

REGIONAL IDENTITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SIBERIAN LITERARY  
CANON

by

ALEXIS KATHRYN GUNDERSON

A THESIS

Presented to the Russian and East European Studies Program  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 2011

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Alexis Kathryn Gunderson

Title: Regional Identity and the Development of a Siberian Literary Canon

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Russian and East European Studies Program by:

Dr. Katya Hokanson                      Chairperson

Dr. Julie Hessler                        Member

Dr. Jenifer Presto                        Member

and

Richard Linton                        Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies/Dean of  
the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2011

© 2011 Alexis Kathryn Gunderson

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Alexis Kathryn Gunderson

Master of Arts

Russian and East European Studies Program

June 2011

Title: Regional Identity and the Development of a Siberian Literary Canon

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Katya Hokanson

Siberia is a space that is more ideologic than it is geographic; it lacks defined physical boundaries and has no precise date of founding. Throughout its contemporary history as a Russian territory, the Siberia of public imagination has been dictated primarily by the views and agendas of external actors, and its culture and literature – despite having multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious roots – have been subsumed by the greater Russian tradition to which they are uneasily tied. Using an historical framework, this thesis establishes that there is, in fact, a canon of Siberian literature that stands apart from the Russian canon and that incorporates not only Russian texts but also other European and local indigenous ones. Furthermore, I contend that this canon has both been shaped by and continues to shape a pan-Siberian identity that unifies the border-less, ideologic space in a way that physical boundaries cannot.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Alexis Kathryn Gunderson

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Macalester College, St. Paul, MN

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Russian & Eastern European Studies, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, Russian Studies, Macalester College

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Siberian Literature  
Siberian Regional Identity

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2009-2011

Senior Counselor & Business Manager, Concordia Language Villages, 2006-2009  
Russian, French and English Language Villages

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Gateway Prize for Excellence in Writing, "Doubt and the Brothers Karamazov,"  
Macalester College, 2008

Best Russian Conference Term Paper, Macalester College, 2007

National Merit Scholar, 2004

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincerest thanks goes first to parents, for facilitating my study of language and for their continued editorial passes and constructive criticism on all my biggest projects. I wish also to express appreciation to Professor Hokanson, whose sustained support helped develop this manuscript, and who provided me with the conceptual framework to discuss the invention of identity through topography; Professor Hessler, whose enthusiasm for Valentin Rasputin and familiarity with Siberian history spurred my original interest in the region; and Professor Presto, whose advice behind the scenes helped see me through near scheduling disasters, and whose comments at my defense were keen and instructive.

For Wyoming

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: HOW TO BOUND THE BOUNDARY-LESS.....	1
Notes .....	10
II. LITERARY RUMBLINGS IN THE AGE OF “SOFT GOLD” .....	11
The Great North Expedition .....	12
Semyon Remezov, Writer of Worlds.....	14
Avvakum Petrovich Kondrat’ev, Rebel Priest.....	17
Conclusion .....	21
Notes .....	22
III. INVENTING A CONTIGUOUS COLONY: SIBERIA IN THE 19 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY .....	24
Intellectuals from Irkutsk.....	26
Siberia as Imperial Prison.....	33
Fyodor Dostoevsky .....	36
Vladimir Korolenko.....	39
Anton Chekhov .....	43
Conclusion .....	47
Notes .....	48
IV. NATIVES TO NEIGHBORS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS LITERATURE FROM IMPERIAL TO SOVIET RULE.....	50
Natives: Ethnographic Respect from Korolenko to Arsenyev.....	52
Neighbors: the Soviet Union and the Indigenous Writer.....	55



Chapter	Page
Conclusion .....	63
Notes .....	64
V. SOVIET SIBERIA: FROM REVOLUTION TO ODDBALLS .....	66
<i>Sibirskie Ogni</i> and the Literary Journals of the 1920s .....	68
... <i>from under the overcoat of war</i> .....	69
Victor Astafyev's Post-War Life .....	74
Oddballs and Environmentalists .....	76
Vasily Shukshin .....	76
Valentin Rasputin .....	79
Conclusion .....	83
Notes .....	83
VI. CONCLUSION: KRAEVEDENIE FOR A MODERN ERA .....	85
Notes .....	89
APPENDIX: PROPOSED CANON .....	90
REFERENCES CITED .....	92

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642-ca. 1720. Khorograficheskaya kniga [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. MS Russ 72 (6). Plate 34.....	15
2. Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642-ca. 1720. Khorograficheskaya kniga [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. Plate 220.....	16

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: HOW TO BOUND THE BOUNDARY-LESS

Siberia doesn't exist.

There are no physical boundaries to Siberia, no real date of founding, no natural central quality that might promote internal cohesiveness. The area of land we call Siberia today is not the same as the one that saw the rise of the bronze-rich Afanasevo culture in the Altai; it is not the same Siberia that saw the more sophisticated Andronovo society take over as the Afanasevo faded; it is not the same Siberia that was ruled by the Kirghiz and Khanate societies that followed both, and held dominion over the peoples of western Russia for centuries.<sup>1</sup> The Siberia that Ermak Timofeevich conquered in the sixteenth century was certainly not the Siberia that Archpriest Avvakum Petrovich was made to walk in the seventeenth, nor were either of them the Siberia that Chekhov crossed on his investigative journalist's trek to Sakhalin Island in the nineteenth.

Similarly, the role of Siberia in relation to those outside it has morphed and shifted over time. W. Bruce Lincoln, in his historical survey of the Russian conquest of Siberia, considers the space purely in terms of its identity in relation to the Russian empire: a Siberia of a kind certainly existed before Ermak's conquest,<sup>2</sup> he contends, but the Siberia that really matters is the conquered one, the one that "has enabled Russia to rise among the great powers of the world."<sup>3</sup> This view – considering Siberia in colonial terms, with Russia as sole colonizer – will be discussed in greater depth in the first and second chapters, and has undeniably been one of the most popular views in the past five centuries. It is, however, not the only popular position to take: for a great many, the value

of Siberia reaches far beyond Russian power, lying wholly in the rich natural resources which have long propelled industry and inspired conservation efforts from all corners of the globe. Discussed further in the fourth chapter, this is the Siberia of Valentin Rasputin, a land that can evoke a feeling “like plunging into a dream that has surfaced and become reality,”<sup>4</sup> while at the same time being “in a position to prolong our hopes for clean air, water, and tillable soil for a long time.”<sup>5</sup> A still third view of Siberia, equally pervasive and equally unique, which is examined in chapters two and four, is that of the Siberia known to Dostoevsky and Solzhenitsyn, the Siberia of penal colonies and exile. This iteration of the space holds again a different meaning, a different identity, but one that is just as familiar in the popular, global imagination as are Siberia as Colony and Siberia as Endless Resource.

While these views of the space are distinct from one another in focus, they do share two common features: first, they embrace a Siberia that can be at any given moment “either the object of exaggeration and praise, of joyous aspirations and dreams... [or] the object of disappointment, blame and betrayed hopes” (N.M. Iadrntsev, 1865); second, they define Siberia in terms chosen almost exclusively by outsiders. In so doing, these definitions assign Siberia, as a geography external to primary power, an identity corresponding not just primarily but entirely to the ideological categories of its progenitors.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, any geographic space can claim multiple identities and meanings, but only a very few can do so without having internal agency. Siberia – being neither homogenous, nor centrally unified, nor concretely bounded – has no such agency. Its primary definitions are and have always been assigned it by outsiders.

This is where literary texts – and the more encompassing model of canonization – become significant to my argument about the development of a national identity in Siberia; it is through the formation of a Siberian canon, I contend, that internal agency in self-definition can be found.

Canons are controversial beasts, and, much like Siberia, could be argued as too ambiguous to be real. Postmodernist criticism claims that a canon forces readers to interpret literature – and by extension, the culture it is intended to represent – strictly, and according narrowly-chosen identities.<sup>7</sup> This can in turn lead to generalization, marginalization, and dispossession of minority voices. “Proponents of the Western Canon, like missionaries before them, frequently ignore what we might call the pagan influences,” states Joel Whitney, in his discussion of the need for multi-ethnic, “mongrel” canons. “[This] has the strange effect of reinforcing our cultural limitations—re-insularizing us. It’s no coincidence that the literary canon as a concept was born in the 18th century in the same breath as the catch-all concept of the West.<sup>8</sup>” No coincidence, indeed, and this connection between canonization and Westernizing efforts in Siberia will be further explored throughout the study.

The opposing perspective to this criticism is more optimistic, arguing that a literary canon can provide a group of people (usually a national group) with the opportunity to develop a sense of pride through shared identity, which in turn can serve to bring a population more closely together.<sup>9</sup> By establishing a canon, populations formerly divided by class, geography, or ethnicity are able to forge a bond around a common national language – whether it be a literal language, chosen for being the most common denominator, or a figurative language based upon a shared sense of spirit. The latter,

indeed, is representative of the kind of “mongrel” canon preached by Whitney, a canon which seeks unity through multiplicity, commonalities despite apparent differences, and inclusivity beyond narrow, often Western, biases. This complex, atypical canonic personality is particularly supported by the multi-generic character of what I argue to be the core of the Siberian canon, where the important texts are not limited to prosaic, poetic and dramatic work, but include also maps, charts, scientific studies and census reports. It is in this way, if nothing else, that the Siberian canon distinguishes itself from the Russian one, which would never include such nontraditional, non-literary texts.

While both perspectives on the canonization model have significance in the discussion that follows, it is through the second that I shape my core argument; namely, that through a gradually developed and widely-drawn collection of local literature, Siberia has managed to create a national identity that both distinguishes itself from the greater Russian identity that overhangs it, and demonstrates the kind of internal agency in defining *itself* that is so distinctly absent at all other moments in its history.

This distinction of local identity, I argue, became standardized early in Siberian texts, to the point that literature about the space became easily recognizable through common tropes and images – particularly those regarding nature, weather, isolation, imprisonment, hope, and independence. Furthermore, I contend that the questions and themes established by Siberia’s earliest chroniclers have remained prominent in and inherent to Siberian literature through the centuries and up until today, each local literary development further separating and cementing the Siberian voice from the Russian one. Rivers, for example, were the original mode of transport for Russian explorers and settlers, and thus arose as the central feature in Siberian literature from the outset;

Russian literature now may recognize the river as an image, but would not identify with it as centrally as would a Siberian who continues to live with rivers as a daily, integral part of life. Similarly, the apparent intentionality of Siberian weather systems have played a key role in Siberian writing from the beginning, as they have always dictated the possibility and impossibility of human activity within the space, whether fire or snow, wind or mud. Russia's size is a point of pride, and an important part of the country's national identity, but the vastness of Siberia *within* Siberia is not tempered by European, metropolitan centers – it is, rather, the entirety of the space, and therefore plays a different, more acute role in local self-identification, both within and outside of literature. The vastness led to Russia's institution of penal colonies and a tradition of exile in Siberia, but again, while that system is a *part* of the Russian heritage, it *is* the Siberian one. Like squares in relation to rectangles, much of Siberia's literature plays a role in the larger picture of Russia's; the bulk of Russian literature, however, plays an increasingly small role in the canon of Siberia.

This contention is one that is relatively new to American literary scholarship. While many scholars have written on Siberian texts (at least one for every example I use here, including the obscurer works of early nineteenth-century Irkutsk writers), these studies have thus far discussed the texts as Russian, environmental/scientific literature, or indigenous literature. Other disciplines have produced book-length studies of Siberian identity – W. Bruce Lincoln's *Conquest of a Continent* and Yuri Slezkine's *Arctic Mirrors* in the field of history, and Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer's *The Tenacity of Ethnicity* in the field of anthropology, for example – but even the questions central to these studies are founded in terms that correspond to only one indentifying part of what

makes up the region that is Siberia (Russian, Far Northern, and Khanty, respectively). Within the field of literary studies, several scholars have researched and anthologized indigenous folk stories, and a many more still have focused on (Russian) literature of prison and exile, but the idea of a unique, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, self-sustaining *Siberian* literary tradition has not yet appeared. *Between Heaven and Hell*, the 1993 essay anthology edited by Yuri Slezkine and Galya Diment, makes the clearest strides towards this concept in contemporary scholarship, with Diment noting in her introduction that a Siberian literature of a sort exists (christened notably by a non-Russian Westerner in 1837<sup>10</sup>), but that it has always been ambiguous – “[I]n its broadest use...encompass[ing] literature *about* Siberia as well as literature of Siberian exile, and literature written by Siberian ‘insiders,’ Russian and non-Russian alike...[and] at its absolute narrowest...appl[ying] only to the works of Russian ‘native’ sons...who were either born or raised in Siberia.”<sup>11</sup> But however strong the rest of Diment’s argument for a Siberian literary tradition, it remains that the *Between Heaven and Hell* collection situates Siberian literature according to Russian identity, the thematic thread running through the various contributions being Siberia’s subjective role as myth, and the relative concepts of *heaven* and *hell* as judged through a Russian experience.

What I aim to accomplish with my study, then, is to take Slezkine and Diment’s evaluation of Siberia’s unique politico-geographic relationship with Russia (“Only Siberia, alone among [Russia’s] historic regions, has remained a part of Russia while maintaining a separate past and a separate present,”<sup>12</sup> Slezkine states, while Diment adds that, “[L]ike its political development, Siberian literary development has never been truly ‘independent,’ yet is rather distinct”<sup>13</sup>), and prove that a very real Siberian literary canon



exists according to parameters that are not broad, but rather implicit. Siberia on its own terms is not solely Russian, and its literature should not be collected or read as such. Furthermore, while its development may not have begun as “independent,” both Siberia and its literature have both grown to be if not autonomous, then at least self-sustaining.

To that end, I use this study to establish the core literary works that might make up a definitive Siberian canon, working from the earliest portrayals of the topography by Avvakum Petrovich and Semyon Remezov in the seventeenth century, through to some of the most current work being done by multi-ethnic, native Siberians in local literary journals in the twenty-first century. What unites these texts is not a single language, or a single religion, or even a shared cultural background: the texts that form Siberia’s canon depend as much on British, French, German, American, Australian, Persian, Scandinavian, Chinese, and Japanese scientists, adventurers, and writers as they do on Russian ones; so, too, does the canon depend on the oral and now written traditions of the myriad indigenous peoples spread across the five thousand miles once conquered by the Khanate, then retaken by Muscovy. Russian may be the most commonly spoken language throughout Siberia, but it is not the language *of* Siberia. That language is less tangible, and runs in the stones of the taiga and bones of those raised there.

In what follows, I use the first chapter to look at the establishing texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which played a major role in the trajectory taken by Siberian literary works to come: the autobiography of Archpriest Avvakum Petrovich, which includes the first depiction of Siberia in Western literature; the charts and maps of Semyon Remezov, which encompassed visually for the first time the space conquered by the Russian empire; and the scientific and ethnographic accounts written by the four

European scholars sent by the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences on the 1733 Great Northern Expedition.

In the second chapter, I examine Siberian literature of the late-eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century through the lens of Imperial colonialism, using works of native Siberians and European Russians alike to portray the ways in which the stricter sense of Russian nationhood established in St. Petersburg during this time period helped to further distance and shape a unique Siberian identity. Of the many legacies imposed by Petersburg's government and appropriated by Siberia's literature, the two that loom largest are also the most disparate: a newfound stability in many Siberian cities that allowed for the development of local intellectual culture, and of the [establishment] of Siberia's most desolate regions as penal colonies and points of exile. Nikolai Polevoi, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Vladimir Korolenko are all examined in detail.

Expanding on the depictions of northern peoples in the exile stories of Korolenko at the end of chapter two, in the third chapter I move from the broadest external visions of indigenous Siberians (in V. Arsenyev's *Dersu Uzala*) through the fluid self-imaging of Soviet writers of the Institute of Northern Peoples (Yuri Rytkeu, Vladimir Sangi). While focusing on the role played by indigenous Siberians in the development of a literary canon may appear more thematic than chronologically linear, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that stories in which natives were the protagonists (even as symbols) began to take center stage. Furthermore, it was not until the advent of Socialism and Stalin's forced homogenization of indigenous populations and a written standardization of their languages that any of these groups found literary voices within their own communities.

The fourth and final chapter continues the discussion of the Soviet legacy in Siberia, arguably the richest era in Siberian literature, and certainly the most prolific. It is also the most entangled, complex as the relationship between Siberia and the Soviet identity was. I examine the texts of this era thematically, moving from the establishment of Siberian literary journals and communities in the 1920s, to the effect of the Second World War on this newly established community, to the development of Siberian village prose, of the oddball (Shukshin) and natural-spiritual (Rasputin) variety, both. The most important takeaway of this era is that it was the era by which Siberian literature, as a recognizable entity, had finally been established – and not just due to the blurring of identity that came about from Soviet policies of homogenization. The tropes were solid, the themes consistent, and to any reader with even the slightest keen eye, the physically boundary-less Siberia had become a very real discursive, mythological space.

To return to the idea of a “mongrel” canon, Joel Whitney ties together his argument by reminding us that, “[H]owever multiculturalism may be maligned, what it means is omnidirectional universality. Vain attempts at putting writers or other creative personalities in tiny boxes, or making them the symbols of a vast landscape, too often come at the expense of the far more compelling, and nuanced, mongrel—or hybrid—nature of influence.<sup>14</sup>” My contention both draws on and directly opposes this, as I firmly believe that, in the case of Siberia, it is the very act of making a writer or a text the symbol of the Siberian landscape that multiculturalism and omnidirectional universality is achieved: there is no boundary otherwise, and the vacuum that would be left without the consideration of Siberian literature as a distinct canon would likely see the externally creative, imposing actors regain control over the space’s identity. These external actors

contribute to the hybrid nature of influence over Siberian literature, but it is the symbol of the canon that firmly establishes Siberia as its own, bounded entity.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, W. Bruce, *The Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians* (New York: Random House, 1994), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 46. October 26, 1582 is the “official” date of founding accorded by Russian historians, “[A]rrogantly, and with all the self-righteous certainty of men and women who had proclaimed it their mission to bestow the blessings of their way of life upon the other peoples of the world.” (ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>4</sup> Rasputin, Valentin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” in *Siberia on Fire*, edited by Gerald Mikkelson and Margaret Winchell (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 178.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>6</sup> Bassin, Mark, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 96:3 (1991): 764.

