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Resurrecting Pushkin: Mayakovsky's Struggle for Poetic Immortality

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Abstract

Though they lived a century apart and wrote in starkly disparate historical, cultural, and literary contexts, Russian poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Vladimir Mayakovsky were both victims of the posthumous processes of bureaucratization and monumentalization at the hands of the Soviet regime. Their biographies, politics, and poetry were sanitized and manipulated for use as state propaganda. This dissertation synthesizes several scholarly approaches including theories of poetry, close reading of prosody and metaphor, and analysis of biographical and cultural context in order to analyze Mayakovsky's relationship with Pushkin and his legacy. Ultimately, I argue that Mayakovsky uses his poetry both as a means of "resurrecting" Pushkin from his posthumous stagnation and as his own "immortalization program"—a plan through which Mayakovsky hoped to be similarly resurrected by his descendants and rescued from his second death as a lifeless monument of "marble slime." Much of my analysis centers on Mayakovsky's treatment of the Pushkinian themes of the monument and the destructive statue, which appear throughout his oeuvre in many different forms and provide a wealth of information about Mayakovsky's concerns regarding his relationship with Pushkin and his own poetic immortality.

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Notes on Transliteration, Spelling, and Translation

For transliterated titles, names, and other text, I have used a modified version of the Library of Congress system, in which ligatures for the digraph letters (e.g., *ts, iu*) are absent. Certain names are rendered with spellings that have become more common or accepted in English-speaking contexts than the Library of Congress spellings (e.g., Mayakovsky, Shklovsky). The title "*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*" ("*Complete Works*") is abbreviated in the footnotes as *PSS* after its first appearance in the text. All translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise noted.

Dedication

For Kevin Reese, who awakened my love of Russian poetry and without whom this dissertation would never have been written.

Contents

Chapter 1: Monumentalization and Bureaucratization in the Legacies of Pushkin and Mayakovsky

In a 1969 interview with Viktor Duvakin, pioneer of the Soviet Union's Oral History Project, artist and friend of Vladimir Mayakovsky Evgeniia Lang describes a memory of the poet from sometime between 1911 and 1912:

> That winter, Mayakovsky came to pick me up at Kelin's school. It was a very pleasant winter day; the snow crunched under our feet. We walked from Tverskaia-Iamskaia into the center and crossed the square by Strastnoi monastery. Mayakovsky suddenly stopped as he sometimes liked to stop while walking, made a wide gesture with his arm and said, completely unexpectedly: "This is where my monument will stand someday."[1]

The spot Mayakovsky allegedly indicated was situated across from Opekushin's famous monument to Aleksandr Pushkin erected in Moscow in 1880. Whether or not the event Lang describes actually occurred, Mayakovsky certainly felt that both he and Pushkin would share a common posthumous fate of immortalization through monuments. Mayakovsky would spend much of his career as a poet concerned with this kinship between him and his greatest predecessor, using poetry to exorcize his fear of the stagnation of the monument, as well as to fight against it.

Mayakovsky's own monument was erected in Moscow in 1958, not across from Pushkin's as he predicted, but on Triumphal Square, which would carry his name from 1935 to 1992. The beginning of Mayakovsky's bureaucratization by Soviet authorities and the lead-up to the monument's unveiling famously began in 1935, when Lili and Osip Brik appealed to Stalin to officially recognize the poet. His legacy had been neglected by the regime up until this point,

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[1] Gor'kii."Verbliuiuiud! Maiakooovskii! Duurov!: Vospominaniia khudozhnitsy Evgenii Lang o Vladimire Maiakovskom," *Gor'kii*, January 25, 2018, https://gorky.media/context/verblyuyuyud-mayakooovskij-duuurov/.

and Stalin's branding of Mayakovsky as "the greatest poet of our Soviet epoch" marked a dramatic change in the poet's posthumous perception and celebration in the Soviet Union. Pasternak characterizes this moment as Mayakovsky's "second death," after which he was "introduced by force, like potatoes in the time of Catherine the Great."[2] Svetlana Boym describes the posthumous death suffered by Mayakovsky as a process by which "the poet is no longer in control of the dynamic and playful process of self-creation; some of his masks are already 'patented' by the literary establishment with all rights reserved."[3] As a poet who relishes his ability to manipulate his many "masks" through his poetic personae, Mayakovsky would certainly have objected to being limited in this way. While he at times champions the concept of the artist's unfreedom, as in the poems "Homeward!" [«Домой!»] (1925), "A Conversation with the Tax Man About Poetry" [«Разговор с фининспектором о поэзии»] (1926), and many others, relinquishing his ability to vacillate between being a "Soviet factory manufacturing happiness" and an autonomous artist fills him with revulsion. This play is essential to Mayakovsky's identity as a poet, and, as Boym shows, such play is impossible within monumentalism and bureaucratization. In my second chapter, I will discuss the concept of the poet's autonomy as conceived by Pushkin and Blok, and its relationship with Mayakovsky's struggle against the powerful forces of bureaucracy that subject the poet to censorship while he is still living, and trap him in stone once he is dead.

Mayakovsky perceived posthumous commemoration through monuments as a kind of death after death, an immortality that removes the vitality of the poet's legacy. In his monograph

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[2] Boris Pasternak, "Liudi i polozheniia," *Novyi mir* no. 1 (1967), 231.
[3] Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*: *Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1991), 152.

Greetings, Pushkin!: Stalinist Cultural Politics and the Russian National Bard, Jonathan Brooks Platt describes monumentalism as a process which "provides the dead with an inorganic form of immortality: an 'afterlife' visually anchored in the collective memory of their descendants or the national community."[4] Both Pushkin and Mayakovsky are victims of this phenomenon, which Platt presents without value judgments, but which Mayakovsky viewed as highly destructive. For him, monuments represented eternal imprisonment, obsolescence, and torpidity at one end of the spectrum, and disease and death at the other. This profound anxiety toward monumentalism is especially apparent in his "The Jubilee Poem" [«Юбилейное»] (1924) and *At the Top of My Voice* [«Во весь голос»] (1930), both of which are in metric and thematic dialogue with Pushkin. As I will argue later on, Mayakovsky's anxieties about the monumentalism and bureaucratization of his own legacy are intimately connected with Pushkin's poetry and legacy.

