Universiteit Leiden

An Angel Sent From God, Or A Servant Of The Devil

An Analysis Of Russian Cinematic Portrayals Of Grigory Rasputin

MA Thesis

Russian and Eurasian Studies

Leiden University

Christopher Lee

S2216620

Thesis Supervisor: Dr.O.F.Boele

July 2019

22,334 words (Including Bibliography)

Table of Contents

N.B

All translations provided in this thesis are my own, unless stated otherwise.

The title of this thesis was a line taken from page 96 of Douglas Smith's 2016 biography on Rasputin.

Introduction

Rasputin

"The poison still had no effect. The Starets continued to walk about the room. Finally I took the Grand Duke's revolver. I fired. The bullet had passed through the region of the heart. There could be no doubt about it; he was dead. Then the incredible happened. With a violent movement Rasputin jumped to his feet. At that moment I felt in the fullest degree the real power of Rasputin. It seemed that the devil himself, incarnate in this muzhik was holding me in vice-like fingers. A third shot rang out. Rasputin stumbled and fell. He showed no signs of life."[1]

Thus came the end to the life of one of the most controversial and infamous figures in Russian history. The 'vice-like fingers' that many felt too tightly gripped around the Romanovs finally relinquished their hold, with Prince Felix Yusupov and many others hoping that the death of Rasputin would allow Russia to breathe more comfortably. Yet as the life of this Siberian peasant ended, the whirlpool of intrigue, conspiracy theories, myths, and mysteries was only just beginning for a man that continues to divide the opinions of anyone who has glimpsed into the annals of his history.

Born in 1869 in the small village of Pokrovskoe in the Tyumen Oblast, Grigory Rasputin's early life mirrored that of almost every other Russian peasant of the time, as the historian Douglas Smith writes in his biography of the Siberian- "Rasputin's life appeared to be unfolding as it did for millions of Russian peasants: working the fields, attending church, saying one's prayers, marrying, having children, and keeping the eternal rhythm of peasant life in motion. But then, everything changed."[2] Like most peasants of the time he was somewhat illiterate and never formerly educated. Despite this, Rasputin spent his formative years trying to learn holy scripture and travelling the lengths and breadths of his beloved Russia as a 'strannik'[3]. After arriving in St Petersburg, stories of his miraculous healing powers, hypnotic mesmerising eyes, love of various vices, and general descent into debauchery quickly followed him and would not cease, even after his death.

Rasputin was soon presented to the Tsarina Alexandra. With Russia heading into turmoil, and with the Tsareivich Alexei suffering from haemophilia, the Romanovs sought guidance and support in any number of guises, with Rasputin best fitting the shoes now left empty by the previous holy man of the Romanovs, 'Monsieur Phillipe'. It was this initial introduction and subsequent stories of his

[1] Yusupov, Felix, taken from, Jonathan Daly and Leonid Trofimov, *Russia In War and Revolution, 1914-1922*, Hackett Publishing Company, 2009, pg 28-30
[2] Smith, Douglas, *Rasputin,* Macmillan, 2016, pg 19
[3] A religious pilgrim/wanderer.

perceived grip and control of the Romanovs that was one more push for a Russia already staring over a precipice, as Smith again alludes- "Alexandra's need for and blind truth in a spiritual advisor, her mysticism and intense religiosity, her willingness to insert herself in politics and to use the words of holy men to try and instruct Nicholas on how to rule only deepened the chasm between the throne and the rest of Russia and would, in the case of Rasputin, lead to revolution."[4]

Perhaps no other figure in history has had so much misinformation, and indeed, disinformation, written about them, propagated, and instantly believed than has been the case with Grigory Rasputin. This most famous peasant could either be a miracle worker or a womaniser, a sensational healer or a debauched libertine , a 'Starets'[5] or a simple common peasant, a pathetic drunkard or a prophetic visionary, a sly opportunist or a man of great generosity, a hypnotiser or someone who loved and cared for all. The myths, mysteries, truths, and untruths that surround Rasputin are the perfect ingredients for the Russian film director to create and mould any image and depiction of Rasputin as they please. It is this character of Rasputin, shrouded in so much controversy, with the lines between his accuracies and inaccuracies blurred to the point of almost complete indistinction which makes him such a perfect historical figure for Russian historical filmmakers. As is oft repeated, "there is nothing as unpredictable in Russia as her past"[6], and thus history grants Russia the perfect figure in the shape of Rasputin- a character ripe to be remoulded to reflect the political anxieties and hopes of the time, in a country where, as David Gillespie writes in his book *Russian Cinema*- "the Russian historical film is of interest to the viewer above all in what it tells him not about the past, but the present."[7] Yesterday, perhaps the truth was that Rasputin was a common horse thief, a drunkard, a crazed womaniser. Today, a generous, caring miracle healer, perhaps the buffer against, rather than the harbinger of, the chaos that lead Russia on the road to ruin.

This thesis will centre on Grigory Rasputin and Russian cinematic portrayals of him and attempt to highlight what these depictions can reveal about the political climate in Russia around a production's release. This thesis thus builds upon David Gillespie's conviction that- "The Russian historical film, be it pre-1991 or subsequent, is not only about representing the past or visualising it as a means of entertainment or instruction. Rather, it is there to legitimise the present, to explain past events in the light of present-day realities and so point to the future. Thus, there is in Russian cinema a constant effort to reinvent history."[8]

[4] Smith, Douglas, *Rasputin,* Macmillan, 2016, pg 49
[5] A religious elder who is an adviser or teacher.
[6] Gillespie, David, *Russian Cinema,* London Routledge, 2014, pg 59
[7] Ibidem, pg 59
[8] Ibidem, pg 60

The Research Question

This thesis will attempt to show how onscreen portrayals of Rasputin reveal the fears, anxieties, and general political climate in Russia around the period of the relevant film's production. As Gillespie alludes, Russian historical films can reveal as much about the present as the past, and while much has been written on various other films on this theme, no study has looked specifically at each Russian portrayal of Rasputin. Thus, this thesis will adopt the research question of 'How do Russian cinematic portrayals of Grigory Rasputin reflect the hopes, fears, concerns, and anxieties at the time of the film's production?'

Thesis Structure

There will be three films under consideration for this thesis and they will be analysed chronologically (according to a production's release date). Thus, there will be three chapters analysing the productions, with one chapter dedicated to each work. As stated, this thesis desires to show how these portrayals of Rasputin can reflect a relevant historical period, and so in each of the three chapters listed above, I will provide historical context for the production's release. Background on the directors and actors playing the role of Rasputin will also be provided in each chapter. I will also provide background on the production of the work, as well as offering a plot synopsis of each film.

Chapter 1 will undertake an analysis of a film named *Agoniа* (*Агония*), which was directed by Elem Klimov and was officially ready for release in 1975, before being banned and shelved for 10 years and thus first appearing on Soviet cinema screens in 1985.

Chapter 2 will look at the film *Rasputin* (*Распутин*). This work was a joint Russian-French co-production and two versions of the film exist. One was directed by the Frenchwoman Josee Dayan and was released onto French television in 2011. A rework was undertaken by the Russian-Georgian director Irakli Kvirikadze and was released into Russian cinemas in 2013. It is this version that this thesis will analyse.

Chapter 3 will analyse the third and final production, *Grigory R* (*Григорий Р*). This work differs a little from the previous two productions as this was an eight-part TV series aired on Russia's 'Pervy Kanal' (Первый Канал) in 2014.

Naturally, one can be sure that the question now arises of why these three productions in particular? The answer is a quite simple one- while there have been numerous cinematic portrayals of Rasputin outside of Russia, it is only the three depictions listed above that have been Russian cinematic reimaginations of Rasputin.

Why The Historical Film?

As Gillespie alluded, 'the Russian historical film is of interest to the viewer above all in what it tells him not about the past, but the present'. This is one of the statements that best underpins this study. However, it is also necessary to detail why the historical film at all. It is of course against the written word and penned history that historical cinema provides an alternative. R.J. Raack, a historian who worked on many documentaries, argued that- "traditional written history is too linear and too narrow. Only film, with its ability to juxtapose images and sounds, with its quick cuts to new sequences, fades, speed-ups, slow motion, can possibly hope to approximate real life. Only film can provide an empathetic reconstruction. Only film can recover all the past's liveliness."[9]

In his book *Visions Of The Past*, Robert Rosenstone, in again comparing film to written history, argues that- "an image on screen contains much more information than the written description of the same scene, but this information has a much higher degree of detail and specificity."[10] He continues to say that-"Film lets us see landscapes, hear sounds, witness emotions…film can most directly render the look and feel of all sorts of historical particulars and situations."[11] However, while historical film has certain clear advantages over written history, Rosenstone highlights some drawbacks of the medium that are particularly relevant for this study, as he says of film directors- "When we historians explore the historical film, it is history as practiced by others, which raises the ominous question: By what right do filmmakers speak of the past, by what right do they do history?"[12] One should keep this line in mind, for it is the directors portraying Rasputin who can decide which facts on the famed Starets should be ignored, included, or manipulated. Rosenstone continues on the contrast to written history that- "Film emotionalises, personalises, and dramatizes history. It is not really the past on the screen, but only an imitation of it."[13]

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, I will first take a reading of secondary literature focusing on the relevant historical period that each production should be analysed against. A concise summary of each period will then be provided in each of the three main chapters. Where possible, in order to gauge reaction and reception to the three cinematic works, I will also take a quantitative analysis of various newspaper and magazine articles on the films, as well as interviews with cast and

[9] Raack, R, Quote taken from Robert Rosenstone, *Visions Of The Past,* Harvard University Press, 1995, pg 25-26
[10] Rosenstone, Robert, *Visions Of The Past,* Harvard University Press, 1995, pg 28
[11] Ibidem, pg 31
[12] Ibidem, pg 65
[13] Ibidem, pg 59 and 25

crew members. I will then provide a breath summary in each chapter and present the most important comments from journalists and crew members alike.

After this, I will conduct close-readings of scenes from the three works, and then compare said close-readings against the aforementioned historical context. Through these close readings I will desire to show how Russian cinematic portrayals of Rasputin reflect the fears, anxieties and intricacies of the relevant period surrounding the production's release. Where appropriate, I will also provide various stills and screenshots from the considered productions to help substantiate certain elements of the analysis.

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to answer the research question, one first needs to provide examples of literature that relate to this topic, and also highlight any gaps in this specific field. The aim of this Literature Review is to highlight and summarise existing literature and themes on the topic of Russian historical figures in film, as well as looking at literature that highlights how Russian historical films can help reflect the anxities and intricacies of the present. We will first look at the reversal of hero and villain status in Russian historical films before and after 1991 by drawing on the work of Steven Norris and his paper *Revising History, Remaking Heroes*.

The second theme on the genre of the Russian historical film and how they can be used to reflect the political climate occuring in Russia in the present will draw on the work of David Gillespie and his chapter named *The Course and Curse Of History* from his book *Russian Cinema*. This section will also touch on Robert Rosenstone and his aforementioned book *Visions Of The Past.*

The Reversal Of Hero/Villain Status In Russian Cinema Before And After 1991

[1]

In Andrey Kravchuk's 2008 film 'Admiral', a work which tells the story of vice-admiral and leader of the Whites, Alexander Kolchak, there occurs a brief but important scene midway through the film. As the civil war rages on, one witnesses the heinous gunning down of an innocent nurse helping

[1] Kravchuk, Andrey, *Admiral*, Dago Productions, 2008

wounded soldiers fallen on the battlefield. The ringing fire of machine gun shells comes not from what would previously have been a rifle belonging to the Whites, but instead from the barrels of a weapon belonging to a Red. In one swift movement, a topological 'X' axis develops, relegating the previously brave and patriotic Reds down to the level of barbarous and bloodthirsty villains, while simultaneously elevating the earlier treacherous and perfidious Whites to the level of courageous and valiant heroes. This scene in a microcosm attests to the malleability of Russia's historical characters and the changing post-Soviet narrative of the villain and the hero in Russian historical film.

It goes without saying that in early Soviet films it was the Reds who were the undoubted heroes, with the Whites stamped from the beginning as the villains. As Steven Norris writes in his paper *Revising History, Remaking Heroes* - "the task of Soviet cinema across time was to offer immortal images of national heroes."[2] One such 'immortal image of a national hero' became the leader of the Reds during the civil war, Vasily Chapaev, who was shown heroically riding on horseback into battle against the villainous Whites in the 1934 film 'Chapaev.'

Yet, what was earlier such a black and white case became slightly more vague in the 1950-80s. Marginally relaxed censorship, a gradual move away from the absolute doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, and a change of perception of what were previously regarded as incontestable facts allowed for a more soft-hearted portrayal of Whites in the cinema of the Thaw. A film in 1956 by Grigory Chukhrai named 'The Forty-First' detailed a sympathetic love story between a Red sniper and a White officer, and as Norris states- "Chukhrai's film posited that it was no longer necessary to hate the enemy in order to connect to the past and to feel a sense of Soviet patriotism."[3] This notion was further enhanced by Evgeny Karelov's 1968 film 'Two Comrades Were Serving,' a work which presented, as Norris states,- "complex performances about what it means to be a Bolshevik hero. It also suggests that White officers could be human too."[4] Norris continues- "Soviet cinema from the 1950s to the 1980s included more complicated heroes, charismatic villains and more nuanced depictions of the past. The heroes were still those who chose the Soviet cause and the villains still mostly White officers, but the history lessons offered onscreen grew less contentious and more complex."[5]

After the fall of the Soviet Union, and with the revolution eventually coming to be seen as almost a national tragedy in Russia, the former villains of the civil war became the heroes, and the heroes

[2] Norris, Stephen, *Ruptures and Continuities In Soviet / Russian Cinema*, Routledge, 2018, pg 200
[3] Ibidem, pg 205
[4] Ibidem, pg 209
[5] Ibidem, pg 213

became the villains, as the film 'Admiral' and the depiction of Kolchak best highlights. Norris says of this film that- "Reversing decades of Soviet narratives that presented him as the ultimate enemy, Kravchuk's film depicted Kolchak sympathetically, as a deeply devout, deeply patriotic Russian who fought for his motherland. His opponents, the Bolsheviks, are now the enemy."[6] This 180 degree spin was acutely summarised by a headline from the paper 'Izvestiya', which read- "Earlier the hero was Chapaev, now it is Kolchak."[7] However, these portrayals of former villains turned heroes not only highlighted the way history was now viewed in Russia, but films also spotlighted that these heroes possessed values that Russian citizens should also embody to help stabilise their country after the crazy and traumatic 1990s, as Norris continues- "Russian films after 1991 featured tsarist officers as the real heroes who possessed attributes needed to inspire viewers. Russian cinema after 1991 continued to use the past to connect it and its values to the present and to help form the 'world and soul' of new audiences. It did so by promoting a 'new' form of patriotism and 'new' history."[8]

While much has been written about the cinematic reversal of the Reds and Whites, as well as other figures from pre-revolutionary Russia, there remains little on Rasputin's comparative image in Soviet and Post-Soviet cinema. While thoroughly intent on answering the research question of how cinematic portrayals of Rasputin can help reflect the present, as a natural by-product, this thesis can elucidate whether the Starets has also undergone any such reversal and if and how Rasputin embodies 'the attributes needed to inspire viewers' like that of the tsarist officers and Kolchak.

The Russian Historical Film As A Reflection Of The Present

In his paper *The Course and Curse of History*, David Gillespie writes that- "Every national film culture likes representing its own past on screen. The Russian historical film is of interest to the viewer above all in what it tells him not about the past, but the present."[9] Gillespie notes that in early Soviet cinema, it was the individual hero who thus became the emblem of both past and present glories, as he notes- "It was above all the task of the Soviet filmmaker of historical dramas in the 1930s and 1940s to harness the perceived glories of the past in order to legitimise the present, and their most popular form was through the lives of great men."[10] As Norris alludes to above, historical dramas of the Thaw period saw the lines between heroism and villainism become more blurred and thus a handful of films emerged that painted more sympathetic portrayals of the Whites. However, after a

[6] Ibidem, pg 214
[7] Izvestiya headline, taken from Norris, Stephen, *Ruptures and Continuities In Soviet / Russian Cinema*, Routledge, 2018, pg 215
[8] Norris, Stephen, *Ruptures and Continuities In Soviet / Russian Cinema*, Routledge, 2018, pg 216
[9] Gillespie, David, *Russian Cinema,* Routledge London, 2014, pg 59
[10] Ibidem, pg 63

lull in historical films between 1964 and 1985, Gillespie notes that Gorbachev's 'Glasnost' saw a renaissance in the genre, as he writes- "With the freedoms afforded by Gorbachev's new 'openness', the exploration of history often overlapped with a desire to settle political scores. Both the historical and political merged, as new films were made exploring the Stalinist past."[11] Films made shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union desired to look more romantically at the Tsarist past, particularly Stanislav Govorukhin's documentary 'The Russia We Have Lost' (1992), and Gleb Panfilov's film 'The Romanovs' (2000). These films exhibited, as Gillespie puts it,- "a lament for the lost pageantry and glory of Imperial Russia. These films can be located within a post-Soviet cultural discourse that confronts the past and seeks to reinvent history."[12]

However, most crucially, Gillespie posits that- "The Russian historical film, be it pre-1991 or subsequent, is not only about representing the past or visualising it as a means of entertainment or instruction. Rather, it is there to legitimise the present, to explain past events in the light of present-day realities and so point to the future. Thus, there is in Russian cinema a constant effort to reinvent history."[13] If there is only one line to keep in the back of one's mind while undertaking this thesis, then it is this from Gillespie. This is the most vital perspective, and this thesis will show not *if* it holds true for cinematic portrayals of Rasputin, but *how*.