<sup>7</sup> Whitney, Joel, “A Mongrel Canon,” *World Policy Journal* 27:3 (2010): 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, Jackie, “The Primary Canon: A Critical Review,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 52:3 (2004): 250. The 1921 *Newbolt Report*, which established the value of English language literature in education in the face of backlash from classicists, stated, “. . . a feeling for our own native language would be a bond of union between all classes and would beget the right kind of national pride. Even more certainly should pride and joy in the national literature serve as a bond.”

<sup>10</sup> Slezkine, Yuri and Galya Diment, eds. *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 7. The progenitor of this term – *eine ganz sibirische Literatur* – was Heinrich Koenig, who was attributing the new tradition to the Slavophile-in-exile Nikolai Polevoi, an Irkutsk writer whose work is discussed in greater depth in the third chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Whitney, 23.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERARY RUMBLINGS IN THE AGE OF “SOFT GOLD”

In the introduction, I established my argument that Siberia has, through a growing canon of local literature, created its own identity. I also established that for this to happen, a variety of external actors had to assign their own versions of Siberian identity to the space. What I would like to add here, in launching a more detailed examination of the earliest, foundational works in Siberian literature, is the contention that what these same outsiders have tended to define Siberia as, is exactly what the space is *not*: It is not America. It is not Russia. It is not Asia.

And yet, in the public imagination, Siberia is all these things. When Ermak conquered Kuchum Khan’s nephew Mahmet-Kul on the banks of the Irtysh in 1582, it was a victory against Asian enemies. This distinction is one that has remained: no matter the length of Russia’s occupation, Russia sees Siberia as Asian. Paradoxically, October 26, 1582 is also the date of Siberia’s genesis as determined by Russian historians: beginning with Ermak’s conquest, Siberia became an official *Russian* entity. At the same time as being both Asian and not, and Russian and not, Siberia’s frontier culture has long drawn parallels to the American West: Siberia can’t be completely Russian, people remember, or completely Asian, because it is so vast and so wild and not all that unlike America. The Northwest Passage, after all, was an American interest as well as a Russian one, and Alaska has belonged to both countries at different points in its history. The struggle between these three identities has been a part of Siberian literature from its very beginning, and is reflected in the texts I see as foundational in a Siberian canon.

This Frontier identity became firmly established in the first two centuries following Ermak's conquest as more and more people arrived to explore, chart, and take advantage of this "newly" opened space, and while Siberia's frontier development had become recognized globally as a kind of Russian Manifest Destiny – on top of the vast wilderness and natural grandeur, there was glory, iron, and fur for the taking – but while these dreams propelled explorers and *promyshlenniki*<sup>1</sup> up raging Siberian rivers and deep into the harsh, unwelcoming tundra, there was no early systematized knowledge of the land Russia now claimed. The Russian government – first from its seat in Moscow, then from the new seat in St. Petersburg – set about changing this with the commission of settlement maps and scientific expeditions, both of which produced texts which I submit as essential background for a Siberian canon. While texts chronicling religious interests and evangelizing missions occupy the earliest period of Russian Siberian literature, the topographic elements founded by the scientific writing that shortly followed are so formative to the Siberian canon, that is with them that I wish to begin, first with the texts of 1733 Great Northern Expedition, and then with Semyon Remezov's 1720 map collection, the *Khorographicheskaya Kniga*.

### **The Great Northern Expedition**

The 1733 Great Northern Expedition, put together by the prestigious Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences in its earliest years, saw the appointment of a Westphalian ethnographer, a Wüttemberg physician/professor of chemistry, a "mediocre" French scientist ("who, despite a knowledge of astronomy that has been described as 'very defective,' had been assigned to determine the precise latitude and longitude of Siberia's

main towns and landmarks”<sup>2</sup>), and a young Russian naturalist named Stepan Petrovich Krashenninkov who the other Europeans looked down on, but who “would return after eight years in the Siberian wilderness<sup>3</sup> to become as renowned as any of the Europeans who had disdained him.”<sup>4</sup> The work that came out of the Great Northern Expedition cannot be narrowed down to a single title, or even a single discipline – the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences had assigned the group to produce “a complete historical, physical, botanical, ethnographical, and linguistic description of Siberia,”<sup>5</sup> after all – but, as a whole, represent both the first thorough and systematic accounting of Siberian life, as well as the fact that even the identity of a Russian-conquered Siberia is not predicated on Russian voices alone. True, the Frenchman was mediocre, but Johann Georg Gmelin, the Wüttemberg scientist, produced the four-volume *Flora Sibirica* which “is still remembered as a classic in the history of botany,”<sup>6</sup> and Gerhardt-Friedrich Müller unearthed scores of historical documents from the time of the early Russian conquest, among which were documents from the iron-baron Stroganov’s private archive which told details of Ermak’s campaign, as well as those that detailed the Dezhnev voyage around northern Kamchatka that had been successful (but unproven) a century before other, contemporary attempts failed.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the very fact that an expedition like this *could* take place, that settlement was consistent enough that travel through Siberia was no longer restricted to the warm seasons, and that two of the scientists could even “squabb[le] with the local authorities about the quality of their accommodations and...find east Siberian life distinctly less than pleasant”<sup>8</sup> was a herald of the blossoming Siberian identity that was preparing to take its place in literature.

## Semyon Remezov, Writer of Worlds

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Siberian Court Office in Moscow set out a *prikaz* for the production of a large number of charts displaying topographic and demographic information for as much of Siberia as could be charted, as the seat of power had no definitive sense of its largest territory.<sup>9</sup> While they hired land-surveyors, artists and draftsmen from all throughout the territory, it was Semyon Ul'yanovich Remezov, a low-level administrative official from the western – and then most powerful – Siberian city of Tobol'sk, that emerged as the most widely recognized, and whose work comprises an estimated eighty percent of the maps of Siberia from the seventeenth century that still survive today.<sup>10</sup>

Born around 1642, Remezov was “a ‘restless’ intellect” who threw creative energy into his census registry work and art alike, and who contributed as much to his own city of Tobol'sk as he did to the Siberian Court Office in his extensive ethnographic research in the wilds of Siberia. He was also a first-generation Siberian native, the son of a member of the gentry exiled to Siberia for a misdemeanor (1628), but who still maintained intimate terms with local governing officials – an early example of the kind of family identity that would come to typify the Siberian experience.<sup>11</sup> His maps followed the contemporary (Moscow) tradition of being focused around river systems, but stood out for the dynamism with which he portrayed the natural territory surrounding them. Remezov put so much of himself in his work, in fact, that many of his maps he refused to part with. A number of these he later compiled into his *Khorograficheskaya kniga* (*Cartographical Sketchbook of Siberia*), which he published in 1720. This text is 300 pages thick, and – much like the land it describes – is impossible to bound within normal



terms: a number of the charts have variously-sized fold-outs, and all have prodigious levels of detail that go well beyond the terms dictated by Moscow (See Figures 1 and 2).



Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642–ca. 1720. *Khorograficheskaya kniga* [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. MS Russ 72 (6). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

**Figure 1.** Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642 – ca. 1720. *Khorograficheskaya kniga* [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. MS Russ 72(6). Plate 34.

Harvard University Library digital archives,  
<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/18273155?n=34&printThumbnails=no>

In his analysis of the maps and illustrations contained within *Khorograficheskaya kniga*, cartographic historian and *Imago Mundi* founder Leo Bagrow notes that, as strong as the Muscovite cartographic tradition (to set rivers as the most constant character) is in Remezov's work, the details that remain have an obvious – and charming – level of

idiosyncrasy: “Indeed, there are moments in the maps that seem almost like whimsy: expressively inked animals, neatly rising turrets and towers, smatterings of tents, diverse, sloping clumps of trees and mysterious patches of forest, meticulously penned notes curving around the landscape.”<sup>12</sup>



Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642–ca. 1720. *Khorograficheskaya kniga* [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. MS Russ 72 (6). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

**Figure 2.** Harvard University – Houghton Library / Remezov, Semën Ul'ianovich, 1642 – ca. 1720. *Khorograficheskaya kniga* [cartographical sketch-book of Siberia]. MS Russ 72(6). Plate 220.

Harvard University Library digital archives,  
<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/18273155?n=34&printThumbnails=no>

It is this combination of factors that convinces me that Remezov’s work should be counted as one of the foundational texts of a Siberian canon. Rivers as characters is a trope central to the Siberian tradition (see Chekhov, Korolenko, Astafyev), and so is whimsy (see Shukshin and Rasputin). If the rivers trope is rooted in Muscovite tradition, though, the whimsy contributed by a “restless intellect” of Tobol’sk is pure Siberia – it

this very mongrel nature of literary influence that is central to the character of a Siberian canon.

### **Avvakum Petrovich Kondrat'ev, Rebel Priest**

While the writings of Avvakum Petrovich Kondrat'ev chronologically precede the charts of Remezov and the writings of the Northern Expedition, I have saved it as the example with which to close this chapter due to its position as one of the first purely *literary* texts to belong to the Siberian canon, a fact which makes it most appropriate as a transition to the literary works of the nineteenth century in the next chapter.

Rebel Priest Avvakum Petrovich was not the first writer to depict Siberia on paper, nor is his autobiography considered the first example of Siberian literature by Russian Siberian literary scholars. Galya Diment notes in *Between Heaven and Hell* that there are hagiographic works associated with Siberia that precede Ermak's conquest – *Zhitie Stefana Permskogo* (“The Life of St. Stephen of Perm,” early fifteenth century) and *Skazanie o chelovetsekh neznaemykh v vostochnoi strane* (“The Tale About the Unknown People in the Eastern Country,” also early fifteenth century), both of which influenced early Siberian culture and popular depictions of Ermak as a saint – and that Siberian literary scholars generally agree that *Esipovskaya letopis* (“Esipovskaya Chronicle”), published in 1636 and wildly popular in Siberia for the duration of the following century, stands as the true genesis of *Siberian* literature. I do not begrudge these texts their place in the Siberian canon – *Letopis*' depiction of Siberia not as “alien” but as “home,” and its establishment of local ecology as mythologically proportioned<sup>13</sup> certainly lay the groundwork for the most important core principles of a Siberian canon –

but I do think that Avvakum's 1672-73 *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma im samom napisannoe* (*The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*) stands out as a more appropriate text for this study, because while Avvakum was not *first*, he was *notable*, for both his ambiguous self-identification as well as the ways in which his experience in Siberia affected the Russian public's perception of the space.

Avvakum Petrovich was a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church, and what patriotism he felt towards the place of his birth was neither secular nor geographical: he found Russia "holy... because it was the vessel of orthodoxy, not orthodoxy because it was Russian."<sup>14</sup> This distinction made by Avvakum between self-definition and geography is important to the present discussion of Siberian literature, in that it demonstrates perfectly the disconnect experienced by Siberian natives to the external entities that dictate various parts of their identities. The eponymous quarter-Russian hero in Korolenko's *Makar's Dream* reflects this same feeling a century later, finding his own identity Russian because he chooses to, not choosing a Russian identity because it is the most true. Alternately, Siberians are Siberian because of the realities of the land in which they live, not because of the identities assigned to the land by outsiders.

Typically, *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* is considered most notable as a turning point in the history of Russian literature, from its introduction of a new literary style and colloquial lexicon, to its firsthand depiction of the Orthodox schism and the realities lived by those affected. This brief autobiography, however – depicting Siberian flora and fauna for Western readers for one of the very first times – is also important to the genesis of *Siberian* literature. The tone and themes established by Avvakum Petrovich in the 1670s have influenced and infiltrated works of writers and scholars in the centuries since, and

images originated by the rebel priest can be found in the most contemporary Siberian texts. Chekhov, for example, invokes Avvakum in *Sakhalin Island*, by inverting the conclusion Avvakum makes of Baikal:

The place [Baikal] was surrounded by high mountains: I have wandered over the face of the earth 20,000 versts and more, but have never seen the like. [...] Onions grow on them and garlic, bigger than the Romanov onion, and exceeding sweet to the taste; there also grows wild hemp, and in the gardens fine grass and exceeding fragrant flowers, and there is great quantity of birds – geese and swans that fly over the lake like snow. [...] *And all this has been fashioned by our sweet Christ for man, so that, with a mind at last at rest, he might give praise to God.*<sup>15</sup>

to describe a different inland valley on Sakhalin:

This plain is many times larger and more interesting than the one at Alexandrovsk. The abundance of water, the variety of building timber, the grass which grows higher than a human being, the fabulous wealth of fish and coalfields would lead one to suppose a well-fed and satisfied existence for all of a million people. And so it might have been, but the cold currents of the Sea of Okhotsk and the ice-floes which drift by the east coast of the island even in June testify with merciless clarity *that when Nature created Sakhalin the last thing she had in mind was mankind and his benefit.*<sup>16</sup>

Both list the natural majesties of the place in which they find themselves, but whereas Avvakum then determines that the bounty of Baikal “has been fashioned by our sweet Christ for man,” Chekhov declares, ultimately, that “when Nature created Sakhalin the

last thing she had in mind was mankind[...].” Though Chekhov is attributing creation to an ambiguous “Nature,” and Avvakum to “our sweet Christ,” the concept that Siberia is so vast and fantastic that man is forever an interloper at the mercy of a powerful unknown constant remains the same. This core belief in the basic Truth of Siberia speaks to the perpetual desire Siberian authors have to divorce external agency from local identity: Siberia’s majesty will be there, regardless of what lens is viewing it, and the actions of characters within such a self-assured landscape can only effect change on a personal level. External actors see a space defined by its natural bounty, internal actors see a space defined by the life that exists around and despite it.

If on the one hand, Avvakum established the tradition for external human agency to be ignored by local writers, he simultaneously established the intentional behavior of natural phenomena: “...[I]t was as if Winter was of a mind to come; our hearts froze, our limbs shook,”<sup>17</sup> he says at one point, assigning intentions to Winter while describing his first season in Siberia. His Winter acts on their party with an agenda, as does the wind in Korolenko’s *Siberian Tales*, and fire in Rasputin’s *Pozhar*.

The stylistics here and elsewhere in his descriptions of Siberian natural phenomena also demonstrate another aspect of Avvakum’s writing that sees parallels within its successors in the canon of Siberian literature: the superlative poetic metaphor, especially when discussing nature and topography. When compared against writers such as a Chekhov or a Rasputin or an Astafyev, who are recognized for their lyrical prose,<sup>18</sup> Avvakum’s moments might not stand out as anything noteworthy. However, unlike Chekhov, Rasputin, or Astafyev, Avvakum was not a lyrical writer; the majority of *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* is many things – forthright and severe, rambling and

conversational, at times even salty – but it is rarely lyrical. The only times when Avvakum lapses into poetics are when he has come around to describing travels through or life in Siberia; no other part of Russia garners this kind of attention, or sparks this kind of creativity. Even the members of his family fare better (at least in writing) for having been with him in Siberia – the bulk of references to his wife and children come when he is speaking of their travels in exile, as if the majesty of Siberia’s landscape momentarily opened his heart wide enough to let them in past the religious fanaticism. Even the family chicken earns a heartfelt remembrance.

Ultimately, while Avvakum will always be remembered in Russian history for establishing a new style and written language for literature for public consumption, he has just an important role in the foundation of Siberian literature as its own entity, as the tropes and themes he established in *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum* formed the basis around which the rest of the Siberian canon would later develop.

## **Conclusion**

While the first two centuries following Ermak’s conquest saw a fractured Asian/Russian/Frontier Siberian culture develop at the whim of Russia, they also saw the establishment of a literary tradition that was both multi-ethnic and multi-generic, beginning with the more literary *Esipovskaya letopis* and *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*, and continuing on through the scientific and ethnographic writings of Remezov and the members of the Great Northern Expedition. While indigenous voices had not yet been incorporated into the burgeoning literary tradition, the idea that Siberia was a *home* in addition to a possession was beginning to solidify. Furthermore, the themes of

mythological proportions, ecological abundance, and independence through/despite exile, and the images of rivers, teeming wildlife, and self-serving natural elements were all established, paving the way for the more vociferously self-identifying writers of the nineteenth century, and the quieter, firmly established Siberian voices of the twentieth.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, 55. “Working in groups as small as two or three or as large as sixty, these men . . . plunged into the Eurasian wilderness for years at a time . . . Kept alive by a brand of raw courage that few humans possessed, the conquerors of Siberia sought the pelts of squirrels, foxes, ermines, martens, and, above all, the valuable sable.” (ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. The only one of the bunch to travel to Kamchatka, where he was sent when the others declined on the reasoning of complete disinterest.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>9</sup> Leo Bagrow, “Semyon Remezov—A Siberian Cartographer,” *Imago Mundi* 11 (1954): 111.

<sup>10</sup> Houghton Library Blog, “Early Maps of Siberia Digitized,” last modified October 4, 2010, <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/houghton/2010/10/04/early-maps-of-siberia-digitized/>

<sup>11</sup> Bagrow, 111.

<sup>12</sup> Houghton Library Blog, “Early Maps of Siberia Digitized.”

<sup>13</sup> Slezkine et al., 8.

<sup>14</sup> Prince D. S. Mirsky, preface to *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*, transl. Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrless, transl., *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963), 96-97. Emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Anton Chekhov, *Sakhalin Island*, transl. Brian Reeve (Surrey: Oneworld Classics, 2007), 137. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Harrison et al., 53-54.

