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COLLECTIVE AUTHORSHIP AND PLATONOV'S SOCIALIST REALISM

KATHARINE HOLT

Abstract

This article argues that Platonov's relationship to collective authorship is a rich and productive line of inquiry for Platonov studies because: 1) he spent much of his career negotiating his position vis-à-vis the theory and practices of literary collectives; and 2) this approach offers insight into texts that were produced specifically for collectively authored volumes or republished in them during Platonov's lifetime. The article then presents readings of two such texts, 'Takyр' and 'Odukhotvorennye liudi', against the collectively authored volumes in which they appeared, *Aiding-Giunler: Al'manakh k desiatiletiiu Turkmenistana, 1924-1934* (1934) and *Stalinskoe plemia* (1944). Ultimately the article suggests that when these so-called "socialist realist" texts are read synchronically, rather than just diachronically against the wholes of Platonov's *oeuvre* or the Russian canon, they take on extra life, as the uniqueness of Platonov's voice within the collective emerges.

Keywords: *A.P. Platonov*; *Socialist Realism*; 'Takyр'; 'Odukhotvorennye liudi'; *Collective Authorship*; *Aiding-Giunler*

I. *Collective Authorship and Platonov Studies*

As Andrej Platonov's reputation has grown ever more secure over the last thirty years, his work has been freed from the socio-political readings to

which it was all too long confined. This is no doubt a beneficial thing for Platonov studies and, I should think, for all lovers of Russian literature. This “freeing” of Platonov is not without its effects, however, and in what follows I would like to explore one of these: how it encourages us to think about Platonov’s authorship.

The more accepted Platonov becomes as one of the “great” Russian writers, I would argue, the more we are encouraged to read his texts as parts of two specific wholes: 1) the whole of his *oeuvre* (the excellent new academic and popular editions of his works are facilitating this trend); and 2) the whole of the Russian literary canon. This is not unusual, of course. Whenever an author is canonized – which is to say, considered culturally central or “classic” – we increasingly read him or her across time, focusing on how the “great” writer’s works relate to one another and to other works by comparably “great” writers. Whether we focus on the “mode of originality” of different canonized writers, as Harold Bloom famously has, or on some other facet of the writer’s work, by approaching an author as a “great” one, we agree, in effect, that he or she deserves to be elevated from his own time.¹ But if Platonov’s canonization process is not particularly unique, it is, perhaps, particularly fraught, for much of his work has a relationship to collective authorship that canonization runs the danger of obscuring.

Before moving any further, I should pause for a moment to explain what, exactly, I have in mind with the term *collective authorship*. For the purposes of this article, I will define the practice as *the collaboration of a group of authors in the production of a single work or series of works* and I will propose three subcategories: *strong*, *weak*, and *unacknowledged*. The strong form of collective authorship, in this schema, involves collaboration on multiple aspects of a work and group authorial credit, while the unacknowledged form involves unspecified amounts of collaboration and no group authorial credit. In between these two extremes, as I have defined them, is the weak form, where collaboration occurs on one or more aspect of a work and credit is divided (not necessarily equally) among the individual participating authors.

Each of these types of collective authorship was present in Platonov’s literary environment – and remains in ours, which suggests that our “author function”, to borrow a term from Foucault, is not so different from the early Soviet one, despite all the differences between the two cultures’ systems of ownership.²

The strong form of collective authorship surfaced in many of the literary groups of the Russian avant-garde and the early Soviet period (e.g., the Futurists, Imagists, Hylaeans, Obèriuty), which often collaborated on their manifestoes and signed them as one unit. This form of authorship also occurred periodically during the First Five-Year Plan and the early Stalinist

era, which saw the creation of works like *Belomorsko-Baltiiskij kanal imeni Stalina. Istorija stroitel'stva* (*The Stalin Belomor-Baltic Canal: The History of Construction*, 1934), billed as being collaboratively designed, composed, and edited by thirty-six different writers.³ Today this form of authorship is rarely practiced in literary arenas, though it occurs frequently in contemporary film and television writing, where teams of writers regularly collaborate and share credit.⁴

The weak form of collective authorship was extremely common in Platonov's world, when co-authored texts regularly appeared in celebration of various Soviet enterprises. Examples include the *Zemlja i fabrika* (*Soil and Factory*) series edited by Fedor Gladkov, the *Istorija zavodov* (*History of Plants*) series edited by Maksim Gor'kij, and the slew of almanacs and collections that were dedicated to the national literatures of the Soviet Union.⁵ Between 1918 and 1937, approximately 1300 literary *al'manachi* (almanacs) and *sborniki* (collections) were published in the Soviet Union – not including collections of criticism, anthologies made up exclusively of already published works, and readers for students – and the vast majority of these were products of weak collective authorship in which multiple authors were credited for their own individual contributions.⁶ This form remains widespread today, especially in academic publishing, full as it is of collectively authored volumes of essays.

As for the unacknowledged form of collective authorship, if Roland Barthes is to be believed, it is to be found in every single text, since each is “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture”.⁷ Even if we do not accept Barthes's famous proclamation of the “death of the author”, however, we must recognize that unacknowledged collective authorship has been prevalent as long as the “author” has had its current function in Western literary discourse – which is to say, since narratives began circulating under a specific author's name, instead of being passed along and valorized without any questions about the author's identity.⁸ Just as John Keats's *Sonnet to Sleep* changed so substantially with its exposure to transcribers and printers that it became, in effect, a product of unacknowledged collective authorship,⁹ countless Soviet texts from Platonov's period were altered, often drastically, by the input of censors, editors, Party officials, and Stalin himself. Today, the production of literary texts is affected not only by editors and publishers, but also, in many cases, by such contemporary phenomena as the writer's workshop and Twitter.

Of the three types of collective authorship I have identified, I am interested for the present article only in the strong and weak forms in relation to Platonov's work. Analyzing Platonov's compositions as products of unacknowledged collective authorship could no doubt yield productive insights, since the Soviet literary apparatus affected the shape of Platonov's literary output, as we can see from the excellent philological work that has been done

on assorted textual variants. Here, however, my focus will be on how Platonov's relationship to acknowledged forms of collective authorship can help us understand both Platonov's literary career and a very specific set of texts: those that were produced for collectively authored volumes or republished in them. I will examine two of these texts, 'Takyr' and 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' ('Spiritualized People'), in detail below, but before doing so, I will briefly outline how collective authorship is relevant to various stages of Platonov's literary career.

Collective authorship is a productive heuristic for analyzing Platonov's work because he spent much of his literary career negotiating his position vis-à-vis artistic collectives and responding to their discourses. In the late 1910s and early 1920s Platonov was not a member of any of the major literary groups, despite their dominance in the period. Indeed, Platonov seems generally to have expressed disinterest in literary collectives at that time, as the questionnaire he filled out when attending the founding congress of VAPP in 1920 suggests. When asked, on that form, "каким литературным направлениям вы сочувствуете или принадлежите?" ("which literary school do you sympathize with or belong to?"), Platonov answered, "Никаким, имею свое" ("None, I have my own").¹⁰

The fact that Platonov provided this answer at a VAPP congress, however, reminds us that he negotiated with literary collectives from the beginning of his career. Indeed, Platonov may have been proud to have his "own" literary orientation in the early 1920s, but this did not prevent him from joining the communist union of journalists in Voronež¹¹ or from publishing his poetry, in these years, in various products of weak collective authorship, including *Stichi (Verses, Voronež, 1921)* and *Naši dni. Al'manach. № 4 (Our Days: Almanac № 4, Moskva-Petrograd, 1924)*.¹² Platonov's sense of independence, moreover, did not preclude him from expressing enthusiasm for – and being influenced by – many of the aesthetic doctrines of Proletkul't, LEF, and the Futurists.¹³ Platonov's early essays that engage with the thought of Aleksandr Bogdanov, such as 'K načínajúščim proletarskim poétam i pisateljam' ('To Beginning Proletarian Poets and Writers', 1919), suggest that questions about artistic collaboration were critical to Platonov in the first years of his literary career.¹⁴

As the 1920s progressed and Platonov gave up engineering to work as a writer full time, he moved further and further away from his youthful interest in Proletkul't and from the other literary groups surrounding him. What is more, though he did collaborate in 1928 with Boris Pil'njak on the satirical sketch 'Če-Če-O' and the satirical play 'Duraki na periferii' ('Fools on the Periphery'), Platonov engaged very little, in this period, with group artistic projects. Moreover, just one of his works was published, in these years, in a product of (weak) collective authorship: this occurred when 'Gorod Gradov'

(‘The City Gradov’), first published in Platonov’s book *Epifanskije šljuzy* (*Sluices of Epiphany*, 1927), was reprinted in *Literaturnyj sbornik ‘Krasnoj panoramy’* (*The Literary Anthology of ‘Red Panorama’*, 1928). While making a place for himself in the literary world of Moscow and publishing with many of the most reputed houses and journals in the late 1920s, Platonov increasingly defined himself as an individual, independent actor.