To tie both Norris and Gillespie together then, one turns again to Robert Rosenstone. In his book *Visions Of The Past*, he opines that the filmmaker- "can at once indulge himself by playing historian and yet ignore- whenever convenient- all known techniques of assessing evidence from the past, as well as the findings of previous research and scholarship. Thus the filmmaker can tell us whatever story he wishes (and history be damned!)."[14] The sources available on Rasputin that a director can dive into are endless, the possibilities of how to use them for a new representation of him innumerable, and as the historical 'truth' about him becomes the will of the director, perhaps the image of the fears, anxieties and hopes for Russia at the time of *Agonia, Rasputin,* and *Grigory R* becomes even yet clearer.

[11] Ibidem, pg 73
[12] Ibidem, pg 77 and 79
[13] Ibidem, pg 60
[14] Robert Rosenstone, *Visions Of The Past,* Harvard University Press, 1995, pg 91

Agonia

Introduction

The first production to be analysed for this thesis is Elem Klimov's *Agonia. Agonia* was first intended for release in 1975, before it fell victim to strict Goskino censors and was thus shelved for 10 years, before finally being released in 1985. With this in mind, I will first provide some historical context for the early Brezhnev era of the Soviet Union, before then chronicling Klimov and his career. I will then also provide a background to, and a synopsis of, *Agonia*. In order to perform sound close readings of scenes from the film, it is necessary to perform an 'Aesopian reading', and so this chapter will also offer a brief explanation of what one means by 'Aesopian.' This chapter will highlight how *Agonia* potentially reflected the hopes, anxieties, and insecurities of the early Brezhnev era. This will be done by concentrating on the two central protagonists of the film- Tsar Nicholas 2nd, and, of course, Grigory Rasputin. Thus, a reading of the film will first look at how a very human and sympathetic portrayal of Tsar Nicholas 2nd as a powerless and incapable leader could be seen as a parallel of an impotent Leonid Brezhnev, who seemed equally as incompetent as his Soviet Union also encountered innumerable problems. This very human portrayal of the Tsar will be contrasted with a reading of Rasputin's depiction as being decidedly *in*human and animalistic. I will argue how this extremely inhuman reimagination of the Starets could be seen as a comment on the vitiating effect of corruption, showing how Rasputin's proximity to the Romanovs could be read as an analogy for corruption that was particularly rife during the 1970s Soviet Union.

Aesopian Language

It is first necessary to provide a brief description of a well-worn motif prevalent through many Soviet era films- that of 'Aesopian language.' It goes without saying that the term 'Aesopian' derives from the ancient Greek author Aesop, who famously penned fables centring on animals, with each fable culminating with a very overt moral.

The Russian writer has had to contend with the bane of censorship since (at least) the era of Peter the Great, and in order to deliver barbed satirical critique, writers and directors have sought to circumvent such censorship by utilising this 'Aesopian language.' In his book *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*, Lev Loseff defines Aesopian language as- "a special literary system, one whose structure allows interaction between author and reader at the time that it conceals inadmissible content from the censor."[1] It would here be beneficial to provide an obvious example, and so one turns to Mikhail

[1] Loseff, Lev, *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*, Peter Lang International Academic Publishing Group, 1984, preface, X

Bulgakov and his famous novel, *The Master and Margarita*. Within the book, which, it is vital to remember, was penned between 1928-40 and the era of Stalin, Bulgakov writes of -"a large black car standing by the entrance"[2], waiting outside Moscow apartments to collect unaware would-be suspects, only for said 'cars' never to return. While they are only ever referred to as 'cars', it would hardly need the most perceptive of reader to understand Bulgakov's thinly veiled reference to Soviet Russia's secret police. These 'cars' become what Kevin Moss, in the book *Inside Soviet Cinema: Laughter With A Lash*, defines as 'markers', as he writes- "tipped off by these markers, the audience begins to look more closely at the whole plot as a potential Aesopian comment on Soviet life."[3] Moss further elucidates that -"the function of an Aesopian text is to make the reader name, at least to themselves, the Soviet reality to which the text does not overtly refer"[4]. Reading a text as a comment on Soviet reality is a symbiotic process between the author and reader, for some 'markers' are more heavily concealed than others, and the true meaning of the text is both covert and overt at the same time, depending on a reader's level of perceptiveness.

It is crucial to take an Aesopian reading of *Agonia* in order to help potentially disclose Klimov's concealed yet pointed observations of the Brezhnev era. One can be absolutely certain that Klimov, who "became famous as a biting satirist"[5], would certainly not pass up the opportunity to "give the finger up one's sleeve"[6] in *Agonia*.

Historical Context

Agonia was shelved for ten years after being banned by Goskino. However, the film was shot in the early 1970s and was originally completed and ready for release in 1975. Therefore, it is against the historical backdrop of the early 70s of the Soviet Union that the production should be analysed. This period that came to be known as the Stagnation or 'Zastoi' (Застой) era was headed by Leonid Brezhnev, the 5th leader of the USSR. The previous 60 or so years had been turbulent for the Russian and Soviet people, as William Tompson makes clear in his book, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*- "Over the preceding 60 years , the country had undergone three revolutions, two world wars, a civil war, the upheavals associated with collectivisation and forced industrialisation, the Great Terror, no fewer than four famines, and the political roller-coaster ride that was the Khrushchev era."[7] After

[2] Bulgakov, Mikhail, *The Master And Margarita,* Alma Classics, 2014, pg 300
[3] Moss, Kevin, in Andrew Horton, *Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter With A Lash*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pg 26
[4] Ibidem, pg 21
[5] Fomin, Valery, and Liliya Mamatova, 'Rossiisky Illyuzion', Materik, 2003, pg 604
[6] Rozanov, A, Quote taken from Lev Loseff, *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*, Peter Lang International Academic Publishing Group, 1984, pg 8
[7] Tompson, William, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pg 27

such prolonged turmoil "the Soviet people were being offered the chance to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labours"[8], as Mark Galeotti wrote in his book *Gorbachev And His Revolution*.

However, while not without improvements in some elements of society, the Soviet Union was still dogged with economic and social problems throughout Brezhnev's reign. As the historian Stephen Kotkin summarised for his book *Armageddon Averted*, a faltering economy was but one of a myriad of problems facing Brezhnev- "Soviet economic growth slowed substantially, and, because quality was notoriously poor, a Soviet economy growing at 2 per cent was tantamount to stagnation. Infant mortality began to rise. The incidence of cancer grew phenomenally, and alcoholism and absenteeism, already high, were rising."[9]

With a plummeting economy, and with once again food shortages and long queues for goods, coupled with knowledge of the aforementioned tumultuous history, it could be said that a feeling of disillusionment and pessimism began to emanate throughout Soviet Russia, as Tompson again highlights- "The slowdown in the growth of living standards, the slow unravelling of the social contract and declining social mobility all contributed to an increasingly widespread social malaise, a growing sense of pessimism and cynicism. These feelings both contributed to and were fed by pervasive corruption at all levels."[10] Tompson here briefly touches upon yet another problem of the Soviet Union of the 70s- that of corruption. It was an issue that Galeotti again explains- "The Party became increasingly lazy and inefficient. It thus became prey to massive and institutionalized corruption. Under Brezhnev, corruption became endemic to the Party or state bureaucracy."[11]

The problems of the early 70s Soviet Union were plentiful, complex, and convoluted, and they had to be wrangled with by a Leonid Brezhnev who was largely considered to be an impotent and blundering leader at a time when the Soviet Union needed decisive action and change. Perhaps this section is best encapsulated by Fedor Burlatsky, former advisor to both Yuri Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev, as he wrote in an article retrospectively analysing the Stagnation era- "The abandonment of reforms, the freeze of living standards, the general delay of absolutely self-evident decisions, the corruption and degeneration of power in which whole strata of the people became increasingly involved, the loss of moral values- if that is stagnation, what is crisis?"[12]

[8] Galeotti, Mark, *Gorbachev And His Revolution,* Macmillan Press, 1997, pg 4
[9] Kotkin, Stephen, *Armageddon* Averted, Oxford University Press, 2001, pages 25-26
[10] Tompson, William, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pg 90
[11] Galeotti, Mark, *Gorbachev And His Revolution,* Macmillan Press, 1997, pg 13
[12] Burlatsky, Fedor, Quote taken from Ronald Suny, *The Structure Of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg 446

Elem Klimov

Elem Klimov was born in Volgograd in 1933 and, as a young man, he harboured rather different desires for a career than becoming a film director, as, in the early 1950s, he enrolled in the 'Moscow Aviation Institute.' However, it was here that he encountered some like-minded students and started directing shows, as he says of his time in Moscow- "I got involved in student satirical revues, which were very fashionable. At the institute we had our own group of authors, directors, actors, and stage designers and our shows became well known around town."[13] It was almost certainly due in part to this experience that, having graduated from the MAI, he decided to enrol in the State Institute of Cinematography. Klimov was perhaps lucky to graduate at a time when "new theatres were born and the Soviet film industry was starting to move forward again"[14], as he explains.

Klimov's most famous work is a remarkable film from 1985 named 'Come And See' (Иди И Смотри), a production which journeyed through the unremitting and interminable hell of Nazi atrocities in a small Belorussian village. However, Klimov's initial forays into film were light-hearted comedies. His first feature length film of this ilk was the 1964 work 'Welcome, Or No Trespassing' (Добро Пожаловать Или Посторонним Вход Воспрещен), a film which took a satirical glance at the life of children vacationing in a 'Young Pioneer Camp.' The comedy was briefly shelved by Goskino for being far too satirical, being labelled an 'anti-Khrushchev film.' Klimov's second production, the 1965 work 'Adventures Of A Dentist' (Похождения Зубного Врача), became his second comedy and one largely criticised, being seen as- "a protest against the suppression of talent and individualism; an allegory of the Soviet artist's plight."[15] The half-fiction, half-documentary 1970 production 'Sport, Sport, Sport' (Спорт, Спорт, Спорт) completed the trio of his comedies.

It is clear then that the historical film *Agonia* was a large break from his repertoire for Klimov, and one that he hadn't initially planned. It was Klimov's directorial talents showcased in 'The Adventures Of A Dentist' that caught the eye of a very influential director named Ivan Pyryev, and it is he who offered Klimov the chance to shoot *Agonia*, as he explains- "Pyryev completely dumbfounded me by asking what I knew about Grigory Rasputin. I knew very little. I hadn't done historical films previously, and, to be honest, I didn't intend to retire to the past. I became interested in the topic only when I sat down to read historical literature, memoirs, documents."[16] However, although Klimov had not made historical films previously, his film 'Sport' allowed him to employ a cinematic

[13] Klimov, Elem, Quote taken from Cohen, Stephen, and Katrina Heuvel, *Voices Of Glasnost- Interviews With Gorbachev's Reformers,* Norton and Company, 1989, pg 232
[14] Ibidem, pg 233
[15] Christie, Ian, *Monthly Film Bulletin: 54*, British Film Institute, 1987, pg 200
[16] Klimov, Elem, 'Iskusstvo Kino'*,* May 2004

technique named 'mixed-media', a method which combines real historical footage, photographs, and artefacts with fictitious and concocted set pieces, as he says of *Agonia*- "The material captured me, took possession of me. I already started thinking about another type of cinema. While working on the film 'Sport', I became interested in the assembly and chronicle method."[17]

A History And Synopsis Of *Agonia*

Agonia underwent a convoluted journey to appear on Soviet cinema screens. It was originally intended to commemorate 50 years since the October Revolution and was to be released in 1966/67, but the film encountered numerous production issues. Klimov and Pyryev, who was also working on *Agonia*, regularly disagreed about the script and direction of the film, and when Pyryev died during the production's development, the work came to a standstill and "the script of *Agonia* lay on the shelf until better times."[18] After various iterations of the text were sent off to Goskino for approval, the film was finally given the green light to be shot in early 1973.

It was Klimov's background in comedy and satire that led to him on declare on Rasputin that- "Our attitude towards him changed. I'm talking about the first version of the script. There the approach was purely satirical. A lot was left over in our mood from the film 'Welcome, Or No Trespassing.'"[19] After pouring through the archives on the famed Siberian peasant, Klimov declared in an interview with the magazine 'Iskusstvo Kino' that- "We had two Rasputins: One- the real, and the second- the way legend, rumour and gossip saw him. We understood that we offered the viewer not a genuine historical person, but a historical person through the prism of his contemporaries. So to some extent our Rasputin is a myth."[20] Despite having 'two Rasputins', Klimov was in no doubt about the healing powers of the Starets, as he continues- "He was an outstanding person, endowed with considerable abilities- healing for example. He knew how to assess any situation and subordinate himself to it."[21]

Perhaps due in part to Klimov's relative inexperience as a director at the time, he later reflected on his production that- "In general I have a critical attitude to *Agonia*. The bottom line is that when I started making the film, I was still not internally and professionally prepared for it."[22]

Agonia takes place in 1916 and the last days of Tsarist rule. Russia is embroiled in a bitter and bloody war with Germany, and an indecisive Tsar Nicholas seeks advice from his close-knit clique on how to defeat such a well drilled enemy. With a shortage of both artillery and food at the front, there is

[17] Ibidem
[18] Razzakov, Fedor, 'Strasti Po Agonii', 'Viki Chtenie'
[19] Klimov, Elem, 'Iskusstvo Kino', May 2004
[20] Ibidem
[21] Ibidem
[22] Ibidem

growing derision towards the royal family among the maltreated soldiers, with many beginning to rebel and ignore orders. While fighting one enemy at war, the Tsar also has to contend with troubles closer to home- that of a dismayed Russian peasantry. The looming prospect of revolution follows the Tsar throughout, with growing consternation among the masses mirroring that of the troops.' With revolutionary spirit in the air, a deluded Emperor seems powerless to avert Russia's sail towards oblivion. The viewer finds a debauched and wanton Rasputin already snug under the wing of the Tsarina, who believes she has successfully found the man who can cure her beloved Tsareivich of his haemophilia. As Rasputin begins to exert more and more influence on the family, and as he falls even further into the vices of corruption, he delivers some questionable instruction on military strategy to the Tsar, which he duly employs. After learning of such impropriety, and believing that Rasputin holds too much sway over the family in general, a quartet of conspirators hatch a plot to kill the Mad Monk. Rasputin is thus invited to a party at the palace of Prince Yusupov, where the right-wing politician Vladimir Purishkevich shoots and kills Rasputin.

The Banning of *Agonia*

There are three reasons proffered as to why Goskino banned the film, although none can be confidently verified. One such theory is proposed by Valery Fomin and Liliya Mamatova in their book *Rossiisky Illyuzion*, as they state that- "Having seen the film in 1975, the cinematographic officials perceived the film as an expanded metaphor for the decay and corruption of the elites in the Brezhnev era."[23] With many scenes from the film showing the Tsar and his advisors revelling in palace luxury, and many of those close to the Emperor benefitting from corruption, and when contrasted with mixed-media images of an ailing and starving Russian peasantry, it is easy to comprehend why Goskino might have seen the film as an exaggerated mirroring of the early 70s Soviet Union.

