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Russophonia:
Towards a Transnational Conception of Russian-Language Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Slavic Languages and Literatures

by

Naomi Beth Caffee

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Russophonia

by

Naomi Beth Caffee

Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professors David W. MacFadyen and Roman J. Koropecj, Co-chairs

This dissertation introduces the concept of Russophonia, which refers to the widespread and variegated uses of the Russian language outside of the customary boundaries of ethnicity and nation. Using the designations of Anglophone, Francophone, and Sinophone literature as a model, I propose Russophone literature as an accurate and necessary classification for works that are too often dismissed as peripheral, or at best, awkwardly shoehorned into the existing Russian canon. I further argue that Russophone Studies, as a potential field of academic inquiry, would provide the space for understanding realities outside of an imperial center, and identities beyond a traditional understanding of nationality.

The first chapter provides an introduction to Russophonia, illustrating its major issues through an analysis of works by Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008), Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov (b. 1951), and Eduard Bagirov (b. 1975). The subsequent three chapters trace the development of Russophone literature in the Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. Chapter 2 dates the

origins of Russophone literature to the Russian Empire's colonial expansion into Central Asia and the Caucasus, as the Russian language, Russian institutions, and contact with Russian intellectuals shaped the development of local literatures in the newly colonized areas. I show how early Russophone writers synthesized local literary forms with elements from Russian and West European literatures. I also discuss the processes of Soviet mythmaking by which Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812–1878), Abai Kunanbaev (1845–1904), and Chokan Valikhanov (1835–1865) were recast as the foundational figures of national literary traditions in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

In chapter 3 I discuss the proliferation of Russophone literature as a product of the Soviet mandate for proletarian national literatures under the postwar ideology of *druzhba narodov*, the “friendship of peoples.” I focus on the Soviet Thaw period of the late 1950s and 60s, when postwar decolonization and the beginnings of a postcolonial consciousness in world literature and criticism coincided with Soviet attempts to exert influence over the newly independent states of the so-called Third World. With these issues in mind, I analyze the poetry of the Russophone Kazakh writer Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1937), who enjoyed the ample privileges of a state-sanctioned writer, but eventually used his position to raise awareness of Soviet oppression and ecological violence. I cast this intersection of Soviet literature and postcolonial awareness as the catalyst for a later wave of nationally charged activism that contributed to the Soviet Union's eventual disintegration.

The concluding chapter examines contemporary literature written in Russian in the independent post-Soviet states, as well as in new “locations” online. At the center of my analysis are two schools of Russophone poetry that arose from the print culture of Soviet Central Asia, but today maintain a parallel, equally significant presence online: the Tashkent School and the

Fergana School. Although many writers from these schools have emigrated either to the West or to the Russian metropole, they continue to assert a poetic distance/difference from Russia. I conclude by raising several questions for further research: how has an increasingly mobile and transnational world changed what it means to be a Russophone poet? How has technology changed the way poets engage with identity, history, language use, and the literary tradition? Is contemporary Russophone literature evidence of continuing Russian cultural and economic neo-colonialism?

The dissertation of Naomi Beth Caffee is approved.

Olga Kagan

Ronald W. Vroon

Roman J. Koropeckyj, Committee Co-chair

David W. MacFadyen, Committee Co-chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

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The central concept of this dissertation originated in a seminar meeting of UCLA's Mellon Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities. Following a presentation by Mellon Fellow Dr. Sarah Valentine on the twentieth-century poet Gennadii Aigi, who composed in Russian but employed an avant-garde aesthetic of difference based on his Chuvash heritage, Professor Françoise Lionnet raised a provocative question: Could there ever be such a thing as Russophone literature? This is only the beginning of the enormous debt I owe to the UCLA faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students. Foremost among them are the members of my dissertation committee, Professors David MacFadyen, Roman Koropecykj, Olga Kgan, and Ronald Vroon. I reserve special thanks for Professors MacFadyen and Koropecykj, who lent me their expertise, support, and boundless patience for the duration of this project. I also thank Professor Altay Göyüşov, Dr. Boris Dralyuk, Rob Denis, Naya Lekht, and P.J. Emery for their indispensable help behind the scenes.

Awards from the UCLA Slavic Department, the Center for European and Eurasian Studies, and the US Department of State made it possible for me to travel to Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan several times for preliminary research and language study. I am particularly grateful to the UCLA Graduate Division for providing me with a Graduate Research Mentorship, which allowed me to lay the foundation for my project, and later, a Dissertation Year Fellowship in order to complete it.

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Note on Transliteration and Translation

The writers I discuss in this dissertation were active not only in the Russian-speaking world, but in a variety of other linguistic spheres as well: Kazakh, Azeri, Turkish, Persian, Chagatay, and even English. Their weathered multiple language and orthographic reforms from the nineteenth century through the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and was accordingly published in scripts ranging from Arabic to Latin to Cyrillic. As such, they are known by various names, with various transliterations, depending on the contexts in which their work is published or studied. Because the present dissertation is above all concerned with the Russophone identities of these writers, I will be using the Russified versions of their names, under which they published their Russian-language works and by which they were known in the Russophone world. Thus, I refer to the Abai Kunanbaev, rather than Qunanbaev or Qunanbaiuly; Chokan Valikanov, rather than Shoqan Ualikhanuly; Mirza Fatali Akhundov, rather than Axunzadā; and Chingiz Guseinov, rather than Huseinov. For the sake of consistency, toponyms and ethnonyms are likewise listed in their Russophone variants, e.g. Semipalatinsk, not Semei; Kazakh, not Qazaq. Toponyms are given in historical context and transliterated from Russian, e.g. Tiflis (Tbilisi) in the nineteenth century, or Alma-Ata (Almaty) in the twentieth. All in-text quotations from Russian are transliterated from Cyrillic according to the Library of Congress system, without diacritics. All block quotations include a translation as well as the original Cyrillic text. When quoting pre-1917 Russian texts, I have updated the orthography. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

VITA

- 2004 BA in Russian
Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA
- 2008 MA in Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2009-2012 Teaching Assistant
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2010 C. Phil., Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2011–2012 FLAS Fellowship
Center for European and Eurasian Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2012 Graduate Certificate in TESFL
Department of Applied Linguistics
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2012–2013 Dissertation Year Fellowship
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2013 Teaching Fellow
Collegium of University Teaching Fellows
Office of Instructional Development
University of California, Los Angeles

Chapter 1

Introduction to Russophobia

In recent years the discipline of Slavic literary studies has expanded to include Eurasia in its purview.¹ This necessitates an investigation into the hegemony of the Russian Empire and its successor states, as well as a critical look at the longstanding relationships between Russian and non-Russian peoples, especially as they are represented in literature and broader cultural narratives. So far, however, this investigation has focused on canonical Russian literature: the Caucasian themes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoi; the eighteenth-century civic verse supporting Russian imperial expansion; and Orientalism inspired by Russian territorial acquisitions in the Far East.² Though scholars have taken significant steps to understand and interrogate the Russian side of the imperial encounter, a crucial piece of the puzzle is still missing: what about the literary and cultural production of the Russian Empire's colonized populations and their descendants?

¹ In 2010 this consideration prompted the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies to change its name to the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. According to a report by executive director Linda Park, the name change reflects the “increased internationalization of the organization” as well as “the goal for greater inclusion of Central Asian and Caucasian studies.” Meanwhile Bruce Grant, announcing the name change in the ASEES newsletter, acknowledges the problematic history of the term Eurasia, but contends that “being Eurasian, or at least thinking Eurasianly [...] does not have to mean that we are gratuitously all things to all people. But it does suggest a flexibility of experience that leaves all of us open to the rest of the world around us.” See Linda Park, “From AAASS to ASEES: The Future of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies,” in *Where is Eurasian Studies Heading for? Global Talks with Scholars, Directors, and Editors* (4th International Conference of the HK Russia-Eurasia Research Project, Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea, October 10-12, 2012), 87. http://www.eurasiahub.org/data/ftpoot/2012_1011_%EC%A0%9C4%EC%B0%A8HK%EA%B5%AD%EC%A0%9C/Lynda%20Park.pdf; Bruce Grant, “We are all Eurasian,” *NewsNet* (January 2012), 6. <http://aseees.org/newsnet/2012-01.pdf>.

² The highlights of this fascinating body of scholarship include Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*, *Publications of the Wisconsin Center for Pushkin Studies* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Susanna Soojung Lim, *China and Japan in the Russian Imagination, 1685-1922: To the Ends of the Orient*, *Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia* 79 (New York: Routledge, 2013). A more detailed discussion of these studies will commence in chapter 2.

In fact there existed thriving, centuries-long literary traditions in many areas of Eurasia that fell under Russian imperial rule, and the introduction of the Russian language brought about unprecedented forms of expression that warrant scholarly attention. The phenomenon grew in complexity during the Soviet period, as the “affirmative action empire”³ formulated and sustained a multitude of distinct nationalities with corresponding national literatures, and it continues to do so in the post-Soviet period, as newly independent republics undergo national rebuilding processes in the wake of shifting political alliances and increasing mobility of individuals and institutions. Described in the broadest possible terms, this dissertation is a study of non-Russians using the Russian language to produce literature in the Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet eras. By bringing to the forefront authors who have so far been classed as peripheral, if considered at all, my dissertation aims to shed light on the ways in which, to quote a pioneering group of theorists, “the Empire writes back.”⁴

Such an endeavor is already familiar to scholars of European literatures, who have long employed postcolonial methods of inquiry to analyze the dynamics of power and identification influencing the production of literary texts. Currently the most pressing, unresolved obstacle to such a postcolonial consideration of Russian literature is the perceived incongruity between Russian hegemony in Eurasia and that of empires originating in Western Europe. Because the Russian Empire grew gradually, by assimilating territories that were contiguous rather than overseas, it asserted authority over groups that shared a long history of contact as well as cultural and even genetic intermingling with Russians. Furthermore, since the socioeconomic order of

³ The phrase comes from Terry Martin’s extensive study of the Soviet project to institutionalize ethnic and national equality among the diverse populations of the Soviet Union’s constituent republics, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

Imperial Russian society was itself based on the establishment and exploitation of a permanent underclass, the Russian postcolonial space appears to lack the same types of divisions—and therefore inequities—of former Western European empires.⁵ This position is illustrated by the famous adage of nineteenth-century Russian historian Vasili Kliuchevskii that Russia “colonized itself” and that colonization remains “the central fact” of Russian history throughout the ages.⁶ Kliuchevskii’s assertions are often taken to mean that the enigmatic, essential despotism of Russian civilization has resulted in a sort of equal-opportunity oppression that fails to distinguish between privileged colonizers and oppressed Others. Yet Kliuchevskii’s formulation merely hints at the depth and diversity of Russia’s imperial situation, as Nicholas Breyfogle et. al. explain in their introduction to the 2007 compilation *Peopling the Russian Periphery*:

Kliuchevskii was right: colonization *is* the ‘basic fact’ of Russian history. But ‘basic’ is neither simple nor uniform. Colonization was carried out by a stunningly diverse panorama of settlers ... In fact, Russian colonization unfolded with such splendid diversity that it is more accurate to talk of Russian *colonizations* in the plural than in the singular.⁷

In his exhaustive and masterful study of this problem, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience*, Alexander Etkind traces Russia’s “diverse attempts at discovering, appropriating, populating, cultivating, and domesticating – in a word, colonizing – lands within and beyond the

⁵ Brian Boeck points out that the institutionalized inequalities of Russian society, in particular the legal codification of serfdom, are actually a product of the Russian Empire’s expansion and its efforts to centrally manage populations and economic activity in newly acquired areas. He refers to the establishment of the Law Code of 1649, which infamously “not only bound peasants to their masters and/or the state, but also severely restricted the mobility of military men or townspeople.” He adds that, “the ascription of virtually the entire Russian population to places of residence recorded in state record books marked the culmination of government efforts to harness and utilize its limited human resources to the fullest.” See “Containment vs. colonization: Muscovite approaches to settling the steppe,” in *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History*, eds. Nicholas Breyfogle, Abby M. Shrader, and Willard Sunderland, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 38 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 45.

⁶ V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, vol. 1., American Council of Learned Societies reprints (J.W. Edwards: Ann Arbor, MI, 1948): 20-21.

⁷ Nicholas Breyfogle, Abby M. Shrader, and Willard Sunderland eds., “Russian colonizations: an introduction,” in *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History*, 7.

moving boundaries of the Empire.”⁸ As the Russian state “imported people, settled and resettled them, and launched experimental forms of population management,” both Russian and non-Russian identities emerged along the “elastic continuums of internal versus external, native versus foreign, assimilated versus alien.”⁹ Crucially, however, “the main paths of colonization led not only outwards, but also into the Russian heartland,” where Russians themselves became objects of “the characteristic phenomena of colonialism such as missionary work, exotic journeys, and ethnographic scholarship.”¹⁰ Thus, by the time it reached the height of its territorial expansion in the nineteenth century, Russia was simultaneously “a colonial empire alongside those of Britain or Austria, and a colonized territory like Congo or the West Indies.”¹¹ Etkind concludes that even the “white, educated, and sometimes rich” writers of canonical Russian literature “belonged to an oppressed minority within their own society” and voiced “the suppressed part of historical experience.”¹² Paradoxically, however:

“Russian literature proved to be an extremely successful instrument of cultural hegemony ... it conquered more Russians, non-Russians, and Russian enemies than any other imperial endeavor. Standardizing the language, and integrating its multiethnic readership on an enormous scale, this literature was a great asset. The tsars and the censors rarely understood or appreciated it. Thus, the Empire collapsed, but the literature outlived it.”¹³

Etkind’s surprising revelations draw our attention to the far-reaching effects of Russian cultural imperialism, and remind us of the relationship of literature to mechanisms of power. Yet most

⁸ Alexander Etkind, *Internal colonization: Russia's imperial experience* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 250.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 251.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 254.

¹³ Ibid., 169.

importantly, his work hastens the need for a postcolonial investigation into the non-Russian cultures and literary traditions that evolved in the wake of Russian literature's "conquest," and that most assuredly helped shape its form and content.

Scholars' reticence toward postcolonialism has carried over to assessments of the Soviet Union as an "empire" unlike any other. The Soviet state's ideology of anti-imperialism, together with its efforts to develop a multicultural field of proletarian national literatures, significantly altered the dynamics of power and culture inherited from the Russian Empire. As a result, authors of the Soviet Union's non-Russian nationalities often held positions of great privilege and zealously supported the regime. Anthony Olcott notes that some Russophone authors even enjoyed the most coveted privilege of all: greater freedom of expression.¹⁴ These facts fly in the face of the model of "literature-as-resistance" that forms a cornerstone of postcolonial literary studies, and as such it raises doubt about whether the so-called "Second World" can even be considered a postcolonial space. Therefore, in order to extend postcolonial investigations to the literature of the Soviet Union and its successor states, new approaches must emerge.

Enhancing the situation's urgency is the fact that inquiries into this topic have already begun from outside Slavic literary studies. David Chioni Moore, in a seminal essay on the need for a synthesis of postcolonial and post-Soviet discourses, has expressed shock at "first, how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are, and, second, how

¹⁴ Referring to Chingiz Aitmatov's 1980 novel *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years*, Olcott notes that no one had "any illusions about why it was Aitmatov who was given so much leash, when other writers were being jailed for less; had he been Russian, Aitmatov too would have been silenced. Because the USSR of those years was pursuing policies designed to show the wonderful harmony in which the many ethnic groups of the country live and work (as it was then maintained they did), Aitmatov, a Kirgiz, enjoyed a latitude far greater than did his Russian fellow writers, which his ability to write in Russian permitted him to put to socially-useful purposes." Anthony Olcott, "Non-Russian Writers of Russian Literature," Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research (Washington, D.C.: The Council, 1989), 4.

extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact.”¹⁵ However, answering Moore’s call to action is not merely a matter of pasting the existing discourse onto a blank canvas—Gayatri Spivak points out the need for postcolonialism to “unmoor itself from its provisional beginnings in monopoly capitalistic or mercantile colonialisms” in order to account for the unique position of Russian dominance in Eurasia and its dissimilarities with West European colonial histories. After all, she notes, “every postcoloniality is situated and therefore different.”¹⁶ Yet some contemporary scholars stress above all the practical similarities between the Soviet Union and European empires. Andreas Hilger maintains that the Soviet Union is consistent with five generic “imperial attributes” outlined by Jürgen Osterhammel, Alexander Motyl, and Stephen Howe: “territorial extension, a multi-ethnic population, and an asymmetrical centre-periphery structure, ruled by an imperial elite.”¹⁷ Finally and most importantly, they note that an empire possesses “its own, privileged ideology—an ideology not only to explain the world but to model a new world.”¹⁸ According to Francine Hirsch, however, the Soviet Union’s hegemony was consolidated and established only through “an interactive and participatory process” that involved the “selective borrowing” of European ideas and practices by “Soviet leaders, experts, and local elites,” who

¹⁵ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique.” *PMLA* 116, no. 1, Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies (Jan, 2001), 114.

¹⁶ Gayatri Spivak, “Are you Postcolonial? To the teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Literatures” in Robert L. Caserio et al., “Forum: Conference Debates,” *PMLA* 121 (May 2006), 828.

¹⁷ Andreas Hilger. “Soviet Indology in the Cold War: on the relationship between science and politics from Stalin to Chruščev, 1945-1966,” paper presented in the panel “Area Studies in the Soviet Union: Actors, Entanglements and Paradigms” Third European Congress on World and Global History, April 14-17, 2011, 4. http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/congress/fileadmin/eniugh2011/dokumente/Abstract_Hilger_-_Indology.pdf

¹⁸ Hilger adds: “[d]uring the Cold War, such discussions used to be contaminated by obvious political-propagandistic arguments” but now a new generation of historians, among them Terry Martin and Francine Hirsch, has come to similar conclusions. *Ibid.*

each had their own “specific, and sometimes competing agendas.”¹⁹ Not only do these assessments further confirm the postcoloniality of Soviet and post-Soviet spaces, but in fact they support a recent current in postcolonial studies: dismantling what Shaden Tageldin calls the “domination/resistance binary” that arose with the work of Edward Said and instead accounting for the multitudinous inconsistencies, ambiguities, imprecise cultural and textual translations, and mutual “seductions” inherent in the power and cultural production of empires.²⁰

Moore and Spivak present an exciting challenge to the scholarly community: just as recent studies have re-conceptualized the political and economic realities of Eurasia in the post-Soviet era, so too must we develop new critical perspectives in order to address the particularities of literary production of Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet societies. This dissertation introduces the critical paradigm of Russophonia in order to accommodate all three. At the same time, this dissertation seeks to shed light on the unacknowledged ways in which Russian-language literature contributes to, and draws influence from, developments in world literature.

Why Russophone? An Overview of Russophonia’s Theoretical Predecessors

¹⁹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 5. On the subject of the Soviet Union’s similarities and differences with European empires, and the general relationship between Soviet discourses on empire and nation, see also Vera Tolz, “Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-communist Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (1998): 993–1022. See also Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2001).

²⁰ Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 11. This current is also present in the field of Slavic/Eurasian Studies. Historian Adeeb Khalid voices a similar goal of avoiding the “hackneyed dichotomies of resistance and collusion, of native authenticity and ‘Westernization’ (or, in our case, Russification)” in *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, *Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies* 27 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 13–14. On the issue of mimicry and ambiguity in postcolonial writing, which will haunt all subsequent chapters of this dissertation, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), and also his *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

In the course of researching and writing about authors who wrote in Russian—yet did not identify themselves as Russian—I found significant limitations to the existing categories of identification and differentiation. At first I employed the designation of “Non-Russian, Russian literature,” which actually originated in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era and gained currency as a marketing term for certain publications of the Michigan-based Ardis press, one of the most important organs of Russian *tamizdat* in the 1970s and 80s.²¹ The term came into academic use in the West in late 1980s and commonly denotes a movement in late twentieth-century Soviet literature that includes authors like the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov and the Abkhazian novelist Fazil Iskander.²² Although “Non-Russian, Russian literature” does serve as an accurate classification for some authors whose main poetic and political aim is an expression of non-Russian-ness, particularly those publishing under the favorable policies of the Brezhnev era,²³ the term does not readily apply to authors of mixed or ambiguous heritage. Moreover, even in reifying the importance of non-Russian identities, the term does not allow for the fact that these identities are themselves quite complex and problematic. Should the modifier “Russian” be used to refer to citizenship, geographic distribution of populations, language use, ethnicity, or some combination of these things? Furthermore, who is responsible for conferring upon the

²¹ For a short history of Ardis, See Kathleen Schroeder, Jennifer Sharp and Kathleen Dow, “Finding Aid for Ardis Records, 1971-2002,” University of Michigan, 2007, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/s/selead/umich-scl-ardis?rgn=main;view=text>. See also Thomas R. Beyer, “Russians in America: the Third Wave,” Middlebury College, 2007, <http://community.middlebury.edu/~beyer/ratw/publishing.htm>.

²² In 1989 Anthony Olcott produced the first comprehensive study of the Soviet Union’s “non-Russian, Russian literature” in the West. Taking a sociopolitical approach, Olcott’s stated aims are “first, to identify as many Soviet writers as possible who are non-Russian by nationality but who write and publish in Russian,” and second, to identify the extent to which such writers would use their command of Russian and their greater freedom of speech to address “the problems of the USSR as a whole.” Anthony Olcott, “Non-Russian Writers of Russian Literature,” 1.

²³ Although his study focuses almost exclusively on writers from the late Soviet period, Anthony Olcott disputes the popular opinion that non-Russian writers are “as much a relic of the Brezhnev era as . . . the [Irtysh] river diversion project or BAM.” Writing in 1989, he accurately predicts the enormous influence many non-Russian writers would go on to have in the post-Soviet period, particularly in politics. *Ibid.*, 12.

author the quality of “non-Russian”— academics, critics, the writer’s ethnic community, the reading public, literary markets past and present, or the writers themselves? How is the appropriate degree of non-Russian-ness determined? Ultimately the term creates false or time-sensitive dichotomies and privileges Russian-ness as an essential identifying quality. Yet still the greatest problem is that it defines its field through negation (“non-Russian”) and is therefore exclusive rather than inclusive.

Another group of terms available to Slavic scholars, most frequently when dealing with texts of the Soviet period, is that of “multinational,” “minority” and “bilingual” literatures. These terms are indeed descriptive of certain authors, since they allow for a discussion of the central issue of bi- or multi-culturality. At the same time, they fail to account for the varying degrees of Russification in non-Russian-identified people, or the implications of Russification within each author’s particular social and historical position. For example, many authors admit to an asymmetrical bilingualism which allows them to draw inspiration from the culture of their mother tongue, but their core competence—and by extension, the medium for their engagement in the broader world—is in their second language, Russian. Some writers have no proficiency in the purported mother tongue at all. At the same time, “minority” is inaccurate for describing the identity of ethnic groups who may actually be majorities in their own sovereign state, region, or literary milieu. Such is the case with ethnic Kazakh poets like Aigerim Tazhi and Marat Isenov, who live and publish in Kazakhstan, but write in the Russian language exclusively.

“Multinational,” is the most problematic term of all, since it formed the basis for the Soviet designations of multinational literature [*mnogonatsional’naia literatura*], literature of the “fraternal” nations [*literatura bratskikh narodov*] and literature of minor nations [*literatura malykh narodov*]. Thoroughgoing studies by Soviet scholars themselves, as well as later

assessments by Western scholars such as Kathryn Schild, theorize and trace the deliberate construction of Soviet multinational literature from its inception at the First Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in Baku in 1934.²⁴ Azeri writer Chingiz Guseinov has provided an exceptionally insightful study of Soviet multinational literature, including text written in Russian as well as in titular languages, by situating the identities of authors and their works at the cross-section of several discursive “levels”: the individual level (the author’s own oeuvre), the national level (local literary tradition), the level of “regions and zones” (which includes broader “geographical, linguistic, historico-cultural, and aesthetic considerations”), and eventually, the “problem-thematic” level—where the author’s ideas fit along the national vs. all-union continuum.²⁵ Above all he stresses that national literary traditions do not arise in a vacuum, but rather in evolve in constant dialogue with other traditions—both oral and written. As such, Soviet multinational literature is a “commons [*obshchnost'*]” where different literary traditions interact.²⁶ Yet Russian is still at the top of this hierarchy. As the most “highly developed” language and literature, it acts as the “channel of connection” between the Soviet Union’s constituent national literatures.²⁷ As Guseinov’s detailed schema shows, “multinational literature” carries a very specific meaning within the system of literary production and national identity politics in the Soviet Union. Using it for pre-revolutionary literature would be

²⁴ See Ch. G. Guseinov, *Formy obshchnosti sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi literatury* (Moscow: Mysl', 1978); Georgii Iosifovich Lomidze, *Chuvstvo velikoi obshchnosti: stati o sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi literature* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1978). Under the auspices of the Gorkii Institute for World Literature, Lomidze and L. I. Timofeev also edited a six-volume history of Soviet multinational literature, *Istoriia sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi literatury* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970). See also Kathryn Schild, “Between Moscow and Baku: National Literatures at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers” (Doctoral diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010).

²⁵ Ch. G. Guseinov, *Formy obshchnosti sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi Literatury*, 5–6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 163–64.

anachronistic, while using it for contemporary literature would be to assume the hierarchical cultural order of a now-defunct political entity.

Despite the limited discourse on this topic in the West, there does exist a reasoned, comprehensive system of classification for dealing with the Russian-language literature of non-Russians. Perhaps not surprisingly, it has its origins in Kazakhstan. In 2007 the comparative literature scholar and folklorist Nurbulat Dzhuanyshbekov put forth the concept of *marginal'naia literatura* [marginal literature]. Writing about the interface of Russian and Kazakh culture in the work of the Soviet author Mukhtar Auezov, Dzhuanyshbekov classifies “marginal” authors according to a five-tier system based on the extent of each author’s Russification. These tiers range from “contact-adaptive [*kontaktno-adaptivnyi*],” where the author has made contact with Russian culture but his “creative work remains within the frames of his native language”²⁸ to “integrated [*integririvannyi*], where authors “write in a foreign language, while preserving their national mentality,”²⁹ and finally “assimilated [*assimilatsionnyi*],” whose authors may “genetically” retain their ethnic heritage, but “in terms of language, education, culture, and most importantly, creative work, belong to another ethnicity.”³⁰ The main shortcoming of this approach is that it rests on essentialist designations of “national mentality” and even genetics, and it enforces a hierarchy of greater/smaller and central/peripheral peoples. After all, if marginality is the basis of identifying this literature, it necessarily privileges something else as central. Finally, Dzhuanyshbekov presupposes that an author’s “marginal” political, geographic, and cultural position is static, thus rendering his system inadequate for analyzing authors whose careers span several decades, continents, languages, and regimes. There would be no place in

²⁸ Nurbolat Dzhuanyshbekov, *Mukhtar Auezov v kontekste russkoi i mirovoi literatury* (Almaty: Iskander, 2007), 37.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 38

marginal'naia literatura for someone like the nineteenth-century Azeri writer Mirza Fatali Akhundov, who was born under the Qajar dynasty of the Persian Empire, died a high-ranking officer in the Imperial Russian Army, and wrote in Azeri, Persian, and Russian—all without ever leaving the South Caucasus. Likewise the contemporary poet Ol'ga Grebennikova, an ethnic Russian member of the Central Asian Fergana School of poetry who recently immigrated to the United States, would be completely unclassifiable in this system.

Since nearly every available terminological and classificatory system bears at least some vestiges of Soviet cultural engineering, they cannot be extended to refer to the broader phenomenon of Russian as a colonial language on par with English, Portuguese, or French. Nor can they be used to make salient comparisons between Soviet authors and those of the Imperial or post-Soviet period. Therefore, taking a cue from postcolonial literary studies, especially from the disciplines of Francophone and Sinophone studies, I propose the term “Russophone” to describe literature written in the Russian language, and “Russophonia” to describe the totality of social, linguistic, and geo-political environments in which Russian-speaking authors write and live.

This dissertation calls for a distinct, new field in Slavic and Eurasian literary studies, analogous to the designations of Francophone and Anglophone literatures that have been in place since the latter half of the twentieth century. I envision Russophone literature as a separate, but related tradition to Russian literature that emerged and continues to develop in dialogue with Russian literature. As a potential academic field, Russophone studies would provide a framework for discussing literary works from past and present communities of Russian speakers regardless of citizenship or ethnic identity, both within and outside of the Russian Empire and its successor states. Russophone is the most accurate term available for two major reasons: first, because it is

descriptive, rather than prescriptive; and second, because the term is not ethnically, politically, or geographically specific. Its only central criterion for inclusion is the participation in Russian-language discourse. As such, it provides a space for viewing authors of a variety of cultural backgrounds and historical periods. Above all the introduction of Russophonia is an attempt to step away from the classification of literature by nationality (so beloved by the Soviets), and instead to rely on the social and linguistic realities inherent in the production of texts and the multi-faceted structuring of identity.

Finally, by incorporating such a field of study, the academy would be catching up with—and contributing to—a discourse which already exists to some extent in the Russian-speaking world. Russophone critics and scholars, especially those who do not identify as Russian or live in predominantly non-Russian areas, frequently make use of the distinction between *ruskii* [Russian] and *ruskoiazychnyi* [Russophone]. A similarly nuanced understanding of Russianness also pervades the language of identity, citizenship, and state in the Russian Federation, as demonstrated by the distinctions between the ethno-national descriptor *ruskii* [Russian] and the term *rossiiskii* [of the Russian Federation]. This is also a meaningful distinction in the independent post-Soviet states, where the identifier of *ruskoiazychnyi* [Russophone] or *ruskogovoriashchii* [Russian-speaking] plays an increasing role in public and official spheres of life: in education, in the degree of language proficiency required for jobs, in the form of language tests for potential political candidates, and in the media.³¹ Kazakhstani scholars noted in 2004 that “Russian-language-ness” [*ruskoiazychie*], or, as I would term it, Russophonia, had become a fundamental aspect of Kazakh culture, and that Russian-language writing in Kazakhstan was

³¹ Pål Kolstø, “The price of stability. Kazakhstani control mechanisms in a bipolar cultural and demographic situation,” *Democracy and Pluralism in the Muslim Areas of the Former Soviet Union*, University of Tel Aviv, 7–9 November 1999.

“not just a literary school, but a widespread literary tendency, which appeared at the border [*na granitse*] and on the confluence [*na styke*] of two cultures and literatures.”³²

Moreover, a direct calque of “Russophonia” was recently coined in the Russian language, and similar concepts have been in use for over ten years. The Uzbekistani poet Shamshad Abdullayev introduced the adjective *russkofonnyi* [Russophone] in 1998 to describe the multicultural milieu of his Russian-speaking poetic circle in Central Asia’s Fergana Valley.³³ In 2002 the journalist Mikhail Gusman introduced the term *russkofoniia* as “the unified informational space of the Russian language, in which people raised in the system of the Russian language and culture live and work, irrespective of national boundaries, place of residence, religion or creed, etc.”³⁴ Kazakhstani scholar German Kim later adopted *russkofoniia* in an essay on the ramifications of Russian as the language of Internet communication in Central Asia. He also identified its analogue in political discourse, the idea of the *russkii mir* [Russian world/Russian society]. None other than Russian President Vladimir Putin is responsible for the present meaning of this term, first using it in a 2001 summit to describe an entity extending “beyond the geographical borders of Russia and even far beyond the boundaries of the Russian ethnos.”³⁵ Kim points to Putin’s 2007 establishment of the Russian World Foundation, a soft power initiative designed to promote Russian culture throughout Eurasia, as evidence of the Russian government’s continuing efforts to affect the linguistic and cultural dynamics of the

³² S. S. Kirabaev et. al., *Literatura narodov Kazkahstana* (Almaty: Gylym, 2004), 295.

³³ Shamshad Abdullaev, “Poeziia i Fergana,” *Znamiia* 1 (1998), <http://magazines.russ.ru/znamia/1998/1/abdul.html>.

³⁴ “Mikhail Gusman, “Russkofoniia mirovogo informatsionnogo polia,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, October 7, 2002, http://www.ng.ru/project/2002-07-10/9_field.html.

³⁵ G. N. Kim, “Russkoiazychnyi internet kak instrument rossiiskogo vlianiia v postsovetskoi tsentral’noi azii,” 2011, http://world.lib.ru/k/kim_german_nikolaewich/17.shtml.

post-Soviet world.³⁶ The foundation's own website defines the "Russian world" in the following way:

The "Russian world" is not only Russians, not only Russian citizens, not only our compatriots in countries of the near and far abroad, and emigrants from Russia and their descendants. It is also foreign citizens, speakers of the Russian language, those who study or teach the language, and all who are sincerely interested in Russia, and who worry about its future.³⁷

A similarly global outlook on the Russian-speaking world is evident in the stated mission of the Russian Prize [*Ruskaia premiia*], an annual literary competition dedicated exclusively to "Russophone [*russkoiazychnye*] writers living in any country of the world outside the borders [*za predelami*] of the Russian Federation," with the goal of "preserving and developing" the Russian language as "a *unique phenomenon* of world culture" [emphasis mine].³⁸ Funded primarily by the Eurasian Research Institute, a Russian NGO dedicated to maintaining "cultural, humanitarian, and educational connections between Russia and the former USSR,"³⁹ the prize recognizes not only outstanding works of literature, but Russophone cultural institutions as well. Since 2010, the fund has conferred an additional award to the organizers of "cultural centers, publishing houses, archives, literary festivals, forums, and conferences" for their efforts to "preserve and develop the traditions of Russian culture" outside of the Russian Federation.⁴⁰

³⁶ Quoted in *ibid.* In addition to its forty-nine centers throughout the former Soviet Union, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the Russkii Mir foundation maintains two centers in the U.S. (New York and Washington, D.C.), one in Gyaquil, Ecuador, and one in Havana, Cuba. Its efforts are similar to many other international organizations for the promotion of national culture, such as the Confucius Institute, British Council, American Centers, the Goethe Institute, etc. Russkii Mir, "Tsentry i kabinety," Accessed June 2, 2013, <http://www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/rucenter/catalogue.jsp?pager.offset=0&pageIndex=1&pageSize=30>.

³⁷ Russkii Mir, "O Fonde," accessed June 2, 2013, <http://www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/fund/about>. Quoted in Kim, "Russkoiazychnyi internet."

³⁸ Ruskaia premiia, "Usloviia konkursa," accessed May 21, <http://www.russpremia.ru/conditions/>.

³⁹ Institut evraziiskikh isledovani, "O fonde," accessed May 23, <http://www.ea-studies.ru/o-fonde.html>.

⁴⁰ Ruskaia premiia, "O fonde," accessed May 23, <http://www.russpremia.ru>.

Taken in aggregate, these initiatives indicate that the idea of Russophonia has already emerged independently from several different sources and seems to be gaining currency rapidly.

Therefore the potential discipline of Russophone Studies—as the synthesis of a range of literary, sociolinguistic, and cultural studies—would provide the crucial interdisciplinary space for the examination of these pressing contemporary issues.

Institutional Implications

For all Russophonia's theoretical potential, there are also practical advantages to developing a new avenue of inquiry in Slavic/Eurasian studies. Because it necessarily engages with areas traditionally considered “peripheral” to the Slavic discipline, e.g. the Caucasus or the Russian-speaking diaspora, Russophone Studies would form a suitable contribution to the newest wave of scholarship in those areas. True to its new name, the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) has noted a surge in scholarship outside the traditional boundaries of the field: the number of panels on postcolonial, Eurasian, or Central Asian topics has more than *doubled* between 2004 and 2013.⁴¹ This in itself indicates a step toward bridging a much-maligned gap between Slavic/Russian Studies and Eurasian/Central Asian Studies, as well as a newfound flexibility of disciplinary boundaries.⁴²

Additionally, Russophone Studies may aid in addressing a series of critical institutional problems identified in the Modern Language Association's 2011 report on the state of instruction

⁴¹ The ASEEES online archive of convention programs provides a window into scholars' changing interests: <http://aseees.org/convention/pastconventions.html>.

⁴² One of the long-decried problems in Eurasian Studies is that the Cold War-era disciplinary compartmentalization has contributed to persistent myopia and a lack of synthesizing approaches. A notable work on this phenomenon is Yuri Breghel's *Notes on the Study of Central Asia*, Papers on Inner Asia 28 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1996).

in the field.⁴³ The report discusses recent fundamental changes in the role of language and literary/cultural studies in undergraduate education, warning that the traditional “two-tiered configuration” of lower-division language sequences that “feed into” courses on canonical literature “has outlived its usefulness and needs to evolve.” Departments are no longer solely responsible for training the next generation of literature specialists, the authors maintain, but rather to foster “translingual and transcultural competence” in the new generation of globalized, mobile, and multicultural students. The report offers a correspondingly updated view of language acquisition, which no longer aims “to replicate the competence of an educated native speaker,” but instead “places value on the ability to operate between languages.” Russophone studies may play a role in answering the MLA’s call for “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses.”

The 2011 MLA report actually echoes observations made over a decade ago in French and Francophone studies, which have since led to positive changes in that field. In 2002 Françoise Lionnet stressed the importance of “understanding and theorizing the interplay between dominant and second or muted languages,” and encouraged French and Francophone departments “to teach languages not just as expressions of one or another narrow national culture but as instruments of communication that are first and foremost transcultural and transnational.”⁴⁴ Although many factors affect enrollments, it is interesting to note that Lionnet’s remarks coincided with a reversal of the precipitous three-decade decline of French enrollments

⁴³ MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, “Foreign Language and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” May 23, 2007, http://www.mla.org/pdf/forlang_news_pdf.pdf.

⁴⁴ Françoise Lionnet, “National Language Departments in the Era of Transnational Studies,” *PMLA* 117, no. 5 (Oct., 2002): 1252–1253.

in the United States, with a modest but steady increase of 7% between 2002 and 2009.⁴⁵ Similar “transcultural and transnational” approaches are currently revolutionizing Russian language teaching, yet corresponding changes in literary and area studies curricula have yet to fully materialize. Following a nearly 50% drop in enrollments in the early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian language instruction in the United States is now beginning to recoup its losses, sustained in part by the classification of Russian as a Critical Language by the U.S. Department of State. Further affirming the multiculturalism of the Russophone world, Critical Language programs in Russia operate from the historic Muslim Turkic population centers of Ufa and Kazan’.⁴⁶ Back in the U.S., groundbreaking research on heritage speakers of Russian, as well as developments in computer-assisted language learning, have yielded new, “transnational and transcultural” curricula and pedagogical methods.⁴⁷ Yet as overall government funding of language and area studies hits an all-time low, critics fear the demise of the traditional

⁴⁵ Enrollment statistics are from the Modern Language Association’s “Language Enrollment Database, 1958–2009,” accessed July 3, 2013, http://www.mla.org/flsurvey_search.

⁴⁶ “Critical Language Scholarship Program,” http://www.clscholarship.org/lang_2013_russian.php

⁴⁷ *Russian for Russians* by Olga Kagan, Tatiana Akishina, and Richard Robin (Slavica, 2002) is one such example of a textbook for heritage learners of Russian. Yet transnational approaches and interactive online platforms are not limited to materials for heritage speakers. *Beginner’s Russian*, a textbook for Russian as a foreign language by Olga Kagan, Ganna Kudyma, and Frank Miller (Hippocrene Books, Inc., 2010) contains a significant online component, and it also features Los Angeles-based heritage speakers, rather than ostensibly “native” Russian speakers in a Russian setting, for its audio and video materials. The Title VI Heritage Language Resource Center facilitates a great deal of research in this area. In Russia, meanwhile, instructors are developing new textbooks and programs—and even special schools—for the instruction of migrants from the republics of the former Soviet Union. One example is Anna Vladimirovna Golubaeva’s *We Live and Work in Russia: a Russian Language Textbook for Labor Migrants* [*My zhivem i rabotaem v Rossii: uchebnik russkogo iazyka dlia trudovykh migrantov*] (St. Petersburg: Zlatoust, 2011). Also notable is the 2013 textbook *Foundations of Russian Language and Culture* [*Osnovy russkogo iazyka i kul’tury*], a joint effort by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Federal Migration Service. According to one report, the Russian Orthodox Church is responsible for 12 of the country’s 253 free language courses for migrants. Maksim Semenov, “RPTs vystupila uchebnik russkogo iazyka dlia migrantov,” *Vzgliad*, June 3, 2013, <http://vz.ru/news/2013/7/3/639800.html>.

language and literature department as we know it.⁴⁸ Thus, in an era when the appeal and financial support of Eurasian Studies is still tied to national security interests, and when Russian language teaching is staking new ground in transnational approaches, the creation of corresponding interdisciplinary avenues in literary studies does not merely satisfy scholarly fascination—it may also contribute to institutional survival.

What (and where) is Russophobia?

