Writing the Frontier from Inside:
The Geopoetics of Experience in Soviet Siberian Literature, 1953-1983

By

Maria Karen Whittle-Shaw

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Professor Harsha Ram, Chair
Professor Edward Tyerman
Professor Beth Piatote

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Abstract

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This dissertation considers the rise-to-prominence of Siberian writers during the late Soviet period as a form of literary regionalism arising in response to postwar state interventions in the region. Reading works by Russian-Siberian village prose writers Valentin Rasputin, Vasilii Shukshin, and Viktor Astafiev and Indigenous writers Yuri Rytkheu, Anna Nerkagi, Vladimir Sangi, and Yuvan Shestalov, I argue that the poetic innovations for which Siberian writers of the period became known can be characterized as literary articulations of Siberian spatial practice. Through mimetic simulation of local relationships to place, perspectival concerns are transcribed onto the formal and stylistic fabric of the text and features such as genre and plot take on contours of natively experienced Siberian space-time. These figurations cultivate distinct modes of expression, which in alignment with Soviet literary values served a didactic purpose: in theory, the text would generate a locally formulated Siberian imaginary into which outsiders could be oriented through the phenomenology of reading.

Spatial practice is informed by the specificity of its environment. Likewise, colonial policies and patterns of human settlement in Siberia were shaped in part by the region's watersheds. My literary analyses are thus each organized according to a *state of water* representative of both an aspect of state intervention in Siberia and a regional literary response. "Water" considers Valentin Rasputin's conservationist depictions of the Angara River in dialogue with popular depictions of Siberian hydroelectricity. "Ice" traces the development of Yuri Rytkheu's Bering Strait fiction as a response to modernizing discourse about Indigenous Siberians under Soviet nationalities policy. "Air" reads the significance of aerial motifs in Siberian narratives of displacement as a regional instantiation of Soviet jet-setting culture as it emerged during the period. Within these literary ecologies, I argue, authors evoke Siberian spatial practice to manifest a sense of environmental and civic responsibility in a readership increasingly deprived of place-based community knowledge transmission due to urbanization. Siberian regionalism illustrates the generative potential of the "region" as a discursive category in ongoing discussions about diversifying the Russophone literary canon. In addition to understanding writers in terms of their individual ethnic/national literary traditions, this dissertation demonstrates the influence of the unique properties of Siberian *place*—including its physical geography and settler colonial history—on Russophone literary aesthetics.

For Oksana, Ira, and the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky community,
who taught me the warmth of Siberian hospitality and ensured that
Kamchatka would always be my second home.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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A NOTE ON NAMING, TRANSLATION, AND TRANSLITERATION

All transliterations follow the Library of Congress system, excepting common Anglicizations of names (eg. Yuri, Yevtushenko, Ob, Biysk), or when alternative transliterations appear in quotations of other authors. I have also chosen to transliterate less-common names starting with ю or я to start with a Y rather than an I (e.g., Юван as Yuvan rather than Yuvan). The scholarly apparatus follows the LOC system. All translations into English are my own unless otherwise specified.

As is true for many sites of settler colonialism, there is a great deal of variation in the names for Siberian peoples and places, and usage has changed across cultures and time. Most of the official terminology for Siberian places and ethnicities do not correspond to their original Indigenous (and sometimes even settler) names due to changing nature of national and local politics. Likewise, currently accepted names do not necessarily correspond to the ones that were in use at the times that the works in this study were published. In this dissertation, I have for the most part chosen to use the Anglicized versions of names that the writers in this study used to describe themselves and their home regions at the time of writing. When necessary, I will also provide the traditional names that Indigenous Siberians have used to describe people and places that were important to them. In these instances, naming conventions and nuances will be explained in a footnote. Due to the linguistic limitations of this project, these will be transliterated into English to follow the authors' own spellings, which themselves may be Russified variants or simplified transliterations.

For instance, throughout the Soviet period Yuri Rytkheu referred to himself and his people as *Chukchi*, according to the official Soviet ethnographic designation. "Chukchi" (or *chukcha* in the singular) is the Russified version of the word *Chauchu*, a term originally used by nomadic reindeer-herding clans to distinguish themselves from the sea-hunting clans (*Anqallyt*) to the East who shared their language. Both groups referred to themselves as *Luoravetlan*, meaning "real person" or "genuine person."[1] In the post-Soviet period, Rytkheu would also openly refer to himself as *Luoravetlan*, although, like many Luoravetlan people currently residing in Chukotka, he typically used both names interchangeably. In this dissertation, I have chosen to use *Chukchi*, (which in the English usage can be used to refer to the Luoravetlan people in both singular and plural) because that is the term that Rytkheu preferred at the time that the works in this study were published.

The main exception to this rule is in reference to Yupik people, who reside in close proximity with the coastal Luoravetlan people, and who are regularly referenced in both Rytkheu's works and in settler scholarly and literary accounts of the region as *eskimosy* (Eskimo), a term that was long used as an umbrella term for describing three culturally and linguistically-related Indigenous peoples: the Yupik (Siberia), Iñupiat (Alaska), and Inuit (Canada and Alaska). Although *eskimos* was the official ethnographic designation for the Yupik people during the late Soviet period, and although it remains in use as a common Russian ethnographic descriptor, I have chosen to only use this term in quoted text. I instead use the preferred Indigenous name Yupik not only to provide a sense of cultural and geographic specificity, but also to avoid the pejorative connotations that are now associated with the word

[1] See Waldemar Bogoras and Boas, Franz, *The Chukchee* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1909), 11.

"Eskimo" within Indigenous communities.[2] For a full glossary of the terms used in this project and their corresponding Indigenous and Soviet names, see Table 1 below, which is based on the glossary provided by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON).[3]

Table 1: Glossary of Siberian Indigenous Names

Chosen Term	Indigenous Name	Soviet Nationality
Chukchi	*Luoravetlan* – "real person, genuine person"	*Chukchi* (*chukcha*)
Mansi	*Māńsi* – "person"	*Mansi (mansiets*)
Nenets	*Nened', neneinenets'* – "person, real person"	*Nentsy* (*nenets*)
Nivkh	*Nivkhgu* – "people"	*Nivkhi* (*nivkhgu*)
Yupik	*Yupigyt, yupik* – "real person"	*Eskimosy* (*eskimos*)

[2] See Lawrence Kaplan, "Inuit or Eskimo: Which Name to Use?," Higher Education Institution, Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, accessed March 1, 2023, https://uaf.edu/anlc/research-and-resources/resources/resources/inuit_or_eskimo.php.

[3] RAIPON, "Korennye malochislennye narody Severa, Sibiri, i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiiskoi Federatsii," Assostsiatsiia korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri, i Dal'nego Vostoka, 2021, https://raipon.info/narody/.

PROLOGUE. SIBERIAN STATES OF WATER

The Russian came alive on the river and lived with her in deep spiritual accord. […] At times of resettlement the river showed the way, and when he ultimately settled, she was a faithful neighbor: he held close to her, built his dwelling, hamlet, or village on her high banks. […] The Russian river taught those who dwelt on her banks common life and its virtues. […] the populace moved along the rivers, population centers grew particularly dense along the shores of her lively, navigable rivers, leaving wooded or boggy ground in the areas in between.[1]

– V. Kliuchevskii, *Course on Russian History*

Throughout its history, human presence in Siberia has been shaped by its networks of rivers, lakes, and seas. Unlike many of the rivers in the northern hemisphere, Siberia's arctic river systems (the Ob-Irtysh, Yenisei, Lena, and Amur) flow northward, starting as tiny springs and tributaries in the mountainous terrain to the south and gradually flowing together to converge into large and powerful streams before emptying their waters into the northern seas that lead to the Arctic Ocean.[2] Before the arrival of Russian and Cossack explorers, Siberia's Indigenous peoples lived along rivers and coasts, which provided fertile pastures for horses and reindeer and an abundant supply of fish and animals for nourishment.[3] In the eleventh century, Novgorodian traders followed fur-bearing animals into the unexplored territories to the northeast. They gradually followed this river network into the Ural Mountains before stopping near the mouth of the Ob River in the northwesternmost corner of Siberia, their resources and maritime technology unable to withstand the harsh conditions brought about by the region's terrain and climate.[4] Russian merchants and Cossack explorers first reached the taiga regions east of the Ural Mountains in the mid-sixteenth century via the northern river passage. Once one river had carried them as far east as it would go, they would travel a short distance via overland river portage trails to tributaries in the next river system, where they could continue up or downstream into the hinterland, setting up fortresses at strategic points for annexing the surrounding territories and bringing local inhabitants under Russian rule, whether through material incentives,

[1] V. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Moscow: Tip. G. Lissnera i D. Sovko, 1908), 74–75. Translation by Jane Costlow and Arja Rosenholm, *Meanings and Values of Water in Russian Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 1–2.

[2] For general information about Siberian Arctic rivers and their ecological processes, see Olav Slaymaker, "Large Arctic Rivers," in *Introducing Large Rivers*, by Avijit Gupta, Wolfgang J. Junk, and Olav Slaymaker (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2020).

[3] James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10–21.

[4] See Raymond Henry Fisher, *The Russian Fur Trade, 1550-1700*, electronic resource, v. 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943); Robert Joseph Kerner, *The Urge to the Sea: The Course of Russian History*, [Publications of the Northeastern Asia Seminar of the University of California] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946).

coercion, or brute force.[5] Some of these fortresses would eventually become Siberia's urban centers for trade and government administration, as well as regional hubs for rural settlers.[6] It was via these routes that explorers would reach the Pacific Ocean less than a century later in 1639.[7]

In the mid-eighteenth century, fortresses along the northernmost part of these routes would also serve as bases for the Great Northern Expedition led by Vitus Bering, a series of three expeditions ordered by Peter the Great to establish a Northern trade route to the Pacific and – eventually – North America.[8] Lacking the technology to create traversable roads across Siberia's diverse and often treacherous landscape, water routes remained the region's most important transportation network well into the nineteenth century, transporting goods, traders, settlers, colonial administrators, missionaries and prisoners to the region, and exporting furs and raw materials from Siberia's abundant natural resources. The form of Siberia's river system is reflected even in more recently erected infrastructure, from the railroads and postal stations to that related to the extraction of natural resources such as mining and hydroelectric power.[9]

Although water was the central means by which Siberia was settled, water's solid state, ice, is perhaps one of the best-known natural markers of its cultural mythology, a material reminder of the region's extreme climate and unforgiving terrain. Until the arrival of the railroad in the late-nineteenth century and aviation in the twentieth century, ice served as one of the major barriers to transportation in and out of Siberia. Ice blocked major river and sea routes,[10] while heavy snowpack rendered certain portions of the rudimentary overland roads impassable throughout the long winter. During the short and slow-arriving spring, melting ice and snow became their own obstacles: seasonal flooding from river ice floes rendered water routes unpredictable and runoff water from the snowmelt created muddy road conditions.[11] The frozen permafrost in Siberia's tundra regions also made farming and construction difficult for Russian

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[5] For a historical discussion of how annexation affected Siberian Indigenous peoples, see James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57–69; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 11–45; G. F. Bykonia, *Zaselenie Russkimi Prieniseiskogo Kraia v XVIII v* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo "Nauka, " Sibirskoe otd-nie, 1981), 36–58.

[6] Janet M. Hartley, *Siberia: A History of the People* (Yale University Press, 2014), 55–69; G. F. Bykonia, *Zaselenie Russkimi Prieniseiskogo Kraia v XVIII v* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo "Nauka, " Sibirskoe otd-nie, 1981), 1–36, 59-61.

[7] Kerner, *The Urge to the Sea: The Course of Russian History*, 66–73.

[8] For an overview of how such expeditions figured into Russian exploration and expansion in Eastern Siberia, see Kerner, 66–73. For a more in-depth history of the Great Northern Expedition see G. N. Ianikov, *Velikaia severnaia ekspeditsiia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1949); Maria Tolmacheva, "The Early Russian Exploration and Mapping of the Chinese Frontier," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 44, no. 1 (2000): 43–54; N. N. Zubov, *Otechestvennye moreplavateli-issledovateli morei i okeanov.* (Moscow: Gosizd-vo geogrlit-ry, 1954). For a brief historical study of nineteenth century exploration of the northern sea passage, see Daniel Beer, "The Exile, the Patron, and the Pardon: The Voyage of the Dawn (1877) and the Politics of Punishment in an Age of Nationalism and Empire," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 1 (2013): 5–30; Seija A. Niemi, "An Environmentally Literate Explorer: A. E. Nordenskiöld's Three Expeditions to the North Asian Coast, 1875–1879," *Sibirica* 17, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 13–40.

[9] For a discussion of the relationship between Siberian water and overland transport routes see O. N. Kationov, *Moskovsko-Sibirskii trakt i ego zhiteli v XVII-XIX vv.* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo NGPU, 2004), 85–101, 129-33. For a history of the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway and its relationship to existing river and road networks, see Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[10] Zubov, *Otechestvennye moreplavateli-issledovateli morei i okeanov*; Ianikov, *Velikaia severnaia ekspeditsiia*, 49–64.

[11] Kationov, *Moskovsko-Sibirskii trakt i ego zhiteli v XVII-XIX vv.*, 98–102.

settlers and administrators.[12] Local *Sibiriak* settlers and Indigenous people adapted to the ice, developing strategies for using it to their advantage. Ice enabled alternative forms of mobility during the long winter months, as snowpacks and thick freeze created seasonal overland sled routes across rivers and lakes. The Sakha people living in the Eastern Siberian tundra learned to use permafrost to their advantage, using the sunken, grassy patches that thawed in the summers as pasture lands for horses and cattle.[13] In Beringia and other coastal Arctic regions where ice is present in some form year-round, seasonal changes to land and sea ice alter the contours of the shoreline, creating what Bathsheba Demuth calls a "floating coast."[14] Indigenous maritime hunters became adept at reading the ice, developing a complex vocabulary for understanding its dozens of forms and their properties. They learned, for instance, which forms of fast ice – the thick, rigid ice that freezes it to the shore – were safe to navigate on foot or by sled, while in the spring and fall, they learned to read the *tyliagyrgyn*, the ever-changing transition between fast ice and floating drift ice and slush, to determine which parts of the sea were navigable by boat.[15] The ice also became a means through which to intuit the rapidly changing weather: seasoned hunters became adept at reading the patterns of movement in the floating ice forms off the coast to determine the direction of the wind and ocean currents and predict coming weather patterns.[16]

For most of its modern history, Siberia came to be viewed by the Russian colonial imagination as a realm of unrealized potential, its abundant natural resources remaining largely unexploited due to the challenges presented by its environment. This would change in the mid-twentieth century, when modern technology had advanced sufficiently to take on Siberian nature in full. The period between 1953 and 1980 would mark a period of massive environmental and demographic change, as Soviet planners rushed to conquer its final territorial frontiers in Siberia and the Far North, allowing the Soviet dream to be realized through the complete mastery of nature by man. During this period, Siberia became the focus of massive industrial projects designed to alter the contours of Siberian geography itself. Rivers transformed into seas with the construction of massive hydroelectric dams designed to support rapidly growing cities and towns that had emerged to support the extraction and processing of Siberia's natural resources (including mineral ore, oil/gas, timber, fisheries, fur farming, and whaling). Plans were in the works to use explosive force to increase waterflow from Lake Baikal's mouth and to reverse Siberian rivers to flow southward to irrigate Central Asia.[17] Oil drill engineering in the Far North had advanced enough to bore the deepest hole in the world, through one third of the earth's crust.[18] Advancements in aviation transformed the sky – once a realm of the clouds, birds, and local spiritual worlds – into an aerial ocean, overcoming the limits of water, ice, and land and linking Siberia more readily to the Soviet cultural and administrative metropole.

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[12] Pey-Yi Chu, *The Life of Permafrost: A History of Frozen Earth in Russian and Soviet Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 30–32.
[13] Chu, 31–32.
[14] Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: Norton, 2019), 73–74.
[15] Liudmila S. Bogoslovskaia and Igor Krupnik, *Nashi l'dy, snega, i vetry. Narodnye i nauchnye znaniia o ledovykh landshaftakh i klimate Vostochnoi Chukotki* (Moscow: Russian Heritage Institute, 2013), 156–93.
[16] Bogoslovskaia and Krupnik, 224–35. Rytkheu also describes this navigation process in his stories about maritime hunters. See "Staryi Memyl' smeetsia poslednim," in *Chukotskaia saga* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1960), 114–238.
[17] Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1999), 357, 415.
[18] Yevgeny A. Kozlovsky, "Introduction," in *The Superdeep Well of the Kola Peninsula*, ed. Yevgeny A. Kozlovsky, Exploration of the Deep Continental Crust (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 1987), 1–13.

Finally, the collectivization and assimilation of Siberia's Indigenous peoples and the modernization of its rural settler population would cause fundamental changes to the structures and rituals of Siberian everyday life. Such measures would cause irreversible changes to Siberian environment and culture, the consequences of which are still felt today. It was amidst these changes that the Siberian writers in this study emerged to reclaim Siberia in the Russian cultural imaginary.

CHAPTER ONE. TOWARDS A GEOPOETICS OF SIBERIAN LITERATURE

There dwells an indelible awareness in the mind of the Russian inhabitant of Siberia that he does not live in the same homeland as the core of the Russian nation which founded the Russian state, Russian literature, Russian political life. He cannot fight off the urge to continue the creative work of the Russian tribe: not through old forms, but new ones that correspond to his new surroundings. This refraction of the Russian national spirit under the rays of the Siberian sun will not diminish, but only enrich Russian life. [1]

— Grigorii Potanin, "The Needs of Siberia", 1908

The term "Siberian" can raise many objections. They could say that since our literature is written in Russian, then it is Russian literature. […] The Siberian is a métis*, and consequentially he brings elements of native arts into his literature. […] I believe that you can't just shrug off this issue, because biological, economic, geographic, and other factors can't help but play a notable role in the creative works of Siberians, can't help but leave their own sort of stamp on them. In Siberia all these factors are obvious. Here, the interaction between Russian and native cultures is obvious. We are entitled to use the term "Siberian [literature]" and demand this very "Siberianness" from writers in their work.* [2]

— V. Zazubrin, remarks at the commemorative meeting dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the literary journal *Sibirskie ogni*, March 21, 1927

Since Siberia's annexation in the sixteenth century and throughout its subsequent colonial history, cultural discourse on Russia's eastern frontier has been shaped by the non-local literary and scientific accounts penned by writers, explorers, travelers, and scientists visiting the region. These depictions of Siberia's vast expanse and extreme climate generated a consistent imaginative geography of the region across multiple genres and distinct periods. Until Stalin's death in 1953, however, writers from Siberia were essentially marginal to Russian literature. Strikingly, between 1956 and 1980, the post-Stalin era saw the rise to prominence of Siberian-born Russian (*Sibiriak*) and Russophone Indigenous writers, who would not only become known

[1] G. N. Potanin, "Nuzhdy Sibiri," in *Sibir', ee sovremennoe sostoianie i nuzhdy: sbornik statei*, ed. I. S. Mel'nik (St. Petersburg: izd. A. F. Devriena, 1908), 267–68.

[2] Notes from the meeting appeared in a 1927 issue of *Sibirskie ogni*: Dmitrii Riabov, ed., "Piatiletie 'Sibirskikh ognei,'" *Sibirskie ogni* 1927, no. 2 (April 1927): 174–206.

for their innovative contributions to Soviet literature, but equally for their political activism, both in the Soviet Union's emergent environmentalist movement of the late sixties, and later within the ethnonationalist movements that crystallized in the early eighties and carried through into the post-Soviet era.

Late Soviet Siberian writers are typically understood as belonging primarily to two distinct, but thematically and stylistically related movements within official Soviet literature. Siberian Indigenous writers were formally tasked with contributing to state-sponsored ethnonational literary projects. In the case of Indigenous Siberians belonging to the nomadic "small-numbered peoples of the north" (*malochislennye narody severa*), writers were tasked with constituting a written literary tradition for their own people in their national language, even as many Indigenous writers also wrote in Russian to reach a broader audience. In contrast, Siberian-born Russian writers were often regarded as pioneering figures within the emerging Village Prose (*derevenskaia proza*) trend in Soviet literature, which centered the experiences of Soviet rural subjects and often evoked the Russian folkloric tradition. Thematically and formally Village Prose was comparable in many respects to the literatures of the constitutive Soviet republics: as such, it can also be read as an unofficial expression of Russian national literature. Siberian *derevenshchiki*, such as Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafiev, and Vasilii Shukshin, were in the main descendants of *Sibiriaki*, Russians who arrived in Siberia during the prolonged period of Russian settler expansion from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. To acknowledge both their ancestral ties to the region and their status as settlers on colonized territory, I will henceforth call the Siberian-born Russian settler writers in this study "*Sibiriak* writers." Although both tendencies – Indigenous writing and Siberian village prose – are often discussed in terms of their common themes and stylistic tendencies, such as their privileging of regional and rural perspectives, their strong ethnographic and environmental orientation, and their merging of literary realism with traditional worldviews and oral narrative modes, few scholars have examined these convergences in significant depth, and almost none has investigated Siberia's centrality to the development of these disparate literary movements during the late Soviet period.[3] In fact, due to the importance of regional organizations within the state literary apparatus during the late Soviet period, both *Sibiriak* and Siberian Indigenous writers often started professional careers working in the same regional literary institutions and published

[3] National minority writers (including Siberian Indigenous writers) are often mentioned alongside Village Prose writers in Soviet criticism from the seventies and eighties, particularly in discussions of the literary turn to the past and literary uses of folk narrative. (See, for example, V. Iakimenko, "Granitsy i vozmozhnosti," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 11 (November 30, 1978); Robert Bikmukhametov, "Desiat' let spust'ia. Zametki o novopis'mennom slove Sibiri," *Voprosy literatury* 1975, no. 11 (November 30, 1975): 43–73.) Similarly, Katerina Clark has called national writers such as Chingiz Aitmatov "fellow travelers" of Village Prose writers, who shared their rural settings and interest in folklore, as well as their "marked bias against modernity, technology, and urban life," but were distinct for their non-Russianness. (See "Foreword," in *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, trans. John French (Indiana University Press, 1998), v–viii.) Parthe has also remarked on late Soviet national writers' similarities to Village Prose, but sees them as "borrowing of some of the themes and characters of Russian Village Prose" in a different setting. (See *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past*, electronic resource, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992), 94, 119.) Several recent studies of Indigenous literatures have drawn more direct and detailed comparisons to Village Prose, although these comparisons remain in the service of a broader argument about Indigenous literary poetic, rather than as a tool for more comprehensive comparison. See, for example Klavdia Smola, "(Re)Shaping Literary Canon in the Soviet Indigenous North," *Slavic Review* 81, no. 4 (December 2022): 955–75; Morch, Audun, "The Chronotope of the Primordial: Yuri Rytkheu's When the Whales Leave," *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i Litteratur Og Kultur*, no. 32 (August 1, 2014); Natalia A. Nepomniashchikh, "The motif of loss in the literatures of Siberian indigenous peoples," *Zhurnal Sibirskogo federal'nogo universiteta. Gumanitarnye nauki* 11, no. 10 (2018): 1593–1603.

in the same regional publications, and once they had achieved national literary success, many would go on to contribute to these same organizations in the roles of literary gatekeepers and mentors.

This project seeks to understand the sudden significance of Siberian writers within both literary movements as an informal manifestation of literary regionalism, one that arose in response to state economic and cultural interventions in postwar Siberia, and whose distinct parameters were formed by nineteenth-century Siberian regionalist thought, by the twentieth-century flowering of "regional studies" or *kraevedenie*, and by the aesthetic, social and environmental concerns of Thaw-era Socialist literature more broadly. I argue that Siberian regionalist poetics can be characterized as a literary articulation of Siberian spatial practice: through the mimetic representation of local relationships to place, perspectival concerns are transcribed onto the formal and stylistic fabric of the text and features such as genre and plot take on the contours of a natively experienced Siberian space-time. These figurations cultivate distinct modes of expression, which in alignment with late Soviet literary values served a fundamentally moral-didactic purpose: in theory, the text would generate a locally formulated Siberian imaginary into which outsiders could be drawn through the experience of reading. The resulting sense of connection to imaginary place could then foster a personal sense of responsibility for the environment in a community of readers who had been deprived of place-based knowledge transmission in the wake of urbanization and geographic dispersal. This dissertation thus seeks to demonstrate the distinct influence of the unique and heterogenous properties of Siberian *native place*—from physical geography to settler colonial history—on Russophone literature.

As the case studies in this project will demonstrate, late Soviet Siberian writers often conveyed their Siberian regional identities through the articulation of highly familiar, intimately experienced place – most often through the specific Siberian localities in which they were born and raised. Although I will examine the functions and features of distinct localities as they function in individual works, I have adopted the term *native place* as a more general referent for describing the distinct spatial and environmental relationships that their literary representations evoke. In Russian criticism and scholarship, these localities are often described using the term *malaia rodina*, often translated as "small motherland." I have selected the term "native" as counterpart to the Russian word *rodnoi*, which Russian and Indigenous Siberian writers often use when writing about Siberia as a homeland. The Latin root *nat-* and the Slavic *rod-* convey a sense of both genealogical kinship and birth, an important convergence, since Siberian writers often evoke both lived and ancestral ties to place in their regionalist poetics. In Russian, the root *rod-* is often tied to home spaces, such as home city, *rodnoi gorod*, and is also related to the Russian word for motherland, *rodina*. This understanding of *native* is not to be confused with the proper descriptor for Indigenous peoples, Native, which would be translated as *korennoi* the preferred term used to describe Indigenous peoples from Siberia and elsewhere in contemporary Russian.[4]

[4] *Korennoi*, a more narrowly defined word synonymous with "indigenous," also has inscribed connections to ancestral place due to its etymological root *koren'* (literally "root"). Incidentally, Geoffrey Hosking describes Village Prose literature of the sixties as interested in native "rootedness," although the Russian word he evokes for "roots" is the figurative usage of *istok* ("source" or "spring"). See "The Russian Peasant Rediscovered: 'Village Prose' of the 1960s," *Slavic Review* 32, no. 4 (1973): 705–24.

The Cultural Origins of Siberian Regional Thought

The name Siberia (*sibir'*) and its derivative forms have acquired a variety of geographic meanings depending on historical context and colonial practices. The tsarist and then Soviet government divided the territory into multiple administrative regions, the lines of which were redrawn several times. As such, regional identity has been constituted in various ways at disparate points in Russian and Soviet history and is often nested in terms of larger and smaller scale. For instance, the Pacific coastal region now known colloquially as the Far East (*Dal'nii Vostok*) was administratively considered part of Eastern Siberia prior to 1884, after which point the new Amur Regional Governorate was established to account for recent territorial acquisitions. As John Stephan states, after this point "the Far East had an ambiguous relationship with Siberia after 1884" and although it was "in some cases subsumed by it," it developed its own sense of regional identity in the decades following, which has continued into the present.[5] Yet regardless of such administrative-territorial categorizations and of the identities that emerged from them, the term "Siberia" has its own distinct status as an imaginative geography within Russian national culture, replete with its own symbolic vocabulary and mythologies, the distinct forms of which will be discussed further. Geographer Mark Bassin describes the real territory to which this imaginative geography corresponds as "the vast expanse of taiga, tundra, and steppe that extends eastward from the Ural Mountains across northern Asia to the Pacific," and which for Russian settlers typically started north of the Kazakh steppes, at approximately fifty-five degrees northern latitude.[6] It is precisely this definition of Siberia with which my project is concerned. The authors in this study hail from diverse regions across Russian Asia: the Altai mountains in southern Siberia (Shukshin), the Yenisei River basin in central Siberia (Astafiev), the Chukotka peninsula on the Russian side of the Bering Strait (Rytkheu), the Lake Baikal region in southeastern Siberia (Rasputin), Sakhalin Island in the north Pacific (Sangi), and the remote tundra and taiga regions north of Tyumen in northwestern Siberia or the northeastern Ural region, depending on the classification (Nerkagi, Shestalov). While each of these writers claim their own sense of local, ethnic, and national identity, all have described themselves and their birthplaces as Siberian, and all participated in some capacity in the Siberian regional literary apparatus.

To understand the significance of Siberian literature's emergence on the Soviet literary stage during the postwar period, it is necessary to understand the historic connection between literature and Siberian regional identity. Prior to the nineteenth century, Russian literary depictions of Siberia tended to fall under one or more of the following categories: travelogues of expeditions to Siberia by European Russians as well as foreign visitors; first-hand memoirs and accounts of life in Siberia by Russians – voluntary settlers, government administrators or political and religious exiles – who had lived there for some period of time; historical chronicles of Siberia's conquest and colonization; and adventure novels about expeditions to Siberia.[7] Most of these genres of course originated elsewhere; accounts of Siberia were composed for a wider

[5] For a concise history of how the Amur region was territorialized at various points in Russian and Soviet colonial history, see John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994). For a discussion of how Far Eastern identity developed specifically in the pre-revolutionary period, see pp. 91-98.
[6] Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (1991): 765; Stephen Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894" (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 1970), 115.
[7] This list excludes the rich heritage of oral narratives belonging to the dozens of indigenous peoples scattered throughout Siberia, most of whom did not develop a written literary tradition until the early twentieth-century or later.

Russian reading public by people who had visited or studied the region as outsiders. Scholars of such "Siberian texts" argue that such texts developed alongside the "unique overlapping of geopolitical, cultural, historical, and natural factors" in its colonial history to form a mythic or imagined space.[8] Although interpretations of this myth vary, they generally define the myth according to a series of binary oppositions such as center vs. periphery, freedom vs. confinement, backwardness vs. progress, and east vs. west.[9] Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine have argued that most of these versions of the Siberian myth constitute a simultaneous embodiment of symbolic "heaven" and "hell." In its "heavenly" state, Siberia represented a space not unlike the American West, where outsiders could find freedom and opportunity in the anonymity of the frontier's wild expanses and the wealth of its natural resources. In its "hellish" state, Russians saw death and suffering in its distance and isolation from the center, its central role in the Russian penal system, and its harsh climate. These diametrically opposed representations of Siberia often functioned in tandem, rendering it a contradictory and liminal space.[10] Therefore, as Mark Bassin has argued, over the course of much of Russian cultural history, Siberia was and to some extent remains "not only foreign, but a virtual terra incognita," its mystery allowing it to become a "geographical canvas" of the imagination, onto which the "externalization of private vision[s]" of metropolitan Russians could be projected.[11] In contrast Siberia's Indigenous communities, whose presence in and knowledge of the region long predates European presence, have maintained a conceptualization of Siberian land as central, rather than peripheral.

Siberian intellectual thought in many ways developed as a response to colonial mythologies of Siberian space, which Siberian-born intellectuals viewed as romanticized or hyperbolic representations existing to serve metropolitan interests, rather than to truly understand or document Siberian reality. Due to the lack of educational infrastructure and its predominantly peasant population, Siberia lacked a cohesive literary or intellectual culture for much of its colonial history. In the nineteenth century, however, Siberia's educational system experienced a series of significant changes sparked by the Governor-General Mikhail Speranskii's infrastructural reforms of 1819-21, and subsequently by the influx of Decembrist exiles into Siberia's urban centers following their release from penal labor starting in 1839.[12] These developments allowed for the emergence of a small group of Siberian-born writers, working between 1820-1850, who utilized their Siberian-born Russian identity as a device intended to entertain the St. Petersburg reading public, providing insiders' adaptations of popular genres such as the adventure novel, which were framed as correctives to previous works that they felt misrepresented Siberian reality.[13] Although these writers lacked sophistication, and were mostly inspired by European genres, they were the first Russian Siberian writers to invoke Siberian

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[8] Valerii Tiupa, "The Mythologeme of Siberia," *Orbis Litterarum* 61, no. 6 (2006): 3.

[9] For a historical chronology of how such oppositions developed and evolved, see Jan Kusber, "Mastering the Imperial Space: The Case of Siberia," *Ab Imperio* 2008, no. 4 (2008): 52–74.

[10] See G. Diment and Y. Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

[11] Bassin, "Inventing Siberia," 765–66.

[12] Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894," 29–83.

[13] In Ivan Kalashnikov's *Kamchadalka*, for example, the narrator presents himself as an insider authority on geography, ecology, and local customs in order to "introduce the reader to Siberian nature and its native inhabitants" (Ivan Kalashnikov, *Kamchadalka*, 2nd ed. (Saint Petersburg: Tip. A. Iogansona, 1842), 3). For an in-depth scholarly discussion of this generation of "Siberian romantics," see Galya Diment, "Exiled from Siberia: The Construction of Siberian Experience by Early-Nineteenth-Century Irkutsk Writers," in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. G. Diment and Y. Slezkine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 47–65.

identity as part of their narrative strategy. The task of conceptualizing a stylistically distinct Siberian form of Russian literature would fall to the next generation of Siberian thinkers, the *oblastniki*, or Siberian regionalists. Siberian regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) emerged in St. Petersburg in the late 1850s among a circle of Siberian-born students, most of whom were the descendants of *Sibiriak* settlers in Siberia's administrative urban centers.[14] The *oblastniki* derived their name (adopted in the 1880s) and their concept of region from Irkutsk historian Andrei Shchapov's 1860 coinage of the term *oblasnost'*, or "regionality," a Russian corollary to the romantic notion of nationality (*narodnost'*). Shchapov argued that the complexity of Russia's colonization and the diversity of its territories and peoples was a crucial component of Russian national character and that to truly understand Russia, it was therefore crucial to study the particularities of regional history and identity, a task which Shchapov, and later the *oblastniki* adopted for Siberia.[15] Siberia was thus the site of the earliest movement of political regionalism in Russia; indeed, it was among the first in Europe.[16]

Siberian regionalist ideology rested on the conviction that *Sibiriaki* could be considered a distinct Russian sub-nationality, whose character had been shaped by Siberia's harsh climate and unique history of frontier colonialism, as well as by *Sibiriaki's* ethnic hybridity, a result of centuries of interaction between Russian settlers and local indigenous inhabitants.[17] Like other movements rooted in romantic nationalism, the *oblastniki* believed in the importance of literature as a means of building regional self-consciousness and advocating for regional political autonomy. Since Siberia lacked its own cohesive literary tradition prior to 1820s-40s, many of the innovations in Siberian literature between 1860 and 1917 took place in the form of non-fictional essays and criticism, which formulated a vision for what a mature Siberian literature might look like. So long as Siberian writers attempted to conform to the conventions of a national literary canon, they would remain marginal "provincial writers" rather than innovators. The most critical component of Siberian *regional* literature was therefore to be its "freedom from the powerful pressure of the general current of Russian intellectual forces."[18] A mature Siberian literature had to emerge from within a distinct Siberian intellectual culture, harnessing a unique Siberian worldview formed by Siberia's physical climate and local culture, and creating a literary language that would truly capture regional reality.

Although they were overwhelmingly a settler-centered movement, the Siberian regionalists believed that as colonized Siberian subjects, Indigenous people shared a similar, though distinct set of interests and struggles in relation to colonial power, and that they could best advocate for these interests through national self-determination. Regionalist reformers

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[14] In his autobiographical essays, regionalist leader Nikolai Iadrintsev mentioned a handful of Indigenous Buryat and Sakha intellectuals participating in *oblastnik* groups. See Nikolai Iadrintsev, "Sibirskie literaturnye vospominaniia," in *Sbornik izbrannykh statei, stikhotvorenii i fel'etonov* (Krasnoiarsk: Sibirskie zapiski, 1919), 50.

[15] Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894," 242–43; A. P. Shchapov, *Sochineniia A. P. Shchapova*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Izd. M. V. Pirozhkova, 1908), xxxi.

[16] Susan Smith-Peter, "The Six Waves of Russian Regionalism in European Context, 1830-2000," in *Russia's Regional Identities: The Power of the Provinces*, ed. Edith W. Clowes, Gisela Erbslöh, and Ani Kokobobo (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 17.

[17] For detailed explanations of the Siberian regionalist conception of Siberian regional character, see Nikolai Iadrintsev, "Obshchestvennaia zhizn' v Sibiri," in *Sbornik izbrannykh statei, stikhotvorenii i fel'etonov* (Krasnoiarsk: Sibirskie zapiski, 1919), 6–9; Nikolai Iadrintsev, "Narodno-oblastnoe nachalo russkoi zhizni i istorii," in *Sbornik izbrannykh statei, stikhotvorenii i fel'etonov* (Krasnoiarsk: Sibirskie zapiski, 1919), 34–43; Potanin, "Nuzhdy Sibiri."

[18] G. N. Potanin, "Roman i rasskaz v Sibiri," in *Izbrannoe*, ed. A. P. Kazarkin (Tomsk: Tomskaia pisatel'skaia organizatsiia, 2014), 31.

believed that it was the duty of *Sibiriak* intellectuals to be allies in this cause, advocating for educational and material resources to which Indigenous Siberians had been denied access. Although for the most part Siberia's Indigenous peoples lacked a written narrative tradition until the Soviet period, intellectuals from some of the region's larger Indigenous groups, such as the Sakha, Altaian, and Buryat peoples began forming small nationalist movements towards the end of the nineteenth century.[19] Like the *oblastniki*, the leaders of these movements believed that literature was a necessary means of defining the national spirit of their people and advocating for their interests on a wider pan-Russian stage. By the turn of the twentieth century, these Indigenous thinkers had begun writing poems and prose in their native languages, many of which were inspired by traditional orally transmitted narrative forms, such as folklore, epic poetry, and mythology.[20] These works preceded the development of more robust written national literatures during the Soviet period, when they were promoted as part of a state-sponsored nationalities policy.

While the regionalists' pre-revolutionary essays on Siberian literature are considered by both scholars and later generations of Siberian writers as "the moment of inception of Siberian self-consciousness," Siberian literary genres remained in embryonic stages of development until the 1910s, although Indigenous and peasant settler communities had maintained a long and robust tradition of oral narrative and lyrical genres.[21] Shortly thereafter, the sociopolitical upheavals caused by the revolution and the civil war led to an ideological rupture in the conceptualization of Siberian regional identity.[22] The Soviet state in turn viewed regionalism's separatist or centrifugal tendencies as a political threat and prioritized the implementation of centralized control over Siberia.[23] Bolshevik critics in the 1920s dismissed regionalist writing as the tool of a "reactionary movement": the *oblastniki*s' pre-revolutionary conception of regional literature could thus no longer function as an official model for regional literature in Siberia or elsewhere.[24] Nevertheless, regional literature as a concept remained important for early Soviet literary critics and was the topic of heated debates about the value of regional literature in the wider context of the Soviet internationalist project throughout the twenties, the outcome of which was the establishment of a handful of geographically-based regional literary journals during the twenties and thirties. The first of such journals*, Siberian Fires* (*Sibirskie ogni*), debuted in March 1922 and would immediately propel the concept of Siberian writing into the critical limelight. The journal was originally intended to arouse socialist consciousness amongst Siberian

[19] The leaders of these movements occasionally collaborated with the *oblastniki* to advocate for regional interests but were focused on developing their own national cultures. The *oblastniki* typically were fierce advocates for indigenous self-determination and autonomy and recognized their mutual interests, but at times their attitudes towards indigenous peoples, particularly those without a written literary tradition, could be patronizing. (Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894," 259–61.

[20] James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 285–86; Varvara Okorokova et al., "Mythopoetics in the Works of the Yakut Classic Writers" (International Conference on Man-Power-Law-Governance: Interdisciplinary Approaches (MPLG-IA 2019), Atlantis Press, 2019)

[21] See Aleksandr Kazarkin, "Proza Sibiri v XX veke," *Sibirskie ogni* 2007, no. 7 (July 2006): 159–68.

[22] Although most prominent regionalists aligned themselves with socialism, by the time the revolution reached Siberia, they actively resisted Bolshevik control, believing that its centralized and urban approach to socialism would undermine their agenda of regional autonomy and self-determination. (See M. V. Shilovskii, *Sibirskoe oblastnichestvo v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni regiona* (Novosibirsk, 2008), 219-264).

[23] Vladimir I. Shishkin, "Moscow and Siberia: Center-Periphery Relations, 1917-1930," in *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, ed. Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 75–88.

[24] Shishkin; Kazarkin, "Proza Sibiri v XX veke."

readers, and allowed promising Siberian writers a space in which they could hone their craft and strengthen local literary institutions under the guidance of central editorial staff.[25] *Siberian Fires* would serve as a prototype for other broadly-circulated literary journals run by regional Writers' Unions that were founded during this period, such as the Khabarovsk-based *Far East* (*Dal'nii vostok*), and the Sverdlovsk-based *Ural*.[26]

The journals' presentation of regional literature illustrates the complex relationship between regional and central literary apparatuses, and the role both played in the construction of Soviet regional identity. First, regional literature was organized along administrative lines, differentiating between Siberian, Far-Eastern, and (in the case of northwestern Siberia) Uralian writing, and thereby reaffirming the state's geographical-administrative definition of region, although in practice writers from east of the Urals often were published in adjacent regions' journals.[27] It was also not necessary for selected works to express any sense of regional self-identification, or even for authors to be born in these regions; many featured works were written by metropolitan writers on regionally-specific themes. While many pieces often perpetuated Soviet versions of the Siberia myth, the journals also passively formulated their own vision of regional identity and literature.[28] Editors were attuned to the demographic diversity of Siberia and the Far East, and sought to mirror it in their journals' contents, publishing works by Siberian indigenous writers, as well as works which celebrated Russian Siberian peasant cultures. When peoples residing in the region lacked exemplars of written literature, as was the case for many of Siberia's nomadic "small peoples" prior to the 1940s, the journals would publish Russian translations of oral folklore recounted to Soviet ethnographers sent into Indigenous communities to collect ideologically appropriate folklore as exemplars of early "national literatures." By the forties and fifties, once processes of "indigenization" (*korenizatsiia*) had taken hold among Siberian Indigenous peoples that had previously lacked a written language or intellectual elite, the journals would become a space in which young Indigenous writers could publish their work for the first time. Adhering to the nationalities policy of the time, the journals also strove to accurately represent Siberian regional demographics in their editorial staffs.[29] I will discuss the historic specifics of the regional processes for institutionalizing Indigenous literatures under Soviet nationalities policy in more detail in Chapter Three. The journals imagined regional literature as a multi-ethnic, regionally specific phenomenon in which writers were required to move between Soviet literary ideology and a mimetic account of local experience or reality. The early Soviet conceptualization of multinational regional literature therefore bore some resemblance to the notion of the "friendship between peoples," which regarded Soviet literature as constituting an umbrella of national literatures bound together by Soviet nationalities policy.

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[25] Aleksei Gorshenin, "O zhurnale 'Sibirskie ogni,'" Electronic journal, *Sibirskie ogni*, n.d., http://sibogni.ru/content/o-zhurnale-sibirskie-ogni.

[26] Iu. A. Golovin, "Osobennosti funktsionirovaniia regional'nykh literaturno-khudozhestvennykh zhurnalov v postsovetskom periode," *Vestnik Mosckovskogo gosurdarstvennogo universiteta kul'tury i isskustv* 32, no. 6 (December 2009): 51–56.

[27] For instance, literature from Kamchatka, located in the Far Eastern administrative region, might be published in both *Siberian Fires* and *Far East*.

[28] Golovin, "Osobennosti funktsionirovaniia regional'nykh literaturno-khudozhestvennykh zhurnalov v postsovetskom periode"; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[29] Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 127.

Siberian writers would finally begin to gain widespread recognition in the Brezhnev era, as writers who had come of age amidst Khrushchev's reforms reached maturity and began to experiment with literary genre and form in their ethically inflected responses to urbanization and industrialization in their native regions. As such, the period between 1953 and 1980 was a time of tremendous growth and innovation for Siberian letters, which would help to shape the public understanding of late Soviet official literature. Soviet *Sibiriak* writers were instrumental in the formation of Village Prose, a genre of state literature that emerged from Socialist Realist *kolkhoz* narratives and sketches during the 1950s and reached the height of its popularity by the mid-seventies. Village Prose narratives typically depict the reality of Soviet Russian villagers in locally specific settings by focalizing the Russian peasant perspective, emphasizing those villagers' "self-description" and "self-understanding," and striving to depict local nature and traditions in ethnographic detail. Village Prose is typically characterized by its critique of Soviet modernization and its impact on local rural environments, and its romantic nostalgia for a return to the traditional Russian peasant worldview as a solution to the corruption of modern (urban) existence.[30] During this same period, Siberian Indigenous writers were gaining national notoriety for the first time as they began to graduate from Soviet writing programs in larger numbers and embark on the imposing task of developing national written literary traditions for their peoples. As "fathers" of their respective national literatures, these writers adopted elements from their peoples' cultural traditions (as defined according to nationalities policy) to create nationally distinct forms of Socialist literature. In contrast with many national minority writers, Siberian Indigenous writers often chose to write in Russian, sometimes only subsequently translating their works into their native tongue. Many times, writers wrote in Russian as a means of reaching a broader, multinational audience of readers.[31] Like Village Prose, Siberian Indigenous literature is generally understood to have come to maturity in the 1970s, when Indigenous writers of both the older and younger generations increasingly incorporated national narrative forms and drew upon locally focused themes, such as tribal genealogies and retellings of Siberian colonization from an Indigenous perspective. Siberian Indigenous writers thus shared many common themes and stylistic tendencies with their *Sibiriak* contemporaries; like Village Prose, indigenous writing of the seventies and eighties is characterized by its privileging of rural indigenous perspectives, strong ethnographic and environmental detail, and the merging of literary realism with traditional worldviews and narrative modes, such as oral folk poetry.[32]

Siberian Literature in a Late Soviet Context

In addition to its connection to Siberian regional thought, I contend that the rise to prominence of Siberian literature during the late Soviet period can be understood as part of four wider historical and literary developments unfolding at the time: 1) the realignment of the Soviet literary agenda during the Khrushchev period, 2) the relative decentralization of historiography and a new emphasis on the study of Russia's far-flung regions known as *kraevedenie*, 3) the significance of Siberia as an economic and ideological site of developed socialism, and 4) the state-sanctioned

[30] Anna Razuvalova, *Pisateli-"derevenshchiki": literatura i konservativnaia ideologiia 1970-kh godov*, Nauchnoe prilozhenie ; vyp. CXXXXVI (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 7; Parthe, *Russian Village Prose*.
[31] Naomi Caffee coined the term "Russophone literature" to describe this tendency among Soviet national minority writers in Central Asia. She proposes that the term can serve as a means of broadening categories for describing literature written in Russian. (See "Russophonia: Towards a Transnational Conception of Russian-Language Literature" (UCLA, 2013), 15–24.)
[32] Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 333–35.

political dissent and renewed interest in the past taking place during the Brezhnev period. The section that follows is intended to provide general historical context for each of these four developments as they relate to Siberian literature. More specific historicization of individual works will take place in subsequent chapters.

1) As I have stated previously, historians and literary scholars of village prose and national minority literatures, the two primary movements with which late Soviet Siberian literature is generally associated, understand them as thematically and stylistically similar movements sharing an interest in ruralism, a past-oriented moral vision, and an interest in lyric, epic, and folk genres.[33] Both movements emerged in the late fifties, a time when Soviet official literature was undergoing massive ideological and formal changes in response to the cultural de-Stalinization taking place under Nikita Khrushchev. Although political de-Stalinization began in earnest following Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin's cult of personality in February 1956, literary historians typically trace the beginnings of literary de-Stalinization to Vladimir Pomerantsev's essay "On Sincerity in Literature" (*Ob iskrennosti v literature*). Published in December, 1953, just ten months after Stalin's death, the essay is widely regarded as the "first manifesto of the post-Stalin liberal intelligentsia," and the work that "set the terms for many subsequent literary and political debates during the thaw."[34] Although Pomerantsev did not stray from the Socialist Realist notion that Soviet literature should promote a set of ideologically appropriate ideals, he argued against its formulaic "varnishing of reality" in favor of showing the ways in which socialist ideals are illustrated in the actions and experiences of real individuals. Instead of teaching through formulaic epics with heroes and villains, literature could achieve its moral-didactic ends by showing, through mimetic literary representation, how acting both according to one's individual conscience and in favor of the public good can result in a more ideal society.[35] The essay sees "sincerity" in part as in part as an intimate connection between author, text, and reader. Pomerantsev argues that readers are only willing to deeply engage with and learn from a literary work if they find its characters and events genuine and believable in relation to their own experiences and struggles as humans. The writer must therefore strive to represent events as he genuinely experiences and judges them from within, even though those experiences may be complicated and subjective. Similarly, the writer should be able to understand and reproduce the complexity of his subjects; to do so he must not only make himself personally familiar with them, but he should also learn to listen and empathize, acknowledging that each individual has their own personal history and struggles that influence her perception of the world.[36]

Cultural surveys of the Khrushchev period note a turn away from the grand epic and plot-driven forms of Stalinist literature to subdued and internally driven stories that focus on the private life and subjective experiences of a handful of typical Soviet citizens. During the Khrushchev period, the didactic function of Socialist realism was thus achieved through the mimetic representation of Soviet subjects confronted with moral-ideological dilemmas in their everyday lives. Readers could learn to be better citizens in their public and private lives by empathizing with characters' thought processes and applying the lessons derived from these

[33] See Note 3.
[34] Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State 1917 to the Present*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Verso Books, 1989), 140; Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 50.
[35] Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 46–48.
[36] V. Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi mir* 12 (1953): 218–45.

processes and their outcomes in their own lives. Literature of the period thus had a civic quality in line with the politics of de-Stalinization laid forth in Khruschev's Secret Speech of February, 1956; in many works protagonists fought corruption within the Soviet bureaucracy for the sake of socialist ideals.[37] Many of the Siberian writers in this project became writers against this literary backdrop and, as I will argue, traces of Pomerantsev's literary formulation of sincerity can be found in the authors' underlying aims, and literary style. These traces include a common belief that the authentic representation of Siberian lived experience could serve a moral purpose in contemporary Soviet society, and that experimentation with narrative perspective and the author-text-reader relationship could achieve these aims.

2) De-Stalinization also led to a nationwide turn to *kraevedenie*, or "regional studies," consisting of locally centered research by local libraries, universities, and museums that sought to determine a particular region or town's place in the national narrative. The state initiated such projects to re-invigorate Soviet citizens' sense of pride by emphasizing their localities' individual roles in national history. This was intended to serve as a more accessible alternative to the totalizing mythmaking of Stalinist historiography, which had favored a centralized narrative of history that reinforced Stalin's cult of personality. Such "fragmentation of national memory along regional lines" allowed for multiple perspectives (within reason) of historical events and gave Soviet individuals a stake in creating narratives of local history, placing increasing pressure on central state to pay attention to local and regional demands. As Victoria Donovan argues, although *kraevedenie* was initially intended to function within official state organs, in practice its development was highly decentralized, with amateur enthusiasts and highly localized institutions such as libraries and social organizations steering its development in individual localities. As such, late Soviet *kraevedenie* and the regional forms of identity it cultivated developed somewhat autonomously and outside of the strict control of the state.[38] I will discuss the further impact of *kraevedenie* on *Sibiriak* Village Prose writers such as Valentin Rasputin in Chapter Two.

3) Regionally, the rapid urbanization and large-scale industrialization of Siberia which took place during the Khrushchev period and the transition to "developed socialism" as it was introduced during the Brezhnev period led to massive geographic and demographic changes that would propel Siberia to the center of ideological discourse and permanently alter everyday life there. As cultural critics Genis and Vail wrote, recovery from the blight of Stalinism required an unfettered field of action: "The old myth about Siberia became imbued with new content. If [the country] was to strive once more towards now-tattered ideals, then it followed to do so in the virginal Siberian lands. Not to clear away the ruins of unsuccessful socialism, but to build it anew."[39] Siberia quickly became the economic and ideological center of the "scientific-technical revolution," a chance to demonstrate Soviet technological progress and envision a more democratic path forward for socialist reconstruction following the horrors of Stalinism and the war. Given its wealth of unused space and untapped natural resources, Siberia became the site of

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[37] For a history of how this civic tendency in late Soviet literature developed in the early years of the Thaw, see George Gibian, *Interval of Freedom: Soviet Literature During the Thaw, 1954-1957* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 191–209. Leiderman and Lipovetskii have referred to this tendency within late Soviet literature as "Socialist Realism with a human face" (*Sovremennaia russkaia literatura. 1950-1990-e gody*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Akademiia, 2013), 89.

[38] Victoria Donovan, "'How Well Do You Know Your Krai?' The Kraevedenie Revival and Patriotic Politics in Late Khrushchev-Era Russia," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 3 (2015): 464–83.

[39] Petr Vail′ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e– mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 82.

sweeping land-transformation and resource extraction campaigns, including the Virgin Lands campaign of 1954, which was intended to increase Soviet agricultural output through the settlement of the "unused" lands in the Western Siberian and Kazakh steppes. Other efforts to excavate new mines, drill for oil and gas, harness rivers through hydroelectric dams, and conquer Siberian distance through modern infrastructure projects soon followed throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies. They were accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign intended to recruit idealistic young Komsomol members to join cadres of workers in the national history-making taking place there. This resulted in significant demographic growth in the region as this contemporary wave of *Sibiriak* pioneers flocked to remote regions of Siberia to support industry in the newly constructed cities cropping up there.[40] The chapters to follow will provide a more in-depth look at how transformations enacted by the scientific-technical revolution such as hydroelectric dam construction, industrial whaling, and infrastructural expansion impacted specific writers and their communities.

4) The literary concerns of late Soviet literature, particularly of works interested in environmental and cultural conservation (whether by Russian *derevenshchiki* or national minority writers) are often linked to several related policy changes that took place under Brezhnev between 1964 and 1983. Both Soviet/Russian and Western analysts of the Cold War have linked these policies to the general societal and cultural atmosphere of "stagnation," or *zastoi*, as it was coined by Gorbachev to describe the historical retrenchment, inhibited economic growth, and reinstatement of neo-Stalinist, conservative party hegemony taking place under Brezhnev.[41] Recent historical studies of the period have sought to reconsider some of these assumptions, and increasingly understand the period as emerging out of Khrushchev-era ideology and unfolding synchronously with historical developments in the West.[42] Some cultural historians have similarly advocated decoupling the term "stagnation" from its associations as a period of cultural stand-still to account for the vibrancy taking place in both official and unofficial avenues of discourse.[43] Although this project draws on sources that rely on both formulations of the era, it aligns itself to the newer, more revisionist approach, particularly in its reading of Brezhnev-era temporality. Ultimately, while Brezhnev-era official literature is typically understood in terms of its neo-traditionalism and its past-orientation – particularly towards the deep past – I suggest that Siberian writers' turn to tradition is in part symptomatic of the complex attitudes towards the *present* and *future* during the period, particularly as it manifested itself in decentralized social and private spaces.

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[40] For a succinct history of the scientific-technical revolution in Siberia see Paul Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[41] Edwin Bacon, "Brezhnev Reconsidered," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.

[42] See, for example, Neringa Klumbyte and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964–1985* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2013); Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Natalya Chernysheva, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

[43] These analyses generally take place within the fields of cultural studies, such as Christine Evans' history of Soviet television and Anna Fishzon's queering of late Soviet animation and social practice. See Christine Elaine Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television*, 1st edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); Anna Fishzon, "The Fog of Stagnation: Explorations of Time and Affect in Late Soviet Animation," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 56, no. 2/3 (2015): 571–98; Anna Fishzon, "Queue Time as Queer Time: An Occasion for Pleasure and Desire in the Brezhnev Era and Today," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 61, no. 3 (2017): 542–66.

Many of the sociocultural features of the stagnation are understood to be related to Brezhnev's ideology of "Developed Socialism," which was officially defined and incorporated into the party platform in 1972 but developed gradually throughout the sixties.[44] Developed Socialism was understood to be an intermediary stage of development between socialism and communism, when collectivization and the socialist restructuring of the economy (measured by rapid growth of hard-industrial production) was already complete and in the process of gradually "maturing" or being perfected before its natural evolution into full-scale communism. Brezhnev argued that the rapid economic growth taking place under Khrushchev had advanced Soviet society into this stage and that the task of the party going forward should be to facilitate the gradual transition into communism by perfecting existing facets of national society and the economy. Therefore, as Sandle notes, Developed Socialism was not so much an "abandonment of utopia" or its future-orientation, but rather a slowing of the pace taken in getting there. The Party's central priorities thus focused on identifying ways to perfect the system in the present, including overcoming scarcity, increasing technological efficiency, and democratizing the state (at least superficially) by incorporating a variety of perspectives and fields of expertise into party leadership while still upholding the party-mediated ideology of socialism.[45] Such improvements could also serve a diplomatic purpose: in demonstrating its economic stability, cultural/scientific enlightenment, and more democratic representation of its populace in party ranks, the Soviet Union could compete with capitalist nations as a world leader and poster-child for socialist success.[46]

One strategy for democratizing party leadership was through the "policy of inclusion," a term describing informal liberalizing measures taken by the party that were intended to engage and retain intellectuals within party structures by allowing for mediated debates (and even dissent) on certain ideologically "safe" topics, particularly related to policy matters.[47] The philosophy behind such policies was that creating an atmosphere of healthy debate and allowing individuals to voice their views about policy in a moderated manner would encourage greater participation in planning and policy-making from intellectuals and experts, as well as helping to advance Soviet society further on its gradual path to communism. Two topics central to such debates were ecological conservation and questions of national identity and heritage.[48] Given the centrality of both themes in Russian village prose, the movement's relative success as a party sanctioned literary form of dissent has been explicitly tied to such policies.[49] National identity was also central to debates taking place among the non-Russian intellectual elite. Jeremy Smith observes that Brezhnev-era ideology "had contradictory effects on the nationalities," particularly

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[44] Mark Sandle, "Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of Zastoi?" in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 175–83.

[45] Sandle, 169–70.

[46] Sandle, 179–81; Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*, 185–89.

[47] The term was coined in 1975 by American political scientist Kenneth Jowitt and has since been subsequently used by historians to describe this form of party-sanctioned debate during the Brezhnev era. (See Kenneth Jowitt, "Inclusion and Mobilization In European Leninist Regimes," *World Politics* 28, no. 1 (October 1975): 69–96, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010030; Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, electronic resource, Russian Research Center Studies 91 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 16–17.)

[48] Josephson posits that ecological conservation was of particular interest for the Soviet government due to its importance in relation to international diplomacy of the era, particularly due to its more active participation in UNESCO proceedings on cultural heritage and the environment throughout the seventies (189-205).

[49] Razuvalova, *Pisateli-"derevenshchiki"*, 7–13.

in debates about the relationship between national and Soviet culture. Officially, Brezhnev-era discourse characterized nationality similarly to the Stalinist-era friendship between peoples, framing Soviet culture as "socialist in content, multifaceted in national forms, and international in spirit and character." However, perceived inequities between national and Russian culture became a growing source of contention in national party leadership as rural populations increasingly moved to urban centers for professional opportunities, many of which required the mastery of Russian language and other forms of cultural assimilation into the default intellectual culture. As such, national party elite often advocated for the preservation of national culture through literature and the arts and facilitated debates about perceived inequities between minority and Russian cultures, particularly after Brezhnev's assertion that Developed Socialism had achieved equalization across nationalities. These debates in the seventies have been linked to the fledgling nationalist movements that would grow throughout the eighties.[50]

Finally, much has been made about the temporal shift that took place between the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, which occurred in various forms on various planes of public and private life. Generally, this shift is understood as a turn away from the rapid, future-oriented temporal discourse that was instituted under Khrushchev's policies and a renewed interest in the past and present as viable discursive modes. Although varied in their framing, many studies often understand Brezhnev-era temporality in terms of its heritage politics, that is the necessity of identifying and preserving artefacts of a national or local past as objects of moral or educational value.[51] Others understand it according to what Anna Fishzon terms a "temporal and rhetorical […] impasse" due to the fact that "the eschatology that initially underpinned Soviet life had broken down" thanks to the silencing of the Stalinist past and the deferment of the utopian communist future under Developed Socialism.[52] The works in this project vary in their distinct temporal orientations and often share elements of the varying temporalities described above. Yet their authors often shared a sense of the tempered optimism about the future inherent in the ideology of Developed Socialism. In many cases, the turn to the past, and its instantiation in the lived present, serve as models through which fictional Siberian subjects and their Soviet readership can understand a gradual path towards a better future.

Siberian Writers in Russian Literary Studies

It is difficult to piece together a clear picture of Siberian literature and the role of Siberian regionalism in the wider field of Russian literature, a fact reflected in the uneven scholarship on the topic. This difficulty is reflected in the slipperiness of terminology that would allow us to distinguish between literature *about* Siberia from literature emerging *from* Siberia.[53] For the

[50] Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 217–20, 244-51.

[51] See Corinne Geering, "Protecting the Heritage of Humanity in the Cold War: UNESCO, the Soviet Union and Sites of Universal Value, 1945–1970s," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26, no. 12 (December 1, 2020): 1132–47; Parthe, *Russian Village Prose*; Ekaterina Melnikova, "By the People's Hands: The Sledopyt Movement in the USSR of the 1960s-80s," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 2018, no. 4 (2018): 107–36.

[52] Fishzon, "Queue Time as Queer Time," 543.

[53] Literary terminology has historically been a point of debate among Siberian intellectuals, who sought more precise vocabulary for distinguishing between the two. Vladimir Iarantsev traces a history of these debates from their nascent form in the regionalist writings of the late-nineteenth century to more formal debates within Siberian regional literary groups during the Soviet period. (See "Literatura Sibiri ili sibirskaia literatura? O putiakh razvutiia regional'noi literatury," *Sibirskie ogni* 2013, no. 11 (November 2013): 171–77.) In general, the term "Siberian text" (*sibirskii tekst*) is used to describe works written *about* Siberia, while "Siberian literature" (*sibirskaia literatura*) is

purposes of this project, I understand "Siberian literature" to mean literature by Siberian writers written about Siberian themes. The Siberian sense of regional self-consciousness cultivated throughout the 19th and 20th centuries has developed into a robust interdisciplinary academic field of Siberian studies, *sibirevedenie*, which is generally conducted by Siberian scholars and spans fields such as Siberian history, ethnography, ecology, and culture. Nevertheless, there is a surprising dearth of Russian and Western scholarship on Siberian literature as a multiethnic, regional phenomenon. Starting in the Soviet period, much of the critical conceptualization of Siberian literature (or the "literature of Siberia," as it was commonly called) was taking place within regional literary institutions, and through the editorial gatekeeping of regional literary publications, the historical significance of which I will later discuss. Although the extent to which this "literature of Siberia" centered Siberian regional perspective varied, collections of literary works (in the form of journals and anthologies) published by the regional and national press generally understood Siberian regional literature as a constellation of three distinct perspectives, framed as distinct "literatures" in their own right: Russian literature by *Sibiriak* writers; the national literatures of Siberia's Indigenous peoples (written in either the national language or Russian); and important literary works about Siberia by outsider visitors.[54]

Some scholarly and popular references published in the post-Soviet period have opted to follow a similar but modified nested model for Siberian literature, lessening the emphasis on "Siberian texts" written by outsiders and privileging texts and authors from Siberia.[55] However, Russian and Western scholarly analysis of Siberian literature has tended to take a narrower approach, focusing on individual analytical categories that fall under the broader umbrella of Siberian literature. As Komarov and Lagunova have surmised, the greater part of Russian *sibirevedenie* tends to belong to one of four specific categories:[56] studies of the specific national literatures of Siberia's indigenous peoples; semiotic studies of specific "local texts" belonging to geographically distinct territories within Siberia (such as Altai or Baikal); historical studies of

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the preferred term among contemporary Siberia scholars for describing regionally-conscious literature by Siberian writers. One common term, "Literature of Siberia" (*literatura Sibiri*), is often used interchangeably to describe either or both, creating a certain sense of ambiguity in Siberian literary scholarship outside of the narrow field of regional Siberian Studies.

