WORLD LITERATURE IN THE SOVIET UNION

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CHAPTER 11

Can “Worldliness” Be Inscribed into the Literary Text?: Russian Diasporic Writing in the Context of World Literature

Maria Rubins

Sometimes it seems that the World Literature discourse is sustained mainly by the polemic that sets out to deconstruct it. The foundational models of World Literature have repeatedly come under attack for their Western/Eurocentric bias (despite the professed commitment to “peripheral” voices, with their potential to change the system from within); constructing the “world” from the majoritarian viewpoint;[1] their failure “to integrate the study of literature with urgent matters of global significance”;[2] their tendency to endorse cultural equivalency and substitutability;[3] the risk of World Literature becoming World Literature in English,[4] etc. More radical critics even cast doubt as to whether World Literature, as it has evolved over the last few decades, has done much more than provide a kind of psychotherapy for readers and literary scholars alike, inviting them to embrace their natural and professional limitations.

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[1] Cf. Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, “A Non-Universal Global: on Jewish Writing and World Literature,” *Prooftexts* 36, no. 1 (2017): 1–26.

[2] Karen L. Thornber, “Why (Not) World Literature: Challenges and Opportunities for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of World Literature* 1, no. 1 (2016): 107–118.

[3] Emily Apter, *Against World Literature? On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013) and “Philosophizing World Literature,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 171–186.

[4] Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 10.

Indeed, most mere mortals cannot master more than a handful of languages and become experts in multiple cultural contexts and literary traditions. We are compelled to read most texts in translation and rather superficially, unable to tap fully into their distinctive cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Never mind, World Literature theoreticians tell us. It is better to practice "distant reading" and "detached engagement" with narratives that are beyond our immediate expertise. Our habitual reading practice is thereby elevated into a sophisticated "mode of reading."

Such skepticism aside, the recent expansion of World Literature is symptomatic. With the current departure from essentialism evident in many disciplines, World Literature indirectly prompts us to reconsider important questions. Is a literary text an essential(ized) object invested with an intrinsic meaning, or is the meaning continuously produced in the process of its circulation? Does each new interpretation, each new (mis)reading and (mis)translation transform the text itself, or does it just reflect the sensibilities and intellectual experiences of the receiving culture, leaving the text intact? While just a few decades ago such questions would have appeared ill-conceived, now they feed into broader cross-disciplinary debates. Today, cognitive scientists often recall the visionary formula of the Russian physiologist Alexei Ukhtomsky: "There is no object without a subject, and no subject without an object."[5] The relevance of this perspective for the literary domain consists in further empowerment of the reader. In some cultures, Russian in particular, this leads to a radical reversal of the canonical roles of the writer, once worshiped as a prophet, and the reader, once a passive receiver of the wisdom imparted in literary texts and now a co-creator. Of course, reception theory has already engaged with the evolution of the writer/reader relationship, arguably in a more persuasive manner. Where World Literature knows no competition is the sociology of the book market, the calibration of the work's value based on economic aspects, the number of translations, the proximity to or remoteness from "prestige-bestowing centers," and strategies of success defined by how a specific author emphasizes or downplays this distance.

With so much attention given to circulation and macro/micro literary structures, the dominant World Literature discourses have so far done precious little to engage with the text itself. This poses no problem for Franco Moretti who, explaining his concept of distant reading, says bluntly: "If in process text

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5 Tat'ana Chernigovskaia, "Raznoiazychie i kibernetika mozga," accessed August 5, 2020, https://m.polit.ru/article/2009/11/24/brain/.

disappears, well, less is more."[6] Not everyone, even in the World Literature circles, is ready to subscribe to this view. Close reading still remains for many a form of connecting to the philosophy, style, and forms of human experience encoded in the literary narrative before extra layers of meaning are added through the efforts of critics, translators, and diverse readerships. Can we bring the text back while retaining global cross-cultural parameters? Is there a way to appreciate the work as part of World Literature by re-focusing on the narrative itself? In her article "Writing World Literature: Approaches from the Maghreb," Jane Hiddleston makes a compelling argument, observing that the standard models of World Literature leave out the question of what constitutes the worldliness of the text. She suggests that "[t]he worldliness of World Literature may be intrinsic to the form of the work." A text, she continues, is "enmeshed" in the world not because "it circulates after completion but because it comes to life through the dialogues it maintains with the place of its creation––with the broader, multiple cultural histories that its language draws on or taps into; and with itself."[7]

In this chapter, I will test the assumption that "worldliness" *can* be inscribed into the text by turning to diasporic, or extraterritorial, Russian literature. The internal diversity of this corpus calls for multiple methodological optics, and the conceptual foundations of World Literature will inevitably come into conversation with other sub-disciplines, including diaspora studies, translation theory, and scholarship on bi- and translingualism. Created over the last century beyond the geographical, ideological, or aesthetic purview of the Soviet and post-Soviet literary establishments, yet indirectly linked to the metropolitan culture in a number of ways, Russian diasporic writing is likely to offer a distinct variation on the World Literature paradigms examined in this volume. To reflect on this specificity, I will engage with the following questions. Has diasporic literature, positioned as it is in a contact zone between national and transnational, predicated on hybridity and standing for culturally pluralistic aesthetic practices, developed distinctive features that mark it as potential World Literature? How does it negotiate its origins, language(s), and the concept of the "national literary space"? What distinguishes its patterns of circulation? Finally, how does this corpus problematize the basic tenets of World Literature? Various sociocultural formations of diasporic literary culture, which have emerged over a century of massive Russian dispersion, are likely to yield different answers to the above questions. I will therefore draw on a range of contexts, including the cultural policies of interwar Russian Paris; contemporary Russian Israeli writing and cultural polemics, with a detailed case study focused on Gali-Dana Singer's poetry; the problematic reception of Andreï Makine's francophone novels in Russia; and the russophone poetry of the Fergana school.

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[6] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, no. 1 (2000): 54–68, 57.

[7] Jane Hiddleston, "Writing World Literature: Approaches from the Maghreb," *PMLA* 131, no. 5 (2016): 1386–95, 1388.

