

Fredric S. Levinson

*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*:  
Remizov's Chronicle  
of Revolution

Of all Alexei Remizov's works *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* remains one of the most ambitious and enigmatic. Yet paradoxically it has continued to be one of the most sadly neglected pieces in the writer's prodigious oeuvre. The work's multiple distinctions and its pivotal place in the artist's career make the need to examine it all the more imperative. For *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, with its involved compositional history, not only represents the transition in Remizov's career from Russian to émigré writer, but more importantly stands as the first significant example of a type of writing which was to assume a central place for all the years to come.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the impulses underlying Remizov's creativity, that which kindled innovation was perhaps the most insistent. In the course of a long and productive career Remizov furnished examples of an astonishing number of literary modes and types. Much to his credit, Remizov never abandoned this willingness to assay new forms. In fact his later years gave rise to even more original works than the zealousness of youth had produced. It is just this willingness to disregard or to tamper with conventions which has led Nikolai Andreev to the cogent observation that Remizov's creativity is essentially summed up in his "systematic fracturing of genres."<sup>2</sup> The writer's persistent efforts to fashion extended prose pieces provide ample witness to that statement.

Remizov's frustrated attempts at the novel are largely confined to the earlier years of his career, a fact not without significance. Bely's complaints about the untidiness and lack of cohesion in *Prud* sounded notes rung repeatedly in the years to follow.<sup>3</sup> Of particular interest is his recognition of Remizov's reliance on concatenating episodes as a central compositional device. Remizov conceded Bely's points when he later acknowledged the unsuitability of his artistic temperament to the novel: "I snova povtoraiu, ia nikakoi romanist, a ia popytalsia, no ne vyshlo. U menia net dara posledovat'nosti, a vse sryvu." ("Again I repeat, I am no novelist. I have tried but it just hasn't worked out. I don't have the gift of consistency—everything is helter-skelter.")<sup>4</sup> Unwilling to abandon the larger prose format, Remizov introduced instead significant modifications which allowed him to rechannel the creative urge which had earlier been misdirected to the uncongenial compositional demands of the novel. That outlet was provided by a type of writing which was frankly autobiographical in reference and at the same time thoroughly imaginative. Even as Remizov was first embarking on this new undertaking Viktor Shklovsky sensed its importance: "Remizov . . . once said to me: 'I can no longer begin a novel: "Ivan Ivanovich was sitting at the table."'" Shklovsky continues:

As a cow devours grass, so literary themes are devoured; devices fray and crumble.

A writer cannot be a ploughman: he is a nomad, constantly moving with his wife and herd to greener pastures . . .

Our business is the creation of new things. At the moment, Remizov wants to create a book with no plot, with no "man's fate" lodged at the base of the composition. He's writing one book made from bits and pieces—that's *Russia in Writ*, a book made from scraps of books; he's writing another one based on Rozanov's letters.

It's impossible to write a book in the old way. Bely knows that, Rozanov knew it well, Gorky knows it when he's not thinking about syntheses and Steinach; and I, the bob-tailed monkey, know it.

We have introduced into our works the intimate, identified by first and last name, because of this same necessity for new material in art. Both Solomon Kaplun in Remizov's new story and Mariya Fyodorovna Andreeva in his lament for Blok are dictated by literary form.<sup>5</sup>

In *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, as in a great many other works from Remizov's émigré period, that "intimate" element of which Shklovsky spoke is provided by the figure of the author, "identified by first and last name." In this work, which lays no claim to documentary or empirical value, the autobiographical material supplies a readily identifiable experiential basis, a central mediating consciousness grounded in time and space.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of this internal point of view determined more decisively than any other artistic stratagem how Remizov would circumscribe his theme of the experience of revolution (in the broad sense, drawing in this case as well on the February Revolution and the years of the Civil War). The experience of revolution, its maelstrom and destruction,

the anguish of deprivation, sacrifice, and loss left in its wake, was to be communicated directly, as it revealed itself to the sensibility of the artist who serves as both a gifted observer and pathetic victim.

*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* evolved only through a complex, agglutinative process. In view of this, and in view of the critical clichés which had rooted themselves in the minds of Remizov's readers, it should come as no surprise that in one of the few responses ever accorded the work, Osorgin describes it as "a disjointed miscellany of manners and experience."<sup>7</sup> In fact, when the work is carefully examined its unity becomes clear. Throughout the book Remizov's attention is directed to three separate but interrelated ways of perceiving the experiences incorporated into it. All of the compositional and thematic elements of the work can be assigned to one of these modes of apprehension. That is, the narrative consciousness which embraces the book and which is identified as belonging to our author manifests itself in three functions or roles. These three functions may be labelled the artistic, the diaristic, and the annalistic.