The second reason was thought to be due to Klimov's very sympathetic portrayal of Tsar Nicholas 2nd, the first portrait of the Emperor in Soviet film history. As John Dunlop writes in his reading of the film for the book *The Red Screen*, this depiction of the Tsar was one of- "a good man, albeit one with a weak will. This 'deviation' in depicting Nicholas was probably the chief reason that the film was shelved for ten years."[24] The 'deviation' that Dunlop alludes to here is one that is a large departure from the Tsar's depiction in Soviet historiography, which as Fomin and Mamatova highlighted, painted him as- "a paltry fool and a bloody tyrant whose derogatory image was fashioned by the

[23] Fomin, Valery, and Liliya Mamatova, *Rossiisky Illyuzion,* Materik, 2003, pg 608
[24] Dunlop, John, in Anna Lawton, *The Red Screen,* Routledge, 1992, pg 244

joint forces of Soviet historiographers and the arts."[25] The Tsar Nicholas in *Agonia* is a far cry from a 'bloody tyrant', and instead shown to be a downtrodden, misguided, but loving family man. One must remember that since the film was intended to commemorate a half century since the 'heroic' October Revolution, depicting the Tsar in such fashion would surely have affronted the cinema authorities, as Klimov himself points out- "From the very beginning I didn't like the idea of shooting *Agonia*. It wasn't possible to make cinema about the Tsarist rule at the time when it was required to insult this regime, when Nicholas had to be portrayed as an idiot."[26]

The third reason offered is because there are various scenes of (female) nudity in the film. These scenes appear intermittently throughout *Agonia*, and, especially for a prudish Soviet society, these segments were certainly risqué. Thus, for a famously puritanical Goskino, these scenes would not have helped Klimov's case. Although one cannot know for sure which of these reasons led to the film being proscribed and shelved, the most likely truth is that it was a combination of all three factors.

Agonia **Analysis**

Corruption Of The Elites

Agonia opens with Klimov's now famed use of mixed-media. Archival footage of a beleaguered looking Russian people is overlaid by a sombre narration charting Russia's surmounting problems, as it reads- "2/3 of the populace are illiterate. It is a country of glaring social contrasts, the tyranny of bureaucracy and censorship, the total disregard for human rights. The First World War has revealed the insolvency of the state machine."[27] This opening account and sequence could not be in sharper disparity to the proceeding initial encounter with the Tsar, as the splendorous palace grounds give way to a shot of the Emperor painting a still life of what he sees before him- that of the Romanovs ice skating over a beautiful snow-lined pond. It is perhaps here that we see the Tsar seeking escapism from the decay and dismay occurring outside the walls of Tsarskoye Selo. After an argument with the chairman of the State Duma, Mikhail Rodzianko, about the supposed growing influence of Rasputin, the Tsar, walking away from his easel, declares "My people love me!"[28] His delusion is palpable, for the painting on his canvas is a far cry from the images of the Russian masses that one witnesses in the above mentioned mixed-media montage. Perhaps it is also here that we witness Klimov's first use of Aesopian language, for we know that Brezhnev also liked to surround

[25] Fomin, Valery, and Liliya Mamatova, *Rossiisky Illyuzion,* Materik, 2003, pg 605
[26] Klimov, Elem, 'Iskusstvo Kino'*,* April 2008
[27] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[28] Ibidem

himself in splendour and wealthy objects beyond the reaches of the average Soviet man, namely luxury cars.

It is the luxury of palace opulence contrasted with mass squalor that is prevalent throughout *Agonia*. At a party among regal elite, a refined guest shaking a bottle of champagne declares- "Fire at the German enemy!"[29], before then frivolously showering a beautifully dressed dancing woman. With ammunition, food, and water desperately short at the front, the disparity between the aristocracy and the impoverished masses could not be starker. It is scenes like this that one could take an Aesopian reading of, since, as Burlatsky highlights, elitism was rife during Brezhnev's rule- "The vast majority of the government *apparat* idolised him (Brezhnev) and received everything from him- titles, prizes, academy money, dacha buildings, bribes. He was also supported by those social strata that lived fearlessly on unearned income."[30]

[31]

Champagne at home but no water at the front.

We also know that nepotism surrounded Brezhnev's reign, as on more than one occasion he appointed family members, as well generally having favourites, as Tompson explains- "Brezhnev's consolidation of power would have given him greater freedom to disregard colleagues' views, to promote favourites or to act arbitrarily….corruption and nepotism that had long been a part of the regime became increasingly brazen."[32] While nepotism is not evident in *Agonia*, Brezhnev's

[29] Ibidem
[30] Burlatsky, Fedor, Quote taken from Ronald Suny, *The Structure Of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg 452
[31] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[32] Tompson, William, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pg 21 and 122

seemingly arbitrarily promotion of favourites and demotion of his bete noire is perhaps mimicked in the film. To again take an Aesopian reading, the lady-in-waiting Anna Vyrubova reads aloud a list to Rasputin (a man with such powerful influence) of hopefuls to be elected to the State Council-

Vyrubova- "Izmaylov?"

Rasputin: "Let him die at home."

Vyrubova: Chagodayev?

Rasputin: "His height is wrong."

Vyrubova: "Korf, Ivan Ivanovich?"

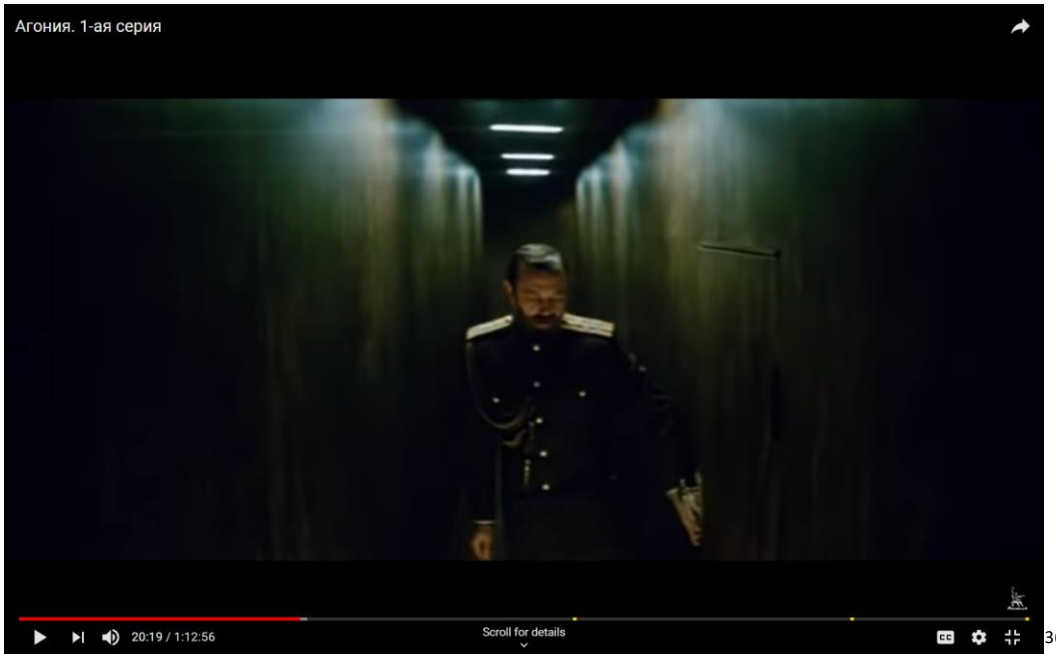
Rasputin: "Let him be. He's a thief, but he's our thief."[33]

This seemingly arbitrary, whimsical advancement of political hopefuls that was prevalent even before Brezhnev's reign is perhaps mocked by Klimov, as yet another problem that plagued the 70s Soviet Union is also prevalent in pre-revolutionary Russia.

The Human Tsar

As briefly mentioned, this is a far different portrait than the 'bloody tyrant' one found in Soviet historiography. The Tsar here is impotent, weak-willed, indecisive, downtrodden, and, like Rasputin, appears accepting of his and his country's fate (for Rasputin also predicts his own death). At a time when Russia needs decisive leadership, the Emperor instead dallies and postpones, seeking escapism in his art (for beyond painting, we also witness him developing photographs). In a meeting with the Tsar and various ministers, they begin to discuss mutinies among increasingly disgruntled troops, as well as issues among the peasantry. After receiving conflicting advice, and with the word 'revolution' hanging in the air, the Minister of Interior Khvostov declares that- "It's time to decide your Majesty."[34] This is quickly repeated by Goremykin, who says- "We have to decide!"[35] The feeble Tsar promptly resigns from the room to a narrow corridor which leads to his family.

[33] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[34] Ibidem
[35] Ibidem



[36]

The walls closing in on the Tsar.

It stands to reason that when taking an Aesopian reading of the film, the leader of Russia in 1916 in *Agonia* could reflect the leader of the Soviet Union in the 1970s. We have here perhaps the sharpest comparison. Just like in 1916, the problems facing Russia are some of the exact same problems facing the USSR in the 1970s- rising discontent, corruption, a black market economy, and censorship. When faced with such issues, one finds a Tsar just as indecisive, dithering and perplexed as Brezhnev was declared to be, as Burlatsky again opines- "Being an extremely cautious man who had not taken a single rash step during his rise to power…He allowed everyone to have a say and if there was no consensus he postponed the matter. How did it come about that in such a difficult period in the history of our motherland, the man at the helm of the country's government was the weakest of all the leaders?"[37] Like in pre-revolutionary Russia, the 70s Soviet Union needed reform and change, and Brezhnev, like the Tsar in *Agonia,* stood idly by and remained indecisive.

Klimov's depiction of the Tsar is also extremely sympathetic. The Emperor in *Agonia* is one who loves his family, who is in pain and tears at seeing his beloved Russia on the edge of collapse, and one who feels powerless to avert his country's course. One could read the portrayal of the Tsar and the revolutionary heroism in *Agonia* as perhaps being against Marxism-Leninism, since the heroes of the era, the Bolsheviks, are conspicuous by their absence, spending a large majority of the film on the periphery and only flickering into view at the very last, as Louis Menashe highlights in his reading of

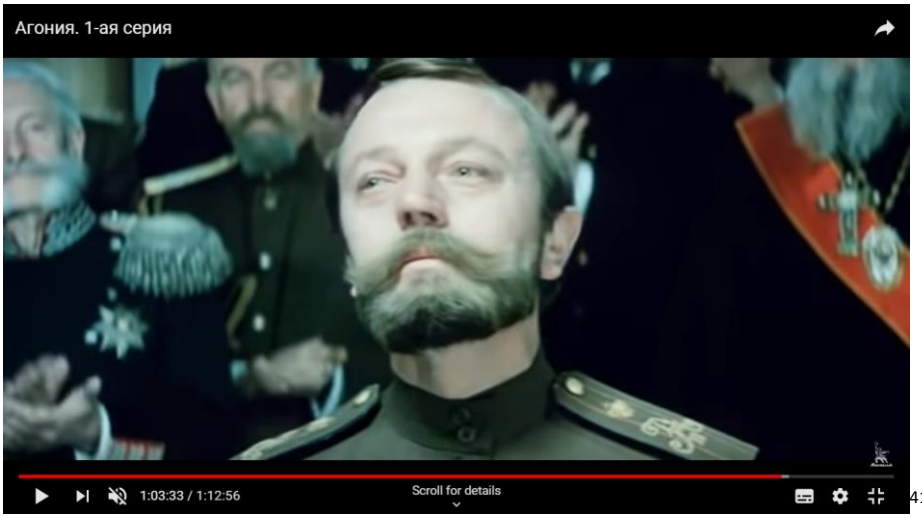
[36] Ibidem
[37] Burlatsky, Fedor, Quote taken from Ronald Suny, *The Structure Of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg 446 and 449

the film for *Film Quarterly*- "In a film set in Petrograd in 1916, with revolution in the air, we get no positive heroes, no Lenin, no Bolsheviks, no sturdy proletarians, no aroused peasants. *Agonia* challenges some of the hoariest canons in Soviet cinema treatments of the revolution."[38]

Agonia's Possible Resonance With Russian Nationalism

This kinder view of the Tsar that Klimov presents perhaps mirrored a renewed interest and even passion for the Emperor and pre-revolutionary Russia among Russian nationalists, as Galleoti explains- "Among the early movements were groups committed to championing national rights. In some cases these were Russian nationalists who, for example, devoted themselves to restoring tsarist monuments."[39] While *Agonia* is not the full 'restoration of a tsarist monument' that a growing number of Russian nationalists would champion, it is important to remember that for Klimov, the Tsar was no villain. Perhaps then, Klimov and *Agonia* just slightly predate a more positive future reassessment of Tsar Nicholas 2nd and the pre-revolutionary period that would really begin to flourish during Perestroika and the late 1980s. After some 50 years under Soviet rule, there was growing pessimism and perhaps even doubts creeping in, with more and more venerating Russian as opposed to Soviet values. A growing number of Russian nationalists became more interested in their Russian past rather than their forever promised Soviet utopian future, especially at time when "the emphasis had shifted 'from getting there to being there'"[40], and 'being there' wasn't nearly a 'utopia.' By highlighting that the problems that dogged pre-revolutionary Russia were the very same that continued to plague Russia under 50 years of Soviet rule, and with his sympathetic portrayal of the Tsar, Klimov reflects and plugs into such an 'anti-Soviet' mood (in some quarters) of the 70s and 80s, and in this instance, his middle finger is hidden under no such sleeve.

[38] Menashe, Louis, *Film Quarterly,* University Of California Press, 1986, pg 18
[39] Galeotti, Mark, *Gorbachev And His Revolution,* Macmillan Press, 1997, pg 98
[40] Tompson, William, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, pg 27



[41]

The Tsar is no villain.

<u>The Inhuman Rasputin</u>

The sympathetic and humanising portrayal of the Emperor is in stark contrast to the very unhumanising and animalistic depiction of the Starets. A wonderful performance from Alexey Petrenko sees the audience greeted with a crazed, erratic, highly charged, drunk, power-hungry leech. In a film where people are constantly referred to as various animals, it is perhaps of no surprise that Rasputin is often alluded to as a 'dog'. Yet a similar but perhaps more accurate term to describe Klimov's version of Rasputin would be that of 'werewolf', for in both appearance and actions, Rasputin often undergoes what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes as- "the lupization of man, and the humanization of wolf."[42] The straggly, hairy, unkempt, animalistic, sex-crazed peasant so often experiences this 'lupization', as the below scene attests to-

[41] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[42] Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power And Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998, pg 106

[43]

A dog/werewolf-like Rasputin, drinking from a puddle, scrounging in the dirt, corrupted and degenerated.

Rasputin's accursed near lycanthropy means that he exists in somewhat of a state of 'in-between'- a theme Agamben highlights, as he continues to say that the werewolf is -"the monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city: the werewolf, is, therefore, in its origin the figure of a man who has been banned from the city."[44] One here recalls that Rasputin too is quite literally 'banned from the city' by Tsar Nicholas, now no longer at home in St Petersburg among the elites, but crucially, also no longer at home in 'the forest', in the countryside, with the poor and the peasants. This is best emphasised in a vital scene shortly after Rasputin has been banned by his sovereign, as the Starets and his fellow peasants sit down for a plentiful banquet of food that Rasputin has presumably procured due to his once lofty acquaintances in the capital. One villager, quizzing Rasputin on his relationship to the Tsar, asks-

"Why should he (the Tsar) speak with a peasant then?"

Rasputin: "To talk to a peasant is like honey to him."

Villager: "And the peasant is you, right?"

Villager 2: "Well, you, Grigory Yefimovich, are a thief! Although you're with the Tsar now. You're the thief, Rasputin!"[45]

[43] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[44] Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power And Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998, pg 105
[45] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985

Rasputin promptly flies into a fit of rage with the label of 'thief.' After being banned from the city, and rejected by his peasants, Rasputin becomes the werewolf 'divided between the forest and the city.'

This dog/wolf/werewolf-like Rasputin, who exists in this state of 'in-between', who lives somewhere between the city and forest, and who is divided between man and animal is highlighted in a scene with the Buryat-Mongol healer Badmayev. After recovering from a physical attack from some concerned Priests, an ailing Rasputin says to Badmayev-

"They tear me in two. Some people yell Christ! Others, the Antichrist! Who am I, Badma?

Badyamev: "You're a dog, Grisha. A lecherous dog. And you'll die like one."[46]

Beyond being prophetic, Badmayev's words once again consign Rasputin to the now familiar rung of hound, mutt and mongrel. Torn in two, Rasputin closely straddles the line between powerful and corrupted, peasant and prosperous, saint and sinner, Christ and Antichrist, and, like a werewolf, man and beast.

