

“I Want to be Honest”: The Rhetoric of Sincerity in Soviet Russian Literature, 1953-1970

Michael Gluck

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2021

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Abstract

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This dissertation chronicles the discourse of sincerity in state published Soviet Russian literature and criticism from Stalin's death in 1953 to 1970. It presents a means of reading sincerity as a literary device in fiction and poetry that corresponds to an understanding of sincerity as rhetoric. This view holds that sincerity is a socially determined effect of language and affect. As such, the dissertation begins by analyzing the valences of sincerity during the Thaw, exploring them in connection with writers of the Village Prose and Youth Prose movements as well as in the poetry of Evgenii Evtushenko. From this survey of different literary trends, a general framework of a shift from an essentialist to a performative conception of sincerity in Russian official literature is presented. This dissertation argues that there was a gradual process which saw authoritative discourse and a discourse of sincerity exist in tension with each other in the early Thaw before performativity seeped into sincerity rhetoric in the Youth Prose of the early '60s. An awareness of sincerity as rhetorical or performative language flourished in postmodernist literature and late Soviet underground art, creating a mode that was self-conscious of the impossibility of essential sincerity while still seeking a way to be sincere.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Valentina Izmirlieva for her consistent confidence in me, Boris Gasparov for his perceptive feedback, and Mark Lipovetsky for working exceptionally hard on my behalf and his ability to see my project clearly even when I could not.

Dedication

To my family – mom, dad, Rebecca, and Mina.

Introduction: Sincerity Under Scrutiny

Vladimir Voinovich's short story "I Want to be Honest" ("Khochu byt' chestnym"), published in 1963, relates an episode from the banal life of "comrade" Zhenia Samokhin. The supervisor for an important construction project, Samokhin faces two dilemmas, one immediate – the building whose completion will secure him a promotion is not up to his standards – and the other existential: he cannot remember what he is meant to do with his life. That is, Samokhin is dissatisfied with his current circumstances and vaguely aware of some unfulfilled purpose he might have pursued but has no idea what that could have been or might still be. With the passing of time his world has turned into a pseudo-world¹ that he moves through mechanically, and he suspects others of doing the same. Together with the crowd he crosses a busy street on his way to the cafeteria where he eats daily – the woman behind the counter, Zoia, beams at him and asks "How are you – like always?" ("Вам – как всегда?"), "Like always" ("как всегда"), he responds.² Perhaps, Samokhin reflects, she really does like him, but, he decides "her smile has a simpler explanation – I'm a frequent customer" ("её улыбка объясняется более просто – Я постоянный клиент.")³ As with Zoia, Samokhin refuses to disclose anything of himself to his boss, even to his romantic partner, Klava, to whom he lies when he says he loves her.⁴ Finally, he manages to tell the truth about the building not being ready despite his impending promotion – an act of courage and character – but even after this apparent personal and professional breakthrough he remains clueless about his true desires, reiterating at the end of the story that his

¹ Lev Anninskii, *Iadro orekha: kriticheskie ocherki* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1965), 122.

² Translations my own unless otherwise noted.

³ Vladimir Voinovich, *Khochu byt' chestnym: povesti* (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1989), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

true purpose in life has escaped him. For Samokhin, honesty is a struggle, but sincerity and authenticity belong to a different realm entirely – a parallel universe where life is meaningful.

Honesty, sincerity, and authenticity are notions that presuppose some truth outside or within the self. They fundamentally concern truth as a feature of introspection and interaction rather than, for example, scientific laws, which might be said to exist apart from human intervention. However, just as we rely on astrophysicists and bacteriologists to tell us (honestly and accurately) about phenomena that, without the proper training, would be mostly mysterious to us, we must trust others to tell us about their inner states – the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are inaccessible to others except in external manifestation. Before disentangling and demarcating the overlapping categories of honesty, sincerity, and authenticity, it must be conceded that these are areas that, in practice, depend as much on interpersonal trust as they do personal or scientific truth. Honesty, sincerity, and authenticity are categories that cannot hope to be perfectly stable or accurate, instead, they are components of what the philosopher Bernard Williams calls “trustworthiness” – the quality that enables ourselves and others to be mutually intelligible. Williams observes: “we are all together in the social activity of mutually stabilizing our declarations and moods and impulses into...beliefs and relatively steady attitudes.”⁵ As such, no matter how honest, sincere, or authentic we may believe ourselves to be, an interlocutor must believe that what we say about ourselves and the world is dependable, that it “has a future” as a reliable opinion or facet of one’s identity. A pattern of, if not consistent, then consistently intelligible interactions and behaviors helps form the impression of a self that may or may not have these three qualities.

⁵ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 97, 193.

Voinovich's story illustrates how honesty, sincerity, and authenticity – qualities that would seem to spring naturally from the self or empirical reality – are heavily reliant on others to help negotiate an agreeable version of the self. Ironically, given the Soviet Union's purported collectivism, Samokhin lives in an atomized society that is only barely held together by the pseudo-world that its inhabitants share. When Samokhin tries to be honest, to avail himself of the measurable evidence, apparent to his colleagues as well as to him, they caution him against warning about the building.⁶ Samokhin, whose name contains the Russian word for "oneself" (*sam*), is isolated by telling the truth in a professional context, but his failure to tell Klava the truth – that he does not love her – about his emotions comes out of a fear of being alone that paradoxically reinforces his aloneness, even with a supposed intimate. Likewise, his suspicion of Zoia, the cafeteria worker, who really does seem to love him, is the result of a Sartrean "bad faith" over-identification with social roles that prevents him from seeing her humanity in relation to his own. Samokhin feels that others are not trustworthy sources about themselves or the world – he humors Klava's love, which he believes to be as inauthentic as his own, finds Zoia insincere, and his colleagues dishonest. In the pseudo-world of Voinovich's story, the process that Williams describes as lending steady beliefs and attitudes (i.e., a defined, perceived "true" self) cannot function due to a lack of social trust. Moreover, Samokhin does not even have a "true" private self to fall back on, he is entirely lost on his own – unable to find or recall his purpose even in moments of introspection.

The social, relational aspect of honesty, sincerity, and authenticity in a way simplify their definitions, since it is their perception, rather than any supposed essence, that matters. As the above examples from "I Want to be Honest" suggest, honesty and sincerity are qualities that

⁶ Vladimir Voinovich, *Khochu byt' chestnym: povesti*, 46.

inhere in speech – “communicative virtues”⁷ – whereas authenticity is a state or way of being in the world.⁸ The exact boundaries between these concepts are difficult to draw, and the words may be used interchangeably in everyday speech at times, but, besides their social aspect, the three ideas are united by a myth of original or essential truth. Dishonesty, insincerity, and inauthenticity stipulate some divergence from an origin to which words and actions ideally – in these concepts’ positive expression – ought to correspond. However, as outlined above, our knowledge of reality or others’ minds is always limited, leaving us to seek after this unreachable origin. Put another way, we would have no use for honesty as a virtue if dishonesty were impossible, if everyone invariably told the truth, and “from a Hegelian perspective, from the moment they are conceived by the intellect ‘authenticity’ and ‘sincerity’ announce their longing for, thus the *absence* of, the very thing they denote.”⁹ Authenticity and sincerity, to a greater extent than honesty, which can be founded in empirical observation alone, locate this origin in the self. Sincere utterances constitute the “subjective truth” – one’s true feelings or beliefs – while authenticity describes the “true self” that sincere utterances express. Understandings of the self may be more or less complicated by an individual’s awareness of the boundlessness of self-interrogation, of the fact that, historically, investigation of the self has only made the matter of discerning the sincere and the authentic in the self more fraught. Charles Taylor observes that, since the Enlightenment brought inner states to the fore, the rationalistic ideal of a transparent inner self that could be accurately expressed in words and actions has given way to an ever more

⁷ John Eriksson, “Straight Talk: Conceptions of Sincerity in Speech,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 153, no. 2 (March 2011): 232.

⁸ Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes, introduction to *Romanticism, Sincerity, Authenticity*, eds. Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

sophisticated set of scientific disciplines that themselves reveal our incomplete knowledge of the mind and its workings in addition to whatever knowledge they provide.¹⁰

The Road to Sincerity

This dissertation is concerned with sincerity in literature – how it is conveyed and received – as an extension of the social practice of sincerity. Like authenticity and honesty, sincerity is, on the one hand, an ideal of personal conduct that one may approach asymptotically but never quite consummate, or, on the other, a kind of affective and semiotic exchange that produces the culturally determined *effect* of seeming sincere. It is the latter aspect that makes sincerity, of the qualities under discussion, the most applicable to the study of literature. First, sincerity, unlike authenticity, is primarily concerned with particular utterances and, despite the ongoing salience of sincerity’s appeal to an authorizing origin, these utterances can be considered a rhetorical mode of sorts, making sincerity a speech genre that might be found in fiction. Moreover, we can talk about fiction as being sincere or insincere whereas honesty is a category typically considered inapplicable to the language of fiction. A scholarly vocabulary for discussing sincerity as a fictional device will be introduced later, but questions of an author’s sincerity in the general public might concern, for example, whether they are writing what they “really” think and feel or are only writing for monetary gain.¹¹ Ultimately, as a kind of interpersonal communication, literature is liable to be subjected to contemporary social standards of sincerity insofar as the reader attributes what is written to a particular authorial subject.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Susan Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 4-5.

Sincerity, like the self in general, becomes, paradoxically, more difficult to discern the more it is scrutinized. Regimes of sincerity, which range from the oppressive to the self-directed, participate in a utopian notion, one that posits anything from a moment¹² to an eternity¹³ of clarity concerning the fundamental limitation of human subjectivity. Sincerity addresses a universal condition called “epistemic privacy,”¹⁴ also known as “the opacity of other minds”¹⁵ or “the problem of other minds.”¹⁶ The issue with other minds is, in a word, their inaccessibility, the fact that what is inside others’ heads (or hearts, or souls) cannot be directly experienced or felt. The gap between people can be bridged with language, affect, gesture, touch, but the door for divergence (or deception) is always open. For cultures that imagine an inner and outer self, sincerity describes the state of “congruence between avowal and actual feeling”¹⁷ that allows what is purportedly internal or private to be rendered externally.

However, few societies have treated inner states¹⁸ as truly unknowable and have instead developed circumscribed contexts for their expression. The sincerity practice par excellence for Christians is confession. Quite simply, as Webb Keane notes, “confession demands sincerity.”¹⁹ The notion of sincerity expressed above is, in a manner of speaking, “fallen” from religious

¹² Boris Groys, *Under Suspicion: A Phenomenology of Media*, trans. Carsten Strathausen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 51.

¹³ Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107-12.

¹⁴ Howard Pickett, *Rethinking Sincerity and Authenticity: The Ethics of Theatricality in Kant, Kierkegaard, and Levinas* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 145.

¹⁵ Joel Robbins and Alan Rumsey, “Introduction: Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 407-8.

¹⁶ Anita Avramides, *Other Minds* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁷ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2.

¹⁸ For the argument that certain Pacific societies find speculation about others’ inner states taboo, see Joel Robbins and Alan Rumsey, “Introduction: Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds”. However, this claim has been contested and revised to include some social contexts but not others, see Alessandro Duranti *The Anthropology of Intentions: Language in a World of Others* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179-86.

¹⁹ Webb Keane, “Others, Other Minds, and Others’ Theories of Other Minds: An Afterword on the Psychology and Politics of Opacity Claims” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 476.

confession, which presupposes the soul's intelligibility to god and the achievability of a virtuous congruence between words and inner state. As a potential feature of the immortal soul in early Christianity, an individual's sincerity was strictly the provenance of the divine. Echoing 1 Samuel 16:7,²⁰ St. Augustine wrote that only god can truly perceive a person's inner world, whereas "even though a person may have a pure eye (that is, may live with a sincere and single heart), he cannot look into the heart of another."²¹ The emergence of confession as a secular commonplace in private and public life is in part the story of the violation of this injunction. In the absence of a divinity able to see into one's soul, or judge one's purity of heart, sincerity became, especially outside the confessional, a more purely linguistic matter, a question of whether or not one could persuade others of one's sincerity. However, far from leaving the matter of sincerity to god, by putting his account in writing for the public, that is, by confessing to the reader in addition to god, Augustine helped bring the private practice of confession out into the arena of public discussion. With Augustine's *Confessions*, the confessing subject could for the first time be associated with the figure of the author. It was with the rise of Western individualism that confessing, and hence, sincerity, became an object of scrutiny for lay people in society.

The Christian practice of confession and the emergence of individualism are intertwined with the development and dissemination of sincerity in both Western Europe and Russia. The Russian word for sincerity, "*iskrennost*," emerged in the Middle Ages, at the beginning of Russian written culture. The Russian "*iskrennii*" is in some ways different from the English "sincere," including etymologically. "*Iskrennii*" derives from the Old Russian "*iskr*," meaning

²⁰ "But the Lord said to Samuel... 'The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart,'" 1 Sam. 16:7.

²¹ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The Preaching of Augustine "Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount"*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Francine Cardman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 177.

“*blizko*” in modern Russian²² or “close” in English. “Sincere” lacks this etymological dimension, its Latin root, meaning “clean” or “pure,” links it with words like “authentic” and “genuine.” The linguist Anna Wierzbicka suggests that “self-disclosure,” as a concept rooted in the birth of Western individualism, merely characterizes sincerity and that defining *iskrennost’* requires a similar elaboration of its own cultural associations. However, as will be seen, the history of *iskrennost’* is also the history of “sincerity.” Further, even if it does not etymologically include “closeness,” “sincerity,” as “self-disclosure,” is clearly suited to intimate situations.²³ Still, the etymology of *iskrennost’* underscores the fundamental import of trust to sincerity since intimacy is, among other things, a category of profound trust. We should be cautious about ascribing a greater degree of trust (or any other quality) in comparing synonyms across languages based on etymology. As Ellen Rutten notes,²⁴ while the word *iskrennost’* dates to the beginnings of Russian civilization in the 11th century – significantly earlier than sincerity’s coinage in English in the 16th century – preoccupation with sincerity only took hold in the 18th and 19th centuries in Russia, spurred in part by factors such as commodification, nationalist awakenings, and the Sentimentalist and Romantic literary movements that were likewise shaping Western Europe.²⁵ Indeed, the importation of this intellectual foment ensured that, rather than merely developing in parallel to the West, Russian conceptions of the self were directly impacted by them.

²² “Proiskhozhdenie slova iskrennii,” Lexicography Online, accessed April 1 2021, <https://lexicography.online/etymology/и/искренний>.

²³ According to Wierzbicka, defining “*iskrennost’*” requires an elaboration of its own cultural associations. Because Wierzbicka does not believe *iskrennost’* to be related to the anglophone concepts of self-disclosure or privacy, nor does she attempt a history of *iskrennost’*, she defines the word in selective social contexts as “saying what one thinks” – indeed, Wierzbicka sees the virtuous view of *iskrennost’* in Russian culture standing in opposition to cautious politeness in anglophone societies. However, it is the intersection of politeness and sincerity that, by definition, she describes. In failing to consider contexts beyond public interactions, Wierzbicka actively leaves out the entire category of intimate ones where self-disclosure might, in fact, be encouraged. See Anna Wierzbicka, “Russian Cultural Scripts: The Theory of Cultural Scripts and its Applications,” *Ethos* 30, no. 4 (December 2002).

²⁴ For a more extensive review of the history of sincerity in Russia and the West, see Ellen Rutten, *Sincerity After Communism: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 35-77.

²⁵ Ellen Rutten, “Sovetskaia ritorika iskrennosti,” *Neprikosnovenyi zapas* no. 3 (2017) https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2017/3/sovetskaya-ritorika-iskrennosti.html#_ftn14.

In Michel Foucault's influential account, confession in the Western European monasteries of the Middle Ages and the practice's introduction to the wider, non-ecclesiastic public thereafter spurred and shaped the emerging Western European subject.²⁶ Foucault provides a powerful framework for explaining how confession became an intersubjective phenomenon – how people came to confess to one another as well as to god. Oleg Kharkhordin, however, insists that confession in the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia had nowhere near the significance that Foucault attributes to it in the West. He points to public penance rather than private confession as the main technique of self-knowledge in the Orthodox Church.²⁷ However, the Orthodox impact on modern Russian conceptions of the self and sincerity is more demonstrable in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revival of “eldership” (*starchestvo*) and lay spiritual guidance, when “educated Russian lay people turned to writing to go beyond sacramental confession.”²⁸ In the latter half of the eighteenth century, ascetic monks gained traction with local peasants and nobles alike for their accessible language and teachings,²⁹ which they disseminated orally in visitations and in booklets directed at the educated lay person.³⁰ By the nineteenth century, many educated members of the lay Orthodox,³¹ had entered into correspondence with elders on how to live up to monastic spiritual standards in a modern,

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 1:59.

²⁷ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6-8, 63.

²⁸ Nadieszda Kizenko, “Written Confession and Religious Thought in Early Nineteenth-century Russia” in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context*, eds. Patrick Lally Michelson and Judith Deutsch Kornblatt (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 178.

²⁹ Irina Paert, *Spiritual Elders: Charisma and Tradition in Russian Orthodoxy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 53.

³⁰ What Kharkhordin calls “attending to oneself,” a practice popularized by 18th century monk Tikhon Zadonskii. See Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 257.

³¹ While it is difficult to know precisely how widespread this practice was, Irina Paert offers as evidence of the significance of elders the canonization of Serafim Sarovskii (1754-1833) in 1903, which was attended by 300,000 people, including members of the royal court. See Irina Paert, *Spiritual Elders: Charisma and Tradition in Russian Orthodoxy*, 5.

sometimes urban, environment.³² In a study of the correspondence between elite penitents and spiritual elders, Nadieszda Kisenko shows how confession became a collaborative, ongoing exchange between penitent and elder as well as a widespread social practice. With Russia's increasing literacy, by the late 19th century the practice of written confession spread beyond the nobility to other classes and became a feature of secular literature in the works of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii.³³

If the way for Western European sincerity was paved by confessional practices spilling out from the monastery and into secular life, then the solicitation and adoption of monastic techniques of self-knowledge by the educated classes in eighteenth and nineteenth century Russia represents a similar process. Sonja Luehrmann applies Louis Dumont's account of the development of monastic practices in the laity in the West to the Russian context: an "outworldly" individual – a monk, elder, hermit – removes himself from society in order to focus on shaping the self in relation to god.³⁴ Russian elders modeled this mode of life for "inworldly" individuals – that is, everyone not withdrawn from society – and offered insight into how inworldly individuals might learn from their example via correspondence and visitations, as a result "outworldly individualism...develops from an oddity reserved to uncanny outcasts into a marker of prestige, thereby exerting pressure on the holistic social world and creating space for inworldly individualism." The notion of individual sincerity followed a similar trajectory: the "internalization of piety" among inworldly individuals made for an "isolated individual responsible for maintaining consistency between words and actions, internal thoughts and their

³² Ibid., 96-7.

³³ Nadieszda Kisenko, "Written Confession and Religious Thought in Early Nineteenth-century Russia," 191.

³⁴ Sonja Luehrmann, "'God values intentions': Abortion, Expiation, and Moments of Sincerity in Russian Orthodox Pilgrimage," *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 167.

external expression.”³⁵ In this account, sincerity seems to have become a kind of cultural capital for educated urbanites in 19th century Russia. Peculiarly, accumulation of this capital relied on monastics who had, at least in theory, renounced the world and pursuit of social status. The rise of anchorites as arbiters of sincerity points to the increasing sense in this period that sincerity ought somehow to be resistant to the social world while being, at the same time, a socially reinforced value of a particular milieu.

The spiritual developments of the 18th and 19th centuries in Russia helped shape what it meant to be an “individual” – a term that has its origins in Western European thought. In his account of the evolution of the term “lichnost” – meaning the “person” or “individual” and sometimes translated “personality” – Oleg Kharkhordin traces the word’s first appearance to mid-18th century translations of Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers into Russian, as well as to works by figures the Russian Enlightenment such as Aleksandr Radishchev and Nikolai Karamzin. Under the influence of German idealism and Romanticism, “lichnost” came to entail “the unique individual” in the 1820s. From this definition proceeded the modern notion of selfhood, including an implicit belief in the self’s “exposure of personal qualities and features, personal essence” which, Kharkhordin notes, spread rapidly to everyday speech.³⁶ Therefore, while the notion of individuality may have been imported, it has been implied by the Russian lexicon since at least the 19th century.

The self or individual and the “subject” are intimately connected terms, though the latter has been primarily a feature of scholarly discourse about Russia and the Soviet Union. As late as the Soviet period, “subjectivity” (*sub’ektivnost’*) simply meant the opposite of “objectivity”

³⁵ Ibid., 179.

³⁶ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 184-90.

(*ob'ektivnost'*) to the average speaker of Russian.³⁷ However, the term has been vested with meaning by recent scholarship (to be discussed below) and the influence of its use by Michel Foucault. This dissertation will engage with works that subscribe to Foucault's notion that discourse creates subjects and present an argument for a "normative" Soviet sincerity along these lines, but what is essential to this brief precis of sincerity is the advent of a holistic view of the self that the individual (in the sense described above) strives to understand.³⁸ While the "subject" and "individual" may be used synonymously, the idea of the individual striving to ascertain their unique essence brings out a valence of the concept that is key to sincerity, which is underpinned by a self-reflexivity that considers one's words and actions in relation to one's sense of self.

Romanticism, an important influence in the evolution of Russian "lichnost,'" offers one such self-reflexive prism for evaluating sincerity in the self and others. While notoriously difficult to capture in full, recent attempts to characterize Romanticism have emphasized its resistance to modernization and commodification.³⁹ Russian Romanticism evinced, if not the same concerns about modernity and capitalism, then a sense that the authentic self was at odds with modern society.⁴⁰ The Byronic heroes and superfluous men of early 19th century literature rebelled against the constraint of social mores, and their authors were likewise skeptical of conventions, both social and literary. This included the convention of sincerity – Susan Rosenbaum notes that, though Romantic writers "popularized the cult of sincere self-expression,

³⁷ Anatolii Pinskiĭ, introduction to *Posle Stalina: pozdnesovetskaia sub'ektivnost' (1953-1985): sbornik statei*, ed. Anatolii Pinskiĭ (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2018), 11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14

³⁹ See, for example, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); David Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Orrin N. C. Wang, *Romantic Sobriety: Sensation, Revolution, Commodification, History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes, introduction to *Romanticism, Sincerity, Authenticity*, 6.

were often suspicious of it.”⁴¹ The narrator mocks the sentimental Vladimir Lensky in Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin* for his “sincere” poetic style, while, as Monika Greenleaf observes, Pushkin’s own notion of the creative process, the “sense of incompleteness and confusion that impels the clarifying act of writing,” stands opposed to the immediacy of sincerity.⁴² However, it is the yearning for completeness itself and writing as an integrative process that characterizes much of Romantic sincerity.⁴³ In this regard, the Romantic sensibility, which suggests its sincerity in part by its “seemingly meaningful resistance to cultural, social and literary norms”⁴⁴ can also be seen in other 19th century intellectual and social movements that theorized a practicable resistance to society such as the Slavophiles, whose *sobornost’* valorized the kind of organic unity German and Russian Romantics poeticized, and the similarly arcadian *Narodniki*.⁴⁵

Before moving on to the Soviet period, it is worth reflecting on the trajectory of sincerity in Russia versus that of sincerity in Western Europe. Protestantism has been presented as the foundation of modern anglophone notions of sincerity.⁴⁶ Luehrmann’s account of eldership in some ways resembles accounts of Protestant denominations’ reliance on diaries and confession to become “self-possessed” subjects.⁴⁷ However, Keane points out that a particular set of beliefs about language accompanied Protestantism. In Protestantism, according to Keane, language is treated as exterior to the speaker due to its “material embodiment in sounds or writing and its

⁴¹ Susan Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading*, 3.

⁴² Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 241.

⁴³ Deborah Forbes, *Sincerity’s Shadow: Self-consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-twentieth-century American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 14-15.

⁴⁴ Stuart H. Goldberg, “The Poetic Device and the Problem of Sincerity in Gavrila Derzhavin’s Verse,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 95, no. 2 (April 2017): 231.

⁴⁵ Guillaume Sauvé, “The Apogee of Soviet Political Romanticism: Projects for Moral Renewal in Early *Perestroika* (1985–1989)” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 9 (2018): 1414.

⁴⁶ Webb Keane, “Sincerity, ‘Modernity,’ and the Protestants” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (February 2002).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

social character.”⁴⁸ For Protestants, who treated manifestations of the material world with suspicion, this was a problem for sincere prayer’s efficacy. Luehrmann suggests that this discomfort with the material character with words was less prominent in Russian Orthodox Christianity, which viewed the ritually circumscribed circumstance of confession as sufficient and stressed constant monitoring of one’s internal state to a lesser extent than Protestantism.⁴⁹ That said, linguistic expression is always at issue in sincerity, whether or not certain beliefs about language alert one to this fact. The inscrutability of the other, and, to a certain extent, the self, is both enabled and compounded by linguistic self-expression: what one thinks and says about the self is, if not structured by language, then abetted and constrained by the set of linguistic resources and patterns (genre, register, cultural scripts, style) relied upon to establish socio-cognitive intelligibility.⁵⁰

Eitan Wilf argues that Keane’s Protestant sincerity fails to capture another dimension of modern sincerity, which he calls “self-expression,” that can be traced to Sentimentalism and Romanticism.⁵¹ In contrast to sincerity, wherein thoughts are assumed to precede words (hence the problem of expressing them in words), self-expression relies on words, and especially writing, to structure thought. Therefore, diary-keeping is properly one of self-exploration and self-creation according to the ethic Wilf describes, rather than the confessional cleansing and interrogation of a more or less steady pre-existing self in the Protestant view of the diary.⁵²

⁴⁸ Webb Keane, “From Fetishism to Sincerity: On Agency, the Speaking Subject, and Their Historicity in the Context of Religious Conversion,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 4 (October 1997): 685.

⁴⁹ Sonja Luehrmann, “‘God values intentions’: Abortion, Expiation, and Moments of Sincerity in Russian Orthodox Pilgrimage,” 165-6.

⁵⁰ Alessandro Duranti *The Anthropology of Intentions: Language in a World of Others*, 112.

⁵¹ Wilf acknowledges, however, that Romanticism in some ways subsumed the Protestant ethic that involved “the legitimacy and the drive to imagine scenes that were re- mote from everyday experience and to find pleasure in the feelings provoked by these scenes.” See Eitan Wilf, “Sincerity versus Self-expression: Modern Creative Agency and the Materiality of Semiotic Forms,” *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 3 (August 2011): 463, 469.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 468.

Given the strong Romantic influence on Russian culture it may be more appropriate to apply Wilf's concept of self-expression to more cases in the Russian context than Keane's, however, we are of the opinion that both "sincerity" and "self-expression" can coexist in linguistic and artistic expression to varying degrees (a fact that will become evident in relation to the Soviet period) and therefore, moving forward, use of the word "sincerity" can be taken to contain elements of Wilf's definition as well.

The dynamics of power, ideology, and subjecthood in the Soviet Union make for an especially fraught, fascinating, and frightening case study of sincerity. Among the unrealized utopian expectations of Soviet ideology was a state of "transparency," that would level epistemic privacy and make one's intentions immediately legible. According to Igal Halfin, party propagandists maintained that "'A unity of essence and appearance... is one of the unique features of our time.'"⁵³ Of course, such a transparent state was not – or not only – reflective of a vision of intersubjective understanding, it was a dystopian vision of state control. It was in this repressive dimension that the Soviet obsession with sincerity came to the fore. The imposition of new orthodoxies of identity required Soviet subjects of the 1920s and '30s, under threat of punishment, to publicly adopt a proletarian biography and mindset. Cognizant of the danger that divergence would bring, the newly Sovietized dissimulated, falsely professing what was expected of them. Soviet authorities, also cognizant of this fact, saw correctly apprehending sincerity as the key to rooting out "wreckers," "spies," "double-dealers," and potentially disloyal elements among the population.

The diary and self-creation also featured in early Soviet sincerity practice, in part as a continuation of pre-Revolutionary trends, but in the Soviet period techniques of control

⁵³ Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 267.

inevitably circumscribed self-creativity, making diaries, for those so inclined, a laboratory for transforming the self into a loyal political subject. Jochen Hellbeck's account of diaries suggests that their purpose was not dissimilar to that of Socialist Realist literature, which was also seen by party leadership as a tool for inculcating self-formation.⁵⁴ However, whereas obligatory autobiographical accounts and Socialist Realism covered over misgivings about the Soviet project, diarists under Stalin admitted and agonized over their membership in the collective, worrying that they would never be able to meet the impossible demands of the Soviet New Man and Woman. Hellbeck's study reveals a concern for sincerity beneath the Soviet insistence that sincerity ought and would become all social being's natural state – a yearning, familiar since the Romantic era, to merge into a single, fully integrated unit. In this case, that organic unity was identified not with nature, but with an ideal society comprised of other fully integrated subjects. The Marxian promise to eliminate private life was thus a guarantee that the problems of a self divided between incommensurate private and public identities would also disappear once one embraced the social self as fundamental. Of course, so long as the diarist was unable to effect this self-transformation, their doubts and thoughts continued to manifest in their diaries, creating a further separation between public and private identities.

Given its task of supporting the mythologization of socially-oriented behavior and collective action, Socialist Realism paid little attention to the emotional world that diaries attended to. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the diary became the form most associated with rehumanizing and rehabilitating Soviet literature after Stalin's death in 1953. The denial of a tumultuous, complex inner life in Socialist Realism reflected the well-known doctrine of presenting the "heroic prospects" of an idealized society, but the lack of interiority did not

⁵⁴ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 44.

contradict the Soviet view of sincerity because, unlike other models, the Soviet ideal of sincerity did not exist in tension with a public self – the sincere self was, ideally, not an alternative to the public one.⁵⁵ Again though, the paradox of Soviet sincerity, in literature as in life was, as Oleg Kharkhordin notes, that the dissimulation required to meet Soviet requirements made for a secret, private self in which one’s transgressive thoughts and feelings dwelled.⁵⁶

Reading as Rhetoric, Sincerity as Device

While, in our view, sincerity represents an unattainable promise of unity – between inner and outer self, between self and other – sincerity has overwhelmingly been treated as not only possible, but as a virtue to be desired and cultivated. Many religions hold that inner and outer forms can and should be unified.⁵⁷ In these cases, the religious tenet of god’s omniscience does make sincerity ultimately knowable, if only to god. The influence of such a belief in self-congruence is evident even in secular societies where sincerity is necessarily – in the absence of an all-knowing god – a horizontal, person-to-person relationship rather than a vertical one.⁵⁸ An individual acculturated in a society in which sincerity is commonly believed to be a moral virtue is liable to attach moral judgment to their own and others’ sincerity or lack thereof. Webb Keane suggests that “sincerity is a matter not just of imputed alignment between expression and interior state but also a product of one’s desire to make one’s expressions aligned in this way.”⁵⁹ As such, in societies that value sincerity, the willingness or ability to be sincere cannot be neutral or coincidental because it is inextricably linked to elements of character and morality. Though it

⁵⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁶ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 357.

⁵⁷ Sonja Luehrmann, “‘God values intentions’: Abortion, Expiation, and Moments of Sincerity in Russian Orthodox Pilgrimage,” 173.

⁵⁸ Howard Pickett, *Rethinking Sincerity and Authenticity: The Ethics of Theatricality in Kant, Kierkegaard, and Levinas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 5.

⁵⁹ Webb Keane, “Sincerity, ‘Modernity,’ and the Protestants,” 75.

may be true that, as William Reddy argues,⁶⁰ sincerity should not be considered the most “natural” or “best” mode of communication and that it ought not be privileged in analysis as less “artificial” than any other mode, sincerity, and the moral evaluation, practices, and discourse that it entails, can serve as a key to unlocking assumptions about language and values in a given society.

Before laying the groundwork for the study of sincerity in fiction, recent redefinitions and reevaluations of sincerity must be taken into account. The split between inner and outer forms is an assumption that is reflected in some of the foundational contemporary studies of sincerity. In his influential work *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling describes the shift away from sincerity as a moral virtue in 1970s American society and toward the ideal of authenticity, the ideal of being “true to oneself” rather than beholden to old-fashioned expectations of personal integrity. It is from Trilling’s study that the previously quoted definition of sincerity as the “congruence between avowal and actual feeling” comes. Trilling was aware, however, of the difficulties of locating “actual feeling” – he cites the vagaries of the self and self-knowledge that (according to Trilling) had resulted from Freudian insights about the irrational workings of the psyche, though other modern de-stabilizations of subjectivity could just as easily be applied. While Trilling found sincerity and authenticity to be two different values, different ways of being in the world, Trilling’s contemporary, the philosopher John Searle, had already reframed the question of sincerity as a matter of meeting the conditions required for a speech act to be

⁶⁰ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 108.

successful.⁶¹ Searle's theories suffer from an uninterrogated confidence⁶² in speakers knowing what they feel and mean and being accountable for these precise words.⁶³ Nevertheless, Searle's theory of speech acts helped decouple sincerity from authenticity – terms that, when ascribed to people, could be said to be interchangeable in an everyday context – by framing sincerity as a communicative practice rather than as a state of what an existentialist or Trilling might call “authentic” being.

Recent scholarship has centered on how sincerity is conveyed and experienced in interpersonal and mediated interactions. Scholars of what Boris Groys terms the “phenomenology of sincerity,” or what the editors of a volume of the same name call the “rhetoric of sincerity” have been careful to distinguish the topic from past accounts of sincerity as a virtuous or essential quality in a person. They recast it, instead, as a kind of affective and rhetorical effect. In fact, in his account Groys goes so far as to deny sincerity's existence *except* as an effect: “Sincerity does not take place ‘inside the other’ – as if it were the other's conscious decision finally to tell the truth about his inner side. Rather, sincerity is a phenomenon that presents itself only to the observer...The observer then gets the impression that a mask has been lifted, revealing the true face of the other that the mask hitherto had concealed.”⁶⁴ In this version, sincerity is no longer a matter of self-knowledge at all – an idea suited to explaining media,

⁶¹ These conditions are: (a) assertions are sincere if and only if the speaker believes the proposition asserted, (b) requests are sincere if and only if the speaker wants her interlocutor to fulfil the request and (c) questions are sincere if and only if the speaker wants to know the answer and so on. See John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 66-7.

⁶² That is, Searle assumes that speakers are the “self-possessed selves” that Webb Keane identifies as part of the Protestant legacy of contemporary anglophone sincerity ideologies.

⁶³ For critiques of speech act theorists on these grounds from an anthropological perspective see Michelle Z. Rosaldo “The Things We Do with Words: Ilongot Speech Acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy” *Language in Society* 11, no. 2 (August 1982); Alessandro Duranti *The Anthropology of Intentions: Language in a World of Others*, 11-26.

⁶⁴ Boris Groys, *Under Suspicion: A Phenomenology of Media*, 50-51.

advertising, and virtuality, which can stimulate sincerity responses even without having a clear human “author” behind them.