[54] Valentin Rasputin adheres to a similar characterization of Siberian literature(s) in his review of a literary anthology of works by young Siberian writers (Valentin Rasputin et al., "Molodaia Sibir' i molodoi pisatel'," *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, April 27, 1973). Several comprehensive reference works were published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences during the late Soviet period, including *Episodes in Russian Siberian Literature* (*Ocherki russkoi literatury Sibiri*), a two-volume encyclopedic history of Siberian literature, and *A Literary Heritage of Siberia in Eight Volumes* (*Literaturnoe nasledstvo Sibiri v 8 t.*), an anthology of Siberian literary sources organized by theme (A. P. Okladnikov et al., ed., *Ocherki russkoi literatury sibiri v 2 t.*, 2 vols. (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otd-nie, 1982); N. N. Ianovskii, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo Sibiri v 8 t.*, 8 vols. (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1956). Despite the ideological biases they display, Siberian scholars credit such works for their detailed and textologically grounded history of Siberian writing, and as pioneering attempts to conceptualize Siberian literature as a distinct regional movement. Several reference volumes written after 1991 period position themselves as post-Soviet continuations of this project.

[55] See, for instance, Gorshenin's 2012 encyclopedic reference volume *Literature and Writers of Siberia* (*Literatura i pisateli Sibiri*), which builds on a 1997 manuscript by former Nauka scholar N. N. Ianovskii in order to "present Siberian literature more fully" to both academic and popular readerships by expanding its purview of historical sources and including Russian and non-Russian writers from both the Siberian and Far Eastern administrative regions (Aleksei Gorshenin, *Literatura i pisateli sibiri: Entsiklopedicheskoe izdanie* (Novosibirsk: Novosibirsk branch of the Russian Writers' Union, 2012), 2.)

[56] Komarov, S. A. and Lagunova, O. K., *Literatura Sibiri: Missiia, etnichnost', aksiologiia* (Tiumen': Izdatel'stvo Tiumenskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2016), 5.

individual cultural movements and centers within Siberian literature; and studies of individual Siberian writers situated within the broader Russian literary tradition.[57] Similarly, Western literary scholarship on Siberian writers tends to situate them within broader national literary trends, or in terms of the poetics of individual writers. The most comprehensive body of existing western scholarship has focused on individual *Sibiriak* writers' contributions to the Village Prose movement, and their later alignment with Russian ethnonationalism in the eighties and nineties. Since local identity was an important facet of Village Prose, Siberia's presence is often felt indirectly in scholarly analyses of spatial figuration and ethnographic detail, although the region itself is rarely treated with any degree of specificity.[58] Although Indigenous and *Sibiriak* writers collaborated and published together in Siberian literary organizations and publications, region is rarely evoked in Western and Russian scholarship on Siberia's Indigenous writers. Many studies exist of the contributions of individual writers (most commonly Yuri Rytkheu) to Soviet national minority literatures, while others take a comparative approach to conceptualize Siberian Indigenous literature more broadly.[59]

In contrast, very few scholarly analyses have attempted to articulate *Sibiriak* and Indigenous Siberian literature as a synchronic system, a "conceptual crisis" with which multiple

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[57] Both literary and scholarly anthologies tend to be organized around geographically- or ethnically defined themes to unite scholarship on individual writers, localities, or regions. See, for example N. V. Kovtun, ed., *Sibirskaia identichnost' v zerkale literaturnogo teksta: tropy, toposy, zhanrovye formy XIX-XXI vekov* (Moscow: Nauka, 2015); Natal'ia Tolstikova and Anatolii Stateinov, eds., *Pisateli Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* (Krasnoiarsk: Bukva Stateinova, 2012); V. P. Trushkin, *Literaturnyi Irkutsk. Ocherki, literaturnye portrety, etiudy* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1981). This genre is especially common when discussing Siberian Indigenous literatures, which have been anthologized in collections of regional "national writing" since at least the late 1950s. See, N. N. Ianovskii, ed., *Literatura narodov Sibiri* (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1956); G. I. Lomidze and R. F. Iusufov, eds., *Vzaimodeistvie literatur narodov Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otd-nie, 1983); N. N. Toburokov, *Sovremennaia poeziia narodov Sibiri*, Novoe v zhizni, nauke, tekhnike. Seriia Literatura 3/1986 (Moscow: Znanie, 1986).

[58] For instance, Katerina Clark reads the distance of the local village chronotopes from Moscow as spatial representations of the writers' view that Russians could find salvation by "journey[ing] 'far away from Moscow' not in place but in time" (Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 241). Siberia and other regional settings, thereby served as physical manifestations of the temporal distance between metropolitan modernization, and the romantic Russian past that Village Prose writers longed to replicate in their nationalist politics. Likewise, Kathleen Parthe observes that the formal literary traits that define Village Prose's localism become synecdochic representations of Russian national culture, such as the peasant commune, to which Village prose writers sought to return (Parthe, *Russian Village Prose*, 3–12.). David Gillespie examines these ideas as they pertain more specifically to Siberian writers but again discusses Siberia as a local instance of a broader Russian nationalist vision ("A Paradise Lost? Siberia and Its Writers, 1960 to 1990," in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 1993), 255–73).

[59] Barker and Razumovskaia's literary studies of indigenous writers as practitioners of intergenerational and intercultural translation examine the effects of colonialism, assimilationism, and center-periphery relations on indigenous poetics (See Adele Barker, "The Divided Self: Yuri Rytkheu and Contemporary Chukchi Literature," in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. Yuri Slezkine and Galya Diment (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Veronica Razumovskaya, "Translating Aboriginal Siberian and Circumpolar Cultures in Russia," in *Translators, Interpreters, and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating and Communicating Power from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era*, ed. Federico M. Federici and Dario Tessicini (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 190–212). Yuri Slezkine and Bathsheba Demuth each read Soviet Indigenous writing as primary literary sources by which to trace broader cultural and environmental histories of Siberian and Far Eastern indigenous peoples. While not primarily focused on literature, both works make important observations aboutindigenous writers' use of folklore, ecology and local perspective in response to narratives about indigenous life imposed by the center. See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 352–71; Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (Norton, 2019), 118–19, 126-27, 244-45, 305.

Siberian philologists have expressed frustration.[60] Of the existing attempts to understand Siberian literature in terms of its regionalist poetics, many acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous writers while remaining Russocentric in their approach.[61] This is perhaps due to the lasting impact of regionalist thought and Soviet notions of ethnic identity on Siberian identity formation. (Both pre-revolutionary regionalists and the formulations of Siberia that emerged from multiethnic Russian literary journals adhered in varying ways to the "nested" understanding of Siberian identity described above.) As I have discussed previously, Siberian settler identity was defined in part through the interethnic mixing that took place between local Indigenous populations and European settlers, and while many Russian Siberians (old and new) use this idea to claim a distinct national identity for themselves, Indigenous peoples are often viewed as distinct nationalities with distinct literary and cultural traditions.[62] While I am not disputing this claim, both *Sibiriak* and Indigenous Siberian writers in this study have described themselves as Siberian (*sibirskie*), a regional affiliation reflected in the multiethnic lens through which they frame native place in their works. I therefore align my methodology with the synchronic one taken by Komarov and Lagunova in their recent analysis of Siberian poetics, which examines a broad archive of Siberian literature across nationality, locality, genre and epoch. As one of the first studies of its kind, the authors chose an "open-ended exploratory model" of analysis, using comparative close readings to demonstrate a variety of compelling thematic and stylistic patterns across Siberian literature intended as an "impetus for further study" of individual, focused topics.[63]

Methodology: Towards a Geopoetics of Siberian Spatial Practice

This project seeks to trace one such avenue for the further study of Siberian regional literature, namely the extent to which conceptions of *Siberian place* have helped to shape the poetics of Siberian literature emerging during the late Soviet period. Scholarship on the metropolitan "Siberia text" (generally written about Siberia by outsiders) often understands the mythologies it creates as "imagined" or "imaginative geographies," the means through which the mind perceives and ascribes meaning to space.[64] In the colonial context, the colonizer's imaginative

[60] One prominent scholar complains that Siberian literature is "understudied and unconceptualized" for a literature of its scope, while others complain of existing scholarship's overdependence on the "European gaze" or Soviet ideological bias. See Gorshenin, *Literatura i pisateli sibiri: Entsiklopedicheskoe izdanie*, 3; Kazarkin, "Proza Sibiri v XX veke"; Komarov, S. A. and Lagunova, O. K., *Literatura Sibiri: Missiia, etnichnost', aksiologiia*, 5–6; I. I. Plekhanova, ed., *Tvorcheskaia lichnost' Valentina Rasputina. Zhivopis' - chuvstvo - mysl' - voobrazhenie - otkrovenie* (Irkutsk: Izd-vo IGU, 2015), 4.

[61] For instance, prominent Siberian literary historian Aleksei Gorshenin includes Indigenous writers in his encyclopedic reference guide *Literatura i pisateli Sibiri*, but his historically oriented scholarly analyses focus on "Russian literature of Siberia" (*russkaia literatura Sibiri*), centering an ethically Russian *Sibiriak* perspective. (See, for example Aleksei Gorshenin, *Chetyre stoletiia puti. Besedy o russkoi literature Sibiri* (Litres, 2022).)

[62] Edith Clowes argues that "contemporary Siberian self-awareness" in the Putin era can be connected to both in her discussion of how contemporary Siberian imagined geographies are formed through "the historical development of various Siberian movements, how Siberians identify, and what they wanted from their relationship to European Russia" ("Being a Sibiriak in Contemporary Siberia: Imagined Geography and Vocabularies of Identity in Regional Writing Culture," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 2, no. 1 (August 22, 2013): 51).

[63] Komarov, S. A. and Lagunova, O. K., *Literatura Sibiri: Missiia, etnichnost', aksiologiia*, 5–6.

[64] See for example, Bassin, "Inventing Siberia"; Valerii Tiupa, "The Mythologeme of Siberia," *Orbis Litterarum* 61, no. 6 (2006): 443–60; G. Diment and Y. Slezkine, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (Springer, 2016).

geography of the colony (and by extension the colonized "Other") is self-reflexive, in that the traits and features that are perceived as Other or exotic can, through their relational opposition to the perceived norm, reflect back traits that the colonizer ascribes to themselves and their own geography.[65] More recently, Edith Clowes has argued that imagined geography, which she defines as "patterns of predominant metaphors of geographically and geopolitically located identity that [Siberians…] use to delineate the markers of place […]; and […] the relation […] of those places to crucial systems of values and to specific issues of self-understanding and identity," can be used to understand "vocabularies of [regional] self-identity."[66] Clowes identifies these Siberian imagined geographies in contemporary literary depictions of place. I contend that these imagined literary geographies not only provide insight into Siberian self-identity, but also constitute the primary means through which late Soviet Siberian writers sought to generate a distinct regional poetics, one shaped by the desire to authentically represent Siberian experiences of place. Before establishing how such literary geographies might look and be read, it is first crucial to understand the relational dynamics at play in how place is perceived and represented.

Beginning with the nineteenth-century *oblastniki*, Siberian intellectuals have tended to understand regional history and identity as a geographical dialectic between Siberia and the Russian metropole, which is often understood as one of two competing spatial "gazes" (*vzgliady*), those that look on Siberian space "from the outside" (*vzgliad so storony/storonnii vzgliad*) as visitors or strangers versus those that look "from the inside" (*vzgliad iznutri/vnutrennii vzgliad*) through local lived experience.[67] According to regionalist thought (in its historic and current form), the outsider's gaze historically shaped Siberia's colonization and continues to define administrative policy, as well as scientific and popular discourse about Siberia, often to the detriment of regional interests. Valentin Rasputin described these two gazes as a phenomenological problem, arguing that a person can only fully understand and come to love Siberia through prolonged, embodied experience: "Siberia has the ability not to stun people, nor to immediately surprise them, but to pull people into itself slowly and almost involuntarily, with deliberate calculation, and, once having pulled them in, to attach itself firmly. And that's it – the person becomes infected with Siberia." Rasputin illustrates this phenomenon using travelogues by Chekhov and Goncharov that depict the authors' experience of crossing Siberia from opposite ends, Chekhov from the west and Goncharov from the east. Rasputin observes that both accounts follow a similar structural arc in their narration of Siberian space: as the narrators' journeys progress through time and space, readers can detect a gradual tonal shift in the descriptions of Siberian territory from distanced alienation to deep affection for the surrounding environment. Since each account starts at an opposite end of the territory, Rasputin notes that this shift is dependent not so much on the exact locales that authors were describing, but instead to a given point in the traveler's journey, the moment of "infection" taking place after the traveler has spent multiple weeks in the taiga. The transition also demonstrates how lived experience of space affects its literary representation: Rasputin notes that following the moment of infection, descriptions of Siberia become more nuanced and abundant in sensory detail when compared to the detached generalizations inherent in accounts of the early days of the trip. For

[65] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014), 71–95.
[66] Clowes, "Being a Sibiriak in Contemporary Siberia," 50.
[67] Valentin Rasputin, "Sibir' bez romantiki," in *Sibir', Sibir'* (Irkutsk: Arm Izdat, 2000). Although I borrow these terms most directly from Valentin Rasputin, this turn of phrase seemingly predates him and is common in both historical and contemporary analysis of the region.

Rasputin, authentic spatial knowledge of Siberia can only be obtained by becoming *familiar* with it through repeated encounters with space over a prolonged duration of time.[68]

Familiarity and lived experience are important geographic criteria for understanding the nature of various social spaces. For geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, familiarity is one of the most important ways in which humans organize space and ascribe it meaning. Tuan differentiates between *space,* a potentially boundless expanse existing objectively in the world, and *place*, which are the conceptual means by which humans organize space. According to Tuan, space becomes place once humans "get to know it better and endow it with value." The means by which humans categorize and perceive place can be determined on a spectrum between "concrete knowledge," (sometimes called "lived space" or "real space") based on firsthand sensory experiences of one's spatial surroundings, and "abstract knowledge," which is determined through secondhand information and models about a place (such as information obtained from stories, scientific references, or maps).[69] As a person becomes more and more familiar with a given place over time, and as he experiences more and more places, his concrete knowledge of place expands drastically. Concrete knowledge of place is therefore not only spatial, but temporal: it is gradually acquired by the continuous extension of the physical body, mediated through subjective consciousness, into space. This knowledge is also relational, in that it is organized according to the centered subject's *orientation* towards an object. According to Tuan, *intimately experienced places* or dwelling places are the means through which the subject's spatial orientation is centered due to the accumulation of repeated experiences of that place. These experiences also often serve as schemas through which the subject becomes oriented in unfamiliar places.[70] Sara Ahmed refers to the process of spatial orientation as one of "inhabitance," or that of "extending bodies into new spaces" in order to "mak[e] the strange familiar."[71] A subject becomes familiar with a space (or gains concrete knowledge of it) by both following maps/schemas written by others, and also, through his own agency, by drawing the maps himself.[72] The literary effects that Rasputin describes when authors became "infected with Siberia" can thus be understood as the result of becoming oriented to Siberia, in that the stylistic and tonal shifts that take place occur as the narrator gradually obtains concrete knowledge of Siberian place.

Michel de Certeau views embodied relationships to space (or concrete knowledge of space) in terms of their potential to subvert hegemonic control, which he models through the

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[68] Rasputin, "Sibir' bez romantiki" 35–38.

[69] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 5–7. Tuan's model of abstract and concrete knowledge correspond roughly with Lefebvre's "real" and "ideal" spaces, with real spaces defined as pertaining to concrete social interactions, whereas ideal spaces exist as purely rational ideas about space.

[70] Tuan, 136–48. For Tuan, "intimate experiences of place" are synonymous with feeling at home. This feeling is in part related to the deep familiarity and attachment to place that is acquired through the accumulation of repeated experiences there.

[71] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

[72] This process is akin to de Certeau's concept of "practiced space." Like Tuan, de Certeau distinguishes between place and space, but his models are more like Tuan's models of concrete and abstract knowledge of place. For de Certeau, "space" would correspond with Tuan's concrete, phenomenological knowledge of place. It can be "practiced" by individual subjects, who do so by interacting with their surroundings, by moving through established static places through personal agency. "Place" for de Certeau corresponds more with abstract knowledge of place, those top-down models of a place described by maps, histories, or plans, and often dictated by a source that may or may not dwell within a space.

example of walking in the modern city. He argues that walking is an everyday *spatial practice*, a bottom-up process governed by the everyday lives of "ordinary practitioners" who navigate space with their bodies. Spatial practices such as walking are subjective and spontaneous and" "make use of spaces that cannot be seen," relying on concrete sensory knowledge. The networks of intersecting paths "written" spontaneously by individual subjects together compose the "lived space" of the city, a "manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces."[73] Because these embodied spatial practices are primarily sensory and spontaneous, and because they often elude visual representation, the lived space that they generate resists the totalizing qualities of "theoretical" or "conceptual" administrative spatial organization, such as city planning and cartography, which are often the instruments of hegemonic control.[74] Although de Certeau examines spatial practice through the study of urban space, his understanding of the power relations underlying spatial knowledge demonstrate many similarities to the Siberian regionalist formulation of identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As we have established, regionalist thought in Siberia was in part founded on mistrust towards state theorizations and abstractions of Siberian space, and that discourse formed through the concrete knowledge from inhabitants of Siberia could better represent regional interests on a national stage. In some senses, Siberian literature was thus founded on the assumption that the mimetic representation of spatial practice could help to overcome the flattening effects of abstract representations of space, which they viewed as a tool of the metropole. As this dissertation will demonstrate, in the Soviet context, Siberian writers often viewed the literary representation of spatial practice as a means of subverting state discourse on Siberia in an ideologically acceptable manner, even as the very act of *representing* spatial practice often inadvertently recreated some of the very totalizing qualities that conceptual space imposes.

Tuan's "place," Ahmed's "orientation," and de Certeau's "spatial practice" all encompass the complex relationships between subject and object and between materiality and abstraction that are at play when we ascribe meaning to space. Henri Lefebvre argues that space (as it is ascribed meaning by humans) is produced by a complex network of such relationships, which can be categorized as a dialectical triad of three constituent parts.[75] Firstly spatial practice, or *perceived space*, describes how material space is perceived sensorily and navigated by the body in everyday, lived experience. Secondly, representations of space, or *conceived space*, are the abstract or rational representations of space, such as maps, models, plans, and other schema, that are created by humans. Thirdly, representational space, or *lived space* describes the ways in which the imaginative mind ascribes meaning to the space it perceives through the bodily senses and is often evoked in artistic representation. Collectively, the network of relationships created by the dialectical negotiation of these meanings of space generates "social space," which is produced in every society according to its distinct sets of spatial relationships.[76]

Geographer Edward Soja argues that although Lefebvre's formulation of *lived space* was often read as a "simple combination or mixture of the 'real'[perceived] and 'the imagined' [conceived] in varying doses," such readings rely on the dualistic modes of spatial thinking that

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[73] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, 3rd edition (Berkeley, Calif. u.a.: University of California Press, 2011), 93.
[74] Certeau, 92–93.
[75] Edward Soja calls this a "triple dialectic." See *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 7.
[76] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 68–168.

Lefebvre himself was trying to avoid in his "triple dialectic" or "trialectic" model of space. Soja reads the "thirding" of the spatial imagination embodied in Lefebvre's social production of space as emerging from an "urban, or […] more generally spatial crisis spreading all over the world" starting in the late 1960s sparked by the "end of the long postwar economic boom," a moment that sparked a "restructuring-generated crisis" due to the massive social changes that had taken place as the result of urban restructuring and postmodernization during the postwar period.[77] In response to this crisis, spatial thinkers such as Lefebvre and Foucault sought alternative forms of spatial thinking that moved beyond the dualism of space as either real (material), imaginary (abstract), or a combination of the two. Instead, they sought modes of thinking that both "dr[ew] upon the material and mental spaces of [this] traditional dualism but extend[ed] well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning" to encompass spatial knowledge that reflect the experience of the Other. These new forms of spatial knowledge could theoretically be applied in a variety of disciplines, including not only traditionally spatial ones, such as geography, architecture and urban planning, but also literary and cultural scholarship.[78] Soja coined the term "real-and-imagined place" to encapsulate the complex, hybridized relationships at play in Lefebvre's "trialectic" understanding of social space as a combination of *perceived, conceived*, and *lived*.[79] According to this trialectic, "no one mode of spatial thinking is inherently privileged or intrinsically 'better than others' as long as each remains open to the recombinations and simultaneities of the 'real-and-imagined'" modes of spatiality.[80] Although Soja primarily uses the term in the service of his broader concept of Thirdspace, which requires combining concrete and abstract spatial knowledge with conscious spatial actions to enact change and resolve some of the inequities triggered by the global spatial crisis of the late-nineteen sixties, he applies the term liberally to more broadly describe the attributes of the "thirding" of spatial thinking that took place during the period, including in the work of spatial philosophers, works of literature, and in the spatial practices of postmodern Los Angeles.

As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, Siberian regional literature as it emerged in the sixties and seventies was itself the product of the global spatial crisis that Soja describes, and its poetics of space in many ways reflect Siberia's changing spatial dynamics (both material and abstract). For my purposes, Soja's concept of *real-and-imagined place* likewise embodies the complex relational geographies at play in literary representations of Siberia, in that it considers the extent to which material space (such as topography and climate) exerts influence upon representational form (just as abstract or imaginary knowledge of space exerts influence on how it is perceived). Furthermore, the term encompasses the extent to which the literary representation of the bodily inhabitance of native place generates alternative modes of spatial knowledge for translating the experience of the Soviet geographic Other, even if it would simultaneously recreate them. The complexity of these dynamics become apparent once we take into account the conscious stylization of Siberian spatial practice that the authors in this study were attempting to undertake. If we return briefly to Lefebvre, Rasputin cites Chekhov and Goncharov's travelogues to describe the experience of Siberian *lived space*, or *spatial practice*—that is, he cites the experience of how their perceptions of Siberia change as they develop

[77] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 11, 22–23.
[78] Soja, 11. Soja cites Foucault's formulation of heterotopia, which I will discuss in Chapter Four, as another example of this spatial turn in scholarship.
[79] Soja, 10–11. Soja uses *real-and-imagined place* interchangeably with his term.
[80] Soja, 65.

embodied relationships to the space, which serves as a corrective for abstract spatial knowledge of the region. However, Rasputin's reading neglects the dimension of *representational space* that is at play in the composition of the texts themselves: as artistic representations, the texts are an imaginative interpretation and stylization of Siberian spatial practice, one that is also informed by the rational spatial representations through which their initial "outsider's gaze" of Siberia was determined. What, then, does the literary *representational space* of Siberia look like for writers concerned with "authentically" conveying Siberian *spatial practice* of native place to a broad readership, for whom the *social space* of Siberia incurs differing meanings depending on orientation? In the minds of Siberian regionalists and their successors, accurate representation of Siberian native place (that is, the spatial practice of intimate place) could play a moral-didactic role in the fight for regional self-determination. By promoting a literary language that reflected what they believed to be regional character, which was itself determined via centuries of embodied relationships to the local environment, Siberian literature could stake a regional claim in a national literary tradition that had previously excluded it, and in doing so, could also transmit this embodied knowledge to a readership for whom Siberian *representational space* was most often been determined by the *represention of space* found in the maps, government policies, and discursive traditions of metropolitan outsiders.

Ironically, in orienting themselves in opposition to metropolitan imaginary geographies of Siberia, Siberian writers produce an abstracted representational space that is unconsciously dependent on the imaginary geographies that they attempt to resist. Since the concept of *spatial practice* is inherently phenomenological, and relies on the body's perception of its sensory encounters with the material environment, a conscious *representational poetics* of Siberian place (defined in part by embodied spatial practices) necessarily concerns itself with embodied relationships to the material world, and the abstractions of that world represented in the imagined geography of native place in the text therefore contain stylized elements that echo the forms of those real, embodied spatial practices. This connection is inherent in both the nineteenth-century regionalist assertion that Siberian literature should be a "refraction of the Russian national spirit under the rays of the Siberian sun" shaped by "new [forms] corresponding to [Siberian] surroundings,"[81] and in Rasputin's argument that people could only come to know Siberia through prolonged, embodied experience.

This also held true for Indigenous national writers attempting to identify a national literary voice reflective of their people's worldview. The field of environmental studies has adopted the term Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to describe the ways in which Indigenous worldviews are interconnected with the local environment.[82] Pierotti and Wildcat define Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a "way of thinking and concept of community" shared among many Indigenous cultures that rests on the assumption that "history cannot be separated from the entire geography, biology, and environment to which [a community] belong[s]" and a sense that "no single organism can exist without the web of other life forms that surround it and make its existence possible." This sense of connectedness to place and community between human and non-human entities contributes to a worldview that is at once spatial, ethical, political and epistemological.[83] Liz Cameron, who writes from an Indigenous

[81] Potanin, "Nuzhdy Sibiri," 267–68.
[82] The terms Traditional Indigenous Knowledge (TIK) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) are synonymous terms for describing the same set of concepts.
[83] Raymond Pierotti and Daniel Wildcat, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The Third Alternative (Commentary)," *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (October 2000), 1334-1336.

Australian perspective, identifies four "principles of knowing" on which such "localized" ecological knowledge forms are often based: "traditional knowledge" transmitted through ancestral ties, "current knowledge" based on experimentation and adaptation to change, "revealed knowledge" acquired through spiritual encounters, and "embodied knowledge" acquired through "human and non-human sensory connections." Embodied knowledge describes knowledge acquired through bodily connection to place, defined as both "geographical representation" and the "historical set of lived experiences passed down" generationally through narrative and ritual practices.[84] The worldviews that fall under the category of Traditional Ecological Knowledge are therefore deeply shaped by embodied spatial practice, and ancestral spatial practice represented and transmitted through narrative, artistic and spiritual practice. As such, TEK is highly localized, dependent on the conditions in which ancestral and contemporary knowledge is formed, accumulated, and transmitted.

Given the influence of embodied, material knowledge on the Siberian understanding of both their own identities and of their conscious literary project, I argue that late Soviet literary representations of place inadvertently attempt to textually map "real-and-imagined Siberian place." I use Soja's term, rather than Clowes' "imaginary geography" to encompass the material, as well as mental geographies that emerge from Siberia as a lived or native place. Just as the material and the mental inherently impress upon each other in Lefebvre's understanding of lived place, so too does the material seep into and shape its literary representation. Although the precise form of these geographies varies according to local and ethnic differences in how space is produced, their ascribed commonalities point to a regional poetics concerned with the mimetic representation of Siberian relationships to native place. In mapping native place as it is locally produced, Siberian literature could theoretically provide a textual schema through which geographically dispersed readers could (through the reading process) gradually become oriented to the Siberian worldview, through which the text could deliver moral insights about community- and place-based relationships at risk of being erased through processes of urbanization and natural resource extraction.

This project is thus concerned with locating the *geopoetic* dimensions of late Soviet Siberian writing about region. W. J. T. Mitchell defines *geopoetics* as "the question of landscape, the poetics and iconology of space and place, and all their relations to social and political life, to experience, to history."[85] Geopoetics was intentionally defined broadly to encompass a variety of methodological approaches to both space and poetics, ranging from geological to geopolitical forms of reading.[86] These methodologies typically fall under the broader purview of spatial literary studies, a term coined by Robert Tally to include a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to the intersections between literature and space.[87] Such approaches include Tally's

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[84] Liz Cameron, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems – Exploring Sensory Narratives," *Ecological Management & Restoration* 23, no. S1 (January 2, 2022): 27–29.

[85] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Geopoetics: Space, Place, and Landscape," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000): 173–74.

[86] Although the precise meaning of "geopoetics" remains somewhat impressionistic, there have been several recent attempts to investigate the concept's applicability for Slavic and Eurasian studies, including a special issue of *Slavic Review* on the topic published in summer, 2016. In the introduction to the special issue, Anindita Banerjee and Jenifer Presto argue that geopoetic methodologies and their investment of the study of "presence in the world" can "'open up' Russia itself to a qualitatively different set of spatial relations than those offered by geopolitics alone" ("Introduction: Toward a Russian Geopoetics, or Some Ways of Relating Russia to the World," *Slavic Review* 75, no. 2 (2016): 247–55.)

[87] Robert T. Tally, "Spatial Literary Studies Versus Literary Geography? Boundaries and Borders Amidst Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space and Literature," in *Spatial Literary Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

own conceptualization of the author-text-reader relationship through "literary cartography," to Franco Moretti's data-driven "distant reading" analysis of historical-geographic literary processes.[88] This project combines methodological practices from two methodologies within spatial literary studies more broadly: 1) Sheila Hones' definition of *literary geography*, an interdisciplinary practice that consciously applies concepts from human geography to primary literary texts in an attempt to answer broader questions about space within either discipline,[89] and 2) Bertrand Westphal's *geocriticism*, a mode of literary analysis, achieved through close reading with attention to style and form to determine "what the text and the place are doing…and doing to each other."[90] Given the importance of embodied knowledge and phenomenological spatial practice for Siberian writers, this project additionally draws on scholarship within environmental studies and anthropology to investigate the distinct role that local environmental processes play in the literary articulation of local spatial practices.

Finally, considering the inherent temporal qualities of spatial practice, and the centrality of time and temporal orientation for the authors and works in this chapter, it is necessary to address the temporal dimensions of this geopoetics of Siberian spatial practice.[91] Mark Rifkin has asserted that time, like space, is relative, in that it is understood through a subjectively centered *temporal orientation*. Like spatial orientation, a subject's given temporal orientation is shaped through both rational knowledge and embodied experience, and often influenced by socially produced worldviews. Rifkin observes that histories of colonized people (in his case Native Americans) are often written through the temporal orientation of the colonizer and argues that considering alternative temporal orientations through "temporal multiplicity" can help recenter the perspectives of colonized peoples.[92] As I will discuss in my second and third chapters, late Soviet Siberian writers often frame their fascination with time, and particularly the inherited past, as a stated form of resistance to the colonial characterization of Siberia and its people as backwards. In his formulation of the chronotope, Bakhtin argues that in literature "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."[93] Similarly we can understand the geopoetics of Siberian spatial practice that I have identified in late Soviet Siberian literature to be intrinsically intertwined with Siberian notions of time. While the exact character of these spatial and temporal practices varies by ethnic identity and locality, and while they are expressed through a variety of generic chronotopes, they share an interest in stylistically representing and transmitting the embodied knowledge gained from local spatial practices.

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[88] See Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012); Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (New York: Verso, 1999).

[89] Sheila Hones, *Literary Geography* (London: Routledge, 2022), 1–22.

[90] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 10–11.

[91] Ahmed observes that "If orientation is a matter of how we reside, or how we clear space that is familiar, then orientations also take time and require giving up time. […] Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future" (*Queer Phenomenology*, 20–21).

[92] Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1–48.

[93] M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Emerson, Caryl (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

The Watery Forms of Siberian Geopoetics

Throughout Siberia's human history, lakes, rivers, and coasts both shaped and were shaped by human settlement as well as state policies. Accordingly, my dissertation is divided into three case studies, each organized according to a state of water representative of a specific Soviet modernizing initiative and a Siberian literary response. Chapter Two, "Water: Siberian Hydroelectricity and Valentin Rasputin's Fluvial Poetics," traces the importance of Siberian rivers to Valentin Rasputin's formulation of Siberian regional literature, culminating in his famous environmentalist novel *Farewell to Matyora* (1976). Placing Rasputin's work in dialogue with the large-scale hydroelectric construction of the Thaw-era, I argue that many of the literary innovations of Rasputin's work can be understood as part of an overarching "fluvial poetics" formed by the author's sustained study of Siberian history and the ecology of river habitats. The chapter first discusses the influence of Siberian construction projects on Khrushchev-era cultural discourse about the scientific-technical revolution through close readings of Alexander Tvardovskii and Evgenii Yevtushenko's long-form poetry about the Bratsk Hydroelectric Dam as a backdrop for understanding the environmentalist literary responses that followed in their wake throughout the sixties and seventies. It then traces the development of Rasputin's literary ideology, which was shaped by Thaw-era literary policy and by the revival of *kraevedenie* ("regional studies") and culminated in an embrace of grassroots environmental activism in the seventies and Russian ethnonationalism in the eighties. Finally, it examines the relationship between Rasputin's literary ideology and local environmental form through a close reading of *Farewell to Matyora*, which focuses on a group of old Russian *Sibiriak* settlers located in the flood zone of the Bratsk Dam construction. In contrast with the literature of hydroelectric expansion, whose structures and imagery reinforce a linear frontier construction of Siberian space, Rasputin's prose draws on embodied and traditional community knowledge of the river, reenacting formative fluvial processes such as sedimentation and the hydrologic cycle in its form and style to deploy a moral philosophy of Russian settlement, which demonstrate the potential consequences (environmental and narrative) of extractivist practices like damming.

Chapter Three, "Ice: Ecologies of Knowledge Production in Yuri Rytkheu's Bering Strait Fiction" traces the function of the Bering Strait chronotope in Chukchi writer Yuri Rytkheu's fiction about his home village on the easternmost point of the Chukotka peninsula, which are read against the background of polar exploration and Soviet nationalities policy. As an Indigenous writer tasked with constituting a written literary culture for his people, Rytkheu faced particular challenges as a state writer in an apparatus that viewed his people as "primitive" and "backward," a belief about which Rytkheu expressed ambivalence, even as his early work would outwardly reinforce it. The chapter traces Rytkheu's literary development from the start of his career to the beginning of his stylistically "mature" period in the mid-1970s through close readings of the short story cycle *A Chukotkan Saga* (1956), short story "The Sea Lion" (1969), the polar expedition novella *A Dream in Polar Fog* (1970), and his "contemporary legend" *When the Whales Leave* (1975). It argues that Rytkheu's signature style arises from the author's lifelong interest in intercultural communication, and particularly in how literary language (most often Russian) could be harnessed to better represent the experience of the Chukchi people and the ecological community amidst a literature that viewed the Arctic as a romantic frontier and his people as living vestiges of the past. This literary task is rooted in a practice of *place-based knowledge production* wherein the reader learns to blur the distinction between the self and Other, the familiar and the alien. The reader learns to do this by becoming oriented to the literary imaginary of Beringia, a medium through which the author translates Indigenous ways of seeing

to a readership conditioned by the exotic gaze of polar exploration and ethnography. Evoking Chukchi cosmological understandings of the environment, the Bering Strait ecosystem is reimagined not as a monotonous and physically alienating force, but rather as a generative space for knowledge production and transmission between peoples, species, and continents.

Chapter Four, "Air: Aviation and Aerial Perspective in Siberian Narratives of Displacement" discusses the significance of airplanes and aerial perspective in *Sibiriak* and Indigenous narratives about migration and displacement, wherein Siberian protagonists moving between urban centers and native locales experience airspace as a liminal region within which to process feelings of alienation and placelessness. It reads Siberian accounts of air travel against the backdrop of Soviet jet-setting culture, which emerged at the beginning of the Thaw in 1956 and was instrumental in the popular discourse of developed socialism as civilian air travel expanded throughout the late Soviet period. In Siberia, passenger air travel played an important pragmatic role in everyday life, filling in gaps in a historically inefficient transportation infrastructure and connecting Siberians more readily to professional and educational opportunities in urban centers. The chapter first provides an overview of aviation and aerial geography and its symbolic importance in late Soviet national and regional culture, before turning to close readings of scenes from Siberian fiction that take place in aircraft and airports to demonstrate the various ways in which Siberian writers across backgrounds evoke aerial life to make sense of spatial relationships transformed by the rapid changes taking place in Siberia during the period. Organized thematically, the chapter's close readings examine how aviation and aerial perspective are evoked in narratives of Indigenous *Bildung* (Rytkheu's short story "Tegryne Flies to Khabarovsk and Yuvan Shestalov's (Mansi) novella *When the Sun Rocked Me*), environmental change (Viktor Astafiev's (*Sibiriak*) novel *Queen Fish* and Vladimir Sangi's (Nivkh) novella *False Chase*) and physical and psychic displacement (Anna Nerkagi's (Nenets) novella *Aniko from the Nogo Clan* and Vasilii Shukshin's (*Sibiriak*) short stories about Russian peasants flying for the first time). It argues that in contrast to the idealistic discourse of Soviet aviation (particularly during the Soviet "Jet Age" inaugurated by Nikita Khrushchev) which regarded aerial perspective as a measure of Soviet modernization and its mastery of space, Siberian literary representations of aviation imagine the air as a heterotopic space that reveal the underlying dynamics in Siberia's relationship to national space and Siberian subjects' changing (and fraught) position within both.

CHAPTER TWO. WATER: SIBERIAN HYDROELECTRICITY AND VALENTIN RASPUTIN'S FLUVIAL POETICS

The sirens of the gantry cranes blare
Over the Angara,
And day and night the fight with the obstinate river
Is like a battle.[1]

– Komsomol song, 1963

... Valia Rasputin writes about the Angara so precisely…no, no not landscapes, not external objects, although he is a master of this craft too, but, as it were, the very soul of this sleek and impetuous river. [2]

– Viktor Astafiev, letter to wife

In 1976, Valentin Rasputin's *Farewell to Matyora* (*Proshshanie s Materoi*), a novel[3] about the human and environmental impact of the damming of Siberian rivers, was released in the tenth and eleventh issues of *Nash sovremennik*, thrusting the young author into the literary limelight. Critics praised the novel for its sincere portrayal of Siberian peasant life and for its vivid descriptions of the Angara River Basin where its action is set, framing it as a "requiem to the disappearing Siberian village" of the Russian ancestral past, an insider's "poetic" counterpoint to the "direct verisimilitude of the everyday" which served to remind an urbanized Soviet readership of the values and traditions threatened by the accelerating pace of the modern era.[4] Aligning Rasputin to the literary sensibility of a growing albeit loosely organized group of "village prose writers," such critical assessments shaped international critical and scholarly discourse on the novel—and Rasputin's oeuvre more broadly—for decades to come, particularly in light of the author's increasing alignment with the RSFSR's burgeoning econationalist movement throughout the 1980s and beyond.[5] As such, the novel's depiction of Siberian rural

[1] [Гудят сирены двухконсольных кранов / Над Ангарой, / И днём и ночью спор с рекой упрямой / Похож на бой.] A. Pakhmutova, S. Grebennikov, and Dobronravov, "Gudiat sireny nad Angaroi," in *Taezhnye zvezdy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Muzyka, 1965), 7–12.
[2] The letter was dated June 22, 1979 and was published in *Net mne otveta. Epistoliarnyi dnevnik 1952-2001.*, ed. S. N. Sapronov (Irkutsk: Izdatel' Sapronov, 2009), 271–72.
[3] Although *Farewell to Matyora* was published as a *povest'*, I am using the English "novel" instead of "novella" because I feel that it better reflects the work's narrative complexity. At nearly 250 pages, its length also corresponds to the contemporary English understanding of "novel."
[4] Evgenii Sidorov, "Preodolevaia zabvenie. Povest' Valentina Rasputina 'Proshchanie s Materoi,'" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 26, 1977.
[5] The novel's themes and poetics are routinely discussed as a case study in broader discussions of village prose. See, for example, Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*; "A Paradise Lost?"; Razuvalova, *Pisateli-"derevenshchiki"*; Parthe, *Russian Village Prose*. Similarly, scholarship on the novel itself often discuss it in terms of its relationship to Russian national folk culture. See Walsh, "Christian-Pagan Syncretism in Russian

settler identity and the threats posed to Siberia's natural environment by Soviet industrial modernization came to be read as a past-oriented literary expression of preservationism, symptomatic of the emergent regionally-centered econationalist politics that left its footprint both in Russian-language village prose and in the literatures of national minorities throughout the region.

Siberian critics and scholars have also read the novel within the context of Rasputin's broader role in the cultivation and canonization of Siberian literary regionalism, which regarded the representation of local place and the narration of folk practices as granting Siberian culture a singular moral role within Russian letters. Initial reviews of the novel within Siberian publications emphasized the "unique strength of feeling" for environmental concerns manifested both in the novel and in the response of Siberian readers,[6] while scholarly accounts of the novel within Siberian studies emphasize the local topoi and regional character of Rasputin's prose.[7] Rasputin himself insisted on the significance of a native Siberian literary perspective in the novel and other contemporary literary depictions of Siberian construction, arguing to both the press and to private acquaintances that Siberian writers' uniquely phenomenological understanding of the region could provide a moral foundation from which to evaluate the "great speeds and enormous social transformations" of the postwar scientific-technological revolution.[8]

This chapter examines the above two interpretive frames – regionalist and econationalist – as necessarily interrelated: the environmentalist and nationalist ideologies that have shaped dominant readings of *Farewell to Matyora* can be understood as a regionalist problematization of the Siberian spatial imaginary, one that is heavily informed by traditional Russian settler cosmologies of the local environment. The novel offers a case study in Siberian regionalist poetics as formulated by Rasputin and his Russian *Sibiriak* contemporaries: both diegetic and formal elements of the novel contribute to Rasputin's conception of Siberian identity and the critique he offers more broadly of state-sponsored modernization.[9] I will demonstrate how the novel problematizes state extractivist models of Siberian space by initiating readers into a new Siberian way of seeing, wherein the river is recast as an inhabited place, a center from which all spheres of life emanate. First, I will briefly retrace the history of Soviet postwar hydroelectric projects in Siberia and their sociopolitical impact on the region and examine the impact of such projects on late Soviet cultural and aesthetic values through close readings of two epic poems by pioneering writers of the thaw-era: Alexander Tvardovskii's *Distance beyond Distance* (*Za dal'iu—dal'*) and Evgenii Yevtushenko's *Bratsk Station* (*Bratskaia GES*). I will then retrace the Siberian environmentalist debates of 1960s that arose in response to such projects as

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'Ruralist' Prose"; Stepanova, "Transformatsiia mortal'nykh motivov v pozdnei proze V. Rasputina." Many of the essays in Plekhanova, *Tvorcheskaia lichnost' Valentina Rasputina.* also fit this category.

[6] See, for example interviewer commentary in O. Soboleva, review of *Doveriaia mysli geroiam*, by Valentin Rasputin, *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, April 28, 1977.

[7] The novel is often discussed in broader comparative projects about Siberian literature, such as Komarov, S. A. and Lagunova, O. K., *Literatura Sibiri: Missiia, etnichnost', aksiologiia*; Gorshenin, *Literatura i pisateli sibiri: Entsiklopedicheskoe izdanie*. Rasputin's Siberian identity is also a point of interest for author-specific studies by Siberian scholars. See Ol'ga Iur'eva, "Khronotop povesti V. G. Rasputina 'Proshshanie s Materoi': etnoeticheskii aspekt," ed. Petrozavodsk State University, *Problemy istoricheskoi etiki* 17, no. 2 (July 2019): 289–313.

[8] Valentin Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 16, 1977.

[9] In my dissertation I use *Sibiriak* to refer to ethnic Russian settlers in Siberia. This term has been used interchangeably throughout Siberia's colonial history to refer to various waves of settlers arriving in the region. While the Soviet state routinely used the term to refer to Soviet workers migrating to the region, Siberian intellectuals like Rasputin typically use the term to refer to the descendants of old Russian settlers arriving prior to the 20th century.

sociohistorical context for the emergence of Rasputin as a journalist and prose writer and offer a reconstruction of Rasputin's gradual formulation of Siberian regional literature, including its debts to Siberian regionalism and Soviet regional studies. (I will refer to these phenomena by their Russian names, *oblastnichestvo* and *kraevedenie*, to emphasize them as specific movements within Siberian regional identity formation.) Finally, I will offer a reading of the novel *Farewell to Matyora* that highlights its embodied phenomenology of place and fluvial processes on various levels of the text such as plot, characterization, novelistic structure, and narrative voice.

As I will argue, many of novel's characteristic markers of village prose – including its use of cyclical temporality, peasant dialect, and syncretic spiritualism – also contribute to its *fluvial poetics* – a narrative mode for expressing the complex and mutable space-time of Siberian river ecosystems. The novel's representation of Siberian fluvial place deals with multiple modes and scales of space-time at work on the level of the plot and its protagonists, while fluvial orientation, by contrast, is largely modeled by the novel's layered narrative voices and by the river itself as a form-giving device. The diegetic level of the plot and its protagonists contributes to the novel's representational task as a chronicle of the Siberian experience of modernity while the novel's formal patterning contributes to the moral-didactic task which Rasputin believed Siberian literature should perform, *orienting* the text and by extension the reader into the fluvial ecosystem through its representation of fluvial phenomenologies. Like a river ecosystem, the novel generates a multiplicity of interconnected materials, temporalities, and subjectivities which together can be understood as a contained if disrupted system, creating a fluvial imaginary through which the geographically remote reader can reestablish a connection to the environment in the absence of locally grounded and generationally transmitted knowledge. The spatial imaginary of the Angara River before and after its damming became not only a representational means by which to understand the human and environmental consequences of state sponsored industrialization, but also a form-generating force, one that shapes the temporal as well as spatial dimensions of the novel and *orients* its reader into a new mode for relating to Siberia's rivers, which had long served as a discursive signifier of Russian colonial expansion in the region—and most recently of the Soviet technological ambitions of the new post-Stalin era.

Hydroelectricity, Sibiriak Pioneers, and the Frontier Poetics of the Thaw

Just outside of the Eastern Siberian city of Irkutsk, on Lake Baikal near its southeastern corner, the Angara River begins. Each second nearly 1900 cubic meters of the lake's waters—the sum of hundreds of small rivers and streams from the surrounding mountains—pour through a kilometer-wide trough from the deep and narrow rift that makes up the lakebed, rushing past a jutting rock formation known as the "shaman stone" before embarking on a nearly two-thousand-kilometer journey northward to join forces with the Yenisei River and flow onward towards the Kara Sea and the Arctic Ocean.[10] Past Irkutsk and continuing to Bratsk the river channel descends steeply, cutting a straight and narrow channel with high cliff banks through the taiga's basalt deposits, its high volumes of water rushing downstream through the narrow passage to form nearly 300 km of rapids between Irkutsk and Bratsk.[11]

[10] Nikolai Prokop′evich Bakhtin, *Reka Enisei*, Reki zemnogo shara (Leningrad: Gidrometeorologicheskoe izd-vo, 1961), 97–99; V. I. Astrakhantsev, *Angara i ee bassein: Gidrologicheskii ocherk*, Trudy Vostochno-Sibirskogo geologicheskogo instituta 12 (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1962), 17; Nick C. Davidson, "Yenisei River Basin and Lake Baikal (Russia)," in *The Wetland Book: II: Distribution, Description, and Conservation*, ed. C. Max Finlayson et al. (Dordrecht, Neth.: Springer Netherlands, 2018), 1477–84.
[11] See A. A. Sokolov, *Gidrografiia SSSR* (Leningrad: Gidrometeoizdat, 1952), ch. 23.

Siberia's rivers—and particularly Rasputin's native Angara watershed—served as a defining feature of official Thaw-era Soviet discourse, achieving a symbolic status in state energy policy, postwar reconstruction and urban development. Ever since the late nineteenth century the Angara's unique geomorphological and hydrographic properties garnered the interest of hydrologists and engineers, who recognized the enormous untapped energy output of the river's upper stretches. Early Soviet infrastructure planners quickly saw the massive untapped energy reserves of the Angara and its sister the Yenisei as crucial to the State's long-term energy plans, which they presented as a crucial component of the State Commission on the Electrification of Russia's (GOELRO) *Plan for the Electrification of the RSFSR* as early as 1920.[12] Although the rivers were omitted from the initial stage of energy planning due to insufficient research, technology, and funding, the commission noted the watershed's potential for future hydroelectric construction, noting that the river's unique climatic and geomorphological properties, not to mention its role in facilitating access to the region's wealth of agriculture and natural resources, was such that "there is no doubt that in the future the Angara and the entire Priangar'e region will occupy [their] proper place in Siberia."[13]

The energy generated by the Angara and other Siberian rivers would have the pragmatic purpose of expanding the region's access to the central power grid, thus allowing for an increase in agricultural production, industry, and natural resource extraction.[14] While the young Soviet state lacked the proper scientific data and technology to realize its plans, it began long-term preparations for the rivers' eventual damming almost immediately: by the 1930s, it had commissioned expeditions across all of Siberia's major watersheds to study the rivers' geomorphological and hydrological properties, thereby facilitating future planning.[15] Early Soviet plans for hydroelectric construction on the Angara thus demonstrated the party leadership's marked interest in continuing the Russian imperial project on the eastern frontier: Siberia's relevance was seen to lie squarely in the economic potential of its geological and ecological fabric, to be actualized through state intervention. By the early 1950s, the Soviet economy, along with its scientific apparatus, had advanced sufficiently to actualize GOELRO's

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[12] Although politically didactic in tone, M. F. Zhuravlev provides a broad overview of the history of hydroelectric planning on the Angara Rivers, and of the rivers' role in GOELRO discourse in his introduction to *Bratskaia GES. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* (ed. Fridman, 8-39). Full citation? More recently, historians such as E. A. Budrin ("Gidroenergetika v Plane GOELRO (1920-25 Gg.)") and O. D. Simonenko have commented on the influence of pre-revolutionary hydrological research in Siberia and elsewhere on GOELRO and other energy planning that influenced Siberian hydroelectric construction. Although politically didactic in tone, M. F. Zhuravlev provides a broad overview of the history of hydroelectric planning on the Angara Rivers, and of the rivers' role in GOELRO discourse in his introduction to *Bratskaia GES. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* (ed. Fridman, 8-39). More recently, historians have commented on the influence of pre-revolutionary hydrological research in Siberia and elsewhere on GOELRO and other energy planning that influenced Siberian hydroelectric construction. See for example E. A. Budrin, "Gidroenergetika v Plane GOELRO (1920-25 Gg.)" and V. L. Gvozdetskii and O. D. Simonenko, "Plan GOELRO — primer sozidatel'noi deiatel'nosti novoi vlasti," in *Nauka i tekhnika v pervye desiatiletiia sovetskoi vlasti: sotsiokul'turnoe izmerenie (1917-1940)*, ed. L. V. Chesnova and E. B. Muzrukova, Monograficheskie issledovaniia : istoriia nauki (Moscow: Academia, 2007), 54–107.

[13] Gosudarstvennaia Komissiia po Elektrifikatsii Rossii, *Elektrifikatsiia Zapadnoi Sibiri*, 22-23.

[14] Prior to Soviet midcentury construction of hydroelectric dams, fewer than one third of state and collective farms connected to the central power grid, relying instead on small power generators that couldn't produce enough energy to power modern farming technology—a problem that an expanded energy grid could mitigate. (See Josephson, et al., 163-4).

[15] Kabinet Ucheta Vody i Obzornykh Kart sektora Gidrologii TsNIGRI, *Karta Issledovannosti Aziatskoi Chasti SSSR v Gidrogeologicheskom Otnoshenii*, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/2018693898/. Kabinet Ucheta Vody i Obzornykh Kart sektora Gidrologii TsNIGRI.

plans for the river system and its basin. In the press Siberian hydroelectric construction was framed as a crucial facet of the so-called ongoing "scientific-technological revolution:" both the hydroelectric plants themselves and the energy they provided the region would help position the USSR as a viable competitor to western nations during the new Cold War.[16]

In late October 1954, preliminary construction began on the Bratsk Hydroelectric Station, the locus of *Farewell to Matyora* and the most famous plant in the "Angara-Yenisei Cascade," a series of dams and reservoirs planned at strategic locations along the watershed. Although it was just one of the dozens of slated sites for power plants in the state plan for the electrification of Siberia, the Bratsk construction quickly joined the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) railway as one of the most prolific symbols of post-war developmentalism. Portrayals of the construction site and its physical signifiers– such as the hydroelectric dam or "station" in Russian (*gidroelektricheskaia stantsiia* or GES), its resulting reservoir (*vodokhranilishche*), and the upper rapids of the Angara River itself—figured heavily in films, sketches, and songs of the era, which, as various historians of the Khrushchev era have observed, collectively formed a spatial imaginary that embodied the broader ideals of the Thaw.

Siberian hydroelectric construction had a self-explanatory appeal in the post-Stalin era: indeed, Siberian GES sites might well be regarded as a spatial extension of de-Stalinization itself. Unlike such Stalinist construction projects as the White Sea Canal, many of which relied on forced prison labor, the Siberian construction projects of the 1950s and 60s were predominantly completed through the collective labor of willing volunteers from across the Union, the ranks of whom included "freed prisoners, demobilized soldiers, migrants from collective farms […] looking for a place to live and work," as well as members of the young post-war generation who were lured by the promise of being a part of something greater than themselves.[17] Dams and reservoirs still embodied the Promethean triumph of human reason over nature that had long characterized the visual symbolism of socialist labor: through hard work, idealism, and collective cooperation, the Soviet citizenry could overcome the forces of nature to enact positive change for the nation. [18] Bratsk GES thus exemplified communist energy in its Thaw-era form: as the sum of a multitude of individuals, "real people" collectively finding meaning in striving for the betterment of society.[19] Siberian construction could thus liberate even Siberia *itself* from the blight of the camps, weakening its centuries-old associations with the

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[16] Arnold Buchholz, "The Scientific-Technological Revolution (STR) and Soviet Ideology," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 30, no. 4 (1985): 337–46; Susan E. Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289–316.

[17] Rozhanskiy, "Trial by Siberia," 121; "'Ottepel'' na sibirskom moroze". As Rozhanskiy's use of interviews and personal narratives demonstrates, this spirit of voluntarism was a trend that extended beyond official party discourse and into the subjective experience of many Siberian construction workers, although the pragmatic reason for some workers' participation was sometimes dictated by less voluntary circumstance; many early construction workers were migrant laborers lacking stable housing or jobs due to displacement following the war or release from prison camps.

[18] Vail' and Genis have argued that the ideology of energy was also a symbolic component that allowed depictions of Siberian construction to sever associations with Stalinism through their direct engagement with Leninist ideology, particularly the popular axiom that "communism is equal to Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country." By connecting the collective spirit of the construction sites to Leninism, socialist realism of the Thaw could bypass the cult of Stalin altogether: Lenin (at least in his Thaw-era interpretation) "could not be mistaken […] Bratsk GES was not built by young enthusiasts, but by the communism promised by Lenin and Khrushchev." See *60-e--mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 80-84.

[19] Siberian cultural historian Mikhail Rozhanskii has an extensive body of work on the relationship between Siberian GES construction and the ideological symbolism of the Thaw in both Soviet cultural production ("Trial by Siberia") and in the memoirs of construction workers themselves ('Ottepel' na sibirskom moroze'.)

Russian carceral state and reviving the Eurasianist vision of the Siberian frontier as a foundation for constructing the nation's *future*, rather than as the territorial endpoint for forced deportation and state repression.

To garner public enthusiasm and recruit eager volunteers, media and cultural coverage of Siberian construction hailed workers migrating to the region as a new incarnation of Siberian pioneers, the *Sibiriaki* who had first settled the Siberian lands. In the words of Mikhail Rozhanskii, "the historical myth of Siberia made it possible to draw together the Russian [national] character and imperial scope. A true Siberian is a dreamer and a hero who has inherited the disposition of those who came to bring Siberia to heel."[20] By this metric, the traditional mythology of the *Sibiriak* served a useful symbolic purpose: revered in Russian culture for their strength of body and character, and their devotion to creating a better life, the repurposed image of the *Sibiriak* was an ideal embodiment of Thaw-era idealism and its celebration of the idealistic individual subject's contributions to the Soviet collective.[21]

The Bratsk hydroelectric dam and the Angara River owe their cultural visibility in no small part to two important narrative poems of the Thaw era: Aleksandr Tvardovskii's *Distance beyond Distance* (*Za dal'iu dal',* 1961) and Evgenii Yevtushenko's *Bratsk Station* (*Bratskaia GES*, 1965). Both Tvardovskii and Yevtushenko played central roles in defining the literary values of the Thaw era—Tvardovskii through his editorship of the leading literary journal *Novyi Mir* (1950-1954 and 1958-1970) and Yevtushenko as the most famous of the *shestidesiatniki* poets and an iconic representative of the aspirations of Soviet youth. Both wrote about Siberia as relative outsiders and from distinct generational vantage points, depicting the Angara River and the surrounding environment in distinct ways.

Published as a narrative poem or *poema* in 1960, Aleksandr Tvardovskii's *Distance beyond Distance* follows its hero—a poet and the implied author—on a railroad journey from Moscow eastward into Siberia to write about the ongoing construction at Bratsk. While the poem is ostensibly based on the author's notes from his own travels to the Bratsk construction site in 1956, it is actually a conceptual reworking of individual lyrical poems published in Soviet journals (including *Novyi mir* under his own tenure as editor) throughout the 1950s, which were inspired by various short trips Tvardovskii had taken to Siberia between 1947 and 1956.[22] The region was of particular interest for the poet due to his personal biography. Born in 1910 to a peasant family in western Russia, Tvardovskii was a member of the "first Soviet generation" to come of age and be educated within the Soviet system, his career thus having been shaped by the Stalinist system.[23] Tvardovskii's parents had been arrested as kulaks and exiled to the northern Urals in 1931 and the young writer was forced to choose between his family and his career, a choice that would haunt him throughout his life, particularly as writer friends began to face repression in the late 30s.[24] Scholars have read Tvardovskii's trips to Siberia in part as a way of coming to terms with his own place within the Stalinist system: on his trip to Bratsk in 1956 he also visited the old Alexander Prison, and diary entries and drafts of writing about Siberia were filled with references to the terror.[25] Thus, like Tvardovskii's other post-Stalin creative works, *Distance beyond Distance* is often read in the light of the author's broader literary and

[20] Rozhanskiy, "Trial by Siberia," 128.
[21] See, for example Vail and Genis, 80-84; Rozhanskii, "Trial by Siberia" and "Ottepel' na sibirskom morose."
[22] Turkov, *Aleksandr Tvardovskii,*191; 404.
[23] See Krylova, "Identity, Agency and the First Soviet Generation," in *Generations in 21 Century Europe*, 2007."
[24] See Turkov, 28-30.
[25] See Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 148-151.

intellectual goal of helping his generation (the "first Soviet generation") make sense of their collective experience of Stalinism and the war by "conceptualizing and verbally representing the tragedies of the country's recent past" as "a search for authenticity".[26]

In *Distance beyond Distance*, these existential concerns are mapped onto Siberian space—the poem's primary form-giving device. Although the poem is one of the most extended Thaw-era literary depictions of the Bratsk GES, the dam and river themselves appear in just one chapter, "On the Angara" ("*Na Angare*"). The greater part of the narrative follows the subject's eastward journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway towards Bratsk and ultimately the Pacific Ocean, which the poet maps as a national homeland.[27] The train's rapid passage eastward through multiple time zones literalizes Siberia's symbolic status as the land of the future: the train's temporal distance from the center lengthens and accelerates as it approaches Bratsk, thrusting the poem's today further and further into Moscow's tomorrow and hence its future.[28] The poem also establishes a unique sense of spatiotemporal relativity between the present of the train car ("apartment, home, and street" for the subject and his fellow travelers), and the surrounding landscape, which constantly transform – to quote Michel de Certeau – "into the speed with which they slip away" behind him.[29] Once "freed from the walls of Europe", momentary glimpses of his native landscape (birch trees, rivers and soil) allow the hero to access painful memories and process his role in history from the safe spatiotemporal distance of the train car, whose present accelerates away from the nation's past and administrative center as it approaches the Siberian future.[30] For much of the poem, then, Bratsk and the Angara serve as the anticipated ending—an imagined destination that is both the location and embodiment of the nation's future.

When the train disembarks at Bratsk in the poem's twelfth chapter, the Angara River's manifestation as a *real*, physically experienced place triggers a marked spatiotemporal shift. Having *arrived* in the future, the hero is plucked from the passive, cerebral train car and thrust into the dynamic present of Siberian construction. The hero's interiority is subsumed by the ongoing action, which the poet-hero observes "as if nailed to the ground" as his account of the construction writes itself.[31] The resulting text is relatively consistent with the poetics of Socialist Realism as told by Katerina Clark, describing the struggle to build the dam in military

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[26] Kozlov, 134.

[27] The poem's characterization of Siberia and the Far East as Russian *national* space rather than *imperial* space is highly important for the poem's thematic treatment of Russian national history, as I will explain further. For instance, in one chapter the subject compares Moscow and Siberia, pronouncing: "Страна родная, полон я / Тем, что от края до края / Ты вся – моя, моя, моя!" ("My native country, I am full / With the fact that from edge to edge / You are all mine, mine, mine!") (Tvardovskii 188).

[28] For instance, the poem consistently uses references to day and night to illustrate how Moscow's spatial relationship to Siberia is also temporal: "И стрелкам времени навстречу / Я устремился к Ангаре, / В Москве оставив поздний вечер / И Братск увидев на заре". ("And towards the arrows of time / I rushed off toward the Angara / Leaving the late evening behind in Moscow / And glimpsing Bratsk in the dawn.") (176-77).

[29] For the original quote from the poem, see Tvardovskii, 58. The train chronotope of the poem can in fact be read as a lyrical exploration of Einstein's theory of relativity, which utilized train cars in "thought experiments" as practical illustrations. Although Einstein's theories and particularly his Theory of Relativity had been deemed incompatible with Marxian dialectical materialism, they were rehabilitated as a part of Khruschev's program of de-Stalinization, and became an important component of Thaw-era public debates on the relationship between science and art. See Vucinich, *Einstein and Soviet Ideology*, 120-141, 178-191. Michel de Certeau also explores the train car problem in his discussion of spatial practice in *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 112.

[30] Tvardovskii, 12.

