

# **A Caucasian Utopia in Russian Literature and Politics: Alexander Griboedov and Iuri Tynianov**

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## **Introduction**

The protagonists of my paper are the Russian writer and diplomat Alexander Griboedov (1795-1829) and the literary critic Iuri Tynianov (1894-1943). Tynianov was one of the foremost representatives of Russian Formalism. Griboedov was the author of the comedy “Woe from Wit,” which all Russian schoolboys know by heart. He also wrote a “Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company,” which he considered, if one can believe some sources, the main achievement of his life. However, usually this work is hardly ever even mentioned. The “Project” was written by Griboedov in collaboration with Petr Demianovich Zaveleiskii, the soon-to-be governor of Tiflis, and it was signed by both of them in Tiflis on 17 July 1828. Two months later Griboedov, in the rank of Resident Plenipotentiary Minister representing Russia, was sent to Tabriz which at that time was a foreign mission, and from there to Persia, where he was to perish, torn to pieces by a mob of Muslim fanatics.

Approximately 100 years after the death of Griboedov Iuri Tynianov wrote his fictionalized biography.<sup>1</sup> By that time, Formalism had come under criticism by the Soviet authorities and those who considered themselves to be representatives of the movement had started looking for other ways to pursue their professional activities. Some, such as Tomashevski and Eichenbaum, focused on academic studies. Tynianov turned to fiction and began writing biographical novels. Prior to working on the life and career of Griboedov, he had already written a biography of Wilhelm Kuchelbecker, a Lyceum friend of Pushkin, later a Decembrist, who in the early 1820s traveled to Germany, where he became involved in a critique of German

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<sup>1</sup> Tynianov Yuri. *Smert Vazir-Muhtara* (The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar). Leningrad: Priboj, 1929.

Romanticism, in particular, of Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In 1826 he was imprisoned and later exiled to Siberia for his part in the Decembrist uprising.<sup>2</sup> Until the end of his life, Tynianov worked on a fictionalized biography of Pushkin.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Tynianov's other two novels which were in the full sense of the word biographies, *The Death of Vasir-Mukhtar* (the title of the Griboedov biography) deals, with a few retrospective digressions, with the last eleven months of Griboedov's life. To this end Tynianov transposes various earlier episodes of his life to the year 1828. There is almost no mention of Griboedov the writer, and all of the action revolves around the Caucasus Project, with which, according to Tynianov, Griboedov signed his own death sentence.

Here the question naturally arises: why did Tynianov, forced, after the defeat of Formalism, to turn to fiction and literary heroes, shy away from questions of literature, focusing instead on matters of Russian foreign policy and diplomacy? Why was the Caucasus a key topic for him? And should we not see in the biography of Griboedov a hidden message, a story, not so much about *the affairs of bygone days*,<sup>4</sup> but rather about Tynianov's own time and its problems?

However, this story has still another mystery: what role did the Caucasus Project actually play in the fate of Griboedov and what really were the goals he pursued with it?

### Way of Life and Life's Journey

Before we turn to the Caucasus Project which, according to Tynianov, played such a fatal role in his life, let us review some of the major facts of Griboedov's biography. Born in Moscow, Griboedov graduated the Moscow Noble Boarding House (pension) and studied at Moscow University from 1810 to 1812. He attended lectures on ethics and politics and clearly demonstrated a penchant for archeology and history as well as literature. His first burlesque comedy "Dmitry Drianskoi" (which has not survived) ridiculed the brawls between Russian and German professors at Moscow University. Griboedov then obtained a commission in a hussar regiment. 1815 was a year of his numerous literary debuts; by this time, he had resigned from the military and was living in St. Petersburg. That year he translated Creuzé de Lesser's play "Family Secret" ("Le Secret du ménage," 1809) and published the parody of French

<sup>2</sup> Tynianov Yuri. *Kuehla*. Leningrad, Cubus, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Tynianov Yuri. *Pushkin*. Part 1. Leningrad, Hudozestvennaja Literatura, 1936.

<sup>4</sup> From Pushkin's "Ruslan and Liudmilla."

comedy, "A Young Couple." In the spring of 1816 he published an article "On the Analysis of a Free Translation of Buerger's Ballad 'Lenore.'"<sup>5</sup> This was an attack on Zhukovskii's translation of the ballad and a defense of one by Katenin, which put him in the camp of the so-called literary "archaists."<sup>6</sup> In the same year Griboedov's name appeared on the list of full members of the Masonic Lodge "Les Amis Réunis."

In 1817 Griboedov entered the civil service in the College of Foreign Affairs, leading a Bohemian lifestyle in a circle of writers and actors. In the same year a "four-person duel" (*partie carrée*) between Zavadovskii-Sheremetev and Griboedov-Iakubovich over Istomina, the ballerina who Pushkin immortalized in *Eugene Onegin*,<sup>7</sup> took place. Istomina's lover, Sheremetev, was mortally wounded in the stomach. Since Zavadovskii had to take Sheremetev immediately to the city, their seconds, Iakubovich and Griboedov postponed their duel (it took place the next year in Tiflis; Griboedov was wounded in the left hand). Popular opinion condemned Griboedov for the tragic outcome of events. He accepted an appointment as secretary of the Russian legation in Persia, which may have been a kind of disguised exile.

In August 1818 Griboedov left for Tabriz where the diplomatic mission was located. Concerned about the fate of Russian soldiers in Iranian captivity, he wrote in his travel diary of 1819: "Hassles over the prisoners. Rage and sadness... I would give my life for my unfortunate compatriots." From January 1820 to 1823 Griboedov alternately lived in Tiflis and in Persia. He studied Arabic, Turkish, Georgian and Persian. At the same time, he began to work on his comedy "Woe from Wit." From February 1822, he was Secretary in the diplomatic section of General A. P. Ermolov, head of the Russian troops in Tiflis and the chief commander of Georgia. In the same year he is thought to have worked on a drama entitled "1812," apparently meant to mark the tenth anniversary of Russia's victory over Napoleonic France.

