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Questions of Art, Fact, and Genre in Mikhail Prishvin

It is customary in Soviet criticism of Mikhail Mikhailovich Prishvin (1873–1954) to speak of the unique blend of fact and fantasy, of science and art in his work.¹ In fact, this view is not restricted to Soviet discussions of the writer's art.² It is a reasonable view, if cautiously considered as no more than a convenient generality. Something of the same generalizing nature operates in discussions of the literary forms which Prishvin most often employed in his narrative art: the *ocherk*, the *rasskaz*, and, less frequently, the *povest'*. Scholars and critics speak of the writer's inimitable mastery of these forms, but rarely in definitive terms. Briefly summarized, Prishvin's preferred forms are the half-sketch and half-tale, or the novelette-sketch; his pieces represent an amalgam of fact and fiction. They are, above all, lyrical and poetic, but they are also "scientific." They are the one and the other, but their specificity seems almost too elusive to capture and define.³

It is interesting in this respect to note the kinds of epithets which have most often been applied to Prishvin in the attempt to generalize succinctly about the nature of his craft. These epithets contribute little to a thorough understanding and appreciation of his work, but they are suggestive of the dual impulse behind his creativity and broadly indicative of the special character of his preferred genre. Most critics begin with the assertion that Prishvin is a *lyrical poet-philosopher*; they then proceed to qualify this tag with a wide variety of "scientific" epithets. Among Prishvin scholars, for example, it is axiomatic to speak of the writer as a *poet-fenolog*, a *poet-fol'klorist*, a *poet-puteshestvennik*, a *poet-etnograf*, a *poet-kraeved*, a *poet-geograf*, a *poet-okhotnik*, a *poet-pedagog*, a *poet-sledopyt*, a *poet-agronom*, a *poet-estestvoispytatel'*, or even a *poet-rybolov*.⁴ The few commentators who do disdain such inclusive tags seldom fail to speak of Prishvin's manner as one of "poetic scientism" (*poeticheskaiia nauchnost'*).⁵ The writer's widow, V. D. Prishvina, accounts for the double impulse in his work:

1. I. P. Motiashov, *Mikhail Prishvin* (Moscow, 1965), p. 4.

2. K. Davydov, "M. M. Prishvin," *Novyi zhurnal*, no. 68 (1962), pp. 146–54.

3. V. A. Kovaleva, ed., *Russkii sovetskii rasskaz: Ocherki istorii zhanra* (Leningrad, 1970), p. 206; see also pp. 206–14, 416–17, 422, 594. A similar looseness of terminology pervades A. Khailov's recent study of the *rasskaz*, "Grani rasskaza," in *Zhanrovo-stilevyie iskania sovremennoi sovetskoi prozy* (Moscow, 1971), pp. 200–231. Khailov for all practical purposes makes no distinction between the *liricheskii rasskaz* and *liricheskii ocherk*, suggesting, especially in Prishvin's case, that the forms frequently represent a hybrid blend (*ibid.*, p. 205).

4. See especially A. Khailov, "Put' k 'druguii chitateliu,'" *Russkaia literatura*, 1958, no. 4, pp. 163–74; A. K. Tarasnikov, "O Prishvine," *Stat'i o literature*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1958), pp. 148–57; and M. Prishvin, "Moi ocherk," *Moi ocherk* (Moscow, 1933), pp. 9–15.

5. L. Borovoi, "Tainaia sovremennost' iazyka," *Iazyk pisatel'ia* (Moscow, 1966), p. 177.

It is common knowledge that Prishvin began his creative life working in science. Thereafter the school of scientific thought doubtlessly affected his artistic work. To the end of his days he constantly sought to combine both methods: the scientific and the artistic. For Prishvin they are both *essential*. . . .⁶

Prishvin himself in a letter to a friend, Iu. Saushkin, wrote:

My imaginative literature ("belles-lettres") was formed during the transition from scientific (for which I prepared myself for a period) to artistic (poetic) activity. That is most likely why a great deal of my writing bears the character of "research" devoted to describing the features of a region.⁷

Clearly, the writer's own remarks substantiate the comments of the critics about the dual character of his creative work. It remains to examine these general genre characteristics in more detail and to attempt a more satisfactory statement of their distinguishing features.