If Platonov cultivated his own quasi-outsider status throughout the 1920s, in the 1930s and 1940s it was not entirely of his own choosing. In this period, he occupied a tenuous position within the larger literary culture: he was still operating inside of it, even as he was distorting Soviet discourse and dissenting, to greater and lesser extents, against the Party-State, but he was no longer able to participate quite so independently. The real troubles for Platonov began, of course, in 1929, when RAPP accused him of falling under the influence of Boris Pil’njak. Platonov’s position within the ever-more-consolidated official literary establishment grew even more precarious after the 1931 publication of ‘Vprok’ (‘For Future Use’), which was read as a satire of collectivization, and which, famously, earned condemnation from Stalin himself. As a result of this controversy, Platonov was not published for three years, though he made active efforts to find his way back into the literary world by appealing to Gor’kij and others.

Beginning in 1934, when he participated in the writers’ brigade excursion to Turkmenistan, Platonov began to find a way to continue publishing his work periodically. ‘Takyр’ (‘Takyр’, occasionally translated as ‘Mudflats’), appeared in *Krasnaja nov’* and the writers’ brigade almanac in 1934, ‘Glinjanyj dom v uezdnom sadu’ (‘The Earthen House in the District Garden’) in *Krasnaja nov’* in 1936 (under the title ‘Nužnaja rodina’, or ‘The Essential Homeland’), ‘Tretij syn’ (‘The Third Son’) in *Krasnaja nov’* in 1936, ‘Bessmertie’ (‘Immortality’) in three different publications between 1936 and 1939, ‘Sredi životnych i rastenij’ (‘Among Animals and Plants’) in two different publications between 1936 and 1940, and so on.¹⁵ After the late 1920s, however, Platonov was never comfortably ensconced within Soviet literary culture again. As Michail Geller has argued, Platonov’s rehabilitation in 1934 was rather superficial, since documents from the time suggest that his contemporaries continued to hold him at a distance, as though they were testing him for trustworthiness. Vs. Ivanov, for instance, wrote in his diary in this period: “Леонов сделал мне выговор публично за то, что не посетил вечера А. Платонова. Сказал и – сам испугался” (‘Leonov scolded me publicly that I did not attend Platonov’s evening. He said this and got scared himself’).¹⁶

Platonov’s marginal position in the 1930s is evident in the fact that he contributed to only two collective literary undertakings in this period: the writers’ brigade almanac of 1934 (discussed in detail below) and the state project on the railroads led by L.M. Kaganovič, which began in 1935.¹⁷ Even

more telling, in this phase of his career Platonov was rejected from more than one collective project, including the “strong” one of the Belomor Canal almanac, even though he had already written about the construction of canals in ‘Epifanskije šljuzy’ and ‘Gorod Gradov’ and had specifically asked Averbach and Gor’kij to include him on the trip.¹⁸ The beginning of the Great Patriotic War brought some relief to Platonov, as the demand for correspondents and texts about the war allowed him to find work and to publish both journalism and literary creations. But after the war, Platonov remained on the fringes of Soviet literary culture, unaligned with a powerful faction. He was left struggling, once again, to make ends meet and to find some way of making his work acceptable for print.

What I mean to suggest, with this very brief overview of Platonov’s literary career, is that any one moment could be productively analyzed in terms of how he related to the collectives he encountered and how he negotiated his own, relatively, but not completely, independent position. For throughout his career Platonov acted as both an independent (often dissenting) actor and a part of the larger Soviet culture in which he lived – a culture that was itself profoundly shaped by collective enterprise.

II. *Collective Authorship and Platonov’s Socialist Realism*

In addition to offering insights into various moments in Platonov’s literary career, attending to Platonov’s engagement with collective authorship also sheds light on those texts that were written for or published in collectively authored volumes during Platonov’s lifetime. Reading these works synchronically against the volumes in which they were originally published, rather than just diachronically against the larger Platonovian and Russian canons (to see how Platonov did or did not preserve his own voice), highlights nuances that otherwise would remain hidden. By throwing the discourse that Platonov shared with his contemporary Soviet writers into sharp relief, it reveals just how unique Platonov’s voice is, but also how influential certain collective discourses were for Platonov’s thought and style.

This is a particularly fruitful strategy of reading, I would argue, when we consider Platonov’s works from the 1930s and 1940s, the moment in his career when he was seeking to find an acceptable mode of collaboration and was navigating the hardening of socialist realism as a literary style. In what follows, I will try to demonstrate the value of approaching Platonov’s so-called “socialist realist” stories synchronically by reading two of his works, one produced specifically *for* a collectively authored volume (‘Takyry’) and one reprinted later *in* a collectively authored volume (‘Oduchotvorennnye ljudi’), against the volumes as a whole.¹⁹ None of the critical literature on ‘Takyry’ and ‘Oduchotvorennnye ljudi’, to my knowledge, focuses on the rela-

tionship between the stories and the larger volumes in which they appeared, though Natal'ja Kornienko and Elena Roženceva have written excellent articles on the context of Platonov's Central Asian texts and I.A. Spiridonova has provided an outstanding analysis of the textual variants of 'Oducho-tvorennye ljudi'.²⁰ My readings thus shed fresh light on these stories, in addition to raising broader questions about our reading strategies for Platonov's texts.

A. *Writing for a Collectively Authored Volume: The Case of 'Takyr'*

Platonov's engagement with the brigade sent to Turkmenistan in 1934 and its practice of (weak) collective authorship is well documented. We have letters and journal entries from his trip, which attest to how he related to the group expedition as a whole, as well as the short story 'Takyr', which was written specifically for and published in the collectively authored volume *Ajding-Gjunler: Al'manach k desjatiletiju Turkmenistana, 1924-1934* (*Radiant Days: The Almanac for the Tenth Anniversary of Turkmenistan, 1924-1934*), though the story was also published the same year in *Krasnaja nov'* (1934, no. 9).²¹ Five other fiction writers were featured in this collective almanac along with Platonov – Petr Skosyrev, Georgij Maksimov, Vladimir Kozin, Michail Loskutov, and Konstantin Bol'sakov – and it is against the work of these writers that I would like to read 'Takyr'. Before turning to the fictional texts these writers produced, however, I will briefly explore how Platonov navigated the experience of visiting Turkmenistan with a collective, since it is instructive for understanding not only the production of 'Takyr', but also Platonov's evolving relationship with the Soviet literary system and its various factions.

It must be emphasized first off that Platonov's inclusion in the writers' brigade to Turkmenistan was quite significant for him, since it marked his reemergence onto the Soviet literary scene. With the dissolution of RAPP in 1932, the most vocal persecutors of Platonov – including Leopol'd Averbach, Aleksandr Fadeev, and Aleksej Selivanovskij – had been quieted, and Platonov had had a chance for rehabilitation. But as it had turned out, Platonov had remained on the fringes of the official Soviet literary scene throughout 1933. Publishing houses continued to refuse his work and, as noted above, he was denied a place in the Belomor Canal expedition in 1933. When Gor'kij responded to Platonov's application for help in September 1933 and invited him on the Turkmenistan trip, it thus signaled a significant change in the official view of the writer.