In early 1823 Griboedov took a leave from service and returned to Russia, where he lived for about two years. He wrote the first version of his famous waltz in E minor

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<sup>5</sup> *Syn otecestva* (Son of The Fatherland), 1816. No. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Tynianov Yuri. *Arhaisty i novatory* (The archaists and innovators). Leningrad, Priboi, 1929.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*:

Блистательна, полувоздушна,  
Смычку волшебному послушна,  
Толпою нимф окружена,  
Стоит Истомина; она,  
Одной ногой касаясь пола,  
Другую медленно кружит,  
И вдруг прыжок, и вдруг летит,  
Летит, как пух от уст Эола

and completed work on a free translation of the "Prologue in the Theatre" from "Faust" and, together with Viazemskii, wrote the opera-vaudeville "Who's the Brother, Who's the Sister, or Deception after Deception." After moving to St. Petersburg, he completed "Woe from Wit" in the fall of 1824. Despite the fact that he was unable to publish or stage the comedy, it was read in salons and became widely known from handwritten copies; the literary world erupted in debates over it. However, discouraged by the fact that it was rejected by the censors, Griboedov returned to the Caucasus. He saw the play staged only once, by the officers of the Russian garrison in Erevan.

On the way to Georgia, in Kiev, Griboedov met his friends M. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, A. Z. Murav'ev, S. I. Murav'ev-Apolstol and S. P. Trubetskoi, members of a secret society. This meeting almost had serious consequences for him: after the Decembrist uprising, during the investigation, Trubetskoi and E. P. Obolenskii named him as a member of the society. He was arrested at the fortress in Grozny on suspicion of belonging to the Decembrists and brought to St. Petersburg, but the investigation failed to find evidence of his affiliation to them. Ryleev, one of the ringleaders, defended Griboedov, declaring that he had sounded Griboedov out and had not found him suitable. Griboedov himself categorically denied any involvement, referring to the fourth act of his comedy in which he ironically depicted the conspirator Repetilov. Griboedov was released from custody with a "certificate of good health"; he was received by Nicholas I and raised to the rank of court counselor, although for some time he was kept under secret surveillance. And in early September 1826, he returned to his diplomatic post in the Caucasus, where war with Persia had broken out.

It was from this moment that the period in Griboedov's life that is of special interest to us began. General I. F. Paskevich, who was married to Griboedov's cousin, was appointed to replace Ermolov as the chief commander of Georgia, and this opened new career possibilities for him. In 1828 Griboedov took part in drawing up the Torkamānčāy Peace Treaty<sup>8</sup> which was particularly favorable to Russia and when he delivered the text to St. Petersburg he was rewarded and elevated to the rank of Plenipotentiary Minister, resident of Russia in Persia. After returning to Tiflis, in July 1828, as already mentioned, he signed the "Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company," which outlined a plan for a bold economic transformation in the Caucasus. Just after he departed for Persia, to Tehran, to carry out provisions of the Torkamānčāy Treaty: to recover indemnities and to send

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<sup>8</sup> It was a Treaty between the Russian Empire and Persia (Iran), which ended the Russian-Persian war of 1826-1828 on terms that were favourable to Russia. It was signed in 1828 in the village of Torkamānčāy (near Tabriz). According to the terms Russian gained the territory of Eastern Armenia - Erevan and Nakhchivan khanate.

Russian subjects' home to Russia. He also presented himself to the Shah, as one of the conditions of the Turkmanchay Treaty was the Russian government's recognition of Abbas Mirza, who signed the treaty with Russia, as the heir to the Persian throne. On the day he set out for Persia, September 9, 1828, Griboedov gave Paskevich for his review an additional note concerning the "Project" that Zaveleiskii had dictated to him.

Subsequent events are well known. In the aftermath of the war and the humiliating Treaty of Torkamānčāy there was a strong anti-Russian sentiment in Persia. Soon after Griboedov's arrival in Tehran, a mob stormed the Russian embassy. The incident began when an Armenian eunuch escaped from the harem of the Persian shah and two Armenian women fled from that of his son-in-law. All three sought refuge at the Russian legation. As agreed in the Treaty of Torkamānčāy, Georgians and Armenians living in Persia were permitted to return to Georgia and Eastern Armenia. However, the Shah demanded that Griboedov return the three asylum seekers. Griboedov refused. This caused an uproar throughout the city and several thousand Persians encircled the Russian compound demanding their release.

On January 30, 1829, a crowd of Muslims emerged from mosques and stormed the Russian mission. The escaped eunuch and Griboedov, who defended himself with his sword, were among the first to be shot to death. Griboedov's mutilated body was identified by the scar on his left hand that had been wounded in the duel with Yakubovich.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem that Griboedov's biography could easily qualify for a novel or, in any case, for a novelized biography. And yet Tynianov, in creating his fictionalized biography of the writer, concentrated on the last two years of his life, and more precisely on his "Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company." There were many objective reasons for this decision, as the history of the "Project," as well as of the additional note, themselves constitute a kind of detective novel, and even more of one than Tynianov could have guessed.

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<sup>9</sup> Russian sources claim that British agents who feared Russian influence in Teheran and Persian reactionaries who were not satisfied with the Torkamānčāy Treaty were responsible for inciting the mob. English sources claim that Griboedov's behavior in Persia as the ambassador was provocative and offensive, that he ridiculed local customs. The last statement is unlikely, because he knew the customs of the country very well. In a move to compensate Russia for the attack and the death of its ambassador, the Shah sent his grandson Khosrow Mirza to St Petersburg to avoid another war and he presented the Shah Diamond to Nicholas I as a gift.