Groys’ provocative definition adds another pole to the debate over sincerity’s locus and practice – if sincerity does not inhere in the soul, the secular private self, nor is it legible to its articulator, where and how does it take place? The editors of the influential collection *The Rhetoric of Sincerity* (2008) claim that sincerity “is an indispensable *affective* (hence, social) process between subjects.”⁶⁵ In this account, the locus of sincerity is in interaction, but not in words alone, as Searle would have it, rather it is specifically in the exchange of feelings that verbal interaction – accompanied by facial expressions, gestures, physical contact, etc. – entails. This account also treats sincerity as an effect in that it holds that sincerity depends on a second party to be recognized as such, but it focuses on a repertoire of tropes that individuals offer (consciously or subconsciously) as evidence of their sincerity.

The chapters to follow will consider sincerity in literature rather than in social interaction. Fiction often fundamentally implicates sincerity. This is because, in works in which we get access to characters’ internal monologue, epistemic privacy is less of a factor than it is in the real world. The fact that this is a convention of fiction means it may sink into the background and go unrecognized for many readers, but fiction aficionados might be said to be seeking unmediated access to another’s thoughts in some measure. Authorial sincerity in fiction diverges from that of fictional characters and that of real-world speakers in social scenarios for two salient reasons: the fact that printed words exist at a temporal and physical remove from the author and that these words are presented in the context of fiction. Poetry represents a somewhat different dynamic (to be theorized in Chapter 2), but fictional prose, unlike everyday communication, is generally

⁶⁵ Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal, introduction to *The Rhetoric of Sincerity* eds. Ernst van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel Smith (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5.

understood to not reflect the author's immediate mental and emotional state. One might be tempted to say that in fiction sincerity is purely verbal, reliant on words alone for its effect. While it is true that the author cannot present the same array of non-verbal cues that exist in the face-to-face interaction, the communicative act of writing and reading folds into it many of the qualities of sincerity discussed above, including affect.

One notable English-language full-length study of sincerity with a focus on Russian fiction is Ellen Rutten's *Sincerity After Communism: A Cultural History*, which will help elucidate what studying sincerity in literature might entail. Rutten proposes to trace "sincerity talk," or the "trend" of sincerity, rather than providing an "exhaustive theoretical definition" of the term, since "such comprehensive descriptions" may not exist.⁶⁶ Rutten's determination to trace sincerity wherever she finds it and the lack of a more general definition of sincerity (she poses postmodernism or postmodernist irony as sincerity's opposite in large part) forces her analysis to take professions of sincerity at face value. This problem is compounded by the fact that Rutten's analysis focuses almost entirely on author interviews and public statements – rather than their writing – from literary chameleons like the poet Dmitri Prigov and the writer Vladimir Sorokin. While her chapter about Sorokin is largely devoted to critics' speculation about Sorokin's intentions in penning the *Led (Ice)* trilogy, she nevertheless concludes that Prigov's double-voiced plea for a New Sincerity inspired Sorokin to "give his readers precisely that which they later found in the *Trilogy*: tenderness, ideals, and direct access to the author's worldview."⁶⁷ This conclusion is based wholly on Sorokin's public self-presentation during this period, which sees him more engaged with sincerity rhetoric than in the past.⁶⁸ Rutten is correct that a motif of

⁶⁶ Ellen Rutten, *Sincerity After Communism: A Cultural History*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

Ice is “direct, unmediated expression”⁶⁹ – in the novel, a cult of otherworldly beings who are able to literally communicate with their hearts find out if the human form conceals beings like themselves by hammering their hearts, either until the victim’s heart speaks or until they die.⁷⁰ In other words, *Ice* is a *dystopia* of sincerity. Though it may seem perilous to define sincerity, we do have to account for its functioning, whether in the text or in the real world, otherwise we will be left, as is the case with Rutten’s chapter on Sorokin, to speculate about whether an author “really believes” what he says and writes or if he is “just” marketing himself. Even if this mode is termed “cultural history” rather than literary analysis, the writing of an author must comprise part of that culture and their writing must be taken as the jumping off point for discussions about the author’s sincerity.

What is clear from Rutten’s survey is that some authors cultivate and convey personas that bespeak sincerity, and may do so for a variety of reasons. If the writer is sufficiently well-known, this sincere posture will often include a public dimension whereby the writer displays qualities that informed readers might see as being affirmed or contradicted by their work.⁷¹ Stuart H. Goldberg writes (of poetry) that the sincere voice is “firstly a human voice, a voice which somehow manages by its inflections to imply a thinking and speaking subject constituted outside the frame of literature.”⁷² While in fiction the vocal inflections Goldberg discusses belong to a narrator or character, authors of fiction may also imply a subject outside the literary frame even if they themselves are not publicly known. James Phelan suggests that the implied author and narrator engage in narrative rhetoric – telling a particular story to a particular

⁶⁹ Ibid., 130.

⁷⁰ Vladimir Sorokin, *Led: roman* (Moskva: Ad Marginem, 2002).

⁷¹ Boris Tomashevsky, “Literature and Biography” in *Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries* eds. Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter 2017).

⁷² Stuart H. Goldberg, “The Poetic Device and the Problem of Sincerity in Gavrila Derzhavin's Verse,” 224.

audience in a particular context to some end.⁷³ With other narratologists,⁷⁴ he therefore characterizes narrative as a communication – no matter how elliptical – between author and reader.

The capacity for the author to speak to the reader, to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and values, also allows for them to influence readers' perception of the author, including their perception of him or her as potentially sincere. In her innovative essay "The 'I' of the Beholder: Equivocal Attachments and the Limits of Structuralist Narratology," Susan S.

Lanser asks:

against the claims of imaginative literature to be purely imaginative, the ontological status of literary speech acts as fictions, and the efforts of narrative theorists to enforce boundaries between fiction and "reality," under what circumstances might readers nonetheless attach a speaking voice within a literary text to the (presumptive) author of that text? What textual signals might lead us to take a formally fictional voice for the author's against our instructions to do otherwise?⁷⁵

Lanser identifies five factors that might cause readers to identify a fictional voice with that of the author in homodiegetic fiction (stories in which the narrator is also the protagonist), but several of these categories could also be applied to third person, heterodiegetic narration. Of the five factors⁷⁶ Lanser identifies, reliability (the "determination that the narrator's values and perceptions are consistent with...the values and perceptions the reader believes the author holds"⁷⁷) and nonnarrativity ("The farther a homodiegetic narrator wanders from the demands or details of story, I speculate, the more likely that voice is to get authorially attached"⁷⁸), can be

⁷³ James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁵ Susan Lanser, "The 'I' of the Beholder: Equivocal Attachments and the Limits of Structuralist Narratology" in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz (Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 211.

⁷⁶ They are singularity, anonymity, identity, reliability, and nonnarrativity.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

seen, I would argue, in most fiction. Concerning “reliability” – it is not unusual for readers to identify a character with an author’s views – let us recall that Bakhtin saw Dostoevsky’s polyphony as an exceptional innovation, not the rule – especially when we sense a didactic element to the storytelling. Readers’ – especially informed readers’ – inference of “reliability” may be quite flexible. In Andrei Bitov’s *Pushkin House*, the metafictional author reasons that if, in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy had made Levin a writer by profession everyone would have immediately known that he was Tolstoy himself – implying that Levin’s status as a landowner makes for a transparent disguise for Tolstoy himself anyway. To continue with the example of *Anna Karenina*, nonnarrativity – Levin’s thinking rather than his actions – allows us to connect him with Tolstoy. The fact that the novel closes with Levin’s thoughts may draw readers’ attention to their privileged place in the “hierarchy of importance” structured by the novel.⁷⁹

There is a latent affective component to Lanser’s idea of authorial attachment as well. Geir Farnen suggests that there is a phatic function in fiction as well as in language – a way of evoking the feeling of contact with the author in the reader. Sincerity, he holds, is part of the phatic function – sincerity concerns the personality that the reader intuits from the text and that voice’s a “wish to confide in the reader,”⁸⁰ indeed, Farnen goes so far as to say that this feeling of contact is a way of making the reader feel less alone in the world.⁸¹ Though we should remain cognizant of sincerity’s status as rhetoric or device, explication of the phatic function in literature returns us to the affective valence of Russian “*iskrennost*” as “close,” “intimate,” in addition to entailing self-expression.

⁷⁹ Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 44.

⁸⁰ Geir Farnen, *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), 322-3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

There are a multitude of genres, personas, and devices that might be used to produce the effect of sincerity in a reader. These may evoke either a sense that the author him- or herself is being sincere, confiding something about themselves (especially when combined with an extra-textual posture of sincerity), or a sense that certain ideas and feelings are reflective of the author's own – or both. Further, one of these ideas or feelings may be a conception of sincerity itself. That is, in works that thematize sincerity, we may attribute one or another view of sincerity to the author. To be sure, this process of attribution is fraught, and the reader's understanding of "how one is supposed to read" a given work may be terribly flawed. Alternately, the point of deploying these sincerity devices and presenting the qualities that Lanser identifies may be to confound the reader as to the author's "true" position and to obfuscate their identity. In these cases, we would maintain that such strategies of sincerity must still exist, otherwise they could not be exploited and toyed with by a self-conscious writer.

While authorial sincerity can be perceived in non-diegetic as well as diegetic works, sincerity may also be simply a thematic focus of a work or quality of a character. A number of intersecting notions could be explored in connection with the depiction of sincerity, but this dissertation will focus on how the fundamental functioning of sincerity rhetoric, which we take to be interrelated with broader beliefs about language, cultural values, and social practices, is depicted in fiction and enacted in poetry. We will document a shift in the perception of sincerity as a highly desirable value and essentialist notion to an awareness of sincerity as a discourse or rhetoric, which is subject to arbitrary linguistic signs as much as inner states. This shift corresponds to the disillusionment that followed the Thaw after the broad socio-political change with which sincerity was associated failed to materialize. Alexei Yurchak has identified a similar shift – from a constative to a performative understanding of language – in official discourse in

this period. Yurchak dates this turning point to Stalin's death in 1953,⁸² however, our analysis of official literature of this period reveals a widespread suspicion of purely performative official discourse (itself often associated with Stalinism) and an attendant search for means of injecting sincerity into official language and literature. Tracking sincerity during the Thaw enables us to better describe the turn toward authoritative discourse as a gradual process that existed in tension with an attempt to reinvigorate the constative dimension, or truth-value, of official discourse – a complex process that constitutes the main plotline of this dissertation. Reconfiguring Yurchak's timeline according to a late and post-Thaw shift toward an awareness of the rhetoric behind sincerity aligns his theory of authoritative discourse with the literary examples he offers, which come from the late Soviet period, and places underground literature of the '70s and '80s' experimentation with combining irony and sincerity in continuity with the developments of the prior decades.

The official literature of the Thaw offers an intriguing test case for sincerity rhetoric because the Thaw was a period when party leadership renewed the drive for social collectivization without recourse to Stalinist coercive power,⁸³ leaving a greater role for persuasion as a means of mobilizing the public. Part of the Khrushchev leadership's attempt to persuade constituents of its legitimacy and desirability was by "credibly" demonstrating "the 'openness' of its new politics by relaxing restrictions in the region of culture."⁸⁴ While unfettered openness or sincerity was innately dangerous to the regime, the appearance of sincerity in literature – which in many cases signaled its popular appeal – could help create an image of the

⁸² Alexei Yurchak *Everything was Forever, until it was no More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 19-25.

⁸³ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 279-80.

⁸⁴ Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs. "Soviet Russia" in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, eds. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 99.

new regime's openness while simultaneously fulfilling readers' expectations of appealing high culture.⁸⁵ It is telling that sincerity rhetoric in the official literature of the early Thaw often evoked the private realms of thoughts, feelings, and experience⁸⁶ that had been covered over in late Stalinist Socialist Realism.⁸⁷ For the Khrushchev leadership, the utility of this particular form of sincerity rhetoric was that it exemplified the regime's signal popular reform: the rolling back of control over citizens' private lives.⁸⁸ If party and state officials under Stalin "refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of spheres of the private and set about attempting to colonize or eliminate them,"⁸⁹ then the sincere official literature of the Thaw ushered the private world back into the public sphere. Of course, censorship prevented writers from conveying their candid opinions, feelings, and private lives. As such, while writers could evoke these private contexts, in terms of content much presumably remained unsaid, and writers were therefore heavily reliant on form and affect to signify sincerity. This is not to say that sincerity was conceptualized by the Khrushchev leadership or by individual writers as purely a matter of rhetoric – sincerity remained an essential Soviet value, and a widely shared value across ideologies, in the early Thaw. However, whatever hope or pretense of maintaining the Stalinist ideal of sincerity as the transparency of intentions, which was intimately tied to Stalinist repression, disappeared with the new regime. Instead, a more humane, but still unrealistic, vision depicting the individual as a

⁸⁵ In this sense, high culture was analogous to Gleb Tsipursky's account of popular culture post-Stalin in Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945-1970* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

⁸⁶ The widespread evocation of this private inner space in official literature of this period is amply illustrated by the appropriation of the diary as a fictional form. See Anatoly Pinsky, "The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014).

⁸⁷ Eleonory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov, "The Thaw as an Event in Russian History" in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Eleonory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov, (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 50.

⁸⁸ Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs. "Soviet Russia" in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, eds. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

⁸⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, introduction to *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 14.

Romantic subject sincerely motivated to join a Soviet collective that appealed to one's "real desires" became widespread in the official literature of the Thaw.⁹⁰

The above account is meant to explain the tolerance of previously precluded forms like lyric poetry and the influence of journals like *Novyi mir*⁹¹ and *Iunost'* as part of a mutually beneficial relationship between the Khrushchev leadership and the liberal intelligentsia. There was a great diversity of viewpoints and approaches to sincerity among and within these groups of intellectuals, many of whom proved to themselves be agentic in setting the agenda for the discussion of sincerity. The diversity would be even greater if unofficial literature were included in this survey. However, for those writers who wanted to reach a mass audience during the Thaw, the great challenge of sincerity rhetoric was trying to "speak through" the medium of official literature, to navigate censorship from above and overcome suspicions of insincerity from readers.

Each of the following chapters trace the evolution of a given sincerity rhetoric from the early Thaw to approximately 1970. The essentialist Soviet sincerity (the utopian version of sincerity as a feature of being an individual fused with the collective) can be found in Soviet reformers ranging from Valentin Ovechkin to Evgenii Evtushenko, who attempted to broaden the appeal of Soviet sincerity by expanding the role of individual self-expression in service of collectivism. However, with the change of regimes and dashed hopes of the Thaw, Soviet sincerity rhetoric itself finally lost its currency entirely, leading to an awareness of official discourse as performative and the perception of loyalists like Evtushenko as poetic parrots of that

⁹⁰ Anatoly Pinsky, "The Origins of Post-Stalin Individuality: Aleksandr Tvardovskii and the Evolution of 1930s Soviet Romanticism," *The Russian Review* 76, no. 3 (July 2017).

⁹¹ Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin, "Literary Criticism during the Thaw," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 2011), 191.

discourse. At the same time as Evtushenko and Ovechkin were trying to reinvigorate Soviet sincerity, an alternative collective, that of the Russian ethnic nationalist, emerged touting continuity with tradition and rural *byt* as the true source of individual and social harmony for its members. While Russian nationalists for the most part maintained the illusion of the essential sincerity of this identity, the constructed nature of this identity and its expression contradicted that self-image. Sincerity became entirely de-essentialized in the postmodernist fiction that had its roots in the Youth Prose movement – a development which progressed into a performative mode that acknowledged, *avant la lettre*, the rhetoric behind sincerity practiced by urban art groups in the late Soviet period. The performative shift in sincerity rhetoric problematized sincerity but it did not necessarily spell the end of sincerity as an ideal amongst the intelligentsia, instead it channeled the sense of self-separation inherent in sincerity into an almost unrecognizable form that incorporated sincerity's opposite – ironic distance.

The first chapter considers the impact of Vladimir Pomerantsev's article "Ob iskrennosti v literature" ("On Sincerity in Literature") and the push for sincerity in rural Soviet literature. Pomerantsev's article helped open the floodgates on public discussion of sincerity, though he himself limited the conversation to considering what authorial and narrative qualities might best give the impression of a return to realism in Soviet literature. The sketch provided the formal means for the writer Valentin Ovechkin to attempt to reassure a skeptical readership of Soviet literature's interest in the truth. Ovechkin's hybrid sketches of the collective farm mixed journalistic detail with narrative fiction's concern for characters' interiority in order to bolster his arguments for a putting greater responsibility in the hands of citizens as part of widespread agricultural and bureaucratic reform. The diaristic form was taken up by early representatives of what would come to be known as the *derevenshchiki* (Village Prose writers), such as Efim

Dorosh and Vladimir Soloukhin, who turned Ovechkin's sketch into a diary – a first-person narrative of return to one's native village that appropriated the Socialist Realist metanarrative of the journey from spontaneity to consciousness for the purpose of depicting an awakening of a Russian nationalist spirit. Mature Village Prose became a search for the sincere voice of the Russian peasant after decades of displacement and denaturing under the Soviet regime. The *skaz* that Vasilii Belov developed and the folk style of the heroes of Boris Mozhaev's "Zhivoi" ("Alive") and Solzhenitsyn's "Matrenin dvor" ("Matryona's Homestead") were literary stylizations that pointed to a language more "one's own" through which peasants might express themselves more sincerely. The project of mature Village Prose was overshadowed in the public eye by the tremendous success of Vasilii Shukshin, whose stories and films explored a peasant rootlessness and a longing for sincerity that was no longer accessible in its exalted form.

The second chapter examines the career of Evgenii Evtushenko in the context of the Soviet Romantic subject that came of age during the Thaw. Studies of late Stalinism have revealed an inward-looking tendency and expanded individual responsibility were attributed to the ideal Soviet subject in the late Stalinist period. This trend coincided with a push for the sanctioning of lyric poetry in the late 1930s, which contained the roots – particularly a defense of self-expression – of the revival of the form in the 1950s. Evtushenko helped expand Stalinist Romanticism – which encouraged individuality only insofar as it contributed to collective feats – to include concern for one's private, emotional life. Evtushenko's charming, disarming style and grandiose-yet-affable poetic persona gave the impression of a sincere idealist. Like Ovechkin, Evtushenko imbued Soviet literature with a rhetoric of sincerity. This rhetoric proved effective in mobilizing young people to poetry readings and other events, but Evtushenko's own credibility as an independent voice suffered due to his relationship with the regime and his apparently

sincere beliefs' habitual alignment with the party line. As draconian measures for subversive writers returned in the 1960s, Evtushenko's collaborationism undermined his sincere posture.

The third chapter chronicles the development of Youth Prose – a somewhat heterogeneous mix of writers associated with the literary magazine *Iunost'* (*Youth*), whose stories thematized young men finding their place in Soviet society. As with the Village Prose writers, this group went from reinterpreting Soviet sincerity to forging their own sense of self. The Youth Prose presentation of Soviet sincerity fixated on choosing one's profession as a means of aligning the personality (expressed in work) with the collective. Youth Prose also saw the emergence of unusual literary heroes for Soviet literature – ones full of doubt and distinctively average, unheroic figures. The writers Anatolii Gladilin and Vasilii Aksenov were instrumental in infusing Soviet literature with an unprecedented ironic sensibility via these savvy portrayals of contemporary youth. Airing cynical views about the Soviet system, even if they were ultimately rejected in Youth Prose, raised the prospect of cynicism and irony being more important than idealism and sincerity to contemporary youth. Andrei Bitov, who was initially grouped into Youth Prose, examines the seeming impossibility of sincerity (Soviet or otherwise) in his postmodernist novel *Pushkinskii Dom* (*Pushkin House*). In Bitov's novel, the Romantic irony of Youth Prose, which allowed for greater self-discovery, becomes a postmodern irony that precludes a sincere self.

Chapter 1

Awakening the “Russian Soul”: The *Derevenshchiki* and their Readers

When Vladimir Pomerantsev’s epochal essay “On Sincerity in Literature” (“Ob iskrennosti v literature”) appeared in the pages of the journal *Novyi mir* in 1953, it set in motion a public conversation about sincerity in Soviet literature that continues to this day. Upon its publication, “On Sincerity in Literature” became the “subject of exuberant polemics among thousands of people. They debated it at Komsomol and party meetings, at gatherings of artists and doctors, at research institutes of the Academy of Sciences, and at the Stalin Automobile Plant.”⁹² It is a testament to the post-Stalin resonance of the word “sincerity” that Pomerantsev’s article gained such a widespread and profound response. Beyond Pomerantsev’s antipathy for the so-called “*kolkhoz* novel,”⁹³ which he pilloried for the artificiality of its characters and plots, for “varnishing” (лакировка) reality, the article was not particularly programmatic. He alternately calls sincerity “immediacy” (“непосредственность”) equates it with another amorphous virtue – talent – and ultimately concludes that sincerity is “always very complex,” (“искренность всегда очень сложна”) but the party’s truth is paramount to any subjective measure.⁹⁴ Still, perhaps *because* of its open-ended implications in a society no longer under Stalin’s hegemony, “sincerity”

⁹² Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 51.

⁹³ For more on the *kolkhoz* novel and other *kolkhoz* genres, see Evgeny Dobrenko, “Utopian Naturalism: The Epic Poem of Kolkhoz Happiness,” trans. Alexandra Berlina in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, eds. Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2009).

⁹⁴ Vladimir Pomerantsev, “Ob iskrennosti v literature,” *Novyi mir* no. 12 (1953).

became the watchword that captured what so many had found wanting in Soviet art and in Stalin-era public discourse as a whole.⁹⁵

In the first few paragraphs of “On Sincerity in Literature” Pomerantsev makes the case that writers who attain an intimate air with their readers have proven more persuasive than polemicists, who disguise their argument as fiction. Though at times in the article it seems that he has “honesty” – rather than the subjective honesty of “sincerity” – in mind, Pomerantsev did hold that literature ought to be warm, that sincerity was not the truth itself but what made “truth feel personal, familiar,” and established a bond between writer and reader.⁹⁶ In the article he associates intimate writer-reader relations with form and style:

In the history of literature, artists have striven for confession, not just preaching. The rhetorical novel disappeared because it contradicted the nature of man, who grew bored with lessons and arguments while in school. On the other hand, the epistolary novel enjoyed general success because the personal letter seemed more frank. When the reader began to feel that the letters were composed for him, and not for the addressee, when it degenerated into a widespread device, the epistolary novel lost favor and disappeared.

Но в истории литературы художники стремились к исповеди, а не только к проповеди. Риторический роман исчез потому, что разноречил с естеством человека, которому уроки и доводы наскучивают со школьной скамьи. Наоборот, эпистолярный роман имел всеобщий успех оттого, что частное письмо казалось всего откровеннее. Когда читатель почувствовал, что письма составляются для него, а не для адресатов, когда это выродилось в распространённый приём, - эпистолярный роман потерял спрос и исчез.⁹⁷

Specious generalizations about history and human nature aside, Pomerantsev here identifies a suggestive factor for the perceived sincerity of a work when he notes that the “confessional” mode, the personal letter – styles and forms identified with private emotional life – are a means of signaling to the reader that the contents are candid, personal. In Pomerantsev’s account, the epistolary novel overtook the “rhetorical” one because it appeared more intimate, sincere, but

⁹⁵ Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis claim that sincerity was one of the key words of the era, see Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996), 171.

⁹⁶ Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past*, 63.

⁹⁷ Vladimir Pomerantsev, “Ob iskrennosti v literature.”

when the device became more widespread, the rhetoric behind the epistolary novel was laid bare and it lost its viability as a sincere form. While one need not accept his account of literary evolution, Pomerantsev hints that sincerity might be governed by a kind of defamiliarization⁹⁸ whereby the perceived sincerity of a certain form or device expires once it becomes recognizable. However, defamiliarization, in Shklovskii's conception, entails "the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception,"⁹⁹ whereas forms or devices associated with sincerity must be imperceptible as such, lest they be recognized as "artificial." Stuart H. Goldberg remarks "it is constantly necessary to reinvent sincerity as poetic 'device' — something of a paradox: immediacy must be actively achieved, with the effect not of undermining, but of elevating that rare, tangible immediacy." Purportedly sincere writing strives to elide its rhetoric such that it appears anti-rhetorical, spontaneous, or at least resistant to dominant literary norms.¹⁰⁰ In the example at hand, it must be said that the epistolary novel is also rhetorical in its attempt to persuade the reader that they really are eavesdropping. In the pursuit of seeming sincere, an innovative mode may be more convincing than a well-used form, but it remains just as much of a contrivance as past innovations. The fact that what is accepted as sincere in one era may be rejected as insincere in another illustrates how dependent this cycle is on the cultural currents that underpin "sincere" writing. While Pomerantsev remains invested in an essentialist notion of sincerity as literary confession, he recognizes the role of form in bridging the gap between writer and reader.

"On Sincerity in Literature" was one of many articles in *Novyi mir* concerning the deficiencies of late Stalinist literature to appear in 1953-1954. Rural literature played an outsized

⁹⁸ Viktor Shklovsky, "Art, as Device," trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3, (September 2015): 172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁰⁰ Stuart H. Goldberg, "The Poetic Device and the Problem of Sincerity in Gavril Derzhavin's Verse," 231.

role in this debate. In the early years of the Thaw, the state of agriculture and certain aspects of Stalinism were the two major subjects with limited approval for public discussion.¹⁰¹ *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii published, in addition to Pomerantsev's article, the young rural writer Fedor Abramov's "People of the *Kolkhoz* Village in Post-war Literature" ("Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoennoi literature") in 1954 which inveighed against the late Stalinist novel on the grounds of "varnishing" a year after Pomerantsev's article. Serving as war correspondents and traveling throughout the country as journalists had made writers, including Tvardovskii and rural prose reformer Valentin Ovechkin, profoundly aware of the reality of the situation in the countryside – a fact that made the state of rural writing under Stalin most transparently egregious. While initially approved for publication, articles on this theme by Pomerantsev and Abramov, as well as anti-Stalinist reviews that challenged the orthodoxy of Soviet literary criticism by Vladimir Lifshits and Mark Shcheglov led to the official censure of *Novyi mir* and Tvardovskii's removal from his post (though he would be reinstated in 1958). However, the debates they sparked were at the forefront of the Second Soviet Writers Union Congress in 1954 and their terms suffused the discussion of the positive hero in Soviet literature for the remainder of the Khrushchev era.¹⁰²

Susanne Schattenberg identifies the "democratic" technical specialist as one archetype of the positive hero prevalent during the Thaw and this hero's clash with a dictatorial, dogmatic bureaucrat (a Stalinist holdover) as a common narrative trope of the era.¹⁰³ Daniil Granin's novel *The Seekers (Iskateli)*, 1954) exemplifies this conflict in the sphere of science, pitting an idealistic

¹⁰¹ Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 46.

¹⁰² Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin, "Literary Criticism during the Thaw," 187.

¹⁰³ Susanne Schattenberg, "Democracy' or 'Despotism?': how the Secret Speech was Translated into Everyday Life," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (London: Routledge, 2009), 64.

scientist against a dishonest, cruel bureaucracy. However, a similar narrative emerged in writing about the countryside, where longtime rural chronicler and journalist Valentin Ovechkin inaugurated a new era of rural writing with his focus on the peasantry and reliance on the sketch (*ocherk*) to tell the story of the collective farm. In Ovechkin's rural version of the bureaucrat versus democrat narrative, peasants are the experts in the field who ineffective, unscrupulous collective farm managers denigrate to the detriment of productivity. This was a significant difference given authorities' distrust and harsh treatment of the peasantry throughout Soviet history. In fact, Ovechkin's sketches represented a literary attempt to rehabilitate the peasantry as a class that would be taken up by other rural writers in the years to come with somewhat different results.¹⁰⁴

Given his reintroduction of a neglected genre (the sketch) after the predominance and now discrediting of a previous approach (the bombastic Socialist Realist novel), it is fitting that, in "On Sincerity in Literature," Pomerantsev approvingly cites Valentin Ovechkin's series of sketches *District Routine* (*Raionnye budni*) – which were published in *Novyi mir* between 1952 and 1956 – as an example of sincerity in rural writing. Kathleen Parthé writes that so-called "Village Prose" (*Derevenskaia proza*) – the movement that she argues Ovechkin founded – and especially early Village Prose writers (*derevenshchiki*) consciously rejected the novel (the preferred form for Socialist Realist literature) in favor of sketches and short stories.¹⁰⁵ The sketch allowed Ovechkin to imitate a journalist's form and documentary style, to chronicle the everyday lives of everyday people and, according to Parthé, "to begin the process of returning rural

¹⁰⁴ Anna Razuvalova, *Pisateli- "derevenshchiki": literatura i konservativnaia ideologiya 1970-kh godov* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 40.

¹⁰⁵ Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radian Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.

literature to real life.”¹⁰⁶ That is, the form and subject matter were suited to giving the impression that rural literature was returning to real life.

The perceived realism of Ovechkin’s form and style contributed to the impression of the author’s sincerity – it bolstered the perception of the implied author as a sincere believer in Communism. Anatoly Pinsky has termed the stance exhibited by Ovechkin, among others, as a post-Stalin epistemic shift, endorsed by reform-minded elements in politics and culture, toward “a focus on facts rather than narrative” – i.e. the kinds of narratives that would excuse or “lacquer” the shortcomings and mistakes of reality – which he terms the “empirical imperative.”¹⁰⁷ This shift recognizes the growing authority invested in the individual and the attendant encouragement of individuals to speak out in service of the Soviet cause. The sketches’ protagonist, the *kolkhoz* secretary Petr Illarionovich Martynov, elicits emotion-laden self-expressions, not merely empirical observation, from his constituents and colleagues.¹⁰⁸ In *District Routine*, Ovechkin points to the need for a renewal of the emotional regime on the *kolkhoz* as well as the epistemic order. William Reddy describes an emotional regime as the “normative order for emotions” which exists in any enduring political regime. A strict emotional regime requires “individuals to express normative emotions and to avoid deviant emotions. In these regimes, a limited number of emotives¹⁰⁹ are modeled through ceremony or official art forms.”¹¹⁰ Ovechkin does not seek to entirely reshape the Soviet emotional regime – his positive hero remains a model of enthusiasm, while disaffection and despondency remain the emotional

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰⁷ Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 808.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 809.

¹⁰⁹ Reddy’s term for a type of speech act that differs from both performative and constative utterances, which both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world, because emotional expression has an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion. See William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, 128.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 124-6.

enemies of the ideal Soviet citizen¹¹¹ – rather, Martynov serves as a new model of enthusiasm. For Martynov, who suggests that party workers, like writers, ought to be considered “engineers of the human soul” (“инженеры человеческих душ”)¹¹² modeling and encouraging sincere self-expression serves the function of bringing “deviant” emotions out into the open to be corrected. In this regard, the objective of Martynov’s new openness is similar to that of Pomerantsev’s anti-varnishing stance – to face difficult truths and confront, rather than conceal them. Through Martynov, Ovechkin makes clear that the battle against “formalism” (*formalizm*) – a word Martynov uses to describe dogmatic linguistic, literary, interpersonal, and institutional stultification¹¹³ – requires inner change to take place within the individual to go forward. In other words, returning to Martynov’s conflation of literary theory and socio-political mobilization, engineering social and political reform is dependent on engineering a sincere Soviet soul.

When Martynov claims that kolkhoz secretaries can be engineers of the human soul, his interlocutor,¹¹⁴ and perhaps the reader, treats the phrase with some levity – however, matters of the soul are not taken lightly in *District Routine*. Igal Halfin has shown that, despite its scientific pretenses, Soviet communism was suffused with ethical considerations that implicated the moral condition of the soul. Late Stalinist dogma held individuals solely, and, for the most part, irredeemably responsible for their ideological shortcomings.¹¹⁵ Anticipating and then echoing the reforms of the Thaw, Ovechkin presents open discussion, debate, even confession, as tools for re-engineering the wayward souls amongst the *kolkhoz* brigades and bureaucrats that Martynov encounters. However, the fact that Martynov is unable to successfully apply these measures to

¹¹¹ Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*, 20.

¹¹² Valentin Ovechkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989-1990), 2:88.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 2:122.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:88.

¹¹⁵ Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*, 1, 256.

many bureaucrats seems to reaffirm the position that certain souls are fundamentally damned to anti-communist behavior. Ironically, it is the Stalinist officials who are irredeemable in Ovechkin's depiction.

The first installment of *District Routine*, "Borzov and Martynov" ("*Borzov i Martynov*") establishes the moral and spiritual undertones of kolkhoz management. Martynov, who has recently been named second regional committee secretary seeks out the chairman of the most successful kolkhoz in the region, Dem'ian Vasil'evich Openkin, described as a "soulful communist" ("душевный коммунист")¹¹⁶ for advice. Martynov complains that his superior, the first secretary Borzov, cannot tolerate Martynov speaking his mind: they clash immediately over a telegram that Borzov dictates to machine-tractor station directors blaming criminal elements for his lagging farm's sorry state. Martynov offers a moral and stylistic objection to the message asking Borzov if he sent the telegram to "cleansing his conscience" ("очистить совесть") and sarcastically noting that the message was so formulaic that someday a whole collection of variations on this theme could be published.¹¹⁷ Already, Ovechkin has tied effective *kolkhoz* management to somewhat unexpected traits – Openkin's soulfulness and openness – and depicted signs of poor management as related to cliché and insincerity, conveying that Borzov's "confession" is not a true confession at all, but a form letter. In response, Borzov witheringly invites Martynov to write something "more original" ("пооригинальнее") before "wholeheartedly" ("от души") advising Martynov to ask to be reassigned since they evidently cannot work together. In concluding that he and Martynov have irreconcilable differences, Borzov seeks to preclude the possibility of further debate. He also employs a figure of sincerity rhetoric – claiming to speak "from his soul." The suggestion that this proposal comes "from his

¹¹⁶ Ovechkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 2:12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:18-19.

soul” indicates that Borzov is fundamentally (sincerely) not amenable to debate, and therefore change. Martynov, like Openkin, finds open discussion to be a virtue – if only as the arena in which “true” intentions and natures can be expressed – and instead invites Borzov to lunch (Borzov declines), reasoning “in a healthy body is a healthy spirit” (“в здоровом теле здоровый дух.”)¹¹⁸ The health of the soul as a measure of the health of the body politic emerges as a principle preoccupation in the first sketch in Ovechkin’s series and so too does the discourse of sincerity, which permeates mentions of the soul, conscience, and the practice of confession.

Where Martynov sees Borzov’s missive to the machine tractor station as an insincere, failed attempt at expiating his sins, his encounters with the peasants who work on the *kolkhoz* reveal that they have a greater capacity for sincerity. Though they are not yet sincere enthusiasts – in the sense of being true believers in communism and the Soviet cause – the peasants are at least capable of telling the truth about their motives. In “On the Front Line” (“На переднем крае,” 1953), when Martynov finds two workers idling on a tractor, he discovers that they are willing to tell him honestly that their tractor has broken down and that they are not motivated to get it fixed because they are not paid according to productivity.¹¹⁹ Martynov takes this admission into consideration with an “unsettled soul” (“беспокойная душа”) and counsels them that a conscience is required of all workers, but elsewhere reflects that the system of pay should be reformed, that conscience is not enough. Here Martynov is pictured plotting his reengineering of the peasant. He points to the necessity of honesty, which the peasants already display by avoiding the “formalism” of Borzov’s letter, in which he places the blame elsewhere a faith in the system that would come with practical reforms as the necessary conditions for sincere belief.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2:20.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2:38.