The imagery of animals likened to people is a recurrent theme in *Agonia*, with the Russian masses often referred to as 'sheep' (sheep perhaps being led to a metaphorical slaughter[47], as Dunlop suggests). Yet it is this vision of the dog/wolf/werewolf that is most prevalent. The dogs featured in *Agonia* are never seen in their domesticated, tamed, obedient form, but instead appear in their most primal, wolf-like origins, with ears pinned back and baring vicious teeth, mirroring Rasputin's near lycanthropy, as the below stills attest to-

[46] Ibidem
[47] Dunlop, John, in Anna Lawton, *The Red Screen,* Routledge, 1992, pg 244

[48]

Rasputin, like a dog/wolf, muddied and baring teeth.

Rasputin's near lycanthropy into the dog/wolf/werewolf sees him rarely triumph over his animalistic tendencies, especially his carnal desires. With this in mind, Henrietta Mondry, in her book *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture*, writes of dogs/animals that- "the animal world is based on a tripartite system of values: to satisfy hunger, to hate death, to enjoy sex in the open."[49] With his mythical near immortality, Rasputin also 'hated death', but in *Agonia* we also witness a Rasputin who regularly gorges to the point of excess, and on one occasion we literally see him attempt 'sex in the open', as at the same party as mentioned earlier, an unperturbed, possessed Rasputin molests and gropes an unsuspecting baroness.

[48] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[49] Mondry, Henrietta, *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture*, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pg 325

[50]

Sex in the open becoming of the dog/wolf/werewolf.

However, there is always hope for a werewolf's return. It is usually true in werewolf mythology that the accursed lycanthropic metamorphosis is not the final form, but instead there occurs a retransformation back from wolf to man, and the same is true for the dog/wolf/werewolf Rasputin. To preface such a claim, Mondry writes on the poem 'Howl' by Ivan Sokolov-Mikitov (another work detailing the dog/wolf) that- "Nature is opposed to civilisation, which has created a cult of death and placed the corpse in a privileged position. The notions of public burial and secretive sexual coitus are in direct opposition to animal behaviour."[51] With this in mind, after Purishkevich shoots and kills Rasputin (like a dog), the Mad Monk's corpse is given 'a privileged position' as he is buried by the Tsar and Tsarina. This burial, 'in opposition to animal behaviour', is serene, sombre, solemn and ceremonial, and is perhaps the only time in the entirety of the film that one feels any semblance of sympathy for Rasputin. Thus, Rasputin is given an animal's death, but, crucially, a human's burial. Right at the last, even after death, the inhuman becomes human, the wolf becomes man.

[50] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985
[51] Mondry, Henrietta, *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture*, Brill Rodopi, 2015, pg 325-326

[52]

Rasputin killed like a dog but buried like a man.

Since animals are famously so readily utilised for Aesopian readings, what does Rasputin as the dog/wolf/werewolf represent? One here carries the conviction that Rasputin is the image of the corrupted. As discussed, corruption was rife in the Soviet Union of the 70s. Just like Rasputin, many *appratchiki* benefitted from proximity to the elite, and just like in pre-revolutionary Russia, the gap between the top and the bottom of the social strata widened. By producing such an exaggerated depiction of Rasputin, by showing him to be a debauched, immoral dog/wolf/werewolf who only grows more ravenous and corrupted as he falls further into numerous vices, Klimov uses this character to highlight the vitiating effects of corruption on the human soul. It is through the dog/wolf/werewolf Rasputin that Klimov denounces and arraigns all those that bare even slight similarity to the Starets by indulging in such unabashed corruption. Although, since an Aesopian reading runs through this chapter, one could also say that for the Romanovs, Rasputin was very much the 'wolf in sheep's clothing.'

Conclusion

In an attempt to analyse how this cinematic portrayal of Rasputin reflects the hopes, fears, and anxieties at the time of its production, one could suggest that the answers have been staring us in the face this entire time, for the reasons for the banning of *Agonia* perhaps tell us all we need to know. The vitiating effects of corruption, most prominently practised among the elites of the 70s Soviet Union, is perhaps mimicked in *Agonia* through Klimov's use of Aesopian language. One believes that by creating such a warped and disturbed depiction of Rasputin, Klimov wanted to

[52] Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985

exaggerate the debasing effects of said corruption, for it is the Starets who was famously snug with the elite then, and perhaps similar such 'Rasputins' existed in the 70s USSR. More importantly than this, the second theory proffered for the banning of the film- the sympathetic portrayal of Tsar Nicholas- plugs into a reassessment of the Emperor and pre-revolutionary Russia that would really flourish among Soviet intellectuals in the 1980s, and this theory for the banning perhaps highlights that such straying from the party ideology would not be tolerated lightly. Klimov highlights how many of the problems that plagued Russia of 1916 still continued to afflict Soviet Russia of the 1970s, and thus this perhaps reflects a growing pessimism, especially among the Soviet middle-class, that after some 50 years of Soviet rule, large aspects of life had not improved. With this in mind, one could even suggest that with Klimov knowing the puritanical nature of Goskino, his decision to include risqué scenes of nudity would inevitably lead to the film being banned, and thus again highlight another problem of pre-revolutionary Russia that still remained in 1970s Soviet Russia- that of strict censorship laws.

Rasputin

"A great calm, at the same time both bitter and serene, spread through me. I no longer had to struggle between my Russian and my French identities. I accepted myself."[1]

Introduction

In Andrey Makine's 1994 novel *Dreams Of My Russian Summers* (above), the main protagonist Alyosha spends much of the tale caught between two worlds- the Russia of his birth, and the France of childhood tales told by his French grandmother. It is at this moment above that he finds some inner equilibrium. Makine, born in Siberia in 1957 but granted political asylum in Paris in 1987, was similarly caught between these two dual worlds. As a Russian born novelist writing in French for a French audience, Makine was criticised for being guilty of creating a stereotypical caricature of Russia in order to please his foreign readership, as Tatyana Tolstaya, author of *The Slynx*, said of Makine's style- "This is not the way in which a Russian writes for Russians, this is how a Russian writes for the French, 'understanding' as it were, what is expected of him, what 'they' need, how to attract 'their' attention."[2] Makine could be criticised for painting a picture of Russia that was based on a pining for literary success, rather than on sincerity. It is this supposed lack of sincerity that Makine doesn't hide, as he says of Russian writers wanting to achieve success in the West- "One has to write a caricature- about Russian filth, drunks, in other words, about everything negative. And it will be published. You will do damage to Russia and Russian literary culture, but you will have success."[3] Makine appears unashamed at creating a hackneyed caricature of Russia. It is these clichés that Adrian Wanner, in his book, *Out Of Russia: Fictions Of A New Translingual Diaspora*, argues are in danger of being realised by other novelists, as he says- "If the success of the translingual writer depends on his 'exotic' appeal to a foreign audience, the communication between author and reader risks becoming a mere indulgence in glib stereotypes."[4]

With Makine, the two countries of France and Russia, and the words of 'glib stereotypes' all ringing in one's mind, one now comes to the next film under consideration- the French-Russian co-production of *Raspoutine/Rasputin* (2013 in Russia), starring Gerard Depardieu. One could argue that this film is similar to *Dreams Of My Russian Summers* in that its creators also lie between the worlds of Russia and France, as well as being a work that sees an image of Russia moulded for an originally French/foreign audience. It was also a work that garnered Tolstaya-like criticisms after its

[1] Makine, Andrey, *Dreams Of My Russian Summers*, Arcade Publishing, 1997, pg 183
[2] Tolstaya, Tatyana, Quote taken from Adrian Wanner, *Fictions Of A New Translingual Diaspora*, Northwestern University Press, 2011, pg 48
[3] Makine, Andrei, Quote taken from Ibidem, pg 46
[4] Wanner, Adrian, Ibidem, pg 46

initial release in Russia, with the description of 'kliukva' (Клюква), a term we will come to in greater detail shortly, being a recurrent theme in reviews of Russian film journalists.

Two versions of this film exist. One was made for French TV as a series by the French director Josee Dayan in 2011, and another 90-minute film for Russian cinemas was reworked by a Georgian-Russian director named Irkali Kvirikadze in 2013. This chapter will only analyse the 2013 Russian version. After profiling Depardieu, defining 'kliukva', offering a synopsis of the film, and providing historical context, I will elucidate how Rasputin as a 'healer/protector' could be read as a metaphor for Putin and the Russian people. Secondly, I will show how reviews of *Rasputin* perhaps reflected a wider theme / conversation occurring in Russia at the time.

Gerard Depardieu

In her book *Stars And Stardom In French Cinema* (2000), Ginette Vincendeau described Gerard Depardieu as- "the axiom of (then) contemporary French cinema."[5] Over his lengthy career in France, Depardieu crafted a persona of- "a committed French citizen whose working life was informed by a deep and secure identification with a particular social class and national identity."[6] A lot has changed in Depardieu's career in these intervening 18 or 19 years. For a man who was once this 'axiom', Depardieu has undergone a dramatic fall from grace in his homeland, as Sue Harris highlights in her paper *Degraded Divinity?*- "Depardieu as an ageing star has fallen out of favour and fashion in French cultural life, and is today routinely held up as a figure of ridicule and contempt by the French media."[7] This fall from grace began most dramatically in 2012, when Depardieu rallied against a proposed (but never actually passed) tax law which would have seen- "income in excess of 1.3 million euros taxed at the rate of seventy-five percent"[8]. Depardieu's obvious displeasure at the supposed implementation of what is termed the 'Solidarity Tax On Wealth', saw the French man threaten to sell up his luxury Paris mansion and flee to the unexpected open arms of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who not only offered Depardieu a Russian passport, but also property in Saransk (and would later be given an apartment in Grozny by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov). This turning of his back on his homeland was largely met with opprobrium in France, especially since Depardieu "was an actor who had literally got fat on the land of French tax payer subsidies,"[9] as Harris termed it. One journalist in the newspaper 'Liberation' asked of Depardieu- "You leave the French ship in full storm? You sell your goods and you leave with your money. Shut up, take your

[5] Vincendeau, Ginette, *Stars And Stardom In French Cinema*, Continuum, 2000, pg 215
[6] Harris, Sue, *Degraded Divinity? Sacred Monstrosity? Gerard Depardieu And The Abject Star Body* in *Screen*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pg 326
[7] Ibidem pg 320
[8] Ibidem pg 324
[9] Ibidem, pg 325

dough and get lost; don't ask for respect, not you."[10] The then French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault also described Depardieu's conduct as 'shabby.'

While many non-Russians have played Rasputin previously, these portrayals have also been for a non-Russian audience. Depardieu however has the distinguished feat of being the only foreigner to have played Rasputin for a Russian audience. Because of this, it may seem no surprise that eyebrows were raised at his casting by a contingent of Russian journalists, with one pondering whether- "a sleek European can ever play a dense Russian man?"[11] Yet, while doubts were raised, Depardieu has at least been no stranger to playing prominent historical figures. A cursory glance at his CV shows that he has played Christopher Columbus in the film '1492:Conquest Of Paradise' (1992), and the playwright Honore De Balzac in 'Balzac: A Life Of Passion' (1999). Thus, for Depardieu, his experience at playing historical figures, rather than particularly a Russian, was vital for the role, as he said- "the question is not whether I can play a Russian, but whether I can become the person of history."[12] The role of the 'Holy Devil' is one that Depardieu claims to have wanted to play since the 1990s, after he "met with the writer Henri Troyat, author of a book about Rasputin."[13] Depardieu also wanted to change previous negative portrayals of Rasputin and aimed to do this by adding to the role- "a human dimension that lives in me as well as in Rasputin."[14] Depardieu was perhaps also suited to playing Rasputin due to a cultivated on screen style that has permeated a number of his previous characters, as Vincendeau explains- "Depardieu's dramatic star persona is that of the 'suffering macho', a figure of misogynistic virility who is simultaneously in crisis."[15] This last line could seemingly have been lifted straight out of Rasputin's biography.

However, these tenuous links did little to quell any confusion with Russian film critics. Among the litany of first-hand accounts of Rasputin that history grants us, the adjectives of 'portly' and 'overweight' are unsurprisingly absent, which perhaps is one of the main reasons as to why Depardieu was a somewhat odd choice to play the Mad Monk. A rotund Depardieu, with "a belligerent jutting chin, (and) a boxer's irregular nose"[16], only serves to highlight that, physically, at the age of 61 (when filming), the plump Frenchman might not have been best placed to play the somewhat slim, 46 year old Siberian.

[10] Torreton, Phillipe, 'Alors Gerard, T'as Les Boules', 'Liberation', 2012
[11] Pevchev, Alexey, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[12] Depardieu, Gerard, Quote taken from Ibidem
[13] Dombrovskaya, Inga, 'Rasputin, Putin, I Depardieu', 'RFI', December 2011
[14] Depardieu, Gerard, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[15] Vincendeau, Ginette, *Stars And Stardom In French Cinema*, Continuum, 2000, pg 225
[16] Ibidem, pg 219

Doubts about the compatibility of Depardieu were surely only exacerbated by an interview Depardieu gave to 'Izvestiya'. When asked why he was so drawn to the figure of Rasputin, Depardieu replied that- "I have been interested in him for a long time. He was very Russian, idealistic, whole, and even sometimes too flawless. I feel a closeness to this person. Both of my grandmothers were fortune-tellers and hypnotists, and they healed people."[17] It is here that one can almost hear the clutching of straws by Depardieu in order to cultivate any sort of connection with Rasputin, and with Russia.

Kliukva

The most commonly repeated phrase one finds from the Russian reviews of *Rasputin* is the curious expression of 'Razvesistaya Kliukva' (Развесистая Клюква)- meaning literally 'spreading / branching cranberries'- a term most often shortened to simply 'kliukva' and occasionally used in the form of an adjective, such as 'kliukvenni'. At first glance then, describing a film as 'cranberry' might seem completely illogical. Yet, 'kliukva' has a more apt second meaning and can be used to mean 'fake', 'implausible', or 'false', as well as sometimes being used- "to denote outlandish clichés about life in Russia that are circulating in foreign countries,"[18] as Wanner writes. As for the etymology of this phrase, and why particularly 'cranberries' are used to denote such a quirk, it is difficult to say with assurance, but the answer might coincidentally lie once again between these two recurring countries of France and Russia. In a 2017 article entitled 'Kliukva: Ours or France's?', a journalist for 'Rossiiskaya Gazeta' posited that the phrase first emanated from the French writer and author of *The Three Musketeers*, Alexandre Dumas pere, who, when travelling through Russia in 1840, wrote that he- "sat under the spreading branches of a cranberry tree."[19] This somewhat unlikely event was treated with suspicion by Russian readers and thus the 'spreading branches of a cranberry tree' became a synonym for over-the-top and facile tales of Russia and its inhabitants. Yet, in the same article, a later-dated origin of the phrase was proffered by a 'specialist in phraseology', Valeri Mokienko. Mokienko determines that the term first originated in 1910 in a Russian parody of an originally French drama. The production was named *The Love Of The Russian Cossack* and played in the St Petersburg theatre 'Curved Mirror.' The play detailed the lives of Russian farmers and featured a heroine forced to marry a Cossack. Reminiscing about past times with her true love, the

[17] Depardieu, Gerard, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[18] Wanner, Adrian, *Fictions Of A New Translingual Diaspora*, Northwestern University Press, 2011, pg 45
[19] Dumas, Alexandre, Quote taken from Marina Koroleva, 'Kliukva: Nasha Ili Fransuzskaya?', 'Rossiiskaya Gazeta', 2017

heroine remembers a time where she and he- "sat under the sprawling twigs of a hundred-year-old cranberries."[20]

A History And Synopsis Of *Rasputin*

Like *Agony* before it, *Rasputin* underwent a convoluted journey to appear on Russian cinema screens. In its original incarnation, *Rasputin* was made as a TV series and aired on French television in 2011. The French-Russian co-production, shot "in a practically record time of 26 days"[21], was directed by the Frenchwoman Josee Dayan, who had worked previously with Depardieu with some success on the aforementioned 'Balzac: A Life Of Passion', as well as on 'The Count Of Monte Cristo'. The success of the duo was not replicated in *Rasputin*, with the series being "poorly received"[22] in Dayan's and Depardieu's homeland. It was perhaps this poor reception of the series that led the Russian contingent on the project to declare that they- "didn't like it very much, and so decided to make their own."[23] The opportunity to salvage and reproduce a more 'Russian' version to be shown solely in Russian cinemas fell to the Georgian-Russian director Irakli Kvirikadze, who had previously gained experience working as an editor/cutter on films such as 'Generation P' (2011) and 'Olympic Village' (2011). This 'dietician' of films (as he was referred to in an interview in 'Kommersant') used "a series of vignettes taken from the French series"[24] to turn the production into a 90 minute feature length film- a process which took "almost a year, with varying degrees of activity"[25], as he explains. The label of 'dietician' for the film is an apt one, since, on the reproduction, he declared that- "the film is like a very fat man who needs to run a marathon….to lose 40 or 50 kilos and become lean and energetic."[26]