Platonov's participation in the expedition meant more than a renewal of trust from the literary establishment, however, for it had a profound effect on him as a writer. No doubt this was, at least in part, because he went into the venture primed for inspiration, desperately needing to earn money from his

writing and knowing that future opportunities for work were probably dependent on his performance during this commission.²² Whatever the reason, according to his letters and journals from the time Platonov found a great deal of inspiration in Turkmenistan. In his 30 March letter to his wife Marija Aleksandrovna and his son, for instance, he writes: “Я смотрю жадно на все, незнакомое мне. [...] Я никогда не понял бы пустыни, если бы не увидел ее – книг таких нет” (“I hungrily look at everything that is unfamiliar to me. [...] I never would have understood the desert, if I had not seen it – such books do not exist”).²³ On 15 April, he sends them confirmation of the Kara-Kum’s power, noting: “Пустыня под звездами произвела на меня огромное впечатление. Я кое-что понял, чего раньше не понимал” (“The desert under the stars made an enormous impression on me. I understood something, which I never understood before”).²⁴ Platonov’s notebooks from the period, meanwhile, include dozens of pages of notes about Turkmenistan, not only ideas for fictional works, but also observations about the relationship between ancient and modern Turkmenistan, about the construction of wells, and about the connection between Russians and Turkmen. These notes fit quite well with the official Soviet discourse of the period, emphasizing how Soviet progress is transforming the region, but also reveal Platonov’s (Fedorovian) interest in the region as a homeland of the human race and as a landscape of deep philosophical import. At one moment, for instance, Platonov observes the following: “Удивительно, что родина человечества столь пустынна. Что здесь связывало людей?” (“It is amazing, that the homeland of man is so deserted. What bound people together here?”).²⁵ These two dimensions of Platonov’s interest in Central Asia – the officially aligned attention to progress and the more idiosyncratically philosophical – would be reflected on the one hand in the publicistic sketch ‘Gorjačaja arktika’ (‘Hot Arctic’, written 1934, first published 1975) and on the other in the novella ‘Džan’ (‘Džan’, occasionally translated as ‘Soul’, written 1933-1935, first published in fragments in 1938).

Despite the importance of the brigade for his career and the well being of his family, Platonov was quick, in his letters to his wife and son, to make clear that he defined himself against the rest of the writers on the trip. In his 2 April letter, Platonov first notes his discomfort with the collective and the manner in which it is accommodated, writing:

Недавно в первый раз обедал – кормят так обильно, что стыдно есть. Но мне не нравится так праздно пребывать, и я что-нибудь придумаю. Кроме того, и публика не по мне, – я люблю смотреть все один, тогда лучше вижу, точнее думаю.²⁶

Not long ago I had my first dinner – it is shameful how much we are fed. But I do not like to remain so idle, and I will think up something.

And anyway, I don't like the crowd, – I like to watch everything alone, then I see better, think more precisely.

Two days later, he describes his (literal and figurative) split from the other writers, who remained in Ashgabat while Platonov ventured on to Krasnovodsk, in the following terms:

Только 3 неполных дня я пробыл в Ашхабаде. Сейчас сижу в салон-вагоне председателя СНК Туркмении Атабаева. Я еду в Касановодск. Все остальные писатели остались в Ашхабаде, завтра, кажется, приезжает Санников и др., но я уже оторвался ото всех.²⁷

I spent barely three days in Ashgabat. Now I am sitting in the parlor car of Atabaev, the chairman of Turkmenia's SNK [Sovnarkom, or Council of Regional Commissars]. I am heading to Krasnovodsk. All the other writers remained in Ashgabat; tomorrow, it seems, Sannikov and the others are arriving, but I've broken away from them all.

Then, on 10 April, Platonov explores the tensions between him and the other writers in greater detail, questioning the very notion of "brother-writers":

Братья-писатели надоели друг другу ужасно. К 15-16 числу все разъедутся. Бригада более чем наполовину состоит из барахла или из таких хлюстов как Коська или Козин-дурачок.

Отношение ко мне постоянно имеет тот оттенок, о котором ты знаешь, но я не обращаю внимания. Я приехал ради серьезного дела, ради пустыни и Азии.²⁸

The brother-writers have had quite enough of one another. Around the 15th or 16th everyone will disperse. More than half of the brigade is made up of trash or of jokers like Kos'ka or the fool Kozin.

The attitude toward me constantly has that overtone that you know about, but I am not paying any attention. I came on account of serious business, on account of the desert and Asia.

Finally, on April 15th, Platonov explicitly states that the other writers bother him:

Мне здесь вчера в достаточно серьезной форме было сделано предложение остаться надолго работать в Туркмении в качестве "министра без портфеля". Это пустяки. Но важно, что я здесь, следовательно, не на плохом счету. Да это еще писатели мне мешают. Вот убогие люди! Здесь я их еще яснее разглядел, даже более чем в Москве.²⁹

Yesterday it was proposed, in a fairly serious manner, that I stay for a while in Turkmenia to work in the capacity of “minister without a portfolio”. This is nonsense. But it is important that I apparently am not in bad standing here. And this is when the writers are interfering. These wretched people! I have seen them even more clearly here, even more than in Moscow.

In these letters, Platonov implicitly contrasts his goals with the other writers' goals (he has serious business in the desert and in Asia, they do not) and his character with theirs (they are jokers and wretched people, he is not). Together the passages suggest that even in the midst of the most significant exercise in collective authorship of his life, Platonov still saw himself as being alone in the crowd and still defined himself against the group. It seems not much had changed, in this respect, since the VAPP meeting in 1920.

Armed with a sense of how Platonov approached the brigade experience, we can turn now to the almanac that came out of the Turkmen expedition: *Ajding-Gjunler*. Given that the original brigade members had been directed toward a particular set of topics by the Turkmen Sovnarkom on 10 February, before they departed for Turkmenistan, it is not surprising that the fictional works published in the almanac complement one another in their subject matter.³⁰ One story focuses on the railroads, another on the world of Turkmen horses and their trainers, another on the construction of *kolchozes*, and still another on irrigation problems. Nearly all refer, at least in passing, to the changes that the Bolsheviks have introduced in the sphere of women's issues. It is also not surprising, given the circumstances of the fiction's production, that there are correspondences in the kind of “socialist construction” the various stories present. The most striking correspondence, in my eyes, and the most interesting for understanding how ‘Takyr’ relates to (and diverges from) the rest of the almanac, is the shared message that these stories present about the “double assimilation” of the population, to use a term of Francine Hirsch's.³¹

Together these works of fiction suggest that the population of Soviet Turkmenistan had already, by the time of the almanac's writing, incorporated themselves into the Soviet Union by developing a new understanding of their place within nationality categories and, simultaneously, within the Soviet state and society. What is more, the stories in the collection connect “double assimilation” with exposure to sacralized Soviet spaces, suggesting that residents of Central Asia needed to become incorporated within the new Soviet geography to develop a new understanding of Soviet national identity. I do not have space to discuss all of the prose pieces in detail, so I will look here at just the two other full-fledged fictional works in the almanac, Petr Skosyrev's novella ‘Oazis’ (‘Oasis’) and Georgij Maksimov's novella ‘Pesn' Amana’ (‘Song of Aman’).³²

Skosyrev's novella 'Oazis' follows Mamed Džafarov, an accomplished Persian *kolchoz* supervisor and winner of the prestigious Order of Lenin, as he recollects the circumstances that aided him in his evolution as a Soviet citizen. Important for our purposes is how the "positive hero's" development is presented here in terms of space and national identity.³³ In 'Oazis', Mamed begins his journey in a backward, pre-Revolutionary Ashgabat split by cleavages among the various ethnic populations. Skosyrev writes:

Ашхабад в то время еще назывался Ашхабадом.

Еще деревья на улицах, в саду возле мечети с большим куполом и в саду Гасана были молодые деревья и не давали тени. Еще на ночь жены чиновников тщательно запирали окна тяжелыми ставнями и до рассвета прели в собственном поту на российских, вывезенных из Саратова или Тамбова пухлых перинах, боясь свежего воздуха, так как на свежем воздухе – там, где-то близко, под самым городом – притаились разбойники-текинцы.

Впрочем текинцы на разбойников походили мало. [...]

На разбойников скорей были похожи русские.

Они каждый вечер кричали и ругались, напиваясь пьяными, и если затевалась драка, пыряли друг друга – спьяну, правда, не попадая куда хотели – складными маленькими ножами...

Однако отец называл туркмен разбойниками, а русских – дураками.³⁴

Ashgabat at that time was still called Ashgabat.

