

## *Pamiat'* vs. *Memorial*: Rasputin, Aitmatov and the Search for Soviet Memory

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The title of this paper may be misleading: neither was Valentin Rasputin a member of the ultra-nationalist Perestroika-era *Pamiat'* organization, nor did Chinghiz Aitmatov ever belong to the human-rights-oriented *Memorial* Society.<sup>1</sup> During the Perestroika years, however, the life trajectories of these two writers brought them close to the respective orbit of each of these movements. In his infamous 1988 article “Sacrificing Oneself for Truth’s Sake” in the nationalist journal *Nash sovremennik* and in other statements, Rasputin publicly defended *Pamiat'*. To be sure, he was less conspiratorial in his thought, less rabid in his anti-semitism, and less violent in his appeals than the leaders of that organization. Yet all of these trademark *Pamiat'* characteristics have been sadly explicit in his writing ever since the early 1980s. Similarly, Aitmatov’s background (his father, a prominent Kyrgyz communist, was executed in 1938) made him keenly attuned, as a writer and a public persona, to *Memorial*’s chief object of investigation: the crimes of Stalinism. In his role as a post-Soviet politician, he has also spoken about human rights in the countries of the former Soviet Union, and yet, being an astute navigator of the Soviet system, he appears lacking in *Memorial*’s moral maximalism. Thus, *Pamiat'* and *Memorial* could serve as the idealized poles towards which both Aitmatov and Rasputin tended in their mature lives and works. And it will be the purpose of this paper to understand the memory templates that brought Rasputin and Aitmatov to such divergent modes of remembering, and ultimately, to such opposite poles of Perestroika-era politics.

After all, before these tendencies took them apart, Aitmatov and Rasputin had been moving along parallel political and artistic courses. In the field of Soviet letters, they shared similar (liberal anti-Stalinist) politics and traditionalist, village-prose aesthetics. Both derived their voice and moral authority from speaking for their native/narrative province (Siberia, in Rasputin’s case, and Central Asia, in Aitmatov’s), yet both also realized that these voices could be heard

only through Moscow. These voices, politically and esthetically constituted, represented their attempts to remember the past, both their personal past and that of their communities.

The common origin and motivation of Rasputin's and Aitmatov's writing are reflected by their parallel professional trajectories. Both moved into the field of letters after several years in journalism. After early short stories that perfectly conformed to the socialist realist canon, both discovered the tremendous artistic potential writing about their homelands. In Aitmatov's case, the process of this discovery took somewhat longer: even though his "Dzhamilia" (1958) was praised by Louis Aragon as "the most beautiful love story in the world" and in 1963 received the Lenin Prize for literature, it was not until 1966 that he wrote the politically critical novella *Farewell, Gul'sary* [*Proshchai, Gul'sary!*], which has all the signature features of the mature Aitmatov. Nine years his junior, Rasputin entered Soviet letters somewhat later, but found his voice as a village prose writer much faster, publishing his first major novella *Money for Maria* [*Den'gi dlia Marii*] in 1967, barely six years after his first publication. From then on, their careers ran in parallel. Whether consciously borrowing or not, they relied on some of the same literary optics through which Faulkner and, later, Latin American magical realists realized the literary potential of their respective provinces.<sup>2</sup> It was that kind of authorial vision that made artistically rendered provinces attractive to readerships from the literary capital (Moscow). Such recognition from the center in such a highly hierarchical literary system such as the Soviet Union was critical for Aitmatov and Rasputin's professional success. Moreover, access to Moscow' publishing venues, which were subject to a much more liberal censorship regime than literary provinces such as Siberia and especially Kyrgyzstan, made possible their voicing of serious systemic critiques. Indeed, alongside the much greater readership the Russian language offered, the much more lenient censorship with which it came was a significant reason for Aitmatov's early switch away from his native Kyrgyz.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, seeking an ever larger form, both wrote a number of widely popular works, culminating in Rasputin's case with the novella *Farewell to Matyora* [*Proshchanie s Materoi*] (1976) and Aitmatov's the novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* [*I dolshe veka dlitsia den'*] (1980), each of which became the literary event of the year of its publication. The beginning of Perestroika saw their last major fiction: Rasputin's *Fire* [*Pozhar*] (1986) and Aitmatov's *The*

