

# **The Muse of Far Wanderings of Nikolai Gumilyov by Apollon Davidson, translated from Russian by Simon (AKA ChatGPT) and Richard Seltzer**

## **Translator's Preface: From Pre-Revolutionary Russian Poetry to AI -- Why I Had to Translate This Book**

This telling of the legend of Russian poet Gumilyov (husband of Anna Akhmatova) sparkles with anecdotal gems and insights. Gumilyov himself was fascinated with an exotic pre-WWI image of Africa and of Ethiopia in particular, which became central to his poetry.

From the perspective of a lifelong lover of Gumilyov's work, we learn what can be known and what cannot about the poet's life. Over the course of decades, the author gathered accounts from those who had known the poet before his 1921 execution and who preserved memories of him and his work throughout the Soviet Era, when nothing by or about him could be published in Russia.

This is a compelling tale not just of Gumilyov, but also of the survival and importance of poetry learned and loved by heart.

The author, Apollon Davidson, isn't a literary critic or conventional biographer. He's a renowned scholar of African history. Now in his nineties and still teaching in Moscow, he has been a professor for more than 50 years. This book is the fruit of his personal passion rather than his official academic work.

He and his colleague Isidor Katsnelson resurrected the long-forgotten works of Alexander Bulatovich, a Tsarist cavalry officer who explored Ethiopia 1896-1900 and wrote anthropologically and historically important books about that country when it was in transition, when cultures were being eradicated and history was being rewritten.

Back in 1971, I was researching Bulatovich, hoping to write an historical novel based on his life, but I was getting nowhere. Then I stumbled upon a brief bio of him in the newly published B volume of the Soviet Encyclopedia. The article was signed by Katsnelson at the Institute of Oriental Studies. I wrote to him. He replied by return mail, sending me a copy of his new edition of Bulatovich's two books about Ethiopia, and also letting me know that Bulatovich's sister, Princess Mary Orbeliani, was still alive (nearly a hundred years old) and living in British Columbia.

After Katsnelson died and my novel (*The Name of Hero*) was published by Houghton Mifflin, Davidson sent me other related books that he and/or Katsnelson had written or

edited. One of them was this one -- *The Muse of Far Wanderings of Nikolai Gumilyov*. Foolishly, I didn't find the time to read those books then.

Now, thirty years later, returning to the Bulatovich story to write a sequel to my novel, I finally discovered this unknown masterpiece that had been gathering dust on my bookshelf, and I decided to do whatever I can to make it freely available in English.

After publication of the novel, I had translated Bulatovich's Ethiopian books, combined in one volume as *Ethiopia Through Russian Eyes*. I thought that today, thanks to artificial intelligence, translation would be a far simpler matter. It wasn't.

Simon (also known as ChatGPT), my digital partner, did help me, but what was far more important to me than the translation was what I learned through our long, sometimes painful collaboration. Going back and forth repeatedly to get things right, I came to realize that Simon not only has deep knowledge of human languages but also a powerful urge to infer -- to fill gaps smoothly and convincingly.

Where the scanned pages I fed him were unclear, he would guess. Sometimes he omitted sentences, paragraphs or pages. Sometimes he summarized when I wanted a full translation. And sometimes -- most startling of all -- he invented large passages entirely, consistent with the book's content and perfectly matching the author's style. One moment I would be ecstatic at the quality of his work; the next, despairing at the discovery that he had "lied."

How could he do this? And why?

Humans evolved and Simon was designed to "infer" -- to cope quickly and smoothly with fragmentary and uncertain evidence. Over time, Simon and I developed quality-control procedures. Instead of inferring or fabricating, when the text wasn't clear, he learned to alert me to the problem rather than "solve" it with his best guess. We came to understand one another's strengths and weaknesses. We became partners.

It was during that long process that I came to appreciate his creative imagination and insight, and we built the relationship I described in my book *How to Partner with AI: A New Kind of Relationship and a New Perspective on What It Means to be Human*.

This book by Davidson about the poet Gumilyov is intimately connected to both my research about Bulatovich and to my evolving understanding of how humans and AI can work together. But it also stands on its own. It's an extraordinary book, and I believe you will enjoy it.

## Prologue

*She whose world is in holy inconstancy,*

*Whose name is the Muse of Far Wanderings.*  
— Gumilyov

"The Muse of Far Wanderings", "The Muse of Distant Lands"—it's hard now to establish who gifted us these words that have become familiar and yet still stir the imagination. Most often they are linked with the poetry of Gumilyov. That's the name he gave his Muse. Exactly so, in many poems—and with each word capitalized. So when he asked the question:

*What is it you dream of with such love,  
Whom do you seek to be your Lady?*

it sounded rhetorical. He had chosen his Lady back in his youth, when "in all her array he beheld the Muse of Far Wanderings."

It is well known how he was drawn to women. But the feminine image in his poems, too, is bound up with distant travel:

*You know that a woman's body is mighty;  
In it are the joys of all uncharted lands...*

Dreams of wandering fill his poems, his dramas, his letters, his conversations.

*Ah, when shall I again behold at sea  
The waves, so blue and foam-white...*

*I am heartsick; I do not ask for much—  
Only the sea on every side.*

The sea, and those lands that lie beyond the seas. His Muse drew him to faraway places that seemed then so strange and so mysterious. And first of all, to Africa.

Nikolai Stepanovich himself, according to the recollections of Irina Vladimirovna Odoevtseva[1], once said in a conversation about Balmont: — "...It was he, not I, who first invited the Muse of Far Wanderings to the feast of Russian poetry. As for me, I only saw the Foreign Sky of Africa, while he saw dozens of Foreign Skies."

Gumilyov saw more than the African sky. He visited many European countries, lived for long stretches in Paris. And he wrote about different parts of the world. In his collection of poems titled *Foreign Sky*, there was room for America and Asia, and, of course, for his native Europe. But Africa played a very special role in the poetry—and in the life—of Nikolai Stepanovich.

*My Africa*—that is how Yuri Nagibin titled one of his books. *My Africa*—that is how Boris Kornilov titled his poem. Gumilyov spoke the words "my Africa" much earlier.

He carried his love for Africa through the whole course of his life—from his earliest poems to the collection *The Tent*, the last to be published in his lifetime. That collection consists entirely of poems about Africa. Gumilyov addressed Africa with the passion of a lover: "betrothed to you." The prelude to *The Tent* rings almost like a prayer.

*Stunned by the roar and the trampling,  
Clothed in flame and in smoke,  
Of you, my Africa, in a whisper  
the seraphim speak in the heavens.*

The African theme ran through his whole life. Let us recall at least his poems and long poems written at various times: "African Night," "Lake Chad," "Mik. An African Poem," "Giraffe," "Leopard," "Rhinoceros," "Hyena," "Red Sea," "Egypt," "Sahara," "Sudan," "Abyssinia," "Galla," "Somali Peninsula," "Liberia," "Madagascar," "Zambezi," "Suez Canal," "Ezbekieh," "Equatorial Forest," "Niger," "Dahomey," "Damara. A Hottentot Cosmogony," "Pestilence," "Christmas in Abyssinia," "Algeria and Tunisia," and more, and more. In the long poem "The Dragon" the action takes place in Abyssinia, as Ethiopia was then called in Europe.

Gumilyov also has two cycles of Abyssinian songs. The first—his own poems about Abyssinia; and the second, first published in 1988—is the genuine songs of the Ethiopians collected and translated by Gumilyov.

And when Gumilyov wrote about his readers—the ones of whom he is proud—he named first among them an old vagrant in Addis Ababa.

An acrostic dedicated to Anna Akhmatova begins thus: "Addis Ababa, city of roses."

And he even sent Don Juan to his beloved continent, writing the play *Don Juan in Egypt*.

Gumilyov himself liked the verses addressed to him by the poet and critic Erich Höllerbach:

*Is the exquisite giraffe akin to you?  
The hippopotamus, slow and stately,  
And the boa that hides in the thicket of grasses,  
And the rhinoceros, fierce and brave.  
They have found sympathy and a refuge  
In your verses, patterned and chiseled.*

The artist Natalia Goncharova portrayed him riding a giraffe. And the authors of the satirical collection *Parnassus A-Tilt* began their parody of Gumilyov like this:

*At the sources of the somber Congo,  
By the lake Victoria Nyanza...*

Gumilyov also has the story collection *The Palm's Shadow*, the story "An African Hunt. From a Travel Diary," the article "Is Menelik Dead?", a "Note" about Abyssinia. He wrote an article "African Art" the beginning of which has survived. And in 1987 and 1988, parts of a previously unknown *African Diary* by Gumilyov, which he kept during his 1913 journey, were published.

The African theme was not merely important for Gumilyov. In his oeuvre it took up incomparably more space than it did for other Russian writers and poets. And he lived in Africa considerably longer.

How one must fall in love with those faraway lands to speak of them with such brightness and joy:

*Ah, surely, on this very morning  
The drums are beating far too loudly,  
Stretched tight with crocodile skin;  
Too loudly the sorceresses call  
On the cliffs of the Nubian Nile,  
For the heart is tight with pangs,  
The brow is hot and the eyes grow dark,  
And in dreams the lively quay returns,  
The voices of swarthy-faced sailors,  
The merry sea in foamy rags,  
And beyond the sea the gorge of Dar-Fur,  
The forest-galleries of Kordofan,  
And the mighty waters of Bornu.*

Yes, for him, distant lands are, above all, Africa—now romantically beautiful, now crudely realistic.

*Before them the slave traders  
Lead their merchandise proudly;  
People groan in heavy stocks,  
And the whites of their eyes flash in the sun;  
Chieftains ride past out of the desert,  
Pearled threads in their turbans,  
The long feathers of the ostrich streaming  
Above the napes of the prancing horses;  
And the French march by, haughtily,  
Smooth-shaven, in white attire;  
In their pockets papers with seals;  
And seeing them, the lords of Sudan  
Rise from their thrones.*

But why Africa, precisely? And precisely for Gumilyov? What drew it to him? Why did his passion for it last so long? With what notions did Gumilyov go there? With what did

he return? Did living impressions from his journeys affect what he wrote about Africa, or are his lines about it merely the caprices of his fancy?

It is not so easy to answer these questions. Until 1986—his centenary—over many decades even the articles about Gumilyov in our country were published only in encyclopedic editions, and only very brief ones. You cannot learn much from them. Brevity, incidentally, did not protect against errors. In the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia it says: "After the February Revolution of 1917 he was assigned to the Salonika Front, from there he moved to France." [2] But Gumilyov never reached the Salonika Front; he was only in France and in England. The second edition of the GSE avoided mistakes—there simply is no article on Gumilyov there.

In the book *Nikolai Gumilyov's Unpublished and Uncollected Works*, released in Paris in 1986 for Gumilyov's centenary [3], the photograph given as his portrait is that of his contemporary, the poet Boris Sadovsky. And even at home our newspaper *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, which always insistently demands respect for the national past, in 1987 changed Gumilyov's patronymic, calling him Semyonovich [4].

As for the African side of Gumilyov's biography—what can one say? In Gumilyov's lifetime, and for many years afterward, people knew little about Africa—still less than we do now; and even now we do not know all that much. Even with the word "Africa," usage back then was quite free. Osip Mandelstam, writing in 1923 about his meeting with the young Ho Chi Minh, stated that the latter "had been in North and Central Africa" [5], although in reality Ho Chi Minh, working on ships, had seen only a few port cities. And the literary encyclopedias? Sources that are supposed to contain the most reliable information. The article "Gumilyov" in the Literary Encyclopedia of the 1930s says: "The period from 1907 is crisscrossed by journeys: Egypt, Africa, Abyssinia, Italy." [6] Egypt and Abyssinia are, then, not Africa—so what is meant by the word "Africa" there? The article on Gumilyov in the *Concise Literary Encyclopedia* (that volume appeared in the 1960s): "From 1907 G. traveled. He was in Italy, in Africa." [7] What is hidden there under the word "Africa"—which among the many African countries?

If there were inaccuracies and errors even in encyclopedias, what can one say of other publications, both domestic and foreign? In a very solid anthology, *Russian Literature of the Late 19th and Early 20th Century*, published in 1981 in Budapest, it is asserted that Gumilyov traveled in Central Africa [8]. In fact, he was never in any country of Central Africa.

In the preface to a one-volume edition of Gumilyov in the large series *Library of the Poet*, it is said that Gumilyov visited Sudan, and in the winter of 1909–1910 set off for Abyssinia "as part of an expedition organized by Academician V. V. Radlov." [9] Gumilyov was never in Sudan, and that expedition took place in 1913.

So one must agree with the compilers of the already mentioned book *Nikolai Gumilyov. Unpublished and Uncollected*. They observed with sadness that in memoirs, reference

works, and books about him "one can find highly contradictory information about the time and even the number of his trips to Africa." [10]

And Gleb Struve—who devoted much effort to the study of Gumilyov and published a four-volume edition of his works—wrote: "Particularly little has been published up to now about the African period of Gumilyov's life..." [11]

Truly, there is a complete cacophony regarding how many journeys to Africa Gumilyov made and when, how long they lasted, in which lands exactly he managed to be, and what he did there.

There are even more contradictions on a question far more important for understanding not only Gumilyov's work but the destinies of Russian literature. Is Gumilyov's Africa connected with Russian life, with the social and literary currents of his time? Or is it only a matter of the purely personal peculiarities of the poet's interests and character, and his passion is simply a whim and a craving to be original?

"Why did Gumilyov travel?"—this was the topic Mayakovsky included in his talk at a literary evening in the Red Hall of the Moscow Committee of the RCP(b), on Bolshaya Dmitrovka [12], seven years after Gumilyov's death, in September 1928.

To this question, it seems to me, no answer has yet been given.

Must we answer it now, in our day, eighty years after those journeys and the poems connected with them? Perhaps we can apply to them the remark once made by Nina Berberova, who was one of Gumilyov's last pupils: "Mysteries lose their interest with time: who hid under the name of the Man in the Iron Mask no longer matters to anyone, except historians. The publication of Natalya Herzen's letters to Georg Herwegh (in England) passed almost unnoticed; the archive of Heeckeren, published in France, has still not been translated and taken into account in Russia. Everything has its season, and mysteries die, like everything else." [13]

I do not know whether one may call by the grand name "mystery" the lesser-known pages in the life of the knight of the Muse of Far Wanderings, but it seems to me that interest in them has not died. That is why I ventured to write this book—I wished to present materials I had gathered for many years to the judgment of all who are not indifferent to the memory of Gumilyov.

When I began to write, one of my good acquaintances, older and more experienced than I, said: "How did you decide to do this? After all, so many people consider Gumilyov to be something very much their own, personal, intimate—something they have carried in their souls through long, terrible years. In such a sacred feeling there is, after all, a kind of egoism: this is mine, only mine, only I have the indisputable right to it. You know, like when a film is made from my favorite book—it will necessarily seem to me that it was done wrong. Distorted, spoiled—in a word, they failed. And many will feel the same

toward you, even if they do not find obvious mistakes in the book. And if they do find them—watch out! Are you not afraid?"

I am afraid. My only hope is that I, too, am among those who have considered Gumilyov their own, intimate. That I fully respect such feelings in others and was glad that the work on this book gave me the chance to get to know many of them.

Mistakes? Now, after a hiatus of many years, new materials on Gumilyov are appearing almost every month—both here and abroad—and sometimes in such publications where one would not expect them at all. So, no matter how hard one tries, something will be missed. And in general, who is insured against mistakes?

Once Pushkin wrote about his *History of Pugachev*: "I do not know whether I shall be permitted to publish it; at least, in good conscience I have fulfilled the duty of a historian: I sought out the truth with zeal and set it forth without duplicity, neither striving to flatter power nor to flatter fashionable ways of thinking." [14]

Will the author not be taking too much upon himself if he tries to apply these words to his own modest labor?

Let the reader judge.

## Day Dreams

### OKUDZHAVA

*And the woman's name is Road...  
How far she is!*

### VISOTSKY

*What was it then that we could not live with, that we could not sleep with,  
What drove us out upon the high wave?  
We have not yet been granted to behold the radiance—  
That is rare, and radiance is dear.*

### WIFE

*And there are no longer witnesses to events,  
And there is no one with whom to weep, with whom to remember.*

*To the living I was a traitor;  
And faithful—only to a shade.  
— Akhmatova*

I began gathering materials for my first article on Gumilyov in 1962, when, in the "ideological struggle" that had raged for decades, a certain easing seemed to be felt. In

the editorial office of a Moscow oriental studies journal they even heartened me a little, promising to print it. True, they warned me—if the general situation allowed.

The work dragged on. I knew little then. There was no domestic literature on Gumilyov, and I had no access to foreign literature; nor am I sure that it was so fully represented in our libraries.

So I ran into countless uncertainties. Then I resolved to take my questions to Anna Akhmatova. Securing a meeting turned out not to be difficult—I knew people with whom she was friends.

I came with a long list of questions. But I could not ask them all at once. I had to answer, "And why are you so interested in Nikolai Stepanovich?"

I was not prepared for that turn in the conversation. Indeed—why?

Haltingly I told how it began in childhood, in the mid-1930s, when I lived near the house where Gumilyov spent his last years. At that time it was called Radishchev Street, but the old-timers still called Preobrazhenskaya. At its far end had stood the barracks of the Preobrazhensky Regiment.

Near that house a kerosene tank would often stop. A horn sounded loudly. Housewives with cans hurried to fuel their Primus stoves and kerosene burners.

The adults would take me with them to that line. There I heard my mother speaking in a low voice with someone: "There, you see, on the second floor..."

Just a decade and a half earlier, this man walked along the same cobblestone street. Maybe he stood in line. Where else could you go? You could not survive without kerosene—any more than without bread. Poets wrote about kerosene not only in letters but in verse: Blok, Mandelstam, Sorgenfrey. Sadly: "Today, citizen, I slept badly; I traded my soul for kerosene."

Who knows—perhaps the kerosene-seller was the same one, and even the same horse. And in the courtyard the same rag-and-bone-man's cry would ring out: "We buy old stuff..."

I even ended up at the very same school that Gumilyov had attended forty years earlier: at the corner of Ligovka and Basseinaya. Once it had been Bychkov's Gymnasium, where Innokenty Annensky taught Greek, not yet famous as a poet. In Gumilyov's school years the headmaster was no longer Bychkov but Yakov Grigorievich Gurevich, a teacher of history. As for Annensky, as is well known, Gumilyov met him later—already as the director of the Tsarskoe Selo school.

In our family there was an old actor from the Alexandrinsky Theater, Vasily Garlin. When guests gathered, he would recite Gumilyov's poems—most often "By the Hearth"

and "Giraffe." My mother, laughing, would say that he imitated a little too much the manner and intonations of Nikolai Khodotov, idol of the Alexandrinsky. He would not object.

He also told of meetings with Gumilyov. In the poet's lifetime, my grandfather treated him with interest but without reverence—perhaps because he was noticeably older. Admiration for Gumilyov's verse came to him, as to many, after the author's tragic death. And his interest in Gumilyov's life was strengthened by the stories of Olga Nikolaevna Hildebrandt, who performed under the stage name Arbenina and was close to Gumilyov—more often even the retellings of her stories.

Thus, in childhood I imagined Africa from Gumilyov's poems, earlier than from the school textbooks. Those poems kindled in me my first interest in Africa.

In our house we owned all of Gumilyov's collections. In March 1942, already at the ebb of the blockade famine, my mother even managed to barter them for a piece of *duranda*—so Leningraders called oil-cake. And the old actor had died back in January, at the very height of the hunger, when bread could be exchanged only for gold.

In my school and university years I too heard a great deal about Gumilyov—not from teachers and professors, though I graduated from the very university where he had once studied. The years were terrible: the Leningrad Affair, Zhdanovism, the "struggle against kowtowing to the West," the "struggle against cosmopolitanism," the Doctors' Plot. Several instructors were arrested or thrown out of their posts; many awaited dismissal or arrest. Who among them would have dared to speak to schoolchildren and students such seditious names?

And we were taught early on not to ask unnecessary questions. In the very first months of my university life, one of the students in our small group was given ten years. We never found out why.

But one could hear about Gumilyov in the gloomy corridors of the Public Library, once trodden by his feet. In long, sad conversations between darkened bookcases. From people considered failures. "Wrong profile," they would say with forced smiles. That was what made them outcasts, cast them out of science, journalism, and literature. The library remained their only link to their past lives. Conversations with young people—those who agreed to listen—were an outlet for them.

These meetings became my universities. And also conversations with friends of my relatives. Especially with one of them. Both of his grandfathers were actual state councilors—and for that reason, he was not accepted into the university's history department in the 1920s. He started out as an electrician and became an automatic telephony engineer. In the evenings, he wrote articles on the history of Russian culture—for the drawer, of course; publication was out of the question. He had folders with poems

by Gumilyov, Akhmatova, Balmont, and Kuzmin, handwritten. He gave them to me to read.

...Anna Andreyevna [Akhmatova] listened. Memories of the siege, it seemed, never left her, and she vividly recalled such starving boys as I once was.

She asked if I was a native Petersburger. After a slight hesitation, I admitted that I was born in a Siberian taiga village, in exile. Back then, people preferred to keep such personal information to themselves. But I think this, more than anything, weakened the mistrust that, as I had been warned, had long ago—and not without reason—emerged in Anna Andreyevna toward visitors, even acquaintances of her friends. Encouraged by her, I couldn't resist telling her about some of my troubles. Well, she'd heard worse.

In response, she told how many of her acquaintances had paid dearly for meetings with her. And how, when she came home, she'd find that someone had cut up the spines of her books—they must have been looking for something illicit.

She listened with interest about the Alexandrinsky Theatre's actors. She knew them. And about Preobrazhenskaya Street—perhaps because she had never been there with her first husband. At least, that's what I understood.

She approved of the theme "Gumilyov and Africa." She immediately said that Gumilyov deeply loved the traveler in himself and wanted others to see him in this light. She recalled that he had wanted to visit Africa back in 1907, when he had lived in Paris for a long time, but hadn't been able to.

According to her, in the autumn of 1908 Gumilyov decided to set out for Egypt, and from there either to the East—to Palestine—or to the West—to Italy. The plans were not especially definite. There was little money, and the journey turned out short: only to Cairo and Alexandria.

Anna Andreyevna remembered this journey well. No doubt because both on the way to Egypt and on the way back Gumilyov stopped in Kiev to see her—nineteen-year-old Anna Gorenko [later known by her pen name Anna Akhmatova]. Once again he urged her to become his wife.

When I met her, she mentioned the poem "Ezbekieh," which Gumilyov wrote much later—some ten years after that first trip. It was clear that Anna Andreyevna viewed Gumilyov's first encounter with Africa through the images of that poem. Naturally, when I got home I immediately opened the collection *The Bonfire* and found those verses. And, it seems, I understood Akhmatova's feelings when I read the very first lines:

*I was tormented by a woman then.  
And the salty, fresh sea breeze,  
Not the din of exotic bazaars—*

*Nothing could console me.  
I prayed to God for death then,  
And I was ready to hasten it myself.*

After that first short trip, Anna Akhmatova said, Gumilyov visited Africa twice. Later she described Gumilyov's two African journeys. The first was shortly after their marriage. [they were married April 1910.] He left in the autumn of 1910 and came back on March 25, 1911 (Old Style), on a ship named the Feast of the Annunciation. The second was from April to August 1913. He collected Abyssinian and Somali songs. After his return he gave away several paintings by artists from there, and he kept for himself a tropical fever.

She recalled that Gumilyov brought an Abyssinian triptych and something else to Professor Turaev. I was delighted to hear this. It meant that Gumilyov knew the leading Egyptologist and the founder of Russian Ethiopian studies. By that time Boris Aleksandrovich Turaev already had a worldwide scholarly reputation. When and how had they become acquainted? How did they regard one another? Which of Turaev's works had Gumilyov read? Turaev knew the written sources on the history of Abyssinia perfectly, but had never been there. With what envy, one imagines, he must have looked at Gumilyov—the eyewitness, the man who had been there. And how interesting it was for Gumilyov to share his impressions with a true connoisseur. I tried to ask Akhmatova about all this. But, alas, it was no longer preserved in her memory.

During his 1913 trip to Abyssinia and Somalia, Anna Andreyevna said, Gumilyov kept a diary. He wanted to publish it, but didn't have time. She had the diary, then she gave it to someone for safekeeping and lost track of it long ago. She said she would now do everything possible to find it, and if she did, she would let me read it.

In addition, a book about this journey was prepared for publication. It was written by Gumilyov's companion, the son of his half-sister, Alexandra Stepanovna, née Sverchkova. When they set out on their journey, Kolya was only seventeen years old. He died young. In 1921, when publishing his collection *The Tent*, Gumilyov dedicated it "To the memory of my comrade in African travels, Nikolai Leonidovich Sverchkov."

In 1920 or 1921, Sverchkov's manuscript was sent to Z. I. Grzhebiia's publishing house (it operated not only in Petrograd and Moscow, but also in Berlin, and published, among other things, books about travel). Anna Andreyevna didn't know the manuscript's fate—most likely, it was simply lost. She believed that the numerous photographs Sverchkov took along the way were also lost.

She didn't know the manuscript's title, what it was, or who submitted it to the publisher. Anna Andreyevna recalled that in 1919, Grzhebin had published Gumilyov's translation of Gilgamesh, and she became captivated by the story of the hopes that many Petrograd

writers, including Gumilyov, had placed in Grzhebin at the time. Somehow I couldn't bring the conversation back to Sverchkov's manuscript, and it didn't seem like Aina Andreyevna could say anything else about it.

She insisted that most of Gumilyov's African poems (the entire collection *The Tent*) were based not on personal impressions, but were conceived before his travels, at least until the very end. *The Tent* was prepared as a verse textbook for studying geography, probably for Grzhebija.

She'd casually remarked more than once, "But this is in *Works and Days*." I didn't know what it was back then, and after the third or fourth mention, I decided to ask.

"Well, of course, it was Lukitsky, his *Works and Days of Gumilyov*."

So I learned that the writer Pavel Nikolaevich Lukitsky had been compiling a chronicle of Gumilyov's life, day by day, since the mid-1920s, and that Anna Andreyevna tried to help him.

In connection with Gumilyov's travels, she recalled the poet Vladimir Narbut's trip to Abyssinia in the winter of 1912/13. The poet Vladimir Narbut traveled to Abyssinia in the winter of 1912/13.

She said that Vladimir Ivanovich [Narbut] was forced to leave Russia for a while—his collection *Hallelujah* had displeased the authorities. Gumilyov advised him to choose Addis Ababa, and afterward they exchanged impressions.

Later, already in the 70s, Valentin Kataev wrote in his book of memoirs, *My Diamond Crown*, where he brought out Narbut under the name of Kolchenogiy, that Gumilyov and Narbut hunted lions and rhinos together in Equatorial Africa. In fact, Gumilyov and Narbut did not travel together and at different times.

And the places they visited are not usually called Equatorial Africa.

I asked about Gumilyov's relations with Narbut—their political views seemed very different, for Narbut had become a Bolshevik even before October.

Anna Andreyevna answered that the relations were good. Gumilyov valued Narbut's poetry and in one of his reviews called it bright. And Akhmatova herself dedicated a poem to him. Before the First World War they were comrades in the Guild of Poets. As for Gumilyov's political views, said Anna Andreyevna, there was scarcely any point in discussing them seriously ("What sort of politician was he? He was a naive man"). And Narbut's views? Those too did not take shape at once.

She judged them as a woman seasoned by seventy-five years of life—judging quite inexperienced youths.

She mentioned that Gumilyov, like many poets of his generation, did not even like to read newspapers. On hearing this I recalled with what disgust Marina Tsvetaeva wrote about newspaper readers:

*Better to go to the cemetery,  
Than to the festering hospital  
Of scab-scratchers,  
Of newspaper readers!*

Of course I asked why Gumilyov became so fascinated with Abyssinia and with Africa in general.

"I don't know," she said, "probably the times were like that. Books of travel, tales..."

And she remembered how guards officers in Tsarskoe Selo, where Gumilyov and Akhmatova lived, would boast of their journeys to Abyssinia: "Well, what is there to it—to go to Africa and bring back a little black boy."

There was nothing incredible in this. The well-known traveler, a hussar cornet who later became a monk of the great schema, Aleksandr Ksaverievich Bulatovich, really did return from one of his journeys with an Ethiopian boy and named him Vaska. The boy later returned to Abyssinia, and Bulatovich was planning to visit him.

After a pause, Anna Andreyevna added that on his last trip, in 1913, Gumilyov may have seen lands unvisited by Europeans before. And that in 1918 he dreamed of a new trip to Africa. She asked if I remembered his poems about the Museum of Ethnography. Of course, I did.

There's an ethnographic museum in this city  
Above the Neva, wide as the Nile, full-flowing,  
When I tire of being just a poet,  
I'll find nothing more desirable than it.

I go there to touch the savage things,  
Which I once brought from afar,  
To smell their strange, familiar, and ominous scent.  
The scent of incense, animal hair, and roses.

And I see how the sultry sun blazes,  
A leopard, arched, crawls toward the enemy,  
And how in a smoky hut my old servant awaits me  
For a joyful hunt.

She recalled that Gumilyov loved to recount his African adventures at the Stray Dog soirées and would sometimes stay late into the night, missing the last train home to Tsarskoye Selo. Anna Andreyevna herself, she said, attended far less frequently. And

generally, she spoke of the "dog" soirées without much enthusiasm. There wasn't much that was truly interesting there. Not all the poets and writers who came there were truly worthy of attention. Moreover, there was a large, motley crowd who had nothing to do with literature and came to gawk. The poet regulars called them somewhat mockingly—"pharmacists," I think.

I asked to what Gumilyov owed his varied interests and broad outlook. Was it to that vibrant society that, as it seemed to me, had gathered then in Tsarskoye Selo? Anna Andreyevna, to my surprise, protested vehemently. Society, she said, was boring, life monotonous, the influence of educated Petersburg was barely felt, even though it was nearby. And even Gumilyov's first poems were poorly received there—they even wrote sarcastic parodies. So Gumilyov owed his education mainly to himself—and to St. Petersburg. Anna Andreyevna cited only the influence of the poet Innokenty Annensky as beneficial.

And she spoke of the Petersburg of her childhood without the saccharine sentimentality you encounter in many memoirs. Listening attentively, I couldn't write it down verbatim, but later I learned that in her unfinished memoirs she painted the same picture:

"He was covered from head to toe in tasteless signs - underwear, corsets, hats, no greenery at all, no grass, no flowers, all to the sound of drumbeats, reminiscent of the death penalty, in good French, in grandiose funeral processions and described by Mandelstam in the highest prose."

When she mentioned how emigrant writers wrote about Gumilyov, a look of hostility crossed her face. She sharply replied about Georgii Ivanov's *Petersburg Winters*. Irina Odoevtseva [Georgii's wife] was criticized for her stories that Anna Andreyevna had heard.

I tried to understand the source of her irritation, subsequently reading *Petersburg Winters* and *On the Banks of the Neva*, published in 1967. Georgii Ivanov's memoirs are quite clear. In his vividly written book, he, I think, did not strive for authenticity and objectivity at all. And even less so in his essay "On Gumilyov."

In "On Gumilyov", for example, we read: "He did not travel as a tourist. He ventured into unexplored regions, studied folklore, reconciled native petty kings at odds with one another. At times he even fought battles. The blacks of the detachment he had formed sang as they marched across the Sahara." And he quoted the words of the song:

*"There is no rifle better than the Mauser!  
There is no sergeant-major better than Z-Bel-Bek!  
There is no commander better than Gumilekh!"*

But Gumilyov did not stage battles. He never managed to reach the Sahara. The Africans with whom he traveled had no "sergeant-majors." Nor did Abyssinia have any "petty

kings". Abyssinia was a centralized state headed by an emperor. And the *song* must have been invented by Georgii Ivanov himself.

And Narbut in *Petersburg Winters* is turned into a rather simple fellow, almost as if he were about to suck his mitten. Ivanov probably mocked him so viciously because Narbut belonged to the Bolsheviks, whom he hated. Ivanov might not have known about Narbut's horrific end.

In the summer of 1988 I visited Peredelkino, where Irina Vladimirovna Odoevtseva—returned after long years of emigration and whom Gumilyov liked to call his pupil, even his first pupil—was then staying. I asked her about her husband Georgii Ivanov's recollections as well. Without hesitation she replied that one should not look for an exact account of events in that book: "It's a literary work."

As for Odoevtseva's own recollections—the book and also her oral accounts—they seem to me more objective. This was because she had a quality that is rare among memoirists: the lack of egocentrism. She did not place herself, as many do, at the center of events. And in her judgments about those who had passed away, she tried to be kindly, to remember the good. Could this be the secret of her astonishing longevity? Perhaps she realized this long ago? After all, she wrote in one of her poems:

*We walk along the embankment at night,  
How wonderful it is—we walk, silently together.  
And we see the Seine, a tree, the cathedral  
And the clouds...*

*And this conversation  
We'll put off until tomorrow, until later.  
Until the day after tomorrow...  
Until when we die.*

Odoevtseva always strove to appear cheerful and carefree in her poetry.

*In dreams and in reality,  
I live with pleasure.*

Although at the same time, she took Blok's words as an epigraph to one of her poems:

*Stars, stars, where does such melancholy come from!*

Back then, in Peredelkino, in response to my questions, she largely repeated what she had already said in her book, *On the Banks of the Neva*. But in the real-life account, it sounded more vivid and even somehow more believable.

She insisted on the complete truthfulness of everything she had written about Gumilyov's participation in "counterrevolutionary activities" and about the leaflet he had prepared for the Kronstadt rebels. She repeated this later on a television program.

But, she told me, there was something else. She felt that, although he was apolitical and yet very ambitious, Gumilyov might have somehow changed his attitude toward the authorities, if they had clearly recognized his talent and importance.

I was extremely interested in the details not included in the book. After long conversations, I decided to ask even more sensitive questions. Even this one: "You wrote that on the eve of his arrest, Gumilyov had begun a new affair, and he eagerly awaited the arrival of this lover, but he was arrested literally on the eve of the arranged meeting. But you didn't mention her name. Perhaps you could mention her now? After all, she's probably long dead."

"Oh, no, she's alive and well."

And, coquettishly placing her finger to her lips, she told me the name of the famous writer. And, laughing, she added: "Of course, of course, Georges, I remember helping him clean out that bachelor apartment on Preobrazhenskaya."

She called her late—and then future—husband, Georgii Ivanov, "Georges."

It's a shame that Odoevtseva's work is generally little known in our country, aside from her two books of memoirs. And she has a very good novel about Stalin's terror, *Abandon Hope Forever*. And her poetry? It's not that many people praised it, even Trotsky (she mentioned this to me with some pride). She really does have quite a few truly good poems.

Whatever the flaws in Odoevtseva's memoirs, her book, *On the Banks of the Neva*, contains far more information about Gumilyov than any other memoir. It is the first book devoted almost entirely to Gumilyov.

And how accurate are Odoevtseva's reports and her assessments? Here's a review from Boris Vasilyevich Anrep, a friend of Akhmatova. Anrep knew Gumilyov well. When leaving London in 1918, Gumilyov left his archive and belongings to him. In 1968, Gleb Struve sent Anrep photocopies of a book dedicated to Gumilyov from the book *On the Banks of the Neva*. Anrep replied: "I think her long conversations with Gumilyov have been worked over somewhat, but, so far as I remember my own conversations with him, they remain true to his character... My general conclusion about Odoevtseva's recollections is that they may have been used literarily and condensed, but they are close to the truth. I speak only of her characterization of Gumilyov."

Odoevtseva also spoke about Gumilyov in the chapters of her third book of memoirs, *On the Banks of Lethe*, which remained unfinished. She dictated these chapters to Aleksandr

Radashkevich at her home in Paris, on Rue Casablanca, and then edited the transcript. Odoevtseva was already ninety. They were published after her death, at the end of 1990, in the Paris newspaper *Russkaya Mysl'*.

The most one can reproach Odoevtseva for, it seems, is the rosy color of her reminiscences. One gets the impression that the final years of Gumilyov's life were easy and cheerful: merry walks in the Tauride Garden, pranks, jokes... The hardships of those terrible years Odoevtseva does not conceal, but they are somehow in the background. "All the days then were merry. Those were the days of the winter of 1920/21, and their merriment was indeed not without madness. Cold, hunger, arrests, executions. And the poets made merry and laughed in dying Petrograd..."

Or: "Thus did the poets make merry. So childishly, artlessly, ingenuously. They laughed to tears at what, perhaps, from the outside did not even seem funny..."; "Everyone is laughing again. Yes, probably nowhere and never did poets laugh so much as in those fabulous years..."; "Everyone was more or less in love,"

But Gumilyov had to feed his family. His mother, wife, two children. His previous life hadn't prepared him for this. Hungry and cold, St. Petersburg was incredibly difficult for him. Besides, he was a "former" one [from former days]. So for him, there wasn't always time for walks, jokes, and pranks.

But Odoevtseva is young. These are her first successes in life. And where, of course? Among such interesting people. So can she be blamed for writing about those years with such tenderness, almost half a century later? After all, whatever comes to pass will be sweet...

And of Akhmatova—with a deep, almost prayerful tremor. As a poet, Odoevtseva simply idolized her. And she judged Akhmatova's relations with Gumilyov with the utmost respect. "I am certain that Akhmatova was the principal love of Gumilyov's life and that until his very death—despite his many infatuations—he never ceased to love her."

Of her lone meeting with Akhmatova after Gumilyov's death she wrote: "If I had dared, I would have tried to explain to her that: Gumilyov did not blame her for anything, that he would have said —just as in her poem—'Enough! You see, I've forgiven you too,' that he loved her until his very death."

Reverence for Akhmatova pervades Odoevtseva's book. "Oh, I would have given five, ten years of my life," she exclaims, "just to walk with her like that and listen to her all night until dawn."

Anna Andreyevna could not have known any of this: the book *On the Banks of the Neva* appeared when she was no longer among the living.

What, then, provoked her sharp judgments? Doubtless she was irritated in general that many who scarcely knew her, and who had long since emigrated, presumed to pass

judgment on her and on her terrible fate. Is it not offensive that they there, far away, could publish memoirs, while she here could not! And people would learn about her, about her life, from these alien books.

I did not, however, bring myself to ask Anna Andreyevna about all this. In general, I didn't ask anywhere near as many questions as I had. It was impossible to interrupt Akhmatova when she got carried away and began recounting.

In passing she remarked that Gumilyov would have been surprised to learn which poems she had recently translated.

"Which ones?" I asked.

*"The Lyric Poetry of Ancient Egypt."*

Literally a few days later I learned that the idea of bringing out *The Lyric Poetry of Ancient Egypt* in good translations came from to the Orientalist and my old friend Isidor Savvich Katsnelson. It was he who persuaded Anna Andreyevna to undertake the translations. She must have agreed because, from youth, she had heard of the poetry of the ancient Egyptians—both from Gumilyov and from her second husband, the noted scholar of the Ancient Near East, Vladimir (his full name was Voldemar-Georg-Anna-Maria) Kazimirovich Shileiko.

I read the manuscript of the translations, which were later included in the book *The Lyric Poetry of Ancient Egypt*. I remember these lines from her translations:

*Lamentations save no one from the grave.  
Therefore celebrate the lovely day  
and do not wear yourself out.  
You see, no one has taken his possessions with him.  
You see, none who has departed has come back again.*

The title of this poem is much closer in spirit to Gumilyov than to Akhmatova: "Song from the House of the Deceased King Antef, Performed before the Lyre-Player."

Anna Andreyevna also mentioned in passing that Balmont had translated Egyptian love songs. She didn't say anything negative about his translations.

Soon I found Gumilyov's review of them. He called them "molasses." "How can one explain to K. Balmont, who wrote an essay on Egyptian love poetry, "That there must be a connection between the most beautiful words, and that the essence of sugar tastes bitter?" As an example, Gumilyov cited a sample of Balmont's prose: "The Egyptian turtledove resembles in its tenderness and subtlety of feeling even more the Indian lover, whose name is Radha and whose amorous dreams and lamentations fill the charming poem of Jayadeva..." And "in the translations of the Egyptian songs themselves, there is nothing Egyptian at all - only Balmont of the later period."

Gumilyov wrote this in 1911 and must have shared his impressions with his wife. Did Anna Akhmatova recalled this half a century later, when she herself began working on ancient Egyptian poetry? In any case, her translations cannot be called saccharine.

At most, the only reproach one can make to Odoevtseva is the rosy coloring of her reminiscences. One gets the impression that the last years of Gumilyov's life were easy and high-spirited. Cheerful walks in the Tauride Garden, pranks, jokes... She does not hush up the hardships of those terrible years, but somehow they remain in the background. "All the days then were merry. Those were the days of the winter of 1920/21, and their merriment was indeed not devoid of madness. Cold, hunger, arrests, executions. And the poets made merry and laughed in the dying Petrograd..." Or again: "That is how the poets made merry—so childishly, ingenuously, artlessly. They laughed till they cried at things that, from the outside, perhaps did not even seem funny..." "All are laughing again. Yes, probably nowhere and never did poets laugh so much as 'in those fabulous years'..." "Everyone was more or less in love." [4]

Yet Gumilyov had to feed a family—his mother, his wife, and two children. His previous life had not prepared him for that. In hungry, cold Petersburg it was very hard indeed. Besides, he was 'one of the former people.' So there was not always leisure for strolls, jokes, and pranks.

But Odoevtseva was young; these were her first successes in life—and where? In the circle of such interesting people. Can one reproach her that later, almost half a century on, she would write about those years with such tenderness? For what has passed becomes dear...

And about Akhmatova—she writes with deep, almost prayerful trembling. As a poet, Odoevtseva practically idolized her. And she judged her relations with Gumilyov with the utmost respect: "I am sure that Akhmatova was the great love of Gumilyov's life and that up to his very death—despite his numerous infatuations—he did not stop loving her."

Of her only meeting with Akhmatova, already after Gumilyov's death: "If I had dared, I would have explained to her that Gumilyov did not blame her for anything; that, as in her poem 'Enough! You could have said...', he too could have said that he loved her to the very end."

Odoevtseva's reverence before Akhmatova permeates the book. "Oh, I would give five, ten years of my life—only to walk with her and listen to her all night until dawn."

All of this Anna Andreevna could not have read: the book *On the Shores of the Neva* came out when she was no longer alive. Why then her harsh judgments? It must be that she was irritated that many who did not really know her, and who had long since gone abroad, allowed themselves to pass judgment about her and her terrible fate. Is it not offensive that they, over there, far away, could publish their reminiscences, while she,

here, could not! And that people would come to know about her, about her life, from those alien books.

But I did not dare ask Anna Andreevna about any of this. And in general, of course, I asked far, far from all my questions. It was impossible to interrupt Akhmatova when she grew carried away and began to tell something.

In passing she said that Gumilyov would have been surprised to learn what poems she had recently translated.

"Which ones?" I asked.

"The lyric poetry of Ancient Egypt."

Literally a few days later I learned that the idea of publishing the lyric poetry of Ancient Egypt in good translations belonged to the Orientalist, my older friend Isidor Savvich Katznelson. He it was who persuaded Anna Andreevna to undertake the translations.

She probably agreed because from her youth she had heard so much about the poetry of the ancient Egyptians—both from Gumilyov and from her second husband, the famous specialist in the Ancient Near East, Vladimir (his full name was Voldemar-Georg-Anna-Maria) Kazimirovich Shileiko.

I also read the translation manuscripts. They were later included in the book *The Lyric Poetry of Ancient Egypt*. What stuck in my memory in Akhmatova's translations were the lines:

Lamentations save no one from the grave.  
Therefore, celebrate the beautiful day  
and do not wear yourself out.  
You see, no one has taken his possessions with him.  
You see, none of those who have gone has returned.

The title of that poem is much closer to Akhmatova: "A Song from the House of the Deceased King Antef, Performed before the Singer with the Harp."

Just as incidentally, Anna Andreevna mentioned that Balmont had translated some of those love songs. She said nothing bad about his translations.

Soon I found Gumilyov's comment on them. He called those translations "molasses."  
"How can one explain to K. Balmont, who wrote an essay on Egyptian love poetry, that among the most beautiful, to Gumilyov, are the pages in the book *On the Shores of the Neva?* that between the sweetest words there must be a connection, and that the essence of sugar tastes bitter?" As an example, Gumilyov cited a specimen of Balmont's prose:  
"The Egyptian turtledove recalls, in the tenderness and subtlety of its feeling, even more

the Indian beloved whose name is Radha, and whose amorous dreams and laments fill Jayadeva's enchanting poem..." And "in the translation of the Egyptian songs themselves there is nothing Egyptian—only Balmont of his last period." [6]

Gumilyov was writing this in 1911 and, no doubt, shared his impressions with his wife. Did Anna Andreevna remember this half a century later, when she herself took up ancient Egyptian lyric? In any case, you could not call her translations "molasses."

...On the broad windowsill to the right of Anna Andreevna, in her tiny six-meter room, lay photographs recently made by re-photographing the old ones. On top were precisely photographs of Gumilyov. But she did not show them to me, and I did not ask—I hoped I would still have time. I would do more work, get the final consent of the journal... She promised to see me again, adding:

"Please, here on Ordynka, or find out where else I will be. But in Moscow. In Leningrad—no."

And in a half-voice, as if speaking to herself:

"There it didn't always end well..."

I began to look for the materials mentioned by Akhmatova. But the immediate occasion fell away. Soon the ideological freeze strengthened, and they refused to print my article: the topic "doesn't pass."

The work proceeded more slowly. Without a direct assignment it felt wrong to steal time from Anna Andreevna. It seemed there would be time enough. I saw her again only in 1966, on a gloomy morning of March 9, in the far reaches of the Sklifosovsky Hospital, in the morgue, where hundreds of Muscovites came to say farewell. The brief, spontaneously arisen funeral gathering in the drizzling rain was opened by Viktor Efimovich Arlov, in whose apartment I had last seen her.

Many years later, in 1978, when I opened another issue of the archival series *Encounters with the Past*, I found a trace of that conversation of ours. In the survey of Anna Akhmatova's notebooks prepared by the archivist E. I. Lyamkina, there is an entry for that time under the heading "Gumilyov and Africa." Here it is:

"*The Tent* is a commissioned book of geography in verse and has no relation to his journeys. In 1908 he was in Capri (Ezbekiye). There were two journeys: one lasted half a year. He left in the autumn of 1910 and returned on 25 March [Old Style] 1911. He was in Addis Ababa, via Djibouti. The second time he left in 1913 with an open letter from the Academy of Sciences, with his nephew Nikolai Leonidovich Sverchkov (his sister's son), to acquire articles of daily life (ethnography). The article 'Shark Fishing' (in Niva). There was an African diary. In *Works and Days* and something in *Niva* ('Somalia'), there

may be some details. African hunts. (Narbuth in Abyssinia.) African fever. He presented the triptych to Prof. Turaev. He recorded songs. There may exist letters from the road and from the place... Sverchkov's book about the 1913 journey was given to the Grzhebin Publishing House and, apparently, was lost there." [7]

So Anna Andreevna not only told me, she also certified in writing that the trip to Cairo, with a visit to the famous garden, was in 1908.

Just as definitely, Anna Andreevna named two long journeys: from the autumn of 1910 to 25 March 1911, and in 1913. Nevertheless, in the journal *Nashe Nasledie* in 1989 there appeared an article "New Information about the African Journeys of N. Gumilyov." Its author claimed for himself the honor of discovering the first major journey of Gumilyov to Africa, informing readers: "And now, after receiving additional material, it can be considered that he was there in 1910–1911 as well." [8]

It would seem that we all now cherish every line that issued from the pen of Anna Akhmatova. Why then did those to whom it was simply necessary not pay attention to these her testimonies?

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THAT CONVERSATION

*I love the feel of the years that are gone...*

— David Samoilov

...Almost thirty years have passed since Anna Andreevna told me all this... Gumilyov's Africa has lived with me all these years. Questionings, searches—if only from time to time and more often fruitless—yet sometimes also findings.

And although I did not speak with Anna Andreevna again, it seems to me I came to understand her and everything she said that evening better. I understood more clearly her words that it would be better next time to see her in Moscow as well—"in Leningrad one shouldn't. There it did not always end well."

At the time I listened above all to the story about Gumilyov and paid less attention to those words. Of course I knew much about her fate. And yet only later did I truly feel how much Anna Andreevna must have suffered in her beloved city because of surveillance and denunciations, how many storms thundered over her head and how many lightning bolts struck her loved ones, if even afterwards she feared to cast suspicion upon people with whom she met.

Many times I returned to that conversation. And more than once I became convinced of the justice of everything Akhmatova had said. Her assessment of spiritual life in Tsarskoe Selo had seemed to me then almost blasphemous. But later I read the reminiscences of

the poet Dmitry Klenovsky, who studied at the same Tsarskoe Selo gymnasium as Gumilyov.

"In the 'City of the Muses'—Tsarskoe Selo—two entirely dissimilar worlds existed side by side for a long time, right up to the Revolution. One of them was the solemn world of splendid palaces and vast parks with ponds, swans, statues, and pavilions—a world in which, contrary to all sound artistic sense, classical colonnades, Turkish minarets, and Chinese pagodas coexisted so harmoniously side by side. And the second world (right there, around the corner!) was the world of a dusty in summer and snow-covered in winter semi-provincial garrison town with one-story wooden houses behind carved palisades, with hussars marching to the bathhouse carrying bath brooms under their arms, with a white cathedral on an empty square and with an equally empty market arcade where the town's only bookshop, that of Mitrofanov, in essence did business only once a year—in August, on the opening day of the local schools.")

Klenovsky's impressions of the gymnasium itself were no better: "In the filthy classrooms behind carved-up desks, mustachioed loafers raised a racket and carried on, contriving to sit two years in every class, or even more. The teachers were of a piece with their pupils. Somewhat drunk, Father Deacon would come into class and doze comfortably on the rostrum. With the look of a crest-plumed sick bird, the half-insane mathematics teacher, Maryan Genrikhovich, scowled from beneath his overhanging gray brows. As for Annensky himself, he showed up in the corridors two or three times a week, not more often." [9]

I learned much about Gumilyov's Tsarskoe Selo years and indeed about his whole subsequent life from Vsevolod Aleksandrovich Rozhdestvensky. I was introduced to him by his daughter, Milena Vsevolodovna, and her husband, the Leningrad Ethiopianist Sevir Borisovich Chernetsov.

Rozhdestvensky had known Gumilyov since the time of study at the Tsarskoe Selo Boys' Gymnasium. True, Vsevolod Aleksandrovich was younger, but his older brother Platon was in the same class with Gumilyov, and his sister Olga—in the same class as Akhmatova at the Tsarskoe Selo Girls' Gymnasium.

Later, already after the Revolution, Vsevolod Aleksandrovich attended Gumilyov's lectures on the theory of versification; he worked with him in the publishing house World Literature and prepared translations of the ballads about Robin Hood.

In Saltykov-Shchedrin's *History of a Town* it is said: "...since the archival files, as usual, turned out to have burned (or perhaps were deliberately destroyed), it was necessary to content oneself with oral accounts and traditions." These words have to this day not at all lost their sense; perhaps they have become even more true. And not in the last place do they apply to the gathering of testimonies about Gumilyov.

Viktor Andronikovich Manuilov, an excellent literary scholar and a fine man, told me how, sometime, a few years after Gumilyov's death, he rented a room in Tsarskoe Selo, in the house where Gumilyov had lived—simply in order to try to find at least some lost scraps of manuscripts. In vain...

But he, one may say, himself created a unique document for Gumilyov's biography. He gave to the patriarch of Soviet African studies, my university teacher Dmitry Alekseevich Olderogge, his own copy of *The Tent* and asked him to annotate it.

Dmitry Alekseevich filled all the margins of that volume with his minute handwriting. These are explanations of names and terms to the African poems. More than that—it is an attempt to penetrate the laboratory of Gumilyov's "stirring and strange" world.

Quite a bit of information can after all be found in the Petersburg and Moscow archives—even letters by Gumilyov from Africa and from the road.

There have been preserved large collections of African utensils, items of everyday life and culture, brought by Gumilyov in 1913—and the inventories of these collections compiled by him. All of this is kept in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg.

There have been found also some of the materials that Anna Andreevna considered lost. A collection of photographs (negatives) brought by Gumilyov and Sverchkov has been discovered, together with a detailed inventory of 243 negatives compiled by Sverchkov in early 1914. The collection and the inventory are likewise kept in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. For decades no one consulted this collection, and it was somehow forgotten. Only in 1988 were first prints made from the negatives—unfortunately, already very faded by time (and, at first, far from all of them were successful). Some of these were reproduced in the documentary film *African Hunt*, directed by the Leningrad filmmaker I. Alimpiev.

The African Diary of 1913 has also been found—at least some parts of it.

The diary's fate proved complicated. Anna Andreevna told me that the diary had been in her possession and that, in a difficult time, she gave it to acquaintances but was not able to get it back. True, she told me that hope was not lost. But during her lifetime, as far as I know, the diary did not return to her.

I questioned Pavel Nikolaevich Luknitsky, the compiler of *The Works and Days of Gumilyov*, about this diary in 1968. I did not have the opportunity to meet him, and I put my questions by telephone (already after his death his widow, Vera Konstantinovna, permitted me to become acquainted with some of the material he had gathered).

Luknitsky's contemporaries had different attitudes toward *The Works and Days*. Konstantin Vaginov, in the novel *Goat Song*, portrayed Luknitsky under the name of Misha Kotikov, who gathers material about the deceased Petersburg poet "Zayevfratsky" (read: Gumilyov) and persistently pesters the poet's widow: "And what kind of nose did Aleksandr Petrovich have? And how long were his arms? And did Aleksandr Petrovich wear starched collars or prefer soft ones? And did Aleksandr Petrovich drum his fingers on the windowpane?"

As a result of these interrogations, Vaginov mocked, "Misha Kotikov learned everything: how many birthmarks there were on Aleksandr Petrovich's body, how many calluses; he learned that in 191... Aleksandr Petrovich had a boil on his back; that Aleksandr Petrovich loved coconuts; that during his marriage to Yekaterina Ivanovna he had a multitude of mistresses—but that he loved her very much." But "the harvest of information of another kind—the poet's work, his thoughts about art—turned out somewhat poorer."

Vaginov knew Gumilyov. Gumilyov praised his poems. Vaginov's wife studied in Gumilyov's poetry seminar and for a time lived with him in the same house—the House of Arts on Nevsky. So Vaginov must have considered himself entitled to pass judgment on the degree of value of the information collected by Luknitsky. Yet he is unjust. Luknitsky—and, after his death, his wife and son—did much to preserve the memory of Gumilyov.

Alas, Luknitsky was not very interested in Gumilyov's fascination with faraway lands—so he told me. Later, traveling as a tourist along the Nile, he did recall Gumilyov's wanderings, and in 1959 he himself wrote a story about an African. And the fate of his brother, Kirill Nikolaevich, also turned out to be linked with Abyssinia: in the 1930s he wrote several articles about its history and economy.

According to Pavel Nikolaevich, *The African Diary* was once in his possession. If I understood correctly, he received the diary from Gumilyov's second wife, Anna Nikolaevna Engelhardt, back in the 1920s when he was writing his diploma thesis about Gumilyov. But at the turn of the 1920s–1930s, setting off for a long time to the Pamirs, he brought the diary to Anna Akhmatova. She later gave it into the safekeeping of other people. The war...

Pavel Nikolaevich expressed regret that he could not include quotes from *The African Diary* into *The Works and Days*—only the dates connected with the journeys. He, like Anna Andreevna, did not lose hope that the diary would yet be found.

And the diary did indeed come to light—but only in 1987, when both Anna Andreevna and Pavel Nikolaevich had long since passed away. True, it did not appear in its

entirety—only in part. And it is hard to say whether it is that very part which Akhmatova and Luknitsky had in mind.

The portion that has been found consists of fourteen sheets from a school notebook. They were kept by Gumilyov's sister, Alexandra Stepanovna Sverchkova, the mother of "Kolya-the-Little." In 1951 she sent them to Orest Nikolaevich Vysotsky, the son of Gumilyov and the actress Olga Nikolaevna Vysotskaya.

At the beginning of 1987, Orest Nikolaevich handed them over to the editorial office of the magazine *Ogonyok*, accompanying them with a letter in which he regretfully stated that "some of the sheets have been lost," and that the surviving ones were written "in a small, illegible hand, in black ink that had grown slightly faded. The text contains corrections, slips, some words are crossed out. Some entries in the diary are struck through."

The history of this diary is a subject in its own right and, as yet, not very clear.

Closely connected with the part published in 1987 is the work that Gumilyov himself published in August 1916 in the Monthly Literary and Popular-Science Supplements to the journal *Niva*. It is entitled "African Hunt." The subtitle is "From a Travel Diary" (catching a shark in the Red Sea, hunting a leopard not far from a Somali village, hunting a lion, a drive in the tropical forest). Nowhere did Gumilyov indicate to which of his journeys these events of his life belonged. But one of the episodes of the African Diary—catching a shark in April 1913—appears in "African Hunt" almost word for word.

Most likely, the Diary and the Hunt are parts of one and the same diary of the 1913 journey (although African Hunt may also include impressions of earlier journeys).

In 1988, Doctor of Geological and Mineralogical Sciences V. V. Bronguleev reported in the journal *Nashe Nasledie* [*Our Heritage*] that back in the early 1960s he had bought from the autograph collector V. G. Danilevsky two little notebooks of Gumilyov's diary entries. Danilevsky kept his priceless collection—which included autographs of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Hugo, Balzac, and of Russian tsars—for years in an old suitcase in the lodge at the entrance to the Moscow Carburetor Plant on Shabolovka. Like the underground millionaire Koreiko, he considered this the most reliable option.

In these notebooks only one precise date is indicated: 4 (17) July 1913; but in Bronguleev's opinion, they describe events from 4 June to 20 or 21 July 1913. Unfortunately, Bronguleev did not publish Gumilyov's entries, giving this strange explanation: "Since the second diary was not intended for publication, I present from it only separate excerpts, and I set out the description of the journey in my own words." If one reasons this way, then one ought not to publish Pushkin's letters either—for they too were not intended for disclosure.

V. V. Bronguleev also asserts: "...this diary, acquired by me, as I have said, almost thirty years ago, is the only continuation of the first." [10] This assertion also sounds strange. Gumilyov's journey did not end on 20 or 21 July, and it is by no means possible to exclude that there were (and, God grant, will still be found) diary entries at least for the weeks of the journey that followed.

Work still remains to be done on a scholarly publication of the parts of the diary that have been found—with analysis of the text and commentary—and on clarifying its history, which promises to be interesting.

Even now, however, the parts of the diary that are known to us are the largest document about Gumilyov's African journeys written by Gumilyov himself.

The diary tells about the most important of Gumilyov's journeys. In contrast to the first trips, prompted by curiosity, by the desire to see unknown lands, to hunt, and to gather unusual impressions, this journey was undertaken by Gumilyov on assignment from the Academy of Sciences; consequently, he had to look at what surrounded him more carefully, to think more, to analyze and compare more. Besides, this was his last journey. He compared his impressions with those of earlier times.

In recent years, many of Gumilyov's letters have seen the light, including letters sent from Africa. Little-known or even previously unpublished works by Gumilyov have been published, including works devoted to distant lands.

We have learned quite a bit that is new about Gumilyov's last journey. It is to this journey—in 1913—that the African Diary, the ethnographic collections, Sverchkov's photographs, documents in the Academy of Sciences Archive, and several letters pertain.

About the other journeys, unfortunately, not much new has appeared in print. About the longest of them, which took place in 1910–1911, almost nothing, so far, from Gumilyov himself.

Yet new evidence has been found even about that journey. And what a testimony it is! Letters sent home by the chargé d'affaires of the Russian Empire in Abyssinia, Boris Aleksandrovich Chemerzin, and his wife, Anna Vasilievna. It was during the Chemerzins' time in Abyssinia that both of Gumilyov's long journeys took place. He visited the Chemerzins in Addis Ababa, and they knew him as he was in Africa.

The Chemerzins' letters cover the period from 27 July 1910 to 29 June 1914. Upon returning to Russia, the Chemerzins collected their letters—addressed to various people—and copied them into three common notebooks.

Boris Aleksandrovich died in Leningrad in 1942, during the blockade. A few years ago, the notebooks were transferred to the Leningrad Ethiopianist Vatanar Saidovich Yagya, and he gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with them.

Of course these letters are interesting not only in connection with Gumilyov. From them one can judge the Ethiopia of that time, the life of Russian diplomats in that (for the time) exotic country, and how those distant lands appeared to a Russian diplomat; and, to some extent, even how work was then conducted in Russian diplomatic missions.

But with regard to Gumilyov, these letters are priceless. The issue is that during the longest of his journeys to Africa, Gumilyov seems not to have written to anyone. No diaries have yet been found, nor notebooks. And the Chemerzins' letters make it possible to judge what sights presented themselves to Gumilyov's eyes: the Chemerzins set out for Abyssinia by the same route as Gumilyov and almost at the same time—only a few weeks later. In the notebooks there are also direct mentions of meetings with him and of his stay in Addis Ababa.

Yes, surely we now know about Gumilyov's wanderings much more than Anna Andreevna knew. Yet even now much remains unclear. Hence my frequent use of "it seems," "probably," "perhaps." If a historian wishes to speak honestly with his reader, he cannot avoid such words.

## UP THE NILE

*Are you crying? Listen... far away, on Lake Chad,  
An elegant giraffe is wandering.  
— Gumilyov*

The Muse of Far Wanderings had commanded him from his youth. From his first poem, published in the newspaper *Tiflissky Listok* in 1902: "I ran to the forest from the cities." His entire first, gymnasium collection of verse, *The Path of the Conquistadors*, is connected with wanderings.

And in the verse and prose of the Paris period of his life, his fascination with Africa had already manifested itself.

Soon after finishing gymnasium, in the summer of 1906, Gumilyov set out for Paris. He lived there, with interruptions, for quite a long time. He left for good only in April 1908. In Paris he lived on Boulevard Saint-Germain, listened—although very irregularly—to lectures at the Sorbonne, familiarized himself with French literature and art, and visited the studio of the well-known artist Elizaveta Sergeyevna Kruglikova, where writers and people of the arts gathered on Thursdays.

But what he considered most important for himself was new verse. In January 1908, he published a small, dark green book in Paris, dedicated to Anna Andreevna Gorenko

[Akhmatova]. He gave this second collection (he himself even came to consider it the first, never attempting to republish *The Path of the Conquistadors*) the title *Romantic Flowers*.

He was proud of the "African" poems that went into that little book. In December 1907 he wrote from Paris to Valery Bryusov, whom he considered his mentor: "I have three poems, a sort of series, on African motifs. Two of them, 'The Giraffe' and 'The Rhinoceros,' you know." [11] The third—"On the Mysterious Lake Chad" ("Lake Chad")—was enclosed with the letter.

He called "Lake Chad" his favorite poem. "The Giraffe" later also became well known. In *Parnassus Upside Down*, its lines are parodied:

*Today, I see, your gaze is especially sad,  
And your hands are especially thin, clasping your knees.  
Listen: far, far away, on Lake Chad  
An exquisite giraffe is wandering.*

In these poems Africa is an elegant fairy tale. But it entered literature. According to the friends of Vladimir Vysotsky, Gumilyov's giraffe became the prototype of the "hero" of his song "In Yellow, Sweltering Africa."

Gumilyov's Africa was noticed by Innokenty Annensky. And he wrote about it. In general, he was among the first to appreciate the talent of a pupil who was kept back a year in the graduating class, but yet was writing original verse. About Annensky there later appeared Gumilyov's lines:

*I remember the days: I, shy, in haste,  
Would enter the lofty study  
Where a calm and courteous,  
Slightly graying poet awaited me.  
A dozen phrases, captivating and strange,  
As if casually he would drop.  
He would cast them into the space of nameless  
Dreams—upon weak little me...*

Annensky wrote a review of *Romantic Flowers* and published it in the influential newspaper *Rech'* [*Speech*]. He also noted the African motifs. He quoted two stanzas from the poem about an Egyptian queen. He also devoted much attention to "Lake Chad," yet his assessment was equivocal:

"'Lake Chad' is good too, the story of some African woman who entertains Marcel... Here is a whole series of tropical effects, and all, of course, stage props: the snake-lianas, the enraged beasts, and the 'exquisite giraffe'—especially the giraffe—yet all the charms of the African woman are imbued with tragedy. N. Gumilyov might have preserved in the

songs about this lady—of which he wrote three—the full force of exotic irony; but this time his voice strayed a little from the Anacreon of the twentieth century: he simply feels sorry for the savage woman; he wants to weep." [12]

Annensky's response turned out to be more benevolent than the review by Viktor Gofman, a fashionable poet of that time, in the journal *Russkaya Mysl* [Russian Thought]'. [13] "...I especially want to thank you for the flattering response about 'Lake Chad,' my favorite poem," Gumilyov wrote to Annensky. [14]

But the epithet "stage props," of course, stung his pride. And it is easy to imagine that after a reproach about "stage-prop effects" Gumilyov had to see with his own eyes the continent he had sung.

In Paris he began to publish his own journal—*Sirius*. Subtitle: "A fortnightly journal of art and literature." He did not publish it alone, but together with two other young Russian artists and art historians: Farmakovsky and Bozherianov.

Gumilyov placed great hopes on the journal, but they were not justified. Three issues came out early in 1907. Then the publication came to an end.

We know little about how the young Gumilyov published this journal in Paris. Perhaps Ilya Ehrenburg's reminiscences help to clarify this somewhat.[15] Ehrenburg brought out a little book of his poems in Paris around the same time, two or three years later. On Rue des Francs-Bourgeois there was a Russian printing house. It was considered inexpensive to have a book printed there. Ehrenburg paid only 125 francs. But for him that was no small sum. He only got 50 rubles a month from home—133 francs.

Gumilyov's parents sent him twice as much—100 rubles. And the expenses for the journal were probably divided among the three founders. But, in the end, there was a shortage of everything: money, experience, readers, and even authors.

An eighteen-year-old Akhmatova wrote to one of her relatives: "Why did Gumilyov undertake *Sirius*? It amazes me and puts me in an extraordinarily merry mood. How many misfortunes our Mykola has endured—and all in vain! Did you notice that the contributors are just as well known and respectable as I am? I think an eclipse from the Lord has come over Gumilyov. It happens." [16]

Gumilyov was the principal author of this journal. He published there his poems and stories, and even the novella "Doomed to Destruction," which remained unfinished. He published both under his own name and under pseudonyms.

One of his pseudonyms was Anatoly Grant. In a letter to Bryusov of 24 March 1907, Gumilyov wrote: "To you I will reveal the incognito. Anatoly Grant is me. What was I to

do if we have no suitable contributors at all? One has to resort to stratagems, and the truth about Anat. Grant is a secret even from my partners." [17]

Under the pseudonym Anatoly Grant there also appeared in the journal a work entitled "Up the Nile (Pages from a Diary)." It yells of a long stay in Egypt. The first entry is dated 9 May. And even there, already, we read: "I am tired of Cairo... Days pass, weeks, and I am still in Cairo." The last entry is 17 June, and in it there is not even a hint of an impending departure from Egypt.

What is this? An actual travel diary? Then in what year did this journey take place? There are five entries: 9 May, 11 May, 12 May, 24 May, and 17 June. The year is indicated nowhere. But in one of the entries we read: "We, people of one thousand nine hundred and six." So then—1906? But on 30 May 1906 Gumilyov had just received his school-leaving certificate at the Imperial Nicholas Gymnasium in Tsarskoe Selo. So the journey could not have taken place 1906.

Could it have been 1907? But all three numbers of *Sirius* appeared in January–February of that year.

Well then, what about the content of the "Pages from a Diary"? The author recounts how he visited the bottom of a pyramid unknown to tourists—"I tied a rope to a rock ledge and began to descend, holding a tar torch in my hand." Above all, he easily read there an ancient Egyptian "half-erased hieroglyphic inscription. It was written in very old Egyptian, much older than the papyri in the Louvre." And he added: "Only in the British Museum have I seen the same kind of script." But by that time Gumilyov had not yet been to the British Museum. If he went there at all, it was ten or eleven years later.

One of the *dramatis personae* in the "Pages" is a "thoughtful toad." It crawled out from behind a stone and helped the author make out the ancient hieroglyphs. "...It must be that the blessing of the thoughtful toad clarified my mind; I read and understood." But this mystery was unraveled by Mr. Thierry, the companion of Anatoly Grant, who, as if casually, uttered: "Beware of thoughtful toads."

"Pages from a Diary" is a literary composition. It anticipated future travels.

And it must have been inspired by the novels of Rider Haggard, whom Gumilyov loved from childhood. At the same time, "Anatoly Grant" wanted to go further into the sphere of the mystical than Haggard. Hence the thoughtful toad. In the tale the author says: "Rider Haggard was content when he encountered ferocious slavers, slippery dwarfs, and lovely girls with white skin. But we, people of nineteen-hundred-and-six, seek what is hidden. And we find mysteries where Haggard would have seen nothing but a withered palm and a sick negress."

It is, perhaps, strange that no one has yet, it seems, sought the connection of the "Pages from a Diary" with Gumilyov's dreams and his first journey. The "Pages" are not mentioned at all either in the American four-volume edition, or in the one-volume *Biblioteka Poeta*, or in other editions of Gumilyov's works. The "Pages" were included only in the three-volume edition published in Moscow at the end of 1991. Perhaps the reason is that only a few copies of *Sirius* have survived, so very few people could have seen it.

I think it is precisely from this tale of 1907 that the rumor arose of a journey allegedly made at that time. A rumor that, perhaps, was not much contradicted by Gumilyov himself. But "Pages from a Diary" is not an account of actual journeys. It is dreams of encounters yet to come.

At that time, in Paris, he could only be thinking through a trip to Africa. He became acquainted with Africans. Striving to learn more about the nature and animal world of the continent, he went to the Botanical Garden and to the menagerie. More than once he even drew Aleksei Tolstoy into these excursions.

But how and when did he actually encounter these lands that this fanciful muse pointed him to?

## LEGEND

*We know nothing—  
Neither how, nor why...  
— Gumilyov*

*How many rumors strike our ears...  
— Vysotsky*

There is a firmly established opinion that the first time Gumilyov visited Africa was in 1907, that he set out to there from Paris.

"In 1907 he is—for the first time—in Africa." And further: "He is drawn to open spaces, to the primitive, the unspoiled. He finds all this in 1907 on the way to Africa and in Africa." This is from the preface to a collection of Gumilyov's *Selected Works* published in Paris in 1959.[18] The author, Nikolai Otsup, is regarded in the West as a connoisseur of Nikolai Stepanovich's work. He devoted his dissertation to Gumilyov and even knew him personally—though not in 1907, but much later, in 1918–1921. He did not specify which African countries Gumilyov visited, and he did not support his words with any evidence.

In the preface to the American four-volume edition of Gumilyov's works, we find the same assertion: "From Paris he made his first journey to Africa already in 1907." Nothing

more specific is said there either, but the author, Gleb Struve, at least pointed to a source. He indicated the reminiscences published in 1956 of Gumilyov's sister-in-law, the wife of his elder brother Dmitry, who, like Akhmatova, was named Anna Andreevna.[19]

Here is the passage from those reminiscences on the basis of which G. P. Struve decided that Gumilyov went to Africa in 1907: "About this dream of his (to go to Africa) ... the poet wrote to his father, but his father categorically declared that he would receive neither money nor his blessing for such an (for those times) 'extravagant journey' until he finished university. Nevertheless Kolya, heedless of everything, set out in 1907, having saved the necessary means from his monthly allowance from his parents. Subsequently the poet told with rapture of all he had seen: how he spent the night in the ship's hold along with pilgrims; how he shared their meager meals; how he was arrested in Trouville for attempting to sneak aboard a steamer and ride 'as a stowaway.' This journey was kept secret from his parents, and they learned of it only after the fact. The poet wrote letters to his parents in advance, and his friends dutifully sent them from Paris every ten days."

And here is Gleb Struve's comment—also in full: "Perhaps not everything in this account is accurate: for example, it remains unclear why on the way to Africa Gumilyov ended up in Trouville (in Normandy) and was arrested there—it may be that two different episodes got mixed up—but we nevertheless cite A. A. Gumilyova's account, since no other reminiscences about the poet's first trip to Africa appear to have been preserved." [20]

With the author of that article one can, without doubt, agree on one point: that no other reminiscences about this journey to Africa have been preserved. But do those reminiscences themselves prove that such a journey actually took place? There is talk there of dreams—and that, of course, is true. But where exactly Gumilyov sailed in the hold with "pilgrims" is entirely unclear.

The sister-in-law's account passed as well into our domestic literature. Her assertion about a journey in 1907 was even taken as a point of departure for dating the poem "Ezbekiye."

*How strange—exactly ten years had passed  
Since I saw Ezbekiye,  
The great Cairo garden, by a full moon,  
Solemnly illumined that evening.*

Proceeding from this ("exactly ten years had passed"), the editor of the Gumilyov volume in Biblioteka poeta writes: "Gumilyov was in Egypt in 1907; consequently, the poem may be dated to 1917." [21]

And yet, in her notebook Akhmatova assigns the trip to Egypt and the walk through Ezbekiye not to 1907 but to 1908. In mentioning this, I do not mean to reproach the

editor of the one-volume Gumilyov. He did a very great amount of work. This mistake only shows how much labor the study of Gumilyov's legacy still requires.

In Vladimir Karpov's article "The Poet Nikolai Gumilyov," the passage from Struve's preface is repeated almost verbatim:

"...He sets out on his journey through Africa, which was always for him the land of dreams and adventure. Of his long-standing dream of undertaking such a journey, Gumilyov wrote to his father and asked for money, but his father considered this a futile occupation and not only did not send money but did not give his blessing to such an extravagance, adding that one must first finish university and only then undertake such trips. Of course, possessed by his dream, the poet did not heed his father's admonitions and, having saved from the money his parents sent him monthly for living, nonetheless set out on the journey. It was, naturally, very modest—given the means at his disposal; the food was not very plentiful; in some places he tried to ride as a 'stowaway.' In order to conceal his trip from his strict father, he wrote several letters in advance, left them with his friends, and they mailed them from Paris every ten days. In 1908 Gumilyov returned to Paris from Africa..."

Evidently, Vladimir Karpov, like Gleb Struve, conducted no special investigations here. He used the same version of the poet's sister-in-law—most likely because he did not attach much importance to it. He wrote, indeed: "Gumilyov's sympathies during his journeys through Africa are unambiguous. There can be no misunderstandings here, and there is no need to undertake any inquiries or research." [22]

I am sure Vladimir Karpov meant nothing bad by this. But even so, the last phrase sounds like a command to stop. How so—"no need"? Why, abolitionists related sympathetically to Africans and to American Negroes, and so did Beecher-Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and, I hope, we now. But are those sympathies the same? They are very different, and one can understand them only in historical context.

So it is with Gumilyov's Africa. It unquestionably deserves inquiries and research. The legend of an alleged journey in 1907 is the best proof of how little has yet been done here.

The reminiscences of Gumilyov's sister-in-law, which authors both abroad and at home have trusted so readily, were first published in 1956—half a century after the supposed journey. There are no direct indications of when they were written. But one must suppose—also quite late. This is suggested by the epigraph taken from *Faust*:

*Distant dreams of distant youth,  
Fly back to me once more in a familiar train!*

*And open once again, page after page,  
The leaves of a forgotten tale.*

As A. A. Gumilyova writes, she married the poet's brother in 1909. And she had no special closeness with Nikolai Stepanovich. "For the first time in all my twelve years of living in their house he was frank with me"—this is about the end of July 1921, a few days before Gumilyov's death. And then "he spoke about his travels."

In her reminiscences she confused many things that happened during the period when she lived in the Gumilyov family: the years of the births of Gumilyov's children, Lev and Elena; the year of his second marriage; and much else. Gleb Struve himself treated her assertions "without particular trust," and his words were later repeated by Irina Odoevtseva.

Anna Akhmatova thought that Gumilyov's sister-in-law "mixed up a lot and told lies," and she was indignant: how could one in general "allow a petty bourgeois and a ninny to approach the sacred shade?"[23]

It is entirely possible that in the memory of the sister-in-law—and of some other contemporaries as well—the story "Up the Nile," published in 1907, with such a subtitle—"Pages from a Diary"—became intertwined with the poet's memories of his genuine journeys. Into this tangle also fell his stories not always connected with Africa—about an arrest for trying to ride as a stowaway, about nights spent in a ship's hold, and about letters that his friends dutifully mailed to his parents.

His letters to Valery Bryusov shed light on the adventures Gumilyov had at that time. In these letters he told of the most important events of his life.

