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**Invisible Transcendence:
Vladimir Makanin's Outsiders**

by Peter Rollberg

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INTRODUCTION

In one of his most personal short stories, "The Blue and the Red" (Goluboe i krasnoe, 1983),¹ Vladimir Makanin tells the story of how as a little boy, his protagonist Kliucharëv becomes the object of a long quarrel between his two grandmothers. One of the grandmothers is of gentry, the other of peasant stock. The title ironically refers to their respective "bloods:" the blue, aristocratic, the red, plebeian. The two old ladies, both proud of their roots and the ancient ethos they represent, confront each other shortly after the Second World War, during a year of devastating famine in the Soviet Union in 1947. They are as exhausted as they are stubborn in pursuing the last goal of their lives: gaining influence over the boy and making him into one of "their" kind. Little is the likelihood that Kliucharëv's grandmothers will survive the years to come, and they sacrifice all their material and spiritual possessions in order to secure the survival of their descendant. Ultimately, the struggle ends in a draw. What the women could not foresee, however, is that their grandson would inherit their most exceptional traits, primarily a powerful sense of pride, personal dignity, and particularity. In a mass society like that of the Soviet Union, these rare characteristics will probably prevent Kliucharëv from gaining easy access to predefined official careers, directing him instead to the intellectual margins, where life is complex, unique, and meaningful.

Makanin's relationship to Kliucharëv is of a special kind: Kliucharëv is the central character in several narratives, including the short story "Kliucharëv and Alimushkin"² (1979) and the short novel *The Trap Door*³ (Laz, 1991). The name of this character is derived from the word *kliuch*, meaning "key." Indeed, Kliucharëv's repeated appearance in Makanin's *oeuvre*, the closeness of the narrator to this character's point

1. Vladimir Makanin, "Goluboe i krasnoe," in *Predtecha* (Moscow, 1983).

2. Vladimir Makanin, "Kliucharëv i Alimushkin," in *Kliucharëv i Alimushkin* (Moscow, 1979).

3. Vladimir Makanin, "Laz," *Novyi mir* 5 (May 1991).

of view, and the introspections which he conducts more frequently than any other of Makanin's characters suggest that Kliucharëv is a key figure, perhaps even a peculiar alter ego of the author. As the fictionalized childhood memory in "The Blue and the Red" indicates, the young protagonist's education provides him with a healthy dose of individualism and a sense of particularity. Precisely these traits distinguish Vladimir Makanin himself and shape both his self-image and his position on the Russian literary scene. Makanin appears particularly sensitive to being designated as part of a group⁴ or even a generation. Critical claims that he was a "writer of everyday life⁵ (*bytopisatel*⁶)" or a member of the "Moscow school of prose authors"⁷ virtually gave him an allergic reaction. After critics like Anatolii Bocharov and Vladimir Bondarenko

4. "Some critics discerned in Makanin's first novel affinities with Young Prose, but with time he became pigeonholed as a member of the 'Moscow School.' The prose of this group, which emerged in 1979 and unites such talents as Anatoly Kim, Vladimir Orlov, and Ruslan Kireyev, typically engages in moderate formal experimentation, largely with time, space, and narrative, and focuses primarily on the average man newly transplanted to the metropolis" (Helen Goscilo, "About the authors. Vladimir Makanin," in *Glasnost. An Anthology of Russian Literature Under Gorbachev*, ed. B. Lindsay and Helen Goscilo [Ann Arbor, 1990], 461).

5. See, for example, the topical generalization of "Soviet prose describing everyday life" in Franziska Martynowa, "Izobrazhenie povsednevnoj zhizni v russkoj sovetskoj proze 80-ykh godov," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 3 (March 1986).

6. Continuing a theme that began in the nineteenth century and resurfaced again in the 1920s, Soviet literary criticism of the 1970s intensely discussed the importance of *byt*. At the time, the target of this criticism was what might be called "the Trifonov phenomenon:" the literary discovery of the essence within the unpompous, the simple, the seemingly unspectacular. "In the literary debates of the post-Stalin years the concept of *bytovaia literatura* has assumed exceptional significance because, by focusing on the 'everyday,' it implicitly rejects the ultimate purpose, the transcendent Goal, which buttresses teleological socialist realist literature. Reality is seen, and presented, not 'in the light of its revolutionary development' but for itself and its immanent meaning" (Josephine Woll, *Invented Truth. Soviet Reality and Literary Imagination in Iurii Trifonov* [Durham and London, 1991], 102-103). It is also possible that the concepts of *byt* were put forward with the intention of legitimizing a branch of Soviet prose that was ideologically risqué, for it described a frightening amount of trivial reality (according to previous standards of Socialist Realism) without fitting it into the appropriate satirical, accusatory ("anti-philistine") patterns offered by Soviet literary discourses.

7. German critic Klaus-Peter Walter maintains that writers like Makanin and Trifonov intentionally separated themselves from "Village Prose" and therefore chose urban subjects for their narratives. See Klaus-Peter Walter, "Vladimir S. Makanin," in *Kritisches Lexikon zur fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. H.-L. Arnold (Gottingen, 1988), 2.

coined the term "prose of writers in their forties (*proza sorokaletnikh*)"⁸ and grouped a number of authors, including Makanin, under this rubric, the latter, despite a usual hesitation to publicly express his opinions, forcefully spoke out against the imposed classification.⁹

Indeed, Makanin had acquired artistic individuality years before the "prose of writers in their forties" was ever noticed, and without having been identified as a member of any group. In one statement, he raised a fundamental issue for Soviet literature by emphasizing the importance of analyzing each author's *unique* qualities instead of the *shared* qualities of a number of authors grouped according to non-aesthetic traits.¹⁰ The fact is that Soviet criticism, and perhaps criticism in general, has always shown a somewhat alarming inclination to consign authors to an abstraction, tracing their profiles back to such classifications as their social background, style, period, topicality, etc. Although this practice diminishes the individual merits of an author, even denying his significance as such, the insistence of Soviet writers such as Makanin that they be viewed exclusively as unique creators is an overreaction to the "law of levelling" instituted by Soviet literary conventions and its prerequisites of "insiderdom." To the unbiased observer, however, common traits of different authors can reveal affinities between a writer and his times, between literary fiction and reality (including the spirituality, subjective vision, and metaphysical dimensions to which literary texts refer). If used appropriately, these aspects do not deny an author's uniqueness, but make the unique more distinct from the common. In other words, what is "typical" is significant only if it acts as a prism for the unrepeatable. Still, by criticizing the group consciousness of Soviet writers and their critics, Makanin essentially identifies

8. See Anatolii Bocharov, "Rozhdeno sovremennost'iu," *Novyi mir* 8 (August 1981); Vladimir Bondarenko, "Avtoportret pokoleniia," *Voprosy literatury* 11 (November 1985); and other articles by the same authors.

9. Peter Rollberg, "Interview mit Wladimir Makanin," *Weimarer Beiträge* 10 (October 1987): 1659.

10. Makanin has never given an interview to the Soviet/Russian press. In interviews with foreign scholars he has admitted that he has intentionally withstood the temptation to participate in literary debates in the Soviet Union because they were shaped by group cohesion and used non-artistic devices. See *Ibid.*, 1659–60.

"outsiderdom" as a vital quality of his own artistic identity, challenging the validity of any broad classification of his work.¹¹

The present study is devoted to Vladimir Makanin's artistic development, characteristic features of his poetics, and the world view expressed in his texts. It is the present writer's intent to explore Makanin's body of fiction from each of these perspectives and to arrive finally at an understanding of the profound functional unity demonstrated by his poetics, world view, and evolving position on the Russian literary scene. The goal of the close reading of one of Makanin's most complex works, the short novel *The Loss*¹² (1987), rendered in the second section of this study, will be to demonstrate this functional unity. The analysis in that section will reveal that, far from simply describing Makanin's social position, the term *outsider* bears a richer meaning, one that transcends the purely social and encompasses a metaphysical dimension.

11. In 1983 Makanin gave an interview to Sergei Nikolaev, a graduate student at Moscow State University. Nikolaev included the interview in his thesis on Makanin only after having agreed to the latter's condition that the text of the interview not be published in the Soviet Union. There the author explicitly distances himself from other writers of his generation ("In my view, there is no common aesthetic ground between [me and] these authors") and from Iurii Trifonov in particular, with whom he is often linked. See Sergei V. Nikolaev, "V poiskakh cheloveka. Tvorchestvo Vladimira Makanina v kontekste npravstvennoesteticheskoi problematiki sovremennoi sovetskoi literatury," Ph.D. diss., Moscow State University, 1983, 65-66.

12. Vladimir Makanin, "Utrata," in *Povesti* (Moscow, 1988).

PART I. LIFE BEYOND LINEARITY

Born in 1937 in Orsk (Orenburg region) to a mining engineer and a teacher of Russian, Vladimir Makanin was the oldest of four brothers, one of whom died in the post-war famine. Makanin studied mathematics in Moscow from 1954 to 1960. In 1964, while working as a mathematician at an institute tied to the Soviet military-industrial complex, he published a monograph on applied mathematics. The book, issued by a military publishing house, appeared when Makanin was only twenty-seven and dealt with linear programming as it applied to weapons technology.¹³

Curiously, linearity is also a key concept in Makanin's first fictional text, *A Straight Line* (*Priamaia liniia*, 1965).¹⁴ This novel initiated a discourse on moral and spatio-temporal linearity in metaphorical form that would continue throughout his literary development. Although Makanin's future as a scientist seemed secure, the success of *A Straight Line*—which appeared in the then highly respected journal *Moskva*—convinced him that his true calling was literature. From 1965 through 1967, Makanin was enrolled at a branch of the Soviet State Institute for Cinematography (Russian acronym, VGIK), where he attended courses on screenwriting. His diploma work was the scenario of his own novel, *A Straight Line*, which was filmed in 1968 and released in 1969.¹⁵

A Straight Line immediately made Makanin appear a latecomer to the "youth prose (*molodaia proza*)" of Vasilii Aksënov, Anatolii Gladilin, and Boris Balter, a fairly unconventional literary stream centered on the world view of a new, post-Stalinist generation which had begun after 1956 and was just fading out at the time. Clearly reflecting the author's experiences in the military research institute at which he worked from

13. Vladimir Makanin, *Lineinoe programmirovaniie i teoriia raspisaniia* (Moscow, 1964).

14. Vladimir Makanin, *Priamaia liniia* (Moscow, 1965).

15. The film was produced by Gorky Studio in Moscow and directed by Iurii Shvyrev.

1960 to 1965, the novel's plot is overshadowed by the Cuban missile crisis, which had suddenly made the nuclear threat look shockingly real.

Makanin later wrote in his complex short novel *Voices*, "I would only publish the first book of any author,"¹⁶ indirectly referring to his debut text. Yet had Makanin applied this sentiment to his own work, his image as a writer would be radically different from that which it is today. The stories, novellas, and novels that he published afterwards are structurally more complex and lack the didactic elements of *A Straight Line*, particularly those dealing with the East-West political situation. Similarly, never again would Makanin trust the first person narrator as he did Volodia Belov, the main character of *A Straight Line*.¹⁷ For the peculiar style of this novel, which combines moralism and social analysis, the first-person perspective was justified, as the author could then be identified as a "worried contemporary" with concerns common to many Soviet people (the exterior threat of war and the interior threat of "philistinism"¹⁸).

A severe car accident interrupted the early chain of successes in Makanin's career and confined him to bed for two years. He would never

16. "Ia by izdaval tol'ko pervye knigi avtorov" (Vladimir Makanin, "Golosa," in *V bol'shom gorode* [Moscow, 1980], 257).

17. In his novel *Portrait and its Surroundings* (*Portret i vokrug* [Moscow, 1978]), Makanin uses a first person narrator with an analytical mind (the writer Igor' Petrovich) not only as the narrating medium, but as *an object of analysis* as well (i.e., the reader can simultaneously observe the changes that happen to the narrator). This device was common in classical Russian literature, particularly in Dostoevsky, whereas for canonical Soviet literature such a digression between the roles of author/educator and narrator was unthinkable—the reader was called to trust and "follow" the narrator, not to distrust him.

18. Philistinism (*meshchanstvo*) was used in Soviet public discourses to denote a supposedly anachronistic world view—alien to Soviet ideals—which stemmed from bourgeois society and emphasized the interests of the individual (home, family, prosperity, etc.), rather than those of society. The basic opposition in Soviet writing on philistinism can be identified as *collectivist, idealistic asceticism vs. individualistic, materialistic philistinism*. The demagogic character of Soviet ideological campaigns against philistinism was not always obvious, for philistinism as such has long been regarded as the arch-enemy of all lofty aspirations in Russian literature. (Remarkably, a negative attitude towards philistinism became the foundation of Vera Dunham's pioneering study, *In Stalin's Time: Middle-Class Values in Soviet Fiction* [Cambridge, 1976; second edition, Durham, 1990]). It is noteworthy that the demagogic subtext of *A Straight Line* likens Soviet discourses on philistinism to the never-ending discourses on bureaucracy that served to stabilize the Soviet system.

again be the physically strong athlete and basketball player he had been in his youth. Years later, Makanin would transform his dreadful experiences in Soviet hospitals into one of his most powerful short stories, "Sing Quietly for Them" (Poite im tikho, 1974).¹⁹ In this narrative, the doctors, nurses, and a Komsomol-type character all urge the patients of a ward to courageously endure their sufferings. The inappropriateness of this demand, which follows a long tradition of self-denial in Soviet literature,²⁰ is depicted in a sarcastic manner. The tone changes, however, when an old woman visiting a relative begins to speak with other patients and sings unpretentious, melancholy songs to them. Avoiding any explicit judgment, "Sing Quietly for Them" is a convincing indictment of human hypocrisy and Soviet literary norms of pathos.

Following *A Straight Line*, Makanin mostly wrote novellas and short stories that did not attract much critical praise. These narratives were largely created in the monstrous and diffuse space of Moscow—the historical, religious, political, and artistic dimensions of which the author never tires of exploring—and were nourished by myths of the Ural mountains, visions of deserted areas in the Russian countryside or on the Caspian Sea, and the music of Stravinsky and Bach, whose themes and variations acquired a particular significance for Makanin after he departed from more conventional principles of prose composition. "Orphanhood" (Bezotsovshchina, 1971) and "Man-Soldier and Woman-Soldier" (Soldat i soldatka, 1971)²¹ even now impress a reader with their unspectacular tone and calm wisdom in their view of human characters. At the time of their publication, however, they were barely noticed precisely because their tone was so unusual for the time.

19. Vladimir Makanin, "Poite im tikho," in *Povest' o starom poselke* (Moscow, 1974).

20. Boris Groys has shown that the denial of physical pain and personal emotion in general is a trait of Stalinist culture, apparent in such classic texts of Socialist Realism as Boris Polevoi's *Story about a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke*, 1947) or Nikolai Ostrovskii's *How the Steel was Tempered* (*Kak zakalialas' stal'*, 1936). See Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1988), 68. (The English edition was published as *The Total Art of Stalinism* [Princeton, 1992]).