It is a basic premise in World Literature theory that the text "begins" in its original language and ceases to be the exclusive product of its culture of origin once it is translated.[8] The concept "culture of origin" is problematic in itself since, as Thornber correctly points out, "many works of literature . . . have 'origins' in multiple cultural spaces"[9] This multiplicity of roots is certainly a marker of diaspora writing created in the "contact zone" between different cultures. And what is the "original language" of diasporic texts written, for the most part, in-between languages and consciously responding to global cultural and linguistic diversity? Over time, Russian writers who found themselves beyond the metropolitan borders have made different linguistic choices, roughly classified as:

(1) loyalty to the metropolitan linguistic idiom;
(2) complete or partial language shift;
(3) creolization.

For example, stubborn loyalty to the prerevolutionary linguistic norm (and even orthography) was the preferred option of first-wave émigré writers, whose mission was ostensibly to preserve Russian culture for future generations. This was the case of the émigré literary elite represented by the likes of Bunin, Merezhkovsky, Khodasevich, Gippius, Zaitsev, Shmelev, Kuprin, and many others. Occasionally even this cohort paid lip service to the "worldliness" (*vsemirnost'*) of Russian émigré literature. In the words of Gippius:

> . . . contemporary Russian literature (personified by its main authors) has been thrown out of Russia into Europe. This is where one should look for it. [. . .]. They threw literature out the window and slammed the window shut. Not to worry. One day the doors to Russia will reopen and literature will return there,

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[8] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 22.

[9] Karen Thornber, "Why (Not) World Literature? Challenges and Opportunities for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of World Literature*, no. 1 (2016): 107–118, 108.

> God willing, with a greater consciousness of worldliness than before.[10]

But in reality, this "worldliness" was just rhetorical. The émigré establishment, absorbed by the national agenda, showed very little interest in adopting contemporary Western literary trends and aesthetic languages.

The second option, complete or partial switching to adopted languages, has been practiced by émigrés at various times, including Nabokov, Pozner, Nemirovsky, Brodsky, Zinik, Makine, Shteyngart, and Zaidman. In fact, gradually more writers living outside of Russia began to experiment with writing in foreign tongues. In this way, they foreshadowed the global cultural reality of the early twenty-first century, when universal diasporization transformed what used to be specific (trans)cultural practices of displaced people into "a mode of everyday existence."[11]

The third type of practice consists in using a creolized idiom (writing between and across Russian and the host language, creating translingual texts within ostensibly Russian narratives). Such works present the most interesting case, because they implicitly interrogate the very concept of language, rewriting Russian from within, and destabilizing the Russian literary "center." This kind of practice is reminiscent of immigrant writing, the traditional object of diaspora studies, except the process is reversed. The Russian émigré author estranges not the adopted tongue of the former colonial metropolis (as per the postcolonialist paradigm) and Eurocentric master narratives but his own native language, by creatively manipulating, weirding, and foreignizing it, fusing it with foreign words and concepts, altering it using unconventional syntax, word-play and translingual puns.

While such experimental texts have appeared more frequently in the contemporary period, they were also produced during the earlier stages of the Russian dispersion. For example, alongside the "purists" in interwar Paris was a large group of authors (such as Poplavsky, Felzen, Bakunina, Yanovsky, Shteiger, Odoevtseva, Berberova, and Gazdanov) who peppered their texts with foreign words, concepts, and cultural references—to such an extent that critics complained that their books read as poor translations into Russian from Western European languages.

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[10] Anton Krainii [Zinaida Gippius], "'Polet v Evropu'," in *Kritika russkogo zarubezh'ia*, ed. O. A. Korostelev and N. G. Mel'nikov, vol. 1 (Moscow: Olimp, 2002), 60.

[11] Igor Maver, "Introduction: Positioning Diasporic Literary Cultures," in *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-Colonial Literatures* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), ix–xiv, xi.

Most of the time, this odd linguistic usage served as an ironic reflection of the Russian-French cross-pollination characteristic of the speech of many émigrés, who had no refined linguistic consciousness. These Russian texts ply calques, transliterated French words and hybrid expressions, conveying the flavor of this peculiar Russian-Parisian "dialect," as in the following examples:

> *шомаж, карт д'идантитэ, вакансы, маршан, мезон де кутюр, concierge, croissant, "bande de châtrés," консомации, жимназ, лавабо, ажан, апаш, куаферша*; «Подходит ко мне *жином*. Садится у *вуатюру*. *О ла-ла*!- думаю» (Poplavsky); « *карт-постальный* залив », « группа дам предавалась *интегральному нюдизму* »; « Он плыл *brasse-омъ coulée* » ; «мулат [. . .] прекрасным *indienne-ном* понесся вперед» (Yanovsky);
>
> «Да можно прямо сказать, что мы, мол, не ручаемся, что она очень странно *пейе* за свой *плясь*, и что ее *персонъ* не *коне*» (Teffi);
>
> «взять ванну»; «Вы крутите с понедельника» (крутить—снимать фильм (tourner un film)); «Я онетт» (Odoevtseva);
>
> "тайна, которой нельзя профанировать никакими словами" (Bakunina); «экзаминировать билан»; «будем вместе ходить по моим туалетным делам» (as the heroine of Felzen's novel *Obman* suggests to her suitor implying shopping for her new outfits) etc.

As the later development of diasporic literature demonstrates, this last strategy of breaking out not only of the "monolingual paradigm" but also of the monolingual/multilingual dichotomy has proven to be the most generative.[12] Since the turn of the century, extraterritorial writers have more dramatically emphasized their postnational and postmonolingual condition through idiosyncratic use of the Russian language. The parodic intent is no longer a dominant motivation underlying this practice. Rather, authors seek more or less consciously to assert their distinctness from the metropolitan idiom, to destabilize the "original language," and to flesh out their multiple linguistic affiliations. This may also reflect the markedly different political context compared to the postrevolutionary period. First-wave émigrés were eager to emphasize their connection to the culture of their homeland from which they were banned, hence their conservationist pathos, insistence on the purity of the language, and travesty of substandard usage. But since *perestroika*, the place of former émigrés' residence and, more importantly, their cultural and linguistic affinity, became a matter of personal preference—and some choose to highlight their extraterritorial hybridity through unconventional linguistic gestures.[13]

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[12] For a detailed discussion of the "monolingual" and "postmonolingual" paradigms, see: Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

