ENCHANTING LITERARY MODERNITY:
IDRIS BAZORKIN’S POSTCOLONIAL SOVIET PASTORAL

In his classic study of the country/city dialectic in nineteenth-century British literature, Marxist critic Raymond Williams revised the way we read the modern pastoral. Williams recognized the richness of Thomas Hardy’s œuvre for the broad contours of his argument. But rather than treating Hardy as a spokesperson for the ‘timeless backwater to which he is so often deported’, Williams explored how Hardy’s novels were occupied by landscapes that were ‘still predominantly rural’ decades after England’s industrialization.¹ In Williams’s account, the persistence of the rural imagination in the midst of industrialized life is bound up with modern literary form. Williams identifies a ‘structure of feeling’ grounded in the ‘idea of innocence: the rural innocence of the pastoral’.² The rural imagination haunts literary modernity long after the countryside has been effaced by industrialization. The structure of feeling embedded in the town/country distinction led twentieth-century writers to evoke in their historical narratives long lost pasts, and to generate from them new futures. Even the temporality that is ‘now called the “timeless”’, Williams reflects, is but a facet of that ‘sense of history’ that ineluctably shapes the constitution of global modernity.³ The impulse to freeze the movement of time is itself a reflex of the objectifying process that in modernity is referred to as history.

Williams suggests among other things that the pastoral novel, so firmly associated with the transition to modernity, was more global than literary history has hitherto registered.⁴ Although best known through the bucolics of Theocritus and Virgil, the pastoral shaped world literary history from Asia to Europe, often serving as a counterpoint to representations of modern urban life.⁵ The genre’s chronology varies as widely as literature itself, yet Williams’s

This research has been enabled by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under ERC-2017-STG Grant Agreement No. 759346 (Global Literary Theory: Caucasus Literatures Compared).

² Ibid., p. 46.
³ Ibid., p. 206.
⁵ There is no deep or systematic history of the non-European pastoral. One worthwhile study, confined to Indian novels in English, is V. D. Katamble, The Rural Novel in Indian English (Jaipur: Shruti Publications, 2008). A Companion to Poetic Genre, ed. by Erik Martiny (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), includes a discussion of the postcolonial pastoral, but is confined to Anglophone literatures. Rob Nixon gestures towards a concept of the postcolonial pastoral in Slow Violence
Idris Bazorkin's Postcolonial Soviet Pastoral

insight that, in modernity, ‘the life of the country and city is moving and present: moving in time, through the history of a family and a people; moving in feeling and ideas, through a network of relationships and decisions’ indicates how the variegated paths of global literary modernity can be brought into productive comparison.

Williams’s dialectic between town and country offers a useful framework for narrating the history of Russian literary prose. Here too, from Tolstoy to Turgenev to Chekhov, the reader encounters a persistent contrast between the ethics of the country and the new conceptual horizons opened up by life in the city. What Williams does not quite articulate is the way in which the pastoral aesthetic offers an alternative to the realist prose that was the nineteenth-century norm. Yet the Russian canon has much to offer in terms of rethinking the dialectic between the city and the country. Chekhov scholars have recognized how this author’s fictions 'break down and reconstitute the pastoral according to the same principles that lie at the foundation of progress'. This insight pertains to the Russian and Soviet canon in general. Beyond serving as a foil for the Bildungsroman’s odyssey through metropolitan life, the Russian pastoral also negates this narrative by questioning its claims to supremacy and, indeed, veracity. As my citations indicate, I draw on prior scholarship on Russian literary history, but with a significant difference. The Ingush author with whom I am concerned figures nowhere in the Russian canon, notwithstanding his importance for Soviet literature. Hence this article has a dual aim: to Russify the global pastoral and to decolonize Russian studies. By attending more closely to the Russian and Soviet pastoral’s episteme, and especially to its reframing of the relation between the imagination and representation through its methods and means of enchantment, we can arrive at a more concrete awareness of the alternative trajectories opened up by this genre within the multilingual and multiconfessional Soviet Union.

This article explores how a historical novel by the Ingush writer Idris Bazorkin (1910–1991) marked a turning point in Soviet Ingush literature. The Ingush are an indigenous mountain-dwelling people of the north-eastern


6 Williams, The Country and the City, p. 7.

7 For one endeavour to tease out these tensions see Clarence Augustus Manning, ‘Dostoyevsky and Modern Russian Literature’, Sewanse Review Quarterly, 30 (1922), 286–97.


9 Notwithstanding brief encyclopedia entries (e.g. The Modern Encyclopedia of East Slavic, Baltic, and Eurasian Literatures, ed. by Harry Butler Weber and others (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1978), p. 140), Bazorkin’s work has not been discussed in English. For attempts to situate Bazorkin within the literatures of the Caucasus see Lilii Kharsieva, Spetsifika ingushskoi kul’tury: esteticheskie i dukhovno-nravstvennye osnovy romana I. Bazorkina ‘Iz t’my vekov’ (Nazran:
Ingush literature is one of the least studied among the many Soviet literatures in a field wherein non-ethnic Russian contributions to Russian literature have yet to be given their analytical due.\(^\text{11}\) The names of such major Ingush poets as Tembot Bekov and Akhmet Vedzizhev remain unknown even to specialists. By engaging for the first time in English with a founding text of modern Ingush literature, I add to a growing body of work on the literatures of the Russian empire’s non-Russian communities and to the endeavours of Platt, Caffee, Smola, and Uffelmann to establish Russophone literature as a field in its own right.\(^\text{12}\) Historians and philologists of Arabic, Turkic languages, and Persian, such as Devin DeWeese, Vladimir Bobrovnikov, Michael Kemper, and Paolo Sartori, have been introducing the Arabic, Turkic, and Persian literatures of the Russian empire for decades, but their contributions are historical in orientation and do not directly reframe the Russian literary canon. Probably for this reason, pioneering philological and historical labours with non-Russian sources have not yet broken through the ethnocentrism of mainstream Russian literary studies.

Even in the absence of access to relevant archives and primary sources, postcolonial framings are increasingly used to think with and within post-Soviet studies. Historians such as Adeeb Khalid and political scientists such as Laura Adams have opened new lines of enquiry within their respective disciplines.\(^\text{13}\) Slavists who focus on literature lag substantially behind their historian counterparts in exploring how postcoloniality illuminates the Soviet experience. Tlostanova, Pucherová and Gáfrik, and Jackson have each documented the reach of global Russian literature, but the connections they

---

\(^{10}\) Ingush ethnicity and the politics pertaining to its classification are discussed in Rebecca Ruth Gould, ‘Language Dreamers: Race and the Politics of Etymology in the Caucasus’, in \textit{Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories, and the Making of a World Area}, ed. by Bruce Grant and Lale Ya\l\c{c}in-Heckmann, Hall studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, 13 (M"unster: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 143–66. See also V. A. Shnirelman, \textit{Byt' alanami: intellektualny i politika na Severnom Kavkaze v XX veke} (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006).

