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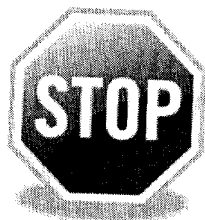
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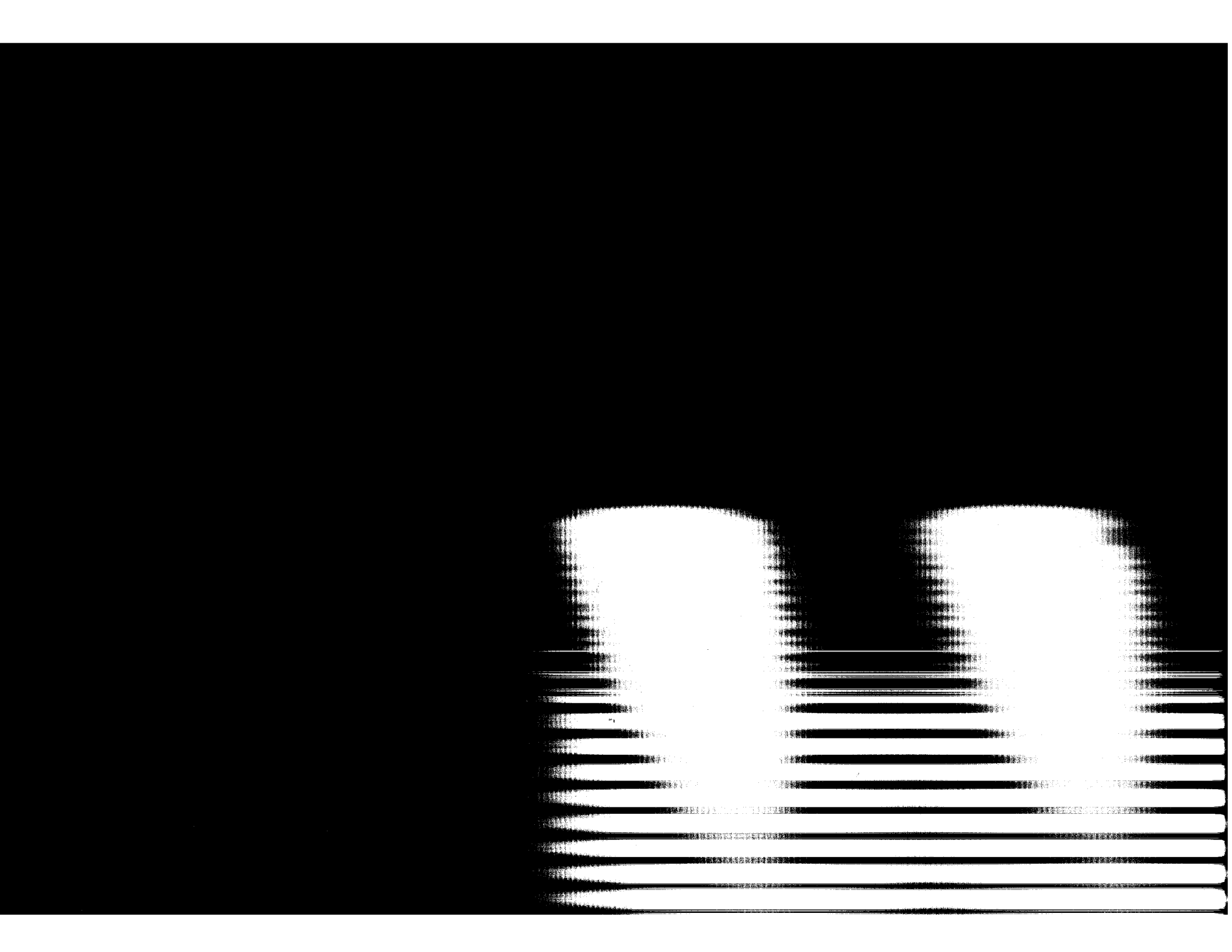
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Poetry after 1930

The lasting prestige of twentieth-century Russian poetry flows from those poets who endured the Stalin years with honour and integrity. Poets are thought to have performed hidden acts of heroism when they took the simple risk of composing verse. Some famous images of the 1930s come from these poems, including the woman who whispers with blue lips in 'Requiem' by Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966). She described the internal exile of Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938) as a time when fear and the muse stood guard. His poems, and the memoirs of his widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam, made him the emblematic poet of Russia's modern time of troubles.

Life for Russia's poets was more complex than these dramatic images suggest. The dangerous 1930s were also an era for cultural negotiation and the sheer work of imagining a readership. Both efforts continued as the Soviet Union evolved, and as it collapsed in the 1980s. The flourishing of post-Soviet poetry merits separate treatment, but most contemporary poets came of age in the late Soviet period, so it makes sense to see these decades as a strangely unified epoch, with several persistent features. Indeed the late Mikhail Gasparov argued that rhythmic innovations and the presence of semantic aureoles for metrical patterns are surprisingly constant across the many decades.¹

How readers were imagined early in the Soviet period has been well studied by Evgeny Dobrenko. He traces the multiple points of entry that the state-controlled system offered those seeking everything from entertainment to reassurance at their status as Soviet citizens.² Poets who participated in tasks of identity formation for the new citizen produced poems in praise of Stalin and odes extolling the heroic Soviet people during the Second World War. These poets were in many cases as sincere as marginalized poets, and the quality was not always inferior. The forging of national identity in a time of war could also lead to extraordinary poems of individual non-conformity, as in Mandelstam's 1937 'Lines on the Unknown Soldier' or the poems of daily life written by Boris Slutsky (1919–1986). Such poems did



not immediately reach their readers, however, and long delays in reception often shaped writers' and readers' experiences.