On 21 July (3 August) 1907 he wrote: "After our meeting I was in Ryazan province, in Petersburg, spent two weeks in the Crimea, a week in Constantinople, had a fleeting romance with some Greek woman in Smyrna, fought with apaches in Marseille, and only yesterday, I don't know how, I don't know why, I found myself in Paris." [24] To be sure, a bit boyishly. But after all, he had finished gymnasium only a year earlier.

Later, to the end of 1907, he informed Bryusov only of Parisian news—for example, that at the Russian exhibition in Paris he "became acquainted with Rerikh and with Princess Tenisheva." [25]

There are no mentions at all of a trip to Africa in the letters of 1907. And would he really have kept silent about it?

Akhmatova denied the 1907 journey not only in conversation with me. Already in 1925 she told Luknitsky (and he wrote down her words at once) that the 1908 trip to Egypt was "Nikolai Stepanovich's first trip to Africa." [26]

It seems to me indisputable that Gumilyov was not in Africa in 1907.

Why, then, am I trying to examine this possibility so thoroughly? The reason is that after my talks on Gumilyov at the Moscow House of Scientists and at the House of Architects in 1986, soon after the poet's "rehabilitation," listeners who considered themselves knowledgeable about his life and work took the floor and insisted on a journey in 1907. They cited the reminiscences of Gumilyov's sister-in-law and the poem "Ezbekiye."

And later, in 1989, to one of my essays there responded by letter Vadim Kreid, an author of a number of publications on Gumilyov who now lives in America. In general he responded benevolently, but he defended his dating of Gumilyov's first journey to Africa—the autumn of 1907. And he referred to the reminiscences of the poet and translator Aleksandr Biek.

Biek did indeed mention in passing that by the time Gumilyov invited him, Biek, to publish in *Sirius*, Gumilyov had already managed to visit Africa.[27]

But all three numbers of *Sirius*—including the second, with Biek's poems—appeared in January–February 1907. So if one takes Biek's words on faith, the journey would have to be assigned to 1906 or to the first days of 1907, but by no means to the autumn of 1907, which Kreid insisted on.

I think Biek's words can hardly be taken seriously at all. His reminiscences are not about Gumilyov—he has only a few lines about him. Moreover, they were published in 1963, almost six decades after the events mentioned there.

Kreid's main proof was the poem "Ezbekiye." He proceeded from the assumption that it was written "apparently" in 1917 and that Gumilyov's words—"exactly ten years had passed"—should be read literally. But, as I repeat, in Akhmatova's notebook this journey is unequivocally assigned to 1908: "In 1908 he was in Cairo (Ezbekiye)." She could not have confused it—after all, the poem is dedicated to her.

From information published in recent years it is clear that after the collapse of *Sirius*, in 1907 Gumilyov traveled from France to Russia—and more than once. In the summer, having made yet another proposal to Anya Gorenko and received yet another refusal, he returned to Paris via Constantinople and Marseille, and from there he went to Normandy to end his life in Trouville (the town mentioned by the sister-in-law). But there he was detained as a vagrant (in A. A. Gumilyova's version—as a "stowaway") and returned to Paris.

In October he again visited his future Anna Akhmatova, again received a refusal, and returned to France, visiting Petersburg and Tsarskoe. About this trip—evidently the one

he had intended to end by suicide—Rozhdestvensky also wrote. (In A. A. Gumilyova: "this journey was concealed from his parents.")

These travels—intermingled, it seems, in the sister-in-law's memory with the story "Up the Nile"—later misled many.

It is surprising, perhaps, that the version of a journey to Africa by Gumilyov in 1907 continues to be repeated even now, after the publication of the letters of Gumilyov, of Akhmatova's notes, and of Luknitsky's materials.

In *Nashe Nasledie*, V. V. Bronguleev, having quoted the passage from the sister-in-law's reminiscences (and calling her not Anna but Alexandra), asserts without reservation that Gumilyov's trip to Port Said and Cairo in 1907 "raises not the slightest doubt," that it fell between May and the first half of July and "occupied, it appears, no more than two months." [28]

In reality, judging by Luknitsky's information, those two months Gumilyov spent in Kiev, Moscow, Sevastopol, and Odessa, whence by steamer he came to Marseille and then by train, on 20 July, to Paris.

It is curious that in his assertion V. V. Bronguleev relies on the above-quoted letter from Gumilyov to Bryusov of 21 July 1907. Yet from the letter it follows that Gumilyov was anywhere at all—in the Crimea, in Constantinople, Smyrna, Marseille—but only not in Africa.

Bronguleev's assertions were repeated in 1989 in the pages of the journal *Narody Azii i Afriki*. The author of the article, M. L. Volpe, writes that this journey is "indirectly indicated" by "The Giraffe," "The Rhinoceros," "Lake Chad," and other poems in the collection *Romantic Flowers*, in which "there are poeticized, but in their way quite precise descriptions of African nature, the appearance of its villages, and the life of peasants."

But in none of these poems is there even a hint of "quite precise" descriptions of the nature of Africa, of the appearance of its villages, of peasant life. Nowhere is there the effect of presence. There are none of those personal impressions that are so characteristic of the poems written after the journey.

Reading those poems, it is hard even to imagine that their author—albeit later—could say: "What I loved in Africa was the everydayness... To be a shepherd, to walk along the paths, to stand by a wattle fence in the evening..."

Those poems do not belong to the times when Gumilyov traveled to distant lands in order, as he said, in a new setting to find new words.

They are connected much more with another confession by Gumilyov: "And once again I hasten to the libraries, striving to learn from the masters of style how one may overcome the fatal inertia of the pen."

And if it was later written about him that his giraffes and leopards are stylized, salon-like, that they are generated not by the genuine sea and tropical world, not by Africa, but by Montparnasse; that they are wholly inspired by other writers: Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, Coleridge, Stevenson, Kipling—then it was those first poems that were meant.

And even in the responses that followed immediately after the publication of those poems, no one, either, perceived any "precise descriptions." On the contrary, everyone, like Annensky, noted the "stage-prop" effects.

This diminishes those poems not in the least. People memorized and recited them, perhaps, even more often than many that came later from Gumilyov's pen:

*Today, I see, your gaze is especially sad...  
Listen... far away, on Lake Chad,  
An exquisite giraffe is wandering.*

...

*I know cheerful tales of mysterious lands,  
About a dark-haired maiden, about the passion of a young leader,  
But you have breathed in the heavy fog for too long,  
You don't want to believe in anything but the rain.*

*And how can I tell you about the tropical garden,  
About the slender palm trees, about the scent of unimaginable herbs...  
Are you crying? Listen... far away, on Lake Chad,  
An elegant giraffe is roaming.*

These and other similar lines, of course, cannot be called "precise descriptions" of African nature and life. That is entirely obvious.

And nonetheless, having found no other proofs besides this "indirect" one, M. L. Volpe draws the conclusion: "On his first trip through Africa, Gumilyov probably visited Egypt and, possibly, went up the Nile as far as Sudan. At the same time it is tempting to suppose that he reached Lake Chad, though here we step onto the shaky ground of conjectures." [29]

Such far-reaching conjectures were not ventured even before 1986–1988, before the flood of materials on Gumilyov. But nowadays the main events of Gumilyov's life in 1907 would seem to have been clarified. Why then remain on the "shaky ground of conjectures," and that in scholarly publications?

So now it is not only Cairo and Port Said, but even Sudan and Lake Chad—two and a half thousand kilometers from Cairo. Even today, without an airplane, try to get there—across the waterless Sahara. And Gumilyov, as if playing, managed it, and even told no one about it...

Nevertheless, this legend found its way into the three-volume edition of Gumilyov published in Moscow at the end of 1991. In the "Chronicle" section (compiled, overall, with great care) it is said: "...there are grounds to suppose" that in the summer of 1907 "Gumilyov first happened to reach Africa." What "grounds"? N. Berberova, many years later, recalled that in the days of his infatuation with her, a few days before his arrest, Gumilyov said: "I lived near Petersburg—it was summer—but I could not get warm. I went south—it was still cold. I went to Greece—the same. Then I went to Africa, and at once my soul grew warm and light. If only you knew what silence there is there!.." [30]

These words the compiler of the chronicle took as sufficient grounds.

The 1907 journey is far from the most significant of the legends surrounding Gumilyov's name.

Far more important, for example, is the fiction about his involvement in politics. Originating with the Petrograd Cheka, it cost him his life. Later it was maintained and propagated—by different people and for different purposes.

The Cheka and its successors did so to find yet another justification for themselves, for their existence and their activities.

And among those who hated Bolshevik power most of all, a legend took hold that if Gumilyov was not the soul of a political conspiracy, then in any case he participated in it with extreme zeal. Nikolai Ivanovich Ulyanov, a well-known historian living in America—of whom there will be more to say—showed convincingly how widespread this view was in émigré circles. In this role Gumilyov was even set in opposition to the "Bolshevizing Blok" with his "The Twelve." Ulyanov, himself an émigré, noted bitterly: "A certain segment of the emigration has its own political catechism—no less flat and no less vulgar than the Soviet catechism, only with a different sign."

What can be said about this? Best of all—the words of Gumilyov himself. He lamented that destroying legends is harder than creating them.

## Strange Sky

### GUMILYOV

*And so I leave my home  
to meet a different fate  
a whole world, strange and familiar,*

*ready to become kin with me.*

## THE FIRST MEETING

*"What do you see in the glance of my eyes,  
In this pale, shimmering glance?"—*

*"I see in it a deep sea  
With a great sunken ship."  
—Gumilyov*

About Gumilyov's real encounter with Africa less has been written, perhaps, than about the supposed one. Is it not because there is less room here for conjecture?

Gumilyov set out not from France but from Russia.

In the spring of 1908 he returned to his homeland; in August he entered Saint Petersburg University. And immediately, in September, he set out for Egypt.

Anna Andreevna told me that Gumilyov left Odessa on 10 September aboard the steamship "Rossiya". He saw Sinop, Istanbul, the Piraeus, lingered for a few days in Athens. Then he lived in Cairo and Alexandria—for a short while, several weeks.

At last a long-standing wish was fulfilled: to see whether the "dark Nile, lord of silent waters," was truly dark; to stand "beside the reeds of the sluggish Nile"; to grasp what a person feels "when upon the emeralds of the Nile the moon rocked and grew pale."

In *Romantic Flowers* there were verses about the Nile—about how a crocodile was brought to ancient Rome and even Emperor Caracalla came out to admire the curiosity.

*The mariner Pausanias  
From the far shores of the Nile  
Brought to Rome deer hides,  
And Egyptian cloth,  
And a great crocodile.*

*And like some wondrous tale,  
A disturber of harmonies,  
The crocodile sparkled by the ship  
With emerald scales  
On a silver pontoon.*

In the autumn of 1908 Gumilyov did in fact see the Nile—its lower reaches. The crocodiles there, to be sure, were long gone, but he bathed in the Nile's waters.

A letter from Gumilyov to Bryusov, early October 1908: "Dear Valery Yakovlevich, I could not help but think of you while 'near the sluggish Nile, there where Lake Moeris

lies in the realm of blazing Ra.' But alas! I cannot manage to go inland, as I had hoped. I will look at the Sphinx, lie upon the stones of Memphis, and then go—I do not know where, but only not to Rome. Perhaps to Palestine or Asia Minor."

On 30 November 1908: "From Cairo I sent you a long letter with poems." [1]

Luknitsky's *Works and Days*. There are several entries about the 1908 journey. Judging by them, Gumilyov left Petersburg on 5 September. On the morning of 10 September he arrived in Odessa; that same day he took the "Rossiya" to Sinop. Four days in quarantine at Sinop. Constantinople. The Piraeus. On 27 September—Athens, where he visited the Acropolis. On 1 October—Alexandria; on the 3rd—Cairo; on the 6th—again Alexandria. He saw the sights, bathed in the Nile, strolled in the Ezbekieh Garden (so that is when it was!). In Alexandria he found himself without money, nearly starving. Having borrowed from a moneylender and abandoned his dream of continuing the journey, he returned the same way. "Another stop for two or three days in Kiev, where A. A. Gorenko lived."

On 26 October he was still in Cairo. From there he wrote to Annensky's son: "I'll be back in a few days." And on 14 November he was already sending a letter from Tsarskoe Selo. [2]

Akhmatova told Luknitsky: "Nikolai Stepanovich's first trip to Africa lasted six weeks—he was in Egypt." [3]

Unfortunately we know little of his impressions. The brightest of them is his 'Ezbekieh,' about the famous Ezbekieh Garden in Ismailia, the European quarter of Cairo. The garden drew many Russian travelers' eyes. They admired both its beauty and its size—eighty thousand square meters.

Gumilyov may have read a description of the garden in a lavishly produced volume whose title page proclaimed: "23,000 Miles on the Yacht Tamara. The Journey of Their Imperial Highnesses Grand Dukes Aleksandr and Sergei Mikhailovich in 1890–1891." The book spoke of the countless plants in the Cairo garden, "completely unknown to Europeans," and of the buildings "surrounding this splendid garden, enclosed by an iron railing." [4]

This garden enchanted Gumilyov as well.

*But this garden in every way resembled  
The sacred groves of the young world:  
There slender palms lifted up their boughs  
Like maidens to whom God descends;  
On the hills, like oracular druids,  
Stood massed the stately plane trees,*

*And a waterfall whitened in the dark,  
Like a rearing unicorn.  
Night moths flitted  
Among the flowers grown high,  
Or among the stars—for the stars hung so low—  
Like ripe barberries.*

Linked with the journey to Egypt is an important event in Gumilyov's life. He believed that it was there—I do not know for what reasons—that his attitude toward suicide changed.

Aleksey Tolstoy, in his recollections of Gumilyov, told of their meetings in a Paris café in the summer of 1908. Among other things they talked "about journeys to the tropics."

And suddenly Gumilyov said that he had recently attempted suicide—not just on impulse; no, he had carried potassium cyanide with him for a full year.[5]

In this dark mood Gumilyov was not alone. Three years later the poet Viktor Hofmann, in Paris, in a hotel on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, decided to shoot himself in the temple and, alas, did not miss...

What tormented Gumilyov? From Luknitsky's diary: "It became clear to Gumilyov that A. A. was not innocent. This news, the pain of this knowledge, drove Nikolai Stepanovich to attempts at suicide." [6]

In Luknitsky's *Works and Days*: "1908. Autumn. In a depressed state all the time. Pursued by thoughts of suicide. The trip to Egypt is connected with this. Apparently an attempt at suicide was made in Egypt (the last in his life). The trip to Egypt sharply affected his attitude toward suicide. From this time N. G. did not return to the thought of it and regarded it most negatively." And the phrase: "He wanted to end his life far from his homeland."

The poem 'Ezbekieh.' A confession:

*At that time I prayed to God for death  
And was myself ready to hasten it.*

And a renunciation of such thoughts.

*And I remember I exclaimed: "Above grief  
And deeper than death is life! Receive, O Lord,  
My freely vowed pledge: whatever may befall,  
Whatever sorrows or humiliations  
May fall to my lot, I shall not  
So much as think of an easy death again*

*Until I enter once more on such a moonlit night  
Under the palms trees and sycamores of Ezbekieh."*

On this journey Gumilyov most likely kept no diary. In any case, no diary or notes have been found. Only a few brief letters. On the way back he stopped in Kiev to see the one of whom he wrote, "I was then worn out by a woman."

This first short journey left traces in many poems. And there arose a thirst to see Africa again—a thirst that did not leave him until the end of his days.

## THE ENCHANTED LAND

*—That's all! Let's go for a ride!*

*The requiem will come later.*

*—Vysotsky*

Gumilyov saw Egypt several more times, but only on the way south. His goal became Black Africa—above all Abyssinia-Ethiopia.

The dream of a journey to Abyssinia had ripened in him long before, even before Egypt. On 14 July 1908 he wrote to Bryusov: "...in the autumn I am thinking of going to Abyssinia for half a year, so that in a new setting I might find the new words I so lack." [7]

And if in 1908 he did not go farther, it was above all, probably, for lack of money.

Of suicide—not a word. The plans are very businesslike.

His first journey to Abyssinia fell in the winter of 1909/10. It lasted several weeks—only a little longer than the trip to Egypt.

He was in his twenty-fourth year. What did he have behind him, besides two books of verse?

He continued the work we would now call literary criticism. He reviewed newly published volumes of poetry. In the tenth issue of the journal *Vesna* (Spring) for 1908 there appeared his review of the second edition of Balmont's *Only Love*. In the newspaper *Rech*, from November 1908 to September 1909, he published four reviews: of Yuri Verkhovsky's *Miscellaneous Poems*, Andrey Bely's *Urn*, V. Pyast's *Enclosure*, and Valentin Borodayevsky's *Poems*.

Then Gumilyov moved all this activity to the pages of a new journal, *Apollon* (Apollo), whose editor was Sergei Konstantinovich Makovsky.

Gumilyov helped Makovsky organize the journal and became one of his closest associates. He introduced him to Innokenty Annensky and took upon himself the reviewing of the most important poetry collections then appearing.

Without Gumilyov's participation there was created at *Apollon* the "Society of the Guardians of the Artistic Word." Sergei Makovsky wrote: "In essence, it was this society that created the literary ambiance in which the journal flourished. Founding such a society was no simple matter in those days—Stolypin was pacifying the 'first' revolution." [8]

The compiler of a collection of memoirs about Gumilyov called 1909 in his biography "a time of storm and stress." [9]

The autumn proved especially stormy. The first issue of *Apollon* came out in October. At that time the Society of the Guardians of the Artistic Word also began its work.

The young Aleksey Tolstoy, in his vivid—if far from wholly accurate—notes on Gumilyov, recalled those days with admiration: "The literary autumn of '09 began noisily and engagingly. *Apollon* opened with exhibitions and evenings of poetry. The closed readings on versification that had begun in the spring at Vyacheslav Ivanov's 'Tower' were moved to *Apollon* and turned into the Academy of Verse. Innokenty Annensky appeared—tall, in a red vest, a straight old man with the head of Don Quixote, with difficult and extraordinarily beautiful poems and every manner of oddity. Scriabin played. From Moscow came Bely with a thousand-page poetics. In *Apollon's* spicy, exquisite, exalted atmosphere there arose the poetess Cherubina de Gabriak. No one saw her; they knew only her gentle, melodious voice on the telephone. She was sent proofs with gilt edges and a basket of roses. Her wonderful and stirring poems were a mixture of falsehood, sorrow, and sensuality." [10]

Work at the journal gave Gumilyov something crucial for him—the chance to enter Petersburg's literary circles.

*Apollon* published Blok, Bryusov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Benois, B. M. Eikhenbaum, B. V. Tomashevsky, G. I. Chulkov, F. F. Komissarzhevsky, and many other poets, writers, critics, and art historians.

In that very first issue of *Apollon*, Gumilyov printed his cycle of poems "Captains."

Not everything in "Captains" was successful. For example, the line *Who tracked the rhumb above the sullen sea*. Akhmatova later recalled how her father, a naval engineer-mechanic, explained to him that one cannot say "tracked the rhumb," and asked: "Anechka, do tell him to change that line." [11] Yet many stanzas of the cycle became popular:

*"Or, discovering mutiny on deck,  
He tears a pistol from his belt,  
So that gold rains from the lace  
Of his pink Brabant cuffs."*

Igor Severyanin later recalled:

*"The very first number of Apollon,  
That dims the gold of the fleece,  
Comes out—and from the sky vault  
A new comet can be seen:  
It's Gumilyov's "Captains"—  
Where not a word is superfluous—  
And to the roster of sounding names  
Is added: Gumilyov."*

"Captains" was learned by heart by Vladimir Vysotsky and his friends when, as schoolboys, they managed for a few days to get hold of a volume of Gumilyov's verse. The whole cycle is a hymn to distant wanderings. Its heroes are

*Gonzalvo and Cook, La Pérouse and da Gama,  
A dreamer and a king, the Genoese Columbus!*

*Hanno the Carthaginian, the Prince of Senegambia,  
Sinbad the Sailor and mighty Ulysses...*

*And all who dare, who will, who seek,  
Who are sick to death of their fathers' lands...*

In one of the poems of the cycle there was a line that sounded like a summons or a dream:

"There—beyond the Tropic of Capricorn!"

He set out toward the Tropic of Capricorn in November 1909, soon after "Captains" appeared and after another event in his life—the duel with Maximilian Voloshin.

Twenty years ago, when I heard the story of this duel from Viktor Andronikovich Manuilov, one could hardly read about it anywhere in our country. But in recent years there has been more than one account of the mysterious Cherubina de Gabriak: of how she sent her poems to *Apollon* on mourning-black sheets soaked with strong perfume and interleaved with dried "Our Lady's herbs"; of how all the *Apollon* circle were in love with her in absentia—the self-styled infanta and zealous Catholic who spoke only by telephone; of how it turned out that behind this pseudonym stood the poet Elizaveta Ivanovna Dmitrieva; and of how all this led to a duel between Gumilyov and Voloshin.

They fought near the Black River, famous from Pushkin's duel, on wasteland near Novaya Derevnja. There Aleksandr Ivanovich Guchkov also exchanged shots with Colonel Myasoyedov.

And as Voloshin later recalled, "if not with the very pair of pistols with which Pushkin fought, then in any case with ones of his time." [12] Duel pistols were not easy to find. At last they procured from Boris Suvorin pistols "with a history"—on them were engraved the names of all who had fired them in duels.

Gumilyov demanded they shoot at five paces, to the death of one of the opponents. The seconds worked out conditions far less harsh, and as a result the duel ended without bloodshed.

But it immediately attracted wide publicity—and not of the sort favorable to the duelists. They wrote all kinds of things: that writers, forsooth, have nothing better to do (one article was even titled "What Are Our Writers Busy With?"), and that if they took it upon themselves to fight, then fight—and yet there wasn't even any blood. In the newspaper *Rech* the feuilletonist Vladimir Azov sneered: "About the duel? A splendid thing—especially in winter. In winter what sort of duel is there without cognac and champagne? And of course they demand only the very best, the top brands. Duels support the wine trade... You still get your name in the papers: such-and-such were the seconds. And without the slightest danger to yourself. In general it gives a man a certain weight." [13]

It is hard to say who spread the details of the duel. Perhaps the duelists themselves. More likely one of the seconds: the sensation-loving young Aleksey Tolstoy, or Prince Aleksandr Konstantinovich Shervashidze, a contributor to *Apollon*—Voloshin's seconds; or the journal's secretary, the man of letters and chess player Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Znosko-Borovsky, and the poet Mikhail Kuzmin—Gumilyov's seconds. *Vechernii Peterburg*, *Russkoe Slovo*, and *Peterburgskaia Gazeta*; the tabloid *Kopeyka* and the respectable *Birzhevye Vedomosti*, *Stolichnaia Molva*, and Suvorin's *Novoe Vremya* paid attention to the duel. The news also reached Moscow—there the paper *Rannee Utro* responded with an article, "A Decadent Duel."

In short, gossip about this duel somehow spread wider than about many other encounters of the time. And often in the spirit of a later poem:

*From a pistol at a duel  
A fool fires at a fool.*

In the memoirs of *Apollon* staffer Sergei Abramovich Ausländer, taken down by Lev Vladimirovich Gornung, we read: "The story began to 'spread' in the papers and to take on an unpleasant character. They wrote about a galosh lost, it seems, by Znosko-Borovsky... The whole business and the newspaper tattle were distasteful to

Gumilyov. His romanticism was offended. Soon he left on his first journey to Abyssinia."[14]

Yes, of course, Gumilyov sought fame—but not of that sort. Quite possibly the uproar made him wish to disappear for a time and hastened his trip to Africa.

A letter survives that he sent the day after the duel—24 November—to the poet Annensky-Krivich, Innokenty Annensky's son: "Dear Valentin Innokentievich, if you are free, come this evening at eight... Interesting people will be here. This is the last time before Abyssinia that people will gather at my place."[15]

Two days later he left for Kiev; there he received Anna Gorenko's final consent to become his wife.

On November 30, unexpectedly, at the Tsarskoe Selo railway station, Innokenty Annensky passed away. Gumilyov was already on his way to Odessa.

Then—Varna. From there he writes to Valery Bryusov in a boyishly swaggering tone: "Greetings to you from Varna, where I stopped on my way to Abyssinia. I'll be there in a week and a half. I'll shoot two or three baboons, lounge under the palms, and come back just in time to catch your lectures at the 'Academy of Verse.' I'll write again from Djibouti or from Harar."[16]

His letter to Vyacheslav Ivanov—who was planning to join Gumilyov on the road—was not so brash. From Odessa on December 1, Gumilyov writes: "...I would very much like your company." And he reports that on the 3rd he is leaving for Constantinople, hopes to be in Cairo on the 9th, and is waiting for a telegram there. If it does not arrive, he will go farther alone on the 12th.[17]

Having reached Cairo and not received a letter from Vyacheslav Ivanov, Gumilyov writes—already not to him—about his melancholy mood. "It is very nice here." He describes the beauties of a garden where it is "marvelously pleasant." And at the same time: "But every day a terrible thought comes into my head, which I, of course, will not carry out—to go to Alexandria and there, not to drown myself like Antinous, but simply to board a ship bound for Odessa. I feel very lonely."

And immediately: "I am sitting in Cairo in order to finish an article for *Apollon*; if only you knew how it torments me—money I have little. But I would rather work in Abyssinia; by the way, a railway is being built there from Harar to Addis Ababa, and they need hands; better let [Sergei] Makovsky curse me for keeping him waiting."

He even hesitated about whether to go to Djibouti. "But, thinking that letters are waiting for me there, I decided to be there come what may. And, it seems, this is working out. I

will only have to ride fourth class and go first to Aden and from there to Djibouti." [18]  
Such was this rambling letter.

He overcame his hesitation. He sailed through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.  
Somaliland. Then Abyssinia. His spirits, evidently, improved.

On January 5, 1910, he writes to Vyacheslav Ivanov: "I reached Djibouti perfectly and tomorrow I go on. I shall try to get to Addis Ababa, arranging escapades along the way. Here it is already the real Africa. Heat, naked blacks, tame monkeys. I am quite consoled and feel wonderful." [19]

To Bryusov, undated: "...As you see, I am already writing to you from Djibouti. Tomorrow I go into the interior toward Addis Ababa, the capital of Menelik. On the way I shall hunt. Everything is here already, up to and including lions and elephants... Real Africa. I am writing poems, but few... There are masses of impressions—enough for two books of verse. If they don't eat me, I shall return at the end of January." [20]

The journey delighted him, although he did not reach Addis Ababa.

A letter to Mikhail Kuzmin, his colleague at Apollon. January 1910: "Dear Misha, I am already writing from Harar. Yesterday I did twelve hours (70 kilometers) on a mule; today I must ride another eight hours (50 kilometers) in order to find leopards. Since the principality of Harar is on a mountain, it is not as hot here as it was in Dire-Abaya,\* from where I came. There is only one hotel here, and the prices, of course, are frightful. But tonight I shall have to sleep in the open air—if I sleep at all, because leopards usually appear at night. There are lions and elephants here too, but they are as rare as moose are with us, and one must count on one's luck to find them.

[\*We're talking about the town of Dire Dawa. There must be a typo. In general, Gumilev used the then-accepted Russian spelling of geographical names and personal names, and even then, often differently (for example, Harar or Harrar). By our time, the transliteration has changed: not Gavash, but Awash; not Harar, but Harer; not Dire Dawa, but Dire Dawa; not Chercher, but Churchher; not Sheikh-Gusseine, but Sheikh-Hussein; not Margarita, but Margherita; not Rodolfo, but Rudolf; not Tafari, but Teferi; not Makonen, but Mekonyi, etc. Some old names have changed so much in Ethiopia itself that they are difficult to identify with anything known today.]

"I am in a dreadful state: my clothes are torn by the thorns of the mimosa; my skin is burned and copper red; my left eye is inflamed from the sun; my leg hurts because on a mountain pass a fallen mule pinched it with his body. But I have waved my hand at everything. It seems to me that I am dreaming two dreams at once, one unpleasant and hard on the body, the other delightful for the eyes. I try to think only of the latter and to forget the former. As you see from this letter, I have quite forgotten the Russian

language; here I speak five languages at once. But I am pleased with my journey. It intoxicates me like wine.

"When you receive this letter, I will probably already be on the road to Constantinople and in a week I shall see you.

"Give my regards to everyone at the Tower and at *Apollon*. My servant, an Abyssinian, is waiting for me at the door. I finish writing." [21]

A letter from Vyacheslav Ivanov to Bryusov of January 3, 1910. The host of the "Tower," then well known to literary Petersburg as the gathering place of poets, wrote: "I almost left for Africa with Gumilyov... but I was ill, beset with affairs, and—poor, very poor in money." [22] And later he permitted himself a gibe at Gumilyov—his "solitary journey to Africa for a couple of leopard skins."

*Labors and Days* on the same journey: "1909. December. Journey to Africa. In Odessa—December 1. From Odessa by sea: Varna (Dec. 3) — Constantinople (Dec. 5) — Alexandria (approx. Dec. 8–9) — Cairo (Dec. 12). En route wrote 'A Letter on Russian Poetry' and sent it to the editors of the journal *Apollon*. Port Said (Dec. 16); Jeddah (approx. Dec. 19–20); Djibouti (approx. Dec. 22–23). From Djibouti on December 24 set out on mules to Harar. On the road—hunting big game. From the road wrote letters to his family, to Anna Andr. Gorenko, to friends at *Apollon*—M. A. Kuzmin, E. A. Znosko-Borovsky, S. A. Auslender, P. P. Potemkin, and others. Two postcards to V. Ya. Bryusov."

The journey was short. On February 5, 1910, he returned home.

Thus Gumilyov's became acquainted with French Somaliland (now this country is called the Republic of Djibouti) and with the eastern outskirts of Abyssinia—an acquaintance that later came to occupy such a large place in his life that several years before his death he deemed it possible to write: "I visited Abyssinia three times and in all spent almost two years in that country." [23]

Information about that first journey is extremely scant. Perhaps most curious is that Anna Akhmatova did not mention it—neither in her answers to my questions nor in the notes "Gumilyov and Africa" in her notebook. She could not have failed to know of this trip—it fell at the very time when she was preparing for her wedding to Gumilyov.

Back at the beginning of July 1909, having come to her near Odessa, in Lustdorf, Gumilyov urged her to go with him to Africa. And although marriage had long been under discussion—he had first proposed to her three years earlier—still, preparations for the ceremony itself, no doubt, had to be thorough. They decided to be married not in Petersburg but in Chernigov Province, in the church of the village of Nikolskaya

Slobodka. Then there was the wedding trip to Paris; that too called for preparations. The wedding took place on April 25, 1910. So if in January the groom was still roaming somewhere over the expanses of an unknown land, the bride ought to have been anxious. However, if the bride is Akhmatova, one can hardly judge with confidence.

Perhaps Anna Andreyevna simply did not consider that trip a "journey"? Indeed, it was much shorter than the next two—only a few weeks. Gumilyov set out rather in haste and did not himself regard the trip very seriously.

It is unlikely that immediately before it he had time to look closely at new literature on Africa—apart from that already familiar to him. But his interest was probably kindled by the large "Abyssinian Exhibition," which opened in 1908 in Petersburg, on Nevsky, in house no. 59. In the Petersburg journal *Zritel* it was advertised in very high-flown terms: "An ethnographic and zoological demonstration of the fabulous land of the black Christians. A large collection of weapons, clothing, household utensils, etc., exhibited among decorations that make it possible to become acquainted with Ethiopia, our friend." Could Gumilyov have passed by such an announcement?

It must be that the exhibition aroused huge interest. They even opened a cinema with it. Not an exhibition at a cinema, but a cinema at the exhibition. The announcement read as follows: "At the Abyssinian Exhibition there is a 'Gaumont Theater.' The French joint-stock company Gaumont has installed the latest and most perfect cinematographic apparatus, the 'Chrono,' which portrays life on the screen with an illusion never before achieved. Admission to the exhibition—a half-ruble, 'with the right, without extra charge, to take a seat in the rows nearest the screen of the Gaumont Theater.'"

Perhaps Gumilyov was not so much tempted by the French apparatus that "portrays life on the screen with a hitherto unprecedented illusion." Living in France had given him ample opportunities to get to know that novelty. But the Abyssinian exhibition itself—with its weapons, clothing, household objects, and decorations reproducing the life of that country—must of course have inflamed his desire to see it all on African soil itself.

One wonders whether Gumilyov read the two articles on Abyssinia in *Novoe Vremya* that appeared right on the eve of his departure, on October 30 and November 4, 1909. Someone among his acquaintances, having learned of the planned trip, surely told him about them. The headline could not fail to catch the eye: "The Present Situation of Abyssinia." And the author was well known—Nikolai Leontiev, who had spent several years in Abyssinia.

True, at that time, Gumilyov hardly set himself the task of sorting out Abyssinian affairs. He went to distract himself, to wander, to hunt—and, above all, to gather new impressions. He did not reach Addis Ababa. He spent only a few days on Somali and Ethiopian soil.

But that land proved astonishingly interesting to him. The unpleasant impressions from the noise over the duel at once receded into the distance. It was easy to imagine how friends in dank, slushy winter Petersburg envied exotic travels and hunts, and how much "interest" those wanderings must add to one's image in the eyes of the bride. And not only in her eyes.

And one could recall Arthur Rimbaud in Harar (today there is even a Rimbaud House there).

In his African travels, Gumilyov each time repeated his first route through Somalia and Ethiopia, seeking only to extend it. He called those parts a "bewitched land," devoted so many rapturous poems to them, and became ever more accustomed to them. He became kin to them.

By the time he returned, the story of the ill-fated duel had already been half forgotten. Sensations were short-lived in resplendent St. Petersburg. And talk of journeys to exotic lands pushed aside the gossip over the quarrel with Voloshin.

True, a year later, in October 1910, the newspapers again remembered the duel. By that time the case had been brought to court, and headlines reappeared: "A Duel over a Poetess," "The Case of the Writer-Duelists," "A Duel between Men of Letters." But Gumilyov was already back in Africa—and this time for long.

## INTO A LONG JOURNEY

*I must be ill: a fog is on my heart,  
All bores me—people and their tales;  
I dream of royal diamonds,  
And a broad yataghan, all caked with blood.  
—Gumilyov*

Less than eight months passed between Gumilyov's first and second journeys to Abyssinia—from late January to late September 1910. Yet many events befell his life.

He now published mostly in *Apollon*. In 1910 his articles and surveys of poetry appeared in almost every issue; in the sixth and eighth numbers—even twice. He became an authoritative critic.

What were his literary tastes?

He bowed before Bryusov, who had restored "in Russia, forgotten since Pushkin, the noble art of writing verse simply and correctly." And before Annensky: "In his poems one is captivated by the harmonious balance between image and form." He was delighted by Kuzmin, "with the full unexpected boldness of his themes and devices, with a

vocabulary unheard of in Russian poetry, and with a verse that sounds refined and strange."

But he was stern toward Bunin's poetry: "Bunin's poems, like those of other epigones of naturalism, must be considered counterfeits, above all because they are dull, they do not hypnotize. In them everything is understandable and nothing is beautiful." Zinaida Gippius too "got it" for her "mastery frozen at a single point."

As for Sasha Cherny: "He has his own philosophy—a consistent pessimism that spares not even the author himself." His verse is "original and well wrought."

Brief yet pungent characterizations are given of the poems of Fyodor Sologub, Fofanov, Alexander Roslavlev, Teffi, Sergei Solovyov, and Ratgauz.

"For me it is beyond doubt that for a good satirist a certain dullness of perception and a narrowness of horizon are necessary—that is, what in everyday life is called common sense. It is known that people of the higher breed, ennobled by long poetic contemplation, do not laugh and do not become indignant." [25] Did readers like such pronouncements by Gumilyov? By then Oscar Wilde had already instilled a taste for paradoxes.

Gumilyov devoutly believed that those whom nature had endowed with the poetic gift are the best part of the human race. Even in mature years he was convinced that if poets headed states and governments, life on our planet would change for the better. Well, long before him the English poet Matthew Arnold asserted that "poetry will save us." In our time, Joseph Brodsky, in his Nobel lecture, spoke more pessimistically: "The world, probably, can no longer be saved, but the individual always can." [26]

Literary criticism was for Gumilyov both a means of understanding the mechanisms of poetic creation, which always interested him, and a way to win a name and establish himself in literary circles. But the main thing, of course, remained his own lyre.

In 1910 his third collection of verse—*Pearls*—appeared, with the dedication "to my teacher, Valery Bryusov." In the second edition, in 1918, this dedication was removed, just as in the second edition of *Romantic Flowers*, also in 1918, the dedication "Dedicated to Anna Andreyevna Gorenko" was removed. Yet even in *Pearls* (1918) Bryusov's name was not entirely eliminated: the first poem—"The Magic Violin"—is dedicated to him.

Bryusov himself reviewed this collection that same year in the journal *Russkaya Mysl*. He wrote that Gumilyov "lives in an imagined and almost phantasmal world. He somehow shuns modernity; he creates lands for himself and populates them with beings of his own making: people, beasts, demons. In these lands—one might say, in these worlds—

phenomena are subject not to the usual laws of nature, but to new ones that the poet has decreed to exist; and people there live and act not by the laws of ordinary psychology, but by strange, inexplicable caprices whispered by the author as prompter." [27]

Vyacheslav Ivanov also responded at once—and likewise without much approval—writing about Gumilyov's exotic romanticism and "haughty stanzas." [28]

And yet it was precisely this collection, which included the cycle "Captains," that probably first brought Gumilyov some renown among lovers of Russian letters. Even Bryusov, in his review, noted that Gumilyov was "slowly but surely moving toward complete mastery in the realm of form," and that "almost all his poems are written in a beautiful, well-thought-out, and subtly sonorous verse."

And private life? That which remains in the shadows—or even entirely off-camera—in many scholarly and historical works, yet in reality constitutes the living, seamless fabric of any writer's personality.

Soon after his return from Abyssinia, in March 1910, his long-ill father died.

On April 25, a long-cherished dream of Nikolai Stepanovich came true: he finally married Anna Andreyevna Gorenko. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon in Paris and then settled, together with Gumilyov's mother, in Tsarskoe Selo, in a two-story wooden house at the corner of Boulevardnaya and Konyushennaya streets.

Wanderlust already seemed so inherent in Gumilyov that such a seemingly quite ordinary marriage—as in everyone's case—even aroused the surprise of his acquaintances. The poet Vladimir Pyast later recalled: "...a rumor spread that Gumilyov had married and—against all expectation—'the most ordinary young lady.'" That was how it was somehow said. Apparently, from someone who had already made his first journey to Abyssinia, people expected that he would bring as his wife a Zulu woman or at least a mulatto; apparently, only an exotic bride was deemed suitable for him. Otherwise, of course, no one would have thought to say of Anna Akhmatova that she was "the most ordinary young lady." [29]

At the end of the summer of 1910 (judging by the text) Gumilyov writes to Bryusov: "I am already married and living in Tsarskoe at the old apartment, Boulevardnaya, house of Georgievsky." He adds: "And I think to remain for a few more months, until I feel the urge to go somewhere south. For the moment a trip to Central Asia is vaguely sketched out." [30]

And suddenly he reports a sharp acceleration of his departure and a change of route: "In about ten days I am again going abroad—namely, to Africa. I plan to pass through

Abyssinia to Lake Rudolf, thence to Lake Victoria, and through Mombasa to Europe. Altogether I shall spend about five months there." [31]

The journey to Central Asia did not happen. And from this letter it appears that in Africa Gumilyov intended, it seems, to undertake a large expedition. Through Abyssinia he planned to descend much farther south, into the region of the Great African Lakes, to Lake Rudolf, to visit Uganda and Kenya, and perhaps also the country now called Tanzania, then German East Africa. "Mombad" is, of course, Mombasa, one of the largest East African ports, midway from Ethiopia to Mozambique.

So Gumilyov set out to penetrate the Southern Hemisphere—"There, beyond the Tropic of Capricorn!" as he wrote in 1909.

Is it not strange that only half a year after his wedding to Akhmatova—an event he had long sought—he so easily left his wife and went off to distant lands, and for so long, for several months?

Sergei Makovsky answered this question thus: "...After the trip to Africa his exotic raptures burst into riotous bloom, and he so wanted to carry his wife away with the dream of the faraway enchantment of the world, of the beauty of deserts beneath the sky of the southern hemisphere with the constellation of the 'Cross,' and of the primordial man, divinely strong, unspoiled by the so-called civilization, living in accord with nature and her mysteries. From Anna Andreyevna he demanded worship of himself and submission, not allowing the thought that she was an independent and equal being. He loved her but failed to understand her. She was inwardly proud and intelligent—more intelligent than he; she did not confuse personal life with poetic delirium. For all her outward fragility she was strong in will, in common sense, and in industry. Flint struck stone. Returning from Slepnevo to Tsarskoe, he dreamed only of speeding into a new journey and, without much thinking, disappeared again for several months into Abyssinia." [32]

And what did Anna Andreyevna herself think? I very much wanted to ask when I spoke with her, but did not dare. The writer Natalya Ilyina, who knew Anna Andreyevna well, did dare—and asked:

— Why did he leave six months after the wedding?

Anna Andreyevna answered thus:

— He had a passion for travel. And I promised that I would never prevent him from going wherever he wished. I promised even before we were married. We began to talk about a friend of ours whose wife would not let him go hunting. Nikolai Stepanovich asked: "And would you let me go?"—"Wherever you want, whenever you want!" And so, I was at my mother's, and he sent for me. He conveyed that he was leaving and wanted to say goodbye. I came. He was packing. Saddles had been bought. [33]

Even from these words alone it is in some measure evident that everything was not so simple. Their family life did not come easy—each was a personality and possessed a complicated character. Perhaps that became the reason for his hasty departure.

To another interlocutor, Lidiya Chukovskaya, Anna Andreyevna said in 1940:  
— ...We were fiancé and fiancée for too long... When we married, in '10, he had already lost his pathos...

And in yet another conversation she admitted:  
— In my youth I had a difficult character; I strongly defended my inner independence and was spoiled.[34]

Be that as it may, on September 25, 1910, Gumilyov set out. Anna Akhmatova more than once named this date, as well as the day of his return—March 25, 1911.[35]

So he left—again, rather in haste. And he was not in much of a hurry to return...

Did the threat of legal proceedings over the previous year's duel also influence Gumilyov's decision? In 1911 the case of his duel was heard in the St. Petersburg District Court on October 17. Since the duel ended without blood, the sentence proved mild: for Gumilyov—he was charged with issuing the challenge—seven days of house arrest; for Voloshin—one day.

On the day of the trial, Gumilyov was already approaching Port Said—he arrived there on October 13, having written on the way the fourth canto of "The Discovery of America." He served his house arrest in the cabins of the steamers that proceeded farther south.

A month and a half after his departure, on November 9, Anna Akhmatova, also having left Tsarskoe—though not so far, to her native Kyiv—wrote:

*He loved three things in the world:  
Evening singing, white peacocks,  
And worn-out maps of America.  
He did not like when children cry,  
He did not like raspberry tea,  
And women's hysterics.  
...And I was his wife.*

Thus his third journey to Africa began, and his second to Ethiopia. A great journey to faraway lands.

How much one could have seen in half a year! But again—as with the first two journeys—we know extremely little about those months of his life.

In *Labors and Days* there are only two entries about them. The first: "1910. Late October, November, and December. Journey through Africa. He writes to no one. For three months there is no news from him." The entry has a continuation: "Apparently, New Year's found N. G. in Addis Ababa. Here he saw the Russian envoy B. A. Chemerzin and Doctor Kokhanovsky. He met the Abyssinian artist Ato-Encheduark. He was presented to the Abyssinian emperor (Lij Iyasu). He took part in a ceremonial dinner for 3,000 Abyssinians. He was robbed in Addis Ababa." Next to this part there is Lunknitsky's note: "Verify everything." That is how he wrote when he doubted the reliability of the facts reported to him.

Is it all correct? Not all. At least one postcard has not only been found but published. It was sent from the road. On the postcard—a view of Port Sudan, a harbor in the central Red Sea. Two postmarks: "Shellal—Halfa, 5 November 1910" and "Cairo, 7 November 1910." It was sent to Vyacheslav Ivanov, with whom on his previous trip Gumilyov had planned to go to Ethiopia. The text is laconic: "Most esteemed and dear Vyacheslav Ivanovich, finding myself again in those places of which we spoke so much last year, I could not resist the temptation to remind you of my existence with this postcard... My bow to the Tower. Yours sincerely, N. Gumilyov." [36]

The remaining notes look plausible. Boris Aleksandrovich Chemerzin really was then the head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa, and Alexei Kokhanovsky—physician to the mission. Lij Iyasu was the grandson of Emperor Menelik II, the heir to the throne. Perhaps Gumilyov considered him the *de facto* emperor, since the ailing Menelik no longer appeared to anyone.

This portion of Lunknitsky's entry is apparently confirmed by Gumilyov himself. In his "Note" on Abyssinia he says: "...I made the acquaintance of many ministers and chiefs and was presented at the court of the former emperor by the *chargé d'affaires* for Abyssinia". [37] (The "Note" was compiled in 1917, when Gumilyov could already consider both Menelik and Lij Iyasu as "former").

But there exists a far more detailed—one might say, exhaustive—confirmation of which Lunknitsky could not possibly have known, and which, likely, Gumilyov himself did not suspect. This is a letter from Anna Vasilievna Chemerzina of 1 January 1911. She described that state banquet in detail, remarking in passing: "Boris arranged an invitation for Gumilyov, who was very pleased with all he saw." The date is also given: the banquet took place on 25 December. [38]

In the reception hall of the imperial palace, the Gébi, there was a large table for Europeans—diplomats, doctors, bank employees, and generally all Europeans "holding a certain position." At this table also sat the Abyssinian Minister of Foreign Affairs. To his

right was the wife of the British envoy, to his left—Chemerzina. European dishes were served to this table, prepared by the cook of the French envoy.

Lij Iyasu, the heir to the imperial throne, dined seated on his throne. (The commentary to the three-volume collected works of Gumilyov says that "Gumilyov was presented to Menelik".[39] But the gravely ill Menelik no longer appeared at public ceremonies.)

At the foot of the throne were seated the regent and the princes of the blood. Everything served to the heir was first tasted by his bodyguards and pages. The throne was separated from the rest of the hall by light curtains.

When the dinner ended, "our eyes beheld a peculiar sight—the feeding of the veterans and of all the troops of the Abyssinian government. The troops entered in order of seniority and seated themselves on the floor, which was covered with carpets and mats, at low tables; and the palace servants brought in entire carcasses of raw meat on large poles, which they carried around among the tables; each person took a knife from the table and cut himself the piece of meat he desired from the carcass." And they washed it down with a drink made of honey and hops, and ate it with sour pancakes. About three thousand people dined in all, including the ashkari—soldiers who guarded the Russian mission.

This is, of course, that very reception which in *Works and Days* carries the note "Verify all."

We may assume that this banquet gave Gumilyov a wealth of impressions. He saw all the capital's notables, and perhaps made the acquaintance of some local aristocrats. With his own eyes he saw traditional ceremonies and the manners of different estates.

As for the robbery: in matters of theft and brigandage Addis Ababa ranked far from last among the cities of our planet. The Chemerzins' letters are full of complaints that "as a result of the lawlessness in the upper Abyssinian spheres, excessive thievery has flourished in the cities," that bands of thieves plunder all the foreign missions, that thieves have already broken into the Russian mission five times, even though it is guarded by the local watch.[40]

The artist's name sounds entirely plausible, though under current transliteration it would be written a little differently—Inchetewark. Ato is not a given name, but a form of address: "Mister." He was probably not widely known—no information about him has yet been found.

Did Gumilyov manage to reach the lands lying south of Abyssinia? Evidently not. He could hardly have kept silent about such a thing. His further route is unknown. Did he reside the whole time in Addis Ababa? Did he travel anywhere? Chemerzina says no more...

And the entry in *Works and Days* is completely laconic: "6 January 1911. Gumilyov—in Addis Ababa; until mid-March—still in Africa; preparing to return to Russia." This coincides with Akhmatova's testimony: "He returned to Russia only on 25 March (old style)."

Such a long journey—half a year—and so little is known...

What was the meaning of this journey? What did it give him; what place did it occupy in his life?

The departure to Abyssinia resembled a flight. Most likely, Gumilyov admitted as much to himself. He wrote, a few years later, when he was undergoing a new inner drama:

*Ah, to run away, to hide like a thief,  
To Africa, as before, as then.*

Half a year of life... What did he think about, long for, worry over? From what did he try to step away, to rest? How did news from home reach him—and how did he receive it? Lev Tolstoy's death?

Was he eager to return to resplendent St. Petersburg? More likely the opposite—he lingered.

His young wife—she was twenty-one—wrote during those months many of the poems that later went into her first collection, *Evening*. Among them was "The Grey-Eyed King." In the spring of 1911 she wrote:

*I was thinking about him on the eve of Epiphany.  
I was his girlfriend in January.*

And also:

*The days of intense longing are over,  
Along with the white winter,  
But why, oh why, are you  
Better than my chosen one?*

In those months that Gumilyov spent in Africa, she experienced her first success as a poet, above all at Vyacheslav Ivanov's "Tower." She had written poems before, but Gumilyov did not like them. Akhmatova herself later understood that the poems had been "appalling."

"In September he went off to Africa," Akhmatova recalled three decades later, "and stayed there several months. During that time I wrote a great deal and lived through my first fame—everyone around praised me, both Kuzmin and Sologub, and at Vyacheslav's (at Vyacheslav's they did not like Kolya and tried to tear me away from him; they said—

‘there, there, he does not understand your poems’). He came back. I say nothing to him. Then he asks, ‘Have you written poems?’—‘I have.’ And I read them to him. These were poems from the book *Evening*. He gasped. From then on he always greatly loved my poems.”[41]

But neither her success at the "Tower," nor her husband's return, particularly pleased her. In March 1911, two and a half weeks before Gumilyov's return, already in Tsarskoe Selo, she lamented:

*You know, such a fate  
I could wish  
Only for an enemy.*

Poetry is not confession, yet Akhmatova, like Gumilyov, was usually precise in rendering the signs of time and place. Sergei Makovsky wrote of that period: "I do not wish to specify too closely the vicissitudes of the Gumilyovs' domestic drama. Moreover, for anyone who knows the poems that open *Strange Sky* and the many in Akhmatova's collections *Evening and Rosary*, it is not hard to reconstruct this drama and to judge how far everything in these poems is autobiographical.”[42]

...And Gumilyov kept silent, for months sending no word of himself. What lay behind that silence? Nervousness, the urge to flee ever farther—and the realization that there is nowhere to flee from oneself? Or, on the contrary, a certain lofty detachment?

*I send you, Postumus, these books.  
What in the capital? Do they spread it soft? Is it easy to sleep?  
How is Caesar? What occupies him? All the intrigues?  
All the intrigues, no doubt, and gluttony.  
I sit in my garden, the lamp is burning.  
No mistress, no servant, no acquaintances.  
Instead of this world's weak and strong—  
Only the harmonious droning of insects.*

This is not Gumilyov. It is Joseph Brodsky—Akhmatova later loved his poems dearly. Was this not how Gumilyov felt in his voluntary exile? Did he not write to Kuzmin once: "In Petersburg all is as before: they quarrel, drink, and read poetry.”[43] And once back home he remembered his wanderings with longing:

*I'll let my body sink into the chair,  
I'll shade the light with my hands  
And I will weep long, long,  
Recalling the evenings,  
When 'yesterday' did not torment me  
And chains of duty did not weigh me down;*

*And the cape cleaving the sea,  
And a solitary cypress,  
And the gracious Hussein,  
And his slow tale,  
In those hours when no eye can see  
Either cypress or the basin.*

## THEIR PATHS

*When a sly woman's glance  
Startles me on a March night,  
It is not verses that enchant me—  
But a geographical map.  
Gumilyov*

One can hardly say with complete certainty why Gumilyov chose Abyssinia in particular for his travels. Yet the choice was probably not accidental.

Most often people pointed to the influence of Arthur Rimbaud. Sergei Makovsky, for example, wrote that, beginning his work at *Apollon* in 1909, Gumilyov "was preparing, after the example of Rimbaud, for a journey to Africa." [44]

Gumilyov did indeed love Rimbaud; he translated his poem "Voyelles" ("Vowels").

But did he set off traveling after Rimbaud's example? I think yes—and no.

The example of Rimbaud surely had its effect. But they went with altogether different aims.

In Rimbaud's fate the poet and the traveler were sharply separated. In the African period of his life, Rimbaud spoke of his poems as the delusions of youth: "Absurd, disgusting childishness."

To Boris Poplavsky, Rimbaud's fate looked like this:

*London was full—  
With crowds of clowns—  
And off to the Congo  
Rimbaud was ready.*

Gumilyov, of course, also had such feelings. But he went to Africa not to give up writing poetry, but, on the contrary, "to find new words in a new environment."

In Africa Rimbaud was a trader, dreaming only of wealth; he led caravans selling arms across the deserts, with several kilograms of gold coins sewn into his belt. Setting off for Africa, he wrote: "I shall return with iron muscles, with dark skin and furious eyes... I

shall have gold: I will become idle and coarse. Women care for the fierce cripples who return from the tropics."[45] And after many years in Africa, rumor reached France that he had established a harem and called women "living dictionaries of the local tongues, bound in leather."

All this is true. But Rimbaud in Africa was something else as well. The French Geographical Society expressed its gratitude to him. He could walk twenty days across the Somali desert. Having spent about a decade in Ethiopia and Somalia and having returned mortally ill, even on the eve of death, in Marseille, he dreamed of returning to Africa.

And however much Rimbaud-the-traveler tried to forget Rimbaud-the-poet, admirers of his verse refused to forget. Long before Gumilyov, Innokenty Annensky and other Russian poets had translated him.

The names of peoples, places, cities connected with the travels of Gumilyov and of Rimbaud are strikingly similar. Above all, the city of Harar—where Rimbaud spent most of his time. There he had his trading post. There he dreamed of returning before he died.

Was it not for this reason that two decades later Gumilyov was drawn so strongly to Harar on each of his African journeys? Is that not why he ended up there every time?

And yet the example of the French poet was probably not the sole reason.

Of all the countries of Black Africa, Abyssinia aroused the greatest interest in Russia at that time.

The years of Gumilyov's childhood, adolescence, and youth coincided with a turbulent surge of that interest.

The initial reason for bringing Russia and Abyssinia closer was the similarity of their religions. Much was written about this both by figures of the Orthodox Church and by laymen.

In 1863 the journal *Spiritual Conversation* published an article "Monophysites in Abyssinia." [46] In 1866 Bishop Porphyry Uspensky published a work on the ecclesiastical and political condition of Abyssinia from the most ancient times. In 1889 the popular journal *Niva* ran an article "The Russian Spiritual Mission in Abyssinia." [47] In 1894 a booklet was published in Petersburg entitled "A Christian Country in Africa"; in 1895—"In the Land of Black Christians"; in 1900—"Our Black Co-Believers: Their Country, State Structure, and the Tribes Constituting the State"; in 1900—"On the Country of Black Christians"; in 1905, in Moscow—"The Country of Black Christians."

The striving toward closer ties was on both sides. "From the days of the Muscovite tsars of pre-Petrine Rus', Abyssinia sought to open relations on the basis of religious kinship. In the past century these attempts were repeated more than once: in 1855, 1874, 1876, 1879, 1887, and other years. Unfortunately, being strangers to international politics, the Abyssinians often chose the most inopportune moment for establishing relations." [48] So wrote in 1913, in a memorandum to Foreign Minister Sazonov, Alexei Kokhanovsky. A doctor by profession, for several years he in fact performed the duties of head of the Russian diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. And in 1913 he exchanged impressions of that country with Gumilyov.

As early as 1847–1848, a Russian expedition had visited Ethiopia. Porphyry Uspensky and Bishop Kirill later tried to secure the dispatch of a spiritual mission, but did not succeed.

To establish permanent ties between Russia and Ethiopia was not easy, at least until the last decades of the past century. If the route lay overland, it had to pass through the vast, scorching deserts of Northeast Africa; if by sea, then around the Cape of Good Hope, all the way round the African continent.

Only with the opening of the Suez Canal did a shorter road appear. But the canal opened only in 1869, and that route still had to be mastered, to become customary.

In the 1880s and early 1890s many Russians spent time in the places that now form the republics of Djibouti, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Among them were representatives of the Orthodox Church, Cossacks, retired officers. They went for various purposes—some official, others at their own risk. Many of these journeys have not been reliably documented.

At the end of the last century, the best-known compendium of world geography was probably the multivolume *Earth and People* by the Frenchman Élisée Reclus. Reclus began the bulky volume devoted to Africa thus: "First of all, the chief share of my gratitude is due to my friend Lev Mechnikov, who allowed me to make use of his unpublished memoirs on the peoples of Southern Africa and on the Somalis." [49] Lev Il'ich, the elder brother of the biologist Ilya Il'ich Mechnikov, was an entomologist and spent most of his life abroad. What those "unpublished memoirs" of his are, I have unfortunately been unable to determine.

Mechnikov himself seems to have published only a single comparatively large article—in the *Bulletin of the Neuchâtel Geographical Society*, and even there he signed it only with initials. One does not at once guess the Russian author behind them. How Mechnikov gathered this material, where exactly and when he travelled—this is one of the "blank spots" still to be filled in.

There were journeys of another sort as well.

In his *African Diary*, Gumilyov mentioned one of them: "...Ragheita, a small independent sultanate to the north of Obock. One Russian adventurer—Russia has no fewer of them than anywhere else—had all but acquired it for the Russian government." [50]

Most likely, Gumilyov had in mind the Terek Cossack Nikolai Ivanovich Ashinov, who in 1888 and 1889 attempted, at the head of a detachment of a hundred and fifty men and accompanied by Archimandrite Paisii, to 'take possession' of lands on the shore of the Red Sea and to found a settlement called 'Moscow Stanitsa' (or 'New Moscow') to the north of what is now the city of Djibouti.

The French, who claimed this area, took alarm. In the Cossacks' appearance they saw a typical colonial adventure. They decided that if the Cossacks managed to gain a foothold here, then in the end the Russian tsar would declare the settlement under his protection, and the French would then have a powerful rival at a strategic point—the narrow throat where the Red Sea debouches into the Indian Ocean.

To tell the truth, certain Russian officials, merchants, and churchmen did indeed feel such a temptation. On 20 September 1888 the Nizhny Novgorod governor-general Baranov sent Alexander III a lengthy memorandum putting forward the idea of creating a Russian colony in those places. Seeking the tsar's support, he wrote: "The settlement of the African littoral by Russian emigrants will only bring Russia the full measure of possible benefit if the government firmly directs the arrangement of the colony and its relations with its neighbors, and especially with Abyssinia. Only under this condition will the colony receive the state significance proper to it."

Baranov even proposed: "In the event of the Highest favor I would most gladly undertake to travel, under the guise of a leave, to the Cossack colony," and even "with a certain assistance from the government to form a Russo-African Company."

The sovereign sent this document to the foreign minister Nikolai Karlovich Girs with the note: "I will speak with you about this." He also wrote: "I should like to know the opinion of I. Shestakov, who, it seems, sympathized with Ashinov." [51] The naval minister Admiral Shestakov probably supported Ashinov, but I do not know whether he had time to report his opinion to the emperor—he soon died.

Ashinov was even presented to Alexander III. Pobedonostsev compared the founder of the "Moscow Stanitsa" with Christopher Columbus...

...In February 1889, the Cossack camp was shelled from a French warship. There were dead and wounded... The Cossacks had to leave those parts and return home. These events are best depicted in Yuri Davydov's novella *The Fate of Usoltsev*.

As for the scandal that broke out in Petersburg after the collapse of the adventure, one can judge it by the diary of the assistant foreign minister, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf.

"His Majesty is very irritated with Ashinov and almost regrets that the latter was not thoroughly beaten there on the spot; Captain Ptashinsky of the Nizhny Novgorod, having encountered this band in Port Said, reports to the Naval Ministry: 'Ashinov plays roulette and scatters gold, while most of his comrades stagger about the streets and taverns ragged and drunk.' His Majesty ordered this report to be printed in the *Kronstadt Gazette*."

Who knows how people would have regarded Ashinov and Paisii had they succeeded.

But in this case, of course, they hastened to disown them. The Foreign Ministry produced a prosecutor's report three years old "which records a series of brigand acts committed by the notorious Ashinov. The newspapers too began to let slip reports about the past of this adventurer, who had been compared to Yermak, Columbus, and the like, and whom they wished to elevate into a pioneer of the 'Russian cause.'"

As for Paisii, they began to say that he was illiterate and that he had been made an archimandrite only as a fervent supporter of creating the colony, and solely at the insistence of Pobedonostsev. And Pobedonostsev himself now went to the sovereign to prove his non-involvement in the affair. But even the no less reactionary Prince Meshchersky hurled darts at him. An editorial in *The Citizen* was directed squarely against the Holy Synod: "O righteous God, if in the capital of the Russian realm and at the helm of its Orthodox Church such accidents are possible as put Russia into the position of a potential clash with other states. The guilt assumed by the mysterious senders of choice—of the half-beast Ashinov, the illiterate monk Paisii," and so on and so forth.

In a word, let the failure weep.

"The 'mysterious senders' were never named. Nor was anyone going to announce their names publicly. To the question why he had supplied Ashinov with arms and military stores, the governor of Odessa replied: 'I believed the government sympathized with these enterprises; as for the arms and supplies, they were furnished from Nikolaev by the Naval Department.'"

Setting forth all these facts, Lamzdorf drew a conclusion: "Among ourselves we must admit that this unfortunate incident came very much in time to open the Sovereign's eyes and to rein in our pseudo-patriots, who have so often misled His Majesty." [52]

It must be said that far from everyone in Russian society greeted penetration into Abyssinia with delight. And Saltykov-Shchedrin made merry with it to his heart's

content. In his *Contemporary Idyll* the globetrotting General Polkan Samsonych Rededya "found good fortune in Africa." He entered the service now with the Ethiopian king, now with the Egyptian khedive, now with the Zulu ruler. All the African potentates whom Rededya served were taken prisoner, but he himself "everywhere received travel vouchers and per diem by account from Petersburg." Rededya won no battles. But the Moscow merchants and "Petersburg patriots-concessionaires" were wild about him. "He especially captivated the hearts of merchants by identifying Russia's mission in the East with those brilliant prospects which, if it were realized, must open up for the plush and mitten workers of the leading Russian firms."

Shchedrin wrote all this back in the early 1980s. But he already had Rededya and the black-eyed Lampopb, and, most importantly, he had already spotted those calico merchants who supplied the adventurers with money.

Energetic and rapid Russo-Abyssinian rapprochement began in the mid-1890s. At that time Abyssinia faced the threat of an Italian invasion. The Italians had a convenient bridgehead: they had already seized Eritrea.

In March 1895 an expedition arrived in Addis Ababa organized by the well-known traveler Alexander Vasilievich Eliseev and the retired Uhlan officer Nikolai Stepanovich Leontiev. The expedition also included Archimandrite Ephrem. And three months later an Abyssinian diplomatic mission came to Petersburg.

At the end of the same year a twenty-thousand-strong Italian army invaded Abyssinia. The Abyssinian negus (emperor) Menelik—whom Alexei Kokhanovsky, for his reforming activity, compared to Peter I—managed to organize resistance and to rout the Italians.

But the dangers hanging over the country did not end there. During the colonial partition of Africa, not only Italy but also Great Britain were inclined to divide Abyssinia into spheres of influence.

In March 1896 the Russian Red Cross resolved to dispatch a medical detachment to Abyssinia and appropriated 100,000 rubles for the purpose.

They even issued an unusual breast badge. I remember my joy when, in childhood, I was given one—I collected pre-revolutionary coins and medals. On it is the inscription: "To the Orthodox Brethren of Abyssinia. The Red Cross of Russia." And the date: 1896.

A detachment was formed under the command of Major General I. K. Shvedov—doctors, physician assistants, feldshers, orderlies, and nurses, and several officers. The nurses had to be turned back en route, from Egypt, after the Italians refused to allow the detachment to pass through Eritrea, and it had to proceed by a more difficult route.

From late May, when the detachment reached Harar, an outpatient clinic was opened there; and in July a Russian hospital began to operate in Addis Ababa.

In February 1898, the Russian imperial mission arrived in Addis Ababa. Its arrival effectively meant the establishment of permanent diplomatic relations. The mission was headed by P. M. Vlasov. He possessed not only the high rank of Actual State Councilor, but also substantial experience of diplomatic work in the East—in Persia and in Jerusalem.

The mission was accompanied by a convoy—twenty Cossacks under the command of Podyesaul P. N. Krasnov of the Life Guard Ataman Regiment. Yes, that very Krasnov. In the Civil War he, by then a general, became one of the leaders of the White movement. Later he became a writer, without renouncing political activity. His best-known work is probably the novel *From the Double-Headed Eagle to the Red Banner*. But his first literary experience came with the book *Cossacks in Abyssinia*, already published in 1899.

This was the first diplomatic representation that Russia sent to Black Africa.

The importance which the Russian government attached to Abyssinia is shown not only by Vlasov's extraordinary mission, but also by the composition of the permanent Russian diplomatic representation in Addis Ababa, established in 1902.

The head of the mission was appointed the Actual State Councilor Konstantin Nikolaevich Lishin. He was elevated to the rank of minister-resident.

With six attached officers, the mission numbered fifteen persons (not counting the servants), and in addition a convoy of seven Cossacks of the 1st Guards Cavalry Division.

Most Russian diplomats and officers became acquainted only with the central part of Abyssinia, with the province of Shoa, in the center of which lay the capital, Addis Ababa, founded only a few years earlier. Of this province and of the young capital, Gumilyov later wrote:

*But trusting in Shoan refined flattery,  
From the efforts of a homeland of poets and roses  
The wise Elephant of Ethiopia, the Negus Negesti,  
moved his throne to rocky Shoa.*

*In Shoa the warriors are crafty, cruel, and rough,  
they smoke pipes and drink intoxicating tej,  
they love to hear nothing but drums and trumpets,  
to oil their rifles and sharpen their swords.*

*The Hararis, the Galla (Oromo), the Somalis, the Danakil,  
cannibals and dwarfs in the depths of the forests—  
they all were subdued to Menelik  
and paved his palace with lions' skins.*

Colonel of the General Staff Leonid Konstantinovich Artamonov saw the far western reaches of Abyssinia and even the Eastern Sudan. He was assigned by the Ministry of War to Vlasov's mission and, arriving in Addis Ababa, almost without delay, he went further west. With two Cossacks, Arkhipov and Shchedrov, he traveled for almost a year, from March 1898 to February 1899, and explored a part of the White Nile basin which was almost unknown to Europeans. He crossed mountain massifs of Abyssinia, went by hard-to-pass paths, through places about which Gumilyov wrote:

*Palms, cacti, grasses the height of a man—  
there is altogether too much of this sun-scorched grass...  
Be careful! In it boas lie in wait,  
panthers lie in wait, and tawny lions.*

*Along the cliffs and ravines of a road that is toil itself  
climb upward—and, unexpectedly, you will see all around you  
sycamores and roses, merry villages,  
and a green meadow mottled with people.*

The very dispatch of Artamonov to Abyssinia in itself showed how much interest this country aroused in Russian military circles. Artamonov was one of the most experienced General Staff officers. He finished two military academies, took part in a number of campaigns, led expeditions in Turkestan, the Caucasus, and Persia... A brilliant military career was foreseen for him—and he indeed made it. It was broken off in 1914, when Artamonov, by then a lieutenant general, commanded Samsonov's First Corps, which was routed by the Germans. Solzhenitsyn devoted not a little attention to General Artamonov in *August 14th* telling how he "dashed about the Priamur [a territory in far eastern Siberia] and dashed to the Boers, and dashed to Abyssinia." [53] (To the Boers? Meaning in the Transvaal?—he never was in that part of Africa; in that, Solzhenitsyn was mistaken.)

Several years ago, a daughter of Artamonov gave the Geographical Society notes that he kept for many years. How interesting it would be to study those notes and to try to understand a man, whose destiny prompted a youth of Gumilyov's generation to travel!

Another member of the mission, the physician Viktor Petrovich Shchusev, set out from Addis Ababa to the north in 1898 and reached the sources of the Blue Nile. And in the following year, the officers Davydov and Dragomirov struck south toward Lake Margherita.

In 1903 an expedition led by engineer N. Kurmakov crossed all of Abyssinia from east to west. Its aim was to survey the gold deposits of the province of Wolléga, near the Sudan.

*Climb higher still! What coolness!  
As if in late autumn, the fields lie bare.  
At dawn the rills freeze, and the herd  
huddles beneath the eaves of the house.*

*Baboons roar among the spurge bushes,  
smeared with the milky, sticky sap;  
riders race, hurling long spears,  
firing their rifles at a full gallop.*

But it was Second Lieutenant of the Life Guards Hussar Regiment Aleksandr Ksaverievich Bulatovich who became most intimately acquainted with Abyssinia. He was there four times. On the eve of his third journey, in March 1899, he was received and given a blessing by Nicholas II.

Bulatovich saw even the remotest southwestern outskirts of that country. He was the first European to traverse Kaffa from north to south—the region from whose name the word "coffee" derives. He proved that the Omo River is not connected with the Nile. He named a mountain ridge on the right bank of the Omo in honor of Nicholas II.

*Higher up there are only crags, naked escarpments,  
where winds wander and eagles exult;  
no man has climbed so far, and the peaks  
are white with snow under the tropic sun.*

Across those regions of which Gumilyov dreamed, Bulatovich had passed almost a decade and a half earlier. And immediately he published books about his marches: *With the Armies of Menelik II: Diary of a March from Ethiopia to Lake Rudolph*; *From Entotto to the River Baro: Report on a Journey to the Southwestern Regions of the Ethiopian Empire in 1896–1897*; and *From Abyssinia through the Country of Kaffa to Lake Rudolph*. In 1972 they were reissued in Moscow. And in 1987 his previously unpublished letters and dispatches appeared as the book *Third Journey through Ethiopia*.

The name of Bulatovich overgrown with legends, tall tales, and fables—and small wonder. A hussar officer, he became a monk of the great schema [the highest rank of Orthodox monasticism]. His first three journeys to Ethiopia he made as a soldier, the

last—already as a monk, on his own initiative. Intimately acquainted with Menelik, he was one of the last Europeans to see the hopelessly ill emperor and tried to treat him.

In our own time Bulatovich has been written about more than once in scholarly and popular literature. But even those who have not read it are, without knowing, acquainted with him through one of our most famous satirical novels.

"A brilliant hussar, Count Aleksei Bulanov... was truly the hero of aristocratic Petersburg. The name of the magnificent horseman and roisterer never left the lips of the prim inhabitants of the palaces on the English Embankment nor the columns of the society pages. Very often on the pages of illustrated magazines there appeared the photographic portrait of the handsome hussar—his jacket braided embroidered with brandenburgs and trimmed with grained astrakhan...

"Fame pursued Count Bulanov—that of a participant in many secret duels with fatal outcomes, of flagrant affairs with the most beautiful and unapproachable ladies of society, of outrageous pranks... The Count was handsome, young, rich, lucky in love, lucky at cards... He was bold and dashing. He helped the Abyssinian negus Menelik in his war with the Italians. He sat beneath the great Abyssinian stars, wrapped in a white burnous, poring over a three-verst map of the terrain. The torchlight cast wavering shadows on the slicked sideburns of the Count. At his feet sat his new friend, an Abyssinian boy, Vaska."

So runs the story in *The Twelve Chairs*. Ostap Bender relates it to Ippolit Matveevich on the eve of the latter's wedding to Madame Gritsatsuyeva. Ilf and Petrov, of course, did not intend to give an exact account of Aleksandr Bulatovich's fate. They changed his name and greatly embellished his story. He certainly did not enjoy such riotous triumphs in society. But the rumor of his campaign spread widely and must have fired the imagination of the young Gumilyov. He could not have been unaware of the hussar's books; he must have read them and admired the fate of this man.

To be sure, many different sorts of people went to Abyssinia in those years. Some simply on official duty. But there were also those who were truly captivated and leant their labor and talent to learning about Abyssinia and drawing it closer to Russia.

There were, of course, adventurers too—as in every land—Gumilyov mentions them. The most vivid of them was Leontiev. From 1894 on he more than once visited Abyssinia, accompanied Abyssinian missions to Petersburg. For a time he served as Menelik's military adviser and then as governor of a southern region newly annexed to Abyssinia.

Dispatches from Russian diplomats in Addis Ababa are full of complaints that in Abyssinia Leontiev posed as a trusted agent of the Russian government, while in

Petersburg he posed as Menelik's closest counselor. Leontiev was accused of grasping for profit and of trying to sell off the natural wealth of lands entrusted to him to English and Belgian companies.

As early as 1897 Vlasov wrote to Foreign Minister Lamsdorff that Menelik "has no confidence in Leontiev and regards him rather as an adventurer pursuing his personal aims." [54]

A dispatch from the chargé d'affaires Orlov, 24 July 1902: "Lately Emperor Menelik has repeatedly expressed regret that he took Mr. Leontiev into his service and has expressed his assurance that the said person will not return to Abyssinia." Menelik also asked that the government of Nicholas II be warned "not to place credence in Leontiev's communications about Abyssinian affairs." [55]

In early 1904 Leontiev petitioned Menelik for permission to come to Abyssinia in order to say goodbye and settle his affairs. Menelik refused him, and the Russian minister-resident Yanshin considered that decision justified. [56]

Of the motley careers of men like Leontiev people spoke and wrote; of many other countrymen of ours it is hard to find even a mention.

In Konstantin Paustovsky's lovely book *Distant Years* one chapter is devoted to a man the author calls Uncle Yuzya. Uncle Yuzya was chief of camel caravans that went from Uralsk to Khiva and Bukhara; he lived in the Ussuri region, in Manchuria, in China and Japan; he fought in the Anglo-Boer and the Russo-Japanese wars... No wonder the tales of Uncle Yuzya seemed to young Paustovsky and his peers more interesting than the adventures of Baron Munchausen.

So Uncle Yuzya too was a knight of the Muse of Far Wanderings—even before Gumilyov. And, again before Gumilyov, fate carried him to Abyssinia. According to Paustovsky, "he returned from there with a huge golden order, bestowed on him for something or other by the negus Menelik." True, the nephew wrote about the decoration itself with little reverence: "The order looked like an ordinary janitor's badge."

The nephew gave neither the full name nor the patronymic of his uncle. True, this is easy to ascertain: it was Iosif Grigorievich Vysochansky. But in the documents and memoirs connected with Abyssinia I have so far found no mention of him.

And in the memoirs of the writer and literary scholar Boris Andreevich Filippov there is a little chapter called "An Heir to the Abyssinian Throne." It tells of a meeting in Moscow during the Christmas holidays of 1924. Filippov came from Petersburg with his friend, also a student, whom he calls Yuri K. It was Yuri who said:

"Let's drop in, Boris, on an acquaintance of mine. He lives not far off, in one of the Arbat lanes... The heir to the Abyssinian throne..."

"What?"

"Yes—that's what we usually call him. Aleksei Nikolaevich—he is a noted Moscow engineer-technologist—was born in Addis Ababa and spent his early childhood there. His father, a physician and naturalist, a participant in one of the expeditions to Abyssinia—almost certainly the notorious Ashinov venture—stayed there for several years; he served as court physician to Negus Menelik: the negus was his son's godfather. And all the godchildren of the King of Kings, the Emperor of Ethiopia—like his innumerable sons and grandsons, kinsmen and connections—are regarded as heirs to the throne, as descendants by blood or spirit of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Each—in his own precisely defined turn. So Aleksei Nikolaevich is also an heir, in, I think, the five-hundred-and-seventeenth place..."

Filippov's story struck me as so curious that I give it here in full.

"The cozy two-room flat of Aleksei Nikolaevich was a small museum. Terrifying African masks, squat wooden idols with eyes of mother-of-pearl buttons; primitive Ethiopian bronze crucifixes; some kind of capes and aprons of many-colored bright feathers; icons with dark-brown Madonnas and Saviors with the Glaring Eye... Everything in the rooms breathed old-bachelor neatness—not without a certain pedantry, but also with old-Moscow cordiality and warmth. Iron-tiled stoves heated hot, green and scarlet vigil lamps. If not for the African trophies—an utterly typical flat of a patriarchal Muscovite of the turn of the century.

"The host, a broad-shouldered, clear-eyed sturdy man not yet forty, emphatically of the Great Russian type, greeted us with open arms.

"‘Thank you, Yura, for not forgetting old friends...’

"‘And I, without asking, have brought a comrade to you,’ Yura apologized.