<sup>18</sup> Chekhov, for example, wrote in a letter to a friend in 1890, “The water [of Baikal] is extraordinarily translucent, so you can see through it as if through air; it has a delicate turquoise hue, very agreeable to look at. The banks are mountainous and covered with woodland; all around there is an impenetrable mass of game and wildfowl – so thick you can’t see a chink of light through them. There’s an abundance of bears, sables, wild goats, and every old kind of game you



---

can think of, who occupy their time by living in the taiga and making meals of each other.”  
Chekhov, 493.

CHAPTER III  
INVENTING A CONTIGUOUS COLONY: SIBERIA IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY

Along with the Caucasus – and, to a degree, the lands of Central Asia – Siberia has long played the role of Russia’s “Orient,” a Saïdian Other against which Russia can project its dreams and ambitions, its fears and prejudices. After centuries spent suffering under the Tatar Yoke, Russia took a kind of vengeful pride in pushing eastward through their former oppressors’ lands; “Siberia,” for them, represented a retaking of power and a recasting of political hierarchy, and it necessarily situated the land being conquered as Asian, and separate from the Russian state. That the land was rich with fur and space in which to settle was not nothing, but Russia’s whirlwind conquest of a nearly inconceivable expanse of land (5,000 miles in sixty-six years) was fueled first by a hunger for dominion over the (Asiatic) Golden Horde. This attitude towards Siberia became standardized in the Russian psyche, and by the time Peter the Great had pulled St. Petersburg from the marshes and positioned the Russian empire as a modern, colonial *imperia*,<sup>1</sup> Siberia was in the prime position as “Russian Orient” to become a contiguous colonial interest.

In his discussion of Russia’s nineteenth century invention of Siberia, Mark Bassin notes that at the point of Peter’s declaration, “[L]ike its Western counterparts, Russia was now to be recognized formally as a geographical composite, made up of organically Russian regions representing a European metropolis and a vast, extra-European colonial

domain.”<sup>2</sup> This concept of a geographical composite – made up on one end of Petersburg canals, and on the other, of Siberian taiga – privileges the existence of component parts that are unique, extending to each a specific topographical identity and propriety. The argument I would like to make against Bassin’s assertion, then, is that Peter’s reforms did not create *one* “geographic Other,” but rather two: Siberia as the Russian-imagined, extra-European colonial domain, and Petersburg as a self-imagined European metropolis, with each space owing its sense of self to the mere fact that the other exists.

This development represented the first instance since the Khanate’s dominion over the Rus in which Siberia could effectively assign an identity to an external geographic entity, even if only through the same mode of conceptualization used to pigeonhole it as Oriental Colonial Interest in the first place. This turning of tides had critical bearing on the development of the Siberian literary scene, first in that it established a new level of confidence within the ranks of local intellectual cultures – and, by extension, an increased sense of ownership over the texts being produced by local authors – and second, in that the Russian institutions developed in Siberia during this period (namely, penal and exile colonies) automatically became Siberian entities, due to the ideologically-enforced distance between Russia as *imperia* and Siberia as colony. If the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided writers and scientists from the outside the opportunity to develop the first Siberian-specific tropes, and to clear the path to the creation of a Siberian canon, then the nineteenth century is the one which gave Siberians the agency to take up that development and begin to shape Siberian literature according to their own specifications.

The texts produced by Siberian writers in the first half of the nineteenth century are most important for the trends they established and the geographical conclusions they endorsed than they are as individual works appropriate for a canon. Ironically, it is with the exile texts of European Russians in the later half of the century that I again take up my proposed canon, but those texts would not have been possible without the Siberian works that preceded them. In what follows, I will first examine the ideological trends behind the Slavophilic works of Irkutsk-born writers who transplanted to the west for their writing careers, and will follow with a discussion of canon-likely texts from the writers of Imperial exile, Vladimir Korolenko, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Anton Chekhov.

### **Intellectuals from Irkutsk**

In his 1986 essay, “A Guide to a Renamed City,” Joseph Brodsky examines the roots of literary invention in St. Petersburg, focusing on the connection between topography, identity, and creative agency. He notes:

The reason for this sudden outburst of creative power was again mostly geographical. In the context of the Russian life in those days, the emergence of St. Petersburg was similar to the discovery of the New World; it gave pensive men of the time the ability to look upon themselves and the nation as though from outside. [...] Then, enhanced by the alternative – at least visually – utopian character of the city, it instilled those who were the first to take quill in their hands with the sense of the almost unquestionable authority of their pronouncements.<sup>3</sup>

Siberia is almost too easily invoked by this passage, not least because of its colonizing terminology; the emergence of Siberia's cultural identity was not *similar* to the discovery of a New World – it was exactly that. And the writers at its center in the nineteenth century – and the middle of European Russia's cultural imperialism – found a similar sense of authority in their work once they began to see Siberia as a viable alternative to the western cities of power.

The central-Siberian city of Irkutsk in the early nineteenth century had almost more in common with St. Petersburg than it did differences: like Petersburg (and, to be fair, most Siberian cities), Irkutsk was highly planned; it exists alongside a large body of water, Baikal, which impacts the local weather; it was, at the time, made up of opulent homes that “were built in the same palatial style as the royal mansions in St. Petersburg,”<sup>4</sup> and which belonged to Siberia's version of the aristocracy – the prosperous frontier merchants and self-made millionaires not dissimilar to ambitious Petersburg officials and tradesmen of the same time. Intellectual and material life, too, was developing at this point, to the degree that most wealthy merchants possessed both extensive home libraries and subscriptions to thick journals and newly published works. Further, local author Nikolai Shchukin reported in 1828 that, “[I]n this wild and cold country people are admiring Pushkin's poems and read Homer.”<sup>5</sup> Cultural vibrancy, indeed.

As welcome as this development was, however, it was slow coming. Many young and passionate intellectual types ended up heading westward to Moscow and Petersburg in search of a more challenging culture – a voluntary action, but one which was easily felt as a kind of exile or loss to those who could see no other option. In addition to Nikolai

Shchukin, who ultimately spent more time back in Siberia than did many others, Ivan Kalashnikov and Nikolai Polevoi both moved west to find their niche. What this move did to these transplanted writers from Irkutsk did nothing less than cement the validity of a Siberian literature, not to mention the possibility of a Siberian canon. Polevoi, in fact, was hailed as “the banner of the Siberian literary uprising” for his 1830 work, *Sokhatyi: Sibirskoe predanie* (“Sokhatyi: A Siberian Legend”)<sup>6</sup>. That this claim was made by fellow Irkutsk-exile, Shchukin, only proves that conviction in a literary tone native to Siberia was internally generated.

In the end, though, it was the transition to western cities that brought out this “literary uprising.” This is not a paradox: the many similarities between Irkutsk and Petersburg made it easy for the self-exiled to draw comparisons, and it is generally with a view from the outside that we are best able to see and effect change on the places from which we originate. Had Siberian writers never left their hometowns, they would never have discovered there was a border between Siberia and Russia at all.

The comparisons between home and west made by Shchukin et al., as it turned out, were almost universally sympathetic to Siberia: “They felt that St. Petersburg’s damp winter climate compared unfavorably with bright sunniness and dryness of Siberian frosts,” notes Galya Diment in her study of the three men, “while the density of Petersburg’s population as well as the frantic tempo of the urban existence prevented one from enjoying the same high quality of life as Russians did in Irkutsk.”<sup>7</sup> Diment calls this response to Petersburg’s climate *ironic*; I call it inevitable. This preference for Siberia demonstrates two things: first, that Siberian intellectuals by the nineteenth century felt a sense of belonging to their native space, and second, that this very sense of belonging –

as well as its associated feeling of loss once away from Siberia – inspired the creation of an inherently Siberian literature, and began the building of the intangible boundaries of identity that were beginning to form around the perpetually boundary-less territory.

Not surprising given the era, this “inherently Siberian literature” was also of a wildly Slavophilic nature. At a time when Europe’s colonialist traditions were invading Russian life and impinging on Siberian policy, Russian Siberians saw their “virgin, innocent” land (this description, if anything, conjuring the real irony of time) as the last defense against the “deadly influences” and corruption of Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that during this period there was still a cultural divide between Russian Siberians and indigenous peoples: while the literary tropes that would come to shape the Siberian canon were beginning to be formed and incorporated into the local literature, they did not yet include indigenous themes – unless you count anti-indigenous sentiments, that is. Nikolai Polevoi, who moved to Moscow when he was still a teenager and, in the face of his loss, became obstreperous in defending Siberia’s culture against the west, turned his Siberian identity into “a source of spiritual sustenance,” consciously distancing his Siberian experience from that of indigenous peoples in order to argue against Europeanizing influences. “Why treat Siberia as a new Holland?” he wrote in 1827, invoking the colonialist practices described later by Bassin as cultural imperialism<sup>9</sup>:

Siberia is just the same as Russia, and we are not children and do not live in the XVIth century. The morals of the Siberians, their way of life, the degree of their education are the same as in Great Russia; it is even possible that in education and quality of life in general the Siberians stand higher. [Why should one be

surprised] to have met wealthy peasants and educated landlords in Siberia? He [is], after all, not traveling among the Iakuts or the Chukchi. His surprise could have been understood from people who know nothing about the subject, but to us, Russians, such ignorance of our fatherland is unforgivable.<sup>10</sup>

Arriving in Moscow and St. Petersburg strengthened even further the Slavophile inclinations – and therefore, anti-European sentiments – that Shchukin, Polevoi, and Kalashnikov already held. Here, after all, the Siberians were faced at last with a pure form of the culture they claimed as inheritance – expectations ran high, disappointment higher. Shchukin, in particular, found his footing in “exile” by contrasting the corruptive influences of Europe to the pure and innocent state of Siberia. In his 1834 work, *A Settler: A Siberian Tale*, he writes:

My dear countrymen! Do not offend a beautiful land with an unfair judgment, do not be strangers – it is your land, and in it live kind and even thoughtful people. They speak the same language as you hear on the banks of the Neva or Volga...[I]f you are so willing to waste money, inherited from your ancestors, in the cities of Europe from where you mostly bring harmful innovations alien to our fatherland, then why not come and behold the picturesque and virginal nature of Siberia!<sup>11</sup>

Russia, for Shchukin, had become tantamount to a foreign land, too deeply invaded by alien influences, and in need of a spiritual awakening. By viewing his homeland from the outside, he was able to cast it as a Brodskian “alternative utopia,” and in so doing, to imbue his opinions with a real sense of authority. Most importantly, he was able to see a



distinct (if ideological) boundary between what was Europe, what was Russia, and what was Siberia, and to set it down in ink.

Shchukin was not alone in demarcating this boundary in his writing. Polevoi, too, was fanatic in his desire to promote the wealth of culture to be found in Siberia's merchant class, going so far as to criticize Shchukin for being too "gloomy" in his portrayal of Siberian culture. Though his move to Moscow was realized in order to distance himself from his merchant background, Polevoi clung to this identity as a soapbox once he began writing. His polemics sprang from a deep-seated desire to mythologize and glorify Siberia as Russia's savior, and to do so, he had to identify as closely as possible with the class he saw as most hopeful ("[A]s for [Shchukin's] disapproval of the character of merchants *in general*," he wrote in an 1833 criticism of the writer, "[I myself] belong to this respected estate and do not wish to exchange it for any other..."<sup>12</sup>). Thus Polevoi reinvented himself and his birthplace in one motion. However, by so passionately self-identifying as a Siberian merchant – and then vehemently defending this social and geographical position in public discourse – he also reinvented what *Siberian* meant in the west at the time.

Ivan Kalashnikov held the most complex feelings towards his homeland of the three writers on hand. While Polevoi left Irkutsk as a teenager in 1811, and formed his opinions of Siberia from a distance as a kind of outsider, Kalashnikov spent much of his adult life in Siberia, experiencing its dark side as well as its virtues. Working in the local government during the rule of the infamously absent Siberian governor, Ivan Pestel ("the most far-seeing of all officials," according to one Siberian jokester of Kalashnikov's acquaintance<sup>13</sup>), and the infamously vicious Irkutsk governor, Ivan Treskin, Kalashnikov

saw public life beaten into submission by brutal, physical terror. It was from his darker experiences in the Treskin years in concert with his more idyllic memories of a childhood spent enjoying Siberia's bounty that Kalashnikov developed his stories – there was a kind of joy to be found in Kalashnikov's Siberia, and certainly a pride of place and sense of belonging, but there was no real innocence. Kalashnikov's portrayal of life in Siberia was a one of experience, so while his writing was ultimately as supportive of Siberian sovereignty and identity as were those of Shchukin and Polevoi, it ultimately held a greater entertainment value (and a much lower degree of declamatory polemic) than did the works of the other two. Kalashnikov's plots were action-filled, his protagonists falsely accused Siberian merchants who had to conquer foes in "exotic" situations, and his inevitable hero always Siberia, itself. These stories – *Doch' kuptsa Zholobova* (*The Daughter of Merchant Zholobov*, 1831) being the most well-known, in which a young Irkutsk clerk is wrongly accused of a petty crime and sent by a gruel government official to work in the Nerchinsk mines – quickly became popular successes in European Russia, so much so that Kalashnikov was often dubbed as a "Siberian Cooper" or a "Siberian Scott."<sup>14</sup>

This is important: despite being a Russian Siberian writing during the height of Russian colonialism in Siberia, and alongside the Slavophilic fervor of Polevoi and Shchukin, Kalashnikov was named a "*Siberian Scott*," a "*Siberian Cooper*." This recalls the externally assigned identity of Frontier/America applied to Siberia in the previous century, while at the same time giving ownership of identity to Siberia, itself. Furthermore, the darkness redolent in Kalashnikov's work, as Diment notes, actually works in favor of Siberia instead of against it, as this 'darkness' is always something

imposed on Siberia from the outside. Not only does Kalashnikov delimit his positive experiences as a Siberian as separate from the negative ones at the hands of Russian policy, but he further bolsters the boundary-building through literature established by Shchukin and Polevoi, that would come to be a central pole in the future development of the Siberian canon.

What is important to take away from the works of Shchukin, Polevoi, and Kalashnikov is not that any of them strongly self-identified as Russians, but that they saw their Siberian-ness as distinctly removed from and superior to the culture of western, Europeanized Russian cities.<sup>15</sup> That Siberia is a space filled with wildly different ethnicities and cultural groups is not in dispute: certainly, each of these groups is always going to be passionate about defending and promoting their own, individual background. However, in arguing for another, more universal identity that might run through and connect each of these distinct ones, these writers from Irkutsk provided a model by which literature might succeed as a cohesive element. Furthermore, they established hints of an internally-assigned Siberian identity that would begin to invade the public imagination in the coming centuries. When European Russians traveled east from then on, it would not be through a Russian territory populated by Russians and savages, but one populated by Siberians who had begun to take ownership of their own identity.

### **Siberia as Imperial Prison**

Creativity in exile happens in a negative space; the muse is not what is there, but what, significantly, is not. There is a certain dependency inherent in exile that is not present in an unmarked creative life, a bond that, through the very fact of its forcible distance makes

the connection to the place of origin ever stronger. If the beginning of nineteenth century saw native (Russian) Siberians “in exile” establish for the first time as a literary trope a reverential loyalty to their Siberian roots – and then distancing these roots from the Russia that was succumbing to European pressure in the west – the second half of the century belonged to European Russians in exile in Siberia, finding a connection to their roots through the lens of Siberian experience.

Siberia by the nineteenth century had long been a dumping ground for Russian prisoners, but with little measure of systemization or control. Thieves and rogues moved east when the opportunity presented itself in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and many of the settlements originally charted by Remezov and others were established, if not by criminals, then by criminal types. Avvakum Petrovich himself had been such a type when marched to the Amur Valley and back. In Polevoi’s rose-lensed estimation, Siberia was “vast enough to contain and hide the pernicious (*tletvornym*) crimes, which by the sound of chains signify their path from here [European Russia – likely a reference to Decembrists traveling to exile, given the time period], only to vanish in the immensity of your deserts, like a little stream vanishes in the waves of Angara, like the traces of the quick deer vanish in the deep snow of Yakutia.”<sup>16</sup> Kalashnikov had a more balanced view of the criminal “problem,” reporting that at the very least, under Treskin’s brutal fist, the gang members and criminal elements which certainly did exist in Irkutsk were pushed well beyond the outskirts of the city – a “great achievement in a region full of criminals.”<sup>17</sup>

While the Decembrist experience of punishment and exile was well-documented in poetry and literature – both from those who actually experienced exile, and those who

merely observed from a distance – their texts belong firmly to the Russian tradition. Their characterization of Siberia, and that characterization’s concomitant influence on the Russian imagination, was desolate and gloomy: not even close to an alternative utopia to the European Russia that had suppressed them, Siberia provided a foil of hardship against which Decembrists could struggle and continue their ideological agitation from a distance. In examining K. F. Ryleev’s poem “*Eshche k grobu shag*” (“There remains still a step to the grave”), Harriet Murav notes that “Siberia...is almost an abstraction; it is a stage on which the Decembrists’ heroic deeds are enacted.”<sup>18</sup> Even when this interpretation shifted in the works of A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, who saw the value of Siberia’s “pristine beauty” through the lenses of “traveler-philosopher” and “traveler-physiologist,” and N.A. Nekrasov, whose poetry invoked the sacred role Siberia held as the locus for a “rebirth” of the Russian state, the existence of a local, native identity was purposefully ignored. “Not the human voice – only the rumble of thunder has from time to time disturbed the sleep of this half-wakened creation,” Bestuzhev writes, reporting on the “untouched quality of the landscape.”<sup>19</sup> Murav notes that in the case of Bestuzhev, his attitude towards Siberian natives (in this case, indigenous – Russian Siberians are not discussed) is “one of bemused curiosity,” not one in which a valid, cohesive Siberian identity is considered.<sup>20</sup> For Nekrasov, whose opinions demonstrate at least some similarity to those of Polevoi, the population that already inhabited the eastern territory was unimportant – it wasn’t that Siberian culture offered a salvational model for a necrotic European Russia, but rather that Siberia itself offered a blank slate. Siberia, in the case of Decembrist exile, was once again assigned a role by external actors who had

very particular agendas, agendas that simultaneously ignored Siberians as a real group, and left them with no native agency.

