Tampere University

MIKA PERKIÖMÄKI

Imagined Riverography of Late Twentieth-Century Russian Prose

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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PREFACE

The source of the river is in Lithuania.

Twenty years ago, when visiting a small record shop in Vilnius, I bought the live album *Chërnyi pës Peterburg* by the Russian rock band DDT. Little did I know what a mighty river was opening in front of me. The captivating music and the incomprehensible lyrics sparked an interest in the riddle of Russian culture. First, I needed to decode the mysterious Cyrillic script. The river widened, and soon I wanted to understand the language. Farther downstream, I immersed myself in the rich history and variety of the Russian culture. The flow increased when I learned about Soviet environmental literature, whose mere existence blew my mind. I was fascinated by the prominence of the Russian river and its multifaceted meanings in literature. Before long, I found myself involved in an academic project on the social and cultural aspects of water. This dissertation is my latest attempt in cracking the enigma of Russian culture. By now, the river is so wide that I cannot see the opposite shore. Whether I have arrived in a confluence of two rivers, a reservoir, or an ocean, remains to be seen.

Along this journey that turned out to be far more epic than I could ever have anticipated, I have travelled in Russia and other former Soviet republics not only mentally but also physically. The very first trip took me to the Trans-Siberian Railway – alone and illiterate. Later, I have seen the church where Lenin was married in Shushenskoye, couchsurfed in Pskov, taken my mother to her birthplace in the Karelian Isthmus, and cycled around White Sea Karelia. I have studied in Tver, given lectures in Yekaterinburg, lived in a communal flat and witnessed massive demonstrations in St. Petersburg. I have eaten *borshch* in Rzhev, *manty* in Sochi and *ponchiki* on the boat to Solovki, and drunk *balzam* with an eminent scholar of Russian philology in a student dormitory. I have smelled the coal of Vorkuta, marvelled the onion domes of the Kizhi Pogost, and suffered extreme heat in Turkestan and blizzards in Murmansk. I have attended several Easter Vigil Processions, visited Buddhist temples in Kalmykia and Buryatia as well as mosques in Tatarstan, and tasted mineral waters of Kislovodsk. I have been to graves of renowned writers, admired the Chekhov house museum behind a closed fence in Taganrog, and met by accident the famous singing *babushki* in Buranovo. I have felt myself small in the

face of huge war monuments in Volgograd, Murmansk, Brest and Kiev, and visited the Kalashnikov museum in Izhevsk. I have swam in the Aral Sea and Lake Baikal, hidden a geocache on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, and hiked in the mountains of Karachay-Cherkessia. I have participated in the annual Road of Life winter marathon event in severe frost and a Siberian mountain running event in stifling heat, attended a trail running event in the Northern Urals, and skied in the foot of the Khibiny Massif.

I have been to the source of the Volga in the Valdai Hills, travelled by a riverboat along the Yenisei from Krasnoyarsk to Igarka, seen where the Angara drains out of Lake Baikal as well as where it meets the Yenisei near Strelka. I have travelled by train over the huge Bratsk dam, visited the Krasnoyarsk dam, crossed the Ob on a ferry from Labytnangi to Salekhard, spent a leasurely day on the banks of the Pripyat in Pinsk, and seen the lotuses of the Volga Delta.

The number of people and organizations who have contributed to this dissertation is astonishing. Naming them all here is impossible, but I will try to acknowledge at least a significant share of them. First, I want to thank Associate Professor Alexander Brookes for agreeing to act as my opponent in the publice defence of my dissertation and for his thorough pre-examination comments. I sincerely look forward to our discussion. I am also truly grateful to the other pre-examiner, Chief Research Fellow Dmitry Zamyatin, whose feedback was also highly valuable.

Through the years, I have received financial support that has been invaluable. The work on this dissertation started as a part of the research project AQUA – Water as Social and Cultural Space, funded by the Academy of Finland (programme #263417). My work was also supported by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation and the City of Tampere Research Fund, and I received a travel grant from Tampere University Foundation. I am extremely grateful for all the external funders for their support. I also thank Professor Emeritus Yrjö Haila for kindly accepting to act as a reference for me in my numerous grant applications. Thank you to Finland for financing all my previous education.

I will never be able to express the extent of my gratitude to my responsible supervisor, Professor Emerita Arja Rosenholm. Nothing could have replaced the support, the discussions and the endless iterations of sharp and accurate feedback that I have received from her ever since the days when I started my Master's studies. I also want to thank my supervisor Professor Maria Litovskaya for numerous helpful comments on my manuscripts and for kindly receiving me on a research and teaching visit in Ural Federal University.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues at the AQUA project. The project meetings and the events we organised within the limits of the project gave a wonderful start for my work on this dissertation. I especially want to thank the forerunners of Finnish ecocriticism, Professor Markku Lehtimäki for insightful support on many phases of my project, and Dr. Toni Lahtinen for the constant encouragement that has helped me to believe in my ability to finish this work. I also want to express my thanks to Dr. Nina Tynkkynen, Dr. Withold Bonner, Dr. Maija Ojala, Dr. Petri Juuti, Dr. Tapio Katko, and Dr. Riikka Rajala. It is only now that I am beginning to understand how important it was for me to be able to work with you. I am also grateful to the colleagues in my current project. Thank you to Eeva Kuikka, Dr. Karina Lukin, and particularly, Dr. Tintti Klapuri for your patience, feedback and support.

There is a host of other academics whose help and inspiration has been most valuable for me. Thank you to Professor Jane Costlow, whose wide knowledge of Russian environmental literature has been most helpful. I have also been lucky to be able to work with Professor Scott Slovic, a true pioneer of ecocritical research. Thank you for the useful comments and discussions; I also have dear memories of our inspirational jogging and cross-country skiing activities in the Kauppi forest. I thank Professor Natalia Kovtun for providing me with opportunities to disseminate my work in Russia, and for extremely helpful advice and support. Thanks also belong to Dr. Natalia Tsvetaeva for helpful discussions about the Russian river and for bringing me to valuable sources of information. I would also like to express my thanks to Professor Nicholas Breyfogle and Professor Emeritus Philip Brown for inviting me to a workshop that proved productive for one of my articles. Thank you to Dr. Inna Sukhenko for keeping me up to date on appropriate academic events, and to all my anonymous referees for useful comments on my article manuscripts.

The support of colleagues and fellow PhD Candidates at Tampere University has also been indispensable. Thank you to Dr. Irina Savkina for introducing me to the world of Russian natural-philosophical prose. Thank you to Professor Sari Kivistö, Dr. Laura Karttunen and especially Professor Sanna Turoma for careful and valuable feedback for the summary part of my dissertation. Thank you to all the staff at the degree programme of Russian for first being excellent teachers and then excellent colleagues. I thank Professor Camilla Lindholm and Associate Professor Maija Hirvonen for facilitating productive communal writing sessions at the final stages of my work. Thank you to Dr. Saara Ratilainen for accepting to act as the moderator of my online defence. It has been a great pleasure to share office space with Jukka Tuominen and Flóra Várkonyi. Thanks to Jukka also for patiently attending to my

requests for support in the English and Greek languages. I also want to acknowledge the great collegial support of Professor Johannes Riquet, Dr. Markku Salmela, Dr. Jarkko Toikkanen, Dr. Juha Raipola, Dr. Hanna Samola, Dr. Anne Ketola, Dr. Juho Härme, Dr. Leena Romu, Dr. Hanna Limatius, Dr. Nanny Jolma, Essi Vatilo, Pasi Metsä, Kirsi Sandberg, Hanne Juntunen, Jenni Ylönen, Anna Kuutsa, and many others.

As a non-native speaker of the languages I work with, I am truly grateful for the excellent editing services that I have enjoyed. I address special thanks to Matthew James for polishing the English of my work. I also thank Natalia Mikhailova for help with the Russian.

Even working on a PhD is not all work and no joy. Thank you for the members of RC Eemeli and Juhani for providing meaningful leisure activities, ranging from swimming across Kaukajärvi Lake to night orienteering in the annual Jukola relay.

Finally, I direct my immense gratefulness to the light of my life, the best possible peer support, Anni Lappela. Without your love, I would still be lost somewhere in the upper reaches of the river.

In Helsinki, on Flower Day (Finland) and Day of Prisoner Transport Security Service (Russia), 13 May 2021

Mika Perkiömäki

ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation examines imaginations of rivers and riverscapes in Russian natural-philosophical prose of the 1970s–1990s from an ecocritical point of view. It also analyses Russian environmental philosophical discussions of the same period, outlining the confluences and differences between them and the corresponding international discourse. The dissertation offers new perspectives on the interconnections of Russian literature, Russian environmental history, Russian environmental thought, and the river. The dissertation coins the term 'imagined riverography', which refers to the ways literary works inscribe and imagine the river, producing spaces that intersect with physical geography. The main objective is to explore representations of the river and its connection to people in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian natural-philosophical prose, and to analyse the ecocritical meanings they convey.

The theoretical foundation draws on spatiality, environmental humanities, and, most importantly, ecocriticism, which is interested in the ways texts mediate environmental ideas and understandings of the natural environment. The work belongs to the recent international turn in ecocriticism, where works from multiple cultures and languages have been focused on and where theories, concepts, and methods are integrated in an interdisciplinary fashion. The study expands the scope of contemporary ecocriticism by focusing on Russian literature. The research questions correspond to the ecocritical perspective, which means that the relationship of literature and the physical environment are studied from the point of view and being conscious of the environmental concern that humanity's detrimental impact on the biosphere has generated.

The dissertation produces new knowledge on meanings of rivers in the literature written by representatives of the natural-philosophical wing of the so-called Soviet village prose movement. It shows that in their literature, environmental concern is connected closely to the river. They discuss burning environmental problems – such as the overexploitation of natural resources, contamination of natural waters, extensive submergence of lands due to damming, and draught due to excessive irrigation – in ways where the river is a main agent. Their works create an imagined riverography, where the Soviet environmental catastrophe threatens the future of

Russian rivers and, consequently, the future of Russian culture. The analysed works are environmental because of their imagined riverography, where human material corporeality is inseparable from the other-than-human, where proximity to a river is essential for the fulfilment of environmental justice, where the river is an essential precondition for human culture, and where moral questions are vital.

This dissertation consists of four peer-reviewed publications and a summary, which provides the work's background, summarizes the study and presents the conclusions. The theoretical and methodological frameworks stem from the specific research questions of each of the publications. The dissertation introduces concepts and perspectives from Russian natural-philosophical research to international ecocriticism. All the publications involve close reading, and the central theoretical concepts that permeate through the work are space, place, the river's agency, environmental history, natural-philosophical prose, and imagined riverography. The other main concepts applied in the individual publications are trans-corporeality, environmental justice, the noosphere, the Anthropocene, ecology of culture, and literature as cultural ecology. Other theoretical concepts that the dissertation discusses include abstract space, the development of environmental thought, landscape science, the homosphere, and noosphere stories.

Publications I–III analyse autobiographical fiction. Publication I analyses the river's cultural and material relationship with the people living in contact with it in Viktor Astaf´ev's novel *Queen Fish* (1976). It shows how the human and other-than-human spaces constitute one trans-corporeal whole, which helps to see them as inseparable from each other rather than as two distinct realms. It also discusses how metaphors of the river convey environmental meanings in the work. Publication II illustrates how the absence of the river is the cause of a deficit of environmental justice in Valentin Rasputin's river prose of the 1970s. It also examines the ways in which changes due to modernization turn the meaningful place of the river into a meaningless, abstract space in Rasputin's travel essay "Upstream and Downstream" (1972). Publication III concentrates on depictions of geographical metaphors and understandings of the riverine environment in Sergei Zalygin's *An Environmental Novel* (1993) and states that the failure to understand the significance of Vladimir Vernadskii's concept of the noosphere that he introduced in the 1920s–1930s is central in the novel's critique of the Soviet state's so-called amelioration of the natural environment. It further argues that the novel associates Lev Berg's concept of geographical landscapes with environmentalism and contrasts it with Andrei Grigor'ev's ideas that the Soviet state supported and that were based on dialectical materialism and the Stalinist interpretation of Engels's dialectics of nature.

Publication IV investigates Dmitrii Likhachëv's two non-fiction essays, both titled "Ecology of Culture" (1979, 2000). It details how Likhachëv's ecology of culture differs from cultural ecology by emphasizing morals, traditional values, and Christian ideology instead of highlighting literature's potential as an ecological force, despite the common premise of human cultures having evolved in close interrelationship with the material environment. Publication IV further explains how Russian natural-philosophical prose's representations of the river illustrate its inherent connections to ecology of culture and its role as cultural ecology.

The dissertation also analyses the metaphors through which late twentieth-century Russian natural-philosophical prose produces meanings of the river. The most powerful metaphors are the 'river of life' and the 'river of death'. The 'river of life' reflects water's characteristic as a constituent of life that also symbolizes life. The river flow can determine the destinies of people, prevent people from taking their own life, and turn them towards dedicating their life to the protection of nature. The 'river of life' is an active agent and a medium between the realms of nature and culture. The 'river of death' confronts people with dangers. The death of a river can be depicted as a drowning, a personified dramatic turn of events that humankind has initiated, turning the freely flowing 'river of life' into a stagnant 'river of death'. A contaminated river loses its life-giving character and can make a dedicated environmentalist self-destructive. Together, the two metaphors create a national awareness of Russian culture as something for which the river is indispensable.

The imagined riverography that this dissertation outlines extends to that part of the latest realist Russian literature that is often described as traditionalist and referred to as 'new realism'. The summary of the dissertation briefly discusses Russian literary works of the twenty-first century that openly refer to the study's research material, that draw inspiration from the studied writers, and that recycle the river tropes that they produce by bringing them to the contemporary context.

This dissertation concludes that even though late Soviet Russian natural-philosophical prose rose from national premises, it bears many similarities with international environmental literature. Its driving ideology has a conservative and nationalistic character, while the international environmental consciousness is usually associated with liberalism and internationalism. Despite this difference, the common environmental anxiety resulted in similar phenomena in the environmental literatures of different spheres. Ecocritical research is not practiced in Russia, but the Russian literary and philosophical traditions bear multiple confluences with ecocritical applications. It may not be justified to say that ecocriticism as such exists in Russia, but practices similar to those promoted by ecocriticism certainly do.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöskirja tarkastelee 1970–1990-luvun venäläisen luonnonfilosofisen proosan kuvittelemaa jokea ja jokimaisemaa ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta. Lisäksi se analysoi saman ajanjakson venäläistä ympäristöfilosofista keskustelua hahmotellen yhtymäkohtia ja eroja vastaavaan kansainväliseen diskurssiin. Väitöskirja tarjoaa uusia näkökulmia venäläisen kirjallisuuden, Venäjän ympäristöhistorian, venäläisen ympäristöajattelun ja joen vuorovaikutuksista. Työ esittelee kuvitteellisen joentieteen käsitteen (engl. *imagined riverography*) ja viittaa sillä tapoihin, joilla kirjallisuus merkitsee ja kuvittelee jokea tuottaen fyysisen maantieteen kanssa risteäviä tiloja. Päätavoite on tutkia esityksiä joesta ja sen yhteydestä ihmisiin myöhäisen neuvostoajan sekä varhaisen jälkisosialistisen ajan venäläisessä luonnonfilosofisessa proosassa ja analysoida niiden välittämiä ekokriittisiä merkityksiä.

Työn teoreettinen pohja perustuu tilallisuuteen, ympäristöhumanismiin ja ennen kaikkea ekokritiikkiin, jossa tarkastellaan tekstien tapoja välittää ympäristöajattelua sekä käsityksiä luonnonympäristöistä. Väitöskirja kuuluu ekokritiikin viimeaikaiseen kansainväliseen käänteeseen, jossa tutkimuksen kohteena on teoksia lukuisilta eri kieli- ja kulttuurialueilta ja jolle on tyypillistä tieteidenvälinen teorioiden, käsitteiden ja menetelmien yhdistely. Työ laajentaa ekokriittistä tutkimusta keskittymällä venäläiseen kirjallisuuteen. Tutkimuskysymykset vastaavat ekokriittistä näkökulmaa, mikä tarkoittaa, että kirjallisuuden ja fyysisen ympäristön suhdetta tutkitaan ihmiskunnan biosfääriä tuhoavan toiminnan aiheuttaman huolen kautta.

Väitöskirja tuottaa uutta tietoa joen merkityksistä neuvostoliittolaisten kyläprosaistien luonnonfilosofiaa painottavien kirjailijoiden tuotannossa. Se osoittaa, että heidän kirjallisuudessaan ympäristöhuoli liittyy läheisesti jokeen. Teokset käsittelevät ajankohtaisia ympäristöongelmia – kuten luonnonvarojen liikakäyttöä, luonnonvesien saastumista, laajojen alueiden jäämistä vesivoimaloiden patojen aiheuttaman tulvaveden alle sekä liikakastelusta johtuvaa kuivuutta – joissa joki on keskeinen tekijä. Teokset luovat kuvitteellista joentiedettä, jossa Neuvostoliiton ympäristökatastrofi uhkaa Venäjän jokien ja siten myös venäläisen kulttuurin tulevaisuutta. Käsitys analysoiduista teoksista ympäristökirjallisuutena perustuu niiden kuvitteelliseen joentieteeseen, jolle moraalikysymykset ovat keskeisiä ja jossa ihmisen aineellinen ruumiillisuus on erottamaton ei-inhimillisestä ympäristöstä, joen

läheisyys on välttämätön ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden toteutumisen ehto ja joki on ihmiskulttuurin ehdoton edellytys.

Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä vertaisarvioidusta julkaisusta ja yhteenvedosta, joka taustoittaa tutkimusta sekä esittelee sen pääpiirteet ja johtopäätökset. Teoria- ja menetelmäkehykset juontuvat kunkin julkaisun erityiskysymyksistä. Väitöskirja tuo käsitteitä ja näkökulmia Venäjällä tehdystä luonnonfilosofisesta tutkimuksesta kansainvälisen ekokritiikin piiriin. Kaikki analyysit perustuvat lähiluvulle, ja keskeiset koko työn läpäisevät teoreettiset käsitteet ovat tila, paikka, joen toimijuus, ympäristöhistoria, luonnonfilosofinen proosa sekä kuvitteellinen joentiede. Muita yksittäisten julkaisujen pääkäsitteitä ovat transruumiillisuus, ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus, noosfääri, antroposeeni, kulttuurin ekologia ja kirjallisuus kulttuuriekologiana. Muita työssä käytettyjä teoriakäsitteitä ovat abstrakti tila, ympäristöajattelun kehitys, maisematiede, homosfääri ja noosfäärikertomukset.

Kolme ensimmäistä julkaisua tutkivat omaelämäkerrallista kaunokirjallisuutta. Ensimmäinen julkaisu analysoi joen kulttuurista ja materiaalista suhdetta sen rinnalla eläviin ihmisiin Viktor Astafjevin romaanissa *Kuningaskala* (1976). Se osoittaa, kuinka teoksen inhimilliset ja ei-inhimilliset tilat muodostavat yhden ruumiillisen kokonaisuuden, mikä auttaa näkemään ne toisistaan erottamattomina eikä kahtena erillisenä maailmana. Julkaisu käsittelee myös teoksen jokimetaforien välittämiä ympäristömerkityksiä. Toinen julkaisu osoittaa, miten joen puuttuminen aiheuttaa ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden toteutumattomuuden Valentin Rasputinin 1970-luvun jokiproosassa. Se tutkii myös tapoja, joilla modernisaation aiheuttamat muutokset tekevät joen merkityksellisestä paikasta merkityksetöntä abstraktia tilaa Rasputinin matkakertomuksessa "Myötä- ja vastavirtaan" (1972). Kolmas julkaisu keskittyy Sergei Zalyginin *Ympäristöromaanin* (1993) maantieteellisiin metaforiin ja käsityksiin jokiympäristöistä sekä esittää, että Vladimir Vernadskin 1920–1930-luvulla esittelemän noosfäärin käsitteen merkityksen ymmärtämättömyys on keskeistä romaanin Neuvostoliiton ympäristönhoitoon kohdistuvassa kritiikissä. Julkaisu esittää lisäksi, että romaani yhdistää Lev Bergin maantieteellisten maisemien käsitteen ympäristönsuojeluun ja asettaa sen vastakohdaksi Andrei Grigorjevin näkemyksille, joita Neuvostoliiton valtio tuki ja jotka perustuivat dialektiseen materialismiin sekä Engelsin luonnon dialektiikan stalinistiseen tulkintaan.

Neljäs julkaisu tutkii Dmitri Lihatšovin kahta tietokirjallista esseetä, joiden molempien otsikko on ”Kulttuurin ekologia” (1979, 2000). Julkaisu selvittää, miten yhteisestä lähtökohdasta, jossa ihmiskulttuurien ajatellaan kehittyneen läheisessä vuorovaikutuksessa aineelliseen ympäristöönsä, Lihatšovin kulttuurin ekologia eroaa kulttuuriekologiasta korostaen moraalia, perinteisiä arvoja ja kristillistä ideologiaa

kirjallisuuden potentiaalin ekologisena voimana painottamisen sijaan. Lisäksi julkaisu selvittää, miten joen esitykset venäläisessä luonnonfilosofisessa proosassa havainnollistavat sekä sen luontaisia yhteyksiä kulttuurin ekologiaan että sen roolia kulttuuriekologiana.

Väitöskirja analysoi myös metaforia, joiden kautta 1900-luvun lopun venäläinen luonnonfilosofinen proosa tuottaa joen merkityksiä. Vahvimmat metaforat ovat "elämän joki" ja "kuoleman joki". "Elämän joki" heijastaa veden ominaispiirrettä elämälle välttämättömänä aineena, joka myös symboloi elämää. Joen virta kykenee määrittämään ihmiskohtaloita, estämään itsemurhan ja tekemään ihmisestä luonnonsuojelijan. ”Elämän joki” on aktiivinen toimija sekä luonnon ja kulttuurin välinen rajapinta. ”Kuoleman joki” taas saattaa ihmiset vaaraan. Joen kuolema voidaan kuvata hukkumisena, ihmiskunnan aiheuttamana henkilöitynä dramaattisena tapahtumana, joka muuttaa vapaasti virtaavan "elämän joen" seisovaksi "kuoleman joeksi". Saastunut joki menettää elämää tuottavan luonteensa ja voi tehdä omistautuneesta luonnonsuojelijasta itsetuhoisen. Yhdessä nämä metaforat luovat kansallista tietoisuutta venäläisestä kulttuurista sellaisena, jolle joki on korvaamaton.

Tässä väitöskirjassa esitetty kuvitteellinen joentiede ulottuu uusimman venäläisen realistisen kirjallisuuden siihen osaan, jota usein kuvataan traditionalistiseksi ja jota on kutsuttu uudeksi realismiksi. Väitöskirjan yhteenveto-osio käsittelee lyhyesti 2000–2010-luvun venäläistä proosaa, joka viittaa avoimesti työn tutkimusmateriaaliin, saa inspiraatiota sen kirjoittajista ja kierrättää heidän tuottamiaan jokitrooppeja nykykontekstissa.

Vaikka myöhäisen neuvostoajan venäläinen luonnonfilosofinen proosa nousi kansallisista lähtökohdista, sillä on monia yhtäläisyyksiä kansainvälisen ympäristökirjallisuuden kanssa. Sen takana oleva ideologia on luonteeltaan konservatiivinen ja nationalistinen, kun taas kansainvälinen ympäristötietoisuus liitetään yleensä liberalismiin ja internationalismiin. Tästä erosta huolimatta yhteinen ympäristöhuoli johti samanlaisiin ilmiöihin eri alueiden ympäristökirjallisuuksissa. Venäjällä ei tehdä ekokriittistä tutkimusta, mutta venäläisillä kirjallisuusperinteillä ja filosofisilla traditioilla on useita yhtymäkohtia ekokriittisten sovellutusten kanssa. Vaikka Venäjällä ei olisi ekokritiikkiä sellaisenaan, ekokritiikin piirissä suosittuja käytänteitä muistuttavia tapoja kuitenkin on.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have mostly followed the American Library Association and Library of Congress (ALA-LC) Romanization Tables of Russian in the transliteration of Russian words and names. For the letters 'й', 'ц', 'ю' and 'я' I have, however, used the simplified versions 'i', 'ts', 'iu' and 'ia'. Most of the exceptions to this rule are geographical names that have an established English variant: 'Yenisei' rather than 'Enisei', and 'Krasnoyarsk' rather than 'Krasnoiarsk'. In a few cases of internationally renowned people, I have followed the widely used transliteration of the name to avoid confusion: 'Leo Tolstoy' rather than 'Lev Tolstoi', and 'Maxim Gorky' rather than 'Maksim Gor´kii'.

In the bibliography, concerning the publications that were published in English, I use the transliteration that has been used in the original publication: "Astafiev" rather than "Astaf´ev", which I use in the body text.

ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation consists of a summary and four original publications. The summary includes three chapters: an introduction, a presentation and structure of the study and conclusions. In the summary, the publications will be referred to as Publication I to IV.

Publication I Perkiömäki, Mika. 2017. "'The Sovereign of the River and the Sovereign of All Nature—in the Same Trap': Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish*". In *Water in Social Imagination: From Technological Optimism to Contemporary Environmentalism*. Edited by Jane Costlow, Yrjö Haila, and Arja Rosenholm, 145–66. Leiden: Brill Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004333444_009.

Publication II Perkiömäki, Mika. 2018. "Matka hukutetulla joella: Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus Valentin Rasputinin jokiproosassa". In *Veteen kirjoitettu: Veden merkitykset kirjallisuudessa*. Edited by Markku Lehtimäki, Hanna Meretoja, and Arja Rosenholm, 305–32. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Publication III Perkiömäki, Mika. 2020a. "The Anthropocene on Planet Water: Competing Views on Rivers and Geography in Sergei Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*". *Slavonica* 25, no. 1 (2020): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617427.2020.1754570.

Publication IV Perkiömäki, Mika. 2020b. "Rivers of Noosphere Stories: Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology". *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 47, no. 3 (2020): 257–84. https://doi.org/10.30965/18763324-20201369.

1 INTRODUCTION

> Not yet fully used, never completely controlled, the river has been, of all natural forces, the one most intimately involved in human development at every stage. (Brittain 1958, 17)

In the summer of 2018, local residents discovered the construction site of a huge landfill near the Shies railway station in Arkhangelsk Oblast, northern Russia. It turned out that the Oblast authorities had silently agreed with Moscow that enormous amounts of waste from the capital would be transported by train more than a thousand kilometres north to Shies and dumped in the new landfill. The local authorities had not been informed.

Soon, ordinary local people started to organize protests against the landfill, and a round-the-clock tent camp of protesters appeared next to the construction site. In 2019, the affair gained national coverage, and ecoactivists started pouring in from all over Russia into the camp, which began to be called the 'Republic of Shies' (*Respublika Shies*). Activists prevented construction work and took the issue to the Arkhangelsk Oblast's Court of Arbitration. In January 2020, the court declared the construction site illegal. The investor appealed against the decision, but the Arkhangelsk authorities decided to pull their support for the project. Finally, in October 2020, the fourteenth Arbitration Court of Appeal confirmed the earlier court decision, and the activists won the dispute over the landfill.

The case of Shies has attracted widespread attention, both nationally and internationally. It is one of the most notable recent ecological disputes in Russia, and it has developed as a symbol of the tensions between Moscow and the provinces. Many see it as a prime example of the capital's arrogance towards rural areas. The symbolic power of the case, which is a manifestation of the age-old tensions between the Russian centre and the periphery, blends with the ecological aspects of the dispute around the 'Republic of Shies'. The imminent environmental threat is that the landfill would spoil the small Shies River that flows next to the planned landfill by spilling toxic waste into the waterway. The Shies would transfer the toxic matter

to the Vychegda River, contaminating it too. The Vychegda would then carry the toxins to the Northern Dvina River, which would in turn take it to the city of Arkhangelsk and discharge it to the White Sea, from where it would spread throughout the Arctic Ocean. From the point of view of the rivers, the threat is twofold. First, the waters of the rivers themselves would become polluted. Second, due to their flowing character, the rivers would carry the toxic matter far away and spread it to ever-larger bodies of waters.

Another recent case is the massive oil spill that took place in Norilsk, northern Siberia, in May 2020. A fuel storage tank in a thermal power plant owned by Nornickel failed and leaked about twenty thousand tons of diesel into local rivers, most notably in the Daldykan, which had already been regularly polluted by the local nickel industry. The Daldykan is a small river flowing to the Ambarnaia River, which in turn discharges into Lake Piasino, the source of the Piasina River. The Piasina empties into the Kara Sea and the Arctic Ocean. The longer the rivers carry the diesel, the direr becomes the environmental catastrophe.

The role of rivers as an intermediary of toxic substances from the Shies landfill and Norilsk nickel industry is exemplary. At the material level, rivers carry toxic waste all over the Northern provinces, and even overseas. The dispute also involves a symbolic level, as the rivers spread 'toxic ideas' from the centre to the periphery. Ultimately, it is a dispute concerning the well-being not only of provincial human communities, but also of riverine ecosystems, which have always been vital providers of fresh water for humans. In the modern world, rivers have often become carriers of toxic matter, and their course has been obstructed by dam building or redirected by canals. This has all led to huge environmental problems. In Russia, issues connected to the well-being of rivers surfaced in the 1960s, when the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union adopted a resolution that declared many of the country's major rivers "immensely polluted" (Sovet Ministrov SSSR 1960), and an environmental movement protested against the building of massive hydroelectric plants on major Russian rivers.

Literature contributes to the conceptualization and ethical definition of new societal phenomena. In the Russian culture, where the word has been "accorded a supernatural mystique", the writer has a role of an opinion-leader, or "a sage and a prophet" as the contemporary writer Mikhail Berg (2002, 7) puts it. David Bethea (1998, 167–71) refers to the Russian writer's role as a "secular saint" and Russian literature's significance as "social conscience". Since the mid-nineteenth-century, the idea of the Russian culture as literature-centric has dominated the Russian literary discourses, and it is part of the national identity (see Krylov 2017). Therefore, the

study of literature helps to understand characteristics of the Russian culture particularly well. My intention in this dissertation is to better understand developments in the Russian environmental discourse by looking into Russian environmental literature.

At the forefront of the Soviet environmental movement were well-known and influential writers. These writers included Viktor Petrovich Astaf´ev (1924–2001), Valentin Grigor´evich Rasputin (1937–2015), and Sergei Pavlovich Zalygin (1913–2000), who originally came from Siberian villages and who often connected the fate of the Russian people to the fate of Russian rivers. They handled environmental issues in both their fiction and non-fiction, where Zalygin was especially prolific. The most popular fictional works of Astaf´ev and Rasputin were widely read around the Soviet Union, and the writers became famous not only as writers but also as environmentalists and philosophers. Fiction allows more room for metaphorical and symbolic language than non-fiction, as well as narrative techniques that are more comprehensible and approachable to the reader. Non-fiction can handle powerfully issues that are quantifyible, but only part of the interconnections of people and nature can be measured. By studying fiction, it is possible to learn more about the qualitative aspects of people's relationship to nature.

In the 1960s Soviet Union, open public discussion of environmental problems was minimal because the state heavily controlled mass media. Literature was also under control – although its degree of strictness varied at different times – but writers were able to handle environmental themes in their fiction. As Zalygin (1991, 10) writes in one of his essays on literature and nature, in the late twentieth century, the relationship of humanity and the non-human world was a "new area of global tragedy" for which "literature was not prepared". The writers of my research material explored the possibilities of literature in handling environmental issues. Towards the mid-1970s, the volume of environmental prose grew larger and larger. As the sales of the major environmental works of the aforementioned writers were in the millions, they were very influential in spreading information on local environmental issues to the national level.

When discussing the river's role in environmental problems, these writers operate on both the material and the symbolic level. Margaret Ziolkowski (2020, 2) notes in her recent study *Rivers in Russian Literature*: "As a growing crisis in both the availability and quality of water confronts us, the literature on water and waterways, material and symbolic, becomes ever more critical". Therefore, the works of the writers that I study in this dissertation provide pivotal material for the research of Soviet-era environmental Russian literature. Environmental prose written by Astaf´ev,

Rasputin, and Zalygin constitutes the basis of my research material in this dissertation, and Publications I–III concentrate on ecocritical analyses of the river in it.

The philosophical discussion on the relationship of nature and culture also intensified in the 1970s. The same writers actively participated in this debate, both in their prose as well as in their non-fiction. A major thought leader and role model for many of the prosaists interested in the interrelationship of nature and culture was the Academician Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachëv (1906–99), whose essays on ecology, nature, and the philosophy of science are part of my research material. In Publication IV, I interpret Likhachëv's texts in relation to corresponding Western theories and use the prose by Astaf´ev, Rasputin, and Zalygin to illustrate how the river exemplifies the characteristics of Likhachëv's philosophy of nature and its relation to Western theories. Zalygin's non-fiction essays on people's connection to nature are also important in my analysis of one of his novels in Publication III.

Literary research conducted in Russia has studied the natural-philosophical foundations of Astaf´ev's, Rasputin's, and Zalygin's works, as well as those of many other Russian writers of the Soviet period who handled the theme of the relationship of people and nature (see Publication IV). It uses the term *naturfilosofskaia proza* ("natural-philosophical prose") to refer to Russian prose that takes a natural-philosophical position. Even though many Russian scholars connect the philosophy of this kind of literature to the German idealist philosophy of the turn of the nineteenth century, most notably to Schelling and his *Naturphilosophie* (see Gurlënova 1999; Smirnova 2009), *naturfilosofskaia proza* usually denotes any Russian prose that studies the essence of nature (Publication IV, 11; see also Kovtun 2015, 7)[1]. Astaf´ev, Rasputin, and Zalygin are central figures for *naturfilosofskaia proza*, as the term was coined in a 1976 review of Astaf´ev's novel *Tsar´-ryba* (*Queen Fish*), and all three were leading writers of the so-called village prose school, where issues about humanity's relationship with nature were most often handled in 1970s Soviet literature.

In this dissertation, I have applied an ecocritical perspective to meanings of the river in late Soviet and early post-Soviet autobiographical Siberian natural-philosophical prose. I am interested in the river because it is the most meaning-laden and "most fully and vividly manifested"[2] archetype of Russian water (Zamyatin 2017, 65). Vasilii Kliuchevskii (1987, 85–86), a leading Russian historian of the nineteenth

[1] In the references to Publication III and Publication IV, I use the page numbering of the Accepted Manuscript versions of the publications rather than the final versions, because those are included in this dissertation. I do not have a permission to republish the final versions of these two publications.

[2] All the translations are mine unless otherwise noted – M. P.

century, reflected in the 1880s on the historical meanings of the Russian river, and concluded that its historical role has been most diverse. For Kliuchevskii, the river was the third key element of the Russian landscape, in addition to the forest and the steppe, but it differed from them in that it was unequivocally beloved by Russians. He notes the material significance of the river, but acknowledges also its spiritual and psychological meanings for the human population. The Russians have lived with the river "in deep spiritual concord", the river has "nourished an enterprising spirit, the inclination to work in common", and it has also "taught the dwellers on her banks common life and its virtues" (ibid.; translation by Jane Costlow in Costlow and Rosenholm 2017, 1–2).

The river has always been very important and meaningful in Russia, both materially and as a signifier of symbolic production. Almost all Russians have grown up next to a river, as almost all the significant Russian cities are located on the banks of a river – many on a major river. The river has been a central character in Russian literature since its beginning in the Middle Ages, and it has continued to be ever since.

Rivers also played a central role in the Soviet modernization project, which started with the first five-year plan in the late 1920s, because many of Russia's great rivers were harnessed to produce hydroelectric energy. The frenzy did not end with Stalin's death in 1953; rather, the emphasis moved from Europe to the great Siberian rivers. This led to numerous environmental and social problems that were not unique to Russia but were instead a global phenomenon. The widespread and often disastrous consequences of the human-induced ecological problems are the backdrop for the emergence of ecocritical research, which started in the United States in the early 1990s and which studies representations of nature in various texts as well as the interrelationship of culture and nature in them. The contribution of my dissertation in the global ecocritical discourse is to explore the ways in which Russian writing discusses the river in relation to the environmental challenges that Soviet modernization created. Furthermore, this dissertation describes the philosophical foundations and concepts connected with the environmental discourse of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet eras in Russia.

An ecocritical position towards rivers inevitably brings me into close contact with geography. As in Emma Widdis's (2004) study on Russia as space, my focus is not on the real geography of Russia, but rather on the ways how literary works have inscribed and imagined the Russian river, producing spaces that intersect with physical geography. To adapt Edward Said's (1979) concept of imaginative

geographies, I call it the *imagined riverography*[3] of Russia. In an imagined riverography, the material features and the symbolic meanings of rivers are inseparable. The main objective of this dissertation is to explore representations of the (mostly Siberian) river and its connection to people in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian natural-philosophical prose, and to analyse the ecocritical meanings they convey. "Russian" refers here not only to prose written in the Russian language but also by ethnic Russians. River imaginations of the numerous native Siberian peoples would need a study of their own.

Hydropower plants profoundly change the character of the river. Martin Heidegger (1977, 16) describes the reversal of agency in the process particularly well when he writes that the plant is not built into the river, but rather "the river is dammed up into the power plant". In Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza*, Valentin Rasputin most powerfully describes the changes to the Russian river in this process (see Publication II).

With its flowing fresh water, the river has always been a vital partner to humankind. As the Russian-Swiss geographer and anarchist Lev Menchikov (1995, 355) wrote in 1889, "Rivers are the main reason for the emergence and development of civilization". Rivers have been the most accessible source of freshwater in the world, even though they hold only six-thousandths of one per cent of the total freshwater (Solomon 2010, 12). Therefore, the first civilizations emerged on the shores of great rivers, and the majority of modern metropolises are situated next to a river. Menchikov's (1995, 358) main argument was that the great rivers not only offered early civilizations nourishment and a means of transport; they also forced human populations to cooperate with one another, because only through solidarity and cooperation could the dangers of the great rivers be avoided and their life-offering traits properly utilized. Kliuchevskii (1987, 86) also notes that in ancient Russia, the river "brought together far-flung parts of the population" and helped people "to communicate with those who weren't neighbours". Contact with distant peoples that rivers facilitated has not always been based on cooperation and mutual benefit, because rivers have been useful for colonization too.

In fiction, different metaphors of the river are a commonly used trope referring to building a cultural identity. Central to these metaphors is the flowing character of the river. Rivers can function as a metaphor for life, time, change or destiny (Grady

[3] The scientific study of river hydrology is known as potamology. This term is not applicable for the purposes of the current study, which is interested in geography. By 'imagined riverography', I mean approximately the same as 'imagined geography of rivers', but it better encapsulates the idea of rivers as something written by connecting the Greek root *graphō* ("I write") with the river.

2007, 14; McMillin 2011, 27–29, 61). In his classic of river writing, *Danube*, the Italian scholar of German literature Claudio Magris (1989) travels the whole course of the Danube discussing the cultural history of the river that he has called "a symbol for life and death and disappearance" (quoted in Flanagan 2016). Another typical metaphor is the river as a boundary, but rivers can also connect (McMillin 2011, xii). Going over or under a river can be used as a means of producing new possibilities, while going against the flow of the river might stand for the victory of culture over nature (ibid., 4–20). Mark Twain, who often wrote about the Mississippi in his fiction, used the river as a metaphor for reading (ibid., 127–30). The rushing river is also a powerful metaphor depicting uncontrollable or unrequited love or any deep feelings. In Siberian shamanistic mythology, the river connects the underworld to the middle and upper worlds (*Ėntsiklopediia mifologii*).

It is important to study what the river means for human cultures on both the material and the symbolic levels. As the American geologist Luna Leopold writes, "insufficient knowledge of the characteristics of rivers and the effects of our actions that alter their processes" is one reason for the ecological degradation of North American rivers (cited in McMillin 2011, xviii). Russian waters are also badly polluted (see Feshbach and Friendly 1992, 113–30; Peterson 1993, 55–93). Environmental literature handles these effects of human actions on the ecology of rivers on the material level, often intertwining it with the symbolic level. A manifestation of the remarkable symbolic power of Russian rivers is the major water complex called *Rivers of Siberia*, designed by the architect Arėg Demirkhanov and the sculptor Konstantin Zinich. The complex was opened in Theatre Square, the main square of Krasnoyarsk, in 2006 (Figure 1).

Six female statues on the sides of the fountain resembling Ancient Greek sculpture depict six of the minor rivers of the Krasnoyarsk Krai: the Biriusa, Tunguska, Khatanga, Mana, Kacha and Bazaikha. A central older female figure represents the second largest river in the area, the Angara, whose source is Lake Baikal, which includes 20% of the world's unfrozen surface freshwater. At the bottom of the 20-metre long water complex is a sole male figure. It is the major river, the Yenisei, frequently called the 'Father-Yenisei', the fifth longest river in the world. All the other rivers depicted in the fountain flow into it in the material world, as does the water in the monument.

The water complex tells various things about the role of rivers for humans. Human life in the area is dependent on these rivers, and it is entangled with them to such an extent that the rivers in this metaphorical fountain are in the most central place in one of the most important cities in Siberia. This is by no means unique in

Russia. Indeed, because of their constant presence and importance for the prosperity of human communities, rivers possess important cultural meanings throughout the country. In Siberia, the role of rivers is especially pronounced, perhaps because the largest and longest Russian rivers flow there. Menchikov (1995, 356–57) did not see major Siberian rivers as significant for humanity, because they all flow to the Arctic Ocean, which is frozen most of the time. Certainly, at the global level, the great Siberian rivers have not played as big a role as the large rivers of more temperate areas, such as the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Indus River, the Ganges, the Yellow River, or the Yangtze. Nevertheless, this does not mean that their significance for the local human communities and cultures is not immense.

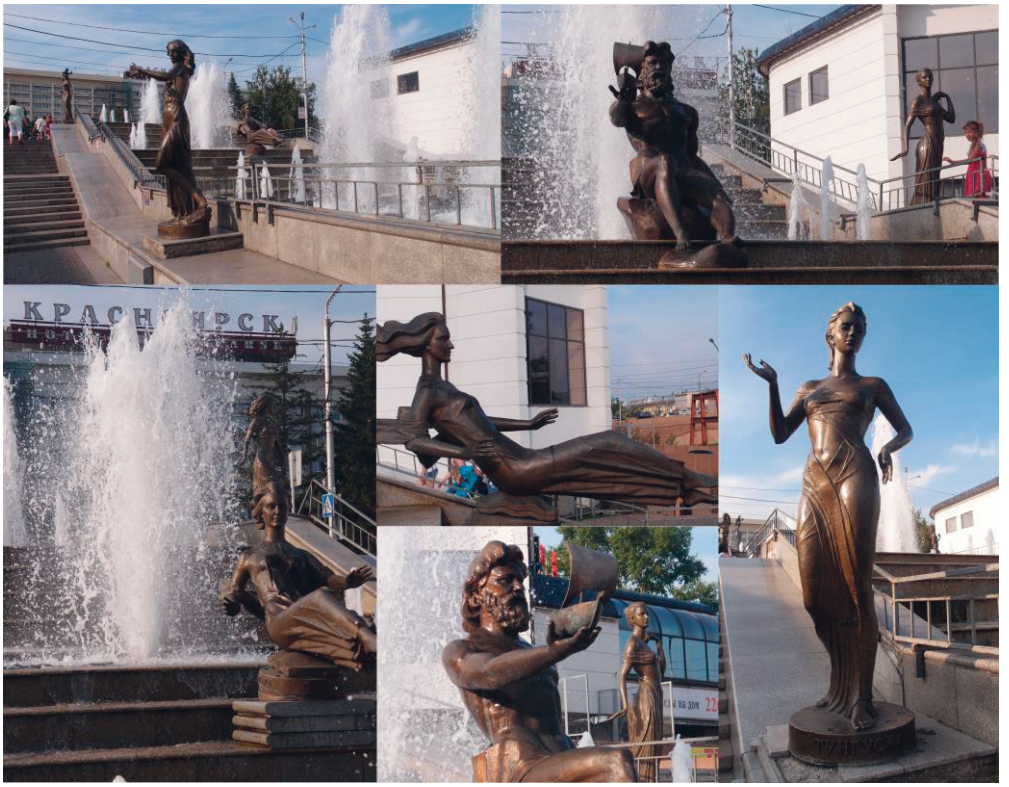

Figure 1. *Rivers of Siberia*, a water complex in central Krasnoyarsk. Photos: Mika Perkiömäki, 2013.

Rivers of Siberia also reflects the human tendency to attach gendered meanings to rivers. People have for ages referred to the Yenisei as their father, while the Volga has been thought of as the mother of Russians. Gendered meanings of rivers and

creatures living in them appear also in *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and more research is needed to better understand their ecocritical significance.

The main question that has been driving my research is this: what is the Russian river? My dissertation aims to shed light on what kind of environmental meanings the river embodies in Russian literature, and I will do this by analysing three case studies of Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* and one case of it as cultural ecology. My hypothesis is that the river and the meanings attached to it are important factors in how Russian natural-philosophical prose handles questions related to the well-being of the biosphere. Because of this, I have chosen an ecocritical point of view for this study.

The main field of study of this dissertation is Russian Language and Culture. My focus is on fictional literature, and all the publications belonging to the dissertation are essentially literary analyses. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of ecocritical studies, the work touches on other disciplines. All the works that I study connect closely to environmental history of Russia, and their writers were prominent actors in the Soviet environmental movement. Due to restrictions in the number of words, it has not been possible to give proper emphasis on the historical background of the dissertation in the publications. This introductory chapter serves that purpose.

An important part of my analysis is to compare the phenomena related to the river's role as a carrier of environmental issues in Russian literature to corresponding Western concepts. I hypothesize that, contrary to the common belief, the environmental discussion in Russia has often followed similar patterns as in the West. It has done this from its own premises, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1.4, independently of the Western discourse, and in some cases even earlier than in the West. I will present my research questions more thoroughly in Chapter 2.2. I aim to answer the question "Does something we could call 'Russian ecocriticism' exist?" in the concluding third chapter. In the final subchapter 3.3, I also briefly review the main specifics of Russian environmental literature that, according to this study, differentiate it from the international environmental mainstream, namely nationalism and conservatism. The core of my study is, however, in the interconnections of Russian environmental literature and that produced elsewhere.

1.1 Rivers of the noosphere

In 1920s Paris, three intellectuals met to discuss the evolution of the biosphere. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French scientist, philosopher, and Jesuit priest who had first-hand evidence of the effects of modern weaponry on the environment in the First World War. Edouard Le Roy (1870–1954) was his close associate. A mathematician and natural philosopher, Le Roy was interested in how human activities were changing the biosphere. The third man, Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadskii (1863–1945), was a Soviet scientist who lived in Paris from 1922 to 1926. Then in his sixties, Vernadskii was an established mineralogist and geochemist who was developing a completely new branch of science called biogeochemistry. The three scientists noted how human reason had initiated processes that were increasingly changing the biosphere. To denote the new stage in the evolution of the biosphere, they developed the concept of the noosphere, the sphere of reason (Bailes 1990, 162).[4]

While for the deeply religious Teilhard de Chardin and Le Roy, the noosphere was a higher level of the biosphere, a kind of thinking layer above it, for Vernadskii it was inseparable from the biosphere (Samson and Pitt 1999, 5). He articulated the idea of people as a new and dominant geological force already in 1924 in his *La géochimie*, and he started to popularize the noosphere as a term in the 1930s to denote the stage to which the biosphere was evolving (Vernadskii 1924, 344; Vernadskii 1991, 20, 43). This step was initiated by scientific thought, which had inflicted irreversible changes on the geology of the planet. In the age of the noosphere, it is not only geological and biological processes that affect the Earth's geology, but also reason. Although Vernadskii often writes about humanity as the initiator of these changes, strictly speaking the notion of the noosphere implicates the general mental development of organisms as the originator.[5]

Vernadskii's noosphere became a popular concept in Soviet debates on the relationship of society and nature in the 1970s (Bassin 2016, 134). In 1984, the eminent philologist and cultural philosopher Dmitrii Likhachëv (2000, 92) wanted to highlight humanity's role in the transformation of the biosphere, and he proposed the notion of the homosphere (*gomosfera*) as an extension of the noosphere. Likhachëv's idea was that the term 'noosphere' effaced humanity's decisive impact on the biosphere, but 'homosphere' links directly to the actions of the human

[4] *Noos* is Ancient Greek for 'mind' or 'intellect'.

[5] For more on Vernadskii's understandings of the noosphere, see Publication III, 21–22; Publication IV, 8–10.

species. Likhachëv's homosphere has not, however, become such an established concept as Vernadskii's noosphere, either in Russia or elsewhere. In the post-Soviet period, the noosphere has been referred to in Russia's governmental documentation about its plans for sustainable development (see Oldfield 2001; Oldfield and Shaw 2006). In this vision, the sustainable development of humanity will lead to the emergence of the noosphere, which is – contrary to Vernadskii and Likhachëv – understood as a state of harmony between humankind and the nonhuman environment.

Outside the Soviet Union and Russia, the noosphere has attracted less attention. Nevertheless, as Steffen et al. (2011, 843–45) explain, it is an important antecedent of the Anthropocene, which has become one of the central buzzwords of the environmental thinking of the twenty-first century. Atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer proposed the idea of the Anthropocene in their short pamphlet in 2000. They considered the numerous major impacts of human activities on the Earth and suggested that the role of humankind in geology and ecology has reached such a scale and long-term impact that it would be appropriate to use the term "Anthropocene" to denote the current geological epoch. They argued that an appropriate date for the transition from the post-glacial geological epoch of the Holocene to the Anthropocene would be the latter part of the eighteenth century, because since then "the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable" and "data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several 'greenhouse gases', in particular CO_2 and CH_4" (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, 17).

The idea of the Anthropocene is very close to the noosphere, but it highlights human agency rather than the general mental development of organisms, which Vernadskii's concept implies. It is also a much more recent idea than the noosphere, and, unlike the noosphere, it is a direct reaction to the global environmental crisis of the last few decades. This difference is essential, because in the 1930s no one, not even Vernadskii, was aware of the actual environmental threats that supporters of the emergence of the Anthropocene now take for granted. However, Vernadskii was fully aware that scientific thought had a destructive potential for the well-being of the biosphere (see Publication IV, 9). Because of this, he has been regarded as a founder of modern environmentalism (Samson and Pitt 1999, 55). In this respect, the noosphere does not differ substantially from the Anthropocene. The similarity of contemporary conception of the Anthropocene and Vernadskian thought is apparent already in Vernadskii's (1998) idea of the biosphere. As Jacques Grinevald (1998, 25) notes, while the Teilhardian biosphere has an "anthropocentric view of

life", a "biocentric view of the nature's economy" characterizes the biosphere of Vernadskii.

Clive Hamilton and Grinevald (2015) argue that the concept of the Anthropocene is deeply rooted in the development of Earth system science in the late twentieth century, and that due to this, the noosphere – or indeed any other concept – cannot be considered as a precursor of the Anthropocene. Alec Brookes and Elena Fratto (2020, 9–10) object to this and claim that Vernadskii's understanding of the biosphere is consistent with the "systematic interrelation of the atmosphere, the Earth's geological strata, and the ocean" that is central for Earth system science. They further state that both the problem and solution to the Anthropocene have been attributed too much to Anglo-American and western European actors alone (ibid., 11). In light of my current study, it is evident that Russian writing and philosophical practices are worth attention in terms of the history and emergence of the Anthropocene. As I show in Publication III (p. 21–22), Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* used the concept of the noosphere in a similar way as the Anthropocene is used in the twenty-first century. In his 1993 work *Ėkologicheskii roman* ("An Environmental Novel"), Sergey Zalygin, an influential Soviet-Russian environmentalist and writer, presents the failure to understand the consequences of Vernadskii's noosphere as the reason for the immense environmental destruction in the Soviet Union (see Publication III).

It is sometimes noted that the term 'Anthropocene' originated in the Soviet Union (see Brookes and Fratto 2020, 8). In 1922, the Russian geologist Aleksei Pavlov renamed the current geological period, which was known as the Quaternary, *chetvertichnaia sistema (period)* in Russian. Pavlov saw this term as an anachronism from the nineteenth century and wanted to coin a new term that would be more in line with the earlier geological periods of the Cenozoic Era, the Paleogene (*paleogena*) and the Neogene (*neogena*). The term he suggested was *antropogenovaia sistema (period)*, or *antropogen* (*Bol´shaia sovetskaia ėntsiklopediia* 1970, 100, 104). This has been translated into English as both the Anthropogene and Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin 2015, 173). The English translation of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1970, 140) translates it as "'Anthropogenic system (period)', or 'Anthropocene'". The term has to some extent been used in Russia in parallel with the term Quaternary, but not in the Anglophone world. Thus, Pavlov's *antropogen* refers to the period of the last 2.5 million years or so and has a very different timescale than today's understanding of the Anthropocene. Further, the Russian word for the Anthropocene is *antropotsen* rather than *antropogen*, so the similarity of Pavlov's term to the Anthropocene is rather coincidental. Nevertheless, despite the difference in timescale and the exact wording,

Pavlov's *antropogen* does share with contemporary science the fundamental understanding that humans are geological dominants.

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the Anthropocene has become an ever more widely discussed concept. Debate continues about whether it really is a proper geological epoch, and, if it is, when it began. The emergence of the so-called 'Great Acceleration' of the period after the Second World War is widely acknowledged, however. Steffen et al. (2011, 845) call it the second phase of the Anthropocene, the period of "worldwide industrialization, techno-scientific development, nuclear arms race, population explosion and rapid economic growth". Johan Rockström et al. (2009) have identified nine "planetary boundaries", thresholds that if overstepped could generate unacceptable environmental change. According to the researchers, three of these boundaries have already been crossed, namely global warming, rate of biodiversity loss and the amount of N_2 removed from the atmosphere for human use (ibid., 473). They are consequences of the Anthropocene and the Great Acceleration, and global warming in particular is currently inflicting major changes in political life in many societies.

The idea of the Anthropocene has been well received in the humanities, which have studied the "cultural, ethical, and personal implications of the concept" (Kerridge 2017, xiii). This has given rise to the term 'environmental humanities', denoting the interdisciplinary fields of study that "address the complexities of material networks that cross through local and global cultures, economic and social practices, and political discourses" (Oppermann and Iovino 2017, 1). Interdisciplinarity lies at the heart of environmental humanities, which bring together the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences "to address the current ecological crises from closely knit ethical, cultural, philosophical, political, social and biological perspectives" (ibid.).

One strand of environmental humanities has focused on water, which is an indispensable but also destructive element of life. According to social scientist Jason M. Kelly (2018, xviii), "human processes use half of all the freshwater that exists". The history of water has received attention since the formation of an academic association concerning it in 2001 and the appearance of a journal dedicated to the field (*Water History*) in 2009. Veronica Strang (2004) has studied by ethnographic means the social, spiritual, political and environmental meanings in the cultural context of the River Stour in Dorset. She suggests that, despite the evident need for conservation, extensive "water usage is driven by deep rationality and, ironically, a yearning for social reconnection and reconciliation with nature" (ibid., 2). Jamie Linton (2010) has explored the history of water and concluded that water is a

dynamic process that depends on us. Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrid Neimanis (2013, 10) show how water seeps into our language and mental world through watery idioms and metaphors – indeed, we not only think about water but also *with* water (Linton 2010, 38). Karlheinz Cless and Hans Peter Hahn (2012, 9) emphasize the understanding of social and cultural valuations of water, which is neglected in perspectives that reduce water "to a problem of supply or to questions of value and price". Water as social and cultural space was the focus of the research project that formed the genesis of this dissertation. One of the outcomes of this project, the book *Water in Social Imagination: From Technological Optimism to Contemporary Environmentalism*, edited by Jane Costlow, Yrjö Haila and Arja Rosenholm (2017), considered what knowing water might mean.

Ordinarily, water has been researched only as a 'resource', as a quantifiable and instrumentalized substance, but its symbolic power is also strong. Fiction, which often makes use of symbolic discourses to tickle our imagination, can especially well employ this symbolic power of water. In fiction, water can be used as a means of boosting a more environmentally aware human–nature relationship, but it can also be used as a tool for emphasizing the oppositional pairing of nature and culture (see Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis 2013). In the Soviet Union, it played both roles. According to Cynthia Ruder (2018, 21), water was highly important for the construction of Stalinism in both practical and metaphorical terms. By the late 1960s, water pollution had become the country's main resource conservation issue (Josephson et al. 2013, 222). The Volga was especially detrimentally affected; by 1990, almost one-third of Soviet untreated or partially treated effluent discharge ended up into its waters (Peterson 1993, 75).

Water-focused research, inspired by environmental humanities and the challenges of the noosphere and the Anthropocene, is the context where my current study on the imagined riverography and meanings of the river in Russian literature belongs. It is part of the trend stretching over the past few decades wherein the attention of scholars of rivers in the humanities has shifted from rivers as a backdrop of human life to the rivers themselves, their environmental change and human impacts upon them (see Mauch and Zeller 2008, 2; Pettinaroli and Mutis 2013; Skinner 2013; White 1995). According to Rockström et al. (2009, 473), increasing consumption of freshwater by humans is threatening one of the nine "planetary boundaries", global freshwater use. Technological and policy solutions are not adequate to address the challenge of water security in the age of the Anthropocene. As Kelly (2018, xvii) argues, it "requires a holistic approach premised on a better understanding of the complex dynamics between human societies and their environments". My

dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the better understanding that Kelly insists on by explaining the dynamics between Russian literature and the Russian river. I will more explicitly open up these dynamics in the second chapter, which concentrates on the studies I have done.

An essential starting point for my research is the dual characteristic of rivers as a source of life and death. Thanks to their vital role in the hydrological cycle, rivers are an essential precondition of all forms of life on Earth, but their work is also destructive. Robert Brittain (1958, 23–24) notes that in the shaping of the Earth, the destructive action of rivers is even more significant. Moreover, my dissertation "recognizes the centrality of rivers in the human past", as Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted (2015, 1) notes on the recent trend of scholarship on rivers. It acknowledges the rich collective memories that have always been attached to rivers, as well as the important roles that rivers have played in mythologies and folk tales. At the same time, it concentrates on the contemporary challenges for the riverine environments and their human communities that were caused by Soviet modernization.

A significant recent contribution for a better understanding of the dynamics between rivers and human societies is the article collection *Rivers of the Anthropocene*, edited by Kelly et al. (2018). This comparative study of global river systems attempts to "give voice to how we got to our present human-impacted river systems" (Syvitski 2018, xii) and show how rivers are cultural worlds, "shaped at the interface between humans and nature" (Kelly 2018, xv). It recognizes that social, cultural and political solutions are essential to address the pending water crisis, because "culture shapes attitudes, and society determines actions", and human systems are not discrete from natural systems (ibid., xviii–xix). The volume, which addresses problems ranging from irrigation management in the Blue Nile Basin to the environmental history of the Seine and an ethnography of the Singapore River, reminds us that rivers have massively affected the history of humankind, and not only the other way around.

Rivers of the Anthropocene does not, however, provide any insight into the role of rivers in the Russian context, nor does it explore the ways in which fictional literature has represented the river. These topics are the focus of my dissertation, which concentrates on the role of Russian rivers in the rapid modernization of the Soviet period as perceived in some of the most widely published and read Russian writing of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period as well as in Russian philosophical practices of the late twentieth century. Margaret Ziolkowski's (2020) aforementioned *Rivers in Russian Literature* focuses on the geographical, historical and folkloric contexts and mostly lacks the ecocritical perspective of my study, which is based on deep analyses that concentrate on a few key texts. Ziolkowski's study is more like a

review of a large body of literature, and she studies mostly different rivers from my work, which focuses less on the characteristics of individual rivers than on the Russian river in general.

The current water crisis and the devastated state of the major rivers is an important lens on the larger question that forms the backdrop of my work. After the break-up of the USSR in 1991, Western researchers avidly disclosed the critical state of the Soviet environment. The most influential work was Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly Jr's (1992) *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature under Siege*, which extensively reviews the extent of the ecological catastrophe in the country that had just ceased to exist. More recently, this 'ecocide' position is often deemed too simplistic, because the USSR was only one modern country among numerous others that inflicted huge stress on the environment. Even though we should not undermine the detrimental legacy of Soviet environmental policies and practices, it is not useful to overdramatize it. Despite Stalinism's "anti-ecological ethos" (Roe 2020, 33), even under Stalin's USSR, environmentalism survived, and the forests of the Russian heartland were preserved from hyperindustrialism (Brain 2010, 93; Brain 2011, 2).

Steven Solomon's (2010) extensive survey shows how water has as an indispensable resource been used and fought over from ancient times up until today, where it is becoming more scarce and being treated as 'the new oil'. Solomon's focus is on geopolitical issues, such as clashes between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers during the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the construction of the Aswan High Dam that ensued. Guido Hausmann (2005) shows how Vasilii Rozanov's essay entitled "Russki Nil" from 1907 likens the Volga to the Nile in how the people inhabiting their banks perceive the rivers as their sacred nourishers. The cultural consequences of damming the Nile are critically handled in Russian natural-philosophical prose, which presents the cultural connection of the river to human communities as being lost due to the dam, which was built with Soviet aid (Publication III).

Riverine ecosystems have been greatly affected by dam-building, the most notable example being the disastrous shrinking of the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The discharge of the main rivers in the European part of the Soviet Union (the Volga, the Dniestr, the Dnieper and the Don) has been reduced by 50–70 per cent (McCully 2001, 45). Ageing dams are another threat; in 2009, the Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric plant in western Siberia suffered a catastrophic accident when a failed turbine flooded the station building, resulting in the death of 75 people and massive repair operations.

Russian natural-philosophical prose touches on the history of damming rivers, the subsequent negative environmental effects and the human consequences of large dams. It is also connected to contemporary resource practices that threaten rivers and water resources. This is a global issue. According to Kelly (2018, xv), dams regulate no less than two-thirds of the Earth's running water. They have reversed the anthropogenic impact on the geomorphology of rivers. While in the early twentieth-century, mechanization inflicted increased sediment flux in large rivers, the proliferation of dams later has led to sediment load reduction even below pristine levels (Syvitsky and Kettner 2011, 957).

To get an idea of the scale of the anthropogenic effects on river systems, we can quote Patrick McCully (2001, 7), who notes that the storage capacity of the reservoirs worldwide is "equivalent to five times the volume of water in all the rivers in the world". Large reservoirs contain so much water that they can even trigger earthquakes, and up to 20% of the world's freshwater fish have either gone extinct or are heavily endangered (ibid.). According to McCully (ibid.), tens of millions of people have been flooded off their lands globally.

