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Russian Literature on Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea

Translated by Paul Vickers

1 Outline of Our Research Focus

The areas that we are interested in—the Black Sea, the Crimean Peninsula, and the Caucasus Mountains—have featured as subjects or motifs in Russian literature since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They remain popular to this day.[1] Each appears, however, in different forms and is prominent to varying degrees. While Crimea and the Caucasus form part of the conceptions of the Russian Empire's coloniality and acculturation processes taking place within it, and as such have featured regularly in literary works, the (Black) sea has largely remained marginal in literature.[2] An analysis of literary reflections of cultural history concepts should not limit itself to the "impression" these concepts have left on texts, thus treating literary works as a parallel mode of expressing historical facts, but should also take into account the aesthetic form of individual pieces of literature. Furthermore, the extensive contextualization of literary texts enables them to become elements of particular literatures' aesthetic-axiological systems. In turn, literary texts can exert influence on, for example, cultural history precisely because they are aesthetic facts. Fictional texts thus belong chiefly to the aesthetic-literary context and not to a (cultural) historical one. The primary objective of a literary studies analysis is to establish, above all else, how texts are "made," with what they depict (or objectivize) being of lesser significance.[3] In our approach to "Crimea" and "the Caucasus," however, what we propose is to combine literary historical and cultural history methods especially because—at least as far as Crimea is concerned—these approaches have been adopted not in tandem but separately, leading to a certain degree of discord on particular aspects.[4]

1 It is necessary to stress that Crimea tends to serve as a synecdoche for the northern Black Sea coast.

2 This is how the sea has traditionally been approached in Russian culture, a theme also addressed in Helena Ulbrechtová's essay, "Die Fluidität in der russischen Kultur: Erde, Wasser und Luft in der russischen Literatur," in *The Meeting of the Waters: Fluide Räume in Literatur und Kultur*, ed. Marija Javor Briški and Irena Samide (Munich: Iudicium, 2015), 219–44.

3 Cf. the critique of Hayden White: Ansgar Nünning, "Wie aus einem historischen Geschehen ein Medienereignis wird: Kategorien für ein erzähltheoretisches Beschreibungsmodell," in *Der Krimkrieg als erster europäischer Medienkrieg*, ed. Georg Maag, Wolfram Pyta, and Martin Windisch (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2010), 201–2.

4 A starting point is offered by two divergent conceptualizations of Crimea: one that emphasizes "insularity," with the peninsula treated as a *de facto* literary island; Tatjana Petzer, "'Falten von Land und Meer': Zur geokulturellen Begründung der Krim," in *Grundordnungen: Geographie, Religion und Ge-*

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In Russian literature, the topoi of Crimea and the Caucasus play an important role because they constitute an integral element of Russian "culturosophy and historiosophy." Relations towards both regions were shaped not only by a Russian imperial urge, but also by the fact that these were spaces about which much knowledge was produced, something that was reflected in literature. Both topoi were "appropriated" by literature, with Crimea almost always being treated as a "Russian realm" and sacred Russian space, while the Caucasus (as well as Armenia and Georgia) was for a long time framed using orientalizing and exoticizing tropes. In other words, while the Caucasus was subject to re-semanticization (and not only in literature), Crimea was treated from the outset as a "familiar" territory, even though the ethnic groups there and its environment was something of a blank page for the Russian Empire.[5] Thus, literary texts on Crimea and the Caucasus established a particular tradition in Russian literary spatial semiotics.

A more fruitful conception that is associated with Russian culturosophy and geopoetics[6] treats Crimea as part of the South. This is connected both to the Russian axiology of the points of the compass[7] and to specific models of the Russian South.[8] Imaginations of Crimea as a fertile orchard form a trope that can be traced back to literary conceptions of Ukraine. Mirja Lecke has outlined the literary motifs and metaphors of Ukraine as a (southern) garden, with Ukrainians depicted as a southern people, where

setz, ed. Zaal Andronikashvili and Sigrid Weigel (Berlin: Kadmos, 2013), 67–85, or also Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, "'Wo es ganz plötzlich abbricht: Rußland/Über dem schwarzen dumpfen Meer': Russische kulturelle Semantiken des Schwarzmeeresraumes," in *Topographien pluraler Kulturen: Europa vom Osten her gesehen*, ed. Esther Kilchmann, Andreas Pflitsch, and Franziska Thun-Hohenstein (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012), 75–96; and another that treats Crimea as a crossroads of cultures; for example, Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums: Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007). The diverse positions regarding the seclusion or openness of Crimea towards to outside world give rise to different assessments of the value of Antiquity for different conceptions of Crimea. While historians consider Antiquity an essential component of conceptions (and visions) of Crimea owing to historical facts, reflections on Crimea in literary studies tend to play down Antiquity, generally reducing it to a literary-aestheticizing pose of the modern (cf. Thun-Hohenstein, "Wo es ganz plötzlich abbricht...," 96).

5 Cf. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 81.

6 For more on this concept, see Magdalena Marszałek and Sylvia Sasse, eds., *Geopoetiken: Geographische Entwürfe in den mittel- und osteuropäischen Literaturen* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2010).

7 The opposition of East and West was, and remains, part of Russia's efforts in the realms of developing culture, nation-building, and state-building. The North–South axis, with St. Petersburg and Crimea at either end, constituted a geopolitical and "historiographical" supplement to the East–West axis. The North–South axis has re-emerged regularly since the times of Peter I and reached a peak with the first annexation of Crimea in 1783. This theme has also been addressed by Aleksandr Liusyi, *Krymskii tekst v russkoi literature* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2003), 20–31, who offers a summary of the most renowned studies on the subject.

