

## **Distribution Agreement**

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Katy Joy Mayerson

April 10, 2017

Transcultural Pathways and the Literary Imagination:  
French as Incubator and Irritant in Imperial Russia and Postcolonial Africa

by

Katy Mayerson

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan  
Adviser

Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture  
Institute for the Liberal Arts

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan  
Adviser

Dr. Kevin Corrigan  
Committee Member

Dr. Joel Zivot  
Committee Member

2017

Transcultural Pathways and the Literary Imagination:  
French as Incubator and Irritant in Imperial Russia and Postcolonial Africa

By

Katy Joy Mayerson

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan

Adviser

An abstract of  
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences  
of Emory University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture  
Institute for the Liberal Arts

2017

## Abstract

### Transcultural Pathways and the Literary Imagination: French as Incubator and Irritant in Imperial Russia and Postcolonial Africa By Katy Joy Mayerson

With some exceptions, policymakers around the world have developed the tendency to focus solely on the disparate elements of a target culture. In other words, rather than capitalizing upon the commonalities in a diplomatic partnership, legislation often fixates on differences. This thesis is not alone in suggesting that this current model, which privileges disciplinary and quantitative expertise, leaves room for improvement. UNESCO, for example, offers the *cultural diversity lens*, outlined herein, as a partial but flawed solution. Though work has been done to examine the various implications of the cultural lens, no one has yet considered the question of respectful and truly representative foreign policy from a purely qualitative perspective. Furthermore, few have directly addressed the numerous points of interface between the Russian ideas of culturology and transculture and the American concepts of cultural studies, interdisciplinarity, and integration.

This thesis advocates a shift toward a more interdisciplinary and transcultural approach to international relations and policymaking using francophone literature as a case study. The first chapter details the instrumental role of the French language in the development of Russia's national identity during the Imperial Period. The second chapter describes the problematic prevalence of French in postcolonial Africa, which serves to challenge the privileged status enjoyed by the language in Russia. Six key authors are examined to aid in this juxtaposition: Aleksandr Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Lev Tolstoy for Russia; and Kateb Yacine, Ousmane Sembène, and Sony Labou Tansi for Africa. These writers act as microcosmic representatives of Russian, Algerian, Senegalese, and Congolese literature, respectively. Finally, viewing reading comprehension as a feasible mode of cultural comprehension, the third chapter compares two exemplary works in Russian and French literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. This close reading is designed to demonstrate the value of literature and literary analysis as cultural analytical tools.

Transcultural Pathways and the Literary Imagination:  
French as Incubator and Irritant in Imperial Russia and Postcolonial Africa

By

Katy Joy Mayerson

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences  
of Emory University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture  
Institute for the Liberal Arts

2017

## Acknowledgements

As this thesis represents the capstone of my collegiate career, as well as my lengthiest academic endeavor to date, I would be remiss not to include a few words of gratitude.

**Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan** has been my trusted adviser for the bulk of this project, and indeed for the bulk of my time at Emory, in the Russian department and beyond. Her passion for everything Russian is infectious, and I am endlessly thankful for her guidance and supervision. She continues to introduce me to prose and poetry that I surely would have failed to discover on my own. I will treasure Dr. Glazov-Corrigan long after my graduation as my *(м)учительница*.

**Dr. Kevin Corrigan** has been my faculty adviser since my start at Emory, and I am incredibly grateful for his shared love of French, translation, and interdisciplinary work, among other interests. His breadth of scholarly references is seemingly inexhaustible, which has proven especially helpful at times when inspiration and motivation are scarce. I doubt many people bond over Plato's *Symposium*, but I can't think of a more fitting introduction.

**Dr. Joel Zivot** has been an invaluable addition to the conversation between medicine and academia, and I greatly appreciate his real-world expertise. I admire his ability to turn proposed life achievements into hobbies, and his work ethic and worldview have noticeably shaped my approach to this work. I count Dr. Zivot among my mentors who ground and challenge me, even though I know he doesn't believe in the title.

To my friends, thank you for putting up with me during the rough patches and during the times when it was reasonable to wonder whether I was still alive. Thank you for the check-ins, the chocolate, and for listening.

To Riley, thank you for reminding me that giving up is not an option, and also for reminding me to get back to work.

To my dear mother, none of this could have happened if not for you, at the most basic level all the way up to wishing me good luck before my defense. Your love and support humbles me in its vastness, and it is one of the great pleasures of my life to make you proud. Thank you.

Table of Contents

**I | Introduction .....1**  
A Fresh Look at the Cultural Lens..... 1  
Possibilities for a Paradigm Shift..... 3  
Further Key Concepts .....4  
Premise and Structure .....7

**II | An Immortalized Infatuation .....9**  
Fickle Francophilia in Imperial Russian Literature .....9  
Out of Darkness .....10  
The False Frenchman: Pushkin..... 13  
The French Frenetic: Dostoevsky..... 16  
The Peasant’s Polyglot: Tolstoy.....17  
Conclusion... ..19

**III | Problems in Postcoloniality .....21**  
Residues of Forced Francophonie in Postcolonial African Literature..... 21  
The Hydra’s Head .....23  
The Enfant Terrible: Sony Labou Tansi .....26  
The (Other) False Frenchman: Kateb Yacine .....29  
The Father of African Cinema: Ousmane Sembène .....32  
Conclusion... ..34

**IV | The Little Princes..... 35**  
Cultural Analysis through Comparative Literature..... 35  
Rosy Cheeks, Cheeky Roses..... 38  
Tears of a Fox... ..41  
On Death... ..44  
On Loving-kindness.....45  
Of Wealth and Wisdom .....46  
Conclusion... ..48

**V | Conclusion..... 49**  
At the Limits of Cultural Expression... ..49  
Interdisciplinary Relations .....50  
The Value of Literature.....51  
Future Applications and Further Research .....53

**VI | Bibliography..... 55**

**Transcultural Pathways and the Literary Imagination:**  
French as Incubator and Irritant in Imperial Russia and Postcolonial Africa

By Katy Joy Mayerson

## **I | Introduction**

### *A Fresh Look at the Cultural Lens*

“A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Winston Churchill famously described Russia in 1939, and many continue to cite his definition in trying to convey the country’s cryptic and unpredictable character. In trying to understand the country that has confounded foreigners for centuries, it is helpful to be mindful of the value of the *cultural lens*. This figurative lens has the potential both to generate conflict and to facilitate compromise on a global scale. Despite the many differences that distinguish cultures and peoples, there are a number of common concepts that inform the human condition. Unfortunately, little work has been done to illuminate the way in which the cultural lens distorts and obfuscates the commonality of these concepts. As a result, those ignorant to the nature and function of the lens often perceive manifestations of such concepts as love, success, and social manners as exclusive defining factors limited to their respective cultures. Awareness of the cultural lens, however, carries the potential to offer a thoughtful—and likely novel—perspective on an issue that can now be acknowledged as one that transcends cultural boundaries. The initial question thus becomes one of how to define the notion of this lens.

It is important to note that neither the phenomenon, nor the role of the cultural lens is invented in this work; the goal of this thesis is only to present a rather specific meaning of the term. In its attempt to assist in successful cultural exchange and intercultural projects, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) offers what is perhaps the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cowell, Alan. “Churchill’s Definition.”



most practical definition of the cultural lens in a “pedagogical guide” to the so-called *cultural diversity lens*.<sup>2</sup> In the most recent report, adapted from previous versions by Edouard Jouveaud, UNESCO details the potential uses of the lens as a practical methodological tool “designed to create awareness of cultural dimensions, issues, and factors in development programmes.”<sup>3</sup> According to the United Nations agency, the cultural diversity lens is “designed” as a “tool” that “allows policymakers to analyze to what extent a particular programme respects the principles of cultural diversity” and “helps to better understand [...] cultural practices, knowledge and know-how.”<sup>4</sup>

Though this thesis shares UNESCO’s view that the cultural lens aids in identifying possible areas of improvement “while respecting and promoting cultural diversity,”<sup>5</sup> I will take a somewhat different approach to the question of the cultural lens. Rather than treating this concept as a “designed tool,” I will view the cultural lens as an intrinsic filter unique to each cultural community, in some cases going so far as attempting to account for differences between individuals. Though I acknowledge the fact that in our intention to understand other cultures, it is nigh impossible to escape our own social limitations and predispositions, I will make a concerted effort to discover those differentiating factors which already exist—not in the world of sociological paradigms, but in the works of art which effectively communicate across existing cultural borders. Thus, for the purposes of this investigation, I posit that the cultural lens is actually a numerous set of lenses, each derived from the idiosyncrasies present in the multitude of cultural value systems seen around the world, that are never absolutely isolated from each other. By extension, I will demonstrate the necessity of qualitative representations of cultural

---

<sup>2</sup> Jouveaud, *Cultural Diversity Lens*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

identity such as literature as significant and unique bridges between global communities. In short, in being “mindful” of the cultural lens, as mentioned earlier, my thesis is more concerned with how a given community sees the world than with how *we* see *them*.

### *Possibilities for a Paradigm Shift*

Notably, this thesis represents more than a logical exercise; I consider its arguments to be an important aspect of my vocation. I am mindful, for example, of the fact that through Joubaud’s report, UNESCO emphasizes that “the concept of cultural diversity is making headway as a source of inspiration and an essential asset for sustainable development.”<sup>6</sup> However, the authors of the report also highlight the need for “a real effort to accept that there are multiple legitimate ways of seeing the world,” a position I fully endorse. At the same time, I believe that policymakers around the world have developed the tendency to focus solely on the disparate elements of a target culture. As someone who wishes to work in the Foreign Service for the Department of State, I am disheartened to observe what appears to be a disproportionate reliance on data alone. While experts in such favored fields as economics and political science are in no way superfluous, I feel that by introducing the perspectives and expertise of a more colorful array of disciplines to the Foreign Service, we might develop a more holistic approach to international relations that is both sustainable and adaptable for the future. Furthermore, this change would better reflect State’s goal of producing not only specialists, but generalists, who can bring a broader and vital perspective to pressing cultural issues.<sup>7</sup>

I am not alone in this enterprise. In suggesting that the current model, which privileges disciplinary and quantitative expertise, leaves room for improvement, this paper finds itself in very good company. In his book, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*, Allen Repko

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup> See State, *Foreign Service*, for an explanation of the difference between Foreign Service Specialists and Officers/Generalists.

urges budding scholars to consider the periphery not included within the purview of the social sciences. “In this world of specialists,” he writes, “even highly educated persons can be unaware of the social, ethical, and biological dimensions of a policy or action. Indeed, one may know a great deal about a particular subject but know little about its consequence.”<sup>8</sup> Here, Repko, former longtime director of the Interdisciplinary Studies program at the University of Texas at Arlington, is touching on a rather crucial issue, as well as alluding to its potential ramifications: the issue of comprehensive training, and its desirability to future intercultural specialists. Emory’s own Mikhail Epstein chooses to tackle the interface of culture, policy, and disciplinary “tunnel vision,”<sup>9</sup> as Repko calls it, from a different angle. In *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication*, written with Ellen Berry, Epstein contrasts the Russian field of culturology with its America-based counterpart, cultural studies, demonstrating the potential that exists in the former for effective and truly intercultural communication.

#### *Further Key Concepts*

In *Transcultural Experiments*, Epstein outlines three key concepts—cultural studies, culturology, and transculture—which, in addition to elucidating the concept of the cultural lens, form the theoretical foundations of this paper. As Epstein recounts, “*cultural studies*” was first introduced by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. In 1972, eight years after the Center was established, the inaugural issue of a journal aimed at “put[ting] cultural studies on the intellectual map”<sup>10</sup> was published under the title, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. As “both an intellectual and pragmatic enterprise,”<sup>11</sup> the field of cultural studies shared “the aim embodied by the postmodern Western humanities to criticize and

---

<sup>8</sup> Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Berry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19.

deconstruct power and cultural manifestations of politics.”<sup>12</sup> This arguably narrow focus upon the political aspects of culture helps to explain the seemingly innocuous tendency of American universities to offer International Relations and similar majors that closely follow—and in some exceptional cases, mirror—the curricula traditionally used in Political Science programs, which usually ignore the potential offered by cultural and literary artefacts.

For Epstein, the concept of cultural studies serves as a foil for another, lesser-known alternative: *culturology*. Scholars of Russian familiar with the labyrinthine quality that often characterizes the trajectory of creative movements in the country will not be surprised to find that culturology is harder to trace than its Western counterpart. Not unlike the advent of cultural studies, Epstein places the emergence of culturology roughly amid the sixties and seventies, citing the influential works of Yuri Lotman, Mikhail Bakhtin, Vladimir Bibler, Georgy Gacher, and Sergei Averintsev. In contrast to cultural studies, and in keeping with the concept of the cultural lens put forth in this thesis, culturology “attempts to approach culture on its own terms and to develop a holistic language that avoids lapsing into [...] the absolutization of any single aspect of culture.”<sup>13</sup> This plainly interdisciplinary “metadiscipline within the humanities”<sup>14</sup> rejects the emphasis on power and politics so germane to cultural studies. Instead, culturology works to “depoliticize culture, to rescue it from the narrow pragmatic context where it served as an instrument of power.”<sup>15</sup> As culturology endeavors to “encompass and link the variety of cultural phenomena” typically studied separately, the field “becomes a critique not only of specific branches and disciplines within a particular culture, but of any given culture as a

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 22.

whole.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, interdisciplinary scholars acknowledge the disciplines as necessary components of meaningful research, and interdisciplinary work by definition privileges no one field over another.<sup>17</sup> At this juncture, *culturology* attains its status as a transcultural theory.