For Martynov himself, sincerity is not only faith in the righteousness of communist striving and pride in one's own labor – it is a public-facing, linguistic expression of this singlemindedness. This public airing of thoughts and feelings is far from self-expression for the sake of self-expression, rather, Martynov holds, since party workers use language itself as a tool, self-expression is a kind of labor.¹²⁰ Speaking in the empty language of officialdom represents a dereliction of duty to Martynov, which Ovechkin juxtaposes with the openness which his peasant constituents have in common with Martynov. In the third sketch, “In the Same Region” (“V tom zhe raione,” 1954), having replaced Borzov as first secretary, Martynov angrily denounces the officials at a committee meeting who, like Borzov, merely reproduce party slogans while defending a less educated, plain-speaking secretary.¹²¹ Prior to this meeting, Ovechkin depicts Martynov in his office receiving visitors from the local farms and hearing their concerns. The parallel between Martynov's role and that of a country priest is drawn with a story an old woman from the planting team tells him about her late husband, who was hanged during the civil war when someone confessed to a priest about his underground activity and the priest reported them to the Whites.¹²² This piece of personal history puts the practice of punishing confession in the hands of the enemies of the Bolsheviks – an allusion to and critique of the use of the same techniques by the party under Stalin.

At the meeting, Martynov's role model, secretary Openkin, decides to read directly from his personal diary after the formulaic speeches of the other secretaries. According to Openkin, his diary is merely a record of fact, a log of what he did and where he was each day¹²³ rather than a means of self-investigation. Indeed, the kind of confession Openkin imagines in connection

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2:87-8.

¹²¹ Ibid., 2:110.

¹²² Ibid., 2:74-5.

¹²³ Ibid., 2:112.

with his diary is a judicial one: “If someday...they drag me to the prosecutor's office – this is my justification. The prosecutor will read it, understand, and sympathize” (“Ежели меня когда-нибудь...потянут к прокуру – это мое оправдание. Прокурор прочитает, поймёт и посочувствует.”)¹²⁴ Pinsky notes that, despite its entirely empirical nature, the personal touch of the diaristic form inspires ten other speakers to support Openkin’s conclusions on the superfluity of the many committee meetings and speeches.¹²⁵ Openkin seems to suggest that the impression of intimate disclosure that the form conveys is powerful enough to convince even the most negatively predisposed reader (i.e. a prosecutor) of the author’s sincerity. In this iteration, diary-keeping serves the purpose of being a record of clean conscience for the individual (and evidence of the same for authorities) rather than a tool for self-transformation. Openkin’s reading of his diary and its positive reception reinforces the argument – which Ovechkin’s sketches themselves exemplify – that a fact-based narrative is a more persuasive tool (or sincerity rhetoric) than the parroting of the clichés of official discourse.

In the following sketch, “A Difficult Spring” (“Trudnaia vesna,” 1956), Martynov follows Openkin’s example, writing his own diary during a long hospital stay following a car accident. Martynov’s diary is far more speculative than Openkin’s (justified by his confinement to a hospital bed) and engages a wide range of topics, many familiar to readers of the series, including agricultural management, bureaucracy, writing, Leninism, but also Herzen and Nekrasov, among other cultural and political matters. These observations border on the metafictional when Martynov theorizes on literary matters: “If writers are engineers of the human soul then up to what rank? Do their rights extend to the souls of big shots?” (Если писатели – инженеры члвеческикх душ, то до какого ранга? Распространяются их права

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2:111.

¹²⁵ Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev,” 820.

на души больших начальников?”)¹²⁶ The diary, inserted into the narrative, represents the point of greatest overlap between author and hero. Susan Lanser writes that “non-narrative” elements – elements of a story that do not advance the plot or appear to exist outside of narrative time – are liable to be attached to an authorial voice, rather than that of a narrator, by the reader.¹²⁷ By the time of the diary inlay in this sketch, the reader is predisposed to see Ovechkin in Martynov: we learn in the first sketch that Martynov is actually a failed writer, an author of a minor sketch himself who left journalistic work to become a kolkhoz secretary.¹²⁸ If the reader knows nothing else of Ovechkin, they know he is the author of the present sketch. Further, as a Soviet biographer admits, where elsewhere Ovechkin channels his own distinctive breadth of knowledge through his characters, with Martynov’s diary we get Ovechkin’s thoughts in their “pure form.”¹²⁹ Though one may disagree that a fictional frame leaves any writer’s thoughts “unfiltered,” the impression that one is getting direct access to Ovechkin’s thoughts bolsters the illusion of intimacy between writer and reader.

Authorial self-presentation as sincere relies on the ability of the author to constitute a figure outside the frame of literature to whom the reader attributes sincerity. In *District Routine* there are fleeting glimpses of a narrator who fits Ovechkin’s profile. We first encounter him at the end of the first sketch, where he writes “For now this sketch has no continuation, since it is written almost from nature. It may even grow into a novella but this requires events to develop in life. I meet these kinds of people, hear arguments like those of Martynov and Borzov in one

¹²⁶ Valentin Ovechkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 2:291.

¹²⁷ Lanser gives the following example: “As I read *The Human Stain*, I know that Nathan Zuckerman is not Philip Roth. I do not assume that Roth has prostate cancer just because Zuckerman does. . . . But when Zuckerman the narrator writes a several-line paean to male friendship, I do attach that paean to Philip Roth.” Lanser does not argue that these words *ought* properly be attributed to Roth, but that readers are liable to see them as such since they have real-world application. See Susan Lanser, “The ‘I’ of the Beholder: Equivocal Attachments and the Limits of Structuralist Narratology,” 216.

¹²⁸ Valentin Ovechkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 2:23.

¹²⁹ Lilia Vil’chek, *Valentin Ovechkin: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1977), 122-3.

district” (“Очерку нет пока продолжения, так как пишется он почты с натуры. Он, может быть, вырастет и в повесть, но для этого необходимо развитие событий в жизни. Я встречаю таких людей, слышу такие споры, как у Мартынов с Борзовым, в одном районе.”)¹³⁰ Ovechkin’s narrator enters the sketch and announces that he has indeed written it “almost from nature,” i.e. based on his on-the-scene reporting and impressions. He thereby affirms the sketch’s basis in personal experience while also admitting that the characters are, of course, composites, not the actual secretaries of a certain district committee. However, this fictional element potentially strengthens the bond between writer and reader – to accept Ovechkin’s account is to find it sincere rather than strictly factual. Ovechkin’s balancing of fictional and non-fictional aspects allows him to have it both ways: to present his narrator’s observations as reportorial documentation yet intervening to reveal the private thoughts of a character, which violates the non-fictional frame. Whether by design or coincidence, *District Routine* does, in fact, turn into more of a traditional piece of fiction. The narrator only appears once more, in the third sketch, and by the time of the fourth sketch, when Martynov writes his diary, the figure of the author has begun to merge more decisively with that of Martynov.

Returning to the question Martynov poses in his diary: in the final scene of *District Routine* the matter of writers’ and party workers’ ability to engineer the souls of officials comes to the fore for both Martynov and Ovechkin. When Martynov recovers, he goes to the regional committee office to ask that his temporary replacement – a Stalinist-style bureaucrat who has been terrorizing the farm officials – be removed. However, Martynov proves his sincere commitment to the Soviet cause by performing the ultimate sacrifice in the battle against the cult of personality: he asks that he himself be removed from his position as first secretary, citing his

¹³⁰ Ibid., 33.

failure to properly cultivate his underling's soul.¹³¹ Martynov affirms the eternal need for self-criticism and criticism from below, affirming that people in a position of power deserve critique, and not only the obviously corrupt, but seemingly ideal heroes like Martynov as well. This is also an argument for the ongoing role of sincere self-examination and self-expression in bureaucracy and society writ large. Ovechkin's depiction of characters like Borzov that are fundamentally negative and incapable of reform suggests that engineers of human souls (which, Martynov claims, includes officials like himself) cannot re-engineer everyone into positive heroes. This is reinforced when Martynov happens to run into Borzov at the regional office and finds that he no longer holds a personal grudge against Martynov but otherwise remains cynical about his work. Of course, Martynov's failure to reform recalcitrant souls and Ovechkin's unwillingness to shy away from depicting them is part of an argument against "varnishing": Martynov hands over his diary to his superior as a summary of his tenure on the *kolkhoz*, reflecting his superior was probably hoping for another *Cavalier of the Golden Star* (*Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy*),¹³² one of the late Stalinist *kolkhoz* novels that Pomerantsev railed against in "On Sincerity in Literature."

In *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, drawing on the linguist John Austin's theory of speech acts, the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak describes a post-Stalin shift in Soviet official discourse from the constative dimension of language (the concern for the truth-value of signifiers) to an emphasis on language's performative dimension in official settings and an attendant understanding of official discourse as standardized, formalistic and citational. In Yurchak's account, this shift is concurrent with Stalin's death because Stalin was the "master" external editor of the metalanguage of ideology. In the absence of such an

¹³¹ Valentin Ovechkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, 2:343.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2:342.

editor of ideological metalanguage, official discourse became “authoritative discourse,” a Bakhtinian notion that describes an autonomous, self-sufficient discourse that cannot be changed, only performed in speech acts or quoted.¹³³ However, Ovechkin’s sketches suggest that performativity was not only a feature of official discourse under Stalin, he identifies it as one of the main enemies in the fight against “lacquering” and connects it with a lack of enthusiasm inappropriate for party officials. At the meeting in which Openkin reads from his diary, the other officials are engaged in the clichés and formulas of authoritative discourse, while Openkin, with his record-keeping, is eminently concerned with language’s truth-value, its correspondence to empirical fact. Likewise, in the first sketch, when Borzov sends a telegram dishonestly blaming criminals for sabotaging the harvest, Ovechkin juxtaposes sincere confession, which, as something tied to the individual soul is necessarily “more original” (in Martynov’s words) than the tropes of official discourse, with Stalinist officials’ standard repertoire. Moreover, while he relates the abuse of language by officials like Borzov to other abuses associated with Stalin, Ovechkin also suggests that there is an ever-present struggle between purely performative and sincere approaches to governance by identifying the conscientious Openkin as the longest-serving *kolkhoz* secretary.

While Yurchak’s recognition of performativity as the category to which the language used in official settings belongs is useful as a general framework and in describing later developments in literary sincerity rhetoric, the early Thaw saw a revitalization of an essentialist view of sincerity emerge as a reaction against the idealized master narratives of late Stalinist literature described by Pomerantsev. This essentialist sincerity was part of an attempt to reinsert the human element into literature. “On Sincerity in Literature” best expressed the hope that new

¹³³ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 37.

forms, ones that expressed something of the author's inner self in their originality, could be found. In *District Routine*, Ovechkin attempted to define the parameters of such self-expression, depicting empiricism and an honest disposition as intrinsic to achieving the sincerity and enthusiasm that Martynov exemplified. This basis for inclusion in the collective legitimized Martynov's greater trust in the peasantry, who show a capacity for honesty in *District Routine* and prove to be motivated by Martynov's enthusiasm. Sincerity, therefore, turns out to be both a tool for persuasion and for engineering the soul, underlining the fact that sincerity remains a matter of rhetoric (and backing up those words with deeds) even in essentialist conceptions.

1.1 The "Lyric Turn" in Village Prose

The writers who took up Ovechkin's approach to rural writing also sought a "sincere" alternative to linguistic performativity, but they found that essentialist sincerity in the "Russian soul." For all the realism of his observations, Ovechkin presented an idealized scenario of the peasantry's voluntary participation in the labor that was demanded of them. Just as idealized was the notion that, upon instilling independent-mindedness, conscientiousness, and pride in the peasantry, they would agree to interpret these values in the narrow Soviet definition which Ovechkin offers in *District Routine*. Rural writers like Efim Dorosh, Vladimir Soloukhin, and Aleksandr Iashin began to transform Ovechkin's polemic in favor of investing the peasant with limited agency, based on an argument for their practical utility, into an assertion of the peasant's *innate* dignity, and, ultimately, the moral and spiritual authority of the traditional rural Russian way of life.

The distinction between Ovechkin and his successors has been characterized as a "lyric turn" in Village Prose, which Kathleen Parthé claims entailed the abandonment of the present

problems of the kolkhoz for lyric evocation of the countryside and an idealized village past. Parthé suggests 1956,¹³⁴ the year of Ovechkin's final *District Routine* sketch, as the turning point, but, as will be seen, 1956 hardly marks the end of social critique in Village Prose. Anna Razuvalova instead identifies the 1950s as a period when *derevenshchiki* coalesced around Khrushchev's agricultural reform agenda, before breaking off into a "right-wing critique" that would become the *nepochvennik* cultural and political movement, and a left-wing critique of the Soviet village that continued to be associated with *Novyi mir*.¹³⁵ This framework is more accurate and useful for the discussion of sincerity in Village Prose following Ovechkin. The question for both sides of the debate became "can the Russian peasant speak?" Or, more accurately, how might the peasant speak after decades of dispossession and dislocation that forced them to adapt to Soviet "newspeak"¹³⁶ and, for many, meant abandoning the village for the city. The response to this question was inherently informed by one's politics – the portrayal of the sincere peasant depended on a sense of the character and destiny of the peasantry.

In 1954, at the Second Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union, Valentin Ovechkin presented his case that rural writers ought to disperse throughout the countryside and embed there in order to address the problems in each region and, in this manner, ensure literature's connection to real life.¹³⁷ Efim Dorosh, who began publishing *A Village Diary* (*Derevenskii Dnevnik*) in 1956, and Vladimir Soloukhin, whose *Vladimir Country Roads* (*Vladimirskie Proselki*, 1958) was based on a journey to his home region, heeded Ovechkin's direction to spend time reporting in the countryside. In fact, both Dorosh and Soloukhin went a step further–

¹³⁴ Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radian Past*, 93.

¹³⁵ Anna Razuvalova, *Pisateli- "derevenshchiki": literatura i konservativnaia ideologiya 1970-kh godov*, 11.

¹³⁶ Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language of Soviet Communism*, trans. Ken Connelly (London: The Claridge Press, 1989).

¹³⁷ Lilia Vil'chek, *Valentin Ovechkin: zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 163.

just as Martynov offered his diary to his superior as an honest record of his thoughts and activities on the kolkhoz, the authors presented these works as their own diaries of their reflections on their experience in their respective regions. Exchanging the sketch for the diary – a form for individual confession and self-examination – at once signaled authorial sincerity and marked the thematization of the journey to the countryside itself (mostly absent from Ovechkin’s sketches but inherent in his method), which unfolds day-by-day in the diaristic telling. Though the problems of collective farming were still an important feature of both Dorosh’s and Soloukhin’s work, by framing them with the perspective of an *ocherkist* on a journey (back) to the Russian heartland and a journey of self-discovery, the issues come to seem like oppressive, unnatural impositions on the peasant workers rather than opportunities to prove their worth to the Soviet regime and, hence, as Ovechkin would have it, to themselves.

The diaries that Soloukhin and Dorosh published were neither the entirely practical record of events that Openkin’s diary represented, nor were they the early Soviet self-interrogations described in Jochen Hellbeck’s *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*. Hellbeck writes that, like the Puritan diary, the Soviet diary had a spiritual and propagandistic function as a model tool of self-formation.¹³⁸ Writers’ appropriation of the diaristic form was as much about public self-presentation as self-examination, and, as such, their “diaries” can only recall, play with, and simulate the private diary.¹³⁹ However, by appropriating the diaristic form, both Dorosh and Soloukhin allude to its legacy as a means of transforming the self, which in turn discloses the didactic purpose of their works. What occurs in the course of these diary-travelogues is a journey in place and time that takes advantage of another Soviet

¹³⁸ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*, 44.

¹³⁹ In our opinion, Pinsky takes too broad a view of the diary, which conflates the literary diary intended for publication with the private, personal diaries that Hellbeck describes. See Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev.”

means of forming subjectivity – the journey from spontaneity to consciousness. Patrick Colm Hogan has observed that nationalists “commonly analogize...the development of nationalist ‘consciousness’ as a process of ‘awakening.’”¹⁴⁰ The awakening of the “Russian soul” is also characteristic of Village Prose. Parthé notes that later Village Prose writer Vladimir Lichutin presented the awakening as an awareness of “ancestral memory” (*rodovaia pamiat*): Lichutin recalled being unmoved by his childhood in a cramped izba at first, but eventually his consciousness grew to remind him that he was “not an alienated person, but one whose connections stretch back through the centuries,” a feeling cemented by his travels in the Russian North and by folk culture.¹⁴¹ Whether this resemblance to Soviet culture was intentional or not, many Village Prose writers sought to accomplish through hero identification in the name of Russian ethnic consciousness the task Soviet writers were expected to accomplish for Communism.

Dorosh’s and Soloukhin’s travelogues are important documents of the displacement of the peasantry in the Soviet period, a displacement that these writers evidently felt made it incumbent upon them to rediscover the source of sincerity in the village and folk culture. The natural addressee of the message of ancestral memory was the former or uprooted peasant, who, as part of the mass migration to urban centers in the Soviet,¹⁴² was disconnected from the village. In *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State*, Yitzhak Brudny describes the Village Prose writer’s position vis a vis the average migrant’s:

Although themselves beneficiaries of this migration, the newly urbanized intelligentsia regarded the depopulation of their native villages with horror. They sought a revitalization of village life, not its decay, because the village provided them with a sense of identity and intimacy that no city could. They did not feel at home in the large Westernized cities and saw themselves as the voice not of the millions of workers of peasant origins, but of those unaffected by Westernization—

¹⁴⁰ Patrick Colm Hogan, *Understanding Nationalism: on Narrative, Cognitive science, and Identity* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2009), 142.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radian Past*, 57.

¹⁴² Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, 37-8.

traditional rural Russia and its peasants, which they increasingly identified with the Russian nation. Many cherished the dream of returning to their native village... For most of them, however, the return would be not literal but literary.¹⁴³

By providing this vicarious literary return to a village, *derevenshchiki* kindled the sense of nostalgia for an ideal traditional way of life in the personal and historical past into an identity. We can add to Lichutin's remarks the key fact that Village Prose itself also helped spur a sense of traditionalist consciousness. The narrative of return simultaneously discursively pointed the way back to an authentic self and helped the reader feel connected to a community of likeminded readers with a shared identity, many of whom were also struggling with an unforgiving urban existence under an unwelcome ideological hegemony.

In his foreword to *A Village Diary*, Efim Dorosh presents his own journey from an Ovechkin-like journalist to a self-conscious member of the Russian *narod*. While on a journalistic assignment, Dorosh writes, he “collected material, wrote and published a sketch” (“собрал материал, написал и напечатал очерк”) and imagined he would never return to the distant territory, “as it almost always happens with newspapermen” (“как это почти всегда бывает с газетчиком.”)¹⁴⁴ Dorosh is not himself a native of the fictional region of “Raigorod” (which contains the Russian word for “paradise”), but his diary does mark a return: a few months later, Dorosh finds himself back in the region, no longer on assignment, but “drawn to the shore of the Каово, to Raigorod and its ancient fortress” (“потянуло на берега озера Каово, в Райгород с его старинным кремлем”) as well as to many other settlements, each of them far older than Moscow.¹⁴⁵ Dorosh falls in love with the surrounding nature and history, making his return explicitly a journey of the heart – venturing back to the roots of Russian civilization. Dorosh makes it clear that he now believes these roots to be his own. He goes on to quote an

¹⁴³ Ibid., 41-2.

¹⁴⁴ Efim Dorosh, *Derevenskii dnevnik* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1958), 5-6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

ancient Old Slavonic manuscript about the founding of the fictional locale, which relays that “seeing as the place was very beautiful” (“видевша яко место то зело красно”) the first wave of Slavs decided to settle there.¹⁴⁶ Dorosh follows in the footsteps of these Slavic ancestors both as someone discovering this place and its edifying beauty as though anew, and as a chronicler of the Russian people who, as his reproduction of the Old Slavonic shows, considers these early scribes to be his literary ancestors. Crucially, Dorosh’s rediscovery of his “true” self is not only a return to an “authorizing origin,”¹⁴⁷ it is a revelation about how to be sincere moving forward in life and especially in autobiographical literature, where the modality and virtue of sincerity entails, he suggests, achieving and expressing an alignment with Russian tradition.

Even months before disembarking, Vladimir Soloukhin experiences the irrational pull of his native region. While he has already made up his mind to visit Vladimir, it is only when the “mischievous little thought” (“озорная мыслишка”) ‘Could I go by foot?’” (“А не пойти ли пешком?”) suddenly occurs to him that he becomes enamored of the prospect of returning. Soloukhin relays that for a “Whole week I wandered as though drunk, raving about the dream that had arisen” (“Целую неделю я ходил как пьяный, бредя возникшей мечтой.”)¹⁴⁸ Closing his eyes, Soloukhin sees a trail overgrown with white clover on a steep hill, a stream crossing where he imagines himself drinking ice water from a well, “the bright well water streaming sweetly along the larynx” (“светлая колодезная вода сладко струится по гортани.”)¹⁴⁹ Soloukhin merely imagines his future walking tour of Vladimir oblast’, but this is enough to trigger the sensations he experienced while traveling on foot in the region in the past, presumably

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴⁷ Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes, introduction to *Romanticism, Authenticity, Sincerity*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Alekseevich Soloukhin, *Sobranie sochineniĭ*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983), 1:219.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:219.

in his youth. Soloukhin's enthusiasm for his home takes the form of an emotionally charged memory of an idyllic past life, marked by the pure and purifying sensation of the water. The return to one's childhood self – imagined to be uncorrupted and unified – is an important trope in both Village Prose and sincerity rhetoric. For *derevenshchiki*, childhood was a moment of harmony with nature, the family, and the rhythms of rural life. From the vantage point of a peasant migrant to the city, it represented a lost unity of identity that justified, even necessitated, a figurative return to that time and a figurative or physical return to that place to recover a sense of wholeness. Few Village Prose writers were old enough to remember a pre-Revolution village, and Soloukhin's generation would have grown up in the midst of collectivization, but it has been argued that sincerity is characterized by an “almost childlike fascination with authenticity, with uncovering the ‘uncorrupted’ fount of feeling or the ‘pure’ state of experience.” Childhood may be the closest we can get to a primordial state, “a vision of wholeness...that is lost with the very earliest stages of differentiation.”¹⁵⁰

On the final day of his trip, Soloukhin reflects on a ritual that he claims was practiced by his ancestors on departing their native region and which points to the Sisyphean nature of retaining the essentialist unity of childhood and tradition. He notes that the ancient Slavs would tear a rootstock of grass (*odolen'-trava*) said to have magic properties from the riverbed and carry it with them on their travels. Soloukhin suggests that the Slavs valued the grass less for its magical properties than for the fact that it represented “a little piece of their native land, the embodiment of the homeland and their ineradicable love for it” (“была она для них кусочком родной земли, олицетворением родины и неистребимой любви к ней.”)¹⁵¹ Soloukhin's

¹⁵⁰ Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107-8.

¹⁵¹ Vladimir Soloukhin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:432.

interpretation of the grass-picking renders the practice a paradoxical attempt to remain “rooted” in tradition by performing a ritual of uprooting – plucking the rootstock from the river. The parallel between the grass’s and individual’s uprooting in this account has the perhaps unintended consequence of suggesting that the performer of the ritual, like his grass keepsake, once uprooted may return home but cannot be wholly reunified with his native roots.

Despite diminishing the superstitious dimension of the magic grass, Soloukhin ends his travelogue with an incantation. He puts forth that love for one’s homeland might be a guiding force when traveling the figurative and literal roads ahead, inviting the reader to repeat an incantation involving the magic grass that asks for protection in return for the reciter’s promise to keep the magic grass in his heart no matter where his path leads. This peculiar covenant with the grass is also a covenant between writer and reader – Soloukhin’s invitation to recite the incantation and the fact that the incantation appears in quotation marks suggests as much.

Soloukhin characterizes the recitation as being undertaken in imitation of an “ancient primogenitor,”¹⁵² indicating that the writer – and now the reader – are initiated into an ancient kinship community of ethnic Russians, inheritors of their forefathers’ customs. Given the ritual of carrying the soil of the native land in conjunction with the widespread uprooting of peasants from that land, this community, Soloukhin suggests is built on language and identity more so than on contiguous and continuous cohabitation.

The poet Aleksandr Iashin likewise relates identity to memories of one’s native region in his first forays into prose, his lyrical “little stories” (*malen’kie rasskazy*), which dealt with similar themes of childhood and uprooting. In 1954’s “Cranes” (“Zhuravli”), Iashin recalls how, after the harvest, he and other village kids would run out of their homes shouting at the migrating

¹⁵² Ibid., 1:432.

flocks of cranes passing by “Wedge, wedge of cranes!” (“Клин, клин журавлин.”)¹⁵³ When the cranes break formation, the children shout this incantation so that they will reconstitute in a triangular shape. When the birds do so after the children yell they take this as a sign of the “power of words” (“сила слов.”)¹⁵⁴ In adulthood, Iashin discovers another magical property of words, when, upon seeing cranes flying in formation, a “warm feeling for the birds flying overhead engulfed my entire soul” (“доброе чувство к летящим птицам охватило всю мою душу.”)¹⁵⁵ Without consciously summoning them, the same words come to him – he whispers them to himself and to the cranes of his childhood.¹⁵⁶ The cranes’ migration is symbolic of the possibility of return home, but in the story the fictional Iashin does not interpret them, he is simply overwhelmed by the feeling they evoke deep within him, almost possessed by this feeling that elicits the magical words unbidden.

Iashin’s “Cranes” captures the intrinsically affective nature of Village Prose’s “spontaneity” or “awakening.” Like Soloukhin and Dorosh, Iashin makes clear that the connection he feels to the village of the past is based in an emotional, almost irrational appeal to the heart and soul. Soloukhin too is “intoxicated” by the idea of a walking tour of his home and Dorosh cannot resist the pull of Raigorod. Each writer also connects the activation of this affective response to language – whether the words of enchantment that Soloukhin and Iashin use to conjure up their homes, or the ancient Slavonic that Dorosh quotes as an invocation of the ancestor. The power of these words to act upon the fictional authors implicates their own words’ role in evoking the same feeling in their readers. Keith M. Opdahl notes that reading can require

¹⁵³ Aleksandr Iakovlevich Iashin, *Zemliaki* (Moskva: Sovremennik, 1989), 481.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 481.

¹⁵⁵ Aleksandr Iashin, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984-1986), 2:621.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:621.

a parsing of metaphors and patterns, but affective response “is capable of synthesizing or distilling a large body of information” in an instant, making reading an “emotionally impressionistic” experience.¹⁵⁷ Village Prose, with its evocation of the domestic and natural setting, was particularly well suited to stirring feelings from a rural childhood, but, as one scholar argues, childhood memories are also “the most emotive and most enduring kind, they are most prone to unconscious activation while reading.”¹⁵⁸ In Village Prose, such memories are important not because they represent a return to a state of self-unity merely through the act of remembering, but because they represent a call to begin the journey of self-discovery that the author himself has just undertaken. By rendering their literal and figurative journeys in diaristic form, these writers did not necessarily encourage their readers to themselves keep a diary, or even to visit their own native villages (many, as mentioned, could not do so), instead they encouraged a mode of self-examination or “soul-searching” suggested by the diary and return journey.

1.2 Can the Peasant Speak?

Aleksandr Iashin’s short story “Levers” (“Rychagi,” 1956) represents an important would-be turning point in Village Prose’s shift from a Soviet to a nationalist perspective. It was only a potential turning point because Iashin’s social criticism turned out to be too provocative for the time – the story was formally published only to be heavily rebuked and the journal it appeared in shuttered.¹⁵⁹ However, “Levers” captures the peasantry’s inability to truly express

¹⁵⁷ Keith M. Opdahl, *Emotion as Meaning: The Literary Case for How We Imagine* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2002), 99.

¹⁵⁸ Michael Burke, *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion: An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 57.

¹⁵⁹ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, 48.

themselves through the Soviet apparatus. In “Levers,” peasants can only be sincere in private conversation with each other, in the context of an official meeting they turn into cogs in the machine, reproducers of authoritative discourse. The story depicts peasant members of a *kolkhoz* board gathered in a smoke-filled izba, debating the importance of truth and justice prior to the beginning of the meeting. An old man called Petr Kuzmich affirms the ongoing necessity of such lofty ideas – another board member facetiously agrees, saying they are necessary, but only at meetings and festive occasions.¹⁶⁰ The meeting is called to order by one *kolkhoznik*, who stands up and pronounces “the very same words that in similar situations the district committee secretary of the party had pronounced” (“произнес те самые слова, которые в подобных случаях произносил секретарь райкома партии”) which turn out to be “Let us begin, comrades! Is everyone assembled?” (“Начнем, товарищи! Все в сборе?”)¹⁶¹ Iashin’s peasants, unlike other peasants in Village Prose who struggle with the language of ideology, are fluent articulators of authoritative discourse – the lone “mistake” comes when one member begins to say that their high productivity has created positive conditions “throughout the entire kolkhoz” (“по всему колхозу”) and Kuzmich corrects him “throughout the entire country” (“по всей стране.”)¹⁶² This same Petr Kuzmich, who is the one most committed to truth as a value in the conversation that precedes the meeting, is also a master of authoritative discourse.

Meanwhile, things only return to normal when the meeting ends and Petr Kuzmich leaves with his friend, both of whom again become “pure, heartfelt, straightforward people. People, and not levers” (“чистые, сердечные, прямые люди, люди, а не рычаги.”)¹⁶³ Kuzmich’s ability to sincerely express himself is stripped of him by Soviet power, but he seemingly remains

¹⁶⁰ Aleksandr Iakovlevich Iashin, *Zemliaki*, 302-3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 313.

unaffected by discourse outside the confines of the official proceedings. In this regard he is distinct from the subject that Yurchak argues is typical of the late Soviet period, who found greater freedom in the performance of discourse but treated this freedom as distinct from any emancipatory grand narrative.¹⁶⁴ Kuzmich upholds the meaningfulness of notions like truth and justice, though evidently the board member who makes the sarcastic remark about official occasions has allowed performativity to devalue these concepts in his own mind. Iashin's critique in "Levers" is devastating to the prospect of Soviet sincerity: rather than ensuring sincerity, membership in the collective has precluded these peasants from speaking sincerely, disabusing one member of the constative dimension of expressions of ideals like truth and justice, and, implicitly, sincerity in the process.

While Dorosh and Soloukhin depicted themselves in the act of discovering language and traditions in line with a Russian ethnic identity, in the 1960s *derevenshchiki* made greater use of folk forms and elements in an attempt to express themselves "in their own words." The classics of Village Prose abound with *chastushki*, fairy tales, songs, and tall tales. While they may have created the impression of speaking through tradition, these writers were themselves stylizers. In addition to many writers' actual dislocation through urban migration and newfound membership in the intelligentsia, this generation of rural writers were more like pre-Revolutionary "peasant poets" Aleksei Kol'tsov and Nikolai Kliuev than the folk storytellers they idolized. J. Alexander Ogden notes that peasant poets practice Bakhtinian "stylization" (*stilizatsiia*): "the purposeful reproduction of someone else's style as a defined aesthetic and ideological position in a new artistic context."¹⁶⁵ Framing these folk forms within the narrative of one's story or novel

¹⁶⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 125.

¹⁶⁵ J. Alexander Ogden "The Impossible Peasant Voice in Russian Literature: Stylization and Mimicry," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 3 (Autumn, 2005): 517.

constituted a way for Village Prose writers to create their own legends while appropriating the perceived sincerity and authenticity of the old storytellers. Ogden explains of peasant poets “if a work's creator was seen as belonging to ‘the folk,’ even obvious examples of stilizatsiia were willfully disregarded in favor of a more romanticized view of literary creation.”¹⁶⁶ This impression is consistent with the contradictory enterprise of sincerity rhetoric, which seeks to create the calculated illusion of naturalness. Of course, it stands in contrast to the scholarly view, which contrasts “folklore” with “folklorism.” Laura J. Olson explains that “folklorism is the conscious use of folklore in popular, elite or officially sponsored culture...Folklore becomes folklorism as soon as it is consciously manipulated, scripted, organized, institutionalized, published or marketed,” even if this is undertaken by rural dwellers themselves.¹⁶⁷

Fedor Abramov’s “To Petersburg for a Sundress” (“V Piter za Sarafanom,” 1961) provides a useful illustration of how Village Prose authors appropriated elements of folk storytelling to create a new myth. In the story the narrator finds himself in an izba visiting an elderly couple, thinking “at times it seemed that there, outside the windows was either the Kashcheevo kingdom from the half-forgotten folk tales of a distant childhood, or some kind of unknown fantastical planet” (“временами казалось, там, за окнами, не то Кашеево царство из полузабытой сказки далекого детства, не то какая-то неведомая фантастическая планета.”) When an old lady enters the home, crossing herself and greeting everyone “in the old-fashioned manner” (“на старинный манер”) he is again put in mind of an old folk tale. Abramov primes the reader both to receive the events that occur in this fantastical setting as mythic and to hear a folk tale from the old woman herself. After the woman tells her tall tale about walking to

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 523.

¹⁶⁷ Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 6.

Petersburg as a girl and her adventures along the way, the narrator watches her leave and, passing out of sight, he reflects that now her trace has “Long ago been washed away by rain and time. Soon time will wash away Filipp’evna herself. But her walk, like a folk tale, will remain in people’s memory” (“Давно смыт тот след дождями и временем. Скоро своим время и самое Филиппьевну. Но хождение ее, как сказка, останется в памяти людей.”)¹⁶⁸ Filipp’evna’s story is merely a memory told in her characteristic folksy register, but, in his reflections upon watching Filipp’evna disappear, the narrator elevates the memory to the level of a folk tale. The narrator’s fantastical frame subsumes Filipp’evna’s story, so that she becomes a figure of mythic proportions and he takes on the role of folk storyteller himself.

Derevenshchiki, especially those belonging to right wing of the movement, did not see themselves as appropriators, but as Russians struggling to preserve their traditions and maintain continuity with the past. Razuvalova notes that, for the *derevenshchiki*, preserving artifacts of national self-knowledge like folklore was a means of enabling individual self-knowledge.¹⁶⁹ That is, for *derevenshchiki* modern society stood in the way of authentic individuation, while a traditionalist society would ensure real self-knowledge and, therefore, sincerity. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s “Matrena’s Homestead” (“Matrenin Dvor,” 1963) offers a compelling vision of the traditionalist individual adrift in a hostile modernity. Solzhenitsyn, who was not himself a *derevenshchik*, in a way both constructs the “sincere” peasant voice of the titular Matrena and dramatizes its reception by another outsider, the story’s narrator, Ignatich. As a self-conscious interpreter of the genre, Solzhenitsyn’s entry illustrates Village Prose’s reliance on constructed voices while still being an affirmation of the value of traditionalism.