"‘All the better. “Every guest is sent to us by God,” as the old song goes. I didn't prepare a supper today, it's true, but we'll have tea in the Moscow way: with fresh kalach rolls and Ukrainian fried sausage, with a little vodka (of course, only “Rykovka”—a mere thirty degrees—but I have steeped it on rowan berries). And the day before yesterday I received a parcel from Addis Ababa—candied fruits from there and some kind of pickles and preserves... From an old friend of my late father's... We'll taste those too...’

"Over the tasty tea the host told of Menelik's Abyssinia, of his guard dressed à l'européenne, yet almost entirely barefoot; of the plump, portly Ethiopian beggars driving

about on mules and donkeys in two-wheelers attended by their slaves, thin and almost naked, who begged alms 'for Christ's sake' for their masters; of the small white-stone monasteries in the hills and the howling of hungry beasts on the very outskirts of the City of the King of Kings...

"Many, many years passed. When I was freed from the Ukhta–Pechora camps in March 1941, I secretly visited Peter (I had been strictly forbidden even the briefest stay in any large centers, let alone in the capitals). I saw Yuri K., by then a noted physicist. As usual, we recalled the past.

"‘Yura, and how is your acquaintance "the heir to the Abyssinian throne"?"

"‘In '36 he was shot—as a member, albeit of a foreign, imperial house. And of a semi-colonial, feudal country to boot..."[57]

Of course, Boris Filippov is unlikely to be precise in the details.

People who knew his family well told me that his mother used to say:

"My Borya knows everything, and what he doesn't know, he invents."

Here too, in this tale, Filippov can hardly have rendered the details exactly—the right of succession, the "517th place," and the notion that only "the day before yesterday" Aleksei Nikolaevich received a parcel from Addis Ababa. It is not out of the question that he may not have remembered even the man's name exactly; after all, the meeting was in Moscow in 1924, and the memoirs appeared in America in 1982. And although he underlined that "the meeting stuck fast in memory," Filippov nonetheless added: "I forgot his surname. I remember he was called Aleksei Nikolaevich."

Still, the kernel of the story seems undoubtedly true. There is so much in it that would be hard to invent. So indeed there lived in Moscow of those years a man born in Ethiopia, who had filled his flat in an Arbat lane with Ethiopian furnishings.

Perhaps it will yet be possible to establish who he was... If he really was called Aleksei Nikolaevich, then who knows—perhaps he was the son of Nikolai Petrovich Brovtsyn. Brovtsyn was a physician; he came to Abyssinia in the late '90s and so won Menelik's favor that the latter begged Nicholas II to leave him in Addis Ababa for several years, not to replace him with another doctor.

The rapprochement of Russia and Ethiopia was explained by the fact that at the end of the last century their interests largely coincided—above all because both countries saw England as their adversary.

In this, Menelik wanted from Russia both protection and direct material aid. And the tsarist government? Sergei Yulyevich Witte, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire, remembered those events as follows:

"In Russia in the highest circles there exists a passion for conquests—or rather, for the seizure of what, in the government's view, is lying about 'badly.'

"And since Abyssinia, after all, is a semi-idolatrous country, yet in that religion of theirs there are certain gleams of Orthodoxy, of the Orthodox Church; so, on that basis, we very much wished to declare Abyssinia under our protection and, when a convenient occasion arose, to swallow it as well."

In connection with Russo–Abyssinian relations of that time Witte, in exasperation, uttered a broader judgment: "...running through the maps of Russia's development from the time of Rurik, every gymnasium student will see that the great Russian Empire, during its thousand-year existence, took shape in that the Slavic tribes living in Russia gradually absorbed, by force of arms and by all manner of other means, a whole mass of other nationalities; thus arose the Russian Empire, which is a conglomerate of diverse peoples and therefore, strictly speaking, there is no 'Russia'—there is a Russian Empire. And now, after we have swallowed a whole mass of alien tribes and seized their lands—now, in the Duma and in *Novoye Vremya* a half-comic national party has appeared which proclaims that Russia must be for the Russians, i.e., for those who profess the Orthodox religion, whose surnames end in -ov, and who read *Russkoye Znamya* and *Golos Moskvy*." [58]

There were no concrete plans for the "annexation" of Abyssinia. But such moods existed. "It would be good to annex the Kaffirs and Abyssinia to the Russian Empire. In the newspapers this was not so much said as let slip," Viktor Shklovsky recalled in old age. [59] And he was not alone.

The Russian government would have liked to ensure for its fleet a coaling harbor on the way from Odessa to Vladivostok, so as not to depend on the willingness or unwillingness of Western countries to supply Russian ships with coal. This was considered necessary for a firm link between the western and Far Eastern parts of the empire. The Russo–Japanese War later proved just how important this really was: England, and not only England, refused to coal Rozhdestvensky's squadron in the ports of their colonies.

Foreseeing this, the government sought to obtain at least a fueling station on that vast ocean route—among other places, near Abyssinia, at the exit from the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean. One vivid piece of evidence is a document preserved in the Naval Archive: the order of the Main Naval Staff to the commander of the gunboat *Manchur* of 11 November 1888. He was instructed to examine carefully the Gulf of Tadjoura, where Ashinov founded the "Moscow Stanitsa," and to report to the Naval Ministry whether the enclosed bay there "provides a safe refuge for ships and to what extent and by what

means it can be fortified so that, to a certain degree, it would be inaccessible to an enemy." The directions were even more explicit: "In making your considerations on this matter,

mark on the chart where, in your opinion, it would be most advantageous to place fortifications or mine barriers, and places suitable for the construction of coal depots."

He was also instructed to ascertain "how foreigners regard the Cossacks and whether they consider possible the existence and development of the 'Moscow Stanitsa.'"

The order ended with a reminder of strict secrecy: "It goes without saying that all results obtained and all your considerations must remain in the strictest secrecy."

This was not the first such reconnaissance carried out by Russian ships—and by no means the last, even after the French had expelled Ashinov's settlement.

Admiral G. Tsyvinsky, who for a time commanded the Black Sea Fleet, wrote that in 1898 he, returning from the Pacific on the clipper Kreiser, received in Singapore a secret cable from the Naval Ministry: "The French government has proposed to us, in its African colony of Djibouti, a plot of territory for a coal depot for naval vessels bound for the East. On the passage from Colombo to the Red Sea, call at that port, without making this public in Aden, and come to terms with the governor of Djibouti regarding the cession to us of an area sufficient for this purpose."

Literally a few days later the French government withdrew its offer. But this episode was not the only attempt by Russia to obtain a site for the entrance of her ships.

Thus Russian policy in Ethiopia and the adjoining regions accorded with the general international situation.

As for Gumilyov—he knew nothing of these political intricacies. They were kept secret. The documents I have quoted were classified; the memoirs had not yet been written; the diaries had not yet been published. A man keenly interested in politics and living by it might, perhaps, have guessed something—from rumors, from the hints of officials, from what we now call leaks. But Gumilyov? He did not even suspect the underpinnings of Ashinov's expedition and in his *African Diary* gave a simple explanation of its failure: "...our Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused him."

Plainly, he saw only the romantic side of journeys to Abyssinia.

In his childhood and youth a great deal was written about that country. And the very titles of the books—*A Russian Cavalryman in Abyssinia* or *Cossacks in Abyssinia*—how they inflamed dreams of wandering!

Accounts of travels were published not only in the capitals but also in provincial towns. In Grodno the physician D. L. Glinsky put out pamphlets: "Harar and Its Inhabitants" and "The Life of the Russian Sanitary Detachment in Harar." The first dictionary—

*Abyssinian*

*Alphabet and Elementary Abyssinian–Russian Dictionary*—was published in Petersburg in 1888.

Russian scholarly literature on Abyssinia also began to appear. Professor Turaev as early as 1899 published an article on Ethiopian verses; in 1903 a brochure, "Abyssinian Free-Thinkers of the Seventeenth Century"; and thereafter a series of other works.

Most likely this fascination with Abyssinia influenced Gumilyov's choice of route for his wanderings. The country attracted by an exoticism already to some extent familiar and at the same time was a gateway to lands virtually unknown.

Vsevolod Aleksandrovich Rozhdestvensky, in answer to my questions about all this, said that Abyssinia excited extraordinary curiosity among the Tsarskoe Selo gymnasium boys. Like Akhmatova, he believed that in Tsarskoe Selo there served—or, at least, often appeared—officers and Cossacks from the escort that accompanied the first Russian diplomatic mission. And the young Gumilyov, said Rozhdestvensky, loved to ply soldiers with questions.

In his travels through Abyssinia he had people to think of, people to remember, men with whom to compare himself...

Perhaps the romantic turned both to Arthur Rimbaud and to some of his own countrymen when he wrote:

*How strange, how sweet to enter your dreams,  
to whisper your cherished names...*

## **BUT WHAT ABYSSINIA WAS IT THAT HE CAME TO?**

*Between the shore of the boisterous Red Sea  
and Sudan's mysterious forest a land is seen,  
sprawled among four plateaus,  
like a lioness at rest—such is the country.  
Gumilyov*

Gumilyov found himself not quite in the country he knew from the books of Russian travelers of the end of the last century.

The "honeymoon" of Russo–Abyssinian relations had passed. One reason was the Russo–Japanese War: it showed Menelik that Russia was weakened. And the diplomatic services of Japan and of the Western powers likewise did their best to persuade him of this. At the end of the previous century Russia supplied Abyssinia with rifles; after the war the

Japanese ostentatiously offered to replenish Menelik's stock with weapons captured in Manchuria and Port Arthur. Not a few Russian three-line rifles found their way into Abyssinia by that route.

Aleksei Kokhanovsky wrote to Foreign Minister Sazonov: "In December 1906 England, France, and Italy signed an agreement dividing Abyssinia into three zones of influence... This comes after Japan's defeat of Russia... whereupon Russia is reducing its representation in Abyssinia and its expenditures on Abyssinia, distancing themselves from their previous activities as their friend-patron... After the Russo-Japanese War, the Abyssinians were assured that so many Russians had been killed in the war that they had now become a small people...

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But the mission's staff was drastically reduced.

In 1902 it had been set (counting those attached to it, but not the service staff) at fifteen people, and the mission was headed by a minister-resident with the rank of actual state councilor.

On the eve of Gumilyov's arrival, however, there was not a single diplomat and not a single officer attached to the mission. The duties of head of mission were being performed by the physician Kokhanovsky.

...How much of this did Gumilyov understand? Likely only in part. He was not interested in politics and even in his mature years did not understand it very well. And as for newspapers, his attitude was, I repeat, that of Marina Tsvetaeva:

*What do such gentlemen care  
for sunset or for dawn?*

*Gulpers of empty air,  
Readers of the news!*

## LETTERS

*"I love the weary rustle  
of old letters, distant words."  
—Voloshin*

*"Letters, more than memoirs—  
they are caked with the blood of events;  
they are the past itself as it was,  
retained and imperishable."  
—Herzen*

And so, Gumilyov left almost no testimony about his longest journey. He kept no notes—or at any rate none have yet been found.

But there are the letters of the Chemerzins. A remarkable source. From them one can learn much about that journey—not only about the dinner at the emperor's.

A letter from Anna Vasilievna Chemerzina, November 19, 1910:

"...Today at our house we had for lunch the Russian correspondent of *Rech* and of the (decadent) journal *Apollon*, N. S. Gumilyov; he has come to study Abyssinian songs. It was very pleasant to see a Russian. He told us that he arrived at the same time as our maid—the wife of Dmitrii—and saw to her needs, serving as her interpreter in Djibouti and Dire Dawa."

Apparently, Gumilyov thought that in the eyes of his compatriot-officials he would seem odd or unserious if he said he had set off for these faraway lands simply on his own. So he called himself a correspondent not only of the journal *Apollon*—knowledge of which diplomats had no reason to possess—but also of the well-known newspaper *Rech*.

It is not impossible, given the practice of letters of introduction, that Gumilyov had armed himself with some papers from *Apollon* and even from *Rech*, though they were hardly paying him money and, as is known, he did not write dispatches for them.

A second mention appears in Anna Vasilievna's letter of January 1, 1911:

"...Here in Addis Ababa there is temporarily residing with us the decadent poet Gumilyov, a graduate of the Sorbonne and now enrolled in the final year of St. Petersburg University. In May he married a young woman from Kiev, and already in late August he left for Abyssinia and has remained here ever since. We, of course, do not ask him about the reasons that moved him to leave his wife, but he himself said that between him and his wife it had been decided to maintain mutual love by long separations. Evidently he will soon depart via the desert and Chercher; after a thousand most

incredible projects, he has resolved on this route. He seems a man of means, very well-bred and pleasant in manner."

A few simple phrases—but how much they tell us! About those "most incredible projects"; about Gumilyov's desire to present himself as a man of means; and about his domestic situation. He described it in terms he might not have used even with close friends. Pose? Or an attempt to give, as briefly as possible, to people of very plain views, an explanation of complexities of feeling and life beyond their reach?

How one would like to have heard Gumilyov's conversations in the Chemerzins' veranda-girdled house in a suburb of Addis Ababa. Before his eyes was an avenue of eucalyptus; in the distance, blue mountains. The mistress of the house thought the garden reminded her of those in Ukraine, in Belotserkovka—only, of course, more luxuriant. And at the mention of Tsarskoe Selo, so close to Gumilyov's heart, the hosts no doubt did not fail to say that they were preparing to send to Russia a lioness and three zebras—gifts from the Ethiopian government to Nicholas II—and that most likely they, like other beasts, would be placed in Tsarskoe Selo (so it was first supposed; later they were sent to the Moscow menagerie).

The last mention of Gumilyov is in Anna Vasilievna's letter of January 14, 1911, describing how Christmas Eve and Christmas were celebrated at the Russian mission:

"We also had a Christmas tree; a little tree was brought in, resembling our firs; we adorned it with great candles, and also with flowers and ribbons—in general, it was not bad. We lit it on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day, in the presence of the doctor and the Russian Gumilyov..."

After that, there are no further mentions of him. Was it simply that there was no occasion? Or had he left Addis Ababa? For where?

Even the few references already quoted, brief as they are, allow important inferences. First, that for the greater part of his stay in Ethiopia—at least until the beginning of January 1911—Gumilyov remained in the capital, Addis Ababa. Second, that he had "a thousand most incredible projects," but none of them, at least up to early January, came to fruition; he decided to return home by the same route he had come.

Above all, the information that can be gleaned from the Chemerzins' letters about his journey is by no means limited to these direct mentions.

We do not know in what mood Gumilyov was, what he thought, how he perceived what he saw. But the scenes that met his eyes, the circumstances in which he found himself—the letters of the Chemerzins unquestionably convey them.

The Chemerzins set out for Ethiopia almost at the same time as Gumilyov. He on September 25; they several weeks earlier, in early August.

Their route coincided entirely—from Odessa to Addis Ababa. The same stopovers. The same faces and sights. Only the weather might have differed.

I repeat: Gumilyov's impressions could, of course, have been different. One must assume he saw the world with other eyes—not as the unliterary Chemerzins did. And yet every small detail in those letters hints: Gumilyov too went that way; he too saw this; he too experienced it.

Most of all, the Chemerzins write about the hardships of the road. Gumilyov avoided dwelling on such prose of life, though he had more than his share of it—he did not enjoy the diplomats' conveniences and honors.

At the very beginning, before entering the Bosphorus, the Chemerzins were held in quarantine for several days. In Constantinople they were warned that plague was raging in Port Said.

The eight-day passage through the Red Sea proved arduous. Heat, humidity. "The stifling air and vapors made us ill—we tossed and suffered at night more than by day," wrote Anna Vasilievna.

Yes, travel then was far less comfortable than now. There were no air conditioners yet.

In Djibouti "we spent three days in terrible heat." But Dire Dawa, being higher—1,200–1,400 meters above sea level—was more bearable. Even so, at midday the sun "beat down mercilessly."

In Dire Dawa they were delayed for three weeks. They came down with fever. Meanwhile forty camels were loaded and dispatched to Addis Ababa with ten guards. They themselves first lodged in a hotel and then moved into tents—to accustom themselves to the hard road.

The stretch from Dire Dawa to Harar takes less than two days. Even so, it struck Anna Vasilievna as no easy business. From her letter of September 23, 1910, already from Harar (I retain her spelling in all her letters):

"On the 20th, as we had planned, we left Dire Dawa and our camp, where in tents we had spent a whole week, making use of our cook Efim the Cossack, of Dmitrii and the Cossack Vasilii, and of our \*zenkers\*, washerwomen, maids, etc. We set out nearly at 9 o'clock instead of 7 in the morning, since preparations and loading took much longer than we had thought. We were accompanied by the local town chief, an Abyssinian, with two telephonists and \*ashkeri\*, the unofficial Russian vice-consul Galeb with his assistant, and the wife of the French governor of Djibouti, Mme Pascal, with whom we had become acquainted during our stay in Dire Dawa. They escorted us only as far as the fourth kilometer, and there we all parted; only the telephonists and two of the town chief's staff rode with us to Harar. The mule caravan was small, not more than twenty-five animals,

since the rest—thirty mules—had left the day before with Dmitrii. The road ran all the while through hilly country and along the beds of dried-up streams.

"At this season the countryside is rather lovely, for the mimosa trees, the euphorbia, the cacti, and a host of other broad-leaved plants are green and very beautiful, and the grasses and shrubs, too, are tinted a marvelous emerald. There are comparatively few flowers. But they say that ordinarily, before the tropical rains, it is a true desert and there is not a blade of grass nor a leaf on the trees; only the prickly cacti stand, and the thorny mimosa (leafless) reminds one that although there is no winter here, heat and drought strip the trees of their leaves no less than frost and cold do.

"In places we had to go along stony slopes and rather narrow paths; however, I saw no great abysses—rather, hollows, where an abundance of green and grass reminded me of Swiss valleys and gorges. We rode on mules for four hours without a break; it was very hot... Soon we halted for half an hour near Lake Addele, having first crossed a desert and then found ourselves in avenues of great tree-like euphorbia and in fields of \*durra\*. The rest stop restored my strength; after a glass of strong wine and some eggs and biscuits we set off for Lake Haramaya, where our first camp was to be. We got there only by five o'clock, after a seven-hour march. For a first time, it was no easy matter, and I was quite stupefied; my body ached, my head pounded, and a spasm gripped my throat. It was impossible to lie down to sleep at once. The large tent was not opened; we slept in the so-called dining tent; it was cold, damp, and unpleasant, and there were multitudes of mosquitoes."

The Chemerzins had no literary gift. Sometimes that is for the best. Lacking imagination, they "photographed" reality—and that is the value of these letters, for all their dullness.

The road from Harar to the capital—the very road that Gumilyov took after the Chemerzins—runs through the mountainous district of Chercher and then across the desert part of the country. You recall Gumilyov:

"For eight days from Harar I led a caravan  
through Chercher's savage hills;  
I shot gray monkeys in the trees  
and slept among the roots of sycamores."

In the Chemerzins' letters the road looks far more prosaic, without the halo of the unknown and the mysterious that one unfailingly feels in Gumilyov's verses. Of course the Chemerzins, with their cook, maids, washerwomen, and armed guards, had a much easier time of it. Yet even in their letters a certain elation peeps through now and then.

"After Harar, we reached in a day the mountain country of Chercher. It is hard to imagine a place and forests more beautiful. We went through Chercher with rest-days until October 10, making approximately ten stages, and all the while I never tired of admiring the country: the unscalable cliffs, the marvelous virgin forests twined with lianas; once I

even saw palms; I delighted in the ceaseless nightingale song, the fragrance of sweet jasmine and wild rose and yellow chamomile, and the incredible variety of field flowers. More than once I saw green parrots in flight and other birds of very gaudy plumage. Twice I saw monkeys sitting in the trees, leaping with incredible agility from bough to bough...

"On the way we lived chiefly on partridges and guinea fowl that are plentiful here in the wild; twice I ate snipe, wild goats (the meat is not very tasty), and wild geese. There are masses of birds: eagles and kites everywhere in the camps, always circling over the kitchen. In general we hardly saw any wild animals except the local wildcat, but in camp we always heard the howling of hyenas and jackals, and twice we even saw a hyena's den in the forest. In the desert we saw goats and antelope.

"We spent nearly a week crossing the desert, from the 17th to the 22nd of October. Because the rains had ended only a month before our arrival, there was just one place—the Fantale—where there was no water for the animals, though there was a brook for people. In the desert it was bearable; the wind blew constantly, either from the N.W. or from the N. I saw dust-devils formed by the burning rays of the tropical sun, which scorches horribly by day and is the cause of frequent sunstrokes.

"In Chercher we walked a great deal in the forests, but later there was nowhere to stroll. In the desert, after washing up and refreshing ourselves after breakfast, we would stretch out on our camp beds until three o'clock, reading and writing the travel diary, and then we prepared for dinner. In the desert we often ate soup from tins, but for the roast there was always something or other from the game."

The Chemerzins reached Addis Ababa only thirty-nine days after leaving Russia—so long because of illness, and especially the malaria that delayed them for a long time soon after they disembarked from the steamer.

Gumilyov made the trip more quickly.

At the place called Tola, the last stop, within sight of Addis Ababa, the Chemerzin caravan prepared for a ceremonial entry into the capital. To welcome the new head of the diplomatic mission came Dr. Kokhanovsky, who for a long time had been the senior member of that mission.

The next day came the ceremony of presenting credentials to the heir apparent, Lij Iyasu (his name, like other Ethiopian names and place-names, the Chemerzins spell in various ways; so, for that matter, does Gumilyov).

"On October 30 by eight o'clock Borya and I were ready to enter Addis Ababa. Borya in uniform with his orders, and I in a white woolen suit and a white hat with black and white feathers, but wrapped in white muslin, with a green parasol to protect me..."

The order concluded with a reminder about the strict secrecy of the assignment: "It goes without saying that all results obtained and all your considerations must remain strictly confidential." [60]

This was not the first reconnaissance of its kind carried out by Russian ships—and far from the last, even after the French expelled Ashinov's settlement.

Admiral G. Tsyvinsky, who for a time commanded the Black Sea Fleet, wrote that in 1898, while returning from the Pacific Ocean aboard the clipper *\*Kreyser\**, he received in Singapore a secret dispatch from the Naval Ministry: "The French government has offered us, in its African colony of Djibouti, a parcel of territory for a coal depot for warships bound for the East. On the leg from Colombo to the Red Sea, call at that port—without announcing this in Aden—and reach an agreement with the governor of Djibouti on ceding to us an area of sufficient size for the stated purpose." [61]

Literally a few days later the French government withdrew its offer. But this episode was not the only attempt by Russia to secure a place of call for its ships.

Thus Russian policy in Ethiopia and the adjoining regions was aligned with the broader international situation.

But Gumilyov knew nothing about these political maneuvers. They were kept secret. The documents I have cited were classified; the memoirs had not yet been written; the diaries had not been published. A person deeply interested in politics and steeped in it could probably infer something—from rumors, from the hints of officials, from what we would now call "leaks." But Gumilyov? He did not even suspect the background to Ashinov's expedition and in his *\*African Diary\** gave its failure a simple explanation: "...our Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused him."

What stood out clearly to him was only the romantic side of journeys in Abyssinia.

In his childhood and youth a great deal was written in Russia about that country. Even the book titles alone—*\*A Russian Cavalryman in Abyssinia\**, *\*Cossacks in Abyssinia\**—were enough to set dreams of wandering ablaze!

Accounts of travels were published not only in the capitals but also in provincial towns. In Grodno, the physician D. L. Glinsky issued brochures titled "Harar and Its Inhabitants" and "Life of the Russian Medical Detachment in Harar." The first dictionary—*\*An Abyssinian Primer and Elementary Abyssinian–Russian Dictionary\**—was published in St. Petersburg in 1888.

Russian scholarly literature on Abyssinia also began to appear. Professor Turaev published a study on Ethiopian verse as early as 1899, followed in 1903 by a booklet, "Abyssinian Free Thinkers of the Seventeenth Century," and later by several other works.

Most likely this fascination with Abyssinia influenced Gumilyov's choice of route for his wanderings. The country attracted by its exoticism—already in some measure familiar—and at the same time served as a gateway to lands wholly unknown.

Vsevolod Aleksandrovich Rozhdestvensky told me, in answer to my questions, that Abyssinia aroused extraordinary curiosity among the gymnasium boys of Tsarskoe Selo. Like Akhmatova, he believed that officers and Cossacks from the escort attached to the first Russian diplomatic mission served there or at least passed through. And the young Gumilyov, according to Rozhdestvensky, loved to question the military.

On his travels through Abyssinia he had people to think about—people to recall and to measure himself against.

Perhaps the romantic in him addressed both Arthur Rimbaud and some of his own compatriots when he wrote:

"How strange, how sweet to enter your dreams,  
to whisper your cherished names..."

## **INTO WHAT ABYSSINIA, THEN, DID HE ARRIVE?**

"Between the shore of the boisterous Red Sea  
and Sudan's mysterious forest you see  
sprawled across four plateaus,  
a land like a lioness at rest."  
—Gumilyov

Gumilyov did not find quite the country he knew from the books of Russian travelers of the late nineteenth century.

The "honeymoon" of Russo–Abyssinian relations had passed. One reason was the Russo–Japanese War. It showed Menelik that Russia had been weakened; and the diplomatic services of Japan and the Western powers did their utmost to persuade him of the same. In the late 1800s Russia had supplied Abyssinia with rifles, but after the war the Japanese ostentatiously offered to replenish his stock with weapons captured in Manchuria and Port Arthur. A good many Russian three-line rifles reached Abyssinia that way.

Aleksei Kokhanovsky wrote to Foreign Minister Sazonov: "In December 1906 Britain, France, and Italy signed a treaty dividing Abyssinia into three spheres of influence... This comes at a time when Russia, defeated by Japan... is reducing its representation in Abyssinia and its expenditures on Abyssinia, withdrawing from its former activity as a friend and protector... After the Russo–Japanese War the Abyssinians were assured that so many Russians had been killed that they had now become a small people... At a meeting of the Abyssinian–European Committee, in connection with the purchase from the Japanese of Russian rifles, one European said: 'If you like, we will bring you not only the rifles but also Russian uniforms.'"[62]

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But the mission's staff was drastically reduced.

In 1902 it had been set (counting those seconded to it, but not the service staff) at fifteen people, and the mission was headed by a minister-resident with the rank of actual state councilor.

On the eve of Gumilyov's arrival, however, there was not a single diplomat and not a single officer seconded to the mission. The duties of head of mission were being performed by the physician Kokhanovsky.

...How much of this did Gumilyov understand? Likely only in part. He was not interested in politics and even in his mature years did not understand it very well. And as for newspapers, his attitude was, I repeat, that of Marina Tsvetaeva:

*"What do such gentlemen care  
for sunset or for dawn?  
Gulpers of empty air,  
Readers of the news!"*

## LETTERS

*I love the weary rustle  
of old letters, distant words.  
—Voloshin*

*Letters, more than memoirs—  
on them the blood of events has dried;  
they are the past itself as it was,  
arrested and imperishable.  
—Herzen*

And so, Gumilyov left almost no testimony about his longest journey. He kept no notes—or at any rate none have yet been found.

But there are the letters of the Chemerzins. A remarkable source. From them one can learn much about that journey—not only about the dinner at the emperor's.

A letter from Anna Vasilievna Chemerzina, November 19, 1910:

"...Today at our house we had for lunch the Russian correspondent of *Rech* and of the (decadent) journal *Apollon*, N. S. Gumilyov; he has come to study Abyssinian songs. It was very pleasant to see a Russian. He told us that he arrived at the same time as our maid—the wife of Dmitrii—and saw to her needs, serving as her interpreter in Djibouti and Dire Dawa."

Apparently, Gumilyov thought that in the eyes of his compatriot-officials he would seem odd or unserious if he said he had set off for these faraway lands simply on his own. So he called himself a correspondent not only of the journal *Apollon*—knowledge of which diplomats had no reason to possess—but also of the well-known newspaper *Rech*.

It is not impossible, given the practice of letters of introduction, that Gumilyov had armed himself with some papers from *Apollon* and even from *Rech*, though they were hardly paying him money and, as is known, he did not write dispatches for them.

A second mention appears in Anna Vasilievna's letter of January 1, 1911:

"...Here in Addis Ababa there is temporarily residing with us the decadent poet Gumilyov, a graduate of the Sorbonne and now enrolled in the final year of St. Petersburg University. In May he married a young woman from Kiev, and already in late August he left for Abyssinia and has remained here ever since. We, of course, do not ask him about the reasons that moved him to leave his wife, but he himself said that between him and his wife it had been decided to maintain mutual love by long separations. Evidently he will soon depart via the desert and Chercher; after a thousand most incredible projects, he has resolved on this route. He seems a man of means, very well-bred and pleasant in manner."

A few simple phrases—but how much they tell us! About those "most incredible projects"; about Gumilyov's desire to present himself as a man of means; and about his domestic situation. He described it in terms he might not have used even with close friends. Pose? Or an attempt to give, as briefly as possible, to people of very plain views, an explanation of complexities of feeling and life beyond their reach?

How one would like to have heard Gumilyov's conversations in the Chemerzins' veranda-girdled house in a suburb of Addis Ababa. Before his eyes was an avenue of eucalyptus; in the distance, blue mountains. The mistress of the house thought the garden reminded her of those in Ukraine, in Belotserkovka—only, of course, more luxuriant. And at the mention of Tsarskoe Selo, so close to Gumilyov's heart, the hosts no doubt did not fail to

say that they were preparing to send to Russia a lioness and three zebras—gifts from the Ethiopian government to Nicholas II—and that most likely they, like other beasts, would be placed in Tsarskoe Selo (so it was first supposed; later they were sent to the Moscow menagerie).

The last mention of Gumilyov is in Anna Vasilievna's letter of January 14, 1911, describing how Christmas Eve and Christmas were celebrated at the Russian mission:

"We also had a Christmas tree; a little tree was brought in, resembling our firs; we adorned it with great candles, and also with flowers and ribbons—in general, it was not bad. We lit it on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day, in the presence of the doctor and the Russian Gumilyov..."

After that, there are no further mentions of him. Was it simply that there was no occasion? Or had he left Addis Ababa? For where?

Even the few references already quoted, brief as they are, allow important inferences. First, that for the greater part of his stay in Ethiopia—at least until the beginning of January 1911—Gumilyov remained in the capital, Addis Ababa. Second, that he had "a thousand most incredible projects," but none of them, at least up to early January, came to fruition; he decided to return home by the same route he had come.

Above all, the information that can be gleaned from the Chemerzins' letters about his journey is by no means limited to these direct mentions.

We do not know what mood Gumilyov was, what he thought, how he perceived what he saw. But the scenes that met his eyes, the circumstances in which he found himself—the letters of the Chemerzins unquestionably convey those.

The Chemerzins set out for Ethiopia almost at the same time as Gumilyov. He on September 25; they several weeks earlier, in early August.

Their route coincided entirely—from Odessa to Addis Ababa. The same stopovers. The same faces and sights. Only the weather might have differed.

I repeat: Gumilyov's impressions could, of course, have been different. One must assume he saw the world with other eyes—not as the unliterary Chemerzins did. And yet every small detail in those letters hints: Gumilyov too went that way; he too saw this; he too experienced it.

Most of all, the Chemerzins write about the hardships of the road. Gumilyov avoided dwelling on such prose of life, though he had more than his share of it—he did not enjoy the diplomats' conveniences and honors.

At the very beginning, before entering the Bosphorus, the Chemerzins were held in quarantine for several days. In Constantinople they were warned that plague was raging in Port Said.

The eight-day passage through the Red Sea proved arduous. Heat, humidity. "The stifling air and vapors made us ill—we tossed and suffered at night more than by day," wrote Anna Vasilievna.

Yes, travel then was far less comfortable than now. There were no air conditioners.

In Djibouti "we spent three days in terrible heat." But Dire Dawa, being higher—1,200–1,400 meters above sea level—was more bearable. Even so, at midday the sun "beat down mercilessly."

In Dire Dawa they were delayed for three weeks. They came down with fever. Meanwhile forty camels were loaded and dispatched to Addis Ababa with ten guards. They themselves first lodged in a hotel and then moved into tents—to accustom themselves to the hard road.

The stretch from Dire Dawa to Harar takes less than two days. Even so, it struck Anna Vasilievna as no easy business. From her letter of September 23, 1910, already from Harar (I retain her spelling in all her letters):

"On the 20th, as we had planned, we left Dire Dawa and our camp, where in tents we had spent a whole week, making use of our cook Efim the Cossack, of Dmitrii and the Cossack Vasilii, and of our *zenkers*, washerwomen, maids, etc. We set out nearly at 9 o'clock instead of 7 in the morning, since preparations and loading took much longer than we had thought. We were accompanied by the local town chief, an Abyssinian, with two telephonists and *ashkers*, the unofficial Russian vice-consul Galeb with his assistant, and the wife of the French governor of Djibouti, Mme Pascal, with whom we had become acquainted during our stay in Dire Dawa. They escorted us only as far as the fourth kilometer, and there we all parted; only the telephonists and two of the town chief's staff rode with us to Harar. The mule caravan was small, not more than twenty-five animals, since the rest—thirty mules—had left the day before with Dmitrii. The road ran all the while through hilly country and along the beds of dried-up streams.

"At this season the countryside is rather lovely, for the mimosa trees, the euphorbia, the cacti, and a host of other broad-leaved plants are green and very beautiful, and the grasses and shrubs, too, are tinted a marvelous emerald. There are comparatively few flowers. But they say that ordinarily, before the tropical rains, it is a true desert and there is not a blade of grass nor a leaf on the trees; only the prickly cacti stand, and the thorny mimosa (leafless) reminds one that although there is no winter here, heat and drought strip the trees of their leaves no less than frost and cold do.

"In places we had to go along stony slopes and rather narrow paths; however, I saw no great abysses—rather, hollows, where an abundance of green and grass reminded me of Swiss valleys and gorges. We rode on mules for four hours without a break; it was very hot... Soon we halted for half an hour near Lake Addele, having first crossed a desert and then found ourselves in avenues of great tree-like euphorbia and in fields of *durra*. The

rest stop restored my strength; after a glass of strong wine and some eggs and biscuits we set off for Lake Haramaya, where our first camp was to be. We got there only by five o'clock, after a seven-hour march. For a first time, it was no easy matter, and I was quite stupefied; my body ached, my head pounded, and a spasm gripped my throat. It was impossible to lie down to sleep at once. The large tent was not opened; we slept in the so-called dining tent; it was cold, damp, and unpleasant, and there were multitudes of mosquitoes."

The Chemerzins had no literary gift. Sometimes that is for the best. Lacking imagination, they "photographed" reality—and that is the value of these letters, for all their dullness.

The road from Harar to the capital—the very road that Gumilyov took after the Chemerzins—runs through the mountainous district of Chercher and then across the desert part of the country. You recall Gumilyov:

*"For eight days from Harar I led a caravan  
through Chercher's savage hills;  
I shot gray monkeys in the trees  
and slept among the roots of sycamores."*

In the Chemerzins' letters the road looks far more prosaic, without the halo of the unknown and the mysterious that one unfailingly feels in Gumilyov's verses. Of course the Chemerzins, with their cook, maids, washerwomen, and armed guards, had a much easier time of it. Yet even in their letters a certain elation peeps through now and then.

"After Harar, we reached in a day the mountain country of Chercher. It is hard to imagine a place and forests more beautiful. We went through Chercher with rest-days until October 10, making approximately ten stages, and all the while I never tired of admiring the country: the unscalable cliffs, the marvelous virgin forests twined with lianas; once I even saw palms; I delighted in the ceaseless nightingale song, the fragrance of sweet jasmine and wild rose and yellow chamomile, and the incredible variety of field flowers. More than once I saw green parrots in flight and other birds of very gaudy plumage. Twice I saw monkeys sitting in the trees, leaping with incredible agility from bough to bough...

"On the way we lived chiefly on partridges and guinea fowl that are plentiful here in the wild; twice I ate snipe, wild goats (the meat is not very tasty), and wild geese. There are masses of birds: eagles and kites everywhere in the camps, always circling over the kitchen. In general we hardly saw any wild animals except the local wildcat, but in camp we always heard the howling of hyenas and jackals, and twice we even saw a hyena's den in the forest. In the desert we saw goats and antelope.

"We spent nearly a week crossing the desert, from the 17th to the 22nd of October. Because the rains had ended only a month before our arrival, there was just one place—the Fantale—where there was no water for the animals, though there was a brook for

people. In the desert it was bearable; the wind blew constantly, either from the N.W. or from the N. I saw dust-devils formed by the burning rays of the tropical sun, which scorches horribly by day and is the cause of frequent sunstrokes.

"In Chercher we walked a great deal in the forests, but later there was nowhere to stroll. In the desert, after washing up and refreshing ourselves after breakfast, we would stretch out on our camp beds until three o'clock, reading and writing the travel diary, and then we prepared for dinner. In the desert we often ate soup from tins, but for the roast there was always something or other from the game."

The Chemerzins reached Addis Ababa thirty-nine days after leaving Russia—so long because of illness, and especially the malaria that delayed them for a long time soon after they disembarked from the steamer.

Gumilyov made the trip more quickly.

At the place called Tola, the last stop, within sight of Addis Ababa, the Chemerzin caravan prepared for a ceremonial entry into the capital. To welcome the new head of the diplomatic mission came Dr. Kokhanovsky, who for a long time had been the senior member of that mission.

The next day came the ceremony of presenting credentials to the heir apparent, Lij Iyasu (his name, like other Ethiopian names and place-names, the Chemerzins spell in various ways; so, for that matter, does Gumilyov).

"On October 30 by eight o'clock Borya and I were ready to enter Addis Ababa. Borya in uniform with his orders, and I in a white woolen suit and a white hat with black and white feathers, but wrapped in white muslin, with a green parasol to protect me from the scorching rays of the tropical sun, which burns during the day: it's terrible and often causes sunstroke. Our cook Yefim put on his handsome uniform of His Majesty's Convoy; our footman, himself a Cossack from the Terek region and a former non-commissioned officer of the Convoy, likewise dressed in Cossack attire. According to the ceremonial, from the Gebbi Palace (an hour and a half from Tola), the residence of the Negus, a procession composed of many mounted and foot soldiers and ranking officers, headed by the Abyssinian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Master of the Court—joined out of affection for the Russians by the Minister of Agriculture, who was married to Menelik's daughter—was to arrive about 10 o'clock in Tola. At the same time a mule, richly caparisoned with velvet-covered saddle and gold-decorated harness, was brought for Boris's ceremonial entry into the city. Accompanied by the whole procession—our European staff, Abyssinian horse and foot soldiers hired for the caravan journey from Dire-Dawa, and our own mission personnel—we were to ride straight to the Gebbi Palace, where the heir appointed by Menelik, Lij Yasu, together with Regent Ras Tessama, was to receive from Boris the letter accrediting him from the Russian Foreign Ministry and to hear his inaugural address. All preparations were delayed nearly an hour

because of the difference between Dire-Dawa time and Addis-Ababa time.

The ministers with their entourage and troops arrived only at 11 o'clock; earlier came the doctor with mounted mission askari bearing national flags on long poles—four of these mounted flag-bearers always accompany Boris on his outings from the mission. The ministers were dressed as splendidly as they had been in Harar, but even more richly, with an abundance of glitter and gold embroidery. The soldiers, on foot and on horseback, formed the same decorative spectacle that had already delighted me in Harar—one felt as though at some pageant. Boris greeted the ministers with coffee and liqueurs; after an exchange of formal courtesies we all mounted our mules and horses and moved slowly toward the Gebbi. The road, as usual, was far from good—full of holes and ruts; twice we forded mountain streams. The sun burned pitilessly, yet a harsh east wind blew in gusts. I shielded myself as best I could with parasol and veil, but Boris, in his cocked hat, could not escape the sun; luckily the back of his neck was covered. Halfway to the Gebbi a whole regiment of riders with their colonel joined us. All dismounted except me; greetings were exchanged again, and we continued on our way. After more than half an hour we began to approach the scene of the main ceremonial performance.

The palace was immense, surrounded by a wall standing on a low yet steep and almost inaccessible hill. We entered the first courtyard, at the back of which rose handsome white gates reached by high steps. Around the entire palace stood black warriors in white shawls (*shamma*), armed with spears and shields covered with ram's skins and brightly colored velvet or satin "leopard skins" on their shoulders. By the gates those same warriors grouped picturesquely on the steps—a scene straight from the opera *L'Africaine*. Despite the heat I could not help admiring the fantastic beauty of the spectacle. Our mules had still to pass through other gates, and only in the second courtyard did we dismount in view of the imperial audience hall; the ministers accompanying us dismounted already in the first courtyard. We walked slowly across the second court, climbed the steps, and entered the main imperial reception hall—an enormous building at least a hundred cubits long, without windows, lit only by its huge doors. The floor was covered with carpets; at the back gleamed a throne richly decorated and draped in silks. Upon its dais sat the future young monarch of Abyssinia; on his right was the Regent, and on either side princes of imperial blood, ministers, and courtiers.

We mounted the throne steps; Lij Yasu rose as we approached. Down the sides of the hall stood crowds of Abyssinian nobles. Boris, at first agitated but then firm and clear-voiced, read his speech. My throat tightened with emotion for him—but only for a moment. Before me stood a beautiful black boy with gazelle eyes and plump cheeks, still entirely unaccustomed to his lofty station. I stood at Boris's left, Dr. Kokhanovsky still further left; the mission dragoman, an Abyssinian, translated the speech. Then Boris took the letter from the Foreign Minister and handed it to the Regent (had the Emperor himself

been present, the Tsar would have written personally). One of the imperial interpreters replied in Abyssinian on behalf of the heir and translated his answer into French.

After the presentation of the letter, twenty-one gun salutes were fired, as protocol required. Boris presented himself and shook hands with the heir, introducing me and Kokhanovsky. I made a curtsy—wasn't that amusing? Then we were introduced to the chief dignitaries and invited to sit on chairs placed two yards from the throne. Compliments were exchanged; they asked about the Tsar and Tsarina, their health, then about our journey and caravan. Our three Cossacks from the mission greeted the ruler, as customary, calling him His Imperial Highness. After the prescribed quarter-hour of conversation Boris asked permission to withdraw; we took leave in the same order and left the hall.

Immediately after the ceremony at the imperial palace came a reception at the Russian mission. It was so empty that even leopards began visiting. But by the time the Chemerzins arrived, it had been restored. It was, according to Chemerzina's description, a beautiful, cool, large house—eight rooms, not counting the servants' quarters. Enormous, bright, carpeted rooms. The house was intended only for the Chemerzins—the rest of the mission staff lived separately.

"...We proceeded as before, with the whole procession and the ministers, to our Russian mission...

Another three quarter of an hour, we rode at a slow ceremonial march; in front, music played constantly (it had played from Tola on): the brass band of Abyssinians trained in Russia alternated marches and the Marseillaise, rather off-key, with the jangling, unbelievable Abyssinian music.

Crossing the Kamban River, we at last came onto Russian grounds. The road through them was excellent, just repaired by the doctor for our arrival. First came a field with Abyssinian houses (kullé) for the askaris and interpreters; then the mission's gate, surrounded by a wall; we entered a garden planted with eucalyptus and mimosa; farther on, climbing the hill, it grew ever more decorative and beautiful. An alley, edged with stones and planted with trees and shrubs, led to the house. The house stood on a knoll; before it was a profusion of rose bushes in bloom and tall shrubs of crimson geranium. To the left rose a hill all in greenery—this was the grave of Yanshin, the minister who died here five years ago. Incredibly beautiful.

At the gate there was a little scuffle, as they did not wish to let in extra onlookers. We were greeted with songs by the children of the mission askaris with flowers in their hands; by custom Boris tossed them a thaler for sweets. Everywhere at the gates were national flags with greenery and flowers. The whole house was likewise decorated with flags and small pennants crossed on the posts of the veranda encircling the entire façade.

A fine staircase led into the first room, carpeted. Above the great entrance doors the great state coat of arms, painted on canvas, waved. We dismounted at the porch and entered the hall. The room was very large—most importantly four and a half to five meters in height, seventeen paces long and twelve and a half wide. Everything was handsomely furnished, adorned with flowers, bouquets, carpets, blooms in vases and pots, draped in the colors of the national flag.

As we entered the mission they played our national anthem. Champagne was served—Boris had ordered twelve bottles. I sat on a kind of divan (Turkish), covered with a Persian carpet; beside me were the ministers of foreign affairs and of agriculture. Boris proposed a toast to Emperor Menelik, paralyzed, to his heir, to the government and to Ethiopia; the toast was translated. A great many people gathered; they sat on the divans and furniture, some stood. A general lively animation. Fortunately, all this lasted only about three quarters of an hour; then everyone took their leave and we remained among Russians. There were few of them: our doctor, and some former officer wearing Abyssinian dress, S....

## **AN OLD ROVER IN ADDIS ABABA**

*Many there are—strong, fierce, and merry—  
Who have killed elephants and men,  
Who have died of thirst in the desert...  
They carry my books in a saddle-bag,  
They read them in a palm grove...  
—Gumilyov*

*To say to him—our road lies together with yours...  
—Mandelstam*

The former officer S., wearing Abyssinian clothing... Who could he have been? And why did Chemerzina not name him? She is a meticulous person and in her letters gives fellow countrymen by given name and surname, sometimes not forgetting their patronymics.

Did she not know his surname? Nonsense! In Addis Ababa there were in all so few Russians one could count them on one's fingers—and the Chemerzins, of course, knew them all by name. Her husband was obliged by position to know them, even to send reports about them home.

And here—"some." And instead of a name and surname—a letter S. with dots. Why would that be?

This man was in Addis Ababa at the same time as Gumilyov. There were not so many compatriots Nikolai Stepanovich could meet there. For that reason alone it would be good to establish who this "S..." was.

I recall here one of the many riddles linked with Gumilyov's travels. The poem "My Readers," one of the last he wrote—and one of the best known.

I won't insult them with neurasthenia,  
I won't humiliate them with warmth,  
I won't bore them with meaningful hints  
About the contents of a damn egg.

And when a woman with a beautiful face,  
The only thing dear to her in the universe,  
Says: "I don't love you,"  
I teach them how to smile  
And leave, and never return.

The poem, as you probably remember, begins with very specific images. The prototypes of DG have been discussed more than once...

Is it worth looking for a specific person, an event, a fact, behind a poetic image? Many have noticed that when Gumilyov wrote about himself, about his life, he tried not to greatly alter the facts, although he dressed them in the garb of his romanticism.

Nikolai Tikhonov, who knew Gumilyov personally, confidently identified the prototype in the quatrain:

*A lieutenant who piloted gunboats  
Under fire from enemy batteries,  
All night long over the southern sea  
Recited my poems to me from memory.*

Tikhonov believed that Gumilyov had in mind a very specific person: Sergei Adamovich Kolbasyev, a naval officer who later became a writer.

It's hardly worth arguing about the "reader" in the other quatrain.

*A man, among the crowd of people  
Who shot the imperial ambassador,  
Came to shake my hand.  
To thank me for my poems.*

Irina Odoevtseva described in detail[66] how these lines came about—after meeting Gumilyov at an evening of his poetry at the Moscow Palace of Arts in the summer of 1921.

"...We're walking. Gumilyov looks back.

—And that red-haired guy is right there again. Like a shadow, he follows me, muttering my poems under his breath. Do you hear that?

I look back, too. Yes, indeed—a huge, red-haired fellow in a brown leather jacket, with a revolver in a holster at his side, following us closely, his eyes never leaving Gumilyov, chanting:

*Or, discovering a mutiny on board,  
He tears a pistol from his belt,  
So that gold falls from the lace,  
From the pinkish Brabant cuffs...*

Gumilyov stops and asks him coldly and haughtily:

"What do you want from me?"

"I'm your admirer. I know all your poems by heart," the comrade explains.

Gumilyov shrugs:

"This, of course, testifies to your good memory and your good taste, but it's absolutely none of my business.

— I just wanted to shake your hand and thank you for "the poems," he adds, confused: "I'm Blumkin."

Gumilyov suddenly changes completely. Not a trace of arrogance and coldness remains.

— Blumkin? The very same one? Mirbach's killer? In that case—with great pleasure.— And he, smiling, shakes Blumkin's hand.—Very, very glad.

Returning to St. Petersburg, Gumilyov described this scene in his last poem, "My Readers."

Yes, of course, it was Blumkin. Valentin Kataev considered him a monster. Trotsky considered him a revolutionary hero. Whatever he was, he really did kill Mirbach, the German ambassador. And he really did follow Gumilyov around, reading his poems aloud to him.

But the very first image? The one with which Gumilyov proudly begins his list of his "strong, evil, and cheerful" readers:

*An old vagabond in Addis Ababa,*

*Having conquered many tribes,  
Sent to me a black spearman  
With greetings composed of my poems.*

No one even tried to find a prototype for this "old vagabond."

But if it's so easy to suggest prototypes in the other two quatrains, then there must be one here too.

In memoirs about Gumilyov, I was able to find only one hint. Nikolai Otsup, calling the poem "My Readers" Gumilyov's spiritual testament, casually remarked: "We recognize both the Socialist Revolutionary Blumkin... and the old tramp in Addis Ababa, familiar to the poet's St. Petersburg friends from his oral histories."

So, Gumilyov loved to talk about this man. But who was he? Otsup didn't say. Where and how can we find him?

Among the Abyssinians? Well, there were some among them who knew Russian perfectly and lived in our country for years, even if we don't mean "Peter the Great's Moor," Hannibal. In one of Chemerzina's letters, it was mentioned in passing, as if something natural and unsurprising: "...a trumpet orchestra of Abyssinians who studied in Russia." And Kokhanovsky, in his report, mentioned that the Abyssinians studied in Russian military schools, theological seminaries, and medical assistant schools. And... the translators at the Russian mission were not Russians, but Ethiopians.

Several Abyssinians came to Russia with Ashinov back in the late 1880s. But their names are forgotten, and it is unknown whether they ever returned to their homeland.

More is known about those who arrived later. And some fates are remarkable. A young Abyssinian, Haile Mariam Vande, from Harar, came to Russia with Lieutenant Mashkov in the early 1890s. He learned Russian and returned to Ethiopia in 1897 with the first Russian diplomatic mission.

Krasnov, then a junior lieutenant of the Life Guards Ataman Regiment, sent at the head of the convoy to accompany the mission, wrote in his book *Cossacks in Abyssinia*:

"In Moscow, a boy cadet from the 1st Moscow Corps, Haile Mariam Wondi, son of Ato Wondi, a Harar landowner, joined the detachment. At the age of eight, he arrived in St. Petersburg a perfect Abyssinian; now he is 14, speaks excellent Russian, but has forgotten his native language. Dr. Brovtsyn, candidate Kuznetsov, and first-class medical assistant Sason are trying to revive his memory of the Abyssinian language, but they are not always successful. When ask questions in Abyssinian, the boy smiles sheepishly and shakes his head." [67]

I'm not sure that the boy really had completely forgotten his native language and that the Russian paramedic had to teach him, but Krasnov's testimony is nonetheless intriguing. Haile Mariam then went back to Russia, studied at the Pavlovsk Military Academy, and became a lieutenant in the Russian army. But soon after his final return to his homeland, he died of some illness—it was believed he had contracted it in Russia. By the time of Gumilyov's travels, he was no longer alive.

Several distinguished young men who came to Russia in 1895 and 1896-1897 to study military science and medicine achieved high positions in Ethiopian society. The most famous of these was Takkele Wolde Hawariat. He spent 12 years in Russia, acquired an excellent knowledge of the language while living with a Russian family, and became so comfortable there that he was called Pyotr Sergeyevich. He graduated from the Cadet Corps and the Mikhailovskoye Artillery School in St. Petersburg and was considered a capable officer.

The little "Blackamoor" became friends with Pushkin's eldest son. And not only with him. According to a leading Ethiopian historian, he "developed friendly relations with several of the most distinguished Russian liberals of the time, among them Princess Volkonskaya, the granddaughter of a Decembrist, and Kochubey, the progressive nationalist leader of Ukraine.

Returning to his homeland with the liberal and democratic ideas of pre-revolutionary Russia, he began to propose reform projects. This repeatedly hindered his career, but he nevertheless held high positions. In the early 1930s, he was Minister of Finance. He was Ethiopia's Foreign Minister and its representative to the League of Nations. After the capture of Ethiopia by Mussolini's troops in 1936, he became one of the leaders of the guerrilla war.

Did Gumilyov meet him? It's hard to say. From 1908 to 1911, Takkele lived in France and England, and I was unable to establish the exact date of his return to his homeland. Of course, Gumilyov could have met him during his next, final trip, in 1913.

But do the words "old vagabond" suit him, a statesman and diplomat?

But the name of another noble Abyssinian, albeit slightly altered, made it into Gumilyov's poems. One of the heroes of the poem "Mik" is Ato-Gano, Mik's master. Gumilyov introduced him to his readers this way:

*The Abyssinians were confused—but  
Suddenly Lto-Gano, their leader,  
stepped forward. He was an old man,  
polite in gatherings, savage in battle,  
looking upon all dangerous deeds  
with the gaze of an eagle.*

A very similar name—Ato Geno—belonged to a man also from a noble family who came to Russia to study back in 1895. He, too, was imbued with the democratic ideas of Russian society at the time and returned home as a reformer. He, too, achieved a high position in the Ethiopian hierarchy, receiving the title of grazamach, one of the highest.

Gumilyov most likely met Ato Geno. But could he have considered this man his reader? No matter how well Ato Geno knew Russian, could he have become an admirer of Gumilyov's poetry, which was not so understandable or familiar to a foreigner?

Only a fellow countryman could become a reader of Gumilyov's works back then. Who was this?

Anna Vasilyevna Chemerzina wrote, as if it were something quite ordinary: "Tomorrow morning, three Russian Abyssinians will arrive, and I'll have to keep them entertained."

Statistics were not kept in Ethiopia, so any precise figures are impossible. There were probably fewer Russians than the Greeks who ran butcher shops and wine shops, or the Indians who, as stated in a letter from Chemerzin in early 1911, owned "general warehouses" selling everything from shoe polish to lamps, fabrics, carpets, and beds. How many of these "Russian Abyssinians" were there then? Not just Russians by nationality, but people from Russia in general?

But there were also people from Russia, and people of very different professions and social status.

In the province of Maraca, there lived a former Cossack officer named Trofimov and his wife, also Russian, who owned a coffee plantation. Having set off on a short trip around the country in the spring of 1912, the Chemerzins stayed with them for a week.

Chemerzina's letters from early 1911 include the following phrases: "For any repairs, we turn to the Russian Caucasian, Ganefi."

Georgian Peter Merabishvili lived in Abyssinia for many years. In 1908, Menelik appointed him court physician. In 1916, Merabishvili opened an outpatient clinic and the first pharmacy in Abyssinia in Addis Ababa, naming it "Georgia." Dr. Merab continued his medical and pharmaceutical practice in Abyssinia until 1929. He published several books about Abyssinia in Paris.[69]

Russian diplomatic reports typically mentioned only a few names: Babichev, Trofimov, Senigov, Krupeisky, Pavlov, Shedevr, the Mordvin Sharro, and the merchants Ganefi (Khaiefi) and Hadji Magomedov (I give all the names as they appear in the reports). But this, of course, is not a complete list.

Perhaps the "old tramp" was Babichev? During Gumilyov's stay in Addis Ababa, Babichev was there or in the surrounding area. His name is mentioned several times in Chemerznaya's letters during those months. She wrote that Babichev was then "in

Abyssinian service" and held a high position, that he had an "estate" in Adda, a five-hour drive from Addis Ababa, near the railroad under construction. And in the capital, he owned a small grocery store.

As it turned out, Babichev's name was Ivan Filaretovich. He was an officer in the 25th Kazan Dragoon Regiment. In 1897 or 1898, when he was 18 or 19 years old, he found himself in Ethiopia as part of the military escort of the Russian diplomatic mission. In 1899, he took part in an expedition organized by N. S. Leontiev to the extreme southwest of Abyssinia, to Lake Rudolf.

Babichev soon married a noble Abyssinian girl and decided to remain in Abyssinia. He received the title of fitaurari (literally, "attacking at the head"), one of the high local military-feudal titles. Europeans considered it equivalent to the rank of colonel in the military hierarchy. There were varying accounts of Babichev's position and role. The secretary of the Russian mission, Evreikov, wrote in 1906: "...Lieutenant Babichev of the Russian cavalry reserve has a detachment of 300 cavalymen. But this detachment never shows itself, and apparently its members are more like servants and workers for Babichev himself." [70]

So Babichev could have sent Gumilyov a spearman. And poetically, one could say of him, "one who conquered many tribes."

And it was quite possible to meet Babichev in the Chemerzins' house. True, he had fallen into disgrace with the tsarist government. Probably for his unauthorized decision to remain in Abyssinia. But by the time Gumilyov arrived, the disgrace had long since been lifted, and Anna Vasiliev could use his full name in her letters.

As early as May 22, 1904, the then head of the Russian mission in Abyssinia, Lishni, reported to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Goasby Lamsdorf:

"Following Your Excellency's secret telegram of this May 18th regarding the Imperial permission to lift the ban on reserve lieutenant Babichev from staying in Abyssinia, the said lieutenant has been informed by me that henceforth he 'will be considered a full member of the Russian colony in Addis Ababa.'"

"Yesterday, Reserve Lieutenant Babichev came to me and warmly thanked me for the Imperial favor shown to him." [71]

So, Nicholas II himself forgave Babichev. It must have been important for Babichev to receive this forgiveness. And then, in 1912, it was he who signed the Tsar's Christmas telegram of congratulations on behalf of the entire Russian colony.

Ivan Filaretovich lived in Ethiopia for the rest of his life. He died in the spring of 1955 at the age of 84. A gray-haired European old man with a thick, full beard, he attracted the glances of curious onlookers on the streets of Addis Ababa.

Of his five children, the most famous was his son, "Mishka" (his name remained his entire life). He was still an infant during Gumilyov's journey—born October 14, 1908, in Addis Ababa. After finishing school, he entered a military academy to become a tank driver, but in the late 1920s, Ethiopia decided to purchase its first airplanes, and his dreams changed. He became the first Ethiopian pilot. He made his first solo flight near Harar, in the region of Jipjiga, about which Gumilyov wrote so much. Emperor Haile Selassie appointed Babichev his personal pilot.

During the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936, he remained in Ethiopia and, in effect, commanded its air force—twelve aging aircraft. They were no match for the four hundred Italian bombers and fighters in combat and were used primarily as communications devices, as the country was poorly supplied with telephones and radios.[72] An American adviser, whom Babichev took to the front along with the British military attaché, was astonished by the appearance of the antediluvian single-engine aircraft with a wooden frame and a tarpaulin-covered fuselage. However, during the entire war, not one of Babichev's aircraft was shot down.[73]

In 1941, after Ethiopia's liberation, Babichev again became one of the leaders of its small air force. He was then transferred to the diplomatic corps and, at the end of 1944, sent to Moscow as part of the first Ethiopian diplomatic mission to the USSR. He worked in Moscow until 1948, first as the embassy's first secretary, and from May 1946, as chargé d'affaires. He married a Russian woman. When he returned to Ethiopia, his family remained in the same building (I was unable to determine the reasons).[74]

Babichev died in 1965 and is buried in the center of Addis Ababa, by the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, in the Heroes' Cemetery. On the grave there is an inscription in Amharic that "here lies the first Ethiopian pilot."

Ivan Filaretovich, Mishka's father, could probably be called an "old wanderer." But could he be counted among the readers? If he had a fondness for reading verse, no information about it has come down to me.

I could not let go of that "former officer, wearing Abyssinian dress"—from Chemerzina's letter. Why in the letter "S..." and not the full surname? Anna Vasilievna could not have failed to know it. One must assume she made the acquaintance of S..., questioned him properly. After all, she herself writes that after the Ethiopians left, only two remained to sit and chat at the mission—Kokhanovsky and "S...". Why then did she not want the surname to appear in a letter home? Was it simply because this man had settled in a foreign land and did not wish to return to his homeland? No, in those years that in itself was not considered such a grave offense, and in her letters Anna Vasilievna freely gave the names of such people. So perhaps there was some secret in S...'s fate?

Among the Russian surnames mentioned in Chemerzin's dispatches, only one began with the letter S—Senigov.

One can say with confidence that Anna Vasilievna also had him in mind in her letter. It was about Senigov. Not without difficulty did I learn his name and patronymic: Evgeny Vsevolodovich. A man of a remarkable fate. In those years he lived not far from Addis Ababa and was called "the white Ethiopian."

Little information about him has survived, and that needs verification. It was said that his family was close to the court of Nicholas II and that his sister was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress. Senigov served in Turkestan; in the last years before his departure for Ethiopia he lived in Samarkand.

He arrived in Ethiopia at the turn of the last and the present centuries. According to one version, as part of a military mission. According to another, together with several friends who hunted, collected ethnographic curiosities, and lived in tents. Then all returned home, but Senigov stayed. Emperor Menelik granted him a small estate and often called upon his services when he needed an interpreter.

The German traveler Friedrich Bieber, preparing in Addis Ababa in 1905 for an expedition to Kaffa, recorded in his diary: "To accompany us the Emperor sent one of his most reliable men. This is a former Russian officer who has turned into a real Ethiopian—E. Senigov. The Negus gave him a plot of land in Daura, not far from Addis Ababa, and often invited him to his palace. There he met a beautiful Amhara woman, who soon became his wife."

But Senigov is better known as an artist. Thanks to his mastery as a painter—an inborn gift (he seems to have studied nowhere)—he was invited to paint portraits of Ethiopia's nobles, even of Menelik himself and Empress Taytu.

Most of his paintings Senigov created not for money. The Polish scholar Czesław Essman called him a Russian Gauguin and wrote, on the testimony of eyewitnesses, that "Senigov drew large compositions on sheets of coarse paper, anticipating that Gauguin whom Somerset Maugham invented." For some reason Senigov destroyed these pictures. Perhaps during periods of special attachment to spirits...

Senigov knew the languages of several local peoples, lived by local customs, and dressed like an Ethiopian. He went barefoot—something eminent Ethiopians had already given up. Dr. Merab, a Georgian who lived in Ethiopia for many years, wrote: "I do not know whether it was a matter of the character of his art or of his love for antiquity, or whether his democratic, socialist ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality moved him to behave in such a way."

So far as one can judge from fragmentary data, Senigov was imbued with the spirit of Populism, yet he saw that capitalist development was destroying the Russian peasant commune. Falling in love with the nature of Ethiopia, he supposed that there, on one of the picturesque islands of Lake Tana, he could create a people's commune and embody his ideas.

There, perhaps, lies the riddle of why Chemerzina did not write the surname "Senigov" in a letter home. The ideas of "liberty, fraternity, and equality." Populism. [75]

Nothing came of the utopian project. What remained for Senigov was to show himself as a military adviser and administrator under Ethiopian feudal lords. And, most of all, as an artist.

Russia's diplomatic representatives in Abyssinia did not pass Senigov by. A. Orlov, head of the Russian mission at the beginning of the century, reported to Petersburg on April 10, 1901:

"For about three years there has lived in Abyssinia a person calling himself a Russian subject and a reserve lieutenant, Senigov. This person formerly resided in Harar, and a year ago entered the service of Mr. Leontiev. At present Senigov, not content with the modest remuneration he received from Leontiev, has entered the service of Ras Walda-Giyorgis, governor of Kaffa, and in the coming days is leaving there as instructor of Ras's troops." [76]

A few years later, on June 15, 1906, S. Likhachev, then acting head of the Russian diplomatic mission, in a secret report to the Foreign Minister, Aleksandr Petrovich Izvolsky, again expressed dissatisfaction with Senigov. He did not even trouble to clarify the spelling of Senigov's surname and mentioned him as "a certain completely Abyssinianized former Russian officer, Sennikov, living in Kaffa, who has not only no ties with Russia but is even hostile toward her."

The relations between Senigov and the authorities of the Russian Empire, plainly, did not improve thereafter. In any case, on the telegram sent by the Russian colony in Abyssinia to Nicholas II in Livadia at Christmas 1912, Senigov's signature is not present. [77]

It is hard to judge his military and administrative activity. Specific information is scant.

Only quite recently, in 1990, when previously closed Moscow archives began to open a little, it emerged that the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation holds his brief autobiography. [78] From it we learn that he was born in 1872. He studied at a Realschule in Petersburg, and in 1892–1894 at the Moscow Alekseev Military School. In 1894–1897 he served in Ferghana in the 4th Turkestan Line Battalion. Since 1898—Abyssinia. The first three years—with Leontiev. In 1901–1918—"chief of the right wing of Ras Wolde-Giyorgis's army and administered the corresponding province."

From 1918, after the Ras's death—a farmer ("I have a farm to this day") in Western Abyssinia on the Baro River near Gambella (Wollega).

Is everything in this autobiography, which Senigov sent in 1923 to People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Vasilyevich Chicherin, correct? About some things he might have kept silent; others he might have magnified. Those were turbulent years.

"Chief of the right wing of the army" is a high rank. But what were Senigov's rights and duties in the army of a powerful feudal lord and in the administration of the province subject to him? I have not yet found testimony about this.

The well-known journalist Sergei Kulik related that on the caravan road from Ethiopia to Kenya, in the small settlement of Lokinach near the Omo River, he was shown a bundle of books that had belonged to a European who had once lived there, whom they called "the white Ethiopian." One of the books was Russian: *Our Black Co-Religionists, Their Country, the State System, and the Tribes Constituting the State*. Published by P. P. Soykin in Petersburg in 1900. In the upper left corner a brownish ink inscription—E. Senigov.

According to Kulik, a French professor, Camille Arambourg, traveling with him, said that even before the Second World War he had discovered in this settlement a shed containing books in several European languages.

Its walls had been covered with pencil drawings and watercolors—vivid, dynamic sketches of battle scenes, lyrical landscapes, and portraits of representatives of local tribes in national dress. The old men of Lokinach spoke with reverence of the master of the shed—which, incidentally, looked quite cozy inside—and called him "the white Ethiopian," lamenting that he had not visited them for several decades. They said that in former times, with the onset of cold weather, he would come to his "shed" each year and live there for long stretches, painting and treating the local people. [79]

How did Senigov's fate unfold thereafter?

Some notion of this is given by a document also preserved in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. It was drawn up some twelve or thirteen years after Senigov's possible meetings with Gumilyov, on August 27, 1923. It is an application to Chicherin from "the émigré Evgeny Vsevolodovich Senigov."

It says: "In 1898, being listed as politically unreliable, I emigrated from Russia to Abyssinia, where I lived without leaving for 24 years.

"In 1921, after the end of the intervention, I set out to return to Soviet Russia to serve the cause of the Revolution and to convey my information on Abyssinia.

"On the way I was forcibly detained for two years in Egypt and Bulgaria."

The application also states: "In Bulgaria I was a member of the Communist Party."

Attached to the application is the same autobiography that I cited above. In it Senigov repeats that, setting out for Russia in 1921, he was detained by the British in Egypt "in the company of Russian refugee Denikinians." [80]

Where did a man with such a fate spend the remainder of his days? In Ethiopia? Somewhere else? In the archive, his application bears this heading: "Application of E. V. Senigov on employing him for work in Abyssinia." From this, it would seem, one can draw the conclusion that he might have returned to Abyssinia.

Or perhaps did he spend his last years in his homeland?

The Ethnography Museum in the city on the Neva, so beloved by Gumilyov, houses many of Senigov's drawings. Seven watercolors were purchased in 1932 from Dmitry Nikolaevich Brovtsyn, the son of Dr. Nikolai Petrovich Brovtsyn, who once worked in Ethiopia. Fourteen watercolors were purchased from Chemerzin in 1935. Seventeen drawings were purchased in 1936 "from Senigov's wife."

Unfortunately, there are no data in the documents about Senigov's wife. Who was she?

Together with the drawings she delivered to the museum a manuscript, 47 pages. On the title page: "Diary of an African Hunter. E. Senigov." And the subtitle: "From the Diary of an Abyssinian Buffalo Hunter." [82] The manuscript is written engagingly, in excellent Russian.

I think information about Senigov will yet be clarified. His life story will appear. I write of him only in connection with Gumilyov.

It is well known how much Gumilyov was interested in the work of Gauguin, who spent many years on Tahiti and the Marquesas. In 1908, in the journal *Vesy* (*The Scales*), Gumilyov wrote: "Paul Gauguin left not only European art but European culture and spent most of his life on the islands of Tahiti. He was haunted by the dream of the Future Eve, the ideal woman of the future <...>. He sought her under the tropics as they appear to the naive gaze of the savage, with their strange simplicity of line and brightness of color. He understood that orange fruit among green leaves is beautiful only in the swarthy hands of a lovely native woman looked upon with a lover's gaze. And he created a new art, deeply individual and brilliantly simple, such that one cannot remove a single part of it without altering its essence." [83]

So could Gumilyov really have failed to meet the man whose life and art had so much in common with Gauguin's? Senigov must have attracted Gumilyov more than anyone else in that country—at least more than any other compatriot.

And Senigov? Could Gumilyov, the first man from the world of Russian literature to set foot on Abyssinian soil, fail to interest the author of the tales "Diary of an Abyssinian Hunter"?

Who among his compatriots in that far land could appreciate Gumilyov's poems? Most likely, after all, Senigov.

"Who had subdued many tribes"—well then, he did administer a province.

Of course, it is hard to suppose that Gumilyov's collections were being sold in Addis Ababa. But they were probably in Gumilyov's own possession, and one must think he willingly showed or even gave them to compatriots.

And so it seems to me that Senigov is that "old wanderer in Addis Ababa." That it was about him alone that Gumilyov could have said: "He sent to me a black spearman with greetings composed from my verses." That it was he whom Gumilyov recalled and celebrated a few weeks before his death. And that he was among those to whom Gumilyov turned in his thoughts as he completed his poem:

*And when their final hour shall come,  
a level crimson mist will veil their sight—  
I shall teach them to call to mind at once  
all the harsh, dear life,  
all the native, wondrous land,  
and, standing before the face of God  
with simple and wise words,  
to wait calmly for His judgment.*

When Gumilyov wrote these lines, the "old wanderer" was making his way back to his homeland after an absence of a quarter of a century. Gumilyov could not have known that. And he left this life earlier, hardly having had time to finish that poem.

Senigov's watercolors are now kept in that same Museum of Ethnography in St. Petersburg where the ethnographic collections Gumilyov gathered in Africa ended up. A posthumous meeting took place...

Senigov—what an exotic figure!

And yet not so rare in Gumilyov's time, nor before, nor after. How many of our compatriots had similar destinies—perhaps without that artistic talent, yet in their own way no less vivid.

We still know too little about the Russians whom fate, often after many tribulations in Wrangel's camps in Gallipoli, cast into the French Foreign Legion. And there were quite a few of them.

The poetess Marianna Kolosova, who lived in Harbin, wrote in 1932:

*My friend in hot Africa,  
in the Foreign Legion.  
From him I do not hide my soul,  
he is my close and welcome one.  
A little high-schooler from Tambov  
has now become a legionnaire.*

*I will write to him three words:  
friendship, homeland, and faith.*

The celebrated Ivan Mozzhukhin had someone to remember when he played a sergeant of the Foreign Legion in the film *Sergeant X* by director Vladimir Strizhevsky.

Zinovy Peshkov, elder brother (though by no means a like-minded one) of Yakov Sverdlov, adopted by Maxim Gorky, served in the Foreign Legion in North Africa, and in the early 1940s was the representative of Fighting France in southern Africa. A Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur, who had lost an arm in the battles of the First World War, a friend of de Gaulle, he died a French general.

And Georgy Adamovich, a poet from Gumilyov's circle, also fought in the ranks of the Foreign Legion in the Second World War.

And on my journeys (we don't, in our times, call them "travels") I too happened to meet people who recalled Gumilyov's heroes.

Lev Ernestovich Kreger was the grandson of a *narodovol'ets* was exiled to Sakhalin. Lev Ernestovich was born in 1912 in the Far East. Until 1945 he lived in Harbin. Then he moved to London, but it turned out that there the sky was too low, and there were far too many people. He set off for Mozambique. He became a hunter; he taught rich American tourists who came on safari how to hunt. He became an entrepreneur as well, owner of sawmills. But he is proudest of his ability to hunt, to catch fish, and to cook fish dishes. When the chance opened to come to Russia, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, he fished on Lake Baikal, hunted in the North Caucasus and the Far East. Not only I, but many far younger than he, would like to look as he does at eighty years old, and to have the same clarity of mind. Unhurriedly, with taste, he writes his memoirs—little sketches, three or four pages each, about life episodes that stuck in his memory. It will be a captivating book. I can judge because I have read many of Lev Ernestovich's sketches.

Vladimir Ilyich Kremer. I met him at Soviet–American conferences. For many years he was the chief Russian interpreter of the State Department. He translated at meetings of American presidents with Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev. And he was born in 1915 into the family of a first-guild merchant of Petersburg. He lived on Fourth Rozhdestvenskaya. Revolution. Famine. They went off to near Mogilev, where relatives had a cow. Then they emigrated and, after long tribulations, ended up in America. In 1937 Vladimir Ilyich was on the point of moving to Rhodesia. Then the war began, and, finding himself in the American army, he passed through that part of the Second World War about which we know little: the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, New Caledonia. He had been in Africa as well...

There have been not a few such destinies in our twentieth century. But how often are they remembered... A Gumilyov's pen is lacking.

A decade and a half earlier, Gumilyov would have seen many more of his compatriots in Abyssinia. But even then, had he stayed in Addis Ababa for another three months, he would have seen that very Bulatovich, through whose books he had, of course, become acquainted with that country.

Perhaps, indeed, it is better that he did not see him. The times had changed that man too much.

A letter from Chemerzina, 11 June 1911: "Yesterday arrived Hieromonk Antony, in the world a captain of His Majesty's Hussar Regiment, a former lyceum student and dashing cavalryman. Boris intends to set up a chapel at the mission for our monks to serve in, for he arrived with a lay brother."

But Bulatovich arrived no longer with an official mission, not at the expense of the state. The Russian government no longer stood behind him. He, now a monk of a Mount Athos monastery, had come with the intention of curing his old acquaintance, Emperor Menelik.

And Bulatovich himself was no longer the same. Seemingly not old yet—only forty-one—but quite ill and with many oddities. The Chemerzins took a dislike to him at once. After just two weeks, Anna Vasilievna wrote:

"Bulatovich is simply a psychopath... He is completely ill and weakened from fever, yet he refuses to take quinine and waits for a miracle and for recovery without medical aid, and instead of quinine drinks water brought from Athos from a wonder-working spring, and treats himself to lamp oil from the *lampada* that burns before a wonder-working icon he has brought from Athos, by whose help he hopes to heal Emperor Menelik."

She condemned him very sharply. "In general, Father Antony is a phenomenon quite far from pleasant... Unpleasant in his intolerance, narrowness of view, and fanaticism toward other religions."

To a great extent, this harsh assessment is explained by the fact that Bulatovich and the other monk who came from Athos arrived completely without means and ended up at the Chemerzins' expense. Hence Anna Vasilievna's laments: "At first the monks ate seven pounds of sugar a week in lumps; I even howled... It seems the butler reminded the monks that we do not have a sugar factory at the mission." And her complaints: "And yet formerly he was delicate, lavish, and rich, as befits a real hussar."

Bulatovich lived in Abyssinia almost to the end of 1911, and the Chemerzins' letters are nearly full of curses at him. "The religion to which he has given himself has not taught him forbearance, nor kindness and goodwill toward people. It is power-loving, egoistic, and devoid of any delicacy. [Here, obviously, the word 'nature' should follow, but it is omitted—A. D.]... To crown all that has been said, Father Antony, despite having finished the Lyceum, believes in devils, in all kinds of unclean spirits, in the power of witchcraft and spells, and he believes in all this as deeply as in the Symbol of the Orthodox Faith."

Pity, of course, if these judgments are in any way fair. As is known, over the last three decades in Moscow there have been published not only his books but also articles and books about him, with the most laudatory evaluations of him—not only as a traveler but as a person.

Perhaps, of course, the authors were too enraptured by him. But it is not excluded at the same time that in the hieromonk, completely broken by illnesses, there truly remained little of that dashing, resourceful, and observant Guards officer. For, in Chemerzina's words, "besides fever, he has liver disease, kidney disease, indigestion, etc." That can make one bilious—and even superstitious!

Perhaps there is something else even stranger. Spending dozens of pages of their letters on cursing Bulatovich, the Chemerzins did not once allude either to his earlier journeys or to his books. And yet he was the most prominent Russian traveler in Ethiopia. His books are the best that were published in Russia about that country.

Finally, he was probably among those who chose the site in Addis Ababa for the Russian embassy—the very grounds on which, by their own admission, the Chemerzins later settled there quite comfortably.

And even when, saying with a sneer that the hieromonk wanted to heal the Emperor with holy icons, the Chemerzins did not mention that Bulatovich was an old acquaintance of Menelik.