Epstein defines *transculture*, another important educational lens, both as “a way to transcend our ‘given’ culture and as a method to apply culture’s transformative forces to culture itself”; as such, transcultural studies offers “an open system of symbolic alternatives to existing cultures and their established sign systems.”<sup>18</sup> As interdisciplinary scholarship seeks to do, transculture challenges the limits and confines that shape and often impede national activity in professional, ethnic, and other cultural spheres.<sup>19</sup> Of course, despite its immense potential, transcultural practice is not without its challenges. Indeed, Epstein acknowledges the constraints of this expansive model by pointing out that “culture, by releasing us from physical limitations, imposes new limitations.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, transculture is not meant to diminish the symbolic or cultural selves that constitute our identities, but instead to enrich and expand the parameters of our various identities.<sup>21</sup> Here, Epstein moves to make one further important distinction, as he clarifies, “Culturology is not a form of political dissidentism. It does not criticize one cultural politics on behalf of another, more advanced and progressive politics. Rather it criticizes politics, as a [dominant] discourse, as a relation of power, as a narrow pragmatism, from the standpoint of culture as a whole.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, rather than promoting homogeneity or affecting regression, transculture and culturology are champions of progression, advancement, expansion, and transcendence.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 16, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Berry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 23, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21.

For further explanation, it may help to define transculture in relationship to culturology: “If culturology is the self-awareness of culture,” Epstein writes, “then transculture is the self-transformation of culture, the totality of theories and practices that liberate culture from its own repressive mechanisms.”<sup>23</sup> In this comparison, just as the culturologist “surpasses [the] confines”<sup>24</sup> of his culture, the transculturalist learns to “transcend a given practice or theory using the symbolic capacities of culture, its infinitely rich, multileveled encodings and decodings of every human phenomenon.”<sup>25</sup> This idea is echoed in the interdisciplinary idea of *integration*. In 2003, Boix Mansilla and Howard Gardner define integration, or the blending of various parts into a functional whole, as the primary objective of interdisciplinary work.<sup>26</sup> Repko elucidates this concept as it relates to intellectual discovery, as he writes, “The integration of knowledge, then, means identifying and blending knowledge from relevant disciplines to produce an interdisciplinary understanding of a particular problem or intellectual question.”<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, integration offers practical solutions to problems that require an interdisciplinary approach due to their complex and specific nature. No one discipline accommodates the critical modes of thought, understanding, and inquiry made possible by interdisciplinary research.<sup>28</sup>

### *Premise and Structure*

It is here that one begins to see the practical value in the convergence of culturology, transculture, interdisciplinarity, and the cultural lens. In familiarizing oneself with the “symbolic capacities” of a given culture through thoughtful analysis of literature and other creative products of cultural expression, one begins to develop a more holistic understanding of that particular culture, as well as the processes by which the cultural lens operates within it. This understanding

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>26</sup> Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 19, 21.

equips scholars and policymakers alike with the tools necessary to find integrated solutions to cultural issues whose intricacies transcend those currently accommodated by established cultural configurations and systems. Because the field of interdisciplinary studies is uniquely suited to such work, it is only logical to draw upon the principles offered by interdisciplinary theory in this thesis. With these ideas in mind, I point to literature and language as areas that draw attention to the striking similarities between very different cultural landscapes, rather than focusing on their discrepancies. I will approach the issue of clarifying the potential importance of the cultural lens using the three chapters contained herein.

In the first chapter, “An Immortalized Infatuation,” I will detail the rise and fall of Francophilia in Imperial Russia, with the aim of demonstrating the instrumental role of the French language in the development of Russia’s national identity. In chapter two, “Problems in Postcoloniality,” I will describe the problematic prevalence of French in postcolonial Africa, which serves to challenge the privileged status enjoyed by the language in Russia. To aid in this juxtaposition, I have chosen to highlight six key authors—Aleksandr Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Lev Tolstoy for Russia; and Kateb Yacine, Ousmane Sembène, and Sony Labou Tansi for Africa—as microcosmic representatives of Russian, Algerian, Senegalese, and Congolese literature, respectively. Finally, viewing reading comprehension as a feasible mode of cultural comprehension, I will use the third chapter, “The Little Princes,” to compare two exemplary works in Russian and French literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*. With this close reading, I wish to demonstrate the incredible value of literary analysis to cultural literacy<sup>29</sup> when performed with respect to and awareness of the cultural lens. Hopefully, in showing that such work is not only possible, but

---

<sup>29</sup> A term coined by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. in his 1987 bestseller, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. It is defined as the ability to understand and participate in a given culture “fluently,” as in a foreign language.

also that it can illuminate unnoticed details and produce new and provocative insights, this thesis will make significant contributions to the ongoing scholarly conversation while also acting as a stepping stone toward a more interdisciplinary and transcultural approach to international relations and foreign policy.

## II | An Immortalized Infatuation

### *Fickle Francophilia in Imperial Russian Literature*

In attempting to lay the groundwork for this unusual effort in literary analysis, one must confront the question of relationship: what do bygone literary greats like Fyodor Dostoevsky have in common with modern African writers such as Kateb Yacine? Perhaps surprisingly for some, the common thread is composed of French. Though much has been written about the critical role played by France in Russia's Westernization, few have explored the sociolinguistic impact of French on the country, as well as the ways in which the language both shaped and hindered the development of a thitherto-unestablished literary Russian. Similarly, African authors continue to use French as a medium through which to reach a wider audience; the language also offers more accessible and easily transcribed narratives. In this chapter and the one that follows, I will discuss the complex cultural significance of French in Imperial Russia and in postcolonial Africa using examples from the intersection of history and literature.

During the Imperial Period, the Russian court was immersed in a sweeping Francophilia whose reach extended from fashion to philosophy, and everything in between. Despite common misconception, this period spans nearly two and a half centuries. The era of Imperial Russia conventionally refers to the two hundred and thirty-five years between the beginning of Peter the Great's reign in 1682 and ending with the fall of the Empire in the Russian Revolution.<sup>30</sup> The

---

<sup>30</sup> "Sophia: Regent of Russia." This *Encyclopædia Britannica* article, and many others on the subject, place Peter's rise on 7 May, or 27 April by the Julian calendar. See also Freiden, "Russian History," for a handy and succinct chronology of significant events in Russian history from the year 998 to 2000.



latter is sometimes used as an umbrella term to comprise two revolutions, both of which took place in 1917. On 8 March of that year, the February Revolution began,<sup>31</sup> causing Nicholas II to abdicate the throne in three days' time.<sup>32</sup> Nine months later, on November 7, the October Revolution saw the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, lay the groundwork for the former Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Together, these revolutions marked the beginning of communism in Russia as well as the definitive end of the tsarist empire.

For those seeking to examine this infatuation with French in one of history's largest empires, the need for an accurate gauge of societal sentiment becomes apparent. This thesis supports literature as one of the most precise and telling indicators of cultural opinion. Guided by the powerful pens of some of Russia's greatest writers—Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy—modern readers can sense a waning intensity in the trajectory of this great Gallic love. Indeed, each of the above authors struggled with mixed feelings about the prevalence of French influence in Russia; their resulting angst is clearly reflected in some of their monumental works. Nonetheless, through these icons' frequent use of French expressions and references in their fiction, elements of this Francophilia were effectively immortalized, which helps to explain the residue of French culture felt in Russia today.

### *Out of Darkness*

In order to pinpoint the origins of this tempestuous, yet transformative cultural embrace, it is imperative to understand prevailing notions of the cultural landscape in both Ancien Régime France and Early Imperial Russia. For Peter the Great, modernization and Westernization were

---

<sup>31</sup> The February Revolution is named for the Old Style date on which it started. According to the Julian calendar, 23 February marked the beginning of the revolution, while the 26<sup>th</sup> is noted for the tsar's abdication.

<sup>32</sup> The Tsar's abdication came after then-Chairman of the State Duma (Russia's first elected parliament), Mikhail Rodzianko, sent Nicholas II an urgent telegram, which stated—among other things—that it was “necessary that some person who enjoys the confidence of the country be entrusted at once with the formation of a new government. There must be no delay. Any procrastination is tantamount to death.” See Browder and Kerensky, *Provisional Government*, 40 for more.

<sup>33</sup> Freiden, “Russian History,” 2-3.

virtually synonymous; both were necessary for any country seeking to establish itself as a world power. In the case of Russia, a radical reimagining was required to shed its longtime image of a backwards, primitive, Asiatic nation in favor of a progressive, sophisticated, and European one. France appeared to be an ideal candidate for emulation as, in contrast to Russia, the country was viewed as “a model to be revered not only for its fashion and cultural cues, but also for its status as [...] refined, modern, and technologically superior.”<sup>34</sup> As for the language, perhaps the most crucial catalyst for Russian francophonie came during the reign of Peter’s daughter, Elizabeth. Having learned the language from a French governess in her father’s time, Elizabeth initiated the use of French in her own court, laying the groundwork for its entrance into “many social and material domains which developed as the nobility began to look upon itself as a corporation of a Western sort and as nobles adopted the habits of their counterparts in other European lands.”<sup>35</sup> It was not long until French took hold in all corners of Russian high society, becoming the language of choice “in the salon, at the soirée, the ball, the theater, and the opera [...] It was also the language of fashion, coiffure, cuisine, and new pastimes such as card-playing and gambling.”<sup>36</sup> This infectious rise of the language did not go unnoticed by those for whom Russia was once of cultural inconsequence. Though Elizabeth did not live to read it, a 1771 letter to Catherine the Great from her beloved Voltaire reveals, “Light [is] now coming from the North.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, adorned in its French finery, Russia emerged from the darkness.

This emergence, however, as some scholars argue, came at a price: in acknowledging the critical role of France in Russia’s modernization, one necessarily concedes a certain level of cultural deficiency in Russia. In her cultural ethnography of Russian salon hostesses, Lina

---

<sup>34</sup> Conley, “Confused Identities,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Argent et al., “Functions and Value,” 10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 12. See also the original French, “*C’est du Nord aujourd’hui que nous vient la lumière,*” in Voltaire, *Dialogues et Entretiens*, 441.

Bernstein relates the questionable context in which Russian was situated at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In 1800 there was no standard and commonly accepted literary Russian, and in the absence thereof the principal language of the educated Russian elite was French. The widespread dominance of French among the upper classes and their neglect of Russian greatly diminished interest in Russian literature, thereby retarding the development of a Russian literary language, especially of Russian prose.<sup>38</sup>

Sadly, when Bernstein writes of “neglect” and “diminished interest,” she is leaning more toward an understatement than an exaggeration: mid-eighteenth century records from Moscow and St. Petersburg indicate French as the primary foreign language taught to noble children,<sup>39</sup> furthermore, following the establishment of French as the “sine-qua-non foreign language in Russia,”<sup>40</sup> Russians of high birth with only a peasant’s command of their native tongue became a “common paradox.”<sup>41</sup> In the way of explanation, Argent et al. suggest in their article on foreign language in Imperial Russia that French was responsible for Russia’s successful transformation from a “barbarous kingdom” with a “tyrannical” government into an elite, enlightened, and truly European absolute monarchy.<sup>42</sup> The implication here, of course, is that the concept of French as “the language of social prestige” went hand in hand with that of Russian as “unfinished.”<sup>43</sup> Perhaps, then, it is fair to assume that the Russian intellectual’s reliance on French was tied to feelings of communicative inadequacy and fear of regressing into cultural irrelevance.

---

<sup>38</sup> Bernstein, “New Language,” 220-21.

<sup>39</sup> Argent et al., “Functions and Value,” 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>41</sup> Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Argent et al., “Functions and Value,” 12.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 14.

*The False Frenchman: Pushkin*

Despite the modern scholarly stance that prestige and value are attributes subjectively assigned to a given language, the Imperial Russian notion of French as intrinsically superior was not entirely misguided. “For one thing,” Argent et al. explain, “[European] languages, and French in particular, provided syntactic, phraseological, and lexical material for linguistic innovation in Russian.”<sup>44</sup> For one young Russian in particular, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, French incited enough passion to earn a nickname: *Француз*.<sup>45</sup> Though some are surprised to learn that Pushkin did not, in fact, earn top marks in all of his courses at the Imperial Lyceum at Tsarskoye Selo,<sup>46</sup> the young writer always excelled in his studies of French. In fact, as David Baguley observes, “He wrote his first poetry in French and frequently preferred, so it seems, to express abstract ideas, to write official letters and love letters in French.”<sup>47</sup> Of the many French writers to whom Pushkin was exposed in his years at the lyceum, it is Catherine the Great’s own favorite who roused his admiration: Voltaire was “always and everywhere great,” the young Pushkin praised, also speaking highly of Gresset and Parny in his notes.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, another nickname for Pushkin, “*смесь обезьяны с тигром*,”<sup>49</sup> derives from a 1776 letter written to d’Alembert, in which Voltaire writes of “*des singes et des tigres*.”<sup>50</sup> Later, however, the groundbreaking author of the novel-in-verse became passionately disillusioned with Voltaire, describing his poetry as “charming trifles in which philosophy spoke in a joking language.”<sup>51</sup> Still, as Robert Maguire notes, “To the end of his life Pushkin held up Voltaire as the model for a

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>45</sup> Авенариус, *Юношеские годы Пушкина*, 296. *Russ.* The Frenchman.

<sup>46</sup> Pushkin, “who had unsurpassed talent and intellect, was poor in mathematics,” according to one source, among other things. See Breizman and Van Dam, *Reflections and Remembrances*, for more.

<sup>47</sup> Baguley, “Pushkin and Mérimée,” 177.

<sup>48</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 104.