Assigning a name to the phenomenon of Russophobia is only the beginning. Although Russophobia lends itself to fairly straightforward definitions as the use of the Russian language by non-Russians, the task of unraveling its manifestations and implications is far from simple. The first step in this process is a short discussion (and deconstruction) of the term itself, along with its increasingly weighty derivations. Lifted directly from Shu-mei Shih's definition of the Sinophone, which will receive a great deal more attention later in this section, Russophone is a calque of the French adjective *francophone* ("French-speaking"). According to Belinda Jack, the term first came into use in the late nineteenth century as a socio-linguistic and geopolitical term "to describe French-speaking populations and to describe a French-speaking bloc."⁴⁹ The French noun *francophonie*, therefore, designates the space in which francophone linguistic interactions take place. This terminology was revived in the 1960s to describe literature written in the former French colonies of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean; and in the present day it is generally taken to refer to any literature "written in the French (or a recognizably French)

⁴⁸Laura L. Adams, "The Crisis of Funding for Area Studies," *Newsnet* 53, no. 2 (March, 2013), 1. <http://aseees.org/newsnet/2013-03.pdf>. For a concise assessment of the "area studies crisis," at the time of its onset, see Peter Rutland, "Remapping the World After the Crisis in Area Studies," *Diaspora* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 129–136. Rutland's article is actually a review of a book-length study on the subject, Neil Waters, ed. *Beyond the Area Studies Wars: Toward a New International Studies* (Hanover, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Belinda Jack, ed., *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

language by a writer who is not French, or by a writer who believes his or her identity is not French (even if he or she has become a French national).” Placing the utmost emphasis on undoing the conflation of nation, ethnicity, citizenship, and language, Jack concludes that “to describe a literary text as ‘francophone’ is to distinguish it from a French text and therefore to emphasize a certain difference.”⁵⁰ In the same way, I use the adjective Russophone (“Russian-speaking”) to refer to Russian-speaking people as well as to distinguish literature written in Russian by self-professed non-Russians, but also to posit language use as a point of departure for exploring the unique conditions and experiences created by the central fact of Russian dominance in Eurasia. Russophonia includes, therefore, both ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas outside of the Russian federation, notably in émigré centers of the United States, Israel, Western Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus

By reminding us of *francophonie*’s nineteenth-century origins as a social and political designation, Belinda Jack implicates writers—and the scholars who study them—in the process of affirming imperial power throughout geographical and social space. Despite the breakup of French imperial power in the twentieth century, the enduring cultural capital of the French language accompanies the continuation of Western hegemony. Ultimately “to write in the French (or a French) language is to participate in *la francophonie*.”⁵¹ This realization gives rise to questions about the boundaries and implications of Russophonia as a concept. Is Russophonia a political bloc unified by a common language—and is it therefore synonymous with the post-

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Indeed, the idea of the French language enforcing a neo-imperial order has led some critics to abandon the focus on *francophonie* altogether, using the term “Literatures in French” instead. Winifred Woodhull points out an additional disadvantage of *francophonie* on the institutional level: the “hegemony of French literature in relation to the literatures of the former colonies” is “supported by the structure of French departments in the United States, where one ‘Francophone’ specialist (if there is one at all) is presumed capable of covering the vast and heterogeneous field of literatures in French.” Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxii.

Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States? Certainly not, since Russian is spoken widely in linguistically diverse former Soviet states which are not members of the CIS, such as Georgia and the Baltic Republics, and moreover it has long been spoken as a diaspora language throughout the world—and not only among ethnic Russians. The wide global dispersal of Russophones also disqualifies Russophonia from being synonymous with “Eurasia,” which has lately become the catchall term for the geopolitical vestige of Russian dominance in the post-imperial, post-Soviet world.⁵² At the same time, however, while my definition of Russophonia is fundamentally a linguistic one, I must also point out that the political and social dimensions of language use are impossible to ignore. After all, to speak of the “use” of the Russian language by non-Russians gives rise to fundamental questions about the relationship of communication and power. To what end is language “used” and why are some languages more “useful” than others? For what and for whom are Russian-speakers themselves—as distinguished from ethnic Russians—“useful”? And what, if not language, forms the basis for a meaningful distinction between Russians and non-Russians? The continued presence of the Russian language even outside the boundaries of the former Soviet Union or the Russian Empire hints at a certain utility, a reluctant necessity, or even a fraught desirability of the Russian language; and the struggle to come to terms with it is a prominent feature in the work of Russophone writers, artists, and other culture workers. Therefore Russophonia is best defined as a linguistic field of discourse that is

⁵² Eurasia is one of the most widely debated geo-political concepts in post-Soviet studies as well as in the post-Soviet world itself, and the theory of Eurasianism has its own fascinating history that unfortunately falls outside the scope of this study. See A.V. Ivanov, et. al. *Evraziistvo: Kliuchevie idei, tsennosti, politicheskie prioriteti* (Barnaul and Moscow: Izd-vo AGAU, 2007); Victor Shnirelman, “To Make a Bridge: Eurasian Discourse in the Post-Soviet World,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 68–85; and Mark Bassin, “Nationhood, natural regions, *mestorazvitie*: environmentalist discourses in classical Eurasianism” in *Space, Place, and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History*, ed. Mark Bassin, 49–80 (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010). The theories of twentieth-century historian Lev Gumilev, which have returned to contemporary discourse on Eurasia with a vengeance, are available in the recent collected works volume *Ritmy Evrazii: epokhi i tsivilizatsii* (St. Petersburg: Kristall, 2003).

connected to, but not bound by, Russian political and economic power, and which is held together by a combination of social, cultural, political, economic, and spatial relationships.

As the manifestation of spoken and written discourse in Russian, Russophonia circumscribes and characterizes a variety of material and abstract spaces. It closely resembles Henri Lefebvre’s conception of social space as a “dialectical relationship” existing “within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.”⁵³ It is most obviously a geographical space, as we can readily see in the vast range of Russian toponyms throughout the former Russian empire and Soviet Union. Despite the post-Soviet rush to excise Russia’s influence from the history and topography of the newly independent nations, city streets from Riga to Dushanbe still bear the names of Russian historical and literary figures like Dostoevskii, Pushkin, and Tolstoi. Ambivalence toward Russified public space has been a fixture of Russophone writing as far back as the 1960s, with Olzhas Suleimenov’s poems “In Pushkin Square [*Na ploshchadi Pushkina*]” and “Lenin Street in our Town [*Ulitsa Lenina v nashem gorodke*],”⁵⁴ and it perhaps reached its apotheosis with Chingiz Aitmatov’s 1980 novel *The Day Lasts Longer than a Thousand Years* [*I dol’she veka dlitsia den’*], whose main plots hinged on the Soviet government’s usurpation of a traditional Kazakh burial ground for a top-secret missile defense project. In the following exchange between a beleaguered Kazakh funeral party and an ethnic Kazakh official on guard at the perimeter of the restricted zone, the Russian language represents the unassailable authority of Soviet power:

- Биз, бизрой, карагым. Ана-Бейитке жетпей турып калдык. Калай да болса, жардамдеш, карагым - сказал Едигей, стараясь, чтобы награды на груди попали на глаза молодому офицеру.

⁵³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 39.

⁵⁴ Olzhas Suleimenov, *Noch’—Parizhanka* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhskoe gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry), 9–11; id., *Dobroe Vremia Voskhoda: Kniga Stikhov* (Alma-Ata: Zhazushy, 1964), 151–152.

На лейтенанта Тансыкбаева это не произвело никакого впечатления, он лишь сухо кашлянул и, когда старик Едигей намерился было снова заговорить, холодно упретил его:

- Товарищ посторонний, обращайтесь ко мне на русском языке. Я лицо при исполнении служебных обязанностей, — пояснил он, хмуря черные брови над раскосыми глазами.⁵⁵

“Biz, Bizroi, karagym. Ana Beitke zhetpei turyr kaldyk. Kalai da bolsa, zhardamdesh, karagym,” Yedigei said, trying to make medals on his chest catch the eye of the young officer.

But it made no impression on Lieutenant Tansykbaev, who only coughed dryly and, when the old man Yedigei began to speak again, cut him off coldly:

“Comrade outsider, speak to me in Russian. I am an official on duty,” he clarified, knitting his black eyebrows over slanting eyes.

When the Kazakh official goes on to inform the funeral party that “outsiders are strictly forbidden to enter the zone... under any pretext,” his Russian fluency not only enforces the physical barrier between privileged insiders and disadvantaged outsiders, but it also nullifies the outsiders’ historical claims to the land, as they struggle to justify themselves, literally, on someone else’s terms:

- Что значит посторонний! - вдруг подал голос до сих пор молчавший зять-алкоголик.- Кто посторонний? Мы посторонний? - сказал он, багровея дряблым, испытанным лицом, а губы у него стали сизые.

- Вот именно: с каких это пор? - поддержал его Длинный Эдильбай.

Стараясь не переступить некую дозволенную границу, зять-алкоголик не повысил голоса, а лишь сказал, понимая, что он плохо говорит по-русски, задерживая и выправляя слова:

- Это наш, наше сарозекский кладбище. И мы, мы, сарозекский народ, имеем право хоронить здесь своя людей. [...]

“What does that mean, an outsider?” piped up the alcoholic son-in-law, who had been silent until now. “Who is the outsider? Are we the outsiders?” His haggard, flabby face was reddening and his lips had turned blue-gray.

“That’s right, since when?” said Edil’bai the Long in support.

Trying not to overstep his bounds, the alcoholic son-in-law raised his voice, but, knowing that he spoke Russian badly, he held back and adjusted his words, saying only:

⁵⁵ In the original text, a Russian translation of the Kazakh speech is provided in a footnote: “It’s us, it’s us, sonny. They won’t let us into the cemetery. Do something to help us, sonny.” This and all other citations of the novel refer to Chingiz Aitmatov, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1983), 468–470.

“This is ours, our Sarozek cemetery. And we, we, the Sarozek people, we have the right to bury our own people here. [...]”

Aside from its uses to signify state authority, Russian continues to predominate in unofficial spaces as well. In the twenty-first century, Russophonia is also increasingly a virtual space, where the Russian language serves as the preferred interface for online social networking communities throughout the world, and particularly in the post-Soviet world. However, just as virtual spaces are tethered to the physical realm of hardware and telecommunications infrastructure, Russophonia generates its own vast topography contoured by the particularities of history and place. To name and to study this phenomenon is to also acknowledge its heterogeneity, and in doing so we may find that Russophonia appears starkly different from Belarus to Abkhazia, from Chuvashia to California.

Yet Russophonia is also an intimate physical space, manifesting on the body and in the body's actions.⁵⁶ This is evident in Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov's portrayal of Russian acquisition as “that dreaded two-tongued-ness,” Mirza Fatali Akhundov's poetic dialogues between a Persian subject and his Russified heart, and Sandzhar Ianyshv's representation of a migrant's nostalgia for Central Asia through the imagery of organs, tongues, and glands.⁵⁷ Language and the body intersect in the racialization of non-Russians in Eduard Bagirov's 2006 novel *Gastarbaiter*, a first-person narrative of the travails of migrant workers in post-Soviet Moscow. Bagirov's mixed-heritage main character, whose biographical details bear an uncanny resemblance to Bagirov's own, embodies the contradictions of having a “foreign” birthplace and “foreign” heritage, yet also having the physical appearance and language capabilities of a

⁵⁶ In Lefebvre's triadic conception, space “presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the *perceived*.” *The Production of Space* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 40.

⁵⁷ Sandzhar Ianyshv, “Tashkent kak zerkalo nevernogo menia,” in *Gorod Kotorogo Net*, *Malyi shelkovyi put'* 2 (Moscow: Izd-vo Ruslana Elinina 2001), 89.

Russian. This contradiction is neatly inscribed in his name, Evgenii Aliyev, which is a combination of a Russian first name (perhaps a nod to Pushkin's rootless hero?) and a Russified surname derived from an Arabic root, which codes him as Muslim. The result is that he is doubly racialized, and ostracized wherever he goes in the post-Soviet world:

Итак, давайте знакомиться. Я – Евгений Алиев. Мне двадцать лет. В Азии я – гонимый русский, в России же – не менее гонимый «чёрный», в просторечии «чурка». Неважно, что на азербайджанца, благодаря русской маме, я похож весьма условно, плевать, что говорю я порусски без акцента – я же родился в «чуркистане», да ещё и ношу такую неудобную фамилию! В современной России этого вполне хватает, чтобы нередко чувствовать себя синклерльюисовским Кингсбладом.⁵⁸

So let's get acquainted. I'm Evgenii Aliyev. I'm twenty years old. In Asia I'm a persecuted Russian, and in Russia I'm not just persecuted—I'm a "black," or in common parlance, a "churka." It doesn't matter that, thanks to my Russian mother, I look only somewhat like an Azerbaijani, and it doesn't matter that I speak Russian without an accent - I was born in "churkistan," and what's more, I bear such an inconvenient last name! In modern Russia, sometimes that's enough to make you feel like Sinclair Lewis's Kingsblood.

By invoking *Kingsblood Royal*, Sinclair Lewis's 1947 novel of racial "passing" in postwar America, Bagirov highlights the discrepancy between the external markers of ethnic and racial identity whose significance is socially determined—physical appearance, language fluency, birthplace, family name—and the ways they influence and sometimes contrast with the subject's inner sense of self. In this way, Bagirov's passage leads us to perhaps the most important domain of Russophonia: subjectivity. Russophonia occupies a distinct space in the mind, directing the process of self-identification and the positioning of the self in relation to the outside world.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Eduard Bagirov, *Gastarbaiter* (Moscow: Populiarnaia literatura, 2007), 5.

⁵⁹ Under this understanding of Russophonia as the dynamic interaction between subjects and the systems that constitute their environment, Russophone literature falls closely in line with French theorist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field, as delineated in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

Finally, any discussion of Russophone literature must necessarily engage with the issue of the Russian language itself – and how Russophonia shapes it. Aleksandr Fainberg, who in 2004 was named a People’s Poet of Uzbekistan, describes the Russian language in Tashkent as “much cleaner, much more classic here than in many Russian cities,” due to the benevolent presence of “Tsarist officials... scientists, teachers, and doctors.” He adds: “Russians themselves admit it.”⁶⁰ Fainberg’s assertion, though entirely inaccurate, does much to clarify the desire for ownership of a language, as well as the anxiety about cultural legitimacy that can occur on the periphery of an empire. In this regard, it corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of minor literature, in which “a minority constructs from within a major language.”⁶¹ Far from being preserved in the stasis of a “pure” or “classic” form, as in Fainberg’s wistful recollections, a major language undergoes a “becoming-other,” a “minorization” in the hands (and on the tongues) of writers on the boundaries of more than one nation, empire, or culture.⁶² The previously quoted passage from Aitmatov’s *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years* provides a fine example of language’s “becoming-other” in the outraged, non-normative Russian speech of one of the members of the Kazakh funeral party:

- Это наш, наше сарозекский кладбищ. И мы, мы, сарозекский народ, имеем право хоронить здесь своя людей. [...]

“This is ours, our Sarozek cemetery. And we, we, the Sarozek people, we have the right to bury our own people here. [...]”

⁶⁰ Andrei Kudryashov, “Prominent Tashkent poet Alexander Fainberg becomes a People's Poet of Uzbekistan,” Fergana Information Agency, Sept. 19, 2004, <http://enews.fergananews.com/article.php?id=607>.

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Theory and History of Literature 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16–17.

⁶² Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and life,” in *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5.

Here the rupture in grammatical gender, case endings, and adjective agreement occurs in phrases conveying possession: *nash, nashe sarozekskii kladbishch; khoronit' zdes' svoia liudei*. The same problem occurs in the speaker's shocked reaction to being excluded from the cemetery grounds: "Are we the outsiders? [*My—postoronnyi?*]" In this exchange, Aitmatov manipulates the mechanics of Russian grammar to convey the speaking subject's loss of autonomy, authority over the land, and traditional identity. Such losses are marked by a failure to produce the normative language of the majority. This exchange stands in contrast to the normative language of the main characters' dialogues throughout the novel, which are assumed to be in Kazakh and are signaled by recognizably Kazakh words such as *dzhigit* [brave warrior] or the honorific suffix *-aga* appended to proper names. In this way, Chingiz Aitmatov's Russophone novel brings the reader into the ostensible world of the Kazakh language, into Kazakh subjective space. The heated exchange between the Kazakh funeral party and the Russified Kazakh guard ruptures this carefully constructed "suspension of disbelief," and provides a jarring reminder that the reader is firmly outside of this subjective space.

Extrapolating from Aitmatov, I suggest that utterances in non-Russian languages as well as utterances in non-normative Russian, along with what Johanna Domokos terms the "artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts" of non-Russian cultures, make their way into the Russophone text and further distinguish it from the Russian text.⁶³ Based on the degree to which the author foreignizes, domesticates, or explains this information, it is possible to discern the author's audiences, and even to generate starkly different readings of a single Russophone text. In this

⁶³ The terminology of "artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts" has its roots in early twentieth-century anthropology, but Johanna Domokos has adopted it for literary analysis in several studies of authors in multicultural and multilingual environments. See Domokos, "Notes on the Prospects of Uralic Literary Studies," in Johanna Laakso and Johanna Domokos eds., *Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Finno-Ugric Literatures*, *Finno-Ugric Studies in Austria* 8 (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2011), 2.

way the Russophone text, echoing the Francophone text, is a site of differentiation between “the French sense of *langue* (tongue) and *langage* (system).” As with the Francophone text, it is necessary to ask whether the Russophone text “stages a dramatic confrontation between the *langue* and the *langage*.”⁶⁴ However, the relationship is not always one of confrontation, but frequently also mimicry, dialogue, transference, and occasionally unison. Russophone writing is inherently translating, transferring, and interpreting; and because the label itself indicates a distinction from Russian identity—or in the words of Shu-Mei Shih, an identity “bound up with linguistic difference”—it is also inherently Othering.⁶⁵ For this reason, many Russophone texts demonstrate a preoccupation with establishing identity, and also with categorizing and hierarchizing identities, and this is reflected in the theoretical and literary works of Guseinov and Auezov. Yet despite the drive to pin down an author’s cultural essence, works of Russophone literature often belong to more than one literary tradition concurrently, and Russophone writers are acutely aware of this gap between traditions, between identities, and between locations. In fact, it is possible to say that Russophone authors reside in the very essence of culture’s “in-between-ness.”⁶⁶

Teasing out the threads of meaning in Russophonia reveals Russian literature not only to be a deserving subject of postcolonial analysis, but in fact to be much more in dire need of new postcolonial approaches. In this regard, Russophone Studies has its closest antecedent in the emerging field of Sinophone Studies, which faces similar obstacles to adopting European models of postcoloniality. Shu-mei Shih, who introduced the concept of Sinophone literature in the mid-

⁶⁴ Jack, *Francophone Literatures*, 18.

⁶⁵ Shu-mei Shih, ed. *Sinophone Studies: a Critical Reader*, Global Chinese Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3.

⁶⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

2000s, points out China's unique position as a past victim of Western imperial exploitation, yet also as a former empire engaged in oppressing, assimilating, and also at turns Orientalizing its own minority populations. Chinese critiques of western imperialism, she writes, "easily slip into an unreflective nationalism, whose flip side may be the new imperialism."⁶⁷ Additionally, much like the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China proves particularly resistant to postcolonial scrutiny from the Western academy, in part due to "lingering leftist romanticism" but also owing to the West's "political and economic need" to appease China. Studying Sinophone literature, which is produced both by minority groups within China and diaspora groups outside its borders, provides a much-needed critique of the "China-centrism and the hegemonic call of Chinese-ness," while also disrupting "the chain of equivalence established, since the rise of nation-states, among language, culture, ethnicity, and nationality." The concept of the Sinophone thus creates space for exploring "the protean, kaleidoscopic, creative, and overlapping margins" between the nation-state and the enigmatic qualities of nationhood. The recent critical work on Sinophone literature stands as a testament to the possibilities of postcolonialism to accommodate the literature outside of Western European world powers. Particularly salient in this regard is that it enables a critique of the relationship between geopolitics and academic practices, a necessity that any Slavic, East European, or Eurasian Studies department weathering the post-Cold War "area studies crisis" can attest to.

Who are Russophone writers?

⁶⁷ Shu-mei Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (May 2011), 709–710. See also id., *Visibility and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, Asia Pacific Modern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and id. ed., *Sinophone Studies: a Critical Reader*.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have delineated Russophone literature into three major categories. The first and broadest category is Russian-language texts written by non-Russian identified authors. The second category is Russian-language texts written and published outside the Russian Federation by authors of any ethnicity or nationality (including Russian). The third category includes bilingual or multilingual writing and self-translation.

The first category comprises a wide range of authors and sociolinguistic environments, including indigenous and minority groups within the territory of the Russian Federation and the states preceding it, many who are capable of writing both in Russian and in a mother tongue. One such author is Askol'd Bazhanov (1937-2012), a Skolt Sami from the Kola peninsula whose poetry engages in a minoritarian interpretation of historical events such as Soviet collectivization, the Second World War, the Sami people's assimilation into Russian culture, and the ecological destruction of the traditional Sami homeland in the wake of large-scale industrial and hydroelectric projects.⁶⁸ This category also includes authors belonging to titular nationalities of former Soviet republics and minority groups residing therein: Fazail Iskander of Abkhazia, Sukhbat Aflatuni and Sandzhar Ianyshv of Uzbekistan, Natig Rasul-Zade and Anar Rza of Azerbaijan, Timur Pulatov of Uzbekistan, Chingiz Aitmatov of Kyrgyzstan, and Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov and Anatolii Kim of Kazakhstan. This category also comprises authors who identify themselves as belonging to a particular national or ethnic group, but who have lived abroad either permanently or intermittently for a substantial part of their careers: Bakhyt Kenzhev, Gennadii Aigi, Chingiz Guseinov, Rustam Ibragimbekov, Chingiz Aitmatov, and Olzhas Suleimenov, to name but a few. Additionally, although I do not focus on it in the present study, one of the most potentially interesting groups of writers in this category are those who

⁶⁸ Johanna Domokos analyzes his work in terms of these experiences in "Liminality in the poetry of Askold Bazhanov," in Askold Alekseevich Bozhanov, *Stikhi o saamskom krae/Verses on the Saami Land*, Kleine saamische Schriften 2 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2009), 65–70.

write in Russian in the predominantly Slavic countries bordering Russia, such as Andrei Kur'kov of Ukraine or Vasiliï Bykov of Belarus. This phenomenon, too, has a parallel with Francophone studies. In a 2003 issue of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to the trajectory of Francophone Studies, Farid Lassoud and Christopher Miller note that while “Sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, Quebec, the Caribbean, and even Vietnam” had been unquestionably included within the borders of Francophone Studies, scholars had yet to “account for the *francophonie* of European nations like Belgium and Switzerland, which are not colonies of France and therefore not part of the same problematic.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the “final frontier” of Russophone studies may very well turn out to be Russia’s own backyard, since the Russophonia of Ukraine and Belarus represents the greatest blurring—and yet also the most passionate conflict—between Russian and non-Russian identities.

Authors from the second category comprise what is currently known as émigré or diaspora literature, which can include canonical authors (Turgenev, Tiutchev, Bunin, Nabokov, Brodsky), contemporary bestsellers such as Mikhail Shishkin and Dina Rubina, as well as lesser-known figures such as Pavel Bannikov, Il’ia Odegov, and Valerii Pereleshin.⁷⁰ This category may include authors who write entirely in another language, such as Gary Shteyngart. Importantly, the topic of Russian-ness is explored through the author’s adaptation of the Russian language to non-Russian experiences and themes.

Many of the authors from the first and second categories also belong in the third category, by virtue of actively translating texts from another language into Russian, or

⁶⁹ Laroussi, Farid, and Christopher L. Miller, “Editors’ Preface: French and Francophone: The Challenge of Expanding Horizons,” *Yale French Studies* 103 (2003), 1.

⁷⁰ Pereleshin is a mid-20th century poet who mainly published in Harbin, China and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. See Evgenii Vitkovskii, “Valerii Pereleshin: Poslednii sonety,” *Novyi Zhurnal* (2002): 29. <http://magazines.russ.ru/nj/2002/229/pere.html>.

conversely, by translating or adapting Russian texts into another language. Among the most compelling and under-studied works are the translations of nineteenth-century authors who entered the Russophone field through auto-translations and adaptations of Western literature. One example is Mirza Fatali Akhundov's 1837 elegy, "On the Death of Pushkin [Na smert' Pushkina]," which he composed in Persian, self-translated into Russian, and published in Moscow in the journal *Moskovskii Nabliudatel'*. Similarly Abai Kunanbaev, who is considered one of the founding fathers of modern Kazakh literature, synthesized Central Asian and European literary traditions by adapting Russian lyric poetry into Kazakh ballad forms, and transforming Tatiana's letter to Onegin into a Kazakh ballad. Owing to the sheer breadth of this phenomenon, the production, reception, and analysis of Russophone translations is conditioned by several factors: varying degrees of Russification on the part of the author, whether the author's non-Russian mother tongue has a literary tradition of its own which informs the author's Russian-language texts, and the language profile of the area in which the author publishes – e.g., how many languages are used in public life, and how many outlets for publication in Russian exist. Above all, I stress that these categories are not fixed; Russophone authors can self-identify and be identified in a multitude of ways. As future studies reveal more about them, Russophonia may emerge as just one of many possible planes of identification along the lines of poetic, regional, pan-national, pan-linguistic, or religious affiliations.

How does Russophonia work?

To illustrate the possibilities of Russophonia and the type of analysis it can generate, I will now give an example. The setting is Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, in the year 1986. Moscow's appointment of an ethnic Russian to the office of the First Party Secretary of Kazakh SSR

sparked riots in Alma-Ata, which then spread to several other cities before being violently suppressed by Soviet authorities. Known as the Zheltoqsan (December) uprising, it was among the first openly anti-government protests in the Soviet Union, and it was followed by a cascade of ethnically motivated uprisings leading up to the Soviet Union's collapse. "The Language Forgotten since Childhood [*Pozabytyi mnoi s detstva iazyk*]," a short poem by the Russophone author Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov, was slated to appear in the December issue of the Kazakhstani journal *Prostor*, but its publication was preempted as the uprisings intensified. Nevertheless, the poem reached Kazakhstani audiences when it was read aloud in a Voice of America broadcast by Bakhyt Kenzheev, a Russophone Kazakhstani poet living in Toronto.⁷¹ In spite of the crackdown on protesters, Moscow eventually relented and appointed an ethnic Kazakh to the position, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who would go on to become President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the architect of its post-Soviet national identity.

The memory of Zheltoqsan, which now stands as the foundation myth of the independent nation-state of Kazakhstan, is inextricable from the context of Kanap'ianov's poem, which has also taken on a mythic significance of its own among Kazakhstani writers. The initial dissemination of the poem via Voice of America, in turn, is dependent on the type of transnational connections made possible by Russophonia. The poem's subject matter, which at the time was highly politically sensitive, is actually a personal confession about the psychological effects of the process of Russification, foremost among them the splitting of identity which leads to the postcolonial subject's estrangement.

Позабытый мной с детства язык,
Пресловутое двуязычие,

⁷¹ V. V. Badikov, *Liniia sud'by* (Almaty: Zhibek zholy, 2002), 58. See also Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov, "Dvadsat' let tomu nazad," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, November 4, 2006, <http://newsite.kazpravda.kz/c/1162587877>. Reprinted with commentary by Valerii Antonov in id., *Vesy* (Almaty, Zhibek-zholy, 2008), 286–294; 345–351.

При котором теряю свой лик
И приобретаю двуличие.
Я пойму неизвестного мне
Уходящего аборигена,
Но когда среди ночи во сне
Перед предком склоняю колено,
Сознаю, что не верит он мне,
Как пришельцу из тяжкого плена.
Усмехнется он в той тишине:
"Ты меня недостойная смена."⁷²

The language I have forgotten since childhood,
That notorious two-tongued-ness,
In which I lose my own face,
And take on two-facedness.
I catch a fleeting aboriginal,
A stranger to me,
But in the middle of the night, in a dream,
When I bow before my ancestor,
I realize he does not believe me,
As if I'm some outsider from tight captivity,
He chortles in the silence:
"You are an unworthy successor."

Since the prevailing ideology of the time dictated that Russophone authors treat the Russian language as a positive development, as a way of uniting the Soviet Union's disparate nationalities under a common goal of building socialism, Kanap'ianov's poem was actually more subversive than it may seem to us today. Facing the social and psychological realities assimilating into a dominant foreign culture, Kanap'ianov's lyric subject "loses face" and his ability to communicate in his native language is shunted. Here Kanap'ianov's use of the figurative word *dvuiazychie* [literally "two-tongued-ness"] instead of the common academic synonym *bilingvizm* [bilingualism] establishes the theme of split identity by rhyming "two-tongued-ness" and "two faced-ness" [*dvulichie*]. This also binds together the concepts of language proficiency and outward identity. Thus the process of acquiring the Russian language serves to erase the subject's essential identifying characteristics, and with it his credibility and

⁷² Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov, *Izbrannoe*, vol. 1 (Almaty: Zhibek Zholy, 2011), 45.

acceptance into the aboriginal culture. The “two-faced” subject bows in disgrace before an imagined ancestor, whose condemnation—“you are unworthy” – signifies rejection by kin and community. Kanap’ianov’s description of this condition is remarkably similar to Leela Gandhi’s reading of the poem “Diwali,” by the Anglophone Indian writer Vikram Seth. In Seth’s poem, the subject is a “faultline,” embodying “the ‘separateness’ and ‘fear’ attached to the self-conscious acquisition of English.” “To speak in the desired way,” Gandhi concludes, “is from now on, to also learn how to speak against one’s self. It is to concede, as Seth does toward the end of the poem, that his “tongue is warped.”⁷³ Yet in Kanap’ianov’s case, this bold acknowledgment of split subjectivity resonated profoundly among his readers and fellow Russophone writers in the aftermath of the Zheltoqsan uprising. Kanap’ianov’s poetic account of “speaking against” himself and betraying his ancestors actually helped unite Kazakhs in their drive for self-governance. Kanap’ianov’s contemporaries note that the poem grew to symbolize Kazakhs’ solidarity in their shared experience of cultural erasure, and in doing so forged a new basis for their opposition to the power of the metropole.⁷⁴

Kanap’ianov’s simple poem is an example of the phenomenon I am outlining in this study: the use of the Russian language as a medium for expressing non-Russian perspectives and the social, political, and psychological realities that condition them. I will now provide a second example which illustrates another important advantage to the paradigm of Russophonia: the role of the Kyrgyz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov (1937-2008) in Russophone Soviet literature, contrasted with his posthumous appropriation in the contemporary construction of pan-Turkic

⁷³ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 13.

⁷⁴ N. Rovenskii notes that Soviet officials received the poem “with aggressive hostility” and considered it to be “no less than a call to revolt.” Meanwhile it galvanized Kazakh readers, as it “reflected the mood of a generation of people who did not speak their own native language, in the primordial homeland [*na iskonnoi zemle*] of their ancestors” and who “considered themselves to be inferior members of their ancient family.” Quoted in Badikov, *Liniia sud’by*, 58–59.

identity. Aitmatov's varied legacy illustrates the fact that Russophonia is not an exclusive category, but rather one of many possible discourses in which authors and reading audiences may participate.

Chingiz Aitmatov's lifetime coincides with a period of monumental changes in Central Asia brought about by the ascendance of Soviet power. His works depict the struggle to preserve elements of traditional Kazakh and Kyrgyz cultures, but also highlight the ways in which these cultures are hybridized in a totalitarian, multinational state. The assimilation of Aitmatov's characters into the Soviet system (represented variously by kolkhozes, railroads, the Communist Party, and the military/war effort) is depicted as the end-point of a long process of Russian colonization, which has profoundly altered traditional ways of life but has not erased them completely. Aitmatov's most enduring contribution to the culture of non-Russians in the Soviet Union was the concept of the *mankurt*, introduced in the bestselling novel of 1980, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years*. Aitmatov presented the *mankurt* as a legend from Kyrgyz folklore, referring to an imagined ritual practice of brainwashing captive enemy warriors. His novel interwove this legend with a contemporary tale of cultural erasure. Today, however, the concepts of *mankurt* and *mankurtizatsiia* [mankurtization] are widely used in the Russophone world as a metaphor for the traumatic process of cultural amnesia that accompanied the Russification and Sovietization of non-Russian populations.⁷⁵ This issue is central to the works of other Soviet Central Asian authors who are also seen as gatekeepers of traditional Turkic

⁷⁵ Joseph P. Mozur has provided the most thorough studies in English of the *mankurt* and Aitmatov's myth creation in general. See "Doffing 'Mankurt's Cap': Chingiz Aitmatov's 'The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years' and the Turkic National Heritage," *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 605 (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1987); id. *Parables from the Past: The Prose Fiction of Chingiz Aitmatov* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995). See also Nurbolat Dzhuanyshebekov, *Mukhtar Auezov v kontekste russkoi i mirovoi literatury* (Almaty: Iskander, 2007); Erika Haber, *The Myth of the Non-Russian: Iskander and Aitmatov's Magical Universe* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003).

cultures and collective memory in the wake of oppressive cultural and political forces, such as Olzhas Suleimenov and Mukhtar Shalakhonov.

Aitmatov's visibility in pan-Turkic spheres increased in the years leading up to his death in 2008, which marked nearly two decades of closer economic collaboration between Turkey and other Turkic-speaking states of the former Soviet Union. Turkish President Abdullah Gül was among the first world leaders to respond to the news of Aitmatov's death, characterizing the tragedy as a "loss not only for Turkic countries, but for the whole world," while the Uzbek writer and political dissident Muhammad Solih eulogized Aitmatov as "one of the greatest geniuses of the Turkic literary world" who embodied the "honor and dignity" of all Turks.⁷⁶ Soon afterward, the international pan-Turkic organization Turksoy formed a committee to nominate him for the Nobel Prize in literature, a move supported by the Ministries of Culture of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, along with the Russian Autonomous Republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Turksoy has funded several cultural events focused on Aitmatov, including a Turkish ballet performance based on his novel *Mother's Field* [*Materinskoe pole*] and an international conference entitled "Chingiz Aitmatov and the Renaissance of Turkic Civilization." This conference was held at Manas Turkish University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, which is one of several institutions of higher learning the Turkish government has established throughout Central Asia in recent years. With the stated goal of determining "[Aitmatov's] honorable place and leading role in the development of Turkic civilization," the conference featured speakers from throughout the CIS and Turkey, most of

⁷⁶ "Chingiz Aitmatov, A Modern Hero, Dies," Eurasianet.org, November 6, 2008, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp061108.shtml>.

whom delivered presentations in Turkish and Kyrgyz.⁷⁷ Such events reveal new economic, geopolitical, and above all cultural ties in the post-Soviet world, which are being forged despite the best efforts of Russia-centric organizations like the Russian World foundation and the “Russian Prize” to sustain a sense of unity among Russian speakers worldwide.

In examining the context and content of Kanap’ianov’s poem, and in comparing Aitmatov’s Soviet works to his post-Soviet legacy, we can see that politically-motivated attempts at nationalization, homogenization, and consolidation of identities have actually resulted in the opposite: hybridization, heterogeneity, and a multiplicity of discourses. The ease with which authors like Aitmatov and Kanap’ianov fit into more than one national or pan-national literary tradition reinforce the need for an apolitical, “anational” critical approach to literature written in the Russian language. This leads to a crucial revelation: most Russophone authors are fundamentally in-between, rather than within, the precise boundaries of nation, language, and territory that Soviet and national literary models presume. Russophonia is a useful and necessary designation for this very reason.

Selection principle

This dissertation is in no way meant to be comprehensive. Because Russophonia is such a broad field brimming with possibilities, there is no way I (or any scholar) could cover every movement and author in a single study. Instead, borrowing a metaphor from the motion picture industry in my hometown of Los Angeles, I will be presenting a series of exemplary works and moments from Russophone literary history that, in my estimation, serve as Russophonia’s most compelling

⁷⁷ Conference Organizing Committee, “First Circular,” Chingiz Aitmatov and the Renaissance of Turkic Civilization, Turkish Manas University, 2012, <http://www.manas.kg/index.php/en/component/content/article/1294-uluslararası-cengiz-aytmatov-ve-türk-uygarlığı-ve-roenesans-kongresi>.

“tent-pole features.” This also means I will be limiting myself severely in terms of genre, history, and geography. Because my definition of Russophonia is predicated on an understanding of language “use” as inherently tied to political power, I have broadly periodized my study according to Imperial, Soviet, and Post-Soviet eras. In terms of geography, I have chosen to analyze works primarily from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Practically speaking, I elected to highlight these regions because some of the most thoroughly articulated theories to date on the subject of Russophonia come from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan: Dzhuanyshbekov’s *marginal’naia literatura*, Guseinov’s *obshchnost’ mnogonatsional’noi literatury*, Kim and Abdullaev’s *ruskofoniia*, as well as its common synonym *russkoiazychie*. More generally, because the Russian Empire’s acquisition and colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia bears a much greater resemblance to the violent conquests, economic exploitations, and civilizing missions of European mercantile colonialism, these regions seemed to be the obvious place to begin drawing comparisons between Russophone literature and other postcolonial literatures. Within this geographical purview, I have chosen to focus primarily on authors from Turkic backgrounds, not only due to the richness of their literary works, but also because the Turkic populations of Eurasia are the most visible Others against which Russian identity historically has been established; therefore their writing in Russian makes for a fruitful investigation of the relationship of Russian literature to Russophone literature. While I recognize the overwhelming heterogeneity of Russia’s overland colonization, as well as the unique phenomenon of its internal colonization as theorized by Etkind and others, I have concluded that the Russophone tradition of Turkic writing from the Caucasus and Central Asia presents the most straightforward material for examining Russophonia’s central issues—and at the very least, in the absence of a unified tradition of scholarly work on the topic, it seems as good a place as any to start.

Chapter 2 follows the colonial expansion of the Russian Empire into Central Asia and the Caucasus, as non-Russian intellectuals came to be incorporated into the imperial apparatus as bureaucrats, language instructors, Orientalists, and translators. The resulting Russophone texts, such as the work of Azeri writer Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812–1878) and the famed Kazakh philosopher-bard Abai Kunanbaev (1845–1904), are a hybrid of traditional and newly transplanted cultural elements. These earliest Russophone authors were advocates for learning the Russian language and for closer allegiance with the Russian Empire, while also paving the way for the emergence of a discourse on the nation. I argue that the ideas of identity they advanced, along with the ideas of identity that subsequent generations “read into” their works, were directly impacted by their exposure to Western discourse on the nation, which in turn was a product of Russian colonization. By focusing on Akhundov’s and Abai’s literary representations of Russia’s most famed writer, Aleksandr Pushkin, I conclude that the appearance of the Russian-language text in the Caucasus and Central Asia did not trigger assimilation into Russian culture—rather, it unleashed the generative potential for a diversity of literary expression that eventually became the basis of distinct, non-Russian national literary traditions.

The third chapter discusses the proliferation of Russophone literature under the Soviet ideology of *druzhba narodov* the “friendship of peoples,” and its corresponding mandate for proletarian national literatures. I focus on the Soviet Thaw period of the late 1950s and 60s, when post-war decolonization and the beginnings of a postcolonial consciousness in world literature coincided with Soviet attempts to exert influence and control in newly independent states. By analyzing the poetry of Olzhas Suleimenov, a politically-minded Kazakh writer and public intellectual who was also involved in Soviet anticolonial projects such as the Association of African and Asian Writers, I examine the uses of the Russian language to construct non-

Russian—yet completely Soviet—identities. In an overview of Suleimenov’s later career, when the optimism of the Thaw gave way to the disenchantments of the Brezhnev era, and *druzhba narodov* was ruefully re-imagined as *tiur’ma narodov* [prison of nations], I show how Russophone writers became voices of opposition and national self-determination on the local level.⁷⁸

Chapter 4 analyzes the effects of globalization and mobility on two contemporary Central Asian schools of Russophone poetry, the Tashkent School and the Fergana School, as well as the Kazakhstani arts organization Musaget, which has facilitated a “New Wave” in Russophone Kazakhstani literature. All three groups arose from the print culture of Soviet Central Asia, but today they maintain a parallel, equally significant presence online. Although the names of the Tashkent and Fergana schools suggest a static and significant geographic location, many of the schools’ practitioners have either emigrated to the West or, conversely, have relocated to the center of the Russian metropole. Nevertheless, they continue to assert a poetic distance (and difference) from Russia in their online iterations. By following the post-Soviet trajectory of Russophone literature into its virtual, transnational, and multicultural iterations, I address the following questions: How has an increasingly mobile and connected world changed what it means to be a Russophone poet? How has technology changed the way poets engage with identity, history, language use, and the literary tradition? When migration is a fact of life for many Eurasians, how are Russophone communities and peripheral identities imagined *outside* of

⁷⁸ The persistent concept of Russia as a “prison of nations” originated with the French writer Marquis de Custine, who coined the phrase in his travel narrative *La Russie en 1839*. It endured in speeches by Lenin, Winston Churchill, and eventually even Leonid Brezhnev. Perhaps its most memorable literary analogue is Fedor Dostoevskii’s *Notes from the House of Dead*, which presents a prison camp as a microcosm of the multicultural Russian Empire. See Konstantin Dushenko, *Tsitaty iz russkoi istorii. Ot prizvaniia variagov do nashikh dnei* (Moscow: Litres, 2005); see also Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander Martin, *Orientalism and Empire in Russia*, Kritika Historical Series 3 (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2006), 360.

the Russian periphery? I also analyze the diminished role of the state in post-Soviet literary production, and point to the increasing role of NGOs—both domestic and international—in developing contemporary Russophone literature.

Conclusion: Is it Neo-colonialism?

One of the most persistent and unresolved issues in Francophone and Anglophone literary scholarship is the concern that literature in these languages is a result of the inherent inequality of postcolonial societies. By paying attention to authors writing in the colonial language, to the exclusion of authors composing in their “native” tongues, do scholars perpetuate this inequality by upholding the authority of the metropole and those with access to it? Patrick Corcoran summarizes this relationship in a study of French and Francophone identities:

“In blunt terms, being able to state that one is ‘French’ is to claim a particular identity whereas the fact of being ‘francophone’ merely indicates a relationship to an ‘identity’ that belongs to someone else or, at best, to locate oneself in terms of a culture that is not one’s own ... inevitably this is a context of incompleteness, marked by difference, an inescapable sense of lower status and ultimately, possibly, exclusion rather than inclusion.”⁷⁹

Would the potential discipline of Russophone Studies actually enforce a type of Russian neocolonialism? Would paying attention to the Russophone texts lead scholars to ignore the other significant literary languages of Eurasia? Is it retrograde to cling to literature in a colonial language, when such effort might be better spent studying and appreciating literatures written in the once suppressed but now flourishing non-Russian languages of Eurasia? This is not to mention the fate of literatures in non-Russian East European languages: will their plight be overlooked as scholars turn toward the newer, more exotic postcoloniality of Central Asia and the Caucasus? In the end, Russophonia exists regardless of our scholarly attention, and ignoring

⁷⁹ Patrick Corcoran, *The Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10.

it is to also ignore a significant factor in the production of Russian and non-Russian literatures alike. I maintain that studying the ongoing effects of Russification, instead of ignoring its existence (which happens from a policy perspective in many former Soviet republics) helps to draw attention to the continuing inequalities that originate from the Russian imperial project, and the way they are reflected in culture. This does not necessarily entail a deconstruction of Russian literature of the metropole (although some of the existing scholarship has done exactly that), but rather it sheds light on the discursive and connective elements that make up the social realities in which Russian-language texts are written. The result is a more complicated but far more compelling picture.