\(^{11}\) For a preliminary effort to reconceptualize the non-Russian and Russophone literatures of the Caucasus see Rebecca Ruth Gould, \textit{Writers and Rebels: The Literature of Insurgency in the Caucasus} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).

have explored offer at best distant vantage points from which to survey the literatures of the multilingual Caucasus. By way of deepening the encounter between postcolonial studies and philology, and of supplementing the Russian with the cosmopolitan Russophone, I read a key text of Ingush literary modernity at the intersections of Soviet aesthetic canons, Ingush indigeneity, and the global pastoral. Along the way, I also consider how this Soviet tale of colonial-era enchantment places the global pastoral within a new frame of reference, enabling us to view anew how ‘the large-scale diminishment of sacredness’ has been generated by and framed within ‘industrial modernity’.

This inaugural engagement with Bazorkin’s Dark Ages (1968) considers the novel as a refraction of Ingush modernity and as a distillation of Ingush national culture. In comparing Bazorkin’s and Thomas Hardy’s pastoral novels, I suggest some divergences between the type of pastoral that dominates most accounts of this genre in modernity and its manifestation in less-studied indigenous narratives. While sharing a genre, these divergent examples remind us of the complex literary entanglements of the Soviet with the postcolonial. This juxtaposition elucidates how major literary genres are inflected by what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih have called minor transnationalism. I further demonstrate how an Ingush text, marginalized within both European and Russian literary traditions, can extend the analytical purchase of Williams’s thesis while also attesting to the potential of a cross-cultural prosaics of the pastoral for the study of world-literary form.

Largely a creation of the Soviet period, Ingush literary modernity brings together diverse influences, including indigenous cosmologies, Islamic history, and Russian literary norms. The development of Soviet literature from within new concepts of indigeneity across the Caucasus has generated a unique literary modernism that merits closer attention, and, in


15 Sarah Cole, ‘Enchantment, Disenchantment, War, Literature’, PMLA, 124.5 (2009), 1632–47 (p. 1633). Scholarship on enchantment in modern literature acknowledges its ambivalent status vis-à-vis modernity, as the product of the very condition it seeks to reverse; see e.g. Michael Saler, As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Much the same critique might be extended to the discussion of indigeneity.


17 Christian Dettmering reviews the Ingush ethnography during the tsarist period that created one of the frameworks for Bazorkin’s work, in ‘No Love Affair: Ingush and Chechen Imperial Ethnographies’, in An Empire of Others: Making Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR, ed. by Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 341–68.
particular, more comparative scrutiny, across the Soviet canon as well as transnationally. Collectively, the ethnographically inflected Ingush, Chechen, Abkhaz, Avar, Lezgi, Ossetian, and other indigenous literatures of Soviet modernity can reframe literary canons that have for too long been read within exclusively metropolitan or ethnically Russian frames of reference.

By analysing Bazorkin’s Bildungsroman within a broad panorama of multilingual Soviet literatures, this enquiry sheds light on the relation between indigenous literary modernity and the incipient national consciousness that shaped the emergence of Soviet literatures, a term that is always best used in the plural form. The national forms taken by Soviet literary modernity can productively be examined as literary landscapes that, in the words of eco-theorist Leo Marx, can ‘help us in planning the future of the actual landscape’. As a major theorist of the urban American pastoral, Marx opens a path for thinking about how Caucasus literary landscapes can enhance our understanding of Soviet literary form. These literary landscapes can also broaden our understanding of global literary modernity by bringing to light the relationship between literary and technological change.

Of Gods and Men

Although its plot is firmly rooted in the history of Ingushetia’s encounter with colonial rule, Bazorkin’s novel is structured by a cosmology of indigenous time. As Bazorkin states at the end of the novel, he composed his narrative in Jarakh, a village near which much of the story transpires, from 16 August 1965 to 10 February 1967. The road on which Kaloi, the novel’s impoverished hero, was born winds through Jarakh. As an actual location, Jarakh bears a different relation to history from Egi, the village in which most of the novel’s action unfolds. The British pastoral novelist Thomas Hardy described his fictional Wessex as a ‘partly-real, partly dream-country’; Bazorkin’s Ingushetia may similarly be seen as a dream country where the major crises of the Ingush encounter with modernity unfold. William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County offers yet another modern pastoral parallel, wherein the author uses

---


an imaginary setting to show his readers ‘our modern and complex problems mirrored in a simpler and more primitive world’.\(^{21}\) The historicity of Jarakh enabled Bazorkin to convincingly evoke a world he knew only as an outsider, and through academic study.

Bazorkin’s protagonist is named after Kaloi-Kant, one of the mythical giants (narts) from whom the Ingush people are said to descend.\(^{22}\) In a violent battle with his enemy Soska Solsa in long-ago mythical time, Kaloi-Kant smashed a boulder with such force that it sank into the ground. Soska Solsa responded by throwing a rock at him. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, both rocks were reported by local ethnographers to be standing in the spots where they entered historical time.\(^{23}\) As his father proclaims, the modern fictional Kaloi was born ‘under the rock which our hero [bogatyr] Kaloi Kant and his enemy [. . .] threw at each other’.\(^{24}\) Born under a mythical rock to an impoverished family that was fated to bear the brunt of the colonizing project, the modern Kaloi thus has indigenous Ingush mythology inscribed in his name. Elliptically echoing one of the most recurrent eco-critical motifs in Caucasus literatures, Bazorkin’s narrator proclaims that ‘rocks always speak’ (p. 332). For Bazorkin, as for other Ingush and Chechen authors such as Magomed Mamakaev, rocks speak more powerfully than humans and in a language that, to adapt Leo Marx, is ‘one of our most delicate and accurate means of joining ideas with emotions, public with private experience’.\(^{25}\) The medium of this language is the pastoral form.

Kaloi’s mythical name is only one sign of his association with the ancient gods of the Ingush pantheon. When he receives a horse as a gift from his uncle, Kaloi ‘remembers the story of his namesake’s magical horse’ (p. 124). Kaloi also passes much time with his horse near the cliffs of Seska Solsi, named after the mythical Kaloi’s enemy. A forest that the modern Kaloi wanders through is said to be enchanted (volshebnyi) (p. 366). As if surreptitiously alluding to Kaloi’s descent from the mythical narts, one of the villagers jokingly asks his niece what it was like to ‘spend the night [in the enchanted forest] with a giant.

\(^{23}\) Chakh Akhriev, ‘Iz chechenskih skazanii: neskolko slov o chechenskikh i ingushskikh skazaniyakh’, *Sbornik svedeni o kavkazskikh gortsakh*, 4.2.2 (1871), 38–46 (p. 46).
\(^{24}\) Idris Bazorkin, *Iz tʹmy vekov*, in *Sobranie sochinenie*, vol. 1 (Magas, Ingushetia: Serdalo, 1968), p. 68. Future references to this novel are given parenthetically. All translations from Bazorkin are from Russian and are my own. The full novel is in two volumes; this article confines itself to discussion of volume 1.
[velikan]’ (p. 380). Earlier, Kaloi is explicitly called a nart (p. 353). Such statements reveal the historical divide severing Ingush literary modernity from its cosmological origins. The disjunction between mythic and historical time also inflects this narrative with irony, disenchanting the text while crafting a modern pastoral from the colonial encounter.\footnote{26}