*Executioner's Block* [*Plakba*] (1986), probably the major works of *glasnost'* to come out before the deluge of "returned literature." As *perestroika* went on, both seemed to abandon literature for journalism and politics: both were elected delegates to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR (1989-1991) and served as two of the five members of Mikhail Gorbachev's Presidential Council (1990-1991).

The outside similarity of these trajectories should not obscure the two writers increasing divergence in matters of politics and aesthetics. The advent of *glasnost'* not only revealed but also reinforced the chasm that had unnoticeably grown between them during the years of stagnation. By the mid-1980s, Rasputin, like most of his fellow village-prose writers, had rediscovered the Russian nationalist narrative: we, Russians, lived peacefully until the enemy oppressed us; now is a time of crisis when we shall vanquish the alien forces. This apocalyptic logic affected him aesthetically and politically, coloring his later fiction and also bringing him to the camp of the *putschists* in August 1991. Aitmatov, by contrast, stood loyally by Gorbachev's attempt to reform and preserve the Soviet Union. Understandably, he could not become a Russian nationalist. Yet neither could he espouse his seemingly native Kyrgyz nationalism. After all, Aitmatov was, together with so many non-Russian Soviet cultural producers—Bulat Okudzhava, Fazil' Iskander, Chinghiz Guseinov, Aleksandr Ebanoidze or Merab Mamardashvili,—a truly hybrid, Soviet subject, a product of both his native Kyrgyz tradition and cultural contact with the metropole. None of them could be simply classified as either a Russian or, say, Georgian, writer. They were all, in different ways and to different degrees, Soviet.

It is odd to think how the dramatically different outcomes reached by Rasputin and Aitmatov were brought about by essentially the same act—one of remembering. Indeed, historical reconstruction was the chief probing instrument of the whole generation of writers that emerged after Stalin's death. Theirs was probably a reaction to four decades of violence to history that followed the Great October Revolution. Not only was historical memory in the Soviet Union a highly teleological sequence supposed to go through stages predefined by Marxist ideology, but it was also manipulated to the convenience of Stalinist policies: time could be accelerated through *stakhanovism*, or by the regular fulfillment of five-year plans in four years; people could be disappeared thanks to dexterous application of airbrush to inconvenient faces on old photographs or upon the submission of their books

to fire or *spetskebran*; histories could be rewritten in school textbooks and encyclopedias.<sup>4</sup> This attitude to history inevitably came to characterize the official artistic method of the country—socialist realism. In her study of the Soviet novel, Katerina Clark, too, writes of the “Great Time” experienced by *stakhanovites* during their meeting with Stalin (Clark *Soviet Novel* 114-136). Lenin’s presence had a similar effect; in fact, the whole of the Civil War period belonged, from the point of view of socialist realism, to Great Time. The future world of Communism was, too, Great. By contrast, even if pre-revolutionary time allowed neat ideological narratives, it was, in a sense, pre-historical. Time warps pervaded socialist realist perception of history.

It was against such background that in the years following Stalin’s death (and especially, after the historical revisions of the XX Party Congress) Soviet writers began in earnest to reconstruct recent history.<sup>5</sup> Practically all the most prominent works of the period, from *Doctor Zhivago* [*Doktor Zhivago*] to *Gulag Archipelago* [*Arkhipelag GULAG*], represented attempts to challenge and provide counter-narratives to the official versions of history. Within the limits of censorship, and sometimes transcending those, Soviet writers were using their privileged social status and relationship with history to revise and re-evaluate the whole of the country’s past. Memory became their chief means of return to the past:

Clearly, it is not only Chinghiz Aitmatov who is worried about the problem with *mankurty* [people without memory], the problem of *mankurtstvo*: almost all contemporary novels test their heroes on the strength of their attitude to the past, to what one must not forget, for to forget the past is always tragic. (Bocharov 31-32)

After all, the memory of one’s own individual experience was something no official textbook could rewrite or prettify. Most often, the process of submergence into history was initiated by the writer’s own memory or the collective memory of his family.