[31] Tvardovskii, 158.

terms as a battle between the rationalizing force of Soviet labor and the spontaneous, elemental force of the river itself.

Specific to the chapter, however, is its rendering of this characteristically Promethean struggle according to the received narrative of Siberian colonization. The Soviet army of humans and machines become a new manifestation of Siberian pioneers or *Sibiriaki*, who bear the same traits of heterogeneity, resilience, and collective spirit as their mythical forebears.[32] Conversely, the Angara River is personified as a savage enemy force, described almost exclusively in terms of its hydrological properties.[33] The battle between the two is couched with the language and imagery of Siberia's annexation; the dam builders' primary task is not to vanquish the river completely, but rather to subjugate and assimilate it into the Soviet state. Using the language of the imperial *iasak* tribute system imposed on Indigenous Siberians starting in the sixteenth century, the chapter envisions a future in which the Angara's waters will be paid as "nature's tribute" (*dan'*) to the nation by flowing "into their prescribed path" to be converted into electricity "like the Volga" (described in a previous chapter as a "mother river" akin to Russia itself).[34] The poem thus superimposes the specific Thaw-era goals of hydroelectrification onto an older myth of Siberian colonial expansion, wherein a new generation of *Sibiriak* pioneers can reforge themselves even as they transform the Siberian landscape. This frontier orientation extends to the poem's final chapters, which leave the subject and the reader looking ever eastward; once the dam has been constructed, the subject jumps on the newly constructed Baikal-Amur Magistral (BAM) railway and heads onward towards the Pacific Ocean, leaving the once-future dam behind in the past. The poem has no formal ending, instead inviting readers to continue the expansionist journey with a promise to meet again at "new distances" built by future generations.[35]

Whereas the Bratsk of *Distance beyond Distance* serves as a (con)temporary location of the nation's spatial and technological frontier and a mere stopping point in a broader, forward-facing path into the nation's future, in Evgenii Yevtushenko's *Bratsk Station* it becomes a material symbol for the post-Stalinist nation itself. Published in the journal *"Iunost'"* in 1965, *Bratsk Station* is characteristic of the sincere and civically minded "youth" literature popularized by the journal and the oratorical *shestidesiatnik* poetry for which Yevtushenko is best known. Like Tvardovskii, Yevtushenko utilizes Siberian space as a site for reckoning with the existential problems of his own generation, in this case the so-called "children of the war," who had by now reached young adulthood. Throughout his lyrical oeuvre, Yevtushenko had a particular affinity for Siberia and particularly *Sibiriaki* thanks to his strong personal and ancestral ties to the region. Although he was primarily raised in Moscow, Yevtushenko was born in a small town near Irkutsk and he would return there often throughout his childhood to spend time with his maternal

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[32] See, for instance, this stanza: "Сибиряки! Молва не врет, — / Хоть с бору, со сосенки народ / Хоть сборный он, зато отборный, / […] Плечом надежным подопрет, — / Не подведет!" ("Siberians! The rumors don't lie— / Although a people from the forest, from the pines / They are a collective, although selective, / […] When he braces his steady shoulder— / he will not fail! (150).

[33] Notably, the river is described almost exclusively in terms of its hydrological traits – its soldiers are the flow of the water itself (the waters of Baikal that flow into it, for instance, wait "in reserve at the rear"), which is described as a separate entity from the river's banks and bed (Tvardovskii 140). The comparison of the Angara as a fierce warrior reads as a nod to Chekhov's famous comparison of the Yenisei River to a "mighty, furious bogatyr'" in his 1890 travelogues (*Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii i Pisem v Tridtsati Tomakh*, 35).

[34] Tvardovskii 143. The poem discusses the Volga as a symbol for the Russian nation in chapter 3, "Three Thousand Rivers" (*Sem' tysiach rek*).

[35] Tvardovskii, 222.

grandparents, the descendants of 19th-century exiles to the region. Yevtushenko's Siberian heritage figured heavily into both his lyrical poetry and his public persona; both Yevtushenko's lyrical "ia" and his autobiographical "ia" in his 1963 memoirs emphasize *Sibiriak* traits such as physical strength, fearlessness and stubbornness/resilience of spirit, traits which the poet would also attribute as characteristic of his generation more broadly.

The poem *Bratsk Station* invokes the Bratsk GES construction as an antidote to the contemporary ailment of "superficiality" (*poverkhnost'*), a condition brought on in Soviet youth by a sense of helplessness and lack of purpose. The dam is presented through its loose unifying narrative, a polemic between the newly constructed Bratsk plant and an Egyptian pyramid about the relationship between labor, power, and historical memory. Emerging thereafter is a Khrushchevian socialist critique of autocratic power (embodied by the pyramid) articulated through historical memory and ongoing history-making. The first half of the critique is a series of poems that collectively provide a progressive history of revolution in Russia embodied by individuals who built it. The poem's key representatives of Russian revolutionary values are so explicitly tied to Siberia via persecution and exile that it is transformed from symbol of the Russian carceral state to a metonym for revolution, as evidenced in the poem's first description of the Angara:

Вижу в пенной могучей музыке
Ангары
да и моря Братского –
Спартака,
Яна Гуса,
Мюнцера,
и Марата,
и Джона Брауна.[36]

I see in the frothy mighty music
of the Angara
and also the Bratsk Sea
Spartacus
Jan Hus
Müntzer
and Marat,
and John Brown.

Despite its importance as a symbol, however, this Siberia lacks regional specificity; descriptions of the territory instead utilize the familiarly vague imagery of the territory's distance, remoteness, and harsh climate. Siberia becomes a place in the second half of the poem, wherein the poem's historical epic qualities give way to a panoramic and relatively non-linear depiction of contemporary Bratsk, a broad sample of the subjective experiences and memories of Soviet dam workers juxtaposed against a backdrop of the distinct sights, sounds, and sensations of the surrounding taiga.[37] Although some workers belong to the new generation of *Sibiriaki* that

[36] Evgenii Evtushenko, *Bratskaia GES* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), 104.

[37] Soviet critic Adol'f Urban described the section as having "not one, but many narrative motifs" and temporal modes that "coalesce under the master's will of the 'I'." Urban argues that *Bratskaia GES* was Yevtushenko's first major foray into the panorama poem as a genre, although it would become a defining trait of his later work (Adol'f

dominated in Tvardovskii's poem, many of the worker-heroes in this section of *Bratsk Station* are native-born Siberians descending from both settlers and Indigenous peoples.[38] The human dimension of the dam construction in the poem is thus imbued with elements of natural Siberianness, including subjects' cooperative spirit, physical resiliency, and connectedness with the earth.[39]

Ultimately the poem presents the relationship between Siberia (including the river) and the ideology of Bratsk GES in the same light: individual subjectivity, national history, and place are simultaneously inseparable from and subsumed by the dam and thus by the Soviet future. According to the poem's logic, this relationship is inherently ecological, as discussed explicitly in a section titled "Nature" (*priroda*), which describes an encounter with the taiga on a boat trip down the Angara. The chapter uses the boreal forest, (which it likens to a mother's womb) to critique contemporary society's lackadaisical relationship to nature, citing the hypocrisy of man's willingness to engage in "cruel" extractive practices such as logging "when it is useful to us," even as "we come to the woods" to "purify ourselves."[40] Yet the poem's ecological consciousness ultimately still relies on a relationship of utility – man is ultimately incentivized to protect the woods for the spiritual benefits it gives him. This provides rationale for the ultimate ecological argument of the poem: that "our dams and our Sputniks are part of nature, not something else!"[41]

Indeed, in *Bratskaia GES*¸ the Angara River and its surrounding environment are present in the structure of the poem only so much as they relate to the dam itself, transformed by the hands of laborers into a new form of nature which (under man's stewardship) will continue to bestow gifts upon subsequent generations. In the worldview of the poem, and in the dominant Soviet poetics of GES construction more generally, the power plant is not a monument to man's conquest of nature but to his ability to *reshape* the existing ecosystem into a newer and more evolved one. It is, then, not accidental that one of the most vivid extended descriptions of water in the poem is about the dam's reservoir, called the "Bratsk Sea" (*Bratskoe more*), as was typical of cultural depictions of the reservoir throughout the period. Appearing in the last chapter, the passage describes how the dam transforms "the stormy Angara" (*Angara vzmetennaia*) into the

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Urban, "A esli eto proza? O poeme Evg. Evtushenko 'Mama i neitronnaia bomba,'" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 36 (1982): 3.) The panorama poem classification appears to provide more flexibility for the generic hybridity of narrative poems by Yevtushenko and others in the late Soviet period, which "traverse[d] such a wide front in both the generic and thematic sense" (L. Voronin, "Liricheskie zhanry v sovremennoi poezii," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 10 (1976): 236–41.).

[38] These include an old woman who brings taiga flowers to worker dormitories (housed in former GULAG barracks), a young construction worker who was raised in the taiga, and an elderly peasant whose crops feed the workers.

[39] Although these depictions of Soviet *Sibiriaki* bear many of the same idealistic qualities as Tvardovskii's, they also contain a strong sense of the personal and a rootedness in local space, which can be attributed to Yevtushenko's own personal and genealogical ties to Siberia. Yevtushenko was born in a small town in the Irkutsk region of Siberia and although he was mostly raised in Moscow, he spent significant time in Siberia throughout his childhood due to his personal and ancestral ties to the region through his mother's family, who were exiled there in the 19th century. Notably, Yevtushenko's Siberian heritage figures heavily into both his lyrical poetry and his public persona; both Yevtushenko's lyrical "ia" and his autobiographical "ia" in his 1963 memoirs emphasize traits that are typically part of Russian cultural associations with the *Sibiriak*, such as strong ties to folk culture, physical strength, fearlessness and stubbornness/resilience of spirit. See "Ia sibirskoi porody…", Evgenii Evtushenko, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975), 40 and Evgenii Evtushenko, *Avtobiografiia* (London: Flegon Press, 1964).

[40] See Evtushenko, *Bratskaia GES*, 216. ("Когда-то зверино-косматые […] / приходим, приходим к лесам!")

[41] "а наши плотины и спутники— / природа! – не что-то еще!" *Bratskaia GES*, 216.

calm and shimmering waters of the reservoir, replete with all the properties of a natural sea (such as fish, buoys, waves, and sea captains).[42] The new romantic landscape formed by the dam and the Soviet ideals it represents thus offer the lyrical subject—and the reader—the very remedy for "superficiality" that he initially seeks in the prologue – an escape "to the sea."

Tvardovskii and Yevtushenko's disparate depictions of Siberia and the Angara River illustrate two distinct but intertwined conceptions of environmental relationships that dominated Soviet ecological discourse, which Andy Bruno collectively refers to as a "dualistic conception of nature." Tvardovskii's rendering of Siberian space in frontier colonial terms corresponds to the "largely antagonistic" and "hostile" Prometheanism dominant in early Soviet discourse which "envisioned the natural world as a wartime battlefield" and a "set of obstacles to be overcome in a bellicose manner." On the other hand, Yevtushenko's depiction of the dam as inseparable from the local environment and the people and histories accumulating there aligns more readily with a more "holistic" and "amicable" model of the environment, which gained in popularity later in the century and rested on "the notion that economic activity could bring mutual improvement for humanity and all that was outside of it."[43] Both approaches to Siberian space emerge and interact in other late Soviet depictions of Siberian hydroelectric construction, forming a literary gaze that Rasputin would later critique as "taiga romanticism." Yet as Bruno has argued, throughout Soviet history combinations of both models dramatically informed the State's approaches to empire and nation-building, and shaped human interactions with the environment. Many Thaw-era depictions of hydroelectric construction would thus implement elements of both models; for instance songs on a popular music album *Taiga Stars (Taezhnye zvezdy)* describe both a valorous "battle" between Komsomol workers and the Angara and tent brigades "lighting stars over the taiga" with the electricity generated by newly constructed dams, while a book of "autolithographies" by artists visiting the construction site simultaneously compares the river's features to a "mighty bogatyr" (to borrow Chekhov's comparison) and its surroundings "the floor of the Bratsk Sea."[44]

Siberian Environmentalism and Regional Literature

Although the best-known exemplars of taiga romanticism were created by outsiders through the central cultural apparatus, Siberian writers such as Rasputin also participated in the creation and dissemination of idealistic Siberian construction narratives during the nineteen-fifties and sixties. During this period, regional newspapers, magazines, and journals remained central fixtures for literary production outside of Russia's cultural capitals, serving as a space in which aspiring local writers could gain experience, editorial feedback, and a valuable network of connections within the central literary apparatus. They also continued to serve their intended purpose of shaping Socialist Realist discourse on a more localized level, which would "ignite spiritual life" and socialist consciousness in Siberia through idealized depictions of regional reality.[45] The

[42] Evtushenko, *Bratskaia GES*, 229.

[43] Andy Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11–12.

[44]See Pakhmutova, Grebennikov, and Dobronravov, "Gudiat sireny nad Angaroi." and A. Pakhmutova, S. Grebennikov, and B. Dobronravov, "Zvezdy nad taigoi," in *Taezhnye zvezdy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Muzyka, 1965), 3–6. ; S. M. Razbozhaev, G. N. Bodylev, and N. A. Semenov, *Gde shumit padun* (Irkutsk: Irkutskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1960). Razbozhaev, et al.'s description of the Angara once again appears to reference Chekhov's 1890 comparison of the Yenisei River to a bogatyr.

[45] Such was Gor'kii's characterization of *Sibirskie ogni* upon its release in March 1922. *Sibirskie ogni* was the first regional Soviet "thick journal" of its kind and would serve as an important blueprint for regional journals of various

pages of Siberian publications were therefore full of articles, sketches, and stories written by local authors depicting the rapid development of the region.

However, even in the early 1960s, environmentalist responses had begun to surface in those same publications. The years following Stalin's death and through *perestroika* in the mid-80s experienced a major uptick[46] in public environmental consciousness, the emergence of which political historians have attributed to both increased civic engagement during the period and the party's "policy of inclusion." Hence the state allowed for its discussion both in official Party proceedings and in the press.[47] Siberia—and particularly the Irkutsk region—had become an epicenter for Soviet environmental activism thanks to organizing efforts that had taken place surrounding the fate of Lake Baikal, which as an enduring center for Russian settlement in Siberia and the primary source of the Angara River was a strategic location for state industrial planning. The so-called "Baikal protection movement" arose in response to two massive expansionist projects that were unveiled at the Conference on the Development of Productive Forces of Eastern Siberia, which convened in Irkutsk in August 1958: the construction of two cellulose processing plants in the vicinity of the lake and a state plan to expand the Angara's hydrological output through the widening of its source via explosives.[48] Disturbed by the potentially disastrous environmental consequences of the projects, a coalition of scientists, writers, and amateur naturalists formed, creating what Nicholas Breyfogle has called "one of the most visible, powerful, and successful environmental movements in the Soviet Union."[49] Siberian writers and intellectuals played a particularly prominent role[50] as public faces for the movement, publishing letters, essays, and longer works in widely-circulated newspapers and journals such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Pravda*, and the nationally-distributed regional journal *Sibirskie ogni*, which garnered a strong response from readers across the Union and led to a

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sizes across the union. See Golovin, "Osobennosti funktsionirovaniia regional'nykh literaturno-khudozhestvennykh zhurnalov v postsovetskom periode;" Gorshenin, "O zhurnale 'Sibirskie ogni.'"

[46] While smaller conservationist currents had existed in the first few decades of the Soviet Union, they were primarily limited to scientific discourse within formal institutions of field scientists. See Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

[47] For an in-depth explanation of how the state implemented its policy of inclusion starting in the mid-60s, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): 16-20. Although Brudny's discussion is framed through the problem of various Soviet ethnonationalist movements (including Russian), he notes the importance of ongoing debates on ecological policy permitted through the policy of inclusion in shaping Soviet ethnonationalist identities and aims. For a broad survey of the impact of the policy of inclusion on Soviet environmentalism more specifically, see Paul Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 239–50. For an analysis of how the policy of inclusion applied to literary policy and its impact on conservative Village Prose see also Razuvalova, *Pisateli-"derevenshchiki"*.

[48] I have adopted Nicholas Breyfogle's term "Baikal protection movement" as a shorthand for describing the massive, but loosely organized environmental activism that arose around Lake Baikal between the 1950s and the 1980s, which occurred in several stages among a wide variety of players, including local volunteers, regional intelligentsia, and students and scientists from across the Soviet Union. See Nicholas B. Breyfogle, "At the Watershed: 1958 and the Beginnings of Lake Baikal Environmentalism," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (2015): 147–80. For an in-depth analysis of the various groups, individuals, and ideologies that converged around the movement, see chapter 16 of Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

[49] Breyfogle, "At the Watershed" (148).

[50] Regional identity was in fact an important catalyst for grassroots environmental activism throughout the RSFSR during this time period, which (like ethnonationalism and village prose) some scholars have tied to the revival of the *kraevedenie* movement. See, for instance, Donovan, "How Well Do You Know Your Krai?"; Breyfogle, "At the Watershed"; Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 1999.

sharp increase in civic environmental protection initiatives.[51] Among them was Rasputin's "literary godfather" Vladimir Chivilikhin, whose famous essay about Baikal "The Luminous Eye of Siberia" (*Svetloe oko Sibiri*) was published in the journal *Oktiabr* in 1963.[52]

It was within this regional literary landscape of "taiga romanticism" (as he would later call it) and the locally generated response to it that a young Valentin Rasputin cut his teeth as a young writer in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Rasputin started his career while still a student at Irkutsk State University, earning money as a journalist at local construction sites and publishing articles and sketches in regional youth publications such as the Irkutsk-based *Sovetskaia molodezh'* and Krasnoyarsk-based *Krasnoiarskaia komsomolets.* Many of these earlier works engaged the same idealistic tropes and topoi used by his Moscow and Leningrad-based peers such as Evtushenko. Early sketches about Bratsk GES emphasize the strength and stubbornness of construction workers amidst a backdrop of Siberia's industrial transformation, characterized in terms of harsh climate, endless distances, massive scale, and rapid speeds.[53] Yet even these early sketches show an awareness of perspective and gaze in relation to Siberian space absent in outsider narratives; depictions of Siberian space that rely on "myths" such as its "taiga that stretches for thousands of kilometers," its "clouds of mosquitos," and the untapped "riches" of its natural resources are focalized through the thoughts and dreams of outsiders prior to their arrival. Similarly, Rasputin's early repertoire also showed an interest in the "unnoticed stories" of Siberian subjects such as an elderly woman searching for her son who had gone missing at the GES construction site.[54]

Rasputin's interests gradually turned to fiction writing and by the mid-1960s he had begun to publish short stories about Siberian life in regional journals and participate actively in local literary circles and workshops, most notably a 1965 seminar for young writers of Siberia and the Far East in Chita, after which he was inducted into the Writers' Union.[55] Rasputin would later recall the seminar as formative for Siberian literature, granting its participants, or *chitintsy* as they came to be called, "heightened sense of authority" both nationally and regionally.[56] By the early 1970s, Rasputin was positioning himself not only as a Siberian writer, but as a canon-maker and gatekeeper of Siberian letters, serving on the editorial board of the Irkutsk-based literary almanac *Angara*, writing corrective letters to other regional journals such as *Sibirskie ogni*, and publishing editorial reviews and introductions for the works of other Siberian writers.[57]

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[51] See Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*; Paul Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 226-7.

[52] Rasputin participated in a seminar for young Siberian writers led by Chivilikhin in 1965 and often mentioned him as an important mentor and influence throughout his career. See, e.g., "Byt' samim soboi," 164.

[53] See for instance Valentin Rasputin, "Sil'nye zhdut sil'nykh," *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, March 6, 1960; Valentin Rasputin, "Idut na vostok poezda," *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, March 9, 1960; Valentin Rasputin, *Kostrovye novykh gorodov* (Krasnoiarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966). For a brief discussion of hydroelectricity and socialist realist conventions in Rasputin's early work, see David C. Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose* (MHRA, 1986), 18-19.

[54] Valentin Rasputin, "Nezametnye istorii," *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, March 15, 1960.

[55] See Chapter 2 of Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*.

[56] See Valentin Rasputin, "[Vospominaniia o seminare molodykh pisatelei Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka, g. Chita, sentiabr 1965 g.]," *Angara* 4 (1970): 19. Among the leaders of this seminar were Rasputin's mentor, Vladimir Chivilikhin, and Chukchi writer Yuri Rytkheu, who will be the focus of the next chapter. (See "Literaturnyi forum v Chite," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 28, 1975.)

[57] See Valentin Rasputin, "Eto ozhidanie snega, a potom...: pis'ma V. G. Rasputina v redaktsiiu 'Sibirskikh ognei'" 4 (2015): 124–28; Rasputin et al., "Molodaia Sibir' i molodoi pisatel'."

At the same time, Rasputin was gradually honing his literary craft to more forcefully convey the values and worldviews that he believed Siberian literature could best express.

Such expression entailed conveying a Soviet Siberian reality that Russian literature and the outsiders flocking to the region had "stubbornly neglected to notice"— particularly the elderly *Sibiriak* peasants living and working in villages scattered throughout the taiga. Rasputin drew on skills he gained through both his knowledge of journalistic methods and Siberian *kraevedenie* ("regional studies") as well as his lived experience.[58] Incorporating ongoing fieldwork would become an essential part of his writing process, he sought to close the gap between his childhood and the present by spending weeks over the summer in villages along the Angara where he would study the spiritual and physical world of his subjects, recording the dialectal nuances of their "living language" as well as their everyday rituals and beliefs.[59] By the early 1970s, Rasputin's quiet portraits of Siberian life had reached a national audience thanks to the publication of several short stories and novellas in widely-circulating literary publications such as *Nash sovremennik* and *Literaturnaia Rossiia*. The texts' attention to ethnographic and geographic detail and their empathy for their subjects also earned him a reputation as a pioneering writer of Village Prose alongside other young writers from rural Slavic backgrounds whose work offered what one critic characterized as an ethical and "'poetic model' of village life."[60]

Rasputin's Literary Ethics

Published in *Nash sovremennik* in 1976, *Farewell to Matyora*'s empathetic depiction of the last weeks of a village in the flood zone of the Bratsk reservoir generated considerable excitement among readers and critics, solidifying Rasputin's reputation as a village prose writer (*derevenshchik*). However, in interviews conducted throughout the 1970s Rasputin bristled at characterizations of his work that confined it to the parameters of "village prose," even as he expressed admiration and affinity towards other writers whose work fell within the category.[61] In particular, Rasputin disliked the rigid categories and binary oppositions that were often used to distinguish Village Prose from other official Soviet literature, such as tradition/modernity, past/future, urban/rural, elderly/youth, and lyrical/realist. Instead, he argued that the rural themes and experiences presented in his prose were necessary for the moral reorientation of Soviet readers as they forged a path forward in an age of rapid urbanization:

> Когда говорят о "деревенской литературе, о нравственной проблематике в ней […] часто упускают главное: дело не в том, о сельской или городской жизни речь в произведении — и в городе те же люди, что и в деревне. Но деревня издавна

[58] In one interview Rasputin expressed this as a duty to "talk about those things that only I know" (Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi," 145–46).

[59] This scholarly attention to the details of his elderly rural subjects' lives helped establish Rasputin's writerly reputation in the Soviet and foreign press, as a "rural" writer, the semantics of which (as I've established above) Rasputin resisted.

[60]Sidorov, "Preodolevaia zabvenie. Povest' Valentina Rasputina 'Proshchanie s Materoi.'"

[61]These writers included fellow *Sibiriaki* such as Vasilii Shukshin and Viktor Astafiev, as well as others from across the RSFSR and other Slavic regions such as Belarus. It must be noted that even when aligning himself with other village prose writers, Rasputin seems to express a reluctance to formalize the group into a distinct school or circle of writers, stating in one interview that he "would prefer not to come up with a specific list". (See Rasputin, "Byt' Samim Soboi," 146.) Instead, he often intersperses the names of contemporaries with classic Russian and Soviet writers such as Tolstoy, Bunin, or Sholokhov.

> считалась хранительницей моральных устоев народа, и городу легче существовать, если у него есть столь прочный нравственный тыл, как деревня. […][62]
>
> When they talk about 'village literature,' about its moral agenda […] they often miss the point: it's not a matter of whether a work speaks about rural or urban life – in the city there are the same types of people that are in the villages. But traditionally the village was considered the custodian of the nation's moral code and it's easier for the city to exist if it has such a solid moral backbone as the village. […]

Here Rasputin adapts the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia's insistence on the Russian peasantry as source and keeper of national values for the sake of a Soviet readership for whom rural life was rapidly becoming irrelevant. The spiritual significance of the village lay not so much in the fact that past ways of life were better preserved there but rather in its role as a repository of wisdom, formed over generations and traditionally kept by community elders, to be passed down to younger generations connected by kinship and place. In this regard, Rasputin believed that Soviet youth, who had come of age at a time of innovation and future-orientation, had "something to inherit from their grandfathers."[63] Urbanization and modernization were threatening to dislocate community ties between local elders and the younger Soviet generation.[64] The writer's task was thus to document existing inherited knowledge at risk of being lost in the progressive, forward-oriented mode of time.[65]

Rasputin thus framed his interest in folk tradition and ancestral knowledge to be an essential part of his "responsibility to the communist upbringing [*vospitanie*] of the people," which acquired the ethical humanist character typical of postwar Soviet literature.[66] Echoing Vladimir Pomerantsev's sentiment that literary production should document "the soul of an epoch" by appealing to readers through its faithful portrayal of the "worries, duties, and emotions of people," Rasputin believed that literature was "first and foremost a sentimental education," wherein the "proper and sublime nurturing of the human spirit" it provided could serve as "an antidote against spiritual deafness and dumbness" that had emerged due to the "great speeds and enormous social transformations" of the "scientific-technical revolution."[67] A faithful literary documentation of the "spiritual life" of the Siberian village and the generations of inherited knowledge that informed it could therefore provide a tangible means through which to offer such

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[62] Soboleva, "Doveriaia Mysli Geroiam."

[63] Rasputin, "Ne Mog Ne Prostit'sia s Materoi."

[64] This anxiety is reflected not only in Rasputin's public comments, but also in the anxieties of his elderly heroines, which I will later discuss.

[65] Folklorists have noted that in Russian rural tradition, the elderly, particularly elderly women, are viewed as "memory-keepers," whose role at transmitting ancestral and experiential knowledge to younger generations amounts to a sacred ritual. See Olson and Adonyeva, *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise*, 277-306.

[66] Rasputin, "Valentin Rasputin, "K mezhdunarodnoi vstreche pisatelei v Sofii," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, June 1977; Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi." As a young writer coming of age in the late 1950s, Rasputin's literary coming-of-age was sculpted by the liberal atmosphere of Thaw-era intellectual values, which called for Socialist values that were driven by a subjective, internally-driven sense of moral duty and empathy for others. See Inna Kochetkova, *The Myth of the Russian Intelligentsia: Old Intellectuals in the New Russia* (London: Routledge, 2010); Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*.

[67] Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature"; Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi"; Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi," 145.

an education to a rapidly urbanizing Soviet public. Even as the geographical focus of their civic concerns differed, Rasputin had this in common with the urban and youth-centered literary ideology of the *shestidesiatniki*: all were equally interested in representing facets of *subjectively experienced* reality in the lived present, which could serve as a moral foundation for navigating a rapidly changing world.

Such concerns were necessarily national in scale, particularly considering the demographic shifts caused by postwar migration and urbanization: the increased mobility throughout the Soviet Union meant that the ties between Soviet subjects and their home regions were weakening. Moving to new cities or regions when still young, the new generations had lost their strong connection to their birthplaces (and the intergenerational knowledge accumulated there) without acquiring longstanding experiential ties to their new homes. Moreover, Siberia was undergoing its own significant demographic shift as waves of Soviet workers attracted by idealistic depictions of the region flocked to the construction sites, plants, and mines cropping up there. Preserving and transmitting the inherited moral knowledge required for the ethical construction of the Soviet future was therefore a decidedly *regional* problem, one that Siberian writers had the singular vantage point to address.

At the center of this work was a strong pride for the writer's native Siberia and a deep sense of responsibility for documenting Siberian experience for a broad readership. This relied on recentering the region territorially and symbolic as a *rodina,* a native, genealogically-rooted place: "that archetypal motherland, the center of the world, to which other lands in which I find myself for the first time are gradually affixed."[68] Rasputin's native Siberia serves as a phenomenologically oriented frame of reference for making sense of national space; other spaces become affixed to and incorporated into the subject's central idea about homeland as they are encountered, but the ancestral Siberia is the model according to which other maps of space make sense. It was therefore precisely through this sense of a specifically Siberian orientation that Rasputin envisioned literary interpretations of Siberian reality.

Creating a distinctly Siberian chronicle of the present thus required capturing the *local* experience of Siberian construction, illuminating the realities not only of the shock workers who had arrived en masse to Siberian cities and construction sites to participate in Soviet future-building, but also those of the Angara-Yenisei basin's local inhabitants, many of whom resided in the very villages that Siberian GES construction were wiping off the map. Siberian writers with a "strong sense of the contemporary" (*s ostrym chuvstvom sovremennosti*), and a "pure and biased love for Siberia" (*pristrastnaia i chistaia lyubov' k Sibiri*) could use their unique regional knowledge as tools in their literary arsenal. Through the cultivation of a distinct regional poetics, Siberian literature could serve as a corrective to the latest perpetuation of the cultural myth of Siberia as a utopian "land of the future" (*zemlia budushshego*) that the cultural discourse of GES construction had come to define, "present[ing] readers with the story of our spiritual discoveries both large and small instead of the exotic tall tales about the Siberian frosts, taiga campfires and the rapid conquest of rivers," a "sin" characteristic of a "fair portion of [Russian] literature about Siberia."[69]

Rasputin's interest in documenting Siberian regional experience was in fact characteristic of a broader turn towards regional identity that had begun to spread throughout the Soviet Union

[68] Gennadii Mashkin, "Sud'ba moia- Sibir': pisateli o sebe," *Vostochno-Sibirskaia pravda*, December 7, 1969.

[69] "…предлагают читателю рассказ о наших, больших и малых, духовных открытиях – взамен экзотических баек о сибирских морозах, таёжных кострах, стремительно побеждённых реках, коими грешит некоторая часть нашей литературы о Сибири." (Rasputin et al., "Molodaia Sibir' i molodoi pisatel'.")

just as Rasputin was beginning his career as a journalist in the late 1950s and into the 60s. This interest was cultivated formally through a resurgence of the Russian scholarly discipline of *kraevedenie* or "regional studies," the scholarly study of a particular region or place within the nation, which extends across disciplines to include ecology, history, demography, anthropology, and economics. As Emily Johnson has noted, practitioners of the discipline, or *kraevedy,* typically self-identify as natives or insiders to their region of study, and believe that the specificity of a given region or locality "can influence our options, choices, points of view, and to some extent even our character," making geographic space an important framework through which to understand local consciousness and culture.[70] The practice had its roots in local scholarly practices arising in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which had been suppressed by the end of the 1920s as bourgeois and narrowly-focused. The shifting state narratives of history resulting from de-Stalinization allowed for its reemergence within party institutions in the late 1950s, and by the 1960s both professional and amateur pursuits in *kraevedenie* came to be sponsored in an official capacity by local libraries, universities, and museums. Victoria Donovan has posited that the discipline's "fragmentation of national memory along regional lines" was intended to serve as a more accessible alternative to the totalizing "national mythmaking" of Stalinist historiography, creating a multiplicity of perspectives on historical events in place of the centralized narrative of history favored under Stalin. Due to its highly decentralized nature, *kraevedenie* offered Soviet individuals a more direct stake in forming narratives about national history, placing increasing pressure on the central state to pay attention to local and regional demands. [71] *Kraevedenie* circles thus became loci for activism during the late Soviet period, particularly for the locally organized environmentalist and nationalist campaigns of which village prose writers were also a part.[72]

The prerevolutionary scholarship from which *kraevedenie* developed as a field had been fueled by a strong regionalist political movement over the course of the nineteenth century. Siberian regionalist ideology (termed *oblastnichestvo* by its adherents) rested on the conviction that Russian Siberians (*Sibiriaki*) should be considered a distinct Russian sub-nationality, whose character had been shaped by Siberia's harsh climate, unique history of frontier settler colonialism, and the ethnic mixing that arose due to centuries of interaction between Russian settlers and local indigenous inhabitants. Many of the radicals who advocated for Siberian regional autonomy such as Nikolai Iadrintsev and Grigorii Potanin also published an extensive body of interdisciplinary, regionally-centered scholarly research or *rodinovedenie*, including natural taxonomies, local histories, and economic and demographic sketches of the region and its

[70] Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*, 3-4.
[71] Donovan, ""How Well Do You Know Your Krai?," 465-67.
[72] A few scholars have in fact directly connected the postwar interest in *kraevedenie* to the rise of village prose during the same time period: elements of *kraevedenie* research, such as folklore, dialectology, and ecology were important features of village prose poetics. For a discussion of the relationship between Siberian *kraevedenie*-adjacent groups and Soviet environmentalism, see Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*; Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 1998; Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*; Donovan, "How Well Do You Know Your Krai?" Some scholars have directly connected the postwar interest in *kraevedenie* to the rise of village prose during the same time period: elements of *kraevedenie* research, such as folklore, dialectology, and ecology were important features of village prose poetics. For a discussion of the relationship between Siberian *kraevedenie*-adjacent groups and Soviet environmentalism, see Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia*; Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 1998; Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*; Donovan, "How Well Do You Know Your Krai?"

development, all of which served to illuminate the conditions shaping the Siberian character.[73] Such studies served a broader regionalist political purpose: insider-generated scholarship on the region could provide an alternative scholarly frame through which to understand and govern the region, and could therefore be used to advocate for Siberian interests on a national stage.[74]

The movement also called for the development of Siberian literature as a means of generating regional self-consciousness and advocating for regional political autonomy, although by the time the movement was suppressed in the 1920s, its primary literary innovations remained in the realm of *publitsistika*. The regionalists by and large prescribed to the materialist belief dominant at the time that the human psyche and therefore culture were shaped by the features of the surrounding environment. Siberian literature would arise from a distinctly Siberian intellectual culture harnessing a unique worldview formed by the region's distinct historical, geographic, and environmental conditions, creating a literary language that would most faithfully capture the region in its essence rather than copying or adapting literary forms developed at Russia's center, all of which were ill-suited to Siberian reality.[75]

Rasputin's literary ideology and practices thus contained strong influences from his engagement in Soviet *kraevedenie* as well as the older regionalist ideologies of the prerevolutionary *oblastniki*, although he would not explicitly connect himself to the latter until the 1980s. Such influences manifested themselves most explicitly in the author's belief that literature had a responsibility for the moral upbringing of the nation. Rasputin would later attribute this idea to *oblastnik* Semyon Kapustin's assertion that "the Siberian peasant represents the Russian as he was in ancient Russia, before the appearance of servitude, slavery, and serfdom," and thus encapsulated a Russian national ethos in a way the Western Russian peasantry, distorted by serfdom and industrialization, could not.[76] Traces of regionalist thought were also present in Rasputin's belief that his status as a "native (*korennoi*) *Sibiriak*" made him and other Siberian authors best poised to illustrate that Siberian rural reality for a broad Soviet readership.

Rasputin therefore saw the cultivation of a distinct Siberian literature shaped by a strong sense of regional identity and perspective as a necessary solution to a perceived moral crisis

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[73] M. V. Shilovskii, "Aktual'nye voprosy istorii i sovremennoi praktiki istoricheskogo kraevedeniia v Sibiri," *Zemlia Tiumenskaia* 17 (2004): 32–42.

[74] This idea was a mainstay of Siberian regionalist ideology, and was one of the criteria for how Irkutsk historian Andrei Shchapov proposed determining the characteristics of Siberian *oblastnost',* or "regionality" (a coinage based on *narodnost'*) in the 1860s (*Sochineniia A. P. Shchapova,* xxxi. Notable examples of such cross-disciplinary regional scholarship include Iadrintsev's *Sibir' kak koloniia* (1892) and Potanin's long essay "Nuzhdy Sibiri" (1908) For a broader overview about how regional studies figured into the development of *oblastnichestvo* and regionalist ideas about Siberian identity, see Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894," 242-3 and 285-294 and Shilovskii, "Aktual'nye voprosy istorii i sovremennoi praktiki istoricheskogo kraevedeniia v Sibiri" and *Sibirskoe oblastnichestvo v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni regiona*, 127-218.

[75] In Potanin's words, the ideal Siberian writer "does not fight back the urge in himself to continue the creative work of the Russian people not in old forms, but in new ones, corresponding with his new surroundings. This refraction of the Russian national spirit under the rays of the Siberian sun will not impoverish, but only enrich Russian life" (See Potanin, *Izbrannoe*, 267-268).

[76] Rasputin, *Sibir', Sibir'*, 31. Some historians have argued that the claim that Siberia was lacking in a serf system was not entirely correct; there were occasionally serfs in Siberia, albeit at a much lower number and in a much less systematized fashion than in European Russia. (See, for example, Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*.) However, this claim was central to various 19th-century formulations of Siberian history and identity, which were perpetuated by both the *oblastniki* and by western Russian liberal intelligentsia. (See Watrous, "Russia's 'Land of the Future': Regionalism and the Awakening of Siberia, 1819-1894"; Bassin, "Inventing Siberia.")

unfolding on a national scale. Given the importance of place and embodied knowledge within this paradigm, both crisis and solution had necessarily *ecological* components. The Siberian knowledge forms Rasputin sought to textually preserve and transmit were inherently rooted in place, accumulating and evolving gradually over the course of centuries through intergenerational transmission within settled communities. Hence the destruction of the environment and dispersal of the people living there was akin to the destruction of the community itself, and of the history and knowledge accumulated there.

While the Baikal protection movement was ultimately unsuccessful at changing Soviet policies (both cellulose plants were up and running by 1967 and a decade later had caused "irreversible degradation" according to the USSR Academy of Sciences), it had successfully mobilized Russian intelligentsia and amateur naturalists to engage with environmental issues. By the 1970s, the Soviet state had begun to adopt more comprehensive measures for environmental protection as a strategic component of Cold War diplomacy. The international community and UN were increasingly concerned with ecological conservation, and in order to compete with the West as a model of "advanced socialism" the USSR pledged its own commitment to the environment. These measures were generally superficial at best: in practice, the state continued to engage in practices that had a negative environmental impact. Siberian watersheds remained an important object of environmental debates throughout the 1970s and into the 80s, particularly in light of newly unveiled state plans to reroute and divert northward-flowing rivers (many of which were located in Siberia) as a way to irrigate drought-ridden agricultural regions such as the Aral Sea Basin.[77]

For Rasputin and other Siberian writers, the environmental impact of such projects raised questions that transformed regional concerns into a matter of a national import. The hydroelectric projects of the 1960s had already led to a wave of mass cultural and ecological extinction, plunging entire Siberian villages and their surrounding environs underwater and wiping them off the map.[78] The environmental consequences of such large-scale projects of environmental engineering were yet unknown, but had the potential to be even more devastating. Literary chronicles of place, or rather of *embodied* human relationships to place and nature, were therefore equally necessary for preserving and transmitting the moral perspective that could prevent environmental catastrophe. For although, as Rasputin stated to the press, the literary problem of "man and nature" was (like other topics) "eternal," the rapid transformation of such relationships via the scientific-technological revolution and urban migration had rendered the theme "overdue" in contemporary literature.[79] Privately, Rasputin expressed mistrust in the scientific community's ability to address these more human dimensions of environmental conservation due to their inability to intervene in State planning, complaining to Viktor Astafiev in 1976 about the "castrated academics" who "for some time now [had] been quietly condoning" state policies that allowed for nature's "annihilation" and stating that "writers remain the only

[77] See Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom,* 402-428; Peterson, *Pipe Dreams*, 331-33. Protests to these "mega projects" appears to have been more controversial than the Baikal activism, and many works were disseminated through underground means.

[78] "Stranitsy budushchikh knig. Valentin Rasputin," *Nedelia*, June 21, 1976, sec. Sobytiia i podrobnosti.

[79] Soboleva, "Doveriaia mysli geroiam." Rasputin viewed the popularity of his fiction as a reflection of the sudden timeliness of this issue.

ones who are attempting to discuss [environmental conservation]" due to their perceived role as the moral compass of the nation.[80]

In Rasputin's view, the Siberian writer's task was to utilize the finality of written text in order to overcome the growing fissure between Soviet human subjects and the natural environment, which had traditionally been modeled by the very same *inherited* and embodied knowledge forms that influenced his personal literary ideology. The rural Siberian imaginary of Rasputin's village prose could in this regard serve as a bridge across space and time, sometimes both at once. The text's mimetic representation of the Siberia experienced by contemporary elderly villagers— "contemporaries, living in the same age"[81] as young Soviet urbanites— demonstrates the relativity of spatial "truths about the present"[82] and evokes empathy in readers whose understanding of Siberia had been formed by the dominant narratives told by urban or territorial outsiders. The novel's juxtaposition of events in the recent past (as a representation of the planned flooding in the Priangar'e region that took place between 1961-63 to create the Bratsk reservoir) with the environmental threats of the ongoing present (in interviews the author's repeated references to environmental changes currently taking place read as a veiled reference to contemporaneous discourse on river diversion and other controversial environmental policies) provide a blueprint for civic consciousness, raising present and future readers' sense of urgency.

These modes converge in the process of reading, transmitting the novel's ideological values. Rasputin stated that the resulting transformation of the reader's "spiritual and intellectual state" could "be compared to a river receiving the flow of a new tributary (*prinimaiushei v sebia novyi pritok*). After a good book, the reader is no longer the same person as he was, but a different one, richer in composition (*bolee bogatoi napolnennosti*)."[83] If for Rasputin fictional texts are tributaries of human moral development, then we can understand them to possess fluvial dynamics, wherein the intellectual and spiritual ideas of the text enter and accumulate within the ecosystem of the reader's character, transported and deposited over time (like sediment in water) by the formal properties of the narrative itself. As the pages that follow below demonstrate, *Farewell to Matyora'*s textual depictions of the Angara watershed give physical form to this fluvial understanding of the text-reader relationship, forming a textual whole that models the "proper" human relationship to the Angara River and the Siberian environment more broadly through what I term a poetics of fluvial settlement. The novel can be understood to depict Siberian space on two distinct but intertwining levels. The text *chronicles* the Angara River of the recent past and present on the level of the text's plot, providing readers a vivid picture of place that (as Rasputin put it) dominant culture had "stubbornly neglected to

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[80] Letter dated May 14, 1976, from the private archive of A. F. Gremitskaia. Published in Valentin Rasputin and Viktor Astaf'ev, *Prosto pis'ma...*, ed. O. V. Loseva, Biblioteka memuarov "Blizkoe proshloe" (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2018), 37–39. Much of Rasputin's disdain for the scientific establishment would seem to be tied to Rasputin's deeper mistrust in the administrative center and its emphasis on internationalism and artifice, which was increasingly tied to his own developing nationalist sentiments. Elsewhere in the letter he associates the same institutions with the creation of Esperanto, complaining that its leaders "never heard and [don't] want to hear living language." In fact, scientists from both the capitals and smaller cities played a critical role in grassroots environmental conservation efforts, as Weiner has discussed (*A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 375).

[81] Rasputin, "Byt' samim soboi." 145.

[82] Rasputin and his co-editors of the 40-volume literary anthology *Molodaia proza Sibiri* argued in 1974 that "writing the truth about the present" of Siberia should be one of the primary tasks of Siberian literature. See Rasputin et al., "Molodaia Sibir' i molodoi pisatel'."

[83] Rasputin, "Ne mog ne prostit'sia s Materoi."

notice". Simultaneously, it *orients* its readers into the various phenomenologies of the river at the level of the text's narration, diegetically reproducing embodied experiences and temporalities of the river that together shape local place and the knowledge systems emerging from it. As a holistic system, the novel's spatial imaginary thus models an alternative relationship to Siberian rivers from the dynamic "taiga romanticism" of the frontier models that were popularized during the Thaw.

Ways of Seeing in Farewell to Matyora

Focalizing the Bratsk hydroelectric construction through the perspective of the village-island Matyora as its inhabitants live through its final weeks of existence, *Farewell to Matyora* establishes a stark tension with dominant socialist realist discourse by framing the damming of the river not as a symbol of the open-ended future of Soviet progress but as the cataclysmic end of the geological and human history of the island and village as a place. Although scholarship on the novel tends to read this tension as symptomatic of Village Prose's conservative rejection of socialist realism in general, as we have seen, Rasputin's position in the Soviet literary apparatus and his beliefs about literature's (and particularly literary realism's) moral didactive function in society aligned him firmly within the dominant Soviet literary ideologies of the period.[84] In its essence, then, the novel can be read as a distinctly Soviet regionalist response to dominant socialist realist discourse about space which seeks to demonstrate the relativity of spatial perception[85] and the extent to which our assumptions about the world are shaped by preconceived notions and narratives, the novel's detailed rendering of its peasant subjects and river ecosystem serving as a foil for idealized depictions of the Angara River, the future "Bratsk Sea," and inhabitants of the flood zone. Throughout much of the novel, readers are presented with a constant dialectic between two discursive realities – that of the State (dominant in mainstream Soviet culture) and the "alien" (*chuzhie*) outsiders it brought there, and that of sympathetic Siberian villager insiders (dominant in the novel itself). As I will later discuss, this binary opposition is amplified through the novel's centering of Matyora via the sum of its focalized narrative voices.

The novel's most explicit discussion of perspectival relativity as it pertains to Siberia is presented as a dialogue between three Matyora "natives" and relayed primarily through direct dialogue with sparse narrative intervention.[86] The episode in question, which occurs in the novel's twelfth chapter, is a confrontation between Daria, one of the novel's elderly peasant protagonists, her son Pavel, who works on a nearby *kolkhoz* and his youngest son Andrei, who returned to the region after his army service to work on a Komsomol brigade at the Bratsk construction site. The argument that results presents readers with clear definitions and explanations of the novel's competing "ways of seeing:" stripped of clear geographic affiliations, value judgments and narrative focalization, the scene forces the reader to serve as the primary interpreter of the unfolding conversation.

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[84] See, for example, Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 241–46; Parthe, *Russian Village Prose,* ix-xiv; Gillespie, "A Paradise Lost?"

[85] By "relativity of spatial perception", I mean the relative position or orientation of the subject in space and time, a spatiotemporal phenonomenology, if you will, which is dependent on the dialectic created by the extension of the subject's body into time and space. For a discussion of how this relationship relates specifically to geographic perspective, see Tuan, *Space and Place*. For a theorization of how phenomenological orientation l can be applied in a historical/temporal context, see Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*.

[86] The dialogue's sparsely distributed narrative interruptions are mediated by a free indirect discourse narrator, which focalize the perspective of each of the three interlocutors at various points throughout the chapter.

The scene is framed as a Turgenev-style debate, wherein each generation is aligned with one of the novel's competing ideologies of space. Born prior to the revolution, Daria is one of the novel's guardians of ancestral knowledge and the village's most vocal opponent of flooding. As a proud Komsomol dam-worker and member of the postwar generation, her grandson Andrei is clearly aligned with the romantic idealism of the Thaw-era, voicing a desire to make his own contribution to history through his work on the GES, which he (like Yevtushenko) views as a monument that would "stand for a thousand years."[87] This position informs even Andrei's Siberian identity; he is not concerned with Matyora's impending demise, but rather views it as a natural progression of Siberian history and a benefit to the region more broadly, proclaiming that "our Matyora will go for electricity [*na elektrichestvo poidet*]" to "be of use to the people [*pol'zu liudiam prinosit'*]."[88] Pavel, a member of the first Soviet generation and leader of the local *kolkhoz* is positioned ambivalently in between them.

The spatiotemporal contours of the conflict emerge as the dialogue unfolds, as exemplified in Andrei's statements about why his generation prefers urban construction work over agrarian labor in the countryside:

> [Andrei:] ГЭС строят... […] Вот я и хочу туда, где самое нужное. […] Жалко Матеру, и мне тоже жалко, она нам родная... По-другому, значит, нельзя. Все равно бы она такой, какая она сейчас есть, такой старой, что ли, долго не простояла. […]
>
> [Pavel:] - Почему не понимаем? […] Я с тобой не о том говорю, нужна или не нужна ГЭС. Об этом спору нет. Я говорю, что и здесь кому-то работать надо.
>
> [Andrei:] […] Все-таки не сравнить - там или здесь, условия-то разные. Туда люди для того и едут, чтоб одну большую работу всем вместе сделать, […] а вы здесь вроде как наоборот, вроде как работаете для жизни. […] Когда-то, наверно, и на нашу Матеру, казалось, зачем идти? […] А кто-то пришел и остался - и вышло, что земли без Матеры и правда не хватало. А сын его пошел дальше - не все же тут задерживались. А сын сына еще дальше. […] Пожилые, значит, остаются на обжитых местах, остаются еще больше их обживать, а молодые, они так устроены, наверно, они к новому стремятся. Ясно, что они первыми идут туда, где труднее...[89]
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> [Andrei]: They are building a hydroelectric station. […] See I want to go thither, where it is most needed. […] It's a pity for Matyora, and I'm sorry too, it's our homeland… But there is no other way. In any case, if it stayed the way it is now—so old, I mean--it wouldn't make a difference, it wouldn't remain standing for long. […]
>
> [Pavel] Why don't we understand? I am not talking about whether we need a hydroelectric station. There's no arguing there. I am saying that even here someone needs to work.

[87] Valentin Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1984).
[88] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:291.
[89] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:293.

> [Andrei] […] Still you can't really compare – here or there, the circumstances are different. People go thither so that they can build something big together, but here it's kind of the opposite, like you are all working to live. […] One day [people] thought that about our Matyora—why go thither? But someone came and stayed […] And his son went even further, not everyone stayed here after all. […] That's the law of life and you can't stop it […] The elderly stay in the inhabited places, they stay to inhabit them further, but the young, […] they strive for the new…

Marked by the completed action of perfective aspect and the dynamism of verbs of motion, Andrei's linearly progressive *thither* (underlined once in the passage) corresponds to Thaw-era taiga romanticism, the latest iteration of the Siberian frontier myth wherein *Sibiriak* pioneers push territorial boundaries forever eastward in the name of progress.[90] In contrast, the imperfective aspect and prepositional case mark Daria and Pavel's cyclical accretive *here* (denoted by the double-underlining in the passage) and its understanding of Siberia as an inhabited place.

The two worldviews espoused above are in fact simultaneously embedded in Matyora's colonial history; Andrei is correct in his assertion that Siberia (and by extension Matyora) was founded or *colonized* by Russian pioneers, whose belief in a particular vision of life pushed them further east and beyond the boundaries of the empire into something unknown. Yet the text also makes clear the historical impact of *settlement*—of the *Sibiriak*'s conscious selection of land as a potential dwelling for himself and his descendants, a narrative of Siberian colonization that is previously presented through Matyora's origin story in the first chapter, which imagines its first peasant settler as a "farsighted and inventive person" (*chelovek zorkii i vygadlivyi*) whose qualities of character allow him to "correctly judge" (*verno rassudivshii*) the island's natural qualities that render it ideal for habitation.[91] Such an historical narrative reclaims the *Sibiriak* as a settled inhabitant *of* Siberia and foregrounds the importance of organic, intuitive relationships between humans and their environment, a sensibility which the late Soviet *Sibiriaki*, defined by their restless spirits and adventurous idealism, lack. By juxtaposing Dariia's *here* (the dominant discourse of the novel), with Andrei's *thither* (the dominant discourse of Soviet culture) and synthesizing them in Matyora's history, the scene not only concretely demonstrates the extent to which understandings of Siberia are relative and shaped by subjective perspective, but also invites such a synthesis of perspectives in forging a path into the future.

For Daria's family, this synthesis occurs through the shared sensory experience of nature, which is framed as transcending language and ideas. Seeking an escape from the argument, all three characters fall into silence as they experience the sights, sounds, and smells of rainfall, gradually realizing that "their talk had divided them (*ot'edinil ikh*), who were related in the

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[90] The connection between the novel's Soviet reality and Siberia's past of settler colonialism is made explicit in Andrei's remark that Matyora itself was founded by people like him – pioneers who saw value in Siberian territory and sought it out: "Когда-то, наверно, и на нашу Матёру, казалось, зачем идти? Земли, что ли, без нее не хватало? А кто-то пришел и остался - и вышло, что земли без Матеры и правда не хватало. А сын его пошел дальше - не все же тут задерживались." ("At one time people probably asked that about our Matyora—why go? Wasn't there enough land without it? But someone came and stayed, and it turned out that there truly wasn't enough land without it. And his son went even further – not everyone stayed here.") (*Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:294).

[91] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:209. Later processes of Siberian colonization are presented from a similar vantage point, emphasizing the impact of the island's ecological features on the shape of Russian settlement in the region: it is a stopping point for merchants en route to trade, a shelter for convoys of convicts searching for a place to cook fish, the site of a strategic battle during the civil war years.

closest way (*rodnykh po samomu priamomu rodstvu*), and that a minute's empty watching of the rain had brought them back together (*sumelo snova sblizit'*)."[92] Andrei's moment of synthesis is immediate, his shift in worldview demonstrated by his word choice: afterwards when his father asks when he "will depart" ("*kogda uezzhaesh'-to*") Matyora, he replies that he will "stay a while" (*pozhivu poka*), asking "what's the hurry?" (*kuda toropit'sia?*), emphasizing a departure from his previous *thither* and towards the *here* that his native village represents. Andrei's sudden transformation is facilitated by the same type of "moral knowledge" for which Rasputin advocated: transmission of familial wisdom (that is Dariia's knowledge of Matyora and the Angara River as *here*) that occurs simultaneously with an embodied experience of ancestral place.

As we have established previously, Rasputin believed literature could allow for such a transformation in a readership immersed in the official discourse of Siberia as *thither* by creating the conditions for such knowledge transmission in the text's spatial imaginary, that is by presenting a chronicle of the Angara River as *here* rather than *thither*, not as a means of transportation or a stockpile of unharnessed energy, but rather as an inhabited place. Simultaneously, it must recreate the environment in which such knowledge is traditionally transmitted—that is through the mimetic representation of the bodily relationship between the river and its inhabitant subjects. Therefore, the *chronicle* of the Angara's past and present *here* that is expressed through the text's plot must necessarily be presented through its subjects' *frames of reference* of its subjects, which are expressed through narrative voice.

In the debate, as in the novel at large, the Angara River's *here* is embodied by Matyora, a fictionalized proxy for the 249 settlements flooded to create the Brastk GES and the hundreds of other inhabited sites across Siberia that were flooded for similar projects.[93] Matyora as a place name is remarkable in that it is used fluidly to represent both the village and the island on which it is located, a detail about which the reader is constantly reminded due to the text's constant referential shifts, which sometimes occur within a single paragraph or even sentence.[94] This semantic blurring emphasizes native place as being both social and environmental: Matyora is both a topographical feature of the river and also a human settlement that is *of* the river. Matyora's placement on a fluvial island also serves a strategic purpose in articulating the novel's distinct vantage point; unlike most villages within the Bratsk flood zone, which were situated on the fertile land of the Angara's floodplain (itself a less obvious geological feature of the river ecosystem), the novel's fluvial island setting allows readers to clearly visualize the geographic features and inhabitants of the Angara as being "inside of nature's changes (*vnutri proiskhodiashikh v prirode peremen*)," "neither falling behind, nor running ahead of each day."[95]

What does it mean, then, to be "inside of" fluvial space-time? Narrative cartographies of Matyora and the river offer a model through which to understand how the village-island's spatial and temporal realities are governed by fluvial processes. For instance, in one early mapping of the island and its surroundings, geological history is described through a description of its geomorphology:

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[92] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:295.
[93] Irina A Dal'zhinova and Viktoriia V Pliusnina, "Pereselenie zhitelei Bokhanskogo raiona v khode stroitel'stva Bratskoi GES," *Vestnik Buriatskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Pedagogika. Filologiia. Filosifiia*, no. 7 (2011).
[94] For instance, the first lines of the opening chapter introduce Matyora as "the island and the village bearing the same name" (*ostrov i derevnia, nosiashshiesia odno nazvanie*). (Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:208).
[95] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:208

> Когда-то протока тянулась тут одной прямой и ровной струей, но постепенно своротом с носа острова натащило сюда камней, и живая, быстрая вода отошла влево, а за мысом кисло теперь бестечье с илистым дном и качающимися водорослями. Ниже протока поправлялась, натягиваясь во всю свою ширь, там опять появлялся каменишник с песком и вырастал яр, на котором и построилась деревня.[96]
>
> Once the channel stretched out here in one straight and even stream, but gradually rocks were dragged in by the turn at the tip of the island, and the lively, fast water went off to the left, and beyond the point there now lay a stagnant pool of water with a muddy bottom and swaying aquatic plants. Downstream the channel righted itself, spreading out to its entire width and there again was fine pebble and sand from which the bluff on which the village was built towered forth.

Described here, the island is shown as a mutable entity that is inseparable from the river channel and the movement of the water itself, which is sometimes rendered as an unnamed force (using subjectless neuter verb phrases) that acts upon the island and riverbed (reflected through passive and reflexive verb constructions), and sometimes as an active agent that moves with direction and purpose. The speeds and forms of the river and island constantly change based on the mutual influence each has over the other: the river deposits pebbles at the tip of the island, which in turn pulls and slows the flow of the river's waters. Furthermore, even in the island's present, the water is shown to possess multiple directions, tempos, and forms of motion, from deep, stagnant water, to shallow rapids on the island's left.

The novel's representations of river ecology demonstrate an innate understanding of fluvial processes, such as sediment transport and deposition, which govern the formation of both the river channel and the lands within and surrounding it. Fluvial islands are semi-permanent protrusions of riverbeds, defined as "landform[s], elevated above and surrounded by stream-channel branches or waterways that [persist] sufficiently long to establish permanent vegetation" and (like other parts of the river channel) formed by "variable conditions of erosion and deposition."[97] As water is discharged through a river channel and its tributaries, it picks up sediment from the surrounding river basin, which travels downstream, gradually sorting itself depending on the speed and path of the current. Coarser, heavier pieces of rock and organic matter tumble along the river's floor while finer particles such as runoff soil and sand remain suspended in the middle and upper layers of water towards the river's surface. Gradually, layers of sediment deposit in accordance with the patterns of the river's current at given moments in time, sometimes hardening into layers of bedrock that form the foundation of the river's bed, while at other times getting swept away by strong currents from seasonal flooding, snowmelt, or heavy rainfall, only to be redeposited as the river's waters gradually slow downstream. A river's shape and its geological features are thus a partial chronicle of the river's mechanics as an enclosed system, "a physical system with a history" in which "present form is influenced by both past and present conditions."[98] Islands and other features of a river's geomorphology are thus a summation of heterogenous directions, shapes, and temporalities: of the water's movement, of

[96] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:249.
[97] Osterkamp, "Processes of Fluvial Island Formation, with Examples from Plum Creek, Colorado and Snake River, Idaho," 508, 533.
[98] Knighton, *Fluvial Forms and Processes*, 261.

the environmental conditions of the places over which it passes, and of external climatic conditions that influence both.[99]

We can therefore understand Matyora's space-time as a summation of the various heterogenous and simultaneously occurring temporalities of the Angara's ecosystem, which converge and accumulate to form the textual shape of the island and its inhabitants. Like the river and its constituent parts, the novelistic structure of *Farewell to Matyora* is extremely complex, containing a variety of narrative voices and spatiotemporal orientations which can be collectively understood to belong to Matyora as an island, including its human and non-human subjects and the river ecosystem more broadly. If *Farewell to Matyora*'s environmental message relies on the representation of the Angara River as an *embodied place* operating (like the island itself) according to and within the time-space of the river itself, then we might understand these constituent voices and temporalities as an expression of the fluvial system within the fabric of narrative form. Taken together these properties not only provide the reader with a more complete chronicle of the river and multiple *ways of seeing* the river from inside, but also demonstrate how these various perspectives and actors operate as a complex and interconnected system in which human subjects are only one part, allowing younger generations to better understand the systemic repercussions of unidirectional, progress-based approaches to the environment.

Matyora's Fluvial Orientation: Environmental Knowledge and Narrative Multivoicedness

The novel's expression of Matyora and the Angara's reality is mediated through several distinct third-person narrative voices, each of which possesses a distinct speech register and is marked by a specific spatiotemporal orientation and scale. If we borrow Rasputin's metaphor of the novel as a river tributary which converges into the reader's own stream of personal development through the process of reading, then each of these voices take on the properties of fluvial currents, branching and diverging at times to orient the reader according to a specific view of the river ecosystem and converging throughout the course of the novel's flow to propel the plot forward and establish a holistic sense of Matyora as a place and community.

The most prominent narrative voice of the novel is granted access to the subjective experiences of elderly Siberian villagers, giving readers an alternative perspective of the Siberian present and recent past. This narrative voice is close to a traditional realist narrator in that it slips seamlessly between omniscient expository description, reported speech, and the narration of the protagonists' thoughts, which are primarily rendered through quoted internal monologue and free indirect discourse. The reader is oriented towards the peasants' "ways of seeing" through careful stylization of the peasant vernacular: unlike descriptions of the physical environment, which are for the most part rendered in standard Russian, the moments of free indirect discourse adopt colloquialisms and conversational linguistic tendencies such as idiom, filler words, and diminutives that close the distance between reader and *Sibiriak* subject. At the same time, the text avoids objectifying peasant subjectivity: while its moments of psychological narration contain syntactic nuances that mark it as colloquial, it avoids the overly stylized dialect markers typical of traditional *skaz* narration. Instead, the text's representations of Siberian peasant dialect (the product of exhaustive ethnographic research for which Rasputin received critical praise) are reserved for moments of reported speech.

[99] For an accessible overview of the physical processes of hydraulic discharge and sediment transport and how they impact fluvial geomorphology, see David Knighton, *Fluvial Forms and Processes: A New Perspective* (Oxon, England: Routledge, 2014), 260–335. For a more technical discussion of the physical science behind such processes, see Luna B. Leopold, *Fluvial Processes in Geomorphology*, Dover Earth Science (Newburyport, MA: Dover Publications, 2012).

Since Rasputin believed that Siberian peasant worldviews could provide future generations of readers with a moral blueprint for relationships with the environment, this narrative register is particularly important for helping readers understand villagers' distinct spatiotemporal perspective, particularly in comparison to the dominant and familiar discourse of Soviet progress espoused by Andrei and other party members within the novel. It does so by centering individual peasants' distinct ways of seeing and understanding space, which are shaped by the geography of the island itself as well as an adherence to traditional Russian peasant cosmology of religious syncretism or *dvoeverie*, which relies on a belief that "everything in nature" including symbols of dwelling such as houses and samovars "is alive, potentially sapient and sentient."[100] As such, the reader is initiated into mode of understanding space in which everything in Matyora, from houses and stoves to livestock and trees are alive and interconnected.