A century before Bazorkin, British pastoralists such as Hardy evoked a world controlled by pagan gods to explain how the sacred permeates their characters’ lives. Hardy’s peasant woman Marty South, who is consumed by unrequited love for Giles Winterbourne, is compared to the Norse goddess Sif, the wife of Thor, whose hair was ripped off by Loke, the ‘crafty, cowardly, and destructive giant of Norse mythology’.\footnote{27} While a herdsman was transformed into a stag by Artemis in Greek mythology, a male hunter in Hardy’s pastoral landscape pants with ‘Acteonic excitement’.\footnote{28} In keeping with the conventions of the pastoral, Hardy’s rural characters attract comparisons to the gods.\footnote{29} Divinity belongs in the countryside within Hardy’s aesthetic universe. While the gods and goddesses of Ingushetia retain their sacred status within everyday Ingush life, nineteenth-century English separates the world of the pagan deities from everyday life. As Hardy’s protagonists amass wealth and power, the numinous recedes from their horizons and the pastoral comes to function as a ‘foil for antipastoral “wasteland” images of barrenness and alienation’.\footnote{30}

Far from dichotomizing tradition and modernity, modern pastoralists use the mythological past to enchant their fictional presents. Hardy reinvents Norman and Christian traditions; Bazorkin reinvents ancient pagan, Islamic, and Christian traditions. Hardy’s text is suffused with references to Greek gods and biblical figures who, although not native to his landscape, are indigenized in the text. When the rumour of her husband’s infidelity spreads through Little Hintock, Grace’s grief is depicted through an eclectic juxtaposition of deities: the Greek princess Ariadne, the ancient Persian Vashti, and Amy Dudley, favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.\footnote{31} Here as elsewhere in Hardy, Greek mythology merges with biblical narrative and modern history to generate dense palimpsests of multiply interwoven pasts. While Bazorkin’s


\footnote{27} Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, ed. by Dale Kramer (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2005). The comparison occurs on page 19; the gloss cited here by the editor is on page 343. Future references to this novel are given parenthetically.

\footnote{28} Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 78.

\footnote{29} George Eliot’s novels provide another example of this tendency; consider her famous apologia for Dutch realism in the person of a kitchen maid in Adam Bede (1859).


Ingush cosmology mixes historical memory with myth, Hardy constructs an imaginary topography, pertaining to a world far beyond his characters’ ken.

Bazorkin’s web of pagan and monotheistic deities is rooted in his protagonists’ everyday lives. In Bazorkin’s novel, invocations to pagan gods intermix with prayers to Allah. When the village mullah Hasan Hajji departs from the mountain village of Egi, the elders first travel to Nazran, the closest urban centre, to request a second mullah. Their request goes unanswered because no qualified mullah from the plains will agree to ‘bury his life high in the mountains’ (p. 332). Once it becomes clear that their mullah will never return to Egi, the villagers receive occasional visits from a mullah from the plains, but the rarity of these visits means that ‘the villagers’ faith in Allah began to weaken’ (p. 332). Kaloi honours both pagan and Islamic traditions when he addresses a crowd alongside the local pagan priest. ‘Nearly everyone here is Muslim,’ Kaloi announces to the crowd, ‘but there isn’t one of us who, no matter what he might say, hasn’t prayed to the goddesses Miatt-sela, Tusholi, and Tkamish-erdi!’ (p. 343).

Elsewhere, when the villagers ask their pagan priest to explain why the gods punish them even when they make sacrifices, he argues for the necessity of following both Islamic and pagan traditions. Bazorkin cleverly denominates the highest divinity worshipped by the villagers of Egi: ‘god-Allah [bog-Allah]’

a term that conveniently conjoins a pagan concept with an Islamic name. ‘I consider god-Allah to be great,’ says the pagan priest, ‘But our earth, mountains, water, and air have their own gods, and we shouldn’t forget about them. What would exist without the sun? May it shine its grace on us!’ (p. 365).

Beyond its accommodation of multiple paganisms to the modern pastoral, Bazorkin’s pastoral demonstrates how monotheism merges with a pre-Islamic pagan ethos high in the Caucasus mountains. The numinous is more proximate within Bazorkin’s text than in most modern European pastorals, which typically relegate industrialized societies to a time-space exterior to the narrative. Furthermore, in Bazorkin the gods traverse boundaries between the living and the dead. In addition to setting the pivotal scenes of his novel on the magical cliffs of Seska Solsi, in an enchanted forest, and in the so-called Cave of Wonders, Bazorkin opens and closes with a majestic storm that alters his protagonists’ fates, destroys their property, and brings them to the verge of death. As a cosmic force that collapses historical time, nature’s text merges the pastorals of eras past with the realism of Soviet modernity.

Bazorkin inherited the realist aesthetic of the nineteenth century novel from numerous predecessors, including Tolstoy. This realism acquired a new layer of complexity in the context of Soviet representational canons, most saliently for Bazorkin the Socialist Realist novel and so-called village prose. But what

32 For these developments within Soviet literature see, respectively, Katerina Clark, The Soviet
is most striking is the distance between Bazorkin’s and mainstream Soviet literary norms. The depiction of the love affair between Nasi and Hasan Hajji transgresses numerous Ingush ethical norms, for example, just as its narration transgresses Soviet aesthetic norms, yet its meticulous, measured eroticism is unsaddled by any kind of overt ideological agenda.\textsuperscript{33} Even more unusual within the context of 1960s Soviet fiction is the epic scope of Bazorkin’s regionalism. Bazorkin does not mimic the blood-and-soil nativism cultivated by ethnic Russian village prose writers of the time;\textsuperscript{34} nor does he mimic the humorous style of his fellow Caucasus writers Nodar Dumbadze or Fazil Iskander. The fiction of the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, in particular his novella \textit{The Day Lasts More Than a Thousand Years} (1983), might be the closest approximation to Bazorkin’s epic tone within the Soviet literary canon, but the differences between the two authors are as palpable as their similarities. Bazorkin depicts a subtle texture to the colonial encounter that is missing from the fictions of Aitmatov. Further, he grafts onto the regional epic an element of enchantment that recalls the fictions of other non-Russian Soviet authors from the same period, such as Oleksandr Ilchenko in his Ukrainian novel \textit{The Cossack Line Never Wanes} (1958) and the genre of \textit{khymerna proza} (‘chimerical prose’) that this work fostered in Soviet Ukrainian literature. More than the familiar names of Aitmatov, Iskander, and Dumbadze, Bazorkin’s closest interlocutors are authors such as the Chechen Magomed Mamakaev and the Abkhaz writer Bagrat Shinkuba, neither of whom has been the subject of sustained scholarly discussion.\textsuperscript{35} How do we explain the greater currency and canonicity of writers such as Iskander and Dumbadze when compared to the more ambivalent and thought-provoking fictions of Bazorkin, Mamakaev, and Shinkuba?

Katerina Clark’s classic study of the Socialist Realist aesthetic provides one possible answer to this question. ‘The Socialist Realist novel was intended to be a form of popular literature,’ notes Clark, ‘and like most varieties of popular literature it is formulaic.’\textsuperscript{36} Many Socialist Realist authors worked creatively within the representational canons they inherited, producing innovative works within an ossified literary system. Bazorkin responded to the pressures of Soviet censorship in a different way from his better-known


\textsuperscript{33} The love affair is depicted in the excerpt from the novel that I translated under the title ‘Evening Prayers’ in \textit{The Russia Reader: Culture, History, Politics}, ed. by Bruce Grant and Adele Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 293–302.