Kornei Chukovsky describes a variation of destructive monumentalism as it relates to Pushkin's legacy in his article "Two Poets" [«Два поэта»] (1936), which was written in anticipation of the jubilee marking the centennial of Pushkin's death:

> In all of the gymnasiums, "men in cases"[5] took hold of Pushkin and made his luminous name just as dusty, bureaucratic, and boring as Greek verbs, God's law, or Latin. The most humane of men, the life and poetry of whom were the irrepressible rejection of every kind of carrion and falsity, they bureaucratized, emasculated, made one of the icons of the autocratic regime.[6]

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[4] Jonathan Brooks Platt, *Greetings, Pushkin!: Stalinist Cultural Politics and the Russian National Bard* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 42.
[5] A reference to the protagonist of Chekhov's story "The Man in the Case" [«Человек в футляре»] (1898).
[6] Kornei Chukovsky, "Dva poeta," *Smena* no. 9 (1936), 17.

Ironically, the jubilee celebration for which Chukovsky wrote this article has been interpreted as contributing to the very process of bureaucratization that it rejects.[7] Stephanie Sandler marks the 1937 jubilee as the beginning of the Soviet Union's favored national pastime of Pushkin-worship, specifically pinpointing the poet's fixed existence as a monument in the Russian and Soviet cultural consciousness:

> The monuments' stillness and similarity well represent for us the attitude of official Pushkin myths, as constituted by literary, religious, philosophical, and political culture. These myths produce a static rather than dynamic Pushkin, also disembodying him. How ironic that these monuments now seem to incarnate an official and slightly dishonest myth of Pushkin: erecting a monument to a private person in 1880 was actually quite a daring thing to do in a nation that previously so honored only autocrats and generals. But the monuments are consonant with a disembodied version of the Pushkin myth where there is no place for stories and legends of the poet that suggest bodily energy, erotic inventiveness, transgressive desire, and physical difference.[8]

Sandler goes on to argue that writers actively fought against the official perception of Pushkin in the Soviet era, naming among them Marina Tsvetaeva, Abram Terts, and, of course, Mayakovsky. I will touch on each of these writers later on. But what was special about Mayakovsky's fight against the current of Pushkin's bureaucratization? I argue that Mayakovsky's preoccupation with Pushkin and his legacy is not at all disinterested, but profoundly personal. As Evgeniia Lang's striking anecdote shows, Mayakovsky viewed his own posthumous legacy as inseparable from Pushkin's. Thus his rejection of monumentalism and

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[7] I will note that Chukovsky uses a cliché here in referring to Pushkin's "luminous name" [светлое имя]; Sandler points out that this epithet contributes to the Pushkin myth as early as the nineteenth century (Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 10). However, it is possible that he uses this term ironically in order to ridicule those who contributed to Pushkin's bureaucratization by using such clichés.

[8] Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin: Russia's Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 10.

bureaucratization applies to his own legacy as well. Mayakovsky's deep-seated anxiety about his own posthumous biography is intertwined in his poetry with Pushkin's own legacy.

It is as though Mayakovsky knew that only he and Pushkin could share the same fates of monumentalism and bureaucratization. How fitting that Soviet-era articles written about both Mayakovsky and Pushkin, including Chukovsky's "Two Poets," contribute to these very processes. Innokentii Oksenov's article "Mayakovsky and Pushkin" (1937), the most intensive Soviet-era study of Pushkin's influence on Mayakovsky I have found, belongs to this same group. In this case, the bureaucratization of the two poets' legacies takes the form of their canonization as proto-Socialist Realist writers. Oksenov begins with a tack similar to Chukovsky's, describing Pushkin's adoption as the emasculated figurehead of aristocratic culture in the late Tsarist era, this time in explicitly political terms:

> At that time (1912), Pushkin was one of the invulnerable strongholds jealously guarded by the societal opinion of the ruling class. Depending on necessity, Pushkin was proposed at times as an evangelist of "pure art," at other times as a representative of "ideal" poetry—"ideal," of course, within bourgeois-liberal (in the best case) frames. [...] in the pre-Revolutionary epoch there still existed the canonized image of the official Pushkin, the Pushkin of cheap "popular" and *lubok*-style volumes, whom the state autocratic bureaucracy considered to be "their own" poet.[9]

While Chukovsky objects to representations of Pushkin that reduce his impact and potency, Oksenov rejects the aristocracy's characterization of Pushkin as the pure aesthete, the poet's poet, the enemy of socially and politically driven art, and, finally, the phony canonical image of Pushkin endorsed by the Tsarist state. Though it may be true that the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia downplayed Pushkin's political existence and poetic innovation, Oksenov creates a new problem by proceeding too far in the opposite direction.

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[9] Innokentii Oksenov, "Maiakovskii i Pushkin," in *Pushkin: Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii.* (Moskva: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1937), 291.

Oksenov goes on to argue that Pushkin remains Russia's national poet because of his dedication to Realism, a line which, according to Oksenov, Mayakovsky follows in his own poetry:

> In all discussions about the paths of the development of our Socialist Realist poetry, as soon as we talk about legacy, the names of Pushkin and Mayakovsky emerge as the primary ones, those that define the direction of the work of Soviet poets. The mutual closeness of these two names most valuable to us is defined not only by the fact that Mayakovsky gave examples in his work of the deepest and most correct understanding of Pushkinian traditions, but also by the fact that Mayakovsky's historical meaning for the development of Socialist Realist poetry is largely analogous to Pushkin's meaning for the development of Russian Realist poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[10]

Oksenov's argument contributes to the bureaucratization of both poets' legacies by reducing the complexity of their works. Can we really define Realism as the central characteristic of Pushkin's poetry? Ivan Vinogradov takes a similar tack in his article "Pushkin's Path to Realism" [«Путь Пушкина к реализму»] (1934), when he states that "the question of Pushkin's Realism is actually the question of Pushkin's entire creative path."[11] I argue that this definition is yet another example of the phenomenon Boym describes as the metaphorical death of the poet's process of self-creation.

In his unconventional and controversial critical work *Strolls with Pushkin* (1968), Abram Terts describes Pushkin's "Realism" in a much different light than Oksenov and Vinogradov, characterizing it as only one aspect of his prolific facility for poetic play:

> Pushkin's late loquacity has been regarded as Realism. He defined it in a different way.
>
> *My tongue is my enemy: all lies within its reach,*
> *It's used to jabbering away about everything!*
>
> This chatter suggested, in the context of his general urbanity of tone, an invariable

[10] Ibid., 303-304.
[11] Ivan Vinogradov, "Put' Pushkina k realizmu," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo: A.S. Pushkin* (Moskva, Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob"edinenie, 1934), 49.