The search for a Soviet memory was also Rasputin and Aitmatov’s starting point and motivation as writers. As Kathleen Parthe has shown in her excellent monograph on the subject *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past*, writers such as Rasputin were constantly reconstructing a childhood idyll (20-28). In Katerina Clark’s words, the model chronotope of village prose was the “place that also takes one back in time” (“Political History” 243). The village populated by old people, the central figure of the old woman, the rich Siberian land-

scapes – these were all features of Rasputin’s childhood, to which he would return, over and over again in his works, yet with an adult’s elegiac (and later, excruciating) awareness of the imminent ruin of this world. While village prose’s Russianness and its reliance on Russian peasant folklore renders Aitmatov’s inclusion into that tradition problematic, he is certainly animated by the same concerns about native landscape and cultural memory, whose destruction by the juggernaut of the Soviet modernization project village prose writers so lamented. Aitmatov, however, draws on different folklore, most significantly, the Central Asian mythical tradition, as the titles of most monographs about him indicate.<sup>6</sup> Yet to weave that material into his fiction, he turned to the chronotopes and narrative paradigms developed by the Russian village prose, as exemplified by Rasputin. The best of these writers’ prose is motivated by a common search for lost recollections, an attempt to remember their childhood and extrapolate their memories even further back in time. This is also the reason why Rasputin and Aitmatov are so invested in the concept of generations: to both, generations provide the conveyor belt along which ancestral memory passes down in time (or fails to do so).

Yet it is the specific content of their cultural memory that pulled these writers’ trajectories to such different directions that they found themselves on the opposite camps of the Perestroika denouement. In July 1991, together with a number of political conservatives and later participants in the attempted *putsch* in August of that year, Rasputin co-authored the notorious “A Word to the People,” now seen as the manifesto of the coup leaders. By contrast, Aitmatov always remained loyal to Gorbachev’s agenda of liberalizing and preserving the USSR until the union’s unexpected dissolution in August 1991. Their choice of political stance requires a more elaborate explanation. In the 1960s, Rasputin, like most fellow village prose writers, belonged to the liberal wing of the Soviet political spectrum.<sup>7</sup> Why did he end up allying himself with the conservative forces in 1991? Similarly, why did Aitmatov remain faithful to the idea of the Soviet Union (not that of Kyrgyz or Russia) as the Union was falling apart? What are we to make of his employment in the 1990s and 2000s: Soviet ambassador to Luxemburg, where he remained until 1994 as the Russian ambassador, and then, Kyrgyz ambassador to Belgium (as well as an *in-absentia* member of the Kyrgyz parliament)? These seem to be two very different cases but our main analytical tool for answering both would be the same—a more nuanced consideration of the

remembering that brought Rasputin and Aitmatov together in the first place.

*Perestroika* changed neither Rasputin nor Aitmatov overnight; rather, it brought into the open and dramatized wounds that had been festering over the long years of stagnation. The evolution of village prose writers from conscientious objectors to the Soviet Union's often thoughtless modernization and Russia's first environmentalists to virulent nationalists had already been completed by 1985, as a number of studies testify. By an act of great charity Kathleen Parthe even declares village prose as a school essentially over by 1980, thereby exculpating it from the unseemly opinions and activities of many of its representatives during *perestroika* and after (see her Introduction). Here, I will attempt to show that Rasputin's evolution resulted from the overriding logic of nationalist remembering. In a sense, the story of Rasputin's evolution condenses the trajectory of nationalism in general: from the wistful reflection of the ruined Castle of Heidelberg and fascination with Germanic folklore (the Romantic origins of nationalism) to violent political demands to restore that lost "purity" and "authenticity" of the Germanic nation. Or, to choose a geographically closer example, such was the evolution of the peacefully nostalgic Slavophilism into the aggressive nationalism of Pan-Slavism in mid-nineteenth Russia.