The poet faces the state

Poets who had found ways to adapt to Soviet rule in the 1920s faced staggering new challenges as Stalinism consolidated its hold on all public institutions in the 1930s.³ The emergence of the official doctrine of Socialist Realism clarified some expectations, but complicated others: creators of narrative poetry were urged to pursue plots of successful integration into the new socialist order, and the requirements for lyric poetry were hotly debated. Some, including Boris Pasternak (1890–1960), wrote about the individual's merging with the collective will in simpler words and forms so as to meet the needs of the newly literate public. Critics have traced the 'poet's internal change triggered by outside pressure' in such poems as 'The Waves' (1931), where Pasternak says to his city, Moscow, 'I will accept you like a harness'.⁴ For the poet who was famously compared to both an Arabian horse and its rider, this may seem a gesture of abject submission. Yet Pasternak retained sufficient independence to later write *Doctor Zhivago* (1958), with its ethos of Christian self-sacrifice.

Mandelstam chose a more defiant path than Pasternak's search for accommodation and public recognition. Mandelstam declared, 'And I am not one to draw. I do not sing. I do not play with a black-voiced bow,' as if renouncing public performance. Yet he also said that he had walked 'deeply into a deafened era', and he called on the air to witness his creative acts.⁵ As Nancy Pollak has persuasively shown, the Christian principles Pasternak would later embrace contrasted with Mandelstam's increasing identification with the fate of the Jewish people (neither practised, but both poets had been born Jews).⁶

Although cast as a pariah by the authorities, Anna Akhmatova maintained an identity as the voice of her people. (As Vladimir Kornilov [b. 1928] was to write much later, 'Motherland and state/Are not the same thing').⁷ She steadfastly recorded the suffering and silence of others, and her own losses as well, often in code. Few poems attained the iconic status of 'Requiem' (1936–1940), with its terse recreation of night-time arrests, the bereft madness of women left behind. The poem's changing metrical schemes and quick thematic movement contributed to its success in recreating the forcible silence of the Stalin Terror. Some have come to see Akhmatova in a less flattering light in recent years, even suggesting a peculiar mirroring of authoritarianism in her acts of self-creation.⁸ But she retained considerable admiration among Russian intellectuals, as was reaffirmed when 'Requiem' was first publicly

recited in Leningrad in 1987 by Mikhail Kozakov, and when her centenary was celebrated in 1989. Her example of truth-telling, psychological firmness, and verbal precision has shaped the ethos of later poets, Oleg Chukhontsev (b. 1938) among them; her stoicism and conservative form finds a worthy successor in Mikhail Aizenberg (b. 1948) who, like Akhmatova, is also a keen literary critic.

A harsher stance toward the state was taken up by a quite different woman poet, Anna Barkova (1901–1976). Enthusiastic about the Revolution, Barkova grew as profoundly disenchanted as better-known Modernist poets. She was arrested and served out several long terms in the labour camps, where the severity of her circumstances earned her comparison to the long-suffering Varlam Shalamov (1907–1982). Barkova had written of fire-brand revolutionary heroines in the 1920s, and her later work was marked by a zeal for cold realism and stony resilience. As a lesbian, she fitted poorly into the Stalinist-era artificial family cosiness, and her lyric heroine became something of a Holy Fool. The publication of Barkova's later work was another significant cultural event during *perestroika*, and the legacy of her stoical resistance persists. It was echoed in the fierce protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968) by the Moscow poet Natalia Gorbanevskaja (b. 1936), and Barkova's poetic persona as misfit inspired the later Leningrad poet Elena Shvarts (1948–2010).

Shvarts was among the poets who created a lively poetic underground in the 1970s, and this activity constituted a new chapter in the relations of poet and state. These poets reacted against the public showmanship of Evgenii Evtushenko (b. 1933) and Andrei Voznesensky (b. 1933), who performed before stadiums full of youths in the 1960s. But the 1970s underground poets were each others' small audiences, and their works were circulated in the same *samizdat*-like atmosphere that defined the dissident movement; indeed, their gatherings were subject to surveillance and occasional restriction. Some of these poets were visual artists and creators of happenings; among the best performers and instigators in Moscow was Nina Iskrenko (1951–1995), who broke taboos against explicit mention of women's bodily functions and desires. Officials were most likely to clamp down on events that attracted a public following, like the bulldozing of an art market in the Moscow suburbs in 1974. Poets increasingly sought larger public hearings, as permissions were gained for new anthologies and gathering places. Glasnost' opened new outlets for publication and public reading, embracing young poets in the provinces and the capitals, and a huge backlog of works that had long been suppressed.

In post-Soviet Russia, the problem of the poet and the state would seem irrelevant: censorship has seemingly disappeared. The rise of the internet,

new small presses, commercial venues for poetry readings, and the removal of travel restrictions have enriched connections between poets and their readers. Some say that there are now more poets than readers, but the freedom is invaluable, and it has allowed poets who see remnants of tyrannical rule in the post-Soviet state to speak their mind openly. If integrity is a lasting mark of twentieth-century Russian poetry, then this political courage remains significant. The anguished protest at violence in the Caucasus found in the work of Sergei Stratanovsky (b. 1937) stands out. Some poets have largely devoted themselves to the public discourse of politics. Lev Rubinshtein (b. 1947) is a prime example; others, including Tatiana Shcherbina (b. 1954), are outspoken voices on their blogs and on other widely read web sites.

War and historical catastrophe

Mandelstam's 'Lines on an Unknown Soldier' stands as the major statement against war's violence in twentieth-century Russian poetry. A poem that recollects the appalling violence and losses of the First World War, 'Lines' also eerily foresees a coming conflict, and places Mandelstam's generation squarely between these two experiences of human horror. Long unpublished, this poem invokes both a stable cosmic order and a chaotic human experience of death; like Moses speaking to an angry God, ready to destroy the Israelites for their idolatry, 'Lines' asks how humanity can have come to such an era of wholesale destruction. The poem's music is its salvation: the anapaest rhythm and frequent dactylic rhymes make it mesmerizingly intense.