### **Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company: Quid pro quo**

Griboedov's visible social success, his career advancement, and even his marriage to the woman he loved, the beautiful Nina Chavchavadze, daughter of his friend, the Georgian writer Alexander Chavchavadze—all of this, judging by his letters, could not make up for his troubled civic and artistic consciousness in the mid-1820s. On one hand was his comedy's lack of success; which despite the interest it aroused could not be published. On the other hand, was the tragic fate of the Decembrist rebels, many of whom were his friends. It has been suggested that "Griboedov sought to combat the atmosphere of stagnation by asserting certain principles of civil behavior.... of service to a cause, not to particular people, and to try to accomplish progressive reforms within the realm of the possible."<sup>10</sup> Such an attempt was the project to establish the Russian Transcaucasian Company.

In fact, the idea to exploit the natural resources of the Transcaucasus dates back to 1823, when Griboedov, together with A.V. Vsevolozhskii and T. Ethier, conceived of an enterprise to exchange goods with Persia.<sup>11</sup>

Griboedov's duties required that he make frequent visits to Georgia and the Caucasus. This gave him the opportunity to explore the region, its industries, agriculture, commerce, culture, way of life and local customs. Griboedov was aware that industrial development in the South Caucasus lagged behind Europe, so he had the idea of organizing a large commercial and industrial enterprise for trade with Persia modeled to a certain extent on the East India or the Russian-American Company.

In July 1828 the "Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company" received final clearance. It was aimed to ensure the strengthening of Russia's position in the Caucasus, the integration of the Caucasus into Russian economic, political and cultural space, and to unite Russia and the Caucasus into a single country. As noted, on the day of his departure to Persia, on 9 September 1828, Griboedov submitted an additional text to I.F. Paskevich entitled "Note on the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company." Griboedov had only four months to live and so apparently never found out about the fate of his project.

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<sup>10</sup> Grishunin A. L., Markovich V. M. Griboedov Alexander S., in *Russkie pisateli. 1800-1917. Biograficheskij slovar'*. Vol. 2. Moscow, Fiant, 1992. P. 22.

<sup>11</sup> See: Calma N. Kommerceskie zamysly Griboedova (Commercial plans of Griboedov), in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, t. 19-21. Moscow, 1935, p. 143-173.

After his death his co-author Zaveleiskii made an attempt to create a Trans-Caucasus trade company in Tiflis in 1831, an attempt to carry out at least a part of their joint project. In this connection, he published in the "Tiflis News" (Tiflisskie novosti Vedomosti) a slightly modified "Introduction" to the "Project" which included almost a half of the text he conceived together with Griboedov.<sup>12</sup> Yet this plan also remained unfulfilled.

Russian readers only became aware of the project after I.A. Shliapkin's publication of the "Introduction" in 1889 and another in 1891 together with Griboedov's "Note" in the journal "Russian Messenger" (Russkii Vestnik).<sup>13</sup> The latter publication was by A. Malchinskii, a man of dubious reputation who carried out assignments for the secret police.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the fragments of Griboedov's text, this publication also included a retelling of the missing part of the project based on an unknown source as well as negative comments on it which Malchinskii presented as belonging to Colonel I.G. Burtsov, a former Decembrist, and to Paskevich.

It has been suggested that Malchinskii's bad reputation was the reason that when in 1911-1916 the first academic edition of Griboedov's works was prepared in Russia, his publisher Nikolai Piksarov did not include either the "Note" or the "Project" but only mentioned them briefly.<sup>15</sup>

It was this dubious publication in the "Russian Messenger" that fell into the hands of Tynianov in the mid-1920s and, as we shall see, to a large extent determined the plot of his novel about Griboedov, where Burtsov's criticism of the project plays an important role. Burtsov was a man of Decembrist views whom Griboedov had perceived as a like-minded person.

In the subsequent collection of Griboedov's works published in 1940, the texts of the "Project" and "Note" were included. The editors, headed by Vladimir N. Orlov, generally accepted Malchinskii's version of events and explained the project's failure as due to Burtsov's sharp criticism, that determined Paskevich's decision to definitively reject the plan.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Tiflisskie gubernskie novosti* 1831. № 18, 19, 20. P. 137-155.

<sup>13</sup> Malsinskij A. Neizsannaja zapiska P.D; Zaveleiskogo (Unpublished note by P. D. Zaveleiskij), in *Russkij vestnik*, 1891. № 9, p. 3-7.

<sup>14</sup> Griboedov A. S. *Polnoe sobranie socinenij*, (3 vol.). T. 3. Ed. edited by S. A. Fomichev. SPB., 2006. P. 568.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Griboedov A. S. *Socinenija*. Ed. by Vladimir Orlov. Leningrad, Goslitizdat, 1940. P. 585-608, 645-646.

This version influenced the future perception of Griboedov's project by the experts, causing them to doubt the nobility of his intentions that allegedly contradicted the "humane ideas of the Decembrists." Burtsov's "critical review" was seen in this context as evidence of disagreements that existed between Griboedov and the Decembrists. Some researchers labeled the "Project" as "the clearest evidence of the exploitative [tsarist] policy of the first half of the nineteenth century", and the goal of the Russian-Transcaucasian Company - "the organized colonization of the region».<sup>17</sup> A shadow fell on Griboedov as an imperial colonialist.