21. Vladimir Makanin, *Bezotsovshchina/Soldat i soldatka* (Moscow, 1971).

The 1970s for Makanin were a decade of difficult searching, during which he attempted to establish his distance from the Soviet literary mainstream and find individual principles that would allow him to maintain that distance. The diversity of genres he employed in his works in those years—grotesque mystery novellas ("Old Books" [Starye knigi]²²), complex parables ("Kliucharëv and Alimushkin" [Kliucharëv i Alimushkin]) and an experimental novel (*A Portrait and Its Surroundings* [Portret i vokrug])—indicates that Makanin had still to discover a literary form adequate to his aesthetic needs. The novella "Voices" (Golosa, 1980), a loose montage of reflections, fictional episodes, parodies, and parables, became a turning point in this search. The novella broke with conventional spatio-temporal unity, an act of liberation for Makanin that inspired other writers. From this point on, Makanin would develop more systematically his unique type of plot, with asynchronological order and the merging of several story lines, myths, reflections, and passages of dialogue between the narrator—semblant of the author—and the reader. In *The Loss* (Utrata, 1987) and *Left Behind* (Otvstavshii, 1987),²³ these elements are woven into a complex cloth but never semantically homogenized either by a "realistic framework" or explanatory comments of the author. In recent years, grim apocalyptic notions have shaped the atmosphere of Makanin's novellas and stories, as in his last major works, *The Trap Door* (1991) and "Long is Our Way" (Dolog nash put, 1991).²⁴

Unfolding Motifs

The two main characters of *A Straight Line*, Kostia Kniazegradskii and Volodia Belov, intend no less than to save the world. Had they been children of another age, they might have used the ideal of beauty as their "weapon," but in accordance with the spirit of the 1960s, they use the sciences: they plan to mathematize the world, turn it into a formula,²⁵

22. Vladimir Makanin, "Starye knigi," in *Starye knigi* (Moscow, 1976).

23. Vladimir Makanin, "Otvstavshii," *Znamia* 9 (September 1987).

24. Vladimir Makanin, "Dolog nash put," *Znamia* 4 (April 1991).

25. The "world formula" of physicist Werner Heisenberg was the topic of heated debate in the 1960s; in personal conversation with this author in March 1987, Makanin admitted his life-long admiration for Heisenberg.

and solve the equation so as to rid humanity of conflict and potential disasters. In the end, the attempt to achieve this ambitious goal in their concrete profession will kill one of them and make the other a cynical opportunist.

Initially the friends are devoted idealists, longing to unite with all those who search for universal meaning. Their ideals, revealed in a plot structure that indeed resembles "youth prose," painfully collide with the pettiness of the laboratory staff—their insincerity, scheming, and philistinism,²⁶ traits which were officially condemned in Soviet culture and remain characteristic of the surviving Soviet social environment today. When two people die on a military training site, supposedly due to inaccurate calculations by Kostia and Volodia, Kostia (an early Soviet yuppie with certain idealistic aspirations) denies being at fault and, aligning himself with everyone else in the laboratory, makes Volodia the scapegoat for the deaths. Although investigators finally conclude that the casualties were the result of an accident, depression and a feeling of guilt prove too much to bear for Volodia: still in his early twenties, he dies of a heart attack on a flight back from the test site. Kostia, whom Makanin does not depict as a "linear" evil-doer but a complex personality with a highly developed sense of the realistic, anticipates this final result of Volodia's straightforwardness—his "moral linearity," so to speak.

One critic later spoke of *A Straight Line* as a "novel of confession,"²⁷ juxtaposing the novel to all of Makanin's later works. To a certain extent this juxtaposition is justified, as "linearity" in this work is depicted as maximal ethical straightforwardness. After *A Straight Line*, Makanin would forever hide the idealist and preacher in himself; in his second long work, "Fatherlessness," the narrator states: "I am not talking about my personal business, for the personal could cloud the general picture; this is not about me..."²⁸

26. Attacks on philistinism in Party documents, editorials, and works of literature usually signified a trend towards a stronger emphasis on Communist morality and a rejection of individualism. See note 18 above.

27. Lev Anninskii, "Struktura labirinta," *Znamia* 12 (December 1986): 218.

28. Makanin, "Bezotsovshchina," 102.

Although his initial view of linearity would change over time, important elements of Makanin's prose are already present in his first novel.²⁹ These elements include:

1. The motif of *treason*, especially the treason of the collective (described as the "swarm"—*roi*) against an individual, acquires the status of a *leitmotif* in Makanin's later works. The fact that the entire staff of the laboratory celebrates the official proof of their innocence at exactly the same moment that Volodia Belov dies on the plane suggests the author's preferences in the *swarm/individual* dichotomy with a bitter, almost polemical lucidity.³⁰
2. The motif of *the attempt to save*. In a number of Makanin's works the fate to which the protagonists are doomed is challenged by an attempt to save them. As in *A Straight Line*, this attempt always fails, not because fate is seen as a higher force that cannot be resisted, but because the protagonists either do not understand those fundamental changes in society which may be called *socio-spiritual shifts*, or because they do not want to be saved—they appear to be *programmed*, capable only of blindly following a path that some obscure authority has placed in their minds.
3. The motif of the *sermon*. For a number of Makanin's central characters the word possesses magical qualities, and they believe in enlightenment through preaching the good and the

29. Therefore, Vadim Kovskii's statement—intended as a compliment—that Makanin was among those few authors who managed to radically break with the artistic methods that initially brought them success, does not seem completely convincing. (Vadim Kovskii, *Literaturnyi protsess 60kh–70kh godov*, [Moscow, 1983], 119.) The same holds true for Sergei Nikolaev's somewhat softer formulation, "*A Straight Line* has remained the most non-Makanian work, except for the story 'Man-Soldier and Woman-Soldier.'" (Nikolaev, "V poiskakh cheloveka", 12).

30. Of note is the shift in the narrative's point of view: on the last few pages, an omniscient narrator takes over for Volodia Belov and in brief, matter-of-fact style relates the circumstances of the party and Volodia's death. The very end, however, is given over to Volodia's voice once again, moving back to an earlier point in the story. It is unlikely that Makanin intended this ending as an heroic epilogue. Rather, this writer views it as the first, cautious appearance of a narrative device used in Makanin's later works with increasing frequency: a digression from chronological narration that places the end of the story somewhere in the middle of the plot.

truthful. (All three of these first motifs are crucial elements in Makanin's first novel, but never again does he suggest an identification between the author or first-person narrator and a positive value held by a protagonist.)

4. The omnipresent motif of *universal apocalypse*. In *A Straight Line* this motif is indicated by reports of the growing tension between the superpowers and the immediate danger of a nuclear war; in later texts it is less politically concrete. Fear of universal catastrophe as *the individual's anticipation of his own end*, however, remains a constant element in Makanin's work.
5. Finally, the *experimental and formulaic character of the text* reappears in many of Makanin's narratives. As in his debut novel, the narratives of later works basically serve an exploratory function. The exploration of a certain philosophical problem (moral linearity in *A Straight Line*) is primary and provides the aesthetic framework that shapes the text. Devices such as composition, motif, structure, language, etc., are subject to the rational task of solving the initial problem. The more factors this problem incorporates, however, the more these literary devices gain compositional independence (particularly the single *word*), and the harder it becomes to formulate a single outcome (i.e., interpretation) of the literary experiment, thus the less efficiently the initial formulae works.

Makanin's prose, which in *A Straight Line* moves on the fringe between functionality ("improving the world") and cognition (literary texts as interpretive world models, or "world formulae"), would with time clearly come to rest at the pole of cognition. Yet it would require years of intense artistic searching before Makanin arrived at this pole. If one traces the above-mentioned motifs throughout his artistic development, each new narrative work appears to represent another stage in Makanin's unfolding of the deeper meaning of these themes.

Treason

One of the plot lines of "Voices" is devoted to a short, awkward man named Shustikov. He is infamous among his colleagues for always telling the truth, no matter how unpleasant it may be for himself. Acting moderately, decently, Shustikov is unable to participate in the common social game of pretension and conformity. He knows that he has "nothing extraordinary to offer" and freely says so when his female colleagues ask him why he is not married. Any woman, he claims, would soon notice his deficiencies, get angry on account of his former, untruthful claims, and leave him. The astounded people in Shustikov's environment, for whom lying is habitual, are uneasy with his frankness and initially label it "naïveté" or "talkativeness." Some well-meaning colleagues even try to teach him how to cheat on women in order to "get" them. The fruitlessness of these attempts leads to a growing, perceptible irritation that culminates in open verbal attacks (Shustikov is called a "eunuch") and ultimately, his firing under a fabricated pretext. Interestingly, *treason* in the story is not committed by an individual against the collective—that is, in the way the word treason is usually understood—but by the collective against the individual. The repetitiveness with which the motif of treason between an individual and a "swarm" occurs in Makanin justifies Christoph Veldhues description of this motif as an "arch-opposition" of the two parts, "conformity vs. differentiation."³¹

The plot pattern drawn by Makanin in the Shustikov episodes consists of the following steps:

- discovery of the "other" and surprise at his dissimilarity,
- attempts to make him/her fit into the patterns of normative behavior,
- isolation after such attempts turn out to be futile,
- restrictions, open repression, and finally,
- exclusion.

31. Christoph Veldhues, *Vladimir S. Makanin. 'Golosa'—Literarischer Text und schriftstellerisches Programm*, vol. 10 of *Bochumer Slavistische Beiträge* (Hagen, 1987), 10.

This pattern can be regarded as typical for the interaction between the individual and the swarm and, in the long run, for society's attitude towards an individual once he or she proclaims his/her individuality.

In later years, Makanin further develops and varies the treason motif, discovering additional dimensions within it. In a character such as Shustikov, separation from the swarm seems to occur both due to the cruelty of the collective and the individual's naiveté—his peculiar "social blindness." But what if individuals repress their wish to be part of a swarm and choose to live apart from society, adhering to other values, most of which belong to a former epoch? In this case the aspects of treason, responsibility, and guilt appear less unequivocal than in the Shustikov episode, where the notion of the swarm is associated with malice and dishonesty. In Makanin's fiction, an inability or unwillingness to establish social relations is a key trait of individuals whose longing to belong is less powerful than their longing to be individuals of a certain kind.

In a novella with the untranslatable title³² "Odin i odna" (1987),³³ Makanin goes even farther in rendering this pattern as an inner/outer conflict. The story suggested in the title cannot in itself be regarded as a story, for the two main characters—both outsiders of the Shustikov type, though with a higher degree of erudition—meet only briefly and fail to establish a relationship. The indirect reference to Claude Lelouch's celebrated film *A Man and a Woman* (*Un homme et une femme*, 1966), an overwhelming success in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s, connotes the sad irony which characterizes the narrative as a whole: the fact that the two characters are a man and a woman is insignificant, for their lives remain infertile biologically, socially, and intellectually. Yet it is exactly the expectation of a story and the ensuing *absence of a story* which shapes the unfolding plot. Like the numerals, whose gender in Russian denotes their respective sex, both protagonists stand alone and remain so. The conjunction 'i' (and) represents not a link

32. In Russian, the cardinal numeral 'one' is a numerical adjective which has gender and number (*odin, odna, odno, odni*) and can be used as a substantive adjective, i.e., a noun. Thus, 'odin' can mean 'one (a) man', whereas 'odna' can denote 'one (a) woman'. Makanin was obviously interested in the laconism of these words, for they produce an effect of estrangement on the reader.

33. Vladimir Makanin, "Odin i Odná," *Oktiabr'* 2 (February 1987).

between the two, but a shared solitude. The use of numerals instead of names or nouns hints that the characters of the two protagonists can be generalized: they stand for the generation which saw the late 1950s and early 1960s as an awakening, or "thaw," infused by the romantic aura of a genuinely new Communist beginning. In a later period, they find society no longer has any use for them, the swarm excludes them, and they attempt to comprehend this exclusion and come to terms with it.

In the story, a famous sculptor in Moscow gives a party to celebrate a prize he has been awarded. The same models whose petrified nude bodies populate the walls of the studio drink and dance. Gennadii Goloshchekov, the "odin," a long-term friend of the sculptor, is invited. An old bachelor, he already shows signs of being alienated from modern reality. In his youth Goloshchekov had been famous as a courageous fighter against bureaucracy, moral deterioration, and stagnation in Soviet society. (This period, sometimes referred to as the "epoch of Tvardovsky and Khrushchev," created its own semantics, ideals, and behavioral patterns.) Goloshchekov's courage was a commonly respected virtue at the time, and it rewarded him with the fear of the local establishment and the admiration of women. Now, however, he has become an easy victim for boorish yuppies like Daev, who meets Goloshchekov at the party and proceeds to use his apartment as a trysting place to meet various lovers and drink with old friends. Neither the lovers nor the friends are of any enduring significance to Daev. His effusive language, which impresses Goloshchekov so deeply, covers a complete indifference and superficiality towards others. Goloshchekov appears to function under a different semantic system, one based on a perceived obligation to help others—he immediately acts to help when asked to do so. Although these acts of solidarity always end the same way—Goloshchekov's services are used and then, when they cease to be useful, he is virtually thrown away—he is incapable of understanding, much less using, the new language of easy selfishness. Goloshchekov is eternally searching for a perceptive soul, preferably female, but all his cautious attempts to find someone who would suit him bear no fruit. Resignation, apathy, and depressions requiring medical treatment follow.

Goloshchekov's female counterpart is Ninel' Nikolaevna. Her first name, probably based on the simple Russian form, "Nina," has been made to sound foreign, signalling a wish to appear exclusive and aristocratic. Ninel' is a product of Russian classical literature and its

clichés, consequently her moral standards are based on notions such as dignity, knighthood, courage, and sophistication. A man has to look like Lermontov and behave like a hussar officer, otherwise relationships are meaningless. Ninel' feels contempt for the trivia of Soviet everyday life—she loves poetry, hiking, and elegant conversation. Makanin describes these symptoms of maladjustment with keen interest and soft irony, at times imparting to the reader a clear sense of the tragedy which has turned two gifted, honest people into outsiders who cannot find any application for their talents. Both characters recall their youth—the time when they were at the center of the swarm—with nostalgia, both suffer from apathy and depression in the present. Their rejection by contemporary society, which senses the anachronism of their values, provokes a self-denial that leads to a suicide attempt in the case of Ninel' and to constant accidents—psychosomatic symptoms of his subconscious death wish—in the case of Goloshchekov.

A series of misfortunes culminates in Goloshchekov's death in a car accident. It is telling for Makanin's poetics in the 1980s that this death is described in the middle of the text, so that it neither appears a fatal consequence of the character's actions nor acquires a didactic undertone. Makanin treats the story as raw material which is then deformed into a plot according to his intentions. Consequently, the composition of "Odin i Odná" is oriented towards a central philosophical problem and not the story's external development. Makanin thus rules out the possibility of a didactic interpretation (inevitable had the hero's death been presented at the very end of the narrative) in which Goloshchekov's death would be viewed as the consequence of his "alienation from the people."