Chapter 2

“Enlightened Intercessors”: The Earliest Russophone Writers

You write to me that you love me. And I tell you without ceremony that I have fallen in love with you. Never, not to anybody, not even my own brother, have I felt such an attraction as I do to you, and God knows how this has come about. One could say much in explanation, but why should I praise you! And you will believe in my sincerity even without proof, my dear Vali-khan, and even if one were to write ten books on this theme, one would write nothing: feeling and attraction are inexplicable.

—Fedor Dostoevskii, letter to Chokan Valikhanov, December 14, 1856.⁸⁰

Fedor Dostoevskii’s zealous declaration of love, written during his nine-year period of imprisonment and forced military service in Siberia, had a most unusual recipient: the Kazakh geographer, ethnographer, and translator, Chokan Valikhanov (1835–1865).⁸¹ The two met initially in the Russian frontier city of Omsk, where Valikhanov completed his military education in the Omsk Cadet Corps and later served as Adjutant to the Russian Governor General of Western Siberia. They carried on a correspondence throughout the late 1850s and early 60s, as Valikhanov’s intelligence-gathering expeditions to the exotic frontier of the Russian Empire’s Central Asian territories captivated the Russian popular imagination. Dostoevskii’s letters to Valikhanov reveal his fascination with the intellectual promise of the young Russophone officer and scholar, but they also impart the paternalistic attitudes and anxieties inherent in the Russian

⁸⁰ “Ch. Ch. Valikhanovu,” in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Pol’noe sobranie sochinenii v 15 tomakh*, vol. 15 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), 157–159. The English translation is based on Michael Futrell’s in “Dostoyevsky and Islam (And Chokan Valikhanov),” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1, 1979), 21.

⁸¹ For a full discussion of Dostoevskii’s life in exile, see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal 1850–1859*. 4th ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 190–192. For a discussion of the influence of Dostoevskii’s Muslim contemporaries on his religious thought, see Futrell, Michael. “Dostoyevsky and Islam (And Chokan Valikhanov):” 16–31. For studies exclusively dealing with Dostoevskii and Valikhanov’s relationship, see L. P. Grossman, *Zhizn’ y trudy F. M. Dostoevskii* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1935), 76, 382; A. S. Dolinin, *V tvorcheskoi laboratorii Dostoevskogo (istoriia sozdaniia romana “Podrostok”)* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’: 1947), 127–130; M. O. Auezov, “F. M. Dostoevskii i Chokan Valikhanov,” *Druzhba Narodov* 3 (1956): 154–155; M. N. Fetisov, *Literaturnye sviazi Rossii i Kazakhstan* (Moscow, 1956) 239–321; V. I. Manuilov, *Drug F. M. Dostoevskogo Chokan Valikhanov*, Trudy Leningradskogo bibliotechnogo instituta, tom 5 (Leningrad, 1959): 343–369.

Empire's longstanding encounter with Central Asia.

In the same 1856 letter, Dostoevskii urges Valikhanov to spend the next several years completing his education in Russia and Europe, "so that you may become extremely useful to your native land." He continues by stressing Valikhanov's unique obligation to act as an intercessor between his people and the Russians:

... Is it not a noble goal, a holy task [*sviatoe delo*], to be just about the first of your people to explain in Russia what the steppes are and their significance, and about your people in relation to Russia, and at the same time to serve your native land through enlightened intercession [*khodotaistvo*] on its behalf to the Russians? Remember that you are the first Kyrgyz⁸² completely educated in the European way. Moreover, fate has made you an exceptional person, and has given you a soul as well as a heart.⁸³

This passage finds Dostoevskii enacting a familiar colonial discourse, in which the colonizer dictates the terms of the colonized subject's inclusion into the imperial world ("a noble goal, a holy task").⁸⁴ He delineates the subject's weighty responsibilities as an intermediary between the two cultures, most crucially to provide the Empire with useful knowledge about its subject population and environs ("the first of your people to explain to Russia what the steppes are and their significance and your people in relation to Russia"). He simultaneously stresses the subject's exceptionality ("enlightened," "first European-educated Kyrgyz") but also the ultimate inferiority of his position (the necessity of a plea [*khodataistvo*] with the Russians "on behalf" of his native land). In the end, he even takes the liberty of bestowing humanity upon the subject ("a soul as well as a heart"). Despite the presumptions of Dostoevskii's rhetoric, however, the relative positions of power he and Valikhanov occupied in Imperial Russian society were actually, in a way, inverted. At the time Dostoevskii wrote the letter, he had recently completed a

⁸² At the time Dostoevskii was writing, the Russians used "Kyrgyz" as a general term for the nomadic Turkic peoples who would later be differentiated as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.

⁸³ Dostoevskii, *Pol'noe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 15, 157–159.

⁸⁴ Homi K. Bhabha provides an analysis of colonial discourse in his chapter "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*, 317–325.

prison sentence in Omsk and begun a four-year compulsory turn in the Siberian Army. Echoing the previous generation of Russian writers in exile, whose ranks include some of the most revered figures in canonical Russian literature, Dostoevskii fell victim to the autocratic efforts of Tsar Nicholas I to penalize any form of real or perceived political dissent. Valikhanov, meanwhile, was a free man, an officer, and a member of one of the most politically powerful, aristocratic families of Central Asian steppe society; and his academic accomplishments would soon make him the toast of the Russian metropole.⁸⁵ By virtue of the seemingly typical, but altogether unconventional nature of their relationship, the written record of mutual admiration and mentorship between these two writers at the farthest edges of the Russian Empire forms an apt metaphor for the complex interrelationship of Russophone and Russian literature.

Precipitated by the expressions of fascination, affection, and foreboding that characterize Dostoevskii's correspondence with Valikhanov, this chapter offers a critical look at Russophone literature's moment of conception in the nineteenth century.

As the Russian Empire expanded into the Caucasus and Central Asia and strengthened its institutional presence there, the Russians began training native cadres who, as translators and bureaucrats, would facilitate Russian rule. Instrumental in this process was the rapid establishment of Russian-language schools, which eventually displaced centers of Islamic education in many parts of the empire.⁸⁶ The appearance of the Russian language, Russian

⁸⁵ Valikhanov's father, Chingiz, enjoyed a stellar career in the Russian Imperial government. By the 1860s he had attained "six appointments as senior Sultan of Kushmurun *okrug*, a term as chief Kazakh advisor to the frontier board, promotion to Colonel, and a separate term as senior Sultan in the Kokchetav *okrug*." Smithsonian Institution, "In the Footsteps of Chokan Valikhanov." http://www.valikhanov.si.edu/sec2_footsteps-valikhanov/sec2_4_meteor-flash.html. See also "Biographicheskii material: Otets Chokana Valikhanova" in Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 4, 175–303.

⁸⁶ Although I offer only a crude synopsis here, I cannot stress enough how essential educational systems were to the spread of Russophonia throughout Eurasia. What's more, the appearance of Russian-language education in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the mid-nineteenth century also coincided with the drive for secular mother-tongue education as well as reforms in Islamic education. The graduates of these schools went on to play a formative role in

institutions, and Russian intellectuals in the newly colonized areas shaped the ideological views and cultural orientation of local elites. Many of the writers who emerged from this milieu were also advocates for learning the Russian language and for closer allegiance with the Russian Empire in the interest of transforming the societies in which they lived. Through an investigation of Western European literature and thought, primarily available to them in Russian translation, they became advocates of democracy, social justice, and the development of a coherent national identity. While serving the Russian Empire, they also acted as agents of the transplantation of Western culture to the intelligentsia in their own cultures. They were often also reformers, utilizing their positions of relative power in order to advocate for changes in local social, political, and religious practices.⁸⁷

In addition to Chokan Valikhanov, my central examples of this phenomenon are Abai Kunanbaev (1845-1904) and Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812-1878). These two multilingual writers, whose works synthesized local literary forms with elements of Russian and West European literature, are now considered to be central figures among the progenitors of national identity in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, respectively.⁸⁸ I argue that the ideas of nationhood they

the native intelligentsia leading up to the 1917 revolution. For a focus on this process in Azerbaijan, see L. G. Velikova, *K istorii prepodavaniia russkogo iazyka v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku: Azerbaidzhanskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo uchebno-pedagogicheskoi literatury, 1960); for a focus on the northern Kazakh steppes and Turkestan, see the excellent Ph.D. dissertation of Ayse Deniz Balgamis, "The Origins and Development of Kazakh Intellectual Elites in the pre-Revolutionary Period" (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2000). Wayne Dowler's *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* is a study of the topic as a whole (Montréal; Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

⁸⁷ Evaluating the overall role of Islam in the Russian colonization of Eurasia, particularly the intellectual history behind the influential pan-Turkic, pan-Islamic Jadid reform movement based in Kazan', is entirely beyond the scope of this study. Thankfully, however, this fascinating topic has received its due attention in several other studies. See Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2006); Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: a Profile in National Resilience* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1986); Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 27 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁸⁸ In her study of the Soviet and post-Soviet appropriation of oral Kazakh song traditions, Eva-Marie Dubuisson notes that Abai, together with two other Kazakh poets, Suinbay Atonoly (1815-1898) and Zhambul Zhambaev (1846-1945) "were invoked as the literary or artistic 'face' of the Kazakh nationality during the Soviet period,

came to embody were directly impacted by their exposure to Western discourse on the nation, made possible through their acquisition and use of the Russian language. Through an analysis of their writings in Russian as well as their translation—and transplantation—of Russian and other West European texts into early forms of the Kazakh and Azeri literary languages, I will show the organic connection between the development of Russophone literature, Russian literature, and literature in the vernacular languages of the Russian Empire, which would become the basis for the construction of Soviet multinational literature in subsequent decades.

This story does not end in the nineteenth century. The influence of writers like Kunanbaev and Akhundov extended far beyond their own lifetimes and came to its greatest fruition in the Soviet period. This chapter also examines the canonization of early Russophone authors by their Soviet counterparts in the service of fulfilling the state directive for distinct, proletarian national literatures. Particularly consequential in this regard were the efforts of two Soviet Russophone writers, Chingiz Guseinov and Mukhtar Auezov, whose popular biographic novels of Akhundov and Kunanbaev form major contributions to the Russophone field as well as to the Kazakh and Azeri national literatures. Part *bildungsroman* and part historical fiction, Auezov's 1949 *The Way of Abai* [*Put' Abaia/Abai zholy*] and Guseinov's 1980 *Fatal Fatali* [*Fatalnyi Fatali*] re-package the lives of these nineteenth-century writers according to the formula of a Soviet saint's *vita*. The Soviet versions of Akhundov and Abai are born into a world of Oriental despotism, fraught with villainous, feudal *bais* and backwards, corrupt religious leaders. Through the miracle of a Russian education, acquisition of the Russian language, exposure to Russian literature, and contact with exiled Russian intellectuals, our heroes transform into secular progressives, dedicating their lives to strengthening national culture,

precisely for their praise of the Russian ... and then Soviet rule." "The Value of a Voice: Culture and Critique in Kazakh Aitys Poetry" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009), 36.

fostering national self-determination, sowing the seeds of revolutionary consciousness among their co-nationals, and overturning capitalist exploitation in both its tsarist and local forms. In these biographical novels, as well as in a constellation of other revisionist portraits, the subjects' acquisition of the Russian language does not lead to their cultural erasure and submission to Russification, as might be expected. Instead the Russian language is presented as a tool of empowerment, ultimately aiding in the overthrow of the imperial order and the emergence of nascent proletarian nations.

The twenty-first century finds Valikhanov, Kunanbaev, and Akhundov undergoing yet another wave of makeovers, this time cast in the pantheon of national founding fathers for the independent republics of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. This process is manifest through film, stage, and television adaptations of their biographies and literary works, new state-subsidized publications and translations of their works as well as their Soviet biographies, and the appropriation of their names and visages to mark spaces of state power: postage stamps, currency, place names, public memorials, names of educational institutions, and federal holidays celebrated in their honor.⁸⁹ In some cases, the mass commemoration of these writers has elevated them beyond mere symbols of the nation's rich cultural heritage—one study suggests that Abai Kunanbaev has literally attained the status of a religious figure in contemporary Kazakhstan.⁹⁰ As fixtures of public life, the images of these writers function as a canvas onto which the desires

⁸⁹For a study on the larger process of signification involved in elevating historical figures to national symbols in Central Asia, see Diana Kudaibergenova, "'Imagining Community' in Soviet Kazakhstan. An Historical Analysis of Narrative on Nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet Literature," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal on Nationalism and Ethnicity* (April 25, 2013): 1–16.

⁹⁰Dubuisson details how the mausoleums of Abai and other Kazakh poets have become integrated into "practices of shrine visitation, pilgrimage, ancestor worship, and Muslim tradition" in Kazakhstan. "The Value of a Voice," 38.

and agendas of the present moment are projected.⁹¹ Therefore, much like Dostoevskii's declarations of love to Valikhanov, the variety of interpretations and appropriations of Russophone writers throughout history calls attention to the difficult—and not always obvious—assertions of power, desire, knowledge, and identification at the heart of the imperial encounter. It also redefines the imperial encounter as a sustained dialogue continuing into the present, rather than a fleeting historical moment.

Russian Literature and Empire

In untangling the dynamics of power and representation in Imperial Russia, postcolonial criticism is the logical place to start. However, studies taking a postcolonial approach to topics in the discipline of Slavic literatures have so far largely limited themselves to canonical Russian literature. Nevertheless, an overview of this body of scholarship is necessary, not only because it forms the closest “ancestor” of the present study, but also because it deals with the close—and often personal—relationship between canonical Russian writers and their counterparts from the Empire's periphery.

Susan Layton pioneered this endeavor with her 1994 work *Russian Literature and Empire*. She anchors her analysis in Edward Said's theoretical works on cultural imperialism, in particular the concept of Orientalism as “a system of knowledge about the Orient” that sustains a relationship “of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” between West and East.⁹² Orientalism in this sense is also essentially a “dynamic exchange,” between writers

⁹¹ For example, in order to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the Zheltoqsan ethnic uprisings in 1996, the Kazakhstani government erected monuments to Abai in the city of Semipalatinsk (Semei) and Zhambul in Almaty. Ibid., 35. For a broader study of this phenomenon, see Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past?: Competition for Ancestors Among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996).

⁹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 5.

and the political concerns of the empires in which they live.⁹³ In Said's formulation, writers possess the autonomy to engage in dialogue with society's sources of power, but their efforts are likewise shaped by the realities these sources of power create. It follows that in the context of imperial literature, where imperial power predicates every action, the identity of the colonizers is actively shaped by their encounters with an Other. As the foundational discourse of empire building, Said's "dynamic exchange" resonates profoundly in Russian literature, which came to its full fruition as an independent tradition concurrently with the Russian Empire's expansion into the Caucasus and Central Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Building from this premise, Layton deconstructs Caucasian themes in the work of Russian authors whose literary output and personal lives were intertwined in the imperial project, but who "wielded their representational authority to different ends."⁹⁴

The first and most important of Layton's subjects is Aleksandr Pushkin, whose initial stint of political exile led him on an inadvertent tour of the Caucasus in 1820, followed by a three-year stay in Kishinev, an outpost in the Russian Empire's recently-annexed territory of Bessarabia.⁹⁵ The poet's initial confrontation with seemingly exotic Caucasian peoples and locales resulted in an astonishing poetic output that became a touchstone, if not a direct template, and for all subsequent literary representations of the region. Traveling with a volume of Byron's works in tow, Pushkin depicted Russia's new frontier with little attention to accuracy; instead he tailored Western Europe's Romantic images of the Orient to fit the specifics of the Russian colonial situation. According to Layton, the Caucasian landscape's topographical extremes made

⁹³ Ibid., 14–15.

⁹⁴ Layton, *Prisoners of the Caucasus*, 9.

⁹⁵ Present-day Chişinău, Moldova. The territory was annexed to the Russian empire in 1812 after its victory in the Russo-Turkish war.

it an ideal stand-in for Byron's alpine scenes; and when combined with the region's enigmatic, warlike inhabitants, this made the Caucasus a site of great beauty, but also great terror, which in the parlance of Romanticism is known as the sublime.⁹⁶ For Pushkin as well as the subjects of his poems, traversing such a place provided an exhilarating experience of freedom, as they outran the stifling expectations of Russian society and the very real political constraints that had driven them to the Caucasus in the first place. In this way, beyond provoking spiritual and aesthetic preponderances, the Caucasus also serves as the site of social critique, where the fierce and free Caucasians are imagined as noble savages, and their presence holds up a mirror to the hypocrisies of Russian polite society and in some works even questions the logic of imperial conquest. Foiled or star-crossed love affairs between Russian interlopers and Caucasian women provide an erotic dimension to the thrilling colonial encounter, while projecting imperial ambiguities into the frame of gender relations.

The sensual and sensational nineteenth-century Russian writing on the Caucasus is also tempered by a sense of obligation—in this case, acknowledging the reality of participating in a civilizing mission, coupled with the anxieties of competing with European *and* Asian empires in a protracted struggle for geopolitical dominance. An often-quoted letter from Pushkin to his brother in 1821 provides an illustration of the difficulties of representing and evaluating this issue in writing.

Caucasia, the sultry border of Asia, is in all respects remarkable. Ermolov has infused it with his name and beneficent genius. The savage Circassians have been intimidated; their ancient audacity is vanishing. The roads are hourly becoming more secure; large armed convoys—superfluous. One must hope that this conquered land, which until now has brought no substantial benefit to Russia, will soon bring us closer to the Persians through

⁹⁶ Layton has an extended discussion of sublime and the significance of the Caucasian landscape in Russian Romanticism, *Russian Literature and Empire*, 1–36; Harsha Ram's *Imperial Sublime*, as the title suggests, is an authoritative source on this phenomenon in Russian literature as it relates to imperial power. See also Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

secure commerce and will not present us with an obstacle in future wars—and it just may be that Napoleon’s chimerical plan for the conquest of India may become a reality for us.⁹⁷

First it is necessary to point out the ironic tone that is ubiquitous in Pushkin’s correspondence with family members and intimate friends.⁹⁸ With exaggerated descriptions of “savage” natives and the “beneficent genius” of Aleksey Petrovich Ermolov, Russia’s conquistador of the Caucasus, we find Pushkin mocking the rhetoric of Western imperial ambitions, and by extension, Russia’s own efforts to recapitulate them. Referring to Napoleon’s lifelong “chimerical” dream of conquering India, which manifested in a failed campaign in collaboration with the Russian Tsar Paul I just months before the latter’s 1801 assassination, Pushkin takes this caricature to its hyperbolic extreme. At the same time, by obscuring his criticism behind a veil of ironic imperial rhetoric, Pushkin’s letter sheds light on the precarious position of the writer in Russia’s imperial project.

In the work of Pushkin and his contemporaries, a link to European Romanticism via the Orientalization of a southern frontier serves to reify Russia’s emerging identity as a European imperial power. One groundbreaking work on this topic is *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age* (1998), compiled by Monika Greenleaf and Stephen Moller-Sally. In their introduction to the volume, Greenleaf and Moeller-Sally conclude that the ideology with which the Russian Empire conquered its contiguous outlying territory was predicated by the deep-seated memory of their centuries-long conflicts with neighboring, non-Russian peoples

⁹⁷ A. S. Pushkin, *Pol’noe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, vol. 10 (Moscow: Akademiia nauka SSSR, 1962-66), 16–17. Translation by Peter Scotto in “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of Imperialism in Lermontov’s ‘Bela’.” *PMLA* 107, no. 2 (March 1, 1992), 249–250.

⁹⁸ Of course, irony is also a fundamental element of Pushkin’s poetics. Monika Greenleaf elaborates on Pushkin’s use of this device, which “automatically eliminates the literal-minded, who do not recognize the invisible quotation marks that surround language aware of its own history of usage.” See Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 39–45.

(best exemplified by the mythology surrounding the Mongol invasion), as well as a sense of inferiority and backwardness in comparison with Western Europe.⁹⁹ The result is the impression that the conquest and Othering of neighboring “Asiatic” populations was an attempt to dispel a dread of the same nascent, essentially “Asiatic” qualities in Russia’s own culture. Several scholars of Russian literature succinctly illustrate this point with a quotation from Dostoevskii’s *Diary of a Writer*: “In Europe we are hangers-on and slaves, whereas in Asia we shall go as masters. In Europe we were Tatars, whereas in Asia we too are Europeans. Our mission, our civilizing mission in Asia will bribe our spirit and drive us thither.”¹⁰⁰ Katya Hokanson revisited this issue in her 2008 study, *Writing at Russia’s Border*, which traces these developments in the work of two literary founding fathers: Karamzin, whose twelve-volume *History of the Russian State [Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo]* became the preferred version of Russia’s history as well as the basis for the central mythology of its nationhood; and Pushkin, who reigns in both scholarship and popular culture as the chief architect of Russian national literature. Hokanson provides a description of the situation:

“To become the kind of Russians they wanted to be, Russians had to emphasize their relationship to their southern and eastern borders. It was when Russians first wrote about their military exploits in the Caucasus, bringing together discourses of empire, the civilizing mission, freedom from oppression, and an appeal to Russian history ... that the Russians recognized this literature as being truly national, independent of European models and themes.”¹⁰¹

This interplay between the national and imperial actually predates the Romantic era, as shown in Harsha Ram’s 2003 study *The Imperial Sublime*, which traces the origins of Russian imperial

⁹⁹ Monika Greenleaf and Stephen Moller-Sally, eds., *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age*, Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁰⁰ Harsha Ram, “Russian Poetry and the Imperial Sublime” in Greenleaf and Moeller-Sally, eds., *Russian Subjects*, 46. See also Katya Hokanson, *Writing at Russia’s Border* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 40.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

tropes back to modes of representation developed by the first neo-classical Russian poets in the eighteenth century. Thus the ever-expanding frontier of the Russian empire, as both a physical and psychological boundary between self and other, becomes the site of the development of both the Russian national literature and the Russian imperial identity.

Keeping Said's "dynamic exchange" in mind, I note that Pushkin's journey through the Russian Empire's new frontier was a direct result of the Russian Empire exercising its hegemony over individual and artistic autonomy. Pushkin's representation of Caucasian "Others" was shaped by a climate of intellectual upheaval in the post-Napoleonic Russian Empire, which included the transplantation of Romantic ideas of nationhood, as well as debates between the camps of Slavophiles and Westernizers to define the Russian identity along the lines of language, history, territory, and political and spiritual orientation.¹⁰² At this time the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire was captivating the Romantic spirit of Western European writers as well as their counterparts in Russia, and Pushkin occupied a front-row seat on the action from his post in Kishinev.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, covert political circles such as the Decembrists plotted acts of resistance to the oppressive rule of the tsar. On suspicion of activity in these illegal circles, which included composing a poem containing anti-imperial sentiment, Pushkin was initially at risk for banishment to Siberia or a prison colony in the Far North. But

¹⁰² For a complete discussion of Slavophiles and Westernizers in Russian intellectual history, see Sergey Horujy, "Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the birth of Russian philosophical humanism" in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27–51. For an exploration of this issue with regard specifically to disputes over the Russian literary language, see V. V. Vinogradov, *Ocherki po istoricheskoi grammatike russkogo literaturnogo iazyka XIX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964); id. *Ocherki po istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka XVII-XIX vv.* (Leiden: E.I. Brill, 1949).

¹⁰³ Pushkin spent 1820-23 in Kishinev and 1824 in Odessa, which Marcus Wheeler describes as "the principal base of the Greek community in Russia." His close proximity to the conflict made him "uniquely qualified to observe, assess, and, had it aroused his sympathy, propagate support for the Greek Independence Movement." Marcus Wheeler, "Pushkin: Ideologist of Post-Petrine Russia or Liberal Humanist?" in *The Search for Self-Definition in Russian Literature*, ed. Ewa M. Thompson (John Benjamins Publishing, 1991), 154.

owing to the intercession of his friends with the imperial court, he was instead enlisted in the chancellery of General Ivan Inzov, the “Chief Trustee of the Interests of Foreign Colonists in the Southern Territory of Russia.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, Pushkin’s involvement in the Russian imperial project poses a complication to Said’s formulation of Orientalism as a “dynamic exchange”: his Orientalizing literary portraits of Russia’s colonization campaigns reflect his self-conscious role as a subject of imperial oppression as well as a recipient of its privileges.

It is namely this aspect of Pushkin’s encounter with the Caucasus that has become the starting point of postcolonial discussions in Russian literature, and it forms the bedrock of the analysis of other major nineteenth-century literary works. Pushkin’s essentializing descriptions of native Caucasians became a fixture of Russian writing on the empire’s periphery, yet also provided a mode for criticism of the Russian state and expression of colonizers’ anxieties. The remaining text of the 1821 letter to his brother serves as a representative example:

I saw the shore of the Kuban and its village encampment – and much admired our Cossacks. Always on horseback, always ready to fight, eternally vigilant! I rode within sight of hostile fields of free, mountain peoples. Around us rode 60 Cossacks, and behind us a loaded cannon with a lit fuse. Although the Circassians are now quite placid, you still cannot rely on them; they are ready to attack the famous Russian general in hopes of a large ransom. And wherever a poor officer safely rides on the chaise, he could easily wind up in the noose of some Chechen.¹⁰⁵

Layton notes that these descriptions are typical of Pushkin’s “Southern poems” written during this initial period of exile, and form the ur-text for subsequent works by Lermontov, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and Tolstoi, as well as a score of lesser-quality imitators.¹⁰⁶ Pushkin’s iconic long poem of this era, *Prisoner of the Caucasus* [*Kavkazskii plennik*], crystallized this theme, which

¹⁰⁴ I. T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A Biography* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003), 101.

¹⁰⁵ Pushkin, *Pol’noe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, 16–17. Translation based on Scotto, “Prisoners of the Caucasus,” 249–250.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, see also e.g. “The Brother Bandits [*Brat’ia razboiniki*],” “The Gypsies [*Tsigany*],” “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai [*Bakhchisaraiskii fontan*].”

endures in various literary and filmic iterations in Russia to this day. Not only did the poem spawn a legion of copies by minor writers of Pushkin's era, but it also provided the conceptual basis for several subsequent classics of Russian literature, including works of the same title by Mikhail Lermontov (another Romantic poet considered to be Pushkin's immediate successor) and the great realist Lev Tolstoi. Harsha Ram summarizes how the trope of the "Caucasian prisoner" alternates between the two poles of the imperial encounter: empathy and antipathy.

Fleeing the constraints of his own state, [the protagonist] falls captive to the freedom-loving mountain dwellers in their war against the Russian army and comes to admire them even as he plots his escape. In the prisoner's fate, we see the many-sided effects of Russia's coercive state apparatus, which stifles the creative artist from the metropolis just as it subjugates the peoples of the Southern periphery.¹⁰⁷

The "Caucasian prisoner" embodies the author's simultaneous Orientalization and sympathetic identification with the non-Russian Other. In this way, it also becomes a vehicle for expressing the irreconcilable rift between individual rights and state power in Tsarist Russia.

As Layton, Ram, and other scholars have suggested, the Romantic conception of a cohesive and organic Russian national literature was in fact frequently at odds with the multi-cultural realities of its imperial identity. In his contribution to *Russian Subjects*, Harsha Ram concludes with the provocative claim that "neither the Russian autocratic state nor the Russian subject exist, but are 'endlessly produced and reaffirmed in the violent encounter' with the East."¹⁰⁸ This chapter serves as an expansion of Ram's formulation, in order to include textual and discursive contributions from the non-Russian side of this "violent encounter." I argue that the "clash of tongues" that manifests in Russophone writing, translation, auto-translation, and in the academic canonization of Russophone writers, also served to affirm non-Russian identities

¹⁰⁷ Ram, *The Imperial Sublime*, 10

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5

and literary traditions. Moreover, I will show that Russophone writers were not merely employing the language of the colonizer in order to “write back” to the center, to restate one of the earliest axioms of postcolonialism. They were often also writing “to” their contemporaries in their own communities, and as a result they enjoy quite different legacies in Central Asia and the Caucasus than in the Russian metropole. Their work served to decenter and diffuse the imperial discourse, and in doing so hastened its ultimate end product: the nation.

Disorienting Pushkin in Mirza Fatali Akhundov’s “Oriental Poem”

Touted in Europe as the “Tatar Molière,”¹⁰⁹ but garnering more serious renown in the Near East as the intellectual forbearer of both Azeri and Iranian nationalism, Mirza Fatali Akhundov is the quintessential example of Russophonia’s capacity for multiplicity. His lifetime coincides with a period of great social and political upheaval in the South Caucasus, as the Russian Empire reached the apex of its territorial expansion by annexing principalities previously under Persian control.¹¹⁰ Akhundov was born in 1812 in the mountain city of Nukha (now Sheki), which today falls within the northwestern border of the Republic of Azerbaijan. His life follows the pattern of many nineteenth-century Russophone intellectuals: he received a Shi’a clerical education in his early youth, becoming versed in the Koran and Islamic law as well as

¹⁰⁹ The name was coined by a German reviewer in the August 14, 1852 edition of *Magazin für die Literatur des Auslandes*. This same article was translated into Russian and published in the Petersburg paper *Russkii invalid* in 1853. Akhundov’s works were translated into French, German, and English in the 1850s, and he insisted that his European translators use the Russian texts as a base, rather than the Azeri or Persian ones. Nadir Mamedov, *Khudozhestvennoe Tvorchestvo M. F. Akhundov* (Baku: Izdanie Akademii nauk Azerbajjanskoi SSR, 1962), 45.

¹¹⁰ This territorial acquisition, codified by the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) came about through a series of four wars between the Russian Empire and Persia’s ruling dynasty, the Qajars. Qajar Persia gradually declined throughout the nineteenth century, due to a combination of internal fissures and increasingly violent encroachment from the Russian, Ottoman, French and British Empires. For a complete historical overview of identity building in Azerbaijan vis-à-vis the Russian Empire, see Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule*, Studies of nationalities (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1992); Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); id., *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge and New York: New York University Press, 1985).

classical Arabic and Persian poetry, before joining his fate to the Russian Empire by enrolling in a Russian school and embarking on a secular career path. In 1834 he began working for the Russian chancellery in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) as an assistant to the chief translator of Oriental languages (e.g. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish). He quickly attained fluency in Russian, and in 1836 he began teaching Turkish and Persian at the Tbilisi military school. He later joined the Imperial Russian Army as an instructor and translator of Oriental languages, eventually rising to the rank of colonel before his death in 1878.¹¹¹

The environment in which Akhundov lived and worked was a unique space of overlap between Turkic, Persian, Russian, and pan-Islamic worlds. Because Akhundov was employed within the institutional system of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, he became one of a contingent of local intellectuals responsible for spreading Russian culture and advocating reforms within it. His use of language was similarly hybrid: educated first in Arabic and Persian, he composed in Persian, Russian, and Azeri.¹¹² In the multicultural environment of Tiflis he fraternized with circles of Georgian, Armenian, and Russian intellectuals, including the Azeri writer and translator Abbasgulu Bakikhanov (1794-1847, pen name Qodsi); the Armenian nationalist writer Khachatur Abovyan (1805-48); the Georgian writer now recognized as the founder of Georgian romanticism and modern Georgian national literature, Ilia Chavchavadze

¹¹¹ Mehrdad Kia, "Mizra Fath Ali Akhundzade and the Call for Modernization of the Islamic World," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1995), 423–424. Among the extensive biographical information available on Akhundov, see also in Dzh. Dzhafarov, *M.F. Akhundov: kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962); id., *M. F. Akhundov i teatr* (Baku: Izd. Azer. teatral'nogo obshchestva, 1962). A similar chronological study of Akhundov's literary work is available in Mamedov, *Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo M. F. Akhundov*.

¹¹² At the time Akhundov was writing, the literary language in use among the Turkic peoples of Transcaucasia, known to them as *Türki*, was just beginning to undergo a series of standardizing reforms. Akhundov proposed a series of modifications to the Arabic script in order to accommodate Turkic vowels, and eventually advocated for a move to Latin script, though his efforts were largely unheeded in his own lifetime. His plays were written in the Azeri vernacular, which provided the basis for their popular appeal. "Azerbaijani" came into official use as a separate national-linguistic designation only in the Soviet period. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 51–53; 124.

(1786-1846), and Raphael Eristavi (1811-1864), a Georgian playwright, director, and actor later reputed by the Soviets as the father of “critical realism” in Georgian literature. By virtue of his proximity to Transcaucasia’s intelligentsia in the Russian administrative capital of Tbilisi, Akhundov also made the acquaintance of exiled Decembrist writers Aleksandr Odoevskii and Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, whose connections to Pushkin and Lermontov were instrumental in the advancement of Akhundov’s own Russophone writing career.¹¹³

Akhundov is best known for six comedic plays written, printed, and staged in the Caucasus in the 1850s and 60s, which marked the ascendance of the Azeri language as a legitimate idiom for literature, as well as a medium for social critique.¹¹⁴ However, despite their resonance in Azeri literature, even these works are in essence multilingual, and they can be viewed as the product of the multicultural environment of Russian-occupied Transcaucasia. The Azeri scholar Dzhafar Manafoglu points to the Tsarist government’s 1851 construction of a dramatic theater in Tiflis as the main impetus for Akhundov’s astonishingly prolific output of drama. His first two plays, which he translated into Russian himself, were performed there in 1852 and 1853. In fact, all of Akhundov’s plays appeared in Russian translation before they were ever published or performed in Azeri—mostly in *Kavkaz*, the government-funded periodical of Russian Transcaucasia, but also in a separate bound volume of 1853.¹¹⁵ Yet by Akhundov’s own assertion, his intended audience was his own community of Muslims. In a letter to Ia. I. Isakov,

¹¹³ Ibid., 426.

¹¹⁴ Edward Allworth provides a detailed historical overview of Azeri theater in the context of theatrical developments throughout the Russian Empire in “Drama and the Theater of the Russian East: Transcaucasus, Tatarstan, Central Asia,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (December 1, 1983): 151–160.

¹¹⁵ Mamedov gives a full history of each play’s publication and performance dates (also noting which language was used) in *Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo M. F. Akhundova*, 41–72. Ragif Manafoglu provides a painstakingly detailed analysis of Akhundov’s process of translating his own works into Russian, his reception in Europe, in the Russophone milieu of Transcaucasia, and also in the Russian metropole, drawing heavily on his personal correspondence with Russian and Persian colleagues, in *Istoriia avtorskogo perevoda v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku: Mutardzhim, 1997), 18–65. The Persian translator he refers to is Mirza Mukhammed Dzhafar, *ibid.*, 20.

one of his Russian translators, he points out that his work “was not written for Europeans, but for Muslims, for whom these ideas are completely new ...it is the translator’s obligation to show this ... so that the Europeans know that the author is specifically preaching to [*propoveduet*] his own nation.”¹¹⁶ Akhundov’s message to his fellow Muslims was singularly focused on modernization. By satirizing entrenched customs and beliefs, particularly traditional gender roles, religion, and the unjust power of local leaders, Akhundov’s plays chastise what he saw as the conservative excesses of Islamic society. For example, *The Vezir of Lenkoran* [*Vezir lenkoranskogo khanstva/Sərgüzəşti Vəziri-Xani Lənkəran*] features a despotic khan marrying a young girl against her will, and serves as an indictment of polygamy and a call for women’s rights; the plot of *Monsieur Jordan, Botanist, and the Sorcerer-Dervish Mastali Shah* [*Mus’e zhordan, botanik i dervish Mastalishakh Mastalishakh, znamenityi koldun /Hekayəti Müsyö Jordan Həkimi-Nəbatat və Dərviş Məstəli Şah Cadükuni Məşhur*] revolves around the juxtaposition of rural Islamic society and Western enlightenment.¹¹⁷ These works, influenced by Gogol’ and Griboedov as much as Voltaire, Molière, and Shakespeare, provided a platform for Akhundov’s strong advocacy of enlightenment and reason over “superstition” and tradition. Moreover, Akhundov’s “preaching,” had its own ramifications beyond Russian-occupied Transcaucasia: the Persian translations of his plays took on comparable significance in Iran, which underwent a period of societal transformation in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ Historian Nikki Keddie characterizes Akhundov’s attraction to Western ideas and literary forms as a typical tendency among “first

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁷ In the Soviet period the plays were translated into many languages of the USSR and employed for didactic purposes, particularly as part of anti-Islamic campaigns. *Monsieur Jordan* was even performed in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1957. Mamedov, *Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo M. F. Akhundova*, 45.

¹¹⁸ Mehrdad Kia, “Mizra Fath Ali Akhundzade and the Call for Modernization of the Islamic World,” 422–423.

group of colonized intellectuals” to become “Westoxicated.”¹¹⁹ However, the publication and reception of Akhundov’s earliest literary work indicates that the intoxication was mutual.

Though he achieved his greatest literary success in the 1850s, Akhundov’s writing career actually began two decades earlier, touched off by a watershed event that shook the Russian literary establishment to its core: the 1837 death of Aleksander Pushkin. When Mikhail Lermontov’s controversial and (at the time) un-publishable poetic response to the tragedy, “Death of a Poet [*Smert’ poeta*],” circulated among the Russian intelligentsia in the Caucasus, Akhundov immediately set out to write his own poetic eulogy of Pushkin.¹²⁰ The resulting work, commonly referred to in Russian as “The Oriental Poem [*Vostochnaia poema*],” is considered a landmark work of modern Azeri literature, and most certainly one of the first high-profile Russophone works by a Turkic author.¹²¹ The poem’s publication history, as much as its content, evinces the peculiar nature of contact and conflict that comes to light through the process of composing, translating, and publishing Russophone works.

Akhundov composed the original text in Persian, but first published his own Russian translation in the *Moscow Observer* in 1837. Entitled “On the death of Pushkin [*Na smert’ Pushkina*],” the 1837 version contains a subtitle identifying Akhundov as “a contemporary Persian poet,” as well as a detailed commentary on the poem’s significance in the Persian literary

¹¹⁹ Although Soviet literary historians and ideologues have inaccurately portrayed him as an atheist, in fact he was in favor of modernization from within Islam, and above all he opposed abuses of power by the Islamic hierarchy. Mehrdad Kia, “Women, Islam and Modernity in Akhundzade’s Plays and Unpublished Writings,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (July 1998), 5.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Aziz Sharif has published several studies of various aspects of this poem; one focuses exclusively on its publication history: “Iz istorii publikatsii poemiy M. F. Akhundova ‘Na smert’ Pushkina,” in *Pushkin v stranakh zarubezhnogo vostoka* (Moscow: 1979): 215–229. See also Shikhali Kurbanov, *A. S. Pushkin i Azerbaidzhan* (Baku: Azerbaidzhanskoe izd-vo detskoi i iunosheskoj lit-ry 1959).

tradition and in Muslim culture in general.¹²² This information establishes the poem as an as an object of primarily ethnographic value to the Russian reader. Further contributing to this framing, an extensive editorial footnote explains the curious circumstances by which this “remarkable Persian poem...together with a Russian translation made by the poet himself” arrived on the journal’s pages. The editor’s note includes the full text of a letter by the Russian Orientalist Ivan Klemen’tev, an acquaintance Akhundov’s, who sent the poem to the journal’s editors to be published. The letter is not only foreignizing, but Orientalizing in the Saidian sense, as Klemen’tev presents Akhundov as a representative of a distant tribe whose wild, enigmatic nature—exemplified by the Arabic script of the original Persian text— bleeds through into his clumsy Russian-language poem. The result presents an edifying and exciting curiosity for the Russian reader:

The original was deliberately written in Arabic script [...] I am sure that the savagery [*zhestokost’*] and wildness [*dikost’*] of expression in some places will be excused in the spirit of the East, insomuch as it is the opposite [*protivopolozhennyi*] of the European spirit. The main goal of the author of this translation was to maintain the utmost possible fidelity to the original, almost without any correction by me, as I thought it necessary to preserve the bright local color of Iran [...]

Klemen’tev’s letter also frames the poem as a testament to the success of Russia’s civilizing mission in Transcaucasia. He assures the reader of Akhundov’s loyalty, as evinced by the great impression Pushkin left on him, as well as his willingness to be “tamed” by Russian culture:

It is inexplicably comforting to the Russian heart to see the benevolent traces of civilization in that part of the world where the first flickers of world education are appearing, in a country where powerful nature lavishes its splendor and wealth among a tribe [*plemen’*] still oppressed by the yoke of wild passions [*iarom strastei dikikh*]. This new civic consciousness is the gradual taming of the turbulent forces of hostile human nature, abundantly pouring out the gifts brought about by Russia! ... We offer our heartfelt wishes for success to this amazing talent, and moreover, we see in him such a sympathy for Russian education.”

¹²² Mirza Fatkh-Ali Akhundov, “*Na Smert’ Pushkina: sochinenie v stikhakh sovremennogo persidskogo poeta,*” *Moskovskii Nabliudatel’* 11 (March, 1837): 297–304.