The reproduction was deemed drastic enough for it to also lose some more of its 'Frenchness', as Dayan's name was completely dropped from the credits. Yet, while one name was cut, the name of Vladimir Putin could have been unexpectedly added for performing the role of 'script proof-reader.' The unlikely friendship that blossomed between Depardieu and Putin was in evidence again as the French actor gave the script for the film to the Russian President. Depardieu said that- "I've had a few meetings with Putin. I gave him the script and said 'you should read it and tell us if you like it or

[20] Mokienko, Valeri, Quote taken from Ibidem
[21] Pevchev, Alexey, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[22] Norris, Steven, *Rasputin*, KinoKultura.com, 2014
[23] Kvirikadze, Irakli, quote taken from Olga Kasayanova, 'Shestki Montagh Dayet Filmu Energiyu', 'Kommersant', 2013
[24] Norris, Steven, *Rasputin*, KinoKultura.com, 2014
[25] Kvirikadze, Irakli, Quote taken from Olga Kasayanova, 'Shestki Montagh Dayet Filmu Energiyu', 'Kommersant', 2013
[26] Ibidem

not'."[27] Putin did indeed read the script and, according to Depardieu- "made a few changes."[28] Depardieu continued to say on his relationship with Putin that- "I saw a man who is committed to the historical values of his country. He helped us a lot, having opened many doors for us."[29]

Despite the film's production issues, *Rasputin* had no such problems in attracting a distinguished and luminous list of actors and actresses. Vladimir Mashkov (who would later go on to play Rasputin in *Grigory R*) plays Tsar Nicholas 2nd, Filipp Yankovskii is Yusupov, Konstantin Khabenskii is Rasputin's secretary, and Fanny Ardant plays the Tsarina (a role which encumbered similar criticisms to Depardieu playing the role of a man 20 years his junior. Ardant was 60 at the time of filming and played the then 44-year-old Romanova). This star-studded cast could not save the film from being panned by critics however, with journalists lamenting Depardieu's performance, as well as repeatedly highlighting the "kliukvenni product."[30]

The film curiously begins with murder of the Romanov family by the Bolsheviks in 1918, before switching back in time a near 10 years to a 'kliukvenni' Russian village where the viewer witnesses Rasputin repeatedly labelled as a 'khlyst'[31] by a Russian peasant. From here, the film details Rasputin's rise from out of the provinces and into the grandeur of the Romanovs, as well as then recounting Russia's war with Germany. Despite this damning label of 'khlyst', this incarnation of Rasputin is a far cry from the wanton starets we find in *Agonia* (a film Depardieu claims to have seen in preparation for his role). Although Rasputin is somewhat inevitably shown to be on occasion a sex-crazed drunkard (one remembers a scene with Rasputin lounging in bed with three naked women), this depiction of the Mad Monk is a much more sympathetic portrayal than Petrenko's, with the focus not on Rasputin's seduction to vices, but instead on his mystical healing powers. These healing abilities are put to good use early on, as the haemophiliac Tsarevich suffers an unfortunate accident playing with toys. Rasputin is thus summoned and successfully works his magic- a move which only induces the Tsar's and Tsarina's dependence on him. Gaining more and more influence over the family, Rasputin begins to mingle in political decision making, including unsuccessful attempts to dissuade the Tsar from entering Russia into war. With unfavourable rumours circulating about Rasputin in the press, and with his perceived growing influence on the Romanovs, Prince Yusupov, Purishkevich, and the Grand Duke Pavlovich become increasingly

[27] Depardieu, Gerard, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[28] Dombrovskaya, Inga, 'Rasputin, Putin, I Depardieu', 'RFI', December 2011
[29] Depardieu, Gerard, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', 'Izvestiya', 2013
[30] Maslova, Lidia, 'Rasputin', 'Kommersant', 2013
[31] The Khlysty were a Christian sect who engaged in strange rites and ceremonies, including orgies and self-mutilation.

concerned about the negative effect of the 'Holy Devil' on Russia. The trio thus hatch and carry out a plan to rid Russia of Rasputin once and for all, culminating with his assassination.

Historical Context

Kvirikadze's 2013 reproduction of *Rasputin* was moulded from segments taken from Dayan's 2011 version. Thus, it is wise to place Kvirikadze's remake against a three-year historical backdrop, spanning from 2010-13. This period in Russia was punctuated by the 2012 re-election of Vladimir Putin to President. However, the term 're-election' might be more accurately described as a 'job swap'. In September 2011, the then Prime Minister Putin announced he would take his old job as President, while Dmitry Medvedev, the President at that time, would complete the reversal by retaking the position of Prime Minister. The circle was completed when United Russia was granted a majority in the Russian parliament and Putin won the Presidential elections a few months later. It was a calculated move that, as the journalist Arkady Ostrovsky explains in his book *The Invention Of Russia*, broke any previous "illusion of change"[32] that had been emanating in the country, and it left many Russian citizens feeling "duped and humiliated."[33] Having overseen a 2008 financial crisis, and with "the party losing legitimacy across different social strata and risking broader discontent,"[34] the prospect of yet more years of a Medvedev/Putin partnership was not greeted warmly by some Russian citizens. This notion, coupled with this feeling of having been 'duped', led thousands of Muscovites to take to the streets in demonstration in December 2011. Protesters sported white ribbons and balloons emblazoned with the words 'If you blow us up again, we will burst.'

In what has become a customary move by Putin, growing unrest in Russia is rarely admitted to have been caused by missteps he or his government have taken, but is instead the fault of 'the other'- usually pernicious forces outside of the country. Thus, in December 8, 2011, just three days after the demonstrations began, Putin switched the blame to America and Hilary Clinton, declaring that "she gave the signal"[35] for the protests to erupt. As the historian Timothy Snyder, in his book *The Road To Unfreedom*, summarises, this was a tactical move where – "some intractable foreign foe had to be linked to protestors, so that they, rather than Putin himself, could be portrayed as the danger to Russian statehood."[36]

As well as being the work of a 'foreign foe', sexual imagery was also widely used to discredit demonstrators, as Snyder states- "Dmitry Medvedev retweeted a message to the effect that a

[32] Ostrovsky, Arkady, *The Invention Of Russia*, Penguin Books, 2015, pg 309
[33] Ibidem
[34] Ibidem, pg 311
[35] Putin, Vladimir, quote taken from Timothy Snyder, *The Road To Unfreedom*, Penguin Random House, pg 54
[36] Snyder, Timothy, Ibidem, pg 51

leading protestor was a 'stupid cocksucking sheep'. Putin said on Russian television that the white ribbons worn by protestors made him think of condoms. Visiting Germany, Putin told a surprised Angela Merkel that the Russian opposition was 'sexually deformed.'"[37] The twin themes of sexual orientation and the Western 'other' were used in this period to help define what it was to be 'Russian', to highlight 'Russian' values, to place emphasis on the Russian Orthodox Church, and to show how Russia was not so much better than, but instead different to the West. It was a growing theme that Ostrovsky again highlights, when he writes that- "Russia no longer aspired to be like the West or sought its approval and recognition. Instead, it trumpeted its difference. Putin defended his rent-seeking, crooked, post-Soviet system of governance by claiming moral superiority over the West. 'We see how many Euro-Atlantic countries are in effect turning away from their roots, including their Christian values', Putin said."[38]

***Rasputin* Analysis**

Rasputin As A Protector / Healer

It is intuitive to begin an analysis of the film by looking at the very first sequence. Somewhat counter-intuitively however, a film about the life of Grigory Rasputin begins with a scene almost two years after his death. After the Tsar's abdication and the revolution, the Bolsheviks usher the Romanov family down to a basement and execute them. This scene immediately paints Rasputin in a more positive light than what was witnessed in *Agonia*. At the time of filming *Rasputin*, more prominence was being placed on the Orthodox church and the prevalence of the ROC is noticeable throughout the film. Icons can be witnessed being kissed and prayed unto in the hope that they could provide spiritual protection. Rasputin becomes the Romanov's spiritual protection, a 'shield', and a healer who was "sent by God"[39]. With this 'shield' long since disposed of, the family thus become sitting ducks ready to be executed by the Bolsheviks. By presenting the bloody assassination of the Romanovs as the very first scene, the film suggests that, rather than being the harbinger of doom for Russia, Rasputin was instead a spiritual protector against the 'apocalyptic forces of chaos'[40] for the Romanovs. Thus, the very first scene of the film-the death of the Romanovs, is linked to the very last scene- the death of Rasputin.

It should be noted that in *Agonia*, scenes depicting Rasputin as a mystical healer are in short supply and it instead largely focuses on the corruption of the Starets. In contrast, *Rasputin,* while

[37] Ibidem
[38] Ostrovsky, Arkady, *The Invention Of Russia*, Penguin Books, 2015, pg 312-313
[39] Kvirikadze, Irakli, *Rasputin*, VGTRK, 2013
[40] Engstrom, Maria, *Contemporary Russian Messianism*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Routledge Taylor And Francis Group, 2014, pg 357

occasionally showing a drunk Mad Monk, instead features a generous amount of scenes displaying Rasputin's healing abilities. One witnesses him heal both the Tsareivich, lady-in-waiting Anna Vyrubova, his own secretary's son, and even supposedly has a calming effect on the Tsarina, as the Tsar declares to Stolypin- "She is no longer tormented by migraines. Look how happy she is (with Rasputin)."[41] After healing the bed-stricken Vyrubova, the Empress asks of the Tsar- "I told you from the very beginning. He was sent by God! Are you convinced now?"[42] This line seems as much aimed at the watching audience as it is at the Tsar.

Beyond being a healer and protector of those closest to him, Rasputin is also shown to care for his country. With Russia heading towards disaster, it is Rasputin who implores the Tsar to save the motherland, as he says to 'Papa'- "If you enter into war then there will be no one to collect the crops. Diseases will kill the weak. Thousands of children will be buried. Mothers will curse you. Save Russia! Do not let us drown in an ocean of grief and tears!"[43] In contradiction to *Agonia,* Kvirikadze's Rasputin is thus seen not as a bearer of doom for his country but is instead portrayed as a figure trying to protect and heal Imperial Russia.

One could also suggest that this portrayal of Rasputin as the healer/protector also serves as a timely metaphor for Russia at the time of the film's production and echoes Vladimir Putin's self-crafted image of the saviour of Russia. After Russia plunged into the darkness of the crime-ridden, crazy, Wild West-like 90s, Kremlin propaganda portrays Putin as the man who pulled Russia out of a 'black hole' and stabilised the country. It is he who came to the motherland's aid and 'saved' a 'dying' Russia. Putin often uses the decade of the 90s as a period of Russia's history that should never be returned to, as he said in a 2017 press conference- "The Government should not be like a bearded man who idly picks cabbage out from it and looks at how the state turns into some muddy puddle, from which the Oligarchs catch a goldfish for themselves, as we did in the 90s and as happens today in Ukraine. Do we want the second edition of today's Ukraine for Russia? No, we do not want it and we do not allow it."[44]

This theme of Putin bringing Russia out of the disastrous 90s is reflected in a few Russian historical films, most notably those that centre on the Russian civil war. To recount Gillespie's belief that the Russian historical film highlights the fears and anxieties of the present, one here refers again to the 2008 film 'Admiral' to highlight how the civil war acts as a synonym for the craziness of immediate Post-Soviet Russian life. As Steven Norris wrote on 'Admiral'- "the film allowed audiences to feel the

[41] Kvirikadze, Irakli, *Rasputin*, VGTRK, 2013
[42] Ibidem
[43] Ibidem
[44] Putin, Vladimir, 'Bolshaya Press-Conferentsiya Vladimira Putina', 2017

futility of the civil war and to detect onscreen the tragic and terrible history of the country. Kravchuk's film depicted Kolchak as a deeply devout, deeply patriotic Russian who fought for his motherland."[45] Like Kolchak, Putin also 'fought' for his motherland in the late 90's / early 2000s. This decade of the 90s was a similarly 'futile, tragic and terrible' time in Russia's history. Like Kolchak, Putin also embodies these 'deeply devout', 'deeply patriotic' values needed to 'heal' Russia at the time of destructiveness. This idea of Putin being a saviour of a 'sick' post-Soviet Russia was reflected in a 2011 radio show, when he asked of his listeners- "Can we say that our country has fully recovered and healed after the dramatic events that have occurred to us after the Soviet Union collapsed? No, of course she is still quite ill, but here we must recall Ivan Ilyin: 'Yes, our country is still sick, but we did not flee from the bed of our sick mother."[46] To link this idea to *Rasputin* and take a Gillespie-like reading, the Mad Monk too does not flee from the bed of the Tsareivich, nor from the bed of Anna Vyrubova. During the scene in which Rasputin attempts to cure the Tsareivich, Rasputin enquires-

"What are you afraid of?"

Tsareivich: "Dying."

Rasputin: "Well, children who have never been ill grow up to be weak. You will be a healthy and great Tsar! You will be strong and battle-hardened!"[47]

Russia too has been sick before, and as Putin alludes to, remains sick and will be sick for a while longer yet. But, like Rasputin, its citizens do not flee from its death bed. Having also been 'battled-hardened' through its tumultuous history, Russia will recover and become a great and strong country again. There is a Putin in Rasputin and vice-versa, for both men desired to protect Russia and avert its slide into chaos.

[45] Norris, Steven, *Ruptures and Continuities In Soviet / Russian Cinema*, Routledge, 2018, pg 214-215
[46] Putin, Vladimir, Quote taken from Timothy Snyder, *The Road To Unfreedom*, Penguin Random House, pg 58
[47] Kvirikadze, Irakli, *Rasputin*, VGTRK, 2013

[48]

(Ras)Putin as the healer/ saviour/protector of Russia.

Kliukva

The prevailing sense of 'kliukva' that the film supposedly carries and the roll of negative reviews the film garnered after its release highlights the difficulty for the foreign duo of Depardieu and Dayan to paint Russia's history and the life of one of its most notorious citizens. This sense of 'kliukva' is perhaps most keenly felt in the first ten minutes of the film as one witnesses vast wintery steppes, golden-domed Churches, shubas, shapkas, izbas, and a troika set against the splendour of the Peter and Paul Fortress. It was perhaps images of this ilk that led Russian journalists to deride the film as one where- "French authors spread cranberries on Russian themes"[49] by including images of "vodka, birch trees and domes- the whole 'cranberry' set of stereotypes about Russia is in range"[50], which thus ultimately resulted in- "a kliukvenni product."[51] Yet, in a film so 'cranberry', one might wonder why there are no bears. However, this omission is unfortunately filled by Depardieu himself. If in *Agonia* a superb performance from Petrenko saw him became the werewolf, then, in *Rasputin,* a clumsy performance from Depardieu saw him cast as a 'medved' by many Russian film critics. Depardieu's aim of portraying a more 'human' Rasputin was scuppered as his kliukvenni 'shuba' and awkward onscreen presence only sought to accentuate the image of- "a wild dancing bear"[52], as one journalist described him.