As in other works of that period, the complex composition of Makanin's "Odin i odna" represents a *reflection on the state of existence* as embodied in the two central characters. Doubtless, Ninel' and Goloshchekov are betrayed and literally thrown away by the swarm (in one scene, described several times from different viewpoints at various points in the plot, a group of young rowdies throws Goloshchekov off a train simply for intuitively perceiving that he is not "one of theirs," i.e., not a member of the swarm). Despite such acts of treason, however, the two protagonists stick to their ideals, proving incapable of adapting to the changing norms of the majority. This stubbornness is depicted as likeable, even moving, but is comical at the same time, as the two loners fail to notice the anachronistic basis of their outsiderdom. It is significant that

Makanin does not show a preference for individuals rejected by the swarm in the novella. "Odin i odna" is composed specifically in order to make such a judgment impossible; Makanin's agenda is not moralistic, rather, it is analytic and reflexive. Thus it come as no surprise that "Odin i odna," although published at the height of *perestroika*, did not participate in the common euphoria of the time, but instead struck pensive, ironic, and sad tones, causing much controversy.³⁴

The Attempt to Save

In most of Makanin's narratives, acts of collective treason are not committed immediately after the identification of an individual's "otherness." Most members of the swarm do not delight in turning an individual into an outsider and the final separation of that individual from the "swarm" is usually preceded by compassion, warnings, and attempts to draw the "endangered" person back into the comfort of the collective. Makanin's social perception thus transcends the boundaries of literary cliché and shows the paradoxical other side of the conflict between the swarm and the individual. Following *A Straight Line*, the linked motifs of swarm, treason, and outsiderdom in Makanin's narratives are increasingly freed of the usual moralistic undertone expected by a Soviet reader. Makanin in these works tries to gain an ever deeper understanding of why some characters—in some cases, gifted and sympathetic idealists, in others, rather ordinary people—leave, or are forced to leave, the refuge of collective notions.

The subtle atmosphere of sadness which occasionally characterizes these narratives should not be mistaken for moral judgment. It becomes clear from Makanin's works that he rejects the functionalization of literature as a tool of social pedagogy—a trait for which the Socialist Realist branch of Soviet literature is infamous. He does view it, however, as an instrument for comprehending social and cultural processes. Naturally disinterested in the kind of official social and cultural rhetoric

34. Soviet critic Natal'ia Ivanova accused Makanin of a "lack of feeling" (*nedochuvstvie*) and discrediting the "generation of the 1960s" (*shestidesiatniki*), of which she considers herself a member. Ivanova held that Makanin dispassionately categorized those idealists—predecessors of *perestroika*—like insects, building a glass wall between them and the reader. (Natal'ia Ivanova, "Illuziia obreteniia," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1 April 1987.)

that provided the subject matter for numerous congresses of the Communist Party and the USSR Union of Writers, Makanin instead dissects shifts in a society's self-image that remain unnoticed by sociologists and political scientists. Makanin's interpretation of these processes, as well as the minuscule corresponding shifts in society's consciousness, finds reflection in a language and metaphors which lie beyond official ideology.

Making use of a metaphor, Makanin coined the term "parquet floor epoch" for a period that in his view began precisely in 1958. The term connotes the increasing sense of individuality expressed in the growing number of single apartments (*otdel'nye kvartiry*) as opposed to communal apartments (*komunalki*), and the greater attention paid to material comfort—however modest in Western eyes—unthinkable in the preceding era. Interestingly, Makanin's date does not coincide with the usual chronology of Soviet historiography, which emphasized 1956 and the Twentieth Party Congress as a turning point. Nor does it agree with the timeline established by Soviet studies in the West, which sees the principal political shift occurring after 1953, the year of Stalin's death. In Makanin's world view these dates bear only an external importance. Changes in the hierarchy of individual values, personal philosophies, and world views that develop in innumerable individuals without being noticed or reflected on by them, yet finally acquire societal significance, are of greater significance to him.³⁵ I would call this kind of "inaudible" process leading people from one cultural epoch to another a *socio-spiritual shift*. Often dramatic on an individual level, such a shift may bring about casualties among those who cannot or will not adjust in time.

During such transitional periods, the *attempt to save* becomes the central idea of certain of Makanin's characters, whose indefatigable

35. Similar shifts in values and philosophies which are difficult to describe in terms other than those of literature, and too vague or amorphous to be taken seriously by sociologists or politicians, were evident in the increasing fascination with parapsychological or extrasensory phenomena (*extrasensy*), particularly healing, of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as in the radical cultural Westernization of the late 1980s, which fostered a total contempt for everything Soviet, including such previous icons as Lenin, the "Great Patriotic War," and the reform attempts of the 1960s generation (*shestidesiatniki*). These shifts were reflected in everyday folklore (jokes, cynical quatrains, songs, rumors, and the like) much earlier than in highbrow culture. Makanin centered his attention on these phenomena and made them visible by directly juxtaposing different epochs in achronological narratives.

defense of endangered ideals sometimes acquires a quixotic quality. The examining magistrate Lapin from Makanin's novella "Fatherlessness" (Bezotsovshchina, 1971) is such a man. In the late 1950s, Lapin struggles in a modest, almost shy, way to try to save juvenile delinquents from becoming societal outcasts. But Lapin himself, who sacrifices his private life for the sake of his mission (precisely meeting the positive value criteria of a fading epoch), loses touch with Soviet society's invisible transition towards a materialistic way of life and ultimately becomes a victim and outsider himself. His young defendants cannot resist the wave of attractive goods that replaces the communal comfort of the orphanage; they have grasped the signs of the times quicker than their protector, for whom they feel affection and pity alike. Lapin, reminiscent of Volodia Belov, although stronger and more down-to-earth than the latter, is another example of a flawed positive hero. His quiet, manly resignation after his vain attempt to save the most idealistic of his group, Serëzha Stremoukhov (a character Dostoevskian in his naive purity and fight against the departure from old ideals), can be seen as one of the first admissions of the positive hero's defeat in Soviet literature. To "save" a person from the consequences of socio-spiritual shifts, Makanin seems to say, is an effort as futile as fighting windmills.

The "savior" and the "to-be-saved" in Makanin's narratives are connected by strong, even mysterious ties. Following a disquieting automatic exchange of habits, they sometimes switch roles altogether. In the novella "River with a Fast Stream" (Reka s bystrym techeniem, 1979),³⁶ Ignat'ev knows that his wife Sima has cancer, although she herself is unaware of it. As her organism decays from day to day, her behavior becomes more and more irresponsible: she drinks, goes to parties alone, returns home late, neglects her child. Only when Ignat'ev himself loses control, begins to abuse alcohol, and visibly deteriorates does Sima change her behavior and try to save him in the same way he had previously tried to save her. In Makanin's works a hidden power seems to make all attempts to save human beings futile and meaningless. What remains is a potentially endless chain of role reversals between the "savior" and the "to-be-saved." In "River with a Fast Stream," Makanin varies the "attempt to save" motif in a new way, as he makes the

36. Vladimir Makanin, "Reka s bystrym techeniem," in *Kliucharëv i Alimushkin* (Moscow, 1979).

historical background entirely irrelevant—the story could happen anywhere. The impossibility of saving another, implies the novella, must be ascribed to reasons beyond those the socio-spiritual shifts which cause outsiderdom in a social sense.

As always in Makanin, there is an "on the other hand." Those who would be saved and indeed are the objects of "attempts to save," yet resist due to an astounding, quasi-genetic inability to be saved, possess a peculiar sense of *dignity*. Be it Goloshchekov and Ninel' Nikolaevna ("Odin i odna"), Serëzha Stremoukhov and Lapin ("Fatherlessness"), or Ignat'ev and Sima ("River with a Fast Stream")—they stand out from their environment in that they follow rules different from those of the swarm. No entreaty or threat can bring them to deviate from their strangely prescribed ways. A striking example of the ambiguous nature of this dignity, which Makanin neither explains nor turns into a moral lesson, is Kurenkov, the main character of the short story "The Antileader" (Antilider, 1984).³⁷ Kurenkov is described as a psychological type with inalterable personality traits, a man who does not respond to any change in his environment, regardless of how profound. Normally calm and reasonable, he cannot stand "champions of society," whether their success is based on professional excellence, intelligence, good looks, or smooth behavior. In the moment when such a person—who inevitably attracts the attention of his surroundings—reaches the pinnacle of his social achievement, Kurenkov in a sudden explosion of choleric energy openly confronts and humiliates him so that the "champion" will never again attain the same position.

These clashes are often harmful for Kurenkov: because societal hierarchies are of no concern to him, he combats bosses as well as subordinates. Kurenkov's wife desperately tries to save him, and on a rational level he seems to give in. But at the moment he next encounters a "social champion," his actions escape rational control. Kurenkov's end is so inevitable that it is sufficient for the narrator only to hint at it: after a violent fight with a show-off on the street, Kurenkov is convicted to two years in a prison camp. With his temper he undoubtedly will not survive the deadly hierarchy of the criminal world and his wife knows he is doomed.

37. Vladimir Makanin, "Antilider," in *Mesto pod solntsem* (Moscow, 1984).

Makanin depicts this doom and the vain attempts to resist it in such a way that the protagonist is both the object of a "will" stronger than his rational consciousness and the subject of his own interaction with the swarm and its norms. These interactions provide the atmosphere of dignity which surrounds the character, even though his behavior may often be incomprehensible or unappealing to the reader. This inability to adjust can be regarded as both a fatal curse and a source of pride in many of Makanin's characters, a trait that dooms them to the status of *unintentional outsiders*.

The Sermon

In the novel *A Straight Line*, Volodia Belov from his first day at the laboratory preaches the ideals of honesty, human solidarity, decency, and industriousness to his colleagues. The fact that these colleagues are much older than Volodia himself, but nevertheless tolerate his daily sermons can be seen as a sign of the times in the USSR, when young people—even downright children—were often portrayed as sharper and more attuned to Soviet reality than adults, who were depicted as needing lessons from the young. Volodia is later victimized by this myth of the moral and intellectual superiority of youth. Considering his ultimate failure, the passages describing his impudent moralistic sermons may also signify a disappointment with the Soviet ideal of youth. (The narrative structure of *A Straight Line* suggests a certain compassion for this character, an option Makanin would refrain from using in later works). In keeping with the theme of this study, one could say these ideals do not turn the young hero into a leader among insiders, as both Volodia expects and Soviet mythology postulates, but into an outsider who pays with his life for his separateness from the swarm.

In the context of the Soviet 1960s and the conventions of "youth prose," the laboratory workers' skepticism of Volodia's idealism would likely have been interpreted as a critique of philistine tendencies in Soviet life, a critique to which the positive hero and the reader were supposed to respond like punching clowns.³⁸ Yet in the context of

38. See Daniil Granin's idealistic heroes in novels like *The Seekers* (Iskateli, 1954) or *I Approach the Thunderstorm* (Idu na grozu, 1963), who work in the same scientific sphere as Makanin's characters and usually win their battles against bureaucracy, irresponsibility, and other

Makanin's later works, the reaction of the swarm appears to be more human, more sound. The main character of the short story "A Cute Romantic" (*Milyi romantik*, 1974),³⁹ Kudriavtsev, gradually turns himself into a buffoon with endless sermons on the need for social concern, honesty, and making the workplace more efficient (he actually uses the term *perestroika*). The swarm does not long withstand these injunctions and makes Kudriavtsev's life miserable until he switches to another job, much to the relief of his co-workers. Makanin does not take the side of the swarm, of course, but he does point out the ridiculous asynchronicity which accompanies the tragic aspect of Kudriavtsev's fate: the time of the Soviet-style romantic is over. Like in "Odin i odna," if idealistic would-be leaders (and would-be insiders) are unable to understand societal changes, they will become outsiders and inevitably fall victim to the powerful swarm and its shifting orientations.

In "A Cute Romantic," Makanin also chooses not to continue the conventional "honest fighter/cruel majority" dichotomy popular in the anti-philistine prose of the 1960s. The conflict is not resolvable by means of an easy equation, implies Makanin, as the text emphasizes the innate harmlessness of the philistinism displayed by Kudriavtsev's colleagues. Indeed, when compared to the incredible destructiveness of the Soviet system as a whole, these little clerks simply often do that which is regarded as "normal" of human nature. This provocative reversal of common verbal evaluations is repeated in other works such as "Fatherlessness," in which the face of an arrested criminal is described as "good-natured and submissive" and secretaries in the bureau exchange gossip "quietly and peacefully."⁴⁰

During the early 1980s, a "time of troubles" when Soviet society seemed to have lost its last moral and political underpinnings, Makanin for a brief period enjoyed sensational notoriety. As a writer extremely sensitive to those changes in the social and spiritual atmosphere (socio-spiritual shifts) of the Soviet Union and its administrative center, Moscow (Moscow has always had a somewhat magical quality in Russian literature

phenomena "alien to the Soviet lifestyle."

39. Vladimir Makanin, "Milyi romantik," *Povest' o starom posëlke* (Moscow, 1974).

40. Makanin, "Bezotsovshchina," in *Bezotsovshchina/Soldat i Soldatka*, 36, 40.

of the twentieth century), Makanin risked describing the emerging cult of spiritual healing that gained particular momentum in the last years of the so-called Brezhnevian "stagnation."⁴¹ In a short novel ambiguously titled *The Forerunner* (Predtecha, originally published in 1982),⁴² Iakushkin, an uneducated, strange old man, discovers in himself the potential to heal cancer by remedies made of toothpaste and herbs and by the power of his personality—expressed in both his "biological field" and endless sermons. Kolia Anikeev, a young journalist who has come from the provinces to Moscow in search of a career, attempts to make Iakushkin a star and, indeed, after a short while generates a stir in an urban society craving health and healing. Suddenly, the star-healer loses his ability, leaves the city, and dies a lonely death, accompanied only by a dog to whom he continues to preach.

Makanin structures his narrative in an intriguing way, preserving an inner ambiguity so that the text never becomes simplistic. Until the very end, the author keeps the reader in a state of uncertainty about his attitude towards the words of the narrator and the healing successes of Iakushkin. This unwillingness to lend the reader a helping hand—to give him an explanation and, in the long run, educate him—certainly neglected the principles of Soviet literary convention, which prescribed the function of schoolmarm to the author. Because the tendency towards ethical guidance has long been stringent in Russian literature, the rejection of such guidance in *The Forerunner* must have caused feelings of unease in the reader, an unease compensated for only by the fascination of the topic itself.⁴³ Since the suggestions contained in the text are various and confusing, the reader cannot but decide for himself what he is willing to believe.

41. At this time the infamous "healer" Dzhuna gained access to the Soviet establishment and was able to exert influence over political leaders whom she pretended to heal with the irradiation of her hands. Terms like the 'biological field' (*biopole*) of living matter, 'Kirlian photography' (*fotografiia Kirliana*), and the like became commonplaces in semi-official discourse. These terms marked yet another shift in Russian society's hierarchy of values, this time towards the mystical.

42. Vladimir Makanin, "Predtecha," in *Povesti* (Moscow, 1988). The archaic Russian term *predtecha* is used for John the Baptist.

43. The stir caused by *The Forerunner* was reflected even in the newspaper *Pravda*. See Aleksandr Krivitskii, "Reliatsii s polia bitvy," *Pravda*, 23 June 1984, 3.

Makanin relates to the reader of *The Forerunner* not only as a social being with a certain number of normative traits qualifying him as "Soviet man," he addresses regions of the reader's thinking hidden from rational social control—his subconscious fears and uncertainties. In this way the author aesthetically manipulates the very uncertainty which he describes as the basis of the phenomenon of spiritual healing and, more generally, as the epistemological dilemma of man in this world. Undoubtedly, sensitivity to the paranormal or parapsychological is stronger in a society in times of crisis, when rational concepts seem to have exhausted their explicatory potential. (It is therefore no surprise that with the further deterioration of the Soviet system, interest in magic healers like Alan Chumak or Aleksei Kashpirovskii, who received in part official recognition, increased further.⁴⁴) Finally, the fact that Makanin, by creating a plot structure that suggests several, equally probable interpretations, forces the reader to make decisions on his own, must be regarded as the author's quest for the mature reader, free of the majority's intellectual domination.