\textsuperscript{34} See Parthé, \textit{Russian Village Prose}.

\textsuperscript{35} See in particular Shinkuba’s novel \textit{Poslednii iz ushedshikh} (1974), trans. from Abkhaz into Russian by Konstantin Simonov and Iakov Kozlovskii (Moscow: Sovetski pisatel’, 1976), and into English by Paula Garb as \textit{The Last of the Departed} (Moscow: Raduga, 1986).

\textsuperscript{36} Clark, \textit{The Soviet Novel}, p. xi.
Idris Bazorkin’s Postcolonial Soviet Pastoral

contemporaries. He did not produce a Socialist Realist novel: instead, his prose epic evokes the vanishing pastoral world of mountainous Ingushetia before colonial rule. Although his Bildungsroman acquired immense popularity among late Soviet and post-Soviet Ingush readers, this popularity was radically circumscribed and does not appear to have reached beyond the Caucasus. The demographic narrowness of Bazorkin’s readership is an anomaly within Soviet literary history, which achieved an unprecedented degree of cross-pollination across the various national literatures that comprised the Soviet Union, particularly in the field of translation studies.\textsuperscript{37} Closer in spirit and aesthetic to Oleksandr Ilchenko’s The Cossack Line Never Wanes and Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita (1966) than to Sholokov’s The Quiet Don (1928–40), Bazorkin’s novel inspired Soviet Ingush literature to depart from normative Russocentric Soviet aesthetic canons.\textsuperscript{38}

Bazorkin’s anomalous status within Soviet and Russian literary history calls for a reconceptualization of the Soviet literary canon. Even as he presents Ingush indigeneity on new Soviet foundations, he also situates the ethnic-driven constructs that have shaped Soviet and Russian literary history within a new framework. That Bazorkin’s aesthetic is more magical than Socialist Realist, less subservient to the laws of cause and effect, and more invested in the autonomy of the imagination accounts in part for its elision within canonical treatments of Soviet literature, and to its absence from European scholarship on Soviet literature.

\textit{Silence as a Narrative Device}

Bazorkin’s and Hardy’s parallel universes intersect in ways that reach beyond their respective palimpsests of paganism, monotheism, and modernity. Bazorkin deploys the marriage plot in ways that recall the nineteenth-century British pastoral, ‘as the vehicle and confirmation of […] the moral and sentimental education of their marriageable protagonist’.\textsuperscript{39} Hardy’s Giles Winterbourne parallels Bazorkin’s Kaloi, an orphaned god desacralized within


\textsuperscript{38} A more typical example of Chechen Soviet prose that conformed to Socialist Realist aesthetic canons and imitated the Russian Soviet Bildungsroman is Khalid Oshaev’s Plamennye gody: istoricheskii roman v trekh chastях [The Fiery Years: A Historical Novel in Three Parts] (1966; repr. Groznyi: Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnnoe izd-vo, 1988). While Bazorkin wrote his novel first in Russian and later translated it into Ingush, Oshaev wrote his novel in Chechen and later translated it into Russian.

secular time. Both protagonists are self-effacing young men who dream of marrying their childhood sweethearts. Born in the forest and the mountains, respectively, neither character has been exposed to urban life. The female beloved in both novels is passive and virtuous in equal measure, capable of deep love but lacking the courage to act on her passion. Kaloi’s beloved Zoru curses her mother for coercing her into marrying a rich man she does not love, but nonetheless obeys her mother’s will. Similarly, Grace questions her father’s insistence that she marry into wealth without love, but she feels powerless to resist social norms.

Giles and Kaloi are not enticed by the glamour of urban life. In Bazorkin’s text, material wealth entails acclimatization to the colonial bureaucracy and thereby reeks of corruption. Kaloi’s rival Chaborz steals his beloved, and soon after is appointed a village elder (starshina) by the colonial administration. Chaborz’s victory over Kaloi is thereby compromised by the profit he extracts from his collusion with a suspect regime. Even as it marks them out as heroes of the modern pastoral, Kaloi’s and Giles’s love for their natural environments spells their doom, for it makes them unattractive suitors to parents who desire social mobility for their children.

The major obstacle to pastoral dreams of marrying for love is convention-bound parents: a father who is ambitious for his child in the case of Hardy’s novel, and a fortune-hungry mother in Bazorkin’s text. Grace and Giles, Zoru and Kaloi all find their happiness thwarted by social conventions and class prejudice, exemplified in their parents’ ambitions for their children. With respect to the contrast they offer between the corruption of urban life in the plains and the ethical values that inform the woodlanders’ and highlanders’ ethics, Hardy and Bazorkin work within a shared pastoral aesthetic. The pastoral romance of industrial modernity is marked by tension between unreasoned convention and individual happiness. This tension acquires particular poignancy amid the conflict between indigenous lifeways and colonial norms in the Ingush text. In both texts the realism that drives the novelistic discourse of bourgeois social ascent—in the fictions of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding in the Anglophone tradition and Tolstoy in the Russian tradition—clashes with pastoral nostalgia for an ethical mode of belonging that precedes industrial modernity.

Bazorkin deploys modern narrative techniques in the most unexpected places. In a revealing instance of narrative restraint, he reports on the reaction among the villagers of Egi to the news of the death of their mullah Hasan Hajji. ‘Hasan Hajji was respected for his learning and for his selfless devotion,’ the narrator reports, ‘No one could even have guessed what, other than faith and a sense of duty, had made him move to the mountains and live there as a hermit!’ (p. 332). Readers of Bazorkin’s novel will be well acquainted with the
plot twists that prompted the educated and urbane Hasan Hajji to pass his life in a mountainous village where other mullahs refused to tread. As the novel reveals towards the end, Hasan Hajji made this choice in order to be close to Nasi, the mother of Chaborz. Over the course of the narrative, readers learn that Chaborz is Hasan Hajji’s son, although all the villagers believe him to be the son of Nasi’s lawful husband, Goitemirov. Bazorkin’s handling of this plot detail is Chekhovian: he does not judge his characters and instead allows his readers to make their own assessments of Hasan Hajji’s sexual morality.

Nasi destroys Kaloi’s dream of marrying Zoru when she arranges for his beloved to marry her son. Although her malignant behaviour sets her apart from the protagonist, Nasi’s life story hauntingly parallels Kaloi’s biography. Both Nasi and Kaloi are prevented from marrying the love of their lives. Unlike Kaloi, who bears his burden silently and never consummates his desires, Nasi passes her life in dissimulation. She lives as Goitemirov’s wife in public, while sleeping with Hassan Hajji under the cover of night when her husband is away from home. These intrigues are narrated in meticulous detail, without judgement or sentimentality, and with careful attention to the complexity of human emotions. As the novel draws to a close, Bazorkin reverts to the pastoral mode. With Chekhovian understatement (of the kind on most eloquent display in stories such as ‘Lady with a Lapdog’), Bazorkin gestures towards the secret that dominates Hassan Hajji’s life, while describing the public mourning that follows the mullah’s death in terms befitting a pious spiritual leader of his community.