> lowering of speech into the sphere of personal affairs, which are thus dragged out into the open with all of their domestic clutter and everyday junk. This is where *realism* came from. But this same chatter excluded any serious or lingering familiarity with reality, which the author dismissed with his compliments and, blowing kisses along the way, rushed further on to squash flies. You won't ask of Pushkin's realism: And where is serfdom shown in your work? And where did you mislay the famous tenth chapter of *Eugene Onegin*? He always cops out: "I was just joking."[12]

Terts obviously has Soviet critics like Oksenov and Vinogradov in mind when describing Realist interpretations of Pushkin's works. He sees beyond the official gloss of Pushkin's bureaucratization to find the poet beneath. Terts's project goes beyond returning complexity and nuance to Pushkin's legacy: it rejects the state-sponsored narrative of Pushkin's life and work established through bureaucratization. In manipulating the poet's legacy to suit its own needs, the state revises the memory of the poet in the collective national consciousness. After the poet's death, the memory of others becomes the means by which he attains immortality. Once this memory is transformed by outside forces, the character of the poet's legacy changes entirely. It is this altered memory that Mayakovsky fears and fights against.

Both Oksenov and Vinogradov contribute to the state-sanctioned manipulation of Pushkin's legacy. Their articles were written in the early 1930s, when Socialist Realism was quickly becoming the only acceptable form of artistic expression. Condemning or abandoning the two most popular poets in Russian literary history would likely have been unfavorable for the party's image. Instead, Socialist Realist critics altered these poets' narratives in order to fit the Socialist Realist paradigm. These critics foreground the so-called "realistic" aspects of Pushkin and Mayakovsky's works in their treatments of the poets' output in this period. As Terts shows

[12] Abram Terts, *Progulki s Pushkinym* (London, Overseas Publications Interchange, 1975), 84.

in *Strolls with Pushkin*, this critical focus distorts not only the poet's work, but also his artistic individuality—what makes Pushkin Pushkin.

Terts—in reality Andrei Siniavskii—composed *Strolls with Pushkin* via letters to his wife while imprisoned in a labor camp, and it was only published abroad under his pseudonym after his release from the camp.[13] Considering the conditions under which it was written and the delay of its publication in the Soviet Union until 1989, its depiction of a complex, paradoxical, living Pushkin was more than simply controversial.[14] It undermined the foundation on which the Soviet state had built its literary culture: veneration of Pushkin the Revolutionary, the People's Poet, the Realist. At the same time, the work upholds the idea that the poet's artistic freedom is paramount—not only freedom of poetic play as described by Svetlana Boym, but also the poet's freedom from the stifling forces of bureaucracy and censorship. Both Pushkin and Mayakovsky struggled against these forces during their lifetimes. Their posthumous legacies further reflect the tension between autonomy and unfreedom. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I will connect the poet's coveted freedom from the stagnation of bureaucracy to the concept of "secret freedom" (*tainaia svoboda*) as presented in Blok's speech "On the Poet's Purpose" [«О назначении поэта»] (1921) and discuss this concept within the context of Mayakovsky's many attempts to revitalize Pushkin's legacy through poetry.

Mayakovsky's conception of the poet's secret freedom is essential to his mission. I define Mayakovsky's secret freedom as the primacy of the Word, of poetic innovation, even in the face of the ossifying literary milieu of the late 1920s. Mayakovsky sees himself and Pushkin as

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[13] Michel Aucouturier, "Vtoroi sud nad Abramom Tertsem," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, 26 July 2019, http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/15/aucouturier15.shtml.
[14] Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin,* 302.

champions of the literary Word. Mayakovsky views poetry as a means of immortality, hence the Word itself is the remedy for the death of the poet's legacy. Mayakovsky strives to maintain the freedom of the Word for himself and Pushkin in perpetuity in order to ensure their immortality. Mayakovsky's fear of death, his anxiety about his own legacy, and his desire for resurrection are key to my argument. I intend to show that Mayakovsky believed that he and Pushkin would share the same posthumous fate of bureaucratization and attempted to escape it by "resurrecting" his predecessor through immortal poetry as he one day hoped to be resurrected himself.

Critically Framing Mayakovsky's Struggle for Poetic Immortality

Death abounds in Mayakovsky's poetry—especially the suicides of his poetic personae. His frequent use of suicidal imagery is central to Roman Jakobson's article "On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets" [«О поколении, растратившем своих поэтов»] (1930). Jakobson provides many examples of such imagery from throughout Mayakovsky's oeuvre, then remarks that as the result of the poet's actual suicide, the question of suicide loses its "literariness"—*literaturnost'*—a reference to his own early Formalist criticism.[15] According to Jakobson, the theme of suicide in Mayakovsky's poetry ceases to be purely a literary device and becomes literature of fact—*literatura fakta*. The contrast between these two concepts, one from early Formalist criticism and the other from the *LEF* period of the 1920s, highlights a major shift in Jakobson's thinking during this period. For him, the Formalists' initial rejection of the context of a literary work and the author's biography was no longer relevant in the aftermath of Mayakovsky's suicide.

[15] Roman Jakobson, "O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov," in *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Rokovoi vystrel*, ed. Leonid Katsis (Moskva: ACT, 2018), 401.

Mayakovsky's biography becomes paramount to Jakobson in the context of the poet's death. Jakobson explicitly pinpoints Mayakovsky's real-life preoccupation with death and resurrection as a biographical fact essential to a thorough understanding of his poetry. I believe that this aspect of Jakobson's article illustrates the insufficiency of Formalist criticism to adequately explain the nuances of Mayakovsky's works. Though I will incorporate some Formalist criticism into my arguments, my approach, which incorporates biographical details and anecdotes from Mayakovsky's life, theories of poetry, and close reading, treats Formalist criticism as important groundwork for larger questions that have remained unanswered. What does Mayakovsky's use of Pushkinian metaphors—particularly the monument—show about his relationship with Pushkin's legacy? What does Pushkin's presence in Mayakovsky's poetry show about the troubled poet's psychology? How does Mayakovsky attempt to overcome his anxiety about death through poetry? I intend to address these questions over the course of this project.

In his monograph *Writing as Exorcism: The Personal Codes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol,* Ilya Kutik presents a method by which the critic can, in the light of relevant biographical details, "decode" a poet's writings to reveal his or her underlying preoccupations and anxieties. According to Kutik, the poet's struggle with the legacy of his successor can occur on a coded level. Lermontov's relationship with Pushkin, his immediate predecessor in the line of great Russian poets, exemplifies this phenomenon:

> [...] in Lermontov's case, as in any genuine one, succession does not mean parroting. Quite the opposite, it rather means repulsion: the desire to demonstrate that he as an author is *different*. In relation to Pushkin, Lermontov did not leave any statement comparable to his famous poetic one about Byron ("No, I am not Byron, I am different..."), but his mental "duel" with Pushkin's fame, the struggle for his own

"difference," occurred, I believe on a *coded* level.[16]

The "mental duel" Kutik describes is fought between a poet and his immediate successor. Is it possible to apply the same critical approach to Pushkin and Mayakovsky, poets separated by an entire century? I argue that Mayakovsky's particular relationship with Pushkin demands such an interpretation. However, being separated by several literary generations, Mayakovsky's desire is not, as in Lermontov's case, for "repulsion" against Pushkin's legacy, but rather the opposite.