There were still trees on the streets. In the garden in front of the mosque with the big cupola and in Gasan's garden there were young trees and they did not provide any shade. At night the bureaucrats' wives still carefully boarded up their windows with heavy shutters and sweat until dawn as they lay on the Russian featherbeds they had brought with them from Saratov or Tambov, fearing the fresh air, since out in the fresh air – out there, somewhere close, outside their very city – Turkmen bandits were hiding.

It must be said, the Turkmen rarely qualified as bandits. [...]

The Russians more closely resembled bandits.

Every evening they shouted and fought, having drunk themselves silly, and if a fight broke out, they stabbed each other – drunkenly, true, not hitting where they meant to – with little pocketknives...

Nonetheless, his father called the Turkmen bandits, and the Russians – fools.

Over the course of the narrative, Mamed's essentialist understanding of ethnic groups (Persians as good and honest, Turkmen as bandits, Russians as fools) is shown to weaken as he progresses out of the backward environments in which he was raised, including a colonial Russian school and the home of

an abusive mullah who instructs him. Eventually, Mamed signs himself up for the Komsomol, officially Sovietizing himself, and then commits himself to working on a *kolchoz*. Importantly, Mamed is said to take these final steps in his evolution in newly Bolshevized Ashgabat, after hearing a speech by a Jewish comrade from Tashkent. His final conversion moment is described as follows:

Еврейка, по фамилии Зусман, приехавшая из Ташкента, держала речь о мировой революции, после которой не стыдно будет называться ни персом, ни русским, ни туркменом, ни евреем. Еврейка Зусман говорила горячо и понятно, и когда улыбалась, у ней можно было сосчитать все зубы во рту, как и у Ай-Гюль, которая осталась в песках с нелюбимым мужем, – и Мамед записался в комсомол.³⁵

The Jewess, Zusman by name, having arrived from Tashkent, was giving a speech about the world revolution, after which no one would be embarrassed to call himself a Persian, a Russian, a Turkmen, a Jew. The Jewess Zusman was speaking heatedly and comprehensibly and when she smiled, it was possible to count all the teeth in her mouth, just as it was with Aj-Gjul', who remained in the sands with an unloved husband, – and so Mamed signed up for the Komsomol.

The suggestion of the story, given this description, is that Mamed's progression "upward" in how he conceives of ethnic identity (toward "double assimilation" as a proud member of both an ethnicity and a state transformed by the world revolution) is connected with an "upward" migration in Soviet space (away from the environments of mullahs and "the sands" and towards Bolshevized spaces like Ashkhabad and Tashkent, which offer an "oasis" to Central Asians like Mamed).

Like Skosyrev's 'Oasis', Georgij Maksimov's 'Pesn' Amana' charts the transformation of a resident who reorients himself in newly Sovietized Turkmenistan. In this case the "positive hero" is a young Turkmen named Aman Nur-Mamedov, who has become the first Turkmen to work as an engine driver on a high-powered diesel train. Aman's story unfolds over the six chapters of the novella in non-chronological order, refracted in the "song" of his life, as performed for a visiting writer who has arrived from "far away", much like the members of the brigade themselves. Over the course of the novella, episodes from Aman's history are interwoven with a present struggle to fix a crisis on the railroad. The coherent story that eventually emerges echoes that of Mamed in 'Oasis'; in this novella, too, a citizen of Turkmenistan progresses out of the contaminated spaces of an oppressor (in this case a local *bai* named Murad Kuliev). After liberating himself from

Murad Kuliev, Aman begins to make his way into the wider world beyond his home:

Оказалось: пастбище, табун коней и кибитка – это еще не все, что есть на этой земле. Оказалось, что мир заполнен вещами, о которых Аман до того не имел никакого представления, и что всего удивительней – эти вещи кто-то делает. Где-то, быть может, на краю земли был завод (и, возможно, не один), который выпускал такие сложные машины.

Теперь Аман хотел знать.³⁶

It turned out that there was more to this world than a pasture, a herd of horses, and a caravan. It turned out that the world was full of things that Aman knew nothing about, and most amazing of all – someone made these things. Somewhere, maybe on the edge of the earth, was a factory (and, most likely, not just one), which produced such complicated machines.

Now Aman wanted to know.

With exposure to this wider world (and its factories), Aman begins to gain a new sense of his identity. His evolution is then completed when he arrives at the new Soviet space of the railroad. Here, he is able not only to realize his potential, but also to finally trust the Russians around him, whom he has doubted for most of his life, and to become a fully realized (and “doubly assimilated”) Soviet Turkmen.

As is evident from these brief looks at Skosyrev’s novella and Maksimov’s story, there are clear resonances between ‘Takyr’ and the other fiction in the almanac. Platonov’s story, it might be remembered, describes the young Persian girl Džumal’s escape from slavery in the mudflats (*takyr*) of the Turkmen plains and her return, after receiving educational training in the more enlightened Soviet spaces of Ashgabat and Tashkent, to the land of her birth to set up agricultural experiments. Thus, just as Skosyrev and Maksimov’s heroes do, Džumal’s national identity evolves (from oppressed Persian slave to “doubly assimilated” Soviet Persian scientist) as she moves from an unreformed space (an oppressive desert) through a reformed one (Ashgabat and Tashkent).

For all the parallels between ‘Takyr’ and the other fiction in the almanac, there are important distinctions to be made. For one thing, Platonov’s “postive hero” is female. But even more strikingly, while the others follow a hero from one space to another and relate that hero’s liberation narrative, ‘Takyr’ focuses on one landscape and casts doubt on the very prospect of liberation. It is telling, in this regard, that Platonov’s story is entitled ‘Takyr’ and not ‘Oasis’, as Skosyrev’s is, or something like ‘Pesn’ Džumal’. For although Platonov employs the same basic plotline as Skosyrev and Mak-

simov, and although he gestures toward the same “message”, ‘Takyr’ is ultimately not the story of a “positive hero’s” transformation. I would argue, rather, that the central character of Platonov’s story is the *takyr* itself and that the narrative is one of constancy.

Džumal’s supposed liberation seems subordinate to the *takyr*’s constancy because she is never described outside that environment – though the reader is informed that she receives education elsewhere – and because the descriptions of the *takyr*, even those that occur after Džumal’ has “liberated” herself, underline its unchanging and harsh nature. One of the main devices the story employs to convey the inescapability of the *takyr* is a series of redundant comparisons. The best example of this series appears early in the story, when Džumal’s mother Zarrin-Tadž looks at a plane tree. I quote the passage in full:

Ночной ветер медленно дул из Персии по ущелью, слышен был запах цветов, одинокая птица напевала где-то далеко в слепых горах, потом она умолкла; лишь река неслась и работала на камнях – всегда и вечно, во тьме и в свете, *как работает раб в туркменской равнине или неостывающий самовар в чайхане.*

Персиянка поглядела на старинную чинару – семь больших стволов разрасталось из нее и еще одна слабая ветвь: семь братьев и одна сестра. Нужно было целое племя людей, чтобы обнять это дерево вокруг, и кора его, изболевшая, изъеденная зверями, обхватанная руками умиравших, но сберегшая под собой все соки, была тепла и добра на вид, *как земляная почва.* Заррин-Тадж села на один из корней чинары, который уходил вглубь, *точно хищная рука,* и заметила еще, что на высоте ствола росли камни.

Должно быть, река в свои разливы громила чинару под корень горными камнями, но дерево вьело себе в тело те огромные камни, окружило их терпеливой корой, обжило и освоило и выросло дальше, кротко подняв с собою то, что должно его погубить. “Она тоже рабыня, как я! – подумала персиянка про чинару. – Она держит камень, *как я свое сердце и своего ребенка.* Пусть горе мое вырастет в меня, чтобы я его не чувствовала”. Заррин-Тадж заплакала. Она была беременна второй месяц от курда-пастуха, потому что ей надо было любить хотя бы одного человека.³⁷

The night wind slowly blew from Persia through the canyon. The smell of flowers was in the air. A lone bird sung out somewhere far off in the blind mountains, then grew silent; the river alone rushed along and worked on the stones – always and eternally, in the darkness and in the light, *as works a slave on the Turkmen plain or an ever-bubbling samovar in a teahouse.*

The Persian looked at the old plane tree – seven big boughs grew from it and also one weak branch: seven brothers and one sister. It

would take a whole tribe of people to embrace this tree, and its bark, sickly, gnawed by animals, grabbed at by the hands of the dying, but having saved under itself all its sap, was warm and pleasant in appearance, *like the earth's soil*. Zarrin-Tadz sat on one of the plane tree's roots, which went underground *just like a grasping hand*, and noticed that rocks were growing on top of one of the boughs.