This effect is particularly apparent in the villagers' descriptions of the island itself, such as in this following episode where Daria looks out at the river from the island's highest point:

> Отсюда, с макушки острова, видно было как на ладони и Ангару, и дальние чужие берега, и свою Матеру, смыкающуюся за сосновой пустошью в одно целое с Подмогой, так что островная земля тянулась чуть не до горизонта и лишь у самого его краешка проблескивала полоска воды. Правый широкий рукав реки, словно оттопыриваясь на сгибе, теснил низкий противоположный берег, вдаваясь в него, и опять выпрямлялся вдали, спадая ровно и аккуратно; левый рукав, более спокойный и близкий, как бы принадлежащий Матере, свисая с ее крутого берега, в этот час при тихом солнце казался неподвижным. Его в Матере так и называли: своя Ангара. В эту сторону смотрела деревня, сюда спускали лодки, ходили за водой, отсюда ребятишки впервые озирали мир, до каждого камешка все здесь было изучено и запомнено, а за протокой при колхозе держали поля, которые только нынче и забросили. И тихо, покойно лежал остров, тем паче родная, самой судьбой назначенная земля, что имела она четкие границы, сразу за которыми начиналась уже не твердь, а течь.[101]
>
> From here, the top of the island, she could see everything spread out below her—the Angara, the distant foreign shores, and her Matyora, conjoining with Podmoga beyond the pine barrens into one whole such in such a way that the island's lands stretched almost to the horizon and it was only at the very edge that there was a shiny strip of water. The broad right sleeve of the river, sticking out at the bend, crowded the low opposite bank, digging into it, and then straightened out in the distance, falling smoothly and neatly, the left sleeve, calmer and closer, at that hour in the quiet sunlight seemed motionless. In Matyora they called it Our Angara. The village faced that way, and it was here that they set out their boats and went down for water, and it was from here that the children first looked out into the world; they knew and remembered everything here down to the last pebble, and beynd the channel near the collective farm they had kept fields, although nowadays they had mostly abandoned them. And quietly, peacefully the

[100] Harry Walsh, "Christian-Pagan Syncretism in Russian 'Ruralist' Prose," *Religion & Literature* 27, no. 2 (1995): 72.
[101] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:236-7.

> island lay there, all the more fated to be their native soil, because it had clear boundaries, beyond which there was no more solid ground, but watery flow.

Daria and the reader behold the island and river in panorama: facing downstream and gazing down from above in near 360-degree view, the reader is guided in a sweeping horizontal motion across the landscape, in a near bird's-eye view to form a textual map of the island and its section of the river, bordered by the "distant alien shores" that delineate the river from the mainland. The text is careful to distinguish this vista from an actual bird's eye view, however: although the subject beholds the surroundings in a manner that would seem to claim mastery over the visual realm, (the text plays with scale by suggestively placing the river "as if on the palm" of the island and the viewer) the perspective remains rooted on the ground underneath. Rendered as "*svoia Angara*" just as Matyora's inhabitants and descendants are conceptualized as "*svoi*", the possessive pronoun is detached from any singular subject, instead suggesting a sense of belonging to Matyora as a whole. The landscape's features are rendered with a similar sense of interconnectedness. Angara's contours become body parts belonging both to the river and to Matyora itself and individual features of the river and its environs, such as the pines growing on neighboring Podmoga, and the steep shores of the island are shown to blend "into one whole" whose individual features or dimensions might change or stand still depending on the sun or the time of day. Finally, the subject's understanding of the island's landscape expands backwards into the subject's memory, which blends with the present through associated images such as boats and fields through which the subject intuits the whole of the world through the island and the river "down to each pebble." Even the physical "firm boundaries" of the island, which give the subject a sense of completeness and wholeness, blend into the river; water and land are replaced merely with the concepts of sensation and motion, "*tverd' i tech'*."

This understanding of Matyora and fluvial space as an interconnected whole is shown to profoundly shape villagers' understanding of Soviet reality, and their perceived inability to comprehend Soviet modernization. The novel thus often utilizes peasant spatial perspective to defamiliarize common components of contemporary Soviet life, pointing to the ways in which they are detached from a more intuitive understanding of space. Administrative spatial categories are primarily used as an expository means of differentiating the village's relationship with space and the environment from that of the average urban Soviet citizen; cities, towns, or regions apart from Matyora itself are rarely named and generally lack identifying specificity. For instance, relatives who have departed simply live in "the city" (*v gorode*). Organic village settlements inhabited by old-settler *Sibiriaki* or Indigenous people are referred to by the colloquial *derevnia*, whereas *poselok*, the official Soviet category for small rural settlements, is used only to refer to the artificial settlements to which they will be relocated. The only specific administrative territories to be mentioned by name are landmark cities Irkutsk and Bratsk, which are referenced in relation to the new construction, and Moscow, described as a far-away and almost mythical place.

The privileged spatial categories and scales of the novel are typically environmental or genealogical. For instance, the village itself is not mapped by street or even family names or municipal landmarks, but instead by the personal or natural, such as trees, individual cottages, the ancestral cemetery, bathhouses, many of which are described by reference to the generations of family who have resided at a particular location. On a larger scale, rivers and riverbanks are the most prominent means of conceptualizing distance and relative location for the villagers; nearby landmarks are measured in terms of cardinal directions and locations along the Angara

Riverbank and its inhabitants (i.e., to the left or the right, or on the Buryat side) while more distant territories are conceptualized in proximity to other watersheds such as the Lena or Ob.

Similarly, the villagers' perspectives defamiliarize elements of everyday Soviet life that urban readers might view as commonplace, practical, and even close to nature, such as gardening or drinking tea, recasting them as impractical or illogical in their understanding of humans' relationship to nature. For instance, one villager expresses disdain at the idea of growing crops at a garden plot at the new settlement (why bring soil to an inhospitable land instead of choosing land that has fertile soil?) while another questions the idea that an apartment, rather than a house, could ever amount to a home (thus playing with the semantics of дом and the Russian sense of what it means to be at home). Such examples urge readers to question what it means to live in a settlement that was planned *without regard for* or even *in spite of* humans' relationship to the environment.

Whereas this "realist" narrator voice emphasizes the perspectival relativity of the Siberian present and centers Soviet Siberian peasant experience to allow the reader to empathize with and listen to the experiences of rural elders, the novel's other narrative voices model the older natural rhythms and spiritual worldviews that have accumulated to form and shape these peasant perspectives. These are the cyclical rhythms that have shaped the geological history of the river itself; the communal knowledge of Matyora the village, which was formed through gradual transmission and accumulation of knowledge transmitted generationally through place; and the *spiritual* knowledge of Matyora as a system of cohabiting human and non-human subjects, which are governed as parts of a *whole* embodied by the river itself.

The novel's sense of geological time is evoked in what can best be described as an epic quasi-omniscient voice, audible in the novel's first chapter and in brief narrative interludes which situates the events of Matyora's present within a broader geohistorical cycle. This is particularly evident in the first pages of the novel:

> И опять наступила весна, своя в своем нескончаемом ряду, но последняя для Матеры, для острова и деревни, носящих одно название. Опять с грохотом и страстью пронесло лед, нагромоздив на берега торосы, и Ангара освобожденно открылась, вытянувшись в могучую сверкающую течь. Опять на верхнем мысу бойко зашумела вода, скатываясь по релке на две стороны; опять запылала по земле и деревьям зелень, пролились первые дожди, прилетели стрижи и ласточки и любовно к жизни заквакали по вечерам в болотце проснувшиеся лягушки. Все это бывало много раз, и много раз Матера была внутри происходящих в природе перемен, не отставая и не забегая вперед каждого дня. Вот и теперь посадили огороды - да не все: три семьи снялись еще с осени, разъехались по разным городам, а еще три семьи вышли из деревни и того раньше, в первые же годы, когда стало ясно, что слухи верные. Как всегда, посеяли хлеба - да не на всех полях: за рекой пашню не трогали, а только здесь, на острове, где поближе. И картошку, моркошку в огородах тыкали нынче не в одни сроки, а как пришлось, кто когда смог: многие жили теперь на два дома, между которыми добрых пятнадцать километров водой и горой, и разрывались пополам. Та Матера и не та: постройки стоят на месте, только одну избенку да баню разобрали на дрова, все пока в жизни, в действии, по-прежнему голосят петухи, ревут коровы, трезвонят

собаки, а уж повяла деревня, видно, что повяла, как подрубленное дерево, откоренилась, сошла с привычного хода.[102]

And once again spring had come, in her own way, in her never-ending progression, but it was the last for Matyora, for the island and village that carried one name. Once again, the ice broke up with rumbling passion, piling fragments of ice on the banks and the freed Angara opened up, stretching out in a mighty, shimmering flow. Once more the water grumbled boisterously at the island's upper point, rolling in steams on both sides of the riverbed; once again the greenery flared up along the ground and trees, the first rains spilled, the swifts and swallows flew back, and in the evenings in the bog the awakened frogs croaked their love of life. All of this had happened many times and many times Matyora was inside of the changes in nature, neither lagging behind nor running ahead of each day. And even now they were sowing their gardens—but not all of them: three families had moved out since the fall, dispersing to various cities, and three other families left the village even earlier, in the very first years when it had become clear that the rumors were true. As always, they planted the wheat – but not in every field: they didn't touch the pastures beyond the river, but only here, on the island, where it would be closer. And they now planted potatoes and carrots in the gardens not all at once, but whenever they could, whomever whenever he was able: many were living now in two buildings, between which there were a good fifteen kilometers of water and hills, and they were being torn apart. The same Matyora and not the same: the buildings stand in their places, only one small cottage and a bathouse had been torn down, everything is still alive, in action, the roosters still crow as before, the cows low, the dogs bark loudly, but the village was already withering, you could see that it was withering like a half-felled tree, it had been uprooted, departed from its usual course.

Whereas the free indirect discourse of a focalized realist narrator oriented the reader according to the psychologically experienced perspective of its peasant subjects, this more epic narrator orients the reader by placing him into the midst of the river's natural rhythms, which are framed as the continuation of a system of delicately tuned, recurring natural processes, located at the moment of "and once more" (*i opiat'*). These processes encapsulate both larger-scale environmental processes such the thawing of the Angara River and migration patterns of local birds and the simultaneous controlled agricultural processes that rule the lives of its human inhabitants, such as the sowing of the seeds.

At the same time, the reader enters this rhythmic cycle at a moment of interruption and a sudden temporal shift towards the future: a reminder that this cycle will be "the last for Matyora, for the island and the village that bore the same name." Cyclical processes invoked by "and once more" (*i opiat'*) and "as always" (*kak vsegda*) are interrupted by a change in state brought about by *teper'*, (but now) or undermined by grammatical negation and incompletion – for instance the wheat is sown "as always" but "not in all of the fields" (*da ne na vsekh poliakh*). The immediate establishment and disruption of this natural rhythm effectively acclimates the reader to the natural rhythms of the river while simultaneously creating a sense of uncertainty, marked by the jarring interruption of cyclical time by linear motion towards the future, which is triggered on a grammatical level several pages later when it shifts from the past tense to present and future tense as the narrator reveals the village's impending flooding: "Further down the Angara they are

[102] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:208.

building a dam (*stroiat plotinu*) for an energy plant, the water in the rivers and streams will rise and spill out (*podnimetsia i razol'etsia*), and will flood much of the land (*zatopit mnogie zemli*), including, especially, Matyora of course."[103] Although this narrative voice is epic in tone and scope, it makes ample use of folk narrative traits, such as diminutives (*morkoshka* instead of the standard *morkov'* for "carrot", *tserkvushka* rather than the standard *tserkov'* for "church," etc.), reduplication (*khudo-bedno*), echo/rhyme combinations,[104] and the use of colloquial conjunctions *da* for "and" ("*da ne vse tak*," *skripelo da khripelo*) and the use of an emphatic *i* ("*tak i zhila derevniia*"). The narrator also introduces information from sources that would not necessarily be considered rational or factual in modern narratives, such as its assertion that the disorder in the village is the work of an evil spirit (*kakaia-to nechistaia sila*).

While this more epic narrator is responsible for orienting the reader according to Matyora's sense of geological time, a similar narrative voice, which can best be described as a "town gossip" narrator emerges in expository situations connected to characterization and Matyora's more recent anthropogenic history. This narrator utilizes mostly standard Russian, but slips into more colloquial language whenever relating information that could be considered collective knowledge, such as the origins of the character Bogodul:

> Мало кто помнил, когда Богодул впервые появился в Матере - теперь уж казалось, что он околачивался здесь всегда, что за грехи или еще за что достался он деревне в подарочек еще от тех, прежних людей, полным строем ушедших на покой. Помнили только, что было время, когда Богодул лишь заплывал, заворачивал в Матеру со своих дорог по береговым деревням. Знали его тогда как менялу: менял шило на мыло. И верно, наберет в сидор ниток, иголок, кружек, ложек, пуговиц, мыла, пряжек, бумажек и обменивает на яйца, масло, хлеб, больше всего на яйца. Известно, магазин не во всякой деревне, и что требуется по хозяйству, не вдруг под руками, а Богодул уж тут, уж стучит: не надо ли этого, того? Надо, как не надо! И зазывали Богодула, поили чаем, делали заказы, подкладывали к десятку яиц еще два-три, а то и все пять, курицы у всех - яйца эти он потом сдавал в сельпо и пускал в оборот. Разбогатеть от такого оборота, ясное дело, он не мог, но кормился, и кормился, пока носили ноги, вроде неплохо.[105]
>
> There were few who remembered when Bogodul first appeared in Matyora – now it seemed that he had always been hanging about here, that he had been given to the village as a gift for their sins or for something else by all those people before them who had gone to rest. They merely remembered that there was a time when Bogodul had merely sailed in, had stopped in Matyora from his route through the riverside villages. They knew him then as a trader: he would trade bad to worse. And truly, he'll gather thread, needles, cups, spoons, buttons, soap, buckles, and papers in his sack and trade them for eggs, butter, bread—mostly for eggs. It's true, there's no store in the entire village and whenever something is needed around the house and nowhere to be had, suddenly here's

[103] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:211.
[104] I borrow this term from Nick Ukiah, who defines echo/rhyme combinations as "compound word[s] consisting of two […] constituents, which either echo each other, or which rhyme" (402). Echo/rhyme combinations have distinct meter and are typically markers "of the colloquial, rather than the written language." ("Russian Echo/Rhyme Combinations.", 426).
[105] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2:226

> Bogodul, knocking: you wouldn't happen to need this, or that? To need or not to need! And they would invite Bogodul in, make him some tea, give him their orders, add another two or three eggs to the dozen – if not all five, everyone had chickens – he would later trade these eggs in at the rural cooperative for a profit. It was clear that he could not become a rich man from such profits, but he fed himself—and as long as his legs would carry him, fed himself pretty well.

The narrator briefly introduces details about Bogodul that are immediately contested, pieced together by the unreliable and finite memories of a past plural collective of villagers. Instead of presenting Bogodul's background as a singular, objective history, the narrator instead presents a variety of possible explanations for Bogodul's name and his behavior, which are related using traits of oral conversational narration, including filler words (*Bogodul uzh tut, uzh stuchit*), exclamations (*nado, kak ne nado!*), and judgments (*vrode neplokho*). This ultimately creates a narrative effect that is similar to free indirect discourse, in that the third person narrator takes on qualities of characters' own subjectivity, but rather than reflecting the subjective experiences of individual characters, it instead conveys attitudes, knowledge and experience belonging to the village itself, which has accumulated across multiple generations and experiences. This narrator voice thus orients the reader into Matyora's collective knowledge and lore by mirroring the storytelling of the villagers themselves, engaging the reader as an imagined listener and learner.

Finally, the most distinct and unusual narrative voice in the novel is a third-person focalization of the Master (*khoziain*), the *genius loci* for the island and (by extension) the village, who is described as a "small animal, slightly bigger than a cat and not resembling any other animal."[106] The Master serves as the embodiment of the Slavic cosmology of place; like every other component of the village world, including houses, samovars, plows, and trees, the Master represents the spiritual life-force of Matyora and its environs, each of which coexist as subjects within an intricate and interconnected world. At various times throughout the novel (including chapters 6, 8, and the final chapters of the novel), the normal narrative is interrupted by a narration of events focalized through the Master's perspective. Stylistically, the Master's narrative voice has many of the stylistic components of a traditionally omniscient narrator – it is rendered in neutral, standard literary language and avoids slipping into literary colloquialisms or focalization that would align him specifically with distinct human characters or subjects. Although his scope of vision is limited to Matyora and the section of the river immediately surrounding it, the Master possesses powers such as flying, or looking through walls, which afford him perspectives of space that human narrators do not possess. In addition, he is able to see far into the pasts and futures of the island, including its demise, and the lives of the dead in the afterlife, who are still tied to the island through their connection to place. The Master thus seems to serve as a personification of the local ecology, and it is in his passages that the reader is made most familiar with the nuanced sensory experience of Matyora's natural environment. Furthermore, by presenting this omniscient view of the island as the focalized perspective of the island's local deity, the novel's totality is mediated through a distinct, local, place-based spirituality and knowledge rather than through a more distanced, transcendent knowledge of a traditional omniscient narrator or Abrahamic God. Unlike an Abrahamic God, the Master cannot prevent the future, but can only foresee it: because of his inherent ties to the island environs, his existence is also tied to its inevitable destruction.

[106] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2: 247.

Although all three of the novel's narrative voices are broad in temporal scope, elements of folk oral narrative (whether epic, colloquial gossip, or spiritual) position them alongside individual characters as being distinctly *of* Matyora. While each individual narrative voice is distinct in style, scale, and spatiotemporal orientation, they often slip into one another or reference one another at various points throughout the text, creating a body of environmental knowledge of Matyora in which – like the geology of a riverbed or the dynamic of peasant syncretism – "the new does not replace the old, but is layered on top of it."[107] The narrative fabric of the text thus takes on the spatial traits of a "*here*," wherein geological composition, generational knowledge, and even reading itself all take on the forms and traits of fluvial sediment deposition. In this way the river's multivoiced collection of parts distinct in temporality, direction, and composition converge in equilibrium to create a complete unified ecosystem.

Rasputin and other Siberian environmentalists viewed the environmental transformations brought about by hydroelectricity as having potentially catastrophic consequences for Siberian river systems due to the "annihilation" of individual parts (such as islands) on which the river ecosystem as a whole depended. Likewise, the fictional flooding of Matyora and its encoded literary structures must necessarily have narrative as well as environmental consequences. As the novel's plot gradually unfolds, its disparate voices begin to collapse and converge as the village empties in anticipation of the coming flood, accelerating as the plot flows towards the novel's ending. In a vision, the Master foresees the island's death, watching as the flood halts the cyclical rhythms that govern the river's "usual and fixed life" (*obychnaia i urochnaia zhizn'*) and replaces it with dampened silence, where "only the wind would howl over the silenced water" (*budet zdes', nad zaglokhshei vodoi, gudet' tol'ko veter*).[108] This vision predicts the novel's ending, in which the remaining villagers await Pavel, who comes to fetch them in a boat. Their rescue, and the novel's anticipated resolution never comes; instead the villagers, and the reader with them, are thrust into the disorienting silence of the rising water and fog, which replaces the familiar landscape of the island and obscures whichever landmarks remain, a silence violated only by the howling of the wind (*sil'nee zasvistel veter*), the "Master's parting voice" (*proshchal'nyi golos*), and the sounds of the boat coming for Matyora's remaining villagers carrying "as if from below" (*budto spodnizu*).

Matyora's death, personified through the Master's parting gasps of breath, thus gives new meaning to the novel's Russian title, *Proshshanie s Materoi*. On first reading, the title seemingly serves as an ironic reversal of "*Proshshanie s Bratskom*," ("Farewell to Bratsk") a 1968 Komsomol song commemorating the end of construction on the Bratsk Hydroelectric dam, which depicts once-young Bratsk construction workers bidding farewell to Bratsk and their youth as they move on to the next phase of their lives and are replaced by a new generation of construction workers moving (like Tvardovskii's lyrical hero) further eastward towards a new frontier.[109] However, the island's death emphasizes secondary meaning of *proshchanie* as a funerary rite, the instrumental phrase "*proshshanie s*" connoting the funeral rituals that mark a community's parting with the deceased.

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[107] Boris Rybakov, qtd. in Harry Walsh, "Christian-Pagan Syncretism in Russian 'Ruralist' Prose," *Religion & Literature* 27, no. 2 (1995): 71.

[108] Rasputin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2: 251.

[109] Written by the same composer and lyricists as the popular *Taezhnye zvezdy*, a 1964 cycle of Komsomol songs about Bratsk, the song serves as an epilogue-of-sorts to that cycle, engaging much of the same imagery as in the earlier songs. See A. Pakhmutova, S. Grebennikov, and B. Dobronravov, *Proshchanie s Bratskom* (Moscow: Notnye izdaniia, 1968).

Earlier, the novel emphasizes the human and spiritual collateral of environmental transformation through its depiction of the village cemetery – a spatialized expression of the existential relationship between Soviet subject, earth, and memory. The novel's understanding of the cemetery site and its inhabitants rests on the importance of place in Russian folk beliefs about death and immortality[110], which are based in "an intense sense of biological immortality, the idea that one lives through one's descendants" through acts of remembrance[111] and a belief that the deceased's body still contains a part of the soul which "is material and has requirements—for nourishment, clothing, warmth, and interaction with family members—similar to those of the living."[112] The cemetery, which is typically located on the edge of a given settlement, serves as the home of the deceased, which descendants and community members can visit according to certain sets of rules and etiquette so that they may communicate with their loved one.[113] The deceased's relationship to the burial site is therefore of utmost importance; in order to pass fully into afterlife, bodies must be returned to their native soil and failure to do so renders the death "wicked" (*zlaia*) or "unclean" (*nechistaia*), as they have been severed from their communities.[114]

Throughout *Farewell to Matyora*¸ the villagers express the most anguish and anger over the flood's impact on the cemetery and thus the connection between dead, living, and earth. One villager expresses her fear that the flood's severance of these ties is merely the beginning of a disastrous cycle: "They're all together: father, mother, my brothers, my old man—only I will be taken away to other earth (*uvezut v druguiu zemliu*). And I'll be flooded too (*zatopit'-to posle i menia*), I suppose, and my bones will eventually float away too, but I'll never catch up with them."[115] *Farewell to Matyora*'s use of funerary imagery to describe the environmental and cultural consequences of hydroelectric construction emphasize the existential importance of place and memory in the continued transmission of environmental and moral knowledge. The novel thus itself serves as the site for a proper parting with the Siberian places now lost to modernization, allowing their shared memory to be relived (and thus their existence preserved) by present and future readers.

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[110] As I have stated above, Rasputin meticulously studied *Sibiriak* folk beliefs both theoretically and in the field, and death rituals are a recurring theme throughout his literary output. For a comprehensive literature review and an overview of death rituals in Rasputin's later works see V. A. Stepanova, Stepanova, "Transformatsiia mortal'nykh motivov v pozdnei proze V. Rasputina."

[111] Svetlana Adonyeva and Laura J. Olson, *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013): 278.

[112] Svetlana Adonyeva and Elizabeth Warner, *We Remember, We Love, We Grieve: Mortuary and Memorial Practice in Contemporary Russia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021): 57.

[113] Adonyeva and Warner, *We Remember, We Love, We Grieve*, 13.

[114] See Olson and Adonyeva, *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise,* 277-306; Warner, "Russian Peasant Beliefs and Practices Concerning Death and the Supernatural Collected in Novosokol'niki Region, Pskov Province, Russia, 1995. Part I."

[115] *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, tom 2, 230.

CHAPTER THREE. ICE: ECOLOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN YURI RYTKHEU'S BERING STRAIT FICTION

> *"My family tree (*rodoslovnaia*) is like the tundra plant* iuneu *- a golden root that firmly grips its native soil.* Iuneu *doesn't penetrate very deeply into the earth - permafrost is close by. But no windstorm can tear it from its native soil, no bitter frost can freeze its roots. So do I imagine my family tree, my biography…"*
>
> — Yuri Rytkheu, *The Last Shaman*, 2004[1]

Born into a family of Chukchi hunters in the settlement of Uelen on the shores of the Bering Strait, Siberian Indigenous writer Yuri Rytkheu (1930-2008) displayed a precocious love of learning which led him gradually from one of the Soviet Union's most remote peripheries to its center: first to the regional capital of Anadyr, where he worked and wrote for Chukchi-language periodicals, and later to the Institute of the Peoples of the North in Leningrad, where he would reside and work, penning novels, stories, plays, screenplays, and essays in a career that spanned over fifty years. Although he was dubbed the "founder [*osnovopolozhnik*] of Chukchi literature" thanks to his pioneering efforts to write stories and novels in his native language, many of Rytkheu's best-known works during both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods of his career were initially written and published in Russian, even as they consistently referenced both the Chukchi oral tradition and Russian literature as dominant influences.[2] By the 1970s Rytkheu had gained significant critical recognition both in the Soviet Union and internationally for his singular ability to merge elements of Chukchi oral narrative with Russian literary form.[3]

In this chapter, I argue that Rytkheu's signature style arises from the author's life-long interest in the relationship between language and intercultural understanding, and particularly in how literary language (most often Russian) could be harnessed to represent the experience of the Chukchi people outside the colonial forms of literary representation which reduce him and his people to living vestiges of the past. This literary task is rooted in a practice of *place-based knowledge production* wherein the reader learns to blur the distinction between the self and Other, the familiar and the alien. The reader learns to do this by becoming oriented to the literary imaginary of Beringia, whose topography is often characterized (in Rytkheu's words) by the "unboundedness of space" (*bespredel'nost' prostrantstva*) and lack of "sharp demarcation" between "sky and earth, as between dry land and sea."[4] I read Rytkheu's characteristic blending of Russian, socialist-realist literary and Chukchi oral narrative genres (the latter informed by the unique environment of the Bering Strait), as a means to introduce a broad and geographically diverse Soviet readership to this ecologically complex and culturally diverse region, not as the Soviet Union's farthest periphery, but as a generative center of human and non-human life. After

[1] Yuri Rytkheu, *Poslednii shaman* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal "Zvezda," 2004), 7.
[2] Iu. M. Shprygov, *Iurii Rytkheu. Istoki i evoliutsiia tvorchestva* (Magadan: Magadanskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1979), 3.
[3] By the 1970s, Rytkheu's works had already been translated into a number of languages (mostly domestically, some internationally.
[4] Yuri Rytkheu, *Pod sen'iu volshebnoi gory* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), 81.

briefly retracing a history of the Chukchi people's presence on the Bering Strait, their subsequent colonization by the Russian empire and their gradual assimilation into Soviet culture through a process of modernization and Russification via Soviet nationalities policy, as outlined in both scholarly accounts and Rytkheu's own biography, I examine the evolution of Rytkheu's literary perspective and form through his literary representations of Beringian place, which can be understood as a palimpsest of social, historiographical-scientific, and finally metaphysical knowledge forms.

Siberian Indigenous Writers and Soviet Nationalities Policy

Rytkheu was often perceived as embodying the success of Soviet nationalities policy in the realm of literature, with the editors of one literary anthology remarking that "in the history of Soviet multinational literature there has arguably never before been a case of a young writer who, unable to rely on his native literature or on the works of his predecessors could succeed in such a short time in becoming so widely known."[5] His success also made him a poster child for intellectual achievement among the small nomadic Indigenous groups scattered throughout the sparsely-populated territories of Siberia and the Russian Arctic, classified collectively under Soviet nationalities policy as "the peoples of the northern borderlands" (*narodnosti severnykh okrain*), or the "small peoples of the north" (*malye narody severa*).[6] Although for more than two centuries Northern Siberia had been a Russian colony, resistance to Russian assimilation had allowed Indigenous Siberians such as the Chukchi to uphold cultural and spiritual practices that were viewed as foreign and antiquated by their Soviet liberators. Although their clan-based social organization was recognized as a praiseworthy (if "primitive") form of collectivism, their animistic beliefs, subsistence-based, oral cultures (as opposed to agrarian, written ones), and lack of national consciousness were regarded by Soviet planners to be the antithesis of progress.[7]

In accordance with party policy on the culture of national minorities, Siberian Indigenous peoples were thus regarded as the union's most "backward" (*otstalye*), a problem that had been exacerbated by exploitative Tsarist colonial policies.[8] The Bolsheviks formally rejected the Eurocentric imperialist notion that certain races were inherently more inferior than others and believed that such "inferiorities" were in fact the consequence of colonial oppression. Socialism could help Siberian Indigenous peoples (as with others deemed "culturally backwards") overcome the negative effects of capitalist and imperialist policies and participate in modern society through targeted economic and cultural development in the region, as guided by socialist ideology. As such, during the first decades of Soviet power in Siberia and the Far North,

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[5] G. I. Lomidze, *Istoriia sovetskoi mnogonatsional'noi literatury*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Nauka, 1974). 759.

[6] Both terms were coined in the mid-1920s, the latter to distinguish smaller nomadic peoples residing in the far North from larger Siberian Indigenous nationalities such as the Yakut and Buriat. They replaced the earlier designation *tuzemtsy* (commonly translated as "natives"), which had replaced the tsarist designation *inorodtsy*, or "aliens" after the revolution. See Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 141, 152.

[7] Due to their extremely low rates of literacy and loose tribal organization, the Arctic "small peoples" were considered the most backwards of the Soviet Union's dozens of nationalities within the official classification system that governed Soviet nationalities policy starting in the 1920s. (See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 127.)

[8] For general discussion of how Soviet nationalities policy understood backwardness in relation to Tsarist rule, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 23-24, 123-82. For details of how this ideology figured into the early implementation of nationalities policy in the Soviet arctic, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 131–83.

regional policies were aimed at accelerating modernization in the region according to the Marxist stages of development, not only through collectivization, but also by pouring resources into education, infrastructure, and cultural policies aimed at raising a sense of national consciousness.[9] Theoretically, these policies were aimed at countering imperialist chauvinism by helping Indigenous peoples achieve national self-determination and self-governance within the multinational Soviet state. In practice, however, these policies often implicitly recreated imperialist stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as backward or inferior, viewing their one path to progress through the lens of Eurocentric modernity, which was achievable only by the civilizing hand of Soviet (and by default Russian) culture.[10] Within a system that defined "culture" according to the mode of production, national consciousness, and access to literacy, Indigenous national cultures had to be constituted almost from scratch rather than reshaped.[11] Since they had also been impacted by the capitalist exploitation of European and American whalers and Russian sea traders who by the late nineteenth century dominated the regional economy, the progress of Beringian Indigenous peoples such as the Chukchi was particularly imperative as a heuristic for comparing the outcomes of socialist and capitalist policies towards Indigenous people.[12]

According to Soviet nationalities policy as it was conceived by Lenin and further developed by Stalin, the path to development and socialist liberation for national minorities should be achieved through national "self-determination," governed by the distinct cultural and linguistic forms that constituted national consciousness. For more "developed" nations, this process could be accomplished solely via the process of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization): the recruitment and training of national elites (via centralized financial aid and policies of affirmative action) for positions within the national and local party bureaucracy.[13] While such policies were aimed at liberating national minorities from Russian colonial rule, for Siberia's Indigenous peoples, they paradoxically often reinforced Russian cultural and linguistic dominance due to the specific obstacles that Indigenous community structures posed for nationalities policy more broadly.[14] Firstly, "small peoples" such as the Chukchi and Yupik were organized via tribal or clan communities that were too small and loosely organized to constitute a sense of "national consciousness." Tribal languages and delineations were therefore often

[9] In this regard, even though the Bolsheviks formally rejected Siberian regionalist ideology in the 1920s, Soviet nationalities policy towards Siberian Indigenous peoples was in some ways a realization of the regionalists' proposed reforms for addressing the "Native question," which argued that the Siberian radical intelligentsia could help Indigenous peoples achieve national self-determination and consciousness through the establishment of schools, infrastructure, and other institutions aimed at helping overcome colonial policies that had impeded their development. See, for example, Nikolai Iadrintsev, *Sibir', kak koloniia* (St. Petersburg: Tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1882), 106–25.

[10] For a more detailed discussion of this dynamic and how it played out in the Soviet East, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 123-182.

[11] Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 141-50.

[12] For discussion of how Soviet attitudes towards Western commerce in the region impacted local developmentalist policies in the realm of whaling and art respectively, see Demuth, *Floating Coast*; Tamara Mitlyanskaya, "Native Carvers and Outsider Artists: Patterns of Interaction in Siberian Eskimo/Chukchi Ivory Carving," ed. Igor Krupnik, trans. Eugenia Davis, *Arctic Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (1996): 67–88.

[13] See Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 9–15; Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–52.

[14] As Yuri Slezkine has pointed out, by the 1930s, nationalities policy under Stalin had reinstated Russian as the dominant language and culture, and the default culture of developed socialism ("The USSR as a Communal Apartment"). However, as I will discuss, even in the 1920s developmentalist policies towards Indigenous peoples in Siberia and the Far North were fundamentally infused with a Russian worldview and oriented towards assimilation, even though they prioritized eventual national self-determination.

consolidated along territorial and linguistic lines to "help them 'evolve' […] into new official nationalities."[15] Furthermore, even once these new nationalities were established, achieving national consciousness necessitated the cultivation of a literate and educated national elite, which in turn presupposed the establishment of educational institutions in the region. Both processes required the intervention of the central state (both financially and through developmentalist policies). Such interventions were often mediated through the findings of Russian ethnographers, linguists, and educators sent to study Indigenous cultures, to determine what defined them as "nations," and to establish a primary education system[16] that would eventually foster the development of an educated stratum of the population.[17]

As the first writers working within their respective national traditions, Indigenous writers thus faced a unique burden within the established paradigms of Soviet literary production: they were tasked not merely with providing a Socialist Realist blueprint for a new Soviet way of life, but also with constituting a literary tradition that would correspond to their national culture. Such a task required intellectual commitment, literary skills, and a strong belief in the promise of Soviet modernization, as reflected in Rytkheu's exemplary performance in the Soviet education system. Born in 1930 and coming of age after the war, Rytkheu belonged to the first generation of Indigenous intellectuals to fulfill the party's standards: for this very reason Indigenous Soviet literature only began to find vigorous expression in the 1950s. If literature was a path to progress as expressed in the Socialist Realist master plot, which Yuri Slezkine has called "the ultimate story of conquered backwardness,"[18] then literary success for a young Indigenous writer of Rytkheu's generation required the successful development of new "national" equivalents of pre-existing Soviet literary forms. Thus, despite the relaxation of ideological constraints for which late Soviet literature is known, until the late 1970s it was nearly impossible for Indigenous writers to stray far from mainstream Soviet literary conventions or buck the control of state literary institutions. Rytkheu was no exception to this rule; born in 1930, Rytkheu had been personally impacted by the rapid changes that were taking place in his region, including economic policies and material support that objectively improved the quality of life in his community, and (most importantly as an intellectually curious child) by an education system that allowed him access to knowledge and opportunities that had previously been unavailable.

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[15] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union*, Culture and Society after Socialism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8–10.

[16] Most of the schools within this system were established as *internaty*, a Soviet version of residential schools, which were intended to raise literacy and provide children with the technical skills to good members of the Soviet collective. Although these schools were in part intended to train future generations of Indigenous teachers (to ensure the future self-determination of Indigenous peoples), the first cadres of teachers were predominantly young Russians, who often lacked a strong command of local languages. As such, while schools were ideally intended to be taught in students' native languages, in practice most students, including Rytkheu, received most of their instruction in Russian. See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 236-46; Yuri Rytkheu, *Pod sen'iu volshebnoi gory* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974). For an in-depth study of the impact of residential schools on the Evenk community, see Alexia Bloch, *Red Ties and Residential Schools: Indigenous Siberians in a Post-Soviet State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). As Bloch discusses, the schools' emphasis on "creating an egalitarian society" often took the form of "rigorous means of assimilation" even while they also promoted other elements of Indigenous identity, such as their role in the Soviet collective (*Red Ties and Residential Schools*, 17). Indigenous attitudes towards the *internaty* and other aspects of the Soviet educational system are often complex (and even positive) and vary from generation to generation.

[17] For a general overview of the role of ethnographic knowledge in various forms of early Soviet nation building, see Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*. For a discussion of how Russian ethnographers specifically shaped socialism in the Far North, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, especially 159-63.

[18] Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 292.

Rytkheu's consistent praise of Soviet developmentalist policies towards Indigenous people throughout the Soviet period of his career (and his unapologetic embrace of the Soviet education system and Russian language) made him a controversial figure following the collapse of the Soviet Union due to his perceived support for assimilationist policies that had erased elements of his native culture.

Unsurprisingly, Soviet critics[19] praised Rytkheu as a successful national writer, due to his ability to merge Russian literary genres (particularly the realist novel) with Chukchi national aesthetics (particularly folklore and oral narrative convention) and infuse representations of regional realia and national history with problems of universal scope, a practice which to some extent has continued in post-Soviet critical and scholarly retrospectives of Rytkheu's oeuvre.[20] During the post-Soviet period Rytkheu benefitted from an increase in international scholarly recognition due to increased translation and distribution of his works abroad, and as such, Rytkheu's post-Soviet writing increasingly positioned itself for an international readership interested in Indigenous world literatures.

Both Russian and Western Rytkheu scholarship from the post-Soviet period thus tends to adhere to a rough periodization that divides Rytkheu's work into stages, which vary in their designation of specific watersheds and works but correspond roughly to late Soviet history: an early stage (the 1950s-60s), a transitional or mature Soviet stage (the 70s-80s), and an aesthetically sophisticated post-Soviet stage (the 90s-00s).[21] Such periodization is often accompanied by a value judgment: Rytkheu's early works are typically viewed as less-sophisticated, often naïve texts, which, although sharing latent attributes and themes from some of his later works, were ultimately compromised by their praise of State modernization campaigns and an excessive adherence to Socialist Realist literary convention. Later works, on the other hand, are deemed more artistically significant, particularly as literary restrictions

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[19] See David Kul'tigenov, "Pevets surovogo klimata," *Literaturnaia gazeta* 1980, no. 47 (November 19, 1980): 5; Shprygov, *Iurii Rytkheu. Istoki i evoliutsiia tvorchestva*; A. Vlasenko, *Iurii Rytkheu. Literaturnyi portret* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1980).

[20] See Iulia Gennadievna Khazankovich, "Povest' Iu. Rytkheu 'Kogda kity ukhodiat': ot mifa k skazke," *Severo-Vostochnyi gumanitarnyi vestnik*, no. 3 (28) (2019); Svetlana Roisova Kochneva, "Vremiia Iuriia Rytkheu," *Kul'tura i nauka Dal'nego vostoka* 28, no. 1 (2020): 35–39.

[21] Some (generally earlier) scholarship tends to divide Rytkheu's work into a Soviet and post-Soviet period, with select novels from the 1970s and 80s fulfilling a sort of transitional role, introducing some of the narrative innovations and themes that were fully expressed in his post-Soviet works. (See Mikhail Kotomin, "Samyi ekologichnyi pisatel': k 90-letiiu Iuriia Rytkheu," Online Magazine, *Gor'kii Media* (blog), March 8, 2020, https://gorky.media/context/samyj-ekologichnyj-pisatel-k-90-letiyu-yuriya-rytheu/; Joseph Mozur, review of *Die Reise der Anna Odinzowa*, by Yuri Rytkheu, *World Literature Today* 75, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 165–66; Joseph Mozur, review of *Im Spiegel des Vergessens*, by Yuri Rytkheu, *World Literature Today* 73, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 771; Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*; Barker, "The Divided Self."
More recently, scholars have used the three-stage approach mentioned above, with the beginning of the second period marking a turning point for Rytkheu's significance as a writer, but the third stage allowing for his full freedom of expression. (See, for example, Caroline Damiens, "The Birth of a Soviet 'Fourth Cinema' on Prime Time Television: Iurii Rytkheu and The Most Beautiful Ships," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 17–36; Tamara Lönngren, "Zhizn' na grani vyzhivaniia. Zametki o tvorchestve Iuriia Rytkheu," *Poljarnyi vestnik* 2 (February 1, 1999): 12–29; Ivan Sablin, "Written Oral History: Dimensions of Identity of Chukotka's Indigenous People in the Works of Rytkheu," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 1 (2012): 27–41; Albina S. Zhuleva, "Mythopoetics of Space in the Novels by Yuri Rytkheu," *Studia Litterarum* 3, no. 3 (2018): 208–31.).

relaxed and Rytkheu increasingly aligned himself with pan-Indigenous literary movements.[22] Although some recent scholarship has attempted to rehabilitate Rytkheu's earliest works by tracing individual themes and literary techniques as they developed over time, most of these studies still rely on a progress-oriented pro-Soviet/anti-Soviet binary, wherein Rytkheu was at his most authentic as an Indigenous writer when he was writing freely about his disillusionment with Soviet power.[23]

Critical discourse on Rytkheu has been dominated by a sense of linear progress aligned with the end of the Cold War. Many view Rytkheu's Soviet fiction, especially that which was written early in his career in the fifties and sixties as performing overtly in the service of the state, rather than on behalf of Indigenous interests, while the gradual liberalization of Soviet literature and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union marked a transitional stage in which the author was liberated from the confines of Soviet literature and transformed into a more authentically Indigenous writer due to his increasing experimentation with Chukchi narrative forms and his more open critique of Soviet modernizing policies and the damage they caused within Beringian Indigenous communities. Rytkheu himself was open about his own changing attitudes towards Soviet power throughout his lifetime, using his post-Soviet fiction and essays as a literary canvas for reconsidering and publicly reckoning with the previous values and historical perspectives he espoused in his earlier years as a Soviet writer and intellectual. At the same time, even during the Soviet period, he also expressed frustration with stadialist categorizations of himself and his people as backwards or stuck in the past, stating in one interview that he wanted his work to "show the present/real (*nastoiashchee*) of Chukotka," since "almost all of the books written about Chukotka illustrated its past."[24]

Although Rytkheu was a life-long advocate for intellectual inquiry, throughout his career he expressed ambivalence about the Soviet scientific gaze and its interventions in Chukchi everyday life, which he described jokingly in a 1983 essay for *National Geographic*: "During […] the 1930s and '40s the arctic peoples were being intensively studied by scientists from the outside. We cherished a joke in those days about the composition of the typical arctic family:

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[22] For one reviewer, Rytkheu's post-Soviet works are still "overrated" because Rytkheu was predominantly publishing his novels in translation in the West, rather than for a regional or national Russian audience. See Kotomin "Samyi ekologichnyi pisatel.'"

[23] See Damiens, "The Birth of a Soviet 'Fourth Cinema' on Prime Time Television"; Lönngren, "Zhizn' na grani vyzhivaniia"; Mozur, "Die Reise der Anna Odinzowa"; Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*; Zhuleva, "Mythopoetics of Space in the Novels by Yuri Rytkheu." To my knowledge, only one reviewer has made the case for the sophistication of Rytkheu's earlier works, stating: "the old Rytkheu was more nuanced than he is sometimes credited with being while the 'new' one is less new than one might think from reading only a sample of his oeuvre." See Klenin, "Review of *The Chukchi Bible,*" 123.

[24] Vlasenko, *Iurii Rytkheu. Literaturnyi Predmet*, 36-37. Incidentally, the beginning of Rytkheu's "mature" period of writing also coincided with the emergence of the "Chukchi joke" (*anekdot pro chukchu*) in the early seventies. This particular subgenre of Russian ethnic humor typically features Chukchi hunters in "the part of a fool who […] 'not only tells the truth but also sees it with the directness and insight of children, poets, and the insane.'" Folklorists posit that this role was likely assigned to the Chukchi in response to Soviet propaganda comparing Soviet Chukchi progress with the fate of the Alaskan Yupik people living across the Bering Strait under capitalism, which often implicitly associated the Chukchi and other Northern indigenous people with "harsh living conditions and permanent deprivation" and "presumed ignorance and illiteracy." While the early instantiations of the jokes were typically intended to satirize the Party's failings to live up to its ideological discourse, with the rise of Russian nationalist sentiment in the eighties the Chukchi had become the butt of pejorative jokes intended to assert Russian superiority over other nationalities. See Emil Draitser, *Taking Penguins to the Movies: Ethnic Humor in Russia* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 75–80.

father, mother, two children, and over there in the corner of the hut, the researcher."[25] Like the researchers in the hut of Rytkheu's joke, scientists and scholars are constantly present as characters in the background of Rytkheu's fictional works. These outsider characters often fundamentally misunderstand Chukchi worldviews and ways of life, but also bring with them access to teachers, schools, and new forms of knowledge, which Rytkheu viewed as essential to the progress of his people.[26] Rytkheu's anecdotes about Soviet science are characteristic of a broader mistrust among Indigenous peoples towards Eurocentric scholarship due to its role in colonial and/or assimilationist policies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori) has described this relationship as follows:

> The word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. […] This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.[27]

Tuhiwai argues that scholars can begin to decolonize scholarly inquiry about Indigenous people through the development of methodologies that center Indigenous communities, perspectives, and ways of knowing, most ideally through the cultivation of Indigenous scholarship.

Rytkheu's ambivalence towards Soviet science speaks to the nuances of Soviet nationalities policy, and particularly its role in the educational system. Half a century before Smith, Rytkheu also imagined a future in which Indigenous writers, artists and scholars could shape Soviet knowledge production about the Arctic by centering their perspectives and experiences. This vision was shaped by Rytkheu's own positive experiences in the Soviet education system and by a belief, informed by Soviet nationalities policy, that dedicating resources to education and intellectual production among recently literate nationalities could contribute to better representation and self-determination. Much of the skepticism Rytkheu expressed toward Soviet science instead lay in the existing gaps between ideology and reality, as the education of future Indigenous thinkers ultimately relied on research and pedagogical policies that were created by outsiders, who – while well-meaning – lacked the familiarity with the local way of to truly understand Indigenous needs. However, Rytkheu remained optimistic that the willing outsider could eventually come to know Chukotka in his own way, provided he opened himself (as a new member of the community) up to learning local ways of understanding and knowing. Rytkheu had a local blueprint for this belief. His hometown Uelen was historically heterogenous, consisting of Yupik and Chukchi sea hunters and the occasional white *Sibiriak* settler, many of whom learned to speak the local language. Uelen's location on the Bering Strait also meant that residents had regular contact with Alaskan Natives, as well as American, European, and Russian explorers and traders. This heterogeneity figured heavily into Rytkheu's Chukotkan imaginary and in many ways, this place-centered vision for Chukotkan knowledge

[25] "People of the Long Spring," 212.
[26] Rytkheu writes extensively about the positive impact of Soviet schooling on his life in his autobiographical writing, even in post-Soviet works which tend to be more critical of Soviet policies towards Indigenous peoples. See, for example, *Pod Sen'iu Volshebnoi Gory*; *Dorozhnyi Leksikon*.
[27] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1.

production would serve as a foundation for many of the literary problems that I will discuss in this chapter.

Reading Rytkheu as a Global Indigenous Writer

A number of recent studies have attempted to understand Rytkheu's work through the lens of his Indigeneity, but these rely on narrowly Western or Soviet analytical frameworks. Most commonly, scholarship on Rytkheu tends to characterize and analyze his oeuvre through the lens of "Chukchi national literature," which relies on models of national identity and culture that were in many ways formulated by non-Indigenous ethnographers and policy-makers.[28] While some ecocritical readings attempt to evoke Rytkheu's Indigenous perspective, many rely on Eurocentric temporal models of modernity that understand Indigenous peoples in terms of their associations with a more traditional or primeval past,[29] or on generic Western scholarly descriptions of mythological time and space rather than Chukchi ones. In many ways, these limitations are testament to the ubiquity of Soviet ethnography in scholarly discourse about Siberian Indigenous peoples, and to a general dearth in contemporary research on Chukotka's Indigenous cultures, and particularly in scholarship that utilizes methodologies that center Indigenous knowledge and experiences, such as autoethnography.[30]

In 2010, Rytkheu appeared alongside other Siberian Indigenous writers in the English-language anthology *The Way of Kinship*. The collection, with a forward by prominent Native American writer N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), was published as part of a University of Minnesota series on global Indigenous studies, and was one of the first scholarly attempts at placing Siberian Indigenous writers in dialogue with global Indigenous literatures and centered through an Indigenous perspective.[31] The collection's co-editor Alexander Vashchenko, a Russian scholar of Native American studies writes that the anthology's aim was "to bring together, for the first time in English, prominent samples of contemporary Native literatures of Siberia" to "capture the flavor, the scope, and most of all the essence of Native Siberian writing," both to highlight Siberian Indigenous writers' literary innovations, which were rooted in the extension of Indigenous oral tradition, and also to preserve them for an international audience.[32] Vashchenko also notes that Soviet Siberian Indigenous literature uncoincidentally came to maturity in the nineteen-sixties, a precise global historical moment that marked "the beginning of an era of

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[28] For a general discussion of how ethnographic knowledge shaped conceptions of nation in Soviet policy and culture, see Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*. For discussion of how ethnographic interventions often functioned within a Soviet Indigenous context, particularly through the Institute of the North in Leningrad, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 219–63. I will discuss specific examples of how ethnographic knowledge by outsiders shaped individual elements of Soviet Chukchi culture later in this chapter, particularly in my discussion of walrus ivory carving.

[29] Alexander King, "A Dream in Polar Fog," *Sibirica* 12, no. 1 (March 22, 2013): 85–89; Morch, Audun, "The Chronotope of the Primordial." While studies like this are often well-meaning and contain some valuable insights on Rytkheu's literary style and form, some still implicitly equate Rytkheu and his culture with backwardness, such as one scholar's comparison of Rytkheu's childhood to "life as it was during the Stone Age."

[30] For an in-depth examination of this issue from a contemporary anthropological perspective see Virginie Vaté and John R. Eidson, "The Anthropology of Ontology in Siberia: A Critical Review," *Anthropologica* 63, no. 2 (2021): 1–27.

[31] A. Vashchenko and Claude Clayton Smith, eds., *The Way of Kinship: An Anthology of Native Siberian Literature*, First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[32] Alexander Vashchenko, "Introduction," in *The Way of Kinship: An Anthology of Native Siberian Literature*, ed. A. Vashchenko and Claude Clayton Smith, First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): xx. The collection was published at a time when Siberian Indigenous writers had difficulty finding Russian publishers for their work.

ethnicity, a cultural factor of world importance on all levels" through movements in literature and the arts, such as the Native American renaissance (of which Momaday was a part), that "introduced a new universe of ideas, imagery, and alternative values" such as environmental stewardship, communalism, and the value of oral narrative tradition.[33] Momaday, who taught American literature in Moscow in 1974, and who subsequently returned to Siberia to collaborate with members of the Khanty-Mansiisk writers' union, suggests that the collection can be counted among an invaluable repository of global Indigenous knowledge, its stories embodying the "ancient bonds of kinship, common denominators that are indispensable integrations of the indigenous world."[34]

Since the collection's publication, a handful of scholars have read Rytkheu's work using methodologies from the broader field of Indigenous Studies.[35] Historian Ivan Sablin has turned to Rytkheu's autobiographical literature as source material for expanding the scholarly understanding of Chukchi identity-formation and bridging the gap between Russian and Western ethnography and local oral history, arguing that while "the [literary] narratives produced by indigenous non-scholars […] cannot be considered "reliable" historical sources in academic terms, […] they can be seen as a written continuation of the rich, indigenous, oral traditions."[36] Similarly, I suggest that a close reading of Rytkheu's texts and autobiography using methodologies from Indigenous studies can help bridge existing gaps in literary scholarship on Rytkheu and augment the existing historical and anthropological models available for discussing his life and worldview. While as a settler scholar I cannot make definitive claims about Chukchi perspectives and worldviews, I turn to Rytkheu's texts themselves to seek answers about how the author understood his unique vantage point within Soviet literature, and in turn how this worldview informed his poetics.

A closer look at Rytkheu's literary output leading up to his ecological turn in the mid-1970s reveals that even in his earliest socialist realist works the author was experimenting with literary perspective, genre, bilingualism, and other devices which came to characterize Rytkheu's and other Indigenous writers' poetics in the second half of the twentieth century. Tamara Lönngren has observed that many of Rytkheu's post-Soviet works revisit familiar places, characters, and themes from his early prose, and can be read as "the artist's perspective on a life lived, the reconceptualization and reevaluation of values, an attempt to explain, ultimately to himself, admitted mistakes, miscalculations, and failures."[37] Although I do not contest Lönngren's and others' assertions that Rytkheu's later works are in many ways acts of contrition for the sins committed by Soviet literature towards his people, I also see the various literary permutations and evolutions of Beringia in his literary imaginary as generative practices of storytelling, a term that Rytkheu himself would adopt to describe his work:

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[33] Vashchenko, xiv. Other Native Americans mentioned include Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, and Leslie Marmon Silko.

[34] N. Scott Momaday, "Foreword," in *The Way of Kinship: An Anthology of Native Siberian Literature*, ed. Alexander Vashchenko and Claude Clayton Smith, First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), x–xii.

[35] Caroline Damiens has read Rytheu's cinematic collaborations with director Anatolii Nitochkin as a Soviet instantiation of "fourth cinema," which understands Indigenous film as a decolonial response to mainstream cinema. (Damiens, "The Birth of a Soviet 'Fourth Cinema' on Prime Time Television.") Boliachevetz and Sablin have similarly read the work of Rytkheu and other Siberian Indigenous writers as part of a global trend of "fourth-world" Indigenous literatures. (Lilia Boliachevets and Ivan Sablin, "The Second or the Fourth World: Critique of Communism and Colonialism in Contemporary North Asian Literature," *Ab Imperio* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 385–425.)

[36] "Written Oral History."

[37] Lönngren, "Zhizn' na grani vyzhivaniia," 27.

> I have always found literary scholars' discourse about the writing process to be interesting and amusing […], how [the writer] contributed and expressed a Great Idea […] I'm not thinking about that. The Americans have a good designation of 'storyteller.' [sic. Here he uses the English phrase rather than the Russian *rasskazchik* or *skazochnik*.] And so, I'm a 'storyteller': not a philosopher, not an intellectual, not even a member of the intelligentsia.[38]

Rytkheu's adoption of the "American" term *storyteller* is hardly accidental. Comparisons between Rytkheu's literary oeuvre and Chukchi oral narrative tradition were widespread among Soviet critics as early as the 1950s, a stance that Rytkheu supported in his personal writing. Furthermore, given his later collaborations with Native American activists and writers such as Momaday, it seems that at least at the time of the interview in the late 1990s, Rytkheu was positioning himself within an international Indigenous literary tradition more broadly.[39]

Native American renaissance writer and scholar Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) has visualized the narrative structure of Pueblo storytelling as akin to a spider's web: "with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing each other" and the narrative structure "emerging as it is made" via individual words, "stories within stories," and the speaker's embodied performance. Storytelling thus emerges as:

> something that comes out of an experience and an understanding of that original view of creation - that we are all part of a whole; we do not differentiate or fragment stories and experiences. […] So, in the telling (and you will hear a few of the dimensions of this telling) first of all, as mentioned earlier, the storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners. The storytelling continues from generation to generation. Basically, the origin story constructs our identity- within this story, we know who we are.[40]

Although Silko's spiderweb metaphor emerges from the importance of the spider in Pueblo narrative tradition specifically, she suggests that it serves as a useful heuristic for understanding the operative structures of Indigenous narrative traditions more broadly. Silko's approach, like Rytkheu's adoption of the "American" term "storyteller," exemplify the generative potential of

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[38] Private interview, qtd. in Lönngren, "Zhizn' na grani vyzhivaniia," 16. It's likely that Rytkheu's use of the English term here was intended to align himself within a broader international tradition of Indigenous literatures, particularly given Rytkheu's collaboration with Native American writers such as N. Scott Momaday (who himself worked as a visiting professor in Moscow in the 1970s), a relationship I would like to explore in more depth in the future.

[39] There is evidence to suggest that Rytkheu was considering the Chukchi place in a global Indigenous community much earlier in his career, even when he sometimes relied on settler accounts of specific Indigenous cultures. For instance, in one short story, "The Peace Pipe," a Chukchi ivory carver hears a local storyteller's retelling of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* and feels a deep sense of connection with the Native American traditions depicted there. In response, he fashions a peace pipe (carved in the Chukchi style) for a colleague to bring to an international delegation as a gift to represent his own people's commitment to international friendship. (See *Chukotskaia saga*, 102-113.)

[40] Leslie Marmon Silko, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," in *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, ed. Leslie A. Fielder and Houston A. Baker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 54–72.

"trans-Indigenous" literary interpretive practices, which Chadwick Allen has defined as "a methodology of focused *juxtapositions* of distinct Indigenous themes, performances, and contexts," including aesthetic practices which, when applied purposefully serve to "augment and significantly refocus" traditional literary interpretive methods, which often reinforce "dominant settler culture and produc[e] hierarchies of Indigenous oppression" and instead "augment[t] and expan[d] broader, globally Indigenous fields of Inquiry."[41]

By applying Silko's model trans-Indigenously (as Rytkheu himself did), we can view the real-and-imagined Chukotka of Rytkheu's works as a site of knowledge production and narrative transmission, its constitutive parts contributing to the broader whole of Chukchi knowledge. Although such knowledge had traditionally been transmitted through oral narrative practices such as song and storytelling, Rytkheu's transposition of such practices into literary form allow for the transmission of such knowledge to a contemporary readership. In doing so, his works present knowledge that the Soviet readers could use to understand not only the history and humanity of "present/real" Beringia and its inhabitants, but also as a means of understanding themselves. If, as Silko suggests, Indigenous storytelling can be understood as a "continuation" that is constantly being written and adapted to address changing realities, I aim to read Rytkheu's works (and his evolution as a writer) as belonging to this tradition. Therefore, although the close readings to come present Rytkheu's works, *A Chukotkan Saga* (1957), "The Sea Lion" (1969), *A Dream in Polar Fog* (1970), and *When the Whales Leave* (1975) in roughly chronological order, my intention is not to periodize, but rather to trace their continuities and reverberations as interconnected parts, as late Soviet instantiations of a broader Chukchi narrative tradition that is still being written and adapted to navigate a constantly changing reality.

Rytkheu's career as a writer was inextricably bound to the archetypal success story his biography embodied. As was the case for other writers belonging to "partly-literate" (*malopis'mennye*) nations, reviews of Rytkheu's early work were not so much assessments of the author's literary talent so much as celebrations of the imprint of Soviet progress on his people.[42] Rytkheu was framed as worthy because he was the "first writer in the history of the Chukchi," the face of Soviet equality for a people "coming to socialism from patriarchal tribal relations" and seeking to overcome the legacy of the tsarist system in which, in the words of Gorkii, they "never possessed rights, except […] the right to gradually die off."[43] Rytkheu would subsequently adopt this characterization of himself when fashioning his persona as a public intellectual, both for a Soviet audience (as a Chukchi writer) and for an international one (as a Soviet writer), routinely praising the gifts bestowed on his people by Soviet progress and the "universality and common humanity of Russian culture" as reflected in its literature.[44] Although this stance garnered favor among the Soviet literary and bureaucratic gatekeepers who published his work, Rytkheu's consistent praise of collectivization and Russification[45] would later prove

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[41] Allen, *Trans-Indigenous,* xvii, xiv.

[42] For example in one 1953 review of two Rytkheu stories published in Chukchi and Russian, Rytkheu and his stories are mentioned only halfway into the first column of text, after several paragraphs about the triumphs of Soviet national minority writers, after which the majority of the discussion is on the author's sense of national "self-consciousness" and his stories' success at depicting of Soviet progress in Chukotka. (Goffensheffer, V., "Okno v bol'shoi mir," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 7, 1953.)

[43] Maksim Gor'kii, "Pis'mo redaktsii zhurnala 'Budushshaia Sibir','" *Izvestiia TsIK SSSR i VTsIK*, January 24, 1931.Qtd. in L. Klimovich, "Vzvrashshennye oktiabriam," *Izvestiia*, September 29, 1957.

[44]Yuri Rytkheu, "Pereshagnuv cherez veka...," *Voprosy literatury* 1977, no. 6 (June 30, 1977): 10.

[45] For instance, in a 1972 article for the UNESCO *Courier*, Rytkheu remarked that prior to Soviet modernization "there were few who seriously worried about [Arctic nationalities'] future, about the act that these ancient peoples,

controversial for some post-Soviet critics (Indigenous, Russian, and international), who viewed his Soviet work prior to 1975 as overly assimilationist and his criticism of the Soviet state in the nineties as either a sign of the author's belated regret for his participation in the Soviet apparatus, or as a cynically opportunistic attempt to redefine himself before an international readership eager to discover Siberian Indigenous literature. (It is worth noting that after the collapse of the USSR Rytkheu had trouble finding a Russian-language publisher: his post-Soviet writing was typically first published in translation abroad.)[46] Yet a closer look at Rytkheu's work – including the full arc of his editorial and autobiographical writing – suggests that the author had a more complicated relationship to the Soviet state and to Russian literature than it would initially appear, including in the ways that he applied Soviet formal and thematic conventions for so-called "national literatures" in his work.

On the one hand, Rytkheu's praise for his people's progress under Soviet modernizing policies in Chukotka remained consistent throughout his career, particularly with respect to educational and intellectual opportunities afforded him by the Soviet education system and the Russian language. For instance, throughout the 1980s, Rytkheu publicly characterized his people using the linear model of Soviet historiography, according to which Soviet modernization had allowed his people to "march across one millennium" in a matter of years as their "primitive" language and "centuries-old lifestyle" were rapidly transformed by Soviet intervention, [47] and even after the fall of the Soviet Union, the author expressed the positive impact of the Russian language and education system on his life, even as he was critical of other aspects of the Soviet system.[48] At the same time, Rytkheu consistently expressed frustration with scientific and literary studies of Siberian Indigenous people – generally written by outsiders – which exoticized or mocked them as remnants of the past. By the 1970s, Rytkheu – like Rasputin and other Siberian and rural writers – increasingly emphasized the importance of folk traditions and artistic practices as important for the "moral climate" of the nation:

> In my time I recovered from a childhood disease: I strove to flee as fast as possible from folklore and master the supposedly contemporary techniques and genres standing at the vanguard of artistic creation. That was naïve. What a treasure it is, our oral folk culture. In our era of struggle for the conservation of the environment, it would not hurt to also turn our attention to the necessity of protecting our spiritual and artistic-poetic environment, of languages—here there are sometimes traces (*sledy*) [49] that are harder to wash away than oil slicks on the surface of the ocean…[50]

Rytkheu's above statement – made in reference to his "contemporary legend" *When the Whales Leave* – is illustrative not only of the renewed interest in the past that was characteristic of Brezhnev-era moral debates, but also of the complex connection between place, language, and

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with their patriarchal way of life now being drawn into the world economy, were totally unprepared for it and helpless. Not assimilation, but extinction threatened them," (See "Schools of the Soviet Far North," 30). Rytkheu repeats similar sentiments in other essays and autobiographical writing from this period. (See for example Rytkheu, *Pod sen'iu volshebnoi gory*; Yuri Rytkheu, "People of the Long Spring," *National Geographic*, February 1983.)