8 Cf. for example Kerstin S. Jobst, "Über den russischen Südländer: Zur Funktion der Krim als russischer Süden und des *iuzhanin* (Südländers) im russischen Krim-Diskurs des Zarenreichs," in *Bilder der 'eigenen' Geschichte im Spiegel des kolonialen 'Anderen': Transnationale Perspektiven um 1900*, ed. Claudia Bruns (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2010), 34–49.

images of cherry trees and arcadia are prominent, albeit in a highly folkloristic manner (in contrast to texts on Crimea).[9]

Crimea played a much less significant role in Ukrainian literature than in Russian works. Ukrainian modernist poets like Lesia Ukrainka, Mykola Zerov, and Pavlo Tychyna, for example, were, much like their Russian counterparts, in awe of the peninsula's ancient charm and the environment there. Interestingly, Ukrainian poetry paid greater attention to the Black Sea and its waters, presenting them as a vital, vibrant world. In certain cases, however, the Black Sea was compared to the Ukrainian nation and language, reflecting a tendency towards didacticism in Ukrainian literature that remains in place today. It also opened up a strand of competitiveness between Ukrainian and Russian literary nationalisms. One difference between the two literatures is the Ukrainian interest in the Crimean Tatars, a group that was framed from the late nineteenth century on as another victim of Russian imperialism (for example, elements of the works of Kotsubynskii) that the Ukrainians could thus identify with. The second annexation of Crimea in 2014 provoked renewed interest in Crimean Tatar culture, leading to new reflexive texts by younger poets who took up the theme of the "loss" of Crimea. Most of the authors mentioned here had already produced works on Crimea before the annexation. Such works of poetry are not numerous, although representative examples include texts by Viacheslav Huk (*Krymski Elehii* [Crimean Elegies], 2013), Olena Kytsan (Pashuk), Oleh Kotsarev, and Svitlana Povaliaieva (*Pislia Krymu*, [After Crimea], 2018). Many other works have appeared primarily online as a nationalist counter to Russian propaganda poetry. A mixture of naïve patriotism and modern poetry typified the 2016 anthology *Krym, iakyi my liubimo* (Crimea, Our Love).

2 Is There a Russian "Crimea Text"?

The first scholarly-journalistic Crimea "reports" resulted from the Enlightenment-era pursuit of knowledge, something that they had in common with the first literary documents. From the nineteenth century, literary and journalistic discourses formed separate realms, although they were both typified by travel reportage. This kind of "tourist exploration of Crimea" that the Symbolist poet and painter Maksimilian Voloshin criticized heavily in 1925[10] was for a long time—including still quite often in the twentieth century—the primary mode in artistic representations of Crimea. These included depictions of nature and certain tourist attractions (Chatyr Dag [Crimean Tatar: Çatır

9 Cf. Mirja Lecke, *Westland: Polen und die Ukraine in der russischen Literatur von Puškin bis Babel* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 130, 140, 176. Lecke's literary studies analysis suggests a certain parallel to Kerstin S. Jobst's findings regarding "beautiful Crimea" (Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 132–58). From the perspective of the literary South, the literary take on Crimea became part of Russian literary discourse on Ukraine.

10 Maksimilian Voloshin, "Kultura, iskusstvo, pamiatniki Kryma," in *Koktebelskie berega: Poeziia, risunki, akvareli, stati* (Simferopol: Tavriia, 1990), 217.

Dağ], Chufut-Kale [Crimean Tatar: Çufut Qale] etc.) that featured regularly (mostly in lyrical epic travel cycles).[11] This "travel perspective" was adopted, for example, by Esther Kinsky and Martin Chalmers in their travel diary.[12] Their journey, pursuing traces of representations of Crimea in literature, myth, and sagas, took place before the second annexation of the peninsula and ultimately ended in disappointment as far as the authors were concerned: The famous *genius loci* had disappeared. Although the book consistently draws on individual impressions that are juxtaposed with literary texts,[13] with the authors also avoiding politicization, their text is nevertheless implicitly critical of the economic situation and tourist infrastructure of Crimea as they were under the Ukrainian government.[14]

The number of literary primary sources related to Crimea is rather meagre compared to historical studies, with historiographical and cultural historical writings on Crimea often appearing ahead of literary studies on the subject. Interest in literary aspects of Crimea has fluctuated greatly, often in relation to dominant political discourses, with the outcome of such studies generally spontaneous and spread across a range of texts. This means that certain literary texts remain undiscovered, while other works fail to meet the expectations of literary and cultural studies scholars. The situation is similar with scholarly texts that deal with literature on Crimea. The fact that there has not yet been a systemic study on such works means that it is only possible to trace research in the field partially, in contrast to studies on literature depicting the Caucasus.

Even in Russia, systematic research on "Crimea literature" is rare. With the increasingly imperialist tendencies of the state under Putin from around 2000 on, the subject of "Russian literary" Crimea acquired increasing salience. This resulted not only in a series of diverse essays that explored literary depictions of "Russian Crimea," but also led to efforts to create theoretical frameworks for such research. Hence the literary historian Aleksandr Liusyi developed the concept of "the Crimea text in Rus-

11 In this way, poetic journeys to Crimea contributed to the development of cycles in Russian poetry; cf. Siegfried Ulbrecht, "Das literarische Verfahren der Zyklisierung in der Germanistik: Mit einem Ausblick auf die slavische Philologie sowie Ansätze einer europäischen Zyklusforschung," *Weimarer Beiträge* 54, no. 4 (2008): 612–23; Siegfried Ulbrecht, "Zum Problem der Gattungsinterferenz in der russischen Lyrik der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: am Beispiel ausgewählter poetischer Reisezyklen," in *Zyklusdichtung in den slavischen Literaturen: Beiträge zur Internationalen Konferenz, Magdeburg, 18.–20. März 1997*, ed. Reinhard Ibler (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 545–61.