Apocalypse

The danger of nuclear war and the ever-present eschatological motif of Soviet media once the USSR achieved superpower status provided a seemingly legitimate justification for the sermons of Volodia Belov and other idealists in Makanin's writings. But, as in the case of Belov, verbal images of global destruction in Makanin are often described as reflections of the individual's anticipation of his own end or the anxiety he experiences after separation from the swarm—a "personal apocalypse" of sorts. In the late 1980s, when nuclear war no longer appeared a real danger, fear of war was replaced by similarly apocalyptic visions of the rapid deterioration of Soviet society as a whole. Unlike the "nuclear holocaust," however, symptoms of social decay were visible to all in everyday life.

44. See A. Manucharova, "Fenomen Kashpirovskogo," *Izvestiia*, 28 August 1989, 3; and "Tverdyyi tarif na chudesu," *Izvestiia*, 28 February 1990, 6. On the recent popularity of the occult sciences and their political aspects see Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred. The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York, 1993), 149–53.

One could expect with some certainty that Makanin's reflection of the decay of Soviet statehood would differ from mainstream Soviet literary production, in which eschatological prophecies were usually tailored to fit trivial political stereotypes.⁴⁵ In his short novel *The Trap Door* (1991), Makanin takes up motifs from certain earlier works, interpreting them this time in connection with an unprecedented apocalyptic situation the political causes of which appear completely secondary. The sources of events (political, economic, historical) are disturbingly invisible not only to rank and file citizens, but to the leadership as well. All that is visible is the impact of events on human existence and social communication in the gigantic city which Makanin chooses as the set for his version of the Russian apocalypse. (Not the usual anti-utopian "somewhere," the city is apparently Moscow.) Society's unstoppable deterioration is incomprehensible to the individuals living in the city and they respond apathetically, trying to avoid harm themselves while ignoring other victims of daily catastrophes.

As in certain earlier works, Makanin chooses a man named Kliucharëv, prototype of a fairly independent, though not intellectually extraordinary personality, as the novella's main character. Against the backdrop of a violent, dysfunctional urban landscape, Kliucharëv tries to bury his good friend,⁴⁶ the engineer Pavlov, who has been trampled to death in one of the spontaneous, chaotic mass demonstrations that have become as common as the kind of death Pavlov has died. Makanin's motif of the swarm—an entity which under normal circumstances does not

45. An example of a liberal "anti-utopia" is Aleksandr Kabakov's overrated novel *Without Return* (Nevozvrashchenets [Moscow, 1989]), which is a variation on the theme that Russia will be taken over by a fascist dictator. A conservative counterpart of sorts is Iurii Bondarev's *The Temptation* (Iskushenie, *Nash sovremennik* 1–2 [January–February 1991]). It is characteristic of both camps that these novels are narratively conventional and conceptually secondary, i.e. they illustrate concepts from actual political discourse instead of creating original concepts.

46. The need to bury the dead instead of letting them rot or be interred in mass graves by "the authorities" is a basic ethical rule of many civilizations. This rule can be forgotten only when there is a general degeneration of morality. To bury and honor the dead was an elementary commandment in Russian literature and philosophy, the refusal to do so was considered a symptom of diabolic evil and the final consequence of materialism. It suffices to recall Platonov's narratives, Rasputin's anathema against the flooding of a graveyard in "Farewell to Matyora" (1976), and the recent revival of Nikolai Fëdorov's "Philosophy of the Common Cause" (Vernyi, 1907; Moscow, 1913), with its peculiar cult of the dead. In the chaos described by Makanin, the fading respect for human beings *per se* results in the neglect of ritualized burial, once the last expression of respect for human life.

tolerate outsiders but nevertheless behaves in a predominantly civilized manner—is transformed in *The Trap Door* into the motif of a frightened and frightening mob. Urban masses consisting of individuals who have lost rational control over themselves maraud in the streets without purpose, suddenly driven here and there by rumors and demagogues, killing and being killed in fatal accidents.

Makanin finds numerous images for the reality of a nightmare in *The Trap Door*. The streets are empty and people hide in their apartments, staying for days without electricity or water, lacking regular means of transportation, being hunted by brutal criminals. The city's inhabitants have lost their ability to live with each other and anxiously avoid all fellow inhabitants. As in Evgenii Zamiatin's short stories describing post-revolutionary chaos, houses have become caves and people are constantly searching for new caves that can provide better security. The once generously illuminated world of the big city has been drowned in darkness. This everyday nightmare, however, has its counterpart: the world in which the ruling elite lives. Ironically, and in accordance with Makanin's differing view of the relation between society's *bottom* and *top*, the anti-world is located underground and lit by an overabundance of lavish lamps.⁴⁷ Kliucharëv is one of the few who knows of a trap door connecting the upper, dark half to the lower, bright half of the city; he acts like a messenger between these worlds ("We are grateful for any information from there,"⁴⁸ he is told politely.)

Kliucharëv journeys into the underworld for the practical purpose of obtaining medication for family and friends. Curiously, both the "unruly" world above and the "ruling" anti-world below take their way

47. It may be a private joke on the part of Makanin that the descriptions of the luxurious underground realm of the elite clearly evoke the Palace of the USSR Writers' Union on Moscow's Vorovskii Street, with its spacious restaurant and basement cafeteria.

48. Makanin, "Laz," 94. (See Introduction, p. 1, note 3; translation mine.)

This sentence can be regarded as a peculiar *parable* for Makanin's own situation as a writer who, at least in the 1980s, was able to achieve some social and material success (many of his books were translated into foreign languages at the time) and thus had access to privileges that normally belonged to the ruling establishment. Moreover, as this establishment was almost completely isolated from everyday life in the USSR, some of its institutions may well have looked upon literature as a means of communicating with the "dark" side of Soviet life which was hidden from them. Yet for Makanin these privileges were temporary and permanently in danger, as he was a rank and file citizen who never possessed any kind of administrative or governmental influence.

of life for granted, considering it normal that one half is deprived of elementary supplies, whereas the other has food, medication, and sophisticated cultural values. Again contradicting the evaluative conventions of the top/bottom dichotomy, Makanin shows that no leader and no administration could govern the irrational, dark upper half and that it is not primarily selfish malice which characterizes the ruling establishment. Contravening popular clichés, the people governing on the bottom are depicted as being sincerely concerned, yet helpless. The topics of their conversations include the already trivialized question of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov of whether one infant's tears are too high a price for the achievement of paradise. Members of this unusual elite observe the human lava above them as part of a volcano whose eruption can no longer be prevented—no one knows how to handle the dilemma of the masses on top. This deviation from the usual distribution of "good" and "evil" between bottom and top is significant in that it indicates Makanin's skepticism towards conventional explanations of Russia's misery. The endless discussion of solutions and alternatives among the representatives of the establishment sounds like a parody of common political debates among Russian intellectuals: What kind of leader does the country need? A dictator, Chaplinesque, perhaps? A wise old man? An "average-type" person?

From the very beginning of *The Trap Door*, the narrator plays with the reader's preconceived notion that the fundamental reason for the decay of Soviet society is the gap between the grass-roots and the elite (bottom and top) and that this decay could be reversed by removing the elite or exchanging it for another. This *predictable* notion forms the basis of the *unforeseen* in the narrative: the common view is held up to doubt at the very point in the text when the narrator reveals that the conventional hierarchy, with the elite on top and the grass-roots on the bottom, is invalid, at least for the country's present situation. This transformed notion functions as a narrative hypothesis in the novella and can be envisioned as a mathematical fraction with the numerator and denominator inverted. Into this paradoxical formulaic hypothesis about society as a whole is inserted the metaphor of a trap door. Here the trap door represents the narrowing space of an individual whose singularity is signified both by his ability to move back and forth between denominator and numerator and his insistence on following moral rules that the majority of the population has forgotten.

The trap door changes its shape, narrowing from day to day; at some point in the foreseeable future it will close altogether and communication between top and bottom will no longer be possible. The *individual* lack of alternatives thus metamorphoses into a *societal* lack of alternatives. In the end, Kliucharëv comes to think that only by his efforts did the trap door remain open, allowing for at least minimal communication between the two worlds. This vague belief in the responsibility of the individual—and yes, the outsider—to act is supported by the last sentences of *The Trap Door*, which somewhat ironically reproduce the cliché of the central character waking up and discovering that "it was all just a nightmare." However, the dialogue between Kliucharëv and a stranger (called "a kind man at dawn") once again strikes a pensive tone:

"Get up," the man repeats with a calm and patient smile. "One ought not to sleep on the street."

And he stretches out his hand. Kliucharëv would have gotten up himself, so the man helps him just a little bit. His hand is warm, a touch that will remain with Kliucharëv afterwards.

Kliucharëv gets up.

"Yes," he says, stretching, "how dark it has become."

"But it is not night yet," says that man, again with a soft smile..."⁴⁹

Experimental and Formulaic Plots

The plots of Makanin's narratives reveal his inclination to construct an experimental situation⁵⁰ premised on both a philosophical hypothesis and a metaphor. Makanin is interested in developing maximum tension between the hypothesis, often laid out in the very first paragraph of the narrative, and the metaphor, usually incorporated into the text with a frankness similar to that of the hypothesis. In many cases the fictional

49. Makanin, "Laz," 133. (Translation mine.)

50. This experimental mode and apparently rational way of conducting "a literary experiment on human beings" caused considerable irritation among critics who expected a traditionally open, compassionate, and evaluative attitude on the part of the writer. Typical of this kind of rejection is a statement by the Soviet critic E. Sergeev: "[S]uch an interested and impersonal, contemptuous, and attentive relation towards the characters is hard to find in any other writer.... There seems to be a different ethic. The ethics of an experimenter, perhaps" (E. Sergeev, "Po okruzhnoi doroge," *Znamia* 8 (August 1986): 217.

nature of the narrative is disturbed by this explicit use of narrative devices.⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, this is consistent with Makanin's intention of exploring a problem through literary forms, thus in a certain sense Makanin's plots might be called formulaic.

Volodia Belov in *A Straight Line* fails to "mathematize the world"—to turn life into a formula in order to heal humanity's diseases and solve the enigma of its doom. Possibly for Makanin, mathematics did not prove an adequate medium through which to comprehend the world and express his relationship to it. Literature must have appealed to him as a system of signs more suited to interpreting the entire complexity of human existence, including its known and unknown aspects. Still, mathematics exercises an undeniable influence on Makanin's literary works.

One example of a formulaic plot type in Makanin's *oeuvre* is that of *the exchange*, described earlier with respect to the novella "River with a Fast Stream." The most formulaic rendition of such "reverse proportionality of luck," however, is Makanin's short story "Kliucharëv and Alimushkin" (Kliucharëv i Alimushkin, 1979),⁵² in which the dependency of the fates of the two title characters, who are in no way connected, reaches an extreme: Kliucharëv achieves more and more social success, whereas Alimushkin dies. In "River with a Fast Stream," stimulated by Iurii Trifonov's short novel of the same title, Makanin tries to define his own approach to the phenomenon of the constant exchange of values—material and non-material, consumer-related and ethical—in which people engage. Opposing Trifonov's political and moralistic rendition of the problem, Makanin attempts to portray such exchanges as part of an irreversible universal law. In short stories such as "The

51. It is typical of Makanin's narratives of the 1980s that he openly comments on the literary devices he employs, giving the reader the impression that he is not "fooling around" with him and is laying bare the secret of how the stories are built. In *The Trap Door*, the narrator greets Kliucharëv—introducing him as "our old acquaintance" and describing his appearance, which has supposedly changed since previous narratives ("Etot chelovek—Kliucharëv, nash staryi znakomets. (On tol'ko postarel; potusknel; viski posedeli uzhe sil'no, prosed' v volosakh. No eshchë krepok. Mushchina)" [Makanin, "Laz," 93].)

52. See Introduction, p. 1, note 2.

Vent" (Otdushina, 1979),⁵³ the objects of exchange include love relationships, as well as college admissions and material goods. Most astounding for Soviet readers was the apparent indifference with which Makanin described these exchanges.

There are other examples from Makanin's *oeuvre* where the exchange formula acquires a tragic, even personal, dimension. In a story with a detectable autobiographical refrain, "Where the Sky Merged with the Hills" (Gde Skhodilos' Nebo s Kholmami, 1984),⁵⁴ the composer Bashilov, having achieved international recognition, discovers that the more he succeeds in his artistic career, the more the musical culture of his native Urals settlement dies out. At the height of his individual fame, his fellow country folk at home (whose spontaneous artistic creativity once nourished the orphan's talent) consume nothing but cheap radio music. Bashilov becomes a stranger to his former environment and the inevitability which the narrator attributes to this painful metamorphosis makes it seem reasonable to suspect a comparable experience in Makanin's own life. Quite possibly, the writer's personal literary gain has been accompanied by a collective cultural loss, turning the soil on which he was born into a spiritual desert. In the case of Bashilov, the ultimate death of his adolescent world makes his pilgrimages into the past increasingly disturbing and, finally, impossible—completing the fatal exchange.

In the majority of Makanin's narratives, the author's *hypothesis* appears as a question explicitly posed in the text. As for the central *metaphor* of a work, Makanin explores it throughout a text in order to demonstrate its inner ambiguity and varied dimensions, many of which surface unexpectedly. Plot development itself, then, is fueled by the tension between a chosen hypothesis and a specific metaphor. Makanin renders their composition in such a way that the two often contradict and thus stimulate one another. The formulaic nature of Makanin's narratives—a trait which he shares with Anatolii Kim and Ruslan Kireev in their later works and, to a lesser degree, with many writers of the late

53. Vladimir Makanin, "Otdushina," in *Kliucharëv i Alimushkin* (Moscow, 1979).

54. Vladimir Makanin, "Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami," in *Gde skhodilos' nebo s kholmami* (Moscow, 1984).

1970s and early 1980s⁵⁵—led to accusations of coldness and constructedness by Soviet critics, who regarded such traits as alien to the essence of literature and art in general.⁵⁶ By persisting in writing in this manner, however, Makanin eventually changed the views of certain critics who came to praise him for the same aesthetic "vices" of which they earlier accused him.⁵⁷

It is easy enough to refute that "constructedness" is alien to art by recalling such classic plot types as the parable and the allegory, which are highly formulaic. However, this writer would hold that Makanin employs constructions only at the outset of his narratives. As Makanin looks at the term "construction" itself as a metaphor, the construction of his narratives should not be viewed as the skeleton of a body, such as the steel frame of a building (i.e., statically), but as an ingredient of a quasi-physical experiment the outcome of which is not yet known to the author. Considering the unpredictability of Makanin's narratives, his habit of rationally creating the *primary nexus* of literary texts which make up these works should be understood as a characteristic part of his poetics. Although there is no strong tradition in Russian literature on which Makanin could build, earlier authors such as Evgenii Zamiatin have displayed a similarly rational artistic temperament.

In some cases the text experiment is described literally, as in one of the most disturbing episodes in *The Forerunner*.⁵⁸ Without any direct link to the story of Iakushkin the healer, inserted in an almost

55. The rational world view revealed in this tendency towards formulaic plot constructions may, on the one hand, be perceived as expressing the rationalism of the Soviet system inherited by all these authors through their educations and, on the other, as a symptom of disappointment with the vulgar teleological construction which Soviet ideology offered as an obligatory world model.

56. Soviet critic Vladimir Gusev called Makanin's plots "precise and transparent, he is stylistically not musical and not colorful, but graphical." According to this critic, Makanin is "formally always exact, clear, and his types are visible." Thus, maintains Gusev, Makanin pleases literary critics who are afraid of everything unclear and rationally inexplicable. (Vladimir Gusev and Aleksandr Muliarchik, "Slushat' drug druga," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 March 1987.)