Although a detailed description of each function is impossible here, a brief recapitulation of the compositional features contained in all three should prove useful. In the first place, it provides a convenient summary of the principal elements of the work. Secondly, such an accounting of the constituent parts will make clear the context in which Remizov's view of history is couched. It is through the articulation of this historiography that a significant part of the Remizov *Weltanschauung* can be defined.

The artistic function involves all those features of the text which direct the reader's attention to the fact that raw materials are being artfully manipulated, that artifice is employed in the composition of the work. Many of these features draw attention to the ordering of the text (e.g., unit and chapter titles, foreshadowing passages, or the use of perspective to set past events in relief). The network of motifs and images, their interrelations and systems of cross-reference, the establishment of points of contiguity and the use of counterpoint to order episodes all signal the artist's presence in the text. As is the case with the other two functions, the rationale for employing all the compositional elements associated with them is provided by the treatment of the theme from each of these points of view. Thus on the thematic level the artistic function treats the question of art and revolution (the Revolution and the artist, the Revolution and language) and accommodates the programmatic chapters standing outside the text's chronology, as well as the elements of modernist involvement with literary antecedents (in this case with Gogol, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Blok).

The artistic function represents a midpoint between the stylistic extremes of rhetoric and pathos, associated with the annalistic function, and the deliberate baldness and pretense of effecting an ingenuous, non-literary manner brought into play by the operation of the diaristic function.

It is this latter function which accounts for much in the text which is mundane and immediate (e.g., the various types of passages resembling journal entries, the intermittent use of a synchronic point of view on the temporal plane and of other devices to establish a sense of immediacy). All those passages which are personal, private, esoteric, or confessional belong here as well. On the thematic level the role of the diarist is to communicate the experience of revolution as seen through the eyes of the "little man" (the *malen'kii chelovek*).

That the diaristic function, which embraces its own themes and compositional devices, should be so closely identified with the "little man," and thus with a literary tradition which suggests the operation of the artistic function, is by no means accidental.<sup>8</sup> In fact, such an intertwining of functions further contributes to the unity of the work. It is, however, the interrelation of the diaristic and the annalistic functions which is both more complex and more germane to a discussion of *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* as a chronicle.

On the compositional level the annalistic function appears in the work in several ways. The original chronicle format, especially the chronological pursuit of events, is honored throughout the work.<sup>9</sup> It is this function which legitimizes whole passages written in a highly stylized and richly rhetorical manner. Then, too, the viewpoint of the chronicler is suggested by the presence of modernized versions of Old Russian genres, particularly those found in the chronicles (eulogies, laments, legends, the *zhitie*, inserted documents, and brief reports of various historical events). What is particularly noteworthy is the way in which these genres are often found in the text in inverted form. Thus, posted announcements, versified instructions on hygiene, and revolutionary slogans displace the texts of treaties and epistles of sovereigns. So too are the heads of state and official personages neglected. Instead Remizov offers the obituary notices of common men.

All of the mundane aspects of life which nevertheless come within the purview of the annalistic function suggest how very different the outlook of our chronicler is from that of his medieval counterpart. For the medieval annalist, as Likhachev points out, the abstracted view of events prevented distinguishing the momentous from the trivial. Although minutiae are in no short supply there, no concrete picture of the Old Russian *byt* emerges—the thickness of reality is missing. This is largely due to the fact that the medieval chronicler concentrated on events to the exclusion of social mores and political institutions, both of which were seen as immutable and hence presumed familiar. Even though his record focused on the dynamics of his situation, the medieval annalist's ultimate concern was to establish the underlying meaning of the event in the eternal, cosmic scheme of the universe, that is in the divine plan according to which every occurrence makes known the will of God.<sup>10</sup> The contrast between this

outlook and Remizov's is striking, all the more so in view of the conspicuous presence of the accoutrements in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* which are borrowed from medieval historiography.

Rather than an inability to distinguish the relative magnitude and importance of events, we find in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* a deliberate effort to concentrate on the "inconsequential," a strategy which in turn suggests Remizov's belief that the real sense of experience is gained only by restricting attention to the circumstances of the "little man." That is not to say that *byt* prevails in the work—it does not. Remizov is not a realist, is unconcerned with sketching in details, and shuns verisimilitude. His objective of realizing the essence of revolution is achieved by examining and contemplating the unassuming detail. We should recall that the original title of the work was "Vseobshchee vosstanie" ("Universal Insurrection"), 'vseobshchee' connoting the way in which all parts of a phenomenon are infused with the characteristics of the whole, in this case the way in which the cosmic principle of revolution may be discovered in every facet of daily life.

Yet despite this difference, Remizov shares with the medieval annalist an interest in understanding how the events of his lifetime, in particular the events under consideration in this book, fit into the larger, evolving patterns of history.