The public face of wartime patriotism dominated official poetry during and after the Second World War. Just as there were dozens of poets willing to glorify the state or its leader, so there were those who wrote patriotic exhortations. Lasting value can be seen in poems by Akhmatova, Slutsky, Boris Chichibabin (1923–1994), and many others.⁹ Slutsky was the only major poet who saw front-line service and survived, but he maintains an unusually even and dispassionate tone, even in recording terrible suffering or ethically indefensible crimes. Along with Konstantin Simonov (1915–1979) and Alexander Tvardovsky (1910–1971), Slutsky, Mikhail Kulchitsky (1918–1942), and David Samoilov (1920–1990) were perhaps the best-known poets of the wartime generation. Samoilov's poem 'The Forties' (1961) merged the themes of wartime losses and Stalin's Terror. Slutsky often embedded multiple points of view into his poems, and he wrote for a desk drawer that was found brimming with remarkable work at his death. A powerful theme in this work is the grieving of widows who, as he put it, continued to fight every night long after the war had ended.¹⁰ Other poems convey the lives of

soldiers, most famously in Tvardovsky's *Vasily Terkin* (1941–1945), and, in a poem that looks ahead to postwar calm, 'The Sky', by Kornilov (1931).¹¹ Simonov's tremendously popular 'Wait for Me' (1941) was the romantic opposite of these accounts of war's dailiness: it exhorts the beloved to be faithful and steadfast, for her love can bring her soldier home alive.

The 900-day Blockade of Leningrad proved a powerful subject for poetry, including the poems by Olga Berggolts (1910–1975) broadcast on the radio to bolster the courage of Soviet citizens. Berggolts' poems echo the heroic rhetoric of official writings, although her experience of imprisonment (pregnant, she was savagely beaten, and her child died) in 1938 and the death of her husband from starvation underlay her work with deep personal tragedy and, particularly in poems published only later, considerable aesthetic and political complexity. The poems of Natalia Krandievskaja-Tolstaia (1888–1966), another Blockade survivor, also provide terrible, evocative vignettes of daily life during the siege, with images of corpses frozen in the streets and rats living brazenly in communal kitchens.

The topic of war and loss proved important for later poets as well, some of whom insisted on the freedom to write about aspects of the war that had been passed over in silence. Shvarts, for example, evoked cannibalism in her 'Portrait of the Blockade' (1999). Any representation of the war's survivors as callous or unethical would have been impermissible earlier. Other poems broke taboos in the 1960s, including the murders and persecution of Jews and members of other minority groups, famously in Evgenii Evtushenko's 'Babii Iar' (1961). It fell principally to prose writers to fill in the documentary record of this period of historical catastrophe, but poetry could indirectly conjure up the sense of unnamed fears and enforced silences, as in Mandelstam's 1930s poems and the later work of Akhmatova, for example, her 'Northern Elegies'. Mandelstam's 'Voronezh Notebooks', published only much later, record with a fractured lyric subjectivity the threatened sense of personhood that was widespread during the Terror. In one poem, he imagines a future Mandelstam Street, only to correct himself – it is not a street, but a pit; in another, he locates himself in a spider-web of light, and in still another he lies in his grave, lips still moving.¹² These sharp images appear fleetingly in the complex late poems, which are as filled with literary quotations and echoes as the earlier work; their power comes from the poet's enduring ability to draw deeply on the cultural tradition in formally beautiful poems of doom.

Poets' freedom after the Stalin period to think about Russia's catastrophic history saw the emergence of poems that assess larger patterns of violence and suffering. Akhmatova's late work 'Poem Without a Hero' (1940–1962) created a personal model for such retrospective work, with its private, often

coded recollections. Although written about pre-Revolutionary Russia, the poem is infused with the emotions of a poet who had guiltily survived Terror, war, and postwar recriminations. Viktor Krivulin (1944–2001), a later Leningrad poet, wrote powerfully of Soviet citizens' shared history of trauma, including such poems as 'The Wine of Archaisms' (1973) and 'At the Public Festival' (2001). Krivulin's poetry is better known for employing the material of myth and religion. Indeed, some of the most powerful writing against the grain of official, jubilant public history has come from poets who draw on religious thinking and experience – for example, Shvarts, or Iurii Kublanovsky (b. 1947). Shvarts' longer lyric poems often layer historical eras, as in 'Kindergarten Thirty Years On', where motifs of Petrine revolution, Avvakum's seventeenth-century revolt, the 1905 workers' uprising, and the Blockade all appear.

Historical material also informed the work of poets describing life during the Cold War and the era of Stagnation, as the Brezhnev years came to be known. The Moscow Conceptualists' transformation of the everyday language of Soviet slogans and popular discontent in effect became a historical record of these years. Such poems – not all by Moscow Conceptualists, to be sure – as Dmitrii Prigov's (1940–2007) 'Screaming Cantata (Who Killed Stalin)', Sergei Gandlevsky's (b. 1952) 'There's our street, let's say –', Sergei Stratanovsky's (b. 1944) 'A Leningrad Stairwell', and Rubinshtein's 'A Little Night Music' displayed what Jed Rasula, writing of American poetry, called a 'documentary propensity'.¹³ At times, unofficial poets put historical themes to work parodying the official language that had been used to describe the past, as in Prigov's 'Kulikovo' and 'The Year 1937', and in 'When Lenin Was a Little Boy' by Timur Kibirov (b. 1955). These poems can be difficult to capture in translation, so dependent are they on Soviet jargon, but the contribution of these prolific poets (especially Prigov and Kibirov) has been massive and their performances very popular. Their importance can be measured by the enormous outpouring of grief at Prigov's death in 2007. The legacy of poetry as public performance endures, particularly in the era of YouTube and the internet more broadly.¹⁴

Poems of mind, spirit, body

The poetry of private experiences suffered from overscrutiny and public attack during the Soviet period and, for quite different reasons, during the years of *glasnost* and post-Soviet reconstruction. Yet such lyrics thrived over these decades, suggesting both the remarkable resilience of the form and the deep psychological demand to which lyric responds. Few poets demonstrated a keener awareness of the pressures to write of inner

experience than Pasternak. In a long poem of the 1920s, *The Lofty Malady*, he forthrightly weighed the expressive benefits of lyrical speech against the responsibilities of listening to 'the music of the revolution' (as Blok put it). His writing demonstrated as well the many pressures against taking up the lyre. The choice of longer poetic forms was eminently logical; in fact, poets through the twentieth century tried to measure up to some notion of larger form. The task was difficult – the poems rarely succeeded – and Pasternak's eventual solution was to append the lyric poems Iurii Zhivago 'writes' to the large narrative that tells his story.