12 Esther Kinsky and Martin Chalmers, *Karadag Oktober 13: Aufzeichnungen von der kalten Krim* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2015).

13 First and foremost, Laurence Oliphant's travel reportage *Russian Shores of the Black Sea in the Autumn of 1852: With a Voyage Down the Volga, and a Tour Through the Country of the Don Cossacks*, from 1853; new edition: Laurence Oliphant, *The Russian Shores of the Black Sea and a Journey to Katmandu* (Cologne: Könemann, 1998).

14 An insightful outline of the complex situation of Crimea after 1990 and the "culture war" between Russia and Ukraine is presented in the contributions to the edited volume: Matthias Schwartz and Roman Dubasevych, eds., *Sirenen des Krieges: Diskursive und affektive Dimensionen des Ukraine-Konflikts* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2019).

sian literature"[15] as an analogy to the notion of "the Petersburg text in Russian literature."[16] In Russian literary and cultural studies, however, this model has gone "cold," to use the terminology of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jan Assmann:[17] Theoretical aspects remained underdeveloped and, contrary to initial intentions, the Petersburg text remains something of a metatextual phenomenon, meaning that rather than tracing Petersburg as a motif in particular texts, it is instead treated as a catalogue of motifs. This also pertains to the concept of "the Crimea text in Russian literature," which is applied in diverse ways to any text that mentions Crimea in one way or another. It is for this reason, too, that we will not apply this concept and instead use the more neutral notion of "the literary Crimea topos" or "the literary model of Crimea."

Liusyi's book is indeed an interesting read, but it is not very sophisticated in terms of theory. In the introduction, he attempts to elucidate his concept of the Crimean metatext by tracing the symbols of Ancient Tauris that appear in Russian poetry. In the analyses of individual works, however, he does not highlight metatextual symbols but specific Tauric motifs in Semen Bobrov, Konstantin Batiushkov, and Aleksandr Pushkin, among others. Liusyi connects his largely compilation-based texts to a geopolitical stance typical of Russia today. Hence his description of Crimea after 1990 as "an alternative mode of being for Russia,"[18] while describing the poetry expressing yearning for a Russian Crimea as a "simulacrum." However, he overlooks other modes and forms of literature on Crimea, including prose literature, as well as works marked by patriotic or Orthodox traits. Indeed, a patriotic element implicitly underlies his essays, interviews, and book reviews that were then compiled into books. In 2006, the Saint

15 The concept was used in parallel by others, but Liusyi claims to be the "founding father" of this reworking of Toporov's term. The first, abovementioned book, appeared in 2003, with a second, *Nasledie Kryma* (Heritage of Crimea), appearing in Moscow in 2007. The latter, however, is a "copy" of his first Crimea-related publication, reusing the most important and longest study word for word. The second Crimea book also features reviews, reports and interviews that were by and large reprints of previously published texts.

16 This term was introduced to literary studies in the mid-1980s by Vladimir Toporov, "Peterburg i 'Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury,'" in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam. Vyp. 18: Semiotika goroda i gorodskoi kultury*, ed. Aleksandr E. Maltsev (St. Petersburg: Tartuskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1984), 4–29. It describes a metatext that is positioned, or understood, between the city that is being read and its depictions in particular literary texts. Both elements (the city-as-text and texts about cities) are involved in constant exchanges and are inseparable from each other. The term has its origins in Iurii Lotman's spatial semiotics. This perspective is being superseded today by a regional perspective that Susi Frank terms "geoculturological" (Susi K. Frank, "Geokulturologie – Geopoetik: Definitions- und Abgrenzungsvorschläge," in Marszałek and Sasse, *Geopoetiken*, 19–42). What is missing from this concept, however, is the spiritual element that shapes Toporov's concept.

17 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999), 66–70.

18 Liusyi, *Krymskii tekst v russkoi literature*, 14. What is evident in this work is a memory-based, aesthetic take that following Renate Lachmann can be termed a "diegetic memory model." Cf. Renate Lachmann, "Kultursemiotischer Prospekt," in *Memoria: Vergessen und Erinnern*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp, Renate Lachmann, and Reinhart Herzog (Munich: Fink, 1993), xxi–xxii.

Petersburg-based Pushkin House Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences published an edited volume bearing the familiar title "The Crimea Text in Russian Culture."[19] The volume features a series of diverse essays that are neither methodologically nor theoretically coherent.

What follows here is an outline of the particular literary models depicting Crimea, taking into account, on the one hand, their entanglement with political models of Crimea and those applied in cultural history, while on the other hand stressing the models' aesthetic and literary specificities, as well as their role in Russian literature more generally. What is outlined here is not so much a set of fixed categories with strict borders but rather an open model that shows that certain texts can be aligned with several models, while some fit with no model at all. What we present here, then, is a brief overview with pointers towards the most important names or existing studies for analysing particular models.