¹⁶⁸ Fedor Abramov, *Poslednaia okhota: povesti i rasskazy* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1973), 309-16.

¹⁶⁹ Anna Razuvalova, *Pisateli-“derevenshchiki”: literatura i konservativnaia ideologiia 1970-kh godov*, 57.

Solzhenitsyn also presents a narrative of return, but not the return to the village by an uprooted peasant familiar to Village Prose readers. Instead, Ignatich (who does not seem to have peasant roots) is a *zek* on his way back from a prison camp, evidently seeking mooring for his new life in an idealized rural setting. Ignatich relates at the outset that he is seeking the “very interior of Russia” (“в самой нутряной России”),¹⁷⁰ the true Russian heartland, adding “if such a place existed somewhere, once upon a time” (“если такая где-то была, жила.”)¹⁷¹ Ignatich’s self-aware statement of his quest and the invocation and inversion of the typical fairy tale beginning “zhila-byla” point to the failure of Soviet society and the appeal of the Russian hearth. Like the hero of a folk tale, Ignatich must leave his prior environment and journey to a new region, but home and destination (like “zhila-byla”) are reversed: it is the Soviet system that has made him homeless, excluded him from a cohesive, stable life, and his destination is the native environment that he hopes will provide this for him. While works of Village Prose commonly depicted the toll of Soviet hegemony on the peasantry, “Matrena’s Homestead” is perhaps uniquely pessimistic about the moral state of the Soviet village. Ignatich comes to live with Matrena, an old peasant woman retired from the *kolkhoz*, who, he decides after her death at the end of the story, Ignatich decides is the “righteous person” (“праведник”) upon whom all society depends.¹⁷² The other villagers, in contrast, denigrate and take advantage of Matrena. Not coincidentally, Matrena embodies many of the qualities of traditional life, while her fellow village dwellers have become highly materialistic. Rural *byt* alone proves to be insufficient as the foundation for an ethical or sincere individual in Solzhenitsyn’s story.

¹⁷⁰ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rasskazy* (Frankfurt/Main: Posev, 1976), 215.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 259.

Ignatich's narrative is an attempt to memorialize Matrena, which he does in part by preserving her manner of speaking, integrating the old woman's idioms and expressions into his tale. Recording (in writing) her voice turns out to be the most reliable form of remembering Matrena. At one point Ignatich takes up photography, trying in vain to capture Matrena's smiling round face, which would become uncharacteristically strained in front of the lens.¹⁷³ Having failed to capture her image, Ignatich attempts to recreate Matrena's distinctive voice. In response to his "Good morning," ("Доброе утро") the "very same kindly words would always ring out from behind the partitions. They began with a kind of deep, warm purring, like that of grandmas in folk tales: 'М-м-мм... to you too!'" ("И всегда одни и те же доброжелательные слова раздавались мне из-за перегородки. Они начинались какими-то низким теплым мурчанием, как у бабушек в сказках: М-м-мм... также и вам!") After which Matrena adds "And your breakfast has come along" ("А завтрак вам приспел.")¹⁷⁴ Ignatich relates the timbre and lilting intonation of Matrena's speech to a literary model, the old women of folk tales. Of course, one cannot actually hear the voice of old women in folk tales unless the (oral) storyteller ventriloquizes, speaking in the voice of such a character. But Solzhenitsyn tries to make Matrena's voice as immediate as possible – Matrena's voice is further distinguished by orthographic marks that indicate atypical syllabic stresses in her direct speech. Solzhenitsyn's written rendering of Matrena's voice and evocation of folk tales as a model, combined with Ignatich's mishaps with the camera, suggest that writing is an enduring and despite the fictional frame, accurate mode for preserving tradition.

Ignatich also focuses on her word choice in his own narration. After breakfast, Matrena asks "Well, now what can I make you for dinner?" ("Ну, а к ужоткому что вам

¹⁷³ Ibid., 224.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 223.

приготовить”)¹⁷⁵ prompting Ignatich to explain that the expression “k uzhotkomu” meant “for dinner”¹⁷⁶ in standard parlance. Ignatich goes beyond offering explanations of Matrena-isms, he often employs free indirect speech that resembles Matrena’s direct speech.¹⁷⁷ After defining “k uzhotkomu,” Ignatich asks himself ““What could I request for dinner?”” (“Что мог Я заказать к ужоткому?”)¹⁷⁸ incorporating the alien expression into his inner monologue. However, as Moody notes, at least some of the unexpected word choices and apparent archaisms that populate Matrena’s speech seem more invented than aligned with any particular dialect. In one instance, Matrena uses “duel” as a synonym for “metel” or “snowstorm”. This variant is not to be found in Dal’s dictionary and appears to be a coinage constructed from the verb “dut” (“to blow”), analogous to the derivation of “metel” from the verb “mesti” (“to sweep”).¹⁷⁹ When a storm interrupts work on Matrena’s home, Ignatich announces this development using the same word.¹⁸⁰ Ignatich is eager to attribute this and other unusual words to Matrena. Whether or not some of these words are neologisms of Solzhenitsyn’s creation rather than longstanding folk variants, it is their association with the pure-hearted traditionalist Matrena that marks such verbiage as “authentic.” As Ogden noted, Matrena’s perceived rootedness in the *narod* is enough for Ignatich to see her idiosyncrasies as related to a time-honored tradition that may be as much invented (not by Matrena, but by Solzhenitsyn) as it is “real.” It is this perceived authenticity that ensures Matrena’s perceived sincerity: Ignatich finds her to be an uncorrupted conduit of tradition, a peasant who truly can speak in the voice of the *narod*. Thus, in “Matrena’s

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 224.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 224.

¹⁷⁷ Leo Carl Moody, “Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s Prose: A Study of Phraseology and Characterization” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1971), 48.

¹⁷⁸ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rasskazy*, 224.

¹⁷⁹ Leo Carl Moody, “Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s Prose: A Study of Phraseology and Characterization,” 50.

¹⁸⁰ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rasskazy*, 243.

Homestead,” Solzhenitsyn strikes an uneasy balance between self-aware construction of Russian folk culture and credulous acceptance of figures like Matrena as exemplary of this tradition.

Though the hero of Boris Mozhaev’s 1965 story “Alive” (“Zhivoi”) is a wily, sharp-tongued *muzhik* rather than a saintly old woman, Fedor Fomich Kuz’kin is likewise an ideal communitarian forced apart from the community by his uncompromising moral character. Where Matrena is depicted as a saint that is routinely taken advantage of, Kuz’kin is a sort of Ivan-*durak* who refuses to be cheated by the corrupt world he inhabits. Kuz’kin is also hopelessly, often tragically sincere – he cannot stop saying what he thinks even though it has landed him in prison in the past and infuriated the authorities and some of his comrades to the extent that they are bent on ruining his life. However, Kuz’kin is also the proverbial wily *muzhik* – endlessly resourceful, he embodies another of Matrena’s pointedly paradoxical virtues: he is a tireless, ingenuous worker who is accused of malingering because he refuses to work at the *kolkhoz* for little or no pay. The exploitation of his labor puts him at odds with the hypocritical Communist officials on the collective farm, which eventually causes him to leave the *kolkhoz*.

The peasant voice with which Mozhaev endows Kuz’kin is a critical, satirical one that insists on following an inner mandate, refuses to be silenced or censored. He first ran into trouble some years ago, when the bread runs out before it’s his turn in line and an official tells him simply “‘consumer union’” (“‘потребительский союз’”) in response to his complaints, Kuz’kin mutters “‘no it’s a rubbish union’” (“‘нет, это потрёпсоюз’”), after which he is arrested and sent to prison.¹⁸¹ Kuz’kin’s suffering, exacerbated as it is by his own actions, testifies to his sincere commitment to defending freedom of speech. However, freedom of speech is not a political end for Kuz’kin, it is merely a necessary condition for him to express and be himself. This defense of

¹⁸¹ Boris Mozhaev, *Zhivoi: povest' i rasskazy* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1977), 35.

personal sincerity is also a defense of tradition of sorts, since Kuz'kin embodies the folkloric fool in his ability to land on his feet and the wily peasant's (often verbal) resourcefulness and relationship to authority.

Kuz'kin is neither a staunch traditionalist, nor is he morally incorruptible or selfless. His relativism makes for a source of tension in the story: though Lively is inveterately guided from within – animated by his spirit, as his nickname suggests – he is not particularly concerned with spirituality or the state of his soul. In the early days of collectivization, Kuz'kin was a *kolkhoznik* in good standing – in fact, he rose all the way to the rank of chairman before he became disillusioned, refused a higher position, and was censured for “sabotage” as a result.¹⁸² His career included the sin of taking part in the arrest of the village priest. After being summoned to the regional committee and commanded to pay an exorbitant fine, Kuz'kin stops by the former church building, now the regional finance office, exhausted, and tells the bookkeeper Andriusha, that he wants to confess. He relays the events of the day to the bookkeeper, who tells Lively he needs to get a certificate for his workday units in order to combat the charge of malingering.¹⁸³ This entirely mundane advice does help save Kuz'kin from his predicament, since it proves that he is not a malingerer, though the confession in church would seem to do little for his soul. Instead of relieving Kuz'kin of a sin (his role in the arrest of the priest, for example), the mock confession affirms his identity as a hard worker. Indeed, the certificate later exculpates Kuz'kin when he is put on trial for the same charge.¹⁸⁴ The result of the church conversation, then, is an affirmation of Kuz'kin's authentic self, which is not defined in relation to any higher purpose, but to his ability to work.

¹⁸² Ibid., 35.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 95-105.

Mozhaev suggests there is no divine justice on earth, only the luck we make for ourselves. The priest, Kuz'kin remembers, was also the best worker in the village. Elsewhere, Kuz'kin encounters a ferryman at a crossing suggestively named "Bogoiavlensk" (which suggests theophany in Russian) who maintains his own "ark" of a ferry in case of a flood. They discuss whether the ice will melt away soon since it is late winter, but, in the meantime, Kuz'kin grabs a stick, scurries across the ice, and vaults over the part of the river that is unfrozen. In doing so, he cheats both the ferryman and death of their wages and proves endlessly resilient in a corrupted world awaiting its own biblical reckoning.¹⁸⁵ In this godless world sincerity cannot be a matter of the divine soul, it can only be rooted in an individualistic essence.

Instead of trying to align himself with tradition, tradition directs Kuz'kin back to his own principles and pursuits. He encounters a novice priest (another great worker) who is part of a group that he persuades to help Kuz'kin with his personal vegetable plot. In response to Kuz'kin's wife lamenting that God has abandoned them, the priest tells her that God is in everyone that "each of God's creatures has their own joy" ("У каждой божьей твари свои радости есть") to be sought within and whose nature depends on an individual's destiny. Kuz'kin interprets this message "if a person has lost his faith in himself, God no longer helps him," ("ежели человек веру в себя потерял, ему и бог не поможет") with which the priest enthusiastically agrees.¹⁸⁶ The priest suggests, therefore, that everyone has a God-given essence, and it is an act of devotion to steadfastly, sincerely express that essence in the course of one's life. Despite getting him into trouble, Kuz'kin's saving grace has also been his tongue, which he uses to persuade others of his essentially hard-working nature.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 66-9.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 92-3.

Kuz'kin's homespun rhetoric reaches new heights when he conducts his own defense after being put on trial for planting in a private plot that he no longer has a right to after leaving the *kolkhoz*. Kuz'kin (who happens to have a law degree) mounts a defense based on the meaninglessness of the charges against him. He tells the judge "Almost every day Voronin tries to scare the life out of me one day he said I was going to be exiled. Then he threatened to throw me in jail... You never knew what he might say. So I stopped believing him" ("Воронин почти каждый день меня страшал: то говорил, что меня вышлют. Потом грозился посадить в тюрьму. Мало ли чего он говорил. Я уж и верить перестал.") This microcosmic account of political disillusionment takes official's pronouncements to be entirely performative. The official's hollow words contrast with Kuz'kin's account of himself: "Who am I?" he asks rhetorically, "I have ploughed the earth, built Soviet power, and fought at the front" ("кто я такой? Я землю пахал, советскую власть строил, воевал на фронте...")¹⁸⁷ Kuz'kin's defense ends up being a tour de force of sincerity rhetoric that hinges on the official's insincerity, his words' meaninglessness. The charges, Kuz'kin points out, should have been submitted in writing, otherwise they cannot be considered. Here it is the Soviet official who cannot speak (because of a reasonable suspicion of insincerity) instead of the peasant, who is able to provide an admirable Soviet autobiography. The judge agrees that the charges ought to have been in writing and pronounces Kuz'kin not guilty.

"Alive" represents the triumph of the peasant, who succeeds despite being made to play by a Soviet court's rules and forced to become a better articulator of Soviet law than Soviet officials themselves. Mozhaev suggests that the sincere peasant voice is the one that asserts its own identity, but not in service of an alternative ideal society run by peasants, rather, the peasant

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 102-5.

voice's assertiveness is a means of pointing out the hypocrisies of the present society. Humor and wit, rather than an elegiac mode, are paramount for this task. Unlike in Iashin's "Levers," Kuz'kin is able to manipulate the content of official discourse, not just deploy it performatively. Kuz'kin is not fully aware of his sincerity as rhetoric but, as the court scene shows, he is able to effectively put it to rhetorical use. Further, he denies sincerity's roots in tradition or the divine, preferring to see himself as a person who speaks his mind and stands up for himself. While this remains a vision of sincerity as stemming from an individual essence, Kuz'kin's version destabilizes nationalists' claim to a monopoly on sincerity – any similarly uncompromising individual from any milieu might follow Kuz'kin's example.

Vasilii Shukshin's short stories depict a still more radical de-essentialization of sincerity. Shukshin's villagers are neither religious nor full materialists – they experience an existential longing for a sincere mode that they cannot identify in themselves or in tradition. They are disconnected from agriculture and lacking the essentialist identity that many *derevenshchiki* believed connection to the land conferred. John Givens notes that the village of Shukshin's stories, rather than a preserve of Russian ethnic tradition, "represents the space of public spectacle, *skandal*, and debate on a host of issues, all safely distanced from the centers of power."¹⁸⁸ These debates and conflicts quickly devolve into an irresolvable absurdity, and Shukshin's treatment of the topic of sincerity is no different. For many of Shukshin's volatile, frustrated characters, sincerity is largely a formal exercise or spectacle wherein, unlike words cease to signify or perform even a ritual function.

One of the paradigmatic narratives in Shukshin's work centers on a village man who is afflicted by his soul, and by a domineering wife, who cannot or will not understand his

¹⁸⁸ John Givens, *Prodigal Son: Vasilii Shukshin in Soviet Russian Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 27.

condition. The closedminded shrews who nag Shukshin’s hapless heroes bear no resemblance to the peasant women of Village Prose classics. In 1962’s “By Themselves” (“Одни”), Antip Kalachikov complains to his wife that he works all the time, telling her that he also has a soul – to which she responds “I don’t care about your soul” (“Мне плевать на твою душу.”) Sincere communication, even self-expression appears impossible for Antip and Marfa. The first line of the narrator informs that Antip “valued soulful sensitivity and goodness,” but he himself tells his wife “tenderly” that she’s a “strong woman” (“крупная баба”) but a “dumb one” (“бестолковенькая.”)¹⁸⁹ There is evidently a disjuncture between Antip’s inner state, his intentions, and the way he expresses himself. In fact, in forty years of marriage, we learn Marfa has never learned to distinguish when Antip is serious from when he is joking.¹⁹⁰ The only thing that brings them together is Antip’s balalaika playing and singing. As he plays, they sing together, leading both their minds to wander to the river and forests near their native village and Marfa is so moved that she agrees to give Antip money – which she jealously guards – for a new balalaika. When she offers him the money Antip wordlessly takes the money and leaves: “it was dangerous to talk or linger – Marfa could easily change her mind” (“разговаривать или медлить было опасно – Марфа легко могла раздумать.”)¹⁹¹ Only singing – pronouncing another’s words – and the non-verbal act of playing music can bridge the gap between husband and wife. However, the final sentence calls into question how sincere their harmonization really was, since it seems Antip does not share Marfa’s emotional response to the music – in fact, he may have manipulated his wife into paying for a new balalaika. Marfa proves that she can be moved to care about Antip’s passion, his balalaika, and his pursuit of inner edification, but Antip

¹⁸⁹ Vasilii Shukshin, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti knigakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Nadezhda-1, 1998), 1:146.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:146.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:152.

reveals himself to be more transactional than he claimed – taking the money without another thought of the moment of intimate connection they might have experienced.

Shukshin’s “I Believe!” (“Veruiu!”) has a premise similar to “By Themselves” but, unlike Antip, Maksim Iarikov does everything he can to try to express the torment of his soul. On Sundays Maksim Iarikov gets intensely depressed and claims to feel physical pain in his chest, where his soul is – his wife mocks and harasses him for this, but Maksim’s need to cleanse his soul is so great that, when drunk, he goes to the police with a fantastical confession. His confession is an attempt to “repent of such vile sins” (“каяться в таких мерзких грехах”) like inventing and selling a new kind of engine to the enemy and ends with Maksim insisting he is “worse than Vlasov” (“хуже Власова”)¹⁹² – the Soviet general who defected to the Nazis and was hanged for treason. Maksim is attracted to the form of sincerity – confession – but not the content. Later, though he doesn’t believe in god, Maksim seeks out a priest to find out if believers’ souls hurt. The priest, it turns out, does not believe in god, and also has an aching soul. The priest tells Maksim “you guessed right: believers’ souls don’t ache. But what should we believe in? Believe in Life” (“Ты правильно догадался: у верующих душа не болит. Но во что верить? Верь в Жизнь.”) At the priest’s direction they begin feverishly chanting “I believe!” (“верую!”) and dancing.¹⁹³ In the absence of belief, Maksim and the priest enact a simulacrum of the creed with their ritualistic recitation. If Mozhaev depicts a peasant type with a powerful sense of self and his own agency to express it, even if it gets him into trouble, Shukshin’s troubled souls desperately want to express what is inside them but lack the linguistic means and self-knowledge to do so. Both Antip and Maksim are attracted to forms that others evidently find apt for soothing the soul – singing and confession – but they themselves get little

¹⁹² Ibid., 1:448.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1:455.

out of them. In “I Believe!” Maksim tries to imitate the forms of criminal and religious confession, which eventually devolves into a makeshift ritual where the performative “I believe” (“верю”) reflects the hope that this absurd ceremony will lead to genuine belief. For two atheists, “life” might be an appropriate thing to believe in, but it is Maksim’s desperation to believe in something, anything, that drives his fervor.

Shukshin undermined the Slavophilic element of Village Prose sincerity rhetoric, replacing it with a tragi-comic sense of alienation in a more contemporary peasant-migrant type who happens to be stuck with his head in the clouds as well as between city and countryside. The entirely performative sincerity exhibited in his fiction reflects this sense of being cut off from the source of a meaningful life as a result of the materialism and cynicism of Soviet life. In this regard, Shukshin was typical of the *derevenshchiki*, who saw sincerity as being enabled by continuity with a traditional past that had been ripped out from under them by Soviet power. Reclaiming this continuity led to a paradoxical need to reinvent an appropriate folk forms and populate their stories with them – making the *derevenshchiki* not just inheritors, but appropriators and interpreters of tradition. The focus on new or renewed forms as a means of conveying sincerity was itself continuous with a Thaw-era obsession with the prospect of sincerity that can be traced back to Pomerantsev’s “On Sincerity in Literature.” Excluding Ovechkin, Village Prose can be seen as an answer to the crisis of sincerity that Pomerantsev depicted – the essentialist conception of sincerity as something that could truly be expressed through unifying the self and self-expression became a search for a peasant voice that might express that true self.

While we conclude this survey of Village Prose with Shukshin, who rendered the peasant as substantially voiceless when it came to expressing the self, the essentialist view was far more

typical of Village Prose, especially in the late Soviet period. Even though Shukshin's stories defied convention, they remain an angry, despairing commentary on the state of the peasant in the Soviet Union. In this regard, Shukshin was aligned with the right wing of Village Prose, a group of writers who increasingly sought to place blame for the spiritual ills of the Russian under Soviet hegemony. Blame for the Revolution and the ensuing events often fell on the Jews. Maxim Shrayer has argued that this overt, ideological antisemitism doomed Village Prose as a genre and sapped its best writers of their talents, turning their work into unimaginative caricature.¹⁹⁴ There have been numerous recriminations and reconsiderations of the character of Village Prose¹⁹⁵ – was it always a reactionary, *neopochvennik* movement, were the more liberal-minded *derevenshchiki* ever really “full members”? Following Razuvalova, we have taken a broad view of Village Prose as possessing a right and left wing, but Nikolai Mitrokhin has argued that, although they crossed paths with the nationalist camp, writers like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Iashin, Boris Mozhaev, and Sergei Zalygin do not belong to the movement at all. Instead, Mitrokhin argues, these writers (several of them associated with the liberal *Novyi mir*) exhibited an interest in folk culture and village life that is not equivalent to nationalist sentiment.¹⁹⁶ We would argue that Solzhenitsyn's staunch traditionalism and deployment of antisemitic tropes qualify him for membership in the right wing of the movement, even if his stories were not always set in the countryside. In any case, this survey has shown the divide behind left- and right-wing critiques or between nationalist and folk enthusiast (in Mitrokhin's parlance) to be largely predictive of the view of sincerity as either essential and

¹⁹⁴ Maxim D. Shrayer, “Anti-semitism and the Decline of Russian Village Prose,” *Partisan Review* 67, no. 3 (Summer 2000).

¹⁹⁵ Kathleen Parthé, “Village Voice” in *Post-Soviet Nostalgia: Confronting the Empire's Legacies*, eds. Otto Boele, Boris Noordenbos, Ksenia Robbe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 71-3.

¹⁹⁶ Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 403.

rooted in tradition (in the right-wing case of Solzhenitsyn and the *neopochvennik* Soloukhin) or as essential, but rooted in a unique individual essence (in the case of Mozhaev). Shukshin, who depicted the negation of the essence of sincerity, in a way straddles this divide as well.

Chapter 2

Act Your Age: Evgenii Evtushenko and the Lyric Poetry Revival

During the Thaw, the Stalin-era embargo on lyric poetry would be challenged and substantially overcome under the aegis of sincerity. The 1950s and 1960s saw thousands of young urbanites filling squares, lecture halls, even Moscow's Luzhniki stadium to hear lyric poetry recited. They had been mobilized by a new generation of poets, but both audience and performer alike were the beneficiaries of increased accommodations in the post-Stalin party's efforts to animate youth participation in Soviet society. The most popular lyric poets to emerge in the Khrushchev Thaw – Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii, Bella Akhmadulina, the bards Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotkii – reflect the diversity of the lyric form. Still, this shared form itself implicates sincerity whether or not the poet draws attention to that fact: as one critic puts it, an “assumption of autobiographical authenticity” is “something like the ‘default setting’ for lyric poems.”¹⁹⁷ The lyric poem's potential to be taken as a sincere emanation of the self made famous poets' public-facing character all the more influential – their performances and personas “extended poetry beyond written texts to behaviours, relationships, and social spaces.”¹⁹⁸ For the poets of the Thaw and their audiences, lyric poetry constituted a discourse of the self that managed to become a widespread part of culture.

No poet dramatized the self and its role in society on a grander scale in this period than Evgenii Evtushenko, who became a celebrity during the Thaw, rising to “the same level as

¹⁹⁷ Brian McHale, “‘A Poet May Not Exist’: Mock-Hoaxes and the Construction of National Identity” in *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert J. Griffin (New York and Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 235.

¹⁹⁸ Eleonory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov, “The Thaw as an Event in Russian History” in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, 53.

canonized symbols and figures of the official world.”¹⁹⁹ Evtushenko extrapolated the perceived lyric poetic tendency to speak *in propria persona*,²⁰⁰ thematizing his own biography in his poetry and presenting a public self that could be identified with the poetic one. He engaged in what has been called “staged celebrity”²⁰¹ – “calculated technologies and strategies of performance and self-projection designed to achieve a status of monumentality in public culture.”²⁰² Staged celebrity adds another dimension to the already fraught relationship between writer, text, and audience: the perception of apprehending the poet’s “private” self in public dissemination which lyric poetry encourages is doubled (and acted upon) by a parallel encounter with the author in news media and public events. In the Soviet context, Evtushenko’s image was further inflected by Soviet state control of media, collectivism, cultural policy and the need to negotiate the space between official and unofficial culture.

In enacting his staging of celebrity, Evtushenko courted the “scandal of sincerity,” the paradox that sincerity is “inimical to performativity; however it must be read in or on the body” or in linguistic codes not of our making “and in that sense it is coextensive with performance.”²⁰³ As we have argued, sincerity rhetoric depends on an erasure or, at least, acceptance of the necessarily performative and rhetorical nature of sincerity for its effect. The rehabilitation of lyric poetry in the early Thaw, which centered on the need for emotionalism and subjectivity in poetry, set the stage for a boldly self-presentational poetic persona like Evtushenko’s to be received

¹⁹⁹ Andrew Kahn, Mark Lipovetsky, Irina Reyfman, and Stephanie Sandler, *A History of Russian Literature*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 760.

²⁰⁰ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1-2.

²⁰¹ Identifying “staged celebrity” with Evtushenko is appropriated from Alexandra Harrington, “‘It is Unseemly to be Famous’: Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and the Melodramatic Dynamics of the Myth of the Russian Poet in Russia and the West,” *Celebrity Studies* 7, no. 4 (2016) where Harrington applies the term to a poet seemingly inimical to Evtushenko – Anna Akhmatova.

²⁰² Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 201.

²⁰³ Angela Esterhammer, “The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon” in *Romanticism, Sincerity, Authenticity*, eds. Kerry Sinanan and Tim Milnes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 102-3.

enthusiastically after the dearth of such voices in the Soviet public sphere under Stalin. In this chapter we argue that Evtushenko cultivated a sincere persona by dramatizing his own poetic self-expression and expressiveness at a time when a Romantic emphasis on self-knowledge was becoming more prominent in Soviet society. Evtushenko advanced an ideal of sincerity as a civic virtue that was likewise reminiscent of Romantic conceptions of the utilitarian purpose of sincerity in political governance. We propose that Evtushenko's monumentalization of his contradictions and imperfections along with his admirable qualities in his poetry retained and heightened the dramatic staging of sincerity. However, Evtushenko maintained the same staging that had proved popular during the Thaw while perceptions of sincerity – in addition to politics and culture – changed around him. As Vail' and Genis put it “society betrayed Evtushenko, because it stopped needing tribunes.”²⁰⁴ What began as part of a campaign to return the individual personality to Soviet letters came to be seen as a vehicle for official discourse and Evtushenko's own self-importance. This had to do with the novelty of lyric poetry as a form synonymous with sincerity wearing off as well as the collapse of the reformist movement with which Evtushenko aligned himself.

While Evtushenko's fame and popularity would have been unthinkable under Stalin, his role in Soviet society and culture ought to be placed alongside ideological processes that began in the 1930s. High Stalinism, beginning in the mid-1930s, saw what historians have described as a second wave of Soviet ideological pronouncements on the individual.²⁰⁵ When the New Man and the building of socialism were declared finished projects in the 1936 Constitution, individual

²⁰⁴ Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 36.

²⁰⁵ Vladimir Papernyi, *Kul'tura "Dva"* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 32-3.

predilection became the only possible source of counterrevolutionary activity,²⁰⁶ but those individuals who were seen as having internalized the ideological precepts of the party could be further guided toward “often elusive conclusions about the moral and material world, and about one’s own earlier ostensibly stable, unitary self.”²⁰⁷ The character attributed to the new men and women of high Stalinism was “Romantic to the core” and, though self-expression for self-expression’s sake remained anathema, such citizens were called to “express their rich essence in contributing to the collective project of building the perfect future.”²⁰⁸ A distinction between sincerity and self-expression will be drawn later, but the period following the 1936 Constitution represented the apotheosis of Soviet sincerity hermeneutically: the private state of the human soul came to be seen as intelligible.²⁰⁹ This came not only with the essentialization of opposition within the individual, but the internalization of qualities in the New Men such that they could reliably be sincerely expressed in productive collective endeavors.

The late ‘30s also saw a failed critical push in favor of lyric poetry that resembled the one that took place in the early Thaw in its demand for sincerity as a guiding artistic principle – indeed, prominent participants in this abortive attempt would also factor in the post-Stalin reprise.²¹⁰ Though lyric poetry was not deemed an appropriate mode for collective productivity in the ‘30s, the notion that self-expression could mobilize the collective reappeared implicitly during a brief

²⁰⁶ Glennis Young “Bolsheviks and Emotional Hermeneutics: The Great Purges, Bukharin, and the February-March Plenum of 1937” in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 133.

²⁰⁷ Anatoly Pinsky, “The Origins of Post-Stalin Individuality: Aleksandr Tvardovskii and the Evolution of 1930s Soviet Romanticism,” 461.

²⁰⁸ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*, 31-2.

²⁰⁹ Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*, 42; Glennis Young, “Bolsheviks and Emotional Hermeneutics: The Great Purges, Bukharin, and the February-March Plenum of 1937” in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe* eds. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 133.

²¹⁰ Katerina Clark, “‘Wait for Me and I Shall Return’: The early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?” in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Eleonory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov, (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

reprieve in World War II and, with the continuation of high Stalinism, the concept was “inculcated to the masses on an unprecedented scale, laying the educational basis for the generation that grew under Stalin, then came to political maturity during de-Stalinisation.”²¹¹ This chapter, therefore, is a case study in the Soviet Romantic sense of self in a figure like Evtushenko, who elevated the personal to stand on equal footing with the political. As Jochen Hellbeck intimates, quoting Evtushenko’s “Two loves” (“Dve liubimikh,” 1955), the poet’s two loves in the poem, “the revolution and you,” the female addressee of the poem, speak to the new realms of self-expression that Evtushenko contributed to making a regular element of Soviet culture.

To characterize the relationship between Evtushenko and his audience I use Michael Warner’s conception of a “public.” Warner describes a public as a both actual and imagined community that is self-organizing – neither non-institutional nor based on distinctions like class or race, but a community that exists by virtue of being addressed and defined as a particular grouping.²¹² This creative-subjunctive address does not create a public out of thin air, however: “A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence.”²¹³ Evtushenko discovered a public by addressing them in poetry, which led to the continuous process of “recruiting” more members by writing more poetry in the same socio-political vein. Such a continued interaction between poet and public performs the function of creating a “concatenation of texts through time” which focuses a public on “an ongoing space of encounter for discourse.”²¹⁴ Crucially, likeminded readers were not limited to encountering

²¹¹ Guillaume Sauvé, “The Apogee of Soviet Political Romanticism: Projects for Moral Renewal in Early *Perestroika* (1985–1989),” 1415.

²¹² Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002), 51-55.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

Evtushenko on the page or in isolation, the many widely attended events and meeting places made for an integrated community. In Warner's words, a public shapes "the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons in a context of routine action,"²¹⁵ thereby turning participation in an event like a poetry reading into an act of self-definition and an affirmation of group belonging.

Warner outlines the role of public speech in the formation of a public in terms that resonate with features of lyric poetry. First, Warner suggests that a public is the result of poesis, of world-making on the part of the orator who addresses, and therefore molds, the public. Lyric poetry would seem a peculiar mode for creating a public – poems are often irreducibly elliptical and, in any case, are marked apart from everyday speech by their sound patterning, structure, and recitation. Jonathan Culler observes "to address someone directly – an individual or an audience – one would not write a poem."²¹⁶ However, the indirect nature of poetic address makes the lyric a particularly powerful discursive mode for collective experience. Warner perceives public speech as both personal and impersonal: "Public speech can have great urgency and intimate import. Yet we know that it was addressed not exactly to us, but to the stranger we were until the moment we happened to be addressed by it."²¹⁷ Such is the case for a poem, which can at once seem to speak directly to one's innermost thoughts and feelings while ultimately remaining an impersonal address to the masses of potential readers or listeners. The effect of reading a poem and then hearing it as part of a crowd or simply discussing that text with another person is to give "general social relevance to private thought and life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so."²¹⁸ Evtushenko's public had the opportunity to experience his

²¹⁵ Ibid., 57.

²¹⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 243.

²¹⁷ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 57.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

poetry through solitary reading and as part of a live audience – a confirmation that their subjectivity resonated with other likeminded poetry lovers. The fact that private life had been largely passed over by Socialist Realist works lent still greater immediacy to Evtushenko’s verse, which, in addition to its programmatic political elements, appealed to the emotional, social, and intellectual preoccupations of the younger generations.

There are other important features fundamental to the lyric, as distinct from other literary forms, which contribute to collective experience. In *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler rejects the “novelizing” interpretation of lyric poetry as mimetic fiction. Rather than a “lyric hero” or fictional mask, Culler recasts the author of poetry as an orator performing an epideictic feat. This is not to say that the naïve view of poetry as the direct expression of the poet’s thoughts and feelings is tenable, but that the lyric belongs to a different category than fiction, that the lyric is discourse about *our* world rather than an imagined one. As epideictic speech, the lyric seeks to be “memorable writing to be received, reactivated, and repeated by readers.”²¹⁹ With that aim in mind, the lyric is singularly seductive: it creates voicing, rhyme, rhythm – in a word – euphony, so that readers will want to learn it by heart, to recite to themselves or for others. This adds a ritualistic dimension to the lyric, one that stresses “the iterative and iterable performance of the event in the lyric present, in the special ‘now’ of lyric articulation.”²²⁰ Culler’s account of the genre points to the special salience of lyric poetry as an instrument for making a public. The lyric encourages reader participation through memorization and repetition. The present tense of the lyric, the “now” of recitations, adds to the pertinence of its words, which can be understood as directly related to the present moment. The fact that lyric poetry encodes directions for voicing in its line breaks, rhythms, and rhymes, means that readers may come “ritualistically to occupy the place of the lyric

²¹⁹ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 37.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

I.”²²¹ Reader participation can therefore reach the point of integrating the lyric into one’s self-conception, of inhabiting a poet’s persona and adopting it as part of one’s own.

2.1 The Rehabilitation of Lyric Poetry

Ol’ga Berggol’ts led the campaign to legitimize lyric poetry in the early Thaw. Berggol’ts was bolstered by the sense of intimacy and solidarity that she had gained with her audience during her radio broadcasts throughout the 900-day blockade of Leningrad in 1941-1944. Berggol’ts eschewed the stilted style of Stalin-era public discourse for a more familiar mode. Katharine Hodgson writes that the “role of the poet that Berggol’ts assumed had its foundations in the nineteenth century, with Pushkin, Lermontov, and Nekrasov,” all of whom shared a “strong sense of the poet’s civic duty to speak out on issues of social and historic importance.”²²² Berggol’ts melded this sense of civic duty with an informal, unguarded element in her broadcasts – a quality she cited as the source of their artistic virtue in her later reflections: “art rose to the position of an unprecedented tribune for the whole city, and not just to hold meetings, conduct agitation, rouse people to action—in addition it was simply talking to its fellow citizens —talking quietly, in a real sense ‘heart to heart.’”²²³ However, authorities’ tolerance of lyric poetry’s intimate style when it proved useful for mobilization ended with the war.