As the editors of the 2003 anthology *Simvol "My"* (featuring russophone Jewish literature created in North America, Europe, and Israel) state in their preface, many decades of emigration and dispersion transformed Russian language and literature into diasporic phenomena. In their opinion, the hierarchy of "dominance and subordination," determined by the geographical location of the text and the author, was replaced by a relationship of "complementary distribution" between metropolis and diaspora. Diaspora writers are therefore encouraged to cultivate their "foreignness," in particular by means of linguistic distancing from the metropole.[14]

It is important to keep in mind that the majority of writers who reject a straightforward national identity and position themselves in a broader, imprecisely defined "world," greatly depend on the metropolitan book market. Published in Russia and read by Russian readers often unaware of the cultural, political, and social parameters specific to these authors' locality, their texts inevitably acquire different significations, losing some of the meanings relevant in the places where they were created. This deterritorialization of meanings and concepts (and acquisition of new interpretations) is similar to what happens to any translated text as it crosses the national boundary and enters World Literature. Far from being viewed as an obstacle, this tint of foreignness is often seen by today's publishers and critics as a marketable feature.[15]

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[13] This chapter was written in 2019 and reflects the post-Soviet situation through the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Since 2022, the new wave of massive and sometimes forced emigration of Russian intellectuals has considerably changed the relations between the metropolitan and diasporic cultures, as they are presented in this study.

[14] Irina Vrubel'-Golubkina, ed., *Simvol "My." Evreiskaia khrestomatiia novoi russkoi literatury* (Mosow: NLO, 2003), 6–7.

[15] Cf. Kevin M.F. Platt, "The Benefits of Distance: Extraterritoriality as Cultural Capital in the Literary Marketplace," in *Redefining Russian Literature Diaspora, 1920–2020*, ed. Maria Rubins (London: UCL Press, 2021), 214–43.

Over the last decades, postmonolingual practices found strong conceptual reinforcement and practical application in the writing of russophone authors in Israel. The Tel Aviv-based avant-garde journal *Zerkalo* organized a series of discussions about the *sui generis* quality of Russian Israeli writing and its conscious and strategic opposition to metropolitan master narratives and normative language. Critic Yakov Shaus articulated this position unambiguously: "We are fundamentally different from Russian literary emigration. Our texts are not Russian in spirit! . . . 'But the TV brings us the Noise of perestroika and its call' ['Зато доносит телевизия Шум перестройки и призыв']—this is not Russia contemplated from afar by a native, this is not Russian poetry and already not quite the Russian language!"[16] The reference in the last part of the quotation is to avant-garde artist Mikhail Grobman, defined by Alexander Goldstein, another participant in the *Zerkalo* polemic, as "a good poet, but with a psychic essence alien to Russians—and for this reason interesting."[17] Goldstein's own imaginative essays have been interpreted by Shaus as a radical departure from the Russian cultural code: "And Goldstein's new texts about Israel, about the eclipse of Ashkenazi culture—these are not Russian preoccupations! This is not the Russian cultural code. All of it can provoke interest in Russia—but as non-Russian literature written in Russian."[18]

One of the most radical steps towards estranging Russian from its original territory has been taken by Gali-Dana and Nekod Singer, writers, poets, and editors of bilingual Hebrew-Russian journals, particularly *Dvoetochie/Nikudotaim* (the title of the journal, meaning "colon" (:) in both languages, in itself asserts linguistic duality). The Singers seem to have abandoned any commitment to a single language, favoring linguistic polyphony instead. Here, I will focus on Gali-Dana Singer's poetry as a representative case study that illustrates some important tendencies of contemporary diasporic writing. Reflecting on her creative evolution, she says:

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[16] "Ostrov liubvi ili poluostrov otchuzhdeniia? Problemy evreiskoi identifikatsii. Kruglyi stol zhurnala *Zerkalo*," in *Razgovory v "Zerkale,"* ed. Irina-Vrubel'-Golubkina (Moscow: NLO, 216), 448–68, 464.

[17] Ibid., 466.

[18] Ibid., 464.

Признание власти языка всегда было важнейшим побудительным фактором для меня. То, что вместо единственного тотального языка я обрела два, каждый из которых, казалось бы, потерял своё право претендовать на единственность и тотальность, не пошатнуло моих верноподданнических сантиментов. Да, я получила относительно редкую для поэта возможность взглянуть с тыла на свой язык (свои языки). С той стороны, где обнажены потаённые слабости и немочи всевластных владык. Но только оттуда можно разглядеть и постичь простейшую и насущную в кажущейся своей простоте истину: тотальный и единственный язык, которому присягают на верность некоторые поэты, по-прежнему существует, и это-язык поэзии. И здесь я безусловно не имею в виду этакий всемирный свод метафор и гипербол, рифм и аллитераций, но праязык, осознающий себя и диктующий свои законы сотворения мира через поэтов и посредством современных языков, располагающих грамматиками и словарями.[19]	Recognition of the power of language has always been for me an essential motivating factor. That instead of a single total language I acquired two, each of which would seem to have lost any claim to uniqueness and totality, did not shake my feeling of loyalty. Yes, I gained an opportunity, quite rare for a poet, to look at my language (languages) from the rear. A point of view from which the hidden weaknesses and ailments of omnipotent rulers are exposed. But only from there can one perceive and understand the simplest truth, essential in its apparent simplicity: the total and sole language to which some poets swear allegiance persists—and this is the language of poetry. And I certainly do not mean by this some global repository of metaphors and hyperboles, rhymes and alliterations, but the self-conscious proto-language that dictates its laws of world creation through the medium of poets and modern tongues equipped with grammars and dictionaries.

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[19] Gali-Dana Zinger, "Oshchushchenie zemli, uhodiashchei iz-pod nog (s Marinoi Astinoi)," Kontkest, November 13, 2003, accessed August 5, 2020, https://peregrinasimilitudo.blogspot.fr/2010/07/blog-post.html.