In its floods the river must have pounded the tree with mountainous stones under its roots, but the tree had taken these huge rocks into its body. It had embraced them with its patient bark, adopted and assimilated and grew further, meekly accepting what should have killed it. "She is also a slave, as I am!" thought the Persian about the plane tree. "She holds stones, *like I hold my heart and my child*. Let my grief root itself in me, so that I cannot feel it." Zarrin-Tadz began to cry. She was two months pregnant, from a Kurdish shepherd, because it had been necessary for her to love at least one person.

The first analogy in the passage is, of course, the one comparing the work of the river to that of a "slave on the Turkmen plane" ("раб в туркменской равнине") and of an "ever-bubbling samovar in a teahouse" ("неостывающий самовар в чайхане"). In this first simile, the river is effectively compared to Zarrin-Tadž herself, who is a slave headed for the Turkmen plain, though she is not explicitly mentioned. When the next two similes appear, they compare the bark of the tree to "the earth's soil" ("земляная почва") and a root to "a predatory hand" ("хищная рука"). Again, while neither of these directly compares the landscape to Zarrin-Tadž, both underline the central idea of the passage: that she and the tree are alike, in that they can grow up among obstacles and survive as captives. This central idea, of course, is then repeated in Zarrin-Tadž's own speech, which includes a direct exclamation about the tree's status as a slave and yet another simile: "She is also a slave, as I am! [...] She holds stones, like I hold my heart and my child" ("Она тоже рабыня, как я! [...] Она держит камень, как я свое сердце и своего ребенка").

What becomes clear when this passage is excerpted from the story is just how redundant the comparisons in it are. Here, the landscape around Zarrin-Tadž is directly linked back to her in four similes, the metaphor about the branches, and in Zarrin-Tadž's own speech. By the end of the passage, it is impossible to ignore the connection between Zarrin-Tadž and the tree with which she identifies: both, apparently, are defined by the obstacles they face. The similes here do not gesture toward the Soviet transformation that awaits the landscape and the woman growing in it. Rather, they bring both Zarrin-Tadž and the reader further down into the muck of the *takyr*, emphasizing its abiding power. Just as there is no place for metaphor here, only metonymy, there seems to be no room for full transcendence, only partial adaptation.

A broader discussion of Platonov's similes in 'Takyr' is fruitful, since there are other comparable examples within the text, but this lies beyond the scope of the present article. What is important for our purposes is simply that these redundant comparisons in 'Takyr' appear as subtle distortions of the official discourse about Central Asian space and identity when they are considered in the context of the rest of the almanac's fiction. Read only against Platonov's other writings, the "socialist realist" story 'Takyr' may seem flat and one-dimensional, but when it is read as part of the larger whole of the almanac, striking nuances such as these appear. Especially when considered alongside Platonov's observations about his time with the brigade, these nuances suggest that Platonov's work for *Ajding-Gjunler* was less purely accommodationist than is often believed.

B. *Writing in a Collectively Authored Volume: The Case of 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi'*

If I chose to discuss 'Takyr' because it was written specifically for a collectively authored project, I have chosen 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' because it was not.³⁸ Unlike 'Takyr', 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' was written independently of a brigade and only published in a collectively authored volume a year after appearing in the journals *Krasnoflotec* and *Znamja* (1942). Although 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' was not composed explicitly for the collectively authored volume in which it appeared in 1944, the collection *Stalinskoe plemja* (*The Stalinist Tribe*),³⁹ I still consider its inclusion in that volume to be relevant to our reading of the story, for it means that Platonov's text was branded soon after its creation as part of a very particular collective project: the construction of a "Stalinist tribe" of writers and heroes. Moreover, I still find reading the story against the volume a useful strategy, since it underlines important nuances in the text.

Like most of the stories in the volume *Stalinskoe plemja* – and most of Platonov's war stories – 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' is based on documentary material and focuses on a specific act of sacrifice for the Soviet motherland. The stories in the collection complement one another in their choice of heroes: contributions about composers and writers and mathematicians (Dmitrij Šostakovič, Nikolaj Ostrovskij, Sergej Sobolev) coexist with contributions about more accidental heroes, such as partisans and female snipers. 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi' diverges from most of the stories included in the volume in featuring *multiple* heroes, namely the five Black Sea sailors who died fighting off German tanks outside Sevastopol' in November 1941, all of whom received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union: Nikolaj Fil'čenko, Ivan Krasnosel'skij, Vasilij Cibul'ko, Daniil Odincov, and Jurij Paršin. But since Platonov highlights the heroism of each of these men individually and the illustration accompanying the text highlights the individual sacrifice of one of

the men (who is depicted alone in front of an oncoming tank), its subject matter fits within the larger whole of *Stalinskoe plemja*.

Where ‘*Oduchotvorennye ljudi*’ more radically differs from the other texts in the volume, I would argue, is in its conceptualization of the *podvig*, or deed of valor, and its relationship to narrative. Many of the stories in *Stalinskoe plemja* suggest that their subjects have a will to heroism because they have modeled their lives on inspirational literary heroes. The first story of the collection, I. Zyrjanov’s ‘*Volja k žizni*’ (‘Will to Live’), sets the tone in this respect by focusing on Nikolaj Ostrovskij. Ostrovskij, Zyrjanov stresses, is widely admired for the story of his own life, with all its sacrifices for the Bolshevik cause, and for the novel that relayed his biography, *Kak zakaljalas’ stal’* (*How the Steel Was Tempered*). This admiration, Zyrjanov makes clear, is evident every day in the post Ostrovskij receives. Zyrjanov writes:

Потом Александра Петровна переходит к письмам. Они поступают со всех концов Союза. Владивосток, Ташкент, Фергана, Тбилиси, Уфа, Минск, Щигры, Киев, Кромы, Ленинград, Москва. Это родина переключается с автором книги *Как закалялась сталь*. Тысячи писем, бережно разложенные по папкам, хранятся рядом с произведениями классиков на книжных полках. Сегодня к ним прибавится еще несколько десятков. Кто пишет? Все: рабочая молодежь, моряки, летчики, педагоги, командиры Красной Армии, пионеры.⁴⁰

Then Aleksandra Petrovna turns to the letters. They arrive from all corners of the Union. Vladivostok, Tashkent, Fergana, Tbilisi, Ufa, Minsk, Ščigry, Kiev, Kromy, Leningrad, Moscow. This is the homeland calling out to the author of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Thousands of letters, carefully laid out in folders, are kept on the bookshelves, along with the works of the classics. Today several dozen more will be added to them. Who writes? Everyone: the working youth, sailors, pilots, teachers, commanders of the Red Army, pioneers.

The implication in this passage, of course, is that powerful narratives – including those by Ostrovskij and, presumably, this one by Zyrjanov – can inspire people from every walk of life and in every corner of the (Soviet) world. Narratives are so effective in cultivating heroism, in fact, that they should be considered part of the “arsenal” of the Red Army, as the concluding lines of Zyrjanov’s story make clear:

Николай Островский борется вместе с нами. Его нетленные книги находятся на вооружении Красной Армии. Они зовут на подвиги, на смертный бой. Они закаляют волю к победе над коварным и ненавистным врагом. Благородный образ писателя-бойца, который

до последних минут своей жизни сражался за народное дело, встает над полками Красной Армии.⁴¹

Nikolaj Ostrovskij fights together with us. His immortal books are on the armament of the Red Army. They invite deeds of valor [*podvig*], mortal combat. They harden the will to victory over the insidious and hateful enemy. The noble image of the writer-warrior, who fought for his people's cause until the last minutes of his life, soars above the regiments of the Red Army.

One of the great weapons in the cultivation of the *podvig*, Zyrjanov argues in no uncertain terms, is the narrative, which calls all Soviet citizens to great, courageous action.