Prishvin's own comments are not too helpful. Even though he was wont to state that "belles-lettres, for example, does not interest me; the *ocherki* interests me because it overlaps with science,"⁸ there still appears to be a considerable lack of rigor in his understanding of the nature and definition of genre forms. One scholar has correctly noted that "at one time or another Prishvin designated all his pieces as sketches, folk tales, or narrative poems, depending on which genre fascinated him at the time."⁹ More often than not, he labeled all his literary pieces as *ocherki*, including even the large-form *Kashcheeva tsep'*. This has occasioned considerable confusion among Prishvin scholars and critics, particularly with regard to the distinction between the writer's *rasskazy* and *ocherki*. In fact, one critic is inclined to include most of the writer's work under the category of the narrative tale (*rasskaz*), asserting that this is his basic genre form.¹⁰ Others are closer to the mark when they note that Prishvin's basic literary forms lie outside of, or violate, commonly accepted genre categories:

All this only says that his creative work does not fit into the customary bounds of a traditional genre, that he destroys all genres and creates his own new, unprecedented, inimitable . . . genre. . . . Therefore much more important for Prishvin are not the limits of a genre—he continually

6. See the introductory essay by V. D. Prishvina, in M. Prishvin, *Nezabudki* (Moscow, 1969), p. 3. On another occasion Prishvin's widow reiterated this fundamental premise of the writer's art: "It is common knowledge that he got into art through science. The school of scientific thought doubtlessly exerted an enormous influence on his creative work. To the end of his days he continually sought to combine both methods of knowing the world: the scientific and the artistic. For Prishvin they are both one and mutually indispensable" (see V. Prishvina, "Ot nauki k iskusstvu," *Puti v neznaemoe: Pisateli rasskazyvaiut o nauke*, vol. 2 [Moscow, 1962], pp. 369–70).

7. V. K. Pudozhgorskii, *Pevets rodnoi zemli* (Vologda, 1960), p. 39.

8. Borovoi, "Tainaia sovremennost' iazyka," p. 131.

9. T. Iu. Khmel'nitskaia, *Tvorchestvo Mikhaila Prishvina* (Leningrad, 1959), pp. 268–69. Prishvin's widow echoes Khmel'nitskaia's remarks, although with an explanatory note: "In the heat of a polemic Prishvin sometimes designated all the genres of his works as *ocherki*, beginning with the poetic miniature and ending with the individual chapters of a novel" (see "Ot nauki k iskusstvu," p. 382).

10. Pudozhgorskii, *Pevets rodnoi zemli*, pp. 3–4.

violates them—but rather genre definition, or what it is in a given genre that he considers essential for himself.¹¹

Nevertheless, such statements are scarcely definitive. It is one thing to say what something is not; it is considerably more difficult to define what something is. The studies by A. K. Tarasenkov and I. P. Motiashov, therefore, have been steps in the right direction. While not pretending to thoroughness, these studies do suggest the point from which any literary analysis of Prishvin's genre forms ought to proceed. They suggest that Prishvin's primary form is the *ocherk* and that all his work *basically* derives from this literary type.¹²

Prishvin himself frequently acknowledged that it was difficult to define his *ocherk* precisely. In his essay "Moi *ocherk*," presented to a gathering of local folklorists in 1933, he discussed this particular problem: "As we understand the term *ocherk*, it has to do with a particular, specific relation that the author has to his material in the sense of submission to it, as well as, say, *possession* [by it]."¹³ He then recollects the response of the poet Alexander Blok to his *Za volshebnyim kolobkom*: "This is poetry, of course, but something else too."¹⁴ Tacitly acknowledging the poetic component of his work, Prishvin proceeds to define this "something else" as the critical determinant of his conception of the *ocherk*:

[I have] now solved this problem: in each *ocherk* there is something not of the poet; there is something of the scholar and, perhaps, of the truth-seeker in the sense of what Turgenev said about Gleb Uspenskii's *ocherki*: "This is not poetry but it may be greater than poetry." In general, this something of the *ocherk* is like a residue of material that has not been artistically worked; it springs from an authorial relation to the material that is more complex than the workings of art alone. From this, however, arises yet another question: is it artistically possible to polish this something in the *ocherk* and if yes, then can the finished piece be called an *ocherk*? Answering this question [I] . . . can say that such *ocherki* . . . as "The Black Arab," "The Chain of Kashchei," and countless small tales can be designated *ocherki* only by a special effort if the author's actual relation to the material is intensified so truthfully and forcefully that students of local lore, ethnographers, pedagogues, and hunters consider his works to be like ethnography, local lore, hunting stories, children's literature, and so on.

