bureaucrat, crammed into his minuscule apartment in the name of “success” and “progress.”

In his article, “Shamanism and Animistic Personification in the Writings of Valentin Rasputin” (South Central Review, 1993), Harry Walsh brings out a few new insights into the agrarian vision through the prism of ancient Shamanism. While Rasputin is Orthodox, his view of the ancient pagan “religion” of Russia is typical of my own: harmless customs that serve largely to humanize nature. These kinds of simple religion take natural reason and feeling as far as it can go in dealing with natural phenomenon without revelation. There are no “gods” in the Christian sense, but rather poetic fetishizations of either natural or social forces. It is precisely these customs and poetic “humanizations” that St. Innocent of Alaska strictly forbade his missionaries to interfere with as they were being evangelized into Orthodoxy. So long as these ideas did not interfere with the Christian faith, they were to be left alone.

Once of these sort of “personalizations” that comes out in Rasputin’s work is important to agrarianism and anti-modernism, and that is the “personification” of objects; that is, the personification of the land itself, and its common markers: rovers, mountains, leaves, colors and sounds. Here, as is commonly seen in Johann Herder, language is merged poetically with nature, with one’s surroundings. In Herder’s case, thought is inconceivable without language (and thus historical experience), thought itself is merged within the natural world. The natural world is then a home.

Contrary to the ravings of the gnostics and technophiles, nature is not an arbitrary creature, the creation of a semi-wicked demiurge that needs to be dethroned and “corrected,” but is a home, a life, it is not “other,” but an extension of one’s self. In Russian the noun “drug” means both “friend” and “other,” showing the slow merger of the two concepts. Of course, there is no “other” in friendship: the one is swallowed in the other. Friendship is precisely the swallowing of otherness, and a pleasant and voluntary absorption of otherness.

For the agrarian, the land is a person, in a sense. It is a loving mother that, all other things being equal, yield her bounty when she is treated with respect, no different than a loving wife. Is there a connection between modernity, abortion and the destruction of agrarian lifestyles? Of course. They are all really the same notion: the female, nature is desecrated and abused in the name of progress. As Francis Bacon wrote, “knowledge of nature” is “power.” Knowledge of nature is designed to keep her in submission, chained to the libidinous whims of the Lunar Society. Rape and industry have the same Baconian/Atlantean root. Therefore, agrarianism is seen as backward, as the male whoremonger is seen as macho and virile.

Nature in Rasputin is not merely to be preserved and loved as a mother/wife because she is pretty, or because she yields fruit. Both are important, but it goes deeper: nature is a mediator, of sorts, between man and God. The Orthodox vision of relics partakes in a limited way from this insight. Nature, to the sensitive, aesthetic and ascetic soul, contains the “fingerprints” of God in that it is regular, law governed, and sensitive to affection. It is not a difficult road from nature as

law bearing, to nature as designed, to nature as the subject of a creator.

The sensitive soul sees in nature tremendous beauty, order, proportion and the source of bodily life. How difficult is it to go from here to God as Beauty, Love and Provider? Even in the more disagreeable aspects of nature, such as snake's venom, or cow dung, one can see the hand of the creator. Human beings, like it or not, eat that cow dung when we eat the products of the earth, that have been fertilized by it. Back in Nebraska, the farmers would tell the suburbanites holding their noses in the rural areas: "It smells like s**t to you; money and food to us." They never quite had the heart to tell these benighted souls that they eat this fertilizer in every bite of a tomato or carrot.

For the agrarian, nature, the village, the trees and mountains are friends. They create a home. They are part of a larger community all bound together in love, a love at least partially manifested in the "law bearing" aspect of natural events. Science has never been able to understand that nature of regularity as such. Newton can understand it as a quality of matter, but as to its source, that's another issue. Regularity is not something that adheres to objects, but itself must have a source. Regularity and law are the basis of science, and yet its source is purely in the realm of metaphysics and theology. Regularity and law are not the products of random events, but themselves are objects of scientific inquiry, and only a Law of Law, or the ground of law, can be responsible for order in a universe that tends to disorder and dissolution.

Yet, contrary to the myopia of modern positivism, poetry is the source of making a home out of natural objects. A home for the modern suburbanites is the McMansion thrown up in a few weeks by a builder making a quick buck, only soon itself to be sold in order to see a profit. Rasputin and the agrarian tradition see a home as a complex matrix, a matrix of sights and sounds, smells, people, colors and structures. Only a sensitive mind can "see" memories in an old barn, a careworn field, or an old tractor. The modern suburbanite cannot. Margaret Winchell:

The tales and rites that Rasputin alludes to all include crossing boundaries between the real physical world and the world of spirits, between life and death – a requisite transition, in the author's view, for the sort of experience Sanja undergoes. They also depict similar spirit worlds and emphasize the power and beauty of nature, which upholds Rasputin's thesis that spiritual states of mind can be attained only in a natural setting and not in the everyday world of civilization. Perhaps most important, they create a religious underpinning that gives Sanja's experience a timeless, universal, and sacred quality, endowing it with a significance far beyond that of the adventures of a Soviet youth (Winchell, 543).