Despite Akhundov's purported "sympathy for Russian education," the poem's formal and rhetorical makeup owes far more to the poet's early education in the traditions of classical Arabic and Persian literature. Several critics note that Akhundov's original text adhered to the classical Near Eastern court genre of the *qasida*, which originated in Arabic poetry, thrived in the Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu traditions, and typically took the form of a long panegyric ode in praise of the poet's patron.¹²³ Classicist Julie Scott Meisami adds that the Persian *qasida* was "the courtly poem par excellence" because it simultaneously functions as a "celebration, homage, and gift, presented by the poet to his prince" that ensures "the enduring fame of both the ruler it praises and the of the poet who is its maker."¹²⁴

The 1837 version of the poem comprises fifty-one unrhymed lines with no identifiably Russian metrical structure (the editorial commentary of *Moskovskii Nabliudatel'* goes as far as to call it a "prose poem"), rhetorically divided into two sections. The first section finds the poet meditating on Pushkin's death as a personal loss, which is enacted through a dialogue between the poet and his own heart. In the midst of a springtime garden's fertile bloom (the commentary helpfully points out that "spring begins in February" in the Caucasus), the poet finds his heart stricken mute with grief, and demands to know the reason for such unseasonable silence:

Не ты ли тоже самое сердце, которое, погружаясь в море мыслей для стихов,
подобных жемчужинам царским,
Давало ли нити сих перлов на украшение ланит тысяче игривым
выражениям, будто девам.
Теперь не знаю, откуда печаль твоя? теперь к чему ты сокрушаешься и

¹²³ A deeper analysis of this poem in terms of its Near Eastern poetic pedigree, as well as its intersections with Russian Romanticism and Islamic thought, can be found in Leah Feldman's excellent dissertation, "On the Threshold of Eurasia: Intersecting Discourses of Empire and Identity in the Russian Empire," PhD diss. (University of California, Los Angeles), 28–34.

¹²⁴ Julie Scott Meisami, "Poetic Micocosms: the Persian Qasida to the end of the twelfth century," in Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, eds. *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, vol. 2 (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 139.

унываешь, как плакальщица похоронная?

“Are you not the same heart that dove into the sea of thoughts and brought back verses, just like royal pearls?

That gave strings of those same pearls to decorate the cheeks of a thousand playful expressions, as if they were young girls?

Now I do not know, where does your sadness come from? Why do you now grieve and despair, like a mourner at a funeral?

The second section of the poem consists of the heart’s astonished and passionate reply, as it addresses the poet in series of rhetorical questions emphasizing Pushkin’s greatness:

Разве ты, неведающий мира! разве не слышал о Пушкине, главе собора
Поэтов,

О том Пушкине, которому стократно гремела хвала со свех концов, когда он игриво изливал свои мечтания;

О том Пушкине, от которого бумага жаждала потерять белизну свою, чтобы только перо его проводило черты по лицу ее?

Really you, ignorant of the world! Have you really not heard about Pushkin, head of the assembly of poets,

Of that Pushkin, who in a hundred ways received praise to the ends of the earth, whenever he playfully poured out his dreams;

Of that Pushkin, to whom paper longed to lose her whiteness, if only his pen would leave a mark upon her face?

Here Akhundov employs a metonymy of the body in order to convey the split subjectivity of a Persian-trained poet living at the edges of the Russian Empire: the heart, which is the seat of poetic talent, understands the significance of Pushkin, while the poet himself remains “ignorant” to the world outside the Caucasus. It is only through the heart’s exhortations of Pushkin’s greatness that the poet comes to understand the gravity of the Russian poet’s tragic death. The heart goes on to eroticize Russian literature’s conquest through the metaphor of the paper “longing to lose” its purity to Pushkin’s pen. The heart’s replay to the poet extends throughout the poem’s second section, but in the final four lines it turns to address Pushkin directly. In doing so it forms an overarching dialogue between Akhundov’s Near Eastern poetic heritage—enhanced by the classical garden symbolism of parrots, tulips, jasmine, and singing

nightingales—and, on the other hand, his newly-acquired consciousness of the Russian poetic tradition, which builds into his sense of outrage at the injustice of Pushkin’s death.

In the second section, again speaking “from the heart,” Akhundov positions Pushkin as the pinnacle of the Russian literary tradition, having surpassed three other canonical writers connected to Russian imperial ambitions, Lomonosov, Derzhavin, and Karamzin. In this way, “the light of [Pushkin’s] mind” has made him into a beacon of enlightenment for northerly Russia, “just like the new moon, which is a precious sight to the East [*podobno molodoi luny, kotoroi vid dorog Vostoku*].” The “new moon” of Pushkin’s genius—which Leah Feldman points out is the crescent symbol of the *Ummah*, “the international community of Islamic believers”¹²⁵—is then linked to the unwavering global power of the Russian Empire:

Распространилась слава его гения по Европе, как могущество и величие
Николая от Китая до Татарии.

The glory of his genius spread throughout Europe, just like the might and
greatness of [Tsar] Nicholas from China to Tartary.

Comparing Pushkin’s genius to the imperial power of Nicholas I is a particularly conspicuous gesture, especially in light of Pushkin’s own ambiguous relationship to Russian imperial power—after all, Pushkin’s involvement in the Russian intelligentsia’s resistance to Nicholas I is the reason his name became associated with the Caucasus in the first place. This comparison, far from signifying unequivocal support of Russian imperial power, reveals yet more complexities in Akhundov’s poetic perspective. Although Tsar Nikolai’s “greatness and might” may dominate the farthest expanses of Asia, Akhundov places it in a secondary place of importance by comparing it *to* Pushkin’s genius, not the other way around. In this nuanced simile, Pushkin becomes synonymous with progress and enlightenment, yet not entirely synonymous with Russia itself.

¹²⁵ Feldman, “On the Threshold of Eurasia,” 33.

In subsequent lines that imagine Pushkin’s genius outliving his decaying body, Akhundov pictures the Russian poet’s soul “flying as a bird” in order to befriend, through sorrow, “everyone old and minor [*druzhila vsekhn starykh y malykh sdruzhila s gorest’iu*].” In one sense, the asymmetrical dichotomy of “old and minor” or “old and small” [*starykh y malykh*], rather than the more typical expression “old and young,” can be interpreted as a subtle attempt to uphold Pushkin as a figure of society’s marginal people, rather than as the literary arm of Nicholas’s imperial prowess. Akhundov amplifies this association in the closing lines of the poem, where the heart directly addresses Pushkin with the second-person *ty* form. Here the heart inscribes Pushkin’s legacy onto a specific geographical place—not the center of the Russian Empire or in the far reaches of China or Tartary, but in the Caucasus and at the legendary fountain of Bakhchisarai:

Фонтан из Бахчиварая посылает праху твоему с весенним зефиром
благоухание двух роз твоих.
Старец седовласый, Кавказ, отвечает на песни твои стоном в стихах
Сабугия.¹²⁶

The fountain of Bakhchisaray sends the fragrance of two roses to your ashes with the Western winds of spring.
That grey-haired old man, the Caucasus, answers your songs with the grieving verses of Sabukhi.

By recasting the objects of Pushkin’s “Southern” poetry and imbuing them with agency, as well as equating his own words to theirs, Akhundov affirms the primacy of his own vision of Pushkin and his own interpretation of Pushkin’s work in contrast to the poet’s legacy in Russian mainstream culture. Further, by referring exclusively to Pushkin’s “Southern” works, and making the slain Russian poet into an object of observance by an Eastern subject, from within the genre conventions of a non-Russian literary tradition, Akhundov is effectively domesticating

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Pushkin and his legacy. This is especially evident in the poem's final line, when Akhundov, as the mouthpiece of the Caucasus, "answers" Pushkin under his own Persian pseudonym, Sabukhi.¹²⁷ "Signing" a poem in this way is a convention of classical Persian poetry, and the signature seals the poem with an affirmation of Akhundov's non-Russian identity.

Additionally, by publishing such a work in the Russian language, Akhundov is "answering" Pushkin in Pushkin's own language, thereby inserting his own perspective into Russian literature. This contributes to the spatial understanding of Russophonia I established in chapter 1: by occupying space in a Russian journal, Akhundov also occupies space in the literary memorialization of Pushkin, and ultimately, a space in Russian discourse on empire and literature as well. Yet his poem also reifies the Caucasus as a Russophone space, one of many "conquered by Russian literature," to once again borrow Alexander Etkind's phrase. The result is an unsettling fact: even in affirming a non-Russian perspective, and folding Pushkin into this non-Russian perspective, the poem is not wholly resistant to Russia. This is evident in the hybridization of the *qasida* genre itself upon the poem's translation into Russian, which Akhundov described as an "elegiac ode."¹²⁸ Of no less importance is that Akhundov is also directly addressing his own people through the metonymic dialogue between the knowing heart and the ignorant mind ("You, ignorant of the world") in order to promulgate his pro-Pushkin, pro-Enlightenment views. Crucially, by positioning Pushkin as the apex of Russian literature's evolution, Akhundov upholds Pushkin's life (and death) as a measure of Russia's own troubled path toward progress. In this way, Russia comes into focus as a fellow Eastern culture hostile to

¹²⁷ Leah Feldman provides a detailed analysis of the meaning of this pseudonym in Turkic and Persian languages in *ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁸ Shikhali Kurbanov, ed. "Predislovie," in M. F. Akhundov, *Na smert' Pushkina: vostochnaia poema*, (Baku: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Azer. SSR, 1962), 7.

the forces of enlightenment.

Subsequent Russian translations and adaptations of this poem gradually normalize Akhundov's Russian, and Russify the content and poetic structure of the work, while at the same time framing it as more explicitly "Oriental." The next translation, made by Bestuzhev-Marlinsky in the 1830s, appeared in the journal *Russian Antiquity* [*Russkaia starina*] only in 1874, along with an introductory essay by Adolph Berzhe, a Russian Orientalist.¹²⁹ Here, as in Klemen'tev's letter of 1837, Berzhe states that the motivation behind the publication was not necessarily to draw attention to the work's "literary merits," but rather to showcase the "deep impression" Pushkin made "even among the Muslim population in one of the furthest peripheries [*odin iz dal'nikh krain*] of our expansive fatherland [*otechestva*]." ¹³⁰ Curiously, however, unlike the 1837 publication, this supplementary material contains no language at all framing the poem as Persian. Instead, it locates the poem firmly within Russia's ongoing conflicts in the Caucasus—which would flare up again a scant three years later with the start of the Russo-Turkish War. Berzhe refers to Akhundov as "a young Muslim of the Nukha population [*molodoi musul'manin iz Nukhinskogo zhitelei*]" and gives a short history of Akhundov's role in the chancellery of the governor-general of Georgia, emphasizing his work teaching the "Tatar" language to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. He also indicates the collaborative nature of the work, noting that Bestuzhev-Marlinsky made the translation in consultation with Akhundov himself. Yet the essay ends on a foreboding note, describing the circumstances of Bestuzhev-Marlinsky's untimely death on a campaign "to punish the mountaineers" and reminding the reader that the present work "was the last thing to come from Bestuzhev's pen before his death." Signaling this

¹²⁹ Mirza Fetkh-Ali Akhundov, "Vostochnaia poema na smert' A. S. Pushkina," introduction by Adolph Berzhe, *Russkaia Starina* 11 (1874), 76–78.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

shift in tone, the poem's original title, "A Poem on the Death of Pushkin," is rewritten as "Oriental Poem." Thus, Berzhe frames the work as a dispatch from Russia's own Orient, which, after a prolonged and violent struggle, Russia had finally—however tenuously—domesticated.

Bestuzhev-Marlinsky's prose translation preserves the two-part structure of the original, complete with the dialogue between the poet and his own heart. Yet there are subtle, significant changes to the language. The heart's admonishment of the poet, originally phrased as "you, ignorant of the world [*ty, nevedaiushhii miru*]" is now "you, foreign/alien to the world [*ty, chuzhdyi miru*]." In the lines comparing Pushkin's genius to Russia's imperial prowess, he omits the reference to Nicholas I entirely; instead Pushkin's glory spreads "like the tsar's might [*kak mogushchestvo tsarskoe*]" from Europe to China and Tartary. Leaving his earthly body, the "bird" of Pushkin's soul no longer befriended "all old and minor people [*sdruzhila vsekh starykh y malykh*];" instead, "everyone—old and young, befriended each other in sorrow [*vse, star y mlad, sdruzhilis' s gorest'iu*]." This message of unity is repeated and even embellished in a later translation by A. Sokolov, published in *The Petersburg Leaflet* [*Peterburgskii listok*] in 1880 to mark the dedication of the monument to Pushkin in central Moscow:¹³¹

И вместе, стар и млад, слились в печале
сдружились крепко горестью единой.

And together, old and young converged in sadness,
They strongly befriended each other, unified in sorrow.

Sokolov's 1880 translation continues the domestication of Akhundov's work by using blank verse, a European and especially English metrical form of unrhymed iambic pentameter that

¹³¹ The establishment of this monument marked Pushkin's elevation to the status of a national poet for all of Russia. Speeches by Dostoevskii and Turgenev—and the notable absence of Lev Tolstoi, who derided the ceremony as a "farce"—made the occasion a landmark in Russian literary history. See Marcus Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880*, Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); see also D. W. Martin, "The Pushkin Celebrations of 1880: The Conflict of Ideals and Ideologies," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no. 4 (October 1, 1988): 505–525.

became popular in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth century, and which Pushkin himself used in *Boris Godunov* and the “little tragedies.”¹³² Sokolov also enhances the work’s association with Pushkin by changing the phrase “*starets sedovlasnyi, Kavkaz* [grey-haired old man, the Caucasus]” to the more recognizable *sedoi Kavkaz* [grey-headed Caucasus],” a phrase made popular by several of Pushkin’s Caucasian works, including “Fragments of Onegin’s Journey [Otrivki iz puteshestviia Onegina],” the extratextual fragment of *Evgenii Onegin* detailing the protagonist’s travels through the Caucasus. Finally, as Leah Feldman points out, the poem’s culminating image of the Caucasus “answering” Pushkin with the verses of Sabukhi has been stricken out entirely.¹³³

Taking into account the differences between the 1837, 1874, and 1880 versions of this poem, I note the emergence of a clear pattern: by bringing the poem “closer” to Pushkin in terms of stylistics, versification, and historical commemoration, Akhundov’s subsequent collaborators, translators, and publishers also frame his work as an alien phenomenon from *within* the borders of the Russian “fatherland.” This required them to obscure the complexities of the original text as well as the persona of its author. There was no ideological or literary script that would quite fit the work of a Persian-educated, Azeri Turk who worked as a Caucasian imperial administrator and happened to be an ardent Russophile—so instead Akhundov came to be imagined by Russians as yet another of Pushkin and Bestuzhev-Marlinsky’s colorful “Southern” characters.

Yet by the time of the unveiling of the 1880 Pushkin monument in Moscow, writers had already begun to turn to national, rather than imperial, scripts. This process continued throughout the twentieth century, as Akhundov began to be re-cast as a purely Azeribaijani national writer.

¹³² Pushkin’s contemporaries Lermontov and Zhukovskii also made regular use of this form in “imitations of folk poetry” as well as lyric verse. Boris Unbegaun, *Russian Versification* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1956), 152–153.

¹³³ Feldman, “On the Threshold of Eurasia,” 34.

The most illuminating example of this transformation surfaced over a century later, in a 1988 volume published by the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences in commemoration of the 175th anniversary of Akhundov's birth. A document from the twilight years of the Soviet Union, the volume contains translations of the work into twenty-four languages of the USSR. The arrangement of the translations reflects a clear list of priorities—the first entry is a reprint of the (ostensibly) original Persian text,¹³⁴ followed by an early Azeri translation, and then translations into all of the titular languages of the Soviet republics (including Russian), as well as select minority languages: Uyghur, Bashkir, Tatar, Udmurt, Marii, Ingush, Yakut, Ossetian, and Karachay. An appendix contains the original 1837 translation, as well as the 1874 and 1880 versions, and also three more undated Azeri translations. The title of “On the Death of Pushkin” is restored, and the volume is prefaced with an essay praising the universality of Akhundov's work, while also lauding the poem's translation as an early glimpse of the forthcoming spirit of *druzhiba narodov*: “Only in our era has it become possible for every significant work of the fraternal literatures [*literaturny bratskikh narodov*] to be accessible to millions.” In this way, Akhundov's original Russian poem, with its unique interlanguage, Persian genre conventions, and thoroughly domesticated portrayal of Pushkin, comes to bear the weight of its later editors and translators, who performed their own selective domestications, foreignizations, and interpretations as they entrenched the poem in Russian and Azerbaijani literary history simultaneously.

“How Tatiana's Voice Rang Through the Steppe”: Abai, Auezov, and the Russian text

¹³⁴ In his 1874 essay, Berzhe claims that the original Persian text of the poem was lost; however, Sharif contends that the document was recovered among Akhundov's unsorted papers in the 1930s, *Pushkin v stranakh zarubezhnogo vostoka*, 215.

In one of his reports to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society on the subject of Kyrgyz-Kazakh shamanistic religious practices, Chokan Valikhanov describes a ritual in which “the hair of a Russian is used as one of the means to dispel illness.”¹³⁵ The talismanic value assigned to Russian hair in Valikhanov’s sensational account (if it is to be taken at face value) only hints at what Russia may have signified in the imagination of many of its colonized subjects who, unlike Valikhanov, never had the means to represent themselves to the Russians. However, the meaning of Russia, emblemized by the miraculous and transformative power of the Russian-language text, became a fixation in biographical and critical narratives of Valikhanov, Akhundov, and most memorably, Abai Kunanbaev, as they became elevated to their respective national canons.

Abai, who, in the true fashion of a cultural icon, is known by his first name alone, enjoys a dual legacy as the father of modern Kazakh literature (as distinct from oral tradition), yet also as an enlightener who translated the classics of Russian literature into Kazakh and provided an important bridge between the two cultures. In a collected works volume published on the eve of the 150th anniversary of Abai’s birth, a mere three years after Kazakhstan gained its independence, the country’s newly elected president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, neatly summarized Abai’s significance in Kazakh culture. He lauded Abai’s work as “a true reflection of the Kazakh people’s mentality and existence” and characterized him as the epitome of the Kazakh nation’s “bitter struggle for freedom, independence, and the preservation of national pride.”¹³⁶ In the same volume, the critic Z. A. Akhmetov pointed out that although Abai “reviled” Russian colonization, he viewed Russian culture as a “window” to the world. Akhmetov then drew a

¹³⁵ Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov, “Sledy shamanstva u Kirgizov,” *Zapiski imperatorskago russkago geograficheskago obshchestva po otdeleniiu etnografii*, vol. XXIX (St. Petersburg, 1904), 27. Reprinted in id., *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, 469–493.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

familiar analogy to describe Abai's legacy: "just as Pushkin was Russia's spiritual father, so too did Abai become the founder of Kazakh culture."¹³⁷ Providing a blunt contrast to the worshipful words of the Kazakhstani president, a Soviet scholar remarked in 1923 that, "the Russian book awakened [Abai's] poetic soul," and "if not for the powerful [*moshchnaia*] Russian culture [...] Abai would have been just another well-known *bii*."¹³⁸ How did Abai come to be known as Kazakhstan's equivalent to Pushkin, and how did contemporary hagiographies come to link Abai's genius to the Russian book?

Abai was born into an aristocratic Kazakh family in 1845, in a village just outside the Russian colonial outpost of Semipalatinsk, where Dostoevskii would go on to spend several life-changing years in exile in the 1850s.¹³⁹ He received a customary Islamic education, first from a village mullah, then at the *medrese* of Akhmet Riza in Semipalatinsk, before enrolling for a brief period at the city's Russian school. Here, according to his biographers, he had his first taste of the Russian classics—though he only attained fluency later in life, after many years of self-directed study.¹⁴⁰ Like his father before him, Abai spent much of his adult life as an administrator for the tsarist government of the Semipalatinsk *uezd*, ascending the ranks of *volost*

¹³⁷ Z. A. Akhmetov ed., *Abai Zhane Qazirgi Zaman: Omiri Men Adebii Muralarynyng Zhanga Qyrlary* (Almaty: Ghylym, 1994), 23. In the customary law system of nomadic Kazakh society, a *bii* pronounced judgments and dealt with other administrative tasks.

¹³⁸ Quoted in A. Zhirechin, *Abai i ego russkie druz'ia* (Almaty: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1949), 9.

¹³⁹ The area around Semipalatinsk is one of the most politically sensitive and significant symbolic spaces in modern Kazakh culture—first as the epicenter of the Kazakh intelligentsia as well as the headquarters of the separatist party Alash Orda and the short-lived Alash Autonomy (whose history was repressed in Soviet times), then as the home of Abai and his Soviet biographer Mukhtar Auezov (and their contemporary pilgrimage sites), and finally as the site of the Soviet government's secret nuclear testing facility, the Semipalatinsk "Polygon." After years of environmental devastation, the Polygon became the site of the Kazakh fight for independence, as the center of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement. More discussion will follow at the end of chapter 2.

¹⁴⁰ Zhirechin, *Abai i ego russkie druz'ia*, 14–16.

chief and then governor.¹⁴¹ His involvement in the Russian cultural life of Semipalatinsk led to his acquaintance with the exiled Russian intellectuals Evgenii Petrovich Mikhaelis (1841–1893) and Nifont Ivanovich Dolgoplov (1857–1925), who encouraged Abai in his studies and creative efforts.¹⁴² In middle age he embarked on a parallel career as a writer, composer, and *aqyn* (traditional bard), and he came to be known for his contributions to the tradition of *aitys*, a Kazakh genre of extemporaneous spoken-word poetry set to music.¹⁴³ Yet Abai published only a handful of works in his own lifetime, many of them anonymously, in the bilingual Russian-Turkic bulletin of the Tsarist administration, *The Kirgiz Steppe Gazette* [*Kirgizskaya Stepnaia Gazeta/Dala Uailayetining Gazeti*].¹⁴⁴ The pre-revolutionary Kazakh intelligentsia, and, later,

¹⁴¹In this capacity, he led a local legal assembly and contributed to the establishment of a local judicial code. Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Surrey, UK: Routledge Curzon, 2001), 7.

¹⁴²Detailed biographical information on Mikhaelis and Dolgoplov can be found in Zhirechin, *Abai i ego russkie druž'ia*, 12–74.

¹⁴³For more on the oral *aitys* tradition and its “entextualization” in Kazakh culture, as well as Abai’s fundamental role in this process, see Dubuisson, “The Value of a Voice,” 1–4; 35–36. Here it is also worth noting that Abai’s artistic awakening at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with an especially dark chapter in the history of Russia’s steppe colonization, which Kazakhs call the *zar zaman*, the “time of grief and tribulations.” Beginning with two successive Provisional Statutes in 1867 and 1868 that incorporated the Kazakh steppe territories into Russian administrative districts, the imperial government’s seizure and re-appropriation of Kazakh pastoral lands, combined with a sharp in-flow of Russian settlers, created irreversible upheavals in the Kazakhs’ traditional culture, social organization, and livelihood. The *zar zaman* has strong literary associations: it likewise refers to a group of Kazakh poets who were among the first to write in their native language, and who decried the injustices of Russian colonization: Dulat Babataiuli (1802–1871), Murat Monkeuli (1843–1906), and Abubakir Kerderi (1858–1903). See “Zar zaman,” *Kazakhstan: natsional'naia entsiklopediia* vol. 2 (Almaty: Kazak Entsiklopediasy, 2005), 384. See also Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 2nd ed., Studies of Nationalities 427 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 77; 108.

¹⁴⁴In Abai’s lifetime, the Kazakh literary language was only beginning to be standardized. Beginning in the 1860s, the first Kazakh materials were printed in the Tatar intellectual center of Kazan—the location of the nearest Arabic-script printing press. Isabelle Kreindler describes the Kazakhs at this time as “a culturally submerged people without a written language of their own and dependent mostly on their fellow Muslim Tatars for mullahs and teachers. Their native Kazakh language was shunned not only in the Koranic schools, where the vernaculars were generally ignored, but also in the few native schools set up by the tsarist government ... By the 20th century the Kazakhs had a written language of their own and a small but talented and very energetic group of people consciously molding it into a modern literary idiom. By the time of the October Revolution about 300 Kazakh-language books had been published, most of them in the 20th century.” Isabelle Kreindler, “Ibrahim Altynsarin, Nikolai II’ minskii and the Kazakh National Awakening,” *Central Asian Survey* 2, no. 3 (September 1983), 99. See also Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 59–60.

Soviet folklorists and literary scholars, took on the task of transcribing, editing, and, publishing his best-known works, including his philosophical tract *Words of Edification* [*Qara sozder*], his lyric verses and *poemy*, his compositions in the oral song tradition, and his adaptations of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoi, and Krylov.¹⁴⁵ In particular, Abai's legend was carefully cultivated in the early Soviet period by the Kazakh writer and literary scholar Mukhtar Auezov, who hailed from the same region and was even acquainted with the elder Abai as a small child. In 1937, at the height of the Stalinist purges, he brought his efforts to the Russian reading public with a series of articles strikingly titled "How Tatiana's Voice Rang through the Steppe," focusing on Abai's translations of excerpts from Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* into Kazakh song form, and positing these translations as the awakening of Kazakh culture to the majestic potential and universal appeal of Russian literature.¹⁴⁶

"How Tatiana's Voice Rang through the Steppe" formed the basis of Auezov's most enduring contribution to the Abai legend: a multivolume, semi-fictionalized set of biographical narratives *The Way of Abai* [*Put' Abaia/Abai Zholy*], or, in some editions, simply *Abai*. The work was published first in Kazakh and then in Auezov's own Russian translations in collaboration with Leonid Sobolev from 1942 to 1956. Upon winning the Stalin Prize in 1948, it became the

¹⁴⁵ The first published assessment of Abai's work appeared in the journal *Semipalatinskii listok* in 1905. It was an obituary written by A. N. Bokeykhanov, a local intellectual and education reformer who went on to become a member of the Alash party, as well as the president of the Alash Autonomy during its brief (and unrecognized) existence as an independent state from 1917–1920. Abai's obituary was re-printed in 1907 in the proceedings of the Semipalatinsk branch of the West-Siberian division of the Russian Geographical Society. Then in 1909 Bokeykhanov prepared and published the first collection of Abai's poetry in St. Petersburg (this text was in Kazakh using Arabic script). In 1918 the young Mukhtar Auezov founded an entire journal, *Abai*, dedicated to propagating the *aqyn*'s works.

¹⁴⁶ Mukhtar Auezov, "Kak zapela Tat'iana v stepi," trans. M. Vorontsov, *Literaturnyi Kazakhstan* 6 (1937): 61–80. Auezov's Kazakh-language piece was concurrently published in *Kazak adebiati* and *Adebiat maidany*. For an analysis of the legacy of Auezov himself in Kazakh literature, see Michael Rouland "Mukhtar Auezov," in *Russia's People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, eds. Stephen M. Norris and Willard Sunderland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 297–308.

template for most subsequent accounts of Abai’s life. Several passages are dedicated to Abai’s budding enchantment with Russian culture, in stark contrast to the conservative, reactionary—and, most troubling of all, religious—perspectives of his family and friends. In one early exchange, a friend jokingly equates Abai’s acquisition of Russian with emasculation: “So, can it be that by immersing yourself in Russian books, you’ve become a Russian yourself? They aren’t allowed to have two wives, you know [*A mozhet byt’, ty nachtalsia russkikh knig i sam stal Russkim? U nikh ved’ s dvumia zhenami zhit’ nel’zia*].”¹⁴⁷ But the greater implication of this conflict is staged in another memorable passage detailing a conflict between Abai his conservative father, who warns him that “clinging to the Russians [*l’nut’ k russkim*]” will result in his rejection from the Muslim community: “If your soul goes over to them, [...] every Muslim will be alien to you [*tvoia dusha ukhodit k nim ... kazhdyi musul’manin steanet zhuzhdat’sia tebia*]” (343). In an impassioned reply, Abai defends his decision to learn Russian in terms of his overarching desire for enlightenment and learning. He describes enlightenment as a “treasure,” which, crucially, only the Russians can bestow upon him:

--Я не могу принять ни одного из ваших упреков, отец. Я убежден в своей правоте [...] Самое дорогое и для народа и для меня — знание и свет... А они — у русских. И если русские дадут мне то сокровище, которое я тщетно искал всю жизнь, разве могут они быть для меня далекими, чужими? Откажись я от этого— я остался бы невеждой. (289)

“I cannot accept a single one of your accusations, Father. I am in the right [...] The most valuable thing to me, and to [our] people, is knowledge and enlightenment ... And these things are in the hands of the Russians. And if the Russians give me that treasure, which I sought in in my whole life in vain, how could they be distant from me, how can they be alien? If I had given up on this, I would have remained ignorant.”

By rendering the alien familiar and the distant close, the “treasure” of enlightenment triggers a personal transformation in Abai. As the medium of enlightenment, the Russian language makes

¹⁴⁷ Mukhtar Auezov, *Abai* (Moscow: Gos. Izd-vo literatury, 1950), 343. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

this transformation possible. Auezov spends several chapters detailing Abai's process of teaching himself Russian, and the miraculous change in consciousness that take place as a result of his contact with the Russian book. While books in "Old Uzbek,"¹⁴⁸ Persian, and Arabic invite Abai into the "flowering gardens, *medrese*, mosques, fairy-tale palaces, and libraries" at the historic centers of the Islamic world, Russian books offer a new, contemporary perspective on these areas. Russian books strike Abai as a source greater objectivity and contemporary relevance, as they "uncover the secrets" of Central Asia and offer practical information about them:

Рядом со старо-узбекскими, которые Абай читал свободно, тут лежали арабские и персидские книги, более трудные для него, и русские, понимать которые ему было еще труднее. [...] Русские книги раскрывали перед ним тайны вод, песков и пустынь Средней Азии, Ирана, Аравии и жизнь их больших торговых городов. Сегодняшний день этих стран интересовал Абая больше всего. Читая, он делал подробные выписки о караванных дорогах и водных путях, о крупных городах и больших базарах. Все эти сведения были необходимы для путника, отправлявшегося сегодня в далекие края. (293)

Along with Old Uzbek, which Abai read freely, there lay Arabic and Persian books, which were more difficult for him, and Russian books, which were harder still. [...] Russian books uncovered before his eyes the secrets of the waters, sands, and deserts of Central Asia, Iran, Arabia, and the life of their large, commercial cities. What interested Abai most of all was the contemporary life of these countries. As he read, he made detailed notes on the caravan routes and waterways, about big cities and bazars. All of this knowledge was indispensable for a traveler setting out to these far-off regions today.

Although Abai laments that he missed the chance to learn Russian as a child ("Such a great loss for me!") Russian books soon become his "inseparable friends [*nerazluchnymi druž'iami*]," and he begins to collect them with great care, in spite of the his fellow villagers, who react to the strange, impenetrable Russian writing with superstitious fear:

[...] когда они замечали, что книга раскрывается влево, что страницы ее — с рисунками, и когда, взглядевшись, они видели вместо затейливых арабских букв ровное и спокойное течение русских строк, — они, пораженные, шарахались от книги и тут же умолкали. (558)

¹⁴⁸ Soviet historians of Central Asia gave the Chagatay language a nationalistic makeover as "Old Uzbek." See n. 186.

[...] when they noticed that the book opened from the left and that its pages were illustrated, and when they looked closer and saw the level, steady flow of Russian lines instead of intricate Arabic letters—they recoiled from the book in shock, and fell silent on the spot.¹⁴⁹

The turning point in Abai’s transformation comes when he discovers Pushkin for the first time—not through *Evgenii Onegin* or lyric verse, but through *Dubrovskii*, the unfinished story of a betrayed nobleman who robs from the rich:

Всю минувшую зиму Абай, окружив себя помощниками— словарями и учебниками, сидел только над русскими книгами. Весной, когда ему показалось, что свет нового мира уже открывается ему, он взялся за Пушкина. Начал он с прозы и, читая, с восторгом чувствовал, что понимает решительно все. Это был «Дубровский». Пушкин открыл перед Абаем все богатство русского языка — и теперь Абай смог оценить и все богатство мыслей этой книги.

Глубокое душевное удовлетворение и особенно острое ощущение окружающей жизни, владевшие сейчас Абаем, и были вызваны встречей с этой книгой: она оказалась тем спутником, которого случайно находишь в дороге и который вдруг становится неожиданно близким другом. Абай давно не испытывал такой радости. Сегодняшний день был оправданием его долгого отшельничества, оправданием его ухода от всех домашних дел и разговоров: брод, который он долгие годы искал, стремясь достичь другого берега, был наконец найден и перейден. (370)

All winter Abai surrounded himself with aides, textbooks and dictionaries, sitting just above the Russian books. In the spring, when it seemed that the light of a new world was revealed to him, he took hold of Pushkin. He began with prose and, reading it with delight, he felt that he understood absolutely everything. It was *Dubrovsky*. Pushkin opened the riches of the Russian language to Abai—and now he was able to appreciate the richness and thoughts of this book.

The deep spiritual satisfaction and particularly acute sense of life around him, which Abai now possessed, were caused by the encounter with this book: the book turned out to be like a fellow traveler you happen to meet on the road, and who suddenly becomes unexpectedly close friend. Abai had never experienced such joy. Today was a justification of his long seclusion, a justification of his departure from all the household chores and conversations: he found the passage he had been seeking for years in an attempt to reach the other shore, and he finally crossed over.

¹⁴⁹ Auezov’s description of the “level, steady flow of Russian lines” takes on additional significance in light of the novel’s historical context—at the time of its first publication in the early 1940s, Stalin’s campaign to institute the Cyrillic alphabet for the languages of Central Asia was well underway. (This supplanted the Latinization campaigns of the 1920s and 30s.) See n. 170.

This triumphant encounter with Pushkin marks two psychological changes: first, Abai's recognition of the familiar in the foreign; but also his recognition of the inevitable "becoming-Other" in the process of seeking out and understanding the foreign. The metaphor of motion, in which the Russian language enables the subject to "cross over" to the other shore, illustrates this momentous change in perspective. "Crossing over" and recognizing one's self in the other becomes a common theme in Kazakhstani Russophone writing throughout the twentieth century; Olzhas Suleimenov went on to voice similar sentiments a generation later, in a poem dedicated to his Russian counterpart, Andrei Voznesenskii:

Мы кочуем навстречу себе,
узнаваясь
в другом.

We wander in search of ourselves,
Recognizing ourselves
In the other. (*God obez'iany* 12)

However, with this breakthrough, Abai's problems of identification are just beginning. Despite finding and recognizing Pushkin as a "fellow traveler," he still longs to convince his own people to "cross over" with him. For this endeavor, he decides to appeal to the most authentic, most truly Russian character of all: Tatiana, the heroine of *Evgenii Onegin*. He begins translating her famous letter to Onegin into Kazakh. But this is no solitary effort—he succeeds only through collaboration with his fellow *aqyns*, who set the verses to musical accompaniment on the traditional Kazakh instrument of the *dombra*. As the *aqyns* begin rewriting and singing their own versions, performing the song at weddings and large gatherings, Tatiana's song finally spreads like wildfire through the steppe:

Это были чудесно-грустные слова Татьяны. Гости притихли и, не шевелясь, следили за каждым словом песни. [...] Вначале слушатели все же не могли понять — какую песню они слушают, казахскую или русскую? Одно было ясно: новая песня, прекрасная и грустная, говорит о глубоких чувствах. Особенно очаровывал

ее язык. Молодые акыны как будто впервые поняли, как нужно петь о любви. Такую искреннюю грусть, такую нежность они постигали впервые. (570)

It was the wonderful, sorrowful words of Tatiana. The guests fell silent and motionless, following every word of the song. [...] Initially, the listeners could not understand - what were they listening to, a Kazakh song or a Russian one? One thing was clear: the new song, beautiful and sad, expressed deep feelings. Its language was especially fascinating. Young *aqyns* understood, as if for the first time, how to sing about love. Such sincere sadness, a tenderness they learned for the first time.

Word of Abai's feat even spreads to the Russian community, where Mikhaelis, Abai's Russian mentor, is astonished to hear that Abai "made Tatiana speak in the Kazakh language [*zastavil Tat'ianu zagovorit' na kazakhskom iazyke*]" (572).

Homi Bhabha's allegory of the "fortuitous discovery of the English book," which he uses to foreground a theoretical discussion of British cultural imperialism, also lends insight into the exceptional textual relationship between Auezov, Abai, Pushkin, and Tatiana.¹⁵⁰ Bhabha helps situate the allegory as a ubiquitous tale among the colonizers of the British Empire, in which an English book—usually the Bible—appears in the "wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa, and the Caribbean" and "installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art, creates the conditions for beginning, a practice of history and narrative." In this way the English book becomes "an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline." But even as its signifying power is accepted, the book is also refashioned in the hands of the colonized, as Bhabha demonstrates in an 1817 account from British India in which a small community outside of Delhi discovers the Bible and accepts it as the word of God, but only after translating it, recopying it, and subsuming it entirely into their own Hindu religious practice. Thus, "the institution of the word in the wilds is also an *Enstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation." Moreover, the extent to which the colonizers' book is

¹⁵⁰ All quotations in this section are from Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 145–146; 149.

“repeated, translated, misread, and displaced” is exactly what “makes the presence of the book wondrous.” In Mukhtar Auezov’s *The Way of Abai*, the Russian book is similarly emblematic—not only of the authority of the Russian Empire, but also of the revolutionary potential of Russian culture. Abai is transformed through his encounter the miraculous Russian book, and in a most unexpected way: instead of becoming Russified and rejecting his traditional culture, he transforms into a Kazakh icon—a more authentic Kazakh, in fact, than his conservative, reactionary peers. In turn, Abai’s translation of Tatiana’s letter has a reciprocal effect on the Russian heroine: Tatiana escapes her epistolary confines, and her voice freely “rings across the steppe” in the idiom of the Kazakhs.

At this point the historical and ideological context of Auezov’s work becomes pertinent to understanding the miraculous encounter with the Russian colonizer’s book. As one of the few members of the Kazakh intelligentsia to survive the purges of the 1930s (but only after serving two years in prison for his affiliation with “bourgeois nationalists”), Auezov found himself in a position of unprecedented responsibility—and authority—over the fate of Kazakh literature’s nineteenth-century progenitors.¹⁵¹ “How Tatiana’s Voice Rang Across the Steppe” and *The Way of Abai* came to light at pivotal moment in the Soviet nationalities policy, as the original ideals of nativization and radical national self-determination were forcibly replaced with a vision of a union dominated politically and culturally by the Russian SFSR.¹⁵² With this ideological shift in mind, it is possible to view Auezov’s translations, transcriptions, critical studies, and literary representations of Abai as acts of “displacement, distortion, and dislocation” in their own right,

¹⁵¹ Part of this authority came from his work as a university professor of Kazakh literature and history. Nurbolat Dzhuanyshebekov, *Mukhtar Auezov v kontekste russkoi i mirovoi literatury*, 4–5.

¹⁵² See “The Reemergence of the Russians,” the final chapter of Terry Martin’s *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 394–431.

specifically in order to emphasize the importance of Russia to the Kazakhs. Eva-Marie Dubuisson refers to the unique collaborative relationship between these two writers as the “Abai-Auezov dyad,” and points out its formative role in the “entextualization” of Kazakh culture—the process by which an oral tradition in a vernacular language became codified, and summarily “transformed,” into a modern national literary tradition.¹⁵³ Taken as a whole, the literary output of the “Abai-Auezov dyad” corresponds to Bhabha’s characterization of the discovery of the English book as “at once, a moment of originality and authority.”

The *Aqyn*, the Orientalist, and the “Tatar Molière”: Some Conclusions

This chapter has dealt with three fascinating and problematic figures in Russophone literature and intellectual history: Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Abai Kunanbaev, and Chokan Valikhanov. Because all three nineteenth-century writers advocated Russian-language education, progressive reforms of Islamic society, and a closer relationship with the Russian empire, their legacies were preserved in the Soviet period and they received a great deal of scholarly attention. However, they were elevated to national symbols at the expense of several other important intellectuals, whose ideas proved incompatible with Soviet ideology and were relegated to obscurity until the post-Soviet era.¹⁵⁴

Although Abai and Valikhanov are positioned side-by-side in Kazakhstan’s pantheon of national founding fathers, in many ways they are opposites. The radical differences in their lives, their uses of language, the subject matter and audiences for their work, their relationships and attitudes toward the Russian Empire, and their subsequent Soviet canonization, reveal much to us

¹⁵³ Dubuisson, “The Value of a Voice,” 42.

¹⁵⁴ Steven Sabol makes this point in *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 54–55.

about the heterogeneity of Russophonia, as well as its persistent relationship to state ideology. Valikhanov was a Russian-educated Orientalist, tsarist administrator, and feted member of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society. Owing to his childhood Islamic education and his subsequent training at the Russian military academy in Omsk, he was both a “mimic” of the Europeanized Russian intelligentsia and a model “intercessor” between the Russians and the Turkic steppe nomads who had come under Russian rule. His firsthand knowledge of Turkic languages and cultures proved invaluable on expeditions with famed Russian explorers M.M. Khomentovskii and P.P. Semenov (popularly known as “Tien-Shanskii”). Valikhanov’s success as an Orientalist in service of the Imperial Russian Army provided the Russian Empire with a body of knowledge necessary for advancing its territorial expansion at one of its most politically sensitive historical junctures.¹⁵⁵ His ethnographic work on Central Asian political and judicial systems, customs, languages, and folklore provided a basis for the Russian Empire’s further assertion of power in this region. His well-documented disdain for Islam as a vestige of despotic backwardness would provide fuel for subsequent Soviet antireligious campaigns, while also securing his image as a secular enlightener (and thus obscuring the memory of the influential wave of progressive Islamic reformers in Eurasia at the turn of the century, the Jadids).