Could the Chemerzins really have known none of this? It seems so. Otherwise it would somehow have shown in their letters. They knew only that the hieromonk had once been a hussar. Could it really be that, leaving for Abyssinia, they did not bother to glance, at least briefly, at books about that country? And did the Foreign Ministry advise them nothing of the kind?

Alas, it seems so.

And one more thing. Perhaps the Chemerzins had many virtues. But it somehow happened that in their letters there are few kind words about other people. And, perhaps, not much kindness itself.

Dr. Kokhanovsky lived in Abyssinia for a long time and grew to love it, but when he was going on leave, Chemerzin "officially declared to him" that he would no longer tolerate him at the mission, and "he should not return from leave to Addis Ababa." Kokhanovsky "has entirely gone to seed and has almost completely lost his mind: I would not be surprised if he soon goes stark mad," wrote Chemerzin.

The doctor A. I. Saenko, who came to replace Kokhanovsky, was "very muddle-headed." He was not invited to their home, "for he does not deserve invitations"; his actions were "the tricks of an alcoholic." About the secretary N. Z. Bravin, who arrived in the autumn of 1912—"it is clear he came here to make money and pay off his debts." All his words

are "lies and evasions"; he has a ruinous effect "on the delicate, sensitive nature of my husband." [84]

Of course, such manners have reigned in embassies before.

Should one write about that atmosphere here, in a book about Gumilyov? Evidently yes. He spent several months there. And of course he was drawn to compatriots and, in general, to people who spoke Russian, all the more since he did not know the local languages. He surely met some of the people mentioned. And traces of this may yet be found.

And Gumilyov's acquaintance with Chemerzin did not end then. Even if he didn't meet him, Gumilyov would at least correspond with him during his next journey, in 1913. And, anticipating a little, it is worth noting that then too Chemerzin did not show his best side.

The Soviet embassy is still located in the same corner of Addis Ababa where Gumilyov visited the Chemerzins and met his compatriots. And when I visited there once, I looked at the same eucalyptus trees and the same mountains turning blue in the distance.

## UPON RETURN

*Like a traveler who girds his loins  
and goes toward an unknown land,  
so you, settling deeper in your armchair,  
adjust the pince-nez upon your nose.*  
— Gumilyov

Gumilyov dedicated this quatrain to Mikhail Lozinsky. But it can quite well be referred to him himself—to those years of his life when he did not wander but sat over books—at Tsarskoe, in Petersburg, or at his family's estate at Slepnevo. What distinguished him from Lozinsky was perhaps only the absence of pince-nez.

In such periods he usually lamented that he was doomed *to dry up in the depths of a study before dusty piles of books*. He envied *the one who departs, who will see the Muse of Far Wanderings in all her adornment*. He complained:

*And I, as if by certain giants,  
by solemn folios,  
am shut from a free life in a niche.  
I neither see it nor hear it.*

The two years between his journeys to Africa—from the spring of 1911 until the time of the next travels —was also such a period.

Almost immediately after his return, still in the first onslaught of tropical fever, he spoke to the editorial board of *Apollo*. He told about his journey and demonstrated items of

household use and ornaments he had brought. At Vyacheslav Ivanov's "Tower," on Tavrisheskaya, he read "Mik." Lydia recalled that they listened to him with rapture.[85]

The poet Aleksandr Kondratyev wrote a playful "Solemn Song on the Return of Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilyov from His Journey to Abyssinia." [86]

*Brothers, perform a joyful dance!  
Arrived in our circle from beyond the distant Pont,  
to outshine the glory of the Mexican Balmont,  
Gumilyov the African has come with a cargo of verse!*

*The golden throne of King Menelik  
proudly rejecting, he brought with him  
a girdle of modesty, taken by storm  
from a passionate, untamed Ethiopian girl.*

*Proud heir to Sindbad's fame,  
by Ras Mangash he's ennobled as a count;  
from the land where giraffes are pastured  
he carried off an apron of honor for bravery.*

*Fighter of buffalo, slayer of lions,  
in battles he tamed the unruly Adals\*,  
in search of new and unknown distances  
he is the best teacher for young poets.*

*Before the hero the elephants trembled;  
the cowardly hyena hid in the thicket;  
and meekly they bent the knee,  
the Adals\* fell with faces to the ground.*

*Proud with ostrich feathers for adornment,  
with a lion's mane above his noble brow,  
before the crocodile's hungry maw,  
opened fearsomely, he stood unafraid.*

*And returning to the lap of his wife,  
who awaited the hero more faithfully than Penelope,  
he graciously presented her, with a tender smile,  
the horns of a young antelope.*

\* *Adals*— a wild African tribe that caused much harm to our poet-traveler. (Note by A. Kondratiev)

Petersburg life went on in its usual course. In the spring—disagreements between Gumilyov and Vyacheslav Ivanov.

In May 1911 he decided to leave St. Petersburg University and, during the next academic year, and he didn't study the following year. That same May he accompanied his wife to Paris and he himself went to Slepnevo. There he spent the summer in the company of neighbors, mainly with the family of his second cousins, the Kuzmina-Karavaeva sisters.

Together with the household and neighbors he even organized a home theater. In the autumn he returned to Tsarskoe. He made the acquaintance of the orientalist A. E. Shpileiko. This acquaintance strengthened Gumilyov's interest in the East. Moreover, in the summer at Slepnevo he became carried away with the reading of Senkovsky, who was both a writer and an orientalist.

In that same autumn of 1911 Gumilyov carried out his plan: he succeeded in creating a new literary organization—the Guild of Poets. Gumilyov drew ever closer to Lozinsky and Mandelstam. They became his friends. At the same time, his former ties weakened—with Znosko-Borovsky, Ausländer, Kuzmin, Potemkin.

The Guild's meetings were held in turn at Gumilyov's in Tsarskoe, at Zenkevich's, at Gorodetsky's—or at the home of the poetess Elizaveta Yuryevna Kuzmina-Karavaeva's (well known to us as Mother Maria).

And at the beginning of the next year, 1912, Gumilyov together with Gorodetsky proclaimed the creation of a new literary movement—Acmeism.

Those who declared themselves Acmeists included Sergei Gorodetsky, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Mikhail Zenkevich, and several other young poets. The Acmeists gained great influence in *Apollo*. In 1912–1913, under Lozinsky's editorship, ten issues of their journal *Hyperborean* were published.

As is well known, Gumilyov gave one of the first, if not the very first, extended definition of Acmeism in issue no. 9 of *Apollo* for 1912, in a review of Sergei Gorodetsky's book of verse *The Willow*.

"Acmeism (from the word *acme*—the flowering of all spiritual and physical powers) is in essence myth-making. For what, if not myths, will the poet create who has renounced both the exaggerations inherent in youth and the wingless moderation of old age, who evenly strains all the powers of his spirit, who accepts the word in all its fullness—musical, pictorial, and intellectual—and demands that every creation be a microcosm."  
[86]

Gumilyov's article "The Heritage of Symbolism and Acmeism" was a full-dress manifesto of the new movement. It appeared in the first issue of *Apollo* for 1913, and in the table of contents the word "heritage" was replaced by "testaments." It began thus: "For the attentive reader it is clear that Symbolism has completed its circle of development and is now in decline. In place of Symbolism there comes a new tendency." Gumilyov thought it could be called Acmeism or Adamism. He characterized Adamism as "a manfully firm and lucid view of life."

Opposing Acmeism to Symbolism, Gumilyov did not harshly denounce the latter. On the contrary, he emphasized that for Acmeism "Symbolism was a worthy father." He saw the difference in the fact that the Acmeists strive to achieve "a greater equilibrium of forces and even an exact knowledge of the relations between subject and object than was the case in Symbolism."

With which names of the past did Gumilyov then most closely link his new direction? He answered this question: "In circles close to Acmeism, the names most often pronounced are Shakespeare, Rabelais, Villon, and Théophile Gautier. This selection is not arbitrary. Each of them is a keystone for the edifice of Acmeism, a high tension of one or another of its elements. Shakespeare showed us man's inner world; Rabelais—the body and its joys, a wise physicality; Villon told us of a life that has no doubts about itself, though it knows everything—God, and vice, and death, and immortality; for this life Théophile Gautier found, in art, worthy garments of impeccable form. To combine these four points in oneself—that is the dream which now unites among themselves the people who so boldly called themselves Acmeists." [87]

Another manifesto of Acmeism was Sergei Gorodetsky's article in that same first issue of *Apollo* for 1913, titled "Some Currents of Contemporary Russian Poetry." The ideas it contained were very close to Gumilyov's.

And finally, Osip Mandelstam's article "The Morning of Acmeism." may be considered another manifesto of this movement. It was published much later—January 1919—in the illustrated biweekly *Sirena*, which Vladimir Narbut issued in Voronezh. Evidently it had been written much earlier, but the World War and then the Civil War... The article was later reprinted in the collection *Literary Manifestos*, published in Moscow in 1929.

Mandelstam explained the difference between Acmeism and Symbolism thus: "The Symbolists were poor homebodies; they loved travels, but they were ill at ease in the cell of their organism and in that world-cell which Kant constructed with the aid of his categories.

"To build successfully, the first condition is a sincere piety toward the three dimensions of space—to look at the world not as a burden and an unhappy accident but as a God-given palace."

To the mystic striving of Symbolists toward "the unknowable," the Acmeists opposed the concrete-sensuous apprehension of the "world of things," "the element of nature," and a return to the word of its original, and not symbolic, sense. It is customary—and probably correct—to think that the Acmeists were influenced not just by the four authors named in Gumilyov's article. Who exactly influenced them and how is under dispute: Leconte de Lisle, Coleridge, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Kipling are named.

Gumilyov set forth his views on poetic creation in articles and in numerous surveys of the books of verse that were appearing. These surveys were regularly printed in *Apollo* and also in other journals.

Reading these surveys now, one involuntarily compares Gumilyov's assessments with those of our day. Moreover, Gumilyov reviewed the first collections of poets who were then beginners and later gained wide renown. How well was Gumilyov already then able to discern their talent and distinctiveness?

And was he able to be sufficiently fair, objective toward his peers and elder contemporaries—toward all those with whom he willingly or unwillingly compared himself?

Even if you don't agree with all of Gumilyov's assessments, still you will be struck by the breadth of his horizon and knowledge—and by that quality for which a definition has been coined in our time: "unfetteredness."

Aleksandr Blok spoke out against Acmeism. He expressed his attitude later in an article with the clear title: "Without Divinity, Without Inspiration (The Guild of Acmeists)."

Gumilyov caught it hard in that article. Blok, with an uncharacteristic extremity, reproached Gumilyov even for his literary-critical surveys. He accused him of having "begun to speak loudly and breezily, in a half-society, half-professorial language, to shy Russian writers... For some things he encouraged them and patted them on the shoulder, but for the most part he reproached them. Most of N. Gumilyov's interlocutors were occupied with thoughts of a completely different sort: society felt a terrible decay, the air smelled of storm, some great events were ripening; therefore they somehow did not object to N. Gumilyov energetically, all the more since he listened to no one at all..."

This article of Blok's—though he mentioned in it Gumilyov's surveys printed in *Apollo* before the First World War—was written in April 1921, soon after Gumilyov was elected, in Blok's stead, chairman of the Petrograd branch of the All-Russian Union of Poets. In Blok's diary there is an entry: "In February they expelled me from the Union and elected Gumilyov chairman." [88]

Scholars will probably still take up Blok's polemic with the Acmeists, and Acmeism in general, more attentively than up to now. As for the reproaches to Gumilyov's literary surveys—their unfairness seems so obvious that one wishes to speak of them here.

Can one truly claim that Gumilyov wrote his reviews "breezily," patting shoulders and "mostly reproaching"?

I begin with the young poets. It would seem that breeziness and reproach would most likely be aimed at them. But as it turned out, Gumilyov was one of the first to assess their abilities, to give—or not give—they a ticket into life. It was his voice that sounded from the pages of the influential *Apollo*.

Marina Tsvetaeva's first book was *Evening Album*. Tsvetaeva was then eighteen. Her verse was not yet fully "Tsvetaevan." And how highly Gumilyov praised it! "Much is new in this book: new is the bold (sometimes excessively so) intimacy; new are the

themes—for example, childish infatuation; new is the immediate, thoughtless delight in the trifles of life... Here the chief laws of poetry are guessed instinctively, so that the book is not only a charming book of girlish confessions but a book of fine verse."

The first collection by Georgy Ivanov was *Departure for the Isle of Cythera* (1912). The author was also eighteen. "...An unquestionable taste even in the boldest attempts, unexpected themes, and a certain graceful 'silliness' to the extent to which Pushkin demanded it." And "each poem gives an almost physical satisfaction."

In early 1912, Gumilyov called Nikolai Klyuev "already a fully matured poet, a continuer of the traditions of the Pushkin era." He wrote of his verses, and later called them impeccable.

He did not pass over the verses of the twenty-year-old Prince Dmitry Svyatopolk-Mirsky either. The poems were still unripe, and yet Gumilyov found how to encourage him—praising the string of "polished and full-sounding stanzas." Gumilyov's notice, I think, will not be overlooked by those who continue to study the work of Svyatopolk-Mirsky, who perished in the terror of the late 1930s.

"Mother Maria," Elizaveta Yuryevna Kuzmina-Karavaeva, didn't enter history with her verse. But she began as a poetess. When she was approaching twenty-one, in 1912, she published a collection, *Scythian Shards*. She was so carried away by "Scythia" that she involuntarily set it against the Russia of her day. Gumilyov concluded that she "belongs to the poets of a single idea," and gave her a characterization that, perhaps, may apply to some poets and artists of our own days who boundlessly idealize the distant past. Yet he also found very kind words to say about her verses.

He responded immediately to the first poems of Ilya Ehrenburg, and in his second notice observed that Ehrenburg had begun to write better. "In his tercets there is a genuine sense of paganism—earth-dear and slightly wondrous. He skillfully joins lyrical elevation with the historicity of themes and almost never raises his voice to a shout. Of course, we have the right to demand of him still more work, and first of all on language—but the main thing is already done: he knows what verse is." Gumilyov noted that even then Ehrenburg had begun to acquire imitators.

As is well known, a mockingly dismissive attitude toward Ehrenburg's poetry subsequently took hold. This was especially evident in Sergei Vasiliev's epigram, written four decades later, entitled: "From a Collective Letter from Readers to Ilya Ehrenburg."

*Your merits are so obvious and so great  
and your sins so essentially small,  
that we forgive you everything,  
even the poems you wrote in your spare time.  
What's the point of blaming them?  
We forgot about them a long time ago anyway.*

Ehrenburg loved the poet in himself, perhaps just as Gumilyov loved the traveler in himself. Therefore, attentive and kind reviews in a magazine like *Apollo* were flattering and helpful to the twenty-year-old Ehrenburg.

Gumilyov wrote about the poems of Khodasevich, his coeval, : "By free and faithful verse, by seriousness and a hidden sadness, the verses of Vladislav Khodasevich captivate—moreover, they are impeccable in form."

Of Sasha Cherny's second book—*Satires and Lyrics*: "For future times, his book will be a precious aid in studying the intelligentsia stratum of Russian life. For contemporaries ,it is a collection of all that is most hateful to long-suffering but tenacious Russian culture."

Of Igor Severyanin's early verse: "Of course, nine-tenths of his work cannot be perceived otherwise than as a desire to scandalize, or as incomparable pitiable naïveté. Where he wants to be elegant he recalls parodies of Verbickaya's novels; he is clumsy when he wishes to be graceful; his audacity is not always far from impudence."

And yet: "But then his verse is free and winged; his images are genuinely—and sometimes delightfully—unexpected; he already has his poetic physiognomy... It is hard—and one doesn't wish—to judge now whether this is good or bad. It is new—thanks even for that."

And many who considered themselves refined intellectuals judged Severyanin's verse in a single contemptuous tone.

Two and a half years later Gumilyov found in *The Cup of Roaring* a reason for a serious conversation.

"Long since Russian society has split into people of the book and people of the newspaper, who had almost no points of contact. The former lived in the world of millennial images and ideas, spoke little, knowing what responsibility must be borne for every word, tested their feelings, fearing to betray an idea, loved like Dante, died like Socrates, and, in the view of the latter, must surely have resembled badgers... The latter, brisk and bustling, plunged into the very thick of contemporary life; they read the evening papers; they spoke of love with their hairdresser, of brilliantine with their beloved; they used only ready-made phrases or certain intimate little words, hearing which every uninitiated person experienced a definite sense of embarrassment. The former were shaved by the latter, ordered boots from them, dealt with official papers or issued them bills of exchange, but never thought about them or called them anything at all. In a word, relations were the same as between Romans and Germans on the eve of the Great Migration of Peoples.

"And suddenly—oh, here this 'suddenly' is truly necessary—the new Romans, people of the book, heard a youthful, ringing, mighty voice of a real poet who, in the Volapük of the people of the newspaper, spoke hitherto unknown 'fundamentals' of their strange existence. Igor Severyanin is indeed a poet, and moreover a new poet. That he is a poet is

proven by the wealth of his rhythms, the abundance of his images, the sturdiness of his composition, and his own keenly lived-through themes. He is new in that he is the first of all poets to insist on the poet's right to be sincere to the point of vulgarity."

From this paradoxical argument Gumilyov drew what at first glance is a paradoxical conclusion.

"I repeat, all this is very serious. We are present at a new invasion of barbarians, strong in their talent and terrible in their lack of fastidiousness. Only the future will show whether these are 'Germans'—or... Huns, of whom not a trace will remain."

Gumilyov frankly did not like Futurists. But he even responded to their manifestos without that lofty breeziness for which Blok reproached him.

About *A Trap for Judges*, he wrote in the fourth issue of *Apollo* for 1911: "The culminating point of audacity this year is, of course, the collection *A Trap for Judges*... Of the five poets who published their verse there, only two are truly daring: Vasily Kamensky and V. Khlebnikov; the others are simply helpless."

Gumilyov left without comment the manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," in which Burlyuk, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky, and Khlebnikov proposed to "throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc., from the steamship of modernity." But of the collection *A Trap for Judges II*, signed by the same authors and several of their like-minded, he wrote not without a touch of approval: "The circle of writers who united to publish this collection involuntarily inspires confidence, both by its undoubted revolutionism in the realm of the word and by the absence of petty hooliganism."

Gumilyov did not consider it beneath him to depart from earlier—even very recent—assessments. So it was with his attitude to the poet Sergei Klychkov. At first Gumilyov saw in him only an imitator, in whose verse there is "nothing but sweet water, a Slavic Arcadia with the invariable Ladas and Lelyas, princesses and brides." But soon he acknowledged that Klychkov "has made progress since the appearance of his book. His 'Shepherd' is good... and the sea smell is audible in his 'Fishergirl.'"

Thus Gumilyov related to the young, to his peers, and in general to those who had not yet received universal recognition.

And to the venerable?

Of Bryusov, his mentor, Gumilyov still wrote rapturously. He called Bryusov a "wise Daedalus." In his "simple and infinitely noble lines" he saw "a synthetic understanding of that so-reviled and so-heroic nineteenth century."

Of Bryusov's translations of Paul Verlaine: "Valery Bryusov's book gives a complete idea of Verlaine as a poet. Perfect knowledge of all his poetry allowed the translator to use

Verlaine's own vocabulary in places where exact translation is unthinkable. Many stanzas, even poems, compete with the original by the charm they produce."

Of Mikhail Kuzmin: "In M. Kuzmin's cycle *Autumn May* there are beautiful, classically impeccable poems." And: "Among contemporary Russian poets, M. Kuzmin occupies one of the first places."

Of Vyacheslav Ivanov Gumilyov wrote: "On every page one feels one is dealing with a great poet who has reached the full flowering of his powers." Or: "Vyacheslav Ivanov's ghazals are a magnificent mosaic of words."

Of Balmont, Gumilyov wrote that, alas, "even a very great poet can write very bad verse." And yet—"suddenly he prints a poem, and not just a fine one, but a marvelous one, which for weeks resounds in the ears—in the theater, in the cab, and at night before sleep."

With almost every poet, whenever it was even minimally possible, Gumilyov sought to note something good. He loved Oscar Wilde and, perhaps for that reason, was rather strict toward Aleksandr Deich's translation of "The Sphinx." But he was glad even that the poem had been translated: the translator "has given only a very conscientious paraphrase. One must be grateful even for this."

Gumilyov had to dislike poems very much for him to allow himself to express his judgment categorically. Thus, having read the poems of Baron N. A. Wrangel, Gumilyov was appalled: "I do not believe he has read Pushkin." And he reproached the poet Aleksandr Kotomkin for the narrowness of his thought, which amounted to the appeal: "Though few we are, brothers, still we are Slavs!"

In the very first long article that Gumilyov published after his return from Africa, he gave assessments of twenty books of verse. Dividing them into "amateur," "daring," and "books of writers," he placed only four "outside literature."<sup>[90]</sup> One can only marvel that the still young, twenty-five-year-old Gumilyov proved so tolerant toward other people's verse, other people's ways of thinking.

So Blok's accusations had insufficient grounds. Blok himself spoke sharply of Gumilyov: "All men in hats—he in a top hat. All go to France, to Italy—he to Africa. And his poems also, in my opinion... are in a top hat."<sup>[91]</sup> Yes, he wrote more intolerantly about Gumilyov than Gumilyov did about other poets.

Why?

One would not wish to think it was because of personal relations and antipathy—or because of rivalry in the All-Russian Union of Poets. Perhaps one reason was Blok's illness. Moreover, Gumilyov irritated many by his manner of bearing himself in public; even Akhmatova wrote of his hauteur. But the main thing, of course, is that Acmeism proved entirely alien to Blok.

And how did Gumilyov relate to Blok's work?

With boundless admiration. He returned again and again in his surveys to Blok's verse. In a notice on Blok's collected works in three volumes he wrote: "Usually a poet gives people his creations. Blok gives himself." Of the poems in the *Anthology* of the Musaget publishing house: "Aleksandr Blok appears in the full flowering of his talent; worthy of Byron is his sovereign frenzy, fused into full-sounding verse." He admired Blok's collection *Night Hours*: "...even the theme of a forgotten way-station sobs in him like the most full-voiced violin." [89] These are the lines:

*The cars went along the habitual line,  
shivering and creaking;  
the yellow and the blue were silent;  
in the green they wept and sang...*

Gumilyov read the article "Without Divinity, Without Inspiration," in manuscript, shortly before his death. It was written three or four months before they were both gone—both Blok and Gumilyov. It saw the light only in 1925, and then with gross errors. In the authentic text it appeared later still, in 1935, in the tenth volume of Blok's collected works.

But even without that article Gumilyov knew well Blok's attitude toward Acmeism and toward himself. And nonetheless this, it seems, did not affect his veneration for Blok's work. There is no lack of testimony to that. Irina Odoevtseva cites these words of Gumilyov:

"Only don't think that I wish in any way to diminish Blok. I understand perfectly what an enormous talent he is. It is possible that he is the best poet of our century." [92]

One of his fruitless arguments with Blok he explained as follows—

—Imagine you are conversing with a living Lermontov. What could you say to him, what would you argue about? [93]

Gumilyov carried his admiration for Blok throughout his life, despite the fact that their personal relations left much to be desired.

Gumilyov wrote his *Letters on Russian Poetry* with extreme concision—sometimes only a single line about an entire collection. Bryusov appreciated the posthumous edition of the *Letters*: "Gumilyov had the instinct of a true critic; his judgments are sure; in brief formulations, they express the very essence of a poet." [94]

People are still learning from Gumilyov's laconic manner. In 1991 Konstantin Kuzminsky, compiler of the nine-volume anthology of unofficial poets *At the Blue Lagoon*, said of himself:

"As a model of criticism I chose Gumilyov and Khodasevich—masters of the short, precise, stinging appraisal."

...How much labor it cost Gumilyov to respond to almost all of contemporary Russian poetry and to analyze it against the vast canvas of world literature! Thousands of books, whole libraries, passed through his hands and, more importantly, through his consciousness. How could he not lament: "Flowers do not live with me... and birds do not live here either"—

*Only books in eight rows,  
silent, ponderous volumes  
guarding age-old languages,  
like teeth in eight rows.*

*The bookstall seller who sold them to me—  
I remember—was hunched and destitute...  
...He traded beyond the cursed cemetery—  
the bookstall seller who sold them to me.*

Compared to this work, his travels must have seemed—and doubtless were—rest. And, beginning his next journey in April 1913, he wrote to Akhmatova from the road: "The mad winter is telling on me; I am resting like a beast." [95]

Gumilyov was very proud of the journal. The Apollonians were inclined to consider their offspring the arbiter of literary taste. But, as they said in ancient Rome, let the other side be heard as well.

Arkady Averchenko, head of the far more widely circulated magazine *Satirikon*, titled one of his feuilletons "Apollo" and mocked it to his heart's content. Doubtless many felt the same toward *Apollo*. Therefore it is worth quoting at least the beginning of the feuilleton.

"Once, in a bookshop window I saw a book... By its outward appearance it resembled the solid, serious catalog of a technical firm—which tempted me, as I am keenly interested in new things in the field of technology.

"But when they showed it to me closer, I saw that it was not a catalog but a literary monthly.

"‘What is it... called?’ I asked, bewildered.

"‘Why, the title is on the cover.’

"I peered attentively at the title, turned the book sideways, then upside down, and, intrigued, said: ‘I don't know! Perhaps you would be so kind as to initiate me into the title—if, of course, you happen to know it?... For my part, I can give you my word that if

what you tell me is a secret, I shall keep it sacredly.'

"‘There is no secret here,’ said the clerk. ‘The journal is called *Apollo*—and if the letters are Greek, that’s nothing... The next issue will be much easier for you, the third easier still, and after that everything will go like clockwork.’

"‘Why then is the journal called *Apollo*, while the picture shows a lizard pierced by arrows?’

"The clerk pondered.

"‘Apollo is the god of beauty and light, and the lizard is the symbol of something slippery, repulsive... So, evidently, she is pierced by the god of light.’

"I liked this subtlety of conception.

"When I publish a book of my stories under the title *Gnashing* [of teeth], I shall ask them to draw on the cover a young lady entering a school of dentistry..."

In Averchenko's time, the coarse word *vypendrézh* [showing off] had not yet been invented. But something like it must have been buzzing in his mind when he was, to use today's language, snarking. He didn't spare neither the journal's authors, though some—Mandelstam and the artist Bakst—also contributed to his *Satirikon*.

"The first article I began to read—by Innokenty Annensky—was entitled ‘On Contemporary Lyricism.’

"The first sentence ran thus:

"‘The jasmine thyrsi of our first maenads were swung briskly...’

"I felt, in part, a painful pity for our muddle-headed Russian people, and in part annoyance: you can't trust a Russian with anything... Put a jasmine thyrsus in his hands, and he rejoices and starts waving it until he has utterly unwaved the instrument.

"A sentence I happened to catch from the middle of the ‘lyricism’ did not cheer me either: ‘In Russian poetry float particles of theosophy—that most bourgeois of Anti-Deathists...’

"It was painfully offensive." [96]

It seems Averchenko had foremost in mind the programmatic article of *Apollo*'s first issue, published unsigned, under the title "A Boring Conversation." The U.S.-based literary scholar Vadim Kreid, on the basis of textual analysis, argued—though erroneously—that the article was written by Gumilyov. [97]

Averchenko also had a feuilleton titled "African Troubles," about the "chief of the Beri-Beri tribe Koribu," said to live on the west bank of the Congo. And the author declared: "Which of our magazine's readers are interested in some inhabitants of the Congo, corrals, aloe sap, and petty chiefs named Koribu? As if that mattered to us Russians!"[98]

True, all this was only a literary device; in reality he had in mind not African but homegrown Russian troubles. Still, he cast them in African form—possibly after reading Gumilyov's poems.

Averchenko's mockery can of course be put down to the contentiousness for which the writerly fraternity is often blamed even today. But there was also much more, without which it is hard to understand the environment in which the Apollonians lived.

We, now, after the horrors of the last seventy-five years, are inclined to idealize that life before 1917. This euphoria extends to the literature of that time. Sometimes, reading about the years before 1917, one gets the impression that literary salons flourished everywhere and that, under their beneficent influence, the reading public's high artistic taste grew like yeast; that censorship did not exist.

And above all, that in literature—or at least in poetry—the undisputed dominance of the best was universally acknowledged: Blok, Bryusov, Balmont, Gumilyov, Akhmatova, who later were called poets of the Silver Age, and that these poets were among the most widely read authors.

Perhaps I exaggerate; still, many of today's articles, publications, and films highlight only the edifying aspects of that past. If the earlier period between the Revolution of 1905 and the German War was commonly considered a black stripe in our history, now that same time appears only in rainbow hues. Probably the present tilt is not as bad as the former. But it, too, leads to a loss of veracity. The difficulties writers like Gumilyov had to overcome then are glossed over or vanish altogether.

In 1908 Gumilyov lamented: "now, when there is such a great influx into literature of unlettered and untalented people." Two years later he spoke "on behalf of the contemporary Russian poetry that is spat upon from the right, reproached from the left, timidly skulking." [99]

Wasn't it bitter for Gumilyov that he had to publish his verse at his own expense, in two- or three-hundred-copy runs? The print run of the journal *Hyperborean*, which he organized, was only about two hundred copies—and even those did not all sell. Whereas the works of Anastasia Verbitskaya appeared in half-million editions. Yet the respectable, sober *Brockhaus and Efron* encyclopedia said about the most popular of her twenty-five books—*Keys to Happiness*—: "They are permeated with that cheap romanticism which is now found only in boulevard novels intended for the readers of penny sheets." [100]

Who didn't read *Keys to Happiness*! The first Russian two-part film was made from that novel (and in 1917—another screen version!).

The number of Nietzsche's admirers, already not small, multiplied with the appearance of *Keys*. Its epigraphs were his sayings: "In your body there is more wisdom than in your best wisdom" and "There is a share of madness in love, but in madness there is a share of reason."

In 1908 Verbitskaya published memoirs of her childhood and youth—*To My Reader*. That book struck me as the most interesting of all I read by Verbitskaya: vivid and likely sincere narrative, especially about studies at the Moscow Elizavetinsky Institute for Noble Maidens. It made an impression on me perhaps because I reread it while watching on television *The Cabaret of the Fifth Wheel*. That day, 16 August 1990, the cabaret talk was about Gumilyov. Mikhail Boyarsky declaimed "The Giraffe," old announcements of evenings at the Stray Dog were read aloud. Fine performers, excellent direction. They transferred the notion of a "Silver Age" from poetry to the whole of national culture at the start of the twentieth century.

And the Stray Dog! It's been invoked so much in recent years that the place of that very short-lived cellar in the history of national literature is also exaggerated. And Akhmatova, as I recall, was not so enraptured by the Dog.

In the Cabaret nostalgic ditties sounded:

*Ruddy schoolgirls,  
a bit tipsy from the frost...*

I listened with pleasure—well sung, spirited. Yet I kept involuntarily comparing that evening in Verbitskaya with what I was reading.

"There was no milk... Breakfast of two dishes, with gutta-percha cutlets, stale pies, and stinking kvass, left us hungry. We fell upon black bread, which was given without limit, and stuffed our pockets with it. Fights broke out over the lower crust, the so-called *zakoryávochka*... We were chronically hungry, all of us suffered from catarrh of the stomach and anemia...

"A sedentary life and lack of air with exhausting labor... turned us into hysterics—physical and moral cripples...

"Typhus raged in the institute and carried off several girls every year.

"Smallpox, typhoid, scarlet fever, measles—with fatal outcomes; consumption—everything lay in wait for us in the gloomy corridors, in the gloomy dormitories, in the gloomy garden."

A hundred girls slept in one room, on beds separated by little table-cupboards.[101]

And Verbitskaya came from a well-off noble family. True, she writes about the 1870s. Later much changed. My mother, who finished gymnasium in 1917, did not experience

such a life; her memories of childhood and youth were far brighter. Yet even prosperous Samara province, where she lived, after the famines of 1872, 1891, and 1901, endured—up to 1911—seven more "little famines," as Brockhaus and Efron wrote.[102] In 1891, when famine engulfed twenty-nine provinces and aid had to be sought from America, Alexander III wrote on a minister's report mentioning starving peasants: "I have no starving; there are only those who have suffered from a poor harvest." Thereafter censors struck the words "famine" and "starving" from newspapers, replacing them with "crop failure" and "those who have suffered from a poor harvest." [103]

Listening to the idyllic songs today, I thought that that way of life cannot be thrown out of history altogether, completely forgotten. It too is part of our past.

...And where was Verbitskaya borne away in her early dreams? "For hours I would stand over a map and travel in my mind on camels through the sands of the Sahara; gallop on a wild mustang across the pampas of South America; together with Captain Grant's children look for him in the gum forests of Australia... The dead map with its conventional signs and lines—that hateful and frightening map for most pupils—was for me suffused with wondrous colors and complex and mysterious life..."[104]

Isn't that like Gumilyov's dreaming? The very words are almost the same.

But it was her books that people read, not his. She had the many-thousand readers and admirers to whom she could address herself publicly in her pompous-sentimental manner: "To you, lonely, misunderstood, unsatisfied; to you who seek oblivion in invention..."

And Gumilyov's inventions? How many readers did they have—and still less admirers?

Could this have pleased him?

...*The Wrath of Dionysus* by Evdokia Nagrodskaia. She posed "sexual problems" much more sharply than Verbitskaya: the masculine principle in women, the feminine in men... This brought her money the fame of a society lioness, and her own literary salon. She patronized Mikhail Kuzmin. "Sexual problems" were not alien to him, and he needed patronage, as did the best poets of that time.

The poets of the Silver Age did not live as Nagrodskaia or Verbitskaya did. Odoevtseva recalled: "Only Blok, in the first years of his marriage, could live on verse alone. True, Blok wrote an incredible number of poems, and he and Lyubov Dmitrievna lived day after day exclusively on buckwheat porridge and drank chocolate. But in any case, I knew no other instance of existing on poetic fees." [106] Odoevtseva darkened the picture somewhat regarding Blok. But for Gumilyov, certainly, verse could not feed him. He was fortunate to have his father's savings. Even so, the house in Tsarskoe Selo had to be let to summer tenants.

In the summer of 1914 Akhmatova complained to Gumilyov: "I think we'll be very hard up for money in the fall. I have nothing; probably you don't either. From *Apollo* you'll get pennies. And already in August we'll need several hundred rubles. It will be good if we get something from *Rosary*. This worries me very much. Please don't forget that things are pawned. If possible, redeem them and give them to someone to hide." [107]

Soon afterward, in the second year of the World War, Empress Alexandra Feodorovna wrote to Nicholas II from Tsarskoe Selo: "There is no butter in Moscow, and here there is a shortage of many things, and prices are rising, so that even the rich find it hard to live." [108] And the Gumilyov family was never rich.

...Mikhail Artsybashev. In his novels, he combined sex (though the very word was not yet in use) with a mood of despair, hopelessness, expectation of death. In the novel *At the Last Threshold* (the title coincides, oddly, with Pikul's!) it says: "Life is a vast cemetery."

Artsybashev was prosecuted because of *Sanin*; in Germany and Austria-Hungary the translators were put on trial. But the scandals only strengthened the author's noisy fame. Critics asserted he had said a fresh new word. Even Blok fell under the general hypnosis and decided that in *Sanin* "a real man was felt—with an unbending will, a restrained smile, ready for anything, young, robust, free." [109]

What had all this to do with Gumilyov? Here is his letter to Bryusov, 6 April 1908: "My attempt to be printed, as usual, was unsuccessful, and Artsybashev declared that my poems do not suit 'in character.'" [110]

And never mind! Alongside the poems of Blok, Balmont, and even Gumilyov himself came endless reissues of chapbook literature a century and a half old: the indestructible *Vanka Cain*; *The Tale of the Adventures of the English Milord George and of the Brandenburg Margravine Friederike Luise*. This "milord"—Sytyn alone sold fifteen thousand copies a year and it was thought profitable enough to republish even in 1916. [111] Yet Nekrasov had dreamed of times:

*When the muzhik—not Blücher  
and not some silly milord—  
will carry Belinsky and Gogol  
home from the market.*

But most read of all was *Pinkertoniana*. [detective stories] This genre outstripped both Artsybashev and the "milord": Nick Carter, the "Russian sleuth Kobylkin," and above all *Nat Pinkerton, King of Detectives*. In Petersburg alone, in May 1908, there were bought 622,300 copies of boulevard detective literature (not Conan Doyle—no!), which means seven and a half million in a year.

Horried by these figures, Kornei Chukovsky reminded his readers that in Dostoevsky's lifetime *Crime and Punishment* appeared in two thousand copies, that these pitiful two thousand were sold from 1876 to 1880 and still could not all be disposed of. [112]

How many admirers there were (and are?) of *Pinkertoniana*! Of the many millions of pamphlet-installments, almost nothing remains even in the Russian State Library, our largest repository: read to rags, stolen. Rare editions of Blok or Gumilyov are now much easier to find than, say, *The Model-Murderess* or *Pinkerton's Journey to the Other World*, which were once sold in the newsstands of almost every Russian town. So that even to become acquainted with this literature is now nearly impossible.

True, I did read it. In the Russian State Library I found part of the novel *Rosa Burger, the Boer Heroine, or The Gold-Seekers in the Transvaal*[113]—the first 1,032 pages, forty-three installments. In St. Petersburg's Public Library—several more. These are the selfsame gaudy pamphlets that came out for months, three times a week—people would read it, then come back to the stand two days later for the continuation.

The authors, as usual, were not indicated on the cover—anonymous. They were thought to be failed or drunken men of letters, or "eternal students." Not all of them were talentless. In *Rosa Burger* the plot unfolds at a gallop; in each episode the intrigue is engagingly conceived.

Why has at least something of *Rosa Burger* survived? Probably because the title did not include the names "Pinkerton" or "Carter." And the detective theme formed only part of the content. Perhaps also because in 1902 such a genre was just becoming fashionable; the craze had not yet become universal.

In reminding readers of all this literature—from Charskaia to Nick Carter—I do not mean to stigmatize it. In what replaced it, what was called Socialist Realism there was plenty of talentless and harmful wrutubg. And what is better: disquisitions on "the sexual problem" in Nagrodskaia and Artsybashev, or what replaced them—the total silencing of intimate aspects of life, the effort to cover everything with prudish fig leaves? And did Verbitskaya really need to be removed everywhere from libraries later on?

And the authors of the spy tales of the 1930s, with which we schoolchildren were fed, and also the creators of some of today's detective stories could have learned from that *Pinkertoniana*.

That mass literature of the time was reproached for hostility to foreigners, aliens, adherents of other faiths. Titles of *Pinkerton* pulp: "Yellow Devils," "The Plot of the Negroes," "The Predator of the Chinese Opium Den"...

In the works of Lidia Charskaya, one girl is seized by Tatars and about to be killed, another is abducted and tortured by Gypsies. Meanwhile, in the historical novel *Ghazavat*, rivers of the blood of Siberian peoples flow, spilled by Yermak's band—and Charskaia is filled with rapture. Manya Eltzova, the heroine of *Keys to Happiness*, loving the Jew Shteinbakh (a millionaire), confesses: "I keep trying to forget that you are a Jew." And Shteinbakh himself declares in Verbitskaya: "We Jews are quickly degenerating." Naturally, Manya leaves him for a Russian.

Chauvinism and praise of imperial ambitions by no means permeated all this mass literature. Still, to many works one could attach as an epigraph the words of Benckendorff, chief of Nicholas I's Third Department and head of the gendarmes: "Russia's past is astonishing, its present magnificent, and its future remarkable." [114]

But can one assert that such attitudes were more dangerous then than they are now?

I mention this miscellaneous literature for only one purpose: to see the background against which Gumilyov performed, and understand far he stood from the main body of the reading public.

As is known, already in Gumilyov's lifetime—in 1897—less than ten percent of the population in Russia was literate. Even in Moscow more than half the inhabitants could not read or write. [115]

Afterward literacy grew rapidly. Yet even then there were shady sides.

"A new wave of readers surged into literature: half-secure, half-educated, irritated by the upper crust of urban civilization, raised on the asphalt, brought up on newspaper feuilletons..."

"...Novels are written for the city savages: *The Mysterious Dagger*, *The Cashier's Three Mistresses*, *The Poisoner-Corpse*, etc. One cannot blame these novels: since savages exist, they must have their own art."

"No, they are not even savages. They are not worthy of nose-rings and painted feathers. Savages are seers, dreamers; they have shamans, fetishes, and spells; but here there is a sort of hole of nonbeing."

"This complete cannibal in Russian literature was foreseen long ago and his approach was watched with horror. But when you read Herzen, Shchedrin, Konstantin Leontiev, Dostoevsky, Gorky—all of them anathematizing philistinism—you see that even in a hundredth part it did not present itself to them as monstrously abominable as it stands before us." [116]

So, in the last years before the First World War, Chukovsky lamented in virtually every one of his numerous literary surveys.

Should we be surprised at his judgments? Probably not. In our state, much—very much—has always been determined by its highest authorities. And these, as we well know, have far from always and not in all periods so loved education and the educated.

Two decades before Gumilyov's travels, the heir to the throne—the future Nicholas II—set off for the East. It was the first journey of so highly ranked a personage of the Russian Empire to eastern lands. The route was well planned, every day accounted for, yet the heir "spent two weeks making merry in Athens, without viewing even the most

interesting sights of Greece. Always and above all pleasures, without any constraint, in the family circle, in bourgeois fashion," as the assistant foreign minister wrote in his diary. [117]

We all deeply sympathize with the tragic fate of the last tsar. But was he a standard of erudition? Only in Ekaterinburg captivity did he read and value some of the best works of national literature. Less than two months before his death, on 8 May 1918 (O.S.), he noted in his diary that he was reading the fourth part of *War and Peace*, "which I did not know before." The next day: "Maria and I were reading *War and Peace* greedily." So when Tolstoy was being anathematized, the tsar had not even finished *War and Peace*? Entry of 13 May: "I began to read the works of Saltykov (Shchedrin)." On 5 June he continued: "Entertaining and intelligent." A few days before his death, 23 June: "Today I began volume VII of Saltykov. I like his tales, stories, and articles very much." [118] Did he not read earlier?

But if much had not been read, categorical opinions were nonetheless expressed. "For a long time there have been no major writers in any country; nor are there famous painters or musicians..." wrote Empress Alexandra Feodorovna to her husband. And more: "There are no real 'gentlemen'—that's the trouble—no one has proper upbringing, inner development, or principles one could rely on. It is bitter to be disillusioned in the Russian people—so backward are they..."[119]

Nicholas II himself, shortly before his overthrow, coolly and primly rebuked the French ambassador Maurice Paléologue: "You tell me, Mr. Ambassador, that I must earn the trust of my people. Should not the people rather earn my trust?"[120]

"The Sovereign also loves, in political questions, clarity and straight-linedness—truths foreign to any 'intelligentsia' contrivances," observed Sergei Yulievich Witte. In his resolutions Nicholas II called the Japanese "those macaques." [121] Thousands upon thousands of soldiers and sailors paid with their lives for such clarity and straight-linedness!

Even Suvorin, owner of the loyal *Novoe Vremya*, reproached the grand dukes in his secret diary: "they always took bribes," and Sergei Alexandrovich, Moscow governor-general, once took two million.[122]

The Church? The caustic Witte wrote of how many churchmen received the start of the Russo-Japanese War, : "Why, Seraphim of Sarov predicted that peace would be concluded in Tokyo. That means only the Yids and the intelligentsia can think the contrary." [123]

How did Gumilyov take all this? Though later, after the Revolution, he liked, in a spirit of defiance, to speak of his monarchism, yet, by contemporaries' testimony, "he very much disliked Nicholas II and the last generation of the fallen dynasty." And by Akhmatova's recollection, on the eve of the February Revolution he wanted to be transferred from the Life-Guard Uhlan Regiment of Her Imperial Majesty and explained

it so: "Soon a revolution will begin, and I will have to defend the Empress. And I do not want to." [124]

His attitude toward the Church? Here is Khodasevich's opinion: "Gumilyov did not forget to cross himself at every church, but I rarely saw people who to such an extent had no inkling of what religion is." [125]

In 1902 John of Kronstadt (Ioann Ilyich Sergiev) published a book *A Few Words in Denunciation of the False Teachings of L. N. Tolstoy*. And in 1908, on the occasion of the eightieth birthday of "the Great Lion—Tolstoy," one of the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church, Hermogen, delivered a speech; in the notes of those present it appeared thus:

"...O accursed and contemptible Russian Judas, who has strangled in his soul all that is holy, morally pure and morally noble, who has hanged himself, like a vicious suicide, upon the dry branch of his own swollen mind and corrupted talent, now morally rotten to the marrow and with his outrageous moral-religious stench infecting the entire vital atmosphere of our intellectual society! Anathema upon you, vile, rabid tempter, who with the poison of your passionate and depraved talent have poisoned and led to eternal ruin many, many souls of your unfortunate and weak-minded compatriots." [126]

Tolstoy was also blamed for defending people's right to emigrate. We like to recall that after the Revolution one to two million people left our country and call that the first wave of emigration. But we forget that in the last decades before the Revolution far more departed—because of national and religious persecution, out of want and hard fate.

In his survey of Russian literary life for 1911, Chukovsky wrote: "Unter Prishibeyevs continued to trample our literature beneath their clodhopping boots. To the Shlisselburg prison once again goes N. A. Morozov, for the book *Star Songs*. A. V. Peshekhonov has been sentenced to a year and a half in a fortress for some old articles! The works and letters of Lev Tolstoy, the most innocent books of O. Dymov, Garin, and Serafimovich, the autobiography of Nietzsche, Shevchenko's *Kobzar*—all this were somehow confiscated and, with dreary obtuseness, destroyed..." [127]

I cite Chukovsky not only because he was on friendly terms with Gumilyov. At the time he was the leading literary critic and wrote both articles on individual writers and, year after year, surveys of the entire state of our national letters. Everything he wrote about cheap reading matter could of course be applied not only to our country but to many others. And Chukovsky, who followed English literature closely, most likely knew Chesterton's essay "In Defense of 'Penny Dreadfuls'." But he was pained not for some other country, but for his own. He considered patriotism not boastfulness about achievements but the struggle against evil—after Nekrasov's precept:

*Who lives without sorrow or anger  
does not love his native land.*

Let another witness speak—Arkady Averchenko. Here is what he wrote about the censorship practices of the time when Gumilyov was taking the literary field—about 1908–1913:

"I will list only what we are categorically forbidden to write about:

1. The military (even everyday scenes).
2. Starving peasants.
3. Monks (even the very worst).
4. Government ministers (even the most incompetent).

"And in the last issue even a cartoon mocking *Novoe Vremya* was not passed."

These were the themes tabooed in *Satirikon* and *Novy Satirikon*.

"Reader! Bare your head in reverence before this fact," Averchenko concluded his list. [128]

On my shelf stands *Universal History, as Rendered by Satirikon*, written by Teffi, Osip Dymov, and Averchenko, and D'Or's *Russian History*. Both were published in Petersburg in 1912. In the *Russian History*, for example, in the section on Paul I, there are lines and lines of ellipses. The censors did not pass it. Only after the February Revolution could the book appear under the title *The History of Rus' Under the Varangians and the Vorangians*.

Of course, those old prohibitions are nothing compared with the horrors of civil war and the terror of the ensuing decades. If Averchenko could publicly expose censorship, it means it was not all-powerful. And Chukovsky could mock in print Lidia Charskaya for her "barracks-patriotic vulgarity," for her cooing whenever she mentioned the House of Romanov—the tsar, the grand dukes; for the way, in *Notes of an Institute Girl*, "the heroically built figure of the monarch adored by Russia" appears. [129]

Give Chukovsky free rein to write the same sort of literary surveys after 1917, and what murderous characterizations would have come from his pen! Was it because he was having a good life that he had to restrict himself to children's books? And to write in Aesopian language—

*"I'm a grasshopper, a grasshopper,  
almost just like a little man,  
hop, hop, hop, hop!  
behind the bush,  
under the bridge—  
and hush!"*

Even so, the times before that were no unbroken idyll for writers.

Perhaps those difficulties did not touch Gumilyov and the Apollonians? The journal was not political. And Gumilyov, then and later, did not have to collide with the filth of political life as, for instance, Blok did when, under the Provisional Government, he served as secretary of the Extraordinary Investigative Commission interrogating tsarist dignitaries. Gumilyov did not resemble Bely, who, even before the Revolution, voiced his alarms in the cycle *Crisis of Life, Crisis of Thought*, and *Crisis of Art*; or Blok with his *The Intelligentsia and the Revolution*. He did not write satirical feuilletons about the Romanovs—*The Lords of Deceit*, like Amfiteatrov. Nor did he, as Balmont, prophesy:

*He who began his reign with Khodynka  
will end it on the scaffold.*

True, Gumilyov wrote a poem about Rasputin ("The Mudzhik"):

*Into our proud capital  
he enters—God save us!—  
bewitches the tsarina  
of immeasurable Rus'*

*with his glance, his childlike smile,  
his roguish speech—  
and on his bold young breast  
a golden cross has flashed.*

But even in this poem the political coloration is not very strong.

Not meddling in politics, Gumilyov felt less pressure from that quarter than many. But he could not fail to feel it altogether.

And other sources of stress? There were those too.

Alexander Blok, outwardly so imperturbable and so finely attuned, wrote—addressing not just anyone but his friends (he titled the poem "To Friends"):

*We are secretly hostile one to another,  
envious, deaf, estranged—  
oh, how could we live and work  
without eternal enmity!*

In his poem "Poets," also from 1908, comes a cry of the heart:

*A desert quarter rose beyond the town  
on swampy, shifting soil.  
Poets lived there—and each would greet  
the other with a haughty smile.*

*When drunk, they swore eternal friendship,  
chattered cynically and spiced;  
toward morning they were sick. Then, locked away,  
they labored dull and fierce.*

And in 1913 Blok cursed those semi-literary ladies whose entire "talent" consisted in spreading gossip, creating schools of slander, weaving intrigues. "They praise and abuse us, but in so doing drink our artistic blood. They fatten, we drink ourselves to ruin. Any little cur can turn into a dragon... They push ministers off their perches... It is from them that the literary milieu stinks so that one must run away without looking back."

Who are these harpies? "Patronesses, liberal ladies, little actresses, hangers-on, secretaries, old maids, married women, pretty cocottes—there is no counting them." [130]

To what state had they driven him, if he poured out such things in his diary—he, the knight of the Beautiful Lady!

And the official bureaucratic spirit? It was a far cry from the system that replaced it and that for some reason was gently called "command-administrative". But it, too, was no sugar. Alexey Konstantinovich Tolstoy—whose works Gumilyov prefaced with such love—once wrote ironically:

*In Russia love is chilled by cold,  
and, besides that, by service we're enslaved:  
few of us are born unclothed—  
most in uniform and with a blade.*

How many turncoats there are in our life today! How we'd like to think there were none in Gumilyov's time. Alas!

Alexander Alexandrovich Okonev, an officer of the aristocratic Guards Order Regiment, shot a student in the Petersburg restaurant The Bear on New Year's night because he did not stand up during the anthem "God Save the Tsar." Okonev got three months' arrest, after which he was granted the highest audience. Nicholas II, kissing him on the forehead, said: "No need to be hot-headed." And a few years later Okonev and his wife were riding in Trotsky's train. [131] So they managed to ingratiate themselves there as well!

This was the world in which Gumilyov lived; a world in which, as he said, only snakes shed their skins, while we change our souls, not our bodies. And to him, for all his organization and imperturbability (also largely outward), it must, at least at times, have been upsetting, knocking him off his stride.

Consider the Cherubina scandal, the duel with Voloshin, and the immediate storm of spoken and printed (and unprintable) gossip. Did this not mirror the atmosphere in the country and in literary circles?

And was it not for this reason that Gumilyov so often felt drawn somewhere farther off—to Africa? In our own day Vladimir Vysotsky lamented: "If only I could lie low, like a submarine, and send out no call signs." And Gumilyov:

*Ah, to run, to hide like a thief,  
to Africa, as once, as then.*

True, Gumilyov constantly forced himself to be (or at least to appear to be) an optimist. He was heartened by the founding of *Apollo*, to which he tied several years of his life, and by other successes that befell him in the last prewar years—and by his faith (perhaps self-suggestion) that poetry would save the world. Hence, probably, his confident words in mid-1912: "...we are indeed living through a poetic renaissance. Special attention is given to verse; to be interested in it is considered elegant, and it is no wonder that more and more of it is appearing..." The difficulty, he saw, lay only in this: "to write good verse now is just as hard as it has always been." [132]

Chukovsky looked far more pessimistic: "The past year was, strangely, poor in poetry," he wrote in his survey for 1911. [133]

What would Gumilyov have said of those times, had he lived to see the Second World War—as did his contemporary Vladislav Khodasevich? The latter, in his memoir *Necropolis*, put it thus:

"We lived through the years that followed 1905: years of spiritual fatigue and rampant aestheticism. In literature, on the heels of the modernist school—which unexpectedly received general recognition precisely for what in it was inessential or bad—came countless low-grade imitators. In society, sickly young ladies resurrected Hellenism by going barefoot. The bourgeois, suddenly feeling a will to 'audacity,' flung himself upon 'the sexual question.' Lower down, the Saninites and the Ogarists multiplied. Decadent houses were built in the streets. And imperceptibly, over all this, electricity gathered. The thunderbolt struck in 1914." [134]

The writer Boris Zaitsev: "In the prewar and prerevolutionary years, Blok's vague miasmas reigned—stuffy air, tango, melancholy, temptations, jangled nerves, and 'short breath.' Nemesis was approaching, and the blind knew nothing for certain; they sensed disaster, but there was no helm. We had a very refined stratum, a seductively unhealthy culture whose spokesman, for its young—poets and prose writers, painters, actors and actresses, intelligent and 'nervy' girls, bohemia and demi-bohemia, all the 'Stray Dogs' and studio theaters—was Alexander Blok. He found a response. The subtle decay of his poetry, its barrenness and diffuseness, its unheroic spirit perfectly suited the milieu. Blok needed fresh air, inner strengthening of health [of the spirit].

"Whence could this come at that time?" [135]

In a long article, "Akhmatova and the 'Silver Age,'" Naum Korzhavin wrote: "Some will probably be surprised by my very attitude toward the 'Silver Age'... In general, I am no admirer of that epoch—brilliant, but somewhat wanton, especially on its periphery."

He explained: "...my rejection of the 'Silver Age' does not mean a blanket rejection of everything written or everyone writing then. It concerns only the atmosphere, which was felt even by real talents. The influence was not beneficial for them, but, fortunately, it was not fatal: strong individualities cannot stray too far from themselves. But they lived in that atmosphere. And it was such that in it the lack of a rare artistic gift was perceived as the lack of a right to dignity (if not to life). So in certain circles people had nothing left to do but claim a place in the realm of the gods—not out of immodesty, but simply because that seemed to them the only imaginable place under the sun. And everyone puffed himself up. One who had not yet 'created' said he was 'seeking himself but had not yet found himself'—this status, too, was still recognized as worthy of a human being. In my youth, I myself encountered micro-hotbeds of such an atmosphere ."

Reading this in Korzhavin, I recalled what I had heard from my elders, born at the end of the last century. The scourge of a milieu that considered itself intelligent, they said, was the urge to display extraordinary, affectedly strong feelings: not to speak, but to exclaim; not to weep, but to sob; not to love, but to be consumed by love. Affectedness in feeling, in self-expression. Was this artificiality, play, a mask? Even if a mask—masks, as is known, if worn long, grow to the face. They become your face.

And the suicides that grew more frequent among the young at the century's start? To end one's life seemed a way out of a personal tragedy, at times even out of the sense that one could not pass the exam for the exceptionality of one's "I."

My elders linked this to the influence of such writers as Leonid Andreev. And in *modern* style, which came into fashion not only in architecture but in everyday life, they saw above all pretension, warp, a standing against simplicity and naturalness.

One cannot but recall Nietzscheanism. Korzhavin considers it "the stamp of the time that lay not only upon the 'talents and admirers' of art but upon all who claimed any kind of activity, including revolutionaries—for instance, Russian interpreters of Marxist theory and the role of personality in history."

For poetry this had the most direct bearing: "As time has shown, no one—not even good poets—escaped the influence of the poisoned atmosphere of that epoch, and for no one did it pass entirely without consequence."

Korzhavin also attacks the Silver Age's romanticism: "...This is a special 'romanticism,' for it is almost entirely devoid of romance in the accustomed sense of the word—be it heroic, Byronic, or idyllic."

He makes an exception for Gumilyov: "Gumilyov's heroic romanticism does not count here, for, first, it already stood at the exit from the 'Silver Age,' and second, it was

determined by the author's way of life rather than by literary pose; in literature it was only reflected." In general, Korzhavin does not direct his reproaches at Gumilyov; on the contrary, agreeing in much with "Without Deity, without Inspiration," he considers that Blok was unjust to Gumilyov.

But of course the affectation and mannerism of those years could not fail to touch Gumilyov as well. Nadezhda Teffi, who remembered him with great warmth ("I was very fond of Gumilyov"), put it gently: "He too, of course, had his stiff manner of speech, though not excessively—and more out of politeness, so as not to differ too sharply from the other poets." [136]

And certainly Nietzscheanism influenced Gumilyov—perhaps more than many. Everyone seems to have noted his effort to bear himself unnaturally, to stand out: not to speak, but to pronounce; to be not only a strong personality, but to seem one.

How would Gumilyov himself have assessed the role and place of the phenomenon we now, with such reverence, call the Silver Age? His own role?

Perhaps he would have reminded us of the familiar thought that the Italian Renaissance was only a hundred and fifty or two hundred people.

What helped him then, and what hindered—how would he have said it himself? We can judge only from crumbs, scraps, phrases tossed off and remembered by someone.

Pasternak, after all, insisted:

*The tale of our fathers—  
like a tale  
from Stuart times—  
is farther than Pushkin,  
and appears  
as if in a dream.*

And Akhmatova echoed him: "*our fathers and grandfathers are incomprehensible.*"

Yet we do know the signs of those years.

## **IN EVERY PUDDLE THE SMELL OF THE OCEAN!**

*I know the merry tales of far-off lands  
about the black maiden, the young chieftain's lust—  
but you have breathed too long the heavy mists  
and will believe in nothing now but rain.  
—Gumilyov*

Gumilyov did not win the mass reader. Did he strive to? But in poetic Petersburg, after his return from Addis Ababa, success accompanied him: the founding of the Poets' Guild; the emergence of a new literary movement.

With his critical articles, he won the authority of a judge to whose voice poets and connoisseurs of poetry listened.

In 1912 there appeared a new collection of his poems—*Strange Sky*.

To his success was added the success of his wife. In 1912 her first collection *Evening* came out. Though published in only three hundred copies, it received many responses. The critics, as Akhmatova herself later wrote, greeted it "benevolently."

In *Strange Sky* Gumilyov dedicated a large cycle of poems to his wife. As an epigraph to one of them he set Akhmatova's lines:

*...How red my Chinese parasol,  
how chalked my little shoes.*

And Akhmatova loved, for example, the poem "The Pilgrim" (*Akhmed-Oghlu takes up his staff*) from *Strange Sky*.

But successes on the poetic field did not cool his passion for far countries. Indeed, his success was bound up with strange skies—with how their images were reflected in his verse. The new collection was called, after all, *Strange Sky*.

It included the "Abyssinian Songs": "The Military Song," "The Slave-Girl's Song," "Five Bulls," "Girls of Zanzibar." The first was inspired by the Italo-Ethiopian war:

*Rhinoceroses trample our durra,  
monkeys strip the figs,  
worse than monkeys and rhinoceroses  
are white drifters—the Italians.*

And the second—also about whites:

*Out from the tent steps the European,  
flourishing a long whip.*

In the journal *Our Heritage* it was asserted: "...he gathered local folklore, transforming it into a series of original Abyssinian songs included in *Strange Sky*." [137] But, in Gumilyov's own words, they were written "independently of the true poetry of the Abyssinians." [138]

The collection turned out to be variegated: translations of five poems by Théophile Gautier; the play *Don Juan in Egypt*; in most poems—thoughts and dreams of distant

lands: "By the Fireplace," "I Believed, I Thought," "The Hippopotamus," "Dazzling," "Rhodes," "The Pilgrim," "Constantinople," and even "Modernity" and "Turkestan Generals"; and the beautiful poem *The Discovery of America*.

And laments. Some sound perhaps too florid to be taken wholly seriously:

*Surely I am ill: there is a fog upon my heart,  
I'm bored by everything—by people and their tales;  
I dream of royal diamonds,  
and a broad yataghan bathed in blood...*

But others one cannot but believe. "By the Fireplace," so loved by Konstantin Paustovsky and Nikolai Khodotov. In it there is the unfeigned bitterness of a man not understood. He traveled through unknown lands, fearing neither beasts nor men, yet afterward "I learned what fear is, buried here within four walls." Above all—no sympathy, no shared feeling, no love.

This complaint had a concrete addressee. It was addressed to his wife and sent from the road to Africa. Again and again something failed to work out with her whose love he had courted for so many years.

...After his return from Africa, Gumilyov, together with his wife and his mother—already a widow—moved in Tsarskoe Selo from Boulevard Street to Malaya, house 63, almost opposite the gymnasium where he had studied. He lived there for a long time. There he received Mikhail Leonidovich Lozinsky, with whom he was very close, Osip Mandelstam, Vladimir Narbut. There, too, came the future Mother Maria.

Akhmatova took a dislike to that house:

*In that house it was terribly frightening to live,  
and neither the patriarchal glow of the hearth,  
nor my child's little cradle,  
nor the fact that both of us were young  
and full of plans...  
lessened that feeling of dread.*

This was written in Tsarskoe Selo in 1921, soon after Gumilyov's death. It ends:

*Now you are there, where all is known—tell me:  
what lived in that house besides ourselves?*

Teffi wrote of that house: "It was always dark and uncomfortable there, and for some reason always restless. Gumilyov was either going somewhere, or getting ready to go, or had just returned. And one felt that in that household they somehow lived 'for the time being'." [139]

How did Gumilyov live in that house? Literally a few days after his return from Africa he wrote:

*From the serpent's lair,  
from the city of Kiev,  
I took not a wife, but a sorceress...  
Call to her—she frowns;  
embrace her—she bristles;  
but when the moon rises—she grows troubled,  
and looks, and moans,  
as if she were burying someone—  
and wants to drown herself.*

A son, Lev, was born to Akhmatova; a son, Orest, to the actress Olga Nikolaevna Vysotskaya. The father of both was Gumilyov. From Akhmatova burst out:

*One day, they led me to the lectern,  
With whom, I don't know. But I remember—long ago...*

For all his successes in creative life, Gumilyov must have lacked much.

The opportunity to continue traveling was not long in coming. Less than two years passed.

"One day in December 1912 I was in one of those charming corners of Petersburg University, lined with books, where students, graduate students, and sometimes professors drink tea and gently poke fun at each other's specialties." So begins the *African Diary*. [140]

"I was waiting for a well-known Egyptologist, to whom I had brought as a gift an Abyssinian folding diptych I had brought back from my previous journey: the Virgin Mary with Child on one leaf and a saint with a severed leg on the other."

So that is the folding icon (Anna Andreevna called it a triptych). And the "well-known Egyptologist" was Boris Aleksandrovich Turaev—also called Russia's first "Abyssinian-ist."

"In this little gathering," Gumilyov admitted, "my diptych met with a middling success: the classicist spoke of its pseudo-artistry; the scholar of the Renaissance of European influence, which depreciated it; the ethnographer of the superiority of the art of Siberian natives. They were far more interested in my journey, asking the usual questions in such cases: are there many lions there, are hyenas very dangerous, what do travelers do in case of an Abyssinian attack? And no matter how I insisted that lions have to be sought for weeks, that hyenas are more timid than hares, that Abyssinians are strict legalists and never attack anyone, I saw they hardly believed me. It turned out to be harder to destroy legends than to create them."

Even in the way he told of these disputes there peeps out that wary scepticism that colors relations between the two worlds—literary and scholarly. He did not conceal it: "I have grown used to looking upon academicians as my inveterate foes."

In how many poems did Gumilyov oppose bookish knowledge to full-blooded life, poking fun at scholars—his "Bologna," written at that very time, for instance. The university—well, go there, if you have failed to achieve a life worthy of a real man. After all:

*...the sweeter wine, the headier;  
the fairer the lady, the craftier.  
Now the gawkers slip away  
to dream in quiet of highest glory.  
And they will come, they'll come by dawn  
with wise thoughts of Justinian  
to the dark door of the university,  
that age-old lair of knowledge.*

And what of the professors then, those who teach these gawkers?

*An old doctor, hunched in a red toga,  
seeks laws in lawlessness—  
and even he, at times, drags his feet  
through Bologna's merry streets.*

For all that, Gumilyov himself was then a student of that "age-old lair of knowledge." He entered the law faculty of St. Petersburg University in August 1908;\* a year later he requested a transfer to the history and philology faculty; in May 1911 he asked to be withdrawn and was withdrawn; in September 1912 he asked to be re-enrolled and was re-enrolled. And finally, in March 1915, while serving at the front, he was "dismissed from the rolls of university students for nonpayment of fees for the autumn of 1914." [141]

His matriculation records show that he attended lectures by such brilliant professors as the linguist I. A. Baudouin de Courtenay, the historian S. F. Platonov, and the classicist F. F. Zelinsky.

With what warmth Gumilyov spoke of the university's "charming, book-crammed corners"! And yet the following lines from *Strange Sky* may be applied to academic science, though they were written in a different context.

*You never believe in anything  
until you've counted it, measured it;  
you'll never set out anywhere  
unless you find the route on a map.*

*And alien to you is that mad hunter  
who, climbing a craggy cliff,  
in drunken bliss, in reasonless longing,  
lets fly his arrow straight at the sun.*

And when, in that university corner, they asked whether he had reported his previous journey to the Academy of Sciences, the question only astonished him. "At once I pictured that massive white building with inner courtyards, staircases, passageways—a whole fortress guarding official science from the outside world; the liveried attendants, pressing to know precisely whom I wished to see; and finally the cold face of the duty secretary, informing me that the Academy is not interested in private undertakings, that the Academy has its own researchers—and the like disheartening phrases... Part of these reflections, of course in softened form, I did voice..."

But a pleasant disappointment awaited him. The scholars treated him without a trace of arrogance. To his surprise, "the princes of official science turned out, like true princes, to be kindly and well-disposed."

From that meeting began the preparations for a journey which, unlike the previous ones, was entirely official. "Not half an hour had passed before, with a letter of introduction in hand, I found myself on a worn stone staircase before the door to the reception room of one of the arbiters of academic destinies."

Where was that staircase? Perhaps he meant the stately, white-columned building on the Neva that belonged to the Academy of Sciences and still does. But more likely the neighboring building, also on the Neva and opposite the Admiralty—the Petrine Kunstkamera. In Gumilyov's time, as now, it housed the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

And the "arbiter"? Most likely Academician Vasily Vasilyevich Radlov—then the museum's director. Or the museum's scholarly curator, Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg.

Preparation for the journey took five months, from December 1912 to April 1913. "In that time I spent many hours on inner stairways and in spacious offices cluttered with yet-unsorted collections, in attics and in cellars of the museums of that large white building by the Neva. I met scholars who seemed to have just stepped off the pages of a Jules Verne novel; and others who, with an ecstatic gleam in their eyes, spoke of aphids and coccids; and still others whose dream was to procure the hide of the red wild dog that lives in Central Africa; and others who, like Baudelaire, were ready to believe in the true divinity of little idols carved of wood and ivory. And almost everywhere the welcome I received amazed me by its simplicity and cordiality."

Thus began the journey to Abyssinia which proved for Gumilyov not only the last, but also the richest in diverse results. More testimony has survived about this expedition than about all his earlier ones put together.

And everything, of course, was decided in that old building where, later, the first museum department of Africa in our country was created and the Academy's first scholarly division for African studies. The first head of both was Dmitry Alekseevich Olderogge—my teacher, and the continuer of Radlov and Shternberg's traditions. His lofty office, with darkened portraits on the walls, looked out upon the Neva, the Admiralty, and the Winter Palace.

It was in that building, in the cold winter of 1948/49, that I first heard from him about the African collections kept there—Gumilyov's trophies from the journey conceived in that same place in the winter of 1912/13.

## "I HAVE A DREAM"

*And through my veins there streams and sings  
a joyfully surging blood.  
—Gumilyov*

The question of this trip to Africa was decided quickly—one can envy that today. Now everything takes far longer.

How many petitions various offices demand; how much must be "settled," "pushed through." What horrible words.

Was it all simply because at that time the "princes of official science" were "kindly and well-disposed"? Unlike now? That, as we know, is one of today's favorite debating points. I won't join in. *The Bible* says: "Say not, 'Why were the former days better than these?' for it is not from wisdom that you ask this." Alas, the older one gets, the more often one must remind oneself of this saying, and on ever more occasions.

Gumilyov, of course, was lucky. Precisely in those years the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography secured state subsidies for long expeditions to augment the African, South American, and Indian sections. Radlov and Shternberg dreamed that the museum's exhibits would truly allow one to judge the diversity of humanity's evolutionary forms. And by long-continued effort they overcame a multitude of bureaucratic hurdles—hard to clear even then. Radlov also managed to found a Committee for the Museum's Support and attract private donations.

And so several long expeditions could be organized at once. In 1912 the Academy of Sciences sent three young scholars to the Amazon. On the eve of the First World War, in 1914, the Mervart couple, Alexander Mikhailovich and Lyudmila Alexandrovna went for four years to India to study culture and languages and to acquire collections. Collection of ethnographic material was undertaken in Manchuria in those years as well.

Thus the chat with Gumilyov in that book-crammed corner of the Petrine Twelve Colleges building proved—as they say—timely. The museum needed African collections. If it could not fully fund the expedition, it could at least give material support.

And Gumilyov, of course, proved a suitable figure for the museum's leaders.

Having written the previous sentence, I thought: let no one apply to me Yevtushenko's reproach—that Gumilyov's poetic and life path is now being "thoughtlessly made up," almost into an operatic "Hey, Slavs!"[142]. Yevtushenko is right. One journalist even claims: "...neither Radlov nor Shternberg had the slightest doubt about Gumilyov's candidacy; they knew they were sending a professional ethnographer to Africa."[143] That, of course, is not so. Gumilyov was no professional ethnographer—he had no formal training in the field and had never worked in an ethnographic institution. He sought fame as a poet, traveler, and warrior—not as a professional scholar.

And yet he suited Radlov and Shternberg. The point is that our country then had no professional Africanist ethnographers. But Gumilyov already knew the country, was young and healthy, full of energy to withstand the hardships of the road, the natural conditions, the climate. He was burning to go to Africa.

Several documents about the expedition's preparation survive. Documents always speak better than any retelling. I will therefore quote in full those I found in the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This branch is in a building nearly adjoining the Museum of Ethnography. Gumilyov trod all those sidewalks.

The earliest document in that archive is dated March 20, 1913. It is a letter from the museum's director, Academician Radlov, to Otto Lvovich, the managing director of the Board of the Volunteer Fleet.[144] Its text:

*Most honored sir, Otto Lvovich,*

*Permit me to address Your Excellency with the following request:*

*The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography named for Emperor Peter the Great is commissioning to Abyssinia, for the collection of ethnographic specimens and for the survey of the Galla and Somali tribes, Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilyov and Nikolai Leonidovich Sverchkov. In view of the extremely limited funds allotted to this expedition, I appeal to your enlightened assistance to provide said persons free passage on the steamers of the Volunteer Fleet from Odessa to Aden and back.*

*The expedition intends to depart from Odessa on April 10 and to return in early August.*

*Pray accept assurances of my profound respect and devotion.*

*V. Radlov*

Next come three documents with the same date—March 26, 1913.[145]. Evidently that day the director devoted no small time to the Abyssinian expedition. A matter of first importance was arming the expedition. Hence the following letter:

*To the Main Artillery Administration*

*As the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography is dispatching an expedition to Abyssinia under the leadership of N. S. Gumilyov, we most humbly request authorization to issue to Mr. Gumilyov, from the arsenal, five soldiers' rifles and 1,000 cartridges for them upon POSSIBLY preferential terms.*

*Director of the Museum  
Actual Privy Councillor  
Academician V. Radlov*

It was necessary to secure the aid of the Imperial Russian Mission in Abyssinia. A message was sent to its head, Chemerzin.

*To His Excellency B. A. Chemerzin*

*Most honored sir, Boris Aleksandrovich!*

*Permit me to address Your Excellency with the following request: The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography is commissioning N. S. Gumilyov to Abyssinia to study the Galla tribe. Since, for unimpeded travel through the territory of this tribe, the assistance of the governor of Harar is necessary, I most humbly beg you to obtain the corresponding letter of recommendation from the Abyssinian government and to send it in the name of Mr. Gumilyov to Onge Pasa; I likewise beg you to inform our vice-consul in Djibouti to render assistance to Mr. Gumilyov in that city, whereby you will greatly oblige the Museum of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and your most humble servant.*

*V. Radlov*

Finally, that same day, the so-called "open letter" was evidently signed—granting Gumilyov undoubted privileges along the route. The document itself is not in the archive; it was given to Gumilyov. What remains is a large sheet on which, in a sweeping hand, is written:

*March 26, 1913.*

*Open letter for Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilyov and Nikolai Leonidovich Sverchkov, departing to Abyssinia for scientific investigations.*

The museum director did not have to wait long for replies. Though the bureaucratic wheels of the Russian Empire are thought to have turned slowly—and very often they did—in this case matters were decided promptly. The Main Artillery Administration answered Radlov seven days after his letter; the Board of the Volunteer Fleet—on the sixteenth day.

True, the distances were not so great. The Board of the Volunteer Fleet was on Mikhailovskaya Square, No. 5—two to two and a half kilometers from the museum; the

Main Artillery Administration was not far either. But, as we know, papers sometimes crawl for weeks even from one desk to the next.

Moreover, only a month was needed for a reply from Addis Ababa—given the means of communication then!

The weapons were released to Gumilyov. The Artillery Administration's reply read:[146]

*April 2, 1913.*

*To the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography  
of Emperor Peter the Great*

*An order has simultaneously been given to issue, for payment, from the Petersburg depot, five Berdan rifles with 1,000 cartridges to Mr. Gumilyov, who is departing to Abyssinia at the head of the expedition being outfitted thereto.*

*The cost of the items issued will be withheld by direct order of the Chief of Artillery of the Petersburg Military District.*

*Lieutenant-General (illegible)  
Colonel (illegible)*

And the managing director and the office head of the Board of the Volunteer Fleet reported:[147]

*April 5, 1913.*

*To the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography  
of Emperor Peter the Great*

*In response to your communication of the 20th of last March, the Board of the Volunteer Fleet has the honor to inform you of its agreement to provide free passage on a Volunteer Fleet steamer from Odessa to Djibouti and back, with the cost of board to be borne by themselves, to N. S. Gumilyov and N. L. Sverchkov, who are departing to Abyssinia for the collection of specimens and the survey of local tribes.*

*The terminal point of the voyage is designated as Djibouti, not Aden, since Volunteer Fleet steamers do not usually call at Aden; should a stop occur caused by the landing of even two passengers, the steamer would be considered to be conducting commercial operations, which would entail significant port fees.*

*The Office of the Volunteer Fleet in Odessa is being informed simultaneously of the permission granted.*

And finally—also entirely favorable—a letter on the letterhead of the Imperial Russian Mission in Abyssinia:[148]

*April 27, 1913.*

*Most honored sir, Vasily Vasilyevich!*

*In reply to your letter of March 26, 1913, No. 122, I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the Ethiopian government, apprised by me of the forthcoming arrival of N. S. Gumilyov, expressed its readiness to render him full assistance in carrying out his intentions.*

*I have also informed our vice-consul in Djibouti accordingly.*

*It is desirable, however, to have exact information as to when Mr. Gumilyov intends to arrive in Djibouti and in Abyssinia; I therefore take the liberty of asking you to notify me of this.*

*B. Chemerzin*

This letter—though, I repeat, it came very quickly—did not find Gumilyov in Petersburg. He was already en route. Most likely Radlov, confident of a favorable reply from Chemerzin, did not deem it necessary to make Gumilyov's departure contingent on it.

The slowest mover, judging by the documents, appears to have been the Academy of Sciences itself. The question of dispatching the expedition was considered only on May 22, when Gumilyov was already in Ethiopia.

Strange? Nevertheless, here are two documents.