This is an essential point rarely alluded to in the literature today. Urban or suburban life has effects on the brain. The mind of an agrarian and the mind of an urbanite are very dissimilar. The former is broader and can see more of the natural order than others. His connections, as well as healthier lifestyle, make him sharper and less anxious.

Taking this one step further, Dr. Walsh makes it clear that in Rasputin's writings, these connections among objects, God, law, sense, memory (in the affective sense), loyalty, home, family, community, local institutions, etc., called by the ever misinterpreted Slavophiles "integral knowledge" automatically mean that man is a mediator, he is a mediator between the senses themselves (what philosophers sometimes call "intersubjectivity"); between logic and poetry; between sense and love; and most of all, between the living and the dead. Edmund Burke once famously called "tradition" the "democracy of the dead." The traditions that hold rural communities together is not the creation of the present generation, but can only be the product of

generations past, generations who suffered and struggled to make it possible for the present generation to be alive at all. The fact that the founders are now dead should have no bearing on their influence over the present. If one exists through the accident of birth, than why should the accident of death be a problem? Why should mere death be a barrier to influence? What is the moral ground for such an opinion? Should the dead vote? Yes, and it's called tradition.

There are some modern philosophers who are slowly rejecting the concept of "I" in moral theory. Such a revolutionary opinion is almost inconceivable in modern post-revolutionary times. The "I" according to Oxford's Derrick Parfit, should be reduced to "streams of experience" that do not admit of an ontological fundament. Such a notion is common enough for agrarianism and is found in Rasputin: the idea that the "I" is not a fundament, but is part of a larger reality. The ego is sunk into the integral basis of reality, but such a basis must be rather small (physically) and be based on a determinate community of people, region and language. The separation of the "I" from its surroundings is primarily an invention of the Roman empire and Stoicism, and is so well lampooned in Chekov's *Ward No. 6* The "I" is not a fundament, the community is, the integrity of one's surroundings is. And it is on this basis that the personification of reality makes sense.

Reality is absorbed by the community and transformed its social experience. And, further, it is this that makes capitalism and democracy so vile: for they see a forest as only so much wood, or as a potential field for development. The community, however, sees it as an ontological reservoir or feelings and memories; it is an aspect of personhood. The extreme emotions that sometimes are drawn out when old, rural settlements are bulldozed over for some trivial purpose is derived from precisely this ontological reality.

There is little doubt that Rasputin is a threat. His recent death does not change that. His work is accessible, and his message is clear. His characters are powerful and his personality uncompromising. Rasputin should have the role of the Solzhenitsyn of the 21st century, only it is not the Soviet GULAG that is the target, but the modern world and its sickness; the merger of corporate capital and Soviet repression.

The themes of Rasputin are the same for all village prose writers: the village itself, home, nature and the natural order against its enemies, either the state or capital. Kathleen Parthe, in her *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton University, 1992) is worried about even tackling this topic because of its connection to "Antisemitism." As an academic, she has only been exposed to caricatures of nationalism. Worse, she is not allowed to know why the Antisemitic mind has always been mainstream in Russian history. The obligatory expression of condescending horror can be found in her Preface:

Anti-Semitism has a long history in Russia. In the early 1700s. Peter the Great would not allow foreign Jews to take part in his own perestroika program; at the same time, Russians opposed to Peter assumed that he was a Jewish Antichrist. There are many examples of anti-Semitism through the centuries; in the twentieth century one can point to the pogroms before the Revolution, and to the murder of Yiddish writers and the "Doctors' Plot" in the late Stalinist period. (Parthe, 1992: xii).

She is not in a professional position to make sense out of this, so antisemitism remains a phenomenon without a cause. Unlike almost everything a historian or literary critic can deal with, this phenomenon must hang in mid air, or at best, be dismissed as a bizarre episode of "blind hate" from an otherwise moral and decent population. While Parthe cannot say so lest she risk the

loss of her position, Jews were absolutely dominant in the USSR right up to Brezhnev. There was no institution in the Soviet Union in the first 40 years that was not dominated by them. Therefore, the hatred for them is well earned. Jewish author Louis Rappoport writes:

Under Lenin, Jews became involved in all aspects of the Revolution, including its dirtiest work. Despite the Communists' vows to eradicate anti-Semitism, it spread rapidly after the Revolution -- partly because of the prominence of so many Jews in the Soviet administration, as well as in the traumatic, inhuman Sovietization drives that followed. Historian Salo Baron has noted that an immensely disproportionate number of Jews joined the new Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka And many of those who fell afoul of the Cheka would be shot by Jewish investigators (Rappoport, 1990: 30-31).

There were few Jews in Russia under Peter I (they did not exist in the empire in great numbers until the absorption of Poland under Catherine II). Stalin's entire bureaucracy was top-heavy with Jews and his secret police was almost exclusively so. Antisemitism was punishable with death under Stalin, curiously the only such ethnic view that earned the death penalty.