McCully's study shows how the twentieth-century drive to modernize by 'ameliorating' river environments resulted in similar environmental problems and environmental justice issues in different parts of the Earth. A peculiarity of Soviet dam building was its persistence in trying to rationalize rivers (ibid., 17). In the words of the prominent revolutionary writer Maxim Gorky (1929), the Dniepr was a "mad" (*beshenyi*) and "obstinate" (*stroptivyi*) river. A river in its natural state was regarded as an enemy of the Soviet people that must be made sane and tame. As M. Ilin (1931, 35) noted in a Soviet schoolbook, "man must fight the river, as the animal-tamer fights wild beasts". Thus, the positivist faith in the omnipotence of science and the instrumental attitude to water was systematically taught already to schoolchildren. In general, Soviet literature of the time was harnessed in the service of the Soviet Union's battle against nature and the drive to mould nature to the needs of the state (Ruder 2018, 3).

By the 1970s, this had resulted in 120,000 square kilometres being covered by the USSR's reservoirs (McCully 2001, 17). While these complexes were remarkable technological achievements, their practical and social effects were often poorly planned. Some dams were so large and submerged such good farmland that their power plants did not generate any more energy than could have been yielded by burning hay harvested from the area of the dam (ibid.). Josephson et al. (2013, 167) note how the production capacity of the huge Bratsk hydroelectric power station went largely unused in the 1960s due to the lack of industrial complexes that would

need the electricity.[6] Sergey Zalygin handles this feature of Soviet engineering in his *Ėkologicheskii roman*, where the autobiographical hydrologist-protagonist learns in his youth that for Soviet authorities, it is more important to be the one who does something for the first time in history – blocking the wide Ob River in this case – than to do something actually useful (Publication III, 11).

In a world dominated by the sphere of reason, the noosphere, the Russian river is experiencing vast changes. When a river is dammed, it turns into a completely different state of being. Some Russian rivers have so many and such large dams that today they are practically only a series of artificial lakes. To better understand the significance of these huge changes for Russians, I will next give a brief overview of the general role of the river in Russian culture and how it changed in the Soviet period.

1.2 The Russian river

The river is an integral part of Russian national identity in general and Siberian regional identity in particular. The contemporary Russian writer Mikhail Tarkovskii (2013, 403) writes that "the nonhuman powers of nature are most clearly manifested in the Siberian rivers, which are not only magnificent in appearance, but in the most important things, because life in these harsh lands depends on them". The river's importance for Russian culture has been immense materially, socially and symbolically. Literary works are involved in all these aspects. Ecocritical literary research, such as this dissertation, is interested in all meanings of the river, be they material, social or symbolic.

The material significance of rivers is obvious, because they are useful for economic activities, such as fishing and timber floating, and they are an important source of freshwater. The social significance of rivers derives mainly from how rivers have determined the locations of human habitats as well as transportation between them, and enabled building of infrastructure. In Russia, the traditional symbolic meanings of rivers come from Slavic folklore. Movement and journey are the most usual symbolic significances, with the river also being the route from the world of the living to the world of the dead (Vinogradova 2009, 416–17). Cleansing and

[6] The local cheap price of electricity because of the Bratsk station's overly huge production capacity has recently attracted extensive bitcoin mining in Irkutsk Oblast. As of early 2021, Russia accounts for 7% of global bitcoin mining, a single Bratsk based company alone being responsible of 2% of the global production (Marrow 2021).

beneficial forces are attached to river water, which often receives such epithets as "living", "healthy", "powerful", "lively" and "fast" (ibid.) The Siberian rivers have typically been perceived of as roads, supporters (of life) and teachers (Tarkovskii 2013, 403).

The Russian river has also been connected to political power. This is evident in the fine arts of the early Soviet Union, where Lenin is often portrayed standing next to a dam. In Arkadii Rylov's 1934 painting *V. I. Lenin v Razlive v 1917 godu* the Bolshevik leader proudly stands next to the artificial lake Razliv, formed when a dam was built on the Sestra River in Sestroretsk, where he hid in the summer of 1917. In Isaak Brodsky's painting from 1927, *V. I. Lenin na fone Volkhovstroia* Lenin stands in front of the construction site of the Volkhov Hydroelectric Station on the Volkhov River. Built in 1918–26, it was the first major hydroelectric project in the Soviet Union. In both cases, images of a river that the Soviets have harnessed for the use of the people bolster the political power of the Communist Party that the image of Lenin represents. A similar image of President Vladimir Putin during his fishing trip to Tuva in southern Siberia was published in the summer of 2007. In this image, the president slowly walks, stripped to the waist, in camouflage-patterned trousers and army boots, on the shore of the Balyktyg-Khem River. The river bears important meanings also in this image, although its role is opposite to the one in the paintings of Lenin: here, it carries the idea of a return to wild nature rather than subjugation of nature. The connection to political power remains, however. Another example of that connection is the tendency to portray political leaders swimming in a river as a proof of their vitality and masculinity. Putin returned to Tuva in 2009 and was photographed swimming in the Khemchik River in a widely disseminated reportage of his one-day holiday (see RIA Novosti 2009).

The key to Russia's close interrelationship with the river lies in geography (see Figure 2). Great rivers traverse the Russian lands and they have always directed life in the area, with the main settlements developing along the rivers. Road construction has generally been laborious in Russia due to the long distances and difficult weather conditions, which has highlighted the river's significance as a passageway. Already in ancient Russia, the most densely populated areas were along the banks of the navigable rivers (Kliuchevskii 1987, 85). In the ninth century, the East Slavic federation of the Kievan Rus´, the precursor to modern Russia, developed around the Dnieper and the Don Rivers.[7] In the late medieval period, the environs of the

[7] According to the conventional Russian view, Kiev is the mother of Russian cities and Muscovite Russia was a successor of Kievan Rus´, which fell to Mongol forces in the thirteenth century. The

Moscow River became the local powerhouse. Peter the Great transferred the capital to the Neva estuary in the early eighteenth century, but by the nineteenth century, the Volga had established its position as Russia's most important river.

Figure 2. Major rivers in Russia. Source: Karl Musser, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_rivers.png>. Licence: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>.

The most important and massive rivers on the Asian side of Russia are the Amur, the Angara, the Irtysh, the Lena, the Ob, and the Yenisei. These Siberian rivers traverse through vast regions, where human habitation has always been extremely sparse and concentrated along the riverbanks. The Russians colonized Siberian lands only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so the Great Siberian Rivers did not play a role in the rise of Russian culture. They were, however, crucial for the Soviet state, which strove for rapid modernization from the 1920s onwards. The consequences of Soviet modernization for Siberian rivers are central to my research, and I will pay closer attention to this question in Chapter 1.4.

Railways were built in Russia relatively late, but at the turn of the twentieth century, the railway network stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Japanese Sea. The importance of rivers as routes decreased with the appearance of railways, while the

Ukrainian point of view contests this narrative and maintains that the history of Kievan Rus´ constitutes the early history of only Ukraine.

population centres along the railways grew and developed. However, the settlements remained next to the rivers, as the most important railway nodes were built in cities that already existed on the banks of major rivers (Helanterä and Tynkkynen 2002, 24). Therefore, still now, the 25 largest cities of Russia are all along a river, and most Russians have grown up by a river.

The Neva is an example of a Russian river of small physical proportions, but great cultural significance.[8] Its length from lake Ladoga to the Gulf of Finland is a mere 74 kilometres, but because it flows through the city of Saint Petersburg, the capital of Russia from 1713 to 1918, it has played an important role in the dual character of the city and the way it has been real-and-imagined in the so-called Saint Petersburg text (see Toporov 2003). According to Ziolkowski (2020, 23), the Neva "is associated above all with the Russian imperial project and Peter the Great's desire to make Russia part of the much admired West". Randal Dills (2010) explores how the Neva defined imperial Russia's capital in the early nineteenth century both physically and symbolically. For him, the river provides a lens through which to examine how the city evolved into a more cosmopolitan, capitalist city in the nineteenth century. Water was one of the city's most vital attributes, and the city was prone to floods. These unpredictable conditions gave rise to a vibrant river culture, which the officials later diminished by trying to control the river by bridges, canals, granite embankments and flood control. Dills (2010, iii) argues that water and the river provide the best lens to trace the disputes that ensued.

Culturally, the most important river in the history of both imperial and modern Russia, as well as the most studied Russian river, has been Europe's largest river, the Volga, which flows 3,531 kilometres from the Valdai Hills in the Tver´ Oblast through central Russia and into the Caspian Sea. The Volga is home to several large cities along its course, most notably Tver´, Yaroslavl, Nizhnii Novgorod, Kazan´, Ulyanovsk, Samara, Saratov, Volgograd and Astrakhan. Russian expansion along the Volga in the Muscovite period induced a rich mythology around the Volga, which has been immortalized in Russian folklore as well as later prose, poetry, song and art.

Russian domestic tourism appeared in the Caucasus shortly after the publication of Aleksandr Pushkin's *Kavkazskii plennik* ("The Prisoner of the Caucasus") in 1820–21 (Layton 1994, 54). The Russian heartland was not considered of touristic interest or aesthetically appealing, unlike the western European destinations. However, in

[8] The Neva has been under Russian rule since the early eighteenth century, when Peter I captured it and established his new capital on its mouth. The area has been inhabited by the Ingrian Finns since prehistoric times, and ruled by Novgorod, Moscow and Sweden before the Russian Empire (Kepsu 1995, 126–28).

the latter half of the nineteenth century, tourism in the Russian heartland was born on the Volga. At the time, numerous travel books and guidebooks, such as Vasilii Nemirovich-Danchenko's *Po Volge* ("Along the Volga", 1877), praised the Volga riverscape and its natural beauty, creating a new idea of Russian nature as scenic and pleasing to the human eye (Ely 2003, 670–71). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of steamships served tourists on the river, and cargo ships started to carry tourists too (Zeisler-Vralsted 2014, 102).

Historically, the Volga has been connected to great events, such as the peasant uprising led by Stepan (Stenka) Razin in 1671, and culturally it was celebrated as an embodiment of Russia already in the eighteenth century (Cusack 2010, 142). The Volga has also been an important border separating Russian lands from the Tatars, and despite the heavy Tatar influence along its banks, it has been strongly marked as a Christian river (ibid., 143). In imperial Russia, the Volga was an important symbol of national identity and the unifier of different parts of the empire, because numerous ethnic groups and nationalities lived along its banks. Additionally, the river was a significant route of war and trade to the east, as well as a common interface between the Orthodox and Islamic parts of the empire (Hausmann 2009). The nineteenth-century Volga as the symbol of the unity of imperial Russia was "unknown in earlier centuries" (Zeisler-Vralsted 2015, 10). Later, in the Soviet period, the Volga's role in defining Russia continued, for example, in Soviet songs (Zeisler-Vralsted 2015, 7; see also Litovskaya 2017).

Tricia Cusack (2010, 127–57) has studied the connections of the Volga riverscape and cultural nationalism in Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She shows how riverscapes have played a part in the construction of nationalist discourses. Like other, what she calls "national rivers" – the Hudson, the Thames, the Seine and the Shannon – the Volga's strategic use as a territorial and historical boundary as well as its ability to sustain prosperous settlements by way of access to the sea, facilitating trade and military exploits, gave rise to its early importance. In Cusack's account, the Tatars and other ethnic and religious minorities were symbolically excluded from Russianness by way of the Volga riverscapes, which acquired a Christian iconography and featured a great role in the construction of a Russian national identity and imperial space. This is visible in visual imagery of the nineteenth century, such as how the painters Ilya Repin and Isaak Levitan portray the Volga.

The river meets nationalism also in Soviet village prose of the 1970s. As Yitzhak Brudny (1998, 11) argues, it often idealizes the "traditional Russian village as the embodiment of Russia's moral values". The "traditional Russian village" that this

literature deals with does not exist without a close relationship with the river on whose banks it has been built – it is an inseparable part of the village. At the same time, it also belongs to the realm of uncontrollable nature, which makes it an important mediator between the human community and its non-human environment (Publication I, 153–57). For some scholars, these nationalist overtones even overshadow the environmentalism of much of Soviet village prose. Nikolai Dronin and John Francis (2018, 52) call it a form of econationalism, where ecological problems are only a tool to promote nationalist ideas.[9] We should, however, avoid labelling all natural-philosophically inclined village prose econationalism, because its writers varied in their level of nationalism, and, importantly, not all of their works reflect an unequivocal celebration of Russian nationalism (Publication IV, 14–15). Furthermore, it is a universal feature that landscapes and nature are branded as part of national identity. Russia is not an exception, but it does not mean that the concern about the state of the environment is not real.

Curiously, rivers have played a role not only in the formation of the Russian national identity but also in an understanding of Russia as a 'normal' European country, as explained in Robert E. Jones's study of the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Russian grain trade. Rivers played a pivotal role in transferring goods to the capital, and Jones (2013, 222) notes that the grain trade along them helped to develop Russia's economy so that it appeared to be modernizing in a similar way as the western European powers of the day. Similar connections can be found in the literature of Stalin's USSR, which praises the technological accomplishments of the young Soviet state in building modern hydropower stations and canals.

Catherine Evtuhov (2011, 32–38) reviews the ecological history of the Volga and the Oka Rivers around Nizhny Novgorod and notes how, according to the classification system of the nineteenth-century climatologist and geographer Aleksandr Voeikov, these rivers are of the type where consistent spring high waters are typical. This characteristic distinguishes most major Russian rivers from their European and North American counterparts, and Voeikov reasoned that it is because of the predictability of the spring floods that they are seldom destructive in Russia (ibid., 37). This is also reflected in Russian natural-philosophical prose, which usually describes the spring floating of the ice as a spectacular event, but not particularly disastrous. Evtuhov (ibid., 37–38) also explores the language used to describe various physical features formed by the river, and concludes that the rich vocabulary related to them reflects the significance of the theme of constant flux in

[9] On econationalism generally, see Dawson 1996.

the river environment. She notes the economic consequences of the volatility of the level of river water for trade, but there are cultural meanings as well: due to their flowing character, rivers are often connected to change, but this connection is even closer because of their ability to shape their physical environment in several ways.

In modern Russia, the Volga connects to the Moscow River via the Moscow Canal, which was, as the White Sea–Baltic Canal, or "Belomorkanal", a few years before, built by prison labour in Stalin's Soviet Union in the 1930s.[10] It connects via a canal – opened in 1952 – to the Don River. As Zeisler-Vralsted (2014, 93) points out, Stalin's efforts to rapidly modernize made the harnessing of rivers especially attractive to him. This is also visible in the literature of the time, which often celebrates the conquest of nature in the service of socialism. These canals worked as symbols of the Soviet ambition to modernize and the promise of a bright future. The much-propagated idea of Moscow, an essentially landlocked city, as a "port of five seas" reflects this.

As Cynthia Ruder (2018, 2) explains, the idea that "Soviet power could control water" was important for the sake of these megaprojects and their role in the process of creating Soviet space. The idea of the total control of water complemented the "total *conscious* mastery over nature, people, and events" that was an intrinsic feature of the Stalinist worldview (Weiner 1988, 171; emphasis in the original). Maxim Gorky (1931) wrote about "second nature", which would replace the original or "first nature", the main rival of people, who had been subordinated under its rule. Gorky's (1929) second nature refers to the human culture that had taken the first nature under its control: "we have to redo everything in our own, new way".[11] In Gorky's (1933) utopian vision, it is the "planned, organized labour of the socialist society", the "victory over the elements, over illness and death" that Soviet writers must promote.

Gorky's vision reflects the total lack of understanding of any other values of nature "but the most narrowly utilitarian", which Douglas Weiner (1988, 170) connects to the heritage of the nihilists of the 1860s. Gorky did not tolerate connecting any aesthetic values to nature, and the idea that nature could provide any valuable ecological services that society needs to be able to continue exploiting the natural resources seems alien to him (Weiner 1988, 170; Weiner 1995, 72). The public and the political leadership shared his misconception that there were no ecological

[10] For the history of the Belomorkanal and the Moscow Canal and their significance for the creation of Soviet space, see Ruder 1998; Ruder 2018.

[11] Gorky does not refer to any sources behind his idea of second nature. However, variations of the concept go back to Aristotle, Kant, and most particularly, Hegel (McDowell 1994; Smith 2002; Bertram 2020). More recently, William Cronon (1991) has popularized the idea of second nature as artificial nature erected atop the original, unconstructed world.

limits to the exploitation of the USSR's natural resources, and opposing this idea became dangerous (Husband 2006, 305). Gorky coined his famous slogan "man, in transforming nature, transforms himself" in this context as the motto of the volume on the Belomorkanal he edited (see Chapter 1.3), referring to "a world that would be totally transformed by the human will" (Weiner 1995, 72).

Gorky (1931) writes that the creation of "second nature" is not a difficult task:

> What do we have to do? Cover the sandy steppes with a green cover, plant forests on them, irrigate arid lands with river water, etc. We need to plant nurseries of plants and trees that can survive the sands. Tens of millions of shrubs and trees are needed. The organization of such nurseries, not necessarily large but all over the country, is not a difficult matter. Even pioneers are capable of it, under the guidance of experienced foresters and agronomists of course.

In Zalygin's (1993, 9) *Ėkologicheskii roman*, this attitude about the easiness of the transformation of nature is part of the ideology of the state authorities, who instruct the novel's protagonist to build a huge dragnet in order to cover the Ob and catch all the fish from the river. The protagonist thinks that the idea is insane and impossible due to its vast scale, but the members of the Communist Party Committee say that "it is a simple thing, nothing could be simpler" (see Publication III, 11). Clearly, the authorities had read their Gorky.

1.3 The manifold river in Russian literature

Writing about the Yenisei and the Angara, Mikhail Tarkovskii (2013, 404) maintains that "the main fairway of Russian literature has passed along these great water veins, and each has a responsible writer: for the Angara – [Valentin] Rasputin, for the Yenisei – [Viktor] Astaf´ev". Meanings of the river as imagined in literary works of these "river writers", as Tarkovskii calls them, plus Sergei Zalygin, are the focus of my dissertation. However, the works that I use as my research material are very specific. They were written between the early 1970s and the early 1990s, their writers came from the Siberian countryside (so-called *derevenshchiki*), all the works are heavily autobiographical, and they all bear significant environmental meanings. I present these writers and works in Chapter 2.4 of this summative part of my dissertation and provide more detail in each individual publication. Before this, it is necessary to outline a brief general history of the river in Russian literature.

It is not possible here to give a comprehensive survey of this huge topic, and this is not what I intend to do.[12] I will discuss examples from the history of Russian literature to review the multifaceted development of the imaginations of the river in different times by different authors driven by different ideologies and aesthetics. The goal of the selection of examples that I raise is to show that the river is central for Russian literature, regardless of genre or historical period, and that it has carried a multitude of various meanings attached to it. I give special attention to works, where the meanings of the river take part in discussing interrelationship of people and nature, which is in focus in my own analyses, but since the river has been used to discuss other important questions also, such as the essence of humanity, I do not totally neglect them. I do not intend to offer a deep analysis of the meanings of the river in these examples, but they provide background information that is useful in contextualizing the results of my own study.

Since rivers, especially the Dnieper, were important parts of the medieval Kievan Rus´ empire, it is not surprising that they appear prominently already in the oldest known Russian literature. In the landmark of ancient Russian literature, the epic poem *Slovo o polku Igoreve* ("The Song of Prince Igor's Campaign"), originally written probably in the late 1180s, Prince Igor compares the local rivers in his dialogue with the Donets River. In this work, the Don is frequently called the "Great Don", while the Donets is the "Little Donets". Despite this, it is the Donets that provides the prince with shelter and protection, thus enabling "the Russian land's gladness". In Vladimir Nabokov's (2003, lines 776–91) translation, Igor addresses the Donets with gratefulness:

> Igor says:
> "O Donets!
> Not small is your magnification:
> you it was who lolled
> a prince on [your] waves;
> who carpeted for him
> with green grass
> your silver banks;
> who clothed him
> with warm mists
> under the shelter of the green tree;
> who had him guarded

[12] Margaret Ziolkowski's (2020) *Rivers in Russian Literature* offers an extensive review of Russian literary and folkloric treatment of the Angara, Dnieper, Don, Neva and Volga.

by the golden-eye on the water,
the gulls on the currents,
the [crested] black ducks on the
winds."

This passage gives the Donets a meaning as something that is vital for the welfare and even existence of the Rus´ empire. Despite its modest physical proportions – about 1,000 kilometres shorter than the Dnieper and the Don, the size of its basin is about one-fifthth of theirs and its discharge just a fraction of theirs – the river is not represented as small. Since the very earliest days of Russian literature, different rivers have received different meanings, and physical characteristics are not necessarily attributed to these meanings significantly. This is evident also when Igor continues by comparing the Donets to the rugged Stugna and the gloomy Dnieper Rivers, whose characteristics are entirely different:

"Not like that", says [Igor],
"is the river Stugna:
endowed with a meager stream,
having fed [therefore]
on alien tills and runnels,
she rent between bushes
a youth, prince Rostislav,
imprisoning him.
On the Dnepr's dark bank
Rostislav's mother weeps the youth.
Pined away have the flowers with
condolement,
and the tree has been bent to the
ground with sorrow." (Nabokov 2003, lines 792–804.)

Another twelfth century text, the semi-historical *Povest´ vremennykh let* ("Tale of Bygone Years"), better known in English as the *Primary Chronicle*, also refers to dozens of rivers, most often the Dnieper and the Volga. The selection of these rivers is logical, because the Dnieper was "foundational in the development of Russia", and the Volga is the "quintessential Russian river" (Ziolkowski 2020, 23). However, these references are nothing more than the documentary naming of the places the text handles; no characteristics are attached to the rivers, save the practical features, such as enabling contact between various tribes. Two literary works from the turn of the fifteenth century, the *Slovo Sofoniia riazantsa (Zadonshchina)* ("Tale of Sofonii of

Riazan [Zadonshchina]") and the *Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche* ("The Story of Mamai's Slaughter"), draw a parallel between the splendour of the Don and the victorious Battle of Kulikovo Field against the Mongols in 1380 (ibid., 138–39).

Russian eighteenth-century literature – by, for example, Mikhail Lomonosov, Vasilii Trediakovskii and Aleksandr Sumarokov – connected the Neva to the grandeur of the new imperial capital of Saint Petersburg, the military victories of Peter I and his efforts to Europeanize Russia (Ziolkowski 2020, 108–15). Telling is Lomonosov's appellation of the Neva as *vladychitsa*, which refers to the word *vlast´*, power. In the early nineteenth century, Pushkin "helped redefine the image of the Neva as a partner in tsarist crime rather than a laudable and complacent sovereign of Russian rivers" (ibid., 202). In addition to Peter, it is Pushkin who is most often evoked in connection to the Neva. This is thanks to his celebrated narrative poem "Mednyi vsadnik" ("The Bronze Horseman", 1833), where a storm changes the river from a majestic and glorious component of the imperial capital to "a frenzied beast that attacks the city" and later "a thief that crawls in through windows with malevolent intentions" in the form of a huge flood (ibid., 119). Pushkin's poem was inspired by the flood that took place on 19 November 1824 and killed hundreds of people. Another nineteenth-century poet, Fëdor Tiutchev, used the Neva as a means to express longing; for the warmth of southern Europe in "Gliadel ia, stoia nad Nevoi" ("I Gazed, Standing above the Neva", 1844) and for his deceased mistress in "Opiat´ stoiu ia nad Nevoi" ("Again I Stand above the Neva", 1868) (ibid., 121).

In early nineteenth century Russian and Ukrainian literature, the Dnieper was connected to Slavic exoticism, and it was the location of folkloric creatures, such as the *rusalki*. In Vasilii Zhukovskii's *Dvenadtsat´ spiashchikh dev: Starinnaia povest´ v dvukh balladakh* ("Twelve Sleeping Maidens: An Ancient Tale in Two Ballads", 1817), the Dnieper is described in Romantic terms as mysterious, exotic and dangerous, and the locus of Asmodeus, the king of the demons (Ziolkowski 2020, 34). It is Nikolai Gogol, however, who is the writer that is probably most closely linked to the Dnieper. In the 1830s, Gogol further developed the attachment of a mysterious aura and supernatural forces to the Dnieper, especially in his horror story "Strashnaia mest´" ("A Terrible Vengeance", 1831–32). The story highlights the river's magnanimous generosity and destructive power by depicting its ability to be marvellous and beautiful on sunny days but terrifying and dangerous on cloudy nights and during a storm (Bojanowska 2007, 51–52). Like Gogol's historical novel *Taras Bulba* (1835/1842), the story also links the Dnieper to the Cossacks. Taras Shevchenko's poetry also evokes the special significance of the Dniepr for the

Cossacks, as well as its link with the supernatural, although, unlike Gogol, he wrote in Ukrainian rather than Russian (Ziolkowski 2020, 41).

Depictions of nature that could be called protoecological appear in Russian literature around the mid-nineteenth century. A particular case is Sergei Aksakov's trilogy on fishing and hunting, published in 1847–55. Aksakov writes about the decline in the populations of game and other negative changes in the natural world that he observed while avidly hunting and angling in the eastern parts of European Russia for decades. As Ian Helfant (2006, 61) notes, Aksakov argues for the need to treat the Russian forest resources more responsibly. He also relates the question of logging to a concern about its potential disruption to Russian rivers: "The falling water levels of rivers, which have been seen throughout Russia, are generally thought to result from the destruction of forests" (Aksakov [1852] 1998, 213). Aksakov also mentions how a river's water becomes "polluted" when a mill is built upon it (Helfant 2006, 62). At the turn of the twentieth century, dirtying waters of the Volga due to steamship traffic and deforestation along its banks led to publication of poems, which depicted environmental degradation of the river, such as Aleksandr Navrotskii's "Na Volge" ("On the Volga") and Aleksandr Shiriaevets's "Volge" ("To the Volga") (Ziolkowski 2020, 92–93).

Ivan Turgenev wrote a review of the second part of Aksakov's trilogy, *Zapiski ruzheinogo okhotnika Orenburgskoi gubernii* ("Notes of a Provincial Wildfowler", 1852), a work that, according to Thomas Newlin (2003, 74) is "imbued with a deep and sustained *appreciation of nature as such*" (emphasis in the original). Turgenev also argued for the appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature: "love nature not for what it means in relation to you as a human being, but because it is dear to you for its own sake – and then will you understand it" (quoted in Newlin 2003, 74). In Turgenev's ([1859] 1961, 153) novel *Dvorianskoe gnezdo* ("Home of the Gentry"), the bottom of the river works as a metaphorical place for a contemplation of one's connection to nature, "a kind of peaceful torpor" for the protagonist Lavretskii. The bottom of the river represents a place where a human individual can experience total immersion in the natural world, a state that Newlin (2003, 76) calls "affective awareness". In my research material, a similar immersion, but in a more concrete manner, happens for the narrator of Astaf´ev's *Queen Fish* in the story "Kaplia" ("The Dewdrop"), when he overnights at a camp in the Siberian taiga and feels a deep connection to nature and a sudden anxiety about its future (Publication I, 160–61).

The late seventeenth-century rebellion leader Stenka Razin's commitment to the Volga is commemorated in folkloric style in Pushkin's "Pesni o Sten´ke Razine" ("Songs about Stenka Razin", 1826). Dmitrii Sadovnikov's "Iz-za ostrova na

strezhen" ("From behind the Island onto the Mainstream", 1883) is an example of a nineteenth-century poem celebrating the traditional plot of the Volga's connection to freedom and Stenka Razin. Examples of twentieth-century poets that continued the trend include Marina Tsvetaeva and Velimir Khlebnikov. (Ziolkowski 2020, 69–77.)

Many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poets – such as Aleksandr Sumarokov, Ivan Dmitriev and Nikolai Karamzin – used the Volga as a symbol of Russia and its imperial rulers (Ely 2002, 35). Sumarokov's ode on the Volga, "Oda" from 1760 compares the geographical expanse and diversity of the Volga area to the imperial mission (Ziolkowski 2020, 87). Karamzin's poem "The Volga" from 1793 praises the river as "the holiest river in the world", the *tsaritsa*,[13] and the mother, while Dmitriev's "To the Volga" from 1794 calls it the head and the *tsaritsa*, attributing honour and glory to the river. A myriad of nineteenth-century poets followed and attached patriotic qualities with the Volga, including Aleksandr Vostokov, Pëtr Viazemskii, Nikolai Iazykov, Ivan Aksakov, Spiridon Drozhzhin and Konstantin Sluchevskii (Ziolkowski 2020, 89–90). Later in the nineteenth century, the poet Nikolai Nekrasov continued this trend, adding also a realist representation of the Volga, which became, in addition to an idyll and a mother, part of the tyranny associated with the imperial rule (Ely 2002, 161–62; Zeisler-Vralsted 2015, 69). Nekrasov's poem "On the Volga" (1860) begins with an idyllic depiction of a childhood on the river. Towards the end, however, it turns away from the pastoral past to the harsh reality of the barge haulers (*burlaki*), who did the strenuous job of pulling barges over the shallow parts of the Volga, working endless hours (see Hausmann 2009, 242–55). The river becomes a representation of the lower classes of society:

> Oh, bitterly, bitterly sobbing,
> When I stood that morning
> On the banks of my native river
> And the first time called her
> A river of slavery and longing! (Nekrasov 1860)

Vladimir Giliarovskii was a poet, who had served a short period as a barge hauler himself. Similarly to Nekrasov's "On the Volga", his "Burlaki" dismisses the idea of the Volga as a caring mother and accuses it of complicity in the harsh fate of the barge haulers (Ziolkowski 2020, 82). Compared to the serfs on the land, the river

[13] The female tsar, or the tsar's wife.

may have offered the barge haulers outsider status and lawlessness, and thus relative freedom, which was associated by contemporaries with the free movement of the river's flow (Zeisler-Vralsted 2015, 7, 55, 66). Nevertheless, in the imagined riverography that Nekrasov's and Giliarovskii's poems construct, only negative connotations connect the river to the barge haulers.

Aleksander Ostrovskii wrote several plays about the life of the Russian merchantry on the Volga, based on his trips to the river in the 1850s. The best-known of these is *Groza* ("Thunderstorm", 1860), where Katerina, a victim of two petty domestic tyrants, dreams of escaping her miserable life on a boat on the Volga. Eventually, the river, however, does not lead Katerina to freedom but works as a means of self-destruction when she plunges into the river. (Ziolkowski 2020, 83–84.)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian realist painters – such as Ilya Repin and Isaak Levitan – portrayed Russian society in their paintings of the "Mother Volga" and participated in the construction of a national identity with their works and the image of the Volga represented in them (Cusack 2010, 127–57). In literature, an example of this is Grigorii Danilevskii's novel *Volia (Beglye vorotilis')* ("Freedom (The Return of the Fugitives)"), which was published in 1863. The novel is set in the year 1860, when rumours started to spread that the serfs in Russia would soon be liberated. At this time, some serfs escaped from their owners and returned to their homelands, even though the liberation did not take place until early 1861. Ilia Tantsur, the hero of Danilevskii's novel, returns from serfdom in Ukraine to his home village on the Volga. In addition to associating the Volga with Cossack insurrections, marking it as the site of the rebellions of Stenka Razin and Emelian Pugachëv, the novel associates the Volga with liberation from serfdom and Russian national sentiments:

> Hello Mother Volga! I have lived enough on the Don, in the lower steppe of Ukraine; I'll now live on the Volga! We were once Cossacks… We will now be something again! Our grandfathers came here from Zaporozh´e, fought against the Tatars, guarded the borders, lived among the Russians. (Danilevskii [1863] 2011.)

The idea of the Volga as the mother of the Russians is many centuries old, and it is connected to the symbol of "Mother Russia" (see Riabov 2017). Because rivers have been sustainers of life and linked to fertility in many cultures, they are referred to as "mothers" elsewhere too, for example in India and Thailand (McCully 2001, 9–10). The Angara has also been comprehended as feminine, as "a beautiful and soulful woman" (Tarkovskii 2013, 406). Connections of rivers to femininity in general are usual in both Russia and other cultures, but one of the rivers important for my

research, the Yenisei, is considered masculine and has the often-used epithet "Father Yenisei" (*Enisei-batiushka*). The same masculine epithet is often attached also to the Don, for example in Danilevskii's *Volia (Beglye vorotilis')*. In the city of Rostov-on-Don, on the river embankment, a sculpture called *Don-batiushka* was installed in 2013.

The major writer, publicist and civic activist Vladimir Korolenko lived on the middle Volga in Nizhnii Novgorod in the 1880s–1890s. He wrote a series of sketches of the region, featuring the Volga and its tributaries, the Oka and the Kama. In one of them, "Za ikonoi" ("After the Icon", 1887) he contrasts the Oka to the Volga:

> After the bustling river traffic of the Volga her neighbor Oka makes a strange impression. How quiet it is here! Far away on the other side a sailboat slips along the sands. Beneath the bluff … a dark splotch moves along the shore. It's haulers, who you almost never see anymore along the Volga, dragging a small barge. … A miserable Oka steamboat is running from Nizhnii, its wheels making a hollow, slapping sound against the empty banks. You can't see anybody on deck; even on the ladder it's empty. The only thing visible is the lonely figure of the pilot, almost imperceptible by the wheel.[14]

Jane Costlow (2015, 206–07) notes how remarkably empty and quiet the scene is, but how the emotion is "embedded in landscape rather than human form". Korolenko's sketch also defines the Oka as everything that the Volga is not. Traffic on the Oka is almost non-existent, barge haulers are still used, and the sole steamboat visible is reminiscent of a ghost ship. As the opposite of the Oka, the Volga is thus attached with meanings connected to modernity. It is bustling with traffic, devoid of barge haulers, and ships sailing on it are active.

Leo Tolstoy is one of the Russian writers who uses characteristics of the river to illustrate human traits by comparing rivers to humans. In his last major novel, *Voskresenie* ("Resurrection", 1899), the river plays an important role. The novel's main characters are the poor young maid Katiusha, and the nobleman Nekhliudov. The night when Nekhliudov forces Katiusha to have sex with him is decisive for the fate of Katiusha, who becomes pregnant and is doomed to prostitution and, eventually, banishment. It is spring, and the ice on the nearby river is melting. The floating of the ice of great rivers is a dramatic and impressive event that does not last long, but produces tremendous noise, hustle and bustle. The narrator parallels the fateful events between Katiusha and Nekhliudov with the breaking of the ice on the river:

> From the river under the hill, about a hundred steps from the front door, came a strange sound. It was the ice breaking. […] He stood and looked at her, involuntarily

[14] Translation by Jane Costlow (2015, 206).

> listening to the beating of his own heart and the strange sounds from the river. There on the river, beneath the white mist, the unceasing labour went on, and sounds as of something sobbing, cracking, dropping, being shattered to pieces mixed with the tinkling of the thin bits of ice as they broke against each other like glass.
>
> […] From the river below the creaking and tinkling and sobbing of the breaking ice came still louder and a gurgling sound could now also be heard. The mist had begun to sink, and from above it the waning moon dimly lighted up something black and weird.
>
> "What was the meaning of it all? Was it a great joy or a great misfortune that had befallen him?" he asked himself. (Tolstoy [1899] 2011, 95–98.)

The river seems to be at its most powerful during the floating of the ice, so it is an apt backdrop of a brief event that defines the destiny of a human being. The fact that Tolstoy compares events on the river to a rape is noteworthy for my study, because also in Viktor Astaf´ev's novel *Tsar´-ryba*, the river is imbued with important meanings by being associated with rape. While Tolstoy merely uses the breaking of the ice as a metaphor for a crucial turning point in the destiny of a human being, Astaf´ev parallels the mistreatment of nature by humans with rape (see Publication I).

Later in *Voskresenie*, when Nekhliudov already deeply repents for his sins and tries to make amends for Katiusha's injustice, the narrator explicates the metaphor even more explicitly:

> Men[15] are like rivers: the water is the same in each, and alike in all; but every river is narrow here, is more rapid there, here slower, there broader, now clear, now cold, now dull, now warm. It is the same with men. Every man[16] carries in himself the germs of every human quality, and sometimes one manifests itself, sometimes another, and the man often becomes unlike himself, while still remaining the same man. In some people these changes are very rapid, and Nekhludoff was such a man. These changes in him were due to physical and to spiritual causes. At this time he experienced such a change. (Tolstoy [1899] 2011, 300.)

Perhaps the most famous work depicting the river in the history of Russian literature is Mikhail Sholokhov's epic novel set during the First World War and the Russian Civil War, *Tikhii Don* ("The Quiet Don", 1928–40). It is no coincidence that the name of the river found its way into the novel's title. The epithet 'quiet' has been attached to the Don centuries before Sholokhov, but in his novel's title it becomes ironic, because the novel handles some of the most tumultuous times in Russian

[15] Gender-inclusive *liudi* in the original, referring to all people.

[16] Gender-inclusive *chelovek* in the original, referring to any human being.

history. The Don is usually associated with the Don Cossacks and unsuccessful rebellious attitudes toward the state, and in folklore it plays the role of "beloved source of nourishment and focal point for the cultivation of a martial spirit" (Ziolkowski 2020, 23, 144). Also in Sholokhov's novel, the Don represents, above all, the homeland of the Cossacks, but also their life itself. The qualities of the anthropomorphized river correspond to the ideal Cossack personality and bear a martial aura (ibid., 161). The Don's fragile ice might represent the instability and unpredictability of life, its steep banks could stand for turning points in history, and the shells scattered around its shores may represent the Don Cossacks that live on its banks. These meanings reflect the tendency of Russian art and literature to portray the river as something that is inherent in the idea of the mythical "Russian soul", something that is integral for the purpose of human life in Russia. The river plays an essential role in the way Sholokhov's novel handles important issues in the life of the Don Cossacks.

The October Revolution changed everything in Russia, including the literary representation of rivers. The Neva, which in the wake of Pushkin had repeatedly been marked by nightmarish attributes throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, turned into an object of nostalgia, "an imagined paradise truly lost", in works of exiled writers, such as Irina Odoevtseva and Vasilii Sumbatov (Ziolkowski 2020, 128–29, 132). The Russian river and human habitation coexisted throughout Soviet history too. However, the scale of the human exploitation and utilization of rivers increased dramatically in the twentieth century. Consequently, people changed the river environments thoroughly. The impact on the habitat – both human and non-human – in terms of water quality and species was long lasting at best, extending to the irreparable. Since 1934, all Soviet art had to follow the method of socialist realism, which meant that it should reflect the historical optimism regarding the victory of the socialist system and the supremacy of the Communist Party. The 1930s was a period of rapid industrialization in the Soviet Union, and the planned economy demanded that natural resources be subordinated to the modernization project. This Party policy was reflected also in the works of socialist realism, leading to representations of nature as an opponent to culture; uncontrolled nature had to be overcome and subjugated to human use (Shtil´mark 1992, 432).

In Vladimir Papernyi's (2006, 173) account, the 1930s were the time of "water culture" in the Soviet Union, because at this time water was especially important in the so-called struggle against nature. Inside this 'water culture', the river played an important role both symbolically and materially. The Soviet state believed that a centralized economy and the communist system were essential for the successful

facilitation of major hydro-projects (Zeisler-Vralsted 2015, 12). Huge hydroelectric power stations were built to harness rivers to produce energy (see Josephson 2002; Bahro 1986), and in several key works, such as Marietta Shaginian's canonized novel *Gidrotsentral´* ("Hydrocentral", 1931), the river was seen as a subjugated driving force for modernization, the economy and politics (Rosenholm 2017a). In Leonid Leonov's ([1930] 1953, 170) production novel *Sot´* (1930), Soviet engineers, while transforming virgin nature into a paper mill on the banks of the Sot´ River, become "accustomed to the idea that, once subdued, the river obeys until the end". Also concerning the Volga, the dominant narrative was its actualization "as a locus of socialist modernity", in both literature and film (Ziolkowski 2020, 93–94).

The Dnieper Hydroelectric Station was built in 1927–32. It became a high-modernist nationalist icon of its time and the symbol of the success of the first five-year plan. The futuristic and revolutionary poet Vladimir Maiakovskii anticipated in his poem "Dolg Ukraine" ("Debt to Ukraine, 1926) how the Dnieper will "be forced to flow into turbines" and "flow with electricity throughout buildings".[17] Other notable works, where the construction was hailed, include Aleksandr Bezymenskii's narrative poem *Tragediinaia noch´* ("A Tragic Night", 1930–63) and Fëdor Gladkov's novel *Energiia* ("Energy", 1932–38) (Ziolkowski 2020, 53–55). The optimistic vision of humanity's ability to subjugate natural forces for its own purposes and "the war with the river" was emphasized in schoolbooks, such as M. Ilin's *Rasskaz o velikom plane* ("The Story of the Great Plan", 1930). It also appeared in children's poems, for example in Samuil Marshak's[18] *Voina s Dneprom* ("The War with the Dnieper", 1931), which he wrote during the construction period of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station:

> Man said to the Dnieper:
> – I shall block you with a wall.
> You
> Will
> Rush down
> Quickly,
> You
> Will
> Move
> Machines.
> – No, – answered the water, –

[17] Translation in Ziolkowski 2020, 52.

[18] Samuil Marshak was influential in defining the list of priorities for children's literature in socialist realism (Husband 2006, 311). He was also the brother of M. Ilin, whose real name was Ilia Marshak.

No way and never!
And so an iron wall
was built in the river.
And so against the river was declared
War,
  War,
  War! [19] (Marshak [1931] 1939, 1–2.)

The amelioration of river environments was a theme that was often handled in the literary works of the 1930s. Inspired by Maxim Gorky, the writers produce what Frank Westerman (2011, 129) has described as a "waterworks library", where they celebrate this chapter in Soviet history and "fantasize about the birth of Socialism" (Rosenholm 2017b, 85). An example is Boris Pil´niak's *Volga vpadaet v Kaspiiskoe more* ("Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea"), which was published in 1931, in the midst of the repressions against Soviet writers that Stalin had initiated. Due to his earlier story having been published abroad, in Germany, Pil´niak was one of the targets of the repressions, and this novel was his attempt to please the authorities and adjust to the new requirements that aimed at placing literature under the direct authority of the state and the Communist Party (Huttunen 2015, 475–76). These requirements eventually led in 1934 to the declaration of socialist realism as the official style of Soviet culture. Pil´niak's production epic carefully follows the ambitions of the Communist Party and handles themes that the Party considered pivotal: dam building, navigation and irrigation. The main idea is that the Bolsheviks have the power to turn the flow of Soviet rivers in any direction they need.

In August 1933, 120 Soviet writers that Gorky had hand-picked arrived in a Gulag construction camp to observe works on the "Belomorkanal", the canal that was being built by prison labour from the White Sea to the Gulf of Finland. The writers included some of the best known of the time, such as Shaginian, Pil´niak, Aleksei Tolstoi, Vera Inber and Mikhail Zooshchenko. In January 1934, the praising accounts of the construction works by 36 of these writers were published in a volume titled *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina: Istoriia stroitel´stva, 1931–1934 gg* (*Belomor: An Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea*) (see Ruder 1998, 39–85; Westerman 2011, 59–80).

The Soviet sniper Vasilii Zaitsev's declaration "there is no land for us beyond the Volga" became a rallying call during the Battle of Stalingrad on the west bank of the Volga against the invading German forces in the autumn and winter of 1942–43.

[19] I have translated the verses as literally as possible.

The struggle over Stalingrad produced the association of the Volga with the heroic defence of the Red Army and the perseverance of the inhabitants of the city. This association is commemorated in numerous literary works, such as Evgenii Dolmatovskii's poem "Razgovor Volgi s Donom" ("Conversation of the Volga with the Don", 1942), Konstantin Simonov's novella *Dni i nochi* ("Days and Nigths", 1944), Gennadii Goncharenko's novel *Volga – russkaia reka* ("The Volga is a Russian River", 1970) and Viktor Nekrasov's novel *V okopakh Stalingrada* ("In the Trenches of Stalingrad", 1946) (Ziolkowski 2020, 94–95). The Khrushchev administration changed the name of the city to Volgograd in 1961, thus commemorating the role of the river – rather than Stalin – in the victory of the Soviet forces.

Konstantin Paustovskii (1892–1968) earned a place as one of the most respected and popular authors of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. His historical and autobiographical fiction, such as the novels *Kara-bugaz* (1932) and *Kolkhida* (1934), focused on life in and with nature and "actively participated in creating the imaginary geography of the 1930s" (Rosenholm 2017b, 79). The aims of this imaginary landscape reconstruction work were "the mastery and conquest of both space and social desire, and the remaking of nature in man's image" (ibid., 83). The works that Paustovskii wrote in the post-war years at the turn of the 1950s, during the Stalin-initiated Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature (see Chapter 1.4), continue this trend. The novel *Rozhdenie moria* ("Birth of the Sea", 1952) narrates the construction works of the Volga–Don canal, and represents rivers as the "persistent" and "recalcitrant" inner enemy that must be subdued (Paustovskii 1952, 24)[20]. The fight against nature is compared to the fight against the external enemy of the 1940s, Nazi Germany: "You have been at the front of Stalingrad, defended Moscow, captured Berlin. […] We have a similar front line here as back then." (Ibid., 189.)

In the spirit of immense technological optimism and faith in humanity's ability to totally control its environment, the construction workers connect the two great rivers by a navigable canal and build a giant dam on the Don, creating a huge artificial lake and a vast irrigation system in the barren southern steppe, which had been devoid of water until then. The natural state of rivers is described as "wasteful", because most Russian rivers flow to the north through lands where human life is nigh on impossible (ibid., 139). In the novel, these rivers become bountiful only through human reconstruction work. These bountiful Soviet rivers contribute to the cultural self-understanding of the Soviet Union as part of a new modern world.

The construction workers view nature as their "eternal opponent" and have learnt to "subjugate it to total obedience in their work in the creation of the rich and happy

[20] The text version of *Rozhdenie moria* I use is from the 1956 Finnish translation, *Meren synty*.

Soviet country" (Paustovskii 1952, 25). Nature has a calming effect on them only when it is under their "total control" (ibid.). Still, the novel approaches the great rivers with respect. The Volga is described as "mighty" (ibid., 90), and when the narrator wonders how advanced must be the civilization that is able to build a dam and a power station on such a great river, he states: "I looked at the Volga. One could barely discern the opposite shore. Such is the river as are its people!" (Ibid., 104) The comparison of rivers to people reminds us of Tolstoy, although his *Voskresenie* compares rivers to people on a metaphorical level, while *Rozhdenie moria* states a true likeness in how the Volga is as great as the people who live around it.

Before the canal, navigating the Don was dangerous in Pauskovskii's novel. The Don is a "capricious" and "constantly mischievous" (ibid., 133) river, which becomes especially "furious" during the spring flood (ibid., 196). Nevertheless, even these great rivers cannot resist the human will. At the end of the novel, the construction is complete and the rivers tamed. The Don "finds the human-made channel" (ibid., 224) and becomes safe to navigate, while the Volga is so calm, void of swells and rocks, that it even makes a sailor uneasy (ibid., 240–41). In total contrast to how Valentin Rasputin's works two decades later represent the reservoir of a hydropower station as death (see Publication II), the "newborn sea" of *Rozhdenie moria* washes away "the remainder of the former life" and creates new life (Paustovskii 1952, 131). The constructors know that the climate of the area will be profoundly changed, and they are sure they totally understand how it will change and that all the changes will benefit the Soviet state and people.

The awareness of the vast scale of human-induced changes in the Soviet landscape developed in the 1960s (see Chapter 1.4). This new understanding is the backdrop of the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov's Russian-language novella *Belyi parokhod* ("The White Ship", 1970). The novella draws from Kyrgyz mythology in the character of the Horned Mother Deer, the ancestral mother of all members of the Bugu tribe (Mozur 1994, 65). A young orphan boy, who is the main focalizer of the novella, learns of the myth in the form of a fairy tale from his grandfather. In the fairy tale, the Kyrgyz people used to live in Siberia on the banks of the Enesai River – meaning the "Mother River" – now known as the Yenisei. The Horned Mother Deer saves the Kyrgyz people from extinction, and leads them far away to make their new home at Lake Issyk-Kul, thus establishing the Bugu tribe and earning their respect and worship. Along the generations, the Bugu are alienated from the natural world and begin treating sacred deer as their property. They trophy hunt the deer to near extinction, and the Horned Mother Deer is forced to flee.

The main antihero of Aitmatov's novella is Orozkul, who, unlike the boy and his grandfather, does not believe in the Horned Mother Deer. He serves the Soviet state by working as a senior forestry officer for a protected forest. He is brutal towards his wife and her relatives, and instead of protecting the forests, which is his duty, he poaches and exploits the timber illegally for his own benefit. Through the character of Orozkul, the exploitation of natural resources by the Soviet state is associated with vile behaviour, alienation from the natural world, and a lack of respect for ancestral roots.

The ending of *Belyi parokhod* received heavy criticism in the Soviet press, because it is tragic, even hopeless (Mozur 1994, 62). The Horned Mother Deer returns, but Orozkul forces the boy's grandfather to hunt her for meat. The boy, for whom the Horned Mother Deer is the only mother he knows, is horrified when he finds Orozkul cracking her lifeless skull and pulling her horns out for a trophy. The boy, who knows nothing of his father, save that he works on a ship on Issyk-Kul, has seen a white ship travelling on the lake with his binoculars from the mountains, and imagines that his father works aboard. In his despair over the loss of the Horned Mother Deer, he decides to escape to his father. He imagines that he is a fish who can swim along the river to the lake and the white ship. He steps into the river water and starts to swim, but the narrator's words imply that this is practically a suicide: "Did you know that you will never turn into a fish. That you will never reach Issyk-Kul" (Aitmatov [1970] 1983, 114).

The river plays two crucial roles in *Belyi parokhod*. First, while the Horned Mother Deer is the ancestress of the Bugu, the "Mother River", the Enesai is the ancestress of all the Kyrgyz tribes. In this role, the river is associated with life; without it, the Kyrgyz would not exist. The second role associates the river with death: it is the river where the boy protagonist perishes in the end. This river is the only way out of the nightmare of the home village for the boy, who loses his connection to the pre-modern mythology when his grandfather kills the Horned Mother Deer. He did it to save his descendants, but at the same time, by killing the mythical ancestress, he kills his own kin. This happens as a result of the alienation from the other-than-human world that has seized the modern Soviet Kyrgyzstan and that leads to the demise of the boy in the river.

Belyi parokhod is clearly *naturfilosofskaia proza* as well as a reaction to the emergence of the age of the noosphere, and its river carries important meanings related to life and death. However, it differs from my research material in that the river is not an active character in it. Additionally, it depicts life in Kyrgyzstan rather than in Russia.

Therefore, I have not included it in my research material. For a more postcolonial approach, Aitmatov's novella would be essential.

In the early decades of the Soviet Union, the country's European rivers were heavily harnessed for production, but after the Second World War, the focus shifted to the "heroically[21] powerful" Siberian rivers, in the words of one governmental publication of the time (Tsunts 1956, 6). Giant hydropower plants blocked the flows of the Ob, the Irtysh, the Yenisei and the Angara as more than 80% of the country's hydro energy potential lied in the Siberian rivers (Kuznetsov 1961, 37). Especially the Angara was seen as a river that "nature had specially created for the production of powerful streams of electrical power", as the "pearl of Soviet hydropower", and as the "river of electricity" because of the high volume and stable flow of its water – from Lake Baikal – and the great variations of altitude along its course (Tsunts 1956, 20–21). It was calculated that together with its obituaries, the Angara could produce as much energy as all the energy production of France, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark combined (Kuznetsov 1961, 39). In his book *Sokrovishcha nashikh rek* ("Treasures of Our Rivers"), the chemist and later Academician Nikolai Kuznetsov (ibid., 36) even called Soviet rivers the "pantry of 'white coal"'. While he recognized the ecological threats of river pollution, poaching and wasteful use of water resources, he did not seem to be worried of the environmental consequences of large dams (ibid., 59–69).

Soviet literature of the time reflects the zeitgeist of harnessing rivers for energy production. Kuznetsov (ibid., 148) fantasizes how "future poets and writers will sing the marvellous charm and beauty of our rivers with new force" in works where "the treasures of our rivers will no longer appear as the gift of nature, but a tribute paid by nature to the genius of humanity, its industry and persistence".[22] A notable such a work was Frants Taurin's production novel *Angara*, which appeared in 1957. Taurin had worked as editor of the newspaper of the Irkutsk dam construction site in the 1950s, and the novel is based on his personal experiences. In the beginning, the river is described as "the pearl of Siberia", "indomitable and brave, severe and pure", and "different from all rivers", because it is "powerful right away" when it drains out of Lake Baikal (Taurin [1957] 1983, 1:18).[23] In the spirit of M. Ilin's *Rasskaz o velikom plane* (see above), the river appears for the dam constructors as a strong and hostile enemy, against whom they embark on a battle. People are destined to win the battle,

[21] *Bogatyrskii* in the original, referring to the legendary warriors of the epic poems of the Ancient Rus´ – the *byliny*.

[22] Translation by Margaret Ziolkowski (2020, 11–12).

[23] Translation by Margaret Ziolkowski (2020, 185).

and eventually the dam is complete. The river is subdued, and it becomes a Soviet citizen and an obedient servant of the Communist Party. (Ziolkowski 2020, 184–86.)

Especially prolific were works, celebrating humanity's – and Communism's – victory over nature that the building of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Station on the Angara, opened in 1967, represented. Aleksandr Tvardovskii published poems of the site where the Bratsk Dam was to be built, the Padun Rapids. In one of them, "Razgovor s Padunom" ("A Conversation with Padun", 1958), the damming of the Angara on the site of the Padun is equaled to Soviet victory over the Germans in the Second World War. The rapids are initially confident of their strength and status that nothing can threaten, but the poet declares that clever people will force them into silence beneath the water. (Ziolkowski 2020, 188–89.) Dam construction on the Volga also called for tendentious novels, such as Fëdor Panferov's trilogy *Volga – Matushka reka* ("Little Mother Volga", 1953–60) (ibid., 97).

Evgenii Evtushenko devoted a whole narrative poem "Bratskaia GES" ("Bratsk Hydroelectric Station", 1965) to the huge hydroelectric power station that was being built on the Angara in the 1960s. The poem depicts the construction in a very positive light and equates the station to the Egyptian pyramids. It includes a dialogue between the dam and an Egyptian pyramid that is initially worried about the usage of slave labour in the construction. The dam, however, convinces the pyramid that, unlike the pyramids, the power station is not built by slaves but by enthusiastic workers dedicated to socialism (Marsh 1986, 45). "It is difficult to imagine a more exalted poetic endorsement of a dam than this", Ziolkowski (2020, 192) concludes.

Despite the prominence of praising the damming of rivers, depictions of agentic rivers also existed in Soviet writing. Alec Brookes (2021, 337, 342) calls Varlam Shalamov's short story "Sententsiia" ("Sententience") a story for the Anthropocene that attributes agency to the river by literally equating it to "life itself" rather than "only the incarnation of life" or "just a symbol of life" (Shalamov 2013, 404). "Sententsiia" was written in the same year 1965, when Evtushenko's "Bratskaia GES" was published. It is one of the short stories of Gulag camp life in Shalamov's collection *Kolymskie rasskazy* ("Kolyma Tales"), which was not published in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s. The river is not a major character in Shalamov's story, which, however, marks the context of the analyses in my dissertation, because around the time of its writing, critical and environmentally conscious prose where the river is an agentic protagonist increasingly appeared in the Soviet literary scene, and not only in prohibited literature, such as Shalamov's work. Before continuing to the presentation of my analyses, it is necessary to briefly recount the environmental movement of the time in the Soviet Union.

1.4 Russian and Soviet environmentalism

The history of the effects of human intervention on the Russian environment go far beyond the Soviet period. The medieval Novgorod State hunted beaver out of Europe, incessant war and epidemics in the sixteenth century resulted in increased exploitation of land and the loss of soil fertility, the great expansion and colonization during and after Peter I required vast amounts of charcoal and led to a considerable decrease in forest cover (Weiner 2009, 281). The seventeenth-century colonization of Siberia was driven by fur trade. The increasing number of hunters, the effective hunting techniques of the Russians as compared to the natives, the tremendous demand for fur in Russia, and the advance of settlement resulted in rapid decline, in a matter of decades, in the number of Siberian fur-bearing animals (Fisher 1943, 94–95). Especially sables were nearly exterminated by the late 1600s (Bakeyev and Sinitsyn 1994, 250). In the late 1700s, fur traders had seriously decimated marine mammal populations, including sea otters and fur seals, in the North Pacific (Jones 2011). The northern areas around the White Sea had lost their significance as hunting grounds by the early nineteenth century, when the walrus and sable had been hunted to extinction in the area (Tšistov 1976, 100). Examples of lost fauna by the mid-nineteenth century include the European bison, the tarpan wild horse and tur (an ancestral form of cow), while the elk had been driven from the steppe and the saiga antelope far to the east (Weiner 2009, 281).

The first, although modest, measures for environmental protection in Russia were taken in the seventeenth century, when the first forest parks were preserved for the interests of the nobility (Josephson et al. 2013, 28). Peter I issued forest protection decrees for the sake of naval construction and to prevent erosion, but other tsars had less interest in the protection of nature (ibid., 30). Zoologists and agronomists of Moscow University raised protoecological concerns in the eighteenth century with the goal of improving agriculture (ibid., 33). The agriculture of the most fertile areas, the *chernozem*, was based on communes. The communes coordinated strictly the choice and timing of crops, which helped to protect the soil (ibid., 43). A mid-eighteenth-cenury tsarist degree forbade the hunting of nursing animals and mothers, but in Siberia it was often not enforced (Jones 2011, 548). These early protection measures can hardly be considered environmental in the modern understanding of the word, however. The communal system was also a problem, because it was a major source of the inefficiency of agriculture; when the peasants needed more crops, they did not turn to more efficient land use but simply increased the amount of land (ibid.).

The first major environmental concerns in Russia emerged in the nineteenth century, when accelerating waves of settlers onto the steppe, increasing shipbuilding, and poor management of forest resources resulted in massive deforestation and growing anxiety over the disappearing forests (Moon 2010b). While in the main Russian river basins, the area of woodland was halved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the worst affected areas, the loss of forest cover was up to 95% (ibid., 52). This resulted in heated public debate on the effects of the loss of Russian forests. In the early twentieth century, foresters started to favour the protection of forests, both because it was by then the international trend and because of the famine of 1891–92 (Josephson et al. 2013, 38).

Comments on this so-called 'forest question' are numerous in works of Russian literature and the fine arts of the time. In addition to Sergei Aksakov's writings (see Chapter 1.3), these include Turgenev's collection of short stories *Zapiski okhotnika* ("A Sportsman's Sketches", 1852), Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* (1878), and Repin's painting *Krestnyi khod v Kurskoi gubernii* ("Procession of the Cross in the Kursk District", 1883) (see Costlow 2013, 81–115). A particularly well-known contribution to this discussion is the figure of doctor Astrov in Anton Chekhov's 1897 play *Diadia Vania* ("Uncle Vania"), and the famous monologue, where Astrov laments how the "woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the axe".

The forest loss also led to the debate on whether the climate of the steppe region was changing. This further involved a debate on whether the possible change was cyclical or progressive and whether human activities had caused it. (Moon 2010a.) Two major Russian geographers of the late nineteenth century, Vasilii Dokuchaev and Aleksandr Voeikov, studied the connection of climate change and soil fertility for the benefit of agriculture (ibid., 252). In the 1860s, the agronomist and clergyman Ivan Palimpsestov, among others, believed – echoing Alexander von Humboldt's ideas about a "close connection between the surface of the land and the atmosphere and climate" – that "changes to the face of the land would cause changes in the climate" (ibid., 260). By the turn of the century, however, most Russian scientists argued that the steppe climate had not significantly changed (ibid., 263). Voeikov wrote in 1894 that "people could not alter the basic conditions of the climate" (ibid., 267).

The famine in 1891–92 was a game changer also because it initiated the development that led to the creation of the *zapovedniki*, a system of preserved natural environments excluded from most human activities. The government asked Dokuchaev to identify areas for nature preserves to prevent future famines, and in 1892 he founded three research stations in the Luganskie steppe that can be regarded

as the first *zapovedniki* (Josephson et al. 2013, 49; Moon 2005, 168). During the Soviet period, the status and number of *zapovedniki* varied. As of today, more than a hundred *zapovedniki* exist in the Russian Federation, and their total area is more than 27 million hectares (Ministerstvo prirodnykh resursov i ėkologiia Rossiiskoi federatsii 2017).[24]

Everything changed in Russian society after the Bolshevik revolution. Although the First World War, the two revolutions of 1917 and the Russian Civil War that ensued had led to great environmental costs, during the first decade after the revolution, the Bolsheviks enacted a series of conservation measures, including more protective hunting laws, a new law on the protection of nature and a new forest code (Weiner 1988, 24–30). Civil society, such as the All-Russian Society for the Conservation of Nature (VOOP), was also active in the implementation of nature protection laws during the 1920s, a time that held great hope for the future of Soviet conservation (see ibid., 40–52). This was also the period when Vladimir Vernadskii developed new ecological theories and the concepts of the biosphere and the noosphere, reminding the Soviet planners of the limits of growth and speaking against the excessive exploitation of natural resources (ibid., 44–45; see also Chapter 1.1). Especially Vernadskii's noosphere, which includes the idea of humankind as a geological force on Earth, has often been discussed in Russian environmental discourse, including prose literature (see Publication III; Publication IV). However, during the Stalinist period, from the late 1920s until 1953, the conservationists were under heavy pressure and the whole conservation movement suffered serious setbacks.

In November 1920, Lenin (1965, para 18) delivered a speech to the Moscow Guberniia Conference of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), where he famously stated: "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country, since industry cannot be developed without electrification". The ability of rivers to provide massive amounts of power for electricity production became vital to the Soviets. The focus was first on harnessing the country's major European rivers, such as the Volga and the Dnieper. Leon Trotsky proclaimed in 1926 that the Dniepr was "waiting until we harness its stream" (quoted in Deutscher 1959, 211). The Dnieper Hydroelectric Station, which was completed in 1932, gained iconic status as it symbolized the Soviet state's progress and supremacy over nature, eased navigation on the river and ranked third in the world in terms of amount of generated power. The positivist frenzy seized the entire Soviet society of Stalin's period, including the field of literature, where Gorky was an influential thought leader. As the characters of Zalygin's novel *Ėkologicheskii roman* ponder, Gorky and Stalin

[24] For a history of Russian and Soviet *zapovedniki*, see Roe 2020.

formed an "anti-natural alliance" that redefined the natural space of the USSR (Publication III, 8–9).