[46] Lönngren, "Zhizn' na grani vyzhivaniia."

[47] See Rytkheu, "Schools of the Soviet Far North," 30–31; "Pereshagnuv cherez veka," 7.

[48] See *Poslednii shaman, Dorozhnyi leksikon*.

[49] In this instance, Rytkheu's use of *sledy* appears to be a play on the scientific term *sledy zagriaznenii,* meaning "trace contaminants" or "trace pollutants," which commonly appears in technical writing of the period.

[50] "Pereshagnuv cherez veka," 10.

history in his understanding of literature's artistic task. In Rytkheu's fiction and editorial writing, people and their history and language are inseparable from the environment in which they were rooted – their perception of reality (including Soviet modernity) shaped by a sense of their complex relationship to place – in this case Rytkheu's birthplace, the shoreside settlement Uelen and the surrounding Bering Strait region.

Rytkheu's simultaneous willingness to speak the language of Soviet progress via assimilation, and his desire to correct the past-oriented erasure of Indigenous life exemplify a common dilemma for Indigenous people devising strategies to survive and endure in a dominant settler culture constructed upon their absence (whether via assimilation or extermination). Native American scholar Gerald Vizenor has described the various tactics enacted by Indigenous American peoples to achieve this as acts of "survivance," which he defines flexibly as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories" to "counter the surveillance and literature of dominance," which depends on the erasure of Native cultures in order to propagate the mythology of frontier colonialism and its extractivist worldview.[51] Native Americans from a variety of tribal backgrounds, historical contexts, and ideological positions "contravene the absence of the real" (that is Indigenous reality) characteristic in settler colonial narratives through the "recreation of the real" via strategies such as humor, performance, and metaphor. [52]

Although Vizenor applies his argument within the capitalist American myth of Manifest destiny, when considering Rytkheu's literary ideology alongside the historical and literary contexts of the Soviet modernizing project in Chukotka, I argue that when applied Trans-Indigenously, Vizenor's figuration of survivance provides a helpful model for understanding the evolution of Rytkheu's poetics and themes, even while the precise circumstances of Russian colonization and the Soviet modernization project differed. Soviet policies towards Siberian Indigenous peoples were rooted in an ideology of equal rights and national self-determinism, which could be obtained through socialist modernization. In practice, however, their application was often only partially successful, implicitly recreating some of the assimilationist practices that they were theoretically designed to overcome, and thus participating in the erasure of Indigenous identities and customs in multiple ways. Their predicated understanding of nomadic peoples as backwards (*otstalye*) relied on racial and temporal hierarchies that relegated Indigenous peoples to a primitive past,[53] while propelling those people forward into socialist consciousness (the present) required processes of national and cultural construction that were ultimately defined and designed through the othering gaze of the Russian center and implemented via assimilationist practices.[54] Additionally, due to Soviet developmentalist policies in Siberia and the Far North, settler colonial policies in both Russian Imperial and Soviet Siberia relied on the mythology of its emptiness – its potential as an uninhabited *tabula rasa* rife with untapped natural resources. Like in other parts of Siberia (including in places inhabited by *Sibiriak* settlers such as those described by Rasputin), the state prioritization of natural resource extraction and industrialization of the area often paradoxically neglected the people already residing there, leading to subpar living standards in many regions.

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[51] Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (U of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii, 4–5.
[52] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners,* 5.
[53] For a theoretical discussion of how settler temporalities and histories often participate in the othering and erasure of Indigenous peoples, see Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 1–47.
[54] See Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment."

As such, as Siberian Indigenous peoples maintained a complex relationship with the State throughout Soviet history, sometimes maintaining multiple, syncretic identities that "often ignored and […] compartmentalized" Soviet values "so that bi- or multicultural behavior did not seem insincere to its practitioners."[55] These forms of cultural assimilationism, neglect, and erasure would be a major point of critique for Siberia's Indigenous activism in perestroika and the post-Soviet era, a movement with which Rytkheu's post-Soviet writing aligned. Notably, it was precisely the successful formation of an Indigenous intellectual elite under the Soviet Union's "affirmative action" approach to nationalities policy that would spearhead its eventual rejection. Indigenous writers such as Rytkheu found not only professional opportunities, but also national and transnational community through institutions such as the Institution for the Peoples of the North in Leningrad, and thus often felt indebted to the educational system, even as they were ambivalent about its cultural consequences. In this sense, the successful organization of an Indigenous activist movement in the eighties and nineties was paradoxically both a product of and a reaction to the outcomes of Soviet nationalities policy; ideologically it was a realization of the Soviet Union's aims to support Indigenous self-determination through the formation of an intellectual elite, even as that self-determination would lead to a rejection of its foundations and practices.[56]

In Rytkheu's case, the ambiguous relationship that members of the Indigenous elite had with state power thus contributed to his subtle subversion of state-prescribed literary conventions for non-Russian national literatures, long before he would come to openly critique Soviet policies toward Indigenous cultures in the nineties. Throughout his career, Rytkheu remained steadfast in his assertion that his works were intended provide readers with a better understanding of his people as *real* members of a *present*, global community, although his literary strategies for doing so would evolve and adapt alongside the changing contexts of that reality. For Rytkheu storytelling and other folk narrative forms are more than just an artistic practice, but also a means of understanding and transmitting an ongoing, unfinished history; if a Chukchi storyteller was (as he would later describe) an "encyclopedic writer […], an artist of words, an improvisor, [and] a guardian of treasured creative riches,"[57] continuing that tradition in his writing would not only allow him to preserve this knowledge for future generations of Chukchi, but would also fulfill the more universal task of a Soviet writer to "turn to sources, to thoroughly research the entire historical path, so as to more fully and deeply understand the present."[58] We can thus understand Rytkheu's works as literary acts of Soviet Indigenous survivance, which I understand here as the various strategies that Rytkheu and other Soviet Indigenous writers implemented to assert Indigenous presence within the contexts, forms, and limitations of the Soviet political and cultural apparatus that could interrogate the dominant

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[55] Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 21. Balzer's ethnographic research in Siberian Khanty communities since 1976 has revealed some of the subtle ways in which Siberian people both acculturated and simultaneously suspected and/or resisted Soviet practices. Some forms of resistance included small, but armed clashes against efforts to collectivize in the 1930s, subtly lying to Soviet ethnographers trying to glean information about familial lineage, and the quiet practice of Indigenous religions.

[56] Patti Gray, an anthropologist working with Chukchi activists during the 90s and 00s remarks that although many activists critiqued Soviet policies towards Indigenous people more broadly, the majority viewed the Soviet education they received and the subsequent opportunities it afforded them in a positive light. See Patty A. Gray, "Chukotka's Indigenous Intellectuals and Subversion of Indigenous Activism in the 1990s," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 31, no. 1/2 (2007): 146.

[57] Rytkheu, *Dorozhnyi leksikon*, 367.

[58] "Pereshagnuv cherez veka," 13.

narrative of their people as backwards. By describing Chukotka as a *real* and *present* part of the Soviet Union, Rytkheu not only asserted a narrative presence for his people in response to their erasure: he also transmitted their history and moral code in a Russian vernacular accessible to a wider Soviet readership. This rendering of Beringia, and of its residents' place within it, could then contribute to what Rytkheu described as:

> a new feeling of socialist homeland (*otchizna*), which supplements and strengthens a primordial feeling of attachment to the 'little motherland' (*malaia rodina*), to that place where you were born, grew up, where the land guards the remains (*prakh*) of your ancestors.[59]

The new socialist homeland consisted not only of the diverse natural landscapes of "earth, country, mountains, rivers and tundra, forests and fields" that made up the Soviet Union "but also of that moral climate *(nravstvennyi klimat*) in which our Soviet people live."[60] Rytkheu's specifically Soviet form of survivance thus contributed to the broader ideological underpinnings of his career as a Soviet writer. Although Russian might represent the "language of [written] artistic ideation," giving him the tools to translate his culture to a universal audience, Beringian place and Chukchi worldviews and narrative forms provided fundamental *ways of knowing* that would allow the Chukchi to assert their presence as architects of the Soviet "moral climate" and help readers make sense of their place in the present and future.

Literary Nomadism and Indigenous Representation in *A Chukotkan Saga*

Rytkheu's early explorations of the relationship between this "new socialist homeland" and ancestral ties place can be observed in his 1957 short story collection, *A Chukotkan Saga (Chukotskaia saga*), Rytkheu's third published book and one of his few publications to be translated from Chukchi rather than written in Russian. The book is a collection of fifteen previously-published short stories (including two thematic cycles), which Rytkheu revised and adapted to create a book-length cycle "unified by a single idea, a single goal, and even a single set of characters,"[61] which together presented readers with a chronicle of the Chukotkan present, as focalized through the collective everyday experiences of the residents of a coastal hunting settlement organized around the collective farm "Morning" (referred to by both its Russian name *Utro,* and Chukchi *Ergyron*).[62] On its surface, *A Chukotkan Saga* reads as a straightforward, socialist realist celebration of Chukchi progress under socialism, its stories demonstrating not only the technological and infrastructural progress brought about by the Soviet system (such as accounts of elders installing the first glass windows in their traditional *yaranga* tents or depictions of modernized hunting), but also the presumed benefits of cultural assimilationism, including the demise of "superstition" and shamanism and the benefits of the Soviet education system (including residential schools).[63] However, the book's narrative peculiarities –

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[59] *Pereshagnuv cherez veka*. 13.
[60] *Pereshagnuv cherez veka*. 13.
[61] Vlasenko, *Iurii Rytkheu. Literaturnyi portret*, 36–37. Many earlier versions of the short stories in *A Chukotkan Saga* were previously published in Rytkheu's first book, *The People of our Shore* (*Liudi nashego berega: rasskazy* (Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1953), which lacked the conscious markers of cyclization present in the latter.
[62] I will henceforth refer to the place by the Chukchi name, Ergyron.
[63] See for instance the stories "Okoshko" (*Chukotskaia Saga*, 3-41) and "Liudi s togo berega" (*Chukogskaia saga,* 42-58), and "the cycle "Staryyi memel' smeetsia poslednim" (*Chukotskaia saga*, 114-238).

particularly those arising from Rytkheu's revisions to previously-published short stories for their cyclicization – demonstrate the ways in which Rytkheu was already experimenting with literary formulations of Chukotkan place as a means of asserting Soviet Indigenous presence for a Russian readership.

The book's primary unifying structure is its character system, which Rytkheu later described as a form of narrative nomadism, a likely nod to the nomadism of his people: "the characters of the book […] wander like nomads [*kochuiut*] from one story into another. In one story they occupy a leading role while in another they recede into the background."[64] Although when read individually, each short story focuses on discreet episodes from the lives of individual characters or households, when read together, readers can gradually begin to construct a more complete picture of the settlement and its daily dynamics by tracing characters' relationships and interactions across stories, piecing together a more complete picture of the Chukotkan postwar socialist everyday and the subjective experiences of the people living within it, which for the most part are mediated in the present tense through the free indirect discourse of a third person narrator. Although stylistically this narrator is mostly unremarkable (perhaps an effect of the translation from Chukchi to Russian), the voice occasionally slips into the first person, revealing the narrator to be a community member telling the stories of his neighbors, rather than an omniscient outsider.[65] This narrative voice creates a dialectic between part and whole, both in the book's structure (and the reader's understanding of it), but also in the events presented; in one of the first scholarly studies of Rytkheu's work, Aleksandr Vlasenko describes the stories in *Chukotkan Saga* as "growing into one another, creating the sensation […] of a continuous, unified narration [*povestvovanie*]."[66]

While this narrative technique is hardly unique to Chukchi culture, Rytkheu's choice to frame the effects of his narrative framing device as a form of literary nomadism speak to his early attempts to experiment ways of finding continuity between Chukchi and European narrative forms. The sensation that Vlasenko describes, which he characterizes as a particular innovation in Rytkheu's work, is in fact similar to narrative techniques implemented by Chukchi storytellers, whom ethnographer Waldemar Bogoras described as having the ability to "tell stories for hours at a time uninterrupted and to string together various episodes one after the other so adroitly that the listeners don't notice their adhesions."[67] Rytkheu later described this narrative technique as a sort of shapeshifting that took place in the bodies and souls of particularly gifted storytellers, which allowed them to traverse vast spatial expanses and "converge with the white winter sky," in their voices, and "externally transform" into their characters through bodily expressions.[68] Both Bogoras and Rytkheu describe this oral narrative technique as enacting physical changes in the listener, enabling him to remember and later transmit the story to others.

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[64] *Chukotskaia saga,* 36-37.

[65] For instance, in "People from that Shore ("*Liudi s togo berega"*), the narrator interrupts an account of a village elder's memory to comment on a merchant named Mr. Carpenter, who "ran a shop in our town" (*Chukotskaia saga*, 48).

[66] *Chukotskaia saga*, 36.

[67] See Waldemar Bogoras, *Materialy po izucheniiu chukotskago iazyka v Kolymskom ogrugie V. G. Bogorazom* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1900), iv. It is unclear whether Vlasenko was implicitly referencing Bogoras' description of Chukchi storytelling in his description of Rytkheu's work, although given Bogoras' influence on Soviet ethnography, it is likely he would have been familiar with the text. However, Vlasenko does not draw an explicit connection between Chukchi storytelling and the narrative "peculiarities" of *Chukotkan Saga*.

[68] *Dorozhnyi leksikon,* 375.

As a socialist storyteller of the Chukotkan present, Rytkheu's literary narrator lacks the spatiotemporal and stylistic scope of his oral storyteller forebears. However, *Chukotkan Saga*'s merging of Socialist realist narrative devices and emplotment strategies from the Chukchi oral tradition suggests that the author was already exploring methods for transcribing Indigenous modes of embodied knowledge transmission for a broad literary audience. Although the outcomes of individual stories ultimately champion the benefits of Soviet progress (and by extension a degree of assimilationism), the nomadic wandering of characters – and the free indirect discourse accounts of their inner experiences – encourage the reader to take on a variety of perspectives, piecing together a constantly evolving understanding of present reality.

Through these experiences, readers are given a glimpse of the ways in which the exoticizing colonial gaze can be mistaken – and of how Indigenous knowledge can benefit Soviet progress. Readers are introduced to the nuances of Indigenous scientific knowledge in "Tegryne flies to Khabarovsk," which follows a young Chukchi student's air journey as she begins her studies as a biologist. Tegryne's aerial view of her native tundra triggers memories of her educational journey, beginning with an early fascination for observing the plants and animals of the tundra which was fostered by her father – a hunter with a keen eye for observation.[69] Although Tegryne's love for science is fostered by the Soviet educational system, her scholarly passions are rooted in a love for her native place and an instinctual understanding of its many details. This grants Tegryne a gift of scientific sight – as someone with lived experience of the tundra, she is able to notice (and inspire others to notice) details invisible to "those for whom subarctic nature seems meager, boring, or monotonous."[70] Another memory reveals the shortcomings of scholars observing Chukotka from the outside: when a Russian ethnographer visits Tegryne's father Memyl, the town "storyteller" (*rasskazchik*), he is disappointed to hear Memyl retell the plots of canonical Russian works of literature, a skill for which Memyl is renowned in his community. After asking him to tell more "traditional" stories from Chukchi folklore, the well-meaning ethnographer learns that since Chukchi stories are traditionally sung rather than spoken, he should have asked for the town "singer" (*pevets*), emphasizing the importance of Indigenous perspectives in Soviet science.

The stories continue in roughly chronological order until "Five letters of Valia Kramerenkova" ("*Piat' pisem Vali Kramerenkovoi*"), the book's tenth of fifteen stories and one of the last to be written. The story marks a distinct narrative shift from the stylized secondary oral mode of storytelling presented by the "insider" narrator of the cycle's remaining works. Instead, it demonstrates a marked shift to explicitly written narrative, providing an epistolary account of life on Chukotka by Valia Kramerenkova, a young Russian biology teacher from Moscow who has chosen to come to Chukotka on a three-year work assignment. Kramerenkova's letters are framed with editorial notes from the narrator, who after summarizing the events of the book thus far, asks the reader to turn his thoughts backwards in time to Kramerenkova's arrival. Presenting Kramerenkova's letters as real and unedited, the narrator promises the readers that the letters will teach them "that which I could not tell you myself" (*to, chego sam ia rasskazyvat' ne sumel*) about the events and characters of the book – that is "to see them in a new light" ("*uvidet' ikh v novom svete*").[71] Following are five letters from Valia to her friend Tania, which document her arrival to Ergyron and her gradual integration into the local community. Valia's letters move through the process of culture shock in real-time, from

[69] I will return to the significance of this aerial view in the next chapter.
[70] *Chukotskaia saga*, 64.
[71] *Chukotskaia saga*, 240.

enchantment with her new surroundings in the first letter, to disgust and rejection of her new home in the second letter, to fear and homesickness in the third letter, and finally to gradual acceptance and integration into the community in the fourth letter. By the fifth letter ("redacted" for privacy by Tania), the reader learns that Valia is engaged to be married to the principal of her school, a young Chukchi man. The letters are placed strategically within the overarching plot structure of the book: moving several months backwards in time, Valia's initial letters provide an alternative, outsider's account of the events and characters which are by now familiar to the reader.

When juxtaposed with these earlier insider accounts of the Chukotkan present, Valia's perspective as an outsider is called into question. Whereas prior to reading *Chukotkan Saga* a Russian reader may share Valia's initial impressions of the tundra as a "gloomy backwater" (*unylaia dyra*) and its residents "so deeply ingrained with unculturedness [*beskul'ture sidit tak gluboko*] […] that higher education can't even help them," the diverging accounts of reality depicted in the previous stories reveal her perspective as the stereotypical thinking of an emotionally-distraught outsider.[72] Furthermore, Valia's documented growth across her letters calls into question the permanence of the perspectives finalized by written text; in later letters, Valia expresses regret for the judgments of previous ones "which of course, should never have been sent."[73] (Valia compares this judgmental mindset to being "blind" (*slepaia*), revealing that some ways of knowing are not necessarily dependent on the physical ability to see.)[74] The written narrative text is thus revealed to be less reliable in some ways due to its inability to sufficiently capture the changing perspective of the narrator, who must recant her previous, "blind" narratives in order to capture a more accurate rendition of her reality. As she becomes more integrated into the community and learns to see it as a member of the community, Valia's status as a newcomer becomes a narrative asset, providing objective distance that allows her to notice and recount interesting details about people and events (such as character backstories or comments about the Chukchi language) that the Chukchi narrator has not provided. By the fifth letter, Valia's timeline has also merged with the timeline of the Chukchi narrative, placing her firmly in the present of the book alongside Ergyron's local characters, her story's ending (like that of the other characters) yet to be written.

While attachment to place figures heavily into the ethos of *Chukotkan Saga* and other early works by Rytkheu, the topographic and environmental features of the Bering Strait remain secondary to its social dimensions, and mostly provide a vivid, ecologically rich background designed to make the experiences of individual characters more convincingly real. When geographic features of the Bering Strait do figure into *A Chukotkan Saga* formally, they do so as a means of organizing the social dynamics of the book's character system; for instance, the short maritime route between Chukotka and Alaska and the subsequent intermingling that results between settlers and Indigenous people from both regions serves as a heuristic for comparing Indigenous rights under socialist and capitalist systems,[75] while a stormy sky in another story juxtaposes Western meteorological and Chukchi environmental knowledge about reading the

[72] *Chukotskaia saga,* 247, 249-250.
[73] *Chukotskaia saga*, 250.
[74] *Chukotskaia saga*, 261.
[75] See "Liudi s togo berega," *Chukotskaia saga*, 42-58. The cultural similarities between Indigenous peoples across the Bering Strait were often used in Soviet cultural texts as devices for comparing the impact of Soviet and American ideologies through depictions of distinct interventions in the region. For a more in-depth discussion of this phenomenon as it appears in literature and film, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 327–30.

weather.[76] By contrast, administrative cartography figures heavily into the Beringian imaginary mapped by *A Chukotkan Saga.* For the greater part of the book Ergyron serves as the geographic center from which all other points emanate: readers are oriented to its location on the Soviet map based on its distance from less peripheral cities and towns that are mentioned throughout, which move westward from the Beringian center in reverse of the typical administrative map of the Soviet Union (and Russian empire). Instead, characters in the text grow more peripheral as they move to further and more urban locales: from collective farm to the district center Uelen, and onward to the provincial capital Anadyr, to the regional metropolis Khabarovsk, and finally to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Despite its omission from the Soviet administrative map, Ergyron remains the center of both plot and character system until Valia's letter reveals its exact location on a map:

> Если хочешь, Танечка, […] раскрой атлас и на карте Советского Союза отыщи Анадырь, центр Чукотского национального округа. Нашла? Это, как видишь, на крайнем северо-востоке страны, у самого Берингова моря. […] На карте [Эргырон] не ищи — на общесоюзной карте его, конечно, нет. […] Поставь крохотную точечку на берегу Чукотского моря, где-нибудь между Уэленом и Ванкаремом, и знай, что в этой точечке живет и работает преподавательница биологии Валентина Алексеевна Крамаренкова. Эргырон — это даже не название населенного пункта, а только название колхоза.[77]
>
> If you want, Tanechka, […] open the atlas and on the map of the Soviet Union find Anadyr, the center of Chukotka. Did you find it? As you can see, it's located on the extreme northeast of the country, on the Bering Sea itself. […] Don't look for [Ergyron] on the map – on the All-Union map, it doesn't exist, of course. […] Place a tiny little dot on the shore of the Chukotka Sea, somewhere between Uelen and Vankarem and know that in this little dot the biology teacher Valentina Alekseevna Kramerenkova is living and working. Ergyron is not even the name of this populated point, but only the name of the collective farm [located there].

Valia's preliminary glimpse of the Beringian coastline expresses a disconnect between the lived experience of navigating Beringia from the sea and the existing knowledge available to outsiders on the administrative map. In the absence of adequate cartographic representations of her new home, Valia must fill in the gaps by creating a literary image for her friend, which first requires recentering her gaze to a marginal point on the "extreme northeast" of the map, and then augmenting its blankness with details, such as descriptions of the sea ice and distances to sail between capes and other landmarks. However, as Valia herself admits, even when they are present as names on the map, such categories are often inadequate for accurately describing Chukotkan place—Ergyron's name describes an externally-imposed institution (the collective farm) rather than the place name itself. We can understand the literary task that *Chukotkan Saga* performs to be somewhat akin to the one that Valia presents to Tania when describing the limitations of cartography. The literary space of Ergyron gives meaning to blank space on the administrative map of the Siberian Arctic by *peopling* it – populating unnamed and uncategorized space and imbuing it, through the language of storytelling, with the embodied

[76] See "Trubka mira," *Chukotskaia saga*, 102-113.
[77] *Chukotskaia saga*, 241

knowledge of place with which its various inhabitants know it, thus realizing the existence of Indigenous place as a location of the Soviet present.[78]

However, while Valia's attempts to map the Beringian shoreline for her friend are limited by the cartographic categories available to her, *Chukotkan Saga*'s structure as a cycle of short stories allows Rytkheu to deploy local strategies for describing place. In a study of Yupik and Chukchi place names, ethnographer Mikhail Chlenov notes that Indigenous place naming in the region "demonstrate[s] deeply rooted features" of local Indigenous cultures and the ways that they perceive space. The Yupik maritime hunter informant "recited toponyms systematically, as if he was sailing along the shore" and "the area was a line with notable landmarks on it." In contrast, the tundra-dwelling Chukchi reindeer herder described surrounding landmarks as "a circular space" of "sites […] connected by radial lines and he was standing in the center of an imaginary circle at their convergence." In both Chukchi and Yupik cultures, places are often named for visible landmarks and geographical features.[79] *Chukotkan Saga* maps Ergyron through the perspectives of various subjects residing there. In each individual story, readers are encouraged to understand the physical landmarks and social dimensions of Ergyron through the centered perspective of one or two principal characters. The reader gleans knowledge about Ergyron as a place through distinct landmarks (including physical places, relationships, and memories) that are meaningful to that character. The cycle as a whole allows the reader to piece together details about Ergyron related from a variety of perspectives that may be limited by the individual character's position in relation to the community, producing a more vivid, navigable map of Ergyron in its various forms. Although the stories appear roughly in chronological order, that order is secondary to the details about place and community that are revealed, and each character becomes an individual landmark of sorts for navigating the social structure of the settlement as a whole. For instance, Old Memyl quickly becomes the book's trustworthy source of stories, while Tegryne's keen eye for observation is a reference point for ecological passages. The constellation of the cycle's characters, and their nomadic wandering between texts, thus provides the reader with an alternative means of mapping Uelen as a place, imbuing the space with place-based community knowledge forms that are not visually representable via administrative cartography.

As we have seen, the Chukotka in Rytkheu's early short stories in part serves to fulfill a task of literary inhabitation – the "peopling," if you will, of Beringia as a *real* and *present* place that defied expectation in the Soviet reader's imagination. Centuries of contact with (and resistance to) white explorers and missionaries and nearly half a century of direct Soviet campaigns to modernize the region made Chukotka's residents well-acquainted with Russian culture. Nevertheless, for Soviet citizens more broadly, Beringia and its inhabitants remained –

[78] Anthropologist Ivan Sablin has similarly argued that Rytkheu's literary accounts of Chukchi place can serve as useful sources for understanding Chukchi formulations of identity formation due to their nuanced understanding of place-based relationships. See "Written Oral History."

[79] Michael Chlenov, "Indigenous Place Names in the Senyavin Strait Area, Chukotka," in *Memory and Landscape: Indigenous Responses to a Changing North*, ed. Kenneth L. Pratt and Scott A. Heyes (Athabasca, AB: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2022), 337–72. Chlenov's study was published in 2022, but is based on interviews with Indigenous elders conducted in the 1970s-80s in the Senyavin Strait region, which lies slightly south of Rytkheu's hometown Uelen and the fictional location of Ergyron/Utro. Although I was unable to find a similar study of place naming in the Uelen area, Chlenov notes that these naming conventions follow general sets of trends for place naming on the Chukotka peninsula in both Chukchi and Yupik cultures. Chlenov's Chukchi informants belonged to the reindeer herding group, rather than the maritime hunting group with which Rytkheu and other Uelen Chukchi people identify, so it is unclear which of these two worldviews is more aligned with the maritime Chukchi.

with rare exceptions – a *terra incognita*, a point to which *Chukotkan Saga* directly alludes many times. At the heart of the *Chukotkan Saga* cycle, then, is an anxiety and desire on the part of Rytkheu's Chukchi protagonists of *being seen*.

Artistic Vision and Ways of Knowing in "The Sea Lion"

By the late 1960s, Rytkheu had begun to assimilate Chukchi self-perception into his literary portrait of Uelen, as evidenced in the 1969 short story "The Sea Lion," ("Otlek," the title, is Chukchi, although the story was originally written and published in Russian), which considers the connection between sight, place, and artistic mastery. [80] The story follows Emul', a young worker in the Uelen cafeteria who earns extra income for her family as a walrus tusk carver, an art she has taught herself based on childhood observations of her grandfather, a master in the craft.[81] Emul' is particularly renowned for her carved figures of Piliken, a "well-fed, squinting demigod (*bozhok*)", a popular souvenir for tourists and villagers which – according to Emul's grandfather – had traditionally been a "symbol of greed and ignorance" due to their use as talismans for drawing away bad energy from its carrier.[82]

Throughout the story, Emul's artistry is tied to her inherent ability to see and understand detail, the "ability of a child's eye" to see "every blade of grass, every leaf, and every pebble on the banks of the sea," which has been gradually lost to age and experience, a loss she laments in the opening lines of the story:

> Почему я вижу вместо отдельных травинок сплошной зеленый покров, галечный пляж, небосвод и океан и мне нужно напряжение и внимание, чтобы вглядеться в очертания отдельного зеленого листочка?[83]
>
> Why is it that instead of each blade of grass I see one continuous carpet of grass, a pebble beach, a sky and ocean, and why do I need exertion and attention to look closely at the contours of a single green leaf?

These disparate ways of seeing drive the story's plot and Emul's personal and artistic education through the tension created by the binary oppositions they generate: childhood/adulthood, past/present, part/whole, large/small, general/specific. Although Emul' is typically unable to engage this form of seeing in her day-to-day life, she is able to gain temporary access to it

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[80] Yuri Rytkheu, "Otlek," *Ogonek*, no. 7 (February 1969): 20–24. The story was originally published in *Ogonek* and in journals in translation using this title, although it was subsequently changed to "Segodnia v mode Pilikeny" ("Nowadays Pilikens are in Fashion").

[81] Emul' may have been named for Vera Emkul' (1919-1985), who after learning ivory carving from her father Aromke (a founding member of the Uelen carving workshop) became "one of the most prominent engravers in Chukotka." See Mikhail M. Bronshtein, "Uelen Hunters and Artists," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 31, no. 1/2 (2007): 85.

[82] Rytkheu, "Otlek," 21. Although now widespread in the folk art (and particularly carvings) of Indigenous peoples across Beringia, Piliken is not in fact a traditional deity within Chukchi or other Indigenous cultures, but instead have their origins in American "Billiken" dolls, small figurines that were marketed as good luck charms at the turn of the 20th century, and which rapidly gained popularity throughout the world. The figurines made their way into Alaskan and Canadian Indigenous art during World War II, when sailors stationed in the area would commission the figures from ivory carvers as souvenirs. They reached Chukotka via these channels by 1953, likely brought across the Bering Strait by Yupik hunters residing in Uelen. (See Dorothy Jean Ray, "The Billiken," *The Alaska Journal*, Winter 1974, 25–31.)

[83] Rytkheu, "Otlek," 20.

through her grandfather's walrus tusk, either side of which bears a depiction of Uelen's shoreline of the past and present:

> Эмуль пристально вгляделась в рисунки, и тихое волнение охватило ее. Она не знала, что коснулась большого искусства и таинственные струны ее души оказались созвучны мыслям рисовавшего. […] Эмуль рассматривала клык и чувствовала, как слезы застилают глаза. В душе возникала нежная горечь от мысли, что это мгновение, запечатленное в чуть поблекших красках дедова рисунка, уже больше никогда не вернется […] Разглядывая клык, Эмуль чувствовала себя возвращенной в детство, когда она видела каждую травинку, каждый листочек и каждый камешек на морском берегу… Ее зрение уходило в глубь моржового клыка и вызывало мысли и чувства, образы и звуки прошлого, пережитого. И многократно усиленный луч вдруг возвращался в настоящее и высвечивал уже в ином свете то, что казалось таким знакомым и обыденным.[84]
>
> Emul' looked closely [*pristal'no vgliadelas'*] at the drawings and a quiet excitement engulfed her. She didn't know that she was touching great art and the mysterious strings of her soul seemed to sound in tune with the thoughts of the artist. […] Emul' examined [*rassmatryvala*] the tusk and felt tears welling in her eyes. In her soul she felt a tender pang of grief that this moment, imprinted in the slightly faded colors of her grandfather's drawing could never again return […] Looking [*razgliadyvaia*] at the tusk, Emul' felt herself returned to childhood, when she saw every blade of grass, every leaf, and every pebble on the seashore. […] Her sight departed into the depths [*ee zrenie ukhodilo v glub'*] of the walrus tusk and summoned thoughts and feelings, images and sounds of the past, of that which had already been experienced [*perezhitogo*]. And suddenly the beam of light, now many times stronger, returned to the present and illuminated that which had seemed so familiar and ordinary in a different light.

Emul' is able to access the memory of her grandfather – and through him her childhood sense of sight – through the experience of engaging his art, a form of "deep seeing" which engages not only her vision (and interpretation) of the image depicted there, but also her tactile engagement with the medium of the walrus tusk, whose heaviness and luster embody a multilayered depth which allows present reality to flow into and out of the past and allows her to see "the big, beautiful world, precise and clear (*otchetlivyi, poniatnyi*)" in its "white, slightly yellow varnished" surface. This triggers Emul's artistic awakening, "illuminating in a new light" the "familiar and mundane" images and experiences of the present, which helps her Pilikens transform from commercial approximations of her grandfather's art into unique objects imbued with her own voice.[85]

It would be hard to ignore the clear metaliterary resonance of the story's presentation of Chukchi folk aesthetics. Emul's experience of "intently seeing" her grandfather's art recalls the language of Russian formalism, wherein the walrus tusk (/text), becomes the material object onto which thoughts and memories are recorded and accessed by future readers. The tusk, like literature, also seems to perform a process akin to defamiliarization, illuminating the mundane and everyday in a different light. However, whereas formalist defamiliarization seeks to

[84] "Otlek," 21.
[85] "Otlek," 22.

overcome habitual perception in order to make the world seem new, the tusk serves a very different aesthetic purpose as an object of knowledge transmission. For Emul' the ability to see comes not from the artistic object itself, but rather through its intrinsic connectedness to time and space. The art's simultaneous *depiction* of place and the tusk's connection to it via the environment, allow her access to an instinctual but forgotten knowledge (and recognition) of place from which she has been alienated. This form of "reading" the walrus tusk thus performs a task we could instead call *refamiliarization*; that is reestablishing connections and ways of seeing that we previously possessed, but from which we have (through routine and change) become alienated or blinded.

Although the act of looking intently grants Emul' the artistic vision to be a masterful *craftsperson*, her true initiation as an *artist* is born of the internal desire to transmit this way of seeing and understanding Chukotka as a place to outsiders. When Gennadii, a young archaeologist with whom she has fallen in love, asks her to make him a memento of Chukotka, carved in such a manner "that [he] would want to come back here again," Emul' seeks inspiration by tapping into a sensory memory of a childhood encounter with a sea lion, which she summons once again in an "unexpected glimmer" through a tactile connection to her medium – an ancient tusk foraged from the sea:

> Его гладкое, будто отлакированное тело блестело на солнце. Но самым прекрасным была линия изгиба тела, — это было такое волшебство чистой линии, что Эмуль не сдержалась […] Отлек шевельнул головой и вдруг взлетел! […] Упругое и удлиненное тело отлека мелькнуло таким совершенством линий, что Эмуль застонала от восторга. […] сейчас, когда она держала в руке нагретый от ладони моржовый клык, она вдруг почувствовала: если ей удастся воспроизвести линию тела отлека, чистоту и выразительность — получится как раз то, что всегда будет напоминать Геннадию Барышеву о прекрасной земле Чукотке.[86]
>
> His body, smooth as if it were enamel, glistened in the sunlight. But the most beautiful was the line of the curve of its body [*liniia izgiba tela*], -- it was such a magically pure line [*bylo takoe volshebstvo chistoi linii*], that Emul couldn't contain herself […] With a slight move of his head, the *otlek* suddenly took flight! The elongated and elastic [*uprugoe i udlinennoe*] body of the *otlek* flashed in such perfect lines [*mel'knulo takim sovershenstvom linii*] that Emul' cried out in rapture. […] now, when she held the walrus tusk, warmed from her touch, she suddenly felt it: if she could successfully recreate the line of the otlek's body, its purity and expressiveness, then it would always remind Gennadii Baryshev of the beautiful land of Chukotka.[87]

Emul' understands the sea lion's body, with its elasticity and linear contour as providing the perfect aesthetic form through which to artfully express the essence of her relationship to Chukotka as a *place*. Prior to encountering the seal, Emul' remembers the Bering Sea in shimmering, but disorganized detail, where earth, water, and sky blend together and take on elements of each other: rock escarpments "float" in the sunlight, jellyfish "hang" in water whose transparency reveals its unfathomable depths, her grandfather's small boat providing a meager skin barrier to prevent her from becoming immersed. The "perfection of the line of the curve of

[86] "Otlek," 23.
[87] "Otlek," 23.

[the sea lion's] body" becomes a tool for organizing space into place: its simultaneous lines and curves and smooth shimmering skin allow it to pass organically through earth, sky, and sea, at home in each.

Emul carves the tusk in the form of the sea lion to transmit this sense of *familiarity* to its viewer and therefore evoke in him an understanding of and attachment to place:

> […] надо было вглядеться, всмотреться в ту единственную линию, которую Эмуль сумела передать, вырезая морское животное. Все было в этой линии — и песня, и робкий намек, и невысказанная нежность. Только надо всмотреться.[88]
>
> […] one needed to look deeply, to gaze deeply [*vgliadet'sia, vsmotret'sia*] at that single line that Emul' had been able to convey, when carving the marine animal. Everything was in this line – songs, and timid glimpses, and unspoken tenderness. One only needed to look deeply. [*Tol'ko nado vsmotret'sia*.][89]

The sea lion's hybrid form, embodied as art in a walrus tusk, represents the "everything" of Chukotka as Emul' has intimately experienced it, including an internal sense of tenderness, affection, and artistry born from her feelings of connectedness to something outside of herself, allowing the landscape to feel stable and familiar if one were only to look closely at it. Although Emul' possesses the ability to look deeply at her own work, and at the work of others in her community, her Russian archaeologist does not; beholding the carved sea lion for the first time, he remarks disappointedly: "this is good […] but right now Piliken figures are in fashion! How will I show my face in Leningrad without them?" Unable to read the tusk nor grasp the familiarity of Chukotka in the sea lion's form, Gennadii instead understands Uelen ivory carving as ethnographic kitsch, notable for its exoticism rather than for its artistic mastery.

In this regard, the story is ultimately an examination of artistic failure, which arises from her outsider reader's reduction of Chukchi art to souvenir. This dilemma is in fact embedded in the shared history of Chukchi and Yupik ivory carving, of which Uelen is often regarded as the center. Although walrus tusk carving has been an integral part of Indigenous culture in the Bering Strait for centuries, the forms for which it is known today emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Uelen carvings began to catch the attention of visiting whalers and traders in the region.[90] Recognizing the objects' economic value, local carvers began to use traditional techniques to make items that would specifically appeal to foreign tastes, such as hairpins, figurines, and walking sticks, in a new style that emphasized realism over traditional motifs. Tamara Mitlyanskaya notes that unlike some artistic practices, such as sewing and embroidery, "ivory carving began to lose its direct link with the local way of life and gradually took on the character of a native 'art form'" or handicraft.[91] In the 1920s and 30s, Soviet ethnographers at the Institute of the North recognized the potential of ivory carving as a national art form through which Arctic Indigenous people could develop their own national form of Soviet culture, and in the early 1930s, professional artist Alexander Gorbunkov was sent to

[88] "Otlek," 23.
[89] "Otlek," 23.
[90] For a general overview of the motifs, forms, and functions of ivory carving prior to the 19th century, see Sergei Arutiunov and Dorian Sergeev, *Ancient Cultures of the Asiatic Eskimos: The Uelen Cemetery*, trans. Richard Bland (United States: Shared Beringian Heritage Program, National Park Service, 2006).
[91] Mitlyanskaya, "Native Carvers and Outsider Artists," 68.

Uelen to assist with the establishment of local ivory carving collectives, through which local artists could cultivate culturally-specific creative practices that would help transform ivory carving into a "fine art culture" that could be displayed in Soviet art and ethnographic museums while also attracting enough interest from buyers to help sustain the local economy.[92] The practice continued to expand in the postwar period when, under the supervision of Russian artist Igor Lavrov, the Uelen workshop was given access to modern facilities and electric tools, although to some extent artists were still beholden to the tastes of their Russian supervisor, even as they developed their own individual approaches for depicting the local environment.[93]

Although Russian intervention is conspicuously absent from the Uelen workshop in "The Sea Lion," the story's complex treatment of intercultural artistic reception reveals the struggles of Soviet Indigenous artists seeking to convey their vision to outsiders. Though artists were encouraged to identify their own sense of artistic voice, cultivated through their "thorough knowledge of the northern environment" and distinct cultural worldview, their work was still in many ways beholden to the tastes of both the State cultural apparatus (still under Russian leadership), and of the visitors consuming their work (either as exotic mementos representative of arctic travels, or as museum exhibits with an ethnographic flare). While Emul' is unable to find the distinct forms to transmit her vision to Arkadii, her struggle to transpose that vision into artistic language that he can understand actually allows her to regain her childhood ability to see herself and "every blade of grass and every pebble" of her environment more clearly.

"The Sea Lion" expresses Rytkheu's ongoing dilemma as a writer wishing to familiarize his Russian-speaking readership with the Chukotkan everyday. Unfamiliar with both Beringia as a place and its distinct ways of seeing, a distant Russian readership would be unable to "read" the underlying meanings in place, instead understanding imagery through the same colonial lens that Rytkheu was trying to resist. It was not enough to present the reader with the authentic literary perspective of his Uelen characters; even if literary form could close some difference between self and other through the relationship between text and reader, his protagonists would still be coded for a Russian reader as ethnic Other. The author must therefore find a way to translate Chukchi *ways of knowing* Chukotka for a Russian audience without coding them as Other (and thus distant).

Translated Ways of Knowing in *A Dream in Polar Fog*

This problem is central both to the plot and to the form of Rytkheu's 1970 novel *A Dream in Polar Fog* (*Son v nachale tumana*), the author's response to the polar exploration novel.[94] Set at the turn of the 20th century, the novel follows the journey of Canadian John MacLennan,[95] a sailor aboard the *Belinda*, a commercial ship attempting to set a record sailing from Vancouver to the mouth of the Kolyma river along the Arctic Ocean coast. John is stranded ashore near the coastal settlement Enmyn after being injured by fireworks that he lights in an attempt to break a path for his ship in the ocean ice. On its surface, the plot is an account of John's gradual integration into the Chukchi community, a process known as "going native," a common enough trope in frontier exploration novels. Shari Huhndorf has traced the phenomenon to American

[92] Bronshtein, "Uelen Hunters and Artists," 87.
[93] Mitlyanskaya, "Native Carvers and Outsider Artists," 72–81; Bronshtein, "Uelen Hunters and Artists," 91–95.
[94] *Son v nachale tumana* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1969).
[95] Reviewer Alexander King has suggested that MacLennan was likely named for "Scottish lawyer and armchair-anthropologist John Ferguson MacLennan, who coined the term totemism and published speculative anthropology on ancient forms of kinship and religion." See King, "A Dream in Polar Fog," 86..

literature of late nineteenth-century, where it marked a shift in representations of Native Americans from predominantly negative accounts of Native people as "savages, [and] living antitheses to civilization" to positive, but romanticized accounts in which "noble Indian life" served as "a means of escaping a degenerate and corrupt white world" and can allow the white settler to "uncove[r] his own 'true' identity and redee[m] European-American society," after which point he could return to it.[96] Reflecting settler anxieties about modern culture, which Huhndorf links to the end of the United States' annexation of the American West and "the rise of industrial capitalism" and related models of "linear historical process," dominant literary narratives of "going native" were shaped within a decidedly American context.[97] Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the clear and constant historical similarities with the United States, a comparable phenomenon known in Russian as *obinorodchivanie* has been observed among accounts of Siberia's exploration and settlement.[98]

As a Soviet Indigenous novel about going native written in the 1970s, Rytkheu's depiction of John's process both engages and rejects thematic markers of the genre, an important detail when considering Rytkheu's broadly imagined Russophone readership. For white readers in particular, Rytkheu's subversion of the polar expedition novel uses the focalized interactions between the white Canadian protagonist John, and his Indigenous counterpart Toko as a means of defamiliarizing literary tropes that had in many ways shaped conceptions of Arctic Indigeneity in the white European cultural imaginary. As he begins to acclimate himself to his new community, John sheds the initially negative assumptions about Arctic "savages" (*dikari*) formed by literary and scientific narratives, including Kipling's poetry, travelogues about "shores on which civilized people had never set foot," and the "smiling flat face" of "stylized depictions of Eskimos" in the Toronto University museum.[99] In typical fashion, he then replaces these assumptions with romanticized expectations of going native, dreaming of a time when:

> Он усвоит обычаи этого племени и, возможно, даже уверует в здешних духов и богов… И ни разу больше не порадует его глаза цвет зеленого леса, не будет теплая вода ласкать его тело, а сердце не замрет при виде красавицы. Он приобретет облик чукчи, а внутренним своим миром не будет сильно отличаться от тех животных, которые обитают в здешних холодных краях…[100]
>
> He would master the customs of this tribe and perhaps, would even come to believe in the local spirits and gods. … And never more would the color of a green forest delight his eyes, nor would warm water caress his body, nor would his heart melt when encountering

[96] See *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Cornell University Press, 2015), 5, 20.
[97] Huhndorf, *Going Native,* 14.
[98] See Willard Sunderland, "Russians into Iakuts? 'Going Native' and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s-1914," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 806–25, https://doi.org/10.2307/2501239; Aleksandr Turbin, "'Deception Begins with Trade . . .': Vladimir Arsen'ev's Economic Expertise and Challenges of Rationalizing Imperial Diversity in the Taiga," *Sibirica* 19 (December 1, 2020): 37–59. Although the trope of going native and becoming embedded in Indigenous communities was not as popular a trope in Russian fiction of the same era, famous early 20th century accounts of Siberian Indigenous peoples - most notably Arsen'ev's *Dersu Uzala* and Fadeev's *Poslednye iz Udege* (*The Last of the Udege*, a clear homage to Fennimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*) had a similar tendency to center white explorers enchanted with the lifestyles of Siberia's own "noble savages." (See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 127-28, 292-93.)
[99] *Son v nachale tumana*, 11, 25.
[100] *Son v nachale tumana*, 72.

> a beautiful woman. He would acquire the appearance of a Chukchi, and his inner world would almost resemble the animals that inhabit these cold local lands.

However, as his comrades remind him, to truly be integrated into this new "real" life, John must also reject this mindset and instead adopt a realistic view of the beauties and hardships of his new lifestyle and environment.

What is most notable about the novel is its atypical approach to looking. The novel is structured as a dialogue between two forms of seeing, as well as two narrative perspectives: that of the sailor John and that of Toko, a Chukchi whale hunter from Enmyn. At the beginning of the novel, major events are presented twice, juxtaposing each character's often opposed understanding of the people and places they encounter. The effect can be observed both on the larger scale, with individual chapters alternating between different characters' accounts of events, and on the smaller scale, on the level of paragraph- and even sentence-length instances of exposition, such as this moment when MacLennan is being pulled on a Toko's dogsled and the characters look closely at one another for the first time.[101]

> Белый сидел с открытыми глазами и смотрел на бегущих собак. Его голубые глаза потемнели то ли от боли, то ли от усталости. А может быть, ему было и впрямь грустно расставаться со своими товарищами и пускаться в этакую дальнюю дорогу? Кто знает, какие мысли рождаются в голове, покрытой такими светлыми волосами, что с непривычки они кажутся ранней сединой. Надо же родиться с такими холодными глазами!
> Джон почувствовал на себе пристальный взгляд туземца, который ехал за ними. Какие у него странные и узкие глаза! Что можно разглядеть за этими щелочками, похожими на прорези в бабушкиной копилке? Но если пристально приглядишься, так словно в бездонную пропасть падаешь. Там полнейшая неизвестность, которую никому не дано разгадать. Интересно, о чем думает этот молодой чукча?[102]
>
> The white man sat eyes open and looked at the running dogs. His pale blue eyes had grown dark, either from pain or exhaustion. Or maybe he was truly sad to say goodbye to his comrades and set off on such a far journey? Who knows what thoughts are conceived in that head, covered with hair so light that they would seem prematurely grey to the unaccustomed. Imagine being born with such cold eyes!
> John could feel the fixed gaze of the native traveling with him. What strange and narrow eyes he has! What might one see from behind those little slits, which resembled the slot in his grandmother's coin bank? But if you fixedly met that gaze, it was like falling into a bottomless abyss. There, there was complete obscurity which no one could decipher. Wonder what this young Chukcha is thinking about?

Interrupting the novel's linear sequence of events and slowing its passage of time, the reader is forced not only to consider the *relativity* of perspective, but also the obstructive qualities that such clashes create. Interestingly, the device only works when the two perspectives are placed in

[101] Neither character has previously had close interactions with white/Indigenous people; Toko's assumptions are formed from passing trade with white merchants and the stories of his elders, whereas John's are formed by books and museums.
[102] *Son v nachale tumana*, 21.

succession. Toko's impressions effectively defamiliarize John's whiteness and disrupt its status as the default culture. Moreover, their structural similarities to John's own impressions of Toko undercut his clichéd understanding of the "native," constructed out of the racial stereotypes that have often defined literary and cultural depictions of Arctic Indigenous people. In presenting (to a hypothetical white Russian-speaking reader) the *familiar* literary language of Arctic Indigeneity after a structurally identical, but *defamiliarized* understanding of whiteness, the text thus also defamiliarizes the stereotype itself and calls into doubt both the veracity of the reader's own perspective and the perceived objectivity of the literary text itself.

Toko's mediating perspective gradually fades as John integrates himself into the community, learning both the local language and ways of seeing and relating to his surroundings. More and more, the novel is focalized through John's perspective, while Toko's remains as a Chukchi lens through which to understand John's gradual initiation into local culture: "John, this helpless, pitiful person who hadn't possessed the slightest understanding of how a real man (*nastoiashchi muzhchina*) should live, had begun to become a person in the full sense of the word (*nachinal stanovit'sia chelovekom v podlinnom smylsle*)."[103] Rendered in the familiar terminology of Socialist Realism, Toko observes John's process of "becoming a person" or a "real man" in the Chukchi sense of the word; the text likewise casts John's process of "going native" and becoming a member of Chukchi culture as a Soviet master plot of sorts, wherein John, the positive hero, becomes a "real person" by becoming initiated into the collective with the help of mentor figures who help him acquire various physical skills such as shooting. (The text later draws a direct equivalency between Chukchi identity and the Soviet idea of a "real person" (*nastoiashchii chelovek*) when one of John's mentors, Orvo, praises him for "thinking like a *luorovetl'an*," the gloss for which defines "Luoravetl'an" as "Chukcha. Literally – real person [*nastoiashchii chelovek*]".)[104] Narrative focalization helps the reader become initiated into Chukchi culture alongside John, initially providing assistance in learning to see with Toko's alternative perspective, dialogues between John and his mentors, and glossed translations of Chukchi words, which fade as John (and the reader) begin to properly understand his surroundings "like a Luorovetl'an" and without stereotypes.

Although John must incorporate his relationship to Beringia as a place into this new way of seeing and train himself to discern detail from "this monstrous space without end or borders" by distinguishing between the types, layers, and shades of ice, this environmental and spatial task is ultimately subordinate to the novel's broader emphasis on looking itself as a linguistic/ communicative task. Once initiated into an Enmyn way of seeing, John is granted access not only to a new language, but also to a new way of understanding and narrating life in a way that transcends language: in a conversation with Mr. Carpenter, an Alaskan trader and gold prospector trying to promote a business venture, John rejects his proposals to protect the interests of Enmyn, remarking, even as the two are speaking English, that "we are speaking two different languages," one capitalist and one (at its roots) socialist.[105]

In *A Dream in Polar Fog*, Rytkheu evokes Chukchi spatial orientation as a means of emphasizing the relativity of perspective in intercultural (and specifically settler-Indigenous)

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[103] *Son v nachale tumana*, 75.
[104] *Son v nachale tumana*, 115.
[105] *Son v nachale tumana*, 254. This would seem to be a reference to the "primitive socialism" of the Chukchi and other nomadic peoples, as it was understood under Soviet nationalities policy. When Carpenter later critiques the Bolshevik occupation of Beringiia through bad-faith readings of their slogan "*Kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est*," John corrects him, stating that "I've already heard such a slogan in Enmyn" in relation to hunting (270).

encounters, and of teaching readers the validity of Indigenous ways of seeing, particularly as they relate to community ethics and values. Although on its surface the novel's depiction of Enmyn would seem to serve as an ideal microcosm of Soviet internationalism via friendship of the peoples—a community where Chukchi, Yupik, and certain settlers have learned to successfully coexist, the manner of John's gradual orientation into Beringian space suggest that the novel is in fact advocating for relationships deeper than "friendship" and spanning categories broader than "people." John's ability to empathize with his Chukchi comrades and to see their experiences as valid is a necessary first step for his initiation as a community member (both in opening his mind and in gaining the trust of Chukchi villagers for whom relationships with white people were often traumatic), this step alone is not enough to allow John to thrive in his new home. Instead, John's subsequent romanticization of Chukchi culture and its relationship to the environment creates new problems that are potentially more hazardous. As his friends point out, John's understanding of Chukchi culture as "better" than the West due to its closeness to the natural environment lack an understanding of the realities of living in that environment, including the potential hazards and hardships that it can entail. In order to thrive in his new home, John must not only learn to see himself as a part of his predominantly Chukchi community, but also learn to understand that community as a part of the place in which it is centered. Only at that point can John truly advocate for the needs of his community.

The novel's framing of successful intercultural and communal relationships is thus intertwined with John's gradual acquisition of traditional Chukchi spatial knowledge (both of his community and the place itself), which he obtains through both community transmission (listening to/respecting the knowledge of his friends) and through his own increasing familiarity with the rhythms of the tundra and sea. To survive and thrive in Enmyn, John must learn to dismantle the perceived boundaries between himself and his Chukchi neighbors, as well as the boundaries between humans and nature. Although the novel successfully conveys these values as crucial for John's survival in Enmyn, it ultimately prioritizes the impact of John's knowledge on his *human* community, a detail which is reflected in the novel's narrative devices for transmitting this knowledge to its readership. The novel's linear structure and its use of free indirect discourse teach the reader the initial modes of observation and reflection which allowed John to see himself as part of Enmyn's human community as a model for becoming better citizens in a global socialist community, by closing the distance between the self and the ethnic Other. However, as a socialist historical novel that generally conforms to the official state discourse of Marxist historic materialism, its depictions of environmental relationships and connections to place ultimately serve the purpose of teaching the reader how to advocate for socialist progress in a culturally responsive manner.

Chukchi Knowledge Production and Narrative Form in *When the Whales Leave*

The 1975 publication of the novella[106] *When the Whales Leave* (*Kogda kity ukhodiat*), Rytkheu's contemporary adaptation of a story that he heard as a boy in Uelen, would mark one of the

[106] *When the Whales Leave* was first published in the July 1975 issue of *Novyi Mir*. However, I will be citing the 1977 bound reprint. See Yuri Rytkheu, *Kogda kity ukhodiat* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1977). Although it is the typical length of and adheres to many of the literary conventions of a Soviet novella (*povest'*) of its era, *When the Whales Leave* was actually published as a "contemporary legend" (*sovremennaia legenda*), a genre classification that Rytkheu coined to characterize the text's formal and thematic engagement with the Chukchi folk narrative tradition. I will discuss the textual significance of this formal classification in depth later in the close reading that

author's initial attempts to model Chukchi ecological knowledge as a means for teaching a broad, geographically dispersed readership alternative ways of seeing and relating to the broader (nonhuman) environmental community itself.[107] The basis for the text's plot is an etiological tale about the origin of the coastal Chukchi people and their connection to the sea. In the beginning, on "Pebble Spit" (*Galechnaia kosa*), a rocky landform surrounded by cliffs, tundra, and sea, the first woman Nau is unable to distinguish herself from the animals and plants around her.[108] Suddenly after seeing the sunlight reflected in a whale's spout, a "Great Love" (*Velikaia liubov'*) comes upon her and Nau falls in love with Reu, a whale who through their sexual union becomes a man.

Nau's connection to Reu grants her the gift of sight and reason, allowing her to differentiate herself from the natural world around her. Although his whale brothers call him to the sea, Reu is unwilling to part with Nau and chooses to remain on land as a man. Together, Reu and Nau create "future life" (*budushshaia zhizn'*), a litter of whale children and, subsequently, human children who would become the ancestors of the whale and human clans in the region.[109] At the end of Part I Reu dies and his body is returned to the sea as a whale, while Nau stays at Pebble Spit as a living reminder to her descendants of their Great Love and the kinship between people and whales. Nau remains at Pebble Spit, teaching her human descendants about her Great Love for Reu and their people's kinship with the whales. The remainder of the plot is narrated as a progressive history of the human community at Pebble Spit, involving their acquisition of knowledge and technology and their gradual alienation from the natural world, the latter regarded as the result of the increasing hubris and disregard on the part of humans for the "implausible" teachings of their elders, even when those teachings contribute to the community's survival. After a headstrong hunter Armagirgin convinces his clansmen to cast off the "fairytales of their previous life" and kill a whale to feast on, the bond of trust and kinship between whales and humans is broken and the whales depart forever.

When the Whales Leave was published as a "contemporary legend" (*sovremennaia legenda*) – a term that Rytkheu coined to describe a genre-bending parable about human-environmental relationships. The novelty of the term didn't escape Rytkheu's readers – Soviet press about the text excitedly discussed its generic innovations as demonstrative of the unique perspectives Indigenous authors could offer within the ethical discussions taking place in contemporary Soviet fiction. Critics particularly lauded the novella's moral and metaphysical

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follows. However, for the sake of clarity and brevity I have chosen to use the more recognizable classification "novella" when referencing the text in my analysis.

[107] Rytkheu recalled a memory of his grandmother telling him the story as a child when they encountered "enormous whale bones" by a cliff on a trip by dogsled from Uelen to Naukan: "Grandmother Givenau halted the dogs, took out crumbs of dried reindeer meat from a leather basket, and threw them toward the whale bones. […] 'Here, under the whale's bones, lies the spirit mother who gave life to all the people of the coast. She was impregnated by this very whale, who changed into a man for the purpose…" ("People of the Long Spring," 209.)

[108] I have been unable to determine whether the Russian *galechnaia kosa* corresponds to any specific Chukchi toponyms. However, Rytkheu is likely using the name to describe Uelen, which is located on a pebbly spit at the end of Cape Dezhnev. (See Rytkheu, "People of the Long Spring," 206; Bogoslovskaia and Krupnik, *Nashi l'dy, snega, i vetry. Narodnye i nauchnye znaniia o ledovykh landshaftakh i klimate Vostochnoi Chukotki*, 156.) If so, the name is not a translation of the Chukchi meaning of Uelen, thought to mean "black, thawed patch," nor to its earlier name Pok'ytkyn, meaning "flooded place." Instead, Rytkheu appears to have assigned his own toponym for the region, which corresponds with local Chukchi and Yupik naming conventions, which often describe places in terms of their topographical or geological features. (See Chlenov, "Indigenous Place Names in the Senyavin Strait Area, Chukotka.")

[109] Rytkheu, *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 17.

implications for the global present due to its overarching axiom to "love your brothers, even if they don't look like you." For critics, the novella's successful merging of thematic and formal features of both Chukchi oral narrative and Russian literary realism also exemplified the innovative contributions that "cultured" Indigenous voices such as Rytkheu's could add to the Soviet literary canon: not only did his people's "close proximity with nature" make Rytkheu "particularly qualified to express a civic and artistic warning to those forgetting their debts to nature," as one critic argued,[110] but the stories that helped to explain these relationships, "formed in the depths of the past of [Chukchi] national consciousness," could be applied in a more universal setting. In adroit hands, stories that had previously constituted "life itself, in all of its real concreteness" in specific places and cultures could be applied consciously by Indigenous writers and artists to create a "symbolic, multi-layered fiction" conveying abstract facets of a global "contemporary consciousness."[111] The ability of national writers to transform traditional mythic structure, conventionally assumed to be unaware of its symbolic nature and claiming to directly mirror or explain reality, to one that is self-consciously metaphorical, was seen as a literary marker of the successful modernization of Siberian Indigenous cultures, a belief which Rytkheu himself referenced in earlier works.[112]

In other words, the metric for successful Soviet national literatures was in authors' ability to consciously transform *myth* into *fiction*, a process akin to the natural transformation that Frank Kermode describes in *The Sense of an Ending*. For Kermode, myth and fiction exist on a continuum as factually false narratives whose recounting helps humans establish order and locate themselves temporally within the unbounded, infinite nature of time. The two differ in their approaches to time, space and scale:

> Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were […] Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time […]; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now.[113]

Kermode's definition of myth is fairly broad, in that it can encompass cultural phenomena across time and space, including in the industrialized present. Myth evolves into fiction as society progresses and generally comes to reject the totality of myth as false. Literary fiction's complexity thus reflects the specificity of of modernity itself, its conscious falseness allowing it to "find out about the changing world on our behalf" by mirroring (in a contained way and from a distance) the chaotic dynamism of the modern era.[114]

Rytkheu's innovations in *When the Whales Leave* proved "paradoxical" to Soviet critics, in that the transformation between myth and fiction was neither smooth nor complete. Instead, the author's melding of oral and literary forms constituted a textual "whole of seemingly

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[110] Vladimir Akimov, "Liudi galechnoi kosy," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 17, 1975.
[111] See Iakimenko, "Granitsy i vozmozhnosti." 86, 91.
[112] For example, Rytkheu's character Varia Kramerenkova makes a similar argument when describing the artistic process of village "storyteller" (*rasskazchik*) Memyl, who in his stories has transformed concepts from Chukchi folklore from "shamanic nonsense" to "poetic figures" sed to describe "honest truth" (*Chukotskaia saga* 271-72).
[113] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.
[114] Kermode, 64.

incompatible levels of consciousness": the consciousness of contemporary world culture (as expressed through literary prose), and the specific consciousness of recently literate cultures, for whom "mythology has remained still a part of their life experience." To put it another way, the paradox at the center of *When the Whales Leave* (and other Indigenous texts like it)[115] lay in the fact that the metaphysical world of Indigenous cosmogony coexists within the same literary space-time as human events, closing the distance the "deep time" of Chukchi cosmology and the rational/scientific present.[116]

This "paradox" in fact constitutes the crux of the novella's environmental message. As the novella's constant references to Chukchi narrative mediums such as song, dance, and ivory carving emphasize, storytelling is crucial for the transmission of environmental knowledge to future generations due not only to the metaphorical applications of its lessons, but also as a means of establishing real, lived connections with nature through repeated performance, allowing the knowledge conveyed in such narratives to change and adapt to the changing conditions and needs of the community. I contend that the novella's unique formal and generic hybridity can be read as the author's attempt to adapt such methods of knowledge transmission for a rapidly changing Soviet reality. The novella thus serves as a continuation of the same narrative traditions it cites. Rytkheu's blend of genres and narrative forms generate a new literary mode for the transmitting Chukotkan traditional environmental knowledge to an ethnically diverse and geographically dispersed readership and cultivating environmentally conscious citizens with a heightened sense of responsibility for the real environmental threats facing both contemporary Chukotka and their own local ecological community.