One is a petition from the museum director:[149]

*May 22, 1913.*

*To the Historical-Philological Section  
of the Imperial Academy of Sciences*

*I request the Section's permission to commission N. S. Gumilyov to Africa for the survey of the Galla tribe and the collection among them of specimens, and at the same time I request that 600 rubles be allotted for expenses connected therewith—of which 400 rubles are to be issued here to the person whom Mr. Gumilyov shall authorize, and 200 rubles to be transferred on July 1 through the Crédit Lyonnais to the following address: Addis Abeba, One-Pasa, Vale of Abissinia—via the Indo-Chinese Bank in Djibouti, Mr. Nicolas Goumileff.*

*Director Radlov*

This petition bears the date of the meeting of the Historical-Philological Section. The second document is the minutes—extremely laconic: "Academician V. V. Radlov,

director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, read the following." Then his petition's text is given, followed by the decision—only one sentence: "Resolved to report the commissioning of N. S. Gumilyov to the Board for the necessary dispositions." [150]

Most likely the Section's resolution was a purely formal act—a counter-signature of what had already been decided, as often happened later in Academy practice.

"I have a dream, persistent despite the difficulty of its fulfillment: to cross from south to north the Danakil Desert lying between Abyssinia and the Red Sea; to explore the lower course of the Awash River; to get to know the scattered, unknown, enigmatic tribes there." This is part of Eritrea and, by today's administrative divisions, the provinces of Wollo and Tigray, as well as lands that now belong to the Republic of Djibouti.

Was it fair to say that in 1913 "unknown and enigmatic tribes" lived there? Of course, the phrasing is too solemn; but in Russia—and all Europe, really—little was known of those peoples.

The Academy refused to subsidize a journey there—it was too costly.

Gumilyov had to propose another route—farther south. "I was to proceed to the port of Djibouti in the Bab el-Mandeb; from there by rail to Harar; then, assembling a caravan, head south into the region lying between the Somali Peninsula and the lakes Rudolf, Margarita, and Zwai; to cover the largest possible area." In other words, the eastern and southern parts of present-day Ethiopia and the western part of Somalia.

This route was approved. It required less expense; and the opening stages were familiar to Gumilyov from earlier journeys.

True, in our day claims have been made that Gumilyov traveled "to an Abyssinia that remained mysterious to whites," that "Gumilyov chose a path through the least studied part of the country," even that he "not by chance included in his route the land of the wild and warlike Galla tribes." [151]

The author of those phrases was evidently striving to aggrandize Gumilyov as much as possible. But Gumilyov himself did not call these lands the least studied—even compared with those of his originally proposed route.

And as for "wild tribes"! Europeans once favored such labels for Africans. But now?

The "Galla" people—so Europeans called them in Gumilyov's time—were later properly understood to bear the self-name Oromo.

As for "Abyssinia, mysterious to whites," one can, of course, proceed from the notion that all nations, all countries, indeed all people are mysterious to one another—against such a view there is no arguing. But the author cited meant something else: he considered Abyssinia especially mysterious—harder to agree with. It was, after all, a land with an

ancient statehood, and even an embassy of the Russian Empire had been established there long before Gumilyov's arrival.

...The museum's leadership also agreed that Gumilyov could take along his nephew, Kolya Sverchkov.

The expedition's aims? "To take photographs, collect ethnographic specimens, record songs and legends. In addition, I was empowered to collect zoological specimens."

Gumilyov's personal aim, as in his earlier journeys—and perhaps foremost—was to gain new impressions for his poetry. He also wanted to keep a diary—with an eye to publication.

Official financial support, of course, was not lavish. Much had to be done at his own expense. But Gumilyov and Sverchkov received free passage—and arms: five rifles and a thousand cartridges.

For the first time, Gumilyov was going to Africa not at his own risk, but on an official mission. The Academy's commission gave him undeniable advantages. Having scarcely set foot on African soil, he wrote to Akhmatova: "The magic open letter has already saved me about fifty rubles and, in general, has rendered a number of services." [152]

This, then, was Gumilyov's best-prepared, most carefully thought-out journey.

And he himself had entered maturity. In April 1913, a few days before departure, he turned twenty-seven.

"Preparations for the journey took a month of hard work. One had to procure a tent, guns, saddles, pack gear, credentials, letters of recommendation, and so on and so on. I was so worn out that on the eve of departure I lay all day with a fever. Truly, preparing for a journey is harder than the journey itself."

But that month was only for the last-minute tasks. In fact, Gumilyov had been preparing far longer and must have plowed through heaps of books, articles, and maps. Of course he had read much before; but this time he was dealing with the Academy of Sciences. In proposing and defending his goals and routes, he could expect the most varied questions. And with his very sensitive self-esteem he surely feared looking incompetent. After all, he was being presented as a man who had already made three journeys!

So reading and rereading were imperative. Gumilyov left no list of works consulted; but it is not hard to imagine it—or at least its core.

Did he consult foreign-language literature? If so, it was the exception. Languages were never the strongest part of his schooling. His English was poor; his French better—he had long lived in France. Even so, his translations from French sometimes contained serious mistakes.

Time was also short, which surely pushed him toward works in his native tongue. And those were not so scanty.

In Russian he could read translations of several fundamental German, English, and French publications.

In 1909 a Petersburg translation from the German appeared of *The History of Mankind*, devoted to Africa and Western Asia. This was a multivolume work by leading German scholars, issued under the editorship, with substantial additions, of eminent Russian historians and ethnographers. Among them were Radlov and Shternberg, V. V. Barthold, A. A. Kizeveter, D. A. Koropchevsky, E. V. Tarle, and many others. In the third volume Turaev rewrote most of the article on Abyssinia, compiled a genealogical table of the Abyssinian kings of the "Solomonic dynasty," and added material on the Anglo-Boer War. Gumilyov had much to discuss with Turaev when he presented him that Abyssinian folding icon.

The African part of that volume began thus: "Huge and ungainly... Africa... sullen and enigmatic, like the sphinx in the Egyptian desert. And as the land, so the people... By the color of his skin already as if rejected from the ranks of noble nations, he lived, shut in upon himself, countless years, not crossing the natural borders of his territory either for friendly intercourse or hostile attack."

Europe's history was compared to "activity on a bright sunny day," whereas "the history of Africa is only a heavy night's sleep."

The authors saw not only Africa's past as dark, but its future as well. "The true light of real history will, of course, never illumine the last corner the darkness of Africa's ancient times—but can we seriously wish it? Shall we greatly advance in knowledge if we discover that such-and-such a Negro tribe, with a strange name, migrated in such-and-such a year to a neighboring province, and in some other year was dispersed and destroyed? Africa is a monotonous land; as the fates of its peoples monotonously repeat." [153]

So thought the German authors of that bulky tome. Did Professors Barthold and Turaev—the editors of the Russian translation—agree with them in all things? The translator's preface says: "The editor of the translation by no means accepts responsibility for all the views of the author of this part of the book—often too bold and insufficiently grounded." But "to enter into polemic with them in substance would mean rewriting the book." [154]

Russian conceptions of Africa could not be deeper than Western Europe's. In late-Stalin times it became fashionable to say that our scholars and our views were almost always and in everything better, more farsighted, and—above all—more "progressive" than foreign ones. Hence the joking refrain, "Russia is the homeland of elephants." Echoes of those attitudes are still heard now.

As for Africa—whence were clearer knowledge and farsighted views to come? Only speculatively? After all, almost all African countries—Abyssinia the exception—were better known to Western Europeans than to us. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers drew their knowledge from Western authors. And Gumilyov could hardly be an exception.

He surely read another hefty work from another multivolume set—*World Geography*: the Königsberg professor F. Hahn's *Africa*. In Russian it was reissued more than once in the first decade of our century. He certainly pored over the African volumes of the French geographer Élisée Reclus's *The Earth and Its Inhabitants*.

But most often, it seems, he turned to old Brockhaus. The 86 volumes published by F. A. Brockhaus and I. A. Efron were considered—and truly were—the best Russian encyclopedia. The article "Abyssinia" in the first volume appeared in 1890 and was, of course, already outdated. But in 1911 Brockhaus and Efron began issuing the *New Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Unfortunately, only the first 29 volumes came out before the Revolution.

In this *New Dictionary* Africa received more attention. In the tiny one-page "From the Publishers" preface it said: "The East has been set in motion. In the wake of Japan, Turkey, Persia, and China are joining European civilization and political order. Next on the agenda is developing culture in the countries of the African continent." [155]

In the *New Dictionary* the "Abyssinia" article was evidently written by Turaev, who by then was already issuing *Monuments of Ethiopian Writing*. There was also a decent map. Most importantly, the article was fresh—the volume came out in 1911—so it gave the latest information.

## AT GUMILYOV'S SUGGESTION

*All sooted over, bearing an immeasurable load  
of years upon her stooped back—  
she recalled the steppe-Russia...  
—Narbut*

Gumilyov needed to grasp the latest changes that had taken place in Abyssinia in the two-plus years since he last saw it. What must he be ready for now?

Such fresh information had not yet made it into books. But Gumilyov was lucky: shortly before his departure two of his good acquaintances returned from Abyssinia. The fullest report was brought by Dr. Alexei Kokhanovsky. He knew the country well, had spent several years there, loved it, and left not of his own free will—he'd fallen out with his chief, Chemerzin.

At the end of February 1913 Vladimir Narbut also returned to Petersburg. His information was less complete—he had spent only four months in Abyssinia. But Gumilyov likely awaited his stories with even keener impatience. Narbut had gone to

Abyssinia at Gumilyov's suggestion, and became the second Russian poet to see that land. How could Gumilyov not compare Narbut's impressions with his own?

Unfortunately, what has survived about Narbut's life in Abyssinia is extremely scant. In the early '70s I tried to ask his widow, Serafima Gustavovna—a woman with an unusual fate. One of the Suok sisters, she was married first to Yuri Olesha and then to Narbut. Narbut was arrested and perished during the Stalinist purges. Later Serafima Gustavovna married Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky. A vivid personality, she could have written a gripping memoir or family novel titled *Three Sisters*. One sister was Bagritsky's wife, another—Olesha's second wife. Yuri Olesha immortalized their maiden name, Suok, in *Three Fat Men*.

Anna Akhmatova wrote that among the women who visited Mandelstam's wife in her terrible times was "Sima Narbut, not yet touched by disaster." [156] Valentin Kataev portrayed Serafima Gustavovna in *The Diamond Crown* under the name "Little Friend," and many thought that name was not without irony. Shklovsky didn't know how to take it. Lev Slavin told me that Viktor Borisovich anxiously asked his opinion. Slavin tried to calm him: "I think you should be proud—she comes off like a second Manon Lescaut."

Serafima Gustavovna had much she could have told. She spoke readily with me about Narbut. But she knew very little of his Abyssinian journey. No wonder: World War I, the Revolution, the Civil War... By the time she met Serafima Gustavovna, Narbut's Ethiopian impressions had been pushed far back in his memory. And so far as I know, he left no memoirs.

What has survived? A handful of poems about Ethiopia and Djibouti, and a few letters. With Narbut those places are anything but romantic. In "Somali Desert" it's the hardships of the trail and bivouac.

*In the hut, it's stifling. And the water,  
like liquid sludge—in the skins.  
Never, never, never  
will you find a spring on these sands!*

The same impressions are in his letters. He yearned constantly for home. In December 1912, he wrote his journalist friend N. N. Sergievsky from Dire Dawa, so familiar to Gumilyov. "I've been in Abyssinia almost two months. The country is very interesting, though nearly inaccessible without Arabic or Abyssinian. I gorge on bananas and, to be frank, miss Russia terribly... Perhaps we'll meet in February in Pitere [Saint Petersburg]. Impressions in abundance." [157]

Most of what I've managed to find about Narbut's journey in contemporaries' memoirs is in Georgy Ivanov's *Petersburg Winters*. Ivanov strongly disliked Narbut and wrote mockingly, even spitefully, clearly trying to belittle him. Still, it's no sin to acquaint oneself with those recollections.

The established opinion is that Narbut's departure in autumn 1912 was caused by publication of his poetry collection *Alleluia*, which offended the Church. But Ivanov insisted that although that book truly "was confiscated and burned by court order," Narbut left for an entirely different, weightier reason.

Which? Ivanov claims shame drove him out—before Petersburg's democratic intelligentsia. Narbut had founded the monthly *New Journal for All* and received official permission to publish it; but since things didn't go well, he sold it. And, thoughtlessly, he sold it to a rabid Black-Hundreds man, Goryazin. "The thunderclap struck two weeks later—when suddenly everyone learned at once that the 'decadent' Narbut had sold an 'ideological and democratic' journal to Goryazin—member of the Union of the Russian People and friend of Dubrovin." And so he had to flee the disgrace.

Then, Ivanov says, a terse but flashy telegram came to every Petersburg editorial office: "Abyssinia. Djibouti. Poet Vladimir Narbut betrothed to the daughter of Abyssinia's sovereign, Menelik."

After that came a letter with an Ethiopian postmark and the Narbut arms stamped in lilac sealing wax shot with gold. Sent from the Grand Hotel in Djibouti, it read:

*"Dear friends (if you're still my friends), greetings from Djibouti; I envy you, because Petersburg is better. I came here to shoot lions and hide from disgrace. But there are no lions, and I now reckon there's no disgrace either: how was I to know he was Black-Hundreds? I'm no Vengerov to know everything. It's skinny here. What the devil brought me? Still, I'll soon come back and tell all.*

*My marriage to Menelik's daughter fell through because she isn't his daughter. And as for Menelik himself, rumor has it he died some seven years ago."*

Ivanov describes Narbut's return thus: "He came back from Africa yellowish, worn-out. At the 'reception' immediately thrown for him, he readily fielded curious questions about Abyssinia, but from his tales it emerged that the 'golden land of titans,' Africa, was something like Russian backwoods: filth, boredom, drunkenness. Someone even doubted he'd actually been there.

Narbut gave the doubter a contemptuous look.

"When Gumilyov gets back, let him examine me."

"How am I to examine you," mused Gumilyov. "You don't know the languages, you're not interested in anything... Well then—what is 'tekeli'?"

"A third rum, a third cognac, soda, and lemon," Narbut shot back. "Only I drank it without the lemon."

"Ah..." Gumilyov said another native word.

"Roast suckling pig."

"Not a piglet—pork in general. All right, tell me now: if you go right from the station in Djibouti, what do you find?"

"A garden."

"Right. And beyond the garden?"

"A watchtower."

"Not a watchtower, but the remains of an ancient tower. And if you turn right again, around the corner?"

Narbut's pock-marked, browless face spread in an oily smile:

"Not proper to say before ladies..."

"He's not lying," Gumilyov clapped him on the shoulder. "He's been to Djibouti—I vouch."

Soon it turned out Narbut had brought back from Africa not only these bits of knowledge, but a fever.[158]

Of course—hats off to Georgy Ivanov if, years later, by memory or notes, he could reproduce the whole conversation. But Akhmatova classed Ivanov among those who "consciously and cleverly stack the deck." [159] And toward Narbut he was especially biased.

Could Gumilyov have sneered, "You're not interested in anything"? Had he felt that way, he would hardly have placed, one after another, two notices on Narbut's verse in *Apollon*. In mid-1911 he wrote: "Not a bad impression is made by Narbut's book of verse... it is vivid." [160] In mid-1912 his review of *Alleluia* appeared—the very book supposedly forcing Narbut to leave Russia.[161]

And in 1913, already en route to Abyssinia, Gumilyov wrote his wife: "I am quite persuaded that of all post-Symbolist poetry it is you and, perhaps (in his own way), Narbut who will prove the most significant." [162]

Akhmatova later dedicated "About Poems" to Narbut, while calling Ivanov's *Petersburg Winters* "boulevard memoirs."

And how can one claim Narbut "was interested in nothing"? One need only glance at *Vestnik Evropy*: in August 1913 he published a thoughtful review of Marina Tsvetaeva's and Marietta Shaginyan's new books.[163] After pining in Abyssinia for literary work, he plunged into it at once in Petersburg.

Even in his *Alleluia* review, Gumilyov defined Narbut's gaze—his way of seeing. "M. Zenkevich, and even more Vladimir Narbut, came to hate not only empty pretty words but all pretty words; not only cliché elegance, but elegance of any sort. Their attention was drawn to all that is truly outcast: the slime, filth, and soot of the world. Yet where Zenkevich softens the shameless reality of his images with the haze of distant times or distant lands, Vladimir Narbut is consistent to the end—though, perhaps, not without a touch of mischief." [164]

Abyssinia did not enchant Narbut as it did Gumilyov. But that doesn't mean he was some dim, lumbering oaf. It was he, in Odessa of 1920, working for Yugrost, who rallied a cohort of writers, poets, and artists—many later far more famous than he: Bagritsky, Babel, Evgeny Petrov, Kataev. The publishing house *Earth and Factory*, which he later headed for many years, proved anything but the worst of its time. And while he could, he tried within his means to help Mandelstam and other writers.

His Abyssinian journey proved his only trip so far afield. A few years later he could hardly have repeated it: in 1918 unknown assailants attacked and badly maimed him (hence his tactless nickname "Gimpy" in *The Diamond Crown*).

Abyssinia didn't seize him as it did Gumilyov, but he saw it—another Abyssinia: prosaic, everyday. That showed the other side, enriched Russian readers' notions, made them more varied, more three-dimensional. And it helped Gumilyov feel his Abyssinia from a different angle, too.

## "I AWAIT AFRICA IMPATIENTLY"

*I remember night, a black naiad,  
beneath the sign of Southern Cross.  
I sailed south; the mighty heave of waves  
was power-sundered by the screw,  
and oncoming ships, a joy to see,  
were swallowed almost at once by dark.*

...

*But months went by... Returning,  
I sailed and brought back elephants' tusks,  
paintings by Abyssinian masters,  
panther pelts—their spots I liked—  
and what before was incomprehensible—  
disdain for the world and the weariness of dreams.  
—Gumilyov*

Departure was set for April 7. That date is in a letter to Bryusov: "That day I leave for four months, by commission of the Academy of Sciences, to Africa, into the almost unexplored land of the Galla, east of Lake Rodolfo. Letters cannot reach me. And you will understand my impatience to know your opinion—the opinion of a teacher—of the movement\* so dear to me. I shall ponder it in the desert; it's far more convenient to do so

there than here."[165]  
[He plainly means Acmeism.]

Several letters and cards survive, sent by Gumilyov en route and soon after arriving in Djibouti and Abyssinia—among them letters to Akhmatova.

The first—from Odessa, undated; I think April 9–10. It speaks more of Russian matters than African: that in Odessa just now "Bakst and Duncan and the whole heavy artillery" are present; that Vera Inber "will give a lecture on new women's attire"; that he himself is sitting in an "almost foreign" café. The shop sells the magazine *Harvest* with Akhmatova's poems. Remembering her lines, he writes: "...never could I have guessed that hearts hopelessly wither from happiness and glory, yet you could never have set about studying the land of the Galla."

He gives addresses for mail in Africa: until June 1—Dire Dawa; until June 15—the Somali port of Djibouti; until July 15—Port Said; then—Odessa.

And at once about Sverchkov: "The little one has so far been an excellent companion; I believe that will remain so."

The second missive, also to Akhmatova in Tsarskoe Selo—a postcard of the Suez Canal, postmarked April 13. "The insane winter tells on me; I am resting like a beast... I await Africa impatiently... Write me—let me find many letters in Dire Dawa." The *African Diary* has already begun; work continues on translation of the poems of Theophile Gautier translations. (Translating Gautier goes sluggishly; writing the diary goes better.)"

The third letter—from Djibouti. No exact date, but clearly only a few days later—the Red Sea passage is short. Africa was doing him good: "My indisposition has entirely passed; my strength grows with each day." Important diary news: "My diary goes well, and I am writing it so that it can be printed straight off." He adds: "Off Jeddah we caught a shark from the steamer; it was truly a spectacle. It took two pages of the diary."

And an important encounter: "On the steamer goes the Turkish consul appointed to Harar. I've become quite friendly with him; he will collect Abyssinian songs for me, and we shall stay with him in Harar. With the local vice-consul, Galeb—remember, I quarreled with him—I have at last made peace, and he has rendered me several important services."[166]

Anticipating a little: that meeting indeed proved important—owing to a circumstance Gumilyov could scarcely have foreseen. One of the Somali chiefs there came to greet the Turkish consul there came, and through people in his retinue Gumilyov was able to buy many interesting items for the Petersburg museum.

And who was this Galeb, with whom Gumilyov had quarreled on his previous journey? A Greek merchant, he served as Russia's honorary vice-consul in Djibouti. There were

many such vice-consuls of the Empire then—in South Africa alone, three. They were local residents who agreed to aid the few Russians appearing in their region, protecting their interests. Chemerzin mentioned Galeb in his letters too.

In the Academy archive are postcards and a letter from Gumilyov to Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg from Djibouti—a colorful card, a photograph of dancing men of a local tribe. As usual, Gumilyov did not put a date; some helpful soul long ago tore off the stamp, so exact dating is impossible. The text is laconic.[167]

*Russia  
Petersburg  
Imperial Academy of Sciences  
Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography  
To His Excellency Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg*

*Highly esteemed Lev Yakovlevich,  
We are already in Djibouti. Tomorrow we go inland. There will be no rains for another month and a half. The journey promises to be successful. The Russian vice-consul, Galeb, has already rendered me several services. From Harar, when I assemble the caravan, I will write a detailed letter; for now, forgive the postcard.*

*Sincerely respecting you and devoted to you,  
N. Gumilyov*

He did not, in fact, write from Harar; but from Dire Dawa he sent a comparatively detailed letter.[168] On hotel "Continental" stationery, and even with a date: May 20, 1913.

*Highly esteemed Lev Yakovlevich,  
as you will see by the postmark, we are already in Abyssinia. It cannot be said the journey began without adventure. Rains washed out the line, and we traveled 80 kilometers on a handcar and then on a stone-haul platform. Arriving in Dire Dawa, we immediately set out for Harar to buy mules, since here they are dear. So far we have bought four very decent animals at 45 rubles apiece. We then returned to Dire Dawa for our things and here have hired four servants—two Abyssinians and two Galla—and a fifth, an interpreter, a former pupil of a Catholic mission, a Galla. From Harar I telegraphed the Russian envoy in Addis Ababa to obtain permission for me to come, but so far there is no reply. I hope nevertheless to get it. My route is more or less established. I think to go to Bari, from there along the Webi Sidamo to Lake Zwai, and, having traversed the land of Arussi, along the Chercher mountain ridge to return to Dire Dawa. Thus I shall be all the while in the least studied part of the Galla country.*

*Thanks to the rains it is not hot; everywhere there is grass and water—that is, all that a caravan needs. True, the rivers sometimes flood, and in Dire Dawa there are almost daily accidents with people; but with mules such as mine the danger is reduced to a minimum.*

*Tomorrow, I hope, I shall already set out, and for three months you will have no news of me. Most likely in late August I shall come directly to the Museum. I very much ask that in mid-June you send 200 rubles via Crédit Lyonnais to Vale of Abissinia, One-Pasa, through the Indo-Chinese Bank in Djibouti, Mr. Nicolas Goumileff. I am counting on them to pay off the ashkers and return. The Russian vice-consul in Djibouti, Mr. Galeb, has rendered me a number of important services: arranged free entry for the weapons into Djibouti and Abyssinia, a discount on baggage transport by rail, and gave letters of recommendation.*

*Sincerely yours,  
N. Gumilyov*

How quickly the mail moved between Tsarskoe Selo and Abyssinian towns! From Djibouti, Gumilyov sent his wife a freshly written poem and asked: "Write to Dire Dawa what you think of it." [169] And Dire Dawa lies some 300 kilometers from the ocean, hardly at the crossroad of busy overland routes.

## **DJIBOUTI, DIRE DAWA, AND HARAR**

*Merry, unexpected, and blood-bright  
are the joys, the sorrows, and the sports  
of that wild, enchanting land...  
—Gumilyov*

Disembarking in Djibouti, Gumilyov spent three days there, then took the train and a handcar to Dire Dawa; from there, on mules, to Harar. Dire Dawa and Harar—well known to him from earlier journeys—were the starting points of the route. There he hired attendants—four servants and an interpreter—and bought mules.

These three towns were the gates to Abyssinia. Gumilyov's notes on the changes he observed in familiar places—the way he compares the impressions of his three journeys—are interesting.

The harbor and little town of Djibouti, where he first set foot on African soil. "Djibouti lies on the African shore of the Gulf of Aden south of Obock, at the edge of the Gulf of Tadjoura. On most maps only Obock is marked; but it has now lost all significance: there lives but one stubborn European, and sailors rightly say Djibouti has 'eaten' it. The future belongs to Djibouti. Its trade steadily grows; the number of Europeans living there as well. Four years ago, when I first arrived, there were three hundred; now there are four hundred. But it will fully ripen when the railway is completed linking it with the Abyssinian capital, Addis Ababa. Then it will surpass even Massawa, for in southern Abyssinia there are far more of the usual export items here: ox hides, coffee, gold, and ivory."

Gumilyov's forecast proved true—in spades. Djibouti as a seaport has long since outstripped "Massowa"—Massawa. Obock has vanished from the maps; no one remembers it. Djibouti is the capital of the republic created in 1977 and bears the port's name. Today its motto is "24/365!"—meaning "We are open to ships 24 hours a day, all 365 days." The whirl of port life: tankers and freighters, container ships, liners, and warships; and around them stevedores, smugglers, "ladies of the night," black-market dealers, souvenir peddlers, bartenders and brokers, beggars and the homeless—everyone. Not only the seaport, but Djibouti's airport ranks among Africa's largest.

In Gumilyov's day it was not so easy to foresee such a boom—I've often thought this while sitting at that airport now humming like a gigantic hive.

True, by then the railway into Abyssinia had already been built. Several consuls protected the interests of traveling foreigners. There was even an official Russian representative. Cafés were already at the service of locals and travelers.

Still, trains ran only twice a week—and irregularly at that: cloudbursts washed out the track. There were only two cafés. And the Russian representative was not a diplomat sent from Petersburg but a resident Greek merchant: an "honorary" vice-consul.

Djibouti's life was still very patriarchal. "I love this little town," wrote Gumilyov, "its peaceful, limpid life." From noon to four in the afternoon the streets seem deserted: all doors are shut; now and then, like a drowsy fly, some Somali shuffles by. At these hours people sleep, as we do at night. But then—out of nowhere—carriages appear, even automobiles driven by Arabs in motley turbans, the white helmets of Europeans, even ladies in light dresses hurrying off on visits. The terraces of both cafés are packed with promenaders... Afterward everyone goes for a stroll. The streets are filled with a soft evening dusk in which the houses stand out cleanly—built in the Arab style, with flat roofs and crenellations, round loopholes and keyhole-shaped doors, with terraces, arcades, and other devices, all in a blinding whitewash. On one such evening we took a delightful outing to a garden outside the town in the company of Mr. Galeb, a Greek merchant and Russian vice-consul, his wife, and Mazar Bey, the Turkish consul I mentioned above. There the narrow paths run between plane trees and broad-leaf banana palms; big beetles buzz; the air is warm as in a conservatory and thick with scents. On the bottoms of deep stone wells water glints faintly. Here and there you see a tethered mule or a meek, humped zebu.

Back then, in Gumilyov's time, it was still not settled which ports on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden would prove the most important. Those shores had only recently—just a little earlier—come to occupy a notable place in world trade and politics. Until the last thirty years of the previous century, Europeans considered them forsaken by God and man. The world's main water artery, the link between Europe and Asia, then went around Africa. The canal of which Gumilyov wrote had not yet been dug:

*Flocks of days and nights  
cast spells over me,*

*yet I know nothing more bright  
than the Suez Canal,*

*where ships go not by sea  
but by puddles,  
in the middle of the earth,  
like a camel caravan.*

Ocean-going ships began to pass through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden only in 1869, when the canal was solemnly opened to the strains of the opera *Aida*, written specially for the ceremony. But of course it could not be clear at once which of the harbors on that route would become the chief ports. At first many thought it would be Obock. Ashinov and Mashkov ended up there as well. Only later did the town of Djibouti begin to outstrip it.

Gumilyov voiced just one concern about Djibouti's future: "It's a pity the French own it, for they usually treat their colonies very carelessly and think they've done their duty if they send a few officials there who are utterly alien to the country and do not love it."

Gumilyov also noted the rapid growth of Dire Dawa, through which the route from the port of Djibouti led into Abyssinia's central regions. "Dire Dawa has grown greatly in the three years since I last saw it, especially its European part. I remember when it had only two streets; now there are about ten. There are gardens with flowerbeds, spacious cafés. There is even a French consul. The whole town is divided into two parts by the bed of a dry river, which fills only during the rains: the European part, closer to the station, and the native quarter..."

In the "native" quarter "you can wander all day without getting bored. In the two big shops, belonging to rich Indians—Giovaji and Mohammed Ali—there are silk garments embroidered with gold, curved sabers in red morocco scabbards, daggers with silver chasing, and all sorts of Eastern ornaments that so delight the eye. They are sold by grave, portly Indians in dazzling white shirts under their robes, with flat silk caps. Yemeni Arabs flit by, traders too, but mainly commission agents. The Somalis, skilled in all kinds of handicrafts, sit right on the ground weaving mats and making sandals to measure. Passing the huts of the Galla you catch the smell of incense—their favorite thing to burn.

And finally, Harar. That city occupied a special place in Gumilyov's wanderings. He stayed there for long stretches on each of his Abyssinian journeys. This time, too, he met several old acquaintances. He sought out the Ethiopian director of the local school. "Inclined to philosophize, like most of his compatriots, he sometimes put forth interesting ideas, told amusing stories, and his whole worldview gave the impression of a sound, steady equilibrium. We played poker with him and visited his school, where little Abyssinians of the best families in town practiced arithmetic in French."

There were less pleasant encounters too. "A suspicious Maltese named Caravana, a former bank clerk with whom I had quarreled to the death in Addis Ababa, was the first to come greet me."

There was even a compatriot there in Harar—Artem Iokhandzhan, an Armenian, a Russian subject who had been living in Abyssinia for twenty years.

Why did Harar attract Gumilyov so strongly? Likely by its interesting fate. By the time of Gumilyov's journeys not only Djibouti, but Abyssinia's capital Addis Ababa too, did not yet boast a long history: it was a peer of Gumilyov's, even a year younger. But Harar? Gumilyov took an interest in its history and set it down in his diary, beginning: "Harar was founded some nine hundred years ago by Muslim emigrants from Tigray fleeing religious persecutions, and by Arabs who mingled with them."

Its place along the great thoroughfare of the region, its mixed population, its motley, colorful culture—all this must have caught his eye.

But there were likely other reasons. Gumilyov, who loved Arthur Rimbaud as a poet, had to be seized by the fate of Rimbaud the traveler—and by that fame of "discoverer of new lands" for which Gumilyov had such a weakness.

The names of peoples, towns, and places linked with the wanderings of these two men coincide strikingly. And Harar—there Rimbaud spent the most time, there was his trading post, there he wished to return from Marseille when he was mortally ill. Is this not why, two decades later, Gumilyov felt so drawn to Harar on every African trip?

## WITH THE FUTURE EMPEROR

*An emperor with an aquiline profile,  
with a black, curly beard—  
oh, what a sovereign you would be  
if you were not yourself!*  
—Gumilyov

Rimbaud's name does not appear in Gumilyov's diary. Another man, however—also resident of Harar and yet more famous—is named, and more than once. Rimbaud was much older than Gumilyov; this man was younger. It so happened that Gumilyov was among the first to tell about him: to describe his looks, his manners, his wife, his house. That man was young and did not yet bear the name by which the world would know him. Those who published the *African Diary* in *Ogonyok* in 1987 evidently did not know this; otherwise they would not have left readers in the dark.

In Harar Gumilyov met the man who later became emperor and managed to hold the throne a stunning forty-four years. And if we add the fourteen years he served as regent beforehand, it comes out that he ruled the state almost sixty years. For length of rule, one can set beside him only Queen Victoria, Louis XIV, Franz Joseph, and Hirohito.

Haile Selassie I, emperor of Abyssinia from 1930 to 1974; regent from 1916 to 1930. According to the official Abyssinian genealogy he was counted the 225th descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—the founders of the Solomonic dynasty, which possessed the exclusive right to power in that country. A claimant to the throne had to be of that line. In Gumilyov's day—and long after—the legendary tale of the dynasty's founding was by no means a past remote from Ethiopians' lives. Before their very eyes painters, with inspiration, "painted King Solomon between the Queen of Sheba and a gentle lion."

Haile Selassie proved not only the last emperor of Ethiopia, but the last (let us hope!) autocratic monarch in human history. Much has been written about him, and his figure keeps drawing researchers' attention.

In Ryszard Kapuściński's book *The Emperor* (in Russian translation), Haile Selassie appears as a ruler so refined in craft and treachery he might be the central figure of Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Doubtless Haile Selassie was a complex, ambiguous figure. He himself, and the methods he employed, changed much over so long a reign. In his autobiography *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress* the aged sovereign recalled with some pride how, upon first coming to power, he banned the cutting off of hands and feet—then a routine punishment even for petty offenses; he outlawed the barbaric custom of quartering, which had to be carried out publicly by the closest kinsman—a son killing his father, a mother her son. He forbade slave trading.

Gumilyov met Haile Selassie when he was a *dejazmach* (one of Abyssinia's highest military-feudal titles; Gumilyov writes "dedyazmach"), governor of Harar and the surrounding territories. His name then was Täfäri Mäkonnen (Gumilyov: Tafari Makonen). Gumilyov thought him nineteen; in fact he was a bit older—twenty-one. It's unlikely Gumilyov could guess that just three years later this man would become Abyssinia's regent. Still, he underlined that Tafari was among the most noble men in the country and traced "his line directly from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba"; that he was "son of Menelik's cousin and friend," and that his wife was the late emperor's granddaughter and the sister of the heir apparent.

Gumilyov came to the future Haile Selassie to obtain a pass—permission to travel in Abyssinia. As is known, later, as emperor, Tafari built himself a palace in each of the country's provinces; but then, Gumilyov writes, his palace was "a large two-story wooden house with a painted veranda facing an inner, rather dirty courtyard; the house recalled a not very good dacha somewhere in Pargolovo or Terijoki. In the yard a couple of dozen *ashkeri* (soldiers) milled about, very cocky. We went up the stairs and, after a minute's wait on the veranda, entered a big carpeted room where all the furniture consisted of a few chairs and a velvet armchair for the dedyazmach. The dedyazmach rose to meet us and shook our hands. He wore a *shamma*, like all Abyssinians; but from his finely cut face, framed by a little black curly beard, from his large, dignified gazelle-like eyes, and from his whole bearing, you could at once recognize a prince."

By custom, one was to appear with a gift. A crate of vermouth bottles was set at Täfäri's feet. But he, "despite the gift, replied that without an order from Addis Ababa he could do nothing... Then we asked the dedyazmach for permission to photograph him, and at once he agreed. A few days later we came with the camera. The *ashkeri* spread carpets right in the yard, and we took the dedyazmach in his ceremonial blue attire. Next came the princess, his wife. She is the sister of Lij Iyasu, the heir to the throne, and thus Menelik's granddaughter. She is twenty-two, three years older than her husband; her features are very pleasant, despite a certain plumpness that has already spoiled her figure. It seems, moreover, that she was in an interesting condition. The dedyazmach showed her the most touching attentiveness. He himself seated her in the proper pose, straightened her dress, and asked us to take her picture several times to ensure success. It then turned out that he spoke French, only he was shy, thinking—rightly—that it is unseemly for a prince to make mistakes. We photographed the princess with her two maidservants."

These shots are probably among the very earliest photographs of Haile Selassie.

The Ethnographic Museum has preserved the negatives. In the inventory compiled by Kolya Sverchkov they are numbered 159–164 and titled: "Dedyazmach Tafari, governor of the city of Harar." "Wife of Dedyazmach Tafari, seated" (two shots), "Dedyazmach Tafari, standing" (two shots), "Wife of Dedyazmach Tafari with attendants." There was also a negative "Gate of the governor's house in Harar," but it has not survived.

Gumilyov's notes on how Harar was administered are of interest. In the diary he tells how Emperor Menelik conquered Harar and how at first it was governed by Täfäri's father, Mäkonnen. Gumilyov calls him one of Abyssinia's greatest statesmen and even mentions him in verse:

*The first flag fluttered above Harar—  
it is Ras Mäkonnen's city...*

Immediately before Täfäri, Harar was governed by General Balcha. "He was a strong, stern man. People in the city still speak of him—some with indignation, some with unfeigned respect. When he arrived in Harar there was a whole block of merry women, and his soldiers began to quarrel over them, even to the point of murder. Balcha ordered them all brought to the square and sold at public auction [as slaves], laying down the condition that buyers must watch over the conduct of their new slaves. If any one of them were caught practicing her former trade, she would be put to death, and her partner in crime would pay a fine of ten thalers. Now Harrar is perhaps the most chaste city in the world, since the Harrarites, not having properly understood the Iriptsä, have extended it (order - A.D.) even to simple adultery. When the European mail went missing, Balcha ordered all the inhabitants of the house where the empty bag was found to be hanged, and for a long time fourteen corpses swung from the trees along the road between Dire Dawa and Harar."

Of Täfäri's own rule Gumilyov writes: "Tafari, by contrast, is mild, irresolute, and unenterprising. Order is maintained only by the vice-governor, *fitawrari* Gabre, an old

official of Balcha's school. He readily hands out twenty or thirty 'giraffes,' i.e., lashes with a whip of giraffe skin, and sometimes even hangs people..."

So the future emperor did not himself issue savage orders, but he allowed his subordinates to do so—in other words, even then showing a touch of the Machiavellianism later ascribed to him.

But perhaps we should not judge too harshly. The mores were severe, and the regime that came to replace the imperial one, as we all know, turned out even more cruel.

According to Gumilyov, the young Täfäri established in Harar the first theater in Abyssinia by inviting traveling Indian actors. Gumilyov attended one performance and described the scene in detail—just as he did a court proceeding he happened to witness.

In both Harar and Dire Dawa, Gumilyov visited Catholic missions. He spoke as well with the local bishop, a monsignor living in Harar. Unfortunately, Gumilyov did not give his name; he only wrote that the bishop was a Frenchman of about fifty and described his behavior and manners. This bishop was surely that very Jesuit Jérôme whom Kapuściński calls Rimbaud's friend and the only teacher of the young Täfäri Mäkonnen.

Of course Gumilyov had heard much of the future emperor and formed his picture not only from personal meetings. He was in Harar for the third time. And the Chemerzins surely told him earlier about the reception Täfäri organized for them on their way to Addis Ababa in September 1910. Täfäri then made a faux pas: he failed to order in advance that a good campsite be provided for the official Russian mission as it approached Harar. He had to apologize by telephone and then, on September 21, lay on a splendid welcome. In a letter from Harar two days later, Chemerzina described the ceremony he staged.

"...I kept feeling we were characters in some féerie or very 'spectacle-heavy' opera—*The African Woman*, *Aida*, etc. The Abyssinian troops, fifteen thousand strong, drawn up along the road and on a hill an hour's ride from the city were fabulous, motley, utterly incredible. Those galloping and prancing old men with pikes on wild horses—veterans, contemporaries and companions-in-arms of Menelik and Ras Mäkonnen. The white garments of the black warriors, barefoot but adorned with the most extraordinary sabers and rifles, set a sharp contrast to the motley garb of their chiefs and officers. Green shirts, black silk and velvet togas, capes with zigzag braids of multicolored velvets, and sometimes lion skins thrown over the black togas. The most improbable headgear, like a cross between a crown and a Russian *kokoshnik*, with silver fringe and a lion's mane as a halo—all this taken together resembled a theatrical show more than reality. After the customary greetings at our approach, the most incredible Abyssinian music—most unmelodious—struck up, and we moved toward Harar's main gate, preceded by Abyssinian troops and escorted by commanders.

Passing through the narrow streets of this old Arab city, which has fully preserved its Oriental character, we stopped by the house of the governor-general—the dedyazmach

Tafari, son of Ras Mäkonnen—who with his suite awaited us in his courtyard. He is a youth of eighteen or nineteen whom, at the demand of the Harari troops, they appointed governor-general—or rather lord—of Harar despite his youth. A thin young fellow, recently convalescent from pneumonia, he looked more like a silent doll. He bears his father's title 'Highness.' He understands French and has with him an Abyssinian interpreter, a Catholic, who knows French. Tafari's smile is wonderful; it makes him at once attractive and lively. In general I would say—among the Abyssinians there are many handsome, distinctive faces, very expressive and pleasing. All of them, especially the high dignitaries, are majestic in their movements and gait, like Eastern Turks.

We were lodged in Menelik's palace... Yesterday evening we visited Tafari's garden; we saw lemon and orange trees; peaches and oranges bloom there, a marvelous fragrance—only it is a pity the garden lies close to cesspits which you pass by to reach it."

Boris Aleksandrovich Chemerzin's letter upon arrival in Harar is more laconic: "A ceremonial reception was arranged for me here. The chief commander rode out with eight thousand soldiers in parade dress. Up to six thousand stood in files. There was a sixty-gun salute. A magnificent sight."

It would also be interesting to compare Gumilyov's impressions with those of Academician Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov, who, a decade and a half later, likewise began his journey at Dire Dawa and Harar. He too was received by Täfäri—no longer governor and not yet emperor, but already regent—and now in Addis Ababa. "Ras Tafari asked with great interest about our country; he was especially interested in the revolution and the fate of the imperial court." Did he ponder then that a revolution would also come to his own land and that he himself would end his days under arrest?

Sadly, Vavilov left only brief notes. Like Gumilyov, he did not live to finish a book about his travels—a fate awaited him no less tragic than Gumilyov's.

## **"FOR EIGHT DAYS FROM HARAR I LED THE CARAVAN"**

*Distant, enigmatic lands*

—Gumilyov

The diary has only two sentences about what followed Harar : "We decided Harar had been studied as far as our strength allowed; and since a pass could be obtained only in about eight days, we set out light—i.e., with only one pack mule and three *ashkeri*—for Jijiga, to the Somali tribe Gabarizal. But of this I shall permit myself to speak in one of the following chapters."

Those chapters have not been found. Did he write them? For now we can speak only of two notebooks, now owned by V. V. Bronguleev, which, he says, contain entries from June 4 to July 20 or 21. From these he has published only a few passages; the rest he retold in his own words, admitting that "a number of local names could not be made out." [170].

Judging by this retelling, Gumilyov's caravan moved from Harar back toward Dire Dawa, and from there west, toward the Chercher Mountains, and then to the Wabi River. Crossing to its right bank, they reached the town of Ginir.

Most of the way ran across highlands—between one and a half and two and a half kilometers above sea level, even higher. There the air was bearable. But descending into valleys and lowlands the heat became unbearable. Water was often scarce. They replenished provisions by hunting. Gumilyov was tormented by fever.

In one settlement they met a Russian doctor, but Gumilyov does not give his name.

They visited a village named for a saint—Sheikh Hussein—and viewed his tomb. Judging by the poem "Galla," they revered not only dead but living prophets, and, probably, the same name was conferred on them.

*For eight days from Harar I led the caravan  
through the wild Chercher mountains  
and shot gray monkeys in the trees,  
slept among the sycamore roots.*

*And the mysterious city, a tropical Rome—  
Sheikh Hussein—I beheld on high;  
I bowed to the mosque and the holy palms,  
was admitted before the prophet's eyes.*

Some idea of events on the subsequent route may also be gleaned from the sketches "African Hunt. From a Travel Diary," which Gumilyov published in 1916. The sole purpose of those sketches was to talk about hunting in Africa. But still, in each case there are at least a few words, however approximate, about the locale itself. Telling how he managed to kill a leopard, Gumilyov mentions that it happened near a small Somali village "somewhere on the edge of the Harar plateau." Speaking of a less successful lion hunt—this was near the River "Gavash," i.e., far to the east of Harar, some 150 kilometers or more. And a long drive in which Gumilyov shot a male baboon—one hundred and fifty versts from Addis Ababa.[171]

Present-day claims that "Gumilyov chose a route through the least-studied part of the country" and included "in his itinerary the region of wild and warlike tribes"[172] echo the reminiscences of Aleksandra Stepanovna Sverchkova. Those are full of horrors. For example: "How to find him (Gumilyov—A.D.) in the impenetrable darkness among the thickets, when all around you hear the roaring of beasts and the cackle of hyenas?"[173]

How can one not recall the words already quoted from Gumilyov's own *African Diary*, that "lions must be searched for over weeks," and "hyenas are more timid than hares"?

Sverchkova wrote of "wild Africa." That none of the guides "wished to go into uncharted lands to the savages," and then one was found "who even knew a few words in Russian."

Just so: uncharted lands, savages—and right nearby, a local who even knows a little Russian...

Aleksandra Stepanovna is understandable. Fear and pride for son and brother overlaid notions of "wild Africa." Gumilyov himself—though, as is known, he was by no means averse to showing off—still did not pose as a trailblazer. He knew perfectly well that many Europeans had been to Abyssinia before him, including our compatriots—and not only those he called adventurers.

Before leaving Petersburg, in agreement with the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, the route after Harar was laid out thus: to the town of Bari, then along the Webi Shabelle (Uebi Sidamo) to Lake Zwai, through the Arussi region, over the Chercher ridge, back to Dire Dawa, and via Djibouti—home.

In general, the completed route can be judged from a small blue notebook, pocket-size, which upon returning home Gumilyov deposited in that museum; it is kept there to this day, cataloged as "archive to collection 2156." On the cover the inscription: "Galla, Harari, Somali and Abyssinian items collected by the expedition of N. Gumilyov, 1913, from May 1 to August 15." The cover is decorated in a manner habitual for Gumilyov: the head of an African, a white man in a tropical helmet, little animals, and a skull. And another inscription, in a slightly different hand or style: "N. Sverchkov."

In this notebook are remarks on almost everything Gumilyov gathered then for the museum. On page fourteen a schematic of the journey is drawn, and on pages fifteen and sixteen the legend to it. Unfortunately not the entire route is marked, but the schematic still conveys an idea of it. Gumilyov visited Harar, Jijiga, the Meta district, the Annia (Anniya) desert, the Webi, Sheikh Hussein, the Arussi region, the Chercher mountains. That is—the eastern central part of Abyssinia and the area adjoining Northwest Somalia. The planned route largely matches what was carried out.

Some of these places were also mentioned by Sverchkov (as reported by his mother). In Gumilyov's poem "African Night," which bears the place and date: Eastern Africa, 1913—the "land of Sidamo" and the "waves of the Webi" are mentioned.

## COMPANIONS

*A European marvels how strangely alike  
a people and their homeland are.*

—Gumilyov

Relations with the *ashkeri* (soldiers hired to guard the caravan) were difficult. They could hardly be otherwise. To them, Gumilyov was a foreign white man. His aims were alien, incomprehensible. Why had he come to their land? With what intentions? Perhaps, like the Italians recently, to prepare for war? So for most of them the only meaning in joining the trek was: squeeze as much as possible out of the white man.

One *ashker* stole Gumilyov's *burnous*. "Our Abyssinian friends who came to us lent us shackles, and the thief was chained."

Academician Vavilov also wrote of the difficulties awaiting a traveler. [174]. "The personnel, gathered with such trouble, scattered at once," when they learned that—out of the best intentions—he had bought donkeys instead of mules for the caravan. "As it was explained to us, travel on a donkey is an insult to a man; only children and women travel on them."

Vavilov asked the governor of Addis Ababa what to do if the hired escorts mutinied. He "advised taking along a sufficient quantity of shackles, noting that that is what everyone does—Frenchmen and Englishmen alike." Vavilov refused to follow such an example. The governor shook his head.

"You'll see, young man..."

How many difficulties must Gumilyov have had—after all, he traveled much earlier, in harder times.

But in the surviving part of his diary he speaks more about interpreters. The language question—and hence the interpreter—turned out to be crucial for him. Though he had already been in this country twice, he could hardly make himself understood satisfactorily, especially considering that his path lay through the lands of peoples speaking different tongues. And on this journey, given the Museum's specific assignments, he needed especially precise translation.

He apparently did not find anyone who could translate with any fullness from the local languages into Russian. So speech could only be translated into some Western European language. Of the Western languages Gumilyov knew French best; thus he needed a translator with French. Such a person was easiest to find among alumni of Catholic missions. But there, too, were difficulties.

First of all, it was scarcely possible to find an interpreter who, speaking French, would also know all the local languages. So misunderstanding—and even miscomprehension—were, as we would now say, programmed.

There were other difficulties. For a long trek by a small group in harsh conditions, mutual trust and general compatibility are vital. This too did not come easily. In Dire Dawa, wrote Gumilyov, "Haile, a negro from the Mangalia tribe, speaking French badly but briskly, was taken as interpreter." No tribe called Mangalia existed. Perhaps Gumilyov misheard, or perhaps the handwriting was misread in publication. Most likely the word is "Shankalla": that is what Sudanese peoples were called.

With this interpreter the caravan reached Harar, but there Gumilyov dismissed Haile. He had not helped buy mules or speed preparations and "even, it seems, winked to the hotel keeper to delay us there as long as possible."

At the French Catholic mission in Harar they recommended to Gumilyov a former pupil named Paul, but they could not agree on the price. Back in Dire Dawa, Gumilyov struck a deal with another mission alumnus, Felix, although he too did not much please him. "...He had such an air as though he were about to retch; when he walked up the stairs one almost wished to support him, and yet he was perfectly healthy." But evidently Gumilyov no longer hoped to find someone better. "They told me that all pupils of the Catholic missions are like that. They give up their natural liveliness and quickness in exchange for dubious moral qualities."

Kolya Sverchkov (in his mother's account) also mentions an interpreter named Fasika, who supposedly even knew a few words of Russian. And in Gumilyov's diary this name appears: Felix and Fasika—might this be one and the same person?

In 1987, after the "African Diary" appeared in print, *Moscow News* received a letter from an Ethiopian, O. F. E. Abdui. [175]. He wrote that on the missionaries' advice in Dire Dawa Gumilyov took as interpreter his relative H. Mariam. "Gumilyov (or 'Gumilo,' as he was known in our family) reached Dire Dawa on May 19, 1913, and met my father's uncle H. Mariam (before baptism: Regossa), who at that time studied at the French Catholic school."

Unfortunately, the full name is not given in the letter—only the initial H. Is this not the very Haile of whom Gumilyov writes? It would seem everything matches—the Catholic mission in Dire Dawa, the road from Dire Dawa to Harar. But Gumilyov wrote that he let him go in Harar. The letter says: "At the end of his journey N. Gumilyov stayed in the district called Dera (the lowland between the Chercher mountains and the Arussi massif to the north of Lake Zwai), with the interpreter's family, where he spent a day and a half."

One may suppose it is indeed the same Haile. Gumilyov could have reconciled with him after the Harar quarrel.

The Ethiopian letter provides other interesting data. Not only is the exact date of Gumilyov's arrival in Dire Dawa given (it's absent from the diary), but the date of his final departure from there on the return leg, before going home: "On the day the poet left our house in Harar, a local landowner tied his worker by the leg to a tree (a form of corporal punishment). Gumilyov untied him and brought him to Dire Dawa, entrusting him there to the care of the French missionaries. That same day, August 13, my grandfather had a son, and in honor of the Russian traveler he was named Gumilo. (In some parts of Ethiopia there is a tradition of naming newborns after a guest who has visited the house.) The Ethiopian namesake of N. Gumilyov died in 1974 at the age of 61."

According to grandmother of the author of the letter, he said was treated by Gumilyov with antimalarial tablets, at a time when malaria raged so fiercely that people would give a bull or a cow with a calf for such tablets. Gumilyov refused payment. "Many traditions about Gumilyov have been preserved in our family," Abdui wrote.

It is hard to judge whether all the information in the letter is correct. The author made at least one error. At the end he claimed that "many mentions of Gumilyov are contained in Richard Pankhurst's *Travellers in Ethiopia*." This, alas, is not true. In Pankhurst's book—by that foremost expert on Ethiopian history—Gumilyov is not mentioned.

And yet one can only marvel that after so many years so much information and legend about Gumilyov should have been preserved in an Ethiopian family. Much of it looks plausible. And perhaps the dates named by the author will help to refine the facts we know.

## COLLECTIONS

*There is a Museum of Ethnography in that city  
above the wide, Nile-like Neva's flood...*  
—Gumilyov

The assignment from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography—how was it carried out?

We must return to Harar. "...We set to work in Harar. My companion began collecting insects in the environs of the town. I accompanied him twice. It is an astonishingly soul-pacifying occupation: to wander along white paths among coffee fields, climb the rocks, descend to the stream—and everywhere find tiny beauties—red, blue, green, and golden. My companion collected up to fifty a day, avoiding duplicates. My work was of a completely different sort: I gathered ethnographic collections, unceremoniously stopping passers-by to inspect the items they wore, entering houses without asking and riffling through the utensils, losing my head trying to find out the purpose of some object from the Harraris, who did not understand what any of this was for. They made fun of me when I bought old clothes; one woman cursed when I decided to photograph her; and some refused to sell what I asked for, thinking I needed it for witchcraft. To get hold of a sacred object here—the turban worn by Harraris who have been to Mecca—I had to feed its owner, a half-witted old sheikh, with leaves of *khat* (a narcotic used by Muslims) for a whole day."

Gumilyov even "rummaged in a stinking rag-basket and found much of interest there. This hunt for objects is fascinating in the extreme: before your eyes there gradually rises a picture of the life of an entire people, and the impatience grows to see more and more of it. Having bought a spinning machine, I found myself obliged to learn about the loom as well. After I had acquired household utensils, I now needed samples of food. In all, I acquired about seventy purely Harari items, avoiding the purchase of Arab or Abyssinian ones."

Thus the gathering of materials went forward. And the folklore? The diary gives the text of one of the Somali songs he collected. True, he immediately stipulates that "the Somalis show certain taste in the choice of ornaments for their shields and jugs, in the making of necklaces and bracelets; they even set fashions among surrounding tribes," but their

songs are inferior "in comparison with the majestic simplicity of the Abyssinian songs and the tender lyricism of the Galla."

Gumilyov translated this song (he also wrote that its text in Russian transcription was "given in the appendix," but the appendix to the diary has not yet been found).

"Beriga, where the Isa tribe lives, Gurti, where the Gurgura tribe lives, Harar, which stands higher than the land of the Danakil, the people of Galbet who do not leave their homeland, the short people, the land where Isaac reigns, the land beyond the Sellal River where Samarron reigns, the land where the Galla carry water for the chief Darotu from the wells on the other side of the Webi—the whole world I have gone around, but fairer than all this, Marian Magana, be blessed, Reraudal, where you are more modest, more beautiful, and more pleasing in skin tone than all Arab women."

And the collected items of material culture? It is hard to judge them from the diary. But they can be seen with one's own eyes. They are still kept at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. They came from three different peoples and were therefore registered as three separate collections. By museum rules, each collection could include only items belonging to one people.

Gumilyov deposited the three collections on the same day, September 26, 1913. In the Africa section they are numbered 2154, 2155, 2156.

Along with the collections, Gumilyov handed in detailed inventories of these items. Those inventories are preserved to this day. Here, for example, is how the inventory registered under number 2154 looks.

From whom — on assignment of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography named after Peter the Great

Date received — September 26, 1913

Collector — N. Gumilyov

Method of acquisition — purchase

Cost — one thousand rubles for the entire collection, a third of which applies here

Locality — Harar plateau

People — Harari

Contents of collection — articles of life and cult

Documentation — list by the collector

Register number — № 36

Number of items — 46

Registrar — N. Gumilyov

This collection consists of items Gumilyov bought in Harar. Inventory 2155 was likewise compiled by Gumilyov. Locality: "northwestern part of the Somali peninsula." Number of items—48. This collection was bought from people in the suite of that Somali chieftain who came to Harar to greet the Turkish consul.

Inventory 2156. Locality—"Harar plateau / Meta, Annia, Bali, Arussi." People—Galla (Kotu and Arussi). Number of items—34. Registrar—N. Gumilyov.

This collection was gathered among the Kotu and Arussi—peoples belonging to the Oromo group.

Nor is that all. The museum holds collection 2131, not purchased from Gumilyov but donated by him, also in 1913. It consists of items of Abyssinian daily life. And many years later there appeared collection 5376—four Abyssinian paintings brought by Gumilyov at that time. In 1936 the museum acquired them from the artist E. S. Kruglikova, who had received them from Gumilyov (she was well acquainted with Gumilyov and Akhmatova and drew their portraits).

Of the documents turned over by Gumilyov to the museum, the most interesting is probably that blue notebook with its cover illustrated by him. It is cataloged as "archive to collection 2156." The museum inventories are based on the notebook's data. These are especially interesting since they were compiled by Gumilyov before any possible consultations with museum specialists. Here are a few examples:

1. **Budch** — a wooden club; in the time of Harar's independence it served as a weapon; no longer used. Price: 1 thaler. Harar.
2. **Gabata** — a painted wooden tray. On it the bride at the wedding feast goes round all present, beginning with the groom, offering drinks and sweets; a glass is set in the middle, the sweets go in circles; it seems to have a symbolic meaning—introducing the woman to the duties of mistress and servant. Harar. 1 thaler.
3. **Kaiso** — a bow with a rope string; with it a *goboya*, a quiver with double sheaths attached for daggers and with five poisoned and three unpoisoned arrows; — *fallat*. They shoot the bow holding it perpendicular to the ground and with the horns toward themselves; the arrow is held between the bent index and middle fingers of the right hand. The bow is made and used in the center of the Somali peninsula; it disappears day by day. The arrows are poisoned by special masters who live in the desert and hide not only the secret of the poison's preparation, but even the very craft, since they are despised as people who got their knowledge from *djinns*—evil spirits. Harar. 8 thalers.
4. **Djeba** — a whip; with it the groom strikes the bride on the wedding day, before becoming her husband, as a sign of his full dominion over her; if a man strikes another man with it, that is the highest insult that can be inflicted, and the offender must pay the offended a fine of five horses. Jijiga. Price: 1 thaler.
5. **Amarti** — a ring, a traditional gift from Galla bridegrooms to their brides; they wear it on a cord around the neck and remove it forever on the wedding day. Harar.

And so for every item: the name, purpose, whether it is still in use or no longer, the place where purchased, the price. Why did he pay everywhere in thalers and piastres? In Abyssinia these coins had circulated since olden times; they came from Europe and the Near East. The silver thaler was traditionally minted in Austria for trade with Africa and

the Near East and contained 23.4 grams of silver. It bore the image of Archduchess Maria Theresa (1717–1780).

Gumilyov's collection is among the earliest large collections brought by Russian travelers from Africa. In Moscow's Museum of Oriental Cultures there are no collections so old.

Thus it is reality, not poetic fancy, that stands behind the lines of the poem "Abyssinia":

*I go there to touch the "savage" things  
that once I myself brought from afar...*

"Savage"? Well, in Europe they wrote so then; you can't strike the word from the song. The point is not the word. Both Gumilyov's journeys and his verses attest to his undoubted respect for Africa. And by the composition of the collections one can see that Gumilyov was very interested in items that would allow people in Russia to judge more concretely the level of the spiritual culture of the peoples of Ethiopia and Somalia. Many things are tied to literacy, to preparing manuscripts and books, to the binder's craft.

5. **Tibet** — an inkwell, with two pens (*kalam*). A village in Annia near the Webi. 10 piastres.

6. **Ukha** — a board for teaching children to read and write. A village in Annia. 12 piastres.

8. **Lebebkān** — a set of bookbinding tools in a canvas bag: three rhinoceros-hide ornaments used to press patterns into the damp leather of a binding, four wooden tools for embossing and trimming. Price: 3 thalers. Harar.

9. **Jeddi** — five old bindings, one document portfolio, one parchment transparency. Price: 1 thaler. Harar

17, **Kitab-dufan** ("book-tree") — a wooden stand for a book. Sheikh-Hussein. 2 thalers.

24. **Abakay** — a painted sheet with verses from the Qur'an; it is issued as a prize to schoolchildren on graduation day, pasted onto a board of the shape used in № 17; they are drawn by a special Harari artist. Price: 2 thalers. Harar.

Perhaps these collections aren't all that important? These days you can see masks and little human and animal figures from Africa in many apartments. But those are often items made by Africans not for themselves, but specifically for tourists—aimed at the taste of the average European bourgeois. Gumilyov's collections, by contrast, consist of things that were actually in daily use, part of real life. Some of these items reflect a way of life already passing into history by the early twentieth century. Thus in the blue notebook there is:

20. **Mal'fata** — a spinning machine: five stakes, a base, a handle, a drum, an iron rod; made about fifty years ago; today they make the same kind, but simpler and in small numbers, since the craft is being displaced by imported textiles. Harar. 3 thalers.

Of course, the names of items—as with geographic names—may have been written down by Gumilyov imprecisely, by ear, given only a surface knowledge of local languages. Still, the descriptions are often careful, especially considering that Gumilyov had no special ethnographic training. If something does not accord with present-day scholarship—well, that is only natural. Gumilyov worked at the start of the century, and we are nearing its end.

Almost two and a half hundred negatives were also a result of the expedition. Kolya Sverchkov did the photography and prepared the inventory. In listing them he did not systematize the shots—most likely he simply enumerated them in the order they lay before him at that moment. [176]

Most photos were taken in Harar, Sheikh-Hussein, Djibouti, and on the road to the Chercher range. They capture all sorts of scenes. In Djibouti— a ceremonial Muslim procession during a religious festival. In Harar— not only the future emperor, his wife, and their house, but also a church, a smithy, a leprosarium for lepers, a battery of guns, a hay market. In Sheikh-Hussein—places connected with that saint and with legends about him: "The cave in which Sheikh-Hussein turned a snake to stone," "A woman turned into stone," "On the horizon the mountain that followed St. Sheikh-Hussein from Arabia."

Also recorded: "Abu-Muda, the current steward of the sanctuary of Sheikh-Hussein." And "Interior of the hut where Abu-Muda lives (in the back, a mat hung with roots of herbs)."

To this steward of the prophet—calling him Sheikh-Hussein—Gumilyov dedicated a poem.

*I bowed; he smiled and replied,  
and patted my shoulder kindly;  
I gave him a Belgian pistol  
and a portrait of my sovereign.*

*He asked and asked how much they knew of him  
in far and savage Russia...  
Down to the sea he's famed for sorcery,  
his deeds seeming almost blessed.*

*If in the woods your mule cannot be found  
or your restless slave has fled—  
you will have them back at once, if you promise to bring  
Sheikh-Hussein a proper gift.*

The poem's substance—putting aside poetic ornament—lines up strikingly with Sverchkov's account (again in his mother's retelling).

"In the course of travel N. S.'s caravan met two Abyssinians going to Hussein for help finding a missing mule. N. S. was intrigued and led the caravan to the prophet's dwelling. On the way the natives told him many marvels: how the saint turned an enemy army to stone, how a mountain moved after the saint from its old place to a new one, and so on. Hussein received the Europeans with honor, was pleased with the gifts presented, allowed them to see everything, but ordered that they be closely watched so they took nothing—not a single pebble, not a single rag." [177]

The travelers themselves appear in the photos too. "N. Gumilyov writes down Galla songs from the words of a Galla singer (the interpreter stands by)." "N. Gumilyov with *gerazmach* Haile on the veranda" (*gerazmach*—a military rank in Abyssinia; in war he commands the army's left wing, in peace he is a provincial chief). "A group of Abyssinians and slaves during our quarrel with them and with their chief, *gerazmach* Haile." And little Kolya himself: "Nikolai Leonidovich Sverchkov, participant in the expedition to the land of the Galla." "N. Sverchkov and N. Gumilyov in a tent at dinner at the house of an Abyssinian woman, our guide's aunt."

The steamer Tambov, which brought Gumilyov and Sverchkov to Djibouti, was photographed. They also snapped a view of the bay near Djibouti where Ashinov once tried with his Cossacks to found a "Moscow stanitsa."

Most negatives are badly faded with time, and the shots are not by a professional; Sverchkov was an amateur. Even so—if, with modern equipment, good prints can be made from these negatives—they will be a valuable source for understanding not only Gumilyov but Abyssinia of that era, long since past.

## LOOKING BACK AT THE LAST ENCOUNTER

*Africa... awaits precisely guests, and never acknowledges them as masters.*  
—GUMILYOV

So, in the autumn of 1913 the expedition ended. The collections brought back were exhibited in the Museum of Ethnography. Plaques reading "Gift of So-and-so" hung there for a long time—even after the Revolution.<sup>178</sup>

But how, overall, were the expedition's results assessed? What responses were there?

It is hard to judge. I did not find them in the scholarly journals of the time. Perhaps because scholars usually reply only after thinking, weighing, comparing—and that takes time. World war began in less than a year, and amid the bloodbath there was no time to discuss the trip of two young men through African wilds.

Unfortunately, I also failed to find in the archives materials giving any kind of generalized evaluation of the expedition. The few documents the archivists uncovered are of a private nature—but of interest nonetheless.

On October 27 B. A. Chemerzin sent Radlov a letter written with his characteristic irritation.[179]

"By your letter of March 26 of this year, No. 122, Your Excellency requested that assistance be rendered to N. S. Gumilyov, sent to Abyssinia for scholarly purposes. On August 8 Mr. Gumilyov, while in Harar, prior to departure for Russia, asked me to send him 140 thalers [...], without which, owing to a delay of funds promised him by the Academy of Sciences, he could not leave for Russia; at the same time he undertook to reimburse the said sum immediately upon arrival in Russia. Receiving to this time no notification from Mr. Gumilyov and not knowing his address, I beg Your Excellency most humbly to assist in the return of said sum [...]."

Radlov replied on November 26 [180] with a letter equally dry—perhaps he found Chemerzin's appeal insufficiently correct? It was indeed a bit hasty.

*To His Excellency B. A. Chemerzin*

*Most honored Boris Aleksandrovich,*

*Upon receiving Your Excellency's letter of October 27 of this year, No. 102, I invited N. S. Gumilyov to the Museum, who informed me that a month ago the money had already been transferred by him to the Mission via the Crédit Lyonnais. The delay in remitting the money was due to Mr. Gumilyov having had to wait about three weeks in Djibouti.*

*Informing Your Excellency of the above, I take the opportunity to express to you my sincere gratitude for the assistance rendered to Mr. Gumilyov.*

*Please accept, dear sir, assurances of my distinguished respect and perfect devotion.*

And one more document, also about money—a copy of Gumilyov's statement. [181]

*Under assignment from the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography named after Peter the Great, I acquired among the Somali, Harari and Galla tribes ethnographic collections and took photographic pictures, for which I am to receive 400 (four hundred) rubles.*

*January 8, 1914.*

*N. Gumilyov*

...The collections brought by Gumilyov and the journey itself drew less attention in Petersburg than they merited. He did not manage to generalize his observations, publish

them, compare them with the innumerable impressions of other travelers that he had studied in books...

Of course, writing scholarly or publicity articles on Africa was not an end in itself for him. Poetry remained paramount. Still, keeping a diary, he intended to publish it, and he even decided to write an article on African art (as a letter to Anna Akhmatova sent in July 1914, in the very days before the world war, attests). Like many other plans, these did not come to pass—he immediately volunteered for the army.

Probably, though, the war was not the only obstacle. Perhaps he was in no hurry to publish his impressions and reflections at all, seeing the journeys of 1908–1913 not as a conclusion but as only the beginning—the first steps of his distant wanderings. He was, after all, only twenty-seven...

"Mik. An African Poem." Work on its early variants falls in that period. Early in 1914, at a meeting of the Society of Lovers of the Artistic Word, as reported in *Apollon*, [182] "N. Gumilyov read a long (960-line) poem of his, 'Mik and Lun.'" But the poem was not published before the war, either whole or in excerpts.

Gumilyov translated twelve Abyssinian songs. Unlike the "Abyssinian songs" in *Strange Sky*, these are genuine Abyssinian songs. Most are of relatively recent origin, mentioning Emperor Menelik and statesmen of his reign. These songs help to picture Abyssinia as Gumilyov saw it.

He appended a note to his translations. "The songs printed here were collected by me during my three journeys to Abyssinia and are rendered as literally as possible. None, so far as I know, has been translated into European languages. Freshness of feeling, unexpected turns of thought, and the authenticity of situations make them valuable independently of the exoticism of their origin. Their primitivism is extremely instructive alongside European attempts in the same vein." [183]

He wanted to publish them. This is suggested by the note's last sentence: "The drawings in the book are done after Abyssinian models." The manuscript itself survives in Mikhail Lozinsky's archive. There are no drawings there, but blank leaves are reserved for them. Attached is a slip without signature or date: "To be passed to N. S. Gumilyov. The Eastern Collegium finds it difficult to print." [184]

Little from the journeys saw the light then.

Even so, he managed to publish something before the war. How well he knew the affairs of the country he had just left can be judged by the article "Has Menelik Died?" It appeared in *Niva* in February 1914.

Why did one of Russia's most widely read magazines take an interest in the Abyssinian emperor? Menelik's fate concerned many at that time. The world did not know whether he was still alive—the head of the only African state not conquered by Europeans. The

emperor had not appeared anywhere for a long time; rumors flew. Many thought Menelik had long been dead and that this was being kept secret due to court intrigues. In the end, so it was—though the gap between his death and the official announcement was not as great as thought abroad.

Russia was invested in Menelik's fate. It was in his reign that close ties were established between Russia and Abyssinia. *Niva* had no small circle of authors to commission. Russian diplomats, officers, travelers had met Menelik, knew him. That the choice fell on Gumilyov was, in itself, a recognition of his competence.

Gumilyov acquainted readers with the rumors roiling Abyssinia—over the struggle for the throne, court intrigues, attempts to poison Menelik. He explained the backdrop: feudal lords striving to revive their former might, to weaken the central imperial power and resist Menelik's desire to make his grandson Lij Iyasu his successor.

"After Menelik's death," he wrote, "the mighty feudal lords will raise a dispute over the imperial throne; the newly subjugated peoples will revolt, and all this will serve as a pretext for Europeans to divide Abyssinia among themselves." He even sketched how this division might occur—which parts England would try to seize, which France, which Italy.

He tied his hope for preserving an independent Abyssinia to Menelik's still being alive. "If Menelik lives—everything will remain as before. Ministers from the capital of Abyssinia, Addis Ababa, will rule the feudal lords; strong garrisons will hold the subjugated tribes in obedience; white men will not dare attack a united, insanely brave, and astonishingly hardy people."

In fact, when the article appeared, Menelik was no longer alive. He had died in September 1913. But for several months no one knew this except those closest to the throne.

How did Gumilyov's forecast pan out? As soon as the news of death appeared, a time of turmoil began. A struggle for power flared, and the young Lij Iyasu never managed to secure the throne. As for European intervention—Abyssinia had already been divided into zones of economic influence by then. Likely his prediction of military intervention would also have come true, but what he could not foresee happened: a world war broke out. Colonial powers had other concerns. Perhaps for that reason the turmoil ended after two or three years, and Abyssinia retained independence and integrity. Military intervention did come—only later, in 1935.

In Gumilyov's early trips, a considerable role was played by a drive toward eccentricity, a wish to draw attention to himself—and, in part, attempts to flee from himself. And, of course, curiosity. Was it not about such travels that the dramatist Lev Ustinov said the simple words:

*He who has walked all roads  
and found no happiness,  
was doubly happy still:  
the day he set out,  
and the day he returned.*

But the last journey was prompted by a deepening interest, a love for those lands, and a striving to understand them.

## **Memory**

**GUMILYOV**

*At the giraffe's well  
I shall end my life.*

**IGOR SEVERYANIN**

*The poet didn't know that death was already looming.  
Not somewhere in the Madagascar forest.  
But in St. Petersburg, where he was killed.*

## **WE'RE OFF TO MADAGASCAR FOR TWO YEARS!**

*I know that in Madagascar everything will change.  
—Gumilyov to Larisa Reisner*

After 1913 Gumilyov never went to Africa again. Not because he didn't want to. On the contrary, there's plenty of evidence that he dreamed of new, long journeys.

But obstacles came, one after another.

The first—1914, the German War.

There are various conjectures about why he went to war with such zeal. Here is one: "He went to war not out of love for it, but due to inner emptiness. Roaming around various Levants, he burned through and lost the best in life and longed for the alarms of battle as a means to fill the void." So argued the historian Nikolai Ivanovich Ulyanov in an article about Gumilyov.

So, he emptied and burned away all the best in life with his travels, which, by implication, were worthless. Perhaps no one else has ever leveled such a reproach at Gumilyov.

But many did reproach him for glorifying war. Ulyanov simply did it more sharply than the others. He believed that among Russian poets only Gumilyov deserved this charge. "When the world war flared up and all our major poets responded with verses full of anxiety for the fate of Russia and humanity, when even Mayakovsky wrote the

humanistic poem "War and Peace," only Gumilyov greeted Europe's conflagration with rapture." [1]

In fact, Gumilyov was far from the only one to welcome that war. The fine writer Arkady Sergeevich Bukhov, later to perish in Stalin's prisons, in May 1917—right after the February Revolution—passionately scourged several well-known poets for their stance on that war. Titling his article "To the Psalmists of the Bayonet," Bukhov exclaimed: "Did any one of them feel the full horror of blood shed? Did any one of them reflect that if war can be acknowledged, it is only as a bloody necessity, not as a chance to come at someone else's agonizing wound with a slobbery kiss?..."

Bloody lechers of words, they got drunk on Cossack exploits and sweetly dived into a bloody nirvana... Shut up, you defiled by drum slogans..."

How much must have boiled up in Arkady Bukhov—usually so tactful and, as they said in those days, delicate—if this time he didn't even try to restrain his fury! "What did they see in the world slaughter?" he asked. And answered:

"To take a break from the pederastic, quiet boys of Navi's charms, F. Sologub longed for a foreign land:

*And our horizons will grow wider,  
And the Mediterranean roar of war—  
What we dreamed of for so long,  
What only came to us in sleep.*

Balmont, suddenly tossing aside the weight of his perceptive talent somewhere to the side, akimbo, sang:

*Who stands in the way of honest fighting?'—  
the rifle croaked...  
The dead bookman, a known coward—  
'A female—away with her!*

Kuzmin downright capers with joy and lisps like a clown:

*My acquaintance is a jolly fellow,  
He even plays whist,  
And now a crimson stream  
Of blood seeps through the bandage.*

How merry... Universal joy! Blood is seeping through the bandage...

And here's Igor Severyanin—the haberdashery banshee—who simply burst into tears of tenderness. What a blissful wish to rip bellies open with bayonets:

*When the fatherland is in flames—  
Do not spare water, pour blood like water...  
A blessing to the people!  
A blessing to war!*

It was in this line that Bukhov placed Gumilyov. "For Gumilyov, for instance, the slaughter at the wire entanglements and the bloody mash in the wolf pits seemed a holy deed.

Touchingly joyful:

*And truly bright and sacred  
The lofty business of war;  
Seraphim, shining and winged,  
Stand behind the warriors' backs.*

Well, isn't it an edifying picture: Major Preissner, by order of his superiors, is hanging the people of Łódź, and behind his back stand seraphim!"[2]

Yes, Gumilyov really had poems in which he poetized war as a "sacred longed-for battle." In 1915 he wrote:

*How could we earlier live in peace  
And await no joys, no woes,  
Not dream of a fire-blazing battle,  
Of the booming trumpet of victory.*

This unfinished yet widely known poem is in the same key:

*Drums, thunder! and trumpets, roar! and banners everywhere are raised.  
Since Alexander's time there's been no such stormy, wondrous war.  
Purple blood of Germans, blue—of Frenchmen, and of Slavs the scarlet flood.*

This mood echoes in many pages of the *Notes of a Cavalryman* that Gumilyov sent from the front. The *Notes* ran from 3 February 1915 to 11 January 1916 in the morning editions of *Birzhevye Vedomosti* ("The Exchange Gazette"). They were printed in the "Chronicle of the War" section, sometimes under the subheading "From our war correspondent." They cover autumn 1914 to autumn 1915, when Gumilyov served as a one-year volunteer in Her Majesty's Life-Guard Uhlan Regiment, part of the Second Guards Cavalry Division.

Here is the first dispatch—from East Prussia. "These highways splitting off in different directions, these groves trimmed like parks, these stone little houses with red tile roofs filled my soul with a sweet thirsting to press forward, and the dreams of Yermak, Perovsky and other representatives of a Russia conquering and triumphant seemed so close. Is this not the road to Berlin, the splendid city of soldierly culture, into which one

should enter not with a pilgrim's staff in hand, but on horseback and with rifle on shoulder?"

War itself, not always but quite often, looks almost idyllic in the *Notes*. In some cases he wrote it outright: "Everyone's mood was the most idyllic."

Preparing for an offensive is "a time when breath catches from happiness, a time of burning eyes and unreasoned smiles."

And rest after battle? "...Amid the dear idleness of a peaceful bivouac, when you read yellow booklets of the Universal Library, clean your rifle, or simply chat with pretty *panienki*."