In Svetlana Boym's framework, the first stage in both these examples stands for the "reflective" mode that dwells with resignation "on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not try to shy away from the contradictions of modernity" (xviii). By contrast, the "restorative" mode does not think of itself as memory, but rather, as truth and tradition, and appeals for a return to these. In this scheme, Rasputin's journey was one from the "reflective" to the "restorative."

Boym's framework is useful in offering a system of classification. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is too static; that is, it does not envision of the possibility of transition between her categories. Yet combined with James Wertsch's Russian nationalist narrative template, however, it reveals the trajectory along which Rasputin has traveled in the process of remembering:

1. An initial situation (Propp) in which the Russian people are living in a peaceful setting where they are no threat to others is disrupted by
2. the initiation of aggression by alien force, or

- agent, which leads to
3. a time of crisis and great suffering, which is
  4. overcome by the triumph over alien forces by the Russian people, acting historically alone.
- (Wertsch 86)

Most European nations have similar myths, yet their specific content endows their nationalism with a specific flavor. The above myth, which Wertsch dubs “triumph over enemy forces,” was developed gradually in the nineteenth century on the basis of such events as the Tatar Yoke, the Teutonic knight offensive, the Polish conquest of Moscow in the seventeenth century or Napoleon’s invasion, and has also structured both official Soviet and unofficial nationalist narratives of the Civil War and the Great Fatherland War. That narrative has, therefore, been a part of Russian nationalist memory: Rasputin only had to rediscover it for himself, as a writer. Part One of Wertsch’s scheme corresponds to Rasputin’s early aesthetic ideal, “the radiant past” of Russian peasantry. A sad yet passive witness of the irreversible decline of the Russian countryside, the writer merely seeks to remember an Atlantida that will soon be no more. Such nostalgia corresponds to Boym’s “reflective” category.

The transition to the “restorative” begins with an attempt to explain the causes the ideal’s disappearance, an attempt that in Russian history has traditionally degenerated into finding alien scapegoats. That process, captured by Part Two of Wertsch’s narrative template, took place in Rasputin’s worldview gradually between the late 1960s and early 1980s, and only obliquely surfaced in his writing, most likely because of censorship considerations. Typically, the immediate agents of destruction in his novellas of the period are the morally corrupted village dwellers, especially among the younger generations (most strikingly, in the characters of Petrukha and Klavka Strigunova from *Farewell to Matyora*). These have abandoned time-honored village morality for the allure of city values. Yet, if terribly corrupted, they are still Russian; it is not until Rasputin’s 1986 novella “Fire,” that the destructive forces are portrayed as explicitly ethnically alien: “One of them, apparently from the Caucasus [*kavkazskogo vida*], who held leadership in their gang, was, apparently, brought down” (Rasputin Vol. 3 284). Until then, Rasputin’s city is ethnically nondescript, devoid of national content, yet carrying the implication that Russianness is disappearing precisely there, in this Soviet melting pot. And even if Rasputin evokes the “alien aggression” for the first time in his *oeuvre* as late as

1986, by that time the term was already an established presence in his circles. Thus conjured up, the image of the alien galvanized insipient Russian nationalism and gave it a concrete agenda to work towards. It also motivated the shift in Rasputin's nostalgia from the "reflective" to the "restorative." The "triumph over alien forces by the Russian people," the final component of Wertsch's scheme, has not come, but certainly motivates the Russian nationalist teleology.