Thus, in an effort to add Russian texts of exile to my proposed Siberian canon, I turn to later writers: Korolenko, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. Although Polevoi and Kalashnikov both made their names painting Siberia in broad poetics, it is the European Russians who discovered “their” Siberia while in late nineteenth-century penal exile who offer some of the more extraordinary examples. For actual outsiders – not Siberians in exile mediating their Siberian authority through self-imposed distance – Imperial Siberia offered literature that painted a romantic image that was almost scientific in scope: the results (images) were reproducible, the tropes were familiar and comforting. If gray skies, stone canals and murky street lamps were the go-to images for the Petersburg story, then harsh taiga, roaring rivers and endless natural beauty were those for the Siberian one. The romantic imagery penned by Dostoevsky, Korolenko and Chekhov comes primed for the foreign (non-Siberian) imagination, while simultaneously mediating the importance Siberia had in the writers’ personal experiences during their separation from Mother Russia.

### *Fyodor Dostoevsky*

Dostoevsky was a Russian subversive. He was much more, of course, but this is the quality that sent him to Siberia, and it is the same quality that lent the accounts of his time there the ability (though not necessity) to be taken as separate from the Russian canon.

Arrested in 1849 for his association with the anti-autocratic rebel group, the Petrashevsky Circle, Dostoevsky found himself pardoned from a firing squad at the last minute and exiled to a *katorga* prison colony in Omsk. His eight-year experience there dictated the direction his writing would take in his later life, and his semi-autobiographical *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma* (typically translated as *Notes from the House of the Dead*, 1861), which chronicles the daily life of convicts in a prison camp in Siberia and the gradual spiritual reawakening of the semi-fictional narrator Aleksandr Petrovich Goryanchikov, is most often discussed in terms of politics, philosophy, and religion, and the effect all three had upon the later writings of Dostoevsky.

However, this text – as well as the experiences it portrays – influenced more than just the creative work of one of the pillars of the Russian literary canon: it contributed to the development of the Siberian one. Others (including the Decembrists) had been exiled to Siberia before Dostoevsky, but it wasn't until him that a tradition of exile literature that privileged the idiosyncratic identity of Siberian locals was established, in Russian or Siberian literature. While he found the conditions in exile similarly oppressive and grim as had the Decembrists, unlike them, Dostoevsky did not see Siberia only as a canvas upon which to paint his Russian-bound struggles. Instead, Dostoevsky saw in Omsk the existence of a unique, self-sustaining Siberian culture, and while the majority of his narrative focuses on the bleak internal life of the prison, he nevertheless confirms the existence of a local identity. “[I]n the remote parts of Siberia,” *Notes* begins, “in the midst of steppes, mountains, or impassable forests, there are scattered here and there wretched little wooden towns of one, or the most two thousand inhabitants, with two churches – one in the town and one in the cemetery. [...] A post in Siberia is usually a

snug berth in spite of the cold.”<sup>21</sup> Like Kalashnikov, Dostoevsky balances the good with the grim, and allows Siberia to define itself. He goes further to say that, in terms of Russian officers who are given posts in such remote regions, “[T]hose of them who are clever at solving the problem of existence almost always remain in Siberia, and eagerly take root there.” This, in addition to the warm words with which he describes the shore of the Irtysh (from which was visible “pure, clear distance, the unpopulated, free steppe... for me, everything here was precious and sweet”<sup>22</sup>), demonstrates his acknowledgment of Siberia’s distinctively native character.

Harriet Murav claims that Dostoevsky’s primary interpretation of Siberia is as a place of salvation, where “renunciation from revolutionary thought and the embrace of an idealized primitive state” can easily occur.<sup>23</sup> It is with this thought that she aligns him with the very Russian, European-influenced writer Nekrasov (Whose *Russkie Zhenshchiny* [*Russian Women*, 1871-1872], incidentally, followed the lives of two women who accompanied their Decembrist husbands into exile, although I do not count this text as part of a Siberian canon, as it develops the identity of people whose main interests are Russian, not Siberian), although “Siberia as salvation” just as easily reflects the utopian pronouncements of the very Siberian, ultra-Slavophilic Polevoi. This is not the appropriate forum in which to discuss whether or not absolute renunciation of revolutionary thought was Dostoevsky’s ultimate agenda, but the fact remains that, whatever the case, “the *narod* [people of the land] is a crucial ingredient in the process.”<sup>24</sup>

Siberia as a natural, physical space may be for the most part a ghost at the edge of the prison experience described in *House of the Dead*, but its people are not: by focusing



on the *narod*, both in and out of prison, Dostoevsky leaves his mark on the development of a specifically Siberian literature.

### *Vladimir Korolenko*

Ultimately the lesser-known of the two major Imperial-era writers who experienced Siberian prison life firsthand, Vladimir Korolenko was exiled not once but three times – first to Kronstadt in 1876 for revolutionary activity with the Narodniks movement, then to Vyatka (Siberia) for five years in 1879, again for revolutionary activity, and finally to Yakutia (Siberia) in 1881 for refusing to swear allegiance to the tsar. If Dostoevsky was a subversive, Korolenko was an utter troublemaker. His long and varied experiences in Siberia prepared him to write equally varied accounts of Siberian life, which he did throughout the following decades.

Korolenko is most well-known for his populist romantic prose, and for his ability to synchronize poetic descriptions of nature with the mood and plot of the story at hand – generally in a gloomy, destructive fashion. Because of this, his writing is able to portray the kinds of highs and lows that Kalashnikov – another populist writer – was well-known for. While this is one reason Korolenko’s Siberian tales belong to a greater Siberian canon, it is his inclination (and ability) to portray the struggles for justice and personal freedom among the lowest strata of Siberian society that cements his place in the list. Avvakum may have *been* a prisoner, and Kalashnikov might have been influenced by a mixed experience of high- and low Siberian society, but it was Korolenko who first portrayed these downtrodden men as everyday (that is, out-of-prison) fictional heroes.

In *Son Makara* (“Makar’s Dream”), Korolenko’s most famous story, the protagonist whose death dream the reader follows through its half-Orthodox, half-Yakutian end, is decidedly unsympathetic: Makar is an opportunistic drunkard who knows his own faults and is entirely unapologetic of them – he almost considers them his right. While most of Korolenko’s anti-heroes are Russian exiles or prisoners in penal colonies, who he really counts as representative of Siberian society is anyone suffering an acute lack of Russia. In Makar’s story, Korolenko focuses not on a European Russian trapped versts and versts from home, but on a Siberian native who is only partially Slavic: Makar’s heritage is more than mixed – his Russian ancestors having married Yakut women and adopted local customs and language – but Makar holds what he thinks of as his Russianness in a death grip. All the same, Makar recognizes himself in the reflection of his thoroughly un-Russian neighbors:

However that may be, my Makar still firmly remembered that he was a native Chalgan Russian peasant. He was born here, had lived here, and he planned to die here. He was very proud of his background and sometimes abused the other “pagan Yakuts” although, to tell the truth, he himself was no different from the Yakuts either in his habits or in his way of life. He spoke Russian little and rather poorly, he dressed in animal skins, wore *torbasa* on his feet, usually ate only a flat cake mixed with brick-tea, and on holidays and other special occasions he consumed precisely as much boiled butter as was on the table in front of him.<sup>25</sup>

This description is a study in contradictions: first, Makar never fails to identify as a local resident, and he looks down on his neighbors; at the same moment, however, he recognizes he is no different from them. Immediately after invoking the Russian

language, a native Yakut word is thrown in (and defined, in an author's footnote). This may be a mess, but it is an *honest* mess: local Chalgan (and Siberian) identity, Korolenko avers, can be nothing more.

This characterization marks an odd divide in Korolenko's work that would at once seem to preclude him from a Siberian canon, while simultaneously making his inclusion all the more necessary. Makar, it is true, does not self-identify with his native land, instead identifying *through* it, *tearing* through it, wanting nothing more than to move on from the backwoods that is only populated by Yakut and Tatar pagans to a vague, dreamy "mountain" where he would "save himself," primarily by doing no work, and paying no taxes:

When sober he abandoned these thoughts, perhaps admitting the impossibility of finding such a mountain; but when drunk he became braver. He would grant that he might not find the real mountain and end up on another, "In that case I would die," he would say, but nevertheless he intended to go.<sup>26</sup>

Siberia becomes a way for Makar to mediate between his rotten lot in real life, and what he sees as his true cultural inheritance, however misguided. But while Siberia playing this role for the Decembrists kept them from adding productively to a Siberian canon, for Makar, it highlights his Siberian identity all the more: he may self-identify as Russian out loud, but his vociferousness only highlights his internal struggle over recognizing that such self-identification is ridiculous – he is Siberian, from ancestor to ancestor.

The real revelation here, though, is not that Makar is struggling to come to terms with his Siberian identity in the face of a mixed heritage – it is instead the fact that

Siberia's mixed-heritage settlements are portrayed in such plain language. To write about an indigenous culture without bemusement or an ethnographic lens is one thing, but to normalize in print the multiethnic, "mongrel" communities (and related mongrel cultures) that had become common in Siberia by the nineteenth century – that was a turning point.

"Makar's Dream," of course, is not generally read as a turning point for the internal fortitude of Siberian literature; Makar's sloppy self-loathing and the multiple uses of Yakut words within the narrative both highlight the folk aspects of the story, while his ultimate, drunken reversal of a divine death sentence reminds readers from the Russian tradition of the "democratic satire" of previous eras.<sup>27</sup> There is even a sense of Akaky Akakievich-ness to the plot that would not fail the notice of a Russian reader: that Makar comes to an ambiguous, unredeemed and tragic end is not unexpected, nor is it unfamiliar. He is a child of extreme circumstances and extreme topography, and with him, a Russian audience would find a comfortable perch from which to consider Siberian life (worse than theirs, of course, much worse than theirs). But however much Korolenko pillories the life of the mongrel Siberian, with Makar, he also performs a miracle, normalizing as a Siberian trope the characterization of the lowest common form of Siberian society living a common Siberian life. Prior to this, there was no Siberian everyman: everyone in Siberia was either savage, or Russian salvation in waiting. Or a criminal. But for the Siberian *native* to take center stage as sympathetic hero in the twentieth century, this depended entirely on the foundation laid by Korolenko with his Makar.

*Anton Chekhov*

*To A.S. Suvorin. 9th March 1890, Moscow.*

*On the score of Sakhalin we are both mistaken, but you are very likely more in error than I am. I am departing totally convinced that my trip will yield a valuable contribution neither to literature nor to science: I do not have sufficient knowledge, time or pretension for this. [...] Possibly I will not succeed in writing anything, but even so the journey is not losing its spice for me. [...] In addition I dare say that the journey will involve six months' unremitting physical and mental labor, and this is essential for me, since I'm a Ukrainian and have been growing indolent for some time now...<sup>28</sup>*

Chekhov was never Siberian. Then again, neither was he indolent – his extended investigative work, *Ostrov Sakhalin (Sakhalin Island)*, is an exercise in dogged perseverance, thoroughness, and rational compassion, all glued together with a keen eye and a sharp tongue. As a Chekhov text, the writing itself has intrinsic value; as a investigative work on one of the more controversial topics of the time, it is considered invaluable (A. Bogdanovich, in a 1902 edition, made the claim that “If Mr. Chekhov had never written anything other than this book, his name his name would forever be inscribed in the history of Russian literature, and would never be forgotten in the history of Russian exile.”<sup>29</sup>); as a non-fiction travelogue of Siberia, the Russian Far East, and the climes of Sakhalin, itself, the text plays a role in the figurative foundation of Siberian literature.

Undertaking a trip across Siberia to the penal colony of Sakhalin was not what anyone would have expected of a well-respected Russian (the Ukrainian claim was,

clearly, a joke) playwright suffering early-stage tuberculosis, but Chekhov hurled himself into the journalistic unknown all the same. The manuscript he produced is fascinating, at once entertaining and sobering, and for all his claims of being ill-suited for the task, his research is thorough and compelling. But it is not the manuscript that I wish to discuss here, but the personal letters he wrote to friends and family prior to leaving, and from the road through Siberia.

Chekhov knew exactly what he was doing when he went into this journey, and ensured that he would be well prepared. He read everything he could get his hands on (and yet, “the more I read, the more strong becomes by conviction that over the next two months I will not succeed in doing a quarter of what I had intended...<sup>30</sup>), and recognized the subjectivity that stood in the way of balanced understanding when trying to work out the truth about a far-off land’s character with only reports from specifically-interested outsiders available:

The articles have been written either by people who’ve never been to Sakhalin and understand nothing of the matter in question, or else people who have a vested interest, who have made a lot of money in connection with the question of Sakhalin, and have never maintained their innocence. The sheer nerve of the former, and the subterfuge of the latter – both of them obscuring and impeding factors – must be more valuable for the researcher than any data...these factors typify extremely well the relationship of our society in general to the subject...<sup>31</sup>

He had familiarized himself with Dostoevsky, as well as with the work of the American writer George Kennan, who undertook a similar investigative mission in 1886 to various prisons across Siberia. He had even immersed himself in children’s adventure stories,

which he alludes to at the most unexpected moments within the manuscript, itself.<sup>32</sup>

Chekhov respected preparedness, and that is commendable. But what is most noteworthy is that he saw both the need for examining all literature that might combine to elucidate a local Sakhalin identity<sup>33</sup> (basically, a canon), as well as the possibility of an even better, more thorough literature that might escape the tenterhooks of external actors' agendas and give the local populace the opportunity to define themselves.

Of course, in a manuscript devoted to the ethnographic observation and description of the local inhabitants of Siberia and Sakhalin, there are going to be many instances of what I have highlighted as important to the development of Siberian themes of independent culture in previous examples. The entirety of *Sakhalin Island* fits the model I have thus far been building. And yet, several moments stand out as supportive of my baseline argument, that through literature and because of the territory's multi-ethnic nature, a cohesive internal identity can emerge. In a letter to his sister on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April (when he was still traversing Siberia), Chekhov wrote:

The Kama is the most extraordinarily boring of rivers. To appreciate its beauties you'd have to be a local aborigine[...]. The towns of the Kama are all grey; it seems as if their inhabitants are employed in producing clouds, tedium, wet fences and mud for the streets – and that's their sole occupation...

The local people instill something like horror into an outsider. They have prominent cheekbones, large forehead, and are broad-shouldered, with tiny eyes and utterly enormous fists. They are born in the local iron foundries, and it's not a midwife who's present at their birth, but a mechanic...<sup>34</sup>

At first, the inclination would be to think of these “local aborigines” as members of some indigenous tribe (likely from the Siberian Tatar family), but upon closer examination, it stands to reason – mechanic not being high on the list of common indigenous specialities – that the locals must be of mixed heritage, local Siberian Tatar blood mixed up with early Russian settler/escaped criminal blood, very much like Korolenko’s Makar. Following Korolenko’s footsteps, Chekhov presents a local, “mongrel” community as typical, and in so doing, normalizes further the multi-ethnic character intrinsic to Siberian identity.<sup>35</sup>

Of the natural setting of Siberia, Chekhov has plenty more *bon mots* that add to the poetic tradition Avvakum began. In a letter to N.A. Leykin, describing the wonder he felt upon reaching Lake Baikal, he writes, “...Baikal is marvelous, and it’s no wonder the Siberians don’t call it a lake, but a sea. The water is extraordinarily translucent, so you can see through it as if through air; it has a delicate turquoise hue, very agreeable to look at.”<sup>36</sup> Avvakum Petrovich is again invoked in Chekhov’s description, although with Baikal, one must wonder if it is not a function of the place itself, that it can inspire such consistent and glowing review. In a second letter that same day, Chekhov writes, “I am still under the influence of Zabaikalye, over which I travelled. It’s a magnificent area. Generally speaking, from the Baikal onwards begins Siberian poetry, while up to the Baikal it was mere prose...”<sup>37</sup>

This is not the only time that Chekhov cites a connection between Siberia’s reality and literary creativity: within the *Iz Sibiri (To Siberia)* narrative, in contemplation of the rampant brothel culture he keeps finding in each settlement stopped at, he states, “When in due time Siberia brings forth its own novelists and poets, a woman will not be the hero



of their novels or poems; she will not inspire or arouse anyone to lofty action, or come to the rescue, or “travel to the ends of the earth.”<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, all of the Irkutsk writers mentioned here at the very least are ignored, but it should be imagined that Chekhov is not employing his most researched tone here. The two important things that remain, then, are first, the fact that Chekhov sees a future in which *Siberia* is producing its own poets and novelists, which one must assume he means as separate from those with primary associations with Russia, and second, the idea that a woman could never be central to such work, given the culture Siberia has. The former, I believe, is entirely earnest. The latter is likely a tongue-in-cheek response to weariness and irritation at encountering the same kind of low-level woman everywhere he went, but it still stands out as a wildly poor prediction, given the stories produced by Astafyev and Rasputin in the Soviet era.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, while the nineteenth century was, for Siberia, defined by the role assigned it by Peter’s establishment of St. Petersburg as a colonial *imperia*, it was in struggling towards and away from this very identity that a truly Siberian literature began to develop. Without the extremely Slavophilic leanings of the early century Irkutsk writers, or the expanded system of *katonga* and exile imposed upon the Russian population (and the Siberian infrastructure), the future canon might not have developed. The trends developed here by European Russians and Russian Siberians, however, do not complete the foundation of what has become Siberian literature: for that, we must turn to indigenous texts.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bassin, "Inventing Siberia," 767.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Brodsky, "A Guide to a Renamed City" in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1986), 79.