I propose to view the poetics of Gali-Dana Singer, who claims dual allegiance to Russian and Hebrew (and who has also composed poems in English) as a productive model for creating World Literature in the current situation of universal diasporization. It is ultimately irrelevant how many readers her elitist and complex poems actually attract, or whether she even aspires to write herself into World Literature. Her very method illustrates the worldliness that, in Hiddleston's words, "may be intrinsic to the form of the work." The multiplicity of meanings so characteristic of her texts results from the superimposition of different associations. This is of course typical of poetry in general. But the "worldliness" is produced when different sets of associations engage respective cultures, languages, literary canons, and historical traditions on equal footing, forcing a dialogue between them.

To illustrate this point, let us consider the poem "Gorodu i miru" (To the City and the World) from Singer's poetic collection *Osazhdennyi Iarusarim* (2002). From the outset, the poem's title indicates several vectors pointing to diverse cultural contexts. It is a translation from Latin of *Urbi et orbi*, a message of blessing delivered by the Pope on important Christian holidays and addressed to the city of Rome and to the world (traditionally to the entire Catholic community). Singer just changes the stylistic register in Russian substituting the colloquial "gorodu" for the Old Church Slavonic form "gradu" usually used in the translation of this expression. Jerusalem is thereby linked to Rome.

The title also recalls Valerii Briusov's 1903 cycle *Urbi et orbi*, and in this way Singer plugs into the Russian literary tradition of representing Rome. Maria Virolainen traces Briusov's Rome to its portrayal by Gogol as an old, rundown city of faded glory, but which still retains sacred meaning and a capacity for renewal and transformation:

> We see a persistent set of characteristics which shape the reputation of Italy and Rome: the former lost glory and decay on the one hand, and magical or sacral opportunities for revival, for acquiring renewed power and a new story on the other . . . the Russian perception of Rome, recorded both by Gogol and Briusov, is informed by this logic that construes paucity, decay and even death as a pledge of future mobility, renaissance and even transfiguration.[20]

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[20] M. Virolainen, "Rim i mir Valeriia Briusova," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, accessed July 20, 2020, http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/21/virolajnen21.shtml.

Building a parallel between Jerusalem and Rome of the Russian tradition, Singer shows the city as decrepit, dilapidated, and dusty:

Идейской матери	Shabby palaces of Mater Ideae
дырявые чертоги	[. . .]
[. . .]	
А дервиша в пыли лежит старуха	and the dervish's old wife is lying in the dust
и пыльной пресмыкается	And slithering along the dusty
дорогой. [. . .]	road [. . .]
Ее змеиной судорогой сводит.[21]	wracked with serpentine convulsions.

Singer reinforces the Jerusalem/Rome association by weaving classical antiquity into her complex portrait of the unnamed city. *Ideiskaia Mat'* (*Mater Idaea*) is a reference to the cult of the mother of gods, in some ancient sources also identified as Rhea (likewise mentioned in Singer's poem). While Idaea was derived from Mount Ida in Troy, the near-homonymy in Russian between *ideiskaia* and *iudeiskaia* (Judean) transposes this myth into the Jewish context, with Jerusalem becoming the matrix for all cities of the world. The image of the serpent, meanwhile, recalls Briusov and offers a faint hint at the possibility of renewal through shedding the old skin.

Singer uses the spelling of мiр according to the prerevolutionary orthography, which is a more precise rendition of "orbi" (as opposed to мир—peace, мiр signified world, people, community). This spelling also recalls the confusion about the title of Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*. It has often been speculated that the original title contemplated by the author was *Война и мiр* (War and the World) and only through typographical error or editorial misunderstanding was the alternative spelling adopted and subsequently approved by Tolstoy. Be this as it may, the reference carries special significance in a poem addressing Jerusalem. Its name in Hebrew incorporates two roots: one meaning "city" and the second derived either from שלום (peace) or שלם (entire, whole). Thus, Jerusalem signifies either "the city of peace" or a "whole/indivisible city." The opening lines of the poem may refer to the etymological proximity of the Latin *urbi* and *orbi* (implied in the title), or between שלום and שלם :

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[21] Gali-Dana Zinger, *Khozhdenie za naznachennuiu chertu* (Moscow: NLO, 2009), 53.

Отрадно сознавать, что оба слова, из одного быв извлечены корня, двумя стволами разветвили крону.[22]	How pleasant to know that both words, extracted from the single root, split the tree's crown into two trunks.

Singer plays with the duality of the word *koren'*: the root of a tree and a linguistic root. Her main trope for Jerusalem is that of a "world tree," growing from one root but split into two trunks, presumably Judaism and Islam, Jews and Arabs. Each tree trunk is crowned with a book. Because celestial Jerusalem is very distant, it is unclear whether the books contain an identical religious message, or whether there are multiple conflicting messages:

Один ствол в белом небе держит книгу, другой ствол в черном небе, белоглазый, [. . .]	One trunk holds a book in a white sky, the other, white-eyed, in a black sky. [. . .]
Держатель книги держит книгу в небе так высоко, что ничего не видно—она одна, а может, ее много?	The book holder is holding the book in heaven so high that nothing can be seen— is it one, or perhaps many?

The tree is so heavily weighted down with legends, myths, and narratives, that it is on the brink of collapse:

Гроссбухи на вершине накренились, Вот-вот и рухнет груда счетовода	Grossbücher at the top leaned over, The accountant's pile will collapse any moment

Towards the end of the poem, Singer incorporates vague references to Jerusalem's internal conflict into a thick network of folk and mythological allusions and even early Sovietisms:

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[22] Ibid., 53.

Вершки и корешки не поделивши грядущего, мужик и черт на грядках сидят и судят, черт-те что городят, рядят о смычке города с деревней	The peasant and the devil contesting the tops and roots of the future Are sitting in the vegetable patch arguing, devil knows what they are saying About the union of city and country

The formula смычка города с деревней (union/alliance between the city and the country) in the 1930s designated the Soviet social policy directed at bridging the gap between urban dwellers and peasants. In Singer's poem, it may ironically hint at the ill-defined boundaries of East Jerusalem, incorporating Arab villages, some of which are under either Israeli or Palestinian Authority control, and some under Jordanian jurisdiction or with no legal status at all. A city of unique and endless contention, in reality Jerusalem in large part is but an endless amorphous sprawl of barren or chaotically built-up hills with no visible boundary. The immediately following lines refer to the "siege" of the city, rendered in language reminiscent of Russian medieval epic songs describing the military campaigns of legendary Slavic princes:

Они стоят под городом осадой, они сидят под городом дружиной, Рух-птица во древлянах новых княжит и Гарудой с червем земным Нидхеггом бухгалтерскому подлежит учету. (54)	They are laying siege to the city, Legions beneath the walls, The Rukh bird reigns over a new *drevliane* And Garuda, with the earth- worm Nidhogg Will subject it to an account- ing audit.