However, the work of early Russophone intellectuals like Valikhanov was not only valuable for political reasons. By codifying, valorizing, and preserving elements of their

¹⁵⁵ Valikhanov’s expeditions to the heart of Inner Eurasia took place at the height of the so-called “Great Game” of the mid-nineteenth century, in which the Russian and British Empires vied for control of Central Asia in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and intrigue. British suspicion of the Russian Empire’s motives led the British Royal Geographical Society to translate and publish one of Valikhanov’s reports in 1865. The introduction notes “the great interest which Central Asia has lately attracted [...] and the comparative ignorance which has prevailed in England respecting the true position of Russia in those distant regions,” and goes on to mention that the Russian Empire’s recent territorial acquisitions “have increased the apprehensions that have been entertained by a portion of the English public of hostile intentions against British India.” Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov and Mikhail Veniukov, *The Russians in Central Asia: Their Occupation of the Kirghiz Steppe and the Line of the Syr-Daria : Their Political Relations with Khiva, Bokhara, and Kokan: Also Descriptions of Chinese Turkestan and Dzungaria*, trans. John and Robert Michell (London: E. Stanford, 1865).

indigenous cultures in Russian terms, as part of a Russian imperial project, these writers played a crucial role in the subsequent development of national vernacular literatures. Valikhanov's transcriptions of the Kyrgyz epic, the *Manas*, as well as several other works of the Kazakh-Kirgiz oral tradition, provided the basis for the academic study of these works by generations of Soviet scholars. Thanks to these projects, oral culture lives on as the basis for establishing contemporary national heritage.¹⁵⁶ In this way, Valikhanov's work and legacy complicates certain essentializing dichotomies of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said wrote that "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly powerful dialectic of information and control."¹⁵⁷ In Valikhanov's case, the knowledge he generated eventually became a tool of empowerment for the Russian Empire's "subject races" in Central Asia during the pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. At the same time, the "dialectic of information and control" in the Russian Empire (and later, in the Soviet Union) was never easily traceable to clearly delineated "subject races" and colonial masters. Therefore it is possible to conclude that the earliest Russophone writers not only acted as "enlightened intercessors"—to borrow Dostoevskii's terminology—between the Russian Empire and its colonized peoples. They also provided a vital contribution to the modern conception of nationhood itself, as well as to its many political manifestations.

Unlike Chokan Valikhanov, whose contribution to Kazakh literature consisted of transcribing and translating Kazakh/Kyrgyz oral epics and folklore as part of an imperial

¹⁵⁶ Here I should note that the study and promotion of indigenous prerevolutionary culture swung in and out of acceptability in the Soviet period. Many Soviet Orientalists were purged for "bourgeois nationalism" in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, including quite tragically, those who were working on translating the Kyrgyz oral epic *Manas* into Russian.

¹⁵⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 36. Quoted in Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (April 1, 2000), 75.

mission, Abai Kunanbaev was not an Orientalist in any sense of the word. On the contrary, he attained the status of a legend in Kazakh culture largely propagated by his fellow Kazakhs. Abai's body of work can be viewed as a combined effort of the poet himself as well as his early editors and transcribers in the Kazakh intelligentsia, with Mukhtar Auezov figuring most prominently of all. Beginning with his contemporaries in Kazakh intelligentsia and continuing until today, scholars have credited Abai's works as landmark innovations of modern Kazakh literature, with their introduction of Russian subject matter and verse forms, philosophical preponderances on the meaning of the Russian language in Kazakh society, and above all the spread of Russian "progressive" ideas to the steppe.¹⁵⁸ Mukhtar Auezov's epic biographical novel *The Way of Abai* gave rise to the portrayal of the Russian book as a miraculous, transformative event in Abai's life. The ideological climate in which Auezov was writing, characterized by the growing necessity of the Russian language, increased contact and collaboration with Russians, and the anticipation of a Russophone readership, was paramount in this portrayal.

Although Shaden Tageldin's 2011 study *The Seduction of Translation* focuses on Egyptian writers' translations of European literature, her theoretical framework does much to explain the writing, translation, and publication of the earliest Russophone writers. Casting aside the conventional understanding of translation as "a bipolar choice between foreignization and domestication, hitched to an understanding of imperialism as an equally bipolar dynamic of domination and resistance," Tageldin redefines cultural imperialism as "a politics of translational seduction, a politics that lures the colonized to seek power through empire rather than against it,

¹⁵⁸ Gulnar Kendirbaeva discusses Abai's reception as a "poet of a new type" among the Kazakh intelligentsia during his lifetime and immediately following his death in "'We Are Children of Alash...': The Kazakh Intelligentsia at the Beginning of the 20th Century in Search of National Identity and Prospects of the Cultural Survival of the Kazakh People," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (1999), 20–22.

thereby repressing its inherent inequalities.”¹⁵⁹ Building on the central points of Jean Baudrillard’s 1979 essay *Seduction*, which rest on the word’s root meaning as “diversion, leading astray,” Tageldin suggests that seduction “is fundamentally not about sex” but instead it is a “strategy of displacement, a mastery of diverted (thus diverting) appearances.” Translational seduction in the context of cultural imperialism is made possible by “the ‘copulation’ of the colonizer and the colonized,” and its end result is “to make the grammars of both signs and ontologies dance: to make the polarities of subject and object oscillate such that they blur, and the mastered can fancy himself master.” The Russophone works of Akhundov and Abai can be viewed as products of mutual seduction between the writers and their Russian counterparts (Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Mikhailes, Dolgopolov), their compilers, editors, and biographers (Klemen’tev, Berzhe, Bokeikhanov, Auezov, Guseinov), the Russian writers who inspired them (Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevskii), and finally, their readers. Tageldin’s nuanced understanding of seduction also provides a key to understanding the curious correspondence of Dostoevskii and Valikhanov. Contrary to Dostoevskii’s claims, I suggest that the “feeling and attraction” between Russian writers and their colonized counterparts was *indeed* explicable, and likewise inseparable from the impulse to see one’s self in the other. For the nineteenth century’s “enlightened intercessors,” the mastery of the Russian language made this vision possible.

¹⁵⁹She notes that “Even Bhabha, who early refused a simple politics of colonial imposition and anticolonial ‘writing back’ favors the oppositional narrative. Hence Bhabha describes the language of mimicry, a hybrid native idiom that bespeaks both “civility” to and “civil disobedience” of the colonizer, as a mode of ‘spectacular resistance.’” Tageldin, *Disarming Words*, 3.

Chapter 3

Russophone Writing and Postwar Decolonization

And a barefoot Negro on a dusty square in an aggrieved continent listens, turning his face to the heavens. He ponders the greatness of mankind.

Could there be a people who would make the whole world bow down?

Well, there is a people that forced mankind to raise its head to the scalding, rainy April sky.

GLORY TO THAT PEOPLE!

—Olzhas Suleimenov, *Earth, Bow Down to Man!*, 1961¹⁶⁰

In the closing passage of his 1961 ode to the achievements of the Soviet space program, the Russophone poet Olzhas Suleimenov introduces a subject that was ubiquitous in Soviet culture of late 1950s and early 1960s: the budding relationship between the Soviet Union and the rapidly decolonizing nations of the Third World. Employing a simultaneously optimistic and paternalistic portrait of an impoverished Black subject pondering the “greatness [*velichie*]” of the Soviet people and the unified nation they constitute, Suleimenov draws a clear contrast between the “barefoot,” “dusty,” and “aggrieved [*oskarblennyi*]” existence wrought by capitalist imperialism, and another, better path to freedom offered by the Soviet Union, a nation that could “make the whole world bow down.”

Such a comparison by itself is not particularly unique—after all, the myriad injustices of colonization were used to construct all manner of patriotic and propagandistic messages throughout Soviet history. What is significant about this particular poem, however, is Suleimenov’s position as an ethnic Kazakh writing in Russian for a Kazakhstani publication.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Olzhas Suleimenov, *Zemlia, poklonis’ cheloveku! : poema* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhskoe gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1961), 39. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

¹⁶¹ A shortened version of the poem appeared first in *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, then shortly afterward in a separate bound volume by the state literary publishing house of the Kazakh SSR. It was reprinted several times in

Although Suleimenov predictably uses the language of postwar decolonization to uphold himself and his fellow Central Asians as direct beneficiaries of the Soviet Union's particular brand of liberation, the circumstances of the poem's publication also enable a nuanced exploration of the complexities and ambiguities of existence as a Soviet "postcolonial" citizen. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that Suleimenov's literary efforts arose alongside his active political work as a representative in various Soviet outreach organizations, including the Soviet Committee for Relations with African and Asian Writers and, later, the Soviet Committee for Relations with African and Asian Countries, which itself was headed by another Russophone writer, the Tajik poet Mirzo Tusunzoda.¹⁶² Suleimenov's poem, and indeed his entire body of work, encapsulates a major issue in Russophone literature that has so far escaped critical attention: the role of Russophone writers as intermediaries in the Soviet Union's campaigns for influence in the Third World. An analysis of the cultural dimension of this relationship sheds much light on the Soviet Union's conceptualization of the Third World vis-à-vis its own homegrown "postcolonials." The first task of this chapter, therefore, is to delineate the deliberate, tangible connections between Soviet Russophone literature and the emerging literatures of decolonization; and in doing so, to further justify a postcolonial approach to the analysis of Russophone literature.

Although the tensions of the Cold War loom large in the mainstream literary traditions of the United States and the Soviet Union, the voices of authors from oppressed groups articulating the "view from below" on Cold War issues is rarely given similar attention. For this reason the

Kazakhstan, as a separate volume in 1967, and as part of Suleimenov's collected works in 1964 and 1973, and again for his complete works in 2004.

¹⁶² Both committees were set up under the umbrella of the 1956 Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, which itself became a constituent body to the international Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization as a result of the Second Conference of Independent States in Cairo in 1957. For a discussion of Mirzo Tursunzoda's work in international Communist organizations, see Lisa Yountchi, "Between Russia and Iran: Soviet Tajik Literature and Identity, 1920–1991" (Doctoral diss., Northwestern University, 2011), 116–117.

Russophone and minority-language literature of the Soviet Thaw period is not often considered in the context of a watershed development in world history: the breakdown of the last vestiges of West European empires and the genesis of a new world order in which military and ideological alliances divided the globe into First, Second, and Third Worlds.

To give the reader a better idea of the magnitude of these changes, as well as the rapidity with which they occurred, a brief historical overview is necessary. In the years leading up to 1950, Africa was home to only four independent countries. By the end of the 1950s, this number had increased to ten, and it increased by a record number of seventeen in the year 1960 alone.¹⁶³ The seemingly overnight transformation of the political and economic global order, together with its cultural ramifications, led some analysts, most notably the African-American political scientist Ralph Bunche, to dub 1960 the “Year of Africa.”¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile thirty-six Asian nations also achieved their sovereignty between 1945 and 1960.¹⁶⁵ The changing face of the globe, not to mention the chamber of the United Nations, whose ranks swelled from 35 to 127 delegates between 1946 and 1970, left an unmistakable impact on the ideology, foreign policy, and cultural life of the Soviet Union as well as the countries of the First World.

The Soviet Union was no stranger to the issue of decolonization, possessing its own anticolonial ideology dating back to the earliest days of Marxist revolutionary activity under the Russian Empire. But though the postwar independence movements of many Third World countries were likewise based in Marxism, their explicitly national character and the elite

¹⁶³ Daniel Schwartz, “1960: The Year of Africa,” *CBC News*, June 8, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2010/06/07/f-year-of-africa.html>. For an analysis of Marxism and postwar decolonization, see Mohan Jitendra, “African Liberation Struggle: In Continental and International Perspective,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 11, no. 4 (January 24, 1976): 105–116.

¹⁶⁴ William Henry Chamberlin, “Africa’s Year,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 5, 1960, 10; Paul Hoffmann, “Bunche says '60 is year of Africa,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1960, 15.

¹⁶⁵ US Department of State, “Milestones 1945–1952,” Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/AsiaandAfrica>.

background of many of their leaders proved a strained fit for the ideology of Soviet anticolonialism, which rested on rigid definitions of class, ethnicity, and nation, and self-determination. Since Russophone authors occupied a unique position as cultural *and* political intermediaries in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Third World, as well as between the Russian SSR and the other constituent republics of the Soviet Union, their treatment of decolonization as a literary subject offers us a rare and valuable window into the dynamics of this unwieldy relationship.

This chapter will investigate the problem of Second-World postcolonialism through a close analysis of the Thaw-era works of Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1937), a poet, journalist, screenwriter, politician, and diplomat who has been continuously writing and publishing since the late 1950s. Suleimenov's literary work and political activism have made him one of contemporary Central Asia's most influential public figures, as well as an architect of Kazakh and pan-Turkic identity in the post-Soviet period. Most critical discussions of Suleimenov's work focus on the political squall that resulted from *Az i Ia*, his provocative 1972 tract that disputed Russocentric interpretations of the medieval tale *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, and, by extension, the Russocentric paradigm of Eurasian languages and history.¹⁶⁶ However, scholars have much to learn from his poetry of the 1960s, which represents his earliest efforts to reconcile

¹⁶⁶ The Igor tale has been the subject of heated debate since its discovery and first publication in the late eighteenth century. The major controversy surrounding the work is regarding its authenticity, as some scholars believe it to be a forgery. The other major debate surrounds the identity of its author and reading audience, particularly the extent of Turkic linguistic and cultural influence. See Edward L. Keenan, *Josef Dobrovsky and the Origins of the Igor' Tale* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003); A. A. Zalizniak, "Slovo o polku Igoreve": *vzgliad lingvista* (Moscow: Rukopisnye pamiatniki Drevnei Rusi, 2007); Edward L. Keenan, "Turkic Lexical Elements in the 'Igor Tale' and the 'Zadonščina'," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 3 (July 2002): 479–482. Despite a lack of formal training in Turkic historical linguistics (though he had a lifelong interest in the topic and researched Russian medieval literature at the Gorkii Institute in Moscow), Suleimenov argued that the Igor tale was written for a bilingual Turkic and Russian-speaking audience, and posited this as further evidence of the primordial cultural unity of Eurasia's Slavic and Turkic populations. Scholarship does exist on *Az i Ia* and its famously hostile reception in the Soviet Union; see Harsha Ram, "Imagining Eurasia: The Poetics and Ideology of Olzhas Suleimenov's *AZ i IA*," *Slavic Review* 60, no. 2 (Summer, 2001): 289–311.

elements of a prerevolutionary Kazakh identity with the established Soviet one. In focusing on Suleimenov's early work, I intend to trace his evolving ideas of Kazakh national identity, and his location of a Soviet Kazakh lyric subject within this identity, at a crucial moment in the evolution of Soviet anticolonial ideology. This historical moment not only coincided with, but also contributed to, the birth of postcolonial literature. Crucially, Suleimenov's use of Russian as a medium for the synthesis of postcolonial writing and Soviet anticolonial discourse paved the way for a sophisticated critique of Russocentric Soviet power and culture. This critique culminated in the ethnic and national upheavals of the late 1980s, eventually contributing to the dissolution of the "Affirmative Action Empire."

"Two Easts:" Soviet Anticolonial Ideology before and after Stalin

Unlike postwar Anglophone or Francophone literatures, which arose from myriad political and economic circumstances, Russophone literature of the Soviet period is a phenomenon that took place almost entirely within government-controlled official channels—namely, the Soviet Writers' Union. Therefore an overview of Soviet anticolonial political rhetoric holds the key to understanding the framework in which Soviet Russophone literature operated.

Soviet anticolonial thought has its origins in the European Marxist movements of the early twentieth century. In the years leading up to the October Revolution, the rising strength of international workers' movements in the Western world, along with the political upheavals of the First World War, formed the backdrop to Russia's own ideological push toward socialist revolution. With the consolidation of Bolshevik power in the early 1920s, the central state apparatus immediately set itself with the task of modernizing and Sovietizing its own

“liberated”¹⁶⁷ populations in the former colonial holdings of the Russian Empire, while simultaneously spreading revolutionary ferment among the Western proletariat as well as the colonized populations of Asia, the Americas, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These efforts manifested in a constellation of international organizations such as the Komintern (the Communist International or Third International), which formed in Moscow in 1919, as well as domestic representative bodies like the Narkomnats (the People’s Commissariat for Nationality Affairs), which was headed by Stalin and met from 1917 to 1928. A string of educational institutions helped to tie together the country’s goals of national and international development. The best known such institution was the KUTV [Communist University of the Toilers of the East], which offered a Socialist education and political training to cadres from the Soviet Union’s domestic and foreign “East.” Among the notable and diverse alumni of the KUTV were the future revolutionaries Ho Chi Minh and Deng Xiaoping, as well as a substantial cohort of African Americans from the United States.¹⁶⁸ In a speech commemorating the opening of this

¹⁶⁷ “Liberation” was a fixture of the language of early Sovietization campaigns in Central Asia and the Caucasus, particularly with regard to the cultural dimension of reforms, e.g. literacy, antireligious, and de-veiling campaigns. The extent to which this constituted “decolonization” of the Russian Empire is a matter of debate, though certainly early Soviet literature is explicit about this intent. On Sovietization see Ali F. Iqmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* Central Eurasia in Context. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012). See also Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001). For a study focusing on gender, see Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁸ One such alumnus, Henry Haywood, became an advisor to Stalin and was the architect of the “Black Belt Thesis,” a Komintern initiative for the founding of an autonomous Negro republic in the south of Russia. Maksim Matushevich, “Black in the U.S.S.R.,” *Transition* 100 (2008), 62. There are several studies of prominent African American intellectuals who spent time in the Soviet Union; most notable among them are David Chioni Moore, “Colored Dispatches From The Uzbek Border: Langston Hughes' Relevance, 1939–2002,” *Callaloo* 25, no. 4 (2002) 1119–1135; Ani Mukherji, “Like Another Planet: Black Cultural Work in 1930’s Moscow,” in *Africa and Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*, eds. Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 1209–1241. Mukherji’s dissertation provides an in-depth study of the convergences of international communism and anticolonialism, particularly with regard to African Americans in the Soviet Union: “The Anticolonial Imagination: The Exilic Productions of American Radicalism in Interwar Moscow,” (PhD Diss., Brown University, 2011).

university, Stalin himself set the parameters of the discussion on Soviet nationalism and internationalism:

All the students at this University are sons of the East. But that definition does not give any clear or complete picture. The fact is that there are two main groups among the students at the University, representing two sets of totally different conditions of development. The first group consists of people who have come here from the Soviet East ... The second group of students consists of people who have come here from colonial and dependent countries ... where imperialist oppression is still in full force, and where independence has still to be won by driving out the imperialists.

Thus, we have two Easts, living different lives, and developing under different conditions.¹⁶⁹

Stalin goes on to delineate the possibilities of establishing national identity within an internationalist framework, based on an invocation of Lenin's mandate of "national in form; socialist in content:"

But what is national culture? How is it to be reconciled with proletarian culture? ... Proletarian in content, national in form—such is the universal culture towards which socialism is proceeding. Proletarian culture does not abolish national culture, it gives it content. On the other hand, national culture does not abolish proletarian culture; it gives it form.¹⁷⁰

Later in the speech Stalin expresses the goals of the university in terms of three imperatives, each of which grew to be problematic as the 1930s and 40s wore on, and irreconcilable by the end of the Thaw period. First, he declares that victorious revolution is necessary for liberation from capitalistic exploitation—a position he would reverse by the end of the 1930s, when the Soviet drive toward worldwide revolutionary activity was abandoned and replaced by the dictate of "socialism in one country." Second, he stresses that the proletariat must drive the revolution forward, rather than elites or "bourgeois nationalists"—a problem which was already present

¹⁶⁹ Stalin gave the speech on May 18, 1925, but the quotation is taken from its subsequent printed version in *Pravda*, May 22, 1925, 2. The translation is from Stalin, *Works* vol. 7 (Moscow: Foreign languages Publishing House, 1954), 135–154.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

during the Sovietization campaigns in Central Asia, and which would later alienate the Soviet Union from its would-be cadres in Africa. Moreover, this directive would falter in the Soviet Union within a generation, by creating a new cadre of elites from politically correct class backgrounds.

Stalin's third point is most relevant to an understanding of the postcoloniality of Soviet literatures: he stresses the necessity of a link between formerly colonized subjects of the "two Easts" and the Western proletariat. In fact, the burden of advancing the East falls squarely on the shoulders of the West. Therein lies the heart of the conflict: on one hand, the speech puts forward a vision of the "East" as unified on an institutional level by the KUTV; on the other hand, however, it stresses the disparity in conditions between the two "Easts," and in doing so maintains the paternalistic paradigm of backward countries in dire need of education and economic support—in a word, *civilization*—from more advanced ones. This attitude is a fixture of Western discourse on empire, and it has its most famous iteration in Rudyard Kipling's literary axiom of the "white man's burden,"¹⁷¹ but in fact Soviet writers enforced a similar position throughout the twentieth century, and the work of Russophone authors is no exception.

The internationalist agenda of the Soviet Union stalled in the years leading up to the Second World War, as Stalin consolidated political power and fueled an ideological shift toward "socialism in one country." This resulted in a number of isolationist policy decisions, such as the closure of the University of the Toilers of the East in 1938 and the dissolution of the Komintern in 1943. It also coincided with increasing, institutionalized Russocentrism on the domestic front: for example, the 1938 dual mandate for compulsory Russian-language education and for non-

¹⁷¹ Interestingly, Kipling's original poem of the same name from 1899 refers to the United States' involvement in the Philippines, a topic I will soon revisit with Khrushchev's famous shoe-banging outburst at the United Nations.

Russian languages to be written with the Cyrillic alphabet.¹⁷² Yet this isolationist turn proved to be temporary; as early as 1947 there were signs of renewed interest in building communism internationally, such as the establishment of the Soviet-run Kominform (Communist Information Bureau) as the successor to the Komintern.

The Soviet rhetoric of postwar decolonization began with the words of Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of ideology and culture of the Communist Party's Central Committee, in an address at the first meeting of the Kominform in 1947.¹⁷³ Zhdanov announced the formation of the bureau as a response to the “the sharpening of the crisis of the colonial system as a result of the Second World War,” predicting that worldwide decolonization will prove “an embarrassment to the capitalist West.”¹⁷⁴ He also praised the Soviet Union's role in the “powerful movement for national liberation in the colonies and dependencies” which had “placed the rear of the capitalist system in jeopardy,”¹⁷⁵ and went on to boast that the colonized subjects of waning European empires were rapidly finding their liberation in Marxism:

The colonial peoples refuse to live any longer in the old way. The ruling classes of the metropolitan countries can no longer rule their colonies in the old way. Attempts to suppress national-liberation movement by armed force now encounter ever-growing armed resistance on the part of colonial peoples and lead to long-drawn-out colonial wars (Holland in Indonesia, France in Vietnam).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² This is despite the fact that Latin alphabet reform was already ten years underway in parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Lenore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 54.

¹⁷³ Zhdanov is best known for a related achievement in the realm of culture: the series of mandates that came to be collectively known as *zhdanovshchina*, which entrenched socialist realism as the only acceptable mode of artistic expression, and which spurred the brutal anti-formalism campaigns of the late 1940s. Katerina Clark and Evgenii Aleksandrovich Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (Yale University Press, 2007), 349–350.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Matusevich, ed. *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 5–7.

¹⁷⁵ Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaia evropa, 1947–1956 gg.*, 220–221.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Zhdanov's speech set the practical, ideological, and rhetorical precedent for the Soviet Union's growing involvement in the affairs of independent Asian and African states in the 1950s and 60s. William Thon summarizes the underlying motivation for this sea change: "the de-colonization process appeared to Russian observers as damaging to the West and therefore beneficial to World Communism—if it could be properly exploited."¹⁷⁷

Ol'ga Edel'man points out that the Soviet Union's new outlook on the decolonized world reflected "serious changes in Soviet internal politics." She contrasts Thaw-era Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev to his predecessor, Stalin, who never made official visits abroad and only left the Soviet Union for the Tehran and Potsdam conferences concluding the Second World War. "But Khrushchev went—and what's more, his first order of business was not to travel to the West, but to the East: to Afghanistan, to India, to Burma."¹⁷⁸ Thon expands on Khrushchev's particularly innovative role:

Khrushchev more than any other figure shifted emphasis to the Third World and to Africa—what he called the underdeveloped third of mankind. He saw the retreat of colonialism as a decisive opportunity to weaken the West in the era of cold war tension and nuclear stalemate. It was in the Khrushchev period that the concept of wars of national liberation was popularized. It is not difficult to see a relationship between this phenomenon and changing Soviet policy toward involvement with African nationalist movements.¹⁷⁹

One aspect of this reinvigorated relationship was a surge in arms trade, with the rate of Soviet arms sales to the Third World increasing by 120 percent from 1956 to 1968.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ William G. Thom, "Trends in Soviet Support for African Liberation," *Air University Review* 25 (July–August 1974). <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1974/jul-aug/thom.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Interview in Vladimir Tolz, "Chto takoe Mavritaniia? –50-letie sozdaniia Sovetskogo komiteta solidarnosti stran Azii i Afriki," *Radio Svoboda*, June 11, 2006. <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/160802.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Raymond Hutchings, "Soviet Arms Exports to the Third World: A Pattern and Its Implications," *The World Today* 34, no. 10 (October 1, 1978), 379.

Aside from direct military and economic interventions, another important vehicle for disseminating the Soviet Union's newfound anticolonial ideology was the academy. The immediate postwar period witnessed an explosion of scholarly works on Africa and Asia, as well as translations of Western works on related topics. I. I. Potekhin, who would go on to become the leading Africanist of the period, published several articles in 1950 that touched off the trend, including an entry on Africa in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* [*Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*] as well as "The Stalinist Theory of Colonial Revolution and the National Liberation Movement in Tropical and Southern Africa," which echoes Zhdanov's speech by identifying the "crisis of colonialism" as "part of the general crisis of capitalism."¹⁸¹ In 1954 Soviet Africanists published a large volume entitled "Peoples of Africa" as part of the series "Peoples of the World," which one researcher describes as a typical "mixture of ethnological information and denunciation of colonial rule."¹⁸² As the 1950s drew to a close, the Soviet drive to produce knowledge on the Third World grew even more urgent. Moscow State University opened an Institute of Africa and Asia in 1956, and the Soviet Academy of Sciences founded its Africa Institute in 1959, with Potekhin serving as the director. The Gorkii Institute of World Literature became the seat of scholarship on African writing in European languages, producing extensive studies of Francophone and Lusophone works.¹⁸³ Additionally, they took initiatives to educate the public about the decolonizing world, including the publication of pamphlets such as

¹⁸¹ Quoted in *Russia Looks at Africa* (London: Central Asian Research Centre in association with the Soviet Affairs Study Group of St. Antony's College, 1960), 7.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸³ The institute's longstanding director, I. D. Nikiforova, was one of the Soviet Union's most prolific scholars of Francophone African literature. Another member of the institute, Elena Rjazova, authored several studies of African literature in Portuguese. For summary of the Soviet academy's main contributions to the study of African literature, see Vladimir Klima, "African Literature Research in Socialist Countries: A Brief Survey," in Albert S. Gérard, ed. *European-language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 1986), 1212.

A. Letnev's *On the Awakened Continent* [*Na razbudivshemsia kontinente*] (1957) and the circulation of popular journals such as *The East Today* [*Sovremennyi vostok*] (1957) and *Soviet Oriental Studies* [*Sovetskoe vostokovedenie*] (1959), as well as the academic peer-reviewed journal *Asia and Africa Today* [*Aziia i Afrika segodnia*] (1961). However, the Third World did not figure merely as an object of academic inquiry; the Soviet government also took measures to encourage collaboration and fraternization among students and scholars from decolonizing countries. Soviet academics flooded the international Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement, and they formed a substantial cohort at the widely publicized Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference, held in Cairo in 1957. That same year, the International Youth Festival in Moscow brought a tide of foreign students to the USSR, which was then bolstered and sustained by the 1960 founding of the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow.

Of no less significance in the realm of such soft power initiatives was the role of the Soviet Writer's Union, which served as the locus of extended contact and collaboration between Soviet and Third World writers. The Soviet Writers' Union held a Conference of Asian and African Writers in Tashkent in early October, 1958, with notable writers from both of the "two Easts" such as Rasul Rza, Mirzo Tursunzade, the Francophone Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembène, and the African-American writer and activist W.E.B. Du Bois—as well as the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev—in attendance.¹⁸⁴ The conference resolution demanded: "the

¹⁸⁴ Detailed accounts of the proceedings can be found in many Soviet newspapers, including *Pravda*, October 8, 1958, 3; and *Bakinskii rabochii*, October 5–15, 1958. For an extensive discussion of the conference's ideological goals, see S. Goliakov, "Vstrecha pisatelei v Tashkente," *Novoe vremia* 42 (October 17, 1958): 21–23. Du Bois' visit to the Tashkent conference, which was part of a longer tour of the Soviet Union, is detailed in David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois--the Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: H. Holt, 2000), 701–703. Du Bois also mentions the conference in his own autobiography. He prefaces a description of Samarkand by quoting from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and notes that the Uzbeks' fields "were growing tall, long-staple cotton, which an American from Tuskegee planted." Of the conference itself, he says, "The discussion and the papers were mainly on cultural matters, although politics, and especially colonialism continuously forced themselves to the forefront. The interrelation of all cultures was stressed, and the contribution of the West, despite its aggression against Asia and Africa. As one poet from the mountains of Dagestan said, 'We must not confuse colonialism with

liquidation of colonialism and racism” in order to ensure “the complete development of literary creativity.”¹⁸⁵ Subsequent meetings were held in Cairo (1962), Beirut (1967), Deli (1970), and Alma-Ata (1973). Elena Rjauzeva notes that these meetings heralded a period of “serious, systematic research” on Asian and African literature, and yielded a plethora of translations of these literatures into Russian. Such efforts added to the multiculturalism of literary life in Thaw-era Moscow, with Russian as the primary medium of communication.¹⁸⁶ In April of 1959, Potekhin led the first Soviet Association of Friendship with African Peoples, which encouraged cultural exchange and committed to publishing African literary works, both in the original languages and in Russian translation.¹⁸⁷ Some of the outlets for publication were the journals *Friendship of Peoples* [*Druzhba narodov*], *Foreign Literature* [*Inostrannaia literatura*], and *Literature of Asia and Africa* [*Literatura Azii i Afriki*]. When the Soviet Union’s renewed international orientation met with a newly Russified generation of non-Russians, the result was a boom in Russophone literature—in particular, works focusing on themes of decolonization. At times, translated works from the Third World were published alongside works from the domestic “East” such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and they became venues for the publication of classical Central Asian poetry in Russian translation.¹⁸⁸

culture, nor Dreiser with Dulles.” William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1968) 40–41.

¹⁸⁵ *Bakinskii rabochii*, October 15, 1958, 3.

¹⁸⁶ Elena Rjauzeva, “The Reception of Luso-African Writing in the Soviet Union,” in *European-language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Gérard, 1224.

¹⁸⁷ The full extent of this decades-long literary exchange, including a detailed publication history of translations, as well as notes on performances of Russian plays in West Africa, is available in Vladimir Aleksandrovich Brykin ed., *SSSR i strany afriki, 1946-1962 gg: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1963), 378–80.

¹⁸⁸ For example, a total of fifteen poems by Ali-Shir Navo’i (1499–1501) and Sultanmakhmut Toraigyrov (1893–1920) appear in Mikhail Kurgantsev’s translated volume of contemporary Middle Eastern, African, and Asian poetry, *Lirika poetov Azii i Afriki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978). It bears mentioning that Navo’i’s poems were actually

In contrast to Davidson and Filatova's assertion that "the 1960s seemed to have brought the fulfillment of the Communist hopes of the 1930s,"¹⁸⁹ the Soviet Union's vested interest in the liberation struggles of the Third World stands in direct contrast to its tightening control over the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, which became evident with the violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and, later, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. These events revealed the paradox at the center of Soviet anticolonial ideology: the Soviet Union encouraged and even facilitated violent uprisings in the Third World, while cracking down on such activity within its own sphere of influence. This problem was mythologized by Khrushchev's infamous and perhaps even apocryphal "shoe-banging incident," which took place in the context of a heated debate about Soviet neocolonialism at the October 1960 general assembly of the United Nations. Accounts differ about whether or not Khrushchev actually banged his own shoe on the pulpit, waved the shoe, or merely banged his fists, but all confirm that the outburst was triggered when a delegate from the Philippines accused the Soviet Union of neocolonial oppression in Eastern Europe.¹⁹⁰ In the following section, I will investigate a poem published at the apex of the Soviet anticolonial "movement," a mere seven months after Khrushchev's theatrical—but deadly serious—gesture.

composed in Chagatay, the Turkic literary language of Islamic Central Asia, though they are listed in this collection as "Uzbek Classical Poetry." As part of Soviet historians' effort to project newly delineated national categories onto prerevolutionary history, Chagatay was reclassified as "Old Uzbek" in the early twentieth century. Yuri Breghel, *Notes on the Study of Central Asia*, 10–11.

¹⁸⁹ Appolon Davidson and Irina Filatova, "African History: A View from behind the Kremlin Wall," in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, ed. Maksim Matusevich (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 117. See also Maksim Matusevich, "An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans and the Soviet Everyday," *Race & Class* 49, no. 4 (April 2008): 57–81.

¹⁹⁰ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 477–657.

Identity and Hybridity in Olzhas Suleimenov's *Earth, Bow Down to Man!*¹⁹¹

The early years of the Soviet Union's Third World outreach, culminating in the 1960 "Year of Africa," coincided with Olzhas Suleimenov's own education at the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow. Having already completed a degree in geology at the Kazakh State Pedagogical University in Almaty, Suleimenov relocated to Moscow in 1958 and began establishing himself among the young generation of Soviet poets who would later be known collectively as the *shestidesiatniki*. At the same time, he was easing into his own role as an "Eastern" author in the milieu of the city's multicultural awakening. This emerging worldview is evident in the poet's 1961 debut work, *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* [*Zemlia, poklonis' cheloveku!*], a jubilant 940-line ode to Yuri Gagarin on the occasion of his legendary launch into space from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in the Kazakh SSR. Upholding the figure of Gagarin as a symbol of the Soviet Union's general triumph, the poem presents a vision of worldwide liberation ushered in by the Soviet Union's tandem advances in industrial growth, technological development, and political empowerment.

Suleimenov wrote and published the ode while on hiatus from his studies at the Gorkii Literary Institute.¹⁹² The poem instantly catapulted him to fame and secured him a place among the young, dynamic ranks of the *shestidesiatniki*. Suleimenov's dominant images of Gagarin and his spacecraft, which carries the name of *Vostok* [the East], together represent a new era in mankind's history, where the chains of colonial dominance are finally broken and newly-liberated peoples join the Soviet Union in its unstoppable march toward a utopian future.

¹⁹¹ Parts of this section were previously published as "Identity and Hybridity in Olzhas Suleimenov's *Earth, Hail Man!*" in *Green Desert: the Poems of Olzhas Suleimenov*, ed. Rafis Abazov, 223–229 (San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2011),

¹⁹² In an address to Columbia University on November 5, 2009, Suleimenov recalled with amusement that he was actually suspended for fighting, but declined to reveal the reasons for the fight.

Suleimenov describes the event as marking the dawn of a “great second age [*nachalo velikogo vtorogo veka*]” (9). Employing the theme of space exploration and Gagarin’s iconic significance as the embodiment of Soviet progress, Suleimenov’s poem also celebrates the primacy of the Kazakh perspective on this globally significant event, offering literally a “view from below” that stands in contrast to the typical centralized and overarching perspective found in Soviet literary representations of historic events. Most importantly, however, the poem raises the possibility that Soviet authors, even those who wholeheartedly accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet experiment, found a way to subtly articulate their difference by manipulating elements of the dominant literary discourse.

The Soviet era witnessed the rebirth of the “occasional” text—a work of literature written in commemoration of a nationally significant event. In the Russian literary tradition, such works have their origin in the eighteenth-century panegyric ode, which served as a justification of the empire's expansion and an enforcement of its authority and ideological foundations.¹⁹³ Explicitly public and political in nature, the Soviet version of such texts fit into the larger body of Soviet literature, which Katerina Clark has termed a “repository of state myths.”¹⁹⁴ As such, the immediate predecessor to Suleimenov’s unique brand of occasional poetry is undoubtedly the late verse of Maiakovskii, in particular the epic poem *150,000,000*, which revived the hexameter verse form of eighteenth-century panegyric odes in order to praise Soviet industrial might.¹⁹⁵ Suleimenov’s work was subsequently echoed by Evgenii Evtushenko’s 1965 hymn to the monumental Bratsk hydroelectric dam project, *Bratsk Station [Bratskaia GES]*. In analyzing

¹⁹⁴ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), xii.

¹⁹⁵ For a study of this poem in the context of Maiakovskii’s complicated use of meter and his parodistic revival of the Russian folk genres, see Robin Aizlewood, *Two Essays on Maiakovskii’s Verse*, School of Slavonic and East European Studies Occasional Papers 49 (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2000).

American literary representations of railroads, bridges, skyscrapers, industrial landscapes, electrification and monument construction, one scholar introduced the idea of the “technological sublime,” a modified version of the Romantic sublime, which conveys the simultaneous awe and terror of technology’s transformative potential.¹⁹⁶ This idea transfers easily to Soviet literature, visual arts, and film, particularly works of Socialist Realism, in which technology figures as the arm of state power over nature and citizens *en masse*.

Although Suleimenov’s 1961 poem incorporates elements of the Russian literary tradition, its roots lead back to Kazakh-language poetry from the early Soviet period, as well as even farther back to the Kazakh oral epic tradition. In the early Soviet period, the language of newly-developing Soviet myths merged with the devices of traditional oral folklore to form a hybrid genre that addressed the overlapping spheres of the culturally-specific Central Asian world and the multinational Soviet one. Thomas G. Winner observed this phenomenon in his description of Soviet Kazakh poetry of the 1930s, which revived traditional oral songs and epics in the form of strongly ideological written works:

The Soviet leader, be he Lenin, Stalin, or a local Kazakh leader, is often compared in typical epic fashion to a falcon, to a strong young horse, or to a tiger [...] There are also maintained many of the other characteristics of the traditional epic style, the frequently high-flown hyperbolism, the characteristic epic repetition and slow movement, and the ever-present typical epithets and symbols used for both friend and foe.¹⁹⁷

With its incorporation of traditional imagery and epic stylistic devices, *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* is a variation on the oral folklore-literature hybrid Winner describes, but updated for the exuberant mood of the Khrushchev era. Suleimenov's most noticeable and effective deviation is his choice to write in Russian, which pushed his work into dialogue with the Russian literary

¹⁹⁶ David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of The Kazakhs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1958), 159.

tradition and offered him the ability to cull material at will from the overlapping cultural spheres in which he lived and worked. Writing in Russian also made it possible for Suleimenov to construct complex poetic messages while maintaining a consistent front of unquestioning Socialist ideology. Moreover, Russian provided Suleimenov with a platform to directly address his own demographic, the postwar generation of politically active, Russian-speaking, Soviet-educated young people, regardless of their ethnicity.

In order to characterize Suleimenov's unique position as a Russophone writer of the Soviet Thaw period, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is especially useful. Discussing the role of English-language writing during the British colonization of India, Bhabha posits that cultures are "never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation to Self and Other." Instead, they are characterized by multiplicity and ambivalence.¹⁹⁸ As a result, literary texts—and language itself—have the potential to carry varied, even contradictory meanings for their creators and interpreters. In this fractured act of communication, the gulf between sender and recipient, which extends to the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, is what Bhabha terms the "third space." It functions as a stage for "the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity."¹⁹⁹ Suleimenov himself voiced a similar opinion about his position as a writer in between the Soviet Union's international and the national arenas:

We all wanted to be national as well as international— we are all in the same boat, although each of us has his own specific goals. We marginal individuals [*marginal'nye lichnosti*], who are born on the boundaries of at least two cultures, we simultaneously act as a bridge between them, as well as conductors of their mutual influence [*vzaimovlianie*]. We bring world culture into our own culture, and our own culture into the world.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," in Bill Ashcroft et. al. eds., *Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 207.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁰⁰ From S. S. Kirabaev et. al. *Literatura narodov Kazakhstana* (Almaty: Gylym, 2004), 95. They identify the original source as an interview with *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1981.

In analyzing the co-development of Soviet and Kazakh identity in *Zemlia, poklonis' cheloveku!*, the concepts of Bhabha's "third space" and Suleimenov's "bridge" allow us to view the poem as a confluence of multiple, simultaneous messages: a young poet's philosophical musings on the nature of human progress; a personal reflection on a historical event; a contribution to the body of official Soviet literature; and finally, a contribution to the Russian tradition of civic verse beginning in the eighteenth century. The coexistence of these messages in a single work solidifies the poet's identity as hybrid of many cultural influences, and it also reveals the unique freedom of the multicultural poet to consciously play on the limiting designations of Self and Other.

The cultural hybridity of Suleimenov's poem is evident from its very first lines, as the narrator speaks from a first-person perspective to ask the reader a series of rhetorical questions. This framing device establishes an identifiably Kazakh context for the event, which is superimposed with an illustration of the upward trajectory of Soviet progress.

. . . Разгадай:
Почему люди тянутся к звездам?
Почему в наших песнях
Герой—это сокол?
Почему все прекрасное,
Что он создал,
Человек, помолчав, называет
—Высоким? (5)

Guess:
Why do people reach for the stars?
Why is the hero a hawk
in our songs?
Why does Man, silent, call
anything beautiful
he made with his hand
—lofty?²⁰¹

²⁰¹ My translations of *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* are based on a translation by Sergey Levchin and Ilya Bernstein

By using the imperative informal mode of address to urge the reader to “guess [*razgadai*],” Suliemenov immediately establishes an intimate, egalitarian relationship between author and audience, and he continues this affinity by alluding to a specifically Kazakh piece of cultural information: “why is the hero a hawk in our songs?” The Russian-speaking Kazakh reader would recognize the folkloric significance of the hawk, and may even recall the figurative use of the hawk in nineteenth century Kazakh lore to represent resistance to Russian imperial control.²⁰²

The bird imagery continues throughout the poem, as the narrator becomes an awed earthly observer of Gagarin's eagle-like flight:

. . . исчезают морщины ущелий
Глядят
В белый след голубые глаза океанов, —
Так орлы от земли,
Не прощаясь,
Летят.
Я гляжу тебе вслед из степей Казахстана. (19-20)

...Cliff faces, furrowed by time,
recede;
The blue of the ocean eyes
Looks down on the foam-white trace.
Just as eagles rise from the earth,
Without looking back,
And fly away.
I am keeping an eye on you,
Tracking you from the Kazakh steppes.