<sup>4</sup> Galya Diment, "Exiled *from* Siberia: The Construction of Siberian Experience by Early-Nineteenth-Century Irkutsk Writers," *Between Heaven and Hell*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 48.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 49. Nikolai Schchukin, 1828.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>9</sup> Bassin, 767. "...the colonial, or even better, imperial image...was a picture of Siberia as a mercantile colony of the Russian state, for all intents and purposes a foreign territorial possession useful exclusively by virtue of the natural resources there available for exploitation."

<sup>10</sup> Diment, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., from N. Shchukin, *Posel'shchik: Sibirskaiia povest'* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Konrada Vingebera, 1834): 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., from I. Kalashnikov, "Zapiski irkutskogo zhiteli," 193.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 58. "Even clouds...were much superior in Irkutsk," Diment reports, quoting Kalashnikov, "They were 'mountain-like' and 'fiery yellow,'" whereas Petersburg was only ever "'rainy and boring.'"

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>18</sup> Harriet Murav, "'Vo Glubine Sibirskikh Rud': Siberia and the Myth of Exile," in *Between Heaven and Hell*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 98. "You did not lower your gaze from your star./And in the bare wilderness, despising the groan of storms,/You sought the sacred law of love and truth." (lines 5-7)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*, Translated by H. Sutherland Edwards (New York: Dutton, 1962), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>23</sup> Murav, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Korolenko, "Makar's Dream," in *From Karamzin to Bunin: An Anthology of Russian Short Stories*, edited by Carl Proffer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 301.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Murav, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Chekhov, *Sakhalin Island*, 478.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 475. Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> February, 1890.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Letter to A.P. Chekhov, 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1890.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 438. From translator Brian Reeve's endnotes, "...in *Sakhalin Island*, along with the learned references to over 110 books and pamphlets dealing with geography, ethnography, coal-mining, etc., Chekhov has also mentioned adventure stories by Jules Verne and Thomas Mayne Reid... One wonders where he found the time to read this kind of literature among all his other commitments – and just why did he read it? To relax between his medical and his literary work? ... One can only say that it is impossible to think of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky settling down to read children's adventure stories – or, if they did so surreptitiously, they would certainly not have admitted it openly in one of their works!"

<sup>33</sup> From a post-script to A.S. Suvorin in a letter dated 28th February, 1890, we can see the tedious lengths to which he went to achieve this goal of thoroughness: "*Our geologists, ichthyologists, zoologists and so forth, are dreadfully ill-educated people. They write so clumsily that not only is it tiresome to read, but occasionally you even have to rework phrases to make sense of them. But the importance and seriousness of the material more than makes up for this.*" (ibid., 476)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>35</sup> Two further examples, from *Iz Sibiri (To Siberia)*, give a good sense of the local character Chekhov recognized in the people he was encountering. At the bank of the Kama, the exile convict oarsmen provide a certain entertainment: "[O]n pulling into the bank, the first thing the oarsmen do is set about abusing each other. They swear with malevolence, for no reason at all, and obviously in a half-asleep state. Listening to their choice vituperation, you might think that not only my driver, the horses, and they themselves, but even the water, the ferry and the oars, all have mothers" (p. 6), and later, discussing the flooded roads between Tyumen and Tomsk, he notes, "[O]ver rivers and inundated water meadows the mails are carried in small boats, which do not overturn because, most likely, the Siberian postmen's mothers are praying for them fervently" (p. 29). With both of these quick descriptions, the reader gets an image not only of the physical setting (and obstacles) presented by Siberia, but also the land's culture, which is an independent sort far removed from that of European Russia, even on the territory's westernmost edge.

<sup>36</sup> Chekhov, 493. Letter to N.A. Leykin, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1890.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 493. Letter to A.N. Pleyshcheyev, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1890.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 26.

## CHAPTER IV

### NATIVES TO NEIGHBORS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS LITERATURE FROM IMPERIAL TO SOVIET RULE

In prefacing his study of the hunting and pastoral groups of Russia's far north, Yuri Slezkine notes, "No longer 'foreigners' but still alien insofar as they remained 'unsettled,' these peoples have repeatedly posed a challenge to government officials, Orthodox missionaries, and assorted intellectuals seeking to define Russianness and otherness to both Russians and others."<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the specific position taken by the state at any given time, the Arctic nomads, Slezkine avers, "have been the most consistent antipodes of what it means to be Russian."<sup>2</sup> This is made clear through the constant yet consistent renaming of the indigenous groups by terms of *other*-ness: in Russian, the 'small peoples' go from *inozemtsy* (alien by land) to *inovertsy* (alien by belief) to *inorodtsy* (alien by ethnicity) to *inoiazychniky* (alien by language). Even when the Soviet machine attempted to fold the circumpolar peoples into the same social soup as everyone else, they were 'Uncertain Proletariats.' What Slezkine's argument boils down to, then, is that whether savage or noble, Russia's northern nomads are (and have consistently been) the ultimate reference point for Russia's cultural identity.

This should not be unfamiliar to us by this point: while Slezkine is separating Siberia's history into its component Russian and non-Russian aspects, his argument can really be extended to Siberia as a whole. As I have established in the preceding chapters, *Siberia* was from the very beginning a "consistent antipode" of what it meant to be

Russian, even if it did not have a cohesive identity to call its own. Russians may have explored and settled and interpreted in their own terms the territory that makes up Siberia, but they (and their descendants) were not the same kind of Russian as were those left behind. If one is to call any inhabitant of Siberia *inozemets*, *inoverets*, *inorodets*, or *inoyazychnik*, it should apply to them all – indigenous and Russian, alike. This is a [fact] embraced by Siberian literature from very early; Remezov’s settlement maps, Kalashnikov’s merchant-heroes, Korolenko’s Makar – especially Korolenko’s Makar – all are indicative of the ethnic *mélange* inherent to Siberian cultural life. I do not argue that there weren’t real and serious distinctions made between European Russian settlers and the indigenous peoples they overwhelmed and objectified, but I do argue that much of the *other*-ness Slezkine attributes to the ‘small peoples’ of the far North in reality – and even more so in literature – belonged (and belongs) to Siberians as a whole, giving them a way to mediate through Russia’s own mode of self-identification their own “mongrel” identity.

While it was not until the early Soviet period that the collection and legitimization of indigenous peoples’ folklore – as well as the written standardization of their languages – began to occur, several texts served as a bridge from the invisibly influenced Slavophilic Siberia of Polevoi and Shchukin to the visibly influenced multi-ethnic Siberia of the Soviet and post-Soviet era. Among these texts were the aforementioned “Makar’s Dream,” by Korolenko, his remaining Siberian tales from the turn of the century, and the ethnographic adventure stories of Russian explorer Vladimir Arsenyev from the 1920s. In what follows, I will examine the role these texts played in the evolution of an indigenous presence in the Siberian canon, and will then move on to discuss the rise of the true

indigenous writers who appeared in the Soviet era, focusing particularly on Pavel Kuchiyak (Altai) and Yuri Rytkeu (Chukchi).

### **Natives: Ethnographic Respect from Korolenko to Arsenyev**

In the previous chapter, I established the significance of the “mongrel” settlement of Chalgan in “Makar’s Dream” to the normalization of a multi-ethnic Siberian identity in the greater Russian tradition. The Yakut natives of Chalgan are not portrayed in a positive light, but the particular mix of culture within the village is presented more as a setting with which the protagonist, Makar, can interact and find conflict, than it is to be morally judged by the readers.

Vladimir Arsenyev takes Korolenko’s modicum of respect towards indigenous culture and brings it forward to the twentieth century. Traveling the Amur and the Ussuri River Basins, Arsenyev’s scientific reasons for being in Siberia lay somewhere between those of the men on the Great Northern Expedition and those of Chekhov (he describes both the number of trees afforded growing space by the valleys’ alluvial soil as well as ethnographic information on local Korean and Chinese farming populations,<sup>3</sup> the latter which is a good reminder of Siberia’s many non-Russian, non-indigenous Asiatic cultural influences) – minus the interest in the penal system. The aim of his writing, however, was more in line with the popular adventure stories of Kalashnikov and all the Americans he was compared to, only with an indigenous (Goldi/Nanai) hunter as protagonist instead of an Irkutsk merchant. *Dersu Uzala* is, for this very combination of disparate factors, an important part of Siberian literature and history, both: it is a (mostly) non-fiction Siberian adventure story, told by a Russian cartographer and ethnographer, which stars a native

hunter and wanderer of the Russian Far East and calls to mind the stories of James Fenimore Cooper. Chekhov aimed for this kind of hodgepodge, but Arsenyev achieved it.

The greatest appeal of *Dersu Uzala* lies in the fact that the character of Dersu (the Goldi hunter) is so well fleshed-out, as is the related ‘character’ of the natural world in which he lives. Prior to this, indigenous characters appeared in Russian and Siberian literature alike as stereotypes or placeholders. Even Chekhov, in the letter about the Kama, continued his description of “local aborigine” with “sit[ting] immobile on a barge by a barrel of petroleum or a sack of roach, and do[ing] nothing by swill bad vodka all day.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, their natural surroundings were reported as static points of observation by which a dynamic story passes, not dynamic spaces in which a life is fully lived. Dersu interacts on every level with the natural world, and the lessons he imparts to Arsenyev (the narrator) are treated not simply with the ethnographic curiosity of an outsider, but with respect:

As he spoke a duck flew by; Dersu quickly raised his rifle and fired. The duck, mortally wounded, hurtled to earth head over heels. My glance shifted in admiration from the spread-eagled bird to Dersu’s face. He was overjoyed, and suggested that I should throw up a few of the egg-sized stones lying about us. I flung ten of them into the air, and he struck eight of them in flight. His eyes were aglow. He looked at me triumphantly, but it was not mere vanity that spoke in him. He was pleased that he could still make his living by hunting.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that there are not moments of beauty; on the pair’s first journey (the narrative is split by three separate meetings between Arsenyev and Dersu), after an afternoon spent diving the Yolaiza river for pearls with some Chinese men (again, note

the continuation of river imagery into the twentieth century), Arsenyev takes a moment to describe the forest: “Every time I step into a forest extending for hundreds of miles I am overcome by a feeling bordering on awe. Such primeval stretches of forest land are an element in their own right.<sup>6</sup>” It is not poetry, or literary allusion, or even a clever stab at a metaphor, but in this moment Arsenyev manages to convey the sense that he is experiencing something more than just a hard, calculating slog through the wilderness: he is seeing the bigger picture, the majesty about which other Siberian writers (admittedly, more lyrically) also wax on.

*Dersu Uzala* is neither difficult nor complex, and today is often shelved not as “literature,” but as genre (sci-fi/adventure) fiction. It is also one of the first Siberian texts that has transcended its original form, inspiring Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa to produce a film based on the main characters. Today that film is far better known than its paperback counterpart, but that only speaks to the power of the Siberian text as vibrant and unique enough to stand alone. It is in an entirely different category than the rest of the texts discussed thus far, but not because of its origins, which I have established are just the right mix of everything that came before to be considered canon-worthy. Rather, *Dersu Uzala* supersedes its predecessors because of the audience it ultimately found: Arsenyev does a very good job of relating his adventures in a way that is engaging to a large audience because he recognized that focusing on a single compelling individual as a representative of the wild Far East would be more captivating than to either just enumerate unrelated vignettes on the journey, or to turn Dersu into an objectified stereotype against which he could act as Russian foil. What results from this is an



engaging and complex treatment of a real Siberian native, bringing the reality of a Siberia canon that much closer.

Ultimately, *Dersu Uzala* is valuable not for the fact that it is particularly spectacular writing, but for the very reason that it exists, that it is such a pure representation of a land and a way of life that is so fundamentally different from that of modern, urban Russia. Dersu's death at the end of the book, and the subsequent loss of his grave to urban development and indifferent workers – much like the stories of the “death” and flooding of Matyora, and other village prose tales in later decades – serve as a predictable moral, especially in the Siberian tradition: that modern civilization is anathema to purer, truer, ancient ways of living, and that we should value the wild (Siberia) and its inhabitants if we are to maintain ties to the soul of the earth. Polevoi's idea of Siberia as an alternative utopia is not far from this, nor, really, is Dostoevsky's, at least in Murav's reading. *Dersu Uzala*, though, unlike the works of the village prose movement later on, or the Slavophilic and exile works before it, strives to be nothing more than it is – a catalog of adventures in the Siberian taiga, and as such, is an almost perfect example of Siberian literature.

### **Neighbors: The Soviet Union and the Indigenous Writer**

In Soviet Siberia – and, perhaps to an even greater degree, in the Soviet Arctic – development ruled above all else. It was to be established as equally amongst the indigenous peoples as amongst any other group or in any other region of the USSR, despite the fact that indigenous population, in general, was beginning at a much lower level of modern social development than the rest of their Russian and Central Asian

comrades. “Otherness” after the Revolution was a thing to be erased or subsumed, and there was nothing more *other* than the indigenous populations of the taiga, tundra, and the North.

After the Skachko reforms in the 1920s laid the groundwork for collectivization, a policy of homogeneity was issued, and modern reforms – including electricity, local primary schools, and the systematization of a written language – were brought to all indigenous Siberian communities. In 1930, the Institute of the Peoples of the North was established at Leningrad State University, and indigenous students from across Siberia were invited to enroll. It is due to these developments that Siberian literature saw the advancement of indigenous voices prepared to speak for themselves, and which established the indigenous perspective as a major part of the Siberian canon.

One of the earliest indigenous voices was the Altai writer Pavel Kuchiyak, who is still well known today as a writer of children’s stories and Altai fables. Writing in the first two decades following the Revolution, Kuchiyak was a major contributor to the early issues of the Novosibirsk literary journal, *Sibirskie Ogni*, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Although he died shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, several of Kuchiyak’s works were included in the special wartime *al’manakhy* issues that were published to help boost Siberian soldiers’ morale on the front lines. In the 1944 issue, three works of Kuchiyak’s were included – chapters from the novel *Detstvo* (*Childhood*), and the poems “Pis’mo ot syna” (“Letters from a son”) and “Kamni poyut” (“The stones are singing”), as well the autobiographical story *Adyiok* (in a Russian translation by then-editor A. Koptelov). In these pieces, Kuchiyak examines Siberian life from the perspective of a non-Russian native. *Detstvo* is broken into

thematic sections – “Moroz” (“Frost”), “Vesna” (“Spring”), “Perekochevka” (related to Summer), “Nabroski” (“Rough draft”) and “Beda” (“Misfortune”) – that are bounded by both external (weather/season) and internal (intellectual and emotional) events, and are often offset by Altai proverbs and sayings.<sup>7</sup> In these excerpts, the protagonist, Adiyok, faces challenges of growing up in the taiga, and struggles to live up to the expectations of his parents and his blood. Kuchiyak uses a number of native, non-Russian words – and many indigenous cultural artifacts – to help characterize his Adiyok, but the story is not intended to be exotic. The juxtaposition of these non-Russian themes with the patriotic and otherwise Russian themes in the wartime *al'manakhy* of *Sibirskie Ogni* highlights both the Soviet goal of homogeneity in (especially extra-Russian) literature, as well as the journal’s unique goal of demonstrating and reinforcing a pan-Siberian message. Siberia, as a historic hotspot of ethnic intermingling, demonstrates through Kuchiyak that the lessons learned by a native Altai boy are easily more universal to a Siberian public unified through their own literary tradition than those same lessons would be to a more general Russian audience.

Yuri Rytkeu, a Chukchi, is an entirely different kind of writer coming from a younger generation. While Kuchiyak was a writer *in* the Soviet Union, Rytkeu was one *of* the Soviet Union. Though Rytkeu was Chukchi by birth, and both wrote about and advocated for the longevity of Chukchi tradition, he was also a member of a generation of change; he grew up in the early Soviet era, and learned more about his native Chukchi myths and legends from research for his later writings – including *Son v nachale tumana* (*A Dream in Polar Fog*) – than he did from day-to-day life in his own *yaranga* (Chukchi hut) as a child. Born in 1930, Rytkeu never experienced life that wasn’t Soviet, never

understood a Siberia that wasn't at least on paper considered equal to Russia and the other countries incorporated under Soviet rule. As a Chukchi, Rytkeu was still an outsider to the metropolitan cities of the west, but only in a geographical way – culturally, he identified with Soviet life and tradition, even if he was picking up the details along the way.

Rytkeu's autobiographical *From Nomad Tent to University* is a good measure of this lens Rytkeu had on Soviet life. Slim and illustrated, this text is a concise look at life in “Western,” Soviet Leningrad through the gaze of a Chukchi outsider. Thanks to the opportunities provided indigenous peoples after the October Socialist Revolution, Rytkeu considered himself “set out on the road of the world of knowledge” – a road clearly made out as a symbol of progress, a window on something qualitatively better than past and present Chukchi reality:

Leaving the *yaranga* that morning, it was as if I had stepped across a thousand years. I entered another world, the world of knowledge, of literature, the world of the future. In this world, as it seemed to me then, it was difficult to find a place for a *yaranga*, and for the old incantations which were recited at times to ensure good weather, the arrival of walruses in large numbers at the breeding grounds, and other bounties.<sup>8</sup>

The Chukchi – and all other indigenous peoples of Siberia – were finally on the road to knowledge, which, apparently, was synonymous with literature. As Adele Barker points out, this road was at the same time one paved by Stalin's policy of enlightenment for peoples of the North – a policy aimed at creating a modern, homogenized native intelligentsia. This homogenization resulted in the rise to fame of indigenous authors like

Rytkheu, but also led to a centralization of culture that had previously been peripheral. Rytkheu – along with other native Soviet authors like Vladimir Sangi (Nivkh) and Grigori Khodzer (Nanai) – used the Communist party to promote the image of a successful “leap” from primitive society to socialism:

A stone receptacle filled with seal-oil, a burning wick of tundra moss – from this began that dazzling light of modern progress, that road which, after thousands of years, covered the distance from primitive tribalism to socialism in several decades. And included in this span of time leading from the stone oil-lamp to the brilliance of atomic energy tamed by man and harnessed to serve the peoples of the Far North, was my road, too – the road that took me from the *yaranga* to university.<sup>9</sup>

According to Barker, “[I]n becoming the most Russianized of the ‘native son’ writers, [Rytkheu] became disengaged from the very people for whom he was presumably a spokesperson. [...] *So thoroughly did he toe the Russian line that he went on record as stating that the oral and folk tradition of the Chukchi past essentially had no place in modern-day Chukchi literature.*”<sup>10</sup> This behavior was certainly a function of the time in which Rytkheu lived, and it is important to note that this does not preclude him from contributing productively to the Siberian canon. Rather, Rytkheu’s toeing of the party line more firmly positions him within the canon, as it demonstrates one of the ways in which Siberian identity continued to exert control over its own definition:

homogenization through enlightenment was obligatory, but active participation in party rhetoric – especially by those who existed on what was still, really, the periphery – was

optional. By choosing to align with the Party, indigenous writers were simultaneously choosing how to define themselves.