The Classicist/Ancient Crimea Topos: Taurians in Crimea: This refers to the first literary evidence related to depictions of Crimea, with these texts linked directly to the political program of Catherine II known as "the Greek project." Her political-cultural idea was immediately reproduced in two literary models of Crimea. A true copy of it was evident in the national/nationalistic model that will be explored in the conclusion to this part of the article, while stylization of it that was more significantly inspired by Antiquity appeared in the Classicistic model of literary reflection on Crimea. The most important texts include Semen Bobrov's 1798 poem *Khersonida*, although this features a strong national tone, as well as Aleksandr Pushkin's poetry that was inspired by his three-week stay in Crimea and the elegy *Tavrida* (Tauris, 1815) by Konstantin Batiushkov.

The Romantic/Oriental Crimea Topos: Christianity vs. Islam: With increasing attention to the "Orient" and "Barbarian" or "primitive" peoples, literary interests in Crimea also shifted. The Crimean Tatars were increasingly foregrounded as a "Barbarian" people that was to be subject to missionary and civilizing efforts. The first text to illustrate the struggle between Russian Orthodoxy and Islam was Mikhail V. Lomonosov's play *Tamira i Selim* (Tamira and Selim, 1750). The best-known "Orientalistic" Crimea text, however, is Pushkin's epic poem *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan* (The Fountain of Bakhchisarai, 1824). It is also worth mentioning at this point the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and his famous Crimean Sonnets (*Sonety Krymskie*, 1825–26) as a form of reaction to Pushkin. As was the case in Russian literature, poetic journeys through unknown and Romantic worlds (Crimea and later Odesa) contributed to the development of cycles of poetry in Polish.

The Intercultural Crimea Topos: Crimea as a Liminal Space between the Mainland and the Sea, and as a Site of (not only) Traumatic Memory: During the modern

19 Nora Buks and Mariia N. Virolainen, eds., *Krymskii tekst v russkoi kulture: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii. Sankt-Peterburg, 4.–6. sentiabria 2006 g.* (St. Petersburg: IRL RAN, 2008), http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=8917.

period, literary-cultural reflections on Crimea shifted significantly. The region's previously fixed geopolitical (and ethnographic) contours became blurred as they were replaced by a conception of Crimea as an intercultural space positioned between two elements: the mainland (steppe) and the sea. The intercultural conception of Crimea can be ascribed to two poets: Osip Mandelstam[20] and Maksimilian Voloshin. The Poluostrov [Peninsula] Group drew on the "archaeological" conception of Crimea of the latter, as did, somewhat later, the Geopoetic Crimea Club led by Igor Sidorenko (Sid). We also consider Liudmila Ulitskaia's 1996 novel *Medeia i ee deti* (Medea and her Children) to reflect this model, as it deals with, among other themes, the Stalinist repression of Crimean Tatars.

Utopia/Anti-Utopia: Crimea as an Imaginary Space Enabling the Fulfillment of Both Private and Political Desires: In contrast to historiography, in certain literary works, Crimea developed into a realm resembling an island where both time and space dissolved. Thus, this "island" becomes a promised land that ultimately remained out of reach. In such conceptions, Crimea appears as a Garden of Eden that at the same time reveals the futility of everyday life. This is the case in perhaps the most famous text on Crimea, Anton Chekhov's short story *Dama s sobachkoi* (The Lady with the Dog, 1899). The absolute pinnacle of the image of a utopian island is Vasilii Aksenov's novel *Ostrov Krym* (The Island of Crimea, written in the 1970s and published in the USA in 1982). It imagines Crimea as an island that secured its independence in a civil war before being retaken by the Soviets at the conclusion of the novel.

The National/Nationalistic Topos: Crimea as Part of Russian National Identity: This literary conception of Crimea stems from the cultural historical myth of an "Orthodox" and "Slavic-Russian" Crimea, as outlined by Kerstin S. Jobst.[21] Its origins can be traced back to the period before the first annexation and serve to justify the incorporation of Crimea into Russia. It is applied in this "pure" form only under certain historical conditions, when the national and the patriotic are brought to the fore. Illustrations include Catherine II's correspondence with Prince Potemkin, her drawings and literary writings,[22] as well as the odes by Vasilii Petrov, Vasilii Kapnist, and others. The most famous ode, Gavrila Derzhavin's *Na priobretenie Kryma* (To the Conquest

20 Research on Mandelstam's writings on Crimea has so far treated it as part of his reflections on Antiquity. See, for example, Oleg A. Lekmanov, ed., *Mandelshtam i antichnost* (Moscow: Mandelshtamovskoe obshchestvo, 1995). In Pavel M. Nerler and Oleg A. Lekmanov, eds., *Mandelshtamovskaia entsiklopediia: V dvuch tomach* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2017), Crimea does not feature as a keyword in the index, which instead lists the particular places where he stayed, with further references to them also included under the entry "Antiquity."

21 Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 289–311.