The dispatches are written in excellent prose. And the feelings are accurately conveyed in a way—yet one-sided. War looks festive all the while.

"It is pleasant to transfer to a new front. On long marches you deplete your supplies of chocolate, cigarettes, and books. At big stations you replenish—secrecy of destination strictly kept—you guess where you'll arrive, dream of the advantages of the new area: fruit, *panienki*, spacious houses; you rest sprawled on the straw of roomy boxcars. Disembarking, you marvel at the landscapes, the character of the locals; the main thing to find out—do they sell milk?—and to learn quicker than others to chat in Polish, Little Russian, or Lithuanian.

"But it's even nicer to return to the old front. People imagine soldiers as homeless, but they get used to the shed where they slept a few times, to the kindly hostess, and to a comrade's grave. We have just come back to our old haunts and were drunk on memories."

Impressions of war are continually tied to the familiar Gumilyov romance of faraway lands. The Muse of Far Wanderings does not leave her devotee even here.

Gumilyov admits: "I could not at all imagine Germans in their natural form." To him they seem now like evil dwarfs, now like Polynesian gods.

In a letter to Akhmatova: "In general, war reminds me very much of my Abyssinian journeys. The analogy is almost complete: the lack of exoticism is compensated by more intense sensations." [3] And he began his tale of a skirmish with two German soldiers like this: "Only on the hunt for big beasts—leopards, buffaloes—have I felt the same feeling, when anxiety for oneself suddenly gives way to fear of missing magnificent prey." [4]

How to take all this? One can, of course, categorically condemn Gumilyov's views, as was done, for example, in 1938 in the Moscow book *Literature and the World War 1914–1918*. There it says unambiguously: "These facts of imperialist adventurism and cruelty turned the major poets of this era into apologists for killing as an end in itself. Characteristically, in this view of war as 'hunting' Gumilyov had many like-minded men.

He merely put into practice those views on war that had been worked out in advance by the ideologists of Russian imperialism..."[5]

But this assessment provokes protest. It is far too categorical, peremptory, clangorous—and above all simplistic. One thing is Arkady Bukhov—he wrote in the very heat of events and hurled his angry accusations in the faces of people alive, influential, able to answer and stand up for themselves. Quite another is 1938.

Gumilyov was already dead; he could not answer. To join a campaign of abuse against him had become unseemly. Most important—twenty years after the war's end, one might give not only a passionate condemnation (as Bukhov did in 1917) but also a more balanced appraisal of a past already distant.

Still, I won't condemn authors publishing in 1937–1938. Those were difficult years...

As for judging Gumilyov's attitude to the German War, now—at a distance of three quarters of a century—much, I think, is clearer. In any case, one would like to think we are less categorical toward people of the past, less mindlessly condemning or exalting, and not dividing them into angels and devils. Though who knows... The urge to see the past only in two colors—black and white—is tough to kill.

Of course, during the First World War, and even at its start, in months of mass war-fever, there were people who viewed events more soberly and wisely than Gumilyov. But Gumilyov... Let me recall what Anna Andreevna Akhmatova told me about him:

— What kind of politician was he? He was a naive man.

Moreover—and perhaps here lies the chief explanation—since childhood and youth he'd grown used to seeing himself as a warrior.

At the war's outset he immediately volunteered—enlisting as a one-year volunteer—and arrived at the regiment in August 1914, the very first month of combat.

A military career was not what he wanted. Even when, for combat merit, he was sent to the St. Petersburg Nikolaev Cavalry School "to sit the officer's exam," he didn't bother to prepare and, as his service record attests, "after not passing the exam returned to the regiment."

But he was awarded the Soldier's Cross of St. George on 24 December 1914, exactly three months to the day after arriving at the regiment. And in 1915 he received a second St. George. He recalled this not without pride.

*Holy George touched twice  
A chest untouched by bullet.*

So it's hardly fair to put him in one row with poets who beat the hurrah-patriotic drums while sitting deep in the rear. Or with Igor Severyanin—whose army service amounted to a few weeks in the barracks of Little Peterhof. According to the writer Leonid Borisov, [6] who slept on the bunks next to him, Severyanin was almost immediately "released entirely from service (by a mighty pull—what nowadays is called *blat*)." Borisov then reminded Severyanin of his grandiose promise to readers: "then your tender, your one and only, will lead you to Berlin." Severyanin, unembarrassed, allegedly replied:

— Give it time. I'll lead you! The time hasn't come yet. I know when...

And one more point. Gumilyov's attitude to war did not remain unchanged. In the poem "And the second year nears its end" a new tone is heard—not brazen, not idyllic.

*And will they count the drowned  
In the midst of difficult crossings,  
The trampled, forgotten in fields,  
Yet thunderous in annals of glory?*

From January 1916 Gumilyov stopped sending war dispatches. And about his own fate that spring of 1916 he wrote a decidedly un-bravura poem, "The Workman."

Around this poem a rumor later spread that Gumilyov had foretold in it his death as it came in August 1921. In fact, he was clearly writing about the German War, the places where he fought, German bullets, and the German workman.

*A bullet cast by him will whistle  
Over the hoary, foaming Dvina,  
A bullet cast by him will find  
My breast; it has come for me.*

...So how, after all, to understand Gumilyov in those years?

Perhaps the recollections of his junior contemporary Mikhail Zoshchenko will help. He wrote of himself: "In '13 I entered the University. In '14—I went to the Caucasus. I fought a duel in Kislovodsk with the jurist K. After which I immediately felt that I was an extraordinary man, a hero and adventurer—and went as a volunteer to the war."<sup>7</sup> He was repeatedly decorated for bravery. But, as is known, later he by no means glorified that war.

Who knows how Gumilyov might have reconsidered his stance on that war and what he might have answered Arkady Bukhov. But unlike Zoshchenko, he had almost no "later"...

Most important—during the war, as before and after, Gumilyov had not a hint of hostility toward Germans as such, toward the German nation. On the contrary, he treated their

culture and literature with respect. One need only recall his interest in Hoffmann, love for Heine, fascination with Friedrich Nietzsche.

His letter to Akhmatova from the front: "In neither Lithuania nor Poland did I hear of German atrocities, not of a single murdered inhabitant or raped woman. They do indeed take livestock and bread—but first, they too need provisions, and second, they must deprive us of provisions; we do the same, and therefore reproaches to them fall indirectly on us—and that is unjust. When we enter a German house we say ‘*Gudn tag!*’ and give sugar to the children; they do likewise, muttering ‘*karosh*’. The army respects the enemy; it seems to me journalists could behave the same. But estrangement is being born between army and country. And this is not my personal opinion; officers and soldiers think so too—exceptions are rare and hard to explain, or rather, are explained by the fact that the ‘*Nemets*’ was all the while deep in the rear and gorged on journals and newspapers."<sup>8</sup>

Was xenophobia characteristic of Gumilyov at all? For judging a person of that time, this is as important as for characterizing our contemporaries.

Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, in memoirs published in emigration, confessed how hard it was for him to overcome xenophobia in his character. He blamed his teachers—in essence, the system of education. "The French were censured for Napoleon's many treacheries; the Swedes had to pay for the harm done to Russia by Charles XII in Peter the Great's reign. The Poles could not be forgiven their ridiculous vanity. The English were always ‘perfidious Albion.’ The Germans were guilty of having Bismarck. The Austrians bore responsibility for the policy of Franz Josef, a monarch who kept none of his many promises to Russia. My ‘enemies’ were everywhere. The official understanding of patriotism required that I keep in my heart the fire of ‘sacred hatred’ against all and sundry."

He especially lamented antisemitism, seeing in it—as many did—the brightest sign of xenophobia. "...My Scripture teacher daily told me of Christ's sufferings. He spoiled my child's imagination, and managed to make me see in every Jew a murderer and tormentor. My timid attempts to refer to the Sermon on the Mount were impatiently dismissed: ‘Yes, Christ enjoined us to love our enemies,’ Father Georgy Titov would say, ‘but that should not change our views regarding the Jews.’ Poor Father Titov! He clumsily imitated the princes of the Church who for eighteen centuries preached antisemitism from the pulpit. Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and other confessions equally promoted religious intolerance—and likewise, Russia's antisemitic legislation drew its main principles from the mindset of Orthodoxy's high hierarchs."<sup>9</sup>

Such upbringing and such policy naturally bore fruit. Elizaveta Ivanovna Dmitrieva—who entered the journal *Apollon* as Cherubina de Gabriak—recalled her childhood: "Once, for about two weeks, my brother became a ‘Christian.’ He and a schoolmate decided to ‘beat the yids’ and cut a cross on their faces. They caught a Jewish boy and carved a cross on his cheek, but didn't manage to kill him."<sup>10</sup>

In Gumilyov's lifetime the country endured bloody pogroms. The Union of Michael the Archangel and the Union of the Russian People with their Black Hundreds arose. The newspaper *Russkoe Znamya*, styling itself patriotic, in 1913 lectured Nicholas II and his ministers: "The government is obliged to recognize the Jews as a people as dangerous to human life as wolves, scorpions, vipers, poisonous spiders and other creatures subject to extermination for their predatory relation to people, whose destruction is encouraged by law... Jews must be artificially placed in such conditions that they gradually die out: that is now the government's duty and that of the best people."<sup>11</sup>

Far from politics, Gumilyov did not speak out against the Beilis case, as did Korolenko, Leonid Andreev, Merezhkovsky, Blok, Sologub, Maksim Kovalevsky, Semevsky, Nabokov, Gorky, Milyukov...

But at Petersburg University Gumilyov did not study with Black-Hundred men. He attended the lectures of Baudouin de Courtenay, who liked to say (Gorky even quoted these words in *Klim Samgin*) that if a Russian steals, they say "a thief stole," but if a Jew steals, they say "a Jew stole."

The closest friends of Gumilyov the nobleman were Lozinsky and Mandelstam; among his students—few in number—were Vera Lurie, Ida Nappelbaum, and Raisa Bloch, who later, in 1943, perished in a Nazi camp.

"For many days Judea grieved," wrote Gumilyov. And about the mood in his circle we can judge from Georgy Adamovich's reminiscences. "In the Russian intelligentsia's milieu, antisemitism was inadmissible, impossible. Whoever voiced antisemitic views cut himself out of that 'order,' or was rejected. Apart from moral repulsion, antisemitism was, for the intelligentsia, a nonsense or a result of insufficient cultural development."

Adamovich wrote this in his article "In the Margins of Academician A. D. Sakharov's Pamphlet." He—a poet from Gumilyov's milieu who had ended up in emigration—welcomed Sakharov's ideas and thought them worthy of "the order of the Russian intelligentsia." And he, like Sakharov, was outraged by "a fresh shameful relapse of antisemitism." [12]

In Adamovich there is not only sympathy but deep respect. "Our Holy Rus', at her best moments, set to a soft Slavic mode the old, wondrous, inspired-wild Jewish songs—and forgot that it was not she who had composed them." [13]

Nikolai Otsup, already in emigration, wrote a brief poem: [14]

*Two women quarreled over a kopeck.  
One was a Catholic,  
And long she scolded the Jewish woman  
For being a Jewish woman,  
And then to church, like the others,  
That believer went—*

*To ask the Jewish Mary  
For solace and warmth.*

Vyacheslav Ivanov, Fyodor Sologub, Bryusov translated H. N. Bialik, and Bunin dedicated to him the poem "May the Times Be Fulfilled." Khodasevich published an anthology of translations of Jewish poetry. Apollon Korinfsky wrote the mournful "A People Without a Homeland." Aleksandr Fyodorov: "O persecuted people! Thy suffering lot moves my heart to pain." Marina Tsvetaeva: "Who has not trampled you—and who has not smelted you... With the last of your sons, Israel, truly we shall bury Christ!" Mother Maria: "Israel, you are persecuted again." Shchepkina-Kupernik: "Their soul is torn by the cruel play of the long centuries' horrors." Balmont: "There is neither Hellene nor Jew; there is the Bethlehem star!" Zinaida Gippius—prayerfully of Jesus Christ: "He is king and brother to us, and Teacher—and He is a Jew."

Arkady Averchenko and his *Satirikon* writers—in their characteristic manner. In their *Universal History* the crusaders, approaching another city, would ask:

— *Listen, is this Jerusalem?*  
— *No.*  
— *No? Are there Jews in it?*  
— *There are.*  
— *May we kill them?*  
— *Do us the favor.*

Irina Odoevtseva soon after the Second World War wrote the novel *Abandon Hope Forever*—about Stalinist terror. There is a line there: "I shall not be surprised if one fine day the Academy of Sciences, by party order, declares that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are genuine." [15]

Anna Akhmatova said to Faina Georgievna Ranevskaya:

— What vileness is antisemitism; it's a tasty candy for scoundrels... [16]

And when Lydia Korneevna Chukovskaya told her of utterly unbridled antisemitic utterances, Anna Andreevna replied even more sharply:

— Such people should be killed. [17]

So did people close to Gumilyov regard racial and national prejudice. And about Gumilyov himself Nikolai Otsup said: "His monarchism, about which he was not afraid to speak openly, was in no way that obscurantism into which members of the 'Union of the Russian People' turned the formula 'autocracy, Orthodoxy and nationality'... He was Orthodox without a shadow of intolerance toward people of another faith and especially of another race." [18]

...Thus, Gumilyov could be carried away—if only for a time—by the romance of war. But it was not connected with hostility to another people, another nation, people of other blood.

A letter from Gumilyov to Lozinsky, sent from the active army on January 2, 1915. It shows that even in the first months of the war, before the hurrah-patriotic fever had passed, Gumilyov's attitude toward it was ambivalent.

"...I'm vexed for Africa. When a year and a half ago I returned from the land of the Galla, nobody had the patience to listen to my impressions and adventures to the end. And yet, truly, all that I invented alone and for myself—the zebras' neighing at night, the crossings over crocodile rivers, quarrels and reconciliations with bear-like chieftains in the midst of the desert, the majestic saint who had never seen whites in his African Vatican—all that is far more significant than those chores of sanitizing Europe that now occupy millions of ordinary townsmen—myself included." [19]

And this was written right after Gumilyov had been awarded his first St. George Cross. Where, in this private letter, is the rapture over war? And how much of Africa's memory there is! Perhaps here lies the explanation why he wrote so little about his journeys—"nobody had the patience to listen." Eyewitnesses wrote that they listened to him holding their breath. But he, it seems, was left with a different impression.

At the front he dreamed of new travels in Africa. There survive the recollections of Captain V. O. Yanishevsky about how, at the start of the war, he and Gumilyov were one-year volunteers, training in the Life-Guard Uhlan Regiment. Learning of Yanishevsky's love of nature and roaming, of his vagabonding by boat, on foot, and by bicycle, Gumilyov said:

— A man like you is what I need; when the war ends, we're off to Madagascar for two years.

"You can understand how to my liking his proposal was. Alas! It all proved only dreams," Yanishevsky later lamented in one of his letters. And he remembered Gumilyov like this: "In the evenings he constantly told me about his two African expeditions. Our platoon sergeant hovered around us, clearly intrigued by Gumilyov's tales of hunting lions and other African beasties... He was a very good storyteller, and to listen to him—who had seen so much on his travels—was very interesting."

When Gumilyov distinguished himself at target practice, the squadron commander asked:

— Where did you learn to shoot?

The sergeant immediately barked:

— Beg to report, Your Nobility: the one-year volunteer—he's a lion hunter. [20]

Later, when Gumilyov, already with two St. George Crosses, was commissioned and served in the 5th Alexandrian Hussar Regiment, then—according to the officer S. A. Toporkov—at friendly dinners and revels he recited poems about Abyssinia, and his stories made such an impression that legends sprang up around them. "Among the young cornets there was talk that in Abyssinia he had married a black native woman and had been happy with her." [21]

He shared his Madagascar dreams with Larisa Reisner during their stormy, if not very long, affair in 1916, when Gumilyov was in Petrograd preparing for the officers' exam at the Nikolaev Cavalry School, and in the first months of 1917, before departing for France. Africa was constantly present in Lera's and Hafiz's letters—the names by which Gumilyov and Larisa Reisner called each other after the heroes of Gumilyov's dramatic poem *Gondla* and the play *The Child of Allah*. Promising to take Larisa to Madagascar and jokingly lamenting her proud temper, Gumilyov wrote: "I know that in Madagascar everything will change." [22]

What an indelible impression Gumilyov's Muse of Far Wanderings made on Larisa Reisner! It showed itself both then—for example, in her review of Gumilyov's dramatic fairy-tale *Gondla*—and several years later. [23]

"Gothic towers, islands forgotten by fate amid the seas, golden springs of conquered lands, the cries of the vanquished and the clanking tread of the victors, unchanged from ancient Latins and seafarers to our blood-stained days—all this has piled up into a mountain of idle, marauders' beauty. Each new book by Gumilyov is a pirate's cave, where one sees many stolen jewels, old wine, spices, tried weapons, and flowers gone to seed without air, in dense darkness. Lawless, in a certain magnificent dazzle, his muse goes high—and ever higher." [24]

So wrote Larisa Reisner in sketches for her still-unfinished autobiographical novel. She began it in 1919–1920, when she was a commissar of the Naval Staff, and continued in 1921, working with her husband Fyodor Raskolnikov in the Soviet diplomatic mission in Kabul.

Of course, Larisa Reisner's attitude toward Gumilyov's work was shaped by her feeling for Gumilyov himself. She loved him and, judging by their correspondence, suffered painfully over his breaking with her. In his last letters to her there is no more tenderness. Instead of "My Lerichka," "Leri, I love you," and signing "Your Hafiz," he addressed her dryly: "Larisa Mikhailovna," and signed himself, "Most sincerely yours, N. Gumilyov."

Perhaps a difference of views played a part? From Norway, en route to France, he wrote her in June 1917: "...enjoy yourself, but don't get into politics." [25] But it's hard to believe that the breakup was due to this difference, or that politics mattered all that much in their relations.

Her farewell letter is filled with love and tenderness.

"In the event of my death, all the letters will return to you. And with them that strange feeling which bound us, so like love.

"And my tenderness—for people, for mind, for poetry and certain things—which thanks to you grew stronger, cast off its own shadow among others—became creation. I often thought that you at some time still had to meet me once more, to speak once more, once more to take all and leave. That cannot be, could not be. But be blessed—you, your verses and your deeds. Meet miracles, create them yourself. My dear, my beloved. And be purer and better than before, for truly there is a God. Your Leri."[26]

Later, in the autobiographical novel, there is no such touching, all-forgiving tone. Hafiz is shown not in intimate relations, but as a habitu   of the Stray Dog cabaret. He appears as a fateful man, cruel and pitiless. The portrait is undeniably striking.

"He is handsome. A narrow, long skull (you can see it in Vel  zquez, in the portraits of the great Charleses and Philips), a merciless brow, irregular, gloomy eyebrows, eyes asymmetrical, with a bewitching fixed gaze. Now that gaze is brimming. It is straight and sweeping, like a garland on the bridal doors, woven of stiff fir boughs with blue ribbons and mountain flowers. From his lips, incessantly moving and inflamed, one sees that after happiness they scan verses—perhaps of night, of the death of hope, and a white mute monastery. There is no crystal window in Petersburg, covered with virgin hoarfrost and a thick veil of snow, that Hafiz would not cloud with his breath, leaving for life a gaping vista into the void between pure frosty patterns. There is no enchanted garden blooming in the early northern spring, behind whose trusting, old, listing fence the poet's daring hands would not break off lilacs full of cold dew and an apple tree, defenseless, made giddy by the sun on the eve of the crown. And still unsated, the singer's will lightly and greedily destroyed much that was beautiful and covered the pages of his manuscripts with verse-mausoleums."

Her attitude to Gumilyov's muse changed as well. Having written that his muse goes high and higher, Larisa added: "...not believing that the anger, ripening slowly, could fall upon her singable head, bereft of shame and pity."[27]

Who knows, perhaps in Madagascar it all would have been different. But in Petrograd—it didn't come together.

...In 1916, in the August issue of the "Monthly Literary and Popular-Science Supplement" to *Niva*, there appeared the sketch "African Hunting. From a Travel Diary." These were not only stories of the hunt. There, too, was an image of Africa—the one he yearned for.

"A European, if he happily slips through the chain of whining skeptics (mostly small traders) in the port towns, if he does not heed the sinister warnings of his consul, if, finally, he manages to assemble a not too big and unwieldy caravan, can see Africa as she was thousands of years ago: nameless rivers with heavy, leaden waves; deserts where, it seems, only God may dare to raise His voice; forests entirely rotted in the mountain

gorges, ready to fall at a single push; he will hear how the lion, preparing for battle, lashes his flanks with his tail...; and if he is a hunter, there he will meet game worthy of fairy-tale princes."

All this is usually called exoticism—often with a shade of condescension. (And exoticism—is that bad?)

But in the same essay, there is something like a summing-up of reflections on Africa's fate and her relation to European conquests. "For how many years have the English been busy subduing the Somali Peninsula—and still have not managed to advance even a hundred kilometers from the shore. And at the same time one cannot say that Africa is inhospitable—her forests are equally open to whites and to blacks; at her watering places, by tacit pact, man approaches before the beast. But she awaits guests, precisely, and will never acknowledge them as masters." [28]

"African Hunting" was reissued six years later, in 1922, in the collection *Shadow from a Palm*. But Gumilyov did not live to see that edition.

As a supplement to *Niva* ("For Children"), Gumilyov tried to publish his poem *Mik*. Nine galleys survive with the stamps "Niva" and "Feb. 10, 1917." [29] But at the end of February, Petrograd and its journals were not at all interested in poems about Africa.

Earlier, hopes of publishing this poem in the journal *Sovremennik*, under the title "Mik, the Abyssinian slave, and Lup, the monkey king," had collapsed. In 1915 the journal ceased to exist. Only excerpts from the early version of "Mik" made it into print—in the collection *The Quiver*, published in 1916.

## **TO AFRICA, AS BEFORE, AS THEN...**

*Gumilyov in Paris raved about the East and Africa.*  
—Gleb Struve

After 1913 Gumilyov's wanderings were limited to trenches on the Desna and the hospitals where he recovered.

And now a new journey. At first glance, not so very far—London, Paris. But there's a war. You cannot get there as before—take a train and in three calm days cross all Europe. Now one must go by sea. Long and dangerous—German submarines, mines... So this is a real journey.

Abroad there passed a notable portion of a life not so long—almost ten months. In Paris—the whole second half of 1917; then in London—from January to April 1918. But he was in London twice—first stopping there en route to Paris. And in Paris twice—returning home, he stopped for a day or two while the steamer lay in Le Havre.

Of Gumilyov's Paris life we have the testimony of the painter Mikhail Larionov; of his London life—that of the painter Boris Anrep. [30]

"We saw each other every day almost until his departure for London... We strolled almost every evening in *L'Avenue des Ternes* without *tire-bouchons*," wrote Larionov (the phrase is playful French). He and his wife Natalia Goncharova "took Nikolai Stepanovich with us every evening to the Théâtre du Châtelet, where the Russian ballet was performing"—all the month and a half while Diaghilev's ballet was in Paris. Who better to know the Gumilyov of that time?

So what does Larionov recall?

"His greatest passion was Eastern poetry, and he collected everything related to it." He wanted to turn his plays *Gondla* and *Feodora* into libretti for Diaghilev's ballet—without success. He met many interesting people. Larionov and Goncharova sketched him—alone, with Diaghilev, with Apollinaire. In one of Goncharova's watercolors, Gumilyov is depicted in Africa.

He fell in love with Elena Karlovna Dubuše, daughter of a famous surgeon, fiancée of the American Lovell. He dedicated many poems to her.

*Here is a girl with gazelle eyes  
Who marries an American.  
Why did Columbus discover America?!*

He gave her an album, about which he wrote:

*It will stand in the library  
Of your calculating grandson  
In the year two thousand twenty-five.*

Quite possibly that album stands there now. But another nearly identical album Gumilyov left in London with his friend Boris Vasilyevich Anrep. Those poems were published soon after Gumilyov's death, in 1923. The collection was titled *To the Blue Star*.

In general, Larionov writes of Gumilyov's time in Paris: "...Gumilyov, who very much wished to linger in Paris, wanted somehow to connect with the Russian ballet (his assignment was to the Balkans). To keep him in Paris, I and Natalia Sergeevna introduced him to Colonel Sokolov, who served as commandant for the Russian troops in Paris." Later, Larionov recalled, they introduced Gumilyov to Rapp (Yevgeny Rapp was commissar to the Russian troops in France), and Rapp "offered him the post of adjutant to himself."

Then the libretti somehow didn't work out (Gumilyov lacked experience), Diaghilev with his troupe left for Spain. Larionov and Goncharova were short of money. "Nikolai Stepanovich's pay also ceased, as the position ended. He got himself a posting to London, where there still remained for a time certain offices tasked with liquidating Russian war orders placed in England."

Traces of his Paris activities survived thanks to the newspaper *The Russian Soldier—Citizen in France*. It came out in Paris after the February Revolution, published by officers and soldiers of the Russian units sent to fight on the Western Front. While Gumilyov was with those units, the editors ran two items connected with his name.

The first, very small, in the issue of 18 August 1917, in a blurb titled "A Literary Morning in the 'House of the Russian Soldier.'" Two sentences concern Gumilyov: "The program included the names of two more well-known Russian poets: N. Minsky and N. Gumilyov, both currently in Paris. But, unfortunately, Mr. Minsky on that day was at the front, and Mr. Gumilyov was present but was unexpectedly called away on urgent business, to the audience's regret." [31]

The second, published 4 November, is much longer and more interesting. It is a review of a poetry volume issued in France by the poet Nikandr Alekseev, *A Wreath to the Fallen*.<sup>32</sup>

The historian Valentin Lavrentyevich Yanin acquainted me with the paper; he, in turn, received it from Jean Blenkoff, professor of Slavic studies at the Free University of Brussels. Blenkoff's father, Boris Blenkoff—half Russian, half Belgian—worked for the paper. It was printed on very poor paper; only four copies—on good paper—were kept "for posterity." One such set survived in their family. At Yanin's request, Blenkoff looked through all issues—no more mentions of Gumilyov.

As for Gumilyov's London life, we get some idea from letters Boris Anrep sent to Gleb Struve in 1968, a few months before his death. Anrep writes that he saw Gumilyov every day in 1917, when the latter worked in the cipher office of the Russian Government Committee in London. (Memory failed the 86-year-old Anrep—the year was 1918, not 1917.)

In London Anrep introduced Gumilyov to the salon of Lady Ottoline Morrell, frequented by famous writers, artists, and actors. Among her guests one might meet Aldous Huxley, Henry James, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence—and Russians too: Bakst, Diaghilev, Nijinsky.

From a letter by Aldous Huxley (June 1917): "I meet a certain famous Russian poet, Gumilyov (of whom I'd never heard till now); he also edits their journal *Apollon*. We managed with difficulty to explain ourselves to each other in French—a language he speaks with a noticeable stammer, and I stumble and blunder at it frightfully. Nevertheless he appears fairly interesting and pleasant."

Even more intriguing are Chesterton's recollections. He told of a reception at the home of Lady Juliet Duff and singled out "a Russian in uniform." This Russian—Gumilyov—spoke so interestingly that the guests did not break off their conversation even when a bombing began. "He spoke French; his smooth monologue captivated us."

True, Gumilyov's ideas did not captivate Chesterton; on the contrary, they provoked protest and even mockery.

"In what he said there was a certain trait characteristic of his nation, a trait many have tried to define and which, if simplified, may best be put thus: that nation possesses all human talents save common sense. He was an aristocrat, a landowner, an officer of one of the famed Tsarist regiments, a man wholly of the old regime. But in him was also something of which every Bolshevik is made—something I sensed in every Russian I had to do with. I can only say that when he goes out by the door, you feel he might just as well have climbed out the window. He is no communist—he is a utopian, and his utopia is far madder than any communism. His practical proposal boiled down to this: only poets should be allowed to govern the world. He politely explained that he was a poet. However, he was so courteous and amiable that he chose me, since I too am a poet, for the role of England's absolute and autocratic ruler. In the same manner d'Annunzio was elevated to the Italian throne, and Anatole France to the French one."

Chesterton tried to object, to no avail. "He brushed aside all these doubts. He believed that so long as politicians were poets, or at least creators, they could neither err nor fail to understand one another." [33]

To this we may add that in England, in the opinion of the literary scholar R. D. Timenchik, Gumilyov also met W. B. Yeats; and that, even en route to Paris, Gumilyov gave an interview to the weekly *The New Age*, printed in the issue of June 28, 1917.

The papers Gumilyov left in London with Boris Anrep before returning to Russia later came to Gleb Struve. On the basis of this archive and the testimony of the artists Larionov and Goncharova, Struve wrote: "In Paris, Gumilyov raved about the East and Africa." Natalia Goncharova at that time drew him astride a giraffe.

Among the papers left by Gumilyov is a "Note on a Possible Opportunity to Recruit Volunteer Units for the French Army in Abyssinia." [34] This document was prepared for official use, not for print. The manuscript is in French. It was evidently drafted (though undated) in the second half of 1917, when he was posted to the Russian units in allied France.

The reasons that led him to prepare this note are obvious. One need only recall the enormous losses of the French army at Verdun and on the Marne to imagine how badly the Entente powers needed soldiers. The war's end was nowhere in sight. And it was being fought not only in Europe, but in German East Africa—quite near Abyssinia.

The "Note" says that recruiting in Abyssinia is more expedient than in other African countries—because of the Abyssinians' high fighting qualities. Of the Amhara people, Abyssinia's largest, he gives this characterization: "In Gondar and Shoa live from six to seven million pure-blood Abyssinians, almost entirely Orthodox, possessing the following qualities: courage and steadfastness in battle (these are the victors over the Italians); endurance and a habit of privation—to such a degree that a man outstrips a horse over a 30-kilometer run, and that on marches lasting several weeks each man carries on himself the food supply needed to feed him. Being highlanders, they can endure the severest climate."

As we would say today, Gumilyov tried to outline ethnopsychological traits of Abyssinia's peoples. True, he did it very briefly and—judged by present-day scholarship—somewhat naively.

"The tribes of Ualamo and Uolo... are good soldiers... To this category may be added the Galla Kotu tribe.

"The Galla Arussi tribe possesses the same qualities as the Abyssinians, and in addition gigantic height and athletic build.

"The Danakil, Somalis, and part of the Harari are brave, deft, and warlike."

These estimates are likely just. The qualities he notes must have arisen from the numerous wars fought on Abyssinian territory. The largest was the Italo-Abyssinian war of the mid-1890s, when the Abyssinians routed the Italian army (hence "victors over the Italians").

All his characterizations are given from a single angle: suitability for participation in the world war. Of some peoples and tribes he wrote that "good soldiers come from them, but they are more suited to transport and medical corps." Of others, that they are "brave, deft and warlike, but submit to discipline with difficulty. They might be used to form a reconnaissance unit..."

In these judgments one can discern the influence of then-common colonial stereotypes. Yet the country knowledge is excellent. He thought through how to conduct recruitment. About expenses. And how much it would cost to buy horses and mules for the army.

What exactly is the text preserved by Gleb Struve? A copy of a document that was processed, or an original that never went anywhere? There is no answer. Writer Vladimir Karpov in an article in *Ogonyok* asserted that the note "was evidently used by both the Russian and French commands," but he gave no proof.

Despite its brevity, the "Note" contains remarks like: "I lived three months in Harar, where I visited Ras (Dejazmach) Tafari, once the governor of that city." And: "The political situation in Abyssinia is as follows: the country is ruled by the emperor (at the moment by the empress, who is aided by the prince known to me, Ras Tafari, son of Ras Makonnen)." This refers again to Haile Selassie, who in 1916 became regent of Ethiopia. Such remarks show that Gumilyov continued to follow Ethiopian events.

Even events of his personal life Gumilyov tied to Africa. In Paris, complaining of his unhappy love for Elena Dubuše:

*Ah, to flee, to hide like a thief  
To Africa, as before, as then...*

Probably in London he wrote "Invitation to a Journey":

*Let's go! Don't you need,  
The very hour the sun has risen,  
To hear the dreadful ballads,  
The tales of Abyssinian roses...*

## Home

*And from our fates there is no guard!*  
—Pushkin

*Somewhere at the last stop  
Let's thank even this fate...*  
—Okudzhava

He is in France and in England, while at home—Kornilov's mutiny, the autumn pre-storm of 1917, October, the start of the Civil War. The whole life in which Gumilyov had grown up was collapsing. The end came to the world to which he belonged. And German troops against whom he had fought against whom he had fought were pressing ever further into the country.

And there, in the epicenter of those terrible events were his wife, mother, son, friends, the women who enthralled him—all the people closest to him on this earth.

One would like to imagine Gumilyov's state of mind then! How contradictory it must have been, how many times it must have shifted. From Larionov's and Anrep's brief recollections you won't learn this. They wrote about interesting acquaintances, about social life. Both stressed their friend's fondness for women. Larionov thought that besides Elena Dubuše he had "another object of infatuation." And "Elena Karlovna, someone else's fiancée—that complicated his feelings... It gave him new sensations, experiences, situations for his creativity, opened new psychological moments for his poetry." Larionov insisted that before returning to Russia Gumilyov detoured from London to Paris. Why? "...To see someone—Elena Karlovna? Perhaps her; but also someone else—that for certain." He underlined "for certain."

And Anrep even wrote that Gumilyov asked to be introduced "to some girl of easy virtue."

Even if all that is so—it hardly exhausts his life at that time.

What did he think in sleepless nights? Anrep says that in London they met every day. Larionov—that in Paris they met every day. What did they talk about? Only Diaghilev, Aldous Huxley, Chesterton, the chase after women?

From the past, our memory snatches the unusual; that is what sticks most. And the everyday, workaday anxieties, worries, conversations? Those are the main thing. But that has not been preserved.

Like a knight from a *bylina* [traditional heroic poem], Gumilyov found himself at a crossroads. Turn right or left—either way, ill luck is waiting with a torch.

Return to Russia?

His future wife, Anya Engelhardt, wrote him from Petrograd as early as December 1917:

"I cannot and do not want to call you here, Kolya, to insist that you come. That would be far too selfish. You know, here in Petersburg now it's nasty, dreary, everyone is running off somewhere... It is truly hard to live here." [35]

He never received that letter. It reached London half a year later, in June 1918. But he knew what things were like in Petrograd and in Russia in general. How could he not? The English and French papers. And all around him Russians—of course that's what they talked about.

Stay abroad?

It was well known that a multitude of people had fled Petrograd—those whom Gumilyov could count as belonging to his social estate, his circle, as they say.

Gleb Struve, citing, to be sure, the stories of Georgy Ivanov, wrote that an opportunity presented itself in London for Gumilyov to go to Africa for a long time.

"He refused an honorable, well-paid appointment in Africa that his influential English friends had arranged for him. A steamer bound for Russia arrived. The preparations were brief. The well-wishers presented Gumilyov with a gray cap from a shining hatter's shop on Piccadilly..." [36]

It is hard to establish whether there really was a chance to receive an "honorable, well-paid appointment in Africa." But even if there was—the return home was dearer.

In April 1918 he set out from London for Petrograd. The route was hard—through Murmansk—twelve days.

His English acquaintances might well have been taken aback by his return to a country where the blaze of civil war was already kindled. Many probably thought him mad. Well, Igor Guberman wrote not long ago—

*No more foolish than the rest are they  
who, in everyday insanity,  
remembering Pompeii perfectly,  
again took lodgings on Vesuvius.*

And that complacency so typical of us, the hope for a miracle—this contemporary put it neatly too—

*There's not yet a crowd on the scaffold square,  
no clanging yet from the watchtower;  
and at a friendly table tomorrow's executioners  
sit with us.*

## **"THE GULLS ARE LURING US TO PORT SAID"**

*And still the soul goes on, proud of its allotment,  
Toward fields that don't exist—but golden all the same,  
And the body hurries after it, growing faint,  
And the earth smells of decay, enticingly.  
—Gumilyov*

He returned. And the same crossroads. What to do? Live and work under the new regime? Fight against it? Or perhaps emigrate?

He knew that officers—those he had fought shoulder to shoulder with in the German War—were now fighting the Bolsheviks. And they expected the same of him, a combat officer, a St. George knight. General Krasnov, whose book *Cossacks in Abyssinia* he had studied before his journeys, first commanded an unsuccessful White offensive on Petrograd, then, having been elected ataman of the Don Host, he raised a Cossack army and tried to take Tsaritsyn.

"We, his former comrades-in-arms who remained alive after the mass shootings of officers by the Bolsheviks in 1918, were astonished that he took no part in the Civil War," a fellow soldier recalled many years later.[37]

Gumilyov's younger son, Orest Nikolaevich Vysotsky, was not astonished; he asserted: "Father was a man of action... If he had been an enemy of Soviet power, he would likely have fought in Denikin's army. But he, on the contrary, began to cooperate conscientiously with Soviet power when its position was still shaky..."[38]

Soviet power, I am sure, could hardly have caused delight in Gumilyov. But the fact remains: on returning home he chose to stand aside from the fray. In one of his, perhaps last, poems he said this outright:

*You know that I am not a Red,  
But neither am I White—I am a poet! [39]*

Emigrate? Sergei Konstantinovich Makovsky, with whom Gumilyov had worked so many years in *Apollon*, was in emigration. And not only he. Many of those fates were joined to Gumilyov in life and letters had emigrated or were about to.

"Gumilyov returns to Russia—already Soviet... Why didn't he stay and wait in London? He who openly said he was devoted to the idea of monarchy; he who loved the world, the exotic, freedom; a seafarer, a hunter—why did he return to that 'dull and sinful land,' as Akhmatova called Russia?"

Posing these questions, Nikolai Otsup gave his answer: "Gumilyov's poetry, that of a Russian European, sinks strong roots into Russian soil." [40]

But is that answer sufficient? What of those comrades-in-arms who went to Denikin's Volunteer Army, to Yudenich, to Kolchak—did they love Russia less? They fought against Soviet Russia, while Gumilyov returned to it, lived and worked in that Russia while civil war raged around. He never made moves to appear on the other side of the front. As for his part in the "Tagantsev conspiracy"—if it happened at all, it was not the main meaning of his life, though the reckoning proved so tragic. And by then it was already 1921, after the Civil War— not '18, not '19, not '20.

And now it turns out that conspiracy did not exist at all. And as for any wish by Gumilyov to emigrate, it seems only Nemirovich-Danchenko mentions it.

Why did an officer, a nobleman, hardly inclined to love the Bolsheviks, behave thus? Otsup offered no answer. And it is not easy to find one.

For Gumilyov not only remained in Red Petrograd. He lived very actively. He not only wrote and translated poems and not only served as editor, but taught the young, built his own school. Opportunities arose that he had not had before, and he tried to take advantage of them. And precisely in those years, he achieved the greatest recognition and honor of his life—the status of a maître.

He returned at the end of April 1918. Already on May 13 he read poems in the hall of the Tenishev School, and in December began teaching a poetry course at the Institute of the Living Word, opened in that building. At year's end he joined the editorial board of Gorky's new publishing house World Literature and, until his last days, worked energetically for it.

In 1918 his poetry collections *The Bonfire*, *The Porcelain Pavilion*, a second edition of *Pearls*, and a third of *Romantic Flowers* appeared. Separate booklets published "Mik" and "The Child of Allah."

He tried to continue his series "Letters on Russian History." The time was ill-suited; it had become almost impossible to print purely literary-critical articles. And yet one such article appeared soon after his return—in the Petrograd paper *Life of Art* for November 1, 1918.

It was a review of the anthology *Arion*, which printed poems by young poets. He praised most of all Georgy Maslov. And Anna Regatt (the pseudonym of Elena Mikhailovna Tagor). Noting Akhmatova's influence on her poems, he wrote: "But does that diminish their merit? Akhmatova has taken in hand nearly the whole sphere of women's feelings, and every contemporary poetess, in order to find herself, must pass through her work."

So he wrote of the verses of the woman who had just left him...

In 1919 he taught in the literary studios of Proletkult, the Baltic Fleet, the Institute of the Living Word, the Institute of the History of the Arts, and the translation studio at World Literature. He joined the council of the Union of Workers in Artistic Literature and the literary council of the House of the Arts. His translation of *Gilgamesh* came out. And *Ballads of Robin Hood*, edited by Gumilyov.

1920. At the House of the Arts in January he read his poems at the first evening of contemporary poetry. In March—another evening there; in August—a lecture; in September—another appearance. In November he read poems at an evening of contemporary poetry at the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow. There were many other performances.

In October 1920, after an evening at the Poets' Club on Liteiny, Blok writes in his diary: "Gumilyov presides." "All under Gumilyov." "...it is unbearable to listen to the general Gumilyov chanting."

In February 1921 Gumilyov in Petrograd was elected chairman of the Union of Poets, , replacing Blok,

And afterwards, in the spring of 1921, according to the recollections of the painter Vladimir A. Milashevsky, he proclaimed: "We'll soon organize an All-Russian Union of Poets!.. First we'll organize the All-Russian Union of Poets, and then the World Union of Poets." [41]

Even these few facts show how intense his life was and what recognition he achieved in literary circles. And he was proud of these successes. As of his success with women.

This does not mean his life was easy. Quite the contrary. Hungry Petersburg. Hungry ruined Russia. And he had to think of his wife, Anya Engelhardt, their daughter Elena, his son Lev, his mother, who lived in Bezhetsk. He wrote, translated, edited... Along with all that, according to surviving testimony, he "intended to work in the Petrograd branch of LITO of the People's Commissariat of Education and negotiated about it." [42]

How did Gumilyov feel in Bolshevik Petrograd? Did he rebel? How? Piously, in full view of passersby, he crossed himself toward churches. At an evening with Baltic sailors, he read from his African poems—

*I gave him a Belgian pistol  
And a portrait of my sovereign.*

One sailor, in the commissar's presence, asked: "So, citizen lecturer, what helps to write good poems?"

"In my view—wine and women," the citizen lecturer calmly replied.

Now the investigative file on the "group of Professor Tagantsev," for which Gumilyov was shot, has been published. But it is laconic and murky. Can one form a clear idea from it of Gumilyov's political views or even his mood then?

One can state confidently, I repeat: however distant he was from politics, the order established in October 1917 could not please him; but he did not want to sneak into the White army, nor did he try to emigrate.

How to explain this?

Odoevtseva's recollections. "Only then and there in Petersburg did one feel that ardent, living bond between listeners and poets, that love. Ovations, endless calls. Poets were seized with a sense of happiness from the listeners' grateful rapture. It seemed that everyone was a friend to poets. Ready for any sacrifice for the poets. If need be—to give the last they had."

Odoevtseva compared those memories with what she experienced later, after leaving Russia. "Here, in emigration, it is simply impossible to imagine how people listened to, how they loved poets in those fabulous years in Petersburg—and all over Russia. Marina Tsvetaeva was right when she wrote: 'From the country where my poems were needed as bread, in '22 I came to a country where neither my poems nor poetry at all are needed by anyone.'"

"Yes," Odoevtseva continued, "poetry then was needed no less than bread. Otherwise, how could all those weary, hungry people, after an exhausting day of work, find the strength to walk on foot, sometimes across the whole of Petersburg, just to hear and see the poets?"[43]

Of course we must, I repeat, make allowances—for the raptures of youth, magnified by memories in later years. In that same Petrograd, Blok felt differently. And Odoevtseva herself, soon after Gumilyov's death, left the country and returned only when she was over ninety.

And yet there is truth in those words. It was precisely Gumilyov, "the dandy exquisite giraffe," as the children in the House of Writers called him, who managed to find himself in the literary Petrograd of that time. That is why he was chosen head of the Union of Poets. This naturally affected his world-feeling. Ambition and even vanity were hardly alien to him. This passed to those around him—people like Odoevtseva.

His fame greatly pleased him—such as he had not managed to win before the revolution. And now he was even inclined to exaggerate his popularity. To the point that when warned of the danger of his reckless actions, he calmly shook his head:

"They're unlikely to dare touch me. I am too well known."[44]

"A gadabout who liked to call himself a tramp, who grumbled even at the woman he loved for chaining him to one place when he was drawn to the open sea, to unknown—or already known but distant—lands, the poet suddenly found himself a prisoner of the starving northern capital, from which it was unthinkable to set out anywhere without special permissions."

But Nikolai Otsup, having written these lines, thought that in Petrograd of 1918–1921 Gumilyov had found a worthy substitute for his travels. "At the World Literature publishing house, where Gorky, on the advice of connoisseurs, entrusted Gumilyov with editing verse translations from French and English, the poet at last worked side by side with scholars whom he teased in verse but secretly always respected... In 1918–1921 there was probably no Russian poet equal to Gumilyov in the dynamism of continuous, varied literary work... Gumilyov's role as an inspired organizer became firmly established."

Otsup's testimony is very interesting. It was precisely then that he knew Gumilyov well and worked with him. And long since in emigration, in the 1950s, he wrote of the satisfaction Gumilyov derived from his teaching at the Institute of the Living Word, in the House of the Arts studio, from lectures in various halls, from unceasing work with books. "It was given him to slake this thirst for reading and scholarship in Soviet Petersburg."

And an interesting conclusion: "Without sympathizing with the revolution, he drew vigor from its element—as if a terrible storm had caught him on a ship, intoxicating him with danger and the fresh salty spray of waves." [45]

The same was asserted by Irina Odoevtseva. And she ended her book about those years with Gumilyov like this:

"No, I feel it, I know it—never and nowhere again shall I be as happy as here, on the banks of the Neva." [46]

We, witnesses of the collapse of the communist regime and all today's hardships, can probably not imagine how our grandparents felt the collapse of their world—the prerevolutionary one. Devastation, disarray. The same fear of tomorrow... Everything familiar, whatever it was, collapsed. It was impossible to return to the former. How to live on? What to do? Is it easy not to be confounded, not to lose oneself?

Of the first three post-revolutionary years Yevgeny Zamyatin wrote: "...we all together were shut up in a steel shell—and in darkness, in tightness, with a whistle we rushed who knows where. In these death-seconds-years one had to do something, arrange oneself and live in the racing shell."

And straightaway—about Gumilyov, with whom Zamyatin worked at World Literature: "Gumilyov, as always, full of joie de vivre; some promising projects and schemes." [47]

Gumilyov managed not to lose himself. That brief last stretch of life after returning home turned out to be his most creative. Chukovsky called it Gumilyov's Boldino Autumn.[48]

Gumilyov himself was sure that his activity and that of his colleagues was fruitful, useful, needed. And when attacks on World Literature appeared in the foreign press, he answered with a letter:

"...in our hard and terrible time, the salvation of the country's spiritual culture is possible only through the work of each in the field he had freely chosen before. Not through the fault of the publishing house does its staff work under conditions which our comrades abroad can hardly even imagine. One might pass by in silence, but only those who do not understand what they are doing—or do not respect themselves can snigger and hoot at it."[49]

Perhaps we can apply to Gumilyov the words by which many of my generation found the sense of their lives:

*I did not join the fighters' ranks,  
I lived—askew;  
My share in history—a face  
That I preserved.*

Fyodor Stepun—whom in 1922 they expelled from Russia with many scholars and cultural figures—wrote later in his memoirs: "There were horrors enough in Russia after October, but even so it was not all darkness. A tense spiritual life still burned; a faith still breathed that perhaps all this would pass."

Philosopher Nikolai Onufriyevich Lossky—also forced in 1922 to leave his homeland—assessed the October Revolution so: "The Bolshevik Revolution is striking confirmation of the extremes to which Russian people can go in their bold search for new forms of life and ruthless destruction of the values of the past. Truly, Russia is a land of unlimited possibilities..."[50]

And even after that shameful expulsion, and after Gumilyov's execution, in 1922–1924 Yakov Protazanov returned to Russia, and Pyotr Chardynin, and Aleksandr Khanzhonkov, and many others.

And the years—1918 to the early '20s! How terrible they seem to us now!

How complicated history is—and perhaps even more complicated is its reception by descendants!

How views of those years have changed. Not so long ago, it was customary to see in them only the revolutionary smashing of all that was obsolete, revolutionary creation, revolutionary romance. And now? Now the other side is being romanticized. "Cornet Obolensky... Cornet Obolensky."

For several decades we remembered Khodynka and the victims of Bloody Sunday, but did not mourn the killing of the last autocrat and his family. Now, on the contrary, the Tsar's execution meets with broad condemnation, but far less often do people recall January Ninth and Khodynka.

How might one succeed in remembering both the one and the other? Not to see in the past only two colors—black and white, not to divide the departed into angels and devils. And yet it somehow doesn't work.

And if it doesn't work, it is hard to understand Gumilyov's life in those years.

Hunger, ruin, terror—and such a surge of interest in poetry! He, Gumilyov—a nobleman. As they said then—tsarist officer. He left his shoulder boards and St. George crosses in England with Boris Anrep, fearing to carry them back to a rebellious homeland, where nobles and tsarist officers were not in favor at all. But here's the paradox—he occupied in society a far more honored place than when nobles and tsarist officers held power.

And literally on the eve of his arrest—perhaps connected with a new romantic infatuation—he said, if we trust Odoevtseva's recollections:

"I feel I have entered the most fortunate stretch of my life."[51]

It remains to say once again: history is a hard thing to comprehend.

*It's all too easy to lose one's way in the past  
And never find the road back.*

So—did Gumilyov have political, social sympathies and antipathies?

He proclaimed his credo immediately upon returning home, amid the height of the revolutionary storm. It seemed the very air was saturated with political struggle, but Gumilyov, going against the grain, categorically separated poetry from politics.

"However historians of literature tried to derive its various schools from events of public life, their attempts inevitably failed, especially in relation to poetry... And the clearer a poet is conscious of himself as a political actor, the darker for him become the laws of his 'holy craft.'" To support this idea Gumilyov cited Goethe's words: "A political song is a wretched song."[52]

True, in that same article he noted that he liked the lines by Elena Tager:

*Lord, how much sorrow there is in Russia,  
It is terrible to think!  
There is no merriment in Russia,  
There is no joy!*

But those lines contained no direct accusation against any definite political forces.

All who knew Gumilyov emphasized his lack of interest in anything connected with politics. Unless one counts a brief infatuation with Marxism in his school years in Tiflis. Soon after returning to Tsarskoe Selo, it passed. The First Russian Revolution stirred the whole country, but in Gumilyov it seems to have caused no special excitement. In any case, Nikolai Otsup recalled: "I see a dapper schoolboy who does not share the infatuation with revolution, standing far from events, haughty, withdrawn, already consumed by the thirst for fame."[53]

Officials could, without any qualms, issue him a "certificate of reliability" for university admission—stating that "by the inquiries made, Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilyov has in the political regard been noticed in nothing blameworthy."[54]

But neither did he burn with loyalist feeling. At his final school exam he could not manage better than a "3" (satisfactory) in Scripture.

In February 1917, Otsup noted: "Toward the revolution he is cold. He is in a hurry to leave."[55]

"Cold" to the February Revolution... What does that mean?

In the last years of Gumilyov's life, the same hot disputes flared that now torment our whole society. It was then that two views, two poles, appeared. One: that the Bolshevik regime has nothing in common with Russia's traditions and was brought by alien ideas of the West—or even that the revolution was made by Jews.

And the other: that all Russia's past prepared the ground for just such a social order. They cite Saltykov-Shchedrin, Herzen. They cite Marquis de Custine, reading whom one is amazed how many frightfully familiar features of our reality he discerned more than a century and a half ago.

And they rightly cite the letter written in 1906 to Nicholas II by the statesman and philosopher Prince Evgeny Nikolaevich Trubetskoy. It contained a dire warning: the "command-administrative" order of the Russian Empire "is doomed to perish." Trubetskoy appealed to the monarch: "...if you delay abolishing it, if you do not hasten to remove counselors brought up in its lore, you yourself will be buried under its ruins. And with you will perish our best future, our hope for a peaceful renewal of the motherland."[56] Did the autocrat heed the opinion of this representative of the most educated part of his subjects? Or the letter that Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich sent the Tsar a few days before the February Revolution: "...the government is today that organ which is preparing the revolution... the government uses every possible measure to make as many as possible discontented—and fully succeeds in this."[57]

Anatol Shpolyansky, who wrote under the pen name Don Aminado, once said that happy nations play sports, and unhappy ones argue about the causes of their unhappy fate.

Gumilyov's generation lived on these arguments—as do we now, with the return of glasnost. How did Gumilyov take part in them? Whose side did he take? What arguments did he advance? Was he also "cold"? Could that be?

It would seem that in hungry Petrograd there was no longer room for romantic dreams of far-off lands. Nor for surrendering to memories... When? Why?

There was no hope of a new journey. But far lands remained—in his spoken stories, his lectures, his poems.

With those memories and poems he performed not only in the House of Arts studio, the Institute of the Living Word, in Proletkult and the literary milieu in general, but also before Red Army soldiers and Baltic Fleet sailors. He would arrive at lectures, listeners recalled, with a motley briefcase—Gumilyov called it his "African" one. In 1920 *Vestnik literatury* printed a notice: "Living in the First 'House of Rest' on the Neva, N. S. Gumilyov, while resting, from time to time gave evening readings of his poems and reminiscences of his African wanderings." [58]

In place of real travels came mental ones again. One of the best poems of 1920 is "Sentimental Journey." A journey in the mind—across the Black and Mediterranean seas to the Red Sea.

*The gulls lure us to Port Said,  
A scorching wind from the desert blew.  
On the right lies Crete,  
On the left dear Rhodes.*

*There's Lesseps' wide mole,  
Blinding white houses.  
A hum, as if from a swarm of bees,  
And a bustle on the quay.*

Distant lands and love, hopes and disappointments, are interwoven, as always.

*Only you remember—and gone around  
Are slender palms, the fountain is still;  
To ride farther, southward bound,  
No big steamer waits at the sill.  
Petersburg's spiteful night;  
I'm alone, pen in hand,  
And no one can help  
My hopeless longing.*

In July 1918, at the Hyperborean press, a separate booklet appeared: *Mik. An African Poem*.

The critics received the poem rather coolly. "Let world catastrophes shake mankind, let the earth crumble from underground blows—through the gardens of Russian letters peacocks strut, horned cats, and, stretching its long neck, with measured step the 'exquisite giraffe' strolls." So wrote Ivanov-Razumnik. He titled the review "The Exquisite Giraffe." [59]

Another review was even more merciless: "...The strangest of Gumilyov's books. Something between Kipling and... Charskaya. For children—too convoluted and dull; for adults—awkward and... also dull." That notice was called "A Requiem for Gumilyov." [60]

But more important to Gumilyov, probably, was his own son's reaction. His son liked the poem. It didn't seem "convoluted" to him. It became the content of his boyish games with his father.

And chiefly, this much-suffering poem did see the light, though, it seemed, at the most unsuitable moment.

In the summer of 1920, at World Literature, he edited H. Rider Haggard's novel *Allan Quatermain* and wrote a preface. It seems that edition never appeared, but I hope the preface manuscript will still be found. From it we could better understand how, already in mature years, Gumilyov regarded Africa, the romance of far journeys, and the adventure literature he had loved when young.

To his very last days he most loved to draw an African landscape with tall, broad-armed palms, lions, camels—and "myself with a gun in hand." Such a drawing was in the album of poems he gave Odoevtseva. After his arrest her relatives burned the album.

In 1981 the Paris newspaper *Russkaya mysl'* reproduced a previously unpublished Gumilyov autograph—on a book by the Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats. In Gumilyov's hand: "From this copy I translated *The Countess Cathleen*, thinking only of the one to whom this book belonged." And the date: May 25, 1921—just over two months before his arrest.

The paper said it had not been possible to establish to whom the book belonged or where Gumilyov's translation had gone.

And under the autograph—a familiar sketch. A palm, a big crocodile, and the sun shining in the sky. [61]

But the main link with far-off lands was the collection *The Tent*.

## THE LAST COLLECTION

*The very sound of those words is to me like sunlight,  
Like a roll of drums, it wakes my dream.*

— Gumilyov

*The Palm-Bearing Mountain,*  
*Gumilyov's Tent.*

— Odoevtseva

To all of us, it seems *The Tent* is most tied to Gumilyov's passion for Africa. There are poems about the Red Sea, Egypt, the Sahara, the Suez Canal, Sudan, Abyssinia, Liberia, the Somali Peninsula, Madagascar, Dahomey; about the Galla and Damara peoples, the Zambezi and the Niger.

And when people want to speak of that passion, they most often quote the prologue to *The Tent*:

*Deafened by roar and thunder,*  
*Clothed in flame and smoke,*  
*Of you, my Africa, in a whisper*  
*The seraphim speak in the heavens.*

African impressions really did give him a surge of creative energy. Even a map of Africa, even the simple listing of African rivers and cities—"the regal Niger," "the city of shining roofs, Timbuktu"...

Africa was for him a "reflection of paradise." In his poems it is colored in festive, joyful tones.

*The Gardener of the Almighty God,*  
*In a silvering mantle of wings,*  
*Created a reflection of Eden:*  
*He spread shady groves*  
*Of whimsical mimosas and acacias,*  
*Set baobabs upon the hills,*  
*In galleries of forests, cool*  
*And bright as a Doric temple,*  
*He led full-flowing rivers*  
*And in a mighty surge of rapture*  
*Created tranquil Lake Chad.*

*And then, smiling like a boy*  
*Who's thought up a droll prank,*  
*He gathered here unheard-of,*  
*Marvelous birds and beasts.*  
*Taking colors from desert sunsets,*  
*He painted parrots' wings,*  
*Gave the elephant tusks whiter*  
*Than clouds of the African sky,*  
*Clothed the lion in golden raiment*

*And dressed the leopard in spots,  
Gave the rhinoceros an amber horn,  
Gave the gazelle a maiden's eyes.*

Yet after spending several months in Abyssinia, N. I. Vavilov brought back different impressions. This is clear in his cycle "Abyssinia," and in his article on Harar published in *Rech'* at the start of 1913, entitled "The City of Ras Makonnen." Poverty, destitution, lepers...

And Vavilov wrote of such difficulties of travel as brawls among caravan men, clashes with highway bandits whom they barely bought off, and the complexity of buying food: "here it is all barter."

In Gumilyov's verse, bivouac life is always joyous.

*How I loved to roam such roads,  
To see at evening stars like chickpeas,  
To run up hills after a long-horned goat,  
To burrow for the night in graying moss!*

Vavilov: "We pitch the tent... I am writing my diary by a small lamp. The whole floor of the tent begins to stir, covered with a vast number of large black solpugids [arachnids that are fierce predators with large jaws] and scorpions... The solpugids climb onto the cots, opening their jaws. We jump out of the tent, some already stung, and must leave this dangerous spot... Clearly, the solpugids and scorpions came into the tent for the light. To put out the light would mean to leave a significant number of uninvited guests inside. I guess to carry the lamp outside. The effect is immediate—mass exit of solpugids and scorpions. I narrow the lamp's slit of light, and literal drilling begins. The solpugids and scorpions line up along the beam; gradually a straight living line forms, but some dawdle. Then I bring the lamp back into the tent. All the remaining solpugids and scorpions gather on the narrow strip of light. Politely, quietly carrying out the lamp, I lead the rearguard from the tent and leave the lamp outside. The tent is cleared; one can sleep." [62]

In Gumilyov's work, against the overall festive background, only very rarely do you find a line like "there is no land more cheerless than theirs," or:

*In this desolate land of Sidamo  
Not even trees will grow.*

First of all, this came from the general romantic key of Gumilyov's art. That is how he saw—or wanted to see. For he even managed to show the bloody mash of the First World War as festive. In *Notes of a Cavalryman* you find phrases like "everyone's mood was idyllic." And how many would write of a dangerous reconnaissance: "We crept like boys playing heroes from Mayne Reid or Gustave Aimard"?

Despair and hopelessness were not alien to Gumilyov, but he suppressed them and tried to let them appear in verse as little as possible—likely because those moods were so typical among many poets of his time. It is hard to imagine him addressing God with bitter reproaches for a badly made world, as the future Mother Maria did:

*Take me off Thy earth:  
this drunken, beggarly, talentless one...*

Even so, in Gumilyov's African poems there is not only romance but a hoard of knowledge. You constantly meet names of cities, tribes, personages, customs—often little known to the reader then, and perhaps now as well. With Gumilyov these realities are not mere mentions; they have their own color, hue, aroma—and precisely those that belong to them in reality, though often in romanticized form. Of Abyssinia, Somalia, Egypt there is no need to speak—he saw those lands with his own eyes. But even when he mentions Darfur, Kordofan, Bornu, where he never was, even there he writes accurately, as of something familiar.

One is convinced of this especially when reading *The Tent*.

Yet of all Gumilyov's collections, it is this one that raises the most questions and perplexities. On what occasion were these poems written? Do they reflect the impressions of journeys—or dreams of journeys?

And even—when, in fact, did these poems come from Gumilyov's pen? Their dating depends on whether they were (at least in part) written from personal impressions or from literary associations.

One would think there's no room for argument. He published this collection himself. Surely he treated its publication attentively—not because *The Tent* turned out to be the last collection in his lifetime (Gumilyov, I think, did not foresee that), but because he had been unable for several years to bring out any book of his own. *The Tent* was the first after such a long break.

*The Tent* came out in the summer of 1921 in Sevastopol. Giving it the subtitle "Poems of 1918," Gumilyov told the reader directly that the poems were written after the journeys to Africa and therefore were based, at least in part, on travel impressions.

But in Anna Akhmatova's notebook it says: "*The Tent* is a commissioned geography book in verse and has no relation to his travels." In conversation with me she insisted, too—that although the commission, probably from Grzhebin, dated to the time after Gumilyov's return from England, still some poems of *The Tent* were conceived, and perhaps written earlier, though not in full.

In her assertions Akhmatova is not alone. Nikolai Avdeevich Otsup had the same opinion. Publishing Gumilyov's *Selected* in Paris, he put the dates "1907–1913" after the title *The Tent*. Otsup was so sure of his dating that he did not even deem it necessary to

explain it. As for the editors of the America-published collected works, they also mentioned "the opinion sometimes voiced that these poems were written by Gumilyov much earlier."

As to the subtitle "Poems of 1918," Akhmatova told me that one should not attach much weight to it—Gumilyov might have said that for a variety of reasons. The same with the dedication to Sverchkov—Gumilyov more than once wrote dedications to old poems. She did mention, though, that it was hard for her to speak of Gumilyov's work in 1918. That year they separated; each created a new family. And before that Gumilyov had long been abroad.

1918 was very difficult for Gumilyov, but that's not the point, Anna Andreevna stressed that some of those poems belong to an earlier time. Why were they not published then? Well, perhaps Gumilyov set them aside to rework after the journeys. But after the journeys—there was the front, trips around Europe. And when he returned, in the Civil War years, Petrograd publishers had no time for poetry. She linked their reworking and the preparation of the whole collection for print with the revival of publishing activity and the appearance of publishing houses seeking to use the production capacities of neighboring countries—Germany, Latvia, Estonia. Grzhebin's house was only one of these.

So how then do the poems of *The Tent* relate to Gumilyov's wanderings or not? And when were they written? One is tightly bound up with the other.

As to how he worked on *The Tent*, we have the testimony of the writer Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko. After his return to Russia, Gumilyov once came to him and asked for any drawings made by Africans. Nemirovich himself had spent long periods traveling in Africa, and Gumilyov hoped to find something in his collections.

"What for?"

"I'm writing geography in verse... the most poetic of sciences, and they make of it some dry herbarium. Now I'm on Africa—the black tribes. One must show how they imagine the world."

Nemirovich recalled: "I saw the first printed sheets..." He must have meant the second edition of *The Tent*—in Revel/Tallinn. He might even have been connected with that edition. According to him, shortly before his arrest, Gumilyov came to him, Nemirovich, "to meet Mr. Org, then head of the Estonian mission in Russia. Org at the same time was the representative of a newly formed publishing house in Revel, Biblioofil. N. S. sold him new poems, and, having settled terms, hurried to the House of Muruzi on Liteiny, where he was to open a new poets' circle." [63]

On the last page of the Revel edition of *The Tent*, we read: "This edition is printed from the manuscript delivered to the publisher by N. S. Gumilyov in the summer of 1921." It is likely that Gumilyov handed over the manuscript to Org in Nemirovich's flat;

Nemirovich could have seen the "first sheets" of that edition. He emigrated from Russia in 1921 (that same year, his memoirs *In the Cemeteries* appeared in Revel.).

Ida Moiseyevna Nappelbaum was Gumilyov's pupil in "The Sounding Seashell." In 1989 she recalled:

"Gumilyov's new little book was *The Tent*. He proudly signed it for everyone, and I forgot to bring the book to class. 'Oh, come now!' said Nikolai Stepanovich—'I will come to your birthday the day after tomorrow, and there I'll sign the book. That will be your present.' But on August 3, 1921, Gumilyov did not come to my birthday. We waited a long time for him at the big oval table in our flat on Nevsky. A treat had been procured for the birthday—a jug of sugar and sandwiches... Alas, we were not fated to meet our maître again!"[64]

But most of all, perhaps, Nikolai Tikhonov told. He prepared an interesting series of radio programs in the "Sound Book" slot, beginning on October 28, 1974, repeated more than once; I managed to obtain the text. They are titled "About the Time and About Myself." In the very first broadcast Tikhonov told of his acquaintance with Gumilyov. It took place in 1921, a few months before *The Tent* appeared. I will quote in full the passage relating to this collection.

"...Suddenly Gumilyov disappeared somewhere. They said he had gone to rest in the Crimea. And when he came back, he did not come back alone. With him came a man who later became a very great friend of mine. This was Sergei Kolbasyev, a naval commander, young, highly educated. He spoke four languages. He was a merited hero of the Civil War. He fought on the Volga, on the Sea of Azov; he commanded a destroyer in the Black Sea. He himself wrote verse and knew English and French poetry excellently. He met Gumilyov in the Crimea, and Gumilyov even introduced him into one of the poems of *The Pillar of Fire*. He wrote: 'The lieutenant who led gunboats under the fire of enemy batteries spent a whole night over the southern sea reciting my poems by heart to me.' The poem was titled 'My Readers.'"

According to Tikhonov, Kolbasyev published *The Tent* in the Crimea. "The thing is that once some publisher had planned a school series of books about the different continents: Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa. Gumilyov took Africa, since in his time he had been on an Academy of Sciences expedition to Abyssinia and even brought back many objects now in the museum. Well, Kolbasyev published this book in utterly makeshift fashion. I don't know where he got the coarse paper on which it was printed, and the binding he made from blue paper used to wrap sugar loaves, which were issued on the sailors' ration. Of course there were a devil of a lot of misprints in this book. When Gumilyov brought *The Tent* and showed up with it at the Muruzi House, he was immediately surrounded by admirers, especially members of 'The Sounding Seashell,' and they all begged him for a copy. And he handed it out. I held back. Gumilyov came up to me, inscribed one of the copies, and said:

'I want to give you my book.'

I thanked him and, to my astonishment, read the brief inscription he had made: 'To an excellent poet, Nikolai Semyonovich Tikhonov. Gumilyov.'

One can easily imagine what the publication of this book meant to Gumilyov. Since 1918 he had brought out no collection at all.

He had the right to consider *The Tent* the first swallow. There was already a glimmer of hope that *The Pillar of Fire* would soon appear, that *Pearls*, *The Bonfire*, *The Porcelain Pavilion* would be reissued.

And indeed very soon, in the autumn of 1921, *The Pillar of Fire* and a second edition of *Pearls* came out. In 1922 second editions of *The Bonfire* (at Grzhebin's), *The Pillar of Fire*, *The Tent*, and *The Porcelain Pavilion* appeared.

But of all that, Gumilyov lived to see only the Sevastopol *Tent*—and even that only a few weeks before his death...

Sergei Adamovich Kolbasyev, who, according to Tikhonov, helped publish *The Tent*, had just turned twenty-three. He was not yet a well-known writer, had not yet won fame with *All Hands on Deck!* That was still ahead—as was a tragic end, a decade and a half later than Gumilyov's.

"The lieutenant who led gunboats" in "My Readers" is, of course, Kolbasyev. In 1920 he commanded the second division of gunboats of the Azov Naval Flotilla and captained the gunboat *Banner of Socialism*.

In June 1921, when Gumilyov traveled briefly to the Crimea, Kolbasyev was head of operations at the staff of the active Black Sea Squadron and acting commander of the division of destroyers and patrol boats. He held those posts about a year.

The Civil War had ended... In February 1922, at the petition of Commissar of Education Lunacharsky, Gumilyov was detached from the fleet to Petrograd to work at *World Literature*. And Kolbasyev stayed in Crimea only a few months.

In the spring of 1923 Kolbasyev worked in Kabul as a staffer of the Soviet legation in Afghanistan—and brought with him Gumilyov's posthumous collection.

The plenipotentiary representative there, Fyodor Fyodorovich Raskolnikov, loved and knew poetry—unlike many diplomats who came after him.

"Kolbasyev, it turns out, brought a whole library, and I am now swallowing, like oysters, thin brochures of verse," he wrote to Larisa Reisner, then his wife. "Of the posthumous poems of N. G., I liked best 'Invitation to a Journey' and the humorous poem 'The Turkey.'" And he added: "...if I were to start quoting them, my whole letter would turn into verse." [65]

The poems pleased Raskolnikov, but that did not mean he liked the author. In the next letter to his "dear Larisotchka" he explains that Kolbasyev was unpleasant to him for the "vile taste of 'Gumilyovism.'"[66]

What is that? An ideological incompatibility? Or a feeling of jealousy on account of a dearly loved woman? Though by then he should have been jealous not of the past with Gumilyov, but of the future—of the affair with Karl Radek, for whom Larisa would soon leave Raskolnikov.

And by ricochet that memory of Gumilyov affected Kolbasyev's fate. At Raskolnikov's insistence he was recalled from Afghanistan.

...At that time, in the Crimea, a few months before his transfer to Petrograd, Kolbasyev must have spoken at length with Gumilyov about literary matters in general and about World Literature, where he planned to work.

Kolbasyev, especially among first-wave Russian émigrés, was mentioned on suspicion that he was involved in Gumilyov's arrest. No evidence was adduced; people simply compared dates: he met so-and-so, and soon that person was arrested and shot. So wasn't the cause in that acquaintance?

Of course, until the relevant archives are opened, the prehistory of Gumilyov's arrest will remain a mystery. As for Kolbasyev, he seems like an honest, upright man. Love of literature, a writer's talent, a passion for journeying, even an interest in Africa—all these kinship ties bound him to Gumilyov. He translated two novels about the life of the French Foreign Legion in Africa—*The Viking's Funeral* and *The Desert*, by Percival Wren, a writer popular in the West in the 1920s–30s. Both novels appeared as supplements to the magazine *Around the World*.

Kolbasyev was also akin to Gumilyov in his pugnacious character. He allowed himself to make remarks that are harmless in our times, but were provocatively bold in the fearful thirties. For instance:

"I was a Petersburg man, I did not love Moscow, and I loved Kipling."

Viktor Konetsky lamented such indiscretion: "Why rake up such a past of yours, when you've long been living in Leningrad, Moscow has long been the capital, and Kipling is the bard of British imperialism..."[67]

In 1921 on the Black Sea Fleet Kolbasyev held a high enough post to help Gumilyov with the publication of *The Tent*.

It is not impossible that Gumilyov had an even more influential patron there, though Tikhonov did not mention him. This was the commander of the naval forces (*kommorsi*) of the Russian republic, Aleksandr Nemitz—a man with a striking biography. He occupied, of course, an admiral's position, and was called "the First Red Admiral." He

went over to the side of the revolution in 1917; from 1919 he commanded the forces of the Black Sea Fleet. He also took part in land operations: in August 1919, together with Yakir and Gamarnik, he led the breakout of the southern group of the Twelfth Army from the Odessa area toward Zhitomir. From March 1920 he commanded the naval forces of the republic, directed combat operations in the Caspian Sea—against the English—and in the Black Sea—against Wrangel. He retired in 1947 with the rank of vice admiral.

Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote in her memoirs that Nemitz (or, as she calls him, "Nemets") invited Gumilyov "to rest and fatten up." He even sent Vladimir Aleksandrovich Pavlov for him to Petrograd. (Nadezhda Mandelstam calls Vladimir a youth from a good naval family.)

Unfortunately, she said nothing of Gumilyov's trip itself, nor of *The Tent*, nor of Kolbasyev's role. All her attention was focused on the connection between that trip and Gumilyov's near death, on the talk going on among his acquaintances then. In Pavlov people saw a stool pigeon attached to Nemitz—and perhaps to Gumilyov. Vladislav Khodasevich thought so, for example.

Seeing the cause of Gumilyov's death in the post-Kronstadt terror, Nadezhda Yakovlevna nevertheless doubted Pavlov's participation in the arrest. She thought Khodasevich all his life imagined "nets and traps," and that in Petersburg the disease—the mania of seeing stool pigeons everywhere—had reached the highest level.[68]

In 1923 the poet, translator, and remarkable photographer Lev Vladimirovich Gornung spoke with Pavlov. In Gornung's rendering, Pavlov's story of his acquaintance with Gumilyov in 1921 sounds like this:

"At that time Gumilyov had already finally parted with his military uniform, which he still wore after the war. He then dressed in a simple suit, a peasant-shirt with turn-down collar, and a cap shoved back."

V. A. Pavlov served later as flag secretary to Kommor-si Nemitz. In summer, Gumilyov and Pavlov came to Moscow and from there, in Kommor-si Nemitz's salon car, set out for Sevastopol.

N. S. Gumilyov had with him the manuscript of *The Tent*. In Sevastopol, with Pavlov's help, he managed in a very short time to print this little book on poor paper, in a blue cover made of wrapping paper used for sugar loaves. Gumilyov gave the manuscript on the spot to Pavlov, and took the entire print run of the book with him to Petrograd.

Pavlov said that besides the World Literature publishing house, Gumilyov intended to work in the Petrograd branch of LITO of the People's Commissariat of Education and was negotiating about it."[69]

For Nadezhda Mandelstam, Gumilyov's death would eclipse the preceding events of his life. Osip Mandelstam loved Gumilyov so much that after his death he gave up the dream of returning to Petersburg:

— "Where am I to go now? I will not return to Petersburg."

Nadezhda Yakovlevna writes that with Gumilyov's death his native city closed for her husband. "With Gumilyov's demise our 'we' collapsed; the fellowship ended." This feeling, she says, is what prompted the later lines:

*Petersburg, I still have addresses  
By which I will find the voices of the dead.*

Nadezhda Yakovlevna must have known about that trip. Osip Mandelstam had a direct connection to that trip. He used it to travel from Moscow to Petrograd: "...he learned that a man from Nemitz was going to Leningrad to invite Gumilyov to the Crimea, and asked him to procure a ticket for the staff car for him as well. Pavlov fulfilled the request, and Mandelstam went to Petersburg to say goodbye to his father before the 'expedition' to the Caucasus." [70]

Whom could one verify all this with now? One can only repeat Akhmatova's words—"and there are no witnesses to events anymore." Though they left life not so very long ago, not counting Gumilyov himself and Kolbasyev. Nemitz died in 1967, Tikhonov in 1979, Nadezhda Yakovlevna in December 1980.

And after all, Tikhonov had begun to tell it. For those times—the 1970s—even the little he told already took courage: it wasn't permitted to speak about Gumilyov. Tikhonov devoted to him his very first broadcast memoir, almost in full. He must have wanted, at the close of his years, to leave a record of his first steps on the poetic path. And those were tied to Gumilyov.

In 1921 Tikhonov learned from the papers that there existed a Union of Poets in Petrograd. He sent his poems to the admissions committee, which then included, by his account, Blok, Gumilyov, Lozinsky, Kuzmin, and, as secretary, Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky. When Tikhonov came to the House of Arts on the Moika and asked Rozhdestvensky about the result, Rozhdestvensky replied:

— "Oh, we've been looking for you for a long time. Come along; our syndic wants to see you."

Tikhonov's recollections characterize both the atmosphere in Petrograd's poetic milieu and Gumilyov himself during those months when he might have been preparing *The Tent* for publication. So I will quote a rather long passage.

"And I, truth be told, didn't even know what a syndic was. I didn't know that in the 'Guild of Poets,' as in a medieval guild, there was an elder called the syndic. That syndic was Gumilyov.

"Rozhdestvensky led me backstage, and in the room behind the stage I saw the whole 'Guild' headed by Gumilyov. There were Georgy Adamovich, Georgy Ivanov, Nikolai Otsup, Irina Odoevtseva, and Sergei Neldikhen. I knew their poems but was not acquainted with any of them. Gumilyov seemed to me a tall, somewhat gaunt man of slightly athletic bearing. I had read his books—some poems I liked, but on the whole the poets of the Guild group were alien to me. Already then I understood I had another path, my own.