Petr Skosyrev's story 'Nastojaščaja žizn' Zoi Kosmodem'janskoj' ('The Real Life of Zoja Kosmodem'janskaja') presents a similar relationship between personal heroism and literary models. The focus here is on a young Russian partisan who was hanged by the group of Germans who discovered her. She embraced her death, the reader is told, and never gave up any information to the enemies – not even her own real name. Instead, she said simply that it was a pleasure to die for her people. These last words, Skosyrev tells the reader in the following passage, should be read, reread, and learned by heart, as part of the inspiring literary narrative that is Zoja's life:

История ее жизни и ее гибели, достаточно подробно описанная в газетах, уже вошла золотой страницей в книгу борьбы советского народа с врагами. [...] Зоя была повешена, крикнув перед смертью слова, которые мы тоже обязаны запомнить. Я уверен, что много позже, когда каждый нынешний день наш станет легендарным для тех, ради спасения кого и бьется сейчас Россия на всех фронтах, много раз будут читаться и перечитываться после войны и заучиваться наизусть предсмертные слова Зои Космодемьянской.⁴²

The history of her life and death, described in rather great detail in the newspapers, has already entered into the book of the battle of the Soviet people with its enemies as a golden page. [...] Zoja was hanged, crying out before her death words that we also are obliged to remember. I am certain that much later on, when our every passing day has become legendary to those for whom Russia now fights on all fronts, the immortal words of Zoja Kosmodem'janskaja will be read and reread many times after the war and learned by heart.

Zoja's heroism, according to this account, has become enshrined as a literary text for future study, not only through Skosyrev's story about her, but also by all the retellings of her story throughout Soviet culture. These began, we learn, within two months of her death, when Zoja's name reached the greatest

heights of the national memory, and they will be repeated, the author assures us, far into the future.

What is especially noteworthy about Skosyrev's depiction of Zoja's heroism is that it is not only inspirational *as* literature; it is also inspired *by* literature. Indeed, Skosyrev makes absolutely clear that Zoja's heroism is not accidental, but has been cultivated by her careful attention to narrative. He writes:

Зоя читала книги так, как и должно их читать, – забывая себя и ничего не видя вокруг, учась тому, о чем редко говорили в школе. В школе говорили, что надо знать Бойля и Мариотта и что такое вектор. Но в школе редко говорили о главном, а Лев Толстой говорил, и Николай Островский говорил, и Сервантес говорил, и Маяковский, и Горький.

Читая, Зоя примеривала любимых героев на себя. Разве Павел Корчагин, комсомолец, герой, – не она?⁴³

Zoja read books as they ought to be read – forgetting herself and seeing nothing around her, studying that which was rarely spoken about in school. In school it was said that one should know Boyle's law and Mariotte and what a vector is. But in school they rarely spoke about what was most important, whereas Lev Tolstoj spoke about it, and Nikolaj Ostrovskij spoke about it, and Cervantes spoke about it, and Majakovskij, and Gor'kij.

Reading, Zoja measured her favorite heroes against herself. Pavel Korčagin, the Komsomol member and hero – was he not her?

Evidently, Zoja reads so carefully that she can draw parallels between the actions of Soviet heroes and herself, bringing the lessons of her learning into her daily life and challenging every Soviet citizen to be “не хуже Пьера Безухова, старого Клооса или Тани из *Евгений Онегина*” (“not worse than Pierre Bezuchov, old Kloos, or Tanja from *Evgenij Onegin*”).⁴⁴ Zoja's attention to literary sources and her active cultivation of heroism allowed her to become a source of pride for the Soviet people, Skosyrev suggests, and the hero of her own literary text capable of inspiring all those who read of her achievements.

Read against these texts, which focus on consciously cultivated heroism, Platonov's attention to the spontaneous, instinctual dimension of heroism becomes all the more striking in ‘Oduchotvorennye ljudi’. In contrast to Ostrovskij's correspondents and in contrast to Zoja, none of the heroes in Platonov's story are shown following the lead of a literary hero. Fil'čenko does find inspiration in the personages of Lenin and Stalin, or at least claims to in the speech he delivers to his colleagues, which reads:

– Товарищи! Наша разведка открыла командованию замысел врага. Сегодня немцы пойдут на штурм Севастополя. Сегодня мы должны доказать, в чем смысл нашей жизни; сегодня мы покажем врагу, что мы одухотворенные люди, что мы одухотворены Лениным и Сталиным, а враги наши только пустые шкурки от людей, набитые страхом перед тираном Гитлером. Мы их раскрошим, мы протараним отродье тирана! – воскликнул воодушевленный, сияющий силой Николай Фильченко.⁴⁵

“Comrades! Our intelligence has disclosed the enemy’s intention to our leadership. Today the Germans will storm Sevastopol’. Today we must prove what the meaning of our life is; today we will show the enemy that we are spiritualized people, that we are spiritualized by Lenin and Stalin, while our enemies are only empty skins of people, stuffed with fear in the face of Hitler’s tyranny. We will crush them, we will batter down the spawn of tyranny”, exclaimed Nikolaj Fil’čenko, inspired, beaming with strength.

Indeed, in this speech Fil’čenko suggests that the spirit provided by Lenin and Stalin is the very thing separating Soviet soldiers from their German counterparts, who are practically objects of taxidermy, since they are “only empty skins of people, stuffed with fear”.

The story as a whole, however, suggests that the ultimate source of the heroes’ inspiration is not Stalin or Lenin or any training they may have undertaken, but a kind of brotherly love. This deeper inspiration is revealed through the actions and thoughts of Fil’čenko, who is shown before his great *podvig* to be reflecting on the suffering he encounters around him, not reading texts or preparing consciously for battle. We see him, for instance, encountering children who are forced to play late at night because the daytime has grown too dangerously full of artillery fire. Platonov describes Fil’čenko as he walks away and contemplates the associations they trigger:

Фильченко пошел далее по своему делу. “И мои две сестренки тоже играют где-нибудь теперь на Украине”, подумал политрук, и в душе его тронулось привычное горе, старая тоска по погибшему дому отца. “Но, должно быть, они уже не играют больше”.⁴⁶

Fil’čenko went on about his business. “And my two little sisters also are playing somewhere now in Ukraine,” thought the political instructor, and in his soul a habitual grief, an old yearning for the lost home of his father, was touched off. “But, probably, they already are not playing anymore.”

The grief Fil’čenko feels at this moment is, it seems, routinely experienced, for it is “habitual” (“привычное”) and related to his “old yearning” (“старая

тоска”) for his father’s home. The suggestion, in this passage, is that Fil’čenko always carries this pain and is spurred on in his work by the desire to prevent this pain from reaching others, to whom he feels inexorably connected.

A few pages later, Fil’čenko’s motivations are confirmed, as Platonov focuses more explicitly on them, writing:

Фильченко представлял себе родину, как поле, где растут люди, похожие на разноцветные цветы, и нет среди них ни одного, в точности похожего на другого; поэтому он не мог ни понять смерти, ни примириться с ней. Смерть всегда уничтожает то, что лишь однажды существует, чего не было никогда и не повторится во веки веков. И скорбь о погибшем человеке не может быть утешена. Ради того он и стоял здесь, – ради того, чтобы остановить смерть, чтобы люди не узнали неутешимого горя. Но он не знал еще, он не испытал, как нужно встретить и пережить смерть самому, как нужно умереть, чтобы сама смерть обессилела, встретив его.⁴⁷

Fil’čenko imagined his homeland as a field where people grow like multicolored flowers and among them is not one that is exactly like another; for that reason he could neither understand death, nor resolve himself to it. Death always destroys that which exists only once, which was never before and will never be repeated again for all eternity. And grief over a person who has perished cannot be consoled. For this he stood here, – in order to stop death, so that people would not know inconsolable grief. But he still did not know, he had not experienced, how death ought to be met and lived through, how he should die, so that death itself would collapse, having encountered him.

The real inspiration for Fil’čenko, Platonov suggests here, is not Lenin and Stalin or any literary hero Fil’čenko has encountered in his reading. Rather, it is a love for the varieties of human experience and an instinctual, Fedorovian impulse to stop death from assailing his fellow man.