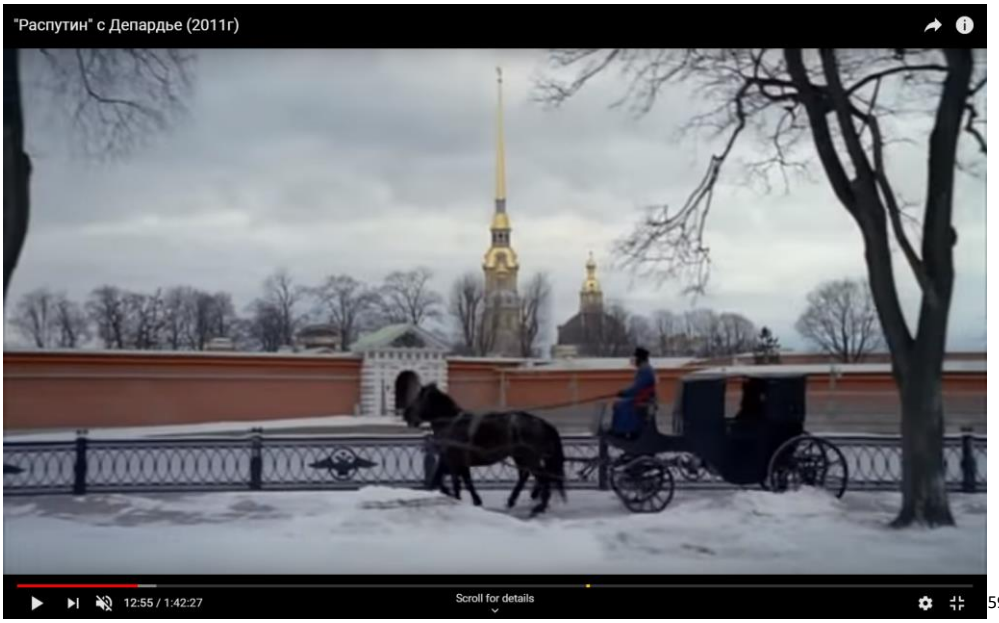
This unfavourable comparison of Depardieu to a bear perhaps attests to a wider feeling of a supposed incompatibility of the Frenchman playing a Siberian peasant. As referred to earlier, one

[48] Ibidem
[49] Kichin, Valery, 'Na Ekrani vhodit 'Rasputin' C Gerarom Deparde', 'Rossiskaya Gazeta', 2013
[50] Kolbovski, Alexander, 'Omut Vozvrata', 'Kommersant', 2013
[51] Maslova, Lidia, 'Rasputin', 'Kommersant', 2013
[52] Kichin, Valery, 'Na Ekrani vhodit 'Rasputin' C Gerarom Deparde', 'Rossiskaya Gazeta', 2013

journalist questioned whether- “a sleek European can ever play a dense Russian man without turning the film into ‘spreading cranberries’?”[53] This theme was echoed by another journalist writing for ‘Kommersant’ who described Depardieu as- “a simple French muzhik”[54] who should have “clinked glasses and shouted ‘Glory to Russia!’ and Vive la France!’ with his new Russian colleagues.”[55] Comments like this also raised questions on whether this Western ‘other’ really understood the complexities of the mythical Russian soul. Alexey Petrenko, an actor so lauded for his portrayal of his Rasputin, stated- “I would not like to comment on the acting of Depardieu. But one thing is completely clear to me- he sincerely tried to understand the soul of a Russian person. Whether he achieved a solid image, it is up the viewer to decide.”[56] One such viewer writing for the website ‘Argumenti I Facti’ answered decidedly in the negative, as she declared that- “It cannot be said that Depardieu managed to convey the Russian soul. We have seen better Rasputins. Gerard should try to understand the Russian soul somehow differently.”[57] This view was echoed in another article that sarcastically divulged that- “Depardieu, having stayed in Saransk and Grozny for a short time, apparently understood everything about the mysterious Russian soul and moved to Belgium (where he also sought tax exemption)… There is not even the smell of the Russian spirit in his character.”[58]

Izbas, Trains, Troikas, And Wintery Landscapes- A Taste Of Cranberries?

[53] Pevchev, Alexey, ‘Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni’, ‘Izvestiya’, 2013
[54] Maslova, Lidia, ‘Prostoy Frantsyzki Muzhik’, ‘Kommersant’, 2013
[55] Ibidem
[56] Petrenko, Alexey, Quote taken from Mikhail Sobolev, ‘Depardieu Ne Pahozh, A Mashkov- Sami Podhodyashii’, ‘Vechernii Peterburg’, 2013
[57] Rogova, Anastasiya, ‘Tsar, Knyaz, I Krectyanin’, ‘Argumenti I Facti’, 2013
[58] Moskvitin, Egor, ‘Gerard- Ptitsa’, Gazeta.RU, 2013



[59]

However, it is vital to note that whether or not the film is indeed 'kliukva', whether or not Dayan and Depardieu indulge in 'glib stereotypes', and whether or not Depardieu can take on this undefinable Russian soul and play a Russian peasant is but by the by. Instead, the fact that journalists describe the film in this way and ponder these questions at all is what is of greater importance. This is because these reviews also reflect and attest to a wider conversation that was occurring in Russia around the time of Kivrikadze's reproduction. This was a period where 'traditional Russian values' were being honed, propagated, and shown to be in contradiction to the West. As Ostrovsky wrote, Russia was 'trumpeting its differences' to the West, and the highlighting of the 'kliukvenni' product of *Rasputin* and the ridicule of Depardieu's performance helps to distinguish Russia from Europe and the West. The critical reviews and the repeated notion of 'kliukva' perhaps only underlines Depardieu's lack of 'Russianess' and the differences between the West and Russia. It is ironic then that midway through the film the German born Tsarina Alexandra, in discussing the war with Rasputin, declares- "All these people hate me. Do you know that for them I will always be a foreigner, a German? They don't love me. They believe that I bring misfortune."[60]

Conclusion

One can see that the recurrent description of 'kiukva' in the reviews of *Rasputin*, and the subsequent questions of whether a 'sleek' European was suited to playing a Russian and encompassing the Russian soul plugged into a wider theme occurring in Russia around the period of the film's release. At a time when Russia was moving further away from the West, highlighting its differences, and

[59] Kvirikadze, Irakli, *Rasputin*, VGTRK, 2013
[60] Ibidem

promulgating Russian values that were in contradiction to those of its Western counterparts, the reviews of *Rasputin* only echoed a similar conversation about 'us' and 'them' emanating throughout the country around 2012/13. Also, the portrayal of Rasputin as healer/ protector for a Russia on the brink of collapse in 1916/17 could reflect a similar image of Putin crafted by Kremlin propaganda of him being a saviour of Russia in the dire 1990s.

Grigory R

Introduction

Konstantin Ernst, the head of Russia's 'Channel One', or 'Pervy Canal', once claimed regarding his station, that- "Our psyche is set up in such a way that only an artistic form can explain the time we live in."[1] Thus, for a thesis that centres on how cinematic portrayals of Grigory Rasputin can help reflect a relevant historical period, and with the third and final production under consideration being a TV series shown on his very own 'Pervy Canal', Ernst grants one the perfect segue into the final part of our study. It is the TV series *Grigory R* that completes the triumvirate of productions analysed. The series differs greatly from both *Agonia* and *Rasputin* in its structure and style. Perhaps surprisingly for a work entitled 'Grigory R', the star of the show, or at very least, co-star, is not the Russian Rasputin, but is instead a detective of German background, Hendrick Svitten, a man tasked with investigating the life and death of the Starets.

Having provided historical context, and after having chronicled the series, I will show how a more positive onscreen representation of Rasputin depicts him as a simple man but a staunch Russian patriot, as well as highlighting how the image of an 'innocent' Rasputin that potentially emanates through the series reflected a wider image of an 'innocent' Russia that could be said to have pervaded since Putin's re-election in 2012. I will also analyse the cinematic portrayal of another historical figure, former Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, showing how his reimagination in this series reflects his wider veneration under Putin. I will also analyse how Prince Yusupov is cast as the villain and how he could be read as synonym for Russia's modern-day enemies.

A History And Synopsis Of *Grigory R*

Grigory R is an eight-part TV series consisting of episodes of around 40 minutes in length and was made by the production company 'Mars Media.' It is not unusual for a Russian TV series to be shown first in a former member of the Soviet Union (usually in order to gauge public opinion and viewing figures) and so *Grigory R* first aired in Kazakhstan on the 11th September 2014. It then proceeded to air on Russia's biggest television channel, 'Pervy Canal', on Monday 27th October 2014. Two episodes of the eight-part series were shown back to back each evening for four nights running, and thus the final episode aired on Thursday 30th October.

The director of the series was Andrey Malyukov. Malyukov, born in Novosibirsk, Siberia, in 1948, had previously directed other TV series including 'MosGaz' (telling the story of a serial killer in the Soviet

[1] Ernst, Konstantin, Quote taken from Arkday Ostrovsky, *The Invention Of Russia,* Penguin Random House, 2017, pg 319

Union), and 'Spetsnaz' (on Russian special forces in Chechnya). In directing *Grigory R*, Malyukov was determined to mould his portrayal of Rasputin as close to historical facts as possible, as he said of the Siberian- "It was interesting for me to look at Rasputin from the point of view of truth. He accumulated a lot of blackness. When you begin to sort out the facts, it turns out that everything was simply invented about this great Starets. He was a man who genuinely supported the Russian empire, the emperor and empress. He categorically opposed the war."[2] However, for a man famously shrouded in mysteries, myths, misapprehensions, and misconceptions, looking at Rasputin 'from the point of view of truth' proved harder than it first appeared, as Malyukov said in an interview with 'Vechernya Mockva'- "There are no reliable facts about Rasputin. Therefore, to this day, he remains a mystery. There are many versions of Rasputin, but the documentary evidence on him is zero."[3] This seems at best contradictory from Malyukov. As he alluded to earlier, his wish was to craft a Rasputin 'from truth,' and yet here he suggests that there is no such truth. There is of course much documentary evidence and accurate first-hand accounts of Rasputin, and while it is true that much misinformation surrounds the Siberian, to suggest that 'the documentary evidence on him is zero' is simply incorrect. Nevertheless, Malyukov's desire, but perceived difficulty, to create an image of Rasputin from historical fact was perhaps the reason that led him to describe the series as one that is- "a film at the junction of an artistic picture and a documentary tape."[4]

The man chosen to play Rasputin was Vladimir Mashkov, an actor much loved in Russia. For Malyukov, there was simply no other candidate more perfect for the role of the Starets, as he said in recounting a consultation with the script writers in 2010- "If you manage to drag Mashkov out of America (he was then living in LA), then the series will work. When they asked me 'why only Mashkov?', I answered 'and who else?' I insisted on Mashkov because this actor has incredible insight. Volodya himself is from Siberia, as is Rasputin."[5]

Mashkov has had a glittering career both inside and outside of Russia, having had prominent roles in such American films as 'Behind Enemy Lines' (2001) and 'Mission: Impossible- Ghost Protocol' (2011). Mashkov is also no stranger to historical film roles, having played Tsar Nicholas 2nd in the previously analysed *Rasputin*, as well as the Cossack soldier Yemelyan Pugachev in 'The Captain's Daughter' (2000). *Grigory R* became the third project that Mashkov and Malyukov worked with each other on, having previously collaborated on 'Do it- Once!' (Делай- Раз!) (1989) and 'Love On The Island Of Death' (Любовь На Острове Смерти) (1991). The role of Rasputin was one that Mashkov

[2] Malyukov, Andrey, 'Grim Dlya Mashkov', 'Argumenti I Facti', 2014
[3] Malyukov, Andrey, 'Vladimir Mashkov Nedeshevi Artist, No Prekrasni Rasputin', 'Vechernya Moskva', 2014
[4] Malyukov, Andrey, 'Vladimir Mashkov: Grigory Rasputin Lechil Molitvoy', 'Ugranow.RU', 2014
[5] Malyukov, Andrey, 'Vladimir Mashkov Nedeshevi Artist, No Prekrasni Rasputin', 'Vechernya Moskva', 2014

apparently took to with great aplomb, becoming so entwined with his fellow Siberian that one journalist writing for the website 'Spletnik' reported that- "The actor is so accustomed to the image that they even jokingly called Mashkov 'Volodya Rasputin' on set."[6] This perceived closeness to Rasputin was echoed by another journalist who declared that- "Vladimir Mashkov has an almost photographic similarity to the character (Rasputin)."[7] While Rasputin famously splits opinions on what sort of man he actually was, for Mashkov, there were no doubts about his integrity, as he said of the famed peasant- "He almost died when he was treating people. He took all the pain onto himself. To declare that he is a holy devil is the most terrible, disgusting mistake that is supported by the Russian people. This is a loving Russian, a very sincere person who loved the people."[8]

This from Mashkov might be a clue alluding to one of three potential reasons as to why Malyukov opted to name the series 'Grigory R'. A historian quoted in the newspaper 'Trud' offered this reason for the choice of title- "Having watched six episodes so far, I can offer a clarification that I would give to the title of this series: 'Grigory R- Rehabilitation' (Григорий Р- Реабилитация)."[9] This is because the portrayal of Rasputin in *Grigory R* is a much more positive one than we find in *Agonia*, and perhaps even in *Rasputin*. Malyukov's Rasputin, while far from perfect, is a truly kind-hearted, sincere, and innocent man. However, the main and most likely reason for the name of 'Grigory R' seems to be that it is a reference to Rasputin's famed near illiteracy, as the host of Malyukov's televised interview with 'Pervy Canal', Valdis Pells, alluded- "The series takes this title because Rasputin wrote poorly and he didn't like writing. So when he signed letters, in place of his name, he simply put 'R'."[10] Yet, another more surreptitious suggestion was proffered by a journalist writing for 'Kommersant', who proposed that the omission of the Mad Monk's family name only attests to his ever-present enigmaticness- "The series acquired the mysterious name 'Grigory R', as if hinting that it is not a real person, but instead a semi-folk character, elusive for historians."[11] One could also suggest that since the series centres largely around the investigator Svitten, *Grigory R* invokes the trope of a detective's propensity to only use the first letter of a suspect's name.

Grigory R largely takes place in the weeks immediately following the February Revolution of 1917 and the abdication of Tsar Nicholas 2nd, with Alexander Kerensky now installed as the Prime Minister heading the Provisional Government. It is Kerensky who employs an investigator to look into the events that led up to the death of Rasputin. However, in Kerensky's wish to completely blacken the

[6] Sezonova, Liza, 'Anatomiya Seriala', 'Spletnik.RU', 2014
[7] Abakymova, Anna, 'Vladimir Mashkov: Grigory Rasputin Lechil Molitvoy', 'Ugranow.RU', 2014
[8] Mashkov, Vladimir, Quote taken from ibidem
[9] Shelokhayeva, Valentina, Quote taken from Sergey Bednov, 'Zagyli Svyatovo Grigoriya', Trud, 2014
[10] Pells, Valdis, *Pervy. Start Sesona!,* 'Pervy Canal', 2014
[11] Yusipova, Larisa, 'Znaete, Kakim On Startsem Bil!', 'Kommersant', 2014

image and memories of the royal family, the detective must also set out to prove that Rasputin was, in the Prime Minister's words, - "a libertine and a charlatan, an evil genius, the symbol of the degrading Imperial family. You should prove to the Russian public that this man was the devil reincarnate!"[12] The man burdened with the task of investigating these 'dark forces' is Hendrich Svitten (played by Andrey Smolyakov), a fictional character based on the very real Vladimir Rudnev[13] (an investigator who, in 1917, was charged with examining Rasputin's murder).

In order to try and fashion a negative image of the Starets, Svitten visits many protagonists who knew Rasputin best and had first-hand encounters with him. The viewer is swept back and forward through time as those connected with Rasputin, upon being questioned by Svitten, recall their encounters with the Starets. Thus, via said recollections, therein ensues a series of dramatic flashbacks that take the viewer back to the pre-revolutionary days and to the life of Rasputin. Among a litany of subjects, Svitten most notably interviews Rasputin's wife and daughter, as well as the Doctor Badmayev, Petr Stolypin's daughter Natasha, Rasputin's surveillance Pyotr Svistynov, and, most frequently, Anna Vyrubova. Through these recollections from eye-witnesses of the Siberian, Svitten is able to build up a more accurate picture of Rasputin, one a far cry from the image that Kerensky had wished for.

Grigory R received a largely mixed reception from critics. One journalist for the newspaper 'Novgorodskie Vedomosti' declared that- "In general, the film is played flawlessly, beautifully, in some places effectively and profoundly."[14] Another critic for 'Vechernya Moskva' enthused that- "The actors are wonderful. The costumes are marvellous."[15] However, others were quick to criticise the production. One journalist for 'Nevskoye Vremya' was perturbed by Rasputin undergoing such a positive reimagination, as he proclaimed that even- "a feeling of embarrassment arises while watching the series. If the directors want to make the character 'white and fluffy' then that's their business, but why waste our time on it?"[16] Another critic writing for 'Kommersant' asked- "Why does the series all look so flimsy?"[17]. The journalist goes on to criticise the show for being overly dramatic, before then lambasting Malyukov for making a series which was- "not interesting or convincing, but one that only seeks to increase his viewership."[18]

[12] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 1, 2014
[13] Kolosovskaya, Svetlana, 'Grigory R, Ili Novoe Prochtenie', 'Radonezh', 2014
[14] Klapatnyk, Maria, 'Eti Glaza Naprotiv', 'Novgorodskie Vedomosti', 2014
[15] Voitsehovskii, Boris, 'Grigory Rasputin- Siyayushi I Bezgreshni', Vechernya Moskva, 2014
[16] Ilchenko, Sergei, 'Kak Andrey M Opravdal Grigoriya R', 'Nevskoye Vremya', 2014,
[17] Yusipova, Larisa, 'Znaete, Kakim On Startsem Bil!', Kommersant, 2014
[18] Ibidem

However, the most commonly reoccurring quirk of the reviews was the comparison of Mashkov's Rasputin to Petrenko's, with the 1975 portrayal of the Siberian being a benchmark to which all other reimaginations of Rasputin seemingly fall short. One journalist writing for 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' suggested that- "After Elem Klimov's *Agonia*, taking the story of Rasputin is a desperately bold act. The genius Alexei Petrenko seemed to have closed this topic once and for all, turning all subsequent attempts to rethink Rasputin's life on screen into 'spreading cranberries'."[19] This opinion was echoed again in 'Trud', as the journalist declared that- "Alexei Petrenko's Rasputin in Elem Klimov's *Agonia* is more convincing. That image was carefully thought out, and Klimov himself as a director is much stronger than Malyukov."[20]

Historical Context

Grigory R was shot throughout 2013 and the early months of 2014. It would thus be logical to place the series against a historical backdrop that picks up where one left off in the 'Historical Context' section of Kvirikadze's *Rasputin*. The sexual imagery used to describe Russian protestors, as well as a growing derision towards homosexuality as being in complete contrast to traditional Russian values was notoriously underscored, when, in June 2013, the Russian parliament passed a now infamous law, unofficially known as the 'gay propaganda law', but officially dubbed- 'For The Purpose Of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values'. At a time when "relations between Russia and much of the West were considered to be at their lowest since 1991"[21], the passage of said law did little to thaw tensions.