There is something inevitable about the logic of Wertsch's memory template. As inscribed in Rasputin's literary career, it resembles the Big Bang theory in cosmology.<sup>8</sup> If his early, backward-looking vision was focused onto one singularity, that of the pure, essential and traditional Russia, often embodied in the image of an old peasant woman, his later writings have focused on the second singularity—that of Russia's future collapse (or triumph). His novella *Farewell to Matyora* came out midway in his evolution between the two singularities, at a point where Rasputin was equally focused on the origins, as represented by the old Russian Matyora village, and the eventual collapse—the behemoth dam to which the village will give way. Even though apocalyptic in its conclusions, the novel lacks the urgency and desperation that would characterize Rasputin's post-1986 writing. The above-mentioned novel *Fire* (1986) exudes a premonition of the approaching grand finale for the Russian nation and superbly exemplifies the apocalyptic poetics of Russian nationalism. After all, the advent of *perestroika* in place of Stagnation, and *glasnost'*, in place of strict censorship, afforded Rasputin the opportunity to remember and express "the time of crisis" moment in Wertsch's narrative template. That whole novella takes place in what Bakhtin would have called "the chronotope of the threshold" (398).

Numerous other non-literary texts Rasputin penned between 1986 and 1991 reflect the apocalyptic or messianic consciousness of the Russian nationalist narrative. None does so more loudly than "A Word to the People," the notorious proclamation the future leaders of the August 1991 *putsch* and Russian nationalist writers, including Rasputin, which appeared in the July, 15 1991 issue of *Den'*. Emotionally overwrought rhetorical questions "What has happened to us, brothers?", exclamations "Russia—singular and beloved!" [*edinstvennaia i nenagliadnaia*], appeals "We'll say no to the invaders and destroyers!" an insistence on addressing national community ("brothers," "Russians," "we," "our," and "countrymen") all bring out in an exaggerated form what we can find already in Rasputin's "Fire."

Indeed, the Perestroika period minimized the already small difference between Russian (or Soviet) letters and publicist appeals, baring completely the author's (in this case, nationalist) politics. I should venture to say that as no Apocalypse happened (though the break-up of the Soviet Union did have tragic consequences), Rasputin found himself in the position of a millennial prophet whose predictions for the end of the world never materialized and had to be postponed to a later date. Yet to this date, the Big Bang vision of the nation's history still colors Rasputin's, and more generally village prose nationalism. The chronotope of contemporary decay, however, has come to replace that of late Perestroika's apocalypse.

Given Rasputin and Aitmatov's common project of resurrecting Soviet memory, it becomes important to understand why over the last twenty years Aitmatov has decidedly not followed Rasputin's political trajectory. That is, how did he manage to eschew the influence of nationalism, Kyrgyz or Russian? Why did he remain one of Mikhail Gorbachev's staunchest loyalists during late *perestroika*? Why did he, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, take up an almost permanent residence abroad?<sup>9</sup>

To answer these questions adequately, we have to return once again the specifics of the cultural memory from which the author was drawing. If Rasputin relied on the Russian nationalist narrative as his exclusive vehicle for time travel, in resurrecting pre-Soviet memory, Aitmatov drew on different traditions. To be sure, by far the most significant among these is Kyrgyz myth, especially the magisterial *Manas*, the gigantic epos of Kyrgyz national origins. In the 1960s and early 1970s, *Manas*, with its admixture of Muslim and pre-Muslim narratives, held near-monopoly on Aitmatov's pre-Soviet folkloric sources. Yet there is an important structural difference between Kyrgyz traditions through which Aitmatov was transgressing Soviet ahistoricity and the Russian national narrative Rasputin was rediscovering. The Kyrgyz tradition Aitmatov was referencing—unlike its Russian counterpart—remained proto-national. No nineteenth-century nationalists had reinvented *Manas* popularly, and early Soviet nationalization policies, which attempted to exploit it to forge a Kyrgyz national identity, had during high Stalinism given way to a much more restrictive approach to “small-country nationalisms.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, after a period of early Soviet support for them, *Manas* and its bards, the *akyni*, while not officially banned, were censored or otherwise suppressed.<sup>11</sup> As a result, no solidified nationalist narrative template of

the kind Rasputin reconstructed came out of Manas or Kyrgyz folklore in general.