Suggesting two conflictual perceptions of the geopolitical situation, the "legions beneath the walls" may refer to the Arab villages associated with a potential terrorist threat or with Jewish settlements around Jerusalem, considered illegal by the Arab authorities. The text thus comes alive through constantly shifting interlocking perspectives much more complex than mere self-identification with one or the other "trunk" of the split city.

The destructive potential of the Rukh bird (a giant bird from Arab folklore and *1001 Nights*) is amplified by its appearance in the immediate proximity to the ancient East Slavic tribe (*drevliane*) who murdered Prince Igor and whose city was subsequently destroyed by his vengeful widow, Princess Olga.

Pretending that she wanted to make peace with the rebellious vassals, she asked for a modest donation instead of the usual onerous levy—just one pigeon from each household. But she sent the birds back, each with a flaming branch tied to its leg. Returning to their nests, the birds burned down the entire city. This bird series is continued with Garuda—a mount of god Vishnu. Significantly, the last fantastic creature featured at the end of the poem is Nidhogg of Norse legends, a dragon or giant worm who gnaws at the root of the world tree.

A hostage to its own universal significance, Jerusalem is portrayed as under siege from all the mythological claims to the city. Various imaginative histories, clashing cultural vocabularies, and competing religious and national master narratives are metaphorically gnawing at its roots, and together with the voluminous texts accumulated in the branches of this "world tree" they threaten to send the entire structure crashing down. Despite its association with eternal Rome, the message of Jerusalem's ultimate survival is marked by ambivalence in Singer's poem. Compressing wide-ranging historical, mythological, poetic, and geopolitical subtexts, this poem, to use Hiddleston's words, indeed "comes to life through the dialogues it maintains with the place of its creation––with the broader, multiple cultural histories that its language draws on or taps into; and with itself."

In almost all of her works, Singer creates an original blend between her present *chronotope*, distant memories, and broader historical and mythological narratives. In "Pis'ma k One" (from the cycle "Informatsiia vremenno nedostupna"), the experience of the 1991 Iraq-Israel military confrontation (suggested by gas masks and windows sealed with plastic in anticipation of gas attacks on Tel Aviv) is superimposed onto recollections of childhood visits to her grandmother's house. The image of the grandmother activates the postmemory of the war and pogroms ("крыльцо/куда выходила бабушка Ами и Тами/встречать автоматы цветами" [25]; "как тополь в погромном пухе и перьях" [26]). Insulation against poisonous gases recalls a gas water heater, a feature of Soviet life, and also the Gaza Strip (when filtered through Russian linguistic consciousness, a false etymology is created (*gaz*—gas), absent from other languages):[23]

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[23] Pronounced as *aza* in Hebrew, and *ghaza* in Arabic, Gaza is most likely linked to the Semitic root for "fortress" or "stronghold."

абсолютно ничейный разум не объемлет ничейные земли между стеклом и полиэтиленовой пленкой не говоря уж о секторе газа и поэтому разом вспоминаются газовая колонка и развешанные нестиранные пеленки (26)	absolutely no one's mind embraces no-man's land between glass and plastic film not to mention the gaza strip and this is why one recalls at once the gas heater and unwashed nappies hung out to dry.

The Middle-Eastern geopolitical context creeps into an almost pastoral setting in the poem "At the Dacha" (title in English) subtitled "Utopia." The poem's main topic is making jam in a big basin at the *dacha*, but the summery imagery is woven from many sources, including Karl Briullov's "Italian Midday," a small-scale portrait of a lovely young woman contemplating a bunch of ripe grapes. In the low-tech setting of Russian dachas, basins filled with freshly picked berries and sugar were often placed on a gas primus in the middle of a crowded courtyard:

В тазу с вареньем полдень италийский В глазу конфорки полдень италийский Огонь поводит плечиком брюлловским Медного таза	Italian midday in the basin with jam In the eye of a gas burner Italian midday The flame shrugs the Briullovian shoulder Of the copper basin
В грозу ряд примусов стоит как обелиски В лазури римской медной обелиски Огонь пускается на модные уловки Цыганки Азы (68)	A line of primuses stand in the storm like obelisks Obelisks in Roman copper lapis The flame does the latest tricks of the Gypsy girl Aza

There is something unsettling in this idyllic-nostalgic recollection. In the context of post-Holocaust Jewish literature, "gas" inevitably recalls the gas chambers. The Holocaust and its ancient and contemporary variations constitute one of the core themes of Israeli literature, and Singer's poetry in particular.[24] The gas burner and flame of this poem are subtly associated with Gaza through innocent mention of "Gypsy Aza" (a more direct association is with the heroine of an eponymous late-Soviet film)—by virtue of a phonetic homology between the Gypsy girl's name and the Hebrew pronunciation of the Gaza Strip, as noted above. If the reader is aware of these multiple additional translingual and transcultural allusions, his expectations of a countryside utopia announced in the poem's title are frustrated at once.[25]

