

A Stowaway on the Steamship of Modernity: Pushkin and the Futurists

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Declaration

I, James Rann, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Note on Conventions

I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration throughout, with the exception of the names of tsars and the cities Moscow and St Petersburg. References have been cited in accordance with the latest guidelines of the Modern Humanities Research Association. In the relevant chapters specific works have been referenced within the body of the text. They are as follows: Chapter One—Vladimir Markov, ed., *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*; Chapter Two—Velimir Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. by Rudol'f Duganov with Evgenii Arenzon; Chapter Three—Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, ed. by V. A. Katanian; Chapter Four—Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, ed. by V. A. Katanian, and Aleksei Kruchenykh, *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov*.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

Abstract

The declared intention of the Russian Futurist poets to ‘throw Pushkin from the steamship of Modernity’, expressed in their manifesto *Poshchekhina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, has come to define their attitude to Russia’s pre-eminent poet and the literature of the past in general. However, its ubiquity has led to a reductive approach to Futurism in the scholarship of Pushkin reception and Russian Modernism. This thesis will contribute to both fields, and to our understanding of Futurism, by showing how, contrary to their reputation, three signatories of *Poshchekhina*—Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Aleksei Kruchenykh—engaged with Pushkin and his legacy in complex ways throughout their careers. Pushkin will be shown to play an essential role in the strategies adopted by the Futurists to articulate their identities, both collectively and as individuals, and in the related project of the presentation of a radical new model of literary evolution. Close reading of specific works and broad theoretical contextualization will reveal two tendencies: iconoclasm, which continues to be an important, and sophisticated, aspect of Futurist identity, and a less obvious transformative impulse which treats Pushkin’s life and work as myths which can be adapted to help the poet respond to contemporary imperatives. After examining the development of a collective persona in the manifestos in the first chapter, I will devote a chapter each to the work of Khlebnikov, Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh, focusing on the way in which they use a specific motif or element of intertextuality to facilitate their self-expression. The notion of the poet as a sort of prophet will be analysed in relation to Khlebnikov’s conceptualization of time; Maiakovskii’s relationship with the state will be elucidated by examining his attitude to monuments and moving statues; Kruchenykh’s innovative use of quotation will be understood as a response to new forms of mass reception.

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Introduction

Aleksandr Pushkin and the Steamship of Modernity

‘Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and so on and so forth from the steamship of Modernity.’¹ This ringing phrase, which appeared in the Futurist manifesto *Poshchechina obshchesvtennomu vkusu* (1912), has not only become emblematic of the Futurist movement as a whole, but has entered into the Russian language as ‘winged words’. The longevity and ubiquity of this slogan is a testament to the Futurists’ ability to present themselves in an original and memorable way. One might detect some irony in the fact that the phrase which is axiomatic of Futurism has not freed them from the past, but rather forever bound them together with the classics. While this is certainly true, we should not underestimate the Futurists’ own awareness of this contradiction. Without doubt the skill of their phrase-making and, to use a not entirely anachronistic analogy, brand management, has had a distorting effect on the understanding of the Futurists’ relationship with the classics and in particular their attitude to Russia’s pre-eminent poet, Aleksandr Pushkin.² The eagerness with which this slogan has been read as an encapsulation of Futurist attitudes to the past is indicative of the lack of attention given to this relationship, both in scholarship and in the popular imagination. This is regrettable because a fuller comprehension of the way the Futurists positioned themselves in regard to their predecessors is fundamental to understanding the Futurists’ self-identity and their position within Russian literature. The primary motivation behind this study is, therefore, to remedy this shortfall and to problematize the assumption that the Futurists’ stated desire to eject Pushkin from their Modernist project was a sincere, comprehensive and achievable

¹ *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, ed. by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Fink, 1967), p. 50.

² In 1914 Vladimir Maiakovskii remarked, ‘And what is Futurist?—a brand-name, like “Triangle” [a make of galoshes].’ See Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘I nam miasa’, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, ed. by V. A. Katanian (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955-61), I, 313-15 (p. 314).

expression of their relationship with the cultural legacy of the past. By investigating the reception of Pushkin by the Futurists in a detailed and nuanced way, I will demonstrate how Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Aleksei Kruchenykh not only help find a very special place for Pushkin on the steamship of Modernity, but even assign him important roles within their avant-garde project. They do so, in particular, in the articulation of their own identity as poets and the development and propagation of their programme for cultural change.

Binary Models in the History of Futurism

My challenging of reductive assumptions about the Futurist reception of Pushkin complements a broad scholarly consensus, one which has gained increasing momentum in recent years and which acknowledges that the Futurists' relationship to the past, both as individuals and as a movement, is more complex than their carefully constructed image suggested, and that studying this relationship can reveal important specifics of Futurist poetics and insights into Russian culture as a whole. The pedigree of this position extends back to Aleksandr Blok, and includes such luminaries as Roman Jakobson and Iurii Tynianov.³ Its recent proponents number such eminent scholars as Viktor Grigor'ev (who warned against the distorting prevalence of the steamship metaphor, which 'still beats the "idoloclasts" like a boomerang') and Aleksandr Parnis, who subverted the steamship metaphor by suggesting, following Mikhail Petrovskii, that while Pushkin may be ejected,

³ Blok said of the Futurists: 'They have taught us to love Pushkin again in a new way—not Briusov, Shchegolev, Morozov etc., but... the futurists. They abuse him, in a new way, and he becomes closer in a new way.' From a diary entry, 13 December 1913. See Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki, 1901-1920*, ed. by V. Orlov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965), p. 168. Jakobson's first study of Khlebnikov includes numerous comparisons with Pushkin. These comparisons were not met with a favourable response by other members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle: see Roman Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia* (Prague: Politika, 1921), and *Mir Velimira Khlebnikova: Stat'i i issledovaniia 1911-1998*, ed. by Viacheslav Ivanov, Zinovii Papernyi and Aleksandr Parnis (Moscow: Iazyk russkoi kul'tury, 2000), pp. 20-102. See also Iu. N. Tynianov, 'O Khlebnikove', in *Mir Velimira Khlebnikova*, pp. 214-23.

his baggage stays on board.⁴ Nevertheless, despite these firm foundations and the enormous volume of scholarship devoted to the reception of Pushkin, no full-length study of the Futurists' contribution to Pushkin's literary afterlife exists.

There is, however, a growing body of work, notable for its meticulousness and perspicacity, which investigates the use of Pushkinian intertexts by individual Futurists. Notable in this regard are: articles and chapters on Khlebnikov by Viktor Turbin, Henryk Baran, Andrea Hacker and Jean-Claude Lanne;⁵ discussions of Maiakovskii and Pushkin which are untainted by ideological concerns, such as those by Zinovii Papernyi and Irina Ivaniushina;⁶ and sections of commentaries on Kruchenykh by such scholars as Sergei Sigei and Nina Gur'ianova.⁷ However, only three scholars have sought to provide more comprehensive, synthetic conclusions about Pushkin's place in the Futurist movement as a whole: Parnis, in the article cited above, Viacheslav Krasovskii in a conference paper, 'Futuristicheskii mif o Pushkine', and Iurii Orbitskii in an article primarily concerned with

⁴ V. P. Grigor'ev, *Grammatika idiotilia: V. Khlebnikov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1983), p. 157. See also V. P. Grigor'ev, 'Khlebnikov i Pushkin', in *Pushkin i poeticheskii iazyk XX veka: Sbornik statei posviashchennyi 200-letiiu s dnia rozhdeniia A. S. Pushkina*, ed. by N.A. Fateev (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), pp. 132-51. Aleksandr Parnis, 'My nakhodimsia k Pushkinu pod priamym uglom (Futuristy i Pushkin)', *Russkaia mysl'*, No. 4255, 28 Jan-3 February 1999, p. 17, and No. 4256, 4-10 February 1999, p. 13.

⁵ V. N. Turbin, 'Khlebnikov i Pushkin (K postanovke problemy)', *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, 9 (1994), pp. 141-66; Henryk Baran, 'Pushkin in Khlebnikov: Some Thematic Links', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, ed. by Boris Gasparov, Robert P. Hughes and Irina Paperno (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 356-81; Andrea Hacker, 'To Pushkin, Freedom, and Revolution in Asia: Velimir Khlebnikov in Baku', *Russian Review*, 65 (2006), pp. 439-69; Jean-Claude Lanne, 'Pouchkine dans le contexte de l'avant-garde russe. Examen d'un cas particulier: Pouchkine et Khlebnikov', in *L'Universalité de Pouchkine*, ed. by Michel Aucouturier and Jean Bonamour (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2000), pp. 333-42.

⁶ Z. Papernyi, "'Ot Pushkina do nashikh gazetnykh dnei...'", in *V mire Maiakovskogo: Sbornik statei*, ed. by A. Mikhailov and S. Lesnevskii (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1984), pp. 80-116; Irina Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo', *Voprosy literatury*, 4 (2000), pp. 312-26.

⁷ Sergei Sigei, 'Strashnaia mest' Alekseia Kruchenykh', in Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Arabeski iz Gagolia*, ed. by Sergei Sigei (Madrid: Ediciones del Hebreo Errante, 2001), pp. 39-47, and Nina Gur'ianova, *Pamiat' teper' mnogo razvorachivaet: Iz literaturnogo naslediiia Kruchenykh*, ed. by Nina Gur'ianova, (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Slavic Specialities, 1999).

Kruchenykh and Igor' Terent'ev.⁸ While all these studies have considerable merits, they are far from exhaustive, serving largely to introduce the question.

In addition to this body of work, other scholars interested in the mechanisms of cultural inheritance, and in particular the Silver Age more generally, have often felt the need to comment, if only in passing, on the Futurists' attitudes to Pushkin. It is not surprising that the strikingly iconoclastic gesture of *Poshchetchina* has regularly been employed by scholars as convenient shorthand for the Futurists' determination not to ground their poetic endeavours in tradition. However, the narrow field of vision inevitable when viewing the Futurist reception of Pushkin through this keyhole has contributed to the general underestimation of the complexity of the Futurist conception of literary dynamics. *Poshchetchina* is at times the Futurists' only representation in the scholarship of Pushkin reception: for instance, in Paul Debreczeny's landmark study *Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture*, *Poshchetchina* is held to be 'symptomatic' of Futurism in general.⁹ The reliance on this image is not only limiting, but also distorting, because it allows the Futurists' self-consciously binary self-presentation both to serve as an index for their entire poetics and to inform the scholar's response to it. Such an effect is manifested in different ways in different branches of scholarship. In some instances, it leads to a tendency for the Futurists to be invoked in passing as a straw man: they are used as a negative pole of brute nihilistic simplicity which can be contrasted with more complex views held by other poets. Even in the numerous cases in which passing references display a nuanced and accurate contextualization of Futurist nihilism as a response to the concretizing effect of the 'cult of Pushkin', such as that of David John Richards and Roger

⁸ Iu. B. Orlickii, 'Russkaia literatura v interpretatsii radikal'nogo futurizma (Pushkin i Gogol' v tvorchestve A. Kruchenykh i I. Terent'eva). Available at: http://postsymbolism.ru/joomla/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=23&Itemid=50. Accessed 20/07/2012; Viacheslav Krasovskii, 'Futuristicheskii mif o Pushkine', paper given at the conference 'Traditsii russkoi literatury XX veka i sovremennost'', Moscow, 14-15 November, 2002.

⁹ Paul Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 231.

Cockrell in the introductory essay to their survey of Pushkin's place in Russian culture, the characterization of the Futurist position solely as a contingent, polemic response curtails the possible creative contribution of the Futurists to the development of Pushkin's legacy.¹¹

What is more, the reasonable and correct recognition made by some scholars that the real target of the Futurists' rhetorical hostility was not necessarily always Pushkin himself, but rather that other instances of his reception can easily develop into another antinomy between 'love' and 'hate'. Stephanie Sandler, in her invaluable history of the Pushkin myth in Russian culture, presents Maiakovskii's relationship to Pushkin in similar terms:

it is too easy to conclude that Mayakovsky flatly resisted the mythic adoration of Pushkin that anniversaries required, or that he substituted violence for admiration. In fact, his aggressive language typically reveals deep feelings of affection, and the man who signed the 1912 Futurist manifesto urging that Pushkin be thrown off the ship of modernity comes close in 1924 to speaking of him as Russia's 'first love.'¹²

Sandler's reading of Maiakovskii is duly subtle, even though the progression implied by her juxtaposition of 1912 and 1924 is dubious considering that Maiakovskii called Pushkin Russia's 'first love' not in 'Iubileinoe' (1924) but in *Poshchechina*, immediately after suggesting he be thrown overboard. More significant, however, is the tendency, in evidence here, to suggest that the Futurists' gesture of brute violence concealed and overcompensated for an opposite pole of affection for the national poet. The governing metaphor for this hidden affection—the antipode to the steamship—belongs to the Futurists' colleague Benedikt Livshits:

I found the text of the manifesto quite unacceptable. I slept with Pushkin under my pillow – and who didn't? [...] To throw him overboard together with Dostoevskii and Tolstoi from the 'ship of modernity' seemed hypocritical.¹³

¹¹ *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. and trans. by D. J. Richards and C. R. S. Cockrell (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1976), p. xvii.

¹² Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin: Russia's Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 100.

¹³ Benedikt Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, trans. by John E. Bowlt (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1977), p. 121.

The question of whether the Futurists ‘liked’ Pushkin or enjoyed reading him is not irrelevant, but, when considering them as poets, it is surely secondary to the question of how they constructed and enacted their relationship with him in their writing. (The evidence suggests that the Futurists remained enthusiastic readers of Pushkin all their lives.) The inherent risk in treating intertextuality as evidence for respect or admiration is that it propagates an implicit hierarchy in which a submissive adoption of Pushkinian norms is a necessary qualification for literary worth (the very sort of simplistic canonization the Futurists challenged). This mode of thinking clearly motivates Gennadii Glinin in his skilful exploration of themes from *Boris Godunov* in Khlebnikov’s poetry: ‘One of the undoubted proofs of the success of Khlebnikov studies is the acknowledgment of the rightful existence of the question “Pushkin and Khlebnikov” in its various aspects.’¹⁴ The existence of this question relies on revealing Khlebnikov’s secret admiration for Pushkin:

I wanted to prove the existence of the problem in itself and show that Khlebnikov does not reject Pushkin and even less does he throw him from the steamship of modernity. It is precisely his desire to compete with Pushkin creatively that bears witness not only to his high esteem for the great poet, but also to the undoubted influence of Pushkin on Khlebnikov, who fruitfully developed Pushkinian traditions in new historical and cultural conditions.¹⁵

Glinin’s aims are not different from my own. However, the present study seeks to show that creatively rewarding intertextual relationships can exist outside this paradigm of respect and antipathy. The ‘stowaway’ of my title is intended neither to perpetuate the binary thinking of the steamship nor refute that thinking in an equally binary way, but rather to symbolize the possibility for a flexible perspective capable of capturing the richness and extent of Pushkin’s appropriation by the Futurists.

¹⁴ G. G. Glinin, ““Boris Godunov” A. S. Pushkina i poema Khlebnikova “Marina Mnishek”: Opyt sopostavlenogo analiza”, in *Poeticheskii mir Velemira Khlebnikova. Mezhdvuzovskii sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Astrakhan: Astrakhanskii pedagogicheskii institut, 1992), pp. 152-59 (p. 152).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

The final example of the binary thinking which tends to accumulate around this question comes from Boris Gasparov's introduction to *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*. The essays in this collection represent, to my mind, the most sophisticated engagement with Pushkin's legacy published in English, and Gasparov's introductory essay the most cogent and insightful summary of the question of Pushkin in the Silver Age. While Gasparov's presentation of Futurism's relationship to Pushkin is beholden to a certain reductive binary logic, the presentation of this logic remains thought-provoking. Not only does his analysis require explication, but it also anticipates the theoretical framework upon which I base my study:

But no matter how much the myth [of Pushkin] evolved, its essence remained the same: incarnated in the contemporary world, the Pushkin principle was regarded as a sign of the eruption of eschatological time into the history of culture – when Russia's 'testament', the mission of the nation, of its poetic word and of the Russian artist as bearer of this word would receive ultimate formation. Remarkably, Modernist currents employing a negative image of Pushkin (the Futurists) essentially moved within the parameters of this same myth; they simply attached a minus sign.¹⁶

Gasparov is surely right to place Futurism within a broader Modernist response to Pushkin's role in Russian culture and to locate them at an extreme typified by negativity; as we shall see, their manifestos do display a marked tendency to characterize Pushkin negatively. However, his characterization of the Futurist Pushkin as, effectively, 'Modernism with a minus sign' more aptly describes the antagonistic self-presentation of Futurism than the totality of their interaction with Pushkin. The mathematical image of the appended minus sign seems to be borrowed from Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii's classic article 'Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture' and its account of Prince Vladimir's destruction of the idols in Kiev prior to the Christianization of the Rus' as a moment of total cultural inversion: 'Vladimir [...] did not simply accept a new system of

¹⁶ Boris Gasparov, 'Introduction: The "Golden Age" and Its Role in the Cultural Mythology of Russian Modernism', translated by Eric Naiman, in *Cultural Mythologies*, pp. 1-16 (p. 8).

values, replacing the old with the new, but rather wrote the old into the new – with a minus sign.¹⁷ The kinship between the two passages becomes particularly obvious when Gasparov specifically compares the Futurists' ejection of Pushkin to Christianization:

Their messianic 'testament' was proclaimed as the liberation of Russian culture from Pushkin; they intended to 'throw him overboard' (like a pagan divinity) from their sacred ship – 'the steamboat of contemporaneity.'¹⁸

Gasparov's allusions reveal his sensitivity to the way in which the Futurists locate their *antipassatismo* within a certain discourse of Russian iconoclasm in which cultural change is understood to be binary in nature and universal in scope. However, he allows this same model of cultural interaction, initially used by Lotman and Uspenskii to describe the self-conscious construction of change through time, to characterize the Futurists' divergence from their Modernist peers. There are considerable problems with this depiction: first, as suggested above, the Futurists' loud self-presentation in *Poshchechina* does not necessarily represent the entirety of their self-conscious image-making, let alone the totality of their interaction with the Pushkin myth; second, it reduces Futurism to a negative mirror of Symbolism and Acmeism; third, the mechanisms and consequences of attaching this 'minus sign' are vague when the figure it is appended to—the myth of Pushkin as the eruption of eschatological time into history—is so complex.

Myth, Culture and History

Despite the problems raised above, I believe that Gasparov's conception of the role of Pushkin in the Silver Age can be used to demonstrate what is special about the Futurist reception of Pushkin. He proposes that: 'In the age of Russian Modernism the concept of

¹⁷ Iurii M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskii, 'Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)', in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History: Essays by Iurii M. Lotman, Lidiia Ia. Ginzburg, Boris A. Uspenskii*, ed. by Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 30-66 (p. 34). The congruity between these two essays could, potentially, have entered at the stage of translation, although this is unlikely, and impossible to verify.

¹⁸ Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 8.

cultural tradition, which had dominated the preceding century, was replaced by the idea of *cultural myth*.¹⁹ The distinction he makes between myth and tradition is fundamental to my understanding of the Futurists' use of Pushkin in their work. I contend that, although the Futurists rejected Pushkin as a figure of cultural tradition (which is to say, they ceased to view him as a respected authority who determined the horizon of their creativity), they also, despite their *prima facie* hostility, continued to use Pushkin mythologically, appropriating the myths used by Pushkin and by others about him to facilitate their own mythopoeic construction of identity. My analysis will further demonstrate how the articulation of a unique Futurist identity was necessarily intertwined with a related Futurist project—the establishment of a new model for cultural development. The question of Futurist identity is inseparable from their concept of literary change. As Gasparov says:

To understand a cultural movement, one should consider that movement's *perception of self* by examining its members' understanding of their relationship to preceding cultural epochs and of their own roles in the movement's teleological unfolding.²⁰

The identity of a group is formed against that of its predecessors, but this process must also make use of the language (both literally and metaphorically) of those other groups. Thus the nature of the distinction that literary groupings make between themselves and other groups past and present is indicative of the way in which members of that group understand transformation in cultural history in general. The focus of this study, therefore, will be the twin Futurist project of creating an identity and formulating a vision of cultural evolution, because it allows us to see how the Futurists positioned themselves within Russian culture.

In order to pursue this goal effectively in the forthcoming chapters it is necessary briefly to contextualize the Futurists' rejection of tradition, creation of a new identity and mythologization of Pushkin, and to comment on the specificities of these actions. As

¹⁹ Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1. Original italics.

Gasparov suggests, all of these identity-forming gestures are party to a wider shift in consciousness in Europe and America which bore varied literary fruit in the works of Modernists. A notable aspect of this movement was an increased focus on myth. It is important to emphasize that myth did not merely enjoy a vogue as a theme, or as a structural device, but that a mythological frame of mind informed writers' conceptualization of the interrelation of life, art and truth, and, consequently, their understanding of their self-identity and their interaction with their predecessors. Michael Bell, in his insightful study of Modernism and myth, locates the fundamental difference between Modernism and the predominantly realist trends which preceded it in the different epistemological worldviews which shaped the writer's conception of his art:

The period of the realist novel was roughly contemporaneous with the prestige of Newtonian science. The physical sciences provided what seemed for a long time the paradigmatic form of truth statement, whereas modernist mythopoeia is an attempt to combine the lived, intuitive, spontaneous nature of belief with the recognition of philosophical relativity.²¹

Such a new perception of the world is, therefore, related to that wider European philosophical and cultural impulse which emerged in the late nineteenth century as a riposte to the latest manifestations of the Enlightenment, and in particular those positivist doctrines which promulgated a confident belief in the gradual progress of humanity. Particularly in its eloquent formulation by Friedrich Nietzsche, this alternative sensibility gained momentum in the early twentieth century thanks to the epistemologically destabilizing effect of scientific discoveries about the nature of the universe. At the risk of over-simplifying, one could say that in the age of Nietzsche and Einstein, writers were no longer able or satisfied to ground their identity and that of their creative endeavours either in accepted overarching systems (be they scientific or religious) or in preceding literary tradition, because the inherent truth value of these givens had been brought into question.

²¹ Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 165.

The nature of myth, however, made it the perfect companion to such a worldview because, while still providing narratives for understanding the world, it accommodates multiplicity and relativity.

The dissemination of Nietzsche was undoubtedly an important driver for the interrelated turn away from positivism and rise of radical new mythopoetic identities across Europe: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and others have shown how Nietzsche's championing of a new myth of a new man was eagerly adopted by members of the Russian intelligentsia in this period as part of a general recalibration of the nature and potential of the individual. The Futurists fitted this profile very closely, and the Futurist rejection of tradition has rightly been seen as, in part, a vivid outgrowth of Nietzsche's questioning of the value of historical memory.²² In accordance with their membership to this loose anti-positivist grouping, the Futurists' self-mythologization tended to align their poetic practice with the activities of other forces perceived as alien and hostile to nineteenth-century discourses of evolutionary progress, such as Scythians, hooligans, terrorists, rebellious bandits like Sten'ka Razin and, of course, Nietzschean supermen.²³ Identification with non-literary figures will be seen to be particularly strong in the manifestos: the use of this genre, with its political origins, is in itself an act of alignment with forces outside of literature.

However, the vogue for Nietzschean mythopoeia was only one symptom of a profound shift towards new forms of understanding of the self in mythic terms, especially in poets' construction of their personae. Gasparov recognizes this mythic self-identity to be

²² See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), pp. 94-111; Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "'Mif istoka" v russkom avangarde 1910-kh godov', in Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, *Russkii avangard: Istoki i metamorfozy* (Moscow: Piataia strana, 2003), pp. 24-43.

²³ Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "'Skifstvo" v russkoi kul'ture nachala XX veka i skifskaia tema u russkikh futuristov', in *Russkii avangard*, pp. 44-70; Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 142-51; Maria Carlson, 'Armchair anarchists and salon Supermen: Russian occultists read Nietzsche', in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture, Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 107-26.

a product of the fact that Russian Modernists conceived of themselves as belonging to an entirely new and separate moment in Russian culture (what has come to be known as the Silver Age) that was linked to the past not by straightforward causative historical progression but by more complex structures of parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and, in some cases, violent rupture.²⁴ In its seemingly eternal character and tendency to draw attention to recurrent paradigms, myth is a useful tool for the articulation of the rejection of linear time and the preservation of a sense of self outside of tradition. In Russia, as elsewhere, ‘modernist writers turned away from the metaphysical problem of grounding, and sought in myth a mode of self-grounding’.²⁵

In this connection, Gregory Freidin comments on the importance of myth for Osip Mandel’shtam:

Mandelstam was the author of his own ‘myth’, or, rather, ‘myths of the poet.’ He worked consistently at designing a figure that could serve as a unifying epic or dramatic centre for a variety of lyric gestures. He was thus able to satisfy a major condition for being a lyric poet in contemporary Russia, namely to compose poetry capable of projecting a powerful, integrative self. [...] Contemporary poets, beneficiaries of the nineteenth-century comparative mythology, understood that this was to be accomplished in large measure by having the protagonist project narrative patterns intentionally designed both to emulate ancient myth *and* to absorb modern historical matter.²⁶

The absorption of historical matter into a mythological paradigm mentioned here by Freidin is very evident in the way in which throughout the Silver Age Pushkin was transformed from a historical figure, the father of certain traditions within Russian literature, into a myth, ‘the main actor in a mythical story about the classical, a myth that is recounted time and time again whenever it is a matter of reinterpreting culture’.²⁷ In fact, Pushkin’s myth overflows the boundaries of the classical to become an almost omnipresent figure in the culture—a storehouse of motifs and stories, liberally stocked by examples

²⁴ Gasparov, ‘Introduction’, p. 9.

²⁵ Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, p. 21.

²⁶ Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colours: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987), p. x.

²⁷ Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism*, trans. by Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 192

from life and his art, with little distinction being made between the two. This resource, as Alexandra Smith and Irina Paperno have shown, was eagerly exploited by writers of the Silver Age looking to construct and express their own identities, both in life and in art.²⁸

Despite the undoubted fact that the relativizing prism of the Modernist perception of the world accelerated the transformation of the historical figure of Pushkin and his works into myths, we must acknowledge that the mythologization of Pushkin had already begun in his lifetime. Like the Modernists, Pushkin consciously forged his lyric persona in relation to not only Russian and European cultural traditions, such as the poet-as-prophet, but also contemporary Romantic identities, such as those pioneered by Byron or André Chénier. Such mythologizing elaborations on the poet's identity provide the base materials from which later variations can be made.²⁹ The forthcoming examination of the Futurist myth of Pushkin will show that the Futurists had a keen awareness of the way in which Pushkin drew on different sources to form his identity, anticipating their own similar endeavour.

The process of mythologization became inexorable following Pushkin's death, as his biography became implicated in longstanding cultural discourses, often with a religious origin, surrounding the role of the outstanding individual in society.³⁰ The refraction and ramification of Pushkin over this century-long process increased his multiplicity and flexibility as a mythological figure and imbued his name and works with the semiotic richness and social and philosophical significance which made the resultant myth so

²⁸ See Gasparov, 'Introduction', passim; Irina Paperno, 'Pushkin v zhizni cheloveka Serebriannogo veka', in *Cultural Mythologies*, pp. 19-51; Alexandra Smith, *Montaging Pushkin: Pushkin and Visions of Modernity in Russian Twentieth Century Poetry* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 36.

²⁹ Compare Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 4: 'For the Romantic consciousness, images of Orpheus, of Dante, of the prophet or apostle setting out into the desert, had possessed enormous symbolic meaning as prototypes of the Romantic "pilgrimage." In the age of Modernism, these images, as well as a host of others (including those of Apollo, Dionysus and Sophia) once again played an enormously stimulating role as symbols of creative messianism. The meaning of these images, however, acquired a more universal character as they were broadened and subjected to endless mythological reflection.'

³⁰ See *Legendy i mify o Pushkine*, ed. by Mariia Virolainen (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994), and in particular M. N. Virolainen, 'Kul'turnyi geroi novogo vremeni', in *Legendy i mify*, pp. 321-41.

conducive to Modernist identity formation. We will see throughout the course of the argument the way in which the Futurists engaged with this mythological hinterland to Pushkin—his incarnation in the works of, for instance, Fedor Tiutchev or Nikolai Nekrasov—to shape their myth of Pushkin and, consequently, of themselves.

Within the diverse field of the reception of Pushkin and his continued mythologization, some distinction must be made between different tendencies. While the poet's life and work have remained famously Protean throughout his afterlife, the use of Pushkin has not always been characterized by the relativism and rejection of linearity present in Modernism. As suggested above, the Futurist rejection of Pushkin was to a significant extent a reaction against what they perceived as almost idolatrous veneration of him. The characteristics of this tendency encompassed: enshrining Pushkin at the head of the Russian literary tradition; ascribing to him a fixed portfolio of moral and aesthetic values, designed to propagate contemporary norms; establishing a hierarchy in which homage to Pushkin (and the values ascribed to him) was a fealty owed by all subsequent poets. The religious metaphors employed in Futurist texts here are not coincidental: the sacralization of Pushkin can be seen as the opposite of mythologization. The latter rejects hierarchies both diachronically and synchronically and allows for the free play of identity creation; the former seeks to create a rigid template with which to understand art—a template which is, furthermore, subject to wider religious and nationalist dogmas.

Building on the clear difference between mythological and sacral attitudes to Pushkin, I will make frequent reference to the Futurist hostility to the 'cult of Pushkin'. However, I do not wish to create a rigid distinction between Pushkin and his cult. The mythological approach to literary personality presupposes the absence of a transcendental 'real Pushkin'; instead, Pushkin consists of a series of narratives which ramify and evolve across time. The cult of Pushkin is thus one element of a multiple Pushkin, just like the Futurist Pushkin. However, it is one that brings with it a certain philosophical and aesthetic

standpoint which the Futurists attack, both to distance their Pushkin from it and to demonstrate the divergence of their underlying worldview from that of the cult's adherents.

The expanding range of Pushkinian mythology in the nineteenth century encompassed acts of virulent rejection long before the Futurists. In contrast to other Silver Age movements, the Futurists' reappraisal of Pushkin did not exclude this development—the prominent exploitation of Pushkin as a symbol for illegitimate, immaterial and obsolete aestheticism by utilitarian critics such as Dmitrii Pisarev and Nikolai Dobroliubov. While the aesthetics (and, perhaps, aestheticism) of Symbolism can be seen in part as a product of the rejection of the utilitarians' rejection, for the Futurists the language and self-presentation of mid-nineteenth-century nihilism was a further element that they could integrate into their mythology. Indeed, the materialism promulgated by these critics is present, in a modified form, in the Futurist rejection of what they perceived as the insubstantial, ethereal spiritualism of Symbolism. It finds further expression in the fact that, although suspicious of the fundamental worldview of positivism, Futurism often modelled its poetics on a commitment to practical knowledge at the expense of the esoteric.³¹

The Futurists' willingness to incorporate allusions to utilitarianism and nihilism into their mythology (we recall Maiakovskii's famous, playful boast: 'Я над всем, что сделано, / ставлю "ниhil"') and the way in which they locate their interaction with Pushkin within a broader historical context of mythologies point to two ways in which their mythologization of Pushkin differs from that of their contemporaries.³² First, as *Poshchetchina* shows, the Futurists' calling card was brutal iconoclasm, featuring deliberate appeals to previous, total transformations of culture (this theme will be examined in detail in Chapter Three).

³¹ Compare Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, p. 20: 'I have emphasized the darkening and oppositional aspect of modern mythopoeia, but when its philosophical ambition is understood it becomes clear why it does not have to be simply iconoclastic or primitivist. Indeed, the ideological thrust of works conceived on this basis could also be highly conservative with respect to Enlightenment values.'

³² Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 181.

Throughout the Futurist reception of Pushkin, the creative appropriation of Pushkin coexisted with an alternative strand of Futurist mythology in which he was vehemently rejected. Such a loud declaration of independence and rupture differentiated the Futurists from their peers, and necessitated a careful handling of Pushkinian themes in order to maintain their iconoclastic image, which cast a shadow over their other, more recuperative manipulations of Pushkinian myth.

Second, the Futurists' advocacy for a thoroughgoing break with the past suggests a slightly different model of time, culture and history from that which Gasparov ascribes to the Silver Age. Gasparov describes the general view:

Historical succession gave way to mythological simultaneity. [...] Historical phenomena previously seen as causally linked now were perceived as syncretic; events earlier understood in terms of 'causes' and 'effects', connected along a temporal axis, were merged into a mythological paradigm or amalgam. [...] Traditional historical and aesthetic problems, important throughout the history of Russian culture, continued to be significant in the age of Modernism, but they were reinterpreted in accordance with the prevailing mode of mythological, atemporal synthesis.³³

The Futurists' two divergences from this model will be sketched here briefly as, to a significant extent, they determine what is unique about the Futurist reception of Pushkin.

The first difference is related to the iconoclasm described above. Like their contemporaries, the Futurists saw the time in which they were living as fundamentally distinct from those which preceded it. Furthermore, like many other Modernists, they believed that the art, literature and language being produced before their arrival did not adequately represent this new reality, as it failed to convey both the energy of new technological and social developments and the fundamental philosophical and spiritual changes which underlay these manifestations of modernity. Consequently, a new means of

³³ Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 2.

expression needed to be found. Maiakovskii says that the Futurists must 'break the old language which is incapable of catching up with the pace of life'.³⁴

As the ejection of Pushkin shows, one of the reasons why, to the Futurists, contemporary culture is unable adequately to express lived reality is that it is overburdened with relics from the past which no longer speak for the present. Many other Modernist groups seek to renovate artistic and poetic languages in order to find new means of expression, but the Futurists set themselves apart from their peers in the vehemence of the rhetoric which they use to declare that a decisive rupture with the past is necessary to achieve this. In an early essay, 'Teatr, kinematograf, futurizm', Maiakovskii describes it as 'the great break, begun by us in all areas of beauty in the name of the art of the future'.³⁵ Like other movements, political and artistic, which use manifestos, Futurism articulates an inherent dissatisfaction: the manifestos declaim the fact that the current relationship between art and life is inadequate and only the Futurist project can remedy this situation. The suggestion that culture is an inadequate representative of the present fractures any picture of a unified, synchronous cultural-historical moment: there are two separate tracks moving through history—art and life. The goal of the avant-garde is to overcome this fissure and to infuse art with life and vice versa. The Futurists' allies Il'ia Zdanevich and Mikhail Larionov express this doctrine clearly in a contemporary manifesto: 'It's time for art to invade life'.³⁶ For this to be achieved, the Futurists must do without the old discredited art and find their own language. This has a literal manifestation in the programmatic use of neologisms and in the radical innovation of *zaum'* poetry, which has only indistinct ties to existing language, but it is also evident in the Futurists' desire to create outside of existing schools and models.³⁷

³⁴ Maiakovskii, 'Kaplia degtia', *PSS*, I, 349-351 (p. 350).

³⁵ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 275

³⁶ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 173.

³⁷ Igor' Smirnov calls this desired position outside of culture 'внесистемность'. I. P. Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl i evoliutsiia poeticheskikh sistem* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p. 12.

However, achieving this position external to culture is complicated by the fact that the Futurists share their peers' belief that, despite its exceptional status, their epoch is connected to others. This connection is not causal or linear, but structural: events and narratives in different times, past, present and future, are understood to have a typological similarity. The teleology of historical time is replaced by specific localized narratives drawn on the model of existing examples, such as myths. It is this idea that all actions are subject to a predetermined script, visible in the stories of previous epochs, which underpins the establishment of the Golden Age as a model for understanding the early twentieth century. Such a belief is also a prerequisite for the mythological appropriation of Pushkin: his work and life are seen more as the source of narratives for understanding the present than as chronologically prior, historical events that helped to bring history and culture to their present position. As Gasparov says:

For Russian Modernism it was not so much 'Pushkin', an integral phenomenon with a concrete historical existence, who was important but the 'Pushkinian principle,' an eternal category of the creative spirit which was dissolved into and incarnated in the world.³⁸

However, and this is the second way in which the Futurists diverge from Gasparov's model of synchronicity, the identity, and non-linear relation, of narratives in different epochs is not tantamount to the dissolution of historical time or diminution of concrete historical existence. Similarity between phenomena in different ages can only be understood against the backdrop of other historical changes, both internal and external to the phenomenon itself. Invariant elements can only be detected in the presence of variables: the detectable similarity between the Golden Age and the Silver Age is contingent on the differences between them.

³⁸ Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 6.

This is best understood in reference to Igor' Smirnov's persuasive comparison of the poetics of Futurism and the Baroque, in which he argues that Futurism posits a spatialized model of time. His suggested model shows the same absence of linearity as Gasparov's: 'time inevitably loses its sign of irreversibility [*neobratimost'*], events are linked in time as if they were organized in space, that is they are not understood from the point of view of temporal order'.³⁹ There is no chronological hierarchy of events, rather, within the space of the Futurist poem, different epochs can come together on equal footing, without either a sense of intervening history or the hierarchy imposed by notions of anteriority.

Two refinements must, however, be made to this argument. First, such an understanding of time may dispense with hierarchy, but it still requires topology: the interrelationship of temporal events would be impossible if they all shared the same coordinates—events may share a similar orientation, but they are not the same. Thus, even if Pushkin is understood to exist on the same *plane* as Futurism, he is not necessarily in the same *place*. This becomes clearer when related to Khlebnikov's modelling of recurrence through time in the works known as *Doski sud'by*: Khlebnikov feels able mathematically to calculate future events because he understands history as a wave which returns periodically to the same position; an event in the future can occupy the same position in relation to the wave as one in the past, and therefore have the same outcome.⁴⁰ Despite the innate connection between disparate events, Khlebnikov's model is far from achronic or synchronic: his calculations are based on the number of calendar years that pass between historical events. For Khlebnikov, linear time is the background necessary to be able to understand the connections between disparate events; it is the ether in which the wave of fate fluctuates. Like other Modernists, Khlebnikov rejects linear causality: the

³⁹ Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ See "*Doski sud'by*" Velimira Khlebnikova: *Tekst i konteksty, stat'i i materialy*, ed. by Nikolai Gritsanchuk, Nikita Sirotkin and Vladimir Feshchenko (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2008). See Velimir Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. by R.V. Duganov, (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2000-06), VI.i, 179.

organizing principle of events is not consecutive. However, he does not entirely reject linear time: chronology provides the medium in which he can detect the complex causal structures of fate.⁴¹ Time is both linear and circular; it is helical, encompassing both progress and differentiation and return. What is more, the fact that linked phenomena occupy different positions within the medium of linear time has a bearing on their essence: his mathematical calculations show how events and people are similar, not identical, precisely because of their different temporal circumstances. The same principle applies in reference to Pushkin and the Futurists: there can be a shared mythology which links them, but the exact manifestation of their common essence is conditioned by their occupation of different points in history. The various ways in which different locations affect eternal mythological essences will become apparent over the course of my argument. Time and again, we will see the Futurist poets treating the Pushkin myth not as an 'eruption of eschatological time into the history of culture', but as one more iteration of a recurring principle. Moreover, we will frequently observe the way in which the Futurists historicize myth, showing how the formation of every new version of a myth, including the Pushkin myth, is contingent both on myths that came before it chronologically and on the historical environment in which it is formed. They show that their interaction with Pushkin is mediated by the writers who have come between them and who have put their own stamp on the Pushkin myth as it passed through their epoch. For example, the manifestos display the intervening role in the development of the Pushkin myth played by Fedor Tiutchev; Maiakovskii shows the intervention of Nekrasov; Khlebnikov lays bare the Biblical origin of Pushkinian motifs; Kruchenykh demonstrates how quotations are modified as they move from one work to another. The idea that chronology has a pull on the structures determining events does not conflict with Smirnov's concept of spatialized time: the

⁴¹ The notion of an overarching structure determining the course of history is reflected in the Futurists' fatalism, a characteristic which expresses itself in their poetry in a tendency to view their biographies through the prism of predetermined narratives, including that of Pushkin. See Smirnov, p. 130.

different iterations of the myth are arranged on the grid of history in accordance with an overarching structure, but their exact coordinates also respond to local temporal conditions.

Smirnov's argument does not recognize the importance of the relative topology that I insist on. Instead he suggests that their spatial understanding of time allows Futurist works to fuse different epochs:

The topological understanding of time becomes the reason why, in the models of the world created by Futurism and the Baroque, the present can be transformed into a single temporal reality, in which the past and the future are embedded like fragments of space.⁴²

The acuity of Smirnov's insight becomes evident when we recall with him that Maiakovskii would imagine himself moving through time as if it were space.⁴³ However, I believe his emphasis on Futurist movement through time requires a caveat: spatialized time can be collapsed into one temporal locality only inside the utopian confines of the Futurist poem. The poem is not meant to act as an accurate reflection of the present functioning of time or culture in everyday life, but as an idealized version of it. Only art possess sufficient fluidity to allow unhindered movement between positions on the grid of history.

We thus return to the schism between art and life which characterizes the Futurist vision of culture and history. Only in Futurist art can epochs intermingle; this is not possible in life. However, according to the avant-garde worldview, once their utopian aim has been achieved and life has attained the same degree of freedom already enjoyed by art, then

⁴² Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 121.

⁴³ Compare *ibid.*, p. 122: 'In the early Maiakovskii the hero directs time according to his own plan; history begins when the poet, who sees all creation as his sphere of influence, enters the world'. I would argue that this ability to transcend time is not limited to his early work. Compare 'Vo ves' golos' (1930):

я шагну
через лирические томики,
как живой
с живыми говоря.
Я к вам приду
в коммунистическое далеко.

Maiakovskii, PSS, X, 280.

both the distancing effect of time and the controlling effect of determinism will be defeated. As Krystyna Pomorska says, 'All his life Majakovskij considered time a trap, and all his life he was looking for a way out of this trap.'⁴⁴ Poetry was one solution.

Thus the two unique elements of Futurism—the desire for a cultural rupture and the insistence on historicism—are shown to be two aspects of the same problem. The rigid determinism of time and fate remains a problem for humanity because life has not yet achieved the fluid status of art. The Futurists, in their poetry and in their lives, both document this sad state of affairs and seek to overcome it.

When we apply this model to the reception of Pushkin, we see that it closely reflects the Futurists' attitudes: they are happy to draw parallels between their own work and his, but they reject any notion that he is either more important than them (which is to say, higher up a hierarchized chronology), or that he represents a unique instance of eschatological time. Rather he is another, important landmark in their topology of history.

The Futurists' hostility to the notion of Pushkin as a force external to history shows considerable similarities with the theories of their friends and colleagues, the Formalists. Iurii Tynianov and others sought to understand Pushkin not as a unique irruption of genius into the run of Russian culture, but as the product of literary evolution. Moreover, they showed that, despite his unique position, Pushkin's influence on subsequent writers was also subject to the influence of their time.⁴⁵ This attempt to contextualize Pushkin should be understood as part of their wider project to bring a scientific, rational sensibility to literary criticism. As suggested above, a similar materialist rejection of notions of revelation and inspiration in poetry and of an ineffable 'Pushkinian spirit' also informed much of the

⁴⁴ Krystyna Pomorska, 'Majakovskij and the Myth of Immortality in the Russian Avant-Garde', in *Slavic Literatures and Modernism*, ed. by Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), pp. 49-69 (p. 56).

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Iu. N. Tynianov, 'Mnimyi Pushkin', in *Poetika: Istorija literatury: Kino*, ed. by B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 78-92. See also Monika Frenkel Greenleaf, 'Tynianov, Pushkin and the Fragment: Through the Lens of Montage', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, pp. 264-92 (p. 267).

Futurists' reception of Pushkin. As we shall see in Chapter Four in particular, both the Formalists and the Futurists recognize the danger in assigning to Pushkin such an unprecedented, ahistorical role in Russian culture: although his transcendence may be contingent on a mythologization of tradition, as Gasparov suggests, stripping the Pushkin myth of historical context sets him apart from the rest of culture, contributing to the limiting, cultic tendency of sacralized reception. Mythology becomes hagiography. For the Formalists, such exceptionalism is unscholarly; for the Futurists, it is particularly dangerous because it makes the domain of art, in this case the Pushkin myth, subordinate to the fossilizing tendencies of day-to-day life (*byt*) and hinders the fundamental eschatological challenge of uniting art and life.

Nevertheless, there are evident congruities between the processes of myth and hagiography: both narrate life through the prism of certain recurring archetypes. Moreover, Pushkin's own self-mythologizing, as well as those myths about him developed by others, drew heavily on religious prototypes. The distinction between the two genres is, however, twofold. First, as suggested above, hagiographic reception seeks to suggest that its object transcends time and exists as a fixed entity, impervious to context. Second, it ascribes a truth value to its narratives, creating a tendency towards an interpretive monopoly, rather than the multiplicity offered by myth.

In the light of such a reading, the Pushkinian text becomes akin to a sacred text—a revered authority and a source of unquestioned moral guidance. The Futurists and Formalists are thus engaged not in a demythologizing enterprise so much as a secularizing one. Of course, sacred texts such as the Bible have always been read mythologically and mined for narratives and motifs that can be used in secular contexts—not least by Pushkin. However, outside of this context, the allegedly transcendental origin of these texts (divine revelation) elevates them above other, lesser texts. The same process was at work in the Pushkin cult: Pushkin's texts were imagined as the product of quasi-prophetic revelation,

with their earthbound origins suppressed, implying that these texts too were of a higher order. The Futurists and Formalists' attempt to show the context of Pushkin's creation could thus be compared to the work of such nineteenth-century Biblical scholars as David Strauss, who used comparative mythology to expose the literary roots of Biblical narratives, stripping them of their transcendental value—an enterprise which, as Freidin observed above, was influential in Russia. This same technique—exposing parallels to challenge the notion of transcendental origin—is often evident in the Futurists' use of multilateral intertextuality to reveal predecessors and successors of Pushkinian motifs.⁴⁶

However, we must also remember that throughout the Futurist reception of Pushkin, such a comparative, multilateral mythology coexists with another narrative of iconoclasm and violent rupture, as symbolized by the ejection of Pushkin from the steamship. As suggested above, this myth cleaves very close to religious models (including martyrology and hagiography). Mikhail Epshtein, whose interest in the complex semiosis of iconoclasm accords with much recent scholarship,⁴⁷ sees the iconoclasm of the Russian avant-garde as akin to the religiously motivated idol-destruction of the *iurodivyi*, or holy fool—making the Futurists' actions an attempt to purify Pushkin and literature, not to destroy them. Moreover, he also sees the avant-garde project in general in religious terms. In a fitting example of the way recurrent myths are shaped by their time, he suggests the

⁴⁶ Compare Turbin, 'Khlebnikov i Pushkin', p. 154: 'In historico-literary actuality poetic tradition never develops tête-à-tête, eye to eye, as a pair: the founder and the continuer. For the creation of a *tradition*, you need, relatively speaking, a third as well, and this third need not be a someone, but can be a something, some other *trend*, which makes a claim to taking over a tradition, but is rejected by the continuer.' The notion that literary tradition is not a direct, genetic process is also expressed by Viktor Shklovskii: 'According to the law, established, as far as I know, for the first time by me, in the history of the arts, inheritance passes not from father to son. But from uncle to nephew.' Viktor Shklovskii, *Literatura i kinematograf* (Berlin: Russkoe universal'noe, 1923), p. 27.

⁴⁷ See *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, ed. by Stacy Boldrick and Richard Clay (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 1997); Richard Stites, 'Iconoclastic Currents in the Russian Revolution: Destroying and Preserving the Past', in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, ed. by Abbot Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 1-24.

Futurists employ religious narratives of iconoclasm but remove them from their transcendental superstructure:

In contrast to the *sacral* art of the middle ages and the *secular* art of the New Age, the avant-garde is the *sacral art of a secularized age*. Hence its intense, world-fighting relationship to the surrounding reality and simultaneous idoloclastic relationship to traditional religious ideals and values.⁴⁸

Epshtein's formulation is a fitting point at which to end this theoretical contextualization, because it reminds us of the duality which obtains in the way in which the Futurists use Pushkin to express their identity and their vision for literature: it encompasses both violent destruction and the transformation and reincarnation of potent cultural myths.

Scope of the Thesis

I have sketched some of the distinctive aspects of the Futurist understanding of literature, history and time. Such is the fluidity of Russian Modernism that these positions cannot be said to be confined to Futurism. However, I propose that they do provide a core set of beliefs which has a distinct influence on Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Aleskei Kruchenykh, all of whom were signatories of *Poshchchina*. The term 'Futurist' heretofore and henceforth is therefore used primarily to describe these three poets; their interaction with other members of the Hylea group and with the myriad other incarnations of Futurism will be discussed only where necessary for the argument.⁴⁹ I suggest that for these three poets, despite their very different career trajectories, particularly after their deaths, the poetic basis of their output, and the attitude to Pushkin, remains consistent with the values expressed in the early manifestos, despite considerable evolution.

⁴⁸ Mikhail Epshtein, *Vera i obraz: Religioznoe bessoznatel'noe v russkoi kul'ture 20-go veka* (Tenafly, NJ: Ermitazh, 1994), pp. 34, 55.

⁴⁹ A larger study would be able to incorporate not only the fascinating story of Burliuk's role in the celebration of the 1937 Pushkin Jubilee in America, but also the way in which Pushkin influences Futurist visual art.

Comparative evidence will, therefore, be very important in determining these group and individual identities.

Moreover, although the abundance of material available would make individual studies of the relationship of any of these poets to Pushkin worthwhile, examining them together (while remaining sensitive to the tension between the individual and the group ethos) is especially profitable because it can highlight certain structural phenomena in the evolution of twentieth-century Russian literature and demonstrate that the dynamics of intertextuality is beholden to forces beyond the personal relationship between individual poets. As such, my conclusions will contribute to the study of intertextuality within the specific context of Russian Modernist poetics, building on such works as Renate Lachmann's superbly instructive *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism*. Nevertheless, grounding the perspective of my analysis in the commonalities of Futurist theory and practice will also contribute to our understanding of such individuals as Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii by reintegrating them into a Futurist context from which they are sometimes artificially distanced: their Futurist beginnings will not be treated as a limitation that must be outgrown but a thread which runs through their careers, providing a continuing source of identity and influence.

By the same token, the historical scope of this study will extend beyond the brief period during which Kruchenykh, Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov worked together closely (1912 to 1914) and incorporate the entirety of their poetic careers. Kruchenykh and Maiakovskii both identified with the Futurist movement until their deaths. Khlebnikov, however, whose relationship with his one-time comrades became somewhat strained, was a less enthusiastic proponent of a group identity later in his career, even after returning to Moscow in 1921 to a warm welcome from Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh. Moreover, it cannot be denied that his unique style is something of an outlier within Russian literature in general, let alone Futurism. On closer inspection, however, his poetics, and his relationship

to Pushkin, will be shown to display considerable similarities with that of Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh.

Despite the continued validity of Futurism as a taxonomic category throughout the early twentieth century, the wide historical scope of this study will also allow us to observe certain diachronic developments within the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin. Of particular interest here is the effect of the restructuring of cultural institutions and values following the establishment of Bolshevik power and of the lasting resonance of the Revolution itself in the artistic consciousness of the avant-garde. This world-historical event, which carried with it the promise of a thoroughgoing overhaul of Russian culture, complicated the avant-garde's approach to their eschatological mission. Furthermore, the disruption of established literary hierarchies and the arrival of new sources of legitimation, such as the increasing importance of 'proletarian' art, forced the Futurists to re-evaluate their position within this field and to reshape their identity in response to the omnipresent question of what direction the new culture should take. The Futurists tried to show how their template for the incorporation of the old into the new—the use of a mythopoeic consciousness to appropriate existing culture while simultaneously 'detoxifying' it by transforming it into an expression of the present—could serve as a solution to the vexing problems of the connection between the culture of the Soviet Union and that of Tsarist Russia and the loss of revolutionary momentum in the 1920s.

The Futurists' continued commitment to an underlying conception which comprises both iconoclasm and appropriation in diachronic cultural interaction is overlooked by numerous scholars who see in the development of the Futurist attitude to Pushkin a gradual rapprochement. We have seen one such articulation of this position in Sandler's suggestion that Maiakovskii had become more affectionate towards Pushkin, or more honest in his affection, by 1924. It is Maiakovskii who most often attracts this interpretation: this can have a political explanation, for example in the case of Nikolai

Oksenov's 1937 article 'Maiakovskii i Pushkin', which could hardly but confirm the eventual eirenic unity of the 'wellspring of the new Russian literature' (Pushkin, then enjoying another jubilee) and 'the best poet of the Soviet epoch'.⁵⁰ However, a political context is not obligatory: Vladimir Markov comments in passing that 'Mayakovsky's final acceptance of Pushkin is well known'.⁵¹ Evgeny Steiner places the rapprochement with Pushkin very early: 'Shortly after the declaration of war, the reappropriation of the fallen idol began.'⁵² Even if we were to assume a fundamental change in attitude, this date would be too early, especially as a poem such as 'Tverskoi' (1914) continues to use very hostile language about Pushkin in the context of the war. Parnis sees the Revolution as the turning point in Futurist attitudes, identifying two distinct periods in their approach:

The reception of Pushkin by the Futurists can be divided precisely into two stages: the pre-revolutionary, 'anti-Pushkin' period, when they fought against Pushkin, or rather against 'the cult of Pushkin', and the post-revolutionary, apologetic Pushkin, when they considered themselves something like Pushkin's most important heirs.⁵³

As with most generalizations, Parnis's evaluation contains some truth, but is also vulnerable to closer analysis. My reading will seek to collapse the dichotomy he sets up and explore the continuities in the Futurist approach across the Revolution.

However, regardless of the tenacity of Futurist principles, at a certain juncture Futurism ceases to exist as a school. In part, the termination of the Futurist project is the result of the untimely deaths of Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii and the unwelcome and implacable imposition of Socialist Realism in the 1930s. However, especially considering Kruchenykh's survival until 1968, it must be acknowledged that there comes a point when

⁵⁰ I. Oksenov, 'Maiakovskii i Pushkin', in *Pushkin: Vremennik pushkinskoi komissii*, 37, ed. by V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, B. S. Meilakh, A. S. Orlov and others (Leningrad and Moscow: Pushkinskaia komissia, 1937-41), pp. 282-311 (pp. 283, 294). Oksenov is also not impervious to the temptation of the steamship motif: 'For Maiakovskii, the question of his attitude to Pushkin was far from summarized by the strategy of "throwing from the steamship of Modernity".' Ibid., p. 292.

⁵¹ Vladimir Markov, *The Longer Poems of Velimir Khlebnikov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 6.

⁵² Evgeny Steiner, 'Programme Notes: "Throwing Pushkin Overboard"', in *A Victory Over The Sun Album*, compiled by Patricia Railing, 2 vols (Forest Row: Artists.Bookworks, 2009), I, 33-40 (p. 39).

⁵³ Parnis, 'My nakhodimsia k Pushkinu', p. 17.

the external changes in the presentation of the Futurist ethos by the poets themselves amount to a fundamental repositioning of principles. Although my analysis will continue to see Kruchenykh as a Futurist to the end of his career, it will also draw attention to the evolution of a new understanding of the poet's role, nascent in Maiakovskii's 1920s poetry and more fully developed in Kruchenykh's later work, in which the emphasis is not on ex nihilo creation, but on skilled selection, anticipating future developments in avant-garde literature and art.

Chapter Structure and Critical and Theoretical Context

In order to facilitate the monitoring of both continuities and transformations, the structure of this study will be broadly chronological, beginning with the jointly-authored manifestos of 1912 and 1913 and ending with the late work of Kruchenykh. The manifestos will serve as a base point from which to evaluate the divergence of individual identities from the group identity established in the early years of Futurism. The first chapter will explore the way in which Pushkin was used to create this collective Futurist myth; it will be succeeded by individual chapters treating Khlebnikov, Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh in turn.

Although these chapters will attempt to give a representative overview of each poet's relationship with Pushkin, the fact that the articulation of this relationship often takes place both very explicitly and almost undetectably means that close reading of individual works is essential. Throughout this study, the interpretation of poems and articles will thus take precedence over adherence to a particular theoretical approach. Rather, I will draw on such approaches as are appropriate to the material and its interpretation. Frequent recourse will, however, be made to the Futurists' contemporaries, the Formalists, and especially Iurii Tynianov, whose analysis is, for the reasons given above, particularly useful for understanding Futurism.

As suggested above, the early Futurist manifestos—including *Poshchchina* and such fundamental treatises as *Slovo kak takovoe*, *Novye puti slova* and Maiakovskii's early short essays—will be read as an instance of collective mythopoesis. The reading will draw on a body of scholarship which examines the unique expressive potential of the manifesto as a genre predicated on the rejection of tradition, in particular Luca Somigli's argument that manifestos provide a form of autogenous legitimation.⁵⁴ The creation of this Futurist identity will be shown to incorporate both the rejection and the appropriation of Pushkin: I will explore the ways in which the manifestos used Pushkin as a constitutive other, depicting him as a relic of the past, subject to foreign influence, feminized, and isolated from the Russian people, so that they could establish their own identity as bearers of the spirit of the present and of Russia, and as strong young men who will save the people. This identity will be located in relation to Jürgen Habermas's analysis of different discourses of modernity. I will also show how the Futurists not only combined a seemingly one-dimensional interpretation of Pushkin with a critique of the misappropriation of him in the Pushkin cult, but also often undercut the aggressively monologic tone of their manifestos in order to imply a more ambiguous relationship with their great predecessor, even occasionally alluding to the ways in which Futurism represented a modernized iteration of the Pushkin myth.

The embryonic appropriation of Pushkinian mythology present in the manifestos grew considerably in scope and complexity in the later output of the Futurists, while still being combined with a prima facie hostility to Pushkin's continued dominance of Russian culture. The subsequent chapters explore the ways in which individual elements of

⁵⁴ Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915* (Toronto and London: Toronto University Press, 2003); Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1999); Marcel Burger, *Les manifestes: paroles de combat: De Marx à Breton* (Lonay: Delachaux et Niestlé, 2002); Jeanne Demers, 'Entre l'art poétique et le poème: le manifeste poétique ou la mort du père', *Études françaises*, 16 (1980), 3-20; Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Pushkinian mythology are adopted and adapted by the Futurists in order to articulate their own identity in relation both to the past and to society at large, and in so doing also establish a paradigm for the use of the culture of the past. A signal instance of this sort of appropriation is Khlebnikov's reappraisal of the prophet motif, which forms the basis of Chapter Two. Utilizing a close reading of Khlebnikov's extraordinary and difficult 1921 poem 'Odnokii litsedei', alongside other poems and essays, and incorporating and extending the insightful interpretations of this theme by Betsy Moeller-Sally and Jerzy Faryno, I will show how Khlebnikov both critiques and combats Pushkin's myth of the poet-as-prophet as it is articulated in 'Prorok' in order to express his own ambitions and doubts about his mission for the Russian people.⁵⁵ After providing the context for Khlebnikov's intervention in this myth (namely the way in which the reception of 'Prorok' emphasized Pushkin's quasi-messianic role for the Russian people), an analysis of Khlebnikov's early poems, particularly 'Vam' (1909) and 'Chisla' (1913), will reveal the way in which Khlebnikov imagines himself as a rational, scientific hypostatization of the prophet and demystifies many of Pushkin's Romantic topoi. Over time, Khlebnikov's prophet persona acquires more and more elements that are in dialogue with the Pushkinian myth, including an increasing emphasis on the poet as a man of action, not revelation. The figure of the active, rational prophet finds a final, intriguing expression in the protagonist of 'Odnokii litsedei', who, at the climax of the poem, kills a bull: this action and the enigmatic identity of the bull has inspired a great deal of debate, particularly regarding the possibility that the bull is a cipher for Pushkin. I believe that reading contemporary works by Khlebnikov can provide a new perspective on this question and allow us to relate this image to Khlebnikov's experiments in futurology and the conceptualization of time which underpins them.

⁵⁵ Betsy F. Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet in the Work of Velimir Khlebnikov: Pushkin and Nietzsche', *Russian Review*, 55 (1996), 201-25; Jerzy Faryno, 'Kak prorok Pushkina sdelalsia litsedeem Khlebnikova', *Studia Russica*, 12 (1988), 38-74.

Khlebnikov's experiments to understand historical determinism and his subsequent belief that he, unlike Pushkin, actually can predict the future problematize the conventional metaphor of the poet as a prophet and produce a complex interaction between reality and metaphor, life and art, acting decisively and being an actor. These tensions form substrata within the poem which are interrogated in relation to Pushkinian mythology. The poem's relationship to its Pushkinian intertexts is also exceedingly complex, including both explicit references and more subtle allusions to a range of other works by Pushkin, such as 'Andre Shen'e', and other non-Pushkinian texts related to the prophet theme. My investigation of these references shows Khlebnikov developing a parallel between his prophecy and Pushkin's based on their (alleged) shared antipathy to imperialism. Furthermore, the existence of parallels between different models of prophecy throughout history, especially Biblical prophecy, seems to suggest that Khlebnikov is announcing an allegiance between himself, Pushkin, Christ and Isaiah, as a sequence of frustrated, persecuted prophets. Nevertheless, these parallels will be demonstrated to be an example of the deterministic structure of fate within history which Khlebnikov the prophet wishes to defeat, bringing together the identity-forming subtext of the poem with the bull-killing narrative. Although it is the least straightforward instance of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin, Khlebnikov's 'Odnokii litsedei' will be shown to be in many ways the most typical, incorporating the realization of metaphors and historicization of mythology outlined above.

A similar approach will be taken for the next chapter, which demonstrates how Maiakovskii appropriates and adapts a particular element of Pushkinian mythology—the moving statue—in order to articulate his existence as a poet, and in particular his relationship with state power, and to suggest a model for the development of literature. Building on Roman Jakobson's seminal analysis of the statue myth in Pushkin and on studies of the Pushkinian statue in Maiakovskii by Irina Ivaniushina and Zinovii Papernyi and on Svetlana Boym's work on Maiakovskii's mythopoeia, I will use close readings of poems

from Maiakovskii's post-revolutionary period, and in particular 'Iubileinoe' (1924), to elucidate three ways in which Maiakovskii uses Pushkin to interrogate the interaction of politics and literature.⁵⁶ I will examine first, the way he reworks motifs from *Mednyi vsadnik* to imagine meetings with Lenin and to help forge a new myth of Soviet power; second, the way in which 'Iubileinoe' and 'Vo ves' golos' reengage with the age-old question of civic responsibility in poetry by subtly alluding to a range of intertexts, including Nekrasov's 'Poet i grazhdanin' as well as 'Andre Shen'e' and 'Anchar'; third, the way in which in 'Iubileinoe' and other poems Maiakovskii inverts Pushkin's schema for the mobile monument as both an enactment of and a metaphor for the creative appropriation of established literary authorities and as a response to concretizing readings of the classics, including those advocated by increasingly conservative state policy. Overall, Maiakovskii's use of intertextuality will be shown to be very sophisticated, combining explicit engagement with layers of subtle allusion in a creative tension with each other.

Subtlety is certainly not the preferred mode of Aleksei Kruchenykh, the arch-provocateur, who has garnered considerably less critical attention than his more illustrious peers. Although this is perhaps commensurate with his talents as a poet, it means that, with notable exceptions,⁵⁷ insufficient credit is given to his innovative theories of literature and his ability to serve as a dynamic embodiment of a wide variety of Modernist credos. My fourth chapter will contribute to the limited literature on this fascinating figure and use Kruchenykh's maximalist tendencies as a shortcut to uncovering many of the poetic

⁵⁶ Roman Jakobson, 'The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology', in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), pp. 318-67; Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo';; Papernyi, "'Ot Pushkina do nashikh gazetnykh dnei..."; Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: The Myth of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ See for instance Sigei, 'Strashnaia mest' Alekseia Kruchenykh'; Sergei Sukhoparov, ed., *Aleksei Kruchenykh v svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1994); Rosemarie Ziegler, 'Aleskej Kručenykh: Unveröffentlichte Gedichte', *Neue Russische Literatur*, 4 (1982), pp. 83-95; Nina Gur'ianova, 'Za sem'iu pechatiami slova', *Pamiat' teper' mnogo razvorachivaet: Iz literaturnogo naslediiia Kruchenykh*, ed. by N. Gur'ianova (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Slavic Specialities, 1999), pp. 311-40.

principles which are only partially revealed in the work of Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii. In particular, this will entail an in-depth examination of a crucial element of intertextuality—quotation. By locating Kruchenykh's use of quotation from Pushkin within the context of Futurist poetics, and in particular in relation to Maiakovskii's very similar use of it, I will demonstrate how Kruchenykh's humorous response to the Pushkin jubilee, *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina*, a quasi-scientific poetry manual combined with a scatological satire on the Pushkin cult, is designed to articulate and defend Kruchenykh's position in the nascent Soviet culture. In describing ways in which Pushkin's poetry can be misheard from the stage Kruchenykh implies a whole new role for poetry in society, transforming it from a solitary activity into a product of mass consumption, much like cinema. By reading Kruchenykh's vision against the theories of Walter Benjamin and Marcel Duchamp, I will show how he recasts the core values of Futurism to make them more amenable to the changed cultural surroundings, with a new constructivist emphasis on the masses, and to preserve the agency of the poet as a conceptual artist. This continued agency is in turn predicated on the system of literary evolution implied by Kruchenykh's use of quotation: the poet recontextualizes semiotic material to find new meanings. Ultimately, this transformative approach to Pushkin's language will be shown to be a *sui generis* encapsulation of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin as a whole, because it brings the quotation (which seems to be timeless) into a specific moment and reifies something timeless and immaterial, replacing metaphor with literalism. This will be shown to parallel similar appropriations by Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii: they both take something which persists through time, seemingly without changing (the motifs of the prophet and the statue) and transform them to serve the present by drawing attention to their context and by realizing the metaphors inherent in these motifs, making the prophet actually a prophet, and showing how the static statue really does immobilize the poet.

A Note on Primary Sources

Although the close reading of texts lies at the heart of this study, it has not been necessary to have recourse to manuscript study: the textual tradition for these poets is, with the exception of some of Khlebnikov's later poems, fairly solid. The case of Khlebnikov is complicated by his unwillingness to stop rewriting poems, leading to alternative versions, and by the haphazard nature of their collation during his final years and after his death. However, this problem has to a large extent been remedied by the recent *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moscow, 2000-06), edited by Rudol'f Duganov with Evgenii Arenzon, which I cite throughout; in one instance an alternative reading, from the *Sobranie sochinenii*, edited by Tynianov and Nikolai Stepanov (originally published in Moscow 1928-33 and reprinted in Munich, 1968-71), will be used to elucidate an argument made by Faryno which is based on this text. Some reference is also made to the selected *Tvoreniia*, edited by Grigor'ev and Parnis (Moscow, 1986), which has excellent annotations.

For the Futurist manifestos, no collection has yet surpassed Markov's *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov* (Munich, 1967). In those cases where manifestos or essays are not included in this slim volume, reference has been made either to the relevant author's collected works, or to the original manifestos, a large number of which are held at the British Library. The most comprehensive and reliable source for Maiakovskii's work remains the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, edited by Vasilii Katanian (Moscow, 1955-61), which in all but a handful of instances provides the primary texts referred to here. Sadly, such a comprehensive collection has not yet been produced for Aleksei Kruchenykh: the best collection of Kruchenykh's work is *A. E. Kruchenykh, Izbrannoe* (Munich, 1973), edited by Markov, which will be referred to where possible. This collection does not, unfortunately, contain all of Kruchenykh's best essays, including *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina*. Thus my citations from this text refer to the 1988 Berkeley Slavic Specialities reprint of the original 1924 text. Likewise, Markov's collection does not

include Kruchenykh's initially unpublished late work: for these, I have made reference to Nikolai Khardzhiev, *Ot Maiakovskogo do Kruchenykh: Izbrannye raboty o rusском futurizme, s prilozheniem "Kruchenykhiady" i drugikh materialov*, edited by Sergei Kudriavtsev (Moscow, 2006).

The Futurists themselves read Pushkin in various forms: for instance, they would have been familiar both with Pushkin's original version of 'Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi', which was not published until 1881, and the edited version released by Vasilii Zhukovskii after Pushkin's death. Consequently, various redactions of Pushkin's work have been consulted for this study. Nevertheless, my standard has been the 1937 *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 17 tomakh*, edited by a team led by Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, reprinted in 1994. Only in one instance do I quote from a different collection, the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1977): the poem listed in the latter collection as 'Tavrida', based on lines written around 16 April 1822 but never published in Pushkin's lifetime, does not appear in the former.

Chapter One

The Futurist Manifestos: Pushkin and the Formation of Futurism

Although they were not the first Russian poets to write manifestos, the Futurists certainly were the most committed and successful exponents of the manifesto as a work of art in Russia, representing a burgeoning trend which spread across Europe in the early twentieth century.⁵⁸ Their manifestos, with their distinctively adventurous typography and bombastic language, remain the key expression of Futurism as a poetic movement, in many ways overshadowing the poetic activity they were designed to announce and accompany. The manifesto was a new genre which announced its newness and the extraordinariness of its composers. As such, its prominence both in the Futurists' activity and in their legacy is evidence of the specific goals of their poetic programme: the announcement of a break with the progressive forward march of tradition and the concomitant establishment of a new identity for the poet, and the promotion of a new paradigm for the interaction of literature across epochs. The same two projects—the construction of identity and the promotion of a certain vision for the evolution of Russian culture—are at the heart of the Futurist reception of Pushkin, and the manifestos represent a crucial arena in which Pushkinian myths were first appropriated and manipulated by the Futurists to articulate their myth of self and vision for literary development. What is more, the manifestos also exhibit the same tendency that we will observe throughout the period in question to create

⁵⁸ Various Symbolist texts have been described as manifestos, and certainly do display some manifestic tendencies. Examples include Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's *O prichinakh upadka i novykh techeniakh v sovremennoi literature* (1892) (see Ralph E. Matlaw, 'The Manifesto of Russian Symbolism', *SEEJ*, 1 (1957), pp. 177-91); Valerii Briusov's introduction to the collection *Russkie simvolisty* (1893); essays by Andrei Belyi such as 'Budushchee iskusstvo' (1907) and 'Magiia slov' (1909).

new myths of Pushkin in polemical contrast to the rival endeavours of their poetic peers and in particular to what they perceived as the cultic adoration of Pushkin.

The manifesto-writers' desire to announce difference and to attract attention to the nascent Futurist movement is reflected in their tendency towards the extreme, even hostile, language exemplified by the ejection of Pushkin from the steamship and the use of negative comparisons to forge the new Futurist identity. The first part of this chapter will show how the Futurists selected and refined certain myths surrounding Pushkin in order to transform Pushkin into a constitutive other against which they could create their own Futurist identity, using the same antagonistic and explicitly iconoclastic poses which have often led critics to condemn the Futurists as limited and nihilistic. However, the manifestos also display, on closer reading, a less hostile attitude to Pushkin. The Futurist manifestos scorn what they see as a transcendental reverence for Pushkin, and seek to establish an alternative model for the use of the literature of the past, typified by contingency and subordinate to the needs of the present. This more positive approach to Pushkin in the manifestos does not emerge from respect or altruism, but is above all a product of the Futurists' universal resistance to concretizing and limiting dogmas and their enthusiasm for dynamism and movement in everything, including literary inheritance.⁵⁹ According to this model, the mythology surrounding Pushkin can be reinvigorated by the Futurists to become an expression of the present.

Contrary to critical opinion, discussed in the Introduction, which posits a diachronic shift in Futurist attitudes from early iconoclasm to eventual acceptance of Pushkin, my analysis will show that these two tendencies, antagonistic and transformative, are present from the very beginning in Futurist writing about Pushkin. Moreover, these two tendencies, although inconsistent, do not exist in opposition to one another, or represent factions

⁵⁹ See Nina Gur'ianova, 'Estetika anarkhii v teorii rannego russkogo avangarda', in *Poeziia i zhivopis': sbornik trudov pamiati N. I. Khardzhieva*, ed. by M. B. Meilakh and D. B. Sarab'ianov (Moscow: Iazyk russkoi kul'tury, 2000), pp. 92-108.

within the Futurist camp. Rather their coexistence can be seen as evidence of both the richness of the Pushkin legacy available to the Futurists (such is Pushkin's semiotic flexibility that he can provoke a multilateral response) and of Futurism's doctrinal catholicity. Both responses, as different as they are, emerge from the Futurists' belief in the danger of letting expressions of a previous age continue to speak, unmediated, for the present. Consequently, we can in fact see elements of both tendencies in single programmatic statements and images, a phenomenon which my analysis will explore.

The two approaches to Pushkin evident in his reception by the Futurists are also different products of a project to establish the Futurists as the sole legitimate voice of the present, in contrast to their peers, who are still, allegedly, overburdened with reverence for obsolete authorities. It has long been recognized that Russian poets of the Silver Age, and in particular the Futurists, felt it important to develop an overarching mythology of themselves as poets—to express their position in the world not only explicitly, but implicitly, by appropriating and adapting longstanding tropes and narratives. The Futurists' use of Pushkin, in both its aspects, is, therefore, only one part of a grander project of the creation of personae and the interrogation of their place in society and history. We can see, however, a difference in the way the two approaches to Pushkin use mythopoesis to express the relationship of the present to the past: in the antagonistic self-definition against Pushkin, myth is used both to emphasize the break with the past and to create the robust identity necessary to exist without a professed connection to tradition; in the appropriation and transformation of Pushkinian motifs, the emphasis is rather on the way in which Futurist creation functions as a prism through which eternal or recurring phenomena are refracted in order to become genuine representatives of the fleeting energy of the present.