22 For example, the drama *Nachalnoe upravlenie Olega* [Oleg's First Government] merged the objectives of the "Greek Project" with the myth of Crimea as the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy. For more on the content of this play, see Andrei Zorin, "Krym v istorii russkogo samosoznaniia," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 31 (1998): 133.

of Crimea, 1783), offers a digest of Catherine II's Greek Project.[23] Leo Tolstoy created a monument to Russian patriotism in his *Sevastopolskie rasskazy* (Sevastopol Sketches, 1855), which also include a powerful criticism of the failures of the Tsarist system and its responsibility for the deaths of thousands of soldiers and civilians. The phenomenon of the collective defense of Sevastopol[24] was appropriated by Marxist-leaning literature, as demonstrated by Sergei Sergeev-Tsenskii's epic *Sevastopolskaia strada* (The Ordeal of Sevastopol, 1937–39). The propaganda literature produced around the time of the second annexation of Crimea corresponds to this model. Some examples include Elena Iablonskaia's *Krym kak predchuvstvie* (Crimea as an Augury, 2017) and poetry on "Russian Crimea."[25] This model also covers anti-Ukrainian and anti-Tatar poetry, as well as texts of an Orthodox bent that call for a new Empire under Vladimir Putin or those that celebrate the annexation (such as Viacheslav Egiazarov, Sergei Ovcharenko, or Olga Golubeva with her poem "I skazala Rossiia – Svoikh ne brosaem").[26] The pinnacle of propaganda poetry is Petr Savelev's 2015 *Oda Vladimiru Vladimirovichu Putinu na vziatie Kryma* (An Ode to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin on the Conquest of Crimea),[27] a text that also references the war in Eastern Ukraine, a conflict Savelev claims was started by the Ukrainians. Putin is depicted as a savior who drives out all "enemies" and whose new kingdom is awe-inspiring. An enemy that had supposedly threatened the entire world is disarmed. Yet it is not clear what is meant by this: Is the enemy Ukraine, Europe, or indeed all those who are critical of Russia's policies? The explicit aggression expressed in this text goes beyond even the official Kremlin propaganda, demonstrating that just as in previous historical eras, Russia's rulers are abusing literature to political ends.[28]

23 While Liusyi emphasizes the repertoire of Antique figures (Catherine as Minerva, the god of war Mars, Circe and Homer), thus depoliticizing those texts (cf. Liusyi, *Krymskii tekst v russkoi literature*, 27), other researchers have stressed the political aspects of these odes—such as Zorin, "Krym v istorii russkogo samosoznaniia," 126, and Ulrike Jekutsch, "The Annexation of Crimea in Russian Literature of the 18th and the 21th Centuries," *Rocznik Komparatystyczny – Comparative Yearbook* 6 (2015): 255.

24 While Sevastopol became a model of Russian literary patriotism, Odesa was more typical of a hybrid Russian-Ukrainian culture that, together with the highly prominent Jewish element, was also reflected in Russian literature. Odesa constitutes a literary topos that differs greatly from Sevastopol; it provided the foundation for diverse literary motifs and styles, particularly in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The city as such was less significant than the fact that it became a location where many Russian literary figures gathered.

25 Many works of poetry can be found online while numerous anthologies were also published. This article draws on V. I. Kalugin, ed., *Krym v russkoi poezii i iskusstve: Antologiia* (Moscow: Veche, 2014).

26 Kalugin, 627. [And Russia Said: We will not abandon our people].

27 Petr Savelev "Oda Vladimiru Vladimirovichu Putinu na vziatie Kryma," accessed July 2, 2024, https://www.stihi.ru/2015/09/24/6155.

28 This section on literature on Crimea is based on the chapter: Helena Ulbrechtová, "Krym v ruské literatuře," in *Poloostrov Krym: od křižovatky kultur k ruské kolonii (Řecko – Řím – Byzanc – Osmanská říše – Krymský chanát – Ruské impérium – Sovětský svaz – Ukrajina – Ruská federace)*, ed. Helena Ulbrechtová and Radomír Vlček (Prague: Slovanský ústav AV ČR, v .v. i., 2022), 157–255.

3 Russian Literature about the Caucasus

While it is the peaceful, diplomatic incorporation of Crimea that is emphasized in relation to that region, the Caucasus are usually associated with battles and military conquest.[29]

Russian literary models of the Caucasus have been studied extensively, particularly as far as nineteenth-century Romantic literature is concerned. Seminal studies include the monographs by Susan Layton[30] and Harsha Rams,[31] while Susi Frank's article on the Caucasus as a site of double imprisonment is also particularly insightful.[32] The Caucasus has always been treated as an integral whole, and not only in politics or in Soviet-type studies.[33] This was also the case in literature that applied notions of foreignness to the entire region, treating it as a borderland between Europe and Asia.[34] The Caucasus often served as a means of giving expression to Romantic desires for (political and private) freedom that ultimately proved illusory. Drawing on other studies on the Caucasus, Frank defines the region through a cultural semiotic lens as a periphery and border where the familiar and the other encounter each other, while examining it through the lens of aesthetics and poetics reveals the Caucasus to be an object and site of projection for Russian Romanticism. The political and imperial often went hand-in-hand with the cultural and aesthetic.[35]

The authors of the 2018 monograph *Landna(h)me Georgien* (Naming and Claiming Georgia) adopted a different approach. They did not perpetuate colonial and Orientalistic discourses because they also listened for the voices of "the Other," while also developing a polyphonic, rather than centripetal, depiction of the Caucasus. This is why

29 In contrast to Crimea, the Caucasus has been read through the lens of postcolonial studies, albeit to a very limited extent. Cf. Alfred Sproede and Mirja Lecke, "Der Weg der postcolonial studies nach und in Osteuropa: Polen, Litauen, Russland," in *Überbringen – Überformen – Überblenden: Theorietransfer im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dietlind Hüchtker and Alfrun Kliems (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011), 28.

30 Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

31 Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: UW Press, 2003), and also "Masks of the Poets, Myths of the People: The Performance of Individuality and Nationhood in Georgian and Russian Modernism," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 3 (2008): 567–90.