Understatement permeates Bazorkin’s narrative. For example, the narrator says of Dali, the young woman who will soon become Kaloi’s wife and the second love of his life, ‘No one saw the light smile that glimmered unaccountably on her face’ (p. 366), in order to convey the transformations taking place inside Dali’s soul. Appropriately for the pastoral, Bazorkin’s narrative style is indirect. His floating third-person voice manifests itself in the subjunctive mode throughout the novel, including the narrator’s statement that ‘looking from the side, it could have been thought that [Kaloi and Dali] were playing tag’ (p. 372), when they are in the process of falling in love. Another third-person interjection occurs when Kaloi and Dali are alone together. ‘If it had not been dark in the cave’, writes Bazorkin, Kaloi ‘probably would have detected a smile on her face’ (p. 371). In Bazorkin’s aesthetic universe, as so often in the pastoral, the unseen enchants the text, suffusing it with light and life.

As a narrator, Bazorkin is skilled at attuning his readers to every character’s inner world and in using the pastoral aesthetic to evoke what words cannot convey. A narrative style premised on indirection, and which values the unseen over the seen, is particularly appropriate to the culture Bazorkin
evokes, where restrained emotions were a cultural norm and women were supposed to refer to their husbands in a generic third person, rather than to address them by their first names (p. 29). A case in point is Nasi, who decides that she wants Zoru to be her daughter-in-law because girls from the mountains are more compliant than girls from the plains. ‘Girls from the mountains are different from girls from the plains, even if they belong to the same clan,’ Nasi reflects to herself, unwittingly invoking the dichotomy between pastoral purity and industrial corruption that, only five years later, was given analytical form by Williams. ‘Girls of the plains are more assertive than mountain girls,’ Nasi continues, ‘who have grown used to lives of strictness, and therefore make obedient wives’ (p. 190). While the notion of highlander purity is in part generated by a Soviet Orientalist imaginary, it is also shown here to be internal to the modern Ingush cultural imaginary.

In Bazorkin’s elegy to Hasan Hajji, the pastoral enters into a seamless narrative flow that registers the disruptive work of passion. At the same time, Hassan Hajji and Nasi’s passion modulates the genre with their sexuality. The narrator of Chekhov’s short story ‘Lady with a Lapdog’ famously reflects that ‘every man passes his real, most interesting life under the cover of a secret, as under the cover of night’. Similarly, Bazorkin intersplices disruptive sexual desire with the conventions of everyday life. There are no impassioned Dostoevskian *cris de cœur* or Tolstoyan tête-à-têtes; with Bazorkin as with Chekhov, the reader encounters a spare, deadpan tone, expressive of oppressive social realities. Social laws weigh heavily, but without suppressing individual voices and perspectives, which are refracted through an alpine landscape and made to merge with sublime vistas.

Bazorkin’s cosmological narration reminds us that his heroes represent more than themselves; they are also signs of a mythical age, when *narts* roamed the earth. So too with Chekhov, who writes in the above-referenced story, as the lovers sit languidly together in Yalta:

> the monotonous hollow sound of the sea rising up from below spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep awaiting us. So it must have sounded when there was no Yalta [. . .] so it sounds now, and it will sound as indifferently and monotonously when we are all no more. And in this constancy, in this complete indifference to the life and death of each of us, there lies hid, perhaps, a pledge of [. . .] the unceasing movement of life upon earth.  

Here Chekhov alights on a defining feature of the pastoral aesthetic: its insight that the temporality of the text is conjoined to the temporality of the reader only through a cosmology measured in the natural cycles of death and

\[40\] A. P. Chekhov, ‘Dama s sobachkoi’, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 22 vols (St Petersburg: A. F. Marks, 1903), xii, 61–77 (p. 75).

\[41\] Ibid., p. 67.
decay. Human life is too short, and cannot provide the rubric of measurement. Throughout his novel, Bazorkin relies on this Chekhovian temporality to distance his text from the anthropocentrism that pervades the Soviet Socialist Realist canon.

In Bazorkin’s hands, the Soviet pastoral courts an aesthetics of indirection that is generated from within a highlander milieu. This duality of genre and discourse in turn mirrors the duality of life between the country and the city described by Williams. While realists of the British and Russian novel—Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, and Tolstoy—evoke literary worlds through proliferating accumulations of detail, Bazorkin’s Soviet pastoral aesthetics prefers silence and indirection.

Ethics of the Mountains versus the Plains

In Bazorkin’s Bildungsroman, the nineteenth-century novel’s marriage plot is enriched with a vigorous insistence that the love interests that have hitherto been relegated to the private sphere are now, under the conditions of industrial modernity, ‘the meeting point of a set of inherently, even intransigently, social discourses’, to apply a formulation used for Hardy’s novel. Conflict- ing social discourses concerning honour motivate the primary tragedies of Bazorkin’s and Hardy’s novels, both of which pivot on the accumulated power of social convention and entrenched prejudice to prevent marriage between a young couple in love. However, the colonial inflection of Bazorkin’s contrast between city and country—or, as he phrases it, between the plains (ploskosti) and the mountains (gori)—revises and complicates Williams’s paradigmatic dialectic. As in other colonial contexts, modernization in the Caucasus was a violent process that came close to annihilating precolonial forms of life. Colonial violence is also inscribed onto Kaloi’s tragic love: Chaborz, who ultimately takes Zoru as his wife, descends from a family favoured by the colonial administration.

In keeping with the pastoral aesthetic, Bazorkin avoids directly critiquing colonial rule. He depicts the colonial administration in a tone of supreme detachment. His biography could easily have generated a more antagonistic aesthetic, for, like the entire Ingush and Chechen people, Bazorkin was deported to Central Asia in 1944, and passed there the next thirteen years of his life. The author’s simulated distance is in part an effect of the genre in which he writes. Bazorkin’s most powerful critique of colonialism comes indirectly, in his rendering of the colonial administration’s response to rumours

of a plague (*chuma*) spreading through the mountains. During the preceding winter the administration stood by while the villagers died of starvation, and took no action to prevent their deaths. Only when the highlanders become sick the following spring does the administration decide to take action. As the narrator reports:

It was decided to erect barriers that would prevent the highlanders from leaving the gorge. No one was allowed to enter or to exit. Black flags were hoisted on high poles. The paths were covered in limestone, terrifying anyone passing nearby. For the highlanders, the mountains had become a stone trap. (p. 348)

Thus immured within their highland habitations, the highlanders are abandoned by an administration that is less concerned with Ingush deaths than it is with the risk of infecting their Russian and Cossack neighbours who inhabit the plains.

Bazorkin exposes the colonial regime from within while viewing it from without. Chaborz is not only opposed to Kaloi by virtue of his wealth and through having stolen his beloved; he is also Kaloi’s ethical antithesis. When his father dies and Chaborz is appointed village elder by the colonial authorities, he delivers a speech that is as striking for its vulgarity as for its craven embrace of colonial rule. Significantly, Chaborz aligns himself with his ancestors, who pursued alliances with the colonial regime. First, he recalls how his father had been among the elders who asked the tsar to ‘take the Ingush under his protection’ (p. 329). Then Chaborz promises to ‘serve the tsar’ and to punish anyone who ‘disrupts the order of things ordained by God’ (ibid.). Chaborz ends by declaring a new era of co-operation between the Russian authorities and their colonial subjects and departs the next day, having eaten his fill.