Of the images, motifs, and topoi drawn from the repertoire of medieval appointments, three are of particular importance. The image of quaking is especially prominent in the early sections of the text. As a received image its significance would be confined to forewarning of ominous events, particularly of impending destruction as the penalty for incurring God's displeasure. In *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* the literal image is metaphorized and used to convey an impression of the psychological shock sustained by the populace. The motif is introduced in its conventional form: "Po obede vyshel ia na voliu—chego tam na vole? A tam zemlia *shatalas'*." (p. 45). Only a few lines later the same verb appears, now in a literal sense, but with clearly psychological implications: "Matushki, gorit!—zakrichala starukha, shla ona *shatalas'* s svoim shitym meshkom, chinovnitsa." Thereafter it is seen repeatedly: "*Poshatyvaias'*, shel navstrechu zdorovennyi soldat." (p. 49)

"Verno, nel'zia!—i *shataias'*, poshel, bormocha." (idem)

"Peredo mnoi stoial zdorovennyi soldat, *poshatyvaias'*." (p.50)

"*Zashatalas'* russkaia zemlia— / smuten chas." (p. 53)

"Nashe tiazheloe mater'ial'noe polozenie okonchatel'no *rasshatalo* nashi nervy." (p. 55)

Russia is reeling from the turmoil, tottering on the brink of disaster. A second motif which Remizov borrows from medieval sources and

which is put to good use in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* is that of the wasteland. From its first appearance, in the title "Ognennaia mat'-pustynia" ("Fiery Mother-Desert"), it is evident that the image serves as a metaphor for Russia, wasted by war, (later we hear: "Obodrannyi i nemoi stoiu v pustyne, gde byla kogda-to Rossiia." ("Ragged and mute I stand in the wasteland where Russia once was.") (p. 185). In this connection it is noteworthy how often the image is coupled with that of fire, our third motif. The chapter opens with a discussion of a picture by Petrov-Vodkin which depicts the disfiguration caused by war. The title phrase makes its appearance in connection with the picture's landscape. With its next occurrence however, a second meaning is introduced: "Russkii narod po sudbinnomu sudu ostavil dom i poshel v pustyniu." ("The Russian people in accordance with the judgment of fate has left its home and set out into the desert.") (p. 32). Now the image is applied to the spiritual vagrancy of the nation. And here the desert invoked for the purposes of analogy is the setting for the trial of the Hebrew nation as it made its way from bondage to the Promised Land.

Conflagration is the third and last of the motifs to be considered here. As just mentioned, when the image of fire is introduced it is tied to the image of the desert. Its significance, however, is not developed before the lament in "Krasnyi zvon" ("Red Ringing") where it carries in part psychological implications. Remizov speaks here of "ognennoi skorbi" (emblazed sorrow), which suggests a crucible for the human spirit. The image of conflagration appears again in the stylized meditation of "Moskva VIII." There in several instances Russia is pictured as engulfed in holocaust. The context makes clear that the concern here is for the actual destruction of Russia rather than the suffering of its people. As might be expected, the familiar omen of the column of fire is reported as well (p. 256). But the consummation of the image comes only in "O sud'be ognennoi" ("Of a Fiery Fate"), and it is here, too, that Remizov brings into play the ideas of Heraclitus of Ephesus who is duly acknowledged in the subtitle ("Ot slov Geraklita Effeskogo") ("From the Words of Heraclitus of Ephesus"). Up to this point we have the Christian use of the image as metaphor and sign of God's will. Now we have added to that the Heraclitan struggle of the elements and primacy of fire as the source and eradicator of all else. This is grafted onto a concept of Fate and a cyclical view of history which belongs to neither doctrine wholly.

The notion of Judgment or trial is introduced on the very first line of the chapter. The agency of that trial is fire, which is both destructive and cathartic. Both the ideas of purgation (insofar as there is a latent moral element) and that of devastation, particularly as a creative act, are in complete harmony with Heraclitus. Remizov conveys this latter idea very expressively when he writes:

i vmesto sozdannogo ostanetsia  
odno sozidaemoe—  
perst' i semena dlia rosta. (p. 263)

(and there remains in place of all that has been made  
only that in the making—  
earth and seeds for growth)

Throughout *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* whenever the theme of Judgment is treated in a Christian context it restates the annalistic formula that human misery is the punishment for transgressing moral imperatives. Already in "Suspsiia" ("Suspicion") the divine retribution explanation is present. Remizov is told by his neighbor Vasilisa: "I tak otstupleny ot Boga, a tut sovsem propad. Dlia chego eto voina? Zhizn' rassypaetsia, zhit' ne-khorosho stalo. Ne do Boga . . . Ni muka, ni zola . . . vse eto kara." (They've been turned aside from God, so things have gone bad. Why we got this war? Everything's a mess. Living's gettin' bad. No use for God. It's neither white nor black . . . all this is punishment.) (p. 15) The stylized meditation of "Moskva VIII" again speaks to the nation's sins. Remizov surveys the wreckage and asks: "Za kakoi grekh ili za kakuiu smertnuiu vinu?" (For what sin or what mortal fault are we punished?) And the answer follows in short order:

Ili tebia posetil gnev Bozhii—Bog poslal  
na tebia svoi mech?  
O moia besschastnaia rodina, tvoia beda, tvoe  
razorenje, tvoia gibel'—Bozh'e poseshchenie.