Over time, however, the tendency to oppose Griboedov to the Decembrists gradually faded and, on the contrary, a tendency to view the "Project" as a work created from Decembrist positions came to the fore. The Decembrist pathos of the project was allegedly the reason for its rejection: "The government rejected Griboedov and Zaveleiskii's project and did not recognize it as 'their own,' which is completely understandable," commented the Soviet historian Netchkina.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1950s in the Department of Manuscripts of the Historical Museum another document was found, entitled: "Notes of the Actual State Councilor Zhukovskii on the Draft of Griboedov and Zavileiskii's Project Concerning the Establishment of the Transcaucasian Company. 1828." Its publication by O.P. Markova, strangely, both confirmed Malshinskij's version and contradicted it.<sup>19</sup> The document, containing summary notes by General Zhukovskii, for the first time provided the opportunity to judge the full "Project of the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company." It included the "Introduction," published in 1831 by Zaveleiskii (see above), as well as the previously lost part of the project about the conditions and rules for the future company. The text of Zhukovskii's notes was divided into paragraphs. The last three paragraphs contain information about Burtsov's review, which confirm his participation in the discussion of the project (the text of Burtsov's review has not survived, but Zhukovskii summarized it in a general form: "After consideration Colonel Burtsov gave an indecisive response but was highly concerned [uzhasalsia] by the scale of the enterprise, from which he feared unfavorable consequences for the company due to the incompatibility of the means for the undertaking with the very nature of things."<sup>20</sup>)

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<sup>17</sup> Calma N. *Kommerceskie zamysly Griboedova*. Op. cit. P. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Netchkina M. V. *Griboedov i dekabristy* (Griboedov and the Decembrists). Moscow, 1951, p. 522, 525. Cf. the comments by S. A. Fomichev: *Polnoe sobranie socinenij*, (3 vol.). T. 3. Op. cit. P. 568.

<sup>19</sup> *Istoriceskij arhiv*. 1951. Vol. 6. P. 324-390.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.



It turned out that Zhukovskii's critical notes on Griboedov's project partially coincided with those which in Malshinskii's publication of 1891 were attributed to Burtsov. This lessened suspicion concerning Malshinskii, who by that time had begun to be suspected of falsifying documents. On the other hand, it showed that although he had based himself on some other actual document, he put his own spin on it and incorrectly attributed authorship. The main conclusion that the newly discovered document revealed was that the one who rejected Griboedov's Caucasus Project was General Zhukovskii, who referred sharply and sarcastically to it, and not the former Decembrist Burtsov, whose response was apparently only "indecisive."<sup>21</sup>

However, the mystery concerning Griboedov's lost project did not end there. In 1954 the archivist I.K. Enikopolov published two more documents, also found in the Historical Archive in the Paskevich Foundation, relating to the Griboedov project: "Comments" ("Zamechaniia") and "Opinion on the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company" ("Mnenie ob uchrezhdenii Rossiiskoi Zakavkazskoi kompanii").<sup>22</sup> From remarks on the margins of the "Comments" that coincide with the critical remarks on the draft in the article by Malshinskii, it was established that this was the very document that Malshinskii used in 1891. And it was this document that he declared was "a review of Burtsov," but which in fact was General Zhukovskii's.

Enikopolov ascribed the second published document, entitled "Opinion on the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company, to Burtsev. As evidence he cited coincidences between the economic and political opinions stated in it with views of the Decembrists as reflected in the charter of the "Union of Welfare" and in the "Practical Principles of Political Economy" ("Prakticheskikh nachalakh politicheskoi ekonomii") compiled by P.I. Pestel'. This attribution to Burtsov was seconded by several other scholars. Subsequently, however, a textual comparison of the documents showed that the "Opinion" also belonged to General Zhukovskii and not to Burtsev, and that it had been written as a summary based on Zhukovskii's notes on Griboedov's project. Scholars were left with three documents: 1) "Comments on the creation of the company..." ("Zamechaniia na sozdanii kompanii..."), Zhukovskii's criticism of various parts of the text of Griboedov project that had not survived, published by Enikopolov in 1954; 2) The "Opinion on the Establishment..." Zhukovskii's final response to the draft, summarizing some of his notes, also published in 1954 by Enikopolov; and 3) "Notes of the Actual State Councilor Zhukovskii," published in 1950 by Markova; this is a later version of the "Comments" prepared by the same Zhukovskii at the request of G. V. Rosen, the

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<sup>21</sup> *Polnoe sobranie socinenij*, (3 vol.). T. 3. Op. cit. P. 569-570.

<sup>22</sup> Enikopolov I. K. *Griboedov v Gruzii* (Griboedov in Georgia). Tbilisi, 1954. P. 102-129.

commander-in-chief of Georgia from 1831, who was deeply interested in the ideas of Griboedov's project. As we have already seen, the "Notes" also contained a summary of Burtsov's response.<sup>23</sup>

### **The "Project for the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company": Between Philanthropy, Economic Calculation and Ambition**

What can we make of Griboedov's "Project," the full text of which has not survived and which we can only judge on those parts that were published in 1831 (in Tiflis), in 1891 in the journal "Russian Messenger," and in the subsequently discovered notes of General Zhukovskii, who had been commissioned to evaluate the draft proposal<sup>24</sup>? First, it should be kept in mind that for all its "fantasy," noted by those who were charged with its evaluation (Burtsov and Zhukovskii), the Griboedov project did take into account the experience of long-established trade companies. In the original text of the project's "Introduction" the companies that served as a reference point were explicitly named - the East India and North American Companies, which enjoyed "exclusive privileges."<sup>25</sup> (When published in the "Tiflis News" in 1831, Zaveleiskii had left this paragraph out.) The powerful East India Company had its own government and diplomatic representatives and was little submissive to the British government in its actions. The charter of the Russian-American company was also well-known in Russia, and Griboedov was friendly with Ryleev, head of the company's chancellery, so could have thus known details about its activities.

Indeed, many of the privileges that were proposed for the Russian-Transcaucasian Company by Griboedov and Zaveleiskii corresponded to the charter of the Russian-American Company. Among them: to assign land to the Company in all of the counties of the Transcaucasian provinces; to give the Company the right to what that land produced, including anything found beneath the surface; preferential terms of trade on Russian and foreign goods; the right to use native people in service of the company; and a monopoly on all of these privileges. (For the American Company

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<sup>23</sup> Tarhova, N.O. "Proekte Rossijaskoj Zakavkazskoj Kompanii (Po materialam arhiva I.F. Paskevica (About the "Project of the Russian Transcaucasian Company (On materials of archive of I. F. Paskevic in the Russian state historical archive) in *Problemy tvorcestva A. S. Griboedova* / Ed. by A. S. Fomicev. Smolensk, 1994. P. 285-295. About the identity of Burtsev see: Makarov, V. B. *Decembrist Ivan Grigorevich Burtsev*. Saratov, 1982.