Tynianov addresses a similar phenomenon through his concept of "deviation" (*otkhod*) from previous poetic traditions as described in *Interlude* [«Промежуток»] (1924): "In its deviations, the twentieth century clings to the poetic culture of the nineteenth century, instinctively trying to succeed it; poems smooth over their guilt before their ancestors. We are still apologizing to the nineteenth century."[17] Tynianov goes on to assert that, despite its instinctive deference toward the nineteenth century, the twentieth century emulates the eighteenth century more strongly and directly: "But in the meantime, the leap has already been made, and we sooner resemble our grandfathers than the fathers who fought with them."[18]

Mayakovsky's poetry adheres to Tynianov's characterization in some respects. Mayakovsky's grand epic ethos as presented in poems like *150 Million* hearkens back to the panegyric odes of the Russian eighteenth century. Even when Mayakovsky writes about the personal and individual, he elevates them to the heights of epic universal struggle. However, it would be inaccurate to argue that Mayakovsky's embrace of certain eighteenth-century

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[16] Ilya Kutik, *Writing as Exorcism: The Personal Codes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2005), 40.
[17] Iurii Tynianov, "Promezhutok," in *Tynianov Iu. N.: Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino,* ed. B. A. Kaverin and A. S. Miasnikov (Mosvka: Nauka, 1977), http://philologos.narod.ru/tynyanov/pilk/ist18.htm.
[18] Ibid.

aesthetics disqualifies him from identifying with Pushkin on a more intimate level than any other poet. After all, Pushkin himself was not purely a poet of the Romantic nineteenth century. He existed in a transitional period between the two literary epochs, between classicism and Romanticism. Perhaps the coexistence of both the epic and lyrical impulse within Pushkin made him all the more attractive to Mayakovsky as a literary father figure. Mayakovsky prided himself on inhabiting multiple lyric personas, and he recognized Pushkin as a kindred spirit in this respect.

Unlike his contemporaries, Mayakovsky viewed Pushkin as his equal. The Symbolists held Pushkin up as a kind of poetic ideal to emulate and, as I will illustrate in my second chapter, a symbol of the poet's "secret freedom"—the autonomy that protects the poet from the influence of the mob. The Acmeists found in Pushkin a model for purity and simplicity in poetry. Mayakovsky, particularly in his later poetry, presents Pushkin as a poetic innovator on a par with the Futurists and, in "The Jubilee Poem," presents him as a member of the leftist avant-garde. It is for this reason that, in terms of the poet's legacy, we see more in common between Mayakovsky and Pushkin than we do between Mayakovsky and any of the Symbolist poets. Although Mayakovsky's poetry was influenced by the foremost poetic figures of the Symbolist movement—particularly Valerii Briusov, Andrei Bely, and Aleksandr Blok—there existed between the Futurist and Symbolist movements a kind of sibling rivalry that prevented meaningful dialogue between them.[19] For Mayakovsky, the Symbolists represented a different, pre-Revolutionary, decadent world, despite the fact that Blok, Bely, and Briusov all wrote in support of the Revolution. Pushkin, however, transcends both time and literary movements to

[19] I thank my advisor, Clare Cavanagh, for suggesting to me this interpretation of the tension between the Symbolists and the Futurists.

appear in Mayakovsky's poetry as an interlocutor on equal footing with his poetic personae. The main reason for this affinity is that Mayakovsky sees himself in Pushkin: his own fears, insecurities, and obsessions are reflected back at him through the legacy of Russia's national poet.

The current study is not the first to address correspondences between Pushkin and Mayakovsky's works and legacies. In *The Unlikely Futurist: Pushkin and the Invention of Originality in Russian Modernism*, James Rann addresses several of the works and themes that I present in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, including Mayakovsky's attitude toward his predecessor in "The Jubilee Poem," his engagement with Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue, and his profound discomfort with the traditional monument as a path to immortality. Rann aptly characterizes the Futurists' attitude toward Pushkin as that of a "stowaway on the steamship of modernity"—despite their intention to discard old world literature and create a new modern literature out of whole cloth, they allow Pushkin to come along for the ride and, in Mayakovsky's case, eventually adopt him as a fellow Futurist.[20] Rann's work provides a valuable study of the Futurists' attitudes toward Pushkin and gives much insight into Mayakovsky's relationship with his greatest predecessor. My in-depth study of Mayakovsky's poems, especially my focus on Mayakovsky's use of poetic meter, deepens and complicates some of Rann's arguments, as I will prove in the chapters that follow.

Harold Bloom's poetic theory of "the anxiety of influence" addresses the question of the poet's legacy from a Freudian perspective. Bloom characterizes the duel between the forefather poet and his descendant as a kind of "compulsion neurosis," an intense degree of "ambivalence"

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[20] James Rann, *The Unlikely Futurist: Pushkin and the Invention of Originality in Russian Modernism* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 16.

from which "rises a pattern of saving atonement which [...] becomes a quasi-ritual that determines the succession of phases in the poetic life-cycle of strong makers."[21] For Mayakovsky—who, I would argue, certainly belongs under the heading of a "strong" poet— the "compulsion" often takes the form of a thematic dialogue with Pushkin. In this sense, Mayakovsky's obsessive poetic tendencies are in line with Bloom's theory. However, my interpretation of Mayakovsky's relationship with his greatest predecessor differs from Bloom's ideas in several essential ways.

Bloom's theory of poetry is concerned with British poets. According to him, "British poets swerve from their precursors."[22] Can the same be said of Russian poets? Perhaps Bloom's argument accurately describes Lermontov's struggle for difference against Pushkin's legacy. However, in the case of Mayakovsky and Pushkin, the question is not of the later poet's deviation from his ancestor, but of the later poet bringing his ancestor into his own Modern context on an equal footing as a friend and colleague. Bloom's theory does not allow for such a state of affairs: the Freudian struggle of father-precursor versus son-descendant precludes it. On the subject of the poet's mortality, Bloom argues that "the later poets, confronting the imminence of death, work to subvert the immortality of their precursors, as though any one poet's afterlife could be metaphorically prolonged at the expense of another's."[23] Mayakovsky's psychology is not that of a son seeking to destroy his father, but of a son frantically trying to resurrect his poetic father and thereby secure immortality for himself as well. This psychology gradually

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[21] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973), 66.
[22] Ibid., 68.
[23] Ibid., 151.

appears in Mayakovsky's poetry as early as 1913, revealing itself only when certain poems are read through the lens of Mayakovsky's profoundly personal Pushkinian code.