Although they are both ever-present, the balance between the two tendencies does nonetheless shift over time in response to the demands of the aesthetic and political

climate and the changing tactical aims of the Futurists. For example, one can argue that the predominance of the antagonistic approach to Pushkin in the early manifestos arises from the nascent movement's need to establish a self-identity, a need which outweighed the urge to explain and enact their aesthetic agenda.⁶⁰ It is precisely these same two elements—chronological priority and emphatic self-definition—that make the manifestos a suitable starting point for this study. It is worth considering first, however, what constitutes a Futurist manifesto and how the Futurists use these manifestos to develop their identity in general.

The Futurist Manifesto

The manifesto is a complex and inclusive genre with a rich critical history and a unique role in Modernism. For the purposes of this chapter I will understand the term 'manifesto' to denote the wide range of non-creative, discursive (or quasi-discursive) material which was produced seemingly to announce or explain the Futurists' poetic output and to promote the movement as a whole, but which nevertheless also served as *sui generis* works of art. This inclusive definition can be made in good faith as all of the texts under consideration here display distinct manifestic tendencies. There is not room here fully to discuss the exact nature of these tendencies, but they can be broadly said to include an inclination towards the paratactic enumeration of apparently righteous tenets; the refusal of equivocation and the possibility of dialogue; departure from typographic norms; confidence in the world-changing potential of the manifestic text; open hostility to authority in all its forms,

⁶⁰ Compare Iurii Tynianov on literary inheritance: 'There is no continuation of a direct line, there is rather a setting off, a pushing off from a certain point—a struggle.' Iurii Tynianov, 'Dostoevskii i Gogol' (k teorii parodii)', in *Poetika: Istoriiia literatury: Kino*, ed. by B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 198-226 (p. 198).

expressed as a direct challenge to the validity of the *ancien régime* in the modern age; the rhetorical suppression of individual identity in favour of group identity.⁶¹

Furthermore, although Futurist writers continued to write manifestos and manifestic essays throughout their lives, I will for the most part limit my analysis to manifestos produced in the early years of the Futurist movement, such as *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu* (1912), the prefaces to *Sadok Sudei II* and *Idite k chertu* (1913), all of which were signed by Burliuk, Maiakovskii, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, and others; Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov's manifestic essays from 1913, *Slovo kak takovoe*, *Bukva kak takovaia* and an unnamed, unpublished piece, later printed as 'Slovo kak takovoe'; Kruchenykh's essays *Deklaratsiia slova, kak takovogo*, 'Novye puti slova', *Chert i rechetvortsy* (1913), and *Tainye poroki akademikov* (1916); Khlebnikov's essay 'Kurgan Sviatogora' (written 1908), his manifesto (in collaboration with numerous others) *Truba marsian* (1916); and Maiakovskii's early journalistic essays, such as 'Dva Chekhova' (1914).

The timeframe placed on this sample is motivated by various factors, in addition to the exigencies of space. Owing to the fact that the texts above were written when the establishment of a unique identity was a strategic priority, they provide the best encapsulation of the Futurists' group identity.⁶² The need for a clearly defined group identity returned at various points during the history of Futurism, notably in the wake of the Revolution, and after the emergence of NEP and a new literary scene: in both instances the Futurists responded with a spate of manifestos, such as the *Manifest letuchei federatsii futuristov* (1918) and the manifestic essays in *Lef* (1922-25) and *Novyi Lef* (1927-28), which, while recalling the initial manifestos in form and underlying poetics, presented a new

⁶¹ The lack of equivocation and dialogue that is the hallmark of the manifesto makes it seem particularly unsuitable for subtle explorations of the relativistic and contingent construction of identity: however, it is precisely this veneer of brutal simplicity which makes them fascinating documents.

⁶² Similarly, one might suggest that the manifesto returned to prominence as a 'Futurist' genre in the wake of the establishment of *Lef* and the need to create a new identity for left avant-garde poetry in response to the new Soviet reality.

identity in response to the new political and literary situation. However, as one of the aims of this chapter is to establish a norm from which to track any subsequent changes in the Futurist attitude to Pushkin, these manifestos will not be considered here. Similarly, this study seeks to treat Futurism both as a corporate whole and as a prism through which to view the individuals that comprise the movement; consequently, it is useful to focus on those manifestos which seek to create a specifically Futurist group identity in preference to individual self-promotion.

The Futurist Persona

Although this study endorses the validity of the label 'Futurist' as a heuristic tool, one must still tread carefully when delineating the margins between individual Futurists and Futurism. The Futurist manifestos present themselves as the product of a corporate genius: for example, even a manifesto-style article signed by only one Futurist, Aleksei Kruchenykh's 'Novye puti slova', contains forty instances of the words 'we' or 'our' in comparison to only two instances of 'I' or 'my', thus seeming to fulfil the promise of *Poshchechina* that 'we stand on the rock of the word "WE"' (50).⁶³ However, this emphatic plural is a deliberate rhetorical tool designed to suppress the individuality of the various authors, and to offer the readership the semblance of inclusion in a creative coterie: as Janet Lyon rightly suggests, this insistent *Wir-dichtung* is a 'pronominal sleight of hand, whereby "we" disguises the metonymic function of the small group of composite "I"s who claim to speak for a whole'.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the intention is clear: to create a document which implies a unified identity for its creators.

⁶³ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 71, 50. Hereafter, references to this volume will be made in the body of the text. The metaphor here is perhaps an echo of Italian manifestos: 'We stand on the promontory of the centuries.' *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio, trans. by Robert Brain, R.W. Flint, J. C. Higgitt, Caroline Tisdall (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 21.

⁶⁴ Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 26.

However, this rhetorical effacement of difference does not necessarily represent an actual suppression of the individual. Rather, particularly at this early stage, subscription to a unified corporate identity can be seen as a strategic decision by the individual poet: by being identifiably Futurist the poet automatically positions himself in the literary field and attracts a certain audience. Moreover, we should not forget that the Futurists genuinely shared certain common values, not least, in their approach to Pushkin. However, there is no doubt that this subscription to shared values results in a degree of tension between the individual's aesthetic and political priorities and those of the collective. For example, while the Futurist emphasis on the collective and engagement with the audience enforces the rejection of the Romantic paradigm of the lone poet, a solipsistic (although fractured and multiple) image of the poet-hero features regularly in the work of Maiakovskii, in, for example, the cycle 'Ia' (1913), and Khlebnikov, as we shall see in the case of 'Odnokii litsedei' (1921-22).

This tension is creative: the myth of the Futurist as an impetuous young man, creative in his destruction and unheeding of doubt or authority, is an important ingredient in the complex self-identity of, for instance, Maiakovskii. The Futurists create a myth of self which in fact tends to the Nietzschean valorization of the creative individual at the expense of collective endeavours, making a Futurist identity even more useful for individual self-expression. Collective and individual identities are symbiotic rather than antagonistic: the collective identity draws on individual identities and the collective identity is one aspect of the individual. Tynianov adroitly suggested that 'futurism and *zaum'* are by no means just quantities, but rather a conventional name covering different words, something like a surname, under which go about different relatives and even namesakes.'⁶⁵ This is a useful distinction: while there is tension between the surname and the first name, they are constituent parts of the whole and without both full identification is impossible. Although

⁶⁵ Iu. N. Tynianov, 'O Khlebnikove', in *Mir Velimira Khlebnikova*, pp. 214-33 (p. 24).

the degree to which each poet inhabits either the collective or the individual identity varies over time in response to personal needs and tastes, this dual identity obtains for Maiakovskii, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh throughout their lives.

I propose that the Futurist collective identity was expressed through a personification of Futurist ideals, which stood for the whole movement. This persona does not represent any individual Futurist, and is neither an aggregate nor an amalgam of the specific characteristics of their individual identities. Moreover, the Futurist persona is not merely a mouthpiece for Futurist aesthetic programmes, but is akin to a mythical archetype, which serves as a touchstone for both the collective and the individual. The Futurist persona, like the mythical heroes it resembles, is both the actor of shared Futurist narratives of origin and destiny and a possible source for individual identification and legitimization.⁶⁶ Although he is never fully personified, I suggest that the manifestos help in the construction of this mythical Futurist hero by shaping his identity in opposition to contemporary and historical enemies.

The Futurist Persona and Legitimation

As well as developing a Futurist identity, the Futurist persona provided two alternative sources of legitimation for Futurism's aesthetic programme, and in so doing mitigated the loss of legitimation effected by Futurism's break with tradition. For, by declaring themselves independent of the stream of literary history, the Futurists excluded themselves from possible sources of legitimation both for their self-professed exceptional status as artists and for the ambitious aspirations of their programmes. By not making such a self-conscious break with preceding literature, other equally innovative writers were able to negotiate their position in society in reference to their forerunners, using them as

⁶⁶ An illustrative parallel is the use of mythical characters as emblems of national identity: for example, in Athenian myth Theseus both represented the city itself, expressing and explaining its values and history, and offered individuals a point of comparison and self-justification.

affirmative evidence of the special status of the artist. However, because the Futurists and other iconoclastic Modernists defiantly stated their departure from existing notions of the writer, they disqualified themselves from hereditary models of literary progress and so could not express explicit allegiance to time-honoured notions of the artist's privileged societal function or attempt to justify this position with an appeal to continuity. (Although the Futurists did appropriate and adapt Pushkinian concepts of poetic identity, this adoption was unheralded, compared to their negative persona, and designed to emphasize transformation.) Consequently, the Futurists and other Modernists sought alternative legitimation.⁶⁷

One source of legitimation was the persona itself, which both enacts and compensates for the rejection of tradition. In both its Italian and Russian incarnations Futurism insists that it is not created out of existing literature, but out of itself.⁶⁸ Its legitimation is similarly autogenous. In this respect it reflects and contributes to the genre which articulates it, the manifesto, which presupposes its own authority rather than referring to external, existing authorities. Much of the self-generated justificatory force of the Futurist persona arises from the fact that its characteristics are a priori respected and trusted. Like a hero of classical myth, the Futurist mythical persona incorporates characteristics widely valorized by society: he is young, active, male and acting in the best interests of the wider community. Moreover, by attaching themselves to the archetype of the young hero, the Futurists insert themselves into the heroic narrative of eventual inevitable triumph over adversity. In this connection it is worth noting that the heroic paradigms offered by Greek myth were particularly popular at this time, especially such

⁶⁷ This argument is indebted to Somigli's analysis of legitimation in the Modernist manifesto: 'The question that both modernist aesthetics and modernist politics have to confront is one of legitimation: given the anti-institutional thrust of their programs, on what basis can they found the legitimacy of their own counterproject?' Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1986), p. 157: 'More than a rejection or dissolution of the past, avant-garde originality is conceived as a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth.'

figures as Prometheus, whose theomachy and technical innovation seemed very much in accord with the revolutionary spirit of the age, just as they had in the Romantic era.

As suggested in the Introduction, the heroic Futurist persona garnered a second source of legitimation by implying the Futurists' allegiance to a wider coalition of radical anti-establishment forces which also employed similar heroic personae to express themselves. This broader philosophical movement has been described by Jürgen Habermas as the 'counter-discourse' to modernity;⁶⁹ he characterizes modernity as a project, originating in the Enlightenment, which consists of the gradual triumph of the universal subject through the mechanisms of rationality, open debate and progressivist reformism.⁷⁰ In contrast, the representatives of the counter-discourse find cause to doubt the benefits of such modernity:

[Their] accusation is aimed against a reason grounded in the principle of subjectivity. And it states that this reason denounces and undermines all unconcealed forms of suppression and exploitation, of degradation and alienation, only to set up in their place the unassailable domination of rationality.⁷¹

What is more, as well as eschewing the tyranny of rationality, the counter-discourse, particularly in the person of Nietzsche, rejects modernity's mechanism of gradual reformism and its reliance on a belief in the validity of the lessons of the present for the future, in favour of a rejection of the present and recent past.⁷² This anti-historicism is shared by Modernist writers and artists: 'the anarchistic intention of exploding the

⁶⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. xi.

⁷⁰ This project is also responsible for the separation of the spheres of art, religion, law and politics in the modern era and as such is antithetical to the aims of the avant-garde which seeks to reintegrate art and society.

⁷¹ Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, pp. 55-56.

⁷² See in particular Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. by Daniel Brezeale, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 59-121. Compare Rosenthal: 'The futurists' "new man" was young, strong, healthy, daring, combative, heroic, and mad (they associated madness with creativity), and in some cases, a Jesus surrogate or an apostle'. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, p. 101.

continuum of history accounts for the subversive force of an aesthetic consciousness which rebels against the norm-giving achievements of tradition'.⁷³

As participants in this counter-discourse, literary Modernists distanced themselves from the possible legitimation of tradition and relied on alternative forms of legitimation. This could take the form of a restructuring of the notion of literary influence, such as the idea of the Pushkin myth as an eternal force of creativity as described by Gasparov: ancestral legitimation continues to function but outside of the paradigm of continuity.⁷⁴ It could, however, find legitimation in mythopoeisis internal to the counter-discourse, and in particular in myths of autogenous legitimacy. The Futurists, like other representatives of the counter-discourse, make constant recourse to the myth of the individual as a powerful, young man who embodies the ideals and aspirations of the nation. Although the Futurist heroic persona is less fully realized, by reprising elements of other expressions of this broader philosophical resistance to modernity it can partake of its counter-cultural energy and alternative legitimacy, as well as establishing its own inherent adoption of traditionally positive characteristics such as youth, energy and power.

The propagation of this heroic Futurist persona was not limited to the manifestos: rather they are a key area of its articulation, injecting the mythopoeisis seen elsewhere in poetry and drama into a declamatory, paratextual context in order to convey their sense of self more clearly. By way of introduction to the particularities of the Futurist collective myth of self, I will begin by briefly examining one important instance of its formation outside the manifestos—the opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (1913). My analysis will, however, be brief, as this area has already been well examined by Evgeny Steiner.⁷⁵

⁷³ Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project', in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. by Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 38-55 (p. 41).

⁷⁴ Gasparov, 'Introduction', p. 8.

⁷⁵ Evgeny Steiner, 'Programme Notes: "Throwing Pushkin Overboard"', in *A Victory Over The Sun Album*, compiled by Patricia Railing, 2 vols (Forest Row: Artists Bookworks, 2009), I, 33-42.

Like the manifestos, *Pobeda nad solntsem* is notable for its communal production: the libretto was written by Kruchenykh, with an introduction by Khlebnikov, a score by Mikhail Matiushin and set design by Kazimir Malevich. It was performed alongside Maiakovskii's *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia*. This fascinating *Gesamtkunstwerk* not only embodies many of the principles of Futurist poetics—shocking engagement with the public, the blurring of the boundaries between the arts, the remaking of language, the celebration of new technological possibilities—but also relates a mythologized narrative of the Futurists' break with tradition. The plot centres on the defeat and imprisonment of the sun by Futurist strongmen, which then ushers in a new period of freedom for mankind: 'The sun of the iron age has died! The cannons [*pushki*] have fallen broken and the tyres yield like wax before [people's] gazes.'⁷⁶ The sun embodies, amongst other things, the influence of the past. After its demise, people live freely: 'how extraordinary is life without the past / With risk but without remorse and memories...'⁷⁷ (*Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia* also depicts a heroic transformation and the subsequent dystopia, showing the importance of this narrative to the Futurists.) In particular, the sun is connected with the figure of Pushkin (named 'the sun of Russian poetry' by Vladimir Odoevskii). As Steiner has shown, references to Pushkin recur throughout the work, often through paranomasia with the word '*pushki*', establishing him as a target for Futurism's liberating iconoclasm and as a point of contrast with the Futurists. The defeat of the sun and the ejection of Pushkin in *Poshchetchina* are parallel instances of Futurist myth-making: both represent the need to overcome the past, and in particular Pushkin, in order to make an eschatological break with tradition. What is more, the characterization of the Futurists in *Pobeda nad solntsem* matches that of the identity established by the manifestos: they are strong young men ('*silachi*'), who battle against the past. They have a very modern passion for sport (they

⁷⁶ Aleksei Kruchenykh, 'Victory over the Sun—the Libretto', trans. by Evgeny Steiner, in *A Victory Over The Sun Album*, I, 42-103, p. 79.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

dress like footballers);⁷⁸ they speak in *zaum'* with strong neo-primitivist echoes of early Russian; the future they espouse is relentlessly male—their claim that ‘Everything has become masculine’ is borne out by the neologicistic regendering of feminine and neuter words.⁷⁹

Pushkin and the Formation of the Futurist Identity

In the manifestos, as in *Pobeda nad solntsem*, the Futurist heroic persona is formed in opposition to a constructed constitutive other played by Pushkin. As befits the Manichean morality of the heroic narratives of the counter-discourse, as well as the manifesto’s abhorrence of equivocation, the manifestos depict the Futurists as engaged in a constant struggle against enemies who are utterly and definitively different in every aspect.⁸⁰ Much of the Futurists’ ire is directed against their contemporaries and their illustrious predecessors, the Symbolists, who are dismissed as pretentious, effeminate, obsolete and uninspired, which is to say, everything the Futurists claim not to be. However, equally important to Futurist self-definition is the figure of Pushkin, who recurs prominently in the manifestos in a constructed dualistic opposition to the Futurist heroic persona.⁸¹ While

⁷⁸ Kruchenykh, ‘Victory over the Sun—the Libretto’, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 55. See also Nina Gourianova, ‘Aleksei Kruchenykh’s Theatre of Alogism’, in *A Victory Over The Sun Album*, II, 31-44 (p. 38)

⁸⁰ Such binary thinking is central to the myth-making of totalitarianism and its dehumanising logic which, in its Fascist and Bolshevik forms, can be seen as a perverse development of this same counter-discourse. This is not to say, however, that the Futurists are culpable of the same dehumanization just because their poetic self-identity partakes of the same logic.

⁸¹ Compare Vahan D. Barooshian: ‘The Futurists’ revolt against tradition was partly polemical and programmatic. Their antagonism towards Puškin and Dostoevskij was an effort to define themselves, their own aims, to chart their own poetic quest.’ Vahan D. Barooshian, *Russian Cubo-Futurism 1910-1930: A Study in Avant-Gardism* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1974), p. 108.

Symbolism is a more immediate target for antipathy, Pushkin is a more potent source of identity.

The fact that Tolstoi and Dostoevskii are also expelled from the steamship might suggest that the manifestos display a generalized antipathy to the past which overwhelms the individual role played by Pushkin. Maiakovskii explains the obvious reason for the iconoclasm of *Poshchechina*: 'To throw [*sbrosit'*] the old great ones off the steamship of modernity.'⁸² However, unlike Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, Pushkin is singled out for particular opprobrium in *Poshchechina* and the other manifestos, and comes to play a programmatic role in their rhetoric. Such an emphasis is natural: as the fountainhead of the Russian literary tradition, he served as the most frequent touchstone for Russian poets and as the metonymic embodiment of Russian literature and culture as a whole. The Futurists invert this tradition, retaining Pushkin's iconic power but using him as the negative pole against which to define themselves.

The Futurists' oppositional self-construction is based on three key binaries. It should be noted that these binaries do not correspond to any real version of Pushkin, nor are they even necessarily related to a possible reading of Pushkin; instead, they develop a new myth of Pushkin in the text which is sufficiently plausible to act as a straw man to be knocked down.

In these binaries Pushkin represents qualities that the Futurists construct as negative: the past, foreignness, and ineffectual aestheticism. Moreover, all of these qualities are presented as effete and even feminine. These are used for expressive contrast with the persona the Futurists construct for themselves in their manifestos and poems, which is emblematic of modernity, Russia and an active engagement with society, all of which are gendered as masculine. Although all these categories are closely linked and

⁸² Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 350. Note that Maiakovskii has already adopted *sbrosit'* in place of *brosit'*, suggesting a slightly different understanding of the steamship metaphor.

interdependent, we will now consider each of these definitional binaries in turn, examining how they contribute to the larger Futurist myth.

The Past against the Present

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Futurists' myth of self is youth, for example in Khlebnikov's insistence that: 'We want a sword made from the pure steel of young men' (151). Aside from its obvious connections with vigour and vivacity, youth has a particular function in this context as an emblem of the refusal of the past and commitment to a new beginning. The Futurists proclaim: 'We are the new people of the new life' (52). The young are free from the burden of history.⁸³

The image of the poet as young hero brings to mind the mythical narrative of the oedipal overthrow of the father, a trope adopted by Harold Bloom to explain the motivations of new generations of poets who seek to overcome the legacy of illustrious predecessors.⁸⁴ The Futurists' rhetorical ejection of Pushkin is in some ways a whole-hearted endorsement of the notion that progress is dependent on parricide, especially if, like Aleksandr Zholkovskii, we believe this action to be intended to lead to Pushkin's death.⁸⁵ The killing of the father is a useful metaphor for a break with tradition, and is a fitting encapsulation of the Futurist belief that the present should be represented by its own inhabitants. However, it presupposes a progressive model of history and culture: sons replace fathers and then become fathers themselves. The Futurist manifestos, in their

⁸³ As often, however, this rhetorical gesture conceals a historical consciousness: the self-description as 'new people' seems to recall Nikolai Chernyshevskii's influential gospel of radicalism, *Chto delat'*, the subtitle for which was 'From the tales about new people'.

⁸⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 64.

⁸⁵ Aleksandr Zholkovskii, 'Sbrosit' ili brosit'?', *Novyi literaturnyi obozrevatel'*, 96 (2009). Available at: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2009/96/zh14.html>. Accessed: 26/07/2012. Zholkovskii makes the persuasive argument that another model for the ejection of the classics of the steamship was the famous casting overboard of a kidnapped Persian princess by Sten'ka Razin. Razin was a popular figure for the Futurists. What is more, this scene was particularly popular at the time after being featured in Russia's first home-grown feature film.

ambition not only to express the present but ultimately to break free from the continuum of history, strive to discredit this genetic model of literary inheritance: they not only kill fathers, but, by seeking to exclude any memory of them, to pretend they never existed. This is paralleled by the prominent disdain for museums felt by the Italian Futurists: museums do not claim to represent the present, and so are not unwanted for that reason; rather, they are repositories of memory and history, and as such evidence of the prehistory of the present, its grounding in a continuum of events.⁸⁶ The Russian Futurists imagine themselves as Adam, the man without a father, and their creation as *ex nihilo*: 'The artist has seen the world anew and, like Adam, gives everything its name' (63).⁸⁷ Moreover, this fatherless man must also be characterized as young, otherwise his creative potency would be tarnished by his own accumulated history: they preface their self-identification as Adam with the insistent statement that 'The world is eternally young' (63).

Of course, any effort to suppress the existence of the past is futile, since the rejection in itself represents an acknowledgment of the existence and importance of the past. Moreover, as suggested above, the Futurists need the representatives of the past in order to form their own identity, whether as oedipal parricides, or in their denial of the influence of history. Thus, ironically, Pushkin is needed to show the Futurists' independence from Pushkin. Ultimately, it is more important for the Futurists to appear to be rejecting history and promoting their own self-creation, than actually to erase the memory of the past.

Thus the key aspect of the heroic persona's youth is its opposition to history. In the Russian Futurist manifestos one important arena for the articulation of this conflict is the constructed opposition between an obsolete Pushkin and the Futurists, the 'new face of our Time' (50). This first binary is fundamental, hence its articulation in the Futurist's most famous injunction: 'Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and so on and so forth from the

⁸⁶ See Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ The figure of Adam was of course also very important to the Acmeists.

steamship of Modernity' (50). The message seems very clear: there is no room for the defunct figureheads of Russian literature in modernity. The Futurists conceptualize this burden as clutter ('The past is crowded'; 50) which obstructs the originality the Futurists crave in order to express the moment.⁸⁸ This statement of rejection implies a generalized anti-historical sentiment: the dismissive 'and so on and so forth' suggests that this trio of writers have been chosen not because they are obstacles to the Futurists as individuals, but because they are metonymic of all past literature and, therefore, represent the burden of history which encumbers modern man. The suggestion that all past writers are undifferentiated also serves as a (not entirely effective) counterweight to the reasoning that by singling out these writers, the Futurists are contributing to their canonization.

It cannot be doubted that the ejection of Pushkin, Tolstoi and Dostoevskii was to a significant extent intended as an act of tongue-in-cheek, attention-seeking *épatage*. This view is confirmed by the Futurists' own reminiscence of the aims of the document (although a certain amount of revisionism is not impossible). Maiakovskii says, 'True, we had a lot of stunts just to shake up the bourgeois.'⁸⁹ However, this does not undermine the effectiveness of this statement in radically differentiating Pushkin and the Futurists. In fact, an examination of memoirs relating to the composition of *Poshchechina* reveals that the Futurists were more concerned with showing that their poetic expression of modernity was incompatible with Pushkin and the past than with seeking to dethrone Pushkin from his pre-eminent position.

In his memoir *Nash vykhod* (1932) Kruchenykh describes his initial suggestion for the manifesto: 'throw out [*vybrosit'*] Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Pushkin'. Maiakovskii then added: 'from the steamship of modernity'. Someone (presumably Burliuk) then suggested that the verb be amended to 'throw off' [*sbrosit'*]. Maiakovskii allegedly disagreed, arguing that:

⁸⁸ Compare Nietzsche, 'On the Uses', p. 64: 'no painter will paint his picture, no general achieve his victory, no people attain its freedom without first having striven for it in an unhistorical condition'.

⁸⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Teper' k Amerikam', *PSS*, I, 311-12 (p. 311).

'*throw off*—it's as if they were there, we have to "throw" [*brosit*'] them from the steamship'.⁹⁰ This account implies that Pushkin, Tolstoi and Dostoevskii are not present on the steamship before they are thrown off: Pushkin is not a passenger, but a potential interloper who must be refused entry. One could argue that this refinement is irrelevant because it goes unnoticed. However, it does reinforce the identification of Pushkin and the past as an incompatible opposite to the indivisible unit of Futurism and the present.

We can thus conclude that the steamship of Modernity does not represent the entirety of Russian literature in the modern era, since Pushkin would certainly be on that ship, but specifically the Futurist project, which seeks to give a voice to the unprecedented present and thus must be protected from the contamination of the past. A similar sentiment is evident in Khlebnikov's list of ordinances, in his role as king of time, listed in *Truba marsian*: 'free the swift engine of the young ages from the fat caterpillar of the goods train of older ages'.⁹¹ The use of means of transport to describe their own project does not just invoke the Italian Futurist discourse of speed: the mobility of these devices represents their ability to stay in harmony with the changing spirit of the present—it is, indeed, properly the steamship of contemporaneity (*sovremennost'*), not modernity. This motif perhaps has its origin in another famous phrase, from Maksim Gor'kii's *Na dne*, when Satin tells Baron 'you won't go anywhere in the carriage of the past', arguing that one must live according to present means, not in memories; this carriage can be counterposed to the (more technologically advanced) steamship of modernity, which is capable of carrying Russian literature forward.⁹² The steamship is therefore a self-reflexive metaphor: by

⁹⁰ Aleksei Kruchenykh, 'Nash vykhod: K istorii russkogo futurizma', in Gur'ianova, *Pamiat teper' mnogo razvorachivaet*, pp. 29-194 (p. 52). Accounts of the composition of *Poshchechina* vary; they are comprehensively analysed by Gur'ianova, who largely vindicates Kruchenykh's telling. *Ibid.*, p. 359, n. 12. Original emphasis.

⁹¹ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 248-49 (p. 249).

⁹² Maksim Gor'kii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati piati tomakh*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1968-76), VII, 175.

updating Gor'kii's image to reflect the present it is itself an instance of cultural contemporaneity.

The importance of the immiscibility of past and present becomes even clearer when one considers the historical context of this statement, even though such a consideration reveals the potential irony encoded into the ejection from the steamship. The year of *Poshchechina's* composition, 1912, was not a golden one for steamships—in April of that year the Titanic sank. The giant liner (routinely referred to as a *parokhod* in Russian) was instantly adopted as a symbol of the hubris of modern technology. The Titanic was also the prototype for the steamship in Khlebnikov's *Deti vydry* on which his heroic sons of the otter (who could be likened to the Futurists) travel.⁹³ On the one hand, this technological wonder famed for its speed seems a fitting symbol for the Russian Futurists, considering their occasional flirtation with the technolatriy of Italian Futurism; on the other hand, the Titanic's demise makes it an unlikely candidate for a supposedly positive association with the new poetic school, and makes ejection a favourable option for Pushkin. One might suggest the Futurists' principal motivation was that, for better or worse, the Titanic was a symbol of modernity. Alternatively, the Titanic context of the initial Futurist manifesto could point to a knowing invocation of the inevitable failure of their project, providing an early example of the narratives of inevitable death which typify Maiakovskii's poetry.⁹⁴

Pushkin is doubly connected with the enervating influence of the past because he both represents history and is held to be an advocate for its importance, for example in his

⁹³ Khlebnikov, *SS*, V, 259.

⁹⁴ The importance of steamships elsewhere in Futurist imagery is discussed by Zholkovskii, who cites Maiakovskii's *Misteriia-Buff* and 'Tovarishchu Nette, parokhodu i cheloveku' and Khlebnikov's 'Truba Gul'-Mully'. Another Futurist, Vasilii Kamenskii, had spent an earlier part of his career working on steamships on the Kama.

research for his *Istoriia Pugacheva*.⁹⁵ Aleksei Kruchenykh makes clear this double bond between history, Pushkin and inaction: 'Pushkin said that the past is nice. That's only for idle people.'⁹⁶ What is more, Pushkin's approval of pleasantness is anathema to Futurist extremism.

That the ejection of Pushkin from the steamship of modernity was motivated by the urge to live unhistorically is shown by Maiakovskii's 'Kaplia degtia' (1915), which suggests that the most potent influence of the burden of the past is the canon, which must therefore be destroyed: 'Crush the freezer of all sorts of canons, which makes ice from inspiration.'⁹⁷ This metaphorical conflation of the inhibiting past and ice is also found in Khlebnikov's rejected suggestion for *Poshchechina*: 'We will drag Pushkin by his iced-over moustache.'⁹⁸ Not only is his facial hair outmoded, but Pushkin is so ancient that he lingers like a Neolithic man preserved in the ice of a glacier. Ice represents the curtailment of water's mobility; the veneration of the past carries with it the risk of the stagnation of culture.

In *Poshchechina* Pushkin is further conflated with the Academy ('The Academy and Pushkin are more incomprehensible than hieroglyphs'; 50), which stands for everything that Futurism opposes: institutionalism, the isolation of art from society, antiquarianism, social and aesthetic conservatism. In truth, none of these qualities are particularly Pushkinian, but the hendiadys suppresses this and the possibility that Pushkin, who was often accurately characterized as a young, creative genius, even occasionally by the Futurists, might occupy the space intended for the Futurist persona. However, the figure of the alleged Academician Pushkin, as well as representing the burden of history, is a way of

⁹⁵ In his detailed research into the past Pushkin in fact anticipates the work of Khlebnikov, who studied it obsessively for his prognostications; this sort of research, just like their wide reading of the classics, is excluded from the Futurist persona.

⁹⁶ Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Elena Guro, *Troe* (St Petersburg: Zhuravl', 1913), p. 37. I have been unable to locate this remark in Pushkin, although Kruchenykh may be speaking generally.

⁹⁷ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 349-51 (p. 350).

⁹⁸ Kruchenykh, 'Nash vykhod', p. 59.

articulating the Futurists' complaint against established literature: its inability, especially in its linguistic resources, to express the new reality of the modern age. The Futurists' emphasis on the specifically linguistic obsolescence of Pushkin is evident in the unflattering comparison with hieroglyphs. As well as being a hyperbolic statement of the irrelevance of his supposedly arcane and inscrutable language, this comparison also associates Pushkin with a civilization that was renowned not only for its distance from modernity, but also for its cultural conservatism.⁹⁹

The theme of irrelevance recurs in the manifestos. Maiakovskii argues in 'Shtatskaia shrapnel': Poety na fugasakh' that art must change in response to the times: 'Poetry is the word loved every day in a new way.'¹⁰⁰ After the advent of the First World War Pushkin is criticized for his failure to understand the demands warfare makes on poetry. Maiakovskii's attack uses a familiar tone of address 'Forget the war, Aleksandr Sergeevich, it's not your uncle!'¹⁰¹ He reduces the variety of Pushkin's oeuvre by suggesting that his only sphere of expertise is the domestic, symbolized by Onegin's uncle. Maiakovskii's comment is prompted by a comparison between the first four lines of *Evgenii Onegin* and four lines from Mikhail Lermontov's 'Borodino' describing a battle. Pushkin is condemned for being unable to respond differently to different stimuli: 'both quatrains are identical. A defunct measure. An indifferent approach. Is there really no difference between the feelings of a nephew and the turbulent sensation of conflict?'¹⁰² Maiakovskii's criticism of Pushkin's inflexibility and monotony is reinforced by the misattribution of the four lines of 'Borodino' to Pushkin. In his next article, 'Shtatskaia shrapnel': Bravshim

⁹⁹ This Egyptian context will re-emerge in 'Iubileinoe', when Pushkin is compared to a mummy.

¹⁰⁰ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 305-07 (p. 306).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 306. The use of the uncle as a pejorative metonymical representation of Pushkin can be seen also in Kruchenykh's essay 'Novye puti slova': 'The idea of symbolism necessarily presupposes the limitation of every creator and that the truth is hidden away somewhere in the possession of some *honest uncle* [*chestnogo diadi*].' Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 70. I suggest that Pushkin's incidental character has metamorphosed into an avatar of Pushkin himself, representing the mundane and limited epigonism of contemporary poetry.

kist'iu', he dismisses this as an 'annoying bit of nonsense' occasioned by 'the numerous blotches' on his copy.¹⁰³ However, one suspects that this alleged mistake was an extension of Maiakovskii's polemical point that all existing poetry is identical.

Maiakovskii's rejection of non-Futurist war poetry fuses two Modernist complaints against past literature: the limits it places on creativity and its inability to express new truths. Maiakovskii celebrates the old art's obsolescence because, in his triumphalist rhetoric, it has brought about the death of that art: 'Art has died because it ended up being behind life: portly, it could not defend itself.'¹⁰⁴ This death allows the new art to blossom: 'Life goes forward, having given meaning to the new beauty.'¹⁰⁵

Of these two critiques of the past, it is the call for the oblivion of the hindrance of the past that predominates in explanations of why Pushkin and his like must be discarded in *Poshchchina*: 'Whoever does not forget his *first* love cannot know his last love' (50). Although the complexities of this statement will be discussed at more length later, it is clear that the Futurists believe that the old must be forgotten for the new to flourish.

In conclusion to this section it is worth noting how such a statement eroticizes the reader's relationship with literature: the favourite poet becomes a lover. This feminization of the poet is designed as a slur against their Symbolist rivals: 'Who, gullible, will give their last Love to the perfumed lechery of Bal'mont?' (50). However, femininity is not just a characteristic of the Symbolists but, along with the sentimental discourse of love, symbolizes an obsolete approach to literature: 'Is the reflection of the masculine soul of the present in this [the 'last love']?' (50). The association of the present with the masculine and the past with passive, uncreative femininity follows similar imagery in Nietzsche: 'is a race

¹⁰³ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 308-12 (p. 310).

¹⁰⁴ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 302-4 (p. 302).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302. The necessity of death for progress is encapsulated in the article's epigraph, 'Art is dead.... Long live art!' This slogan is, however, at odds with a whole-hearted rejection of history: as a reminiscence of the linear constancy of monarchy that is ensured by heredity it suggests a more Oedipal model of poetic interaction.

of eunuchs needed to watch over the great historical world-harem?', and the Italian Futurists, who condemn 'the neurasthenic cultivation of hermaphroditic archaism'.¹⁰⁶

Foreign against Russian

The suggestion made above that the Futurists and other Modernists advocated a complete break with preceding literature requires some qualification. In fact, as is widely acknowledged, the Modernists who claimed to reject the dominant pan-European artistic modes sought inspiration in alternative traditions: for artists on the periphery of the Western world, such as Russia, this alternative could be found in native culture. For their part, the Russian Futurists, who have rightly been described as neo-primitivists, embraced the genres of pre-Petrine Russia, such as Slavic mythology and the iconography of Kievan Rus'.¹⁰⁷ The Futurists' enthusiasm for the distant past (which is often a hallmark of the rejection of modernity¹⁰⁸) was both a reason for and a product of their antipathy to European influence in Russian literature, a development for which they held Pushkin to be largely responsible. By laying claim to a connection with a more genuine national consciousness, members of the Russian avant-garde could therefore usurp Pushkin's position as the representative of the spirit of the people.

Enthusiasm for the autochthonous primitive is clearly expressed in Kruchenykh's meditation on Pushkin's oeuvre:

The best thing that Pushkin wrote was 'out came a she-bear...' But Pushkin has got nothing to do with this—it is slavish imitation of folk tales. It's always like this: they spoil and smarm up to great art, and then then throw themselves at its feet—but

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses', p. 84; Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷ See Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "'Mif istoka" v russkom avangarde 1910-kh godov', in Bobrinskaia, *Russkii avangard: istoki i metamorfozy*, pp. 24-43 (p. 29); I. Kliun, 'Primitivy XX-go veka', in A. E. Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, ed. by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Fink, 1973), pp. 191-92. This essay was originally published alongside Kruchenykh's *Tainye poroki akademikov*.

¹⁰⁸ Habermas suggests that those opposed to modernity 'locate the spontaneous forces of imagination and self-experience, of affective life in general, in what is most distant and archaic'. Habermas, 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project', p. 53.

that's good!... But why not then burn his previous fakes of folk tales along with *Evgenii [Onegin]*...¹⁰⁹

Kruchenykh's comment is interesting because it utilizes the almost clichéd image of the book-burning or bonfire of the vanities, which has been a commonplace of iconoclastic movements since before Savonarola, but is rare in Futurist rhetoric, with the exception of Khlebnikov's 'Edinaia kniga'.¹¹⁰

In Kruchenykh's evaluation Pushkin is only worthwhile as a mimic of native Russian forms. These native forms are praised by the Futurists, who cast themselves as the descendants of folk literature. Maiakovskii describes his Herderian vision of Futurism's relationship with the national spirit in 'Rossiia: Iskusstvo: My'. He praises

that literature which, having in its ranks Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, has emerged not from the imitation of books which have come out of 'cultured' nations, but from the bright stream of the narrative primordial word, from nameless Russian song.¹¹¹

Elsewhere in the manifestos the fairy tales and other instances of Pushkin's engagement with native traditions are largely ignored. Instead, he is widely criticized for exposing Russian literature to the infection of foreign influence. Russian literature before Western interference is imagined by Kruchenykh in 'Novye puti slova' as an ideal age and Pushkin as the nadir of decadence from this ideal: 'after the *byliny* and *Slovo o polku Igoreve* verbal art

¹⁰⁹ Aleksei Kruchenykh and Zina V., 'Porosiata', in Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 93-110 (p. 108). Zina V. was an eleven-year-old girl, which is indicative of Kruchenykh's determination to disrupt traditional aesthetic hierarchies. The work of Pushkin in question is 'Skazka o medvedikhe' a fairy tale based on folk motifs first published by Pavel Annenkov. Pushkin, *PSS*, III, pp. 503-05. See P. V. Annenkov, A. S. *Pushkin: Materialy dlia biografii Pushkina i otsenki proizvedenii* (St Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1873), p. 145.

¹¹⁰ Khlebnikov, *SS*, IV, 114.

¹¹¹ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 318-20 (p. 320).

declined and in the time of Pushkin it stood lower than in the time of Trediakovskii' (65).¹¹² In a typical inversion of the contemporary practice of crediting Pushkin with the establishment of the Russian literary language, here he is seen as culpable for the degradation of the language. Immediately before the comparison with Trediakovskii in 'Novye puti slova' Kruchenykh explains how Pushkin and others have debased the Russian language. His diatribe illuminates the sexualized discourse and primordial self-image prevalent in Futurist discussions of language:

Everything has been done to quash the primordial feeling of our native language, to strip the word of its fertile grain, to castrate it and release it around the world as 'the clear honest resonant Russian language' although it's not a language anymore, but a pitiful eunuch unable to give the world anything. It's impossible to perfect it, and we were absolutely right to announce 'throw [*brosit'*] Pushkin, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii and so on from the steamship of Modernity' so that they don't poison the air! (65)

The choice between native and foreign had been given a mythological framework in Khlebnikov's early essay 'Kurgan Sviatogora', in which he described Russia as the descendant of an ancient sea and, as such, eternally different to Europe, which emerged from the dry land of the islands. For Khlebnikov, Pushkin ignores Russia's true heritage:

And should not the great Pushkin himself be scolded because in his work the sonorous numbers of the existence of the people [=words]—the heir to the sea—have been replaced by the figures of peoples that are obedient to the will of the ancient islands?¹¹³

¹¹² The specifically linguistic focus is evident in the reference above to Vasilii Trediakovskii: both Trediakovskii and Pushkin were transformative figures in the creation of the literary language. In his earlier work Trediakovskii emerges as a proponent of native East Slavonic forms over Church Slavonic alternatives; conversely, Pushkin, in the Futurists' somewhat erroneous conception, is seen as an importer of Western European influence. The Futurists see themselves as similar to Trediakovskii and Pushkin as moulders of the literary language. On Trediakovskii, compare V. Vinogradov: '[his] translation of Tallement was even presented as a creative attempt to facilitate the formation of a literary "non-[Church]slavonic" language'. V. Vinogradov, *Ocherki po istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka XVII-XIX vv.* (Leiden: E. I. Brill, 1949), p. 85.

Trediakovskii may well represent less of a rival than Pushkin in this enterprise because later in his career he sought to allocate distinct languages for different genres; similarly, the Futurists (and Formalists) saw poetic language as something distinct from prose. Pushkin, on the other hand, has largely been seen as a unifying force across genres. Compare Vinogradov, pp. 228-29: 'The traditional division of the Russian literary language into three layers was definitively destroyed by Pushkin.'

¹¹³ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 22-27 (p. 24).

This article predates the birth of Futurism by some four years. Consequently, there is no evidence of the later obligatory diminution of Pushkin.¹¹⁴ However, even at this early stage Pushkin is used as a point of contrast with an idealized persona which anticipates the Futurist self-image: like Pushkin, contemporary poets remain ‘mockingbirds of Western voices’.¹¹⁵ (Khlebnikov continued to identify Pushkin and some of his works with the deleterious influence of Western literature: in his essay ‘Pushkin i chistye zakony vremeni’ (1921) he contrasted *Evgenii Onegin*, which was redolent of the ‘noxious’ breath of the West, to the more Eastern *Kavkazkii plennik*.¹¹⁶) The theurgic proto-Futurist is different:

And should we not welcome with the name of ‘the first Russian who has dared to speak Russian [*pervogo russkogo, osmelivshegosia govorit’ po-russki*]’, he who tears apart the wicked, but sweet spells, and conjure his rise with cries of ‘Let it be! Let it be! [*Búdi! Búdi!*]’¹¹⁷

Although this passage does not explicitly refer to Pushkin, Khlebnikov’s idea of the ‘first Russian who dares to speak Russian’ (the proto-Futurist) seems to engage with the traditional image of Pushkin as the fountainhead of the Russian literary language. Specifically, this passage seems to correspond with Vissarion Belinskii’s sixth article on Pushkin, in which he discusses Pushkin’s independence from foreign and Russian influence, a theme very similar to Khlebnikov’s own. Belinskii claims that:

Pushkin dared to write [*osmelilsia pisat’*] in a way in which no one in Rus’ had written before him, to have the unheard of boldness [*derzost’*], or rather the downright riotous defiance [*buistvo*], to take his own path, not taking as his example one of the Parnassian lawmakers, great poets either foreign or Russian.¹¹⁸

The possibility of this passage as an intertext for ‘Kurgan Sviatogora’ is supported by the thematic similarities, the repetition of ‘осмелился’ and the reminiscence of ‘буйство’

¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Khlebnikov already showcases key elements of Futurist doctrine: for instance, he introduces the concept of the self-sufficient word: ‘Here are the paths of the beauty of the word, separate from its goals.’ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*.

¹¹⁶ This point was made by Jason Strudler in an unpublished conference paper, ‘Searching for the Slavic Pushkin: Khlebnikov Revisits Boris Godunov’, given at Princeton, NJ, April 17-18, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 24.

¹¹⁸ V. G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1953-59), VII, 358. This passage is an early and influential example of the exceptionalism which surrounds the reception of Pushkin.

(‘defiance’) elsewhere in Khlebnikov’s article in the words ‘буй’ and ‘буйвичках’ (‘defiant’, ‘the tribe of the defiant’).¹¹⁹

The implicit rivalry between Pushkin and the Futurist for the role of Russia’s national poet is made explicit in *Slovo kak takovoe*, written by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov. Discussing Kruchenykh’s infamous *zaum’* poem ‘Dyr bul shchyl’, they make another aside dismissing Pushkin’s connection with the nation:

(By the way there is in these five lines more of the Russian national spirit than in all the poetry of Pushkin)
not a voiceless languorous creamy smear [*tianuchka*] of poetry (*patience* [*pas’ians*]... *pastila*...) but tremendous *bardry* [*baiach*’]. (55)

Whereas ‘Kurgan Sviatogora’ emphasizes Russia’s innate femininity, probably because of the influence of Viacheslav Ivanov and other Symbolists, Kruchenykh’s aside displays evidence of the counter-discourse’s tendency to stigmatize the feminine.¹²⁰

The conjunction of the foreign and the effete is made more explicit in Kruchenykh’s *Tainye poroki akademikov*. Kruchenykh, expanding on the decadence motif, suggests that Russian literature has been degraded into a succession of whistling sounds:

all of *Evgenii Onegin* can be expressed in two lines:

ёни — вони
се — и — тся
Sleepy whistling is victorious!
Slush [*sliakot*’] crawls! (82-83)

Similar analysis of Pushkin’s language recurs in Khlebnikov’s ‘O sovremennoi poezii’ from 1920: ‘In Pushkin words sounded on “enie”’.¹²¹ While none of these allusions explicitly

¹¹⁹ The translation of ‘буй’ and ‘буйвичках’ is taken from *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, ed. by Charlotte Douglas, trans. by Paul Schmidt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), I, 233. Duganov notes that ‘буй’ is an ancient Russian word for bravery. See Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI, 362.

¹²⁰ Ironically, the Futurists recapitulate Pushkin’s own desire to keep Russian free from feminine influences: ‘The split between “feminine” Frenchified tradition and “masculine” language looking back to its Slavonic (or popular) roots was the cause of many anxieties in the 1820s, particularly among male writers espousing a “Frenchified” literary language. It is evident, for instance, in Pushkin’s insistence, expressed in his diaries and letters of the mid-1820s, on the need to create a properly “virile” style for prose and poetry.’ Neil Cornwell and Faith Wiggell, ‘Literaturnost’: Literature and the Market-place’, in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 38-49 (p. 44).

attributes these sounds to femininity, it is alluded to by the suggestive imagery and grammatical gender of the nouns used to describe it ('тянучка', 'слякоть') which contrast with, for example, the masculine endings in 'Dyr bul shchyl', which supposedly more truly represented masculine Russia. Such gendered geography is articulated in Khlebnikov's article: 'In Pushkin the linguistic north was betrothed to the linguistic west'.¹²² Although Khlebnikov admits of some possibility of the syncretism of Russian and Western influences in Pushkin, it is notable that Russia (here understood as the North) plays the male role of the bridegroom.

Kruchenykh, returning to this theme in *Tainye poroki akademikov*, compares Pushkin's language to the 'true' native Russian tongue. Moving beyond his comparison of Pushkin with 'Dyr bul shchyl', Kruchenykh makes a bathetic and unflattering juxtaposition of *Evgenii Onegin* and a laundry bill:

so it turns out: their style is higher than Pushkin! in fact: in the eight lines of the bill we see those rare and sonorous letters of the Rusichi: *y, f, iu, zh...* (and they are so rare in the novel) in general there are more sounds than in Pushkin and there's no *sia—sia, te—te* and so on. (83)

Kruchenykh makes Pushkin the opposite of the pure language of the primitive Rus': the term *rusichi* appears only in *Slovo o polku Igoreve*. Moreover, just as Khlebnikov in 'Kurgan Sviatogora' praised 'words [...] the audible numbers of our existence',¹²³ Kruchenykh locates the power of language in 'sonorous letters' (83); thus we can see the intersection of the Futurist preference for the sonic aspect of the word with their identity formation against Pushkin.

The Futurist manifestos strive to depict Pushkin as corrupted by feminizing foreign influences in order to emphasize their own Slavic purity. As the image of the 'fertile seed' of language suggests, this primitive masculinity is closely linked with notions of creativity,

¹²¹ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 182-84 (p. 183). Notably, this is another article emphasizing the importance of linguistic change.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83.

¹²³ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 24.

as well as the poet's responsibility to represent his people. In the next binary we will examine how the Pushkin of the manifestos is found wanting in both these aspects of the duty of the poet.

Isolation against Integration

The heroic young man of Futurist myth not only represents the Russian people, but is actively engaged with them, rejecting the elitism of his predecessors, while still maintaining his exceptional status. Although this aspect of the Futurist persona is somewhat harder to define than its hostility to the West and history, we can say that the manifestos construct the image of an ideal poet who is beneficially engaged with society, whom they contrast with a Pushkin who has little connection either with the people or with true art. As suggested in the Introduction, the Futurists depict themselves as the proselytizing agents of a new utopian integration of art and life in which their aesthetic norms become the basis of societal organization, breaking down the boundaries between art and life. Maiakovskii grandiosely declares this mission complete in 'Kaplja degtia' in 1914: 'The people are Futurist.'¹²⁴

In order to use Pushkin as chiaroscuro for this brilliant persona the Futurists were compelled to make him a representative of two occasionally conflicting tendencies which were anathema to the integrationist avant-garde poet. Pushkin is, therefore, forced to represent both the bourgeois commercialization of literature and the Romantic image of the poet's withdrawal from society. We will now briefly sketch these positions, before describing how Pushkin is compelled to occupy them.

In his famous parable on the relationship of the artist to modernity, 'Perte d'auréole', Baudelaire described the way in which the artist's special status, symbolized by

¹²⁴ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 349-51 (p. 350).

the halo, is challenged by modern life.¹²⁵ Prompted by a reading of this vignette, Somigli argues that the tendency to form poetic groupings which characterized Modernism was ‘a fundamental strategy to resist the assimilation of the work of the artist to that of any other producer’.¹²⁶ For the same reason the Futurist heroic persona exhibits a strong antipathy to the commercialization of literature and its connotations of uncreative hackwork. To a certain extent this insistence on a special creative status can be seen as a rehearsal of Romantic disdain for the book market. However, the avant-garde’s rejection of commercialism also encompasses a repudiation of a previous response to the threat of art’s assimilation by the market, namely Aestheticism. The Futurist persona, while still a defiant expression of the artist’s unique role, boasts of its engagement with society and rejects the perceived isolationist elitism of Aestheticism, a trend the Futurists locate in both the Romantic eschewal of the *profanum vulgus* and Symbolism’s alleged aristocratic indifference, which two phenomena they accordingly conflate.¹²⁷

Pushkin is made to stand for both commercialism and isolationism. In his article ‘Ne babochki, a Aleksandr Makedonskii’ Maiakovskii inveighs against what he sees as the servile nature of most poetry.¹²⁸ Although the principal targets of his attack are Konstantin Bal’mont and Valerii Briusov, his main supporting example is taken from Pushkin.¹²⁹ (Pushkin’s canonical status as a source for quotation is here used against him.) Maiakovskii, as in ‘Shtatskaia shrapnel’’, juxtaposes four lines of an advertisement (for ‘Riz Royale Paper’ and ‘Viktorson’ cartridges) with four lines (slightly misquoted) from *Evgenii Onegin* 1.XXIV.

¹²⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Pléiade, 1975), I, 352.

¹²⁶ Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, p. 54.

¹²⁷ The Futurists’ hostility to the alleged isolationism of the Symbolists can be related to the technical definition of the term avant-garde proposed by Peter Bürger: ‘We should come to see that avant-garde artists were actively attacking the institution of art. Their effort was not to isolate themselves, but to reintegrate themselves and their art into life.’ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, ‘Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde’, in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. vii-xxvii (p. xxxvi).

¹²⁸ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 316-17 (p. 316).

¹²⁹ Bal’mont is described as ‘dancing in a short skirt’, reinforcing the identification of negative qualities with effeminacy. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 316.

Once again Maiakovskii decries their similarity: ‘Examine the fingerprints! How close are the free fingers of the bard to the hired hand of Mikhei!’¹³⁰ The clichéd image of the free bard is ironically contrasted with that of Uncle Mikhei, the pseudonymous author of many contemporary cigarette adverts.¹³¹ Pushkin is reduced to the level of a commercial writer. Although Maiakovskii is not seriously accusing Pushkin of product placement, he equates ‘pleasant’ poetry with commercialism and the idea of art as a diversion, an accompaniment to life, not its essence: ‘poets are not nice little butterflies, created for the pleasure of “useful” citizens’.¹³² A similar description of Pushkin’s poetry as a domestic comfort can also be found in Kruchenykh’s ‘Novye puti slova’, in which, just before his unflattering comparison of Pushkin with Trediakovskii, he argues that: ‘before us there was no verbal art [...] there were verses for all sorts of domestic and family use’ (65). Nevertheless, Maiakovskii ultimately exculpates Pushkin because he is only a product of his time: ‘For old poetry this is nothing shameful.’¹³³ Pushkin’s commercialism is subordinated to his primary characteristic—his connection with the past. Here, as elsewhere, this is contrasted with the Futurist’s urgent mission for the present: ‘Gentlemen, enough of serving events in white aprons! Get involved in life!’¹³⁴

Compared to the association with commercialism, the connection of Pushkin with isolation is considerably more well-developed, particularly by Kruchenykh in his essays ‘Tainye poroki akademikov’ (1916) and ‘Chert i rechetvortsy’ (1913-22).¹³⁵ These two related essays are opaque satires which use biblical themes to show how ridiculous Russian literature was before the intervention of the Futurists and to attribute dubious characteristics to their literary rivals past and present. Kruchenykh sets out to show the

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹³¹ This identification may also suggest some elements of the transformation of Pushkin into an ‘honest uncle’.

¹³² Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 316.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

¹³⁵ Kruchenykh returned and reworked an essay he had begun in the early years of Futurism.

similarities between the Symbolists and the Romantics, in order to suggest that only the Futurists represent literary innovation. Both the other groups are typified by remoteness from the people, and by a series of related negative characteristics such as effeminacy, morbidity and pretentiousness. This is intended to contrast with the Futurists' closeness to the people and other positive facets.

The opposition between Symbolist/Romantic isolation and Futurist integration is expressed by contrasting the solitude of the countryside to the Futurist metropolis: 'Go from the city into the forest of symbols and whisper cherished names [...] and slip about in the boat of proud solitude...'¹³⁶ Kruchenykh sees this alleged Symbolist retreat from the city as a new hypostasis of the Romantic locus of the desert: 'Those who were grieving with sadness at modernity and vulgarity have gone off into the deserts—not new attempts—and still the old results...!'¹³⁷

Kruchenykh assigns the foundational role in this tradition to Lermontov, whose poetry regularly features the desert: 'In our literature the departure was first mapped out in *Demon*.'¹³⁸ He quotes *Demon* and Lermontov's poem 'Smelo ver' tomu, chto vechno'. However, Kruchenykh's demon is syncretic, drawing on other Romantic demons. In *Chert i rechetvortsy*, the figure of the demon is connected with Pushkin, whose 'Demon' is misquoted to describe the protagonist's bitterness: 'И ничего во всей вселенной / благословить он не хотел'.¹³⁹ In turn the embittered, solitary Romantic is given a typically Modernist eschatological framework: in *Chert i rechetvortsy* the demonic protagonist is variously described as a locust and a flea, which, in a plot dense with biblical allusion, contrives to bring about the apocalypse. The story reads as an Aesopian tale of the morbidity and decadence of pre-Futurist Russian literature: 'Russian literature before us

¹³⁶ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, 'Tainye poroki akademikov', 159-96 (p. 163).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116. The original reads 'И ничего во всей природе / Благословить он не хотел.' Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 267.

was spiritualistic and anaemic it span round in the devil's wheel'.¹⁴⁰ In the conclusion the demon which holds literature in its thrall is defeated by the Futurists: 'wordsmiths have come—Futurian bards—and immediately turned the devil into a janitor'.¹⁴¹

In addition to solitude, the hybrid Symbolist/Romantic demon is connected with several other characteristics that Kruchenykh wants to denigrate: effeminacy, discourses of ethereal inspiration, and solipsistic martyrdom. The first is evidence of the near ubiquitous gendering of difference practised by the Futurists: Kruchenykh understands the loneliness of the desert as a cover for suspicious effeminacy and dubious behaviour. He describes this in *Tainye poroki akademikov*: 'And they go about with their sufferings and their soul like young ladies with a hair-do'; 'Should we go off into the desert to dream knowing what it is like and what they do there on their own?!'¹⁴²

The second negative aspect, ethereal inspiration, relies on a further piece of hybridization, again using the Pushkin myth, which connects the lonely demon with discourses of divine or sublime inspiration. As Gasparov has argued, in Romantic mythology the distinction between angels and demons is easily blurred.¹⁴³ Kruchenykh identifies the demon as an emblem of these poets' creative weakness. He articulates this link after his unflattering comparison of *Evgenii Onegin* and the laundry list: 'Pushkin is watery [*zhidok*]¹⁴⁴—but so are Lermontov and all the Realists and Symbolists: and the boring songs of the earth could not replace the sounds of the heavens.' The reference to Lermontov's 'Angel' ('И звуков небес заменить не могли / Ей скучные песни земли') is ironic: for Kruchenykh the songs of the earth are infinitely superior to the ridiculous songs of the

¹⁴⁰ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 111-28 (p. 113). Kruchenykh puns on the word for Ferris wheel, '*chertovoe koleso*'. The implication is that Russian literature has been going round in demonic circles until the Futurists come to break it free.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁴² Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 159-96, (pp. 164, 182).

¹⁴³ See Boris Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk Pushkina kak fakt istorii russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1992), p. 236.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

sky.¹⁴⁵ Kruchenykh's mockery of the Romantic/Symbolist search for inspiration from above is demonstrated further in a bathetic couplet: 'и когда я в небесном [*sic*] в тоске замираю /хозяйка с улыбкой предлагает мне чаю'.¹⁴⁶

The negative ethereal quality of Romanticism and Symbolism is contrasted with the Futurists' own emphasis on the earth, which symbolizes their focus on the material and also, indirectly, in a sort of latter-day *pochvennichestvo*, on their Russianness. In a later article Kruchenykh is alleged to say of 'Dyr bul shchyl' that 'it becomes clear that **our earth** is in this sharp gamut and that Pushkin is the **foreign sky**.'¹⁴⁷ In accordance with their general orientation towards the material at the expense of the ethereal, the Futurists remain committed to the poetry of the earth, as a way to refute insubstantial faux-revelatory poetry in favour of the chthonic expression of the spirit of the people. In Khlebnikov's final epic *Zangezi*, the poet's disciples crave this: 'Zangezi! Something earthy! Enough sky!'¹⁴⁸

Finally, Kruchenykh mocks the Romantic tendency to see their biography according to martyrological and Christological patterns. The demon-locust's epitaph is a misquotation of Lermontov's grandiose presentiment of his own death, 'Я начал рано кончу рано', taken from 'Net, ia ne Bairon, ia drugoi'.¹⁴⁹ The final line of this poem introduces one aspect of such fatalism that Kruchenykh finds, at this stage at least, particularly ridiculous—the

¹⁴⁵ Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. by G. N. Seleznev (Moscow: Voskresen'e, 1999-2002), I, 343.

¹⁴⁶ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, p. 168. This couplet may recall the incident described in Pushkin's *Puteshestvie v Arzrum*, when, while crossing the Caucasus, he is offered tea by a Kalmyk girl. Pushkin, *PSS*, VIII, 447.

¹⁴⁷ Attributed to Kruchenykh, by Tat'iana Tolstaia-Verochka in 'Sliuni chernogo geniia', in *Zhiv Kruchenykh* (Moscow: Vserossiiskii soiuz poetov, 1925), pp. 10-39 (p. 30).

¹⁴⁸ Khlebnikov, *PSS*, V, 330. Compare the words of another Futurist, Vadim Shershenevich: 'Global Futurism pushes away from old earth—towards the new earth, but it must be to the earth, because outside the earth, outside the terrestrial, there is no life. On the flag of Futurism, which flutters in the wind of modernity are the words: "I don't like mystic stuff. The closer to the sky, the colder it is! To the earth above all – that is l'art poetique of Futurism.' Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁹ The original is: 'Я раньше начал, кончу ране'. See Lermontov, 'Net, ia ne Bairon, ia drugoi', *PSS*, I, 377.

poet's apotheosis in death: 'Я—или бог—или никто.'¹⁵⁰ Kruchenykh also identifies this messianic ambition in Pushkin in *Chert i rechetvortsy*: 'it [the locust] was the prototype (although strangely occurring afterwards) of another young and beautiful paschal lamb (Pushkin).'¹⁵¹ The Christological undertones of many narratives of Pushkin's death are ridiculed by the association of Pushkin with the Lamb in the Book the Revelation. Kruchenykh mocks the widespread rejection of chronological time, despite the fact that it is present in Futurism also. The link between different narratives—Revelation, the Passion, Pushkin's death, Kruchenykh's ridiculous demon-locust—is shown to be typological rather than chronological. The locust comes after the lamb both in Biblical eschatology (the apocalypse comes after the death of the Messiah) and in Russian literary history (Symbolism comes after Pushkin), but in the Silver Age this succession of events seems to be confused.

The ironic reference here to a Christological reading of Pushkin's end contrasts with Kruchenykh's later description of the demon-locust's death: 'Shoot him like Pushkin and Lermontov, like a rabid dog!'¹⁵² Kruchenykh criticizes overly reverential responses to Pushkin, which we will examine in more detail in the next section.

A New Model of Cultural Progress

We have seen Pushkin play the role of other to the Futurist persona in three spheres: he acts as a representative of the past, with its connotations of inactivity and irrelevance; he symbolizes the baneful influence of the West and the suppression of native creativity in Russian literature; and he is used as a tool to demonstrate the evils of commercialism and

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 111-28 (p. 118). Kruchenykh uses antiquated spellings for young (*'iunago'*) and beautiful (*'prekrasnago'*), alluding to their sacral origin.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 121.

isolationism. In this way the Futurists exploit both Pushkin's flexibility and cultural heft to help establish their own poetic identity. However, in addition to this antagonistic relationship with Pushkin, which is used to help articulate the Futurist identity, the manifestos also reveal, less explicitly, the Futurists' convictions concerning literary inheritance. Frequently, it was to the figure of Pushkin that they turned to express their genuine fears about the dangers of ossifying and institutionalizing readings of poets and to showcase the fact that recurring motifs and metaphors can be reconciled with an avant-garde insistence on the contemporary, if they are transformed by the creative agency of the poet in the present. The next section will examine how the Futurists engaged with established tendencies in Pushkin reception in order to present a new, mobile Pushkin as an example of the way society should treat its poets and incorporate the culture of the past into the present and future.

The Futurists' mobilizing, contingent approach was intended to replace what they saw as the dominant mode of reception: the elevation of Pushkin to the position of a sacred, transcendental authority outside of history and indifferent to the imperatives of the present. The Futurist critique of this notion of Pushkin as a touchstone of certain values will be analysed first, before outlining the more semiotically flexible Pushkin espoused by the Futurists. (Nevertheless, elements of the outright rejection of Pushkin will still be evident.)

Criticizing the Canon

From the very beginning the Futurists were as critical of readers as they were of writers. One of the demands of *Poshchechina* was a rejection of the cheap baubles of popular adulation: they sought 'to distance from our proud brow in horror the Wreath of tawdry glory you have made from bathhouse switches' (51). On the one hand, this *épatage* is an example of a familiar, almost Romantic, disdain for the reader, which strives to reconfirm the poets' exceptional status and invoke a coterie of right-thinking readers who knowingly

resist a simplistic mode of readership. On the other hand, it speaks of the Futurists' genuine rejection of the institutionalization of literature through the medium of the canon.¹⁵³ As Maiakovskii's description of the canon as a 'freezer' suggests, its principal threat is the way it hinders the fluidity essential for cultural development. Such conservatism contradicts one of the central tenets of early Futurism—the importance of dynamism (both aesthetically and philosophically).¹⁵⁴

Maiakovskii expands on the deadening effect of the canon in his masterful essay 'Dva Chekhova'. I will return to this text in my treatment of Maiakovskii, but it demands inclusion here for its succinct expression of the Futurist antipathy to canonization: 'They divide writers up among anthologies and etymologies and it is not the real ones they adorn with wreaths, but these invented ones who are devoid of blood and body.'¹⁵⁵ Maiakovskii argues that plaudits are too often falsely awarded on the basis of assumed moral or political virtue, not aesthetic competence: 'They have made writers into heralds of truth, posters of virtue and justice. [...] Out of writers they squeeze bureaucrats of enlightenment, historians and guardians of morality.'¹⁵⁶

Although Maiakovskii's title refers to Chekhov, he soon turns to Pushkin as the signal instance of this misappropriation. Maiakovskii cites the inscription on the Pushkin memorial, which emphasizes the political import of his poetry, as evidence of the institutionalization of Pushkin, and explains its disastrous consequences:

There is only one practical result: as soon as the sharpness of some author's political views is smoothed over, his authority is not supported by studying his works, but by force. So, in one of the southern towns a bureaucrat came up to me

¹⁵³ There is a telling parallel between the Futurist rejection of the laurel wreath and the loss of the halo in the Baudelaire story: the Futurists refuse the traditional place of the poet in society because it has been debased.

¹⁵⁴ See Gur'ianova, 'Estetika anarkhii', pp. 92-108 (p. 105): 'Russian Futurism in the early 1910s tried in its creative practice to capture the inescapable movement of time itself, to capture an indefinite slipping motion, the very process of changes.'

¹⁵⁵ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 294-301 (p. 295).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

and announced: 'Bear in mind, I won't let you say anything disapproving about the activities of the authorities and Pushkin and all that!'¹⁵⁷

Maiakovskii insists that it is bureaucratization, not Pushkin, that the Futurists are fighting.¹⁵⁸ This claim is slightly disingenuous: the Futurists genuinely did attack Pushkin as a representative of the past. However, they were even more critical of those contemporaries of theirs who were responsible for institutionalizing him, limiting his flexibility and subordinating his myth to nationalist and authoritarian discourses. Their disdain for those who misrepresent Pushkin does not, however, mean that the Futurists believed in a 'real' Pushkin whom they supposed they could restore by chipping away the accretions of institutionalization. They share the belief of their rival Briusov that 'too many magnifying glasses have been placed between us and Pushkin: so many that one can almost see nothing through them', but they go further in suggesting that attempting to recover the original Pushkin is now impossible.¹⁵⁹ This ungrounded Pushkin is memorably described by Khlebnikov in his essay 'Budetlianskii' (1914): 'Pushkin is a molly-coddled tumbleweed, borne hither and thither by the wind of pleasure.'¹⁶⁰ The Futurists rejected the idea that there was a definitive Pushkin that could be used as the lodestar for either political or aesthetic values for all times, and set out to attack those who tried to establish him as such.

One consequence of this multivalent approach to Pushkin was hostility to the propagation of a uniform image of Pushkin. In *Tainye poroki akademikov* Kruchenykh attacks the way Pushkin is taught in schools: 'the poor reader has already been so scared by Pushkin in school that he doesn't dare let out a peep and until this day "Pushkin's secret" has remained a secret'.¹⁶¹ Kruchenykh makes this accusation in the middle of his comparison of *Evgenii Onegin* with a laundry list. He implies that the canonization of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁵⁹ Valerii Briusov, 'Iz zhizni Pushkina', in *Moi Pushkin: Stat'i, issledovaniia, nabliudeniia*, ed. by N. K. Pksanov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970), pp. 9-25 (p. 9).

¹⁶⁰ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 227.

¹⁶¹ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 159-96 (p. 176).

Pushkin has made reasonable criticism all but impossible (except of course, for the Futurists, thus enhancing the daring profile of the Futurist persona) and made Pushkin even more distant. Moreover, Kruchenykh ironically invokes 'Pushkin's secret', a theme introduced into Pushkin reception by Dostoevskii: 'Pushkin died at the full development of his powers and undoubtedly took with him to the grave some great secret. And we are now trying to discover this secret without him.'¹⁶² Kruchenykh, who, as a Futurist champion of the 'word as such', was hostile to the mystical hermeneutics encouraged by Dostoevskii, responds bathetically by hinting that Pushkin's undiscovered secret is the phonological weakness of his poetry.

Dostoevskii's speech marks the intersection of three trends in the reception of Pushkin: institutionalization (because it is made to mark the opening of the Pushkin memorial); a sort of mystical hermeneutics, in which Pushkin becomes a sacred text; the morbid fascination with his death and the subsequent elevation of the poet to messianic status. Futurist dismissal of this third trend has already been observed in *Tainye poroki akademikov*. However, it is also present in another statement already discussed, from *Poshchetchina*: 'Whoever does not forget his *first* love, cannot know his last love' (50). This was interpreted above as a statement in support of the necessity of oblivion for progress. Such a reading maintains its validity, but can be supplemented with an intertextual reading which shows this statement to be a criticism of elements of the reception of Pushkin. The Futurists make a deliberately obvious allusion here to Fedor Tiutchev's well-known elegy for Pushkin, '29-oe ianvaria 1837'. They are eager to respond openly to the established position of Pushkin in society; Kruchenykh admits that their aim was to 'pique Tiutchev'.¹⁶³ Tiutchev is guilty, in their eyes, of sentimentalizing Pushkin and perpetuating an attitude to

¹⁶² Fedor Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh*, ed. by V. G. Bazanov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-88), XVI, 136-49 (p. 149).

¹⁶³ Aleskei Kruchenykh, 'Nash vykhod', p. 53.

the national poet characterized by a morbid combination of messianism, nationalism and eroticism. Love for Pushkin is directly related to his death, not his poetry:

Вражду твою пусть тот рассудит,
Кто слышит пролитую кровь...
Тебя ж, как первую любовь,
России сердце не забудет!¹⁶⁴

The Futurists' reference to 'last love' suggests a link between the elegy and another famous Tiutchev lyric, 'Posledniaia liubov', written between 1852 and 1854, some fifteen years or so after '29-oe ianvaria 1837'. While critics have often read the latter poem purely in a biographical context, the Futurists' juxtaposition of first and last love brings to the reader's attention the considerable links between the two poems.¹⁶⁵ There are clear echoes of the earlier poem, notably in the repetition of the themes of light and shadow and blood in veins, and in the repetition of words such as 'ten', 'krov' v zhilakh', and 'skudel'nyi' and 'skudeet'. By exposing the common ground between the maudlin love poem and the morbid elegy, the Futurists expose Tiutchev's sentimentalization of the relationship between the nation and the dead poet. The final line of '29-oe ianvaria 1837' echoes the opening:

Из чьей руки свинец смертельный
Поэту сердце растерзал?¹⁶⁶

Tiutchev suggests an equivalence between Pushkin's heart and Russia's heart: this serves both to make Pushkin seem to be an embodiment of the nation and to suggest an erotic link between the two. The echo also reminds us that the Pushkin who will be forever remembered by Russia is above all not a productive poet, but a martyr. Pushkin is attributed divine, quasi-Christlike status: he is a 'divine vial' ('божественный фиал') and

¹⁶⁴ F. I. Tiutchev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pis'ma v shesti tomakh*, ed. by N. N. Skatov, L. V. Gladkova, L. D. Gromova-Opul'skaia et al. (Moscow: Klassika, 2002-05), I, 57.

¹⁶⁵ Compare Richard A. Gregg, *Fedor Tiutchev: The Evolution of a Poet* (New York and London, 1965), p. 168, and Anatoly Liberman, *On the Heights of Creation: The Lyrics of Fedor Tyutchev*, (Greenwich, CN, and London, 1993), p. 127.

¹⁶⁶ Tiutchev, *PSS*, I, 57.

the ‘living organ of the gods’ (‘богов орган живой’); his fate is ‘great and holy’ (‘Велик и свят’) and is presented as a blood sacrifice on behalf of mankind (‘И сею кровью благородной / Ты жажду чести утолил’).¹⁶⁷ This salvation, however, is not for all mankind but specifically for the Russian nation which mourns him (‘горести народной’).¹⁶⁸ Tiutchev wants us to remember Pushkin as an emblem of Russia, the Messiah-King, whose sacrificial death makes him beyond reproach—no one, having smelled his blood, will criticize his death.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Futurists chose this poem as the target for their attack on poetry’s obsession with the past. It is poems such as this, and Lermontov’s ‘Smert’ poeta’, which gave Pushkin an unassailable position in Russian letters that was not connected to his aesthetic production, but rather to a perceived moral, national quality.