Moreover, in the late 1970s, as the Russian village prose writer was deepening in his study of ancestral memory, Aitmatov's attempt to understand the wider Soviet (or even more ambitiously, human) condition drew him to ethnic mythologies other than his own. His novella *Piebold Dog Running along the Seashore* [*Pegii pes, begushchii kraem moria*] (1977) relies on the mythology of the Nivkhs (a small people in Northeast Siberia), as related to Aitmatov by a Nivkh writer, Vladimir Sangi, whose historical novel *The Kevongov Wedding* [*Zhenit'ba Kevongov*] (1975) proved a rich source of ethnographic material for Aitmatov. *The Piebold Dog* represents the Kyrgyz author's first serious literary attempt set outside Central Asia through the use of myth.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat closer to his native Kyrgyzstan, but more significant in literary terms was Aitmatov's first novel *A Day Lasts Longer than a Century* (1980), based on the life of Aral Kazakhs. Episodes of the novel, such as the arrest of Abutalip Kuttybaev, for example, still reconstruct moments from the writer's own biography, yet the very choice of this setting suggests a refusal to confine his historical exploration of human fate to his own ethnic tradition. Aitmatov's last Soviet-era novel, *The Executioner's Block*, decidedly transcends his Muslim background by positing as its protagonist a young Russian truth-seeker, Avdii Kalistratov, whose travels very explicitly follow the story of Christ. Yet Kalistratov is a very heterogeneous Christ, constructed as he is from the gospel narratives and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* [*Master i Margarita*]. Anthony Olcott even sees certain Muslim theological beliefs coloring the protagonist's faith (214). While accommodating of the values of *globalnost'* and *mashtabnost'* that "developed socialism" officially embraced, Aitmatov's use of different societal historical memories also reveals how, as a writer and a public persona, he sought to universalize his moral lessons (Clark "Mutability" 575).

The multitude of traditions which Aitmatov weaves into his works carries aesthetic consequences almost converse to the singularity of Rasputin's nationalist plot and motivates the narrative disunity of Aitmatov's later fiction. His failure to integrate the science fiction subplot into the structure of *A Day Lasts Longer than a Century* appears minor in comparison to the universally acknowledged narrative incoherence of *The Executioner's Block*. That later novel, made up of three poorly connected parts, bifurcates between the Christ plot centered on Avdii Kalistratov and the animistic plot about the wolves Akbara

and Tashchainar, and their encounters with humans. But the real orgy of traditions occurs in the novella *The Mark of Cassandra* [*Tavro Kasandry*] (1994), where the Christ-like Harvard professor Richard Bork reads the future from his astrologically arranged garden and enjoys a perfectly animistic communication with whales. Greek mythology also motivates Bork's character: a contemporary Cassandra, he is killed on account of his warning prophecies. Because of the multiple national traditions Aitmatov intertwines in his effort to represent the universal human condition, in all its national varieties, his later works compositionally disintegrate, a perfect contrast to the complete narrative unity of Rasputin's novellas, which draw on a single Russian nationalist narrative.

Maybe this overly ambitious project reflects Aitmatov's aspiration to position himself as a bridge between cultures, be they Kyrgyz and Russian, Soviet and American, Eastern and Western, as well as the feasibility of this project. The particular division that concerns this paper is the break-up of the Soviet Union, a process Aitmatov staunchly opposed. Bilingual, culturally fluent in both, as a writer and public persona, he relied equally on his ethnic Kyrgyz heritage and Moscow's cultural capital. Indeed, it was only using Moscow's literary prestige that he could, first, reach a wider, Russian-speaking audience, and second, legitimize himself as an international author. Yet he had not merely taken advantage of Moscow's unique position or merely served as the poster child of Soviet nationalities policies showcased in the West: Aitmatov was a genuinely Soviet subject. Thus, the disappearance of his homeland in 1991 meant that ever since then, he has been a cultural exile of sorts. Such reframing of his cultural identity would help explain why he has spent most of the decade and a half following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the Benelux countries. His switch from serving as a Russian ambassador in Luxemburg to being a Kyrgyz special representative to Belgium, NATO and the European Union, as well as his involvement in internal Kyrgyz politics suggests that, in the absence of the international reality of the Soviet Union, the national is gradually reasserting itself in him. Nevertheless, he belongs neither to independent Kyrgyzstan nor to independent Russia as he did to the Soviet Union.