Soviet engineers were convinced that they completely understood the hydrological cycle and could totally control river flows with a clear understanding of the consequences to flora, fauna and the human cultures along the rivers, as well as the knowledge of how to best mitigate them (Josephson 2002, 15–16). The truth turned out to be quite the opposite. The massive hydropower stations not only blocked the passage to upstream spawning grounds of many fish species, thus negatively impacting the fish populations, but also submerged enormous amounts of lands under their reservoirs. Pristine forests, fertile agricultural lands, and countless human habitations and animal habitats ended up at the bottom of these "hand-made seas" (*rukotvornye moria*), as they were called. Damming also resulted in dried up areas below the dams, flourishing of pernicious algae and massive erosion, as well as "inaccessible shores, treacherous sailing conditions and an excess of decaying plant matter in the water" due to the failure to remove the forests before opening the dams (Ziolkowski 2020, 12, 192–93). Mercury contamination in the reservoirs is another significant environmental problem (Pastukhov, Poletaeva and Tirskikh 2019).

The focus of the Soviet state shifted in the 1950s to the Siberian rivers, which were still in a quite pristine state. The Great Siberian Rivers were seen as a virtually endless resource of energy, and the authorities wanted to transform them into planned, rational Soviet waterways in the way most European Russian rivers had already been transformed (Josephson et al. 2013, 129). The autobiographical fiction that I study in this dissertation mostly handles the consequences for the riverine environments of these activities.

During Khrushchev's period (1953–64), protection of nature was marked, as in other spheres of life, by haphazard turns for the better or worse. Highly polluting projects remained the backbone of the economy, but the government somewhat eased the strict control on publication. This enabled civil society, such as the biologists in the Academy of Sciences, or members of VOOP and other civil society organs, to conflict with the government on such issues as Lysenkoism,[25] the *zapovedniki*, and Khrushchev's devastating Virgin Lands campaign (Josephson et al. 2013, 172–76).

[25] Lysenkoism refers to the anti-Mendelian biological doctrine of Ukrainian agronomist Trofim Lysenko (1898–1976). It states that acquired characteristics can be inherited (Hossfeld and Olsson 2002, 55). Declared supreme in the USSR in 1948 (Josephson et al. 2013, 124–25), the doctrine was largely classed as pseudoscience in the West (Gordin 2012, 443).

One of the first victories of this new environmental movement was to prevent the construction of a massive hydroelectric station on the lower Ob River near the town of Salekhard in the Arctic Circle. Sergei Zalygin, already an established writer of both fiction and non-fiction as well as a hydrological engineer by education, studied the environmental impact of the planned station and the huge reservoir that it was going to produce in the early 1960s (Josephson 1997, 194). The planned location of the station was on low-lying lands. Due to this, the size of the reservoir was to be more than 100,000 km^2 – more than all the reservoirs of the 54 hydro stations that were working in the Soviet Union at the time combined (Dunenkov 1964, 61).

Zalygin understood that the consequences of flooding such an enormous area would be devastating for the fragile Arctic nature. In 1962–63, he wrote three articles in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the newspaper of the Union of Writers of the USSR, where he sharply complained that the decision-makers were not listening to experts on the ecological consequences of the planned stations. As Elena Petushkova (2004, 24) notes, in his essays, Zalygin persuasively based his argumentation on scientific evidence, and he justified his opinions using concrete examples and accurate calculations. This was also the case in the articles against the plans for the lower Ob hydro station, and it is widely acknowledged that Zalygin's articles played a remarkable role in their cancellation. The authorities were convinced that the station would negatively affect prospects for oil and gas production as well as agriculture and forestry in the area, and the plan was abandoned (Nekrasov and Stafeev 2012, 181). Zalygin has written both in his fiction (Zalygin 1993, 28–59) and non-fiction (Zalygin 1962) about his role in the process and hinted that there might have been also reasons connected to the political careerism of one of the chief engineers of the construction plans (see Publication III, 19).

Around the same time as the debate on the lower Ob hydro station, prominent writers and scientists started to write about the need to protect Lake Baikal (see Josephson 1997, 163–203). The 'Baikal question' grew to be the first major environmental dispute in the Soviet Union. The discussion became heated when the programme for the large-scale development of the Baikal basin started in the early 1960s (see Weiner 1999, 355–73). The dispute resulted in intense opposition from environmentalists, who included members of the intelligentsia as well as Russian nationalists. There were many influential names among the dozens of writers that actively supported the preservation of Baikal, such as Aleksandr Tvardovskii, Mikhail Sholokhov, Frants Taurin, Leonid Leonov, Oleg Volkov, Vladimir Chilivikhin and Sergei Zalygin. Later, Valentin Rasputin gained perhaps more prominence than

anyone else as an advocate of Baikal, although he was not yet active in the initial dispute of the 1960s. Rasputin saw the struggle to preserve Baikal as a fight to save Russian culture (Josephson et al. 2013, 249). In addition to the 'Baikal question', Rasputin's writings handled practically all problems concerning Siberian nature (Kaminskii 2010, 89). Despite fervent opposition by numerous scientists and writers, the environmental movement failed to prevent the opening of the two pulp and paper combines on the shores of Baikal in Baikalsk and Selenga, which started to pollute the Baikal waters from the late 1960s.[26] The waters of the Angara also became so heavily contaminated by chlorides, sulphates and nitrates that Feshbach and Friendly (1992, 98) describe the river "an aqueduct for poisons".

Another major environmental dispute that involved numerous writers concerned the idea of turning the flow of major Siberian and northern Russian rivers south towards arid areas in Central Asia and around the Caspian Sea. Of the two projects, the one involving Siberian rivers, the Ob and the Irtysh, was more gargantuan in scale and was called the 'Project of the Century'. The idea had been considered at least since the nineteenth century, and one of the main characters of Paustovskii's *Rozhdenie moria*, published in 1952, fantasizes about it. However, the plans gained real momentum in the 1960s, when irrigation of Central Asian cotton fields drastically reduced the flow of the rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya. This eventually led to one of the worst environmental catastrophes in the Soviet Union by drying practically the whole Aral Sea, which used to be one of the largest lakes in the world. The plans involved moving mountains by using thermonuclear devices, and the scale of their environmental effect would have been unprecedented. The Siberian project would have destroyed the northern marshlands along the Ob and the Irtysh, along with the fish in those rivers, and led to negative effects on the lands where the planned giant Sibaral canal would have traversed, but it might have also affected the climate of the entire Arctic region (Micklin 1986, 309–19). The damage to human culture, its historical monuments and villages – as well as the natural beauty of Siberia and the north of Russia – would have been massive and irreparable, and it would have led to

[26] Originally, the combines were supposed to supply the Ministry of Defence with durable cord for bomber tyres. The production of the cord required extremely pure water, which was abundant in Baikal. Especially the remarkably low amount of silicon in the water of Baikal was important for the sake of the needs of the defence industry. Eventually the combines, which were opened in 1966 and 1973, ended up producing just pulp and paper, as well as ordinary cord and nutrient yeast for pig food (see Weiner 1999, 355–73; Josephson 1997, 163–202).

significant social costs. A vast amount of work was done towards the planning of these projects until August 1986, when the idea was finally abandoned.[27]

The river diversion projects had also faced fervent – and influential – opposition by major Soviet scientists and writers since the 1960s. The opposition grew fiercer towards the mid-1980s, when the plans were almost complete and the political leaders hinted that construction works were about to start soon. Among the writers, Sergei Zalygin was an especially tireless and strict opponent of the plans. He was also one of the first to "see the potential for huge damage" that this kind of monumental project entailed, noting already in 1961 that the understanding of the consequences of the river diversion projects was far too inadequate (Weiner 1999, 416).

According to Robert Darst (1988, 224–25), Zalygin best represented the group that he calls "populist environmentalists" among the opponents. This means that while he accepted the central role of scientific knowledge, he also thought that "its use must be tempered by the introduction of 'humanist' values and, most importantly, the consideration of public opinion" (ibid.). In 1985, Zalygin repeatedly sharply criticized the projects for being "ill-conceived, lacking in economic justification, and environmentally harmful", and he was joined by several other writers (Micklin 1986, 290–91). In an article that Zalygin (1987a, 9) published in *Novyi mir* – the major literary journal edited by Zalygin himself – months after the abandonment of the river diversion projects, he bitterly criticizes the ministries and institutes in charge of the water amelioration projects (referring to them as *vedomstvo*, "the department"), as well as their scientists and engineers for ruining the well-intentioned plans of the state and society:

> The state and society are interested in the conservation of nature, but the department is interested in the maximum (both sensible and stupid) exploitation of all its resources.
>
> The state and society are interested in increasing labour productivity, but the department is interested in increasing their own personnel.
>
> The state and society are interested in concentrating funds on the most important construction projects, but the department doesn't get anything done.
>
> Why is that? There are many reasons for this, some of them earnest and objective. The state decides to create a new department and develops a broad programme of activities for it. But there are different items in this programme. Some are relatively easy and profitable to fulfil, others are difficult and detrimental for the department's

[27] For more detailed accounts on the river diversion projects and opposition to them, see Darst 1988; Josephson 1997, 185–91; Micklin 1986; Vorobyev 2005.

> budget. Which items of the programme will the department give preference to? The first one, of course.

"The department" that Zalygin writes about is, of course, part of the state too. However, he separates their interests from those of the state. The criticism seems to be aimed at the Soviet bureaucracy, which Zalygin blames for causing the separation of "the department's" interests from those of the state and society.

Valentin Rasputin also opposed the river diversion project, which he thought would be as destructive for the Russian countryside as the collectivization of the 1930s (Weiner 1999, 423). Rasputin represented the 'Russian nationalism' variant of the opponents' environmentalism. The central differences to the 'populist environmentalism' of Zalygin were that the nationalists did not see the role of scientific knowledge as important as the spiritual needs that the natural environment can provide, and Russian nationalist opinions played a central part in their articulation (Darst 1988, 241–46). In addition, the doyen of Russian medieval literature and defender of Russia's Christian and cultural heritage, Dmitrii Likhachëv – who created the theory of the 'ecology of culture' (*ėkologiia kul´tury*) and for whom the preservation of nature and human cultures was first and foremost a question of morality (see Publication IV) – belonged to the opposition of the river diversion projects. The question of morality is also central in all the works of fiction that I have studied in this dissertation. The genre of these works by Astaf´ev, Rasputin and Zalygin can be described as *naturfilosofskaia proza* ("natural-philosophical prose"). They all discuss moral aspects of environmental questions in a similar manner to Likhachëv's *ėkologiia kul´tury*, and as I show in Publication IV, the imagined riverography of *naturfilosofskaia proza* exemplifies this particularly well.

2 PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

My research material consists of late twentieth-century Russian writings, both fiction and non-fiction. All the writers that I study were important actors in late Soviet society, not only as writers but also more generally in the public sphere. Their works act as a lens on the position of their environmental understandings in the Soviet Union. I have used approaches and methods characteristic of literary studies, but I have aimed not only for a better understanding of my research material as literature; I have also sought for a more holistic understanding of its significance and role in the public sphere of late Soviet Russia. Because of this, my study also uses concepts that originate from other disciplines than literary studies, most notably environmental history, the philosophy of science, geography and sociology. This kind of interdisciplinary approach is characteristic of ecocritical literary studies as well as the environmental humanities in general.

2.1 Object of study

The object of my research is the river in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian natural-philosophical prose. I study the river and its cultural significance because these topics are important from the point of view of the current global environmental crisis and the challenges it has initiated (see Chapter 1.1). Meanings of the Russian river are relevant also because of the river's great importance in the history of Russia and Russian literature (see Chapter 1.2; Chapter 1.3). In the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet scientists and writers woke up to the environmental catastrophe in the country (see Chapter 1.4). They understood that humans are capable of inflicting massive damage on the biosphere. This led to the publication of prose that handled environmental problems in the country. Ecocritical analyses of this prose help to better understand its role in the Russian society. They will also help to compare and contrast the Soviet ecological discourses with the ones around the Western environmental movement.

I have been particularly interested in how the river and its relationship to humans are represented, as well as what ecocritically relevant meanings their representation conveys. At the same time, my attention is inevitably drawn to the interrelationship between culture and nature. As Raymond Williams (1983, 219) famously argued, "nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language". Williams (ibid., 87) further states that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language". Donna Haraway (2003) has popularized the concept of 'natureculture' to work out the damaging distinction of nature and culture. When I refer to 'nature' and 'culture', I do so with a clear comprehension of the complexity of the concepts.

What in the modern discourse is usually called 'nature' and 'culture' are entangled to such an extent that it is difficult to name any objects that would clearly belong to only one of the two. It is also not clear whether the river belongs to what people usually mean by 'nature' or 'culture', to both, or to neither. I started my research with the hypothesis that Russian natural-philosophical prose perceives the river as part of something that it understands as 'nature'. However, already the first analysis, where I examined the social and cultural meanings of the river in Viktor Astaf´ev's novel *Tsar´-ryba*, exposed the ambivalence of the river's role. In the novel, the river belongs to both nature and culture. Even though it is alien and incomprehensible to people in many respects, it is also an integral part of the human life that has settled on its banks. Without the river, there would be no village on its shore, and this makes the river an integral part of the village. This connection is strongly present in Astaf´ev's work.

I found similar ambivalences in the other texts too. On the one hand, the river is mysterious and incomprehensible, but at the same time, it is an essential companion of human communities that takes part in all the important events of human life. I am interested in how the river connects nature and culture. I further seek to understand what the significance of the river is as such a bridge between nature and culture during a time when a better understanding of the massive effects of human exploitation on the natural world was forming.

2.2 Research questions

The focus of my research is on representations and meanings of the river in literature. By representation, I mean any depiction of the physical world. It is an interpretation of the material world as it appears in the source text. It has a referential

relation to real rivers, but it does not have to be representative of the material world in a mimetic sense. Whether the writer has aimed at a realist and referential representation of the world is irrelevant for my purposes, and my intention is not to evaluate how well the text corresponds to the real world. Instead, I am interested in the meanings that the river carries inside the world of the source text itself – the riverography that it imagines.

As T. S. McMillin (2011, xi–xviii) notes in the introduction to his study on meanings of rivers in American literature, contemplating the meaning of rivers, or representations of rivers to be exact, is like pondering the meaning of life. After all, rivers consist of water, which is the most fundamental constituent of all life as we know it. My treatment of meaning is similar to McMillin's (ibid., xii) in that I also understand it as an energetic fluid, as "something that flows", rather than as matter. The meanings that I search for are not stable or measurable, and they change depending on context and flow in a similar manner as rivers flow. Studying meanings of literary rivers can help make sense of not only literature itself but also the material world that literature represents by providing interpretations of meaning that the natural sciences cannot grasp.

My focus on ecocritical meanings of literary rivers directs me to search for specific types of meanings; those that bear significance for the ecocritical point of view. Ecocriticism is a central approach that I use throughout my study, and I present how the ecocritical perspective affects it in Chapter 2.3.

My research questions have been adapted text by text, but the question that has guided the whole of my research is this: *how is the river and its connection to people represented in Russian natural-philosophical prose of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period, and what ecocritical meanings are conveyed by this representation*? As the works that I have studied often handle meanings of the river through metaphors, the main research question inevitably means that I have also studied these metaphors of the river and their significance. An important part of my research has also been the comparison of phenomena related to environmental literature in Russia and elsewhere: is the handling of environmental questions in Russian natural-philosophical prose unique to Russia, or is it comparable to how environmental issues have been handled in Western literatures? In the individual analyses, I have narrowed these main research questions down to more specific questions considering the nature of each work. The list of the text-specific research questions is presented in Table 1, and the research material is presented more thoroughly in Chapter 2.4.

Table 1. Main research questions of the publications

#[28]	Main material	Research Questions
I	Viktor Astaf´ev: *Tsar´-ryba* (1976, narrative collection of stories)	What is the river's cultural and material relationship with the various people living in contact with it? How do metaphors of the river convey environmental meanings?
II	Valentin Rasputin: "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" (1972, travel essay)	How is the river connected to questions of environmental justice? How are changes due to modernization visible in the space and place of the riverine environment?
III	Sergei Zalygin: *Ėkologicheskii roman* (1993, novel)	How does the novel depict geographical metaphors and understandings through the history of the USSR? How do the metaphorical meanings of the river in the work's imagined riverography engage with real geographical landscapes?
IV	Dmitrii Likhachëv: "Ėkologiia kul´tury" (1979; 2000, two essays)	What are the differences and similarities of cultural ecology and *ėkologiia kul´tury*? How do representations of the river in Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* illustrate its connections to *ėkologiia kul´tury*? How do representations of the river in Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* illustrate its role as cultural ecology?

2.3 Theoretical and methodological foundation

Spatiality has become one of the key concepts in literary and cultural studies in the past few decades. This spatial turn, as Robert Tally (2013, 11–43) calls it, has its roots in postmodernism. Initially, the French philosophers of the 1960s that were critical of structuralism – such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault – provided the theoretical bases for it, but soon the project that is behind the spatial turn and that came to be known as post-structuralism extended into international philosophy and literary criticism. New perspectives and phenomena, such as globalization, the rise of information technologies, postcolonialism, increasing

[28] Number of publication.

immigration and ecological crises put space and place in the foreground and helped in moving spatiality higher up the agenda, because they did not follow the old spatial or geographic limits. Spatiality is important in literature, because writing is a form of spatialization that creates its own cartography, or literary geography, as Tally (2013, 5) calls it. Bertrand Westphal (2011) advocates a geocentred approach to literature and cultural studies that he calls geocriticism, which has been influential in helping us to understand the interrelations of literature and the physical world. Westphal's geocriticism discusses temporal metaphors that spatialize time (spatiotemporality), the mobility of contemporary space (transgressivity), and the referential aspects between the text and the physical world (referentiality).

In the Russian context, the geographer and culturologist Dmitrii Zamiatin (2011, 154–57) has similarly highlighted the significance of the figurative perception of space and advocated the notion of metageography, which highlights the cultural construction of landscapes and spaces by images. The 'image' here refers to the Russian word *obraz*, which signifies "cognitive, linguistic, aural, or bodily forms of representation" in addition to visual representation (Smirnov 2019). Zamiatin (2011, 229–30) also promotes the interdisciplinary mental field between spatially understood cultural geography and literature that he calls geopoetics.

As I noted above, the ongoing global ecological crisis is one of the reasons behind the heightened interest in spatiality. The global environmental movement was initiated by Rachel Carson's environmental science book, *Silent Spring*, which came out in 1962 and documented the harmful effects of the use of pesticides, especially DDT. After that, modern environmentalism has spread to all spheres of life in the global community and had an enormous effect on how human societies work and engage with their non-human environment. It is an indication of literature's significance for spatiality and potential as an ecological force that a literary work was the initiator of these fundamental changes. As Greg Garrard (2004, 1–2) shows, Carson's work, while being mostly scientific in its approach, "relies on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse" in its opening fairy tale, "A Fable for Tomorrow", which imagines a future world without birds. The dystopian opening is probably the best-known part of Carson's work, which is a sign of the power of fiction for the human mind. Usage of these familiar ways of imagining the place of humans in the more-than-human world is a powerful method for getting the message across. Without the fairy tale, perhaps *Silent Spring* may never have gained such a fame it did.[29]

[29] When I gave a public talk in 2015 on ecocriticism in the 3rd Ural Industrial Biennial in Yekaterinburg, I was approached by an elderly man who told me that he and many of his friends had read a Russian

Ecocriticism is the field of literary studies – and cultural studies in general – that is interested in the ways texts mediate environmental ideas and understandings of the natural environment; it emerged in the early 1990s in the context of Anglo-American literature (see Glotfelty and Fromm 1996). It is part of a larger multidisciplinary project called the environmental humanities, which acknowledges the emergence of the Anthropocene and where ecological crises are studied from multiple perspectives, such as geography, philosophy, anthropology, communications and history (see Chapter 1.1). Research within the environmental humanities is based on the idea that environmental problems are "essentially social and cultural issues deeply interwoven with economic and political agendas and thus demand solutions on many dimensions" (Oppermann and Iovino 2017, 3). The ecocritical approach overlaps with geocriticism; both "concern for the manner in which spaces and places are perceived, represented, and ultimately used" (Tally and Battista 2016, 2). The most obvious difference between the two is that geocriticism has mostly been interested in the cultural history of cities, lacking the "green" activist bent of ecocritical studies (see Prieto 2016).

Spatiality, environmental humanities and, most importantly, ecocriticism are the central theoretical backgrounds from which my current study draws. My work belongs to the trend that started in the 2000s and has first been called the transnational turn (Heise 2008), and later the international turn in ecocriticism (Heise 2013). The terms imply the more global focus of research – in regard both to the objects of study and the more interdisciplinary integration of theories, concepts and methods – than ecocriticism's original interest in Anglo-American culture.

I have constructed the research questions (see Chapter 2.2) to correspond to my ecocritical perspective. This means that I have studied the "relationship between literature and the physical environment" from the "perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere" (Glotfelty 1996, xviii; Marland 2013, 860). The ecocritical point of view is biocentric, which means that the interests of the whole biosphere take precedence over those of humankind and that all species have inherent value (Bertens 2014, 226).

Of particular attention is the representation of the river and its watery nature. As a fundamental element of human life, the river has been used as a metaphor for a

translation of *Silent Spring* in the Soviet Union as *samizdat* in the 1970s. However, I have not seen research on the role of Carson's seminal work in the development of Soviet awareness of ecological issues. Either way, the emergence of the awareness of ecological issues in the Soviet Union is largely related to the concept of biogeocenosis, which resembles the idea of ecosystem, that Vladimir Sukachëv, an opponent of Lysenko, introduced in the 1940s (see Brookes and Fratto 2020, 8, 15n7). Weiner (1999, 93) uses the term 'community ecology' as a synonym for 'biogeocenology'.

plethora of things in literature. River imagery has played a key role when building Russian national identity (Cusack 2010; Hausmann 2009), and modern man has signified himself throughout the ages using the trope of the river. Representations of nature, water and the river can be and have been used as means of handling the anxieties and ambiguities connected to modernization.

Ecocriticism does not have its own theory or method. It is a point of view that can be used to study literature and other works of culture "by way of any scholarly approach", as Scott Slovic (2008, 27) notes. The method that I apply in all the publications to study meanings of the Russian river is close reading – the thoughtful and disciplined reading of texts. When reading, I presume that questions related to materiality and ecology are always entangled with cultural aspects and that texts are able to convey non-human meanings. The more specific theoretical and methodological frameworks of each publication stem from the specific research questions of the publications. Each of the publications explores the research questions through key concepts. The main concepts through which I approach my research questions in each of the four publications are presented in Table 2. Each publication has one or two concepts that are especially important for the sake of the theoretical framework. These concepts are emphasized in Table 2, and briefly explained below the table.

Table 2. Main consepts of each publication

#	Material[30]	Main concepts applied
I	Astaf´ev	**trans-corporeality**, space, the river's agency
II	Rasputin	**environmental justice**, place, abstract space
III	Zalygin	**the noosphere, the Anthropocene**, environmental history, development of environmental thinking, rhetorical analysis
IV	Likhachëv	***ėkologiia kul´tury***, **(literature as) cultural ecology**, *naturfilosofskaia proza*, the homosphere, noosphere stories

Trans-corporeality is a concept that arose in the field of feminist posthumanities in the 2000s. Stacy Alaimo (2008, 238) coined the term in 2008. According to Alaimo (2018, 435), it means that "all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is

[30] In order to save space, only the last name of the writer of the main material is presented in Tables 2–3. Please refer to Table 1 for the titles of the analysed publications.

transformed by them". During the last decade, many ecocritics have started to think of their work in terms of trans-corporeality. My reading of *Tsar´-ryba* and its river through trans-corporeality shows how "the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment'" in it (Alaimo 2008, 238; see Chapter 2.6.1).

The concept of environmental justice was invented at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, when North American NGOs started to fight against the fact that poor – especially Afro-American and Native American – communities suffered from environmental problems more than others did (see Bullard 1990; di Chiro 1996; Murdock 2020). American economists had started to be concerned about the issue in the early 1970s, when they noted that the air quality of the living environment correlates with peoples' economic status (Szasz and Meuser 1997, 100–01). Soon sociology and other fields took an interest in environmental justice too, and along with the so-called second wave of ecocriticism in the early twenty-first century, literary scholars who emphasized social ecology started to work on issues related to environmental justice (Marland 2013, 851–53). My analysis of Rasputin's river prose show how it presents environmental injustice in the Siberian countryside as the result of the lack of the river (see Chapter 2.6.2).

The Anthropocene is a concept that has received much attention in academia in the twenty-first century. Another, not so often debated concept that is very close to the Anthropocene is the noosphere. To find out what the noosphere is, we can turn to Sergei Zalygin's (1993, 76) *Ėkologicheskii roman*: "The noosphere is such a state of the biosphere in which rational activities of human beings have become a crucial factor in the development of the biosphere". For more details about the noosphere and the Anthropocene, see Chapter 1.1. Both concepts are important for the whole of my work, but my take on Zalygin's aforementioned novel is most explicitly based on them, as the novel discusses the development of Russian environmental thinking through the concept of the noosphere (see Chapter 2.6.3).

The dimension of ecology that Dmitrii Likhachëv introduced in 1979 and what he calls *ėkologiia kul´tury* is explained in Chapter 2.4.4 along with the presentation of my research material. Its main idea is that the science of ecology should not concentrate only on the preservation of the natural world; it should also protect human cultures. The concept has received and still receives considerable attention in Russia and Russian academia.[31] Similarly actively used in the contemporary context is the Western concept of cultural ecology, which Julian Steward (1972, 36–42)

[31] For example, issue #1(18) 2015 of *Mezhdunarodnyi zhurnal issledovanii kul'tury* ("International Journal of Cultural Studies") is devoted to *ėkologiia kul´tury*; see also Lukov 2017; Uzlova 2017.

originally coined in 1955. Steward intended to explore how environmental conditions influence human technologies and forms of production. Behind his theory of cultural ecology is the idea that the natural environment heavily affects the evolution of culture. My article on Likhachëv's *ėkologiia kul´tury* explores its similarities and differences with cultural ecology, illustrating the differences by examples of how the river is imagined in *naturfilosofskaia proza* (see Chapter 2.6.4).

2.4 Material

A crucial turning point in Soviet social and cultural life from the point of view of my research took place in the 1960s. Along with the rise of a new environmental movement (see Chapter 1.4), where many writers actively participated, the so-called village prose (*derevenskaia proza*) movement emerged on the Soviet literary scene. Many works of village prose were published in great numbers. They were widely read and appreciated by readers and critics alike, as evidenced by the numerous literary awards that the writers received (Shneidman 1979, 16). The writers raised values that were associated with the traditional Russian countryside above modernization and industrialization, as well as village life in the countryside above modern urbanity and the collectivization of agriculture (Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2003, 63).

According to Georges Nivat (2003, 68), the myth of the abundance of the Russian landscape despite its apparent poverty, which developed in the nineteenth century, gave sustenance to the village prose movement and "its resistance to communism's promethean myth". Indeed, village prose emerged as a backlash against the earlier Soviet literature, which was usually optimistic about the future. The 1960s brought with it an emergent anxiety for having to wait for the radiant future. The "concept of progressive time was already failing", as Edith Clowes (2011, 3) puts it. Writers of village prose sensed that the promise of a utopian communist society was becoming out of reach, and the writers turned their attention to the past instead. In the 1970s, the growing disappointment with the utopian socialist realism project increased the popularity of village prose (Kovtun and Klimovich 2018, 317). Soviet readers learned from it that socialist economic management was not dealing with environmental problems as efficiently as the state proclaimed (Razuvalova 2015, 278; McQuillen 2018, 103–104). The writers were mostly middle-aged men who had been born and raised in the Siberian countryside but had since moved to the city. Some, like Valentin Rasputin, had lost their home village altogether. In their works, they looked

to their childhood in the village with nostalgia and promoted the idea that due to Soviet modernization, Russians had lost their connection to their roots in the village.

Along with the loss of the connection to the village, many writers of village prose nurtured the idea that Soviet industrialization and collectivization had also destroyed the Russians' inherent connection to nature. For them, people's humbleness in the face of nature and life in harmony with nature were important themes. Many of the best-known works of village prose emphasize the oneness of people and nature (Gillespie 2001, 226). The movement culminated in 1976 when two influential works, Astaf´ev's *Tsar´-ryba* and Rasputin's novella *Proshchanie s Matëroi* ("Farewell to Matyora") were published. The concept of "tradition" is vague, and there is no clear historical period to which village prose refers with the idea of "traditional village life". However, village prose often connects its loss to Soviet modernization, which started in earnest along with the first five-year plan and Stalin's rise to power in the late 1920s.

The oneness of culture and nature is a theme that Russian literature had endorsed before village prose, whose focus on the "radiant past", from the point of view of the philosophy of nature, stems from the philosophical practices of the nineteenth century (see Publication IV, 10–11). Nevertheless, compared to all earlier Russian literature, village prose is unique in that it flourished in a time when humanity had only just realized that it had entered the age of the noosphere, which Vernadskii had foreseen in the 1930s (see Chapter 1.1). This means an understanding of human reason as a geological force capable of inflicting irreparable environmental damage. It is not the nostalgia for the past nor Russian nationalism alone that explains the emergence and success of natural-philosophically and environmentally oriented village prose, which later came to be known as *naturfilosofskaia proza* ("natural-philosophical prose"). There are multiple definitions of *naturfilosofskaia proza*, but in a wide sense, it refers to any Russian prose that studies the essence of nature (Publication IV, 10–12).

As the writers of late Soviet *naturfilosofskaia proza* were prominent voices in the Soviet environmental movement, they were important influencers in advancing the awareness of ecological problems. Especially science-oriented writers, like Zalygin, played a key role in creating the environmental awareness together with the scientists. An important factor was also the personal experiences of the writers, such as Rasputin and Astaf´ev, who witnessed the negative changes in their native lands. The scientific knowledge and personal experiences blend together in the works of *naturfilosofskaia proza*, where the awakening to the ongoing environmental catastrophe is present. One aim of the ecocritical analyses of my dissertation is to confirm this

by examining the ways that environmental problems related to rivers appear in this literature. For this reason, I have selected works from major writers of late Soviet and early post-Soviet *naturfilosofskaia proza* as my research material. Because my focus is on ecocritical meanings of the river, all the works that I have studied feature rivers as active and agentic phenomena. Most of the works in my research material were written in the 1970s. One was written and published in the early 1990s, and one was published in 2000, but they have deep connections to the 1970s.

All the prose works that I study are strongly autobiographical, and all the works look back on the writers' childhood environment with nostalgia. The autobiographical character of the works reflects the writers' disappointment with the promises of Soviet modernity, which they believed had alienated Russians both from their roots in the village and from their connection to nature. Another motivation for the autobiographical character of the works is that the writers knew about the environmental problems in their native lands. The works handle topics that the writers had seen with their own eyes during their travels in their native Siberia and the Russian countryside. The environmental understandings of these works are based largely on these personal experiences, but they are all fiction. Although all the writers handled ecological questions also in their non-fiction, their anxiety about the state of the environment is most evident and acute in their fiction.

In Publications I–III, I focus on three writers, in whose prose the river has an especially important role and is an active character rather than just a frame or place of events. All the writers were famous, prestigious and influential representatives of village prose as well as prominent environmentalists and advocates for the preservation of Russian waters. I have conducted a close-reading analysis of a major work of all of them, namely: Viktor Astaf´ev, Valentin Rasputin, and Sergei Zalygin (see Chapters 2.4.1, 2.4.2, and 2.4.3). I have not chosen an extensive range of works by these writers. Rather, I have focused on one key text by each author. All of these writers write about rivers in many of their works, but each has one work where the river is especially powerful when considered from my ecocritical perspective.

All the works include the ingredients of the so-called environmental text that Lawrence Buell outlined in the early stages of the history of ecocriticism. The four ingredients that Buell (1995, 7–8) proposes as characteristic of environmentally oriented works are i) the nonhuman environment is present in a way that suggests that human history is implicated in natural history; ii) nonhuman interests also appear legitimate; iii) the text's ethical orientation includes human accountability to the environment; and iv) the text at least implicitly understands the environment as a process.

Even though I have used Buell's list in the selection of my material, I do not intend to create an ecocritical canon of Russian literature. As Robert Kern (2000, 259) notes, "all texts are at least potentially environmental (and therefore susceptible to ecocriticism or ecologically informed reading)". Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010, 13) emphasize the way of reading "rather than a specific corpus of literary or other cultural texts". My reading of Russian natural-philosophical writing does not reflect the realistic and referential approach that characterized much of the ecocriticism of the 1990s. My analyses do not seek to study whether the ideas of the relationship of humans and nature in my research material are environmentally sound. Rather, I have sought to study the ways in which they represent the material world and the environmentally relevant meanings they convey.

My intention is to focus on the environmentally conscious literature that produced prose with its roots in the Soviet environmental awakening of the 1960s. It has been studied quite extensively from various perspectives. Brudny (1998, 10) notes that it had a strong Russian nationalist character. According to Kathleen Parthé (1992), it idealized the "glorious past" of the Russian countryside. Anna Razuvalova (2015, 8–80) stresses that it was often based on conservative and antimodern ideology. Village prose's connections to ecology have been studied especially in the writers' non-fiction (see Kaminskii 2010; Kaminskii 2013; Petushkova 2004), but also in their fiction (see Rudziewicz 2003). Razuvalova's (2015, 274–418) study on ecology and regionalism in village prose writers' fiction and non-fiction alike is the most extensive look at the ecological aspects of their work.

My dissertation brings a fresh point of view to research on village prose by its ecocritical perspective. This means that I have based my analyses on theories and concepts that have often been used in contemporary ecocriticism but rarely applied to village prose. Previously, Dronin and Francis (2018) have articulated their discussion on the movement's econationalist sentiments in ecocritical terms. Ziolkowski's (2020, 192–98) brief review of Rasputin's Angara can also be considered ecocritical. The concepts that I bring into ecocritical research of village prose include trans-corporeality, environmental justice, the Anthropocene and cultural ecology. Further, even though the significance of the river in village prose has been noted before (see Bukaty 2002, 101–04; Galimova 2013, 49–75), my dissertation is the first extensive study on meanings of the river in the works of Astaf´ev, Rasputin and Zalygin. It is also to date one of the most extensive ecocritical studies on Russian literature, and it concentrates more on the interconnections and similarities rather than differences of Russian and international environmental

literature. I present the research contribution of my study in more detail in Chapter 2.6.

The material for Publication IV is different from that used for the other publications. In Publication IV, I study Academician Dmitrii Likhachëv's two articles titled "Ėkologiia kul´tury" (see Chapter 2.4.4). As Likhachëv was an important authority for the village prose writers (Razuvalova 2015, 122), his articles on the philosophy of science connect closely to the prose that I have studied. In the first of these, published in 1979, Likhachëv introduces and explains his idea of the concept of *ėkologiia kul´tury* ("ecology of culture"). In the second article, published posthumously in 2000, he returns to the same concept, offering his updated views on it. Publication IV concentrates on *ėkologiia kul´tury*'s similarities and differences to Western cultural ecology as well as the connections of *ėkologiia kul´tury* and *naturfilosofskaia proza*. It illustrates these connections with the examples of writings on rivers that I study in Publications I–III.

My research material was written solely by male authors. This has to do with the ideologically and stylistically conservative bent that is characteristic to village prose generally. Even though female characters – often idealised and saintly – are central in many key texts of village prose, female voices speak always through male writers within a traditional patriarchal framework as female writers were excluded from the movement (see Gillespie 1998). At the same time, the natural-philosophically oriented works of village prose are the most prominent works of art that can be described environmental that existed in the formally accepted cultural sphere of late Soviet Union. Therefore, a scholar that intends to study this phenomenon, has no other option but study works of male authors. Inevitably, my research material cannot provide an all-encompassing picture of how the river was perceived in late twentieth-century Russia, because it is insensitive to gendered characteristics of people's connection to nature. Nevertheless, for the ends of my dissertation, the selection of research material is justified and unrivalled, and it provides a representative view on the public discourse of its time around the theme of people and nature.

2.4.1 Viktor Astaf´ev's *Tsar´-ryba* (1976)

Tsar´-ryba ("Queen Fish"[32], 1976) is Viktor Astaf´ev's "narrative in 13 episodes",[33] which relate to each other. Along with Rasputin's *Proshchanie s Matëroi*, it is one of the best-known works of village prose.

When writing *Tsar´-ryba*, Astaf´ev was already an established and respected writer. His reputation was based on his realistic autobiographical depictions of the Second World War and *Poslednii poklon* ("The Last Bow", 1968), a series of stories chronicling his childhood in the Siberian countryside. Along with the publication of *Tsar´-ryba*, the concept of *naturfilosofskaia proza* was coined by the critic Feliks Kuznetsov (1976). The foundation of Astaf´ev's philosophical views on nature lies in the natural philosophy of Friedrich Schelling, whose ideas spread to Russia already in the early nineteenth century. However, what is called *naturfilosofiia* in today's Russia – as well as in the Soviet period – has evolved into something else, and the concept of natural philosophy has been used in Russia – and the Soviet Union – very loosely to denote almost any handling of the interaction between nature and culture (see Publication IV, 10–12). Nevertheless, the continuum of pantheistic Schellingian views is apparent in Astaf´ev.

In Astaf´ev's natural philosophy, the river's significance is great. All the stories of *Tsar´-ryba* are set on the Yenisei (Figure 3),[34] its tributaries or their shores. In the

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[32] The ambiguous title is sometimes translated as "King Fish". *Queen Fish* is, however, the title of the published English translation. It is apt, because the novel's eponymous fish is female. The idea of the sturgeon as the *tsar´* of the fishes dates back to at least the thirteenth century, when it appears in Old East Slavic text *Molenie Danila Zatochnika* ("Praying of Daniel the Immured") (Petrov 2016, 80).

[33] *Povestvovanie v rasskazakh* – the genre of the work as presented in the book itself. As the stories are interconnected and produce a coherent narrative, it is a matter of choice whether to describe the genre of the work as a novel or a collection of stories. The original publication consisted of 12 stories, because one of them was censored out and appeared only in the late 1980s.

[34] I have taken the photos presented in this chapter during my trips to the rivers that my research material handles. The goal of my trips in 2013–19 to the Yenisei, Angara, Ob and Pripyat, and to the hydroelectric power stations on them, was to experience the real physical locations first-hand and thus gain a deeper locational understanding of the texts depicting the rivers. My intention has not been to conduct an ethnographic study, although especially my experiences when travelling by a riverboat along the Yenisei from Krasnoyarsk to Igarka brought me into contact with people whose contemporary life intersects with the writings of Astaf´ev in various ways (see Perkiömäki 2015, in Finnish; also Publication I, 153n). Jason Finch (2016) takes this kind of practical and active approach further in what he calls Deep Locational Criticism. Finch (ibid., 2, 5) "defines place very broadly as the totality of human experiences of spatiality" and advocates the significance of the researcher's personal experience in "visiting the places people have written about and attempting … to get a sense of the richness of impressions available, and of the way they have been constructed and discussed". This kind of approach takes into consideration both the real, referential dimensions of place as well as the imaginary, text-internal world.

superficial level, the Yenisei works as a symbol of the stream of life (Saprykina 2011, 267). The river is more than that, however. It is perceived as an eternal partner of humankind, as a vital precursor of human existence, but also as a cruel punisher. A central motif in the work is the thoughtless poaching by the Siberian villagers on a river that is polluted by modernity. This is associated with humanity's ruthless exploitation of the other-than-human world in a wider sense. The eponymous episode, "Tsar´-ryba", parallels the human exploitation of non-human nature with rape. However, neither Astaf´ev's river nor the giant female sturgeon of the episode, called the Tsar´-ryba, appear as passive victims. They do not submit to their role as the provider of human welfare. Instead, they fight against humans with tremendous strength. The "sovereign of all nature", which is the ironic designation of humanity in the work, is only saved from the punishment of the river and the Tsar´-ryba when it comprehends and repents its sins, and asks for forgiveness from the "sovereign of the river", which is the designation of the Tsar´-ryba (see Publication I).

Figure 3. The Yenisei, the main river in Viktor Astaf´ev's *Tsar´-ryba*. Astaf´ev's native village, Ovsianka, is barely visible on the top left on the riverbank. When Viktor was seven, his mother drowned while trying to cross the Yenisei here. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki, 2015.

The river and other waters are present in many other episodes of *Tsar´-ryba* too. In "The Dewdrop", travelling the river upstream to an almost inaccessible wilderness

enables the autobiographical narrator to see himself as a part of nature when the morning dew settles on his campsite. At the same time, it makes him uneasy: will there be enough of this water of life for future generations? In the episode "The Dream of the White Mountains", the river punishes a selfish opportunist adventurer, the urban geologist Goga Gertsev. The hunter Akim, who calls the Siberian *taiga* forests his home, saves the Muscovite girl Elia, who was left in the wilderness sick and alone after Goga had died, getting his punishment from the river. Akim knows how to deal with nature in the harsh Siberian winter and how to use frozen rivers as pathways to save Elia's life. It is tempting to read Elia as a metaphor for Russia, who is on the verge of destruction due to the temptations of modernity, which Goga represents. Only the age-old wisdom of the Siberian countryside and an understanding of the self as equal to nature (Akim) can rescue her.

The stereotypical gender roles of "The Dream of the White Mountains" underline the episode's connection to traditional values. The novel's numerous Christian motifs reinforce this connection. It discusses the moral aspects of the human exploitation of the other-than-human world through Christian morality, referring to pre-Soviet and pre-modern values (see Publication IV, 17–18).

Astaf´ev's book ends with a story in which the autobiographical narrator leaves the countryside and takes a final gaze at the shores of the Yenisei. He becomes distressed by the great changes that are apparent in the landscape. The city of Krasnoyarsk is spreading further and further, the hydropower plant under construction has swept huge tracts of land out of its way, the tributaries are full of floating timber, and a hovercraft is downright flying across the reservoir. The narrator tries to get himself into thinking that change is normal, that everything has always been in a state of change. He cannot hide his pain, however: "So what have I been seeking? Why torment myself? Why? Why? No answer for me."(Astafiev [1976] 1982: 444.)

2.4.2 Valentin Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" (1972)

The work by Valentin Rasputin that I chose as the object of my close reading is his first environmental text, the travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" ("Downstream and Upstream", 1972). Rasputin, who came from the countryside of the Angara River (Figure 4), began his literary career at a young age in the 1960s when his works depicted problems of rural life in Siberia in the midst of the social changes of the time. His works of the 1960s are not environmental; his early stories and essays do

not deplore the submergence of rural areas under the dams of hydroelectric power stations, nor do they show nostalgia towards the past (Senchin 2015, 169). These early stories depict the conquest of wild nature in romantic overtones. In them, nature is merely a background, which emphasizes the victory of culture over nature (Kovtun 2009, 283).

Figure 4. The Angara, the implicit river protagonist of Valentin Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" and *Proshchanie s Matëroï*, seen from the city of Irkutsk. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki, 2014.

At the turn of the 1970s, Rasputin nevertheless became a central figure in Soviet environmentalism (see Chapter 1.4). In his writings of that time, various local environmental problems accumulate as a global environmental crisis. In them, the destruction of ecosystems and the accelerated depletion of natural resources appear as a question of life and death to humankind, which has chosen a destructive path of development (Kaminskii 2010, 89). Rasputin used his experiences as a circular journalist in the 1960s as his background material. At the time, his task was to write journalistic articles in accordance with the hegemonic state view on the construction work of the Bratsk hydroelectric power station and the creation of the largest water reservoir in the world (Peterson 1993, 86). Later, Rasputin became one of the best-known advocates of the conservation of Lake Baikal (Josephson et al. 2013, 249).

In 1964, the reservoir of the Bratsk hydroelectric power plant submerged Atalanka, Rasputin's native village on the middle reaches of the Angara, along with hundreds of other villages. In "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", the autobiographical narrator travels by riverboat to the reservoir that has submerged his home village. He continues to the new settlement, where the inhabitants of both the home village

and the neighbouring villages have been resettled. The focus is on the narrator's experiences and feelings during the voyage and the arrival at the new settlement, as well as on what the locals tell him about their changed life. Typically for village prose, the old village life on the former river is depicted with nostalgia, while the opening of the dam, which represents modernity, is paralleled with the end of the world and the new life next to the reservoir with the plague. Additionally, as John Givens (1996, 434–37) argues, the river's free flow is associated with creativity in the story. The dam obstructs the free flow of river water, but it also represents the obstruction of a Soviet writer's imagination.

2.4.3 Sergei Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman* (1993)

Sergei Zalygin, who received a degree in water engineering, is one of the most important writers associated with village prose. He was also a well-known environmentalist who often wrote about the relationship of nature and literature (see Zalygin 1980; Zalygin 1991; Zalygin 1992). Rivers were particularly dear to him, which is evident already in the early 1960s, when he influentially contributed to the abandonment of a hydropower plant that was planned on the lower Ob (see Zalygin 1962; Zalygin 1963a; Zalygin 1963b). His resistance to the plans to reverse the direction of the flow of the great Siberian rivers was also remarkable (see Zalygin 1987a). In one essay, Zalygin (1973, 15) portrayed his relationship with the river as follows: "Rivers are dear to me, I enjoy writing about them. I noticed recently that during the whole of my career I have written perhaps only one or two stories where the river does not appear."

Although in his Soviet-era essays, Sergei Zalygin often wrote about the relationship of nature and literature, his most interesting prose work from the point of view of rivers appeared two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I chose this very autobiographical novel *Ėkologicheskii roman* ("An Environmental Novel", 1993) as the object of my third analysis. The work has not been thoroughly studied, especially from the point of view of its rivers. The novel's time span encompasses the entire Soviet period from the days of the Russian Civil War (1918–21) until the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. It offers a broader perspective on Soviet environmental history than Rasputin's and Astaf´ev's works, which were written and published in the 1970s and set in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the roots of *Ėkologicheskii roman* are in the same period and the same understanding of humans as a geological force, which developed in that period, as the other works I

have analysed. The novel is essentially a product of the late Soviet period, although the liberation of literary life in Russia enabled Zalygin to publish his work in the early 1990s without any censorship.[35]

Figure 5. The Ob, the main "River of Life" in Sergei Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman*, flowing in the Ob river valley past the town of Salekhard in the Arctic Circle. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki, 2018.

Even though Sergei Zalygin is associated with the village prose movement, thanks especially for his work in the 1960s, *Ėkologicheskii roman* does not take place in the villages. Its main character is Zalygin's alter ego, the water engineer Nikolai Golubev. The Russian contemporary writer Ol´ga Slavnikova (1998, paras 18, 33) reads Golubev as a 'riverman', a mix of a river and a human being. The work consists of eight episodes at different stages of Golubev's life. The first of these dates back to the Russian Civil War in the late 1910s, when Golubev's special relationship with the river is forming in his childhood. In the other stories, he works as a field engineer during the Second World War on the lower Ob (Figure 5), explores the construction works of the Transpolar Railway built by forced labour during Stalin's reign, and talks the authorities into cancelling a planned hydroelectric power station on the

[35] Sergei Zalygin himself, as editor-in-chief of the most prominent Soviet literary magazine of the time, *Novyi mir*, was a key factor in the elimination of censorship. He spoke in favour of the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Arkhipelag GULAG* ("The Gulag Archipelago"), which appeared in *Novyi mir* in 1989, to Gorbachëv (*Novaia gazeta* 2000) and published many other previously forbidden works in the years of *perestroika* in *Novyi mir*, where *Ėkologicheskii roman* was also originally published.

lower Ob. In one episode, Golubev travels to Egypt to advise on the construction of the High Aswan Dam in connection to a cooperation project, which was part of the Soviet Union's efforts to extend its political power in the Global South by exporting hydropower.[36] Finally, he loses his will to live when he travels to the Pripyat (Figure 6), whose waters were contaminated by the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986.

Figure 6. The Pripyat, the main "River of Death" in Sergei Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman*, seen from the city of Pinsk, in Belarus, upstream of the Chernobyl disaster area. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki, 2019.

2.4.4 Dmitrii Likhachëv's "Ėkologiia kul´tury" (1979, 2000)

The main material for Publication IV is not fiction. It consists of two essays on the philosophy of science titled "Ėkologiia kul´tury" ("Ecology of Culture") by the eminent scholar of Russian literary history, philology and cultural philosophy, Dmitrii Likhachëv. The first essay was published in 1979 in the journal *Moskva*, and in it, Likhachëv introduces and explains his concept of *ėkologiia kul´tury*. The writer

[36] The young, revolutionary Egyptian government, led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, decided to cooperate with the USSR in financing and construction of the High Dam at Aswan after the Western powers had seized the Suez Canal in 1956, which Nasser interpreted as insulting colonialist behaviour (McCully 2001, 239). Even though the dam was completed with Soviet aid in 1968, the Soviet advisers were expelled from Egypt shortly after that, and the USSR failed to penetrate the political power structures of Egypt (Tucker 2010, 148).

argues that the science of ecology has concentrated too much only on the preservation of the non-human natural world. For Likhachëv, this is inadequate, and he proposes that the preservation of human cultures should also be part of ecology. This new side of ecology he calls the "ecology of culture".

A principal idea behind Likhachëv's reasoning is that human cultures and the other-than-human nature have evolved together in a close interrelationship so that the environment of a human culture has a defining effect on the culture, and cultures affect their non-human environments. Because of this, *ėkologiia kul´tury* does not understand nature and culture as separate but as deeply intermeshed. Therefore, the science of ecology should include two sides of equal importance, the biological and the cultural. For Likhachëv, these two dimensions of ecology should be interwoven, but he needs to semantically separate them to illustrate his argument.

Likhachëv explains that for the sake of *ėkologiia kul´tury*, morality is vital. He even uses the term "moral ecology" (*nravstvennaia ėkologiia*) as a synonym for *ėkologiia kul´tury*. This is because he thinks that ecology is a moral question and that "the violation of the norms of cultural ecology can kill a person morally" (Likhachëv 1979, 174). In his 1979 article, Likhachëv is vague about what kind of morality he calls for as the basis of ecology.

The second of Likhachëv's essays was published posthumously in 2000 as a chapter in his extensive survey of Russian culture, *Russkaia kul´tura* ("Russian Culture"). In it, he reiterates his ideas of *ėkologiia kul´tury* from the late 1970s, but argues even more strictly than earlier that it has been a great mistake to see nature and culture as separate and that ecology should be built on moral grounds because a central basis for morality is that humans understand themselves as a part of nature. Likhachëv (2000, 97) also argues that humans have a moral responsibility to defend the rights and interests of all species, because only they have language and reason.

In this second essay, it becomes clear that the moral grounds that Likhachëv seeks for the basis of *ėkologiia kul´tury* relate closely to the Russian Orthodox Church. He refers to Old Russia as an example of a society that understood itself as a part of nature, where moral principles guided everyday life, where marriages were agreed upon on riverbanks and where rivers were trusted with old icons to be carried downstream, and where even literature, such as hexameral literature, always handled moral questions (ibid., 101).

2.5 Summary of the publications

This dissertation consists of four peer-reviewed publications in addition to this summary. I have written all the publications alone. In Publication I, "'The Sovereign of the River and the Sovereign of All Nature—in the Same Trap': Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish*", published in the collection *Water in Social Imagination. From Technological Optimism to Contemporary Environmentalism* (2017), I explore how the harnessing of nature by the Soviet state influenced the environment, focusing on the effects of modernization on the Yenisei. I review the formation of the Soviet environmental movement in the 1960s and the role of village prose writers in it. I situate *Tsar´-ryba*'s river in the course of Russian environmental history. The meanings of Astaf´ev's river are diverse, and based on my ecocritical analysis, I argue that an active and trans-corporeal river that connects the human space to the non-human space of the Siberian countryside is a source of both life and death, and that its role is central for an analysis of *Tsar´-ryba* as an environmental text.

Publication II, "Matka hukutetulla joella: Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus Valentin Rasputinin jokiproosassa", was published in Finnish in the collection *Veteen kirjoitettu: Veden merkitykset kirjallisuudessa* ("Written on Water: Meanings of Water in Literature", 2018). An English translation of Publication II entitled "Journey on a Drowned River: Environmental Justice in Valentin Rasputin's River Prose" is also attached along the dissertation, but it has not been published anywhere before. In this publication, I analyse the river in Valentin Rasputin's travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" (1972, "Downstream and Upstream"). I argue that here Rasputin, for the first time, writes about environmental justice problems in the remote Siberian provinces. I show how the river plays a decisive role in the ways the work problematizes the question of the unrealized environmental justice rights of the people who were displaced by the modern hydropower plants' reservoirs. In the travel essay, the river represents life, happiness and past times, while the reservoir, by contrast, equals death, misfortune and modernity. The former river was a significant place for humans, but the reservoir, produced by modernization, has destroyed it and created abstract space around it (see Lefebvre 1991, 49–51). For the protagonist who arrives from outside to the new community, the reservoir appears meaningless, because the traditional living space of humans, the liminal zone between the river and the forest, has disappeared. The work does not name any places or events. In this way, the problems it discusses are not local but more general – they could appear anywhere in Russia or the Soviet Union. In my analysis, I also

refer to Rasputin's well-known novellas *Proshchanie s Matëroi* and *Zhivi i pomni* ("Live and Remember", 1974).

Publication III is titled "The Anthropocene on Planet Water: Competing Views on Rivers and Geography in Sergei Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman*". This article, which was published in the journal *Slavonica* (2020, no. 1), examines how the dialogues and conflicts between the protagonist Golubev and the government representatives relate to the development of environmental thinking in Russia. I argue that Golubev's relationship with his environment is in line with Lev Berg's concept of geographical landscapes, where changing one part of the ecosystem breaks the integrity of the harmonious whole (cf. Oldfield and Shaw 2016, 80–82). If a river is dammed, it will affect all the other components of the ecosystem, including humans. The state authorities represent Andrei Grigor´ev's ideas, based on dialectical materialism and the Stalinist interpretation of Engels's dialectics of nature, where nature is separate from culture and in constant change (cf. Oldfield and Shaw 2016, 90–94). Understood this way, the landscape is able to adapt even to fast and drastic changes without endangering the whole, and humanity could never be able to modify its very essence even by diverging the flow of a major river. I further analyse the rhetoric and arguments used by different parties when they argue for or against the 'improvement' of the riverine environment. Government representatives, who are advocates of modernization, repeatedly use war rhetoric when discussing rivers, and appeal to higher authorities. The main character, who is devoted to rivers, usually emphasizes human suffering and the utopian ambition of the plans. The failure to understand the significance of Vernadskii's noosphere (see Chapter 1.1), the precursor of the Anthropocene, is central in the novel's critique of the Soviet state's so-called amelioration of the natural environment.

In Publication IV, "Rivers of Noosphere Stories: Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology", published in the journal *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* (2020, no. 3), I compare the Russian concept of *ėkologiia kul´tury*, coined by Dmitrii Likhachëv in 1979, to Western cultural ecology. The concepts share many common premises, such as human cultures evolving in close interrelationship with their environment. Nevertheless, they sharply differ in their conclusions. Instead of highlighting literature's potential as an ecological force within the larger system of culture, *ėkologiia kul´tury* emphasizes morals, values that are associated with traditional life in the countryside and Christian ideology. Russian natural-philosophical prose (*naturfilosofskaia proza*) shares these features with *ėkologiia kul´tury*, which I show by analysing the role of the river in it. Nevertheless, *naturfilosofskaia proza* is also an apt example of literature as cultural ecology, and§ I show how the

writing of rivers illuminates its function as an ecological force within cultural discourses. In this article, I refer to my material and analyses from Publications I–III to illustrate my points.

2.6 Research contribution

Research on the interaction between nature and culture in Russian literature from a natural philosophical point of view is relevant for my dissertation, and it has been an active paradigm in research done in Russia during the past few decades. Pioneers in the natural philosophical research trend include Liudmila Gurlënova (1999) and Taisiia Grinfel´d (1995; 2001) at Syktyvkar State University and Alfiia Smirnova (2009) at Volgograd State University. Despite recent interest in the axiology of nature (see Bogach 2017), currently the theme of nature in literature is not an active research topic in Russia. Further, ecocriticism has so far not been applied in research done in Russia. During the writing period of my dissertation, I have actively been presenting in Russia to speak and write about ecocritical research. I have repeatedly been met by curiosity and interest in ecocriticism, and I believe there is much potential for ecocritical research in Russia.

In the West, especially in the United States, ecocritical research on Russian culture is growing in popularity. In the 2016 annual ASEEES[37] convention, a panel of six sessions was devoted to ecocriticism and the double issue 114–115 (June–July 2020) of the journal *Russian Literature*, edited by Alec Brookes and Elena Fratto, was titled "Anthropocene and Russian Literature". My dissertation is part of this trend. It is among the most extensive academic publications on ecocriticism and Russian literature, as well as on the meanings of the river in Russian literature. Margaret Ziolkowski's (2020) *Rivers in Russian literature* is the only other extensive academic publication from any point of view studying meanings of the river in Russian literature.

From the point of view of ecocritical research, my doctoral dissertation focusing on Russian literature expands the scope of contemporary ecocriticism, which is becoming all the more international since its Anglo-American beginnings in the 1990s. Ursula Heise (2013, 637–38) notes how twentyfirst-century ecocriticism has expanded its scope to "the literatures of Australia, East Asia, continental Europe, and Latin America", how postcolonial theory and criticism has "opened up African, Caribbean, and South Asian literatures" to environmental approaches, and how

[37] Association for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies.

academic organizations devoted to ecocritical studies have institutionalized "from Japan to Turkey and from Spain to India". The ecological questions that are characteristic in Russian culture are still poorly understood in the ecocritical field, which has led to extensive misconceptions about the role of environmentalism in the Soviet Union. Beyond the experts on Russian culture, it is not widely acknowledged that environmentally critical prose, which forms my research material, was openly published in the Stagnation-era Soviet Union. It is also a little-known fact that a wide environmental movement emerged in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, at the same time as the Western environmental awakening. Even though it rose from its own premises and independent of the Western movement, it produced similar literature. My research material includes good examples of this, and my analyses show that Russian literature handled such topics as trans-corporeality, environmental justice, cultural ecology and the Anthropocene early on. Importantly, it did so using a specifically Russian terminology.

Methodologically, my dissertation introduces concepts and perspectives from Russian natural-philosophical research to international ecocriticism. This research has previously been published only in Russian. Because only a small fraction of researchers who are interested in ecocriticism can read Russian – and even fewer will find these publications – my dissertation, especially Publication IV on *naturfilosofskaia proza* and *ėkologiia kul´tury*, has a role in disseminating the discourse produced by these scholars among the international research community. Without knowledge of this Russian natural-philosophical discourse, the conception of depictions of nature in Russian literature will inevitably be inadequate. This does not mean that environmental Russian literature is unique and exceptional. On the contrary, as I have explained above, it has multiple similarities with environmental world literature. Further, my position as a researcher from outside of Russia offers me a different point of view and more opportunities to critically review the natural-philosophical approach compared to actors within Russia.

My dissertation produces enhanced understanding of meanings of nature – and more specifically, of rivers – in the literature produced by representatives of the natural-philosophical wing of the so-called village prose movement and cultural values of this literature. The meanings of the literary rivers of perhaps the three best-known village prose writers, Viktor Astaf´ev, Valentin Rasputin and Sergei Zalygin, have not been properly studied before from an ecocritical perspective. What researchers have noted about them relates closely to Slavic mythologies and other conventional meanings of the river (see Bukaty 2001; Galimova 2013; Rudziewicz 2003). In the case of Russia, traditional symbolization of rivers that comes from

Slavic folklore include movement, the trip, the road, danger, progress, the border between one's 'own' (*svoi*) land and an 'alien' (*chuzhoi*) land, the border between this world and the otherworldly, going to a different world, connecting the dead to the living, cleansing, and giving life (Vinogradova 2009, 416–17). These meanings appear, undoubtedly, in village prose too, but my dissertation shows that its literary river is much more diverse.

Publication I shows that in Viktor Astaf´ev's prose, ecocritical meanings of the river are important. Based on my analysis, Astaf´ev's novel *Tsar´-ryba* appears as a so-called environmental text especially because of its river. The river in Astaf´ev does not only repeat old metaphors connected to the river, but uses them in a new way. Crossing a river does not mean a victory of culture over nature in *Tsar´-ryba*; rather it emphasizes the place of human culture as a part of nature. Further, depicting nature as female does not solely represent the traditional meanings attached to it. Through the concept of trans-corporeality coined by Stacy Alaimo (2008, 238), I have found also other interesting connections with *Tsar´-ryba* and contemporary ecocriticism, as people's trans-corporeal contact with the river and its living creatures play a considerable role in the episode "Fish soup on the Boganida".

In Valentin Rasputin's prose of the 1970s, the river, or rather the lack of the river, depicts how in the late Soviet-era Siberian countryside, environmental justice was not fulfilled. According to Joni Adamson, MeiMei Evans and Rachel Stein (2002, 6), authors who write for environmental justice describe the environmental disadvantages faced by communities that have been deprived of economic and political influence. As Publication II shows, Valentin Rasputin wrote about environmental justice already in the early 1970s, and meanings of the river had a decisive role in how environmental justice issues appear in the work of Rasputin. The case of Rasputin shows how similar the phenomena related to the interaction of nature and culture were on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The authors of my research material have all been socially influential in the Soviet Union. Sergei Zalygin may have been the most influential of them all. Nonetheless, research on his fiction has been less active than Astaf´ev's and Rasputin's. Because of this, my ecocritical analysis of Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman* is important. Zalygin is remembered as a tireless advocate of nature, and this work, written in the early post-socialist Russia, gives an overview of how the relationship between state power and environmentalists developed throughout the history of the Soviet Union. In *Ėkologicheskii roman*, the noosphere, a concept coined by the Soviet-Russian-Ukrainian scientist Vladimir Vernadskii in the 1920s–1930s, is practically a synonym for the Anthropocene. The whole novel is built around the idea of the noosphere.

Like my other analyses, also my reading of Zalygin's novel in Publication III reinforces my thesis that in the second half of the twentieth century, Russian prose often handles environmental concern through questions related to the river, which is a main actor, perhaps *the* main actor, also in *Ėkologicheskii roman*. Experiences of the river have been influenced by the views of the geographic environment that the Soviet or Russian state has supported at different times, and Zalygin's novel reflects these differences. There is no better portrayer of this discourse than Sergei Zalygin, who concentrated on literature's connection to the natural world for decades.

Publication IV is the first comparison in research literature of the Russian concept of *ėkologiia kul´tury* and Western cultural ecology. My publication shows how similar the philosophical foundations of the environmental movements of the West and Russia are, despite having evolved independently of each other. These similarities are also visible in environmental prose that I study to illustrate my argument. My publication also shows how, despite the similarities in the premises, the Western and Russian understandings of the ecology of culture diverge in where they see the significance of the shared history, interrelationship and unity of culture and nature. While cultural ecology stresses literature's function as an ecological force, *ėkologiia kul´tury* looks to traditions and Christian ideology in its search of showpieces of morally justifiable means of living in harmony with nature.