<sup>24</sup> The preserved text and notes were recently published in Griboedov A.S. *Polnoe sobranie socinenij*, (3 vol.). T. 3. Op. cit. P. 325-346.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

privileges were renewed every 20 years; Griboedov sought the monopoly right for 50 years.<sup>26)</sup>

At the same time, the Griboedov project contained items that significantly distinguished it from existing companies. It also dealt with the development of local productive forces and local industrialists, and with trade mediation between Europe and Russia. Among the proposed privileges was also that the Company have diplomatic freedom in its relations with the nine Transcaucasian khanates ("To enter into relations with the proprietors of the Transcaucasian provinces ... to establish institutions and trade in them"). This contradicted the interests of the state, which sought to use the Caucasian and Asian markets for its own goods. It is thus no accident that Zhukovskii criticized the project from the point of view of developing Russia's productive forces, and not those of the Transcaucasus. And Zaveleiskii, who, as mentioned, tried to create a Transcaucasian trade depot in 1831, excluded the development of local industry from his program.

To this day there is still no unambiguous evaluation of Griboedov's project. Of course, it was imbued with a concern to develop the economy of this paradise and envisaged the creation of its own productive forces, setting not only economic goals, but also planning to be civilization and enlightenment to the Caucasus. The company was intended to enrich not only the Transcaucasian elite (landowners and merchants), but also ordinary people. The Russian army provided native peoples a peaceful life, protecting the South Caucasus from Turkish and Persian invasions; as a result, each local resident would be guaranteed security of life and personal well-being. The Caucasian population's participation in the company would automatically start the process of refining their manners. Griboedov described in detail the mechanism of this process in different social strata.

The Transcaucasian Company was intended to inflict a heavy blow on British trade in the Middle East and thus to seriously weaken the colonial position of the British Empire in this key region of international politics. Most likely the British were well aware of this threat. And that is why there a suggestion that perhaps they incited the Persian attack on the Russian embassy in Tehran that Griboedov personally headed. Nevertheless, the most problematic aspect of the project was the question of the status that Russia itself was assigned. On the one hand, the activities of the Transcaucasian Company had to ensure the strengthening of Russia's position in the Caucasus, the integration of the Caucasus into Russian economic, political and civilizational space, linking Russia and the Caucasus into one single country. On the other hand, the freedoms and privileges sought for the company testified to the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. P. 574.

contrary: a desire to obtain almost unlimited power and to distance itself from the Russian autocracy.

According to one researcher, "The Griboedov-Zaveleiskii Project, which gave the government a minimal role in the life of the region, was wholly designed for private initiative and activity, and was contrary to the colonial policy of the government, and that is why it was certainly doomed to failure in advance."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, although the draft of the project presumed there would be four "presidents" in its ruling body, it is obvious that had it been implemented, Griboedov himself would have been endowed with almost unlimited powers.

And yet, unlike the already existing East India and the Russian-American Companies, from the start the project for a Russian-Transcaucasian Company was a utopia, and so it is not accidental that the government rejected it. Griboedov and Zaveleiskii wanted to create a kind of "ideal" state- within-the-state. It is precisely the utopian nature of the project which inscribes it, in an unexpected way, not so much into economic and political history, as into the Russian *literary* assimilation of the Caucasus. Here we need to turn briefly from the historical aspect of the project and consider instead the so-called "Caucasian text" of Russian literature, the utopian space that literature of the time allocated to the Caucasus, into which, in fact, Griboedov's project seemed to fit very harmoniously.

### **Caucasian Utopia**

The origins of the Caucasian theme in Russian literature are very old. At the end of the fifteenth century, when Moscow began diplomatic relations with Georgia, a text called "The Story of the Georgian Queen Dinara" was written by a circle of Moscow scribes. 130 copies of this text have survived, which testifies to its popularity. It is a military novel which depicts an ideal queen and her wonderful victory over the Persians as a result of the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. It is believed that the prototype of Queen Dinara was Queen Tamar (or, Tamar, the Great, c. 1160-1213).<sup>28</sup>

An important aspect of Russian-Caucasian relations was that of pilgrimages, since the route to the Holy Land ran through the Caucasus. The sea route passed along the Volga to the Caspian Sea and then on to Persia, while the land route passed across the North Caucasus, Dagestan, Derbent, Tiflis and Trabzon to Jerusalem. A number

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<sup>27</sup> Markova, O. P. *Novye materialy* (New materials), in *Istoriceskij arhiv*. 1851. Vol. 6. P. 344.

<sup>28</sup> Gudzij, N. K. *Povest o gruzinskoj carice Dinare* (Tale of Georgian Empress Dinara) in *Istorija drevnerusskoj literatury*, Moscow, 1953. P. 255.

of texts suggest that the apostle Andrew stayed in the Caucasus and also describe the activity of the apostle Simon Kananit.<sup>29</sup> During the eighteenth century, the Russian-Turkish Wars proved to be important not only politically, but also poetically. With his "Ode on the Taking of Khotin" Lomonosov established the syllabo-tonic system in Russian poetry, displacing the syllabic system which had been widely used thanks to Polish and French influence.