57. Lev Anninskii admitted to and analyzed this misperception in his article "Struktura labirinta" (see note 29 above) which was later published as the foreword to Vladimir Makanin, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow, 1987).

58. Makanin, "Predtecha," 117–21.

montage-like manner, the episode offers a possible clue to understanding the astounding effects of the protagonist's healing. The episode describes an experiment conducted by Japanese scientists which investigates the behavior of rats under exceptional stress. In a virtually endless stress-producing set, dozens of rats are chased through a glass maze consisting of tunnels in which they receive electric shocks and blows from sharp instruments. The scientists measure how much time is needed until the rats, exhausted by the inexplicable blows and the competition among themselves, give up. Two rats are singled out at the beginning and given special signals and an early interruption of the program, suggesting a sense of "chosenness" and singularity granted by a superior power. (In fact, these rats are separated—"saved"—from the other rats by human hands.) When subjected to the same difficulties as the others, the two "chosen" rats survive much longer. Faith (i.e., the belief that one belongs to an elite or is protected by a quasi-divine entity) helps these rats cope with the bloody stress more successfully than their fellow rats without faith.

The outcome of the experiment is transparent with regard to the plot of *The Forerunner*, but obviously too transparent to fully trust it as a message intended by the author. Still, the episode adds a fascinating dimension of parable to the novel and, as a conceptual option, presents a serious challenge to the reader's ability to judge the text, for he himself must examine the outcome of the experiment with regard to Iakushkin's healing successes. The text does not offer the reader any assistance in this critical examination. As regards Iakushkin himself, he is taken to see the cruel experiment by his journalistic promoter, Kolia Anikeev, but either does not or will not understand the essence of the experiment and runs away without commenting on what he has seen.

A relatively early example of this kind of sophisticated plot-as-experiment structure is Makanin's novel *A Portrait and its Surroundings* (Portret i vokrug, 1978).⁵⁹ Igor' Petrovich, the first person narrator, is a writer whose literary portraits receive no acclaim from the public. In a device reminiscent of a mystery novel, Igor' Petrovich sets out to shed light on the "real" personality of his powerful acquaintance, the scriptwriter Starokhatov, who sometimes appears a cruel, selfish rogue,

59. See Part I, p. 6, note 17.

sometimes a gifted artist who suffers from the gossip surrounding him. There is sufficient evidence for both hypotheses and Igor' Petrovich, himself haunted by a family that regards him as a failure, is sincere enough to acknowledge the impossibility of finding that final piece of evidence which would tip the scales. Thus, the outcome of the writer-detective's experimental efforts is as ambiguous as the dualistic wave-particle model of modern physics: there is no certitude in the human personality, contradictory traits live together peacefully in the same character, and to force these contradictions into one linear scheme would be to simplify and misunderstand this character. Clearly, criticism which accuses Makanin of "formulaic" plots and characterizations in the sense of preformulated constructions—linear equations leading to a result anticipated prior to the creation of the text—somewhat simplifies matters. Makanin's texts may be viewed as formulae solely in the sense that they represent *complex balanced equations* which demonstrate resistance to any simplification in the course of a narrative.⁶⁰

The Discovery of Myth

The motifs of treason, the attempt to save, the sermon, and universal apocalypse, together with experimental, formulaic traits of composition, already appear in *A Straight Line*. In this first major fictional text of Makanin, however, there are no motifs associated with the past—the characters seem to live in the present and for the future alone. This characteristic would change in the 1980s, when the temporal frame of Makanin's narratives would become more and more complex. In 1983, when asked about the relationship of his fiction with that of Iurii Trifonov, Makanin, after mentioning certain topical interests he shares with Trifonov, said: "But for Trifonov, a certain embarrassment (*zazor*) which emerges when one juxtaposes the ideals and aspirations of our time with the ideals and aspirations of the past, is of primary significance.

60. The many diatribes against Makanin indicate just how unusual this type of plot composition was in Soviet prose. Natal'ia Ivanova, for example, identified Makanin's plots as based on anecdotes, which in Russian is synonymous with joke: Makanin "stroit na anekdote prakticheski vsiu svoiu prozu" (Natal'ia Ivanova, "Ochen' predvaritel'nye itogi," *Literaturnaia ucbeba* 1 [January 1981]: 122). Polemicizing with Ivanova, critics S. Piskunova and V. Piskunov contrasted this common misidentification of genuine aesthetic innovation with recognizable patterns. They maintained that Makanin had found "principally new laws of the relation between art and reality..." (V. Piskunov and S. Piskunova, "Vsë prochee—literatura," *Voprosy literatury* 2 [February 1988]: 53).

To a greater or lesser extent, all of Trifonov's characters feel their links with the past. However, the past of my characters is less significant and mostly does not assign a particular value to them."⁶¹ Yet only one year later in the novella "Where the Sky Merged with the Hills," Makanin would create a character whose past heavily impinges upon his present and who undergoes a painful process of separation from it. (The composer Bashilov, native of a Urals settlement the folklore of which became his lifelong musical inspiration, seeks to return to his past and is tragically rejected by it.) In later narratives of Makanin, the past is given an even more prominent function.

In texts like *Left Behind* or *The Loss*, written in the mid-1980s, different time periods exist independently of one another. That is, these time periods do not belong to one chronological line and are not, as in Trifonov's works, connected by a knot of historical and ethical questions which are externally legitimated by some kind of kinship between the characters, say, a father and a son, thus indicating certain moral shifts between generations. Still, a peculiar communication between different time periods expresses itself through narration (legends or songs), dreams, and states of clairvoyance. The past appears in images of historical vagueness and moral indifference in Makanin's narratives, but the effects of the past on different levels of human communication are extremely powerful. For some of Makanin's central characters the significance of time lies far beyond concrete socio-political matters. Like Bashilov, they hear the tempting call of their past while at the same time *losing* their ability to gain access to it. They belong neither completely to the present nor the past, finding themselves outside "temporal normality"—outsiders in a sense beyond the social.

In the 1980s Makanin's narratives, including *The Loss*, would explore social outsiderdom as an unavoidable, though marginal, effect of outsiderdom of a higher philosophical order. Using the narrative devices described earlier, Makanin would achieve a new, dynamic relation between his exploration of a hypothesis and his aesthetic realization of this exploration, reaching a new stage in his understanding of the relation between *outsider* and *world*.

61. Nikolaev, "V poiskakh cheloveka," 66.

If one attempted a quantitative ranking of the realistic, allegorical, and mythological parts that shape *The Forerunner*, the realistic would clearly dominate.⁶² However, the other styles severely disturb the usual integrative function of the realistic narration, which often acts as a paradigm for a text. In the late 1980s, this ratio changes in short novels like *The Loss*, *Left Behind*, and *The Trap Door*. Mythological narrative elements gain increasing prominence in these works, overriding the semantic relevance of the rationally explicable components. This new relationship between the various narrative elements prominent in Makanin's work began with the short story "Voices," the narrative structure of which resembles a kind of montage: the parts demonstrate an inner kinship but lack mutually explicit references. In a sense, the montage technique produces an effect where the connected text segments "radiate" towards one another. (To say that these segments comment on each other would be going too far, as there are no explicit *textual* relations between them).⁶³

The peculiar, subtle influence that takes root in one text segment and "irradiates" another (for example, the mythological parts disturb the realistic passages) suggests the presence of a rationally inexplicable dimension to the text. Consequently, Makanin succeeds in subverting the standards of the materialistic Soviet world view without engaging in open polemics. In fact, it is not his intention to produce implied anti-materialistic statements; rather, the open structure of "Voices" is intended to provoke questions and speculation concerning a *spiritual reflection of the world*—a process previously inhibited by dogmatic Soviet literary convention.

62. It was probably this realistic framework which led to the assumption by certain critics that writers like Makanin, Kim, and Kireev are only moderately innovative with respect to form. (See Helen Goscilo, "About the Authors. Vladimir Makanin," 461 [Introduction, p. 2, note 4]). Undoubtedly, form as such is meaningless to Makanin: form in his narratives does not serve a mimetic function (verisimilitude), but a fundamental epistemological function.

63. Using a psychoanalytical paradigm, one might separate the narrative segments into the ego, id, and superego, where childhood memories and mythological segments are part of the (Freudian) individual or (Jungian) "collective" unconscious and controlled by censorious, authoritarian institutions belonging to the superego. In such an interpretation, the various segments of the text can be seen as conducting a dialogue with one another similar to the interaction of the different functional parts of the human personality.

A good example of this technique can be seen in the discourse in "Voices" that deals with the fate of a sick boy whom the narrator knew in his childhood in the Ural Mountains. The twelve-year-old boy, called Kol'ka Mister (a diminutive plus a nickname), suffers from an incurable kidney disease that makes him incontinent. Kol'ka is aware of his decreasing life expectancy—he will die at age thirteen—and has developed a cynical wisdom which impresses his parents and the neighborhood kids. Born into a family of construction workers characterized by ignorance and brute violence, he is educated on such commonplaces of Communist philosophy as "There is no God. There is matter (*Boga net. Est' materiia*),"⁶⁴ a sentence repeated several times by Kol'ka's mother.

The people in Kol'ka's environment, members of a swarm to which he cannot belong by definition, desperately try to give their lives substance and meaning by pursuing the diversions offered by the Soviet system, mostly trivial entertainment. In the case of Kol'ka's father, all he thinks about are these trivial, feverish activities, leaving him with a sense of emptiness that no entertainment can fill. "This was all he pondered, and he looked like a man who painfully cannot comprehend why the many separate rain drops for him do not unite into a downpour."⁶⁵ The autobiographical character's imagination, which clearly sails beyond official ideological boundaries, compensates for this reduction of human life to its material essence and the lack of transcendence it offers. For example, after Kol'ka has died, the narrator reflects:

There was the moon. And I imagined that above me in the patches of moonlight, maybe following me, Kol'ka Mister's soul was flying. Before it finally went up into the sky, the soul flew parallel to the Earth for a while, accompanying us to the Yellow Hills—and why should the soul not fly a bit above the Earth, thought the kid. So, there I was running and turning back to the nymbus of the moon.⁶⁶

The subtle shift from realistic description to metaphysical image in this segment, although expressed in ironic undertones, echoes openly non-realistic mythological and allegorical segments elsewhere in "Voices." This

64. Makanin, "Golosa," 293. (See Part I, p. 6, note 16; all translations mine.)

65. *Ibid.*, 287.

66. *Ibid.*, 295.

echo "deepens" the semantic level of the realistic segments while connecting them aesthetically and philosophically to the non-realistic segments.

If in "Voices" narrative elements stand apart from each other to a certain degree, their relationship becomes more intimate in Makanin's works of the late 1980s. In these later works, the title/metaphor usually functions to integrate the different discourses interwoven throughout each text. In *Left Behind*, for example, the three main discourses—each situated at a different level in time—are united by the title/metaphor *otstavshii*, which literally means "the one who remained behind." This title encompasses the entire text and refers to a condition of *asynchronicity* (not fitting into one's time), a condition which many of Makanin's characters experience in a painful way.

The first temporal level of the novel unfolds in the late 1950s, when a young idealist named Gena follows his beloved Lera, whose father had suffered under the Stalinist regime, to the Trans Ural region. There, she and her mother await a released inmate with whom they have been in correspondence. Gena aspires to become a writer and publish his first novella in Tvardovsky's legendary *Novyi mir*. He feels a deep compassion for the so-called "repressed people" (*repressirovannye*) returning from Soviet prison camps and longs to be one whose anti-Stalinist vigor will shape the image of his era (later known as "people of the 1960s," or *shestidesiatniki*). The second temporal level is the present; the same character, now mature, deals with his psychologically handicapped father, who is haunted by one and the same nightmare: that "his group" departs in trucks and leaves him behind. Gennadii tries to comfort his father, although to little effect. The third and final temporal level belongs to a group of gold miners some hundred years ago. On this level, historical concreteness becomes irrelevant—it is the "some time" appropriate to a mythological plot. The gold miners' group includes Little Lësha, a retarded youth with an unconscious ability to detect gold: when he cannot cope with the pace of the group and stays behind, he intuitively lies down at a spot where the next day the group will find gold. Little Lësha's desperate need for company forces him to hurry to keep up, but the miners use the fact that in his childlike naiveté, Lësha is unaware of his gift (and consequent function) and *intentionally* leave him behind.

In *Left Behind*, the *mythological* level interacts with the *psychological* (contemporary) and the *mnemonic* (historical) levels. That certain motifs appear on all three levels in the narrative implies that a consistency of phenomena (social relations, individual conflicts, patterns of any kind) exists and repeats itself independently of the flow of time. This repetitiveness is of a metaphysical nature: whatever the time period, the relationship between the swarm and the individual remains essentially unchanged. Although the individual is frightened by the prospect of being separated from the swarm, he has no choice—his belatedness appears grounded in a law which lies beyond rational human comprehension. In *Left Behind*, the ever-recurring treason of the collective against the outsider is less a moral question than a constant of human existence, marking an evolution from earlier narratives. Treason has become a constant, independent of the will of both swarm and outsider. Mankanin employs myth to further investigate this law, using the mythological level in his narratives to explore the same basic hypothesis explored by all other text segments while freeing the latter of their seeming mimetic, historiographic, political, and moral functions.

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PART II.
REALITIES BEHIND REALITIES: A READING OF *THE LOSS*

Notions of Outsiderdom

As demonstrated in the first part of this study, Vladimir Makanin's entire literary development represents a steady movement beyond the boundaries of official Soviet culture. If one applied the well-known criteria of the doctrine of Socialist Realism to his work (the three pillars of "party-mindedness," "ideological saturation," and "popular spirit"), not one of Makanin's narratives, not even the earliest, would qualify as Socialist Realist. Yet it was crucial to his literary development that he never directly opposed official Soviet cultural dogmas nor the powerful literary bureaucracy of the USSR. Makanin's strategy was not to confront, but to ignore. He accepted as a matter of course the sparse and mostly negative critical reactions that his writings attracted and declined to join any official literary body. Thus to say that Makanin, together with other writers, became an *outsider of Soviet literature*, refers to his social and aesthetic position relative to the official center, where appreciation and influence were concentrated. In this respect, Makanin as an author is reminiscent of some of his central characters, but such an understanding of outsiderdom would be dominated by the social meaning of the term. The following analysis of Makanin's short novel *The Loss* argues in favor of a wider understanding of his idea of the *outsider*, whose social marginality results from his transcendence of a prescribed world view.

Although rendered in original metaphors such as the "swarm," Makanin uses the notion of outsiderdom in works written between the 1960s and early 1980s primarily in its conventional meaning: *inside* and *outside* as spatial terms are applied to the social sphere and its rules, with *outsider* denoting an individual's complicated relationship with society. For the central characters in these works, outsiderdom implies:

- loss of an insider position due to unremarked socio-spiritual shifts,
- suffering caused by being out of synch with common hierarchies of value,

- apocalyptic notions of the world caused by the individual's separation from the swarm,
- pursuit of an inner program which prevents all attempts to save the individual.

The time frame of these narratives is predominantly defined by the present. Despite a discernible feeling for the flow of time which permeates these writings, the past of the characters, in the sense of a historical category, is hardly ever mentioned. Chronological shifts—already used in Makanin's first texts—function to lead the reader away from his expectation of a story (with the introduction of conflict, opposition, culmination, and catharsis) towards an extended reflection on a given theme which is embodied in set of varied discourses and motifs.