If Platonov’s story departs from the other fiction of *Stalinskoe plemja* on the level of what inspires the *podvig*, it also departs on the level of what a literary depiction of a *podvig* should do. Zyrjanov and Skosyrev’s texts locate their respective heroes in a pantheon of inspirational literary personages, suggesting that the goal of writing about them is the inspiration of Soviet readers to perform comparable feats. Platonov’s story, meanwhile, suggests that the process of describing a *podvig* has a different purpose. For ‘Oduchotvorennye ljudi’ seems written not to inspire, but to memorialize: to honor those who have already sacrificed and to bring them back to life for all those who knew and loved them. The story, that is, seems intended not so much for

future Soviet heroes, but for those like the Russian maiden singing in the opening paragraph of the story, who is not yet aware that she will lose her beloved Ivan Krasnosel'skij to a great battle.

III. *Concluding Remarks*

I have not meant to suggest, with my readings of 'Taky' and 'Oduchotvorennye ljudi', that the only ways to approach these texts are as meditations, respectively, on Central Asian space and identity and the *podvig* in the age of the Great Patriotic War. Nor have I meant to overemphasize the connections between Platonov's stories and those of his contemporaries. After all, it is not as though Platonov wrote these narratives knowing *precisely* what his contemporaries' stories would look like. Rather, I have tried to demonstrate that, when these Platonov texts are read synchronically against the collectively authored volumes in which they appeared, rather than simply against Platonov's *oeuvre* or the Russian canon, these so-called "socialist realist" texts take on extra life, as the uniqueness of Platonov's voice in the collectives with which he engaged stands out.

By way of conclusion, I would like to stress that considering Platonov's texts as parts of collectively authored wholes need not diminish his "greatness", just as considering him in dialogue with the practices of collective authorship need not stigmatize him as some unreflective "collaborator". If anything, approaching Platonov as a writer who engaged with collective authorship throughout his life bolsters the claims to his unique genius. For as I have tried to demonstrate, even in his "socialist realist" phase, when Platonov was supposedly making more accommodations to the dominant literary groups than ever before, he still privately resisted the practices of the collectives for which he wrote and still publicly – albeit subtly – distorted the discourses championed by other members of the collectives he encountered.

NOTES

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¹ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, New York, 1994, p. 3.

² Foucault argues in 'What is an Author?' (1969) that certain discourses in a given culture are endowed with the "author function", while others are not, suggesting that this function is "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in: Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, Ed. James D. Faubion, Trans. Robert Hurley and others, New York, 1998, p. 211). I claim that the "author function" of our contemporary literary culture resembles that of the early Soviet period because an author's name carries comparable weight today as it did then. Certainly anonymity was more tolerable within the early Soviet literary system than it is today, just as the pantheon of "great" writers was more fixed there and then than it is now. But the *function* enacted by the "author" in literary texts of both periods is similar.

³ Much was made of the collaborative dimension of this work, though final editorial credit was given to Gor'kij, Averbach, and Firin. For two recent analyses of the Belomor Canal monograph, see Cynthia A. Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal*, Gainesville, 1998, and Mary A. Nicholas and Cynthia A. Ruder, 'In Search of the Collective Author: Fact and Fiction from the Soviet 1930s', *Book History*, 11, 2008, pp. 221-244.

⁴ For a discussion of collective authorship in contemporary film and television, see John Caldwell, 'Industrial Auteur Theory (Above the Line/Creative)', in: *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham, NC, 2008, pp. 197-231.

⁵ Between 1928 and the First All-Union Congress of the Writers' Union in 1934, 28 collections and almanacs dedicated to the national literatures appeared (O.D. Golubeva, *Literaturno-chudožestvennye al'manachi i sborniki. Bibliografičeskij ukazatel'*, tom 4, 1928-1937 gody, Moskva, 1959, p. x).

⁶ Between 1918 and 1927, 538 almanacs and collections were published, while 772 were published between 1928 and 1937 (N.P. Rogožin, *Literaturno-chudožestvennye al'manachi i sborniki. Bibliografičeskij ukazatel'*, tom 3,

1918-1927 gody, Moskva, 1960; and Golubeva, *Literaturno-chudožestvennyje al'manachi i sborniki. Bibliografičeskij ukazatel'*, tom 4). Golubeva notes that her figure also does not include songbooks, collections of work by just two authors, collections of folklore, and texts that include just one creative work, even if it was penned by a group working together (pp. xii-xiv).

7 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in: *Image, Music, Text*, Trans. Stephen Heath, New York, 1977, p. 146.

8 Foucault suggests that this shift in Western literary culture took place in the seventeenth or eighteenth century (Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 212). This seems appropriate for the Russian case, since secular Russian literature marked by the "author function" began to fully flourish in the late 18th century.

9 Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, New York and Oxford, 1991, pp. 17-22. What I have called "unacknowledged collective authorship" Stillinger dubs "multiple authorship", arguing that instances of it can be found "virtually anywhere we care to look in English and American literature of the last two centuries" (p. 22).

10 As cited in: Tomas Langerak, *Andrej Platonov. Materialy dlja biografii 1899-1929 gg.*, Amsterdam, 1995, p. 24.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

12 Platonov seems to have regarded the publication of his poetry in *Naši dni*, in particular, as an important step in his establishment as a Soviet writer, for he mentions the almanac in the first line of a 1926 letter to Voronskij, seemingly as proof of his worthiness for literary work in Moscow. Platonov writes: "Товарищ Воронский! / Два года назад я был у вас, разговаривал о стихах, которые потом печатались в альманахе *Наши дни* и *Прожектор*" ("Comrade Voronskij! / Two years ago I visited you and discussed poems that were later published in the almanac *Naši dni* and in *Prožektor*"; Platonov to Voronskij, 27 July 1926, as cited in: Tomas Langerak, 'Andrej Platonov vo vtoroj polovine dvadcatych godov [opyt tvorčeskoj biografii]. Čast' pervaja', *Russian Literature*, 21, 1987, p. 160).

13 A number of scholars have explored the ideological contexts of Platonov's early thought and his relationship to leftist aesthetics. For an introduction to this period of Platonov's work, see Thomas Langerak, 'Andrej Platonov v Voroneže', *Russian Literature*, 23, 1988, pp. 437-488; Elena Tolstaja-Segal, 'Ideologičeskie konteksty Platonova', *Russian Literature*, 9, 1981, pp. 231-280; Thomas Seifrid, *Andrej Platonov: Uncertainties of Spirit*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 32-55.

14 See A. Platonov, 'K načinajuščim proletarskim poëtam i pisateljam', *Železnyj put'*, 19, April 1919, pp. 25-26, reprinted in A. Platonov, *Sočinenija*, t. 1, Moskva, 2004, kn. 2, pp. 9-10. On the connections between this article and Bogdanov's thought, see Langerak, 'Andrej Platonov vo vtoroj polovine dvadcatych godov', pp. 163-164; Langerak, 'Platonov v Voroneže', pp. 453-454; E. Jablov, 'Platonov i literatura', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 63, 2009, p. 260.