Pushkin in the Present

In order to achieve its goals, the Futurists’ attempt to ‘pique Tiutchev’ flattens the mythological depth of his poem. Before returning to the manifestos, I will briefly use the example of Tiutchev’s poem, alongside Maiakovskii’s ‘Ia i Napoleon’ (1914) to showcase the ways in which the Futurist appropriation of Pushkinian mythology differs from that of other poets.

Tiutchev’s poem demonstrates a subtle approach to Pushkinian mythology. It puts itself in dialogue with Pushkin’s own self-presentation, and particularly with his engagement with the Romantic mythical persona par excellence, Napoleon. Tiutchev’s emphasis on Pushkin’s blood-sacrifice echoes Pushkin’s description of Napoleon’s dictatorial ambitions: ‘Среди рабов до упоенья / Ты жажду власти утолил’ (the poem is full of references to bloodshed, so it is strongly implied that Napoleon’s thirst for power is

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

quenched with blood).¹⁶⁹ Tiutchev's reference serves to both approximate and differentiate Pushkin and Napoleon. This double move replicates tensions within the original poem, both the tension between Pushkin's admiration for this titanic figure ('Чудесный жребий совершился: / Угас великий человек') and his criticism of the turmoil Napoleon has caused, and the tension between the poet's combination of identification with the solitary hero (particularly in exile) and revulsion at his alleged tyranny.¹⁷⁰ Tiutchev's elegy, which includes other reminiscences of 'Napoleon', manipulates the myth of Napoleon as it is presented by Pushkin to create a new aspect of the myth of Pushkin, blending the force of the Romantic man of genius with the kenotic Christ of Orthodoxy to produce a new paradigm for the poet. I dwell on this transformation because it is an instructive example of the way that poets combine mythology and intertextuality to define the role of the poet. The Futurists, however, do not only employ this method, but also expose the workings of such mythopoeia, making the process evident in order to make a polemical point about cultural evolution.

A case in point is Maiakovskii's variation on Pushkin's 'Napoleon', 'Ia i Napoleon', which also demonstrates the coexistence of iconoclastic anti-Pushkinian narratives and the adaptation of Pushkinian mythology. 'Ia i Napoleon' depicts Maiakovskii fighting the sun, claiming his superiority to Napoleon, and then predicting his own death, against a background of Moscow and the First World War. (It is perhaps this combination of war and Moscow which first prompted the comparison with 'Napoleon'.) This rich poem alludes to many different texts, genres and poets in order to establish Maiakovskii's own mythology: notable among these points of reference is the sun-killing Futurist myth of *Pobeda nad*

¹⁶⁹ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 192-94 (p. 193).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

solntsem.¹⁷¹ The poet adopts the iconoclastic force of this narrative but complicates and personalizes it. Maiakovskii continues the Futurist polemic against canonization:

Когда канонизируете имена
погибших,
меня известней, -
помните:
еще одного убила война -
поэта с Большой Пресни!¹⁷²

However, he also imparts this polemic with the grim contemporary context of those being killed in the war: these fallen soldiers are made equivalent to the dead poets of the canon and, thanks to his twin obsessions with martyrdom and his own legacy, to Maiakovskii himself. Moreover, while the sun continues to be associated with Pushkin, Pushkin is also present through his connection, both in texts and in mythology, with Napoleon: Maiakovskii's attack on the sun ('Через секунду / встречу я / неб самодержца, / - возьму и убью солнце!') makes literal Pushkin's demand that Napoleon's reign, symbolized by the 'sun of Austerlitz', go dark—'Померкни, солнце Австерлица!'¹⁷³ Maiakovskii makes this link especially clear by twice almost quoting this line—'Это нам последнее солнце—/ солнце Аустерлица!'; 'Здравствуй,/ мое предсмертное солнце, / солнце Аустерлица!' The poles of identification here are confused: Napoleon is identified both with Maiakovskii, the sun-killer ('Сегодня я—Наполеон!'), and with the sun, which enters Moscow in the Napoleonic pose of a mounted conqueror ('Красным копытом

¹⁷¹ See N. I. Khardzhiev, 'Sud'ba Kruchenykh', in N. I. Khardzhiev, *Stat'i ob avangarde. V dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Arkhiv russkogo avangarda, 1996), I, 300-06 (p. 304). The poem can be read as a sort of existential aubade, cursing the dawn not because it parts the poet from his lover, but because it symbolizes the relentless tyranny of time and *byt*. For more on sun imagery in Maiakovskii, see Lawrence Leo Stahlberger, *The Symbolic System of Majakovskij* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1964), pp. 117-18.

¹⁷² Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 74.

¹⁷³ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 193.

грохнув о площадь, / въезжает по трупам крыш!').¹⁷⁴ This ambiguity reprises a similar ambiguity in Pushkin's 'Napoleon', in which the poet both refutes and accepts the mantle of Romantic genius; in Futurist mythopoeia, however, this is given violent exaggeration to include both murder and boastful outstripping.

Maiakovskii's technique—the collation of various myths surrounding the poet—is the same as Tiutchev's, but the Futurist's presentation of this relationship and its goals differ from that of their predecessors, as becomes evident when we compare these two poems. First, whereas Tiutchev writes in tribute to another poet, Maiakovskii self-consciously performs a solipsistic investigation into his own identity—the insertion of the 'I' into Pushkin's title signals this very Modernist introspection. Second, as is typical, the Futurist persona is characterized by fracture and paradox. Third, the concerns of the poem are emphatically in the present: it begins by the poet giving his address (a challenge to grandiose notions of poetic identity) and its focus is so limited as to cover only about fifteen hours. Fourth, Maiakovskii's allusions are made deliberately to stand out: the reference to 'the sun of Austerlitz' is more of a quotation than an allusion, drawing attention to its external origin (this technique will be examined at length in Chapter Four). Finally, Maiakovskii's poem also permeates the iconoclastic strand of Futurist mythology by invoking the discourse of sun-killing.

Towards a Futurist Pushkin

The positive adaptation of elements of Pushkinian mythology is not limited to Futurist poetry and also occurs in the manifestos. When it serves their purposes, the Futurists are very happy to present the positive aspects of the myth of Pushkin in these texts. For example, Kruchenykh, after criticizing Pushkin at length for his westernizing, relates a story in which Pushkin says he cannot tell whether a woman he has been talking to is intelligent

¹⁷⁴ Maiakovskii's on-going dialogue with the sun continues when he invites it for tea in 'Neobychainoe prikliuchenie, byvshee s Vladimirom Maiakovskim letom na dache' (1920); it is perhaps not a coincidence that the dacha in question was located in Pushkino.

because they spoke in French, suggesting a rejection of foreign influence on his part (72). The Futurists can employ the legends of Pushkin's irreverence, despite the fact that they might be inconsistent with the image they have established of Pushkin as a panderer to the West.

In 'Dva Chekhova' Maiakovskii contrasts this irreverent Pushkin more specifically with the moralistic Pushkin implied by the monument: 'They put up a monument to the wrong Pushkin, not the one who was a cheerful host at the great wedding celebration of words and sang.'¹⁷⁵ Maiakovskii, who adduces as evidence the description of St Petersburg at the beginning of *Mednyi vsadnik*, recuperates Pushkin's joie de vivre and hospitality. Moreover, he presents this Pushkin as an ally of the Futurists: Pushkin is described as a sort of bardic wedding singer celebrating words themselves, which corresponds with the Futurist emphasis on audience interaction and the word in itself.

What is more, even when the Futurists are contrasting themselves to a negatively valorized Pushkin, the very fact that there are grounds for this comparison suggests an equivalence between the two parties: it serves to underline the Futurists' importance to Russian literature. On the verso of *Poshchechina* the Futurists placed excerpts from the classics next to their own for 'a demonstration and comparison "in our favour"'.¹⁷⁶ Each Futurist had a counterpart in the canon: Khlebnikov and Pushkin, Lermontov and Maiakovskii, Nadson and Burliuk, and Gogol' and Kruchenykh. This comparison was designed to show how the Futurists' output was a better reflection of the current spirit of the day than the classics. However, by proposing precise pairings, it also helped to develop an alternative Futurist canon, suggesting that individual roles could be played by particular Futurists: Khlebnikov the role of Pushkin, the presiding genius; Maiakovskii that of Lermontov, the egocentric Romantic; Burliuk was equivalent to Nadson (a less important

¹⁷⁵ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 294-301 (p. 295).

¹⁷⁶ Kruchenykh, 'Nash vykhod', p. 54.

figure); and Kruchenykh, with his Ukrainian background and his love of absurdism, was a close fit for Gogol'.¹⁷⁷

The appropriation of the space occupied by Pushkin in Russian culture is often combined with attacks on other forces in the literary field. Opposition to these forces can trump any hostility to Pushkin: Khlebnikov suggests that Pushkin and the Futurists are poetic allies against a coalition of philistines in a cosmic battle between creators and consumers, a contest he describes in *Truba marsian* (161-63). Khlebnikov accuses the establishment, which he holds responsible for Pushkin's death, of hypocrisy: 'Pushkin and Lermontov, supposedly your banner, were once upon a time finished off by you like mad dogs outside of town, in a field' (162). Khlebnikov aligns the hostility faced by his work with the martyrdom myths which surround the Russian poet, but also applies his own categories to this event, implying that history is always marked by a conflict between a caste of creatives and the forces of commerce and banality.

As previously suggested, the image of a rabid dog being killed first appears in Kruchenykh's *Chert i rechetvortsy*. However, Kruchenykh tells us that it was Khlebnikov who originally suggested the metaphor, in answer to a question posed by Kruchenykh about what a bourgeois would do when faced by Dostoevskii having a fit.¹⁷⁸ Kruchenykh, like Khlebnikov, uses the image to describe the reaction of the establishment to inspired creativity. He phrases the question as follows: 'You can love mankind and a man, in the abstract, from a distance, a dead man, but when he's in front of you, raving, dying, what are you going to do?'¹⁷⁹ Kruchenykh suggests that the public prefer to love their poets when they are dead, which replicates the Futurist criticism of the morbid Pushkin cult. However, Kruchenykh, partly because he is satirizing Dostoevskii as well as Romanticism, is

¹⁷⁷ These pairings proved to be astute over the course of time: Khlebnikov died at 37, like Pushkin; Maiakovskii met a similar tragic end by gunshot to Lermontov; Kruchenykh continued to see similarities between himself and Gogol' throughout his career, as is evidenced by *Arabeski iz Gogolia*.

¹⁷⁸ Kruchenykh, 'Nash vykhod', p. 60.

¹⁷⁹ Kruchenykh, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 111-29 (p. 121).

more dismissive of inspired creativity, whereas it is central for Khlebnikov. Khlebnikov is also much more willing to identify with the martyrdom myths surrounding Pushkin, something we will see again in the next chapter.

The equivalence suggested in *Poshchchina* between Pushkin and Khlebnikov was particularly important in the formation of the Futurist identity: Burliuk gave two speeches in 1913, at the Tenishev School in St Petersburg and the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow, both called 'Pushkin and Khlebnikov'. The juxtaposition of the two poets in the title is a clear indication that the two are to be considered equal—a polemical and contentious idea.¹⁸⁰ Burliuk's speeches reprise many of the themes of the manifestos: shocking denunciations of Pushkin (he is 'the callus of Russian life' and can be loved only for his failings) and criticisms of the cult of Pushkin ('the Pushkinists are terrible, they have turned a poet into an idol').¹⁸¹ What is more, Burliuk's presentation of Khlebnikov conforms with the means and ends of Futurist identity formation described above, as comparison with Pushkin is a way both to lay claim to his status and to decry his failings: 'We need a genius who is a word-leader. Pushkin was a nobleman, but Khlebnikov is legendary, holy simplicity. He is a real Russian genius.'¹⁸² While Pushkin is distanced from the people, the dynamic Khlebnikov is their true expression.

In addition to this juxtaposition, Burliuk suggests another model for the relationship of the Futurists and Pushkin: 'We are at a right angle to Pushkin.'¹⁸³ In this fitting geometric metaphor Burliuk shows their unusual relation to Pushkin: the 90° turn perhaps represents the rejection of the paradigm of the linear development of tradition in

¹⁸⁰ Roman Jakobson recalls arguing with his father about Burliuk's speech, which his father denounced as a disgrace. See M. Radzisheskii and V. Teider, 'Velimir Khlebnikov v razmyshlenii i vospominaniakh sovremennikov', *Vestnik Obshchestva Velimira Khlebnikova*, 1 (1996), 44-66. A journalist at *Birzhevye vedomosti* described the lecture as 'blasphemous', nicely confirming the religious trappings of the cult Burliuk sought to undermine. See A. V. Krusanov, *Russkii avangard: 1907-1932 (Istoricheskii obzor)* 3 vols, (St Petersburg: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996), I, 140-41.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*.

favour of a new direction. Burluk also contextualizes the Futurist approach to literary inheritance in reference to the theories of language of Alexander von Humboldt and Aleksandr Potebnia. The reporter from *Rech'* dismissed this as 'a comic attempt to use these authorities to defend the Futurists' pretentiousness, nonsense and indecipherable combinations of letters', but Burluk's references are very apt.¹⁸⁴ Potebnia's theory of literature emphasized the transformation of eternal essences at the moment of communication, just as the Futurists wanted to bring certain Pushkinian motifs into the present: 'the image in poetry is fixed, while its *signification* changes and is defined separately in each case'.¹⁸⁵ Potebnia draws on Humboldt's notion of language not as a product, but as an activity—not an *ergon*, but *energeia*.¹⁸⁶ Once the process of transformation by reinterpretation ceases, literature changes from being *energeia* to being an *ergon*. Potebnia distinguishes between physical art works, such as sculptures, and intangible products such as literature; in his theory, as John Fizer explains, the latter are constantly undergoing transformation: 'Every time they are perceived, they are born anew. The visible signs through which they are affirmed are merely the means of their reproduction, rather than their true essence.'¹⁸⁷ If they cease to be transformed, they become *erga*, immobile like statues.

This same metaphor recurs in Futurist thinking about Pushkin, especially, as we shall see, in the work of Maiakovskii. In *Idite k chortu* Kruchenykh combines the statue metaphor with the implication that the Futurists, while rejecting him, are equivalent to Pushkin, but in a new era: 'The appearance of new poetries had the same effect on the still crawling old men of little old Russian literature as white-marble Pushkin dancing the tango' (80). The Futurists are contrasted to literary critics who are described as old and, later,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid..

¹⁸⁵ See John Fizer, *Alexander A. Potebnja's Psycholinguistic Theory of Literature: A Metacritical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 23.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

‘commercial’ (80). The new poetry (which is to say, Futurism) is equivalent to Pushkin, but is also responsible for transforming him from a static *ergon*, a marble idol, into a mobile embodiment of *energeia*. This modernization is evident not only in the fact that he can move, but also because when he does he is very much in step with modernity, dancing the fashionable tango.¹⁸⁸ For the Futurists, who describe themselves as returning dynamism to a stagnant Pushkin, the creative spirit is contained within their transformative power, not in some ahistorical Pushkinian essence. Pushkin is shown to be sensitive to the imperatives of the historical moment, whether it is concretizing him or liberating with the spirit of the present.

In a crucial document in the Futurist reception of Pushkin, Khlebnikov’s note in the album of L. I. Zheverzhev, dated 25 October 1915, he describes this same process, again in reference to Pushkin’s alleged persecution at the hands of the establishment:

The Futurian [*Budetlianin*] is Pushkin in the light of the world war, in the cloak of the new century, teaching the right of that century to ‘laugh’ at the Pushkin of the 19th century. It was Pushkin who threw Pushkin ‘from the steamship of modernity’, but behind the mask of the new century. And in 1913 the dead Pushkin was defended by D’Anthès who had killed Pushkin in 18** . *Ruslan i Liudmila* was called ‘a peasant in bast shoes come to an assembly of noblemen’. The killer of the living Pushkin, who turned the wintry ground crimson with his blood, has hypocritically put on the mask of defending him (the corpse), in order to repeat the distant shot at the germinating of a herd of the young Pushkins of the new century.¹⁸⁹

Khlebnikov differentiates between the dead Pushkin and the living incarnation of the poet, the Futurists. This identification operates on three levels. First, Khlebnikov suggests that Pushkin was not the establishment figure he is held to be: *Ruslan i Liudmila* was out of place amongst an aristocratic readership. Second, Pushkin was rejected by philistine society, which has now turned its wrath on the Futurists. Third, the Futurists represent a modern equivalent of Pushkin—Khlebnikov insists on the historical context of the First

¹⁸⁸ In 1914 Kamenskii published a very innovative book called *Tango s korovami*.

¹⁸⁹ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.ii, 84. Khlebnikov’s refusal to write the last two digits of the date of Pushkin’s death is curious: it is very unlikely to be motivated by ignorance, since Khlebnikov was obsessed with historical dates; either it was superstition, or perhaps an allusion to this same practice in novels—Pushkin’s death becomes the stuff of fiction.

World War and the new century. It is also worth noting that Khlebnikov expresses the Futurists' relationship with Pushkin using theatrical imagery. Theatre and theatricality were key arenas for the interaction between people of the Silver Age and Pushkin, and its importance will be considered at length in the next chapter. At this stage, however, we should note that the Futurists do not play at being Pushkin; Pushkin dons the garb of the present (a cape and mask) to become a Futurist. Once again, the external form changes in response to the march of history, leaving the core untouched. The idea of the poet—as a principle, as a position in society, as an embodiment of creativity—is eternal, but the masks he wears must always change. There is a structural consistency in the shape of Russian culture, but its outer aspect is modified in response to the zeitgeist. We see here the essence of the Futurist model of the Pushkin legacy: in place of a fixed touchstone that becomes obsolete in modernity, we are presented with a Pushkin who is eternally mutable and always responsive to changed circumstances and new creativity.

Summary

The Futurist manifestos were much more than an expression of nihilistic antipathy to the past: rather they were sophisticated experiments in mythopoeia, which worked along with poems, plays and public performance to help construct a unique, self-legitimizing Futurist identity. Pushkin, and the wealth of myths that had accumulated around him, played a vital dual role in the formation of this identity. In the first part of the chapter we saw how the Futurists used Pushkin as a constitutive other against which they could forge their identity: he was characterized as obsolete, foreign, elitist and effeminate so that he could be contrasted to the dynamic, modern, Russian, integrated, heroic, masculine Futurist. Nevertheless, this antagonism coexisted with a different approach to Pushkin, explored in

the second half of the chapter, in which the Futurists attacked the institutionalization of Pushkin and appropriated Pushkinian myths in order to demonstrate their doctrine of creative flexibility and adaptive evolution.

Chapter Two

Velimir Khlebnikov: Transforming Pushkin's Myth of the Prophet

Velimir Khlebnikov stands apart from other poets of his age thanks to the unorthodox beauty of his poetry, the ambitious scope of his scientific writings and his unwavering commitment to the Silver Age ideal of transforming life itself into a work of art. His egregious genius and eccentric biography have been both a curse and a blessing: he has been simultaneously marginalized and exalted by colleagues, critics and readers. His singular gifts present a challenge to the premises of this investigation: to what extent can Khlebnikov's relationship to Pushkin be understood as subject to a broader Futurist paradigm—an expression of Futurist, not only Khlebnikovian, poetics?

In this chapter I will go some way to demonstrating how Khlebnikov remains a Futurist to the end, while remaining cognizant of the importance of his individual refraction of a common poetics. Irrespective of this argument, and regardless of his differences and disputes with his peers, Khlebnikov was undeniably subject to the same pressures as the other Futurists, and was equally eager to express his role in relation to society and tradition, articulate his own mythology of the poet and establish his legitimacy. While the manifestos had performed this function to some extent, the contribution of this genre to his identity was limited both by time—Khlebnikov did not contribute to any joint manifestos after 1916—and by the manifestos' emphasis on a somewhat bombastic and simplistic version of the collective Futurist myth, which never suited the quiet Khlebnikov. Nevertheless, considerable continuities can be seen between Khlebnikov's identity formation strategies and those detailed in the previous chapter, not least in the fact that Pushkin continued to play an important role in this process in various ways: as a touchstone for negative self-definition; as the source of myths to be appropriated; as a case study for

the Futurist conceptualization of literary progress. The complexity of Khlebnikov's overall engagement with Pushkin justifies considerably more detail than space here allows. Consequently, this chapter will be limited to a consideration of the way in which Khlebnikov uses one particularly potent myth—the idea of the poet as a prophet—and its Pushkinian contexts (especially 'Prorok', 1826) to express his identity and put forward a radical interpretation not only of the nature of cultural evolution, but also of, by extension, the nature of time itself. Just as in the previous chapter, the persistence of both antagonistic and adaptive approaches to Pushkin is reflected in the structure of my argument, which will start with an exploration of the ways in which Khlebnikov differentiates his rational, scientific interpretation of the poet-as-prophet from what he perceives to be Pushkin's Romantic, revelatory paradigm. This contrast, which has been well established by Betsy Moeller-Sally, is mostly found in earlier poems such as 'Vam' (1909) and 'Chisla' (1913).¹⁹⁰ The bulk of the analysis will, however, be dedicated to Khlebnikov's beautiful poem 'Odnokii litsedei' (1921), which combines elements of antagonism with the transformation of Pushkinian mythology. 'Odnokii litsedei' represents both one of Khlebnikov's most explicit references to Pushkin and one of the most complex articulations of his identity, and in particular the relationship between his poetic and numerological endeavours. After discussing one of the most contested elements of the poem—is the bull killed by the protagonist a symbol for Pushkin?—and proposing a new interpretation of this motif, I will discuss the way in which Khlebnikov uses the poem to challenge the boundaries between various poetic personae, exploring the interplay between notions of action, acting and prophecy and their relation to his understanding of the nature of time. This understanding of time is characterized both by the recurrence of consistent motifs and events and by the way in which these recurrent elements are transformed in response to their context. This is expressed in two ways in the poem:

¹⁹⁰ Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet in the Work of Velimir Khlebnikov'.

within the boundaries of the poem by establishing parallels between different personae without grounding them in a specific reality; within the broader literary sphere by using intertextual references to show the recurrence of themes in the work of different poets and challenge the notion of an original source for such themes. These areas of intertextual interaction all centre on the myth of the poet-as-prophet and its relationship to other discourses: classical heroism, notions of physical and spiritual blindness, anti-imperialist narratives, and Christological narratives of frustration and persecution. I contend that Khlebnikov uses these references to relate literary evolution to his general historical schema and to reveal the broader intertextual environment surrounding Pushkin's work and his own, and in particular their biblical precedents, and in so doing historicizes and humanizes Pushkin's creation, challenging his exceptional, sacral status.

The emphasis on the multilateral nature of intertextuality, which was also evident in the manifestos, also applies to Pushkin's own oeuvre. Khlebnikov reads Pushkin's prophet in the context of other Pushkinian meditations on the relationship between the poet and people such as: 'Vol'nost' (1817), 'Svobody seiatel' pustyynnyi' (1823), 'Podrazhaniia Koranu' (1824), 'Andre Shen'e' (1825), 'Poet i tolpa' (1828) and 'Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi' (1836).¹⁹¹ Khlebnikov constructs Pushkin's mythology across the boundaries of texts. By the same token his development of his own myth of self in 'Odnokii litsedei' must be understood in the context of other works by him, in particular texts relating to his time in Persia, such as *Truba Gul'-mully* and *Doski sud'by*, and his mathematical investigations into historical determinism. The organizing unit of the dialogue between poets is not the text, but the myth.

While Khlebnikov's eagerness to discredit the notion of Pushkin as an instance of pure originality was not universal (it was of course a central plank of Formalist studies of Pushkin), his insistence on the constellation of texts which constitute the mythology of the

¹⁹¹ Compare Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk*, p. 239, and Andrew Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 204.

poet-prophet was not unprecedented, but rather self-consciously draws on and engages with the transformations this myth had undergone in the course of the nineteenth century. (We observed a similar mediation taking place with Tiutchev in the previous chapter.) After Pushkin's death 'Prorok' came to occupy, in the words of Andrew Kahn, 'a uniquely important place in Russian literature. The exaltation of the poet as a visionary genius has become inseparable from Pushkin's own image.'¹⁹² What is more, uniting as it does religious and literary discourses, 'Prorok' became an important point of reference for writers wishing to locate Pushkin, and literature in general, in reference to political, nationalist and messianic discourses. A case in point is Dostoevskii's speech at the opening of the Pushkin monument in 1880, mentioned above, in which Dostoevskii described Pushkin's unique place in Russian culture in terms of prophecy:

'Pushkin is an extraordinary and, perhaps, unique manifestation of the Russian spirit,' said Gogol'. I will add myself: he is a prophetic one too. Indeed, for all us Russians there is something undoubtedly prophetic in his coming. Pushkin came just as we were starting to be properly conscious of ourselves, a self-consciousness that had barely begun and that took root in our society after the whole century following the reforms of Peter the Great, and his appearance helped to shine so much guiding light on our dark path.¹⁹³

After the speech Dostoevskii twice recited Pushkin's 'Prorok', clearly implying that Pushkin himself had used this poem to announce his own prophetic mission.¹⁹⁴ As a supposedly foundational statement of the poet's guiding role in society—note how Dostoevskii emphasizes that Pushkin's prophetic existence shows the way for all Russia—'Prorok' inevitably influenced poets' meditation on their own relationship with the people and with notions of national destiny.

In particular, the idea that the poet is a prophet manqué has helped to position the writer in a space outside the binary relationship between ruler and ruled. Pamela Davidson has shown how, regardless of Pushkin's refusal openly to declare himself a prophet, the

¹⁹² Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 201.

¹⁹³ Dostoevskii, *PSS*, XVI, 149.

¹⁹⁴ Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, p. 20.

reception of 'Prorok' contributed considerably to the notion 'that the Russian writer was a prophet, continuing or completing the task of the biblical prophets'.¹⁹⁵ The writer recapitulates the work of the Old Testament prophets by being an alternative source of both moral guidance and authority other than monarchical power.¹⁹⁶ Such a pastoral duty to the Russian people was intertwined with longstanding debates about the civic function of the poet. Nikolai Nekrasov, the champion of the notion of the poet as a socially involved citizen, produced a utilitarian iteration of the prophet myth in 'Prorok' (1874) which suggested that the critic Nikolai Chernyshevskii was tantamount to a prophet. That poem's final stanza exploits another aspect of the prophet myth by suggesting that the prophet's lot is necessarily persecution and, ultimately, crucifixion.¹⁹⁷ This hyperbole draws both on the widespread application of Christological templates to the life of the poet (also seen in Tiutchev's poem in the previous chapter) and on the increasing emphasis on the connection between prophecy and persecution in variations on Pushkin's themes such as Lermontov's 'Prorok' (1841), in which the poet-prophet is pelted with stones, and Vladimir Solov'ev's 'Prorok budushchego' (1884), a poem which Solov'ev self-consciously announced as a fusion and continuation of Pushkin and Lermontov, anticipating the synthetic approach we will find in Khlebnikov.¹⁹⁸

The wide range of themes and qualities associated with the figure of the prophet makes it a particularly fertile area for identity construction. Moeller-Sally notes the motif's attractive flexibility:

¹⁹⁵ Pamela Davidson, 'Vladimir Solov'ev and the Ideal of Prophecy', *SEER*, 74 (2000), 643-79 (p. 664).

¹⁹⁶ See M. N. Virolainen, 'Kul'turnyi geroi novogo vremeni' in *Legendy i mify o Pushkine*, ed. by M. N. Virolainen, pp. 321-41 (p. 334). Aleksandr Panchenko sees the poet as an ersatz saint filling the role traditionally taken in Russian culture by martyrs: 'And so the nation turned away from the tsars, obtained fewer saints than it lost. Only poets were left. And the nation chose Pushkin.' A. M. Panchenko, 'Russkii poet, ili Mirskaia sviatost' kak religiozno-kul'turnaia problema', in A. M. Panchenko, *Russkaia istoriia i kul'tura: Raboty raznykh let* (St Petersburg: Luna, 1999), pp. 361-77 (p. 374).

¹⁹⁷ See Nekrasov, *PSS*, II, 381. The poem is sometimes called 'N. G. Chernyshevskii'.

¹⁹⁸ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Pis'ma Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 3 vols (St Petersburg, 1908-11), II, 356.

The role of prophet suited Khlebnikov so well because it allowed him to fulfil many different ambitions: cognitive, epistemological, and visionary on one hand; communicative, evangelistic, and public / social on the other. The figure of the prophet provided him with a large, culturally, historically and typologically heterogeneous body of material that he could appropriate and manipulate in the construction of his mythology of self.¹⁹⁹

The tradition sketched above concentrates on the sociological functions of the prophet, but marginalizes the epistemological aspects of being a prophet, namely the ability to predict the future. Moeller-Sally detects a movement in Khlebnikov's treatment of the motif away from an early focus on cognitive aspects of prophecy and towards a greater interest in the prophet's 'evangelistic role' and the popular response to it: 'Khlebnikov has become [by 1921] increasingly concerned with his prophetic mission to humanity and public recognition of his value.'²⁰⁰ My analysis will by and large confirm this hypothesis, and show how it relates to a certain shift from antagonism to appropriation in his use of Pushkin. However, we should remember that for Khlebnikov the two aspects of the prophet are indivisible: it is the unique nature of his ability to know the future which enables him to perform a unique role in society. This is because, in contradistinction to most other adopters of the prophet myth (one assumes), Khlebnikov genuinely believes that he can predict future events.

From the very beginning, Khlebnikov's attempts to understand the patterns which govern events had a social, or even soteriological, function. He says in 'Slovo o chisle i naoborot' (1922): 'My initial decision to look for the laws of time came on the second day after Tsushima, when news about the battle of Tsushima reached the Iaroslavl' area, where I was living in the village of Burmakino.'²⁰¹ Khlebnikov believes that if terrible events can be anticipated, they can be avoided. His theories of time are complex, but, as suggested above, they are underpinned by a conviction that within the onward march of history

¹⁹⁹ Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet', p. 202.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 219.

²⁰¹ Khlebnikov, *SS*, II, 10. Hereafter in this chapter, references to this edition will be made in the body of the text.

certain elements (events, people and situations) occur in accordance with patterns which can become evident through mathematical study. Thus, in the early dialogue 'Uchitel' i uchenik' (1909-12), the master is able to explain the patterns of history to his pupil:

I sought the rules to which the fates of peoples are subject. And so I can confirm that the number of years between the beginnings of states is 413. That 1383 years separate the fall of states, the death of freedoms. That 951 years come between great expeditions, rebuffed by the enemy. (VI.i, 39)

The same patterns govern the fate of individuals also, a fact which Khlebnikov explored more in his late *Doski sud'by*:

The universally known Socrates, the prophet of oral dialogue, born in 458 BC. 355 x 5 after him comes Tsongkhapa, the greatest teacher of the Mongols, born in 1357. [...] He is the Socrates of deserted Asia. After 365 x 6 comes Skovoroda (the Ukrainian Socrates) born in 1722. [...] Here is the old Socrates in a new situation. (VI.ii, 32)

Khlebnikov's belief that he is able to apprehend the relationship between events across time has two impacts on his variation on the poet-prophet motif. First, his awareness of the law dictating that certain people are destined to fulfil roles within history, and the belief that this role changes in response to circumstances, makes him see himself as a new, transformed realization of the eternal principle of 'the prophet'. Second, the most important way his version of being a prophet differs from those of his predecessors is that he is aware of the functioning of the laws of time and thus actually can predict the future.

The fact that Khlebnikov believes he actually is a prophet, whereas Pushkin and others are only like prophets, is a significant instance of the Futurist tendency to realize metaphors. What is more, it has an important bearing on the way in which Khlebnikov positions his own career vis-à-vis Pushkin in relation to patterns of history, and on the way in which he views his epoch as a re-enactment of the Golden Age. The concept of re-enactment will be investigated later as part of an investigation of theatrical themes within

‘Odinokii litsedei’. For now, we will concentrate on the way in which, early in his career, Khlebnikov differentiates his prophetic activity from the accretion of stereotypes surrounding the Pushkinian prophet myth, not only on the basis of its efficacy, but also in its fundamental *modus operandi*, contrasting the revelatory mode of the former with his own rational, scientific approach to the interaction of past, present and future.

The Rational Prophet

Khlebnikov’s self-presentation as an actual prophet is based in part on an antagonism towards existing myths of the poet-prophet, and especially the tradition emergent from ‘Prorok’ which presents prophecy as the product of divinely given revelation, and more generally an antagonism towards other Romantic discourses of the ineffable sublime. The epistemological model of the Old Testament prophet, the recipient of God’s word, and of Pushkin’s ‘Prorok’, in which the protagonist is visited by a seraph, is presented as outmoded compared to the mathematic analysis of dates which typifies Khlebnikov’s scientific investigation into the laws of time.²⁰² Khlebnikov articulated the scientific basis of his quest in 1919 in *Nasha osnova*:

Exact laws cut through states freely and they are not noticed, like X-rays go through the muscles and give the imprint of the bones: they separate humanity from the scraps of the state and give another fabric—the starry sky.

²⁰² When we consider that the boundaries of science were being rapidly reconfigured at this time in the fields of non-Euclidean geometry and non-Newtonian physics, Khlebnikov’s experiments, which now seem eccentric, can be seen as a similar attempt to advance scientific method in an area which had previously been deemed an illegitimate object of rational inquiry—predicting the future. This project can be likened to Vladimir Solov’ev’s attempts to use rationalism to engage with the divine. Davidson says of Solov’ev: ‘the method adopted to reach this goal is quite the opposite of the prophetic. Solov’ev lays no claim to divine inspiration; on the contrary, and despite his professed preference for divine madness over human wisdom, he makes it clear that he intends to operate with the tools of human logic and rational discourse.’ Davidson, ‘Vladimir Solov’ev and the Ideal of Prophecy’, p. 646. The same applies to Khlebnikov, who clearly sympathizes with Solov’ev and characterizes him as another rational prophet, in *Zangezi*: ‘В очках ученого пророка / Ero [Mukden] видал за письменным столом / Владимир Соловьев.’ Khlebnikov, *SS*, III, 338.

In addition to this they give a prediction of the future, not with foam on the lips, like the prophets of old, but with the help of cold mental calculation. Now, thanks to the discovery of the waves of the ray of birth, one can say without joking that in some or other year a certain person will be born, let's say, 'someone' with a fate, similar to the fate of someone born 365 years before him. (VI.i, 179)

Such a scientific approach to prophecy is evident in three early poems 'Vam' (1909), 'Liudi kogda oni liubiat' (1911) and 'Chisla' (1913) in which Khlebnikov contrasts his rational approach to allegedly irrational elements in Pushkin's poetry. Although, as Barbara Lönnqvist has argued, Khlebnikov's numerology draws on the work of the Symbolists, his insistence on methodical calculation, disdain for mysticism and rejection of revelatory inspiration can also be seen as part of a general Futurist emphasis on practical, earthbound insight and a more functional approach to verse-construction.²⁰³ These discourses will be shown to be particularly prominent in Maiakovskii's reception of Pushkin in the next chapter.

Khlebnikov's ability to calculate future events is reliant on his conception of human history as a wave, like light, or the recently discovered X-rays. Consequently, it is possible 'to point to the regularity [*zakonomernost'*] of fate and give it the mental outline of a beam and measure it in time and space' (VI.ii, 178). The notion that the seeming chaos of the universe is beholden to certain patterns leads to an interesting parallel between cosmology and chronology and the act of writing verse, which forms a bridge between Khlebnikov's two occupations as prognosticator and poet. Just as a poet marshals the infinite possibility of language into set forms, revealing the inherent connection between seemingly disparate words, the mathematical prophet makes the chaos of history fit into a pattern, uncovering the rhymes and alliteration between people and events across time. Khlebnikov articulates

²⁰³ Barbara Lönnqvist, *Mirozdanie v slove: Poetika Velimira Khlebnikova* (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1999), p. 19

this analogy in 'Ia ne znaiu, zemlia kruzhitsia ili net' (1910): 'Я не знаю, Земля кружится или нет, / Это зависит, уложится ли в строчку слово' (I, 206).

In the same poem Khlebnikov states his desire to be attuned to the fluctuations of the universe:

Но я знаю, что я хочу кипеть и хочу, чтобы солнце
И жилу моей руки соединила общая дрожь. (I, 206)

Khlebnikov repeats the parallels between the laws of the universe and versification in 'Liudi, kogda oni liubiat' (1911), which ends with an unexpected reference to Pushkin:

Боги, когда они любят,
Замыкающие в меру трепет вселенной,
Как Пушкин - жар любви горничной Волконского. (I, 243)

Gods in love confine the trembling of the universe into some measured, regular form; Pushkin brings order to the confusion of his feelings by confining his erotic desires in poems. (Khlebnikov refers to 'K Natashe' [1815] which Pushkin wrote for Princess Varvara Volkonskaia's maid.) One could suggest association with gods might seem flattering, but the bathetic specificity of Khlebnikov's bizarre final line serves rather to contrast the lofty 'tremble of the universe' which Khlebnikov attempts to master with Pushkin's youthful erotic adventures.

In 'Chisla' (1913), Khlebnikov's juxtaposes his scientific prophecy specifically with the protagonist's revelation in Pushkin's 'Prorok'. Pushkin describes his eyes being opened to new realities by a seraph:

И шестикрылый серафим
На перепутье мне явился.
Перстами легкими как сон
Моих зениц коснулся он.
Отверзлись вещие зеницы,
Как у испуганной орлицы.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Pushkin, PSS, III, 30.

Khlebnikov argues that in his case it is not divine intervention, but his intensive study of numbers which has granted him special sight:

Я всматриваюсь в вас, о, числа,
 И вы мне видите одетыми в звери, в их шкурах,
 Рукой опирающимися на вырванные дубы.
 Вы даруете единство между змееобразным движением
 Хребта вселенной и пляской коромысла,
 Вы позволяете понимать века, как быстрого хохота зубы.
 Мои сейчас вещеобразно разверзлись зеницы
 Узнать, что будет Я, когда делимое его - единица. (I, 102)

Moeller-Sally and Lönnqvist both observe that the personified numbers of 'Chisla' take over the role of the seraph which opens the poet's eyes in 'Prorok' ('Отверзлись вещие зеницы'): Khlebnikov locates the power of insight in the scientist-poet, not external forces.²⁰⁵ Both scholars also suggest a link between Pushkin's 'вещие' and Khlebnikov's 'вещеобразно'. Moeller-Sally proposes that this strange formulation, which thanks to the Pushkinian context is read both as 'thing-like' and as 'prophet-like', demonstrates the disparity in actual prophetic power between Khlebnikov and Pushkin because it 'exposes Pushkin's metaphor as a metaphor'.²⁰⁶ While I agree with Moeller-Sally's instinct to read Khlebnikov's work as a challenge to the metaphorical nature of Pushkin's imagery, as part of a general Futurist problematization of symbols, I propose that 'вещеобразно' is also intended to prompt a deeper consideration of the nature of perception by making reference to Kantian and post-Kantian phenomenology. Khlebnikov seems to suggest that because his prophecy is grounded in a perspicacious understanding of material reality, rather than revelation, he can perceive the supposedly inaccessible Kantian thing in itself. Although 'вещеобразно' may be, as Moeller-Sally implies and Lönnqvist states, Khlebnikov's own coinage, it seems to recall the terminology of contemporary phenomenology, and in particular Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, which enjoyed

²⁰⁵ Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet', p. 206; Lönnqvist, *Mirozdanie v slove*, p. 19.

²⁰⁶ Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet', p. 207.

enormous popularity in Russia at the time.²⁰⁷ Husserl uses the German word ‘Dingliche’, which is translated as ‘вещеобразно’ in Russian and ‘thing-like’ in English, to distinguish between different types of perception. In contrast to the ‘thing presented in consciousness’ (a ‘non-thing-like object’):

the object that appears in experience is a *thing-like* object, and, qua thing, requires an infinite perception and intuition, for it always escapes or transcends the gaze of sensual perception. It is in this sense that this object is understood as an immanent transcendent object, the apprehension of which is, by default, always inadequate.²⁰⁸

Thus the suggestion that Khlebnikov’s eyes open in a ‘thing-like’ way when looking at numbers is evidence of the way in which they provide for a level of perception which is impossible when examining ordinary objects.

In Futurist poetics, which derive from a Humboldtian rather than Saussurean tradition, the external qualities of the word are indivisible from its meaning—the signifier is not arbitrary.²⁰⁹ Consequently, there is no distinction between seeming and being in language. The pun which links revelatory prophecy and the perception of ‘things’ (‘вещи’ and ‘вещеобразно’), therefore, seems to emphasize Khlebnikov’s argument that prophecy is only effective to the extent in which it is grounded in material reality. Such paronomasia seems to invert the semiotic structure of the Futurist reception of Pushkin, suggesting a limit to the dualistic model of internal essence and external appearance which I have proposed. However, the iconicity of the word can perhaps be extended from the linguistic to the metaphysical to provide an important caveat: external appearances are never independent of essences but can actively determine them. The mask does not reveal the

²⁰⁷ Husserl’s work exerted considerable influence in Russia in the early twentieth century. One notable enthusiast, and possible intermediary, was Roman Jakobson: he attended Georgii Chellanov’s Husserl seminar at Moscow University; however, it is just as likely that Khlebnikov would have been independently acquainted with Husserl’s work. See Maryse Dennes, ‘Vliianie fenomenologii E. Gusserlia na rossiiskuiu nauku 1910-1920-kh gg.’, *Psikhologicheskie issledovaniia*, 6 (2010). Available at: <http://psystudy.ru/index.php/num/2010n6-14/408-dennes14.html>. Accessed on 08/08/12.

²⁰⁸ Joaquim Siles i Borrás, *The Ethics of Husserl’s Phenomenology: Responsibility and Ethical Life* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 78.

²⁰⁹ On the iconicity of sign and object in Futurism, see Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 136.

face beneath it, but actually shapes it. Although the importance of puns for the Futurist reception of Pushkin will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four in the context of Kruchenykh's far-reaching exploration of this topic, it is important to remember in the following discussion of the donning of masks and the transformation of Pushkin that in both cases the acquisition of a new appearance is not independent from the transformation of content.

The Limitations of Revelation and Romanticism

Khlebnikov counterposes his prophetic project not only to revelation, but also to a range of poetic values connected with Romanticism and exemplified, to his mind, by the poetry of Pushkin, including the Romantic sublime. His 'Vam' (1909) is addressed to Mikhail Kuz'min and contains many references to his work in particular and Symbolism in general. However, it also consciously locates itself in relation to Pushkin's southern topoi. Like the hero of *Kavkazkii plennik* or Lermontov's 'Son', the alien landscape inspires Khlebnikov to think of Russia: 'Я путешествовал по Кавказу / И думал о далекой Волге' (I, 202). However, Khlebnikov also seeks to contrast his rational response to the landscape to Pushkin's awestruck fear. His reaction to a mountain abyss recalls Pushkin's perturbation at seeing a similar scene in Crimea. Khlebnikov describes the scene as follows:

Конь, закинув резво шею,
 Скакал по легкой складке бездны.
 С ужасом, в борьбе невольной хорошея,
 Я думал, что заниматься числами над бездною полезно.
 Невольно числа я слагал,
 Как бы возвратясь ко дням творенья,
 И вычислял, когда последний галл
 Умрет, не получив удовлетворенья. (I, 202)

Pushkin's poem, 'Tavrida', considers the possibility of nothingness after death and compares the angst this inspires with the fears felt by a traveller in the mountains:

Так путник, с вышины внимая
 Ручьев альпийских вечный шум
 И взоры в бездну погружая,
 Невольным ужасом томим,
 Дрожит, колеблется: пред ним
 Предметы движутся, темнеют,
 В нем чувства хладные немеют,
 Кругом оплота ищет он,
 Всё мчится, меркнет, исчезает...²¹⁰

'Vam' reprises the Romantic topos of the mountain ravine, including precise details from Pushkin's description such as the sound of the river below ('Далёко в пропасти шумит река').²¹¹ The responses of the two poetic personae also share lexical elements, such as the word 'ужасом' and two variations on the word 'невольный', suggesting the imprisoning power of the awe inspired by the sublime landscape. The phrase 'Невольным ужасом томим' brings to mind a similar phrase in 'Prorok', 'Духовной жаждою томим', serving as a link between Pushkin's two travellers in unpopulated zones which might have prompted Khlebnikov's focus on the nature of perception in Pushkin's poem. Khlebnikov, like Pushkin, feels the terror of nothingness and death when confronted by the ravine. However, his response is to try to overcome fear with rational calculation. Khlebnikov forestalls thoughts of his own death by calculating the deaths of future generations ('the last Gaul'). Pushkin's traveller, by contrast, becomes almost blinded by fear, which makes the world less clear rather than more so. In 'Tavrida' Pushkin calms his fears of inevitable death with the consolation of the afterlife; Khlebnikov consoles himself, ironically, with the same inevitability of death felt by Pushkin, but recasts death as a calming mathematical reality revealing the logic underpinning the universe.

²¹⁰ A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), II, 103. The lines quoted here were written around 16 April 1822, recalling his time in Gurzuf in 1820, and were not published during his lifetime. Other lines written at the same time formed the basis of 'Ty vnov' so mnoiu, naslazhdenie' and 'Ia liubliu vash sumrak neizvestnyi'. The poem as it is quoted here does not appear in the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 17 tomakh*.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Khlebnikov recognizes that, owing to the sinuous nature of history, there are other viable means of prophecy in addition to both the flawed Old Testament revelatory model and his own mathematical approach. One such route to prophecy is literature itself. Texts are not just a place to discuss prophecy but can, if read correctly, provide insight into the pattern of the future. In an extraordinary collection of writings which are normally referred to by the title 'Ka2', Khlebnikov elicits a comparison between the way in which the Futurists dispersed after their high point in 1913 and a Pushkinian prototype. He first discusses Aristarkh Lentulov's paintings of Moscow with the artist; he sees in the twisting streets the inheritance of the curly beards of Ruslan and of the boyar Kuchko, who is said to have owned the land on which Iurii Dolgorukii founded Moscow:

We chatted, gathering to weave together the air of the word for this big city. I thought that these curved streets were only the curls of the beard of the executed boyar Kuchka [*sic*] and that it was time for those who once gave the head-hill a wild slap to pull out the hidden sword. Sometimes it's not bad to be a Pushkinist. Through the beautiful (Pushkin was, all the same, a bit of smoked glass) it is possible to see the future. By the way, I am not intending to be deceitful. Once again I went stubbornly, reading the orders of seconds, along the hairs of the Boyar Kuchka. But long ago, because of his laughter (Pushkin's head in *Ruslan i Liudmila*) we wandered from sea to sea, borne by the wind of breathing to the edge of the earth. And owls flew from the moustaches and brows of the old head and sat down right on the columns of the leaders. (V, 163)

Khlebnikov seems to allude to the various fates of the signatories of the manifesto who spent the succeeding years scattered over Russia by the war. Just as the streets realize the curly beard of the one-time owner of that land, *Ruslan i Liudmila* presaged the history of Futurism, with the slap on the head equivalent to the slap of *Poshchchina*.²¹² The Pushkinian narrative thus suggests further actions: it is time for the Futurists to pull out the hidden sword which, in the poem, Ruslan will use to defeat Chernomor (by cutting at his beard, which provides a further associative link). This seems to be a call to action for the Futurists to enter another 'heroic' phase of activity.

²¹² See Rudol'f Duganov, *Velimir Khlebnikov: Priroda tvorchestva* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), p. 117.

Both Khlebnikov's suggestion that being a Pushkinist can be acceptable and his reference to positive aspects to Pushkinian 'beauty' are surprising: in addition to the Futurists' well-known antipathy to Pushkinists, Khlebnikov considered 'beauty' to be the main target of the Futurists' polemics against Pushkin. In 'Vospominaniia' (1915), which recalls the glory years of Futurism, Khlebnikov compared this attack to the actions of the First World War:

Вы помните, мы брали Перемышль
Пушкинианской красоты (I, 322)

The edifice of Pushkinian aesthetics is compared to the most heavily fortified town of the Eastern Front, Przemyśl, which was eventually taken by Russian forces with great losses in 1915. This generally negative appraisal of Pushkin is reflected in the ambivalent description here of his work as 'smoked glass': on the one hand, literature allows one to see the 'sun' of the future safely; on the other, it is a very limited viewing apparatus, far inferior to Khlebnikov's more perspicacious calculations. Khlebnikov alludes to one of the canonical expressions of limited perception, 1 Corinthians 13: 12: 'Теперь мы видим как бы сквозь тусклое стекло, гадательно, тогда же лицом к лицу; теперь знаю я отчасти, а тогда познаю, подобно как я познан.' (This is the Russian Synodal Version; it has entered the English language tradition in the words of the King James Bible: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known'.) We recall that this passage begins with the discussion of prophetic powers: 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' Khlebnikov secularizes this context, making the deciding factor not charity, but mathematics. Khlebnikov presents literature as an alternative means to access the patterns of the past, but one which is decidedly inferior: only rarely is it reasonable to be a Pushkinist, and the prognostic potential of literature is very limited.

Doubts about the Rational Prophet

Over time, however, we see increasing uncertainty emerging in Khlebnikov's persona as a rational prophet. In the short drama *Vzлом vselenoi* (1921), which is analysed well by Moeller-Sally, Khlebnikov not only presents his most unequivocal expression of the mathematical means and soteriological ends of his prophecy, but also blurs the distinction between the rational prophet and his ecstatic predecessors. This play depicts an assault on heaven made to rescue Russia, which, in the form of a beetle, is in danger of being crushed by an absent-minded girl. Perhaps because of the emphasis on the nation's destiny, direct engagement with 'Prorok' is more evident here. Khlebnikov again inserts scientific language into the metaphoric template of Pushkin's poem to show how far he diverges from the revelatory model of prophecy of 'Prorok':

Мой разум, точный до одной энной,
 Как уголь сердца, я вложил в мертвого пророка вселенной,
 <Стал> дыханием груди вселенной.
 И понял вдруг: нет времени.
 На крыльях поднят как орел, я видел сразу, что было и что будет,
 Пружины троек видел я и двоек
 В железном чучеле миров,
 Упругий говор чисел.
 И стало ясно мне,
 Что будет позже. (IV, 77)

This speech is given by the Son, a dynamic character who eventually saves Russia and the world. He can be read as a cipher for Khlebnikov himself, whose theory of time was dependent on the fact that the interval between events could be calculated using powers of two and three.²¹³ The unravelling of these connections between events allows the prophet to see outside the paradigm of linear, deterministic time, providing a hint of the timeless utopia outside of history for which the avant-garde strove. The character

²¹³ Compare Khlebnikov, *PSS*, VI.ii, 11: 'I understood that time is built on powers of two and three the lowest even and uneven numbers.'

identified with Khlebnikov is again less passive than the traditional prophet: he, like the Seraph, places the substitute for the burning coal, reason (*razum*) into the dead prophet of the universe. However, the confidence of this statement of rational prophecy is soon undermined by the ecstasy into which the Son falls:

И вдруг застонал, увидев молнии и подымая руку,
И пена пошла из уст, и <молнии > растерзали меня. (IV, 77)

The foaming lips recall the outmoded version of prophecy described in *Nasha osnova*. However, this distinction breaks down in the case of the Son, whose mathematical approach to divination does not protect him either from ecstatic reactions or from the punishments of heaven. The scientific perspicacity of the Son is shown to be ultimately futile, heralding the questioning of the communicative powers of the prophet in 'Odinokii litsedei'.

'Odinokii litsedei'

Vzлом vselennoi can be seen as a transitional piece between the triumphant heroism of *Deti vydry* and the cycle of late poems, first identified as such by Nikolai Stepanov, in which Khlebnikov's poetry becomes unprecedentedly personal as he laments the public's failure to recognize the importance of his teachings.²¹⁵ This sense of rejection is most memorably expressed in 'Eshche raz, eshche raz...' (1922):

Горе и вам, взявшим
Неверный угол сердца ко мне:
Вы разобьетесь о камни,
И камни будут надсмехаться
Над вами,

²¹⁵ Nikolai Stepanov, *Velimir Khlebnikov: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1975), p. 238.

Как вы надсмехались
Надо мной. (II, 400)²¹⁶

The interaction of the poetic persona and the masses is important to Khlebnikov's identity throughout his career. Raymond Cooke describes it as characterized by extremes: 'Exalted or cursed, king or beggar, Khlebnikov's poetic *persona* is separated from the crowd which surrounds it.'²¹⁷ The prophet myth is of course party to this ambivalent relationship with the people: the prophet stands apart from the people, but he also exists for them, so the people's indifference undermines this element of the poet-prophet's self-perception and mission. Khlebnikov's most successful interrogation of his relationship with both the people and his poetic identity is 'Odinokii litsedei', which was written during or shortly after Khlebnikov's return from the Caucasus in 1921, following his sojourn in Persia with the Red Army, which was lending military support to the short-lived Republic of Gilan. Khlebnikov turns his inquisitive eye to the heroic personae which inhabited his earlier poetry, including that of the rational prophet outlined above, and fuses them with the self-reflexive *Ich-Dichtung* and concerns about reception which typify his later work. What is more, like the poems analysed above, 'Odinokii litsedei' deliberately places itself in the context of Pushkin's prophet myth with a very obvious reference to Pushkin's 'Prorok', so that Khlebnikov's interrogation of his own prophet myth extends to a meditation on the mythology of the prophet in general. I quote the poem in full:

И пока над Царским Селом
Лилось пенье и слезы Ахматовой,
Я, моток волшебницы разматывая,
Как сонный труп влачился по пустыне,
Где умирала невозможность,
Усталый лицедей,

²¹⁶ By making (stationary) stones the undoing of the unaccepting crowd, Khlebnikov inverts an element of the prophet myth developed by Lermontov—the stoning of the prophet by the crowd. See Lermontov, *PSS*, II, 203. The prophet myth is also alluded to in the way that 'угол сердца' recalls 'уголь сердца' from *Vzлом vselennoi*, quoted above.

²¹⁷ Raymond Cooke, *Velimir Khlebnikov: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 47.

Шагая напролом.
 А между тем курчавое чело
 Подземного быка в пещерах темных
 Кроваво чавкало и кушало людей
 В дыму угроз нескромных.
 И волей месяца окутан,
 Как в сонный плащ вечерний странник
 Во сне над пропастями прыгал
 И шел с утеса на утес.
 Слепой я шел, пока
 Меня свободы ветер двигал
 И бил косым дождем.
 И бычью голову я снял с могучих мяс и кости
 И у стены поставил.
 Как воин истины я ею потрясал над миром:
 Смотрите, вот она!
 Вот то курчавое чело, которому пылали раньше толпы!
 И с ужасом
 Я понял, что я никем не видим,
 Что нужно сеять очи,
 Что должен сеятель очей идти! (II, 255)

This extraordinary poem has already inspired enlightening analyses by Jerzy Faryno, Harsha Ram, Moeller-Sally and others, but such is its combination of opacity and tantalizing promise of revelation that no reading can be said to be definitive. All readers can agree on the rough *fabula* of the poem: a lonely player ('лицедей') wanders through the wilderness until he finds a monstrous bull which he kills; he is disappointed, however, that this act is not seen and therefore resolves to become a 'sower of eyes'. On this framework an intricate superstructure of metaphor and allusion is constructed which constantly fluctuates between the obscure and the seemingly insistent: the central mythological strand of Theseus and the Minotaur is complicated with references to a grieving Anna Akhmatova, Pushkin, the Bible, other Greek myths, the notion of theatricality and discourses of freedom. Different myths are made to pollinate each other, while Khlebnikov tests the personae (a word which, of course, literally means 'masks') that emerge against his own self-identity.

Of these mythological prisms for his identity, one of the most important is clearly Pushkin: the line ‘Как сонный труп влачился по пустыне’ instantly recalls two lines from Pushkin’s ‘Prorok’—‘В пустыне мрачной я влачился’ and ‘Как труп в пустыне я лежал’. We shall discuss some of the nuances later, but we must note at this stage that this reference, which has attracted the attention of many readers of this poem, is very obvious by Khlebnikov’s standards and its object very well known. While some of the other veiled allusions in ‘Odnokii litsedei’ qualify almost as cryptograms, seemingly designed to baffle the reader into a prolonged engagement with the text, this appropriation of a Pushkinian motif is so close to the original to serve almost as a quotation from ‘Prorok’. Like an epigraph, such an undisguised reference both locates the poem within a certain tradition and establishes a context within which it should be read. Along with the explicit mention of Anna Akhmatova, the obvious invocation of ‘Prorok’ helps to produce a two-level text, which incorporates both dense imagery and straightforward intertextual signposts. The effect is paradoxical: such an explicit reference both overshadows more subtle allusions and also provides the context which is necessary for the existence of these other references to become apparent. The node of corpse/dragging/desert serves as the point of contact between the semantic worlds of ‘Odnokii litsedei’ and ‘Prorok’ (a syllepsis in Michel Riffaterre’s sense of the word), and, more broadly, Khlebnikov’s poetic universe and Pushkin’s.²¹⁹ The clearly enunciated convergence of the two worlds in this image thus necessitates an engagement not only with the immediate object of the allusion, but with an entire constellation of Pushkinian myths.

Pushkin and the Bull

²¹⁹ Michael Riffaterre, ‘Compulsory reader response: the intertextual drive’, in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, pp. 56-78 (p. 71).

The division made above between *fabula* and *siuzhet* fails to represent the extent to which the two elements interpenetrate in the poem. The division between the plot and the metaphorical overlay, which is necessarily blurred in all poetry, is maximally unclear in this poem: metaphors inform and inspire action and vice versa. One important example of this interaction, which must be dealt with before other aspects of the Pushkin context of this poem can be explored, is the possibility that the bull that is killed is a cipher for Pushkin, a reading which has proved popular with numerous scholars. It is impossible and undesirable to try to resolve the question of the meaning of the bull definitively: the figure is deliberately ambiguous and multivalent. However, it is equally impossible to ignore the importance to Khlebnikov's mythology of the tauroctony and its associations.

In addition to the poem's saturation with other Pushkin references and the Futurists' history of metaphorical violence against Pushkin, the identification of the bull with Pushkin is supported by the fact that Khlebnikov twice emphasizes the bull's curly head ('курчавое чело'), recalling Pushkin's famous curls.²²⁰ In 'Ka2', which displays strong thematic and semantic affinities with 'Odnokii litsedei' that will be discussed below, Khlebnikov's description of the Pushkin monument emphasizes the curliness of his hair: 'More than once I had walked past that black, curly, iron gentleman with his hat in his hand. And I always raised my eyes to look at it' (V, 164).

A Symbol of the Past

Proponents of the Pushkin-as-bull thesis have tended to relate it to the Futurists' rejection of Pushkin in the manifestos as a symbol of the burden of the past. For instance, Angelo Ripellino and Moeller-Sally both see the curly head as a symbol of the past, representing

²²⁰ See Moeller-Sally, 'Masks of the Prophet', p. 212.

outmoded literary fashion and classical heroes respectively.²²¹ One could also adduce in support of this argument Khlebnikov's 1914 essay 'Budetlianskii', in which he describes the Futurist's triumph over the established literary order as a bullfight:

O, bull of Aragon!

In 1913 we called a beautifully coloured bull out onto the sand, in 1915 his knees will shake as he falls to that same sand. And a great string of saliva (praise be to the victor) will flow from the shaking animal.

[...]

Goodbye, all you Mr Bulls!

The bullfighter raises his hat and leaves.

It is only we who have discovered that twentieth-century man, dragging a thousand-year old corpse (the past) [*vlacha tysiacheletnii trup (proshloe)*], is bent over like an ant dragging a beam. Only we have returned man his full height, having discarded the bundle of the past (the Tolstois, Homers and Pushkins) [*sbrosiv viazanku proshlogo (Tolstykh, Gomerov, Pushkinykh)*].²²² (VI, 226)

The connection between this essay, which itself alludes to *Poshchetchina*, and 'Odnokii litsedei' is reinforced by the invocation of 'Prorok', in which Khlebnikov ironically uses a hackneyed literary reference to articulate contemporary man's struggles under the burden of hackneyed literary references (in itself a self-reflexive example of realization of the metaphor).

A Symbol for War

Nevertheless, the idea that Pushkin-the-bull is a representative of the literary past does not necessarily explain the Minotaur aspects of the bull, such as the fact that it lives underground and devours innocent people. How can this be reconciled with Pushkin? In exploring this question, it is revealing to investigate at some length the complexity and ambivalence of Khlebnikov's engagement with Pushkin, his statue and cannons.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 212; see Harsha Ram, 'Velimir Khlebnikov's "Odnokii licedej"', *Die Welt der Slaven*, 46 (2001), 331-46 (p. 340).

²²² This essay is also notable for the fact that Khlebnikov locates Futurist iconoclasm within a tradition of revitalization of the canon: 'For now our development is proceeding like the artistic development of, for instance, Byron (everything on the model of the old).' Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI, 226. An interest in bull fighting was very prevalent in the art of the time, for instance in the work of Il'ia Mashkov.

Cooke suggests that in 'Odnokii litsedei' the literary past is inextricably linked with the bloody political past: 'Khlebnikov makes himself out to be a victor over both the traditional literary order represented by Pushkin and Akhmatova, and the social and political order that feeds on young lives.'²²³ He further notes that an original draft of the poem identified war as the means by which the bull devoured people: 'кроваво' replaced the original 'войною'.²²⁴ Such a view is replicated by Grigorii Amelin and Valentina Morderer, who relate the bull to Pushkin, the literary past and war, wondering 'why [...] Pushkin has been turned into a cannibalistic monster whose head must be cut off and held up to ridicule by all?'²²⁵ Their response to this rhetorical question exhibits considerable sympathy with my broader analysis of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin:

Pushkin has been transformed by the masses [*chern'iu*] from a living poet into a pig-iron blockhead, a dead idol on Tverskaia Street. He has been killed, Khlebnikov is sure, not by D'Anthès, but by idolizing and deaf posterity.²²⁶

The importance of the Pushkin statue as a mediating point in Futurist responses to Pushkin is undeniable (we recall the curly-haired statue in 'Ka2'), as is their enmity to unoriginal veneration. However, the Russian scholars err in trying to use the poem 'Tverskoi' (1914) to support their ensuing argument that the monument was implicated in the slaughter of the war. They suggest that in this poem Pushkin is connected with, even culpable for, the blood spilled in the war:

The monument, bent low and silent, sat on by birds, is a sort of strange necrophilic talisman. He can no longer save anyone, and his name is used to bless the death of other poets. Khlebnikov sips from the cup of death of his poetic kinsman and sets off to march for his freedom [...]. During the war the Pushkinian began to speak the language of a fratricidal symbol of belief.²²⁷

²²³ Cooke, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, p. 251.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203, n. 54.

²²⁵ G. G. Amelin and V. Ia. Morderer, "'Odnokii litsedei" Velimira Khlebnikova', in *Poeziia i zhivopis': Sbornik trudov pamiati N. I. Khardzhieva*, ed. by M. B. Meilakh and D. B. Sarab'ianov (Moscow: Iazyk russkoi kul'tury, 2000), pp. 426-30 (p. 428).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

This reading is compelling, but anachronistic. Although, as an avowed pacifist, Khlebnikov may here be lending his voice to someone else, there is no evidence that the bloodthirsty rhetoric is attributed either to Pushkin or his admirers:

Умолкнул Пушкин.
 О нем лишь в гробе говорят.
 Что ж! эти пушки
 Целуют новых песен ряд.
 Насестом птице быть привыкший!
 И лбом нахмуренным поникший!
 Его свинцовые плащи
 Вино плохое пулеметам?
 Из трупов, трав и крови щи
 Несем к губам, схватив полетом.
 Мы почерневший кровью нож
 Волной златою осушая,
 Сурово вытря о косы венюк,

 Несем на запад злобу зенюк,
 Туда в походе поспешая.
 В напиток я солону окунул,
 Лед смерти родича втянул. (I, 311)

Rather, Khlebnikov invokes the gleefully patriotic and macaronic rhymes of wartime propaganda (as practised by, for instance, Maiakovskii) in order to contrast it with Pushkin. He has fallen silent because he is no longer relevant, drowned out by the grisly music of war. The pun on 'Пушкин' / 'пушки' is made to point out that it is the cannons, not Pushkin, which composed these new tunes. His leaden capes (presumably a reference to the cape on the statue) are not suitable for machine guns, which prefer the lead of bullets. We recall a similar statement of obsolescence from Maiakovskii in 1914: 'Forget the war, Aleksandr Sergeevich, it's not your uncle.'²²⁸

The pun on *Pushkin/pushki* was widely used by Khlebnikov, as well as by Maiakovskii (in 'Radovat'sia rano') and Kruchenykh in *Pobeda nad solntsem*. In the case of the first it should be seen within the context of Khlebnikov's belief in cledonancy, that

²²⁸ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 307. See also Maiakovskii's 'Voina ob'iavlena': "Постойте, шашки о шелк котолок / вытрем, вытрем в бульварах Вены!" Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 65.

name is fate, in accordance with his belief in the iconicity of the sign.²²⁹ Pushkin's close association with *pushki* is, therefore, revealing. However, it is not necessarily negative. Hacker has shown how in Khlebnikov's texts written in Baku in 1921 it has a positive connotation.²³⁰ Khlebnikov uses puns to suggest certain incongruities in the future development of Azerbaijan as he sees it:

свобода [гос] выросла из лени
как песнь росла из пушки

Freedom (from government) will be the eventual result of both '*len*' (here, Hacker argues, in the sense of freedom from slavery) and from *Lenin's* intervention. This is compared to the fact that a song has grown both from *Pushkin* (who has, in Khlebnikov's view, sung of freedom in *Tsygany*) and from the cannon which has begun its martial song.

Moeller-Sally notes a similar connection between Pushkin, cannons and death in 'Voina v myshelovke' (1916):

Лютики выкрасим кровью руки,
Разбитой о бивни вселенной,
О морду вселенной.
И из Пушкина трупов кумирных
Пушек делаем сна.
От старцев глупых вещице юноши уйдут
И оснут мировое государство
Граждан одного возраста. (III, 184)

(Note that the new generation has prophetic powers.) The connection with cannons here is without doubt positive. The idol-corpses (monuments to Pushkin) will be melted down to make the cannons needed for the revolution of the young against the old—a potent

²²⁹ See Duganov's comments in his analysis of Khlebnikov's remarkable meditation on the names of Russian literature, 'O dostoevskii mo begushchei tuchi', Duganov, *Priroda tvorchestva*, p. 102: 'For the poet there is no other means of understanding and expressing the world, other than the word. For that reason, for the poetic consciousness the whole world is a word, a name (just as for an artist it is colour, for a musician sound and so on); all existence from the point of view of sense and expression is a different degree of semantic loading of the word.'

²³⁰ Hacker, 'To Pushkin, Freedom, and Revolution in Asia', p. 461.

metaphor for the appropriation of the rigid Pushkinian legacy by the revolutionary force of the Futurists.

However, in *Zangezi* Pushkin's cannons do seem to have a more sinister aspect:

Пушечной речью
 Потрясено Замоскворечье,
 Мина снарядам кудрями чугунными
 Кланялся низко
 Нижегородец Минин.
 Справлялись Мина именины,
 А рядом
 Самых красивых в Москве богородиц
 В глубинах часовен
 Хохот глушил гор Воробьевых.
 Это Пушкин, как волосы длинные,
 Эн отрубил
 И победителю песен их бросил.
 Мин победил.
 Он сам прочел Онегина железа и свинца
 В глухое ухо толп. Он сам взойдет на памятник.
 Через три в пятой дней
 Сделался снег ал.

[...]

Пушки, что спрятаны в Пушкине,
 Снимали покрывало Эн,
 Точно купаться вышли на улицу,
 Грубые, голые,
 У всех на виду. (III, 340-41)

In this passage Pushkin's life and work is intertwined with the brutal suppression of the uprising in Moscow in December during the 1905 Revolution by General Georgii Min, which is contrasted to the liberation of Moscow by Min's near namesake Minin. The cannons used to suppress the rebellion had been hiding both in Pushkin's namesake town Pushkin and within his name; their barrage is an 'Onegin of iron and steel'. Moreover, the fact that the crowds that receive this message are deaf recalls the uncomprehending crowd which Pushkin described in key poems such as 'Poet i tolpa'. (Although there is a twist here: the ear of the crowd now is deaf not only because they reject Min's unwelcome message, but because they have been deafened by cannon-fire.) Min will assume a place on a monument

recalling not only Pushkin's 'la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi', and his monument, but also the statue of Minin and Pozharskii on Red Square.

The association between Pushkin, Min and Minin is not straightforward. Min and Minin are contrasted as much as conflated: the patriotic hero of the Time of Troubles is historically identifiable with the rebels of Presnia because of his own humble origins. He suffers as they do under Min's onslaught. However, the 'iron curls' of his monument also recall the wavy hair of the Pushkin monument, and, perhaps, the head of the bull in 'Odnokii litsedei'. Moreover, the final pathetic scene of the bloodied snow recalls Lenskii's death in *Evgenii Onegin*, which has just been mentioned, and also Pushkin's own wintry death, which Khlebnikov previously described in similar terms in Zheverzheev's album: 'The killer of the living Pushkin, who turned the wintry ground crimson with his blood' (VI.ii, 84). Pushkin—or Pushkin and his statue—provide a prototype for both killer and victim.

The purpose of this long digression has been to show that Pushkin is never unambiguously treated as a symbol of war or violence by Khlebnikov, and therefore to shed doubt on arguments which cast him as the bull in 'Odnokii litsedei'. This does not mean, however, that the bull is not designed to be reminiscent of Pushkin in some way: it would be entirely fitting with what we have seen of the Futurist reception of Pushkin for sophisticated intertextuality to coexist with the violent expression of a desire to kill Pushkin. On a certain level, Khlebnikov finds a new setting for the Bloomian *agon* between poets, restaging it as a *corrida*; the poetic equivalent of the Freudian Oedipus complex is shifted across the Greek myth cycle from Thebes to Crete, with Laius being replaced by the Minotaur.

A Symbol for Determinism

There are, however, other compelling interpretations of the tauroctony which cast further light on the multiple personality of the poem's protagonist. Harsha Ram does not treat the

bull as a cipher for Pushkin (instead making an effective argument that the curly-headed bull here is equivalent to the snake-haired Gorgon), but still sees it as a representative of both war and the past: 'Insofar as linguistic innovation could be a transformative intervention in history, the Minotaur could readily represent both the logic of war and the inertia of the literary past.'²³¹ Ram goes further than other commentators in identifying the prototype for the lonely player's butchering of the bull—Khlebnikov's bold experiments with language. I would like to follow Ram in focusing not on the bull so much as the act of heroic triumph itself and its possible prototypes in Khlebnikov's poetic career. However, I cannot concur with his suggestion that Khlebnikov's intervention in history is linguistic: although Khlebnikov maintained an interest in linguistic experimentation to the end of his career (for instance in the language of the birds in *Zangezi*), he felt his true mission to be discovering the laws of time.

Khlebnikov often referred to his struggle to understand the hidden laws of time using the same sort of heroic tropes we find in 'Odinokii litsedei', and particularly the motif of the climactic battle with a monster. In a letter to his sister Vera from Baku, dated 2 January 1921, Khlebnikov described his forthcoming year of calculation:

It is time to break the spell of the serpent, something will be the hissing of the serpent kingdom. This year will be the year of the great final battle against the serpent.

Everything that is in my mind—black windows, the breath of the panting firewood as it hurries to become cinders—all this I am raising for my victory over the serpent.

Over this time I forged a spear for my fight against him—it is predicting the future: I have the equations of the stars, the equations of the voice, the equations of the mind, equations of birth and death. [...] I have titled the presentation *The Koran of Numbers*. (V.ii, 200)

²³¹ Ram, 'Velimir Chlebnikov's "Odinokii litsedej"', pp. 340-41. Ram's argument has much in its favour. He adduces as evidence the suggestively feminine pronoun 'она' (which represents 'голова' grammatically); the fact that two themes prominent here, blindness and beheading, are central to the Medusa myth and to Khlebnikov's similar use of the theme in the early long poem *Gibel' Atlantidy*. I will discuss Perseus below.

He had armed himself properly, but he had not yet defeated the beast: this problem would engage him over the next couple of years. We note that in this extract, just as in ‘Odinokii litsedei’, Khlebnikov fuses heroic imagery (here particularly that of St George and the Dragon) with the traditional prophetic pretensions of the Russian poet, and particularly the trope of the poet as Koranic prophet which entered Russian literature in Pushkin’s ‘Podrazhaniia Koranu’. It was in Baku that Khlebnikov claimed to make his crucial breakthrough in unlocking the secrets of time, shortly before writing this letter: ‘The pure laws of time were discovered by me <around 17. XII> 1920, when I lived in Baku, in the land of fire, in the tall building of the naval boarding house, along with Dobrokovskii’ (VI.ii, 9).