<sup>49</sup> Авенариус, *Юношеские годы Пушкина*, 296. *Russ.* Mixture of a monkey with a tiger. See also following footnote.

<sup>50</sup> Voltaire, *Correspondance avec d’Alembert*, 11. *Fren.* The monkeys and the tigers; more literally, of the monkeys and of the tigers.

<sup>51</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 105.

“clear and lively” prose style which could well be imitated by French and Russian writers both.”<sup>52</sup>

The fact that Pushkin held conflicting beliefs regarding Voltaire and the efficacy of French in general—in an 1831 article, for example, he bemoaned the French poet’s “coldness,” “stiffness,” and “strained interpretation”—is clear.<sup>53</sup> The motivations for these contradictory, yet coexistent, feelings are less so. To understand his mindset, we look to Devin Conley, who uses Lev Tolstoy’s classic, *Anna Karenina*, to explore the identity crises suffered by Russian aristocrats. Conley outlines at length the dual—and dueling—identities with which many Russians, and likely Pushkin himself, grappled:

When confronted with two cultural identities, one innate and the other imposed, imitated, or “borrowed,” one’s true identity is muddled in a labyrinth of languages, customs, and traditions. This creates a disjointed relationship with both cultures and a “clash of cultures.” The dual identity of the Russian aristocracy in the nineteenth century is a classic example of a culture’s struggle to find the “right” path independent of any imitation, equated with superficiality and insincerity.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Pushkin “was always on the lookout for any new poet who showed sincere, inspired originality.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, for all his usage and mastery of French—Prosper Mérimée wrote in a letter to Sergei Sobolevsky dated 31 August 1849 that Pushkin’s sentences “are altogether French in character”<sup>56</sup>—he seemed to cultivate “a strong aversion to France.”<sup>57</sup> If Pushkin believed, as he castigated on one occasion, that French prose “hardly redeems the vileness of what they call

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>54</sup> Conley, “Confused Identities,” 1.

<sup>55</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 106.

<sup>56</sup> Baguley, “Pushkin and Mérimée,” 180.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 178.

poetry,”<sup>58</sup> why is it, then, that readers observe French to be so prominently featured in his work—particularly, asks Vladislav Rjéoutski, “*dans son oeuvre épistolaire,*”<sup>59</sup> *Eugene Onegin?*

For Onegin, as for many of the Russian youths who would have run in his social circles, “*une des caractéristiques clé de son personnage est sa parfaite maîtrise du français. Et c’est également en français que Tatiana, éprise d’Onéguine, lui écrit une lettre d’amour.*”<sup>60</sup> For someone who once declared that “there is no true inspiration”<sup>61</sup> in French poetry, Pushkin’s choice to showcase French so frequently is certainly remarkable. Though the narrator relates its contents in Russian, in Tatiana’s famous letter to Onegin, the lovestruck maiden’s various French influences shine through; in the commentary accompanying his controversial English translation, for example, Vladimir Nabokov notes inklings of Racine, Rousseau, Chenier, and Campenon, among others.<sup>62</sup> Such authors were “devoured”<sup>63</sup> by Pushkin in his youth, but after having been “steeped,”<sup>64</sup> as it were, in French literature for the duration of his adolescence, Pushkin’s cup was a bitter one. Though he was “a great admirer of the Classical French poets (notably Parny),” Hugo and other French contemporaries left the national poet “unimpressed.”<sup>65</sup> For Alexander Pushkin, the French romantics represented a “sacrifice of artistic dignity perhaps more serious than all their contrived spontaneity, sermonizing and tearfulness.”<sup>66</sup> This, combined with his conviction that “poetry ought not to have any goal but itself,”<sup>67</sup> helps to explain the writer’s capricious attitude toward French. Instead of the dizzying romanticism favored by native

---

<sup>58</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 107.

<sup>59</sup> Rjéoutski, “Éléments,” 101. *Fren.* In his epistolary work.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* *Fren.* One of the key features of his character is his perfect command of French. And it is equally in French that Tatiana, smitten with Onegin, writes him a love letter.

<sup>61</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 106.

<sup>62</sup> Lakhtikova, “Russian Contexts,” 224.

<sup>63</sup> Baguley, “Pushkin and Mérimée,” 177.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Maguire, “AS Pushkin,” 106.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

speakers, Pushkin sought to incorporate the language into work that remained for him sufficiently restrained and unadulterated—his own. Nonetheless, Pushkin’s fluctuating flirtation with French culture seems almost rapturous as compared to Dostoevsky’s profoundly divided attitude toward it.

*The French Frenetic: Dostoevsky*

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky came to challenge French and the greater European influence over Russia not for a sacrifice of dignity, but for a sacrifice of self. Following his exile in Siberia—a commuted death sentence for which French and Western ideas were responsible—the Russian realist “proceeded, understandably enough, to examine the European right to teach and lead young Russians.”<sup>68</sup> In her book, Wesleyan professor Priscilla Meyer offers a similar suggestion: “We may read *Crime and Punishment*,” she argues, “as Dostoevsky’s argument with the French literary tradition from Rousseau to Balzac, as with French culture as a whole.”<sup>69</sup> This so-called argument stems from the author’s general sense of ambivalence, as Meyer informs us, toward “all things French”: “He deplored French decadence yet revered French fiction, to which he referred directly in his work far more often than any other national literature.”<sup>70</sup> Though he calls it “a most boring city,”<sup>71</sup> Dostoevsky nonetheless chose to visit Paris during his first foray to Europe after his exile. Similarly, while he was quick to dismiss the Frenchman as “quiet, honest, polite, but false,”<sup>72</sup> the writer owned no less than two twenty-volume sets of Balzac’s complete works, not including an updated twenty-four volume edition which he acquired later. Such a fickle temperament seems eerily characteristic of Pushkin, who, as explained earlier, had an equally tumultuous relationship with the French language.

---

<sup>68</sup> Bellow, “The French.”

<sup>69</sup> Meyer, *Russians Read*, 89-90.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

In fact, Dostoevsky shared a love of Jules Janin with Pushkin, the latter of whom found Janin's novels to be "the most interesting of the French literature of the early 1830s."<sup>73</sup> Janin was renowned by many French critics as the founder of *l'école frénétique*,<sup>74</sup> a literary movement characterized by an unbridled, gothic romanticism also favored by Balzac. In *Crime and Punishment*, the Russian author tinkers with many themes typical of the frenetic school—namely "prostitution, murder, and redemption"<sup>75</sup>—to produce a novel which, despite its 1866 publication, "looks entirely familiar" to readers of French literature published in the twenties and thirties.<sup>76</sup> More importantly, at a time when censorship stifled the sometimes graphic depictions of his pen, Dostoevsky "could count on his readers"<sup>77</sup> to view his disenchanted world with a sense of familiarity supplemented by French novels and journals. While the influence of the French feuilleton in particular on the writer has been well documented by Russian scholars such as Viktor Vinogradov and Boris Tomashevsky, Dostoevsky himself reveals this in a way that is perhaps more pertinent: "If I were not a casual feuilletonist but a regular, daily one," he muses, "it seems to me that I should wish to return to Eugène Sue in order to describe the mysteries of Petersburg."<sup>78</sup> This is quite an honor coming from a Slavophile, for whom "the use of French by the small Russian elite was symptomatic of a loss of contact with their native soil."<sup>79</sup> But Dostoevsky was not the only Russian writer concerned with this linguistic disconnection.

### *The Peasant's Polyglot: Tolstoy*

In trying to map the decline of Francophilia in Russia, it is important to remember that to speak French is not necessarily to love it. As Argent and her co-authors point out, "French might

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>74</sup> *Fren.* The frenetic school; referred to by Balzac as *l'école du désenchantement*, the school of disenchantment. See also Kalinine, "L'école frénétique" for more.

<sup>75</sup> Meyer, *Russians Read*, 91.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>79</sup> Argent et al., "Functions and Value," 16.



be used by Francophobes, and even for the expression of Francophobia.”<sup>80</sup> The scholars describe the apprehension in Russia surrounding francophonie: though it had existed even before Pushkin’s time, this condition grew understandably “acute” with the invasion of Napoleon in June of 1812.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps even more significant is “the attempt, which intensified in the post-Napoleonic period, to establish a distinctive Russian national identity,” an endeavor which necessarily “encouraged the development of a standard Russian literary language and discouraged francophonie.”<sup>82</sup> Nine years later, amid the aftermath of this newfound patriotism and nationalistic pride, Dostoevsky was born; seven years after that, Russia receives someone who was destined to become another national treasure: Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy. For modern readers of Russian literature, an introduction to Tolstoy by way of Napoleon is apropos: *War and Peace*, widely considered to be one of his greatest masterpieces, directly addresses the events surrounding the invasion and details their effects on the Russian aristocracy.

In searching for a lens—albeit, not UNESCO’s—through which to examine this epic work, we look again to Argent and her co-authors: for Fyodor Dostoevsky, the overwhelming use of French indicated an unsettling “dissociation from the monolingual Russian peasantry, in whom many members of the Russian intelligentsia considered authentic national essence to be concentrated.”<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the scholars explain, “For Leo Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, Russian francophonie was characteristic of the artificiality and moral poverty of high society.”<sup>84</sup> The famed novelist made a distinction, too, between the aristocrats of St. Petersburg and the Moscow gentry, the latter of whom he perceived with relief to remain firmly rooted to Russia. Another of Tolstoy’s crowning achievements, *Anna Karenina*, was published later to similar critical

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

acclaim. In analyzing this novel, Conley pays close attention to the author's deliberate shifts between French and Russian, which help to demonstrate his Slavophile sentiments:

Using language as a measurement of verisimilitude, Tolstoy creates two verbal entities in the text: while Russian remains the language of intimacy and emotions, French represents the ritualized life of ignorance and falsehood. This linguistic anomaly differentiated the aristocrats from the peasants (the "Russians"), and presented a dual cultural identity for Russians of the upper crust.<sup>85</sup>

Here, again, we are told of how Tolstoy distinguishes between “true” Russians—the *мужики*<sup>86</sup> with whom, despite his noble birth, he came to identify later in life—and “false” ones. Despite this critical juxtaposition, there are a few positive elements of French culture in *Anna Karenina* that remain intact: take, for example, Conley's observation that both female principles, Kitty and Anna, are always dressed in Parisian frocks.<sup>87</sup> Even for Kitty's wedding, “society dictated that the dress be French.”<sup>88</sup> Or see how, in Pevear and Volokhonsky's English translation, Vronsky uses French when speaking to Anna, “seeking to avoid the impossible coldness of formal Russian and the dangers of the informal.”<sup>89</sup> These associations of style and affection with French show that Tolstoy must have maintained at least a minor appreciation for the French language and culture. Thus, even he could not entirely escape the French influence that pervaded everyday life in Imperial Russia.

### *Conclusion*

In his book, *Natasha's Dance*, Orlando Figes writes of the Russian nobleman: “[He] was not born a ‘European’ and European manners were not natural to him. He had to learn such

---

<sup>85</sup> Conley, “Confused Identities,” 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Russ.* Peasants, usually in reference to men.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 187.

manners, as he learned a foreign language, in a ritualized form by conscious imitation of the West.”<sup>90</sup> Figes hits the mark in his emphasis of the bewilderment and malaise inherent in the adoption of foreign ideals and *modes de vivre*. He continues to explain, as though in direct address to the authors here discussed, that while Russian intellectuals were conscious of conducting themselves “according to prescribed European conventions,” their private lives were “swayed by Russian customs and sensibilities.”<sup>91</sup> One could not ask for a more succinct summary of the conflict played out in the minds and on the pages of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. From the false Frenchman, who appears to have more of a critical eye than a critical heart, through the furious vacillations of Dostoevsky, to the acerbic nationalism that flavors a lion fit for his name,<sup>92</sup> there is a common filament of approach-avoidance conflict.

One thing is unquestionably clear: no matter their impressions at any given moment, these men found that French had permeated Russia to the extent that it was nearly impossible not to interact with the language at least occasionally. Their innate attachment to French culture—at times tortured, at others, tender—was crystallized in some of their most stunning creations, which survive them on the streets and in the schools of the modern Motherland. Most Russian women, it is true, can recite Tatiana’s letter by heart from their days as schoolgirls.<sup>93</sup> Raskolnikov’s path is well known to natives, and there have been a plethora of new productions of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Thus, it is no wonder that many students continue to choose to study Russian in conjunction with French<sup>94</sup>—though Russia’s passion for all things

---

<sup>90</sup> Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, 44.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> A reference to Tolstoy, Lev (*Russ. Лев*) is the Russian word for lion.

<sup>93</sup> For a pop culture reference, see R. Igor Gamow’s fictionalized memoir, *The Professor’s Daughter*, 143.

<sup>94</sup> Universities in the United Kingdom, especially, have seen an increase in such joint programs. See, for example, the Universities of Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol, and Warwick.

French “subsided after the Napoleonic wars,”<sup>95</sup> the flame of French influence was never quite extinguished.