Table 3 recaps the main findings of each of the publications. In the following subchapters, I discuss the contribution of my research in more detail in relation to one central concept from each publication. The concepts related to Publications I and II, trans-corporeality and environmental justice, have been mainly used in the West. My research shows that Russian natural-philosophical prose discusses the same issues. The Western concepts related to Publications III and IV, the Anthropocene and cultural ecology, have Russian correspondents: the noosphere and *ėkologiia kul´tury*. The comparison in the following four subchapters shows that the environmental discourses in Russia and the West have produced similar phenomena. It further shows how early they have appeared in Russia and Russian natural-philosophical prose.

Table 3. Main findings of the publications

#	Material	Main findings
I	Astaf´ev	The river connects human space to the non-human space, not only physically but also mentally. Most parts of the novel that conform to the characteristics of an environmental text connect to the river. The work reflects trans-corporeality by presenting human material corporeality as inseparable from the other-than-human.
II	Rasputin	The environmental justice rights of the people have been violated due to the lack of the river. The old river was a meaningful place for people, while the new riverless space is abstract.
III	Zalygin	The river is an eternal companion of the people, and an essential precondition for human culture. The border of nature and culture is unclear or non-existent. Human culture is represented as part of nature and a product of the river. The novel implies that even though Soviet authorities propagated more environmental views on the exploitation of natural resources from the early 1960s, Russian environmental thinking had not changed even in the early post-socialist period.
IV	Likhachëv	Both cultural ecology and *ėkologiia kul´tury* are based on the idea of the mutual evolutionary interrelationship of human cultures and nonhuman nature, both argue against the dualist oppositional pairing of nature and culture, both recognize the unique traits of human cultures among the more-than-human world, and both see that humankind has become a geological force on Earth. While cultural ecology stresses literature's potential as an ecological force, *ėkologiia kul´tury*, like Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza*, emphasizes the importance of human morals and draws on traditions based on Christian ideology for good examples. Meanings of the river in Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* stress the moral questions and connections to the supposed age-old traditions of the Russian countryside in response to the problems raised by *ėkologiia kul´tury*. Writings about rivers in *naturfilosofskaia proza* are illustrative also in light of Hubert Zapf's (2016b, 95–121) triadic functional model of literature as cultural ecology.

2.6.1 Trans-corporeality

I found the concept of trans-corporeality useful in explaining how Viktor Astaf´ev's *Tsar´-ryba* directs us to see the human and the other-than-human spaces as inseparable from each other, rather than two distinct realms (Publication I). This is especially clear in the story "Fish soup on the Boganida". Boganida is the birthplace of the main character of the book, Akim. It is a tiny, poor settlement in the far north on the barren banks of the Yenisei, a pastoral image of the northern past (see Martazanov 2006, 116).

In the springtime, once the Yenisei is free of ice, the children, who are starving after the long winter, hobble on their weakened legs to the water – not to wash themselves, but to be one with the "living, healing water", which makes their hearts beat (Astafiev [1976] 1982, 214). Here, the children and the river are part of the same trans-corporeal whole.

The story refers to trans-corporeality especially clearly when the narrator describes the festive consumption of fish soup. The narrator minutely depicts how the fish swim around in the fervently boiling communal fish soup as in a spectacular "fish dance" in the huge cauldron that feeds the whole village, including the seasonal workers and even the dogs (ibid., 229). Later the narrator describes how a living fish, after eating the gnats and worms that live in the river, digests them in a similar way as the fishes "danced" in the cauldron: "the fish's belly was cooking, just like the Boganida's cauldron" (ibid., 246).

The gnats, who live on the river, are eaten and digested by the fish, then the fish "swim" and "dance" in the cauldron like the gnats in the fish's belly, and the flesh of the fish feeds the people and becomes the substance of humans, who are themselves metaphorically swimming in the great river of life. Boganida's gnats, fish, and people constitute one trans-corporeal whole together with the river, which is vital to them all. The way how *Tsar´-ryba* represents them underlines their material and corporeal oneness.

It is important to note that the transformation from gnats and worms to fishes and human flesh is not hierarchical in *Tsar´-ryba*. Rather it is heavily cyclical: all these bodies are part of the same hydrological cycle (cf. Neimanis 2017, 3), conveying an idea of the unity of human culture and the river and its creatures. By emphasizing how these all are, through eating and digesting, materially not just connected, but actually one and the same body, the story presents a challenge to anthropocentrism by the non-hierarchical relations of the villagers to the "more-than-human hydrocommons" (Neimanis 2017, 2).

The eponymous main story, "Tsar´-ryba", also works on a trans-corporeal level, because it depicts the fate of the people and the fish as intermingled with each other due to the actions of the people. The river works as a God-like judge who possesses the power to punish people for their vile behaviour.

Astaf´ev's novel is an example of how trans-corporeality, a useful concept in twenty-first century posthumanist, material feminist, and new materialist studies, helps us to understand meanings of the river also in 1970s Russian literature, which does not at first sight have much, if anything, to do with the theoretical background of trans-corporeality. In Russian research, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1968) grotesque is, however, a concept that somewhat overlaps with trans-corporeality. Boganida's fish soup is not devoid of grotesque features, because it highlights material and bodily elements that are positive and universal in the sense that they constitute an indivisible whole, and it uses metamorphosis to advocate life's cyclical nature (cf. Bakhtin 1968, 18–25). It lacks, however, the elements of exaggeration, degradation, carnival and ambivalence that are characteristic to what Bakhtin calls grotesque realism.

2.6.2 Environmental Justice

In the 2010s, environmental justice received significant attention in conjunction with postcolonial ecocriticism (see Banerjee 2016). Along with this, it is increasingly being connected to cultures other than that of its Anglo-American beginnings. In the context of Russian literature, however, it has not been actively debated. There is no good reason for this, because environmental justice issues are highly relevant to Russian literature of the 1970s. Additionally, they are closely connected to the river, especially in the works of Valentin Rasputin. Rasputin started to handle issues connected to environmental justice in his prose in 1972, independently of the Western interest in the theme.

Rasputin shows how the building of gigantic hydropower plants along the great Siberian Rivers violated the environmental justice rights of the villagers, who had lived on the riverbanks for centuries (Publication II). The hydropower plant, which is supposed to represent science, progress and modernization, becomes reactionary due to the stagnant water of its reservoir. The river, which used to be a significant place for the people, has been colonized by the modernization-driven Soviet state and turned into meaningless abstract space (cf. Lefebvre 1991, 49–51), as manifested by the reservoir. This is visible in Rasputin's travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", where the reservoir is depicted as completely different from the river.

The reservoir has drowned the river, and the death of the river means the death for both nature and culture. Along with the river, the traditional living space has also disappeared, because human habitation has been possible only in the liminal zone between the river and the *taiga*. The excerpt below describes the gloomy characteristics of the abstract space of the reservoir:

> The water seemed motionless and gray. [---] the sun […] could not penetrate the water but only illuminate its dim, faint rocking. In it there was now no whimsical play of blue and green, no lively, exciting tirelessness in the beauty and joy of the motion being made; there was no dark bottle-green glow in the still depths, and no crystal sounding music in the rumbling; no wavy criss-crossing rivulets formed by mountain streams rushing down with force, and no majestic view of islands beckoning to you – there was nothing left of that which only yesterday the river had carried with it. (Rasputin [1972] 1982, 401.)

The river's agency manifests powerfully, for example, in a scene where the river in the springtime violently breaks through the ice. This creates a feeling of more space around the protagonist and holds similar meanings as the end of the Second World War. Conversely, the meaningless reservoir is not particularly active, except when it destructively drowns the old river.

There are differences in the environmental justice of Rasputin's work and the environmental justice of North American literature. Rasputin does not depict the life of indigenous peoples, but ordinary Russian villagers. Nevertheless, they are as powerless against the state machine as the North American tribes, and also victims of social, material and spiritual destruction. Further, Rasputin's protagonists do not put up a fight or actively resist. In the name of passive resistance, however, they are ready to die for their cause. As means of resistance were mere for ordinary people, the significance of a distinguished writer like Rasputin as an advocate of environmental justice is strong, because his works brought local environmental issues to public national awareness.

As the 'Republic of Shies' movement in the dispute over the planned landfill shows (see Introduction), environmental justice issues are actual and acute in today's Russia too. Incidentally, the Shies case much resembles the 1982 protest demonstrations in Warren County, North Carolina, which is considered one of the key events in the history of the environmental justice movement (see Murdock 2020, 7). The success of the 'Republic of Shies' shows that people's resistance against environmental injustice in today's Russia is active and capable of producing change.

A similar earlier case was the Boguchany Dam, which was opened in 2012 on the Angara. Rasputin, despite appearing publicly against the project and expressing his

sympathy for the people who had to move away from their native lands, was not able to prevent the building of the dam. When a character in Roman Senchin's 2015 novel *Zona zatopleniia* criticizes Rasputin for not taking enough action against the Boguchany Dam, he would probably have liked to see the writer use his eminence for organizing a powerful grass roots resistance movement akin to that of the 'Republic of Shies'. I handle Senchin's novel and its connections to Rasputin and environmental justice in more detail in Chapter 3.2.

2.6.3 The noosphere and the Anthropocene

Sergei Zalygin (1987b, 52) highlighted the need for new kinds of "noosphere stories", in contrast to the conventional "biosphere stories", because "nature demands enormous noospheric efforts for its (and our own) preservation". Zalygin's narrator refers to Vladimir Vernadskii. In Vernadskii's (1999a, 99–100) own words, "the noosphere is a new geological phenomenon on our planet. In it for the first time man becomes a large-scale geological force."

As Steffen et al. (2011, 843–45) have explained, the noosphere is an important antecedent of the Anthropocene. They seem identical in their definitions, but they are not equivalent. The most notable difference is that even though the noosphere has manifested itself through the energy of human reason, in Vernadskii's conceptualization, this new geological energy has emerged as a result of the general mental development of organisms (cf. Oldfield and Shaw 2006, 148–49). This does not apply to the Anthropocene, which refers explicitly to the actions of human beings (from *anthrōpos*, Greek for 'human').

Dmitrii Likhachëv also recognized that the interrelationship of nature and culture has evolved to the point that human culture is now acting as a geological force in its environment. To describe the new situation, Likhachëv (2000, 92) in 1984 coined the term 'homosphere' (*gomosfera*), which is his extension for Vernadskii's noosphere. While the noosphere is the sphere where reason is a geological force in the natural world (Vernadskii 1999b), the homosphere emphasizes that this force is specifically human, whether based on "reason or foolishness", as Likhachëv (2000, 92) ironically states.

This difference, however, is insignificant for the purposes of the aforementioned novel by Zalygin (1993, 76), because its narrator defines the noosphere as being the result of the "rational activities of human beings". For Zalygin, the noosphere is practically a synonym for the Anthropocene. Further, his idea of "noosphere stories"

comes close to the contemporary notion of "Anthropocene fiction" although there are significant differences (see Publication IV, 22). The novel's main message is that the Soviet state's failure to understand the concept of the noosphere leads "to the catastrophic nuclear accident in Chernobyl, which is a manifestation of the dystopic modernity in the age of the Anthropocene" (Publication III, 25). As Zalygin's novel came out in 1993, again we have a concept that is often debated in contemporary ecocriticism and which was used already early on in Russian literature, albeit using Russian terminology and emerging from Russian conditions and premises.

2.6.4 *Ėkologiia kul´tury* and cultural ecology

The idea that the natural environment and culture evolve in close interrelationship with each other – a notion inherent in the theory of cultural ecology – is also an important part of *ėkologiia kul´tury*. It is part of both cultural ecology and *ėkologiia kul´tury* that human beings and their cultures are included in the concept of ecology, because culture and nature are not opposite or separate but belong to the same whole.

Another similarity between the two concepts is what Steward (1972, 32) called the "super-organic factor of culture". By this he means that human cultures have unique traits that make the mind vitally different from matter. Likhachëv, on the other hand, writes about humanity's moral responsibility for the welfare of the planet. This responsibility derives from people's unique traits of language and reason. Both Steward and Likhachëv here lean toward human exceptionalism, because highlighting the significance of human reason seems to locate humans existing independently of and separate from nature.

In recent ecocritical research, Hubert Zapf has been the most prominent proponent of literature as cultural ecology. Zapf (2016b, 27) argues that "imaginative literature *acts like an ecological force* within the larger system of culture and cultural discourses" (emphasis in the original). Zapf (2016b, 84–87) acknowledges that "the processes and activities of culture cannot simply be identified with processes of material nature", but he is aware of the problematic nature of seeing evolutionary difference between nature and culture, because it "resists … attempts to simply dissolve culture into nature and to replace an anthropocentric ideology by a physiocentric or ecocentric naturalism". He maintains, however, that the dynamics of cultural evolution differ from natural evolution qualitatively, although not ontologically (Zapf 2016a, 4). His solution to this problem is to balance somewhere

between "a naturalist reduction of culture" and a "culturalist reduction of nature" (Zapf 2016b, 87). This contemporary usage of cultural ecology is already different from *ėkologiia kul´tury*, which treats ecology as a moral question and looks to the past to provide good models for how people can live in harmony with their environment, emphasizing Orthodox Christian traditions. These traits it shares with Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* (see Publication IV, 10–18). Publication IV (p. 18–25) further shows that, despite this, Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* can also be read as cultural ecology.

3 CONCLUSION

My dissertation shows that in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian natural-philosophical prose, environmental concern is connected closely to the river. This literature handles burning environmental problems in various ways, and the river is a main actor. These texts create an imagined riverography (see Introduction), where the Soviet environmental catastrophe threatens the future of Russian rivers, and therefore, the future of Russian culture.

Russian literature had started handling natural-philosophical questions well before the period when my research material was written, namely the 1970s to 1990s. Moreover, the river has been a main actor in Russian literature since its very beginnings (see Chapter 1.3). However, the understanding of the extent of the environmental crisis and the realization that it may threaten the very existence of civilization was novel in the late Soviet period. This makes the imagined riverography of the Russian natural-philosophical prose of my research period different from anything published before it. In it, rivers work as an ecological force. They embody the organic material connection of humans to the more-than-human world, but they also reflect people's emotional connection to the river. It is an imagined riverography, where human life is not environmentally just unless the fruits of the river are equitably distributed. It calls for 'noosphere stories', where the river is more than a mere backdrop of events or a source of inspiration and physical strength, but rather demands people's responsibility for the well-being of both the river itself and, through it, themselves (see Chapter 2.6.3; Publication IV, 22).

Since the environmental anxiety of the late Soviet period involved a worry about the survival of Russian culture, the river is an apt agent for handling this anxiety, because it has always been connected to questions of life and death. In Chapter 3.1, I elaborate on this connection in more detail. The influence of the writers and works that I study extend to the latest Russian prose, which refers to them when handling current environmental problems. In Chapter 3.2, I briefly examine how these connections are visible in two contemporary writers, Roman Senchin and Mikhail Tarkovskii, and how their handling of rivers differs from that found in my research material. The final subchapter 3.3 of this conclusory chapter of the summary part of my dissertation I devote to the question of whether something that we could call

Russian ecocriticism exists; if it does, what it might be; and whether it is somehow distinctively and specifically Russian.

3.1 Rivers of life and death

The metaphors of the 'river of life' and 'river of death' recur in Russian natural-philosophical prose. They link the imagined riverscapes of my research material together, because both are central to all the writers I have studied.[38] The association of the river with life is more than just a metaphor associated with habitat, sustenance, nurture, and enabling life on Earth – it is not just a manifestation of life, but life itself (Publication II, 9)[39]. It reflects water's characteristic as a constituent of life, and it also symbolizes life. The river flow is able to determine the destinies of people, prevent people from taking their own life, and turn them towards dedicating their life to the protection of nature (Publication III, 7–10). Without the river's flow, there would be no life on Earth (Publication II, 11). The 'river of life' is also an active agent – not just a passive frame of events – and an important medium between the realms of nature and culture (Publication I, 146, 157–62).

In Russian natural-philosophical prose, the 'river of death' confronts people with dangers – rivers are often depicted as dangerous and lethal. The river's agency is central also in this respect (Publication I, 157). The death of a river can be depicted as a drowning, a personified dramatic turn of events that humankind has initiated, turning the freely flowing 'river of life' into a stagnant 'river of death' (Publication II, 15). A contaminated river loses its life-giving character and turns into something that makes a dedicated environmentalist self-destructive (Publication III, 21–24).

In the works of the three prosaists that I have studied, the relationships of the 'river of life' and the 'river of death' are different. In Astaf´ev's *Tsar´-ryba*, the one and the same river, the Yenisei, is at the same time both the 'river of life' and the 'river of death' (see Publication I). Human life would not be possible without the river, which is the source material of humans and provides the villagers with food and a means of transport. The river also takes part in all the important events in people's lives, such as weddings, funerals, and christenings. The river, the creatures

[38] By 'imagined riverscapes', I refer to the individual riverscapes imagined by each literary work. One work imagines a riverscape, but many works together imagine a riverography that is common to them all. This is comparable to a landscape in a single work and the imaginative geographies of a host of works (cf. Said 1979).

[39] In the references to Publication II, I have used the page numbers that correspond to the English translation of the Publication.

living in it and the people constitute one trans-corporeal whole. The same river, however, is not only a saviour, but also a destroyer that punishes people who do not follow the natural-philosophical moral code. This code is often severely violated in the modern world, where the river's value is understood solely in a material sense. The novel does not undermine the river's material significance for human life, but it associates the river also with spiritual power.

In Rasputin's river prose, the lively flowing river represents life, while the hydropower plant's water reservoir represents death (see Publication II). Thus, only the river is associated with life, while the reservoir – which is everything that the river is not – takes on the role of the 'river of death'. The reservoir is also agentic; it submerges, replaces and drowns the river, which is an integral part of both nonhuman nature and human culture. Therefore, its death means the death of both nature and the age-old peasant culture of the Siberian hinterland, as the people do not know how to live without the river.

Rivers are central characters in Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman*, which closely operates with ideas of the 'river of life' and the 'river of death' (see Publication III). In Zalygin's novel, however, one river – the native river of the protagonist, the Ob – is the 'river of life', while another – the Pripyat – is the 'river of death'. The 'river of life' saves the protagonist's life during his childhood by stopping him from committing suicide and thus gives him a new life. At the end of the novel, the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which is a manifestation of modern ideology-driven geography, poisons the Pripyat, and this depresses the environmentalist protagonist so much that he sees no other way out but to take his own life. The novel's message is that the modern Soviet state, which never understood the meaning and implications of Vernadskii's noosphere (see Chapter 1.1), has turned the 'river of life', which gave a new life to the protagonist in his childhood, into the 'river of death', which drives him to suicide.

In his study, *A Story of Six Rivers: History, Culture and Ecology*, Peter Coates (2013) examines what rivers have meant for human communities. He concentrates on perceptions of rivers as cultural constructions. None of the six rivers he studies is Russian; they are the Danube, Spree, Po, Mersey, Yukon and Los Angeles River. Coates (ibid., 15) acknowledges that rivers symbolize nature's awesome powers and are "the collective product, not just of geology, ecology and climate, but of economics, technology, politics and human imaginings", which is one of the premises of my own study.

Coates (ibid., 9, 15) identifies seven metaphors that are associated with rivers in cultures in different times. Of them, the 'river of life' is part of the 'river of life' of

the Russian natural-philosophical prose I have identified: it nurtures us and other creatures, and provides a habitat and sustenance. Unlike the 'river of life' of Russian natural-philosophical prose, however, this metaphor does not include the idea of the river *as* life. Another of Coates's metaphors, the 'river of riches' also bears a similarity to my study's 'river of life' because it gives us water, fish and a means of getting around. The one feature of the 'river of riches' that is not reflected in my 'river of life' is that it provides hydropower – in Russian natural-philosophical prose, this is rather a feature of the 'river of death'. The 'river of inspiration' in Coates's account informs our cultural life, which is also part of the 'river of life' in Russian natural-philosophical prose, as cultural life without the river is an impossible idea.

Coates also identifies a 'river of recreation' that provides us with opportunities. While the 'river of life' of Russian natural-philosophical prose certainly provides people with opportunities, it usually involves sustenance rather than recreation. There is one exception: in Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", the excitement of the fishing trips on the river are an important part of the river experience. The same excitement is not present when fishing on the reservoir, where fish come easy. While these trips are not primarily made for recreation but as a source of livelihood, the excitement is a relevant part of the experience nonetheless. When the fish are merely fetched from the reservoir, it does not feel like a fair deal, since the fish have no means of escape.

The 'river of death' of my study combines features from Coates's 'river of peril' and 'river of death'; the former confronts us with dangers, while the latter illustrates the limits of our authority to disrupt natural processes and inflict lethal damage on the natural world. The 'river of death' of Russian natural-philosophical prose is also dangerous, but not only that – people are also dangerous to the river and the creatures living in it. In this respect, the 'river of death' of Russian natural-philosophical prose includes both Coates' 'river of peril' and 'river of death'; the river is both dangerous and vulnerable at the same time. Of the metaphors that Coates sketches, the 'river of power', which offers energy for human control over the rest of the natural world, is present in Russian natural-philosophical prose only in the thinking of the antagonists.

Both the metaphors that I have identified as well as those of Coates's study engage with identities. The 'river of life' and the 'river of death' of Russian natural-philosophical prose create a national awareness of the Russian culture as something for which the river is essential. Russia is not exceptional; rivers are useful providers of identities for nations, empires, and societies more generally too. As Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (2008, 1) note in their introduction to rivers in history,

China and the Yangtze are inherently connected, as are Egypt and the Nile, Caesar's Rome and the Tiber, and Dante's Florence and the Arno. The Whanganui's material and spiritual connection and value to the Maori culture of New Zealand is so great that in 2017 it received the status of a legal person (New Zealand Ministry of Justice 2017). The Volga is the quintessential Russian river, the one that has most provided sustenance to the idea of Russianness (see Chapter 1.2). Additionally, the general concept of the river is also significant for the sake of Russian national identity, and the metaphors of the 'river of life' and the 'river of death' are central to the connection of Russianness and the river.

All the literary material that I have researched use the metaphors of the 'river of life' and the 'river of death' vividly. My analyses suggest that not only is the river an essential part of Russian cultural ecology, but also that in environmental Russian literature, it is heavily connected to questions of life and death. Each writer uses the metaphors in their own way, however. Despite the differences in the usage of the two metaphors, common to all these writers is that they all underline the common history, interdependency and fate of the river and the people. Especially in the case of the 'river of life', it also connects to the active, agentic river, whose actions have implications for both human culture and the more-than-human world. The active agency is not attached to the 'river of death' always as closely, as Zalygin's poisoned Pripyat exemplifies, although Astaf´ev's 'river of death' and Rasputin's lethal reservoir are highly agentic. Even in the case of Zalygin's Pripyat, the contaminated river is agentic in a wider sense, because of the river's intrinsic character as something that flows. Because of its flow, the river is always agentic.

3.2 Reflections on the latest Russian literature

In the late 1970s, the significance of village prose in Russian literary life started to wane. Its chief writers thought that the movement had by then said everything about the loss of traditional Russian village life and people's connection to nature, and in the 1980s, they moved on to other themes (see Parthé 1992, 119–21). Some of them, like Rasputin, earned dubious fame as reactionary promoters of xenophobia and exclusive Russian nationalism. Postmodernism marked much of Russian literature between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, and interest in realist literature decreased. In the early 2000s, however, realism returned prominently to the Russian literary scene. This did not signal an end to Russian literary postmodernism, nor is it the first time that such a turn has taken place. A comparable – although much sharper – turn

took place in the early 1930s, when the Russian avant-garde gave way to Socialist Realism. Natalia Kovtun (2017b, 725) notes that when in a February 2007 meeting with representatives of new realist literature, President Putin "voiced the idea of a state order in literature", it was analogical to the situation of the turn of the 1930s, when the authorities solved the problem of literary diversity by forming a new proletarian literature. As was the case then, the recent traditionalist turn also involves a distancing from complex, self-reflecting and fragmentary narration, which is replaced by transparent, coherent and simplistic techniques. As Kovtun (2017b, 726) notes, the comparison is not simple though, because the current realist trend strives for "avant-gardism in conservatism", which combines conservative ideas related to the Russian classics to innovations associated with avant-garde.

In this subchapter, I study Roman Senchin's (b. 1971) novel *Zona zatopleniia* ("The Flood Zone", 2015). It is part of the latest traditionalist turn and is the most interesting recent work for the sake of my dissertation, because it openly refers to Valentin Rasputin, a writer to whom Senchin is often compared, and because the novel recycles the river tropes of Soviet village prose. I will also briefly discuss the Yenisei of Mikhail Tarkovskii's (b. 1958) stories from the 2000s as well as the Angara in his novel *Toyota Cresta* (2016), which have connections to Astaf´ev's and Rasputin's rivers.

A starting point for the renewed interest in realism was Sergei Shargunov's essay "Otritsanie traura" ("Denial of Mourning") in *Novyi mir* in 2001 (Wawrzyńczak 2018, 73). It reflects the disappointment in the prospects of postmodernism in literature in postsocialist Russia, which had enormous social, economic and ecological problems, and it argues for the need to depict the world in realist ways instead. Shargunov also calls for more autobiographical literature that concentrates on the "I" rather than "them" (Ivanova 2011). Shargunov coined the term *novyi realizm* ("new realism"), which literary criticism started to use, and Shargunov's article is known as the manifesto of *novyi realizm*. The writer, critic and editor Alisa Ganieva (2010) describes *novyi realizm* thus:

> A literary movement that marks the crisis of a parodic attitude to reality and combines the markings of postmodernism ('the world as a chaos', 'the crisis of authority', accent on corporeality), realism (typical hero, typical circumstances), romanticism (the rift between the ideal and reality, the contrast of 'I' and the society) with an attitude towards an existential dead end, alienation, seeking, dissatisfaction, and a tragic gesture.

Roman Senchin is one of the best-known writers associated with *novyi realizm*. He is also a prominent literary critic who has gained fame as a theoretician of the very

literary genre that he participates in constructing. According to Senchin, the central characteristics of *novyi realizm* are documentarism, topicality, social criticality and autofiction (Klapuri and Lappela 2015, 93). The ideal is to describe the world – or Russia – "as it is", so that future generations can read and understand it "like we learn about nineteenth-century France from the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Èmile Zola" (Beliakov 2011). Many well-known Russian realist writers of the twenty-first century have been connected to *novyi realizm*. The ideological bases of these writers vary, but what is common to them is the longing for a realist, even naturalist, representation of the world as well as an emphasis on strong protagonists and national identity (Kovtun 2017a, 81).

Novyi realizm is also connected to the revival of traditionalism in Russian literature in the twenty-first century. According to Mark Lipovetsky (2011), what he calls "traditional realism" of the 1990s–2000s is actually a variation of Socialist Realism. He compares Viktor Astaf´ev's war novel *Prokliaty i ubity* ("The Cursed and the Slain", 1994) to Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don* and Zakhar Prilepin's successful novel *San´kia* (2006) about activists of the forbidden National-Bolshevik Party to Gorky's landmark novel of Socialist Realism *Mat´* ("Mother", 1907). Lipovetsky argues that the revival of models characteristic to Socialist Realism relates to the loss of collective (Soviet) identity and attempts to restore it.

Aleksander Wawrzyńczak (2018, 73) notes that the appeal to traditional prose is what unites writers of *novyi realizm* significantly more than their political positions or worldviews. As village prose was a backlash resulting from the disappointment with the socialist reality compared to the Soviet state's utopian visions, *novyi realizm* grew from the economic crisis of the 1990s, the increasingly authoritarian character of the Russian regime, and disappointments with globalization and postmodernism's literary prospects. This resulted – similarly to village prose – in nostalgia for the past, national sentiments, and the realist form. In Kovtun's and Natalya Klimovich's (2018) classification, *novyi realizm* is one of the three main directions of the latest traditionalism, in addition to classical traditionalism and neo-traditionalism.

The desire to suppress the ongoing ecological catastrophe is an important theme for some new realists. Writers of *novyi realizm* typically refer to their traditionalist predecessors in the themes and motifs of their works. In relation to the river, these are most apparent in Roman Senchin's novel *Zona zatopleniia*, which draws parallels to Rasputin's *Proshchanie s Matëroi* and features Rasputin as one of the characters. Senchin is a Moscow-based writer who originally comes from Kyzyl, the capital city of the Tuva Republic in southern Siberia. He is widely known as one of the figureheads of *novyi realizm* and for his realist depiction of the life of ordinary people

at a time of great changes in postsocialist Russia, especially in the novel *Eltyshevy* ("The Eltyshevs", 2009).

The story of *Zona zatopleniia* revolves around the building and opening of the Boguchany Dam on the Angara. The Soviets started to build the dam and the related hydropower plant in the 1970s, but construction halted in the early 1990s after the collapse of the USSR due to the lack of financing. In the mid-2000s, construction continued with the financial help of the aluminium giant Rusal company, controlled by the oligarch Oleg Deripaska. The dam was completed in 2012, and this involved the resettlement of thousands of people from several settlements. The events resembled those that had happened in the 1960s with the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station, although on a smaller scale. Roman Senchin wanted to write about the recurrence of the events that Valentin Rasputin had depicted in the 1970s. He asked the veteran writer whether he felt a novel on the Boguchany Dam was necessary. Rasputin said that it would be essential (Lappela 2015, 103). Rasputin never had a chance to read Senchin's novel, because he passed away a few days before it came out in print.

Zona zatopleniia depicts how people are resettled out of the villages to towns, where living conditions are often poor. Compensations for lost livelihoods are inadequate, and urban life is meaningless compared to life in the countryside. A Krasnoyarsk-based journalist becomes interested in the events, but the authorities keep media coverage to a minimum. Those who resist face extreme violence. In the sixth chapter, titled "V novom meste" ("In the new place"), one of the protagonists, Aleksei Briukhanov, remembers how a famous writer visited his village a few years before the opening of the dam and expressed deep distress for the fate of the people who were about to be resettled. The writer is evidently Valentin Rasputin, and the visit refers to his trip to the Angara, which is depicted in the documentary film *Reka zhizni. Valentin Rasputin* ("The River of Life: Valentin Rasputin", 2011), directed by Sergei Miroshnichenko. The film group visits villages that are about to be submerged by the Boguchany Dam and interviews the locals. Briukhanov is angry when the old writer says that people are too tired to resist, that they have given up. Briukhanov himself thinks that the people are not tired but lost, because no one defends their interests, not even the famous environmentalist writer.

The end of the novel is rather dystopian. It is also the only part of the novel that takes a distance from the realist genre, because it refers to the flood myth of the biblical great deluge. In the final scene, villagers from different generations stroll around a cemetery where bodies of the deceased from the old villages have been resettled. Suddenly, a huge flood approaches them, apparently due to a crack in the

dam. The ending is open, but it leaves the reader with the idea that everything in the new settlement will be flooded and submerged due to a technological flaw. While at the end of Rasputin's *Matëra*, the remains of the village are flooded intentionally, in *Zona zatopleniia* the deluge is unintentional. Nature takes over and destroys human constructions. As an adaptation of the deluge myth, the ending carries the idea that water is a purifying element that destroys humanity's mistakes. In the modern context, the mistakes relate to the thoughtless exploitation of nature.

Literary critic Aleksandr Zhurov (2015) calls *Zona zatopleniia* "the postscript of village prose", because it is dedicated to Valentin Rasputin, it openly references *Proshchanie s Matëroi*, it uses Rasputin's figure as a "rhetorical device", and it ends with a small dictionary of the language of the Siberian villages that "nowadays almost no one speaks, and in the next generation will not be spoken at all". Kovtun (2017a, 81) maintains that *Zona zatopleniia* is not "so much a 'continuation' of the symbolic text of V. Rasputin, but, rather, his refutation: from the system of motives to the interpretation of the writer's mission, the significance of the Logos". In her account, the main difference between the two works is in how the author understands the writer's role. Rasputin's self-understanding of himself as a writer is an authoritative source of a moral codex for the people, a position that writers have widely held in Russia since the nineteenth century. As the protagonist of Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" is a famous writer and the author's alter ego (Gillespie 1986, 36), the story investigates the constraints that threaten Soviet writers in their creativity and the relationship between the author and authority. In the case of Rasputin's story, at stake is the writer's ability to create and publish, because the protagonist has just been heavily criticized in the national press (Givens 1996, 428). In Senchin's novel, what is questionable is the writer's significance as an authority: Rasputin appears as a character that recognizes the pain of the people in face of the imminent ecological catastrophe, but he is unable to help them in any way despite his fame as a leading Russian environmentalist.

Additionally, Kovtun (2017a, 83), as well as Wawrzyńczak (2018, 80) see differences in how the two works treat common motifs and how Senchin's novel is devoid of Rasputin's mythopoetic meanings that it replaces – as is characteristic to *novyi realizm* – by documentarism and naturalism. It avoids mythopoetic meanings also when dealing with the conflict between humans and nonhuman nature. Wawrzyńczak (2018, 77) notes that in *Zona zatopleniia*, nature appears as the winner in this conflict, because when people had left the villages, "nature took back its territories" by penetrating into the gardens, yards, streets, and houses (Senchin 2015, 77). This is a temporary phenomenon, however, because the reader should

understand that after the opening of the dam, the reservoir – a work of human hands – will submerge everything, and humanity will be in control again. This becomes clear already at the beginning of the novel: "now it [the village] is doomed, only some months are left, or a year at best" (ibid., 22). In Senchin's novel, the future of nonhuman nature looks as gloomy as the future of the people.

While in Rasputin's works, the river represents life and meanings of the river are connected to his works' significance as an ecological force, Senchin's river is mainly the victim of human perseverance to subjugate nature. It disappears and appears, depending on the schedule of the openings and closings of the dam, and one protagonist thinks that people are trying to act like gods when controlling the river's flow (ibid., 46). Another ridicules the acronym of the future hydropower plant, BoGES, for referring to God (ibid., 59).[40] This is reminiscent of Zalygin's *Ėkologicheskii roman*, which has a similar allusion of people acting like gods when turning the river's energy into electricity (Publication III, 20).

A common theme of Rasputin's and Senchin's rivers is the pressing need of people to live next to a river, which becomes clear in *Zona zatopleniia* when the authorities arrive in one of the villages that is going to be submerged. Together with the villagers, they discuss where the people could be resettled:

> – I'd like to live somewhere next to a river.
>
> – In the city of Abakan there are the Yenisei and the Abakan.
>
> – I'd rather live next to my own river.
>
> – Well, then there is Kolpinsk.[41] It is growing and developing. And it is very near from here.
>
> – Aha, – a third one intervened in the slow discussion. – You can't walk from Kolpinsk to the river, it's too far.
>
> – Well, then there is Boguchany downstream, – the superiors were losing their patience. – It is a marvellous settlement. Motygino…
>
> – They want to build a hydropower station there too. Yet another resettlement.
>
> – Really?
>
> – Yes, – the superiors reluctantly admitted, – there are plans.
>
> – So what is left of the river? (Senchin 2015, 62.)

Later, when one of the protagonists travels back to his native village to transport the bodies from the cemetery, he is astonished to find out that "the river is go-one, …. Everything is go-one" (ibid., 228). As in Rasputin's river prose, people simply do not

[40] "Bog" is Russian for "God".

[41] The real-life equivalent to Kolpinsk is Kodinsk, a town of about 15,000 inhabitants that is located on the Angara, about ten kilometres south of the Boguchany Dam.

know how to live without the river (see Publication II, 18). In this way, Senchin's novel handles the environmental justice of the Siberian villagers similarly to Rasputin, even though its river is not as lively and not associated as clearly with life as in the latter. According to my analysis (Publication II, 9–10, 17), because Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" does not name any of the settings, it works on a general level so that it does not address local but national and cross-border problems. *Zona zatopleniia*, however, is explicitly placed in the site of the real-life Boguchany Dam on the Angara, although some of the place names have been slightly changed.[42] In Senchin's novel, one's 'own' river gets a significance of its own. One feels special attachment to the local river where one has grown up and always lived, which is something that no other river can offer. The 'artificial town' that has been built for the people that had to flee from their villages is "in a high, inconvenient place, far away from the river and the *taiga*. One cannot feel the protection of the hills and woods, like in the villages" (Senchin 2015, 191). To see the river, one has to drive half an hour along a wretched road, and people do not even want to go there due to a debilitating anger at having to retreat from the river (ibid., 210).

In *Zona zatopleniia*, the reservoir's connection to death is similar to Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu". It is not such a central motif as in Rasputin's work (see Publication II), but it is present when the narrator describes what a village that is going to be submerged will be like in the future: "A savage, dead place over dead stagnant water" (Senchin 2015, 123). Also, the fishes that remain in the reservoir after the opening of the dam "soon … will die in the stagnant water of the reservoir, and then it is empty here" (ibid., 129). On the other hand, the Yenisei is also marked by death, because due to the hydropower plant upstream, its water never freezes in Krasnoyarsk. The river, in its unnatural state, is attributed meanings similar to the reservoir: "Nowadays, winters and summers, the water of the Yenisei is ice cold and black. Wicked, battered by the turbines, refined of everything living…" (ibid., 177). The reservoir does not drown the river as in Rasputin's work, but the people who had to move away from their native villages are called "the drowned ones" (*utoplenniki*), as in *Matëra* (ibid., 190; cf. Publication II, 14). Another similarity to Rasputin's work is that the reservoir water is dangerous for someone who traverses it on a boat due to "woods, mounds, and protruding snags" beneath the water (Senchin 2015, 226; cf. Publication II, 8).

In Rasputin's "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", the water that is pumped from the reservoir to the new settlement is described as so contaminated that it is unsuitable

[42] People's names have been changed too. The character clearly referring to the oligarch Oleg Deripaska bears the name Oleg Baniasko.

for making tea or for washing one's hair (Publication II, 7–8). In *Zona zatopleniia*, Aleksei Briukhanov does not anticipate that he should bring drinking water when spending a day on the reservoir, because in his childhood he would drink straight from the river. Thirsty, he does not see or taste anything suspicious in the reservoir water, and he decides to drink it "without apprehension, like in his childhood" (Senchin 2015, 235–37). The result is that he contracts anthrax. Although he (barely) survives, another character, Aleksei Tkatchuk, mysteriously dies, after possibly having also drunk the reservoir water. This is the most evident connection of the reservoir to death in the novel. The connection is more blunt and material than in Rasputin's river prose, where the reservoir's connection to death is more metaphorical.

Like *Zona zatopleniia*, the chapter titled "K sozhzheniiu gotov" ("Ready for Burning") of Mikhail Tarkovskii's novel *Toyota Cresta* is also devoted to Valentin Rasputin. The chapter touches on the same event as *Zona zatopleniia*: the opening of the Boguchany Dam. It is similarly critical of the construction of the new dam, and Senchin (2016) calls it his favourite chapter of the novel even though – or perhaps because of – its less poetic and more documentary style, compared to the rest of the novel. Like in Senchin's novel, also in "K sozhzheniiu gotov", external forces destroy the traditional order on the river. The chapter poses the reader a critical moral question in the face of the environmental havoc: "And you will have to ask yourself: what have I done for these lands, for these people?" (Tarkovskii 2016, 378) It compares the Angara to the Yenisei, marking the former as more valuable both naturally and culturally, but also as having suffered more from the Soviet state's obsession to subjugate nature:

> Richer than the Yenisei in its nature and more suitable for life, the Angara, in contrast to it, flows in a wide drain between numerous islands with rich soil. … Before the construction of three hydroelectric power stations – Irkutsk, Bratsk and Ust´-Ilimsk – this only river flowing from Lake Baikal was strikingly crystal clear. And how much fish there was! And how good were the fields and meadows on the long islands that ended up beneath water – many of them inhabited! … The Angara was less fortunate than the Yenisei. It was severely knocked down by the Soviet wood industry, which cut beautiful pine forests and attracted a dubious rabble that upset the age-old way of life and intensified the drain of young people from the countryside. (Tarkovskii 2016, 368.)

Mikhail Tarkovskii is a contemporary writer from a family of Russian intelligentsia. His grandfather was the poet Arsenii Tarkovskii, and his uncle the world-famous film director Andrei Tarkovskii. Originally from Moscow, Mikhail Tarkovskii moved in the mid-1980s to the tiny and remote northern village of Bakhta on the Yenisei in

the Turukhanskii District of Krasnoyarsk Krai, where he still lives as a professional trapper and writer. After publishing poetry in the early 1990s, he started to publish prose in the late 1990s, and characters of his early stories reflect the movements of his own life from the city to the village. People's interrelationship with nature, characteristic to Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza*, has been a theme in his works since the publication of the collection *Za piat´ let do schast´ia* ("Five Years before Happiness") in 2001 (Val´ianov 2020, 7–8). The literary critic Vladimir Bondarenko (2003) describes the realist form of these short stories as "absolutely no different from … Astaf´ev". According to Val´ianov (2020, 9–10), the connections of Tarkovskii's works to Astaf´ev's are visible in the *taiga* as a sacred space, Siberia as a blessed land and the topos of revival, emphasis on the masculine, and similar ontological motifs. Astaf´ev himself was one of the first to comment Tarkovskii's breakthrough novella *Stroika bani* ("Construction of a Banya", 1998) and call it remarkable (Mil´man 1998). Indeed, in addition to *novyi realizm*, Tarkovskii's oeuvre belongs to the nostalgic and traditionalist continuum of village prose. It further belongs to the natural-philosophical continuum of Rasputin and Astaf´ev, where the Siberian nature and people constitute one integral whole (Davydova 2012, 254).[43]

In Tarkovskii's early stories, the Yenisei is the centre of human life. Many of these stories are autobiographical, and they maintain a strong emotional connection to the Yenisei and the landscape around it (Filimonova 2016, 218). Nikita Val´ianov (2020, 89) studies the river in Tarkovskii's stories as a topos of overcoming space and notes that his Yenisei is similar to Astaf´ev's in that it is an "embodiment" of "the whole cosmography", and it is similar to Rasputin's river as living water that is a "protective and saving force". The Yenisei is so essential in Tarkovskii's works that the words 'river' and 'water' are synonymous to it (Beliaeva 2009, 148).

Tarkovskii's Yenisei is a symbol of the grandeur of Siberian nature and its age-old world order, of harmony, wisdom and continuity of life (Beliaeva 2009, 143). The huge extent of the physical proportions of the Yenisei are evident, for example, in the stories "Shyshtyndyr" (2000), "S vysoty" ("From High", 2001) and "Lerochka" (2001). The space of the Yenisei is a prime example of *neob"iatnyi prostor* ("boundless territory") that Widdis (2004, 33) describes as "a powerful symbol of Russian national identity". Tarkovskii's Yenisei further represents wisdom, poetry and eternity; and it is a source of inspiration for his protagonists (Beliaeva 2009, 142). Its agency is summed up in its unique ability to help the protagonists find meaning in their life. Tarkovskii himself has characterized the word "Yenisei" as "holy", and

[43] See Chapters 1.2 and 1.3 for Tarkovskii's comments on the significance of the river for Russian literature and Russia generally.

he has said that just the enunciation of the word is enough to help him "understand everything" (Iakovlev 2007). The narrator of the story "Tania" (2003) reflects on this spiritual connection, as well as on the boundless territory: "And I wanted to … kneel down and take a look at the Yenisei, wide as a sea, and thank heaven for this feeling sent by God…" (Tarkovskii 2018).

While the character of Tarkovskii's early stories was ontological, his later novel *Toyota Cresta* leans towards Russian nationalism, and it has been praised by one of the best-known contemporary Russian conservative and ethno-centric nationalist writers, Zakhar Prilepin, who considers Tarkovskii an equal of Valentin Rasputin (Filimonova 2016, 218).[44] If *Zona zatopleniia* lacks this nationalistic tendency characteristic of Rasputin, *Toyota Cresta* takes it even further. Orthodox symbols are important in it, and it conveys an idea of bringing Christianity further east and strengthening Russia's ties to Japan, which it portrays as respecting traditions better than Europe (Kovtun and Klimovich 2018, 323–24).

In the scope of this work, I cannot explore whether it is appropriate to consider Tarkovskii's or Senchin's works equals to Rasputin's river prose as representatives of the struggles for environmental justice by the Siberian villagers. Nevertheless, this question would be a fruitful research topic in the future. It would also be worthwhile to analyse the role and meanings of 'eternal' nature in the works of Tarkovskii and Senchin. Part of such an analysis should be an examination of the extent of building and recycling national myths of Russian nature and people's connection to it in their works. This leads to another important point of view on the future study of Tarkovskii: the connection of his works with econationalism.

As late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* can be understood as cultural ecology, and it can thus work as an ecological force (Publication IV), its contemporary successors that I have briefly presented in this subchapter might also be considered cultural ecology. This question, however, falls outside the scope of the current work and remains a potential future topic for research.

3.3 Russian 'Ecocriticism'

The 1960s was a turning point in world history. After the publication and wide success of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, human perceptions of the non-human

[44] Prilepin's praise of Tarkovskii as an equal of Rasputin is also printed on the cover of the edition of *Toyota Cresta* that I have used.

environment changed fundamentally, especially in what was then known as the 'First World' – the industrialized countries that were not socialist.[45] The widespread public discussion that ensued helped to spread awareness of the fragility of the biosphere in the face of human-induced changes to it. The philosophical, social and political environmental movement gave rise to multiple improvements in environmental policies, such as sustainable development and the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer, as well as to changes in individual behaviour. Even though environmental consciousness had existed even before the 1960s – in the West as well as in Russia and elsewhere – its major role in the developments in multiple spheres of society that ensued was unprecedented.

Despite the origins of the Western environmental movement arising from a literary work, ecological questions were a rare topic in literary criticism until the rise of ecocriticism in the 1990s. Since then, ecocriticism has grown hugely and it is nowadays practiced in the scope of multiple cultures and languages around the world. In the 2000s, the scope of ecocritical research has greatly diversified. The material turn in feminist theory gave rise to the idea of trans-corporeality, where environmental theories meet theories of human corporeality, underlining the inseparability of humans and their 'environment'. In its critique of colonial regimes and transnational capitalism, postcolonial ecocriticism found a common interface with economics and sociology, which had noted that environmental benefits and burdens were not equally distributed among different social groups, and developed the idea of environmental justice. A host of ecocritical studies have approached the contemporary ecological crises as a consequence of the Earth entering the disputed geological epoch of the Anthropocene, an idea that was originally discussed in the spheres of ecology and chemistry. Others have drawn from the work of twentieth-century anthropologists and theorized how imaginative literature can be understood as a form of cultural ecology.

The international environmental movement did not have a significant effect on Soviet society. Furthermore, literary studies done in Russia have not framed their research in terms of ecocriticism, nor have the theoretical concepts that I presented in the previous paragraph been discussed actively there. Judging by this, it appears that there is no such thing as 'Russian ecocriticism'.

Nevertheless, an environmental movement surfaced in Soviet society at the same time as the international movement. It happened for internal reasons, not in

[45] Below, as throughout the dissertation, when I use the more compact term 'the West' or 'Western', I refer most specifically to these countries. My usage of these terms is not geographical, and countries that fall out of their scope, such as Russia, are not necessarily 'Eastern'.

interaction with international environmentalism (see Chapter 1.4). Writers and imaginative literature played a key role in the movement, first because literature was one of the few arenas where environmental issues could be discussed, and second because literature has long been an important forum for the discussion of social problems in Russia. Russian literary research has characterized this kind of literature as *naturfilosofskaia proza* and studied the ways it handles natural-philosophical questions.

As my dissertation shows, even though late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* rose from distinctively national premises, it bears many similarities to international environmental literature. Even though Viktor Astaf´ev has nothing to do with material feminism, his writings reflect the very same idea of the inseparability of the human flesh and the material, more-than-human world that is inherent within the concept of trans-corporeality. Valentin Rasputin was not aware of how indigenous North-American communities suffered from environmental problems more than others did, but he wrote about environmental justice in Soviet Siberia, nevertheless – not from the indigenous point of view, but from the perspective of ordinary Russians in remote villages. Sergei Zalygin never heard about the age of the Anthropocene, but he understood that humanity had inflicted significant changes on the biosphere and had thus initiated the noosphere, the sphere of reason, which necessitates a completely new approach to the natural world in order to save humankind from destroying itself. Dmitrii Likhachëv had hardly read about cultural ecology, but he created the concept of *ėkologiia kul´tury*, and theorized the interplay of culture and nature and their significance to each other in a similar way as Julian Steward and Gregory Bateson.

The research on the relationship of nature and culture in literature, conducted in Russia, is essentially literary research that has sharp eyes for the poetics and semiotics of literature. It can find important connections of literary works to Slavic mythology and philosophical practices. It shares with international ecocriticism the interest in space and place, and it also studies cultural aspects of geography. While these are characteristic to ecocriticism too, the interdisciplinarity of contemporary ecocriticism is more diverse. Feminist, postcolonialist, posthumanist or new materialist positions or those taken by queer studies, gender studies and animal studies are common in the sphere of ecocritical research, but these perspectives are usually not used to study the connection of people and nature in Russia. Ecocriticism does not imply the use of any specific theoretical perspectives or methodological tools, but the lack of the diversity of ecocritical approaches can narrow down the possibilities of environmental criticism.

In this sense, ecocritical research is not practiced in Russia, but evidently the Russian literary and philosophical traditions have multiple connections to ecocritical practices, as my dissertation shows. Undoubtedly, Russian literature deserves and needs to be studied from ecocritical perspectives. Some theoretical concepts, such as the noosphere and the 'ecology of culture', greatly resemble those concepts that ecocritics have been working on over the last couple of decades. Others, such as environmental justice and trans-corporeality, do not have their Russian 'counterparts', but Russian literature has handled the issues nonetheless. Therefore, it may not be justified to say that ecocriticism as such exists in Russia, but many ecocritical practices definitely do. My dissertation shows that in discussions around these ecocritical practices, the river is a key element.

One essential question to ask is why Russian natural-philosophical prose bears such a similarity to Western environmental literature. I see two reasons for this. First, the environmental crisis is global, and so the anxiety about the state of the environment is common to various cultures. In Russia, this anxiety has been discussed through the concept of the noosphere, while the West currently discusses it through the idea of the Anthropocene. This is not adequate, however. The second reason is that both in the West and in Russia, faith in perpetual progress failed in the 1960s – although for quite different reasons. In the West, it happened because people started to realize that it was leading to the exhaustion of natural resources. Therefore, governments saw no other way but to restrict their exploitation. In Russia, the primary cause is the Soviet state's inability to fulfil its promise of an affluent future. People tired of waiting and turned their eyes to the past instead. Writers remembered their childhood in the villages with nostalgia. The writers had grown up on the banks of rivers: the river was part of their psyche and they formed a close material connection to it that involved its corporeal presence. As such, the rivers became active protagonists in the works of these writers.

When compared to Western ecocritical literature, late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* differs due to its nationalistic tendencies. Environmentalism is not, however, always subordinate to nationalism, as my analysis of Sergei Zalygin shows (Publication III, 6; Publication IV, 15). A more important difference is its emphasis on the past in search of a moral way of living. It finds a good example for a morally and environmentally sound way of life often in Orthodox Christian communities somewhere in the past. Its driving ideology has a conservative bent, while the Western environmental consciousness is usually associated with liberalism. The connections of village prose to nationalism and conservatism have been widely discussed. Less emphasis has been put on its multiple

similarities to international environmental literature, where the main contribution of my dissertation lies.

The traditionalist turn in Russian literature concurs with Western environmentalism, even though it is based on a different ideology. Nevertheless, the anxiety over the well-being of the environment is shared.

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PUBLICATION 1

"The Sovereign of the River and the Sovereign of All Nature—in the Same Trap": Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish*

Mika Perkiömäki

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CHAPTER 8

"The Sovereign of the River and the Sovereign of All Nature—in the Same Trap"

The River in Viktor Astafiev's Queen Fish

Mika Perkiömäki

Abstract

Russia is a country of great rivers whose population is largely concentrated on river banks. These invaluable sources of fresh water have always directed life in Russia, where huge modernization projects occurred during the Soviet era. Attempts to control nature had a great effect on the Russian countryside; awareness of negative environmental impacts from modernization efforts increased in the 1960s. Russian literature of the 1970s raised these ecological issues, helping to spread them in national consciousness. This chapter examines one of the key prose texts of this movement, Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish* (1976), concentrating on the meanings of the river in the novel. The active and trans-corporeal river, which connects human space to non-human space in the Siberian countryside and is a source of both life and death, is central in considering the work's characteristics as an environmental text.

> Then why, oh, why had their paths crossed? The sovereign of the river and the sovereign of all nature—in the same trap. One and the same painful death awaited them.
>
> ASTAFIEV, *Queen Fish* 180

⁘

Introduction

This chapter examines the river in Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish*, a thirteen-episode novel that was published in the Soviet Union in 1976. It is a collection of interconnected stories set on and around the Yenisei River in Krasnoyarsk Krai, Siberia. The work's depiction of humankind's responsibility for its abuse of nature has earned the book the reputation of being the author's natural philosophical manifesto (Smirnova, "Russkaia naturfilosofskaia proza" 38–39)

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and one of the central ecologically identified statements on Soviet modernization (P.A. Goncharov 180; Petushkova 66, Razuvalova 288, Shneidman 21). However, Astafiev's river has not been studied from an ecocritical point of view. I will argue that the river in *Queen Fish* connects human space to the more-than-human world, not only physically but also mentally. The river's active agency manifests itself in the motifs of the "River of Life" and the "River of Death," and the river's trans-corporeality[1] reflects its role as the medium between nature and culture: Astafiev's river is part of both nature and culture.

T. Scott McMillin has considered the motivation for researching the cultural meaning of rivers. He argues that studying the cultural meaning of rivers helps us to improve our understanding of the characteristics of rivers and human interactions with them (McMillin xviii). Rivers have great cultural meaning in Krasnoyarsk Krai, as exemplified by a fountain called "Siberian Rivers" (see fig. 8.1). It is located in the central square of the city of Krasnoyarsk and it depicts eight local rivers as statues. Six female statues on the sides of the fountain represent some of the area's minor rivers. The central female statue represents the Angara, the second largest river in the area. At the bottom of the fountain, a sole male figure represents the Yenisei, the major river—the "Father-Yenisei" as it is known. All the other rivers depicted on the fountain flow into it.

FIGURE 8.1 *"Siberian Rivers," a fountain in the Theatre Square, Krasnoyarsk.* SOURCE: AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPH.

1 See Alaimo.

The Historical Context of Soviet Modernization

From the first five-year plan in 1928, the Soviet Union strived for rapid modernization, emphasizing heavy industry and the military sector, which resulted in long-term extensive, negative environmental impacts. Attempts to control nature affected the natural circulation of water in some major rivers, particularly where massive dams and reservoirs were built (Josephson et al. 71–74). The industrialization efforts intensified during the period of reconstruction after World War II. The great rivers were transformed into planned, rational waterways—at enormous environmental cost—because the Soviet leaders considered hydroelectric power to be a sign of modernity (Josephson et al. 128–129, 163). How Russian literature reflected these attitudes to nature in the 1930s and 1950s is the topic of Arja Rosenholm's article in this volume.

The northern Russian territories experienced significant environmental changes due to the intensive industrial development. The human intervention into the natural environment was strong and the hydrologic regime of the rivers was disturbed (Krapivin et al. 121–122). In 1960, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union adopted a resolution acknowledging that all major rivers in the USSR were severely polluted (Josephson et al. 177). The relaxation of censorship led to public debate—which included prose fiction—regarding the state's catastrophic impact on the environment (Gillespie, "Thaws, freezes and wakes" 226). Maria Litovskaya touches on this toward the end of her contribution to this volume on the role of the river in Russian culture during the "Thaw" period.

A new movement known as village prose[2] emerged on the Russian literary scene in the 1960s. Unlike most Soviet writers, village prose writers came from the countryside, mostly from Siberia. They emphasized values that were associated with the traditional life of the Russian countryside over modernization, and their ideas were often critical of the official ideology and party policies. Even though the censorship of Russian literature strengthened again in the 1970s, many village prose authors were still published because of—according to Yitzhak Brudny—their nationalist character and because the authorities wanted to transform the village prose writers into an articulated audience that would be obedient to the regime (15–18). Many of these authors emphasized humanity's humility before nature, and Viktor Astafiev became a figurehead in the conservative wing of the movement.

2 *derevenskaia proza.*

Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism

The main theoretical framework of my study is ecocriticism, which is a new approach to Astafiev. Ecocritical analyses of village prose will aid our understanding of its representations of nature and its significance to Soviet-Russian society. *Queen Fish* may at first seem like a book about nature, but it is even more a book about people, and primarily a book about the relationship of the human and the non-human, which makes it an ideal object for an ecocritical reading. It depicts nature as humankind's ancient partner, discusses human accountability for the well-being of the more-than-human world, and presents the interests of the non-human environment as legitimate. The river is used as the main metaphor for conveying these ecocritically relevant ideas, but the river's role as a means of conveying the environmental message of *Queen Fish* has not been studied so far.

I focus on the representation of the river and its cultural and material relationship with the various people living in contact with it. Because the river plays an important role in *Queen Fish*, the central aim of my analysis is to better understand the meanings of the river in Astafiev's work.

In Russian research literature, Alfiia Smirnova ("Russkaia naturfilosofskaia proza" 38–68) and Elena Bondarenko have studied Astafiev's work from the point of view of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*,[3] which provides an alternative perspective for the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human in literature. Compared to ecocriticism, its position is more philosophical and ethical, and less ecological and political. *Naturphilosophie* offers a reasonable perspective to village prose, as village prose authors can be seen as philosophers.[4] They handle the moral aspects of human life while keeping a sense of the inseparability of culture and nature foregrounded. They describe the world as they see it, but do not clearly name the problems or present solutions to them. Nevertheless, they do have an ecological vision too, and this is especially true of Astafiev. An ecocritical reading can clarify the characteristics of his environmental message better than other approaches and create new connections between environmental history and literature.

Russian research has focused on people's perceptions, senses, or feelings of nature and their place in it,[5] which is essentially an anthropocentric point of view (see Gurlenova 4–37). Ecocriticism offers a more biocentric perspective

3 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), a German philosopher and the main founder of *Naturphilosophie* at the turn of the eighteenth century.

4 For more information on *Naturphilosophie* in Russian literature, see Grinfeld; Gurlenova; Smirnova, "Aktual'nye problemy."

5 *chuvstvo prirody.*

to studying the interaction of the non-human and the human. It helps us to listen to the voices of the non-human elements and characters that have been marginalized (McDowell 374). Astafiev's river is one such character.

I will first briefly present Viktor Astafiev and his novel *Queen Fish*. Next, I will show that the river is a key element when considering the novel's characteristics as an "environmental text." I will then take a closer look at the agency of the river before ending my analysis by a few concluding remarks.

Village Prose, Viktor Astafiev, and *Queen Fish*

Bernd Stevens Richter has suggested five complexes of reasons that led to the deterioration and destruction of nature in the Soviet Union. One of them is aesthetic, that is, art. Richter reasons that "[a]rt was to be affirmative, to strengthen the belief in the ultimate cause, to maintain the power of the leader and the [Communist] Party" (92). In the realm of socialist realism, nature—as the opposing force to culture—was something to be overcome by humankind. Nature was an object of transformation—an endless resource of material riches—to be subordinated to modernization and economic and political gain, and the purpose of rivers was to produce energy (Shtil'mark 432).

As David Gillespie notes, Russian village prose "is generally considered to have developed from Valentin Ovechkin's essays on the serious economic and cultural deficiencies of the collectivized village, published in the early 1950s" ("Valentin Rasputin" 6). Other similar essayists followed, and in the 1960s, these journalistic beginnings led to the birth of the village prose movement (Gillespie, "Valentin Rasputin" 6). Prose writing enabled the authors to write in a language that was easier to approach for the ordinary Soviet reader (Razuvalova 278). According to Gillespie, "[v]illage prose tells of the individual trapped in history, caught in a changing environment" ("Valentin Rasputin" 7).

The Russian environment was, indeed, rapidly changing in the 1950s–1970s. The Russian countryside was becoming increasingly mechanized, villages were submerged by reservoirs, and people were moving to new settlements away from the river, their traditional habitat. Particularly in Siberia, the machine age was replacing the rural past. The rapid development of natural resources inflicted increased pollution and ever worsening environmental problems that left the Soviet waters poisoned. By the late 1960s, water pollution had become the Soviet Union's key resource conservation issue. The total fish catch had dropped by almost 40% in just six years because of pollution, dams, rapacious fishing, and poaching. The state finally reacted with an inaugural inclusion of expenditures for environmental protection in the state budget for the ninth five-year plan in 1971. However, the aim was not so much a genuine concern for

the environment as a need to demonstrate that environmental standards met those of the West (Josephson et al. 184–190, 222–224).

Many village prose authors wrote in the spirit of nostalgia. The lifestyles and values of the Russian peasantry were often depicted as wholesome and morally correct. The village prose writers had a negative attitude to "the teleological vision of human progress" and offered "an alternative set of values based on emotional experience" (Gillespie, "Valentin Rasputin" 1). Many questioned the superiority of the typical Soviet citizen of the technological and rational age. Humanity's spiritual links with the natural world formed a specific kind of culture and traditions, embodied in the disappearing Russian village life (Gillespie, "A Paradise Lost?" 264; Gillespie, "Thaws, freezes and wakes" 226; Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2: 63; Shneidman 16–17). The authors did not intend to use oppositional rhetoric, but in fact they often assumed a voice that spoke out against the state institutions responsible for the environmental problems (Razuvalova 278).

Along with Valentin Rasputin, Sergei Zalygin, Viktor Belov, and Vasily Shukshin, Viktor Astafiev was a major figurehead of the village prose movement. He was born in 1924 in the village of Ovsianka near Krasnoyarsk. He endured a difficult childhood under Stalin's regime in Siberia; his early years were marked by poverty, suffering, war, and death. After his mother drowned in the Yenisei, he spent his teenage years north of the Arctic Circle in the remote town of Igarka, where a local teacher sparked his interest in literature. He was badly wounded on the front line in World War II—where he went at the age of 17—but survived. Astafiev started to write in the 1950s, professionally in the 1960s, and continued to write until his death in 2001.[6]

Viktor Astafiev earned a reputation as an environmentalist and a moralist (Brown 87–88). He is widely remembered as an advocate of the environment, the ordinary Siberian people, and traditional Russian moral values (Gillespie, "Thaws, freezes and wakes" 226; Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2:97–100). Humankind's interaction with its environment is a major theme in Astafiev's works from the 1960s onwards, and he wrote about the coexistence of people and nature in many of his essays, articles, and prose (Petushkova 66). Astafiev is considered a hero in his native Krasnoyarsk Krai, where his works are still widely read and highly valued. After his death, the city of Krasnoyarsk not only erected a statue to commemorate the author,[7] but also erected one for

6 For more on Astafiev's biography, see Briskman; Gerasimenko; P.A. Goncharov; Ianovski; Medvedeva et al.

7 In contrary to his wishes, I have been told by the locals.

FIGURE 8.2 *Queen Fish statue in Krasnoyarsk.*
SOURCE: AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPH.

one of Astafiev's most famous characters: the giant sturgeon from *Queen Fish* (see fig. 8.2).