A light touch, walking a fine line between and across many diverse meanings, is a hallmark of Gali-Dana Singer's poetic style. The title of her cycle "Osazhdennyi Iarusarim" (Besieged Iarusarim) furnishes a dense exemplary formula of the fusion of cross-cultural references: the title immediately recalls Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Liberated Jerusalem*, except Singer reverses the gaze and switches sides, viewing the conflict from the perspective of the besieged city and not that of the victorious Christian knights. The corrupted name of the city (*I**a**rus**a**r**im* instead of Russian *I**e**rus**a**l**im*), can be broken into sub-modules: *ia* (I), *rus* (Russian), *Rim* (Russian pronunciation for Rome), *arim* (Hebrew for "cities"), and *iarus* (tier in a theater). The last element spells the poet's strategy of building successive "tiers," or layers of meaning. Commenting on this title in his article in Hebrew, Nekod Singer focuses on the connection between Jerusalem and Rome: in his view, by placing the city in this Roman, Western, and imperial context Gali-Dana Singer deemphasizes its Babylonian, Eastern profile.[26] In addition, a visual image on the book cover featuring Saint Petersburg adds yet another dimension, estranging Jerusalem even more. With such a rich palette of connotations, built through the medium of Russian, this title (and Singer's poetry more generally) cannot be adequately rendered in a foreign language. Do words and texts that push the limits of translatability pose a problem for a poet whose ambition is to transcend her mother tongue? Quite to the contrary. Nekod Singer suggests that the sheer untranslatability gives the reader an extra opportunity to engage creatively with the text—by building a philological and philosophical discussion around the untranslatable concept: ("לתרגם את המלה ואת המושג אי־אפשר, אבל אפשר לערוך סביבם דיון פילולוגי ופילוסופי.")[27]

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[24] For example, Singer's poem "Ritual," describing the Passover *seder* in Jerusalem, suggests a reading of the Jewish exodus from Egypt as a foundational story of persecution and antisemitism culminating in the Holocaust and persisting in the present time in other forms, including suicide bombings and other forms of terrorism.

[25] Cf. Mikhail Gendelev's poem "K arabskoi rechi," in which Gaza is linked to asthma, real and figurative suffocation induced by the firecrackers periodically launched into Israel by Hamas youth activists, heavy smoke from burning tires, and the Russian connotation of Gaza/*gaz*: "а взять горючую автопокрышку под язык таблетку к въезду в астму Газы негасимой."

[26] Nekoda Singer, "Nekoda Zinger: arba ha-birot shel hashirah harusit beyisra'el," Nekudatayim:, December 19, 2014, https://nekudataim.wordpress.com/2014/12/19/nekoda-singer-4cities/.

But if this kind of reflection on the proximity and distance between languages, histories, cultures, memories, and mythologies is engendered in the mind of the reader, do we not approach the ideal of World Literature?

The most direct way to stimulate such a transcultural dialogue is when the author recreates his or her own text in another language, modifying it according to the logic of that language. The reader, provided he shares the author’s linguistic competence, has simultaneous access to both versions and can examine the relationship between them. This kind of creative self-translation, resulting in the production of complementary non-identical variants of the work, was previously a rare eccentric practice: its best achievements can be illustrated by Nabokov. But gradually, with the rise of diasporic literatures and readerships over the last decades, it has become more common.

For Gali-Dana Singer, non-equivalent self-translation becomes a conscious exploration of additional dimensions and meanings of her poetic project, and of her own poetic persona. As Adrian Wanner remarks, “a self-translator is forced to grapple with his or her own multiple identities, which may not always be reducible to a common denominator.”[28]

Asked whether there is any connection between two versions of her book that came out in Russian and Hebrew, she explains:

Конечно, связь есть. Всё же это один и тот же голос одного и того же поэта, исповедующего одно и то же отношение к двум разным языкам. Новый язык, в свою очередь, диктует различия, иначе, на мой взгляд, не имело бы смысла выходить за рамки русского. И если бы я была способна объяснить, в чем эти различия заключаются, я не писала бы стихи. Стихи—это мой способ постижения мира.[29]	Of course there is a connection. This is still the same voice of the same poet, professing the same attitude to two different languages. The new language, in turn, dictates the differences, otherwise, I think, it would not have made any sense to transcend the Russian. And if I had been able to explain the nature of these differences I would not be writing poems. Poetry is my way of understanding the world.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Adrian Wanner, *The Bilingual Muse. Self-Translation among Russian Poets* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 175.

[29] Zinger, “Oshchushchenie zemli.”

Poetically, Gali-Dana Singer expresses this idea through the trope of a split tongue:[30]

Непонимание мое, ты тут?	Are you here, my non-understanding?
Мое чужое, непойманное, ты не оставляй меня.	My foreign, my uncaptured, do not leave me.
Ужо тебе, негоже мне одной, сменяя	Don't you dare! It is not appropriate for me alone, changing
двух языков ободранную кожу	the scratched skin of two tongues
на жалящий себя ж раздвоенный язык. («Тут» 62)	for a self-biting split language.

Singer lays bare her strategy in "Sonet, perevod s chuzhogo iazyka" (Sonnet, translation from a foreign language). The poem consists of two parts, one entitled "Podstrochnik" (Interlinear translation) and the other "Perevod" (Translation). The first part exemplifies a rough attempt to convey the meaning of the "original" by placing awkward synonymous constructions side by side. It is deprived of any elegance, poeticity, style, and in many respects remains imprecise (it is unclear whether the lyric voice is male or female, etc.). The multiple variants fuse into a robust sonnet in the second part, but the last line is given in transliterated Hebrew:

как розовая жвачка растянулась	like pink chewing gum stretched
изо рта Рут	from the mouth of Ruth
из мисрад-а-тайярут.	from misrad-ha-taiarut.

In the "interlinear translation" this corresponds to:

как розовая жевательная резинка	like pink chewing gum
изо рта Рути из министерства [конторы] туризма.	from the mouth of Ruth from the Tourism ministry [bureau]

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[30] *Split tongue* (Safa seshua), incidentally, is the title of the novel of another Israeli writer from the Russian *aliah*—Boris Zaidman. As opposed to Singer, he works in Hebrew only, but his Hebrew is saturated with cross-references to the Russian language and experience.

Frustrating the reader's expectations, this ending raises a number of questions: What is the language of the "original?" Into which language is the "original" translated? No answers are provided, and the "Sonnet" becomes a performance of a multiplicity of tongues, or indeed, the multiplicity of the poetic Self highlighted in Singer's poem by the unlikely a-grammatical declension of the Russian pronoun "I" ("склоняя я—о яе, яей, яю" (57)).