Lawrence Lipking explores the complex relationship between the deceased poet and his successor in a different way in *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers*. Like Bloom, he defines stages of the poet's work as it relates to the poet's life. However, Lipking's approach is not to create a model of the poet's life cycle based on psychological principles but to identify the ways in which poets define their careers through their poems: "The poet who claims to have entered a new stage of life brings a witness who cannot lie: the evidence of the poems. The poems themselves, above all, declare the life of the poet."[24] The most important of these poetic stages for the present study is that of the *tombeau*—a work in which the living poet eulogizes his predecessor while also remaining obedient to the demands of his own art:

> The tomb of the poet is built by other poets; their verses take him in. They may also make him unrecognizable. Every *tombeau* represents a collaboration between two poets, the dead and the living, and the interests of the two do not necessarily coincide. The dead poet demands tribute, the living must look to his own art. To some extent these alternatives are posed by the very word *tomb,* which can stand either for the burial place or for the monument erected over it. Poets may try to design their own memorials, but all they can be sure of is the body of their work; the monument, the way the work will be remembered, must be left to other hands. Very quickly the poet ceases to control his fate.[25]

Lipking aptly identifies the connection between the deceased poet's legacy and its monumentalization. He does not identify this monumentalization as a force that the living poet is compelled to fight against. Perhaps this is due to the inevitability of the phenomenon he describes—all poets must die. The process of monumentalization feared by Mayakovsky,

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[24] Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), ix.
[25] Ibid., 139.

however, is a fate worse than death. It is ultimate stagnation, a death without the possibility of resurrection.

Lipking's study does not address Russian or Soviet writers. All poets are concerned with the survival of their poetic legacies, but the Russian poet's obsession is especially potent, as indicated by each major Russian poet's rewriting of the Horatian monument ode, from Lomonosov to the poets of the twentieth century. For Mayakovsky, who considered it part of his poetic mission to oppose the stagnation of the poet's legacy, the poet's inevitable loss of control of that legacy is a matter of great anxiety. This explains Mayakovsky's many poems throughout his career devoted to Pushkin or Pushkinian themes, which unite the two poets' legacies. Instead of placing a stately monumental tomb atop Pushkin's poetic legacy, Mayakovsky seeks to create a living monument to Pushkin through his verse. Instead of marking the death of the poet, Mayakovsky attempts to give the dead poet new life. Though Lipking's concept of the *tombeau* certainly resonates with Mayakovsky's many invocations of Pushkin, the word itself—"tomb"—cannot apply. In this case, the verses of the living poet do not seek to build the tomb—they seek to destroy it.

Mayakovsky's struggle against the stagnation of Pushkin's legacy relies on several different ways of summoning the poet. The earliest and least direct of these is the transplantation of certain themes from Pushkin's Romantic context into Mayakovsky's Futurist context. One of the earliest examples arises in Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist drama *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* [«Владимир Маяковский: Трагедия»] (1913), one of his many renditions of the Poet-Prophet topos. In Pushkin's foremost exemplar of this theme, "The Prophet" [«Пророк»] (1828), a seraph violently kills the poetic persona and transforms him into a supernatural being capable of "burning people's hearts with the Word," thus resurrecting him. As in Pushkin's poem,

Mayakovsky's poetic persona is a prophet who wanders over land and sea in order to inspire the masses with his feats of superhuman poetic power. In spite of his efforts to liberate a group of grotesque city dwellers from their suffering, the poetic persona is driven away by precisely those people he had intended to help. He then undergoes a kind of suicidal martyrdom as he "leaves shred after shred of his soul on the spears of houses."[26] The coexistence of the Pushkinian theme of the Poet-Prophet and the Mayakovskian themes of suicide and physical mutation in this play presents the earliest (and therefore vaguest) manifestation of a connection that can be found throughout Mayakovsky's work. As Mayakovsky's poetic career advances and his poetic persona becomes more psychologically developed, his thematic dialogue with Pushkin becomes more sophisticated.

Many of the poems I address in this study contain explicit invocations of Pushkin. Some of Mayakovsky's poetic personae call Pushkin by name, thus bringing his shade into the world of the poem. In other poems, Mayakovsky's lyrical persona takes a more radical tack, addressing the national bard directly in his preferred metrical idiom—the iamb. Mayakovsky makes use of traditional versification in a number of poems throughout his oeuvre. His earliest Cubo-Futurist poems contain both traditional meters and regular rhyme schemes. One of the best examples of his early use of iambs is the short marine-urban lyric "The Port" [«Порт»] (1912):

Простúни вод под брюхом были.
Их рвал на волны белый зуб.
Был вой трубы — как будто лили
любовь и похоть медью труб.
Прижались лодки в люльках входов
к сосцам железных матерей.
В ушах оглохших пароходов

[26] Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: Tragediia, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh* T. 1 (Moskva: GIKhL, 1955), 170.

> горели серьги якорей.[27]
>
> [Bed sheets of water beneath a belly. / A white tooth ripped them into waves. / The howl of a funnel—as if were pouring / love and lust through the funnel's copper. / In the cradles of inlets boats nestled / against the breasts of their iron mothers. In the ears of deaf steamships / burned the earrings of anchors.]

Although this poem is in Pushkin's favored meter of iambic tetrameter with a regular aBaBcDcD rhyme scheme, it is impossible to make any kind of meaningful connection to Pushkin based on this fact alone. I do not argue that every single instance of iambic meter in Mayakovsky's poetry is part of a dialogue with Pushkin: iambic meter has been frequently used by Russian poets from the eighteenth century to today. However, there are certain instances in which Mayakovsky's use of iambs is inseparable from certain Pushkinian themes. Mayakovsky's partially or fully iambic poems on the themes of the monument and the living statue fit within this pattern. They are also the most revealing with respect to the poet's anxieties about his posthumous legacy.

In his article "How Are Verses Made?" [«Как делать стихи?»] (1926), Mayakovsky asserts not only that he attaches no significant meaning to his use of traditional versification, but that he cannot even tell the difference between an iamb and a trochee:

> I'm speaking honestly. I know neither iambs nor trochees, never distinguished between them and never will. Not because it's a difficult thing to do, but because I have never had to deal with such things in my poetic work. If fragments of such meters are to be found, then they are simply recorded by ear, like such clichéd motifs are very often encountered, along the lines of "Down Along the Mother Volga."[28]

As Mayakovsky's life and work is rife with contradictions, such a statement from him is not surprising. Mayakovsky frequently made statements about himself and his poetry that defied single straightforward explanations. There also may have been a political explanation for his

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[27] Ibid., 36.
[28] Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Kak delat' stikhi?," in *PSS*, T. 12, 86.

denial of traditional poetic meter. By the time he wrote this article in the mid-Twenties, Mayakovsky had already distanced himself considerably from lyric poetry, emphasizing instead journalistic verse that commented on the political developments of the day. His rejection of the importance of traditional versification in his work could have been a pointed statement on his dissociation from the lyric, intended to signal that Mayakovsky was, first and foremost, a proponent of revolutionary poetic language, and therefore a loyal servant of the Revolution.