The crucial points being made in these remarks are the following: First, the material of Prishvin's *ocherki* is processed with a scientific fidelity and exact-

11. Khmel'nitskaia, *Tvorchestvo Mikhaila Prishvina*, pp. 209–10.

12. See A. K. Tarasenkov, "O Prishvine," *Stat'i o literature*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1958), p. 152; and Motiashov, *Mikhail Prishvin*, p. 237.

13. Prishvin, "Moi *ocherk*," pp. 9–15. N. Zamoshkin refines this general statement in his essay "Tvorchestvo Mikhaila Prishvina: K voprosu o genezise poputnichestva": "One of the favorite forms of his creative work is the half-sketch, half-tale. The sketch genre is closely linked with the journey as a means of gathering material. In the artist-traveler the sketch imperceptibly changes into a tale, and it is no accident that the author himself divided them solely by the thin line of linguistic refinement. Their structure is original: instead of a plot-line there is a plot-center (*siuzhetnaia zatsepka*) on which the sketches proper are threaded, a series of sketched incidents" (see *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, 1925, no. 8, p. 130).

14. A. Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962), p. 651.

ness. Second, Prishvin has a special relation to his material. Third, the “*chto-to*” of his work arises out of the mutual relation between this authorial attitude and the natural phenomena being presented. It constitutes, in varying proportions, a blend of authorial lyricism, factual scientific data and phenomena, and cognitive “truth”: perceived moral and aesthetic qualities. The authorial personality is tripartite: the poet, the scholar-scientist, and the truth-seeker. Natural phenomena, coupled with autobiographical material, are presented through a lyrical authorial prism of microscopic clarity and precision (“*mikrogeografiia*”), ultimately yielding a poetically transformed, cognitive representation of reality.¹⁵ Artistic and scientific “truth” merge into an evocation of cognitive “truth.” It is this complex interrelation that has prompted Soviet critics of Prishvin to speak of the coexistence in his work of a moralizing philosophy, objective “knowledge,” lyricism, and the “baring” of a personal relation to the world.

Fidelity to this “objective” material was important to Prishvin, who preferred the designation *writer-researcher* (*issledovatel'*) to that of belletrist; he strove rigorously to preserve the integrity of the facts in his artistic *ocherk*. His narrative was designed not to subvert a documentary quality, but to channel it:

In my experience the ideal *ocherk* . . . results if I don't discard any of the documentary material, if I don't change a single feature in it, and if I give it artistic significance exclusively by arranging it correctly in the course of my artistic experience.¹⁶

It is generally agreed that in addition to the central importance of the author-narrator's direct role in the *ocherk*, the representation of real facts—documentary details—is crucial to the genre. Real events and people are to provide the factual basis on which the *ocherk's* plot (*siuzhet*) is organized and developed. Moreover, this factual basis is to be founded upon *primary* details; materials only tangentially related to the central movement of the narrative are to be avoided or discarded. The informational demands of the genre require a faithful presentation of perceived material, that is, the material may be organized around the principle of artistic generalization or typification, but it is not to be altered by “fictional invention” (*vymysel*). On the other hand, a certain admixture of *vymysel* is necessary in the interests of narrative and thematic direction. Broadly speaking, the *ocherk* represents a form of “fictionalized factuality”; yet, the fictional quality of the form must be subordinated to the documentary quality. The “factuality” of any given *ocherk* must be perceived as such, and not as the result of fictional invention.

In a recent essay on the genre, Deming Brown has noted that there is an artistic obligation upon the author-narrator of an *ocherk* to inform his reader

15. The term *mikrogeografiia* can be found in Khailov, “Put' k 'drugu-chitateliu,” p. 165. See also the introductory essay by P. Kiselev in *M. M. Prishvin: Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1951), p. 20.