Pasternak's approach was to represent interiority as it was formed by the pressures of historical experience – this is the theoretical model developed by Lidiia Ginzburg.¹⁵ Other poets sought to represent the process of identity formation as if from within, and Pasternak wrote in this way particularly in his last volume, *When the Skies Clear* (1956). Such poems often allegorize the creative process, as in Leonid Martynov's (1905–1980) 'Sunflower' (1932) or Akhmatova's poems about shattered identity.¹⁶ Émigré poets are treated separately in this volume, but one should not forget that such representations of selfhood were important to poets who left Russia, Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941) among them. She and Mandelshtam were key figures for Arsenii Tarkovsky (1907–1989), who especially inherited the Acmeist insistence on purity of language and a love for classical themes. Tarkovsky may now be better known as the father of the film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky; from the 1950s onward, he exemplified a preservation of poetic ideals and public restraint (although he signed the letter of protest against the 1965 trial of Siniavsky and Daniel, which was a major act of public dissent). His poems celebrate natural phenomena and life itself, as in the splendid lyric 'Life, Life' (he reads this poem, along with three others, in the film *The Mirror*). In the lyrics' receptivity to the subtleties of the natural world, and in the poems' allegory of poetic creation as a similar form of aesthetic absorption, they recall early Pasternak, whose legacy Tarkovsky also carried on.

Among poets in Tarkovsky's generation and those slightly younger, Semen Lipkin (1911–2003) and Inna Lisnianskaia (b. 1928) stand out for their roles in the *Metropol* affair (1979), an independently assembled almanac of writings that aroused a scandal and caused a number of its participants to resign from the Writers' Union. Lipkin and Lisnianskaia, who lived as husband and wife for decades, crafted highly individualistic lyric voices, and both became enduring figures in the intelligentsia. Lipkin's superb artistry and original formulations produced poems of forthright beauty, as in the lines that open 'In the Desert': 'Like wanderers in elevated meekness,/We move in the fourth dimension.'¹⁷ Lisnianskaia's lyric poems, many of them

compactly introspective, explore the dimensions of subjectivity and memory. She employs mirror imagery in some poems, and the theme of loss weaves throughout her work, as in her reprisal of Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art', which begins 'I rejoice when I lose things' and ends 'I've lost my ringing voice, And nests of words, and their soaring order' (1983).¹⁸ As with Akhmatova, for whom loss was a crucial theme, Lisnianskaia became a premier practitioner of the modern elegy. Her decades of productivity and growth remind one of such long-lived poets as the Americans Robert Creeley and Barbara Guest, or the visual poet Elizaveta Mnatsakanova (b. 1922). Unlike them, however, Lisnianskaia's is not an experimental or radical voice in terms of form. Using traditional meters and measured expression, she has simply burrowed deeper into the topics that have long sustained lyric poetry.

One of Lisnianskaia's great themes and metaphors is illness, which bears special mention among lyric topics. Sickness and disease elicit allegorical comparisons to the failing body of the state and, conversely, dig into individual experience of physical integrity and vulnerability. Pasternak set this topic on its course, largely in poems written earlier in his career, for example those collected under the title 'The Malady'. A study of Pasternak's poetry in the 1920s has shown persuasively that the topic of hysteria was closely tied to his metaphors of poetic creation.¹⁹ Maladies of both psyche and body (hysteria being the illness that links the two) are experienced by the lyrical heroes of some of the greatest poems of these decades, including Mandelstam's descriptions of suffocation ('Oh the horizon steals my breath', 1937), swollen glands ('Leningrad', 1930), or repudiated migraine ('No, it's not migraine', 1935).²⁰ Diseases of spirit and being that infected survivors and victims found expression in lyric poetry that referred obliquely to the body's sufferings, as in these poems by Mandelstam, in Lisnianskaia's cycle 'In the Hospital for Face Wounds' (1984), and in Bella Akhmadulina's (b. 1937) poem 'Fever'.

A poet who explored the topic of mental distress early in his extraordinary career (largely discussed elsewhere in this volume) was Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996), in the long poem 'Gorbunov and Gorchakov' (1968), set in a mental hospital.²¹ Brodsky himself had been declared to display the traits of a psychopath at his trial for parasitism in 1964. Later poets with far deeper experience of mental illness would include this theme in their work, among them the Leningrad poet Vasilii Filippov (b. 1955), who has lived in a mental hospital for many years. Mental illness as interruption in one's life also appears as a theme in the work of other poets, including Olga Sedakova (b. 1949). Compare the terse expressiveness of her lyric poem 'In the Psych Ward' (1979–1983), or the longer lyric 'The Malady' (1978),

which opens with a headache so powerful that it is alive. Illness teaches what other experiences cannot, writes the poet. Its lessons include a capacity to see the maladies of the culture in which the poet resides.

The enduring natural world

Lyric poets have long sought refuge from social ills in the natural world. Again, modernist poets were important models, especially Pasternak, although many poets reach back as well to the Romantic pantheism of Fedor Tiutchev or the simple diction and clear emotions of Pushkin. An unusual and powerful figure is Nikolai Zabolotsky (1903–1958), initially a member of the Oberyuty, who then seemed destined to become a mainstream Soviet poet, particularly in his poems in praise of agriculture. Zabolotsky's penal servitude, as well as his profound connections to peasant mentality and a religious sensibility, changed his later work. The purity of expression in such poems as 'A Lake in the Forest' (1938) impressed later poets. Sedakova praised his integrity and honesty of expression, noting that the compassion with which the poet turned to nature was a cover for a sense of 'shared orphanhood and sadness', and of solitude in the world.²²

Many poets chose still simpler language, perhaps carried to extreme in the primitivism of Kseniia Nekrasova (1912–58). Minimalism distinguishes the work of Gennadii Aigi (1934–2006), famous in the West before his poetry was much available in Russia. After his earliest poetic output in his native Chuvash and translations, Aigi began to compose poems in Russian as well. His poems preserve Chuvash folk beliefs and absorb the influences of French poetry, which he had translated, and show as well the impact of Oberyuty minimalism. The result is an unusual body of work characterized by an intense formal compression and linguistic barrenness. His subject matter is frequently the simplest of natural events – a snowfall, a moving stream of water – imbued with an intense affirmation of human value and spirit, as in these lines from a poem dedicated to Pasternak, 'Here' (1958):

and life had disappeared into itself like a road into the forest
and a word became a hieroglyph
to me, the word 'here'
and it signified both earth and sky
and what was in shadow
and what we see eye-to-eye
and what we cannot share in verse²³

As an aside one might note that Aigi's preference for unpunctuated and uncanceled lines has found many successors in contemporary poetry, poets

as different as Kirill Medvedev (b. 1975), Andrei Sen-Senkov (b. 1968), and Anna Glazova (b. 1973), not all of whom would cite Aigi as a model, to be sure.