Michael Wachtel makes note of the ways in which Mayakovsky's use of iambic meter belies such statements. In *The Development of Russian Verse,* Wachtel shows that versification carries thematic associations in the Russian tradition. He makes special note of Mayakovsky's use of iambic meter in "An Extraordinary Adventure that Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky in Summer at the Dacha" [«Необычайное приключение, бывшее с Владимиром Маяковским летом на даче»] (1920) and "The Jubilee Poem," arguing that Mayakovsky actually did recognize the semantic associations of meter and incorporates the iamb to subvert the tragic Pushkinian theme of the destructive statue as found in *The Bronze Horseman* [«Медный всадник»] (1833), *The Stone Guest* [«Каменный гость»] (1830), and a number of other works[29]:

> This is one of the numerous ways in which Mayakovsky takes potentially serious (and traditionally tragic) situations from Pushkin's works and turns them upside-down, into scenes of utter harmony. I would emphasize that these allusions are both semantic *and* metrical. The fact that Mayakovsky is using his sources parodically in no way lessens their significance. Indeed, his dependence on the tradition proves to be no less than that of Pushkin.[30]

[29] See Roman Jakobson's article "The Statue in Pushkin's Poetic Mythology" [«Статуя в поэтической мифологии Пушкина»] (1937).
[30] Michael Wachtel, *The Development of Russian Verse: Meter and Its Meanings* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

Wachtel's analysis of Mayakovsky's iambs in these poems as an affirming reinterpretation of Pushkin's destructive theme is certainly correct, but I believe that this phenomenon warrants further discussion. Why did Mayakovsky turn the myth of the destructive statue on its head in "An Extraordinary Adventure..." and "The Jubilee Poem"? I argue that this subversion was a psychological necessity for Mayakovsky.

Statues that come alive in Pushkin's oeuvre cause death. The statue of the Commander in *The Stone Guest* drags Don Juan to Hell, and the statue of Peter the Great in *The Bronze Horseman* drives Evgenii to madness, and, ultimately, to his death. In contrast, Mayakovsky's parallels to these statues, the Sun and Opekushin's personified monument to Pushkin, are the means through which the poet's life and work is validated through a connection between the later poet and his predecessor. In "An Extraordinary Adventure...," Mayakovsky's poetic persona complains to the personified Sun, who has been interpreted as a metaphor for Pushkin, as Wachtel reminds us: "After all, since his death, Pushkin was constantly referred to as the 'sun of Russian poetry.'"[31] Pushkin is even invoked indirectly in the beginning of the poem: the village in which Mayakovsky's dacha is located is called Pushkino. In the context of the poem's iambic meter, the village's name is a clue to the Sun's hidden identity.

The friendship that develops between the personified Sun and Mayakovsky's poetic persona presents us with even more clues as to the encoded meaning of the poem. When the persona says that he is tired of slaving away on posters for ROSTA, the Sun provides encouragement, comparing his own difficult work of shining forth light to the poet's work of composing verses. The Sun and the poet become friends and form a kind of dynamic duo,

[31] Ibid.

fighting against "the wall of shadows, / the prison of nights" like a "double-barreled shotgun of suns."[32] Mayakovsky perceived himself throughout his career as a profoundly misunderstood poet and craved the validation and support of other poets. In eliciting the approval of Pushkin—the "Sun of Russian poetry"—Mayakovsky assures himself that his poetic labor, thankless as it may be at times, is necessary. His use of iambs in these poems is a manifestation of his poetic partnership with Pushkin through which his own existence as a poet is justified.

Unlike the Sun poem, "The Jubilee Poem" largely consists of Mayakovsky's characteristic accentual verse. Nevertheless, the poem represents yet another poetic partnership between Mayakovsky and Pushkin. In the poem, Mayakovsky's poetic persona addresses a monologue to Opekushin's monument to Pushkin, across from which Mayakovsky predicted his own monument would stand. The speaker drags Pushkin from his pedestal, and instead of seeking validation from his predecessor, the poetic persona criticizes the treatment of Pushkin's legacy, remarking to Pushkin's likeness that perhaps only he is "really sorry / that today / you are no longer with us."[33] Mayakovsky rejects the official version of Pushkin's legacy that prevailed from the late nineteenth century onward.

By so strongly identifying with the "living" Pushkin instead of the poet's monumentalized likeness, Mayakovsky reveals his fears surrounding his own posthumous legacy. The idea of being "mummified" through the process of monumentalization and bureaucratization repulses him. Thus, "The Jubilee Poem" ends with a powerful affirmation of life, echoing the optimistic ending of the Sun poem: "I hate / every kind of dead meat! / I love /

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[32] Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Neobychainoe prikliuchenie, byvshee s Vladimirom Maiakovskim letom na dache," in *PSS*, T. 2, 38.
[33] Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoe," in *PSS*, T. 6, 51.

every kind of life!"[34] The final lines also anticipate the admonishing tone of the end of his poem "To Sergei Esenin" [«Сергею Есенину»] (1926), in which Mayakovsky patronizingly responds to the text of Esenin's suicide note, declaring that "In this life / to die / is easy. / To make life / is much harder."[35] Mayakovsky presents the same response to both his fear of the posthumous ossification of his legacy and his anxiety about suicide: he attempts to stave off these outcomes by projecting his characteristic grandiose positivity. Ultimately, these efforts are unsuccessful.

The monument as the poet's immortality is the focus of Mayakovsky's coded dialogue with Pushkin in accentual verse as well as in iambs. The foremost exemplar of the monumental theme in Russian poetry, Pushkin's Horatian ode "I erected a monument to myself not made by human hands..." [«Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный…»] (1836), serves as Mayakovsky's jumping-off point for his own poems on similar themes. Much of this dialogue takes place indirectly, without Mayakovsky's poetic persona even calling Pushkin by name. Several later poems fall into this category, including those in which the poetic persona presents a kind of "anti-monument" that combats the stagnation and death of the conventional bronze or marble monument.

Mayakovsky's reversal of the Pushkinian monumental theme highlights his preoccupation with the finality of death: monumental stasis signifies an ending, a silencing. His inversion of the monumental theme is intended to undo this fatal stasis. How, specifically, are Mayakovsky's reinvented monuments meant to fight against death? They are part of the poet's individual immortalization program, his pathway to ensuring resurrection for himself and for Pushkin.