The location of this battle fits with the mountainous topography of ‘Odinokii litsedei’, with its allusions to the Caucasian topos in Russian poetry and references to Khlebnikov’s poems set in Persia such as *Truba Gul’-mully*. But why does the snake (the sinuous movement of which emblemizes the structure of history) become a bull? First, the lonely player’s enemy is sufficiently ambiguous to accommodate multiple animal familiars. Second, we note that Ram’s intuition that there is something serpentine about the bull’s head tallies with Khlebnikov’s description, in an essay on the laws of time, of the extinction of the dinosaurs and their replacement by men:

In that time the kingdoms of slippery serpents, covered in flashing scales, were replaced by the kingdoms of naked men in the soft covering of skin. Only the curls of the head [*kudry golovy*], like the wind of the centuries that have descended, remind us about the past. (VI.ii, 21)

(We remember that the curls of Kuchko’s beard also persisted through time.) It is not difficult to see how the myth of the Minotaur reproduces a similar narrative: the hero battles against the mute force of nature in order to free his people. Khlebnikov’s longstanding interest in the Minotaur myth, evident in ‘Ka2’ and elsewhere, prompted him, therefore, to change the identity of his intangible foe from a snake to a bull.

Seeing the defeat of the bull as a symbol for Khlebnikov's intellectual defeat of the laws of history fits neatly both within the Khlebnikovian myth of the heroic rational prophet sketched above, and within the internal logic of 'Odnokii litsedei': the reference to 'Prorok' invites us to expect that the poem will be about Khlebnikov's divinatory experiments and not linguistic innovation. This is not to say that the connections with Pushkin, and particularly with war, are invalid. Khlebnikov's superior form of prophecy, represented by killing the bull, makes obsolete the Pushkinian model of prophecy, an action which is also symbolized by the killing of the bull. The tauroctony also symbolizes the defeat of war by prophecy. Khlebnikov sees war as a natural by-product of the deterministic nature of history, and therefore it is quite natural for the two to be connected. He argues, in a brief essay called, tellingly, 'Odnochestvo', that the mathematics of fate lead to violent conflict, unless they can be overcome by calculation:

One and the same problem of the change of balance can be solved either by means of war, or by means of ink. The dead crowds (the numbers of war) are not necessary in the second case. (VI.ii, 44)

Acting, Action and Prophecy

The crowds of the dead of war described in 'Odnochestvo' recall the crowds which are in thrall to the murderous bull in 'Odnokii litsedei': 'Вот то курчавое чело, которому пылали раньше толпы!' Their fascination with the bull—recalling the crowds of young Athenians sacrificed to the Minotaur—could also allude to both the morbid spectacle of war, which inspires fanaticism as well as destroying those whom it attracts, in addition to Pushkin's popularity—the crowd which he spurned. The latter suggestion is supported by the way in

which the metaphor of burning recalls the way in which Pushkin's prophet set out figuratively to set fire to the hearts of men in 'Prorok'.²³²

Spectatorship

The idea of spectatorship is fundamental to the poem: the protagonists' victory over the bull is rendered futile by the fact that it is not observed by anyone. Spectatorship provides a point of contact between the different personae experimented with in the course of the poem—the prophet, the actor and the active hero. All three personae intertwine: the protagonist is introduced as a player, a maker of faces, but he also seems to act in a very different way—the decisive action of a hero. Furthermore, such heroic action is, as suggested above, a metaphor for Khlebnikov's heroic intellectual intervention in prophecy, unravelling the laws of time.

Khlebnikov often connects the figure of the bull with conflicts over the attention of the crowd. The roughly contemporaneous long poem *Truba Gul'-mully* describes a scene which is most likely the progenitor of the tauroctony in 'Odinokii litsedei'. The protagonist, 'the priest of flowers' (a name Khlebnikov acquired in Persia²³³) carries the head of a bull on his staff:

Бык чугунный на посох уселся пророка.
А на палке его стоял вол ночной,
А в глазах его огонь солнечный. (II, 300)

The dead bull returns a while later:

Мертвая голова быка у стены.
Быка несут на палках,
Полчаса назад еще живого.
И в полушариях черных
Блестает глазами толпа, как черепа,

²³² In 'Poet i tolpa', however, Pushkin shuns both the crowds which come to him for guidance and the Old Testament model of a pastoral prophet; instead he aligns himself with a classical prophet, the Sybil, by quoting her words from the *Aeneid* in his epigraph 'Procul este, profani'. Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 141.

²³³ Sofiia Starkina, *Velimir Khlebnikov: Korol' Vremeni: Biografiia* (St Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2005), p. 366.

В четки стуча. (II, 306)

As in 'Odnokii litsedei', the dead bull's head is hung up on a wall. (The bull is described as 'iron', perhaps strengthening claims for a link between the bull and the Pushkin statue.) In contrast to 'Odnokii litsedei', however, the priest figure making the sacrifice here is not alone: other participants also carry the bull on sticks and a crowd watches on. The religious aspect of their spectatorship is highlighted by the (presumably Islamic) prayer-beads the crowd click as they watch on.

The bull's relationship with spectatorship is more fully examined in '<Kusok>', a fragment which has been printed in two very different editions: the more recent *Sobranie sochinenii* edited by Rudolf Duganov and the *Sobranie sochinenii*, edited by Tynianov and Stepanov, and republished by Markov in Munich in 1968-72. The latter redaction is the subject of an exhaustive analysis by Jerzy Faryno (although, strangely, Faryno does not mention any possible link between this poem and 'Odnokii litsedei'). Although this poem does not feature the death of the bull, we can infer from some of the final lines that such a death would probably have been included in a final version: 'Перед смертью знакомый жадно вбирает почет. / Чу, нож блеснул в руке палача!'²³⁴ As Faryno demonstrates, the poem depicts the opening stages of a bullfight in which an old nag is sent out to be killed by the bull—a bloodthirsty spectacle intended to make the toreadors' achievements seem more impressive. The action is very explicit, centring on the horse's guts becoming wound around the bull's horns and revealing their contents. The spectacle is watched attentively by a crowd whose cultic voyeurism Khlebnikov describes with disdain:

И когда тянулись, как столетья, миги вонзаемых в мясо ходящее
 Бык был бог, люди богомольцами.
 И пиявками у трупа женщины молодой,
 Молодой и белой и бледной,
 Морскими щупальцами тянулись к коню слепому и бедному –
 Храма тысячеокого очи,

²³⁴ V. V. Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Iu. Tynianov and N. Stepanov (Munich: Fink, 1968-71), II, 218-23 (p. 223).

Бык пятился прочь, бык конский живот на рогах волочит.
И толпа тысяч и тысяч сосала
Щупальцами и жалами зрелище.²³⁵

The crowd watching the slaughter are compared to pagan worshippers, recalling both the religious setting of *Truba Gul'-mully* and the biblical motif of the Golden Calf, the epitome of misguided attention, which surely informs Khlebnikov's bull imagery. Moreover, Khlebnikov's disgust at the crowd watching the dying horse recalls a fairly common topos in Russian literature: one remembers the dead horse in Raskol'nikov's dream in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* and Maiakovskii's 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshad'iam'. This motif also appears in 'Ka2' during Khlebnikov's conversation by the Pushkin statue.

In contrast to the voracious gaze of the crowd and the bull, whose eyes are also frequently mentioned, the old horse is repeatedly described as blind. Faryno uses some fairly tenuous logic to demonstrate that this horse is a representative of Khlebnikov and his prophetic abilities.²³⁶ While this identification is not certain, it is beyond dispute that Khlebnikov sympathizes with the horse; perhaps, therefore, his own victory over the bull in 'Odinokii litsedei' can be seen as an act of revenge for the bull's brutality. Moreover, if we accept that the victory over the bull symbolizes Khlebnikov's victory over determinism, the blind horse could perhaps be seen as a representative of those who are blind to the laws of history which Khlebnikov can see. In a dichotomy typical of the poet-prophet's ambiguous relationship with the crowd, the people play the role both of the blind, benighted horse and the voyeuristic crowd: people relish the spectacle of the effects of determinism (that is, war) but are blind to its causes and effects. Khlebnikov depicts this blindness in 'Odinochestvo', describing humanity walking blindly through time, unable to see the pitfalls of history:

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 220.

²³⁶ Jerzy Faryno, "'Kusok" Khlebnikova (opyt interpretatsii)', *Dissertationes Slavicae. Sectio historiae litterarum*, 19 (1988), 125-51 (p. 136).

I thought: a blind man recognizes a pit [*iama*] when he has fallen into it (a rough measuring of the pit). But one endowed with eyes sees it and wisely walks around it. I was thinking that it would be quite useful to find something like galoshes for the puddles of fate and waterproofs from the slanting raindrops for the downpour of fate. Man, build yourself a home! I thought when such a device is discovered, there will be nothing for states to do. War is a rough way of measuring holes. Predicting the future is a subtle, elegant solution to the equations of time. (VI.ii, 42-43)

Khlebnikov also imagines himself as a prophet leading the blinded masses with his calculations in his utopian poem *Ladomir*:

И в чертежах прочту судьбы я,
 Как блещут алые зарницы.
 Вам войны выклевали очи,
 Идите смутные слепцы,
 Таких просите полномочий,
 Чтоб дико радовались отцы.
 Я видел поезда слепцов,
 К родным протянутые руки,
 Дела купцов - всегда скупцов -
 Пророка грязного поруки. (III, 239)

The Blind Leading the Blind

In common with other strands of metaphor in 'Odnokii litsedei', the imagery of blindness is related to Biblical sources, in this case Matthew 15:14, in which Jesus decries the Pharisees: 'Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.' (The word '*iama*' is used in both the Russian Synodal Version and 'Odnochestvo'.) However, in 'Odnokii litsedei' Khlebnikov also describes himself as blind ('Слепой я шел'), recalling the metaphorical blindness of Pushkin's prophet before the Seraph opens his eyes: is this not a case of the blind leading the blind? However, the *litsedei's* blindness is ambiguous, not least because blindness is a typical attribute of the classical prophet and sign of his superior inner sight. Furthermore, the title of the poem conceals a suggestion that Khlebnikov does have superior vision: to committed paronomasiasts like the Futurists the adjective 'одинокий' and the noun 'одиночество' suggested the meaning 'one-eyed' (from '*oko*', an eye). Khlebnikov regularly punned on this word, for example in his short

story ‘Okо: Orochonskaia povest’ in which ‘oko’ is both ‘an eye’ and a native Oroch word for breast (V, 93-95, 403).²³⁷ ‘Одинокий’ is used in an ocular context in ‘Burliuk’, a short poem about David Burliuk, who had only one eye, written in roughly the same period as ‘Odinokii litsedei’:

Силу большую тебе придавал
Глаз одинокий. (II, 233)

In his notebook (the *Zapisnaia knizhka* collated by Kruchenykh in 1925), Khlebnikov writes in his comments on the *Sbornik novoi literatury*: ‘я бедный воин, я одинок’.²³⁸ When one learns that the original title of ‘Odinokii litsedei’ was ‘Bednyi litsedei’, this self-description seems particularly close to the later poem.²³⁹ However, the earliest use of this pun in Futurist writing is from Maiakovskii’s 1913 poem ‘Neskol’ko slov obo mne samom’:

Время!
Хоть ты, хромой богомаз,
лик намалюй мой
в божницу уродца века!
Я одинок, как последний глаз
у идущего к слепым человека!²⁴⁰

Maiakovskii’s description of his poetic mission, and his opposition to the forces of determinism and linear time, closely foreshadows Khlebnikov’s in ‘Odinokii litsedei’: while the poet may be impaired, he is still in better condition than the people. Maiakovskii echoes the old saw that in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king in order to

²³⁷ Robin Milner-Gulland has noted the importance of the word *oko* in this passage and in Khlebnikov’s semantics in general. See Robin Milner-Gulland, ‘Khlebnikov’s eye’, in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 197-220. One might add a further semantic layer to Milner-Gulland’s analysis: *Truba Gul’-mully* begins with the cry: ‘Ок! / Ок! / Это горный пророк!’ Khlebnikov, *SS*, III, 299. As Duganov explains in his notes, ‘ok’ means ‘truth’ in Arabic; here Khlebnikov seems to use it to suggest an alternative etymology for the word *prorok*, emphasizing the link between prophecy and truth. The question of truth is also central to ‘Odinokii litsedei’: the protagonist is described as a ‘воин истины’ (a warrior of truth). See Khlebnikov, *SS*, II, 485.

²³⁸ *Zapisnaia knizhka Velimira Khlebnikova*, ed. by A. Kruchenykh (Moscow: Izdanie vserossiiskogo soiuza, 1925), p. 16.

²³⁹ See Velimir Khlebnikov, *Tvoreniia*, ed. by V. P. Grigor’ev and A. E. Parnis (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1986), p. 675.

²⁴⁰ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 48.

suggest a hierarchy of perspicacity in which the Futurists have a gift of vision which sets them apart from the rest—a further point of contact with the Romantic poet-prophet motif.²⁴¹

Khlebnikov's prophetic mission is to share his gift of vision with the crowd. In this respect *Truba Gul'-mully* seems to be more optimistic than 'Odinokii litsedei' because there are witnesses to the defeat of the bull: we can perhaps see here the impact of Khlebnikov's failure to find recognition for his theories on his return to Moscow.²⁴² Prior to this Khlebnikov is more optimistic about the prospects for his proselytizing. In 'Ka2' he describes his mission to share his insights with the masses in terms of an actor and audience. His language exactly foreshadows 'Odinokii litsedei': "“Fine,” I thought, “now I am a lonely player [*odinokii litsedei*], and all the rest are spectators. But there will be a time when I will be the only spectator, and you will be players”" (V, 154). An alternative telling of this story has also survived in Petrovskii's transcription of Khlebnikov's manuscript and is given the title 'Zakon mnozhestv tsaril...' (1916) in the latest collected works. In it Khlebnikov suggests that the transformation of spectators into actors will come about thanks to the imposition of the narrator's will: 'I will subordinate these endless crowds of the city to my will' (V, 360). This statement of power over the crowds is notably more self-confident than the somewhat forlorn sower of eyes in 'Odinokii litsedei', who can only hope to provide people with the means to gain new insight. In 'Ka2' Khlebnikov expects that the spectators of his performance will in time become actors: in a typically avant-garde

²⁴¹ This hierarchy between the perspicacity of the poet and the blindness of the crowds was popular amongst theoreticians of the avant-garde. Compare Mikhail Matiushin's description of the role of the artist in society: 'Artists have always been knights, poets and prophets of space in all areas. Sacrificing to everyone, perishing, they have opened eyes and taught the crowd to see the great beauty of the world which was hidden from it.' Quoted and translated in L. D. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 368. Matiushin's metaphors are strikingly similar to Khlebnikov's. This imagery appears elsewhere in Khlebnikov's work. For instance, in *Deti vydry*, his tale of the feats of Promethean supermen, the loneliness that the heroes' abilities confer is described as follows: 'O, бедствие нам—одиноким и зрячим / Столбам на полях слепоты.' Khlebnikov, *SS*, V, 263. The heroes, who could perhaps profitably be compared to Khlebnikov's avant-garde colleagues, are alone in being able to see; they are solitary, like stylites in the desert.

²⁴² Starkina, *Korol' Vremeni*, p. 384.

fashion the boundary between his own creation and the lives of the masses will be broken down. Their lives too will be transformed into acts of creation.

The player of 'Ka2', like the lonely player of 'Odinokii litsedei', is acting according to a predetermined script, formed by pre-existing mythic archetypes. One of these is the Theseus myth, in which the heroic young man rescues his people by defeating a bull. In 'Ka2' in 1916 Khlebnikov foreshadows his identification with Theseus and looks forward to a recreation of the Minotaur myth: 'In those days I sought in vain for an Ariadne and a Minos, intending to play out one of the stories of the Greeks in the 20th century' (V, 157). Khlebnikov had already likened himself to Theseus in 'Priznanie', in which he describes a hat knitted for him by his host, and object of his affection, Vera Budberg: 'Я рад, что он из ниток, как Тезей' (I, 338).

The notion of replaying a previous narrative clearly has parallels with Khlebnikov's views on the return of archetypes, including events and narratives, within history. In 1916 Khlebnikov collaborated on a talk with Dmitrii Petrovskii, his host during the writing of 'Ka2', which just precedes it: it was entitled 'Chugunnye kryl'ia', and in it Khlebnikov was to discuss the use of his theories of time as a means to prevent war.²⁴³ (He was eventually forbidden from doing so by his superior officers—he had recently been drafted.) One of the points advertized on the poster for the talk was: 'The Future of Futurism as the Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.'²⁴⁴ Theseus and the Minotaur, like *Ruslan i Liudmila*, provided a prototype for the future development of Futurism: in both the Futurists were to become heroes who would slay a mythic enemy—Chernomor, the Minotaur or the bull.

For Khlebnikov, the Futurist hero acts in two senses of the word, both playing through existing narratives and, in so doing, providing the liberating action needed to free his people from oppression. What is more, this active actor is a cipher for the prophet,

²⁴³ See D. Petrovskii, *Vospominaniia o Velemire Khlebnikove* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1926). Available at <http://hlebnikov.lit-info.ru/hlebnikov/vospominaniya/petrovskij.htm>. Accessed on 11/08/2012.

²⁴⁴ The poster is reproduced at: <http://www.hlebnikov.ru/biography/1916/6.htm>. Accessed on 11/08/2012.

whose ability to free people from the tyranny of the deterministic laws of history is founded on the fact that he realizes that events in the present are rehearsals of those that have come before. The means by which Khlebnikov fights against the hegemony of fate is conditioned by its effects—recurring narratives.

Costume Dramas

The notion that the protagonist is rehearsing literary or mythological archetypes is alluded to in the poem itself through the description of the actor's costume: 'Как в сонный плащ вечерний странник'. The specific words used to describe his journey through the desert recall Pushkin's poem 'Strannik' (1835), which is central to that tradition of the poet as a wanderer that Khlebnikov made literal in his life. More importantly, the cloak that the *litsedei* is wearing is used by Khlebnikov as a sign of the theatricalization of life—a marker of the fact that the wearer has donned the cloak to play a new role. In 'Ka2' Pushkin wears Gogol's cloak, described in language similar to that of 'Odinokii litsedei': 'Meanwhile even the black writer had wrapped himself in Gogol's cloak [*zakutalsia v plashch Gogolia*]' (V, 164).²⁴⁵ In the same year, Khlebnikov uses the cloak as an indicator of transformed identity when he describes a Futurist as 'Pushkin in the cloak of the new century' (VI.ii, 84). A cloak is also worn by the 'youth of the earth's globe' in one of the prose pieces written alongside 'Ka2',²⁴⁶ and by the eponymous poet, closely identified with Khlebnikov, in his superb 1919 poem 'Poet'. Lönnqvist accurately suggests that here the cloak bears connotations of Romanticism.²⁴⁷ I would go further to suggest that the cloak as a symbol for life as an act of

²⁴⁵ My emphasis.

²⁴⁶ This fragment is collected separately from 'Ka2' by Duganov under the title 'la opiat' shel po zheltym dorogam', but he does describe it as one of two pieces 'related to this narrative construction'. Khlebnikov, *SS*, V, 481. It largely repeats the action of 'Ka2'.

²⁴⁷ Barbara Lönnqvist, *Khlebnikov and Carnival: An Analysis of the Poem 'Poët'* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1979), p. 109. This poem contains important references to Pushkin and imitations of Pushkinian style. See V. P. Grigor'ev, 'Khlebnikov i Pushkin', in *Pushkin i poeticheskii iazyk XX veka*, pp. 132-51 (pp. 136-37).

literary-inflected performance can be traced, in the Russian context, to the description of Evgenii in *Evgenii Onegin* as ‘Москвич в Гарольдовом плаще’.²⁴⁸ The cloak is the attribute of those for whom dress is a deliberately literary construction of self, in this case in homage to Byron’s Romantic hero. For Khlebnikov, the cloak is a signal of the outward transformation of an eternal principle, and thus is a key expression of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin in general.²⁴⁹

The notion that the present is a theatricalized rerunning of previous events was very common in the Silver Age. It was a commonplace of the era to see life theatrically, as the creative construction of a drama. Such ideas were particularly espoused in the Futurists’ circles by their sometime mentor Nikolai Evreinov.²⁵⁰ This creative approach to life can be seen as a subset of the *zhiznetvorchestvo* which enjoyed favour among all factions in the Silver Age; here the ‘creativity’ to be applied to life is seen through the narrower prism of theatre.²⁵¹ As Irina Paperno has demonstrated, the culture-saturated Russians of the Silver Age were preoccupied with the idea of their age as a reworking (indeed, a rehearsal) of the Golden Age and thus self-consciously played through their lives as if according to this script.²⁵² Moreover, in the Silver Age such theatricality was influenced

²⁴⁸ Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 149.

²⁴⁹ Khlebnikov uses clothing as a metaphorical representative of the way that external aspects change, while the internal essence is unchanging, for instance in ‘Chisla’, where the numbers which underpin everything in the universe dress up as animals: ‘И вы мне видите одетыми в звери, в их шкурах’. Khlebnikov, *SS*, I, 102.

²⁵⁰ For the influence of Evreinov on the Futurists, and Khlebnikov in particular, see Tamara Boikova-Poggi, ‘La théâtralité chez Evreinov et les futuristes russes’, *Revue des Études Slaves*, 53 (1981), 47-57.

²⁵¹ A concise expression of the essence of *zhiznetvorchestvo* is given by Irina Paperno: ‘Art was proclaimed to be a force capable of, and destined for, the “creation of life” (*tvorchestvo zhizni*), while “life” was viewed as an object of artistic creation or as a creative act. In this sense, art turned into “real life” and “life” turned into art; they became one.’ Irina Paperno, ‘Introduction’, in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*, ed. by Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 3-11 (p. 3).

²⁵² See Irina Paperno, ‘Pushkin v zhizni cheloveka Serebriannogo veka’, in *Cultural Mythologies*, pp. 19-51, and Barbara Henry, ‘Theatricality, anti-theatricality and cabaret in Russian Modernism’, in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 149-71.

by the popularity of theories of either cyclical time or simultaneous time, creating the impression that the Silver Age was in a way a theatrical performance of the Golden Age.

The question of theatricality challenges the scholar's usual rejection of the biographical fallacy, the notion that poetical personae necessarily relate to aspects of lived reality. After Khlebnikov's death, Tynianov, with his typically Formalist concern for the primacy of text, observed as early as 1924 that 'Khlebnikov is now threatened by [...] his own biography. A biography which is unusually canonical.'²⁵³ The danger of allowing a biography which conforms to certain Romantic tropes to force a specifically Romantic or tendentious reading of the poetry is very real. However, there is no clear distinction between the protagonist of this biography (no 'real' identity) and the constructed poetic identity formed by the poems because the poet's life is also in quasi-intertextual communion with his predecessors' mythology and with his own poems. Viktor Turbin has argued that Khlebnikov made literal the metaphorical poetic identities created by Pushkin: 'where we only admire Pushkin's thoughts, Khlebnikov acted';²⁵⁴ 'he was a thought-through and conscious incarnation of the word of Pushkin'.²⁵⁵ For instance, Khlebnikov himself had actually lived through many of the tropes attached to the myth of the prophet-poet, such as wandering close to death through the desert, as he had done in Persia in 1921. This self-consciously theatrical-biographical 'I' is a further interlocutor in a dialogue between different poetic selves—the protagonist of the poems, the lyrical ego and the chimeric 'real' self—and the primary medium for the expression and dissemination of this complex identity. This is especially true in Khlebnikov's late poems, which introduce a more prominent and reflective lyric persona, producing, in Ronald Vroon's words, 'a group of

²⁵³ Iu. N. Tynianov, 'Promezhutok', in *Poetika: Iskusstvo: Kino*, ed. B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 168-95 (p. 180). Tynianov, writing in the year of the Pushkin Jubilee, identifies Pushkin as a classic example of the dangers of the cult of the poet obscuring the poetry. Nevertheless, Khlebnikov quickly became mythologized: in the late 1920s Pasternak expressed the worry that Mandel'shtam was becoming a 'new Khlebnikov'. See Freidin, *Coat of Many Colours*, p. 7.

²⁵⁴ V. N. Turbin, 'Svobodnyi um: Obraz avtora v poezii Velimira Khlebnikova', in V. N. Turbin, *Nezadolgo do vodoleia: Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Radiks, 1994), pp. 229-61 (p. 245).

²⁵⁵ Turbin, 'Khlebnikov i Pushkin', p. 161.

texts that seriously compromise the reader's ability to read fictively'.²⁵⁶ The answer to the problem, therefore, is not to read either 'fictively' or 'factually', producing a false dichotomy between biography and textual self-construction, but to examine how the poems articulate the interplay of identities.

Khlebnikov's version of the role of the prophet, both in his life and in his poetry, is typical of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkinian mythology, not only in its creative transformation and revivification of the source material, but also in the way he makes Pushkin's metaphorical prophet real, emphasizing the fact that his mission is literally to foresee the future awaiting Russia, as well as embodying the other functions accreted to the role of prophet. Such self-conscious transformation in the direction of lived reality—turning a metaphor into an action—represents a biographical variation on the Futurist emphasis on the self-oriented word at the expense of the symbol: flesh and blood (and maths) have priority over the ethereal and intangible. This same tendency dominates in the appropriation of Pushkinian mythology—the boundaries of metaphor are constantly pushed in the direction of the literal. (This will be made clear in the discussion of Maiakovskii and the monument in the next chapter.) Futurist theatricality actually makes things less theatrical and more real.

We recall that in the note in Zheverzheev's album Khlebnikov does not depict the Futurists as actors but as the product of the acting of others: Pushkin dons the mask of the present to become a Futurist. The effect is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Futurists are not subordinate to Pushkin, performing a theatrical homage to him—it is more like the other way round; on the other hand, Futurism becomes another pose, something superficial, while Pushkin seems to stand for something essential. The theatricality of Pushkin and his age—symbolized by the cloak—shows that Pushkin and his contemporaries

²⁵⁶ Ronald Vroon, 'The Poet and His Voices', in *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, trans. by Paul Schmidt, ed. by Charlotte Douglas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987-89), III, 1-22 (p. 6).

were also engaged in this sort of role-playing. The Golden Age was itself intensely theatrical: as Lotman observes in a classic article, ‘In the early nineteenth century the border between art and the real life behaviour of spectators was destroyed. The theatre invaded life, actively restructuring the real life behaviour of people.’²⁵⁷ Pushkin himself is another actor performing roles which predate him, occupying the same position as the Futurists as a reworker of myths. The Golden Age was not a reality which is now recreated in performance, but was itself a performance—a self-conscious playing of eternal roles in accordance with the norms of the age. We shall see how this historicized, theatricalized Pushkin is articulated in ‘Odnokii litsedei’ by means of intertextuality.

Although it is founded on the same principles of helical time which Khlebnikov the prophet exposes in order eventually to undo, being an actor does, in a broader historical sense, offer some respite from the pressures of determinism. Although there is a script, the actor is aware that there is a script and is therefore in a position to manipulate it and impose his own creative agency on fate. Lotman remarks on the emancipatory effect of theatricality:

Precisely because theatrical life differs from the everyday [*byt*], looking at life as a spectacle gave people new possibilities for behaviour. Everyday life, compared to theatrical life, appeared motionless: events, occurrences in it either did not occur at all, or were rare exceptions from the norm. [...]The [theatrical] person was not a passive participant in the faceless current of passing time: freed from everyday life, he led the existence of a historical figure—he himself chose his type of behaviour, actively affected the world around him, perished or achieved success.²⁵⁸

The reaction against *byt*, most commonly associated with Maiakovskii, also motivated Khlebnikov’s life. For the Futurists *byt* represents stasis—both the tedium of everyday existence (hence Maiakovskii’s hatred for the ubiquitous sun) and the limiting influence of universal, transhistorical archetypes. Theatricality is a way of taking control of both by transforming them into expressions of the ephemeral present.

²⁵⁷ Iu. M. Lotman, ‘Teatr i teatralnost’ v stroe kul’tury nachala XIX veka’, in *Izbrannye stat’i v trekh tomakh* (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1992-93), I, 269-86 (p. 272).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

However, this weapon against *byt* is not sufficiently powerful to enact the complete artistic and ontological break with determinism desired by Khlebnikov. Such a utopian rupture requires a more active intervention on the part of the heroic prophet. As a proponent of structurally similar ethos might present it: it is not enough to interpret the world, the point is to change it. For this to happen, theatre must be transformed into ritual.

Poetry, Theatre and Ritual

Such an understanding of the interaction of life and theatre seems to be influenced by the theories of Khlebnikov's one-time mentor Viacheslav Ivanov. The link between Ivanov and Khlebnikov's conceptualization of his life as drama is supported by the fact that in 'Ka2', immediately prior to announcing his desire to re-enact the story of Ariadne and Minos, Khlebnikov describes going to visit Ivanov, who 'reads a vague prophecy and afterwards looks up attentively' (V, 157). The Cretan connection suggested by the Theseus myth is particularly significant. Building on the example of Richard Wagner and of Nietzsche's theories of tragedy and its origins in Greek religion, Ivanov imagined drama as an inclusive, transformative force which could replace religion as a means to unite people towards a common purpose:

And the more passionately we call for this coming, long-awaited theatre, the more significant and inexorable does its historical task seem to us to be – to forge a link between the 'Poet' and the 'Mob', and to unite the crowd with the artist, who has been estranged from it by internal necessity, in one communal celebration and ministration.²⁵⁹

The same desire to unite the artist with the masses is evident in both 'Ka2' and 'Odnokii litsedei'. What is more, Ivanov traces the unifying power of Greek tragedy and, therefore, European drama, back to the ritual of killing of bulls in Crete:

²⁵⁹ Viacheslav Ivanov, 'Novye maski', *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by D. B. Ivanov and O. Deshart (Brussels: Foyer International Chrétien, 1971-87), II, 76-82 (p. 77). It is interesting to note that Ivanov uses Pushkin as a template for understanding this discussion.

Where did the drama of mysteries itself come from? There is no doubt, in any case, that it existed by itself and was older than the tragic structure. It is even likely that it goes back to pre-hellene times. Buildings [...] found in the Cretan palaces of Knossos and Phaistos were interpreted by Evans as the remains of theatres. If that is the case, it is scarcely possible to imagine some spectacle on the Minoan stage other than a sacral act—perhaps, something protobucolic and focused on sending prisoners as sacrifices to the bull and pursuing and killing the bull-god.²⁶⁰

The Cretan ritual bull-killing often takes the form of the ritual cutting off of the head.²⁶¹

Thus by killing the bull and displaying its head to the world the *litsedei* is returning drama to its sacral origins and the promise of a world-changing ritual.

Such revivification (and invention) of archaic Greek rituals owes a great deal to Nietzsche: there is not space here to explore the full interaction between Ivanov and Nietzsche, and the manifold interactions between bulls, Dionysus and drama in their readings of Greek drama. However, what unites them with Khlebnikov is a belief that drama as ritual has the potential to transform the world.

Khlebnikov's knowledge of Nietzsche is evident without being explicit. However, there can be little doubt that the eponymous prophet-hero of his great late poem *Zangezi* alludes to Nietzsche's Zarathustra.²⁶² Khlebnikov's relationship with Nietzsche's version of Zoroaster was certainly influenced by his exposure to the original religious mythology of Zoroastrianism, and his identification with this prophetic wise man is multi-lateral, encompassing both Zoroaster and Zarathustra. Persian religion provides another context for ritual bull-killing and its eschatological function. Petr Tartakovskii has shown that Khlebnikov's poems written in Persia demonstrate a deep interest in Zoroastrian religious

²⁶⁰ Viacheslav Ivanov, 'Dionis i pradionisiistvo: Fragmenty iz knigi', in *Eskhil: Tragedii: V perevode Viacheslava Ivanova*, ed. by N. I. Balashov, D. V. Ivanov, M. L. Gasparov, G. Ch. Guseinov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), pp. 351-453 (p. 411).

²⁶¹ See Philip Westbroek, *Dionis i dionisiiskaia tragediia: Viacheslav Ivanov: Filologicheskie idei o Dionisiistve* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2009), p. 54. Westbroek suggests that this ritual decapitation underlies the story of Orpheus being torn apart and his head disembodied, which still sings as it floats down the river. This legend then forms a crucial part of the mythology of the poet, one which perhaps reemerges in other disembodied talking heads, such as that in *Ruslan i Liudmila*.

²⁶² See Henryk Baran, 'Khlebnikov and Nietzsche: Pieces of an Incomplete Mosaic', in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*, pp. 58-83.

lore.²⁶³ While the areas of Persia visited by Khlebnikov were not strongholds of this pre-Islamic religion, Khlebnikov's interest in this subject, first kindled at university in Kazan', was likely to be reignited by his journey south. In Zoroastrianism bull sacrifices are believed to re-enact the slaughter of the Primal Bull, the first creature created by Ohrmazd, the Zoroastrian deity, by the force of evil, Ahriman—an act which produced all the plant life on the earth.²⁶⁴ Similarly, in the (albeit tenuously) related mythology of Mithraism the killing of the bull by Mithras helps to create the universe. The most closely corresponding instance of tauroctony is, however, one of the key moments in the eschatology of Zoroastrianism which Khlebnikov would have been familiar with from the *Avesta*. In order to bring an end to evil (and hence to the dualistic struggle between good and evil) and to usher in a permanent utopian state (*Frashkart*) the redeemer-hero Saoshyans must perform the ritual immolation of the bull Hadhayans.²⁶⁵ From the bull's fat a drink is made which confers immortality on all mankind. Tartakovskii argues that the binary nature of the Zoroastrian mythos as a whole appealed to Khlebnikov because he believed that 'the revolution [...] is that very same world of Justice and Goodness which was predicted by Zarathustra and Mazdak'.²⁶⁶ He reminds us that Khlebnikov's poetry (particularly *Azy iz uzy* and *Ladomir*) shows a strong causal link between revolution in the East and the establishment of a time of utopian peace, like *Frashkart*. However, while Khlebnikov certainly saw the Revolution in such eschatological terms, he clearly believes that his own research into the nature of time is more important than the Revolution in hastening the beginning of ahistorical utopia. The creation of such a utopia is dependent on the general acceptance of the laws of time

²⁶³ P. I. Tartakovskii, *Poeziia Khlebnikova i vostok: 1917-1922* (Tashkent: Fan, 1992). Online version available at: http://www.ka2.ru/nauka/tar_1917_4.html. Accessed on 25/8/11.

²⁶⁴ R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (London: Sheldon, 1956), p. 128.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140: 'Thus the final Resurrection, the *Frashkart* or "Rehabilitation," is not so much a final judgment as a time when all things shall be restored and all will once again be very good.'

²⁶⁶ Tartakovskii, *Poeziia Khlebnikova i vostok*. Available at http://www.ka2.ru/nauka/tar_1917_4.html. Paragraph 16.

discovered by Khlebnikov, because this will free mankind from the necessity of wars and states (both of which Khlebnikov abhors).

Although Khlebnikov locates his eschatological intervention in a Zoroastrian context, he builds on Ivanov's understanding of drama as a potentially messianic form and, consequently, relates his mission to a conflation of the poet's roles as actor and messiah. In this he anticipates Boris Pasternak's 'Gamlet', which, as Milner-Gulland has observed, has considerable similarities to Khlebnikov's poem.²⁶⁷ Unlike Khlebnikov's protagonist, Pasternak's actor has found an audience: 'На меня наставлен, сумрак ночи / Тысячью биноклей на оси.' Furthermore, Pasternak's protagonist rejects his messianic calling, albeit in a way which underlines his similarity to Jesus, quoting his words ('Если только можно, авва отче / Чашу эту мимо пронеси').²⁶⁸

In 'Odnokii litsedei' the element which unites acting and prophecy is one that remains a prerequisite for the success of messianic intervention: a receptive audience. In Khlebnikov's poem the ritual slaughter of the bull does not produce utopia because this miracle depends on an audience of believers to work its theurgic magic. Khlebnikov problematizes Silver Age theatricality: what can *zhiznetvorchestvo* achieve if it is performed only for insiders? As a representative of the avant-garde, he wants art to enter into the lives of the people. Similarly, how can a prophet change the world if nobody listens to him? Without an audience of believers, the killing of the bull is a failure and mankind remains trapped within a deterministic model of history conditioned by the return of archetypal situations and personae.

²⁶⁷ Robin Milner-Gulland, 'A Poem and Its Versions', in *The Arts in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Fiona Björling*, ed. by Johanna Lindbladh, Terho Paulsson, Karin Sarsenov, Miloslava Slavickova, and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Lund: Lund University Press, 2009), p. 169. I am grateful to Robert Chandler for drawing my attention to this article.

²⁶⁸ Boris Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii s prilozheniami*, ed. by D.V. Tevekelian (Moscow: Slovo, 2003-05), IV, 515.

The Prison House of History

‘Odinokii litsedei’ not only describes this failed break with history but also enacts it, in its internal structure and in the model of intertextuality it suggests. In both instances Khlebnikov suggests a world which is characterized by parallelisms—congruities across history—a poetic embodiment of his belief in the connection between historical events.

The temporal structure of the poem itself expresses this, since a number of clauses are linked paratactically, either by words expressing simultaneous action (‘пока, ’между тем’, ‘разматывая’, ‘шагая’) or by simile markers (‘Как сонный труп’, ‘Как в сонный плащ вечерний странник’, ‘Как воин истины’). The central protagonist is only described through similes and has no other characterization. This is the poetic realization of his description as an actor: as Moeller-Sally has argued, in the course of the poem the protagonist, the ‘лицедей’, literally the maker of faces, tries on a number of masks. There is no baseline of action which can ground either these various simultaneous actions or metaphors—they are all contingent on each other. Lack of grounding is felt even more strongly because the poem starts with a conjunction ‘and’, suggesting it is part of a wider story to which we do not have access (but which we infer to be the grander epic of Khlebnikov’s life). The same simultaneity is expressed on a grammatical level: all the verbs are in the imperfective, until the player makes his decisive intervention in history by killing the bull – for which he uses the perfective (‘И бычью голову я снял с могучих мяс и кости / И у стены поставил’). As Faryno argues, this decisive action is accompanied by an escalation in the power attributed to the masks donned by the actor: in the anaphoric tricolon of similes he comes to life, like Pushkin’s prophet, going from ‘a corpse’ to ‘in a dream’ to finally, after the ritual slaughter, ‘a warrior’.²⁶⁹ This triumphant puissance

²⁶⁹ Jerzy Faryno, ‘Как пророк Pushkina sdelaia litsedeem Khlebnikova’, *Studia Russica*, 12 (1988), 38-74 (p. 54).

presages a section characterized by perfective verbs: 'потрясал' and the emphatic 'понял' when the protagonist suddenly realizes the failure of his heroic endeavour. These perfectives, and especially the last one, which is also marked typographically and metrically, subvert what has come before, contrasting sharply with the dreamlike accumulation of clauses above. Both killing and realizing are decisive actions which will, eventually, lead to breaking the spell of simultaneity. The failure of action prompts (consecutively) the new realization which points the way forward to a solution—sowing eyes.

Similarly, the way Khlebnikov uses and presents intertexts in this poem suggests a structure of parallel instances, challenging any idea of a transcendental origin for motifs, in accordance with the mythological approach to intertextuality that I see as typical of the Futurist reception of Pushkin. These intertexts are used to help form Khlebnikov's self-identity as a heroic but frustrated prophet. However, the way that they are presented polemicalizes with the idea of literary tradition as a sequential, genetic phenomenon and, as such, enacts Khlebnikov's notion of history as the constant exchange of masks. I shall examine three such intertextual fields: the classical hero, the prophet of freedom, and the frustrated prophet.

Greek Heroes

The first analogy—that between the player and the classical hero—applies the mythopoeic approach to identity construction to the myths of antiquity. Khlebnikov likens his actions to those of three mythological heroes: Theseus, Perseus and Jason. The similarities with Theseus (discussed above) are the most obvious. The sowing of body parts, in this case eyes, also recalls the mythological motif of the sowing of dragon's teeth, practised by both Jason and Cadmus, in order to raise a skeleton army. The invocation of these three heroes is not precise: rather, the tropes combine to lend a general atmosphere of mythical

grandiosity to the fight against the bull (in itself one of the most ancient mythical archetypes), presenting Khlebnikov as an all-encompassing cumulative hero. Finally, as Ram suggests, the bull comes to seem very similar to Perseus's enemy the Gorgon, not least in the importance placed upon seeing and being seen: the protagonist's blindness could be said to represent Perseus's averted eyes; Medusa kills by being seen.²⁷⁰ In fact, all these mythical archetypes include some element of theatrical performance: Perseus must show the Gorgon's head to Polydectes in order to fulfil his vow: the act of killing is not enough in itself. This demonstration then has the ironic effect of killing Polydectes. Similarly, Jason must show the fleece to Pelias. The importance of making victory visible goes wrong in the case of Theseus, when his father Aegeus kills himself after Theseus's failure correctly to signal his defeat of the Minotaur by changing his sails.

On the one hand, these heroic prototypes contribute to Khlebnikov's representation of his poetic and prophetic mission as a brave and redemptive intervention in history (although one contingent on being witnessed). By associating himself with ancient Greek heroes, Khlebnikov exhibits a common desire amongst the avant-garde, particularly evident in the manifestos, to recast the poet not as a figure of contemplation, but as a source of world-changing action, and to reimagine the act of writing not as the result of long, temperate reflection, but as a decisive act of presentness. The figure of the mythological hero-warrior also provides a template for a relationship with the people in which he is at once both superior and selfless. Cooke sees this position—for the people, but not of the people—as typical of Khlebnikov: 'There is a tendency for the Khlebnikovian poetic hero to aspire to or to assume godhead.'²⁷¹ More broadly, it is indicative of a certain strain of paternalistic aristocratism within the avant-garde, in which the overall mission to share the redemptive potential of art with the masses led to a self-identity as a specially gifted elite.

²⁷⁰ Ram, 'Velimir Chlebnikov's "Odnokii licedej"', p. 342.

²⁷¹ Cooke, *Velimir Khlebnikov*, p. 41.

On the other hand, we can also see the synthetic intertext constructed of various myths as a case in point for mythopoetic identity construction: no myth has either chronological or authoritative priority over any other—they are not part of a tradition but seem to exist outside of it; they are not grounded in any external authority; the boundaries between myths are not restrictive—the poet can pick and choose between them to help form his own myth. Khlebnikov's innovation is to extend this fluidity by dissolving the boundaries between these mythological sources and the texts of the canon: Pushkin, the Decembrist poets, the Bible and Greek and Persian myth are all treated as equivalents.

The Prophet of Freedom

As suggested above, there had been a long-standing connection within the Russian literary tradition between the poet-prophet and opposition to state power. The link between them has a particular refraction in the case of Khlebnikov's actual, rational prophet: Khlebnikov connected the end of determinism not only with the end of wars, but also the end of state power as a whole. As he said in the passage from 'Oдиночество' quoted above, once the laws of fate have been figured out, 'there will be nothing for states to do'. Khlebnikov welcomed the Revolution because it seemed like the beginning of a new era of freedom: this meant both freedom from internal tyranny and the freedom of small nations from imperialism. The question of imperialism—which was always of interest to Khlebnikov, who had maintained a strong sympathy for peoples of the East since his upbringing in Astrakhan'—became particularly acute after Khlebnikov's journeys in Transcaucasia and Persia in 1920, a time when this region was the subject of a power struggle between Britain and the nascent Soviet Union. Khlebnikov was present at the congress of peoples organized

by the Comintern in Baku in that year to combat British imperialism, before he joined the Red Army on a mission allegedly intended to bring freedom to Persia.²⁷²

For Khlebnikov the combination of anti-imperialism and the East was naturally connected with Pushkin. This connection has been well analysed by Andrea Hacker, whose work provides an invaluable context for reading 'Odnokii litsedei'. Hacker argues that 'in the Baku texts this freedom, which the Russian government carries deep into Asia, is tied to Pushkin' and demonstrates how the unfinished poems of this period, including one *carmen figuratum* in which the text forms the shape of Pushkin's famous sketch of his own profile, depict Pushkin as a positive force in the onward march of liberty.²⁷³ Khlebnikov's essay 'Pushkin i chistye zakony vremeni' (1921) shows how he believed Pushkin to fluctuate between two poles: the positive, typified by *Tsygany* (1824), was connected to the East and promulgated freedom from the tyranny of the state; the negative, typified by *Poltava* (1828), was drawn to the West and glorified government.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, as his analysis of Pushkin's work in 'Ia i Choser' (1921; VI.ii, 69) shows, the imperialist influence of the West is embodied by England, which has too strong an influence on Pushkin, just as it has too much influence in the internal politics of Transcaucasia.

Pushkin, freedom and the east are closely connected with the theme of prophecy. Khlebnikov reads the anarchic state of nature of the gypsies in *Tsygany* as foreshadowing the freedom from government which the East will eventually secure.

On 10 December 1824 Pushkin finished *Tsygany*. In this piece inspiration sacrificially smoked before the human individual alien to the laws of state and society. And by the fire, proclaiming the death of the state and the emancipation of the individual from it, stood Pushkin himself like a seer. (VI.ii, 64)

We return here to a concept of literature as the encoding of future events: Khlebnikov is the exegete both of historical events and of the literary texts which foreshadow them.

²⁷² Hacker, 'To Pushkin, Freedom, and Revolution in Asia', p. 444.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 461, 448.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 459; see Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.ii, 64.

Perhaps influenced by his conviction that Pushkin, even unwittingly, anticipated the advent of freedom for the East, in ‘Odnokii litsedei’ Khlebnikov reads Pushkin’s own prophet myth, and ‘Prorok’, through the prism of Eastern resistance to tyranny. Khlebnikov suggests that the protagonist is motivated by the quest for freedom, even when he cannot see: ‘Слепой я шел, пока / Меня свободы ветер двигал’. The metaphor of being driven by the wind is fairly common in Khlebnikov: we have already seen it, for instance, in the descriptions of Pushkin as a tumbleweed driven by the wind of pleasure in ‘Budeltianskii’; in ‘Ka2’ the Futurists are scattered by the wind of breathing. In another draft of ‘Odnokii litsedei’ Khlebnikov wrote here not ‘freedom’ but ‘birth’ (‘ветер рождения’; II, 471), which must surely be a reference to his calculation of the coincidences between birth dates and their effect on a person’s fate. The coexistence of these two variants is revealing: the protagonist is driven both by his fate—a product of the deterministic nature of history—and by his desire to end this determinism and thus spread freedom.

These two aspects of Khlebnikov’s poet-prophet affect his choice and handling of intertexts: because he treats the anti-tyrannical mission of the poet-prophet as a universal anti-imperialist principle of which he is the latest realization, Khlebnikov disregards the boundaries between all previous hypostatizations of this principle, intermingling texts and myths associated with specific poets.²⁷⁵ Thus the prophet of Pushkin’s ‘Prorok’, ostentatiously invoked early in the poem, is subtly assimilated not only to other prophets and poet-prophets, but also to other instances of anti-imperialism, prophecy and interaction with the crowd in the Pushkinian oeuvre, in particular ‘Svobody seiatel’ pustynnyi’ (1823), ‘Podrazhaniia Koranu’ (1824), ‘Andre Shen’e’ (1825), ‘Prorok’ (1826) and ‘Poet i tolpa’ (1828). Of these, only ‘Svobody seiatel’ pustynnyi’ openly engages with liberal politics, and then only to dismiss it. Nevertheless, the way in which Khlebnikov blends

²⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Jason Strudler observes that in Khlebnikov’s poem *Maria Mniszecz*, the Polish princess is also presented as ‘the realization of a historical concept’. Strudler, ‘Searching for the Slavic Pushkin’.

elements of them in 'Odnokii litsedei' suggests that he perceives them as a cycle.²⁷⁶ The fusion of these poems into one syncretized myth will be discussed below, but, first we should examine how Khlebnikov locates this cycle in relation to a broader coalition of anti-imperialist sentiment comprising the Decembrist poets and the prophets of the Old Testament.

Pushkin founds the story of 'Prorok' on the Old Testament figure of the prophet: it is in effect a retelling of Isaiah 6:9, in which the would-be prophet is purified by a seraph sent by God in order to be able to take up his role. However, as Ram argues persuasively, Pushkin also draws explicitly on Vil'gel'm Kiukhel'beker's 'Prorochestvo' (1822), which was inspired by the struggle for an independent Greece.²⁷⁷ This poem was sent by Anton Del'vig to Pushkin while he was in exile in Kishinev (now Chisinau) in 1822, perhaps in order to draw a parallel between Pushkin's lack of freedom and that of the Greeks.²⁷⁸ In addition to the similar titles, Pushkin's 'Prorok' echoes Kiukhel'beker's poem in the phrasing of the command given to the prophet to stand (Pushkin's 'Восстань, пророк' recalls Kiukhel'beker's 'Восстань, певец, пророк Свободы!') and in its appropriation of the figure of the 'walking corpse', which is also used by Khlebnikov.²⁷⁹ Kiukhel'beker's description ('Ты дни влачишь в мертвящем сне') is doubtless the prototype for Pushkin's ('В пустыне мрачной я влачился'). Khlebnikov's version of this image ('Как сонный труп влачился по пустыне') fuses numerous elements of the 'walking corpse' from various poets including Kiukhel'beker's deadly dream, which is absent from Pushkin; Lermontov's 'Son', which features a corpse ('труп') and a dream; Pushkin's specific verb form ('влачился'); elements of a later line from 'Prorok' ('Как труп в пустыне я лежал').²⁸⁰ Khlebnikov's protagonist

²⁷⁶ On the existence of these poems as a cycle, see Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk*, p. 239, and Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 204.

²⁷⁷ Ram, 'Velimir Chlebnikov's "Odnokii litsedej"', p. 334.

²⁷⁸ Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 64.

²⁷⁹ Ram, 'Velimir Chlebnikov's "Odnokii litsedej"', p. 334.

²⁸⁰ See Ram, *Imperial Sublime*, p. 66.

acquires features from all his predecessors: this bricolage presents a challenge to the exceptional status given to Pushkin in Russian letters and to the notion of literary evolution as a system of genetic inheritance. It suggests instead that all these instances of the myth have equal validity.

Ram regards the 'walking corpse' motif as an attribute of the 'Russian imperial sublime' and its Caucasian topos: the poems in this tradition 'show the prophet intervening in a time of national calamity or imperial war'.²⁸¹ While such a reading supports my argument that 'Odnokii litsedei' is concerned with Khlebnikov's attempt to save the nation from disaster, I would follow Ram's observation in another work of his that this tradition can also be used in an avowedly anti-imperial way.²⁸² As Vadim Stark observes, Decembrist poets such as Kiukhel'beker foregrounded a reading of the Bible as a handbook for freedom and saw Jesus Christ as a proto-democrat.²⁸³ Ram shows that the use of Biblical themes and archaic language with strong Church Slavonic elements was in part an attempt by the Decembrists to use the form of imperial odes to undermine their message of the divine power of the monarch.²⁸⁴ This attempt was abetted by the fact that the themes and imagery of the Hebrew Prophets could readily be adapted to hymns to freedom from imperialism.²⁸⁵ 'Prorochestvo', for instance, includes both an early paean to national self-determination and a lengthy diatribe against the imperial machinations of Great Britain:

Народы! - близок, близок час:
Сам Саваоф стоит за вас!
Восходит солнце обновленья!
Но ты, коварный Альбион,
Бессмертным избранный когда-то,
Своим ты богом назвал злато:

²⁸¹ Ram, 'Velimir Chlebnikov's "Odnokii litsedej"', p. 335.

²⁸² Ram, *Imperial Sublime*, p. 158.

²⁸³ V. P. Stark, 'Pritcha o seiatelye i tema poeta-proroka v lirike Pushkina', *Pushkin: Issledovaniia i materialy*, 14 (1991), 51-64 (p. 52).

²⁸⁴ Ram, *Imperial Sublime*, p. 143

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Всесильный сокрушит твой трон!²⁸⁶

Contemporary political events are re-imagined within the metaphorical framework of the Old Testament with references to 'Sabaoth' and a 'chosen people'.²⁸⁷ The concentration here on the decline of empires and freedom from tyranny corresponds to the Biblical source of Pushkin's 'Prorok', the book of Isaiah, which foretells the fall of Babylon and the emancipation of the exiled Israelites, a story which has always been a prominent source of metaphors for lack of political freedom. One can see how the anti-imperialist, and specifically anti-British, tone of 'Prorochestvo' would have struck a chord with Khlebnikov after his experiences in Baku and Persia.

Very often Russian writers have used commentary on the external freedom of other peoples as a vehicle for discussion of the curtailment of freedom within Russia, and it is plausible to read 'Prorochestvo' in this light. 'Prorok' has itself also been understood as an appeal for domestic liberty, particularly thanks to the anecdote, which became widespread after the publication in 1900 of M. A. Korf's *Zapiski*, which suggests that Pushkin wrote 'Prorok' for his exiled Decembrist friends and originally included a further verse which described the prophet confronting the tsar, which he considered taking to Nikolai at their meeting on 8 September 1826. ('Prorok' is significantly dated 8 September 1826.)

Khlebnikov also connected freedom at home and freedom abroad, especially as the distinction between them was elided by the Revolution, which, in its rhetoric at least, sought to export freedoms won at home. In 'Odnokii litsedei', in which eschatological freedom transcends borders, Khlebnikov signals intertextually the role of prophecy in

²⁸⁶ V. K. Kiukhel'beker, *Sochineniia*, ed. by V. D. Rak and N. M. Romanov (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), p. 67.

²⁸⁷ Pushkin complained in a letter to his brother Lev, 4 September 1822, because Kiukhel'beker used the language of the Church Slavonic version of Jeremiah to talk about Greece, the home of classicism. We see that Khlebnikov exhibits a similar eagerness to merge the Bible with classical myth. Pushkin, *PSS*, XIII, 45.

bringing freedom within Russia. The poem opens with a reference to the recent death of Nikolai Gumilev and his ex-wife Akhmatova's grieving:

И пока над Царским Селом
Лилось пенье и слезы Ахматовой,
Я, моток волшебницы разматывая,
Как сонный труп влачился по пустыне.

Many commentators have correctly observed how in these lines Khlebnikov draws attention to Akhmatova's continuation of the Tsarskoe Selo topos established by Pushkin. Furthermore, Khlebnikov contrasts this element of the Pushkinian legacy, which is primarily private and nostalgic, connected as it is with Pushkin's time at the Lycée, with Khlebnikov's own championing of a more active strand of Pushkinian mythology, the prophet. This distinction is made more striking by the shift in metre between the *dol'nik* of the first two lines, which recalls Akhmatova's poetry, introduced by the emphatic 'Я', and the subsequent free iambs, which are introduced by a metrically ambiguous third line. The use of free iambs metre seems to allude to Pushkin's famous 'Andre Shen'e', which also uses this metre. Such an allusion seems all the more likely when we see how the framing of the turn away from Akhmatova is modelled on 'Andre Shen'e':

Меж тем, как изумленный мир
На урну Байрона взирает,
И хору европейских лир
Близ Данте тень его внимает,
Зовет меня другая тень,
Давно без песен, без рыданий
С кровавой плахи в дни страданий
Сошедшая в могильну сень.²⁸⁸

Pushkin uses the mourning of one recently murdered poet, Byron, as a contrast to his own championing of the long-dead French monarchist poet André Chénier. (Kahn suggests that Pushkin borrowed this opening from Chénier himself, taking it from his poem 'lambes', which surely also provides the metre.)²⁸⁹ Sandler has argued that this poem marks a

²⁸⁸ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 352.

²⁸⁹ Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 195.

transition in Pushkin's own poetic persona: he bids farewell to the solipsism of his early Byronic phase in favour of a more committed poetry which is strong enough to become a rival to royal power.²⁹⁰ This anticipates Khlebnikov's rejection of the contemplative mode in favour of intervention in his capacity as a prophet. When Khlebnikov uses the mourning of Gumilev as the backdrop for his own activity, he is, like Pushkin, using contemporary scenes of temporary disaster to show how he has undertaken a quest to save the nation from more permanent peril (although Pushkin is far from explicit in this). Although Khlebnikov does not go on to discuss another poet, the parallel between the passages is clear: Akhmatova's 'songs and tears' ('пенье и слезы') are a reworking of the 'songs' and 'sobbing' which did not greet the death of Chénier. The comparison between Chénier and Gumilev is very natural: both were executed by revolutionary regimes for being monarchists.

In 'Andre Shen'e' Pushkin conceives of resistance to tyranny as an aspect of the role of the prophet. Gasparov has argued that 'Andre Shen'e' played a central role for Pushkin in the development of his prophecy theme and that as such it is an important forerunner of 'Prorok'.²⁹¹ However, unlike 'Prorok', in which any allusions to freedom are suppressed, in the former poem Chénier is committed to proclaiming freedom:

Но лира юного певца
О чем поет? Поет она свободу:
Не изменилась до конца!

²⁹⁰ Stephanie Sandler, 'The Poetics of Authority in Pushkin's "André Chénier"', *Slavic Review*, 42 (1983), 187-203 (pp. 197, 201). Kahn also argues that the poem is an expression of the poet's independence from his predecessors. Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 191.

²⁹¹ Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk*, p. 240. Gasparov sees Pushkin's adoption of the prophet identity as a development of his earlier messianic identity. He argues that, in the early 1820s, 'The self-recognition as the **Messiah**, announcing the arrival of a "beautiful dawn" (in the field of literature or politics), is transformed into the position of the **prophet**, observing an endless chain of cataclysms and learning their hidden meaning.' *Ibid.*, p. 229; original emphasis. He further posits that Pushkin's prophetic identity develops in three stages throughout the 1820s, reflecting different inspirations: in the early 1820s, the model is Mohammad, as 'Podrazhaniia Koranu' shows; in the mid-1820s it is Biblical prophecy; in the late 1820s, the poet incorporates more elements from the Classical tradition. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

The image of wandering in the desert present in all the poems under discussion also features in 'Andre Shen'e', in the context of the people deprived of Chénier's verse:

Народ, вкусивший раз твой нектар освященный,
 Все ищет вновь упиться им;
 Как будто Вакхом разъяренный,
 Он бродит, жаждою томим;

which anticipates the protagonist of 'Prorok':

Духовною жаждою томим,
 В пустыне мрачной я влачился.

Furthermore, 'Andre Shen'e features a similar model of prophecy to that in 'Prorochestvo'. In the latter, the poet predicts the downfall of British imperialism, in the former Chénier predicts the bloody end of Robespierre (whose downfall and execution took place shortly after Chénier's death):

Мой крик, мой ярый смех преследует тебя!
 Пей нашу кровь, живи, губя:
 Ты все пигмей, пигмей ничтожный.
 И час придет... и он уж недалек:
 Падешь, тиран!

This sort of prophecy—which amounts to little more than a defiant statement of inevitable triumph of the poet's political views—is far removed from Khlebnikov's precise calculations of future events. However, it does coincide with his interest in freedom.

In reading 'Andre Shen'e' and 'Prorok' as evidence of Pushkin's prophet as an opponent of tyranny, Khlebnikov is building on Pushkin's own presentation of these poems in his letters. In correspondence with friends Pushkin seeks to draw parallels between his biographical experience and the typical lot of the prophet, rather than limiting the comparison to his poetic endeavours. After Tsar Alexander's death in 1825 Pushkin wrote to Petr Pletnev with the ironic suggestion that 'Andre Shen'e' had predicted his demise: 'Dear heart! I am a prophet, good God a prophet! I order that 'Andre Shen'e' be printed in

church type in the name of the Father and Son etc.²⁹² Pushkin, with his tongue in his cheek, anticipates Khlebnikov's realization of the metaphor of the prophet. Moreover, as for Khlebnikov, the very act of his prophecy brings about liberation, transforming prophecy into a heroic act. However, while Alexander did die, Khlebnikov's intervention is unsuccessful because of the lack of a sympathetic audience. A hostile reception is also shown to be a universal phenomenon.

The Frustrated Prophet

Pushkin's ironic assumption of the mantle of a real prophet in response to Alexander's death shows that he was well aware of the way in which 'Andre Shen'e' would be read as a comment on the political situation in Russia. Gasparov demonstrates that Pushkin came to identify himself with Chénier as a poet who, like him, was subject to the illiberal whims of tyrannical government.²⁹³ In 1825 his request to be allowed to travel abroad to receive treatment for his (possibly fictitious, at least initially) ailments had been refused by the Tsar. The poet's subsequent self-pity translated into a (no doubt ironic) self-aggrandizement: he wrote to Zhukovskii in November 1825 saying that God did not want him or *Boris Godunov*, which he was working on at the time, to die.²⁹⁴ Such self-promotion combines with a sense of impending death (Chénier must die first for the tyrant to die) to make the figure of the poet in 'Andre Shen'e' equivalent to a prophetic martyr for the liberal cause. Sandler argues that 'Andre Shen'e' should be read as an appeal to the Tsar for better treatment; she understands it as part of a number of works from this period in which Pushkin evaluates his personal relationship with autocratic power, including *Boris Godunov*, chapter four of *Evgenii Onegin*, and, in the same notebook, an imagined dialogue between Pushkin and his namesake Tsar Alexander. An anti-tyrannical context was only

²⁹² Pushkin, *PSS*, XIII, 249.

²⁹³ Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk*, p. 235.

²⁹⁴ Pushkin, *PSS*, XIII, 239.

enhanced by the later reading of ‘Andre Shen’e’ as a hymn to Russian liberty which became more prominent in the wake of the crushing of the Decembrist uprising.²⁹⁵

Prophecy, in all its forms, is connected with persecution. When Pushkin was banished from Odessa to Mikhailovskoe in 1824, he wrote a letter to Viazemskii in which he likened his expulsion to ‘the flight from Mecca to Medina’ and the poems he took with him to the Koran.²⁹⁶ Pushkin’s initial source of identification with prophets was not their ability to contest the power of kings, but the fact that their message is always met with hostility. Khlebnikov found that this aspect of Pushkin’s myth of the prophet—the prophet’s inevitable rejection—corresponded to his own situation on his return from Persia, when his prophecies were met with indifference. It is here that Khlebnikov’s engagement with Pushkin’s poetry as a mythology, rather than as a series of discrete texts, is most evident.

After realizing that his killing of the bull is ineffectual because it is ignored, Khlebnikov resolves to become a ‘sower of eyes’: ‘Я понял, что я никем не видим, / Что нужно сеять очи, / Что должен сеятель очей идти!’ The notion of the prophetic poet as a sower clearly recalls Pushkin’s 1823 poem ‘Svobody seiatel’ pustynnyi’, in which Pushkin describes the failure of his attempts to spread freedom in his early poetry.²⁹⁷ The protagonists of both poems are solitary and frustrated by unreceptive audiences. However, there are important differences: Pushkin’s poem is notable for its sharp deviation from the liberal values which had characterized earlier poems such as ‘Vol’nost’ (1817). The second stanza is an indictment of those who have not heeded his message:

Паситесь, мирные народы!
Вас не разбудит чести клич.
К чему стадам дары свободы?
Их должно резать или стричь.
Наследство их из рода в роды

²⁹⁵ Gasparov, *Poeticheskii iazyk*, pp. 237-38.

²⁹⁶ Pushkin, *PSS*, XIII, 125. We recall that Khlebnikov called *Doski sud’by*, ‘A Koran of numbers’, Khlebnikov, *SS*, V.ii, 200.

²⁹⁷ Pushkin confirms in his letters the connection between Biblical themes and liberal values. See his letter to A. I. Turgenev, 1 December, 1823. Pushkin, *PSS*, XIII, 79.

Ярмо с гремушками да бич.²⁹⁸

It is not impossible that Khlebnikov seeks to invoke this criticism of the unthinking masses in retaliation to his hostile reception: Pushkin's crowd are like a herd, Khlebnikov's is fascinated by a bull. However, the fact that Khlebnikov seeks to sow 'eyes'—that is, to try to help people to acquire the faculties to appreciate him—suggests that he is more optimistic about future audience reactions and does not wish to excoriate the people for failing to understand him. The sowing of eyes can be interpreted as a metaphor for Khlebnikov's continued attempts to explain his laws of time to people, as when in a note dated 1922 he says: 'I have scattered seeing eyes in Kharkov, Moscow and Baku'. However, these attempts seem also to have been in vain: 'Who has not wound them round their feet in place of foot-bindings?' (VI.ii, 101). Like the crowd of 'Poet i tolpa', who prefer a crude bowl to a statue, Khlebnikov's audience, suffering the privations of the Civil War, have more practical concerns than the poet.

The fact that Khlebnikov ends the poem by describing his failed prophetic and emancipatory efforts with a reference to 'Svobody seiatel' pustynnyi' has a significant bearing on the 'Prorok' contexts of the poem, because it encourages us to see the common ground between Pushkin's two poems. As its epigraph openly acknowledges, 'Svobody seiatel' pustynnyi' is based on the parable of the sower. Stark argues that the epigraph is taken from Luke 8:5 in its Church Slavonic translation, with the gerund of the original replaced with the noun 'сеятель': 'Изыде сеяй сеяти семене своего' becomes 'Изыде сеятель сеяти семена своя'.²⁹⁹ (The fact that Pushkin's quotation slightly transforms the original is indicative of the way in which he will adapt the parable to his own ends; it anticipates the way in which the Futurists use misquotation to signal transformation.)

²⁹⁸ Ibid., II, 269.

²⁹⁹ Stark, 'Pritcha o seiatele', p. 51.

In this well-known parable Jesus tells a crowd that: seeds sown on the path will be trampled and eaten by birds; those that are sown on rocky ground will grow but wither; only those that fall on fertile ground will prosper. The disciples ask Jesus the meaning of the parable. He explains to them that the seed represents the Word of God. The parable is, therefore, very self-reflexive because it not only describes the failure of the transmission of God's word, but also enacts it: none of the audience members, including the disciples, are able to understand it. Jesus explains his deliberately confusing ministry with a quotation from Isaiah:

The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.' This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.³⁰⁰

Jesus makes it clear that he speaks in parables precisely so that people will not understand. The parables give the impression that they are straightforward but in fact are not easily understood. Jesus does not want to give out a simple message that will give only the impression of understanding. To illustrate his point he quotes Isaiah 6:

He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."³⁰¹

God appears to be telling the prophet to do the very opposite of that which we might expect: people must listen but not hear. God warns Isaiah that his warnings will be ignored.

The sense that the mission of prophecy is by its very nature doomed to failure, which permeates the Old Testament, is echoed by Christ in the New Testament, as he tries to prepare his disciples for the difficulties that he and they will face. He draws a parallel between his own ministry and that of Isaiah, and their shared rejection, by explicitly citing Isaiah 6. There can be no question that Pushkin was aware of this link to the parable of the

³⁰⁰ Luke 8: 10-12. All quotations from the Bible in English are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

³⁰¹ Isaiah 6: 9-10.

sower, and to the general context of the hostile reception of the prophetic word, when he returned to Isaiah 6 in writing 'Prorok' in 1826. The intertextual hinterland to Pushkin's mythology of the prophet would therefore suggest that he wishes to draw a parallel between the two poems in order to suggest that the newly made prophet of 'Prorok' would not be any more successful in his mission than the sower was in his early attempts to spread the seed of freedom. Khlebnikov activates the hidden link between the poems in order both to problematize triumphalist readings of 'Prorok' (Pushkin is shown to disavow any role as leader of the Russian nation) and to emphasize the inherent futility of the prophet's mission to the people. Being a prophet is a transhistorical mission which is inevitably doomed to failure because of the uncomprehending masses.

As observed above, Khlebnikov expresses failure to comprehend in terms of blindness. This motif is also shown to be a recurrent feature of prophetic mythology, present in the Old Testament, the New Testament, Pushkin, Pushkin's predecessors and, ultimately, Khlebnikov. Moreover, in the classical tradition blindness is the typical attribute of the prophet, an ironic emblem of his superior inner vision. Khlebnikov's syncretic mythology combines this connotation with the Biblical association of blindness with incomprehension. The passage quoted above from Matthew 15:14—'Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit'—occurs in a passage discussing the nature of prophecy with reference to Isaiah. At Matthew 15:7, Jesus says, 'You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."' The quotation is from Isaiah 29:13. This chapter can serve as an additional source of the imagery of 'Prorok'. See, for instance Isaiah 29:8:

И как голодному снится, будто он ест, но пробуждается, и душа его тоща; и как жаждущему снится, будто он пьет, но пробуждается, и вот он томится, и душа

его жаждет: то же будет и множеству всех народов, воюющих против горы Сиона.³⁰²

This passage seems to anticipate the opening of 'Prorok': 'Духовной жаждою томим'. The theme of blindness is also connected with prophecy outside of the Biblical tradition. The crowd in 'Andre Shen'e' cannot see either, blinded by revolutionary fervour:

Но ты, священная свобода,
 Богиня чистая, нет, — не виновна ты,
 В порывах буйной слепоты,
 В презренном бешенстве народа,
 Сокрылась ты от нас.³⁰³

Pushkin's myth of the poet-prophet was also informed by the classical tradition. In 'Andre Shen'e' Chénier is depicted as being able to see far beyond the confines of his cell; words of seeing have particular importance and are not connected to physical sight. In the same year as he wrote 'Prorok' Pushkin translated a poem by Chénier about Homer, 'Slepets', in which the poet is depicted as a lonely and wise blind man in the desert ('Сей белоглавый старик, одинокий, слепой'): it is not impossible that this figure influences Khlebnikov's myth of the poet-prophet, even though Homer is here met with kindness and understanding by those who listen to him.³⁰⁴

It becomes clear that all of Khlebnikov's allusions to Pushkin simultaneously also invoke the intertexts behind Pushkin's work, and, in turn, the intertexts behind that, be they canonical or Biblical. In regard to the motif of blindness, Khlebnikov refers to Pushkin who refers to Chénier, or refers to Christ referring to Isaiah. In regard to the prophet's mission for freedom, Khlebnikov refers to Pushkin who refers to Kiukhel'beker; Pushkin refers to Christ; all three of these refer to Isaiah. Consequently, 'Odinokii litsedei' is transformed into a replica of the Minoan labyrinth. Every allusion contains at least one other: the reader can choose different ways to turn at every instance, but he or she has no

³⁰² Quotations from the Bible in Russian are taken from the Russian Synodal Version.

³⁰³ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 353.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 66.

thread to guide them through. What is more, the complex interiority of this intertextual construction of the poem expresses the principle which underpins Khlebnikov's understanding of time and fate: events recur within the flow of time, each time adopting a new aspect. We recall Smirnov's argument that Futurism presents time spatially: this is borne out by the way 'Odnokii litsedei' represents time, as the protagonist wanders from allusive location to allusive location. However, this journey requires him constantly to double back on himself, to return to places he has already been. History itself is a labyrinth.³⁰⁵ Khlebnikov, however, can navigate it: although he is blind, he has the sorceresses' tread to guide him—his own mathematical understanding of the workings of fate.

The way Khlebnikov presents intertexts suggests that there is no transcendental fountainhead of literary tradition: Pushkin is shown also to collate and rework existing myths. What is more, moving further back in time along the chain of references is not accompanied by an increase in authority. This is clearest in reference to Biblical allusion: Christ may quote Isaiah in order to legitimize his own arguments and to appropriate some of his traditional authority, but his biography will supersede that of the Old Testament prophet—not only will the persecution of the prophet reach its maximal conclusion with him, but his life will culminate in the eschatological, messianic intervention which breaks the interminable cycles of repetition in history and brings about a new time. Similarly, Khlebnikov may appropriate elements of the pre-existing mythology of the poet-prophet in part as a source of consolation in his despair and as a source of legitimation, but he also believes that he represents the ultimate fulfilment of this universal myth because he has the potential to make the eschatological break with deterministic time, if only people would listen to him. Khlebnikov can be Christ to Pushkin's Isaiah; Futurism is the New Testament to the Pushkinian Pentateuch—a bold new gospel and rejection of Pharisaic

³⁰⁵ Smirnov argues that the labyrinth is a typical metaphor of the Futurists' Baroque forerunners. See Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 127.

tradition which nevertheless harnesses and redirects the power and imagery of its predecessor.

Khlebnikov's failure to achieve his goal of liberating the people is one argument against the possible suggestion that the syncretic blend of different sources behind the Khlebnikovian poet-prophet mythology presupposes an atemporal, simultaneous model of time: the poem imagines a future time in which this will be achieved. What is more, the very existence of quotations and quotations of quotations suggests an element of temporal differentiation as well as of return: Jesus can quote Isaiah as a source because, although in a fundamentally similar position, certain conditions have changed. Similarly, Khlebnikov's invocation of Pushkin and others has traction because it is in a new context in his poem and a new context in history.