Mikhail Eremin (b. 1937) writes with more suspicion of the recompense of the natural world. The rapid urbanization and indifferent destruction of natural environments that accompanied the Soviet Union's rush to industrialization rendered the pastoral mode increasingly implausible. Eremin creates extraordinary tension in his poems of nature, holding fast to a single format, the eight-line lyric. But his language and imagery know no bounds, with splendidly opaque juxtapositions and transitions on vivid display, as in this poem from 1957:

Polyhedral kernels of wisdom,
Primordial form of space.
All-Russian holiness, hodgepodge
And the herony tang of swampland
To be searched out in autumnal writing,
Where the slush has left its traces,
Where leaves, like the skirts of an onion
Conceal tears in their creases.²⁴

Traces of Zabolotsky's earthy images touch this poem (his name, in fact, is echoed in the swampland of l. 4, 'boloto' in Russian), as do familiar references to the act of writing, compared to slushy traces on an autumn landscape.

The complexity of Eremin's metaphors finds an apt counterpart in the rich metonymies of Ivan Zhdanov (b. 1948). His poems may take their subjects from mythology or urban spaces. As in Zabolotsky's work, Zhdanov's shows his origins in a provincial farming region (Altai). Poems like 'Hills' and 'Portrait of My Father' are splendidly visual in a dream-like, emotionally logical way. The result is an all-encompassing fantasy of the sights and sounds of the natural and agricultural worlds.

Poems of love

The legacy of Akhmatova's love poetry was as intimidating as it was inspiring for subsequent poets, but Akhmatova proclaimed that the best love poem of the twentieth century had been written by Mariia Petrovykh (1908–1979): 'Make a time to meet me' (1953). In its intensity of imprecation, this poem uses the usual rhetorical situation of love poetry, separation from the

beloved, to recreate the passion of presence. Some poets preferred the pleasures of intimacy to evocations of absence, as in the poems of the 1930s by the lesbian poet Sofia Parnok (1885–1933). First published by Sofia Poliakova in 1979, these poems evoke the experience of aging alongside frank longings. Parnok's was not an entirely isolated lesbian voice: she may have read Barkova's early poems, for example, 'Sappho' (1922), and she clearly knew Sappho's own work. The love lyrics of lesbian poetry vanquish the gender barrier that separates poet and beloved in standard heterosexual love poetry. Akhmatova's innovative contribution lay in the strength she gave to the voice of the speaking woman poet. Her contemporary Tsvetaeva, who left one remarkable cycle of lesbian lyrics, 'The Girlfriend' (1916), was similarly undaunted by the tradition that associated erotic power with male power, also seen in her 'Attempt at Jealousy' (1924).

Many male poets continued to write love poems in the twentieth century. Leonid Aronzon (1939–1970) was highly regarded for his love poetry, which has a light touch and a fine sense of whimsy. More self-consciously substantial are the dozens of poems Joseph Brodsky dedicated to 'M. B.' (Marina Basmanova), beginning in the 1960s; they stand apart for their elliptical evocations of the entire cultural tradition of love poetry. Many of Brodsky's poems engage in philosophical speculation on the nature of human intimacy, and they indulge psychological theories about love's failures. Brodsky's cycle 'Twenty Sonnets to Maria Stuart' (1974) had perhaps the greatest resonance among later poets, producing three poems that were read at a 2008 evening in his memory in Moscow: 'Poems to Maria S.' (1994) by Elena Fanailova (b. 1962); 'Twenty Sonnets to M.' (2001) by Mariia Stepanova (b. 1972); and 'Twenty Sonnets to Sasha Zapoeva' (1995) by Timur Kibirov. Stepanova's poem is dedicated to her mother (a clever reassignment of Brodsky's letter 'M' to 'mama'), and Kibirov's are to his newborn daughter, moving the love lyric into the setting of family romance, while maintaining the usual feminine addressee. Fanailova prosaically addresses 'Maria, wife of the poet B., Nobel laureate' and Mary Queen of Scots, also Brodsky's addressee. She is comfortable with earthy vulgarity, as was Brodsky himself (more than one Brodsky poem to 'M. B.' refers casually to an erection).

One could argue that these three post-Brodsky poems are quite the opposite of love poems: not words addressed to the beloved so much as riffs on the theme of love, penned self-consciously in an age where sentiment is largely suspect. Successful love poets were rare late in the twentieth century. Tatiana Bek (1949–2005) would surely be among the exceptions. Although Bek once said that her shoulders were shaped for basketball, not for

Akhmatova's famous shawl, her love poems were built on Akhmatova's foundation, often sneaking into the territory of conflict and betrayal. Other poets have sought sharper breaks with the models of the past, among them Vera Pavlova (b. 1963). Her brief, colloquial poems play against the expectations of feminine speech and mix lyrical longings with prosaic assertions. In a more maximalist vein, Mnatsakanova created a strong sequence of incantatory lyrics to the beloved in her *Das Hobelied*, her Song of Songs.²⁵ Mnatsakanova's imperatives resemble those of Petrovykh, but with greater sound complexity and musical elaboration. She has also produced a range of richly illustrated albums. Mnatsakanova writes on the back cover of one album, in English, 'This is a book of permanent love. This is a permanent book.'²⁶ The transposition of the adjective is typical of her poetics, as is the urgent assertion that love, like poetry, endures against all encroachments.