## II | Problems in Postcoloniality

### *Residues of Forced Francophonie in Postcolonial African Literature*

In the interest of further contextualizing the use of French as an imported medium of communication and creative expression, this chapter moves to postcolonial Africa. Perhaps the most important distinction to be made in comparing and contrasting the use of French in Imperial Russia and postcolonial Africa is that of choice versus imposition. Unlike in the case of Empress Catherine’s Russia, whose royalty and aristocratic elite eagerly adopted French and many of France’s constituent cultural aspects, the language was foisted upon native African populations in the colonized nations of present-day Algeria, Senegal and the Republic of Congo. As the French moved to colonize Africa, the many repercussions of the colonization process bled into the very core of the continent. Macalester College professor David Chioni Moore provides a succinct overview of these aftereffects. Over time, native governments were either replaced by powerless puppets or unceremoniously overtaken by overt French rule. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the educational infrastructure in French colonial Africa was forcibly redesigned to privilege the use and acquisition of French, leaving remarkably sparse accommodation for local languages and dialects, if any. As an accompaniment, new academic curricula were devised to impose the French perspective on young students. Furthermore, French colonies sought to replace indigenous religious traditions with nonreligious ideologies, suppressing and destroying religious activity and paraphernalia where this was deemed necessary.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Chuchvaha, *Art Periodical Culture*, 130.

<sup>96</sup> Moore, “Post- in Postcolonial,” 114.

From an economic perspective, the African colonized zone was nothing short of feudal, as little to no trade was allowed between colonies, much less in the greater continental and global commercial spheres. Notably, a reorientation of production and manufacture effectively privileged French desires over the needs of local populations. The detrimental effects of such practices were arguably most deeply felt in the field of agriculture, which deteriorated immensely under colonial rule. Such vast and sweeping developmental stagnation was compounded by a monetary reconfiguration by the French, which saw the severe limitation of whatever local currencies remained. These forms of legal tender were convertible only to French currency during colonial rule, which shifted from the WWII-weakened Franc to the Franc des Colonies Françaises d’Afrique (FCFA).<sup>97</sup>

If one considers Russia’s immense geographical size, as well as the country’s population, it seems only logical to offer a select trio of African countries in order to mirror the scope and depth of the previous examination of Russian literature. Though I wish to formally acknowledge the richness presented in the literary tradition of each individual country analyzed herein, this threefold analysis has the added benefit of introducing the reader to a more diverse array of African writers. This chapter will focus specifically on Algeria, Senegal, and the Republic of Congo, from the mid-twentieth century onward. Sony Labou Tansi of Congo-Brazzaville<sup>98</sup> demonstrates the versatile satirical powers of French, turning his critical eye from the colonial regime onto postcolonial government structures. Meanwhile, Algerian Kateb Yacine appropriates the French language as a means of resistance against the former French empire, proudly declaring his Algerian heritage. Lastly, Ousmane Sembène represents a push in Senegal

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> A brief word of clarification: the modern-day Republic of Congo and Congo-Brazzaville are synonymous. The latter alternative is so hyphenated in order to differentiate from Congo-Kinshasa, also known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. These are not to be confused: the DRC was once Belgian Congo, while the Republic of Congo was colonized by the French, hence its inclusion in this thesis.

to embrace the native Wolof, among other African languages, in addition to giving the reader a glimpse into a creative medium other than literature: film. Each of these authors contributed to the complex transcultural tapestry of postcolonial francophone African literature using a unique hybrid idiom featuring French and African influences.

Finally, the reader will note a significant jump in time—roughly a century passes between the Russian writers and the African ones. This choice is a deliberate one, as it serves to further emphasize the importance of considering language and common motifs or themes when performing literary analysis. Transcultural pathways are timeless ones, as the reader will discover, and their inexhaustible currency provides a unique channel through which analysts, historians, and everyone in between can view our world’s trajectory through literature.

#### *The Hydra’s Head*

During colonization, it was exceedingly difficult to hear the cries of dissident voices, who, as Dr. Moore points out, “[were] heard most clearly in exile.”<sup>99</sup> Such “oppositional energies,”<sup>100</sup> as Moore calls them, found solace in various expressions of satire, parody, and other corrosive forms of comedy and critique. For better or worse, these voices had no less source material in the aftermath of colonial rule. In the second half of the twentieth century, newly independent African states found themselves woefully underequipped for self-government. Thus, in place of the questionable leadership of the colonial regime, equally dubious systems of power were set in place; as Montaigne might say, “In order to satisfy one doubt they give me three; it is the Hydra’s head.”<sup>101</sup> As a function of this ill-prepared state, many failed attempts at applying new—often oppositionist—ideologies sometimes resulted in

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Montaigne, *The Essays*, 370.

“lawlessness, graft, and corruption,” among other problems.<sup>102</sup> Formerly robust native political systems had long since shriveled, and would-be leaders with more recent government experience reeked of French compliance. Accordingly, in some places, colonial ideas retained a firm footing; in others, malevolent applications of colonial training saw nascent dictatorships take hold. In this way, writes Moore, “an initial euphoria”<sup>103</sup> gave way to bitter disillusionment, and “neither the collapsed imperium, not the outside alternative, nor the local elite [was] seen to have the answers.”<sup>104</sup>

In the absence of a clear and feasible blueprint for governance, much interethnic friction was exposed, as colonially imposed borders and economic issues mingled with worrisome uncertainties to produce a potent and enduring cocktail of social tensions. For some scholars, such as University of Leiden philosopher Sanya Osha, such bitterness and dysfunction were predestined by the colonial powers that treated Africa like a “mere object to be toyed with, and exploited at will.”<sup>105</sup> To Moore, a gross “underestimation of emancipatory potential”<sup>106</sup> was to blame. The author further observes in postcolonial cultures two common desires, as fervent as they were unrealistic. Communities first sought autonomy, even in the wake of an established dependence upon an external power. Second, these peoples endeavored to be autochthonous, which Moore juxtaposes against “the fact of hybrid, part-colonial origin.”<sup>107</sup> This dichotomy was amplified and mirrored in the constant struggle between “resistance and complicity,” as well as between “imitation (or mimicry) and originality.”<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Osha, “Insanity of Power.”

<sup>106</sup> Moore, “Post- in Post-Colonial,” 115.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

In order to thoughtfully portray postcolonial writers and their literature, it is first essential to define postcoloniality itself. The obvious choice would be to trace, as Moore does, the etymological roots of the term to its beginnings as a replacement for and improvement over its predecessors—“emergent,” “Third World,” “minority,” and “non-Western” among them.<sup>109</sup> Below, Moore describes the difficulty of identifying a satisfying descriptor, as well as the various shortcomings of the hopefuls listed above:

The notion "non-Western" was a sham since it lumped four billion people under a single name and privileged the fragment called the West.<sup>110</sup> "Emergent" worked no better, since the cultures and peoples so described had been producing literature for millennia before most Europeans stopped wearing bearskins or began to read[.] [...] "Minority" was even worse. And "Third World," though [...] still with strong defenders, also seemed to have flaws."<sup>111</sup>

Naturally, however, despite presumably good intentions, the term “postcolonial” was not without its own problems.

Moore, for his part, commends the term’s advancement from its more derogatory cousins, praising its clear direction, historical depth, and cross-cultural analytical potential.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, other scholars, like Ohio State University professor Kwaku Larbi Korang, are quick to highlight diversity of opinion on the subject. “In the temporal sense, ‘postcolonial(ity)’ is the historical period after the variegated encounters inaugurated in the fifteenth century and continuing long thereafter between societies of the European West [...] and those of the non-European/non-

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>110</sup> For “the West,” see Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*, chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



Western world [...], usually referred to as ‘the Rest’,”<sup>113</sup> he writes, more or less in agreement with Moore. In a sociolinguistic sense, however, Korang challenges the common support echoed by Moore for postcoloniality. “The notion that the era we live in is a ‘postcolonial’ one is not universally accepted,” he corrects.<sup>114</sup> “The designation ‘postcolonial(ity)’ has attracted heated opposition from critics who question its conceptual, historical, and political adequacy.”<sup>115</sup> Korang goes on to suggest an inextricable link, if not a plethora of them, between African communities in pre- and post-independence states. Thus, counterintuitive though it may be, it appears that the more generous definition of postcoloniality lies within the rigid confines of time and space, as Korang supplements and nuances Moore’s definition of the term with his concept of the postcolonial world as all that which manifests in the craters and crevices of Western influence.

*The Enfant Terrible: Sony Labou Tansi*

Sony Labou Tansi did not shy away from highlighting the problematic landscape of postcoloniality—in fact, his publishers originally refused a work completed during his stay in Paris due to its overwhelmingly negative treatment of France.<sup>116</sup> Born in the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo, Tansi relocated to Congo-Brazzaville at the age of twelve, the same year in which he began speaking French. Previously, Tansi had communicated exclusively in Kikongo, the language of Congo-Kinshasa.<sup>117</sup> Tansi, who died from complications of the AIDS virus at age 48, lamented in one of his last interviews: “Africa is the only continent left that has not found its way. [...] We have this incredible wealth, of resources and of spirit, but

---

<sup>113</sup> Korang, “Where Is Africa?” 38.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Kennedy, “Congo Novelist.” The work in question is *Le Commencement des douleurs (The Beginnings of Pain)*, which was later published by the esteemed Parisian house Éditions de Seuil, in 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Gray, *Francophone African Poetry*, 182.

outsiders like France are just robbing us while blessing our dictators.”<sup>118</sup> Tansi sought to immortalize this position in his work, which often featured caustic criticism of postcolonial dictatorships. The six novels he published during his lifetime, in addition to a number of his other works, were written in French, and the author’s reasoning for this choice merits inclusion:

*“J’écris en français parce que c’est dans cette langue-là que le peuple dont je témoigne a été violé, c’est dans cette langue que moi-même j’ai été violé. Je me souviens de ma virginité.”*<sup>119</sup>

Though the violence of his speech here is striking, readers of Tansi will attest to the frequency of such language, which characterizes the author’s writing.<sup>120</sup> In the way of explanation, Spelman College professor Pushpa Parekh and former professor Siga Fatima Jagne note that the Congolese writer “has repeatedly stated that ‘normal’ language would reflect or at least imply a ‘normal’ situation.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, for Tansi, the horrors initiated during the colonial regime—and perpetuated by comparably problematic postcolonial dictatorships—must be reflected in the tone of the language used.

In fact, Sony Labou Tansi was keenly aware of the function of French in his writing, and his use of the language is perhaps one of the most memorable features of his work. As an author who continually asserted the diversity of the Francophone literary community, Tansi’s relationship to French was not unlike that of Dr. Frankenstein to his monster. The author revitalized and repurposed the language rendered stale by his colonizers by deconstructing its various parts. Parekh and Jagne attest to this, explaining that the author felt “compelled to

---

<sup>118</sup> Kennedy, “Congo Novelist.”

<sup>119</sup> Baumgardt and Derive, *Littératures orales africaines*, 263. The English translation of this quotation is disputed. The literal translation would be “I write in French because it is in this language that the people for whom I bear witness were violated, it is in this language that I myself was violated. I remember my virginity.” However, Tansi’s comments have also been translated using “raped” in place of “violated.” Though both translations carry a clear emotional charge, some scholars’ choice to include the more graphic reference to rape reflects Tansi’s own tendency to invoke violence as a literary device to capture the reader’s attention.

<sup>120</sup> See Ravet, “Violence Engageante,” 61, and Parekh and Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers*, 462.

<sup>121</sup> Parekh and Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers*, 462.

redefine existing language that [fell] short in describing the present state of affairs.”<sup>122</sup> This practice allowed Tansi to retroactively transfer the communicative power of French to himself, as he is quoted saying, “I have never had to resort to French, it is the French language which had recourse to me.”<sup>123</sup> He applied these and other such techniques of inversion and rearrangement to his writing process as a whole, to a similarly empowering effect. Congolese author Sylvain Bemba, who heavily influenced Tansi’s work, described the tendency of the author to recombine, vulgarize, and conversationalize language as “writing by inventing, and inventing by writing,”<sup>124</sup> and Tansi, too, saw himself as an inventor of sorts: “*Je n’enseigne pas, j’invente. J’invente un poste de peur en ce vaste monde qui fout le camp. A ceux qui cherchent un auteur engagé, je propose un homme engageant.*”<sup>125</sup> Violent though his language may have been, he certainly made good on this proposition.

Though Tansi appeared relatively unconcerned with developing his characters fully,<sup>126</sup> he remained conscious of the context in which he was placing them. The provocative titles of his novels—such as *La vie et demie*<sup>127</sup> (*Life and a Half*) and *La parenthèse de sang* (*Parentheses of Blood*)—exemplify his mastery of the literary “hook;” they beg further reflection and thoughtful assessment of what one is to expect from a postcolonial writer.<sup>128</sup> In an English translation of *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (*The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez*), Tansi clearly defines his own stance on the role of art in the sociopolitical sphere, as he writes: “Art stems from its ability

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Quoted in English as it appears in the source text. For more accuracy, Tansi’s words as they appeared in the original French were, “*Je n’ai jamais eu recours au français c’est lui qui a recours à moi.*” See also Orisha, “Douze Mots,” for more.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ravet, “Violence Engageante,” 61. *Fren.* I do not teach, I invent. I invent an outpost of fear in this vast world which is falling part. To those in search of an engaged author, I propose an engaging man.

<sup>126</sup> Osha, “Insanity of Power.”

<sup>127</sup> It is worth noting that *La Vie et demie*, Tansi’s first novel, claims responsibility in large part for Tansi’s rise to fame. In the second issue of the review *Notre Librairie* (1982), Bernard Magnier and André Nataf asserted that “Upon [its] publication, [...] Sony Labou Tansi assumed the position of leader which he has not relinquished since.” See Parekh and Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers*, 463 for more.