Finally, the biblical context of 'Odnokii litsedei' points to one possible escape from this impasse. Khlebnikov's poem has been shown to be a very self-reflexive text: on both a grammatical and an intertextual level it enacts the model of deterministic, helical time which the protagonist is fighting against in his battle with the bull. Furthermore, Khlebnikov complains that people do not see him, or understand his message, by means of a very difficult poem with no clear and easily discernible message for people. This opacity contrasts with the insistent clarity of his mathematical calculations (although these are not always self-evident, they are clearly intended to be easily interpretable). In this regard, 'Odnokii litsedei' plays the same game as Christ's parable of the sower, which is also an incomprehensible meditation on the failure of communication, a deliberate attempt not to be understood. Not being understood immediately has two corollaries which ultimately facilitate the coming of the eschatological break. On the one hand, the messiah's path to persecution and then redemption is laid open for him—without miscomprehension he cannot fulfil his destiny. On the other, the crowd's failure to understand immediately inspires a deeper engagement with the text, producing a puzzle which stays with the

reader, transforming that reader into fertile soil for the germination of the message. 'Odinokii litsedei' announces a setback in the mission of the Khlebnikovian prophet, but also lays the foundation stone of his triumph.

Summary

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the profundity and complexity of Khlebnikov's engagement with the Pushkinian myth of the poet-prophet and its context, both prior to Pushkin and later in the nineteenth century, as a signal instance of the development of the Futurist reception of Pushkin after the manifestos. As in the manifestos, antagonism was shown to coexist with appropriation: the latter was evident both in the form of a certain parricidal violence, for instance in the (disputable) symbolic murder of Pushkin in the form of the bull, and in the construction of the Khlebnikovian myth of the rational prophet in contrast to Pushkin, particularly in the early poems. Appropriation was shown to be the dominant mode in the crucial poem 'Odinokii litsedei': the Pushkinian prophet is invoked openly as a point of contact between the biographical experiences of both poets, who are shown to be frustrated prophets working for an all but unachievable freedom in the face of hostile reaction. However, this identification is not an act of straightforward homage or consolation. Khlebnikov locates the Pushkinian prophet within a range of other myths and thought systems, such as: Greek heroes, theatricality, messianism, Decembrist and Pushkinian liberalism, and Zoroastrian eschatology. In so doing, he challenges the priority of Pushkin's prophet within the Russian tradition, constructing a system of recurrent instances of heroic prophecy throughout time and space of which he is the ultimate instance. The parallel intertextual model of 'Odinokii litsedei', which accords with the donning of different masks within the poem, represents Khlebnikov's view of helical time: it

is this view of time which allows the rational prophet to make his predictions and it is this law-bound, determinist fate which, in the symbolic form of the bull, Khlebnikov hopes to bring to an end in 'Odnokii litsedei'. In accordance with his historical understanding of the recurring roles in society, the figure of Pushkin is for Khlebnikov an essential precursor and a vital source of identity, but nevertheless one who is always subordinate to the poet's need to express his worldview, an instrument to be used to articulate his own poetic mission and his own place in the world.

Chapter Three

Vladimir Maiakovskii: Pushkin, the Statue and the State in Maiakovskii's Poetic Mythology

While Khlebnikov is noted for his eccentricity and marginality, both posthumously and during his lifetime, his colleague Vladimir Maiakovskii possessed a voice (literally and figuratively) which was not only one of the most prominent of the 1920s, but which was also, once it had been remastered by the propaganda machine, dominant in Soviet culture. On first inspection, there seems to be little in common between their respective attitudes to Pushkin. Whereas Khlebnikov is allusive and mercurial, Maiakovskii often seems to be brash and obvious, almost openly hectoring Pushkin. Nevertheless, I contend that there are shared Futurist foundations, first evident in the manifestos, which inform both interpretations of Pushkin's legacy. Both poets look to repudiate the notion of Pushkin as the transcendental father of Russian literature to whom they must pay obeisance: this is achieved, on the one hand, by means of open rejection of his dominant position and, on the other, by a mythological appropriation of Pushkinian motifs—they are transformed in order to conform to the tempo of modernity. What is more, this transformation not only expresses a dynamic concept of literary evolution but also allows the transformed myths to become instruments for the poet's articulation of his place in society.

An interest in the question of what it means to be a poet—which, even outside the particular issue of the reception of Pushkin, could be said to be the joint obsession of both Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov—is reflected in the choice of the Pushkinian texts which feature most prominently in the work of both Futurists: they are interested in those poems in which Pushkin also probes the nature of poethood, such as 'Prorok', 'Andre Shen'e', 'Poet i tolpa', and 'Poet i grazhdanin'. What is more, they both seek explicitly to locate the

myth of the poet developed in these poems in the context of the variations they inspired from other poets later in the nineteenth century.

As in the discussion of Khlebnikov above, in this chapter I shall concentrate on one particular Pushkinian myth and its manipulation by Maiakovskii: the myth of the moving statue. Furthermore, I will focus on one particular relationship which preoccupied Maiakovskii, particularly after the Revolution: the poet's relationship with state power. Although reference will be made to pre-revolutionary texts, and their influence on later work, the focus of this chapter will be on Maiakovskii's most significant engagement with political power, which is to say, his attitudes to the post-revolutionary Communist state. The key text throughout my analysis is Maiakovskii's imagined dialogue with Pushkin, 'Iubileinoe' (1924). However, this poem will be read in conjunction with a range of poems from the 1920s, including the extremely important 'Vo ves' golos' (1930). In contrast to a commonplace of criticism, Maiakovskii's later poetry will be shown to be complex and ambivalent. However, it cannot be doubted that the changed circumstances of post-revolutionary Russia necessitated a certain evolution in Maiakovskii's understanding of what it meant to be a Futurist. As a consequence, I will also trace ways in which his reception of Pushkin bears witness to a redefinition of the role of the poet, away from ex nihilo creation and towards the selection and animation of existing cultural phenomena.

The idea of the Futurist poet as a sui generis cultural collagist will reach its apogee in Kruchenykh, and only becomes evident very late in Maiakovskii's career. Nevertheless, it will be shown to be a product of a long-standing commitment to mobility as an existential category. I will examine three key areas of the interaction of Maiakovskii, the state and Pushkin's myth of the statue: the imagined confrontation of the poet and the leader, particularly in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and *V Internatsional*; the poet's dilemma between civic and erotic themes in 'Iubileinoe'; and the poet's mobilization of Pushkin's monument

theme in 'Vo ves' golos'. However, before embarking on this analysis, it is necessary to explain why the statue is a suitable lens through which to view this question.

The Myth of the Statue

The centrality of the statue in Pushkin's work was demonstrated in Roman Jakobson's classic article 'The Statue in Pushkin's Poetic Mythology' (1937). Jakobson establishes that for Pushkin the statue was one of the 'constant organizing, cementing elements which are the vehicle of unity in the multiplicity of the poet's works and which [...] introduce the totality of a poet's individual *mythology*'.³⁰⁶ It is the task of the scholar, he suggests, to 'extract these invariable components or constants directly from the poetic work'.³⁰⁷ In the same article Jakobson makes a pertinent observation about the Futurist mythology of Pushkin, noting that in Maiakovskii's work 'an apostrophe to Pushkin is inseparably connected with the theme of the statue'.³⁰⁸ It seems natural, therefore, to apply Jakobson's approach to Maiakovskii also. The intertwinement between the poet and the monument continues in the case of Maiakovskii: his poetry, always obsessed with questions of legacy, became increasingly concerned with monuments. What is more, after his death the statue became the primary means of interaction between Pushkin and Maiakovskii. The relationship between the poets' two monuments, outside their eponymous Moscow metro stations, separated by a few hundred metres of Gor'kii/Tverskaia Street, represents an ironic coda to their shared obsession with monuments and operates as a sort of semiotic rhyme structuring the text of the Moscow landscape. The formal and geographical relationship between the two poets, which is undoubtedly the result of a deliberate

³⁰⁶ Roman Jakobson, 'The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology', in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987), pp. 318-67 (p. 318). Original emphasis.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

attempt by the Soviet government to write its poet into the landscape as an equivalent to Pushkin, combines identification with separation and thus serves as an apt but ironic backdrop against which to examine Maiakovskii's attitudes to Pushkin, the statue and the state.

There is, of course, a multitude of Pushkinian allusions and references in Maiakovskii's work which do not concern statues. Nevertheless, Jakobson's comment will be proved to be accurate: the statue represents a systematic point of contact between Pushkin and Maiakovskii, in works stretching from the 1913 essay 'Dva Chekhova' to his final poem 'Vo ves' golos', including along the way 'Radovat'sia rano' (1918), *V internatsional* (1922), *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (1924), 'Iubileinoe' (1924), 'Shutka pokhozhaia na pravdu' (1927) and 'Anchar' (1929). Other moments of interaction with Pushkin will be mentioned in the course of this analysis, but only where they serve to reinforce the importance of Pushkin in Maiakovskii's conceptualization of the poet's confrontation with power.

By the same token, there are references to statues in Maiakovskii which do not invoke Pushkin. However, these are in an undoubted minority. (One might argue that such is the importance of *Mednyi vsadnik* to Russian literature that all statues in poetry remain under its shadow.) Even when Pushkin is not mentioned in the immediate context of the statue, he often appears soon after. This is a product not only of their connection in the poetic tradition, but also of their proximity in Maiakovskii's worldview. As we have seen, Pushkin frequently becomes a metonym for the literature of the past in general for the Futurists. In the poetics of Maiakovskii this role—as the representative of pre-Futurist culture—is often also played by the statue. Thus in 1926 he complains:

[My speeches] have not, of course, touched much on the old poetry, which is not guilty of anything. It has been attacked only if the zealous defenders of the old ways [*star'ia*] hid from the new art behind the backsides of monuments.³⁰⁹

He repeats the complaint in 1928:

The comrade says that I just destroy all the classics entirely. I have never engaged in this ridiculous business. [...] Learn them, love them in the time in which they were working. But don't let their big bronze backsides block the road to young poets who are on the road today. (XII, 434-35)

These quotations are preceded and followed by references to Pushkin.

The choice of the statue as a symbol for unwanted old literature is very natural, for three reasons. First, statues persist: as the continued presence of Tsarist statuary after the Revolution proved, unwanted expressions of obsolete ideologies often remained impervious to purging waves of revolutionary activism. Such durability made them similar to the classics, which lingered long beyond what the Futurists saw as their natural end. Second, statues are heavy and bulky, characteristics which were anathema to the Futurist world-view. In the quotations above Maiakovskii emphasizes the physicality of the statue, realizing the metaphor of the classics as an obstacle to development. The metaphor of a burdensome weight was continuously used by the Futurists to express the retardant effect classical literature had on forward progress.³¹⁰ As Zinovii Papernyi observes in his comprehensive and illuminating article on Maiakovskii and Pushkin, 'the young Maiakovskii's understanding of the classics was often accompanied by the sensation of something heavy, oppressive. Something stagnant and shackled.'³¹¹ (Similar metaphors are prominent in the manifestos, in which the culture of the past is conceived of as a heavy burden.) Third, thanks to the Orthodox interpretation of the Mosaic prohibition on graven images, statues were traditionally viewed with suspicion in Russian culture and considered

³⁰⁹ Maiakovskii, 'Kak delat' stikhi', *PSS*, XII, 81-117 (p. 81). Hereafter in this chapter and in the subsequent chapter, references to this edition will be made in the body of the text.

³¹⁰ Compare Khlebnikov: 'How can we free the speedy engine of the younger ages from the goods train of the elder generations which has attached itself in an impudent and unsolicited manner?' Khlebnikov 'Truba Marsian', in *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 160-63 (p. 163).

³¹¹ Z. Papernyi, "'Ot Pushkina do nashikh gazetnykh dnei...'", p. 81.

pagan and foreign. Consequently, their iconoclastic destruction or removal functioned, and continues to function, as observed in the Introduction, as a marker of the wholesale inversions which Lotman and Uspenskii see as characteristic of cultural change in Russia.³¹²

In regard of the last reason, a programmatic example is the Futurists' rite of passage, the ejection of Pushkin from the steamship of Modernity, which is the first moment in Maiakovskii's poetic career when Pushkin and the statue come together. *Poshchechina* combines the last two aspects of the destruction of the statue mentioned above: total cultural change and the defeat of paganism. When read in the context of the myth of the statue, this casting overboard is not only an obvious metaphor for the removal of a burden, but also as a reference to a 'decisive milestone in the consciousness of Old Russia', Vladimir's destruction of the pagan idols.³¹³ The Primary Chronicle relates how Vladimir 'ordered the overturning of the idols—some to be chopped up, others burned'; the statue of Perun was cast into the Dnieper, in order to 'insult the devil that had deceived people in this image'. The violence against the statues was necessary to mark the change in beliefs: 'Yesterday he was still revered, but today we insult him.'³¹⁴ This act of iconoclasm is an obvious inspiration to the Futurists when they want to instigate a similarly total reconfiguration in the (artistic) beliefs of the Russian nation by throwing Pushkin and others overboard. Like Perun, the established gods of Russian literature are thrown into the river—the Futurists purge literature of its pagan idols so that they can introduce their own one true faith.

Furthermore, Vladimir's imposition of Christianity from above provides a telling example of the way in which statues are implicated in questions of authoritarian power and its relationship to culture. The building, destruction, preservation and modification of statues and monuments are a means by which those in power can articulate their cultural

³¹² Lotman and Uspenskii, 'Binary Models', p. 33.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ *Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. by D.S. Likhachev (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), p. 190.

agenda. With few exceptions, the state is the only body with the financial and political clout to effect such a prominent and permanent change on the landscape. Consequently, monuments and statues become ‘visual symbols of power’ which allow the state to articulate its stranglehold over the landscape.³¹⁵ However, these symbols are also vulnerable to manipulation in a space which is, initially at least, outside of governmental jurisdiction—the poet’s text. For this reason, statues and monuments provide a way for poets to speak back to power using the language of the state, transforming it by relocating it into their creative space.

For this reason, Pushkin’s recurrence in poems dealing with the poet’s confrontation with power is even less surprising, because he explicitly concerned himself with the triadic interaction of poet, monumental architecture and power, both in his meditations on his poetic monument and his frequent depictions of moving statues. The idea of the poet’s textual monument, first expressed in Horace’s famous and frequently imitated ode ‘Exegi monumentum aere perennius’, has always been concerned with the rivalry between poet and monarch, and the superior longevity of the poet’s chosen medium (poetry) over the ruler’s (public sculpture).³¹⁶ For instance, Pushkin, in his canonical variation on this theme, alludes to his verse outstripping the tsar’s monumental symbol:

Вознесся выше он главою непокорной
Александрийского столпа.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997* (London: Reaktion, 1998), p. 107. See also Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, ‘Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92 (2002), 524-47 (p. 526); Richard Clay, ‘Introduction: Contested objects, contested terms’, in *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, ed. by Stacy Boldrick and Richard Clay (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 5-11 (p. 7).

³¹⁶ Horace puns on the word ‘princeps’, attributing to himself a degree of equality with the emperor: ‘ex humili potens / princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos / deduxisse modos’. See Horace, *Opera*, ed. by O. Keller and A. Holder, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899-1925), I, 227.

³¹⁷ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 424. ‘*Aleksandriiskii*’ actually means ‘from Alexandria’ but the allusion to the Alexander Column is obvious.

The monument is a tangible manifestation of the intangible qualities and policies of the state. In contrast, the figurative function of the statue allows it to be closely identified with the state, not as an abstract notion, but as the product of human will, connecting the achievements and attitudes of power to specific individuals. Consequently, statues are also an important point of conflict between poet and state, and especially so in Pushkin. In *Mednyi vsadnik*, the confrontation between the 'little man' Evgenii and the almost demonic Bronze Horseman has often been read as a fable for the interaction of ordinary humanity with autocracy. Jakobson sees the poem as a sublimation of the poet's interaction with monarchical power: 'One cannot deny, for example, that there is some tie between Pushkin's search for a way to adapt himself to Nicholas's Petersburg and the poet's myth of the punishment of the statue.'³¹⁸ His seemingly subversive alteration of the official narrative of statues and monuments should be seen as part of the discourse of Pushkin's opposition to Tsarist oppression which was particularly prominent in the early Soviet period. As we have seen, poems such as 'Prorok' were read as anti-Tsarist; Pushkin's death was seen as the result of a government conspiracy, congenial as this was to an anti-monarchist regime.³¹⁹ Regardless of the political context, the revelation, or, at times, imposition, of anti-authoritarian sentiment in Pushkin's poetry can be seen as a natural product of the traditionally vexed relationship between the pre-eminent poet and the Russian state. As the national poet, Pushkin is an obvious point of reference when considering the question of the interaction of poet and tsar.³²⁰

The insistent reading of Pushkin as a proto-revolutionary became, after 1917, not a gesture of resistance to power, but another chapter in the on-going appropriation of Pushkin by nationalist forces in search of a unifying figurehead.³²¹ A central symbol of this

³¹⁸ Roman Jakobson and Krystyna Pomorska, *Dialogues*, trans. by Christian Hubert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 146.

³¹⁹ This is the dominant reading in, for instance, the 1928 film *Poet i tsar*'.

³²⁰ See Panchenko, 'Russkii poet', pp. 361-77.

³²¹ See Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, and Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature*.

longstanding misuse of Pushkin was, to Futurist eyes, the Pushkin monument in Moscow, designed by Aleksandr Opekushin, which, while not commissioned by the state, was intimately connected with a nationalist discourse by the presence on the pedestal of lines from Zhukovskii's bowdlerization of Pushkin's 'la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi' and by Dostoevskii's speech at its inauguration. The Pushkin monument shows that interaction between poet and text on the one side and power and statue on the other is bilateral: the poet can speak back to power by inserting the statue into text; the state, or other instances of authority, can exercise control over the poet and his legacy by enshrining his likeness in bronze and his verse in inscriptions. As a very visible Moscow landmark, this statue was naturally a crucial presence in the Futurists' day-to-day relationship with Pushkin and an obvious symbol of the way in which poetic energy could crystallize into moralistic and instrumental dogma.³²²

In addition to the well-established interplay between poet, state and statue, Maiakovskii's adoption of this Pushkinian myth was motivated by contemporary concerns: the question of statuary became particularly acute after the Revolution. First, as mentioned above, the persistence of Tsarist statues meant they were the most eloquent remaining symbols of this form of autocracy. The official response to this ghost at the feast was ambivalent: on the one hand, Lenin's 'O pamiatnikakh respubliki' (12 April 1918) and the ensuing plan for monumental propaganda characterized the Bolshevik position as one of transformative, Vladimirian iconoclasm: 'The Soviet of People's Commissars express the wish that on May 1 the most hideous idols [*istukany*] will already have been taken down

³²² Vadim Shershenevich recalls Maiakovskii staring 'at the face of the iron [*chugunnomu*] Pushkin as if he were trying inquisitively to understand those eyes'. Quoted in V. A. Katanian, *V. V. Maiakovskii: Literaturnaia khronika* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1961), p. 464. We recall that Khlebnikov used the same adjective for the statue in 'Ka2'. It seems Maiakovskii always had a very personal relationship with the Pushkin statue: when arrested for carrying illegal material as a teenager, Maiakovskii claimed he had received them at the Pushkin statue from a man called Aleksandr. See Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 31.

and the first models of the new monuments put up for the judgment of the masses.³²³ On the other hand, the government also established the Section for Museums and Preservation of Monuments within Narkompros (the same organization that housed the fiercely iconoclastic *Iskusstvo kommuny*). Such contradictions typify the Futurist position also. As Richard Stites observes, paradox predominates in Russian statue culture: 'Iconoclasm seems so very Russian. But so does anti-iconoclasm.'³²⁴

Nevertheless, the perceived failure of the Bolsheviks to fulfil their promise of cultural *carte blanche* made monuments a crucial arena for the articulation of the rivalry between the avant-garde and the government over guardianship of the new culture of the Revolution. Boris Groys has famously argued that the avant-garde harboured 'dictatorial ambitions' which eventually laid the groundwork for Socialist Realism by promoting art as a mechanism for the transformation of society, outside of and rival to state socialism; the state then crushed this rival but adopted its totalizing, almost imperialistic, blueprint for art.³²⁵ There is not space here to engage at length with Groys's thesis, but his notion of a confrontation between avant-garde and state is borne out by the hectoring and impetuous tone of the contents of *Iskusstvo kommuny*, including Maiakovskii's 'Radovat'sia rano', which frequently engage with those in power. The tussle between avant-garde and Bolshevik party perhaps points to a final reason for the choice of the Pushkinian statue as a metaphor for Maiakovskii's relationship with the state. Jakobson concludes that Pushkin's mythology of statues gravitated towards the conflict of the young lover and aged husband over the beautiful young woman, a plotline exemplified in *Kamennyi gost'*, in which the old, dead Commendatore continues to exert terrifying control over his wife in the form of a moving statue.³²⁶ Irina Ivaniushina has astutely proposed that we can posit a similar love

³²³ *Dekrety sovetskoï vlasti* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia literatura, 1959), II, 95.

³²⁴ Stites, 'Iconoclastic Currents in the Russian Revolution', p. 18.

³²⁵ Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. by Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 23.

³²⁶ Jakobson, 'The Statue', pp. 325-26

triangle in Maiakovskii's poetry: the young poet does battle with the Soviet gerontocracy over the love of the beautiful Revolution.³²⁷ Although Maiakovskii is not always critical of the new regime, he does express his relationship with it in the terms suggested by Ivaniushina: he is the young Don Juan who must confront the old Commendatori of the Party, most often in the uncanny guise of the moving statue.

The Meeting of Poet and Leader

My analysis of Maiakovskii's use of Pushkin to express his relationship with the state will begin with Ivaniushina's notion of a tussle between avant-garde and state for the heart of the Revolution, in the context of 'Radovat'sia rano' and the furore which it inspired. Although monumental architecture and iconoclasm provided the primary metaphorical language for the articulation of this confrontation, I will start by examining another Pushkinian intertext invoked by Maiakovskii during this interchange to define his relationship with the state. It is one which we have already seen used by Khlebnikov to express his poetic identity in relationship to the people—the setting of hearts on fire from Pushkin's 'Prorok'.

Winning Hearts and Minds

In 1918 *Iskusstvo kommuni* published Maiakovskii's poetic attack on the continued presence of the statue of Alexander III in St Petersburg:

А царь Александр
на площади Восстаний
стоит?
Туда динамиты!
Выстроили пушки по опушке,

³²⁷ Irina Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo', *Voprosy literatury*, 4 (2000), 312-26 (p. 318). Ivaniushina rightly sees this as part of Maiakovskii's generally eroticized relationship with the Revolution.

глухи к белогвардейской ласке.
 А почему
 не атакован Пушкин?
 А прочие
 генералы классики? (II, 16)

Pushkin is invoked in the guise of a White Army general. The virulent rejection of Pushkin of 1913 has been revived, with the addition of bellicose civil war rhetoric, with similar aims: to use extremist *épatage* to draw attention to a recently (re)formed group in a confused literary scene and to establish and broadcast this group's identity.³²⁸ However, the Futurists, as a result of their support of the Bolsheviks, must now contend with a new factor in their identity formation: the revolutionary state. Maiakovskii deliberately politicizes the old culture, equating it to the hated enemies that the Red Army has routed, in order to draw attention to their failure to carry their attack forward into culture and dismantle the *ancien régime*, and to point out the sluggishness of the Plan for Monumental Propaganda.

In response to such presumptuous appropriation of control over the cultural agenda, Lenin instructed Lunacharskii to counter the extremism of 'Radovat'sia rano'. Lunacharskii's article 'Lozhka protivoiadiia', included in the next issue of *Iskusstvo kommuny*, continued Maiakovskii's architectural metaphor: he criticized the paper's 'destructive tendencies', arguing that 'too often in the history of humanity we have seen how fastidious fashion has promoted something new, while striving to turn what is old into ruins as quickly as possible'. He further upbraided *Iskusstvo kommuny* for claiming to speak

³²⁸ On the re-emergence of the themes and motivations of 1913 in 1917, see Bengt Jangfeldt, 'Notes on "Manifest Letučej Federacii Futuristov" and the Revolution of the Spirit', in *Vladimir Majakovskij: Memoirs and Essays*, ed. By Bengt Jangfeldt and Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975), pp. 152-65 (p. 152): 'The two revolutions of 1917 made the cubo-futurists David Burljuk, Vasilij Kamenskij and Vladimir Majakovskii flourish again as a group.'

on behalf of the government, suggesting that soon after the Revolution the Bolsheviks were indeed wary of the avant-garde will to power identified by Groys.³²⁹

While Pushkin's presence in the poem provoking this controversy is perhaps a coincidence, it does seem to suggest a particular sensitivity amongst Party members to the defamation of Pushkin. Pushkin was a universal figure whose youthful revolutionary rhetoric made him amenable to the Bolshevik agenda, and who was as beloved by the Party elite as he was by most other members of the intelligentsia. More interesting still is Maiakovskii's response and its use of Pushkin. A message 'From the Editors' was published alongside Lunacharskii's article. The editors of *Iskusstvo kommuny* were Osip Brik, Nikolai Punin and Natan Al'tman; all three were close to Maiakovskii, who had proposed them to Narkompros (see XII, 221). Bengt Jangfeldt even argues that it is very likely that Maiakovskii was involved in the drafting of this statement.³³⁰ The authors make the familiar and reasonable defence that poetry should not be read literally:

The destructive tendencies displayed by employees of the newspaper can be seen only in Maiakovskii's poem in issue No. 2 of *Iskusstvo kommuny*. The editors, in printing this poem, supposed that one of the most solid cultural achievements of European literature in recent times is freedom from literal interpretation. Not a single contemporary critic would have taken it upon himself to state that Pushkin in his poem 'Burn with the word the hearts of men [*Glagolom zhgi serdtsa liudei*]' is calling on the poet to burn the hearts of his nearest and dearest with incendiary materials of some sort. [...] We considered it our duty to feature the verses in question, although they could provoke a false interpretation in certain circles untutored in poetry.³³¹

As in the manifestos, Pushkin can be used to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the Futurists' enemies. As the archetypal poet, and one with an almost unassailable reputation, Pushkin remained the best source of identification when the profession of poetry itself

³²⁹ A. Lunacharskii, 'Lozhka protivoiadiia', *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 4 (29 December 1918), p. 1. For Lenin's involvement and a fuller discussion of this controversy, see Halina Stephan, *'Lef' and the Left Front of the Arts* (Munich: Sagner, 1981), p. 11.

³³⁰ Bengt Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism 1917-1921*, Second Edition (Stockholm: Hylea Prints, 1977), p. 58.

³³¹ 'Ot redaktsii', *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 4 (29 December 1918), p. 1.

seemed under attack.³³² His metonymic function allows him to be used to draw a line between the spheres of activity of art and politics: just as Lunacharskii had warned *Iskusstvo kommuny* away from the business of government, so in turn its editors imply that the state is not competent to try its hand at literary criticism. By comparing Maiakovskii to Pushkin they not only attempt to normalize (and elevate) his position in the literary tradition, but also expose Lunacharskii's double standards. Furthermore, by citing both Pushkin and the international context they manage to suggest in one move that Lunacharskii is both parochial and somehow unpatriotic.

Nevertheless, the comparison made between 'Prorok' and 'Radovat'sia rano' is not particularly valid: while the former is unarguably metaphorical, the latter deliberately engages with real events and invites a literal reading.³³³ One motivation, then, behind the selection of this quotation is to push literalism *ad absurdum* in order to humiliate Lunacharskii. However, countless other images could have achieved this: the citation of 'Prorok' is also designed to extend the editorial's claim to the independence of art by borrowing Pushkin's own mythology of the poet. Following the vatic identity Pushkin establishes for himself in this poem, Maiakovskii is suggesting that it is the poet who can enlighten and transform people. Moreover, we recall that 'Prorok' was read as a tribute to the Decembrists and as a blueprint for the way in which Aesopian language allows poets to subvert officialdom and foment opposition. Lunacharskii and others are thus warned to mistreat poetry and its metaphorical power at their peril.

The image of burning hearts was common in the early twentieth century, for instance in the title of Ivanov's collection *Cor Ardens* and as a striking metaphor for self-

³³² Jakobson, with this episode obviously in mind, also uses Pushkin to defend the Futurists from their critics: 'To attack a poet for the ideas, the feelings [expressed in a poem] is as absurd as the behaviour of a medieval crowd beating the actor who played Judas, as ridiculous as charging Pushkin with the murder of Lenskii.' Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia*, p. 17.

³³³ See Jerzy Tasarski, 'Komfuty: ideologiczne awangardy w okresie wojennego komunizmu', *Przegląd humanistyczny*, 4 (1968), 41-59.

sacrificing leadership in Maksim Gor'kii's *Starukha Izvergil'*.³³⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that it recurs in different forms in Maiakovskii's work. The treatment of the motif in *Oblako v shtanakh* is typical —it is made literal, aggrandized and used to narrate the poet's own tragic, fractured self:

У него пожар сердца.
Скажите сестрам, Люде и Оле, -
ему уже некуда деться.
Каждое слово,
даже шутка,
которые изрыгает обгорающим ртом он,
выбрасывается, как голая проститутка
из горящего публичного дома. (I, 180)

In 1923's 'O poetakh', however, the notion of poets setting hearts on fire is held up to ridicule as a cliché of the Pushkin-imitating hacks that still flourished after the Revolution:

Изголодались.
С локтями голыми.
Но денно и ночью
жгут и жгут
сердца неповинных людей "глаголами".
Написал.
Готово.
Спрашивается - прожёт?
Прожёт!
И сердце и даже бок.
Только поймут ли поэтические стада,
что сердца
сгорают —
исключительно со стыда. (IV, 60)

Maiakovskii goes on to compare such reworking of the classics to a sausage-making machine: these dilettantes should be ashamed of their claim to transformative poetic powers. Once again Maiakovskii gives a bathetically literal reading of Pushkin's poem: the

³³⁴ Maksim Gor'kii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati p'ati tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968-76), I, 76-96 (pp. 95-96). An old lady relates the story of Danko who, to give light and hope to the people he is leading through a forest, rips out his own burning heart. Like Maiakovskii, Gor'kii plays with literalization of this common metaphor.

fire spreads from the poetic heart to the rather more prosaic side. There are now so many poets that they come to resemble the witless herds that had failed to understand Pushkin's message in 'Svobody seiatel' pustyynni' ('К чему стадам дары свободы?').³³⁵ Despite collapsing Pushkin's division between poet and people, Maiakovskii does not undermine the true poet's claim to poetic power, but rather seeks to distinguish the true poet from a novel iteration of the *profanum vulgus*—the new crop of hack poets.

The image recurs in 1924's *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* in a way which seems to contradict the ethos of the editors' note in *Iskusstvo kommuny*. All of Maiakovskii's poetry shows a particularly personal relationship with the figure of Lenin, but this mini-epic written in response to his death elevates the Bolshevik leader to a strange superhuman status, making him at once an ordinary human being and an embodiment of the power of the Revolution. In a passage rich in Pushkinian allusion, Lenin is granted the poet's mastery of the miraculous ability to enflame hearts:

Но фронт
 без боя
 слова эти взяли -
 деревня
 и город
 декретами залит,
 и даже
 безграмотным
 сердце прожог.
 Мы знаем,
 не нам,
 а им показали,
 какое такое бывает
 "ужо". (VI, 235)

Lenin's quasi-military power even exceeds that of the poet: while Pushkin's poetry, it is implied, is only effective for those who can read, Lenin's magical decrees touch even the illiterate. Political documents are more powerful than literary ones. Such are Lenin's Orphic (and therefore distinctly poetic) powers that even stones can understand him:

³³⁵ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 269.

Здесь
каждый камень
Ленина знает. (VI, 236)

In his illuminating analysis of the poem, Mikhail Vaiskopf argues that in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* Maiakovskii has transferred much of the heroic gigantism which previously typified his own poetic persona to Lenin.³³⁶ Ivaniushina suggests that this shift is motivated by Lenin's death: now he is no longer a rival, he can be recast as a cosmic hero.³³⁷

Vladimir Il'ich Lenin and Mednyi vsadnik

By examining the Pushkin contexts of *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, however, we see that Lenin is a highly ambiguous figure. Vaiskopf elucidates the poem's evident relationship with *Mednyi vsadnik*. On the one hand, Lenin is the tremendous fulfilment of the meek anti-authoritarian threat offered by the crazed Evgenii to the Bronze Horseman:

«Добро, строитель чудотворный! —
Шепнул он, злобно задрожав, —
Ужо тебе!..»³³⁸

On the other hand, Lenin is not the first person in the poem to echo Evgenii's desperate 'ужо'—Maiakovskii is clearly contrasting it to an alternative posited earlier by his bourgeois enemies:

Буржуи
прочли
— погодите,
выловим. —
животики пята
доводом веским —
ужо им покажут
Духонин с Корниловым,
покажут ужо им
Гучков с Керенским. (VI, 284)

³³⁶ Mikhail Vaiskopf, *Vo ves' logos: Religiiia Maiakovskogo* (Moscow: Salamandra, 1997), p. 104.

³³⁷ Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo', p. 314.

³³⁸ Pushkin, *PSS*, V, 148.

Lenin's threat is a refutation of the original bourgeois 'ужо', so who here is really identified with Evgenii? Furthermore, Lenin and Leninism share some of the attributes of the flood which provokes Evgenii's insanity, as this line implies:

деревня
и город
декретами залит (VI, 284)

Vaiskopf argues that the use of the inundation to express the chaotic strength of mass insurrection is an example of the use of flood motifs in left-radical and early Bolshevik culture, which was widespread, in particular as a riposte to the traditional identification of the monarch with such Biblical conquerors of water as Moses and Noah.³³⁹ However, Vaiskopf has also shown that *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* mimics the formulae of eighteenth-century odes to the monarch, with Lenin playing the role of the great helmsman usually taken by Peter (see VI, 114). That is to say, the genre of the poem points to an identification of Lenin not with the 'little man', or the masses, but with the autocrat. Vaiskopf finds further evidence of this identification in some unpublished lines:

И снова
ветер
свежий и крепкий
Вперед
ведущую руку выставил. (VI, 460)

He argues that this image echo Gumilev's depiction of the Bronze Horseman in his 1919 poem 'Zabludivshiiisia tramvai':

И сразу ветер знакомый и сладкий
И за мостом летит на меня,
Всадника длань в железной перчатке
И два копыта его коня.³⁴⁰

While this link is contestable, it contributes to the syncretic picture of Lenin we see through the lens of *Mednyi vsadnik*: he embodies elements of all four protagonists, Evgenii, the

³³⁹ Vaiskopf, *Vo ves' logos*, pp. 97-98.

³⁴⁰ N. S. Gumilev, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. by N. N. Skatov (Moscow: Voskresen'e, 1998-2007), IV, 81.

flood, the historical Peter and the Bronze Horseman. Maiakovskii's myth of Lenin parallels that of Pushkin in its catholicity and flexibility.

However, Maiakovskii's use of Pushkin here seems somewhat reductive. Although *Mednyi vsadnik* undoubtedly incorporates some elements of the eighteenth-century odic style that serves as a model for *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (especially in the opening section), it contrasts triumphalism with the very human story of Evgenii. Maiakovskii, however, transforms all the characters of *Mednyi vsadnik*, including Evgenii, into victors, occluding any mention of Evgenii's pathos-filled death. This accords with the poem's defiant, almost petulant, refusal to countenance Lenin's death:

Ленин—
 жил,
 Ленин—
 жив,
 Ленин—
 будет жить!³⁴¹ (VI, 34)

All the conflicts of *Mednyi vsadnik* have disappeared, subsumed into the all-conquering, immortal figure of Lenin, whose heroic marshalling of historical forces in order to defeat the past is re-enacted in poetry by Maiakovskii's heroic ability simultaneously to exploit and repudiate the poetry of his predecessors. His power over the elements is in turn paralleled by unbounded Maiakovskii's power over genres and traditions: Lenin can rewrite history and Maiakovskii can rewrite Russia's pre-eminent historical poem.

There are, however, nuances to the seemingly simplistic version of *Mednyi vsadnik* in Maiakovskii's unelegiac elegy. In addition to the desire to equate Lenin's position in Russian history with Peter's and his own with Pushkin, I believe that Maiakovskii turns to *Mednyi vsadnik* here because his concentration of all the forces of that poem into one person builds on an ambiguity in the original: the abysmal force of the Bronze Horseman is

³⁴¹ This tricolon has its origins in the Book of Revelation, but, according to Vaiskopf, Maiakovskii's use is mediated through Derzhavin's appropriation of it in 'Bog': 'Ты был, ты есть, ты будешь ввек!' See G. R. Derzhavin, *Sochineniia*, ed. by G. N. Ionin (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), p. 56, and Vaiskopf, *Vo ves' logos*, p. 150.

deliberately related to the destructive force of the flood.³⁴² One can extend this parallel and interpret both Peter and the flood as elemental forces that bring expurgation and transformation and which are indifferent to the private sphere. However, whereas Pushkin simultaneously acknowledges and mourns this radical, inhuman transformation, Maiakovskii, who craves absolute cultural renewal, welcomes it.

What is striking, however, is that Maiakovskii is willing to cede to Lenin the theurgic power to bring about rebirth. One might speculate that this elevation of Lenin was prompted specifically by his recent death: Maiakovskii is trying to transform Lenin from a historical figure into a revolutionary principle, a figurehead for the idea of complete, unstoppable historical change, in order to counter the sacralization and concomitant ideological emptying of him. Pushkin's poem is an invaluable source for this as it provides a template for the transformation of history into myth. Complete binary change executed by a strong leader is shown to be a recurring, eternal narrative. (We remember similar structural principles in Khlebnikov's theories of time.) The example of Peter the Great shows that complete transformation in Russian culture is possible and desirable: Maiakovskii suggests that Lenin can be the specific historic instance of this myth in the present.

The paradigm of recurring total cultural renewal is paradoxical because, as Lotman and Uspenskii suggest, the desire to destroy the past is itself historically conditioned: iconoclasm is one of the 'new historical structures' which 'regenerate the culture of the past' and 'ensure the homeostasis of the whole'.³⁴³ The annihilation of tradition is itself an imperishable cultural myth.

³⁴² See Smith, *Montaging Pushkin*, p. 118.

³⁴³ Lotman and Uspenskii, 'Binary Models', p. 33.

Lenin Fossilized

That Lenin's death prompted a reappraisal of Maiakovskii's characterization of him becomes evident when we consider an earlier example of his use of Pushkin to articulate his relationship with Lenin. In an unpublished draft of *V internatsional* (1922), which has been the subject of a revealing, close reading by Ivaniushina, Lenin meets Maiakovskii in a direct exchange:

Я не окончил речь еще
еще бросались слова ругуны
Ленин
медленно
подымает вечища
Разжимаются губ чугуны
Раскатываясь пустотою города гулкова
на мрамор цоколя обрушивая вес
загрохотали чугунобукво
ядра выпадающих
пудовых словес. (IV, 305)

Lenin's iron face recalls not only Gogol's Vii, but also a statue.³⁴⁴ Ivaniushina remarks on this scene's linguistic echoes of the encounter of Evgenii and the Bronze Horseman: 'пустотою' reflects Pushin's 'пустой', and 'загрохотали' recalls 'грома грохотанье'.³⁴⁵ She further suggests that the action here is reminiscent of *Mednyi vsadnik*, only differing in the fact that Lenin is not on a horse, and speaks. She considers the reasons for this to be, respectively, Maiakovskii's unwillingness to show the revolutionary leader elevating himself above the common man and Lenin's own rejection of the mystique of silence preferred by Pushkin's tsars. In an extension of that last point I would argue that whereas the Bronze Horseman is terrifying in his movement, Lenin is terrifying in his words. It is they which have the terrifying power to pursue Maiakovskii. Lenin's speech is as follows:

Садитесь товарищ

³⁴⁴ See Jakobson, *Dialogues*, p. 141.

³⁴⁵ Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo', p. 313. See Pushkin, *PSS*, V, 148:

И он по площади пустой
Бежит и слышит за собой —
Как будто грома грохотанье.

а где-то в уме там:
 носит чушь такую пороть его
 видят занят
 стою монументом
 за чем только смотрит эта Фотиева. (IV, 305)

Unlike his words, Lenin's statue never comes to life, but is emphatically still ('стою монументом'); he is so incapable that he must be guarded by his secretary Fotieva. That is not to say that Lenin is impotent, but rather that his power lies precisely in words, not in physical dynamism. The critique of Lenin's immobility and fear inspired by his words seem entirely fitting when we recall that this passage was written in response to Lenin's note of 6 May 1921:

Are you not ashamed to vote for the publication of 5000 copies of Maiakovskii's *150,000,000*? Rubbish, stupid, arrant stupidity and pretentiousness. I think that you should print only 1 in 10 of such things and not more than 1500 copies for libraries and eccentrics. And flog Lunacharskii for Futurism.³⁴⁶

Ivaniushina rightly remarks that the dynamic of interaction between Lenin and Maiakovskii actually borrows more from another Pushkinian source popular with the Futurists, Ruslan's encounter with the giant head in *Ruslan i Liudmila*.³⁴⁷ Lenin, like Chernomor's brother, is no longer a mighty warrior, but has been imprisoned in motionlessness; they are both grumpy when disturbed, and dismissive of those who confront them. Maiakovskii is, like Ruslan, defiant when dismissed by Lenin. As Ivaniushina suggests, this defiance can be read as a statement of true ownership of the Revolution: 'As we see, the Poet announces his rights to someone or something. He attempts to replace his defeated rival who has become a monument.'³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ E. I. Naumov, *V.V. Maiakovskii: Seminarii*, 4th edn (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdanie, 1963), p. 210.

³⁴⁷ Ivaniushina, "'Mednyi vsadnik" Vladimira Maiakovskogo', p. 314.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Maiakovskii retains precisely that typical heroic quality which he later forgoes in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, playing the role of fearless Ruslan. Like a good bogatyr, he is not deterred by Lenin's claim that the redoubts of power are impenetrable:

Владимир Ильич
 Напрасно зовете
 Что ей воскресать пустяковины ради
 Меня ль секретарша и дверь озаботит
 И сквозь грудь я пролезу.
 Радий. (IV, 305)

This self-identification with the epic heroes of folklore carried over into the published text: 'стою / будущих былин Святогор / богатырь' (IV, 121). However, Maiakovskii has also taken on some of the aspects ascribed to Lenin in the draft. In a punning self-description he likens himself to Pushkin's giant head:

И я
 на этом самом
 на море
 горой головой плыву головасть –
 второй какой брат черноморий. (IV, 127)

Second, in an allusion missed by Ivaniushina, it is Maiakovskii himself who is like Pushkin's Peter the Great: 'Стою спокойный. Без единой думы. Тысячесилием воли сдерживаю антенны. Не гудеть!' (IV, 128). This humorously inverts the famous opening of *Mednyi vsadnik* ('Стоял он дум великих полн'). Maiakovskii is, self-effacingly, a transmitter, not a formulator of ideas, but he still gives himself, not Lenin, the task of being the transformative instance in society.

Thus, whereas the Lenin of *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* greedily swallows every moment of triumph in *Mednyi vsadnik*, in *V internatsional* he is typified by his grumpy immobility. Ivaniushina locates this within the wider context of the poem, which depicts a future dystopia in which Communist civilization is so comfortable that it has lost all its revolutionary energy. She sees this as an inversion of Pushkin's valorization of domesticity

in *Mednyi vsadnik* in contrast to the demonic force of nature and nation.³⁴⁹ However, such an analysis overlooks some of the subtleties of *Mednyi vsadnik*: nature is not in itself negative—it is civilization’s hubristic incursion into the Neva delta which has caused a problem. We are reminded of the impact of civilization by the way Evgenii addresses the Bronze Horseman as a ‘builder’.

Statues and Mummies

In his borrowing of the Pushkinian myth of the statue, Maiakovskii inverts the key binary which underlies it: the opposition between immobility and mobility. Jakobson suggests that ‘the motif of the *forced, imprisoning immobility* of a statue, polemically opposed to Puškin’s myth of its sovereign rest, acquires particular vigour in Majakovskij’.³⁵⁰ Both Maiakovskii and Pushkin, despite their differences, imagine the statue going from mobile to immobile; however, while for Pushkin, and others, this is negative, for Maiakovskii it is very welcome. Thus, for Pushkin the Bronze Horseman’s movement is a transgression of natural law; for Maiakovskii it is Lenin’s transformation into a statue, his lack of movement, which contradicts the natural dynamism of life.

Consequently, we can read Lenin’s appearance as a stationary monument in *V internatsional* as indicative of Maiakovskii’s unhappiness at the cultural impact of the Revolution, particularly in the wake of NEP and Lenin’s criticism of Maiakovskii’s iconoclastic poetry. However, after Lenin’s death Maiakovskii moves from criticizing him to attempting to maintain whatever revolutionary energy he represented in the face of attempts to fix and reify him. Maiakovskii already fears that Marx has already undergone similar petrification: in ‘O driani’ (1920-21), Marx is depicted as a picture on a wall, looking on in impotent horror at the embourgeoisification of Soviet society (II, 74).

³⁴⁹ Ivaniushina, “‘Mednyi vsadnik’ Vladimira Maiakovskogo’, p. 321.

³⁵⁰ Jakobson, ‘The Statue’, p. 364. My emphasis.

Maiakovskii's change in attitude towards Lenin had an additional, specific motivation: the plans to preserve Lenin's body after his death seemed like a grotesque symbol of the loss of revolutionary impetus. Maiakovskii's argues that this act would preserve not Lenin's life, but his infirmity and death:

Люди
 видят
 замурованного в мрамор,
 гипсом
 холодеющего
 старика. (VI, 252)

Lenin's transformation into a quasi-statue also signalled his instrumentalization at the hands of both political successors and unscrupulous profiteers. In a *Lef* article which was refused by the censors Maiakovskii urged the makers of memorabilia not to 'trade in Lenin' and produced a spoof advertisement of Lenin busts to ridicule the rash of kitsch Leniniana which emerged after his death.³⁵¹

The attitude to Lenin adopted in this article bears striking similarities to Maiakovskii's attitude to Pushkin.³⁵² Just as Lenin memorabilia is mocked here, Maiakovskii pours scorn on a Pushkin-branded cigarette case in 'Gimn kritiku'.³⁵³ Moreover, Maiakovskii frequently urges his audience to learn from the living Pushkin without allowing Pushkin to persist as a dead man:

The comrade says that I simply entirely destroy all the classics. I have never engaged in this ridiculous business. Even one of the most hardened ego-futurists Severianin wrote:

Да, Пушкин мертв для современья,
 Но Пушкин пушкински велик.

³⁵¹ Lars Kleberg, 'Notes on the Poem *Vladimir Il'ič Lenin*', in *Vladimir Majakovskij: Memoirs and Essays*, pp. 166-78 (p. 168) and Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 207.

³⁵² A comparison of the cults of Lenin and Pushkin merits a full study: an enjoyable meditation on this theme is Iurii Mamin's riotous film *Bakenbardy* (1990), in which a sculptor transforms one of the many standard Lenin busts in his workshop into an equally standard Pushkin with a few chisel strokes.

³⁵³ See Kleberg, 'Notes on the Poem *Vladimir Il'ič Lenin*', p. 168.

All I am saying is that there are no classics which have impact for all time. Learn them, love them in the time in which they were working. (XII, 434-35)

In the cases of both Pushkin and Lenin Maiakovskii is distinctly opposed to the grizzly spectacle of corpses outside of graves. At a debate about 'The Proletariat and Art' in 1918 he is reported to have said that:

He is himself prepared to lay chrysanthemums on Pushkin's grave. But if corpses come out of the graves and want to influence the creativity of our times, then we need to tell them that there is no room for them among the living.³⁵⁴ (XII, 453)

In the *Lef* article, Maiakovskii contrasts the morbid preserved corpse with Lenin's true immortality: 'Lenin is still our contemporary. He is among the living. We need him alive, not as a dead man. For that reason: Learn from Lenin, but don't canonize him.'³⁵⁵ Pomorska observes that these lines recur in different form, addressed to Pushkin, in 'Iubileinoe', Maiakovskii's most important treatment of the Pushkin statue myth:

Я люблю вас,
НО ЖИВОГО,
а не мумию.³⁵⁶ (VI, 54)

In the context of our present argument we see that some of Maiakovskii's words to Pushkin clearly also apply to Lenin. The act of preservation was repeatedly understood in an Egyptian context, not least in the pyramidal form of Aleksei Shchusev's Lenin mausoleum. Nina Tumarkin argues that the embalming was inspired by the recent discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb.³⁵⁷ The mummification of the body represents the same imposition

³⁵⁴ Jangfeldt rightly observes that in this instance 'Majakovskij was attacking Puškin the "classic", who had been given a final, canonical form, not Puškin the *writer*'. Jangfeldt, *Majakovskij and Futurism*, p. 57. Jangfeldt locates this speech within the context of the tension within Narkompros: he quotes Lunacharskii saying, on the same day, in a different place, 'We do not want [...] to destroy monuments of the old culture and we will not let anyone do it [...].' The translation is mine; the omissions are Jangfeldt's.

³⁵⁵ Kleberg, 'Notes on the Poem *Vladimir Il'ič Lenin*', p. 169.

³⁵⁶ Krystyna Pomorska, 'Majakovskij and the Myth of Immortality in the Russian Avant-Garde', in *Slavic Literatures and Modernism*, ed. Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), pp. 49-69 (p. 63).

³⁵⁷ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives*, pp. 175, 179.

of immobility as the statue and recalls the figure of the Egyptian mummy, which was a Futurist commonplace for the archaic past.³⁵⁸

Thus we have seen how Maiakovskii uses Pushkin in different ways in three different instances to express his changing attitude to Lenin and the progress of the Revolution and to articulate the confrontation of the poet and the state: in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* Lenin is an all-conquering amalgam of the characters of *Mednyi vsadnik* and 'Prorok'; in *V internatsional* he is a motionless head, and Maiakovskii is a hero; in 'Iubileinoe' Pushkin himself is used to allude to the fact that Lenin has become a symbol of cultural stagnation. We will now turn to that poem to examine in depth how its Pushkinian contexts shed light on Maiakovskii's attitudes to politically engaged poetry.

Poet, Citizen and Bureaucrat

Life and Love

We will now examine the interaction of poetry and politics within Maiakovskii's thematic repertoire and its relation to his myth of self. As suggested above, the poems of 1924, including *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and 'Iubileinoe', almost overstate the poet's dedication to life. Between 1924 and 1926 Maiakovskii produced a sequence of poems in which he enters into dialogue with a dead person and discusses the meaning and value of life. These poems include 'Sergeiu Eseninu', 'Tovarishchu Nette: Parokhodu i cheloveku' and 'Iubileinoe'.³⁵⁹ In all three poems, as in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and 'Komsomolskaia' (1924), which both relate to the continued vitality of the departed Lenin, Maiakovskii plays with

³⁵⁸ Compare the first manifesto of the Italian Futurists: 'The threshold of the future will be swept free of mummies!'. Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, p. 23. We recall the archaic associations of Egypt in *Poshchchina*, mentioned in Chapter One. See Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 50.

³⁵⁹ See Papernyi, "'Ot Pushkina do nashikh gazetnykh dnei...'", p. 86.

the semantic range of the word 'life'. In 'Komsomolskaia' Maiakovskii provides something akin to a dictionary definition:

Ленин и «Смерть»—
 слова враги.
 Ленин и «Жизнь»—
 товарищи. (VI, 36)

The semantic equivalence of Lenin and life is part of the aggrandizing of Lenin typical of the poems after his death. The opposite pole to this dynamism is occupied by death and its simulacrum, the statue, as is evident in what seems to be a paean to life in the famous conclusion of 'Iubileinoe'. Life is contrasted to the deadening effect of statuary:

Мне бы
 памятник при жизни
 полагается по чину.
 Заложил бы
 динамиту —
 ну-ка,
 дрызнь!
 Ненавижу
 всяческую мертвечину!
 Обожаю
 всяческую жизнь! (VI, 56)

The overstated resistance to both death and commemoration can be seen as evidence of Maiakovskii's paradoxical attitude of fascination and repugnance in regard to both suicide and statues. Not only are such tensions characteristic of Maiakovskii's fractured persona, but they are also reflected in the way the poet constructs his relationship with his calling and its place in the world. This is particularly true in regard to the eternal questions of engaged poetry: what sort of poetry should a poet who is concerned for the polity write and what does this choice say about his relationship to the state? In light of the longstanding myths of the persecution of poets and other discourses in Russian culture tinged with messianism, such questions are inextricably related to Maiakovskii's wider existential dilemma: both poetry and the state are implicated in the

question of life and death. We see in 'Iubileinoe' how Maiakovskii turns to Pushkinian mythology in order to articulate his struggles. Although the statue myth is obviously central here, it is accompanied by a range of references to Pushkin which help Maiakovskii give voice to both sides in his internal struggle between writing civic and lyric verse.

When Maiakovskii first addresses Pushkin, he is somewhat desperate:

Дайте руку!
 Вот грудная клетка.
 Слушайте,
 уже не стук, а стон. (VI, 47)

His heart has stopped beating: such were the travails of love that it groans instead.³⁶⁰

Maiakovskii is more statue-like than even the Pushkin monument: he is hard, whereas Pushkin is soft, so he is worried about hurting Pushkin ('Стиснул? / Больно? / Извините, дорогой'; VI, 47). Maiakovskii's head is prodigiously heavy:

Я никогда не знал,
 что столько
 тысяч тонн
 в моей
 позорно легкомыслой головенке. (VI, 47)

This statuesque heaviness is accompanied by a suggestion that he is near death. He says a little later: 'Скоро вот и я умру и буду нем' (VI, 51). Pushkin seems to concur, saying earlier of Maiakovskii's name: 'Нет, не старость этому имя!' (VI, 50).³⁶¹ The forlorn admission of imminent mortality by the statue-like Maiakovskii conceals a claim to

³⁶⁰ Alternatively one could read Maiakovskii's sadness as grief at the death of Lenin. In *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* he describes mourning in similar terms: 'Ужас / из железа / выжал стон.' Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VI, 297.

³⁶¹ There are further hints that Maiakovskii may be dead, or nearly dead: there is an ambiguity to his forlorn plea 'Мне при жизни с вами сговориться б надо'. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VI, 51. Pushkin's advice to him seems more befitting for a ghost than a person: 'Маячь на юг!', since *maiachit'* ('to loom') is commonly used of ghosts (Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VI, 50). Maiakovskii humorously uses it as such in *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*:

Коммунизма
 призрак
 по Европе рыскал,
 уходил
 и вновь
 маячил в отдаленьи...

Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VI, 256.

membership of a tradition of poetic radicalism and an interrogation of the memorialization of poets. It recalls a line from 'Andre Shen'e': 'Я скоро весь умру'. As we saw in the previous chapter, 'Andre Shen'e' can be read as Pushkin's rejection of a certain solipsistic strain of Byronism in favour of greater engagement with themes of national importance.³⁶² Chénier himself is described in the poem as having rejected love poetry in favour of the political, seemingly providing a prototype for Maiakovskii to do likewise. However, it is this same choice which has led to Chénier's death: engagement with civic themes brings risks.

However, the allusion also carries with it the prospect of a form of immortality, albeit one which Maiakovskii associates with death—monumental commemoration. Chénier's words invert a familiar Horatian sentiment from 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius'—'omnis ne moriar'. Horace suggests the poet cannot die completely because he will live on in his works. Pushkin's Chénier, and Maiakovskii, however, seem to imply something different. Maiakovskii also alludes to another Pushkinian iteration of this theme, 'la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi', his version of Horace's ode, in which Pushkin claims: 'Весь я не умру'.

Pushkin's argument that his legacy will be in the form of text, not monument, becomes ironic when addressed to his own actual, physical monument. In this context Maiakovskii's prediction that he will be dumb is ambiguous: it is both the silence of death and the silence of the statue. Maiakovskii plays on the two forms of immortality, books and statues: 'После смерти / нам / стоять почти что рядом: Вы на Пе, а я на эМ' (VI, 51). The first half of the sentence suggests (presciently) that their statues will be close to one another; we then discover that this refers to the fact that, due to an alphabetical coincidence, they will actually stand next to each other on the bookshelf. We will return to this conflict between text and monument below.

³⁶² Sandler, 'Poetics of Authority', p. 197. Byron was also, of course, connected with the struggle for freedom, thanks to his passionate advocacy for Greek Independence.

Maiakovskii finds it impossible to separate poetry from biography. He explains that the reason for 'lubileinoe' is not so much the desire to find solace in conversation, or involve someone else in his pain, as the simple fact that even when he feels his life ebbing away, his natural reaction is to produce poetry:

Нет,
 не навяжусь в меланхолишке черной,
 да и разговаривать не хочется
 ни с кем.
 Только
 жабры рифм
 топырит учащённо
 у таких, как мы,
 на поэтическом песке. (VI, 48)

The disturbing image of poetry as the dying gasps of a stranded fish not only reinforces the sense of impending death, but also shows a desire to find common ground with Pushkin, who is similarly portrayed as a doomed, but compulsive, poet. Maiakovskii portrays himself as something of a love poetry addict, unable to resist its temptation:

Нами
 лирика
 в штыки
 неоднократно атакована,
 ищем речи
 точной
 и нагой.
 Но поэзия —
 пресволочнейшая штукавина:
 существует —
 и ни в зуб ногой. (VI, 49)

Maiakovskii contrasts an ever-persistent lyric impulse with the naked language promoted by Futurist rhetoric (see, for instance, *V internatsional: 'язык мой—гол'*; IV, 108). His morbid persona is clearly linked to the end of the poet's love-affair with Lili Brik. He combines and contrasts love and politics: he is pleased to be free of the two distractions of Lili Brik and the ROSTA propaganda windows: 'Я теперь свободен от любви и от

плакатов'. He stands at a crossroads between the two. Freedom from love has involved the death of one of his key animal personae, the jealous bear from *Pro eto*:

Шкурой
ревности медведь
лежит когтист. (VI, 48)

Other animal alter egos show that Maiakovskii has been doubly disempowered: 'тревожусь я о нем, в щенка смиренном львенке' (VI, 47). 'L'venki' was Maiakovskii's punning term for members of *Lef*, while 'shchenok' was his nom de plume in letters to Lili Brik. The worrying lion cub been thoroughly domesticated—much like the bear transformed into a rug.

The death of Maiakovskii the lover makes sense within the larger narrative of Maiakovskii's poetry: it is a natural consequence of the end of *Pro eto*, in which, after much anguish, the poet is crucified as a sort of Messiah of lovers:

земной любви искупителем значась,
должен стоять,
стою за всех,
а всех расплачусь,
за всех расплачусь. (IV, 172)

Messianic persecution and the travails of love are conflated. The link between the two types of martyrdom is emphasized by the punning connection between crying and being crucified.

Maiakovskii describes his love affair to Pushkin in terms which recall famous love affairs from Pushkin's own work. First, he (mis)remembers Onegin's letter to Tat'iana, misattributing the words to Ol'ga. The mention of a husband for his lover is surely a tongue-in-cheek reference to Osip Brik, Lili's husband and Maiakovskii's friend. Maiakovskii further ironically plays with the notion of adultery, implicitly contrasting his own situation with that of the uxorious Pushkin:

Их

и по сегодня
 много ходит —
 всяческих
 охотников
 до наших жен. (VI, 55)

Maiakovskii erases the boundary between Pushkin's work and his life, comparing the intertwining of his life and poetry with the way in which Pushkin's death mirrored the action of *Evgenii Onegin*. The rumours of adultery that prompted Pushkin to summon D'Anthès for a duel, were said to concern both Nataliia Pushkina and her sister; likewise, Onegin, with his scandalous behaviour towards Ol'ga at the ball and later love for Tat'iana is also implicated in a sisterly love triangle that ends in a duel.

Later, Maiakovskii seems to recall Pushkin's *Pikovaia dama*, in which Hermann waits below Liza's window, out of which she throws him letters:

Было всякое:
 и под окном стояние,
 письма,
 тряски нервное желе. (VI, 50)

This passage also recalls some of the action of *Pro eto* in which Maiakovskii tries to win over Lili. The poet draws attention to the literary nature of his love affair twice over, as not only is his love affair similar to Germann's, but, as we remember, Liza's love for Hermann, like Tat'iana's for Onegin, was perhaps more a product of literary models than genuine feeling. (As in the previous chapter, we see the Futurists locating Pushkin within a sequence of iterations.) This elision of the difference between literary and actual love underlines the argument that 'lubileinoe' is to a significant extent concerned with Maiakovskii's choice of genre, as well as biographical problems.

Pushkin confirms Maiakovskii's diagnosis that love is indeed over, both as an affair and as a theme (the two are presented as indistinguishable for the committed lyric poet): 'вот и любви пришел как, / дорогой Владим Владимыч' (VI, 50). However, poetry is not just a reflex but a cathartic cure: 'Сердце рифмами вымучь' (VI, 50). Pushkin's

colloquial tone has an ambivalent effect: on the one hand, it creates an appearance of intimacy and equality between Pushkin and Maiakovskii, desacralizing the image of Pushkin; on the other, it reinforces the sense, ubiquitous in Maiakovskii's dialogue poems, that the entire dialogue is carried out within Maiakovskii's own voice and persona.³⁶³

Conversations with the Revenant

The monologic aspects of the dialogue notwithstanding, the conversation between Maiakovskii and Pushkin is deliberately located within a long tradition of imagined dialogues between the poet and an illustrious predecessor. The poetic elaboration of this conflicted inheritance has certain established templates, one of which is the motif of the poet's conversation with his dead predecessor, such as Ennius's dream of Homer or Dante's meeting with Virgil. Such interaction between poets is itself a subset of a broader motif in which the living meet the dead, either on earth (in dreams or, in Homer, the *nekuia*) or in the underworld (the katabasis). While Maiakovskii and Pushkin's stroll through nocturnal Moscow has elements of the Dantean katabasis (Maiakovskii gives a list of contemporary poetry's greatest sinners), the literary model it follows most closely is that of the revenant poem, in which a poetic predecessor returns as a dream or a ghost. It would seem that Maiakovskii has produced an original variation on this genre by making his revenant all but silent, thus promoting the importance of the narrator. However, in so doing Maiakovskii actually closely follows a template established by Pushkin himself in 'Ten' Fon-Vizina'.³⁶⁴

In Pushkin's poem a bored Fonvizin returns from the underworld to observe the standing of Russian poetry: his nocturnal visits to Krotopov, Khvostov, Shirinskii-

³⁶³ Compare M. V. Panov, who argues that Maiakovskii's verse 'is a poetic monologue created by means of customary poetic dialogue'. M. V. Panov, *Russkii iazyk i sovetskoe obshchestvo: Prospekt* (Almaty: AN SSSR, 1962, p. 105.

³⁶⁴ For other examples of this genre, see Batiushkov's 'Ten' druga', 'Umiraiushchii Tass' and 'Moi penaty', the last of which is mentioned by Pushkin in 'Ten' Fon-Vizina'. Kahn assigns the re-emergence of this genre to the influence of Lucian. See Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 22.

Shakhmatov, Shikhmatov, Derzhavin and Batiushkov expose the paucity of poetic talent left in Russia (“Бранил он русских без пощады’ [...] “Наш гений долго не восстанет”).³⁶⁵ As in ‘Iubileinoe’, the poem is set on a moonlit night populated only by poets:

Уж вечер к ночи уклонялся,
Мелькал в окошки лунный свет.
И всяк, кто только не поэт,
Морфею сладко предавался.³⁶⁶

This is not to suggest that Maiakovskii’s moonlight is a direct reference to Pushkin’s: as well as being a commonplace of Gothic ghost tales, it is a common feature in more classically inclined revenant poems, such as Konstantin Batiushkov’s ‘Ten’ druga’.³⁶⁷ However, it is notable that moonlight recurs in all Maiakovskii’s poems in which he talks with the dead, including ‘Tovarishchu Nette—parokhodu i cheloveku’ and *Khorosho!*

Maiakovskii, like Denis Fonvizin (who is a mouthpiece for Pushkin) sees Russia as bereft of poets: ‘Чересчур страна моя поэтами нищá’ (VI, 51). Maiakovskii’s hyperbolic criticism of his literary rivals is partly a ploy to imply his own poetic genius, just as Pushkin does. His attack on his rivals must be seen in the context of the beginnings of a new, specifically Soviet, literature and of a time in which different aesthetic tendencies fought it out to be dominant in a cultural sphere turned on its head by Revolution.³⁶⁸ Just as Pushkin inhabits the style of Fonvizin, Maiakovskii gives his revenant a voice by larding his poem with allusions to Pushkin’s works. Maiakovskii deforms the Pushkinian text through misquotation; Pushkin allows Gavrila Derzhavin, one of the characters Fonvizin meets, to

³⁶⁵ Pushkin, *PSS*, I, 125.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁶⁷ See K. N. Batiushkov, ‘Ten’ druga’, in *Sochineniia*, ed. by D. D. Blagoi (Moscow, Leningrad: Akademia, 1934), pp. 74-75.

³⁶⁸ It is no coincidence that at around the same time as Maiakovskii other writers turned to the revenant theme as a device to describe their peers. As Karpushkina observes, there are clear similarities between ‘Iubileinoe’ and Sasha Chernyi’s short story of 1926, ‘Pushkin v Parizhe’, in which a taciturn Pushkin is transported to contemporary Paris, where rival émigré factions compete for his blessing. See L. A. Karpushkina, ‘Vladimir Maiakovskii: Pushkinskoe i “antipushkinskoe”’, in *Vladimir Maiakovskii i ego traditsiia v poezii*, ed. by I. G. Mineralova, Iu. N. Mineralov, O. Iu. Iur’eva (Moscow: Litera, 2005), pp. 60-72 (p. 66). Another point of comparison is Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master i Margarita* in which another returning outsider, the devil, is used to satirize the contemporary literary scene.

speak for himself, but warps his words by turning them into an exaggerated and humorous pastiche of Derzhavin's odic style. Thus we can see that Maiakovskii not only shares Pushkin's desire 'to show respect for literary authority and to debunk it', but also that he uses a Pushkinian model to enact this desire, which further complicates the dynamics of respect and rivalry.³⁶⁹ Maiakovskii uses Pushkin's own poems simultaneously to pay tribute to Pushkin's pre-eminence and to undo it and promote himself.

Esenin and the Good Life

Maiakovskii's quasi-katabasis seems to restore him from the brink of death to good health and good spirits. By the end of the poem he seems eager for life and full of vigour:

Хорошо у нас
в Стране Советов.
Можно жить,
работать можно дружно. (VI, 55)

Similarly, whereas he had taken on the attributes of the statue in the opening verses, by the end, he demonstratively explodes the statue in favour of life. Maiakovskii's new confidence seems to be inspired not so much by Pushkin's words of consolation, but by his own dismissive account of the contemporary poetry scene. Of particular significance are his remarks about his rival Esenin:

Балалаечник!
Надо,
чтоб поэт
и в жизни был мастак. (VI, 53)

Once again 'life' is ambiguous: the poet must be a master both during his life, and be an expert in life, in living. In this context we can see Maiakovskii's choice of life over death in 'Iubileinoe' as a more optimistic prefiguring of the famous conclusion of 'Sergeiu Eseninu', which also plays on the notion of 'life' (1926): 'В этой жизни помереть не трудно. /

³⁶⁹ Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, p. 24.

Сделать жизнь значительно трудней' (VII, 105). Maiakovskii's rivalry with Esenin also perhaps provides the motivation for writing 'Iubileinoe': on 6 June 1924 at the Pushkin statue Esenin had read his own address to the monument. His poem anticipates Maiakovskii's in drawing attention to their shared hooliganism:

О Александр! Ты был повеса,
Как я сегодня хулиган.³⁷⁰

Maiakovskii not only attacks Esenin in his poem, but also implies that he is insincere. Only the wounded Maiakovskii really needs to talk to Pushkin:

Может,
я
один
действительно жалею,
что сегодня
нету вас в живых. (VI, 51)

Esenin's poem also interlaces Pushkin's monument with myths of persecution: 'Но, обреченный на гоненье, / Еще я долго буду петь...'³⁷¹ Maiakovskii, while more subtly engaging similar discourses, seems openly to reject Esenin's maudlin complaints: life is good in the Soviet Union.

Nekrasov and Civil Service

Nevertheless, Maiakovskii does seem to undermine his declaration of the good life by drawing attention to a certain loss: early in the poem there had been a paucity of poets in Russia ('Чересчур страна моя поэтами нищя́'; VI, 52); by the final lines there are none ('Только вот поэтов, к сожаленью, нету'; VI, 55). Not even Maiakovskii is a poet any more. However, he does not regret this, or at least not entirely: 'впрочем, может, это и не нужно' (VI, 55). I would argue that Maiakovskii says that even he is no longer a poet

³⁷⁰ Sergei Esenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, ed. by Iu. L. Prokushev (Moscow: Nauka, 1995-2000), I, 203.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

because, as part of the bargain necessary to carry on living, he must sacrifice ‘true’ poetry—the expression of his lyrical self, mostly in amatory verse—in favour of civic verse and work on behalf of Soviet power. This shift, which anticipates elements of ‘Vo ves’ golos’ which will be discussed below, is reflected both in the content of the poem and in the way in which Maiakovskii describes himself.

First, towards the end of the poem Maiakovskii becomes dismissive of *Evgenii Onegin*, arguing, as he often did in his more bombastic speeches and essays, that Pushkin’s poetry had no relevance to a post-revolutionary audience:

битвы революций
 посерьезнее «Полтавы»,
 и любовь
 пограндиознее
 онегинской любви. (VI, 54)

The reality of the Revolution is humorously promoted above the obsolete and the literary in the form of the poem *Poltava* (Poltava’s existence as both a battle and a poem continues the habit of blending the literary and the actual). The new more grandiose love can be interpreted as love for the revolution, as Maiakovskii has previously foresworn more erotic infatuations. What is more, Maiakovskii inverts the old saw about the pen and the sword, reusing the same vocabulary as in his earlier concession to poetry (bayonets, teeth), but this time as part of an absolute denial of the power of literature in the face of military violence:

Нынче
 наши перья —
 штык
 да зубья вил (VI, 54)

Finally, Maiakovskii explicitly imagines himself as a civil servant: he merits a statue because of his ‘rank’:

Мне бы
 памятник при жизни
 полагается по чину. (VI, 56)

Maiakovskii is not only a bureaucratic servant of the Revolution, but one so loyal and effective that he deserves a monument in his own lifetime. (We recall that Pushkin too was brought into court service as a Kammerjunker.) This sense of civic-minded diligence is foreshadowed in a statement earlier in the poem:

Вред - мечта,
и бесполезно грезить,
надо
ведь
служебную нуду. (VI, 48)

Maiakovskii uses Pushkin's own mythology to express his transformation from a poet into a bureaucrat. In one of a number of references to Pushkin's dialogue poems, he transforms Pushkin's 'Chinovnik i poet' (1823), echoing the sentiments of the bureaucrat who refuses to go for a walk with Pushkin because he is too busy with his duties. Pushkin's bureaucrat suggests the poet is a dreamer ("“Зефиром утренним дышать / И с вашей Музою мечтать / Уединенно и беспечно?””), whereas he must carry on his official business ('Но службы долг зовет меня, / Простите, нам не до гулянья').³⁷²

The contrast between civic duty and poetic calling made by both Maiakovskii and Pushkin should be contextualized within the overarching story of the interaction of poetry and politics in European literature, the Russian tradition and Maiakovskii's career. From its very beginnings lyric poetry, the most solipsistic of genres, has always been used to articulate an internal debate which centres on the love poet's sense of inadequacy at failing to engage with the world around him, and ultimately with politics.³⁷³ This anxiety over theme is closely tied to one of the central questions of literature, neatly framed by Horace, who proved adept at doing both: 'aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae.' This debate remained particularly prominent in Russian culture, in, for instance, the poetry of the

³⁷² Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 252.

³⁷³ For instance, a poet such as Propertius would confess his guilt at failing to engage with the political, in contrast to contemporaries such as Virgil, who operated more readily within the civic-minded tradition of Alcaeus. See Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 139.

Decembrists or the essays of utilitarian critics such as Chernyshevskii who, broadly speaking, argued that literature should function as a sort of social conscience for the nation. This position has always provoked an antithesis in the aestheticist position, which was adopted at times by Pushkin, his lyrical successors, and the Symbolists.

Maiakovskii consciously locates his own internal debate between love and politics within this tradition. One less than obvious intertext that he uses to frame the discussion is Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. The moonlit conversation between Maiakovskii and Pushkin in which expedient politics triumphs over sentimental love is reminiscent of the encounter between the False Dmitrii and Marina Mnishek, in which the latter continuously dismisses the former's appeals to see their union as a pact made in love not politics. Pushkin's advice to Maiakovskii ('Сердце рифмами вымучь'; VI, 50) recalls the False Dmitrii's plea to Marina, 'Клянусь тебе, что сердца моего / Ты вымучить одна могла признание.'³⁷⁴

More programmatically, the conversation in 'Iubileinoe' rehearses elements of two key poems in the Russian poetic canon—Nekrasov's 'Poet i grazhdanin' and its precursor, Pushkin's 'Poet i tolpa'. We see again, as we did with Khlebnikov, that the Futurists self-consciously interact not only with Pushkin directly but with the myths of Pushkin as they have been mediated by the intervening century of poetry. 'Poet i tolpa', like the Pushkinian oeuvre overall, is not an untouchable relic, but a living part of the culture, the meaning of which has been changed by its dialogue with successor poems in accordance with their historical contexts.