Before moving to an analysis of the novella I would like to first establish an operative definition of "myth" as it applies to both the Chukchi story referenced in the novella, and to Rytkheu's conceptualization of the "contemporary legend" as a literary genre. As folklorist Lauri Honko points out, the "emotional overtones" typically associated with myth have resulted in a scholarly tendency (from antiquity to present) to "demythologize," either through the rejection of the term "myth" as a descriptor (as is often the case for the Bible,) or through the partial or total rejection of the mythical tradition entirely, such as by reducing its discourse to an interpretation of symbols or structures.[117] In the past few decades, there have been growing efforts towards identifying interdisciplinary methodologies for the discussion of folklore in literature. Cristina Bacchilega explains that theorizing folklore and literature as part of an "oral-literate continuum moves us away from seeing orality vs. literacy as the great [binary] divide" and that applying methodologies (including theories of oral narrative performance) across the continuum can help to "to subvert frameworks where folk literatures, oral traditions, and Native traditions are held subaltern to print and canonized 'literature.'"[118]

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[115] Rytkheu's literary evocations of Chukchi folklore are often mentioned alongside texts by other Soviet Indigenous writers such as Vladimir Sangi and Chingiz Aitmatov. See, for example Iakimenko, "Granitsy i vozmozhnosti"; Komarov, S. A. and Lagunova, O. K., *Literatura Sibiri: Missiia, etnichnost', aksiologiia*.

[116] Iakimenko, "Granitsy i vozmozhnosti," 83.

[117] Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 6 (January 1, 1972): 7–10. Since *When the Whales Leave* decidedly pushes against the scholarly tendency to demythologize oral narrative, I have opted not to engage literary scholarly treatments of myth that reduces it to its archetypes or constitutive symbols.

[118] Cristina Bacchilega, "Folklore and Literature," in *A Companion to Folklore* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), 451. Bacchilega provides a comprehensive overview of the various scholarly approaches taken towards interdisciplinarity between folklore and literary studies, but notes that many of these methodological proposals remain "more an ambition than a practice" (448).

Due to this fact, I have opted to follow the more narrow, operational definitions for myth as it is defined within contemporary folklore studies, summarized by Salamon and Goldberg as "a sacred story that seeks answers to the great questions of origins," large or small, concrete or abstract. Myths also "provide the cultural building blocks and knowledge that shape perceptions of time, space and causality, pointing to a correct ordering of the cosmos as well as to the social order and human practice."[119] Lauri Honko argues that "in principle it is possible to find models for all human activity," past, present, and future, in the "static, mythical view of the world" of the origin story. The values and behaviors modeled by the myth are taught to its audience through the performance of rituals, "bring[ing] the creative events of the beginning of time to life and enabling them to be repeated here and now, in the present." [120] Mircea Eliade argues that the mythical event is not necessarily the beginning of time itself, but rather marks a change in state from a pre-human time to a human time. The cosmogony of the mythical world thus "becomes the exemplary model for 'creation' of any kind." The performance connects the participant to the deep time of the myth's reality by bringing it to life: when it is retold, "the protagonists of the myth are made present; one becomes their contemporary" and thus healing the participant, "creating the world anew" as the modeled behavior is assimilated.[121] Claude Levi-Strauss famously stated that this effect makes myths simultaneously static and dynamic, containing both the fixed, deep-time of the cosmogonic events they describe as well as its various iterations as they are performed across time and space. A given myth can therefore be understood as the accumulation of "all its versions," and thus repeatedly connecting the deep past to the human past-present-and future.[122]

Rytkheu's classification of *When the Whales Leave* as a "contemporary legend" rather than a novella is as much a political act as it is a generic one: categorizing the text foremost as a "legend," the description primarily aligns the text with the orality of the original Chukchi myth that it retells, rather than with European narrative traditions. The written textuality of *When the Whales Leave* is instead suggested entirely by the adjective description "contemporary," framing literature as the means through which to make the transmissible themes, forms, and stylistic devices translatable to a modern audience. In this sense, Rytkheu is gesturing to the sort of contemporary "secondary orality" described by Walter Ong (that is, orality "intervened" between "the orality of preliterate [cultures] and "the individualized introversion of the age of writing, print, and rationalism"), while also centering the applicability of oral narrative culture in contemporary society.[123] In other words, as the close reading that follows will demonstrate,

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[119] Hagar Salamon and Harvey E. Goldberg, "Myth-Ritual-Symbol," in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. Regina F. Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, 1st ed. (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2012), 125.
[120] Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," 17–18.
[121] Eliade Mircea, *Myth And Reality* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 19-21.
[122] Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (n.d.): 431–32, 434-35. Levi-Strauss was trained as an anthropologist rather than as a folklorist and as such, some folklorists have critiqued Levi-Strauss' characterization of myth's purpose being "to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" due to its imprecision (443). For instance, Alan Dundes points out that most of the examples of myth Levi-Strauss cites in his structuralist approach are in fact other forms of folklore, such as fairytales and legends, and that the examples don't necessarily contain the requisite origin tale function. (See Alan Dundes, "Binary Opposition in Myth: The Propp/Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect," *Western Folklore* 56, no. 1 (1997): 39–50. As such, I have opted not to cite Levi-Strauss' definition of myth in for the purposes of my argument.
[123] Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology; Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 285. Modern folklorists have tended to move away from Ong's distinction between primary and secondary orality in that it tends to reestablish implicit binaries and hierarchies between oral

Rytkheu consciously textually evokes the structures of Chukchi oral knowledge transmission using conscious literary stylizations of orality, in order to translate these forms of knowledge transmission for a culture that no longer understands how to apply them, a key theme in the plot of the text itself.

The story of Nau and Reu in *When the Whales Leave* resembles a Yupik and Chukchi origin myth about a woman from a settlement Nunak who marries a whale and gives birth to a whale-child. She and her community raise the young whale until it is large enough to swim out to sea. Each year, the whale returns, bringing his kin, who allow themselves to be hunted. When a hunter from another settlement slays the whale-child, the whales do not return.[124] The story is often referenced in relation to the Chukchi and Yupik practice of the Whale Ceremony (*Prazdnik kita*), which takes place after a successful whale hunt.[125] Rytkheu describes the legend's connection to the Whale Ceremony, and its importance for Chukchi whale-hunting traditions in his last book, *Dorozhnyi leksikon*, a posthumously-published collection of essays that elaborates the foundational concepts and practices of Chukchi culture. In the entry for "Whale" ("Kit—r'eu") he writes:

> The celebration would begin when they cut the last piece from the enormous whale carcass and took it be stored. The sounds of drums would spread, carrying to the sea bank, where the red carcass of the skinned whale bobbed in the waves, and racing into the distance, beyond the horizon, where it was still possible to catch a glimpse of whale spouts. The singers thanked the whales, our ancestors, for the generous gift, for the bountiful hunt, for their great sacrifice. […] In the smoke of the fire under a roof of walrus skin, as if in the depths of the sea, swam figures of whales and different sea animals and birds, and into the smoke hole (*dymovoe otverstvie*)[126] songs composed by distant ancestors, perhaps, remembering the progenitor of the Chukchi people, the great Reu –Whale turned into a man.[127]

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and written cultures, associating the former with a staidialist, past-orientation rather than as a set of devices that still prevails at various levels of print-based societies. (See Bacchilega, "Folklore and Literature," 451.)

[124] This story diverges from Rytkheu's telling of the story, in that the whale wife is not the first woman, and the death of her child is caused by a hunter in a neighboring settlement, which triggers a war of vengeance between the two communities. It appears to have originated in Naukan, a neighboring settlement of Yupik sea hunters 22 km southwest of Uelen on Cape Dezhnev. (See K. A. Dneprovskii and S. Iu Shokarev, "Legendarnyi eskimosskii poselok Naukan v sostave nominatsii v Spisok vsemirnogo naslediia IuNESKO," *Zhurnal Instituta naslediia* 2, no. 17 (2019): 4.). Most of the existing recordings of this story were thus recounted to folklorists by Yupik elders (see, for example, Van Deusen, *Raven and the Rock*, 130-43; Menovshchikov, *Skazki i mify narodov Chukotki i Kamchatki*, 104-107), although the story is also referenced by a scholar of Chukchi folklore (Belikov, *Chukotskie narodnye skazki, mify, i predaniia*, 8). I have also found references to the tale in journalistic interviews with both Chukchi and Yupik informants in accounts of contemporary subsistence whale hunting by Indigenous peoples residing on Cape Dezhnev. In *A Dream in Polar Fog*, Nau is called "White Woman" (*belaia zhenshchina*), and the story is told to explain the meaning of a rocky landmark marked by whale bones called "The Grave of White Woman," (*Mogila beloi zhenshchiny*), which appears to be a reference to a sacred landmark near Uelen called "The Grave of the Mother of All Chukchi" (*Mogila materi vsekh Chukoch*), however, I have been unable to identify information about this place.

[125] For more detailed discussion of the Whale Ceremony, see L. N. Khakovskaia, "Prazdnik kita v ritualakh aborigenov Severo-Vostoka Rossii," *Gumanitarnye issledovaniia v Vostochnoi Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke*, no. 3 (45) (2018): 73–83.

[126] An opening in the top of the *yaranga* for the smoke to escape.

[127] *Dorozhnyi leksikon*, 137.

Rytkheu would return to the story of Nau and Reu again and again throughout his career, underscoring its importance for both Chukchi cosmogony and history.[128] Although most of Rytkheu's retellings of the Nau story mention its explicit connection to Chukchi whale hunting practices, in *When the Whales Leave* the practice is conspicuously absent; whereas the hunting of other sea mammals such as walrus and seals is shown in detail, killing whales is understood as a grave sin, the callous outcome of unchecked human hubris and a violation of the local ethical system. Although to an unassuming reader this may suggest that whale-hunting practices were in general taboo to Indigenous peoples in Beringia, subsistence hunting of whales in the region was and remains central to Chukchi and Yupik life. The erasure of whale hunting from *When the Whales Leave* is curious, given the story's central importance to Indigenous whale hunting practices. However, its absence makes sense within the context of the fraught history of Soviet whaling practices and their lasting environmental impact in the region, particularly when we consider the novella's audience.

Whale hunting was a key element of early Soviet plans for modernizing the region, beginning in the early 1920s. Initially, local party planners sought to limit commercial whaling activity in Soviet waters due to the damage that unregulated hunting by British, American, and Norwegian fleets was inflicting on the livelihood of the local indigenous population—a consequence of unchecked capitalism on the workers.[129] Whale hunting would be limited to local *kolkhozy* of sea hunters, who would kill just enough animals to sustain the local population and ensure that they had enough to eat, allowing for more successful modernization in the region, although traditional practices such as the Whale Ceremony were formally abolished under collectivization. However, this would quickly change in the 1930s as the Second Five-Year Plan took hold and whaling became the local embodiment of Stalinist Stakhanovism.

As quotas increased alongside the population in the region, whales were incorporated into plans for the national, rather than just the local future: their massive stores of fat, long used by locals as fuel for cooking and keeping warm, could be harvested and used for manufacturing purposes.[130] In 1932, the first Soviet factory whaling boats made their inaugural voyage into the Bering sea as floating factories, where whales were killed, quartered, and processed for human use as workers sped to kill whales and keep up with increasing quotas. Local hunting collectives remained active participants in this process until the 1950s, when Soviet factory whaling rapidly expanded to meet the needs of postwar expansion. Whaling figured into the same Khrushchevian idealism that drove construction throughout Siberia and Central Asia: just as Siberia's rivers could be harnessed for energy that could "light fires over the taiga" by powering local industry,[131] so, too could Beringia's whales power the rapidly expanding Soviet labor force as

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[128] Toko tells a very similar of the story in *A Dream in Polar Fog* to explain how the Chukchi view animals as part of their community (although in John's mind, it is often evoked as a message about brotherhood between peoples).[128] Rytkheu would also pen the screenplay for a film adaptation of *When the Whales Leave* (retitled *Kogda ukhodiat kity*) in 1980, and rewrote the story once more as part of his 2004 novel *Poslednii shaman* (literally *The Last Shaman*, although it was translated in English as *The Chukchi Bible*). By the 1970s, Rytkheu was also citing the story regularly in essays and autobiographical writing. See, for example, "People of the Long Spring," 209.

[129] See Demuth, *Floating Coast,* 260-61. Demuth's environmental history of the Bering Strait offers a detailed discussion of how pre-revolutionary Soviet whaling practices impacted human and non-human communities in Beringiia, and often centers Indigenous perspectives. For a discussion of the specific policies and daily practices that shaped the historic trajectory of Soviet whaling in the Far East see Ryan Tucker Jones, *Red Leviathan: The Secret History of Soviet Whaling* (University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[130] Demuth, *Floating Coast,* 267.

[131] This quote is from a Komsomol song about Bratsk workers brigades in the 1960s. (See Pakhmutova, Grebennikov, and Dobronravov, "Zvezdy nad taigoi.")

"bone meal for fertilizers, fat for margarine, grease for industry, vitamins for strong bodies, nitroglycerine for the military."[132] Indigenous labor aboard rapidly expanding whaling fleets was overtaken by the hundreds of workers flocking to the region from across the USSR to participate in building a communist future. Chukchi and Yupik hunting collectives were instead occupied with the shoreside processing of ever-increasing quantities of whale carcasses as Soviet fleets—in violation of international law—killed more and more whales (over 200,000 unaccounted ones) to keep up with consumer needs.[133] By the late 1960s, whale populations off the coast of Chukotka had dwindled to such an extent that Soviet fleets had to travel further and further afield to meet quotas – eventually moving to waters off the shore of California. Due to overkilling and, in the case of the survivors, out of caution, Chukotka's whales had indeed begun to leave.[134]

By the late 1970s, facing increasing international protest from conservationists and unable to meet its quotas, the Soviet whale industry dwindled, and by 1979 had ceased.[135] Under the regulations of the International Whaling Commission, Beringia's coastal Indigenous communities could still engage in traditional subsistence whale hunting practices, although those would be governed under strict regulations. Although Whale Ceremonies had been formally abolished during early Soviet collectivization, their teachings and practices had been carried on by village elders and passed down to younger generations through storytelling. After the end of Soviet factory whaling, communities used such stories and knowledge to relearn traditional hunting practices and – in the post-Soviet era – to revive traditions such as the Whale Ceremony.[136] Whereas for Indigenous Chukotkans stories such as that of Nau and the whale ancestors was crucial for sustaining and restoring ethical hunting practices in the region, for Rytkheu's non-Chukotkan, non-Indigenous readership, the environmental knowledge to be gained from the Nau story required a different form. Consumer whaling (whether by commercial Western fleets prior to the revolution, or by Soviet factory fleets in the 20th century) had depleted populations of grey and bowhead whales and wreaked havoc on Beringia's ecosystem. Whale-hunting by non-locals, even under the auspices of global regulation and sustainable practices, was neither desirable nor ethical.

The taboo surrounding whale hunting in *When the Whales Leave* might thus be understood as an adaptation of Chukchi ecological knowledge for the changing conditions of increasingly global environmental relationships. Soviet (and international) readers lacked both the connection to Beringian place and the rhetorical frameworks of Indigenous ecological knowledge to fully comprehend the impact of factory whaling and other extractivist practices in the region. How, then, could they be taught to see whales, walruses, and other non-human members of their global community as brothers whose lives held their own sense of meaning? *When the Whales Leave*'s unique hybridization of Indigenous and Western narrative forms can be read as a translation of Chukchi ways of seeing for a modern, global audience: when blended with the formal conventions of realist prose, Indigenous narrative modes and strategies for

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[132] Demuth, *Floating Coast*. 281

[133] Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 281-86; 288-93.

[134] Demuth cites accounts from both Indigenous hunters and Soviet sailors that by the 1960s, the Beringian whale population had begun to exhibit "increasingly cautious behavior" and signs of fear (*Floating Coast*, 291).

[135] Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 301-302.

[136] For a discussion of the official policy changes that led to the reinstatement of Indigenous subsistence hunting in Chukotka, see Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 302-306. For a discussion of how the whale ceremony has been revived during the post-Soviet period, see Khakovskaia, "Prazdnik kita v ritualakh aborigenov Severo-Vostoka Rossii." For a more detailed insight into modern subsistence whaling practices in Chukotka see L. Bogoslovskaia et al., *Osnovy morskogo zveroboinogo promysla. Nauchno metodicheskoe posobie* (Moscow: Institut naslediia, 2007).

transmitting ancestral knowledge about the environment can be conveyed to readers conditioned by Soviet and Western rhetoric to view Indigenous narrative forms as "folklore" or "fairytales" belonging to an earlier, less rational mode for understanding the world. In merging familiar realist literary forms with Chukchi narrative modes for talking about the environment, the novella closes the distance between non-Indigenous readers and the local cosmogonies that have shaped centuries of Beringian ecological knowledge, offering readers a model for enacting such environmental knowledge in their own lives. The novella thus simultaneously raises reader consciousness about the real consequences that rationalist modes of thinking have enacted on Beringia specifically, while also thinking more critically about its environmental implications in their own communities.

Like *A Dream in Polar Fog*, *When the Whales Leave* applies a distinctly Chukchi worldview to European literary conventions, momentarily *disorienting* readers and thus calling into question the perceived objectivity of such conventions. Whereas *A Dream in Polar Fog* primarily filters Chukchi perspectives through familiar Western genres as a means of challenging an objectifying ethnographic gaze, *When the Whales Leave* merges Western literary and traditional Chukchi genres and narrative forms to interrogate reader assumptions about the nature of storytelling and knowledge production, and their relationship to historical progress. On its surface, the novella's rendering of Pebble Spit is a microcosm of the stages of human historical development, starting with the discovery of human reason (conceived at the moment of Nau's union with Reu), and tracing its genealogy in Nau's human descendants as it follows their civilization across various stages of development, including the discovery of technology (such as how to make hunting boats), the exploration of new territory, advances in medicine, and culminating in man's perceived mastery over nature. Throughout the novella, reason (or "thought" (*mysl'*, as it is referred to in the novella) is understood as crucial ethical and life-giving force for Pebble Spit, a product of the divine connection between humans and whales. However, the text's bloody and apocalyptic culmination also implicates unfettered rationalism in the corruption of those same forces, leading to environmental – and therefore human—destruction, thereby exposing the flaws in the same linear, progressive model of history that it has adopted.

At the same time, the text's generic hybridity as a novelized "contemporary legend" allows the narrative flexibility for Chukchi temporalities to coexist in dialogue with the linear novelistic one. Across the intergenerational progression of time, Nau's ongoing rootedness at Pebble Spit serves as a source of tension and doubt for both the increasingly rational characters and the contemporary reader: Nau's seeming inability to age calls into question both the forward progression of time and the veracity of the characters' and readers' perception of reality. By the beginning of Part 2, Nau has remained at Pebble Spit for so many generations that "even the oldest of the elders (*drevnye stariki*) confirmed that in their youth they had known Nau to be a very old woman (*glubokaia starukha*)." Although the residents at Pebble Spit respect Nau as an elder and even implicitly accept her as a possible ancestor, her stories about Reu and their people's connections to whales are understood as "tiresome to everyone" (*vsem nadoevshie*) and "terribly implausible" (*chudovishno nepravdopodobnye*), while her inexplicable age and seeming immortality have earned her the freakish status of a "local attraction" (*mestnaia dostoprimechatel'nost'*).[137]

Despite this increasing doubt, all of the Pebble Spit's true innovators are shown to seek Nau's counsel as a keeper of vital stories and knowledge that – although difficult to explain by reason alone – provide guidance for how to navigate uncertainty. Although their specific forms

[137]*Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 32.

are adapted for a given situation and time, Nau's teachings return to the same axiom: "mystery gave birth to thought" (*taina rodila mysl'*).[138] Directly proceeding each of the stages of progression that take place in Part 2, Nau's descendants are tested by skepticism and doubt towards this teaching. When faced with uncertainty or change, they must then make a conscious decision to resist this urge to rationalize and instead trust in their intuition, even when its form is seemingly "implausible" (*nepravdopodobno*). To complete the cycle, Nau's descendants then record the knowledge through narrative forms such as song, story, and dance as a means of preserving and transmitting it to future generations.

We might therefore understand Nau as a physical embodiment of ancestral knowledge: rooted in the place of Pebble Spit and embedded in each household in the community (in contrast to the researchers in Rytkheu's joke), Nau's continued existence is directly tied to the intergenerational transmission of her knowledge, and namely of the ethical system encapsulated in her Great Love for Reu and the non-human community at Pebble Spit. It's important to note here that although Nau's descendants often view (and even envy) her seeming agelessness as a state of immortality, Nau actively rejects this notion: "there is no immortality. […] I live because the Great Love exists."[139] Indeed, Nau begins to age, weaken, and eventually die when her descendants reject the veracity and relevance of her teachings (myth) and instead make up new knowledge (or fictions) that best suits human needs, severing the connection between human and non-human communities at Pebble Spit. The generic hybridity of *When the Whales Leave* allows the reader to actively engage in this same mode of questioning and (ideally) knowledge-acquisition: while the epic narrative markers of Part I would seem to place Nau firmly within the realm of the folkloric and metaphysical, her continued presence in the more novelistic second and third parts testing the boundaries of literary mimesis and readers' assumptions about what is real and rational. When encountering Nau and other seemingly "implausible" phenomena (such as the lilliputian *rekkeny*, who are revealed as carriers of a plague), the reader is challenged, like Nau's descendants, to accept mystery and derive knowledge from it, in turn adapting that knowledge and applying it in their daily lives.

Rytkheu models this thought process for readers through the complex manipulation of genre and narrative voice, translating traditional modes for narrating ecological knowledge into the familiar literary forms from Western ethics and Soviet contemporaneity. The text's temporal qualities and narrative voice gradually shift to take on qualities of the evolving self-consciousness of its characters, beginning with Nau herself. The novella's opening lines reveal Nau's internal state prior to her initial encounter with Reu, and map her spatial relationship to Pebble Spit prior to experiencing the Great Love:

> Нау чувствовала себя одновременно упругим ветром, зеленой травой и мокрой галькой, высоким облаком и синим бездонным небом.
>
> И когда из-под ног выбегали спугнутые птицы, евражки, летние серенькие горностаи, Нау кричала им радостно и громко, и звери понимали ее. Они смотрели вслед высокой девушке с развевающимися черными, словно крылья, волосами.
>
> Она никогда не смотрела на себя со стороны и не задумывалась, чем отличается от жителей земных нор, от гнездящихся в скалах, от ползающих в траве. Даже угрюмые черные камни были для Нау живыми и близкими.

[138] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 33.
[139] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 56-57.

И ко всему, что она видела — живому, имеющему свой голос и свой крик, безмолвному, но движущемуся, и пребывающему в вечном покое, — она относилась одинаково ровно и спокойно.

И так было с ней до тех пор, пока она не приметила приближающийся китовый фонтан, высокий и слышный у берега, пока не увидела длинное, блестящее, упругое тело морского великана — Рэу.[140]

Nau felt simultaneously like the supple wind, the green grass, and wet pebble, the high clouds and the blue, bottomless sky.

And when frightened birds, ground squirrels, and ermine in their grey summer coats ran out from under her feet Nau called out to them joyful and loud, and the beasts understood her. They looked on the tall young woman with the black hair that fluttered like wings.

She had never looked at herself from the outside and had never thought about what distinguished her from the inhabitants of earthen dens, from those who nested in the cliffs, from those who crawled in the grass. Even the gloomy black rocks were alive and close for Nau.

And she treated everything she saw calmly and equally – that which was alive and possessed its own voice and call, that which was mute, but moving, and that which rested in eternal peace.

And so it was with her, until she took notice of the approaching whale spout, tall and audible from the shore, until she the long, shimmering, and supple body of the sea giant—Reu.

The passage's distinct narrator voice demonstrates the blending of genres and worldviews already taking place within the text. The lines syntactically resemble the opening verses of Genesis: each sentence is recorded as a distinct, verse-like paragraph, which unfold seemingly recursively into one another through sentence-initial conjunctions ("and when the frightened birds would run out from underfoot…", "and towards everything she saw…", "and so it was…") and other forms of syntactic repetition ("Nau searched…Nau ran…Nau felt…") to present a literary world consisting of similar parts: sky, earth, water; light and dark; plants, animals, humans. The passage's biblical qualities code Nau and Reu as belonging to a mythological, deep time-space of great metaphysical import. However, the passage also reveals a distinct spatial and temporal orientation that differentiate Chukchi genesis from its Abrahamic counterpart. In the beginning of *When the Whales Leave*, the world of Pebble Spit – and Nau herself, already exist in a fully formed universe, described as an intricate system of distinct and geographically specific parts that interact in the absence of hierarchical distinctions, although Nau is not yet able to discern the precise nature of her distinct part within this system. Similarly, although the actions in the passage are organized sequentially on the page, the plot itself lacks a distinct temporal sequence of events. Instead, all of the actions are recounted in the imperfective past tense, suggesting that they take place in a simultaneous, ongoing manner absent of cause and effect: just as Nau "simultaneously fe[lt] like the resilient wind, the green grass and wet pebbles, the high clouds and the grey, bottomless sky," the reader simultaneously encounters each of Nau's sensations and actions, which occur in an ongoing state, outside of the sensation of causal or bounded time. The same holds true for Nau's initial "search" for the "shimmer" of Reu's

[140] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 6-7.

whale fountain, which, although it is the first of Nau's actions recounted to the readers, is only revealed to be of temporal significance towards the end of the passage. Only after Nau becomes aware of Reu's presence (delineated by the first use of perfective verbs "noticed" (*primetila*) and "saw" (*uvidela*)) does the text denote a linear shift forward in time—in both the grammatical and narrative sense.

This act of noticing or seeing, which is triggered by Nau's curious attraction to Reu, and which is responsible for her physical and spiritual communion with him, marks the novella's moment of genesis, which is described not as an act of divine creation, but rather as a "moment of awakening" (*mgnovenie probuzhdeniia*). Nau's communion with Reu and her acceptance of the Great Love is characterized not by her mastery over the natural world, but rather by her ability to consciously understand and nurture her connection to it, which requires her to distinguish between herself and the world outside of her:

> Теперь, когда Нау бежала по тундре, упруго отталкиваясь от пружинящих кочек, она вдруг останавливалась и склонялась над крохотным голубым пятнышком цветка, словно осколком неба, упавшим с зенита. Голубой глазок качался на тонком зеленом стебельке, и Нау слышала пронзительный, уходящий вдаль звон.
>
> Мир звуков разъялся, как и видимый, и теперь Нау знала, откуда идет грохот бьющих о скалы волн, шелестящий звук ветра, гладящего невидимой огромной ладонью тундровые травы, плеск мелких волн в лагуне, журчание воды в ручье, бегущем по каменистому склону.[141]

> And now, when Nau ran about the tundra, she would suddenly stop and bend over the miniature light blue fleck of a flower, like a fragment of the sky that had fallen from the firmament. The little blue eye would sway on a thin green stalk and Nau would hear a piercing ring receding into the distance.
>
> The world of sound separated like the visible world and now Nau knew the source of the rumble of the waves beating against the cliffs; and the whispering sound of the wind that stroked the tundra grasses like an enormous, invisible hand; and the splash of the shallow waves in the lagoon, the murmur of the water in the spring that ran along the rocky slope.

The text conveys Nau's newfound awareness by enhancing the existing scenes and actions that are described at the beginning of the chapter. Whereas the initial description reveals a rich world of interconnected beings (plants, animals, humans, and other features of the natural environment), the second passage reveals how the subtle differences between them contribute to this interconnectedness: sounds that in the first passage blend together are now distinguishable, conveying information about their origins and rhythms. In addition to conveying information about Nau's heightened sense of awareness, this narrative device also has the effect of teaching a similar sense of awareness to the reader; by focalizing textual exposition of Beringia through Nau's moment of awakening, the text also awakens the reader towards a new way of seeing and perceiving the space themselves as generalized imagery of the tundra gives way to rich expository detail, including metaphorical comparisons that Nau herself makes (denoted in the text through the increasing use of simile constructions such as *slovno*).

[141] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 8.

Nau's first thoughts also mark the text's gradual shift into a more novelistic style as the epic narrator of the previous scenes is suddenly granted access into her mind:

> И вдруг словно солнечный раскаленный луч прошел через все ее тело. И первая мысль ее была: разве боль может быть радостью? И тут же ответ: да, боль может быть самой высокой радостью, от которой хочется кричать и плакать светлыми, горячими слезами. Луч бродил по ее телу, зажигая его, рождая невидимый огонь, и хотелось только одного — чтобы это продолжалось бесконечно долго, вечно…[142]
>
> And suddenly it was as if a white-hot sunbeam penetrated through her entire body. And her first thought was: could pain really be joy? And right then the answer: yes, pain could be the highest form of joy, from which you wanted to yell and cry light, hot tears. The beam traveled across her body, igniting it, bringing forth an invisible fire, and she wanted only one thing—that this feeling could continue forever, eternally…

Although the passage maintains some narrative distance between Nau and the reader through the use of the same mythical stylistic markers (such as sentence-initial constructions) that characterized previous passages, it exhibits occasional slippages in the boundary between narrator and character that mark the shift that has taken place in the boundaries between subject and environment. For instance, while the passage creates narrative distance between Nau and the reader by filtering her thoughts through quoted text, this distance is flattened by stylistic similarities between the narrator's mediating remark "И тут же ответ" ("and right then the answer") and the quoted thoughts that it frames: the statement lacks subject markers to differentiate between Nau's thoughts and the narrator's own, and its use of the conversational "*tut zhe*" merges with the conversational style of the answer that follows it, almost giving the passage an effect of free indirect discourse. The mythical narrator is similarly unable to maintain such distance in its descriptions of Nau's relationship with the world around her - the infusion of simile the *slovno* ("as if") in the description of the sunbeam ultimately privileges Nau's subjective experience of the sunbeam penetrating her body rather than the phenomenon itself.

The passage's form thus ultimately models for the reader the same epistemological model that has been granted to Nau herself through her Great Love with Reu, in that it both distinguishes between subject and object, but also merges them. As the text makes clear in this and subsequent passages, Nau's thoughts grant the ability to distinguish between herself and the environment and simultaneously understand their mutual connection; much like the horizon, described as "the line [*liniia*] where the sky and the water united," thought serves not as the boundary between the human subject and the external environment, but instead to make meaning from their convergence into a broader whole. Nau's initial thought emerges as a question, based on her observations about an interaction (in the form of sensation) between her body and the environment, which creates the conditions for discovery.

The novella's first instance of true free indirect discourse appears after Reu willingly transforms into a man, emerging alongside the couple's newfound environmental knowledge, which is shown to be the product of their love.[143] The reader can in fact track the generative

[142] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 12.

[143] The novella's first instance of Free indirect discourse is focalized through Nau, after she makes the realization that her whale children are different from her, and the bodily limitations that this will cause: "Видимо ему [Рэу] и в голову не приходило, что они – отличные от него существа. Может быть это оттого, что Рэу сам был китом

dynamic between Nau's bodily relationship to space and rationality through the shifting narrative distance from her thoughts. Nau's nighttime feelings of oneness with the world, reminiscent of her pre-lucid state at the beginning, are recounted by a more distanced narrator who can describe her senses as they simultaneously appear. The listed associations flood the reader with images through which to imagine Nau and her environment without immediately interpreting them. The narrative distance between the reader and Nau then narrows as Nau's worries about her whale children and their difference from her surface. The closeness to Nau's thoughts rendered by free indirect discourse ironically highlights the sudden sense of alienation that they have created between Nau and her environment. This narrative effect thus mimics the dialectic between observation/reason and mystery that the novella argues is necessary for innovation: the reader is first presented with a distanced, harmonious tableau of Nau's sensory world as a present, continuous state, which triggers a question or doubt. The reader's field of vision then narrows as he is thrust into a picture of that world that is colored by Nau's subjective worries or doubts and encouraged to experience that narrowness alongside the character. Finally, the reader's field of vision widens again as Nau seeks answers or reassurance by once again opening herself to possibility in the broader world.

The above passage in fact follows a general pattern that serves as a one of the key narrative devices that drive the plot (and hence the development at Pebble Spit) forward, particularly in the more novelistic Parts II and III: a character has a sensory experience with the surrounding environment (narrated from afar) which prompts a feeling of worry, skepticism, or doubt (narrated from up close, through free indirect discourse and other forms of narrative focalization). This feeling then prompts the character to seek solutions to the problem by gathering more sensory information about the surrounding world (gradually distanced from the reader). Part II, in which the bulk of the novella's plot developments take place, is dominated by such episodes, which are focalized through the perspectives of successive generations of "wise" (*mudreishie*) individuals residing at Pebble Spit (most notably Enu, Kliau, and Givu), each of whom is ultimately shown to be responsible for a major discovery. Although the characters hail from different generations, each is shown to demonstrate a keen sense of observation and curiosity about the world, which can lead to skepticism or doubt about the things that they can't understand. The characters also each share a willingness to seek answers from Nau, who returns to the story about the Great Love and belief in mystery, namely that "fairytales are truths that people sometimes stop believing in."[144] When the hero is faced with a trial (becoming lost, surviving a hunting accident, exploring the world), he must give himself up to both knowledge from his elders and from his own instincts, formed from years of observation and embodied experience of his surroundings, after which point a discovery is made. That knowledge is then passed on to future generations (in song, dance, and story), and thus preserved.

As the novella's plot progresses, the focalized depictions of characters' doubts become longer and more drawn out as their doubt towards the "irrational" increases alongside their body of knowledge. For instance, passages focalized through Enu, who inherently trusts Nau's teachings but questions the plausibility of their supposed origins, show a relative balance between the narrow, free indirect discourse narration of his doubts, and still focalized, but

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во обличье человека…" ["It was clear that it had never occurred to [Reu] that they were different beings from himself. Perhaps this was because Reu himself was a whale in human form."] (*Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 21).

[144] This quote originally appears as one of Reu's thoughts about the resemblance of his love for Nau to plots from ancient whale legends: "Значит, сказки—это правда, в которую люди иногда перестают верить" ["That means fairytales are truths, which people sometimes stop believing.] (*Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 30).

distanced, measured descriptions of the landscape, demonstrating his instinctual ability to understand that environment. This balance is disrupted when Enu allows his thoughts and doubts to distract him (and thus distance him mentally) from the surrounding environment, causing near-fatal hunting errors, but his attention (and the narrative's) immediately shift back to the more distanced perspective once he is faced with the potential consequences of his mistake. In contrast, passages focalized through Enu's grandson Givu, who constantly seeks logical explanations for mysterious phenomena, are initially overtaken by free indirect discourse, even in expository passages about the natural world. Filtered through Givu's mental questions about their origins, such descriptions present the reader with a disorganized collection of natural images rather than with the unified sensory landscapes typical of previous chapters. Narrative distance is only restored after a mysterious voice in the tundra commands Givu to "stop and look around" (*stoi i oglianis')*, at which point he learns to see "somehow differently, as if his eyes had been … cleared of a veil of a certain fog."[145]

Similarly, the novella's tempo condenses and accelerates as human civilization at Pebble Spit becomes more and more technologically advanced. Whereas hundreds of years elapse between Parts I and II, and approximately five generations between Parts II and III, Part III focuses on just one generation, thrusting the reader towards a violent end.[146] Although this accelerating passage of time is implicit in the developments taking place in Part II, the sharp tonal and stylistic shift that occurs at the beginning of Part III makes it jarringly apparent in its depiction of the rise of Givu's grandson Armagirgin and the subsequent fall of civilization. If Part II can be described as having the most traditionally "novelistic" style of the novella's three parts, particularly in its heavy use of free indirect discourse, many of these stylistic elements fall away in Part III. Instances of free indirect discourse (and other forms of narrative access to characters' minds) are restricted to several brief moments in which the dying Givu—and later his grandson—are consumed with envy and resentment towards Nau and the whales.[147] Instead the text is overtaken by its tempo, driven forward by rapidly-sequenced, causally-related actions, events, and dialogue related in increasingly shorter paragraphs as the residents of Pebble Spit (under the leadership of Armagirgin) cast off the old ways in favor of the new and seek to master the sea for their own benefit. This increasing emphasis on causal action also drastically limits instances of exposition – most notably in the text's descriptions of nature, which are often comparably flat and lacking in sensory detail and limited to depictions of hunting. Finally, large sections of part 3 are focalized not through the subjective experiences of a particular character (although as leader, Armagirgin's experiences are the *most* central) but instead through the collective opinion of Pebble Spit's human community, represented through third-person plural verbal constructions that either reference the generalized subject "people" (*liudi*) or lack a subject altogether.[148]

Part III's accelerating tempo, its distanced but still anthropocentric narrative voice, and its lack of expository depictions of the natural world create an effect in which the reader is both subsumed by the tunnel vision of its orientation towards the future but also distanced enough from the minds of its characters (including the collective *liudi* described above) to observe their actions as a bystander. By the time readers are granted a glimpse into Armagirgin's mind in the

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[145] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 64.
[146] Part II opens when Enu is a young man, while Part III opens when his great-great grandson Armagirgin is young.
[147] See *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 73, 89-90.
[148] One particularly clear instance of this effect can be observed at the beginning of Part III, Chapter 3 (see *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 82).

concluding chapter, any narrative closeness is undermined by the demonstrable damage wrought by his actions: the reader can observe the effects of Armagirgin's extractivist mindset in its apocalyptic results. The use of Free indirect discourse in this instance therefore serves not to teach the reader how to think in a certain way, but rather how to recognize the characteristics of harmful thought patterns.

Armagirgin's reign is simultaneously described in the language and imagery of both Socialist realism and capitalism, implicating both systems in the shared destruction of the earth. Described as a "real person" (*nastoiashchii chelovek*) and defined by his desire to be "the real masters of the earth" and the hero in new "songs and in dances" to replace the old ones, Armagirgin embodies many of the qualities and language of the positive heroes of Soviet labor.[149] At the same time, striving for wealth, leisure, and "full-bellied happiness," his society's new values embody the cartoonish imagery of capitalist consumption. The reader witnesses such familiar axioms about human historical progress from the perspective of a detached observer, which effectively defamiliarizes these models against the backdrop of the new ecological knowledge with which Nau and Rytkheu's storytelling has made them familiar. The reorientation of the reader's environmental knowledge allows him or her not only to recognize the limits of rationalist European epistemologies, but also to acknowledge the inherent value of the Indigenous alternative. In carrying the former to its conclusion—the end of Nau, the whales, and life itself on Pebble Spit—and the abrupt ending of the novella itself, the reader is met by the striking emptiness of its end, a conclusion that is not the resolution of linear plot, but instead the rupture and destruction of a system that predates the existence of the story itself. The remedy lies beyond the confines of the linear literary text and instead in the older, oral forms of knowledge production that it teaches: the reader, now attuned to such knowledge through Beringian literary place, is left with the duty to transmit the stories himself.

[149] *Kogda kity ukhodiat*, 34-36.

CHAPTER FOUR. AIR: AVIATION AND AERIAL PERSPECTIVE IN SIBERIAN NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT

[The pilot] sees the Earth's curvature between the Urals and Kamchatka – for him this is not simply poetic, endless Siberian space, but a mathematically exact spatial distribution of rivers, cities, railroads, and aerodromes. He sees the distance between the Ob and the Angara with the same distinctness with which it is possible to imagine the well-trodden path between one's apartment and the closest bakery.[1]

– L. Mal'kov, "In the Aerial Ocean," 1959.

You are flying on a winged boat and feasting your eyes on the earth. And suddenly your heart clenches into a lump and seemingly tumbles downwards. There every stream murmurs fairytales and conjures up dreams of childhood. In this lake I caught whitefish. And in that stretch of river I killed my first duck.

– Yuvan Shestalov, *As I was Rocked by the Sun*, 1972.[2]

The Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras saw the rise of Soviet commercial air travel, which expanded rapidly in the decades following the Second World War due to increased material standards of living and advances in civilian jet aircraft, which emerged from military technology that had been developed during the war. As in the West, the expansion and democratization of civilian air travel that took place during the period was accompanied by profound changes to human relationships to space and time. Steven Harris has argued that in the Soviet Union, the new jet-setting culture that emerged in the nineteen fifties and sixties also played an important role in late Soviet ideology (particularly during the Thaw) as a tangible symbol of the achievements of developed socialism.[3] In flight, regular citizens could participate in the heroic feats of the scientific-technological revolution by conquering vast distances at rapid speeds, all from the domestic comfort of a pressurized airliner cabin. In Siberia, however, the expansion of commercial air travel held other symbolic as well as pragmatic meanings: expanded commercial air (including helicopter) networks and airport infrastructure allowed Siberians to be more readily and rapidly connected to Soviet administrative and cultural centers – and thus to intellectual life in the Russian metropole. Air travel also contributed to the massive demographic shifts taking place in the region: as Siberians increasingly departed remote, rural localities for educational and professional opportunities in urban centers, scientists and laborers

[1] L. Mal'kov, "V vozdushnom okeane," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 30, 1959.
[2] Iuvan Shestalov, "Kogda kachalo menia solntse," in *Taina Sorni-nai. Povesti* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1987), 3–168.
[3] See Steven E. Harris, "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age: Aeroflot Passengers and Aviation Culture under Nikita Khrushchev," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 21, no. 3 (2020): 591–626. See Harris.

from elsewhere could more readily relocate to participate in large-scale research, construction, and the environmental transformation taking place in the region.

This chapter examines the significance of aerial geography and airspaces, such as airplanes, helicopters, and airports, in late Soviet Siberian narratives of geographic displacement. Scenes of air travel and aerial life, which geographer Peter Adey has defined as "the distinctive kind of mobile society […] which the aeroplane has worked to imagine, define, and mould," are recurring features of novels, novellas, and short stories by Siberian settler and Indigenous writers of the late Soviet period.[4] Many late Soviet mass cultural and literary depictions imagine aerial life as a means to realize the Soviet ideals of internationalism and progress: ordinary citizens could now conquer time and space alongside a diverse and globally-minded international community of fliers in the domestic comfort of modern airports and plane cabins. For Siberian writers, aerial life and aerial vision are often evoked at moments in which subjects traveling between their birthplace and the administrative center confront or process feelings of spatial displacement and cultural dislocation. Examining aerial scenes in Siberian novels and short stories written between 1956 and 1980, I argue that Siberian settler and Indigenous writers imagine airspace as a chronotope through which writers can make sense of their own relationships to national space and to Siberia's changing position within it. After providing a brief theoretical and historical overview of the significance of aviation and aerial geography in late Soviet culture, I then turn to close-read aerial scenes in fictional works by *Sibiriak* writers Vasilii Shukshin and Viktor Astafiev, and Indigenous Siberian writers Anna Nerkagi (Nenets), Yuvan Shestalov (Mansi), Vladimir Sangi (Nivkh), and Yuri Rytkheu, to demonstrate how Siberian writers across geographic and ethnic backgrounds evoke aerial life to make sense of personal as well as supraindividual territorial relationships transformed by modernization, migration, and ecological change.

Verticality and Air-Mindedness in the Soviet Imagination

As aviation advanced through the first half of the twentieth century, first as a military technology and then as a civilian way of life, the new forms of vision and motion that it allowed quickly came to embody the values of the modern age that conceived it.[5] As A. Bowdoin Van Riper puts it, aircraft "symbolize[d] the wonders and the horrors of the modern age" and "overthrew the tyranny of time and distance" to connect colonial outposts and the rural interior with national centers, while the heroics of pilots and engineers who constructed and maneuvered them embodied "the greatness of nations and of individuals."[6] Although Van Riper writes specifically about aircraft's symbolic tenor in the Anglo-American tradition, the international networks that aviation enabled generated a discourse that was simultaneously national and global. In her cultural history of the American airline Pan Am, Jenifer Van Vleck argues that "the 'logic of the air' inspired Americans to reimagine the world and the place of their nation within it" by

[4] Peter Adey, *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects*, RGS-IBG Book Series (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 8. Adey notes that while aerial life is often generative, it also "threatens to destroy that life and other non-aerial forms of existence" through the threat of crashes and other aerial catastrophes.

[5] For a discussion of the iconography and imaginative symbolism of flight was imagined throughout the 20th century in Anglophone literature and mass culture, see A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Imagining Flight: Aviation and Popular Culture*, 1st ed., Centennial of Flight Series ; No. 7 (College Station, Tex: Texas A & M University Press, 2004).

[6] Van Riper, 6–7.

"catalyz[ing] the formation and the expression of a new global imaginary […] that allowed Americans to conceive the entire globe as an object of analysis and sphere of influence."[7]

Whereas the "ocean of the air" described by American and Soviet thinkers alike was theoretically an equalizing global space "where geopolitical disputes would dissolve or evaporate" by bridging distances in space and time, airplanes were the national ships sailing within it, asserting technological and spatial dominance of the nations that built them.[8] Throughout the twentieth century, the airplane would become a metric against which nations could measure their progress on a global scale. From the airshows and exhibitions of the twenties and record-setting pilots of the thirties, to the dominance of national air forces during World War II, to the modern airports and mass commercial flights of the post-war jet era, the history of aviation in the twentieth century developed globally and generated a common symbolic vocabulary, the meaning of which was assigned nationally.

Russian and Soviet aviation developed concurrently and followed similar historical and cultural trends as in the West, even if the ideological discourse surrounding them differed. While some of these similarities can be attributed to the profound influence of Western aeronautical engineering in the early decades of Soviet flight, they also speak to the potential moments of convergence in the capitalist and socialist systems in their quest for modernization throughout the twentieth century. Aviation became a marker of technological development and a gauge by which to compete on a global stage. Like in the West, aviation and the new, ungrounded forms of sight it enabled served an important symbolic purpose in the Soviet discourse of the modern. Although much of the Soviet visual and verbal discourse of flight draws from the same symbolic elements that have come to define it in the global imagination,[9] the history of Russian aviation and its relationship to state power nevertheless generated a distinctly Russian and Soviet understanding of "air-mindedness," which Scott Palmer defines as "the interest shown by any nation, group, or individual in things aeronautical," as reflected in that nation's cultural response to the airplane.[10]

Palmer has traced the distinct features of Russian and Soviet air-mindedness prevalent throughout the 20th century back to a Russian version of the Icarus myth, which predates the

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[7] Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, United States: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9.

[8] *Empire of the Air*, 11-14. Van Vleck cites several mentions of the ocean metaphor in as a defining image in American political of the forties. See pp. 89-130.

[9] Among these convergences are the cult of the pilot in the early 20th century, the national heroics of military aviation during World War II, and the modern domesticity constructed in popular representations of civilian air travel during the "jet-setting age" of the midcentury. For a discussion of the cult of the pilot in western anglophone iconography of flight see Van Riper, 33–60. For a discussion of the cult of the pilot as it manifested in the Soviet context, see Scott W. Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103-106; 136-152, 229-258. For a brief discussion of aviation heroes in early socialist realist see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2000), 120–29, 137-39. For an in-depth examination of the pilot in Stalinist visual art see Mike O'Mahony, "Ever Onwards, Ever Upwards? Representing the Aviation Hero in Soviet Art," in *Russian Aviation, Space Flight and Visual Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Vlad Strukov, Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series (Oxon, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 35–52. For a discussion of domesticity in the jet age as it manifested in Russia and the west respectively, see Harris, "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age"; Bruno Vandermueren, *Aeroflot: Fly Soviet* (London: FUEL, 2021). and Van Riper, *Imagining Flight*, 83–108. For a comparative study of the role of Soviet and American flight attendants and gendered dynamics in the domestication of air travel in the postwar era, see Victoria Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[10] *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

airplane by many centuries. In one version, a seventeenth-century serf approaches Ivan the Terrible to announce his intention to build a pair of mechanical wings and fly away to the Alexandrovskii settlement in the Baltics. The tsar deems the serf's project "diabolical" and has him executed, declaring "a man is not a bird [and] does not have wings. Those who attach wings to themselves do so in opposition to the will of nature."[11] Pre-revolutionary Russian aviators returned to the Russian Icarus myth to stake a national claim to the creation of modern flight technology rooted in early modern Russian history.[12] As the myth was projected onto Soviet aviation, the symbolic relationships it established between flight, nature, and state power would help define the unique role that aeronautical imagery would come to play in Soviet discourse of modernization. Specifically, the airplane could serve as "an instrument for collectively liberating the nation from the constraints of its past" through the triumph of technology over nature. Whereas tsarist Russia could not overcome religious superstition to achieve full mastery over nature, socialist enlightenment fostered by the Soviet state could.

Symbolically and practically, the airplane could also help the state overcome Russia's problem of "spatial management" and instill political order through the conquering of space [*prostrantstvo*] itself.[13] For a nation whose massive physical territory, rugged terrain, and harsh climate had inhibited the construction of overland transport, the airplane's ability to cross vast distances at unprecedented speeds released from terrestrial constraints promised to physically connect far-flung regions and exert symbolic control over a landscape that had inhibited national development. The airplane therefore promised to help the nation overcome *time*: in bringing the most remote locations of the country out of backwardness, it was the steel embodiment of Soviet acceleration into the socialist future.

Due to the urgency of overcoming backwardness for the Soviet modernizing project, Party leadership dedicated resources to a "civilian air fleet" (*grazhdanskii vozdushnyi flot*) starting in 1920, including plans for developing high-capacity aircraft to transport mail and state officials.[14] By the mid-twenties, rapid efforts were underway to develop regional air services in further-flung regions such as Ukraine, Central Asia, and Siberia, which would become a primary region of focus in the years to follow. In the 1930s civilian aircraft, now operating under the centralized organization Aeroflot, were integrated into the "uniform transport network", expanding existing routes and performing special duties such as surveying, crop dusting, medical

[11] Palmer, 4. In a later version of the myth, in which a peasant goes before Peter the Great, he is initially given financial support for his scientific endeavors but is punished after the project fails.

[12] A particularly important retelling of the Ivan the Terrible version of the Russian flight myth is Evgenii Opochinin's short story, "The Demonic Flier" ("*Besovskii letatel'*,") which later became the basis of the 1926 silent film *Wings of a Serf* (*Kryl'ia kholopa*).

[13] For analysis of the plane's symbolic connection to overcoming backwardness in pre-Revolutionary and early Soviet discourse, see Palmer, 7–16 and 85-101. For a discussion of how the aviation figured practically into state plans for economic and political "spatial management" see David R. Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot: Civil Aviation in the Soviet Union, 1920-91," in *Russian Aviation and Air Power in the Twentieth Century* (London; Frank Cass, 1998), 236–39.

[14] For instance, Igor Sikorskii, a leading early Soviet aviation expert who was famous for his early prototypes of high-capacity airplanes such as the Sikorskii Ilia Muromets, initially designed the planes for high-capacity air transport purposes, rather than as military bombers (Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 237). For instance, Igor Sikorskii, a leading early Soviet aviation expert who was famous for his early prototypes of high-capacity airplanes such as the Sikorskii Ilia Muromets, initially designed the planes for high-capacity air transport purposes, rather than as military bombers (Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 237).

services and firefighting to remote and inaccessible regions.[15] The high costs of flying limited passenger transport to high-ranking government and military officials.[16]

As Soviet aviation expanded throughout the twenties and thirties, an ideological discourse surrounding flight developed alongside it, in which aircraft served as symbolic representations of the socialist future. Pilots were valorized as positive heroes of the air, whose ability to merge with their machinery enabled them to overcome nature and "Sovietize the heavens" by protecting national skies from threats and providing essential services. The public was introduced to these feats through literature and visual media, exhibitions and air shows, and as popular motifs in functional and decorative arts as visual components of the new Soviet *byt*. By the early thirties such campaigns had shifted their emphasis to align with the values of Stalinism, particularly its preoccupation with speed, scale, and the triumph over nature. Pilots were heralded as "falcons," winged offspring of Stalin himself, whose socialist values such as bravery, physical and mental prowess, and collective-mindedness enabled them to compete on a global stage by going "higher, faster, and farther" and setting international flight records for speed and distance. In the 1940s, state resources for aviation were almost entirely redirected to the war effort, and accordingly, cultural depictions of Soviet aviation reframed popular thirties-era iconography to emphasize aviators' patriotic role in defeating fascism and defending socialist values.[17]

After the war, Aeroflot's focus shifted to extending its existing network of routes, adding additional routes to destinations in popular holiday destinations and between smaller, regional cities. Wartime military technology was adapted for use in civilian aircraft, and old, low-capacity planes were gradually replaced with larger, long-range twin engine propellor planes such as the Ilyushin Il-12 and, eventually with the Tupolev Tu-104 in August 1956.[18] With a large, state-of-the art pressurized cabin and twin turbojet engines, the Tu-104 was the second civilian jet airliner in the world and, from its inaugural flight until 1958, the only model in service.[19] Just six months after Khrushchev's secret speech, the Soviet jet age had begun, an embodiment of the ethos of the ongoing "scientific-technical revolution" and a symbol of the technological prowess of developed socialism. As high-capacity jetliners were gradually added to Aeroflot's fleet, the state lowered the costs of airfare, both to encourage more ordinary citizens to travel and to compete with Western airlines such as Pan Am.[20] The increased speed,

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[15] See Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 243–49. In some instances, these special duties were integrated into agit-flights and other campaigns for raising public air-mindedness. See Palmer's discussion of agit-flights in the countryside (*Dictatorship of the Air*, 152-159).

[16] This was not dissimilar commercial aviation in the West prior to World War II, where for the most part passengers were government officials, business travelers, or wealthy. (Smithsonian, "Early Commercial Aviation: 1914-1941," Museum, *National Air and Space Museum* (blog), accessed May 31, 2023, https://airandspace.si.edu/explore/stories/early-commercial-aviation#modernairliner; Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, United States: Harvard University Press, 2013), 77–78, 203, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3301344.)

[17] Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 195–228; O'Mahony, "Ever Onwards, Ever Upwards? Representing the Aviation Hero in Soviet Art."

[18] Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 255–56.

[19] The first jet airliner, the British DH106 "Comet," was introduced in 1952, but was removed from service in 1954 following several instances of engine failure. See Jones, 256.

[20] Harris has convincingly argued that Aeroflot's price drops were in part a form of Cold War competition with the United States, intended as a means of demonstrating socialist egalitarianism on a global stage. Although the Soviet international flight network was comparatively limited (and Soviet "jet-setters" for the most part did not have the flexibility to travel internationally), Aeroflot's international marketing materials emphasized its socioeconomically and ethnically diverse collective of passengers and the ability of its network to serve developing nations. This was a

comfort, and capacity of the Tu-104 and subsequent jet airliners and lowered costs of airfare suddenly made air transport a viable and convenient option for average citizens. Between 1950 and 1970, the percentage of Soviet intercity travelers traveling by air increased from 1.9 percent to 24.1 percent, creating a new class of Soviet jet-setters and with them new forms of Soviet aerial life.[21]

The expansion of commercial air travel that took place in the Soviet Union starting in the late fifties and continuing throughout the sixties coincided with a worldwide expansion of commercial airliner networks and resulting jet-setting culture in the West.[22] Thaw-era Soviet discourse on air travel enticed everyday Soviet passengers to fly by domesticizing the imagery of flight. Whereas in the Stalinist period Soviet media cultivated a sense of national air-mindedness through the valorization of pilots, by the late fifties, this ideological role had shifted to cosmonauts conquering the new frontier of space. The air was now a tamed, inhabited space accessible as a part of everyday life to ordinary Soviet citizens. As Steven Harris has argued, this discourse reflected not only the new practical role that air travel played in people's lives, but also the ideological tenor of developed Socialism as leaders shifted their focus from military-industrial to civilian needs as part of de-Stalinization. "Passengers became the main subjects [of aviation culture] under Khrushchev" in part "because air travel advanced […] broader goals of promoting the scientific-technical revolution and mass consumption in the ideologically charged context of the Cold War."[23] Commercial flight was an ideal way to demonstrate on an international stage the egalitarianism, technological advancement, and material comfort of the Thaw era. Through commercial air travel, everyday citizens now could now achieve the soaring heights, high speeds, and falcon-like aerial vision that had previously been accessible only to pilot-heroes, allowing them to more readily participate in civic projects across the union.[24] In popular media, depictions of airports and airplanes emphasized them as domestic, yet communal

marked contrast from Pan Am's more aspirational promotion of international travel, a luxury that most citizens could still not afford. (See "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age," 256. For an in-depth discussion of Pan Am's international tourist routes and their representation in mass culture during the jet age, see Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air*, 199–238.)

[21]Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 259.

[22] In the West, this global jet age is typically tied to the rise of private international airlines such as TWA, the iconography of which would help define a culture of commercial air travel for years to follow. Airline advertising emphasized not only the technological advances that made jet travel convenient, but also the domestic comfort afforded by the experience of flying. Everyday passengers could now experience the same sense of speed and adventure as pilots from the earlier era, all while in the comfort of a luxury cabin with friendly service and a wide range of amenities. For a discussion of the iconography of airline marketing in the 50s and 60s see Van Riper, *Imagining Flight*, 83–91.

[23] Harris, "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age," 624–25.

[24] As Harris has demonstrated, Aeroflot marketing materials from the period were aimed at teaching ordinary citizens the proper etiquette for flying. Aircraft were depicted as comfortable, domestic spaces to ease fears for first-time fliers and to frame the skies as a friendly, inhabited environment, rather than a wild aerial frontier, as it was depicted in early depictions of flight. Such strategies resembled similar efforts to encourage passengers to ride subway systems in the 1930s, and were intended not only to raise passenger numbers, but also to demonstrate the egalitarian culture of socialist jet-setting to the rest of the world. (See Harris, 594–95.)

spaces that brought together a diverse collective of adventurous people from across the world and embodied the spirit of Soviet internationalism.

Aerial Life on the Eastern Periphery

As noted earlier, Soviet air-mindedness was partially based on the assumption that flight could help overcome the problem of backwardness by more readily connecting territorial backwaters to the administrative center. As the Soviet Union's most distant and remote frontier, Asiatic Russia was therefore a major focus of state planning and discussion since the inception of Soviet aviation. What did flight mean, then, for the inhabitants of Siberia, the geographic embodiment of territorial backwardness that flight was intended to help overcome? As the remainder of this chapter will argue, air-mindedness and aerial life took on distinct roles in the Siberian imagination due both to the methods through which Soviet air-mindedness was modeled for citizens located in territorially remote regions, and to Siberia's unique territorial relationship to Soviet national space.

Remotely located rural citizens occupied a distinct role in Soviet efforts to raise air-mindedness amongst the general population. As early as 1923, they became the focus of targeted campaigns in the press and media in the hopes of "hastening urbanization by bringing peasants into contact with new technologies and agricultural methods."[25] Early Soviet materials about aviation disseminated in rural provinces and republics differed decidedly from that of the metropolitan centers discussed previously. Media depictions of air travel focused on the airplane's ability to connect remote rural areas to urban centers of industry, culture, and government, and the economic and cultural benefits that such a connection would provide as a result.[26] Soviet pilots were dispatched on so-called "agit-flights" (*agit-polety*) to remote regions so residents could witness the marvels of aviation first-hand. Each day, pilots and an accompanying crew of journalists, photographers, and party officials would disembark at villages along the route, where they would deliver speeches, disseminate materials, and give tours of their plane to curious bystanders. Pilots also performed "aerial baptisms," on select villagers, who accompanied the pilot on a short flight, a practice intended demonstrate aeronautical technology in action and to dissuade religious superstitions connecting flight to divine or dark acts of magic.[27] Press and live demonstrations emphasized the positive effects that aeronautical technology would have for local life on the ground, particularly through designated "special duties" such as crop dusting, medical services, forest fighting, and postal communication, drawing explicit connections between the benefits afforded by Soviet aviation and the Party's role in bringing flight to the countryside.[28] Since its earliest years, then, aviation was framed for Siberians in terms of their own backwardness in relation to the urban metropole, a plight from which the Soviet fairytale of flight could save them.

Practically-speaking, aviation quickly became a passive part of Siberian everyday life due to its importance for the regional transport network. Although (as in other parts of the country) ordinary Siberians would not become regular fliers until after World War II, Party planners began integrating regional flight routes into the Siberian transport network as early as the mid-1920s to close major gaps in existing infrastructure. (Despite advances in highway and railroad engineering in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large swaths of the region still

[25] Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 126.
[26] For analysis of Soviet media depictions of flight in rural regions see Palmer, 126–33.
[27] For a detailed discussion of the planning, practices, and press coverage of agit-flights, see Palmer, 152–59.
[28] Palmer, 130–33.

remained inaccessible via land routes due to the region's extreme climate and rugged terrain.[29]) Dobrolet began to explore methods for incorporating flight into Siberia's existing water and overland transportation network, and extended the main eastbound trunk route from Moscow to Novosibirsk in September 1928 and Irkutsk in 1929.[30] The regional transport network continued to expand into the 1930s, thanks to the establishment of small regional flight networks (operated between urban hubs and smaller, more remote settlements) and the addition of air service to locations in remote regions such as Kamchatka and the Far North. Such local flight networks in the Soviet east were often deemed so essential to local infrastructure and communications that they continued operating at near-regular capacity throughout World War II, even as civilian air operations in western regions of the Soviet Union had been significantly interrupted for the war effort.[31]

By the time the Tu-104 was introduced in 1957, the civilian air fleet had been expanded enough to provide regular service along local routes and daily service between Moscow and major Siberian cities.[32] The efficiency and high capacity of jet airliners made them particularly well-suited to Aeroflot's long-distance trunk routes from Moscow to Siberia and Central Asia. For instance, the Moscow-Vladivostok route, a journey which had previously required thirty-three hours of travel time and nine intermediary stopovers, could now be completed in direct flights just eight hours in duration.[33] Additionally, the introduction of helicopter transport to Aeroflot's local Siberian air networks in the 1960s enabled the transport of people, goods, and services to even more rugged and remote areas.[34] As the reduction of airfares in the 1950s and 60s made travel by air more and more accessible to the Soviet public, the impact of regional and transcontinental flight routes on Siberian life became even more palpable as locals relied on aircraft to provide necessary transport between their homes and urban centers.[35] Flight increasingly provided the means by which Siberians could participate in political and intellectual culture, connecting them to broader opportunities in metropolitan centers. For rural settler and Indigenous Siberians residing in remote regions of the taiga and tundra, flight also provided access to essential facets of modern Soviet culture, such as secondary education, advanced

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[29] Although many regions were still accessible via older water transportation network, such routes were limited due to seasonal weather changes and long travel times. See my second chapter (pp. 27-60).

[30] Dobrolet conducted trial flights between Never, a Trans-Siberian railroad station located in Amur oblast and two cities in Yakutia in 1925 and in the summer of 1928 offered regular service by flying boat (a type of seaplane) between Irkutsk and Yakutsk, with intermediary stops along the Angara and Lena rivers. (See Hugh MacDonald, *Aėroflot: Soviet Air Transport Since 1923* (Putnam, 1975), 7–9.)