Faith, belief, religious fantasies

Such faith in the power of love finds its counterpart in religious faith which, for all the intense prohibition during the Soviet period, endured as a theme in poetry across the decades, in both work published much later, like that of Zinaida Mirkina (b. 1926), and in poems that eventually grew quite famous, like Pasternak's *Zhivago* sequence. But it was poets fated to obscurity who produced the most unusual poetry of religious experience, including Daniil Andreev (1906–1959), whose *Rose of the World* fantasized a cosmic spirituality that envelops the material world. Also important is Vera Merkureva (1876–1943), who followed the intense, aberrant spirituality of the Symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov in poems that show a remarkable range of formal experimentation. She wrote of the self-abnegation that history seemed to press upon Russia. Her image of the world was less Orthodox than pantheistic, closer to the poetry of Shelley, whom she had translated. Like Mirkina's, Merkureva's later poetry became known only in the 1980s.

Religious themes were abundant in the underground poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, most importantly in the work of such Leningrad poets as Krivulin and Stratanovsky. Shvarts became the best-known Leningrad poet, and she continued to write poems and prose for nearly four decades. Her novel-length poetic sequence on the *The Works and Days of Lavinia, Nun of the Order of the Circumcision of the Heart* (1987) imagines women's religious and demonic visions. Shvarts' lyrics can invoke the ecstatic nature of religious experience as an analogue for other forms of rapture. A poet of greater restraint (and an admirer of Shvarts' poetry) is Olga Sedakova, who has reimagined saints' lives and Biblical stories, including that of the Prodigal Son.

Sedakova can represent the universe in the tiniest of images (in one poem, a lentil), or an entire cosmic order in a small natural scene:

The wild dogrose
walks by like a grim-faced gardener, knowing no fear,
with a crimson rose,
compassion's concealed wound, under his savage shirt.²⁷

How a climbing, flowering plant might move with the grim insight of one who tends this garden of Eden is a typical mystery for Sedakova's poetry, where compassion and injury are portrayed equally. With erudition and ease, Sedakova builds her poems on the foundations of the Russian tradition, as in her reprisal of Lermontov's, Pasternak's, and Zabolotsky's ballad structure in 'The Ballad of Continuing', or in her re-working of the folk-religious song tradition in 'Old Songs' (1980–1981).

Soviet anti-Semitism, among its other legacies, discouraged poets from treating Jewish themes, but some poets did so anyway. Slutsky sometimes told tales of a community's suffering and near disappearance, and his poems abound in Biblical references. Ian Satunovsky (1913–82) and Genrikh Sapgir (1928–99) also explored the meanings of Soviet Jewish identity. Sapgir is rightly admired for his transpositions of the Psalms, which effectively bring Yiddish phrases into the Russian lines. Satunovsky and Sapgir were members of the Lianozovo poetry group in a Moscow suburb, and their extensive poetic legacies touch on many other themes. Sapgir was admired for his light touch, and both poets worked as children's writers. Others turned to the Holocaust and the larger identity of Jews as outcasts in their poems – for example, Slutsky and Lipkin. In the post-Soviet period, most notable is the Odessa psychologist and poet Boris Khersonsky (b. 1950), whose *Family Archive* (2006) weaves an indirect history of Jewish experience in the Pale of Settlement. In its characters and plots, the volume is more like an epic than like lyric poetry (and thus participates in a strong trend in contemporary poetry, that of a new epic mode, exemplified also by the work of Fedor Svarovsky [b. 1971]). The prayers that punctuate *Family Archive* are especially remarkable as Russian settings of familiar Hebrew chants. One can anticipate considerable future work on Jewish themes, particularly from the substantial contingent of Russian poets now living in Israel, including Alexander Barash (b. 1960), Elena Ignatova (b. 1947), Gali-Dana Zinger (b. 1962), and Mikhail Grobman (b. 1939). Also significant among emigrants to Israel, but now deceased, are Mikhail Gendeleev (1950–2009) and Anna Gorenko (1972–1999). Jewish themes by no means dominate the work of any of these poets, and Grobman is better known as an avant-garde visual artist. Life in Israel in part has meant that these poets record the political

and cultural difficulties of living in a state at war. On this topic, the work of Aleksandra Petrova (b. 1964) is also quite striking, including the poems in *Residence Permit* (2000), although she has moved to Rome, a city whose myths and realities permeate her poetry.

Sites, locations, communities of poets

The mention of poets living in Israel and Rome brings up an aspect of twentieth-century Russian poets' experience that deserves special mention, the diaspora that has increasingly defined the cultural scene since the 1970s. Among the significant poets who chose emigration from the Soviet Union, apart from Brodsky, were Dmitrii Bobyshev (b. 1936), Lev Losev (1937–2009), Aleksei Tsvetkov (b. 1947), and Vladimir Gandel'sman (b. 1948), Kublanovsky, Gorbanevskaja, and Mnatsakanova. Their departures were orchestrated by the Soviet Union's last attempts to manage intellectual ferment during the Thaw and its aftermath. Significant public trials of dissidents were meant to send messages of control and limitation, as were such public acts of forced exile as the stripping of citizenship from Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaja (1978). The poets who left in the 1970s and early 1980s were cut off from families they had left behind, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union, poets and a good many others remained abroad out of choice. They maintained strong ties and in many cases spent long periods of time in Russia. Others left as the Soviet Union collapsed, in several cases after years of internal dissidence: Sergei Magid (b. 1947), Katia Kapovich (b. 1960), and Nika Skandiaka (b. 1978). Aleksei Parshchikov (1954–2009) and later Mikhail Gronas (b. 1970), Anna Glazova (b. 1973), and Polina Barskova (b. 1976) sought education abroad and found new homes. Some poets have created patterns of travel defined by affinities for a place or a people, as in Shcherbina's regular trips to France. Their access to an audience in Russia is undiminished, in fact a Moscow publishing series, *Diaspora*, presents their work regularly, as do major journals on-line and in print. The vast internet site *Literaturnaiia karta* maps the many locales in which Russian poets now live. Moscow and Petersburg remain important centres for literary gatherings, book celebrations, and ever-increasing prize announcements, but provincial Russian cities and many European and American cities have sizable Russian-speaking populations, and can gather respectable audiences for local poets, poetry festivals, and visiting poets. The poetry itself has drawn upon this presence of new venues and changing readerships as an occasional theme, particularly in the way words from various languages are casually dropped into the Russian lines as signs of cosmopolitan comfort. The bitter air of exile, so much a

theme for the poets who fled post-Revolutionary Russia earlier in the twentieth century, seems a distant cultural memory.