<sup>128</sup> Parekh and Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers*, 461.

to enable reality to express what it would otherwise have been unable to articulate through its own means or, in any case, that which it ran the risk of consciously passing over in silence.”<sup>129</sup> For him, this expression required both a distancing from Western influences and an “erosion” of extant literary traditions, as mentioned above.<sup>130</sup> Notably, this practice is not unlike the phenomenon described by Epstein, who writes in *Transcultural Experiments*: “Culturology advocates the approach of distancing oneself from culture through estrangement and defamiliarization, in order that one might obscure one’s perception and attachment to it.”<sup>131</sup> Parekh and Jagne reinforce this nod to transcultural theory in writing of the author’s refusal to place his dedication to political outspokenness before the “aesthetic dimension” of his novels, plays, and other artistic content: “While political commitment remained an integral part of his work, his primary concern was to ensure that the message articulated did not kill creativity.”<sup>132</sup> For his corrosive honesty and unique style, Sony Labou Tansi was awarded a number of literary prizes, including the Grand Prix Littéraire d’Afrique (1983) and the Ibsen Foundation Prize (1988).<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, another member of the francophone African literary community had his eye on a different type of prize.

*The (Other) False Frenchman: Kateb Yacine*

In Algerian postcolonial literature, the use of French presented at once a unique creative opportunity and a sociopolitical necessity. For Kateb Yacine, the language was a “*butin de guerre*”<sup>134</sup>—and he brandished it skillfully. The author, whose pen name is an inversion of his

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Berry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 23.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> These prizes were awarded for a novel, *L’Anté-peuple (The Anti-People)*; and a play, *Antoine m’a vendu son destin (Antoine Sold Me His Destiny)*. See Thomas, *Nation-Building*, 52-4 for more.

<sup>134</sup> Paulin, “Langue Maternelle,” 126. *Fren.* Prize of war.

first and surnames,<sup>135</sup> sought to utilize French as a tool of both representation and resistance as the newly independent state scrambled to establish a national identity in the wake of decolonialization.<sup>136</sup> M. Kamel Igoudjil, an Algerian native and adjunct professor at American University, emphasizes the inherent hybridity of this identity, which he explains as follows: “[F]ifty years after the departure of the French colonizers, Algeria was still struggling to reconcile the various aspects of its complex personality.”<sup>137</sup> In the case of Kateb Yacine, who incorporated Berber and Arabic proverbs and colloquialisms into his work, Igoudjil observes that the author’s fiction embodied a space of multiplicity while also depicting with appropriate indignation the exploitation of the Algerian people.<sup>138</sup> Effectively, Yacine paved the way for other literary greats who share his view of Algerian multiculturalism. For example, Mohammed Moulessehouli, better known as the best-selling Algerian novelist Yasmina Khadra, counts the following Yacine quote among his various inspirations and influences: “[J]’écris en français pour dire aux Français que je ne suis pas français.”<sup>139</sup> Moulessehouli mentions that among some Arabic speakers, his usage of French is perceived as treachery,<sup>140</sup> which he brushes off with an opinion that his predecessor shared: he refuses to identify purely with either the Arabic or the French literary tradition.

For Yacine’s fiction, this liberation “crack[ed] open the boundaries of language and offer[ed] untold tremendous possibilities for the writer to mix linguistic and cultural codes.”<sup>141</sup> Though he detested francophonie on a larger scale—it was little more than “*une machine*

---

<sup>135</sup> Some sources indicate that this choice recalled Yacine’s roll call from his elementary school days, while others insist that it was a subtle criticism of the French civil system. See Arrous, “Sarah’s Globe,” 33 for more.

<sup>136</sup> Igoudjil, “Language as Representation,” 168.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 169, 187.

<sup>139</sup> Berkani, “Butin de Guerre.” *Fren*. I write in French in order to say to the French that I am not French. See also Kimmelman, “Pardon My French.”

<sup>140</sup> Kimmelman, “Pardon My French.”

<sup>141</sup> Igoudjil, “Language as Representation,” 170, 175.

*politique néocoloniale, qui ne fait que perpétuer notre alienation*”<sup>142</sup>—the writer used French to his literary and philosophical advantage. Below, Igoudjil attempts to situate his countryman’s strategic use of the language in a postcolonial context:

Yacine seeks to subvert the relationship with the colonizer by writing in the French language in such a way as to allow the western reader to acquaint her or himself with colonized culture. In other words, Algerian writers using French compel us to consider the political necessity of the colonial subjects to appropriate the language of the empire in order to respond back and write their own national narratives.<sup>143</sup>

With this, Igoudjil also touches upon an important point regarding the exigency of French; he later suggests that Algerian writers had no feasible alternative.<sup>144</sup> Other scholars agree: Réda Bensmaïa, professor emeritus in French Studies at Brown University, goes so far as to claim that it would be “impossible” to convey the idiosyncrasies of postcolonial Algerian life in any other language.<sup>145</sup> Such truths, if they are to be accepted as such, call to mind the words of Moulessehouli in a 2010 interview: “Culture is always about politics in the end.”<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, Kateb Yacine and his contemporaries frequently made use of their literary platforms to speak up against postcolonial Algerian politics, just as they had during the movement for independence.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, in keeping with Montaigne’s idea of the Hydra’s head, Yacine often employed French—the language previously imposed on his country—in order to oppose classical Arabic, which was likewise imposed by the new Algerian state.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Berkani, “Butin de Guerre.” *Fren*. A neocolonial political machine, which can do no more than to perpetuate our alienation.

<sup>143</sup> Igoudjil, “Language as Representation,” 169.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>146</sup> Kimmelman, “Pardon My French.”

<sup>147</sup> Igoudjil, “Language as Representation,” 170.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-74.

Though he later rededicated himself “de manière militante”<sup>149</sup> to producing theatrical works in Algerian Arabic, the author’s careful exercise of French in many of his most esteemed works—*Nedjma* and *Le Polygone étoilé* (*The Star Polygon*) among them—suggests more than a hint of transculture. University of British Columbia professor Farid Laroussi indirectly substantiates this claim in musing, “The phenomenon of post-modern writing has with Kateb Yacine [...] the character of an ideological demonstration, as if [he] were engaged in a second Algerian revolution.”<sup>150</sup> Thus, using language itself as a literary device, Yacine helped to establish an environment in which the nascent Algerian identity could bloom, as he reminded his readers, “[L]’usage de la langue française ne signifie pas qu’on soit l’agent d’une puissance étrangère.”<sup>151</sup> One of Yacine’s contemporaries, however, viewed the use of French as more insidious.

*The Father of African Cinema: Ousmane Sembène*

Film fanatics may recognize Ousmane Sembène’s name from his movies, but the director and producer was also an acclaimed novelist. In accordance with his “artistic militancy against oppression in all its forms,”<sup>152</sup> even though he wrote in French, Sembène was wary of the language’s influence on his native Senegal after the country declared independence. In their book, *Ousmane Sembène and the Politics of Culture*, Lifongo Vitende and Amadou Fofana—professors at Lawrence and Willamette universities, respectively—Sembène is quoted as saying, “Personnellement, je ne veux pas que nous enferme dans la Francophonie.”<sup>153</sup> Apart from the typical malaise felt by those communicating in the language of their colonizers, the author’s hostility here can be explained in large part by his view of francophonie as a potential precursor

<sup>149</sup> Paulin, “Langue Maternelle,” 118. *Fren*. In a militant manner.

<sup>150</sup> Igoudjil, “Language as Representation,” 175.

<sup>151</sup> Berkani, “Butin de Guerre.” *Fren*. The usage of the French language does not signify that one is the agent of a foreign power.

<sup>152</sup> Vitende and Fofana, *Politics of Culture*, xiv.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. *Fren*. Personally, I don’t want us to lock ourselves up in Francophonie.

for French cultural domination, a fate he naturally wished for postcolonial Senegal to avoid. Instead of promoting the French language, Sembène insisted instead upon the idea that African languages like Wolof were better suited to the budding nation's needs; as he puts it, such languages presented "*un outil plus approprié pour nous.*"<sup>154</sup> Pathé Diagne, who co-created the Wolof journal *Kaddu* with Sembène, immediately noted when asked to describe his relationship to the author, that the movement to write in African languages was incredibly important to him.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, Sembène himself was indeed rather vocal on the matter: while he acknowledged that "*Toutes les langues recèlent de la richesse. Cela dépend de qui les emploie et comment on les emploie,*"<sup>156</sup> he asserted in equal measure that "*Ce n'est pas parce nous allons parler et enseigner une langue africaine [...] que nous allons rejeter l'anglais, l'allemand ou le russe.*"<sup>157</sup> Presumably, he didn't intend to dispose of French entirely, either.

In fact, Sembène's lifelong advocacy of the position that cultural discourse is an invaluable tool in "formulating progressive visions of African societies,"<sup>158</sup> coupled with his campaign for heightened exposure to African languages, eventually placed a strain on the writer-filmmaker's relationships with potential European sponsors.<sup>159</sup> This stance likely arose as a counterpoint to his bitter critique of postcolonial Senegalese leadership, which is perhaps best demonstrated in his book, *Xala*, which he later adapted for the silver screen.<sup>160</sup> The novel follows the story of the successful El-Hadji, a businessman wishing to consummate his marriage to a third wife, as he seeks a cure for *xala*, a curse that causes impotence in those whom it befalls.

Seoul National University professor Eli Park Sorensen notes that in attempting to reconcile

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., xiii. *Fren.* A tool more appropriate for us [than French].

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., xiv. *Fren.* All languages carry a richness. It depends on who employs them and how one employs them.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., xiii. *Fren.* It is not because we will speak and teach an African language that we will reject English, German, or Russian.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>160</sup> Fofana, "Cultural Denial."



through symbolism various conflicting dimensions of social space and collective memory, *Xala*—and likely most other works in Sembène’s oeuvre—“traces the underlying causes and effects of neocolonialism a decade after Senegal gained independence.”<sup>161</sup> Both the book and the film remain relevant and resonant for audiences even today.

Though Sembène was a fervent believer in coexistence and plurality of both language and culture,<sup>162</sup> he recognized that “[t]o speak means [...] above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”<sup>163</sup> As such, he remained attuned to the concerning tendency of the Senegalese nouveau riche to adopt the political values of their European colonizers, despite appearing for all intents and purposes to be proudly African.<sup>164</sup> This dualism exemplifies what Sorensen refers to as “the problematic of imitativeness within postcolonial discourse,”<sup>165</sup> which broaches the unsatisfying nature of synthetic identity in the shadow of foreign influence. Ousmane Sembène used his artistic platform to expose and eradicate the stench of neocolonial inauthenticity where possible, and in doing so, he upheld what scholars praise him for—his commitment to transforming Senegalese and greater postcolonial African society through his work.<sup>166</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In a 2010 article for *Hommes et Migrations*, a French language journal on migratory dynamics, Martine Paulin writes that for the francophone African writer, “*C’est non seulement la création artistique, mais aussi la quête de soi qui est en jeu.*”<sup>167</sup> In such efforts to situate oneself within a given culture, Paulin points out that it is not uncommon for one language to “*fait*

---

<sup>161</sup> Sorensen, “Naturalism and Temporality,” 222.

<sup>162</sup> Vetinde and Fofana, *Politics of Culture*, 165.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>164</sup> Gabriel, “Wax and Gold,” 31.

<sup>165</sup> Sorensen, “Naturalism and Temporality,” 223.

<sup>166</sup> Vetinde and Fofana, *Politics of Culture*, xiv.

<sup>167</sup> Paulin, “Langue Maternelle,” 127. *Fren*. It is not only artistic creation, but the search for self which is in play.

*irruption dans l'autre.*"<sup>168</sup> Though the proper translation would be "to burst into the other," the English near-homophone *eruption* would not be inappropriate. As fiery lava in an ancient volcano, the work produced by Tansi, Yacine, and Sembène, among others, continues to reshape the face of the French literary canon from the inside out. Out of the caustic criticism of Tansi, the defiant appropriation of Yacine, and the sociolinguistic bent of Senegal's most treasured filmmaker, there arises the collective voice of an Africa that not simply accommodates, but cherishes all the features of indigenous culture that her colonizers systematically oppressed.

The rich diversity of attitudes represented by these authors is a testament to and reflection of the unique trajectory of each nation's colonial narrative. Still, there remains a clear commonality of experience to be shared in the postcolonial creative sphere. For better or worse, French became so deeply embedded in the territories occupied in France's scramble for Africa as to form an indelible mark on the fabric of the continent's history. Though this indefatigable recourse to the *langue du colon* is handled differently depending on the writer—Yacine, as we know, reversed the direction of this recourse—the significance of the language within former French colonies is universally undeniable. It becomes the task of postcolonial literature, then, to dictate the modern utility of the old necessity.

### **III | The Little Princes**

#### *Cultural Analysis through Comparative Literature*

At this stage, the thorough examination of French in a number of its various manifestations comes to a close. Having presented so diverse an array of francophone voices up to this point, it is finally appropriate to introduce a comprehensive literary analysis designed to emphasize the transcendent properties of the French language in literature. Here, "transcendent" is invoked in the same sense mentioned by Epstein when he writes that culturology is capable of

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

“transcending itself, that is, exceeding its own boundaries.”<sup>169</sup> Following a history of the language wielded defiantly by African writers in postcolonial Congo, Algeria, and Senegal, this analysis turns backward in time, to retread the territory in which French was favored by the Russian imperial elite. The third chapter of this thesis will highlight the uncanny similarities between the vibrant characters in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petit Prince*.

Close readings such as these go to show how language and literature connect cultural phenomena regardless of chronology. In fact, had I not been introduced to *The Idiot* during my freshman year at Emory and to *The Little Prince* as a child, I am unsure that I would have ever looked into the connection between Russian and French, which planted the seed of this thesis. Furthermore, as Parekh and Jagne so aptly put it, “While revealing similarities between texts and writers, close textual readings highlight instead the remarkable originality of each writer as a constituent part of a rich and diversified literary corpus.”<sup>170</sup> From this chapter, the reader should come away with the sense that drawing transcultural comparisons based on common themes and motifs in literature is perhaps the most lucrative tool imaginable for innovative and immersive cultural analysis.