It was also around late 2012 and early 2013 that the Russian idea of 'Eurasia' began to be propagated by Putin and some other prominent Russian political figures with increasing regularity, as Timothy Snyder again explains- "In 2013, The Russian Federation proposed an alternative to integration under the name 'Eurasia': empire for Russia, nation states for everyone else. Eurasia was 'a model of unification' open to the former republics of the Soviet Union and also to members of the current European Union. Its basis of cooperation was 'the preservation and extension of a common cultural and civilizational heritage.'"[22]

This concept of 'Eurasia' was also being cultivated by a trio of ultraconservative thinkers and 'Eurasianists', namely Alexander Dugin, Alexander Prokhanov, and Sergei Glazyev. While it should be noted that this controversial trio were not officially connected to the Kremlin, it is also true that the

[19] Gusyatinskii, Artem, 'Starets Na Radost', 'Komsomolskaya Pravda', 2014
[20] Bednov, Sergey, 'Zagyli Svyatovo Grigoriya', 'Trud', 2014
[21] Yakunin, Vladimir, *The Treacherous Path*, Biteback Publishing, 2018, pg 166
[22] Snyder, Timothy, *The Road To Unfreedom,* Penguin Random House, 2018, pg 67 and 99

Kremlin did little to restrict their rising notoriety and airtime in Russian media circles. Dugin became a regular guest on Russian television, and the three individuals were also all members of a new Think Tank named the 'Izborsk Club', whose "main preoccupation was the 'Eurasian' idea."[23]

This propagation of the Eurasian idea was also an attempt to drag (most importantly) Ukraine away from a Europe that was said to be, according to Russia's propagandists, degrading and deteriorating, as Prokhanov declared- "Europe is vermin that has learned to call heinous and disgusting things beautiful. The white race is perishing: gay marriages, pederasts rule the cities, women can't find men. We didn't get infected with AIDS, they deliberately infected us."[24] While of course this is puerile nonsense from Prokhanov, it helps to highlight a theme that had emanated with great regularity since Putin's return to President in 2012- that of Russia as always the innocent victim, as heroic saviours and never the aggressor, as Snyder again elucidates- "While the Putin regime had crushed protests at home in 2011 and 2012, it sought to redefine politics as innocence rather than action. The leader who came to power by such means had to divert attention, blame and responsibility to external enemies. For Putin, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the latest episode of Russian self-defence from a Europe whose sin was its existence."[25] Thus, after Putin's return to President, Russia became a vision of innocence against a pernicious and meddling West, with this concept of Eurasia becoming an almost Messianic / Katechonic mission to save Ukraine from a warped, declining and backwards Europe.

***Grigory R* Analysis**

Rasputin The Simple Patriot

In his examination of the 'detective' genre of literature, the philosopher Slavoj Zizek, in his book *Looking Awry*, details that for an investigator to arrive at the truth, it is first necessary to work through what Zizek labels as 'false solutions', as he explains- "The status of the false solution is epistemologically internal to the detective's final, true solution. The key to the detective's procedure is that the relation to the first, false solutions is not simply an external one: the detective does not apprehend them as simple obstacles to be cast away in order to obtain the truth, rather it is only *through* them that he can arrive at the truth, for there is no path leading immediately to the truth."[26] For Svitten to arrive at his final truth about Rasputin, he first works through many of these 'false

[23] Ibidem, pg 91
[24] Prokhanov, Alexander, Quote taken from Ibidem, pg 92
[25] Snyder, Timothy, Ibidem, pg 133 and 151
[26] Zizek, Slavoj, *Looking Awry,* MIT Press, 1992, pg 54

solutions', or indeed, 'false truths'. In order to both figuratively and literally paint a true, sincere portrait[27] of what kind of man Rasputin *really* was, he must first learn who he was not.

Svitten is required to prove that Rasputin was 'the devil reincarnate', and he hopes, at least initially, that his list of interrogees will be able to confirm such an image of the Siberian. However, it soon transpires that many negative stories of the Starets straddle closer to the line of fiction than fact. Thus, Svitten begins to work through a number of these Zizek-like 'false solutions' and reverses previously held truths. As early as the first episode we learn that Rasputin was certainly no 'khlyst', and the image of Rasputin as a leeching and corrupted figure is also disregarded, as Svitten reads to himself that- "From the letters of witnesses, it is clear that he rejected any government subsidies and rewards. With this he underlined his loyalty and inability to be bought."[28] Instead we witness acts of generosity directed at those in need around him, as one scene witnesses him taking food from the house of Vyrubova and dispersing it to a huddle of starving homeless children.

Kerensky also wishes for Svitten to reiterate and prove that Rasputin was a charlatan, but once again Svitten is unable to fulfil his Prime Minister's desires. The viewer witnesses Rasputin successfully wield his mystical healing powers on numerous occasions, most notably with the Tsareivich, Vyrubova, and Stolypin's daughter, Natasha. This leads Svitten to declare that- "For me it's evident that Rasputin undoubtedly had strong healing powers."[29] In order to blacken Rasputin further, Kerensky also requires Svitten to prove that the Mad Monk was a German spy- "I'm telling you he's a German spy and I ask you to prove it. You should receive a confession from Vyrubva about his espionage."[30] However, such a confession is not forthcoming, as Vyrubova states that- "Rasputin never pretended and that was his strength. If he were a German spy, he would have prayed in German."[31] There are yet more examples beyond the realistic length of this study, but suffice to say, by working through these 'false solutions', by breaking down previously held truths of Rasputin, by not blackening him, but instead clearing him of any wrongdoing, Rasputin becomes a picture of innocence.

While throughout *Grigory R* most myths surrounding Rasputin are rubbished by Svitten, there are a handful of stories that do carry some credence, but these anecdotes only highlight that Rasputin was not so different from his fellow compatriots. This is best highlighted in episode three, as Svitten quizzes Rasputin's surveillance, Svistynov, on the Mad Monk's sexual escapades. The subject of

[27] Svitten is shown to be as much an artist as an investigator, as, while interviewing his suspects, he draws portraits of those sitting opposite him.
[28] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 5
[29] Ibidem
[30] Ibidem, Episode 6
[31] Ibidem

Rasputin's famed virility and sexual hedonism has intrigued many a historian. It is his notorious sexual appetite that has become almost synonymous with the name of 'Rasputin', a coincidental real 'rasputnik'[32] and, as Boney M never fail to remind us, he is of course- "Russia's greatest love machine."[33] This supposed virility has never been confidently refuted, and *Grigory R* does not attempt such a bold rebuttal. However, it does seek to place such 'misdemeanours' as that becoming of any man. Upon quizzing Svistynov, Svitten reads aloud a list documenting Rasputin's sexual activity-

Svitten- "On the 17th-18th of January, Rasputin spent the night with the spouse of the captain of the 145th Regiment. On the 3rd April, around midnight Rasputin came home with an unknown woman. On the 25th to 26th November, Rasputin was with the actress Varvara."

Svistnynov- "Why do you call this debauchery? If we were to follow you, we could surely write much more than this. You are not a married man, are you? I see you have a woman's tight hidden under there (gesturing under the table)."[34]

When Rasputin cannot be found completely innocent, his 'wrongdoings' can be justified. Svitten is thus placed on the very same plane as that of the man he is trying to castigate. Rasputin is not perfect and is but a simple man who only wants the best for his motherland.

The Rasputin within *Grigory R* is thus portrayed as a simple man and a patriot. One who cared for all those around him, took pity on those adjudged to have sinned, and one who would do anything to protect the Tsarina, and with her, Mother Russia, as he declares in a drink fuelled rage- "With these hands I will break the neck of anybody who tries to hurt the empress!"[35] With the series totalling some 400 minutes of dialogue, this is one of the key lines from Rasputin. Here we can see in the most lucid terms a figure who is devoted to the royal family and his motherland. He also categorically opposes war with Germany as he only sees such an event as one that would hasten Russia's slide into chaos. Rasputin is thus portrayed as a patriot who values the stability and well-being of his country above all else.

This idea of being a patriot, but at the same time a simple man, imperfect and capable of errors, is prevalent in *Grigory R*. Rasputin is at times shown to get so drunk as to almost blackout, and a fantastic performance from Mashkov sees a Rasputin whose peasant and country life background is

[32] In Russian, 'rasputnik' (распутник) closely translates as 'libertine', but any similarity between the word and Rasputin's name is purely coincidental.
[33] Boney M, *Rasputin,* ATV Music Publishing, 1978
[34] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 3, 2014
[35] Ibidem, Episode 5, 2014

forever an intrinsic trait of the Siberian. His constant murmurs and mumbles, combined with an uncouth use of 'prostonarodni' language (простонародны язык) or 'common folk' language, lead him to almost complete incomprehension. Rasputin's donning of refined and spectacular dress shirts do little to mask his poor and uneducated background, with his 'out of placeness' only accentuated in the sixth episode, as the royal family, seated together in palace splendour, begin to regale tales conducted in English- a language with which Rasputin is unfamiliar. Rasputin is instead encouraged to tell a tale of his own (in Russian), one that culminates with the moral of- "It Is easier to live if you don't lie to yourself about what you really are."[36] With rumours circulating about Yusupov's sexual leanings, the message of the tale is seemingly aimed at the on-watching Prince, for it is he who is known to have harboured denials about his own homosexual tendencies. Yusupov promptly storms out of the dining room fully aware of Rasputin's thinly veiled critique, with irony apparently lost in the fact that the message also carries resonance to Rasputin himself. Yusupov here is thus stamped as an outcast due to his supposed sexuality.

Stolypin

Pyotr Stolypin, the Prime Minister of Russia from 1906 until 1911 (when he was assassinated), is a figure who has undergone as much of a severe reworking as any other individual from Russia's history. Stolypin was considered to be a ruthless, no-nonsense, iron-fisted leader who had no time for dissent among the masses and quickly crushed any uprisings, with imprisonment, exile, and even execution being Stolypin's choice of punishment and deterrent. This uncompromising style of leadership led to the hangman's noose being renamed as 'Stolypin's tie', and "railway trucks that transported prisoners to labour camps in Siberia were colloquially referred to as 'Stolypin wagons.'"[37] Stolypin's image in Russia's history has undergone numerous reimaginations, as Peter Waldron, in his book *Between Two Revolutions*, outlines- "Soviet historians painted Stolypin in uniformly negative terms. They depicted Stolypin as an unprincipled 'bonapartist' politician who indulged in slippery manoeuvring in an attempt to maintain the authority of Tsarism. Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in the Soviet Union provoked a renewed interest in Stolypin….his career was reassessed and his reforming zeal emphasised."[38] This complete reversal of Stolypin's image from the one found in early Soviet historiography was completed in 2008, when, in a nationwide poll to name the greatest Russian ever, Stolypin placed 2nd. However, of more importance is how Stolypin has been venerated by Putin himself. It is no secret that Putin is both fascinated by, and well-versed in, history, and he is often "fond of recalling the words of the reformist authoritarian

[36] Ibidem, Episode 6
[37] Waldron, Peter, *Between Two Revolutions*, University College London Press, 1998, pg 1
[38] Ibidem, pg 1-2

minister."[39] More crucially, in 2012, as 150 years approached since the birth of Stolypin, as well as a centenary since his assassination, Putin had a statue to the former Prime Minister erected in Moscow.

The Stolypin featured in Malyukov's production is a dyed-in-the-wool patriot who would do anything for his country. In one scene with Tsar Nicholas, Stolypin is questioned on whether he would continue to govern in the way he does, even at the cost of peril and jeopardy to the rest of his family[40], to which he answers- "Yes. Of course. If on one side of the scale there is the well being of the Russian empire…then my duty demands me to choose the motherland."[41] Yet what is of more interest is the portrayal in *Grigory R* of Stolypin's relationship to Rasputin. It is commonly believed that Stolypin detested Rasputin, once claiming on a meeting with the Starets that he- "began to feel an indescribable loathing for this vermin sitting opposite me."[42] However, among the litany of 'false solutions' that Svitten works through and finds Rasputin innocent of, yet one more is the issue of whether or not Rasputin was involved in the 1911 assassination of Stolypin. Upon asking Stolypin's daughter, Natasha, about such implication, she decisively answers that- "Rasputin didn't have the slightest connection to the death of my father. They were enemies, but they were one."[43] Thus, two sworn enemies here become united in a mutual yearning to save an ailing Russia.

It is here that the veneration of Rasputin, but more importantly, Stolypin, is witnessed in its most lucid terms. As Ben Judah crucially writes in his book, *Fragile Empire*- "Stolypin brooked no dissent. Putin has built a statue to him in Moscow. After a century of passionate commissars and dissidents, cosmonauts and novelists, his hero is an unemotional bureaucrat whose mission in life was to keep Russia's ideological spirits down, so that it could get on with its development. In a reversion to Tsarist conservatism, rejecting the revolutionary spirit of 1917 and 1991, stability is sacred."[44] If we return to Gillespie's belief that Russian historical films reflect the hopes and anxieties of the present day, then one can see that the exaltation of Stolypin in *Grigory R* reflects a key persuasion under late-Putinism- entrenched patriots are needed for the stability of an innocent Russia. Just like Stolypin did, Putin abhors any such protests and unrest that might disturb said stability and

[39] Judah, Ben, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In And Out Of Love With Vladimir Putin*, Yale University Press, 2013, pg 56
[40] The Stolypin family were subject to various terrorist attacks, one of which left his daughter disabled. Stolypin was eventually assassinated by one such terrorist in Kiev.
[41] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 4, 2014
[42] Stolypin, Pyotr, Quote taken from Douglas Smith, *Rasputin*, Macmillan, 2016, pg 151
[43] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 4, 2014
[44] Judah, Ben, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In And Out Of Love With Vladimir Putin*, Yale University Press, 2013, pg 56

development of Russia, and such protests cannot be the acts of committed patriots like Stolypin was, but instead of the (Western) 'other'.

Thus, the line 'they were enemies, but they were one' becomes the crux of the series and reflects Svitten's 'final truth' about Rasputin. Having worked through many of these 'false solutions', Svitten arrives at his 'final, true solution' and upon delivering his last report to Kerensky, and much to the chagrin of the Prime Minister, he declares that- "Rasputin was a Russian man. In every Russian there is such a Rasputin."[45]

This again reflects the idea of a simple man, but a patriot. Rasputin is portrayed as this simple man and like any of his compatriots, far from perfect, and who, like Stolypin before him, only wanted the best for Russia. As we know, 'they were one', and as discussed, Stolypin was far from a saint himself, but both he and Rasputin are depicted in *Grigory R* as almost literally diehard patriots. *Grigory R* suggests that inside an ordinary man, 'inside every Russian', there is this patriot committed to maintaining the stability, security, and development of their homeland. It is this theme that the journalist Shaun Walker encapsulates as he writes of late-Putinism- "Instead of transcending the trauma of the Soviet collapse, his government exploited it, using fear of political unrest to quash opposition, equating 'patriotism' with support for Putin. The patriotic rhetoric of his years in charge is likely to endure."[46] Thus, although Stolypin and Rasputin were personal enemies, in *Grigory R* they are united in their patriotism and commitment to an ailing Russia- virtues which are exalted under late-Putinism.