Nekrasov is a prominent presence in the poem. When Maiakovskii suggests an alternative pantheon of poets based on the coincidence of the putative proximity of his books and Pushkin's on an alphabetized library shelf, Nekrasov comes between them (mirroring his chronological position):

³⁷⁴ Pushkin, *PSS*, VII, 63. Maiakovskii's fondness for, or at least, intimate familiarity, with this passage is evident in his use of it to make a facetious linguistic point in *Kak delat' stikhi*. See Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XII, 114.

А Некрасов
 Коля,
 сын покойного Алеши, —
 он и в карты,
 он и в стих,
 и так
 неплох на вид.
 Знаете его?
 вот он
 мужик хороший.
 Этот
 нам компания —
 пускай стоит.³⁷⁵ (VI, 52)

Maiakovskii's description of Nekrasov as a '*muzhik khoroshii*' surely alludes to his magnum opus *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho?*, in which he famously gave a voice to the Russian peasant. (Maiakovskii puns on the apt soundplay of Nekrasov's title: '*komu zhit*' seems to represent the *muzhik* heroes of Nekrasov's poem and the '*muzhik khoroshii*' of Maiakovskii's poem.) The title of this work noticeably corresponds with Maiakovskii's interest in the meaning of the word 'life' and is consequently obliquely referenced later in Maiakovskii's description of life in the Soviet Union: 'Хорошо у нас в Стране советов. / Можно жить, работать можно дружно.'³⁷⁶ Maiakovskii seems to try to answer one of the great imponderable questions of Russian literature. Works such as *Komu zhit' na Rusi khorosho?* made Nekrasov's reputation as a poet with a social conscience who operated within a tradition of Russian civic poetry, but who also broadened its aspirations for social change. Maiakovskii seems to announce his own desire to be included in this tradition.

Moreover, the structure of the debate in 'Iubileinoe' accords with that in Nekrasov's own dialogue on the supremacy of civic themes, 'Poet i grazhdanin', which, in turn, takes its form from Pushkin's dialogue poems. In 'Poet i grazhdanin', as in 'Iubileinoe', we first meet the poet in the midst of depression and unwilling to talk: 'хандрит и еле

³⁷⁵ The final 'пускай стоит' is a further statue pun as it means both 'this company will be enough' and 'let him stand' either on the shelf or in the square.

³⁷⁶ This theme is reprised in Maiakovskii's *Khorosho!*: 'Я земной шар/ чуть не весь обошел,—и жизнь хороша, / и жить хорошо.' Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VIII, 322.

дышит', 'нет охоты говорить'.³⁷⁷ As in 'Iubileinoe', Pushkin ('Спаситель Пушкин') manages to provoke the poet to words, in this case in the form of a copy of his works.³⁷⁸ Moreover, just as Maiakovskii ultimately chooses civic themes over Pushkinian love, the Citizen prefers the aesthetically poor but more socially responsible poetry of the Poet to that of Pushkin. The Citizen argues that civic duty is prior to the poetic calling: 'Поэтом можешь ты не быть, / Но гражданином быть обязан.'³⁷⁹ The Poet, who represents 'art for art's sake' in this debate, quotes Pushkin's 'Poet i tolpa', which, thanks to its dialogue form and discussion of aesthetics and utility in verse is the Urtext of both 'Poet i grazhdanin' and 'Iubileinoe':

'Не для житейского волненья,
Не для корысти, не для битв,
Мы рождены для вдохновенья,
Для звуков сладких и молитв.'³⁸⁰

Pushkin's Poet rejects any notion whatsoever of poetry's utilitarian value. Interestingly for our purposes, his symbol of art for art's sake is a statue:

Тебе бы пользы всё — на вес
Кумир ты ценишь Бельведерский.
Ты пользы, пользы в нем не зришь.
Но мрамор сей ведь бог!.. так что же?
Печной горшок тебе дороже:
Ты пищу в нем себе варишь.'³⁸¹

In 'Iubileinoe' Maiakovskii not only repeats the debate between utilitarian and lyric poetry from 'Poet i tolpa' and 'Poet i grazhdanin', but also attacks Pushkin's symbol of aesthetic excellence, the statue itself—he transforms it from a remote symbol of grandeur into a

³⁷⁷ N. A. Nekrasov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, ed. by V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, A. M. Egolin, K. I. Chukovskii (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1948-53), II, 7. *Khandra* is intimately connected with Pushkin, thanks to the famous lines in Evgenii Onegin: 'Подобный английскому сплину, / Короче: русская хандра / Им овладела понемногу'. Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 21. The poet makes the reference entirely clear by adding 'и будет мой портрет готов', a possible reference to Pushkin's poem 'Mon portrait'. Pushkin, I, 69.

³⁷⁸ Nekrasov, *PSS*, II, 7. The conflation of the author with his works draws on the notion of a literary, textual afterlife which is present in, for instance, 'Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi'.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁸¹ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 141.

very human drinking companion. Like the Belvedere Torso, Pushkin the statue represents both refined aestheticism and Apollonian grace, in contrast to the Dionysian dance Maiakovskii leads it on. Pushkin in 'Iubileinoe' is thus both a statue and, thanks to the intertextual relation with 'Poet i grazhdanin' and 'Poet i tolpa', a symbol for detached, apolitical poetry.

Statues for Bureaucrats

Despite its associations with aestheticism, in Maiakovskii's poetics the statue represents above all the transformation of the poet into a servant of the state. Civic poetry is seen not as a sacred duty to the people's liberty, but as a chore ('служебную нуду'). 'Iubileinoe' thus brings together three possible identities for the poet: the lover, the citizen and the bureaucrat. They are all in some way connected to the question of death and immortality, either through discourses of martyrdom or of posthumous monuments. Maiakovskii's potential memorialization in statue form is related to his potential bureaucratization: civic themes bring with them the danger of subservience to the state, which then brings the fatal reward of the statue. Love and political opposition both bring with them the threat of a martyr's death.

We see the elision of the distinction between the roles of the citizen and the bureaucrat elsewhere in Maiakovskii's later work. The internal conflict created by Maiakovskii's commitment to political verse continued to find expression in his poetry, which remained deeply personal even after he had seemingly entirely abandoned lyric in 1923. This conflict can be seen as one of the motivating factors behind his eventual suicide in 1930. Maiakovskii himself clearly formulated this choice in terms of a suppression of his true self, particularly in the famous lines from his final poem 'Vo ves' golos', the introduction to an unfinished paean to the first five year plan in which Maiakovskii reviews his poetic career, explaining his preference for political themes:

Но я
 себя
 смирал,
 становясь
 на горло
 собственной песне. (X, 281-82)

Maiakovskii introduces this image by reigniting the debate between lyric and political themes, with some regret:

И мне
 агитпроп
 в зубах навяз,
 и мне бы
 строчить
 романсы на вас -
 доходней оно
 и прелестней. (X, 280)

He states baldly that it is this more lucrative love poetry that is actually his true metier. However, in an image which recalls the tamed lion cub of 'Iubileinoe', he explains that he continually checked his true desires ('но я себя смирал').

Self-control has, however, led to him becoming the very thing he feared most—the statue. Although Maiakovskii does not explain this transformation explicitly, it is encoded in the image of the poet standing on this throat of his own song. If we trace the history of this formulation in Maiakovskii's work, we see that it is nearly always used to represent the malignant influence of statues, and, by extension, the nationalistic appropriation of poetry by bureaucracy.

It first appears in the 1914 essay 'Dva Chekhova', also discussed in Chapter One, in which the young poet excoriates contemporary attempts to establish literary figures, and in

particular Pushkin, as moral and patriotic lodestars.³⁸² He recounts a story about one of the Futurist tours of the south of Russia and recalls one audience member taking umbrage at their disrespect for Pushkin: ‘Bear in mind, I won’t let you say anything disapproving about the activities of the authorities and Pushkin and all that!’ (I, 296). Maiakovskii is horrified by the conflation of Pushkin and Tsarist power. Moreover, he expresses his disgust with reference to the oppressive influence of statues, the physical embodiment of the bureaucratization of literature:

It is against this bureaucratization [*ochinovnichaniem*], against this canonization of the writer-enlighteners, who with the heavy bronze of monuments are stepping on the throat of the new verbal art which is freeing itself, that the young are fighting. (I, 296)

This brilliant essay can be read, in contrast to ‘Iubileinoe’, as a continuation of the Poet’s arguments from ‘Poet i grazhdanin’ and ‘Poet i tolpa’, promoting the aesthetic element of poetry over its ideological content. Maiakovskii argues that ‘the word is the aim of the poet’ and that ‘content makes no difference’ (I, 297). As suggested earlier, Pushkin is praised above all for his technical skill, not the content of his poetry: ‘They put up a monument to the wrong Pushkin, not the one who was a cheerful host at the great wedding celebration of words and sang’ (I, 296). Maiakovskii criticizes the transformation

³⁸² As further evidence of the intertextual relationship between ‘Dva Chekhova’ and ‘Vo ves’ golos’ we should note the recurrence of the description of non-political literature as a garden in both. Maiakovskii argues in ‘Dva Chekhova’ that ‘literature before Chekhov is an orangery near the luxurious estate of “the nobleman”’; in Chekhov the ‘little shop outside the fence has turned into a colourful and noisy bazaar’. In contrast, Turgenev is only interested in roses and Tolstoi in pretending to go to the people in order to ‘drag the spectacle of new landscapes over the fence of the estate’. In ‘Vo ves’ golos’ Maiakovskii says that he too has left behind the garden estates of the gentry: ‘ушел на фронт из барских садоводств / поэзии - бабы капризной’ Maiakovskii, PSS, X, 280. Whereas in ‘Dva Chekhova’ the alternative to ‘garden poetry’ is a harsher, more urban literature, in ‘Vo ves’ golos’ it is propaganda, imagined as metaphorical military service for the nascent Soviet state. The metaphorical connection between the *ancien régime* and gardens is further evident in Maiakovskii’s ‘Otkrytoe pis’mo rabochim’: ‘With amazement I watch how, from the stages of captured theatres, we hear Aidas and Traviatas with their Spaniards and counts, how the *same roses from noble orangeries* are in the verses that you have adopted and how you are still spoiled for choice when it comes to paintings depicting the magnificence of the past.’ Maiakovskii, PSS, XII, 8-9 (p. 8). Original emphasis.

of writers into ‘heralds of the truth, posters of beneficence and justice’ (I, 296), which brings to mind Nekrasov’s description of the poet as ‘the herald of age-old truths’.³⁸³ However, in the former case, the poet is in service to the state, not in opposition to it. Unlike Nekrasov’s dissident Citizen, Maiakovskii’s modern heralds are not the servants of art, or civil society, but of bourgeois mediocrity and the state:

Out of writers they squeeze pencil-pushers of enlightenment, historians, and guardians of morality [...] How can we differentiate the citizen from the artist? How can we see the real face of the bard behind the portfolio of the court attorney? (I, 296)

The Pushkin statue has become one of these quasi-bureaucratic forces of oppression because it does not treat Pushkin aesthetically, but morally:

No, on his monument they said that it [the commemoration of Pushkin] was for the fact that: ‘He awoke good feelings with the lyre’ [‘Чувства добрые он лирой пробуждал’]. There is only one practical result of this: as soon as the sharpness of some writer’s political views are ironed out, they support his authority not through studying his works, but by force. (I, 296)³⁸⁴

It is ironic, of course, that the same top-down coercion became the hallmark of the reception of Maiakovskii in the twentieth century, and that the emblem of his canonization

³⁸³ Nekrasov, *PSS*, II, 11.

³⁸⁴ Maiakovskii would undoubtedly have been aware of the textual heritage of the line quoted here. Before it was reinscribed in 1936, the lines on the monument read: ‘И долго буду тем народу я любезен, / Что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал’. This edited version was introduced by Zhukovskii after Pushkin’s death, to avoid censorship. After the original was published in 1881, there were two versions of this poem in widespread circulation. The original was ‘И долго буду тем любезен я народу, / Что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал’, to rhyme with ‘свободу’. Zhukovskii felt that ‘свободу’ was too inflammatory. See M. P. Alekseev, ‘Stikhotvorenie Pushkina “Ia pamiatnik vozdvig sebe...”: Problemy ego izucheniia’, in M. P. Alekseev, *Pushkin i mirovaia literatura*, ed. by G. P. Makagonenko and S. A. Fomichev (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), pp. 5-266 (p. 10). Although Maiakovskii only quotes the second line, which appears in both redactions, he emphasizes that he is not quoting Pushkin, but the erectors of the statue: ‘they noted on the monument’. The fact that it is the more anodyne lines that feature on the statue only reinforces the connection between the Pushkin monument and the nationalistic appropriation of the poet by the tsarist regime. In fact, Maiakovskii’s move from acoustics to politics from ‘Dva Chekhova’ to ‘Vo ves’ golos’ reflects a similar shift in the construction of Pushkin’s own monument. The earliest draft of the poem, as a monument in St Petersburg which bears these lines attests, was closer to the Horatian original in focusing on innovation and the sonic aspect of poetic composition: ‘И долго буду тем любезен я народу / что звуки новые для песен я избрал’. See Alekseev, ‘Stikhotvorenie Pushkina’, p. 10, fn. 4.

was Maiakovskii's own statue on Triumfal'naia Square (formerly Maiakovskaia).³⁸⁵ However, even if Maiakovskii could not have anticipated this development, his allusion to 'Dva Chekhova' in 'Vo ves' golos' shows an awareness that he has become not a Citizen, but a statue and, therefore, a Bureaucrat.

This reading is confirmed by the second appearance of the throat motif in the *Manifest letuchei federatsii futuristov* (1918):

As before the theatres are showing the 'King of the Jews' and other 'Kings' (works by Romanovs), as before the monuments of generals, princes—the lovers of the tsars and lovers of the tsaritsas—are still standing on the throats of the young streets with a heavy, dirty foot.³⁸⁶

The battle lines in this attack are still very similar to those in 'Dva Chekhova': Maiakovskii is on the side of the young, who are being prevented from speaking by the weight of the old art, which is still omnipresent.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, the statue is seen as a product of the apparatus of government, whether it be the bureaucracy, the monarchy or, by implication, the Bolsheviks who allow such artistic recidivism.

³⁸⁵ This irony is noted by both Svetlana Boym and Lars Kleberg. See Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 138, and Kleberg, 'Notes on the Poem *Vladimir Il'ič Lenin*', p. 176. Maiakovskii's fate mirrors that of Pushkin, who frequently urged against his own depiction in statue form. See Jakobson, 'The Statue', p. 352. A commentator more hostile to Maiakovskii, Iurii Karabchievskii, has seen Maiakovskii's fate as entirely fitting: 'A monument to Maiakovskii built by human hand—a generalized, standardized in design and use of materials—is an undeniable, almost the chief, element of his cumulative image, his own central demand from life, the fulfilment of his life, the meaning of his existence.' This attitude is not surprising considering that Karabchievskii sees Maiakovskii's repeated rejection of statues as altogether too much protesting: 'There never was in Russian literature, nor, I think, in any other literature, another writer so obsessed by the idea of a monument made by hand.' The repeated reference to Pushkin in the word '*rukotvornyi*' is a reminder of his central role in this question. See Iurii Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 192, 142. Karabchievskii's polemic against Maiakovskii can be seen as a perestroika version of Maiakovskii's own irreverent dismissals of Pushkin: the afterword hints at this in its title 'Brosit' Maiakovskogo s parokhoda Sovremennosti' (p. 221).

³⁸⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, Vasilii Kamenskii and David Burluk, 'Manifest letuchei federatsii futuristov', *Gazeta futuristov*, No. 1 (15 March 1918). Reproduced in Jangfeldt, 'Notes on "Manifest Letučej Federacii Futuristov"', p. 156.

³⁸⁷ The only development is a marked anti-monarchism, which is unsurprising given the political context: Maiakovskii refers here to *Tsar' Iudeiskii*, a verse drama written in 1914 by Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov, which was made into a film in 1918, though swiftly banned by Narkompros. A work such as this—uniting religion, monarchism and conservative art—was a gift to Maiakovskii and his colleagues as they attempted to relate their aesthetic battle to the surrounding political upheaval.

A further variation on the image is evident in a draft version for *150,000,000* (1920), in which stepping on throats is seen as the typical act of the bourgeois: 'To be a bourgeois does not mean to own capital or squander gold. It means to be the heel of a corpse on the throat of the young.'³⁸⁸ Here the statue is replaced by another immobilized body, the corpse. Thus 'Vo ves' golos' draws on a tradition within Maiakovskii's own work in which heels on throats are associated with bureaucratic appropriation of the poet and the negative cultural impact of the statue. Maiakovskii has, according to the ethos he himself established earlier in his career, betrayed his principles, which lends credence to the idea that 'Vo ves' golos' is a sort of apology for his political poetry.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake either to reduce 'Vo ves' golos' to this one image, or to conflate the bureaucratic state with the Revolution in general. It might even be possible to find an alternative, and perhaps less critical, intertextual reading of this image. In *Pobeda nad solntsem* (not, admittedly, written by Maiakovskii, although he did perform in it) a character called 'the Ill-Intentioned One' declares that he will transform himself into a gun: 'I have broken my throat myself, I will turn into powder, wadding, hooks and loops'.³⁸⁹ The 'Ill-Intentioned One' is connected with Pushkin through the theme of duelling and monuments: he alludes to Pushkin in saying he has 'put up a monument to myself – I'm not stupid either' and by being involved in a duel. The idea of becoming a weapon anticipates the way in which Maiakovskii's verses will become a weapon for class war:

Вы
с уважением
ощупывают их,
как старое,
но грозное оружие. (X, 282)

However, there are numerous factors mitigating the possible impact of such an intertext: the 'Ill-Intentioned One' is not a positive character in *Pobeda nad solntsem*; he does not

³⁸⁸ Cited by Roman Jakobson, 'On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets', in *Language in Literature*, pp. 273-300 (p. 276).

³⁸⁹ Kruchenykh, 'Victory over the Sun—the Libretto', p. 62.

become a weapon of war, but a duelling pistol—his transformation of self is ultimately a path to death, a violent presentiment of self-immolation through suicide or suicidal duelling.

Alternative Monuments in ‘Vo ves’ golos’

We have seen how Maiakovskii draws on one aspect of the Pushkinian statue, the monument on Tverskaia, to articulate his own fears of becoming a bureaucrat and hence a monument. In ‘Vo ves’ golos’ and elsewhere, however, he builds on a different but related Pushkinian monument, the famous, intangible, poetic memorial of ‘la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi’, to explore different aspects of his legacy and approximate and differentiate his own myth of self from Pushkin’s. As in the manifestos, Pushkin is used both as a point of contrast and as a source of identification. Moreover, just like the manifestos, this contrastive identity formation is (deliberately) not always consistent. We have seen above how the statue is connected with the poet’s transformation into a bureaucrat. Elsewhere in ‘Vo ves’ golos’, however, Maiakovskii emphasizes the connection between public sculpture and apolitical poetry, present already in Pushkin’s ‘Poet i tolpa’, in relation to his choice between civic and erotic poetry sketched above. Maiakovskii argues that erotic verse would have been more profitable for him but would have endangered Russia:

Неважная честь,
 чтоб из этих роз
 мои изваяния высились
 по скверам,
 где харкает туберкулез,
 где б... с хулиганом
 да сифилис. (X, 281)

Love poetry would bring Maiakovskii fame and commemoration, but the gains of the Revolution would be lost and the nation would fall into despair. The ‘sculptures’ could represent both his love poems (‘made of such roses’) and his potential memorials.³⁹⁰ The fact that they are referred to as sculptures is significant: sculpture is the most aesthetic and least politically symbolic type of public statuary, so the poet’s sculptural monument would enact his lack of political commitment.

Intangible Monuments

The situation described above is a counter-factual: Maiakovskii has, he claims, not taken the easy path of love, but the hard road of politics. We have seen how this leads to his transformation into a monument. However, Maiakovskii also engages with the idea that the poet’s text grants him a different type of imperishable monument—the Horatian ‘monumentum aere perennius’. The most noted Russian instance of this tradition is Pushkin’s ‘la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi’, but Maiakovskii’s treatment of this theme extends beyond Pushkin, through Derzhavin and Mikhail Lomonosov to Horace, further demonstrating how Pushkin is not necessarily the fountainhead of all Russian poetry. Horace’s original ode ‘Exegi monumentum aere perennius’ establishes the premise that the immortality granted by a literary legacy is more enduring than that conferred by physical monuments. The most prominent monument in ‘Vo ves’ golos’, however, departs from this formula by downplaying the importance of the poet and praising a communal political identity:

Сочтемся славою -
ведь мы свои же люди, -
пускай нам
общим памятником будет

³⁹⁰ Maiakovskii elsewhere describes roses as the essence of apolitical, sentimental poetry: ‘Поэзия - это сиди и над розой ной...’. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, II, 17.

построенный
в боях
социализм. (X, 284)

Maiakovskii does, however, also make an extravagant show of rejecting any physical monument:

Мне наплевать
на бронзы многопудье,
мне наплевать
на мраморную слизь. (X, 284)

Vaiskopf notes that Maiakovskii's monument of socialism fits within the parameters of the eighteenth-century ode, with its conventional disdain for the material. He argues that the model for Maiakovskii's monument is Derzhavin's version of this poem, which is also addressed to his descendants and which emphasizes the poet's service to the state.³⁹¹ While there is undoubtedly some truth in this, Maiakovskii, unlike Derzhavin, seeks to remove the state from the narrative of achievement and, in a fairly standard piece of Soviet rhetoric, to credit the Revolution to the people (although they are led by the poet). Derzhavin simultaneously protects some prestige for the poet and enhances the enlightened image of Catherine by portraying himself speaking truth unto power:

Что первый я дерзнул в забавном русском слоге
О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,
В сердечной простоте беседовать о боге
И истину царям с улыбкой говорить.³⁹²

By contrast, Maiakovskii in 'Vo ves' golos' depicts the Revolution as a truly communal achievement (although one in which the poet has a special role). Such communality also differs from the model suggested in Pushkin's poem, in which the people feature only as future payers of homage to the poet's monument: 'К нему не зарастет народная тропа'.³⁹³ Moreover, Maiakovskii further departs from the formulas of the monument

³⁹¹ Vaiskopf, *Vo ves' logos*, p. 162.

³⁹² Derzhavin, *Sochineniia*, p. 224.

³⁹³ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 424.

poem by suggesting that his verses will not outlive him. They are like the thousands of deceased fighters for Communism:

Умри, мой стих,
 умри, как рядовой,
 Как безымянные
 на штурмах мерли наши. (X, 283)

Maiakovskii here alludes once more to 'Andre Shen'e': the French poet calls on his voice to die, 'Погибни голос мой'.³⁹⁴ This gives an ironic tinge to Maiakovskii's desire for the oblivion of his poetry: while he wishes for this verse the unrecorded glory of the soldier, he reminds the reader of Chénier, a poet and martyr who certainly is remembered, through the medium of his verse.³⁹⁵ The poet's desire for his verse to perish, in contrast to the Horatian confidence in the immortality of verse ('omnis ne moriar'). However, as Maiakovskii hints by alluding to Chénier, the immortality of verse is contingent on the poet's physical death: his dying verse is brought into his overriding obsession with martyrdom. Jakobson proposes that: 'Throughout the course of his poems, Maiakovskii had sketched out the monolithic myth of the poet, a zealot in the name of revolution, a martyr condemned to cruel and hostile incomprehension and rejection.'³⁹⁶ We see this martyrdom myth hidden deep in 'Iubileinoe', in which the poet hints that his death is imminent. Although Maiakovskii ultimately murders the monument itself in 'Iubileinoe', the previous allusions to both political martyrdom and death in duelling make clear that an afterlife in commemoration is contingent on dying before your time. He frequently relates

³⁹⁴ Pushkin, *PSS*, II, 354.

³⁹⁵ We recall a similar episode in 'Ia i Napoleon' (1914):

Когда канонизируете имена
 погибших,
 меня известней, -
 помните:
 еще одного убила война -
 поэта с Большой Пресни! (Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 74)

³⁹⁶ Jakobson, *Dialogues*, p. 138; Panchenko, 'Russkii poet', pp. 361-62; Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, pp. 120ff.

visible memorials in the landscape to suicide or martyrdom. In *Chelovek Maiakovskii's* name is inscribed into the fabric of the city because of suicide:

- Прохожий!
 Это улица Жуковского?
 [...]
 'Она - Маяковского тысячи лет:
 он здесь застрелился у двери любимой'. (I, 269)

The Physicality of Poetic Monuments: The Water-Pipe

We have seen that Maiakovskii connects monuments with bureaucratization and with martyrdom, and thus, albeit for different reasons, he comes to occupy the same position as Pushkin in ostensibly rejecting tangible monuments. Pushkin favours the intangible monument of verse, which perpetuates the poet's name by being repeated, copied, translated and reinterpreted. However, in 'Vo ves' golos' Maiakovskii also engages directly with this sort of monument 'not built by human hand' in order to differentiate his practice and legacy from that of his predecessor. He begins the poem by addressing his descendants, whom he imagines as archaeologists:

Уважаемые
 товарищи потомки!
 Роясь
 в сегодняшнем
 окаменевшем г.....,
 наших дней изучая потемки,
 вы,
 возможно,
 спросите и обо мне. (X, 279)

Most of what contemporary culture has left behind is dismissed: not only was it once shit, but it has now fossilized. This petrification corresponds to the cultural stagnation that Maiakovskii and his allies criticize in connection with the statue. Various relics will be left for future researchers, including Maiakovskii's body and his verse:

Мой стих дойдет,

но он дойдет не так, -
 не как стрела
 в амурно-лировой охоте,
 не как доходит
 к нумизмату стершийся пятак
 и не как свет умерших звезд доходит.
 Мой стих
 трудом
 громаду лет прорвет
 и явится
 весомо,
 грубо,
 зримо,
 как в наши дни
 вошел водопровод,
 сработанный
 еще рабами Рима. (X, 281)

His verse will survive, not as an ordinary museum piece, but like a Roman water-pipe. Notably, his verse will not be at all like Cupid's arrow and will have nothing to do with the lyre: Maiakovskii rejects his erstwhile identity as a lyric love poet. I contend that this poetic water-pipe represents an inversion of the Pushkinian intangible and otherworldly monument: whereas the latter seems to have a divine origin, 'not made by human hand', the former is handmade by Roman slaves, alluding to the Horatian origin of this motif.³⁹⁷ Moreover, the monument's communal construction by plural slaves is intended to correspond to the co-operative building of socialism in Maiakovskii's other monument. His verse and the socialist revolution are made equivalent, and he can obscure his own non-proletarian origins.

The communal aspect of the quasi-monument rejects one of the main functions of the monument poem—the exaltation of the poet's genius. Moreover, Maiakovskii inverts the key feature of Pushkin's monument—intangibility. Maiakovskii emphasizes instead his verse's physicality:

вы
 с уважением

³⁹⁷ Vaiskopf observes that in the early years of Soviet rule the slaves of antiquity were often felt to be the precursors of the modern proletariat. Vaiskopf, *Vo ves' logos*, p. 164.

ощупывайте их,
как старое,
но грозное оружие. (X, 282)

(The monument that becomes a weapon is a useful metaphor for the Futurist appreciation of history: at different moments in time the same phenomena can come to be re-evaluated and take on a new meaning.)

The physicality of Maiakovskii's monument should be read in the context of the general Futurist focus on the material. Furthermore, the transformation of the almost mystical and religious monument is a typical piece of Futurist bathos, debasing established icons of beauty and elevating an ordinary piece of street furniture into a lofty poetic symbol. In this respect the water-pipe recalls Maiakovskii's earlier identity as the poet of the streets by reminding us of the drainpipes from 'A vy mogli by': 'А вы / ноктюрн сыграть / могли бы / на флейте водосточных труб?' (I, 40). By collapsing the division between the literary and the physical, Maiakovskii approximates his poetry to a physical product and attributes its survival to its materiality, not, as in Pushkin's case, its intangibility. One can locate this trope within Maiakovskii's later poetry in general, in which he often seeks to approximate his poetic output to the processing of raw materials, as in 'Domi' (1926):

Я хочу,
чтоб к штыку
приравняли перо.
С чугуном чтоб
и с выделкой стали
о работе стихов,
от Политбюро,
чтобы делал
доклады Сталин. (VII, 94)

Here and in 'Vo ves' golos' Maiakovskii's verse becomes another industrial product, the solidity of which serves as a testament to the new political order. The industrial quality Maiakovskii ascribes to his verse has two aspects: its emphatic physicality and the hard work necessary to make it. Maiakovskii insisted on the hard graft necessary for the

production of poetry.³⁹⁸ This hard work—the constructed nature of poetry emphasized in *Kak delat' stikhi* and alluded to here by the word 'сработанный'—was often contrasted to the myth of Pushkinian poetic ease. The weight of Maiakovskii's verse-monument ('весо́мо') seems to be aimed against a quality widely attributed to Pushkin—lightness.³⁹⁹ Maiakovskii openly distanced himself from the idea of Pushkin's ingenious ease when he criticized the Romantic vision of poetic spontaneity displayed in the Pushkin biopic *Poet i tsar'* in 1928:

I asked people who write poetry how they do it... In different ways... But in any case—the stupid tousled hair, the left leg being pushed to one side, the sitting at the table and immediately writing a brilliant poem:

Я памятник воздвиг себе нерукотворный,
К нему не зарастет народная тропа...

is pandering to the most banal and idiotic notion of the poet, one that can only be held by the most banal and idiotic people... (XII, 354-55)

Maiakovskii cites 'la pamiatnik vozdvig sebe nerukotvornyi' as the particular locus of such lazy stereotypes about creativity primarily because the film uses the poem in this scene. However, this is not mere coincidence: in that poem Pushkin certainly contributes to the picture of the poet as the recipient of mystical inspiration. There is an ambiguity in the opening line: the monument is both man-made (erected by the poet) but also somehow heavenly ('nerukotvornyi' alludes to divinely made icons). Pushkin's poetry is thus the product of more than just hard work. Maiakovskii, in contrast, is at pains to present his output as congenial to the new Marxist system of values in which labour is the ultimate determinant of worth. This task was made considerably easier, however, by the fact that an emphasis on construction at the expense of revelation had always served as the polemical framework of Futurist poetics, in, for instance, manifesto essays such as 'Slovo kak

³⁹⁸ See Maiakovskii, 'Kak delat' stikhi', *PSS*, XII, 81-117 (p. 116): 'Poetry is production. Very difficult, very complicated, but production.'

³⁹⁹ See, for instance, D. Merezhkovskii, *Vechnye sputniki (Pushkin)* (Letchworth: Prideaux Press, 1971), p. 5.

takovoe', in which the Futurists sought to differentiate their production from that of the Symbolists.

Maiakovskii later combines his intangible monument (socialism) with the intangible monument of the Horatian tradition (text) by making literal the notion of the text as monument and sovietizing it. He pictures the physical enormity of his literary legacy as if it were a monument towering over his rivals:

над бандой
 поэтических
 рвачей и выжиг
 я подыму,
 как большевистский партбилет,
 все сто томов
 моих
 партийных книжек. (X, 285)

Maiakovskii's quasi-monumental water-pipe combines two of the binaries attached to the Pushkinian statue myth: the (in)tangible monument and the (im)mobility of the moving statue motif. As Roman Voitekhovich has observed, the text that has become the water-pipe allows for mobility: although old and dead itself it is still a conduit for something mobile—water.⁴⁰⁰ The description of water as something essentially positive recalls the beginning of 'Vo ves' golos', in which Maiakovskii imagines himself, somewhat prosaically, as a cleaner:

жил-де такой
 певец кипяченой
 и ярый враг воды сырой.
 [...]
 Я, ассенизатор
 и водовоз
 революцией
 мобилизованный и призванный. (X, 279)⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ Roman Voitekhovich, 'monumenty 3', blog post. Available at <http://r-v.livejournal.com/237027.html>, dated 24/6/2006. Accessed: 20/7/2010.

⁴⁰¹ Maiakovskii puns on the word 'mobilize'. We should also remember that in traditional Russian superstition it is good luck to see a water-carrier.

The contents of Maiakovskii's poetry are more valuable than the conduit itself.⁴⁰² In the light of Maiakovskii's own self-identification as a propagandist, one is tempted to assume that the purifying water he conveys is the political message of Communism. However, such a reading is frustrated by Maiakovskii's previous use of water imagery to describe how he has suppressed the flow of poetry: 'Заглуша поэзии потоки' (X, 281). Maiakovskii deliberately prevents a straightforward reading of his poetry either as a gift freely given to the Revolution, or the product of self-censorship. Instead he provides us with a testament of his own inner conflict and contradiction.

Mobilizing Pushkin

The possibility for motion offered by the water-pipe monument can be seen as subordinate to a fundamental demand for mobility which Maiakovskii makes on Russian culture. To examine the relationship of this overarching philosophical framework to the reception of Pushkin, I will return to 'Iubileinoe' to analyse the way in which Maiakovskii attempts to counteract the stagnation of culture, and in particular the figure of Pushkin, by developing a different, more dynamic, model of culture. One constituent of this alternative model is a rejection of the po-faced hero-worship of Pushkin (be it by the Bolsheviks or by other poets), which helped to cement Pushkin and his statue as emblems of cultural continuity across the Revolution. Another element of this new model is the gradual development of a new paradigm for Maiakovskii's role as a poet: he remains capable of purgative iconoclasm,

⁴⁰² In his poetry Maiakovskii frequently associated water with the dynamic forces of life. An interesting point of comparison is Maiakovskii's poem against alcohol abuse 'Bei belykh i zelenykh', which chronicles the history of alcohol in Russian literary history, but in places seems to be a paean in favour of liquids of all forms: 'Жизнь—фонтан. / Открывайте и пейте-ка!'. Maiakovskii, PSS, IX, 88. As to why water was so favoured by Maiakovskii, one would point to its approximation of life in its mobility, and also its ability to cleanse—to reduce to nothing to allow for a new beginning, like the floods in *Mednyi vsadnik* and *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*. Maiakovskii was also an obsessive hand-washer. See Brown, *Mayakovsky*, p. 28.

but also shows himself capable of selecting and transforming artefacts from the past. The guiding metaphor used for such fluid and creative appropriation is mobility.

After the Revolution, Maiakovskii identified a contrary urge in conflict with his desire for fluidity and change both in the work of less radical poets and in the increasingly conservative policies of the state. We will touch on the former grouping below, but, because of its central importance for understanding Maiakovskii's relationship with the state, first we must examine how the debate over Pushkin in 1924 bears witness to Maiakovskii's resistance to official narratives of Pushkin and, by implication, of culture in general.

The story of the Soviet state's increasing interest in controlling the literary sphere over the course of the 1920s has been told many times.⁴⁰³ In the present context we have noted the state's inclination for censure and censorship in the form of Lunacharskii's 'Lozhka protivodiia' and discussed the way in which, before 1924, Maiakovskii imagined his relationship with Lenin as a conflict over ownership of the Revolution. 'Radovat'sia rano' and other poems show how a significant factor in provoking the conflict between the two factions was their divergence on the question of the extent to which bourgeois, pre-revolutionary culture should be used to help build the new Soviet culture. As the 1920s progressed, this argument often centred on the government's championing of Pushkin. In response to the allegedly nihilistic anti-traditionalism of Proletkul't and the Futurists, Lunacharskii, following Lenin's lead, had promoted the necessity of continuity in Russian literature across the Revolution, a trend which culminated in 1923's 'Back to the Classics'

⁴⁰³ See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), and Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, with Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents 1917-1953*, trans. by Marian Schwartz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

campaign and the Pushkin Jubilee.⁴⁰⁴ In a range of speeches and articles Lunacharskii argued that Pushkin should occupy a central place in the new culture.⁴⁰⁵ He argued that:

it is unthinkable that, in the name of this renewal we have hoped for, we should reduce ourselves to the state of a naked man on the naked earth [...] The proletariat *is* able to renew the culture of mankind, but in deep-rooted connection with and dependence from the culture of the past.⁴⁰⁶

Moreover, by June 1924 Lunacharskii was praising Pushkin's work not only for its technical virtues but because its 'emotional and ideological content' was 'of value to all humanity'.⁴⁰⁷

The official state commemoration of the one-hundred-and-twenty-fifth anniversary of Pushkin's birth in 1924 marks an important step in the Bolshevik Party's increasing involvement in literature and in the development of a new Soviet incarnation of Pushkin.⁴⁰⁸

Lunacharskii describes the triumph of Pushkin in terms of a rivalry with the avant-garde. (One can perhaps see this conflict as yet another love triangle: now Pushkin and Maiakovskii compete for the affection of the regime).⁴⁰⁹ By 1924 the implicit conflict between Pushkin and Futurism had, according to Lunacharskii, finished with Pushkin as victor. He accompanied a speech slurring the Futurists as demagogues with the suggestion that Futurism, and other poetic heterodoxies, had succumbed to the power of Pushkin:

⁴⁰⁴ See Stephan, *Lef*, p. xii.

⁴⁰⁵ See A. V. Lunacharskii, 'Pushkin i Nekrasov', and 'Eshche o Pushkine', in A. V. Lunacharskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by I. I. Anisimov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1963-67), I, 28-37, 38-43; Anatoly Lunacharsky, 'Alexander Pushkin', in *On Literature and Art*, ed. by A. Lebedev, trans. by Y. Ganushkin (Moscow: Progress, 1965), pp. 93-101.

⁴⁰⁶ Lunacharsky, 'Alexander Pushkin', p. 96.

⁴⁰⁷ Lunacharskii, 'Eshche o Pushkine', p. 39.

⁴⁰⁸ See Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature*, p. 237.

⁴⁰⁹ There is some truth to this notion, as a quick look at Lenin's responses to Maiakovskii's poetry shows. Nearly every time he hears or hears of Maiakovskii, Lenin restates his commitment to Pushkin: 'I had a conversation about Maiakovskii with Vladimir Il'ich. He asked, "What was that you read after Pushkin? And why did you choose that poem? I could not understand it all... there were all these strange words." I replied to Vladimir Il'ich that it was a poem by Maiakovskii which he had given me to perform. [...] Vladimir Il'ich said to me, "I am not arguing: the lift, the call, the vivacity—all that comes across. But all the same I like Pushkin more, and it would be better if you read Pushkin more often.'" See E. I. Naumov, 'Lenin o Maiakovskom', in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo (Novoe o Maiakovskom)*, 65, ed. by V. V. Vinogradov and I. Zil'bershtein (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1958), pp. 205-16 (p. 208). Krupskaiia recalled Lenin asking some students, "'Who do you read? Do you read Pushkin?" To which someone replied "Oh, no. He's a bourgeois after all. We read Maiakovskii." Lenin replied, "I think Pushkin is better.'" See *V. I. Lenin o literature i iskusstve*, ed. by N. I. Krutilova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967), pp. 555-56.

‘Even the most turbulent Futurist figures are now bowing down before him’; Maiakovskii talks about Pushkin ‘with reverence’.⁴¹⁰ Lunacharskii is referring here to a speech made by Maiakovskii on 26 May 1924, ‘Vystuplenie na dispute “O zadachakh literatury i dramaturgii”’. On this occasion Maiakovskii not only spoke fondly of Pushkin, but also seemed to endorse the use of the classics as the basis for the new art:

So Anatolii Vasil’evich [Lunacharskii] reproaches us for not respecting the ancestors, but a month ago, while I was working, when Brik started to read *Evgenii Onegin*, which I know by heart, I could not tear myself away and listened till the end and for two days I wandered round under the spell of this quatrain:

Я знаю: жребий мой измерен, [sic]
 Но чтоб продлилась жизнь моя,
 Я утром должен быть уверен,
 Что с вами днем увижусь я.

Of course, we will return hundreds of times to such works of art and study these incredibly sincere artistic examples which provide endless satisfaction and a true formulation of a thought taken, dictated and felt. (XII, 266)⁴¹¹

However, we should not necessarily join Lunacharskii in seeing Maiakovskii’s speech as evidence of total submission to Pushkin. (This unexpected reverence for Pushkin can perhaps be explained by the fact that 26 May was, in the defunct Julian calendar, Pushkin’s birthday.) Maiakovskii’s works in the early 1920s clearly show his desire to emphasize his independence from the standard line on Pushkin, not least because the rejection of Pushkin was still the Futurists’ calling-card, as its prominence in Trotskii’s *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (1923) shows.⁴¹² Maiakovskii alludes to this aspect of his identity in an essay in the first issue of *Lef*, which both established a continuity with Futurism’s pre-

⁴¹⁰ Lunacharskii, ‘Eshche o Pushkine’, p. 39.

⁴¹¹ This text has been edited to remove a reference to suicide: the original read, ‘Of course, we will return hundreds of times to such works of art, even at the moment when death will place a noose on our neck.’ See Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh*, ed. by N. N. Aseev (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939-49), II, 523. It unclear whether this reference was removed by Maiakovskii himself or the editors. One is inclined to think it was the latter, considering they do not note the omission in their commentary.

⁴¹² Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. by Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 130.

war highpoint, and signalled a new era in which attitudes to the literature of the past were modified by the new priorities of the Soviet Union:

‘Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi from the steamship of Modernity’ is our slogan from 1912 [...].
Now the 150,000,000 classics are an ordinary textbook.
Anyway, we are even now able to welcome these books as books which are no worse or better than others, helping illiterates use them to learn. (XII, 45)⁴¹³

Maiakovskii playfully alludes to his own work by listing the number of classics as 150,000,000, a reference to his own poem *150,000,000* (which in turn references the population of Soviet Russia). Unlike the Bolsheviks, he is keen to limit the role of the literature of the past to technical education, saying that ‘we should only establish the correct historical perspective in working with them. But with every effort we will fight against the transfer of the efforts of the dead into contemporary art’ (XII, 45). Maiakovskii’s careful management of public perception of his attitude to Pushkin is further evident in the fact that he redacted the printed version of his speech from ‘O zadachakh literatury i dramaturgii’, which had seemed to approve of Pushkin, to emphasize his divergence from the official policy of cultural continuity. He added the caveat that: ‘this is in no way similar to the slogan “Back to Pushkin”. My attitude to this question is in my poem “Iubileinoe”’ (XII, 266).

Incompetence and Irreverence in ‘Iubileinoe’

The title of ‘Iubileinoe’ engages with this state-sponsored promotion of Pushkin during the Jubilee by brazenly suggesting a quasi-official role. (Maiakovskii is already experimenting with the role of the bureaucrat he foresees for himself in this poem.) However, the content of ‘Iubileinoe’ shows Maiakovskii’s divergence from the official celebrations. The attitude displayed to Pushkin is ambiguous, revealing elements of existential kinship between

⁴¹³ In Maiakovskii’s analogy the classics take the place of the gospel texts and prayer books which had previously been used to teach literacy. The classics are preferable to religious texts, which they nevertheless resemble.

Pushkin and the Futurists, but also the debunking of Pushkin's alleged mastery. From the familiar greeting of the first line onward, Maiakovskii constantly makes Pushkin his equal or subordinate. In particular, he seeks to show that he does not consider Pushkin to have tutored him in verse. This is particularly evident when Maiakovskii has grown in confidence towards the end of the poem:

Были б живы —
 стали бы
 по Лефу соредактор.
 Я бы
 и агитки
 вам доверить мог.
 Раз бы показал:
 — вот так-то, мол,
 и так-то...
 Вы б смогли —
 у вас
 хороший слог.
 Я дал бы вам
 жиркость
 и сўкна,
 в рекламу б
 выдал
 гумских дам.
 (Я даже
 ямбом подсюсюкнул,
 чтоб только
 быть
 приятней вам.)
 Вам теперь
 пришлось бы
 бросить ямб картавый. (VI, 53)

Maiakovskii decreases the distance between himself and Pushkin by imagining that a contemporary Pushkin would be a Futurist, contrary to what Lunacharskii and others might believe. However, if Pushkin were alive he would have to adapt to Maiakovskii's vision of the role of the Soviet poet, abandoning his preferred metre, the iamb, and his subject matter, instead churning out the agitprop posters which Maiakovskii has been able to leave behind. Boym has argued that 'Maiakovskii creates a Pushkin in his own image'.⁴¹⁴ Her

⁴¹⁴ Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 135.

argument, which centres on Pushkin's fondness for Futurist-style wordplay in 'Iubileinoe', is perhaps overstated considering Pushkin's own weakness for a pun. However, Maiakovskii doubtless does play Pygmalion (in both a Shavian and an Ovidian sense) in order to make Pushkin more Futurist, making him work for *Lef* and talk like a pugnacious hooligan: 'Тышу вперед стремя́, / я с удовольствием справлюсь с двоими, / а разозлить — и с тремя' (X, 50).

Pushkin's tough-talking is part of a different, but equally crucial, element of Maiakovskii's response to state involvement in the Pushkin Jubilee: he attempts to distance Pushkin from appropriation by the state by emphasizing the more human and humorous aspects of his poetry and personality which were excluded from the sanitized and sacralized official version. This is not, however, necessarily undertaken to help Pushkin: it also serves to define and protect the Futurist identity. Greta Slobin sees the creation of an irreverent Pushkin as a shared project of Russian Modernists, designed to help underline their artistic independence:

In reappropriating Pushkin from the official critical canon and making tangible his battles with authority, poetic language, and form, modern writers sought not only a confirmation of their own identity in the context of the classical legacy, but also a model in their struggle with the resistance of critics and readers to new art, before and after 1917.⁴¹⁵

The Futurist emphasis on the combative and mischievous qualities which they and Pushkin shared began in the manifestos and continued throughout Maiakovskii's career: for instance in his speech at the dispute 'Puti i politika Sovkino' (1928) he critiques the film *Poet i tsar'* for depicting Pushkin as an empty, saintly figure and argues that: 'we know Pushkin as a womanizer, a bon viveur, a rake, a drunkard...' (XII, 355).

⁴¹⁵ Greta N. Slobin, 'Appropriating the Irreverent Pushkin', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, pp. 214-30 (p. 221).

‘jubileinoe’ can be read as another of these attempts at resistance to the critical orthodoxy, which was now officially sanctioned.⁴¹⁶ Not only does Maiakovskii warn Pushkin away from his official exegetes (‘Бойтесь пушкинистов’; VI, 54), but he also emphasizes aspects of Pushkin largely excised from both the pre-revolutionary Pushkin cult and the sovietized version of it, such as his non-Russian background, his hell-raising youth and, in an echo of Maiakovskii’s own position, his rivalry with established poetic authorities:

Вот арап!
 а состязается —
 с Державиным...
 Я люблю вас,
 но живого,
 а не мумию.
 Навели
 хрестоматийный глянец.
 Вы
 по-моему
 при жизни
 — думаю —
 тоже бушевали.
 Африканец! (X, 54-55)

This polemic extends beyond the immediate context of Pushkin and 1924. It should be remembered that Pushkin is likened to Lenin in this passage: Maiakovskii seeks to protect the leader of the Revolution from becoming sanitized and toothless. Moreover, it shows that, as Tynianov says, the process of literary evolution was one of ‘struggle and replacement’, and that Pushkin was himself party to this struggle for innovation.⁴¹⁷ In this way Maiakovskii simultaneously challenges the official notion of Pushkin as a transcendental source of formal and moral values and draws parallels between the Futurists and Pushkin.

⁴¹⁶ Although this is nothing new: the 1899 Jubilee was also taken over by the state somewhat. See Marcus C. Levitt, ‘Pushkin in 1899’, in *Cultural Mythologies*, pp. 183-203.

⁴¹⁷ Tynianov, ‘Literaturnyi fakt’, p. 258.

Statues as Symbols of Continuity

By showing his humanity, his irreverence and even his fallibility (Pushkin needs an instructor in poetry) Maiakovskii has, metaphorically, taken Pushkin down from his pedestal. However, in a typical gesture, ‘Iubileinoe’ also realizes this metaphor by animating the statue. (In this respect Maiakovskii anticipates a similar endeavour by Abram Terts in *Progulki s Pushkinym*.) The Futurists and their allies saw the Pushkin monument as a symbol of the debilitating effects of the Pushkin cult in transforming the living poet into a fetish. Tynianov pleaded for an end to the exceptional status afforded to Pushkin: ‘Historical literary study, taking full account of the value of phenomena, must break with fetishism.’⁴¹⁸ In 1921 Jakobson expressed his fears that ‘Pushkin’s poems, as poems, are now clearly being taken as a religion, they are petrifying, like a cult object’.⁴¹⁹ For Maiakovskii, statues represent constricting ideological limits which prevent the depicted figures moving in line with history.⁴²⁰ We first see this viewpoint in Maiakovskii’s travesty of *Mednyi vsadnik*, ‘Posledniaia peterburgskaia skazka’ (1916):

Никто не поймет тоски Петра—
узника
закованного в собственном городе. (I, 129)

The theme of shackling returns in relation to the Pushkin statue as such in ‘V. Ia. Briusovu na pamiat’ (1916), an epigram composed in protest at Briusov’s completion of Pushkin’s unfinished ‘Egipetskie nochi’.

Бояться вам рожна какого?
Что
против — Пушкину иметь?

⁴¹⁸ Tynianov, ‘Mnimi Pushkin’, p. 78. One cannot rule out the possible influence on this image of the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism.

⁴¹⁹ Jakobson, *Noveishaia russkaia poezii*, p. 21.

⁴²⁰ This metaphor has proved productive in later criticism. Compare Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*, p. 183: ‘The militant project advocated by the Futurists is iconoclastic. Before this same iconoclasm, heralded by Vladimir Mayakovsky, was itself transformed into an unwieldy monument during the post-revolutionary years, it concerned the petrified representatives of academically conceived histories of literature as well as objects fetishized by public opinion.’

Его кулак
навек закован
в спокойную к обиде медь! (I, 123)

Briusov's completion of 'Egipetskie nochi' was, for Maiakovskii, an example of the way in which the general obsession with Pushkin was preventing the creation of new literature. Moreover, by finishing Pushkin's incomplete poem Briusov had closed it, shutting off the creative potential engendered by its fragmentary nature.

During and after the Revolution, this metaphor takes on a political dimension. As we have seen, for Maiakovskii surviving statues are representatives of the failure of cultural transformation. The same logic was inverted by less radical poets who adopted statues in general, and the Pushkin monument in particular, as a symbol for cultural continuity in the midst of turmoil. Marina Tsvetaeva viewed the Pushkin monument as a 'vision of inviolability and immutability'.⁴²¹ Similarly, Briusov's 'Maksimu Gor'komu v iul'e 1917 goda', which takes as its epigraph the announcement in a newspaper of an attack on a Pushkin monument by a provincial crowd, shows the statue of Pushkin resisting cultural hooliganism by the very act of stillness:

Не в первый раз мы наблюдаем это:
В толпе опять безумный шум возник,
И вот она, подъявля буйный крик,
Заносит руку на кумир поэта.

Но неизменен, в новых бурях света,
Его спокойный и прекрасный лик;
На вопль детей он не дает ответа,
Задумчив и божественно велик.⁴²²

The force of Briusov's argument rests on the quality of calmness and durability shared by the statue (in the physical realm) and Pushkin (in Russian culture). This foreshadows Pushkin's role amongst members of the intelligentsia in the early years of the Soviet Union

⁴²¹ Marina Tsvetaeva, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1980-84), II, 332.

⁴²² Valerii Briusov, *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, ed. by P. G. Antokol'skii, A. S. Miasnikov, S. S. Narchatovyi and N. S. Tikhonov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973-75), III, 43.

as a repository of pre-revolutionary values and a symbol of the endurance of the principles of Russian culture across political upheavals.⁴²³

Maiakovskii's combination of Pushkin and the statue in 'Iubileinoe' can thus be seen as a response to the survival of pre-revolutionary statues in the physical landscape and the parallel instance of the survival of Pushkin in the cultural landscape. Both survivors become metonymic representations of the persistence of certain transcendental values in Russian culture which the poet sees as inhibiting new creativity. The classics and statues are both redolent of educational dogma, as 'V kogo vgryaetsia Lef' (1923) shows: 'The classics were held to be unshakeable, absolute art. The classics crushed everything new with the bronze of monuments and the tradition of schools' (XII, 45).⁴²⁴

The desire for continuity expressed by Tsvetaeva and Briusov has many similarities with the temperate program for literature Lunacharskii suggested in his speech cited above. Lunacharskii also argues that Maiakovskii is too much of a rabble-rouser to be of use in the current, more stable stage of the formation of a communist society, which needs 'to express this calm, joyful and self-assured construction' and should therefore make use of Pushkin.⁴²⁵ All these same qualities are embodied in the solidity of the statue.

An Alternative to Iconoclasm

We will now examine Maiakovskii's response to these appeals to continuity. In contrast to poems such as 'Radovat'sia rano', 'Iubileinoe' seems to shun the iconoclastic gesture of destroying the statue. Although Maiakovskii clearly wishes to remind the reader of his history of enmity to monuments, both as a principle and a historical phenomenon, by exploding his own monument, Pushkin is returned safely to his pedestal at the end of the

⁴²³ See Robert P. Hughes, 'Pushkin in Petrograd, February 1921', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, pp. 204-13.

⁴²⁴ It should be remembered that the association between memorials and texts is somewhat closer in Russian, in which *pamiatnik* can refer to a text of particular historical significance.

⁴²⁵ Lunacharskii, 'Eshche o Pushkine', pp. 41-42.

poem. Why does Maiakovskii's self-presentation seem to move away from iconoclasm, and what implications does this have for his model of culture?

One obvious reason for the curtailment of iconoclasm was the risk of official displeasure at any suggestion that the monuments they had allowed to survive called into question the authorities' revolutionary credentials. Another pressing concern was the fact that the Revolution itself soon became a historical event which had to be commemorated: this presented a challenge to the avant-garde hostility to nostalgia and commemoration. Similarly, by the early 1920s, a decade after the birth of Futurism, Maiakovskii and his colleagues were faced with their own historicity. While it was possible in 1913 to speak of the possibility of creation as a moment of absolute presentness, as they acquired ever longer back catalogues the Futurists were forced to acknowledge a tension inherent to Modernist art: the artist seeks to destroy the past, but this act of iconoclasm itself becomes a new past. As Paul de Man says, the Modernist writer 'is both the historian and the agent of his own language'.⁴²⁶ The Futurists were by this time themselves an artefact of pre-revolutionary culture, unlike new groupings such as Proletkul't. They were, therefore, required to formulate a different approach to cultural survival which was less hostile to all previous production and more oriented towards the question of whether the object under inquiry could be proved to manifest the revolutionary energy which they saw in themselves and which they saw as essential for the future health of Russian and world culture.

One response to these new circumstances was to rephrase the Futurist position in relation to the culture of the past, putting less emphasis on destruction, and bringing to the fore another aspect of Futurism that is present, beneath the surface, throughout their careers—the creative reinterpretation of surviving artefacts. Maiakovskii contrasts this mission to his previous iconoclasm: 'Burn it, down with everything old? No. It's better to use the old culture as a textbook for the present day, in as much as it does not crush

⁴²⁶ Paul de Man, 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', in Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 142-65 (p. 152).

modern living culture.⁴²⁷ Just as the old culture is typified by its oppressive weight, so naturally the prime metaphorical expression of the new dynamic model of culture is movement. We see this most obviously in 'Iubileinoe': the statue's ability to move enacts the flexible approach to Pushkin displayed in the text, not only in the irreverent attitude to the illustrious predecessor, but in the way Maiakovskii inverts the polarity of Pushkin statue myth.

The Avant-Garde Principle of Movement

Although Maiakovskii's moving statue motif has its origin in Pushkin, in order to determine why this myth suited him so well, and why mobility could come, in part, to replace iconoclasm, we must briefly explore the wider context of the poet's valorization of movement.

Just as Khlebnikov's persona is cast as a heroic figure in an eschatological struggle against determinism and its imprisoning effects, Maiakovskii's poems can be seen as part of an overarching epic which depicts the battle inside the poet between the impulse for artistic and existential liberation and the coalition of the limiting and stagnating forces of *byt*. This conflict is imagined in terms of motion and immobility. Jakobson describes it as follows: 'Opposed to this creative urge toward a transformed future is the *stabilizing* force of an immutable present, overlaid, as this present is, by a *stagnating* slime, which *stifles* life in its tight, *hard* mold.'⁴²⁸ Jakobson's meditation on *byt* is motivated by Maiakovskii's famous suicide note, which said 'the love boat has crashed on *byt*', describing the final disastrous victory of immobility over mobility.⁴²⁹ Khlebnikov likewise saw the entire Futurist

⁴²⁷ Maiakovskii, 'Vystupleniia na dispute "Lef ili blef"', pp. 49-50.

⁴²⁸ Roman Jakobson, 'On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets', in *Language in Literature*, pp. 273-300 (p. 276). My emphasis.

⁴²⁹ See Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Predsmertnoe pis'mo Maiakovskogo', in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo (Novoe o Maiakovskom)*, 65, ed. by V. V. Vinogradov and I. Zil'bershtein (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1958), 199-202 (p. 199).

poetic programme as a battle against such limitations: 'Word-creativity is the enemy of the petrification of language'.⁴³⁰

The Futurists' enthusiasm for mobility is typical of the avant-garde's rejection of the limits imposed by traditional science, philosophy, art and literature, which was sketched in the Introduction. The philosophies of opponents of arbitrary limits, such as Nietzsche, and proponents of flux, such as the popular Henri Bergson, in combination with the new technology of the moving image and the new theory of relativity, all contributed to a neo-Heraclitean passion for fluidity across the European avant-garde.⁴³¹ In her analysis of their early philosophy, Gur'ianova has observed that the Russian Futurists sought to rebel against the idea of any limits to their artistic endeavour. These limits, be they generic, moral or metaphysical, are all characterized by their stability: together they comprise the prison cell of conventional understanding. Avant-garde art is intended to break open this cell, functioning as 'the "alchemy" of constantly changing form, taken in the coordinates of time and space, a form that is not ossified, but mobile'.⁴³² This philosophical rebellion against static limitations was naturally given a physical manifestation: the Russian avant-garde is full of examples of mobility being introduced to previously static forms, from Dziga Vertov's mobile camera work to the rotating towers of Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International.⁴³³ Tatlin's tower in fact shows how movement could solve the problem of commemorating the Revolution: in *Iskusstvo kommuny* Nikolai Punin used it as an example of how all revolutionary monuments should look because it preserved the energy

⁴³⁰ Khlebnikov, *SS*, VI.i, 172.

⁴³¹ Hilary Fink says that Bergson argued that 'both human beings and the external world are constantly in a state of becoming or flux, and that through intuition, a "spiritual harmony with a [a thing's] innermost quality", one can grasp the vital principle within'. She further argues that the Futurist emphasis on flux, which other authors attribute to Nietzsche, could equally be a result of the influence of Bergson. Hilary L. Fink, *Bergson and Russian Modernism, 1900-1930* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 1999, pp. 6, 77. Jakobson recalls Maiakovskii's eager interest in Einstein and the impact of the paradigm shift of relativity. Jakobson, 'On a Generation', p. 285.

⁴³² Gur'ianova, 'Estetika anarkhii', p. 95.

⁴³³ Vertov said of himself: 'I am liberating myself from now on and forever from human immobility; I am in constant movement.' Dziga Vertov, 'Kinoki. Perevorot', *LEF*, 3 (1923), 135-43 (p. 141). It is also evident in the Italian Futurists' encomia to speed and transport and in their interrogation of the limits of the plastic arts, or in Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

of the Revolution. Punin argued that, in order to avoid becoming embodiments of political stasis and slowing the Revolution, monuments should be places of 'the most intense movement'.⁴³⁴ These moving monuments sought to perpetuate the dynamism of the Revolution; the ambulant Pushkin tries to fulfil the same function for literature.

Soviet Stagnation

Like Punin, Maiakovskii was aware of the danger of raising monuments to celebrate political triumphs. The notion that monuments represent the imposition of limits is evident in his hostility to Lenin's mausoleum, but it can also already be seen in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia*. In this play objects have started moving of their own accord, thanks to a giant woman who bestrides the city. However, all too soon people want to commemorate this liberation: the woman appears on stage as a giant *kamennaia baba*, an impassive, rough-featured stone statue. Her immobility is exacerbated by the fact that the crowds attempt to set her up as a monument to the revolution (in a gesture which surely has some echoes of Pushkin's 'la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi'): 'на черном граните греха и пророка / поставим памятник красному мясу' (I, 158). In these scenes Maiakovskii implicitly criticizes the 'desire to raise a monument instead of continuing the fury of the carnival whose fantasies really did turn the world upside down'.⁴³⁵

The failure of the post-revolutionary utopia in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia* (the protagonist finds it 'boring'; I, 165) anticipates a number of failed utopias in Maiakovskii's oeuvre in which the ataraxia of successful change leads to complacency and then stagnation in works such as *Klop*, *V internatsional* and *Chelovek*. (In contrast to Khlebnikov,

⁴³⁴ Nikolai Punin, 'O pamiatnikakh', *Iskusstvo kommuny*, 14 (9 March 1919), p. 3.

⁴³⁵ Robert Leach, 'A Good Beginning: Victory over the Sun and Vladimir Mayakovskiy, A Tragedy Reassessed', *Russian Literature*, 13 (1983), 101-16 (p. 110). See also, Katherine Lahti, 'On Living Statues and Pandora, *Kamennye baby* and Futurist Aesthetics: The Female Body in Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy', *Russian Review*, 58 (1999), 432-55 (pp. 445-47).

Maiakovskii's oeuvre shows a marked preference for the process of attaining utopia rather than the achieved condition itself.)

The failure of these utopias is not necessarily a specific criticism of the Soviet project, as much as an expression of wariness at the concretizing of dogmas. From the mid-1920s onward Maiakovskii increasingly focuses his mobilizing efforts on the Soviet project itself, polemicizing against specific examples of stagnation within the Soviet Union, but in a way that suggests that these specific individual battles are not confined to Soviet politics, but are part of a wider war between opposing forces within culture. He relates his campaign against inertia to Pushkin's poetic mythology. For instance, in his poem 'Anchar (poema ob izobretatel'stve)' (1929), Maiakovskii draws a parallel between his own campaign against bureaucracy and what he perceives as a similar critique of power by Pushkin, based on a perceived shared predisposition towards mobility.

The idea that the struggles of Pushkin and Maiakovskii are specific historical realizations of eternal principles brings to mind Khlebnikov's model of history. This is particularly apt in this context because Maiakovskii seems to allude to Khlebnikov's division of the world into two camps: his use of 'изобретатель' revives Khlebnikov's division of society into creators (*izobretateli*) and consumers (*priobretateli*).⁴³⁶ For Maiakovskii the former are characterized by motion, both in his poetry and Pushkin's, and the latter by immobility.

In Maiakovskii's 'Anchar' the Soviet inventor, who resembles the poet, strides through the present ('Это прошагивает / свои года советский изобретатель'; X, 84) but is frustrated by bureaucracy ('Он лбом прошибает дверную серию'; X, 85). The exploitation of the inventive classes culminates in a quotation from Pushkin:

«и умер
бедный раб
у ног

⁴³⁶ Khlebnikov, 'Truba Marsian', in *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 163.

непобедимого владыки». (X, 85)

These lines are indicative of a popular belief that Pushkin's 'Anchar' was an indictment of the injustice of despotism; it was consequently seized upon by Soviet critics as an example of Pushkin's anti-monarchist credentials. One can assume that the eventual death of the slave at the hands of the monarch in the poem would have had particular resonance considering the widespread assumption that the Tsar was responsible for Pushkin's death.⁴³⁷ Maiakovskii's enemy, however, is not autocracy, but bureaucracy:

Кто «владыки»?
 Ответ не новенький:
 хозяйствующие
 чиновники. (X, 85)

The forces of suppression, be they autocrats or bureaucrats, are characterized by immobility.⁴³⁸ In Pushkin's poem the poisonous upas-tree (*anchar*) is depicted as both solitary and immobile:

В пустыне чахлой и скупой,
 На почве, зноем раскаленной,
 Анчар, как грозный часовой,
 Стоит — один во всей вселенной.⁴³⁹

Trees are of course naturally immobile, but Pushkin does emphasize this immobility by comparing the tree to a sentry ('часовой')—an animate person, forced to be still.⁴⁴⁰ The static world of the tree is further underlined by the fact that the once-flowing poison later coagulates into a sort of transparent tar. By contrast, other elements in the poem, including the slave, are all depicted as mobile:

⁴³⁷ Compare the film *Poet i tsar'* (1928), discussed above, in which this assumption is central to the plot.

⁴³⁸ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 133. Lotman points out that Pushkin implicates the slave in the ruler's evil: he obediently ('*poslushno*') obeys his orders. See Iu. M. Lotman, *O poetakh i poezii* (St Petersburg: Iskusstvo SPB, 1996), p. 800. This willing slave, killed by his task of bringing poison, aptly represents Maiakovskii's own fate.

⁴³⁹ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 133.

⁴⁴⁰ The desert itself is also described in very human terms with the adjectives 'чахлой' and 'скупой'. The hints of servitude also foreshadow the slave who will come to the tree: both the tree and the slave are at the mercy of two higher forces—nature and the ruler. See Lotman, *O poezii*, pp. 796, 799.

К нему и птица не летит,
И тигр нейдет: лишь вихорь черный
На древо смерти набежит —
И мчится прочь, уже тлетворный.⁴⁴¹

Not only does Maiakovskii repeat the word 'мчится', but also alludes to the bird in his version: 'Как птицу, утыкали перья' (X, 84). Whereas Pushkin's bird escapes, the modern poet is poked with pens (Maiakovskii puns on *pero*) until he resembles a bird. Maiakovskii goes on to emphasize the inventor-slave's mobility by repeating '*khodil*' four times; this repetition can be compared to Pushkin's own repetition of '*prines*' and repetition of the root *slat*' in '*poslal*' / '*razoslal*'. Finally, Maiakovskii collapses the distinction between the two negative forces in Pushkin's poem, the upas-tree and the ruler (representatives of nature and culture respectively) by suggesting that the bureaucrats should be moved to the Arctic Ocean:

Пусть
в океане Ледовитом
живут
анчаром ядовитым. (X, 86)

In so doing he extends the parallel Pushkin had already drawn between the two: the ruler and the tree are the two fixed points between which the slave moves; the tree's poisonous branch carried by the slave is recalled by the ruler's poisonous arrows. Furthermore, Maiakovskii inverts Pushkin's desert setting and puts further emphasis on immobility: not only have the bureaucrats become rooted like a tree, they inhabit an environment where even the mobile element par excellence, water, has become solid ice.

In this instance Pushkin is used to emphasize the distinction between the Futurists and the forces of cultural inhibition. By using and adapting his poem, Maiakovskii not only shows the historical and philosophical hinterland of his battle with stifling bureaucracy, but also shows a way to combat stagnation by reworking and reapplying Pushkin's words and themes, just as he does in 'Iubileinoe'.

⁴⁴¹ Pushkin, PSS, III, 133.

Despite the fact that he proclaims his opposition to the mechanisms of the state, Maiakovskii's instrumental use of Pushkin here, and his monument here and in 'Iubileinoe', transforming him to suit a particular contemporary agenda, suggests possible affinities between the reception of Pushkin by the Futurists and the state's attempts to appropriate Pushkin for their own political ends.⁴⁴² Maiakovskii explained the rationale behind 'Iubileinoe' in a 1927 dispute, 'Lef ili blef?':

Polonskii says, 'Maiakovskii spat on me and on Pushkin.' My poem dedicated to Pushkin is a way of shaking up Pushkin the Academician and of constructing the sort of Pushkin that a person with a certain revolutionary enthusiasm can talk about like he was his poet... [...] We are using [...] a *means of steering the monument*, in order to be able still to talk to this Pushkin.⁴⁴³

After Maiakovskii's death, the Soviet state also manipulated the Pushkin monument to benefit their version of Pushkin as a champion of freedom: in 1936 the inscription on the monument was changed from Zhukovskii's version to the more radical original and in 1950 Pushkin was physically relocated to the other side of the road.⁴⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the Futurist mobilization of the statue still differs from the mechanisms of state appropriation. Maiakovskii may be serving his own purposes in emancipating Pushkin, but he is also demonstrating the way in which the present context shapes our perception of objects which have survived from the past, be they statues or poems. Whereas the Soviet reading seeks to be definitive, Maiakovskii demonstrates the essential contingency of reception. Moreover, Maiakovskii deliberately foregrounds this transformation, making evident the ways in which figures of authority from the past can be

⁴⁴² Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, pp. 97, 110.

⁴⁴³ Maiakovskii, 'Vystupleniia na dispute "Lef ili blef"', p. 66. My emphasis.

⁴⁴⁴ See Alekseev, 'Stikhotvorenie Pushkina', p. 10. The new lines were written in the post-revolutionary orthography which, it could be argued, was in itself something of a symbol of the new regime. These interventions were typical of the way in which, contrary to popular perception, the Bolshevik authorities sought to preserve monuments from the past and imbue them with new meaning: for instance, Lenin reinscribed the names of famous radicals on the obelisk which commemorated the three hundred year anniversary of Romanov rule. See Christina Lodder, 'Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda', in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State*, ed. by Matthew Cullerne Brown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 16-32 (p. 23).

manipulated; the state, in contrast, seeks to conceal its selective reading and to present it as incontestable.

The Poetics of Selection

Maiakovskii's mobilization of Pushkin both preserves and transforms the past. In this way it points to a new role for the Futurist poet as a selector and modifier of existing cultural artefacts. Aware that they are forever associated with their pre-revolutionary careers, Maiakovskii and the Futurists rebrand themselves as consultants for the nascent Soviet culture, experts on how things which have come from the pre-communist past (such as themselves) can, if injected with revolutionary spirit, prosper in the new culture. This role reaches its apogee in the work of Kruchenykh, and so will be explored in more length in the next chapter, but it is also evident in Maiakovskii's use of Pushkin and his statue.

Maiakovskii's transformation of Pushkin in 'Iubileinoe' is one instance of this tendency; another is the 1928 poem 'Shutka pokhozhaia na pravdu', which functions as a sort of humorous postscript to 'Iubileinoe'. The later poem directly alludes to 'Iubileinoe'—*'Чтоб радовались Пушкины своим изданиям, / Роскошным, удешевленным и юбилейным'* (IX, 249; my emphasis)—and it seems initially as if Maiakovskii is reprising the theme of the statue's frustrating imprisonment: *'Скушно Пушкину. Чугунному ропщется'* (IX, 249). Pushkin is for Maiakovskii so synonymous with his statue that he can be referred to simply as 'the iron one'. However, it is not his metal prison which bores Pushkin, but his surroundings: *'Пушкину требуется культурное общество, / А ему подсунули Страстной монастырь'* (IX, 249).

Maiakovskii wrote the poem as part of a campaign for the destruction of the Strastnoi Monastery, which was ultimately successful in 1937. The poet playfully gives the impression that Pushkin's presence predates the monastery, making Orthodox architecture

seem like an unnecessary accretion to Soviet culture.⁴⁴⁵ The monastery is not merely a hindrance to Pushkin, but to the further development of Soviet culture, because it prevents Pushkin reaching the *Izvestiia* office and lending it his support:

«Известиям» Пушкина Страстной заслонил,
Пушкину монастырь заслонил газету,
И оба-два скучают они,
И кажется им, что выхода нету. (IX, 249)

It is argued that Pushkin needs the newspaper. This amounts to a not unexpected suggestion that Pushkin would be interested in Soviet life. However, Maiakovskii also suggests that the newspaper needs Pushkin, a writer of real quality (IX, 249).⁴⁴⁶ It is the obsolete monastery, not Pushkin's statue status, which prevents him from joining the Soviet world which surrounds him. In fact, it seems to be assumed that, but for the monastery, he would walk over to the newspaper offices: 'От Пушкина до «Известий» шагов двести.'⁴⁴⁷ Thus we see that the statue which had represented stagnation in 'Iubileinoe' has now obtained a positive signification for the building of Soviet culture.

This new meaning is in part a reflection of the events of 'Iubileinoe': the Pushkin statue has already been set free by Maiakovskii to roam the city and would do so if not for the monastery. Moreover, Maiakovskii now seems to have a more collegiate relationship with Pushkin, even urging for more publications of his work (IX, 259). Pushkin has been saved from oblivion by the intervention of the Futurist poet, who has made him suitable to the new age. However, Maiakovskii does not entirely forsake his previous identity as a

⁴⁴⁵ In many respects this poem shares the same concern as 'Radovat'sia rano'—the need to remove the obstacle to development presented by the material culture of the past. There even seems to be verbal reminiscences between the two poems: 'Страстной попирает акры торцов' in 'Shutka' recalls the earlier poem's 'Исходили вёрсты торцов'. See Maiakovskii, *PSS*, IX, 249, and II, 16.

⁴⁴⁶ 'Заскучали от Орешиных и Зозуль. / А как до настоящего писателя добраться'. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, IX, 249.