Aitmatov's planetariness, while culture-specific, is, in a sense, the perfect foil to Rasputin's ethnic particularism. Yet this contrast is not unique to this pair; because they are so highly representative of their respective groups, these authors stand in for many others that

could have been used for the purposes of this comparison. Instead of Rasputin, this essay could have examined any number of village prose writers, such as Viktor Astaf'ev, Vasilii Belov, Vladimir Soloukhin or Evgenii Nosov, most of whom followed the trajectory that led Rasputin to virulent nationalism. While not destined to such an end, village prose writers were certainly predisposed to reinvent Russian-ness by their surprisingly common biographies. Practically all of them came from Siberia, the Russian North or a few other provincial parts of the country. After childhoods spent in the village, they left for universities in the city, where they settled, if not quite comfortably. As writers, however, they rediscovered the village as their theme and the memory of that village as their means of protest against the Soviet present. They found in the violence done to the Russian village (often that of Collectivization) a perfect synecdoche for everything wrong with the Soviet Union. The memory of the Russian village became the one tradition they could rely on, that could artistically and politically sustain them. From that point onwards, few could resist the overriding logic of the nationalist narrative. During the height of *perestroika*, Sergei Zalygin and Boris Mozhaev did politically side with the liberals against most other village prose writers. Both came from the same background and faced the same horizon of expectations as most members of the school, yet their turn away from the xenophobia that came to characterize *perestroika* and post-*perestroika* village prose writers testifies to their ability to connect to narratives other than the all-consuming memory template of Russian nationalism.

Although Aitmatov does not fit as neatly into any single school, his predicament of having lost a homeland is shared by a number of writers from the former Soviet republics, many of whom have gravitated towards Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union: Fazil' Iskander, Chinghiz Guseinov, Bulat Okudzhava and Alexander Ebanoidze. Born in the Soviet Union's southern republics, often into communist families from which the father was purged (which led to a common interest in the Great Terror), these writers made it to Moscow on the strength of their writing. While deeply reliant on the particular national historical memory out of which they emerged, they also gradually transcended it. Whether out of ambition for a status of pan-Soviet, rather than national republic-only, writers, or because they sought to give their writing a measure of universality lacking in more strictly regional writing, they also employed cultural traditions other than their own. In them, the USSR had constructed credibly multi-

national, hybrid Soviet subjects. As a category, they genuinely embodied the loudly proclaimed, yet often poorly practiced Soviet slogan of Friendship of the Peoples. After the breakdown of the USSR in 1991, these non-Russian writers with a Soviet-wide readership became Russian by default; in fact, they clustered around the Moscow-based journal echoing that slogan, *Friendship of the People*, whose mission it is to keep alive the literary connections among the countries that once constituted the Soviet Union. For the most part, these writers opposed the national particularist worldview adopted by most republican-based writers and intelligentsia, whether Russian or non-Russian. While Moscow continues to function as a metropole for some of the people of the former Soviet Union (or more precisely, as a major labor migration destination), as an ideological formation, *Friendship of the Peoples* seems sadly doomed in the face of dual nationalisms and the failure of anything resembling a post-colonial sensibility to take root in contemporary Russian society and highlight the role of post-Soviet diaspora. In addition, the memory of multicultural connections within the former Soviet Union is disappearing, while new connections are hardly being forged.

In different ways, the erstwhile village prose writers have also lost their memory wars. Their beloved corners of provincial Russia have never been so abandoned. In the last two decades, the villages—this other set of internal colonies to the Russian state—have been dying away as rapidly and dramatically as they have not since Collectivization. And the very question of memory that was once fought over so intensely seems displaced in public discourse by other concerns.

