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## **Rivers of Noosphere Stories: Russian Natural-Philosophical Prose as Cultural Ecology**

Ecology is a moral question.

—Dmitrii Likhachev, *Ruskaia kul'tura*

### **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.

### ***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” (*npravstvennaia 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”<sup>1</sup> (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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> All the translations from Russian are mine, unless otherwise noted.

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 *ekologiya 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.).<sup>2</sup>

The idea that humans and nature are intimately connected is not unique to *ekologija kul'tury* or the Russian Orthodox Church. Numerous philosophical traditions before and

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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).<sup>3</sup>

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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

## 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<sup>4</sup> 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 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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).

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.

### ***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,<sup>5</sup> because Schelling’s and Humboldt’s concepts are only the starting points of the contemporary understandings of *naturfilosofiiia* and *chuvstvo prirody*. Despite its origins in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, there is a marked difference when Russian literary research writes about *naturfilosofiiia*. This becomes evident in Alfiia Smirnova’s (2009, 10–11) definition of *naturfilosofiiia*: “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 *naturfilosofiiia* Smirnova refers

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

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 (*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 *ekologija kul’tury* to *naturfilosofskaia proza*, and it is the connection with *naturfilosofskaia proza* that gives the distinctively Russian character to *ekologija 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*.

### **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.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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.



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 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)—*npravstvenniki*, 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 *ekologija 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 *npravstvenniki* (Razuvalova 2015, 122). The similarities between *ekologična kul'tura* and *naturfilosofskaia proza* are an embodiment of this connection. Whether *ekologična kul'tura* is a form of econationalism, remains an open question.

Another feature linking village prose to *ekologična kul'tura* 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 vpered* ("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 Astafiev included at the end of *Queen Fish*;<sup>7</sup> 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 Astafiev 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 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

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<sup>7</sup> The efforts needed for inserting the verses in the published text were enormous (Shtil’mark 1992, 444).

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.

### ***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 Naste na'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").<sup>8</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> This is also the title used in the only English translation available.

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 Astafiev’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).

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),<sup>9</sup> noosphere stories are about any human-

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

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.<sup>10</sup> 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-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 ...

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

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 Astafiev'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"<sup>11</sup> and "Complete geographical description of our Fatherland"?<sup>12</sup> 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)

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<sup>11</sup> Dmitrii Mendeleev: *K poznaniiu Rossii* (1906).

<sup>12</sup> V. P. Semenov, P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, V. I. Lamanskii (editors): *Rossia. Polnoe geograficheskoe opisanie nashego otechestva* (11 volumes, 1899–1913).



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.

## **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.

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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