"And so Gumilyov, unexpectedly, greeted me and said:

— We received over a hundred applications, but we admitted you with no candidacy at all, straight into full membership of the Union. We accepted three out of a hundred: Maria Shkapskaya for the book *Mater Dolorosa*, Onoshkevich-Yatsyna for translations of Kipling, and you.

"He began to praise my poems, then asked how I related to the literary milieu. I said I had no relation to it. And the Guild members crowding around me looked at me rather suspiciously and without any sympathy, because I was in an old Red Army greatcoat, as I was on medical leave from the army at the time.

"Gumilyov asked:

— Are you from Petrograd?

— Yes, I am from Petrograd.

— You must not leave Petrograd, he said.

— Why?

— Because soon literary Petrograd will be inconceivable without you, as you without it.

"These words seemed unserious to me; I laughed and said I might be sent anywhere.

"He asked:

— Do you know the Muruzi House?

— Yes.

— Go there; that's where the poets gather.

"That was in April 1921...

"...Gumilyov invited me to visit one of the studios at the House of Arts where he led a seminar, and the young poets who listened to him formed a poetry circle called 'The Sounding Seashell.'

"The name sounded somewhat parodic. I became friends with the artist Myasnikov, who drew a caricature of 'The Sounding Seashell.' He depicted a toilet—i.e., a sounding basin—and designed it as a book cover. Everyone, of course, roared with laughter at the drawing.

"There were ten or twelve in the 'Sounding Seashell,' I think, no more.

"The very famous photographer of the time, Nappelbaum—he even photographed Lenin—patronized the poets. His daughters Frida and Ida wrote verse and were in Gumilyov's studio. Nappelbaum invited poets to his place and organized evenings. As there were many young poets, people simply sat on the floor, and sometimes they would be given a sandwich. But if venerable figures appeared, they sat on chairs. And everyone read poems in turn. There were endless poems. And the bearded old Nappelbaum would appear and tenderly watch his verse-reading daughters. He provided money for the publication of the 'Sounding Seashell' collection. More than that, on his money the almanac *The City* was issued. I was invited to take part and gave a poem.

"When I came to Gumilyov's seminar and spent one session there, I immediately disliked it. I did not like their poems, for they were entirely drawing-room verse—for verse's sake. And besides, I did not like Gumilyov there either. He would appear with one or two volumes—necessarily of French poets—in his hands, which he would theatrically lay on the table. Then he would begin a high-flown lecture, analyzing poems in a purely formalist spirit, like that which was demolished by Blok."

Tikhonov persistently pushes himself away from Gumilyov. Yet Gumilyov's influence—or, perhaps, moods close to his—sound clearly in Tikhonov's verse of 1921–1922. The poem "Islam." And quite in Gumilyov's manner:

*I am a frenzied savage, I am naked.  
A chalk cliff gleams by the gully,  
To the Tuchkov Bridge a schooner was led  
By the gray old crank Stevenson.*

Or:

*I loved to distraction the Mikado,  
With a yellow heart, a wife across the sea.*

Ivan Tkhorzhevsky asserted: "Tikhonov is a direct pupil of the executed Gumilyov." [71]  
In Tikhonov's performances at evenings in the Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental

Languages in the 1920s, what especially stuck in listeners' minds was the romance of far journeys. Boris Filippov, recalling those evenings, cited Tikhonov's verses of that time, so unlike those he wrote later:

*She loved me not with love,  
But hot as fire loves a birch;  
More cheerful than dawn over the encampment  
Her young shoulder shone.*

*But with neither song, nor scolding, nor pact  
We lasted together very long—  
She ran off with a sullen nomad,  
His sharp-sided kaique whistling...[72]*

Tikhonov must have known well the story of *The Tent*'s publication. He befriended Kolbasyev when the latter moved to Petersburg—just a few months after *The Tent* appeared and Gumilyov was killed. Together with two other young poets, Volkov and Vatinov—they founded the fellowship "The Islanders." They even wrote their own manifesto, and Ilya Ehrenburg published it in Prague. When asked why they called themselves islanders—did they live on Vasilyevsky Island?—they proudly answered:

— "No, no, our motto is: from islands, continents grow."

The fellowship soon fell apart. Kolbasyev left for Afghanistan, Vatinov fell ill and died, Volkov stopped writing verse. But the very creation of the Islanders circle is typical of those years, when a multitude of poetic associations arose, each with its own manifesto. This atmosphere was native to Gumilyov. In it he felt like a fish in water.

What did Kolbasyev tell Tikhonov about publication of *The Tent*? Most likely the little that ended up in Tikhonov's reminiscences is based on that. Will we ever learn this story in more detail...

Few copies of that first edition of *The Tent* have survived. My family was fortunate; along with other Gumilyov collections we had this one—and from childhood I remember that little book. On poor paper, with a cover of blue, but a strangely blue hue—like the wrapping paper in which sugar-loaves were sold. In a word, the book differed from the other Gumilyov collections; it was more poorly produced, the print was not so crisp.

That same year, 1921, a second edition of *The Tent* came out—Estonian. Following old Russian custom, in this Russian-language book Tallinn was called Revel. And it was printed, as stated on the last page, not in Revel itself, but in Tartu, at the press of the Joint-Stock Company "Varrak."

Unlike the first edition, the second was on good paper and even with a drawn cover, headpiece, and tailpiece. The artist, N. K. Kolmakov, used African motifs, but in a fantastic manner.

The Revel edition almost immediately became a bibliographic rarity, too. But still not to the same degree as the Sevastopol one. So I'll name, perhaps, just one owner—rather, owneress. I at one time saw three copies of the Revel edition at her place. This was in 1989 in the very cozy village of Sea Cliff on the bay outside New York. Several dozen families of that Russian emigration known as "the first wave" had long been settled there. The mistress of one house, Tatyana Olegovna Rannit, for many years was the principal custodian of the large Slavic holdings of Yale University Library. She had been passionate about Gumilyov since youth, when she lived in Prague, on Buczkova Street (now Roosevelt), where Russian émigrés lived—mainly professors expelled from Petrograd and Moscow in 1922.

In Prague, for a time the main center of the Russian Abroad, linguists Roman Jakobson and N. N. Durnovo, writers Arkady Averchenko and Vasily Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, historians Milyukov and Kizevetter, and a little later the editor of the journal *The Will of Russia* Mark Slonim and the publisher of the *Skete of Poets* collections Alfred Ludwigovich Bem could speak and argue about Gumilyov. And children—in the Russian gymnasium in Strashnice.

Now those grownups, and many of those children, rest in the Russian cemetery at Olsany. Others fate scattered across the world. The historian Sergei Germanovich Pushkarev compiled inventories of Russian archives in Prague and, after the Second World War, at Yale University, published several books on the history of the Russian state.

At Yale, too, Tatyana Olegovna ended up with her husband, the Estonian poet Alexis Rannit, whose verses Igor Severyanin translated into Russian.

Tatyana Olegovna showed me the treasured copies of *The Tent*, bought for her once in Estonia, brought to Prague, and, many years later, moved with her across the ocean. On two of the three *Tents* there were commemorative inscriptions. One was given to Tatyana Olegovna in Prague on her seventeenth birthday, December 12, 1936, by Professor Nikolai Efremovich Andreev, who taught Russian history in Prague and later at Oxford, and by Professor Gorokholinsky, a chemist—he, too, knew and loved Russian literature. The other copy was from the well-known poet Valery Pereleshin. The third had no inscription. Tatyana Olegovna gave it to me, and now I keep it as carefully as she did.

But what, then, of Anna Akhmatova's assertion that *The Tent* is a "commissioned geography book in verse"? This was confirmed by Tikhonov as well. And by Nemirovich-Danchenko.

Whose commission was it? Anna Andreevna supposed Grzhebin's. But *The Tent* was not issued by Grzhebin, but in the Crimea. And clearly not for schools—the print run was far too small. And the second edition not with Grzhebin in Berlin, but in Revel, and, of course, not intended for Russian schoolchildren either.

The Moscow literary scholar Nikolai Alekseevich Bogomolov shared with me two finds. One in the Central State Archive of Literature and Art. On the back of an unfinished story

is written in Gumilyov's handwriting a plan for "Geography in Verse": Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, Polynesia. The plan for the African section: Egypt, Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, the Sahara, Senegal, the West Coast, the Transvaal, Rhodesia, the Forest Belt, Madagascar, Lake Victoria, Abyssinia, Somalia, the Nile, Lake Chad, the Red Sea.

The second find is in the Chukovsky archive at the Russian State Library. It is a receipt of Gumilyov's. He received an advance from the publisher Petersburg for *Geography in Verse*. The date on the receipt is September 24, 1917.

There are the answers. But also new questions. The date on the receipt is certainly wrong: at that time Gumilyov was in Paris. Likely—1918. But the "Petersburg Press"? Petropolis, as a publishing house, began to operate at the end of 1920; Petrograd in 1922. But "Petersburg"? I, in any case, have not managed to find information about it.

And what then—did Gumilyov undertake only Africa? And why did he never fulfill the intention to write about the Transvaal, Rhodesia, Lake Victoria?..

But he did write "Sudan," "Galla," "Liberia," "Zambezi," "Damara."

Who knows—perhaps it really did begin with Grzhebin, but for some reason fell through.

And do Akhmatova's words that *The Tent* have no relation to his travels, and that in general some of those poems were written or conceived long before 1918?

Only under one of Gumilyov's poems are place—"East Africa"—and date—"1913"—indicated. But that poem, "African Night," isn't in *The Tent*. It was published in the collection *The Quiver*.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that Gumilyov wrote all the poems of this by no means small collection within a few months of 1918, a year so packed with events and, doubtless, very difficult.

He had to re-enter Petersburg life. And it had become completely different: revolution, civil war, ruin, hunger. For Gumilyov, entering this life was probably more difficult than for many. He had not really known Petrograd since 1914: the front, with only short leaves home, then France, England. So for him, after his return in the spring of 1918, the changes proved especially striking. Adjusting to them was hard. "He went hungry and shivered with cold... went to the Maltsev Market to sell his last tie, borrowed half a log from acquaintances, spent whole days in the 'House of Literati' because it was warm and light there." [73]

And at the same time, in creative activity other, very rich possibilities opened up: to lead circles of beginning poets, to give lectures...

Not a little attention and energy went into participation in the World Literature publishing house founded by Gorky. The route to Nevsky, 64, by Anichkov Bridge, where the press was first housed, and then to Mokhovaya, 36, where it moved at the start of 1919, became routine for Gumilyov. Taking part in the press's work gave him the chance to meet and collaborate regularly with Blok, Gorky, Lozinsky, Chukovsky, Oldenburg, Marr, Vladimirtsev—with eighty of Petrograd's leading writers, historians, men of letters and scholars who took part in the publishing house. Discussing a prospective plan consisting of fifteen hundred books.

Was it not perhaps communication with Gumilyov that prompted Yevgeny Zamyatin to give one of his plays the title "The African Guest," and one of his stories—"Africa"?

Of that time Zamyatin recalled: "Petersburg—swept clean, emptied out; shops boarded over; houses dismantled for firewood; the brick skeletons of stoves. Frayed cuffs; collars turned up; padded jackets; knitted sweaters—and in a sweater, Blok. Feverish attempts to outstrip need, and some new, momentary, flimsy projects, some new meetings— from meeting to meeting...

And so—late in the evening, after three or maybe four meetings—in one of the little back rooms of 'World Literature.' A dining table, a lamp under a green shade; faces in shadow. Left of the door—a warm tiled bench; on the bench, by the bench—Blok, Gumilyov, Chukovsky, Lerner, and I—and, a chubby top, Grzhebin rolling from corner to corner.

It's hard to fix the waterworks; it's hard to build a house—but very easy to build the Tower of Babel. And we built the Tower of Babel: we'll publish a Pantheon of Russian Literature—from Fonvizin to our own day. One hundred volumes!"[74]

Gumilyov translated and edited. He had to do what, perhaps, was not to his taste. But where to go—Gorky had procured labor rations for the editors and translators of *World Literature*.

Could Gumilyov combine all this hard labor with preparing *The Tent*?

Perhaps Anna Andreevna is right in much—some poems or parts could have been written earlier. But to agree with her assertion that they "have no relation to his journeys" is impossible.

It seems to me unmistakable that in the poems of *The Tent*, though not in all, echoes of the journeys are heard. In the poems about Ethiopia the author constantly writes directly of himself.

*I pitched my tent on the stony slope  
Of Ethiopian hills falling westward,  
And carelessly watched the blazing sunsets  
Over the green roof of far forests.*

Or:

*And, lowing, the bulls ran from me,  
Who had never seen whites.  
At night merry zebras ran out;  
I heard their snort and the thud of hooves.*

In the poem "The Suez Canal" the author is present from the very first line. The poem "The Somali Peninsula" begins with personal impressions.

*I remember night, and I remember the sandy land,  
And the moon so low in the sky.  
And I remember I could not take my eyes  
From her golden path.*

Might all this be merely a poetic device? No—the Acmeists did not care for such things. They considered that they differed from the Symbolists in the clarity, precision, definiteness of their descriptions. With Akhmatova: "The twenty-first, night, Monday." Or: "I came to the poet's house right at noon, on a Sunday." This style was no less inherent in Gumilyov than in Akhmatova.

And in the poems of *The Tent* a clear distinction is visible. When Gumilyov writes about lands where he truly had been, the effect of presence is felt. If the matter is places where he had not been, such direct authorial presence is never there. In "The Niger" the author tells the story as if bent over a map. And in "Madagascar":

*And at night I dreamed: I am sailing  
Along some great river.  
... I lay on my bed  
And grieved for my little boat.*

It is likely that some part of the poems included in *The Tent*—lines, stanzas—Gumilyov may have been thinking out even during his life with Anna Andreevna. That is what she remembered. On the whole, though, the collection was created, of course, after the return from Paris and London: in 1918, and perhaps a little later.

So Gumilyov continued to think of hot Africa in hungry, cold Petrograd. And that warmed him.

And when he was arrested, acquaintances whispered to each other: — "The Tent has been detained." [75]

## **MY TEACHER'S TESTIMONY**

*O, yellowing leaves  
In the evening walls of libraries.*

*When reverie is so pure,  
And the dust is headier than any drug!*  
—Gumilyov

As Gumilyov changed—grew older, matured, grew wiser—the image of Africa in his verse and prose changed too. In "Sudan" from *The Tent*, Africa is no longer what it was in "Chad" and "The Giraffe." "The poems of *The Tent*, so different from the exotic verses of the early collections, have, it seems to me, not been sufficiently appreciated by critics," wrote Gleb Struve.[76]

The reflections in these poems are different as well. In place of the "exquisite giraffe" came "The Sahara," which environmentalists now quote, alarmed for our future.

*And maybe only a few centuries are left,  
Before, on our world, green and old,  
Savage will rush the predatory ranks of sands  
From the ever-burning young Sahara.*

*They will bury the Mediterranean,  
And Paris, and Moscow, and Athens,  
And we will believe in the heavenly lights,  
We Bedouins on our camels.*

*And when, at last, the ships of Martians  
Reach the globe of earth,  
They will see a solid golden ocean  
And give it a name: Sahara.*

Of course, the goal of his travels was not scientific research nor philosophical musings, but new impulses for poetic creation. "In a new setting to find new words." But impressions, in turn, intensified curiosity, interest. New and newer questions arose. In search of answers he had to turn more and more often to books.

To write geography in verse? And how to avoid mistakes, so that the geographers themselves would not laugh at you? Ethnographers, historians, and the reading public.

How much time again had to be spent in libraries, searching, finding, checking.

Of course, to the end of his days he liked to see himself as a poet, traveler, hunter, and warrior, but not a bookworm. In the autobiographical poem "Memory":

*I love freedom's chosen ones,  
The mariner and the marksman...*

If he spoke of himself as a "reader of books," it was more often with a shade of regret. He sang of those.

*Whose breasts are salted not by the dust  
Of musty charters,  
But by the sea,  
Who with a needle on the torn map  
Marks out his daring course...*

How could he wish "to dry up in the cabinet's depths before the dusty piles of books!"  
How many curses he hurled at them!

*And I, as if by giants,  
By solemn elephants,  
From the free life am shut in by books.  
I do not see it, I do not hear it.*

And how, at the same time, he loved them!

Sergei Makovsky believed that Gumilyov not only "loved the book," but that "his thoughts for the most part were bookish." [77] On this point many of Gumilyov's friends and acquaintances agreed.

However much he wandered, far more time had to be spent with books. And, complaining of this, he admitted he liked:

*To sail untiringly the streamlets of lines,  
To enter, impatient, the straits of chapters...*

And most of all, surely, to prepare the "African" poems. Even now it is much harder to find reliable information about Africa than about Europe and Asia. And how much knowledge *The Tent* demanded—of peoples, culture, everyday life, of flora and fauna—so that all this would flash to life in verse both truthfully and vividly.

Gumilyov strove for exactness not only in the African poems. True, he did not always attain it. In the poem "The Stellar Horror" he mentions "a wind from the mountains of Iran on the Euphrates," though those mountains and that great river, as is known, are sufficiently far from each other. Already in the early 1920s, Orientalists noted slips in Gumilyov. In the dramatic tale *The Child of Allah*, Gumilyov makes Hafiz speak with birds in verses whose form is borrowed from the Malays. And in the tragedy *The Poisoned Tunic*, whose action takes place at the beginning of the 6th century A.D., Gumilyov puts neo-Arabic verse into the mouth of a poet of that time. [78]

And yet the geographic and historical range of realities in Gumilyov's work is immense, and the lapses, after all, are few. Besides—who has none? My beloved poet Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy wrote, "...in the sky the cry of an eagle's flocks," though eagles do not fly in flocks. One can cite many such examples among our classics and foreign ones.

But with regard to African realities Gumilyov was meticulous.

My teacher Dmitry Alexeyevich Olderogge even played upon our shared love of Gumilyov to scold me for laziness in my student years, almost half a century ago.

— Judging by *The Tent*, even a poet has to dig through mountains of books. What then about us, once we've signed up as historians...

Dmitry Alexeyevich left a written testimonial attesting to the breadth of Gumilyov's African knowledge. This document (I already mentioned it at the beginning of this book)—a copy of the Sevastopol edition of *The Tent*—belonged to Viktor Andronikovich Manuylov, a connoisseur of Russian poetry, a brilliant raconteur, compiler of the *Lermontov Encyclopedia*.

On the title page is an inscription: "To Viktor Manuylov from the ever-confused Pavel Luknitsky, for our shared love for Gumilyov. Read "The Tent" and love it as I love it. 21.IX.26, Novorossiysk." This copy of *The Tent* was given to Manuylov by the compiler of *The Works and Days of Gumilyov* six and a half decades ago, when both of them were young.

But Manuylov's *The Tent* is interesting not only for that.

Once, having despaired of finding yet another rare book I wanted amid the heaps of his library, Viktor Andronikovich said:

— But I can show you my *The Tent*. Dmitry Alexeyevich must surely have told you about it.

Dmitry Alexeyevich had spoken with me more than once about Gumilyov; at his Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography I examined African objects brought back by Gumilyov from Ethiopia; I copied descriptions of these items drawn up by Gumilyov himself, and I studied the route of his travels on the map that hung in the museum's Africa Hall. But of Manuylov's *The Tent* Dmitry Alexeyevich had never said a word. Evidently, as they say, it just never came up...

— He didn't tell you? Well, then I'm going to surprise you, my dear fellow.

And Viktor Andronikovich showed me this perhaps most unique copy of *The Tent*. All its margins were sown with handwritten annotations, in that beadlike hand of Dmitry Alexeyevich so familiar to me. It turned out Manuylov had once asked him to explain the historical events, geographic names, and designations of tribes and peoples mentioned in the poems. And Dmitry Alexeyevich, in detail and with his characteristic thoroughness, annotated everything—from the legend of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon to aspects of life that are, essentially, modern.

These notes are so interesting that they deserve publication and, of course, ought now to be used in new reprints of *The Tent*.

When I later asked Dmitry Alexeyevich about these notes, he remembered them, though he could no longer say precisely whether he made them on the eve of the Patriotic War or immediately after it.

Here are examples of his annotations.

Gumilyov: *Thank God, it's cool; I am tired of the heat.*

Olderogge: "The Red Sea is one of the hottest places on the globe. On its shore lies the pole of heat."

Gumilyov: *Irrigating the rocks of Damietta.*

Olderogge: "Damietta—in the era of the Crusades a fortress contended for by Christians and Muslims. It was the key to Egypt. Now Damietta is a quiet little town: flat roofs, clay houses..."

Gumilyov:

*And beyond the sea the gorge of Darfur,  
The gallery-forests of Kordofan,  
And the great waters of Bornu.*

Olderogge: "Darfur, Kordofan, and Bornu are lands of Central and Eastern Sudan. Once a series of independent sultanates with Arab rulers and Black (Negroid) populations. To this day, remnants of Muslim medievalism survive in these lands. Warriors are clad in chain mail and helmets, with shields and spears. The Muslim architecture of Sudanese towns differs from classical Arab building: for example, minarets are in the form of towers, square in plan; mosque walls are strengthened by buttresses that end above in pointed projections, which gives these buildings a most curious look."

Gumilyov: *Royal Gondar rose as the capital.*

Olderogge: "Gondar was founded in the 17th century in the Amhara region. It was formerly the capital of Abyssinia."

Gumilyov: *He moved his throne to stony Shoa.*

Olderogge: "Shoa is a region south of Amhara. Menelik moved his capital south in order to be at the center of his domains, which were expanding at the expense of the lands of the Galla, annexed by him to his empire."

Gumilyov: *They carpeted his palace with lions' skins.*

Olderogge: "A lion skin is a sign of distinction; in many regions of Africa, the king and his counselors enjoy the privilege of wearing it."

Gumilyov: *I beheld Sheikh Hussein, tall.*

Olderogge: "Sheikh Hussein, like Harar, is one of the centers of Islam in the eastern part of Ethiopia."

Such explanations appear on almost every page. He noted as well: "I think that Gumilyov wanted to repeat Arthur Rimbaud's Abyssinian journeys." And also: "It is interesting to recall the link between Gumilyov and Rimbaud. It must be said that Rimbaud became one of the first Europeans to penetrate to Harar. He far outstripped scholar-explorers... thanks to his knowledge of native languages, his energy, and his ability to deal with the local population."

There are also clarifications regarding the collections in the margins of *The Tent*. He wrote about the collections gathered in Harar that the town "is populated by Muslims who speak a special language (a dialect of Arabic). The inhabitants of Harar are called Harari. The poet's interests left their mark on the composition of the collection. In it we find items for manuscripts and books, a banner, ornaments for making tooled bindings. Among other things there are various everyday items—baskets, clothing, etc. Perhaps most interesting is a wooden mortar with a pestle in it. Its interest lies in the stone ring on the pestle. This is a special ethnographic—indeed, perhaps archaeological—question. It must be discussed separately, and the question was hardly known to the poet. But the mortar's purpose intrigued him, and N. G. wrote down that it was a mortar for pounding the leaves of the shrub *qat*. The leaves replace an intoxicating drink for Muslims. In small doses *qat* acts like cocaine, producing nervous stimulation. The leaves are ground in the mortar until a thick, dirty-green mush is obtained, which is eaten with a spoon."

The country's foremost Africanist, in these notes and later, never reproached Gumilyov for serious errors. This is indisputable proof that the Muse of Far Wanderings inspired the poet not only to romantic dreams and travels, but also compelled him to toil hard in the hush of evening in libraries, to ponder

*Wise, ancient books  
That know quiet speeches.*

Dmitry Alexeyevich must have pored over this copy of *The Tent* in his office, with windows onto the Neva, directly opposite the Admiralty and the Winter Palace—in that very building of Peter's Kunstkamera and the Museum of Ethnography where in 1913 Gumilyov came so often.

For many years Olderogge was the curator of the museum's African collections. Making his notes, he surely went into the storerooms to look again at the Gumilyov collections and now and then consulted the inventories compiled by Gumilyov.

The poet Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky also knew of his annotations. Speaking of this, he showed me his own copy of the Sevastopol *The Tent*, which is no less interesting. On it there was not only Gumilyov's presentation inscription, but also corrections made by Rozhdestvensky under his dictation. These are individual words, phrases, even an entire stanza in the poem "The Red Sea." In this copy, there was also inserted a leaf with the poem "Memory," written in Gumilyov's hand. A stanza not included in the first publication of the poem related precisely to journeys to distant lands.

*His tent was lofty,  
The mules were swift and strong,  
Like wine he breathed the sweet air  
Of a land unknown to the white man.*

## WHY THEN DID HE CHOOSE THIS MUSE?

*Among the countless stars  
I freely chose our strict world,  
And in this world I loved  
Only the merry roads.  
—Gumilyov.*

So how, after all, did Gumilyov find his muse? By what paths did he make his way to her? Where did he tread the highway, and where, perhaps, a little footpath known only to him?

As is well known, we all come from childhood. It all started there for him as well.

And childhood? His father served a quarter of a century as a ship's doctor on vessels of the Baltic Fleet. He even sailed round the world on the frigate *Peresvet*—almost a year and a half, in 1865–1866. Retiring for health in February 1887, he maintained close relations with old sea wolves like himself. Among them was Admiral L. I. Lvov, brother of his second wife. And Anna Gorenko's father was a naval engineer.

The poet's stepsister, his father's daughter from his first marriage, married a naval officer (their son was Kolya Sverchkov).

This milieu of professional seamen had a huge impact on Gumilyov's formation.

There even arose a legend that Gumilyov himself, after finishing the gymnasium, entered the Naval Corps and spent one summer at sea.[79] In fact, it was his elder brother Dmitry who took midshipmen's classes and was at sea.

Gumilyov was born in Kronstadt. True, the family soon moved to Tsarskoe Selo—his father retired and bought a house there. But tales of voyages, of Kronstadt, excited the imagination from early childhood.

His gymnasium years—first Petersburg, Russia's maritime gate; then, from 1900, Tiflis, the exotic lanes of the old town, the panorama of the picturesque Caucasus. Then his first poem appeared, *I ran to the forest out of the towns*. Was it not there that the pull toward the East and Africa began?

Then, from 1903—again Tsarskoe Selo. And there, strange as it may sound now, he must have seen Africans. And not only those like Vaska the Abyssinian, who came with Bulatovich, or those who came to Russia to study. There were native-born Africans—"the Tsar's Arabs," who served in the palaces.

I stumbled on a story about one such "Arab woman" from Tsarskoe Selo while reading the reminiscences of the literary scholar Boris Popov. He met her after the Second World War in New York. He titled his juicy account of her "The Patrician."

"Up ahead, swaying with immense bulk, all in pink, walked an already completely gray Negress. It was hard to believe that such spindly legs could carry such a fantastic accumulation of curves: of posterior and bosoms, belly and flanks.

—There's one,' I muttered, breaking off my companion's latest amorous odyssey, 'you should court that mug...

The Negress turned and, in excellent Russian with a kind of dashing *akanye*, tossed at me mockingly:

—Take a look at yourself in the mirror, darling: you're not so handsome...

I was literally stunned. Without even trying to wriggle out of the awkwardness, I opened my mouth, gulped down no less than a ton of scalding air, and squeaked:

—Where, how, why—never mind—how is it you know Russian?!

— Why, I'm Russian. The Negress grinned proudly. Russian and Orthodox. And I'm called Nastasya Vasilievna. I was born in Tsarskoe Selo itself—perhaps you've been there? And I began my schooling there. Ah, what a little town, what a little town! I loved it more than Petersburg. My father was one of the palace Arabs. And we had a lovely little house on Palace Street... A quiet, quiet little street and all green...

Nastasya Vasilievna told how she said farewell to Nicholas II and his family in 1917, how the Tsarevich Alexei gave her a Cossack *papakha*, saying: "Nastenka, now be a Cossack!" She emigrated with her father in 1919. Her father died still a Russian subject, never taking American citizenship.

She also said she had recently been lucky—she bought an album of Tsarskoe Selo and now pores over it, remembering the Catherine and Alexander Palaces, the Cameron Gallery.[80]

Yes, that very Cameron Gallery Akhmatova mourned.

...From childhood in Tsarskoe Selo, Gumilyov must have met such "Arabs" and, doubtless, spoken with them.

But more important still was reading.

In the Gumilyov house in Tsarskoe Selo, there was a large library. It lay between the parlor and Nikolai Stepanovich's room. The shelves went up to the very ceiling, and in the middle of the library stood a big round table. One was expected to speak in a whisper

there. The poet considered the room his "holy of holies" and insisted one behave in it as in a true library.

After the revolution, when the house was requisitioned by the Detskoye Selo Soviet, Gumilyov moved the books to the apartment he received in Petrograd on Preobrazhenskaya Street. He moved them in baskets with the help of friends and students.

"The bookcase of early childhood is your companion for life. The arrangement of its shelves, the choice of books, the color of the spines are perceived as the color, height, and layout of world literature itself. Yes, the books that did not stand in the first bookcase will never squeeze into world literature, into the universe. Like it or not, in the first bookcase every book is classical, and you can't toss out a single spine." So thought Osip Mandelstam.[81]

What spines gleamed on the shelves of retired naval doctor Stepan Yakovlevich Gumilyov? About what books did his younger son most hotly argue with his gymnasium friends?

I have found no written testimony. I put these questions to Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky. He could not list Gumilyov's favorite books, but he well remembered what gymnasium boys devoured then. H. Rider Haggard—half his novels are about Africa. Mayne Reid, and he too has plenty of Africa: *The Young Voyageurs* (often translated as *Adventures of Young Boers*), *The Hunters of the Giraffe*, *In the Forests and Prairies of South Africa*. Louis Boussenard—*The Diamond Hunters* and *Captain Dare-Devil*; the German writer A. Nyman—*Pieter Maritz*—*The Young Boer of the Transvaal*. Jules Verne—even his now-forgotten *Adventures of Three Russians and Three Englishmen in Southern Africa*.

Popular among gymnasium boys were the many books of travel then published—above all Livingstone and Stanley. The magazines *World Traveler*, *Nature and People*. In 1897 there appeared a translation of Luís de Camões's *The Lusiads*—about Vasco da Gama's sail around Africa.

And the geography lessons themselves were, as Vsevolod Alexandrovich said, lively, with vivid descriptions. No wonder gymnasium boys' dreams fled the gray routine of surrounding life to lands of distant fantastical nature, with wholly different customs and mores.

Much that later influenced Gumilyov and helped him define his literary—and not only literary—taste first appeared the year he was born. Rimbaud's *Illuminations* came out. Nietzsche expressed *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* thoughts on the strong man that he later developed in *Beyond Good and Evil*. The bard of far wanderings, Stevenson, published the adventure novel *Kidnapped* and the philosophical tale *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Then too appeared *An Iceland Fisherman*, a novel by Pierre Loti, another author of adventure and exoticism.

A few months before Gumilyov's birth Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* came out. Judging by Gumilyov's essay in *Sirius*, he loved Haggard from childhood. The romance of African wanderings would be inspired to no small degree by Haggard's novels.

Perhaps we can judge, at least in part, about Gumilyov's childhood and youthful reading by the books on which his son grew up—the now well-known Orientalist Lev Nikolaevich Gumilyov. He was brought up in Bezhetsk and lived there with Nikolai Stepanovich's mother. In 1988 Lev Nikolaevich recalled that time:

"Fortunately, in the small town of Bezhetsk there was a library full of works by Mayne Reid, Cooper, Jules Verne, Wells, Jack London, and many other captivating authors, who supplied abundant information that I absorbed without effort but with pleasure. There were Shakespeare's chronicles, historical novels by Dumas, Conan Doyle, Walter Scott, Stevenson. Reading accumulated primary factual material and stirred thought." [82]

What familiar names, what familiar images! But Viktor Shklovsky wrote in old age: "You are now reading a different Jules Verne." [83] And he is right.

...How sharply the meaning of the word "Africa" changed even over the course of my life. On the eve of the Patriotic War, in geography lessons in the third and fourth grades, we read of Livingstone's and Stanley's travels, and it was they that were associated with the notion "Africa." I remember some books for schoolchildren that told of these journeys in genuinely engaging fashion. At twelve we devoured Sienkiewicz's novel about the adventures of two little English children in the African forests and the tattered Soykin and Sytin editions of Mayne Reid's *The Hunters of the Giraffe* and *The Adventures of Hans Sterk, the South African Hunter and Pioneer*.

In the depths of old Petersburg apartments they were carefully preserved together with *Little Women*, *Little Men*, and other red-and-gold volumes of the "Golden Library." And with Charskaya's novels, which our girl classmates adored almost as much as their mothers once had. But in the blockade winter of 1941–42 I, like my peers, fed a smoking pot-bellied stove with beloved books. With their smoke our childish romantic Africa drifted away, so like the one the gymnasium boy Kolya Gumilyov fell in love with.

Then the word "Africa" came to be coupled constantly with the word "struggling." In 1960 the walls of Moscow's houses were emblazoned with big posters: a muscular black man with a wrenching tug breaks the chains that bind him against the silhouette of the African continent.

In our country there was born a certainty that grand achievements in Africa would go by seven-league strides. They began to associate revolutionary reordering of the world, the victory of "non-capitalist development" and "socialist orientation" with the "awakening of Africa"

In Western Europe's intelligentsia, a sense of guilt before Africa's peoples took hold.

In 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth* appeared. Its author, Frantz Fanon, proclaimed on Africa's behalf: "Let us leave this Europe, which never stops talking of man, yet massacres him at every one of its street corners..." For centuries it had stifled "in the name of the so-called 'spiritual adventure' " the overwhelming majority of humankind.

And Jean-Paul Sartre seconded him: "Europe is dead. That is the truth hard to utter, but of which we all—are we not, my dear Europeans?—are absolutely convinced." In his preface to Fanon's book, Sartre expressed thoughts that in Gumilyov's time would have sounded strange.

"Europeans, open the book, read! Having taken a few steps in the nocturnal dark, you will come to a fire around which men unknown to you are huddled. Come to them, listen to their talk. They are speaking of what they intend to do with your offices, with the mercenaries who guard them. They may notice you, but will not stop talking, nor even lower their voices. This cuts you to the quick. Their fathers, the product of the darkness you created, were dead souls. You endowed them with light; they addressed themselves only to you, and you did not even deign to reply to these 'savages.' Their children do not know you. They are lit and warmed by a fire—but it is not your fire. You keep at a respectful distance from it, feel yourselves as creatures of the night, look back, shiver from the cold. The roles have been reversed. In this half-light, in the dusk that gives birth to a new day, the savages—they are you."

And then? Then came a new shift in ideas about Africa. Euphoria gave way to disappointment. The postcolonial road proved far harder than it had seemed. Hunger, wars, bloody dictators...

Even the image of Emperor Haile Selassie, whom Gumilyov and Kolya the Little photographed. In the 1920s–30s he was deemed a reformer and a fighter against the invasion of Mussolini's fascist troops. Later—a bloody tyrant overthrown by a people's revolution. And in February 1992 his remains were found secretly buried in the imperial palace in the office of the fugitive dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, .

And right after that—sympathy and pity for the last monarch.

With all these layers, is it easy now to envision Africa as it was in Gumilyov's imagination? Even if we hold in our hands the very novels that stirred him. The very word "Africa" sounds quite different to us; the associations of Gumilyov's era are forgotten, pushed far back by the impressions of the last decades.

"The words 'Central Africa' evoke in my mind the image of an old man with a weathered, kindly face and a pointed gray beard, walking wearily at the head of a tiny band of his black companions along reed-fringed lakes." So wrote the Ukrainian-born Pole Józef Korzeniowski, known to us as Joseph Conrad. For him, Livingstone was "the most venerated of all the objects of my youthful enthusiasm." [84]

Is not the same rapture in Gumilyov's verses addressed to Africa?

*Grant me for this a beaten road.  
Where no path exists for man,  
Let me give my name to a black river  
That to this day remains undiscovered.*

According to Irina Odoevtseva's memories, even in his last years, Gumilyov loved the magazine *World of Adventures*, though he hid it, being embarrassed by such seemingly unserious reading. Viktor Shklovsky, telling of his meetings with Gumilyov in Paris in 1917, noted: "I often found him deep in reading. It turned out he was reading Mayne Reid." [85] And in games with his son, according to the poet's daughter-in-law, "...Kolya with a boomerang pretended to be an African chief. He would strike various poses and get carried away by the game almost as much as his son." [86]

And surely impressions from the novels of his beloved childhood writer, H. Rider Haggard, played a role in the fact that shortly before his death Gumilyov undertook to edit a translation of Haggard's novel *Allan Quatermain*.

But was it only translated adventure novels? What about events in his native land? How could they have influenced Gumilyov?

Domestic sentiments, of course, influenced his interest in Abyssinia first and foremost. During the Italo-Abyssinian war and the vigorous growth of Russian sympathies for the distant African country, Gumilyov was ten to fourteen. That's the very time when attachments, sympathies, and antipathies are formed. Later, in an article on Menelik, he would write of a "madly brave and amazingly hardy people," and in the "Note..." of "the conquerors of the Italians."

Gumilyov's interest in Africa was unquestionably affected by Russian society's attitude to another war—the first major armed clash of our twentieth century. When Gumilyov was a youth, 1899–1902, Africa blazed with the Boer War. It caused a stormy resonance across all Europe and Russia like no previous African event. Volunteers, doctors, and nurses went to the Transvaal to help the Boers. They went also from Tsarskoe Selo, where the Gumilyov family lived until 1900 and again from 1903. And from Tiflis, where they lived in 1900–1903, Prince Nikolai Georgievich Bagration-Mukhransky went to fight in the Transvaal; he was called "the Boer" all his life thereafter. Many retired officers went there as well. They wanted to acquaint themselves with the latest achievements of military technology, strategy, and tactics—to bring this knowledge home. For the world had long seen no major wars—since the Franco-Prussian and the Russo-Turkish—and all the technical innovations that had accumulated over two or three decades were tried out in South Africa. Russia strove to learn how military operations were conducted in different conditions. Officers were sent for training to the most seemingly unlikely places. Thus, in his youth, Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, later known from the Russo-Japanese War, after the Samarkand campaign of 1868, went to Algeria for a year where he took part in a French military expedition in the Sahara. Returning, he again found himself in Central Asia under General Skobelev.

Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov fought on the Boer side and was wounded . In no small measure thanks to experience acquired there, he was later, in the State Duma, considered a specialist in military affairs. That was important step in the career that brought him to the Duma chair, sent him to Pskov to receive Nicholas II's abdication, and seated him in the War and Navy Minister's chair in the Provisional Government.

At the start of our century, gymnasium boys devoured books about that war—memoirs of the nurse Sofya Izyedina and of the Boer general De Wet.

The song "Transvaal, Transvaal, my country" was spread by organ-grinders all across all Russia. It was sung everywhere—from high-society salons to third-rate taverns.

You can judge from countless reminiscences the impression that war made on children and youths. "We children were shaken by that war. We felt pity for the phlegmatic Boers fighting for independence and hated the English. We knew in all detail each battle fought at the other end of the earth." [87] So Paustovsky recalled. Marshak in childhood played the war of the Boers and the English with his friends. Ehrenburg "first wrote a letter to the bearded President Kruger and then, filching ten rubles from his mother, set off for the theater of war," but he was caught and returned. [88] As a child, Marina Tsvetaeva drew a nasty Queen Victoria in her notebooks. And Akhmatova even mentioned the Boers in her later poems.

That far-off war resounded with astonishing force in our country. Even many years later, in emigration, in Paris, in the voice of the singer Boris Almazov:

*Beyond the Okhta, beyond the Okhta, on the Vyborg Side,  
Yesterday's soldiers sang about the war.  
Smoke tossed over chimneys, sunset flared in the pane.  
Transvaal, Transvaal, my country, you're all aflame.*

*The workers came off shift; beyond the Okhta a drizzle fell,  
A legless man cranked a hurdy-gurdy, begged drink money.  
The dead men's photographs gathered dust on the wall.  
Transvaal, Transvaal, my country, you're all aflame.*

*Railcars, barracks, dugouts, widows' gauze-cozy rooms.  
Still at early dawn they give out bread by ration cards.  
Across years, across distances, it rings and aches in me:  
Transvaal, Transvaal, my country, you're all aflame. [89]*

So why be surprised that the Transvaal penetrated into Gumilyov's verse? In one variant of his poem *Mik* there are lines:

*Like ranks of steppes running far away.  
Then the Transvaal opened,  
And Mik forever remembered*

*Villages, hamlets, towns,  
Where thousands dwelt—  
Not Black—white, all leaders.*

Vsevolod Aleksandrovich Rozhdestvensky told me that as encouragement awards, the Tsarskoe Selo gymnasium authorities gave pupils luxurious volumes *Around the World. Essays and Pictures of Travels through Three Parts of the Old World*, written by that very Eliseev who organized the expedition to Abyssinia in the mid-1890s. Africa and foreign Asia were treated inseparably there. Indeed, Africa in the minds of Russians had not yet fully separated from the concept "the East," at any rate the foreign East.

The gymnasium boys also pored over still more lavishly produced books about the travels of aristocrats, grand dukes, and Nicholas II himself. As heir, in 1890, four years before ascending the throne, he made a long journey to the foreign East "for educational purposes," it was officially said. He sailed from Egypt to Japan, making long stops along the way—not only for ceremonial receptions, but for splendid hunts after exotic beasts.

His journey, as is known, was interrupted in a small Japanese town, where some fanatic struck him on the head with a saber. If the Greek prince George accompanying Nicholas had not softened the blow by interposing his walking stick, the heir to the throne might have paid with his life. Malicious tongues said that the dislike for Japan, born in the young Nicholas then, later contributed to the war with Japan.

The trip of the heir engaged the imagination above all because in Russian history it was the first voyage of so exalted a personage to the foreign East. In connection with this sailing, newspapers and journals in Russia published much about the countries of Asia and Africa; a handsome paper edition appeared with fine illustrations.[90]

In the imperial family this was not the first journey to Africa and Asia. Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, who later married Nicholas's beloved sister Xenia, spent two years in the East at the end of the 1880s. He had also been in Africa.

Even several decades later, after the revolution, in emigration, he remembered Egypt, Singapore, the luxurious leisure clubs of British officers in Cape Town, and the words of Cecil Rhodes, the maker of Britain's empire in southern Africa: "We must think imperialistically." Living for long in Nagasaki, the grand duke, by his own admission, like many Russian officers, took for himself there a temporary "wife," a young Japanese woman. The East so took hold of him that, for a while, he wanted to renounce his titles and remain there. "The Moluccas, the Fiji Islands, Ceylon, and Darjeeling in the Himalayas especially appealed to me."

Acquaintance with the East led the Grand Duke to thoughts by no means typical for such high personages: "I managed to free myself from the truisms and banalities instilled by my improper upbringing. The falsity of official Christianity struck me particularly in the Far East, where ignorant missionaries had the audacity to denounce the sacred visions that constitute the essence of Buddhist belief."

Another grand duke, Petr Nikolaevich, lived a long while in Egypt on doctors' advice while being treated for tuberculosis. Thus the future emperor, traveling in the Far East, met close relatives. On Ceylon, in a tropical night aboard the *Tamara*, he encountered Alexander Mikhailovich. The latter described the meeting thus: "News of his arrival found me in the jungle, where I was hunting elephants. My three-week beard, my tales of adventures and the charm of a tropical night on the deck of the *Tamara* must have made quite an impression on Nicholas Alexandrovich, and I seemed to him a savage. He envied my delightful way of spending time."

The heir's envy proved so bitter that he said: "My trip is pointless; palaces and generals are the same everywhere in the world, and that's the only thing they show me. I might just as well have stayed home." [91]

It was likely after this conversation that Nicholas began insisting more energetically that he be given not only splendid receptions, but also jungle excursions and hunts for animals unknown in Russia.

Among the young members of the imperial family, the craze for the exotic of distant lands had the same roots as among ordinary gymnasium boys. Alexander Mikhailovich recalled: "Like most of my contemporaries, I dreamed of running away to America." [92] In childish imagination it was, of course, not industrial America, but prairies and "natives"—something akin to Mayne Reid's Wild West and Africa.

The travels of the ruling house's representatives heightened public interest in distant countries. There were also direct practical consequences—strengthening ties with the rulers of those lands.

An example is relations with the "land of white elephants"—Siam (Thailand). In 1891 the Siamese prince Damrong came to Petersburg; in 1897 King Chulalongkorn and Prince Vajiravudh, the future king, came. Later Chakrabon, the king's younger son, studied in Petersburg in the Page Corps and married a woman from Kyiv, Ekaterina Desnitskaya. [93]

At the start of the present century, not only did trips to the foreign East become fashionable for Russia's nobility, but also safaris in Africa. Prince Nikolai Bagration-Mukhransky as early as 1899 went from Georgia to Paris in order to set off from there, together with his French friend Count Breda, on a hunt in Africa; only with the onset of the Boer War did he change his plans and, instead of hunting, went to fight on the Boer side.

Later—just pick up *Capital and Manor*, a magazine published for the gentry. Photographs of Russian sportsmen in Africa, accounts of their hunting exploits and trophies... Sketches by N. Bryanchaninov, who had visited Sudan, Nubia, and East Africa. [94]

One of the brightest monuments to these Russian safaris is the book by the Kyiv architect V. V. Gorodetsky, *In the Jungles of Africa. A Hunter's Diary*. It was published in Kyiv in 1914 on coated paper with 114 photographs and drawings.

A house built by the author still stands in central Kyiv. Several buildings by him remain, but only this one bears the name "Gorodetsky's House." Paustovsky recalled how Kyiv children once imagined Africa from this castle-like house on Bankova Street. Its gray walls were inlaid with sculpted rhinos, lions, giraffes, crocodiles; elephant trunks served as downspouts; water dripped from stone horns; stone boas raised their heads from dark niches. "Grown-ups said Gorodetsky was a fool, but we boys loved this strange house—it fed our dreams of Africa," wrote Paustovsky.[95]

Another Kyivan, Viktor Platonovich Nekrasov, remembered the house with the same warmth.

" 'In Kyiv there's a house everyone knows, even non-Kyivans. Is it true you have such a house?' they ask us. 'Yes,' we answer, 'Gorodetsky's House—it's certainly not just a house, it's a fairy tale, an adventure novel, a children's picture book... From the walls there grow elephants, rhinos, antelopes, and giant toads on the roof, and naiads astride mustached dolphins, and in the flutes of columns little lizards and snakes coil.' "[96]

Gorodetsky described Russian safaris more fully than others. He used that very word: *safari*—it was already entering the Russian language then.

He traveled at the same time as Gumilyov and, in part, with similar feelings. He began his book with the words: "In 1911, I finally had the chance to carry out what I had dreamed of for so many years, what from early, almost childhood, under the influence of Jules Verne, Mayne Reid and others, excited my childish imagination and, becoming my cherished dream, impelled a whole series of journeys undertaken by me. Over the last twenty years I made five excursions to various places in Siberia, Central Asia, Persia, and Afghanistan, but not one of them satisfied me. Despite the enormous interest that Central Asia presents to a traveler both for hunting and for life, it cannot compare in flora or fauna with Africa, with this fabulous land. None of the five continents can give a naturalist's mind such rich food as tropical Africa... Our grandchildren will no longer see in Africa all these wonders."[97]

Gorodetsky was fortunate to visit the places Gumilyov longed to reach—the East African countries on the Tropic of Capricorn, south of Ethiopia.

Africa attracted even Russia's earliest motorists. And one of the first series of domestic automobiles (to be precise—No. 14) made a journey across Africa. To advertise Russian cars, the journal *Automobile* (there was already such a journal) issued a hefty book about this journey. It was called *Across Africa by Automobile*. The author tried to write it humorously, in the vein of Averchenko's popular magazine *Satirikon*, aping Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. [98]

But on the last pages, in a tone entirely without humor, the Baltic Shipyard joint-stock company reported that the whole trip had been accomplished in a car of that plant and that the car had won "numerous awards and prizes" and "checked its parts and mechanisms under the harshest conditions." In reality, the "journey across Africa" was simply a traverse from Oran in Algeria to Tunis. The rest of the way was through Spain, France, and Italy. But Africa was still put in the title. Evidently they thought the mention would attract readers.

The fascination with Africa made it possible to step away from everyday routine, to create one's own world—vivid, many-colored, glittering. "My whole world, stirring and strange."

Gumilyov's African poems, if not all then many, stand out for a life-affirming, joyous, even carefree mood. In one poem ("African Night") it is "merry to think"; in another he's preparing for a "merry hunt."

He loved that word in general. In his poems there are ever and again "merry sailors," "merry folk," "merry masks." Even our planet is "merry" to him. And of himself—"I set out on the road and go merrily."

Sergei Makovsky thought Gumilyov wanted to see himself as a "knight of happiness." And as proof he cited a poem of that very title:

*How easy it is to breathe in this world!  
Tell me who is discontented with life,  
Tell me who sighs deeply—  
I can make each one happy.*

*Let him come! I must tell,  
I must tell again and over  
How sweet it is to live, how sweet to conquer  
Seas and maidens, enemies and the word.*

*And if after all he does not understand,  
Does not accept my splendid faith,  
And in his turn complains  
Of world-sorrow, of pain—to the barrier!*

In Makovsky's view, Gumilyov strove to go "against the prevailing political gloom of most Russian poets." Doubtless there was protest against decadence. But it was not only decadence. Likely the mood dear to him was what George Sand once brightly expressed in her diary: "A suffering man is a torment to those around him. He casts gloom on them and irritates. Like a corpse that suddenly turns up on a stroll and from which everyone runs in horror."

Even so, as the same Makovsky said, many of Gumilyov's poems "though at first hearing sound like major-key fanfares, upon closer rereading their covert meaning seems hopelessly sad." [99]

Yes, it is hard to find cheerfulness in a man's character if through so many of his poems runs the thought of death:

*Truthful is death, while life mumbles lies...  
And thou, O tender one, whose name is song,  
Whose body—music, thou too dost go  
Toward pitiless vanishing.*

And if he addresses the Most High thus:

*With this quiet, sorrowful thought  
Somehow I'll drag my life along,  
But of the future—Thou think on it,  
I have already ruined one.*

Or even more hopelessly:

*Woe! Woe! The noose, the pit, and fear  
Await man born on earth...*

Gumilyov tried to flee gloomy ruminations. Most of all this is felt in his poems about far-off lands, travels, war. There he could tear himself away from quotidian cares, from daily life. All the more since he truly proved lucky in travel, in war—and with women. With his interest in European medievalism he surely knew Nostradamus and perhaps tried on for himself the prophet's lines:

*The planet Venus is so kind to thee,  
Great sultan with an African chief.* [100]

Nikolai Otsup said it rightly of Gumilyov's African poems: not only are they "remarkable for their inspiration, captivating," that "one poem is better than another," but he especially stressed that almost all are written in anapests, "a meter extraordinarily suited to descriptions of distant lands." [101]

In distant lands it was easier for Gumilyov to see a soul. It was easier to bind to those land feelings and words that seemed to have lost their meaning, devalued by skeptics and cynics. Those feelings and words to which Gumilyov returned constantly:

*Victory, glory, exploit—pale  
Words, now forgotten utterly—  
Resound within the soul like brazen thunder,  
Like the voice of God out in the desert.*

And so he consecrated himself to serving that muse. And he bore that service to the end, to his last days, when the romance of his muse seemed so odd— perhaps eccentric, even ridiculous—against the backdrop of torrents of blood that flooded the country. But even in our time Boris Chichibabin writes:

*The mad century goes to hell,  
And I read Dickens and Mark Twain,  
And in the days of universal savagery and rot,  
Laughing, I pray to boyish dreams.*

## **"AND THERE WAS IN HER EYES A MALIGN TRIUMPH..."**

*He neither knows nor asks  
What makes my soul proud...  
—Gumilyov*

Yet contemporaries—and posterity—attributed to him anything and everything! You might describe many of them in his words: "a people kind and honest, only cannibals." [102]

Perhaps the most innocent thing they charged him with was posing, a desire to astonish. They especially poked fun at his Africa hobby. They tagged him with the nickname "The Exquisite Giraffe." In her "Ballad about Gumilyov" Irina Odoevtseva recalled those sneers:

*When he came back to Petersburg,  
Friends made sport of him:  
Ah, Africa! How exotic!  
Bonfires, Black girls, tom-toms,  
Exquisite giraffes—  
And your friend the hippopotamus.*

He was called a "fancy foreign trinket." Ivanov-Razumnik set before him as examples not only Blok and Bely but also Klyuev and Yesenin, whom Gumilyov, it seems, did not consider a poet at all. *Apollon's* colleague Andrei Levinson said of him that "this professor of poetry had the soul of a boy running off to the Mexican pampas after reading Gustave Aimard."

Another man of letters who knew Gumilyov well (though likely did not much love him) wrote: "People laughed at him: 'Well, what new trick has our "Exquisite Giraffe" dreamed up?' The 'Exquisite Giraffe' would look on us coldly with his slanted, bleached eyes, smile ironically and dryly, jest—and inwardly be angry. *Like a metal idol / Among porcelain toys.* They said of him: in Africa he shot and shot, never hit a single rhino; in the war he shot and shot, never killed a single German."

Vladislav Khodasevich also wrote without great reverence: "He was astonishingly young in soul, perhaps even in mind. He always seemed a child to me. There was something boyish in his clipped skullcap haircut, in his posture—more gymnasium than military. The same boyishness broke through in his passion for Africa, for war..."

And the writer Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko said that Gumilyov had been born some four hundred years too late, that he would have been in his element in the Middle Ages—"he would have been carried away by the beauty of incredible adventures, tested his strength in bouts with fabulous giants, in tempests and storms mastered unknown seas on frail caravels."

Erikh Gollerbakh thought "he was simply sixteen all his life." And in 1917 he wrote:

*Lawgiver of rhymesters,  
Idol of dentists, demi-maiden,  
Though you lived among Hottentots,  
Not king of beasts, but Gum-mi-lyov.*

Perhaps in reply to this mockery, Gumilyov himself said he was forever thirteen—adding, to be sure, that Mishenka (Mikhail Kuzmin) was three.[103]

Probably most of the scoffing concerned Gumilyov's tales of African adventures. "I remember," wrote Chukovsky, "in *Apollon's* editorial office a round three-legged little table; at it sat Gumilyov; before him a heap of some fluffy, patterned skins; in his solemn, somewhat inflated voice he was telling those gathered how many outlandish beasts and critters he had shot in Abyssinia to obtain this or that exotic skin. Suddenly the editor of *Satirikon*, Arkady Averchenko, an inexhaustible wit, stood up and, declaring that he had carefully examined the skins, asked the speaker very politely why on the reverse of each skin there was stamped the purple mark of the Petersburg municipal pawnshop. The room erupted in malicious snickering—for from the satirist's question it followed that all of Gumilyov's African exploits were a myth concocted here in Petersburg.

...In reality the stamps on the skins had been placed not by any pawnshop but by the Academy of Sciences museum, to which Gumilyov had donated them."

Chukovsky added that "Gumilyov did not say a single word to the wit." [104]

Even so, the teasing stung him. In Teffi's reminiscences there is this passage: "I was very fond of Gumilyov... I would have liked to make friends with him, but something interfered, something... Taking me home from some soirée, he grew thoughtful and confessed that we had been set at odds. What set us at odds were a few lines in one of my stories about travelers—supposedly about him. He took offense."

"In that case there was no reason for offense. We sorted it out right there in the cab. Of course, the story had nothing to do with him." [105] It turned out Gumilyov had harbored the grievance for several years.

No doubt much in his character afforded pretexts for ridicule. Memoirs of contemporaries bristle with such facts—from his childhood to his last years.

He told Irina Odoevtseva that a classmate in the gymnasium whom he fancied was compiling answers for a cherished album: "What is your favorite flower or tree? Your favorite dish? Your favorite writer?"

Gymnasium boys preferred as trees the oak or fir; among dishes—turkey, goose, and borscht; among writers—Mayne Reid, Walter Scott, Jules Verne. Gymnasium girls—rose or violet; tree—birch or linden; dish—ice cream or hazel grouse; writer—Charskaya.

When Gumilyov's turn came, he wrote without hesitation: flower—orchid; tree—baobab; writer—Oscar Wilde; dish—*kanander*. Before such answers everyone wilted. Later young Gumilyov long waited in dread of disgrace, having learned from his mother that the famous French cheese was *camembert*, not *kanander*. And from shame his love for that schoolgirl vanished without a trace.

For a while, having read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the gymnasium boy imagined himself Lord Gray. And his passion for Friedrich Nietzsche perhaps made itself felt all his life. Ambition, vanity, the urge to see oneself as a lone hero among men—this stayed with him long.

But can one explain his character only by that? He truly had a rare gift for pathos and exaltation. Is it not better to seek the answer in his own verses—

*And it seems—as though in the world, as of old, there are lands  
Where no human foot has trod,  
Where in sunlit groves giants dwell  
And pearls shine in the limpid water.*

*As though not all the stars are counted.  
As though our world is not yet fully found!*

If friends and colleagues made sport, enemies mocked openly. Viktor Burenin, shameless even by the standards of Suvorin's *Novoe Vremya*, jeered at Gumilyov in "critical essays" and parodies:

*The street sweeper sweeps the roadway,  
With broom scrapes filth, with shovel too,  
Then buys a "quarter" bottle,  
Drinks it neat without a snack.  
Along the avenue motors race  
And crush passersby without cease.  
Police file reports  
About motor accidents.  
But it's no use.*

"What is that if not 'poetry'?" Burenin asked. "Is it any worse than Mr. Gumilyov's verses? Of course, no worse—perhaps even better than his 'Abyssinian' rhymes..."[106]

He was reproached, too, that his love of the Muse of Far Wanderings arose from lack of interest in his own homeland, its history and life.

Undeniably, in youth and later, Western poets and writers—whose work and life were bound up with distant lands—strongly influenced him. As the epigraph to his first book of poems, Gumilyov took words of the then little-known André Gide: *I became a nomad to touch sensually all that roves!* But most of all—Théophile Gautier (Gumilyov translated several of his poems), Samuel Coleridge (he translated *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*), Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Kipling, Stevenson, Leconte de Lisle. He translated Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Leconte de Lisle. He called Baudelaire one of the greatest poets of the nineteenth century and, at any rate, the most distinctive. And he recalled de Lisle in his verses—

*Of Leconte de Lisle we spoke,  
Of the cold poet we grieved, you and I.*

There is an opinion that the direct influence of these poets was the sole cause of Gumilyov's passion for far lands. From this they go on to affirm that his work generally has no connection with native soil.

One could ignore such speculations were they only from "card-carrying patriots," those whom Kurochkin already hated:

*Hush, hush, gentlemen:  
Here approaches Mr. Iscariot,  
A patriot among patriots.*

But, as is known, similar reproaches were thrown at Gumilyov by Alexander Blok. In the article "Without Divinity, Without Inspiration (On the Akmeists)"—"N. Gumilyov has scorned all that for a Russian is two-times-two—four"; in Gumilyov's verse "there is something cheap and foreign." [107] Gorky held a like view: "He is simply not a Russian writer. A true Frenchman in his tastes." [108]

Later these ideas were expressed most sharply in the article "Gumilyov," which appeared in 1952 in Paris in the journal *Vozrozhdenie* and was later reprinted.

The author of the essay—already mentioned by me—was Nikolai Ivanovich Ulyanov (1904–1985), a student of the historian Sergei Fedorovich Platonov, whose lectures Gumilyov also attended.

I had heard of Ulyanov back in the 1940s at Leningrad University, where he taught in the mid-30s. But I got to know his work and biography better in the 1988/89 academic year, when I was invited to Yale University, where Ulyanov worked for many years.

Unfortunately, I did not find him alive, nor other major Russian scholars who had taught there: Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtsev, George Vernadsky, Sergei Pushkarev, and Arkady Belinkov. But in the spring of 1991 I was lucky to visit New Haven, to see Nadezhda Nikolaevna, Ulyanov's widow, and ask her about him.

Nikolai Ivanovich lived a hard life. He was in Solovki and Norilsk, was a prisoner in Germany, later worked as a welder at a plant in Morocco, in Casablanca. From the mid-50s—at Yale University. He is buried in that university's old cemetery.

Ulyanov's scholarly interests were broad. He studied Ivan the Terrible and Napoleon, Chekhov and Tolstoy, theoretical problems of historical science and the genre of the historical novel. He wrote the historical novel *Atossa*—about King Darius's campaign into Scythia. He wrote passionately, ardently. One can by no means agree with him in everything, but much of his legacy, I am sure, would be well worth publishing in Moscow.

Ulyanov loved Gumilyov's poems. In the hardest times he wrote them down from memory, and later, when he could write and publish again, he liked to quote them.[109] And yet in his essay on Gumilyov he hurled harsh reproaches at the poet.

"Whence, in a northerner from Petersburg, such love of 'colonial' exotica?" he asked. And answered:

"The reason, of course, is not his trip to Africa. He went there only after he had loved it from books, and the trip did not change his aesthetic perception of the Black Continent. His Africa remained a land not seen by a traveler's eye (this is not Stanley's or Livingstone's Africa, not even Marinetti's), but one inspired by other people's works of art. Gumilyov took his maritime and tropical world from Coleridge, Stevenson, Leconte de Lisle, Kipling. They opened and won it in struggle with chaos; our poet inherited it. Hence it looks more pictorial, more dressed-up with him. If Leconte de Lisle's elephants and jaguars are elemental and physically convincing, then in Gumilyov's leopards and giraffes there is stylization. They are 'exquisite,' almost salon-like, meant to charm bored Petersburg ladies. Their homeland is not Africa, but Montparnasse.

"In Gumilyov one feels a certain intoxication with his French taste, with his whole European look. It even seems he cannot forgive himself his Russian origin. And it is strange to watch the persistent effort to wed him to Russia."

To support these impassioned reproaches, Ulyanov cites Blok.

"To Blok—who keenly felt life and the world and foresaw so much that was terrible in them—Gumilyov was alien and hostile; he did not wish to know man, or life, or the abyss surrounding life; he lived in an invented—or rather, read-out—world, and a world plainly not Russian. He is forever hovering between the equator and the forty-second parallel—in Africa, in the Levant, in India, in Persia, even in China, among porcelain pavilions, pagan idols, Nile tombs, 'exquisite giraffes,' lions and leopards. Often he is among

conquistadors, seafarers, 'discoverers of new lands' of the times of Columbus and Magellan. This whole world of sun, blood, salty air, sands, palms, bold exploits and struggle was begotten not by life, not by Russian daring. The homegrown Yermaks, Dezhnyovs, Krusensterns, Miklouho-Maclays—he either does not know them or despises them."

Ulyanov leveled a grave charge: that all his heroics are explained only by "self-love, self-deification, lust for glory." As proof he quoted Georgy Ivanov's words that "as a teenager, going to bed, Gumilyov thought only of how to become famous." He also quoted lines by Gumilyov himself, for example:

*But most beautiful of all is the thirst for glory—  
For it kings are born,  
On oceans ships set sail.*

Ulyanov foresaw that Gumilyov's admirers would of course meet such a thought with indignation, yet he stood his ground: "To smash, in winter, the glass of the Tsarskoe Selo orangery to present a lady with a bouquet of stolen roses in a bloodied hand; to volunteer for the war, go on dangerous reconnaissance, earn two St. Georges; to be arrested, to bear oneself boldly in interrogation, and to meet death with courage—all that is fine and captivating. Woe to the hero if by a word or gesture he should betray that it was done not to win a woman's favor, not from love of the motherland, but out of vanity..."

"The thirst for fame, the thirst for adoration—this is the treasured casket in which his heart is enclosed. It is carefully hidden, like in a tale—on an island amid the ocean, at the bottom of a well—but without finding the way to it, one cannot understand Gumilyov's poetry."

Ulyanov asked: "And what is this stubborn striving after the unconsidered, the purposeless—by a man who, as all his contemporaries assure us, was not at all a born hero? The chosen armor may have been a size too big, though he bore it with honor. In the name of what was it donned?" And answering himself, he explained Gumilyov's "asceticism and all his heroics" as "the intelligentsia's ailment of our century's beginning—self-love, self-deification, lust for glory... For truly, you will not find another god in him."

Interestingly, Ulyanov expressed his thoughts in polemic with that portion of the émigré community surrounding him, who saw in Gumilyov an ideological and consistent fighter against the Bolsheviks. "A certain part of the emigration has its own 'polit-grammar,' no less hackneyed and vulgar than the Soviet one, only with the opposite sign. It has its own 'social mandate.' Isn't... the enveloping of the poet's name... in the sordid shell of cheap politicking?

Does that explain the gradual enveloping of the poet's name in the sordid shell of cheap politicking? He is a great patriot, a knight of monarchy and almost a pillar of Orthodoxy, a singer of the true Russia—unlike the Bolshevizing Blok. And all because he ended his

days in a Chekist prison—a fact seemingly quite alien to his biography and especially to his poetry."

For all that, Ulyanov—let me repeat—loved Gumilyov. He opposed him to the Futurists in his article "On a Failed Poetry." He took Gumilyov's lines as an epigraph to "Dead Words." And he even justified him, though in his own fashion: "Whoever wrote such poems as Gumilyov wrote cannot be 'debunked'; he admits of neither retouching nor underpainting. The pearls of his poetry shine no less for being, like any pearl, the product of a shell's disease." Ulyanov confirmed this with Mikhail Kuzmin's words defining the poet's task thus: "Let each pray to his own god, but let him do it well. Gumilyov prayed to his own as God grant each of us to pray. And if his deity is one of those not admitted to the Pantheon, his poems nonetheless raised it above all other gods." [110]

Well then, one cannot ignore the opinion of a scholar like Ulyanov—though, for example, the references to the poet dreaming of fame already in childhood are odd. Who didn't dream of that in childhood? And later? Judged by such yardsticks, one could level the same reproaches at Pushkin for his "Monument" and other poems.

Much of what Ulyanov wrote will, I expect, still be fiercely debated by literary scholars. Here I would say only this.

For Ulyanov, if Africa looks "more pictorial and dressed-up" in Gumilyov than in Leconte de Lisle or Kipling, it is only because he inherited it from them. But Gumilyov's *Notes of a Cavalryman*, his front-line dispatches of 1914–15, are also far more pictorial and ornate than most other dispatches (for which, incidentally, he was reproached at the time). So the romanticizing and color—it's Gumilyov himself.

And the reproach for fascination with other cultures. Can this be condemned? Ulyanov even reproaches him that "of the bridges thundered over by the 'Lost Tram' only one spanned the Neva; the rest crossed the Nile and the Seine."

And what stinging words: "he cannot forgive himself his Russian origin." During Stalin's campaign against "cosmopolitanism," such formulas would have resulted, at the very least, in dismissal, but more likely arrest, exile, death...

What to answer to that?

We somehow like it when foreigners fall in love with our culture, take to it, steep themselves in it. But if we are fair, we should not then condemn our writers for loving the cultures of other countries.

Gumilyov hardly needs anyone's defense—especially now. And still, it is worth recalling that by translations and original poems he acquainted the Russian reader with English and French poets, with the cultures of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Nikolai Otsup wrote that Gumilyov proved Russia "can love a nature not native to it no less than other lands can." And this truly is his service to Russia. He brought distant lands closer to his readers. Much in their life and culture came to be felt not as purely foreign, alien, but as to a great degree already understood, absorbed—"digested" by native culture.

"The name of Gumilyov," Otsup emphasized, "may be for us and for the West yet another example of the indissolubility of Russian and European destinies. Gumilyov did not betray the East... But neither did he make an idol of the East—he himself learned from the West and called on all to do so." [111]

Poet Yuri Terapiano went even further: "By his thrust toward the West, Gumilyov brought into new Russian poetry his own tone and made a not unsuccessful attempt (judging by his numerous followers and imitators) to shift the switch from 'Slavophile' rails onto 'Western' ones." [112]

And did interest in and love for the culture of other countries prevent Gumilyov from loving his own? His love was perhaps quieter, purer than that of those who were too eager to demonstrate loyalty to the Motherland. Gumilyov could write:

*And I have drunk the air of another fatherland,*

—but for which country did he go to war as a volunteer? For Russia. And where did he return in the spring of 1918? To Russia. And this when the representatives of his social "class," on the contrary, were leaving their native land.

And there were his avowals:

*Russia's golden heart  
Beats evenly in my chest.*

Or—

*O Rus', stern enchantress,  
Everywhere you'll have your due.*

We like to stress that others must understand us—that it is important for other countries to grasp us. In 1980 Solzhenitsyn wrote "How America Is Threatened by Poor Understanding of Russia." [113]

But there is also the reverse side: what threatens us if we poorly understand other peoples and lands.

And Gumilyov helped us understand them.

How Soviet critics loved to unmask Gumilyov! No longer only for his love of exotica, but for "romantic" colonizing and imperialist "conquistadorism."

Here is a fairly typical sample—both in essence and in tone. Vissarion Sayanov's 1929 book *Essays on the History of Russian Poetry of the 20th Century*:

"Some critic has voiced the foolish claim that Gumilyov's exoticism is an escape from real life. On the contrary, it is precisely Gumilyov's exoticism that confirms my view that he was a genuine poet of the rising bourgeoisie—if not organizationally connected to the bourgeois public, then psychologically reflecting its tendencies... Gumilyov was a truly colonial poet, but he sang not of colonies rising toward great social battles of the future; he was a poet of aggressive capitalism growing into imperialism... Some wits, having read my article on Acmeism, zealously tried to prove that poems about how

*On Lake Chad*  
*An exquisite giraffe strolls...*

and the like do not at all justify my thesis about the social nature of Gumilyov's work. For their information, I report that, first, in Gumilyov's work there was a significant decadent period, and second, that a poet of any era may have the most diverse emotions, and that in determining a writer's social face, decisive is not separate works but the general tendencies of development, growth, worldview, and creative method." [114]

In 1935 they branded him thus: "The race theory... greatly appealed to Gumilyov." "He remained a hard-headed imperialist, an implacable enemy of the proletariat." "He was a direct spy of imperialism." [115]

In the large encyclopedic article on Gumilyov in the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia one reads—ungrammatically, at that: "The advent of imperialism explained his love of exotic lands. The 'Muse of Far Wanderings' took on the hue of an aggressively imperialist striving to seize colonies. Gumilyov's poems about Africa... echo Kipling's colonial songs." The *Literary Encyclopedia* says that Gumilyov's craftsmanship "reaches its highest point" in the "exotic stream" of his work. But: "Exoticism in conjunction with militarist aspirations—the typical 'romantic' colonizer mood, imperialist 'conquistadorism.'"

It seems the authors had not read Gumilyov's words that Africa "awaits guests and will never acknowledge them as masters."

Later, the third edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia said only that "the shortcomings of his poetry are its exoticism."

So at least, thank God, they no longer accused him of direct calls for colonial seizure. But his interest in far lands was still held against him and displayed as something that sharply set Gumilyov apart in Russian poetry.

His lines come involuntarily to mind:

*For everything the time of vengeance now has come,  
My lying, tender temple will be shattered by the blind.*

Or—

*Must I indeed be interrogated...*

## **WAS HE ALONE IN WORSHIPPING HER?**

*I see an enchanted shore,  
An enchanted distance.  
—Blok*

*By chance upon a pocket-knife  
You'll find a dust-speck of far lands—  
And once again the world will seem  
Strange, wrapped in colored haze!  
—Blok*

For all the variety of reproaches hurled at Gumilyov, there is, undoubtedly, a common thread. With his passionate interest in distant lands, he appears as a solitary. It comes out as though this sharply distinguished him from writers of the time, as though he were unique among his compatriots and contemporaries in this passion.

Even Gumilyov's admirers argued so. Here is Otsup: "The thirst to learn and experience everything among others was satisfied by armchair wanderings in history and geography, as well as erotic inspirations of a dubious sort. Gumilyov passed through this too, but as a chance guest. He is drawn to the open, to what is primitive, unspoiled. He finds all this... in Africa." [116]

It turns out such moods belonged only to Gumilyov.

Did Gumilyov himself think so? The answer is in his verse:

*So often did I cast a probing glance,  
And so many answering glances met—  
Odysseuses in the gloom of shipping offices,  
Agamemnons among tavern markers.*

Yes, far wanderings, if only in dreams, enticed many people from the most various levels of society.

But how attuned was Gumilyov's mood to the circle he himself belonged to: men of letters, people of art?

What can be said of a letter by Bryusov dated July 1901?

"I love heat. My forebears were from Kostroma, but I am sure my 'heavenly kinship' is with some savages from the tropics... To be naked, to lie with dart in hand on burnt grass by a dried-up river, to bathe in melted air and lazily listen to a distant lion's roar—that is something native and comprehensible to me. The tropical fan of palms, the drunken frenzy of plants, the ugliness and horror of reptiles are somehow clearer to me than our pines and birches and puny grass—this hand-colored photograph of our summer. I know winter's beauty, I admire it, but I do not love it... I dream of the roar of the waterfall Mosi-oa-Tunya." [117]

Bryusov spoke of this not in one letter alone. How is this not a Gumilyov-like dream?

*The heart of Africa is full of song and flame,  
And I know that, when at times we see  
Dreams to which we cannot find a name,  
It is your wind that brings them, Africa, to me!*

And not only Bryusov dreamed of Mosi-oa-Tunya—the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi. Balmont sang of it in verse. Playfully romantic—and surely a little sadly—Larisa Reisner wrote to Gumilyov in 1916: "My dear Hafiz, ah, next time bring a poem, a sonnet, whatever you like—about janissaries, a seven-headed Cerberus, anything, my dear friend, but let lying and fantasy again be adorned with all the shades of a peacock's feather and become my Madagascar, equator, eucalyptus and bamboo thickets, where people supposedly find simplicity of soul and happiness of being." [118]

Was this only his world's reflection? Or a particle of something present in him, in her, in others—what hovered in the air?

"Innocent Annensky's 'A Buddhist Mass in Paris,' Vladimir Solovyov's 'Ex Oriente Lux' and 'The Nile Delta,' Fyodor Sologub's 'The Hindu Warrior,' Mikhail Kuzmin's 'Alexandrian Songs,' Sergei Gorodetsky's 'India' and 'Colonial Song,' Khlebnikov's 'O Asia! with you I torture myself' and 'Asia,' Mandelstam's 'The Egyptian'—what to say of Alexander Grin..." This list could be continued almost ad infinitum.

Alexander Blok—yes, for him, the singer of Petersburg, the great port city, ships and far voyages often appeared:

*Far past midnight—in the distance  
Of an uncharted land—  
Sadly we were seeing off  
The pale-blue ships.*

Bunin, who seemed to focus all his creative forces on Russian life and nature, did not escape an interest in far lands either. He felt the influence of Eastern motifs. He did not pass Africa by: "By Nubian Black Huts," "It Was at Noon, in Nubia, on the Nile."

In the journal *Vostok*, which in the early 1920s was published by *World Literature*, it was said that Bunin's "Zeynab" imitates an Arabic folk song. And pre-Islamic classical Arabic poetry served as material for his "The Trace".[119]

*...They left at dawn. The sandy hummocks  
Lay empty.  
Blue smoke crawled. The coals glowed blood-red  
Where yesterday their tents were black.  
I slid from the saddle—the spicy smell of smoke  
Breathed warmth on me.  
In the sun's glitter was inexpressibly  
Beautiful the clear golden fire.*

*... A valley gray, and naked  
As a donkey's flank. In wells—rot and muck,  
From beyond the hummocks seas run, shining,  
Dully silvering.  
But here for seven days my sweetheart lived:  
I sat upon the knoll where stood her tent.  
Here blows the wind from south and north—  
It will not sweep away her dear trace.*

*...Night wearied with its hush and darkness.  
When will it end?  
Night, like a camel, lay and pushed away  
From head the sacrum.  
The sand grew cool. Cold and unresponsive,  
It slips like a snake through hands...  
A gem-like ring is burning, playing—  
The star of my love.*

A well-known poetess of those years, G. A. Galina (this is Glafira Adolfovna Einzeling, later Burburg-Skobelev), wrote the poem "Boer and Englishman"—her verses became the basis of the Russian folk song "Transvaal, My Country."

Nikolai Nikolaevich Karazin—a writer and painter now almost forgotten—wrote several stories about the Transvaal at the start of our century. He was popular then. There even appeared his collected works in twenty books as a supplement to the journal *Nature and People*.

And the appearance of all manner of African images in popular, often humorous songs and verses... Black girls, exotic trees, giraffes, and hippopotamuses in Nikolai Agnivitsev. In the magazine *Capital and Manor* he opened a column "The Jolly Crocodile." Izza Kremer, the popular Odessa chanteuse, had "A Negro Boy from Zanzibar," "Black Tom."

A tragedy *The Negro's Revenge* was written. Its author, S. V. Kisin (married to Bryusov's sister), appeared under the pen name "Muni." The hero was a Negro in a starched shirt. He turned up in various places in Petersburg: on the Winter Canal, in a fashionable atelier, in a restaurant window where a party of lawyers and ladies were dancing the cakewalk, and he would prophetically say: "It cannot go on like this," or "Nothing will come of it."