16. T. K. Trifonova, *Russkaia Sovetskaia literatura tridtsatykh godov* (Moscow, 1963), see especially p. 77. A more direct assertion of the “scientific fidelity” of his narratives can be seen in the statement that: “I draw materials not from books but directly from nature myself. Second, I strive to obtain these materials systematically, as in science” (see Prishvina, “Ot nauki k ikkusstvu,” p. 370).

as to what is factual and what is fictional in a given sketch. The writer of *rasskazy* and *povesti* can be expected to employ primarily *vymysel* in his craft, but the *ocherkist* has a moral obligation to “label” clearly the difference between fact and fiction in his work. He must distinguish between what is a product of his imagination, and what is the factual representation of real-life phenomena. For a work to be definitively labeled an *ocherk*, this authorial responsibility must be exercised.¹⁷

A major problem confronts the *ocherkist* in determining the appropriate admixture of “fact” and *vymysel*. There is little agreement among literary theorists, critics, and writers with respect to the problem. Although all agree that an admixture is imperative, the relative proportion of *dokument* and *vymysel* continues to be a moot point. However, there is unanimity of agreement on the principle that the representation and analysis of facts—*dokumental'nost'*—is a primary feature of the *ocherk*, whereas the element of fiction (*vymysel*) plays an organizational role. *Vymysel* is employed to structure the element of “fact,” to assist in the interpretation of this “fact,” and to make it accessible to the average reader. In the terms of the Russian Formalists, the element of “fact” in the *ocherk* roughly corresponds to the *fabula* of a literary piece, *vymysel* to the *siuzhet*. But the analogy is not perfect or complete. Studies of the *ocherk* stress that the element of *siuzhet* is usually slight, that “plot” does not play a determinative role in the literary form.

In any case, the factual material in Prishvin's narratives is customarily called the surface text; the subtext marks a subjective, usually metaphorical interpretation of this material, which may or may not be infused with a significant admixture of “verisimilar *vymysel*.”¹⁸ Thus, when Prishvin speaks of the verisimilitude of his narratives, one must understand this epithet as a result of the interrelation between his surface text and subtext. It would be more correct to speak of his *lyrical fidelity* to his material. There is a scientific precision and factual exactness in Prishvin's surface texts. However, the special quality of his narratives stems from the necessary interrelation between this surface text and the subtext. The lyrical authorial attitude derives equally from his personal empathy with the material and his desire to give a lyrical and ethical interpretation to these factual data and phenomena.

The special authorial relation to the material is partially suggested by a number of qualifying phrases: *samosblizhenie s materialom*, *sliianie s materialom*, or, to employ Prishvin's favorite term among these, *rodstvennoe vnimanie* to the phenomena being presented. The terms stress the author's physical, intellectual, and affective proximity to these phenomena. Prishvin strives to fuse artistically his authorial personality with his material. The author-narrator “submits” to his material; he is “possessed” by this material, merging with it completely. Alexander Tvardovskii also discerned a similar relation between an author and his material in his discussion of the lyrical *ocherk*.¹⁹

17. Deming Brown, “The Očerk: Suggestions Toward a Redefinition,” *American Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists*, vol. 2, ed. W. E. Harkins (The Hague, 1968), pp. 1–13.

18. Pudozhgorskii, *Pevets rodnoi zemli*, p. 40.

19. Cited in A. Ninov, “Zhanr obiazvaet,” *Neva*, 1965, no. 4, p. 164. Prishvin appears to “surrender” his authorial self more completely to his material than would Tvardovskii: “First

Soviet scholars and critics generally agree that an intimate, subjective, and sympathetic connection must exist between author and material in the *ocherk* genre. In addition, the authorial "I" serves both an *editorial* and *narrative* function; it is the focal point of the *ocherk* form, for which it supplies both narrative perspective and a thematic center.²⁰ Consequently, the point of view in the *ocherk* is typically that of an editorial, first-person narrator, who is usually an alter ego of the author. More often than not, the first-person narrator will assume a participatory role in the narrative, intellectually and affectively if not "physically." The author-narrator in an *ocherk* performance acts as an eyewitness recorder: "First-person narration in the *ocherk* is perceived not as a hero's speech about himself (the principle of the lyric tale), but rather as the author's speech about what he has personally seen, felt, and experienced."²¹

Prishvin himself recognized that his *ocherki* could be viewed as such only by stretching the concept of the genre. For some Soviet scholars the lyrical coloration of his narratives, the special perspective from which he engages the reader's response to his artistic sketches, represents an excessive reliance upon personal experience and the lyrical interpretation of "fact."²² This is an exaggeration of the importance of the author's personal response, a slighting of the necessity to be essentially "objective" and "informative." However, most Soviet discussions of the genre minimize this objection.²³

Prishvin intended and realized the vast majority of his *ocherki* as both informative and lyrical pieces, as poetic evocations of real-life phenomena. Elements of scientific "knowledge" are organically woven into all of his *ocherki*; yet, in many of his pieces the relative proportion between "fact" and *vymysel*, or "poeticization," appears to be weighted in favor of the latter. This is especially the case in his best collections of lyrical miniatures, *Fatseliia* (1940) and *Lesnaia kapel'* (1940). The genre impulse behind these works is the *ocherk*; on the other hand, the lyrical subtexts in these works, and others, ultimately tend to dominate.