32 Susi K. Frank, "Gefangen in der russischen Kultur: Zur Spezifik der Aneignung des Kaukasus in der russischen Kultur," *Die Welt der Slaven* XLIII (1998): 61–84.

33 The authors of the monograph *Landna(h)me Georgien: Studien zur kulturellen Semantik* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2018), Zaal Andronikashvili, Emzar Jgerenaia, and Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, attempted to diversify the Caucasus, seeking first and foremost to draw attention to its various regions together with their literary and cultural semanticizations. They focused in particular on Georgia and, to some degree, Abkhazia.

34 It was the conquest of this border that, according to Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii in the novel *Kavkazskaia stena* (Caucasus Wall), marked the birth of the Russian Empire, which could then offer protection against Islam. Cf. Andronikashvili, Jgeneraia, and Thun-Hohenstein, *Landna(h)me Georgien*, 145–46.

35 Frank, "Gefangen in der russischen Kultur," 61.

they focused on space and its contextualizations, with the concept of cultural semantics proving particularly suited to this approach that made cultural phenomena such as place and space central. Their study explored the shifting symbolic meanings and semiotic loads attached to the area. Drawing on other works, Andronikashvili developed the semantic concept of the literary space of the Caucasus as a "non-place" or an "atopos." He also incorporated the theoretical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin and Carl Schmitt, as he termed the region a ChroNomotopos.[36]

The authors of the monograph *Sonniges Georgien*[37] (Sunny Georgia) focused primarily on the process of the historical legitimization of the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire. Literary examples are largely limited to Georgian literature, although there are also cases highlighting translation practices from Georgian into Russian, as well as Soviet cultural policy. A separate theme is the image of Stalin in Georgian literature. The authors' central analytical concept is *Figuren des Imperialen*, or "figurations of the imperial," and their translations in the national context. These figurations were often instrumentalized according to the formalistic concepts of form and content (and later according to Stalin's reappropriation of them). The study reveals the unequal relationship between the Empire and Georgia, with the latter nevertheless acquiring a specific position in the Soviet family of nations.

The literary myth of the Caucasus, as marked by the ambivalent attributes of freedom and colonization, has its origins in Russian Romanticism.[38] Tolstoy's texts on the Caucasus shattered any illusions.[39] While he saw the defense of Sevastopol of 1854/55 as the moment a new myth was born, his short stories "Rubka lesa" ("The Wood-Felling") and "Hadzhi Murat" were the nail in the coffin of the classicist-colonial Caucasus myth. Of course, it did not disappear entirely, as it was revived in the Soviet mythology of new men and socialist development.

In Russian Modernism, it was the Eurasian space that came into focus,[40] although an interest in the Caucasus remained in place. The genre of "travel literature," be it in the form of prose or poetry, acquired new forms. The lyrical subject of the period sought to combine impressions from travels or expressive takes on them with a social

36 Frank, 36. Andronikashvili proposed this concept in 2012 already. Zaal Andronikashvili, "Der Kaukasus als Grenzraum: Ein *atopos* russischer Literatur," in *Topographien pluraler Kulturen*, 47–48. Transferring the relationship between order and orientation (*Ordnung* and *Ortung*) to time and space (Mikhail Bakhtin) gives rise to the "contaminated" form of ChroNomotopos. Andronikashvili also defines it as the "united of space, time, and the law"; Andronikashvili, Jgeneraia, and Thun-Hohenstein, *Landna(h)me Georgien*, 133.

37 Giorgi Maisuradze and Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, *Sonniges Georgien: Figuren des Nationalen im Sowjetimperium* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2015).

38 The best-known texts are Aleksandr Pushkin: *Kavkazskii plennik: Povest* (1820–21), *Puteshestvie v Arzrum vo vremia pokhoda 1829 goda* (First edition 1836), *Stikhi, sochinennye vo vremia puteshestviia (1829)* (1836); Mikhail Lermontov: *Mtsyri* (1839; first edition 1840); Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii: *Kavkazskie povesti/ocherki* (1820–30).

39 Lev Tolstoi: *Nabeg* (1853), *Rubka lesa* (1853–1855), *Kazaki* (1852–63), *Hadzhi Murat* (1896–1904).

40 Cf. Felix Philipp Ingold, *Russische Wege: Geschichte – Kultur – Weltbild* (Munich: Fink, 2007), 322.

message. This was the case, for example, with Andrei Belyi and his travel prose on Georgia and Armenia, which he combined during the late Symbolist period with efforts to include a degree of politicization. Belyi, like Mandelstam, sought to get closer to "the Other." Their efforts to understand "the Other" differentiated them from the Romantic poets.[41]

The original Romantic literary reflections on the Caucasus, whose thrust was towards producing images of alien others, shifted significantly during the course of the socialist period, particularly during the interwar years. The "Other" was Sovietized and dissolved in a supposed multiculturalism. The Caucasus Republics were subject to Soviet imperial projects in the 1930s that adopted the forms of Socialist Realism and Futurism. Beyond poems, there were travel reportage and production novels[42] as well as texts that could be classified as Socialist Romanticism (for example, Konstantin Paustovskii: *Kolkhida* [*Colchis*], 1934). This situation persisted in various forms long into the twentieth century.