[31] MacDonald, 12–16.

[32] MacDonald, 20–23.

[33] Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 258.

[34] Helicopter passenger service in Siberia usually operated on an as-needed basis, rather than as a regular service. As such, wait-times for helicopters were often longer than for flights by plane. Helicopters were also important for surveying and transporting goods and mail to construction and excavation sites in remote wilderness regions. For a brief discussion of Aeroflot's national helicopter operations in the 1960s and 70s, see MacDonald, *Aėroflot*, 49–53, 104. For a discussion of helicopter transport and its impact on Siberian mobility during the post-Soviet period, see Joachim Otto Habeck and Dennis Zuev, "Implications of Infrastructure and Technological Change for Lifestyles in Siberia," in *Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North*, ed. Joachim Otto Habeck (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 35–104. (Habeck and Zuev also briefly discuss the introduction of Siberian helicopter transport in the 1960s on page 42.)

[35] Whereas in 1970 approximately 24.1 percent of general intercity travel in the Soviet Union was conducted by plane, this number jumped drastically for travelers in more remote regions and longer distance routes. For instance, nearly 89 percent of people traveling between Moscow and Khabarovsk that year did so by plane. (See Jones, "The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot," 259.)

medical care, and professional training, which was often available only in regional urban centers that were at times inaccessible by road. Aviation also enabled more ready access for travelers from outside Siberia, including tourists, scientists and workers traveling to the region to visit new urban centers or participate in industrial projects (such as mining and oil drilling) that were rapidly expanding in remote locations. The new networks of mobility generated by regional commercial air travel fundamentally changed the social and economic fabric of previously isolated Siberian locales, both allowing for an influx of new visitors – some of whom would remain there temporarily or permanently – and bringing Siberians from remote regions more readily into the Soviet Union's cultural fold. Aviation thus contributed to the seismic demographic shifts that by the seventies would become the subject of national debate under Brezhnev's Policy of Inclusion and which would emerge as prominent themes for Siberian writers, as discussed in previous chapters.

The View from Above

On September 15, 1956 the Tupolev-104 passenger jet departed on its inaugural commercial flight from Moscow's Vnukovo airport to Irkutsk, with a stopover in Omsk. In the months prior to the Tu-104's first non-test flight to Siberia, Karl-Heinz Gerstner, an East German communist and the economic editor of *Berliner Zeitung* caught a glimpse of the new plane on a Moscow tarmac. "Arriv[ing] a month too early" to fly the exciting new route, Gerstner instead boarded a propellor plane along with a group of other East German media workers on a state tour of the new Siberian construction. As his plane headed eastward, Gerstner watched the landscape shrink below him, revealing an aerial topography of the Soviet east:

> We are flying across the Urals. I had imagined them taller. These hills are the very same "large rock face" that in the 15th century blocked Novgorod merchants' passage into Siberia. The stewardess tells me that this is just part of the enormous mountain range. In 1581, at this very same low place over which we are flying Ermak and his Cossacks crossed the Urals on foot to destroy Kuchum, the "king of Siberia". […] Farther and farther, through the night – we go east. The propellers devour space. The mottled lakes, rivers, and swamps of the western Siberian plain are reflected in the moonlight. To the left – a distant night rainstorm. We are flying at an altitude of three thousand meters. At nine p.m. tens of thousands of flames sparkled in the lowlands. Omsk. […] I am flying from the past to the future.[36]

Gerstner's description of his flight to Siberia and "into the future" reveal not only the tremendous scales and speed of the transformations brought to Siberian territory by the scientific-technical revolution, but also the transformations that Soviet aviation technology had enacted on Siberian geography itself. From the air, "large rock face[s]" that had once stood as obstacles to human passage are transformed into mere "hills" or "low places," while bodies of water become specks in the moonlight. The electrified city transforms (like in old Komsomol songs) into "tens of thousands of flames" sparkling on a dark background.

Gerstner's aerial vision makes visible the scale of rapid industrialization that had taken place in Siberian cities during the postwar period, allowing the passenger to see the summation

[36] Karl-Heinz Gerstner, "Polet v budushshee," trans. E. Kitainik and A. Kitainik, *Sibirskie ogni* 1956, no. 6 (December 1956): 128–29.

of changes to the landscape brought about by Soviet construction while also shrinking it in size. It also reveals, in its vast unlit swaths of land, the extent to which Siberia remained unmastered, even as Soviet technology had generated machines that moved at such speeds and heights that years shrunk to hours and mountains to hills. Simultaneously, the movement of the airplane through space lends the air itself its own physical geography: rainstorms become landmarks passing in the distance as the plane's propellers "devour air" like fuel. For L. Malkov, another journalist, traveling by commercial jet in 1959 (now three years into the Tu-104's service on the Moscow-Omsk-Irkutsk route), the plane's motion transforms the sky into a water-like substance, generating the nautical metaphor often found in aeronautics: "Siberia's aerial ocean is now firmly inhabited. Man can become accustomed to even the bluish-black heights of the stratosphere."[37] The comforts of commercial air travel allow the sky to become a dwelling – a familiar part of modern everyday life and the speeds accompanying it.

These accounts illustrate the extent to which Soviet experiences of air travel were intertwined with the ideological discourse of the postwar scientific-technological revolution and the changes it effected in the human experience of space and time. Advances in technology had allowed everyday Soviet citizens not only to participate in the collective conquest and reshaping of Soviet geography, but also to marvel at those changes as spectators from above, suspended in the domestic space of a plane cabin while hurtling through the air at speeds which conquered the Siberian frontier in a matter of hours. Like the train car in Tvardovskii's *Distance Beyond Distance*, the airplane allowed passengers to travel "from the past into the future," even as its velocity and vertical distance from the earth gave ordinary citizens access to new, aerial forms of mobility, or "aeromobilities" that removed the passenger from the earthly space and time that lay between west and east, past and future.[38] In the USSR as in the West, the rapid expansion of commercial air travel which took place alongside the advent of commercial jet technology in the mid-twentieth century generated new habits, spatial relationships, and modes of perception, contributing to aerial life. Among these new life forms are the phenomenal geographies produced by aircraft, airports, and the embodied experience of "being-in-the-air" (rather than "being-on-the-ground").[39]

Central to midcentury Soviet press depictions of "being-in-the-air" are journalist-passengers' experience of aerial perspective and their resulting observations of the earth below, which are presented as a form of spatial orientation. For seasoned pilots,[40] navigating the air required both scientific and experiential knowledge, a "mathematically exact" eye for the topography below, but also a domestic familiarity akin to intimately experienced space, such as the "path between one's apartment to the corner bakery."[41] For the passengers aboard the plane, the verticality of flight became an opportunity to orient oneself to the trans-Siberian route from a distance; removing (in the safe domesticity of the airliner cabin) the affect of the sublime generated by the embodied encounter with Siberian horizontality and alpine heights and instead allowing for the territory to be surveyed rationally.[42]

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[37] Mal'kov, "V vozdushnom okeane."

[38] Here I borrow Peter Adey's term, which he defines loosely as the various forms of human motion that are generated through aviation and aerial space. See Adey, *Aerial Life*, 6–8.

[39] Adey, 8-10.

[40] Malkov's piece celebrates Siberia's "millionaire" pilots, veteran aviators who have flown at least 1 million miles ("V vozdushnom okeane").

[41] Quoted in the first epigraph of this chapter. (See Mal'kov, "V vozdushnom okeane").

[42] The technological advancements that the airplane cabin embodied seemed to provide the ideal conditions through which the human mind can overcome the natural feelings of the sublime described by Kant, which were "located in

Modern theorizations of verticality and aerial perspective emphasize the power differential they generate by removing the vertical subject from the lived world and flattening it, allowing him to survey it as a voyeur. In an account of his visit to the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, Michel de Certeau describes feeling an "ecstasy of reading" the city below, generated from the "voluptuous pleasure of 'seeing the whole:'"

> When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. […] His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god.[43]

The technological advancements of modernity "materializ[e] today the utopia that yesterday was only painted:" in lifting the individual out of the city and upwards into the air, the skyscraper allows the subject to transform from embedded part of the city below to a detached observer who has mastery and control of his "imaginary totalizations" of the expanse below.[44] With the advent of the airplane, this effect was amplified as the distance between viewing subject and the lived world below multiplied. Adey describes the utility of such perspective for surveyors, who saw utility in the benefits of this "new way of looking." The dynamic bird's eye perspective generated by the airplane assured that "the sort of 'rational intelligence' that would ordinarily be acquired via the collection of facts, analysis, education and comparison 'suddenly becomes a matter of total and first-hand experience for the eye,'" which "from above […] is neither clouded with subjectivity nor distracted by feelings," but "calculated" and "truthful."[45] Feminist thinker Donna Haraway understands aerial surveillance technology as an "instrument[t] of visualization" of postmodernity that "endlessly enhance[s]" the human eye in the service of institutional power by creating distance between the subject and the lived world: "Vision […] becomes unregulated gluttony; all seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice."[46] Through the experience of flying, "rational" geographic knowledge becomes phenomenological, while phenomenological experience of the environment becomes rationalized, giving the illusion of objectivity as the distance from the earth and its embodied experience increases.

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the mind itself, as opposed to the natural object [or landscape] that had precipitated the experience." Harsha Ram summarizes Kant's theorization of the sublime as "mov[ing] from a blockage in the mind's relation to the sensory world to its cognitive resolution:" the feelings of awe emerge from the mind's inability to reconcile the abstracted "*idea* of the infinite" (which it can recognize as such) with its "sensuous form," which the human mind could not fully grasp through the embodied encounter. (See Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 13.) The technological advancements of commercial air travel could serve to overcome this inability; by cocooning the body in its pressurized, domestic interior, the airplane cabin removes the embodied, sensory encounter with the infinite and instead enables the viewer to perceive it sensorily from a rational distance. It thus subdues the feelings of the sublime by closing the distance between the senses and the abstract idealization of the infinite, giving the viewer the sensation that his body, too, has mastered space.

[43] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91–92.

[44] *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92-93.

[45] Adey, *Aerial Life*, 86.

[46] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581. For a more in-depth discussion relating Haraway's argument to aerial drone photography, see Adey, *Aerial Life*, 85-113.

While the experience of rational mastery would seem to be most pronounced for those in direct control of the mechanisms for aerial motion and vision (such as the pilot or surveillance photographer), the act of gazing from above can also lend ordinary passengers a unique sense of agency—namely in the ability to impart meaning into the abstracted bird's eye view (converting it from space into place). Caren Kaplan suggests that the perceived "rationality" or "objectivity" in aerial perspective's widened field of vision is easily troubled when considering the experience of reading space from above: "Simultaneously perceived to be abstract and realistic […], the 'view from above' invites decipherment" by the viewer who "attempts to 'see' clearly" those details which "appea[r] at first glance to be 'unseeable.'"[47] However, it is precisely in this process of attempting to decipher concrete detail from the abstract and infer all that below which is "unseen" that aerial subjectivity is imagined, producing "significant differences" and "mak[ing] possible many more perspectives on what people think can be seen."[48] For Denis Cosgrove, "God's Eye view" is "map-like" for its imaginative as well as observational qualities. Psychological evidence suggests that humans have an inherent imaginative sense of aerial perspective that predates modern aviation, a navigational survival skill that is "one of our most basic methods for transforming space into place" by allowing us to "establish a context for individual features on the ground, to place them in relationship to one another and to a broader topography, revealing patterns to the eye, […] to create geographies." Like a map, this aerial "geographic imagination" is subjective in its framing, which "can be produced and viewed with an eye to scientific objectivity" or "made and read artistically" with attention to aesthetic form.[49] As such, aerial vision allows the landscape to be written and read like a text, an act I call *aerial reading*. The parameters and meaning of aerial reading are in part a reflection of the viewer/reader's internal state and motivations, and his existing spatial relationships and assumptions.

Kaplan and Cosgrove cite aerial photography and other forms of surveillance when drawing their cartographic comparisons to demonstrate the various ways in which this aerial reading process can be used to assert power, inspire awe, and otherwise defamiliarize or delineate our "grounded" relationships to earth. Literary representations of aerial vision and aerial reading – add an additional layer of reading to the bird's eye "texts" they depict. Filtered through the author-text-reader dynamics of literary prose, the imaginary geographies of aerial vision in this chapter allow the reader to "read" two simultaneous and inseparable geographies: the topography of the represented territory itself and the imaginary geography of the narrator/subject's relationships to that territory. The first is necessarily shaped by the second: the distinct details (and absences) read in the aerial gaze are determined through the artistic choices of the author and focalized through the distinct worldview of the narrator but are also informed by the reader's own knowledge of, assumptions about, and relationships to space. The second geography – the narration of the aerially mobile subject's "reading" process – reveals the subjective modes through which those readings are shaped, namely the memories, sensations, and stories about intimately experienced space that have shaped their relationships to them. Together, these imaginary geographies express to the reader the same relationships to local and national space through which they were formed, modeling new ways for reading spatial relationships. In the metropolitan state discourse on aviation, these forms of reading were often

[47] Caren Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths: Wartime from Above* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3–4.
[48] Kaplan, 15.
[49] Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, *Photography and Flight* (London, United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, Limited, 2010), 9–11, 17.

used as blueprints through which readers could learn to become cultured fliers in the new culture of jet-setting.[50] In contrast, in the Siberian texts in this chapter, I argue, aerial vision became a means through which texts convey relational dynamics between national and local space as experienced by modern, aerially mobile Siberian subjects.

Siberia's Aerial Readers and Writers

As we have seen, Siberia's unique climatic and topographic conditions and its spatial distance from the Soviet administrative center generated unique pragmatic and symbolic forms of air-mindedness among Siberia's inhabitants, for whom aerial life increasingly became a functional necessity rather than a modern convenience. The distinct relationships to flight and aerial life necessitated by Siberia's remoteness from Soviet administrative and cultural centers can be seen as a specific instance of the more general compression of time and space which civilian aviation enabled from the dawn of the Khrushchev era. Geographer Doreen Massey has described the unequal and differentiated relationship to mobility arising from "time-space compression" as a "power geometry," This determines not merely "who moves and who doesn't," but equally the dynamics of power "in relation *to* the flows and movement."[51] As the close readings which follow illustrate, Siberian representations of aerial life reveal Siberian subjects' precarious position within the power geometries of late Soviet space and culture. As Massey argues, the "feelings of vulnerability which [time-space compression] can produce" can either lead to the "almost necessarily reactionary" tendency to retreat to and romanticize the place of one's birth or generate new understandings of place based on a social rather than physical relationship to space.[52]

In Siberian literature, airspaces such as airplanes, helicopters, and airports function as heterotopic spaces for Siberian subjects moving between their birthplace and the metropole. Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as "real sites" located in the physical world but culturally "exis[ting] outside of all [other] places" due to the unique set of spatial relations they invite, both within their confines and in relation to other sites. Heterotopias reveal hidden spatial hierarchies that exist in modern society due to their position:[53] culturally, they are somewhat liminal, not because they are separate from other spatial relationships (this is impossible), but because they carry distinct physical properties and cultural connotations that "simultaneously represen[t], contes[t], and inver[t]" "all the other real sites that can be found within culture."[54] Heterotopias therefore have a mirror-like quality, in that they reveal things about human subjects and their spatial relationships that both illuminate the real state of things and yet make it unreal.[55]

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[50] See Steven Harris' discussion of an aerial scene in Ida Shul'kina's short story "Aeroflot" (592-593), which is easily linked to his broader discussion of the didactic function of the passenger in Soviet media of the jet age (601-603).

[51] Doreen Massey, "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 61.

[52] Massey, 61.

[53] Foucault argues that unlike time, "contemporary space is perhaps still not entirely desanctified" because everyday relationships to space are governed by binarily opposed categories (such as private/public, work/leisure, cultural/useful) that are understood as objective and assigned value according to moral hierarchies ("Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-23).

[54] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 23-24.

[55] A mirror is a heterotopia because "it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (Foucault, 24).

By nature, airplanes and airports possess many of the qualities of a heterotopia as delineated by Foucault. They "bring together in a single real place several spaces […] that are in themselves incompatible" and "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable," making them "neither fully public, nor fully private."[56] Midcentury airports were designed to maximize the efficient transport of people and goods while also comfortably accommodating a large number of passengers awaiting departures, connecting flights, and luggage. During the jet-setting age, airports were also considered to be gateways to the cities of their destination, and were accordingly designed to entice travelers by evoking the emotions and senses, reflecting the modern essence of that city, and remaining future-thinking in their orientation.[57] As Christopher Schaberg points out, they are also "contact zones," bringing together a diverse, global collective of travelers, and generating a self-contained culture "where common and uncommon narratives collide and where cultural trends and unique exceptions comingle" within a single building.[58]

Similarly, modern jetliners are simultaneously social and domestic, designed to appease passenger anxiety about flying by replicating the domesticity and comfort of a modern apartment, while bringing together a diverse collective of passengers that embodied the new global networks of exchange enabled by air travel. The aircraft window reveals a third type of space, the rationalized aerial view of the earth. Airplanes and airports "break with […] traditional time:" they adhere to a strictly regimented schedule of arrivals and departures, but also operate according to a different set of rules from the outside world. Airports often mark time through various stages of waiting: waiting in line to purchase a ticket, waiting to board,

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[56] Foucault, 25-26.

[57] Since the early years of commercial air travel in the nineteen twenties, airports were designed to "support the nation's progress" through "a more bottom-up process of identity building by cultivating sensations of civic pride and national air-mindedness among visitors. (See Adey, 68-69). The arrival of the jet age in the nineteen-fifties and sixties ushered in a new global era of airport design as countries and municipalities rushed to construct new airports and renovate existing ones to accommodate the larger size and higher capacity of jetliners. (Most airports constructed prior to the fifties couldn't accommodate the increased flow of passengers, and their runways, which were designed for propellor planes, were too small and narrow for jet planes.) Architects such as Minoru Yamasaki (St. Louis Lambert International Airport) and Eero Saarinen (JFK International Airport and Dulles International Airport) were pioneers in midcentury airport design, designing airport structures to evoke the sensory experience of atmospheric flight, while also maximizing the efficient flow of passengers, luggage, and information. Since airports were built to accommodate a technology that was constantly developing, airports were future-thinking in their design to prevent the need for regular and costly renovations. At the same time, many were designed to create an atmosphere of comfort and luxury to accommodate the travelers waiting there. (For a more detailed overview of how such designs functioned in the American Cold War context, see Janet R. Bednarek, *Airports, Cities, and the Jet Age: US Airports Since 1945*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 120–36.) Steven Harris has noted similar intentions within Soviet international airport design, particularly in Moscow's Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo, and Vnukovo airports, whose designs subsequently influenced smaller regional hubs such as Novosibirsk's Tolmachevo airport (609-612). Although most studies of Russian airport design focus on the history of larger international airports, Dolinskaia and Tokareva note the influence of global midcentury modern architecture on provincial Soviet airports constructed throughout the Soviet jet age, which, (although lacking the amenities of larger airports) similarly embraced minimalist, future-oriented design and emphasized efficiency and passenger comfort. (See I. M. Dolinskaia and A. A. Tokareva, "Provintsial'nye aerovokzaly. Epokhi sovetskogo modernizma v statuse dostoprimechatel'nykh mest," *Architecture and Modern Information Technologies* 2, no. 55 (2021): 92–105.

[58] Christopher Schaberg, *The Textual Life of Airports: Reading the Culture of Flight* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 3. For a survey of how geographers have further theorized the cultural function of airports, which he summarizes heterotopically as a "contradictory aggregation of spaces, shapes, and geometries," see Adey, 11-12.

waiting for the plane to take off, which are often governed by outside forces such as staffing, weather, and mechanical issues. Airplanes, on the other hand, disrupt the body's natural orientation to time. Traveling at high speeds and often across multiple time zones, the plane cabin can speed up or slow down the passage of time on the ground depending on direction, while the markers of cyclical time are disrupted due to the plane's speed and position above the earth.[59]

As the close readings in this chapter will illustrate, for Siberian travelers, many of these heterotopic effects become especially pronounced due to the region's distinct environmental and spatial relationships. While the growing ubiquity of commercial air travel allowed Siberian subjects to emerge from their perceived backwardness by closing the spatial and temporal distance between themselves and the Soviet Union's intellectual, cultural, and political metropole, this mastery often necessitated relocation, a physical and temporal distancing from their native birthplace. The ungroundedness of flight could evoke a particular sense of dislocation by essentially removing the bodily experience of moving between origin and destination, as is typical of overland forms of transportation. Rather than being carried through intermediary space, fliers are plucked from their origin points and carried aloft in the ungrounded space-time of the airplane before being dropped in their destination, and the new sets of spatial and temporal relationships that accompany it. In this sense, in many of the works in this chapter, aerial life draws attention to Siberia's spatial and temporal distance from the metropole even while it shrinks and compresses it. Finally, while air travel more readily accommodated Siberian mobility and helped facilitate changes to the physical and social contours of Siberia itself, it couldn't fully resolve discrepancies that still existed on the ground, including the logistical realities that travel between the two still entailed. Due to the long distances and travel time between urban centers and rural Siberian regions, it was often difficult to travel home for short leisure trips. Airspaces were therefore often visited at moments of profound change, grief, or crisis: traveling to the city for work or school or traveling home for funerals, and family emergencies.

As such, the Siberian experience of airspace is often imparted with ritual qualities that are in ways similar to "crisis heterotopias," "privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis." No longer belonging to the home they left behind, but not quite fitting in to the urban societies they are joining, the ungrounded nature of airspace marks it as a "place of nowhere" in which such emotions of grief, longing, and indecision, but also of freedom and possibility can be processed.[60] Whether embracing romanticized notions of homeland or seeking comfort in alternative attachments to place, the Siberian subjects in the close readings which follow must often choose between the advantages and conveniences of the Soviet metropole, or the familiarity and connection of their Siberian birthplaces. Airspace and aerial vision figure prominently in these late Soviet Siberian narratives of migration and displacement, where airplanes, helicopters, and airports are depicted in scenes of Siberians traveling between native birthplaces and urban centers. I argue that in Siberian literature, aerial space offers a series of heterotopic sites in which Siberian subjects can process their own changing relationships and attitudes towards national and local space, including feelings of detachment, displacement,

[59] For instance, a nine-hour flight from Kamchatka to Moscow (a nine-hour time difference) might depart at 9 am and arrive at its destination at 9 am on the same day. When traveling in the opposite direction, it might depart Moscow at 9 am and arrive to Kamchatka at 2 am the next day.
[60] Foucault, 24.

placelessness, and being out of time. For Siberian subjects, the cultural symbolism of Soviet aerial life and its associations with various forms of rationality and power are reworked in conjunction with Siberia's unique position within the Soviet power geometry. The demographically complex social landscapes of the regional airport terminal and airliner cabin reveal the complex entanglements of Soviet national and local community, while the ungrounding which arises from flight and which is gained through aerial reading allow Siberian subjects to observe and experience familiar or native places from a rationalizing distance, one that offers vantage points unavailable to them on the ground.

Aerial Vision and Narratives of Siberian *Bildung*

In 1983, Soviet critic I. Panchenko wrote of an "increasingly common motif" in Soviet literature, which coincided with the increasing literary interest in folklore and the national past: "the hero is flying in an airplane, […] high above the earth, embracing it with a thoughtful gaze and simultaneously experiencing a spiritual ascent, reinterpreting his life and fate anew, sensing it as part of national fate [*chast' sud'by narodnoi*]." Citing works by Andrei Voznesenskii, Viktor Astafiev, Yuvan Shestalov, and Boris Ukachin, she argues that:

> … in each of these works, flight above the earth is a means of lyrically and philosophically correlating individual, private fate with the fate of the country and the earth. And this contemporary attempt to capture the sky and the earth, the public and the private, the self and the planet in a single spiritual impulse[61] is a metaphor for the spiritual impulse towards wholeness, to that nostalgia for wholeness that can be observed in our contemporary literature.[62]

Given the importance of domestic air travel within Siberia's transportation infrastructure during the late Soviet period, it is likely no coincidence that three of the four works Panchenko references were written by Siberian-born authors who often wrote about Siberian themes.[63] Since the early fifties and continuing into the post-Soviet period, aerial motifs appeared regularly in Soviet Siberian literature, particularly in works where Siberian protagonists travel between their birthplaces and urban centers. Panchenko briefly reads the abundance of aerial motifs in the late Soviet period as an instantiation of broader trends taking place within contemporary Soviet national literatures, and particularly their turn to the national past as a means of understanding the multinational Soviet and global future that was unfolding, a trend which I have already discussed in previous chapters. Panchenko's reading demonstrates the extent to which the new perspectives, mobilities, and spatial networks generated by Soviet aerial life were reflected in the national literary and cultural concerns of the period but does not discuss the influence of regional spatial relationships on the late Soviet poetics of flight. In fact, the "lyrical and philosophical" dynamics that drove the "spiritual impulse" of aerial scenes in Soviet Siberian literature often emerged out of distinct Siberian experiences of flight. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate how Siberian aerial motifs often reveal the extent to which the jet age inadvertently

[61] Here Panchenko's phrase (for "spiritual impulse") духовный порыв, seems to extend the aerial metaphors, since the word *порыв* is used in aviation to describe an atmospheric gust of wind or an aerodynamic disturbance.
[62] I. Panchenko, "Voproshshaia proshloe - zaglianut' v budushshee," *Voprosy literatury* 1983, no. 6 (June 30, 1983): 83.
[63] Boris Ukachin, whom I do not write about in this chapter, grew up in a village in the Oirat Autonomous Okrug (now the Altai Republic) and was an Altai national writer who wrote in the Altai language.

reproduced existing tensions and fissures in Siberian relationships to national and local space and identity, even as it simultaneously sought to bridge them.

A central aerial motif is what the Russians term the *illiuminator*, or "porthole," used to describe the windows of aircraft, submarines, and ships. An *illiuminator* is hermetically sealed from outside air and water, distinguishing it from the more general *okno* ("window"), which can generally be opened and shut.[64] The boundary created by the porthole is an important feature of its literary function: visually, it connects the viewer inside the cabin to the aerial topography outside, including the view of the earth below, but physically it separates, disconnecting the airborne passenger and the domesticity of cabin from the air and earth outside. In Siberian literature, this tension between contiguously present internal and external space is one of the primary formal narrative devices for examining Siberian subjects' relationship to the terrestrial world outside, and particularly to his dynamic relationship with national and local space. The airplane porthole plays a significant formal and symbolic role in mediating the subject's relationships to space and time. Aerial visions often trigger vivid fragments of memory and dreams related to the subject's position in relation to the domestic place of the cabin, and the individual glimpses of the national landscape below, allowing the subject (and the reader), to read the big picture of his life much like he would the earth's topography. In this sense, the porthole is a key heterotopic feature: it lays bare the subject's innate relationships to Soviet national space and time by both removing him from it and mirroring it. The porthole is thus commonly tied to depictions of Siberian historical development and personal *Bildung*. The juxtaposition of the shifting landscape below can be traced alongside the plane's path of motion and the static state of the airplane's cabin, allowing both subject and reader to organize memories and thoughts into a coherent narrative of progress and loss.

In Yuri Rytkheu's short story "Tegryne Flies to Khabarovsk" ("*Tegryne letit v Khabarovsk*, 1953), a young Chukchi protagonist and first-time flier marvels at her own ability to identify unfamiliar features of the earth below, using a combination of observational skills, personal knowledge of the familiar tundra landscape and her knowledge from maps that she has studied in school. Tegryne's study of the earth below is revealed to the reader in a series of fragments, which increase in detail as Tegryne becomes comfortable reading the earth's features from above, even as the topography itself becomes less familiar. These glimpses of the earth from above precede glimpses into Tegryne's thoughts – particularly the memories she retains of her scientific education and her dreams for the future as a student of agrobiology in the big city. Tegryne's seatmate, a geologist, remarks that the "similarity between the earth's surface" as viewed from above and "its conventional representation on a map" is a "remarkable coincidence," since "the conventions of cartography were accepted far before the emergence of aviation."[65] The resemblance, of course, is not coincidental, but rather due to the skill of surveyors and cartographers, who, like Tegryne, combined fragments of spatial knowledge gleaned from personal experience and observation and scientific techniques of mapmaking to create a composite of the space in its entirety. Just as Tegryne draws on her observational skills and rational knowledge to learn to "read" the aerial map before her, the story invites the reader to read the big picture of Tegryne's life by piecing together fragments of memory, tracing the linear trajectory of her life as the plane progresses towards her destination, the location of her idealized future.

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[64] D. N. Ushakov, "Illiuminator," in *Tolkovyi slovar' Ushakova* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1935).
[65] Rytkheu, *Chukotskaia saga*, 73.

The trajectory of Tegryne's flight and her initiation into aerial life aboard the cabin allows her to view her childhood and future adulthood more clearly along the lines of Soviet Indigenous progress. Upon takeoff, Tegryne feels spatially disoriented, unable to reconcile her new aerial perspective and rapid motion with the old life she has left behind below her.[66] She is bewildered that she "can no longer make out [her father] amongst the others" bidding the plane farewell, which triggers feelings of guilt for leaving him behind, accompanied by a brief flashback to her chaotic departure in the moments before boarding the plane. This mental chaos is echoed in the plane's circular motion, wherein the airport building and group of people "appear" (*pokazat'sia*) or "flash" (*promel'knut'sia*) repeatedly, before giving way to "hills of some sort—light green ones and greenish-rust colored ones" as the plane "lay[s] its course" (*legli na kurs*) in a southwest direction toward Khabarovsk.[67] The plane's linear route (described as an "invisible path across an aerial ocean") coupled with views of the familiar taiga below enable Tegryne to orient herself on her aerial and developmental trajectories, which propel her "ever forward and forward" (*vse vpered i vpered!*) in time and space. Tegryne's newly acquired ability to aerially read the earth triggers memories of her childhood, and her future professional trajectory as an agrobiologist, an aspiration shaped by her thirst for knowledge and her love for her native taiga. For the most part, these memories are linear, following fragments of Tegryne's memories forward in time.

As Tegryne's comfort with aeromobility and aerial reading increases, her reading of the less familiar territory near her destination becomes a means for orienting herself on a path toward the future. In her next glance out the window, she notices that "the mountains here are not at all like the ones in the north. They are dark green, but this color is not even, not still, it can't be the color of the mountain itself. […] A forest!"[68] Throughout the story, trees serve as a visual symbol of Tegryne's future dreams: born in the tundra, Tegryne has only seen trees in books and films, a marker of a Russian landscape distant from her own. Viewing the trees from the porthole of the plane, Tegryne (and the reader) is granted a glimpse into her future on the ground as a student (and scientist) in a city where trees will become familiar landmarks of her lived experience, a dream that is realized upon landing. Published at a time when Soviet aviation was about to, but had not yet entered the jet age, Tegryne's aerial visions of her intellectual trajectory spatialize the dream of the jet age for her generation of Soviet Indigenous intellectuals like herself and the author, who was a student in Leningrad when he wrote the story. Aeromobility held the promise to connect young Siberians to new possibilities, connecting them to experiences and opportunities that they could then theoretically bring back home.

Written nearly twenty years later, Part I of Yuvan Shestalov's (Mansi) 1972 novella *As I was Rocked by the Sun* (*Kogda kachalo menia solntse*) examines Indigenous intellectuals' eventual return. The text evokes traditional Mansi beliefs about flight alongside modern ones, to make memory and the environment come alive across various facets of aerial life and reverberate with the fragmented psyche and cosmic disconnection of its grieving protagonist. The novella follows a first-person narrator, a thirty-something Mansi man residing in Leningrad, on his journey home to northwestern Siberia to visit his ailing father, perhaps for the last time.[69] A poet

[66] Upon take-off, Tegryne is at first unable to believe that the "small hut of some sort" ("*domik kakoi-to*") below her is actually an airport. (Rytkheu, 60).
[67] Rytkheu, 60.
[68] Rytkheu, 73.
[69] Upon the narrator's arrival home at the end of Part I it comes to light that the illness was made up by his sister to compel him to finally make the trip home.

by training, Shestalov is known for his lyrical style and formal experimentation achieved by genre mixing, and particularly for his nuanced understanding of Mansi oral storytelling and history, which he learned from his maternal grandfather, a shaman. In *As I was Rocked by the Sun*, this literary voice is transposed onto the first person narrator, who shares many biographical similarities with the author.[70] S. Dinislamova writes that "in the novella there are many fairytales, songs, and legends" which "contribute to plot development and help to recreate images of national being, in all of its visualizations and expressions," allowing the narrator to make better sense of his life by "comparing his feelings and thoughts with fairytales."[71]

Fittingly, given their similar formal functions, the novella merges motifs from Mansi folklore with typical imagery of Siberian aerial life. For the protagonist, the aircraft is not merely an airplane (*samolet*), but interchangeably a "winged boat" (*krylataia lodka*, a literal translation of the preferred term in the Mansi language), a "winged horse" (*krylatyi kon'*), or a "winged deer" (*krylatyi olen'*), the latter of which are images from Mansi stories about flight, particularly a legend about the creation of a flying machine:

> Мечта была у манси—смотреть землю. Долго думали, как стать крылатыми, и однажды додумались. Кузнец выковал железного семикрылого коня. […] Семикрылый кон валился набок, не мог летать. Подумал кузнец и выковал восьмое крыло. Восьмикрылый конь поднялся выше дымков островерхних чумов, рядом с облаками мчался. В сказочных снах мансийцы были крылатыми.[72]
>
> The Mansi had a dream [*mechta*] – to look at the earth. They thought about how to become winged and one day they figured it out. A blacksmith forged a seven-winged horse. […] The seven-winged horse toppled over on its side and was unable to fly. The blacksmith thought some more and forged an eighth wing. The eight-winged horse climbed higher than the whisps of smoke emerging from the pointed tops of the Mansi dwellings[73] and racing alongside the clouds. In their fairytale dreams [*sny*], the Mansi were winged.

Just as the pre-revolutionary aviators turned to a Russian version of the Icarus myth when articulating a national vision of flight, Shestalov evokes a Mansi version as a means of explaining the spiritual significance of aerial life. Significantly, the narrator frames the Mansi dream of flight (evoked both in the figurative sense as *mechta* and literal visions as *sny*) in terms of vision and position more so than mobility. The primary goal of flight is posed as a means by which the Mansi could "look at the earth" (*smotret' zemliu*) from above and position themselves close to the sky, "next to the clouds" (*riadom s oblakami*).

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[70] Many of the basic elements of the protagonist's biography correspond to Shestalov's own: his father was an early Communist organizer and kolkhoz leader in his village and his maternal grandfather was a shaman, his mother and grandparents died when he was very young, and after finishing school he left Siberia for Leningrad to study pedagogy, and then literature. (See E. G. Gromova and E. N. Oznoblenkova, *Shestalov Iuvan Nikolaevich: Biobibliograficheskii ukazatel'* (Khanty-Mansiisk: Iugorskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2013), 5–6.

[71] S. S. Dinislamova, "Obraz naroda v tvorchestve Iuvana Shestalova," *Vestnik ugrovedeniia* 2, no. 29 (2017): 34.

[72] Shestalov, "Kogda kachalo menia solntse," 25.

[73] Shestalov uses the Russian *chum* here, which is a Russian word derived from the Komi language used to describe a type of dwelling common to certain Uralic reindeer herding peoples in Siberia and the Russian far north. The *chum* is conical in shape and consists of sewn reindeer hides wrapped around a circle of wooden poles, with a smoke hole at the top.

The images of the plane as winged horse and winged deer imbue the plane's fuselage with a spiritual life force, connecting it to an ancestral past in which "there was nothing on earth—no birch tree, no blade of grass, no stone, devoid of someone's soul residing within it."[74] Throughout Part I, the narrator's connection with the "winged deer" and the constitutive parts of the "new fairytale" of aerial life are similarly imbued with fragments of the narrator's – and by extension his ancestors' – soul. Whereas in many other stories from this period narrative access to memory is organized primarily through the porthole of the plane window, for Shestalov's protagonist, these fragments of the spirit resonate in every corner of Siberian airspace: overheard conversations with a boy and his grandmother trigger memories of his own, an uneaten in-flight meal conjures feelings of hunger experienced during the war, and an off-handed comment by a man in the airport summons feelings about the changing meaning of distance in the Siberian context.

This rendering of aerial life allows the modern Soviet fairytale of flight to function in a similar way to the older, Mansi one, providing a sense of causality and allowing the narrator to confront his own feelings of spiritual unrest and cosmic displacement. The narrator merges the world of "old fairytales" associated with childhood memories and ancestral traditions and beliefs with the "new fairytale" (*novaia skazka*) of modern progress that aviation had come to symbolize in near-Icarian language:

> Я стал крылатым. Высоко лечу. Рядом с облаками и солнцем лечу. Время крылатое…Но неужели от этого счастья я ослепну, оглохну, стану бесчувственным? […] Но неужели все будет только в новой сказке?! А может, и у старой сказки счастливый конец?[75]
>
> I have become winged. I fly high. I fly close to the clouds and the sun. The age is winged…But can it be that from this happiness I am becoming blind, I am turning deaf, I am becoming unfeeling? […] Can it be that everything lies only in the new fairytales?! Or could it be that the old fairytales, too, have a happy ending?!

The narrator's fears of going blind are inherently related to the act of flight itself: the desire to "fly close to the clouds and sun" is threatening to the "old fairytales" which guarantee man's connection to place. However, once the narrator realizes the old Mansi dream of flying as a means "to look at the earth" in new ways, the forms of vision granted him bridge these two fairytales rather than distance them.

Once again, the airplane window plays a more specific role mediating between the sky – associated with the sun and the spirit of the narrator's dead mother – and the earth, the source of life.[76] Upon departing Leningrad, views of the streets below summon old feelings of his youth there, which are coupled with the feelings of disillusionment that he has since faced in his adulthood:

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[74] Shestalov, "Kogda kachalo menia solntse," 37. (In the original text, the double negative construction is far more pronounced, emphasizing the fissure between past and present: "Предки мои […] уверены были, что нет на земле ни березки, ни травинки, ни камня, в которых бы не жила чья-либо душа.")

[75] Shestalov, 30.

[76] When trying to make sense of his grief (described as a "spirit (*dukh*) that won't give me peace (*pokoi*)") the narrator looks back to the fairytale time when his mother was alive: "From mama the earth begins. In the fairytale the earth continues. And on earth- is life" (Shestalov 8).

> […] глаза мои устремлены на землю. Внизу—Ленинград. Город моей юности. В нем я встретил Ее. Она заменила мне мать. […] Улицы этого города—мои лесные тропы. Я иду по ним—как по тайге. Каждый дом—знакомое дерево. У каждого дерева—своя история и тайна. […] Я брожу по улицам, как охотник по тайге. Но ищу не зверя, а добрые слова и мысли. Так мало в мире добра и тепла. Так много шума и грохота! Но в этом шуме городском я стал совсем другим. […] Город растаял в синей дымке. Самолет крылатым оленем скакал по облакам, как по белому снегу. Сквозь сугробы облаков вдруг выскочило солнце. Самолет качнуло, словно люльку. И опять сказка рядом со мной поскакала.[77]
>
> […] my eyes were fixed on the earth. Below is Leningrad. The city of my youth. In it I met Her. She took the place of my mother. […] The streets of this city are my forest paths. I walk along them as I would along the taiga. Every apartment building is a familiar tree. Every tree has its own history and secrets. […] I wander along the streets like a hunter along the taiga. I don't search for animals, but instead for kind words and thoughts. There is so little goodness and warmth in the world. There is so much noise and commotion. But in this urban commotion I became completely different. […] The city melted away in the dark blue haze. Like a winged reindeer, the airplane galloped about the clouds as if through the white snow. The airplane rocked as if it were a cradle. And once again a fairytale galloped alongside me.

Two things occur simultaneously in this passage. First, the narrator's position inside the plane allows him to look down on Leningrad from a distanced vantage point to understand the "city of [his] youth" – and the promise of the "new fairytale" of Soviet life that it once promised – in terms of the bigger picture of his life trajectory. Reduced to the outlines of its streets in the distance, the narrator can understand the city itself as an ecosystem, a substitute for the taiga of his youth that he has left behind. From a distance, the narrator recognizes his grief as a sense of displaced purpose: his urban lifestyle cannot subsume the taiga that shaped his worldview from birth. Instead, it leaves him without a sense of purpose, searching for spiritual "goodness and warmth" in a world where his material comforts have been met. Flying close to the spiritual realm of the sun (and the essence of his dead mother), the plane's flight path first allows the narrator to look carefully at this sense of spiritual unrest and physical displacement from the safe distance of the sky, and then obscures it by leaving it behind in the clouds. The plane's closeness to the spiritual realm also brings a sense of spiritual rest for the psychically disoriented narrator, the sun "rocking the plane, as if it were a cradle."

As the plane flies closer to the familiar taiga in which he was born, the narrator's sudden recognition of the places below triggers a sensation of his heart "falling to the ground", pulled by its connection to the topography below. This sudden feeling of connection to the earth allows the narrator to organize the previous memories and echoes of his childhood and the "old fairytales" and understand his present place within them, which triggers a monologue about the environmental changes that have taken place in the taiga and the responsibility of people towards it. With this realization, the narrator's fragmented psyche gains sudden clarity, after which point the plane lands (in a moment that is not recounted in the text) and the plot of the novel suddenly becomes linear, making space for an extended account of the narrator's father's life. In one of the narrator's early memories, his shaman grandfather gives him an amulet of a swan, saying: "the

[77] Shestalov, "Kogda kachalo menia solntse," 7-8..

winged swan—your winged god—flew here from afar, from the headwaters of the Sos'va river. […] He will help you. He flies to faraway places, where the Mansi cannot walk, he dives deeply, where the Mansi cannot be. Take the amulet and you will be strong."[78] For Shestalov's narrator, the plane's body and flight takes on features of the swan that his grandfather ascribed to him, allowing him spiritual vision of the depths of his memories in space and time and allowing him to understand his place within them.

The heterotopic qualities of the airplane allowed Tegryne, Rytkheu's young, fifties-era protagonist, to understand her own place as an Indigenous intellectual within the fairytale of Soviet progress, her seamless motion between birthplace and urban center signifying a rite of passage into a new stage of life, and of Chukchi national development. Nineteen years later, the airplane had become a place in which the now-middle-aged Tegrynes such as Shestalov's protagonist could learn to recognize and reconcile the hidden spatiotemporal boundaries that Soviet Indigenous body straddled: both the Soviet intellectual fairytale that they had achieved and the older ancestral ones that were impossible to leave behind.

Aerial Visions of Ecological Change

The *Bildung* narrative would evolve and adapt throughout the next two decades, coinciding with the rapid changes to Siberian space (and to the human relationships along with it). By the mid-sixties, a more explicitly ecological component begins to emerge alongside personal biography in fictional accounts of Siberian aerial life.[79] In an early scene of Vladimir Sangi's (Nivkh) 1965 novel *False Chase* (*Lozhnyi gon*), a shared aerial view of the taiga from a helicopter window mirrors Nivkh generational attitudes about the environment and their lives. In the novel, three hunters are sent by helicopter to a remote site to hunt for sable and other animals and fulfill their kolkhoz fur quotas. The men represent three generations: Luchka is an elder fluent in traditional knowledge of Nivkh ways, Nekhan a mature, highly skilled, communist, and finally, Plargun a teenager hoping to gain work skills before deciding on a career path and enrolling at the university. For first-time fliers Plargun and Luchka, the movement of the helicopter is initially disorienting, its sharp turns and dips causing them to lose temporary control of their bodies. Once the helicopter rights itself, they become reoriented in their bodies, which enables them to read the earth in detail.[80]

Strikingly, the process of aerial reading prompts both characters to sketch an environmental history of the region. For instance, Plargun's observations of the taiga landscape, including its, "hills, bogs, rivers, and lakes" is punctuated by the traces of human activity:

> Пларгун с удивлением заметил: через бесконечную тайгу с ее сопками, марями, реками и озерами, хотя и не часто, но проходят узкие светлые полоски. Это трассы, вырубленные геофизиками и лесниками. Когда они только успели сделать это? А вот на сопках и возвышениях желтые пятна, с высоты напоминающие куропачьи

[78] Shestalov, 20.

[79] There is an ecological component present in "Tegryne Flies to Khabarovsk": the young protagonist's inherent interest in botany inspires both the trajectory of her life and her ability to read the earth below. However, this ecological component is for the most used in the service of the story's overarching narrative of Indigenous *Bildung*, with the vectoral motion of the plane and the corresponding temporal trajectory of the protagonist's educational development serving as the primary devices for organizing the plot.

[80] Nekhan, who is shown to be a seasoned flier, also looks out the window "thinking about his own business", but the precise nature of his thoughts is not revealed to the reader, nor to Nekhan's fellow passengers. (See V. Sangi, ed., *Siianie Severa: Sbornik rasskazov narodov Severa* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1978).

лунки. Они разбросаны на многие десятки километров. Это следы сейсмических работ. Ищут нефть. Слева, отсеченный от моря длинной бугристой косой с ольшаником, открылся залив Нга-Биль с множеством островов, темнеющих густым рощами из корявой приземистой лиственницы. […] Край бескрайней земли и начало бесконечного океана. Океан и суша навечно сшиты здесь между собой белой строкой. Сколько помнит память человека, на этих берегах стояли древние стойбища. Не красивые места искал человек. Сказочное обилие рыбы и морского зверя привлекли его.[81]

Plargun noticed with surprise: although they were sparse, light, thin stripes cut across the endless taiga, with its hills, scrub bogs [*mari*], rivers and lakes.[82] These were roads cleared by geophysicists and foresters. When did they have the time to complete this? And over there on the hills and high ground were yellow spots, which from above resembled partridge eyes. They were scattered across many dozens of kilometers. These were traces of seismic exploration. They are searching for oil. On the left, cut off from the sea by a long, hummocky spit with an alder thicket, Nga-Bil' Bay appeared, with its multitude of islands, darkened by thick groves of squat and gnarled larches. […] The edge of the boundless earth and the beginning of the endless ocean. The ocean and dry land were forever intertwined by the white line between them. For as long as man's memory can remember, ancient settlements stood on these shores. Man didn't search for beautiful places. He was drawn here by the fantastic abundance of fish and sea animals.

The vista from the helicopter allows Plargun to recognize the scope of the environmental changes taking place that would not necessarily be visible to someone embedded in the rapid tempos of everyday life on the ground. From the air, the distances of the "endless taiga" shrink, allowing the viewer (and the reader) to understand the extent to which the natural, recognizable landmarks of the ecosystem have changed. Raised in the Soviet school system and planning a possible career as a geologist or geographer, Plargun recognizes the landmarks of oil and forestry expeditions not for their familiar imagery, which is invisible from the distance of flight, but instead for their shapes and colors, which clash with the surrounding topography: "traces of seismic exploration" on the highlands and volcanic hills are recognizable only as "yellow spots resembling partridge eyes" scattered across the land, while the "roads carved by geophysicists and foresters" are visible only as "narrow, light stripes" cutting through the organic forms of the earth. In contrast, the view of the ocean meeting the land allows Plargun to grasp his own people's history in the region. From an ungrounded distance, the land and the sea transform from "boundless land" and "endless ocean" separated by the line of the shore to a contained, but interrelated whole, whose contours and rich resources accommodated the "ancient settlements" of Plargun's ancestors.

For the elder Luchka, this same vista evokes existing lived and ancestral knowledge and allows him to see it in a new way. Luchka recognizes a river below due to his existing knowledge of its shape ("it goes through a lake and into the bay"). This reading then prompts

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[81] V. Sangi, *Lozhnyi gon* (Novosibirsk: Molodaia proza Sibiri, 1968), 15–16.

[82] *Mar'* is a Russian toponym borrowed from the Evenk language to describe a type of boggy woodland terrain present in parts of eastern Siberia. The terrain consists of boggy permafrost interspersed with scrubby birch and larch forest. See M. N. Mel'kheev, "mar'," in *Geograficheskie nazvaniia Vostochnoi Sibiri. Irkutskaia i Chitinskaia oblasti.* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1969), https://east_sibir_toponyms.academic.ru/554/марь.

him to tell Plargun the stories of the place names below. The river, K'atlang-i,[83] means "tart" (*terpkaia*) to describe the taste of the water, which has been polluted by the nearby oilfields, while the bay Nga-Bil', means "Place of Large Animals" (*Mesto krupnykh zverei*), a toponym that is no longer accurate due to the consequences of the river and bay's pollution, first due to Japanese and later Soviet oil drilling.[84] In telling these stories, he describes how Nivkh fishing and hunting communities had been displaced: "They scared away the animals, infected the fish with oil—it became impossible to eat them. And the Nivkh left the bay."[85] Luchka's aerial reading of the landscape becomes a strategy for helping communicate ancestral knowledge to Plargun (and thus the younger generation educated in the Soviet system). The holistic bird's-eye view of the river and bay allow him to illustrate the larger stakes of the stories with which Luchka himself is already familiar, demonstrating the extent to which individual stories about Nivkh names and history are connected to each other and to local place. In this sense, Luchka's aerial reading (and telling) of the landscape illustrates the broader structures of orally transmitted, ancestral knowledge for both Plargun and readers, allowing them to understand how each part functions within a broader cosmological system.

For Plargun, the juxtaposition of these two landscapes, as well as his newfound environmental and linguistic knowledge from Luchka, triggers a set of flashbacks (similar to those in "Tegryne Flies to Khabarovsk") in which the protagonist makes sense of his personal history and dreams for the future. Plargun's biography is linear, but unfinished: retracing Plargun's early childhood and education in the taiga, the narrative reveals Plargun's Soviet development as incomplete due to his indecision about his future. Plargun is situated in a precarious position between the Indigenous past and the Soviet future: his uncle prefers he remain at home to work as a hunter, while Plargun wishes to channel his love for the taiga through higher education in the city, contributing to knowledge about his homeland through a career as a geographer, geologist, or teacher. As such, Plargun's vision for himself and his place in the world is muddled, torn between his natural attachment to the landscape (as observed in the contours of the shoreline) and the desire to build something greater than himself (as observed in the traces of scientific observations). The scene sets the stage for one of the major dramatic conflicts of the novel – Plargun's initiation (through the hunt) as a Nivkh man and his impending choice to either stay and follow a traditional path as a hunter or move to the city to become initiated as a Soviet intellectual. The helicopter thus delivers Plargun and his fellow hunters into the heart of the plot both literally (by delivering them to the hunting site) and figuratively, the aerial perspective spatializing the overarching existential tensions that follow. For both characters, the helicopter cabin's heterotopic communal space enables cross-generational forms of knowledge exchange, both revealing the growing fissures between generational attitudes towards personal duty, tradition, and the environment within their community, and allowing them to be overcome. Whereas aerial reading allows the elder Luchka to visualize and communicate knowledge that is innately known, for the younger Plargun, it reveals new forms of knowledge that he has yet to learn, a precarious position which the novel leaves unresolved.

[83] Plargun, knows the river only by its Russian name Khatagli, also the name of an oilfield nearby. Luchka tells Plargun that "The Russians wrote Khatagli on their maps because their ear doesn't hear Nivkh speech well" (17).
[84] Luchka notes that "We have also sullied [the water]" (Sangi 17).
[85] Sangi, *Lozhnyi gon*, 17.

Personal growth is fully subsumed by social and environmental development in the metaphorical airspace of *Sibiriak* Viktor Astafiev's *King Fish (Tsar'-ryba,* 1976).[86] Described by publishers as a "narration in stories," *King Fish* is composed of twelve stories narrated by a single first-person narrator, a rural Siberian by birth who has relocated to Moscow to work in a white-collar job. The stories in the narrative are intersecting episodes from the narrator's various journeys along the Yenisei, which together form a novel-like[87] "narrative that reproduces the physical and social environment in which Astafiev has always lived" in the upper stretches of the Yenisei River near Krasnoyarsk. The novel is considered one of the best examples of Soviet nature writing from the 1970s. As Mika Perkiömäki has argued, for Astafiev the Yenisei "river is not just a setting— […] it is an active, leading character." Encounters with the river and its environs allow the narrator and other characters to explore broader questions about human relationships to nature amidst the rapid changes taking place in the region.[88] Although most of the stories are specifically concerned with human and non-human life on the ground along various stretches of the river, airplanes are implicitly present throughout as the narrator's primary means for returning home. Aerial life appears more explicitly in two stories, "Damka" ("Little Lady"), which describes a flight to the narrator's birthplace, and "Net mne otveta" ("No Answer for Me"), which recounts various flights from Krasnoyarsk back to Moscow.[89]

In "Damka," the social facets of aerial life such as the airport and airplane cabin emphasize Siberia's physical and temporal distance from the narrator's chosen home in the center, stoking feelings of frustration, impatience, and alienation. For instance, the small regional airport in Yeniseisk, while "cozy in appearance," is shown to have a shabby interior and the "same civic smell […] that is typical of all gloomy provincial railway stations." Although the airport contains traces of the slick, modern airports that dominated both Soviet and Western imagery of the jet age, they cannot overcome the influence of Siberia's social and climatic conditions on the space itself: the terminal's "fashionable seats, upholstered with synthetic leather" have been slashed by razor blades, exposing their "dirty, foam-rubber" innards, the floor is covered with a "white puddle" and broken glass from an overturned bottle of milk, and clouds of infamous Siberian mosquitoes conquer the well-dressed crowd of waiting passengers and bounce against the modern, glass-paneled windows to the tarmac.[90] The terminal is no embodiment of modern cosmopolitan efficiency, but instead mirror to a region corroded by neglect and bureaucratic inefficiency: "as is usual in distant, half-neglected airports [*v dalekikh, polubesprizornykh aeroportakh*], the passengers were made to wait" – not due to mechanical difficulties but instead due to pilot indifference. As such, the Yeniseisk airport is shown to be a heterotopic microcosm of stereotypical Siberian backwardness. This backwardness is revealed to be not the fault of Siberian individuals or communities, but instead a result of state indifference,

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[86] Although Astaf'ev uses the masculine *tsar'* to describe the fish, the title is often translated as *Queen Fish*, perhaps to match the feminine gender of *ryba*, which is used throughout the story from which the novel gets its name. See, for instance, the novel's 1982 English translation: Viktor Astafiev, *Queen Fish: A Story in Two Parts and Twelve Episodes*, trans. Kathleen Cook (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982).

[87] Although its plot structure eludes genre classifications, *Queen-Fish* is often described by scholars as a novel-like work, and many use "novel" as a short-hand reference, a practice I have chosen to adopt here.

[88] Mika Perkiömäki, "'The Sovereign of the River and the Sovereign of All Nature-in the Same Trap' The River in Viktor Astafiev's Queen Fish," in *Water in Social Imagination: From Technological Optimism to Contemporary Environmentalism* (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2017).

[89] The narrator starts the novel with a return homeward, noting that he is compelled to make the trip "rarely by my own will or choice," but "more often than not for funerals and wakes" of friends and relatives. (Viktor Astaf'ev, *Tsar'-ryba* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1980), 7.)

[90] *Tsar'-ryba*, 69.

petty regional officials, and severe climate, demonstrating the extent to which state efforts to transform and modernize Siberian space were still passing its everyday citizens by.[91]

Aboard the plane, the view of the earth below offers the narrator reprieve from the previous circumstances of his travels, as the plane reveals a continuous vista of the Yenisei River:

> […] самолет почти все время летел над Енисеем и […] сколько красот я увидел в оконце! Уроженец горных мест, я и не знал, что по среднему Енисею простираются неоглядные заболоченные низины с редкими худыми лесами, с буроватыми болотами и желтыми чарусами средь них. Пятна и борозды озер с рябью утиных табунов, с белыми искрами лебедей и чаек возникали под левым крылом в то время, как под правым, гористым берегом красным крохалем бежал навстречу красный бакен и над ним, наклоненные, рыжели утесы или выломы гор, меж которыми по щелям, цепляясь друг за дружку, бежали к верху деревья, желто пенящаяся акация, жимолость, бересклетник и белопенная таволга.[92]
>
> […] almost the entire time the plane flew over the Yenisei and […] what beauty I saw in the window! A native of mountainous regions, I didn't know that stretched out along the middle of the Yenisei were endless marshlands with occasional thin forests, with brownish bogs and yellow swamps amongst them. Spots and furrows of lakes with ripples of duck flocks, with the white sparks of swans and seagulls appeared beneath the left wing while at the bottom of the mountainous right-hand shore a red beacon ran out to greet us like a red merganser, and above it sloped reddening cliffs or crags in the mountains: along the crevices between them, running skyward were chains of trees—frothy yellow acacia, honeysuckle, spindle-tree, and white foamy meadowsweet.

The view of the Yenisei River from above allows the narrator (and the reader) to see a more complete picture of the river ecosystem, which the novel generally presents as fragmented locations in various episodes from the narrator's life. Whereas for much of the novel, the reader learns about the river ecosystem through characters' lived interactions with it, the ungrounded view of the river as viewed from above allows the narrator and reader to locate these fragments within the larger picture of the river system itself, including the stretches that are (for the narrator and by extension the reader) less familiar. The vastness of the ecosystem below strains against Russian syntax, revealing itself in a series of nested, intertwining clauses in which figurative language blends together with the landscape itself (such as the buoys resembling the merganser bird). As such, the aerial view here allows the reader to grasp the highly localized social and environmental relationships modeled in the narrator's birthplace in the lower Yenisei as part of a far larger regional space.[93] This "big picture" view thus allows the narrator and reader to

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[91] *Tsar'-ryba*, 70. This culture continues aboard the plane, when the narrator finds his seat occupied by a friend of the pilot who has been allowed onto the plane as a "favor." The narrator is forced to spend the duration of the flight in the aisle, perched in a near-standing position as the noisy, boorish passengers aboard the flight show disdain for his urban, elite appearance.

[92] *Tsar'-ryba*, 73.

[93] As the plane's path continues towards the narrator's destination near his native village Chush, it also reveals the extent to which the specific world of Chush is mirrored in the countless other villages along the Yenisei – which connects the everyday life and fate of that village (as depicted in the novel) to the surrounding region and ecosystem (*Tsar'-ryba*, 74).

understand the ecological and social themes of the text as a part of the broader ecosystem itself – and inherently connected to life outside of it – rather than as an isolated set of places or events.

Appearing in the last episode of the narrative,[94] *Queen Fish*'s second aerial scene offers less comfort for the now older narrator, who recounts "surveying [his] native places anew" [*snova obozrevaiu rodnye mesta*] on various flights from Krasnoyarsk back to Moscow and feeling as if "I am looking at [the Yenisei] for the last time and bidding it farewell forever."[95] Whereas the narrator's previous flight from Moscow *to* Siberia allows him to see and appreciate his birthplace within a larger system of social and environmental relationships, the flight away *from* Siberia reveals a desire to capture its local specificity amidst the rapid changes altering those relationships. As in *Lozhnyi gon*, the narrator is able to understand the shape and scale of those changes through the map-like qualities of aerial perspective: as his plane circles over Krasnoyarsk, he observes only that it "is becoming wider, more full of houses, noisier, and a bit more alien,"[96] before recalling memories of the city as it previously existed, both within Siberian history (in an account of Peter Simon Pallas' visit in 1772) and the narrator's childhood.

As the distance between the plane and the earth grows, the narrator remarks that his reading of the earth relies increasingly on intuition rather than vision: "We are flying high and it is no longer with my vision, but by inner vision that I sense the hillock nearby the mouth of the Greater Slizneva River.[97] This transition can be observed in the shifts in the narrator's description of the space: whereas closer to the ground, the relationship between aerial vision and memory are causal, memories being triggered by concrete features of the topography below. At a higher altitude, the memories meld with physical description to fill in the details of the landscape that can't be discerned from above, as in this passage describing the narrator's view of a hydroelectric dam on a once-familiar stretch of the river:

> Мана! Я поискал глазами рыжий гребешок Манского быка. Нету! Гидростроители смахнули. И сама красавица река ощетинена торосами сплавного леса. Через Ману проложен мост. Когда в устье реки бурили грунт под опоры, на восемнадцатиметровой глубине попадалась в пробы древесина. Утопленный и зарытый лес, все больше лиственница -- она в воде почти не гниет. […] Забирая правее, выше, мчался самолет, оставляя по левому крылу в разъятой голубизне небес леса и горы, родимый Енисей, берега которого отсюда, с пугающей высоты, как в древности, видятся нетронутыми, девственно чистыми, погруженными в мохнатую тишину.
>
> Mana! I searched with my eyes for the red crest of the Mana abutment. It wasn't there! The hydroelectric builders had swept it away. And the river beauty herself bristled with hummocks of floating timber. A bridge was laid across the Mana. When they drilled the subsoil at the mouth of the river for the piles, pieces of wood appeared in the samples at depths of eighteen meters. A submerged and buried forest, now mostly larch, which almost doesn't rot in water. […] Turning to the right and upward the plane sped along, leaving along its left wing, in the broken blueness of the heavens, forests and mountains,

[94] *Tsar'-ryba*, 388-400.
[95] *Tsar'-ryba*, 388.
[96] *Tsar'-ryba*, 389.
[97] "Высоко летим и уже не зрением, дном его чую я бугорок неподалеку от устья Большой Слизневки" (*Tsar'-ryba*, 396).

> my native Yenisei, the banks of which, from a frightening height, appear as they did in ancient times, untouched, pristine, and immersed in wooly silence.

In the heterotopic space of the plane cabin, the Mana headland of the narrator's *imagination* fuses with the Mana headland of present *reality*, revealing the disparities between them. The Mana of the narrator's imagination no longer exists on the physical map of the Yenisei due to the changes brought to the riverbed by the nearby hydroelectric station. However, the impressions of the landscape that are still present in the narrator's memory allow the narrator to assess the full extent of environmental damage, filling in the flood planes with the forest that once stood there. Simultaneously, the increasingly obscured details of the departing landscape allow him to read in its general shape the ancient forms of the ecosystem, erasing the traces of human intervention and returning it (at least in the imagination) to its most ancient and virginal state.

Generally, the narrator's thoughts follow the flight's path, a phenomenon which he describes specifically.[98] The visions that emerge from two simultaneous "flights" are layered on one another, establishing tension between the narrator's memories and the reality of the earth at present. In this regard, for Astafiev, the aerial view does not so much tell the story of the narrator's *personal* development, but rather traces his changing relationship to his birthplace as a metric for understanding the ecological changes that accompanied the *nation*'s development. Whereas the homecoming flight *to* Siberia allows the narrator to appreciate his connection to a broader, present-day ecosystem, his departure *from* Siberia (which he has now experienced in the lived present) forces him to confront the spatial and environmental alienation that has occurred during his physical absence.