Again, by using *tebe*, the Russian informal mode of address (“I am tracking *you*”) while simultaneously situating the poetic “I” in the Kazakhstan steppes, Suleimenov includes Gagarin in the intimate realm of familiar relationships, keeping him connected to Central Asia even as he soars above the earth. Elsewhere Suleimenov makes it clear that Gagarin, backed by the

in *Green Desert*, 112–139. For the purposes of literary analysis, I have made some changes that are far less aesthetically pleasing but offer a more literal rendering of the original.

²⁰² Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of The Kazakhs*, 95.

juggernaut of Soviet science, has actually surpassed the achievements of nature, and has attained even *greater* cultural resonance than the traditional folk heroes. This eclipse is illustrated in the following passage, which describes Gagarin's flight actually surpassing that of the eagles:

Много в небе апрельском
путей
Лишь гагаринский крут
Так в холмистой степи
Вдруг взмывает гранитный пик,
И орел, не достигнув,
Опишет почётный круг. (18)

There are thousands of paths
in the April sky—
But only Gagarin's points straight up,
Like a granite peak
Shooting up suddenly
In the hilly steppes.
And the eagle, failing to reach the top,
Makes its honorable circle.

Here, interestingly, Suleimenov's image of the eagle [*orel*] subtly contrasts with his earlier invocation of the hawk [*sokol*] of Kazakh folklore. Assuming the eagle's significance as a symbol of Russian imperial power, it is possible to infer from this passage that Soviet scientific achievement, represented by Gagarin's flight, surpasses previous imperial gains.

Despite containing many specifically Kazakh cultural references, Suleimenov's poem also contains several markers of Socialist realist literature, which makes it a fitting illustration of Katerina Clark's model of a Soviet literature as a "repository of state myths." As such, the poem can be broken down for analysis along two axes of Soviet ideology: dialectical materialism, which refers to the development of socialism through history; and internationalism, the spread of socialism throughout the world.

Suleimenov lauds the achievements of the Soviet space program by espousing a dialectical materialist view of history, in which a typically rural and backwards people are

brought forth from tribalism into modernity by the advances of dedicated Soviet Socialists from all nationalities. The following passage begins with a generalization about the nature of Soviet progress, and then moves onto parallel, culturally specific metonymies describing the development of Soviet civilization in Eurasian lands:

На сто лет позади шел Восток
По следам машин
Мы со скоростью света
Земную прорезали тьму
От тележных колос
До метровых зиловских шин.
От лаптей—до скафандров,
От юрт—до высотных домов ... (15)

The East lagged one hundred years behind
Following tire-tracks
With the speed of light
We tore through
The earthly darkness,
From carriage wheels
To meter-wide truck tires;
From bast shoes to spacesuits,
From yurts to skyscrapers. . .

Suleimenov's use of the first person perspective— “we tore through the terrestrial night”— serves to identify the author and his audience simultaneously as Central Asians, as the Soviet people in general, and as all of humankind. These three versions of the collective, arranged in concentric semiospheres, collectively embody “the East” as it moves along “with the speed of light” from the simple horse-cart to automobile tires, from peasant shoes²⁰³ to space suits, from yurts to high-rise apartment buildings. In this framework the ambiguous East, which lags “a hundred years behind,” most directly refers to Central Asia, putting Suleimenov in line with the

²⁰³ *Lapti*, traditional Russian footwear made of woven birch strips, were often presented in twentieth-century popular culture as a symbol of the country’s rural backwardness. Khrushchev, who grew up in extreme rural poverty and wore *lapti* himself as a child, often referred to them as a symbol of how far Russia had progressed. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 21.

official view that Socialist revolution acted as a civilizing force for the so-called backwards, unenlightened populations of the Russian Empire's former colonies. But via the imagery of progress "from bast shoes [*lapti*] to spacesuits," the East can also refer to greater Russia, whose imperial rhetoric, literature, and colonial ambitions have long demonstrated a certain degree of self-consciousness about lagging behind Western powers in cultural and technological development. Therefore, in speaking for the Kazakhs, who by 1961 had become a minority group in their own republic, Suleimenov is also able to speak for the dominant cultural group of the Soviet Union via the floating signifier of the East.

Elsewhere in the poem, the East performs a different function. While serving as a general pejorative designation for backwards pre-Communist civilizations, it simultaneously confers a distinction of honor and power, by referring to the title of Gagarin's space shuttle, *Vostok*. Suleimenov plays on this coincidence when he describes Gagarin flying over the Americas. When Gagarin spies Cuba "slowly swimming toward the East [*plyvushchuiu medlenno na vostok*]" (20) and casts his eye over London, Paris, Madrid, Bonn, and even the Mississippi river delta, he remarks: "The west is below/ The 'East' is above [*Zapad—vnizu, /Sverkhu—'Vostok.'*]" (22–23)." In this way, Gagarin's "silver ship [*serebristy korabl'*]" becomes a symbol for progress that will overtake the West. A similar East-West cosmology is present in other contemporaneous poems commemorating Gagarin—one poem by Igor Rink, published in another official Party newspaper, announces: "Morning in Asia, evening in Europe, night in America, and day in Russia."²⁰⁴

Such poetic representations of Soviet geopolitical superiority upholds internationalist ideology as well as a dialectical materialist view of history, in which Socialism provokes African and Asian countries to rise from stone-age conditions to seize their freedom. The Soviet East,

²⁰⁴ *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 13 April, 1961, 4.

which once “lagged one hundred years behind” the rest of the world, is now the site of impressive industrial and cultural development and serves as an aspirational model for such achievements. The following passage, which details the news Gagarin learns while passing over the Third World from above, explicitly depicts colonial rule being overthrown throughout Africa.

В Леопольдвиле белые каски...
Падает раненый в скалах Атласа...
На мостовую упал Кейптаун...
Слет пионеров у Алатау...
Негры, индейцы, арабы с пенъем
Стали на тропы,
Сжигая приклады,
В Белом доме
Забрызганы стены... (21)

In Leopoldville, ...
The wounded fall on the rocks of Atlas....
Capetown fell on the bridge...
The rallying of the pioneers of the Alatay...
Negros, Indians, Arabs with song,
Stood on the tracks,
Brandishing clubs,
In the White House,
Splattered walls. . .

Suleimenov’s images and rhetoric of decolonization are reflected in the Kazakhstani media of the time. Two days after Gagarin’s flight, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda* (the same newspaper where Suleimenov worked as a correspondent and where excerpts of *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* were first published) announced the republic-wide celebration of “Africa Day,” with headlines expressing solidarity with independence struggles in Angola, Congo, and several other embattled countries. “Dawn breaks over the black continent!” announced one headline, while another extended “a warm welcome to the people of the free African governments, who have broken through the chains of colonialism to self-sufficiently fight for the strengthening of their own

independence!”²⁰⁵ These sentiments reflect the Soviet dialectical materialist view of history, which assumes that progress will continue until reaching its inevitable end point: the ascendance of socialism on a worldwide scale. Such was the internationalist ideology of the Soviet Union until Stalin’s ascendance in the 1930s. After Stalin’s death, the revived internationalism of the Thaw period found expression in Suleimenov’s unique use of Gagarin as a poetic device for combining temporal and geographical elements. Throughout the poem he gestures to the eventual freedom from history, and from geographic distance, heralded by technological advancement, as in the following passage:

Мы спешили уйти
От веков
Навсегда, навсегда. (14)
...
Скорость! Скорость! И скорость!—
Всегда сокращает путь.

We hurried to walk away
From the ages.
Forever, forever.
...
Speed! Speed! And speed!—
Always shortens the path. (16)

Since the advances of the modern, mechanistic age herald the endpoint of history, breaking the constraints of both time and space, one of the prevailing themes in Suleimenov's poem is immediacy, conveying the impression that the past and future have finally careened into the present. Suleimenov shows this by mentioning the constant radio communication between Moscow and the spacecraft, as well as the instant broadcasting of the news of Gagarin's flight around the world:

Внимание!
Говорит Москва!
Работают все радиостанции Советского Союза!”

²⁰⁵ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, April 15, 1961, 1.

Дрогнул голос железного диктора. (33)

“Attention!
Moscow is speaking!
Calling all stations of the Soviet Union!”
The voice of the iron radio broadcaster wavered.

Here, ironically, the technology of radios and telephones, which enable virtual presence and annihilate distance, also diminish the importance of the Metropole. Moscow demands the attention of the entire Soviet Union in order to announce what the Kazakhstanis already know, and in fact, have already witnessed for themselves. Even as the center asserts its authority over the distribution of information, it finds itself three time zones and worlds away. In this way, Moscow loses full ownership of the event, since the wavering “iron” voice of the broadcaster is a second-hand medium. Relatedly, the dominant Russian culture loses its ownership of Gagarin when he becomes a worldwide celebrity, a fact Suleimenov illustrates by describing newborn babies in far-off corners of the world named after Gagarin and his wife Valentina,²⁰⁶ and by likening himself to the newscast’s description of Gagarin. Thanks to the immediate availability of information made possible by technology, Gagarin's image becomes refracted into countless diverse identities. And since space travel signifies the freedom from physical boundaries, Suleimenov's poetic depictions of Gagarin culminate in an image of worldwide unity. As the vessel reaches its orbit and the entire planet enters Gagarin's/Suleimenov’s field of vision, time and space collapse to a single point:

Миг! –
И воздух остался
Синеть на карте.
На экране – Земля. (9)

A moment!
And the air began

²⁰⁶ Not to be confused with Valentina Tereshkova, the woman cosmonaut commonly associated with Gagarin. Tereshkova did not become a household name until her first flight into space two years later, in 1963.

To turn blue on the map.
On the screen – Earth.

It is precisely through the annihilation of spatial, temporal, cultural, and personal boundaries that the issues of Soviet nationality politics enter the poem in a serious way. Although the world looked to Moscow as the Soviet Union's ideological center and the genesis of the country's progress, in the world of Suleimenov's poem, technological advances and the crumbling of infallible "iron" truths has actually rendered the traditional distinctions between center and periphery obsolete. In a later section of the poem, Suleimenov transforms the ideologically charged East-West cosmology into a call for unity:

Я рожден в стороне,
Где живут воедино
Все части света,—

...

Мы ведь тоже верим,
Что:

Нет Востока,
И Запада нет,
Нет у неба конца,
Нет Востока
И Запада нет,
Два сына есть у отца,
Нет Востока
И Запада нет,
Есть
Восход и закат,
Есть большое слово—
З Е М Л Я! (26)

I was born in a land
Where all the parts of society
Live together in peace—

.....

You see, we too believe
That there is no East,
No West,
There are no borders in the sky.
There is no East,
No West,

But two sons, born of one father.
There is no East,
No West,
There is sunrise and sunset,
There is a formidable word—
E A R T H!

As demonstrated here, Gagarin's (and by extension, the lyric subject's) transcendence of geographical designations and differences forms the cornerstone of Suleimenov's internationalist aesthetic. This transcendence likewise entails a cultural shift, where the liberated people of the earth are obligated to shed their nationalistic allegiances and embark on a new international path. In discussing the uplifting of various peoples of the world, Suleimenov uses the phrase "Soviet people [*sovetskii narod*]" several times – a phrase which suggests the erasure of traditional national characteristics in order for a unified Soviet culture to emerge. This idea, too, has its roots in official ideology, as can be seen from Khrushchev's speech at the Twenty-Second Party Congress of 1961: "In the Soviet Union there has come to pass a historic unity of people [*narod*] from different nationalities, having common characteristics—a Soviet people [*narod*]." ²⁰⁷

The strange closing lines of *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* take on additional significance in light of this worldview. Suleimenov's "barefoot negro on the dusty square of an aggrieved continent" ponders the nation capable of making "the whole world bow down." Suleimenov's positioning of the "aggrieved" environmental material conditions of the "barefoot negro" are contrasted with his body language, which suggests a new type of colonization by the nation that "forced mankind to raise its head" on the fateful April day. ²⁰⁸ "That people [*tomu narodu*]" is a

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Iulian Vladimirovich Bromlei and Mikhailo Ivanovich Kulichenko, *Osnovnye napravleniia izucheniia natsionalnykh otnoshenii v SSSR*, Nauchnyi sovet po natsional'nym problemam (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 39.

²⁰⁸ Matusevich describes an uncannily similar image published in a cartoon in the satirical magazine *Krokodil* shortly following Gagarin flight. The cartoon depicts "scantly dressed colonial laborers toiling away under the knout of a vicious-looking colonial master." At the sight of Gagarin's satellite blazing through the sky, "clearly marked with a star and a hammer-and-sickle sign," the overwhelmed Africans "drop their equipment, push aside their exploiter and proudly reassert themselves in the process." Matusevich, "An Exotic Subversive," 58.

designation left unqualified, and as such it becomes a placeholder that could refer to equally to Kazakhs (as model postcolonial subjects finally stepping into the spotlight of progress), to the Soviet people (as civilizers), and to mankind as a whole, coming together through the triumph of Soviet-led progress. This creates space for multiple interpretations from the perspective of multiple readerships.

Although Suleimenov is not disputing received ideology outright at this early stage in his career, it is evident that this work is a step toward further questioning. In the rhetorical and symbolic system of *Earth, Bow Down to Man!*, he is visibly making use of his own peculiar position between cultural spheres in order to create a work that resonates both in the idealistic world of the Socialist text and the lyric world of the young Kazakh poet. Relying on the interplay of the different realities of his audience, Suleimenov takes advantage of floating signifiers like “the cosmonaut,” “the East,” and “the nation” precisely to point out the flexibility of their meaning in Soviet culture. Viewed in this way, *Earth, Bow Down to Man!* is a clear example of the hybridity of culture and the multidirectional nature of knowledge and power in the Soviet Union. Finally, beyond the milieu of Suleimenov and his contemporaries, Homi Bhabha’s concepts of cultural hybridity and the “third space” also enhance our understanding of the complex cultural landscape of Kazakhstan and other former Soviet states in the present day. Likewise, Suleimenov’s appropriation of the language of Soviet “occasional” poetry, as well as its roots in Russian panegyric verse, illustrates Bhabha’s concept of mimicry – imitating the language and worldview of the colonizer, but in doing so, emphasizing difference and the insurmountable gulf between “us” and “them.” By rhetorically including Yuri Gagarin in the realm of “us,” Suleimenov presages a point from Frantz Fanon’s breakout work *Wretched of the*

Earth, which would be published two years later: “Colonel Gagarin’s exploit, whatever General de Gaulle thinks, is not a feat which ‘does credit to Europe.’”²⁰⁹

First, Second, and Third Worlds in Olzhas Suleimenov’s Early Poetry

Following publication of *Earth, Bow Down to Man!*, Suleimenov’s fame was further cemented by the publication of his first poetry collection, *Argamaki* (1961), titled after a breed of horse made famous by Turkic steppe-dwellers. These achievements earned him the opportunity to accompany a diverse group of young Soviet poets on a reading tour of Europe and the United States.²¹⁰ Such visits were carefully orchestrated by Soviet Writers’ Union in order to showcase the diversity, liberty, and success of multicultural Soviet society, but their lack of authenticity and spontaneity did not diminish their impact on the poetic developments of the Thaw period. As with other well-known *shestidesiatniki* poets like Evgenii Evtushenko and Andrei Voznesenskii, Suleimenov’s travels abroad had a great impact on his early poetic development. In analyzing poems from his subsequent collections *Sunny Nights* [*Solnochnye nochi*] (1962), *The Night is a Parisienne* [*Noch’– Parizhanka*] (1963), *The Good Time of the Sunrise* [*Dobroe vremia voskhoda*] (1964), and *Year of the Monkey* [*God obez’iany*] (1967), I will demonstrate how Suleimenov’s literary exploration of geographical “outer limits” of Western Europe, the United States, and Asia, is linked to his exploration of his own Soviet Kazakh identity. I will also show how this process is linked to his explicit affinity with worldwide Marxist independence movements and their accompanying literatures. But first, by analyzing poems from Suleimenov’s first collection, *Argamaki*, I seek to contextualize Suleimenov’s poetic accounts of Europe,

²⁰⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 61.

²¹⁰ Suleimenov refers to this journey in several interviews; see, for example, Sandzhar Ianyshv, “Olzhas Suleimenov: Mne nuzhna situatsiia bor’by i sopernichestva,” Fergana Information Agency, February 15, 2007. <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=4908>.

America and the Third World as part of a broader encounter with the West that actually began much earlier in his life, with a fateful trip at the end of the Second World War.

In 1945 the eight-year-old Suleimenov accompanied his elderly grandfather to a village in the heart of European Russia, in order to retrieve the body of an uncle killed in battle and return him to the ancestral homeland for a traditional Islamic burial. Suleimenov recounted this trip, as well as other formative instances of contact with European Russia he experienced in his youth, in the poetic cycle “The Beginning of Happiness [*Nachalo schast'ia*]” (*Argamaki* 52–53). The cycle begins with a description of his grandfather, “illiterate and grieving [*negramotnyi, ugriumyi*],” dressed in the traditional steppe *besmet*, chewing *nasybai* (which a footnote identifies as tobacco) while praying over his lost son in Arabic. Most importantly, the grandfather is steeped in a worldview where native soil defines a people:

Дед не мог представить,
Что тело сына не в родной земле.

Grandfather could not fathom
That his son's body was not in native earth.

After crossing through the war-torn Soviet Union by train, however, eight-year-old Suleimenov notices similarities between the Russian landscape and that of his Central Asian homeland. When local Russian villagers guide them to the mass grave where his uncle is buried, he remarks, “The land, it was almost like ours, though far too damp [*Ona byla, zemlia, pochti takoiu, / Kak nasha, / Tol'ko slishkom uzh syroi*].” Yet he is also conscious of the gaze of the Russian villagers, who linger at the gravesite observing their actions. Initially the grandfather pays “no attention to them [*ne obrashchal na nikh vnimanie*]” and strikes his spade into the ground to begin the arduous task of exhuming the body. But after one woman “spitefully and quietly [*zlo i tikho*]” objects to his actions, he withdraws his spade and uses his hands to smooth over the “wound [*rana*]” in the

earth. “My grandfather already understood a little Russian [*Moi ded uzhe chut’ ponimal porusski*],” observes Suleimenov in the final stanza, marking the grandfather’s entrance into the Russophone world along with its unavoidable and often painful compromises.²¹¹

An intriguing reversal of the situation occurs in another poem from this autobiographical cycle, “The Muscovite [*Moskvich*]” (*Argamaki* 57–60), which features an encounter from Suleimenov’s days as a geologist surveying the Karakum desert for an agricultural development project. A Muscovite newcomer, ignorant to the language and customs of Central Asia and bedeviled by desert mirages of water and trees, wonders aloud, “How do these people live here? [*Kak zdes’ zhivut eti liudi?*],” adding emphatically:

Ни травы, ни деревца, господи божа.
На что это местность, простите, похожа.
Сказали бы мне--здесь ты будешь
бессмертен.
простите, я плюнул бы на предложение
чем жить в кара-кумах посмертно,
повечно,
уж лучше могила в сыром москворечие

No grass, no trees, good lord,
Forgive me, but what does this place resemble?
If somebody told me I could be
immortal here,
Forgive me, but I’d spit on the offer.
Far better a grave in wet Moskvorechie
than a living death in the Kara-Kum
forever.

In the course of a conversation with a family of local nomads, with Suleimenov translating, the Muscovite becomes even more outspoken. When the head of the household explains that he is

²¹¹ This narrative poem was the basis of Suleimenov’s screenplay for the 1966 film *Land of the Fathers* [*Zemlia otsov*], which strips the event of its ambivalence and proffers a much stronger ideological message. After becoming acquainted with a kaleidoscope of Soviet nationalities on the train trip, including a Chechen making his way back to the Caucasus after forced deportation to Kazakhstan under Stalin, the grandfather realizes that all Soviet land is now the “land of our fathers,” and that he is proud to have a son buried among war heroes of all nationalities. Even subsequent publications of this poem bear the signs of minor, but likely ideological, tweaking: the word “spiteful [*zlo*]” is omitted from the Russian woman’s rebuke of Suleimenov’s grandfather, thus significantly altering the tone of the exchange.

illiterate, religious, and opposed to irrigation projects on his land—“we always lived without such things [...] it is the will of Allah [*prozhili bez etogo [...] vse v vole allakh*]”— the

Muscovite interrupts him with a furious judgment:

Скажите ему, что судить его надо:
Вода под ногами, а он развалился.
Вот так и умрет, ни следа не оставив.
Здесь можно такие леса наворочать!

...
Позор!
Что подумать о вашем народе?

Tell him that he should be taken to court:
The water's under his feet, yet he's lazing around.
That's how he'll die, without leaving a trace.
You could plant such forests here!

...
For shame!
What am I to think of your people?

By addressing Suleimenov first, as the interpreter of the conversation (“tell him”), the Muscovite’s scolding becomes directed at Suleimenov as well the recalcitrant nomad. In this way, the Muscovite compels Suleimenov to “speak against” his fellow Central Asians by conveying the damning message. By directing his final, outraged question at Suleimenov (“what am I to think of *your* people?”), the Muscovite compels him to speak against himself as well. Thus, the cultural encounters at the center of this poetic cycle belie the asymmetry of Soviet multiculturalism: in the first poem, it is the responsibility of minorities to present an acceptable version of diversity to the metropole; in the second poem, it is the duty of Russophones to speak for their communities, and to justify their native cultural practices to Russians. In both poems, most significantly, Russians have no such obligation to reciprocate. Whereas the Kazakh grandfather ultimately leaves his son’s body interned in Russian soil in order to “smooth the wound” of the collective trauma of war, the Muscovite geologist would rather be dead in his

native soil than immortal in the Central Asian desert. The motif of soil and water, manifesting variously as earth [*zemlia*], clay [*glina*], sand [*peska*] dunes [*barkhany*], rivers [*reki*] lakes [*ozera*], flooding [*liven'*], damp ground [*syraia zemlia*], damp earth [*zhiden'kaia pochva*] and desert groundwater [*voda pod nogami*], embeds this point by fostering an organic conception of identity and nation. The body of the uncle is “transplanted” through the multinational effort of Soviet Union in the Second World War, and his interment in Russian soil corresponds to the simultaneous growth of new cultural roots and the severance of old ones. The misplaced Muscovite in the shifting sands of the Karakum desert suggests the impossibility of this process in reverse.

Yet almost immediately after the publication of these poems, Suleimenov began interacting with a world beyond the binary of Russian/Other, traveling to the ends of the First and Third Worlds in the 1960s as a cultural ambassador. How did this worldview and its corresponding literary devices change once Suleimenov became completely uprooted? One helpful tool in deciphering Suleimenov’s subsequent “travel” poems is Iurii Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere, which, for the purposes of literary analysis, can be defined as an ecosystem of signification that incorporates texts, authors, and contexts. Lotman explains how the semiosphere operates from the personal to the community and even the geopolitical level:

One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is a boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is “ours,” “my own,” it is “cultured,” “safe,” “harmoniously organized,” and so on. By contrast, “their space” is “other [*chuzhoe*],” “hostile,” “dangerous,” “chaotic.” Every culture begins by dividing the world into “its own” internal space and “their” external space.²¹²

In Suleimenov’s “travel” poetry of the early 1960s, the geographical limits of the first-person form—“their space”—is not merely Western Europe, it is variously Russia, New York City,

²¹² Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Schukman (London and New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 1990), 131.

Alabama, Nebraska, Niagara Falls, Chicago, and finally, the emerging Third World of Africa and Southeast Asia. For Suleimenov, the geographic multiplicity of the “Other” intersects with the multiple identities of the lyric subject, thus realizing Yuri Lotman’s prescription for the essential interdependence of binarism and plurality:

Binarism and asymmetry are the laws binding on any real semiotic system. Binarism, however, must be understood as a principle, which is realized in plurality since every newly-formed language is in its turn subdivided on a binary principle.²¹³

By this turn, Suleimenov’s poetic presentation of foreign places cannot be contained in the binaries of us/them or self/other. Rather, his use of American, European, and “Oriental” images, as well as his use of the lyric perspective of the Soviet writer abroad, allow him to alternate between overlapping semiotic realms, namely those of traditional Russian culture and any number of the subcultures of the multinational Soviet Union. Thus for Suleimenov, an author alternating between the margins and in the center of Soviet society, Lotman’s designation of the “outer limit of a first person form” is constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated.

In the Soviet literary tradition, foreign lands function as both the antithesis of Marxist progress and as a site of the hope for the international possibilities of Socialist revolution. In this scheme the West is often presented as a double—the result of an alternate version of the way history could have progressed but for the interventions of socialist revolution. This anti-utopian view is the thread that unites Russian writing about the West from the pre-Revolutionary period, with Gorkii’s 1906 *City of the Yellow Devil* [*Gorod zheltogo d’iavola*], to the late Modernist period in works such as Maiakovskii’s “Brooklyn Bridge [*Bruklinskii most*]” and *150,000,000*, to the postwar “thaw” period—with Evtushenko’s collection *A Wave of the Hand* [*Vzmkh ruki*] and Voznesenskii’s *Triangular Pear* [*Treugol’naia grusha*]. Soviet poetry about Europe and the West in general focuses on cues that suggest the moral and spiritual decline brought on by

²¹³ Ibid., 124.

capitalist greed: plundered artifacts in museum exhibits, the drunken and drugged decadence of red-light districts, traces of Roman colonization, and rumination on European artistic masterpieces and intellectual traditions.²¹⁴ Given the ambivalence underpinning the Russian cultural fixation on France, it is not surprising that Suleimenov recalls this in his own poetic portrayal of that country. Unlike his predecessors, though, he complicates the picture by incorporating his own negotiated identity of a Sovietized Kazakh, writing from the perspective of someone twice removed from European culture.

In “Montmartre [*Monmart*]” (*Solnochnye Nochi* 96), Suleimenov admires the eponymous bohemian district of Paris, lauding it as a marvel of architectural and urban planning, but also lamenting it as the site of a civilization's path into the decline and decadence of late-stage capitalism. He describes the district as “paved and powerful [*moshchennaia, moshchnaia*],” full of elegant ladies who “count up francs like sins [*franki podschityvaiut, kak grekhi*].” The place-name of “Montmartre” is a subtle example of exactly the kind of ambiguity Suleimenov experiences, since the name itself is a layered artifact of Europe as alternately colonized and colonizing: its Roman name meaning “Mountain of Mars” was eventually Christianized to “Mountain of Martyrs.” Describing a mass at Montmartre Cathedral, the Russian literary tradition and Catholic rituals blend as the priest performs the timeless religious rites, speaking with “the voice of Blok”:

Интеллигентный хмурый викарий
В черной сутане
Голосом Блока
Переговаривается с веками.

²¹⁴ On Gorkii's work, see Paola Cioni, “M. Gor'kii v Amerike,” *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 20 (Spring 2007), <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/20/cioni20.shtml>. On Maiakovskii see S. Kemrad, *Maiakovskii v Amerike* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1970). For a comparative study of the literary portrayals of the U.S. by Gorkii, Mayakovskii, and Blok, see Charles Rogle, *Three Poets Consider America*, *Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature* 8 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1976).

...
Речитативом—скучное место,
Сдвинуты брови, снова чеканит
Каждое слово.
Вечерняя месса.
Вот как стихи человек читает.

The sullen, sophisticated Vicar
In a black robe
With the voice of Blok
Communicates with the ages.

...
Recitative—then stumbling upon a tough place
Furrowing his brow, he once again enunciates
Every word.
Evening mass.
That is how one reads poetry.

By comparing the Catholic liturgical readings to poetry readings, Suleimenov imbues the image of the cathedral with traces of Russian poets who have been to Montmartre before him.²¹⁵ But Suleimenov's identification of Blok is compromised, as Blok's voice is part of the alien, European atmosphere of the Catholic mass. Furthermore, the poet uses this experience to present religion as a perplexing boundary between the individual and the group, and its metaphysical counterpart, the boundary between physical and spiritual worlds:

Но мусульманы и атеисты
Верят сегодня
Иным мирам.

.....
Все—на колени,
И я —на колени,
Верьте,
А я только слушать хочу.

But Muslims and atheists
believe today
in other worlds.

.....
Everyone—on their knees,

²¹⁵ Voznesenskii similarly traces Maiakovskii's footsteps in a later poem, "Maiakovskii in Paris [*Maiakovskii v Parizhe*]," *Antimiry* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1964), 13.

And I— on my knees,
You believe,
But I just want to listen.

Broadly speaking, Suleimenov's use of the command form—"You believe, /but I just want to listen"— can be taken as a requisite nod to atheism, and an attempt to distance himself from the religion of his fellow Kazakhs, as well as a gesture towards the kind of unfavorable portrait of the West the Soviet regime expected. However, thinking back to the ambiguous role of Islam in the non-Russian republics allows an equally ambiguous interpretation of this stanza. In other words, to return again to Lotman, one sign resonates in multiple semiospheres.

Elsewhere we find Suleimenov in another designated space of cultural performance, the museum. In "The Louvre [*Luvr*]" (*Solnochnye nochi* 99) Suleimenov questions the process by which the exhibition of artifacts replicates, and in some cases, invents, a geographical distinction between East and West and a narrative to go with it. Additionally, we find him questioning his own position: where does he, as an interloper from outside the normal binary of Russia and the West, fit into the scheme? This concept finds its culmination in the poem "Night, Paris [*Noch, Parizh*]" (*Solnochnye nochi* 94). Just as earlier he heard the voice of Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok in the Catholic priest's incantation, Suleimenov now sees himself in the Paris night.

Ты—
Пронзительный бас Азии—
Я—
Эхо твое, париж.

You—
Are the piercing bass of Asia—
I—
Am your echo, Paris.

If Suleimenov uses Europe as a stage for the dialogue between the self and presentations of the past, then America is the site of a dialogue between the self and visions of modernity, a

stage on which the dynamic possibilities of the twentieth century are realized. As Suleimenov and his compatriots explored America, attempting to decode its culture and forge a connection with the history and collective memory inscribed in its landscape, they re-traced a path taken by Russian literary giants before them, most notably Vladimir Maiakovskii, the Futurist-turned-canonical-Soviet-poet who had come to serve as a model not only for the Russian *shestidesiatniki*, but for the emerging Soviet Kazakh authors as well.²¹⁶ Chantal Sundaram makes note of the dual existence of Maiakovskii's legacy in official and subversive culture, positing that:

The official Mayakovsky was a bridge with what the young poets were familiar with when they began writing, while Mayakovsky the “rebel,” who combined individualism with populism and aggressiveness with vulnerability, fitted their own self-image as tribunes of the people and voices of their generation.²¹⁷

As the latest participant in the Russian poetic tradition's “eternal return” to America, Suleimenov, like his contemporaries Evtushenko and Voznesenskii, was able to see the foreign land through the eyes of his predecessors as much as through his own. Suleimenov makes use of the same network of images, concepts, and references that characterized the American-themed poems that preceded him, but his essential distance from the Russian tradition metamorphoses the images and scrambles their message. He asserts his Kazakh-ness in a poem about his visit to Columbia University – “My Alma mater is Alma-Ata! [*Alma-mater moia—Alma-Ata!*]” (*Solnochnye nochi* 80). Further in this poem, Suleimenov's use of the word “Columbians [*columbiitsy*]” to refer to Columbia University students relates back to his contemporary Voznesenskii, who, in a poetry collection of the same year, cast himself as a new Columbus,

²¹⁶ Thomas Winner, *Oral Art and History of the Kazakhs*, 199–200; 234.

²¹⁷ Chantal Sundaram, “‘The stone skin of the monument’: Mayakovsky, Dissent and Popular Culture in the Soviet Union,” *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 16 (Spring, 2006) <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/sundaram16.shtml#down>.

viewing America for the very first time: “Open up, America! ... On a whim/ I’m blown to the shore/ When you look for India/ You’ll find America!”²¹⁸ Maiakovskii does the same in his series of travel sketches “My Discovery of America [*Moe otkritie Ameriki*].”²¹⁹ This treatment of travel as not only the discovery of new places, but seeing familiar places with new eyes, will take on greater significance for Suleimenov’s poetic representations of Moscow and Almaty.

In his poetic discovery of the urban American landscape, Suleimenov alternates between simultaneous fascination and revulsion at the industrialized, capitalistic, and uniquely religious American landscape, echoing Maiakovskii’s acerbic exclamation: “dollar-father, dollar-Son, dollar-Holy-Ghost! [*Bog—dollar, dollar—otets, dollar—dukh sviatoi!*].”²²⁰ He also expresses awe at the acceleration of time made possible by increasingly mechanized transportation and technology, and there are glimpses of the “technological sublime,” in which the lyric subject is overwhelmed by man-made constructions such as skyscrapers, factories, and dams, and natural wonders like Niagara Falls (*Solnochnye nochi* 85). Like his contemporary Voznesenskii, Suleimenov creates puns on English language phrases, such as the title of the poem “Flood in New York” [*Liven’ v N’iu Iorke*]” which is homophonous with “livin’ in New York” (*Solnochnye nochi* 83). In that poem, Suleimenov re-introduces Maiakovskii’s transference of the Petersburg Text to New York, likening the city to a menacing “swamp,”²²¹ while at the same

²¹⁸ Andrei Voznesenskii, *Treugol’naia grusha: 40 liricheskikh otsuplenii iz poemy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1962), 14.

²¹⁹ An exploration of the Columbus theme in the writings of Maiakovskii and Esenin can be found in Rougle, *Three Poets Consider America*, 122–125.

²²⁰ V. V. Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoi lit-ry, 1955–61), 47.

²²¹ On the “Petersburg Text” in New York, see Alayne P. Reilly, *America in Contemporary Soviet Literature* (New York, New York University Press, 1971), 14.

time recalling Gorkii's repetitive use of the color yellow to depict the city's repugnant atmosphere in *City of the Yellow Devil* [*Gorod zheltogo d'iavola*]:

Голубая машина
Барахтается, как волна.
Голубая океана
В желтом болоте.”

A blue car,
Floundering, like a wave.
A blue ocean
In a yellow swamp. (84)

Similarly, in “Night in Niagara [*Noch' na Niagare*]” an awestruck portrait of Niagara Falls is interrupted by an unnatural and threatening presence in the night landscape: “the moon flies over [the falls] like a stepmother [*kak machekha nad nei letit luna*]” (*Solnochnye nochi* 85).

Nevertheless, Suleimenov experiences identification and a shared fate with the American city besieged by a downpour:

Я твой гость
Ты намок
И я тоже намокну.

I'm your guest
If you get wet
Then I will get wet too. (83)

In his poetic travelogue of America, Suleimenov makes it clear that the country is haunted by its troubled history. The innumerable injustices of American race relations provided ready fodder for anti-American propaganda in the Soviet media, so it is no surprise to find this theme in Suleimenov's collection. Several poems dwell on the experiences and culture of African-Americans, in particular the struggles of the Civil Rights movement, which was in the midst of its greatest struggles during Suleimenov's 1961 visit. By focusing on the echoes or artifacts of African culture that remain with African Americans, his orientation unites the West

with the Third World. In the poem “African Rhythms [*Afrikanskie ritmy*]” (*Dobroe vremia voskhoda*, 142–146), dedicated to the Kazakh writer Anuar Alimzhanov, Suleimenov describes a jazz performance with both fascination and estrangement, hearkening to primordial, African origins of jazz culture by way of grossly essentializing imagery. When the music begins, the “young Negroes [...] spit out their gum and cry out, stomping their feet;” the stage becomes a “savannah” with banging drums, baobab trees, bananas, mangoes, and pineapples, illuminated by the gleam of “clean teeth on a black face [*chistie zuby na chernom litse*].” He then takes this exaggerated imagery of uncivilized African wildness and extends it to the injustices of American society as a whole. New York City becomes a chaotic “jungle” with air that “smells of hashish,” where assaults and rapes are swiftly avenged with the electric chair and the noose of the lynch mob. As “sinful” scavenger birds circle “the island of this happy hell” he concludes sarcastically: “In America— it’s furious fun ... [*V Amerike—/beshenoe vesel’e...*]”

Yet in “Freedom Ride [*Reis svobody*]” (*Solnochnye nochi* 90), he links his own struggle to that of African-Americans. Narrating an encounter with the Freedom Riders, activists of the Civil Rights movement who rode racially integrated interstate buses into the segregated American South, Suleimenov once again calls attention to the primordial African roots of their culture:

Глядят, поют густыми голосами
 Мотивы Африки:
 --О, Алабама!

They look around, they sing with deep voices
 African motifs:
 -- O, Alabama!

The poet expresses shock and indignation at the suffering of disenfranchised African-Americans, yet admires their courage and is attracted by the beauty of their protest anthem. He joins in their song, and nearly joins them on the bus to Alabama as well:

Я подпел.
Они шумно теснились,
Предлагали мне лучшее место.
.....
Вот рука моя на дорогу.
Мне так хочется в Алабаму.
Вместе с вами принять участие
В честной драке за чье-то счастье,
Я умею. Я так воспитан.

I sang along.
They noisily crowded together,
And offered me the best spot.
...
I reach out my hand to the road,
I want so much to go to Alabama,
Together with you, to take part
In the honest battle for someone's wellbeing,
I know how. I was raised that way.

Suleimenov's expression of solidarity with the African Americans of the First World is tied to his admiration for the triumphs of the decolonizing Third World in "A Negro in the UN Building [*Negr v zdanii OON*]" (*Solnochnye nochi* 84), where Maiakovskii's presence surfaces once again:

В двух угрюмых глазах раскосых
Сонно льются потоки мысли.
[...]
Шалью на плечи—знамя Кении
Поднимается футуристом.
Клеркие гладкие
Мимо—теньями,
Озираются, как туристы.

Так бы шел молодой Маяковский,
Весь во власти недоброй мысли,
В двух огромных глазах раскосых

Осознание своей миссии.

In two sullen, slanting eyes
Sleepily poured streams of thought.

.....

With a shawl on his shoulders—the banner of Kenya
He rises as a Futurist.
Meanwhile, in the form of shadows
Smooth clerks
Look around, like tourists.

That's just how a young Maiakovskii would walk,
Wholly in the grip of hostile thoughts,
In his two huge, slanting eyes
is the awareness of his mission.

In the alien environment of New York, Suleimenov recognizes the revolutionary spirit of his poetic predecessor Maiakovskii in the figure of the Kenyan delegate. This double-identification is the hallmark of Suleimenov's poetics in this period, in which the poet looks outward and inward simultaneously, thereby multiplying his possibilities for drawing boundaries between self and other. As Suleimenov's marginal perspective enables him to treat far-off locales as sites of fellowship, recognition, and inclusion, Moscow and Alma-Ata become sites of estrangement. This is especially visible with regard to race in the Soviet Union, which was becoming a difficult issue by the time Suleimenov returned from his tour of 1961.

Not long after the jubilant 1958 World Youth Festival, Khrushchev's shoe-banging speech against neocolonialism, and the hopeful "year of Africa," cracks in the Soviet Union's utopian vision began to show. As much as Soviet ideologues expressed hatred for Western colonialism, and found satisfaction in its failures, they could not completely condone many aspects of Third World liberation movements, especially those that were nationalistic in character and relied on the power of local elites. Matusевич notes that it was a persistent challenge for Moscow "to domesticate and appropriate African anti-colonial movements," which

were widely divergent in ideology.²²² Many of the African students showing up in Moscow in the 1950s and 60s had “incorrect” class origins and “incorrect” interpretations of Marxist ideology—particularly the with regard to the significance of race as a category of oppression separate from class. On the other hand, writes Matusevich, some students were simply more interested in obtaining an education than joining socialist cadres, and became disenchanted with the restrictions and indignities of daily life: no freedom of movement or assembly, bad dormitory conditions, accusations of spying, and racially motivated harassment. African students’ romantic relationships with Russians were a particular source of hostility. In 1963 the suspicious death of Edmond Asare-Addo, a Ghanaian medical student in Moscow, allegedly on the eve of his marriage to a Russian woman, provoked an unauthorized protest by hundreds of African students in Red Square.²²³ This unprecedented act of civil disobedience provides the context for Suleimenov’s 1964 poem “On Pushkin Square [*Na ploshchadi Pushkina*]” (*Dobroe vremia voskhoda* 151–152) which finds the poet employing his newfound perspective on race, honed by his trip to the United States at the peak of the Civil Rights movement, in order to critique the culture of the Russian metropole.

²²² Maxim Matusevich, “An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans and the Soviet Everyday,” *Race & Class* 49, no. 4 (April 2008), 69.

²²³ Matusevich refers to first-person accounts by African students that were published in a rush of general outrage in the West African press in *ibid.*, 71–72. A contemporaneous report in *Time* magazine estimated that “over 400” African student protesters “fought Red cops in the streets, inside Red Square itself, right past Nikita Khrushchev’s own office window,” bearing signs that read “Moscow—a second Alabama,” and “We too are people, not animals.” The report confirmed that Addo was stabbed to death by friends of his Russian wife, and cast this incident as the culmination of years of discrimination and harassment of African students throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe, citing similar protests in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. A Russian bystander, “obviously groaning under the weight of the imperialist white man’s burden,” was quoted as saying: “We help them and give them an education. Then they turn around against us.” *Time*, December 27, 1963, 20–21. *Pravda* was initially silent on the matter, but published a short report two days after the incident, denouncing Western reports as propaganda and maintaining that Addo wandered drunk into the winter streets and died of exposure. It dismisses the African students’ protest as unnecessary foment whipped up by outsiders. *Pravda*, December 21, 1963, 3.