(Or has God's wrath been visited upon you—  
Has God sent you his sword?  
O my hapless homeland, your misfortune, your ravage,  
your ruin is God's visitation.)

His counsel is acceptance of this punishment as merciful and cleansing.

Whereas the Christian conception concentrates on the redemptive powers of suffering, the Heraclitan emphasizes destruction and renewal. In "O sud'be ognennoi" ("Of a Fiery Fate"), Remizov makes fuller use of motifs associated with the ancient Greek philosopher because he shares with him the conviction that the governing principle of the universe is change, and that the preordained pattern of transformation is cyclical:

Vse sovershaetsia v krug sud'by  
Liudi, zveri i kamni rodiatsia, rastut,  
chtoby pogibnut',  
i pogibaiut,  
chtoby roditsia

All is accomplished in the circle of Fate  
Men, beasts and stones are born and grow  
only to perish,  
and perish  
only to be born (p. 264f).

Again like Heraclitus, the chapter speaks of the continual application of forces counterposed to one another which effect these changes (there is a whole semantic group of words denoting struggle and force: "voina," "bor'ba," "sila," "protivoborstvuiushchee," "raspria," "pobezhdaet"—war, struggle, force, combating, feud, vanquish).

At this point it might be useful to observe that Remizov's allusion to both these bodies of thought, that is to the Heraclitan system and the medieval outlook, does not necessarily imply any influence. Rather both constitute world views with sufficient fortuitous similarities to make reference to them convenient and enlightening. While they can hardly be thought to represent identical doctrines, when each considers the problem of change in the universe there are certain implicit similarities which make it possible for Remizov to combine the two approaches and respond to them simultaneously.

Between the Heraclitan system and the Christian theological doctrine reflected in the chronicles there are several correspondences, aside from the obvious and superficial importance attached by each to the image of fire. The course of change prescribed by the Heraclitan system was not only immutable and inexorable, it also contained within it the notions of Justice and Right which insured that the course of events should be moral (even in realms—such as the natural world—where modern thinking removes the category of morality). Both these prescriptive and moral aspects of the system are understood to reside in the principle of Logos, the name applied by Heraclitus to the natural order.

Here we may observe the areas of contiguity. Firstly, the concept of Logos underwent subsequent development and is seen as finding expression in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."<sup>11</sup> Secondly, and for our purposes more importantly, while Logos is not identified as a personal entity or divine intelligence, it does share with the God of Christianity the absolute power to determine the individual's destiny and the assurance that, despite any of our feelings to the contrary, that way is the way of Justice. However, the most important point of intersection between the three views (including Remizov's here) centers on the question of history's cyclical nature.

As we have just seen passages of "O sud'be ognennoi" ("Of a Fiery Fate"), echo the views set forth in Heraclitus' writing. But it is the Christian, the annalistic conception which is less obvious, and at the same time far more important for *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* as a whole. As Likhachev

explains, the medieval chronicler made considerable use of parallels between contemporary and Biblical events. Implicit in these analogies is the belief that history repeats itself.<sup>12</sup>

Like his medieval counterpart Remizov makes extended use of just such historical parallelisms. What is more, he draws on two particular periods for such analogues, namely, on the Middle Ages and on the Age of Peter the Great. The rationale in each case is clear.

Two particular aspects of the medieval experience make it well suited to such treatment: the constant strife of the period (the internecine struggles in particular) and the interregnum—the anarchic situation of "Zhertv revoliutsii" ("Of Revolution's Victims") is significantly described as "letopisnyi besporiadok" (the chaos of the annals) (p. 71). And again several pages later we are reminded how two eras may be interchanged: "—Esli Lenin ot Bolotnikova, Bleikhman ot atamana Khlopka!—skazal arkheolog Ivan Aleksandrovich, pervodiia sobytiia sovremennye na Smutu XVII veka." (If Lenin is in the mold of Bolotnikov, then Bleikhman is of the ataman Khlopok!—said the archeologist Ivan Aleksandrovich, translating contemporary events in terms of the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles) (p. 85). All of the compositional features which recall the chronicles suggest implicitly this parallelism—the events and experiences of one era may be framed by the outlook of another. In doing this Remizov is repeating the very practice of the medieval historian which betokened his sense of history's repetitiveness.