The Kuchuk-Kaynadzhirskii peace that ended the Russo-Turkish War in 1774 provided the poet Derzhavin with an epithet to glorify Catherine II. He named her "Felitsa, Princess of the Kuchuk Kaisak hordes."<sup>30</sup> Under this name that Catherine the Great figures in Russian poetry up at least until 1800. One could also mention Derzhavin's ode in which he describes Count Zubov's campaign in Persia. Here one finds a new formula for poetic descriptions of the Caucasus, namely as the "Terrible land of miracles" (Uzhasnyi kraj chudes).<sup>31</sup> This formula would be used for nearly a century.<sup>32</sup>

The first prose work on the Caucasus was the novel by Vasilii Narezchnyi *Black Year, or Mountain Princes* (Chernyi god, ili Gorskie kniaz'ia). A graduate of Moscow University, in 1801 Narezchnyi was appointed to the newly formed Georgian government in which he became secretary to the first Russian ruler of Georgia Kovalevskii. Inspired by his reading of Schiller, in 1803 he began work on a novel in the spirit of German tales about brigands and robbers. The novel was finished in 1803 but published only in 1829 (when the Caucasian theme was already firmly established in Russian literature). The main reason that the author did not want to publish it during his time is usually given as follows: that his satirical image of Georgia, described allegorically, was fundamentally at odds with the official point

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<sup>29</sup> See more: Bagration-Mukhraneli I. L. *Drugaja zizn i bereg dalnij* (Another life and a distant shore), Tver, Ed. Marina Butasova, 2016. P. 26. See also: Ram, Harsha. *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003; Layton, Susan. *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> The poem *Feliza* (1782).

<sup>31</sup> The poem «Zubov's return from Persia» («На возвращение Зубова из Персии», 1797). Cf. : О юный вождь ! Сверха походы,  
Прошел ты с воинством Кавказ,  
Зрел ужасы, красы природы.

<sup>32</sup> The poem of Pushkin «I saw Asia's barren limits» («Я видел Азии бесплодные пределы», 1820). Cf: Ужасный край чудес! там жаркие ручьи  
Кипят в утесах раскаленных...

of view, and that Nareshny's allegory, especially that concerning Kovalevskii's abuse of power, could have been all too readily understood by his contemporaries.<sup>33</sup>

There is a strong opinion that with the development of Romanticism the Caucasus in Russian literature received "a voice." Since that time the extraordinary natural beauty, colorful manners and customs of the region, which was already considered part of the Russian Empire, became increasingly attractive to Russian poets and novelists. The Caucasus began to play an important role in Russian social and intellectual life as well. As the Russian historian Natan Eidelmen wrote, "All of Russia went to the Caucasus: exiles as well as the free, the Bestuzhevs and the Pushkins. At that time [the 1820's] the Caucasus was one of Russia's spiritual centers."<sup>34</sup>

After the War of 1812, following the return of the Russian army from Paris, a new doctrine appeared concerning the Caucasus, - a civilizing and humanistic one, dictated by the logic that having liberated Russia from Napoleon, a civilizing "light" could be also be brought to the Caucasus. Of course, we should not forget that the motive for strengthening Russia's eastern policy (or, simply put, the conquest of the Caucasus), was also supported even among liberals and the opposition. As the Decembrist Lunin declared during the Russian-Turkish War in 1828, "taking Akhaltskh is much more important than the occupation of Paris. Here the main enemy was defeated on the main line."<sup>35</sup> Let us also recall the words of Pushkin: "Submit, Caucasus, Ermolov is coming" (Smiris', Kavkaz, idet Ermolov)<sup>36</sup>.

The paradox lies in the fact that the war in the Caucasus, the longest in the history of Russia, lasting from 1817 to 1864, not only opened up the Caucasus as a theme in Russian literature, but also elicited love for the Caucasus. Although a river of blood had been spilled over the Caucasus, Russian literature still wrote with love about it. In *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, for instance, Pushkin described the Caucasus as the "new Parnassus." In 1827 Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, himself exiled in Siberia (Yakutia), wrote to his younger brother, Michael, exiled to the Caucasus: "Have you become a

<sup>33</sup> Bagration-Mukhraneli I. L. *Drugaja zizn i bereg dalnij*. Op. Cit. P. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Eidelman Nathan. "Byt' mozet za hrebtom Kavkaza..." *Russkaia literaturlaja I obsdestevennaja mysl' pervoj poloviny XIX veka. Kavkazskij kontekst* ("Perhaps, over the ridge of the Caucasus...". Russian literature and public thought in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Caucasian context). Moscow, 1990. P. 253.

<sup>35</sup> See: Yakov Gordin. *Kavkaz: zemlja i krov'. Rossija v kavkazskoj voine XIX veka* (The Caucasus: land and blood. Russia in the Caucasian war of the XIX century. SPb., Zvezda, 2000. P. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Pushkin. The epilogue of the *Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

poet, having looked at the Caucasus? It seems impolite not to become a poet, being so close to the sky."<sup>37</sup>

Another paradox: the conquered Caucasus is often depicted in Russian literature as a land of freedom. Heroes professing the cult of freedom were organically linked with it. The Caucasus essentially became the Russian East for Romantics. For example, in Pushkin's poem "The Prisoner of the Caucasus" the Caucasus plays the same role as Louisiana in Chateaubriand's *Attala*. But this is where the duality of the Caucasian myth becomes all the more apparent. Pushkin's poem, written in part on the model of Byron's *Childe-Harold*, partly on *Attala*, affirms freedom as an absolute value. Freedom is something the hero is looking for "in a desolate world" (cf.: "Свобода, Он одной тебя Еще искал в пустынном мире"). He goes to the Caucasus, but it's precisely there, a place that is thought of as place of absolute freedom, where the hero is taken prisoner (in fact, the theme of the Caucasian captive appears for the first time not in Russian literature, but in French. *Les captifs de Caucase*, written in 1815 by Xavier de Maistre, told the story of the captivity and escape of Major Kaskambo for whom the Chechens had demanded a huge ransom of 10 000 rubles).<sup>38</sup>

As is well known, Pushkin's character was saved from captivity by a Circassian woman who fell in love with him. But it was precisely she, "a child of the mountains," who, not finding a response to her love, dies in the denouement of the poem. In this way, Pushkin merges the themes of freedom and captivity, the beauty of Caucasian nature, and death brought about by the actions of a European, enacted upon the free peoples of the Caucasus. Later this theme appears again in *Hero of Our Time*, the story of a virgin of the mountains who perishes, having fallen in love with a person of another culture and another religion. And yet - strange to say - it was precisely Pushkin's "The Prisoner of the Caucasus" which rooted the idea in the public consciousness that the people of Caucasus liked (or even loved) them<sup>39</sup>.