Few authors can claim to have made as lasting an impact on the general public as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The fact that both writers’ works came to English-speaking readers in translation makes this feat only more remarkable. Though one must take into account the natural ability of these wordsmiths to craft prose both captivating and durable enough to withstand generations of readership, it is their characters that render their stories truly unforgettable. Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin from Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* and the little

---

<sup>169</sup> Berry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 23.

<sup>170</sup> Parekh and Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers*, 463.

prince from Saint-Exupéry's novel by the same name are two such characters, each depicted so vividly that they draw readers to their respective realities like moths to light. Here, I shall use both texts to reveal a genuine resonance between *The Idiot and The Little Prince*. Despite the discrepancy in publication of the two works—*The Idiot* was published in 1869, while *The Little Prince* came later, in 1943—I shall argue that this correlation extends to a physiological level; that is, that there is an unmistakable degree of interdependence between the two novels. Using a carefully curated selection of supporting characters as well as the major themes and images that permeate both narratives, this analysis will demonstrate a correspondence that entirely transcends the protagonists. Naturally, though, the initial focus falls to the two princes. In addition to the ideas about literature mentioned above, the reader should finish this chapter with a definitive notion that Prince Myshkin quite simply *is* the little prince.

Even the most superficial study of the two characters yields results for those researching under comparative pretenses; both, after all, are princes. Of course, the similarities do not stop there: the princes share much more than a title, though this detail brings the pair's parallelism to a head. Generally speaking, Princes Myshkin and Little share a destiny, insofar as their sudden arrivals and equally abrupt disappearances. Prince Myshkin arrives in St. Petersburg from Switzerland by train, while the little prince arrives an indeterminate amount of time prior to the pilot's crash in the Sahara desert. He, as the pilot later finds, comes from asteroid B-612, a planet too small to merit christening according to the grown-up astronomers who discovered it. By the end of the novel, the little prince has literally disappeared from Earth; his body, as the pilot explains, is nowhere to be found, giving an entirely new meaning to the words, 'celestial body.' In the final scenes of *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin has returned to the clinic in Switzerland whence

he came. Reduced to a pitiful state of his namesake idiocy punctuated by intermittent fits of epilepsy, the prince readers come to know and love has effectively disappeared.

Before the ghosts of Petersburg begin to wear on this comparably little prince, Lev Nikolayevich is the very picture of youth; in fact, he incarnates the very childlike simplicity that garners such praise for the little prince. Untrammelled by the vices and etiquette of ordinary society, he betrays certain fundamental traits of the typical Russian high-society adult: he laughs easily, dresses modestly, and speaks freely, to name a few. Unfortunately, Myshkin's ethereal simplicity is mistaken for "simple-minded[ness],"<sup>171</sup> causing General Yepanchin to introduce the prince to his family as "a perfect child, and even a rather pathetic one."<sup>172</sup> The little prince, on the other hand, is lauded for his pure and innocent soul—a fact that does not go unnoticed by the snake, who tells him, "*Tu es pur et tu viens d'un étoile.*"<sup>173</sup> Conversely, Myshkin's purity and innocence are dismissed as part of his juvenile nature, despite his repeatedly demonstrating a unique and markedly deeper understanding of his surroundings and the people who inhabit them. Though the traits in the little prince go largely unappreciated in Prince Myshkin, their striking resemblance of character is undeniable.

#### *Rosy Cheeks, Cheeky Roses*

Just as Saint-Exupéry's little prince vigilantly guards his delicate rose, so, too, does Dostoevsky's fiercely guard his equally precious, though perhaps not so delicate flower, Nastasia Filippovna. Though the likeness between these two characters is not quite so obvious at first glance, a number of key details can be coaxed from both texts to reveal an unmistakable parallelism between them. Perhaps the most striking of these details comes in the form of the vanity shared by Nastasia and the rose. In describing his pride and joy, the little prince makes a

---

<sup>171</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 62.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>173</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 60. *Fren.* You are pure and you come from a star.

point of explaining to the pilot that “*Elle n’était trop modeste...Ainsi l’avait-elle bien vite tourmenté par sa vanité.*”<sup>174</sup> In the typical fashion for a so-called fallen woman, Nastasia Filippovna is depicted in a markedly less flattering light, in fact, Ganya labels her as a “silly vain woman”<sup>175</sup> before she’s even had the chance to give the reader a proper self-introduction. Much later, Aglaya, too, calls Nastasia vain in a startling exhibition of libelous jealousy that seems ill-fitting for her gentle character. Perhaps some of Nastasia’s carefully cultivated spite has rubbed off on her in the heat of the moment.

Despite the ongoing debate over Nastasia’s respectability of character, Prince Myshkin forms an opinion of her that is entirely his own. This helps to establish a subtler, but even more telling point of correspondence between Nastasia and the rose: that of their relationships to their respective princes. Both relationships are complex and manifold, and each stems from a tremendous admiration on behalf of each prince for his rose. Upon seeing her portrait for the first time, Prince Myshkin remarks at once upon her “astonishingly good look[s]”;<sup>176</sup> later, in the presence of Madame Yepanchin and her daughters, he is so overwhelmed with ardor that he kisses the portrait. Nastasia’s extraordinary beauty quickly becomes Myshkin’s standard for excellence, shown throughout the novel as he compares any and all women whom he encounters to her. Similarly, the little prince “*ne put contenir son admiration*”<sup>177</sup> when his rose finally blooms in all her glory: “*Que vous êtes belle !*”<sup>178</sup> he exclaims, overcome with love and amazement. Having fallen thusly, each prince makes his mission and duty to love and protect that which has now captured his heart.

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 31-2. *Fren.* She wasn’t very modest...So, she had soon begun to torment him with her vanity.

<sup>175</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 143.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>177</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 31. *Fren.* Could not contain his admiration.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. *Fren.* How beautiful you are!

Unfortunately, it seems that success does not lie in the cards for either prince, both of whom show themselves to be inadequate caregivers to the objects of their affections. While Myshkin makes repeated attempts at protecting Nastasia, he remains helpless to counteract the natural course of events; ultimately rendering his well-intended, however feeble efforts ineffective. Burdened by this knowledge, he eventually confides to Aglaya, “I’d give my life in order to return her peace of mind to her and make her happy, but . . . I cannot love her now, and she knows it!”<sup>179</sup> Though he is loath to admit it, the little prince also finds that he is unable to properly love his rose, as he similarly admits: “*J’étais trop jeune pour savoir l’aimer.*”<sup>180</sup> Despite this, he fears for her life, ever cognizant of the ephemerality of flowers. Lev Nikolayevich shares this fear, perceiving that Nastasia, too, is threatened by imminent disappearance. Though Nastasia asserts that she is not the utter perfection upon which Lev insists, the prince is still brought to tears at her choice to leave him for Rogozhin, knowing that in doing so, she has broken her waltz with him to allow an angel of death to cut in. To his dismay, Nastasia expresses continued desire to see the prince marry someone like Aglaya instead, refusing to “ruin a baby.”<sup>181</sup> Even though she loves him, the little prince’s rose also encourages him to leave her, assuring him that her thorns will protect her from any harm.

Of course, Nastasia’s “thorns”—namely, her quick wit and caustic sense of humor—are only so durable, which allows just enough room for predators like Rogozhin to take advantage of her. With his dark eyes and swarthy complexion, he looks every bit the perfect complement to Nastasia, despite his unabashed disregard for decorum. Even so, Prince Myshkin repeatedly predicts an untimely demise for Nastasia Filippovna at the hands of Rogozhin, casting him into a state of ceaseless anxiety. Myshkin’s constant worry mirrors that of the little prince, who appears

---

<sup>179</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 508.

<sup>180</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 33. *Fren.* I was too young to know how to love her.

<sup>181</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 186.

to be perpetually preoccupied with the issue of sheep on his tiny planet. Though a sheep would rid him of the baobab tendrils persistently burgeoning on asteroid B-612, it could just as easily ignite “*la guerre des moutons et des fleurs,*”<sup>182</sup> extinguishing the stars by wiping out his one-of-a-kind rose. Later in *The Idiot*, Nastasia suffers the very fate foretold in the prince’s premonitions. He was right to think Nastasia unsafe with Rogozhin whom, ironically enough, he first encounters on the train to Petersburg outfitted in a sheepskin-lined coat. And just as Rogozhin is unable to articulate his actions to Prince Myshkin, a sheep un-muzzled might devour the little prince’s rose in one bite, “*sans se rendre compte de ce qu’il fait.*”<sup>183</sup>

### *Tears of a Fox*

During his contemplative interplanetary journey, the little prince’s mind is momentarily taken off of his rose when he encounters a little fox. Disheartened by new knowledge that his rose is not in fact unique, he entreats the fox to be his friend, soon learning that the fox requires taming as a prerequisite to his friendship. Just as he is beginning to grasp the concept of what it means to be tamed, the little prince says to the fox, “*Je commence à comprendre...Il y a une fleur... je crois qu'elle m'a apprivoisé.*”<sup>184</sup> Like the little prince, Prince Myshkin, too, has been unwittingly tamed by his precious rose, Nastasia. This perhaps even more innocent prince, however, does not recognize Nastasia’s doing, despite the fact that he repeatedly demonstrates his loyalty to her—even if a third party’s feelings lie in the balance. In this case, those feelings belong to Aglaya. At the very moment when Aglaya requires the tender loving care so readily given by Myshkin, he is spellbound with pity for Nastasia’s barefaced misery and grief. Just as the prince moves to chase after Aglaya, now fleeing in a shock of humiliation, Nastasia falls into

---

<sup>182</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 29. *Fren.* The war of the sheep and the flowers.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. *Fren.* Without realizing what he’s doing. (*Lit.* that which he does)

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. *Fren.* I am beginning to understand... There is a flower... I think that she has tamed me.



his arms in a swoon. When she comes around, only to see his concerned face, she laughs with the unbridled, vindictive glee that so memorably characterizes her madness.

Aglaya thus becomes a fox in her own right—the prince’s desire for her companionship is without question, and yet she still lacks the irresistible *je ne sais quoi*, as the little prince would say, that draws Lev to Nastasia in the first place. This absence inhibits her possession of the taming powers recklessly wielded by Nastasia. Though her sense of her own inadequacy is made clear by her flagrant displays of insecurity—she cries, runs off, and picks fights fairly regularly—she always returns to the prince, perhaps because she wishes to hear “*un bruit de pas qui sera différent*,” to know “*la vie ensoleillée*” of those who are tamed.<sup>185</sup> Of course, Myshkin, a tamed man, does not experience the sunlit life promised by the fox in *The Little Prince*. Instead, he receives Dostoevsky’s more realistic alternative: Nastasia, in his own words, “pierce[s] his heart for ever.”<sup>186</sup> For an explanation, one must only look to the fox for advice; his third secret is especially pertinent to matters such as these. The fox would likely remain unsurprised, however sullen, that Myshkin places his rose before the fox time after time because, as he explains to the little prince, “*Tu deviens responsable toujours de ce que tu as approvisé. Tu es responsable de ta rose.*”<sup>187</sup> Because Prince Myshkin remains under the mistaken impression that he can tame Nastasia, he would likely respond just as the little prince does, repeating, “*Je suis responsable de ma rose.*”<sup>188</sup>

The fox’s second secret proves equally relevant to Dostoevsky’s cast of characters. When he advises, “*C’est le temps que tu as perdu pour ta rose qui fait ta rose si importante,*”<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. *Fren.* The sound of a step that will be different, the sunny life.

<sup>186</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 666.

<sup>187</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 74. *Fren.* You become responsible forever for that which you have tamed. You are responsible for your rose.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. *Fren.* I am responsible for my rose.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 72. *Fren.* It is the time that you have lost for your rose that makes your rose so important.

Myshkin's relationship to Nastasia immediately comes to mind: his infatuation with her grows like a thirsty flame for every moment he spends in her company. Dostoevsky's own fox, Aglaya, makes light of this when she dexterously replaces the initials of the Holy Mother with those of Nastasia Filippovna in a poetry reading at Lev's sickbed. In the poem, which follows a poor knight who idealizes Mary, Aglaya makes a point of associating the two when she reads, "It was enough that he chose her and believed in her "pure beauty," and then worshipped her for ever; that was its merit, that even if later she became a thief, he would still be bound to believe in her and break a lance for her pure beauty."<sup>190</sup> Indeed, Myshkin had previously promised to "respect [Nastasia] all [his] life," telling her, too, "you aren't guilty of anything."<sup>191</sup> Unfortunately, Aglaya will not be privy to the same boundless admiration and devotion and, as mentioned, she knows this. Instead, she rightfully perceives the onset of a most painful betrayal when the prince is made to choose between her and his rose, just as the other fox fearfully awaits the impending departure of the little prince. She exclaims, "Oh my God!" and "rushes out of the room,"<sup>192</sup> and it is here that she cements her vulpine status. Though she doesn't say it explicitly, Aglaya radiates the fox's telling sentiment: "*Ah ! ... Je pleurerai.*"<sup>193</sup>

The first secret shared by the fox with the little prince is certainly the most vague, but also perhaps the most central to Prince Myshkin's character. As the fox admits, the secret is simple: "*On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.*"<sup>194</sup> Lev Nikolayevich does just that: seeing always with his heart, he is able to see past any impurity or wrongdoing—in Nastasia as well as others—and continue to love unconditionally. The prince exhibits remarkable perspicacity throughout the novel, despite being labeled an idiot by other

---

<sup>190</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 291.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 667.