There are two other ways in which the idea of historical circularity is suggested. It should be recalled that the liturgy was conceived by the Byzantine and Russian Orthodox Churches as drama and that as a consequence religious holidays represent a reenactment rather than commemoration of Biblical history. Likhachev comments on this: "Khristsianskie prazdniki—eto ne tol'ko pamiat' o sobytiiax sviashchennoi istorii, o sviatykh i pr. Sobytiia vnov' sovershaiutsia ezhegodno v odno i to zhe vremia." (Christian holidays are not only a commemoration of the events of sacred history or of the saints and others. At the same time they represent a yearly reenactment of events).<sup>13</sup> Remizov's preference for referring to dates by means of the religious calendar is connected to that tradition, keeping alive an awareness of the martyrology which the saints' days celebrate and reminding us that in modern times, too, heroic suffering is endured.

This intimation that the lives of the saints are recalled in the lives of his contemporaries is also contained in Remizov's text in the resemblance discovered between the images of his contemporaries and saints. On the very first page of the work we meet just such a figure: "Starik, drovianoi prikazchik s Fontanki, vylityi Nikola s Ferapontovskikh fresok . . ." (The old man, the overseer of the wood supply from the Fontanka, was the spitting image of the figure of Nikola on the Ferapont frescoes . . .). And

again in the opening of "Ognennaia mat'-pustynia" ("Fiery Mother-Desert") Remizov sees "litsa vse znakomye" (all familiar faces) (among them Bely in the painting by Petrov-Vodkin which is explicitly described as iconographic (p. 31).<sup>14</sup>

The rationale for the unit "Petersburg" is supplied both by the importance of the *malen'kii chelovek* theme with its origin in the founding of the city (it is recapitulated here) and by the revolutionary character of Peter's reign. Certain clear parallels emerge between the two periods. Bureaucratic stupidity and inefficiency and autocratic control are in no short supply in either era.

The chapter recalls as well the city's construction—the central historical fact responsible for the generation of the Petersburg myth. The willful act of one man, careless in his disregard for human life, is responsible for untold suffering. Peter, as the prime mover of that enterprise, has become the symbolic Nemesis of the "little man," and it is in that guise that he appears in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*. As the tortures inflicted on Asyka/Remizov (in the chapter entitled "Asyka") come to an end, it is the figure of the Bronze Horseman which materializes and forces the victimized fantast into submission: "priskakal na mednom kone, *kak veter*, vsadnik, ves' zakovannyi v *zelenuiu* med': vysoko-vzvishhiisia arkanstianul mne gorlo—i ia upal na koleni." (the horseman, all bound in green copper, galloped like the *wind*: his high spiraling lasso choked my throat—and I fell to my knees" (p. 297, italics added). There are two additional points of interest in this passage. The color green, as mentioned earlier in the text (in connection with the Bolsheviks), has ominous and decidedly negative connotations. And, too, there is the association of Peter (and perhaps by extension his revolution) with elementality (more specifically with the whirlwind of the book's title).<sup>15</sup>

This is not the first time the Bronze Horseman has been mentioned. In "Moskva VIII" we find more material which is helpful to clarifying Remizov's teleology. From the passages of the lament in that chapter a conception of the periods in Russian history takes shape. In an address to Peter Remizov speaks of the Tsar's ambitions:

Bezumniy ezdok! Khochesh' za more prygnut' iz zhelykh tumanov granitnogo liubimogo goroda, nesokrushimogo i krepkogo, kak Petrov kamen',—nad Nevoiu, *kak vikhr'*, stoish' . . . (p. 180)

(Senseless horseman! you want to leap beyond the sea, out of the yellow mist of your beloved granite city, indestructible and strong, like Peter's rock,—like a *whirlwind* you stand over the Neva . . .)

When the "Bezumniy ezdok" (Senseless horseman) is again recalled it is in the role of destroyer of Rus':

Bezumniy ezdok! khochet prygnut' za more iz zhelykh tumanov,—on sokrushil staruiu Rus', on podymet i novuiu iz propada. Slyshu trepet kryl'ev nad golovoi. Eto novaia Rus'—Russkii narod! nastanet Svetly den'! (p. 187)

(The senseless horseman! he wants to leap beyond the sea, out of the yellow mist—he has destroyed old Rus'. From the ruins he will raise a new one. I hear the flutter of wings above my head. It is a new Rus'—Russian people! a bright day will come!)