One can say that the Caucasus as it appears in Russian literary classics has all the features of a utopia - a place of exceptional freedom, the Russian East, a paradise on earth and, last but not least, a place where it is possible to enact special laws, free

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<sup>37</sup> Russkij vestnik. 1870. № 5. P. 259. Cf. Bagration-Mukhraneli I. L. *Drugaja zizn i bereg dalnij*. Op. cit. P. 101.

<sup>38</sup> Takho-Godi, M. A. *Kavkaz i kavkazskie plenniki glazami putesestvennikov nacala XIX veka* (The Caucasus and "Caucasian captives" through the eyes of travelers in the early nineteenth century). E-access: [http://www.darial-online.ru/2001\\_1/taxogo.shtml](http://www.darial-online.ru/2001_1/taxogo.shtml)

<sup>39</sup> Bagration-Mukhraneli I. L. *Drugaja zizn i bereg dalnij*. Op. cit. P. 85-152.

from the state. The image of Caucasus as a dangerous place began to give way to the notion of a “spa” of sorts, a place for healing the body and mind.

In fact, one of the first political utopias associated with the Caucasus goes back to the reign of Paul I, who, unlike his mother, wanted to maintain a policy of peace in the Caucasus. He wanted to create a federation of mountain princes in order to transform the trade, economic and military rivalry between Persia, Russia and Turkey into cooperation.<sup>40</sup>

In 1830-1840 peacemaking efforts conducted in the midst of the war in the Caucasus also helped foster the emergence of utopian projects and utopian literature. Together with representatives of the Georgian intelligentsia A. Chavchavadze, R. Eristavi, the writer Vladimir Sollogub, an aristocrat in service to the governor of the Caucasus, and Count Vorontso, set about creating a new branch of Russian literature – a Caucasian literature. Vorontsov himself tried to institute a new policy of education for the Caucasus.<sup>41</sup> That said, we have to admit that none of these ideas and projects came to fruition. Cultural peacemaking of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus turned out to be illusory.

Leo Tolstoy, who was the last major Russian author to write about the Caucasus, composed his early story “The Cossacks,” in which he expressed the hope that the Caucasus would be an area of just rule by the Cossack community. But this utopia was refuted by historical circumstances. In a later story, the famous “Hadji Murad,” Tolstoy showed no mercy, drawing the Caucasus as a special geopolitical space where proud, strong people lived, but which was destined to become part of a vast empire. Religion, which at first had united Russia and the Caucasus, receded into the background. In Tolstoy’s novel, both Nicolas I and rebel leader Shamil are described as quite ambivalent, and the noble hero who represents the best qualities of the Caucasian people dies.

But even before Tolstoy, the Decembrist Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, mentioned above, resisted idealizing the Caucasus, since he knew all too well the danger this contained: “Poets have made of this giant with a crown of ice... some kind of a pastry on which almond streams flow.”<sup>42</sup>

All this quite complex context directly relates to the subject of this paper. The issues of statehood and freedom in the region are associated with exile and punishment, yet

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. P. 37.

<sup>41</sup> See particularly the sections “The Motives of utopia in the work of count V. A. Sollogub»and «Motive of cultural peacemaking in the monograph of Bagration-Mukhraneli. »

<sup>42</sup> Bestuzhev-Marlinskij A. *Socinenija* (2 vol.) T. 2. Moscow, GIHL, 1958. P. 201.



at the same time it is a place of possible Utopia. All this can be seen as a framework within which we may understand both the last year of Griboedov's life and the picture Iuri Tynianov made of it.

### **A Historical Error that Proved Fatal for Russian Literature**

In conclusion, I return to the question put at the beginning of my paper: why did Tynianov, otherwise so deeply interested in Russian literature, give the central place in his novel, written a hundred years after the described events, not to Griboedov's great comedy "Woe from Wit" but to the project for the Transcaucasian company? Why did he center the intrigue of the novel around "Project of the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company," presenting it as a voluntary gesture on Griboedov's part, and one for which he ultimately sacrificed his life? The situation has certain similarities with, for example, Pushkin's acceptance of the duel with Dante. It was gesture, as described by Tynianov, that inscribed Griboedov into the martyrology of Russian literature.

It would seem that the history of the "Project of the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company" and the accompanying "Note" are of narrowly textological interest. Why has so much controversy arisen about who is the author of the criticism that doomed the project, the former Decembrist Burtsev or the officious General Zhukovskii? The discovery made in the 1950s that the sharply negative feedback on the project belonged to Zhukovskii and not to Burtsev made the mysterious story easier to solve. If previous researchers who considered Griboedov's main opponent the Decembrist Burtsev had to invent complex reasons to explain the disagreement between the former associates, the research of 1960-1980s assigned the role of the destroyer of the project to the reactionary Zhukovskii, while the "indecisive" opinion Burtsev has been considered as almost positive, compared to the sarcastic Zhukovskii. In this way, the failure of the project could be associated with the suspicious and unfriendly attitude of "official circles" toward Griboedov.