<sup>193</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 69. *Fren.* Ah! I shall cry.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. *Fren.* One sees clearly only with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes.

characters. Within minutes of meeting her, for instance, he “heartful[ly] reproach[es]” Nastasia Filippovna as would a longtime friend or even a relative, saying, “And aren’t you ashamed of yourself? You’re not like that, not like the person you pretended to be just now, are you? Is it really possible?”<sup>195</sup> To Nastasia’s own surprise, the prince is right, as she soon finds herself admitting to Nina Alexandrovna, “Indeed I am not like that, he has guessed.”<sup>196</sup> Thus, in this instance and many others, Myshkin shows extraordinary emotional acumen, though he is rarely recognized for it. The alopecoid Aglaya is among the select few who make explicit note of his acuity of mind, as she declares to him, “if they say of you...that you’re sometimes ill in your mind, then that is unfair; I’ve decided that...because although you are indeed ill in your mind...the part of your mind that’s important is better than any of theirs, and it’s of a sort they’ve never even dreamed of” (500). Here, Aglaya summarizes Prince Myshkin admirably: his transcendental way of thinking both elevates him to supernatural levels of insight and condemns him to illness and idiocy.

### *On Death*

Speaking of condemnation, the two princes take similar stances on condemnation to death, a notable detail considering the fact that both authors make a point of giving each prince a moment in which to express his opinion on the subject. For Myshkin, this moment comes at the very beginning of his story: while waiting to see General Yepanchin for the first time, he laments and denounces the certain demise faced by those condemned to execution by guillotine. The little prince’s moment comes in the form of an unusual offer from the self-proclaimed king of a tiny planet encountered in his travels. The king expresses his wish to appoint the little prince as Minister of Justice, to which the prince responds that there is no one to judge. When the king describes a rat who can be condemned to death, pardoned and condemned again, the little prince

---

<sup>195</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 138.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

retorts, “*Moi...je n'aime pas condamner à mort, et je crois bien que je m'en vais.*”<sup>197</sup> As both princes consider life—and presumably, youth—sacred, the only thing that they condemn is the useless, wasteful rage that occasionally takes hold of those around them. While the little prince falls victim to an outburst of frustration from the stranded pilot, Myshkin suffers a slap to the face from Ganya, as well as vitriolic remarks from him, Aglaya, and others on various occasions. Especially interesting is the fact that, in both novels, the transgressor quickly repents of his or her action, begging the prince to forgive and forget. As it is in their nature, the princes do both.

### *On Loving-kindness*

It is also in their nature to be kind—in Prince Myshkin’s case, sometimes to a fault. As Ippolit, a self-proclaimed opponent of the prince, states during a painfully long discourse on life, “In sowing your seed, sowing your ‘charity,’ your good deeds in whatever form, you give away a part of your personality and absorb part of another.”<sup>198</sup> Indeed, Lev gives of himself readily to just about anyone in need, until he is left as but a shadow of his former self, a conglomeration of those touched by his ever-helping hand. It is certainly plausible that, as a child learns from his mother, the impressionable prince truly does “absorb” excess bits and pieces of the outsized personalities surrounding him, a sponge even for spongers like Ganya or Lebedev. In the meantime, Ippolit warns, “All your thoughts, all the seeds you have sown, which perhaps you have already forgotten”—as if Myshkin would ever catalogue his favors for later repayment—“will take root and grow...And how can you know what part you will play in the future resolutions of the fates of mankind?”<sup>199</sup> Though the wording is overdramatized—as is much of what he says—there is certainly truth in Ippolit’s sentiments, and the little prince shares them. Interpreted by Saint-Exupéry in a literal sense, the terminally ill adolescent’s “seeds of charity”

---

<sup>197</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 41. *Fren.* As for me...I do not like to condemn [anyone] to death, and I believe I’m leaving.”

<sup>198</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 472.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

manifest as baobabs, seemingly harmless sprouts that will grow in unpredictable directions at an alarming rate. Like any random act of kindness, each baobab starts as “*une ravissante petite brindille inoffensive,*”<sup>200</sup> but as the little prince cautions the pilot, “*Si l'on s'y prend trop tard, on ne peut jamais plus s'en débarrasser. Il encombre toute la planète.*”<sup>201</sup> For the little prince, a young, energetic sheep is the obvious solution, but he cannot ignore the risk such an animal would pose to his fragile rose. While Myshkin harbors similar fears, Rogozhin, Nastasia and others consume the seedlings of kindness that he has planted without a second thought.

### *Of Wealth and Wisdom*

While their princes each have a capacity for hatred the size of a baobab sapling, Dostoevsky and Saint-Exupéry do not hesitate to use their narratives to highlight the insignificance of wealth, as well as to showcase a general contempt for those who hold it in high esteem. In their protagonists' stead, Dostoevsky's narrator and Saint-Exupéry's pilot are sufficient to convey the message that the disgraceful value placed on money is ludicrous and fabricated. For example, Ganya, who is known to fancy finances, is painted as a money-grubbing fool, while underdog Lev gives away nearly everything he has for the momentary satisfaction of others. Beyond this selfless and indiscriminate charity, Prince Myshkin sees no real value in money. The pilot in *The Little Prince* bemoans the contrasting myopia of adults like Ganya, who cannot see elephants being digested by serpents unless a price tag is attached: “*Il faut leur dire : 'J'ai vu une maison de cent mille francs.' Alors elles s'écrient : 'Comme c'est joli !'*”<sup>202</sup> Of course, earlier in the story, the pilot warns that grown-ups (literally, “big people”) always require explanations, and that they are unable to comprehend anything on its own. Naturally, this defining characteristic is utterly absent in both princes.

<sup>200</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 22-3. *Fren.* A ravishing, harmless little twig.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. *Fren.* If you get around to it too late, you can never get rid of it. It takes up the whole planet.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. *Fren.* It is necessary to say to them: “I saw a house that cost 100,000 francs.” Then they exclaim, “How beautiful it is!”

This distinction between persons big and small is a recurring theme in both *The Idiot* and *The Little Prince*. While only the latter blatantly assumes the omniscience of children, both works are clearly of the opinion that wisdom does not necessarily come with age—in fact, Saint-Exupéry prefaces the dedication of his novel with an apology to children for dedicating the book to a grown-up. “*Toutes les grandes personnes ont d’abord été des enfants,*” he reminds them, admitting afterward, “*(Mais peu d’entre elles s’en souviennent.)*”<sup>203</sup> He assures his younger readers that his novel is dedicated not to Léon Werth, but to Léon Werth as a little boy. As detailed above, the author also uses the character of the pilot to voice his many complaints about the general adult population. It only follows, then, that when the pilot erupts in frustration, the little prince grounds him with, “*Tu parles comme les grandes personnes !*”<sup>204</sup> a statement eerily reminiscent of Prince Myshkin’s “heartful reproach” of Nastasia. This prince, for all intents and purposes still very much a child, makes a point of distinguishing himself from his adult company early on, as he explains: “I am indeed not fond of being with adults, with people, with grown-ups—and have long noticed this—I’m not fond of it, because I don’t know how to be with them...my companions have always been children.”<sup>205</sup> He continues to say that he found himself “simply drawn” to children, and that his “entire soul would suddenly begin to strive towards them.”<sup>206</sup> Having thus identified himself, Prince Myshkin conveys that for some reason or another, everyone sees him as a child and an idiot. He quietly contests these accusations by contenting himself with a thought, which he admits comes frequently to him: “Very well, they

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 4. *Fren.* All grown-ups were first children. (But few of them remember it.)

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 28. *Fren.* You speak like the grown-ups! (*Lit.* big people)

<sup>205</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 87-8.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 88.

regard me as an idiot, but I'm intelligent, and they don't realize it."<sup>207</sup> One can only hope that readers of *The Idiot* do.

### Conclusion

The unrivalled intelligence of children—and children at heart—so heavily emphasized in both *The Idiot* and *The Little Prince* calls to mind a quotation often misattributed to Oscar Wilde: “I am not young enough to know everything.”<sup>208</sup> The quotation, originally from JM Barrie's 1902 play, *The Admirable Crichton*, not only speaks to the limitless confidence and comprehension of childhood, but also foreshadows the threat posed by adulthood to one's understanding of the world, and in some cases, oneself. This threat is realized towards the beginning of *The Little Prince*, when the pilot mourns the loss of the x-ray vision he possessed in his youth: “*Malheureusement, je ne sais pas voir les moutons à travers les caisses. Je suis peut-être un peu comme les grandes personnes. J'ai dû vieillir.*”<sup>209</sup> Sadly, with age, the whimsy of the encased form is lost, and the container becomes more important than what's contained inside of it. Forced to grow up by those who and that which surrounds him, Prince Myshkin experiences a similar problem. Like a muggle attempting to get to platform 9¾, Lev becomes unable to walk through walls, emotional or otherwise. Instead, he runs into them, guided for the first time by his eyes rather than his heart.

As such, it would not be unwise to suggest that the recurrence of the prince's epilepsy and other symptoms of illness are directly related to his being cut off from access to the supernatural components of his identity that sustain him. Like Tinkerbell needs applause to live when she is hurt, the equally otherworldly Prince Myshkin requires these elements to survive the bleak and selfish reality of his accommodations in Petersburg. As he is not given the little

---

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>208</sup> Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton*.

<sup>209</sup> Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 21. *Fren.* Unfortunately, I don't know how to see sheep through cases. I am perhaps a little like the grown-ups. I had to grow old.

prince's option to leave Earth and its inhabitants behind altogether, his condition worsens, revealing what is possibly the only important distinguishing identifier between the two princes. While the little prince is autonomous, Lev Myshkin is a slave to the world; he is made to scale down his being from mystical to mundane. Thus, if it were not for the poorly fitted pressures and constraints placed on him by others, it wouldn't be difficult to fuse the two princes into a single entity.

## V | Conclusion

### *At the Limits of Cultural Expression*

In his paper on the function of linguistic representation in postcolonial Algeria, M. Kamel Igoudjil asks, "Is it possible for any language to express perfectly any culture?"<sup>210</sup> The answer to this question, as demonstrated by the functions of the French language in Russia, Congo, Algeria, and Senegal, is no. To limit the cultural narrative of any country to a single language can be as reductionist as expressing culture using statistics alone, as no one language—neither mathematical nor alphabetical—tells the whole story. The use of French in this thesis makes a particularly comical example of this, as the Académie Française—famous for its stringency and staunch defense of the integrity of the French language—has been forced to yield to the prevalence of slang and even formal words that are rooted in English, Arabic, or other languages. This linguistic *mélange* reflects the asymmetry that is typical of the any historical narrative.

In representing the stunning capacity of literature to shape, reflect, and convey the cultural identity of a given community, this thesis has highlighted a similar question to the above posed by Igoudjil: Is it possible for any one *discipline* to express perfectly any culture? Again, the answer is no. In a way, each discipline has its own "language," from the literal—terminology unique to the field—to the figurative, which encompasses the methodologies, main principles,

---

<sup>210</sup> Igoudjil, "Language as Representation," 168.



etc., which aid in distinguishing similar disciplines from one another. Unsurprisingly, the limits and incompatibilities of disciplinary language are felt in the same way. Though it is unquestionably necessary to rely on specialized terms and procedures under certain circumstances, some issues become “untranslatable” among disciplines as a result, thus further isolating the problem and often prolonging if not totally inhibiting its amelioration. Thankfully, scholars who choose to incorporate transculture and culturology into their work broaden the horizons of the intellectual discourse by softening such restrictive attachments where possible. As Epstein writes, “Culturology distances and ‘alienates’ us from the culture to which we belong by birth and education, and thus prepares us for free cultural activity.”<sup>211</sup> In its own way, interdisciplinarity arguably does the same.

#### *Interdisciplinary Relations*

In his definitive guide to interdisciplinary research, Allen Repko explains, “Interdisciplinary scholars argue that the many complex practical problems confronting society can be understood only by examining them from various disciplinary perspectives and then integrating their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding of them.”<sup>212</sup> This approach, which reintroduces the aforementioned concept of integration, is a vast improvement over the “tunnel vision” about which Repko warns. Interdisciplinary scholars, he writes, “point out that disciplinary experts are prone to tunnel vision when it comes to examining important issues.”<sup>213</sup> In order to express—not perfectly, but as comprehensively as possible—any given culture, interdisciplinary work and discourse is absolutely crucial.

The need for such work is most immediately clear in the realm of international relations and foreign policy. Rather than capitalizing upon the commonalities in a diplomatic partnership,

---

<sup>211</sup> Barry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 23.

<sup>212</sup> Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research*, 29.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

legislation often fixates on differences. This trend trickles down to shape the very lexicon used by Americans to describe foreigners—take, for example, the term *alien*. At the time of writing this, this dehumanizing label is preserved in federal immigration law.<sup>214</sup> Considering the overwhelming discrimination and stereotyping currently faced by Russians, African-Americans, and Muslims everywhere from Algeria to France and beyond, my choice to jointly examine Russian, postcolonial francophone African, and French voices in this thesis is a timely one.

Sadly, this emblematic problem is not indicative of a domestic issue, but a global one. In fact, my strong conviction that there is a fundamental disconnect between international foreign policy and those whom it affects is what attracted me to the field of interdisciplinary studies in the first place. In a rapidly globalizing world—indeed, an *inevitably* globalizing one—I believe that it is imperative that we utilize the tools of insight and inquiry favored by interdisciplinarians and culturologists if we wish to make thoughtful and respectful policy choices. Further, we must remain vigilant in our assessment of the cultural lens in order both to facilitate international communication and to build effective foreign relationships. In short, because culture is inherently interdisciplinary, it naturally follows that international relations be interdisciplinary as well.