Prishvin also recognized that many of his *ocherki* were dissimilar, that his work as an *ocherkist* was not of a piece. Looking back over a forty-year career in 1947, he attempted to identify the two basic strains in his creative life as an *ocherkist*: the *sluzhebnyi* and the *prazdnichnyi ocherki*, or, roughly, the "everyday" and the "holiday" sketches.²⁴ Of the two, it was clearly the latter for which

of all, one must learn not to think, rather not to seek anything from oneself in the new, to completely forget and surrender oneself to it" (see Prishvina, "Ot nauki k iskusstvu," p. 383).

20. Ninov, "Zhanr obiazvaet," p. 163.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

22. Trifonova, *Russkaia Sovetskaia literatura*, p. 77.

23. See especially the *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1968), pp. 516–19; L. I. Timofeev, *Osnovy teorii literatury* (Moscow, 1966), pp. 368–73; Ninov, "Zhanr obiazvaet"; and Brown, "The Očerk: Suggestions Toward a Redefinition." Nearly all the sources cited by Brown were surveyed during a graduate seminar at the University of Michigan, 1967.

24. M. M. Prishvin, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow, 1956), 5:445–46. The terms are purely Prishvin's; however, they essentially correspond to the definition of the genre presented in the *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 5, p. 518: "[The *ocherk*] developed in two forms: the documentary [or 'publicistic'] and the artistic." See also Khmel'nitskaia, *Tvorchestvo Mikhaila Prishvina*, p. 78.

he felt a special affection. The “everyday” *ocherk*, as he complained in his correspondence with Maxim Gorky, provided him with a livelihood, but it could not afford him artistic pleasure and satisfaction.²⁵ Certainly, his “holiday” (artistic) *ocherki* are his best literary creations.

Prishvin’s artistic *ocherki* conform to all the intrinsic features which have been established to date by Soviet and Western scholarship. For example, as Deming Brown notes in summation:

a *xudožestvennyj očer*k must be provided with both an “eye-witness” quality and an explicit analysis of the things it depicts, and . . . although it contains *vymysel*, it must have a means of discriminating between facts and fiction. The only source from which these elements can come is the *narrator*, whose (direct) commentary upon and intervention in the events depicted provide interpretations, verification and *dokumental’nost’*. What is most essential, however, is that the narrator be identified closely with the author himself.²⁶

Soviet sources enumerate identical norms for the *ocherk*, they also develop a lengthy list of quasi-literary features. An example of this kind of norm would be the assertion that the *ocherk* must meet the demand of *operativnost’*: a socio-political informational or agitational function. If judged by this or similar extrinsic features, Prishvin’s *ocherki* do not conform to established standards. In fact, the one real criticism that consistently has been leveled by Soviet commentators at Prishvin’s artistic sketches—indeed, nearly all of his imaginative literature—is his lack of *operativnost’*.²⁷

Two basic tendencies can be observed in the writing of *ocherki* during the 1930s, the period in which Prishvin wrote his most accomplished pieces: (1) a tendency toward writing journalistic, publicistic (“everyday”) *ocherki* on economic, political, and technical themes; and (2) a tendency toward “artistic” sketches with either well-developed plots (*siuzhetnost’*) or a considerable amount of psychologizing.²⁸ The journalistic *ocherki* for the most part are descriptive pieces re-creating the progress of socialistic transformation in the Soviet Union. The narrative interest focuses upon social, economic, agricultural, and industrial problems encountered and overcome by the “builders of socialism.” In general, Prishvin wrote very few journalistic sketches in the 1930s. The artistic *ocherki* of the period, on the other hand, tend to focus on the problem of the individual faced with the reality of this transformation. A major theme is the dichotomy between new and old values occasioned by the country’s sociopolitical upheaval. Often this dichotomy is explored through a psychological analysis of the individual confronted by a choice between these values; at other times the dichotomy is presented not so much as a choice between two systems of values but as a matter of their reconciliation. A number of Prishvin’s works from these years develop this theme, including his masterpiece *Zhen’-shen’: koren’ zhizni* (1933).