Remizov acknowledges that Peter's transformation represented a decided break with the past—the construction of Petersburg ushers in a "novaia Rossiia" (new Russia). This same division is observed in the dedication to *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* inscribed in a copy presented to Vadim Andreev where Remizov writes: "Etu knigu ia pisal kak otkhodnuiu—ispoved' moiu pered Rossiei: peredo mnoiu byla legenda o Rossii—obraz staroi Rusi i zhivaia zhizn' Sovetskoi Rossii." (I have written this book as a prayer for the dying—my confession before Russia: before me lay the legend of Russia—the image of old Rus' and the living life of Soviet Russia.)<sup>16</sup>

Although both the Heraclitan and Christian historiographic conceptions are, to a certain extent at least, cyclical, there remain differences which Remizov fails to mediate. The Old Russian sense of history did recognize a recurrent pattern, but it was not the continual repetition envisioned by Heraclitus. Rather it was eschatological in orientation—just as surely as there was a beginning, there would be an end.<sup>17</sup> While Remizov speaks on the one hand of the circle of birth-death-rebirth, he also uses faintly apocalyptic expressions such as "poslednii sud" (Last Judgment).<sup>18</sup>

Many of the statements already cited point to a belief in the operation of deterministic forces. Remizov is unequivocal about these higher agencies which are seen as the prime movers of our lives and of historical events, whether it is labelled 'sud'ba' (fate) or 'God'. He speaks for example, of the impotence of human will to determine the course of the war: "I po puti ia uzh vsemi glazami videl, chto voina sama soboi konchilas', i net takoi chelovecheskoi sily povernut' nazad, odna est' sila—'nikakoi voiny!'—sila nechelovecheskaia—voinee vsiakoi voiny—/revoliutsiia—" (And along the way I saw fully that the war had ended of its own accord, and that there was no human force to reverse this, there was only one force—"let there be no war"—an inhuman force—fiercer than any other war—revolution—) (p. 100). Just as certainly as the old Russia has perished a new one will rise out of its ruins. However Remizov is not so firmly resolved in his optimism about the shape of that new Russia. In fact what we find in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* is a massive, unresolved ambivalence about the Revolution.

On the one hand there is a romantic attraction to the seething forces of revolution, a sense of thrill and exhilaration. Revolution has a reckless vitality; it excites an unfettered impulsiveness. There can be no question of acceptance or rejection: "Otvergat' revoliutsiiu—stikhiuu—kak mozno

govorit', chto vot otvergaesh' grozu, ne priznaesh' zemletriasneniia, pozgara ili ne prinimaesh' vesnu, zachatie?" (Rejecting revolution is like rejecting the elements—how can you say that you reject a thunderstorm, that you do not accept an earthquake, fire or spring, conception?) (p. 97). Remizov's most unrestrained endorsement of revolution is seen at the opening of "Moskva" where he accosts the reader with a disclaimer of his previous statements in a manner which, in its vehemence, brings to mind the unsettling reversals of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*:

A znaete chto: vse eto nepravda ili ne vsia—i  
 esli govorit' po samoi pravde—  
 etot vikhr' i est' to, v chem  
 ia tol'ko i mogu zhit' . . . .  
 Da, mne ne nado nikakoi etoi tishiny i rovnosti,  
 nikakogo blagopoluchiiia . . . .  
 Slava Bogu, beda vsei nashei zhizni vseгда  
 spasala menia! (p. 156f).

You know all of this is a lie, or not at all—  
 if the truth be told—  
 this whirlwind is the only  
 thing I can live in . . . .  
 Yes, I need no unruffled quiet, no  
 well-being . . . .  
 Thank God, the misfortunes of our whole  
 life have always saved me!

This ambivalence persists to the very end of the work. After the pages of lamentation to which we have been treated, it comes as something of a surprise to hear Remizov declaim: "Da, mnogo byvalo chudes na Rusi i karkat' o ee pogibeli, tol'ko vozdukh portit!" (There have been many miracles in Rus' and cawing about its destruction is just wasting breath) (p. 499).

The final chapter of the book, "V kontse kontsov" ("When All Is Said and Done") dramatizes this inner conflict as the author engages in a debate with an unidentified interlocutor (the antithetically disposed other half of his conscious, perhaps). To his assertion that he has been dispossessed of nothing by the Revolution his interlocutor responds with a reminder that his losses have been greater than the material deprivation others have suffered, namely the loss of his homeland and therefore of the circumstances in which his creativity had flourished. Remizov is not quite ready to concede the point. Instead he speaks of the bracing effects of the Revolution's turbulence. He downplays the carnage by asserting that his anchoritic life style has shielded his view of the events in the outside world. Here he is taunted by the charge of apathy ("chai pit'"—just sipping tea). At this point he confronts the central paradox with remarks which only elicit a perplexed reaction from his listeners:

Da, khotia by i chai pit'—i chto by bylo vse tak, kak est', plokho li, khorosho li, tol'ko b  
 neizmenno i nerushimo! A po dushevnoi moei nedotrogasti: ved' mne bol'no ot  
 kosnach'ego piska, ne tol'ko tam ot chelovecheskikh—tak pochemu zhe mne-to vdrug  
 stanovitsia neobyknovenno veselo, kogda tam za oknom, ia chuiu, nadvigaetsia v mire  
 groza? - - -?! (p. 517)