A bigger shift began in the 1970s, with writers of Caucasus origins writing in Russian.[43] Such literature, which served the postcolonial role of "the Other," made a significant contribution to the destruction of Socialist Realism. To draw on Spröde and Lecke's argument, these texts on the one hand presented postcolonial knowledge of the colonized regions,[44] while on the other hand developing a subversive force against Soviet centralism.[45] The more or less implicit critique was directed primarily against the destruction of ethnic particularities and the national cultures of non-Russian peoples. Many of the non-Russian literary texts played an important role in perestroika under Mikhail Gorbachev. Perestroika literature could nevertheless also adopt imperial-colonial forms (regardless of certain critical points), as is the case with the Siberian author Viktor Astafiev's *Lovlia peskarei v Gruzii* (The Catching of Gudgeons in Georgia, 1986). The novel's depiction of an encounter between two Soviet writers—the narrator and his Georgian former friend Otar—turns out to be an embodiment of Russian cul-

41 Andrei Belyi: *Veter s Kavkaza*, *Armeniia* (1928); Osip Mandelshtam: *Puteshestvie v Armeniiu* (written between 1931 and 1932, published 1933), the poetry cycle *Armeniia* (1931). See also Carmen Sippl, *Reisetexte der russischen Moderne: Andrej Belyj und Osip Mandelštam im Kaukasus* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1997); Christa Ebert, "Man muss sehen können: Andrej Belyjs Reisetexte 'Der Wind vom Kaukasus' und 'Armenien' als ästhetische Lektion," in *Flüchtige Blicke: Relektüren russischer Reisetexte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Wolfgang Stephan Kissel and Christine Gölz (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2009), 181–206.

42 Zinaida Rikhter: *Kavkaz nashikh dnei* (1923–24, as a book 1924), *V solnechnoi Abkhazii i Khevsuretii* (1930); Marietta Shaginian: *Sovetskaia Armeniia* (1923), *Gidrotsentral* (1931); Nikolai Tikhonov: das Poem *Doroga* (written 1924, published 1927).

43 The best-known representative of Caucasus literature is Fazil Iskander with his prose cycle *Sandro iz Chegema* (*Sandro of Chegem*, 1973–89).

44 Spröde and Lecke, "Der Weg der postcolonial studies," 30.

45 This also applies generally to Russian-language literature from the Central Asian republics of the USSR.

ture's mission in Georgia.[46] The unequivocally negative coding of the Romantic Caucasus topos as a site of refuge in Astafiev's novel is something that Thun-Hohenstein has also commented upon.[47]

The Caucasus, like Crimea, was a location of political exile that was often framed as a promised land. The place of exile was thus presented as a desired site of escape or refuge. This applies to a more significant extent to the individual countries, particularly Georgia and Armenia, than to the Caucasus as such. The development of artistic friendships, the sense of finding inspiration to write poetry or indeed the "rebirth" of a poet (as was the case with Osip Mandelstam in Armenia) could all be attributed to this model of the Caucasus. The forced as well as the (almost) voluntary stays in the Caucasus, beginning with Pushkin and all the way through to Mandelstam and Pasternak,[48] not only brought new experiences into Russian literature but also generated innovative texts. From the 1970s, Soviet Russian authors' memories of their encounters with the culture of the Caucasus—primarily though Georgian and Armenian culture—were increasingly the subject of literary works. It is not possible to state here the extent to which the texts mentioned below feature Orientalizing elements. The motif of Georgia as a site of refuge underwent transformation, starting in the 1970s, and it was depicted as a promised land or as the "poetic" homeland of Russian poets.[49] A nostalgic and at the same time politically explosive approach was adopted by the writer and émigré Andrei Bitov. He, too, presents Georgia as a site of refuge and salvation, particularly in his travel sketches *Gruzinskii albom* (Georgian Album, written in the 1970s and first published in Tbilisi in 1985, followed by various subsequent editions). In his late-period essays, he described Georgia as the "internal abroad," while his position between approving and opposing the "Empire" meant that he drew not only on Pushkin but also, albeit polemically, on Joseph Brodsky's explicitly anti-imperial discourse. Despite all the contradictions, Georgia did indeed become a second homeland to Bitov, while he "merely" discovered Armenia.[50]

46 On the content of the novel and its critique of Georgia, cf. Ulbrechtová, "Die Fluidität in der russischen Kultur," 240–41.

47 Andronikashvili, Jgeneraia, and Thun-Hohenstein, *Landna(h)me Georgien*, 409.

48 The volume of poetry *Vtoroe rozhdenie* (1932), with more on the subject in Andronikashvili, Jgeneraia, and Thun-Hohenstein, *Landna(h)me Georgien*, 299–302; Zaal Andronikashvili, "Pasternaks Reenactment der Kaukasusreise," in *Erzählte Mobilität im östlichen Europa: (Post-)Imperiale Räume zwischen Erfahrung und Imagination*, ed. Thomas Grob, Boris Previšić, and Andrea Zink (Tübingen: Francke, 2014), 245–59.

49 For example, Evgenii Evtushenko: *O Gruziia, nam slezy vytiraia, Moi Tbilissi* (1977); Bella Akhmadulina: *Sny o Gruzii* (1960), *Anne Kalandadze* (1975), and the cycle of poems *Sny o Gruzii* (2000).

50 See his travel reportage *Uroki Armenii* from 1969.

4 The Black Sea in Russian Literature

This is a rather marginal theme, as most literary historians and cultural historians agree. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to revise this view, particularly when it comes to the role of individual images of the sea within the structures of Russian literature. For now, it must suffice to outline the most important arguments in this respect with reference to selected works.