### *The Value of Literature*

As the focus of this thesis rests on literature, a third question arises, as readers may ponder whether literature can accomplish something other means of both creative expression and cultural analysis cannot. Each page of this thesis offers an affirmation of this fact. Using French in Imperial Russia and postcolonial Africa as a sort of case study, I have demonstrated that literature and those who produce it create a space for the outpouring of emotions and representations of themes that are too painful, too complex, or simply too specific to a particular culture to convey otherwise. Just as Kateb Yacine writes in French to declare his Algerian

---

<sup>214</sup> See, for example, Title 8 of U.S. Code, “Aliens and Nationality.”

identity, so, too, does literature use words to challenge and defy the limitations of language discussed above. Here, we find another reason why qualitative and creative elements are essential to the future of policymaking, as cultural products construct in large part the vocabulary through which a country identifies itself in relation to others.

In describing the emergence of Russian culturology, Epstein observes that “[c]ulture was explored as the ultimate resource of human freedom and creativity that transcends social limits and historical determinations.”<sup>215</sup> This thesis has reinvigorated and advanced this idea by inverting it: *creativity* is championed as the ultimate resource for understanding *culture*. It is important to reiterate that, as mentioned in the introduction, in examining cultural products as a tool for better understanding and appreciating a given culture, this thesis does not wish to invalidate or replace current tools and methodologies. Instead, this thesis seeks to create space—just as literature does—for interdisciplinary discovery to occur at the intersection of prose and policy. The divergences and discrepancies in style of these chapters—Russian and French, European and African, etc.—are actually indicative of the faults and disconnections constructed by the cultural studies model. For example, few of my peers and mentors understood without explanation how I could envision any similarity between Imperial Russia and postcolonial Africa. If one looks to relationships of language in addition to relationships of power, as I have attempted to do by carrying this work with French, continuity and intercultural connection show noticeable improvement.

It is important, too, to consider the value of literature to cultures in crisis. Imperial Russia and postcolonial Africa can and should be counted among these ranks, as both environments were characterized by cultural suppression. Under the watchful eyes of the tsarist, colonial, or other such regimes, literature was forced to take a political role upon itself, converting its

---

<sup>215</sup> Berry and Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments*, 22.

qualitative nature to quantitative currency. For Russians during the Imperial Period and Africans during French colonization, the French language became something of a teacher of how to write. Subsequently, Francophone writers served as tutors to the people, as their work often represented the only means of self-expression and self-identification possible within the confines of the autocratic structures to which they were limited. In this way, French can be viewed in the aforementioned areas as a refuge for creative activity and cultural expression—an incubator for everything from revolutionary political satire to the development of literary Russian. While the utility and appropriateness of French was not without contest, this thesis has shown that even as an irritant, the language spurred and enabled many of the most influential and treasured works of the Russian and African literary canons.

*Future Applications and Further Research*

Naturally, it has been difficult to organize a definitive framework through which to view the spectrum of multiplicity and potential transcultural pathways while also doing justice to the individual and communal narratives that make these forms of communication possible.

Linguistic representatives of countries help to remind us that rather than being straightforward and static, culture is multifaceted and dynamic, even if one group clearly dominates the conversation. For my thesis, I chose to highlight French, and secondarily, Russian. These languages interact and inform one another across disciplines to produce a composite portrait of my academic career at Emory, which has most prominently featured Russian literature, language, and culture; interdisciplinary studies, and francophone studies. The concepts of cultural studies, culturology, transculture, intellectual integration, and of course the cultural lens allowed me to construct the theoretical basis not only for my thesis but also for my general worldview.

In the future, I wish to continue my research in undertaking various projects in literary analysis similar to that of my third chapter. I also fully intend to incorporate my research thus far

into my master's and perhaps even doctoral work. As someone who is passionate about translation, my mind races with possibilities for introducing surprising and unusual works in comparative literature to audiences who may not have found certain foreign language works accessible or appealing in their original format. Additionally, I plan to focus on the concept of otherness in all its forms—alienation, exile, and discrimination, to name a few—as a paradigm for the tendency to misinterpret or overlook commonalities as a result of failure to account for the cultural lens. For these reasons, among many others, I offer this work prolegomenon to a study of the practical applications of the concepts discussed herein—a study that will likely encompass my life's work. As UNESCO laments, “both at the public policy level and in the field, translating ideas into action is not evident.”<sup>216</sup> This thesis represents the first step forward in my attempt to change that.

---

<sup>216</sup> Jouveaud, *Cultural Diversity Lens*, 8.

## VI | Bibliography

- Argent, Gesine, Derek Offord, and Vladislav Rjéoutski. "The Functions and Value of Foreign Languages in Eighteenth-Century Russia." *The Russian Review* 74, no. 1 (2015): 1-19.
- Arrous, Michel Ben. "Sarah's Globe and the (Un-)naming of Mobile Space." In *Place Names in Africa: Colonial Urban Legacies, Entangled Histories*, edited by Liora Bigon, 27-36. Springer, 2016.
- Авенариус, Василий Петрович. *Юношеские годы Пушкина*. Москва: Директ-Медиа, 2014.
- Baguley, David. "Pushkin and Mérimée, the French Connection: On Hoaxes and Impostors." In *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, edited by Robert Reid and Joe Andrew, 177-92. Volume 3: Pushkin's Legacy. Amsterdam: Rodopi Editions, 2004.
- Barrie, J.M. *The Admirable Crichton*. 1902. *Project Gutenberg*, 2009. Accessed 6 March 2017. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3490/3490-h/3490-h.htm>
- Baumgardt, Ursula, and Jean Derive, eds. *Littératures orales africaines: perspectives théoriques et méthodologiques*. Paris: Karthala Editions, 2008.
- Bellow, Saul. "The French as Dostoevsky Saw Them." *New Republic*, February 23, 2010. Accessed December 12, 2016.
- Berkani, Mohamed. "Francophonie : l'Algérie et son «butin de guerre»." *Géopolis*, March 18, 2015. Accessed February 15, 2017. <http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr/francophonie-lalgerie-et-son-butin-de-guerre-56411>.
- Bernstein, Lina. "Women on the Verge of a New Language: Russian Salon Hostesses in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century." In *Russia | Women | Culture*, edited by Helena Goscilo, 209-24. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.
- Berry, Ellen, and Mikhail Epstein. *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication*. Springer, 1999.
- Borden, Richard C. "Making a True Image: Blackness and Pushkin Portraits." In *Under the Sky of My Africa: Alexander Pushkin and Blackness*, edited by Catharine T. Nepomnyashchy, Nicole Svobodny, and Ludmilla A. Trigos, 172-95. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006.
- Breizman, Boris N., and James W. Van Dam, eds. *G.I. Budker: Reflections & Remembrances*. Woodbury, NY: AIP Press, 1994.
- Browder, Robert Paul, and Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky, eds. *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*. Vol. 27. Stanford University Press, 1961.

- Chuchvaha, Hanna. *Art Periodical Culture in Late Imperial Russia (1898-1917): Print Modernism in Transition*. Brill, 2015.
- Conley, Devin. "French Framing of Anna Karenina: Confused Identities in Russian Aristocratic Culture." Honors thesis, Illinois Wesleyan University, 2007.
- Cowell, Alan. "Churchill's Definition of Russia Still Rings True." *The New York Times*, August 1, 2008. Accessed 12 December 2016.
- Devlin, Kat. "Learning a Foreign Language a 'Must' in Europe, Not So in America." *Pew Research Center*, July 13, 2015. Accessed December 13, 2016.
- Diouf, Mamadou. "Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space." *African Studies Review* (2003): 1-12.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*. Translated by David McDuff. London: Penguin, 2004.
- Fofana, Amadou T. "Betrayal Through Cultural Denial in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*." *Equinoxes*, no. 2 (Automne/Hiver 2003-2004). 2004. Accessed February 15, 2017.
- Figes, Orlando. *Natasha's Dance*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002.
- Freiden, Gregory. "Russian History: A Brief Chronology (998-2000)." Osip Mandelstam: The Modernist Paradigm and the Russian Experience. Accessed April 1, 2017. [https://web.stanford.edu/class/slavic272/materials/chron\\_russia.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/class/slavic272/materials/chron_russia.pdf).
- Friedman, Amelia. "America's Lacking Language Skills." *The Atlantic*, May 10, 2015. Accessed December 13, 2016.
- Gabriel, Teshome H. "*Xala*: A Cinema of Wax and Gold." *Jump Cut* no. 27 (1982): 31-33.
- Gray, Richard J., II. *Francophone African Poetry and Drama: A Cultural History Since the 1960s*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014.
- Hirsch Jr., E.D., Joseph F. Kett, and James S. Trefil. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. New York: Vintage, 1988.
- Igoudjil, M. Kamel. "Postcolonial Algerian Writers in French: Language as Representation and Resistance." Edited by M. Kamel Igoudjil and Sihem Arfoui-Abidi. In *International Conference Proceedings on Science, Art and Gender in the Global Rise of Indigenous Languages*, 168-88. Université de Jendouba, Jendouba. Jendouba: Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines, 2014.
- Joubeaud, Edouard. *The Cultural Diversity Lens: A Practical Tool to Integrate Culture in Development -Pedagogical Guide-*. UNESCO, 2011.

- Kalinine, Paul. "L'école frénétique française et la prose romantique en Russie (1831-1836)." *Revue des études slaves* 49 (1973): 231-241.
- Kappler, Richard Georges. "Ivan S. Turgenev as a Critic of French Literature." *Comparative Literature* 20, no. 2 (1968): 133-141.
- Kennedy, Randy. "M.S.L. Tansi, 48, Congo Novelist Known for Bitter Colonial Satire." *The New York Times*, June 16, 1995. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/16/obituaries/msl-tansi-48-congo-novelist-known-for-bitter-colonial-satire.html>.
- Kimmelman, Michael. "ABROAD; Pardon My French." *The New York Times*, April 25, 2010. Accessed February 15, 2017. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9901EFD9113FF936A15757C0A9669D8B63&pagewanted=all>
- Korang, Kwaku Larbi. "Where Is Africa? When Is the West's Other? Literary Postcoloniality in a Comparative Anthropology." *Diacritics* 34, no. 2 (2004): 38-61.
- Lakhtikova, Anastasia. "The Multiple Russian Contexts of Nabokov's 'Onegin.'" PhD diss., Washington U in St. Louis, 2007.
- Lewis, Martin, and Karen Wigen. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.
- Maguire, Robert A. "AS Pushkin: Notes on French Literature." *American Slavic and East European Review* 17, no. 1 (1958): 101-109.
- Meyer, Priscilla. *How the Russians Read the French: Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.
- Montaigne, Michel de. *The Essays: A Selection*. Translated by M.A. Screech. London: Penguin Classics, 2004.
- Moore, David Chioni. "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique." *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 111-28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463645>.
- Orisha, Ifé. "Sony Labou Tansi, face à douze mots." *Equateur* 1 (1986): 29-32.
- Orlando, Valérie K. *The Algerian New Novel: The Poetics of a Modern Nation, 1950-1979*. University of Virginia Press, 2017.
- Osha, Sanya. "The Insanity of Power." *Bakwa Magazine*, October 20, 2016. Accessed February 18, 2017. <https://bakwamagazine.com/2016/10/20/the-insanity-of-power/>.



- Parekh, Pushpa Naidu, and Siga Fatima Jagne. *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Routledge, 1998.
- Paulin, Martine. "Langue maternelle et langue d'écriture." *Hommes et migrations. Revue française de référence sur les dynamiques migratoires* 1288 (2010): 118-128.
- Ravet, Roger. "Sony Labou Tansi's 'violence engageante'" In *Postcolonial Violence, Culture and Identity in Francophone Africa and the Antilles*, edited by Lorna Milne and Helen Chambers, 59-81. Vol. 7. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Repko, Allen F. *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008.
- Rjéoutski, Vladislav. "La langue française en Russie au siècle des Lumières: Éléments pour une histoire sociale." En *Multilinguisme et multiculturalité dans l'Europe des Lumières: Actes du Séminaire international des jeunes dix-huitiémistes, études réunies par Ursula H. Gonthier et Alain Sandrier*, 101-126. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007.
- Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *Le Petit Prince*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987. Print.
- "Sophia: Regent of Russia." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. June 10, 2009. Accessed April 1, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sophia-regent-of-Russia>.
- Sorensen, Eli Park. "Naturalism and Temporality in Ousmane Sembène's Xala." *Research in African Literatures* 41, no. 2 (2010): 222-243.
- State, U.S. Department of. *What is the difference between a Foreign Service Specialist and a Foreign Service Officer/Generalist?* Accessed 14 December 2016.
- Tansi, Sony Labou. *L'état honteux*. Le Seuil, 2014.
- Thomas, Dominic Richard David. *Nation-Building, Propoganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.
- Vetinde, Lifongo J., and Amadou T. Fofana, eds. *Ousmane Sembene and the Politics of Culture*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.
- Voltaire, Francois-Marie Arouet de. *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire avec des remarques et des notes historiques, scientifiques et littéraires: Correspondance avec d'Alembert*, édité par Charles Badouin et Alexandre Badouin. 3ième édition. Paris: Badouin Frères, 1828.
- Voltaire, Francois-Marie Arouet de. *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire avec des remarques et des notes historiques, scientifiques et littéraires : Dialogues et entretiens philosophiques*, édité par Bazouge-Pigoreau. Volume 43. Paris: Bazouge-Pigoreau, 1832.