As soon as Chaborz and the colonial authorities are out of sight, the narrator reports with characteristic detachment that ‘the highlanders entered the forest that the government claimed as its own, and zealously began to procure firewood, carefully hiding the wood chips, and cutting the trees low, beneath the root’ (p. 229) so that their actions would go undetected by the authorities. This pivotal plot twist reveals two literary discourses in tension with each other, each vying for narrative mastery. The first is the realist Soviet *Bildungsroman*, best suited to depicting Chaborz’s social ambitions. Because the representational logic of this realist aesthetic merges with the colonial aesthetic, sociological realism also registers a tension between life in the mountains and life in the plains. The second discourse is pastoral enchantment, as experienced by characters such as Kaloi, as it interweaves Ingush cosmology with everyday life under colonial rule. The tension between these two modes of representation—a sociology of oppression and a pastoral

---

44 Classic examples of this type of fiction include, in addition to Sholokhov’s *Quiet Don*, Maxim Gorky’s *Mother* (1906) and Fyodor Gladkov’s *Cement* (1925).
prosaics—is also refracted in the highlanders’ surreptitious efforts to keep their ecology alive and to protect it from destruction by colonial technologies of governance, which are hostile to the mountaineer environment.

Refusing to serve the tsar, Kaloi organizes raids against the government treasury in order to benefit his fellow highlanders. While Chaborz stays resolutely settled in the plains and forgets his mountain home, Kaloi never leaves the mountains. For Kaloi, ‘the world beyond’ the colonial capital Vladikavkaz is ‘an unknown mystery’ (p. 309). As if his vow to uphold the colonial legal order were insufficient proof of his loyalty to the new regime, Chaborz promises to learn Russian and to befriend Cossacks (p. 329). Elsewhere in the novel, these same Cossacks inflict much suffering on the highlanders, who are forced to pay their new masters to access the land that used to belong to them in order to reap their harvest (p. 48). Russian is an alien tongue for Kaloi, in contrast to Chaborz, a language comprised of signs he has no desire to decipher.

Shortly after her wedding, Nasi confides to her new daughter-in-law her hatred for mountain life and promises to arrange for Zoru to live on the plains. Conjuring up the darkest images of confinement, Nasi recalls how life in the mountains ‘prevented her from viewing life’ (p. 303). Comparing the mountains to prison, Nasi says that she does not wish such a fate for her daughter-in-law (ibid.). Zoru, however, is constituted quite unlike her mother-in-law; she belongs more to the magical world of the pastoral than to the sociological realism of industrial modernity. Even when she betrays Kaloi, Zoru rejects her mother-in-law’s contempt for life in the mountains. To Nasi’s contempt for mountaineer life, Zoru counters: ‘I was raised in the mountains, and have never seen anything else. I don’t mind living here. Why would I leave?’ (ibid.). The conflicting ethical and aesthetic values reflected in the contrast between the mountains and the plains are recapitulated in the preferences of Bazorkin’s characters. Zoru’s predilection for the mountains over the plains mirrors the views expressed by Kaloi, whom she once loved. Nasi’s preference for the plains mimics those of her son Chaborz, with whom she shares in common an ambition so strong that it destroys the happiness of those around them.45

As Ian Watt noted long ago, with respect to the triumvirate of canonical British novelists—Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding—the modern novel finds its genesis in ‘the typical derangement of the urban Psyche’.46 Watt’s insights

---


were further developed by Williams, in terms of the contrast between the city and the country noted above. Since *Moll Flanders* (1722), if not earlier, the modern novel has delineated the unfolding of the modern self in the context of urban life. In Bazorkin’s world, by contrast, the most fully realized characters—the ones with whom readers identify most profoundly and whose tribulations are experienced most vicariously—begin and end their lives in forests, mountains, and caves. The characters in Bazorkin’s *Bildungsroman* who are linked to industrialization are hollow, weakly realized, and difficult to identify with. This pattern suggests another function of the modern pastoral: to create a space for the critique of industrial modernity, whether Soviet or capitalist. By inverting the order of things, inserting the numinous into the everyday, and reminding the reader that the affective structures of capitalist modernity do not wholly determine the narrative flow, anticolonial Soviet pastoralists such as Bazorkin and the Ukrainian writer Ievhen Hutsalo enchant their texts in order to call into question the certainties of Socialist Realism on the one hand and capitalist ideologies of economic growth on the other.47

Rather than enabling the awakening of which Nasi had dreamed, urban topographies in this *Bildungsroman* induce moral turpitude. They stupefy and render opaque sensations that are more freely experienced in mountains and in forests. The space of freedom for Bazorkin, as for Hardy, is not the urban streets of capitalist modernity. To the contrary: these pastoralists diagnose the moral decrepitude of life on the plains and in the cities to register a critique of modernity. Bazorkin’s and Hardy’s rural heroes come to know themselves as creatures of history, but also as individuals whose distance from dominant social trends confers ethical advantages. As such, both texts illustrate well Leo Marx’s description of pastoralism as ‘an ecological literary mode’ that mediates between ‘the claims of these two conflicting yet inescapable human environments: one associated with man’s biological origins, the other a product of technological change and sociocultural evolution’.48

While the outsider doctor of Hardy’s novel, Fitzpiers, exudes ambition, Grace’s woodlander father laments his daughter’s immunity to this vice; he complains of his daughter that she would ‘fain be like [the peasant girl] Marty South [. . . ] That’s the top of her ambition!’ (p. 205). By the time her father learns to value his daughter’s humility, it is too late. Grace is initially excited by the prospect of marrying Fitzpiers, whose lustful and ambitious character


Idris Bazorkin’s Postcolonial Soviet Pastoral

resembles that of Nasi and Chaborz, not out of love for wealth, but because such a union seems to afford the prospect of ‘a refined and cultivated inner life, of subtle psychological intercourse’ (p. 148). In Hardy’s novel, such naive attractions are distinguished from the lures of self-gain. Belatedly, Grace recognizes that Fitzpiers’s ambition stands in the way of her happiness.

Even more tragic than Grace’s fate is the way in which ambition determines the choices that Zoru’s parents make for their daughter in Bazorkin’s novel. In a fit of rage at having lost his beloved due to her parents’ social aspirations, Kaloi visits the tower where they reside after Zoru has left for the plains, to inaugurate her married life with Chaborz. Kaloi’s pockets are stuffed with the coins he acquired while raiding a Russian postal coach. In one of the novel’s most poignant scenes, Kaloi throws his newly acquired coins at Zoru’s mother, who had put pressure on her daughter to marry for wealth instead of wedding her beloved Kaloi. He then pulls on the ‘sacred chain’ of the hearth, in order to extinguish the flame, shouting, ‘Ancestors! I swear on your hearth chain, for which I paid with gold and silver, that you see in the hands of that cursed woman, I swear by this chain and by this fire: tomorrow, when the sun rises, it will rise on a tower in flames, burning those inside, if they don’t have time escape! Amen!’ (p. 316). With this curse, Kaloi exposes his fellow highlanders’ craven attachment to worldly goods. He also demonstrates that the objects after which Zoru’s mother lusted, which moved her to compel her daughter to turn away from his love, contribute to the erosion of enchantment. Bazorkin reveals this enchantment within the text as congruous with the experience of reading his novel, which transports us, ‘as if through sorcery, into an alternate universe’. Such episodes develop an elliptical critique of industrial modernity (encompassing the Soviet project as well as colonialism) through an indirect method of exposition.