However, Rytkeu did not stop at the party line. As I alluded to already, he matured into a writer interested in reaching into the Chukchi past and recasting oral myths and legends for a new generation, retelling them in a way that would meet newly developing needs of a people more distanced from the tales through time and culture than ever before. Inspired both by the village writers movement in the post-Stalin era as well as the transition of fellow “native son” Vladimir Sangi to the collection of his native Nivkh folk tales, Rytkeu began working with new perspective in the 1970s, necessarily taking on the role that Barker terms “curator of the past” in order to revive and preserve old Chukchi tales. *A Dream in Polar Fog* belongs to this era of Rytkeu’s writing, being set both in the decades before the October Revolution, and in a village well removed from news or real ramifications of Imperial policy change to the west. In *Dream*, Rytkeu retells a Chukchi origin story through the eyes of the Canadian protagonist. The way that Rytkeu presents the story not only serves the original function of outlining taboos, legal codes, genealogy and history, but also highlights the importance of oral storytelling for a generation that may not have assimilated it naturally. “What interests Rytkeu,” Barker suggests, “is his people’s break with the past not so much through their destruction of nature [the story explains the shared lineage between man and whale, and a “fratricide” that curses humanity] as through the loss of the old stories that once sustained them.”<sup>11</sup>

Whereas with his earlier works, Rytkeu established an identity as a Soviet writer grateful for the progress (and homogenization) brought to the native peoples of Siberia and the North by the October Revolution, *A Dream in Polar Fog* represents the shift in his later

years to embracing his native culture and mythology over the brashness of the West – reflecting simultaneously the cries of Polevoi and Shchukin. Almost as a reversal of his earlier views, in *Dream* Rytkeu showcases poetic, drawn-out, almost ethnographic descriptions of native Chukchi life and legend; in this way, as Barker notes, the author plays as much a role as the text, “paying homage to an earlier system of belief that understood the efficacy of magic and in making use of his prerogative as a writer” in recasting this magic as a rhetorical device to reintroduce Chukchi folklore to a new generation, through a new lens.<sup>12</sup> What is important about this recasting is that the Chukchi come out of *Dream* in an idealized state: forget the “savage” – they are just noble, and perfect examples of pure-hearted humanity. This is maudlin and over the top, but it does represent the re-appropriation of stereotyped indigenous tropes into something meaningful to the Siberian identity – and literature – as a whole.

Ironically, this very inclination – to romanticize and mythologize both the shared (native) past, as well as a spiritual connection to land and people – reflects the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian populist tradition, Barker suggests, thus positioning Rytkeu ever more firmly as a Russian author: by distancing himself from the forced homogenization of early Soviet literary policy by “nativizing” his writing, Barker makes the argument that Rytkeu further “Russianized” his role in the canon.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note the fact that Barker – despite establishing Stalin as the puppet master behind the homogenization, and the Soviet socialist dream as the driving motivator – consistently uses the term “Russian” to describe the transformation undergone by native writers. They did not toe the Soviet line, but the Russian one; they were not “Sovietized,” but “Russianized.” “In attempting to retrace and preserve the heritage of his people, Rytkeu

is following in the footsteps of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian populist tradition that similarly idealized and mythologized the lands, its past and its people,” Barker muses, postulating that, “[T]hus in some sense Rytkeu is very much a Russian writer, writing in Russian for a Russian audience in a tradition that is fundamentally a Russian one.”<sup>14</sup> While I see the connections she is making with the older Russian literary traditions, I disagree with the fundamental argument that Rytkeu is grappling between a Chukchi and Russian identity rather than a Chukchi and Soviet one.

This is ultimately misleading, as it presupposes that Siberia exists only to be a territory within Russia. As I have established, it does not. Siberia is multi-ethnic and ambiguous and only partially Russian, and through its history and its literature, has proven itself and its inhabitants greater than the sum of their parts. Furthermore, in the Soviet era these colonial lines were officially (if not in reality) effaced, and it was only through Soviet machinations that Rytkeu was able to come into his voice. Rytkeu was not a writer that would ever have self-identified as *Siberian* above anything else, but nor was he one that would have considered himself Russian. He was Chukchi and he was Soviet, and he struggled between the two, but he was never Russian.

This, however, is one mark of Siberian literature – you do not have to identify as Siberian to write a text that belongs to the canon. Avvakum was neither Siberian nor Russian – he was Orthodox; Chekhov was neither Siberian nor a prisoner – he was a morally interested party; Arsenyev was neither Siberian nor Korean, Chinese, or Nanai – he was scientist. And yet all wrote Siberian texts. In fact, it is *because* of their ambiguous loyalties and mixed identities that these writers were able to contribute; a borderless region building a unique identity couldn’t have anything else. So Rytkeu does not have to have



identified as Siberian to belong to the canon – his Chukchi/Soviet struggle manages well enough for him.

## **Conclusion**

The indigenous literary tradition in Siberia is still fairly new, both in terms of native text production as well as positive representations of native culture in texts by non-native (mostly Western) writers. Before Korolenko wrote *Son Makara* in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Siberian communities were depicted as ethnically divided, Russian from indigenous from Asian. Korolenko's fictional Chalgan diverged from this standard, representing for the first time in popular Russian literature a Siberian community whose history and inhabitants were multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious mongrels.

Arsenyev's respectful chronicle of his adventures with Dersu the Nanai took the normalization of indigenous identity a step further, and, along with the policies of homogenization established by the Soviet Union, opened the way for Siberian indigenous writers to begin to contribute their own voices to the literary stage. While many of these indigenous writers identified most strongly as either Siberian or their own native ethnicity, their work is representative of an ambiguous, non-Russian identity in the Siberian periphery, and therefore still belongs to the Siberian canon.

Furthermore, early indigenous contributors to Siberian literary journals, like Pavel Kuchiyak to 1930s and 1940s *Sibirskie Ogni*, established the place of indigenous voices on the Siberian literary stage, so that today, indigenous voices are an inherent part of the Siberian literary landscape and should be considered neither "native" (in the earlier, more alien sense) or "neighbor," but rather "local." These writers are not "Russianized" as

Barker claims Rytkeu to have been, but rather fully Siberianized, not only growing up but also attending university, building a career, and publishing the majority of their work in Siberia. Bulat Ayusheev, a Buryat writer born in 1963 who contributed a set of short stories to the most recent edition of *Sibirskie Ogni* (May 2011), for example, matriculated in the philology department at Irkutsk State University (a feather in the cap of the multi-linguistic Siberian identity argument), lives in Ulan-Ude, and has published most of his works in *Sibirskie Ogni* (Novosibirsk), *Baikal* (Irkutsk), and *Irkutskoe Vremya* (Irkutsk)<sup>15</sup>, in addition to *Vozdukh*, a Russian poetry journal that specializes in “poetic regionalism.”<sup>16</sup> He has also published in the very Russian journal *Oktyabr*’, and is a member of the Russian Union of Writers, but his day job is with *Baikal*, and his stories center around native Siberians that are more reminiscent of Makar and Adyiok than they are of Rytkeu’s isolated or Soviet Chukchi. This is a trend that will only grow as Siberian literature grows more accustomed to its ownership over its own development.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Arsenyev, *Dersu Uzala*, translated by Raduga Publishers (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1965). “Wherever I went I was met with that stony indifference so typical of Koreans. ‘Land of Morning Calm,’ I remembered, was the apt name given to Korea. Koreans live in farmsteads in the midst of their fields. Their homes are consequently scattered at great distances from each other. That is why, as a rule, a small Korean village sprawls over several square miles.” (ibid., 30)

<sup>4</sup> Chekhov, *Sakhalin Island*, 484.

<sup>5</sup> Arsenyev, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Sibirskie Ogni Al'manakh Kniga 4*, (Novosibirsk: Sibirskie Ogni, 1944), 64. “Куда дождь не пройдет/Туда я проползу./Куда снег не проберется/Туда я молиней–влечу.” – *Алтайская народная пословица о хвастовстве мороза* “Where rain does not fall/There I crawl/Where snow does not force its way in/There I lay my prayers.” – Altai folk proverb regarding the saying of prayers during frost.

---

<sup>8</sup> Yuri Rytkeu, *From Nomad Tent to University* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1980), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Rytkeu, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Adele Barker, “The Divided Self: Yuri Rytkeu and Contemporary Chukchi Literature,” in *Between Heaven and Hell*, edited by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 217. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>11</sup> Barker, 223.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Sibirskie Ogni*. “Avtory: Ayusheev Bulat,” last accessed May 2011, <http://sibogni.ru/writers/714/>

<sup>16</sup> *Vozdukh*, “Literaturnye Proekty: Otkuda Poveyalo,” last accessed May 2011. <http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/vozdukh/rubrics/otkuda-poveyalo/> Of the thirteen regions that *Vozdukh* has focused on, five have been Siberian – Nizhny Tagil, Novosibirsk, Ulan-Ude, Vladivostok, and Chelyabinsk.

## CHAPTER V

### SOVIET SIBERIA: FROM REVOLUTION TO ODDBALLS

The Soviet era is the time during which the possibility of a tangible Siberian canon came to a head. By the 1920s, enough fundamental work had been done by external European and Russian actors and Siberian natives alike that the time for slow development was over: Siberian writers were ready to take control of their literary inheritance and make good with the themes and tropes left them. Stalin's policy of homogenization helped propel not only indigenous writers onto the Siberian stage, but Siberians onto the greater Soviet one, and by giving them this voice legitimized their unique identity among citizens of the Soviet Union. From the Revolution on, Siberia was making its own literary progress at much its own pace, and while it participated in the larger Soviet story, it shaped it according to Siberian tastes.

This is not to say that ethnonational politics within the territory or between Siberian regions and Russian interests had by then necessarily become easy, or even that they are getting easier today. Marjorie Balzer, in the introduction to her ethnographic study of the self-identity of West Siberian Khanty, notes that, "the story of West Siberian development...like most tales of human interaction...has moments of transcending hope for interethnic communication as well as moments of despair."<sup>1</sup> Siberia has an independent identity, but it is not an independent geography; the policies enacted upon it by the Russian and Soviet governments of the past five centuries have had complex repercussions, particularly in indigenous communities. It is easy to confuse the idea of a bounded literary

identity with bounded, bonded sociopolitical one, but as we move into the Soviet era of literature in this chapter, I stress that it is only the former for which I am arguing. Siberians – of indigenous and Russian heritage, alike – did not go easy into the early collectivized, ethnically-regionalized Soviet plans, but it is not individual reactions I am taking into consideration – it is the idea that a common literature can transcend the divergent, conflicting and ambiguous series of identities assigned to Siberians of all sorts by external actors.

By the time the Soviet Union fell, Siberian literature would be firmly established, the canon secure and ready for new additions. The pan-Siberian literary identity that exists today is due almost entirely to the twentieth-century Soviet writers that shaped it, but that identity was only able to develop after all the work put in by Russian and Siberian writers from Avvakum to Arsenyev. Since the Soviet period is so rich with examples of what Siberian literature became when it came into its own, in what follows, I will only examine a few key moments that help elucidate the final transformation: the sudden explosion in establishment of Siberian-local literary journals in the 1920s; the role played by Siberian writers contributing to *Sibirskie Ogni* during the war; the post-war stories of Astafyev; and the village prose of Shukshin and Rasputin. I do not approach the topic of Soviet-era exile and prison literature, but this is due to limitations of length. Osip Mandelstam, Varlam Shalamov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – these writers have a secure place in the canon of Siberian literature, experiencing Siberian life in much the same way Imperial-era convict writers did. How their experiences play out on paper differ stylistically from their predecessors, and are certainly fascinating to study, but the

important result of their participation for the argument at hand is that they all experienced Siberian life on terms that became personal and complicated their literary identities.

### ***Sibirskie Ogni* and the Literary Journals of the 1920s**

It was in the wake of a war (Civil) that the interest in having a Siberia-centric literary journal began to grow, with more than a dozen flash-in-the-pan publications emerging in the early 1920s, including *Snop* and *Rabochie Zori* in the Altai Republic, *Otvuki* and *Krasnye Zori* in Irkutsk, *Ogni Severa* in Yakutsk, *Kame-ny* and *Pechal' Polei* in Chita, and *Arpoepis*, *Taezhnye Zori*, *Proletarskie Pobegi* and *Sibir* 'in Novonikolayevsk. It was during this period too that the critical-literary magazine *Sibirskie Ogni* was established (first issue published in 1922), with the overarching goal of reflecting through a Siberian lens the artistic and cultural progress effected on local communities by the socialist revolution<sup>2</sup>. *Sibirskie Ogni* was intended both to pose and to attempt to answer the most burning questions of the day – those about the Civil War, about revolution, about public consciousness, about new economic developments (such as collectivization, universally despised in Siberia) – all with an eye for establishing pan-Siberian inclusiveness while at the same time maintaining the highest standards of artistic and scientific excellence.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the biggest names of Siberian literature – both prose and poetry – have been published in *Sibirskie Ogni*. In the pre-war Soviet period this list included the likes of Vyacheslav Shishkov, Anton Sorokin, Lydia Seifullina, Vivian Itin, and Efim Permitin, among others. In the last half of the 20th century, some names more familiar to the Western eye became prominent, including most notably Vasili Shukshin, Valentin Rasputin, and Astafyev. Currently, *Sibirskie Ogni* is edited by the well-known (in

Siberia) poet, Vladimir Beryazev, and has on its editorial board other respected writers from the region, including Anatolii Baiborodin (Irkutsk), Natalya Akhpasheva (Abkan), Tatyana Chetverikov (Omsk), and Boris Klimychev (Tomsk), among others. Most of these names are unfamiliar to a Western audience, and many of them are unfamiliar to a Russian one. This very fact, however, demonstrates the explosive growth within the Siberian literary community over the last century: while the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries crawled gradually along, building the Siberian canon up to a point of self-sufficiency, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have rocketed forward, securing the legitimacy of the Siberian canon as it stands today. While the journal may have undergone various evolutions in the past eighty-eight years, the very fact of its existence – and its success – has proven to be an important tool in the ongoing construction of a Siberian literary and cultural identity. Not only does *Sibirskie Ogni* have a strong history and deep roots, but it also continues to be an outlet for modern Siberian voices to be heard.

***...from under the overcoat of war***

Без преувеличения можно сказать, что советская литература  
послевоенных лет вышла из военной шинели.<sup>4</sup>

Literary criticism in the Soviet Union – as well as the publication of literary magazines and “thick journals” – went into notable decline after the onset of the German invasion in 1941. The ‘rule of war,’ according to some critics, seems to be, “*kogda govorit pushki, muzy molchaet*” (“when the cannonry speaks, the Muses fall silent”).<sup>5</sup>

It should be of no surprise, then, that when the war broke out in 1941 and other journals in Soviet Russia shrank into themselves (or disappeared entirely, as the case was for many of the early Siberian journals), *Sibirskie Ogni* saw instead an opportunity to wield the written word as a weapon. The editorial offices set to publishing a series of six one-shot *al'manakhy*, as well as three special edition “newspapers,” intended especially for the edification of Siberian soldiers on the front lines. The content of these special editions was meant to focus on the trials and triumphs of the heroes of both the front lines and the Siberian rear. The shorter genres of poetry, songs, and *rasskazy* were perfectly adapted to both the *agitatsionno-publitsisticheskii* tone required for such a task, as well as to the abbreviated attentions of an otherwise engaged readership, and the war theme provided literary critics and *publitsistikiy* a new sphere in which to make compelling (and state sanctioned) analyses.