Of course, Iuri Tynianov, who died in 1943, could not have known anything about these later discoveries. But it was precisely Malshinskii's wrong version (from an historical point of view) that attributed the project's failure to Burtsev that became central to the plot of the Griboedov's novel which was based on a conflict between former Decembrist confederates who found themselves forced apart by life and coming into harsh conflict over the project to transform the Caucasus. According to Tynianov, Griboedov hoped to implement, and at the same time to improve upon, what the Decembrists had planned and failed to do.

Tynianov himself believed that "every era foreground those past events which are common to it and forgets about the others." A recurrent issue in Tynianov's novel is

the betrayal of Decembrism that at the same time still retains a certain loyalty toward it. Tynianov describes Griboedov as a radical who survived the crushing of the rebellion and a person who reconsidered his former Decembrist ideals. He describes Griboedov's connections with the Decembrists as well as what divided them. He emphasizes the ways in which Griboedov differed from the Decembrists and notes his vision of what might have been had the insurrection of 1825 been successful. Tynianov claims (via Griboedov) that the victory of the Decembrists could only have led to the replacement of one form of tyranny for another, of one despotic police regime by another despotic police regime.

The heroes of pre-1825 Russian Romantic poems went to the East, to the Caucasus, hoping to escape "the bondage of the stuffy city." Tynianov's Griboedov goes to the Caucasus to a state which does not yet exist. He goes to the Caucasus, which Alexander called "a scorching Siberia" and which Nicholas made a place of exile for the Decembrists. But Tynianov compares the Caucasus with the New World and Griboedov goes there hoping that maybe here (or at least here) something might still be possible. These hopes, these thoughts become Griboedov's "Project for the Russian Transcaucasian Company," which he now considers his life's work. And here something quite amazing is revealed. As Tynianov shows, it turns out that like the projects of the Decembrists, Griboedov's project could not offer anything new or better. In the end, all they offer is merely a new form of enslavement.

This was clearly reflected in the experience of the French Revolution, of the Jacobin dictatorship, and this is what Tynianov's Griboedov contemplates. In the same way, considering Griboedov's "Project for the Russian Transcaucasian Company," Tynianov himself cannot help but think about the 1917 Revolution. Tynianov's Griboedov is vaguely aware that tyranny, despotism, autocracy and oppression will always have their fatal power.

"Maybe that is the reason why it is pointless to create something new with the hope that what one creates will be better than before, and one vaguely senses that tyranny, despotism, autocracy and fatal oppression will always exist." This conclusion belongs to Tynianov's biographer, the dissident Arkadii Belinkov who, saw in Tynianov's works something, in turn, in tune with his own epoch – the epoch of the 1950s.<sup>43</sup> Or, to put it another way, Griboedov's Caucasian Utopia resulted in the same impasse as would the Soviet Utopia for Tynianov some hundred years later, and as would Khrushchev's thaw some 30 years after that.

In all this, notable is how Griboedov's "Project of the Establishment of the Russian Transcaucasian Company" remains a litmus test which assesses the possibility of

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<sup>43</sup> Belinkov Arkady. *Yuri Tynianov*, Moscow, 1961.

constructing a perfect state "in a country taken separately." And at the same time, it fits into the tradition of utopia that Russian literature did not cease to confer on the Caucasus.

In conclusion, I will cite an episode from the Tynianov`s *Death of Wazir –Muhtar* that to some extent sums up the collapse of the Caucasian Utopia. Tynianov depicts a group of sectarians from Württemberg who believe that the Second Coming is immanent and that God will appear in Georgia, Turkey and Persia. Hence, they move to Russia and settle in the Caucasus. One of these sectarians meets Griboedov:

Alexander [Griboedov] saw a strange man with a German red mustache.

- Exellenz, - said the German - I am a poor sectarian of Wuerttemberg. We are sent here. Today I finish my quarantine. I know that you are going to Persia.

- What do you need? - quietly asked Griboedov.

- We believe in the coming of Christ from Persia. And if you, Exellenz, hear about it there, write me about it. My name is Meyer.

Alexander looked at the poor German with red mustache. And said in German very seriously:

- Give me your address, Mr. Meyer, and if I meet in Persia *den lieben Gott*, I will tell him to write a letter to you. But do you know Hebrew?

- No, - said the German, and his mustache swelled like sails.

- In this case, I strongly doubt that *der liebe Gott* knows German. You probably will not understand each other.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously neither Griboedov with his Caucasian project nor the new revolutionary state with its Communist utopia could find an adequate language to communicate with *dem lieben Gott*.

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Pushkin. The epilogue of the *Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

## Summary

### A Caucasian Utopia in Russian Literature and Politics: Alexander Griboedov and Iuri Tynianov

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The protagonists of my paper are the Russian writer and diplomat Alexander Griboedov, the author of the “Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company,” which he considered, if one can believe some sources, the main achievement of his life. Approximately 100 years after the death of Griboedov, Iuri Tynianov wrote his fictionalized biography where all of the action revolves around the Caucasus Project, with which, according to Tynianov, Griboedov signed his own death sentence. Here the question naturally arises: why did Tynianov, forced, after the defeat of Formalism, to turn to fiction and literary heroes, shy away from questions of literature, focusing instead on matters of Russian foreign policy and diplomacy? Why was the Caucasus a key topic for him? And should we not see in the biography of Griboedov a hidden message, a story, not so much about *the affairs of bygone days*, but rather about Tynianov’s own time and its problems? However, this story has still another mystery: what role did the Caucasus Project actually play in the fate of Griboedov and what really were the goals he pursued with it? The paper tries also to underline the utopian nature of the project which inscribes it, in an unexpected way, not so much into economic and political history, as into the Russian *literary* assimilation of the Caucasus and the so-called “Caucasian text” of Russian literature, the utopian space that literature of the time allocated to the Caucasus, into which, in fact, Griboedov’s project seemed to fit very harmoniously.

**Keywords:** Alexander Griboedov, Iuri Tynianov, Project for the Establishment of the Russian Caucasian Company, “Caucasian text” of Russian literature, utopia.