The practice of writing in two languages—and between them—can be approached through Mikhail Epstein's concepts of interlation and stereotextuality. As Epstein argues, in the contemporary globalized cultural reality, with a marked increase of multilingual competence among both writers and readers, the role of translation changes considerably—instead of creating a double or a simulacrum of the original, it produces a variation, "a dialogical counterpart to the original text." Such contrastive juxtaposition of two apparently identical but in fact non-equivalent texts suspends the binary between "source" and "target" languages, making them interchangeable, and each variant allows the bilingual reader to perceive what the other language "misses or conceals."[31] Interlation effectively cancels the idea that something can be lost in translation. It creates the effect of stereotextuality, discrepancies between languages come to the foreground, and a reader conversant in all of them can savor additional shades of meaning and layers of imagery. The "same" text unfolds in alternative incarnations, providing a "surplus of poetic value" but also pointing to more fundamental questions: "Can an idea be adequately presented in a single language? Or do we need a minimum of two languages (as with two eyes or two ears) to convey the volume of a thought or symbol? Will we, at some future time, accustom ourselves to new genres of stereo poetry and stereo philosophy as we have become accustomed to stereo music and stereo cinema? Will the development of translingual discourses . . . become a hallmark of globalization?"[32] And, we might add, a trajectory of World Literature?

The recent poetic experiments and philosophical speculations discussed so far seem to render irrelevant David Damrosch's point that literature stays within its national or regional tradition when it loses in translation and becomes World Literature when it gains in translation.[33] Such rigid definitions cannot account for diverse patterns of writing in and out of the "originary language" and the "national tradition" demonstrated by extraterritorial Russian writers.

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[31] Mikhail Epstein, "The Unasked Question: What Would Bakhtin Say?," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (2004): 42–60.

[32] Ibid., 51.

[33] Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 289.

Let us now turn to a different model, exemplified by the francophone Russian author Andreï Makine. As opposed to Singer or bilingual émigré writers of the earlier period, Makine works only in French, his adopted tongue. In 1995, he was awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt for his French novel *Le Testament français* (translated into English as *Dreams of My Russian Summers*). At the time, Makine's strategy seemed quite innovative. Written in French heavily marked by interference from the Russian language, the novel tapped into French and Russian cultural traditions. Most importantly, its plot revolved around the protagonist's linguistic and cultural hybridity, and a significant part of the narrative was consecrated to the negotiation of a complex relationship between two of his tongues. The pseudo-autobiographical narrator contemplates alternative sets of cultural and historical associations (for example, *derevnia/village*), the phonetic discrepancies recalling very different realities (for example, Russian and French pronunciation of the word *tsar*), etc. Makine effectively engaged with translingualism and cross-cultural translation, which would soon become key concepts in the emerging disciplines of translation studies and World Literature. Translated into dozens of languages, his novel became part of World Literature on any view. Yet, the reception of this author in his homeland was problematic. When the Russian translation appeared Makine was ridiculed, perhaps unfairly, as most of the criticism should have been directed at the translators. Indeed, rendering the French word "enfilade" with the Russian cognate *anfilada*, normally used to describe a grand palatial setting, in the context of the all-too familiar Soviet communal apartment could not but provoke laughter. And there were many blunders of the sort. As a result, neither this nor any other of Makine's works achieved popularity, interest, or wide circulation in Russia. Russian reality, culture and—vitally—language, which were so gracefully transposed by the author into French prose, turned into flat clichés when translated "back" into Russian. This failure in one of the novel's "originary contexts" did not prevent it from participating in World Literature. Why did this text lose so much in translation into the author's native tongue? How could this have been prevented?

For Emily Apter, the Untranslatable is a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses.[34] Like many other works of bilingual authors whose writing is in fact a form of reflection on their experiences in their homeland, Makine's novel should not have been translated by professionals who had no choice but to be faithful to the original, but should rather have been rewritten, recreated by the writer himself. Only a non-equivalent translation, an alternative narrative, could have any chance of success with a Russian readership. Makine's example serves as a foil to the creative practices of those authors who not only work across cultures and languages but create parallel non-identical variants of the same literary text.

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[34] Emily Apter, "Philosophizing World Literature," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 171–86, 178.

Finally, let us consider another, arguably a more self-conscious way of writing World Literature by authors from the post-Soviet states. One of the most interesting examples is the Fergana school of poetry, which was active in the 1990s. Its central figures were Shamshad Abdullaev, Khamdam Zakirov, and Hamid Ismailov. They articulated the utopian project of a "new Uzbek poetry" that would draw on Western modernism, Italian neorealist cinema, and Mediterranean literature (Constantin Cavafis' verse was among their key references). The Fergana valley and Uzbekistan more generally were construed as an intermediary cultural space facilitating the interface between East and West. The most paradoxical part of this project was that they wrote exclusively in Russian but elided the Russian literary tradition. Had they embraced Russian literature, they reasoned, they would have been regarded as mere peripheral adepts of the metropolitan cultural lexicons. Aspiring to set their own independent intellectual and artistic agenda, the Fergana poets used Russian as a neutral verbal code for their experimental cosmopolitan verse and also promoted it as a language of creativity that could be shared by russophone writers across the post-Soviet space. This elevated Russian from a national idiom or imperial *lingua franca* to a language of international artistic communication—a far cry from the hierarchical approach of the Soviet language policy makers, who envisaged a dominant role for Russian language and ethnicity in the "union of free nations."

The Fergana practice is reminiscent of that of globe-trotting authors who select English in order to access broader audiences without tapping into any specific Anglophone literary tradition. Their narratives are often characterized by a certain sterility. Released from its deep-rooted connection to a specific cultural territory, with its ethnic, historical, and national discourses, Russian can be positioned alongside "international" English, Spanish, Modern Standard Arabic, or French (especially when it was used as a pan-European literary language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).[35]

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[35] This "international Russian" has recently become more visible, as some émigrés who left Russia as teenagers decide to recover their linguistic heritage through writing. For example, this is the case of Alexander Stesin, a writer, traveler, and doctor who grew up in the United

The verse of the Fergana poets can also be defined as "non-Russian literature written in Russian," to use Yakov Shaus' formula quoted above. But in contrast to Russian-Israeli writing, it is not informed by a polemic or ironic subversion of the metropolitan canon. Despite (and possibly because of) this Otherness of the Fergana school, these poets have mostly circulated in Russia, and Shamshad Abdullaev has been awarded prestigious Russian literary awards (including the Andrei Bely prize and Russkaia premiia [Russian Prize]). In his speech at the Andrei Bely awards ceremony, his fellow poet Arkady Dragomoshchenko praised Abdullaev for his characteristic "worldliness":