Queen Fish is an autobiographical narrative consisting of thirteen loosely connected episodes, which are unified by the theme of humanity's relationship with nature. First published in 1976 in the literary magazine *Nash sovremennik*—which Brudny characterizes as the most important Russian nationalist publication of the time (10, 18)—it is Astafiev's best-known work and is usually considered one of the best examples of the emerging theme of nature in the Russian prose of the 1970s, and as one of the decade's most important literary works in Russia as a whole. It has sold millions of copies and been translated into dozens of languages, and it also earned its author the USSR State Prize in 1978. It covers deep philosophical questions on universal moral and ethical issues and considers the substance of the Russian national character. It represents the kind of village prose that is more concerned with questions of people's contacts with nature and less with village life and its problems. It treats rapid changes in Siberian nature as both an ecological and an ethical problem.

The idea of the inseparability of people and the non-human elements of nature is present throughout the book (P.A. Goncharov 180, 190; Petushkova 66; Shneidman 21).

The original Russian language title of the work is *Tsar'-ryba*. Literally, this translates as Czar Fish, or King Fish. Nevertheless, as the word "ryba" is feminine and the fish in the text is evidently female: the title of the English edition is, quite aptly, *Queen Fish*.

The stories are set on the Yenisei River, and on its tributaries and banks, which were the narrator's boyhood milieu. The Yenisei is one of the great Siberian rivers, the others being the Ob and the Lena. It originates from the south of the Central Siberian Plateau, flows north, and enters into the Arctic Ocean via the Kara Sea and contributes almost a quarter of the total freshwater flow from Asia into the Arctic (see fig. 8.3). About half of the drainage area is underlain by permafrost. The human activities of the Yenisei Basin are considerable and the economic development is advanced. The total population is about five million (Yang, Ye, and Kane 60–61).

The narrator of *Queen Fish* describes the daily life of the locals, and their adventures while fishing and hunting in the Yenisei Basin. Fishing in the Yenisei is strictly regulated and many episodes concern poaching. The river is not just a setting—its role is greater: it is an active, leading character. Inconsiderate

FIGURE 8.3 *The Yenisei river on the Russian map.*
SOURCE: UWE DEDERING, <HTTP://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:RUSSIA_EDCP_RELIEF_LOCATION_MAP.JPG>.

poaching works as a metaphor for humankind's irresponsible activities against nature, but it is also a valid theme in its own right.[8]

The main protagonist of *Queen Fish* is Akim, a 27-year old professional hunter and fisher, who knows everything one needs to know in order to survive in the harsh Siberian countryside. He does not consider himself superior to nature nor does he define himself in opposition to it. Rather, he feels unity with nature and its creatures. He seems to represent the positive side of age-old Siberian village life. In winter, he goes to live and hunt far away from civilization, living a solitary life in a simple cabin.

Much of my analysis is based on the eponymous episode "Queen Fish." It tells of Ignatich, a hard-working man, who is respected by everyone except his evil brother, Utrobin. Ignatich is a poacher and one night he catches a giant sturgeon. The fish is too big for him to land, and he remembers his grandfather's advice that if you carry a great sin with you, you should let this kind of "Queen Fish" go. Ignatich, however, is too greedy to do so, and finally the fish pulls him into the Yenisei and both the fish and the fisherman end up fighting for their lives as the poacher is trapped together with the fish by his own hooks. After a long struggle, as he is close to death, Ignatich remembers a great sin from his youth. He asks for forgiveness from the fish, from nature, and from the girl he raped many years ago. After this act of contrition, both the poacher and the fish finally break free from the hooks and swim away.

The River Connects Nature and Culture

I begin my analysis by examining the four characteristics of an "environmental text," as suggested by Lawrence Buell (7–8). His list has received much criticism over the years (see e.g. Head; Wallace and Armbruster). I agree that it does not offer a thorough list of the environmental aspects of literature and that ecocritics should not be interested only in so-called nature writing,

8 Poaching is a relevant topic on the Yenisei even today, as I saw myself in the summer of 2013 when I met a modern-day poacher in Igarka. His life had not changed much since the days of *Queen Fish*. He thought Astafiev's image of village life was credible, but the fictional elements were confusing to him, because the narration is so realist otherwise. He was also aware of the moral aspects of his profession. Nevertheless, he stressed his point of view: it is not his fault that the river has been spoilt. He did not ask the state to spoil the environment, so he felt he should not be punished for it. Fishing is the only way of making a living that he knows. To avoid the eye of the inspectors, he has to lay his nets 70 kilometers from home.

which many think is implied by Buell's list. I argue, however, that reading a text while keeping Buell's ingredients in mind might nevertheless highlight important characteristics of the work that are not immediately evident. However, it is not my aim to evaluate the "greenness" of the novel by discussing Buell's list.

Astafiev's novel conforms comprehensively to the first three characteristics. First, human history is clearly implicated in natural history by underlining the connection—even the kinship—of the people and the river. Second, human interest is definitely not the only legitimate interest; for example, the needs of the fish receive ample attention. Third, according to my analysis, human accountability to the environment is undoubtedly part of the text's ethical orientation. It is slightly debatable how well Buell's fourth characteristic is met, namely the sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given, but the active agency of nature—which is prone to rapid changes and defends itself—fits this criterion well too.

Remarkably, in *Queen Fish* all these characteristics are closely connected to the river. When in the episode "Queen Fish" the narrator describes the distant relations of Ignatich and his brother, he notices that they meet "only on the river and when the need arose—at funerals, weddings, and christenings" (Astafiev, *Queen Fish*[9] 169). The river is thus equated with the most important ceremonies of human life, which locates it as the realm of people's lives and in the same mental space rather than as their "environment" or the "landscape." In short: the river "is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history," as Buell formulated his first characteristic. It is precisely the river that connects humankind to the non-human environment.

The episode "At the Golden Ridge" tells about Ignatich's brother, Utrobin. He beats his wife, but loves his small daughter Taika more than anything else in the world. Utrobin is poaching on the Yenisei and finds a dead body trapped in his hooks. He gets scared, lets the body loose, not giving it the chance of a proper burial. Soon the local fish inspector spots him, and a furious chase follows. Utrobin knows the rivers well enough to find a spot on the Sym river where he is able to hide from the inspector. After returning home he learns that his daughter has been killed by a drunken driver in an empty village street.

The importance of the river to the local people is evident in this episode when Utrobin finds out that the authorities want to completely stop the fishing

9 In later referrals to the English translation of my primary material, I will only use the letters *QF*.

of the Yenisei. The river and the taiga[10] are his whole world, and he simply cannot imagine life without fishing:

> I don't know what things are coming to… For ever and a day we've all gone fishing and there's been enough for everyone! Nowadays though the fish are dying by the thousand and all there is left to pick up is the odd crumb… Oh, mercy me! We ought to turn our back on all this dilly-dallying and make for the South, for the fruit. If we don't go out into the taiga and fish what's there to keep us here? … They're just driving us out of the river and the forest! There won't be room for us anywhere on earth soon! (*QF* 123)

The fish have been "dying by the thousand," as Utrobin puts it, because of human activities since the 1950s. Within the Yenisei's catchment area, the levels of both atmospheric and water pollution are high. According to Dahle et al. the pollution is largely connected to the industrial enterprises—especially the nickel and oil industries—that are situated in the area (59). In the early 1990s, Melnikov et al. found high concentrations of DDT in the Ob-Yenisei watershed (36), and Holmes et al. noted a strikingly high ammonium flux in the Yenisei already in the 1970s (2311). Yang, Ye, and Kane identified a cold season discharge increase over the Yenisei basin, and concluded that it "is not natural-caused, but the effect of reservoir regulations over the northeast and upper parts of the Yenisei basin" (78).

At the time of the publication of *Queen Fish*, there were two hydroelectric dams on the Yenisei and three more on the Angara, the Yenisei's major tributary.[11] These were all built in the 1950s–1970s. Like elsewhere, big hydro power stations are accompanied by huge reservoirs, which disrupt the natural flow of rivers and cause many problems for both people and wildlife (Precoda 16).

The Yenisei also has had significant radioactive pollution, because in 1953 the nuclear production and processing facility of Krasnoyarsk Mining and Chemical Combine was opened in Krasnoyarsk-26, now known as Zheleznogorsk. Its last plutonium reactor was shut down in 2010 (Podvig). Its weapons-grade plutonium production introduced radioactive contamination into the river. There are also facilities producing chemical pollutants along the Yenisei (Krapivin et al. 121–122). According to Bondareva and Bolsunovsky, the surface

10 Taiga: northern coniferous boreal forest that lies south of the Russian tundra (Josephson et al. 17).

11 Yet another dam was finished in 2012 on the Angara at Boguchany.

waters of the Yenisei basin contain enhanced tritium concentrations, and artificial radionuclide Carbon-14 has also been found.[12]

In order for the poachers in *Queen Fish* to catch enough fish to make a living, they must know the river from childhood, and get frozen and soaked in it; they have to "fraternize" with it.[13] The river is understood to be a family member, which also highlights the common fate of humanity and the natural world.

People are depicted as being so used to the river and its resources that they regard it almost as their own larder. Presenting people as thinking about the river as their larder and not as a natural subject underlines their ignorance of the non-human needs and matches Buell's second ingredient, which is also visible in highlighting the interests of the fish who live in the river. The exploitation of the river is so blatant that the narrator asks:

> Can fish cry? Who knows? They live in the water and if they were to cry it would not show but one thing is for sure they cannot sob, and that's a fact. If they could, then the whole of the Yenisei, and not just the Yenisei but all rivers and seas would echo with their weeping. (*QF* 126)

The third ingredient—human accountability to the environment—is also present through the image of the river: the river is the place where the poacher is trapped with the so-called Queen Fish because of the "greed that had seized him and made him forget the man in him" (*QF* 184). All this highlights the importance of the image of the river in *Queen Fish* in establishing a biocentric position.

The river seems to be an essential, vital partner for the people. It is an integral part of village life and takes part in all the important ceremonies and rites of passage. At the same time, it lives its own life with its own creatures, which are—although sometimes humanlike in some respects—beyond human comprehension. Its direct contact with village life makes it part of human culture, which becomes evident by examining how Buell's characteristics of an environmental text are visible in the text. But clearly it is also part of nature, the impenetrable Siberian wildness, too. This dual character of the river makes it an ample resource for discussing the degradation of the human environment. It signals anxiety over the degradation of both human culture—the ethical aspect—as well as wild nature—the environmental aspect—and Astafiev is

12 For a more detailed report on nuclear contamination in the Ob and the Yenisei, see United States, Office of Technology Assessment (43–47).

13 "Pobratajsia s vodoiu" in the original text (Astafiev, *Tsar'-ryba* 213).

not the only village prose author who has used the river when handling the ecological problems of the Soviet Union.

The Agentic and Trans-corporeal River of Life and Death

Evgeniia Bukaty has briefly looked into the representation of the river and its relationship with human beings in *Queen Fish*. She notes that the river unites human space with natural space since it is the only means of transport in the area (102). To get to the space of the taiga, one must travel on the river ice in winter, while in summer, one must take a boat along the river. Bukaty writes about physical space, but I would like to add that the same applies to mental space too, as I argued in the previous subchapter.

As P.P. Goncharov notes, the river of *Queen Fish* is both a destroyer and a savior at the same time (135). It not only feeds the poachers, but it is also ready to punish them. I argue that the most important motifs connected to the river are the "River of Death" and the "River of Life," and the Yenisei plays both roles. By "River of Life" I do not refer as much to the usual metaphor of life as a river, but rather to the river's role as a vital element of life. Similarly, the "River of Death" refers to the river's lethal aspect. On the one hand, the Yenisei is a vital source of all life, which is well understood and respected by the local people, but not so well by the city dwellers. On the other hand, the river is a cruel, punishing power and many have drowned in it. This kind of paradoxical quality is typical for rivers, which can be or do several things at once (McMillin xii). The river in *Queen Fish* is not, however, an opposing force to humankind; it is more like an eternal partner, for better or worse.

The motifs of the "River of Death" and the "River of Life" paint a picture of the river as something that "is agentic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and non-human world," to quote Stacy Alaimo's and Susan Hekman's description of nature as understood by material feminism (7). It is "an agentic force that interacts with and changes the other elements in the mix, including the human" (Alaimo and Hekman 7). The river is not only a positive presence, but also an "enigmatic, active Other" as in Catriona Sandilands' radical democratic vision (181). I do agree with the conclusion of natural philosophical readings of *Queen Fish* that the work contains a strong sense of the unity of culture and nature. This picture is not complete, however, because the river's agency makes it an independent actor. Even so, it is significant that the actions of both humans and the river have implications for the life of both: "The human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human-world," as Alaimo (238) puts it.

The river represents a border between life and death, but it is also a flow of life-giving water through the body of the land; it feeds the people with fish and the land with water. It represents the flow of time, eternal life, and motion. For this reason, Bukaty notes that the river in *Queen Fish* is a living being (102). The border is a typical metaphorical meaning of the river and, as McMillin has noted, rivers are associated with the possibility of transformation (130). In Astafiev's text, it is not the people that are transformed, but the river itself: the river is said to sleep in winter; in spring, it awakens and "plays" (Bukaty 102).

Another remarkable episode in *Queen Fish* is "Fish Soup on the Boganida." Boganida[14] is a minor river in the barren tundra and also a tiny, poor settlement on the bank of the river, a pastoral image of the northern past. There Akim was born and bred by a half-Dolgan, half-Russian single mother.[15] Life is exceptionally harsh there and people's eyes have an "eternal quiet melancholy of the Northerner," which "[n]o one has yet been able to explain" (*QF* 215). Particularly during the long winter, the locals are "quiet, gloomy, they live in themselves and think about themselves; they curse the winter and the north and make plans to leave it" (*QF* 217). But in springtime they flourish, like the nature around them.

Due to harsh living conditions, the custom is that all the children, as well as the dogs, are fed on the fish soup cooked for the local workers. A major part of the episode is devoted to minutely describing a feast of spring's first such communal soup, cooked in a huge cauldron. The story ends with Boganida becoming deserted, the common cauldron being reduced to a child's toy, and Akim's mother quickly weakening and perishing soon after drinking "black powder mixed with soldering acid from a tin can" in a desperate attempt to abort her eighth pregnancy (*QF* 250). Since the workers and the common cauldron are gone, it would not have been possible to raise another child. Apocalyptically, the whole village is finally completely destroyed and forgotten.

Astafiev describes how the fish swim around in the fervently boiling communal fish soup as in a spectacular "fish dance" in the huge cauldron that feeds the whole village, even the dogs (*QF* 229). Later in the same episode, he describes how a fish digests gnats in a similar way as the fishes "play" in the cauldron: "the fish's belly was cooking, just like the Boganida's cauldron" (*QF* 246). The dancing fish are a metaphor for the people, who are similarly being tossed around by

14 "Bog" is Russian for God. The name of the village highlights its importance as a "gift of God," which is later abandoned by people (Kovtun, *Sovremennaia traditsionalistskaia proza* 273).

15 Dolgans are a Turkic people who mainly live in the Taymyrsky Dolgano-Nenetsky District in the very north of Krasnoyarsk Krai.

life. The story is an example of what Stacy Alaimo calls trans-corporeality, "the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment'" (Alaimo 238). In *Queen Fish*, the gnats are eaten and digested by the fish, then the flesh of the fish feeds the people and becomes the substance of humans, who are themselves swimming in the great river of life. In Alaimo's words, this "underlines the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (238). Boganida's gnats, fish, and people constitute one trans-corporeal whole together with the river, which is vital for them all.

The river also plays the role of *prima materia*, the source material of humans. Fish are primeval and ancient, and people evolved from them. In her analysis, Bukaty perceives an ontological cycle, the cycle of life in Boganida's fish soup: "The fish digest worms and are then cooked in a cauldron, later people digest the fish. Similarly, people are cooked by life, in the cauldron of life. If a person refuses to go to the common cauldron of life … then life is crushed out of him."[16] Thus, the river is not only a metaphor for the stream of life, but also an important part in the cycle of life: it not only gives birth to people; it also grinds and softens them. Soft and amenable people, like Akim, float on the waves like the fish. Hard-hearted people, like Goga Gertsev in the episode "The Dream of the White Mountains," do not let themselves be cooked in the cauldron of life, but also they are powerless in the face of life's flow. The extent of participation in the common cauldron of life is defined by the person's will. The flow of life softens and cleanses the person. If you do not voluntarily let yourself be softened in the river of life, the Queen Fish plunges you violently into the river, where you are purified by repentance and humility, or else die (Bukaty 103–104).

Motifs of perpetual motion and the movement of time are associated with the image of the river. Time proceeds towards death, the ultimate end. Humans float with the flow of the river, but also against its current, like a fish. The main episodes of *Queen Fish* take place within the boundaries of the Yenisei. They introduce different ways of living in the flow of life: one can follow the wave or resist it. Hunters and explorers try to escape the boundaries of the space created by the flow of life, but what follows is either a return or death. According to Bukaty, Astafiev's ethical conception can be summarized thus: "Nature and the river are the direction of movement, but it depends on the person's will which direction they will take. 'Queen Nature' does not dictate the laws, she only forces one to observe them" (104).[17] This also characterizes some

16 The translation from the Russian is by the author.

17 The translation from the Russian is by the author.

of Astafiev's earlier texts, especially the novella "Starodub" ("The Old Oak") from 1960 (Kovtun, "Priroda i religiia").

Travelling upstream against the flow of the river has usually meant humankind's victory over nature (McMillin 61–64), but in *Queen Fish* it represents the unity of nature and culture. The motif of travelling up the river appears in the episode "The Dewdrop," where the autobiographical narrator travels with his son, his brother, and Akim far upstream, deep into the wildness, to catch fish. He camps out there over a short Arctic summer night, stays awake, and contemplates his relationship with nature. On the way back, the group is overtaken by a dangerous storm, which forces them to leave their dog in the forest.

The protagonists row upstream the Oparikha River to a place that is perfect for fishing, because "there are never any people there, it is such an impassable waterway" (*QF* 67). They even have to abandon the boat and continue on foot through the "Siberian jungle," sometimes "creeping on their stomachs," sometimes "crawling on all fours" (*QF* 67). The place continually swarms with gnats.[18] Finally, they arrive at a suitable place and find excellent fishing grounds where they catch fish, "enough to last the winter" (*QF* 67). At night, the narrator contemplates his relationship with nature and experiences some kind of existential, spiritual awakening while spending a long time watching a dewdrop hanging "on the tapering tip of an oblong willow leaf" (*QF* 80). As his identification with other beings increases, he gains a better understanding of nature and his role as part of it.

It is true that the protagonists gain a certain victory over nature when advancing to a place that is almost impossible for humans to visit, and by fishing there they take advantage of what nature has to offer. However, the autobiographical narrator's spiritual awakening does not stress the struggle between himself and the natural elements, but his unity with his environment. There, upriver, is "no trace of human activity—no camp-fire remains, no felled timber or stumps, none, in short, of man's vile doings in the taiga" (*QF* 76). The narrator understands that:

> We only think that we have transformed everything, including the taiga. Not so. We have only wounded it, damaged it, trampled it underfoot, gashed it, and scorched it with fire, but we have failed either to infect it with our own fear and confusion or with enmity, try as we might. The soul of the taiga is as majestic, as solemn, and as imperturbable as it always

18 Mosquitos, blackflies, midges, and horseflies are a recurring motif in *Queen Fish*. During the short Arctic summer, they constantly make human life miserable for those living near the taiga.

> was. We try to convince ourselves that we control the workings of nature, that we can do what we please with it, but this is a fallacy that falls to pieces the moment you confront the taiga face to face. (*QF* 83)

In other words, travelling up the river helped the narrator to better understand the essence of nature. He needed to confront the river and its actively and materially flowing character to better understand the non-human. He states that he feels a compassion for his son, his brother, and all humankind, because he is suddenly very anxious about the future of humankind (*QF* 81–82). The reason for his anxiety stems from the negligent abuse of natural resources. In the morning, however, he becomes calm when the dewdrop finally falls; there is "a wet freshness in the air, and all that grew filled with a life-giving moisture" and "[t]he breath of life suffused everything around" (*QF* 85–86). Living water is the power that keeps things alive, and it is a sign of hope for a better future where humankind and nature will be better connected.

The motif of travelling up the river is actually not solely used in the opposite way of the traditional interpretation. The meanings conveyed by it also reflect the difficulty of the inner struggle to understand a world that differs from your own. "My world" in this case is the city and the "other world" is the deep Siberian taiga, almost impenetrable to humankind. I conclude, however, that the materiality of the journey upstream highlights that it pays for one to try to get along with nature, because only that way can one begin to feel unity with it and better understand one's relationship with it.

According to McMillin, one characteristic that is also typical of the "up the river" stories is that the "movement tends to be back into the past or the forgotten wild" (xvi). These "tales of a voyage against the flow of time and nature [...] attempt to go back into the primitive wild of the human past or into the jungle where that savage past is presumed present" (McMillin 82). This is, to some extent, the case in the episode "The Dewdrop" in *Queen Fish* too. The narrator finds consolation from the wildness for his anxiety that stems from the problems of modernization in his native lands.

Finally, I return to the eponymous episode, "Queen Fish," where humankind's actions against nature are paralleled with the act of rape. Representing human actions against nature as an act of rape can be problematized. In Andrea Blair's words, land has too often been "seen as ... the chaste virgin, needing protection from rape" (111). From a strictly postmodern feminist point of view, this allegory seems to strengthen old, linguistically constructed dichotomies, such as culture/nature and man/woman. Material feminism allows us to look at it differently, however. I would like to refer to Alaimo and Hekman and note that nature is here "more than a passive social construction" and that

it "'punches back' at humans … in ways that we cannot predict" (7). The abused female fish does not surrender easily. Instead, she resists and fights back with all her considerable material force. If you do not repent, she will kill you.

Significantly, woman-like nature is not just a victim, but an active part of the events that shape the life of both the people and the non-human elements. The active character of nature, manifested in the powerful Queen Fish, is also the ingredient that most strikingly sets *Queen Fish* apart from the pastoral tradition, because, as Carolyn Merchant notes, "in pastoral imagery, both nature and women are subordinate and essentially passive" (14). The river and the nature of *Queen Fish* are not subordinate at all to the people's will. Another feature that sets the novel apart from the classical pastoral is the fact that its representation of the village is not idealistic: even though the village people's connection to nature is better preserved than the city dwellers', it is the villagers who practice poaching, drink too much, and run over schoolgirls. Indeed, the novel's rich genderization of nature deserves a more thorough study than is possible in this paper.

The river of *Queen Fish* is an apt example of thinking with water through watery language and metaphor, as suggested by Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis (10). The meanings that this agentic river produces "influence in various ways the existence of both human and non-human natures," which is one of the key ideas of material ecocriticism (Iovino and Oppermann 3). In addition, the motifs of the "River of Life" and the "River of Death" support this view of an active, agentic nature who forces us to observe the laws under which we must live.

Conclusion

Writers have always occupied a prestigious position in Russian society, and this is reflected in their influence in the Soviet environmental movement. Despite the strong state control of literature during the "Stagnation" era, authoritative nationalist writers like Viktor Astafiev could continue to publish ecologically identified works, like *Queen Fish*, which criticized the modernization efforts that had led to environmental disasters.

German *Naturphilosophie* was well received in Russia already in the nineteenth century. Justifiably, Astafiev's literature has been researched as part of the natural philosophical tradition. Russian scholars have identified a whole variety of literature called "natural philosophical prose,"[19] a term which, incidentally, was coined in a 1976 review of *Queen Fish* (Smirnova, "Aktual'nye" 5). Ecocriticism is another valid approach to Astafiev's text. Even though Rachel

19 *naturfilosofskaia proza.*

Carson's *Silent Spring* was not translated into Russian, the Soviet media readily shared information about environmental problems in the Western world (Razuvalova 277). Astafiev's novel rose from the same world, which was entering a global environmental crisis. Perhaps nowhere was this crisis more acute than in the Soviet Union.

My reading has opened new perspectives on Astafiev's text, which tells us about people *and* nature from a biocentric position, and it is therefore a suitable research object for ecocritical analysis. The image of the river—for example as the "River of Life" and the "River of Death"—is an important ecocritical metaphor in the work, because most parts of the text that conform to the characteristics of an environmental text are connected to the river. The text also uses trans-corporeality by presenting human material corporeality as inseparable of the non-human. The river of the text is part of both culture and nature. As such, it is a vital link between the human and the more-than-human world, both materially and mentally. A useful tool for establishing a biocentric position is the use of traditional meanings in non-traditional ways, such as the motif of travelling up the river and the metaphor of nature as female, helping to create a more environmentally aware relationship with nature.

I would like to finish this "eco trip" in the world of Soviet-era Russian literature by returning to the quotation that started this article and represents the main message of Viktor Astafiev's *Queen Fish*. It captures the moment in the eponymous episode where the poacher and the fish are fighting for survival in the river. Metaphorically, it speaks about the relationship and common fate of humankind and nature: "The sovereign of the river and the sovereign of all nature—together in the same trap … they were bound by the same fatal end" (*QF* 180–181).

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PUBLICATION 2

Matka hukutetulla joella: Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus Valentin Rasputinin jokiproosassa

Mika Perkiömäki

Title in English: "**Journey on a Drowned River: Environmental Justice in Valentin Rasputin's River Prose**". Both the original Finnish version and the English translation are included below.

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Matka hukutetulla joella

Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus Valentin Rasputinin 1970-luvun jokiproosassa

Mika Perkiömäki

> Tämän maailman parasta ennen -päivä on jo mennyt.
> (Valentin Rasputin)[1]

Valentin Rasputinin (1937–2015) matkakertomus ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” (”Myötä- ja vastavirtaan”) julkaistiin ensimmäisen kerran Neuvostoliiton konservatiivisten ja radikaalienkin venäläismielisten suosimassa (Brudny 1998, 10) kirjallisuuslehdessä *Naš sovremennik* vuonna 1972. Noihin aikoihin venäläisen kirjallisuuden luontokuvaa uudistivat niin kutsuttua kyläproosaa (*derevenskaja proza*)[2] edustaneet siperialaiset kirjailijat. Heidän teoksensa käsittelevät elämää Venäjän syrjäseuduilla, ja niissä luonto usein esiintyy pelkän tapahtumapaikan tai ihmisen elinympäristön sijaan aktiivisena toimijana. Monien kyläprosaistien

1 Sitaatti Sergei Mirošnitšenkon kaksiosaisesta dokumenttielokuvasta *Reka žizni. Valentin Rasputin* (2011; ”Elämän joki. Valentin Rasputin”).

2 Termi suomennetaan toisinaan myös maaseutuproosaksi, sillä venäjän sana *derevnja* merkitsee sekä kylää että maaseutua. Teokset kertovat nimenomaan kyläelämästä (Viltšek 1985, 36), ja kyläproosa on kuvaavampi käännös myös siksi, että se tekee selvemmän eron niin sanottuun kolhoosikirjallisuuteen (Parthé 1992, 151). Myös se sijoittuu maaseudulle, mutta siinä kyläyhteisön merkitys ei ole yhtä suuri. Esimerkkinä kolhoosikirjallisuudesta mainittakoon Mihail Šolohovin kaksiosainen romaani *Aron raivaajat* (*Podnjataja tselina*, 1932, 1959).

tuotannossa korostuvat ihmisen ja luonnon ykseys, yhteinen historia sekä ihmisen nöyryys luonnon edessä (Gillespie 2001, 226; Leiderman & Lipovetski 2008, 80; Parthé 1992, 7). Kahdesti Neuvostoliiton (1977, 1987) ja kerran Venäjän (2012) valtionpalkinnon saanut Valentin Rasputin oli tämän liikkeen näkyvimpiä tekijöitä.

Venäläisessä proosakirjallisuudessa ihmisen ja luonnon yhteydestä kirjoittaminen ei ollut uutta, mutta 1960-luvulla tapahtunut kyläproosan nousu osui historiallisesti ajankohtaan, jolloin ihmisen toiminnan aiheuttamien, luonnolle haitallisten vaikutusten mittasuhteita alettiin Neuvostoliitossa ymmärtää. Kirjallisuudentutkija Anna Razuvalovan (2015, 278) mukaan kyläprosaistit osoittivat neuvostolukijalle, että valtiopropagandan vakuuttelut sosialistisen taloudenhoidon ylivertaisuudesta ympäristöongelmien ratkaisemiseksi eivät vastanneet todellisuutta. Maaseudun kirjailijat osasivat esittää luonnonsuojeluproblematiikan lukijan kannalta helposti lähestyttävällä ja ymmärrettävällä tavalla. Erilaiset paikalliset ongelmat tulivat heidän teostensa myötä valtakunnallisesti tunnetuiksi.

Tässä artikkelissa analysoin Valentin Rasputinin matkakertomuksen ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” jokea ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta. Väitän, että tässä kertomuksessa Rasputin ensimmäistä kertaa käsittelee Venäjän syrjäseudun ihmisen ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuteen[3] liittyviä ongelmia, ja osoitan, että teoksen joki on ratkaisevassa asemassa siinä, miksi elinympäristöön liittyvä oikeudenmukaisuus ei toteudu. Teoksen joki edustaa elämää, onnea ja mennyttä aikaa, kun taas vesivoimalaitoksen patoallas merkitsee vastakohtaisesti kuolemaa, epäonnea ja nykyaikaa. Mennyt joki oli ihmiselle merkityksellinen paikka, mutta modernisaation tuottama patoallas on hukuttanut sen ja luonut ympärilleen abstraktimpaa tilaa. Ulkopuolelta uuteen kyläyhteisöön saapuvalle päähenkilölle se näyttäytyy entisen rinnalla lähes merkityksettömänä, sillä ihmisen perinteinen elintila, joen ja metsän välinen rajavyöhyke, on kadonnut. Teoksen kokonaisvaltaista luonnetta korostaa se, että tapah-

3 Englanninkielinen termi *environmental justice* on aiemmin toisinaan suomennettu myös ympäristölliseksi oikeudenmukaisuudeksi (ks. Fish 2008, 235). Käytän tässä artikkelissa sittemmin vakiintunutta termiä ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus.

tumapaikkoja ei nimetä. Näin sen käsittelemät ongelmat eivät näyttäydy paikallisina vaan yleisempinä.

Oikeus hyvään elinympäristöön

Toisen maailmansodan jälkeinen jälleenrakennus ja teollistaminen Neuvostoliitossa merkitsivät yhä kasvavaa luonnonresurssien käyttöönottoa. 1960-luvulle tultaessa tehtiin päätös suuren paperi- ja selluloosatehtaan rakentamisesta Baikalskin kaupunkiin Baikal-järven etelärannalle. Lukuisat huomattavat tutkijat, toimittajat, kirjailijat ja muut kulttuurivaikuttajat vastustivat päätöstä, ja heidän ympärilleen syntyi uusi neuvostoliittolainen ympäristöliike, joka pyrki estämään tehtaan rakentamisen (Kaminski 2010, 90). Se näki ympäristöhaitat liian suuriksi järvelle, joka pitkään oli ollut suorastaan pyhä paikka ja puhtaan siperialaisen luonnon symboli.[4] Tehdas kuitenkin rakennettiin ja avattiin vuonna 1966, ja se on vaikuttanut haitallisesti paitsi Baikalin myös siitä alkunsa saavan Angara-joen vesiin.[5]

Neuvostolehdistössä kritisoitiin 1960-luvulla paljon myös maan jättiläismäisiä vesivoimalahankkeita, joiden taloudellinen hyöty sekä yhteiskunnalliset ja ekologiset vaikutukset olivat huonosti arvioituja (Josephson et al. 2013, 168–172). Osa hankkeista oli silloin jo käynnistynyt, osaa vasta valmisteltiin. Ympäristöliikkeen näkyvimpiin edustajiin kuului siperialaisia kirjailijoita, joista Sergei Zalygin julkaisi vuosina 1962–1963 *Literaturnaja gazeta* -lehdessä kokonaisen sarjan artikkeleita, joiden ansiosta Ob-joen alajuoksulle suunniteltu Salehardin vesivoimalaprojekti peruttiin (Weiner 1999, 417; Rudziewicz 2003, 158). Ajan toinen megaprojekti, Bratskin vesivoimalaitoksen rakentaminen Angara-joelle, sen sijaan vietiin loppuun asti ennätysnopeassa aikataulussa. Voimala avattiin vuonna 1967. Neuvostovaltion resurssit eivät kuitenkaan riittäneet uusien teollisuuslaitoksien läheskään yhtä nopeaan

4 Baikalin pyhyys ja puhtaus nousevat vahvasti esiin myös Valentin Rasputinin kaunokirjallisessa esseessä ”Baikal, Baikal…” vuodelta 1981 (Davydova 2012, 248).

5 Jälkisosialistisella Venäjällä talousvaikeuksiin ajautunut tehdas suljettiin vuonna 2013.

rakentamiseen, joten Bratskin voimalaitoksen valtava kapasiteetti meni suurelta osin hukkaan (Josephson et al. 2013, 167).

Vaikka tällaisten megaprojektien taloudellinen hyöty ainakin aluksi oli ehkä vaatimaton, niiden symbolinen arvo oli valtava. Juuri Angarajoen massiivinen valjastaminen vesivoimalle muodostui merkittäväksi Siperian modernisaation symboliksi (Magnusson 1986, 173). Bratskin vesivoimalaitos oli ajanmukaisen neuvostoliittolaisen insinöörityön taidonnäyte, valtaisa hanke, jota ei rakennettu ainoastaan neuvostoyhteiskunnan kasvaviin sähköntuotannon tarpeisiin vaan myös kommunistisen vallan symboliksi sekä osaksi modernia neuvostoidentiteettiä. Jevgeni Jevtušenko omisti voimalalle kokonaisen runoelman ”Bratskaja GES” (1965; ”Bratskin vesivoimalaitos”), jossa hän esittää vesivoimalan hyvin myönteisessä valossa rinnastaen sen egyptiläisiin pyramideihin.[6] Neuvostojohto piti tällaisia vesivoimaprojekteja modernisaation osoituksena (Josephson et al. 2013, 163). Bratskin 4 500 megawatin vesivoimalasta tuli valmistuessaan maailman suurin. Sen 5 500 neliökilometrin laajuinen patoallas on yhä tilavuudeltaan maailman toiseksi suurin.

1970-luvulla merkittäväksi ympäristövaikuttajaksi nousi nuori siperialainen kirjailija Valentin Rasputin, jolle taistelu Baikal-järven ja sen ympäristön suojelemisen puolesta merkitsi taistelua venäläisen kulttuurin säilymisen puolesta ja joka toistuvasti syytti korkea-arvoisia virkamiehiä valehtelusta ja epäpätevyydestä Baikalskin tehtaaseen liittyvissä asioissa (mt., 249). Kirjoituksissaan Rasputin käsitteli Baikalin kysymyksen lisäksi lähes kaikkia siperialaisen luonnon ajankohtaisia ongelmia (Kaminski 2010, 89).

Koska Bratskin voimalaitos rakennettiin nopeasti, kaikkea metsää ei ehditty raivata patoaltaan tieltä. Niinpä valtavat määrät siperialaista havumetsää, taigaa, jäi sellaisenaan veden alle. (Josephson et al. 2013, 170.) Tulvaveden alle ei jäänyt ainoastaan metsää, vaan myös lukuisia Angaran rannan kyliä kirkkoineen ja hautausmaineen. Yksi näistä oli Valentin Rasputinin kotikylä Atalanka, minkä vuoksi aiheesta tuli hänelle läheinen. Vaikka kirjailija olikin muuttanut seudulta pois jo

6 Toisin kuin orjavoimalla rakennetut pyramidit, Jevtušenkon vesivoimalan rakentavat sosialismille omistautuneet, innostuneet työläiset (Marsh 1986, 45).

aiemmin, hän tunsi Bratskin vesivoimalaitoksen rakennustyöt hyvin, sillä niiden aikana hän työskenteli toimittajana ja joutui työnsä puolesta kirjoittamaan valtion virallisen näkemyksen mukaisia kirjoituksia voimalaitoksen rakennustöistä sekä patoaltaan synnystä (Peterson 1994, 86). Kylien hukuttaminen veden alle vesivoimalaitosten rakentamisen yhteydessä oli tuohon aikaan Neuvostoliitossa tavallista[7], ja Rasputin kirjoitti tästä teemasta ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden näkökulmasta. Siinä mielessä hän oli osa maailmanlaajuista ilmiötä, osa kansainvälistä taiteilijaliikettä, joka käsitteli tuotannossaan taistelua ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden puolesta.

Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuteen liittyvät kysymykset nousivat akateemisessa tutkimuksessa ensimmäisen kerran esiin 1970-luvun alussa yhdysvaltalaisten taloustieteilijöiden kiinnostuessa siitä, oliko asuinympäristön ilmanlaadulla yhteys ihmisten taloudelliseen asemaan (Szasz & Meuser 1997, 100–101). Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden käsite syntyi 1970–1980-luvun vaihteessa, kun pohjoisamerikkalaiset kansalaisjärjestöt alkoivat taistella sitä vastaan, että köyhät ja erityisesti afrikkalaisamerikkalaiset sekä Amerikan alkuperäiskansojen muodostamat yhteisöt kärsivät ympäristöongelmista muita enemmän (ks. esim. di Chiro 1996; Szasz & Meuser 1997). Pian aiheesta kiinnostuivat sosiologit ja myöhemmin myös monet muut tieteenalat. 2000-luvun alun ekokritiikin toisen, sosiaalista ekologiaa painottaneen aallon myötä siitä kiinnostuivat myös kirjallisuudentutkijat (Marland 2013, 851–853). Kuluvan vuosikymmenen aikana ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuteen liittyvät kysymykset ovat yhä näkyvämmin olleet ekokritiikin piirissä esillä (Zapf 2016, 6) esimerkiksi jälkikolonialistisen ekokritiikin yhteydessä (ks. Banerjee 2016).

Ekokritiikkiä voi lyhyesti luonnehtia kirjallisuuden sekä muiden kulttuurin muotojen ja fyysisen ympäristön vuorovaikutuksen tutkimiseksi.[8]

7 Ilmiö oli maailmanlaajuinen ja kosketti myös Suomea, jossa kuuden kylän 600 niin sanottua allasevakkoa joutui hylkäämään kotiseutunsa Lokan ja Porttipahdan tekojärvien tieltä (ks. Kauhanen 2014). Neuvostoliitossa mittakaava oli omaa luokkaansa: yksin Bratskin vuonna 1964 täytetty patoallas on yli kymmenen kertaa niin suuri kuin Lokka ja Porttipahta yhteensä, ja sen alta evakuoiduissa kahdessa ja puolessa sadassa kylässä asui yli sata tuhatta ihmistä (Dyker 1983, 130–131).

8 Ks. esim. Pippa Marlandin (2013) tiivis kokonaisesitys ekokritiikistä. Laajempi suomenkielinen johdatus ekokritiikkiin on teoksessa Lahtinen ja Lehtimäki (toim.) 2008.

Sen piirissä kiinnostuminen ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuudesta liittyi osaltaan huomion siirtymiseen ”villistä luonnosta” lähemmäs ihmistä, kaupunkiin ja sen lähiympäristöön (Reed 2002, 154). Ihmiskulttuuri elää maaseudullakin, joten asuinympäristöön liittyvät oikeudenmukaisuuskysymykset koskettavat myös syrjäseutuja. Joni Adamsonin, Mei Mei Evansin ja Rachel Steinin (2002, 6) määritelmän mukaan ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden puolesta kirjoittavat kirjailijat kuvaavat ympäristöhaittoja, joita joutuvat kohtaamaan sellaiset yhteisöt, joilta on riistetty taloudelliset ja poliittiset vaikutusmahdollisuudet.[9]

Valentin Rasputinin matkakertomuksen ilmestymisen aikoihin 1970-luvun alussa ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden käsitettä ei siis vielä tunnettu. Siitä ei myöhemminkään ole tullut Neuvostoliiton kontekstissa aktiivista tutkimuskohdetta. Rasputinin tuotanto sopii kuitenkin erinomaisesti tämän perinteen raameihin, sillä se kuvaa juuri sellaista Adamsonin, Evansin ja Steinin (mt.) mainitsemaa ”sosiaalista, materiaalista ja henkistä tuhoa, joka seuraa kun vesivoimaprojektit hävittävät perifeerisiä maita ja vesiä”.

Eroja pohjoisamerikkalaiseen kirjallisuuteen toki on. Ensinnäkin Rasputinin teokset eivät – joitakin 1960-luvun kertomuksia lukuun ottamatta – kuvaa etnisten vähemmistöjen elämää, vaan niiden yhteisöt ovat venäläisiä. Nämä syrjäseutujen asutusyhteisöt joutuvat kuitenkin elinympäristöönsä kohdistuvien toimien seurauksena hyvin samanlaisen epäoikeudenmukaisuuden kohteeksi kuin Pohjois-Amerikan alkuperäiskansat vaikkapa Linda Hoganin tuotannossa. Toiseksi Rasputinin kuvaamat ihmiset eivät nouse aktiiviseen vastarintaan.[10] Tämä on ymmärrettävää, sillä Neuvostoliiton hyvin autoritäärisissä olosuhteissa pienen ihmisen vastarinta ei yksinkertaisesti ollut mahdollista. Sitäkin suurempi on Rasputinin kaltaisen kirjailijan rooli

9 Pirjo Ahokkaan tässä kokoelmassa käsittelemä Linda Hogan on hyvä esimerkki pohjoisamerikkalaisesta kirjailijasta, jonka tuotannossa alkuperäiskansoihin kohdistunut ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden toteutumattomuus on vahvasti läsnä.

10 Tässä yhteydessä on syytä huomauttaa, että uusimmassa venäläisessä kirjallisuudessa Valentin Rasputinin haluttomuutta aktiiviseen vastarintaan jälkisosialistisella Venäjällä on arvosteltu Roman Sentšinin romaanissa *Zona zatoplenija* (2015; ”Tulva-alue”). Romaanin päähenkilön mielestä palkitun ja arvostetun kirjailijan ei olisi pitänyt tyytyä pelkkiin sanoihin yrittääkseen estää Bogutšanyn vesivoimalaitoksen avaaminen, joka toteutui vuonna 2012.

ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden puolestapuhujana, sillä teoksillaan hän kykeni nostamaan vain paikallisesti tunnettuja ympäristöongelmia ministerineuvoston päätöslauselmista ja muista neuvostobyrokratian syövereistä yleiseen kansalliseen tietoisuuteen. Neuvostoliiton kontekstissa kyse on siis ennen kaikkea mittakaavasta, ympäristötietoisuuden levittämisestä. Ruohonjuuritason aktivismi, urbaanit kysymykset tai alkuperäiskansat eivät Rasputinin tuotannossa nouse esiin, mutta ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus on paljon laajempi käsite, kuten vaikkapa Nicholas Low ja Brendan Gleeson (1998, i) alkusanoissaan kirjoittavat: ”Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuudessa on kyse hyvän ja huonon ympäristön oikeudenmukaisesta jakautumisesta ihmisten kesken.”[11]

Vaikka Rasputinin sankarit eivät nousekaan aktiiviseen vastarintaan, eivät hänen päähenkilönsä toki alistu täysin kohtaloonsa. Selvimmin tämä näkyy pienoisromaanissa *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle* (*Proštšanie s Matjoroi*, 1976), jonka kolmannessa luvussa kylän eukot käyvät hautausmaata tyhjentävän saniteettiprikaatin kimppuun jopa kepein. Kyseessä on kuitenkin vain spontaani primitiivireaktio, eikä organisoitua vastarintaa kylässä synny. Passiivisen vastarinnan nimissä sitkeimmät eukot ovat kuitenkin valmiit jopa kuolemaan, sillä he kieltäytyvät poistumasta kotikylästä vielä siinäkin vaiheessa, kun patoaltaan vesi uhkaa jo nousta ja hukuttaa kylän alleen. Sen sijaan kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” ei esiinny minkäänlaista passiivistakaan vastarintaa.

Valentin Rasputinin matkassa myötä- ja vastavirtaan

Kun Valentin Rasputin keväällä 2015 kuoli, luonnehti kirjailija Roman Sentšin (2015, 162) hänen jäävän historiaan paitsi yhtenä tunnetuimmista kyläproosan edustajista myös venäläisten kansallisten perinteiden vaalijana sekä luonnonsuojelijana. Rasputin on yksi näkyvimmistä viime

11 Samaisten alkusanojen mukaan ekologisessa oikeudenmukaisuudessa on kyse ympäristöjen jakautumisesta oikeudenmukaisesti planeettamme kaikkien asukkaiden kesken. Kyse on siis ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuutta biosentrisemmästä lähestymistavasta. En kuitenkaan käsittele tässä artikkelissa ekologista oikeudenmukaisuutta, koska se ei tutkimassani teoksessa nouse keskeisesti esiin. Enemmän ekologisesta oikeudenmukaisuudesta ks. Baxter 2005.

vuosikymmenten kansallisia perinteitä vaalivan realistisen venäläisen proosakirjallisuuden (*traditsionalistskaja proza*) tekijöistä (Kovtun 2015a, 277).[12] Hänen 1960-luvulta alkavassa tuotannossaan luonnon ja ihmiskohtaloiden vuorovaikutus on tärkeässä roolissa (Karpenko & Merinov 2013, 85), minkä vuoksi Rasputin on venäläisessä kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa 1970-luvulta alkaen luettu yhdeksi niin kutsutun luonnonfilosofisen proosan (*naturfilosofskaja proza*) tekijöistä (esim. Viltšek 1985, 35). Kuten kirjallisuudentutkija Jelena Galimova (2013, 52) vahvistaa, joella on Rasputinin taiteellisessa maisemassa keskeinen paikka. Hänen 1970-luvun tunnetuimmissa pienoisromaaneissaan *Elä ja muista* (*Živi i pomni*, 1974) ja *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle* joki on vastakohtapareihin oma–vieras ja elämä–kuolema kytkeytyvä universaali symboli (Novikova 2005, 194–197).

Muutama vuosi ennen edellä mainittuja pienoisromaaneja julkaistun matkakertomuksen ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” joki on Galimovan (2013, 60) mukaan erityisen kiinnostava, koska kertomuksen jokimaisema on Rasputinin tuotannossa kehittynein ja juuri siinä hänellä ensi kertaa elävä ja kuollut vesi näyttäytyvät mytopoeettisena oppositioparina. Elävänä vetenä teoksessa näyttäytyvä joki on toisaalta mahtava voima. Samalla se on kuitenkin myös turvaton ja haavoittuva, ja kuten kaikki elävä, se voi kuolla.

Kertomuksessa kaksi vastakohtaista vesitilaa nousee keskeiseen rooliin, virtaava joki ja seisova patoallas. Oma tehtävänsä on myös jokilaivalla, joka matkaa kummassakin tilassa ja siten yhdistää ne toisiinsa. Luen kertomuksen jokea ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta ja väitän, että tässä teoksessa Rasputin nimenomaan joen kautta ensimmäistä kertaa kirjoittaa ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden puolesta. Toisin kuin patoallas joki representoituu ihmiselle merkityksellisenä paikkana, jonka kuolema merkitsee sekä luonnon että kulttuurin kuolemaa. Valtakeskuksen periferiaan rakentama modernisaation ilmentymä, vesivoimalaitoksen patoallas, on hukuttanut niin luonnon kuin kulttuurinkin. Joen myötä on syrjäseudulta hävinnyt myös ihmisen perinteinen elintila.

12 1980-luvulta alkaen Rasputin sai mainetta jopa äärinationalistina (ks. esim. Djagalov 2009).

Ekokritiikin soveltaminen tutkimaani kertomukseen on luontevaa, koska sitä pidetään Rasputinin ensimmäisenä ympäristöteemaa käsittelevänä teoksena (Kaminski 2013, 195). Hänen varhaisemmissa kertomuksissaan ja esseissään villin luonnon valloittamista kuvattiin romanttisin sävyin. Niissä luonto oli vain ihmisen elinympäristö, ja niiden luontokuva korosti ihmisen voittoa luonnosta. (Kovtun 2009, 283.) Näissä varhaisissa kertomuksissa ei pahoiteltu maaseudun hukkumista vesivoimalaitosten patoaltaiden alle eikä niissä nostalgisoitu menneitä aikoja (Sentšin 2015, 169).

Rasputin kirjoitti aktiivisesti paitsi kaunokirjallisuutta myös esseistiikkaa. Useissa hänen kirjoituksissaan ne sekoittuvat toisiinsa, niin myös kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju”, jonka kirjailija itse on teoksen toisessa painoksessa nimennyt esseeksi[13] eräästä matkasta (Jelizarova 1986, 33). Luonnehdinta kuvaa jossain määrin teoksen sisältöä, johon kuitenkin kuuluu myös fiktiivisiä elementtejä. Olen muokannut Rasputinin omaa, suomeksi kömpelöltä kuulostavaa lajimääritelmää, ja kutsun sitä matkakertomukseksi.[14] Kyse on joka tapauksessa vahvasti omaelämäkerrallisesta kertomuksesta, jossa matkataan jokilaivalla alavirtaan suurta jokea pitkin, isosta kaupungista maaseudulle hiljattain avatun vesivoimalan valtavalle patoaltaalle asti.

13 Venäjän kielen sana *otšerk* ei tosin aivan täsmällisesti vastaa suomen sanaa essee. Kuten Kathleen Parthé (1992, 13–14) kirjoittaa, *otšerk* on hyvin vapaa tekstilaji, johon usein liittyy peiteltyä tendenssimäisyyttä. Kyläproosaksi kutsutun kirjallisuuden juuret ovat juuri tällaisissa *otšerk*-tyyppisissä esseissä, joita muiden muassa Vladimir Ovetškin, Jefim Doroš ja Gavriil Trojepolski kirjoittivat 1950-luvulla (Nedzvetski & Filippov 1999, 48). Muodoltaan ne olivat lähellä sosialistista realismia, mutta tyypillisestä sosialistisesta realismista poiketen ne sisälsivät maatalouskollektiivien hallinnon kritiikkiä sekä talonpoikaiselämän ihannointia. Nämä yleensä sanoma- ja kirjallisuuslehdissä julkaistut dokumentaariset ja jopa reportaasinomaiset tekstit saivat vaikutteita journalistiikasta ja uudistivat ajan neuvostoproosaa (Viltšek 1985, 43). Nimeämällä kertomuksensa *otšerkiksi* Rasputin eksplisiittisesti sijoittaa sen venäläisen kyläproosan ovetškinilaiseen jatkumoon. Perusteellisen kuvauksen toisen maailmansodan jälkeisestä neuvosto-*otšerkista* tarjoaa Elveson 1975.

14 Teoksen ensimmäisessä painoksessa, jota käytän lähdemateriaalinani, lajia ei ollut lainkaan määritelty. *Naš sovremennik* -lehden sisällä se julkaistiin osiossa nimeltä ”Proosaa”. E. D. Jelizarova (1986, 37) puolestaan luokittelee sen pienoisromaaniksi (*povest*). Teosta on Venäjällä ollut tapana käsitellä osana Rasputinin journalistiikkaa sivuavaa yhteiskunnallisesti kantaaottavaa tuotantoa. Tällainen niin sanottu *publitsistika* on Lilija Viltšekin (1979, 13–14) mukaan aina yhteiskunnallista ja se liikkuu tieteen ja taiteen välimaastossa. Tutkimuskirjallisuudessa Rasputinin matkakertomukselle esiintyy muitakin lajimäärityksiä, kuten esseemäinen pienoisromaani (*otšerkovaja povest*; Galimova 2013, 59) ja matkaessee (*putjovyi otšerk*; Kaminski 2013, 195). Parthén (1992, 15–16) mukaan niin kirjailijat kuin kustannustoimittajatkin antoivat kyläproosan teoksille usein epäjohdonmukaisia lajimäärityksiä, ja yhtenä esimerkkinä hän mainitsee juuri kertomuksen ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju”.

Kertomuksen päähenkilö on kirjailija Viktor, joka jättää hyvästit kaupungin vilskeelle astuessaan kesän ensimmäiseen jokilaivaan. Siellä hän asettuu omaan yhden hengen hyttiinsä. Edessä on pitkä matka sukulaisten luo maalle, missä hän ei ole käynyt viiteen vuoteen. Sillä välin kotikylä on jäänyt patoaltaan alle ja sen ihmiset on siirretty uuteen taajamaan. Laivamatkan aikana Viktor muistelee lapsuuttaan joen äärellä.

Kotikylän lähestyessä Viktor tulee levottomaksi. Vasta silloin hän alkaa tajuta, että vanhaa kylää ei todella enää ole. Kyläyhteisö on muuttunut täysin, sillä uuteen taajamaan on siirretty myös kolmen muun kylän asukkaat ja tavarat. Siellä asuu myös väliaikaista työväkeä, eivätkä asukkaat enää tunne toisiaan. Päästyään perille Viktor oppii, että kylään – nähtävästi vesivoimalan patoaltaalta – pumpattavaa vettä ei voi juoda, siitä ei voi keittää teetä eikä sillä voi edes pestä hiuksiaan. Koska ranta on nyt kaukana, pumppuvettä käytetään kuitenkin ruuanlaittoon, mutta teevesi haetaan patoaltaalta. Kyläläiset vertaavat viime vuosien tapahtumia koleraepidemiaan, vedenpaisumukseen ja maailmanloppuun. Nämä apokalyptiset tunnelmat heijastavat kyläproosalle tunnusomaista, Richard Coen kuvaamaa mustaa nostalgiaa, joka pelkän sentimentaalisuuden sijaan tuottaa ”epätoivon purkauksia ja maaseudun mielivaltaisen tuhon vastustusta” (Parthé 1992, 11). Apokalypsin motiivi on vielä selvemmin läsnä *Jäähyväisissä Matjoralle*, jossa patoaltaan alle hukutettava Matjoran saari edustaa jonkinlaista kadotettua maanpäällistä paratiisia, menetettyä utopiaa (ks. Kovtun 2009, 323–343; Kovtun 2015b, 149–161). Viktorin kotikylä kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” on myös kadotettu paratiisi, mutta, toisin kuin *Matjorassa*, tässä matkakertomuksessa kuvataan vanhan kylän elämää vähemmän kuin sitä, mitä on tullut sen tilalle.

Ensimmäisenä päivänä perillä Viktor lähtee vedenhakumatkalle patoaltaalle ja huomaa, että veden saanti on paljon vaikeampaa kuin vanhalla joella. Toisin kuin joki patoallas ei ole asutuksen vieressä. Lisäksi sen aallot lyövät rantaan hankaloittaen veteen kurottamista. Sitä paitsi Viktor huomaa, että rantavesi on likaista kuin ”keväällä pelloilta valuva vesi” (VV, 33)[15], joten juomavesi on haettava syvemmältä. Viktor lähtee

15 Kaikki lähdeteoksen suomennokset ovat kirjoittajan.

uimaan syvempään veteen, mutta paikalle osunut pikkupoika neuvoo, että vesi on haettava veneellä, koska patoaltaan rantavesi on vaarallista.[16] Vielä sadan metrin päässä rannasta uiminen on pinnan alla olevien puunrunkojen vuoksi vaarallista, mutta veneellä Viktor lopulta saa siellä ämpärinsä täytettyä melko puhtaalla vedellä, josta hänen äitinsä suostuu keittämään teetä.

Viktor viettää maalla alkukesän, mutta lopulta hänelle tulee pakottava tarve palata takaisin kaupunkiin. Kotikylä ei ole enää tuttu. Ensin hän ajattelee tottuvansa siihen ajan oloon, mutta niin ei kuitenkaan käy. Hän tuntee olevansa yhä matkalla eikä koe saapuneensa perille kotikyläänsä. Äitikin huomaa, että Viktor ei löydä paikkaansa uudesta kyläyhteisöstä. Kylässä tai patoaltaan äärellä hän ei löydä inspiraatiota kirjoittamiselleen, joten hän hakeutuu toistuvasti metsään, mutta on sielläkin koko ajan jokseenkin eksyksissä. Hän ei kunnolla ymmärrä, mikä pakottaa hänet lähtemään. Kertoja kuitenkin toteaa, että voidakseen toteuttaa matkan uudelleen mutta tietäen, minne on menossa, on välillä lähdettävä pois. Niin Viktor päättää palata jokilaivalla takaisin sinne, mistä tulikin. Paluumatkasta kerrotaan lyhyesti vain se, että turisteja täynnä ollut laiva muistutti hälinässään mustalaisleiriä. Viktorille ei löytynyt nyt minkäänlaista hyttiä, eikä hän päässyt turisteille varattuun ravintolaankaan.

Joki joka hukkui

Aloitan analyysini tarkastelemalla, millaisina joki, jokilaiva ja patoallas näyttäytyvät Rasputinin matkakertomuksessa. Joki esiintyy kirjallisuudessa usein elämän metaforana (ks. esim. Grady 2007, 14; Imihelova 2015, 267). Galimova (2013, 53) on esittänyt, että Rasputinin proosassa joen arkkityypin tärkein merkitys on joki elämänä, ei pelkästään metaforisessa vaan myös kirjaimellisessa mielessä. Analyysini perusteella matkakertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” joki on juuri tällainen

16 Siitä, mitä ihmiselle patoaltaan rantavedessä voi sattua, poika käyttää monitulkintaista verbiä *podavitsja*. Kirjakielessä se merkitsee lähinnä läkähtymistä, tukehtumista, hengen katkeamista tai nielemisen vaikeutumista siksi, että kurkussa on jotakin. Puhekielessä se tarkoittaa myös litistymistä, rusentumista ja musertumista (kaikesta, paljosta). (Ks. Jefremova 2000; Kuusinen [toim.] 1997.)

elämän ilmentymä. Rasputinin joki ei ole ainoastaan elävä, vaan se on elämä itse.

Kertomuksen joki representoituu puhtaana ja mystisenä elämän vetenä: ”Joki loisti ikään kuin sisältä päin ja säihkyen se kimmelsi päästä päähän kuin selkeärajainen tummansininen nauha, mystinen ja kylmän sadunomainen, ja sen yläpuolelle ilmaan nousi kelmeä, unenomainen sädekehä” (VV, 12). Joki tuo myös onnen ja rakkauden. Nuoruudessaan Viktor rakastui jokilaivalla lääketieteen opiskelijaan, ja nyt kertoja muistelee noita onnen päiviä: ”Niin ihmiselle käy, kun ympärillä on vain vettä” (VV, 4). Myöhemmin kaupungissa, kaukana joelta, romanssi ehtyi heti. Jo lapsuudessa joki toi Viktorille onnea:

> Joella oleilu antoi hänelle jatkuvaa, loputonta mielihyvää. Joen hirmuisiin, houkutteleviin syvyyksiin ja hyökyviin aaltoihin pälyillessä tunsi onnensa, kuten myös venettä veteen viedessä ja rannalta pois soutaessa yhä kauemmas ja kauemmas aalloilla ratsastaen ja niiden pohjiin putoillen [– –]. (VV, 8.)

Rasputinin joki on osa niin kulttuuria kuin luontoakin, aivan kuten toisella kuululla saman aikakauden siperialaiskirjailijalla, Viktor Astafjevilla (ks. Perkiömäki 2017).

Joella matkatessaan Viktor matkaa oikeastaan muistoissaan. Matka alavirtaan kohti patoallasta on hänelle paitsi maantieteellinen siirtymä kohti lapsuuden paikkoja – joita hän ei koskaan löydä – myös henkinen siirtymä kohti mennyttä aikaa. Muisto kuusivuotiaana vapunyönä koetusta jäidenlähdöstä on painunut lähtemättömästi Viktorin mieleen. Tämä muisto joesta on aina lämmittänyt ja auttanut häntä, saattanut häntä elämän tiellä eteenpäin. Vaikka Viktor ei enää aikoihin olekaan asunut kotijoen varrella, muisto joesta on koko ajan ollut hänen matkakumppaninsa. Joki on Viktorin muistoissa jotain aivan erityistä: ”Jokeen liittyvät muistot elivät hänessä erillään toisista muistoista. Ne elivät kuin lämmin sieluntuska, jonka äärellä hän usein lämmitteli ja lepäsi ennen kuin jatkoi eteenpäin.” (VV, 9.)

On huomattavaa, että kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” ei missään vaiheessa mainita joen nimeä. Sen sijaan sana ”joki” esiintyy

38-sivuisessa kertomuksessa 46 kertaa, sana ”virta” 11 kertaa ja sana ”vesi” peräti 104 kertaa. Mitään muitakaan paikannimiä ei käytetä, lukuun ottamatta joitakin geneerisiltä kuulostavia pikku saarten nimiä, jotka eivät kuitenkaan paikannu miksikään todellisiksi saariksi. Päähenkilö lähtee alussa matkaan kaupungista, mutta kaupungin nimeä ei mainita, kuten ei myöskään kaupunkeja, kyliä ja taajamia, joissa laiva matkan varrella pysähtyy. Edes vesivoimalan nimeä tai sijaintia ei mainita. Vaikka valveutunut lukija voi eri yksityiskohdista päätellä, että päähenkilö mahdollisesti lähtee matkaan Irkutskista, että laiva matkaa Angara-jokea pitkin ja että kotikylän peittänyt patoallas liittyy Bratskin vesivoimalaitokseen, ei teksti nimeä mitään näistä.

On oletettavaa, että lukija ei osaa sijoittaa teoksen tapahtumia sen tarkemmin kuin jonnekin Siperiaan, mikä näyttää olevan kirjailijan tarkoituskin. Hän ei halua käsitellä oman kotikylänsä alueen paikallisia ongelmia vaan kirjoittaa niistä yleisemmällä tasolla. Tämä on ymmärrettävää, sillä samanlaisia kohtaloita oli 1950–1970-luvulla lukuisilla muillakin siperialaiskylillä. Rasputinin kotikylä ei ollut siinä mielessä erityislaatuinen. Palaan paikkojen nimeämättömyyden merkitykseen vielä myöhemmin.

Keväällä jäistä jylisten vapautuva joki rinnastuu Viktorin muistoissa ukkoseen. Joen vielä ollessa jäässä sen rannalla vapunpäivänä jäidenlähtöä kärsimättömästi odotteleva juuri kuusi vuotta täyttänyt Viktor tuntee kuin häneltä loppuisi tila. Kun joki ei tuona päivänä alkanut virrata vapaasti, Viktor oli varma, että ”[toinen maailman]sota ei milloinkaan pääty eikä isä koskaan palaa rintamalta” (VV, 6). Seuraavana yönä jäistä vapautuva joki virtaa valtavalla voimalla ja sen vapaa virtaus luo vaikutelman entistä avoimemmasta tilasta: ”Avautunut joki oli täyteläinen ja kärsimättömän nopea. Sen avoin ja vapautunut liike sai ympäristön tuntumaan avarammalta.” (VV, 8.) Vapaana virtaava joki yhdistyy tässä ahdistavasta tilasta vapautumiseen ja sodan päättymiseen, ikään kuin sen myötä alkaisivat vapaasti virrata myös haluvirrat, joihin kertoja viittaakin jo heti kertomuksen alussa Viktorin astuessa laivaan:

> [joen] vesi [– –] juovutti taianomaisesti ja veti jonnekin tuottaen epämääräistä, syvää levottomuutta. Se oli jonkinlainen epätaval-

> linen, selittämätön, ylimaallinen tila, jossa sielua kuohuttivat yhtäkkiä syttyvät odottamattomat halut sekä kuvitelmat ihmeellisistä urotöistä. Siinä tilassa saattoi myös aivan yllättäen liikuttua omasta elämästään, jossa suurinta onnea tuntuivat tuottavan näkeminen, ajatteleminen ja muistaminen. (VV, 4.)