“On Pushkin Square” brings Pushkin’s African ancestry to the forefront, and portrays his death as a tragic result of class *and* racial oppression, ignited by his white wife’s betrayal. Suleimenov introduces Pushkin as “a low-born god, black as galoshes/ with heavy Arab lips [*bog nizkorosl, cheren, kak sapog,/ s tiazhelymi arabskimi gubami*],” who was a “slave [*rab*]” to his wife, Natalia, “whom no one ever called Natasha [*ee nekto ne nazyval Natashei*].” The description of Natalia’s physical characteristics likewise connotes a sense of haughty sexuality, made stronger by the inscrutable power ascribed to whiteness: “Oh, that white throat and shoulders, And breasts as high as scaffolding!” [*Okh, eto gorlo beloe i plechi,/ I grud’ vysokaia, kak eshafot!*]. These qualities allow her to poach Pushkin’s fame and, even more outrageously, to use this position attract other men:

Она на имени его стояла,
как на блистающем паркете зала,
вокруг легко скользили кавалеры,
а он, как раб, глядел из-за портьеры,
сжимая плотно рукоять ножа.

She stood on his name,
just as she stood on the shining floor of the hall,
while cavaliers slid around her with ease,
but he, like a slave, watched from behind the curtain,
tightly clutching the handle of a knife.

In describing the moment of Pushkin’s death, Suleimenov personifies the bullet [*pulia*] to create the impression that Pushkin’s wife is actually the murderer:

... А пуля та летит.
В ее инерции вся злая сила,
ей мало Пушкина, она нашла...
Мишеней было много по России,
мы их не знали, но она —
нашла.

... But that bullet flies.
In her inertia is all evil power,
Pushkin’s not much for her, she found [him] ...

There were many targets in Russia,
we didn't know them, but she –
she found [him].

In subsequent lines, Pushkin the “slave” is only transformed into a god through the martyrdom of the duel:

вышел раб на снег в январский вечер
и умер бог,
схватившись за живот...

a slave went out into the snow on a January evening
and died a god,
clutching his stomach ...”

The image of the dead African in the snow actually repeats, with irony, the language of official Soviet reports on Edmond Asare-Addo: that he was not killed by a racially motivated attack but instead “froze to death in a state of drunkenness.”²²⁴ Further mirroring *Pravda*'s assertions that African students were “unused to the climate, the very severe winter,” the snow figures prominently in Suleimenov's portrayal of the African Pushkin as the embodiment of a hostile, all-encompassing white force against the poet's morally superior blackness. It also echoes Marina Tsvetaeva's essay on the Pushkin Monument in Moscow as a symbol of the ongoing struggle against racism—a view that firmly contradicts the spirit with which the Pushkin monument was originally established in 1880, which framed Pushkin as the origin of a specifically national Russian literature.²²⁵ Raquel Greene notes that for Tsvetaeva, Pushkin's “African shoulders loaded down with all the Russian snows” represent the poet's “estrangement from Russian society with all of its conventions and expectations” but “which failed to destroy

²²⁴ *Pravda*, 1963, 3.

²²⁵ See n. 128.

Pushkin's greatness."²²⁶ In Tsvetaeva's conception, Pushkin's duel is a moral struggle between black and white, with Pushkin firmly in the "positive realm of blackness."²²⁷ In Suleimenov's poem, similarly, the Pushkin monument stands as a grim reminder of the Soviet Union's failure to ensure racial equality. He reads ambivalence, suspicion, and defeat into the body language of Pushkin's statue in the square:

А он стоит, угрюмый и сутулый,
цилиндр сняв, разглядывает нас.

But he stands, sullen and slouching,
his top-hat removed, scrutinizes us.

So who does Pushkin really "stand for" in Suleimenov's poem, and who is the object of his scrutiny? Raquel Greene claims that Pushkin's African heritage, mythologized to a great extent by the poet himself, "constitutes an essential component of [his] singularly persistent appeal within Russian culture" and that "he is such an important part of it because he made the alien [*chuzhoe*] entirely Russian [*svoe*] without changing its alienness."²²⁸ Suleimenov situates Pushkin in the opposite way with regard to Soviet culture: the poet's persistent, unresolved "alienness," set in stone in the monument, hints at the superficiality of Soviet rhetoric on racial equality and progress. At the end of Suleimenov's poem, Pushkin's sullen "alienness" persists in the statue's defeated, slouching pose, as well as his accusatory gaze directed at "us." As in previous poems, "us" may denote disparate groups: Pushkin's fellow Russian writers, for "standing on [his] name" yet failing to prevent his death, Soviet minorities charged with the duty

²²⁶ Raquel Greene, "The 'African-aristocrat': Alexander S. Pushkin's Dual Poetic Persona" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1999), 238.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

of fostering anticolonial brotherhood on a worldwide scale, or the Soviet Union as a whole, for failing to live up to the ideals of its global agenda.

Greene’s formulation also sheds light on Suleimenov’s own changing sense of his own “alienness” as well: it intensifies as the 1960s come to a close. Following his trip, Suleimenov comes to see his own home country with “new eyes,” and this is particularly visible in his poetic portrayal of Russia and Kazakhstan. This “new” vision further destabilizes the already unstable image of Moscow as the aboriginal center of the Russian empire, and it exposes “Russia” to be as much of a heterogeneous entity as the Soviet Union, with borders that are as arbitrary, temporary, and porous as any of those in colonial Central Asia. If, through the ambivalence of the Pushkin Monument, Moscow becomes a “foreign” place in the heart of Russia, then the entire semiosphere of Russian culture upon which his poetics of difference has been forged comes into question. Now it is not only the sign itself that has changed, but the signs have had an effect on their interpreter and creator, Suleimenov himself. In the poems published after Suleimenov’s 1961 trip, the lyric subject undergoes a transformation.

Suleimenov’s altered poetic perspective is evident in the dissociated, defamiliarized way he presents his hometown of Almaty. Previously he touted the links between with American place names and those of his homeland through forceful, alliterative exclamations such as “Alma mater moia, Alma-Ata!” and “Alma-Ata, Alabama!” (*Solnochnye nochi* 80). One year later, in the poem “Lenin Street in Our Town [*Ulitsa Lenina v nashem gorodke*]” (*Noch’ - Parizhanka*, 9–11), he looks to the alienating markings of Russian hegemony visible in his own street and on his own passport:

Эта улица
В тертом паспорте
У бандита—моя прописка

На заборах, исписанных бешено
Это имя эмалированно!

This street
In the scuffed passport
Of a hoodlum— my *propiska*

Scribbled furiously on the fences,
This name is enameled!

Here Suleimenov sets up a contrast between, on the one hand, the haste with which the street was marked with Lenin's name ("scribbled furiously"), and at the same time the permanence of this gesture ("enameled"), and, on the other, its irreversible mark on the subject's identity via the passport and, most importantly, the *propiska*. The Soviet *propiska*, or registered domicile, was marked with a stamp inside a citizen's passport, and it served more than merely an official registration—it represented permission, granted by the central government, to occupy a particular space. This space is challenged in the poem, as Suleimenov recalls how, as a fifteen-year-old boy, he ripped out the street signs with pliers and affixed them to the wrong places.

Гвозди – ржавые. Взмок, но смог.
Я срывал
И боялся милиции.
Я вбивал в стены честных домов,
Как воззвания,
Эти таблицы.

The nails were rusty. I broke a sweat, but I succeeded.
I tore
And feared the police.
I hammered these tablets
into the walls of honest houses,
Like a proclamation.

By tearing out the signs for Lenin Street and using them to re-mark other streets, Suleimenov's act of youthful hooliganism, a "young boy's duty," turns into a metaphor for the act of writing:

re-arranging the order of existing signs in order to make his mark on the world. This act also contradicts the world's effort to make marks on him, disrupting the referent of the *propiska* and creating a new, re-named space apart from official narratives or attempts at geographical organization:

Вы гордились ночным безмолвием!
Вы гордились прямыми аллеями!
Но зигзагом легла в эту ночь,
Сквозь заборы пройдя, как молния.
Моя мощная
Улица Ленина.
... Слово я уважаю,
Слово.
Ночь люблю. Переулки и звезды.
Каждой ночью
Мне хочется снова
Рвать клещами ржавые гвозди.

You were proud of nocturnal silence!
You were proud of straight alleys!
But that night it lay in a zigzag,
passing through the fences like lightning.
My powerful
Lenin Street.
... I respect the word,
The word.
I love the night. Lanes and stars.
Every night
I want to pull out rusty nails
all over again.

Africa also haunts Suleimenov's subsequent descriptions of Almaty. In the poem "Do you hear, it's so quiet in our little town... [*Slyshesh, kak tikho v nashem gorodke ...*]" (*God obez'iany*, 58–59) he notes "it's as if half of Africa is sleeping [*bud'to pol afriki spit*]." Yet, borrowing the metaphor of the "awakening continent" from Soviet decolonization propaganda, he points out that the city's quietude is only an illusion, masking the great revolutionary potential

lying in wait beneath the surface. Using “we” rather than “I,” he resumes his earlier agricultural metaphor in order to depict his fellow townspeople:

Мы в темноте земли, как семена,
растем, травой расталкивая комья,
и чем жирней земная темнота,
тем гуще мы, светлее мы
и выше.
в просвеченных песках мы не растем,
нам нужен мрак,
чтоб отрицать и драться
и вылезать,
расталкивая комья!

We grow as a seed in the dark earth,
pushing up clumps of grass,
and the fatter the earthly darkness,
the stronger and brighter we are,
and taller.
We do not grow in sun-baked sands,
we need the darkness,
in order to deny and fight
and to crawl out,
pushing clumps of earth!

By yet again refusing to qualify “us,” Suleimenov invites an interpretation that this is more than a single national vision; it could refer to all oppressed peoples of the world—including those of the Soviet Union. Similarly, in the 1967 poem “Emil’khan Khazbulatov” (*God obez’iany* 14), which is named after a contemporary Chechen poet, he extends the metaphor of “emerging from underground” to a critique of the authority of the Soviet academy—in particular archaeologists, geologists, linguists, and ethnographers who built up a body of knowledge about the Soviet East. The poem describes an archaeological dig in the Caucasus mountains, where scientists expect to find fabled Chechen daggers (objects that would confirm their essential warlike nature), but find an ancient cooking pot instead.

Но он дошёл до нас не перевёрнутым,
он устоял,

он полон был
землёй,
землёй Чечни, как кости перемолотой,
горячей, выкипающей землёй.
Холмы, холмы,
 о горы моей родины,
как опрокинутые казаны ...²²⁹

But it was not discovered upside-down,
it stood upright,
it was filled
with earth,
with the earth of Chechnya, like ground-up bones,
with hot, buried earth.
Hills, hills,
 o, mountains of my birth
like overturned pots ...

The theme of native soil returns to Kazakhstan in the 1964 poem “The Wild Field [*Dikoe pole*]” (*Dobre vremia voskhoda* 199–201), a surprisingly candid meditation on the country’s troubled history as a site of the Russian Empire’s myriad injustices, as well as a victim of the Soviet drive for industrial and agricultural development. The poem’s title is predicated on the ecological binarism by which the earliest settled Russian principalities differentiated themselves from their steppe-dwelling neighbors. According to historian Willard Sunderland, the “wild field” referred to the “uncultivated” grasslands of the Pontic-Caspian steppe, populated by tribal confederations of non-Christian nomads, which “Eastern Slavic agricultural society eventually overtook... and eclipsed.”²³⁰ In Suleimenov’s poem, the “wild field” refers not only to the “uncultivated” steppe, but also to the violent nature of steppe colonization by the Russians, in which Kazakhstan came to be the site of both Imperial and Soviet prison camps, as well as a destination for internal

²²⁹ This passage is likely an allusion to Taras Shevchenko’s 1847 Ukrainian-language poem “The Plundered Grave [*Rozrita mogila*],” in which the unearthing of an ancient Ukrainian burial mound serves as a metaphor for the systematic violation of the Ukrainian nation at the hands of the Russians.

²³⁰ Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 2.

exiles and deported “enemy nations,” the site of natural resource extraction and the re-appropriation of traditional grazing lands for agriculture, and, most recently and egregiously, the testing ground for nuclear weapons.

The poem hinges on the dual meaning of the Russian word for “test,” *ispytanie*, which refers to any type of scientific test (including weapons testing) but carries the additional meaning of “trial, hardship,” and “adversity.” Likewise Suleimenov makes use of the transitive verb *ispytat’*, “to test, to put (someone) through hardship,” as well as the present passive verbal adjective *ispytannyi*, “one who is/has been tested,” and the past active verbal adjective *ispytavshii*, “one who has tested.” The nuances of meaning, in all their grammatical variations, along with their potential to denote reciprocal action, correspond to Suleimenov’s overall picture of Kazakhstan as a “wild field” with a punishing landscape that “tests” its varied inhabitants and invaders, yet is also “tested” by them.

Beginning with a ceremonious apology addressed to “the country [*strana*],” Suleimenov’s introductory stanza establishes the Kazakh landscape as both unforgiving and potentially unforgivable. The first victims mentioned by name are the nineteenth-century writers Taras Shevchenko and Fedor Dostoevskii, who both spent time in Kazakhstan in punitive exile.²³¹ Although Dostoevskii and Shevchenko are clearly the objects of Kazakhstan’s “test,” Suleimenov remains ambiguous about who exactly did the testing, by refusing to include a pronoun of “we” or “they.” The logical conclusion is that Russia initially “tested” them by sending them into exile. Yet by also imploring Petrograd and Leningrad to “forgive my land,” Suleimenov distinguishes “the country” as a separate entity from Kazakhstan, and implies that the harsh landscape of Kazakhstan is to blame for the hardships of metropolitan Russia.

²³¹ On Shevchenko’s literary and artistic output during his exile, see Roman Koropecy, “Taras Shevchenko’s Encounters with the Kazakhs,” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 27, nos. 1–2 (Summer–Winter 2002), 9–31.

Страна,
Ты прошла испытания Казахстаном —
есть сегодня земля,
на которой крестам не расти.
Испытали Тараса.
И Фёдора испытали.
Петроград, прости.
Ленинград, мою землю прости.

Country,
You have endured the test of Kazakhstan—
today there is a land
where crosses do not grow.
Taras was tested.
And Fedor was tested.
Forgive, Petrograd.
Leningrad, forgive my land.

In the next stanza, Suleimenov turns the blame back toward Russia, lamenting the effects of industrial development and land apportionment that gradually came to dominate Kazakhstan's culture and landscape through the course of the country's contact with Russians. The Kazakh land comes to embody the painful dissonance between traditional nomadic ways of life and the trappings of industrialization and sedentarization: “barbed wire [*provoloka koliuchaia*],” “pastures, theaters, and the best natural resources [*kochev'ia, teatry, i luchshie kopi*],” “horses and blast furnaces [*koni i domny*],” and finally “the Turksib railroad and the heat [*turksib ... i zhara*].” As the land becomes imprisoned by industrialization and agriculture, it also becomes a prison for deported nations, in particular Ukraine and Ingushetia. In asking the Ukrainians and the Ingush to “forgive my land,” Suleimenov remarks that even if he had not been born in Kazakhstan, he would have likely wound up there as a prisoner:

Я хотел бы родиться в горах
и не зваться казахом,
или жить в белой хатке,
коров по оврагам пасти.
Всё равно —
привезли бы меня в Джекказган

вагонзаком.
Украина, прости,
о Ингуш, мою землю прости!

I would have liked to be born in the mountains,
and not to call myself a Kazakh,
or to live in a white hut,
herding cows.
It doesn't matter—
they would have brought me to Dzhezkazgan
in a prison wagon.
Ukraine, forgive,
O Ingush, forgive my land!

Next he reprises his earlier subject matter of France, the Louvre, and Montmartre in order to build on the characterization of Kazakhstan as a massive prison. Directly addressing Kazakhstan, he declares, “[you are] five Frances without Louvres, without Montmartres, [*ty ... piat' Frantsii, / bez Luvrov, Monmartrov*],” and furthermore, “you are a massive prison spread out on a small map [*ty ogromnoi katorgoi plaval na malen'koi karte*].” The scale of Kazakhstan’s incarceration is so massive, in fact, that, “all the Bastilles of sinful capitals [*vse Bastilii/ greshnykh stolits*]” could fit within its borders. By extension, he identifies the Kazakhs as native-born prisoners, whose very existence is incarceration:

Мы, казахи, на этой каторге родились.
Мы прошли испытание
дымом костров и копытами,
в переулках ночных –
испытания горла ножом,
навсегда испытали вербованными чернозём,
радость радия и тяготенье земное испытано.

We Kazakhs were born in this prison.
We have been through a test,
with hooves and the smoke of bonfires,
in night-time alleys—
the test of a knife to the throat,
they used the enlisted to forever test the black soil,
the joy of radium, and the earth’s gravity.

In this way, the environmental devastation wrought by Soviet development projects finds a counterpart in the Kazakh land's inherent harshness. Kazakhstan is a prison even as it becomes imprisoned, and therefore incarceration is the singular identifying quality of an emerging multicultural Kazakhstani identity:

Вся земля в проводах, космодромах,
гектарах и станциях,
если дождь – это ливень,
а ветер – так суховей,
своих все испытавших,
страна, назови казахстанцами,
своих самых испытанных,
преданных сыновей.

All the land in wires, cosmodromes,
hectares and stations,
if it rains, it pours,
and the wind – such a hot wind,
country, name the Kazakhstanis
your own most testing,
your own most tested,
loyal sons.

By naming Kazakhstanis, rather than merely ethnic Kazakhs, as the country's own "most testing and most-tested," population, Suleimenov enhances the significance of the "test" to form the basis of a new, multicultural civic identity: all Kazakhstanis, regardless of ethnicity and regardless of the role their ancestors played in Russia's colonization of the steppe, are united by the "tests" of imprisonment, oppression, exploitation, and the harsh landscape itself. The final line of the passage, which names Kazakhstanis as the country's most "loyal sons [*predannykh synovei*]," neatly encapsulates another, more sinister aspect of the testing. The word "loyal [*predannyi*]" is a homograph for the word "betrayed [*predannyi*]," (from the verb *predat*, "to betray"), which also carries the meaning of "subjected" or "exposed to." Thus the "most tested, most testing" sons of Kazakhstan are also simultaneously the "most loyal," the "most betrayed,"

and overall the “most subjected.” This idea culminates with the ambiguous word order in the poem’s final plea for forgiveness:

Казахстан, если можешь, прости.
И
да здравствует
запрещение испытаний!

Kazakhstan, if you can, forgive.
And
long live
the test ban!

These closing lines can be read as a continuation of the plea to “the country” to “forgive Kazakhstan, if you can.” On the other hand, the lines can be read as a plea addressed to Kazakhstan itself: “Kazakhstan, forgive, if you can.” In the same way, the poem’s final phrase can refer to a ban on nuclear testing (just as “test ban” in English refers most directly to weapons testing), or, in the context of this particular poem, to the “ban of all tests.”

Suleimenov’s rhetoric in this 1964 poem could not be farther from the optimistic spirit of the “technological sublime” he used a mere three years earlier to portray Yuri Gagarin’s launch from the Baikonur cosmodrome. Instead of coming together through the triumphs of technological progress, and in doing so, setting a strong example for the Third World to break its chains, the Kazakhstanis of this poem are united in hardship. Travel, which led Suleimenov to view himself and his homeland with “new eyes,” gave the poet a new perspective on local histories and environmental issues as well. This perspective carried over into his political career, and it eventually came to a head on February 25, 1989, when, in his capacity as a candidate for election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Suleimenov hijacked a routine television appearance in order to give a passionate speech calling for the closure of the top-secret nuclear

weapons testing grounds in northeastern Kazakhstan, the Semipalatinsk “Polygon.”²³² The ensuing public protests, which began at the headquarters of the Kazakh Soviet Writers’ Union in Alma-Ata, evolved into the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement. By forging ties with international anti-nuclear groups and appealing to the Soviet government on the basis of enforcing universal human rights, the movement made significant gains on the local level. In 1991, by decree of the Kazakhstani president Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Polygon permanently closed in a sovereign Kazakhstan.

“A Moment of Silence at the Edge of the World”: Conclusion

As the sun began to set on the turbulent, yet frenetically optimistic decade of the 1960s, Olzhas Suleimenov published an unusual poetic account of a historic event that, in the estimation of many, brought the era to a violent, disenchanting end: the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. His 1968 poem “A Moment of Silence at the Edge of the World [*Minuta molchaniia na kraiu sveta*],” written mere days after the event, ties together the major issues of conceptualizing First, Second, and Third Worlds in Soviet Russophone writing. The poem begins with a short prose account of Suleimenov’s diplomatic visit to the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi at Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent. Suleimenov and an Indian colleague, Mr. Chatterjee, muse on the nature of Gandhi’s own assassination. He was shot in the back five times by a fellow Hindu [*indus*], Mr. Chatterjee explains, and the assassin was not merely a “nationalist” or a “fanatic [*ne to natsionalist, ne to fanatic*]” but also quite simply a “bastard [*svoloch*].” The very same day, as news of King’s assassination reaches India and the

²³²Keshrim Boztaev, *Semipalatinskii polygon* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan, 1992), 141–143. Boztaev published another excellent history of the history of nuclear testing in Kazakhstan, titled after the date of the first nuclear test at the Semipalatinsk polygon in 1949, *29 Avgusta* (Almaty: Atamura, 1998).

country observes a public moment of silence for the “Negro Gandhiist,” Suleimenov attempts to imagine the events from Chatterjee’s perspective:

В этот день в Америке свершилось насилие - убили негритянского гандиста
Мартина Лютера Кинга. Индия почтила его память минутой молчания. 500
миллионов минут молчания. Ровно - тысячелетие.
За каждым выстрелом “какой-то сволочи” - века молчания.
О чем думал Чаттерджи в свою минуту?

On this day in America, an act of violence has occurred – the Negro Gandhiist
Martin Luther King has been killed. India observed a minute of silence in his memory.
500 million minutes of silence. Exactly a millennium.
For each shot by “some bastard,” there is a century of silence.
What was Chatterjee thinking about in his minute?

The next stanzas of the poem are an ostensible narration of Chatterjee’s thoughts on the matter, in which he casts King’s assassination as yet another of the world’s unforgivable injustices, on par with the endless calamities visited upon Asia. Chatterjee assigns the blame in terms of colors: a “white eye [*belyi glaz*]” and an “alien sky [*chuzhoe nebo*]” surveil Asia from above, while “a black mother visits hardship upon us at every occasion [*chernaia mater’ s kazhdoi okkaziei svoi bedy do nas dosylaet*].” As a result, Asia comes to be seen as a “a scheme, a stereotype [schema, stereotyp]” whose identifying features are only “hunger, cholera, and typhoid [*golod, cholera, tif*].” In the rest of the poem, Suleimenov provides a startling rebuttal to Chatterjee’s color-coded lament. He points out that in his world travels, he has witnessed a reality so complicated and multiplicitous that it cannot be distilled into schemes and stereotypes. Echoing Stalin’s declaration of “two Easts” from a generation before, Suleimenov asserts that he has seen blue eyes “in Asias [*v Aziakh*],” just as he has seen brown and black eyes “in Europes [*v Evropakh*].” He identifies the true source of evil in the world as the absence of color, a “grey race [*seraia rasa*]” covertly dwelling within every nation, race, and community, whose essence, like that of Gandhi’s assassin, can be summarized in a word: “bastards!”

Есть они, Чаттерджи,
в каждой стране,
В каждой волости -
сволочи!
Их не узнать
по разрезу глаз,
по оттенку кожи:
[...]
Узнать их не просто:
их цвет отличительный -
серость!
Она растворяется
в черном
и в белом
и в желтом.
Серость
возносится бронзой,
блистает золотом.
В темных углах души
собирается серость, как сырость.
Белый стреляет в черного?
Серый стреляет.
Черный стреляет в белого?
Серый стреляет.
Серый взгляд
проникает в сердце,
пронзительный, волчий.
Узнаю вас по взгляду,
серая раса -
сволочи!

They exist everywhere, Chatterjee,
In every country,
In every *volost* -
bastards!
You won't know them
by their eye color,
or their skin color:
[...]
It's not easy to recognize them:
their color is distinctive -
gray!
It dissolves
into black
and white
and yellow.

Grayness
can be hidden in bronze
and can shine like gold.
In the dark corners of the soul
grayness gathers like dampness.
White shoots black?
Gray shoots.
Black shoots white?
Gray shoots.
The gray gaze
penetrates the heart,
piercing, like a wolf.
I recognize you on sight,
you gray race -
you bastards!

The poem's dialogic structure enables Suleimenov to project his own worldview onto India, first by voicing Mr. Chatterjee's perspective, and then by providing the "final word" on what Martin Luther King's assassination should mean to him in the context of Gandhi's assassination. By attributing the tragedy to the individual moral failings of certain "bastards," Suleimenov willfully glosses over one of the persistent, systemic problems shared by postcolonial societies of the First, Second, and Third Worlds alike: internal ethnic, national, and racial conflict. Instead, he seeks common ground through the abstraction of "greyness."

A similar drive toward the abstract is found in Suleimenov's dialogic poem, "The Reasoning of Kenyan Prose Writer James Ngugi on *Vers Libre* [Rassuzhdeniie keniiskogo prozaika Dzhemsa Ngugi o verlibre, svobodnom stikhe]" (*Povtoriaia v polden' 71-72*). Written shortly before the Conference of Asian and African Writers in Alma-Ata, which Suleimenov attended and helped to organize, the poem is structured as a debate about which verse form is the most progressive and the best-suited to contemporary themes. Articulating the perspective of Ngugi, Suleimenov writes:

строчи, поэт, любым калибром,
сади слова любой обоймой,

СТИХ МОЖЕТ БЫТЬ И НЕ ВЕРЛИБРОМ,
ПОЭЗИЯ БЫЛА Б
СВОБОДНОЙ

compose, poet, with any calibration,
plant the words in any arrangement,
poetry that's not in free verse,
can be just as
free.

Yet in spite of such rhetorical gestures towards universality, the specifics of literature—genre, verse form, subject matter, language, and above all the identity of the writer—*did* matter to Suleimenov, as well as to his Third World counterparts. Ngugi famously went on to renounce the English language in favor of his native Gikuyu, shedding his English appellation of “James” and advocating for the development of African literatures in the vernacular. “Unfortunately,” he wrote in the 1986 classic *Decolonising the Mind*, “writers who should have been mapping paths out of that linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition.”²³³ In the same work, Ngugi characterizes cultural and linguistic imperialism as a “bomb” that makes the colonized subject yearn “to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves.” Although Suleimenov never switched to writing in Kazakh, in the course of narrating the remote struggles of the First and Third Worlds, he ultimately turned his attention back to the beleaguered “native soil” of Kazakhstan. In endeavoring to portray the universal, he embarked on an exploration of the “boundaries of the first-person form.”

As an ethnic Kazakh writing in Russian, the *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union and its successor states, Suleimenov strove to enact the ideals of the Soviet project through literature, yet he was also deeply conscious of preserving his cultural heritage from the damage wrought by

²³³ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1994), 5.

war, collectivization, forced sedentarization, assimilation, cultural erasure, and environmental devastation. His work proves to be an integral part of worldwide postcolonial literature.

Suleimenov's negotiation of a unique poetic perspective from within the colonizer's language, and from within Soviet literary ideology, is a struggle familiar to many postcolonial writers.

What makes this possible, to borrow Ngugi's words from *Decolonising the Mind*, is "that undefinable quality of imagination, a writer's artistry, which is able to perceive what is universal—that is, applicable to the widest possible scale in time and space—in its minutest possibility of the felt experience."²³⁴

²³⁴ Ibid., 78.

Chapter 4

Russophonia's Contemporary Frontiers

You have to understand that the future is not in bureaucratic organizations of writers, but rather in loose cartels and loners [...] the situation is changing.

–Pavel Bannikov, 2010

In a 2010 interview with the Russophone journal *Qazyna*, Kazakhstani poet and provocateur Pavel Bannikov launches into a scathing indictment of the state's role in the production of literature. In his opinion, not only is the Kazakhstani Writers' Union "an outdated institution," but it is also "a Soviet mammoth, long-dead but still with fat on its bones, which is now being eaten up by parasites." Bannikov dismisses the government's support of literature as a Soviet relic, now doomed to sustain irrelevant writers through increasingly meager "kickbacks" in the form of publications and literary prizes. More insidiously, such efforts represent the state's efforts to "control society through cultural codes, through a fake civil society." He points to a future where literature is dominated not by centralized state organizations but by "loose cartels and loners."²³⁵ Bannikov's polemic, though couched in hyperbole, draws our attention to the unforeseen and intriguing effects of globalization and virtual modes of connectivity on Russophone literature.

This chapter explores Russophonia's ever-expanding frontiers in the twenty-first century. I will be paying particular attention to three contemporary literary circles originating from—and maintaining explicit associations *with*—the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. However, as I will show, there is very little conventionally "Central Asian" about them, and in fact their creative output highlights new difficulties in categorizing literature according to the

²³⁵ "Soznatel'nyi slesar': Interv'iu s Pavlom Bannikovym," *Qazyna* 12 (June 2010), http://www.litkarta.ru/dossier/soznatelny-slesar/dossier_6656/.

customary qualifiers of region, ethnicity, nation-state, and language. Triggered by the economic and political crises following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia's most recent waves of domestic and international migration have led to the development of new, hybrid cultural expressions, and increasingly digital means for their distribution and consumption. Meanwhile writers who have remained at home are affected by the advent of Internet publishing, diverted flows of funding and information, and new sources of collaboration and prestige. The changing geographical orientation of writers, combined with the boom in telecommunications technologies, has caused contemporary Russophone literature to take on transnational and virtual characteristics. The poetics and the reception of Central Asian literary works can now be viewed in terms of the transnational networks and virtual worlds that engender their production.

Mobility and connectivity also complicate the basic understanding of Russophone literature as a field of texts written in a colonial language but from outside an imperial center. The post-Soviet exodus of many Russophone Central Asian writers, combined with their newfound access to virtual outlets for publication and networking, complicates the meaning of identity and place. Ultimately, the geographical mobility of writing subjects calls into question the act of "writing back to the center" or "writing from the periphery" embedded in common understandings of postcolonial literature in any language. This leads to pressing questions about the nature of Russophone writing in the twenty-first century: what happens when the presumed dichotomies of metropole/periphery and colonizer/colonized metamorphose in the wake of globalization? How are these changes reflected in literature? How do scholars of contemporary literatures conceptualize these changes, and where does Russophone literature fit?

Paul Jay addresses these problems in terms of a "transnational turn" in literary studies. He traces its origins to a point when "the study of minority, multicultural, and postcolonial

literatures began to intersect with work done under the auspices of the emerging study of globalization.”²³⁶ To characterize the essence of this turn, Jay quotes from a seminal 2007 essay by Doris Sommer:

To listen to the world now is to wake up from a romantic enchantment whose spell cast human subjects into vessels of one language, made language seem almost identical to nation, and made nation practically indistinguishable from state [...] Hardly any spaces are left to the tidy coincidence that some of us imagined between national culture and sovereign state.²³⁷

Jay employs the transnational turn as a framework for analyzing the “post-postcolonial” works of Junot Díaz, Zadie Smith, Zakes Mda, Arundhati Roy, and others. In doing so he also brings to light the troubling impact of globalization on individual and group identities. Although the literatures of the former Soviet Union have so far eluded classification in this way, I argue that a closer look reveals fundamental similarities with the transnational condition that Sommer and Jay identify. I take as my central examples two Russophone schools of poetry, the Tashkent School and the Fergana School, as well as the Kazakhstani arts organization Musaget, which has fostered a “new wave” of Russophone prose and poetry based in Kazakhstan’s former capital city of Almaty.

Virtual Peripheries and Intangible Centers: the Tashkent School, the Fergana School, and Musaget

The Tashkent and Fergana Schools arose from the print culture of Soviet Central Asia, but today maintain an equally active presence online. Although the names of these schools reveal their

²³⁶ Quoted in Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Cornell University Press, 2010), 15–16.

²³⁷ Ibid.

origins in a static and poetically significant geographic location, many of the movements' practitioners have now either emigrated to the West or, conversely, have relocated to the Russian metropole. Nevertheless, the schools continue to assert a poetic distance and difference from Russia in their online incarnations, comprising what I have termed a "virtual periphery." In analyzing their poetry and the dynamics of their group cohesion, I attempt to determine the role of such virtual peripheries in the production and poetic development of contemporary Russophone literature. How has technology changed the way Russophone poets engage with identity, history, memory, language use, and each other?

An unprecedented combination of political, social, and economic factors caused the Tashkent and Fergana schools of poetry to "relocate" to the Internet in the mid-1990s and thrive there. Foremost among these factors was the changing cultural orientation of public life. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the continuous out-migration of the ethnic Russian population of Uzbekistan was compounded by the politically-motivated decline of the Russian language in official spheres, as well as the disappearance of major Russophone print outlets.²³⁸ This led to a changing cultural landscape in certain urban centers of Uzbekistan, marked by the increasing prominence of the Uzbek language—which itself began to undergo a transition to the Latin alphabet and a de-Russified lexicon.²³⁹ As in other newly independent republics of Central

²³⁸ David MacFadyen provides an insightful discussion of cultural effects of the post-Soviet out-migration of Russians in the chapter "Today's Culture and the Ironic Benefits of the Internet" in *Russian Culture in Uzbekistan: One Language in the Middle of Nowhere*, Central Asian Studies Series (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 96–112. See also Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 1998).

²³⁹ For more information on migration and language policy in Central Asia from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period, see Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998); Lenore A. Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003); Mehmet Uzman, "Romanisation in Uzbekistan Past and Present," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series) 20, no. 1 (2010): 49–60; William Fierman, "Problems of language law implementation in Uzbekistan," *Nationalities Papers* 23, no. 3 (1995): 573–595.

Asia, however, Russian persisted in other spheres of life as a marker of prestige and as the *de facto* medium for interethnic communication. Russian also continued to dominate in the realm of digital communications, since access to the Internet was (and still is) overwhelmingly limited to urban, educated—and therefore Russophone—populations.²⁴⁰ The Uzbekistani Internet remained a distinctly Russophone space even as the spheres of official and public life became more homogenously Uzbek. These political and cultural shifts, in turn, were exacerbated by the financial crises of the 1990s, which ushered in the further demise of the longstanding Soviet infrastructure for the production of literature. As a result, Russophone would-be writers and publishers of Central Asia, like their counterparts the world over, reached an important realization: it is simply easier and more cost-effective to maintain virtual communities than to coordinate and fund print journals.

Uzbekistan's capital city of Tashkent is the origin of a loosely-bound, multicultural group of Russophone poets who broadly identify themselves as the Tashkent School. Although the concept of "Tashkent literature" or the "Tashkent text" has existed in Russian literature since the nineteenth century,²⁴¹ there was no accompanying sense of an aesthetically cohesive Tashkent

²⁴⁰ Carolyn Y. Wei and Beth Kolko, "Resistance to Globalization: Language and Internet Diffusion Patterns in Uzbekistan," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 11, no. 2 (December 2005): 215. Shoaziz Shaabidov and Ho-Kyun Shin share similar findings in "A Study on Internet Language Diffusion Patterns in Uzbekistan," *2009 Proceedings of The 7th International Joint Conference of the Korean Association of Logos Management* (Almaty: Kazakhskii Ekonomicheskii Universitet im. T. Ryskulova, July 2009): 643–649, <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/1122178>. See also Mansur Mirovalev, "Independent Online Media of Uzbekistan: Virtually Exiled and Still Dominated by Russian Language," *Fergana Information Agency*, 2003, <http://enews.fergananews.com/mansur.html>.

²⁴¹ Elena Fedorovna Shafrańskaia's study of the "Tashkent text" in Russian literature examines the significance of that city in the Russian imagination, analyzing works from Saltykov-Shchedrin, Akhmatova, the Tashkent School, and the contemporary novelist Dina Rubina. *Tashkent'skii tekst v russkoi kul'ture* (Moscow: Art Khaus Media, 2010). However, she rejects the idea of a separate "Russophone" literary identity, which she refers to as a sore subject [*bol'nyi vopros*]" in a 2010 interview. She continues by using the Tashkent poet Evgenii Abudullaev (pen name Sukhbat Aflatuni) as an example: "'Russian literature' and 'Russian-language literature' are merely terms. Can we consider writers who live in Europe, America or Australia, but who write in Russian, to be Russian writers? Yes. If a writer writes in Russian, that means he cannot express himself in any other way; he cannot think differently [...] If you write about Uzbeks, that doesn't mean you're not a Russian writer. You perceive them through your mentality [...] An Uzbek might perceive some things in the same way, but really it's as different as day and night. I

School until the late 1990s, when a core group of three poets embarked on a collaborative literary program they called the “Lesser Silk Road [*Malyi shelkovyi put*’]”—a conscious play on the trans-Eurasian trade network that came to be figured in the nineteenth-century European romantic imagination as the “Great Silk Road [*Velikii shelkovyi put*’].”²⁴² Vadim Muratkhanov, Evgenii Abdullaev (who publishes under the pseudonym Sukhbat Aflatuni), and Sandzhar Ianyshv first became acquainted in their home city of Tashkent, where they began their writing careers in local publications. Now all three have relocated to major cities in Russia, although they return to Uzbekistan periodically. In the course of publishing their work together in a series of anthologies, reviewing each other’s work in contemporary journals, and appearing together at public readings, they came to be known as the founders of the Tashkent Schools.²⁴³

The Fergana School, on the other hand, began as a closely bound group of poets living in the Fergana Valley and adhering to shared aesthetic values rooted in the 1980s literary and artistic movement of Conceptualism. Initially the Fergana school formed around authors affiliated with *Star of the East* [*Zvezda vostoka*], a journal that began in the 1920s as a propaganda organ but later evolved into a platform for increasingly experimental material in the Perestroika years. *Star of the East* is now defunct, but the Fergana School has been reborn as a virtual community. Among the school’s major contributors were Daniil Kislov, Shamshad

do not consider Evgenii Abdullaev to be a Russophone [*russkoiazychnyi*] writer of Uzbekistan. He is a Russian writer.” Quoted in Mariia Ianovskaia, “Tashkentskii sled v russkoi kul’ture,” Fergana Information Agency, June 3, 2010, <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/6600>.

²⁴² This is a self-aware appropriation of a term that is was first coined by the German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen as *die Seidenstrassen*—the “Silk Roads,” and later entered into popular discourse as the “Silk Road.” There are many recent studies of this early “global system” and its subsequent elevation to an object of Orientalist fascination in the Western academy and popular culture. See Daniel C. Waugh, “Richthofen’s Silk Roads: toward the Archaeology of a Concept,” *The Silk Road* 5, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 1–10.

²⁴³ Federica Boscaroli’s exhaustive study of the Tashkent School includes detailed analyses of all five issues of the *Lesser Silk Road* anthology (1999–2003), as well as the 2008 bilingual Russian and Uzbek anthology *Anor—Granat*. “La produzione poetica in lingua russa nell’Uzbekistan post-sovietico : la scuola di Taškent” (PhD diss., University of Venice, 2012), <http://dspace.unive.it/handle/10579/1161>.

Abdullaev, and Ol'ga Grebennikova. Of these three, only Shamshad Abdullaev, the movement's de facto spokesman, has remained in Uzbekistan.

Because both the Tashkent and Fergana schools arose nearly simultaneously and in close geographical proximity to one another, they have several characteristics in common. First of all, they are not exclusive. For example, Sandzhar Ianyshv has published and collaborated with members of the Fergana School in addition to founding the contemporary Tashkent School. In fact, many poets have come to be identified as members of the Tashkent School while ignoring or even denying any such affiliation. Thus the poet's physical association with Tashkent, either as a birthplace (Sandzhar Ianyshv), a temporary home (Ol'ga Grebennikova), an adopted home (Aleksander Fainburg), or a permanent home (Shamshad Abdullaev) is sufficient to warrant membership in the poetic school, regardless of any particular stylistic features of the literature itself. Second, the schools are also multicultural, consisting of writers who identify themselves as Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek, as well as some who claim a mixed ethnic heritage. Since the Russian language enables discourse between authors from various backgrounds, it is possible to say that Russian is the language of multicultural dialogue in this context.

For both schools, the main online publishing outlets reflect a consciousness of location, while also maintaining group identity through virtual means. The web anthology *Two Shores: the Contemporary Russophone Poetry of Uzbekistan [Dva berega: russkoiazychnaia poeziia Uzbekistana]*, compiled by Vadim Muratkhonov, contains a profile of each poet, complete with a short biography, a list of publications, and select writings. Yet the site's architecture reflects a fundamental geographical division: on the homepage, the names of poets who have remained in Uzbekistan are listed on the left-hand column under the heading "Left Shore [*levyi bereg*],"

while those who have emigrated are listed on the right-hand column as the “Right Shore [*pravyi bereg*].”²⁴⁴ A similar consciousness of geographical disjuncture can also be seen in the major online outlets for Fergana poetry, the *Fergana Almanac* [*Ferganskii al'manakh*] and the *Fergana Library* [*Biblioteka Fergany*]. Both sites are subsidiaries of the Fergana Information Agency, the brainchild of Fergana poet and journalist Daniil Kislov. Kislov claims he initially conceived the site in his early, homesick years in Moscow as a way to re-create his homeland through literature. He likened this effort to that of another writer in exile, James Joyce, who asserted that all of Dublin could be re-created from the pages of *Ulysses*.²⁴⁵ Today the Fergana Information Agency maintains an extensive, web portal for news and cultural information of Central Asia, with content in Russian, English, Uzbek, and French. Although the agency maintains branches in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it is a certified media outlet only in the Russian Federation, and its headquarters are located in Moscow. It is banned in Uzbekistan, though some users manage to access its content through illegal means.²⁴⁶ The *Fergana Library*, which dates back to the early days of the site, is a select archive of work published by members of the Fergana School, whose presence together online stands in contrast to their wide geographic dispersal.