The scene of Kaloi throwing coins onto the hearth of Zoru’s ancestors is shocking because, according to Ingush tradition, the fire in a highlander’s ancestral hearth should never be extinguished. Earlier in the novel, shortly before Kaloi is born and his father Turs emigrates to the Ottoman lands from which he will never return, he stares at his ancestral hearth—a symbol of continuity destined eventually to become Kaloi’s patrimony—and reflects: ‘When and who had first set it on fire? And what would become of his ancestors, for whom he had saved this light and warmth? Would they leave the task of tending the fire to those who came after them?’ (p. 38). That the fire is said to be ‘inextinguishable [neugasimoe]’ from the very beginning of the narrative throws into relief the tragedy of Kaloi’s decision to extinguish the fire in the hearth of Zoru’s parents. Like other modern manifestations of enchantment,

49 I have translated this scene under the title ‘Light of the Ancestors’, in Washington Square, 27 (2010), 152–67.
Kaloi’s action is driven by a rage that verges on violence, and which leads him to banish his beloved’s parents from their tower, and thereby to deprive them of the pastoral idyll within which they had passed their lives.

Equally tragic is the fact that, of Zoru’s parents, only her father has enough respect for Ingush tradition to mourn the extinction of their ancestors’ fire. When the fire dies, Zoru’s father weeps and says in astonishment: ‘The light of our ancestors is extinguished’ (p. 317). By contrast, Zoru’s mother, mercantile to the end, immediately starts counting the coins that Kaloi throws at her in compensation for destroying their tower. This episode well illustrates ‘the conflict of value dramatized by the interrupted idyll’ that Leo Marx takes to be paradigmatic of the modern pastoral, whereby ‘a machine suddenly destroys the tranquility of an asylum in nature’ (p. 256). In this Soviet fiction, destruction arrives in the form of a protagonist whose life is torn apart by colonial governance. As scenes like this one render lucidly, the tension between precolonial ways of life and disenchanted modernity generates new literary forms, and a new take on the modern pastoral. The clash between Ingush indigeneity and colonial rule creates the core interpretative framework for this novel.

Planes of Historical Time

The historical novelist’s ability to evoke ‘the barrows, the Roman remains, the rise and fall of families, the tablets and monuments in the churches’ is a reflex of reading, not necessarily of experience. Although Bazorkin and Hardy knew first-hand the worlds they evoked, they could not have achieved their evocations in the absence of the pastoral tradition. For Bazorkin, the modern pastoral is both a commentary on and a critique of the present, for the historical setting of a novel that deals with the recent past must aim for, as Donald Rayfield suggests, ‘an allegorical presentation of the present which can only be seen when encapsulated in time, that is, science fiction in reverse’. Science fiction narrates the future in a speculative mode, on the basis of events that have yet to transpire. Historical fiction narrates imagined pasts, which have been lost to historical time and can be recovered only through the pastoral imagination. Like the lives resurrected in Chekhov’s fictions, these pasts transpire under the cover of psychic nights. They are hidden ‘in the darkness of ages’ evoked through Bazorkin’s opaque (and difficult to translate) title. The title is misleading because it suggests a more transparent adherence to Socialist Realist aesthetic canons than is found in the text itself. As a historical

---

novelist, Bazorkin set himself the task of enchanting Ingush pasts with the radiant literary form of the postcolonial pastoral. Bazorkin’s novel is suffused with the ancestral light extinguished by Kaloi in a fit of rage. In a figurative sense, this light was already extinguished by the late 1960s, when Bazorkin began writing his novel, and when Williams was still a few years away from embarking on *The Country and the City*.

Temporal distance is as much a condition for historical fiction as geographical distance is for the pastoral. This distance enables as much as it disables, for, even when distance generates frustration, it stimulates innovation. Among British authors, Hardy exemplified this generative capacity of the country/town dialectic by presenting ‘tradition in both ways’ (Williams, p. 206): as an enabler of the past in the present and as a source of alienation from that past. In Williams’s account, Hardy views the world about which he writes ‘as a participant who is also an observer’ (ibid.); this is ‘the source of the strain’ (ibid.) that radiates from his tortured accounts of the impact of industrial modernity on his rural characters. A century after Hardy, Bazorkin conjured up the magic of mountainous Ingushetia through his pastoral evocations of pagan and Muslim lifeways and of the gradual erosion of highlander customs by colonial modes of governance.

During the same era in which Machiavelli examined contemporary warfare on the basis of comparisons drawn from antiquity, early modern painters represented the ancient past as if it were coterminous with their present. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the collapse of the planes of past and present that characterized early modern spatial representation had become theoretically and logically untenable. German theorist Reinhart Koselleck describes a visual rendering of the process in his analysis of *Battle of Alexander at Issus* (1529) by the early modern German court painter Albrecht Altdorfer. Koselleck examines how the ancient battle scenes of this painting enclose the present and past ‘within a common historical plane’. Conceptually and materially, the simultaneous planes of multiple temporalities delineated by Koselleck yielded to a historicism that permitted only one temporal flow, in the direction of a future surrounded by a halo of progress. For the nineteenth-century philosopher Schlegel, gazing on Altdorfer’s tableau of antiquity in the sanitized corridors of an urban museum, ‘the three hundred years separating him from Altdorfer’ traversed a greater expanse of time, ‘or perhaps a different mode of time’, than that which intervened between Altdorfer and ‘the eighteen hundred years or so that lay between the Battle of Issus [333 BCE] and his painting’.

The acceleration of temporal flows distinguishes the postcolonial pastoral

---

from its premodern precedents. Modernity’s altered temporal sequence historicizes the cosmological temporality that frames Bazorkin’s and Hardy’s narratives. Koselleck’s account of how history has, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, acquired a ‘temporal dimension’ lacking in earlier engagements with the past reveals how the modern pastorals of Bazorkin and Hardy critique the newly technologized time-spaces of industrial modernity.

The progressive striation of the planes of the past and the planes of the present rendered lucidly by Koselleck as one of modernity’s breaks with past modes of experiencing time is richly registered in the pastorals discussed here. In Hardy’s Wessex as in Bazorkin’s Caucasus, pagan deities merge seamlessly with monotheistic gods. Only the herald of industrial and colonial modernity who refused to honour the pagan gods posed a threat to indigenous cosmology. Fitzpiers’s rejoinder to the objection voiced by Giles to cutting a tree in order to save a patient’s life is suggestive of the violence inaugurated by the time of the modern. When Giles protests that ‘They never fell a stick about here without its being marked first’, Fitzpiers responds sarcastically: ‘Then we’ll inaugurate a new era forthwith.’

The unfolding of both Hardy’s and Bazorkin’s plots shows that the new era embraced by these urbane antiheroes is fraught with unresolved ethical problems.