Viktorin tapauksessa nämä halut tosin virtaavat vain menneisyydessä, sittemmin tuhotussa lapsuuden kylässä sekä toisen maailmansodan päättymisen optimistisissa ajoissa. Tulevaisuudessa on edessä vain tukahdutettu virta, patoallas liikkumattomine vesineen. Viktorille joki on taigan vastakohta. Metsässä käveleskellessään Viktor löytää lapsuudesta tuttuja paikkoja, jotka herättävät muistoja mutta eivät onnistu luomaan yhteyttä menneeseen. Taiga on ja pysyy paikoillaan eikä liikuta Viktoriakaan. Virtaava joki sen sijaan voi kadota, hävitä pois, lakata olemasta. Sen olemassaolo pitääkin tarkistaa joka aamu. Pienenä Viktor ei voinut ymmärtää, miksi ihmisiä ei huolettanut se, virtaako joki vielä huomennakin. Hänen mielestään joen pitää virrata joka päivä, muuten virran katoamisen myötä voisi kadota myös elämä maapallolta.

Viktor matkustaa jokilaivalla kaupungista jokea pitkin patoaltaalle, jonka alle kotikylä on hukutettu. Joella hiljakseen lipuva laiva yhdistää joen vesivoimalaitoksen patoaltaan tukahduttavaan veteen. Laivamatka alkaa huolettomana, joutilaana ja romanttisena. Jokilaiva näyttäytyy rauhan tyyssijana, saarena, jossa aika lähes pysähtyy. Laivassa Viktor seuraa maalaisperheen elämää, joka näyttää idyllisen onnelliselta. Vaikka hän hieman kadehtii harmonista nelihenkistä perhettä, hän myös iloitsee sen onnesta. Romantiikka kuitenkin loppuu äkisti, kun laiva saapuu vesivoimalaitoksen patoaltaalle, sillä Viktorin ihaileman perheen vanhemmat alkavat riidellä rajusti. Lisäksi laivan täyttää pienimuotoinen kaaos, kun erään laiturin luona kyläläiset ryntäävät ostamaan laivan olutvarastot itselleen.

Tarkkaan ottaen kertomuksessa ei kuvata niinkään laivaa saarena vaan pikemminkin saari laivana:

> Saarella tulee aina liikkeen tunne, ihmeellinen ja petollinen, mutta samaan aikaan todellinen. Tuntuu kuin olisi laivassa, aluksessa,

> joka tärkeänä lipuu hitaasti eteenpäin. Tunne ei tule niinkään ympäröivästä vedestä kuin mieltä kiihottavasta maan yläpuolelle nousemisen tunteesta sekä juovuttavasta kaivatun leijailemisen tunteesta. Sitä tietää olevansa kovalla maalla, mutta jalkojen alla kuitenkin jokin vähän vetää puolelta toiselle. Eikä sitä pysty vastustamaan, sitä vain seilaa hiljakseen kohti jotain arvoituksellista. (VV, 12.)

Jotain arvoituksellista kohti Viktor jokilaivalla todella seilaa, sillä edessä odottaa muuttunut maailma. Jokilaivalla Viktor unelmoi kulkevansa jokisaarten vierestä. Pian hän kuitenkin tajuaa, ettei saaria enää ole. Ne kaikki ovat jääneet patoaltaan vesien alle ja ovat nyt osa pohjaa. Niinpä jokilaivasta tulee Viktorin saari, jonka ympärillä vedestä pilkistää siellä täällä puiden latvoja. Eräässä fantastisen oloisessa kohtauksessa jokilaiva lipuu puoliksi upoksissa olevan metsän halki. Kohtaus vastaa kuitenkin hyvin todellisia tapahtumia, koska patoaltaan alle jäi paljon metsää.

On merkillepantavaa, että Viktor matkustaa nykyaikaisella, moottoroidulla jokilaivalla, kun aiemmin hän oli näillä vesillä matkustanut vain höyrylaivalla. Jokilaiva edustaa modernia maailmaa, ja se siirtää Viktorin vanhasta maailmasta (joelta) uuteen (patoaltaalle). Joen virta edustaa tässä ajan kulkua. Kertomuksen alussa Viktor ajatteli tekevänsä pikemminkin matkan takaisin menneisyyteen, mutta virta vie vääjäämättä kohti uutta. Moottoroidulla jokilaivalla vain ravintola muistuttaa ulkoisesti vanhoista höyrylaivoista. Myös ravintolan ruokalista on aivan sama kuin ennen, ainoastaan jokikala on korvattu järvikalalla. Niinpä ravintola muodostuu paikaksi, jossa Viktor pääasiassa viettää laivalla aikaa. Ravintola on kuin menneiden aikojen saareke modernin jokilaivan saarimaisessa tilassa.

Matkakertomuksen lopussa Viktor pohtii syitä sille, miksi hän kokee pakottavaa tarvetta paeta kylästä. Ehkä hän alitajuisesti ajattelee, että matka takaisin jokea ylävirtaan voisi palauttaa vanhat hyvät ajat takaisin. Kaukana patoaltaalta hän ainakin voisi elää sellaisessa illuusiossa. Tähän viittaa kertomuksen nimi, joka ensimmäisessä painoksessa oli vain ”Vniz po tetšeniju” (”Myötävirtaan”). Se vastaa paremmin kertomuksen juonta, matkustaahan päähenkilö ainoastaan myötävirtaan. Jo

seuraavaan painokseen kirjailija kuitenkin muutti kertomuksen nimeä niin, että siihen tuli maininta myös vastavirrasta. Uutta nimeä voi pitää optimistisempana: Olkoonkin, ettei aikaa voi kääntää kulkemaan taaksepäin, ei silti tarvitse lipua vain myötävirtaan kohti määrätietoista modernisaatiota. Voi kulkea myös vastavirtaan vastustaen modernisaatioajattelun kyllästämää edistysuskoista, tuhlailevaa luontokäsitystä.

Viktorin matkan päässä oleva patoallas on niin valtava ja vaikuttaa niin rannattomalta, että ihmiset kutsuvat sitä mereksi. Viktorin on vaikea uskoa, että se todella on ihmisen tarkoituksella luoma. Patoallas ei millään lailla muistuta jokea, se on täysin vieras tila:

> Vesi näytti seisovalta ja harmaalta. [– –] aurinko ei pystynyt läpäisemään vettä, vaan valaisi sameasti ja haaleasti ainoastaan aaltojen pinnan. Vedessä ei näkynyt sinisen ja vihreän oikukasta leikkiä, ei elävää, täyttyvän liikkeen kauneuden ja ilon kuohuttavaa uupumattomuutta, ei syvyyksien pullonvihreää hehkua, ei kapeikkojen puhtaan lasisen kilkkeen musiikkia, ei voimalla laskevien vuoripurojen tuottamia poikittaisaaltojen uria, ei ylvästä ja puoleensavetävää näkymää saarille. Ei mitään siitä, mitä vielä eilen joki mukanaan kuljetti. (VV, 18.)

Patoaltaan vesi on harmaata ja liikkumatonta. Auringonvalo ei sitä läpäise, taivas sen ylläkin on kuollut. Siinä ei ole elonmerkkejä, kauneutta tai iloa, ei väriä eikä ääniä, ei virtauksia tai saaria. Jokea ei ole. Patoallas on kuollut, hukutettu joki: ”Joesta täällä ei tietenkään ollut mitään jäljellä eikä edes summittaisesti voinut sanoa, missä sen uoma oli. Jo yöllä, kun Viktor nukkui, joki tukehtui ja hukkui kohtaamaansa välinpitämättömään tulvaveteen.” (VV, 18.)

Patoallas on kuitenkin myös kuin meri. Se on tuonut uudenlaista elämää, kuten lokkeja, ahvenia, särkiä ja haukia. Kala on kuitenkin huonolaatuista (”liha on puista ja liejuisaa”; VV 29), sitä syötetään sioillekin. Paljon elämää on kuollut: esimerkiksi harjusta tai lenokkia[17] ei enää ole, sillä ”ne ovat puhtaita kaloja ja vaativat puhdasta, virtaavaa vettä”

17 Lenokki on Siperian kylmissä jokivesissä elävä lohikala.

(VV, 30). Paikalliset kertovat Viktorille, miten he ovat jo alkaneet unohtaa, miltä ”puhdasrotuinen” (VV, 30) kala edes maistuu.

Viktor huomaa, että kyläläiset käyttävät eri tavoin sanoja ”joki” ja ”meri”, vaikka puhuvat yhdestä ja samasta paikasta. Heille joki on paikka, josta haetaan juomavettä, jossa uidaan ja kalastetaan. Patoaltaan valtavassa tilassa paikasta toiseen liikkumisesta puhuttaessa puhutaan merestä. Syy voisi olla se, että liikkumisen kannalta ero joen ja patoaltaan välillä on huomattava.[18] Kömpelöksi koettua sanaa ”patoallas” ei käytetä lainkaan. Jos vapaana virtaava joki loi vaikutelman avoimesta tilasta, niin patoaltaan tilavaikutelma on suuruudestaan huolimatta ahdistava ja painostava. Se muistuttaa sitä tilan puutteen tuntua, joka Viktorilla oli jäätyneen joen äärellä lapsuudessaan sota-aikana.

Patoaltaan rannalle taigan syvyyksistä joutunut metsä näyttää Viktorista alakuloiselta ja yksitoikkoiselta. Se näyttää odottavan yhä uusia vitsauksia, eikä aurinkokaan sitä juuri piristä: ”nahkea ja synkkä metsä maksoi loputtomalla surumielellä siitä, mitä se ei ollut pyytänyt ja mihin se ei ollut valmistautunut” (VV, 23). Patoallas ei ole vailla kauneutta, mutta sen kauneus on keinotekoista, samanlaista kuin käsityönä valmistetun arkun. Joen mystisyys patoaltaasta puuttuu täysin; sen sijaan siellä ”kaikki on selvää: miten, miksi, mistä asti ja minkä vuoksi” (VV, 23). Viktor panee merkille myös, että taigan ja patoaltaan välissä ei ole kunnollista rantaa, vaan ranta on ”teljetty metsän epämääräiseen seinämään” (VV, 25). Patoallas sulautuu taigaan ilman väliin jäävää rajavyöhykettä, toinen seuraa toista välittömästi:

> Eikä rantaa sellaisena, veden ja maan väliin jäävänä rajaviivana, ollut. Toinen alkoi heti toisen jälkeen, ja enemmänkin, toinen ei ehtinyt päättyä, kun toinen jo alkoi. Koko päivänä laivalla Viktor ei nähnyt kiven kiveä tai hiekkaa, josta tämä raja hahmottuisi. Missään ei näkynyt rantatöyräitä upean värikkäine savi- ja kiviseinä-

18 Patoaltaita kutsutaan Venäjällä yleisesti meriksi. Patoaltaista merenä puhumisen Rasputinin kertojan kuvaamassa paikasta toiseen liikkumisen yhteydessä voi nähdä heijastavan sitä, mitä John K. Noyes (1992, 146–162) kutsuu ”tilan myyttiseksi hallinnaksi”. Hänen mukaansa kolonialistinen diskurssi luo kolonisoituun tilaan rajattoman liikkuvuuden myytin hallitakseen haltuunsa ottaman tilan fragmentaarista luonnetta.

> mineen sekä tarkalleen kohdilleen asettuvine punaisine kivipaasikerrostumineen. (VV, 23.)

Samalla tavoin myös uusi kylä ”sulautuu veteen” (VV, 32), kun Viktor katsoo sitä kaukaa ylärinteiltä. Joen rannan rajavyöhyke on kuitenkin näillä seuduilla ollut ihmiselle elintärkeä, sillä juuri siinä asutus on aina ollut. Loppumaton siperialainen korpi on ihmisyhteisöille mahdoton elinympäristö, ja vain sen ja joen väliin jäävä kapea rajavyöhyke on mahdollistanut ihmiselämän. Nyt tätä ihmisen elintilaa ei kuitenkaan enää ole; patoallas ja taiga ovat vain yksi äärettömältä tuntuva tila, jossa ihmisen on haettava paikkansa aivan uudella tavalla.

Joen merkitykset rajana eivät tässä matkakertomuksessa ole yhtä kehittyneitä kuin Rasputinin pienoisromaaneissa *Elä ja muista* sekä *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle*. Jälkimmäisessä joki merkitsee rajaa elämän ja kuoleman välillä (Galimova 2013, 57; Magnusson 1986, 174), ja joen katoamisen uhan myötä tämä raja on häviämässä. Kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” puolestaan joki on jo menetetty, ja päähenkilön huomio kiinnittyy uuteen joettomaan ja rajattomaan tilaan. Patoaltaan alle haudoissaan jääneistä esi-isistä käytetään nimitystä hukkuneet (*utoplenniki*): ”Kuolleista he tekivät hukkuneita. Miten sellaista voi tehdä?” (VV, 29.) *Matjorassa* tätä sanaa taas käytetään uuteen taajamaan muuttaneista, patoaltaan alle hukutettujen kylien entisistä asukkaista: ”Kas kun muut [muualta kuin Angaralta tulleet] nimittävät meitä sillä lailla: hukkuneiksi” (JM, 205). Tämä heijastaa Siperian alkuperäiskansojen animistisia uskomuksia siitä, että hukkuminen on erityisen hirvittävä tapa kuolla ja että kuolleiden on tärkeää saada pysyä kuivassa paikassa (Kwon 1986, 50–51). Nämä ovat uskomuksia, jotka myös pienoisromaanien *Elä ja muista* sekä *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle* päähenkilöt Nastena ja Darja jakavat (Galimova 2013, 58–59; Kwon 1986, 51).

Modernisaatio pyrkii tekemään joesta abstraktia tilaa

Tilan ja paikan suhde voidaan määritellä eri tavoin. Erica Carterin, James Donaldin ja Judith Squiresin (1993, xii) mukaan paikka (*place*)

on tilaa (*space*), johon liittyy merkitys. Paikka siis liittyy aina johonkin tilaan, kun taas tila ei välttämättä liity mihinkään paikkaan. Näin nähtynä paikkaa ei voi olla ilman jotakin, jolle se on jollain tavoin merkityksellinen. Posthumanistisesti ajateltuna tämä jokin voi olla myös ei-inhimillinen toimija (ks. Lummaa ja Rojola 2014), mutta silloin kun kyseessä on ihminen, paikka voidaan nähdä ihmismielen tilasta muokkaamana käsitteenä. Tässä artikkelissa analysoimani teoksen joki on paikka juuri tässä mielessä. Se ei ole pelkkä maantieteellinen tapahtuma- tai sijaintipaikka (*site*; *location*) vaan ihmisen itselleen merkityksellistämä paikka. Sen sijaan sitä ympäröivä siperialainen taiga on pelkkää ihmiselle asuinkelvotonta tilaa. Kertoja kuvaakin taigaa ”pitkäksi ja vieraannuttavaksi” (VV, 25).

Ei taiga merkityksetön ole, mutta sen merkityksiä vähätellään: ”Taiga ei huolettanut ja raastanut Viktoria kuten joki. Taiga pysyi, ja sen tulikin pysyä, aloillaan, kun taas joki saattoi kadota, hävitä, lakata olemasta paljastaen itsestään muistoksi vain paljaan kivisen uoman, jolla koirat juoksentelisivat.” (VV, 9.) Lapsuudessa metsä näytti jäidenlähdön aikaan elävän joen rinnalla kuolleelta. Aikuinen Viktor nauttii täysin siemauksin kävelyretkestään metsään. Hän kuitenkin toteaa, että voisi yhtä hyvin olla missä hyvänsä metsässä ja kokemus olisi silti yhtä palkitseva. Kotiseudun metsä on toki miellyttävä, mutta se ei tunnu kotoisalta paikalta: ”[M]utta hän tiesi, että tämä tunne voisi syntyä missä hyvänsä, missä vain metsässä, ei ainoastaan täällä. Ei tullut sitä ainutkertaista, ainutlaatuista, suorastaan intohimoista ja älyttömästi liikuttavaa jälkivaikutusta, jonka kotipaikat herättävät.” (VV, 36.)

Taigan keskeltä, kaukana niin joesta, patoaltaasta kuin ihmisasutuksesta, Viktor eräässä lyhyessä kohtauksessa löytää paratiisimaisen paikan, jossa hän on pakahtua onnesta. Se on pieni koivikko, jossa on ”tilavaa, valoisaa ja juhlavaa” ja jonka lehdet tuottavat ”pitkän ja onnellisen rauhaisuuden laulun” (VV, 33). Koivikon kuvauksesta nousevat mieleen Ivan Šiškinin 1800-luvun lopun maisemamaalaukset. Kerronta taas muistuttaa, kuten Dale Peterson (1994, 88) huomauttaa, Ivan Turgenevin kertomusta ”Pakovainio” (”Bežin lug”, 1852).[19] Koivikko

19 Kertomus on suomennettu myös nimellä ”Yökausi paimenessa”.

tuntuu olevan seudun ainoa paikka, jossa vanha Venäjä yhä on läsnä. Tämä sopii Katerina Clarkin (1981, 242) huomioon siitä, että silloin, kun kyläproosan päähenkilö ei löydä ikonista perinteistä venäläistä kylää, hän usein menee etsinnässään vertauskuvauksellisesti yhä kauemmas taaksepäin ajassa ja löytää mielenrauhan metsästä. Rasputinin mennyttä aikaa huokuvan koivikon kuvaus ei olekaan realistinen vaan utooppinen.

Joki sen sijaan on reaalisesti se tekijä, jonka ansiosta ihminen voi Siperian syrjäseutuja asuttaa; se on ihmiselämän elinehto, ja siksi se näyttäytyy vahvasti paikkana. Joen kuolema taas näyttäytyy personifioituna ja yön yli tapahtuvana dramaattisena käänteenä: ”joki tukehtui[20] ja hukkui kohtaamaansa välinpitämättömään tulvaveteen” (VV, 18). Rasputinin tukehtuva ja hukkuva joki menettää merkityksensä paikkana. Ulkopuolisen Viktorin näkökulmasta siitä tulee, Henri Lefebvren (1991, 49–51) sanoin, abstraktia tilaa. Tällainen abstrakti tila on eräänlainen modernisaation sivutuote, sillä kuten Timothy Oakes (1997, 509) kuvailee, kapitalistinen moderniteetti on kolonisoinut tilan itselleen. Modernisaatio siis järjestää paikan uudelleen abstraktiksi tilaksi heikentämällä ihmisen kiinnittymistä paikkaan. Kuten Lawrence Buell (2003, 58) huomauttaa, ilmiö ei kuitenkaan liity ainoastaan kapitalistiseen moderniteettiin vaan yhtä lailla sosialistiseen. Myös neuvostoliittolainen moderniteetti otti tilan haltuun ja teki paikasta abstraktia tilaa. Lefebvren (1991, 49) kuvaama ”repressiivisessä tilassa läsnä oleva byrokraattinen ja poliittinen autoritarismi”, keskusjohtoisen moderniteetin kolonisoiman tilan ulospäin näkyvät merkit syrjäseuduilla, olivat siinä ehkä jopa selvemmät kuin kapitalismissa.

Rasputinin kuvaaman siperialaisen 1970-luvun syrjäseudun joeton tila ei ole täysin abstraktia, onhan Viktorin kotiväkikin apokalyptisista tunnelmista huolimatta sopeutunut muuttuneeseen ympäristöön sekä löytänyt taigan ja patoaltaan seasta itselleen uuden elintilan. Tällä uudella tilalla on uusia konkreettisia merkityksiä sekä oma fyysinen paikallisuutensa. Sara Upstonea (2009, 6) mukaillen, neuvostovaltion vesivoimalaitoksen kautta ”ylikirjoittama” siperialainen todellisuus on jo

20 Alkukielisen teoksen verbi *zahlebnutsja* tarkoittaa tukehtumista ensisijaisesti niin, että suu täyttyy nesteellä (ks. Ožegov & Švedova).

muokkautunut joksikin uudeksi, jossa on myös jälkiä vanhasta. Viktor ei näitä uusia merkityksiä kuitenkaan tunnu näkevän tai kokevan, sillä hänen silmissään joki häviää yhden yön aikana hänen nukkuessaan. Kyläläiset taas huomauttavat, että patoaltaan vesi ei peittänyt maita alleen yhtenä aaltona, vaan se tuli vähän kerrassaan, vuosi vuodelta korkeammalle. Paikallisilla on siis ollut aikaa sopeutua uusiin olosuhteisiin, joissa menestyäkseen heidän on katsottava kohti tulevaa. Kyläproosalle tyypillisesti kirjailijan fokus on kuitenkin menneessä, mitä Viktorin ulkopuolisen näkökulma heijastaa.

Lefebvren tarkoittama abstrakti tila ei ole pelkkää ulospäin näkyvää, havaittavissa olevaa materiaa vaan paljon monimutkaisempi ja kokonaisvaltaisempi käsite. Osa sitä kuitenkin näyttäytyy aistein havaittavana, ja yksi tällainen esimerkki on vesivoimalaitosten muokkaama ympäristö. Rasputinin matkakertomuksessa kolonisoitu tila konkretisoituu modernisaation ilmentymässä, patoaltaassa, jonka seisova vesi sekoittuu ympäröivään taigaan. Taiga näyttäytyy teoksessa epäpaikkana (*non-place*; ks. Augé 1995, 77–79), jossa pitää viettää aikaa – metsästää, sienestää, hakea puuta – mutta johon ei kuitenkaan liity suuria merkityksiä. Samanlainen epäpaikka on tyypillinen moderniteetin tuotos, patoallas, jossa on sielläkin käytävä vedenhaussa ja kalassa mutta josta kalastamiseen ei liity erityisempiä merkityksiä: patoaltaalle ei lähdetä kalastusretkelle, vaan sieltä kala ainoastaan käydään noutamassa. Vaikka kala onkin huonolaatuista, sitä on paljon, minkä vuoksi entisten kalastusmatkojen jännitystä ei enää ole. Viktorille kyse ei ole varsinaisesti kalastuksesta vaan pelkästä ruuanhankinnasta, mikä käy ilmi siitä, miten kertoja kuvaa hänen kalastusmatkaansa paikallisen asukkaan Nikolain kanssa:

> Kahdessa tunnissa he vetivät kahdestaan toista ämpärillistä ahventa. Työ oli melkein mekaanista: ensin laskettiin siima, sitten odotettiin hetki, nykäistiin, taas odotettiin, pienen nykäisyn jälkeen tuntui harhautetun kalan epätoivo ja kala nostettiin ylös. Viktorin aluksi vallannut kiihko katosi nopeasti. Odottaminen, kärsimättömyys, piinallinen mutta ihana epätoivo, joita ilman kalaretki ei ole kalaretki, ei ehtinyt kehittyä. Ne hajosivat ja katosivat tuottamatta tavallisesti sellaisiin tilanteisiin liittyvää nautintoa. (VV, 37.)

Teoksen joki representoituu paikkana erityisen selvästi siksi, että siihen ei viitata millään maantieteellisellä nimellä. Mitään muutakaan paikannimeä ei mainita edes kertaalleen, minkä vuoksi kertomus ei kiinnity mihinkään fyysiseen tapahtumapaikkaan. Kuten Buell (2005, 77) huomauttaa, paikasta kirjoittaminen on perinteisesti sisältänyt kiinnostuksen johonkin tiettyyn, pienehköön alueeseen. Jos Rasputin olisi nimennyt matkakertomuksensa maantieteelliset tapahtumapaikat, sen voisi lukea kuuluvan tähän perinteeseen. Kun sijaintipaikkoja kuitenkaan ei nimetä, vaan tapahtumat sijoittuvat vain ”joelle”, saa kertomus kokonaisvaltaisemman luonteen: se ei käsittele paikallisia vaan jokseenkin ylirajaisia, kansallisia ongelmia. Näin teoksen joki tulee lähelle lukijaa, sillä hänen on helppo kuvitella hukutetun joen tilalle oma lähijokensa. Sellainen lähes jokaisella venäläisellä on, sillä maan asutus on maantieteellisistä ja historiallisista syistä keskittynyt jokien äärelle (ks. Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002, 24). Venäjän sadasta väkirikkaimmasta kaupungista vain muutama ei sijaitse suuren joen rannalla.[21] Joen kasvatti on myös Viktor, joka ”kasvoi tällä joella, joka jumalan päivä pyöri siellä aamusta iltaan. Suurin osa hänen lapsuuden ja myös lapsuuden jälkeisistä iloistaan liittyi siihen. [– –] Joella oleminen antoi hänelle antaumuksellista ja loputonta mielihyvää.” (VV, 6, 8.)

Koska Viktorin menettämää jokea ei nimetä, joki näyttäytyy selvemmin paikkana kuin jos se olisi nimetty vaikkapa Angaraksi, joka useimmille lukijoille olisi vieras. Joen käsittäminen paikkana taas saa sen turmelemisen tuntumaan huolestuttavammalta. Kuten Carter, Donald ja Squires (1993, vii, xii) huomauttavat, vaikka nykymaailmassa identiteetti usein ei enää suoraan tukeudu paikkaan, paikat ovat silti yhä tärkeitä tekijöitä identiteetin rakentumisessa. Vesivoimaloiden tuottaman ympäristöongelman nostaminen neuvostoliittolaiseen yhtenäiskulttuuriin liittyväksi kansalliseksi kysymykseksi vaikuttaa myös Rasputinin teoksen jokeen liittyviin identiteettikysymyksiin. Koska joki ei kiinnity mihinkään maantieteelliseen alueeseen, se ei myöskään heijasta mitään

21 Nämä poikkeukset ovat merenrantakaupungit Vladivostok, Murmansk ja Novorossijsk, suurten järvien rantakaupungit Mahatškala ja Petroskoi, pienten jokien äärellä oleva Stavropol sekä kanaalin varrella sijaitseva Himki (Federalnaja služba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2010).

alueellista identiteettiä. Sen sijaan jokipaikkojen menettäminen näyttäytyy kansallisena kysymyksenä, ja siten teoksen joki kiinnittyy enemmän kansalliseen identiteettiin.

Valentin Rasputin palasi vesivoimalaitosten rakentamisesta aiheutuneeseen elinympäristöön liittyvään epäoikeudenmukaisuuden kokemukseen vuonna 1976 pääteoksessaan, pienoisromaanissa *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle*. Tällä kertaa hän sijoitti tapahtumat eksplisiittisesti Angarajoen varrelle. Teoksen tärkeimpiä hahmoja ovat kylän vanhat naiset, jotka yhteisönsä ainoina eivät ole menettäneet yhteyttään perinteisiin ja luontoon. Ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuden puolesta kamppailevat aktivistit ovat usein huonotuloisia naisia (Di Chiro 1996, 300), mihin joukkoon *Matjoran* kapinoivat mummot sopivat hyvin. Kuitenkin jo vuonna 1972 ilmestyneessä kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” Rasputin ensimmäistä kertaa kirjoitti ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuudesta, joitakin vuosia ennen kuin käsite Yhdysvalloissa keksittiin.

Lopuksi

Kuten Pjotr Kaminski (2013, 195) kirjoittaa, matkakertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” Valentin Rasputin ensimmäisen kerran esittää ekosysteemin tuhoutumisen elämän ja kuoleman välisenä rajakysymyksenä. Hän tekee sen ennen kaikkea esittämällä joen elämänä ja patoaltaan kuolemana. Kuten Rasputinin myöhemmässä pienoisromaanissa *Jäähyväiset Matjoralle* sekä Viktor Astafjevin kertomuskokoelmassa *Kuningaskala* (*Tsar-ryba*, 1976) myös kertomuksessa ”Vniz i vverh po tetšeniju” joki ja patoallas kytkeytyvät kiinteästi elämän ja kuoleman kysymyksiin.

Vesimetaforien yhteys elämään ja kuolemaan ei ole harvinaista kirjallisuudessa, mutta neuvostoliittolaisessa kontekstissa Rasputin ja Astafjev poikkeavat valtavirrasta siinä, että kytkemällä joen elämän ja kuoleman kysymyksiin he asettavat maassa meneillään olleen ympäristökatastrofin kohtalonkysymykseksi: heille ympäristön pilaaminen johtaa myös ihmisen tuhoon, niin moraaliseen kuin fyysiseenkin. Myöhemmässä esseistiikassaan Rasputin (1990, 345) tiivisti tämän viestinsä lakonisesti ja suorasanaisesti: ”Luonnon tuhoutuminen on yhtä kuin

ihmisen tuho." Kun joki kuolee, merkitsee se kuolemaa niin luonnolle kuin kulttuurillekin, sillä joki kuuluu niihin molempiin.

Rasputinin matkakertomus esittää joen ja patoaltaan toistensa vastakohtina. On kuitenkin yksi elementti, joka yhdistää ne. Se on moderni jokilaiva, joka vaikuttaa petollisen miellyttävältä tilalta. Sillä matkustaessa tuntuu kuin matkaisi ikivanhalla joella mukavasti ja turvallisesti. Tosiasiassa se vie kuitenkin aivan uuteen maailmaan, joka ei ole lainkaan turvallinen tai ainakaan sitä ei sellaisena esitetä.

Joki ja vesi tarjoavat kirjailijalle luontevan kanavan käsitellä elämän ja kuoleman kysymyksiä, ja vesivoimalaitosten haltuunsa ottama tila on tyypillinen esimerkki siitä, miten modernisaatio tekee ihmisille merkityksellisistä paikoista abstraktia tilaa. Toisaalta joki on myös konkreettinen esimerkki materiaalisesti pilaantuneesta ympäristöstä. Valentin Rasputinin joki saa runollisia merkityksiä, mutta – aivan kuten kyläprosaistien luontoesityksissä yleisemminkin (Parthé 1992, 8) – hänen viestinsä on käytännöllinen: joen hyväksikäyttö johtaa siihen, että se ei enää pysty tarjoamaan sitä, mitä ihmiset siltä tarvitsevat. Patoallas hukutettuna jokena on vahva metafora, ja yhä vahvemman siitä tekee se, että jokea ei nimetä, jolloin ongelma ylittää paikalliset rajat ja näyttäytyy kansallisena ja kulttuurisena, venäläiseen joki- ja luontokokemukseen liittyvänä kysymyksenä. Jos joki, elävä elämän vesi, suorastaan elämä itse, hukutetaan, kaikki pysähtyy. Nykyaikainen vesivoimalaitos ei siten edustakaan joen äärellä eläville edistystä ja modernisaatiota vaan taantumusta ja pysähtyneisyyttä. Määrätietoinen kehityksen virta onkin syrjäseudun neuvostokansalaisille tuhoava ja lamaannuttava voima.

Jos ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus ymmärretään Adamsonin, Evansin ja Steinin (2002, 4) määritelmän mukaisesti terveellisen elinympäristön suomien etujen jakautumisena tasaisesti, voidaan sanoa, että vesivoimalaitosten rakentaminen rikkoi Siperian joenrantakylien asukkaiden ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuutta vastaan, sillä he eivät enää saaneet asua joen äärellä. Rasputinin matkakertomuksen kuvauksessa epäoikeudenmukaisuutta aiheutti ennen kaikkea joen sekä sen ja taigan väliin jäävän rajavyöhykkeen puute. Ihmiset eivät tiedä, miten elää siellä, missä jokea ei ole.

Angaran varrelle alettiin vuonna 1974 rakentaa uutta Bogutšanyn vesivoimalaa. Neuvostoliiton romahtaessa ja rahoituksen loppuessa 1990-luvun alussa työt jäivät pahasti kesken. 2000-luvun Venäjällä niitä kuitenkin jatkettiin yksityisen rahoituksen turvin, ja vuonna 2012 avattiin Angaralle jälleen uusi pato, jonka alta ihmiset joutuivat muuttamaan pois. Venäläisen niin sanotun uuden realistisen proosan kirjailija Roman Sentšin kiinnostui aiheesta ja kysyi Valentin Rasputinilta, pitäisikö Bogutšanyn vesivoimalasta kirjoittaa proosaa. Vanhan kirjailijan mielestä siitä oli välttämätöntä kirjoittaa (Lappela 2015, 103). Sentšin kirjoitti romaanin Rasputinin hengessä ja omisti teoksensa tälle. Painosta teos *Zona zatoplenija* (2015; ”Tulva-alue”) tuli muutama päivä Rasputinin kuoleman jälkeen. Kirja on herättänyt Venäjällä paljon huomiota,[22] ja 1970-luvun kyläproosan tavoin se on auttanut levittämään tietoa Venäjän syrjäseutujen asukkaiden ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuuteen liittyvistä ongelmista. Se on myös osoitus siitä, että teema on Venäjällä mitä ajankohtaisin juuri nyt.

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A Journey on a Drowned River

Environmental Justice in Valentin Rasputin's River Prose of the 1970s

Mika Perkiömäki

"The best before date of this world has already gone." (Valentin Rasputin)[1]

The travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" ("Downstream and Upstream") by Valentin Rasputin (1937–2015) was first published in 1972 in the Soviet Union in the literary journal *Nash sovremennik*, which was popular among conservative and also radical Russian nationalists (Brudny 1998, 10). During these times, the Siberian writers that belonged to the so-called village prose movement (*derevenskaia proza*) were renewing the imaginations of nature in Russian literature.[2] Their works handle life in the Russian hinterland, and in them nature is often an active agent rather than merely a setting for events or people's living environment. The oeuvre of many village prose writers emphasizes the unity of humans and non-human nature, their common history, and the humility of humans before nature (Gillespie 2001, 226; Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2008, 80; Parthé 1992, 7). Valentin Rasputin, who received the USSR State Prize twice (in 1977 and 1987) and the State Prize of the Russian Federation once (in 2012), was one of the most prominent actors in this movement.

Writing about the interrelationship of humans and nature was not new in Russian prose, but the rise of village prose in the 1960s coincided with the period when the true scale of the adverse effects of human activities on nature began to be understood in the Soviet Union. According to literary scholar Anna Razuvalova (2015, 278), the village prose writers showed the Soviet reader that state propaganda about the superiority of socialist economic management in solving environmental problems did not correspond to reality. Writers who were originally from rural areas presented the issues related to the preservation of nature in a way that was easily

[1] A quote from Sergei Miroshnichenko's two-part documentary film *Reka zhizni. Valentin Rasputin* (2011; "The River of Life: Valentin Rasputin").

[2] The Russian word *derevnia* means both village and countryside. The works depict life in the villages (Vil'chek 1985, 36), and village prose is a more apt translation also, because it makes the difference from the so-called kolkhoz literature more distinct (Parthé 1992, 151). Kolkhoz literature also takes place in the countryside, but in it, the significance of the village community is not great. An example of kolkhoz literature is Mikhail Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* (*Podniataia tselina*, 1932, 1959), a novel in two parts.

approachable and comprehensible to readers. Their works helped in disseminating information about various local environmental problems to the national level.

In this article, I analyse the river in Valentin Rasputin's travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" from an ecocritical perspective. I argue that, along with this work, Rasputin for the first time addresses the problems of environmental justice in peripheral Russia, and I show that the river of the work plays a crucial role in why the justice related to the living environment of the people is violated. The river of the work represents life, happiness and the past, while the reservoir of the hydropower plant means death, misfortune and modernity. The lost river was a significant place for people, but the reservoir produced by modernization has drowned it and created a more abstract space around it. For the protagonist who arrives in the new settlement from outside, it seems almost meaningless compared to the former village, as the traditional human living space, the liminal zone between the river and the forest, has disappeared. The holistic nature of the work is emphasized by the fact that no venues are named. In this way, the problems it addresses do not appear to be local but more general.

The right to a good living environment

The post war reconstruction and industrialization in the Soviet Union entailed the ever-increasing utilization of natural resources. In the early 1960s, the state decided to build a large paper and pulp mill in the city of Baikalsk on the southern shore of Lake Baikal. Numerous prominent scholars, journalists, writers and other cultural figures opposed the decision, and a new Soviet environmental movement emerged that sought to cancel the construction of the factory (Kaminskii 2010, 90). It saw the environmental harm as too great for the lake, which has long been considered a sacred place and a symbol of the purity of Siberian nature.[3] The mill was built, however, and opened in 1966. It has adversely affected not only the waters of Baikal but also the waters of the Angara River, which is fed by the lake.[4]

The Soviet press also often criticized the giant hydropower projects of the 1960s, whose economic benefits, not to mention social and ecological impacts, were dubious (Josephson et al. 2013, 68). By then, some of the projects had already started, while some were still being prepared. Among the most prominent representatives of the environmental movement were Siberian writers.

[3] Rasputin's 1981 essay "Baikal, Baikal…" also strongly emphasizes the sanctity and purity of Baikal (Davydova 2012, 248).

[4] The mill was closed due to financial problems in 2013.

One of them was Sergei Zalygin, who published a series of articles in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1962–1963 that led to the cancellation of the Salekhard hydropower project on the lower Ob River (Weiner 1999, 417; Rudziewicz 2003, 158). Nevertheless, another mega-project of the time, the construction of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station on the Angara, was completed according to a record-breaking schedule and opened in 1967. However, there were not enough resources to build new industrial plants nearly as rapidly, so the huge capacity of the Bratsk power plant went largely unused (Josephson et al. 2013, 167).

While the economic benefits of such mega-projects may have been at least initially modest, their symbolic value was enormous. The harnessing of the Angara for hydropower became a significant symbol of Siberian modernization (Magnusson 1986, 173). The Bratsk hydropower plant was a masterpiece of modern Soviet engineering, a mammoth undertaking built not only for the growing need for electricity by Soviet society, but also as a symbol of communist power and modern Soviet identity. Evgenii Evtushenko devoted a narrative poem to the plant, "Bratskia GES" (1965; "Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station"), in which he presents the hydropower plant in a very positive light, paralleling it with the Egyptian pyramids.[5] The Soviet leadership saw such hydropower projects as an indication of modernization (Josephson et al. 2013, 163). The 4,500-megawatt hydropower plant in Bratsk became the largest in the world. Its 5,500 km^2 dam is still the second largest in the world.

The Siberian writer Valentin Rasputin became a major environmentalist in the 1970s. For him, the struggle to protect Lake Baikal and its surroundings meant a struggle for the preservation of Russian culture. He repeatedly accused high-ranking officials of lying and incompetence in issues connected to the Baikalsk mill (ibid., 249). In his writing, Rasputin addressed almost all the burning problems of Siberian nature (Kaminskii 2010, 89).

Because of the fast pace of the construction of the Bratsk power plant, it was not possible to clear all the forest from the area of the reservoir. Thus, huge amounts of Siberian coniferous forest, the *taiga*, were submerged (Josephson et al. 2013, 170). Not only the forest but also numerous villages along the banks of the Angara – along with their churches and cemeteries – disappeared beneath the floodwater. The topic was dear to Rasputin, because one of these was his home village of Atalanka. Although the writer had moved out of the area, he knew the Bratsk plant well, because he had worked as a journalist on the construction site, having to write of it from the state's point of view (Peterson 1994, 86). The submersion of villages related to the construction of

[5] The builders of Evtushenko's hydropower plant are not slaves like the builders of the pyramids, but enthusiastic workers dedicated to socialism (Marsh 1986, 45).

hydropower plants was common in the Soviet Union at the time,[6] and Rasputin wrote on this theme from the perspective of environmental justice. In that sense, he was part of a global phenomenon, part of an international movement of artists that addressed the struggle for environmental justice in their work.

Issues related to environmental justice first emerged in academic research in the early 1970s, when economists in the United States became interested in whether the air quality of the living environment had a connection to people's economic status (Szasz & Meuser 1997, 100–1). The concept of environmental justice emerged at the turn of the 1980s, when North American NGOs began to fight against the fact that the poor – especially African American and indigenous communities – suffered more from environmental problems than others did (see di Chiro 1996; Szasz & Meuser 1997). Soon sociologists and later many other disciplines became interested in the topic. Along with the second wave of ecocriticism that emphasized social ecology in the early 2000s, literary research also became interested in it (Marland 2013, 851–3). Over the past decade, issues related to environmental justice have become increasingly prominent in ecocriticism (Zapf 2016, 6), for example in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism (see Banerjee 2016).

Ecocriticism is the study of the interaction between literature and other forms of culture and the physical environment.[7] Within it, the interest in environmental justice is partly related to the shift in attention from "wild nature" closer to people, the city and its environment (Reed 2002, 154). Human culture thrives also in rural areas, so issues of justice related to the living environment affect remote areas too. As defined by Joni Adamson, MeiMei Evans and Rachel Stein (2002, 6), environmental justice writers depict the environmental damage faced by communities deprived of economic and political influence.[8]

Thus, when Valentin Rasputin's travel essay was published in the early 1970s, the concept of environmental justice had not yet been developed. The concept has never been an active research topic in the Soviet context. Nevertheless, Rasputin's oeuvre fits perfectly into the framework of this research, as it depicts the "social, material, and spiritual devastation that results, when, for example, hydroelectric projects destroy tribal lands and water", as Adamson, Evans and Stein (ibid.) describe.

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[6] The phenomenon was global, and affected also Finland, where 600 evacuees from six villages had to abandon their homeland in the way of the Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs (see Kauhanen 2014). The Soviet scale was in its own magnitude: the dam basin filled in Bratsk in 1964 alone is more than ten times as large as Lokka and Porttipahta combined, and the 250 villages evacuated under it were home to more than 100,000 people (Dyker 1983, 130–1).

[7] See Pippa Marland's (2013) concise outline of ecocriticism. A more extensive introduction in Finnish to ecocriticism is Lahtinen and Lehtimäki (eds.) 2008.

[8] In this volume, Pirjo Ahokas discusses Linda Hogan, who is a good example of a North American writer whose work highlights the lack of environmental justice for indigenous peoples.

Compared to North American literature, there are differences too. First – with the exception of some of his stories from the 1960s – Rasputin's works do not depict the lives of ethnic minorities but Russian communities. However, as a result of the actions against their living environments, these remote communities face a similar injustice as the indigenous peoples of North America, for example, in Linda Hogan's works. Second, the people that Rasputin depicts do not put up active resistance. [9] This is understandable, because under the authoritarian conditions of the Soviet Union, resistance by ordinary people was simply not possible. This only makes the significance of a writer like Rasputin as an advocate for environmental justice even stronger, because his works could bring local environmental issues from resolutions of the Council of Ministers and other deep branches of the Soviet bureaucracy to public national awareness. In the Soviet context, its scale in spreading environmental awareness was significant. Grassroots activism, urban issues, and indigenous peoples are not present in Rasputin's writings, but environmental justice is a much broader concept, as Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson (1998, i) note in their opening remarks: "Environmental justice is concerned with the fair distribution among social groups of environmental quality".[10]

Even though Rasputin's protagonists do not put up active resistance, they certainly do not succumb to their fate. This is most evident in the novella *Farewell to Matyora*: in the third chapter, the elderly village women use sticks to attack the sanitary brigade that is emptying their cemetery. However, this is only a spontaneous primitive reaction, and no organized resistance arises in the village. Nevertheless, in the name of passive resistance, the most persistent women are ready even to die, for they refuse to leave the home village even under the imminent threat of the drowning of the village. On the other hand, "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" does not depict any resistance whatsoever.

[9] Valentin Rasputin's reluctance to engage in active resistance in post-socialist Russia has been criticized in Roman Senchin's novel *Zona zatopleniia* (2015; "Flood Zone"). The novel's protagonist thinks that the award-winning and respected author should not have contented himself with mere words in an attempt to prevent the opening of the Boguchany hydropower plant, which took place in 2012.

[10] According to the same preface, ecological justice is concerned with the fair distribution of environments among all inhabitants of the planet. It is therefore a more biocentric approach than environmental justice. I do not discuss ecological justice in this article, however, because it is not relevant to my research material. For more on ecological justice, see Baxter 2005.

Upstream and downstream with Valentin Rasputin

When Valentin Rasputin died in the spring of 2015, the writer Roman Senchin (2015, 162) described that he remains in history not only as one of the best-known representatives of village prose, but also as a guardian of Russian national traditions and a conservationist. Rasputin is one of the most prominent authors of *traditsionalistskaia proza*, realist prose that cherishes Russian national traditions (Kovtun 2015a, 277).[11] In his works, the first of which date back to the 1960s, the interaction of nature and human destinies plays an important role (Karpenko & Merinov 2013, 85). Because of this, Rasputin has since the 1970s been considered one of the authors of so-called natural-philosophical prose (*naturfilosofskaia proza*). As the literary scholar Elena Galimova (2013, 52) confirms, the river has a central place in Rasputin's artistic landscape. In his best-known novellas of the 1970s, *Live and Remember* (*Zhivi i pomni*, 1974) and *Farewell to Matyora* (*Proshchanie s Matëroi*, 1976), the river is a universal symbol that connects the opposite pairs of own/foreign and life/death (Novikova 2005, 194–7).

According to Galimova (2013, 60), the river is particularly interesting in the travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", which was published a few years before the above-mentioned novellas, because its riverscape is the most developed in Rasputin's writing and because in it living water and dead water appear as a mythopoetic oppositional pair for the first time. The river, depicted in the work as living water, is a mighty force. At the same time, however, it is also insecure and vulnerable, and like all living things, it may die.

In the essay, two opposing water bodies rise to a central role, the flowing river and the stagnant reservoir. The riverboat, which travels in both of the spaces and thus connects them, has its own function. I read the river of the essay from an ecocritical perspective and argue that in this work, Rasputin for the first time writes for environmental justice precisely through the image of the river. Unlike the reservoir, the river is represented as a significant place for people, and its death means the death of both nature and culture. The reservoir of the hydropower plant, the manifestation of modernization built in the periphery by the centre of power, has drowned both nature and culture. Along with the river, the traditional living space of people has also disappeared from the hinterland.

Ecocriticism is a reasonable viewpoint on the essay, which is considered Rasputin's first work on the environmental theme (Kaminskii 2013, 195). His earlier stories and essays depict the conquest of wildlife in romantic tones. In them, nature is merely a human habitat, and their

[11] From the 1980s onwards, Rasputin even gained a reputation as an extreme nationalist (Diagalov 2009).

depictions of nature emphasize people's victory over nature (Kovtun 2009, 283). These early writings do not lament the drowning of the countryside under the reservoirs of hydropower plants, nor are they nostalgic towards the past (Senchin 2015, 169).

Rasputin actively wrote not only fiction but also essays. In several of his writings, they are intermingled, as also in "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", which the author himself called in the second edition of the work a "sketch[12] of a journey" (Elizarova 1986, 33). The characterization describes the content of the work to some extent, but it includes also fictitious elements. I have changed Rasputin's own definition, which sounds clumsy in other languages, to call it a travel essay.[13] Nevertheless, it is a very autobiographical story of a trip by a riverboat downstream along a large river from a big city into the countryside and to the huge reservoir of a recently opened hydropower plant.

The protagonist of the story is Viktor, a writer, who bids farewell to the city as he steps onto the first riverboat of the summer. There he settles in his own single cabin. He has a long journey ahead to his relatives in an area he has not visited in five years. Meanwhile, his native village has been submerged under the reservoir and its people have been relocated to a new settlement. During the boat trip, Viktor recalls his childhood by the river.

As the home village approaches, Viktor becomes restless. Only then does he really begin to realise that the old village does not exist anymore. The village community is completely changed, as the inhabitants and property of three neighbouring villages have also been relocated to a new settlement. Temporary workers also reside there, and the residents no longer know one another. Upon arrival, Viktor learns that the water is pumped into the village, apparently from the reservoir. It is not potable: it cannot be used for making tea, or even for washing one's hair. However, as the shore is now far away, the pumped water is used for cooking, but water for tea is

[12] The Russian word *ocherk*, often translated as "sketch" into English, is tricky. As Kathleen Parthé (1992, 13–4) writes, *ocherk* is a very loose genre, which is often covertly tendentious. The roots of village prose lie in the *ocherks* of the 1950s by Vladimir Ovechkin, Efim Dorosh and Gavriil Troepol'skii, among others (Nedzvetskii & Filippov 1999, 48). In form, they were close to socialist realism, but they contained criticism of the management of agricultural collectives as well as the idealization of peasant life. These documentary texts, which were usually published in newspapers and literary journals, were influenced by journalism and they renewed Soviet prose (Vil'chek 1985, 43). By naming his story an *ocherk*, Rasputin explicitly places it in the Ovechkinian continuum of Russian village prose. Elveson 1975 provides a thorough description of the post-World War II Soviet *ocherk*. I have decided to use the term "travel essay" rather than "travel sketch" here, because Rasputin's work is a mature text that contains deep reflection on the influence of the journey for both the writer and the whole nation.

[13] The first edition of the work, which I use as my source material, did not define the genre. In *Nash sovremennik*, it was published in a section entitled "Prose". E. D. Elizarova (1986, 37) classifies it as a novella (*povest'*). The work has traditionally been understood in Russia as part of Rasputin's socially critical oeuvre, which has journalistic features. According to Liliia Vil'chek (1979, 13–4), this so-called *publitsistika* is always social, and it is somewhere between science and art. Other genre definitions for Rasputin's text include an essayistic novella (*ocherkovaia povest'*; Galimova 2013, 59) and a travel sketch (*putjovyi ocherk*; Kaminskii 2013, 195). According to Parthé (1992, 15–6), writers and publishers often gave inconsistent genres to works of village prose, and she refers to "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" as an example.

retrieved from the reservoir. The villagers compare the recent development to a cholera epidemic, a deluge, and the end of the world. The apocalyptic moods reflect the black nostalgia that, according to Richard Coe, instead of mere sentimentality, produces outbursts of despair and resistance to the arbitrary destruction of the countryside, which is characteristic of village prose (Parthé 1992, 11). The motif of the apocalypse is even more evident in *Farewell to Matyora*, where the island of Matyora, which is about to be submerged beneath a reservoir, represents a lost terrestrial paradise, a lost utopia (see Kovtun 2009, 323–43; Kovtun 2015b, 149–61). Viktor's native village in "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" is also a lost paradise, but, unlike in *Matyor*a, the travel essay describes less the life of the old village than that which has replaced it.

On the day of arrival, Viktor goes to fetch water from the reservoir and finds that access is much more difficult than it was on the old river. Unlike the river, the reservoir is not next to the settlement. Additionally, its waves are rough, making it difficult to reach the water. Further, Viktor finds that the shore water is dirty – like "the kind which usually comes from fields in spring" (DS, 422) – so drinking water must be fetched from further away from the reservoir's edge. Viktor starts swimming towards deeper water, but a boy who arrives on the scene advises that water has to be fetched by boat because the water around the reservoir's banks is dangerous.[14] Even a hundred meters from the shore, swimming is still dangerous due to the tree trunks beneath the surface. By boat, Viktor eventually gets his bucket filled with fairly clean water, from which his mother agrees to make tea.

Viktor spends the early summer in the countryside, but eventually he becomes compelled to return to the city. The native village is no longer familiar to him. At first, he thinks he can get used to it, but he does not. He still feels that he is on a journey, rather than having arrived in his home village. His mother notices that Viktor cannot find his place in the new village community. In the village or by the reservoir, he cannot find inspiration for his writing, so he repeatedly goes out into the woods, but also there he is somewhat lost all the time. He does not properly understand what is forcing him to leave. However, the narrator notes that in order to take the journey again but to know where one is going, one has to leave first. Viktor decides to return by boat to where he came from. Of the return trip, the narrator tells only that the ship, full of tourists, is as noisy as a gypsy camp. This time around, Viktor cannot get a cabin, and he is not allowed in the restaurant that is reserved for tourists.

[14] Of what can happen to a person swimming in the shore water of the reservoir, the boy uses the ambiguous verb *podavit'sia*. In literary language, it primarily means choking, suffocation, loss of breath, or difficulty swallowing because there is something in the throat. In colloquial language, it also means to be flattened, smashed or crushed (of everything or much). (See Efremova 2000; Kuusinen [ed.] 1997.)

The river that drowned

I begin my analysis by looking at the way the river, riverboat and reservoir are depicted in Rasputin's travel essay. In literature, the river often appears as a metaphor for life (see Grady 2007, 14; Imikhelova 2015, 267). Galimova (2013, 53) has suggested that in Rasputin's prose, the most important meaning of the river is the river as life, not only metaphorically but also literally. Based on my analysis, the river in "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" is such a manifestation of life. Rasputin's river is not only living; it is life itself.

The story's river is represented as the pure and mystical water of life: "The river seemed to glow as if from within, from its very depths; and glistening, it shone from end to end like a clearly outlined deep blue ribbon, mysterious and coldly wondrous, with a pale illusory halo rising in the air above it" (DS, 391). The river also brings happiness and love. In his youth, Viktor fell in love with a medical student on a riverboat, and now the narrator recalls those days of happiness: "That's what 'water, water, water everywhere' does to people" (DS, 380). Later in the city, far from the river, the romance ends immediately. As a child, the river brought happiness to Viktor:

> He received untiring, endless pleasure from his stay on the river, from contemplating its frightening, alluring depths and its powerful swells as he sensed his own happiness; from pushing off and rowing from shore, further and further, riding the waves and dipping into them [– –]. (DS, 386.)

Rasputin's river is part of both culture and nature, just like in the works of another renowned Siberian writer of the same era, Viktor Astaf'ev (see Perkiömäki 2017).

When travelling on the river, Viktor actually travels into his memories. The journey downstream to the reservoir is for him not only a geographical shift towards the places of his childhood – which he never finds – but also a spiritual transition towards the past. The memory of the break-up of the ice on the night of Labour Day when he was six is indelibly printed in Viktor's mind. This memory of the river has always warmed and sustained him – brought him forward in life. Although Viktor has long lived far away from his native river, its memory has remained his travel companion. The river is special in Viktor's memories: "Memories linked to the river lived within him distinct from other memories; they lived like a warm, heartfelt sorrow beside which he would often rest and warm himself before moving on" (DS, 387).

Notably, "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu" never mentions the name of the river. In contrast, the word "river" appears 46 times, the word "stream" 11 times and the word "water" 104 times. No other places are named either, except for a few generic names of small islands that do not seem to reflect any real islands. The protagonist leaves the city at the beginning, but the name of the city

is not mentioned, nor are the towns, villages or settlements where the ship stops along the way. Even the name and location of the hydropower plant is not mentioned. While a vigilant reader may infer from various details that the protagonist is probably leaving from Irkutsk, that the ship travels along the Angara, and that the dam that submerged Viktor's home village belongs to the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station, the text does not name any of them.

One can assume that the average reader is not able to place the events more precisely than somewhere in Siberia, which seems to be the author's intention. He does not discuss the local problems of his native village, but writes about them on a more general level. This is understandable, as numerous other Siberian villages faced similar destinies in the 1950s–1970s. In that sense, Rasputin's home village was not special. I will return to the significance of the anonymity of the places below.

The rumbling river that frees itself from ice in the spring equates in Viktor's memories with thunder. When the river was still frozen, Viktor, who had just turned six, anxiously waited for the break-up of the ice on the banks of the river on Labour Day, and felt he was running out of space. When the river did not start to flow freely during the day, Viktor was certain that "the [Second World] war would never end, father would never come home from the front" (VV, 384). The next night, the river breaks the ice and flows with tremendous force. Its free flow creates the impression of a more open space: "The exposed swollen river flowed with a speed marked by impatience because it moved so openly and freely; there was immediately a feeling of more space all around" (DS, 386). The free-flowing river is associated here with liberation from an oppressive space and with the end of the war, as if along with the river, desires could also start freely flowing. The narrator refers to them at the very beginning of the story, when Viktor is boarding the ship:

> the [river] water [– –] now cast a spell, intoxicated and pulled you somewhere, evoking a vague, deep sense of anxiety. This was some kind of an unusual, inexplicable and unearthly condition when unexpected desires were suddenly kindled which aroused your soul and you seemed to envision unusual feats or experienced, out of the blue, a sentimental feeling for your own life, where your greatest happiness seemed to be seeing, thinking, and engraving everything upon your memory. (DS, 380)

In Viktor's case, these desires flow only in the past, in the village of his childhood that has since been destroyed, and in the optimistic times at the end of World War II. In the future, there is only the suppressed stream, the reservoir with its still water. For Viktor, the river is the opposite of the taiga. While walking in the forest, Viktor finds familiar places from childhood that evoke memories but fail to connect with the past. The taiga is and will remain in place, and it does not concern Viktor. The flowing river, on the other hand, may disappear, vanish, cease to exist. Its

existence must be checked every morning. As a child, Viktor could not understand why people were not worried about whether the river would still flow tomorrow. For him, the river has to flow every day, otherwise along with the disappearance of the current, life could also disappear from the Earth.

Viktor travels by a ship along the river to the reservoir under which his home village has been drowned. The ship, slowly gliding on the river, connects the river's hydropower plant to the suffocating water of the reservoir. The trip is carefree, idle and romantic at first. The riverboat appears as a haven of peace, an island where time almost stops. On the ship, Viktor observes an apparently idyllic and happy rural family. While he is slightly envious of the harmonious family of four, he also rejoices in their happiness. However, the romance abruptly ends when the ship arrives in the reservoir, and the parents of the family begin to quarrel violently. Additionally, disorder fills the ship as villagers rush from the pier to buy the ship's beer stores for themselves.

Strictly speaking, the essay does not depict the ship as an island but rather an island as a ship:

> And on the island there is always a wondrous—deceptive and at the same time real—feeling of motion, as if you're on a boat, on a ship, moving slowly and with an air of importance; and this feeling arises not so much from the water all around as from the exciting feeling of being somehow raised above the earth, a feeling that you're sailing cautiously to a mysterious place. (DS, 392.)

Viktor indeed sails towards something mysterious on the riverboat, and a changed world awaits him. On the riverboat, Viktor dreams of passing by the river islands. Soon, however, he realizes that there are no more islands. They have all been submerged by the waters of the reservoir and are now part of the bottom. Therefore, the riverboat becomes Viktor's island, around which the tops of trees peek out of the water here and there. In one dreamlike scene, the riverboat slides through a half-submerged forest. The scene is an accurate depiction of real life, however, as plenty of forest remained beneath the reservoir's surface.

It is noteworthy that Viktor travels in a modern, motorized riverboat, whereas previously he had travelled these waters only by steamship. The riverboat represents the modern world, and it transfers Viktor from the old world (the river) to the new (the reservoir). The flow of the river represents the passage of time. At the beginning of the story, Viktor thinks he will be making a journey back to the past, but the current inevitably leads him to something new. On the motorized riverboat, externally only the restaurant resembles the old steamships. The restaurant's menu is the same as before, only lake fish have replaced the river fish. Thus, the restaurant becomes the place

where Viktor spends most of his time on board. The restaurant is like an islet of the past in the island-like space of the modern riverboat.

At the end of the story, Viktor ponders the reasons why he feels a compelling need to escape the village. Perhaps he subconsciously thinks that a trip back up the river could bring back the good old days. Far from the reservoir, he could at least live with such an illusion. The essay's title indicates this. The title of the first edition was only "Vniz po techeniiu" ("Downstream"), which better matches the plot, where the protagonist travels only downstream. However, in the following edition, the author changed the title to include the reference to the countercurrent. The new name is more optimistic: even if time cannot be turned backwards, one does not have to slide single-mindedly downstream towards modernization. One can also go against the current, resisting the belief in perpetual progress, profligate exploitation and instrumental understanding of nature, saturated with the ideal of modernization.

The reservoir at the end of Viktor's journey is so vast and seems so shoreless that people call it the sea. Viktor finds it hard to believe that it really is artificial. The reservoir does not resemble the river in any way, it is a completely alien space:

> The water seemed motionless and gray. [– –] the sun [– –] could not penetrate the water but only illuminate its dim, faint rocking. In it there was now no whimsical play of blue and green, no lively, exciting tirelessness in the beauty and joy of the motion being made; there was no dark bottle-green glow in the still depths, and no crystal sounding music in the rumbling; no wavy criss-crossing rivulets formed by mountain streams rushing down with force, and no majestic view of islands beckoning to you – there was nothing left of that which only yesterday the river had carried with it. (DS, 401)

The water of the reservoir is grey and stagnant. Sunlight does not pass through it, and the sky above it is dead. It has no signs of life, no beauty or joy, no colour and no sounds, no currents or islands. There is no river. The dam is a dead, drowned river: "There was nothing left here of the river, of course, and you couldn't even vaguely tell where the river bed used to be. While it was still night and Viktor slept, the river choked and drowned in the indifferent gulf of water that lay before it" (DS, 400–1).

However, the reservoir is also like the sea. It has brought new kinds of life, such as seagulls, perch, roach and pike. However, the fish are of poor quality ("like wood and smells of slime"; DS, 416) and they are used as pig food. Much life is lost. For example, grayling and lenok[15] no longer

[15] Lenok is a salmonid living in the cold Siberian river waters.

exist, for "[t]hey're clean fish and need clean, flowing water" (DS, 417). The locals tell Viktor how they have even begun to forget what "clean water fish" (DS, 417) tastes like.

Viktor notes that the villagers use the words 'river' and 'sea' differently even when referring to the same place. For them, the river is a place to get drinking water, swim or fish. When talking about moving from place to place in the vast space of the reservoir, they talk about the sea. The reason could be that in terms of mobility, the difference between the river and the reservoir is considerable.[16] The word 'reservoir' is considered cumbersome and not used at all. If the free-flowing river created the impression of an open space, the spatial impression of the reservoir, despite its vast scale, is distressing and oppressive. It is reminiscent of the feeling of a lack of space that Viktor had by the frozen river as a child during the war.

The forest that has ended up on the shore of the reservoir from the depths of the taiga looks depressed and monotonous to Viktor. It seems to be awaiting ever-new plagues, and not even the sun can refresh it: "a damp gloomy forest would again swim into view, repaying you with endless melancholy for having been brought to the forefront without being asked or prepared" (DS, 407–8). The reservoir is not without beauty, but its beauty is artificial, similar to a handcrafted coffin. The reservoir is completely devoid of the river's mystique; instead, there "[e]verything was clear here—how, and why, and since when, and with what purpose" (DS, 408). Viktor also notes that there is no proper liminal zone between the taiga and the reservoir, but the shore is "locked in by the thick forest wall" (DS, 410). The reservoir merges with the taiga without a liminal zone, one immediately following the other:

> As for the river bank as such, a line between river and land, there wasn't much of one; one began immediately after the other, and even more than that—one had hardly finished when the other began. Nowhere, where they had sailed today, had Viktor seen either rocks or sand marking this boundary; nowhere was there to be seen a sharp bank with wonderfully colored clay and rocks in its wall and neatly arranged red layers of stone at its foot. (DS, 407.)