An Innocent Rasputin

Svitten arrives at his 'final, true solution', and, unable to fulfil Kerensky's wishes for the investigation into the Siberian, Svitten finds Rasputin innocent of much wrongdoing. However, one here uses the word 'innocence' in both the judicial sense, but also in the sense of 'purity.' One here carries the conviction that Mashkov's Rasputin carries something of a childlike 'purity' about him. Rasputin's big, wide open eyes, coupled with his aforementioned mumbling, and, even at times, sulking, marries well with a naïve, blinkered, childlike view of the world.

[45] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 8, 2014
[46] Walker, Shaun, *The Long Hangover*, Oxford University Press, 2018, pg 253

[47]

Rasputin sitting like a sulking child.

As Vyrubova declares when questioned by Svitten on Rasputin's purported corruption-

Svitten: "Don't you admit that you might not have known nothing of his hidden intentions?"

Vyrubova: "This man astounded me as he had no hidden intentions and he couldn't have had. His soul was open, like a child's."[48]

Thus, Rasputin, as a picture of innocence, both judicial and pure, is led to his death throes by, amongst others, Yusupov, and, as one journalist termed it- "the enemies of Russia- the liberals, the Bolsheviks, and the homosexuals, with the active participation of a Western agent."[49] This journalist touches on the second key theme of *Grigory* R, as one here must revert back to the 'Historical Context' section of *Rasputin*, since one discussed how Russian protesters in 2012 were castigated as gay and supported by an obtrusive foreign element (namely America). While Malyukov rubbished most of the myths around Rasputin, here he chose to elaborate those that surround Yusupov and his sexual leanings, as the Prince is seen embracing and kissing with the Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich. Yusupov is also shown to be in cahoots with an English gentry, with the British in *Grigory R* being depicted as intrusive and meddlesome foreign agents trying to weaken Russia.

With Rasputin lying blooded and beaten in Yusupov's courtyard, the final parting bullet to his head is delivered by a mysterious stranger, one thought to be a British spy. Rasputin here becomes the personification of Russia itself. This 'innocent' Rasputin is seen off by a Western-backed liberal and

[47] Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, Episode 3, 2014
[48] Ibidem, Episode 2
[49] Baimuhametov, Sergei, 'Ilyin I Rasputin: Kak Bit?', 'Mosckovskaya Pravda', 2015

homosexual, who then, just as now, was attempting to undermine the stability and development of an 'innocent' Russia. As was discussed in the 'Historical Context' section, Russia often presents itself as the innocent party, both judicial and, by some circles, as pure, with this purity being corrupted thanks to these Western-backed liberals and homosexuals, as Snyder again proposes, writing on the invasion into Ukraine, but bearing relevance here also- "Russians were meant to adapt their minds to a news cycle which instructed them on their own innocence. If Russia were indeed a virginal organism threatened by the world's uncomprehending malice, then Russian violence was a righteous defence against penetration. At the crucial junctures, an innocent Russia is always repelling a sinful West."[50] Thus, in *Grigory R*, an innocent Rasputin, judicial and pure, is unable to repel his own personal enemies who are backed by a pernicious and sinful West, corrupted and degenerated by homosexuality.

Conclusion

To conclude then, one can see that *Grigory R* seeks to knock down many myths that have followed Rasputin. This thus paints a picture of a thoroughly 'innocent' Rasputin, as well as showing him to be a devout patriot. However, of more interest is how *Grigory R* presents the enemies of Rasputin. On one side of the divide we find an exalted Stolypin, a figure known to have detested Rasputin but is here presented as a diehard patriot who is committed to the stability of Russia. This portrayal is thus perfectly entwined with Putin's own veneration of the former Prime Minister and what he stood for. On the other side of the coin we find Rasputin's other enemy, Yusupov, who is most definitely cast as the villain, being presented in no uncertain terms as a homosexual backed by a pernicious foreign intruder. It is Stolypin and Rasputin who become synonyms of Russia's modern-day patriots who now also face the very same 'enemies'. One can see that *Grigory R* perfectly aligns with Putin's ideology- the series exalts patriotism and castigates those that might disturb Russia's stability and alienate it from its cultural roots.

[50] Snyder, Timothy, *The Road To Unfreedom,* Penguin Random House, 2018, pg 134 and pg 155

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to show how Russian cinematic portrayals of Grigory Rasputin could reflect the relevant historical period of the production. One can see that the Rasputin of *Agonia* is the personification of the rampant corruption of the early Brezhnev era. His eminently more positive reimaginations in both the 2013 *Rasputin* and particularly the 2014 *Grigory R* portray him as a devoted patriot who loved his motherland dearly, which thus reflects the significant importance placed on patriotism and stability under late-Putinism. The positive depictions of this devout patriot naturally also mean Rasputin's killer, Yusupov, is painted as the villain. In *Grigory* R, the Prince's homosexual leanings and conspiration with 'pernicious' Western agents are explicit, and thus Yusupov becomes the personification of Russia's enemies under late-Putinism- a outside / Western backed homosexual embodying distinctly 'unrussian' values. Thus, it is he who seeks to upset the stability and innocence of Russia and becomes the perfect personification of Russia's enemies since 2012.

However, interestingly, the other enemy of Rasputin was historically Pyotr Stolypin, but, in *Grigory R*, Stolypin is shown to be united with the Starets in a mutual devotion and love for Russia. Stolypin, although a very different character than Rasputin, is, like the Mad Monk, portrayed as a dyed-in-the-wool patriot, and thus the depiction of the former Prime Minister reflects his veneration under the current President, but also attests again to the wider promulgation of patriotism and stability of late-Putinism.

Beyond close readings of characters from these three productions, one can also see from the reviews of *Rasputin* that the recurrent critique of 'kliukva' and the doubts about a foreigner playing one of the most famed Russians in history reflected a wider conversation and theme in 2012/2013 on Russia's revered and exalted differences to the West.

There is also need for some reflections on this study. I believe my assumption in the 'Introduction' alluding to Rasputin's malleability as a character is substantiated to a certain degree. As Norris cited, Russia's villains of yesterday can become the heroes of today and embody the values needed to remake post-Soviet Russia. One can see that the Rasputin of *Agonia* epitomises many of the negative traits of the early Brezhnev era, but in *Grigory R*, his malleability allows him to embody all the characteristics venerated under late-Putinism. However, I should admit to being surprised at how Rasputin's enemies, both Yusupov and Stolypin, could also be moulded and utilised to reflect the hopes, fears, and anxieties of the relevant period. The figure of Stolypin is of particular interest here, for the 'truths' that surround the former Prime Minister are far more substantiated than those that

surround Rasputin. By looking at these two characters, one can see that the 'foggy' facts and the myths that forever surround Rasputin are not so important. It is the substantiated, verified facts on both characters than can be either be swept under the carpet entirely, or given a completely positive spin. Stolypin's famed hard-line stance on, and detest for, protest and disruption sees him portrayed in *Grigory R* as a devout patriot who would do anything for the stability of his country. Thus, the 'malleability' of Rasputin is important, but it is not as vital as I first ventured, for Russian historical figures with far more substantiated facts to their name than Rasputin can be equally as moulded. The verified facts of a Russian historical character, one far less malleable than Rasputin, can be cherry picked by a director in order to craft the desired narrative. To help clarify this, the homosexual leanings of Yusupov are entirely absent in *Agonia,* and yet, in *Grigory R*, they are the bedrock for his fashioning as the villain.

Future Research

One can be certain that Mashkov's Rasputin will not be the last reincarnation of the famed peasant. In terms of future research on Russian cinematic portrayals of the Starets, studies could analyse if his positive post-Soviet reimagination continues, and if it does, reports could analyse whether the veneration of Stolypin, and the villainization of Yusupov, also reoccur in line with this. It is also interesting to note that at the time of penning this thesis, there is currently an increased push in Russia to castigate those embroiled in corruption, and so with this in mind, one wonders if Rasputin could again be remodelled as that of the corrupted and degenerated once again, a la *Agonia*, in an attempt to mirror Russia's modern day 'Rasputins.' One is also aware that Putin's reign as President will draw to a close in the not-too-distant future, and so studies could also analyse, should a Rasputin film be released, how this would-be portrayal reflects the fears and hopes of a new era in Russia.

To summarise, one can see that cinematic portrayals of Rasputin confirm David Gillespie's conviction that the Russian historical film is just as apt at conveying the present as well as the past. When Douglas Smith wrote that Rasputin was either 'an Angel sent by God, or he was the servant of the Devil', one can see that he is a devil-like figure in *Agonia*, personifying the worst qualities of the early Brezhnev era, but in both *Rasputin* and especially *Grigory R*, he becomes an angel-like figure embodying all the exalted characteristics of late-Putinism. Thus, to slightly rework 'Izvestiya's' headline posted in the 'Literature Review', one might now say 'Earlier the villain was Rasputin, now it is Yusupov.'

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Abakymova, Anna, 'Vladimir Mashkov: Grigory Rasputin Lechil Molitvoy', Ugranow.RU, 2014- http://ugranow.ru/2014/03/07/%D0%B2%

Baimuhametov, 'Sergei, Ilyin I Rasputin: Kak Bit?', Mosckovskaya Pravda, 2015, Only available via Factiva.com

Bednov, Sergey, 'Zaguly Svyatovo Grigoriya', Trud, 2014- http://www.trud.ru/article/31-10-2014/1319111_zaguly_svjatogo_grigorija.html

Boney M, *Rasputin,* ATV Music Publishing, 1978

Bulgakov, Mikhail, *The Master And Margarita,* Alma Classics, 2014

Daly, Jonathan and Leonid Trofimov, *Russia In War and Revolution, 1914-1922*, Hackett Publishing Company, 2009

Dombrovskaya, Inga, 'Rasputin, Putin, I Depardieu', RFI, December 2011- http://ru.rfi.fr/rossiya/20111223-rasputin-putin-i-deparde

Grachev, Sergey, 'Grim Dlya Mashkova', Argumenti I Facti, 2014- http://www.aif.ru/culture/movie/grim_dlya_mashkova_i_opasnye_tryuki_za_kadrom_seriala_grigoriy_r

Gusyatinskii, Artem, 'Starets Na Radost', Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2014- https://www.kp.ru/daily/26301/3179165/

Ilchenko, Sergei, 'Kak Andrey M Opravdal Grigoriya R', Nevskoye Vremya, 2014, Only available via Factiva.com

'Iskusstvo Kino', May 2004 - http://old.kinoart.ru/archive/2004/05/n5-article17

'Iskusstvo Kino', April 2008 - http://old.kinoart.ru/archive/2008/04/n4-article20

Kasayanova, Olga, 'Shestki Montagh Dayet Filmu Energiyu', Kommersant, 2013- https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2210891

Kichin, Valery, 'Na Ekrani vhodit 'Rasputin' C Gerarom Deparde', Rossiskaya Gazeta, 2013- https://rg.ru/2013/11/08/rasputin.html

Klapatnyk, Maria, 'Eti Glaza Naprotiv', Novgorodskie Vedomosti, 2014-
https://novvedomosti.ru/articles/culture/33017/

Kolbovski, Alexander, 'Omut Vozvrata', Kommersant, 2013-
https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2340811

Kolosovskaya, Svetlana, 'Grigory R, Ili Novoe Prochtenie', 'Radonezh', 2014-
https://radonezh.ru/analytics/grigory-r-ili-novoe-prochtenie-staroy-legendy-119101.html

Koroleva, Marina, 'Kliukva: Nasha Ili Fransuzskaya?', Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 2017-
https://rg.ru/2017/03/29/marina-koroleva-razvesistaia-kliukva-poiavilas-ne-vo-francii-a-u-nas.html

Makine, Andrei, *Dreams Of My Russian Summers*, Arcade Publishing, 1997

Maslova, Lidia, 'Prostoy Frantsyzki Muzhik', Kommersant, 2013-
https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2337736

Maslova, Lidia, 'Rasputin', Kommersant, 2013- https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2329622

Moskvitin, Egor, 'Gerard- Ptitsa', Gazeta.RU, 2013-
https://www.gazeta.ru/culture/2013/11/08/a_5743493.shtml?updated

Pells, Valdis, 'Pervy. Start Sesona!', Pervy Canal, 2014-
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5m4Mi0dLkw

Pevchev, Alexey, 'Rasputin ochen Russkii, idealistichnii, tselni', Izvestiya, 2013-
https://iz.ru/news/560189

Putin, Vladimir, 'Bolshaya Press-Conferentsiya Vladimira Putina', 2017,
http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56378

Razzakov, Fedor, 'Strasti Po Agonii', 'Viki Chtenie', - https://document.wikireading.ru/57921

Rogova, Anastasiya, 'Tsar, Knyaz, I Krectyanin', Argumenti I Facti, 2013-
http://www.aif.ru/culture/movie/44737

Sezonova, Liza, 'Anatomiya Seriala', Spletnik.ru, 2014-
http://www.spletnik.ru/culture/serialy/72123-vladimir-mashkov-paulina-andreeva-grigoriy-r.html

Sobolev, Mikhail, 'Depardieu Ne Pahozh, A Mashkov- Sami Podhodyashii', Vechernii Peterburg,
2013- http://www.vppress.ru/stories/Deparde-ne-pokhozh-a-Mashkov--samyi-podkhodyaschii-
15890

Torreton, Phillipe, 'Alors Gerard, T'as Les Boules', Liberation, 2012- https://next.liberation.fr/culture/2012/12/17/alors-gerard-t-as-les-boules_868296

Voitsehovskii, Boris, 'Grigory Rasputin- Siyayushi I Bezgreshni', Vechernya Moskva, 2014- https://vm.ru/news/269350.html

Yusipova, Larisa, 'Znaete, Kakim On Startsem Bil!', Kommersant, 2014- https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2599251

Zaozerskaya, Angelika, 'Vladimir Mashkov Nedeshevi Artist, No Prekrasni Rasputin', Vechernya Moskva, 2014- https://vm.ru/news/268704.html

Secondary Sources

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power And Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, 1998

Christie, Ian, *Monthly Film Bulletin: 54*, British Film Institute, 1987

Cohen, Stephen, and Katrina Heuvel, *Voices Of Glasnost- Interviews With Gorbachev's Reformers,* Norton and Company, 1989

Engstrom, Maria, *Contemporary Russian Messianism*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Routledge Taylor And Francis Group, 2014

Fomin, Valery, and Liliya Mamatova, *Rossiisky Illyuzion*, Materik, 2003

Galeotti, Mark, *Gorbachev And His Revolution,* Macmillan Press, 1997

Gillespie, David, *Russian Cinema,* London Routledge, 2014

Harris, Sue, *Degraded Divinity? Sacred Monstrosity? Gerard Depardieu And The Abject Star Body* in *Screen*, Oxford University Press, 2015

Judah, Ben, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In And Out Of Love With Vladimir Putin*, Yale University Press, 2013

Kotkin, Stephen, *Armageddon* Averted, Oxford University Press, 2001

Lawton, Anna, *The Red Screen,* Routledge, 1992

Loseff, Lev, *On The Beneficence Of Censorship*, Peter Lang International Academic Publishing Group, 1984

Menashe, Louis, *Film Quarterly,* University Of California Press, 1986

Mondry, Henrietta, *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture*, Brill Rodopi, 2015

Moss, Kevin, in Andrew Horton, *Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter With A Lash*, Cambridge University Press, 1993

Norris, Steven, *Rasputin*, KinoKultura.com, 2014

Norris, Stephen, *Ruptures and Continuities In Soviet / Russian Cinema*, Routledge, 2018

Ostrovsky, Arkady, *The Invention Of Russia*, Penguin Books, 2015

Rosenstone, Robert, *Visions Of The Past,* Harvard University Press, 1995

Smith, Douglas, *Rasputin,* Macmillan, 2016

Snyder, Timothy, *The Road To Unfreedom*, Penguin Random House

Suny, Ronald, *The Structure Of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press, 2014

Tompson, William, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev*, Pearson Education Limited, 2003

Vincendeau, Ginette, *Stars And Stardom In French Cinema*, Continuum, 2000

Waldron, Peter, *Between Two Revolutions*, University College London Press, 1998

Walker, Shaun, *The Long Hangover*, Oxford University Press, 2018

Wanner, Adrian, *Fictions Of A New Translingual Diaspora*, Northwestern University Press, 2011

Yakunin, Vladimir, *The Treacherous Path*, Biteback Publishing, 2018

Zizek, Slavoj, *Looking Awry,* MIT Press, 1992

Filmography

Klimov, Elem, *Agonia*, Mosfilm, 1985

Kravchuk, Andrey, *Admiral,* Dago Productions, 2008

Kvirikadze, Irakli, *Rasputin*, VGTRK, 2013

Malyukov, Andrey, *Grigory R*, Mars Media, 2014