- 15 Although I consider collective literary projects distinct from journalism published periodically, it is worth noting that Platonov regularly contributed critical essays and reviews to *Literaturnyj kritik* and *Oktjabr'skaja mysl'* in this period. In addition, he consulted for journals and newspapers like *Krasnaja nov'*, *Oktjabr'*, and *Izvestija* (Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov: Uncertainties of Spirit*, p. 13).
- 16 As quoted in: Michail Geller, *Andrej Platonov v poiskach sčast'ja*, Moskva, 1999, p. 339.
- 17 For this latter project, Platonov wrote such stories as 'Sredi životnyh i rastenij' ('Among Animals and Plants'), 'Bessmertie' ('Immortality'), and 'Fro', all three of which were published, but not without controversy. The publication of 'Bessmertie' and 'Fro' in *Literaturnyj kritik* in 1936, for instance, triggered a discussion about Platonov's stories and the problems of socialist realism. In Natal'ja Kornienko's words, "Рассказы Платонова стали одним из аргументов литературной борьбы второй половины 1930-х годов" ("Platonov's stories became one of the arguments of the literary battle of the late 1930s"; N. Kornienko, 'Kommentarij', in: Andrej Platonov, *Sobranie sočinenij*, t. 4, *Sčastlivaja Moskva. Očerki i rasskazy 1930-ch godov*, Moskva, 2010, p. 583).
- 18 Kornienko has also noted the irony that Platonov had already written about canals and yet was not allowed to do so again with the brigade (see N.V. Kornienko, 'Primečanija', in: Andrej Platonov, *Zapisnye knižki: Materialy k biografii*, Ed. N.V. Kornienko, Moskva, 2000, p. 364).
- 19 'Takyr' tends to be discussed in Platonov criticism along with his later "socialist realist" stories, despite the fact that Platonov began working on it before "socialist realism" was officially adopted as a doctrine by the Union of Soviet Writers in August 1934. I follow this periodization here and treat it as an example of Platonov's so-called "socialist realism", though with the caveat that, to my mind, all of Platonov's "socialist realist" texts are stranger and more nuanced than is often assumed.
- 20 See N.V. Kornienko, 'Andrej Platonov: "Turkmenija-strana ironii"', in: *Nacija. Ličnost'. Literatura*, vyp. 1, Moskva, 1996, pp. 98-122; N.V. Kornienko, 'Istorija teksta i biografija A.P. Platonova (1926-1946)', *Zdes' i teper'*, 2.1, 1993, pp. 6-307, especially pp. 217-246; Elena Roženceva, 'Opyt dokumentirovanija turkmenskich poezdok A.P. Platonova', in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, kn. 1, Moskva, 2009, pp. 398-407; and I.A. Spiridonova, 'Rasskaz Platonova "Oduchotvorennye ljudi"; tekst i kontekst', in: *Tvorčestvo Andreja Platonova. Issledovanija i materialy*, kn. 4, Sankt-Peterburg, 2008, pp. 217-233.
- 21 The brigade's almanac was published in November 1934 in a run of 5500 copies and included written work by the following participants: Vs. Ivanov, Lachuti, P. Skosyrev, O. Taš-Nazarov, A. Platonov, G. Sannikov, G. Maksimov, V. Lugovskoj, Ch.N. Charyev, V. Kozin, A. Kekilov, G. Šengeli, B.S. Nijazov, K. Bol'sakov, M. Loskutov, Ata-Nijazov, Š. Kelikov, D. Klyčev, V. Popov, M. Nemčenko, V. Beljaev, and I.M. Gubin (see *Ajding-Gjunler:*

Al'manach k desjatiletiju Turkmenistana, 1924-1934, Ed. G. Sannikov, Moskva, 1934).

It should be noted that specific plans for the volume had been made as early as 13 March, before the brigade departed. At that point, the deadline for the submission of works was scheduled for 1 August and the editorial board was set up to include Vs. Ivanov, Sannikov, Borozdin, Paustovskij, Kozin, Min'kov, and Veselkov (Roženceva, 'Opyt dokumentirovanija turkmenskich poezdok A.P. Platonova', p. 400).

22 Geller draws attention to the Central Asian trip as an important source of funds for Platonov (Geller, *Andrej Platonov v poiskach sčast'ja*, p. 339).

23 Andrej Platonov, pis'mo 3 (30 marta 1934 g.), in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova. Kniga 1. Naučnoe izdanie*, red. N. Kornienko, Moskva, 2009, p. 504.

24 Platonov, pis'mo 10 (15 aprilja 1934 g.), in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 510.

25 Andrej Platonov, *Zapisnye knižki*, p. 137.

26 Platonov, pis'mo 5 (2 aprilja 1934 g.), in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 505.

27 Platonov, pis'mo 6 (4 aprilja 1934 g.), in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 505.

28 Platonov, pis'mo 9 (12 aprilja 1934 g.), in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 508. In her commentary to the letters from Turkmenistan, Roženceva notes the parallel with the following entry in Platonov's notebook: "Бригада писателей – собрание несчастных (изредка жуликов)" ("A brigade of writers is a gathering of the unlucky [sometimes of thieves]"; as cited in: *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 509. The original quotation can be found in: Platonov, *Zapisnye knižki*, p. 137).

29 Platonov, pis'mo 10 (15 aprilja 1934 g.), *Archiv A.P. Platonova*, p. 510.

30 According to Roženceva, on 10 February the brigade organizers were briefed by K.S. Atabaev, Chairman of the Turkmen Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), about the goals of the expedition and were encouraged to focus on topics like the irrigation of the western part of Turkmenia, the position of women, and the construction of collectivized farms and cultural apparatuses. Specific roles within the brigade were also assigned before the excursion began. After Platonov's application to participate was accepted in March, he was assigned to the literary fiction group, along with Maksimov, Paustovskij, Kozin, Skosyrev, Odoev (Trišin), Muguev, Smirnov, Bol'sakov, and Loskutov. Other writers were to provide poetry, translations, drama, literary criticism and essays in Oriental Studies (Roženceva, 'Opyt dokumentirovanija turkmenskich poezdok A.P. Platonova', pp. 398-399).

31 Francine Hirsch argues that census, map, and museum all facilitated the process of "double assimilation", or the assimilation "of a diverse population into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of those nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society" (Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Ithaca, 2005, p. 14).

32 In addition to Skosyrev and Maksimov's *povesti*, the almanac includes the following contributions by fiction writers: Vladimir Kozin's 'Konskaja krov' ('Equine Blood'), a "play for reading"; Konstantin Bol'sakov's 'Kerki', notes

about the Kerki region that are defined in the subtitle as “материалы к рассказу” (“materials for a story”); and Michail Loskutov’s ‘Predšestvenniki’ (‘Predecessors’), a cycle of short texts defined in the almanac’s table of contents as “рассказы” (“stories”), but labeled as “очерки” (“sketches”) by the author. Because of space constraints, I analyze only Skosyrev and Maksimov’s contributions in the present article, though Kozin’s fictional “play for reading” would fit easily into my discussion of “double assimilation”. Comparisons between ‘Takyr’ and the (apparently non-fictional) sketches of Loskutov and Bol’šakov are less productive, since those works diverge so sharply from ‘Takyr’ generically.

33 I follow Katerina Clark in using the term “positive hero” to describe the protagonist of socialist realist works. See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 2nd edition, Bloomington, 2000.

34 Petr Skosyrev, ‘Oazis’, in: *Ajding-Gjunler*, p. 15; ellipsis in original.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

36 G. Maksimov, ‘Pesn’ Amana’, in: *Ajding-Gjunler*, p. 79.

37 Andrej Platonov, ‘Takyr’, in: *Ajding-Gjunler*, p. 48; italics mine – K.H.

38 A similar example to the one I have chosen would be the war story ‘V Belorussii’ (‘In Belorussia’), first published in *Krasnaja zvezda* in 1944, later published in the collection *Frontovye očerki o Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojne* (*Sketches from the Front about the Great Patriotic War*) in 1957. Still other texts, including Platonov’s screenplay about Turkmenia, several railroad stories, and several war stories, were written for collective projects but rejected for publication.

39 The volume, of which 25,000 copies were printed, includes written works by I. Zyrjanov, A. Drozdov, B. Lavrenev, K. Finn, I. Aramilev, P. Skosyrev, A. Erikeevev, A. Platonov, S. Persov, M. Tevelev, N. Gil’jardi, A. Kalinčenko, K. Krapiva, A. Balodis, K. Ozolin’š, Ja. Vanags, N. Bogdanov, A. Krivickij, L. Gumilevskij, P. Pavlenko, M. Nikitin, B. Rjabinin, A. Jakovlev, A. Karavaeva, V. Šklovskij, and V. Ivanov. According to the title pages of the volume, it was approved for publication in 1943, though it has a publication date of 1944 (see *Stalinskoe plemja*, Eds. A. Drozdov and O. Reznik, Moskva, 1944).

40 I. Zyrjanov, ‘Volja k žizni’, in: *Stalinskoe plemja*, p. 8.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

42 Petr Skosyrev, ‘Nastojaščaja žizn’ Zoi Kosmodem’janskoj’, in: *Stalinskoe plemja*, pp. 64-65; ellipsis mine – K.H.

43 Skosyrev, ‘Nastojaščaja žizn’’, p. 67.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

45 Andrej Platonov, ‘Oduchotvorennye ljudi’, in: *Stalinskoe plemja*, p. 101.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 97, ellipsis in original.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 100.