Yes, if only sipping tea were all there were to do and whether for better or for worse,  
 everything were immutable and indestructible! But because of my spiritual vul-  
 nerability: I feel pain at the whine of a cat, not only at the cry of men—so why then do I  
 suddenly become uncommonly gay when I sense a storm gathering in the world beyond  
 my window? - - -?! (p. 517)

The passage which follows fails to clarify his position, except to restate his belief that adversity has a salutary effect on the human spirit. His final statement, however, reveals a basic pessimism about the possibility of achieving any utopian goals: "—znaiu! — esli by revoliutsii 'osvobozhdali' cheloveka, kakoi by eto byl schastlivji chelovek!—znaiu nikakie revoliutsii ne perevernut', nu skazhu tak: 'sud'by', kotoruiu konem ne ob'edesh!' I vse-taki ili eto ot tesnoty nevozmozhnoi, v kotoroi zhivem my?—kogda podymaetsia buria—" ("—I know!—if revolutions 'freed' man how happy we would be! I know no revolutions can alter—well let's call it fate which there's just no getting around. And yet—perhaps it's only from the impossible suffocation of our lives—when a storm comes up—") (p. 518).

Remizov seems to imply that it is only the melee of revolution which falls within the compass of the preordained pattern of human affairs. Beyond that man's dreams face the resistance of human nature to change: "A khorosho, kogda groza idet—ne dumaiu, chtoby izmenialsia chelovek: kakim zarodish'sia, takim i pomresh'. Znaiu, i samaia groznaia iz groznykh—revoliutsiia—vzvikh i vstrias'—nichego ne izmenit, no ia takzhe znaiu, chto bez grozy propad." (It is good when it is stormy—I don't think that man can be changed: you'll die the way you're born. I know that even the most threatening of storms—revolution—the whirlwind and the shaking—will change nothing, but I also know that without the storm there is only loss) (p. 160). As if the incidents depicting the survival of both selfish and benevolent instincts were insufficient proof, Remizov states more than once his conviction that people are and will remain essentially unchanged (pp. 29, 160, 164). It is not that human nature is immutable, but rather that it is unsusceptible to change directed by human institutions: "Nikakie i samye spravedliveishie uchrezhdeniia i sami pravil'nyi stroi zhizni ne izmeniaet cheloveka, esli chto-to ne izmenitsia v ego dushe—ne raskroetsia dusha i iskra Bozhiia ne vzblesnet v nei." (No institutions, even the fairest, and no proper order of life changes a man, unless something changes in his heart—unless his soul is unbarred and a divine spark is ignited in it) (p. 122). A model for such a spiritual rebirth is offered at the close of "Mezhdusynnym i tifoznym" ("Between Typhus and Spotted Fever") in the story of Sibaev, a penitent Prodigal Son. He stands as an exception to the rule of

disillusionment which is customarily suffered after the disappearance of the hope for a new life which sustains people through difficulty. Sibaev retains his resolve to abandon his prior dissipation. The verb Remizov uses repeatedly is "proshibat'" (to batter, break through)—it is only the human conscience which can effect change: man's callous outer shell must be penetrated. Revolution is not only desirable because it is thrilling and revitalizing, it is a positive force as well to the extent that the suffering which it entails rouses the human conscience, awakens the spirit of compassion, and promotes communion. This is what Remizov has in mind in proclaiming at the opening of "Golodnaia pesnia" ("A Starveling's Song"), "Esli chto eshche i bodrit dukh moi, eto skorb'. I eta skorb' sviazyvaet menia s mirom." (If there is anything else which quickens my spirit it is sorrow. It is this sorrow which binds me to the world.)

Remizov appreciates the ardent desire of those who wish to see human misery eliminated, but he harbors no illusion that such a goal can ever be achieved. Life and misery are synonymous: "a udel cheloveka—smiatenie i neschastie" (but man's lot is confusion and misery) (p. 475). This is not the only passage where sorrow and man's lot are equated. It is interesting to note some of the other words which Remizov uses to denote this Fate and their negative connotations: beda, dolia, zloschast'e, udel, mara, bich Bozhij, sud (misfortune, fate, sorrow, lot, Fata Morgana, God's scourge, judgment). In every instance Fate is met with submission.