Similarly, the new village "merged with the water" (DS, 420) when Viktor looks at it from afar from the upper slopes. However, the border zone along the river shore has been vital to humans in these areas, because it has always been the site of human habitation. The endless Siberian taiga is an impossible habitat for human communities, so only the narrow border zone between it and the river made human life possible. Now, however, this human living space no longer exists; the

[16] Reservoirs are commonly called seas in Russia. Speaking of a reservoir as a sea in the context of moving from place to place, as Rasputin's narrator describes, reflects what John K. Noyes (1992, 146–62) calls the "mythical mastery of space". According to him, colonialist discourse creates a myth of boundless mobility in a colonized space in order to control the fragmentary nature of the space it takes over.

reservoir and the taiga are just one seemingly infinite space where one has to find one's place in a whole new way.

The meanings of the river as a border in this travel essay are not as developed as in Rasputin's novellas *Live and Remember* and *Farewell to Matyora*. In the latter, the river marks the boundary between life and death (Galimova 2013, 57; Magnusson 1986, 174), and with the threat of the river disappearing, this boundary is disappearing. In "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", the river has already been lost, and the protagonist's attention is drawn to the new riverless and boundless space. The ancestors, who were left under water in their graves when the reservoir was opened, are called "the drowned ones" (*utoplenniki*): "And the dead they made into drowned men. How could they do that?" (DS, 415) In *Matyora*, this word is used of the evacuees of the villages that were submerged under the reservoir. This reflects the animistic beliefs of the indigenous peoples of Siberia that drowning is a particularly horrific way to die and that it is important to allow the dead to stay in a dry place (Kwon 1986, 50–1). These beliefs are shared by Nastena and Daria, the protagonists of the novels *Live and Remember* and *Farewell to Matyora* (Galimova 2013, 58–9; Kwon 1986, 51).

Modernization seeks to make the river space abstract

The relationship of space and place can be defined in various ways. According to Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (1993, xii), place is space where meaning is invested. Thus, place always connects to space, while space is not necessarily associated with any place. Seen this way, a place cannot exist without something for which it is meaningful in some way. In posthumanist terms, this something can also be a non-human actor (see Lummaa & Rojola 2014), but when it comes to people, place can be seen as a concept that the human mind shapes from space. The river of the work I have analysed here is a place in this sense. It is not just a geographical site or location but a place that is meaningful to people. By contrast, the Siberian taiga surrounding it is a mere uninhabitable space. Indeed, the narrator describes the taiga as "single and alien" (VV, 25).

The taiga is not meaningless, but its meanings are downplayed: "The taiga neither moved nor tormented Viktor the way the river did; the taiga remained and had to remain in the same place, while the river could disappear, slip away, come to an end, exposing as a keepsake of itself a bare rocky river bed along which dogs would run" (DS, 387). As a child, compared to the river, the forest seemed dead to Viktor during the break-up of the ice. As an adult, he fully enjoys his walks in the woods. However, he notes that he could just as well be in any other forest, and the experience

would be just as rewarding. The forest of the native land is certainly pleasant, but it does not feel cosy: “this feeling, he knew, could arise wherever you like, in any forest you like, not just here; he didn’t have in him one single unrepeatable, passionate and stupidly touching response which your native places evoke” (DS, 426–7).

In the middle of the taiga, far from the river, the reservoir and human settlement, Viktor in a short scene finds an idyllic place where he is bursting with happiness. It is a small birch grove that is “spacious, light, and festive”, and whose leaves produce “a long and happy song of peace” (DS, 421). The birch grove’s description brings to mind Ivan Shishkin's landscape paintings of the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, as Dale Peterson (1994, 88) points out, the story is reminiscent of Ivan Turgenev’s story “Bezhin Meadow” (“Bezhin lug”, 1852). The birch grove seems to be the only place in the region where old Russia is still present. This is in line with Katerina Clark’s (1981, 242) remark that in village prose, when protagonists cannot find an iconic traditional Russian village, they often go back in time metaphorically and find peace in the forest. Rasputin's description of the birch grove that exudes past times is not realistic but utopian.

The river is the concrete reason why people are able to inhabit the outlying Siberian areas; it is a precondition of human life, and therefore it appears strongly as a place. The death of the river, on the other hand, is represented as a personified, dramatic turn that takes place overnight: “the river choked and drowned in the indifferent gulf of water that lay before it” (DS, 401). Rasputin’s suffocating and drowning river loses its significance as a place. From the point of view of the outsider Viktor, it becomes, in the words of Henri Lefebvre (1991, 49–51), abstract space. Such an abstract space is a by-product of modernization because, as Timothy Oakes (1997, 509) describes, capitalist modernity has colonized space for itself. Modernization thus rearranges a place into abstract space by weakening human attachment to the place. However, as Lawrence Buell (2003, 58) points out, the phenomenon is not only related to capitalist but equally to socialist modernity. Soviet modernity also took over the space and converted place into abstract space. The “bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space” described by Lefebvre (1991, 49), the external features of modernity’s colonization of the space of remote areas, were perhaps even more pronounced in it than in capitalism.

The riverless space of the Siberian periphery of the 1970s that Rasputin depicts is not entirely abstract. Despite the apocalyptic moods, Viktor's family has adapted to the changed environment and found a new living space around the taiga and the reservoir. This new space has new concrete meanings as well as its own physical locality. To follow Sara Upstone (2009, 6), the Siberian reality that the Soviet state has “overwritten” through the hydropower plant has already been transformed into something new that has traces of the old. However, Viktor does not see or

experience these new meanings, for in his eyes the river disappears overnight as he sleeps. The villagers, on the other hand, point out that the water in the reservoir did not submerge the lands in one wave – the water level rose gradually, year by year. The locals have had time to adapt to the new circumstances, and they have to look to the future in order to succeed. Typically for village prose, however, the writer's focus is on the past, which Viktor's outsider perspective reflects.

The abstract space that Lefebvre writes about is not mere visible and perceptible matter but a more complex and holistic concept. Nevertheless, part of it appears perceptible to the senses, and one such example is the physical environment shaped by hydropower plants. In Rasputin's travel essay, the colonized space becomes material in the reservoir, a manifestation of modernization, whose stagnant water mixes with the surrounding taiga. The taiga appears in the work as a non-place (see Augé 1995, 77–9), where one has to spend time – hunting, foraging for mushrooms, gathering wood – but its significance is not great. A similar non-place is the reservoir, a typical product of modernity. There, one has to go to retrieve water and to fish, but the meaning of fishing is merely to satisfy the need for food. One does not embark on a fishing trip to the reservoir, one just fetches the fish from there. Although the fish is of poor quality, there is an abundance of it, and therefore the excitement of the former fishing trips is no longer there. Viktor also feels that a fishing trip that he goes to with a local, Nikolai, is not about fishing any more but just obtaining food:

> In two hours the two of them together tossed into the boat more than a bucketful of perch. The work was almost mechanical: lower the fishing line, give a tug, wait awhile, give another short tug, feel the despair of the deceived fish and pull it out into the air. The excitement which had first seized Viktor passed quickly, and the expectation, the impatience, the tormenting and sweet despair without which fishing is not fishing, burst and disappeared without reaching full force and without giving him the pleasure usual for such occasions. (DS, 427)

The river of the work is represented as a place precisely because no geographical names are used to refer to it. No other names of places are mentioned either, which is why the story is not attached to any physical location. As Buell (2005, 77) points out, writing about place usually involves an interest in a small-sized, bounded area. If Rasputin had named the geographical venues of his essay, it could be read as part of this tradition. However, when locations are not named and events take place only on "the river", the story attains a more holistic nature: it does not address local but cross-border and national problems. In this way, the work's river comes close to the reader, as it is easy to imagine the reader's own local river replacing the drowned river of the story. Almost every Russian has one such local river, as for geographical and historical reasons the country's population is concentrated on riverbanks (Helanterä & Tynkkynen 2002, 24). Of the hundred most

populous cities in Russia, only a few are not located on the banks of a large river.[17] The river has also raised Viktor, who "had grown up on this river. He used to spend every Godgiven day on it from morning till night, and a large number of his childhood joys and those which followed childhood were connected with it. Most of his childhood and also post-childhood joys were related to it. [– –] He received untiring, endless pleasure from his stay on the river." (DS, 383, 386)

Since the river that Viktor has lost is not named, the river appears more clearly as a place than if it had been named, say, the Angara, which would be foreign to most readers. Perceiving the river as a place, on the other hand, makes its devastation a more disquieting prospect. As Carter, Donald and Squires (1993, vii, xii) point out, although identity is often no longer directly based on place in the modern world, places are still important factors in the construction of identity. Raising the environmental problems posed by hydropower plants as a national issue related to the uniform culture of the Soviet Union also affects the identity issues related to the river in Rasputin's work. As the river is not attached to any geographical area, it also does not reflect any regional identity. Instead, the loss of the riverscapes appears as a national issue, and thus the river of the work is more attached to national identity.

In 1976, Valentin Rasputin returned to the theme of the experienced injustice related to the living environment that the construction of hydropower plants had caused in his main work, the novella *Farewell to Matyora*. This time, he situated the events explicitly on the Angara. The most important characters are the old women of the village, who are the only ones in their community who retain a connection to tradition and nature. Activists fighting for environmental justice are often low-income women (Di Chiro 1996, 300), like Matyora's rebellious old women. Already in the 1972 travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", Rasputin first wrote about environmental justice, a few years before the concept was developed in the United States.

Conclusion

As Piotr Kaminskii (2013, 195) writes, in the travel essay "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", Valentin Rasputin for the first time presents the destruction of ecosystems as a borderline issue between life and death. He does it above all by presenting the river as life and the reservoir as death. As in Rasputin's later novella *Farewell to Matyora* and Viktor Astaf'ev's collection of stories *Queen*

[17] These exceptions are Vladivostok, Murmansk and Novorossiisk (by the sea), Makhachkala and Petrozavodsk (by great lakes), Stavropol (by a small river), and Khimki (by a canal) (Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2010).

Fish (*Tsar'-ryba*, 1976), in "Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu", the river and the reservoir are inextricably linked to questions of life and death.

The connection of water metaphors to life and death is common in literature, but in the Soviet context, Rasputin and Astaf'ev differ from the mainstream by making the ongoing environmental catastrophe in the country a matter of fate: for them, environmental degradation leads to both moral and physical human destruction. In his later *publitsistika*, Rasputin (1990, 345) summarizes this message laconically and directly: "the destruction of nature is equal to the destruction of people". When a river dies, it means death for both nature and culture, for the river belongs to them both.

Rasputin's essay presents the river and the reservoir as opposites. However, one element connects them, and it is the modern riverboat that seems a deceptively pleasant space. When travelling by it, one feels comfortable and safe on the ancient river. In reality, however, it takes one to a whole new world that is not safe at all, or at least it is not presented as such.

The river and water provide writers with a reasoned channel to discuss issues of life and death, and the space taken over by hydropower plants is a prime example of how modernization turns places that hold significance for people into abstract space. On the other hand, the river is also a concrete example of a materially degraded environment. Valentin Rasputin's river takes on poetic meanings, but – as in the depictions of nature in village prose more generally (Parthé 1992, 8) – his message is practical: exploiting the river means that it can no longer provide what people need from it. The reservoir as a drowned river is a strong metaphor, and what makes it even stronger is that the river is not named, making the problem transcend local boundaries and appear as a national and cultural issue related to the Russian experience of the river and nature. If the river, the living water of life, even life itself, is drowned, everything stops. Thus, a modern hydropower plant does not represent progress and modernization for those living next to the river, but decline and stagnation. The determined flow of development is a destructive and paralysing force for the Soviet citizens of remote areas.

If environmental justice is understood as Adamson, Evans and Stein (2002, 4) define it, as the even distribution of the benefits bestowed by a healthy living environment, the construction of hydropower plants violates the environmental justice of Siberian people in the riverside villages by denying their right to live by the river. In Rasputin's travel essay, the injustice is caused first and foremost by the lack of the river and the border zone between it and the taiga. People do not know how to live without the river.

The construction of a hydroelectric power plant in Boguchany began on the Angara in 1974. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of funding in the early 1990s, work was

interrupted. In the 2000s, however, it was continued with private funding, and in 2012, along with the completion of the construction, yet another dam was opened in the Angara, and yet again people had to move away from it. Roman Senchin, a writer of Russian so-called new realist prose, became interested in the subject and asked Valentin Rasputin whether the Boguchany hydropower plant was worth writing prose about. The old writer thought it was essential to write about it (Lappela 2015, 103). Senchin wrote a novel in the spirit of Rasputin and dedicated his work to him. The novel *Zona zatopleniia* (2015; "Flood Zone") came out in print a few days after Rasputin's death. The book has attracted much attention in Russia and, like the village prose of the 1970s, it has helped to spread the word about the problems of environmental justice for the inhabitants of Russia's remote areas. It is also an indication that the theme is most relevant in Russia today.

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PUBLICATION 3

The Anthropocene on Planet Water: Competing Views on Rivers and Geography in Sergei Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*

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The Anthropocene on Planet Water. Competing Views on Rivers and Geography in Sergei Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*

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The Anthropocene on Planet Water. Competing Views on Rivers and Geography in Sergei Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*

Sergei Zalygin's (1913–2000) autobiographical *Ekologicheskii roman* ("An Environmental Novel", 1993) tells the story of a Soviet water engineer and ecologist Nikolai Golubev between the Russian Civil War and the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The protagonist is repeatedly confronted with state modernization efforts, especially on issues related to harnessing major rivers. My paper examines from an ecocritical point of view how the conflicts and dialogues between the government representatives and the main character relate to the development of Russian environmental thinking. I argue that the protagonist's relationship with his environment follows Lev Berg's almost Schellingian concept of geographical landscapes, while the state authorities typically represent Andrei Grigor´ev's ideas, based on dialectical materialism and the Stalinist interpretation of Engels's dialectics of nature. The failure to understand the significance of Vladimir Vernadskii's concept of the noosphere, the precursor of the Anthropocene, is central in the novel's critique of the Soviet state's so-called amelioration of the natural environment.

Keywords: Anthropocene; ecocriticism; noosphere; Russian literature; river; Sergei Zalygin

> During my whole career, I have written perhaps only one or two stories, where the river does not appear. — Sergei Zalygin[1]

Russia is the largest country on Earth, and the abundance of space has been an important factor in Russian national identity. In post-Soviet Russia, spatial metaphors of territory and geographical space have been central to ideas of Russian identity.[2] Writers and their literary imagination have had a great influence on public opinion in the literature-centric Russia. The connections between geography and Russian culture have been the object of many scholarly works, varying from depictions of the Caucasus in nineteenth-century literature to early Soviet films' visions of new lands.[3]

Ecocriticism is an 'earth-centred' approach to cultural criticism. In her review of the history of ecocriticism, Pippa Marland notes that at its heart is the conviction of an ongoing ecological crisis that raises a need to revise the ways in which we inhabit the planet.[4] Ecocritics believe that our cultural understandings of the relationship between what we call 'human' and 'nature', as well as perceptions of these two ideas, have greatly contributed to our damaging modes of being. Sergei Zalygin (1913–2000) was a remarkable environmentalist, hydrologist, novelist, essayist, literary critic, and the

editor-in-chief of the leading Soviet literary magazine, *Novyi mir*, who shared these convictions.

This article contributes to the discussion on spatiality, Soviet environmental history and Russian literature by examining from an ecocritical perspective how Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman* ('An Environmental Novel', 1993) depicts geographical metaphors and understandings throughout the history of the Soviet Union. The well-known writer and journalist Iurii Gribov describes *Ekologicheskii roman* as Zalygin's greatest novel, which draws parallels between ecology and politics and for which many are grateful.[5] It is essential material for my purposes, because it covers over seventy years of Soviet environmental history with a special focus on rivers.

My focus is on cultural meanings of rivers as the novel is full of debates about Russian rivers and the extent to which we can use them. Russian culture has always existed mostly next to major rivers, which have played a great role in the development of Russian national identity.[6] Ever since the medieval period, rivers have borne special meanings in Russian literature too. In *Ekologicheskii roman*, metaphorical meanings of the river profoundly influence the main character, Golubev, from childhood to old age. The environmentalist Golubev is repeatedly confronted by government officials, advocates of modernization, on geographical issues concerning rivers. These geographical riverscapes, together with metaphorical meanings of the river, constitute the 'imagined geography'[7] of the novel, which depicts Soviet Russian environmental history as the author imagined it in the early post-Soviet years.

Ever since the beginnings of environmental criticism, scholars have debated its role and objectives. Two influential ecocritics, Richard Kerridge and Greg Garrard, have argued that 'cultural criticism can help avert, resolve, mitigate or at least comprehend ecological problems'.[8] Earlier, Garrard stated: 'Ecocriticism cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology, but it can help to define, explore and even resolve ecological problems in [a] wider sense. One "ecocritical" way of reading is to see contributions to environmental debate as examples of rhetoric.'[9] I follow this suggestion and examine Zalygin's characters' rhetoric by exploring how the views of the supporters and opponents of river amelioration reflect the development of Russian environmental thinking, and by identifying the main argumentation for and against harnessing rivers as part of Soviet modernization. Purely geographical approaches cannot grasp the cultural, philosophical and existential meanings of the

river. My ecocritical analysis highlights these meanings, which include both a physical and a metaphorical level as Zalygin's novel mixes real geographical debates with the writer's environmental imagination.

I also discuss the presentation of the concept of the noosphere in the novel, and its relationship to a widely-discussed concept in the environmental humanities in the 2010s, the Anthropocene.[10] Through the noosphere concept, this Russian novel predates by several years the current global discussion among ecocritics on the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Superficially, *Ekologicheskii roman* presents the two sides of the Soviet environmental debates originating from Vladimir Vernadskii, the creator of the noosphere concept, and Iosif Stalin, the country's totalitarian leader. I find this comparison unbalanced, and I have identified a more useful pair that is implicit below the superficial level: two influential Russian geographers of the first half of the twentieth century, Lev Berg and Andrei Grigor´ev. I show how their geographical understandings are behind the novel's antagonistic depiction of Vernadskii and Stalin.

Ekologicheskii roman is heavily autobiographical, and includes elements from scientific research, the essay, the traditional novel, utopia and dystopia.[11] From a natural philosophical point of view, it has justifiably been read as a technocratic dystopia, because it presents technocratic utopianism as leading to a dystopic society, which spoils the natural environment.[12] As Irena Rudziewicz notes, the author seeks to understand the spiritual and moral origins of his characters' behaviour in their contacts with the natural world.[13] The novel's hero, hydrologist Nikolai Golubev, is evidently the writer's *alter ego*. He tries to find ways to stop people's thoughtless, irresponsible acts against nature and raise their ecological conscience, repeatedly failing to have an impact.

The river of Zalygin's novel is an active agent: it has a huge effect on the protagonist. It is also a fragile victim of human exploitation. It is not just a precondition of life, but rather life itself, and the fate of the people is closely connected to the fate of the river. Zalygin's river resembles those of two other important Soviet-era Russian writers of so-called Village Prose (*derevenskaia proza*), Valentin Rasputin and Viktor Astafiev.[14] The river is an eternal companion of the people, and an essential precondition of human culture. The border of nature and culture is unclear or non-

existent. Rather, human culture is represented as part of nature and a product of the river.

To illustrate changes in environmental thought in Russia, my analysis follows the chronological and episodic structure of the novel. This helps to focus on the development of Golubev's environmental thinking, which outlines my argumentation. Before embarking upon the analysis, I will first present the most important facts on Zalygin's biography and briefly explain the general structure of *Ekologicheskii roman*.

Sergei Zalygin – an influential writer, editor and environmentalist

Sergei Zalygin studied for a degree in hydrotechnical agricultural engineering and worked as a hydrological engineer on the Arctic Circle on the lower Ob during the Second World War. After the war, he started his literary career and began a scientific career in hydrology and irrigation. In the early 1960s, he perseveringly campaigned against the building of a hydroelectric power station on the lower Ob. The project was cancelled, which earned him the designation 'the man who saved the Ob'.[15]

Zalygin's writings focus on reality and facts and depict a deep connection between people and their environment. His prose writing started to handle the essence of nature in the novel *Tropy Altaia* ('Altai Paths'), published in 1962. In 1965 he published the influential novel, *Na Irtyshe* ('On the Irtysh River'), which began a new era – it was the first work to openly describe and criticize the Soviet enforced collectivization of the 1930s, as well as being one of the fundamental works of the emerging movement that became known as Village Prose.

At the end of the 1960s, Zalygin accepted a position on the board of the Writers' Union. Many of his 1960s–1980s essays handle literature's connection to nature,[16] and he was also an active opponent of the Northern river reversal project.[17] In 1986, he was the first non-Communist Party member to become an editor-in-chief of a Soviet literary magazine.[18] Zalygin held the post of editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir* until 1998. During the last years of the Soviet Union, he published numerous works that had been banned for years. Mikhail Gorbachev has stated that Zalygin persuaded him to allow the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* in *Novyi mir* in 1989–1990.[19] Back in 1973, Zalygin had – among thirty other Soviet writers – condemned Solzhenitsyn in an open letter to the Party newspaper *Pravda*.[20] Later, Zalygin claimed that he had never been interested in politics, only literature and ecology.[21]

In the last years of the USSR, some Village Prose writers expressed xenophobic and anti-Semitic statements. Due to this, the whole movement has been associated with extreme Russian nationalism and chauvinism. However, as Kathleen Parthé argues, this reactionary stigma is overrated, and unnecessarily attributed to all Village Prose writers.[22] While there were nationalistic tendencies in the work of some writers, others continued to work on ecological issues. Environmentalism became an ever more important part of Zalygin's writings in the 1980s, which is evident in his struggle against the Northern river reversal project.[23] Zalygin has also stated that even though he was never a member of the Communist Party, he did not consider himself a dissident.[24] Still, he very much wanted to be part of the restructuring work of the Soviet state and society under Gorbachev. In *Novyi mir*, Zalygin tried to tone down the anti-Semitic comments of some writers.[25]

During the last two decades of Zalygin's life, the unity of people and nature was a major theme in his writing. He published *Ekologicheskii roman* in *Novyi mir* in 1993, when his anxiety about the state of the natural world was most acute.[26] Zalygin has stated that the novel is very autobiographical and documentary, that much of it is based on his actual experiences.[27] It would be tempting to read the novel as historiography; nevertheless, it is a work of fiction. As such, the author is able to more emotionally express his despair about the state of the environment. Indeed, *Ekologicheskii roman* is old Zalygin's cry of distress.

The novel consists of a prologue and seven episodes, which advance chronologically from the late 1910s to the early 1990s. The prologue is set in Golubev's childhood during the Russian Civil War, when the future hydrologist struggles to find a meaning for his life and finds it when faced by the powerful flow of a river during an attempt to end his life. The first two episodes are set during the Second World War and the construction of Transpolar Railway soon after the war. The following episodes are set in the 1960s and consider the hero's significance in cancelling the plans for the lower Ob hydropower plant before describing his consultative visit to the construction site of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt. The fifth episode describes Golubev's reunion with his teenage sweetheart, and the next narrates Golubev's two months in hospital after returning from Egypt. The final episode is set in the early 1990s and the Pripyat River, which was badly polluted with radioactive isotopes after the Chernobyl nuclear

disaster. Visiting this river, the old protagonist loses his will to live and sees no other way out but to take his own life, which he never does.

My ecocritical perspective on Zalygin's novel implies a focus on the interaction of culture and nature. Zalygin's works offer interesting material for ecocritical research, because of his prominent position in Soviet environmentalism. Rivers were dear to him, and his specialization as a hydrologist adds to the novel's relevancy to research on the cultural meanings of rivers.

River of life

First, I examine one of the two philosophically most important rivers in Zalygin's novel. It is a river that fundamentally influences Golubev's life in his childhood. Images of this river construct his identity and are an essential part of his childhood memories. The river and its flow become determining factors for the development of the opinions, philosophy, thoughts, actions, decisions and career moves of Golubev, who dedicates his life to river protection.[28] I call this river the 'river of life', and argue that it makes the protagonist understand that by protecting the river he protects his own life.

The novel's prologue narrates a vital turning point in Golubev's life when he is six years old at the time of the Russian Civil War. The boy is disappointed with life, as no one can explain the most trivial things to him, such as how humans came to be on Earth. An old woman tells him about Genesis, but he does not believe the biblical stories. He is also tired of the insincerity of grown-ups as well as frustrated by the injustice of the civil war; he feels that life is foolish and there is no reason to live. He has heard about a student, beaten by both the Whites and the Reds, who jumped in the river and drowned, and decides to also drown himself in the river. He goes to a bridge, climbs over the barrier and prepares to jump into the water. Just then, he notices the flow of the river water, and the sight is compelling:

> He had seen this and other rivers before, and he had known that rivers flow, but now he saw for the first time the river current. It was an enormous and fast stream, transparent to some depth, and deeper it was dark and nocturnal, without daylight. Flowing under the bridge, the river foamed around its semi-circular pillar. Passing the obstacle easily and playing along the way, the river burbled and changed its colour a little more, and in the huge stream appeared separate streams, some darker or lighter, some slower or faster. Inside these already small streams were undoubtedly other even smaller streams, and no matter how many streams there were, they all were one river, in one current, in one riverbank, in one aim to eternally flow from somewhere to somewhere…[29]

Faced by the river current, little Golubev wonders why the river flows, where it flows from and where it flows to. He understands the circulation of water on Earth and river's key role in it, and suddenly he is full of life. He realizes that he owes his life to the river, because the river *is* life. He had wanted the river to end his life, but it gave him a new life. The phrasing in the novel creates a strong sense of people as a product of the river, which 'gave him a new birth' and 'to whom you owe your life'.[30] After consulting his parents about the river's role in the ecosystem, Golubev also thinks that human 'existence is indebted to a kind of living movement in this world, similar to the movement of the river'.[31]

Later, Golubev learns that water covers most of the earth's surface and that life began in water. He thinks that 'the planet Earth should appropriately be called the planet Water',[32] and decides to devote his life to hydrology. At the Omsk institute he learns more about rivers. Watching his geography teacher's maps, which he 'learns by heart as easily and joyfully as Pushkin's verses', he understands that 'rivers divide the whole world'.[33] The equality of life and the river becomes ever more evident: 'there are two continuous movements on Earth: the motion of life and the flow of rivers, and it is not possible that between the one and the other there was not something in common, a secret, albeit not obvious connection'.[34]

In the 1960s, Golubev is hospitalized due to heart problems, and this period is narrated in the sixth episode, 'V mire chistoi nauki' ('In the World of Pure Science'). Golubev's existential childhood experience of the 'river of life' connects to what the narrator calls the 'pure science' of the hospital ward, where Golubev becomes acquainted with another patient, Mr. Azovskii, a specialist in literary and theatre studies. Azovskii shares many ideas with Golubev, including a will to support victims of Stalin's repressions and an interest into science. They talk about Maksim Gor´kii and Stalin, wondering why Gor´kii celebrated the White Sea–Baltic Canal[35]. Why did he celebrate comrade Stalin who 'stayed awake all night working on geographical maps with a red pen in his hand, repairing nature, connecting rivers, drying lakes, taking care of himself but not of nature? Isn't it stupid?'[36]

Stalin did indeed rule mostly at his Kremlin office, which included a locked room with numerous maps that the leader used when imagining how future developments would be reflected on the map.[37] By criticizing Stalin's fascination with maps, Golubev and Azovskii hint that Stalin's understanding of geography was reduced

to cartography. They conclude that Gor´kii and Stalin formed an 'anti-natural alliance',[38] where Gor´kii's writing inspired Stalin to the further abuse of natural resources. In effect, Gor´kii and Stalin took a grip on the natural space of the Soviet Union and redefined it.

By referring to Gor´kii, an influential proponent of literary socialist realism, Zalygin locates himself in the same continuum as an authoritative writer on the relationship between culture and nature. Zalygin's understanding of nature is the opposite of Gor´kii's, because much of Gor´kii's writing expressed the omnipotence and greatness of humans over nature.[39] Zalygin's novel presents Gor´kii as Stalin's aide, whose writing supported Stalin's power and understandings about nature.

Gor´kii is not the only writer who is mentioned in the novel, which lists a series of canonized Russian writers of the nineteenth century: Pushkin, Gogol, Herzen, Goncharov, Lermontov, Turgenev, Nekrasov, Dostoevskii, Ostrovskii, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Tolstoi.[40] The narrator parallels them to a series of Russian nineteenth-century geographers, whose geographical understandings, which differ substantially from Stalin's and Gor´kii's, he presents in a positive light. Arguably, the author mentions these writers to state that, as the nineteenth century was a golden age for Russian literature, so it was for Russian geography.

Later, when Golubev thinks about his time in the hospital with Azovskii, he calls their hospital ward the 'world of pure science' for '[h]ere science was in no way contaminated, in no way blocked, it was incomparably freer than in any research institute'.[41] Unlike the universities, which Zalygin knew well thanks to his scientific career, the isolated hospital ward enjoys freedom and independence from the state authorities and thus is not corrupted by ideologies.

He compares this 'pure science' to the child's logic, innocence and purity which prevented him from jumping in the river water when he was six, and concludes that they 'match almost completely'.[42] When Golubev was on the bridge and the flow of the river stopped him from jumping, it was imperative that the water was flowing, for 'if the water under the bridge had been still, he would have jumped in it without hesitation'.[43] When he considers why the river flow had such an effect on him, he thinks a certain child's logic has been dear to him all his life ever since the decisive event on the bridge. Golubev thinks that lacking experience, children do not treat life as their personal property, but are free of prejudice and selfishness.[44] Since the river equates to life, this

child's logic also applies to rivers. This is key to Golubev's environmental thinking: his childhood experience and understanding of the river's role in the ecosystem made him follow this child's logic throughout his life. This understanding can only develop from contact with flowing water, and this logic is the reason why he treats attacks to river systems as attacks to his life.

Although a mention that the river that saved young Golubev's life flows to the Kara Sea, along with knowledge of Zalygin's biography, hint that the river is the Ob, the novel never mentions its name. This gives it a more general character: giving birth and life to people is a universal characteristic of rivers. Valentin Rasputin uses the same technique for the same end in his travel essay 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu' ('Downstream', 1972).[45]

Ol′ga Slavnikova reads Golubev as a 'riverman' (*chelovek-reka*), a mix of a river and a human being, who is 'as natural as a river'. According to her, this is visible in the novel's composition, which inconsistently presents details of the hero's life. Slavnikova refers to the novel's superficially chronological structure, which is broken several times. This creates a feeling that Golubev 'accommodates all that ever happened to him to every moment of this naturally flowing reality'.[46]

When gravely ill Azovskii is taken out of the ward, he is replaced by another patient who also earns Golubev's respect through his vast knowledge of history and culture. Golubev laments the fate of Soviet rivers to him, marking the first signs of Golubev's interest in the idea of riverscapes having been irrevocably transformed by humanity:

> It is a tragedy of our days, but inevitable, somehow like envisaged in advance by nature itself... Rivers are a product of their climate, but while they originate in one climate, they then emigrate to completely different climatic zones, which is a fortune for people, but a misfortune for rivers… A river is born in the mountains, but it doesn't stay there, it flows into the plain, and then man begins tormenting it: he takes its flow for irrigation, for water supply of cities, he throws all his excrements in the river, both household and industrial, and what flows into the ocean is no longer a river, but a gutter.[47]

Wars against Nazism and nature

Many environmental debates between the state authorities and Golubev connect to war rhetoric. In the episode 'Zolotaia rybka' ('The Golden Fish'), which is inspired by Zalygin's wartime experiences, Golubev works as a budding hydrologist during the Second World War on the Arctic lower Ob in Salekhard. He thinks he is doing an

important and intelligent job, but this illusion collapses when he is assigned the task of planning how an enormous dragnet could be built and used to cover the five kilometres wide river in order to trap thousands of tons of fish and send the catch to the front line. The idea seems silly, but Golubev duly does as expected. He calculates the amount of wood, cable and metal netting needed, and concludes that the project is impossible due to its scale. However, after a few months he learns that everything is ready. The only problem is that all they catch is a single fish. It does not become clear why the project was so unsuccessful.

Members of the local Communist Party Committee represent the state authorities. For them, the idea of catching almost all the fish from the river for human food is not strange: 'It is a simple thing, nothing could be simpler'.[48] If they think about the ecological consequences, they would suppose the river would react to the collapse of its fish stock in a way that would enable it to adapt to the new circumstances. Their main argumentation for the project is victory in the war against the Nazis: they want to 'take part in the victory of the [Soviet] troops over fascism'.[49] The scale of the project and its consequences are not relevant when you are at war, and to triumph over Nazism, you must triumph over nature.

The authorities' war rhetoric, which recurs throughout the novel, reflects their antagonistic view of nature and culture as two separate realms, in a similar way to that in which Communism and Nazism are considered two opposite worldviews. Nazism being the external enemy, the river is here the internal one. Young Golubev's environmental thinking is not yet evident in this episode. He thinks 'the project is crazy' and 'stupid',[50] but his argumentation concentrates only on the project's insane scale.

After the operation has failed, the Party officials are not disappointed. Contrary to Golubev's expectations, they punish no one. Instead, they celebrate a huge success: 'We blocked the Ob! Before this, no one has blocked the Ob anywhere between the source and the mouth of this great river! We have made history!'[51] This is a valuable lesson for Golubev: for the Soviet state, it is more important to start projects than to successfully finish them. Going down into history for doing something that no one has done before was so valuable that the authorities did not pay attention to the consequences.[52] Ecological thinking, however, requires forethought. The verb that the Party officials repeatedly use for blocking the river is *perekryt'*, which in colloquial use

can also mean 'to surpass someone or something'.[53] Even though Nazism could not be surpassed by blocking the Ob, nature had been.

War rhetoric, Andrei Grigor´ev and dialectical materialism

In the next two subchapters, I study those episodes of Zalygin's novel where debates on the essence of geography take precedence. I will complement my rhetorical analysis of environmental debates, which concentrates on the philosophical existential level, by an examination of the physical geographical level of the novel, which discusses the reshaping of nature as a consequence of Stalinist geographical thinking. I argue that implicitly the novel treats this as a consequence of Andrei Grigor´ev's thinking, which is represented by the various state authorities. Grigor´ev's views are explicitly clearly visible in the episode that I analysed in the previous subchapter and the one I discuss here. This thinking does not see the river as a single living organism. Rather, it mechanically consists of numerous smaller organisms and is a temporary result of the processes that have previously taken place, and there is no reason why it should be permanent.

The second episode, 'Piat´sot pervaia stroika' ('Labour Camp no. 501'), narrates the construction of the Transpolar Railway, Stalin's post-war project. The narrator notes that Stalin wanted to build a northern railway across Russia to be prepared for a war against the United States.[54] Zalygin had already written earlier about many of the modernization projects that the novel discusses, but the Transpolar Railway was such a sensitive subject that he had not treated it before.[55] This is an important project for Golubev's career, because the railway would cross numerous rivers and the project needed his specialization as water engineer.

In this episode, the planners of the railway do not see anything peculiar in building a railway to an area whose living organisms are extremely fragile and where any building project is very difficult. They act as if this kind of difficulty in nature is meant to be overcome by people, who should be able to build a railway anywhere. The argumentation for the project is again mainly about war, this time not against fascism, but against American imperialism and capitalism.

Like the Party officials in 'Zolotaia rybka', the planners of the Transpolar Railway use war rhetoric to justify their actions, which Golubev labels 'anti-natural', 'anti-human' and 'the most pointless creation of human hands in the whole world

history'.[56] Resorting to war rhetoric again emphasizes the separation of culture from nature, which is considered an eternal enemy of humankind. This juxtaposition has obvious roots in the slogans about war against nature of the first Five-Year Plan, launched in October 1928.[57] Maksim Gor´kii's famous 1931 article 'O bor´be s prirodoi' ('About the Fight against Nature') also reflects this rhetoric.[58]

There is more, however, to the attitude to nature of the Party officials in 'Zolotaia rybka' and planners of the Transpolar Railway. The Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature, which Stalin proposed in the late 1940s, represented the power of the Bolsheviks to shape nature.[59] To understand the thinking behind Stalin's plan, it is necessary to review the ideas of the leading geographer of Stalin's Soviet Union, Andrei Grigor´ev (1883–1968).

Grigor´ev studied in Berlin and Heidelberg, and was influenced by Alfred Hettner's geography. Being very receptive to the ideological changes attached to Stalin's rise to power, he deviated from Hettner's work, which was considered bourgeois, and directed the most important geographical department of Stalin's Soviet Union. In 1931 he wrote that geography should concentrate on the 'interrelationships of the processes of a dialectically developing geographical environment' to be able to 'contribute effectively to the burst of socialist construction initiated by Stalin'.[60]

Like Stalin, Grigor´ev supported dialectical materialism, which was based on Friedrich Engels's ideas of dialectics of nature. Engels did not see nature as harmoniously formed, but rather in a state of constant change. Also for Stalin – and Grigor´ev – there was nothing permanent in nature, which Stalin explicitly stated in 1938: 'dialectics view nature […] in a constant state of movement and change'.[61] Therefore, it is natural for people to shape nature.

This Stalinist interpretation of dialectics of nature leads to a dualistic understanding, where nature and culture operate under strictly distinct laws. Society should transform nature, which has only instrumental value for human self-creation.[62] Nature, which is in a constant flux, is not a harmonious whole but consists of small pieces. Changing a piece does not necessarily affect anything else, because other pieces are able to adapt to changes in their environment – they are constantly changing nevertheless. This is a great paradox in Stalin's and Grigor´ev's thinking, considering that Stalin also stated, in line with Engels: 'dialectics does not consider nature as a random cluster of objects and phenomena that are separate, isolate and independent of

one another but a coherent single whole, whose objects and phenomena are organically related and dependent on one another'.[63]

Neither Stalin's nor Grigor´ev's geographical thinking bases on the idea of nature as a single whole. Grigor´ev was suspicious of the idea of a single, undivided whole, constituted by the biophysical world and the human society.[64] Since nature is constantly changing, he reasoned that shaping nature must be part of geography's function. For him, geography is not a descriptive science; instead, it is dynamic and should actively participate in changing the environment. Because Grigor´ev's understanding followed the views of the autocratic Stalin, it became the leading vision in Soviet geography. Consequences were far-reaching, because in this kind of thinking, nature, which is separate from culture, can adapt to great and fast changes without endangering the whole. Humankind would never be able to change the fundamental substance of nature, not even by redirecting the courses of major rivers or by channelling part of the river water to be able to produce more cotton, which happened in Central Asia and led to the drying up of the Aral Sea.

Golubev hates the idea of an Arctic railway:

> Before this, it had never crossed Golubev's mind to doubt the existence of Golubev-the-hydrologist. Rivers flow and he lives next to rivers, they need his engineering skills. But now Golubev started to doubt, heavily and for the first time in his life.[65]

His arguments against the Transpolar Railway are manifold. Central to his views is again the impossibility: even if you could build the rails over the tundra and the Northern Rivers, they would never stand the strain of the trains. The north Siberian natural environment is simply too harsh. Even if the railway somehow could be built, he sees that the Arctic conditions would destroy it. He also argues that the project is insane, because it causes enormous human suffering – those who fought Nazism are now building the railroad as prisoners.[66] They are treated outrageously and inhumanely, and the number of casualties is great. The bridge construction over the Ob and the Yenisei is especially cruel and unnecessary, because the rivers could be crossed by ferries in the summer and over the ice in the winter.

The Transpolar Railway project was abandoned when Stalin died in 1953, and it has never been finished. This is a sign that Grigor´ev's views of geography started to wane in the Soviet leadership after Stalin's period.

Dead currents of rivers violate Lev Berg's geographical landscapes

After Stalin's death, the Soviet Union experienced a turn to a more environmental vision of the relationship of man and nature. The episode 'Nizhne-Obskaia GES' ('Hydropower Station at the Lower Ob') is set in the early post-Stalin years. It represents the reasons for the new kind of environmental thought more because of party politics than as a genuine change to a more ecological way of thinking. I argue that this episode also implicitly presents the failure to adopt Lev Berg's geographical thinking instead of Andrei Grigor´ev's as a reason for the continued excessive abuse of natural resources in the post-Stalin era.

The episode includes fervent argumentation for and against the eponymous megaproject, which was in the planning phase in the early 1960s. Opposing it becomes Golubev's pet project. His rival is one of the highest engineers, Mr. Chilikin,[67] who is equally persistent in trying to convince the authorities that the project is essential, that its necessity has even been explicitly written down in the third Communist Party Program, adopted in 1961.[68] In a meeting with leading geographers, Golubev makes a fool of Chilikin, whose motivation proves to be personal gain. He shows a letter, which Chilikin wrote a year before the Party Program, to his subordinates in various Hydroproject branches. In the letter, Chilikin describes how the new hydropower station would bring glory and wealth to its designers. Golubev also proves that in this letter Chilikin used the same wordings that were later added to the Party Program, which means that Chilikin himself was behind the project's addition to the Program.

The discussion in the novel is very similar to how Zalygin describes his own meeting in the Institute of Geography of the Soviet Academy of Sciences with the head engineer Aleksandr Chemin.[69] Consequently, the Council of Ministers, the State Planning Committee, various ministries and Soviet Academy of Sciences hold a meeting, where they decide to cancel the project according to the orders from the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Chilikin is like Grigor´ev's apprentice. He bases his arguments on the assumption that the country who controls the most energy is the most powerful. If the Soviet Union wants to be the most powerful, it should convert its rivers into energy. For him, rivers are made for human modification and people should improve their river environment. Chilikin wants to serve Stalin, who 'did not leave alive the current of any great Russian river',[70] which clearly reflects his antagonistic vision of nature and

culture. His argumentation stems from past decades and former authorities; it links to the earlier pathos of the 1930s' fight against nature and to Stalin's Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature from the 1940s, as well as to Lenin and his famous slogan 'Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country'.

As Golubev had learned already on the lower Ob during the Second World War, many Soviet modernization projects were not intended to be finished. Analogously, says a leading hydrologist to him, the army builds new arms even when the country is not at war.[71] Thus, war rhetoric is part of the argumentation for modernization again. Chilikin has also more practical arguments. The reservoir will produce more fish, and it will be easier to navigate than the river. Further, the Northern fleet would become more powerful.[72] Chilikin's final argument seems insurmountable: the hydropower station is part of the Party Program to achieve Communism by 1980. He and his colleague Malkov label opponents of hydroelectricity projects 'conservative obstacles of the future'.[73] Some of them might indeed be described conservative,[74] but I argue that at least their geographical views are based on a conserving understanding of the environment, that of Lev Berg (1876–1950).

During the early years of the Soviet Union, the so-called 'landscape science' (*landshaftovedenie*) heavily influenced the development of geography, and Berg was an important proponent of it. Berg wanted to explain 'the geographical distribution of identifiable aggregations of natural objects and phenomena, namely landscapes'.[75] By landscape science, he means an understanding of geography where its primary role is to study natural landscape units and landscapes.[76] In contrast to Grigor´ev's views of dynamic and agentic geography, based on dialectical materialism, this chorological view posits geography as a descriptive science, which explains natural phenomena without actively taking part in them.

Even though the Russian society underwent exhaustive upheavals during the early years of the Soviet regime, geography's connection to scientists of the pre-revolutionary period was tight. Vladimir Vernadskii based his groundbreaking work with the biosphere on empirical work he undertook around the turn of the century.[77] Berg's understandings of geographical landscapes were rooted not only in Russian scientists – such as Vernadskii and his teacher Vasilii Dokuchaev – but in the science of academics from other countries too, most notably Germany and Hettner. Berg's landscape science is based on a rather materialist worldview. Nevertheless, it reflects

the continuum of Schellingian objective idealism, whose influence on Russian understandings of nature has been strong since the early nineteenth century.[78]

In 1913, Berg defined landscape as 'an area being similar in accordance with the dominating character of relief, climate, vegetation and soil cover' and divided the Russian landscape to such landscape zones as tundra, taiga plain, forest-steppe, *chernozem* steppe, dry steppe, semi-desert and mountains. Two years later, he defined landscapes as the prime focus of geographical study.[79] Unlike Grigor´ev, Berg did not diverge from Hettner's views on geography, which mainly concerned with the spatial distribution of natural phenomena, and he was attacked for this since 1929.[80] Grigor´ev also wrote that Berg's landscape science had a 'conservative vision'.[81]

Berg thought that geographical landscapes are permanent, or at least not dynamic and dialectical in the sense understood by dialectical materialism. Earth has organized itself in its natural way, and the human world is a small part of this harmonious whole.[82] The inner harmony of a large whole implies humanity's harmonious relationship to its environment, because humanity belongs to this one whole. The totality of a landscape is a sum of its parts and the totality influences all its parts. If a part of a landscape changes, the whole landscape changes; damming a river will affect the totality, including the humans. This is also an essential starting point of Zalygin's understanding of the physical world: 'the existence of each element depends on the existence of another element, which on its part, sets limits to the other.'[83] For the narrator of *Ekologicheskii roman* this interaction has been lost:

> Only after a long time science understood that ecology is about the fate of humankind – to be or already not to be in the twenty-first century. This is because all animals and plants depend nowadays, not on one another, but on only one animal: the human.[84]

In Bergian thought, the components of a landscape, such as the river, are living organisms. Therefore, the fate of the river affects everything else. In Berg's thinking, the harmoniously formed landscape cannot adapt to rapid changes. His proponents would not have redirected the waters of the rivers that flow to the Aral Sea to cotton fields. The drying up of the Aral Sea is a logical consequence of the redirection of river water, because it disturbs the homeostasis of the environment. In an essay from 1984, Zalygin refers to a nineteenth-century climatologist Aleksandr Voeikov, who had assured that the Aral Sea would never dry up and disappear, because of the balance of its water system.[85] The Soviet state interrupted this balance, and Voeikov's assurance

proved wrong due to human intervention. Zalygin's words in 1991 reflect these drastic changes in the Aral Sea environment:

> Nature is harmonious, undoubtedly. Only because of its harmony does it exist. But we do not want to understand that harmony – it is also the art of limitations, the art of throwing away everything unnecessary, everything out of place, everything that prevents or will prevent future life on Earth.[86]

Golubev represents Berg's geographical views. This is most evident in the Arctic environment of the lower Ob, where 'space also ceases to be a concept, it appears in its reality, in that absoluteness, without which (according to Newton) there is no being and which does not depend on any processes'. For Golubev, this Arctic space is clearly an environment, which reflects Berg's harmoniously organized landscapes, not a constantly changing process that Grigor´ev proposed. Berg's less dynamic geography is visible not only in the Arctic space, but also in the Arctic time, which is 'less changeable', because of long winter nights and summer days.[87]

Golubev names the governmental water amelioration organization – Hydroproject Institute in the real world – 'kWh', because energy is its business. For Golubev it was 'a sovereign of Soviet rivers, it had unlimited possession over them, rivers were its property, it could control the rivers as it pleased, on its own behalf, on behalf of the state, the Party, the people, the Constitution and socialism in general'. For him, the 'kWh' represents the 'anti-world' and is a proof of man's antinatural character. 'Rivers are no longer nature for the kWh', he thinks, meaning that for them, rivers mean only 'decrees, decisions, development, protocols, projects and feasibility reports'. [88] A river with a power station is not a river for Golubev anymore.

Following Berg's landscape science, Golubev reasons that damming a river inflicts irrecoverable damage to its environment, while Grigor´ev's proponents see that the river environment would adapt to the new conditions. Golubev considers building a hydropower station on low-lying lands a great crime, because the reservoir would be 'the size of Czechoslovakia'.[89] He argues that no civilized country builds dams in low-lying areas. For someone who treats geography as cartography, this would not be evident, because on the Soviet map the area does not appear large. Following Berg's ideas about natural landscapes as a harmonious whole, Golubev thinks that even if the dam is removed in the future, the fragile Arctic natural environment would never recover. He is also worried that the human cost of the Labour camp no. 501 will be repeated.

Golubev manages to convince the authorities to cancel the hydropower plant project on the lower Ob. The novel explicitly names three articles written by Golubev in 1962–1963 as having a great influence on the decision.[90] In reality, Zalygin himself wrote these articles, which *Literaturnaia gazeta* published.[91] He accuses the decision-making organs of narrow-mindedness and failure to hear the experts. He blames the management of Hydroproject Institute for spreading misleading information about the economic and ecological costs of the project. Zalygin argues that this is not a question of 'natural beauty' or 'any kind of protection of nature'.[92] However, in the novel Golubev argues that the lower Ob area is exceptionally beautiful – even unique – and already for this reason it should not be spoiled. I conclude that Zalygin did care about natural beauty and protection of nature, but did not see appealing to them a good rhetorical way of convincing the authorities.

Golubev's decisive argument is not geographical but political. He convinces the authorities that Chilikin has foisted the lower Ob project onto the Party Program for personal glory and material gain. The decree about cancelling the project mentions economical losses of forest, oil, turf and gas resources as the reasons. These reasons are proper, considering the changed environmental thinking of the 1960s. In its third Program, the Communist Party had formalized the break from Stalinism by stating that 'considerable attention will be given to the protection and rational utilization of forest, water and other natural riches, their renewal and accumulation'.[93] Purely Grigor´evian views were not prevailing in the governing organs anymore.

The real reasons for cancelling the hydropower station project on the lower Ob, according to Golubev, were egoist party politics. In the Khrushchev era, science was less an arena for ideological battle, and attitude to ecology was more neutral than in Stalin's days.[94] Despite the changed views in the government in the post-Stalinist period, Golubev does not see a true change in the environmental thinking, at least not back toward Berg. In the latter episodes of the novel, the government's failure to adopt geographical thinking that would be closer to Berg's science become even more evident.

Harmonious landscape of the Egyptians and the Nile

In the episode 'Nil – sviashchennaia reka' ('The Nile: Sacred River'), Golubev travels in the mid-1960s to the Aswan High Dam construction site in Egypt, where Soviet

engineers are building a huge dam across the Nile. His superiors provide the argumentation for this project; they think that they should help to build the hydropower station on the Nile for the sake of Marx,[95] Engels, Lenin and Khrushchev; for the sake of the friendship of nations and the triumph of socialism.[96] They do not open their views about the essence of geography, but referring to Engels is enough to locate them in Grigor´ev's school.

Golubev is against the harnessing of the Nile. His argumentation emphasizes the Nile's cultural and religious meanings, which are in the core of Bergian views, because the age-old coexistence of people and the river constitutes a permanent, harmonious geographical landscape that Berg promoted. An organic part of this is the cultural landscape 'in which humankind and the results of its cultural activity play an important role',[97] as Berg referenced. However, the landscape is permanent only as long as the river stays a river, and Golubev does not think a dammed river is a river. When the river is lost, the cultural and religious connection of the human community to the geographical landscape is also lost.

Golubev bases his arguments on the cultural significance of the Nile, emphasizing the river's religious role, that it has been the sacred, divine foundation of the Egyptian state and culture. Since ancient times, people have depended on its floods and believed that they were the result of the goddess Isis' tears of sorrow. Golubev feels that the Nile is simultaneously the mother and the father of the locals, and that Egypt is the Nile's gift to humankind. Again, as in Golubev's childhood when the river 'gave him a new birth', human culture depicts as a product of the river. Golubev considers it a great sin to demand kilowatt-hours from a god; it means that humans are acting like a god. He asks: 'If there really is no other solution but to build the Aswan High Dam and sacrifice the Nile, why do they celebrate it by an unprecedented jubilee? Why rejoice in a funeral?'[98] Mentioning sacrifice underlines the religious significance of the river. Golubev also argues for the human cost by comparing the Aswan Dam to the pyramids, but not in the spirit of Evgenii Evtushenko.[99] He wonders whether the dam will be built by slaves like the pyramids and the Transpolar Railway were.

The cultural connection of the river to human communities is most evident in the episode 'Nil – sviashchennaia reka', because it represents the river as an integral part and precondition of human existence in Egypt. Human culture is not separate from the river but belongs to the same landscape.

River of death and the age of the noosphere

The final, dystopian episode '+30' concludes the argumentation of the previous episodes by clearly presenting the opposing views of Berg and Grigor´ev. The episode is set in the early 1990s. By raising this juxtaposition then it conveys that Grigor´ev's views about geography still thrived in Russia at the time when the Soviet Union was collapsing. The episode concentrates on Golubev's trip to the Pripyat River in the Chernobyl disaster area.[100] Here, the antagonism is not so much for or against modernization. Rather, it is a question of Vladimir Vernadskii (1863–1945), the founder of biogeochemistry and the first to develop fully the concept of the biosphere, standing against Stalin.[101] Golubev hints that only Vernadskii's science comes close to the 'pure science' of the hospital ward.[102] Zalygin has earlier called for the need of what he calls 'noosphere stories'.[103] Vernadskii and his concept of the noosphere are main motifs of this episode. The narrator explains the concept:

> The noosphere is such a state of the biosphere in which rational activities of human beings have become a crucial factor in the development of the biosphere. How do you get along with yourself when your skull has become a geological force? Without Vernadskii this is not possible![104]

For Vernadskii – thinks Golubev – science is a part of nature, and nature implies the harmony of the species, subspecies and families. Indeed, for Vernadskii, science is a natural development in the evolution:

> The evolution of species turns into the evolution of the biosphere. The evolutionary process […] has created a new geological force: the scientific thought of social humanity. […] Under the action of scientific thought and human labor, the biosphere goes over to a new state – to the noosphere.[105]

Vernadskii further defines: 'The noosphere is a new geological phenomenon on our planet. In it for the first time man becomes a large-scale geological force. [---] The noosphere is the latest[106] of many stages in the evolution of the biosphere in geological history.'[107]

For Vernadskii, the noosphere is a stage in the evolution of the biosphere, where human reason and science change the geological features of the earth. This is very close to another concept that has received much attention in the academia since the beginning of the twenty-first century: the Anthropocene. It refers to a proposed geological epoch, where the human impact on the global environment has reached a stage, where it leaves

an imprint in the earth's geological system.[108] As Steffen et al. explain, the noosphere is an important antecedent of the Anthropocene, but they do not explain what the main difference of these similar concepts is.[109] In my opinion, the most notable difference is that even though the noosphere has manifested itself through the energy of human reason, in Vernadskii's conceptualization this new geological energy has emerged as a result of general mental development of organisms.[110] This does not apply to the Anthropocene, which attaches explicitly to the actions of human beings. For the sake of Zalygin's novel, the Anthropocene might be an even more useful concept than the noosphere, because it handles explicitly humanity's actions in its environment. However, as the narrator defines the noosphere as being the result of 'rational activities of human beings',[111] for the purposes of the novel the concepts are practically equivalent.[112]

Golubev thinks that Vernadskii's position, where science is a part of nature, implies that the destruction of even one species leads to the destruction of other species. This is a very Bergian notion as Berg's landscape science is compatible with an understanding about science as a part of the harmonious whole of geographical landscapes. Like Berg, Golubev also thinks that a river is a living organism and a product of its climate. This is equivalent to what Zalygin has written in his essays. He comprehended nature rather as a complex organic system than as something mechanical, referring to Vernadskii's work as an evidence that the earth is one living organism.[113] Golubev implies that in order to survive, the Soviet Union should have taken up Vernadskii's science. The dystopian finale of *Ekologicheskii roman* underlines this failure.

Golubev refers to Berg explicitly, when he ponders the forgotten role of the nineteenth-century geographers in modern Russia:

> If only Russia would have understood in the footsteps of which experts on its lands it should follow in the future?! But it did not understand, and now it is too late. The visible nature has already been divided into *landscape science*, geomorphology, hydrography, bio and geo, and in these small pieces it was easily subdued by Lenin and Stalin.[114]

This passage seems to give landscape science a negative meaning, but the criticism is against the plurality of geographical trends in the twentieth century, not on Berg.

In Zalygin's novel, the reasoning of Stalin's thinking follows the argumentation of the advocates of modernity: it involves war rhetoric, the propagation of Communism,

maintaining a great power position, science and progress. Even though this is not directly geographical thinking, it shares the ideological base of Grigor´ev's geography. The consequences of Stalinist thinking were obvious for Golubev. In 1986 they materialized in the Chernobyl catastrophe, which contaminated the Pripyat. For Golubev the dead, radioactive river – whose water should be life itself – is a sign that there is no future for Russia.

The poisoned Pripyat depresses Golubev, and it becomes the second river to have a crucial influence on his life. When he was a child, the 'river of life' saved him from taking his own life. Now at old age, the 'river of death' drives him self-destructive. On the radioactive Pripyat, he envisions meeting Russian nineteenth-century geographers,[115] born in 1834–1846. He has a heated debate with them on who is responsible for the toxicity of the river. Both sides agree on Stalin's negative influence, but each side blames the other for allowing Stalinism to thrive in Russia. Apparently, the geographers are representatives of Golubev's innocent 'pure science', precursors of Berg and Vernadskii, and not contaminated by any ideology, as opposed to Grigor´ev's Stalinist geography. Golubev falls deep into self-accusation and sees no other way out but to take his own life: 'Hydrologist Golubev started on the enchanted[116] Ob, […], he will end on the poisoned Pripyat. Logic!'[117]

Golubev's self-destructiveness is common to some other Siberian autobiographical environmental fiction, most notably Valentin Rasputin's novella *Proshchanie s Materoi* (*Farewell to Matyora*, 1976), whose protagonists are ready to die along with their home village. However, Golubev's loss of will to live is not due to the actions of the Soviet authorities, but to the discouraging observation that environmental thinking in post-Soviet Russia is not any different from the Soviet era: 'If only El´tsin and Khasbulatov[118] knew how tired of them Golubev was! For them, nature didn't even exist. In Golubev's whole life, there hadn't been a single administration in Russia that hadn't deceived him'.[119]

'Chernobyl accident is not an incident in modernity, it is modernity itself', Golubev concludes.[120] For Zalygin, 'ecology should not be just a science, but our burning necessity', and turning ecology to a part of people's everyday life was an important objective for him.[121] An essential starting point and an inseparable part of Zalygin's philosophy, morale and ethics is a careful relationship to the natural world and its riches,[122] visible already in his 1962 novel 'Altai Paths'.[123] In the end of the

1980s, Zalygin wrote: '[N]ow it is already very clear: humankind will never see paradise. Avoiding hell is another question.'[124] When he wrote *Ekologicheskii roman* with its dystopian outcome in 1993, had he lost hope that human existence would ever be compatible with his worldview? My answer is yes and no.

Events take a new turn a day before Golubev has planned to take his own life when his son is killed in a car accident. The son's widow now needs Golubev's help and the grandchildren his presence more than ever, and the anxiety about the grandchildren's future sparks a renewed will to live. Near the grandchildren, he even forgets his worries about the natural environment: 'Chernobyl and Vernadskii's noosphere no longer worried him, there was no time for them. He must live, survive.'[125] The river of life has won, and the flow of life must go on. Nevertheless, the reason for Golubev's renewed spark to live does not stem from a hope that people will find a balance with their environment. This is just the way human life is: the will to continue its river-like flow outcomes all, even ecology. Golubev experiences an ecological death as he becomes more worried about his descendants' immediate survival than the state of the environment and the long-term future of his grandchildren.

Conclusion

In Sergei Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*, meanings of the river are central to the depiction of changes in geographical thought in Russia through the twentieth century. The prologue equates the river current to the flow of life and presents humanity as a product of the river, while in the end the poisoning of the Pripyat by radionuclides is a dystopian result of the lost geographical understanding of people and rivers constituting one harmonious whole.

The novel depicts Andrei Grigor´ev's geographical understandings, based on dialectical materialism, as the prevailing view of the Soviet state authorities in the 1940s and early 1950s. In the episodes 'Zolotaia rybka' and 'Piat´sot pervaia stroika', the state representatives concentrate on achieving a victory over nature, leaning to war rhetoric that connects to victories over Nazism and American imperialism. Grigor´ev's views thrived in Stalin's period, because they responded to the state's modernization goals better than Lev Berg's landscape science. The novel depicts the erosion of Grigor´evian views in the early 1960s in the episode 'Nizhne-Obskaia GES' by showing how the state authorities decide to cancel the construction of a hydropower station in the

Arctic. However, even though views that resonate with a new kind of environmental thinking are stated as the reasons for the abandonment of the project, Zalygin's novel depicts these reasons as superficial. The real reasons are political, and the Grigor´evian thinking of the authorities has not changed.

However, the protagonist Golubev's geographical thinking has evolved, and it is now compatible with Berg's landscape science. As Golubev is an *alter ego* of Zalygin, who was a prominent character in the Soviet environmental movement, the novel associates the movement as a proponent of Berg's geography. This association develops further during the 1960s in the episode 'Nil – sviashchennaia reka', which depicts the river and the human community as one harmonious whole, in line with Berg's landscapes. For Golubev, Egypt is a place, where natural and cultural landscapes coexisted in harmony and had never been two separate realms until the Aswan High Dam was built with Soviet aid. In the novel's final episode, '+30', it becomes clear that the Grigor´evian notion was guiding the environmental understanding in Russia still in the 1980s–1990s. In the novel, the state's failure to return to Berg's geography, free of ideological combats, and understand Vladimir Vernadskii's concept of the noosphere lead to the catastrophic nuclear accident in Chernobyl, which is a manifestation of the dystopic modernity in the age of the Anthropocene.

By poisoning the Pripyat, the accident – and therefore modern ideology-driven geography – has turned the 'river of life', which gave a new birth to the protagonist in his childhood, to the 'river of death', which drives him self-destructive. In Golubev's intended farewell letter to his son, the frustrated old 'riverman' compares humanity's actions against nature to those of the Soviet state against the Gulag prisoners and wonders why do we do so: 'why do we not recognize that we also environ nature, only in a much more hard and cruel way than it us?!'[126] Golubev has no answer.

The protagonist Golubev is a complex character, and a combination of many discourses. He is not just a hydrologist and an environmentalist, but also avidly keen on geography and, as Zalygin's *alter ego*, represents writers' point of view too. This versatility of the protagonist fits and might even be the origin of the novel's complex genre, a mix of conventional literary genres. Complex problems call for complex representation.