Interest in water, particularly in the form of the sea and rivers, is something that in Russian culture can be traced back almost exclusively to imperial and geopolitical concerns. Just as rivers have been treated as border markers,[51] the same applies to the sea, including the Black Sea.[52] The sea is not something that connects, with its waters providing a common body to multiple cultures and countries; rather, it is a space that divides worlds and is linked to a military strategy.[53] That Russians had little cultural or literary interest in the sea, preferring instead rivers, was something that Evgenii Markov noted in the early twentieth century in his book *Ocherki Kryma* (Sketches of Crimea).[54] Often, the Black Sea remained merely a symbol of the Russian Empire's territorial expansion, as is the case in Derzhavin's well-known poem, "Pamiatnik" ("Monument," 1795): his fame as a poet will "flow from the white to the black waters."

The Black Sea is also present in Russian literature as the embodiment of Romantic desire and as the backdrop for the sensitive poetic soul. This tradition can be traced back to Vasilii Zhukovskii (the 1822 poem "More" ["The Sea"]), reaching a peak with Pushkin and his cycle of Crimea poems, of which two directly address the Black Sea. They deal with arrival in and departure from Crimea, with both set on the deck of a ship. In the farewell poem "K moriu" ("To the Sea," 1824), the sea is associated with freedom (Pushkin employed a similar motif with reference to the Caucasus), while its dark, turbulent waves and depths are a reflection of the Romantic poetic soul. For Pushkin, the Black Sea is also a reservoir of memory, a motif that Osip Mandelstam later drew on. This Romantic tradition also found resonance in the aesthetic play evident in certain Symbolist poets, including for example Innokentii Annenskii.

Pushkin's metaphor of the Black Sea as a "free element" was also employed by the Slavophile poet Fedor Tiutchev, whose poem "Chernoe more" ("The Black Sea," 1871) praises the lifting of restrictions imposed on Russia in the wake of its defeat in the Crimean War. The sea appears again as a reflection of Russia's military and imperial might; once it was again permitted to employ its Black Sea Fleet, based in Sevastopol, in battle.[55]

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51 Ingold, *Russische Wege*, 33–34.

52 This is the case, for example, in Bestuzhev-Marlinskii (*Kavkazskaia stena*). Cf. Andronikashvili, Jgeneraia, and Thun-Hohenstein, *Landna(h)me Georgien*, 145.

53 See also Ulbrechtová, "Die Fluidität in der russischen Kultur," 234.

54 Cited in Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 353.

55 On the geopolitical load of this text, see Liusyi, *Krymskii tekst v russkoi literature*, 133.

Osip Mandelstam contributed a special chapter to the body of works featuring sea motifs and themes, with his poems giving expression, first and foremost, to the desire for freedom and a "world culture" in the form of materialized metaphors. In several of his poems, the sea is transformed into a reservoir of memory (of ancient poetry, mythology, and culture). Mandelstam consciously adopted Pushkin's metaphors, including his use of the term "blue sea" (*sinee more*). Irina Surat is one scholar who has conducted an intertextual comparison of the two poets.[56] Mandelstam, however, viewed the Black Sea as a "one-way street" which offered no route out of Russia. Transit (in physical and mental terms) was something that he associated with the Mediterranean, a body of water that he believed offered a genuine connection to the world of Antiquity and Europe.[57]

The Black Sea as an escape route that offered no return path was a motif that was taken up by the Russian émigré and Nobel Prize winner Joseph Brodsky (1940–96). In his well-known essay "Flight from Byzantium" (1985),[58] he also mentioned the absence of the sea in Russian culture. Generally speaking, Brodsky's primary focus was on confronting Soviet imperial policy, which was something that he associated with Byzantine rule. Furthermore, Brodsky also mentions the issue of the Russo-Asiatic space that, rather than using the usual term Eurasia, he termed "Asiopa."[59]

While the Black Sea formed in the 1980s a border between worlds that, read through an imperial framework, connected two autocratic regimes across different periods, in transcultural migrant literature the sea was a place where a hybrid temporal-spatial culture emerged. One example is Mariia Rybakova's essay "Shumit Tirrenskoe more" (The Hum of the Tyrrhenian Sea, 2006). The Tyrrhenian Sea, reminiscent of the Black Sea of her childhood, develops into an image of the whole of Europe. Rybakova's deliberations on relations between Russia and Europe, and Russia and Asia, could have been inspired by Brodsky's take on the same issues.[60]

The literary images of the Black Sea (there are some that "merely" depict the sea as such, although we have assumed that they have the Black Sea in mind) oscillate between the (anti-)imperial and the Romantic, with the latter also enveloping metaphors of memory.[61] For Russian literature, however, it is the image of the Black Sea coast that typically serves as an image for the topos of the sea, thus bringing us back again to Crimea and the Caucasus. The sea is a "liminal" space that primarily serves to link the center of the empire with its "colonies" and peripheries.

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56 Irina Surat, *Mandelshtam i Pushkin* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2009), 240–44.

57 Cf. Ralph Dutli, *Mandelstam: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2005), 128.

58 On his essay, see, for example, Thun-Hohenstein, "'Wo es ganz plötzlich abbricht…'," 76, 91–94.

59 See also Ulbrechtová, "Die Fluidität in der russischen Kultur," 235.

60 Cf. Ulbrechtová, 236. For more on the intercultural poetics in Rybakova's essay and the so-called "mixing places," see Eva Hausbacher, *Poetik der Migration: Transnationale Schreibweisen in der zeitgenössischen russischen Literatur* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2009), 211–15.

61 Comparison with the Georgian vision of the sea, which presents it as an almost exclusively destructive element, could prove interesting.