However, none of these verities of the human situation deter Remizov from entertaining his own detached visions. And these most frequently involve the moments of equanimity that come when communing with the physical universe. This frame of mind is symbolized by the appearance of the stars which are glimpsed from time to time (e.g., pp. 33, 40, 64, 179f, etc.). As the first mention of this image indicates (p. 18) these visions have profound spiritual ramifications (N.B. the metaphoric title "Zvezdy serdtsa" ("The Heart's Star"). They enable Remizov to briefly escape the maelstrom surrounding him. This transcendental communion with the cosmos, and not merely the Georgian setting, lies at the heart of the phrase "lermontovskie zvezdy" ("Lermontovian stars"). Even though these visions did not remain unsullied, their presence bears testimony to the considerable emotional investment made in scrutinizing the era of revolution. It is for this reason that Remizov can claim with some justification that *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* is essentially a lyrical book. As he puts it: "Posle Plachuzhnoi kanavy budet *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*. Napisano po-drugomu. V *Plachuzhnoi kanave* ia umnichaiu, v *Vzvikhrennoi Rusi* zapis' moego chuvstva." (*Russia in the Whirlwind* will come after *The Whimpering Ditch*. It is written in a completely different manner. In *The Whimpering Ditch* I show off my smarts, but *Russia in the Whirlwind* is a record of my feelings.)<sup>19</sup>

In the final analysis if Remizov had hopes for his country's future they

were that out of the destruction and chaos a brighter future would grow, that man's desire to establish an earthly paradise would be sustained if not realized. If he had misgivings about the path the nation had embarked on, they revolved around a feeling that the break with the past was too decisive, and around an awareness that everything he stood for had been jettisoned with the past.

## Notes

1. The only complete edition of the work and the only version to bear this title was published in Paris in 1927. All references are to this edition.
2. N. Andreev, "Aleksei Remizov," *Grani—zhurnal literatury, iskusstva i obshchestvennoi mysli*, XXXIV-XXXV (1957), 212.
3. Andrei Belyi, "A. Remizov. Prud, Roman," *Vesy*, No. 12 (1907), 54-56, reprinted in his *Arabeski: Kniga statei* (Moscow, 1911), pp. 475-477.
4. Natal'ia Kodrianskaia, *Aleksei Remizov* (Paris, 1959), p. 110.
5. Viktor Shklovsky, *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*, trans. and ed. Richard Sheldon (Ithaca, 1971), p. 22f. Kaplun appears in the "story" "Pered shaposhnym razborom" and is mentioned again along with Andreeva in "K zvezdam," both of which form units of *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*.
6. Remizov confirmed the memoir status of the work in a generic breakdown of his writing published in Kodrianskaia, op. cit., p. 117.
7. Mikhail Osorgin, "Kritika i Bibliografiia. Aleksei Remizov. *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*," *Sovremennye zapiski*, XXXI (1927), 454. The other reviews, both unreserved in their praise, were D. S. Mirskii, "Kriticheskie zametki. *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* Remizova," *Versty*, No. 3 (1928), 155-156, and Mochul'skii, "*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*," *Zveno*, No. 219 (1927), 2-3.
8. In addition to the pose of an abject figure buffeted by circumstance, the identification with the "malen'kii chelovek" is made clear in the chapter "Sabotazh" which, like Dostoevsky's *Bednye liudi*, revises Gogol's "Shinel" in order to reassert the hero's dignity.
9. It can be demonstrated that the chronological principle was observed when sections from other works were added to the text as it first appeared in *Epopeia* (1923). Many passages were dated in the original versions. Yet others contain references to historical events which place them within the time scheme. These latter indicators, along with references to the Orthodox calendar, are all that remain in the final version. Programmatic chapters and other occasional passages stand outside the chronology but do not violate it.
10. D. S. Likhachev, *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury* (Leningrad, 1967). See in particular the sections of Part IV ("Poetika khudozhestvennogo vremeni") entitled "Letopisnoe vremia" and "Aspekty 'vechnosti' v propovednicheskoi literature," pp. 261-287.
11. It should be noted that 'Logos' literally means 'the Word'. This quotation and the discussion of Heraclitus is drawn from B. A. G. Fuller, *History of Greek Philosophy: Thales to Democritus* (N.Y., 1923), pp. 118-142.
12. Likhachev, p. 268.
13. Ibid. p. 281.
14. For a similar use of this device see Babel's "Pan Apolek" in *Konarmia*.
15. "Peterburg," too, makes repeated reference to the important contribution of the German element in Russia to Peter's transformation of the country. It is possible that the peculiar habit witnessed throughout *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* of including German words in the text is connected to this fact, that is, that they serve as a reminder of the contact of the two cultures and of the way in which the pristine Slavic culture was penetrated by Teutonic influence (N.B. e.g., the juxtaposition in Anton Antonovich's assertion: "Ich bin russische



krasnaia vorona!," p. 498).

16. Vadim Andreev, *Istoriia odnogo puteshestviia* (Moscow, 1974), p. 303.

17. G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, Vol. I: *Kievan Christianity. The Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries*. (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 386.

18. See also the apocalyptic presentiments voiced on pp. 164, 186.

19. Kodrianskaia, *Remizov*, p. 304.