Makanin's view of insider-/outsiderdom includes the conventional, everyday understanding of these terms, but even in relatively early works he never reduces the motif to this trivial understanding alone, managing to avoid simplifying its meaning first, by depicting the insider/outsider opposition as a shifting relationship and, second, by reflecting on the complexity of the many elements which define what is "inside" and "outside." As "The Man from the Suite" (Chelovek svity, 1982)⁶⁷ shows, insiderdom is not homogeneous—it has a structure of its own, with at least a center and margins that shape the position of the insiders, making some of them "occasional outsiders" and vice-versa.

After exploring the relationship between individual and swarm from various points of view, Makanin at the beginning of the 1980s appeared to reach the borders of the social interpretation of insiderdom/outsiderdom. "The Man from the Suite" is an exemplary model of this interpretation. The story depicts human relationships in an industrial mega-enterprise, more precisely, those within its administration. The director is mostly away on business (*na kommandirovke*) and his chief secretary Aglaia⁶⁸ becomes the center of influence in the enterprise. An

67. Vladimir Makanin, "Chelovek svity," in *Mesto pod solntsem* (Moscow, 1984).

68. Her name, nowadays very rare, evokes a sense of exclusiveness and dangerous shrewdness. A literary association with the youngest, most beautiful, and shrewdest daughter of General Epanchin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*—even if coincidental—confirms these evocations.

elderly yet attractive lady, she has established a court of people who meet every day at her office after work for tea and a chat. Belonging to this club (called "the suite") means to be respected by bosses and colleagues, promoted easily, and sent on prestigious business trips with the director. Mitia Rodëntsev, the main character of the story, trusts that his place among the chosen is based on his looks and sociability. When he is suddenly excluded from the suite and becomes an outcast despised by the same colleagues who had previously feared him, he desperately tries to find and remove the reason for his exclusion, but fails to do so. At the end of the story it remains unclear why Mitia and his female companion were first chosen and then rejected. This unresolved ambiguity can be regarded as the ultimate conclusion of "The Man from the Suite:" neither social adaptation nor the struggle for power can secure an insider position. Rather, a metaphysical law appears to grant social success at certain moments while taking it away at others.⁶⁹ In the presence of such a law, then, inner freedom means recognizing the irrelevance of the social notion of insiderdom/outsiderdom and to neglect it as much as possible. Mitia gains this insight when all his attempts to regain entrance to the suite prove futile and he finally celebrates his exclusion by getting drunk.

In "Voices" (1980), the innovations which would later lead Makanin to a new phase in his artistic development are already present: an achronological plot, a historical past in the post-World War II period, and a legendary past—all connected by folklore motifs of the Ural Mountains. Intertwined with these elements are traditional sub-plots (micro-discourses), such as disturbing stories from life in the big city, parables, parodies of literary criticism, and anecdotes. And, of course, stories about societal outcasts, described with irony and compassion. Innovative and traditional elements are not, however, organically linked in this story. Skillfully edited, they stand side by side and create the impression of a genuine, formal experiment. The title suggests acoustic disorder, which indeed is the only organizing poetic principle of the literary montage, as movement from one time period to another appears chaotic. The present, historical past, and legendary past coexist in

69. As previously mentioned, the short story "Kliucharëv and Alimushkin" (1976) is Makanin's most formulaic rendition of this "law."

"Voices," but in disjunction, providing Makanin the elements which would shape his poetic vision in works to come.

Composition

Let us now look at "content" of *The Loss*, a work written by Makanin in 1987, in order to determine both the composition of the novel and its central discourses and motifs. *The Loss* consists of the following basic discourses:⁷⁰

1. Some hundred years ago in legendary time, the entrepreneur Pekalov digs a tunnel underneath the Ural River.
2. A man in Moscow lies in a hospital after being injured in a car accident and tries to reach a girl in need of help in an apartment building across the street.
3. A man returns to the native village of his childhood in the Ural Mountains and attempts to find traces of his past.

These story lines are interwoven in free, irregular patterns. In the first third of the text, Pekalov's story dominates, the second third is dominated by the story of the hospital patient and his nightmares, the last third by a nameless character's voyage to the village of his past.

The text is divided into eight chapters of radically differing length. In chapter 1, an omniscient narrator depicts Pekalov's difficulties in obtaining funding and labor for his project, commonly seen as "crazy." However, his hired hands, permanently stimulated by vodka and promises, are almost halfway through digging under the Ural River when their work is interrupted with increasing frequency by leaks and boulders which must be circumvented. In addition, a number of mysterious murders cause unrest among the diggers until Pekalov's best aide, Iaryga,

70. Here, I prefer the term *discourse* to *plot line*, for many passages in *The Loss* are of a metaliterary nature (i.e., they openly discuss the plot line to which they belong). By "discourse" I mean all statements in the text that belong to a relatively independent plot, distinguished from other plots in the narrative by time, space, the set of characters, and the conflict.

finds the murderer and secretly disposes of him. Scared off by more accidents, one after another worker leaves Pekalov, who finally hires three blind men to finish the tunnel.

In chapter 2, a non-fictional passage about the laws of immortality and the part insanity plays in the formation of legends is followed by a passage which describes a meeting of the first-person narrator with a friend of his childhood.

In chapter 3, Pekalov, who did not reveal his purpose to the pious blind men, fearing that they might regard his plan as sinful, loses his hand in an accident, while one of the blind men is killed by a falling rock. After finishing the tunnel, the two remaining blind men come out on the other side of the Ural River and die in a swamp. Pekalov, lonely and sick, crawls through the tunnel himself and is never seen again.

In chapter 4, a first-person narrator recalls his one-year stay in a ward for post-traumatic patients. It is then that he remembers the Pekalov legend. He notices a girl signalling for help in a building across the street; he tries to walk to her, but the scene appears to be a nightmare.

In chapter 5, after a number of expository passages on the nature of time and loss, the first person narrator relates anecdotes from his childhood about a feast as well as several people who died and were forgotten.

Chapter 6 presents another episode of the first-person narrator's childhood: after the war, his mother sends him to a resort for blind people, whom he observes attentively.

Chapter 7 presents a vision in which the first-person narrator can see Pekalov and talk to him.

In chapter 8, a third-person narrator describes the attempts of a man in his forties⁷¹ to find the remnants of his native village in the

71. The nameless character of the last discourse is described by a third-person narrator and seems to be close to the first-person narrator in the central part of *The Loss*. However, at no point does this closeness become a formal identification between the two characters.

Urals region. He finds the ruins of houses and ovens, as well as a graveyard where he spends part of the night before leaving the place forever.

A first glance at the length of each chapter—they run from two to fifteen pages—shows sharp quantitative contrasts between them. This is certainly a digression from narrative convention, in which the division of text into chapters normally creates a relatively steady rhythm. The narration furthermore shifts from fiction to non-fiction and vice-versa, often within one chapter, in an unpredictable way.⁷² The initial and final chapters, by far the longest in the novel, stand out in that they are rendered in realistic style and, with the exception of a few minor digressions, most resemble traditional realistic narratives. The fact that they are of equal length suggests that Makanin composed *The Loss* in a triptychal structure with the Pekalov and homecoming chapters as the two outside panels which flank the central part of the work.

Undoubtedly, the composition of this narrative provides the reader with no clear and easy key to its comprehension. The three main discourses comment on each other indirectly—in the non-fictional, quasi-essayistic passages, directly—but neither these comments nor the end of the narrative bring resolution to the uncertainties which accumulate throughout the text. The combination of fictional and non-fictional segments, with the fictional segments belonging to various genres (historical narrative, legend, contemporary realistic story, childhood memoir, fantastic story) whose boundaries are constantly shifting, also fails to illuminate the text, rendering it instead more involved. We may therefore assume that the composition of *The Loss* does not stand apart from the complex cluster of epistemological problems explored in the novel, which one intuitively senses as questions of time, death, the formation of myth, and so on. Rather, the composition is part of the *aesthetic realization* of this cluster of issues. In order to gain deeper insight into the meaning of this narrative (and define it in relation to Soviet literature), we must further examine various aspects of its structure.

72. In his latest work to date, "A Plot of Averageness" ("Siuzhet usredneniia," *Novyi mir* 2 [February 1992]), Makanin chose the genre of essay to discuss in an openly non-fictional manner how plots develop their own lives and how he communicates with them. Makanin simultaneously connects this topic with the pressure and wish to become an "average person," a phenomenon he regards as a basic tendency, disquieting and comforting at the same time, in the modern world.

The Poetics of the Title

In spite of the perceived rationality of Makanin's approach to literary creation, for him the word is not primarily a tool for reflecting reality and transmitting information. Multifaceted meanings as well as the sound properties of words⁷³ are used intensively, but belong to the least noticed qualities of Makanin's prose. Beginning with the wording of titles, semantic ambiguity and sound widen the reader's potential scope of associations and resonances. The title of a narrative—the initial text signal transmitted to the reader—plays a particularly important role in Makanin's works.⁷⁴ Titles often are the first element of a topical chain, the unfolding of which is an integral part of the text structure, something like a *leitmotif*. Due to its prominent position, the title word usually acquires a programmatic value.

The title of *The Loss* is a word whose sound in Russian—*utrata*—seems to convey more hopelessness and sadness than its English counterpart. Makanin employs such titles in order to catch the reader's attention, intentionally deviating from the loud social pathos so common in Soviet literature. As always with Makanin, the title vibrates with

73. Vladimir Gusev has claimed there is no musicality in Makanin's prose (*Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 March 1987), whereas critics like Vladimir Bondarenko (*Zvezda* 8 [August 1986]: 187) and Mark Lipovetskii (*Ural* 12 [December 1985]: 157) emphasize exactly those musical qualities of Makanin's style.

74. The titles of Makanin's narratives overall can be roughly divided into three groups:

- 1) Single nouns, sometimes with accompanying adjectives, usually representing a central character or plot element (*A Straight Line*, *Old Books*, "Otdushina," "The Chase" [in *V bol'shom gorode* (Moscow, 1980)], "Voices," "The Antileader," *The Loss*, *The Trap Door*);
- 2) Quotations from previously existing texts, such as folklore, songs, poems, and legends ("So Big and So Clumsy" [in *Povest' o starom posëlke* (Moscow, 1980)], "Sing Quietly For Them," "Where the Sky Merged with the Hills," "Long is Our Way");
- 3) Pairs of nouns which appear as opposing poles ("Man-Soldier and Woman-Soldier," "Kliucharëv and Alimushkin," "The Blue and the Red," *Odin i odna*).

Clearly, the first group activates the reader's associative perception by its connection with the text of the work itself, although in certain cases it may strike a tone relating to general societal discourses (*The Forerunner* and, of course, *The Loss*). In the second case, an associative perception is stimulated by a reference to an existing melody or rhythm, which evokes a certain mood but usually bears a rather vague relation to the text. Finally, the juxtaposed nouns of the third group suggest an innate tension, an enigmatic field of energy representative of the plot as a whole. In each case, however, the poetics of the title are based equally on the sound and the image of the words contained within it, as well as the various semantic levels of the text.

several resonances in the text. These mostly explicit resonances unite into a thread of their own in *The Loss*, closely intertwined with the topical fabric of the narrative. Returning to the title as an initial signal, the reader is prompted to ask: What has been lost? Whose loss was it? In a literal sense, there are no losses in the novel, rather, the characters all gain something: Pekalov succeeds in building his tunnel and the legend; the blind men, while dying, find the spiritual salvation they sought; the contemporary character is able to return to his village and vividly recall his childhood.

The title word *utrata* re-emerges in the text several times with different associations. At the very end of chapter 2, the contemporary first-person narrator finishes a short account of a meeting with his childhood friend by creating the effect of the *sound* of the word:

Neither of us complained, but with our meeting we sensed that we felt cold, chilly, and it would not be bad to dig ourselves into the depth (into the depth of the *layer-cake of time*—this was his expression) where there was a lot of sun and with each layer it would become hotter and hotter, because childhood was closer...

And then the friend of my childhood pronounced the word, which I somehow seemed to hear for the first time, "A loss..."

"What?" It seemed to me that I hadn't heard.⁷⁵

The sound properties of the word '*utrata*' are here underscored by the repetition in both men's utterances and the position of this dialogue at the very end of the chapter.

In the fifth chapter, the non-fictional narrator relates a legend about Alexander the Great, who supposedly broke a valuable amphora because he could not take it with him on a military campaign. The narrator interprets the legend in the following way:

[I]n a certain sense, all people are like him: we live exactly this way, throwing aside, or even breaking the past—we are easy, we go on our campaigns, eat, drink, until we notice the absence of something and scream: A loss, oh, a loss! (p. 157)

75. Makanin, "Utrata," 145. (See Introduction, p. 4, note 12; translation mine.) Unless otherwise stated, all further citations from "The Loss" are quoted from this source and are translated by the present author.

This passage continues with another reflection that somewhat clarifies the former:

But Tolstoy, who rejected Alexander the Great, too asked why we do not understand the past or why we understand it so badly. He appealed, he spoke about the loss, and he was answered—in a very contemporary manner, by the way: well, sure, the monuments of the past have to be preserved (look, we are painting the churches, we have re-edited an ancient book); he spoke about understanding, they spoke about a museum. He spoke about a human being, they about whether or not the tombstone over this man looks good. (p. 158)

Another non-fictional commentary in the second chapter seemingly brings us to conclusion about the meaning of the loss motif:

The anguish of man that he will be forgotten, that the worms will gobble him up and that of he himself and of his deeds there will remain not even a trace (that is about man in the past), and the moans of man (in the present) that he has lost his roots and his links with the ancestors—is this not one and the same? (p. 144)

Without doubt, this passage relates the loss motif to the pain the malfunction of human memory causes man and the fear that precisely this malfunction will destroy man's own post-mortal survival in generations to come. Yet the first passage which uses the term 'loss' refers to the blind: they "*live in their loss*"⁷⁶—the loss of sight. The motif of loss is thus associated with the motif of blindness, which recurs in the blind men working for Pekalov and the blind people at the resort to which the first-person narrator is sent in childhood. The association between loss and blindness further links the title to the motif of darkness, elaborated in both the legendary and contemporary discourses (darkness reoccurs in the tunnel, the dreams of the hospital patient, and the home village of the first-person narrator). In fact, the novel ends with a scene of darkness. Blindness and darkness share a common loss of sight which makes orientation difficult, if not impossible. The characters in *The Loss* all experience disorientation; like the blind, they have lost sight (and orientation) in a literal sense. When they relate to the ideas of memory and *digging*, however, the terms 'darkness,' 'blindness,' and the 'loss of

76. "The blind people were living in their loss (*zhivushchie v utrate svoei*), that's how it was explained [in the legend]" (p. 143; italics mine).

orientation' acquire semantic aspects which go beyond the literal meaning of these words.

Finally, it should be noted that the reader of *The Loss* finds himself in the same position as the characters—the composition and complex nexus of motifs in the novel figuratively plunge him into darkness and turn him blind. The text is as involved to the reader as the world is to the characters. The title consequently reflects yet another facet of the loss motif, that of the reader's loss of sight and orientation. Ultimately, the title acts as an enigma, generating an expectation which is frustrated—literal "losses" are hard to detect—and serving to disorient the reader. The losses to which the title refers are those other than the literal.