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[34] Ibid., 56.
[35] Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Sergeiu Eseninu," in *PSS*, T. 7, 105.

In *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature,* Irene Masing-Delic describes the evolution of Russian literary conceptions of immortality from the turn of the century through 1930. She argues that certain works of this period present what she calls an "immortalization program," a plan for salvation from death and the creation of a materialistic "heaven" on earth.[36] Masing-Delic does not present Mayakovsky's poetry as a focus of her study, as his works do not fit comfortably within the parameters she designates for her analysis. However, I argue that the poetic personae of a number of Mayakovsky's poems present an idiosyncratic personal program of immortalization. The central requirement of this program is that conventional stagnant, tomb-like monuments in honor of culturally significant figures be destroyed and replaced with completely new monuments that will ensure the future resurrection of their subjects.

Mayakovsky's particular immortalization plan is predicated on the official Marxist-Leninist conception of immortality, which, as noted by Masing-Delic's citation of the *Atheistic Dictionary*, can be found in "the preservation of the results of human activity."[37] In this understanding of immortality, the workers who build a factory live on after death through the remembrance of their labor and the factory's continued operation. While this type of immortality seemingly precludes the possibility of personal physical immortality, some writers, Mayakovsky included, manipulated the official definition of life after death to fit their own particular concerns. Masing-Delic describes a prevalent unofficial version of Soviet immortality that makes physical resurrection theoretically possible in the future:

In fact, the official Marxist-Leninist definition of immortality as remembered deeds does

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[36] Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 21.
[37] Ibid., 5.

> not really contradict the unofficial vision of future physical immortality, created by and for mankind. For great deeds not only immortalize those who perform them, creating mnemonic immortality in the traditional sense, but also leave concrete traces in reality. [...] The more valuable the activity, the deeper the imprints, and no imprints or traces of deeds ever disappear completely, matter being eternal and indestructible. The Marxist-Leninist can therefore argue that the material remnants of creative activity contain material particles of the deceased's personality, which can be used in his or her eventual reconstruction. Resurrecting the dead in the materialist way is a paleontological or archeological process of sorts.[38]

This materialistic plan of resurrection, in contrast to the authorized Soviet definition of immortality, allows for life after death on the individual level and in the внphysical sense. According to this model, the workers who have built the factory not only live on symbolically through the collective labor in which they were engaged, but they have left behind physical traces during the construction process that might be used to resurrect them in the future.

Through his poetry, Mayakovsky proposes a similar conception of immortality as a remedy for the stagnation of monumentalization. By advocating the destruction of conventional monuments to cultural figures and rejecting their bureaucratized lifeless homunculi, Mayakovsky attempts to ensure that the "real" versions of himself and Pushkin are resurrected in the future. When the true essence of the poets is lost, the finality of their death remains a foregone conclusion. I will analyze several of Mayakovsky's poems in this project that make up the poet's individual immortalization program, including *About This*, *To the Workers of Kursk*, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, "Brooklyn Bridge" [«Бруклинский мост»] (1925), and "To Comrade Nette, Steamship and Human" [«Товарищу Нетте, пароходу и человеку»] (1926). I will also argue that Mayakovsky's approach to future resurrection through poetry can be traced to Pushkin's

[38] Ibid., 12.

poetry, particularly the poem “To Ovid” [«К Овидию»] (1821). Mayakovsky's preoccupation with immortality through resurrection is intimately connected to his relationship with Pushkin.

Mayakovsky’s anti-monuments must meet certain requirements: they must be very large, in order to correspond to Mayakovsky’s irrepressible hyperbolism and gigantism. They must be manmade, preferably of metal, which in Mayakovsky’s poetry connotes cleanliness, efficiency, and longevity and is the polar opposite of “marble slime”—Mayakovsky’s condemnation of the conventional monument. Finally, they should either serve a practical industrial purpose or glorify human industrial achievement in some way. This conception of the Horatian theme subverts that of Pushkin’s monument “not made by human hands.” Instead of a metaphysical monument, Mayakovsky’s persona presents various man-made metallic structures, which, as Masing-Delic argues, “preserve [the] soul in matter,” thus ensuring the possibility of a literal personal resurrection. The most salient of these anti-monuments include the Brooklyn Bridge in the titular poem from Mayakovsky’s trip to the Americas in 1925 and the titular ship in “To Comrade Nette, Steamship and Human.” In exploring each of these poems, I will use both close reading and biographical details to trace Mayakovsky’s personal code as it relates to his anxieties about the “monumentalization” of his own legacy.

In addition to the industrial anti-monument, Mayakovsky’s late poetry presents one more type of anti-monument—perhaps the most powerful of all. The literary Word itself, free and “resurrected,” withstands the death and decay of the poet’s posthumous monumentalization and bureaucratization. In his early Formalist essay “The Resurrection of the Word” [«Воскрешение слова»] (1914), Viktor Shklovsky describes the Futurists’ poetic project of reinvigorating “dead” linguistic forms and thereby creating “living” words as the pioneering artistic achievement of the time: “And right now, today, when the artist wants to deal with living forms and with a living

word instead of a dead one, he, wishing to give it a face, breaks it apart and mangles it. The 'spontaneous' and 'constructed' words of the Futurists are born."[39]

Shklovsky presents an early description of the literary device that would later become estrangement (*ostranenie*) in his article "Art as Device" [«Искусство как прием»] (1917). However, in Mayakovsky's poetry, the concept of the literary Word appears not as an abstract concept, but in the concrete form of verses and their components through the poet's prolific use of visualized metaphors. Through metaphor, poetry becomes lines of verse, which, in turn, become weapons or a Roman aqueduct, as in *At the Top of My Voice*. Metaphorically realized as such "long-lived" objects, the poet's Word becomes a kind of time capsule propelling his immortal legacy into the distant future. These metaphors present a compelling reworking of the early Futurist and Formalist concepts of "the Word as such" and "the resurrection of the Word," concepts that stress the existence of literature as a self-sufficient phenomenon. In the context of Mayakovsky's body of work, in which the lyrical poetic impulse is often suppressed in favor of the staunchly political, this harkening back to the origins of Futurism is remarkable.