⁴⁴⁷ There is perhaps also an implication of potential walking in 'выхода нету'. This phrase also raises again the connection between the statue, immobility and death: in his suicide note Maiakovskii used a very similar expression ('выходов нету'), to explain his suicide. Maiakovskii, 'Predsmertnoe pis'mo', p. 199.

proponent of cleansing, iconoclastic destruction: the Church is beyond redemption and so must be destroyed.⁴⁴⁸ The juxtaposition of elements in the landscape of the city, some of which are mobile and some of which are not, suggests a vision of the Soviet Union as a bricolage of objects from different ages. However, the poet is also still at hand, acting as a sort of the cultural gatekeeper, to determine which elements from the past are worthy of surviving destruction and of being granted the gift of mobility.

Changing Perspectives

Maiakovskii's juxtaposition of the mobile Pushkin and the offices of *Izvestiia* recalls the way in which, in the Futurist worldview, which was formed under the influence of Cubist art, mobility and changes in perspective are linked. As Kruchenykh observes in 'Novye puti slova', the Cubist painter reveals new, unseen aspects to the object by viewing it, simultaneously, from numerous angles—which is to say, by being able to move:

Modern painters have understood this secret: that (1) movement gives convexity (a new dimension) and that, in return, convexity gives movement and that (2) incorrect perspective gives a new 4th dimension (the essence of Cubism).⁴⁴⁹

Kruchenykh then applies this same rationale to language:

Contemporary bards have discovered: that incorrect sentence construction (from the point of view of thought and panegyric) gives movement and a new perception of the world and that, likewise, movement and change in the psyche foster strange and 'nonsensical' combinations of words and letters.⁴⁵⁰

The juxtaposition of dissonant sounds in *zaum'* language reveals hidden aspects of the word. Similarly the interaction between discordant elements of the landscape—*Izvestiia*, Pushkin and the monastery—reveals hidden meanings in the architectural

⁴⁴⁸ Sometimes not even mobility is enough to guarantee safety from such purges: in *Moskva gorit* (1930) statues of the Tsars come to life, but are immediately attacked and killed by workers. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XI, 371.

⁴⁴⁹ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 68.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

language of the city (we should remember that Futurist rhetoric emphasized its particular interest in the metropolitan experience). The potential for contrast becomes particularly marked after the Revolution and the emergence of an architectural clash between different ideologies. The new ideological context is not necessarily only Communist, but rather it is modernity in general: in 'Iubileinoe' Maiakovskii describes the advertising hoardings around the statue.⁴⁵¹

In a parallel instance Evgenii Margolit has shown how in the 1920s film-makers used foreshortening to show the estrangement of surviving monuments in the new Soviet landscape, giving the illusion of movement and creating a filmic counterpart to the animated statue myth.⁴⁵² The same principle of contrast and dynamism also lies at the heart of montage. Although Maiakovskii is undoubtedly interested in and influenced by cinema (which allows him further opportunities to bring life to static objects) both poets and film-makers were drawing from a common well of inspiration which related perspective, selectivity and movement.⁴⁵³ The Formalists saw the shift of context and perception as the underlying principle of all literary evolution. Literary norms change thanks to

a shift in the function of the esthetic device rather than its elimination [...] The old is presented, as it were, in a new key. The obsolete device is not thrown overboard, but repeated in a new, incongruous context, and thus either rendered absurd through the agency of mechanization or made 'perceptible' again.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Compare a similar device in Pasternak's 1914 poem 'Vozmozhnost'. See Smith, *Montaging Pushkin*, p. 198.

⁴⁵² Evgenii Margolit, 'Monumental Sculptures in Soviet Cinema of the 1920s', trans. by Birgit Beumers, *Kinokultura*, 26 (2009). Available at <http://www.kinokultura.com/2009/26-margolit.shtml>. Accessed on 24/05/2010.

⁴⁵³ Maiakovskii's films show considerable interest in the medium's ability to impart movement. In *Zakovannaiafil'moi* (1918) a girl on a movie poster comes to life (Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XI, 483-85). His films also show monuments being cast down: in *Ne dlia deneg rodivshiisia* (1918), there is a scene in which the hero, Ivan Nov, bursts into a bourgeois literary café and overturns a bust of Pushkin. See Brown, *Mayakovsky*, p. 320.

⁴⁵⁴ Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, 3rd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 258.

Victor Erlich's metaphor of throwing overboard alludes to the origins of this theory in the praxis of the Futurists. The artist's creative repertoire encompasses both iconoclastic destruction and the imparting of fluidity to those same concretized phenomena.

Gur'ianova observes the particular Russian inflection of avant-garde fluidity:

the Italian Futurists' principle of 'universal dynamism' was understood and embodied by the Russian Futurists as a creative, aesthetic method. [...] For the Russian poets and artists the idea of a new 'universal dynamism' and rhythm as consonant to the Bergsonian idea of vitality, transformed in Kruchenykh's articles into the 'Futurist shift of forms [*sdvig form*]', of time and space, came to be seen as the chief and indisputable achievement of Italian Futurism.⁴⁵⁵

The term *sdvig*, which originates in Cubist terminology, encapsulates both the juxtaposition of unlikely elements and the cultural shift which underpins Futurist poetics and, accordingly, their reception of Pushkin. The moving statue of Maiakovskii's poetic mythology exploits the poet's Orphic power to transfer these principles to the urban landscape; in the next chapter, we shall see how the logic of the displaced statue has close parallels in the Futurist attitude to poetic language in the early 1920s and particularly to quotation.

Summary

In anticipation of the developments to the Futurist conceptualization of the poet pioneered by Kruchenykh, we have seen Maiakovskii partly distance himself away from iconoclasm in favour of mobilization. However, his commitment to moving statues (in contrast to Pushkin's suspicion of them) has been shown in this chapter to be a constant feature of his career and his relationship with Pushkin. The moving statue and its connection with *Mednyi vsadnik* provided Maiakovskii with a means by which to articulate his relationship with power, and in particular Lenin, in *V internatsional* and *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*. In 'Iubileinoe'

⁴⁵⁵ Gur'ianova, 'Estetika anarkhii,' p. 103.

the ambulant Pushkin monument provides him not only with a symbol for creative interpretation, but also with a willing interlocutor as he exploits the Pushkinian tradition of dialogue poetry to express his relationship with civic themes in his poetry. What is more, 'Iubileinoe' pointed to the interaction between the myth of the moving statue and Pushkin's other famous monument, 'not built by human hand', which was fully developed in 'Vo ves' golos, in which Maiakovskii engaged with this motif, inverting and transforming it, to articulate his conflicted relationship with the state.

Chapter Four

Aleksei Kruchenykh: Pushkin and the Futurist Poetics of Quotation

Of the three subjects of this study, Aleksei Kruchenykh is by far the most marginal to both popular and scholarly attention. The lack of serious consideration of this compelling figure is regrettable because his work consistently extended the boundaries of Russian literature and art, even during its most ambitious phases. Boris Slutskii was perhaps not exaggerating when he said of Kruchenykh, 'A decade and a half of Dadaism and Surrealism, the work of half a generation of talent in France, Germany, Italy and Yugoslavia, was accomplished in Russia by one person.'⁴⁵⁶ Kruchenykh's playful eclecticism and enthusiasm for experiment make him an excellent prism through which to view the intellectual atmosphere of the Russian avant-garde; if he was not always the originator of forms or movements (with the possible exception of *zaum'*) his eager pursuit of them is a useful bell-wether for the intellectual trends of the time.⁴⁵⁷ In fact, his theoretical eclecticism can be seen as a generalization of the Futurist principle of juxtaposition. New meanings become apparent at the interface of incongruous words and images; the same principle can be applied to theories: their disharmonious interaction in the person of Kruchenykh helps to reveal their various essences. Kruchenykh's indiscriminate approach marks an important point of difference with his peers: Khlebnikov's worldview is characterized by a singularity of purpose and vision; Maiakovskii's, like Kruchenykh's, permits considerable variety, but it expresses itself not in an amiable hotch-potch, as does Kruchenykh, but intense internal conflict.

⁴⁵⁶ Boris Slutskii, 'Kruchenykh' in *Aleksei Kruchenykh v svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov*, ed. by Sergei Sukhoparov (Munich: O. Sagner, 1994), pp. 173-75 (pp. 173-74).

⁴⁵⁷ Gerald Janecek is surely right to credit Kruchenykh with the development of *zaum'* in his landmark study *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1996).

Moreover, while, perhaps because of this self-same flexibility, his talent as a poet may not be comparable to that of Maiakovskii or Khlebnikov, his creative output is in some ways the truest expression of Futurist poetics and aesthetics, not least because these principles are often pushed to their logical conclusions. His former colleague Benedikt Livshits was critical of this tendency: 'Kruchenykh, in his frivolous maximalism, had reduced our extreme tenets to the absurd (he really had nothing to lose!).'⁴⁵⁸ Boris Pasternak argued along similar lines, but in a more sympathetic tone: 'You are the most tenacious of us, we should take you as an example.'⁴⁵⁹ This tenacity and this maximalism are particularly advantageous in seeking to conclude this investigation into the creative principles which underlie the specificities of the reception of Pushkin. This is not to say that Kruchenykh is incapable of making, like Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov, an original and unprecedented contribution to the question of Pushkin's position in culture and its relationship to contemporary poetic identity. Rather, his work lays bare many of the tendencies we have already observed in the work of Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii: the mythological treatment of the Pushkinian oeuvre; a tendency to the realization of metaphors and to self-reflexivity; the persistence of the provocative *épatage* of the manifestos alongside a more adaptive approach in which Pushkin and his legacy are used instrumentally to articulate a position in relation to society and literary tradition.

This chapter will concentrate on one aspect of the Futurist reception of Pushkin which has already been shown to be typical of the work of Maiakovskii, and which reaches its apogee in the work of Kruchenykh—the quoting and misquoting of Pushkin's text. I contend that Kruchenykh's use of quotation can be seen as an attempt to establish a new kind of relationship between the artist and the mass audience. Consequently, Kruchenykh's appropriation of Pushkin's text in his 1924 essay *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina*

⁴⁵⁸ Livshits, *One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, p. 124.

⁴⁵⁹ Boris Pasternak, 'Instead of a Foreword', in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes: 1912-1928*, ed. by Anna Lawton, trans. by Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 1998), pp. 187-89 (p. 187).

will be read in the context of contemporary theories of literary evolution and the relationship between the artist and society, in particular the work of Iurii Tynianov and Walter Benjamin, to help determine his implicit manifesto for the development of art and literature.

Before examining Kruchenykh's use of quotation from Pushkin, I will begin with some general remarks about quotation as a device in Silver Age poetry that are germane to Kruchenykh's appropriations and a brief investigation into Maiakovskii's similar use of quotations from Pushkin, which will be found to operate on the same principles as his use of statues.

Quotation in the Silver Age

A desire to integrate the actual text of Pushkin's poetry into their own poetry seems on first inspection to be anathema to the Futurist quest to cast off the burden of the past: to quote a poetic predecessor makes very clear that the poet not only has an interest in the culture of the past but wants their work to be understood in this context. Moreover, by transmitting the quotation, the poet seems to become complicit in the perpetuation of the allegedly outmoded art of the past. The ideal propounded in the Futurist manifestos is that literature should be an instantaneous and ephemeral experience: in 'Slovo kak takovoe' Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov declare that the work of art should 'be written and seen in the blinking of an eye'.⁴⁶⁰ The Futurists announced their hostility to the re-reading and preservation of works of literature: 'wordsmiths should write on their books: *once you have read this, tear it up!*'⁴⁶¹ Quotation, by contrast, not only gives works a certain afterlife, but is also dependent on the survival of works from the past. (Nevertheless, the manifestos

⁴⁶⁰ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 53.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57. Original emphasis.

themselves feature considerable numbers of quotation, including citations of Pushkin. The manifestos are, like all Futurist writing, a paradoxical indictment of the transience they espouse.)

Acmeism

The same aspects of quotation which should make it unappealing to the Futurists could be expected to endear it to their poetic contemporaries, the Acmeists. The Acmeists, while sharing the Futurists' determination to move poetry away from the Symbolist ethereal towards the material and the substance of the word, nevertheless occupied the opposite pole to the iconoclastic Futurists in regard to the role of the literature of the past in the formation of new work.⁴⁶² Their abundant use of quotation, therefore, serves as an important counterpoint for understanding how and why the Futurists used quotation in their work. For the Acmeists, reusing their predecessors' words represented a declaration of their membership of global culture (their orientation towards the Western canon being another important point of difference with the Futurists) and, ultimately, a way of integrating their own poetic works into the overarching, unitary work comprised by world culture.⁴⁶³ What is more, despite the breadth of the Acmeists' reading, Pushkin always remained a crucial element in this world culture.⁴⁶⁴ The Acmeists, therefore, in stark contrast to the rhetoric of the Futurist manifestos, are only too happy to admit that poetic creation is contingent on existing material, and that this contingency may even be the

⁴⁶² See Iu. I. Levin, D. M. Segal, R. D. Timenchik et al., 'Russkaia semanticheskaia poetika kak potentsial'naia kul'turnaia paradigma', *Russian Literature*, 7-8, (1974), 47-82 (p. 49).

⁴⁶³ See Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandel'stam* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), p. xii: 'The acmeist poets viewed the entire body of world poetry as a creative manifestation of the eternal return and laid stress on the fundamental unity of the multilingual poetic speech.'

⁴⁶⁴ See Olga Chervinskaia, *Akmeizm v kontekste Serebriannogo veka i traditsii* (Chernovtsy: Alexandra cel Bun, 1997), p. 107: 'It is absolutely impossible to list all the names of Russian and world classics to whom the Acmeists make reference, not to mention the attention with which they addressed each other's work and that of their contemporaries, which is revealed in reminiscences as a significant stylistic dominant of Acmeism. I am entirely convinced that nevertheless for all the Acmeists only Pushkin was a universal figure of inspiration.'

essence of literature. Mandel'shtam suggests that the poet appropriates the words of others: 'И снова скальд чужую песню сложит / И как свою ее произнесет.'⁴⁶⁵ Akhmatova extends this argument to include the entirety of poetry: 'Но, может быть, поэзия сама / Одна великолепная цитата.'⁴⁶⁶

The Acmeist text is intended to be so saturated with references, subtexts and allusions as to become inextricable from literature and culture in general. It is not a 'new' work but a palimpsestic variation on the existing canon which ultimately serves as a continuation, not a departure. Text becomes a universe of its own, unconnected with the extratextual world.⁴⁶⁷ Consequently, Acmeist poets do not often explicitly mark their borrowings as quotations (with the exception of formulaic epigraphs). The use of inverted commas, italics or other punctuation would direct the reader unnecessarily: not only is the reader assumed to be highly educated, but his or her future interpretation of the text is deemed to be part of the text's ahistorical existence. Moreover, marking the quotation would bring unwanted emphasis to the otherness of the quoted word, disturbing the integrity and unity of the global text.⁴⁶⁸

Both Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh, in contrast, make their use of quotation very obvious. Alongside the more subtle allusions which we have found to be prevalent in Maiakovskii's work, he also cites texts openly, using quotation marks. What is more, he does not quote recondite texts or Western classics, but works so central to the Russian canon that they would be instantly recognizable to educated readers. Given his central place in the literary culture, this naturally means considerable, almost disproportionate,

⁴⁶⁵ Osip Mandel'shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, ed. by G. P. Struve and B. A. Filipoff (Washington, DC: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1964-66), I, 41.

⁴⁶⁶ Anna Akhmatova, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. by N. V. Kovaleva (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1999), II, 182.

⁴⁶⁷ See Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 152.

⁴⁶⁸ Compare Michael Worton and Judith Still, 'Introduction', in *Intertextuality*, ed. by Worton and Still, pp. 1-44 (pp. 10-11): '[Quotations] function as textual strategies, as tropological events, as metaphors. The use of italics or inverted commas certainly signals a repetition and a ceding of authorial copyright; it also points to an obligatory intertext, to a conscious manipulation of what Barthes calls the circular memory of reading, thereby acting as a blocking mechanism which (temporarily at least) restricts the reader's free, aleatory intertextual reading of the text.'

amounts of quotation from Pushkin. In part, these open references to well-known works represent a deliberate alternative to the Acmeists' scholarly range of reference and their fondness for quoting their colleagues. The Futurist poem is not addressed to a coterie of fellow poets but, at least in theory, to the wider public. Accordingly, the Futurists also strive to suppress or conceal the breadth and depth of their reading in order to promote their self-image as men from the streets in direct conversation with the population.⁴⁶⁹ The motivations for this self-conception change somewhat over time: early in their careers the affectation of limited reading contributes to their own image as an unencumbered and original creative force; after the Revolution it bolsters their attempts to appear accessible to the 'masses', an inchoate concept which nevertheless provided the ultimate source of legitimation for new art.⁴⁷⁰

As we have seen, however, these doubly obvious quotations (both in presentation and source) serve as a smokescreen for other, less straightforward subtexts. Futurist poems do include copious examples both of auto-quotation and of references, subtle or not, to the work of other Futurists (see, for instance, Maiakovskii's self-referentiality in 'Vo ves' golos' or Khlebnikov's allusions to the work of other Futurists in the poem 'Aleshe Kruchenykh'). As often with the Futurists, surface bombast masks interior complexity.

The clear marking of quotation represents a divergence in practice between Khlebnikov and the other Futurists: he does not generally employ quotation marks or reproduce text verbatim. However, this is not to say that he is not interested in the

⁴⁶⁹ The question of the extent of the Futurist poets' reading is hard to answer, although few would argue that their erudition was on the same level as the Acmeists or Symbolists, who tended to come from the metropolitan intelligentsia and to enjoy a better education. Although all the Futurists came to literature relatively late, all their memoirs include a reference to their voracious reading as young men.

⁴⁷⁰ In 'Vas ne ponimaiut rabochie i krest'iane', a speech later published in *Novyi lef*, which defended the Futurists' connection with the people, Maiakovskii actually counterposes their comprehensibility with that of Pushkin, precisely because of the range of his references: 'Where would he have been able to understand, where would he now be able to understand the long passages that are made foreign in *Evgenii Onegin*: "Бранил Гомера, Феокрита, / Зато читал Адама Смита..." and so on.' Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XII, 166.

function of quotation: we saw in 'Odnokii litsedei' how the Biblical passages to which he alludes centre on episodes when Christ quotes Isaiah. Quotations such as these demonstrate both connection and separation: to quote from a source, as Christ does of Isaiah, or Khlebnikov almost does by introducing the walking corpse motif so obviously, draws attention to the intersection of two texts and two times. The quotation is a verbal manifestation of the eternal principle which links events in history.

Maiakovskii and Quotation

Khlebnikov does not go as far as either Maiakovskii or Kruchenykh in emphasizing the difference which makes quotation possible. While Acmeist quotation is presented in such a way as to draw attention to continuity, Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh emphasize the way quotation is an irruption into a discrete work. Throughout his poetic practice Maiakovskii seeks to emphasize the strangeness of the alien material being incorporated into his text. In 'Iubileinoe', for instance, he includes a fragment of English text:

Дайте нам стаканы!
 знаю
 способ старый
 в горе
 дутъ винище,
 но смотрите -
 из
 выплывают
 Red и White Star'ы. (VI, 49)

In other poems English quotations are written in the Russian alphabet, which intensifies rather than mitigates their otherness.⁴⁷¹ Maiakovskii's quotations nearly always draw attention to their origin from outside his text: the implication is that, although different elements of world culture can be brought together, doing so requires that they be (ostentatiously) transferred, relocated in time and place, by the poet. Culture is not an

⁴⁷¹ See, for instance, Maiakovskii, 'Amerikanskii russkie,' *PSS*, VII, 80-82. The same is true of the quotation of a Georgian folk song (transliterated into Cyrillic) in 'Vladikavkaz-Tiflis'. Maiakovskii, *PSS*, VI, 70.

omnipresent, ahistorical and integrated sphere to which the poem contributes and reveals, but a bricolage of objects, still bearing the mark of their origin, that are consciously composed and juxtaposed by the poet. This has an important bearing on the question of cultural inheritance. The Acmeists, and particularly Mandel'shtam, use unobtrusive quotations to underline their view of history as essentially circular or indeed simultaneous, and literature as a gateway to the understanding of this essential truth: 'Все было встарь, все повторится снова, / И сладок нам лишь узнаванья миг.'⁴⁷² The Futurists' quotations suggest that the textual interconnectedness offered by quotation is necessitated by rupture and that discontinuity is the underlying condition of textual production.

This emphasis on disjunction and contrast within the unity of poetic culture is also reflected in the dynamics of the text itself in, for instance, the function of rhyme. Maiakovskii's use of rhyme is frequently self-conscious and virtuosic to the point of macaronic, so that, while rhyme does tie the whole poem together (providing, in Jakobson's terminology, paradigmatic equivalence), this equivalence seems somewhat artificial, the product of enormous effort on the part of the poet. The inherent phonological connection between words and phrases is not immediately self-evident but must be manufactured or at least revealed. As with the use of *lesnitsa* to show the rhythmic construction of the poem, or with the industrial metaphors of *Kak delat' stikhi*, Maiakovskii wants to show his working. Such rhyme contrasts both with the 'naturalness' of Pushkinian rhyme (and consequently with the discourse of Pushkinian lightness criticized by Maiakovskii in 'Vo ves' golos') and with the unobtrusiveness of rhyme in much of the work of the Acmeists. What is more, the desire to show that the poetic text (both in the individual case and in the abstract) is the product of contrasts and contradictions not only

⁴⁷² Mandel'shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, 73. Compare Ronen, *An Approach*, p. x: 'The other device by means of which Mandel'shtam expands lexical meaning and activates its poetic function is based on the use of direct and veiled quotations, reminiscences, paraphrases etc. of other writers, particularly of the poets of the past. These "borrowings" are meant to be perceived by the qualified reader as figures of reiteration, set upon bringing back certain lexico-semantic and thematic configurations of the poetic tradition.'

accords with early Futurist poetics—the surface of language must be made rough in order to reorient attention to the word itself—but with Futurism’s counterpart in literary theory, Formalism, which not only has defamiliarization as a central concept, but also seeks to understand the literary text in terms of its construction.⁴⁷³

Using the same principle of juxtaposition, quotation works to draw attention to the separate existence of different texts. However, this open announcement of the disconnectedness of literature—the absence of an overarching literary supertext—does not preclude the use of subtle allusions which establish deeper connections between texts. Rather it functions in part as something of a diversionary tactic. A case in point is Maiakovskii’s quotation from Lermontov’s elegy on Pushkin’s death, ‘Smert’ poeta’, in ‘Iubileinoe’:

Так сказать,
невольник чести...
пулею сражен... (6:55)⁴⁷⁴

Not only is the source well known, but Maiakovskii announces the irruption of an alien text by saying ‘So to speak’, which also serves to make the allusion seem more quotidian and demotic: quoting Lermontov’s poem is not a sign of erudition but rather of the omnipresence of this founding document of the cult of Pushkin-the-martyr. Nevertheless, Maiakovskii uses this matter-of-fact quotation to hide a more complex system of allusion: while ‘невольник чести’ is taken from the first line of Lermontov’s poem, the second phrase, ‘пулею сражен’ does not occur in the poem. Nevertheless, the poetic ending of the instrumental ‘пулею’ and the ellipsis suggest that these are not Maiakovskii’s words. The word ‘сражен’ does feature, however, in Lermontov’s poem, at the point when he makes a parallel between Pushkin and the hack poet Lenskii from *Evgenii Onegin*, who is also killed

⁴⁷³ Compare Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, ‘Slovo kak takovoe’, in *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 53: ‘it should be written tightly and read tightly, more uncomfortably than polished boots or a truck in the living room’.

⁴⁷⁴ Compare Lermontov: ‘Погиб поэт!—невольник чести—’. Lermontov, *PSS*, II, p. 60.

in a duel: 'Сраженный, как и он, безжалостной рукой.'⁴⁷⁵ Lermontov's use of 'сраженный' is itself a deliberate echo of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*, where this word is used twice in an excursus about duelling following Lenskii's death: 'Что ж, если вашим пистолетом / Сражен приятель молодой'; 'Сим страшным восклицаньем / Сражен'.⁴⁷⁶ Maiakovskii blends Lermontov's poem with its intertext, *Evgenii Onegin*, thus alluding to similarities between Lenskii, Pushkin and Lermontov, who was also killed in a duel, and between Onegin and D'Anthès, both of whom become murderers after, almost unwittingly, becoming entangled in other people's relationships.

The themes of duelling and adultery alluded to here bring back to the surface the *Onegin* subtext previously activated by Maiakovskii's mangled quotation from that poem, which is then used to introduce Maiakovskii's comment on the continued prevalence of seducers:

Их
 и по сегодня
 много ходит -
 всяческих
 охотников
 до наших жен. (VI, 55)

(The rhyme of 'сражен' and 'жен' serves perhaps as a reminder of the link between women and death in the fate of both Pushkin and Lenskii, although the former is married and the latter is not.)

In his previous quotation from *Evgenii Onegin*, discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Maiakovskii not only initially misattributes but also misquotes a famous section from Onegin's letter to Tat'iana.

Как это
 у вас
 говаривала Ольга?..
 Да не Ольга!

⁴⁷⁵ Lermontov, *PSS*, II, 61.

⁴⁷⁶ Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 131-32.

to disrupt the Pushkinian line. This deformation is particularly ironic as Maiakovskii is quoting Pushkin precisely because of his formal skills: ‘Муза это ловко за язык вас тянет.’

As we saw in the previous chapter, Maiakovskii had showed his interest in these four lines earlier in 1924 in his speech at the dispute ‘О задачках литературы и драматургии’ on 26 May, which largely concerned questions of cultural inheritance. He responded to claims of disrespect to his predecessors by showing his ability to quote Pushkin:

For two days I went around under the spell of this quatrain:

Я знаю: жребий мой измерен,
Но, чтоб продлилась жизнь моя,
Я утром должен быть уверен,
Что с вами днем увижусь я. (XII, 265)

Maiakovskii claims to know *Evgenii Onegin* off by heart, which is not impossible considering his allegedly prodigious memory,⁴⁷⁸ but does seem a remarkable admission from an alleged iconoclast. The anecdotal framing of the story, however, exculpates Maiakovskii from any suggestion that he would actually go so far as to read Pushkin—he is either read by others or is always already known, part of the background of the culture—and, by drawing attention to Maiakovskii’s co-habitation with Osip Brik, accentuates the parallel between the love triangles in *Onegin* and that in Maiakovskii’s life. The transformation of the verse is less extreme here than in ‘Iubileinoe’ (which it predates), which perhaps reflects a desire not to draw such attention to the misquotation. However, the alteration is certainly deliberate: Katanian points out that Maiakovskii edited this transcript before publication, giving him ample opportunity to amend any mistake.⁴⁷⁹

What might Maiakovskii’s motivation be for adapting Pushkin’s verse? The alteration in the 26 May speech can be seen as the forerunner of Maiakovskii’s deliberate misquoting of the same passage later in ‘Iubileinoe’, and thus as party to the same general

⁴⁷⁸ Maiakovskii quotes David Burluk to this effect in his memoir *Ia sam*: ‘Maiakovskii has a memory like the road to Poltava—everyone leaves his galosh behind.’ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 27.

⁴⁷⁹ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XII, 610. Katanian observes that Lunacharskii did not level this accusation against Maiakovskii at this dispute: the poet must be referring to an earlier occasion.

approach to Pushkin: Pushkin's legacy should not be thoughtlessly integrated into contemporary culture as a cultural authority, but must rather undergo reworking by contemporary poets; his text must not be sacrosanct and untouchable, but raw material for new poetic creation. By making a subtle change, Maiakovskii can enact a sort of playful Bloomian *clinamen* away from his poetic ancestor, even when he seems to be advocating him.⁴⁸⁰ Such rewriting could be seen as a microcosm of a wider project to produce a Futurist version of all the classics. Jakobson recalls Maiakovskii saying that he wanted to produce his own version of all of world literature: 'I am rewriting world literature. I rewrote *Onegin*, then I rewrote *Voyna i mir*, now I am rewriting *Don Juan*.'⁴⁸¹

This need for change may, however, be more technical than ideological: as we saw in the previous chapter, Maiakovskii frequently found fault with the presentation and rhythmic structuring of Pushkin's verse. In *Kak delat' stikhi* he criticizes Pushkin's use of punctuation in *Boris Godunov*:

Metre and rhythm are more significant than punctuation and they subordinate punctuation to themselves when it is taken according to the old template:
[...]

Довольно, стыдно мне
Пред гордою полячкой унижаться...-

Which reads like provincial chattering:

Довольно стыдно мне...

For it to read in the way Pushkin thought you have to divide up the line like I do:

Довольно,
стыдно мне...

⁴⁸⁰ Compare Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 42: 'The clinamen or swerve [...] is necessarily the central working concept of the theory of Poetic Influence, for what divides each poet from his Poetic Father (and so saves, by division) is an instance of creative revisionism.'

⁴⁸¹ Roman Jakobson in his speech at the World Literature Institute, 24 May 1956, quoted in Parnis, 'My nakhodimsia', p. 13. Jakobson goes on to suggest that 'We should not exaggerate this very important admission by the young Maiakovskii, and one can suppose that the rewritten *Onegin* is his 1913 tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, but this hypothesis requires a separate conversation.'

With such a division into half-lines, there will not be any confusion either in terms of sense or rhythm. (XII, 114)

In the case of the quatrain from *Evgenii Onegin*, Maiakovskii also felt the need to correct and improve Pushkin's verse: Lili Brik recalls that 'He did not like reading "век уж мой измерен", which sounds like "векуш мой", and he reworked the verse in his own way.'⁴⁸² Maiakovskii reinterprets the boundary between the words on euphonic grounds: as we shall see, this same reinterpretation lies at the heart of Kruchenykh's use of quotation.

Pushkin's failings are not, however, merely technical. In *Kak delat' stikhi* Maiakovskii uses quotation to draw attention to Pushkin's inadequacies in the modern world:

It's enough to compare Tat'iana's love and "науку, которую воспел Назон" with the project on the law about marriage, to read out Pushkin's "разочарованный лорнет" to miners in Donetsk or run before the May Day column and declaim: "Мой дядя самых честных правил". (XII, 82)

We recall that Maiakovskii also quoted the opening to *Evgenii Onegin* in 1914 to suggest the obsolescence of Pushkin.⁴⁸³ In both instances Maiakovskii exploits the lack of context inevitable in quotation to emphasize the strangeness of the quotations from *Evgenii Onegin*. In 1926 the contrast with the practical and progressive achievements of Soviet legislation in the sphere of the family and industrial development serves to ridicule Pushkin's poems (as they are depicted by the quoted fragments), with their classical allusions and the strange metaphors.

The use of selective quotation to emphasize Pushkin's alienation from contemporary concerns was well-established in Futurist practice. Kruchenykh reports that in a 1912 performance he cited the same quotation—'разочарованный лорнет'.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² L. Iu. Brik, 'Maiakovskii i chuzhie stikhi', *Znamia*, 3 (1940), 165.

⁴⁸³ Maiakovskii, 'Shtatskaia shrapnel': Poety na fugasakh', *PSS*, I, 305-07. Although the contemporary context is different—at that time it was war that was modern—the approach remains the same.

⁴⁸⁴ The phrase occurs in *Evgenii Onegin*. Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 13.

However, he did so with a different purpose, more in accordance with the literary atmosphere of the time—to show that the Futurists were not as outlandish as their detractors claimed:

I asked about the eccentricities of the innovators:
 ‘Is it not true that their writing has become extreme to the point of insanity. For instance, do you like this image: “a disencharmed lorgnette [*razocharovannyi lornet*]”?’
 The audience laugh.
 Then I revealed all.
 ‘That’s an epithet from Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*!’
 The audience applaud.
 Having shown in this fashion that those who scorned us did not themselves really know what was going on I included them along with the cubists who had been ‘vanquished’ by me.⁴⁸⁵

By removing the epithet from its context, Kruchenykh can make Pushkin seem more eccentric and thus more like a Futurist, legitimizing the Futurists’ own experimental metaphors and simultaneously mocking their predecessor and appropriating him for the Futurist cause.⁴⁸⁶

We have already seen how the poem ‘Anchar (poema ob izobretatel’stve)’ reworks elements of Pushkin’s original, both in the *fabula* and the movement imagery, to express Maiakovskii’s own critique of the tyranny of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. The title of the poem is ultimately ironic because Maiakovskii’s paean to invention bears the title of a famous poem from the canon, casting doubt on his own inventiveness.⁴⁸⁷ This irony continues through the poem, which is heavily reliant on quotation: the opening twenty lines are structured around a repeated refrain, ‘Кто мчится, кто скачет’, which is taken

⁴⁸⁵ Kruchenykh, ‘Nash vykhod’, p. 50.

⁴⁸⁶ The recurrence of the same quotation in Kruchenykh and Maiakovskii’s work may point to some collaboration between them in the 1920s. Valentin Lavrov suggests that Maiakovskii, far more successful in his career than Kruchenykh, would occasionally help out his impoverished friend by paying him to find examples of mistakes in poetry which Maiakovskii could then denounce. See *Kruchenykh v svidetel’stvakh*, p. 190.

⁴⁸⁷ The poem’s title playfully adapts Pushkin’s original, which it exactly matches but for the addition of the subtitle. The description of the work as a ‘*poema*’ is somewhat too grand a word to describe a poem of 79 lines. The subtitle is used to give a new context for the familiar title ‘Anchar’, changing both the genre and the subject matter of Pushkin’s original poem. Pushkin himself provides a footnote to his title, glossing ‘Анчар’ as ‘poison tree’. Both poets explain their curt titles, but in different ways.

from Zhukovskii's 'Lesnoi tsar', a translation of Goethe's 'Der Erlkönig', with the order of the clauses reversed. While this reversal could be a case of misremembering, it is more likely a variation on the deliberate deformation practised by Maiakovskii. What is more, the use of this ballad, in which a child riding through a forest is killed by the possibly spectral Elf King who tries to lure him into the woods, draws attention to the similarities between the plots of Zhukovskii's poem and Pushkin's, in which a slave dies after being sent to the upas-tree by the king. 'Anchar (poema ob izobretatel'stve)' thus provides a further example of Maiakovskii drawing intertextual links between texts at a subtle level beneath obvious quotation.

However, Maiakovskii's use of quotation is not solely a diversionary tactic, but in itself raises questions about the nature of intertextuality. At the moment of the conjunction and climax of the three plotlines, the death of the child/slave/inventor, Maiakovskii quotes Pushkin's 'Anchar':

ходил
 с бородкою на лице,
 ходил седой...
 Ходил
 и слег,
 «и умер
 бедный раб
 у ног
 непобедимого владыки». (X, 95)

Maiakovskii integrates the quotation into his poem both by rhyming it, and by putting it in his preferred *lesnitsa* configuration. Although the quotation marks keep it in a sort of poetic quarantine, it has to a certain extent been infected by Maiakovskii. The quotation's liminal existence emphasizes the parallels between his poem and Pushkin's, and, by extension, the parallels between Tsarist oppression and the obstructive force of Soviet bureaucracy. He effaces the differences in these situations by manipulating quotation. The passage continues:

Кто «владыки»?

Ответ не новенький:

хозяйствующие

чиновники. (X, 95)

Pushkin's word 'владыки', still seemingly protected by the cordon sanitaire of quotation marks, is transformed from being a genitive singular to a nominative plural. Maiakovskii both demonstrates the importance of context for the meaning of a word and, by this sleight of hand, makes the word plural, not singular. This change is made doubly ironic by the fact that the answer to the question is 'not new': while this also refers to Maiakovskii's long-running critique of bureaucracy, it seems to suggest that Pushkin was also referring to bureaucrats.

'Anchar (поэма об изобретател'stve)' uses quotation to establish contiguities between Maiakovskii and Pushkin's relationships with the government. Earlier in Maiakovskii's career, however, such recontextualized quotations were used more radically to parody Pushkin: in 'Posledniaia peterburgskaia skazka' (1916) quotations from *Mednyi vsadnik* are transformed from statements of epic grandeur and ambition into the banal ponderings of a peckish bourgeois. Maiakovskii uses phrases from the opening of Pushkin's poem to describe Peter the statue: 'Стоит император Петр Великий / думает «запирую на просторе я»' (I, 128).⁴⁸⁸ Maiakovskii's quotations invoke familiar concepts from the original such as standing and thinking and almost exactly quote Peter's prediction that St Petersburg will become a major international centre. In Maiakovskii's poem, however, his ambition amounts only to a good meal: he sets off from his position on the pedestal, accompanied by the horse and snake that also make up the monument, to have a meal at the nearby Astoria Hotel.

⁴⁸⁸ The original reads: 'Стоял он, дум великих полн / [...] Все флаги в гости будут к нам / И запируем на просторе.' Pushkin, *PSS*, V, 135.

While I do not agree with many aspects of her intriguing reading of this poem, Smith is surely right to observe that the generic performed by Maiakovskii is a 'radical gesture': he demonstrates his mastery over Pushkin's masterwork by transplanting its characters into a slight, humorous poem.⁴⁸⁹ History repeats itself as farce. Maiakovskii plays with the interaction of continuity and change: the attention given to building and the St Petersburg cityscape in *Mednyi vsadnik* is reprised by the building of the Astoria Hotel in Maiakovskii's poem ('строится гостиница "Астория"). 'Астория' rhymes with 'просторея', and they are indeed equivalent, because it is there that Peter goes to feast. However, their connection also draws attention to the transformation of the space of St Petersburg: there is no open space any more.

'Posledniaia peterburgskaia skazka' highlights the way in which Maiakovskii's use of quotation has considerable parallels with his treatment of the statue, discussed in the previous chapter. Both the statue and the quotation persist through time but are given new meanings by the new contexts they find themselves in. The changed context of words is shown to determine their meaning: Peter is laughed out of the restaurant because his horse mistakes a pack of drinking straws for straw, even though semantic confusion is more plausible here than visual.⁴⁹⁰ What is more, just as a statue can function as a figurehead for a whole city, so a quotation has, alongside its own meaning, a wider connotative role as a representative of the text as a whole. Furthermore, both quotations and statues have a tendency to hide in plain sight, being so ubiquitous that their actual meaning becomes lost. Maiakovskii flaunts his ability to find new meanings to fill these empty carapaces: the quotation, like the statue, does not need to be altered, only moved, to acquire a new meaning. We remember Maiakovskii's water-pipe in 'Vo ves' golos': when it is dug up the people of the future think it is a gun. They have not made a mistake: their new attribution

⁴⁸⁹ Smith, *Montaging Pushkin*, p. 213. Maiakovskii performed the same transformation in the opposite direction with 'Anchar'.

⁴⁹⁰ 'И только / когда / над пачкой соломинок / в коне заговорила привычка древняя, / толпа сорвалась, криком сломана: / – Жует!' Maiakovskii, *PSS*, I, 128.

seemingly inspires the poet to use weaponry metaphors to describe his poetry. Survival over time necessarily leads to new meanings becoming attached to old objects, not the preservation of old meanings.

The analogy between words and statues, which culminates in his interrogation of the notion of the textual monument in 'Vo ves' golos', begins in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Tragediia*. Maiakovskii equates three forms of liberation: political, ontological and semantic. When objects begin to move, they also find new names for themselves: 'все вещи / кинулись / раздирая голос / скидывать лохмотья изношенных имен' (I, 63). The names which the objects wore like clothing are sloughed off like a snakeskin, because they no longer correspond to the object they describe, which has been transformed.⁴⁹¹ These new objects need new names to express their changing essence.

We recall a similar connection between words and statues in the work of Potebnia, cited by Burliuk in his analysis of Khlebnikov. As we have seen, Potebnia's promotion of the iconic value of the word (the non-Saussurean insistence that the relationship between signifier and signified is not arbitrary) and the Humboldtian *energeia* inherent to the phonetics of particular languages had a considerable influence on the Futurists. Another of Potebnia's influential theories was the idea that meaning is not inherent, but rather constructed at the moment of communication: 'one and the same word is understood differently by everyone; here we see the relative immobility of the image together with variability in content'.⁴⁹² The combination of immobility and flexibility described by Potebnia is the same in both the statue and the quotation: the form seems to remain constant, while the meaning attached to it can change. Both statues and quotations are durable enough to find themselves in new temporal and semiotic contexts which produce

⁴⁹¹ We recall the importance of clothing metaphors for Khlebnikov to express the interplay of essence and attribute.

⁴⁹² A. A. Potebnia, 'Mysl' i iazyk', in A. A. Potebnia, *Estetika i poetika*, ed. by I. V. Van'ko and A. I. Kolodnaia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), pp. 35-214 (p. 176). See also Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*, p. 74; V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1986).

new meanings. Ironically, therefore, it is their *prima facie* immobility which guarantees the semiotic flexibility of both statues and quotations. In this respect they invert the function of the objects in *Tragediia*: the objects discard the external part of the sign, the name, because it has lost its connection with the internal meaning; the statue and the quotation, however, are empty husks (immobile images, in Potebnia's terminology) which can be injected with new significance.

This understanding of statues and quotations can be seen as emblematic of an entire notion of cultural change which typified Futurist approaches to this question, particularly after the Revolution. Elements of the old will always persist, but their semiotic content is either unacceptable or has been rendered null through overfamiliarity: in order to bring them into the modern era they must be injected with new meaning by inserting them into new contexts. This approach is remarkably similar to the foundational position of the Futurist movement in regard to language: words have become empty and meaningless through overuse and only new juxtapositions and strangeness can revivify them.⁴⁹³ It departs significantly from Gasparov's synchronic model of time discussed in the Introduction because it emphasizes the diachronic: phenomena are durable through time and find themselves in new contexts, which changes their content. Futurism is relentlessly historicizing, or rather, it always insists on the present, as distinct from the past: texts, images and myths that have become automatic and faceless must be made to bear the stamp of the moment. Thus, in 1924, Pushkin may still be there, but the world around him has changed and he must change too to reflect this, and, therefore, fulfil his potential.

⁴⁹³ Compare Aleksei Kruchenykh, 'Deklaratsiia slova, kak takovogo', in *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 63-64 (p. 63): 'A Lily is beautiful, but the word 'lily' is disgustingly well-thumbed and "raped". Therefore I call the lily *euy*—primordial purity is restored.'

500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina

The Futurist use of quotation to express their understanding of cultural change reaches its apogee in Kruchenykh's 1924 work, *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina* (hereafter, *500*). Written in the late spring of 1924, some months before Maiakvskii wrote 'Iubileinoe', *500* responds to the same context: the emergence of a Soviet-inflected cult of Pushkin and the accompanying threat of cultural retrenchment. Furthermore, the combination of government interference in the cultural sphere and the end of the avant-garde project threatened Kruchenykh's status as a poet. In fact, considering that Kruchenykh's position within the Soviet literary landscape was by 1924 already quite peripheral, his need for self-affirmation was even keener than that of Maiakovskii. Like 'Iubileinoe', therefore, *500* performs two tasks: it develops a paradigm by which Pushkin can be incorporated into a radical Soviet art, and it uses Pushkin to confirm Kruchenykh's own position within this cultural field.

Published by the Moscow Association of Futurists, a NEP-era private publishing house set up by Maiakovskii and Osip Brik in 1921, *500* is a booklet of about seventy pages consisting of a long essay by Kruchenykh, including a typically Futurist 'Declaration' dated April-May 1924, and two shorter pieces reacting to the essay by the Constructivist poet Aleksei Chicherin and a certain K. Iakobson.⁴⁹⁴ In his essay Kruchenykh sets out to show how any line of verse, and in particular any line of Pushkin, can acquire a different meaning when heard from the stage. This misinterpretation comes about, he argues, because the divisions between words can become obscured by the rhythm of the verse, a phenomenon he calls a *sdvig*, or shift. His programmatic example of a *sdvig* in *500* is from *Evgenii Onegin*, IV, 44:

⁴⁹⁴ I have been unable to find out more about K. Iakobson.

Со сна садится в ванну **со льдом**.
 Сосна садится сольдом. (Сольдо(и) – итальянская монета).⁴⁹⁵

Over the course of the essay Kruchenykh provides a superficially scientific analysis of the causes and effects of such *sdvigi*, interspersed with examples from a wide range of works by Pushkin. This is followed by a ‘systematic’ (29) catalogue showcasing a selection of the 7,000 *sdvigi* Kruchenykh claims to have found in Pushkin. The logic behind Kruchenykh’s reading is the same as Maiakovskii’s motivation for reading ‘век уж’ in *Evgenii Onegin* as ‘векуш’. Such wordplay on word boundaries had long featured in jokes, but it was Kruchenykh who decided to transform the manipulation of such ambiguities into a whole pseudo-science, *sdvigologija*.⁴⁹⁶

Kruchenykh had first developed his theories in *Sdvigologija russkogo stikha* (1922), although he also made limited use of *sdvigi* in *Malakholiia v kapote: Istoriia KAK anal’naia erotika* (1918). The latter, an experimental text produced while Kruchenykh was in the fertile creative atmosphere of independent Tbilisi, combined verbal and visual puns on the shape of letters with the Freudian theory then enjoying its first vogue in the former Russian Empire, in order to establish the essentially anal nature of Russian history, language and culture.⁴⁹⁷ This scatological element, so typical of Kruchenykh’s impish disdain for literary niceties, survives in *500*, albeit in an attenuated form:

Как увижу очи томны?
 — что вижу я?! (7) (Из Гонзаго)

Sexual puns also abound:

Была наука **страсти** нежной
 Кастрати?! (32)

⁴⁹⁵ Aleksei Kruchenykh, *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov* (Moscow: MAF, 1924), p. 7. Hereafter in this chapter, references to *500* will be made in the body of the text. See Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 91.

⁴⁹⁶ On possible forerunners of *sdvigologija*, see Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 226.

⁴⁹⁷ See Janecek, *Zaum*, p. 253; and Walter Comins-Richmond, ‘Kručenykh’s *Malaxolija v kapote*: The Anagrammatization of Literature’, *SEEJ*, 4 (1994), pp. 618-35.

Note that Kruchenykh's preferred method for identifying the new words formed by the *sdvig* is a pose of surprised outrage and that his methodology is far from strict: he finds *sdvigi* where he needs them, not where his professed rules demand that they are found.

Like other Futurist manifestos, *500* occupies a liminal position between a serious work of literary criticism and a creative work. As previously suggested, such a refusal to conform to generic norms is in itself an avant-garde act, as it strives to break down the barriers between what is and what is not art. It enacts, moreover, the central logic of *sdvigologiiia*—that a single outer form can contain hidden meanings. Just as the traditional boundaries between words (which, in truth, do not reflect the continuous stream of speech) are exposed as conventional, so are the boundaries between genres. This is neatly encapsulated by Kruchenykh's description of the genre of the piece:

сверх-профессорская **дессертация**
идемонстрация
с'ухабамии! (4)

500 is both a dissertation and a dessert, which can accommodate both a technical analysis of Pushkin's prosody and sniggers at his supposed errors and peccadilloes.

An Alternative Pushkin

In part, *500* represents another example of the tendency, already discerned in Maiakovskii, to seek to expose Pushkin as incompetent: Kruchenykh is moved to ask 'Was Pushkin a bungler?' (11). He exposes Pushkin as technically naive: his failure to realize the importance of the interaction of rhythm and word boundaries makes his verse sound 'not classical, but schoolboy' (11). This incompetence is specifically contrasted to Khlebnikov's classical verse, which is described as 'masterful and successful' (11). Such criticism of Pushkin is clearly designed to challenge his unquestioned pre-eminence at the foundation of the Russia literary tradition.

A similar challenge is encoded in the work's title, with its promise of 'new' works. It refers to the new material which Kruchenykh makes from Pushkin's original, but also mocks the vogue for publishing previously unknown texts by Pushkin. Between 1918 and 1924 twelve new works had come out purporting to include previously unpublished material by Pushkin.⁴⁹⁸ In his essay 'Mnimyi Pushkin', a more sober expression of many of the principles behind *500*, Iurii Tynianov criticized this mania for new Pushkin texts as a hindrance to proper understanding:

it is time to announce completely openly that Pushkin came down to us in a sufficiently complete form [...] and that over the course of the last 20 years the 'new acquisitions of Pushkinian text', which have been published with entirely extraneous triumphalism, and sometimes even with newspaper hype, have contributed little that is substantially new.⁴⁹⁹

Tynianov and the Futurists want the Pushkinian oeuvre to remain characterized by omissions, fragments and uncompleted poems: Tynianov emphasizes the existence of alternative variants to *Evgenii Onegin*; Maiakovskii criticizes Briusov for completing *Egipetskie nochi*.⁵⁰⁰ The idea that a text can be finished is an indictment of the Futurist vision of literature as something spontaneous, organic and ephemeral: the unfinished text, however, is resistant to fossilization. Khlebnikov's poetry is the embodiment of this: Maiakovskii says that he never finished his poems because when it came to correcting them 'he would cross everything out, entirely, giving a completely new text'.⁵⁰¹

Tynianov describes both this exceptional focus on Pushkin in 1924 at the expense of other poets, and the intense interest in discovering rather than studying Pushkin's work, as products of the quasi-religious phenomenon of the Pushkin cult:

⁴⁹⁸ L. M. Dobrovol'skii and N. I. Mordovchenko, *Bibliografiia proizvedenii A. S. Pushkina i literatury o nem, 1918-1936* (Moscow: AN SSR, 1952), I, 5-27.

⁴⁹⁹ Iu. N. Tynianov, 'Mnimyi Pushkin', in *Poetika*, pp. 78-92 (p. 79).

⁵⁰⁰ See Tynianov, 'O kompozitsii "Evgeniia Onegina"', in *ibid.*, pp. 52-77.

⁵⁰¹ Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XII, 23.

This naïve teleologism leads to a complete distortion of the historical view: *all* literature under the sign of Pushkin becomes pointless, but he himself remains an incomprehensible 'miracle'.⁵⁰²

Throughout the 1920s, in works such as *Arkhaisty i novatory* and his novel *Pushkin*, Tynianov sought to establish that Pushkin was not a unique instance of genius but rather that his appearance must be understood within the broader development of Russian literature. What is more, Tynianov's work to contextualize Pushkin within his era served to establish parallels between his literary practice and that of the Modernist poets of the Russian avant-garde, much in the same way that the Futurists would combine their occasional disdain for Pushkin with assertions that he was a Futurist before his time, for instance in 'Iubilieinoe' or in Khlebnikov's suggestion that 'The Futurian is Pushkin in the light of the world war, in the cloak of the new century.'⁵⁰³

The desire to draw parallels between Pushkin and the Futurists continues in *500*. Kruchenykh cites a letter in which Pushkin is clearly also aware of ambiguous word boundaries:

Nothing would be easier than putting:
 Равна грузинка красотою
 but 'inkakr...' and the word *gruzinka* here is unavoidable. (22)

On the one hand, Kruchenykh suggests that Pushkin did not take sufficient care to read his drafts aloud, and would have deleted his infelicitous 'mistakes', thus gainsaying both Pushkin's reputation for perfection, and the Romantic cliché of the inspired writer who does not need drafts. On the other, Kruchenykh also suggests that his own 'science' was well-known to Pushkin. What is more, Pushkin seems to anticipate Kruchenykh in playing games with this knowledge. Kruchenykh cites an authority on verse construction, Vasilii

⁵⁰² Tynianov, 'Mnيمي Pushkin', p. 78.

⁵⁰³ Khlebnikov, *SS*, II, 84. Compare Monika Frenkel Greenleaf, 'Tynianov, Pushkin and the Fragment: Through the Lens of Montage', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, pp. 264-82 (p. 288): 'Tynianov was able to recognize something akin to the Modernist aesthetics of open forms, to detect the same modernist self-definition and formal ferment in the seemingly classical and closed poetic legacy of one hundred years ago.'

Chernyshev's *Zakony i pravila russkogo proiznosheniia* (1915), in which Chernyshev shows Pushkin clearly playing with word boundaries in alternative lines to *Evgenii Onegin* (51):

Порой ленив, порой упрям,
Порой лукав, порою прям.⁵⁰⁴

Kruchenykh also draws attention to similar games in Pushkin's playful erotic verse:

I.
День блаженства настоящий
Дева вкусит, наконец.
Час пробьет и
Дева сядет

II.
Мы наслаждение удвоим
И в руки взявши свой ...
Дева, ног ...
Залетит нетопырь! (21)⁵⁰⁵

Kruchenykh points out that the homophony of the words Pushkin omits here does not consider word boundaries, suggesting some awareness of the potential of *sdvigologiya*.

What is more, even if Pushkin's *sdvigi* are mistakes, Kruchenykh quotes his colleague Igor' Terent'ev's maxim that 'poetry is the ability to make mistakes' (26), a remark which recalls the Futurists' willingness to perpetuate typographical errors in their manifestos and their eagerness to incorporate randomness into the creative process.⁵⁰⁶ However, Kruchenykh's less than consistent authorial personality also takes particular relish in a misprint in Briusov's edition of Pushkin, both praising and censuring the mistake:

Иль с Акамедиком в чепце.
Что за сака медик в чепце? сдвиг Госиздата! (p. 20)

⁵⁰⁴ Pushkin, *PSS*, VI, 619.

⁵⁰⁵ Compare Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 126.

⁵⁰⁶ In the preface to *Sadok sudei II* (1913), the Futurists announced that one of their principles was 'considering blots an indispensable part of the work'. Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 52. Compare Kruchenykh, 'Novye puti slova', in *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 64-73 (p. 70): 'Our aim is only to point out the very method of incorrectness, show the necessity for it and its importance for art.'

Kruchenykh's valorization of mistakes extends to the suggestion that the *sdvigi* 'may be Pushkin's best work' (28). What is more, because of the specific filter that Kruchenykh applies to his text, Pushkin's *sdvigi* show him to be using a very Futurist lexicon, incorporating many *zaum'* words which replicate the Futurists' fondness for forms reminiscent of pre-Petrine Russian language, such as 'напирях' (*na + pirakh*), which Kruchenykh glosses as a 'Slavic form'. Another *sdvig* recalls Sviatogor, a bogatyr and hero of one of Khlebnikov's neo-primitivist essays: "'И мнил загресть он злата горы" like Sviatogor, a name for a billionaire?!' (26). Kruchenykh depicts Pushkin becoming a Futurist, adopting their fondness for neologism:

Прими с улыбкою, мой друг,
Свободной музы приношенье...

(Dedication.
Kavkazskii plennik).

'Он слушал Ленского с улыбкой...

At last the muse has started to talk in free words: *sulybka* is a small, barely noticeable smile, the semblance of one (compare: *supesok, suglinok*)—here we have Pushkin's first neologism! (26)

Furthermore, despite his occasionally high-minded criticism of Pushkin's 'errors', Kruchenykh's insistence that Pushkin shares his puerile frame of mind—an impression enhanced by the fact that Kruchenykh quotes Pushkin's smutty poems and his blasphemous epic, *Gavriliada* (11)—serves to humanize the great poet and to suggest further parallels between Pushkin and the Futurists. Kruchenykh, and Tynianov, save most of their criticism for those who seek to make Pushkin an exceptional case. The deliberate sullyng of Pushkin's pristine image represents a clear rejection of the sanctimonious and sanitized vision of Pushkin promoted during the Jubilee. This is framed in terms of a service to Pushkin. Kruchenykh suggests that undue reverence for Pushkin has transformed him from a resource into a force of oppression: he disdains those who have an 'adoring attitude to Pushkin: more bruised by Pushkin than adapting him' (6).

Kruchenykh's *sdvigi* are intended to expose what lurks behind the poet's Parnassian image: 'Now Pushkin's toga will be removed' (4). By so doing, Kruchenykh will not only desanctify Pushkin, revealing him both as a pervert and an incompetent, but also provide a case in point to demonstrate how he can be adapted. Kruchenykh by and large treats the ambiguous *sdvigi* both as mistakes and as outbursts of the suppressed subconscious. He cites Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: 'it is easy to explain this slip of the tongue with Freud' (12). Chicherin points to the work of one of Kruchenykh's friends in Tbilisi, Georgii Kharazov, who is undertaking a full Freudian investigation into *sdvigologiiia* (55).

Kruchenykh's advocacy of the Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion seems inconsistent with his criticism of others who concentrate on the content rather than the form of Pushkin's poetry, the Pushkinists who have spent more time trying 'to figure out Pushkin's "soul" than his ear or mouth' (6). However, Kruchenykh had always been happy to credit the controlling influence of the subconscious over creativity: the Futurists' concentration on the phonetic aspect of the word was in part motivated by an expressionist desire to gain more direct access to the voice of the subconscious which was misrepresented by conscious thought.⁵⁰⁷

Indeed, Kruchenykh is scornful of those who seek to use Pushkin only for his value as a witness to history—what might be described as the embryonic socialist realist Pushkin: '7 thousand shifts in Pushkin! That proves once again that so-called "clean, pure, honest realism" in art (particularly in Pushkin) is complete fiction' (71). Pushkin's text, he insists,

⁵⁰⁷ In 'Novye puti slova' Kruchenykh quotes with approval lines from Afanasii Fet and Fedor Tiutchev which describe a Romantic ideal of expression outside the limitations of language: "О если б без слова сказаться душой было можно?" (Fet). "Мысль изреченная есть ложь" (Tiutchev). thrice [*sic*] correct! Why could we not leave behind thought and write not with word-concepts but words that have been formed freely?' *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 64-72 (p. 67). Original emphasis and capitals. See also Aleksei Kruchenykh, 'Deklaratsiia slova, kak takovogo', in *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 63-64 (p. 63): 'THOUGHT AND SPEECH ARE TOO SLOW FOR THE EXPERIENCE OF THE INSPIRED MAN, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but his own private language (the creator is individual), and language which has no fixed meaning (not stagnant), *zaum*'.

has multiple levels to it, challenging interpretations of it as a straightforwardly realist text. Kruchenykh appears almost to be quoting his own manifesto *Slovo kak takovoe* from eleven years previous: 'Before we came along the following demands of language were announced: clean, pure, honest, sonorous, pleasant (gentle) on the ear, expressive (convex, colourful, vivid).'⁵⁰⁸ In that instance, the main target of his polemic was Symbolism; now the same demands are made in the service of 'realism'. Unseen forces continue to demand that the poetic language be 'clean', which is to say entirely unlike the jagged surface of Futurist poetry.

Despite this change, Kruchenykh's main critique is still aimed at those readers who have analysed Pushkin's work from a mystical point of view and who have attempted to establish him as a moral inspiration and source of guidance. As we have seen, this includes both more conservative literary figures, and members of the new intellectual elite such as Lunacharskii. Kruchenykh claims that his *sdvigi* have shown that '*zaum*' has been triumphant once again and in the most unexpected place! So let's forget about "the wisdom of Pushkin"' (29). He alludes here to Mikhail Gershenzon's influential *Mudrost' Pushkina*, in which Pushkin is portrayed as 'a religious mystic, a seer of the hidden nature of the universe'.⁵⁰⁹ Kruchenykh's advocacy of a quasi-scientific approach to Pushkin's language is designed to accord with Soviet attacks on mysticism and superstition. He uses religious terms to describe the obsessive relationship with Pushkin: any criticism is treated as 'blasphemy' (6). This imagery, however, has pre-revolutionary pedigree, and eagerly builds on the Futurists' early imagery which depicted the Pushkin cult as a pagan superstition: 'they have made of him an idol, a fetish' (6); the Pushkinists are 'fetishists' who are 'usually blind and deaf in their service to Pushkin' (6); Viacheslav Ivanov is accused of thinking of Pushkin as his 'deity' (*bozhestvo*) (53). Kruchenykh connects the infelicities

⁵⁰⁸ Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, 'Slovo kak takovoe', in *Manifesty i programmy*, pp. 53-59 (p. 56).

⁵⁰⁹ Brian Horowitz, *The Myth of A. S. Pushkin in Russia's Silver Age: M. O. Gershenzon, Pushkinist* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 59. Tynianov also openly criticizes Gershenzon's concept of the 'wisdom of Pushkin' (Tynianov, 'Mnimyi Pushkin', *Poetika*, p. 78).

caused by *sdvigi* not so much with the living author Pushkin but his cult: ‘what a cacophony Pushkin’s marble has borne’ (16). Such language recalls Kruchenykh’s invocation of ‘white-marble Pushkin’ in the early manifestos, as well as Maiakovskii’s critique of the Pushkin monument and the way in which the Futurists’ early iconoclasm reprised Vladimir’s Christianization of Russia.⁵¹⁰ Although, as self-confessed neo-primitivists, the Futurists were extremely positive about Russia’s pagan past, and often included pagan motifs in their poetry, the long-standing status of the attributes of paganism (idols, fetishes) as evidence of spiritual perversion (perhaps bolstered by the concepts of fetish in both Freud and Marx) made it a convenient metaphor to describe the wrong-headed adulation of Pushkin, particularly against the backdrop of Soviet approval of science and its vehement attacks on religion and mysticism. In fact, Pushkin is cherished more than God by the forces of conservatism: ‘attacks against religion are more quickly forgiven than attacks on the white-marble and radiant tsar of the old aesthetics’ (6). Kruchenykh manages to implicate the Pushkin cult in both monarchism and religion.

Nevertheless, quotation, the mechanism by which Kruchenykh desacralizes the fetishized text of Pushkin seems in some ways to approximate the reverent attitude to text usually associated with readers of sacred scriptures: he reads the original closely and obsessively gathers quotations. Kruchenykh makes a point of never misquoting Pushkin, almost as if to misrepresent the text would be a disservice. Transformation, therefore, must take place within the framework of exact quotation, as it does in some of the examples from Maiakovskii above. This practice has its roots early in Kruchenykh’s career. In ‘Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo’ he quotes a poem of his which is made entirely of vowels:

e a

⁵¹⁰ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 80.

и е е и⁵¹¹

He repeats the same experiment in 'Vysoty (vselenskii iazyk)':

е у ю
и а о
о а⁵¹²

In both instances the poems are not entirely original compositions but well-known prayers (The Lord's Prayer and the Credo, 'Veruiu', respectively) with all the consonants removed. Kruchenykh does not, however, announce the source of his poems here, unlike in *500*: the manipulation of the sacred text takes place in secret. Nevertheless, there is a clear continuity between these poems and *500*. The disenfranchized poet both exploits and challenges the power of the universally respected text by repeating it and bringing it under his own creative control. On the one hand, this is reminiscent of the ancient practice of constructing spells and incantations from sacred texts: Futurism, like magic, seeks to harness the power of religion for its own ends. On the other hand, this sly appropriation is a way of undoing the power of the prayer: quotation can transform the solemn into the ridiculous. Kruchenykh enacts the replacement of religion with a sacralized version of art, which, we recall, Epshtein sees as central to the avant-garde vision for culture.⁵¹³

By quoting selectively in order to produce a new *zaum'* text, Kruchenykh implies that *zaum'*, his invention, is all around us, even in sacred texts, but that it is concealed, waiting to be unveiled by the perspicacious poet.⁵¹⁴ He promoted a similar theory in 1925's *Zaumnyi iazyk u Seifulliny, Vs. Ivanova, Leonova, Babelia, I. Sel'vinskogo, A. Veselogo i dr.*, a text which seeks to show the way in which *zaum'* is prevalent, but hidden, in the works of contemporary authors.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵¹² David Burliuk, Nikolai Burliuk, Vladimir Burliuk, et al., *Dokhlaiia luna* (Moscow: Gileia, 1913), p. 17. See Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 121.

⁵¹³ Epshtein, *Vera i obraz*, p. 34.

⁵¹⁴ In this respect, Kruchenykh's experiments recall the genre of 'found poetry', in which the poet draws attention to the inherent poetry within an ostensibly non-poetic text.

Kruchenykh's insistence on verbatim quotation is a natural product of his poetics, which always remained true to the Futurist emphasis on the phonetic aspect of the word in preference to the semantic: as they say in *Sadok Sudei II* (1913), 'We have begun to ascribe content to words according to their graphic and phonic characteristics.'⁵¹⁵ If, as Kruchenykh did in his *zaum'* experiments, this approach is taken to its fullest extent, exact quotation is the only possible form of quotation and indeed the only possible form of intertextuality. Since a phrase is held to have no semantic content outside of its sound, it cannot be paraphrased; the full force of poetry is in its visual and acoustic elements. For the same reason, Kruchenykh argued that interlingual translation is also impossible.⁵¹⁶

Kruchenykh's conviction that meaning was contained in sound and shape extended even to a surprising orthographical conservatism. Iurii Dolgodushin remembers Kruchenykh being horrified by the introduction of modernized orthography in Briusov's new edition of Pushkin's works: Kruchenykh complained that Briusov 'squeezes him into a new, americanized (abbreviated) orthography. Pushkin without "ї", "ѣ" and "ѡ" is like Venus in a pince-nez and American boots.'⁵¹⁷ Kruchenykh's imagery is typically Futurist: the Venus de Milo (significantly, a statue) features regularly as a representative of classical beauty, and boots are often a symbol of brute force and modernity. It is, however, surprising to hear Kruchenykh defend the old orthography, which the Futurists were proposing should be dispensed with in 1913, and to see him almost fetishizing the Pushkinian text.⁵¹⁸ However, Briusov's orthographic changes are made on the assumption that they do not change the

⁵¹⁵ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 52. Kruchenykh's demonstration of the way in which concentration on the acoustic aspect of poetry can lead to a radical reimagining of the original could be profitably compared to homophonic translation such as Louis and Celia Zukofsky's rendering of Catullus into English which prioritized the preservation of the sound of the original at the expense of the meaning. Louis Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 241ff.

⁵¹⁶ Markov, *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 63. Compare Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 104.

⁵¹⁷ *Kruchenykh v svidetel'stvakh*, p. 51.

⁵¹⁸ For the Futurist reaction to orthographic reforms, see Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 12-18.

meaning of the text; to Kruchenykh, the author of 'Bukva, kak takovaia', the graphical appearance of the text is, in theory, a more important element of its effect than its meaning. What is more, the rationale of Kruchenykh's indignation is not incompatible with the Futurist attitude to Pushkin: changing the orthography is a way of disguising Pushkin's archaism so that the classical can infiltrate the present in modern garb. Dressing up the statue is different, it should be noted, from Maiakovskii's mobilization of the monument: the classical essence is not changed, it has merely acquired the trappings of modernity. The Futurists, for their part, emphasize Pushkin's otherness, the fact that he is a relic of the classical past—preserving his original orthography is a way of doing this.

Nonetheless, Kruchenykh himself did not see fit to reproduce the original orthography in *500*, for a number of reasons. It would, for one, be highly unorthodox by 1924, and, considering the politicized use of old orthography by some émigré writers, it would perhaps be a risky gesture. What is more, the larger print runs enjoyed in the post-revolutionary period (*500* was printed in 2000 copies, which, while not overwhelming, was considerably bigger than that enjoyed by earlier, more daring texts) precluded the elaborate designs of the hand-made books of the early Futurist period: the visual aspect of the text ceased to be so important. What did remain important, however, was the aural reception of the text.

The Primacy of Performance

The logic of *sdvigologija* is predicated on the idea that poetry should be read out loud and that the primary forum for the reception of poetry is public performance. (This emphasis on aural communication of the text co-exists with Kruchenykh's interest in transforming the visual reception of the text by challenging assumptions about the presentation of text on a page; the emphasis on visual experiment does, however, seem to decline in importance by the mid-1920s.) The misinterpretations suggested by Kruchenykh could only

be made by a person hearing the text, not reading it. (Although, ironically, Kruchenykh's text is clearly the product not of listening, but reading.) Kruchenykh emphasizes the importance of sound to poetry: he cites the Formalist Boris Tomashevskii, who says 'in verse the sonic requirement dominates over the semantic' (5). This sonic element only emerges during reading out loud:

The reading is one of the most important elements of the correct reception of poetic works. Until the work is read out loud properly there is no sonic reception, there is no sound [*zvuchanie*] (deaf Beethoven does not count), there is no verse. (10)

What is more, this reading should take place on a stage in front of an audience: 'Pushkin read to oneself and Pushkin read from the stage are not one and the same' (10). The new, post-revolutionary era is an 'age of voice and stage' ('голосливо-эстрадная эпоха') (10). Or at least it should be. Kruchenykh urges writers into the public sphere: 'We will cure the deafness of readers and old chamber scribblers! Poets—to the squares and the stages! Beat the moth of *sdvigi* from your threadbare cloaks' (59). This public location is contrasted to the suspiciously solitary endeavours of those who read 'in lonely studies, in "the secret places of the soul"' (6).

The importance of performance and declamation is a constant in Futurist poetics, most notably in the work of Maiakovskii, but equally so in that of Kruchenykh. (Khlebnikov, a notably weak performer, was considered an aberration from the Futurist norm.⁵¹⁹) The emphasis on performance fits closely with the avant-garde agenda: in theory, performance brings art to a wider audience and blends poetry with other art forms by turning it into a spectacle encompassing both theatre and music and often even fashion, thus eliminating some of the boundaries between art forms. What is more, it actualizes the immediacy that Futurist poetry aspired to: by being an unrepeatable moment of contact between text, performer and audience—and one in which mistakes are not only permissible but

⁵¹⁹ See M. Radzishevskii and V. Teider, 'Velimir Khlebnikov v razmyshlenii i vospominaniakh sovremennikov', *Vestnik Obshchestva Velimira Khlebnikova*, 1 (1996), 44-66.

welcome—the performance of poetry avoids the problem of the fact that text’s persistence through time transforms it into a cultural burden.

In *500* Kruchenykh clearly hones his ideal of public performance to suit contemporary priorities, taking it away from the flamboyant theatricality of pre-revolutionary Futurist proto-happenings and making it more amenable to a new, more proletarian, vision of the role of art. In a gesture similar to the ‘change in tactics’ announced by Maiakovskii (XI, 45), Kruchenykh seeks to recast poetry to make it suitable for the new age but still maintain his privileged status as a poet.

Kruchenykh himself makes little mention of the changed *political* circumstances. They are, however, frequently mentioned by other contributors: in *500* Aleksei Chicherin introduces the concept of Marxist dialectic (54). Kruchenykh emphasizes the fact that the audience for poetry has changed in the wake of the emancipation of the Revolution. In *LEF agitki Maiakovskogo, Aseeva, Tret’iakovskogo* (1925) he argues that poetry, like newspapers, was now primarily transmitted by one reader to a largely illiterate audience, and that it thus should be created with this form of reception in mind.⁵²⁰ In *Fonetika teatra* (1923) Kruchenykh had already made the argument that *zaum’* (which he uses broadly here to signify all of his production, not just transrational poetry) represented the only possible course for the development of poetry and theatre not only in the Soviet Union, but the whole world, because it was ready for the age of mass consumption.⁵²¹ His argument rests on the belief that *zaum’* has its origins in collective self-expression (‘*zaum’* language was always the language of the **choir**’). This viewpoint is not often expressed by Kruchenykh, but it does recall his early comparisons of *zaum’* with glossolalia.⁵²² What is more, the nature of this reception is characterized by the speed at which information is received: the

⁵²⁰ Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Lef agitki Maiakovskogo, Aseeva, Tret’iakovskogo* (Moscow: Vserossiiski soiuz poetov, 1925), p. 3.

⁵²¹ Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Fonetika teatra* (Moscow: 41°, 1923), p. 5.

⁵²² Kruchenykh, *Ibid.*, p. 7; *Manifesty i programmy*, p. 67.

zaum' text, read from the stage, approximates the cinema in the way it produces an interminable succession of information which the recipient has no control over:

When in a sentence words that are (constructively) unnecessary, or the construction is broken for the sake of greater speed, the images race, the mind cannot catch up with the imagination and the action—the cinema-image. The shifted [*sdvigovaia*] construction of the word is when certain letters are thrown out (with a compressed middle) or certain letters are moved,—the cinema-word, *zaum'* language.⁵²³

In performance words are elided or confused, although whether this happens in the reader's mouth or the listener's ear is unclear. Nevertheless, this formulation clearly anticipates the way in which Kruchenykh believes Pushkin should be perceived: at such a pace and in circumstances in which it is possible to create new meanings, during live performance. Kruchenykh uses the same cinematic analogy in *500* to describe the way in which misperception is possible when listening to verse: 'the verse has a forward-moving character ≥ the cinematographic' (13).⁵²⁴ The decision to equate the new poetry with cinema bears witness not only to the popularity of this medium among the general population and among the Futurists, but also, perhaps, to cinema's favoured position amongst the Bolshevik elite, which was well-known, even if Lenin did not actually say 'cinema for us is the most important of the arts'.⁵²⁵ This passion was reflected at a theoretical level. Greenleaf observes of the period that: 'Literary and cinematic theory and practice were united to an unusual, self-conscious degree and continued to fertilize each other in areas of investigation quite far-removed from the original context.'⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Kruchenykh, *Fonetika teatra*, pp. 9-10.

⁵²⁴ In 1928 Kruchenykh further identified his poetry with cinema with the publication of *Govoriashchee kino*, a collection of poems intended to convey his impressions of recent films.

⁵²⁵ See Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 35-46, and Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London and New York: Tauris, 2001), pp. 26-47.

⁵²⁶ Greenleaf, 'Tynianov, Pushkin and the Fragment', p. 275.