#### Notes

1. *Pamiat'* and *Memorial* were two of the most conspicuous organizations to emerge during Perestroika. Both the restoration of Soviet history as their object, but went about it in radically different ways. *Pamiat'* coalesced around the most extreme section of Russian nationalists, and preached an overthrow of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy that had historically oppressed the Russian people. For further information about *Pamiat'*, please, see Mark Deich's book *Pamiat' kak ona est*. By contrast, the *Memorial* Society emerged out of the dissident human-rights movement in the USSR and is still uncovering human-rights abuses, both those that took place in Soviet times, and contemporary ones.
2. See Casanova 336-345. In Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*, Paris functions as the literary capital of the world. To be recognized

worldwide, any book has to receive Paris's critical recognition first. Similarly, Moscow functions as the capital of the much smaller, yet multinational, world of Soviet letters. To gain a Soviet-wide audience, a provincial author has to receive publication opportunities, positive reviews, and wide readership in Moscow.

3. There was also another reason why he wrote all his mature work in Russian, translating it in Kyrgyz later: much of it would not have passed the Bishkek censor, who was more severe than his Moscow counterpart.
4. For more information on the Soviet state's particular relationship with history, see Andrew Wachtel's *Russian Writers Confront the Past*, 3. For an analysis of the manipulation of history textbooks to suit political expediency, see chapter "State Production of Official Historical Narratives" in James Wertsch's *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 67-86.
5. A relatively early but accurate account of the process could be found in Jack V. Haney's "The Revival of Interest in Russian Past in the Soviet Union."
6. See Joseph Mozur's *Parables from the Past: the Prose Fiction of Chinghiz Aitmatov*, Nina Kolesnikoff's *Myth in the Works of Chinghiz Aitmatov*, and Erika Haber's *The Myth of the Non-Russian: Iskander and Aitmatov's Magical Universe*.
7. As Nikolai Mitrokhin points out in what is probably the most meticulous study of late Soviet Russian nationalism, "Russian nationalists' most important acquisition after the 1960s, which allowed them to claim a central position in Russian letters, were the authors of the village prose school. The village prose tradition, of course, goes back not to the conservatives, but to the liberals. In the 1960s, S. Pavlov [the First Secretary of the Komsomol and one of the informal leaders of "the Russian Party"—R. D.] and his ideological friends perceived village prose writers as liberals and openly criticized them." It was only after Tvardovskii's forced resignation from *Novyi Mir* in 1970, that most prominent village prose writers migrated to the nationalist organ *Nash Sovremennik*, through which they gradually become part of the broader nationalist network and come to share the movement's anti-semitism. For greater detail, see Mitrokhin, 395-98.
8. While there are numerous cosmological theories of the origin and course of the Universe, most astrophysicists believe that the Universe originated in a zero-space singularity (Big Bang) and has been expanding ever since. However, eventually, the Universe would start a spatial contraction, collapsing another singularity.
9. By contrast, Rasputin has even eschewed Moscow, making a point of remaining an Irkutsk resident. Moreover, during a recent three-day conference visit to Switzerland, Rasputin manifestly never left his hotel, explaining this gesture as his personal boycott of the West.
10. In the Soviet nationalities policy of the 1920s, Russian nationalism, or

“big-country nationalism,” was treated as a threat to the Union, whereas the nationalism of the numerically smaller nationalities of the former Russian empire was strategically supported. For more information, read Yuri Slezkine’s “The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment” or Terry Martin’s *Affirmative Action Empire*.

11. For a more detailed account of the significance of Manas to Kyrgyz national identity, please, refer to Iraj Bashiri’s “Manas: the Kyrgyz Epic.”
12. His only previous story set outside of Central Asia is “Newsboy Dziuiio” (1952), one of his first published stories, which takes place in US-occupied Japan.

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