The Archaeology of Words

As with title words, the central philosophical, epistemological themes in Makanin's narratives are in part rendered as sophisticated inquiries concerning the multi-layered meanings of single words. Makanin approaches these words as both poetic tools and symbolic signs; often named in the title or in the first paragraph of the text, these words are then systematically "checked" for their various associations. Discourses on the meaning of specific words extend, albeit with interruption, throughout entire narratives. These words represent plot lines or micro-discourses which are intermingled in complex ways with the central discourses of a narrative.

Although in all of Makanin's works the text usually fulfills some kind of descriptive function, this function is disturbed by digressions in which the reader's attention is drawn to the language itself, where words or expressions are marked in such a way that they become distinct in terms of their self-reflective nature. In the beginning of *The Loss*, predominantly rendered in traditionally realistic fashion, certain peculiarities of the narration disturb the reader and cause a subtle effect of estrangement. First, the crimes, the criminal, and his final capture and killing are described as something usual in the Pekalov episodes; moral outrage is expressed neither by the workers nor the narrator ("[S]omeone was alive, then no longer alive, what could one do about it" [p. 131]). Second, the relations between Pekalov, the entrepreneur, and his workers

are the opposite of what one might expect in terms of subordination and exploitation. It is, in fact, the workers who verbally and physically abuse the visionary capitalist and immediately leave him when he is unable to provide the enormous amounts of vodka they consume. (This is yet another example of the reversal of the top/bottom relationship discussed previously, a device frequently used by Makanin.)

Finally, the narration turns from the descriptive to the general, where the language used by people of the historical period itself becomes the object of presentation and omniscient commentary:

Iaryga would pour each of them a full glass, the recipient would complain, would ask for more, but Iaryga would send him off to work:
"And now, my fellow, go and dig the earth."
Or, more simply:
"Go and dig."
Or, simplest of all:
"Get along." (p. 131)⁷⁷

Digressions of this kind—where each utterance is marked by a melodious brevity and rhythm and is located in a distinct position in the text—interrupt the comfortable flow of realistic narration and remind the reader of the fictional nature of the text. A similar function is fulfilled by the archaic stylizations built into text segments rendered in contemporary Russian. Within an omniscient statement, these archaic particles represent quotations of voices of characters who are not depicted. For example, in the description of the deeds of the mysterious murderer, it is said:

77. Another segment with similar composition serves as a counterpoint to the dialogue segment of Iaryga and is located at an almost proportional position to the end of the same chapter. There the prayers of Pekalov's three blind aides are described:

"After every ten steps dug under the river, the blind men left their work, fell on their knees and prayed passionately:
'Lord, have mercy on us!'
And after another ten steps:
'Have mercy on us!'
And again:
'Lord, have mercy!'" (p. 142)

И что за злое баловство? Самое страшное в том, что, если уж такой убивец завёлся, он не остановится. Этот будет потихоньку убивать и убивать, пока народу в подкопе останется совсем мало и в оставшихся не вселится ужас,—*вот тут ему, убийце, и сладость.*⁷⁸

To call a series of murders "evil mischievousness" is an understatement when referring to a time and region of feverish industrialization, where killing people was considered habitual. Also archaic and belonging to a voice other than that of the omniscient contemporary narrator is the word *ubivets*⁷⁹ instead of *ubitsa*, and the description of his excitement as *sladost'* (literally, sweetness).

The appearance of certain marked words in the various discourses of a narrative, each of which takes place in a different time period, connotes the preservation and survival of signs through the ages. It is in part due to this survival that proper names acquire a quasi-magical quality; they connect people from distant generations and ages, bestowing the same identity-labeling word on them. When the central character in the contemporary discourse of *The Loss* walks across the remnants of the village of Marchenovka, where he had spent his childhood, he looks for the names of families who once lived in the village and tries to catch a resonance of their existence in his own perception. Among all the "Grushkovs," "Trubnikovs," and "Korol's," there are also the "Iarygins," a family whose roots, like those of the others, reach back into the darkness of time (p. 169). On his second visit, he finds their tombstones in the graveyard:

He can see about five crosses, leaning in such a way that they must be just about to fall over, and another fifteen which have already fallen down—some facing the East, some the West. The names are the same: The Trubnikovs...the Iarygins...the Grushkovs...it would have been impossible to figure them out, but he knows them and reads them easily, he can see where a name lacks three letters, where five, and where altogether, instead of a word, one lonely syllable remained. (p. 174)

78. "And what evil mischievousness was this? The most terrifying thing was that, once such a killer has gotten in, he won't stop. This man will quietly kill and kill, until very few people will be left in the tunnel and the rest are haunted by fear—and that's the murderer's delight." (p. 131)

79. This word appears again later in the text (see p. 138), as do other archaisms.

The name Iarygin, resurfacing in this passage for the second time, is derived from the name Iaryga, Pekalov's aide in the historical/legendary discourse of *The Loss*. The name means the "lowest servants of the local police...who were paid by the community."⁸⁰ Apparently, the name is very appropriate, for Iaryga was Pekalov's most loyal worker and almost the last to leave him. In other words, in that legendary age, name and personality (signifier and signified) still coincided literally. The original meaning would later be forgotten, but the sign would nevertheless be given to the forefather's (Iaryga's) offspring, thus transmitting the initial meaning into the future, albeit on a subconscious level. In the world model of *The Loss*, the name functions as a word whose sound transcends the boundaries of time.

The contemporary character seeks precisely such connections and, in this respect, it is of tragic significance that he himself remains nameless. The absence of a traditional word assigned to him is repeatedly and explicitly emphasized by the third-person narrator. When the character—Pekalov's contemporary counterpart of sorts, who may or may not be identical with the reminiscing first-person narrator of the middle part of the novel—is introduced in chapter 8, he is characterized in the following way:

The man—and he is already well into his forties, and his name is of no relevance—stopped in the middle of a field, then stepped aside (he changed the point of view) and—watches. (p. 164)

When planning his second visit to the ruins of Marchenovka, it is said:

Having thought about the train, the man from far away—he is already well into his forties, and his name is of no relevance—immediately looked to the sky... (p. 171)

The implied discourse on proper names, juxtaposing old families united by names that bear the tradition of centuries with the nameless contemporary observer, marks yet another loss, the loss of a signified connection with the past. This tragic separation from others who form a whole (a swarm) even in their deadness is a form of outsiderdom still linked to the social dimension, but, by encompassing temporal and

80. Vladimir Dal', *Tokovyj slovar' shivogo velikoruskogo iazyka*, 4:679.

semiotic aspects, reaches beyond this dimension and depicts outsiderdom of another order. In his quest for matters past, the nameless character is equally isolated among his contemporaries. Again, it is a word that signifies this alienation: *zagrobnik*. An extremely rare word in contemporary Russian, *zagrobnik* is comprehensible only in the context of Makanin's narrative as denoting an interest in what lies beyond the grave—an interest in the dead and worlds that are no more.

Having been born and living in the city, having children (who were born and lived in the city), and, obviously, aside from the life of the little village which has already acquired its next and different duration, and having appeared here in spite of that—well, after all, is he really alive here, is he not a man gazing beyond the grave (*zagrobnik*)? The word did not surprise him, but cheered him up: *zagrobnik!* (p. 165)

When the character thinks of nature's attitude towards the remnants of the village and himself personally, he continues to refer to himself as a *zagrobnik*, adding "not even a human being" (p. 166). When the word comes up for the third and last time, it is used in a comment of the third-person narrator when describing the character's thoughts. The nameless man is talking to a woman, the only acquaintance from his childhood who remains in Marchenovka, asking her to accompany him on his trip to the village, and the narrator adds an aside in parentheses:

(He is speaking as a man alive, at the same time he continues thinking as the *zagrobnik*.) [p. 172]

The search for connections with the past does not provide the character an identity expressed in a name; he remains outside of the world of names past and present. *Zagrobnik* is simply an ironic reflection of his drive, perceived as strange to those in the present. His attempts to communicate with other times by *literally* revisiting old places fails and he admits that "it was no good to travel and come here. There was no resonance" (p. 176). Visiting the old village, or migrating through the landscape of the heart—motifs made popular by Russian Village Prose representing conscious attempts to continue interrupted traditions—prove fruitless. Approached directly, time past is lost. Transtemporal communication—building a living bridge between Pekalov's epoch and the epochs which follow—can only be achieved by other means.

Paths into Legend

In the first chapter of *The Loss*, when the narration is traditionally realistic (as in a historical novel) and the reader does not yet realize that the text recreates a legend, Pekalov is given several verbal characterizations that demonstrate his ordinariness. In one of these descriptions a detail links the "historical" Pekalov to his contemporary counterpart in the last chapter:

Unlucky and empty, stuck in a tiny settlement, Pekalov was a drunkard and nothing else: without money, *without name*, without conscience. He even drank without special revelry or daring: average in everything. (p. 133; italics mine)

Given that the contemporary character is repeatedly mentioned as nameless, the fact that Pekalov in his lifetime "did not have a name" is significant. Moreover, the statement "*Pekalov was a drunkard and nothing else*"—obviously a quotation integrated into the omniscient narrator's speech—can be regarded as the hypothesis for the epistemological experiment which *The Loss* as a whole represents, initiating the themes of immortality and transgressions of temporal "normality."

In this context, the manifold epithets attached to Pekalov at the beginning of this segment, before his canonization and entrance into legend, unfold a distinct micro-discourse about the path into legend which follows Pekalov's progression from namelessness (i.e., unimportance) to his acquirement of a name (i.e., achieving importance). The text, using omniscient commentaries together with unattributed quotations of other "voices," emphasizes Pekalov's earthiness (the dirt on his hands is pointed out several times) and baseness (he is several times called *tvar*, or creature). In one case, he reacts violently to the latter epithet ("he did not like when the people from the settlement, and after them every drunken bastard, called him creature" [p. 132]), only to regret this demonstration of pride and apologize to the worker in order to make him stay. Makanin literally lowers the legendary character's image to the ground (and, naturally, Pekalov's digging in the depths of the earth is interpreted by his contemporaries in exactly the same way) by emphasizing, among other characteristics, the character's "creature" aspect. When Pekalov, bankrupt, plans to sell his furniture to a rich salesman, we read:

Salkov did not know yet what the matter was, but he knew very well that Pekalov was a *small creature*, that he was ruined and that he was *falling down*, and when a man is falling, one can buy cheaply not only his furniture." (p. 135; italics mine)

The reversal of the common top/bottom hierarchy in Pekalov's relations with his workers adds further to his denigration as an outsider. A similar reversal occurs with the wife of Alëshka, one of Pekalov's aides. When she orders Alëshka to come home and the entrepreneur attempts to resist this order, we read:

Pekalov tried to interfere, but she glanced like a she-wolf and threatened him. She was able to beat him to the ground: compared to her, Pekalov was puny. (p. 132)

In contrast to self-reflective passages on such words as *loss* or *zagrobnik*, which are explicitly discussed in a character's speech or by a narrator, reflections on *smallness* and *earthiness* develop implicitly. From the very beginning, the narration is rendered in traditional style by an omniscient narrator who relates the events as if he had been an eyewitness. Evaluations are given from a "normal," or majority, point of view, with which the reader has no problems identifying.

Everybody knew that Pekalov was *a drunkard and a loser* and that his plan, quite obviously, was and is *stupid*; and nonetheless he, the *jerk*, grabbed everybody by his sleeve and roared:

"Now, guys, who is coming with me—after all, I am digging a tunnel under the Ural!"

And he roared again:

"I'm going under the Ural!" (p. 130; italics mine)

The introductory words "everybody knew," as well as the evaluative epitaphs, are obviously what Pekalov's contemporaries said about him. The passages of dialogue serve to illustrate the interaction between a man driven by a vision and his fellowmen who despise him and participate unwillingly in his vision. The omniscient descriptions do little more than clarify the circumstances, so that the reader always feels that he understands what is going on. Shifts from one text segment to the next are rendered in chronological order so that the reader, provided with such strong evidence of Pekalov's mediocrity, will hardly expect anything spectacular from him.

However, a few signals suggest that the denigrating words do not describe all of Pecalov's personality. He begins to cry as he complains to his lover Nastia about the workers who run away from his enterprise. Describing the scene, the narrator adopts the point of view of the caring woman:

She...threw off the blanket, but he did not stop crying: he looked like a *child* when he was heavily drunk. (p. 134; italics mine)

When Nastia, who is married to a soldier, decides to leave Pecalov (probably because he has lost his house to the businessman Salkov), the omniscient narrator finishes the passage with a remark that sounds unusual in the context of the many previous negative epithets:

Alone, he was standing in the darkness, and *for the first time in his life felt* *dismally stingy*. (p. 140; italics mine)

This remark signals that this strange, driven man usually possesses genuine *generosity*, differentiating him from most of his contemporaries, as well as childlike *innocence*, as addressed in the preceding passage. The fact that he could not bring himself to give Nastia a farewell gift is, in this respect, secondary. The traits of generosity and innocence, together with the invincible stubbornness he displays in pursuing his project, disturb the "normal" insider point of view that Pecalov is nothing but a drunkard and a creature. These traits are the basis for his social outsiderdom, but also the foundation of his ultimate achievement of superiority over time and space—his entrance into the immortality of legend.

The ordinariness of Pecalov, constantly underlined by the narrator, sets the stage for the reader to be surprised by Pecalov's canonization. A shock-like effect is achieved when, suddenly, the mimetic narration abruptly shifts to non-fictional discourse. Describing Pecalov's blind workers, the omniscient narrator says:

They came to the surface. /End of omniscient third-person narration and shift to non-fictional, quasi-essayistic discourse./ *In the old Ural legend* this was particularly surprising: the blind did the work better and more reliably than all the others. (p. 143; italics mine)

Never before has the narrator mentioned that the story of Pekalov is based on a legend. This sudden metaliterary statement changes the genre of the discourse, so far taken for a historical novel, as well as the time of the story, transforming *historical* into *mythological* time.

The religious aspect of the text, although not dominant, is also of note. This aspect becomes prominent for the first time with the appearance of three⁸¹ blind men who are led through the world by an infant guide. The bankrupt, drunken Pekalov meets the blind men as he is leaving a pub and they respond to his offer to "dig under the earth" by cautiously asking whether it is the Lord's work ("*Bogovo li delo?*").

Pekalov answered that indeed it was the Lord's work. And not theft. And no other loathsome thing. Only he did not tell them that the tunnel was being dug under the river—it seemed to him that *God had told him to be quiet in this bitter minute*, when he was left alone with Kutyr. (p. 142; italics mine)

What appears to be a harmless lie turns out to be the focus of a short debate concerning the essence of Pekalov's entire enterprise. The first passage of the third chapter, which emphasizes the immediacy of the discourse by using the conjunction 'and,' continues the dialogue between the fanatical entrepreneur and the blind men, touching the heart of the philosophical problem posed by the tunnel:

And it was telling how Pekalov answered when he was lying to the blind men. "How can it be the Lord's work, when there is no meaning to it?" reasonably asked the blind men whom Pekalov had ordered to dig and did not tell anything, not even about the river above their heads. Pekalov *answered them immediately*, seemingly calming the blind men and deceiving them, but essentially working for the sake of the legend and its creators: could there be, indeed, a meaning to a deed of God?...*There can be meaning only in a human deed, whereas God suggests to us that seemingly there is no meaning, but one is driven by the deed, and it must be done.* (p. 146; italics mine)

By allowing Pekalov to speak this way, Mukanin establishes the fact that his central character is aware of the impact the tunnel project will have on the future. Pekalov thus consciously "works for the legend" (*rabotal na*

81. The recurrence of the number three in *The Loss* calls for some kind of mythopoetic, perhaps Jungian, analysis of its significance. *Three* occurs on several levels in the narrative: in the triptychal plot structure, three discourses, three main characters, the threefold repetition of certain utterances, etc.

legendu). The religious dimension of his deed is just a hypothesis, but the fact that Pekalov answers the blind men immediately may hint that he has already considered the question. Nevertheless, it is an inexplicable inner drive which makes him pursue the project, not the quasi-religious purpose attached to it *a posteriori*.