The Theoretical Context

Benjamin

The way in which Kruchenykh's poetics of miscomprehension attempts to respond to the emergence of a new mass audience anticipates Walter Benjamin's classic essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936). Although it would be fanciful to suggest that Kruchenykh's essay influenced Benjamin, the remarkable congruities between the theoretical analysis of the reception of contemporary art expounded by Benjamin and the theory of poetics enacted and projected by Kruchenykh point to more than just a shared leftist intellectual milieu and highlight the value of *500* as an embodiment of the experiments of the Russian avant-garde, which greatly influenced Benjamin, and serve as evidence of its central place in the development of the intellectual atmosphere of inter-war Europe.

Benjamin's argument is based on the conviction that 'the greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation'.⁵²⁷ He suggests that the traditional means of perceiving the work of art, concentration, has been replaced by a new mode, distraction. He argues that: 'Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: a man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. [...] In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.'⁵²⁸ Using this terminology, we can characterize Kruchenykh's new vision for mass poetry readings, with multiple hearing and mishearing, as an attempt to transform poetry from an art of concentration into one of distraction. Benjamin and Kruchenykh share the belief that film, as the art of distraction par excellence, points the way forward for all art: 'Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasingly noticeable in all fields of art and is symptomatic of

⁵²⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 211-44 (p. 232).

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise.⁵²⁹ Furthermore, like Kruchenykh, Benjamin likens the distracting effect of film to Freud's revelations in the field of language in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: film has finally provided a visual equivalent to the rapid flow of everyday language and the concomitant possibility for revelations of the subconscious mind in the midst of conscious self-expression.⁵³⁰ Although his argument does not, by and large, address literature directly, Benjamin does cite the Dadaists as pioneers in bringing the new distracted mode of perception to literature, in response to the changed political climate. His words could be said to be equally true of Kruchenykh:

In the decline of middle-class society, contemplation became a school for asocial behaviour; it was countered by distraction as a variant of social conduct. Dada activities actually assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the centre of scandal. One requirement was foremost: to outrage the public.

From an alluring appearance or persuasive structure of sound the work of art of the Dadaists became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality. [...] Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it has already changed.⁵³¹

In Benjamin's reading *épatage* is part of the new poetics of distraction, directed against the practice of the contemplative reception of art. If we apply this logic to *500*, we can see that the scatological besmirching of the Pushkinian text is an expanded version of the individual mishearing: it is a means to ensure that the work of art is perceived not in a quasi-religious communion (Benjamin has a footnote on the religious origins of contemplation of art) but in the riotous distraction of a scandal. The jokey authorial persona of *500*, reminiscent of the Futurist pranks of 1913, prevents the reader taking the content seriously and pushes them into something resembling a state of distraction. Like the Dadaists' experiments,

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

Kruchenykh's work itself occupies a space between an actual work of art and a stunt. It thus has two existences, like the lines of poetry it contains, both as something serious and as something ridiculous at the same time.

Benjamin's notions of contemplation and distraction emerge from an overarching thesis that the mass reproduction of works of art has transformed the nature of their perception. In a thumbnail sketch of the sociological history of the reception of art, Benjamin examines the concept of authenticity and 'the original' and argues that 'the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value'.⁵³² He criticizes the lingering influence of these sacral beginnings: 'This ritualistic basis however remote is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.'⁵³³ Similarly, Kruchenykh's mockery of the cult of Pushkin in the opening pages of *500* is an attack on those readers of Pushkin whose admiration for his formal qualities, the beauty of his poetry, transforms the reading of poetry into a solemn, quasi-religious ritual.

Benjamin contends that the work of art became the centre of ritual because it was unique and not easily reproduced. Benjamin's Marxist analysis then seeks to relate superstructure to base and introduce a diachronic element: he argues that the development of new methods of mass production has led to a new, secular, non-hierarchized mode of apperception of the work of art. Mechanical reproduction strips the work of art of the aura that was granted by its former, unique status. This degradation of the aura then challenges the notion of tradition:

the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.⁵³⁴

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Benjamin's argument addresses literature only in passing for good reason: the concept of an 'original' does not apply to texts in the same way as it does to paintings. Texts have been reproduced mechanically for many centuries and, even before the introduction of printing, mass reproduction was the essence of 'literature': what differentiates the canon of antiquity from the oral tradition that preceded it is that these texts could be reproduced (with, it must be admitted, compromised accuracy). The innovation of writing thus radically transformed the function of tradition: whereas oral transmission of culture naturally precludes exact reproduction, writing allows imprecise oral traditions to crystallize into fixed canonical texts. However, neither the advent of reproduction (writing) nor of mass reproduction (printing) was accompanied by the rejection of the dethroning of the notions of originality or the quasi-religious reverence for the 'original'. In fact, the sanctity of the 'original' text became the cornerstone of tradition: the unchanging classical text became a benchmark for all later works (one thinks, for example, of the works of Homer once they had been written down being the dominant force in Greek education). This leads to a system featuring two forms of reproduction, which I will call here the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical reproduction of a text consists of exact copying from edition to edition, reproducing the original through history. This coexists with the horizontal transmission of the content of this text—its inexact intertextual reproduction in other texts by other authors, who either allude to or cite that text, reproducing elements of it. Both these forms of reproduction are necessary for literary tradition: classical texts can influence new texts (horizontal reproduction) precisely because they can be passed on down through the centuries without being changed (vertical reproduction).

Unlike the decorative arts, the aura of these unchanging texts is attached not to the material form of the sacred, hand-worked object but to its content, which is

reproduced exactly. Thus text has always been in a condition similar to that which Benjamin suggests has been achieved latterly in the visual arts: the creative work can be accessed by many people on their own terms, without travelling and without needing to consider the 'original', unique object. Reproduction does not result in a 'plurality of copies' but a plurality of originals. Any reproduction which damages this text is no longer another original.

It is precisely the accumulated pressure of centuries of these reproducible but auratic texts that the Futurists sought to throw off in their poetic practice. Many of the hallmarks of Futurism speak of a rejection of the reproducible, written text: their promotion of handmade books (as if to undo the homogenizing and controlling influence of printing); their preference for *zaum'* (words which have just been made up and therefore have no predecessor); their urging for the destruction of the text; their valorization of glossolalia and children's writing, which are essentially oral in origin; their love for folkloric motifs (Khlebnikov especially); their belief that the unique performance is the true essence of a work. Above all, their rejection of reproduction is evident in their hostility to the Pushkinian and Horatian 'monumentum aere perennius', a metaphor which speaks of a type of literature which is predicated on the preservation of the 'original' through reproduction.⁵³⁵ Finally, as I have sought to show, their rejection of textual tradition in its written, reproducible form is evident in their desire to treat the legacy of distinguished predecessors such as Pushkin mythologically, which is to say, to reject the aura accumulated by Pushkin and the concomitant notion that new material emerges in accordance with a linear, genetic model, and to treat motifs culled from Pushkin as myths which can be reworked and reappropriated in the spirit of the ephemeral present. Of course, many of these tendencies are evident in many other literary movements: what is

⁵³⁵ There is, of course, some blurring of the lines between orality and the auratic text. As Maiakovskii's misremembering of Pushkin's verse shows, once texts are committed to memory, as happens often with poetry, they are susceptible to reinterpretation in performance and even evolutionary change.

notable about Futurism is the extent to which the pursuit of this goal informs the entirety of their poetics.

Kruchenykh's *500* is a very specific instance of this polemic: it uses quotation to challenge the interaction of the vertical and horizontal reproduction of text. Kruchenykh lays bare and challenges both these forms of reproduction by reproducing Pushkin's verse in two contexts—the imagined context of the mass reading and the context of his own essay.⁵³⁶ In regard to the vertical transmission of the text Kruchenykh seeks to problematize the assumed stability of Pushkin's verse over time by drawing attention to the way that poetry, because it should be read out loud, can never be reproduced exactly but is always susceptible to transformation and miscommunication between the reader and the audience. Kruchenykh suggests that the mass age introduces creative errors into reproduction, in contrast to Benjamin, for whom the age of mass perception renders the possibility of inexact reproduction irrelevant, as in the case of film or popular prints.

⁵³⁶ A comparable challenge to the two forms of literary reproduction is Jorge Luis Borges's 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*' (1939), which also pretends to be a work of serious literary criticism. The story purports to be a review of the work of the eponymous author, who has rewritten *Don Quixote* in its entirety. Menard's rewriting fuses the two forms of reproduction—the vertical, exact reproduction of the text and the horizontal, the use of quotation and influence—and in so doing brings both processes under question. Both Borges's Menard's *Quixote* and Kruchenykh's reimagined Pushkin recall the ancient genre of the cento, a text made by reordering lines from famous poems to change their meaning. These poems took canonical texts, mostly Homer and Virgil, as their source, but showed how even within the constraints of verbatim quotation entirely new meanings could be created. The cento, like *500*, was by and large treated as a linguistic joke, regardless of the intriguing questions it raised about the nature of authorship and tradition. In an argument which could be applied to Kruchenykh's experiments with some validity, Marie Okáčová proposes that: 'I believe that the cento, rather than being an eccentric curiosity devoid of all literary value, is primarily a kind of intricate and actually perfectly legitimate play with language, which reflects its principles of operation. Being in fact the embodiment of absolute intertextuality, the patchwork poems implicitly question every notion of literary originality because they emphasize the interdependence of individual texts representing different literary metalanguages. The cento is therefore "recycled" art only in a more conspicuous way than the rest of literature inevitably is.' See Marie Okáčová, 'Centones: Recycled Art or the Embodiment of Absolute Intertextuality?' Available at http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/graeca_latina/MOkacova1.pdf. Accessed on 29/06/12. This analogue can be profitably compared with the model often suggested for the Acmeist text, the palimpsest, in Gérard Genette's sense of the word. Justin Doherty suggests that the fact that the poem being written over shines through the present text problematizes the lyric persona, creating an equivalence between the new text and its intertexts, thus downplaying diachrony and difference. The cento, by contrast, preserves the original, but does so in a way which emphasizes difference and change. See Justin Doherty, *The Acmeist Movement in Russian Poetry: Culture and the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 201.

Kruchenykh recognizes that when they enter the public domain works of art become democratized: they are susceptible to reworking at the hands of the masses.

Whereas in the vertical Kruchenykh replaces exactitude with error, in the horizontal (intertextual reproduction, typified by the inaccuracy emergent from inexact allusion and influence) he introduces exactness, by quoting Pushkin verbatim. However, this still achieves transformation. By preserving Pushkin's original words but finding new meanings for them, he hyperbolically demonstrates the way in which borrowed material is always necessarily transformed and acquires new meaning, much as Maiakovskii did with his quotations from Pushkin. Moreover, like Maiakovskii, Kruchenykh's scatological transformations of Pushkin's verse and his pushing of literary allusion to its maximal position (direct, attributed quotation) combine to demonstrate the fact that literary borrowing presupposes rupture and change just as much, if not more, than unity.

Tynianov

Kruchenykh's insistence that new circumstances necessarily transform the meaning of borrowed material necessarily suggests that literature cannot be a stable storehouse of technical and moral values but that it is a dynamic system, shaped not from above but from below. This conclusion, which underlies much of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin and indeed their broader cultural programme, has striking resonances with Iurii Tynianov's conceptualization of literary evolution.

We have already observed the similarities between Tynianov's and Kruchenykh's attitudes to the cult of Pushkin. Equally notable is how closely *500*'s seemingly trivial game-playing showcases the mechanisms which Tynianov sees at work in all literary evolution, particularly as it is understood in his essay 'Literaturnyi fakt'. This essay was published in *Lef* on 25 May 1924, making it almost exactly contemporary with *500* and Maiakovskii's

speech quoted above.⁵³⁷ In this article Tynianov even seems to make mention of Kruchenykh's *sdvigologiia* as a potential future direction for the development of Russian letters:

In fact, every deformity, every 'mistake', every 'error' in normative poetics is, potentially, a new constructive principle (just such a principle, for example, is the use of instances of linguistic carelessness and 'mistakes' as means for semantic shifting [*sdvig*] by the Futurists).⁵³⁸

Like Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh, Tynianov could not help but see the question of the future development of literature in the light of the forthcoming Pushkin jubilee; he extends his argument from 'Mnimyi Pushkin' about the flexibility of Pushkin:

Things that have become automatic can be used. Every epoch promotes some or other phenomena from the past, which are close to it, and forgets others. But these, of course, are derivative [*vtorichnye*] phenomena, new work on old material. Pushkin the historical figure differs from the Pushkin of the symbolists, but the Pushkin of the symbolists is incomparable with *the evolutionary significance of Pushkin in Russian literature*; an epoch always selects the materials it needs, but the use of these materials is characteristic only of the epoch.⁵³⁹

Each age makes a new Pushkin for itself, rescuing him from becoming automatic. All literary figures are constantly evolving: 'the literary figure is dynamic, like the literary epoch with which and in which it moves'.⁵⁴⁰ However, what is important is not the material from the past that is reworked, or particularly the literary figure which undergoes this adaptation—these are 'derivative phenomena'—but the way in which these are reworked and how this adaptation reflects the evolution of literature ('the evolutionary significance of Pushkin'). As Kruchenykh says, 'It's much better to study carefully and listen closely to the **new Pushkin**, who is being revealed (for the first time!) before us!' (26). Like the 'walking corpse' in 'Odnokii litsedei', each quotation in *500* is a syllepsis, 'a word that has two mutually incompatible meanings, one acceptable in the context in which the word appears,

⁵³⁷ The importance of this essay for the Futurists is further evident in the popularity of the term introduced by Tynianov, the 'literary fact', which is used prominently, for instance, by Maiakovskii about Esenin's death in *Kak delat' stikhi*. See Maiakovskii, *PSS*, XII, 81-117 (p. 96).

⁵³⁸ Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', pp. 255-70 (p. 262).

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

the other valid only in the intertext to which the word also belongs and that it represents at the surface of the text, as the tip of an iceberg'.⁵⁴¹ Kruchenykh makes this maximally evident by allowing the imagined new context of the public reading to alter the meaning of the quotation in the most straightforward way.

Kruchenykh's quotations are, however, only the most obvious and explicit form of horizontal reproduction in literature. Tynianov modelled the way in which this sort of intertextuality serves as a mechanism for the evolution of literature in his 1919 article 'Dostoevskii i Gogol' (k teorii parodii)', which shows how Dostoevskii's transformation of Gogolian motifs underpins his work. (Tynianov thus establishes a diachronic element to horizontal reproduction.) This essay also introduces the idea, which has been shown to be obviously sympathetic to the Futurist worldview, that new literature is the product not of heredity but of conflict:

When people talk about 'literary tradition' or 'continuity', they usually imagine a sort of straight line linking a junior representative of a certain branch of literature with a senior one. In fact it is much more complicated. There is no continuity in a straight line, there is rather a departure, a jumping off [*ottalkivanie*] from a certain point.⁵⁴²

Parody

Tynianov returned to the themes of this essay in his 1929 work 'O parodii'. This essay provides a revealing context for understanding Kruchenykh's work as a parody:

All methods of parodying, without exception, consist of the changing of a literary work or of a moment, which unites a range of works (an author, an almanac, a

⁵⁴¹ Michael Riffaterre, 'Compulsory reader response: the intertextual drive', in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Worton and Still, pp. 56-78 (p. 71).

⁵⁴² Tynianov, 'Dostoevskii i Gogol', in *Poetika: Istoriia literatury: Kino*, ed. by B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 198-226 (p. 198). This idea is reprised in 'Literaturnyi fakt': 'It has been forgotten that every new phenomenon replaced an old one and that every phenomenon of replacement was extraordinarily complex in its make-up; that we should talk about continuity only in the phenomenon of a school, of epigonism, but not in the case of literary evolution, the principle behind which is conflict and replacement.' Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt', p. 258.

magazine) or the changing of a range of literary works (a genre) – as a *system*, in the translation of them into another system.⁵⁴³

500 collapses the differences between parody of this sort and scholarly literary criticism. Although Kruchenykh's scholarly pose is always slightly tongue-in-cheek, with exclamation marks and insalubrious jokes being ubiquitous, such a humorous approach contrasts with other elements of presentation borrowed from academic writing, such as the use of examples and the citation of works, and the use of mathematical notation such as '≥' (13). Kruchenykh's academic rigour extends to citing the exact edition he is using, Valerii Briusov's 1920 collected works. Nevertheless, even this exactitude has a polemical sting: Briusov was one of *sdvigologiia*'s most prominent critics, so the fact that it is his edition that should be so deformed is undoubtedly deliberate. A constant tension prevails between seriousness and humour—Kruchenykh's text is both a parody of Pushkin and a work of scholarship, making it a parody of scholarship also. One might even argue that Kruchenykh's 'dessertation' constitutes an even more significant parody of academic work. It lays bare an unspoken truth of scholarship: verbatim quotation, the insertion of the studied text into the context of the study in order to lend authority and authenticity to an argument, is susceptible to manipulation to serve the agenda of the recipient text.

Kruchenykh's parody of Pushkin is reliant on his translation of the Pushkinian text into the humorous system of his *sdvigologiia*, via the imagined translation of Pushkin's text into the hypothetical oral performance in which misprision can take place. Nevertheless, the target of this parody is not so much Pushkin, but the cultic adoration of Pushkin: Tynianov would class *500* in the genre of 'readdressed' parody, one of those works which

⁵⁴³ Iurii Tynianov, 'O parodii' in *Poetika: Istoriiia literatury: Kino*, ed. by B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 284-318 (p. 294). Original emphasis. This paradigm for parody bears striking similarities with Jean-Claude Lanne's very astute summary of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin as a whole: 'Ainsi, facé à l'écrasant paradigme pouchkinien, l'attitude futuriste consiste-t-elle en un second moment, à s'assimiler la poétique de leur grand ancêtre, à l'intégrer – c'est-à-dire la transcrire ou transformer – dans la structure de leur propre système poétique.' Jean-Claude Lanne, 'Pouchkine dans le contexte de l'avant-garde russe. Examen d'un cas particulier: Pouchkine et Khlebnikov', in *L'Universalité de Pouchkine*, ed. by Michel Aucouturier and Jean Bonamour (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2000), pp. 333-42 (p. 338).

use an old target as a stick to beat contemporaries, just as Pushkin's parodies of Khvostov were really aimed at Kiukhel'beker.⁵⁴⁴ This contemporary focus is just part of the fact that, as Tynianov stresses, the insertion of old material into a new context constitutes not a link between the old and the new, but an instance of the transformation of the old into something new: 'every fragment of a literary fact from one system and its introduction into another system constitutes [...] a partial change in meaning'.⁵⁴⁵ As Michael Worton and Judith Still suggest, quotation lays bare this insertion into a different system:

Inevitably a fragment and displacement, every quotation distorts and redefines the 'primary' utterance by relocating it within another linguistic and cultural context. Therefore, despite any intentional quest on the part of the quoting author to engage in an inter-subjective activity, the quotation itself generates a tension between belief both in original and originating integrity and in the possibility of (re)integration and an awareness of the infinite deferral and dissemination of meaning.⁵⁴⁶

Tynianov's notion of continual evolution of meaning through recontextualization, as exemplified by Kruchenykh, was by no means revolutionary: in his essay accompanying *500 Chicherin* traces *svigologiia's* theoretical ancestors back to Chrysippus and the logical concept of amphiboly. More directly, it has considerable common ground with Bergson's theory of *élan vital* and with the linguistic theories of Potebnia cited above; it also echoes Aleksandr Blok's insistence on the ephemerality of ideas: 'It is a lie that thoughts are

⁵⁴⁴ Tynianov, 'O parodii', *Poetika*, pp. 284-318 (p. 288, fn. 1). Tynianov seeks to establish parallels between the Pushkinian period and Modernism partly in order to problematize simplistic notions of Pushkinian genius, and show the complexity of Pushkin's relationship with pre-existing literary culture. See Greenleaf, 'Tynianov, Pushkin and the Fragment', p. 288: 'Tynianov was able to recognize something akin to the Modernist aesthetics of open forms, to detect the same modernist self-definition and formal ferment in the seemingly classical and closed poetic legacy of one hundred years ago.'

⁵⁴⁵ Tynianov, 'O parodii', p. 294. Greenleaf argues that Tynianov's interest in the fragment—which is central to Modernist writing—takes place under the influence of film, which suggests a further congruence with Kruchenykh and Benjamin. Greenleaf, 'Tynianov, Pushkin and the Fragment,' pp. 267-68.

⁵⁴⁶ Michael Worton and Judith Still, 'Introduction' in *Intertextuality*, ed. By Worton and Still, pp. 1-44 (p. 11).

repeated. Every thought is new, because it is surrounded and shaped by something new.’⁵⁴⁷ All these intellectual currents and many more were in turn influential in shaping the theories of Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin, who insist that meaning is not transcendental, but formed at the moment of dialogue between subjects.⁵⁴⁸ The notion that meaning is inherent not within the text itself but is instead created at the moment of perception has profound consequences for the concept of authorship. Kruchenykh insists that ‘Pushkin read to oneself and read from the stage (especially misheard) are not the same thing’ (10), thus seeming to attribute to the audience, not the author, the determining control over the nature of a text. He also cites the Formalist Tomashevskii: ‘Whatever the author thinks about his work, the conditions of perception can destroy what he has invented’ (10). This empowerment of reception, of the listener (and, although not acknowledged, of the reader; after all, he has found all these *sdvigi* by reading) demonstrates Tynianov’s maxim that ‘the writer is also a reader, and the reader, in constructing a work of literature, continues the same work as the writer’,⁵⁴⁹ which in itself anticipates Roland Barthes’ assertion that it is the reader ‘who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him’.⁵⁵⁰

Its centrality to post-structuralist thought has made the notion of the dethroning of the author ubiquitous almost to the point of emptiness. However, it should be noted that this popular concept accords closely with the aims of the Futurists in their proposal for a

⁵⁴⁷ See Fink, *Bergson and Russian Modernism*, p. 6; Aleksandr Blok, *Zapisnye knizhki, 1901-1920*, p. 378.

⁵⁴⁸ See Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*, 116; see also Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 91: ‘the work combines with the whole consciousness of those who perceive it and derives apperceptive values only in the context of that consciousness. It is interpreted in the spirit of the particular consciousness (the consciousness of the perceiver) and is illuminated by it anew.’ The history of the development theories of literary and intellectual development is necessarily beset with ironies: these theories are also party to transformation through recontextualization.

⁵⁴⁹ Tynianov, ‘O parodii’, p. 294.

⁵⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image-Music-Text: Roland Barthes*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-48 (p. 148).

different approach to Pushkin. Consequently, the language of post-structuralism is very reminiscent of the rhetoric the Futurists used to articulate their campaign. Like the Futurists, the stripping away of the aura of the classics is imagined in religious terms (again, Marx may be a common influence here):

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.⁵⁵¹

Barthes' rejection of literature as a unified, authoritative message echoes the Futurists' hostility to the treatment of Pushkin's oeuvre as an integrated sacred text, revealed to the poet and used for the moral guidance of the nation. *500* both overtly, with its jokey disrobing of the Parnassian Pushkin, and more implicitly, strips the national poet of his aura and reveals him as just another piece of linguistic and mythological material to be reworked by the poets of the present and future. Kruchenykh's challenge to the sacred text of Pushkin is one element of his contribution to the mythological treatment of Pushkin that we have seen from the other Futurists: the contingency of the very words themselves that constitute Pushkin's oeuvre is a maximal example of the approach taken by the other Futurists, who adapt Pushkin's imagery to their own ends. Khlebnikov's adaptation of the myth of the poet-prophet locates Pushkin's myth within a sequence of adaptations; Maiakovskii not only reworks Pushkin's myth of the moving statue but challenges the notion of a textual monument which can stand unchanged through the ages; Kruchenykh goes so far as to suggest that the very words themselves of Pushkin's texts can also be remade and that the text which he believes some critics want to make the gospel of the new Soviet culture is not a self-contained, auratic gift from the past which stands

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

untouched, but a flawed and fragmented collection of linguistic material that is necessarily being continually reworked.⁵⁵²

As suggested in the discussion of Maiakovskii in the previous chapter, the question of the reinterpretation of surviving material was of particular significance in the early Soviet Union, as debates raged about what to preserve and what to destroy from pre-revolutionary culture. Kruchenykh's approach to quotation repeats the same gesture as Maiakovskii's mobile monument: it preserves Pushkin's outer form but mobilizes its internal meaning. Such a preservative approach to the relics of the past is not necessarily a departure from the iconoclasm of *Poshchchina*, but rather a development: after all, the specific rejection of something from the past in writing also serves to preserve it. Moreover, Futurists had always been keen to draw attention to the potential multivalence of language, as their use of puns attests. However, it is perhaps no coincidence that this development became more marked as the 1920s progressed and members of the left avant-garde began to become aware of continuities between the ruling ideology and the pre-revolutionary regime (especially after the perceived retreat of NEP, which they fiercely opposed) and to see that the changes to the outer form of Russia (new statues in place of the old, photographs of Lenin in place of icons, hammers and sickles in place of crosses) masked considerable continuities. Kruchenykh and Maiakovskii both propose a transformation of an entirely different sort, in which form stays the same, but content changes. Kruchenykh's programme for the incorporation of obsolete forms with new content into the mainstream of culture also had a personal significance: the Futurists were themselves under attack as representatives of an outmoded and decadent bourgeois aesthetics that had no place in the new order. To some extent, by making a case for semiotic flexibility Kruchenykh is also arguing that the Futurists' own ideological

⁵⁵² This is a further parallel with the cento, which does for the language of, say, Homer, what the Greek tragedians had done to his characters (although of course they also had a prior existence in myth)—it reimagines them and explores new contexts.

transformation into proper Soviet citizens was entirely possible; what is more, it did not require a change to the outward form of their art. However, using the same logic they can also imply that they have not forsaken their avant-garde mission, but that a profound, world-changing impulse can survive under the bland mask of stagnating Soviet reality.

Constructivism

Kruchenykh's promotion of the importance of reception and his emphasis on the contingency of the authorial text bore considerable risks for his own position as a poet. His self-inflicted abrogation of creative agency forced him to develop within his text a new vision for the role of the artist within society. This problem was fairly common at the time: the tendency to locate creativity not in the individual of genius, but in the collective spirit of the organized masses enjoyed considerable intellectual currency after the Revolution in Russia and throughout the European avant-garde. Benjamin suggests in 'The Work of Art' that this blurring of the roles of the creator and consumer of art was partly the result of technological advances:

there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievance, documentary reports, or that sort of thing. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. [...] In the Soviet Union work itself is given a voice. To present it verbally is part of a man's ability to perform the work.⁵⁵³

In the Soviet Union, however, there was undoubtedly a further political motivation behind the new questioning of the relationship between the special position of the artist-individual and the creativity of the productive, working masses. This question was also central to one of the most important artistic movements of this period, Constructivism, which had close

⁵⁵³ Benjamin, 'Work of Art', p. 225.

links to the Futurists, the Formalists and Benjamin.⁵⁵⁴ Maria Gough argues that much of the Constructivists' energy was spent on establishing their very right to exist, which was under considerable pressure both from the new ideological circumstances and from their own avant-garde doctrines:

the essentially bourgeois conception of the artist with which they came of age—the artist defined as an individual committed to the expression of the self—is now under extraordinary pressure, if it is not simply rejected altogether. The question is given further urgency by the Constructivists' commitment to the struggle to abolish the division of mental and manual labour—a struggle that tends to undermine the vanguard artist's traditional and exclusive claim on the realm of radical cultural production.⁵⁵⁵

Kruchenykh collaborated closely with the Constructivists: not only did Constructivists also contribute to *Lef*, but one of the essays included in *500* is by the Constructivist poet Aleksei Chicherin. Kruchenykh's work of the early 1920s clearly shows the imprint of this collaboration, for instance in the title of his 1923 work *Faktura slova*, which, in a more serious tone, anticipates many of *500*'s observations about rhythm in poetry. *Faktura* had long been a favourite term of Futurist discourse, but Gough explains that the word began to acquire new meanings to express the avant-garde's project to eliminate the distance between artist, producer, viewer, reader and consumer:

faktura is an integral in the Russian vanguard's broadly modernist conception of art as a mode of production rather than expression. But if *faktura* had historically been understood as the very locus of artistic subjectivity, it came increasingly to signify—in the hands of the Russian avant-garde beginning circa 1912—the explicit erasure of that subjectivity.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ See Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 193.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 19.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

In *Fonetika teatra* (1922) Kruchenykh goes so far as to describe *zaum'* as 'the only constructive language'.⁵⁵⁷ However, he continues to stress the special role of the artist: 'Zaum' language is created and made by an artist, but it is not taken on passively, like the heavy heritage of the ages.'⁵⁵⁸ The perception of an artistic text can change its meaning but the creative contribution of the 'artist' (notably not the 'writer') is always prior, both in chronology and hierarchy.

A New Role for the Poet

In *500* Kruchenykh simultaneously seeks to emphasize the creative power of reception, flirting with a Constructivist discourse in which writing approximates other industrial production, and to establish his own *Existenzrecht* as a writer/artist, carving out a special niche for himself within the structure of artistic production in the Soviet Union and ultimately justifying both his own special status and that of the avant-garde as a whole. This self-justification takes the form of a series of implied roles which diversify and extend the role of the artist in society both to suit the changed circumstances of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s and to promote the Futurists' avant-garde agenda.

As has been noted in previous chapters, in the early 1920s Pushkin was frequently promoted as a suitable technical guide for the new generation of proletarian poets, despite certain qualms about his ideological content; moreover, his aptitude for this position was frequently contrasted to that of another contender for that position—the pre-war avant-

⁵⁵⁷ Kruchenykh, *Fonetika teatra*, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

garde.⁵⁵⁹ 500 can be read in part as Kruchenykh's response to those assertions. We have seen how he suggests that Pushkin's verse is technically inferior. This is reinforced with a clear implication that Futurist poetry is a more sensible school for any aspiring poet to pass through. In his accompanying essay K. Iakobson actually rebukes Briusov for suggesting otherwise and states the case for the Futurists:

As for this 'temptation' and Briusov's conviction that the stone-hard 'proletarian' poets will not give in to this sort of thing, then this is a good place to remind him that Bezymenskii, for instance, (and there are dozens like him), is so taken with imitating the Futurists that he copies word for word from Maiakovskii. (70)

The notion that the Futurists can be teachers of a new generation is enhanced by Kruchenykh's lengthy dissertation on the nature of rhythm in poetry, accompanying the exposé of Pushkin, which cites numerous scholarly sources such as Tomashevskii. Alongside humorous elements, Kruchenykh presents himself as a serious scholar of verse—again, implying his superior credentials as the tutor of a new generation. Kruchenykh's implication is stated baldly by Chicherin, who says that Pushkin's errors 'have destroyed the **teacher** in him; from a historical point of view they have uncovered a **comrade**; in reality they would have made him our **pupil**' (54).⁵⁶⁰

Kruchenykh does not, however, cite any of his own verse as a model. In fact, he makes very little reference to himself as a poet, striving instead to characterize himself as an authority on verse construction. Of course, Kruchenykh had always written manifestos, constantly seeking to be the exegete of his own innovation. However, despite its ridiculous

⁵⁵⁹ See Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 31, 95-96, 285. In his 1924 work *Noveishaia russkaia literatura*, critic Vasilii L'vov-Rogachevskii states that Russian literature stands at a crossroads and must choose between the language of Pushkin and 'the zaum' of all possible Kruchonykh's with their vagaries and extravagances'. Vasilii L'vov-Rogachevskii, *Noveishaia russkaia literatura* (Moscow: Mir, 1924), p. 376; cited and translated in Janecek, *Zaum*, p. 326. Using the clothing imagery of which he was fond (and which recalls Khlebnikov's donning of Pushkin's cloak), Maiakovskii accused the Proletkul't poets of patching up Pushkin: 'Это вам —/ на растрепанные сменившим / гладкие прически,/ на лапти — лак, / пролеткультцы, / кладущие заплатки / на вылинявший пушкинский фрак.' Maiakovskii, *PSS*, II, 86.

⁵⁶⁰ Original emphasis. The use of the ideologically accented term comrade accords with Chicherin's general attempt to accommodate Kruchenykh's *sdvigologija* within Marxist theories of aesthetics.

touches, *500* departs from his previous manifesto practice: it is considerably more dialogic, showing some willingness to engage openly and fairly with critics, such as Viacheslav Ivanov (53), and to include multiple viewpoints, such as the essays by Jakobson and Chicherin, which do not always agree entirely with Kruchenykh. Kruchenykh's scholarly pose is particularly informed by his close links to the Formalists. His self-characterization as a Formalist is evident not only in his quasi-scientific approach to literary criticism (his 'systematic' table of *sdvigi*, his rejection of biography) but also in his range of quotation (Tomashevskii, Shklovskii, Jakobson), his choice of titles ('*Sdvig* as a Device' is a homage to Shklovskii's 'Art as a Device') and critical vocabulary, such as 'dominates' (5), which recalls the Formalist concept of the dominant.

This adoption of the role of critic and theoretician is both practical and ideological in intent: it gives Kruchenykh a function (and an income) in a difficult literary landscape, and helps to break down the dichotomy of reader and writer, serving the general avant-garde aim of breaking art out of the boundaries imposed on it. I would further contend that this liminal position claimed by Kruchenykh mirrors similar developments in the world of art across Europe, and in particular the experimental art of Marcel Duchamp, and in so doing, helps to develop a new space for the creative personality in society.

Duchamp

It is beyond question that the enormous, and interrelated, technological and theoretical changes taking place in the art world and beyond in the early twentieth century had inevitable effects on the self-conception and self-presentation of the artist.⁵⁶¹ Duchamp's

⁵⁶¹ The list of such changes is almost inexhaustible but, for the sake of illustration could be said to include: the increasing prevalence of photography and film; the rise of abstraction; the introduction of new mechanisms of mass production; the trauma of disillusion caused by the First World War; the rise of extremist left and right-wing politics. These phenomena are of course in some way related to, but by no means wholly determined by, the reaction against progressive, positivist modernity related in the Introduction and Chapter One.

innovative responses to these new circumstances, and especially his notion of the 'readymade' work of art, can help us better understand how Kruchenykh's own work in the field of literature helped articulate a new position for creative professionals.

In the work of both Duchamp and Kruchenykh the artist occupies a more diverse role than was traditional. What is more, the distinguishing feature of this artist is not the ability to create form (for instance, to apply paint to a canvas) but to select and recontextualize objects. His main tool becomes the ability to select and arrange. In seeming contradiction to his assertion that *sdvigi* can easily arise in the aural reception of poetry, Kruchenykh also suggests that they can only be detected by 'a person with developed poetic hearing' (18), which is to say Kruchenykh himself. To a certain extent, as Duchamp argued, art's transformation into a process of selection and rearrangement was a natural extension of the artist's existing function—after all, paintings are made from paints prepared by someone else and are in fact only a rearrangement of pre-existing elements.⁵⁶² The painter is always already merely one link in a chain of creative activity: this aspect of aesthetics had been explored by Cubist painters who would appropriate alien materials, such as pieces of text or scraps of fabric, and incorporate them into their works. The analogy with the eternal recursion of recontextualized words in literature is obvious: nothing is entirely new, everything is a rearrangement of something else.⁵⁶³ Just as Kruchenykh lays bare this underlying truth in *500*, Duchamp takes the process of recontextualization to an extreme by taking mass-produced objects and exhibiting them in a gallery as works of art which he called readymades. The most famous example of this genre was a urinal: Duchamp carefully selected the urinal from a wholesale supplier and

⁵⁶² See William Campfield, 'Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: Aesthetic Object, Icon, or Anti-Art?', in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 133-84 (p. 166).

⁵⁶³ Smirnov sees such reworking as typical of Futurism, and one of the points of contact between it and the Baroque. It is a way of distinguishing artistic speech from the everyday. 'The creators of both aesthetic systems often viewed the process of a text coming to life as the rearrangement of given elements'. Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl*, p. 128. The ability consciously to rearrange is what differentiates the artist from the masses.

submitted it, rotated ninety degrees, signed 'R. Mutt' and titled *Fontaine*, as a work of art to the Armory Show in New York in 1917. This act closely resembles Kruchenykh's treatment of Pushkin in *500*, but with certain elements of the rhetoric behind this gesture inverted. In Duchamp's act of translation (we recall Tynianov's theory of parody), as in *500*, the object appears to stay the same (just as Pushkin's words are reproduced exactly) but its meaning changes thanks to its new context and to the process of selection and relocation it has undergone. Duchamp challenged the concretized categories of art and non-art by transforming a mass-produced object which seemed as far as possible from the refined, auratic aesthetics of a gallery into a work of art. Kruchenykh achieves a similar blurring of concretized distinctions, but by moving in the opposite direction, making Pushkin's work—in the popular conception, a nonpareil of individual creativity and aesthetic and moral purity—appear to be a tawdry and somewhat bawdy mass-produced object. Duchamp moves the toilet into the gallery; Kruchenykh moves art into the toilet.

Epshtein suggests that such an inversion is typical of the aesthetics of the Russian Revolution: he compares *Fontaine* to an incident remembered by Gor'kii, in which a village soviet used the precious vases in the manor house as chamber-pots, not out of necessity but as a deliberately iconoclastic aesthetic act. He says that: 'In the first instance the urinal is exhibited as a work of art. In the second instance the work of art is used as a urinal.'⁵⁶⁴ Epshtein further relates this anti-aesthetic urge to the practice of the avant-garde and, citing Panchenko, compares both to a key iconoclastic mode in Russian religious life, the defacing of sacred objects by the *iurodivyi*, or holy fool:

The life of the *iurodivyi* [...] is a conscious rejection of beauty, a refutation of the generally accepted ideal of beauty, to be precise, the turning of this ideal on its head and the elevation of the ugly to the level of the aesthetically positive. [...] The avant-garde is *iurodivyi* art, consciously aiming for debasements, for the disfigurement of its aesthetic appearance, to the point that a urinal takes the place

⁵⁶⁴ Epshtein, *Vera i obraz*, p. 32.

of a sculpture at an exhibition, and instead of beautiful and meaningful harmonies there is the poor, crooked ‘дыр бул щыл убещур’.⁵⁶⁵

Epshtein’s reference to Kruchenykh’s most famous poem shows how the aesthetic logic of *500* can be seen as of a piece with Kruchenykh’s poetics in general.⁵⁶⁶ *Zaum’* challenges the boundaries of what can be considered poetry by presenting unrecognizable words as poetry; *500* inverts this mechanism, but with the same motivation, by changing something universally recognized and beloved as a poem into unrecognizable *zaum’* words. In both instances we see the typically Futurist insistence on the autotelic value of the ‘self-oriented’ word and its acoustic function.

The Futurist interrogation of the borders of art goes hand in hand with Kruchenykh’s *iurodivyi*-like desire to challenge the boundaries of propriety with the sexual and scatological content of *500*—if Pushkin, the pinnacle of Russian literature, can be turned into a dirty joke, what divisions can be made between high art and low wordplay? *Épatage* continues to be a functional part of the avant-garde project for extending the borders of art.

The attempt on the part of the avant-garde to bring art out of the ghetto of aestheticism was complicated by the rise of mass reproduction described by Benjamin. On the one hand, the widespread availability of art in reproduction achieved one of the avant-garde’s aims—the democratization of art. On the other, mass production and mass availability also brought about the dilution of art’s power, bringing the risk that it too would

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. Marjorie Perloff also makes the comparison between Futurist poetics and Duchamp’s aesthetics: ‘Indeed, the Russian Futurist mode inverts the “ordinary language” aesthetic of Stein and the use of everyday objects like combs and urinals in Duchamp. For the “strangeness of the ordinary” as I have called it, Khlebnikov substitutes the ordinariness of the strange.’ Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 109.

⁵⁶⁶ The connection between Kruchenykh’s poetry and the urinal, and the collision of high and low art, also feature in Georgii Ivanov’s lyrical novella *Raspad atoma*. See Justin Doherty, ‘The Pushkin Contexts of Georgii Ivanov’s Disintegration of the Atom’, in *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin. Volume 1. ‘Pushkin’s Secret’: Russian Writers Reread and Rewrite Pushkin*, ed. by Joe Andrew and Robert Reid (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 121-34 (pp. 127-28): ‘*Zaum* verse stands for precisely this loss of the modern subject’s capacity to perceive and communicate beauty, harmony and spirituality [...] Ivanov’s narrator models the (albeit chiefly rhetorical) “rejection” of Pushkin declared by Russian Futurism.’

be transformed into a bloodless element of *byt*. One response to this was to introduce an avant-garde artistic sensibility to mass produced objects, as in the work of, for instance, Varvara Stepanova with fabrics or Aleksandr Rodchenko with photography, or, outside of Russia, in Bauhaus's reconsideration of objects of daily use. In the linguistic sphere, the Futurists were faced with the same problem. Literature's availability to the masses had made it lose its power as art: Maiakovskii's quotation of famous lines of Pushkin show how ubiquity had led to an automatization of response and meaning.

Duchamp's response to this same problem is again instructive for understanding Kruchenykh. In *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) Duchamp exhibited a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on which he had drawn a moustache. The iconoclastic, decanonizing intent of this work has clear similarities with Kruchenykh's project. The *Mona Lisa* has twice undergone the special type of translation performed by Kruchenykh in *500*, in which the signifier stays the same and the signified changes: it has become a mass-produced object, a postcard, and then once again become a unique work of art, thanks to Duchamp's selection, translation and modification. In Tynianov's terms, we see a hierarchy of systems: by using a postcard, itself an example of high art inserted into a system of mass production, Duchamp interpolates the system of mass-produced objects into the system of a parodic new work of art. Similarly, in *500* Kruchenykh transfers Pushkin into a system of mass reception—the hypothetical performance from the stage—which is then inserted into the system of his essay. In both instances the artist restores agency and creativity to himself and a degree of auratic value to the mass-produced object: the defamiliarization of the painting, or the poem, causes us to reconsider the original, but it also forces us to notice the intervention of the contemporary artist. The artist becomes visible again as an insouciant provocateur who makes us think about the processes which lie behind our everyday consumption of art and as a genius who can use not only the existing language of art, but even quotations from the canon, to create new works and thus call into question the nature of creativity and

originality. In short, Kruchenykh, like Duchamp, is pioneering the role of the conceptual artist.⁵⁶⁷ *500*, therefore, is more than just a linguistic sideshow, but part of a genuine attempt to open up a new space in society for a new type of creative individual.

In *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *500* it is the artist's ability to recontextualize, adapt and question the function of art that transforms familiar, mass-produced, neutered versions of auratic works of art into new works. This is in some ways a closed system: familiar objects become artworks because they have been chosen by an artist. The Author, far from dying, is exalted: he may not create from nothing but his transformative power, his creative personality, becomes the sole locus of authority, replacing the dethroned literary tradition. Furthermore, Epshtein rightly sees this as a response to the stripping away of the aura of the literary work: 'The avant-garde, however, casting off this anachronism of pagan national religions, establishes the sacredness of an independent creative individual predestined for spiritual enlightenment.'⁵⁶⁸ Epshtein's observation apropos Daniil Kharms's *Anekdoty o Pushkine* –'If Kharms writes jokes about Pushkin and Gogol', they are works of art; if someone else did, then it would just be a joke, a gag, knockabout humour'⁵⁶⁹—could perhaps be applied to *500*, in which Kruchenykh hopes simultaneously to make a joke and a conceptual artwork and in so doing establish for himself the very status which will allow his joke to be read as conceptual artwork.

Such an attempt to construct a literary personality with sufficient inherent authority to legitimate the artist's special status without reference to tradition underlies

⁵⁶⁷ Both Kruchenykh and Duchamp are, of course, building on the works of others and broader intellectual trends. It is no coincidence that such an attempt should come from a Futurist, as Kruchenykh, like Maiakovskii, the Burliuks and Kamenskii, had begun as a painter, and was thus inclined to see the role of the artist/writer more broadly than others. The urge to create a role for the 'conceptual artist' also draws on the Silver Age traditions of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and *zhiznetvorchestvo*, pioneered by the Symbolists, which attempted to open up the role of the creative personality, as well as the production aesthetic of the Constructivists.

⁵⁶⁸ Epshtein, *Vera i obraz*, p. 41. According to Epshtein, this new position also has a religious character: 'Avant-garde faith is addressed every time to the individuality of the artist, his inimitable gift'.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

much of the experiment in identity formation examined in this study. The Futurists' manifestos show how, having abandoned the identity and status offered by literary tradition, the avant-garde Futurist poet must seek to construct an identity which in and of itself confers authority on the poet: in the case of the Futurists, this authority is grounded in their group identity as powerful, young Russian men. Moreover, it is this same need to establish the authority of the individual poet outside of literary tradition which, ironically, motivates Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii to look to Pushkin for images which depict the poet's place in society, be it as a prophet or as a monument.

Post Scriptum

The Futurists' attempt to create such a new programme for the poet, and, in particular, Kruchenykh's own attempts to create a new space for his own experiments, can, however, be considered a failure, or, at best, a deferred success. After 1924, Kruchenykh had fewer and fewer opportunities to publish his work and became increasingly marginalized within the literary scene. After the suppression of the avant-garde in 1932 and the ultimate subordination of all creative endeavours to a political agenda he was almost *persona non grata*. In some ways, however, his exclusion from the literary mainstream allowed Kruchenykh to pursue even more radical experiments and to pursue without hindrance the ideal of the self-sufficient avant-garde artist.

500 anticipated the future development of Kruchenykh's poetics in that it heralded his growing interest in reshaping the works of others, which is particularly evident in the cycle *Arabeski iz Gogolia* (1943-44).⁵⁷⁰ For the rest of his life, Kruchenykh continued to use appropriated quotations from Pushkin to draw parallels between the left avant-garde, by

⁵⁷⁰ On Kruchenykh's interest in other people's poetry, see Rosemarie Ziegler, 'Aleskej Kručenych: Unveröffentlichte Gedichte', *Neue Russische Literatur*, 4 (1982), 83-95.

this time already a historical concept, and the Golden Age. For instance, in the visitors' book at the Maiakovskii museum, after an exhibition on Larionov and Natal'ia Goncharova, he left the following brief verse:

Пришел
 Узрел
 Восторг
 Исторг
 Очарован, огончарован.⁵⁷¹

Kruchenykh borrows Pushkin's neologism describing the charms of his future wife Natal'ia Goncharova to pay tribute to the charms of her artist namesake.⁵⁷² As these examples and numerous other memoirs attest, Kruchenykh's relationship with Pushkin continued to be characterized by an intense focus on verbatim quotation.⁵⁷³ This insistence on accuracy bordered on pedantry: when Konstantin Paustovskii misquoted Pushkin in an article in *Oktiabr'*, Kruchenykh wrote him a letter, rebuking him for taking liberties with Pushkin: 'How can you remake Pushkin in your own style!' Paustovskii responded to a similar complaint in the same publication by Maksim Ryl'skii by defending the importance of subjective reception. Kruchenykh was apparently unhappy with this, saying 'But this is Pushkin! He has everything in its place and there's no need to invent things for him. You have to know Pushkin.'⁵⁷⁴ Although this exchange seems very much like a retreat into narrow-minded reverence for the Pushkinian text, it remains true to the essential premise of *500* that reinterpretation could and should take place within the boundaries of the exact reproduction of the text.

However, Kruchenykh's oeuvre also includes an interesting example of appropriation taken to an extreme. In 1941 he wrote a poem which Sergei Sigei has

⁵⁷¹ Nikolai Khardzhiev, *Ot Maiakovskogo do Kruchenykh: Izbrannye raboty o russkom futurizme, s prilozheniem "Kruchenykhiady" i drugikh materialov*, ed. by Sergei Kudriavtsev (Moscow: Gileia, 2006), p. 556.

⁵⁷² For further examples of this parallelism, see Liza Knapp, 'Tsvetaeva and the Two Natal'ia Goncharovas: Dual Life', in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism*, pp. 88-108.

⁵⁷³ *Kruchenykh v svidetel'stvakh*, pp. 147, 191.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

described as ‘not so much a quotation as an act of plagiarism taken to the 41st degree’.⁵⁷⁵ Kruchenykh rewrote an obscure poem by Pushkin, written in Anna Kern’s album, but added two lines (about apples and lemons) signed it ‘Pushkin-Kruchenykh’, and accompanied it with a poem of his own:

1.

Мне изюм
Неидет на ум,
Цуккерброт не лезет в рот.
Апельсины и лимоны
И противны и зловонны,
Пастила не хороша
Без тебя, моя душа!

Пушкин-Крученых

2.

Пышный ужин –
 пища мужа,
Да и музочке –
 не ужас.
В тесте –
 Тмин,
Песни
 не затмил.
Новый год,
 Винное море—вброд!
Съедаю сотый
 Бутерброд.
Полнится
 в кружке брага,
Песня
 подружке рада.

*А. Крученых*⁵⁷⁶

Kruchenykh’s gesture in appropriating the first poem is a maximal example of the logic behind *500*. Sigei argues:

⁵⁷⁵ Sigei, ‘Strashnaia mest’’, p. 41. Sigei seems to be alluding both to the year of writing, and to 41°, the avant-garde grouping Kruchenykh was a member of in Tbilisi.

⁵⁷⁶ Published in Khardzhiev, *Ot Maikovskogo do Kruchenykh*, pp. 429-30. See Pushkin, *PSS*, III, 126.

Placed in the context of Kruchenykh's own production, Pushkin's work may not be instantly recognized by everyone as a work by Pushkin. This is not just a 'lowering' of a classical text, but a demonstration: 'this here is what "the classics are good for" —appropriation'.⁵⁷⁷

Sigei further suggests that, as ever, Kruchenykh's main concerns are contemporary, and that his appropriation of the classics is for the most part a rebuke to Soviet literature and its obsession with literary tradition.⁵⁷⁸ Kruchenykh's marginalization by official literary bodies and his longstanding battle against the obsession with the classics cannot be denied, but there is no particular evidence within the text that his deformations of Pushkin and Gogol' are particularly anti-Soviet. Kruchenykh's challenge is artistic, not political, in nature: pushing to an extreme the role of the conceptual artist. He suggests the only contribution he needs to make to a work to make it his own is to append his signature.

However, it must be noted that Kruchenykh does not erase Pushkin's signature, but rather adds his own. The effect is not to usurp Pushkin, but to imply an equivalence between the two poets. (In fact, the hyphenated poet Pushkin-Kruchenykh recalls the normal practice for pseudonyms, such as Saltykov-Shchedrin, as if Kruchenykh were Pushkin's alter ego.) The choice of poem is also typical of the Futurist approach to Pushkin, emphasizing his humorous, trivial side. While this makes him similar to Kruchenykh, the latter also emphasizes his difference by rejecting the central thesis of Pushkin's poem—that love affects the appetite. The Futurists remain in creative dialogue with Pushkin, adopting and adapting his legacy.

As Kruchenykh got older he increasingly made ends meet not by writing, but by acquiring the manuscripts, both new and old, of other poets and then reselling them, or by finding manuscripts on commission. This career change represents a typically Futurist realization of a metaphor: whereas previously Kruchenykh had appropriated other poets' words into his own work, inserting them into his own literary system, he now physically

⁵⁷⁷ Sigei, 'Strashnaia mest'', p. 42.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

acquired them, storing them up in his tiny flat. The somewhat squalid business of begging for manuscripts is in some ways a fitting culmination of many of the tendencies of Futurist poetics. The valorization of the manuscript is, as suggested above, in part a reaction against the vertical reproduction of the text: by treating the manuscript as superior to its reproductions, Kruchenykh and other collectors imply that the initial creation of the text has an unrepeatable magic which is lost, or transformed, when this text is copied, even exactly. Thus Kruchenykh remains true, in a certain sense, to the Futurist belief that creativity should be an instantaneous and unrepeatable process. What is more, Kruchenykh's collecting of manuscripts recalls Maiakovskii's imagined monument at the end of 'Vo ves' golos', in which the poet emphasizes the physicality of the books: in contrast to Pushkin's 'monument not built by human hand', which is constituted by a text's ability to proliferate in a realm beyond the physical, Kruchenykh constructs a very handmade monument, a *pamiatnik rukopisnyi*. Literature's existence is ultimately physical, not metaphysical, and begins and ends in the moment of creation—an approach which is entirely in accordance with the spirit of the Futurist manifestos. According to Nikolai Nikiforov, Kruchenykh emphasized his desire for the physical survival of his work, in terms which recall 'Vo ves' golos' more than 'la pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi':

I don't need glory either in marble or bronze—I want a paper monument, so that my books, my lines, even on the worst paper, on rough packaging paper, are read, and, the main thing, comprehensible to the masses.⁵⁷⁹

Nevertheless, Kruchenykh's new focus on manuscripts, and the fact that his paper monument consists of other people's work, represents a failure on his part to uphold a central doctrine of Futurism—the rejection of the influence of the past. By preserving these works, and not transforming them, but rather enshrining their auratic value, Kruchenykh was complicit in the transformation of the work of the avant-garde from being a living

⁵⁷⁹ Kruchenykh *v svidetel'stvakh*, p. 167.

creative reality into a historical phenomenon. What is more, Kruchenykh himself became something of a living monument to Futurism. Evgenii Evtushenko said: 'As well as, by the paradox of time, trading in manuscripts, he was himself a manuscript of the time.'⁵⁸⁰ Evtushenko's metaphor is apt: by the 1960s Kruchenykh was himself transformed into an auratic object, a relic of an avant-garde movement which by then seemed like an ancient past. This metamorphosis is perhaps the logical continuation of *zhiznetvorchestvo*—the work of art of one's life, when cut off from the support of a movement, and shorn of the dynamism of new creativity, congeals into a museum piece.

However, the logic of the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin—the idea that a fossilized, automatized text can provide the means for self-expression of a new generation, if these new poets do not venerate it slavishly, but look to exploit it for their own ends—can explain, to some extent the influence of Kruchenykh the man-manuscript as he provided a link between the Silver Age avant-garde and a new generation of poets, such as Evtushenko and Andrei Voznesenskii.⁵⁸¹

Kruchenykh's longevity, albeit as a relic of a bygone age, serves as a link between the historical avant-garde and the renaissance of underground art in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. Markov recalls one young dramatist describing his meeting with Kruchenykh as the equivalent of the young Pushkin meeting Derzhavin (Pushkinian mythology is inescapable).⁵⁸² Although it is hard to find evidence of any direct influence (and would probably be inapt to look for it, considering the Futurists' dislike of notions of genetic literary inheritance), both the poetics of quotation pioneered by Kruchenykh in *500* and the role of the conceptual artist he expounded can be found at the heart of the movements which heralded the return of an avant-garde sensibility to Russia, such as Sots Art and

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁸² See Markov, 'Introduction', in *Izbrannoe*, pp. 7-12 (p. 7).

conceptualist-poets such as Dmitrii Prigov.⁵⁸³ Sots Art artists such as Komar and Melamid would use the recontextualization of material to draw attention to the semiotic emptiness of well-known phrases. Their target was not Pushkin, however, but the slogans and symbols of Soviet ideology: 'In parodying the mechanical activity of ideology, Sots Art disclosed a "core" that was devoid of sense, that is, it exposed the main contents, continuously reproducing verbal and artistic quotations/remarks.'⁵⁸⁴ The creative quotation of Soviet ideology also helped the artists reclaim a creative space for themselves within the Soviet art world.⁵⁸⁵ Prigov, who was himself very much influenced by Sots Art, operated in the same interstices between literature and conceptual art occupied by Kruchenykh. As it was for Kruchenykh, the question of Pushkin and his place in Russian literary culture, and the relationship of this place with structures of power, became for Prigov an essential prism through which to understand art and Russia. Prigov draws parallels between the targets of the Futurists and those of Sots Art, for instance in the cycle *Iosif Vissarionovich Pushkin*.⁵⁸⁶ Particularly reminiscent of Kruchenykh's experiments with quotation is his *Evgenii Onegin Pushkina*, in which he copied out the entirety of *Evgenii Onegin*, but with

⁵⁸³ There are of course important, and entirely self-sufficient, movements which fill the void between Futurism and Sots Art and Moscow Conceptualism and which all contributed significantly not only to the wider question of the relationship between the artist and concretized, canonized language and symbology, but also to the reception of Pushkin as a specific instance of this relationship. Of considerable importance and interest are OBERIU in general, and Daniil Kharm's trio of short works featuring Pushkin 'Anekdoty iz zhizni Pushkina', 'O Pushkine' and 'Pushkin i Gogol' in particular, as well as the work of post-war dissidents in general and Andrei Siniavskii's *Progulki s Pushkinym* in particular.

⁵⁸⁴ Ekaterina Andreeva, *Sots Art: Soviet Artists of the 1970s-1980s* (Roseville East, NSW, Australia: G+B Arts International, 1995), p. 44.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 47. Evgeny Dobrenko suggests a parallel between the avant-garde and the Sots Art movement and Prigov: 'Just as the avant-garde liberated for itself the "ship of modernity", throwing the classics overboard, sots-art is now occupied with "clearing the deck" for its own performance. But that which the historic avant-garde wanted to cast off is what sots-art is trying to "expropriate".' Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Socialist Realism, A Postscriptum: Dmitrii Prigov and the Aesthetic Limits of Sots-Art', trans. by Dianne Goldstaub, in *Endquote: Sots Art Literature and the Soviet Grand Style*, ed. by Marina Balina, Nancy Condee and Evgeny Dobrenko (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), pp. 77-107 (pp. 81-82).

⁵⁸⁶ See N.A. Kuz'mina, 'Pushkinskii text sovremennoi poezii', available at: <http://www.omsu.omskreg.ru/vestnik/articles/y1999-i2/a108/article.html/>. Accessed on 25/06/2012. See also Vitaly Chernetsky, 'Iosif Vissarionovich Pushkin, or Sots-Art and the New Russian Poetry', in *Endquotes*, pp. 146-67.

the introduction of the typically Lermontovian adjectives *'bezumnyi'* and *'nezemnoi'*. Thus a reworked passage looks as follows:

XL
 Безумье моего романа
 Смотри безумную тетрадь
 Безумный в роде мне Альбана
 Бал неземной сей описать.⁵⁸⁷

Like Kruchenykh's *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina*, which showcases Kruchenykh's own jokes while seeming to credit them to Pushkin,⁵⁸⁸ the tautological title of Prigov's work, by overemphasizing the fact that this work belongs to Pushkin, draws attention to the fact that *Evgenii Onegin* has long since become unmoored from its author in Russian culture and ironically conceals the deformation performed on the text by the conceptual artist. Moreover, Prigov's hand-written, samizdat text challenges the reproduction of literature by returning the work to a pre-Gutenberg age.

Prigov's work shows that the ever-growing constellation of myths around Pushkin remains an important arena for the formulation of a poetic/artistic identity. Moreover, the fact that concepts and techniques pioneered by Kruchenykh in the 1920s can be re-engineered to speak for the 1990s is evidence not only of the validity of the questions the Futurists pose to conventional literature, but also of the model they suppose for literary history. The same principles reoccur in different points in history, but inflected in response to the imperatives of the present. Despite their outward iconoclasm, the Futurists nonetheless sought, borrowed and manipulated myths of self used by Pushkin and melded them with other iterations of the same myth in order to find a metaphorical language to express their identity. Likewise, Futurist mythology becomes another resource which later avant-gardes could plunder, rework and splice together with other myths to help forge a

⁵⁸⁷ D. A. Prigov, *Evgenii Onegin Pushkina* (St Petersburg: Mit'kilibris and Krasnyi matros, 1998), p. 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Vladimir Markov observes the success of Kruchenykh's joke, noting that the Berkeley library listed Pushkin as the author of *500*. See Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 418. This mistake is reprised by the British Library.

new identity. Even without professed allegiance to tradition, poets continue to shape their idea of themselves using the material provided for them by their predecessors.

Summary

The foregoing theoretical and historical contextualization of Kruchenykh's *500* in light of the work of Benjamin, Tynianov, Duchamp and others is intended to cast light on all the material discussed in the rest of the thesis. This chapter has concentrated on the question of quotation, first by briefly examining its function in the work of the Acmeists, and then in Maiakovskii, and finally at some length in *500* and still more radical later works. Although the mechanisms behind quotation would at first seem at odds with the mythological appropriation of motifs discussed in previous chapters, the principles underlying the Futurist poetics of quotation have been shown to partake in the same logic that motivates the reception of Pushkin in general: creative agency can transform the past, subordinating it to the requirements of the artist and the present moment. Pushkin can stay on the steamship, but only if he is put to work.

Conclusion

The first impulse to undertake this study was the strong conviction that previous scholarship on the reception of Pushkin deliberately or negligently maligned or ignored the richness and complexity of the Futurist contribution to this field. Consequently, the early stages of my investigation were characterized by a quasi-Futurist zeal for iconoclasm, as I threw overboard any previous considerations of this issue if they even only slightly diverged from my own passionate advocacy. However, it was this approach itself that proved to be reductive and, like the Futurists themselves, my eagerness for innovation was eventually tempered by the realization that the evolution of ideas requires not only the ‘struggle and replacement’ described by Tynianov, but also the subtle appropriation and reinterpretation of existing material. I believe that my use of existing scholarship, which consistently proved itself to be more perspicacious than I had initially allowed it to be, bears witness to this more level-headed attitude. Nevertheless, I believe that both when contesting and when continuing lines of argumentation already current in the fields of Pushkin reception and Russian Modernism, this thesis has broken new ground in our understanding of the Futurists’ construction of identity and of their vision for Russian culture’s past, present and future, not least because my argument has been founded in careful new readings of Futurist poems, manifestos and essays.

The enormous task of examining closely the Futurists’ intertextual references to Pushkin has only been begun by my research. I was compelled to leave to one side many poems and essays which refer to Pushkin or engage with his mythology: they include, for instance, Khlebnikov’s *Zangezi*, Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov’s *Igra v adu*, and Maiakovskii’s *Oblako v shtanakh*. This notwithstanding, the process of selecting the texts which feature prominently in my argument—such as *Poshchечina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, ‘Odinokii litsedei’, ‘Iubileinoe’, 500—represented an important development in the honing of my

argument. I believe that my analysis of these and other related works confirms my initial conviction that the question of Pushkin and the Futurists deserved more consideration, and that the Futurist reception of Pushkin was indeed carefully considered, sophisticated and significant for our understanding of the Silver Age. Moreover, in the course of my argument this polemical point has been proved and then extended by the way in which I demonstrate how exactly Futurist mythopoesis is distinctive in its use of Pushkin. We have seen how the Futurists adopted a unique approach to the widespread mythologization of Pushkin in the early twentieth century: they constantly show how these myths are not foundational or ahistorical, but rather that they recur at different points at history, in which they are adapted to suit their epoch. Thus Pushkin's mythopoesis is shown to be preceded by that of the Decembrists, or by the Bible; the Futurists themselves operate with myths that bear the stamp of Nekrasov, or Tiutchev, or Solov'ev. What is more, the Futurists make their own changes to these myths: shaping them to reflect the galloping pace of contemporary life and to serve their contemporary needs. In so doing they provide an innovative blueprint for the development of culture: it can be radically remade, both by rejecting the past (an element of their own mythology which they never abandon) and, at the same time, by reworking the narratives of the present, not in deference to quasi-sacral tradition, but in the hope of eventually bringing about the longed-for union of art and life.

Let us briefly summarize the arguments and evidence which allow us to draw this conclusion. Over the course of this thesis I have examined how three of the signatories of *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Aleksei Kruchenykh, engaged with Pushkin and his poetic legacy to help them articulate their position in society as poets and promote both their proscription of and prescription for, the culture of the past in the wholly new culture they were forging, first within the narrow, but radically innovative, confines of the avant-garde, and then later in relation to the construction of a new Soviet culture. I have shown, moreover, that these two

projects—identity formation and the propagation of a new vision of literary evolution—were necessarily related, as the Futurist sense of self was determined by their relationship to their predecessors. Two tendencies have been traced in the Futurists' use of Pushkin to construct a myth of themselves: the first is the openly iconoclastic desire to do away with Pushkin and other relics of the past, famously encapsulated in the injunction to throw him from the steamship of Modernity; the second is a more evolutionary approach, in which motifs and identities pioneered or made famous by Pushkin are treated as myths, not as historical realities, which can therefore be adapted and manipulated in the present. Both the urge to iconoclasm and the constant desire to make eternal myths speak for the ephemeral moment are products of a vision of time, explained in the Introduction with particular reference to Khlebnikov, which, on the one hand, yearns for a complete eschatological break with the culture of the past in order to effect the utopian fusion of art and life, and, on the other hand, understands history as structured not only by the on-going march of linear time, but also by the recurrence of essential underlying narratives. The effects of these complementary, underlying conceptualizations of culture and history are evident in the Futurist appropriation of Pushkin: the former in the iconoclastic destruction of, or disdain for, the past; the latter in the way that Pushkin's myths can take on a new form in the hands of the Futurists.

Furthermore, these two tendencies were shown to be present over the whole course of the period under consideration here, from 1912 until 1930, and then on as far as Kruchenykh's death in 1968, although the balance between them would shift in accordance with contemporary imperatives. In the early manifestos the Futurists constructed their identity using Pushkin both positively and, more frequently, negatively: although some aspects of Pushkinian mythology were occasionally aligned with Futurist practice (such as the love of language emphasized in 'Dva Chekhova'), for the most part, Pushkin was constructed as a negative other against which the Futurists could define themselves.

Whereas Pushkin was obsolete, foreign, effeminate and isolated, the Futurist persona was designed to be marked by its youth, Russianness, masculinity and integration into society.

In this thesis the collective identity established in the manifestos has served as a background against which we could plot developments in the Futurist persona, both as it was modified in their individual works and as it was transformed over time, particularly taking into account the effects of the Revolution. Although the underlying principles of the Futurist reception of Pushkin did not change, their presentation of this relationship did, in response to the times. The second chapter traced Khlebnikov's use of the motif of the poet as prophet from before 1912 until its ultimate expression in his 1922 poem 'Odnokii litsedei'. As in the manifestos, antagonism was seen to be typical of his earlier poetry, as he sought to distinguish his rational version of prophecy from what he saw as Pushkin's undue emphasis on ecstatic revelation. Antagonism was also detected in 'Odnokii litsedei': my discussion of the symbol of the bull in this poem did not entirely discredit its identification with Pushkin, but rather sought to show the importance of the relationship of this motif to Khlebnikov's conceptualization of history. In turn, this vision of time, in which humanity was seen as trapped by determinism, awaiting a heroic prophet to free them, was shown to underpin Khlebnikov's use of the Pushkinian myth of the prophet: Pushkin is only one iteration of an endless succession of prophets of freedom, each shaped by their time and each ignored by their contemporaries. Khlebnikov is the ultimate instance of this eternal narrative, the prophet-poet who would transform theatre into ritual and bring about an eschatological break in time, if only people would listen to him.

While my analysis of Khlebnikov focused on the motif of the prophet and his relationship with the people, my reading of Maiakovskii's use of Pushkinian mythology concentrated on the image of the moving statue and on the poet's relationship with the Soviet state. Statues and monuments were shown to be an important arena for the articulation of the poet's position in regard to political power. In the first part of the

chapter poems such as *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and *V internatsional* were read in the light of Pushkinian intertexts, particularly *Mednyi vsadnik*, to show how Maiakovskii turned to Pushkin to help express his attitude to the Revolution and to Lenin. The most important poem under consideration in this chapter, however, was 'Iubileinoe': this address to the Pushkin statue was shown to be overflowing with subtle references to Pushkin which combine to reveal Maiakovskii's inner dilemma over the choice between lyric and civic poetry and suggest an inherent connection between civic poetry, bureaucracy and the poet's deadening transformation into a statue, an allusion which was elucidated with reference to self-referentiality in 'Vo ves' golos'. That important poem also showcased another instance of Maiakovskii's simultaneous rejection and renewal of Pushkinian mythology, in this case the intangible monument of poetry, which Maiakovskii interrogates by suggesting various different monuments of his own, implicating the myth of the monument into his own myth of martyrdom. Finally, my analysis explored the way in which the statue, which can be frozen by official canonization or made to move by artistic intervention, serves as a metaphor for the Futurist appropriation of the past as a whole—they have the creative power to inject motive force into fossilized forms, providing life with the dynamism stripped from it by cultural conservatism.

Maiakovskii's mobilization of statues in the 1920s also points to an evolution in the role of the Futurist poet, away from *ex nihilo* creation and towards the transformation of existing material. We observed that there is a close parallel between the recontextualized statue and the recontextualized quotation, a favourite device of both Maiakovskii and Kruchenykh. After briefly considering Maiakovskii's misquotation of Pushkin in comparison to the very different use of quotation by Acmeist poets, I explored at length Kruchenykh's *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov* and the way in which it not only responds to many of the same official narratives of Pushkin present in the 1924 jubilee, but also implies a new role for the poet in society. By reading *500* in the context of new forms of reception and of

theories developed by Benjamin, Tynianov, Barthes and Duchamp, it became clear how this seemingly slight work both encapsulates many of the fundamental tenets of the Futurist reception of Pushkin—the importance of performance, the transformation of meaning in the ephemeral present, resistance to the auratic effect of textual reproduction—and looks forward to the transformation of the poet into a conceptual artist, a trend evident both in Kruchenykh's later work and in subsequent developments in Russian art.

Viewing Kruchenykh's work through the prism of the wider European Modernist avant-garde (Benjamin, Duchamp) and Russian post-modernism (Sots Art, Prigov), points to two directions in which the exploration of the Futurist reception of Pushkin can be extended. The question which underlies this study is universal and fundamental, both geographically and temporally: how can an artist be truly original when the language which he must use to express himself is constituted by the work of his predecessors? The same problem is faced by all artists and writers everywhere, but the experience of the Russian Futurists is particularly interesting because, as I have shown, it combines demonstrative rejection with careful appropriation, producing an ironic tension between the two. The same irony inevitably applies in all instances of the outright rejection of the past, of which Russian and world history is full, particular during the Modernist period. One way the findings of this study could be taken further, therefore, would be to contextualize them more fully in regard to other European movements, notably Italian Futurism and Dada. While considerable work has been done on relating Russian Modernist visual art to its wider European context, this task has only begun in regard to literature, and, I propose, examining this relationship through the lens of the iconoclastic avant-garde's paradoxical interaction with canonical texts would prove to be a fruitful approach. Furthermore, such contextualization is also possible across time: we saw in the Kruchenykh chapter in particular, but in many other instances as well, how the Futurists' appropriation of Pushkin foreshadowed the ludic bricolage of post-modernism. The boundaries between Modernism

and post-modernism in Russian art and literature are still being explored: I suggest that the question of the use of the past, and, even in isolation the question of extraordinary cultural phenomenon that is Pushkin's place in Russia, would provide a useful framework for this on-going investigation. Such further investigation replicating the approach employed in this thesis would necessarily engage, either individually or in an overarching comparative study, not only with Sots Art, Moscow Conceptualism and 1990s post-modernism, but also the OBERIUTY and also the poets and writers of the 'Thaw'.

Another way in which the methods and conclusions of this study could serve as a foundation stone in bridging the gap between Futurism and later flowerings of avant-garde art and literature in Russia would be to examine the ways in which Pushkinian mythology informs the memoirs of Futurist poets, artists and fellow-travellers. For the most part written after 1930, memoirs such as Kruchenykh's *Nash vykhod*, Livshits's *Polutoraglaziy strelets* and Kamenskii's *Put' entuziasta* and *Zhizn' s Maiakovskim*, and even works that combine memoir with scholarship, such as Jakobson's extraordinary *cri de coeur* 'O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov', serve as a fascinating afterword to the Futurist reception of Pushkin. Many of the approaches used in this study would apply here also. First, these memoirs provided their authors with a means with which to explore their identity and legitimate their position, not just in the past, but in the present also, so the focus on identity formation prevalent in this thesis would be useful in that context also. Second, the complex interplay of life and text, explored here in relation to Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii in particular, is of paramount importance in these memoirs: the lives of the poets themselves were self-consciously constructed in accordance with the narratives of Pushkinian mythology, and then these same narratives were also ex post facto projected onto Futurist lives by memoirists. Is it possible, or desirable, to untangle these interwoven mythologizing threads? This question will have to remain unanswered for now, but I will suggest that in order to answer it, and to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of

the Futurist versions of *zhiznetvorchestvo* and historical recurrence, a more holistic approach should be taken to the question of Futurism and Pushkin than has been possible in this study. This would include not only such fascinating literary figures as Kamenskii and Burliuk, and would perhaps even investigate other poets with close links to the Futurists, such as Pasternak, but would also incorporate more consideration of the afterlife of Pushkin in Futurist art, fashion, performance and day-to-day life.

In December 2012, a few months after I write these words, *Poshchecchina obshchestvennomu vkusu* will be one hundred years old. Nothing could be more contrary to the Futurist creed than the celebration of this jubilee: the Futurists themselves should, according to their own programme, long since have been thrown overboard. For my part, however, I believe, anathema though it may be, the ejection of Pushkin should be celebrated as a truly significant date in Russian literature, because it marks the beginning of a truly significant creative relationship between the Futurists. This study has sought to show that Pushkin remains aboard the Futurists' steamship of Modernity. However, it has also, I hope, provided some arguments for why the Futurists, with their complex and conflicted relationship with the past, remain relevant and interesting today. They are stowaways on our own steamship of Modernity.

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