25. See the Gorky-Prishvin correspondence in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 70: *Gor’kii i sovetskie pisateli: Neizdannaiia perepiska* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 319–62.

26. Brown, “The Očer

27. See, for example, Trifonova, *Russkaia Sovetskaia literatura*, pp. 95–97.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

The artistic *ocherki* of this second tendency at times come very close to qualifying as *rasskazy*. Their focus upon plot (*siuzhet*) and the author-hero's psychological conflict inevitably lead to an increase in artistic *vymysel* at the expense of the principles of *dokumental'nost'* and *poznavatel'nost'* ("objective" informational role). This tendency undoubtedly accounts in large part for the designation of Prishvin's (and others') genre as "half-sketch and half-tale." As we have seen, however, it is the *ocherk* that serves as the basis of his art.

Another feature of Prishvin's *ocherk* which brings it in close proximity to the *rasskaz* is the *personalism* of his authorial-narrative response to the world about him. He does not seek to typify, to generalize his response in accord with customary Soviet practice in the genre; rather, he seeks to individualize this response. Thus, the informational impact of his *ocherki* is restricted in terms of the Soviet standard; his works appeal to a limited readership, an audience which, as Poe would have noted, brings to his work a kindred spirit. In the words of Prishvin's widow, the writer requires a special kind of empathy from his reader. The reader has to *desire to read Prishvin on the writer's terms*.²⁹ This is a far cry from an activist, Soviet theory of the publicistic and informational function of the genre which stipulates a literary response accessible to the broad masses of the reading public. Prishvin's appeal is limited and was intended as such:

I know that my "drop" will not interest every reader, and in particular it will offer little to those seeking deception in verbal art, escape from active life. But what's to be done, you can't please everyone. I write for those who sense the poetry of passing moments in everyday life, and who suffer because they themselves do not have the power to seize them.³⁰

The lyricism of this personal response to reality tends to overshadow the more "objective" informational role of the *ocherk* demanded by most Soviet literary theoreticians and critics. Consequently, Prishvin's *ocherki* represent for this critical persuasion an impure form, a blend of the *ocherk* and the *rasskaz*. On the other hand, it would appear that the lyrical *ocherk* as such is gradually achieving independent literary rights in the present-day Soviet Union.

Prishvin scholars are also in general agreement that the *metaforichnost'*, *inoskazatel'nost'*, and *nedoskazannost'* of his *ocherki* incline them toward the *rasskaz*. These qualities also detract from the genre's informational function, not to mention its *operativnost'*, but they are integral features of Prishvin's lyricism. The writer's metaphors, allegorical or otherwise, are the basis of his natural imagery. They serve to illustrate the fundamental unity between natural and human phenomena through the principle of *analogy*: nature is the mirror of the human soul. Thus:

An analogy which is drawn from the life of nature, and which acquires a figurative, metaphorical meaning in the writer's work proves to be an instrument of cognition and an explanation of the author's thoughts or the hero's (authorial image's) spiritual impulses.³¹

29. Prishvina, in *Nezabudki*, p. 8.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

31. G. P. Trefilova, "M. M. Prishvin," *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi literatury v 4-kh tomakh* (Moscow, 1968), 3:221.

The lyrical interest is always foremost in Prishvin, and the primary means to this lyricism are his *metaforichnost'* and lyrical digressions on man and nature. Although he recognized the informational requirements of the genre, he preferred to frame them within his own lyrical perception. A Soviet critic of kindred spirit expressed it this way: "as an *ocherkist* Prishvin does not separate his informational tasks from his tasks as a writer, and that is why in his hands the *ocherk* acquires the force of a lyric verse or even a narrative poem."³² Put somewhat differently, Prishvin's means to express the informational role of his *ocherki* was his *poetic prose*. The communicative function of his language and work is inseparable from its expressive function.

Prishvin scholars generally agree that the *dnevnik* (diary) form provided a major impetus to the writer's craft. Prishvin frequently acknowledged his diary to be a requisite part of his equipment as a writer. In fact, the daily entries that he made in his diary formed the basis of all his literary pieces.³³ While there is not an inherent, literary connection between the diary and *ocherk*, for Prishvin a direct correlation existed between the two forms. T. Khmel'nitskaia asserts not only that Prishvin's diaries were the basic source of his creativity, but that they were his favorite and primary literary activity. His diary entries constitute, in fact or in effect, the rough first drafts of his literary pieces. As such, they are above all an expression of his authorial personality and his unique perception of the world.³⁴ The diaries also help us understand why Prishvin's alter-ego narrators occupy such a central position in his work.