> I have been most amazed at how he can weave together the finest threads of various cultures into a particular pattern, understanding that he is present in a conversation with great European culture from the shores of Algeria, and at the possibility of a response from Europe by whatever roundabout paths it returns there, at how mighty these invisible linkages can be. I think that precisely this second part, the co-articulation, the creation of these linkages, of these separate cultures (of course they are separate, or they wouldn't be other) is the most important task of the poet.[36]

By co-articulating diverse and ostensibly unconnected works within the medium of his own poetic text, Abdullaev effectively builds constellations, or patterns, that combine authors as broad-ranging as Rousseau, Rimbaud, and Italian avant-garde poets. The concept of constellation was discussed by M. R. Thomsen as a way of drawing less canonized works into the scene of World Literature.[37] Abdullaev's poems that stimulate a parallel reading of texts separated in time and space position themselves in this global literary landscape.

Regarding the Fergana poetry in the optic of the postcolonial theory, Kirill Korchagin finds its rejection of the Russian ("colonial") tradition typical

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States but made a conscious decision to write books in Russian. In *Afrikanskaia kniga*, for example, Stesin describes his medical work and adventures in Africa, providing fascinating details on the diverse modes of life, social structures, cultures and literatures found across the continent. Given the American cultural and linguistic background that shaped Stesin's profile and the exotic topics of his narratives, his neutral Russian is hard to pin down to any specific location.

[36] "Premiia Andreia Belogo za 1993 god (stenogramma tseremonii vrucheniia)," *Mitin zhurnal* 51 (1994): 277–286.

[37] Cf. Rosendahl, *Mapping World Literature.*

of the sensibilities of the postcolonial subject.[38] But at the same time, these poets engage in a paradoxical practice of self-colonization, by adopting a view of themselves shaped by a different, non-Russian, type of colonial imagination. They often construct the Uzbek locality in the language of Western Orientalism, long critiqued by Edward Said. Since Uzbekistan rarely figured on the map of European Orientalist literature, among some stand-ins for Fergana we find Damascus, Cordova, or India. Korchagin points out recurrent references to "expansiveness," "monotony," "repetitiveness," unbearable heat, and dead-end dusty streets, which together form the visual image of Fergana, however, "this image does not emerge independently, but is invented, constructed out of the visual elements, associated with the ideas about the magic East."[39]

Among Western visual references through which this "East forgotten in its formlessness" ("Восток, забытый в бесформии") is filtered in Abdullaev's verse, allusions to Italian locales predominate, transposed from books and cinema. The poet openly acknowledges his sources:

Местность, где я открывался открытому и соответствовал себе,—Фергана как повод для снов и отрешенности, Фергана, перекликавшаяся с напластованиями будоражащих аллюзий, с моей внутренней землей, которую я нашел в Италии, воспринятой мной через литературу (фрагментаристы, герметики) и кино постромантического плана.[40]	The territory where I was opening up to the open and was true to myself—Fergana, as a reason for dreams and detachment, Fergana echoing the layers of disturbing allusions, my internal land that I found in Italy and incorporated though the medium of literature (Fragmentarists, Hermetics) and postromantic cinema.

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[38] Kirill Korchagin, "'Kogda my zamenim svoi mir . . .': ferganskaia poeticheskaia shkola v poiskakh postkolonial'nogo sub"ekta," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 2 (2017), accessed July 31, 2020, https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2017/2/kogda-my-zame nim-svoj-mir-ferganskaya-poeticheskaya-shkola-v-poiskah-postkolonialnogo-subekta.html.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "Shamshad Abdullaev," Ferganskii Al'manakh, accessed July 30, 2020, http://library.ferghana.ru/almanac/pers/shamshad.htm.

What lurks behind this crafted exoticism, however, is a rather apocalyptic vision of a run-down, sleepy city at the southern periphery of the Soviet empire, as in the following examples:

Ни дерева, ни дощатого навеса: только белая стена, залитая огнем,—под нею дуреет желтый, худосочный кот. . . (“Забытый фильм двадцатых годов”)	Not a single tree, no wooden awning: only a whitewashed wall splashed with fire— Beneath it a yellow, emaciated cat Is going crazy. . . (“Forgotten Film from the 1920s”)
Сломанный стул в тени обгоревшей когда-то двери;	A broken chair in the shadow of a once-burnt door;
оса, парящая по глухому периметру над полуденной свалкой.	a wasp gliding along the solid perimeter above a midday garbage pile.
За городом– холм и пустырь, навлекшие на грудь морскую горечь. (“Тоска по Средиземноморью”)[41]	Beyond the town— a hill and wasteland, burdening the chest with sea bitterness. (“Yearning for the Mediterranean”)

The palimpsest of East and West in this poetry results from an endless process of cultural transmission. There is an unresolved ambivalence here between self-exotization in the language of the Other and reinvention of the self in terms of world culture. Potentially, the Fergana school embodies a decentered model of World Literature, bypassing the majoritarian Russian tradition and establishing lateral exchanges with a widely understood European legacy.

Coming back to the original question in the title of this chapter, we can answer it affirmatively. “Worldliness” can indeed be built into the text, and Russian diasporic literature, already embedded in the world by virtue of its geographical situation, offers multiple ways of doing so. As we have seen, extraterritorial authors deploy diverse linguistic strategies to dissociate language, territory, and national identity. They range from translingual discourses, non-equivalent self-translation, decoupling the language and the corresponding literary tradition, and generating a dialogue between different cultures, histories, and mythologies. Diasporic texts, poised in interstitial locations between counties and languages and informed by migration, spell mobility that stimulates reflection on untranslatable concepts, alternative memories, and hybrid identities. The literary practices described in this chapter interrogate not only the "original language" but also such attendant concepts as "original context," "source culture," "linguistic and cultural point of origin," "home," as well as "target" and "non-target audience." As they negotiate the fundamentals of World Literature, they propose new models of inscribing the "world," thereby shaping this theoretical discourse in many innovative ways. While my examples here were drawn from the Russian context, they illustrate a broader recent phenomenon: global writing created by translingual authors with hybrid identities.

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[41] Ibid.