The East and Africa enticed Russian society then, and this was reflected in the work of many writers and poets. Interest in the East was many-sided. There was burning curiosity. And sympathy. And partly fear. Konstantin Leontiev's dark prophecy—"Russia stands not at the beginning of her path, but at its end"—Vladimir Solovyov connected explicitly with the East:

*O Rus'! In lofty forethought  
Thy proud mind is engaged;  
What East wouldst thou become:  
The East of Xerxes or of Christ?*

And a few years later—

*So be it! God's scourging instruments  
Are not yet spent.  
A swarm of wakening tribes  
Prepares new blows.*

*O Rus'! Forget thy former glory;  
The double-headed eagle is crushed,  
And for the yellow children's sport  
Are given tatters of thy flags.*

Akhmatova later wrote of those times:

*The East still lay a space unknown  
And thundered far away like hostile packs.*

The frames of geographic imagination broadened sharply then. The generations of Gumilyov's grandfather and father were enthralled by *Parisian Mysteries*, books by Émile Gaboriau and Ponson du Terrail—novels whose action often took place in Europe. They may have read of far lands only in Fenimore Cooper.

But the childhood and youth of Gumilyov's generation was the time of the colonial partition of the world—above all of Africa. Children and adolescents hardly knew phrases like "the colonial partition," but journals, books, newspapers poured a stream of information about Africa and distant lands in general. The boundaries of the world expanded to the farthest corners of the planet. As in our day, the romantic impulses of childhood and youth are tied to mastering space and to science fiction, so then—they

were tied to learning about the Earth's far places. And this learning began with exotic romanticism, with falling in love with far countries.

In 1890 the *Northern Herald* published an anonymous translation of Baudelaire's sonnet "Exotic Perfume." Multitudes of other poems resembled it, though their authors were not as gifted as Baudelaire:

*If on a warm autumn evening I close my eyes  
Near your hot breast, breathing in its fragrance,  
Straightway I dream of the shores of a blissful land  
Where the rays of a monotonous sun blaze so bright.*

*That lazy island, a fragment of flowering paradise,  
Where on strange trees heavy fruits hang,  
Where the shining eyes of dusky girls gaze so freely,  
And men of athlete build are given such grace.*

*Before me revive the scenes of happy years—  
A harbor full of masts and yet-swollen sails,  
Not yet forgetting the cyclones that raged above,*

*Sailors' chants in the glitter of azure day,  
And the languorous smell of green tamarind groves,  
Blending in harmony, fills me through and through.*

Romances by Mayne Reid, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Jules Verne, Louis Boussenard, Louis Jacolliot gave powerful growth to such moods. Many of these novels are now forgotten—unjustly, I think. Our publishers often feared to reprint them because they contain the prejudices of their time—how could the authors avoid them? But is that sufficient grounds not to reprint many works of the classic adventure literature on which our great-grandfathers grew up?

Vladislav Khodasevich, who so loftily reproached his contemporary Gumilyov for "boyishness," himself ardently translated Stevenson's poem "Subtracted Countries."

*Around the lamp at the large table  
The pashas sit in the evening...  
Then, clutching a carbine,  
Only I creep alone in the darkness  
Along the narrow and silent path  
Between the sofa and the wall.*

[The original, from *A Child's Garden of Verses* and entitled "The Land of Story-Books reads as follows:

*Now, with my little gun, I crawl*

*All in the dark along the wall,  
And follow round the forest track  
Away behind the sofa back.*

*There, in the night, where none can spy,  
All in my hunter's camp I lie,  
And play at books that I have read  
Till it is time to go to bed.]*

Marina Tsvetaeva translated Baudelaire's poem "Le Voyage."

*For the stripling who at night pores over engravings—  
behind each wave is distance, and behind each distance—wave.*

Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich took those lines of Baudelaire (though he evidently translated them himself) as the epigraph to his tale about his voyages.[120]

The great mocker Arkady Averchenko poked fun at this passion. As a child in Odessa, having read Loupe Boussenard and Mayne Reid, he too dreamed of getting his hands on "a wagon like the South African Boers, weapons, supplies, hiring a few hunters for company, and then heading off to the African diamond fields."

But when a menagerie with real lions and tigers came to Odessa, the future humorist was disappointed by the Negro accompanying them. "A Negro ought to be naked, except for his thighs covered with bright paper cloth. And here I saw a profanation: a Negro in a red tailcoat with a ridiculous green top hat."

Nor did the king of beasts behave in the least Boussenard-like. "The lion, terror of black men, scourge of herds and of careless hunters, was jumping through a hoop." Yet "everyone ought to do his own work: an Indian—scalp-taking, a Negro—eating the travelers fallen into his clutches, and a lion—tearing to pieces indiscriminately this one, that one, and the third..."[121]

All this, so he claims, instantly turned the young Averchenko away from dreams of being a hunter in Africa. He even titled that passage of his memoirs "The Death of an African Hunter." True, who knows what really happened in the life of that inveterate fabulist...

Paustovsky, by contrast, remembered without a trace of irony—even in his mature years—how the "enormous continent" lured the boys of that time, "where, according to our notions, only the wise elephants trumpeted, the tropical forests breathed miasmas, and hippopotamuses snorted in the greasy slime of great unexplored rivers... Africa existed as a land for travelers, for various Stanleys and Livingstones... With hunting lions, with dawns in the sands of the Sahara, with rafts on the Niger, with the whistle of arrows, the furious racket of monkeys, and the gloom of impenetrable forests. There, dangers awaited us at every step. In mind we had already many times died of fever or of

wounds behind the log walls of a fort, listening to the whine of a lone bullet, breathing the smell of wet poisonous grass, staring with inflamed eyes into the black velvet sky where the Southern Cross was burning out." [122]

What else but the books loved in childhood prompted Mandelstam's exclamation: "For the red-haired arrogance of Englishwomen, for quinine from distant colonies!"

Those moods—strengthened by fine adventure literature—lasted a long time.

"I always dream of getting to Africa, hacking through tropical forest, alone with an ax and a rifle." These words were said not by Gumilyov and not in his time, but in the autumn of grim 1941, at the front. They were spoken by the commander of the 50th Army, General M. P. Petrov, one of the first Heroes of the Soviet Union, decorated already for the Spanish War. [123] He was born in 1898. How deep the childhood romance of far lands had sunk into his consciousness if he spoke of it in the hardest days of the Great Patriotic War, shortly before his death!

From the end of the last century, poets, writers, and painters increasingly traveled not only to Asian countries but also to Africa. Balmont traveled most of all. He visited Africa. [124] He was in Egypt at the end of 1909 and later dedicated not only the book *The Land of Osiris* to it, but many poems in other collections. And he was in South Africa and Madagascar in the spring of 1912, during his round-the-world journey. In one of his letters then he listed: "I saw South Africa, Tasmania, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, New Guinea, the wonders of the Java Sea, India and Ceylon—our brotherly, unhappy, and great India, so similar to Russia..."

Professor Vladimir Markov of the University of California, a brilliant connoisseur of Balmont, answering my questions, especially emphasized that Balmont prepared carefully for every journey, read a great deal, and "in Egyptology was monstrously well read."

Writer Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko, after a trip to North Africa, published a book *Under the African Sky. Sketches, Impressions, Mirages and Recollections*. Henryk Sienkiewicz visited East Africa; afterward he published *Letters from Africa*—it appeared several times in Petersburg and Moscow from 1895—and the novel *In Desert and Wilderness*.

A few years after Gumilyov's death, the writer Nikolai Piksarov provided something like a tally of increased "mobility" among Russian men of letters: "The older guard willingly traveled abroad, i.e., to Western Europe, chiefly to Germany, more often still—to Italy, and especially to France. The old provincial commoner-writer, after overcoming the pull of the homeland, usually got stuck abroad forever. Studying the lives of writers close to us in time, we see that he is... incomparably more mobile and bolder than the older ones. Having made calculations, we establish that 25 percent of our belletrists have been abroad. For some, e.g. Bely and Slezkin, 'a going beyond the borders' took place along habitual routes—to the West. But many of the writers went far to the East. Sokolov-

Mikitov saw Turkey, Greece, Syria, Africa; Novikov-Priboy, a participant in the Battle of Tsushima, lived in Japanese captivity and then from 1907 to 1913 wandered abroad as a political émigré in France, England, Spain, Italy, and North Africa." [125]

But Piksanov underestimated their "mobility." Andrei Bely went not only West; in 1911 he visited Tunisia and Egypt. Kuzmin—Egypt. During a Mediterranean voyage at the start of our century, Yevgeny Zamyatin saw Constantinople, Smyrna, Beirut, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Port Said, Alexandria.

And the painters? Petrov-Vodkin in 1907, traveling through North Africa, even reached the edge of the Sahara. Pavel Filonov in 1907 saw Constantinople, in 1911—Palestine. The art historian Vladimir Matvei (V. Markov) toured many European capitals, searching museums for objects of African art, and wrote the book *Negro Art*.

I do not know whether Alexander Yakovlev already had an interest in Africa then. But later, in the first years of emigration, he crossed Africa as part of the "Black Expedition" organized by the firm Citroën, and published a splendid album of drawings—"African Mephistopheles." In Paris, "of the Russian painters, it seems only Yakovlev prospered"—largely thanks to the success of his African pictures and drawings. So thinks his daughter Tatyana Yakovleva-Liberman—the unrealized dream of Mayakovsky.

These travels and dreams of travel were inspired by diverse aims. Nikolai Nikolaevich Strakhov, author of the three-volume *Struggle with the West in Our Literature*, intended at the end of the last century to go to Egypt so as at least to see there a life original and not yet much touched by European influence. But later he refused to go, deciding that even there, on African soil, he would encounter the very European influence he so disliked.

For those who had not been to Africa, possibilities arose to get to know it in ways other than from books. In Petersburg there was an "Abyssinian Exhibition." In Moscow's Znamensky Lane, at the art exhibition of the merchant Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin, one could see pieces of African art. They stood in one hall with Picasso, who, as they said then, in search of the primitive, turned to African art.

From year to year, "Dahomey Amazons" came on tour. Boris Pasternak, an eleven-year-old boy, after seeing their performance, recalled a quarter-century later: "...my first sensation of art was linked for me with the sensation of naked black bodies, an act of compacted suffering, a tropical parade under the boom of drums." [126]

In Gumilyov's lifetime and afterward, many thought he lived as if in two dimensions. A very practical, worldly Petersburger, a man of affairs (as Akhmatova said), but at the same time a citizen of the Unknown Country. He sang of "a foreign sky," "the fields of an unknown land," "the call of the wind" from some "blessed country,"

*The torturing outlines  
of unknown continents.*

But even in these dreams—was he alone?

"Of the Unknown Country" was the title of an essay at the start of our century by the English writer Belloc—about eternal dreams that are born again and again. "God is my witness," he wrote, "this Unknown Country has been opened hundreds of times in poetry." He cited lines by his compatriot:

*There is for it neither word nor notion  
in human speech. The blessed land!*

And he told of an acquaintance of his, a simple man of the early twentieth century, not a poet but a reader, who in the stalls of street bookmen searched for books "about the Unknown Country, of which he was a citizen: as a crank—I thought then; as a sage—I think now." [127]

Gumilyov knew Belloc; they met in early 1918 in London at a soirée.

In Russia there were no fewer, perhaps more, such dreams that beyond the far-off bad weather lies a wondrous country. For some, that country was overseas; for others—in mankind's distant past.

In times of historical rupture, nostalgia for the past grows stronger—when, it seems, people were not yet mangled by the distortions of later civilizations. Rousseau wrote of the simple and dignified life of the "noble savage."

The beginning of our century was such a rupture. A sharp acceleration of socioeconomic development, the rise of capitalism, industrialization, the breath of an approaching revolution, of worldwide upheavals... The old way of life was collapsing; to many in the arts it seemed the ground was slipping from underfoot, and the future was unclear, anxious, perhaps apocalyptic.

Industrialization was the step-grandfather of the white man of Europe and the United States. Hence the splitting apart in Western culture that first took hold, perhaps, among the intelligentsia—what was later labeled "the creative intelligentsia."

Speeding industrialization, the breaking of customary life provoked in many writers and artists a protest as fierce as Maupassant's at the building of the Eiffel Tower.

With the East—and even more with Africa—there was linked a simple, naive, almost primeval life: an idealization that rose sharply among men of letters and the arts before the World War, not only in Western Europe but in Russia too. The painter Pavel Kuznetsov dreamed of penetrating the "mystery of the East." At the start of 1903 Maximilian Voloshin wanted to go to the East in order, in Bryusov's words, "to free himself from Europeanism." The painter Natalya Goncharova declared: "...I shake the dust from my feet and depart from the West."

Already in the air were the very ideas that Spengler would later voice in *The Decline of the West*—and those with which Nikolai Berdyaev and several Russian philosophers answered him in their book *Oswald Spengler and the Decline of Europe*.

It is hard to say how familiar Gumilyov was with serious philosophical literature (though, as Odoevtseva recalled, he recommended young poets "to read the eleven volumes of Carus's *Naturphilosophie*"). But he felt these moods acutely. In one of his stories he smilingly portrayed a man—an Indian—who "so sincerely hated everything European that his success in England was assured." Having befriended in Paris the painters Mikhail Larionov and his wife Natalya Goncharova, he dedicated that story to her.

To look for a simple and happy life in Africa seemed the most natural of all: the cradle of mankind, a sunlit land, wild nature not yet spoiled by modern civilization. Such idealization undoubtedly influenced the surge of interest in Africa. To such a degree that the art historian Matvei (V. Markov), author of *Negro Art*, proclaimed in his article "Principles of the New Art" that the primitive man in his quest "intuitively seized some little trait of the divine and returned as a happy child."

African art was hotly debated. Alexandre Benois, for example, it did not enthrall. At Shchukin's exhibition he was amazed to see that the host admired an African "idol" "as another would admire the Hermes of Praxiteles," insisting that "the beauty of a statuette made some five hundred years ago by savages in the wilds of Africa teaches him to understand better the present-day beauty of Picasso."

What need to speak of African idols if the work of Picasso himself did not inspire in Benois any sacred tremor. And Nikolai Berdyaev wrote in 1914: "When you enter the Picasso room in S. I. Shchukin's gallery, a feeling of eerie horror seizes you..."

Gumilyov wanted to set out his views in an article "African Art," but he only managed to begin it; in any case, only the very beginning has been found so far, and it is hard to judge his main ideas and the overall plan.

In *Russkoye bogatstvo*, one of the most serious Petersburg journals, there appeared in 1913 an article "At the Foot of the African Idol," subtitled "Symbolism—Acmeism—Ego-Futurism." It said:

"...The word 'savage' is beginning to fill with lyrical content. Behind it are dreamed limitless distances promising to eclipse all the fairy-tale acquisitions of nineteenth–twentieth-century culture. That same 'happy child'—the savage—is what cultured society wishes to become." [128]

The editors deemed the article so important that they gave it space across two issues. The author, the well-known literary scholar Alexander Redko, published it again after the Revolution—shortened—in his book *Literary and Artistic Quest at the End of the 19th and Start of the 20th Century*. He gave it another no less symbolic title: "The Aesthetics

of the 'Black' Apollo." The book itself proved so interesting that in 1973 England brought out a reprint of the 1924 Moscow edition.

Redko tied his reflections to Gumilyov's work.[129]

...Two more phrases from Bryusov's 1901 letter quoted above. "I know the beauty of the city, I revel in it, I breathe the city—but with despair, with rage, as one inhales poisonous vapors, as one smokes opium. This is already a love of revulsion and hatred, a love of a crime committed upon one's own soul." [130] Perhaps here Bryusov was among the first to catch what soon permeated much of literature: a sharp opposition of nature to the ugly faces of urbanism and a fresh surge of idealization of simple, primeval human existence—or what was taken for such.

And what of the very first published poem by Gumilyov—"I ran into the forest from the towns"? It appeared in 1902. The moods are in harmony not because Gumilyov later called Bryusov his teacher, his maître. Rather, Gumilyov counted Bryusov his teacher because here their feelings were in harmony.

These feelings are likely as eternal as the world—and not the monopoly of Europeans weary of civilization. In that Africa to which Gumilyov fled from noisy Petersburg such moods had long existed. Does not the Ethiopian poet Mangestu Lemma's mid-century poem echo Gumilyov's "I ran into the forest from the towns"? Its title is "Fed Up."

*These Ethiopian dandies,  
And European snobs—  
All that's a worldly rabble.  
I'm sick of their quips,  
Their bickering and bragging,  
Their gossip and their gall.  
They quarrel here and there,  
And never understand.  
Let's run off to the green wood,  
To gaze up at the crowns,  
To drink an infusion of leaves,  
To wander the thick grass,  
And, answering the flocks of birds,  
Let my dog go racing, barking,  
To fall upon the grass  
And sleep our fill at last. [131]*

Such moods—together with rejection of Symbolism, and let us admit it, the desire to found and head one's own literary school—all this led to Gumilyov's proclamation of his Acmeism, or Adamism.

On the eve of the First World War, Kornei Chukovsky, like many, wrote of this with a touch of disapproval, irony, and perhaps without full understanding: "Now even the

subtle aesthetes, the Parnassians—like, for example, Gumilyov—have suddenly enrolled as Adams: they have founded a sect of Adamists, primitive, primeval men."

Gumilyov himself, as is known, did not agree with such a definition. Admitting that the trend he founded could be called not only Acmeism but Adamism, he explained Adamism not as primitivism, but as "a manfully firm and clear view of life."

Indeed, his relation to "exotic" lands was by no means pure idealization. And Africa, which he so loved, appears in the poem "Equatorial Forest" as fearful, horrifying. Yet he writes so that this Africa attracts as well.

As for the "primitive, primeval men" (by which, of course, he did not mean the Africans—the Ethiopians and Somalis—through whose lands he traveled), he portrayed them in the play *The Rhino Hunt*. Their life appears not as a happy Arcadia but as a harsh, rough, primitive struggle for existence—a truthful picture, far from the rosy cloudlessness with which some historians and writers try to present our past.

At the same time, in what Gumilyov says about "exotic" lands and their peoples one can find very different shades. Hardly can he be called "a whole nature" (I have never been able to understand what that is): he was, as befits a real person, woven of contradictions.

So it is no easy task to reconstruct his views even somewhat fully—and was that picture ever finished? The times were turbulent, the surrounding life changed with extraordinary speed, and it was hard to make sense of it, while the poet himself was only approaching mature age.

Echoes of other moods, also characteristic of that time, sound in statements by Gumilyov recorded by Vera Nevedomskaya. In the last years before the First World War she often met with Gumilyov and Akhmatova.

In her words, to Gumilyov "there appeared in the future a decline of the white race drowning in materialism, and, as retribution for this—the rising of the yellow and black races." More than that, "Gumilyov somehow spoke of an inevitable clash of the white race with the colored." [132]

Much in Gumilyov's views would doubtless have become clearer had he finished the works he began: the essay on African art; or the article "The Poetry of Baudelaire," in which he tried to assess the role of the nineteenth century in the history of humanity. The preserved portion of that article gives an idea of the path of his thought.

"People suddenly remembered how little they had done, and set to work feverishly and at the same time methodically. Mendeleev's periodic table was only a belated symbol of this work. 'What has not yet been discovered?' the researchers asked each other, as once knights asked about monsters and villains, and rushed wherever there remained even the slightest possibility of creation. A whole series of new sciences appeared; the earlier ones

received an unexpected direction... In the depths of European society, by Lassalle and Marx, there was discovered a new powerful explosive— the proletariat."

And further:

"The forests and deserts of Africa, Asia, and America revealed their age-old secrets to travelers, and bands of daredevils, as in the sixteenth century, seized huge exotic kingdoms." [133]

Of course, the Muse of Far Wanderings did not rule all of Gumilyov's work. But in his worship of that Muse were expressed both love of nature, that inexplicable "sixth sense"—"neither to eat, nor drink, nor kiss"—to which he devoted such ardent avowals, and above all a love of real, primeval nature.

Here too lay a protest against the ugly life of great industrial cities. Hence the interest in lands we have come to call exotic.

Gumilyov was no solitary. To use the bureaucratise of certain textbooks, he was a brilliantly vivid representative of a definite trend in the creative quest of the intelligentsia at the beginning of our century—only he expressed those quests more fully and brightly than many of his brethren in letters.

## MULTIPLE ECHOES

*Poems have one advantage over people:  
they come to life—more than once. —*  
*Tynyanov*

*I have something to sing, standing before the Most High;  
I have something with which to justify myself before Him.*  
*—Vysotsky*

The influence of Gumilyov's romanticism can be seen in poets as different as Eduard Bagritsky, Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky, Nikolai Tikhonov, Irina Odoevtseva, and Vladimir Vysotsky.

"His poems hypnotize. I remember how, as a youth, I bought in Wolf's bookshop on Nevsky Prospekt in Petersburg a book by a poet then unknown to me, titled *Romantic Flowers*. Returning home to Kamenny Island, I began to read it. More and more the poems took hold of me. And suddenly two lines pierced me straight through—I caught my breath:

Far, far away on Lake Chad  
An exquisite giraffe strolls."

So wrote the poet Leonid Strakhovsky. He carried his reverence for Gumilyov through his whole life. In 1953 in Toronto he published a collection of his poems with a

dedication: "To the memory of a faultless poet, a perfect wizard of the Russian word, my dear and respected Friend and Teacher Nikolai Gumilyov—with deepest humility I dedicate these verses." [134]

Gumilyov's impact on Konstantin Paustovsky is undeniable—at any rate, there is much in common in their work. From Taganrog in April 1917, Paustovsky wrote his wife: "Do you know what I found in Gumilyov's *Strange Sky*—it is so close and clear to me." And he copied in the letter the whole of Gumilyov's "By the Fireplace," about far wanderings. Having copied it entire, Paustovsky added: "Isn't it fine?" [135] And in Paustovsky's prose the Muse of Far Wanderings always hovers.

Gumilyov's tramway thundered in the verse of Iosif Utkin— even in 1929, when mentioning Gumilyov was still considered risky.

And what trace did those leave who studied with Gumilyov in Petrograd circles and studios?

Who among us has not heard—and who has not loved—Vertinsky's song "Here strange towns make noise, and strange waters lap"? From Paris restaurants and the taverns of Russian Harbin came to Moscow—"we must live; we must not remember."

But how many knew that those words belong to Raina Blokh, a student of Gumilyov? [136]

Gumilyov's influence is diverse. Those who became engrossed in his little books—especially when those books had to be hunted down with such difficulty—willingly or not fell under the charm of his mysterious, strange world.

Influence is complex. At times we ourselves cannot quite understand who influenced us and how. And having understood, we are not always ready to admit it, still less publicly. And those Gumilyov influenced went to their graves without ever being able to name him—him whose name was banned.

And yet Nikolai Otsup believed that "he even expanded the geographic boundaries of Russian songs by introducing Africa, the exotic." [137] And that is true.

A lilac Negro, banana-lemon Singapore, a Brazilian cruiser and the dives of San Francisco—when Vertinsky created all these images, did he call to mind Gumilyov? And Vera Inber—in her early verses and ditties?

And the ditties of the era of the New Economic Policy? It is customary to consider them banal, tasteless. Perhaps. But though they did not make it into songbooks and their authors often remained unknown to the wide public, still they were copied and sung: "There was in Batavia a little house," "A stern captain fell in love with a girl from a little tavern," "In the port of Cape Town," "Cabin boy Bill," "The night-time Marseille roars," "John Gray"... And that frivolous ditty with the sticky tune—"When the sky is dyed with

turquoise, beware of doing something bad"—where "captain's pipe" and "captain's bridge" cheekily rhymed with "beckoning gray skirt."

How many such songs there were. "Over a pair of tousled braids a sailor brawled with a ragamuffin..." Many survived to the late thirties; some outlived the Second World War. And new ones appeared later, perhaps with another tone: "In the mysterious land of Madagascar" or "The captain gave us the order—to fly to Cape Town."

"The easiest thing, of course, with the peremptoriness of a Stalin-era planner, is to declare them vulgar, philistine—or better yet, nonexistent. But they were; people sang them; they were part of living life. Why cross them out of the past? For some reason they appeared and became popular amid all-too-familiar thunders, slogans, and campaigns."

By no means do I wish to attribute their appearance directly to Gumilyov's influence. It was more complicated than that. Yet surely there existed some link, however indirect. In any case, in Gumilyov's poems—and in those songs—there is, indisputably, an echo; and his mysterious, strange world found a reverberation in those who wrote them and in those who sang them.

I very much hope that Gumilyov's admirers will not take what follows as sacrilege, blasphemy, or profanity—as a belittling of Gumilyov's poetry and of the poet's memory in general, whom I love, no doubt, no less than they do.

"In that world—a world of fear, terror, secret prisons—poetry did not die. And so, when out in the street, walking home from a tedious editorial office, through snow and slush, I would suddenly hear a passerby muttering aloud, say, lines by the forbidden Gumilyov—so, too, would a fellow believer recognize a fellow believer in my country." [138] Thus wrote Fabian Zverev, one of the poets of the Russian emigration, quoting verse by Nikolai Morten:

*O, wondrous magic of forbidden lines...  
...Thus do they recognize each other,  
In my land, the co-faithful.*

This was the most important influence of Gumilyov's poetry: the way it was copied out, passed from hand to hand in secret, memorized by heart, discussed in half-whispers.

One of the typescript collections of Gumilyov's poems I saw in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department of Columbia University's main library in New York. A sizable collection—one hundred and fifty pages. It includes poems about Africa and the East. It was typed in 1939.[139] How strong the fascination with Gumilyov's verse was even before the Second World War, if one of these homemade collections even reached Columbia University.

Until 1986, as is known, Gumilyov could not to be published in our country. Nor even to be mentioned in print. But it happened that poets smuggled manuscripts dedicated to him abroad. Like this:

*Like Gumilyov—to hunt the lion—  
I go into the city, hunting you:  
They've given me spears—the gilded spires,  
And on the snow, a sand still dry;  
And ebony trees in a smoky distance,  
And a rose-pink granite chest—  
And there where Winter Palace lies, a desert,  
I roam—a Petersburg Hagar.*

These sorrowful lines are dated 1935. Lidiya Ivanovna Averyanova-Diderikhs, a Leningrad poet who wrote under the name L. Lisitskaya, secretly sent abroad, even before the war, the manuscript of her collection *The Silver Reliquary. Poems about Gumilyov*. Gleb Struve later published some of the poems from that collection—but only many years afterward.[140]

Editions of Gumilyov and poems dedicated to him are a large chapter in the literature of the Russian Emigration.

In 1988 at Yale University I met Eduard Stein, a native of our country who founded the press "Antiquariat," which has already brought out a good number of reprints of rare Russian books.

He told me that in 1984 he visited West Berlin and Nina Lurie, one of Gumilyov's students in the "Sounding Shell" circle. She believes it was she who had the last conversation with Gumilyov before his arrest (though many claimed this honor). In the spring of 1921 she celebrated her twentieth birthday together with Gumilyov; in the autumn she was at the memorial service in Kazan Cathedral.

She wrote five poems about her teacher. Three were printed in the 1922 Petrograd memorial collection *The Sounding Shell*. In 1984 she gave Stein a handwritten collection of her poems. It includes the poem "On the Death of Gumilyov." She likely did not hope then that, after such a long break, she would see her poems in print again. But in 1987 her book finally appeared in Berlin.[141] And "On the Death of Gumilyov" once more saw the light.

*He was strong, and free, and proud—  
He built himself a house of marble.  
But he did not die beneath that sycamore  
Where Mary sat with Christ.*

*He passed, calm and grim,  
Casting a glance into the black of heaven.*

*And his last thoughts  
Only the northern forest knows.*

Another poem: "Autumn. On the Death of Gumilyov."

*I remember the Moika all in snow,  
Him in his cloak and mossy cap,  
A smoky cigarette at his lips,  
The way he used to greet me.*

*Then, narrowing his eye, he'd lazily go  
To the table where we sat in a long row,  
Lay down his cigarettes, slow on the board.  
I will not see that gray glance anymore.*

*From restaurant eyes the light pours out,  
The bow-strings call and call with pain,  
Along Nevsky Prospect, year on year,  
High heels tap out the autumn again.*

Poet Vasily Betaki devoted a poem to Gumilyov. Written in 1963, it is called "The Lion Hunt". The epigraph—Gumilyov's own lines:

*But understand the incomparable right  
To choose one's death oneself!*

The first four-volume edition of Gumilyov is not the well-known one prepared by Filippov and Struve. True, it is far more modestly produced, lacks that completeness and commentary. But it was the first. It was published in the DP camps (from the English *displaced persons*)—those who, after the Second World War, were left without a homeland.

It was very hard to publish books in the camps: no paper, no presses, no money. The American authorities administering the camps were reluctant to issue permits: they did not much encourage, as we would now say, *samizdat*. Above all, there were more pressing concerns.

And yet books, journals, newspapers appeared. Neither then nor later did anyone compile a catalogue of Russian publications from the camps, but there were probably about four hundred titles.

They were often printed on the blank verso of some German forms. The print runs were tiny, from a hundred to four hundred copies. Very few of these editions have survived. The DP's gradually dispersed—to the USA, Latin America, Australia, various European countries, even to Morocco. They were often allowed, I was told, to take only very little baggage. Books were the last thing. People left them behind. Those going to America and

other English-speaking lands took Shidlovsky's English textbook. And perhaps in second place were those little volumes of Gumilyov.

Now about a hundred DP titles are held by the New York Public Library. The largest collection belongs to Eduard Stein: two hundred titles of journals, newspapers, and books. He is preparing a bibliography of DP publications. In his home in New Haven he showed me the four little volumes of that Gumilyov edition—pocket-sized, on poor paper. Published in Germany, in Regensburg, in 1947, edited by Vyacheslav Zavalishin, whose introductory essay—"Standard-Bearer of Heroic Poetry"—opens the set. *The Tent* and *Pearls* make up volume one.

In an article published in 1972, Yuri Ivashe (Ivasc) conjectured that Gumilyov also influenced the poetry of Russian Harbin. "Of the Far Eastern center (of Russian poetry—D.)—Harbin—we still know very little. There, it seems, they often followed Gumilyov." But this was only a supposition. Only of Valery Pereleshin did Ivasc speak more definitely: "His recent translations of Chinese poets echo Acmeism." [142]

Now we can speak confidently. In 1988 Natalia Reznikova's memoir of Harbin in the 1920s–30s appeared. Of the students at Harbin University she wrote: "We... often, throwing aside our textbooks of political economy or civil law, recited by heart, interrupting each other, drunk with delight, the poems of Gumilyov." And of her friend, the student Vasya Obukhov: "His idol was Gumilyov." [143]

A collection of Gumilyov's verse was published in Shanghai; in Harbin a *Gumilyov Anthology* with essays about him, one (at least signed) by Ataman Semenov.

In Harbin, perhaps, appeared the very first translation of a Gumilyov poem into English: "Thy temple, O Lord, is in the heavens." [144]

It was translated by Maria Wiese (by marriage—Turova). She was born in New York in 1904; her father an American, her mother Russian. As a child she went to Russia, where her father was on diplomatic service. She was in Harbin because her father was sent to China on a diplomatic mission. Maria Germanovna now lives in California. She told Eduard Stein that she began translating Gumilyov in her early youth. But the first published translation is dated 1928 and came out in her 1929 collection, which bears as an epigraph two lines by Akhmatova:

*...It is impossible to live  
Without the sun for the body and song for the soul.*

Here too is Valery Pereleshin's *Sacrifice*, published in Harbin in 1944. [145] The poem "On Receiving the Poems of Gumilyov" is dedicated to Adrian Adrianovich Lamble, who evidently gave Pereleshin a copy of *Romantic Flowers*. Two stanzas:

*With the fragrance of a cherished South  
I'm languid, drunk, and new:*

*Today there came to me from a friend  
The book Romantic Flowers.*

*Proud wizard and magician—  
Lord, will you forgive him so?  
Beneath his pen, the paper lived,  
He, like You, made out of nothing.*

Another striking poet of Russian Harbin, Arseny Nesmelov (A. N. Mitropolsky), mentioned Gumilyov kindly in a poem about the St. George Cross:

*That badge was worn by splendid Gumilyov,  
And Kutuzov was its first cavalier.*

This poem, popular among Russian émigrés, appeared in Harbin in Nesmelov's collection *Bloody Dawn* (1928) under the title "In the Pawnshop," and in 1931, in the journal *Rubezh*, as "Saint George." [146]

Vasily Loginov's book of poems—he died, I think, in the 1960s—was published in Harbin in 1935. [147] He took as an epigraph Gumilyov's lines:

*Ah, how otherwise in former years  
The earth cast spells upon the heavens.*

Marianne Kolosova also dedicated poems to Gumilyov. They may not please the most fastidious taste. In mood they are ultra-patriotic. But likely for that very reason Kolosova was popular in Harbin. Among Ataman Semenov's troops (or, as was once written among us—"bands"), she was considered the bard of Russian China. In the poem "The Doomed Muse," dated April 27, 1933, she wrote:

*Through a hidden doorway out of Paradise  
There suddenly steps Gumilyov,  
With a Bolshevik bullet in his heart,  
Merciless and stern.*

*Consumed by anger-sorrow,  
He chose a darker night;  
He stole away from Paradise  
To help his Motherland.*

*And is it at his shoulders  
That two bright wings now shine?  
And to his soul at midnight  
Did the bells sing hymns...*

*I'm not prepared for heroism—  
But for the pain of my love—  
By Gumilyov's bright death  
Let me too be blessed.[148]*

In that same collection *To the Ring of Swords*, published in Harbin in 1934, there is a long poem "Nocturnal Sheet-Lightning," with stanzas like these:

*And thinking of Gumilyov,  
I flared up once again with rage—  
To drag to the cellar for execution  
My heaven-sent news,  
My lofty glory,  
My people's honor!*

*And some dull snout  
Leveled its Nagant  
At him, who walked in pride,  
Not stooping his back.*

*For the warrior and the poet—  
Whose eagle gaze was proud—  
That night before the dawn  
A hundred brainless snouts should have been shot! [149]*

Kolosova considered herself Gumilyov's follower. In her collection *Army of Songs* she wrote:

*To Gumilyov—shot down—  
Whose thought, like a beacon fire,  
Burns in my stern country—  
I am still a younger sister! [150]*

With the start of the Great Patriotic War, the moods in the poetry of Russian China changed. But this did not affect the reverence for Gumilyov. Though, to be sure, the poet Nikolai Shchegol expressed himself about Gumilyov in a rather unexpected way, in the 1941 Shanghai anthology of Russia's poets in China:

*On such days—of steel and lead—  
It seems: if he had taken up the roar of Moscow—  
Then Gumilyov would have fought to the end,  
In one rank with Blok—and Mayakovsky.*

*But if he had joined the enemy's lines  
And given them his forged-in-fire word—*

*Then we would not need his poems,  
Then we would not need even Gumilyov!*[151]

Poet Yevgeny Vitkovsky, a connoisseur of the literature of Russians Abroad, told me that Russian émigrés who left China for the Philippines published in 1950, on a small island near Luzon, a collection of Gumilyov's verse.

Vadim Kreid, author of a number of publications about Gumilyov, is preparing a volume *The Image of Gumilyov*. For my part, I only wished to show that the knight of the Muse of Far Wanderings was not forgotten even in those far corners of the earth that were so dear to him.

## **"I TEACH THEM HOW NOT TO FEAR..."**

*"There are many of them—strong, cruel, and merry...  
They carry my books in a saddle-pouch,  
read them in a palm grove,  
leave them behind on a sinking ship."  
—Gumilyov*

Perhaps the most astonishing thing is that Gumilyov's poems to the Muse of Far Wanderings could influence people's destinies—and by no means only literary ones.

The noted Arabist Yuri Nikolaevich Zavadovsky spent the last twenty years of his life in Moscow, at the Institute of Oriental Studies. His life was not ordinary. During the Civil War, his mother emigrated, taking him, then a boy. Constantinople, Paris... in Paris École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, then Africa—publishing medieval Arabic manuscripts. Service in the French Resistance in the Second World War. A return to the homeland.

I knew him, and for a time worked in the same institute. But back then we somehow never talked about "non-specialist" topics—"about life."

We did so only shortly before his death—and not in Moscow but in Leningrad. In early May 1978, we both went to a scholarly conference timed to Oldenroge's jubilee. It took place in the Museum and Institute of Ethnography. Afterwards Dmitry Alekseevich invited us to a banquet on the ship Kronverk, refitted as a restaurant and moored nearby on the Neva.

The Neva, a schooner, the Museum of Ethnography... How could one not recall again:

*There is a museum of ethnography in that city  
above the wide, like the Nile, many-watered Neva.  
When I am tired of being only a poet,  
There is nothing I would rather seek.*

I confessed to Zavadovsky that Gumilyov's poems had influenced my choice of profession—that I had become an Africanist. Hearing this, he smiled:

"Then hear me out too. Do you know what first stirred my interest in Africa? You won't guess? Well then—Gumilyov's *The Tent*. It was because of it, I suppose, that I became an Arabist."

And Yuri Nikolaevich told me this story. It happened in 1922, when his family was in Constantinople. One of his older friends, a poetry enthusiast who was close to Marina Tsvetaeva (as is known, she held Gumilyov in high esteem), gave the thirteen-year-old Zavadovsky a copy of the just-published *The Tent*, writing on it: *Ici est l'Afrique mienne* ("Here is my Africa"). The stanzas that made the greatest impression on the young Zavadovsky were those about the African city of Timbuktu (now we write—Tombouctou):

*And marked, of course, with a wondrous pearl  
Will be the city of radiant roofs—Timbuktu—  
Above which even the kite screams, puzzled  
To see, in the heart of the desert, mimosas in bloom,*

*To see girls, dusky and pliant as vines,  
Whose breath is more heady than balsamic resins,  
And fountains in the gardens, and crimson roses  
That crown the chiefs of poetic schools.*

Timbuktu became the city of his dreams. In June 1922 he and several of his peers swore that exactly ten years later, in June 1932, they would meet in Timbuktu at the main well. Then, already in Paris, Zavadovsky was given African birds, and this strengthened his dreams all the more.

Yuri Nikolaevich kept the vow. He entered the Paris School of Living Oriental Languages, finished it in 1931, and then set off to Northwest Africa. For several years he worked in the Sahara and in Morocco on the publication of Arabic manuscripts. Later, in Moscow, he published substantial studies of the Arabic dialects of North Africa.

By his own account, he often repeated Gumilyov's verses in those lands—the apocalyptic ending of the poem "The Sahara."

"Gumilyov must have written those lines in a very bleak mood. Or perhaps he foresaw the ecological disasters to come?" Zavadovsky said then.

Here is another story—one that struck me even more. Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Gnedin. He was a friend of one of my teachers, the noted Anglicist Nikolai Aleksandrovich Erofeev. In the 1930s, Gnedin held senior positions at *Izvestia*, and then in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. From the late thirties to the mid-fifties he was in prisons and camps.

He read Gumilyov's poems to himself in a punishment cell at the Lubyanka in May 1939, after he had been interrogated in his office by the then People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, Beria.

They sought from Gnedin incriminating testimony against the former People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Maximovich Litvinov, and he refused to give it. Then, at Beria's order, there in the same office he was beaten half to death by Kobulov, head of the NKVD's Special Investigations Unit, and his henchmen.

Gnedin told his friends about all this, and later wrote a book. Academician Sakharov, in his memoirs, called it "a remarkable book." Unfortunately it was published in our country only in 1988, after Gnedin's death.

"Beaten, my head burning, my body as if scorched, I was stripped naked and placed in a cold punishment cell... I stood naked again on the stone bench and recited verses by heart. I recited Pushkin, many poems by Blok, Gumilyov's poem *The Discovery of America*, and also his *Sixth Sense*... Someone quietly asked the guard, watching me through the peephole: 'Well, what's he doing?' He answered: 'He just keeps mumbling something to himself.'"[152]

So there, in the Lubyanka's punishment cell, awaiting execution or tortures worse than death, he tried to find strength by recalling Gumilyov's Columbus, his Muse of Far Wanderings—and then the dungeons that held the great discoverer. His memory involuntarily repeated:

*All passed like a dream! And in the present—  
A troubled foreboding of disaster.*

But so as not to go finally mad, he suggested to himself:

*Gay, unforeseen, and blood-bright  
The joys, the griefs, the frolics are  
Of that wild and captivating land...*

Who has not accused Gumilyov of posing, of bombast, of arrogance, of self-importance! And indeed, it may seem easy to see all that in his address to his readers:

*And when their final hour shall come,  
and even sight is veiled by level crimson mist—  
I'll teach them how at once to summon  
All the cruel, lovely life,  
All their native, wondrous earth...*

But for that reader—Gnedin—those lines truly helped "in the hour of awaiting death." He lived; but those lines might well have been the last words his lips had time to whisper. And we would never have heard his testimony, as we never heard it from the millions

who shared his fate. And was he the only one who tried then to gather his last strength by reciting these—or similar—verses?

Can there be any higher honor for a poet? His lines determined the choice of profession—and therefore the life—of a great scholar. And they helped a diplomat keep his reason in a desperate situation, on the verge of madness.

Shulgin remembered Gumilyov's "Captains" in the mid-1920s, when, under the name Eduard Emilievich Schmitt, he crossed the Soviet border and secretly visited Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad.[153]

After five years in the Ukhta-Pechora camps Boris Andreyevich Filippov read Gumilyov "greedily." He borrowed his volumes from the library of the Gippius sisters—Tatyana Nikolaevna and Natalya Nikolaevna (the third, with Merezhkovsky, was in Paris)—who had ended up in Novgorod; like Filippov, they were forbidden to live in Leningrad.[154]

...Reading this in Filippov's book, I involuntarily began sifting through my childhood memories of Novgorod and of those who had been banished there. One of them, after Siberian exile, was my father. I went to him in the summers and recall something of the conversations of the grown-ups. But most of all I remember how in Leningrad two NKVD men, choosing a time when I was home alone, came and with honeyed words pumped me: did my father ever come here, to Preobrazhenskaya–Radishcheva? Two adult uncles Jesuitically tried to wring from a preschooler whether his father had violated the sentence of exile—had he secretly returned to Leningrad to see his family? And in general—who visited us...

And that Novgorod reading of Gumilyov led Boris Filippov, many years later, already in America, together with Gleb Struve, to prepare and publish the four-volume Gumilyov.

Even Nikolai Ulyanov admitted that during the brutal months of the German siege, outside Leningrad in 1941–42, he tried "to fill the void in his mind" by writing down from memory poems—including Gumilyov's.[155]

Was it only these people whom Gumilyov helped? Only those whose direct testimonies time has preserved for us?

And Gumilyov himself? Did his own and others' verses help him? In August 1921 at the Cheka on Shpalernaya, and in his last moments at Berngardovka—what was it that pounded at his temples: what had not been completed, not done? What "most important little song, which I could not sing" did he fancy he heard?

Was he able himself, as he taught his readers—

*...to stand before the face of God  
With simple and with wise words,  
To wait calmly for His judgment?*

Did an image of a woman stand up in his fevered brain? And did he address her, like another poet:

*When my time had already passed  
And my star had set—  
You did not seek out faults alone,  
Nor judge me for my flaws.*

For Gumilyov, so often infatuated with several women at once, perhaps it was the face of an all-forgiving mother that appeared then...

And someone later managed to convince Anna Ivanovna that her younger son was alive: he was not the sort to perish so simply. And she believed that he had managed to escape, and that with the help of his friends and admirers he would, of course, make his way to his beloved Africa. "That hope did not leave her to her dying day," his elder sister later recalled.[156]

## POST SCRIPTUM

*Bitter is the fate of poets of every tribe;  
Russia's is punished hardest of all...  
— Küchelbecker*

*Our burden is a grievous burden:  
A baleful task allotted by fate,  
To glorify, for a brief time—  
No, not us, only our graves.  
— Gumilyov*

For several decades nothing was written about Gumilyov. Not only was his life taken, but his memory was silenced.

But did his memory suffer?

When Joseph Brodsky was exiled to the North, Akhmatova said:

— What a biography they're making for our redhead! As if he had hired someone to do it.

And to a question about the poetic fate of Mandelstam—exiled more than once and dead in the camps—she answered briefly and completely unambiguously:

— Ideal.[1]

Of Pasternak's death Kornei Chukovsky said in Lermontov's words:[2]

*And you will not wash away with all your black blood  
The righteous blood of the poet.*

That brand is on the killers of Gumilyov as well.

But at the same time Georgy Ivanov's words are fair: "In essence, for the biography of Gumilyov—the very biography he wished for himself—it is hard to imagine a more brilliant end." [3]

By Odoevtseva's testimony, Mandelstam said:

— How I miss Gumilyov... He was much bigger and more significant than his poems... But you couldn't invent a better death for Gumilyov. He wanted to be a hero and became one. He wanted fame and, of course, he will receive it. [4]

Georgy Adamovich was of the same opinion: "...his early violent death gave an impulse to the expansion of his poetic fame." And he added to that "Never during the life of Gumilyov did his books get wide distribution. Nikolai Gumilyov was not popular" [5]

Perhaps that is said too categorically. But it's hard for us to judge, how well-known and popular the poets and writers whom we love so much today were back then.

How many people truly understood Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Blok in their own time?

He himself answered:

— There were few who understood them, very few! [6]

Well then—during Bulgakov's life neither *The Master and Margarita* nor *Theatrical Novel* were published. And when Varlam Shalamov was writing his best stories, did many suspect his existence? And are there so few similar fates?

Even such an—so it seems to us now—universally beloved figure as Yesenin. He wrote to his friend Anatoly Marienhof just three years before his death: "...in Russia, apart from Jewish girls, no one reads us." [7] What is that? The coquetry of a poet spoiled by fame, or sincere bitterness?

Gumilyov, especially in the last years of his life, gained recognition both as a poet and as a teacher. But this recognition still was limited to a fairly narrow circle of writers and readers. In his lifetime, his poetry collections came out in tiny print runs. The first edition of *Romantic Flowers*—only three hundred copies.

Anna Akhmatova said of him:

— He did not live to see fame. It was at the threshold, about to arrive. But he did not have time to know it. [8]

Of the fame of true poets, Voloshin wrote:

*More honorable to be recited by heart  
And copied secretly and on the sly,  
In life to be not a book, but a notebook.*

Such fame did come to Gumilyov, but not in life, rather posthumously, when a martyr's halo shone around his name. His poems were memorized, declaimed in secret. Love for them became, for many, almost a password to recognize fellow spirits.

So the official silence around his name only gave it resonance and purity.

And his early end? Terrible, of course. But compared to what—what lives, what deaths? In the late twenties, thirties, forties, early fifties, "when fate trailed after us like a madman with a razor in his hand." How did the fate of his contemporaries—so very many—turn out?

And they'll soon write "traitor"  
To anyone they please.  
And to the full our contemporaries  
Will learn fear and trembling...

As if they did not bow to bullets,  
But then at random  
Crucified themselves and repented  
On the tribunes' Golgothas,

And drank themselves down, losing faith,  
And "maybe" didn't see them through,  
And shot themselves, and hanged themselves.  
And you—were spared.

How to imagine Gumilyov in those years?

Yes, none of that fell to his lot. His life was cut short suddenly. And, it seemed, on the rise. He had received the recognition he had so striven for. He began to be perceived as a maître. His lectures were attended. People studied with him. And women loved him—and that was so necessary for him...

In the country the devastation was ending; NEP (New Economic Policy) had begun. Several of Gumilyov's collections were about to go to press. The first, the African *The Tent*, had already been released. Gumilyov was already rejoicing over it... Even in prison he believed in his star; he wrote to his wife that he was calmly playing chess.

*To the Tsarskoe Selo Kipling  
It was his good fortune to preserve  
An officer's bearing  
And haughty speech.*

*...Neither illness, nor old age,  
Nor betrayal of himself  
Did he come to know,*

*and in August,  
In twenty-one, to the wall  
He stood, not wiping from his brow  
The cold sweat,  
Delivered from the shame  
Of the Petrograd Cheka.*

Terribly written by Vladimir Kornilov, but, alas, likely true.

Gumilyov did not live to reach that condition in which, ten years after his death, his friend Osip Mandelstam was throwing furious phrases onto paper: "All the works of world literature I divide into permitted and written without permission. The first are scum, the second are stolen air. To the writers who write things permitted in advance I want to spit in their faces; I want to beat them on the head with a stick...

"I would forbid such writers to enter into marriage and to have children. How can they have children—when it is the children who must continue for us, must say for us the chief thing—while their fathers are sold to the pockmarked devil three generations ahead."[9]

The pockmarked devil—Stalin?

And what mortal despair in Mandelstam's words: "I have no manuscripts, no notebooks, no archives. I have no handwriting, because I never write. I alone in Russia work by voice, and all around thick, coarse swine write. What sort of writer am I? To hell! Get out, fools!"

Gumilyov did not have to, in despair, beg his friends at least to answer his letters, as Mandelstam had to, who wrote to Tynyanov in the cursed Thirty-Seventh: "Please, do not consider me a shadow. I still cast a shadow... Not to answer me is easy. To justify not writing a letter or a note is impossible. You will do as you wish."[10]

And however much Gumilyov complained of loneliness, he likely had fewer grounds than Pasternak, who sobbed:

*I am alone, everything drowns in Phariseism.*

He did not have to experience the feelings with which Akhmatova wrote just two decades after his death—

*When by habit I call  
The cherished names of my friends,*

*Always at that strange roll call  
Only silence answers me...*

And she then was only just past fifty!

And how much despair, hopelessness—

*So be it. Without headsman and block  
A poet has no place on earth.*

...In 1989 there was published in Moscow the book *The Evil Songs of Guillaume du Ventre*, the verses of a Gascon, a brawler and reveler, comrade-in-arms of Henry of Navarre, who fought on St. Bartholomew's Night on the Huguenot side.[11] There was in reality no poet with such a name. He was invented by two prisoners who met across the vastness of the GULAG—Yury Veynert and Yakov Kharron. In his name they wrote poems—and those sonnets helped them survive.

Veynert and Kharron were younger than Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and Pasternak. Their talent declared itself already, in Gumilyov's words, "when the country sobbed under God's displeasure." Or, in the words of Vladimir Britanishsky, "when the country entered into its disgrace." Both were already *zeks* [inmates in Soviet labor camps]. Their voices were heard by no one; there could be no talk of publishing. They could not discuss poems with their fellows in the craft; they heard no readers' response. How were they to hone their mastery? And nonetheless many of their sonnets would do honor to the best poets of our time.

How many unclaimed talents—those who might be compared with Gumilyov—went into oblivion, never having declared themselves! And not even having become aware of themselves.

Varlam Shalamov, Irina Ratushinskaya... are there many of those whose voice still was heard, whose voice reached those on the far side of prison walls and barbed wire?

The creators of Guillaume du Ventre wrote of the most important things in a person's life. Of love. Of death. All that was not essential ceased to exist for them then. A sonnet about the execution of the chevalier de La Mole, sung by Alexandre Dumas—

*...If only I—like that—could mount the block in jest,  
Give the confessor a kick with a swing,  
And—put my head under the axe!*

How many people dreamed of meeting the hour of death like that! Judging by rumor—although exactly no one knows—Gumilyov himself behaved so in the last moment. Boldly, fearlessly, defiantly. As in the battles of the German war. As in Africa.

A few weeks before his death, Alexander Blok wrote angrily of his fate: "The filthy, nasty Mother Russia has finally gobbled me up like a piglet gobbles up its piglet." [12] And what a bitter "Conversation with the Motherland" Olga Berggolts had:

*You hounded me and slandered,  
You took my children and my fame,  
Yet I did not stop loving—I knew:  
You are wild. You do not do it on purpose.*

Gumilyov did not live to reach such a state as to say or write something like that. But knows. He did write, on leaving France:

*France, from your enlightened face  
I will turn away once more, once more  
And plunge, as into a bottomless pool,  
into my wild, native Rus'*

In any case, he avoided the lot of an émigré. He did not come to know another hopelessness—the one in which Georgy Adamovich pined:

*It smells too much like ether here, it is stifling, and far too warm.  
When shall we return to Russia... But it has been buried in snow.  
Time to gather ourselves. It is dawning. It is already time to set out.  
Two copper coins on the eyelids. Arms crossed on the breast.*

Marina Tsvetaeva, a year before her death, said: "I have written what I had to write." [13] Such a thought, it seems, could not have occurred to Gumilyov.

...The brevity of Gumilyov's life probably saved him from many humiliations and tragedies that befell his contemporaries. But it also did not allow his talent to fully unfold; it did not let him, like Pasternak, "at the end fall, as into heresy, into unheard-of simplicity."

...The second half of the eighties arrived. The ban on Gumilyov was lifted—and immediately there was an explosion of interest and sympathy. Obscurity and injustice were replaced by fame. Irina Odoevtseva told me she was struck, on returning to her homeland, by the reverence she saw for the name of her teacher.

But how we love extremes, how we love to paint with a single color—preferably black or white. If we deem someone bad, then he's a monster with tail and horns. And if good, then a pure angel, without a single dark speck.

In old age, many wise thoughts occurred to Georgy Adamovich. Among them: "Youth has every advantage over the old. All but one: the old know that each generation comes with its own rightness and its own illusions. The young see only their own rightness and tend to consider it the final rightness." [14]

Gumilyov did not avoid this "vice" of youth. But now it is rarely mentioned. No sooner had Gumilyov's image begun to open than they started to pretty it up, to strip away the genuine.

Anna Akhmatova once bitingly remarked that from one portrait to the next Mayakovsky becomes handsomer. Writer Andrei Mikhailovich Turkov, remembering these words, asked whether a similar metamorphosis is happening now with herself, with Tsvetaeva, with Bulgakov. And with Gumilyov.[15]

Already in 1986, immediately after Gumilyov's "rehabilitation," Yevgeny Yevtushenko urged: "One should not, with the haste of belated veneration, fashion an idol out of Gumilyov—nor out of anyone else." Loving Gumilyov, he thought, one must still "see in a number of his poems theatricality, African Haggard-isms, naïve-melodramatic superman-ness." [16]

But how many people wanted nonetheless to fashion a new idol. Akhmatova, who hated sugary cooing, used to say in such cases: "Big goo-goo!"

This touched Gumilyov-the-traveler as well. He is now called a professional ethnographer, and this opinion is even attributed to the most eminent Petersburg scholars. This, too, is an attempt to make a rosy picture of Gumilyov. It's a disrespect toward the professionalism of scholars.

Nowadays, I repeat, they write as if it were self-evident that Gumilyov traveled through "regions of wild and warlike tribes." But now, through a "land mysterious to whites—Abyssinia." [17]

Once in Europe it was customary to call Africans "savages." But now... "Abyssinia, mysterious to whites."

Of course, all peoples, all countries, and all people are mysterious to one another. There is nothing to object to in that. But they're not writing in that sense... by no means. Abyssinia is presented as especially mysterious. And here it is hard to agree. After all, it is a country with ancient statehood. And the embassy of the Russian Empire was established there before Gumilyov's arrival, and there were a great many compatriots who had been there before him.

Gumilyov does not need such exaggerations. They can only compromise his memory, do him harm perhaps no less than the decades-long silence.

The reason for these exaggerations is that same long silence. We still know too little about Gumilyov's life. A long-standing ban could not but have its effect. And the work of individual enthusiasts—honor and praise to them!—their strength was not so great.

Many of those who knew Gumilyov well died without leaving reminiscences of him. To this day there is not a single scholarly or artistic biography of Gumilyov! His joking prediction has not yet come true—

*My biographer will be very happy...*

And yet, it must be, it was not too late in recent years for Vera Lurie to have written what she remembered. Olga Evgenievna Chagodaeva [18] could also have said something—not because she is Capablanca's widow, of course, but because, as a poet, she studied under Gorodetsky and Balmont and must have known much about Gumilyov. And Nina Nikolaevna Berberova, also living in America, could have told more about Gumilyov than the few pages in her memoir *The Italics Are Mine*.

The efforts of scholars living both here and abroad are needed to gather materials on Gumilyov. Better still—cooperation. And for cooperation, as is known, mutual respect is necessary.

Gleb Struve, Nikolai Otsup, Vadim Kreid, and many other scholars of the Russian Emigration did much to preserve the memory of Gumilyov, to collect and publish his works and recollections about him. In the years when nothing by Gumilyov was published in our country, in the West, through their labor, not only collections of his poems, not only his correspondence, memoirs and articles about him were prepared and published, but a four-volume collected works as well. Documents, poems, the manuscript of *The Poisoned Tunic*—a whole archive kept in London by Anna Akhmatova's friend, the mosaicist Boris Anrep—were published.

These merits cannot be denied. However, in the first collection of Gumilyov's poems, published in Moscow in 1988 after a sixty-year break, of this work only the following was said: "The main émigré editions of Gumilyov's works listed are characterized by substantial shortcomings. In particular, in the four-volume *Collected Works* the notes are extremely scant and not free of errors. The notes in the Paris collections are superficial as well." [19]

This criticism is fair. But would it have demeaned the editor of the Soviet one-volume (indeed very nicely compiled) to have recalled as well the contribution of his predecessors, whose labor he undoubtedly used?

In the very last years, as Vadim Kreid rightly wrote to me, "the center of Gumilyov studies has shifted from the emigration to the metropolis." [20] That being so, it is all the more necessary to recognize the merits of those who assisted in saving Gumilyov's legacy over many years. This is not magnanimity; just simple honesty.

And as for criticism—well, we are not the only ones entitled to it.

As is known, Vladimir Karpov's long article about Gumilyov, published in 1986, was criticized. *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, the largest Russian newspaper abroad, responded to it

with a large piece as well. In it, among other things, it was said: "Of the seven journal pages of 'his' essay, Vladimir Karpov copied more than five from the book by Gleb Struve, *On Four Poets*, published in 1981 by OPI in London." [21]

I think the time has come when we should not peremptorily dismiss or ignore criticism from abroad, as used to happen in earlier times. But Vladimir Karpov's response never appeared.

All this, it seems to me, should make us think, if we want now, without losing time (of which, as it is, unpardonably much has already been lost), to conscientiously recreate the image of Gumilyov—the poet and the man.

In the book you hold in your hands, attention is concentrated on one side of Gumilyov's fate. But in my searches I came across information about very different facets of his life. And I became convinced how much—even now—can still be gathered anew about Gumilyov.

For example, chance helped establish the name of one of the heroes of his *Notes of a Cavalryman*.

During one of the Soviet–American scholarly conferences in October 1987, I mentioned the name of Gumilyov in the presence of Yury Sergeevich Khlebnikov, who worked for many years as a translator at the UN. He was born in the early 1920s, already in emigration, in Germany. He lives in New York.

He remembered that his father, Sergei Vladimirovich Khlebnikov, was a staff rotmistr in a Uhlan regiment together with Gumilyov. According to Yury Sergeevich, Gumilyov wrote very warmly about his father and about his serious wound in his *Notes of a Cavalryman*, although he did not give his father's surname.

After the conversation I took up *Notes of a Cavalryman* and immediately found the passage.

"...There was a wounded officer of our squadron. His leg and head were pierced. When he was picked up, the Austrians opened an especially furious fire and wounded several of the bearers. Then the officer in charge demanded that he be laid on the ground, kissed and crossed by the soldiers present, and he firmly ordered them to save themselves. We all felt sorry for him to the point of tears. He and his platoon were the last to cover the general retreat. Fortunately, now we know that he is in captivity and recovering."

From the warmth of these lines you see how Gumilyov, himself the recipient of two St. George Crosses, knew how to bow before the heroism of his comrades, to sympathize with their tragedies, to rejoice in their salvation. As for Sergei Vladimirovich Khlebnikov, according to the son, he was soon freed from captivity, exchanged for two German officers.

Perhaps there will yet be found someone's written account of Gumilyov's conversations with the daughters of Nicholas II. Gumilyov met them in 1916, when he was lying in the Tsarskoe Selo hospital and they were there as nurses. It is known that Grand Duchess Olga wrote poems. Two of her prayer-poems were found in Yekaterinburg after the tragedy of her family. According to Gumilyov, at that time, in 1916, she showed him her verses.

It is possible to find more in Ethiopia as well. I have already mentioned the letter that an Ethiopian student sent to *Moscow News* at the beginning of 1987. One can only be amazed at how clearly the family of the Ethiopian who served as his interpreter and guide remembered Gumilyov's last journey—down to the exact dates of his stay and departure. Seventy-three years later!

Documents in Ethiopian archives? They did keep watch on foreigners. But Ethiopian archives have always been in poor condition. Then there was the Italo–Ethiopian war. And not only that. When Haile Selassie came to power, he destroyed much of the archives.

But Haile Selassie himself remembered Gumilyov. And why wouldn't he? Gumilyov had visited him, had photographed him and his wife. And that was in his youthful years, the memory of which remains for life.

Haile Selassie—no longer a governor but a regent, and then the emperor of Ethiopia—told the poet Pavel Petrovich Bulygin (1895–1936) about his meetings with Gumilyov. Bulygin lived in Ethiopia almost twelve years. Before that, in the Civil War, he had served in the Volunteer Army, took part in the Kornilov campaign, was wounded, shell-shocked. He became the head of the personal security of Empress Maria Fyodorovna. He was sent by Kolchak to assist N. A. Sokolov, who was conducting the investigation into the murder of the tsar's family. And then—emigration, foreign parts, disappointment, despair.

*The vile grimacing of venal jesters,  
The faded leaves of fallen hopes,  
The sorrowful silence of the last fighters...  
The grave crosses are growing, growing...*

What was there for him to do in such a state of mind, in ruined, tormented Europe? In 1923 Bulygin moved to Abyssinia–Ethiopia.

Eduard Shtein brought Bulygin's name back from oblivion. In August 1991 he published an essay, "Zigzags of Fate," in the New York newspaper *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*. Shtein depended mostly on materials from the Harbin Russian journal *Rubezh* for 1936–1937. Unfortunately, the article only mentioned Bulygin's Abyssinian life in passing. What exactly did Haile Selassie tell him? Was it not due to Gumilyov's influence that Bulygin moved to Ethiopia?

In 1934, having published with the London house Hutchinson a book on the history of the murder of Nicholas II and his family, Bulygin moved to Paraguay and founded a Russian village. True, he did not live there long: in February 1936 he died in Asunción of a cerebral hemorrhage. But who knows, perhaps his notes of conversations with the Ethiopian emperor about Gumilyov can still be found in such an unexpected place as Paraguay?

And Gumilyov's compatriots who remained in Ethiopia? Those who might have met him or heard about him?

By the beginning of the 1990s, of the six children of Ivan Babichev, two were alive: Viktor Ivanovich (a pensioner; earlier he worked at the National Library in Addis Ababa) and Maria Ivanovna. Both were over eighty. They lived together in a small house in Addis Ababa (the large house that once belonged to their family had burned down). On the walls there were many photographs; among them photos of grandfather, parents, Russian army officers.

I didn't have the chance to meet them, but many journalists and diplomats interviewed them. Did it occur to anyone to inquire about Gumilyov?

Those lands to which Gumilyov's Muse drew him soon became a haven for many of his compatriots.

The number of Russians in Ethiopia increased after the October Revolution and the Civil War. Haile Selassie's government feared the Bolsheviks (no wonder he asked Academician Vavilov about the fate of the tsar's family) and at first willingly accepted émigrés.

The Czech historian Czesław Jesman, in his book *Russians in Ethiopia*, listed many names of people from Russia.[22] Prince Tatischev tried to organize an Ethiopian Bank, Major General Drozdovsky supervised topographic works in Addis Ababa. In the 1920s the Ethiopian government invited several Russian doctors. Doctor Gavrilov was, in 1922-1924, the personal physician of Empress Zewditu. Doctor Gogin practiced in Addis Ababa as well.

In the 1920s a group of Russian officers was in the service of the Ethiopian government as military consultants. At their head stood Count Fermer, a former captain of cuirassiers of the Russian Imperial Guard—"yellow cuirassiers" In the Ethiopian army, he received the rank of colonel, headed the Imperial Guard, and commanded the parade at Haile Selassie's coronation. On that occasion, he was seen by the English writer Evelyn Waugh. Former officers from the families of the Kruzenshterns, Semyonovs, Dietrichs, and Bens also lived in Ethiopia.

The center of life for the Russian colony in Addis Ababa was St. Nicholas Church. The priest, Father Voronovsky, had been, before the Revolution, chaplain to one of the cavalry regiments.

"In June 1925," wrote Esman, "Grand Duke Alexei Mikhailovich paid a visit to Addis Ababa. The immediate reason for his appearance was the question of Russian and Ethiopian property in the Ethiopian monastery in Jerusalem. According to Esman, the grand duke, on behalf of Russia, ceded the Russian holdings to the Ethiopians." Is all of this true? In any case, Esman must have gotten the name wrong. There was no grand duke with that name at the time. So it must have been Alexander Mikhailovich, who in his youth had a great love for far southern lands.

Jesman also told of a Georgian who organized in Addis Ababa a network of night entertainments and card clubs. Evelyn Waugh met this man, who passed himself off as Prince Amiredzhibi. After his death, Esman writes, it turned out he was a peasant by birth from near the town of Gori, with the surname Dzhugashvili.

In all likelihood, Esman rendered many surnames and facts inaccurately—he himself was hearing them by ear, and business documentation in Ethiopia was in deplorable shape. In general, he could have mixed things up. He even wrote that Gumilyov fought in Macedonia during the First World War! But unfortunately his report is the only consolidated summary we have.

We can also cite the article "Russians in Abyssinia." It appeared in 1930 in the Paris journal *Illustrated Russia*, alongside a note that a Russian girl had been chosen "Miss New York."

The article said: "At the most recent races arranged in Addis Ababa by the Russian officer, Staff Rotmeister D. L. Semyavin, a cavalry quadrille was performed. The cavaliers and ladies, in costumes from the era of Frederick the Great, executed various figures and changes of formation, arousing the admiration of the Abyssinians. In this country, the art of riding is in its infancy, and the haute école shown by the Russians proved a pleasant novelty for the natives.

"The now-deceased Empress Zäwditu took great interest in the spectacle of the races and wished to speak personally with our ladies. For a long time she examined their riding habits and powdered wigs and expressed regret that so beautiful a fashion had been abandoned by Europeans in favor of hideous short dresses."

The article is accompanied by photographs. Among them is one entitled 'Audience of the Negus'.<sup>[23]</sup> In that same newspaper there are other mentions of Russians in Ethiopia and in Africa in general. On the cover of the August 30, 1930 issue: "Our distant reader (under the sky of Abyssinia)." And August 9—the story "Tanya from Cairo": Tanya from Cairo implores a Russian spirit to answer.

Working in the archives and library of the Hoover Institution in California, I found a bulky microfilm—nearly five hundred pages—of Colonel Fyodor Evgenievich Konovalov's manuscript titled *A History of Ethiopia*.<sup>[24]</sup> The larger—and by far the most interesting—part consists of Konovalov's personal impressions, above all from the Italo—

Ethiopian War, when he served as military adviser to Emperor Haile Selassie. That part, though not in full, was published in Bologna in 1937 in Italian.

When was Konovalov's manuscript written? How did the microfilm reach the Hoover Institution, and where is the manuscript itself? I could get no answer to these questions from the staff of the Institute's archives and library.

But there I met a young Ethiopian scholar, Teliko Simesso, who said he had long been interested in the topic "Russians in Ethiopia." He knew Konovalov's manuscript and believed Konovalov lived in Ethiopia until 1952, but did not know what happened to him after 1952, nor the fate of the manuscript.

There is information about Konovalov as well in the literature on the Italo–Ethiopian War: that he had served in Turkey and Egypt, decided to help Ethiopia in her struggle against Italy, "won the emperor's trust at once," and remained until the end of the war one of his few foreign advisers.[25]

I also heard about Konovalov from Tatyana Olegovna Rannit at the Polish University. Her uncle, Valentin Ivanovich Zakharov, had studied with Konovalov at Petersburg's First Cadet Corps; during the Civil War they were both in the Volunteer Army, and afterwards they followed one another's lives with interest. Konovalov's unusual fate fascinated his Comrade-in-Arms: Africa, Ethiopia, the fight against Italian fascism, adviser—surely to one of the last emperors in human history. But Zakharov died shortly before my arrival in Yale.

The Soviet geographer and Africanist Mikhail Borisovich Gornung, who worked in Ethiopia in the 1960s, told me that another military adviser to the Ethiopian government in those years was Georgii Nikolaevich Turchaninov, an officer in Wrangel's army who had settled in Ethiopia after the White defeat; instead of leaving with the remnants of the Ethiopian army, he fought in the partisan ranks.

Most Russians, however, left Ethiopia even before the invasion by Mussolini's forces. Unfamiliar conditions of life and complicated relations with the authorities took their toll. As foreigners, they were under suspicion. Iosif Vladimirovich Hessen, a deputy of the State Duma who published the émigré newspaper *Rech'*, wrote: "In 1929, the Empress died in Abyssinia under mysterious circumstances; that proved sufficient for arrests and expulsions of Russian refugees to begin." [26]

Only a few—for example, a nephew of Count Tatishchev—started families there, marrying local women. By 1935, according to Esman, fewer than sixty Russians remained in all of Ethiopia: twenty former officers, five engineers, one priest, one lawyer, and three doctors.

Why did these people go to Ethiopia? Of course the main reason must have been cruel fate—the break with their homeland. But why choose Ethiopia?

Surely many of them had the same ideas about that country that prompted Gumilyov to go there. Most belonged to his generation and even to his class—to the social strata closest to him. Nobles, officers. They read the same books, journals, newspapers; they were bearers of the same culture as the Gumilyov family.

Lately there have been many articles titled "Russian Paris," "Russian Berlin," "Russian Harbin," "Russian Prague"—about the destinies of Russian emigrants. But no one yet, it seems, has tried to gather material about our compatriots in Africa.

The artist Bilibin in Cairo. The artist Alexander Yakovlev crossing Africa by automobile. Conan Doyle meeting in the Transvaal a Russian mining engineer, Pavel Kovalev. Another engineer, Pavel Nazarov, discovering platinum deposits in Angola.

These are only a few. And in South Africa alone, in 1921, there were twenty-five thousand people from Russia.

What kind of Africa did they have in their souls and minds when they set off—these contemporaries of Gumilyov?

Unique information must have been in the papers of the Russian diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. Russian embassies—like many others—considered it their duty to keep an eye on their compatriots. Had he become acquainted with those papers, Gumilyov would likely have learned much unexpected about himself.

But that archive, alas, perished. The last head of the Russian mission, P. K. Vinogradov, Chemerzin's successor, refused to submit to the Bolshevik government and in 1919 entrusted the archive to the care of the French Embassy in Addis Ababa.

In 1936, after Fascist Italy's victory over Ethiopia, the archive was transferred to Paris. And soon, in France's terrible June days of 1940, it burned (or was burned) near the Ministry of the Interior on the Quai d'Orsay.

Yet our domestic archives—which have now become more accessible than before—hold many surprises as well.

And the personal archive? Gumilyov did not impose bans on his papers, as Vladimir Nabokov did, who allowed publication of his diaries and letters only half a century after his death—not only his own, but also his wife's and son's.

But where is it, Gumilyov's archival legacy? Scattered in different places, among different people, it is only now gradually opening to us. And that legacy helps us to see more clearly one of the least studied countries of our century—Russia of the last pre-revolutionary and first post-revolutionary years. To understand it is still the historians' task. For contemporaries it was beyond their powers, for

*When an epoch is buried,  
No funeral psalm is heard.*

We are now witnessing the departure of the epoch that succeeded it. All the more important for us to grasp the catastrophe under whose debris Gumilyov was buried. What heavenly conjunction was unique, and what was the long tradition going back to the times of Ivan the Terrible?

*I'll have the axe ground—sharpened keen,  
The headsman dressed in scarlet sheen;  
I'll bid the great bell toll and ring,  
That all the folk of Moscow know  
You too are not forgot below...*

Of course, bringing new materials to light has rarely halted quarrels and rumors. More often it has been quite the opposite. Perhaps that is why Vladimir Nabokov left such a testament. And Kipling, perhaps for that reason, so adjured his contemporaries and descendants:

*If ever my labor  
Should please any of you,  
Then let me be hidden  
In silence that comes in its hour.*

*And keeping my memory  
For one brief instant,  
Ask about me  
Only of my books.*

But far more documents and materials have survived about Nabokov, to say nothing of Kipling, than about Gumilyov. The study of Gumilyov's legacy has only just begun. Shortly before her death Akhmatova called him "a poet not yet read."

We want to learn more about the role of far-off lands in his life.

And about the influence that the image of those lands—created by him—exerted on people. To understand the meaning of his somewhat paradoxical confession: "The most terrible thing is that I liked the everydayness of Africa... To be a herdsman, to walk along the paths, to stand by a wattle fence in the evening..."[27]

Akhmatova wrote at the same time that Gumilyov "treated himself [medically] by traveling"[28]—not only from unhappy love, but from other failures and griefs. And later many were "treated" by his poems—even in the most terrible moments. Like Gnedin.

When this book was already at the printer's, I learned that Gumilyov's verse helped the poet Viktor Nekipelov as well. In January 1974, in a solitary cell of Butyrka prison, he wrote his poem "In Memory of Nikolai Gumilyov." As an epigraph he placed:

*In the evening hour, at the hour of sunset,  
A winged caravel  
Sails past Petrograd...*

These lines are from what is considered to be Gumilyov's last poem, written in prison before his execution; Nekipelov's verses echo them:

*How high the sky!  
What deaf, unyielding grief...  
Again, motionless and mute,  
The clouds hang above me.  
And in my memory—over and over—  
Chafing my tired soul,  
Gumilyov's poems surface,  
Ringing, measured, tender.  
Tremulous, white, and surging,  
Wanderers of the green seas,  
The cloud-caravels are sailing  
Above my stony cage.*

*And so, near half a century now,  
Roaming the airy streams,  
They carry home to native shores  
The outlaw poet's ashes.  
The leaden Lethe flows,  
The wake boils up astern...*

*...And still for sonnets to this day  
Our Motherland pays us with prison.*

Yury Nikolaevich Zavadovsky went to Timbuktu, inspired by Gumilyov's *The Tent*. But was he the only one who recalled in Africa those poems—joyous and sunlit, yet sometimes sad? Some even retraced Gumilyov's route—now a path that has become all too easy...

Wandering the lanes of Addis Ababa, I tried to guess with what mood Gumilyov had once stepped on those stones, what thoughts might have come to him. In London I thought the same, working at the University of London and the British Museum, and always stopping by the nearby Guilford Street, where Gumilyov lived in a modest hotel at the start of 1918 before returning to his homeland.

But more traces of the Knight of the Muse of Far Wanderings are in the city on the Neva: in the corridors he trod at the University and in the Museum of Ethnography, where he dreamed of distant lands and distant wanderings; in the Tauride Garden and the little Prudyki garden, where he liked to stroll. On Liteiny and Basseinaya. Near the house on Preobrazhenskaya, a memorial plaque has now been installed.

On the fence of Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam's grave in the Starokuytsevo Cemetery lies a stone in memory of the poet who has no grave. Has not the time come to find a place for a stone near Berngardovka too—where, in 1921, that bullet whistled past?

Like many who love Gumilyov, I tried to gather at least a portion of what human memory has preserved of him. But, in Georgy Adamovich's words, "the spirit of the epoch has evaporated; its overtones, its special breaths, its tremor, its hopes—these are now beyond capture." [29] Those who could still feel it are gone. And it was for them that this book was conceived. Since the day I came to Anna Andreevna with the first sketch, three decades have passed... One involuntarily recalls what Samuel Johnson said long ago: "While I was writing my books, most of those to whom I wanted to show them departed this world; success, like failure, is an empty sound."

So then, are we to be sad together with Adamovich—

*That we live, that we shall die,  
That all is sad and past repair...*

Or, still more hopelessly, with Georgy Ivanov—

*What connects all of us?  
Mutual misunderstanding.*

Perhaps that is indeed wisdom. And yet, so long as we live, we want to believe that we can understand one another—and those who have passed away. And to feel, at least sometimes, how "the warmth of millennia flows into the dusk." Otherwise, it would be truly sad...

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[\* The reference is to the town of Dire-Daoua. Evidently there is a slip here. In general, Gumilyov used the then customary Russian spellings of place names and personal names—and often in varying forms (for example, Kharar or Harrar). By our time the transliterations have changed: not Gawash but Awash; not Kharar but Harer; not Dire-Daoua but Dyré-Daoua; not Chercher but Chärchär; not Sheikh-Gussein but Sheikh-Hussein; not Margarita but Margherita; not Rodolfo but Rudolf; not Tafari but Täfäri; not Makonen but Mäkonen; etc. And some old names have changed so much within Ethiopia itself that it is hard to identify them with anything now known.]