Although both novelists suggest that tradition is ethically preferable to industry, commerce, and mercantile capitalism, the reader cannot fail to be struck by the contrast between the wit and guile of the urbanites and the passivity and bewilderment of the highlanders and woodlanders. Characters such as Giles, who abide by old ways of life without being able to articulate why, appear naive and sometimes helpless. Kaloi’s naivety deprives him of his beloved. As we soon discover, however, Fitzpiers’s urbane eloquence coexists with extreme foolishness, and Chaborz, although hardly naive, is an unenviable boor. Fitzpiers’s love of poetry coexists with an egotistical determination to make others suffer for the satisfaction of his puerile desires. In neither fictional world does a bookish education entail liberation or bring about the joy associated with enchantment.

Even as Hardy exposes Fitzpiers’s conceit and hypocrisy, he also chronicles the awakening to consciousness of certain of the woodlanders, who learn to question the traditions according to which their ethical values were formed. One of the most moving of such awakenings is that of Grace’s father Melbury, who learns from his daughter’s tragic marriage to question a social institution that, like his fellow woodlanders, he had revered all his life. When he learns of his son-in-law’s infidelity to his daughter, Melbury reflects that he always knew that ‘a woman once given to a man for life took, as a rule, her lot as it came and made the best of it, without external interference; but for the

54 Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 93.
first time he asked himself why’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 195, emphasis added.} The impulse to pose questions never asked before is another feature of modernity; here it is embedded in a pastoral contrast between town and country, the woods and the city, mountains and plains.

**Reading between the Lines: Pastoral as Critique**

Beyond chronicling the disenchantment induced by industrialization, Bazorkin narrates its superimposition onto pastoral landscapes. His understanding of industrialization is inevitably entangled with his understanding of coercive Sovietization as part of an ongoing colonial project. In contradistinction to the Soviet project, colonialism was a relatively safe topic to critique at the time of his writing. Soviet industrialization, by contrast, could not be critically portrayed. In the light of the differential politics pertaining to the Soviet and tsarist literary norms, readers of this text must exert themselves to read between the lines in order to relish all of its complexity.

By the end of the first volume, Kaloi has finally overcome his passion for Zoru and his resentment at losing the love of his life. He is returning from the Cave of Wonders, where he passed the night with Dali, soon to become his wife. As if in a demonstration of her pastoral innocence, Dali sings to the sun while the pagan priest performs sacred rituals. Dali and Kaloi stumble across a cluster of graves scattered around an abandoned settlement. ‘Just like swallows!’ Dali gasps, ‘Our ancestors made their homes everywhere [. . .] What kind of happiness could they find here?’ (p. 373). While Dali discerns traces of misery in these graves, Kaloi sees something else. Filled with anticipation of his future happiness, he uses this occasion to reflect on relations between past and present, and, implicitly, between himself and posterity. Kaloi’s metatemporal—and metafictional—reflections are bound up in a contrast between the mountains and the plains that marries sociological realism to pastoral enchantment. Referencing the rock near which he was born, Kaloi says to Dali:

Those who live in Nazran, on the plains, consider us unhappy. Of course, life wasn’t easy [for our ancestors] here, nor is it easy for us. But happiness was probably part of their lives, just as it is part of ours. I wouldn’t exchange last night by the eagle’s nest for any kind of blessing on the plains. Will the person be right who, a hundred years from now, passes by my rock and pities me for having lived here? (p. 373)

As we know from a coin that is described at a wedding celebration (p. 296), most of Kaloi’s life transpires during the reign of Tsar Alexander III (r. 1881–95). If we view Kaloi through a metafictional lens, then his reference to ‘a
hundred years from now’ can be taken to refer to the time-space of the reader, who thereby becomes synonymous with the posterity of the indigenous Ingush people. Herein lies the enchantment of this text: not in its impossible evocation of precolonial lifeways destined for destruction, but in its reminder of what literature does for us and to us: enabling us to enter, however temporarily, into a state of being ‘so entirely caught up in an aesthetic object that nothing else seems to matter’.56 The peculiar temporal horizon constructed within this pastoral continues a tradition internal to the genre, which shifted from an exclusive orientation to a golden past in antiquity (as in Virgil) to a utopia oriented to an undefined futurity in early modernity (as in Shakespeare).57

Are readers justified in pitying Kaloi for having passed his life high in the mountains, and for rejecting life on the plains? This question, provoked by the form of the postcolonial pastoral and here posed explicitly to the reader by its protagonist, adds a metafictive dimension to Bazorkin’s fiction. Can the modernist break with the past entailed in Soviet literature—and mourned by the pastoral—accommodate indigenous cosmologies? What becomes of premodern associations between literature and magic in a postcolonial pastoral? What becomes of Ingush narrative form when suppressed and reshaped by colonial aesthetics? On a sociological plane, what becomes of the Ingush language when it is transposed into the Cyrillic script? The answers to these questions stand to substantially enrich the ongoing conversation concerning the literary imaginations and the cultural memories of non-Russians under Soviet rule.

The Soviet era was as difficult for the Ingush as it was for the Chechens, whose deportation has been documented in greater detail in European scholarship that has the plight of the Ingush. Had Kaloi lived to 1944, he would have been deported like his author, along with the rest of the Ingush people. He might have died during that deportation, or soon after his arrival in Kyrgyzstan. Such an outcome would have cast the hopeful, magical words he uttered to Dali as they stumbled over their ancestors’ graves in a more ominous light. Although the story of his life reads like a chronicle of almost continual deprivation, of dreams thwarted due to poverty, and love lost due to orphanhood, Kaloi’s happiness is inspired by his geography. The mountains both generate and assuage his suffering, framing it as something more than the toils of a single individual. Kaloi’s understanding of his psychic dependency on his natural environment is reflected in his insistence that he would

56 Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. 54.
not ‘exchange last night by the eagle’s nest for any kind of blessing on the plains’ (p. 373).

Through his odyssey of the disenchantment and then enchantment of Kaloi of Egi as he battles with the forces unleashed by the colonial rule, Bazorkin reminds us that life can never find fulfilment in material prosperity. Neither wealth nor luxury guarantees happiness. Most pertinently to the study of literature, Bazorkin demonstrates that a modernity grounded in local aesthetic forms and indigenous traditions can productively revise and intervene in Soviet canons that threaten to suck the life out of literary form. Framed through its title as a work within the Socialist Realist tradition, Bazorkin’s magnum opus is in fact much more than a pastoral example of Socialist Realism. This inaugural novel of Ingush literary modernity is an innovative pastoral fiction that re-enchants the bourgeois European novel.

As his narrative moves across the temporal and spatial categories of literary modernity, Bazorkin’s evocation of Ingush indigeneity makes an original contribution to world literature while intervening in Soviet literary canons. Painstaking but never sentimental, impassioned but never simplistic in its handling of emotions, Bazorkin’s novel illustrates how the Soviet postcolonial pastoral elaborates an ontological, epistemic, and affective critique of modernity, including in its colonial as well as capitalist dimensions. That the field of postcolonial studies—like Russian studies generally—has yet to take notice of this Ingush contribution to the global pastoral is one measure of the work that falls to those of us who aspire towards a world literature untethered to the nation state.

University of Birmingham

Rebecca Ruth Gould