The one-shot wartime publications of *Sibirskie Ogni* are notable for the laser-like focus of their objective – the first two thick issues to appear after the financially-forced hiatus of 1941 were published under the title *Ognevye dali* (*Fiery Distances*); the issues published in and after 1943 reverted to *Sibirskie Ogni*. In both cases, the term *ogni* and its related fiery imagery were underscored; as today’s editors note, “out of every issue came the scorching breath of war.”<sup>6</sup> Siberian writers and critics were not only tasked with depicting their fictional heroes in the fight for Soviet victory over fascism, but many of them also served as soldiers, support staff, or war correspondents along the front. For these frontline Siberians, as noted above, there were also published several newspaper-length collections which were sent out in care packages, and which became cherished sources of news, as well as reminders of culture and life back home:



I read with great excitement the lines of poetry, the short stories and the essays about my native Siberia,” reads one of [the letters to the editor]. “Word of the delivery of this issue of *Sibirskie Ogni* has spread to all, and a queue has even been established to read it,” said another correspondent. Similarly, there was the characteristic confession, “After reading this newspaper an even greater spirit of battle overtook us, and we plunged into battle with swelled fury.”<sup>7</sup>

The contents of the longer *al'manakhy* reflected and extended that of the newspapers. In the two issues available to me – *Book 4* from 1944, and *Book 5* from 1945 – the iron grip of the war theme is obvious, and is obviously intended to inspire fervent patriotism. The ways in which it does this, however, are locally dependent, the writers and editors employing Siberian themes in order to invoke a pride and longing in the souls of their sons-at-arms that a more general Russian spirit might not have accomplished. Even at a glance, this is made apparent by the tables of content, in which fifteen fiction works and six critical and *publitsisticheskie* pieces refer to Siberia or Siberian themes in the title alone.<sup>8</sup>

The authors included throughout the war editions were recognizable for their Siberian heritages: while *Sibirskie Ogni* has been known over the course of its existence to publish works from writers who were (and are) more well-known on the national stage, preference was given during the war years to local voices. Editors, in fact, were so obsessive about portraying the Siberian experience of war that they used any opportunity as an excuse to publish a new Siberian writer in these wartime *al'manakhy*.<sup>9</sup>

Between the two editions under analysis here, the 1944 issue contained a higher percentage of content which was foremost war-related, while the 1945 issue saw a high

percentage of content first invoking the culture and nature of Siberia – although both themes were still central each year. With a heavier focus on war stories, the 1944 edition included pieces from writers who might normally have been positioned outside the journal’s scope, including visual artists and non-Siberians. The Novosibirsk painter Ivan Titkov was one example of the former, contributing to *Sibirskie Ogni* despite his role as a visual, rather than a verbal, artist. Titkov served in the Red Army, and was known for evoking motion and emotion in his postwar visual art, and in 1944 contributed a kind of soldier’s correspondence/slice-of-life war narrative to the non-fiction section of the issue, entitled *Zapiski frontovnika*. In it, the daily trials and routines of Siberian soldiers were portrayed, along with – of course – the staunchness of the Siberian spirit, and the loyalty to the Soviet cause.

Beyond the war themes of honor, bravery and hard work were the Siberian-centric themes of more local relevance – nature’s beauty and grandeur, the independent spirit of the taiga, the rushing freedom of Siberian rivers. These topics were approached from all angles poetic, prosaic and critical, and included everything from local histories (S. Kozbevnikov’s *Gorod na Obe* and Anna German’s *Eniseiskaya kniga*) to poem cycles (Ignatii Rozhdestvenskii’s *Strazhi Mangazei*, Lev Kondyrev’s “Cheremushka,” and almost all of the Elizaveta Styuart, among others) to stories (A. Braiko’s *Po-sibirski* and Aleksandr Misyurev’s *Dedova sablya*, also among others).

Of the poets, one of the most intriguing contributors to the *al'manakhy* was Elizaveta Styuart. With her name to a total of six poems in the two *al'manakhy* put together – as well as one critical essay on poems about Lenin – Styuart stands out as one of the more prominent literary voices of Siberia in this era. Born in 1906 in Tomsk, she

was both a children's author and a poet, and she specialized in apolitical, atmospheric themes. In his remembrances of her, poet Aleksandr Smerdyakov noted that, with her "classical profile, foreign surname, delicacy of manner, and unmitigated taste, [she] recalled the figure and charisma – and later the lyrical tone poetry – of the 'stately' Anna Akhmatova."<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 1940s – and in light of the 1946 Obkom statement against the *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* literary journals – this comparison was widely accepted, and Styuart was both attacked and lionized as a "Siberian Akhmatova." During the war, however, hers was a respected lyric voice that served to underscore the most abstract, beautiful ideas at Siberia's core, images that were just as important to Siberian soldiers at the front as were the concretely established descriptions of steadfast spirit and fiery resolve decried in more prosaic pieces.

In her 1945 contribution, a series of three poems excerpted from a longer cycle entitled *Sever' (North)*, Styuart managed to bridge the gap between both of these goals. The third poem, "Kto v eti godi voeval..." ("He who these past years has fought...") invokes the spirit of Siberia in the deployment of one of its sons, and fits in well in that regard with the works discussed thus far, if not simultaneously adding more poetic imagery. The other two poems, however, depend solely on natural imagery and formal composition to evoke Siberian pride. The first poem, "Ni ptich'ikh krikov..." ("Neither cries of birds..."), invokes a setting in which even the wind settles down to for a moment of silent observation. Styaurt's North is a place that, once seen, is not to be forgotten; it is a place in which light can have a voice (or a silence), in which colors can ripen and the sea can breathe; it is a place of dynamic action, of agency. It is, most importantly, a place which will never let you go, a feeling which is conjured first by the captivating, captive

fragments of sentences in the opening stanza (“Neither cries of birds. Neither the flight of bees. Mute rocks,” and so on<sup>11</sup>), and later subverted by the repetitive use of ellipses, which refuse to give the reader any sense of closure, and compels him to return again and again. “All will return many times to me/In dreams, in yearning melancholy, dashing from the moor,”<sup>12</sup> she writes in the voice of the North, and it is no difficulty to imagine this sentiment boring straight to the heart of Siberian soldiers off west. When juxtaposed with the more heavy-handed texts in these *al'manakhy* – as well as Styuart’s own more war-thematic work – this poem successfully reinforces the “Siberian equals strength” dynamic set in place by the *Sibirskie Ogni* editors, all the while acting as siren song to a home that has its own strong identity.

### **Astafyev’s Post-war Life**

Viktor Astafyev, born on the banks of the Yenisei in 1924, is one of the Siberian writers known primarily as a realist, with the majority of his early work depicting wartime and post-war experiences on an individual level, often with a tangible connection to Siberia’s natural bounty (particularly its rivers). By his own admission, Astafyev had always loved nature, and after losing his mother to the Yenisei in 1931, was “naturally enough...drawn to [his] second, irreplaceable mother, the Earth.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, his short stories and novellas also rely heavily on a connection to a nature that has as much agency as Styuart’s *Sever*, even those focused more heavily on the war. In “India,” for example, it is a major fire that propels the action, and it is the recovery and natural reclamation of the site of that fire that ultimately soothes the death of the main character, Sasha Krayushkina, who leaves the village where the fire was to be a telephone operator in the

war, and dies an anonymous hero's death trying to get message to the troops in the middle of a blizzard. Nature, here, is presented as a dynamic character, only giving up its greatest secrets after time has passed and the blackened rubble has become home to wild, obstinate life, first in the mound left by the fire:

Meanwhile, the site of the fire was being more and more densely grown over by henbane, nettles and burdock, and two pink rockets of willow-herb – the constant companion of burnt-out buildings – rose up belatedly. Dogs, cats and goats, obstinate town-bred goat's with shamans' eyes, began to wander around in the weeds and the dense thistles that littered the ground with burs and fluff.<sup>14</sup>

and later in the flowers that grow from Sasha's grave. Though life – and Sasha, and her story – move on well past the ruins, the living things that spring up out of them make an impact; like the building, Sasha is buried under nothing more than soil and fire, in her case not of arson, but of war. Also like the building, her grave is neither forgotten nor static – it is scattered with sunflower seeds by the stranger who buries her, and when the next spring comes, yellow flowers spring up from the earth, signaling that she was there, and life goes on.

In his introduction to the collection *To Live Your Life and Other Stories*, Astafyev notes that the biggest difficulty facing a writer is writing about the things closest and dearest to you, which can never be done to complete satisfaction: "Like writing about 'my' lake," he notes,

[T]o depict it like I had once seen it, so that the writing, the written word, would not be noticed, but so that the reader's heart would melt with delight and love, and he would want, like I had once wanted, to kiss every tree in the forest, every leaf,

every pine-needle, and he would rejoice in the knowledge that there was a beautiful world around him and that he was in this world, a participant in all that was great and alive, and he, a human being, would understand that his purpose on Earth was to do good, and to understand goodness, assert it and not lead mankind to self-destruction and to the destruction of everything living on our planet, this is the highest and truest purpose of a writer, myself included.<sup>15</sup>

This is passion for the healing/saving power of the Siberian wilderness rivals that of Polevoi more than a century before, but here with a legitimate personal history to back the conviction up.

Finally, it is important to note that of all the Soviet-era writers, Astafyev has the greatest hand in propagating the regional river trope: the Yenisei, the Abakan, the Valavurikha, more – most of his stories feature a river, and often fishermen. In the early history of the Russian conquest of Siberia rivers were the only means of transportation, and thus also of trade, exploration, settlement and interpretation. By the twentieth century, the importance of rivers lay mostly in the latter – as a way for writers of the Siberian landscape to interpret their own identity.

## **Oddballs and Environmentalists**

*Vasily Shukshin*

[Siberia] has been luring me back. It's even appeared to me in dreams... I should tell you that there, in my native region, I always write in a kind of frenzy, with inexhaustible strength... A writer, of this I am convinced, can exist and move

forward only thanks to the power of those life-giving juices with which native surroundings nourish him.<sup>16</sup>

Vasily Shukshin (1929-1974), though often thrown into the Village Prose writers category with Astafyev and Rasputin, was cut from a unique cloth. Biographically, he more closely resembles the early Siberian writers Nikolai Polevoi and Ivan Kalashnikov, in that all three were notable for having conflicting literary personalities from having been driven artistically by their rural, Siberian roots, despite (or because of) the fact that they moved to urban centers in the west at relatively young ages. John Givens notes that Shukshin, unlike Astafyev and Rasputin, seemed to rarely be comfortable in his own skin, and – compounded by his time at school in Moscow with children of the rich and elite – had a lifelong geographical inferiority complex stemming from provincial roots, a complex which informed both his diction and artistic vision; he did not embrace the wholesomeness of village life (like Polevoi and Astafyev), or the heroic qualities of the community elders (like Kalashnikov and Rasputin), but rather loved the eccentrics, the outsiders, the intensely autonomous.<sup>17</sup> Kathleen Parthé states that Shukshin's characters consistently seek “to get away from everyone else, to spend their time luxuriating in the *banya* all day Saturday... they are peasants with the nervous systems of intellectuals.”<sup>18</sup> Both Parthé and Givens note that *volya*, or personal freedom and will, was Shukshin's only real agenda. This does indeed separate his work from any political agendas a reader might find in other Village Prose works, but it simultaneously recalls the primary objective of Siberian literature since Ermak's conquest: to have the freedom of will to decide its own identity.

Similarly, though Shukshin's narrative style is provincial in the way Village Prose prefers, and his dialogue drenched in dialect, it is so in a way different from that of Astafyev and Rasputin – it is much rougher around the edges, sounding more like transcriptions of oral tales than like crafted narratives. In practice, this makes all the present and credible stories like “I Believe!” in which almost all of the action takes place between quotation marks, from the main character's arguments with his wife, to his existential, drunken debate with the local priest. In “Country Folk,” the granny's decisions are entirely informed by what she is told by either her son (through telegrams) or her neighbors, not by anything she has seen or experienced firsthand. Even in her own letters back to her son, she insists on putting in writing the fact that she has been soliciting advice from anyone who will talk to her. In “Oddball,” the main character is a chatterbox, constantly trying to engage in conversation with strangers whenever he is in an urban – and therefore, unfamiliar – setting, always to his embarrassment. Astafyev and Rasputin also rely heavily on dialogue to propel their stories – the old woman Darya in *Farewell to Matyora* is a locus for village conversations and gossip, for example, and many of Astafyev's short stories function through the device of one character relating to another his life story – but at the same time these writers also use long, descriptive passages to illustrate the land and the natural beauty of their village settings, hearkening back to Avvakum's own poetic digressions. Shukshin does not dwell on “natural beauty.” For him, it is the characters – the representatives of Siberia's cohesive identity – that are important, and they can only be understood through dialogue and action.



What is particularly important about Shukshin as a Siberian writer, however, is that his aesthetic motivations are driven by physical distance rather than by cultural differences, or even a combination thereof. “In this context,” Givens notes, ...the geography that informs Shukshin’s life and stories is not one tied to ethnically or ecologically specific features. Rather, it is the distance – sometimes great, sometimes very small – that lies between the village and the urban centers. Whether the space must be traversed by plane...or by bus...the consequences are equally weighty for the villager making the journey.<sup>19</sup>

Shukshin shuns the specificity of place so cherished by the wandering writers who preceded him, choosing not to dwell on the Angara or the Yenisei or Baikal or the Altai, but rather to focus on the broader significance of the distances between city and country, a netherworld in which he felt most at home, and which, if we take the multi-ethnic nature of Siberia seriously, plays a major role in the territory’s internal identity. “It is precisely this provincial autonomy that emerges as the lesson of the Shukshin myth,”<sup>20</sup> Givens states, but I would add that it is really the Shukshin myth that bears out the provincial autonomy already a major part of the Siberian literary identity.

### *Valentin Rasputin*

But if Siberia had its own voice with which to articulate its true attitude toward its fate, it would say, “Yes, I am ready, but don’t subjugate me any longer – [...] it is time to accept me as a part of your native land without which all the rest of the country could not exist, and to treat me like your native land, with

love and concern. Come to me, but with these things – faith, love, and protectiveness.”<sup>21</sup>

In his career as a novelist, essayist, and environmental activist, Valentin Rasputin (b. 1937) has successfully created a utopian vision of peaceful and sustainable coexistence with Siberia that diametrically opposes the Soviet utopian dream of a wild Siberia tamed and put to economic use by modern man. Furthermore, he puts actual meat on the bones of Polevoi’s fervent declarations of Siberia as an “alternative utopia” to a (culturally) down-spiraling Russia. Rasputin accomplishes this by appealing to the collective national imagination, to the inexpressible pull people from all over the country feel towards Siberia whether they have been there or not.

Rasputin was born and raised in the Irkutsk Oblast, living in the village of Ust-Uda for the first years of his life before moving with his family to Atalanka, where he then grew up. Spending his formative years so far removed from the cosmopolitan influences of European Russia, and even from the larger Soviet cities of Siberia, Rasputin was nurtured by the communal traditions of isolated (Russian) Siberian village life. It is this upbringing that shaped his career once he graduated from Irkutsk University in 1959, first in his initial endeavors as a journalist in Krasnoyarsk, and subsequently as a prose writer whose works resonate still today. Rasputin is widely recognized for his involvement in the Village Prose movement, which was of particular importance in the 1960s as a new class of Soviet writers began to look to the countryside and rural life for inspiration, canting Socialist Realism from its former position of primacy.

Within this movement, Rasputin became known for his deep emotional and stylistic ties to his homeland – central Siberia. His early *povesti*, in particular, are

associated with the movement, their plots centering around family and social situations during times of crisis. These early works included various individual publications in literary journals, as well as the novellas *Money for Maria* (1967), *Borrowed Time* (1970), *Live and Remember* (1974), and *Farewell to Matyora* (1976), and the short story collection *A Person From this World* (1966). Rasputin's writing was notable for combining graceful descriptions of Siberian landscapes and village life with evocative neologisms, dialectic narration and colloquial dialogue – each publication received more critical praise than its predecessor, and within a very short span it had become clear that a contemporary writer of real importance had emerged. Rasputin, at last, was the Siberian novelist Chekhov had predicted, and he had even found a way for a woman (Darya, in *Farewell to Matyora*) to be a heroine in one of his provincial Siberian stories.

Following the publication of the polemical novella *The Fire*, which centers around a lumber community's frantic response to a sudden fire, and the feelings of communion that re-emerged in a group of people who had long felt dispossessed by their forced relocation at the hands of the Soviet state's timber and dam projects, Rasputin fell into an extended period of essay writing, during which more and more moralizing began to be made explicit. By the late 1980s, Rasputin was one of the first Siberian literary personalities to be publicly and heavily involved in the environmental protection movement, especially that which revolved around Lake Baikal. In the 1984 essay, "Your Siberia and Mine," Rasputin calls upon the moral honor of the Soviet public to do Siberia well:

Siberia is large, but we cannot allow a single meter of ground to be treated carelessly, and we cannot permit another tree in its forests to be felled without

urgent need. Siberia is large, but we can claim no credit for its largeness. We will deserve credit if preserve nature's primordial grandeur side by side with the grandeur of our own deeds.<sup>22</sup>

This "primordial grandeur" is on the same level as Chekhov's attribution of glacier floes to Nature, and Avvakum's attribution of Siberia's bounty to God: there is something in Siberia greater than any man, and all that is left to the individual is to conduct himself well. While Rasputin's focus is on the preservation of the land, his words join those of the writers who preceded him, and concluded that whatever Siberia is, it is up to its inhabitants – all held together by their love of and obligation to the land – to also be its caretakers:

So what exactly is Siberia, and why does it draw people here with an irresistible and disquieting attraction? This attraction is often vague and not fully identifiable, but it will persist until people head across the Urals and plunge into Siberia, whether carrying out an ancient, forgotten pledge or filling and aching emptiness inside that demands "something like this" – it is like plunging into a dream that has surfaced and become reality. And if in real life this dream does not fully correspond to their vision of Siberia, we have only ourselves to blame.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, Rasputin is one of the modern Siberian writers who identifies most prominently as Russian, again recalling the Slavophile Irkutsk writers of the 1830s. Unlike Polevoi and Shchukin, however, Rasputin did not have to leave Siberia to understand its power, or to see its possibilities as "utopia." More interesting, still, Rasputin has specifically *not* spent time living outside of Siberia; while he travels to European Russia and around the world to give talks, it is Irkutsk that he calls home. So while he identifies as

Russian, Rasputin's literature is as completely Siberian as any individual oeuvre yet produced. The geography may not be bounded, and the personal identities may be multiple and discreet, but the literary identity is all Siberia.