The omniscient narrator leaves no doubt about the artificial, post-factual nature of Christian alterations of the legend. Questioning the reasons for which God might have accepted Pekalov as a saint ("*for his stubbornness, maybe [today they would call it "for the will to be victorious"]*"—p. 143; italics mine), the narrator attributes the attempt "to model a saint" to the usual rules of legend-building. He reports that a small chapel is later erected on the other side of the Ural River where Pekalov supposedly came out from the tunnel. One spring this chapel falls apart, destroying the painting on its wall ("*Pekalov with a nimbus around his head was lifted up to the sky by angels...*" [p. 143; italics mine]),

[A]nd nothing remains there of the mad digger (*o bezumnom kopatele*), who was remembered by the people and who, whatever one might say, entered legend. (p. 143)

The slight irony of the narrator's description of the nimbus and the angels is indisputable, but, as often in Makanin, irony as a tool for relativizing faith and hagiography is itself later questioned. For, relates the narrator, there was a reason for the holy image: when Pekalov, completely ruined, escapes and crawls for the last time into his tunnel, exiting on the other side of the river "*like a worm getting out from under the scree*" (p. 151; italics mine), he yells to some villagers who can see only the shining nimbus around his head. They cannot know that in recent months, while digging and lying ill, Pekalov has turned grey, creating the impression of an aura of white light over his head. Makanin takes the contrast between the earthly (*worm*) and the divine (*nimbus*) to the extreme in this segment. Then, almost as if the narrator wants to take back the rational explanation of the nimbus, he retells the story of the chapel in a slightly ironic tone:

And until very recently, one could see distinctly a painting, even though it had severely faded: angels carry a man towards the sky. The angels are shown with hands and wings. The body of the raised man, moving upwards, is tumbling a bit to the side, because the angel who holds the one-handed man from the left side is *less comfortable than the one on the right side*. (p. 151; italics mine)

The Loss is, among other things, a reflection on the nature of memory, the overcoming of forgetfulness, and the creation of a legend (indeed, Makanin relates a *tvorimaia legenda*, a "legend-in-the-making"). The narrative offers Christian religion as one interpretive concept, but, as with all linear interpretive concepts and explanations in Makanin's *oeuvre*, it is permanently disturbed and relativized.⁸² To be sure, Christianity appears in two forms in *The Loss*. In one, it is a naive, poetic coloration of the legend-in-the-making, an additional explanatory layer superimposed on paganism and superstition. In the other, it functions as the path which leads to the center of the narrative's epistemological and aesthetic questions:

- What is the origin of the kind of activism displayed by Pekalov?
- Why are deeds with a strong element of irrationality the most memorable to people?
- Towards what goal is this activism directed?
- And, finally, what is the connection between Pekalov and his contemporary counterpart(s)?

Strange Encounter

The Loss incorporates three main characters. Each follows his peculiar *idée fixe*: Pekalov builds a tunnel with no practical purpose, the injured man in the hospital seeks to save a girl whose actual existence is doubtful, and the "man beyond the grave" attempts to rediscover the world of his childhood. These drives put the men in a position where the majority of people cannot understand them; they create a social gap between the men and their respective social environments. The social aspect of the ideas driving the characters is complemented by a spatial aspect which restores the literal meaning to the term *out-sider*. It is

82. The narratives which follow "Voices" in particular provide abundant material for Christian conceptualization; this material is expressed in its most sophisticated form in *The Forerunner*. Makanin often ridiculed clichés of primitive atheism in the Soviet Union, yet for those who seek unequivocal ideologies of any kind, his narratives are a disappointment, as they always provide more than one interpretive clue.

symbolic that all three men strive to break through spatial limitations which appear to be genuine *hindrances* as well as symbolically marked territories. In the first discourse, the Ural River appears to Pekalov's contemporaries—and to generations before them—as a natural, God-given limit which can be overcome temporarily, but not defeated permanently as with the tunnel. In the second discourse, the hospital, like the Ural River, is a *protected space*, and the injured man is forced to hide his identity as a patient in order to leave that space (whether or not it is only in his imagination). Finally, in the third discourse, the "man beyond grave" enters the remnants of an old village, a space left by its former inhabitants, which possesses a sacred, even magical quality, particularly because of the graveyard. Finally, the three characters have a common capability of perceiving something which their environment is not: Pekalov, the future tunnel; the hospital inmate, a distanced human being in a dangerous situation; and the "man beyond the grave," the past.

The visions which drive the three characters are stronger than societal norms, and the men, after struggling with outside forces as well as internalized societal norms in their own personalities, decide in favor of the drive, the *idée fixe*, the vision. Their common traits can be viewed as a typology of *seekers*, of outsiders whose outsiderdom implies but is not limited to social alienation. The central primordial characteristic of these characters is their obsession with stepping over spatial borders, in both the literal and figurative sense. Makanin has synthesized spatial and visionary outsiderdom, at first probably subconsciously, from the very beginning of his creative development. At the end of *A Straight Line*, for example, Volodia Belov, *the one* with a vision of universal threat and responsibility, is in the airplane, while his colleagues, *the many*, who care about little other than their material well-being, celebrate together. This connection between a certain type of outsider's visionary and spatial transcendence becomes essential in Makanin's later narratives, particularly *The Forerunner*, and provides the central theme of *The Loss*.

Within the temporal framework of the first third of *The Loss*, Pekalov the seeker approaches spatial limitations directly by *digging* into the earth. Of course, it is not digging as such that secures his entrance into the immortality of legend, but the insane, visionary nature of his enterprise. In the course of the narrative, however, the word 'digging' acquires an additional metaphorical meaning which is then projected back onto the Pekalov episodes. When the first-person narrator ponders his

recollections during his stay in the hospital, he uses the verb ‘to dig’ (*kopat’*) to signify a movement backwards in time.⁸³ Soon afterwards, the same first-person narrator who encounters Pekalov in his dreams calls the latter “the digger through time” (*kopatel’ skvoz’ vremia*, p. 163). At this juncture, the term ‘digging’ becomes linked to the characters’ approach to space and time.

Digging the tunnel underneath the Ural river—“working for the legend”—simultaneously means to dig into the depths of time, or, like Pekalov, to overcome its all-destructive power. Pekalov, driven by the wish to endure and acquire a post-mortal existence (which, by the way, is bound to the survival of his *name*, i.e., a word) struggles with time *actively, directly*. The first-person narrator in the hospital overcomes time in his *imagination*: although he is convinced that he saves the girl in reality, every new attempt to approach her proves it is only a nightmare, no more real than his dream encounters with Pekalov. (Interestingly, the real surprise is not that the contemporary character can temporarily reach Pekalov—that is, be with him in the same, although imaginative space—but that he cannot reach a person who seems to be with him in contemporaneity. The whole notion of simultaneity is thus questioned.) When, after leaving the hospital, the patient enters the apartment building where the girl signalling for help supposedly lives, he finds himself in a tunnel resembling that of Pekalov. The contemporary character even hears water flowing above him but as he soon discovers, it is merely a nightmare of his imagination. The third character only *observes* the ruins of the abandoned village and tries in vain to catch the voices of the past.

In contrast to Pekalov, the two contemporary characters have no material enterprise which could be later transformed into a spiritual (legendary) project—they cannot dig literally. They leave spatial normality, but know of no way to persistently overcome time. The only method of solving the dilemma of being fixed in one’s time and space, and thus unable to overcome the spatio-temporal continuum, is shown to be the second character’s imagination. This method is formulated as a question,

83. “*Esli kopat’ eschë—mne odinnadtsat’ let: vremia golodnoe...*” (If one *digs* further—I am eleven years old: a time of famine...) [p. 160; italics in original].

a mere possibility, something ephemeral in comparison to the firmness of legend:

When I saw the digger through time, he was standing, leaning on his shovel, and he answered me that he was in a hurry and that it was time to dig...But maybe he could also see? And maybe he also felt depressed like me and also wanted to understand me like I wanted to understand him? Maybe he saw me through the thick layers of days and years, and there he was standing, leaning on the shovel, and looking at how in a hospital ward a man is lying in fever, with his face upwards and no chance of turning around. (p. 163)

The uncertain character of the contact with Pekalov is described as painful by the first-person narrator: he longs for a real connection. The same holds true for the third character, who vividly remembers people and objects from his childhood, but establishes no contact with the past—his imagination remains directed one-way.

*"No matter how long you walked, the yellow peaks would move away, and one could never reach them—but one was able to see them."*⁸⁴ This sentence from "Voices" reveals an intriguing spatial aspect of Makanin's world model. The resulting mood permeates several of his narratives: the feeling that it is impossible to reach the ideal or the dream—in both a literal and figurative sense—or even one's past, where the dream or ideal is usually located. The impact of this sentence can be compared to a camera which is shooting a mountain range using two opposing movements: approaching the mountains on a dolly (consequently narrowing the frame) while simultaneously using a wide-angle lens (widening the frame), so that the viewer/reader/visionary approaches the object of his desire at the same time that he is moving away from it. *The Loss* can be read as an extended reflection on precisely the never-ending attempt to follow the call of "other spaces, other times" and the failure to achieve an encounter outside of time and space.

In view of this conclusion, Makanin's complicated plot composition proves far more legitimate than at first sight. This legitimacy is founded on the network of implied epistemological disputes, micro-discourses, and metaphors explored in *The Loss*. One could say that the basic epistemological problem of the nature of time and man's possible ways

84. Makanin, "Golosa," 218. (See Part I, p. 6, note 16; italics mine.)

of dealing with it (and in it) *necessitated* the composition of *The Loss*. The open structure of the narrative, which likens the problem to a question, seems, however, to allow for varied interpretations of the text. (The analysis presented in this study has certainly not identified one single determinative principle for the novel's composition.) In any case, Makanin virtually required an *achronological* narration in order to realize his epistemological experiment, one which appears to completely ignore the laws of causality and classical physics.

It should be remembered that Makanin's break with the chronological principle, first cautiously introduced and then developed more forcefully in his works, was uncommon in Soviet literature. In mainstream Soviet narratives, the plot basically coincides with the story (deviations are explicitly marked and rationally explicable), and the author/narrator's basic evaluative function remains unquestioned. A multitude of points of view or uncertainty about the narrator's evaluation of events would subvert the social-educational purpose of literature. Any digression from linearity was considered strange and incomprehensible to the *homunculus* called "the broad reader" (*shirokii chitatel'*) denoting mainstream readership in Soviet criticism. (The plot of *A Straight Line*, in which linearity leads directly to catastrophe, can thus be understood as a polemical challenge of a basic principle of Soviet literature, a challenge of which Makanin was quite likely unconscious.) Makanin as a writer intentionally drove himself into an outsider position in the Soviet literary world by using increasingly complex approaches to plot composition. He chose not to be easily palatable to a public brought up on simplistic, straightforward plot patterns, evaluative clichés, and stock characters. In fact, the story itself became progressively more secondary the further Makanin developed his narrative principles. Instead, the plot, with its achronological structure and lack of climaxes, became part of a complex "message" based on a world view in which no one concept could claim to be primordial or finite.⁸⁵

85. For the paradigm of Soviet literature, this was indeed a considerable formal innovation which could be called moderate only if compared to Western European or American avant-garde literature (See note 4 above.) "The form is new, principally new. If one does not make clear how this is made and for which purpose it is made exactly this way, one will not comprehend the meaning of his *oeuvre* and will not be able to find within the seeming chaos the absolutely stringent cosmos" (Tat'iana Tolstaia, *Voprosy literatury* 2 [February 1988]: 81).

In *The Loss*, not only the voices of generations past remain inaudible to the third character, but their lives remain invisible as well. He is *blind* in a figurative sense, endowing the blind characters from previous text segments with additional symbolic meaning. When the man stays at the graveyard, the few decodable written signs (names and dates) on the tombstones and crosses are only further evidence of his blindness. Script and the written word (materially fixed signs) in general are not the level on which he can transcend time. In the very last scene of *The Loss*, Makanin has his protagonist confront the immateriality of these signs. Some are erased, so that the date of death seems to be missing ("1861-..."), others seem to have never been born, their trace is lost in the eternity of the past ("...-1942"). On one cross, the whole life span is covered by a dash: "...-...," or "nil to eternity" (p. 175). In comparison with the pre-legendary Pekalov, the two contemporary characters have lost the genuine, all-encompassing drive to transcend the limitations of time; this is another loss mourned in the title. The pain the third character shares with the hospital patient leads to his ultimate resignation and a decision to never again attempt a journey into the past:

Then he suddenly gets up and shouts into the night, "Ai-ai-ai!"—he shouts without having an addressee, and when in the *dead* silence his voice disappears, he falls on the ground, pressing his face into the soft soil, turning either to the earth, or to the graveyard, or to someone else....He failed to enter *the tunnel*. (p. 176; italics mine)

Makanin's use of the words 'digging' and 'tunnel,' in addition to their literal meaning in the first discourse, metaphorically suggest the process of recollection in the *arch-tunnel of time*, so to speak—the spiritual transcendence of time and the saddening comprehension that this transcendence can no longer be realized. After Pekalov, the tunnel into time opens only to the uncertainty of imagination and the way into legend is closed. The *literary text* itself, then, serves as the final *locus* of an encounter between these men driven by a longing to transcend space and time and a reader driven by the same desire. The title thus also signifies *the loss of a conventional, linear model of the past and an author-narrator-reader relationship in which such a linear model could be realistically conveyed*.

* * * * *

CONCLUSION

Although several themes and motifs in *The Loss* can be read as references to contemporary Russian literary debates that deal with society's views of the past, Makanin's novel distinctly distances itself from the conventional literary rendition of these themes. Most importantly, the author avoids any unequivocal conceptualization and instead composes a philosophically *open* text that offers a multitude of interpretations. The coexistence of several interpretive concepts, as well as the philosophical vagueness of the text's "message," grants this work an exceptional position in contemporary Russian letters.

More than any other literature, Russian and Soviet literature has been interpreted predominantly within its political context, which is certainly justified, given the extent to which the political shapes the cultural in Russia. The value of a literary text over time was measured by the social standing of its author, his display of "social responsibility," and the consequent aesthetic realization of this responsibility in the text. Thus authors who grappled with aesthetic concepts in which social and political factors were of minor importance usually did not gain much critical attention. In the late 1980s, however, with the fatal crisis of Soviet society and the transformation of the role of the Russian intelligentsia, the dominance of socio-political themes began to fade in Russian/Soviet literature. For the first time, former "literary outsiders" such as Vladimir Makanin received considerable recognition.

Makanin's world view is characterized by both a stringent analytical approach and a keen interest in the enigmatic, metaphysical aspects of life. Together with his intentional avoidance of public functions traditional for Russian and Soviet writers, these particularities of his world view determined his outsider position in Russian literary life. Moving away from typical narrative patterns of contemporary Russian letters, Makanin in texts such as *The Loss* consequently transcended the aesthetic and philosophic boundaries of Soviet literature, creating an artistic world beyond the world of social reality, in a realm of his own.