Out of Place in the Air

In Nenets writer Anna Nerkagi's novella *Aniko of the Nogo Clan* (*Aniko iz roda Nogo*), the ungroundedness of aeromobility becomes a formal narrative device through which the protagonist can process and take control of feelings of placelessness and unbelonging. Published in 1977 when the author was just twenty-five years old, the semi-autobiographical novella was Nerkagi's first foray into fiction writing and helped assure her membership in the Soviet Writer's Union in the following year.[99] The novel depicts a twenty-year-old Aniko, a Nenets geology student living in Tyumen who returns to her birthplace Laborovaia, a settlement in Yamalo-Nenets Oblast, for her mother's funeral. Like many Soviet Indigenous children (including Nerkagi herself), whose villages were too small and remote to support a local school system, Aniko was separated from her family at the age of six and sent to a series of residential schools (*internaty*) for Indigenous children before entering university. For the most part, the details of Aniko's separation are focalized through her father Seberui, who is wracked with guilt about losing his oldest daughter to the state, which he still associates with Russian rule.[100] As a child,

[98] For instance, when the plane is circling Krasnoyarsk on departure, the narrator observes that his "memory circled over the city" (*kruzhila moia pamiat' nad gorodom*) (*Tsar'-ryba*, 394).

[99] Nerkagi fashions many details of Aniko's biography after her own, the details of which she described in a speech to the Writer's Union when she joined in 1978. Like Aniko, Nerkagi was separated from her family and sent to an *internat* from an early age, after which she went on to study geology at a university in Tyumen. Nerkagi lost her mother at 24 and expressed feelings of guilt for leaving her father, a hunter, alone. (See Konstantin Lagunov, "Aniko iz roda negnushshikhsia," in *Portrety bez retushi* (Tiumen': Tiumen', 1994), 22–48.)

[100] Seberui is depicted as a good Soviet worker and war hero who willingly allowed Aniko to go to school when "a Russian arrived on horseback to Serebrui's *chum* [a skin tent used by nomadic reindeer herders in northwestern Siberia]." (Anna Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo," in *Molchashshi: povesti* (Tiumen': SoftDizain, 1996), 312.)

Aniko arrived home for her first summer holiday to find no family (or dwelling) in Laborovaia due to a misunderstanding: her semi-nomadic family had moved their reindeer to a summer pasture located several hours away. For subsequent holidays, Aniko thus remained at school "with the Russians," to become a model Soviet citizen.[101] Returning home for the first time in over a decade, Aniko therefore has little familiarity with her birthplace, relying on faint early childhood memories to place herself there. Finding her aging father ailing and alone, she must choose whether to remain with him in their Nenets community (and thus relearn a language and culture that her schooling had taught her was backward), or to return to her "cultured" life in the city as a promising young scholar, a choice which constitutes the novella's central conflict.

At the time of its publication, *Aniko* received fleeting recognition in the national press, and was mostly touted as an exemplar of a promising multinational literary scene emerging in Tyumen alongside the gas and oil boom in the region.[102] However, the novella garnered greater interest in literary publications focusing on issues of region or nationality. Reviews in these publications expressed interest in the nuance with which the novella represented Aniko's cultural and geographic dilemma,[103] a theme that is also central to retrospective scholarship and criticism about the novella. *Aniko*'s resonance within the regional press speaks to the urgency of its spatial concerns for Siberian readers, namely the very real crisis of identity and location that many young Siberians – and particularly Indigenous Siberians – faced in modern Soviet society, a problem that was in part created by state institutional structures. The novella's two scenes in which Aniko flies between Tyumen and Laborovaia utilize aeriality as a formal device for narrating Aniko's inner state. These scenes evoke airspace not only to convey its centrality to late Soviet Indigenous life, but also to convey the young protagonist's sense of being out of place and time, an unforeseen consequence of her success in the Soviet education system.

Aniko's introduction occurs a third of the way into the novel, following a lengthy account of her mother's death and her father's subsequent efforts to contact her.[104] Aniko appears in a small airport in Salekhard, the regional center of the Iamalo-Nenets okrug and the first stopover in a multi-day, multi-step air journey between her home in Tyumen and her birthplace Labrovaia:

> В Салехарде, в аэропорту, Анико узнала, что пассажирских рейсов на Лабровую нет. На вопрос, как можно туда попасть, дежурная в справочном отделе сказала коротко и ясно:
> – Не знаю.

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[101] "Aniko iz roda Nogo,", 312.

[102] I have been unable to find any sustained reviews or studies of Nerkagi's work in the national press before the 1980s, although in several instances, Nerkagi is praised alongside other Tyumen writers for her fresh perspective on life in the region. (See, for example, Naum Mar, "Tiumen': Polgoda spustia," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 16, 1978; Konstantin Lagunov, "Nashi pervye shagi," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 31, 1978.) Another editorial praises a subplot in the novella about Pavel, a Russian geologist who befriends Nenets hunters, as a successful instance of contemporary prose about friendship of the peoples. (See "Chuvstvo sem'i edinoi," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 25, 1979.

[103] While Nerkagi was praised for her nuanced treatment of Aniko's choice, and particularly for the novella's success at realistically representing Aniko's subjective inner state, Soviet critics were dissatisfied with its ambiguous ending. See, for example Anatolii Omel'chuk, "Trudnyi vybor Aniko," *Poliarnaia zvezda* 1979, no. 3 (June 1979): 112–13. See also Sazonov, G. "Uekhat', vernut'sia, uekhat'." *Tiumenskii komsomolets*, Jan. 20, 1978; Komissarova, "Kak oni mogut zhit' tut?" *Druzhba narodov*, no. 8, 1979.

[104] The novella is focalized through the perspective of several characters, including Aniko, her father, and several other close community members.

– То есть как «не знаю»?
Полная рыжая женщина ответила с раздражением:
– Туда, девушка, летают только грузовые самолеты да почтовые два раза в месяц.[105]

In Salekhard, at the airport, Aniko learned that there were no passenger flights to Labrovaia. When asked how to get there, the attendant at the information desk replied shortly and clearly: "I don't know."
"What do you mean 'you don't know'?"
The full-figured, red-headed woman answered with an air of annoyance: "Only cargo and postal planes fly there, young lady. Twice a month."

Aniko's initial appearance in Salekhard, rather than in her current home of Tyumen, (which in the novella appears only in Aniko's memories of the recent past) positions her in a present detached from place and time. Aniko first appears in an airport, her mobility at the whim of external forces that neither she nor the people serving her control.[106] For Siberians, airports often signified waiting and uncertainty: subject to irregular schedules and rapidly changing climate conditions, Siberian fliers from remote regions were often required to wait for "days or weeks" in air terminals or lodgings in stopover towns when traveling to and from their homes.[107] The passivity, liminality, and suspension of time contained in the site of the Salekhard airport and itsreflect Aniko's inner state. Unlike the text's initial depictions of her father Seberui, which include detailed exposition of his character and physical appearance, Aniko initially eludes description, granted fewer details than even minor characters like the airport employee. In Salekhard, Aniko is suspended in the present, detached from any determinate sense of place or time and defined by the external forces acting on her on her rather than by a cohesive sense of self. This existential state continues to Aniko's next stop in Askarka, which blends almost seamlessly into the episode in Salekhard due to the text's omission of the flight between the two cities. Instead Aniko abruptly appears in her next location, where she must wait for another three days.

Subsequently, the reader must piece together fragments of Aniko's character through places and memories that reveal themselves alongside each subsequent leg of her travels, flickering between the present and the distant and recent past. Although Aksarka is in theory familiar – the reader learns that she "finished tenth grade here," and she spends the night at her former school – Aniko discovers that "everything had become foreign" (*vse stalo chuzhim*) amidst the changes to the town in the few years since her graduation. Time has rendered reference points such as teachers, friends, and even the location of certain places such as the classroom and dormitory nonexistent or alien, triggering in Aniko not a sense of disorientation,

[105] Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo," 335–36.
[106] Learning that there are no flights to her destination and having been excused from her coursework for just ten days, Aniko is advised to travel to Aksarka, the "regional center (*raionnyi tsentr*) of Priural'skii region," where she will be able to catch a postal helicopter to Laborovaia.
[107] Habeck and Kuev have argued that although air travel shortened travel times and improved comfort and ease of access to transportation in some regions, it did little to overcome the long periods of waiting as a "habit" and "well-developed social convention" that Siberians had come to endure when traveling between destinations. Instead, it replaced old forms of waiting required for boat or overland transport (e.g., waiting for the ice to freeze or thaw) with new, modern forms of waiting, which "lay in the degree of state control over mobility, of mechanization and individual dependence, and of being able to resort to alternative modes of traveling." (See "Implications of Infrastructure," 41–42.)

but also feelings of "resentment and bitterness" (*obida i gorech'*) due to the decoupling of place from memory that has occurred.[108]

Aboard the postal helicopter that will bring her to her home, Aniko and the reader are presented with the novella's first aerial glimpses of Siberia:

> Когда уже летели, Анико все время смотрела в иллюминатор. Места незнакомые, а сердце волнуется, будто узнает и эти озера, и редкий лесок, что остался позади. Садились в Белоярске и Щучьем. Оба поселка Анико помнила. В первом она кончила восемь классов, а в Щучьем—начальные четыре. Сейчас они были не те, что раньше, и Анико не узнавала в них ничего из своего детства.[109]
>
> Once they were in the air, Aniko spent the entire time looking out the window. The places were unfamiliar, but her heart was full, as if it would come to recognize these lakes and the occasional forest that was left behind. The plane landed at Beloiarsk and Shchuch'ii. Aniko remembered both towns. She completed the eighth grade in the first and went to primary school in Shchuchii. They were not the same now as they had been before and Aniko didn't recognize anything from her childhood in them.

Gazing through the window of the helicopter, the rationalizing aerial view performs a slightly different task than from the aerial visions of Soviet *Bildung* present in earlier works by Indigenous writers, in which aerial vision is a device through which Siberian subjects come to gain a new perspective on relationships to local and national space, or to learn to read and articulate their own personal histories. In contrast, for Aniko, the rationalization of space that occurs through flight reveals the fractured sense of place and identity generated by the Soviet education system, while also becoming a means of overcoming the dislocation that she experiences on the ground.

The helicopter's route is essentially a reversal of Aniko's educational journey, taking her backwards in time through her memory from the present (Tyumen, which we never see) to tenth grade (Askarka), to eighth grade (Beloiarsk), and finally to fourth grade (Shchuch'ii). With each landing, the disorientation Aniko felt in Askarka becomes amplified as the temporal distance between her memories and the present grows and the distance to her birthplace shrinks. In the air, however, the distance between the earth and the helicopter cabin defamiliarize and anonymize the territories of her past, decoupling them from her rational memories. From above, the places below are, by nature, "unfamiliar" (*neznakomye*), yet in this unfamiliarity, Aniko can innately sense that she could learn to recognize the familiarity of natural landmarks below. In this manner, the window is a portal through which Aniko can come to know the landscape of her native region and anchor herself according to the slower, deeper temporalities of ancestral place.

It is at this moment of spiritual recognition that the reader is finally granted access to Aniko's memories, which are nested from the most recent to most distant past, starting from the moment that she first learned of her mother's death. The news uncovers more distant memories of her time at school and her faint awareness of the early childhood years preceding it:

> В сознании все время жила мысль, что мать и отец есть, пусть где-то далеко, но они живы, и значит, по окончании института у Анико будет возможность съездить к

[108] Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo," 336.
[109] Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo" 336.

ним, полюбить, простить их. И от них получить прощение за то, что в жизни по-прежнему много суеты и мало времени для любви.[110]

All the time a thought was alive in her consciousness: that she had a mother and a father, perhaps somewhere far away, but they were alive and that meant that after she graduated from the university, Aniko would have the opportunity to go visit them, to come to love them, to forgive them. And to receive forgiveness from them, because in life there was still so much hustle and bustle and such little time for love.

Like her implicit knowing of the unfamiliar landscape below, Aniko's faint memory of her parents relies on an inherent feeling of attachment to the vague notion of birthplace and family that she has clung to as her sense of self grew more and more distant from her previous life. Although the details of this life are absent, her parents, like her birthplace (rendered as an anonymous "somewhere far away") remain comforting signifiers of identity and belonging.

At this point, the temporal orientation shifts back to the present outside of the airplane window as Aniko beholds a familiar range of mountains below:

Внизу показались горы. Анико вдруг вспомнила, что когда ее брали в школу, она прощались с горами и плакала. Сейчас представила себя маленькую, в старенькой малице и мокрых кисах. Как давно это было![111]

Mountains appeared below. Aniko suddenly remembered that when they were taking her to school, she cried as she bid farewell to the mountains. Now she imagined herself as a little girl, in a worn little deerskin *malitsa* and wet fur *kisy*. How long ago that was![112]

The memories and emotions first triggered by previous aerial views now enable Aniko a new ability to recognize the landscape below. No longer "unfamiliar places" in a vaguely familiar emotional landscape, the mountains in Aniko's last glimpse of the earth before landing emerge as a sharp and recognizable topography in her memory, allowing her to access a vivid picture of her early past. Aniko can recognize the mountains – and thus access her early memory – because of her aerial orientation: her early childhood self also encountered the mountains aerially, flying in the opposite direction *en route* to her new life at school. If flight served as a necessary means of connecting Indigenous children to the broader Soviet world, for Aniko the plane cabin is the sole place in which she can reconcile her urban Soviet present with her rural Indigenous origins. As the site of her early trauma and grief (she was "taken" (*brali*) rather than "led" (*vezli*), the airplane is paradoxically the only place in which Aniko can come to terms with her severed past. Forcibly dislocated from familial place and disoriented in the rapidly changing cities of her Soviet upbringing, Aniko feels anchored to place only in the air.

Aniko's dream of reuniting with her family and reconciling the past self that was lost is shattered amidst the reality of the life that awaits her on the ground. Although Aniko is

[110] Nerkagi, 336.
[111] Nerkagi, 336.
[112] A *malitsa* is a Nenets parka made of reindeer skin. *Kisy* are tall fur boots. While the Soviet readership was likely familiar with some of these articles of clothing from ethnographic exhibits and other educational materials, the words are both marked as distinctly Nenets, particularly for a character who generally immerses herself in Russian Soviet culture.

welcomed by her father and others in her village, she is unable to reconcile her family's lifestyle as reindeer herders with the Soviet life of "culture" that she left behind in Tyumen. No longer fluent in her native language and customs, Aniko finds herself unnaturally repulsed by her father's perceived backwardness. For the remainder of the novella, Aniko is confronted with the choice of staying to take care of her father and relearning the culture that she had long ago left behind, and returning to the now familiar urban intellectual life which she has so successfully mastered.

Wracked with guilt over the choice she is forced to make, Aniko is confronted by Pavel, a young Russian man working in Laborovaia and Aniko's love interest and foil. Pavel's life functionally mirrors Aniko's own: a geologist from the city, Pavel left his family in a Russian urban center and departed to a research station in Aniko's village, where he discovered and cultivated such a deep interest in Nenets culture that a village elder declares him "exactly like a Nenets."[113] Pavel has chosen to stay in Laborovaia and dedicate himself to bettering the lives of the villagers. Thus, when Aniko declares her intention to leave, Pavel chides her, while also declaring it her duty as an educated Nenets woman to stay, although acknowledging the difficulty of her choice. The dialogue reveals the paradoxes of the Soviet education system: a Russian man educated in the Soviet system in his native language and city, Pavel has the privilege of choice: to give up his former life and stay in Laborovaia to study local Nenets knowledge that Aniko had been required to reject. In contrast, Aniko was taken from her family and thrust into an education system that regarded her former way of life as uncultured and backwards. In mastering Soviet culture, Aniko has come to know her old life as foreign and even repugnant, yet the system expects her to return, giving up the life that she has worked so hard to embody.[114]

As Aniko rejects Pavel's assertions and prepares to depart, she learns to control flight to her advantage. Boarding the helicopter, she presses her face to the window as she watches Pavel on the runway below her: "She sat next to the plane window, but in such a way that she couldn't be seen. Pavel was standing with his coat open, and his form was becoming smaller and smaller."[115] Aniko reclaims power and agency through her control of aerial perspective. Positioning herself "so she wouldn't be visible," she claims the power of the aerial voyeur, temporarily regaining the agency she lacks on the ground. As the helicopter gains altitude, she weaponizes her gaze, watching Pavel grow smaller and smaller until he is an insignificant dot in the distance. The scene is Aniko's last, although the novella leaves the reader (along with the villagers of Laborovaia) awaiting signs of her eventual return in the dozen pages that follow before the text's equally uncertain ending. For Nerkagi, the ungroundedness of flight becomes an organizing feature for narrating the character's sense of literal and spiritual placelessness and un-belonging emerging in the collision of Siberian Indigenous identity with Soviet modernity. Airspace and aerial vision help map the character's inner sense of self, granting access to

[113] Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo," 380.

[114] Based on fieldwork done in the mid-90s, Alexia Bloch's research on Evenk women's attitudes towards the Soviet residential school system, demonstrates the complex feelings that people educated in the Soviet residential school system have towards their educational experience. Bloch's interlocutors had a mix of emotions toward Soviet *internaty*, with some expressing positive feelings both for the education and communal bonds they found, while others felt more negatively. There are many parallels to Aniko's trajectory. See *Red Ties and Residential Schools: Indigenous Siberians in a Post-Soviet State* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[115] "Она села к иллюмнатору, но так, чтобы ее не было видно. Павел стоял, распахнув шубу, и фигура его становилась все меньше и меньше"(Nerkagi, "Aniko iz roda Nogo," 389).

memories and knowledge that were previously inaccessible, and generating a familiar sense of place in the air that is impossible on the ground.

The Air from the Ground

Sibiriak writer Vasilii Shukshin's work is often distinguished from that of other village prose writers for its sharp wit and recurring themes of migration, displacement, or unbelonging.[116] In his autobiographical writing and essays, Shukshin often drew on his personal experiences migrating from rural Siberia to Moscow when discussing the material and emotional impact of Soviet urbanization on the Siberian village, and particularly the existential toll that migration had for both those who left and those who stayed behind. Born in a village in the Altai region, Shukshin left home for the nearby city of Biysk at fourteen to train as an automobile mechanic, after which he relocated to the suburbs of Moscow for a job as a metal worker. Shukshin left and returned home several times: after a stint in the Navy, he returned home to work as a schoolteacher before relocating to Moscow one final time in 1954 to study directing at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. This choice, he stated, was not so much a matter of preference, but rather one of pragmatism in a modern society that often privileged the city as the center of education, culture, and daily life.[117] Nor was the dichotomy between "city" and "village" as simple as choosing between one place or culture over the other; young people departing for the city in search of a better life might struggle to fit in or to adapt to unfamiliar elements of urban life, while those remaining in rural areas might feel bored or left behind. For Shukshin, rural-urban Soviet mobility was thus often a liminal experience, which he described in one 1967 essay as a body torn between stillness and motion:

> Так у меня вышло к сорока годам, что я – ни городской до конца, ни деревенский уже. Ужасно неудобное положение. Это даже – не между двух стульев, а скорее так: одна нога на берегу, другая в лодке. И не плыть нельзя, и плыть вроде как страшновато. Долго в таком состоянии пребывать нельзя, я знаю – упадешь. Не падения страшусь (какое падение? откуда?) – очень уж, действительно, неудобно.[118]

[116] Kathleen Parthe writes that "while some of his stories fall within the parameters of village prose, he could not accurately be called a *derevenshchik*" due to his affectionate, but ironic style and emphasis on the eccentricity of rural life (*Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), xi). John Givens states that for many critics Shukshin "occupied the middle ground" between urban and village prose." Givens argues that Shukshiin can be "can be considered the perfect embodiment of both traditional and modern notions of popular culture in Russia" because he "describes—and personifies—an important intersection between the common folk of rural Russia and the mainly urban consumers of culture, popular or otherwise," (John Givens, *Prodigal Son: Vasilii Shuksin in Soviet Russian Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). Diane Nemec Ignashev notes that "transition" for Shukshin is both a "generator of plot" and "the dominant structural principle of his narrative technique," and also helped constitute his public persona as a writer. ("Vasily Shukshin's 'Srezal' and the Question of Transition," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no. 3 (1988): 337–56.)

[117] Shukshin recalled bristling at an interviewer's questions about why he felt so strongly about preserving village culture when he himself had chosen to live in Moscow: "I stated 'If there were a film studio there, I would leave for the village once more." (See "Monolog na lesnitse" In *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), 590–605.)

[118] *Sobranie sochinenii,* 3:596.

> So it occurred to me by the age of forty—that I am not entirely urban and no longer rural. This is a horribly uncomfortable state. It is not even like sitting between two chairs, but rather like this: having one leg on the shore and another in a boat. You can't not float, but floating is sort of scary. I know it's impossible to stay in this state for long – you'll fall. It's not the falling I'm afraid of (what kind of falling? from where?) – it's just really, truly uncomfortable.

Shukshin's boat image is a play on the old Russian idiom *sidet' mezhdu dvukh stul'ev*, or "to sit between two chairs," a saying to refer to someone who tries to maintain two, opposing positions or points of view at once (akin to "being on the fence" in English).[119] Whereas in the original saying, the image of two chairs signifies the subject's precarious positionality, Shukshin's image of the boat and the shore infuses an additional layer of precarity between fixedness and motion. The Siberian subject's discomfort—and fear—is not only from being torn between two spatial allegiances, but also in the growing distance (both literal and figurative) between the two. Stretched between the moving boat and the fixed shore, Shukshin's Siberian struggles to keep them from drifting apart, while fully existing in neither, a position so precarious and uncomfortable that the boat's eventual destination is neither clear nor relevant; the subject is trapped in a position of inertia and liminality.

Shukshin examines early experiences with these feelings through contemporary transport metaphors his semi-autobiographical story "The Airplane" ("*Samolet,*" 1968).[120] The first-person narrator recalls a day when he and three other rural teenagers traveled to the regional city center to enroll at the local automotive college. On the walk up the hill to the college, a group of local boys taunt the narrator and his friends for their rural accents and mannerisms. Amidst the taunts, the narrator catches a glimpse of an airplane parked at a nearby airfield: "standing so close […] that you could go up and touch it…" The narrator compares his feeling looking at the airplane up close for the first time to his earlier wonderment during "rare" moments from his early childhood when villagers "had to look at [airplanes] in the sky" (приходилось […] видеть самолет в небе) from below as they passed overhead.[121]

Viewing the plane from the ground evokes similar feelings of awe in the narrator due to his newfound proximity to modern technology, which in his village could only be viewed from a distance. The city boys also reveal brief expressions of surprise at the plane (a rare sight even in the city), but quickly redirect their attention to the rural boys, whose prolonged expression of emotion further mark them as Other.[122] To become urban, they, too, must conceal their awe by feigning normalcy. The story emphasizes the extent to which aviation remained miraculous in the minds of everyday Soviet subjects in the nineteen-thirties and forties, when for most people airplanes were primarily encountered at a distance from below. The city's proximity to the aviation industry promised to bring aerial life closer to its inhabitants on the ground, but for most

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[119] Aleksandr Il'ich Fedorov, ed., "Sidet' mezhdu dvukh stul'ev," in *Frazeologicheskii slovar' russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Moscow: AST: Astrel', 2008), https://phraseology.academic.ru/11534/Сидеть_между_двух_стульев.

[120] The story was the last and shortest story in cycle *From the Childhood Years of Ivan Popov* (*Iz detskikh let Ivana Popova*), which was ostensibly based on episodes from Shukshin's childhood in rural Altai. The stories in the cycle are linked by a retrospective first-person narrator.

[121] Vasilii Shukshin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), 336-37.

[122] The narrator notes that "It would later come to me in dreams, that airplane. Many times, afterward I would have to walk that hill, past the airfield, but the airplane wasn't there – it was flying." [Много раз после приходилось ходить горой, мимо аэродрома, но самолета там не было – он летал.] *Sobranie sochinenii*: 2:337.

was still an image of the future, a "two-winged beauty from a distant-distant fairy tale" (двукрылый красавец из далекой-далекой сказки), as it would remain until the arrival of the passenger jetliner two decades later.[123]

In his stories taking place in the sixties, Shukshin evoked airplanes when thinking about contemporary village characters' confrontations with growing urbanization and mobility during the period. For Shukshin, aerial life is most often obscured by attachments to the earth. His works primarily examine air travel from the vantage point of peasant subjects who remain on the ground in Siberia, rather than from the perspective of young, aerially mobile subjects like himself.[124] To Shukshin's peasant characters, aerial life and the new forms of perspective emerging from the ungroundedness of aeromobility remain cloudy and out of reach, serving as a reminder of their inescapable ties to life on the ground.

For the protagonists of Shukshin's early story "Rural People" ("*Sel'skie zhiteli*"), flight exists only in the remembered past and imagined future. First published in 1962 as "Before the Flight" ("*Pered poletom*"),[125] the story traces a day in the life of an elderly woman, Malan'ia, and her preadolescent grandson Shurka as they decide whether to become first-time fliers.[126] Malan'ia's son, a decorated pilot, has offered to fly them to Moscow to visit his family. Excited, but unsure of what the trip will entail, Malan'ia seeks counsel from her middle-aged neighbor Egor, who had "traveled a lot in his time and flown on airplanes." The remainder of the story mostly consists of their dialogue over a bottle of mead, with occasional narrative interstitials focalized through Shurka, who is transcribing the conversation. With each drink, Egor reveals a new step or rule that pertains to the strange new life of flying, including the multi-step journey from the village to the Novosibirsk airport, the in-cabin flight experience, and instructions for navigating the airport and avoiding potential mishaps. Becoming more and more frightened, Malan'ia decides to take the train instead.[127]

Although Egor's outlandish tales about flying read as comical to the seasoned flyer, they also illustrate the difficulties rural Siberians faced when adapting to the new reality of air travel. While Malan'ia's circumstances make clear the tangible benefits that commercial air travel would have on her life by overcoming the distance between herself and her son's family (she has never met her son's children), Egor's account of the complex trip between the village and the airport illustrates the logistical obstacles that remained for would-be Siberian fliers. Although airplanes significantly shortened the travel time between larger Siberian cities and Moscow, the commercial passenger network had not yet reached many smaller regional towns, compelling rural passengers such as Malan'ia to travel by bus and train to Novosibirsk on a lengthy, multi-stage route before even reaching the airport to purchase tickets.[128] For elderly, semi-literate

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[123] *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:337

[124] The latter do appear in many of Shukshin's stories, but those works do not tend to evoke aerial motifs and themes to a significant extent.

[125] Vasilii Shukshin, "Pered poletom," *Trud*, April 30, 1962.

[126] Shukshin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1985, 2:90–97.

[127] This is an empty promise to Shurka, who knows his grandmother would never leave her garden for the lengthy roundtrip journey.

[128] As Egor explains, Malan'ia must first travel by bus to the railway station in Biysk, where she will transfer to a northbound train to Tomsk and disembark at Novosibirsk. Then, she must either find to the airline ticket counter in the city center, or straight to the airport, where she can also buy tickets. *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:93. (Today the train trip alone would take over nine hours.)

people like Malan'ia, the bureaucratic processes for purchasing an airfare and arriving at the correct destination create additional obstacles, due to their reliance on text-based instructions.[129]

Although Egor's account is couched in the language and imagery of Aeroflot's promotional materials, which described the speed, safety, and amenities of the Tu-104,[130] his words do not convey domestic comfort to his listeners, but instead reveal the illogical or unnatural aspects of aerial life. For instance, Egor sees the customary procedure of giving passengers a complementary candy at the beginning of the flight (intended to prevent ear discomfort from the sudden change in altitude) as a cunning way to distract passengers panicking during takeoff, the "most dangerous moment" of the flight. Similarly, the announcement to fasten one's seatbelts is explained as simply being "required" (*polozheno*), rather than revealing their real use preventing injury in the event of a crash. ("Say it like it is: we could crash [*mozhem navernut'sia*] and that's it.") Although Egor acknowledges that "jet airliners […] are of course more reliable" than propeller planes (as it was billed by the press), he does not yet trust them as safe. [131] Egor's statements are ridiculous on the surface, but they contain elements of truth left unaddressed by the popular discourse of jet-setting and air-mindedness. Egor's stories defamiliarize commercial air travel, exposing the extent to which aerial life was still intimidating and unnatural for many would-be fliers. While some of Egor's "observations" from flying are based in his personal fears and a misunderstanding of the technology (such as mistaking smoky jet exhaust for an engine fire), others, such as the puzzling lack of emergency parachutes for passengers, are true, demonstrating the extent to which the ideological discourse of flying in the early 1960s failed to address would-be passengers' real concerns about its danger. "Rural People" would likely do little to dissuade an informed readership from flying, but it reveals the extent to which aerial life remained alienating and inaccessible to some of the people in need of it most. For many average Siberians, particularly older generations, the culture of air travel remained firmly in the realm of the imagination. This detail is the hinge of the story itself: as Egor's cautionary tales unfold, the temporal goal posts of story's original title, "Before the Flight" shift. Whereas at the beginning, the flight towards which the story is oriented is situated several months in the future, by the ending it has shifted into a distant and indefinite future.

Published five years later in 1967, when Soviet passenger jet travel was over a decade old and aerial life had become increasingly entrenched in late Soviet culture, Shukshin's famous story "Oddball" ("*Chudik*") examines the experiences of a villager who *does* fly, having chosen to make the journey that Malan'ia could not.[132] The story is presented as the humorous "episodes of one trip" ("*epizody odnoi poezdki*") to an unnamed city in the Urals taken by a middle-aged man from the village called "Chudik," a colloquial variant of the common term *chudak*, and a nickname given to him by his wife (only "sometimes affectionately").[133] Chudik's trip illustrates the character's tendency to get caught up in various forces or "stories" (*istorii*) seemingly outside of his control. With each leg of his journey (by bus, train, and plane), Chudik finds himself more

[129] Egor warns Malan'ia "not to mix up the ticket counters at Tolmachevo [airport]," suggesting that "a person could walk up to the counter for eastbound flights" and mistakenly purchase a ticket heading in the wrong direction. *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:94.

[130] For instance, Egor's instructions for boarding the flight bear striking resemblance to mass media depictions of the Tu-104 circulating at the time: "Get some tickets, sit on the 'Tu-104' and in five hours you will be in Moscow, the capital of our Motherland." ("Возьмете билеты, сядете на «Ту-104» и через пять часов будете в Москве, в столице нашей Родины.") *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:93.

[131] *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:95.

[132] *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:290–98.

[133] *Sobranie sochinenii,* 2:290.

and more alienated and out of place moving through the modern world until arriving at a breaking point at his destination, at which point he abruptly returns home. Tragicomic in tone, the story reveals the struggles of a rural Siberian subject attempting to navigate modern Soviet life through its exploration of Chudik's reactions to the events taking place around him, as well as to the modern forms of mobility that his trip has compelled him to acquire.

Scholars often understand Chudik to be a typical, if not quintessential Shukshinian hero,[134] whom Nicole Christian describes as "tragi-comic figures, at once making hilarious, unsuccessful attempts to adapt, and finding themselves alienated from others by their troubled souls."[135] Despite the character's importance within Shukshin's oeuvre, Chudik generally eludes explicit description or characterization. His name (Vasilii Egorych Kniazev), profession, age, and interests are not revealed until the last lines of the story, while the "one quality" (*odna osobennost'*) attributed to him by the narrator is his passivity:

> Чудик обладал одной особенностью: с ним постоянно что-нибудь случалось. Он не хотел этого, страдал, но то и дело влипал в какие-нибудь истории—мелкие, впрочем, но досадные.[136]
>
> Chudik possessed one quality: something was always happening to him. He never wanted this, he suffered from it, but time and again he would get caught up in stories of various sorts – which, although minor, were annoying all the same.

This passivity is reflected in the narrative distance between Chudik and the story's conversational third-person narrator; although the narrative privileges Chudik's emotional and physiological reactions to the world around him, there are few instances of free indirect discourse to close the distance between the reader, narrator, and hero. Instead, Chudik's actions and interiority are primarily narrated using direct discourse or indirect discourse framed from the vantage point of a detached observer watching events and thoughts happen *to* Chudik.

Chudik's character traits and his internal struggles are instead mapped onto the episodes of his travels, which the reader is invited to witness as a passive observer, much like a visitor to the cinema.[137] In "Oddball's" airplane scene, the heterotopic qualities of aerial life function not so much for revealing the Siberian Soviet subject's internal relationships to national and local space, but instead to make literal the rural Siberian subject's out-of-placeness in modern Soviet life, even when he adheres to all of its rules. Shukshin depicts this experience by creating tension between Chudik's actions and others' perceptions. Based on his actions alone, Chudik is in fact

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[134] John Givens notes that "Russian literature has […] assigned Shukshin his own prominent place in its [literary] typology. Shukshin's signature type has long been considered the "oddball" or eccentric (chudik), a fact inevitably mentioned in references to the writer" (8). For a succinct analysis of the genealogy of the *chudik/chudak* type in late Soviet literature see Jeremy Morris, "From Chudak to Mudak? Village Prose and the Absurdist Ethics of Evgenii Popov," *The Modern Language Review* 99, no. 3 (2004): 698–701.

[135] "Manifestations of the Eccentric in the Works of Vasilii Shukshin," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75, no. 2 (1997): 201. Christian in fact adopts *chudik* from this story as a term for describing the particular qualities and social contexts for Shukshin's heroes and similar characters in the works of his contemporaries.

[136] Shukshin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:290.

[137] Shukshin in fact drew on his professional work in Soviet cinema in his personal philosophy of short story writing and believed that the most effective stories should be governed by similar laws to those of cinema. According to this philosophy, "human actions should be the center of attention in a short story" because, unlike novels "there is little space and time, it is read on the go." Under such laws, the dynamism of action would more quickly and vividly convey a message to the reader. (See "Kak ia ponimaiu rasskaz," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3:575-78).

an ideal aerial subject according to the norms and etiquette of Soviet jet-setting culture of the 1950s and 60s.[138] Although Chudik boards the plane "not without nervousness" (*ne bez robosti*), he quickly overcomes his nerves by settling into the plane's domestic cabin, turning his attention to the flight's on-board service: "Он слышал, что в самолетах дают поесть […] Ему очень хотелось поесть в самолете—ради любопытства." [He had heard that they give out meals on airplanes […] He really wanted to eat aboard a plane—out of curiosity.] Chudik has educated himself about his role as a passenger aboard a Soviet jetliner by "listening" attentively to the experiences of other passengers and is well-prepared to practice the rituals of modern aerial life. He is also aware of his duty to be a cultured passenger, correcting his excitement (and the perception of gluttony) by reframing it as distanced curiosity. He attempts to establish community with other fliers and listens attentively to the flight attendant (a "pretty [*milovidnaia*] young woman") when she directs him to fasten his seatbelt for landing, even conveying the instructions to his inattentive neighbor.[139] Upon landing he also obediently heads to the telegraph office in the airport to notify his wife of his safe arrival, a standard guideline for passengers as a safety measure for "facilitat[ing] identification of deceased passengers in case of a fatal crash."[140]

Despite his relative fluency in the norms of Soviet aerial life, other people in the airplane and airport read Chudik as an awkward outsider. His seat neighbor reacts to his attempts at conversation with exasperated silence, focusing his attention on a newspaper instead, and a worker at the airport telegraph office chides Chudik for his letter-like writing style, which she views as childish and ill-suited to the modern "open text" (*otkrytyi tekst*) format of the telegram.[141] Though Chudik's actions illustrate that he is a cultured flier, perhaps even more so than his fellow passengers (his neighbor's failure to buckle his seatbelt results in bodily injury to himself and others) Chudik's rural body and speech code him as out of place in the air, an archaic and uncultured landed body incompatible with modern, global forms of mobility and communication.

For Chudik, the realities of aerial life—at least the aerial life aboard the regional airliners on which many Siberians were obliged to travel—are incongruous with the ideals and norms in which he is so well versed. Expected amenities such as in-flight meals are absent on his hour-and-a-half-long flight, while fellow passengers are uninterested in forming the close-knit aerial communities modeled in Soviet media representation of the period. Unable to reconcile the stark differences between the banal reality of commercial aviation and its idealistic symbolism, Chudik turns these inadequacies on himself, chalking them up to his own feelings of being out of place in modern life. This internal crisis is most evident in Chudik's reaction to his first aerial view of the landscape below him:

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[138] Steven Harris points out that as commercial air travel expanded during the postwar period, discourse on aviation in Aeroflot's marketing materials and in the popular media was often aimed at teaching a previously earth-bound populus how to be model fliers and representatives of developed socialism in the international space of the air: "Echoing similar prescriptions for flying in the late 1940s and riding the Moscow Metro in the 1930s, this mix of practical information and disciplining norms aimed at transforming ordinary citizens into cultured passengers." Such rules and norms included guidelines for what kind of luggage to pack and why, how to purchase tickets and navigate the modern space of the airport terminal, what to do in the case of emergency or travel mishap, and how to properly behave on board the plane. (See Harris, "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age," 612.)

[139] *Sobranie sochinenii*: 293-94.

[140] Harris, "Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age," 612. Harris cites this guideline from the 1958 edition of *Spravochnik passazhira* (*Passenger's Handbook*).

[141] She scolds: "You're an adult man, not a preschooler!" ("Вы взрослый человек, не в детсаде!") *Sobranie sochinenii*: 294.

> Стал смотреть вниз. Горы облаков внизу. Чудик почему-то не мог определенно сказать, красиво это или нет. А кругом говорили, что «ах, какая красота!». А он подумал: «Почему же я не удивляюсь? Ведь подо мной чуть не пять километров». Мысленно отмерил эти пять километров на земле, поставил их «на попа», чтоб удивиться и не удивился.
> — Вот человек!.. Придумал же, — сказал он соседу.[142]
>
> He started to look down. Mountains of clouds below. For some reason Chudik couldn't say for sure whether this was a beautiful sight or not. But around him people were saying "Oh, how beautiful!" And he thought, "Why aren't I amazed? After all, there are nearly five kilometers under me." In his mind he measured these five kilometers on earth, turned them on their end so as to amaze himself, but he wasn't amazed.
> "That's man for you! … The things he thinks up," he said to his neighbor.

When compared with the other depictions of aerial perspective (Siberian and otherwise) discussed in this chapter, Chudik's bird's eye view is striking for its lack of transformational insights. This view is neither beautiful nor sweeping, but instead underwhelming, obscured by the topography of the air itself. Chudik cannot sense the five kilometers between him and the ground because they are obstructed by "mountains of clouds below." These mountains of clouds block the effects of the rationalizing aerial view, thereby obscuring Chudik's access to the internal insights granted by reading it. Instead, the clouds form "mountains," an aerial topography that obscures familiar topography on earth by replacing it with a banal facsimile, disorienting Chudik as an aerial subject and rendering him an earthly one. Unable to reconcile these underwhelming experiences with the audible delight of his fellow passengers, Chudik fakes cliched wonder at the miracle of aviation, thereby concealing his perceived failure as a fully formed aerial subject.

"Oddball" points to the paradox of rural mobility during the postwar period. Although Chudik is well-prepared for aerial life, his rural, Siberian body is unable to overcome its connection with the ground. The flight's inelegant landing ironically points to this fact: when approaching the runway, the pilot miscalculates the distance and "misses" (*promazal*) the runway, crash landing the plane in a field nearby. Rather than ending up in a modern urban aerodrome, Chudik disembarks practically where he started—on the rural soil of a potato field. Later in the airport, the telegraph worker makes a correction to Chudik's telegram to his wife, changing his verbiage from the more formal "*prizemlilis*" ("we have landed") to the more colloquial "*doleteli*" ("we have flown to the destination").[143] However, Chudik's supposedly naive turns of phrase are in fact more precise than the official bureaucratic jargon of aerial life: having missed runway, the plane does not fully fly up to its intended destination, as is implied by the perfective aspect and prefix of *doletet'*. In contrast, Chudik's original verb choice, *prizemlit'sia*, is more accurate: it has arrived (as per the prefix, *pri-*) on the earth, on the soil of a potato field—a play on the double-meaning of the verb's root word *zemlia.*

The rural Siberian subject's perceived inadequacies are symptomatic of the failure of the ideology of urban mobility to fulfill its promises: despite their attentive mastery of contemporary

[142] *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:293.
[143] The worker considers the verb too utopian for describing the now-ordinary experience of commercial flight, asking: "What are you, a cosmonaut or something?" *Sobranie sochinenii*: 2:94.

norms, remote Siberian bodies remain symbolically out of place in the late Soviet geographic imagination. The story's last lines implicate the reader in these assumptions, filling in the previously blank spaces in Chudik's biography with his age (thirty-nine), given name (Vasilii Egorych Kniazev), his profession (cinema operator for his town), passions (the movies) and childhood dreams of becoming an intelligence officer. The eccentric man is neither old nor illiterate like Malan'ia, but instead a Soviet man in his prime, just a year older than Shukshin himself. In many ways Chudik is a mirror of the author: the two share a name and a passion for cinema, and both work in adjacent fields, Shukshin as a film actor and director trained as an auto mechanic and Chudik a modern mechanic for the local cinema whose dreams were forged through film. The differences in their fates reveal the extent to which old power geometries remained intact for Siberians by time the Soviet Jet Age reached its height in the late sixties and seventies. In the cultural imagination, those Siberian jet-setters who pursued careers in urban centers externally embodied the values and norms of developed socialism and cosmopolitan modernity, even if internally they often felt at home only in the heterotopic space of the air. In contrast, rural Siberians who remained at home maintained strong ties to ancestral place, but in doing so sacrificed the ability to participate fully as subjects of Soviet national space, their dreams – like their bodies – remaining on the ground.

The texts in this chapter illustrate the flexibility and range of the aerial heterotopia for narrating a broad spectrum of Siberian spatial relationships and biographical experiences. Each text is distinct in the Siberian protagonist's specific experience of heterotopia as it manifests across aerial life: in various permutations of the plane cabin, airport terminal, and porthole-window. They also vary in the extent to which these experiences allow the protagonist to derive meaning (typically as a narrative of *Bildung*) from their aerial readings. The extent to which such readings are successful in constructing a coherent narrative is demonstrably correlated with the Siberian protagonist's relationships to place, home, and community, and namely with the degree of rupture between Siberian local/familial place and Soviet public/national place. These relationships are in turn influenced by other factors in Siberian protagonists' biographies, including ethnicity, class, kinship bonds, and degree of urbanization, many of which are intertwined with place-based identities.

On a deeper structural level, Siberian narratives of aerial life, and particularly of aerial reading enable the heterotopic qualities of late Soviet jet-setting to function as a mode of spatial knowledge transmission to the reader, fin a manner similar to the function of elder Luchka's aerial storytelling in Sangi's *False Chase*. Luchka utilizes the domestic, but communal space of the helicopter cabin to narrate his aerial reading of the earth below for an intergenerational audience, and in doing so replicates and illustrates the structural relationship between ancestral knowledge and the local environment. Similarly, textual narrations of heterotopic aerial reading enable Siberian writers to convey the complexity of the Siberian experience of late Soviet geographic mobility, and particularly the ruptures it created in spatial relationships and identities. The materiality of the text functions similarly to the porthole-window of the plane, mediating between the totality of the world presented in the text and the reader's ability to infer meaning from it. The reader is invited to play an active, constructive role like that of the text's protagonists. First, through the characters' experiences of aerial heterotopia, the text reveals the distinct forms that Siberian relationships to national space can take. Then, through the narrative juxtaposition of fragments (of characters' subjective aerial readings and of their fragmented internal sensory and memory responses), the reader must actively reconstruct the relationship between spatial perspective, mobility and biography, an experience which is mediated through

the reader's own rational knowledge of and phenomenal relationships to national and regional space. The aerial Siberian text therefore has heterotopic features of its own, revealing not only the personal stakes of Siberian migration within Soviet national space, but also the extent to which notions of "national space" themselves constitute a geographic imaginary sculpted by hidden spatial hierarchies and the subject's position within them.

EPILOGUE

If the nineteen-sixties and seventies marked a confluence of *Sibiriak* and Indigenous Siberian literatures, by the mid-eighties their paths would once again begin to diverge. Vasilii Shukshin died of a myocardial infarction in 1974 at the age of forty-five. He had been filming aboard a riverboat docked on the banks of the Don River, nearly two thousand miles from his native village in Altai. Viktor Astafiev and Valentin Rasputin would continue to write fiction and essays until their respective deaths in 2001 and 2015, their prose becoming increasingly entwined with the Russian nationalism that they espoused in their political lives. Nationalist sentiments had been increasingly evident in the writings of Russian intellectuals from rural backgrounds since the Khrushchev era, a response, in part, to rapid urbanization and shifts in Soviet nationalities policy which had deemphasized Russianness in favor of a more cosmopolitan "all-Soviet" identity.[1] Whereas in the seventies and early eighties these sentiments had mostly been expressed indirectly through debates deemed acceptable under the policy of inclusion (such as cultural revivalism and ecological preservation), by the late eighties nationalist attacks against the party and its perceived cosmopolitanism had become more open, as a product of and a response to the liberalization of the economy and culture under *perestroika* and a sentiment that the Russian people – especially rural Russians – had been left behind in their wake.[2] Parthe has argued that *perestroika* marked the end of Village Prose and the beginning of a new period of "post-Village Prose." These works carried over old themes into new, provincial urban settings, their plots no longer able to realistically seclude rural Russian subjects in the safety of the village. They were no longer "simply pro-village" but "also anti-city," emphasizing "the consequences not just of one uprooted person or village, but on the uprooting of the Russian peasantry."[3] Although as public figures Rasputin and Astafiev initially adopted the position of "political fence-sitters," who praised some elements of *perestroika* reform while dismissing others, they gradually turned further to the right as nationalist sentiments grew towards the end of the eighties and more blatantly embraced Russian chauvinist and anti-Semitic sentiments.[4] By the 1990s, Rasputin had given up fiction almost entirely, turning instead to the more politically-oriented genres within *publitsistika*, where he would continue to remain a predominant voice on Siberian regional concerns, even as his conservationism had turned to econationalism.

This transformation is readily apparent in Rasputin's essay "My Siberia and Yours" (*Moia i tvoia Sibir'*), first published in Irkutsk-based newspaper *Sovetskaia molodezh'* in 1984, which argued in favor of regional self-determination in the area of land management, urban

[1] Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, electronic resource, Russian Research Center Studies 91 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39–46. Brudny ties some of these sentiments to the material struggles and culture shock faced by rural Russian intellectuals when adapting to life in the city, arguing that "they sought a revitalization of village life, not its decay, because the village provided them with a sense of identity and intimacy that no city could" (41).

[2] Brudny notes that many Russian nationalists were deeply suspicious and critical of liberal reforms, and particularly those characterized by "corrupt" Western and urban values, although paradoxically these reforms also allowed them to be more openly critical of the state (194-226).

[3] Kathleen Parthe, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past*, electronic resource, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992), 120–21.

[4] For a discussion of xenophobia and Russian chauvinism in Rasputin's "Pozhar" (1985) and Astaf'ev's *The Sad Detective* (1986), see Parte, 107-112, 121-122. These developments coincided with the emergence of radical right-wing national groups in 1987-89, including *Pamyat*. see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 200, 205–14.

planning, and environmental policy. The essay was subsequently published in Rasputin's 1991 essay collection *Siberia, Siberia* and then revised and republished for an updated edition in 2000. While the 2000 version of the essay is structurally similar to its original, and maintains the same general line of argument, the differences in its formulation of Siberian regional identity are stark, a shift indicative of the increasing importance of Russian nationalism on Rasputin's work. In the original 1984 version of the essay, Rasputin framed the essay as an attempt to "look inside […] and try to understand the place of Siberia in terms of our own feeling for the Motherland (*Rodina*)," which he argued could be used as a means to create better environmental policies for both the region and the world. Like many of Rasputin's other essays from the period, the essay is mostly a treatise on environmental conservation framed through the perspective of *Sibiriak* settlement, and the resulting rootedness in native place that accompanied it. The *Sibiriak* settler, he claimed, understood how best to care for and utilize the land to his advantage because he had chosen to settle there, adapting to its climate and rhythms. This process of organic "settlement" (*zaselenie*) is contrasted with top-down "conquest" (*osvoenie*), in which land is conquered and managed according to the needs of the state, to the detriment of both the environment and the local community.[5] Adopting a settler mentality of Siberian self-government rather than the conquest and mastery of space by the distant metropole, he argues, would ensure that it can continue to be a land that can "accept, and shelter, and provide the things necessary for the Fatherland (*Otchizna*)."[6]

Although Rasputin doesn't explicitly mention the Russian nation in the essay, it is implicit in his choice of words. *Rodina* and *Otchizna* were now framed in proper noun form and missing the diminuitive modifier *malaia* ("small") that in the sixties and seventies had distinguished regional attachments to birthplace (*malaia rodina*) from a patriotic alignment with country and nation. Instead, the regional motherland of Siberia had become akin to the Russian nation itself, decoupling it from the metropolitan Russian state that had long symbolized oppression and exploitation in the minds of Siberian intellectuals. In Rasputin's view, Siberian values, formed through settlers' attachments to regional place, could now serve as a roadmap for the future progress and interests of the Russian nation, which he felt were no longer served by the policies of the administrative state. This shift is most evident in Rasputin's specific centering of Russian peasant settlers. Less than a century after the regionalists had called upon educated *Sibiriaki* to advocate on behalf of the *inorodtsy* and eight years after Tunguska mourned Matyora alongside her Russian neighbors, Indigenous Siberians were now conspicuously absent from Rasputin's vision of the Siberian future.

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[5] Although the term *osvoenie* is not easily translatable into English, I have chosen to evoke Emma Widdis' definition as "the mastery or conquest of space." As Widdis asserts, *osvoenie* is key concept for describing and understanding Russian and Soviet imaginary geography, and particularly "both prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary attitudes to the uncharted vastness of the space" and often carries connotations of centralized state control. Etymologically, the word contains the root *svoi*, "one's own", and thus expresses this process of mastery as a process of making the land "one's own" via both annexation (i.e., bringing it under the state's territorial boundaries), and cultivation or mastery of the land (i.e., the exploitation of natural resources and the cultivation of the environment for human use). (See *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 7.) In contrast, *zaselenie*, which I translate broadly as organic "settlement," refers to the gradual process of populating a (often empty) territory or place. The term's root, *-sel-*, derives from the old Slavic word *selo*, which traditionally referred to small village settlements or cultivated farmland, while the prefix, *za-*, here carries the connotation of covering or filling. (See Maks Fasmer, "selo," in *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, trans. O. N. Trubachev (Moscow: Progress, 1971).

[6] Valentin Rasputin, "Moia i tvoia Sibir'," *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, January 5, 1984.

By the time Siberians had survived the economic downturn of the late nineties, Rasputin's vision for regional identity would simultaneously acknowledge and then subsume Indigenous people. The 2000 redaction of "My Siberia and Yours" newly took up Siberia's "nationalities question" (*natsional'nyi vopros*), based on the administrative status of its autonomous ethnic districts and republics. Rasputin repurposed the old regionalist myth about Siberian identity being defined in part by interethnic mixing with Indigenous peoples to legitimize Russian settler control of the region, arguing that even before the Russian presence Siberia's Indigenous population would not have possessed "enough strength to maintain control" of the territory. Furthermore, he argued that Siberia's history of "constant displacements, intermixing, uniting and dividing of clans" and "the right of the strongest to the best lands" (a reality he claimed was governed by nature) was reflective of a "law of life," which he saw as continuing, citing the assimilation of Indigenous peoples to Russian culture during the Soviet era as an example.[7] He argued that this law granted the "majority" population of *Sibiriak* Russians equal authority over the land itself and the right to the "guardianship" of the other people within it because the Russian settler had involuntarily "accept[ed] their soul into his soul and their flesh into his flesh."[8] This transformation illustrates the paradoxes that take place once regional perspective comes to be synonymous with national perspective: while Rasputin's vision of ecological conservation relies on a sense of stewardship that he believes can only come through *dwelling* in a space, this spatial practice nevertheless imposes a settler-colonialist mentality onto the social dynamics at play in the region. Just as the metropole was consuming the landscape to its end, so too was the nationalist *Sibiriak* mentality espoused here colonizing and subsuming Indigenous identities.

Meanwhile, Indigenous literatures would continue to grow throughout the eighties, gradually shedding the Soviet literary conventions and platitudes that their forebears had been compelled to adopt and turning ever-increasingly to national traditions and forms. During *glasnost'*, Indigenous intellectuals began "to communicate more freely with their counterparts in the rest of the world and to share new—and more sharply critical—ideas about Indigenous rights within the Soviet Union."[9] In particular, they began to speak out in both national and international forums about the poor material conditions experienced in many Soviet Indigenous communities, contradicting the classic Soviet narratives of success and progress that had dominated popular representation of Indigenous peoples since the nineteen-twenties. In March, 1990 Indigenous leaders organized an "all-Russia" alliance of Indigenous peoples, the "Association of Small-numbered Peoples of the North" (*Assosiatsiia malochislennykh narodov Severa*), which became, under the leadership of Vladimir Sangi, among the largest Indigenous rights organizations in the Russian Federation.[10] In addition to Sangi, other prominent Indigenous writers such as Anna Nerkagi, Yuri Rytkheu, and Khanty writer Yeremei Aipin would be active in Indigenous rights movements. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer has proposed the term "nested sovereignty" to describe the complex forms of ethnic, regional, pan-Indigenous,

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[7] Valentin Rasputin, "Moia i tvoia Sibir'," in *Sibir', Sibir'* (Irkutsk: Arm Izdat, 2000), 396–97. Here Rasputin uses Indigenous assimilation as a cautionary tale for the Russian nation, stating that "as soon as a nation loses its traditions, or even worse – its language – it will turn into a "supply" (*zapas*) for another, stronger nation."
[8] Rasputin, 396.
[9] Gray, "Chukotka's Indigenous Intellectuals and Subversion of Indigenous Activism in the 1990s," 146.
[10] The organization now boasts a new English-based acronym RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North), which reflects the international orientation of Siberian Indigenous activism as it was led by the intellectual elite. (Gray, "Chukotka's Indigenous Intellectuals and Subversion of Indigenous Activism in the 1990s,"145).

and national identity that have developed amongst Siberian Indigenous people during the post-Soviet period.[11] Some writers took on the role previously played Soviet ethnographers and linguists, working to document and revitalize their national cultures, religions, and languages, or to retell oral histories and songs in literary form in their native languages. Their original works, too, would take a more critical turn as writers reckoned both with the aftershocks of Soviet developmentalism and with the material inequities and administrative neglect of the post-Soviet era.

In 2004, Rytkheu would once again evoke the myth of Nau and Reu in his novel *Poslednii Shaman* (*The Last Shaman*, which was translated into English as *The Chukchi Bible*), which he framed in his introduction as at once a "genealogy" (*rodoslovnaia*) and an autobiography, pieced together from oral histories about his recent and distant ancestors told to him as stories. Here, Rytkheu explicitly reclaims the oral tradition to which *When the Whales Leave* could only allude:

> Much that is known about my ancestors, especially the more ancient ones, is not based on the kind of documented, eyewitness accounts customary for people of historical importance. Instead, it has been saved in human memory, like all our distant past, passing from one generation to the next as part of an oral tradition. Naturally, we have a more or less clear idea of the events of the recent past. The further back we go, the more the lives of those who came before me recede into a haze. In order to recreate it, I – like the storytellers of Ancient Times who came before me – must marshal not just memory but imagination.[12]

Performing the role of the *storyteller* (albeit a textual one), rather than a *writer*, Rytkheu retraces the threads of continuity between his story, that of his shaman grandfather, and that of Nau, the original storyteller, creating not only a genealogy of his family and people, but also of their narrative worldview itself. Initially unable to find a Russian publisher, Rytkheu first published it in translation, inscribing himself and Siberian people into a global Indigenous literary tradition, rather than just a Russophone one. In doing so, he laid claim to the legitimacy of traditional Chukchi knowledge in the face of its erasure, asking "why people should put more faith in the stories of some Russian Cossack, who couldn't distinguish either the Chukchi or the Yupik from the tundra animals, than in the traditions passed through the centuries by the very Indigenous inhabitants of the Chukotkan peninsula themselves?"[13] Here, the textual imagining of Chukchi lived space becomes a means for reclaiming Indigenous narrative itself.

The divergent paths of *Sibiriak* and Indigenous writers during the post-Soviet period illustrate the fleeting and unstable nature of Siberian literature as a singular literary regionalism, a reason perhaps, that it has eluded scholarly study as a synchronic system. In many ways, we can read the brief blossoming of multinational Siberian literature that took place during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras as a product of the Soviet system itself – and of Siberia's unique role within it: as a Soviet experiment with the discursive category of region, as a geographic center of the material and socioeconomic changes taking place during the postwar period, and as

[11] See Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *Galvanizing Nostalgia?: Indigeneity and Sovereignty in Siberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 6.
[12] Rytkheu, *Poslednii shaman*, 7. Translation from Yuri Rytkheu, *The Chukchi Bible*, trans. Ilona Yazhbin Chavasse (New York: Archipelago Books, 2011).
[13] Rytkheu, *Poslednii shaman*, 8.

an ideological symbol of Thaw-era idealism and the success of developed socialism. These conditions allowed for the convergence of *Sibiriak* and Indigenous thinkers under a regional identity, one that was tied to the perceived authenticity of local place-based knowledge and experience as a response to state interventions in the region. Early Soviet cultural policy had transformed the *oblastniki*'s loosely organized intellectual allegiances with Indigenous people into a fully-formed regional literary apparatus, which would serve as a blueprint for other regions within the RSFSR. This system both acknowledged the influence of regional perspective in the implementation of socialist culture and celebrated Siberia's ethnic hybridity as a successful microcosm of "friendship between peoples" united under a shared connection to locality. Siberians were likewise united in their response to the massive environmental and demographic transformations taking place during the postwar period, as accelerating urbanization and natural resource extraction threatened the existence of long-standing ways of life and the local environments in which they were formed. The Siberian literary response to these threats was a more or less unified one because of the spatial crisis that these threats posed: for both Indigenous and *Sibiriak* subjects cultural tradition and identity had been formed in part through embodied relationships to the local environment and the spatial practices that they formed.

Yet while Siberian poetics was united by a shared interest in articulating local experiences of native Siberian place, it was precisely through this preoccupation with the authenticity of local spatial experience that the paths of *Sibiriak* and Indigenous literatures would diverge. Settler and Indigenous spatial relationships differed inherently, shaped by distinct cosmological worldviews, local ecologies, and by their distinct experiences of and relationships to the Imperial and Soviet state. Whether their migration was voluntary or the result of religious or political persecution, *Sibiriaki* settled and cultivated land that they had perceived as unused and sparsely occupied, even as the settlement of these regions would in many instances alter the communities already residing there. Siberia's distance from the center also afforded settlers a certain amount of autonomy in relation to state control, even as the movement and economies of Indigenous people were moderated far more closely under the tribute system. The nineteenth century regionalists had acknowledged these differences, even though they relied on a romanticized understanding of Indigeneity and interethnic mixing in their formulation of *Sibiriak* regional character and the Siberian right to regional self-determination.[14] Although liberal regionalist thinkers and later Soviet nationalities policy advocated for the rights of Indigenous people to national self-determination within the political system, this relationship to the category of "region" inadvertently centered the *Sibiriak* experience: *Sibiriak* regionalists' insistence on political solidarity with Indigenous peoples, ultimately rested on the assumption that the state more readily recognized national difference in its policies towards Indigenous peoples than towards Siberian settlers, who were governed under the same policies as European Russians, and they used Indigenous cultural difference as a means of justifying their own pursuit of settler interests. At the same time, *Sibiriaki* often benefitted from the very conflation with European Russians that they protested: cities, infrastructure, and educational institutions in the region were often shaped around localities with a significant Russian presence, whereas many Indigenous settlements would remain isolated from state infrastructure until the advent of aviation in the early twentieth century. Meanwhile, the longstanding assertion that *Sibiriaki* carried a purer sense of Russianness, the product of their isolation from the cosmopolitan values of the

[14] Under this view, the shared connection to place served as a source of political solidarity between settlers and Indigenous people in the fight for Siberian self-determination, even as the differences in state governance towards each population entitled group to their own set of political demands. (See Potanin, "Nuzhdy Sibiri," 262.)

European metropole, carried on into the twenty first century, staking a claim for traditional Sibiriak knowledge in the national imagination.

Siberia's Indigenous people maintained a more complex relationship to this hybridized notion of "region," even as Soviet nationalities policy granted them access to increased educational and professional opportunities and allowed them to participate in party processes. Even prior to Soviet rule, access to state resources was predicated on Indigenous assimilation into Russian society, requiring Indigenous subjects to abandon place-based knowledge transmitted across generations in favor of European science and belief systems. Although on its surface, Soviet nationalities policy in its various instantiations sought to reverse the damage caused to Indigenous people by tsarist imperialism and capitalist exploitation in the region through processes of modernization and affirmative action policies, the stages of Marxist development still equated Soviet Indigeneity, and the associated knowledge systems that accompanied it with superstitious backwardness. For Soviet Indigenous intellectuals tasked with constituting a socialist national culture for their people, claiming a sense of Siberian regional identity often became a means of asserting Indigenous presence in a discourse of Siberian development that still relied on the cultural myths of Siberia as a vast frontier of untapped natural wealth. In claiming a sense of Siberian identity in addition to the official national identities that were often defined through the European Russian gaze, Indigenous Siberians could stake a claim for their people in the processes of national history-making taking place in the region and could also assert a sense of unique identity outside of the ethnic delineations defined by the state. As ethnonationalist sentiments grew in the eighties and into the post-Soviet period, claiming a regional identity also allowed Siberian Indigenous people, particularly those that were smaller in number to establish networks of solidarity and advocate for Indigenous issues across ethnic lines, even as they also sought to revitalize the older place-based knowledge forms that had become endangered through processes of Soviet modernization and urbanization.

Whereas in the Russian nationalist sense, *Sibiriak* place-based knowledge became a means of asserting ethnic Russian interests in Siberia and decentering the Eurocentric parameters of the Russian nation, for Indigenous Siberians, regional identity became a means of cultural preservation, ensuring the continued transmission of traditional knowledge forms in an increasingly nationalized state. As a literary regionalism united by an interest in embodied spatial practices, we might understand Siberian literature of the late Soviet period not as a singular entity, but instead as a constellation, strung together through channels of convergence defined and shaped by forms of metropolitan intervention in the territory. If the representation of Siberian spatial practice was intended as a means of subverting state interventions and metropolitan discourse on the region, such representations – like the spatial relationships themselves – were equally shaped by such relational processes.

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