In spring of 1953, shortly after Stalin’s death, Berggol’ts began a renewed push to rehabilitate the lyric when she published “Conversation about lyric poetry” (“Razgovor o lirike”)

²²¹ Jonathan Culler “Narrative and Lyric Theory” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. Matthew Garrett (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 212.

²²² Katharine Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Ol’ga Berggol’ts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

²²³ Quoted in Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 119.

in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. Berggol'ts suggested the degree of the reader's identification with the lyric hero as a measure of the poet's sincerity,²²⁴ of her ability to speak passionately and successfully impart "genuine emotions."²²⁵ Quoting the 19th century critic Vissarion Belinskii concerning the shared nature of seemingly personal feelings, Berggol'ts argues that an appropriately Soviet *and* intimately confiding lyric hero could galvanize readers and strengthen the collective's bond. Berggol'ts attempted to combine the familiar Socialist Realist literary strategy of hero identification with the Romantic tradition, in which Belinskii participated,²²⁶ that treats individual emotional experience as potentially universal.²²⁷

Berggol'ts advocated still more forcefully for the lyric in 1954's "Against the liquidation of lyric poetry" ("Protiv likvidatsii liriki"), railing against party poets' inability or unwillingness to depict life through the "medium of their hearts" and emphasizing the inadequacy of so-called conflict-less art to represent the tumult of individual and collective emotional experience.²²⁸ Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin note the similarity of both of Berggol'ts' polemics to Vladimir Pomerantsev's call for sincerity as the antidote to conflict-lessness and "lacquering" in "On Sincerity in Literature" (which was published in the time between Berggol'ts' first and second articles). While they suggest that Berggol'ts "practically reiterated the thoughts expressed by Pomerantsev, just that she replaced 'sincerity' in relation to poetry with the no less 'dangerous' concept of 'lyric self-expression,'" ²²⁹ Berggol'ts' emphasis on personal, emotional self-expression

²²⁴ Katerina Clark "Wait for Me and I Shall Return": The early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?" 90.

²²⁵ Ol'ga Berggol'ts "Razgovor o lirike," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 16, 1953.

²²⁶ Anatoly Pinsky, "The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 806.

²²⁷ Deborah Forbes, *Sincerity's Shadow: Self-consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-twentieth-century American Poetry*, 15. Forbes traces this Romantic notion to William Wordsworth, who, she argues, tried to establish a "criterion of sincerity" in his "Essay upon Epitaphs" consisting of an appeal to "the common or universal feeling of humanity" and a rendering of "a distinct and clear conception of the individual."

²²⁸ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, "Protiv likvidatsii liriki," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 28, 1954.

²²⁹ Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin, "Literary Criticism during the Thaw," 189.

would seem to be substantively different from Pomerantsev's advocacy of literary realism as the proper expression of writers' fealty to their "true" experience on the collective farms they documented.

Drawing on Charles Taylor's argument that Romanticism distinguished between the mimetic and creative imaginations – "the mimetic imagination is concerned with an accurate articulation of a reality that exists prior to such articulation, creative imagination is about making something manifest"²³⁰ – Eitan Wilf presents self-expression as a communication wherein "the subject articulates an inchoate interiority in the process of becoming" rather than a fully-formed impression of the self.²³¹ That is, if sincerity, based in Protestant language ideology²³² posits an inner state that exists prior to its articulation and sincerity names the congruence between that state and its avowal, Romantic self-expression is the idea that the inner state does not precede its manifestation, and, further, that articulation and reflection are the processes by which the self is discovered. Therefore, the Romantic ideal is "concerned with open-ended situations that are characterized by a lack of knowledge, multiple possibilities, and potential creativity."²³³ Cynthia Hooper notes that, if the most important political question in the 1930s was how to differentiate disguised enemies from proper citizens, friends, under Khrushchev the question became one of choosing the "right" self from a host of options. The uniform essence of the New Man and the hermeneutics of the terror entailed a fully formed construct of the self, which, as we have argued, made discerning sincerity a more transparent matter than ever. As such, while the actual range of positions and roles one could take on remained limited by Soviet ideological hegemony, post-

²³⁰ Eitan Wilf, "Sincerity versus Self-expression: Modern Creative Agency and the Materiality of Semiotic Forms," 470-1.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 463.

²³² Webb Keane, "Sincerity, 'Modernity,' and the Protestants".

²³³ Eitan Wilf, "Sincerity versus Self-expression: Modern Creative Agency and the Materiality of Semiotic Forms," 471.

Stalin cultural narratives of the self have more in common with the ideal of self-expression, as expressed above, than with sincerity, which emerged as a particularly intense preoccupation in the Stalinist period.

The push for the rehabilitation of the lyric met strong official resistance in the Soviet journals and at the 1954 Writers' Union Congress, however, "the concepts of the lyric hero and self-expression were reinstated into the language of literary criticism, and it was under their cover that a new generation of poets stepped onto the literary scene."²³⁴ Evgenii Evtushenko, who was in his early twenties and already a published, but little-known poet at the time, was one of the members of the new generation to take advantage of the potential for the lyric hero to become a Soviet popular hero that Berggol'ts identified. Dramatizing self-expression, conveying the sense that his poetry was an act of self-creation in the above sense of exploring and hence reifying the self, helped turn Evtushenko into a larger-than-life figure in the course of a decade. At the same time, he entered public life by putting himself in the same position as so many others his age: unsure of the future, actively seeking a coherent self and, at least nominally, open to a range of possibilities.

In his 1963 *tamizdat* memoir, *A Precocious Autobiography (Prezhdevremennaia avtobiografiia)*, having already become a celebrity at home, Evtushenko explained his popularity in terms reminiscent of the 1953-1954 debate: "only in a sharply outlined individual can that which is common to many be combined and fused."²³⁵ The circumstances of its publication abroad, in France, marked the memoir as one of Evtushenko's several transgressions of Communist party

²³⁴ Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin, "Literary Criticism during the Thaw," 189.

²³⁵ Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (London: Collins and Harvill, 1963), 10.

authority (for which he was banned from traveling abroad for several years),²³⁶ but the self-portrait that Evtushenko painted was resolutely loyal. He echoed the reformist, Khrushchev wing of the party's line, blaming cynics and dogmatists for betraying the Revolution²³⁷ and positioning himself not as a dissident (the label that would come to be habitually applied to writers who published abroad), but as a patriot, the voice of the Soviet people.²³⁸ While it is hard to imagine that Evtushenko did not anticipate that the authorities would discover and read his memoir, the rhetorical gesture of supporting the Soviet project – if occasionally expressing loyal opposition to certain developments – in an uncensored *tamizdat* text (often perceived as a means for the “true” self to be expressed)²³⁹ was key to Evtushenko's claim to be a sincere proponent of the regime rather than the kind of cynic he denounced elsewhere. Cynthia Hooper has observed that after Stalin the quest for happiness became an accepted element of official literature and that this narrative often entailed choosing between a Communist and capitalist way of life – the former being defined by genuine satisfaction and collective belonging, and the other informed by material pursuits and egoism.²⁴⁰ Part of the power of Evtushenko's rhetoric in this memoir – published in the capitalist West but embracing a Soviet identity – and his poetry lay in Evtushenko presenting himself as freely *choosing* Communism *over* other available ideological options, rather than being coerced or censored into compliance.

²³⁶ Emily Lygo, “The Need for New Voices: Writers' Union policy Towards Young Writers 1953–64” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (London: Routledge, 2005), 203.

²³⁷ Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (London: Collins and Harvill, 1963), 38.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

²³⁹ Benjamin Nathans, “Zagovorivshie raby: o memuarakh sovetskikh dissidentov” in *Posle Stalina: pozdnesovetskaia sub'ektivnost' (1953-1985): sbornik statei* ed. Anatolii Pinski, (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2018), 416.

²⁴⁰ Cynthia Hooper, “Novomu sovetskomu cheloveku' sluchaetsia oshibat'sia: vmesto geroicheskikh figur, obyknovennye grazhdane, neuverenno ishchushchie schast'e” in *Posle Stalina: pozdnesovetskaia sub'ektivnost' (1953-1985): sbornik statei* ed. Anatolii Pinski, (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2018).

Evgenii Evtushenko first made himself known to a broad readership in 1956 with his autobiographical long poem (*poema*) “Zima Junction” (“Stantsiia Zima”). The poem’s publication in the journal *Oktiabr* laid the basis for Evtushenko’s ensuing fame and popularity.²⁴¹ Fittingly, “Zima Junction” – named for Evtushenko’s hometown – introduces the poet by giving an account of his family history, his birthplace, upbringing, and the formation of Evtushenko’s ethical, aesthetic, and civic worldview. From the first, Evtushenko’s actual biography was not only intertwined with that of his poetic persona, his own life was the great subject of his poetry – Evtushenko’s preferred mode for reflecting on the state of the world and his place in it. In “Zima Junction,” Evtushenko offers up his own experience to his audience as a model, but not as a positive hero from the Socialist Realist tradition, rather, the often open-ended, unresolved thoughts and feelings expressed in the poem allow readers to see themselves in the poet’s image, to identify with Evtushenko within the text and potentially without.

Evtushenko establishes his lyric hero’s journey back to the small Siberian outpost of Zima Junction as a quest for answers to complex questions of morality, identity, and purpose. The plot, animated by interrogating this open-endedness through introspection and experience, depicts self-expression, in the sense used by Wilf, as an act of self-discovery. The lyric hero reflects that though he is merely twenty, his time away in Moscow²⁴² (and likely the aftermath of Stalin’s death²⁴³) has occasioned this reassessment of the young poet’s origins and values. Though he has gained in perspective and worldliness from his experience in the city, Evtushenko reflects that he often daydreams of coming back to “feel the same ground on which / you first walked, bare-foot, kicking

²⁴¹ Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *Selected Poems*, trans. Robin Milner-Gulland and Peter Levi (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1962), 87.

²⁴² Evtushenko had been studying at the Gorky Literature Institute since 1951. The events of the poem would seem to take place shortly after Stalin’s death in 1953.

²⁴³ Evtushenko claimed in *A Precocious Autobiography* to have been part of the long procession that formed to view Stalin in his casket (also alluded to in “Zima Junction”) and to have been shaken by the accidental deaths that occurred from overcrowding.

up dust” (“опять земли коснувшись, по которой / когда-то босиком ещё пылил”), of the pine forest, the bright clouds, fishing, flying kites, and rambling through nature.²⁴⁴ The harmonious old-world simplicity that Evtushenko associates with his childhood and Zima is, he discovers, an inadequate answer to the complexities facing him and his generation. After all, his identity is split between urban and rural, intellectual and peasant. Evtushenko ultimately decides that these questions “which he must answer for himself” (“нужно /давать ответы эти самому”)²⁴⁵ – questions of how to live – cannot be addressed by rediscovering traditional values or an old-fashioned mode of existence. The Romantic view of the self as a ground for knowledge inheres in this quest, but the pain of estrangement from the state of nature typical of the Romantic ideology is also present: fully embracing his past seems impossible to Evtushenko, the town of Zima seems to him like an apartment in which he once knew where everything was, but now, on his return, finds himself bumping into the furniture.²⁴⁶

Answering questions for oneself was another feature of the expanded knowledge of the subject in political matters that came to a head during the Thaw. At dinner with his family, Evtushenko’s sister asks if he was at the Pillar Hall in March, a reference to the month and location of Stalin’s funeral. The mood grows serious and Uncle Volodia interjects “Now anyone can be a kind of philosopher / Such are the times./ They’re thinking, the people./ Where, what and how – you can’t figure it out right away.” (“Сейчас любой с философами схож. /Такое время. / Думают в народе. / Где, что и как — не сразу разберёшь.”) His uncle’s statements accord with what Pinsky calls the “empirical imperative,” that became a feature of post-Stalin subjectivity and encouraged the individual “to approach reality more critically—to focus on so-called mistakes and

²⁴⁴ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 1:284.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:290.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:291.

shortcomings in Soviet life” and “required that the Soviet person collect and highlight these mistakes and shortcomings rather than situate them immediately in narrative.”²⁴⁷ Mentioning the overturned Doctors’ Plot Evtushenko’s uncle reasons that since in Moscow things are clearer, Evtushenko – a Muscovite – should “explain it all to him in order.” Unsure of how to respond, Evtushenko says to Uncle Volodia, “as though everything had long ago become clear to me” (“как будто всё давно мне было ясно”) ‘I’ll explain later’” (“Объясню потом.”)²⁴⁸ Evtushenko’s reticence to even attempt a response puts him in the same position as the average citizen who, like his uncle, has been forced to take on the radical uncertainty of “a philosopher of sorts.” His promise to tell his uncle his conclusion “later” – lest they be made in haste or with the wrong spirit becomes the crux of the self-knowledge that Evtushenko gains in his return to Zima Junction.

Though the harmonic image of Evtushenko’s childhood has proven illusory, certain elements of Zima continue to offer inspiration. While on an outing in the fields around Zima, the cart in which Evtushenko travels along with three women and two girls crosses into the forest during a thunderstorm. The passengers take cover under the hay bales on the cart – all except one of the women, a sullen middle-aged peasant wearing a white bonnet, who suddenly becomes the “youth of youths” (“стала молодою-молодой”) as she stands up to meet the rain and pine needles while the cart careens through the woods. Evtushenko here evokes the speeding troika of Gogol’s *Dead Souls* – he describes the cart as being in flight, in reference to the “winged” troika – a well-known symbol of Russia and its fateful journey through history. The peasant woman, conventionally identified with Russian tradition, is here also associated, counterintuitively, with youth and the future amidst her improbable transfiguration. Despite the protests of the other passengers, the woman remains standing and singing and it seems to Evtushenko that she has had

²⁴⁷ Anatoly Pinsky, “The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev,” 808.

²⁴⁸ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 1:293-4.

a divine vision: “she gazed into the distance,/ as though there, / far away/ singing/ she glimpsed that/ which the rest could not see” (“глядела вдаль, / как будто там, / вдали, / поющая / увидела такое, / что остальные видеть не могли.”)²⁴⁹ This peasant woman emerges as a visionary atop the cart that stands in for Russia, but it is not her vision (which goes unspoken) that moves Evtushenko, it is her enthusiasm. Enthusiasm was a characteristic emotion expressed in Evtushenko’s poetry, and in “Zima Junction” it is by way of enthusiasm that he reconciles himself to the daunting, uncertain future and one of the qualities he uses to fill in his self-portrait.

In Zima Evtushenko discovers not his true self, but a rubric for future self-expression. In the final lines, Evtushenko imagines Zima Junction personified, speaking to him: his hometown tells Evtushenko that he is not alone in his predicament, reassures him not to worry that he has not answered the question that has been posed him, and counsels Evtushenko to “Go through the world with a proud head.../ and on your face – /the whipping of wet needles,/ and on your eyelashes – /tears and thunderstorms” (“Иди по свету с гордой головой, / чтоб всё вперёд — / и сердце и глаза, / а по лицу — / хлестанье мокрой хвои, / и на ресницах — / слёзы и гроза.”) Evtushenko is meant to emulate the peasant woman’s fearless, perseverant hope, a point driven home by the imagery of pine needles, tears, and rain, as well as the value of pride, shared by the two scenes. Finally, Zima again exhorts Evtushenko “go!” (“иди”) at which point the reader reaches the present moment, signified by the tense shift in the final two lines “And I went. / And I’m going.” (“И я пошёл. / И я иду.”)²⁵⁰ The continuous action of Evtushenko’s “going” not only emphasizes the ongoing process of becoming the self, it lends continuity between the persona that Evtushenko establishes in “Zima Junction” and the one he would present in poetry and public in the coming years of his career.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:298-300.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:318-19.

Writing in 1963, Andrei Siniavskii observed that Evtushenko “maintains in his poetry the illusion of meeting a living person,” offering “believable details of his life and milieu, telling where he is from, where he lives, whom he meets, whom he loves, what kind of person he is in outlook and temperament.”²⁵¹ Nowhere is this more evident than in “Zima Junction,” but one might add that, for all his verisimilitude, the lyric hero as presented resembled what would soon become a type in Soviet literature – a positive, but not ideal, hero, the “average citizen, uncertainly seeking happiness.”²⁵² As demonstrated above, heroes like Evtushenko’s were capable, without straying too far or explicitly into politics, to evince the values of the post-Stalin party. Indeed, permissions concerning individuals’ gathering knowledge and self-knowledge, the fact that certain “de-Stalinizing” critiques were allowed so long as faith in the party was also present, made this type a more appealing figure. While Youth Prose protagonists represented significant examples of the average citizen-hero, Evtushenko was himself the subject of his poetry and his mythopoetic self-presentation extended into the public arena, where readers were, in fact, drawn to him and the behaviors he modeled, in overwhelming numbers.

2.2 Creating a Public

In his telling, Evgenii Evtushenko’s first major Moscow poetry reading was in 1955 on the first “Poetry Day” (“Den’ poezii”). This initial day devoted to poetry readings (the event would become an annual one) reflected the official attitude of permissiveness and even encouragement toward lyric poetry. After the Second Congress in 1954, all branches of the Writers’ Union were

²⁵¹ Andrei Siniavskii, *Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii: literaturno-kriticheskie raboty raznykh let* (Moskva: Rossiiskii gos. gumanitarnyi universitet, 2003), 64.

²⁵² Cynthia Hooper, “Novomu sovetskomu cheloveku’ sluchaetsia oshibat’sia: vmesto geroicheskikh figur, obyknovennye grazhdane, neuverenno ishchushchie schast’e.”

issued a directive to improve the state of lyric poetry.²⁵³ Authorities evidently envisioned the reinsertion of poetry into public discourse as a boon to the renewed push for civic engagement under Khrushchev – another return to the revolutionary enthusiasm of Lenin following Stalin’s discrediting. The decision to install a statue of Vladimir Maiakovskii, the premier poet of the revolution, in Moscow’s Triumphal Square in 1958 testified to the regime’s willingness to extend pride of place to poets who followed the mobilizational model of Maiakovskii. Poetry Days, along with the readings on Maiakovskii Square, were crucial points of contact between the poet and the public. Though Maiakovskii Square would come to be associated with the birth of the dissident movement, at least initially, these venues gave Evtushenko and his peers an officially sanctioned site to gather and hold readings, making the events into an arena for the creation of public and poetic selves.²⁵⁴

On Poetry Day 1955, Evtushenko recalled, poets stood behind the counters of bookstores throughout Moscow reading poems and signing copies of their work. He found himself in a bookstore on Mokhovskaia street, where “four hundred people squeezed into the shop which was bursting at the seams” while outside “a crowd of more than a thousand who could not get in were chanting in chorus: ‘Come outside! Come outside!’”²⁵⁵ Evtushenko was not himself well-known at the time, so the enthusiasm he describes represents the public’s thirst for lyric poetry in general, irrespective of the orator. Once Evtushenko became a recognizable voice, however, he harnessed the demand for lyric poetry to shape a following of young readers who coalesced at similar meetings. In his memoir Evtushenko depicts the beginnings of this readership’s formation: on that

²⁵³ Emily Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953-1975: The Thaw Generation* (Bern, Switzerland; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 25.

²⁵⁴ Lidia Brusilovskaia, *Kul'tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "ottepli": metamorfozy stilia: uchebnoe posobie* (Moskva: Universitet Rossiiskoi akademii obrazovaniia: Izd-vo URAO, 2001), 62.

²⁵⁵ Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew, 100.

Poetry Day, according to Evtushenko, he was carried out into the street by the crowd, where he read a socially critical poem to the thunderous applause of thousands. Encouraged by the crowd, Evtushenko “wrote poem after poem calling for recruits to our side...I saw that they wanted my poetry, and that, by speaking of what was wrong in our society, I was strengthening, not destroying, their faith in our way of life.”²⁵⁶ In this mythopoetic account, Evtushenko thus mobilized a reform movement befitting the new era of Soviet life by dint of his poetic voice, installing himself as the articulator of that public’s ideals.

One of the key characteristics of Evtushenko’s public was youth, which he equates with a certain set of attitudes and values. In “Zima Junction,” Evtushenko aligned himself with a generation preoccupied with self-determination, dissatisfied with received wisdom. The youth of the Thaw – the first generation to reach school age following the 1936 Constitution and the attendant reformulation of individual responsibility in official ideology – was, in turn, a particular preoccupation of the post-Stalin party. Gleb Tsipursky aptly summarizes this shift:

the new Soviet leadership expanded considerably the previously narrow boundaries of acceptable emotional norms, self-identities, and worldviews for Soviet youth. It regarded young people’s pursuit of a wide variety of interests as legitimate and as part of a greatly broadened path toward communism. This shift sparked widespread enthusiasm and excitement, helping bring many young people into the fold. Enthusiasm became a hallmark emotion of the early Thaw.²⁵⁷

Tsipursky names singing, dancing, and acting as new popular cultural methods of engaging youth in Soviet culture, but lyric poetry, in light of the above discussion of readers’ and listeners’ active participation in the poetic utterance, can be seen as another practice of individuation for the Soviet subject. Moreover, in his poetry, Evtushenko conceived of youth – especially its association with Soviet “enthusiasts” (*entuziasty*) – in terms that largely complemented those of official discourse.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 101.

²⁵⁷ Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945-1970*, 131.

As in “Zima Junction,” Evtushenko’s lyrics presented an unruly, questing spirit in search of meaning whose charm and self-assertion lend appeal to a Soviet worldview. This entails a portrait of the artist as a young man (also a portrait of youth itself) that emphasizes contradictions as well as reconciles them. In a 1955 lyric entitled “Even with all my strength...” (“Vse sily dazhe prilagaia...”), Evtushenko presents existential questioning and obstinance as part of the virtue of youth. The poem at once presents Evtushenko’s distinctive voice and attempts to shape its reception: “I disagree with a great deal / And cannot be made to agree... / And they will say ‘he would do better to stay silent’ / I want to argue over the big things / and not about / the small” (“многим я не соглашаюсь / и согласиться не могу / Пускай не раз придется круто / и скажут: ‘Лучше б помолчал...’ — / хочу я ссориться по крупной / и не хочу по мелочам.”) Here Evtushenko anticipates the criticism that he will receive for his insistence on following his inner mandate and attempts to head it off, explaining “I am drunk on my own power / I laugh at the hubris of exaggerated glory / And, in order to become still stronger / I do not hide my weaknesses” (“От силы собственной хмелею, / смеюсь над спесью дутых слав, / и, чтобы стать еще сильнее, / я не скрываю, в чем я слаб.”)²⁵⁸ Inexact rhymes such as that of “slav” and “slab” (“glory” and “weakness”) were a novelty at the time and they would become a hallmark of Evtushenko’s prosody.²⁵⁹ The inexact rhyme’s disarming messiness – the sense of an unresolved problem of euphony that it conveys – coincides with the surprising concession offered in these lines. Grandiose self-image notwithstanding, Evtushenko claims that he habitually exposes his faults to avoid hubris. With this disclosure Evtushenko reinforces the dissonance of his imprecise prosody, affirming the sense that there is an innately flawed human behind the persona and poetry. In the last lines, Evtushenko again depicts himself in the world: “I go / straightforward, /

²⁵⁸ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 1:162.

²⁵⁹ Aleksandr Babakin, *Slovar' rfm vrg. evtushenko* (Tiumen': Izd-vo IU. Mandriki, 2000), 14.

intransigent, / that means – / young” (“иду / прямой, / непримиримый, что означает — / молодой.”)²⁶⁰ The connection to the “real world” always remains self-evident, immediate in Evtushenko’s poetry, not only due to gestures at the poet’s public self, but because of his implied invocation and interpretation of the ubiquitous official discourse that would have been so familiar to his audience.

One of Evtushenko’s most popular lyrics from his early period, “Prologue” (“Prolog,” 1956) offers a manifesto of sorts for the poet and his cohort. Like “Even with all my strength...”, “Prologue” begins with self-definition: “I’m varied / I’m overworked / and idle, / I am goal- / and not goal-oriented, / I’m entirely incompatible, / awkward, / timid and impudent” (“Я разный — / я натруженный и праздный. / Я целе- / и нецелесообразный. / Я весь несовместимый, / неудобный, / застенчивый и наглый, / злой и добрый.”)²⁶¹ These introductory lines overwhelm with like rhymes, assonance, and a staccato rhythm. The first nine lines – the poem’s first full sentence – are all A-type rhymes of no more than three words each. The string of contradictory traits, which end with “good and bad” (“zloi i dobryi”) is reorganized by the internally rhyming “raz,” which appears in “raznyi” (varied) and again in “prazdnyi” (idle) and “netselesoobraznyi” (translated “not goal-oriented” here to match the prior line). This assonance means that the “varied” aspect of Evtushenko rhymes with the undesirable elements of his personality, a connection which seems to reflect the critical voice of authority evoked in the poem. Later, Evtushenko fleshes out the critical perspective by addressing it directly. After reiterating how he contains sometimes contradictory multitudes, Evtushenko remarks “I know that you will say to me – / ‘where is the wholeness?’ / Here in all this is enormous value” (“Я знаю — вы мне скажете:

²⁶⁰ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 1:162.

²⁶¹ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, 1:268.

/ ‘Где цельность?’ / О, в этом всем огромная есть ценность.’)²⁶² Both “Intransigence” and “Prologue” feature this apostrophic address to potential detractors following an assertion of identity on the part of the poet himself and an account of the values of the youth whom he purports to represent. In these similar stanzas, Evtushenko seeks to shape his public’s relationship to authority and authoritative discourse – perhaps the defining question of any generation. This relationship is not a dissenting one in Evtushenko’s conception, but it requires acceptance of a divided self. He thus asserts a right to self-exploration through self-expression without finding this inconsistent with a Communist identity – in fact, addressing his unnamed detractors, Evtushenko flatly states “I am necessary to you” (“Я Вам необходим.”) Elsewhere in “Prologue,” Evtushenko presents this apparently divided self as the result of uniting disparate elements within. He writes “I have seen myself in the most varied guises, / I am close / to both Esenin / and Whitman, / to both Musorgskii on the stage, / and to Gauguin’s virgin line” (“Я в самом разном сам собой увиден. / Мне близки / и Есенин, / и Уитмен, / и Мусоргским охваченная сцена, / и девственные линии Гогена.”)²⁶³ Evtushenko here evolves one of his most characteristic themes: rhetorically putting himself in another’s shoes, bridging the gap between supposed opposites by bringing them into relation with his own oversized persona, which contains multitudes.

It was in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s that Evtushenko’s persona reached its widest audience, gaining national and eventually international celebrity. In the poetry of this period, Evtushenko developed the persona of the leader of a youth movement. He likewise developed a compositional and performative style to fit the stage. Evtushenko, Voznesenskii, and other popular poet-performers were disparaged *ex post facto* for their “stadium” (*stadionnaia*) or “stage poetry” (*estradnaia poeziia*), but the demands of performance fit Evtushenko’s declamatory lyrics. As

²⁶² Ibid., 1:268.

²⁶³ Ibid., 1:269.

Valerii Prishchepa notes, Evtushenko's poetry makes extensive use of appeals and addresses, aphorisms, vows, and calls to action.²⁶⁴ While it is difficult to ascertain where and when Evtushenko performed particular poems, a certain rhetorical mode can be discerned from those public-facing poems which seem to address a crowd – even if they were not mainstays of Evtushenko's repertoire.

One of the most dynamic venues for poetry reading, Maiakovskii Square, emerged in 1958. The statue of Maiakovskii installed on the square in 1958 signaled the opening of a sort of youth club for poetry. Designating the square as an official space for poetry was in keeping with the impetus behind the first Poetry Day, the instrumentalization of lyric poetry and its popularity for mobilizing youth. Maiakovskii Square's function also falls under Gleb Tsipursky's definition of "socialist time," a term he uses to describe the Khrushchev regime's attempt to engender popular support by "getting young people to spend more of their free time in state-monitored settings... to make youth leisure more visible, organized, and productive."²⁶⁵ At least initially, much of the poetry to be presented at the evening readings were filtered by the organizers of the events, often Komsomol members,²⁶⁶ though these regime-loyal figures existed alongside informal circles of friends who met at the square. Later, however, official oversight was negotiated and often flouted by the informal groups of poetry lovers who were soon staging readings which included uncensored poetry from well-known poets both published and unpublishable as well as readings of unsanctioned poets of the past, including Esenin, Blok, Briusov and other Maiakovskii

²⁶⁴ Valerii Prishchepa, *Rossiiskogo otechestva poet: E.A. Evtushenko, 1965-1995* (Abakan: Khakasskii gos. universitet im. N.F. Katanova, 1996), 30.

²⁶⁵ Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-sponsored Popular Culture in the Cold War Soviet Union, 1945-1970*, 78.

²⁶⁶ Liudmila Polikovskaia "My predchuvstvie, predtecha": *ploshad' Maiakovskogo 1958-1965* (Moskva: Zven'ia, 1996), 28.

contemporaries.²⁶⁷ The proliferation of impermissible political and cultural activity at these events led to their discontinuation by authorities in 1961.

Evtushenko himself appeared on Maiakovskii Square, though as a widely published and well established poet his work he came to be less associated with “Maiak” – as it was called for short – than the “oral samizdat” of certain poets who were mainstays of the square readings.²⁶⁸ The writer, scholar, and then Maiak poet Igor’ Volgin recalled that one Poetry Day Evtushenko appeared at Maiak and, though unable to recall the exact poem that Evtushenko recited, Volgin says, perhaps facetiously, that it could have been “In the battle for Soviet power” (“V boiu za Sovetskuiu vlast”), so “entirely official” was the event. In those days, Volgin elaborates, even such a nakedly patriotic poem would have been greeted with applause “the struggle for Soviet power implied a struggle against all bad things: against party lies, corruption, etc. We then believed that it was possible to change this system without razing it to the ground.”²⁶⁹ This perception aptly summarizes both the significance of Soviet power in Evtushenko’s worldview and the expanding divide between the future dissidents who met in Maiakovskii Square and Evtushenko. At the same time as the dissident movement was beginning to coalesce, Evtushenko’s sincerity rhetoric began to falter. It was in this period that his strategies of self-monumentalization grew in ambition, while, as the ‘60s wore on and draconian punishments for writers recurred, Evtushenko’s insistence on the bravery inherent in his truth-telling art came to contradict his actual curriculum vitae.

Bravery in Evtushenko’s conception was ultimately a moral virtue, as he bluntly states in a 1962 poem, “The good cannot be cowardly,” (“Dobro ne mozhet byt’ truslyvm”) “when good does not fight with evil, / it cannot be good” (“когда добро не борется со злом, / не может быть

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 205.

²⁶⁸ See Iurii Galanskov’s “Human Manifesto” (“Chelovecheskoe Manifest”) for an example of Maiak’s ideological outlook.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 41.

добром.”)²⁷⁰ On the other hand, Evtushenko was adamant that such aggression should not spill over into deleterious anger aimed at the Soviet system as a whole or the average citizen. Evtushenko’s poetry of the late ‘50s and early ‘60s reflects his mission not only to evoke certain emotions, but to discourage and defeat feelings of resentment or anti-social impulses that threatened to overtake his public cardinal virtue – optimism. Evtushenko identifies the enemy in a 1958 lyric in order to define his public by opposition. In the poem, Evtushenko affirms the value of civic consciousness to his constituents, asking that they become more adept at the “difficult skill – citizenship” while imploring “Let not its foundations be tarnished / by the fervor of false truth-seekers” (“Давайте не очернят её основ / задор поддельных правдолюбцев.”) Evtushenko blames disenchantment with civic-mindedness on its inauthentic practitioners, again insisting on the dangers of spurning “genuine” (“подлинное”) citizenship along with “false citizenship” (“гражданственность ложная.”)²⁷¹ Evtushenko thus equates sincerity with good intentions and selflessness, which form the counterweight to cynical abuses of power. Where he encouraged youth to assert themselves and speak their mind by following his example in prior poems, Evtushenko here uses imperative statements to didactically instill in his audience a sense of civic duty which he associates with sincere citizenship. In other works of the period, Evtushenko further develops the connection between insincerity and injustice, juxtaposing unethical, dishonest self-expression with (his own) courageous sincerity. In another 1958 lyric, entitled “To a Critic” (“Odnomu kritiku”), the titular critic is an arrogant sort who “haughtily ministers to the young” (“важно поучает молодых”) though “Before the unjustly powerful he is quiet. / Before the unjustly weak he is fearsome” (“Перед неправой силою — он тих. / Перед неправой слабостью

²⁷⁰ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 2:328.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2:195.

— он грозен.”)²⁷² This critic earns the title of “coward” in Evtushenko’s verse due not only to his reprehensible treatment of others, but because of his two-faced conduct – not holding back his thoughts when in a position of power but meek when the tables are turned.

The question of bravery returns in 1960’s “They say to me” (“Мне говорят”), which presents a long demurral on the part of Evtushenko when “They say to me – / you are a brave man” (“Мне говорят — ты смелый человек.”) The entire poem is presented as reported speech and reads like a response to an interview question. Evtushenko avers that he has never been brave, only he never “lowered himself to the cowardice” (унизиться до трусости коллег”) of his colleagues. In short, clipped statements, he explains “I wrote poems. / I did not write denunciations. / And I tried to say everything that I thought” (“Писал стихи. / Доносов не писал. / И говорить старался всё, что думал.”) Finally, Evtushenko wryly concludes that our descendants will recall bitterly “that very / strange time, / when / simple honesty / was called bravery!” (“то время очень странное, когда / простую честность называли смелостью!”)²⁷³ This poem speaks to Evtushenko’s growing self-awareness as a public figure and the false humility of protesting his bravery while thematizing it as one of his lyric hero’s personal qualities.

A notable feature of Evtushenko’s poetry of the late ‘50s and early ‘60s is the way it combines his introspective and extroverted personas. While his civic poems are liable to take on a grandiloquent style in any period of Evtushenko’s poetry, much of his “stage poetry” – identifiable by its apostrophic addresses and calls to action – incorporates (and insists upon) an intimate tone. In “The Angry” (“Сердитые,” 1959) Evtushenko imagines himself in the role of intermediary between the angry young men of his generation and the twentieth century itself. He begins as though writing an ode to the century: “Twentieth century, century of the great sputnik, / how

²⁷² Ibid., 2:197.