Rasputin and the genre as a whole takes the home (never a “house”) as a microcosm of the nation. The village too is often so used. It is contrasted to the urban apartment: gray, dreary, perfectly square and insanely cramped. In reality – not just in literature – it cannot compare. Peasant life is more intimate in the home, more social in the village, but these are nesting or “symphonic” entities.

The modern sees the home as cut off, usually quite radically, from the outside world. Extreme levels of privacy preclude moderns from asking the simplest questions about age or income, like these are state secrets. Rasputin and others sees the “symphony” between home and village to be a porous one.

Overwhelmingly, the main theme in Village Prose is loss. While Parthe and others are compelled to call this “nostalgia,” which is an insulting dismissal of the entire genre, it is a living memory and a clarification of precisely what made the old so much better than the new. The USSR was a radical example because the destruction of the village was ideologically mandated and very sudden. In the west, the total disenfranchisement of rural areas took a very long time. In 2016, rural areas are economically extant only in that they are the subject of major agribusinesses. Otherwise, they do not exist in any meaningful political sense.

The USSR saw this occur overnight. This led to a reaction that was squelched for a long time in the USSR and totally ignored in the west. This means that families were broken up. Women under Stalin were herded to the factories because his own murderous policies led to a severe labor shortage. Standardization destroyed the self and any sense of national or individual specificity as all form of “nationalism” were banned.

The home was the creation of numerous generations. It literally was the cumulative creation of numerous generations. This is part of the reason it had to be destroyed: east and west, anything that could serve as the foundation for rebellion was destroyed. Economic deprivation is never enough for a sustained rebellion without ethnic or religious ties serving as the social community from which rebellion can spring.

Scholars in this field remark that Rasputin never “romanticized” or “idealized” the peasantry. For good reason, this is never defined. I dare the reader to find me a writer of any note that speaks of the agrarian live without mentioning its negative aspects. Idealizing the agrarian life in these contexts is to reject modernity, using peasant life as an alternative. No one

“idealizes” peasant life anywhere. Some just believe it is a superior alternative, an easy argument to make. Defending modern life is almost impossible, which is why its advocates must resort to name calling even in academic contexts.

Modern political theory, and much political theory in general, abstracts from life. Terms are used such as “community,” “law,” “self,” “tradition” or “belonging” without any content whatsoever. Arguing for community is never arguing for a specific one. There is no reason to be a communitarian or an individualist since both are equally empty. Egocentric libertarianism never says what this vaunted freedom is ever for. The typical nationalist or agrarian ever says what, specifically, about their nation or community makes it worth preserving or praising. Abstract rights are stated without argument as to their origin or purpose.

The Russian mir is a real, living idea. It is a community with a specific, purpose, Constitution, mentality and goal. There is nothing abstract about it. It was a strongly Christian and socialist enterprise. It was only Marx and Lenin that forced materialism onto socialism. The mir was not based on coercion. The collective farm was exclusively based on violence, as it to underscore its illegitimacy. For academics whose lives bear no connection to the mir at all, their understanding of the commune, while generating quite a bit of writing, is based only on empty words and some worry about “nostalgia.”

This mir is the connection of labor with the seasons. Beauty is seen, though rarely articulated, as this connection between work, tradition and the natural cycles or the logos in creation.

Violence and chaos, and the play complements his downbeat picture of city life. If collectivization signals the end of the old world (the 'fall' into history) and the victory of the Antichrist, then in the new world it has created the hydroelectric dam becomes the new Tower of Babel, a twentieth-century Crystal Palace against which the modern Underground Men Rasputin and Astaf'ev rail. In Rasputin's story we never actually see the dam. It is always in the background, yet it dominates the narrative. In “The King Fish,” though, we see it quite clearly, as the author flies overhead in a passenger aircraft. The passengers crowd to the windows to catch a glimpse of the giant project dominating the landscape, as the author comments: “They were admiring the creation of their own hands” (Gillespie, 1992: 416).

This passage from Gillespie's work on Village Prose is an excellent way to conclude this paper. It needs to be reiterated that the promises of modernity are utopian. Francis Bacon, Karl Marx, Comte, the Renaissance humanists and so many others spoke of a world of peace and plenty: so long as science were granted total power. The underlying assumption in all modernist literature, speaking of the future, is that technology, if granted total power, will end hunger, stop overwork and somehow eliminate alienation. Even today, genetic engineering claims the ability to eventually make man immortal and destroy the genes that cause aging. It claims, usually implicitly, that all diseases will be cured in this way. Modern science has claimed this for itself for centuries.

Yet, as early as Rousseau and even Savonarola, the Gnostic and demonic energy behind this was identified. New diseases have been invented and engineered. Overwork and anxiety are not longer problems – they are the accepted manner of things, “the human condition.” Technology does no “save labor,” but rather just raises expectations. Power has been the only

constant. Darwin was made famous precisely at the height of the British empire and the incredible progress of industrialism. To say that it is the “order of things” for the weak to destroy the strong and take their resources was music to the ears of these new Titans. Those who adjust to their conditions in the most efficient manner will win. This could only have come into existence under industrialization and empire building. Darwin is inexplicable without those factors. And it is those factors that made him irresistible. Unfortunately, it is the rest of us that have been defeated.

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