Translations, comparisons, connections

The large number of poets who travelled abroad extensively or left Russia has meant that the entire poetic tradition has become more open to registering the effects of other languages and other national traditions. That last is nothing new: Mandel'shtam's absorption of Dante and Tsvetaeva's devotion to French, German, and Czech cultures are well known. In the Soviet period, poets turned to translation work to survive the long years when their original poetry could not be published. Much of this work involved translations from the languages of the various Soviet Republics. Many poets felt as if they were performing alienated labour, but some translations became justly famous, like Pasternak's Shakespeare. Among the excellent poet-translators, Sedakova stands out for the range of her linguistic and cultural skills (she has translated St Francis, Rilke, Celan, Dickinson, Pound, Eliot, Mallarmé, and Claudel, among others). Sedakova has said that she translated poems she wishes she had written herself, casting the work of translation as a wish to expand one's own skills as a poet. Sedakova's openness to a wide range of linguistic influences may be greater because of her knowledge of many languages, and some others have considerable facility in moving between cultures. Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (b. 1946) and the American poet Lyn Hejinian developed a strong relationship as each other's mutual translators, and Dragomoshchenko and the Moscow poet Vladimir Aristov (b. 1950) have now brought John Ashbery and Michael Palmer into Russian as well. Alexander Skidan (b. 1965) has translated Susan Howe, among others. A poet whose work shows rich integration of foreign words into his poetry is Tsvetkov, who has included self-translated poems in recent books and written poems like 'kennedy kennedy king with sundry other' (2006) that mark his verbal encounter with American culture.²⁸ Tsvetkov has also translated some of his poems into English.

How foreign cultures are integrated into Russian poetic experience remains a rich and telling process. During the Stalin years and the Cold War, the cultural discourse of the Soviet Union was organized around forms of separation and difference. If a non-Russian cultural influence was countenanced, it was that of nations that the Russian and subsequently Soviet state had colonized, and Western European and American cultures were construed as ideologically backward. That discourse of suspicion weakened during the Second World War, but one has only to recall how those returning to the Soviet Union, even from foreign captivity, were treated to see

how much the foreign remained suspect. The effect on the counter-culture, especially during and after the Thaw, was to make the foreign all the more fascinating, and that produced the kind of openness that led to poets learning Polish, as Brodsky and Gorbanevskiaia did, so that they could read the many foreign poets available in Polish translation.

Poetry has brought down aesthetic borders as well, to good effect. The exalted position of the poet may have lost some of its glamour in the post-Soviet era, but seeing poetry as one among many aesthetic enterprises has been quite salutary. The boundary between poetry and music has perhaps always been a permeable membrane, with poems offering the words that become songs, and poetry accepting into its repertoire the rhythmic innovations of musical composition (Zhdanov's 'Jazz-Improvisation', or Brodsky's poem 'In Memory of Clifford Brown', for example). There are several poets whose rich knowledge of music affects their style of performance and much of their work, including Pavlova, Sedakova, and of course Prigov. Also professionally trained in music history and performance is Mnatsakanova. Her best-known poem, *Requiem in the Lazaretto of Innocent Sisters*, draws on musical polyphony as well as the unusual form of the passacaglia.²⁹ Mnatsakanova is unusual as a poet of sound because she is equally committed to visual poetry. Other major visual poets include Anna Alchuk (1955–2008), Ry Nikonova (b. 1942), and Sergei Sigei (b. 1947); the trend generally shows the long-lasting impact of the visual experiments of the Russian futurists as well as the influence of visual poetry that has long flourished in France and in the United States. The futurist legacy is also seen in the work of poet and theoretician Sergei Biriukov (b. 1950), whose Academy of Zaum and far-reaching prose essays recall the fantastic, compelling schemes of Velimir Khlebnikov.

A different integration of music with poetry appeared in the work of the guitar poets, who flourished beginning in the 1960s and included Alexander Galich (1918–1977), Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997), and the most genuinely popular poet of all time in Russia, Vladimir Vysotsky (1938–1980). Cinema has also exerted a profound effect on poetry, providing it both with thematic motifs and with the example of montage as a structuring principle; the work of Petrova, Fanailova, and Mara Malanova (b. 1970) is exemplary here.

Conclusion

This chapter has unfolded thematically, offering an account of many different poems and poets across the decades. By seeing these many decades as a single era, it has implicitly challenged a historical narrative of progress

from the (totalitarian) Soviet to the (market-economy and politically free) post-Soviet eras. Poetry abounds in material that demonstrates and often thematizes this more complex historical dynamism.

The evolution of poetic trends over these decades has its own history, which this chapter has not discussed. How poetic groupings have formed or been imagined is useful interpretive work by critics, and the conditions of writing and reading as they have changed across the decades are thus far little studied (though excellent work on specific topics, like Moscow Conceptualism and the Leningrad underground, exists). One could argue that the poetic practices of each generation have opened new possibilities for their successors, even when poets looked to distinguish themselves sharply from their predecessors. Much of the groundwork for the post-Soviet era was laid in the 1970s, when the unofficial cultures of the major cities emerged, and that process and the diaspora it spawned await further study. Across these historical changes, however, poetry has sustained itself and its readers by re-imagining themes of national identity and personal struggle, of love and belief, of scepticism and poetry itself. Given the strong voices among poets writing today, this bodes well for the future, even as audiences seem smaller and as the culture itself continues to be in a state of dramatic flux.