²⁷³ Ibid., 2:276.

mournful and troubled are you, / you are both a good century and a villain-century, / a century that is the murderer of its own ideas / a century of angry young people” (“Век двадцатый, век великий спутника, / сколько в тебе скорбного и смутного, / ты - и добрый век, и век-злодей, / век - убийца собственных идей, / век сердитых молодых людей.”) The odic tone quickly mixes with an elegiac mood, and in the next verse Evtushenko turns to the angry young people – a group that includes the “poisonous guys” (“в парнях ядовитых”) on the Hudson, Tiber, Seine and Thames. This internationalist note – sounded prior to his extensive travels abroad – signifies Evtushenko’s expansion of his public in accord with the scale of the other subject of the poem, the century. Evtushenko’s agenda in “The Angry” is to pacify and reassert the optimism emblematic of the public he hopes to create – not only in Russia now, but abroad as well. He professes confusion over what these angry youths want, though he “understands what they don’t need” (“Понимаю я - чего не надо им.”) As such, he counsels adopting enthusiasm as the defining characteristic of youth rather than anger, telling the angry “man-to-man” (“по-мужски”) that “if I am angry at something, / it is just that, in me / pitiful unbelief does not sit / it is love for my native country that buzzes” (“если я на что-то и сердит, / это оттого лишь, что во мне / не безверье жалкое сидит, / а гудит любовь к родной стране.”)²⁷⁴

Evtushenko’s characteristic optimism was challenged by unofficial or explicitly anti-Soviet poetry and polemics – the kind that would be released in samizdat journals like *Sintaksis* and *Feniks* in 1960. Evtushenko’s perception as a sincere proponent of his generation’s freedom-seeking cause was compromised by his relationship with the authorities at a time when actual youth self-determination was being stamped out from above. However, Evtushenko was a proponent of open discussion and polemicizing not only in theory but in Maiakovskii Square. In

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 2: 208.

1962 he appeared before an ideological commission of the Central Committee to advocate for the reintroduction of spaces such as Maiak, which had been shut down in 1961, telling the committee “Now we must fight for the souls of our youth. But again, I want to show you how sometimes we are not trusted, young writers, to fight for these souls.” He describes how the square came to be shut down: local officials came and “cleared out the audience several nights in a row, pulled out those who read poems. One girl was dragged out and she read “I love” by Maiakovskii. They decided that she herself wrote it and that we do not need such poems. And for the whole Maiakovskii Square, the evenings stopped.” Evtushenko asks the committee “What happened? Where is the fight? Capitulated to these slobbering wimps. This situation needs to be corrected...”²⁷⁵ It is interesting to note the similarities between the address given by Evtushenko to the Central Committee and poems like “The Angry” and “Come on boys!” (“Davaite mal’chiki”), wherein he attempts reconciliation with the disillusioned youth. Evtushenko simultaneously argues for his version of communism with both the powers that be and attempts to build a forward-looking collective in his poetic appeals to his droves of readers and listeners. Indeed, despite being on the reform side of most major cultural and political issues, Evtushenko’s reputation as a sincere voice of the youth movement suffered among his constituency for the appearance of being sanctioned by the Soviet government – a position that became more and more unacceptable to many as party orthodoxy reasserted itself in the course of the ‘60s.

However, at least in the early part of the decade, Evtushenko found himself having to forego formal publication in order to print his work. Maiakovskii Square in many ways marked the beginning of samizdat – self-publication – as a popular mode of circulating writings that were unpublishable by Soviet standards.²⁷⁶ Mode of publication had a significant impact on the “literary

²⁷⁵ Quoted in Liudmila Polikovskaia, “*My predchuvstvie, predtecha*”: *ploshad’ Maiakovskogo 1958-1965*.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

function” of the authorial persona. As Andrew Wachtel notes, at a certain point unofficial writers became valued above official writers irrespective of their relative talent.²⁷⁷ This bias in favor of unofficial writers is reflected in evaluations of Evtushenko’s work, such as the dissident Vladimir Bukovskii’s statement that Evtushenko was seen as “compromised” by his relationship with authorities. On the other hand, Igor Volgin favorably recalled reading Evtushenko’s controversial “Babii Iar” (1961) and his *Precocious Autobiography*, which was published in France in 1961.²⁷⁸

“Babii Iar” continues Evtushenko’s ethic of extending solidarity and expanding the public for which he might become, at least in his poetry, a metonymic focal point. The first line, “There are no monuments over Babii Iar” (“Над Бабьим Яром памятников нет”) signals the poem’s intent to memorialize the mainly Jewish victims of the Nazi atrocity in words and poetic transformation. Evtushenko announces that the horrors of the killings at Babii Iar have troubled him to the extent that he feels as old as the Jewish people, in fact, he feels as though he is himself a Jew. He imagines himself wandering through ancient Egypt, then inhabiting the crucified body of Christ, as Dreyfus at court and a boy in Belostok. Evtushenko then affirms “O my Russian people! - / I know - / You / are international in essence” (“О, русский мой народ! — / Я знаю / ты / По сущности интернационален.”) but condemns his countrymen for their anti-Semitism. He offers himself as an example of a true internationalist: “There is no Jewish blood in me. / But with hardened malice / I hate all anti-semitism, / like a Jew, / and for that reason - / I am a real Russian!” (“Еврейской крови нет в крови моей. / Но ненавистен злобой заскорузлой / я всем антисемитам, / как еврей, / и потому — / я настоящий русский!”)²⁷⁹ “Babii Iar” is notable for the programmatic manner in which Evtushenko practices and recommends empathy. Evtushenko

²⁷⁷ Andrew Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 37-8.

²⁷⁸ Liudmila Polikovskaia, “*My predchuvstvie, predtecha*”: *ploshad’ Maiakovskogo 1958-1965*, 43.

²⁷⁹ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 2:311.

appends to his role-playing as a Jew his credentials as a true Russian along with the claim that a true Russian ought to follow his example. In his attempt to lend (his own) humanity to Jews, Evtushenko presents himself, in various guises, as emblematic of both the Jewish and Russian people, thereby enacting in poetic form the rapprochement he advocates.

Evtushenko's practice of self-substitution to evoke empathy is also one he encourages in his public. Evtushenko's idiolectic response to the demand of capturing an audience's attention and imparting sonically memorable, meaningful language included incorporating a marked amount of aphorisms in his poetry. Aphorisms resemble lyrics in their combination of aesthetic and semantic appeal but are shorter in form than the already brief lyric poem, making them ideally accessible and memorable. Evtushenko's aphorisms have been divided into two categories: those that are moralistic maxims, and the paradoxical, polysemic variety.²⁸⁰ The moralizing type brings out the didactic side of Evtushenko's poetry, emphasizing again that his work constitutes a statement about the world in which the reader lives offering concise, compelling words to live by. Paradoxical aphorisms derive their staying power from their irreducibility – the fact that these brief, rhythmic, phrases are easily accessible in memory or catchy enough to be remembered unbidden provokes contemplation of their less readily available semantic possibilities.

Evgenii Sidorov suggests that Evtushenko's poetry seeks to be a kind of "textbook on life."²⁸¹ His 1961 lyric "There are no boring people in the world..." ("Liudei neinteresnykh v mire net...") contains an epistemological and ethical adage in its opening line. Evtushenko plays with the paradoxical implications of his opening proposal: "And if someone lived in obscurity / and made friends with this obscurity, / he was interesting to people / for his very uninterestingness"

²⁸⁰ Vitalii Komin and Valerii Prishchepa, *On prishel v XXI-i vek: tvorcheskii put' Evgeniia Evtushenko* (Irkutsk: Print Lain, 2009), 357.

²⁸¹ Evgenii Sidorov, *Evgenii Evtushenko: lichnost' i tvorchestvo* (Moskva: Khudozh. lit-ra, 1987), 42.

(“А если кто-то незаметно жил / и с этой незаметностью дружил, / он интересен был среди людей / самой неинтересностью своей.”) Despite the contradiction in terms, Evtushenko sees no dissonance in claiming that boring people are, in fact, interesting. He continues “Everyone has one’s own secret personal world. / There is in this world their best moment. / There is in this world their most frightening hour, / but all this is unfathomable to us” (“У каждого — свой тайный личный мир. / Есть в мире этом самый лучший миг. / Есть в мире этом самый страшный час, / но это все неведомо для нас.”)²⁸² In these lines Evtushenko asserts the value of the human subject, bringing awareness of the inaccessible private self to the fore in order to foster recognition of oneself in the other. Just as a public built around the subjective experience of interpreting lyric poetry highlights the connectedness of one’s own inner world with others’, Evtushenko offers a worldview that extends the same fellow feeling to all individuals, even the apparently boring ones. Evtushenko’s logic for undertaking such an empathic leap centers on acknowledging the constancy of epistemic privacy: the basic unknowability of others’ private, internal experience. It is epistemic privacy that sincerity seeks to overcome, albeit in mediated forms like language, emotion, gesture, and so on. “There are no boring people in the world...” affirms the foundation for potentially sincere modalities – the belief that all subjects contain an inner world that is worth expressing.

Both “There are no boring people in the world” and “Babii Iar” contain paradoxes meant to highlight moral stances, combining the two types of aphorisms mentioned above. Paradox and internal division are constant features of Evtushenko’s self-presentation which only became more prominent in his poetry as his persona and reputation grew. In the early ‘60s Evtushenko (along with poets like Voznesenskii, Akhmadulina, and Okudzhava) performed for his largest crowd yet in the Moscow sports arena the Luzhniki. This event, along with his travels in Europe in the

²⁸² Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochineniĭ v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 2:317

following year seem to have occasioned in his poetry of the period a certain amount of self-reflection on Evtushenko's increasingly outsize persona. In 1962's "Uncertainty" ("Neuverennost") Evtushenko attempts to reintegrate his more vulnerable and relatable private side into the charismatic, crusading figure he projected in public life. In "Uncertainty" Evtushenko claims "I am superstitiously uncertain. / Hiding my inner fear" ("Я суеверно неуверен. / Скрывая внутренний испуг.") He asks, rhetorically, to what end does he "play at power" ("в могущество играю") when he worries he cannot manage to live up to expectations. Evtushenko ends by asking "O god let me be a poet! / Let me not deceive people" ("О, дай мне, боже, быть поэтом! / Не дай людей мне обмануть.")²⁸³ "Uncertainty" directs the reader to contemplate the everyday Evtushenko, the "real" person behind the grandstanding public figure who grapples with the power and hope invested in him by his supporters. Evtushenko reveals himself to be deeply aware of the need to balance his ever-expanding public persona with reassurances that he remains the fallible, familiar character of his earlier work.

2.3 The Myth of the Russian National Poet

In 1963 Evtushenko traveled to Europe, where he met with Pablo Picasso and other luminaries. With his international fame ascending, Evtushenko was subsequently forbidden from traveling abroad from 1963 to 1965 for the publication of his *Precocious Autobiography*. Evtushenko instead traveled to the northern locale of Pechora with the rural writer Iurii Kazakov, and extensively around Russia, during which time Evtushenko wrote more self-critically of his rise to fame and the poetic course he charted along the way. His self-criticism incorporated both

²⁸³ Ibid., 2:339.

the Soviet ritual of penance and an attempt to regain some of the humility that his lyric hero had lost during his remarkable rise. Evtushenko presents a rediscovery of his roots in these years – a return encapsulated by the long poem “Again at Zima Junction” (“Опять на Станции Зима,” 1963). Where his 1956 long poem on his return to Zima saw Evtushenko arrive from Moscow as a still unknown individual, in 1963 Evtushenko remarks “I have returned after wandering, / covered in the dust of England, France / and the dust of rumors about me / and – I will be direct – not on a horse” (“Я возвратился после странствий, / покрытый пылью Англии, Франций / да пылью слухов обо мне / и — буду прям — не на коне.”) Evtushenko presents himself as having been humbled “after a harsh critique” – presumably the allegations of anti-Soviet, unpatriotic activity that came with the publication of his memoir abroad – and offering his penitence to the homeland which Evtushenko feels he has betrayed. In Evtushenko’s account, this betrayal also resembles the official reprimand he received insofar as it is related to his extensive activity abroad. Evtushenko bitterly asks of himself how he could love Cuba, which he visited in 1961, “when, tender and crystalline, / I, like Esenin and his peasant mother, / did not adore you. Zima?!” (“когда бы нежно и кристально / я, как Есенин мать-крестьянку, / не обожал тебя. Зима?!”) ²⁸⁴ At the end of the poem, Evtushenko vows to remain faithful to Zima and to the Russian homeland which it represents. This vow of loyalty is emblematic of a gradual shift in Evtushenko’s lyric “I” – he comes to present himself as a national poet whose public is a romanticized vision of Russia rather than as a believer in the present regime.

In the period during which he was prohibited from travel abroad, Evtushenko wrote several poems diminishing the import of his highly public attempts at socio-political mobilization by contrasting them with an eternal Russian spirit. He presents a crisis of poetic voice beginning in

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 2:345.

1963, which would continue into the '70s. In “Long Cries” (“Dolgie kriki,” 1963), which is dedicated to Iurii Kazakov, Evtushenko depicts himself before a drowsy little hut on the shore, crying out but failing to wake anyone in the village. He reflects “My voice boomed in halls like an alarm, / its might rumble shook squares, / but to reach this little hut / and awaken it – it is too weak” (“Голос мой в залах гремел, как набат, / площади тряс его мощный раскат, / а дотянуться до этой избушки / и пробудить ее — он слабоват.”) Evtushenko worries about his inability to rouse the heartland, the peasant, despite his accomplishments in the capital. This he takes as evidence of having gone astray in his poetry, which has weakened his poetic power: “What are you, an orator, what are you, a prophet?” (“Что ж ты, оратор, что ж ты, пророк?”) “All out of bullets. Your voice is torn out” (“Кончились пули. Сорван твой голос.”)²⁸⁵ Evtushenko employs the familiar trope of the poet’s voice as his vitality in this and other poems in which the lyric voice is alone in nature. In another poem set in the Russian North, he laments “Akh, how weak are you, my speech! Akh, how worthless, objectionable, / how uncapacious are all words / before the open spaces of Pechora!” (“Ах, как ты, речь моя, слаба! / Ах, как никчёмны, непричёмны, / как непросторны все слова / перед просторами Печоры!”) Evtushenko’s inventive wordplay in this verse perhaps belies his voice’s enervated state – indeed, the Pechora river proves to be a source of inspiration as well as humility: “And so I jumped in the Pechora, / easily forgetting all that was / like Ivan the fool leapt / into the cauldron of boiling tar, / in order to emerge a proud brute / in a new kaftan, chuckling, / and flex his arms again: / ‘Well now, *oprichniki*, let’s see how you measure up!’” (“И я в Печору прыгнул так, / легко забыв про всё бывшее, / как сиганул Иван-дурак / в котёл с кипящею смолою, / чтоб выйти гордым силачом, / в кафтане новеньком, посмеиваясь, / и вновь поигрывать плечом: / ‘А ну, попробуйте,—

²⁸⁵ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 2:366.

померяйтесь!)”²⁸⁶ Despite being at a loss contemplating the river, Evtushenko imagines himself leaping into the Pechora and emerging renewed by it. In choosing Ivan the fool as his model, Evtushenko shows that his renewal comes with a renewed awareness of the Russian past. This engagement with Russian folk heroes – the traditional hero of Ivan the fool and the contemporary legend of Sergei Esenin – signals Evtushenko’s recasting of his persona in the image of a perennial type: the Russian national poet.

Evgenii Sidorov remarks that, with the possible exception of Pushkin, no poet has been as prepared to declare himself symbolic of the entire Russian nation as Evgenii Evtushenko.²⁸⁷ Especially after 1964, when Nikita Khrushchev was deposed and replaced by a hardline element led by Leonid Brezhnev, Evtushenko increasingly identified himself with the poets of the past who found themselves at odds with the authorities of the time. While Evtushenko himself negotiated Soviet officialdom successfully for the most part – when his ban on travel was lifted two years later he traveled the world, including the United States – other writers suffered harsher punishment under the new regime. In the Brezhnev era, Evtushenko penned grandiose poems about the role of the poet in response to the persecution of literary figures and other injustices. Where much of his previous politically and socially critical poetry theorized a population of fundamentally good people – whether the young urban or rural masses – that opposed injustice, Evtushenko came to valorize the supposed synecdoche for the people, the poet, more than the people themselves in the latter half of the ‘60s.

In two poems about Mikhail Lermontov, Evtushenko glorifies Russian poets’ historical clashes with authority. “Ballad of Lermontov’s Poem ‘On the Death of a Poet’ and of the Gendarmes Chief” (“Ballada o stikhotverenii Lermontova ‘Na smert’ poeta’ i o shefe

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 2:387.

²⁸⁷ Evgenii Sidorov, *Evgenii Evtushenko: lichnost' i tvorchestvo*, 122.

zhandarmov, ” 1964) depicts Nikolai I’s secret police head Benckendorff tormented by the lines of Lermontov’s “On the Death of a Poet” – itself a poem glorifying Russia’s national poet, Aleksandr Pushkin. Benckendorff hallucinates the words “there is divine judgment? (“есть божий суд”) from Lermontov’s poem after exiling the poet to the Caucasus. Evtushenko sententiously concludes “But eternally – for all the scoundrels, / gendarmes, court flatterers, / who rage and lie, / there must sound with the implacability of an alarm: / ‘There is divine judgment, confidants of depravity!’ / and the judgment of the poet – this is divine judgment” (“Но вечно / надо всеми подлецами — / жандармами, придворными льстецами,— / как будто их грядущая судьба, / звучит с неумолимостью набата: / ‘Есть божий суд, наперсники разврата...Есть божий суд... Есть грозный судия...’”)²⁸⁸ Evtushenko avers that the poet is responsible to a higher power than the government, a sentiment expressed by Iosif Brodskii in his 1964 trial as well. Evtushenko here makes common cause with Brodsky, who claimed to be a poet by divine will. Brodskii was sentenced to several years of hard labor, whereas Evtushenko continued to publish and maintain his high status. Though Evtushenko intervened on Brodskii’s behalf to have his sentence commuted, the unavoidable fact that Evtushenko suffered comparatively little for his art – both compared to the 19th century Romantics he claimed as predecessors or contemporary conscientious objectors like Anna Akhmatova and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – made his insistence on the eternal resonance of the poet’s persecution a projected rather than lived truth.

In another poem entitled “Lermontov” (1964), which considers the deaths of Pushkin and Lermontov in duels, Evtushenko affirms the importance of the poet’s fight: “But Pushkin’s voice of citizenship / pushes on to the barrier: ‘Go!’ / ...Poets in Russia are born / with Dantes’ bullet in their chest” (“Но пушкинский голос гражданства / к барьеру толкает: ‘Иди!’ / ...Поэты в

²⁸⁸ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moskva: NEVA group, 1997), 2:398.

России рождались / с дантесовской пулей в груди.”)²⁸⁹ Maybe the most famous of Evtushenko’s aphorisms, “A poet in Russia is more than a poet”, comes from 1964’s long poem *Bratsk Station (Bratskaia GES)*, where it opens the preamble: “A poet in Russia is more than a poet. Poets are fated to be born in her / only those in whom wanders the proud spirit of citizenship, / for whom there is no comfort, no peace” (“Поэт в России — больше чем поэт. / В ней суждено поэтами рождаться / лишь тем, в ком бродит гордый дух гражданства, / кому уюта нет, покоя нет.”) and the “diaphanous prototype” “прозрачный прообраз” of the future. Evtushenko humbly pays his respects to the poets of the past, requesting the characteristic attributes of Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Blok, Pasternak, Esenin, and Maiakovskii.²⁹⁰ Evtushenko deals explicitly and self-consciously with self-monumentalizing art – a Russian tradition that could be said to have begun with Pushkin’s ‘I have raised myself a monument not made by human hands’ and interpreted by Lermontov in “On the death of a poet” – by presenting himself as part of this lineage.

Evtushenko’s exchange of contemporary youth activism for poetic eternity has its most straightforward expression in 1965’s “White snow falls” (“Idut belye snegi”). The poet finds comfort in the thought that he has loved Russia with all his heart and helped his nation in some small way. He reflects “White snow falls / like in all times, / as in the time of Pushkin, Sten’ka / and as after me” (“Идут белые снеги, / как во все времена, / как при Пушкине, Стеньке / и как после меня”) – natural, cyclical time is insurmountable, but Evtushenko’s hope is that “if Russia will be, / it means I will be too” (“если будет Россия, / значит, буду и я.”)²⁹¹ Evtushenko attaches his fate to Russia’s, envisioning himself as a Pushkin or even Sten’ka Razin, the peasant rebel leader, who will become synonymous with a certain part of the country’s history. This poem,

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:443.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 2:447-8.

²⁹¹ Evgenii Evtushenko, *Pervoe sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 3, 3:13.

along with his other aphoristic statements on the poet's place in history and society, mark the culmination of sorts of Evtushenko's development of his persona. Evtushenko began with the stated goals of attaching a human face to reform Communist endeavors, evolved into an outsized public figure who demonstrated and encouraged empathic identification with the persecuted Jewish communities and with the likeminded, albeit capitalist, youth of the USSR's purported enemies abroad. Evtushenko avidly practiced self-substitution, which entailed both empathy and appropriation – the poet presented himself as the avatar of youth, rural Russia, Jews etc. With the rediscovery of his roots in 1963 and the increasingly unfeasibility of reform, Evtushenko came to see himself as embodying Russia itself. That is, he envisioned an alternative Russia to the one extant within the Soviet Union, one that followed in the tradition of great poets who projected a nation and national spirit divorced from that of the tyrannical official government. However, this shift left Evtushenko open to criticisms of insincerity on the basis of his prior cooperation with the Soviet regime (and the safety from persecution afforded by his reputation post-Khrushchev) and the self-aggrandizement involved in praising poets.

Evgenii Evtushenko's legacy bring cultural expectations of the Cold War and Russian literary tradition to the fore. Alexandra Harrington notes that the "Romantic and Christological cultural expectations of the poet as heroic martyr with a cultural mission" that had existed in Russian literature of the 19th century was adapted to the Cold War in the hagiographic treatment of dissidents abroad.²⁹² Evtushenko was himself an interpreter of this myth in his own self-monumentalizing and his portrayal in the Western press often took this image at face value. The

²⁹² Alexandra Harrington, "It is Unseemly to be Famous': Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and the Melodramatic Dynamics of the Myth of the Russian Poet in Russia and the West," 514-15.

poet's eagerness to take on this mantle was contrasted by the attitude of many dissidents, who were suspicious of such narratives being applied to them.²⁹³

The critical reception to Evtushenko also reveals an expectation that a poet's personal and poetic biographies ought to coincide – that is, that poetry must be sincere. Evtushenko's apparent unwillingness to risk his own health or career has been seen as a moral failing, an attempt at misrepresentation, at least since Brodskii remarked in 1972 that Evtushenko was a “very bad poet and an even worse person.”²⁹⁴ Such moral judgments reflect the divide between a staunchly anti-Soviet and a long gone reform-minded Communist faction. Indeed, from a purely political standpoint, Evtushenko was reliably liberal with moments of outspokenness against antisemitism in “Babii Iar” as well as support for endangered writers like Iosif Brodskii himself.²⁹⁵ It was what people like Brodskii suspected Evtushenko of doing behind the scenes for his own personal gain that invalidated these public stances. These suspicions were founded. Evgenii Zhirnov has discovered a speech that a chastened Evtushenko gave before the Central Committee in 1962 about his decision to rework “Babii Iar” after his stance in it was criticized. Characteristically, Evtushenko presented this decision as sincere: “This was not done because I was told to, given instruction, no one forced me to touch this poem. It was my deep conviction.”²⁹⁶

The tendency to depict Evtushenko as emblematic of the Thaw and its disappointments is also evident in scholarly approaches to his work. We have quoted the scholars Vail's and Genis' influential opinion that Evtushenko was so synonymous with the Thaw that his poetic persona was

²⁹³ Benjamin Nathans, “Zagovorivshie raby: o memuarakh sovetskikh dissidentov” in *Posle Stalina: pozdnesovetskaia sub'ektivnost' (1953-1985): sbornik statei* ed. Anatolii Pinski, (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2018), 402.

²⁹⁴ Grace Cuddihy “Brodsky Criticizes His Contemporaries from Beyond the Grave,” *The Moscow Times*, October 24, 2013, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/10/24/brodsky-criticizes-his-contemporaries-from-beyond-the-grave-a28924>.

²⁹⁵ *Ia ostanus' ne tol'ko stikhami: sovremenniki o Evgenii Evtushenko*, ed. Boris Romanov. (Moskva: Russkii mir, 2018), 137.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Evgenii Zhirnov, “Ochen' svoevremennii poet,” *Kommersant' vlast'*, no. 5 (July 2005): 61.

invalid in the eras that followed. They provocatively claim “Khrushchev was the main poet of the era. And his poetic conspectus was compiled by Evgenii Evtushenko.”²⁹⁷ More precisely, it was Evtushenko’s ability to give reform Communism emotional resonance by channeling it through his poetic persona and sincerity rhetoric that made him indispensable. While Evtushenko readily admitted certain flaws, it was the tendency illustrated in the Central Committee meeting above, his unwillingness to admit to having ever been a self-aware agent of official discourse in his navigation of power and poetry, that aligned Evtushenko with an essentialist presentation of sincerity that thrived during the Thaw. In the late Soviet period, in the eyes of interpreters like Brodskii and Vail’ and Genis, the idea of sincere commitment to the ideals of the Thaw (including sincerity) seemed to be only a cynical manipulation. But Evtushenko’s self-preservation and collaboration appear differently depending on one’s view of the “sincerity” and popularity of Khrushchev’s reform project. Recently, reflecting on the obituaries of Evtushenko when he died in 2017, one non-admirer admitted that, while Evtushenko’s poetry had always been of little interest to him, Evtushenko “embodied the tragedy of the second half of the Soviet era—a frantic and sincere attempt by a powerful, cold-blooded dragon to humanize itself and become more youthful, or rather, an attempt by the people whose bodies and souls made up this dragon to become ordinary people and thereby restore their future.”²⁹⁸

The form of lyric poetry and a Romantic subjectivity were key to Evtushenko’s attempt to marry self-expression with ideological art. His project’s success hinged on an ability to credibly depict a subject who, in the language of Eitan Wilf’s definition of sincerity, was truly “inchoate,” or continuously in the “process of becoming” a good Soviet citizen as a result of introspection rather than conformist personal ambition. A compelling rhetoric of sincerity was required to

²⁹⁷ Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 30.

²⁹⁸ Valerii Shubinski, “Yevgeny Yevtushenko has Died” *Russian Studies in Literature* 55, no. 1 (2019), 63.

accomplish this. Evtushenko created a lyric hero that was in many ways conflicted and flawed, but capable of uniting disparate identities within. In presenting his own life as synonymous with that of his lyric hero (down to intimate details), Evtushenko modeled a multi-faceted self that need not necessarily conflict with the Soviet model. Evtushenko therefore extended the Romantic treatment of the Soviet subject that began as a trend in official ideology in the 1930s to include self-expression in the service of non-political pursuits as legitimate.

Chapter 3

An Ironic Phase: Youth Prose Grows Up

If Evgenii Evtushenko's poetry during the Thaw consistently treated authoritative discourse and its poeticizing as a sincere endeavor, his contemporaries – writers of prose from the same generation and milieu – found it far more difficult to reconcile with the party line. The arc of officially published young writers of a hip, cosmopolitan disposition in the same period saw a greater role for irony from the outset – and irony ultimately came to characterize their relationship to authoritative discourse. In the mid-1950s, well-known writers of an older generation such as Veniamin Kaverin and Konstantin Paustovskii adapted the “youth story” (*iunosheskaia povest'*) – a genre especially prominent in the 19th century that portrayed the romantic possibility of youthful adventure, often in a pastoral setting – to modern Soviet society.²⁹⁹ The young writers who appeared frequently in the journal *Iunost'* (*Youth*), which was founded in 1955 under the supervision of another author of youth stories, Valentin Kataev, went on to set the agenda of the contemporary youth story, which came to be called “Youth Prose” (*iunosheskaia* or *molodaia proza*). The youth stories published in *Iunost'* blended the genre's traditional questing for glory and meaning with a revised version of Socialist Realist narrative.³⁰⁰ Two of the most popular authors to appear in *Iunost'*, Anatolii Gladilin and Vasilii Aksenov, published stories in the mid- to late-1950s and early '60s that infused the modern youth story with a heady ironic sensibility. The ironic attitudes expressed were often represented alongside voices of sincere belief in socialism, with the latter worldview winning out in the end. Still, the

²⁹⁹ Timothy Pogacar, “The Journal ‘Iunost’ in Soviet Russian Literature, 1955-1965,” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1985) 19-20.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 37, 64.

verisimilitude of the ironic perspective in Youth Prose spoke to the changing sense of the desirability or possibility of being sincere among a segment of young Soviet writers.

Indeed, the turn to an ironic mode that can already be witnessed in Aksenov's works of the early '60s has been described as a reaction to the Thaw and its ideals – sincerity chief among them – which carried on into the Brezhnev era³⁰¹ and postmodernist fiction. Aksenov's and Gladilin's early writing therefore represents a moment when irony and sincerity comingled in state-published literature. Lev Anninskii's observation that Youth Prose was fundamentally preoccupied with distinguishing “core from surface” and word from deed³⁰² helps explain the impetus behind this comingling. Both sincerity and irony are predicated on judging the separation between appearance and reality in words and behavior. The Youth Prose impulse to “test words in their solidity”³⁰³ entailed exploring irony as a verbal technique that puts signifier and signified at odds. The disruptive effect of irony on language parallels the disjuncture between inner and outer self that bedevils many Youth Prose heroes, who ultimately learn that congruence between word and deed, signifier and signified comes with devotion to the collective.

The tendency to ironize official discourse in Youth Prose reflected the characters' sense of the difficulties inherent in positively expressing oneself in one's own terms (i.e., not the official lexicon of verbal and behavioral clichés) when their identities remained closely connected to the socio-cultural processes of the Thaw.³⁰⁴ Sven Spieker notes that Youth Prose,

³⁰¹ Aleksandr Prokhorov, “Inherited Discourse: Stalinist Tropes in Thaw Culture” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2002), 269.

³⁰² Lev Anninskii, *Iadro orekha: kriticheskie ocherki*, 89.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁰⁴ Cynthia Hooper notes that, despite Aksenov's opposition to the Soviet system, he nevertheless believed that there was a post-Stalin Soviet identity formed by politics and education, see Hooper, “Novomu sovetskomu cheloveku sluchaetsia oshibat'sia: vmesto geroicheskikh figur, obyknovennye grazhdane, neuverenno ishchushchie schast'e”. 55. Oleg Kharkhordin notes that both the “liberal” critic Anninskii and a contemporary Soviet critic critique Dimka in *A Starry Ticket* for his inability to decide his life plan, differing only in prescribing opposite results for the kind of

like Village Prose, was an inheritor of the sincerity discourse of the early Thaw and likewise became intent on constructing a distinct voice.³⁰⁵ However, the youth slang and parody of official discourse that would emerge from such works, while a distinct mode of self-expression, was not necessarily seen as a life-affirming alternative to official discourse even by its articulators, much less its critics. Writing in 1963, one Soviet critic lamented the connection between Aksenov's characters' mistrust of the "lofty words" of official discourse and the sincerity rhetoric of the post-Stalin '50s: "The fight against varnishing ended in pushing back the life-affirming character of the modern young man and bringing to the fore a man incapable of an active, conscious, creative life..."³⁰⁶ In this account, the early Thaw's fixation on sincerity had the effect of setting disillusionment in motion, ultimately invalidating idealism in the minds of many of Aksenov's and Gladilin's generation. While it may be a case of confusing the cure – sincerity as a Soviet value – for the disease (the legitimation crisis the Khrushchev leadership unleashed with de-Stalinization), this lament acknowledges the volatility of sincerity. In fact, in the course of Youth Prose, ironizing official discourse would come to be seen as more sincere than sincere engagement with its truth-value.

The evolution of the search for self in post-Stalin literature became another instance of the battle against "varnishing" ending ironically. The hero's path in Youth Prose represented a reimagining of the positive hero that reflected and extended Romantic Soviet subjectivity. Oleg Kharkhordin notes that *Iunost'* was a significant source of "self-training in order to transform oneself into a hero" from the first article in the journal's first edition in 1955, which asked "the

person Dimka ought to become, see Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 350.

³⁰⁵ Sven Spieker, *Figures of Memory and Forgetting in Andrej Bitov's Prose: Postmodernism and the Quest for History* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang), 35.

³⁰⁶ Grigorii Brovman, "Pafos zhizneutverzheniia ili zhupel lakirovki?" *Voprosy Literatury* no. 12 (1963): 8.

question that haunted the postwar generations of Soviet youth, ‘Who should one be?’³⁰⁷ While the author of the article named Ostrovsky’s Pavel Korchagin as a model and many stories in *Iunost*’ depicted exceptional personalities performing remarkable feats, the relatively mundane maturation of other Youth Prose positive heroes pointed to the accessibility of individuation, which could be achieved simply, for example, via choice of profession.³⁰⁸ Choosing a profession – the logical next step for a young person answering the question of “who to be” – stipulated a certain amount of autonomy and introspection. Youth Prose thematized this choice, depicting identification with one’s profession as the dividing feature between an ironic, non-committal young adult phase and the transition to a productive, individuated sincere self. The transformative power that choosing a profession conferred lent Youth Prose protagonists an awareness of the possibilities of self-creation, and an increasing, sometimes metafictional, awareness of these possibilities as tropes or cultural scripts. In fact, the Youth Prose protagonist was presented as being afflicted by a sense of the Romantic or Kierkegaardian irony inherent in choosing – or failing to choose – an identity. While this identity was not readymade, the progression of Youth Prose reveals heroes who not only felt charged with answering the question of “who to be?” – they developed a sense that they might themselves be the *authors* of a unique, original self not beholden to Soviet models.

2.1 Irony as a Way of Life

The double or simply indeterminate meanings that ironic utterances afford are often taken to be opposed to sincerity. One scholar, referring to John Searle’s criteria for a sincere speech

³⁰⁷ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 238.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 238, 339-40.

act, writes “Ironic utterances, whatever their speech act category, are always insincere: the speaker breaks the sincerity condition of the speech act in question. Thus the speaker who ironically asks a question does not really want to obtain the information she is soliciting.”³⁰⁹ This account, and the speech act approach to sincerity and irony in general, disregard the cultural factors that comprise these values. For example, in the Soviet Union, a society that had long been deeply suspicious of dissimulation, where sincerity was synonymous with making one’s loyalty legible, irony was innately subversive – a fact which endowed irony with one of the hallmarks of sincerity, a Rousseauian or Romantic sense of society’s corrupting influence on the true self. In this context, irony had the potential to be not only politically liberating, but, for the reasons mentioned above, creative – an alternative mode of self-creation to the sanctioned path to individuation. However, adopting an ironic conception of life and language also made for a predicament over how to positively express oneself.