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Notes

1. Zalygin, "Interv´iu u samogo sebia," 15.
2. Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*, xi, 2.
3. For example, Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*; Dobrenko and Naiman, *The Landscape of Stalinism*; Ely, *This Meager Nature*; Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*; Widdis, *Visions*; and Widdis, "Russia as Space."
4. Marland, "Ecocriticism," 846.
5. Gribov, "Krutymi tropami."
6. See Ely, *This Meager Nature*.
7. Cf. Clowes, *Russia on the Edge*, 2, 4.
8. Kerridge and Garrard, "Call for Proposals," para 3.
9. Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 6.
10. See Kelly et al., *Rivers of the Anthropocene*; and Oppermann and Iovino, *Environmental Humanities*.
11. Ostaszewska, "Chelovek i priroda," 47.
12. Filippova, "Utopicheskii vektor naturfilosofskoi prozy," 17, 20.
13. Rudziewicz, "Ekologicheskaia problematika," 70–71.
14. Cf. Perkiömäki, "Matka hukutetulla joella"; and Perkiömäki, "'The Sovereign'."
15. "Chelovek, kotoryi spas Ob´."
16. Most notable include Zalygin, "Voda i zemlia Zemli"; Zalygin, "NTR i literatura"; Zalygin, "Literatura i priroda"; and Zalygin, "Voda podvizhnaia, voda nepodvizhnaia."
17. See Karpenko and Merinov, "Ekologicheskaia problematika," 134–36. The Northern river reversal was a large-scale utopian Soviet project, whose objective was to turn the flow of the Siberian and other northern rivers southward to divert fresh water to the arid Central Asian steppe. A whole system of project-institutes worked on preparing and documenting the plan for decades since the 1950s. The project never started, and it was abandoned in 1986. See Vorobyev, "Ruling Rivers." Gorbachev acknowledges Zalygin's key role in the abandonment of the project. "Chelovek, kotoryi spas Ob´."
18. Smith and Rich, "Sergei Zalygin," 121.

19. See note 15 above. Sergei Zalygin also describes his numerous meetings with Gorbachev and the leader of the Ideological Committee of the Communist Party, Vadim Medvedev, along the publication process of *The Gulag Archipelago*. While Zalygin initially wanted to publish Solzhenitsyn's works in chronological order, the writer himself insisted on publishing *The Gulag Archipelago* first, because he considered it his most important work. Gorbachev and Medvedev yielded to the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* only after Zalygin threatened to resign from his post as editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir.* Zalygin, "Zametki, ne nuzhdaiushchiesia v siuzhete," below the subtitle 'Publikatsiia Solzhenitsyna'; see also Smith and Rich, "Sergei Zalygin," 121.
20. *Pravda,* August 31, 1973. The letter was a reaction to support the condemnation of Andrei Sakharov by members of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in *Pravda* two days earlier. It equated Solzhenitsyn with Sakharov: 'the behaviour of people like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, who slander our political and social systems and try to raise distrust towards peaceful politics of the Soviet state, actually provoking the West to continue the Cold War, cannot evoke any other feelings but deep disregard and condemnation' (translation mine). It is not clear whether all the writers really gave their full permission to sign the letter, which was written and published in only a couple of days.
21. See note 18 above.
22. Parthé, *Russian Village Prose*, xii–xiv, 92–98.
23. Zalygin, "Povorot. Uroki odnoi diskussii"; and Zalygin, "A chto zhe dal´she?"
24. Zalygin, "Zametki, ne nuzhdaiushchiesia v siuzhete"; and Razuvalova, *Pisateli-'derevenshchiki'*, 278–79.
25. Parthé, *Russian Village Prose*, 175–76.
26. Rudziewicz, "Ekologicheskaia problematika," 69.
27. Zalygin, "Rossiia podymetsia," para 36; and Zalygin, "My v zerkale iskusstva."
28. Rudziewicz, *Chelovek i priroda*, 296.
29. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 5. All the translations from Zalygin's works are my own.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 6.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. A ship canal, also known as the Belomor Canal, which connects the White Sea with the Baltic Sea. It was constructed by forced labour, opened in 1933, and exalted by a host of literary works of the time. See Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*.
36. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 67.
37. Dobrenko, "The Art," 190–92.
38. See note 36 above.
39. Shtil´mark, "The Evolution," 430–33.
40. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 83. Curiously, Andrei Platonov, who also was a hydrologist and a well-known Soviet-era Russian writer on the relationship of culture and nature, is never mentioned in the novel.
41. Ibid., 70.
42. Ibid., 91.
43. Ibid., 92.
44. Ibid., 91.
45. Perkiömäki, "Matka hukutetulla joella."
46. Slavnikova, "Staryi russkii," paras 18, 21.

47. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 68.
48. Ibid., 9.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 10.
51. Ibid., 15.
52. The Russian proverb ‘*voina plan pokazhet*’ (‘war will show the plan’) reflects this attitude, meaning that you do not have to plan things ahead – just take up the fight and act instinctively. A war-time slogan, ‘*voina vse spishet*’ (‘war writes everything off’) is mentioned in Zalygin’s novel. The English equivalent, ‘the end justifies the means’, lacks the war rhetoric of the Russian version.
53. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar´ Ushakova*.
54. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 68.
55. Razuvalova, *Pisateli-‘derevenshchiki’*, 279.
56. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 20.
57. See Ilin, *New Russia’s Primer*.
58. Gor´kii, “O bor´be s prirodoi.”
59. Josephson et al., *An Environmental History*, 119–21.
60. Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development*, 90–91.
61. Stalin, “O dialekticheskom,” 255.
62. Weiner, *Models of Nature*, 234.
63. Stalin, “O dialekticheskom,” 254.
64. Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development*, 94.
65. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 20.
66. Ibid.
67. Chilikin’s model is the engineer Aleksandr Chemin. He worked in the Hydroproject Institute, which was responsible of all the hydropower plant projects in the Soviet Union. In his 1962 critical essay about the lower Ob hydropower station, Zalygin quotes Chemin’s words, which are repeated in the novel: ‘We flew by an airplane over the future reservoir, and in front of us was drawn a view…’ Zalygin, “Lesa, zemli, vody,” 15. In the novel, the sentence continues: ‘…of modern socialist cities on the banks of the artificial sea.’ Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 41.
68. The third Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union mentions hydropower projects only on the Angara and the Yenisei. It is unclear whether Zalygin uses here artist’s freedom or the mention is in another document related to the Party Program. He refers to the Program in a similar way also in an essay describing his real-life meeting with the engineer Chemin. Sergei Zalygin, “Zametki, ne nuzhdaiushchiesia v siuzhete. Prodolzhenie,” paras 19–23.
69. Ibid.
70. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 28.
71. Ibid., 31.
72. Ibid., 41.
73. Ibid., 53.
74. Zalygin’s characters use the word ‘conservative’ as a negative expression. Many Village Prose writers have faced accusations of being ‘conservative’. It is a question worth asking, although not in the scope of this article, whether, and why, environmental writing in Russia is connected to conservative ideologies. One could argue that ‘liberal’ ideologies might also unwillingly encourage people and societies for less ecological practices, as Timothy Clark hints: ‘ecocritics should become more forthright in highlighting the

destructive implications and assumptions of given critical schools (whether historicist, formalist, postcolonial or, indeed, many others).' Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 219. Zalygin has advocated for a 'reasonable conservatism' (*razumnyi konservatizm)* as a sound ideological base for modern ecology. Zalygin, "'Ekologicheskii konservatizm'," para 31.

75. Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development*, 80.
76. Ibid., 82.
77. Ibid., 78.
78. Gurlenova, "Chuvstvo prirody."
79. Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development,* 82–83.
80. Ibid., 95, 98.
81. Ibid., 99.
82. Ibid., 94.
83. Kaminskii, "Filosofiia prirody," 124.
84. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 3.
85. Zalygin, "Voda podvizhnaia, voda nepodvizhnaia," 49.
86. Zalygin, "Literatura i priroda," 12.
87. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 8.
88. Ibid., 36.
89. Ibid., 40.
90. Ibid., 38.
91. The original articles are: Zalygin, "Lesa, zemli, vody"; Zalygin, "Lesa, zemli, vody i vedomstvo"; and Zalygin, "Delo narodnoe, a ne vedomstvennoe!"
92. Ibid., 24.
93. "Programma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza." Translation of this phrase in Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development*, 149.
94. Josephson et al., *An Environmental History*, 143.
95. They even call the Nile a 'Marxist river'. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 47.
96. Ibid.
97. Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development*, 82.
98. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 51.
99. Evtushenko's poem *Bratskaia GES* ('The Bratsk Station', 1965) equates the huge hydropower station in Bratsk to the Egyptian pyramids. Unlike the pyramids, Evtushenko's power plant is built by enthusiastic workers who devote themselves to socialism. See Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin*, 45.
100. The title of the episode, '+30', might refer to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, the evacuation area of a thirty-kilometre radius designated around the remains of the exploded reactor. It probably alludes even more to Golubev looking back to the last thirty years of his life in the age of eighty, and the sudden will at the end of the novel to keep on living.
101. Neither was purely Russian. Vernadskii's father was a descendant of Zaporozhian Cossacks, and he is widely recognized as a compatriot in both Russia and Ukraine, while Stalin was from Georgia. Their influence on Russian environmental thinking was, however, great.
102. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 70.
103. Zalygin, "Razumnyi soiuz s prirodoi," 52.
104. Zalygin, "Ekologicheskii roman," 76.
105. Vernadskii, "Scientific thought," 95.

106. Literally ‘last’ in the translation, but ‘latest’ is more apt. Oldfield and Shaw, “V.I. Vernadsky,” 147.
107. Vernadskii, “The biosphere,” 99–100.
108. Crutzen and Stoermer, “The Anthropocene.”
109. Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene,” 843–45.
110. Oldfield and Shaw, “V.I. Vernadsky,” 148–49.
111. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 76.
112. In 1984, Dmitrii Likhachev coined the term *gomosfera*, ’the homosphere’, as an extension to Vernadskii’s noosphere with an emphasis on humanity’s agency. Likhachev, *Russkaia kul′tura*, 92.
113. Kaminskii, “Filosofiia prirody,” 121; and Zalygin, ”Pochva, na kotoroi stoim,” 200.
114. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 83 (emphasis mine).
115. Vasilii Dokuchaev, Dmitrii Mendeleev, Nikolai Mikloukho-Maklai, Mikhail Pevtsov, Nikolai Przheval′skii, Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Aleksandr Voeikov. To Golubev’s amazement, Vernadskii is not there. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 86–88.
116. Zalygin’s original title of the novel was ‘Zakoldovannyi stvor’ (‘Enchanted river station’), referring to the place called Angal’sky Mys on the lower Ob near Salekhard, where he worked during the Second World War. Zalygin, “Zametki, ne nuzhdaiushchiesia v siuzhete.”
117. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 89.
118. Ruslan Khasbulatov, the last chairperson of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, which ceased to exist after the 1993 constitutional crisis.
119. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 100.
120. Ibid., 97.
121. Zalygin, “Vmesto zakliucheniia,” 282.
122. Rudziewicz, “Eticheskaia napravlennost′,” 193.
123. Ostaszewska, “Chelovek i priroda,” 45.
124. Zalygin, “K voprosu o bessmertii,” 45.
125. Zalygin, “Ekologicheskii roman,” 106.
126. Ibid., 102.

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Rivers of Noosphere Stories: Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology

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Title: Rivers of Noosphere Stories. Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology

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Abstract: This article compares the Russian concept of *ekologiia kul'tury* to Western cultural ecology. They both see human cultures evolving in close relations with their environment, but they sharply differ in their conclusions. Instead of highlighting literature's potential as an ecological force, *ekologiia kul'tury* emphasizes morals, traditional values, and Christian ideology. Russian natural-philosophical prose shares these features with *ekologiia kul'tury*, which this article shows by analyzing writings of rivers in it. This *naturfilosofskaia proza* is also an example of literature as cultural ecology, and this article shows how representations of rivers in the so-called noosphere stories by Sergei Zalygin, Valentin Rasputin and Viktor Astaf'ev illustrate its function as an ecological force within cultural discourses.

Keywords: cultural ecology, ecocriticism, ecology of culture, econationalism, natural-philosophical prose, noosphere, river, Russian literature

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Rivers of Noosphere Stories: Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology

> Ecology is a moral question.
>
> —Dmitrii Likhachev, *Russkaia kul'tura*

1 Introduction

In 1979, Academician Dmitrii Likhachev, an eminent Russian literary historian, philologist, and cultural philosopher, introduced the concept *ekologiia kul'tury* ("ecology of culture"). Basing his reasoning on the supposed false idea of humanity as separate from nature, Likhachev argues for an enlarged understanding of ecology that is interested not only in the preservation of nonhuman nature, but also in the preservation of human cultures. He sees this primarily as a moral question, because human beings have a moral responsibility to act for both natural and cultural ecology. He explains that this responsibility was well taken care of in Old Russia, but neglected in late twentieth century.

Likhachev's *ekologiia kul'tury* shares with the Western concept of cultural ecology the principal idea that human cultures evolve in close interrelationship with their environment, and the two concepts have almost identical names. Nevertheless, no comparison of these two similar concepts, which evolved independent to each other, exists. In this article, I connect the Russian and Western research traditions by evaluating the common features of *ekologiia kul'tury* and cultural ecology. Despite the common premises, *ekologiia kul'tury* significantly differs from cultural ecology in its conclusions by diverging toward positions that are characteristic to Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza* ("natural-philosophical prose").

Ekologiia kul'tury shares the philosophy of late Soviet *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and I will illustrate their philosophical confluences by analyzing writings where rivers appear as agentic subjects. *Naturfilosofskaia proza* is also an apt example of literature as cultural ecology, as suggested by Hubert Zapf, who argues that literature can act like an ecological force within culture. I will show how representations of rivers in what the Russian writer Sergei Zalygin calls "noosphere stories" exemplify the functions of *naturfilosofskaia proza* as cultural ecology. It is important to compare *ekologiia kul'tury* and *naturfilosofskaia proza* to cultural ecology and

literature as cultural ecology to illustrate similarities in the philosophical foundations of the Russian and Western environmental movements and in the environmental prose related to them.

2 *Ekologiia kul'tury*

Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev (1906–1999) authored highly influential works on the literature and culture of mediaeval Russia. He stresses the European character and heritage of Russian culture, which adopted European values of freedom, openness, universalism, and respect for the individual along with the Christian religion in the medieval times (Zubok 2017, X–XI). He, however, also sees a distinct national character in Russian culture. For Likhachev (2000, 438), Russian culture has always kept its individuality, and transformed values from other cultures according to a distinctively Russian understanding of them.

Likhachev (1979) coined the term *ekologiia kul'tury* in his 1979 article in the journal *Moskva*, which at the time was one of the most important journals connected to the Russian nationalist movement. A principal idea behind *ekologiia kul'tury* is that human communities evolve together with the nonhuman world surrounding them in a close interrelationship, and this relationship has a defining effect on the culture in question. Likhachev's original article was reprinted several times, and the concept has received—and is still receiving—considerable attention from Russian academia.

Likhachev (1979, 174) understands the science of ecology as a discipline that has two sides of equal importance: the biological and the cultural. He uses the term "moral ecology" (*nravstvennaia ekologiia*) as a synonym for "cultural ecology," and argues that "the violation of the norms of biological ecology can kill a person biologically, while the violation of the norms of cultural ecology can kill a person morally"[1] (ibid.). Likhachev (1979, 173) also argues that Soviet science has neglected the moral and cultural aspects of ecology, because it has not understood that they are "vitally important for people". The basis of Soviet morality was the idea of the "New Man", who puts the interests of the collective above personal needs (Feldman 1989, 151). The most important codex of Soviet morality was the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, adopted as

[1] All the translations from the Russian are mine, unless otherwise noted.

part of the Communist Party Program in 1961. The twelve moral tenets defined in it concentrate almost solely on social relations between humans and take no stand on the nonhuman natural world. Thus, Likhachev's criticism that morality and ecology were separate was reasonable.

Likhachev (1979, 174) further states that "there is no gap between these two [sides of ecology], just as there is no clear border between nature and culture." Referring to examples from the architecture of mediaeval Novgorod, he reasons that human constructions have constituted a harmonious landscape with the natural environment and therefore, they should be protected as one whole. Likhachev (1979, 173) acknowledges that due to the negligence of the laws of biological ecology, environmental degradation threatens the existence of humanity, and he notes that countries around the world, including the Soviet Union, have started "gigantic efforts … to save the air, the bodies of water, the seas, the rivers and the forests from pollution." Correspondingly, the failure to understand *ekologiia kul'tury* has led to demolitions of historic Russian churches and palaces in the Soviet period (ibid., 177–8).

Likhachev (1979, 178) notes that there is one fundamental difference in the ecology of culture when compared to the ecology of nature: with the exception of species that have been driven to extinction, natural destruction can be repaired, while cultural destruction is "irrevocable, because monuments of culture are always unique." At present, it feels striking to argue that human-induced natural destruction could not be irreversible. In some parts of the Soviet Union, environmental degradation was irreparable already in the late twentieth century (Peterson 1993, 7–10). Nonetheless, even though Likhachev accepts environmental problems as a threat to the very existence of humankind, he sees humankind as able to repair the environmental damage it has caused. Living nonhuman nature can even help us in this task by its ability to do a "self-cleanup, the recovery of balance disturbed by humans" (Likhachev 1979, 178).

Likhachev (2000) updated his idea of *ekologiia kul'tury* in a late essay that was published posthumously in 2000 as a part of his extensive survey on Russian culture. He emphasizes even more strongly than earlier that it is a grave mistake to speak of culture and nature as separate, for "humanity does not oppose nature, but belongs to it. Therefore, the ecology of culture together with the ecology of nature constitute a single unity, and they are separated only for the sake of the convenience of studying them" (ibid., 92). This explains the evident contradiction in Likhachev's

reasoning when he claims that there is no clear border between nature and culture, but that the destruction of nature can be repaired while the destruction of culture cannot; he needs to semantically separate culture from nature to illustrate his argument.

Likhachev (2000, 100) goes on to describe ecology as a moral question: "all this should be built on moral grounds, on the basis of a certain philosophy of ecology." He notes that in Russia, these moral grounds were laid by Vladimir Solov'ev in his late nineteenth-century long essay on moral philosophy, *Opravdanie dobra* (*The Justification of the Good*). In Solov'ev's (1918, 347) moral philosophy "neither our fellow-men nor material nature must be a mere passive or impersonal instrument of economic production or exploitation". In other words, he sees that from the point of view of morality, it is important that neither people nor the nonhuman world are misused. This is close to what Likhachev means when he writes that preservation of cultural achievements is as important as preservation of the natural world.

Likhachev (2000, 94) even proposes a new branch of science: the morals of modern people. This does not at first seem like new as German philosophy worked on it already in the eighteenth century. However, what Likhachev means is perhaps rather something closer to Orthodox Christian values of modern people, because the morals that he writes about are closely related to the values of the Russian Orthodox Church. For him, in the field of the ecology of nature, only moral values prevent human beings from overexploiting natural resources. Correspondingly, the corrosion of these moral values in the early Soviet Union led to corrupted and unethical science, such as Lysenkoism, whose sole purpose, according to Likhachev (2000, 95), was to justify the further abuse of natural resources. In another essay, he also states that "the consumer attitude toward living things is immoral" (ibid., 352).

The stance that the Russian Orthodox Church (2000) has adopted toward ecological problems is similarly critical of "consumer relations with nature" of human beings that are "guided by egoistic motives". The Church also sees this as a moral question and calls for "moral and legal responsibility for the damage inflicted on nature" (ibid.). While the Church's pronouncements on environmental issues resemble some of Likhachev's, there are differences. Most notably, the Church states that natural resources are "common human property" (ibid.). Regarding natural resources as someone's property seems contradictory to how the same document in the next

sentence pronounces that man is "organically integral" to nature, and later that "one of the main principles of the Church's stand on ecological issues is the unity and integrity of the world created by God" (ibid.). [2]

The idea that humans and nature are intimately connected is not unique to *ekologiia kul'tury* or the Russian Orthodox Church. Numerous philosophical traditions before and after Likhachev have aimed to overcome binary thinking in the human–nature relationship. In addition to many contemporary theoretical approaches, such as actor–network theory and new materialism, it appears also in Marxist thinking about Engels's dialectics of nature. Even Stalin (1997, 254) wrote that nature is a "coherent single whole", although this is paradoxical to the sharp dualism of nature and culture of Stalinist reality (see Perkiömäki 2020, 9).[3]

Likhachev (2000, 97) reasons that ecologists should be worried about the state of both natural environment and human culture, because "humans are the only creatures that have language and reason." Humanity has a moral responsibility to speak and answer for all the creatures in the world, and to defend their rights and interests. *Ekologiia kul'tury* sees this responsibility as fragile, and therefore it should be protected by protecting human culture. Likhachev (2000, 100–1) stresses the importance of morals in the protection of nature and culture, referring to Old Russia as an example of a culture with good morals, largely because of the Orthodox Church's strong influence. In his original 1979 essay on *ekologiia kul'tury*, the references to Christianity are understandably subtle, but the 2000 essay openly refers to Russian Orthodoxy.

[2] As Stephen Brain (2018, 366) notes, although the ecological consequences of Western Christianity's environmental ethic have been actively studied since the publication of Lynn White's (1967) "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," scholarly attention to Eastern Orthodoxy's connections with environmentalism is scarce.

[3] Even though Engels was vague about whether the natural and social worlds operated under the same laws, Stalinist dialecticians defined nature and society as two ontologically absolutely separate categories (Bassin 2016, 119). Despite the evident negative consequences for the natural world of this separation in Stalin's Soviet Union, forest conservation saved vast amounts of Soviet forests from exploitation—although not driven by preservationist or conservationist concerns but "on the grounds that this would improve the hydrology of the Soviet Union" (Brain 2011, 2).

3 Literature as Cultural Ecology

The American anthropologist Julian Steward (1972, 36–42) introduced the concept and method of cultural ecology in 1955 in his book *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*. He used it in the context of anthropology and ethnology to investigate how environmental conditions influence human technologies and forms of production. Steward's theory was that the natural environment heavily affects the evolution of culture, including its values and mythologies. While recognizing that universal traits of human culture "are reducible to biochemical and psychological processes," Steward (ibid., 8, 31) also introduced the idea of human culture as a "super-organic factor" in the interrelationship of culture and nature, indicating the difference of mind from matter and the unique traits of human cultures.

Steward's super-organic factor of human culture is the same as what Likhachev means by the idea of people as the only creatures with language and reason. The "vital interrelatedness and yet evolutionary difference between culture and nature" is also relevant to contemporary cultural ecology (Zapf 2016b, 87). For cultural ecology, cultural processes are relatively independent, despite the sphere of human culture being "interdependent with and transfused by ecological processes" (Zapf 2010, 137).

Cultural ecology takes culture not as a binary opposite of nature but rather as a metamorphosis in an evolutionary transformation (see Bateson 2000). This is another point of convergence with *ekologiia kul'tury*, which speaks for the unity and mutual evolution of nature and culture.

In ecocritical[4] research, cultural ecology has been particularly discussed in Europe and the German-speaking world. Since the publication of the English edition of Hubert Zapf's *Literature as Cultural Ecology* and *The Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* in 2016 it is receiving wider attention. For Zapf (2016b, 27), "the thesis of a cultural ecology of literature is that imaginative

[4] Ecocriticism, or environmental criticism, is a critical perspective for the research of literature and other forms of culture that focuses on the interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman, usually acknowledging humanity's devastating impact on the biosphere (see Marland 2013).

literature *acts like an ecological force* within the larger system of culture and of cultural discourses." He claims that "literature can itself be described as the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of cultural ecology" (ibid., 89). This means that being a medium of cultural self-renewal, literature has an evolutionary function inside culture.

Steward understood cultural ecology as a multilinear process, where the effects of the environment do not have a deterministic causality on culture but rather create possibilities for it. Zapf emphasizes that literature can also create new possibilities for culture. By acting like an ecological force within the larger system of cultural discourses, literature contributes to the evolution of ecological thinking. The parallel of the interrelationship between environment and culture, and literature and culture is not perfect, for the limiting effects of the environment are greater than that of literature. Further, Terry Gifford (2018, 225) has criticized Zapf for theorizing the obvious when he states that literature has the power to create "transgressive counter-discourses to prevailing economic-technoscientific forms of modernization and globalization." Nevertheless, it is useful to examine how literature acts like an ecological force, because literature not only illustrates existing environmental knowledge, but also produces new ecological understandings. We can only develop toward something that we can imagine.

There are four fundamental similarities in the premises of *ekologiia kul'tury* and cultural ecology. First, they share the idea of human cultures evolving in close relations with their environment so that the environment has a defining effect on human culture and vice-versa. Second, they both argue against the dualist understanding of culture and nature being oppositional. Third, they both see vital differences in mind and matter, and these differences make human cultures unique among the more-than-human world.

The fourth similarity relates to the concepts of the Anthropocene and the homosphere. Cultural ecology recognizes that the interrelationship of nature and culture has evolved to the point that human culture now acts as a geological force in its environment—hence the notion of the Anthropocene, which Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000) coined in 2000. The Anthropocene means a supposed geological epoch that the earth has entered due to major impacts of human activities. Likhachev (2000, 92) bases his conclusions on the same hypotheses,

but he has another name for the Anthropocene: the homosphere (*gomosfera*), a term that he coined in 1984. It is his extension for Vladimir Vernadskii's noosphere (*noosfera*).

Vernadskii, who—together with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Edouard Le Roy—developed the notion of the noosphere, was an early twentieth-century Russian-Ukrainian-Soviet geochemist, mineralogist and philosopher of natural sciences as well as the originator of biogeochemistry, and his work on the biosphere was groundbreaking. Vernadskii (1991, 20, 43) defined the noosphere as a new and irreversible stage in the evolution of the biosphere and stated that "the main geological force that is producing the noosphere is the growth of scientific knowledge." Vernadskii (ibid., 126) writes that the "biogeochemical energy" that initiates the change of the biosphere to the noosphere is the "energy of human culture," but conceptually, the noosphere refers to mental development of living organisms in general. While for Vernadskii the noosphere is a sphere where reason is a geological force in the natural world, Likhachev's homosphere emphasizes that this force is specifically human.

Vernadskii (1999, 99) was optimistic about the potential of the noosphere and humankind's ability to use its capacity to act as a large-scale geological force for the prosperity of the biosphere: "He [man] can and must rebuild the province of his life by his world and thought, rebuild it radically in comparison with the past. Wider and wider creative possibilities open before him. It may be that the generation of our grandchildren will approach their blossoming." In Stalin's Soviet Union, this was understood as a world, where industrialization and technology work as a medium for human control over the natural world (Bassin 2016, 118). In the 1960s–1970s, the controversial historian, geographer and ethnologist Lev Gumilev criticized Vernadskii's ideas as destructive for the biosphere due to their "Promethean impulse" that had led to "large-scale pollution and despoliation of the natural world across the Soviet Union" (ibid., 132). However, Vernadskii (1999, 99] was also aware of the destructive potential of the noosphere: "Man now must take more and more measures to preserve for future generations the wealth of the seas, which so far have belonged to nobody."

Criticism toward Vernadskii's noosphere, such as Gumilev's, is probably one of the reasons why Likhachev introduced his idea of the homosphere, which better contains humanity's impact and responsibility during the new era. The concepts of the Anthropocene and the homosphere are

practically equivalent. Indeed, the noosphere is an important antecedent of the Anthropocene (Steffen et al. 2011), and when Russian parlance refers to the noosphere, it usually means something more akin to Likhachev's homosphere.

Despite the common premises and identical names, *ekologiia kul'tury* and cultural ecology have fundamental differences, and the concept of *naturfilosofskaia proza* is central to them.

4 Naturfilosofskaia proza

The Russian term *naturfilosofskaia proza* denotes prose that takes a natural-philosophical position. This literature has received much attention in Russian academia, which has discussed its connections to the natural-philosophical tradition in Russia. In 1976, a series of interconnected stories by Viktor Astaf'ev was published under the title *Queen Fish* (*Tsar'-ryba*). These 12 stories are set on and around the Yenisei River in Siberia, and they take a critical position on how the modernization-driven Soviet state had treated its environment. Many literary scholars and critics saw the work's connection to the Russian natural-philosophical tradition. Critic Feliks Kuznetsov (1976) coined the term *naturfilosofskaia proza* in his review of Astaf'ev's work in the journal *Literaturnaia Rossiia*: "The book is philosophical, or rather (to update and modernize the old terminology) natural-philosophical prose… ." It is not immediately clear what Kuznetsov means by describing Astaf'ev's prose "natural-philosophical"—nevertheless, the term stuck, and later, many Russian literary scholars have used it in their research of various Russian writers.

Another key term in the research of representations of nature and the relationship of nature and culture in Russian literature is *chuvstvo prirody*, which translates to "feeling for nature," "sense of nature," or "sensation of nature." The origins of both terms lie in the German philosophy and geography of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most notably Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) and his *Naturphilosophie*, and Alexander von Humboldt's (1769–1859) idea of *Naturgefühl*. Schelling's fundamental idea was that nature is a unified, self-organizing, and organic whole (Stone 2015, 2), and every individual in nature is an expression of this whole (Wilke 2015, 60). Humboldt (1866, 21), on the other hand, extensively examines "the difference of feeling excited by the contemplation of nature at different epochs and among different races of men"—their *Naturgefühl*.

Schelling's and Humboldt's ideas spread early on in Russia, and have ever since been used by many scholars and philosophers. It is not worthwhile here to go to the history of their evolution in Russia,[5] because Schelling's and Humboldt's concepts are only the starting points of the contemporary understandings of *naturfilosofiia* and *chuvstvo prirody*. Despite its origins in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, there is a marked difference when Russian literary research writes about *naturfilosofiia*. This becomes evident in Alfiia Smirnova's (2009, 10–11) definition of *naturfilosofiia*: "the etymological equivalent of the philosophy of nature, a set of philosophical attempts to interpret and explain nature with the purpose of obtaining knowledge about the relations and patterns of natural phenomena."

Smirnova's definition is far more general than what Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* implies. It does not presuppose any of his ideas about nature as one big whole, nor of nature's agency or nature as a process. Virtually any study on the essence of nature falls under this definition. Nataliia Kovtun (2015, 7) notes that by *naturfilosofiia* Smirnova refers to the "mythopoetic beginnings of the works and their writers' tendency to view the natural world as a 'thinking cosmos'." Larisa Sokolova (2005, 47) mentions three specifics of Russian natural-philosophical prose: it gives nature intrinsic value, it deals with socio-ethical questions, and it is oriented toward mythopoetic traditions. Elena Bondarenko's (2010, 4) description of the essence of *naturfilosofskaia proza* is similar to Smirnova's: "the question of the interactions of people and nature, and the degree of their kinship." Kinship here refers to the feeling of a universal togetherness of all beings on Earth, and one goal of *naturfilosofskaia proza* is to study the ethical dimensions of that kinship. The connections to Schelling's philosophy lie in the interest in this kinship.

The concept of *chuvstvo prirody* was also reinvented in literary research done in Russia in the 1990s. The Russian idea of *chuvstvo prirody* aligns closely with *naturfilosofiia*, while Humboldt does not refer to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in his presentation of *Naturgefühl*. Liudmila Gurlenova (1999, 23) writes about the ideological (*mirovozzrencheskii*) aspect of *chuvstvo prirody*. This is essentially the same that Humboldt—and later Alfred Biese (1892)—meant by *Naturgefühl*. However, Gurlenova (1999, 25) treats this aspect as a synonym for the philosophy of nature

[5] Liudmila Gurlenova (1999, 4–37) does that in the introductory chapter of her dissertation on *chuvstvo prirody* in the Russian prose of the 1920s–1930s.

(*filosofiia prirody*), because "understanding of nature is closely connected to philosophical questions" and sensual, emotional, and aesthetic perceptions of nature are connected to the human psyche. This connection is the reason for the great interest in *chuvstvo prirody* in Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza*.

It is this natural-philosophical understanding of *chuvstvo prirody* that connects *ekologiia kul'tury* to *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and it is the connection with *naturfilosofskaia proza* that gives the distinctively Russian character to *ekologiia kul'tury*, separating it from cultural ecology. I will next provide nuanced reasoning for these arguments, and illustrate them with examples from Russian literature where representations of rivers illuminate the interconnections of *naturfilosofskaia proza* and *ekologiia kul'tury*.

5 Connections of *naturfilosofskaia proza* and *ekologiia kul'tury*

Like Likhachev's *ekologiia kul'tury*, *naturfilosofskaia proza* treats ecology as a moral question, and looks to the past to provide good models for how people can live in harmony with their environment, emphasizing, like Likhachev, Orthodox Christian traditions. The philosophical system of *naturfilosofskaia proza* is similar to *ekologiia kul'tury.* Below, I will illustrate these arguments with examples from late Soviet *naturfilosofskaia proza*, paying attention to how the river exemplifies this connection.

The writers of so-called village prose (*derevenskaia proza*) in the 1960s–1980s are often seen as the core representatives of *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and Viktor Astaf'ev was one of their figureheads. As for Likhachev, also for *naturfilosofskaia proza* ecology is first and foremost a moral question. It is exactly because of the philosophical handling of the moral questions concerning the kinship of people and the nonhuman world that Smirnova (2009) calls *Queen Fish* Astaf'ev's "natural-philosophical manifesto." Astaf'ev indeed earned a reputation as a moralist (Brown 1993, 87–8).

To examine the moralist overtones of *Queen Fish*, we can explore its representations of the river. The main character of the eponymous story is Ignatich, a poacher fisherman. He is well respected in his community and a very skilled mechanic. However, he is also a poacher, who does not respect the strict Soviet conservation laws. Inside he carries a horrendous secret: in his youth,

in a fit of jealousy, he raped a girl he fancied. His guilt is so oppressive that he blocks the memory of the event from himself. While poaching on the Yenisei, Ignatich catches the largest sturgeon he has ever caught. However, the "Queen Fish" is too heavy for him, but in his will-to-power over nature due to the greed that had "seized him" and made him forget "the man in him", he cannot let it go (Astafiev 1982, 184). Finally, the sturgeon drags him in the river, where the fish and the fisherman seemingly fatally entangle in Ignatich's web of hooks.

The river works here as a metaphorical "River of Death," which possesses the ability to punish people for their immoral behavior—such as inconsiderate poaching, which is rampant in the novel. The poacher is a metaphor for humankind, while the fish is a metaphor for nature (Perkiömäki 2017, 152–3). However, the river also offers salvation. Faced with imminent death in the river, Ignatich remembers his old sin, asks for repentance from the fish, the river, and the whole of nature.[6] Soon the half-dead fish powerfully breaks away from the hooks, also setting the fisherman free. The sudden turn of events is a sign that the river possesses the power not only to punish but also to forgive and purify those who repent.

Another key figure of village prose was Valentin Rasputin, whose environmentalist texts since the 1970s also emphasize humanity's moral responsibility for the state of the environment. Rasputin summarizes his position in a 1988 essay when writing about the lands that were submerged by the reservoirs of huge hydropower plants in Siberia: "And together with the forest, under the water went also the national morals..." (Razuvalova 2015, 339). He saw the destruction of ecosystems and the exponential depletion of natural resources as the borderline situation between life and death, to which humankind has come having chosen the wrong, destructive path of development (Kaminskii 2013, 195).

In Rasputin's first environmental text, the 1972 travel essay "Downstream and Upstream" ("Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu"), moral questions are connected especially to the lack of the river. The autobiographical protagonist Viktor has lived in the city for five years, away from his native village, which used to be on the banks of a major Siberian river. In his absence, the village has

[6] The parallel between exploitation of nature and rape can be problematized from (eco)feminist perspective. Gendered nature in Astafiev's novel deserves more attention, which is not possible in this article. Here my point is merely to illustrate that Astafiev's river connects to moral questions.

been submerged by the huge reservoir of a new hydropower plant. People were forced to move to a new settlement close to the reservoir but far away from a river. Viktor travels downstream to his native lands, observing the changes in the environment and the people. Overnight, he arrives from the river to the reservoir. The narrator notes how "the river choked and drowned in the indifferent gulf of water that lay before it," and continues by minutely describing the negative features of the motionless reservoir water (Rasputin 1982, 401). Viktor notes that the most drastic negative change in the life of the people is the absence of the river, and one of the story's main messages is that the environmental justice rights of the people have been violated due to the lack of the river—the people simply do not know how to live without it (Perkiömäki 2018).

Naum Leiderman and Mark Lipovetskii (2008, 63) also underline the moralist overtones of village prose by emphasizing that the movement's remarkability does not lie in the village setting but in the revival of what they call "traditional morals." To denote those writers who study the spiritual foundations of the Russians, they use the same term as that used by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (2000)—*nravstvenniki*, which loosely translates as "moralists." Likhachev (2000, 215) also notes that the works of these writers "make one anxious, arouse, make one think, call for civil responsibility." Essential parts of these "traditional morals" are the supposed feeling of kinship and equality of all living beings and a human culture that lives in an assumed harmony with its environment. Its antithesis is the idea of humanity as the "sovereign of nature" ("*tsar' prirody*"), which is often ironically used in *naturfilosofskaia proza.* Astaf´ev's (1982, 180) *Queen Fish* summarizes its main message in one sentence, "The sovereign of the river and the sovereign of all nature—in the same trap," when narrating the battle of the sturgeon and the poacher in the river. Whether the traditional morals of the Russian or Siberian countryside are actually based on kinship and equality is another question, but this idea is central to both *ekologiia kul'tury* and *naturfilosofskaia proza*.

The "traditional morals" of *naturfilosofskaia proza* connect to Russian culture. Soviet village prose has repeatedly been connected to Russian nationalism. Yitzhak Brudny (1999, 8–13) categorizes village prose writers and the journals where their works were published to liberals, conservatives, and radicals, according to the character of their nationalism. For Brudny (1999, 11) liberal nationalists differed from conservative nationalists, among other things, in that they "did not idealize the traditional Russian village as the embodiment of Russia's moral values." Astaf´ev

and Rasputin, together with Vasilii Belov, formed the core of the conservative nationalist wing, and have been connected to chauvinistic and ethnically oriented Russian nationalism.

Econationalism refers to a form of nationalism that masks behind an environmentalist agenda. Jane Dawson (1996) introduced the concept, which has usually been connected to nationalist movements in various Soviet republics in the last years of the USSR. Nicolai Dronin and John Francis (2018, 52) argue that "Soviet village prose was a form of econationalism," which is not true environmentalism. Douglas Weiner (1999, 429–30) notes that the nationalist environmentalist current, who "envisioned the rehabilitation of Russian culture—especially rural culture—and morality," deserves much credit for the environmentalist achievements of the late Soviet period. Nevertheless, to label all village prose as econationalism is a generalization. A significant part of village prose does not handle environmental issues at all, and even the works that concentrate on ecology vary in their level and quality of nationalism.

Specifically, Sergei Zalygin, who was one of the most notable writers of the liberal nationalist wing of village prose (Brudny 1999, 200), can hardly be considered an econationalist. As Weiner (1999, 427–8) points out, Zalygin was a Russian patriot, but not in an exclusivist sense—his opposition to the Party bureaucrats was not because of their threat to Russian culture and Russian rural folk, but for their negative effects on science and intellectual life. In the 1970s, Zalygin sometimes strategically capitalized on his close relations with the conservative nationalists, but this does not mean a "warping of genuine environmentalism into econationalism" that Dronin and Francis (2018, 63) argue for. As Anna Razuvalova (2015, 285) explains, Zalygin consistently continued to base his arguments on science. This is evident in his early post-Soviet novel *Ekologicheskii roman* ("An Environmental Novel", 1993), which presents his *alter ego* Nikolai Golubev as a person who has devoted his life to environmentalism, especially river protection (see Perkiömäki 2020).

Even among the conservatives, the econationalist stigma can be challenged. The central hero of *Queen Fish*, hunter Akim, is half Dolgan, and Rasputin has also written about life of the Tofalars. Especially in the case of Akim, who does not practice poaching and who is a person of high moral standards also in his relationships to people, the fact that he was raised by an indigenous single mother is not insignificant for the novel's natural-philosophical moral.

Although, Akim's indigenous heritage is more connected to his inborn ability to "live in harmony" with nature rather than to the morals of the indigenous peoples that have inhabited Siberia for ages. This is also visible in how his Dolgan mother is depicted as similar to northern animals and plants: she eats bread "sighing like a female reindeer" and "bloomed in every branch and root of her body" while nursing her newborn (Astafiev 1982, 241–2).

Various scholars have depicted the character of Dmitrii Likhachev's nationalism. Brudny (1999, 199, 202) places him firmly in the liberal nationalist camp. Weiner (1999, 427) notes that he was a defender of Russian culture, but also a citizen of the world. Others, such as Vladislav Zubok (2017, X), remind that while Likhachev loved his country, he had a "dynamic, open, and liberal" idea of Russia. Dronin and Francis (2018, 64) see him as a scholar "rather than a nationalist." These views demonstrate the multifaceted character of Likhachev's extensive work. Evidently, Likhachev was an important authority for the *nravstvenniki* (Razuvalova 2015, 122). The similarities between *ekologiia kul'tury* and *naturfilosofskaia proza* are an embodiment of this connection. Whether *ekologiia kul'tury* is a form of econationalism, remains an open question.

Another feature linking village prose to *ekologiia kul'tury* is the attention to the past in the search for moral modes of living. This "radiant past" is a key feature of village prose (see Parthé 1992). The emphasis on the past has often been connected to conservative positions, to which the writers have not objected. An autobiographical character of Belov's (1986) novel *Vse vperedi* ("Everything is Ahead") proudly declares, "I am a conservative." Valentin Rasputin dubbed himself a conservative, and Razuvalova (2015, 329) describes his influential 1976 novella *Farewell to Matyora* (*Proshchanie s Matëroi*) as "environmental in form, conservative in content." Astaf'ev's *Queen Fish* also conveys a preference for the past over the modern. Akim has inherited the delicate skill of living in harmony with nature from earlier generations, while the main antihero, Goga Gertsev, is a modern person who believes in science and progress, and perishes due to his blinkered confidence in them (Astafiev 1982, 328). Goga meets his fate by drowning in the river, reflecting the work's metaphor of the "River of Death," and underlining the river's role as a punisher of behavior that violates the conservative values of the countryside.

Village prose writers who also write *naturfilosofskaia proza* often combine environmentalist values with the supposed traditional values of the Russian countryside. This has

resulted in yet another term to denote the literature, *traditsionalistskaia proza* ("traditional prose"). According to Kovtun (2015, 8–9), this term denotes the emphasis to restore a link to the culture of the past and the inclination to bring old legends, spiritual poems, and hagiographic texts to the contemporary context.

Finally, the emphasis on Christian traditions is also evident in *naturfilosofskaia proza*. In the eponymous story of *Queen Fish*, the repentant Ignatich asks for forgiveness for his sins from the giant sturgeon, and the fish finally remits the poacher's sins and sets him free. As the sign of the fish is a symbol of Christ, the story's connection to Christian traditions is clear. The connection becomes even more evident when Ignatich calls for Jesus, asks the Lord to set him apart the fish, and regrets throwing away his grandfather's icons (Astafiev 1982, 179–80). Christian motifs appear also in details, such as the name of the village Boganida, a utopian image of the northern past. "Bog" refers to God, and the name of the village means "a gift of God" (Kovtun 2015, 273). In the episode "The Dewdrop," the narrator overnights in a remote forest, which gives him the feeling that "one can well come to believe in angels, and eternal bliss, and the withering away of evil, and the resurrection of the soul" (Astafiev 1982, 81). Another connection is the quotation of the first eight verses of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, which Astaf′ev included at the end of *Queen Fish*;[7] it even has a hidden environmentalist message to it, because later the same chapter declares: "humans have no advantage over the animals" (Eccl 3:19 [NRSV]).

One of the central motifs of Rasputin's *Farewell to Matyora* is similar to the idea of Boganida as a gift of God: the island of Matyora as a "promised land" that connects with the Old Believers, Orthodox Christians who were anathemized and persecuted in the seventeenth century (Kovtun 2009, 324). Other Christian motifs in the novella include the protagonist Daria, who is able to hear the voice of God, and the village church, which is associated with the first church of Old Russia, Saint Sophia's Cathedral in Kiev (ibid., 326–7).

While the moralist overtones and the attention to the past connect with the river in Astaf′ev and Rasputin, the river does not play a major role in their emphasis on Christianity. This might seem odd, but it is logical. Unlike in some other cultures, the river is not usually connected

[7] The efforts needed for inserting the verses in the published text were enormous (Shtil'mark 1992, 444).

with sanctity in Russia. A search in the main Russian search engine Yandex for "*sviashchennaia reka*" ("sacred river") results in descriptions mostly of the Ganges, but also of the Jordan, the Urubamba, the Brahmaputra, and other rivers around the world, but no Russian rivers. In the *naturfilosofskaia proza* that I have studied, there is only one river referred to as "sacred": the Nile in Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*. The lack of sacred meanings attached to the Russian river is an issue worth researching, but it is not possible here.

This concludes my first thesis, namely that Likhachev's *ekologiia kul'tury*, which shares the premises of cultural ecology, diverges from the Western concept by the philosophical features that it shares with Russian *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and that the river in *naturfilosofskaia proza* exemplifies these diverging features. Next, I will show how despite this, *naturfilosofskaia proza* can be read also as cultural ecology.

6 *Naturfilosofskaia proza* as an ecological force

Zapf (2016b, 95–121) proposes a triadic functional model of literature as cultural ecology. This model is useful for my work, because it helps to characterize the specifics of Russian literature as cultural ecology. Below, my aim is to outline the role played by the river in Astaf'ev, Rasputin and Zalygin. Based on this analysis, I examine what we can say about their literature as cultural ecology. While Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman* is undoubtedly *naturfilosofskaia proza*, it has less connections to *ekologiia kul'tury* than Rasputin's and Astaf'ev's works. However, it connects very well with the idea of literature as cultural ecology.

In its function as a culture-critical metadiscourse, literature responds to dominant civilizational reality-systems and their hegemonic discursive regimes by exposing what kind of petrifications, coercive pressures, and traumatizing effects they have (Zapf 2016b, 103–4). By critically assessing the prevailing hegemonic and normative discursive regimes, literature can expose their hidden metadiscourses. This does not necessarily mean a direct and oppositional criticism, but it can expose the traumatizing effects of dominant civilizational reality-systems that are maintained by the discursive regimes. In Zapf's (2016b, 104) American material, these discursive practices "are associated with overpowering conformist pressures on the individual and

are frequently expressed in the imagery of death-in-life, wasteland, stasis, uniformity, vicious circles, and psychic or physical imprisonment."

Naturfilosofskaia proza often describes the repressive Soviet hegemonic environmental discursive regimes and thus works as a culture-critical metadiscourse. As in the works that Zapf studied, the conformist pressures are often connected to depictions of imprisonment. In Rasputin's *Farewell to Matyora*, imprisonment foregrounds the Siberian riverside village communities' denied right to "share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment," as Adamson, Evans, and Stein (2002, 4) define environmental justice. Matyora is an island in the Angara River, and after the decision to build the Bratsk hydropower plant, it becomes a prison from which the villagers cannot escape. Those who move away find themselves alienated from the river, which was crucial for their old way of living, and their environmental justice rights violated. The ones who choose to stay on their island-home will be submerged by the water reservoir. These motifs are also heavily present in Rasputin's "Downstream and Upstream" (Perkiömäki 2018). Imprisonment also plays a part in Rasputin's 1974 novella *Live and Remember* (*Zhivi i pomni*), where the main character Andrei, a deserter in World War II, is forced to live secretly on the side of the river opposite the village community. His alienation due to isolation goes so far that gradually he loses his human features. The oppressive conditions that cause traumatizing effects, which eventually lead to Andrei's fiancé Nastena's suicide by drowning in the river, are in this case inside the home village that turned against Andrei.

A different kind of imprisonment, resembling paralysis, features in Astaf'ev's *Queen Fish*'s eponymous story. When Ignatich and the "Queen Fish" fight for their lives in the river water, the paralyzing hooks become a prison for them both, and there seems to be no escape. The lethally dangerous situation reveals to Ignatich the detrimental effects of the normative discourse of machine-enabled modernization and humanity's indifferent abuse of natural resources.

Literature's function as a culture-critical metadiscourse is present throughout Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*, which offers episodes from Soviet environmental history. In the episode "The Nile: Sacred River," Soviet engineers are building the huge Aswan High Dam on the Nile in the 1960s. The dam means the death of the river for the autobiographical narrator, who speaks about sacrificing the river and about its funeral (Zalygin 1993, 51). Later in the episode "+30," in the

early 1990s, the narrator travels to the Pripyat River. He sees how heavily it was contaminated by radionuclides after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 and becomes suicidal. Even though he ultimately decides not to end his life, his condition is a consequence of the biophobic civilizational system that has produced grave environmental consequences, the effects of which he experiences through negative changes in the river environment.

By literature as imaginative counter-discourse, Zapf (2016b, 108) means a response to the culture-critical metadiscourse. Literature can build up a "counter-discursive dynamic," and foreground and semiotically empower the imaginative energy of the culturally excluded and marginalized (ibid.). This means giving a voice to the muted by creating alternative worlds, where the culturally excluded is associated with an ecosemiotic agency and works up a counterforce to the cultural reality system. In Zapf's (2016b, 109) material, this connects, among other things, with images of nature and biophilic intensity.

Naturfilosofskaia proza gives a voice to the muted and builds counter-discourses to resist the hegemonic repressive discourses. One of *Farewell to Matyora*'s characters is Kolia, a five-year old boy who is "not mute like his mother, but speaks poorly and little" (Rasputin 1981a, 15). Along with the old women that are his caretakers, he is one of those who remain on the island even when the water starts to rise. When the women realize that they might drown together with the island, one of them panics: "The boy should be shoved off from here. The boy must live" (ibid., 159). His grandmother is strictly against, however: "No, I will not give away Kolia. We are together" (ibid.). The quality of the women's resistance is passive, but they are ready to die for their cause and take the boy along. It is hard to think of a more direct way of giving voice to the muted. The village women belong to the group of the muted, and while the physically (almost) mute one is a little boy, it is tempting to read it as a sign that life for future generations looks bleak.

The counter-discourse is present also throughout Rasputin's "Downstream and Upstream." The autobiographical narrator travels the river down to the reservoir and the new settlement, spending the summer there. After learning how dramatically village life has changed, he travels back upstream to the city. Interestingly, Rasputin's original title of the story was "Vniz po

techeniiu" ("Downstream").[8] However, he changed it soon after the initial publication to include the "Upstream" part. The new title gives the story a more positive character: it refers to the possibility of not just passing downstream along the flow of progressive modernity, but also going upstream, resisting the modern belief in perpetual progress that leads to the profligate use of natural resources (Perkiömäki 2018, 319–20).

In the story "The Dewdrop" of *Queen Fish*, the motif of travelling against the flow of the river also holds important meanings that create a new imaginative counter-discourse. The autobiographical narrator laboriously rows upstream the small Oparikha River to find a perfect place for fishing. This could be viewed as humans gaining victory over nature by travelling against the flow of the river (see McMillin 2011, 61–4). In Astaf'ev's story, however, it has the opposite meaning, because the catharsis is not in finding the perfect fishing grounds. Rather, it takes place when the narrator overnights in the forest. He stays awake all night in the camp; he experiences a powerful spiritual awakening and feeling of unity with his environment because of the pristine nature around him. He understands "man's vile doings in the taiga" (Astafiev 1982, 76) and identifies himself with the more-than-human world in a new way that would not have been possible without the arduous travel up the river (Perkiömäki 2017, 160–1).

Giving voice to the marginalized is also part of *Queen Fish*'s discourse. It draws attention to the position of fish by noting that if they could cry, "all rivers and seas would echo with their weeping" due to the blatant exploitation of their living environment by humans (Astafiev 1982, 126). The eponymous episode also foregrounds a discourse that has been—purposely or unintentionally—concealed. This takes place when Ignatich, on the verge of death, finally regrets his old sin. He had repressed the guilt of the rape he committed in his youth like the Soviet state had repressed the guilt of its superfluous exploitation of natural resources. Other direct counter-discourses that the story gives voice to are Christianity, as I discussed above, as well as the wisdom of older generations. Only on the verge of death does Ignatich realize that it was a grave mistake to not listen to his superstitious grandfather's advice of letting the "Queen Fish" go if he ever catches it (ibid., 184–5).

[8] This is also the title used in the only English translation available.

In *Ekologicheskii roman*, the counter-discursive dynamic appears in its focus on Vernadskii. Zalygin had a few years earlier written about the need for what he calls "noosphere stories" (*noosfericheskii rasskaz*):

> Until recently, a story or a narrative about nature was a "biospheric" story, a story of repose, of a person disposing of his woes in nature and getting rest for his body and soul, mind and flesh, gathering strength. Now, however, nature demands enormous noospheric efforts for its (and our own) preservation. This also calls for noosphere stories, and the responsibility for the change lies not with nature, but you and me. (Zalygin 1987, 52)

Zalygin's idea of noosphere stories is the closest Russian equivalent to Anthropocene fiction, and all the works I discuss here can be considered noosphere stories. The main difference is that while Anthropocene fiction usually refers to fiction that deals with the effects of anthropogenic climate change (see Trexler 2015),[9] noosphere stories are about any human-induced change on the planet. Climate change is still to date a rarely handled issue in Russian literature.

Zalygin's novel juxtaposes Vernadskii's understanding of nature with the one of the hegemonic, modernist, materialist, and positivist view of the Soviet state. The idea is that the Soviet state saw only instrumental value in nature, rejecting Vernadskii's pioneering work on the noosphere.[10] In the novel, this is the main cause for the immense environmental destruction in the Soviet Union, which turned the "River of Life" into a "River of Death" (Perkiömäki 2020, 14–17). Although there was renewed interest in Russia in the ideas of the founders of Soviet environmentalism—including Vernadskii's—after Stalin's death (Josephson et al. 2013, 243), Zalygin's novel hints that Vernadskii's views on nature had not been embraced at the decision-

[9] One might wonder whether the term "Anthropocene fiction" should also refer to literature that does not solely deal with climate change, since the term "climate change fiction" also exists. According to Adam Trexler (2015, 4), "Anthropocene" better emphasizes the scientific beginnings of literature about climate change. The term "Anthropocene fiction" in the context of climate change is confusing because climate change is not the only consequence of the Anthropocene.

[10] Vernadskii's views are not devoid of instrumentalist understandings of nature either. One example is his involvement in the development of Soviet nuclear industry. Nevertheless, in *Ekologicheskii roman* this side of Vernadskii is not present.

making level even in the early post-Soviet period. Thus, the novel associates Vernadskii's excluded science with ecosemiotic agency.

Literature's third function in Zapf's model, reintegrative interdiscourse, connects the hegemonic metadiscourse exposed by culture-critical literature to the imaginative counter-discourse created by imaginative literature. It can do this in both conflictive and transformative ways while at the same time contributing to the "constant renewal of the cultural center from its margins" (Zapf 2016b, 114). In this way, literature can integrate separate domains of knowledge and experience, and work as a conciliatory mediator between polarized perspectives (cf. Garrard 2016). Zapf (2016b, 115) notes that in American literature, the "reintegrative dimension in a transformative dynamics of narrative texts … constitutes a tentative ground for systemic self-corrections and for potential new beginnings."

In *naturfilosofskaia proza*, the river is an active agent that is not only an object of human actions but whose actions affect both the human and the nonhuman world. Not only does the river connect human space to the nonhuman space, but the texts also connect their imaginative counter-discourse to the hegemonic metadiscourse through the river. Notably, this does not hold with Rasputin's *Live and Remember* and *Farewell to Matyora*. The reason could be especially the latter's dystopian character, because in a dystopian narrative, the focus is rarely in the integration of polarized perspectives but rather in the gap between the hegemonic and the marginalized discourses.

Rasputin's "Downstream and Upstream" is not devoid of dystopian elements either, but its reintegrative potential is greater than that of the two novellas because of the changes in the autobiographical protagonist, who is transformed along his journey from the city to the countryside along the river. When the riverboat arrives where his home village used to be, his initial anticipation of returning there changes to desolate disappointment and a realization of the irrevocability of the old village life due to the native lands having been submerged by a reservoir. He finds that life is completely different in the new settlement. He hears much lamentation by the locals, and he is desperately sad about the loss. He also sees that, despite the locals' apocalyptic talk, life in the new settlement continues. The end of the world and the loss of the old way of living in the Siberian countryside is not as palpable as in *Farewell to Matyora*. There is a sense of an

opportunity for a new beginning at the crossroads of Soviet modernization and traditional village life—or there would be, were it not for the absence of the river in the new settlement.

In Astaf'ev's *Queen Fish*, Ignatich's hubris in his disastrous quest to overcome the sturgeon resembles that of Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. The entangled poacher and fish are a blunt reference to the similar "indissoluble entanglement between man and nature" that Zapf (2016b, 117) notes of Ahab, who becomes ensnared with the whale by his own harpoon and is pulled into the ocean. In *Queen Fish*, however, after the Ignatich's repentance the fish breaks free and swims away, also freeing the badly hurt fisherman. Ignatich feels better "because of a kind of liberation," and utters: "Go on, fish. Live as long as you can! I won't tell anyone about you!" (Astafiev 1982, 189) Through Ignatich's regeneration, the story brings together two separated spheres, the culturally central Soviet discourse of humanity's duty to subjugate nature to its rule, and the marginal environmentalist discourse, where humanity is a part of nature and has a moral responsibility to protect the more-than-human world. In the story "The Dewdrop," the narrator's spiritual awakening while staying awake overnight in the forest camp, meditatively watching a dewdrop about to fall and thinking about environmental degradation caused by humanity is another transformative example of *Queen Fish*'s reintegrative interdiscourse. The autobiographical narrator is both the agent and the object of the transformative dynamics of the story.

In Zalygin's *Ekologicheskii roman*, the reintegrative dimension is not evident due to its sharp antagonism of the hegemonic geographical understandings of the Soviet state and the repressed science of Vernadskii and his predecessors. However, in one of its key scenes, Golubev, an environmentalist hydroengineer, envisions meeting a group of nineteenth-century Russian geographers on the Pripyat River, which was badly contaminated in the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (Zalygin 1993, 86–8). The geographers blame Golubev for the damage and ask him a series of questions concerning the causes and consequences of the catastrophe, because they think his generation is responsible by letting Stalinism thrive in Russia. They seem to think that the Stalinist understanding of nature as having only instrumental value is the primary cause of the Chernobyl accident. Golubev himself is first defensive and asks why they blame him, an ordinary citizen, rather than those who were in the decision-making organs: "I am not a main ecologist, and not the best one either. No! My possibilities today are null, absolutely null" (ibid., 87). Then he furiously starts to blame the geographers:

> Where were you yourself? When you founded the sciences of climatology, pedology, and other fields? When you wrote "Getting to know Russia"[11] and "Complete geographical description of our Fatherland"?[12] Where? Wasn't it in your times that Socialism appeared? Didn't we inherit Marxism from your generation? Tell me! Where is your objectivity? Where is your praised learnedness? You have ten questions for me, but I'll throw you a hundred! … It was convenient for you to die in due time. "Today we die, and tomorrow we will return in the memory of our descendants!" And what about us, the descendants? The future is bleak for us. You know what it smells like? It smells like malicious selfishness! (Zalygin 1993, 88)

Once recovered from his vision, Golubev becomes remorseful of his disrespectful behavior toward the doyens of geography. This does not stop him from condemning Stalinism's negative effect on the state of the Russian environment, but it does help him to better understand the complexity of the development of perceiving nature in Russia. There is no one generation to blame for Stalinism.

This concludes my second thesis, namely that *naturfilosofskaia proza* shares Zapf's ideas of literature as cultural ecology and that it has acted like an ecological force within Russian culture. Representations of the river offer a helpful perspective to explore how the non-human material world affects the ways how *naturfilosofskaia proza* works as cultural ecology.

7 Conclusion

Dmitrii Likhachev's *ekologiia kul'tury* comes close to cultural ecology in its premises. Both are based on the idea of the mutual evolutionary interrelationship of human cultures and nonhuman nature. Both, while arguing against the dualist oppositional pairing of culture and nature, also recognize the unique traits of human cultures among the more-than-human world. They both see that due to these unique traits, humankind has become a new geological force on Earth, and they both see this as problematic.

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[11] Dmitrii Mendeleev: *K poznaniiu Rossii* (1906).

[12] V. P. Semenov, P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, V. I. Lamanskii (editors): *Rossiia. Polnoe geograficheskoe opisanie nashego otechestva* (11 volumes, 1899–1913).

Despite the common premises, *ekologiia kul'tury* significantly differs from cultural ecology in how it sees the consequences of the common evolutionary history of nature and culture. Instead of stressing literature's function as an ecological force, *ekologiia kul'tury* emphasizes the importance of human morals and draws on traditions based on Christian ideology for good examples. *Ekologiia kul'tury* shares these characteristics with *naturfilosofskaia proza*. Meanings of the river are an apt example to demonstrate how *naturfilosofskaia proza* stresses the moral questions and connections to the supposed age-old traditions of the Russian countryside in response to the problems raised by *ekologiia kul'tury*. The Russian river does not, however, connect significantly with Christianity or sanctity in *naturfilosofskaia proza*.

Both *ekologiia kul'tury* and *naturfilosofskaia proza* emerged in the 1970s. This partially explains why they overlap significantly as the same social, cultural and environmental conditions of the period affected them. During the last two decades before the emergence of these concepts, Soviet researchers had gained a good understanding of how vast the scale of the effects of human activities in the Soviet environment was. Already in 1960, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union had adopted a resolution that named many of the country's major rivers as "immensely polluted" (Sovet Ministrov SSSR 1960). Open public discussion of environmental problems was not, however, possible due to the authoritarian character of the Soviet state. Writers of prose were allowed to more openly write about these problems, which is why *naturfilosofskaia proza* gained much prominence in discussion of environmental issues.

One topic was the plan to turn the flow of major Siberian rivers to the south, which Likhachev opposed (Ponyrko 2006, 582; Weiner 1999, 421; Zubok 2017, 134–5). His *ekologiia kul'tury* emerged in these conditions, and therefore it is understandable that it comes close to the philosophical system of *naturfilosofskaia proza*. Nonetheless, it is striking that Likhachev, a luminary in Slavic history and philology, considered ecology a moral question, like the founders of the Western environmental movement in the 1960s. Even though late Soviet environmentalism emerged independently of the international movement, it shared these moralist overtones with it.

Although *naturfilosofskaia proza* contains the aforementioned features of *ekologiia kul'tury*, which differentiate the latter from cultural ecology, it can also be read as cultural ecology, and it is a potential ecological force within Russian culture. This shows that also the

environmental literature that was produced in Soviet Russia had significant similarities to that of the West. According to my analysis, writings about rivers in *naturfilosofskaia proza* are illustrative also in light of Hubert Zapf's triadic functional model of literature as cultural ecology. This holds especially for culture-critical metadiscourse and imaginative counter-discourse. *Naturfilosofskaia proza*'s function as a reintegrative interdiscourse also often connects with the river, but only in non-dystopian narratives.

Naturfilosofskaia proza represents both Russian cultural ecology in the way that cultural ecology has been defined in the West and Russian *ekologiia kul'tury* as Dmitrii Likhachev understood it. Studying representations of the river illuminates both of these aspects of *naturfilosofskaia proza*.

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