We see, then, that Prishvin used diary entries as a kind of rough draft; he also employed snapshots in a similar fashion. He was accustomed to equip himself with a camera in his daily pursuit of local lore and natural phenomena. Having noticed some object, situation, or event—plant, animal, or human—Prishvin would record that *momentary impression* of the phenomenon on film. Later, he often would create a verbal representation of that moment, using his photographs as a form of shorthand. Essentially, he would *animate* the still life captured on film. He would not attempt to re-create the entire photograph, because he preferred to focus his artistic resources on one central aspect which, for him, caught the essence of the captured, "beautiful" moment and phenomenon. Concentrating on this central image, object, or situation, he would slowly record his lyrical impression(s) in a manner similar to that of *time-lapse photography*.³⁵ He even entitled one of his collections *Fotosnimki* (1936).

Prishvin's use of the camera has played an important role in recent discussions of his work that seem contradictory. One set of critics stresses the concentrated exactitude ("*mikrogeografia*") of his work and its affinities with time-lapse photography. The other group of critics stresses his paramount interest in the general "contours" of his material.³⁶ The two interpretations appear to be incommensurate and, in fact, incompatible.

The appearance of incompatibility is deceptive, however. One must remember that Prishvin's narrative manner has much in common with literary im-

32. Tarasenkov, "O Prishvine," p. 152.

33. Prishvina, in *Nezabudki*, p. 4.

34. Khmel'nitskaia, *Tvorchestvo Mikhaila Prishvina*, pp. 264–65.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

36. Prishvina, in *Nezabudki*, p. 7.

pressionism—specifically, with the impressionists' propensity for charging their work with suggestive detail and their belief in the importance of capturing the creatively significant moment. A similar propensity underlies both seemingly incompatible interpretations of his work. The desire to re-create lyrically the momentary impression of a given phenomenon is central to both interpretations. Their seeming difference can be translated in terms of the dual planar constructions of Prishvin's *ocherki*: the surface text charged with everyday realistic details, the subtext lyrically evoking the central impression (*kontur*) perceived by the author-narrator. In other words, in the two-planed mosaic composition of Prishvin's work, the surface text represents specific features or details, whereas the subtext strives to create not particulars, but the *distinctive feature*, or features, lyrically emblematic of the total representation. This is a synecdochic manner, with the significant part representing the whole. It is a product of the unique interrelationship between Prishvin's surface and subtexts, an interrelationship predicated upon evoking a "lyrical echo" in the reader identical to that experienced by the writer.³⁷

Prishvin's synecdochic manner springs directly from his understanding of the character of the universal order. As the critic Ivanov-Razumnik perceptively noted early in the writer's career, at the base of Prishvin's art lies a pantheistic interpretation of and response to the universe.³⁸ Reality, for Prishvin, consists of a single essence; every component part of the whole is but a microcosm of the single, macrocosmic essence or being. Moreover, the microcosmic parts are equivalent to the macrocosmic whole; a hierarchical order of values is foreign to his perception of reality, as well as to his conception of the universal order. All of reality consists of, and is expressed in, a single creative process of the "organic whole":

understand life as the creative process of an organic whole, then in its sense the significance or quality lies not in the large or small part, but only in the coordination of this or that part with the whole. Thus the small part must recognize itself in the whole and then it will disappear as a small part and enter into an equal relation with all the parts . . . each phenomenon, be it the appearance of a sparrow or the sparkling of a dewdrop on the grass . . . all these are features of the whole; everything is visible in every feature and it is perfect and understandable. . . .³⁹

The significant detail, the significant part synecdochically represents the whole; microcosmic phenomena express and define the macrocosmic whole.⁴⁰ The measure of *significance* rests completely upon the writer's personal values. In this lies the potential for Prishvin's unique contribution to the artistic interpretation and ordering of the universal experience of Man.

37. I. P. Motiashov, "Zerkalo cheloveka: Priroda v tvorchestve M. Prishvina," *Uchenye zapiski* (Shuiskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut), part 2 (1960), pp. 344–45.

38. R. Ivanov-Razumnik, "Velikii Pan," *Tvorchestvo i kritika*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1911), pp. 42–70.

39. Prishvina, "Ot nauki k iskusstvu," pp. 377–80, 383.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 388; see also p. 389 for a figurative explanation of this synecdochic manner and understanding of reality.