Despite their origins in print, the Tashkent and Fergana schools took on a second life in the “virtual periphery” due to the curatorial efforts of their more successful members. Maksym Popelysh-Rosochynsky refers to the deliberate construction of such online literary spaces as

²⁴⁴ Because the site was last updated in 2002, it is likely that many more poets now live on the right shore than on the left. Vadim Muratkhanov, comp., *Dva berega: russkoiazychnaia poeziia Uzbekistana*, accessed August 24, 2013, <http://www.uzbereg.ru/index.html>.

²⁴⁵ BBC Uzbek Service, “Daniil Kislov ‘Fergana.ru,’ Alisher Soipov va saitning ‘ksiluzbek kaifiati khakida,” May 21, 2010, http://bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2010/05/100516_cy_talkingpoint_daniilkislov.shtml.

²⁴⁶ The Uzbekistani government’s curtailing of citizens’ digital freedom of expression is part of a general clampdown on civil liberties that has escalated since independence—an all too familiar instance of the former colony instating a more repressive regime than that of its former colonizer. See Sarah Kendzior, “A Reporter without Borders: Internet, Politics and State Violence in Uzbekistan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 1 (January-February, 2010): 40–50.

“museification,” and points to the role of similar Russian sites such as Vavilon.ru in maintaining the legitimacy and prestige of an elite cadre of contemporary Russian poets. In this “museum” format, site administrators serve as curators who “monopolize selection and evaluation, and preclude the possibility of outsider evaluative judgment.” Such sites thus act as “one-way channels to bring the texts and authors to a muted audience.” Moreover, because the curators of such sites are often also writers, actively contributing their own works in addition to selecting and publishing the work of other writers, they can be analyzed as a type of text in themselves.

Nowhere are the effects of curation more evident than in the presentation and organization of information on the authors’ personal profiles. The profiles usually contain a photo, a cursory biography and list of publications, and a few sample poems. Popelysh-Rosochynsky addresses the significance of these samples, which are commonly referred to as the poet’s “business card [*vizitnaia kartochka*].” Similar to actual business cards, the samples are intended to offer readers a concise, representative introduction to the poet’s style. The web curators of the Tashkent and Fergana schools reinforce the sense of a peripheral literary movement by selecting “business card” poems that explicitly deal with Central Asia, migrant identity, or distance from Russia.

“Business card” poems and other documents from the Fergana School’s period of transition in the mid-1990s offer scholars a productive place to begin investigating the digital terrain of contemporary Russophone literature, by providing a glimpse of how the movements saw themselves immediately following the Soviet Union’s collapse, and demonstrating how these writers later “curated” this information for display on the Internet. A poetics based on postcolonial alienation is visible in the manifesto of the Fergana School, which was originally published in the print version published in *Star of the East* in 1994, then subsequently published

by Shamshad Abdullaev on the Fergana Almanac site in 1998. “We do not have our own publications, our own journals, or our own readers,” the Fergana poets proclaim, “and we are obligated to come to terms with being diffused (by publications in Russia, in emigration) and existing for others, for other cultures.”²⁴⁷ This *raison d'être* of geographical and cultural estrangement is enhanced by a tendency to favor subject matter that is a “cosmopolitan mixture” of “specific landscape features of the southern, sultry world” and “hermetic ‘Western’ poetics.” The result is what Abdullaev calls a “hybrid stylistics [*gibridnaia stilistika*],” evident in the free verse style which became known as “Fergana *vers libre*.” At the same time, Fergana poetry is characterized by an “orientation toward Mediterranean and to some extent Anglo-Saxon poetry,” as well as “anti-historicism and rejection of social reality.” Fergana poetry thus not only stresses distance from Russia, which is evident in the school’s name, but also distance from the context in which it is written. This is then extended to the principle of distance from the poetic object itself: “the farther away the object, the more perfect a tool it becomes.” The Fergana poetic program is clearly at work in Ol’ga Grebennikova’s poem “Immobility [*Nepodvizhnost'*],” which emphasizes several aspects of irrevocable, irreconcilable distance.

“Immobility” is one of a handful of poems published as a “business card” under Grebennikova’s profile on the *Fergana Almanac*.²⁴⁸ It consists of a series of impressionistic images set against the backdrop of a generically “Asiatic” desert landscape. The lyric subject’s nostalgic and alienated observations of indoor and outdoor landscapes are framed as a note to a faraway friend. But the voice of the friend is completely absent; Grebennikova’s poem is a one-sided communiqué anticipating an answer that may never come. She begins with an image of a

²⁴⁷ Shamshad Abdullaev, “O shkole,” *Ferganskii al'manakh*, accessed August 24, 2013, <http://library.ferghana.ru/almanac/index.htm>.

²⁴⁸ Ol’ga Grebennikova, “Nepodvizhnost',” *Ferganskii al'manakh*, accessed August 24, 2013, <http://library.ferghana.ru/almanac/olga1.htm>.

slow sunset, suggesting an oppressive heat that stalls the subject's ability to think. The mind and landscape are drawn together in an immobile "stupor."

Солнце затянута пленкой.
Оцепенение.

The sun's drawn out like a roll of film.
Stupor.

She then situates the lyric subject's observations within a room, and this enclosed space adds to the general impression of lethargy and stasis.

На противоположной стене
края мешковины, прикрученной
к слуховому окну,
непрестанно колеблются,
то и дело открывая чужое нутро.

On the opposite wall
the edges of a bag, fastened
to the listening window,
constantly move back and forth,
opening up its alien innards.

Indoors, the most mundane objects of material culture are made strange and take on animate or almost human qualities. The bag hanging from the window exposes its "alien innards" and moves restlessly "back and forth" but never actually leaves the place where it is fastened. The window, uncannily taking on the human capability of listening, suggests the complexity and communicability of interior life while also representing the perspective of simultaneously looking inside and outside. Moreover, the succession of observations from outdoors (the sun) to indoors (the window, the bag) places the poetic subject equally distant from "outside" and "inside" – or, if I may extend the concept, from "center" and "periphery."

The next stanzas suggest that the problematic dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" also applies to the body itself. The lyric subject's bodily integrity is compromised by aspects of the

harsh surrounding environment—in this case, the strong wind and particles of sand that violently invade the eyes and lungs:

С надеждой
вспоминаешь азиатский буран,
секущий песочную рябь
в глаза и легкие, словно
вся небесная рать скормлена друг другу
и обрушилась в жилую низину, –
здесь засвечен ее черный плавник.

With hope
you remember the Asiatic storm,
cutting ripples in the sand
in your eyes and lungs, as if
all the heavenly host has fed on itself
and crashed into a residential lowland -
here its black driftwood is burned.

By qualifying the storm as “Asiatic,” Grebennikova locates the poetic subject at the periphery of the Russian-speaking world, while her description of its violent effects codes it as Oriental. By literally marking the land and the bodies that inhabit it—“cutting ripples in the sand”—the harsh “Asiatic” environment is the sole creator of the peripheral identity. Yet the storm’s ultimate effect is erasure, as the elemental forces of nature erode any identifying marks on the landscape, and even the individuality of human voices is lost in the maelstrom:

Желчный пейзаж стерт
до мельчайшей детали. Голоса
дробятся по скатам домов.
Вместо неба искаженная маска,
которой не хватает воздуха.

The bilious landscape is erased
right down to the last detail. Voices
shatter on the slopes of houses.
In place of the sky there’s a disfigured mask,
that lacks air.

Human relationships are likewise eroded by distance, which Grebennikova portrays as seemingly essential to survival but also inevitably producing alienation.

Не замечать, не приближаться,
не слишком выдавать себя окружающим.
Я обучаюсь свободе, чтобы
не сойти с ума.

“... пиши мне, дорогой друг.”

Not to notice, not to come closer,
not to give too much of yourself to those who surround you.
I learn about freedom
to keep from going crazy.

“... Write to me, my dear friend.”

True to the Fergana program, Grebennikova’s fundamental poetic principle is distance – whether it is the poet’s distance from a metropolitan center, or from the substance of the poetic object, or from his/her own identity. Likewise the lyric subject’s perspective exemplifies the awkward and long-unclassifiable position of a Russophone subject living as a minority at the edges of a former empire: estranged from the culture of the metropole, yet also from the cultures of the periphery. Grebennikova’s invocation of mobility through its opposite—immobility—relays the ambiguity of identity and place that later became the “business card” of transnational writing as a whole.

In the 2001 poem “The Mulberry Tree [*Tutovnik*],” Tashkent poet Sandzhar Ianyshv deals with the temporal dimension of mobility by focusing on the intersection of memory and history.²⁴⁹ The poem, which appears as a “business card” under Ianyshv’s profile on the *Dva berega* site, is a surreal, dreamlike narrative framed as a reminiscence of childhood. By titling his poem after the Turkic-derived name for the mulberry tree, *tutovnik*, rather than the Slavic (via Latin and Greek) conversational form of *shelkovitsa*, Ianyshv grounds the lyric viewpoint in Central Asia both ecologically and etymologically. However, since *tutovnik* is the preferred form

²⁴⁹ Sandzhar Ianyshv, “Tutovnik,” *Dva Berega*, accessed August 24, 2013, <http://www.uzbereg.ru/rb/sanzhar.shtml>.

in the higher register of the Russian literary language, Ianyshv's use of it also invokes the linguistic cross-fertilization brought about by Russian colonization. The word *tutovnik* also denotes the significance of the mulberry itself in Central Asian history: as the habitat of silkworms, the mulberry tree is the source of silk cultivation. Therefore the title implicitly draws the reader's attention to the pre-Russian cultural and economic order emblemized by the "Silk Road." The poem's concluding lines further establish a non-Russian (or even pre-Russian) viewpoint by featuring the Islamic ritual of *namaz*.

Stressing the interrelationship of nature and culture, the crux of the poem is the opening line: "O cemetery, leafy palimpsest!" This dichotomy manifests in Ianyshv's juxtaposition of the leafy mulberry tree, which grows organically, and the palimpsest, which comes into being through stasis and can be understood as a relic of successive cultures. The poem's central conceit, a mother and child visiting a cemetery, is likewise situated along the dichotomy of nature and culture. The mother forbids her child to eat berries from the mulberry tree because it grew from the phosphorous of the decomposing dead, but the mysterious voice of the grandfather "from below" contends: "it's my summer gift for you—take it and eat it!"

О кладбище, листовяный палимпсест,
тутовая невыболтанность к лету!..
«Не вздумай поднимать с земли и есть
то, что вошло на фосфоре скелетном», –

так говорила мама. Я алкал
напиться млечным соком шелкопряда.
И сок подобно времени стекал
по ликам измышленного распада.

«Не то сулит беду, что тащим в рот, –
я голос Деда под плитой услужал, –
а то, что изо рта исходит. Вот
тебе мой летний дар – бери и кушай!»

O cemetery, leafy palimpsest,

the mulberry's concealed before summer! ..
"Don't think of taking from the earth and eating
which like a skeleton rose up in the phosphorus"—

so my mother said. I longed to
drink the milky juice of the silkworm.
And just like time the juice dripped
along the face of a fabricated collapse.

"It's not what we put in our mouth that bodes trouble,"
I heard Grandfather's voice from below,
"but what comes out of our mouth. Here,
it's my summer gift for you—take it and eat!"

By forbidding her child to eat the fruit, the mother acts as the enforcer of a particular cultural/social/behavioral order—the likely guess would be Sovietization or Russification, given the poet's own background and his deliberate juxtaposition of European and Asian etymologies of silk in the poem's title. The voice of the grandfather from beyond the grave, on the other hand, serves as a primordial ancestor figure advocating natural and intuitive action. In this way, nature and intuitive acts appear to be more enduring because of their ability to endlessly regenerate. Conversely, culture, which is represented by cemetery and "that which comes from your mouth," is fallible, static, and capable of eroding. But this tension comes to a miraculous resolution in the poem's closing lines, when the gatekeeper of the cemetery performs *namaz* and a mulberry tree spontaneously springs from his eyes.

Страж у ворот, свершающий намаз,
вдруг похитрел сквозь бороду и – чудо! –
два саженца проклюнулись из глаз,
обрызгав тутом. Белым-белым тутом.

The gatekeeper, observing *namaz*,
incanted through his beard, and suddenly - miracle! -
two seedlings sprouted from his eyes,
bursting with mulberries. White, white mulberries.

The gatekeeper's gesture can be interpreted as the fruitful confrontation of culture and nature, as he uses language and the ritual of prayer to bring about a miracle from the natural world. The interplay and mutual dependency of nature and culture also corresponds to the perspective of the transnational poet, who bears the imprint of diverse cultural forces, yet also experiences life as an organic, embodied individual, who is mobile and elects to participate in various discourses from which meaning can be generated.

Such is the dynamic behind Sandzhar Ianyshv's 2001 poem "Tashkent as a mirror of unfaithful me [*Tashkent kak zerkalo nevernogo menia*]." ²⁵⁰ Voicing a migrant's nostalgic rumination on a homeland left behind, Ianyshv describes the city of Tashkent as a reflection of his own "unfaithful" self.

Ташкент как зеркало неверного меня
имеет форму человеческого клубня.
его сады и пни, и кладбища, и клумбы,
и запеченные в курганах имена –
Теперь *фигурка* на Дедулином столе
с земным Гагариным, приклеенным лет сорок
тому назад; и эта вуду для иголок - монтаж меня...
А я плыву на корабле.

Tashkent as a mirror of unfaithful me,
takes the shape of a human tuber.
Its gardens and tree stumps and cemeteries and flowerbeds,
and names baked in the kurgan-
Now a *figurine* on Granddaddy's table
with earthly Gagarin, pasted there forty years
ago, and this voodoo doll for needles – is a montage of me ...
But I'm sailing on a ship.

Split in two through the mirror of Tashkent, the lyric subject envisions his "non-Russian" self in various forms, carrying the cultural weight of Soviet history (with the reference to Gagarin) and Eurasian prehistory (the *kurgan*). In this reflective position, Tashkent becomes the focal point for

²⁵⁰ Sandzhar Ianyshv, "Tashkent kak zerkalo nevernogo menia," in *Gorod Kotorogo Net*, *Malyi shelkovyi put' 2* (Moscow: Izd-vo Ruslana Elinina, 2001), 89.

the poet's estrangement from nature, culture, family, historical memory, and ultimately from language itself:

Ташкент как зеркало нерусского меня
имеет форму купола и арки.
А я плыву, и мне на полубе
гадалки и попки врут, что форма, в сущности, одна;

и что язык един у ящериц и рыб –
какого шуя выбирать тогда нарече,
на коем дохнуть?...
– и что форма человечья
отнынье происходит из икры!...

Tashkent as a mirror of non-Russian me
takes the shape of cupolas and arches.
But I'm sailing, and on deck fortunetellers and asses
tell me lies: that the form is, in essence, all the same;

and that language is the same among lizards and fish --
then how the hell do you choose a language?
how do you breathe? ...
-- and that the human form
now comes from fish roe! ...

In the poem's penultimate stanza, all geographical designations break down completely:

Ташкент как зеркало... А впрочем, все брехня.
Нет ни пространства, ни гребца в триreme.
Востока – нет, нет – Запада, и Время –
Единственное Место для меня.

Tashkent as a mirror ... And yet, it's all bullshit.
There is no space, no rower in the trireme.
There is no East, no West, and Time
is the only place for me.

Here, Tashkent is no longer merely a state of mind, nor is it merely a proxy for the lyric subject's meditation on his own physical journey from periphery to center (and accompanying changes in perspective). Instead, Tashkent has become an absence rather than a place, and the poet has become completely de-situated. Having fallen off the map, so to speak, all that remains of the

poet is ephemera, and therefore “time is the only place” for him. The metaphor of the oar-less trireme illustrates mobility without physical means. This paradoxical, metaphysical mobility is repeated in the next stanza, which depicts the ephemeral Tashkent-as-idea moving “without wheels” and “without propellers.”

В нем-то и движется мой город без колес,
Без лопастей – как на зеленый дух свирели.

In it [time] my city moves without wheels,
Without propellers – as if toward the green spirit of the flute.

In this way, perhaps forming the inverse of Grebennikova’s conception of immobility, the actual physical mobility of Ianyshv’s lyric subject has resulted in a different kind of stasis—the state of being outside of any known location, and existing only in time. Thus the only conceivable journey is temporal: nostalgia, which is experienced through fleeting sensations like the sound of the flute or the scent of sarsaparilla:

И я – в пути, чтоб аромат сарсапарели
Не прекратил струиться из его желез.

And I’m on my way, so that the scent of sarsaparilla
won’t cease to flow from its glands.

Ianyshv’s closing mention of the “scent of sarsaparilla” provides an interesting moment of intertextuality. It refers to a 1953 short story of the same name by the American author Ray Bradbury, in which an elderly man permanently withdraws to his attic and surrounds himself with nostalgic pictures and relics from his past. Bradbury’s protagonist reminisces with such fervor that one day he disappears into the past completely, leaving behind only the aroma of sarsaparilla.

Ianyshv’s representative “business card” poems show how the privileged position of the Russophone poet, now fully mobile and fully tapped into global cultural exchanges via the

Internet, leads to a type of alienation much stronger than that of exile—he comes to express an alienation from the self. This state, represented by the mirror of Tashkent, is initially reminiscent of the “split subjectivity” common in postcolonial literature and in the works of many other Russophone writers, in which a colonized subject must simultaneously inhabit two disparate cultural realms. But as the poem comes to a close, particularly with the reference to Bradbury, Ianyshev’s poem exhibits an erased or even evaporated subjectivity. This is made possible through the devices of reflection, with Tashkent as a mirror of the poet, and montage—with Tashkent as a heterogeneous array of organic and inorganic artifacts and sensations, adding up to the totality of the poet’s identity. It culminates in the lyric subject’s disappearance into the ephemera of time and (American) sarsaparilla.

The Tashkent poets’ geographical move to the Russian metropole, or in some cases, beyond it, has created a shared poetic vision of Tashkent—a virtual “Tashkent of the mind” – that exists only in the poet’s nostalgic gaze back toward the homeland. In fact, the very possibility of treating Tashkent as a poetic object in this way hinges on the poet’s movement *out* of Central Asia. Evgenii Abdullaev, when asked by an interviewer how he managed to write so insightfully about the city while living temporarily in Japan, summarized this position in following way:

For me, Tashkent is not outlined with any kind of rigid, specific geographical or even temporal borders. Quite the contrary. It is the diverse, variegated cultural environment [*sreda*] of a diaspora scattered around the world, yet without losing its self-identification. It is also the vague, elusive world of my own and other people’s memories. This “phantom” is conceived of and experienced as reality.²⁵¹

For the migrant writers affiliated with the Tashkent and Fergana Schools, Central Asia ceases to be the vantage point from which the poet looks out; instead it becomes a state of mind, a

²⁵¹ Quoted in Andrei Kudriashov, “Evgenii Abdullaev/Sukhbat Aflatuni: Chelovek, zamyslivshii opravdat’ gorod,” *Fergana Information Agency*, November 14, 2003, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2321>.

reflection of the poetic subject, and in many ways an ideal poetic object. Crucially, this perspective is only possible when the poet is “looking back” from the vantage point of Moscow. Aleksandr Grishchenko, another Tashkent poet living in Russia, describes this process precisely in an online journal entry detailing his move from Tashkent to Moscow: “My soul was torn toward the north, to my homeland that was not a home.”²⁵² Grishchenko’s sentiments dovetail with Doris Sommer’s 2007 assessment about the perspective of the contemporary transnational writer, where “home means not a here, but a there, somewhere else, a loss [...] a lack.”²⁵³

The poets of the Tashkent and Fergana schools are now also branching out into a variety of mainstream outlets that have no particular geographical orientation—or better yet, are explicitly transnational. Such is the case with Vadim Muratkhonov, who currently serves as an editor for the Russophone journal *Interpoeziia*, which maintains offices and separate editorships in New York, Israel, and Moscow, and publishes in print as well as online. *Interpoeziia*’s editorial board states that the journal’s mission is to take poetry “beyond the borders” of space and time. But they describe the poets themselves as fundamentally “alone in a global, intercultural space where poetry is the only way to communicate between initiates.” They also tout the utility of Russian as a transnational medium: “the Russian language, and with it the poetry, is alive and kicking in different locations: in the metropole, in the near and far abroad.”²⁵⁴ Muratkhonov himself explains the journal as an idea “which appeared on the ruins of the Soviet Empire” and is held together by “the Russian language, which, as the medium of the Internet,

²⁵² Aleksandr Grishchenko, “Koe chto o sebe,” accessed May 5, 2013, <http://grishchenko.ru/>.

²⁵³ Doris Sommer, “Language, Culture, and Society,” in *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. David Nicholls, 3rd ed. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2007), 3–4.

²⁵⁴ *Interpoeziia* homepage, accessed June 19, 2013, <http://magazines.russ.ru/interpoezia/>.

united its speakers [*nositeli*] into one network.”²⁵⁵ The journal’s founder Andrei Gritsman, writing from Israel, reinforces this idea by asserting that whatever lies outside a poet’s window—“a dome, minaret, a cupola, [...] the mountainous Mediterranean, or the MacDonald’s arches”—is unimportant, so long as the “wavering magic of Russian poetry” is visible from the computer screen. In this way the Internet serves as a window not only to the Russian-speaking world but also to the world at large; and the widespread, multicultural poetic network envisioned by *Interpoeziia* exists regardless of geographical position of its constituents.

Moving from Ianyshv’s central metaphors of the palimpsest and the montage, Vadim Muratkhanov’s 2010 poetic cycle “Variations on Themes of Rock ‘n’ Roll [*Variatsii na temy roka*]”²⁵⁶ enables the juxtaposition of multiple cultural worlds. Every poem bears an untranslated English title taken from a classic rock song, and the cycle’s cohesion is based on synesthetic and intertextual elements. The inaugural poem, “David Bowie. Life on Mars?” refers to figures from American and European popular culture that have become entrenched around the world as a result of globalization, thus anticipating a particular type of multilingual, “globalized” reader:

Микки-Маус, Кот в сапогах,
Белоснежка и гномы,
за руки взявшись, танцуют
посреди каменистой пустыни.
Музыка им не нужна,
а стало быть, и воздух не нужен.
Зрители им не нужны,
ибо камеры нет в нарисованном
замкнутом мире.
Шторы задернем — небо бледнеет —
выключим свет...

²⁵⁵ Vadim Muratkhanov, “V poiske sobesednika. Zhurnal ‘Interpoeziia’ – proekt ‘poverkh bar’erov’ i rasstoianii,” *Literaturnaia Ucheba* 6 (December 18, 2008), <http://www.lych.ru/online/0ainmenu-65/35--s62008/191-n-n--l-l->.

²⁵⁶ Id., “Variatsii na temy roka,” *Novyi mir* 9 (September 2010), http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2010/9/mu9-pr.html.

Mickey Mouse, Puss in Boots,
Snow White and the dwarves,
holding hands, they dance
in the middle of a rocky desert.
They don't need music,
so they also don't need air.
They don't need spectators,
or even a camera in the illustrated
closed-off world.
We draw the curtains - the sky pales -
We turn off the lights...

In Muratkhanov's poem, the desert trope of Fergana poetry has been relocated to Mars, where it becomes the setting for a fantasy scene. The awkwardly juxtaposed, decontextualized characters dance, but "they don't need music, they don't need air"—in other words, they are completely severed from their origins in American and European culture. Their unlikely appearance in Muratkhanov's desert landscape can be interpreted as a commentary on the far-reaching effects of commodification in a global economy. It likewise suggests the commodification of the migrant or minority writer, who is obligated to perform a similarly decontextualized version of his or her identity for consumption in the metropole—it is not for nothing, after all, that the "Silk Road" forms such a resonant brand identity for a literary collective circulating along well-worn routes from Central Asia to the West and back again. However, the poem's assertion that the characters "don't need spectators or even a camera" also demonstrates an unselfconscious disregard for an audience. Stripped of their context and frame of reception, the characters cease to signify anything at all, and without the attention of an audience ("we draw the curtains [...] we turn off the lights") they disappear into the vacuum.

Ianyshev, Muratkhanov, and their contemporaries in the Tashkent and Fergana schools demonstrate how a poetics of geographical and cultural distance continues to evolve from within the metropole. Yet globalization and digital connectivity also affect writers who have remained

“at home” in the traditional peripheries of the Russian-speaking world. In the case of arts organizations tied to international NGOs, the production of literature is actually conditioned by the in-flow of financial support, collaboration, and information, rather than the outflow of writers. One vibrant example is the Almaty-based cultural organization Musaget, which emerged in the late 1990s under the direction of the influential Kazakhstani poet and journalist Ol’ga Markova (pseudonym Ol’ga Mark). Musaget has its roots in the Russophone journal *Apollinariii*, which Markova founded as the first independent publication of its kind in the country, and which, like *Star of the East*, became the site of a distinct, local literary circle in the newly independent Kazakhstan. In 1998 Markova reached out to the Netherlands-based NGO Hivas for financial support, and established Musaget as a “Public Fund for the development of culture and the humanities.”²⁵⁷ Though Musaget’s official sponsorship from Hivas only lasted from 1999 to 2009, the organization spawned a movement of local Russophone literature that continues in Almaty today. Its affiliates engage in a variety of cultural activities, including conferring literary prizes, holding readings, publishing the online literary journal *Apollinariii*, and conducting master classes in creative writing at the Almaty Open School of Literature. The group’s activities set the stage for the emergence of a “New Wave” of Kazakhstani writers who began to gain international recognition in the early 2000s, among them Il’ia Odegov, Tirgan Tuniants, Aigerim Tazhi, Erbol Zhumagulov, Marat Isenov, Vadim Gordeev, and Pavel Bannikov.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Information about Musaget’s cultural programs, including estimates of the number of “poor and/or marginalized women and men” who benefit from them, is available on the Hivos website: <http://www.hivos.nl/dut/community/partner/10001993>. Alumni of the Open Literary Institute’s Master Class compiled a hybrid anthology/networking site called *Children of Musaget [Deti Musageta]* following the tenth consecutive master class: <http://cmusaget.narod.ru/index.html>.

²⁵⁸ In fact, the majority of awards these young writers have received are international, rather than local. Il’ia Odegov was awarded the Voloshin Literary Prize in 2007 for his short story “Purusha.” He also received the Soros Foundation’s “Contemporary Kazakhstani Novel” prize in 2003, the “Poetry ON” prize in Great Britain in 2003, and was long-listed for the Russian Prize in 2009. In 2012 Bannikov was long-listed for the international “Debut” prize,

Unlike the Fergana poets, who united under explicit poetic principles based on their geographic location, the writers of Musaget are loosely affiliated in terms of poetics. In fact, some writers go as far as to disengage themselves from questions of literary and ethnic identity entirely, affecting a degree of cultural anonymity, which, for some poets, manifests as near-nihilism. This dynamic is visible in the work of Pavel Bannikov, a poet, essayist, film director, and publisher. Born, raised, and educated in Kazakhstan, Bannikov has been active in Almaty's literary scene since the early 2000s, first as the editor of the literary journal *Appollonariia*, then editing commercial publications such as *Men's Health* and *Around the World* [*Vokrug sveta*] while simultaneously publishing poetry in established Kazakhstani print journals such as *Literary Kazakhstan* [*Literaturnyi Kazakhstan*], and *forty.four* [*sorok.chetyre*], as well as the Russia-based online publications *Topos* and *Kastopravda*. Bannikov is unique in that he has crafted his online literary persona, "Pavel Pogoda," to appear deliberately anti-intellectual, anti-establishment, and even anti-literary. Likewise he stresses his background in the nonliterary professions of furniture upholsterer, construction worker, and technician at an electrical power station.

In Bannikov's poem "google says [*govorit gugl*]" the Internet functions simultaneously as a medium for publication and as a poetic object.²⁵⁹ Since the poem was published in the context of an online literary community, the reader's access to the poem depends on having access to this virtual world. Within the circumscribed environment of the poem, Google is personified as the voice of the collective that "says" untrue things about the poet and his work.

which focuses on works published outside of Russia as well as within its boundaries. Aigerim Tazhi was long-listed in 2003 and short-listed in 2007 for the same prize.

²⁵⁹ This poem was published first in 2008 as part of an e-book compilation of four Kazakhstani poets, *forty.four* [*sorok.chetyre*] (Almaty: Kastopravda, 2008), <http://www.kastopravda.ru/books/44.htm>. The version I cite here is from Bannikov's subsequent e-book of poetry, *I* (Almaty: Issuu, 2009), 51. http://issuu.com/pogoda/docs/paul_pogoda_i_2009.

гугл говорит что мои стихи похожи на дифференциальное уравнение
ещё говорит что они похожи на эпос о гильгамеше
на монографию о метафоре написанную преподавателем
сравнительного
языкознания
на неунывающего феникса в эпоху коммерции и интернета
гугл врёт
я не пишу стихов

google says that my poems are like a differential equation
and it also says that they resemble the epic of gilgamesh
or a a monograph on metaphors written by a teacher of
comparative
linguistics
or the infallible Phoenix to the epoch of commerce and the Internet
google is lying
I do not write poetry

Here the Internet appears to be alienating and duplicitous, and it distances the poet and his lyric voice from the reality of his identity and the essence of his creative works. By showing an absurd and grammatically ambiguous list of ostensible search results, Bannikov challenges the authority of Google as an all-knowing entity, instead deriding it as the lowest and least informed aggregation of knowledge. The poet's claims that "Google is lying" provoke the reader to question the legitimacy of the poem itself. Yet instead of denying any of the outrageous information Google "says" about his poems, the poet takes the contradiction a step further, by denying the fact that he writes poetry at all. Bannikov's simultaneous treatment of the Internet as a poetic object, the medium for conveying information, and a speaking subject ("google says"/ "google is lying") suggests a radically different relationship to technology than the Fergana and Tashkent poets' "museification" in curated web anthologies.

The emergence of interactive, rather than exclusive, forms of Internet publishing continues to shape the digital environments in which contemporary Russophone poets' work is

produced and received. Beyond formal literary journals and anthologies, the Tashkent, Fergana, and Musaget writers now publish and engage in dialogue with their readers and each other on open networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, vKontakte, and LiveJournal. Their poetry can also be found on Stikhi.ru, an open poetry database and networking site that allows users to anonymously post and discuss translations, previously published works, and their own original poetry. This multi-directional and polyphonic method of online cultural production, made possible by advances in communications technology, forms the basis of a phenomenon that media theorists refer to as “participatory culture.”²⁶⁰ In an article on interactive, “new media” genres of poetry, Thomas Swiss and Helen Burgess note that Internet-based participatory literature challenges traditional assumptions of the writer as “a bound, coherent, and self-conscious speaker,” in favor of “a synergy between human beings and intelligent machines.”²⁶¹ Echoing Pavel Bannikov’s pronouncements about “loose cartels and loners” dominating the future of literature, Swiss and Burgess add that “new media” poetry “alternately challenges or ignores the institutional apparatus for ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ poetry.” Accordingly, Stikhi.ru has no apparatus for categorizing writers according to geographic location, ethnicity, nationality, or literary training—the only requirement for participation is the ability to use the Russian-language interface. In this way Stikhi.ru and its counterpart Proza.ru can be seen as the ultimate Russophone spaces, having eliminated all external markers of identity except language.

²⁶⁰ See Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); id. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (NYU Press, 2006). See also Elisa Giaccardi, ed., *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

²⁶¹ Thomas Swiss and Helen Burgess, “Collaborative New Media Poetry: Mixed and Remixed,” in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, eds. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 74.

Although technology enables the subversion of mainstream institutions, Swiss and Burgess are quick to point out that “the terms ‘mainstream’ and ‘marginal’ are relational and always shifting,” and even the most underground participatory cultures soon put their own mechanisms of evaluation into place. Such is the case with Proza.kz, the Kazakhstani version of the Stikhi.ru format. “Unlike other sites,” the editorial board explains, “we enlist literary experts to work for us, from whom authors may receive a review.”²⁶² Pavel Bannikov himself is one of the “literary experts” charged with evaluating the site’s prolific content (estimated at an astonishing 7,000 registered users and 50,000 original works), in addition to being one of its highest-rated users.²⁶³ The site offers its participants not only the prospect of a favorable review by a “literary expert,” but reserves an additional honor for the highest-rated writers: the opportunity to “exit the Internet” and publish in one of its periodic print anthologies. In this way the Proza.kz community of writers, though created and sustained virtually, still oscillates between the poles of boundless “participatory culture,” and the legitimizing power of print—all within the implicitly national space of a .kz domain. Thus contemporary Russophone poets’ transition from print to the Internet—and in one notable case, back to print again—reveals the deep ambiguity inherent in constructions of identity and place, yet also the resonance of identity and place even in the virtual world. The newfound mobility and connectivity of Russophone authors and their reading audiences has served to unify groups of poets via transnational and virtual networks, but, like the medium of the Internet itself, contemporary Russophone poets are confined to the uneasy position of being “everywhere and nowhere” at the same time.

²⁶² Proza.kz, “O proekte proza.kz,” Accessed July 6, 2013, <http://proza.kz/page/about>.

²⁶³ Quoted in Proza.kz, “Prezentatsiia pervogo vypuska al’manakha ‘Proza v seti’ ot portala KZ,” June 25, 2013, <http://proza.kz/news/93>.

Conclusion:

Which Man's Burden? The Ongoing Significance of "Carrying" Russian

In 2008 Vadim Muratkhanov lauded the unique power of the Internet to unite all Russian-speakers from around the world "into one network."²⁶⁴ Although he was most obviously commenting on the global potential of the Russian language, I would suggest that the essence of his statement lies elsewhere: in his use of the word *nositeli* to refer to Russian speakers. *Nositel'* commonly denotes a speaker of any language, but its literal meaning of "carrier" or "bearer" tells us much about Russophone writers' approach to language and identity. The writers I have discussed in this dissertation, regardless of the myriad circumstances in which they wrote, are united by one common concern: the implications and consequences of "carrying" the Russian language beyond ethnic or national boundaries. Sometimes it is an unwanted burden imposed from the outside, as in Bakhytzhan Kanap'ianov's "The Language Forgotten Since Childhood." Other times it is a prized possession, a key to enlightenment and poetic inspiration, as in Mirza Fatali Akhundov's "On the Death of Pushkin." In Mukhtar Auevov's biographical novel *The Way of Abai*, written at the height of the Stalinist purges, it is miraculous and lifesaving. For writers like Olzhas Suleimenov and Chingiz Aitmatov, it provided the key to social and economic mobility, and it also served as a platform for enacting political change. Yet for the Fergana School, it signified exilic longing, the irreconcilable alienation of "existing for others, for other cultures."²⁶⁵ In the works of all these writers, the peculiar burden of the Russian language has the ability to define, to transform, and even to disfigure the carrier. Relatedly, the

²⁶⁴ Vadim Muratkhanov, "V poiske sobesednika. Zhurnal 'Interpoeziia' – proekt 'poverkh bar'erov' i rasstoianii," *Literaturnaia Ucheba* 6 (December 18, 2008), <http://www.lych.ru/online/0ainmenu-65/35--s62008/191-n-n--l-l->.

²⁶⁵ See n. 246.

notion of a *nositel'* presumes movement—not only through space and time, but also in the “crossing over” inherent in the act of communication.

Chapter 1 proposed a critical framework for the investigation of literature written in the Russian language by non-Russians, and, more broadly, proposed a linguistic definition of Russophonia based on the “use” of Russian outside of the customary boundaries of ethnicity and nation. Yet such a definition is not without its own limitations and blurry edges. Much more work remains to be done on the role of Russophone writers as the interface between different languages and literary traditions and even, as is the case with Chingiz Aitmatov, different pan-national identities. This will require a renewed dedication to the study of non-Russian languages and cultures, which is often difficult due to institutional and disciplinary constraints.

Because I have so tightly limited my selection to writers from the Caucasus and Central Asia, the majority of whom adhere to various Turkic identities in addition to being Russophones, the field abounds with undiscovered and unanalyzed gems. Particularly interesting to me are “minority” writers from within the former Soviet Union’s titular nations, such as the Korean Kazakhstani Anatolii Kim, as well as writers from within Russia’s own “autonomous” republics and regions, whose texts are written, published, and read in environments dominated by the Russian language. How might studies of Tatar-language literature from Kazan’ or Sami-language literature from Murmansk fit into, expand, or even refute the definition of Russophonia I have put forth here? Another phenomenon to consider is the interface of Russian with other colonial languages—it would be a fascinating (but linguistically demanding) exercise to compare, for example, Russophone Kazakh writers in the Soviet Union to Sinophone Kazakh writers just across the border in the People’s Republic of China. Might there one day be a comparative study of Eurasia’s “–phone” literatures? Furthermore, because Russophonia puts pressure on our very

understanding of “Russian-ness,” another potential avenue of investigation may be canonical Russian literature itself, since many of the most influential and acclaimed authors defined themselves (or were defined) as only partially Russian, approximately Russian, or not at all Russian: for example, Derzhavin, Pushkin, Mandel’shtam, and most notably, Gogol’.²⁶⁶ Russian canonical authors who emigrated to Western Europe or the United States may also be deemed to fit within the purview of Russophonia: Turgenev, Fet, Tiutchev, Bunin, and so forth. Lingering vestiges of Russophonia may even be pinpointed in the works of writers who began publishing in the language of their adopted country, such as Vladimir Nabokov, Gary Shteyngart, Andreï Makine, and the late American poet laureate Joseph Brodsky.

As I have shown in chapter 2, the portability of the Russian Empire’s subjects, institutions, and culture was the chief factor in the emergence of Russophone literature.²⁶⁷ Abai Kunanbaev and Mirza Fatali Akhundov, who came to be known as the founding figures of Kazakh and Azerbaijani national literatures, were actually multilingual, multicultural writers drawing from Russian as well as a variety of other languages and literary traditions. Their hybrid Russophone works, which included original writing, self-translation, and literary transplantation, can be viewed as a product of the mutual “seduction” between the colonizer and the colonized that occurs regardless of the dynamics of oppression and exploitation. Additionally, their works do much to clarify the relationship between Russian literature and Russophone literature. To the extent that Russian literature “found itself” at the periphery of the Russian Empire (as Ram, Layton, Hokanson, and other scholars have suggested), the inverse is true for the Russophone

²⁶⁶ Koropec’kij, Roman, and Robert Romanchuk, “Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol’s ‘Dikanka Tales,’ Book 1,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (2003): 525–547. Edyta Bojanowska’s study of Gogol “between” two cultures is also particularly relevant in this regard: *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian And Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁶⁷ See n. 5, 7, 83.

writers of this study: they laid the foundation for a distinct, national tradition in part by appropriating the literature of the colonizer—especially by rereading, translating, displacing, domesticating, and generally “disorienting” the figure of Pushkin.

Chapter 3 placed Soviet Russophone writing of the Thaw generation in the context of postwar decolonization and the emergence of postcolonial literatures. In my analysis of the work of Olzhas Suleimenov, I revealed how one writer’s international travel and intercultural contact impacted his literary (and later, political) representation of the national. Moreover, Suleimenov’s ability to move between the Soviet Union’s varied cultural spheres depended on his ability to use that “empire’s” common language, Russian. However, as an unintended result of Soviet efforts to construct a harmonious confederacy of distinct nations, the Russian metropole actually became a site of ethnic and linguistic diversity—and ambivalence. The Soviet Union’s constituent “fraternal nations” and Third World allies eventually became disenchanted with the projects of *druzhba narodov* and internationalism, and began to express their doubts about the feasibility, and eventually the very legitimacy, of the entire project. Thus, in tracing the origins of contemporary Russophone writing, readers and literary scholars are prompted to reconsider the significance of mobility and intercultural connectivity in literatures throughout the world, regardless of imperial and national fragmentations.

The global perspectives of contemporary Russophone writers differentiate them from their predecessors in the Soviet Union. They are far less dependent on the support of state institutions and the unifying power of a state ideology than their predecessors.²⁶⁸ Consequently it

²⁶⁸ For a broader theoretical discussion of the post-Soviet “rollback” of state power and its political, economic, social, and cultural consequences, see James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, “Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality,” *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002): 981–1002; Philip G. Cerny, “Plurilateralism: Structural Differentiation and Functional Conflict in the Post-Cold War World Order,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 27 (1993): 27–51.

is no longer necessary, or perhaps even possible, to identify their literary works in terms of ethnicity, nationality, or citizenship. Virtual spaces have now become an additional locus of literary production—in some cases supplanting the publishing house, the bookstore, the writer’s studio, and venues for readings and the conferment of literary prizes. In sharp contrast with the compartmentalized national and international focus of writers like Olzhas Suleimenov, the Russophone authors of chapter 4 tend toward nuanced expressions of the uncertainties of the postmodern world, where hybridity no longer results from the cross-pollination of “pure” national cultural traditions and semiospheres, but rather a much more chaotic muddying of the waters, drawing into question the very act of signification. At the extreme end of this spectrum is Pavel Bannikov, whose poetics are based on the negation of traditional markers of identity, including the constituent properties of the self, the poetic subject, and the world of the text and readership.

Proceeding from Vasilii Kliuchevskii’s thesis on colonization as the “central fact” of Russian history, I conclude that the Russian language has become the “central fact” of a heretofore-unnoticed transnational discourse: Russophonia. Russophonia has persisted and grown in significance from its inception in the Russian Empire to the present. Future studies may elucidate developments in Russophone literature that this dissertation has overlooked completely. Meanwhile the ceaseless forces of globalization and technological innovation will continue to generate new literary forms and beset scholars with the question: where will the Russian language be “carried” next?

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