## Conclusion

The Soviet era both complicated and simplified the Siberian identity, focusing as it did on regionality and ethnicity at the same time as espousing cultural homogenization and solidarity, the latter compounded by the war experience. Socially and politically, the repercussions from these policies and experiences are still working themselves out, but as they relate to literature, they all helped to solidify a unified Siberian literary identity in which writers self-identifying as indigenous, Russian, or Siberian all work within the same artistic network, a network created and cultivated by them and not by outside agents. The literary journals – as well as the schools, newspapers, and writers organizations – established by Siberians in Siberian cities have blossomed into a healthy regional publishing industry, and it is because of the Soviet experience, reinforced by the three-hundred year Imperial era that preceded it, that post-Soviet Siberian literature remains robust.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Sibirskie Ogni*, "O zhurnale."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> L.P. Yakimova, N.N. Sobolevskaya, E.A. Bal'byrova, and B.M. Yudalevich, *Literaturnaya Kritika Zhurnala "Sibirskie Ogni" 20-80e gody*, (Novosibirsky Gosudarstvenny Universitet, 1994), 159. "Without hyperbole, it can be said the Soviet literature of the post-war years came from under war's overcoat." (Translation mine)

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *Sibirskie Ogn*, “O zhurnale.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., «С волнением прочел я строки стихов, рассказов и очерков о моей родной Сибири», — читаем в одном из них. «Весть о получении выпуска «Сибирских огней» облетает всех, и на чтение его «устанавливается очередь», — сообщает другой корреспондент. Или такое вот, очень характерное признание: «После чтения этой газеты еще больше поднялся в нас воинский дух, и мы ринулись в бой с большей яростью...»

<sup>8</sup> A. Vystotsky et al, ed., *Sibirskie Ogn Al'manakh Kniga 4* (Novosibgiz: Sibirskie Ogn, 1944).

<sup>9</sup> *Sibirskie Ogn*, “O zhurnale.”

<sup>10</sup> *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, “Ya proshu: vspominaite menya...,” Last modified 17 May 2007, <http://resheto.ru/speaking/reshetoteka/news4463.php>

<sup>11</sup> Vysotsky, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Viktor Astafiev, *To Live Your Life and Other Stories*, Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1989), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>16</sup> Vasily Shukshin, *Stories From a Siberian Village*, xxxvii.

<sup>17</sup> John Givens, introduction to *Stories from a Siberian Village*, by Vasily Shukshin (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), xviii.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Parthé, preface to *Stories from a Siberian Village*, x.

<sup>19</sup> Givens, xxii.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Rasputin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” 178.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 179.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: KRAEVEDENIE FOR A MODERN ERA

Siberia exists.

This, despite the fact that there are no physical boundaries and no real date of founding; despite the fact that the area of land we call Siberia today is not the Siberia of the Golden Horde, or of Avvakum Petrovich, or of Vitus Bering; despite the fact that the meaning Siberia now holds for Moscow is not the same meaning it holds for Greenpeace, or for the United Nations. This, despite the fact that even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, voices central to Siberia have continued to identify primarily as Chukchi, or Soviet, or Russian. Because when it comes to the question of a central quality that might promote internal cohesiveness, there is Siberian literature, and the regional consensus over the tropes, images, and themes that make up the tradition is more than enough to prevail over individual ethnic or cultural identification.

An important term that I have not yet invoked is *kraevedenie*, which translates as “local studies” and refers to a discipline indigenous to Russian scholarship that began officially in the early twentieth century. Etymologically, the word *krai* “most frequently signifies the edge or furthest limit of some object or substance (*krai stola*, *krai odezhdy*; the edge of a table, the hem on a piece of clothing) and hence, when used in reference to units of territory, tends to suggest location on the periphery; distance from the center (*krai sela*, *krai sveta*; the outskirts of the village, the world’s end).”<sup>1</sup> While the “theoretical center” of *kraevedenie* is universally taken to be St. Petersburg (the most peripheral of Russia’s European metropolises), the discipline is most associated with the

Russian region most on the periphery – Siberia. That Siberia has been so historically keen on self-examination, then, should be unsurprising: the very act of geographical self-examination is, in Russian, intrinsically tied to liminality.

In her study on *kraevedenie* in St. Petersburg, Emily Johnson focuses on the role of the *putovoditel'*, a guidebook genre she identifies as one of the key elements in establishing that city's myth of place. The importance of the *putovoditel'* as identity-maker, Johnson states, is that by exploring both local geography as well as behaviors and attitudes, this short-form genre gave "the forefathers of modern *kraevedenie* the opportunity to explore two issues that particularly fascinated them: space and identity."<sup>2</sup> It should seem inevitable, then, that the *putovoditel'* should also turn out to be the most common genre in Siberian literature: Avvakum's *Life* is a *putovoditel'* with a sermonizing aim; Remezov's topographic compendium and the writings of the Great Northern Expedition are *putovoditeli* dictated by imperial authority; Dostoevsky's *Notes*, Korolenko's Siberian stories, Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*, and Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* are all *putovoditeli* of the lived experiences of a prisoner in exile, and Chekhov's *Sakhalin Island* is an ethnographic companion *putovoditel'* of the observed experiences of the penal system. Astafyev's survivors of war report their memories in travelogue form, and Shukshin's oddballs compose *putovoditeli* of the netherworld between city and country that Siberians seem always to inhabit. Rasputin's *Matyora* is shaped through a past-tense travelogue of the compiled nostalgia of the characters forced to evacuate; his essays are shaped by his ideological geographic surveys. Siberian literary journals were established not according to theme, but according to region: Novosibirsk was intrinsic to the development of *Sibirskie Ogni*, as was Irkutsk to *Krasnie Zori*, the



Altai to *Snop*, and Yakutsk to *Ogni Severa*. Siberia's sons on the Eastern Front in the Second World War were heartened not just by stories from their hometowns, but by indirect poetic and prosaic wanderings of their missing land. Elizaveta Styuart was not from the north, but recorded her travels there in "Ni ptich'ikh krikov" for Siberian soldiers to experience secondhand. In a territory as vast as Siberia, it seems there is little choice but to relate to it through a *putovoditel'*.

Siberian identity has always been wrapped up in this vastness; its unbound space is what dictates the roles external actors assign it, but it is also what gives Siberians internal agency to define themselves. *Kraevedenie* is a constructive tool with which to negotiate the results of this internal Siberian agency, but it is just a tool – it is not what shaped Siberia's development of a regional identity in the first place. That distinction belongs to the Siberian canon, even if Siberians don't universally recognize it as such. And while the *putovoditel'* connection is both interesting and inevitable, it is not what makes the Siberian canon viable.

In the introduction, I cited Joel Whitney's call for the development of a "mongrel" canon. His argument is that the Western concept of a canon is narrow and marginalizing, and that to apply any single quality of voice to a vast space will only reinforce our cultural limitations. "Quite simply," he states, "we need interpreters from any and all cultures so we can cease projecting what we do know (ourselves) onto what we don't (them)."<sup>3</sup> But while Whitney further argues that globalization and a mixing of demographics will ultimately do away with the need/desire for a Western canon, I am arguing the opposite in the case of Siberia: the mix of demographics inherent to Siberia has always been difficult to overcome, and it is only through the gradual discovery and

development of a cohesive, multi-ethnic voice that any regional literary identity at all has been established. It is *through* the application of a single – and mongrel – quality of voice to a vast space that Siberia has found its Siberians. So while canons typically serve to confirm and preserve the unity an already established, bounded culture, canonization in Siberian literature plays an antithetical role, serving instead to *establish* and *bound* a culture that would otherwise be too disparate to form a unified identity: the Siberian canon is *creative* rather than *created*.

As the twenty-first century matures, and Siberia moves further and further away from its Imperial and Soviet past, the canon is also bound to evolve. As the national population enters an age in which Siberia's physical vastness has no impact on information exchange, and little impact on the exchange of physical goods, the dependent relationship between Siberia and Russia will wane, and their literatures will simultaneously grow more distinct from one another, their identities more unique. The basic connection between Siberia and Russia will not be lost – the shared history is too intrinsic to both – but the works that are most important to Siberia and necessary to its canon will become increasingly different from those that are necessary for Russia's. Furthermore, the negative/dark subjective terms with which Siberia is most often associated will begin to shift into new ones invented and sustained by Siberians rather than by outsiders. In support of the underlying assumptions to her Khanty study that “just as ethnonational groups are interactive, so [too are] theoretical realms interpenetrating and mutually influencing,” Marjorie Balzer states that “[N]arratives out of Siberia should transcend notorious stereotypes of cold and cruelty, as well as reverse stereotypes of

selfless hospitality.”<sup>4</sup> In support of this effacing of stereotypes in favor of locally created identity, Rasputin writes,

Siberians today are ceasing to exist as the composite of their former stable features and are outliving their distinctiveness, wearing it out like old clothes. Everything that was formed by nature, by remoteness, by self-sufficiency, and even by certain conservatism is gradually finding common expression and is being recast in a single mold...Siberia has ceased to be a remote, unknown land, and the Siberian has donned all the armor of a person of the twentieth century, and not without certain satisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

While his tone suggests that the “distinctiveness” lost to the twentieth century is worth missing, the term is at once synonymous with the kinds of stereotypes referenced by Balzer: Siberia’s former distinction lay in its relationship to Russia as a colonial possession, a role which is today neither apt nor sustainable, and which does not allow for the very real internal agency being practiced by Siberians on their own sense of identity through literature. Siberia has indeed ceased to be a remote, unknown land, but with that cessation has come a newly accessible land, one easily read through its mongrel literary canon. And there is, indeed, a certain satisfaction in that.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Emily Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of kraevedenie* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Whitney, “A Mongrel Canon,” 22.

<sup>4</sup> Balzer, *Tenacity of Ethnicity*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Rasputin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” 175.

APPENDIX  
PROPOSED CANON

- Есиповская летопись* ("Esipov chronicle," **1636**), Savva Esipov
- Житие Протопопа Аввакума им самом написанное* (*The Life of Archpriest Avvakum, by himself*, **1672-73**), Avvakum Petrovich Kondrat'ev
- Хорографическая книга* (*Chronographic Book*, **1720**), Semyon Remezov
- Дочь купца Жолобова* (*The Daughter of the Merchant Zholobov*, **1831**) and general writings, Ivan Kalashnikov
- Посельщик—Сибирская повесть* (*A Settler: A Siberian Tale*, **1834**) and general writings, Nikolai Shchukin
- Мечты и Жизнь* (*Dreams and Life*, **1834**) and general writings, Nikolai Polevoi
- Записки из Мёртвого дома* (*Notes from the House of the Dead*, **1861**), Fyodor Dostoevsky
- Сон Макара* ("Makar's Dream," **1885**) and other Siberian Tales, Vladimir Korolenko
- Из Сибири* and *Остров Сахалин* (*To Siberia*, **1890**, and *Sakhalin Island*, **1891-1894**), Anton Chekhov
- Дерсу Узала* (*Dersu Uzala*, **1923**), Vladimir Arsenyev
- Детство* and *Адьюк* ("Childhood," **1944**, "Adyiok," **1944**), and other stories, Pavel Kuchiyak
- Северь* (*North*, **1944-45**) and other poems and essays, Elizaveta Styuart
- Конь с розовой гривой* and *Повести о моем современнике* and *Царь-рыба* (*Horse with the Pink Mane*, **1968**; *Stories of My Contemporaries*, **1972**; *Queen Fish*, **1978**; English collection, *To Live Your Life and other stories*, **1989**) and general writings, Viktor Astafyev
- Сага об Эморон-озере* (*Lake Emoron*, **1965**), Grigorii Khodzher
- Сон в начале тумане* (*A Dream in Polar Fog*, **1970**) and general writings, Yuri Rytkeu
- Колымские рассказы* (*Kolyma Tales*, **1954-1739**), Varlam Shalamov
- Один день Ивана Денисовича* (*One Day in the Life of Denis Ivanovich*, **1962**), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

*Сельские жители* and *Земляки: Рассказы* and *Беседы при ясной луне: Рассказы* (*Villagers*, **1963**; *Countrymen: Stories*, **1970**; *Conversations Under Clear Moonlight*, **1974**; English collection, *Stories from a Siberian Village*, **1996**) and general writings, Vasily Shukshin

*Живи и помни; Прощание с Матёрой; Пожар; Сибирь, Сибирь* (*To Live and Remember*, **1974**; *Farewell to Matyora*, **1976**; *The Fire*, **1985**; *Siberia, Siberia*, **1991**; English collection, *Siberia on Fire*, **1989**) and other fiction and essays, Valentin Rasputin

*Сибирские Огни* (*Siberian Fires* archive, **1920**-present)

Native Siberian folk tales and mythologies, one example of an English collection by James Riordan, *Siberian Folk Tales* (**1989**); one example of a Russian collection, *Легенды и мифы севера* compiled by Vladimir Sangi (*Legends and Myths of the North*, **1985**)

## REFERENCES CITED

- Arsenyev, Vladimir. *Dersu Uzala*. Translated by Victor Shneerson. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1990.
- Astafyev, Viktor. *To Live Your Life and Other Stories*. Translated by Raduga Publishers. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1989.
- Bagrow, Leo. "Semyon Remezov—A Siberian Cartographer." *Imago Mundi* 11 (1954): 111-125.
- Balasubramanian, Radha. *The Poetics of Korolenko's Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997.
- Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam. *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Barker, Adele. "The Divided Self: Yuri Rytkeu and Contemporary Chukchi Literature." In *Between Heaven and Hell*. Edited by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, 215-226. New York: St. Martin's, 1993.
- Bassin, Mark. "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century." *The American Historical Review*. 96:3 (1991): 763-794.
- Brodsky, Joseph. "A Guide to a Renamed City." In *Less than One: Selected Essays*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1986.
- Buckler, Julie. *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and City Shape*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Chekhov, Anton. *Sakhalin Island*. Translated by Brian Reeve. Surrey: Oneworld Classics, 2007.
- Diment, Galya. "Exiled from Siberia: The Construction of Siberian Experience by Early-Nineteenth-Century Irkutsk Writers." In *Between Heaven and Hell*. Edited by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, 47-66. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The House of the Dead*. Translated by H. Sutherland Edwards. New York: Dutton, 1962.
- Harrison, Jane and Hope Mirrlees, trans. *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*. By Avvakum Petrovitch Kondrat'ev. Hamden: Archon Books, 1963.
- Harvard University Library. *Khronograficheskaya kniga*. Last accessed May 2011.  
<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/18273155?n=34&printThumbnails=no>
- . *Khronograficheskaya kniga*. Last accessed May 2011.  
<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/18273155?n=220&printThumbnails=no>
- Houghton Library Blog. "Early Maps of Siberia Digitized." Last accessed May 2011.  
<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/houghton/2010/10/04/early-maps-of-siberia-digitized/>
- Johnson, Emily D. *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of kraevedenie*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

- Korolenko, Vladimir. "Makar's Dream." In *From Karamzin to Bunin: An Anthology of Russian Short Stories*. Edited by Carl R. Proffer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.
- Lincoln, W. Bruce. *Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians*. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Marsh, Jackie. "The Primary Canon: A Critical Review." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 52:3 (2004): 249-262.
- Murav, Harriet. "'Vo Glubine Sibirskikh Rud': Siberia and the Myth of Exile." In *Between Heaven and Hell*. Edited by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, 95-112. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Podbel'sky, Ef'im. "Struna, Zvuchashchaya Stikhami." *Sibirskie Ogni* 2004:2 (February 2004). Last accessed May 2011. <http://www.sibogni.ru/archive/32/362/>
- Polevoi, Nikolai. *Mechty i Zhizn'*. Edited by T.M. Mugev. Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1988.
- Proffer, Carl R. *From Karamzin to Bunin: An Anthology of Russian Short Stories*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.
- Rasputin, Valentin. *Farewell to Matyora*. Translated by Antonina W. Bouis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991.
- . *Siberia on Fire: Stories and Essays by Valentin Rasputin*. Selected and Translated by Gerald Mikkelson and Margaret Winchell. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989.
- Rytkeu, Yuri. *A Dream in Polar Fog*. Translated by Ilona Yazhvin Chavasse. New York: Archipelago Books, 2005.
- . *From Nomad Tent to University*. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1980.
- Shalamov, Varlam. *Kolyma Tales*. Translated by John Glad. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Shneidman, N.N. *Russian Literature 1995-2002: On the Threshold of a New Millennium*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- Shukshin, Vasily. *Stories from a Siberian Village*. Translated by Laura Michael and John Givens. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996.
- Sibirskie Ogni*. "O zhurnale." Last modified 2003. <http://www.sibogni.ru/history>
- . "Avtory Ayusheev Bulat." Last accessed May 2011. <http://sibogni.ru/writers/714/>
- Slezkine, Yuri. *Arctic Mirror: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Slezkine, Yuri and Galya Diment, ed. *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Vystotsky, A., et al, ed. *Sibirskie Ogni Al'manakh Kniga 4*. Novosibgiz: Sibirskie Ogni, 1944. Microfiche.

- . *Sibirskie Ogni Al'manakh Kniga 5*. Novosibgiz: Sibirskie Ogni, 1945. Microfiche.
- Vechernii Novosibirsk*. “Ya proshu: vspominaite menya...” Last modified 17 May 2007.  
<http://resheto.ru/speaking/reshetoteka/news4463.php>
- Vozdukh*. “Literaturnye Proekty: Otkuda Poveyalo.” Last accessed May 2011.  
<http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/vozdukh/rubrics/otkuda-poveyalo/>
- Whitney, Joel. “A Mongrel Canon.” *World Policy Journal*. 27:3 (2010): 19-24.
- Yakimova, L.P., N.N. Sobolevskaya, E.A. Bal'byrova, and B.M. Yudalevich. *Literaturnaya Kritika Zhurnala “Sibirskie Ogni” 20-80e gody*. Novosibirsk: Novosibirsky Gosudarstvennyy Universitet, 1994.
- Yanitsky, Oleg. *Russian Environmentalism: Leading Figures, Facts, Opinion*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnie Otnosheniya Publishing House, 1993.