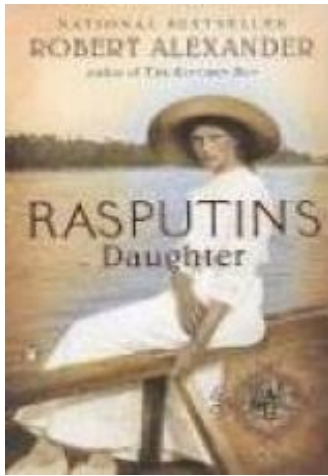


Rasputin's Daughter

by Robert Alexander



About the Book

In St. Petersburg, Russia, in mid-December, the sun does not rise until ten, and it sets barely five hours later. In the waning days of 1916, all of Russia finds itself on the brink of a still more appalling darkness. The casualties of a disastrous war line the streets. As the wealthy savor their pastries and wines, the *narod* --- the ordinary people --- face starvation. In the palace of Tsar Nicholas, Aleksei, the hemophiliac heir to the throne, lies helpless as internal bleeding threatens his life. The once-mighty Romanov dynasty that has ruled Russia for three hundred years labors to stave off collapse.

In their struggle to save their son and their empire, the Tsar and Tsaritsa turn to an improbable savior, an illiterate monk with insatiable appetites for women and alcohol --- and preternatural powers of prophecy and healing. The monk, Grigori Effimovich Rasputin, survives today as one of history's strangest figures; his deeds and violent death have entered the realm of legend. Now, in a gripping novel of suspense, mysticism, and forbidden romance, Robert Alexander tells the story of an almost forgotten woman, Maria Rasputina, a willful, compassionate eighteen-year-old girl. To her, Rasputin is more than a baffling mixture of holiness and hedonism, more than the man who holds the fate of the Romanovs in his rough, unwashed hands. He is her father.

Alexander's novel tells of the last week of Rasputin's life, a time when, Maria says, she learned everything she knows about her father. Through Maria's recollections, history's mad monk emerges in a deftly drawn portrait, one in which saintliness and debauchery become almost impossible to distinguish. With sorrow and amazement, Maria recalls her father's astonishing inner contradictions. She describes not only her father's mysterious wisdom and uncanny clairvoyance, but also his naïve inability to comprehend the venomous political intrigues that surround him.

Yet Alexander's most sensitive portrayal is of Maria herself. A girl on the threshold of womanhood, Maria discovers that the structures on which she most depends --- her family, the Tsarist regime, her own spiritual sense of self --- are rapidly giving way. In the midst of mounting chaos, she finds she must not only learn to understand her father but also to

act decisively if she is to save his life. At the same time, she has to try to decipher the true intentions of a striking young man named Sasha whose behavior is either that of a love-struck admirer or a murderous stalker. Is he Maria's only friend or her father's most implacable enemy?

Finally and most bewildering, Maria must come to terms with the supernatural gift she has inherited from her father and resolve within herself the same dark struggle between good and evil that rages within her father's soul. Just one outcome is certain: The events that will end this strife will be written in the blood of families and kings.

Discussion Guide

1. In Chapter Eight, Rasputin foresees that the River Neva will run red with blood. In what other ways does blood act as a dominant metaphor in **Rasputin's Daughter**?
2. Rasputin's lack of personal morality repels even his own daughter, yet he gives comfort to the royal family and saves the Tsarevich from dying. Is it fair or proper to demand good moral behavior from someone who uses his power to perform great good for others?
3. Maria is also sometimes disgusted when she observes that her father has the mannerisms and perceptions of a peasant. At the same time, however, the opinion is expressed in the novel that the narod, or the common people, must finally be the saviors of Russia. How do ideas of social class influence Alexander's storytelling, Maria's viewpoint, and, finally, Rasputin's fate?
4. Maria suffers terrible anguish at the hands of Sasha, who repeatedly betrays her. But is Maria any less of a betrayer? How do her failures of loyalty contribute to the tragedies of the novel?
5. Given the largeness of her father's character and influence, it seems inevitable that Maria should define herself in comparison with him. Are Maria and her father fundamentally alike or essentially different? What are their most significant points of similarity and difference?
6. Scandal breaks over the Romanovs because of the Tsaritsa's decision to bring in Rasputin to help Aleksei. Yet the public does not know of Rasputin's duties at the palace, let alone that the heir to the throne is suffering from hemophilia. Did the Tsaritsa make the correct decision in keeping this information essentially a state secret, and in doing so did she encourage or lessen gossip against her?
7. Although there is nothing ordinary about Maria's father, many of the issues that arise between them are questions that might come up in any father-daughter relationship. How do the struggles between them reflect typical family tensions? In what ways do their quarrels differ from the ordinary?
8. As Rasputin gives aid to the apparently dying Tsarevich, Maria asserts that she has never seen such a blatant fight between good and evil. To what extent is the entire novel a dramatization of the battle between good and evil? How does Maria perceive the difference between the two? Is she always correct, and, if not, what accounts for her failures of perception?

9. In Alexander's novel, how does Maria's character seem to have been influenced by her heredity? What traits appear to be more the result of her upbringing? Does she have the kind of personality that one would expect from Rasputin's daughter?

10. Food and eating are often mentioned in **Rasputin's Daughter**. Do these subjects have more than literal significance? How do we come to know Rasputin from what he eats and how he eats?

11. On one level, **Rasputin's Daughter** is about a young woman learning to understand and relate to her father. On another level, it is about Maria's anxiety-ridden discovery of her sexuality. How do these two themes intertwine, and what are the results of their interaction?

12. How trustworthy do you find Maria as a narrator? How well does she understand the events that she recounts? Perhaps most significant, how fully conscious is she of her own wishes regarding her father?

13. What are the natures of guilt and innocence in **Rasputin's Daughter**? What feelings of guilt does Maria experience? How does she respond to them? Does she regard her father as ultimately guilty or innocent? Do you share her judgment?

Author Bio

Robert Alexander is a pen name of R. D. Zimmerman. A graduate of Michigan State University, Mr. Alexander has also studied at Leningrad State University and has lived and traveled extensively in the former Soviet Union. In researching **The Kitchen Boy**, Mr. Alexander gained access to Russian archives and palaces that are closed to the general public. Under his own name, he has written numerous mystery novels, including **Hostage**, **Outburst**, and **Innuendo: A Todd Mills Mystery**. Robert Alexander currently makes his home in Minneapolis.

Rasputin's Daughter

by Robert Alexander

Publication Date: December 26, 2006

Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics)

ISBN-10: 0143038656

ISBN-13: 9780143038658