In addition to verbal irony, there is the condition or philosophy of irony, such as Romantic or postmodern irony. Youth Prose, we will argue, introduces a self-consciousness into its characters’ subjectivity that blurs the already opaque boundaries between life and art. These boundaries were already blurry because Socialist Realism’s intended impact was to inspire hero identification and imitation in its readers. Youth Prose protagonists are striking self-aware, not necessarily of their own fictionality, but of everyone’s fictionality – that is, of the notion that all members of Soviet society are expected to follow a script of sorts. The hero identification of Socialist Realism has something in common with Romantic irony insofar as both see literary tropes as implementable in life as well as art, though the former acknowledges the arbitrariness of all conceptions of the self save for the primacy of self-undermining pursuits like laughter and

³⁰⁹ Joana Garmendia, *Irony* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 32.

buffoonery.³¹⁰ Aksenov's and Gladilin's protagonists are caught between this awareness of the Romantic irony inherent in their formation as a Soviet subject and the deep-seated need to join the self to the collective, to choose to identify with one narrative variant in the post-Stalin Socialist Realist master plot.

The work of Andrei Bitov bridges Youth Prose and postmodernist literature – he was himself associated with Youth Prose in the early '60s and his postmodernist master work, *Pushkin House* (*Pushkinskii Dom*) draws on the tropes and themes of the genre. The shift from Romantic irony to postmodern irony can be illustrated with recourse to Bitov's oeuvre and to Paul de Man's recasting of Romantic irony. De Man argues that Romantic ironists' positing of even a self-undermining subject that can be discerned through the workings of language belies the fact that any language used to reflect upon the self also produces that self. As such, the self cannot exist prior to narration – to imagine that any self is merely the product of narrative is still to imagine the self through narrative.³¹¹ De Man sees literature as a more authentic mode than philosophy because it begins from narrative and uses narrative to create its subjects. Here irony once again coincides with authenticity and sincerity, especially in works of metafiction like *Pushkin House*, which acknowledges its own fictionality.

The third person narrators of Gladilin's and Aksenov's respective debut novels purport to be conducting a study of their protagonists through interviews and documentary evidence. However, these narrators do not disrupt the coherence of the plot by considering their narrative choices, instead the metafictional elements owe to the characters' awareness of the need to reproduce literary models, which, as mentioned, was itself simply a fact of Soviet culture. In

³¹⁰ Ibid., *Irony*, 48-51.

³¹¹ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

many of his short stories and in *Pushkin House*, Bitov turns this image of the narrator conducting a study of his characters into an intrusive voice self-conscious about his own responsibilities as narrator. Rather than direct attention solely toward the purported examination of the characters at hand, this self-reflexive, intrusive style entails a “focus on the focusing itself”³¹² – a redirection of scrutiny toward the narrator and the fictionality of narration. *Pushkin House* sees a collapse of the hierarchical position of author, narrator, and character in which the author becomes the subject of postmodernist ironic play,³¹³ which implicates and complicates de Man’s assertion that no self exists outside narrative by playing on the expectation that fictional narrative not be an extension of the author’s narratives about themselves. The foregrounding of the author and his relationship to the text at hand returns us to the question of conveying sincerity in literature. Is the behind-the-scenes look at fiction that metafiction offers a means of reassuring the reader of the author’s transparency? Or does the inclusion of the author in the story reinforce the sense that the real life author is only accessible as a simulacrum or function in the text?

In their Youth Prose period Aksenov and Gladilin experimented with the valences of sincerity and irony, of meaning or not meaning what one says. Both writers’ respective first works depict sincerity as a matter of personal and civic responsibility – being accountable for one’s words becomes a sign of reaching maturity in Soviet society. The average Youth Prose *bildungsroman* consisted of an experiential civic education, with any ironic or detached disposition giving way to a conscientiously collectivist one. However, for certain protagonists, the parallel sentimental education is as much the source of irony as any element of official discourse. Timothy Pogacar suggests that the emergence of irony in Soviet literature during the

³¹² Olga Hassanoff Bakich “A New Type of Character in the Soviet Literature of the 1960s: The Early Works of Andrei Bitov,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 23, no. 2 (June 1981): 131.

³¹³ Mark Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. Eliot Borenstein (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 1999), 18.

Thaw reflected an uneasy transition from the mythic, melodramatic fiction of prior Socialist Realism and young writers' discomfort with the traditional themes of the youth story: first love, relationships with friends and parents, etc. The lack of naturalistic examples of engagement with these themes from Soviet literature – indeed the frequent treatment of private, intimate emotions as frivolous compared to ideologically resonant issues in official discourse and culture – left writers to adopt a critical attitude toward them.³¹⁴

The narrator of Anatolii Gladilin's debut novel, *Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii: Compiled from Diaries, Annals, Historical Events and the Recollections of Contemporaries* (*Khronika vremen Viktora Podgurskogo: sostavlennaia iz dnevnikov, letopisei, istoricheskikh sobytii i vospominanii sovremennikov*), mocks the protagonist's emotionalism in the first part of the novel, creating an ironic distance between narrator and hero. Even if Gladilin's treatment of sentimentality was, as Pogacar suggests, culturally habituated, the narrator's ironic stance, together with the post-Stalin demythologization of the Socialist Realist positive hero and its associated tropes, made for a de-stabilization of authorial position that would come to a head (in the Youth Prose context) with the public criticism of Vasily Aksenov for lacking an unambiguously critical attitude toward his protagonist in *A Ticket to the Stars* (*Zvezdnyi Bilet*). The de-stabilization of the author and the challenge it presented to Soviet cultural authorities also presents a problem for constituting a coherent writer "outside the frame" in the reader's mind.

Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii, which appeared in *Iunost'* in 1956 when the author was twenty years old, exemplifies the Youth Prose fixation on words and deeds in its treatment of emotional confession and professional individuation. The novel follows the painful

³¹⁴ Timothy Pogacar, "The Journal 'Iunost'" in *Soviet Russian Literature, 1955-1965*, 67.

maturation of the earnest Viktor Podgurskii, who struggles to confess his long-held love for his close friend Nina before finding his true purpose working in a laboratory. In this manner, Viktor's fraught dependence on words that he is often unable to find or say gives way to work as a reliable, sincere means of self-expression. Given the hero's progression "beyond" such matters, the narrator's ironizing of Viktor's sentimentality can be read as an appropriately officious stance toward the inner life. However, the narrator's voice also reflects a near universal skepticism of emotionalism in the novel to which Viktor is the only exception. This adds the narrator to the number of (largely negatively portrayed) characters who mock Viktor for his earnestness.

The narrator's attitude toward Viktor is signaled by the book's title and subtitle, which present the entirely ordinary Viktor in a mock-grandiose light. Still, the supposed documentary materials evoked in the title promise a thorough, intimate portrait of a representative of the post-Stalin generation. Though, unlike other characters, Viktor is determined to confess his love for his friend Nina in full, his self-conscious discomfort concerning his desires and their expression make him typical among his peers. When Viktor's heart flutters trying to reach Nina by phone, the narrator comments "In the past he had laughed when the link between the heart and lyrical experiences was talked about; he believed that it was all an idle invention of poets. The heart is just a mechanical pump and, according to doctors, it deteriorates due to nicotine and alcohol. But now..." ("Раньше он смеялся, когда говорили о связи сердца с лирическими переживаниями; считал, что все это досужая выдумка поэтов. Сердце - просто механический насос и, как утверждают врачи, портится от никотина и алкоголя. А теперь...")³¹⁵ A wry take on youthful misadventure was not unusual for narrators of youth

³¹⁵ Anatolii Gladilin, *Khronika vremen Viktora Podgurskogo, Brigantina podnimaet parusa; povesti* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), 9.

stories, and the aloof tone here serves a didactic aim, since such feelings will indeed be shown to be trivial in the face of finding one's place in the collective at the end of the novel. However, the narrator's attitude toward Viktor's romance reveals the dilemma of his confession: the verbal and affective performance inherent in professions of sincerity³¹⁶ might be believed or dismissed as insincere, but it can also be mocked and derided. Viktor's consternation concerns how his confession might both seem sincere and not be risible to Nina. That is, the problem of sincerity is not so much how to be sincere but deciding what kind of rhetoric might avoid triggering an ironizing response.

The impact or mere specter of irony is underscored by two would-be confessions of love for Nina. First, Nina's classmate Ratnovskii – a “hipster's hipster” (“пижон-пижоном”) tells her about his “serious feelings” for her, only to then announce that it was all a joke.³¹⁷ Ratnovskii's retroactive imposition of an ironic lens on his words gestures at attacks on trendy youths for their lack of a sense of duty, which here extends to words as well. His example points to irony as a mode of shirking responsibility for what one says and does. Oleg, an engineer and Nina's most eligible suitor, proves more competent in his proposal, but he too is unwilling to delve into sentiment. Oleg proposes marriage to Nina by writing “the most distasteful thing is to have to speak vulgar words like I love you, I can't live without you, you will be my friend for life and so on...But must I say this somehow? And so, I want you to change your last name.” (“...самое противное, что приходится говорить пошлые слова, вроде: я тебя люблю, я не могу жить без тебя, ты мне будешь подругой в жизни и т. д. . . . Но как-то надо это сказать? И так, я

³¹⁶ Jane Taylor “‘Why do you tear me from myself?': Torture, Truth, and the Arts of the Counter-Reformation,” in *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, eds. Ernst van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel Smith, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25.

³¹⁷ Anatolii Gladilin, *Khronika vremen Viktora Podkurskogo, Brigantina podnimaet parusa; povesti*, 33.

хочу, чтобы ты переменяла фамилию.”³¹⁸ Both Ratnovskii and Oleg twist their pseudo-confessions into manipulations of intimate rhetoric rather than risk embarrassment or “vulgarity.” Oleg’s disdain for the tropes of courtship betokens a sense that such language’s possibilities have been exhausted – indeed, asking Nina simply to change her name constitutes a decidedly unromantic defamiliarization of the act of marriage. Indeed, Oleg presents a different kind of sincerity rhetoric, one that acknowledges the highly suspect nature of such gestures while still asking for Nina’s hand.

Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii is set in 1953 shortly after Stalin’s death and, while the event and its aftermath go mostly unmentioned and appear to have little effect on Viktor and his peers’ lives, its impact can be felt in the cynicism with which “old-fashioned” narratives are treated. As has been shown, this antipathy extends to areas like romance, where the tropes of courtship are inverted, dismissed, or repurposed by Oleg and Ratnovskii. In fact, in the realm of words in which the first part of the novel takes place, the failure of language is a problem that evidently cannot be solved – Viktor simply moves on to work and the world of deeds when he thinks he has lost his chance with Nina, but Nina rejects Ratnovskii and Oleg too. Fittingly, the deed that sets Viktor apart – his participation in an office chess tournament – is an entirely non-verbal endeavor. Viktor’s parting gift to Nina is a copy of *Don Quixote*, no doubt a token of what he now recognizes as an absurd quest, but also the story of a hopelessly, tragically sincere believer in fictional narratives’ ongoing relevance to real life. What first sets Viktor apart is his concern for literary ideals (like those of “the poets” in matters of love) as well as the ideal heroes of another genre meant to have relevance to real life – Socialist Realism. Viktor worries that he “is not one of those ‘representative’ young adults” (“не из тех ‘показательных’

³¹⁸ Ibid., 53.

юношей”) who either lie down in the grass in a wide-open field or carry around a hammer and sing Komsomol songs.³¹⁹ Viktor’s sincerity lies in the fact that he is willing to take such narratives at face value and attempt to see through what it inspires in him, where others treat them with skepticism and subvert them.

Viktor’s sincerity and ordinariness are initially presented as hindrances, but Gladilin presents him as exemplary for his ability to make positive meaning out of his life, to avoid irony and other dead ends. This becomes a metafictional *fait accompli* when, in reference to the positive hero of Socialist Realism, Viktor asks his friends “Guys, what do you think, am I positive or negative?” (“Ребята, как вы думаете, я положительный или отрицательный?”) One friend responds, “in a way that Viktor was no longer sure if he was joking or not,” (“так, что Виктор уже не понимал, шутит тот или нет”) that “Vit’ka belongs to the category of people who are destined to have good intentions, but not fated to accomplish anything” (“Витька принадлежит к тем людям, которым суждены благие порывы, да свершить ничего не дано.”)³²⁰ Characteristically, Viktor chooses to take this half-joking comment as sincere and as a challenge, ultimately becoming a positive hero – if not the positive hero he imagined – by getting a job in a laboratory, earning the respect of his colleagues for his work, and achieving self-actualization by competing in the chess tournament. Viktor does not reach the heights of canonical positive heroes, but the dramatic irony of his worries about conforming to the Socialist Realist archetype lies in the author’s, and potentially the reader’s awareness of the expansion of the Socialist Realist positive hero to include everyday people like him.

Instances of dramatic and verbal irony in *Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii* align the reader with narrator, who invites the reader to observe Viktor with the same mock-

³¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

³²⁰ Ibid., 80.

gravity as he does. David Kaufer identifies this kind of triangulation as one of the few constants of irony: the ironist and observer are united in their evaluation of a third party, the object of the irony.³²¹ Irony is therefore capable of bringing the reader closer to the narrator, whose perspective was meant to be the authoritative voice and a reflection of the author's politically correct judgment in Socialist Realism. However, in *Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii*, the narrator's position is undermined by its association with the negative characters' deleterious irony, making Viktor's triumph at the end of the novel a victory over the narrator's (and implied reader's) condescension as well.

Vasilii Aksenov depicts a narrative of overcoming irony from the perspective of a more straightforward narrator in his debut novel *Colleagues (Kollegi)* published in *Iunost'* in 1959. Set in Spring 1956, not long after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech," irony in *Colleagues* is symptomatic of a greater danger to the Soviet cause: the discrediting of "lofty words" altogether. The narrator maintains the role of voice of authority in the novel while three friends, recent medical school graduates on their first professional assignments, dispute, among other things, how such words and sentiments might be made meaningful again or whether they should be disbelieved in all cases. The inveterately sincere positive hero, Sasha Zelenin, is contrasted with his friend Aleksei Maksimov ("Maks"), whose ironic outlook puts him at risk of disaffection. In their relationship to work and relationship to one another, Maks and their third friend, the carefree Vladka, move from an ironic footing to a sincere one. As in *Chronicle of the Times of Viktor Podgurskii*, the maturation process is emotional as well as ideological, but, unlike Gladilin, who cast love's problematization by irony as irresolvable and quixotic, Aksenov's

³²¹ David Kaufer, "Irony, Interpretive Form, and the Theory of Meaning" *Poetics Today* 4, no. 3 (1983): 452.

debut treats irony, first, as a reasonable reaction, and the issue is therefore resolved rationally when Maks is persuaded that lofty words still have meaning.

The way each character deals with the task of providing their respective autobiographies to an interviewer introduces the impediments to individuation by profession that cause the rift between the three. The major impediment is Maks' and Vladka's reluctance to allow their profession to subsume or become their sense of self. The novel begins with "In forms they wrote: Year of Birth: 1932 Country of Birth: Soviet Union Party Affiliations: Member of the Komsomol since 1947," ("В анкетах они писали: год рождения – 1932-й, происхождение – из служащих; партийность – член ВЛКСМ с 1947 года") before the narrator, momentarily speaking in the first person, introduces their individual voices with "And this is what they said about themselves" ("а рассказывали они о себе так")³²² The narrator, who appears to be the interviewer and the same voice that concludes the story, depicts himself in the act of collecting data on his subjects, just as Gladilin's narrator studied Viktor using (private) documents about his life. The contrast between the forms the three fill out and their verbal avowals both asserts the heterogeneity of statistically identical individuals and subverts the practice of collecting autobiographies itself. Maks remarks that his decision to become a doctor was the result of a misunderstanding, says facetiously "Medicine? I couldn't live without it" ("Медицина? Я жить без нее не могу"), then tells the interviewer "You can go you know where!" ("Идите вы знаете куда!") for asking so many questions. Vladka avoids the topic of medicine entirely, instead telling the interviewer about his home by the Black Sea, singing a song about smoked mackerel and inviting his interlocutor to visit him sometime.³²³ These entirely inappropriate, almost absurdist responses reflect Maks' and Vladka's presentation of their personalities as

³²² Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 1:3.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 1:4.

separate from and paramount to any professional calling, but it also reveals a strange – given the circumstances – desire to interact with the interviewer himself rather than with the tired genre of the Soviet autobiographical account. This practice of collecting autobiographical accounts, traditionally an important locus of sincere self-presentation in Soviet society appears to be only a casual conversation³²⁴ for Maks and Vladka – the former of which resents being questioned too closely while the latter seems excited to meet a new friend – judging by their reactions. Whether a misunderstanding or a conscious attempt to denigrate the process, their responses add, from one perspective, a measure of sincerity to the proceedings, or, from the opposite point of view, they ironize the entire process instead of submitting to the normal order of things.

Only Sasha affirms that medicine is the most important profession and that he sees it as his duty to practice it where he is needed most – after which he tells Maks to stop laughing.³²⁵ Like Viktor Podgurskii, Sasha makes himself vulnerable to mockery from his peers for his earnestness, but sincere belief is simple for him: Sasha is convinced of his duty to society and this sincere conviction will manifest itself in him becoming a doctor in a rural district where doctors are needed later in the novel. On the other hand, the fact that Maks and Vladka are spirited and largely kind and principled, but mostly indifferent to their chosen profession illustrates how, despite Soviet cultural authorities' and actors' insistence to the contrary, sincerity and civic duty come into conflict. Youth Prose avoids this conflict, even when characters seem to present a strong case for it, by attributing a rationalistic desire for sincerity to them. Though he might not be fully aware of it at first, Maks possesses the same drive for self-harmony that supposedly comes with fully identifying with one's profession and citizenship. This becomes

³²⁴ There may be the intimation here that the interviewer-narrator is not actually a figure authorized to conduct these reviews, but some kind of interloper, which might explain the peculiar reactions, but there is no further information given about the narrator.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:4.

clear after the three friends encounter some drunk veterans, and Sasha tries to explain his respect for patriotic duty to Maks, who responds that he is sick of such lofty words: “A great many idealists like you have pronounced them, but so have thousands of scoundrels. Beria probably used them too” (“Их произносит великое множество идеалистов вроде тебя, но и тысячи мерзавцев тоже. Наверное, и Берия пользовался ими.”)³²⁶ This charge contains the dangerous idea, which Maks will later disavow, that the insincerity of the authoritative discourse of the past – as revealed by the unmasking of Beria, among others – makes the purportedly sincere pronouncements of the present ring hollow. However, as this statement shows, Maks clearly wants to believe that commitment to Communism can and should be sincere.

Maks’ shift from cynicism to patriotism, largely inspired by Sasha, constitutes the hero’s journey in *Colleagues*, since Sasha is already naturally inclined to positive heroism from the start. Maks begins on the side of the fun-loving, carefree Vladka, with whom he takes a job as a ship doctor because it is the most adventurous option. However, as his comment about Beria suggests, Maks is especially repulsed by insincerity, and this quality is what leads him back into the fold of believing Communists. When Vladka and Maks meet a senior ship doctor, they ask him if he has had any major cases. Their elder colleague responds that he’s been fortunate enough to hand over all serious cases to the port hospital. Maks reminds him of a recent article the doctor wrote about labor discipline, to which he responds “tactics” (“тактика”) The fact that this colleague could write one thing and think another.³²⁷ causes Maks to reflect on Sasha’s insistence on citizens’ responsibility to one another and how self-interest, including pursuit of fun, interferes. Instead of discouraging Maks further, this incident confirms for him that his hatred of insincerity puts him on the side of those who find meaning in hard work.

³²⁶ Ibid., 1:14.

³²⁷ Ibid., 1:83.

Colleagues also directly connects ironic attitudes toward intimate emotional expression with skepticism of sincere belief in Communism. As in *Chronicle of Viktor Podgurskii*, the three friends in *Colleagues* are cautious of earnest self-expression, whether political or emotional. Even Sasha worries that his love interest, Inna, might find it funny that he is taking a job as a doctor in the rural Russian North out of a sense of patriotic duty. Though Sasha speaks openly with his friends about lofty principles, confessing Sasha's love for his country in conjunction with his love for Inna seems to carry a greater risk of mockery. Likewise, Maks is initially suspicious of intimate interactions,³²⁸ but as he moves toward believing in the value of work he also becomes aware of a need to confess his internal state. When Maks is transferred to a desk job at the quarantine sector after the excitement of his life at sea, he is called into his superior's office for what he realizes with horror will be a "soul-saving" ("душеспасительный") conversation. The job transfer and the ensuing scene demonstrate the tension between having fun and finding meaning that has been pulling Maks in different directions. Maks' superior, Dampfer, aims to get at the external and internal sources of this tension. He tells Maks that work at the quarantine sector will be less enjoyable than his previous assignment, but reminds him of what he suggests young people are inclined to forget – that one's purpose in life is his use to society.³²⁹ Maks sneers and contends that life cannot only be about work, there's "music, poetry, wine, sports, clothes, automobiles..." ("музыка, поэзия, вино, спорт, одежда, автомобили.") He further considers that one must know oneself in order to understand one's purpose, but that "the majority of people have not found themselves" ("большинство людей не нашли себя.")³³⁰ Maks's assertion that true self-knowledge leads to sincere commitment to one's life's work

³²⁸ Ibid., 1:13.

³²⁹ Ibid., 1:119.

³³⁰ Ibid., 1:120.

reflects his distaste for the kind of insincere, compulsory Communism that he has observed prior. In asserting the right of individuals to try to discover their true selves, Maks justifies the ironic attitudes of his generation as an important phase, but one that will be outgrown as they ultimately join the collective.

Maks' conversation with Dampfer is not only an exchange of ideas, it is an intimate back-and-forth that proves cathartic for Maks. During their discussion Maks no longer senses any "constraint" ("скованность") as though he had forgotten Dampfer's age. Dampfer, for his part feels unconstrained enough to blow up at Maks, calling him a "sniveler" ("хлюпик") before asking Maks' forgiveness and opening up to him about his difficult life. The emotional clash is interrupted when fun intercedes – Vladka comes to get Maks for their volleyball game – but Maks later realizes that with Dampfer he had unintentionally let slip the sense of purposelessness that had been tormenting him. The need for intimate emotional and philosophical exchange, like that of his experience with Dampfer, becomes clear to Maks even though "as before he hung out with Vladka...smoked in the hallway and made ironic comments, as before he went...to dances, to the movies...argued about jazz" ("по-прежнему тусовался с Владкой... курил в коридоре и делал ироничные комментарии, по-прежнему ходил... на танцы, в кино... спорил о джазе.")³³¹

Maks becomes one of those "city dandies" ("городские модники") who seem flippant and materialistic, but, as one character says in their defense "who knows" ("кто знает?") what's going on inside them? Even Vladka, the most dandyish of the group, belies appearances by confessing to Maks after a party that he is tired of chasing girls. Vladka shows his capacity for intimacy with Maks when Maks, in turn, confesses that he and a married woman are in love.

³³¹ Ibid., 1:120-2.

Vladka good-naturedly demands that Maks “empty it out, what’ve you got there in that sack you call your soul?” (“выливай, что там у тебя в торбе, которую ты называешь душой!”)³³² as the two laugh and slap each other on the back. Vladka’s maturation, like Maks’, sees his inclination for sincere emotional exchanges – if not hard work – grow. The ironic disposition that the two (to varying degrees) leave behind emerges as a frivolity that, like chasing girls, ought to be outgrown.

With their comradeship renewed, Maks and Vladka decide to visit Sasha in the North. When they first see each other Vladka begins to declaim a comedically grandiose speech, but Maks shuts him up and Sasha quietly suggests they drink to friendship: “each thought it good that Sashka had again come to the rescue and said what each of them was thinking without a smoke screen of buffoonery” (“каждый подумал, как хорошо, что Сашка пришел на выручку и без дымовой завесы шутовства сказал то, о чем думал каждый.”)³³³ Their taciturn affection for each other turns to feverish emotion when Sasha is stabbed in the climax of the novel. Vladka sits in the snow and sobs while Maks becomes blind with rage and accosts Sasha’s attacker.³³⁴ In addition to the climactic outpouring of mostly unspoken emotions – the culmination of the confession and emotional honesty theme – the scene also shows Maks and Vladka fully devoted to their work, which, as doctors, means operating on their friend to try to save his life. Before Sasha was stabbed, Maks admitted to him that he was no longer skeptical of lofty phrases, that “cynicism is a convenient shield...but there comes a time for everyone when he understands that one cannot remain an idler” (“Цинизм — удобный щит... у каждого наступает такое время, когда он понимает, что нельзя оставаться небокопителем.”)³³⁵ Vladka and Maks are finally

³³² Ibid., 1:139.

³³³ Ibid., 1:166.

³³⁴ Ibid., 1:176, 1:178.

³³⁵ Ibid., 1:166.

compelled to abandon their cynicism and emotional restraint when they must leap into action to save their friend. Fittingly, Vladka and Maks achieve this unity of purpose and feeling through Sasha, who himself represents the Soviet ideal of responsibility to others.

The end of *Colleagues* reinforces the primacy of sincerity in sustaining the Soviet cause. A coda from the narrator confirms that “There is no need to fear lofty words” (“Не нужно бояться высоких слов”) – “We will cleanse these words. Now this is the main thing: to fight for the purity of our own words, our own eyes and souls. (“Мы очистим эти слова. Сейчас это главное: бороться за чистоту своих слов, своих глаз и душ.”) Here, as throughout the novel, sincere self-expression is conflated with sincere belief in Communism. In this iteration, though, the narrator depicts sincerity acting upon language, suggesting that tarnished old slogans can be purified by rerouting them through the mouths of sincere believers. The need to purify old words and fight for new, pure ones evinces a concern that positive statements, even language in general, have lost the benefit of the doubt when it comes to sincerity. Faith in words’ purity – in their clear intelligibility and direct relationship to the speaker’s inner state – constituted the necessary condition for sincerity in Soviet society. Ironizing and trivializing language, the narrator warns, risks turning life into a “grim tragedy or a worthless farce” (“жизнь станет зловещей трагедией или никчемным фарсом.”)³³⁶

The insistence in *Colleagues* and *Chronicle of Viktor Podgurskii* on equating sincerity with Communism and the reformist aims of the Thaw somewhat transparently covers over the potential contradiction between sincere self-expression and prescribed Soviet models of behavior. However, by tolerating their heroes’ dalliances with “frivolous” attitudes and activities, Gladilin and Aksenov broach the question of alternate paths to sincere self-expression.

³³⁶ Ibid., 1:183.

Aksenov's next work, *A Starry Ticket* (*Zvezdnyi bilet*), asked the reader to consider whether ironic tendencies in language and outlook really did make life grim and worthless, tragic and farcical. It saw the author devote still more attention to the protean possibilities of individuation. This was combined with an ironic sense of ludic play that both satirized and sincerely contemplated the tropes of Youth Prose.

Like its predecessors, *A Ticket to the Stars* deals with young people finding love and finding purpose. It also attempts to resolve these matters, in a less definitive way, by recourse to hard work, with mixed success. In general, the conformist voices in the novel – insofar as they exist – fail to drown out the raucous slang of the teenagers Dimka, Galia, Yuri, and Alik, who have just finished school and go looking for fun on their vacation. The extent to which these coinages and the characters' playful attitude toward language in general are featured in the novel ensured that their inventive way of speaking emerged as a creative act of self-assertion. There is no objective, authoritative narrator of the story, the first part of *A Starry Ticket* is narrated by Dimka's older brother, Viktor, a moderating influence on Dimka and the character most associated with sincerity and the Youth Prose positive hero in the novel. However, the anarchic Dimka takes over the narration in the second part – in which Viktor also dies suddenly. The lack of an authoritative voice in the person of a character or the narrator in *A Starry Ticket* leaves the reader in “unmediated” contact with Dimka's thoughts, which has the potential to make his behavior seem all the more sympathetic.

Verbal irony abounds in *A Ticket to the Stars*, but, in distinction from the previous two novels under discussion, the irony is directed not only at the Stalinist paradigm that had seen a fall from grace during the Thaw, it is deployed against contemporary reform-minded

discourses.³³⁷ When Dimka, who has just finished secondary school, complains about having to go to the store to buy bread for Viktor, a PhD researcher at a scientific terms in mock grandiose terms he parodies the then-current valorization of “scientific and technological progress” (*nauchno-tekhnologicheskii progress*): “Soviet scientists can work in peace without worrying about food. This is the secret of our achievements. I will provide you with high-calorie food, dear comrades, I, a humble worker of the saucepan! Only figure out faster how to toss a person out into space and toss me out first. I’m sick of all this” (“Советские ученые могут спокойно работать, не беспокоясь насчет еды. Вот в чем секрет наших успехов. Я обеспечу вам калорийную пищу, дорогие товарищи, я, скромный работник кастрюли! Только поскорее придумайте, как забросить человека в космос, и забросьте меня первым. Мне это все надоело.”)³³⁸ Though Viktor will later prove his sincere dedication to science in a manner typical of the contemporary positive hero, here he reflects on his own role in a similarly sarcastic manner: “Mom is always trying to bring him up in my positive example... It turns out, I have become a person thanks to hard work and perseverance” (“Мама все время пытается воспитывать его на моем положительном примере... Оказывается, я стал человеком благодаря трудолюбию и настойчивости.”)³³⁹ Viktor, for his part, mocks the narrative of individuation typical of Youth Prose, conscious of his role as a positive example in Dimka’s life but also as a potential narrative archetype.

Kharkhordin observes that in Aksenov’s early work “intense self-questioning usually stays within the confines of the individual soul” and “when pressed to comment on the same matters in speech, Aksenov's characters adopt an ironic stance... The inner monologue of a

³³⁷ Alexander Prokhorov, “Inherited Discourse: Stalinist Tropes in Thaw Culture,” 270.

³³⁸ Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie sochlenii*, 1:188.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:188.

character—disclosed to the reader—frequently remains a mystery to other characters in these novels.”³⁴⁰ This is also the case in Viktor’s relationship with Dima, in which, despite their obvious affection for each other, it proves difficult for Viktor to break the cycle of irony and tell Dimka what he would like to: that he understands that Dimka is unhappy and feels purposeless, but hopes that he will still help out their mother around the house. He also imagines telling Dimka “you ought to think about the future, and, really now, old fellow, you should really be a bit more diligent. But I don’t tell him anything. I just laugh and clap him on the back” (“надо подумать и о будущем, и вообще-то, старик, действительно надо быть немного понастойчивее. Но я не говорю ему ничего. Я только смеюсь и хлопаю его по спине.”)³⁴¹ This emotional reticence has been encountered in *A Ticket to the Stars*’ predecessors, but the novel drives home the havoc that irony wreaks on would-be appeals to conformism. Like Viktor Podgurskii, Viktor Denisov finds himself unable to solve the problem of confessing one’s true feelings in the face of irony.

Even sincere self-expression through work becomes problematic for Viktor due to an unshakable sense of ironic distance. When Viktor shows his superior his dissertation, which contradicts the work the institute has been doing, Andrei Ivanovich tells Viktor that the work is well done but that he must not publish it or tell anyone that Andrei Ivanovich knows about the proofs.³⁴² This makes for a familiar post-Stalin narrative that pits the honest specialist against a dishonest institutionalist – a fact of which both Viktor and Andrei Ivanovich seem to be aware. When Viktor protests, Andrei Ivanovich tells him “No need for pathos, Vitia. I don’t like such exclamations, like in plays.” (“Не надо пафоса, Витя. Не люблю я таких восклицаний, как

³⁴⁰ Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, 346.

³⁴¹ Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie sochlenii*, 1:189.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 1:211.

в пьесах.”) Upset by his boss’s cynicism, Viktor continues ““Would you suppress your thoughts, go against the true interests of our work for the sake of some kind of fetish?”” (“Вы бы зажали свою мысль, пошли бы против истинных интересов нашего дела ради какого-то фетиша.”) Andrei Ivanovich responds ““Vitia, my friend, don’t speak grandly”” (“Друг мой Витя, не говори красиво.”) The opposition to lofty words that characterized *Colleagues* reappears here, but as quickly as it appears it is subverted by Viktor’s sense that they are, as Andrei Ivanovich intimated, acting out a tired drama. Indeed, Andrei Ivanovich’s words are themselves a quotation from Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*. Viktor reflects “He played the role of the elder and wiser friend, and I the young champion of scientific truth” (“Он играл роль старшего и умудренного друга, а я – молодого поборника научной правды.”)³⁴³ Viktor’s turn as a positive hero boldly speaking his truth is undermined by the feeling that this aspect of official cultural narrative is itself a tired script. His advisor’s invocation of a mistrust of lofty words places the Thaw hero of scientific truth in the same bin as the disavowed words of Stalinist culture.

Dimka and his friends introduce new words to communicate with each other and express themselves. This, along with Dimka’s echoic parodies, is the first substantial creative act that irony animates in Youth Prose. Their slang unites the group of friends and keeps undesirable elements – parents, “squares,” etc. – from penetrating their circle. Just as Vitia and Dimka call each other “old fellow,” (*starik*) the friends refer to each other as “dudes” (*dudki*) or “argonauts” (*argonavty*) along with other shorter-lived nicknames. Here we encounter the ludic pretense that typifies Romantic irony, but the small group of friends and their depend on and reflect *verbal* irony itself in a variety of ways. First, the possibilities for ironic play increase with the level of

³⁴³ Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie Sochlenii*, 1:212.

tacit understanding— a knowledge of the rules of the game and each other lend themselves to improvising in an ironic context. Therefore, ironic game- and role-playing is ideally suited to a close-knit group of friends (who circumscribe their audience with their intimate repartee).³⁴⁴ The group's actions, their trip to Estonia the summer after their graduation school, and status as unserious, relatively directionless youths reflects an ironic “endurance to ambiguity.”³⁴⁵ Both verbal and existential irony require toleration of undecided meaning, the state in which the friends' lives seem to them to hang. Their trip to Estonia, away from their homes in Moscow where, presumably they will make their lives, puts them in such a liminal space, where they have nothing to do but try on identities and banter with each other. Estonia is also the place where the secondary characters give in to external pressures, causing the group as it had been to dissolve. The dissolution begins, fittingly, with language. When Yuri begins dating a Latvian girl on their trip, she explains to Galia that she likes Yuri but “He often speaks incomprehensibly. I know Russian well, but I don't understand him. Not long ago he called me a hammer...And yesterday at the stadium he said ‘They brought the cat to the soap.’ What does a cat and soap have to do with it?”³⁴⁶ (“Он часто говорит непонятно. Я русский язык хорошо знаю, но его я не понимаю. Недавно он назвал меня молотком...И вчера на стадионе...он сказал ‘Повели кота на мыло.’ При чем тут кот и при чем тут мыло.”) Galia laughs at Linda's confusion, but the Latvian Linda vows to teach Yuri proper Russian – seemingly unaware of the irony in this. Later Dima sees Yuri and Linda at the theater together. Yuri tells Dima it's a “bullshit show (“лажовый спектакль”) but “Linda stomps on his foot and he corrects himself: ‘This show doesn't make much of an impression’” (“Линда наступает ему на ногу, и он поправляется:

³⁴⁴ David Kaufer, “Irony and Rhetorical Strategy,” 96, 106.

³⁴⁵ Liesbeth Korthals Altes, *Ethos and Narrative Interpretation: The Negotiation of Values in Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014): 230.

³⁴⁶ Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie sochienenii*, 1:252.