NOTES

- 1 Gasparov, M. L., 'Russkii stikh kak zerkalo postsovetskoi literatury', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 32 (1998), pp. 77–83.
- 2 Dobrenko, Evgeny, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, trans. Jesse Savage (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- 3 See Smith, G. S., 'Russian Poetry Since 1945' in *Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. Neil Cornwell (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 197–208.
- 4 See Zholkovsky, Alexander, *Text Counter Text* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 216.
- 5 Mandelshtam, Osip, *Selected Poems*, trans. Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 93; Mandelshtam, *Polnoe sobranie stikhovtoreni* (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1995), pp. 269, 268, 272.
- 6 Pollak, Nancy, *Mandelstam the Reader* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Pollak's work follows a long and distinguished tradition of subtextual readings of Mandelshtam's allusive poetry; see her bibliography for these works.
- 7 Kornilov, 'An Argument' in *Contemporary Russian Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, trans. Gerald S. Smith (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 54–55.
- 8 Zholkovsky, Alexander, 'The Obverse of Stalinism: Akhmatova's Self-Serving Charisma of Selflessness', *Self and Story in Russian History*, ed. Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 46–68.

- 9 A fine example of Chichibabin's poetry is 'The Battle', *Contemporary Russian Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, pp. 22–23. That volume includes excellent translations of other poets mentioned here, Slutsky and Gorbanevskaya among them.
- 10 Gerald Smith recounts Slutsky's life and work, with extensive translations, in *Things That Happened* (Moscow: Glas Publishers, 1999).
- 11 Kornilov, 'The Sky' in *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry: Silver and Steel: An Anthology*, sel. and introd. Evgenii Evtushenko, ed. Albert C. Todd and Max Hayward, with Daniel Weissbort (New York: Nan A. Talese Doubleday, 1993), pp. 785–787.
- 12 For the poems, see Mandelshtam, *Selected Poems*, pp. 76, 89, 77; *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, pp. 264, 240, 241.
- 13 Rasula, Jed, *Syncopations: The Stress of Innovation in Contemporary American Poetry* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), p. 15.
- 14 Segments of Prigov's funeral were posted to YouTube within hours of the event, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpGybrzaisk&feature=related (accessed 3 February 2008).
- 15 Ginzburg, L. Ia., *O lirike* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974).
- 16 For Martynov, see *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry*, pp. 489–493.
- 17 *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry*, p. 581.
- 18 *Russian Women Writers*, 2 vols., ed. Christine Tomei (New York: Garland Publishers, 1999), vol. 2, p. 1369.
- 19 Ciepiela, Catherine, *The Same Solitude: Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- 20 Mandelshtam, *Selected Poems*, pp. 87–88, 58, 81.
- 21 For Brodsky's translation, see Brodsky, Joseph, *Collected Poems in English* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), pp. 163–208.
- 22 Sedakova, Olga, 'O Zabolotskom' in *Proza* (Moscow: NFQ to Print, 2001), p. 671.
- 23 Aigi, Gennadii, *Razgovor na rasstoianii* (St Petersburg: Limbus Press, 2001), p. 118.
- 24 *In the Grip of Strange Thoughts: Russian Poetry in a New Era*, ed. J. Kates (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 1999), p. 191.
- 25 One of the albums for *Das Hohelied* is held in Houghton Library, Harvard University; others are in the Albertina Museum, Vienna.
- 26 Mnatsakanova, *Das Buch Sabeth* (Vienna: n. p., 1988).
- 27 Sedakova, Olga, *The Silk of Time*, ed. Valentina Polukhina (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994), p. 27.
- 28 Translated by Philip Nikolayev in *Contemporary Russian Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Evgeny Bunimovich and J. Kates (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), pp. 27–29.
- 29 Janecek, Gerald, 'Paronomastic and Musical Techniques in Mnatsakanova's *Rekviem*', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 31, no. 2 (1987), pp. 202–219.

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- Epstein, Mikhail, 'New Currents in Russian Poetry' in *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, trans. Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. 19–50.
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- Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet 'Mass song'* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- Wachtel, Michael, *Cambridge Introduction to Russian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Recommended anthologies, journals, and websites

- Arion: *Zhurnal poezii*, ed. Aleksei Alekhin (1994–), Moscow, four issues annually, www.arion.ru.
- Bunimovich, Evgeny and J. Kates, eds., *Contemporary Russian Poetry: An Anthology* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008).
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- Evtushenko, Evgenii, ed., *Strofy veka* (Minsk: Polifakt, 1995).
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8

KATERINA CLARK

Russian Epic Novels of the Soviet Period

During the Soviet period the epic as a genre was at the forefront of attention for many writers producing long novels, especially if the subject involved military combat. In Soviet literature, two related but distinct versions of epic were most germane. The first was the classical tradition, particular features of which were appropriated for ideological purposes and for the cause of national aggrandizement. The second was the specific model of the epic novel to be found in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–1869), itself an official model for Soviet literature. A complication here is that Tolstoy's novel is indebted to the classical epic (as his own diary entries attest), yet its Second Epilogue takes issue with certain fundamental assumptions of the 'epic' view of history.

A similar ambiguity can be seen in the work of the four writers I will discuss here. Each of them produced epic novels which both challenge, and draw on, the kind of 'epic' exemplified by canonical Socialist Realism, and also both challenge and draw on the reworking of the epic tradition in *War and Peace*. I am treating in particular: Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* (*Tikhii Don*, 1928–1940); Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (*Doktor Zhivago*, 1957); Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* (*Rakovyi korpus*, 1968), *The First Circle* (*V krughe pervom*, 1969), and *August 1914* (*Avugust chetyrnadtsatogo*, 1989);¹ and Vasilii Grossman's *For A Just Cause* (*Za pravoe delo*, 1952) and its sequel *Life and Fate* (*Zhizn' i sud'ba*, 1960/1980). These novels have become famous in the West: three of the authors won the Nobel Prize for literature (Pasternak in 1958, Sholokhov in 1965, Solzhenitsyn in 1970), and though Grossman was not so honoured, his *Life and Fate*, published posthumously, has been hailed by renowned Western intellectuals. But all of these novels are epic: epic in terms of length, but also epic in terms of their canvas, their historical sweep encompassing such critical moments in twentieth-century Russian history as the First World War, the Revolution, the Civil War and, for the later novels, the Stalin years and the Second World War. They have, then, the encyclopaedism that Franco