‘Не производит впечатления этот спектакль.’”) Dima reflects this is how the best people perish.³⁴⁷ Indeed, everyone but Dima – and perhaps Galia – becomes a more useful citizen by the end of the novel.³⁴⁸

Dimka does not entirely embrace an ironic mode of existence, in fact, he agonizes over his inability to choose an identity. A sense of theatricality and role-playing has permeated the novel, beginning with Viktor and Andrei Ivanovich acting out a certain Socialist Realist plot and extending to the teenage friends’ myriad performances. Further, Galia, Dima’s friend and love interest, hopes to become an actress and is seduced by an already famous actor while the group are on vacation. Theatricality is often seen as a sign of insincerity, however the resolution to *A Ticket to the Stars* seems to suggest that the sincere self is discovered through trying on different personas. Irony’s role in Dima’s life resembles Kierkegaard’s view of irony as a phase in a person’s development that first liberates one from the intellectual, moral, and existential constraints of one’s immediate circumstances³⁴⁹ and allows one to experiment with the manifold nature of the self, however, as an aesthetic, selfish form of existence, this experimentation ought to give way to a choice, like the one presented in *Either/Or*, to become one’s true self. Dimka grapples with the lack of criteria for this choice, the fact that, unmoored from the Soviet value system, “what he wants” seems impossible to determine.

Romantic love provides an important test of Kierkegaardian “ventriloquism” – imitating other discourses and behaviors to discover one’s own voice – because romantic love conventionally requires the kind of positive, sincere statement that eludes ironists. Dima’s views

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:323.

³⁴⁸ Lev Anninskii, *Iadro orekha: kriticheskie ocherki*, 96.

³⁴⁹ Soren Kierkegaard, *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 6.

on love are characteristically parodic. He believes that he “knows how it happens. People are building a hydro station and suddenly He says ‘I love you’” (“Он знает, как это бывает. Люди строят гидростанцию, и друг Он говорит ‘Я люблю’”) and Dima also knows that “before people took poison and blew up castles, sat in dungeons...Now, of course, it’s not at all like that” (“раньше из-за любви принимали яд и взрывали замки, сидели в темницах...Сейчас, конечно, всё не так.”)³⁵⁰ Unlike Viktor Podgurskii, Dima has no problem confessing his love for Galia, but his confession exists in the atmosphere of role-playing that pervades their trip. Shortly after they profess their love for each other, Dima insists to Galia that “contemporary love ought to be free” (“современная любовь должна быть свободной.”)³⁵¹ Galia, for her part, desperately wants to be in love, to play the role of Juliet. When Dima confronts her after abandoning him the previous night for a famous actor, she insists that nothing happened between them and vows to take poison if Dima doesn’t say he believes her. Dima responds “Magnificent! You’re in a new role, mademoiselle” (“Великолепно. Вы в новой роли, мадемуазель.”)³⁵² Having been bested by a professional actor for the part of Galia’s lover, Dima moves on to a new role himself by becoming a “*kolkhoznik*,” working on a fishing boat.³⁵³

When Viktor comes to visit Dima in Estonia, he asks Dima what he really wants out of life, and the conversation reiterates Dima’s inability to express himself sincerely. Dima thinks “What do I want? If only I myself knew. I’ll find out someday. But now let me catch fish in peace” (“Чего я хочу? Если бы я сам знал. Узнаю когда-нибудь. А сейчас дайте мне спокойно ловить рыбку”) but instead of saying what the reader learns from his inner monologue, Dima tells Viktor “I want to get married to one of our girls, Ul’vi. The kolkhoz will

³⁵⁰ Vasilii Aksenov, *Sobranie sochii*, 1:244.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:246.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:266.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:297.

build us such a nice house, a typical Estonian home. We'll buy a cow, a television, and a motorcycle. I'll take correspondence classes at the fishing institute. I'll write a dissertation on sprat. Or a novel based on the life of a sprat” (“Хочу жениться на одной нашей девчонке, на Ульви. Колхоз нам построит дом, такой симпатичный, типично эстонский дом. Купим корову, телевизор и мотоцикл. Я поступлю на заочный в рыбный институт. Напишу диссертацию о кильке. Или роман из жизни кильки.”)³⁵⁴ As in the past, Viktor laughs and claps Dima on the back, but after Viktor dies in a plane crash, Dima's ironic intention to follow in his older brother's footsteps by writing a dissertation becomes a grim reminder that Dima has lost the only positive example (or positive hero) in his life. An awareness of death seems to be the only thing that shake Dima, if only temporarily, out of his flippancy.

After reuniting with Galia, Dima writes her a letter prior to setting out on a five day fishing trip: “Dear miss! I thank you for the magical evening spent in your company. I agree to look in on you sometimes if the girls are out at the movies at the moment. Far out in the sea under the rumble of waves and whistle of the wind, as the poet said, I will sometimes along with others recall you as well” (“Дорогая мисс! Благодарю вас за волшебный вечер, проведенный в вашем обществе. Я согласен к вам иногда заходить, если девочки будут вовремя уходить в кино. Далеко в море под рокот волн и ветра свист, сказал поэт, я буду иногда наряду с другими вспоминать и вас.”)³⁵⁵ After a near-death experience on the boat, Dima thinks regretfully that if he had died the only thing that Galia would have had left of him would be his flippant note “and “Juliet wouldn't have her Romeo” (“У Джульетты не будет Ромео.”)³⁵⁶ Dima's dissatisfaction with his own irony does not preclude him from embracing his

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:322.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:335.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:336.

and Galia's Shakespearean affair. Indeed, when Dima returns he discovers that Galia has become all the more committed to her role, having acted out her own version of Juliet taking poison and wandered around at night until she was found and put in the hospital. Dima visits her in the hospital and calls her "my little actress," but Galia tells him that she decided not to enter the academy. The two kiss and reconcile, seemingly making good on their roles as star-crossed lovers, having both survived self-inflicted near-death experiences, just as Galia's passion for acting is waning. Indulging in insincere behavior, identifying with and playing out roles brings Galia and Dima to finally create a new, if not original story, out of their drama – changing the ending of Shakespeare's tragedy to make it into a comedy of sorts, ending with a romantic reconciliation, if not a wedding.

A Starry Ticket does not adopt an essential view of identity as either sincere or insincere, Soviet or anti-Soviet, instead the roles that people play contribute to an ongoing process of self-fashioning. Even after rediscovering his love for Galia, Dima realizes "I still hadn't worked out a life plan for myself. There were a few things I'd like to do: knock down old wall...love Galka and never let anyone offend her (I won't offend her anymore!)...but all this doesn't make a life program" ("Я до сих пор не выработал себе жизненной программы. Есть несколько вещей которыми я бы хотел заниматься: бить ломом старые стены...любить Галку и никому не давать её в обиду [никогда больше не дам её в обиду!]... но всё ведь это не жизненная программа.") Discussing it with his friends, Dima adds, half-seriously, half-jokingly, that he'd like to be a clown, "You know when you're a kid first you want to be a sailor, then a pilot, then a janitor, then a clown. So I'm on a higher phase of development" ("Знаешь, как в детстве, сначала хочешь стать моряком, потом летчиком, потом дворником, ну, а потом клоуном.

Так вот, я на высшей фазе развития.”)³⁵⁷ Trying on roles and not being satisfied with any of them becomes a kind of identity for Dima, here represented by a clown – a figure whose behavior is understood to be performative. Having finally chosen a profession – the conventional source of individuation – Dimka only subverts the Soviet paradigm by choosing a socially useless, self-parodic one.³⁵⁸ Likewise, Dima both fails and succeeds in the Kierkegaardian demand to choose a certain externalization of the self, since the clown also hides its identity. His decision to love Galia, however, represents a choice in his private life that may hold more significance than his profession. Indeed, Dima experiences the opposite trajectory of Viktor Podgurskii – who hopes to find love but finds work instead – discovering his love for Galia from his temporary summer work on the fishing boat.

Whereas *Colleagues* sees Vladka and Maks join Sasha in affirming the personal and societal significance of their work as doctors, in *A Starry Ticket* Dima’s friends transition into lives as useful and respectable citizens while Dima discovers his “job” in the socially useless enterprise of being a clown. Likewise, Aksenov’s debut depicted irony being overcome as the three friends grew closer, but *A Starry Ticket* presents a more ambiguous relationship between irony and intimacy. Dima and his friends use irony as a means of defining themselves in opposition – the victim of their irony is any “square” who might find it incomprehensible and vulgar – and maintaining a mutual understanding that is impenetrable to outsiders. Galia’s and Dima’s romance also speaks to the potential intimacy behind irony: their relationship is saved in part because of their shared understanding of each other’s dramatic behavior as role-playing rather than sincere avowals and disavowals of love.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:343

³⁵⁸ This parallels Pavel Durov in Aksenov’s “In Search of a Genre” (“V poiskakh zhanry”) who becomes a magician, which, as Lipovetskii notes, is a lonely, obsolete profession, see Mark Lipovetskii, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, 112.

2.2 Postmodernist Irony

Andrei Bitov's first stories appeared in *Iunost*' in the early 1960s and, as a young male writer writing about young men, he was associated with Youth Prose. Even his early short stories, however, were marked by a laying bare of the device of Youth Prose. If Youth Prose protagonists were buoyed by their basically upstanding, rational character, Bitov's are sunk by their infirmities. As Olga Hassanoff Bakich observes, Bitov's characters cannot or will not grow up – they are often infantile, petty with “well-developed mechanisms for suppressing all unpleasant and disturbing thoughts.”³⁵⁹ A naïve trust in sincerity is one such flaw, in “Door” (“Dver”) the protagonist waits outside his unrequited love interest's door all night after she promises to see him. More often, though, they are overwhelmed by a sense of unreality that paralyzes moral action, as in “Penelope” (“Penelopa”), where the protagonist becomes, by his own admission, a symbol of false consciousness. An overbearing, self-aware narrator also frequently figures in these stories, calling attention to and undermining his own choices along with the characters'. In these stories, and especially in *Pushkin House*, expressing oneself straightforwardly seems to be a fundamental impossibility for hero and narrator alike owing both to their self-divided nature and to the illusory historical and fictional reality to which they belong.

Written between 1964 and 1971 and published abroad in the late 70s, *Pushkin House* represents a radical break from Youth Prose and the culture of the Thaw. Still, in a novel deeply concerned with the “spirit” of the age, there are echoes of the Khrushchev era – a period that

³⁵⁹ Olga Hassanoff Bakich “A New Type of Character in the Soviet Literature of the 1960s: The Early Works of Andrei Bitov,” 127.

ended in 1964 and upon which Bitov's narrator reflects as a time of "narrow trousers."³⁶⁰ This synecdoche for the Thaw treats its accomplishments – including an expanded range of self-fashioning possibilities – as mainly superficial. *Pushkin House* itself, and its protagonist, Leva Odoevtsev, likewise bear superficial evidence of Thaw-era culture. Leva is a member of the Thaw generation, a wearer of fashionable clothes, and a filler of "available spaces,"³⁶¹ which summarizes the tendency of his generation to go only so far as officially permissible in testing the limits of independence. Given that it centers on Leva, features an ironic – especially in his treatment of the protagonist – narrator, and concerns professional individuation as well as words' functioning *Pushkin House* also contains echoes of the Youth Prose genre. More broadly, though, *Pushkin House* depicts an era that is like the Thaw in its sense of discontinuity from the past, but unlike reform-minded party leaders' insistence that it was possible to bypass Stalinism and return to the roots of the revolution, the narrator of *Pushkin House* sees the literary golden age as being alternately that of Pushkin or the early 20th century Silver Age that the revolution interrupted, and finds this heritage to be irretrievable in full.

The endless entanglements and contradictions of the various narrative levels in *Pushkin House* make sincerity seem unachievable, yet one commentator claims that, despite these hindrances, a striving toward the sincere and organic exists in Bitov's work.³⁶² *Pushkin House* implicates sincerity in two related ways: in Leva's attempts to express something new, authentically his own as a scholar and in the fictional author's and the narrator's running commentary on the narrative. There are two voices, or two ways in which the same voice comments on the novel: the first is the narrator, whose commentary primarily concerns the plot

³⁶⁰ Andrei Bitov, *Pushkinskii dom* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1978), 28.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁶² A.O. Bol'shev "Apologia organichnosti v tvorchestve A. Bitova," *Russian Literature* 61, no. 4 (May 2007): 501.

and its telling, there is also “A.B.” – Andrei Bitov’s initials – whose thoughts appear in italics under passages beginning “(*Italics Mine – A.B.*)” and tend to consider the role of the author and literary history. These two figures are difficult to distinguish and may be taken to be the same entity – in fact, both narrator and A.B. indicate that the characters in the novel are either merely different parts of Leva or different parts of the author’s personality, to make things more complicated, the author A.B. ultimately asserts that he and Leva are mirror images, each other’s double anyway.

The narrator and A.B. are explicit about Leva’s insincerity and the fact that he is not aware of his condition – the narrator claims Leva believed “even his own incongruities with himself were natural and permissible” (“даже его собственные несоответствия с самим собой были естественными и допустимыми.”)³⁶³ A.B., on the other hand, is profoundly aware of his own “lack of inner independence,” (“отсутствие внутренней независимости”) that “the container we must use was created before our day and not by us” (“необходимость воспользоваться даже тарой, созданной до нас и не нами”)³⁶⁴ as he writes in his addition to the prologue. Though he embraces this fact, A.B. toys with the reader’s expectations of the biographical author and implicates himself in the discussion of sincerity by contemplating *Pushkin House* alongside other authors’ works and styles. Indeed, we have previously defined authorial sincerity as a matter of the reader perceiving the author’s own sincere thoughts and feelings within the text. The extradiegetic or metafictional author-narrator is, by definition, a voice that positions itself outside the fictional world, capable of commenting on both the narrative at hand and any number of non-narrative issues or ideas. While the extradiegetic narrator most directly confronts the question of authorial sincerity, the illusion of being addressed by the

³⁶³ Andrei Bitov, *Pushkinskii dom*, 101.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

author only introduces further confusion into the equation. In *Pushkin House*, while A.B purports to be letting the reader in on his secrets, he disguises his own similarities to Leva and his condition until the final section.

Given the leveling of author and hero at the end of the novel, it is worth taking seriously A.B.'s running commentary of self-recriminations, laments, and tantalizing observations about his own inadequacies as a writer. *Pushkin House* has often been compared to Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift (Dar)*³⁶⁵ for the two works' contemplation of Russian literary heritage, but *Pushkin House* also resembles Nabokov's *Pnin* in its exploration of the relationship between narrator and hero. Like *Pnin*, Leva will effect an "escape" from the novel, which brings to light his potential mischaracterization and mistreatment at the hands of the narrator-author, who, like Nabokov's narrator in *Pnin*, resembles both the author, Bitov, and the protagonist, Leva. The difference between the narrator of *Pnin* and both A.B. and the narrator of *Pushkin House* is that the latter two are not unduly cruel to Leva, instead they are apologetic about their own failings in depicting him and sympathetic to Leva's escape, which they actually facilitate for their hero in the end. In fact, any escape would be a mutual escape for author and hero: when Leva first registers his desire to be "vital" ("жизнен"), to "escape... emerging the victor" ("убегать... оставаясь победителем") in the "plot of his life" ("сюжет его жизни") A.B. echoes this sentiment from his authorial position by announcing that the author cannot rest until one of his characters "can suddenly find the story... blast it open, at least enter like a phenocryst into the category's story, which is already wearisome in its... inescapability" ("вдруг сможет обрести сюжет... разорвать, хоть вкрапленником войти в сюжет категории, который уже томит своей неизбывностью.") A.B. describes the discovery of the story, its rescue from the world of

³⁶⁵ Marina von Hirsch, "The Presence of Nabokov in Bitov's Fiction and Nonfiction: Bitov and Nabokov, Bitov on Nabokov, Nabokov in Bitov," *Nabokov Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000).

“categories” as “an exit from the labyrinth into the blessed world” (“выход из лабиринта в божий мир”) that he hopes Leva can effect and which, in turn A.B. “with jubilant cruelty, will even let him [Leva] perish in the name of his story” (“я с радостей жестокостью, дам ему даже погибнуть во имя его сюжета.”)³⁶⁶ At the end of the story Leva does perish but, at least in one variant, Leva the man awakens, and it is Leva the literary hero who perishes.

When A.B. revives Leva and goes to see him at Pushkin House in the last appendix, we realize that the author, by his own admission, knows little about Leva for certain, that he has evidently embellished his story using the examples of classic protagonists from Russian literature, and that Leva is himself quite changed. Indeed, there seems to be more of the author in Leva’s image than he had initially let on – A.B. refers to Leva as “He/I” (“Он/Я”) and calls him “myself,” (“себя”) as he stares at Leva, like into a mirror. His encounter with Leva reveals that A.B. has treated him unfairly by inserting Leva’s article “Three Prophets” into the narrative rather than later works: Leva tells him “that article is naïve, it’s obsolete, an article out of my childhood. I’ve become another person. Why would you judge me by that paper?”³⁶⁷ (“но эта статья наивна, устарела, детская моя статья...Я стал другой – зачем же вы будете судить по ней обо мне?”) This statement reveals that Leva has in fact matured and achieved at least the precondition for authentic self-expression according to the narrator, which requires recognizing one’s own failings. In fact, Leva’s articles are, if not original from a scholarly perspective, part of an “organic line,” (“органическая линия”) an “unintentional unity” (“невольная цельность”) that examines the “I” of Pushkin, but also says as much about Leva himself as it does Pushkin. Pushkin is an emblem of unself-conscious originality in *Pushkin House* – the lost origin of Russian literature itself – and Leva’s decision to study Pushkin from among the “three

³⁶⁶ Andrei Bitov, *Pushkinskii dom*, 244-45, 255.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 403-4.

prophets” (the other two being Lermontov and Tiutchev, both of whom Leva find to be jealous imitators of Pushkin), entails a decision to inhabit the perspective of a genius. Pushkin’s particular genius puts him in “the middle of the contrast,” a position in the calm of the storm, from where everything can be seen.³⁶⁸ This is also an escape from one’s immediacy, from the readymade world of conventions and simulacra.

Leva’s discovery of Pushkin as a conduit for his self-expression presents a somewhat simpler case than that of A.B., who, as the author of *Pushkin House* and an erudite litterateur in his own right, is engaged in a similar enterprise. A.B. endlessly vacillates over whether the author is truly accessible to the reader in fiction, paradoxically suggests that total openness is the best cover for secrecy, and that “writers must be geniuses, and hacks crystal-pure and sincere.” Evidently A.B. aims at genius rather than sincerity with his self-contradictory and subversive nature, which resembles that of Modest Odoevtsev – Leva’s brilliant grandfather, also a man of letters – who has written a work whose chapters alternate between “There is a God” (“Бог есть”) and “There is no God” (“Бога нет.”)³⁶⁹ A.B. insists that not disclosing the author’s participation would be insincere, that “true realism... does not exceed the limits of realistically permissible observation” (“истинный реализм... не выходит за пределы реально допустимого наблюдения”) (a principle he violates in his portrayal of Leva), that prose expresses the author’s intentions, or the author himself but at the same time warns the reader not to be disappointed if his image turns out not to be the author’s, since true confession requires non-fiction.³⁷⁰ These

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 294.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 145. Marina von Hirsch notes that Linda Hutcheon’s description of the technique of *mise en abyme* in metafiction – “a book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete” can be applied to Bitov’s use of various levels of narration to critique and contradict perspectives introduced in his work, see Marina von Hirsch, “In the Context of Metafiction: Commentary as a Principal Narrative Structure in Bitov’s *Pushkin House*” in *Pushkin House by Andrei Bitov: A Casebook*, ed. Ekaterina Sukhanova (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, n.d.), 111.

³⁷⁰ Andrei Bitov, *Pushkinskii dom*, 403.

opposing maxims speak to A.B.'s decision not to be transparently himself in fiction, a quality he attributes to Leva's Uncle Mitya (Uncle Dickens), whose writing is counterposed to Modest Odoevtsev's, and reflects Mitya's pure soul in words, revealing the author completely.³⁷¹ The impulse and potential to read biographically is one enabled by the exponents of the Golden Age in *Pushkin House* – Uncle Mitya, Leva (the conceit of “Three Prophets” is almost entirely biographical rather than formal), and, in a way, Pushkin himself. In aligning himself with figures who “hide in the word” (“спрятаться в слове”) (Modest Odoevtsev, Tiutchev in Leva's reading), A.B. asserts a lineage leading from the Romantic, to the Modernist or Silver Age, and now to himself – the postmodern. This lineage, like the term Silver Age, is predicated on a sense of coming after, of being able only to quote and echo the masters rather than to create something wholly original.

It follows that Leva can never really escape the double bind of “vitality” any more than A.B. does. To see like Pushkin in the modern (or postmodern) day and age is to be enamored of a lost origin that, while perhaps sincere, can only seem like hack work to the contemporary eye. This is the case for Uncle Dickens' stories, which reveal to Leva that people used to be purer and nobler but also more naive, more timid.³⁷² However, one of Dickens' stories resembles Pushkin's “Metel” (“The Snowstorm”) – a fact that goes unacknowledged in the story. Whatever unself-conscious originality Dickens' work has is undermined by this unacknowledged debt – the kind of borrowing that A.B. happily announces, with no pretense of originality. In a similar instance, Leva fails to acknowledge a relevant essay by the literary scholar Iurii Tynianov in “Three Prophets” because, as A.B. is keen to point out, he is unaware of it.³⁷³ A.B.'s creation – *Pushkin*

³⁷¹ Ibid., 294.

³⁷² Ibid., 294.

³⁷³ Ibid., 278.

House and its characters – both acknowledges its debts and, denies the value of their primacy, their superior position based on having “come first,” to the extent that Leva’s “real life” becomes less salient than his life as a literary hero. Indeed, A.B. does not seem to believe in linear time at all: he dates his postscript “1971-1964” and insists that people are the shades of literary heroes, rather than the other way around. The final section of the novel is a narrative inlay from Modest Odoevtsev entitled “The Sphinx,” which laments words’ unmooring – as in the riddle of the sphinx – from their meanings and claims only God lives on the level of reality.³⁷⁴ A.B. previously noted that the condition of characters in a novel was that they are subject to a “rotten person,” deprived of the “right to god” (“право на бог.”)³⁷⁵ However, deprived of God, Pushkin, the organic, some authorizing origin (a return to which is the promise of sincerity), everyone is effectively a character in a novel and sincerity is only possible as a kind of make believe endeavor that either willfully or unconsciously ignores this condition.

In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how postmodernist fiction developed out of Youth Prose, not as an extension of the rebellious spirit of the generation, but as a function of literary self-consciousness. The themes of life being scripted by literature, words’ unreliability, and increasing alienation from a reliable source of sincerity – Soviet individuation within the collective, a stable self – unite the two periods. Gladilin’s Viktor Podgurskii found that he lacked the vocabulary to be sincere in the arena of romance, but that he also lacked the capacity for irony. Five years later, in *A Starry Ticket*, irony proved to be a means for Dima to define himself that helped him remain aloof from the self-definitions foisted on him and his generation. The loneliness of his position involved grappling with what Kevin Newmark identifies as the perennial dilemma of irony concerns – whether it is “the name for a specific kind of

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 408-9.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 400.

philosophical truth, say, its masked appearance in more or less playful form; or... sheer dissimulation, deception, and ultimately the destruction of truth?"³⁷⁶ Dima's decision to be a clown suggests that he sees this position as the only truth he is capable of telling, a kind of Socratic irony that acknowledges how little he knows of himself and how to live. In *Pushkin House*, deconstructionism takes hold – like de Man's theory of reading or Derrida's *differance*, there words and narratives have no origin, no intrinsic meaning except in relation to one another. This is the case for A.B.'s wanton appropriation of Russian literature in telling Leva's (or his own) story, while repeatedly laying bare the cluster of devices that comprise narrative itself. In *Pushkin House*, sincerity, idealism, and organicity can only be held as ideals by the naïve in contemporary life, but Leva nevertheless champions an ongoing awareness of these ideals' absence, a sense of the lost origin that cannot be recovered but can be evoked by the geniuses of a bygone age untinged by self-awareness. When all that he or anyone else seems to be capable of is producing a pastiche or copy, this gesture stands in for the ideal of self-expression.

³⁷⁶ Kevin Newmark, *Irony on Occasion: from Schlegel and Kierkegaard to Derrida and de Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 16.

Conclusion

Old Socialism, New Sincerity

Alexei Yurchak has described a post-Stalin shift in Soviet official discourse from the constative dimension of language (the concern for the truth-value of signifiers) to an emphasis on the performative dimension of official discourse and its standardization, formalism and citationality following the death of Stalin.³⁷⁷ Yurchak's argument is in part a reaction to the binary depiction of public and private selves under the Soviet regime that, like the Soviet discourse of "unmasking" (*razoblachenie*), treats citizens as dissimulators who only let down their guard in intimate settings. In other words, Yurchak attempts to complicate the notion of sincerity as it pertains to the Soviet subject. One of the ways he does so is by taking the question of intention out of official discourse – Austin's concept of the performative (unlike fellow speech act theorist John Searle's notion of sincerity) is reliant on the conventions surrounding an utterance rather than the speaker's intentions.³⁷⁸ To describe official discourse as performative is to suggest that it was impossible for a speaker to fully identify with the language of official discourse even if the speaker wanted to – it simply had no constative substance. However, in keeping with modern scholarship, this dissertation has taken sincerity to be a matter of rhetoric, meaning a performative element – determined by linguistic and social convention – exists in all potentially sincere utterances, whether or not this fact is acknowledged. As Yurchak shows in his discussion of late Soviet period literature and art, authoritative discourse was not mutually exclusive with sincerity rhetoric. The early Thaw saw an attempt to put official discourse in "one's own" words and to imbue it with a projected authorial or archetypal sincere persona in

³⁷⁷ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 37.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-20.

official literature. The essentialist view of sincerity as candid expression of a unified self typified both the Soviet and the Russian nationalist sincerity strategies in literature. Over the course of the '50s and '60s, though, a perception of sincerity as performative emerged in official literature in parallel to this view. It entailed an understanding of essentialist sincerity as impossible due in part to the impact of performative or authoritative discourse's impact on language. While many writers expressed some measure of despair over the inability to be straightforwardly sincere, they also implicitly or explicitly recognized the possibilities of self-creation inherent in a performative sincerity.

In chapter one, we used Vladimir Pomerantsev's "On Sincerity in Literature" as a paradigm for perception of sincerity in literature in the era. Pomerantsev objected to the late Stalinist *kolkhoz* novel for its idealized depiction of rural reality and identified Valentin Ovechkin's sketches as exemplary of a style and form that could more directly reach the reader and convey reality. Ovechkin's articulation of an essentialist Soviet sincerity gave way to the Village Prose movement, which in the 1950s adapted Ovechkin's sketch into a diary in which writers like Vladimir Soloukhin and Efim Dorosh depicted and enacted their transformation into Russian nationalist subjects. The question of the contours of a Russian national identity and how that identity might be expressed after years of silencing preoccupied Aleksandr Iashin in his 1956 story "Levers," and the 1960s saw important examples of this identity in Boris Mozhaev's "Alive" and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "Matrena's Homestead." In the former case, an individual essence authorized sincere self-expression, whereas in the latter it was an unbroken connection to past tradition that provided for sincerity. Vasilii Shukshin's stories undermined the essentialist view of sincerity as something readily available to be expressed, depicting the failure of language and other conventional means to make sincerity signify. Still, Village Prose, especially

in its most conservative, nationalistic, and antisemitic variant remained a redoubt of essentialist sincerity, which was a key component of their ideology and identity.

The second chapter considered Evgenii Evtushenko's efforts to present himself as a sincere Communist in connection with a trend toward a Romantic conception of the self in Soviet ideology. Evtushenko expanded the emotional repertoire of Soviet literature, using a greater range of expressiveness to convey an image of himself as a sincere believer in the party line. Evtushenko's sincerity rhetoric consisted of an uncanny recapitulation of official discourse in his poetry which he attempted to present as his sincere conviction. His self-monumentalization as a flawed but always well-intentioned individual, which brought Evtushenko celebrity, was instrumental to his sincerity rhetoric, lending humanity to what might otherwise be taken as officious sloganeering. However, as the Khrushchev era drew to a close and Evtushenko's relationship with a harsher regime became evident, Evtushenko's attempt to present himself as a voice of conscience became more untenable. Though he continued to cultivate continuity between poetic and public persona, the two appeared increasingly contradictory, imperiling the perceived sincerity of his poetic voice. While Evtushenko himself studiously avoided characterizing himself as a manipulator of sincerity rhetoric, the potential for his collaborationism to devalue the sincerity of Evtushenko's self-presentation led, against his will, to perception of his poetry as merely performative.

Youth Prose, Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House*, and the pervasive influence of first a Romantic, then a postmodern irony were the topic of the third chapter. Youth Prose had a performative element almost from its inception, when Anatolii Gladilin's debut novel revealed an awareness of the self as a construct born out of ironic distance. Vasilii Aksenov's *A Starry Ticket* depicted a Kierkegaardian "ladder" of sincerity, which involved the protagonist Dimka

performatively trying on different personas, but, unlike in Kierkegaard's schema, ceased before the stabilizing decision to stick to just one identity. Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House* pushed this instability even further, turning irony into a constant of postmodern life that precludes sincerity except as a formal exercise, leaving only the impulse as evidence of one's intention to be sincere.

The preceding chapters have been united by sincerity's situation in childhood and youth. The *derevenshchiki* sought out their cultural and geographic roots as a means of returning to the feeling of being a fully integrated member of a group that, in turn, reinforced and nurtured a sense of personal wholeness through that connection. The audiences for Evgenii Evtushenko and Youth Prose were the cosmopolitan young adults whom official discourse associated with sincerity. The post-Stalin era as a whole can be seen as an attempt to harness the revolutionary romanticism of the Russian Revolution's own youth – a supposedly idealistic time cut off from the present by Stalin's reign. It also marked a rediscovery or, more accurately, reassertion of an intellectual heritage that belonged to a pre-Revolutionary age. As Vail' and Genis note, there was nothing radically "new" in *Novyi mir*'s critical outlook (in fact, editors and critics were in the somewhat counterintuitive position of having to defend longstanding humanistic values like sincerity), it was how Tvardovskii approached this agenda, the combination of humanism and Communism.³⁷⁹

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that irony became a part of sincerity rhetoric – leaving any potentially sincere expression's agenda in doubt and open to interpretation – in the urban art scenes of the '70s and '80s, where authoritative discourse's performativity became entwined with sincerity rhetoric. Dmitrii Prigov extended the performativity of authoritative discourse to other discourses in society and culture, including sincerity. His treatment of

³⁷⁹ Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 163.

language's stubborn functionality, its irrepressible ability to signify and impart certain messages and emotions apart from the language user's intentions is evident in some of his best-known projects. In 1984, Prigov came out with the collection *Novaia iskrennost'* (*New Sincerity*), which laid bare the device of sincerity – how it produces the affect of sincerity rather than the speaker's "true" emotional state. In the introduction to the volume, Prigov writes "These verses call upon the sincerity of communication; they signal a situation of sincerity with a full understanding of conventions that characterize both zones and signs of its manifestations."³⁸⁰ This officious statement lays bare the device before it can be deployed in the poems that follow, thereby undermining any sense of authentic emotion on the part of the author that the poems might have produced. Michael Iampolskii notes that Prigov used a similar approach to take aim at literary discourse in "Pushkin's Evgeny Onegin," a "rewriting" of Pushkin's classic in which Prigov systematically inserted "crazy" and "unearthly" into Pushkin's text, creating a genre Prigov called "Lermontovization." Iampolskii describes this genre as a collage that abolishes any notion of authorship and attendant sincerity, which is superseded by a detached, empty emotionalism.³⁸¹ Prigov's New Sincerity made art function like authoritative discourse and acknowledged the rhetoric behind sincerity. Like metafiction, this laying mode can be seen as both "more sincere" because it foregrounds the mechanics of sincerity rhetoric and the impossibility of knowing the author's intentions or inner state, and as an act that precludes sincerity because of its overt self-awareness.

Yurchak relates Prigov's tactics to those of practitioners of *stiob* – an aesthetic that blurred the boundaries between sincerity and irony due to its overidentification with and

³⁸⁰ Dmitrii Prigov, *Sbornik predvedomlenii k raznoobraznym veshcham* (Moskva: Ad Marginem, 1996), 171.

³⁸¹ Mikhail Iampolskii, "Lermontovization, or the Form of Emotion," *The Russian Review* 75, no. 2 (April 2016).

decontextualization with the potential object of parody.³⁸² *Stiob* speaks to the predicament of how to be sincere when, as Modest Odoevtsev says in *Pushkinskii Dom* “everyone’s already Soviet! There aren’t any non-Soviets. You’re for, against, in between – but only in relation to the system” (“все уже – советские! Нет не советских. Вы же – за, против, между – но только относительно слоя.”)³⁸³ To escape this position of relationality, late Soviet intellectuals developed approaches that would offer some measure of freedom even as they carefully avoided full-on rejection of the system. However, as Kevin M.F. Platt and Benjamin Nathans suggest, indifference was an authorial stance rather than a fact – the larger political meaning of such projects was inescapable.³⁸⁴ If sincerity rhetoric aims at eliding its status as rhetoric in order to meet the expectations of spontaneity and being “from the heart/soul” that often accompany sincerity, then the rhetoric of New Sincerity and *stiob* aimed at eliding its status as an emancipatory tactic lest it shade into a grand narrative of liberation and turn into the reactive position that Modest Odoevtsev describes. This threw sincerity rhetoric into question, not because of the suspicion that it might be rhetoric, but because it was alloyed with irony and absurdity – questionably sincere.

How can one be certain that these artists aimed at sincerity? Irony, which, following Friedrich Schlegel, Paul de Man defines as “permanent parabasis” – the ongoing possibility for the interruption of the “inner mood” of discourse – makes such matters endlessly opaque.³⁸⁵ However, a precept of this dissertation has been that invoking the concept of sincerity in the first place speaks to an awareness of the vagaries of self-expression that put sincerity the thing-in-

³⁸² Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 250-52.

³⁸³ Andrei Bitov, *Pushkinskii dom*, 81.

³⁸⁴ Kevin M.F. Platt and Benjamin Nathans, “Socialist in Form, Indeterminate in Content: The Ins and Outs of Late Soviet Culture,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2011): 321.

³⁸⁵ Paul de Man, “The Concept of Irony” in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 179.

and-of-itself out of reach. The perceived obstacles to sincerity are, traditionally, linguistic and social. Two further precepts are the ever-increasing complexity of the self and sincerity the more they are the object of formal scientific study and introspective scrutiny, and the basis of sincerity in social trust. The fractured state of social trust in the Soviet Union and the relative freedom of association in the late Soviet period, the in-group established by ironic acts and utterances, and the exhaustion of self-inquiry depicted in works like Aksenov's and Bitov's could be said to have created the conditions for sincerity to become so complex as to be almost unrecognizable except, ironically, by its signifier.

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