Mayakovsky's return to early Futurism and Formalism is not surprising when we consider the realities of his life leading up to his suicide. Both his play *The Bathhouse* [«Баня»] (1930) and his exhibition *20 Years of Work* [«20 лет работы»] (1930) were failures. Mayakovsky had alienated many of his colleagues from *LEF* and *Novyi LEF* with his many capitulations to the literary authorities, and even his friends wondered whether he was still capable of writing poetry that could be true to the lyrical power of his best works. It was

[39] Viktor Shklovsky, "Voskreshenie slova," *Petrozavodskii universitet web-laboratoriia instituta philologii*, Petrozavodskii Universitet, accessed November 13, 2021, https://philolog.petrsu.ru/filolog/shklov.htm.

precisely at this time that the question of his legacy must have weighed on his mind: how would he be remembered by his country? In writing his unfinished narrative poem *At the Top Of My Voice*, Mayakovsky asserts to his readers that no matter what else happens, his verse, a manifestation of the living Word, will keep his legacy alive. Thus, the Formalist concept of the vital self-sufficient Word becomes a new kind of physical monument through which Mayakovsky attempts to gain immortality and rescue his legacy from stagnation.

The poems Mayakovsky left unfinished at the time of his suicide also present a clue to his understanding of the living, resurrected Word and its significance for the survival of his legacy. These poems are metrically significant: like several of the poems I have already discussed, they are largely iambic. However, the iambs Mayakovsky uses in these poems differ essentially from those in his earlier iambic poems. While the iambic sections of *At the Top of My Voice* are reminiscent in form and content to the high-style panegyric odes of the early eighteenth century, the iambs of the unfinished poems are more lyrical, corresponding to the genre of the metaphysical ode. Like the poetic speaker in Lomonosov's late contemplative odes, Mayakovsky reflects on his own existence and on his place within the universe.

Pushkin's Horatian ode also fits within the tradition of the metaphysical ode. Instead of his usual iambic pentameter, Pushkin uses the Russian alexandrine form, the basis of which is iambic verse of six feet per line. Wachtel notes that Pushkin's use of the alexandrine in his late work is explicitly connected to philosophical, metaphysical content.[40] Mayakovsky adapts the alexandrine to his own poetic idiom in the unfinished fragment "I know the power of words..." [«Я знаю силу слов…»] (1930). Being sensitive to the connotations of poetic meter,

[40] Wachtel, *The Development of Russian Verse*, 254.

Mayakovsky associated the alexandrine with Pushkin's project of ensuring the immortality of his creation and the vitality of the literary Word. Rather than metaphorically embodying the Word within industrial structures to assure its longevity, he pairs his own version of the alexandrine with his own decidedly Mayakovskian manifestation of the Christian concept of the Word as flesh.

In Mayakovsky's rewriting of the Gospel of John, the literary Word becomes "human in lips, in soul, in its bones."[41] For Mayakovsky, who was obsessed with the concept of the resurrection of the dead as a means for immortality, Shklovsky's concept of "the resurrection of the Word" takes on a new meaning: the resurrection of the flesh. Jakobson addresses Mayakovsky's belief in the future resurrection of the dead in "On a Generation...," specifically connecting it to the "materialistic mysticism" of nineteenth-century religious philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov.[42] In his collected works, released under the title of *The Philosophy of the Common Task* [«Философия общего дела»] (1906–7, 1913), Fyodorov describes his vision for mankind's conquest over all nature and, ultimately, over death itself. Despite the stark differences in Fyodorov and Mayakovsky's personal ideologies, there are several points on which the Russian Orthodox philosopher and the blasphemous atheist poet agree. As Masing-Delic points out, Fyodorov's ultimate task—to resurrect all of those who have died on earth in order to bring about true brotherhood and harmony—has a distinctly Communist flair: "…[Fyodorov's task] also has a positivist and even Marxist flavor in its emphasis on immediate and palpable change. Like these pragmatic ideologies, the Fyodorovian active liturgy 'explains

[41] Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Neokonchennoe," in *PSS*, T. 10, 287.
[42] Jakobson, "O pokolenii...," in *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Rokovoi vystrel*, 395.

the world' only for the sake of changing it."[43] Mayakovsky's desire for immediate universal harmony reveals itself in many of his poems. He and Fyodorov have this goal in common and share a fascination with the resurrection of the flesh. One might view Mayakovsky as a Fyodorovian disciple who, paradoxically, does not believe in God.

This ideological inheritance is not as strange as it seems, however. In Fyodorov's theology, it is not God who will resurrect the dead but humankind itself, following Christ's example. Christ's Resurrection serves as the model for the task of universal resurrection that will unite all of humanity: "Fyodorov's Christ is not so much the Resurrected One, or the One who resurrected himself, as the One who resurrected Lazarus to show how it is done."[44] In Mayakovsky's poetic universe, his poetic personae are the Christ figures who attempt to resurrect the dead—including his greatest predecessor, Pushkin—in order to "show how it is done." Following this example, Mayakovsky's descendants will be able to resurrect him in the distant future and free him from the bonds of "insidious passivity," which Fyodorov, too, viewed as the ultimate evil to be overcome.[45]

Still, Fyodorov's theology precludes Mayakovsky's images of a weak and impotent God weeping pathetically in the heavens or a distant, ridiculous God glowering imperiously like Lev Tolstoi.[46] Masing-Delic argues that God is essential to the fulfillment of Fyodorov's task despite his conception of humankind overcoming death under its own power:

> God's role in the Task should not be downplayed. Not only is he the goal toward which the Task is directed; he is also the guarantor of the kinship of all with all, crucial to the Task. Without the Divine Father, loving brothers and sisters become a collective of

[43] Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death*, 77.
[44] Ibid., 85.
[45] Ibid., 87.
[46] The poems I reference here are "And Yet" [«А все-таки»] (1914) and "Petersburg Again" [«Еще Петербург»] (1914).

> comrades who are profoundly indifferent to each other and their dead ancestors, however vociferously they proclaim their solidarity.[47]

Fyodorov believes that, while God may not physically resurrect humankind, he is the means by which resurrected humanity will become whole again and through whom all suffering and alienation will disappear. For Mayakovsky, this unifying force becomes poetry itself—the literary Word.

In Mayakovsky's metaphorical universe, the revitalization of the literary Word is inseparable from the resurrection of the body—they are one and the same. The vitality of the poet's legacy exists not in the abstract but in a concrete physical sense. Thus, Mayakovsky's desire to shake off what he perceived as the corrupting chains of monumentalization and bureaucratization is also a desire to overcome the physical reality of death. Mayakovsky's use of the alexandrine suggests that he viewed resurrection as a corollary to Pushkin's concept of the poet's immortality. His poetic persona's plea in *About This* [«Про это»] (1923) that the Chemist of the Future resurrect him must be taken literally:

> Крикну я
> вот с этой
> с нынешней страницы:
> - не листай страницы!
> Воскреси![48]

[I cry / from this / the present page: / Don't turn the page! / Resurrect me!]

Ultimately, Mayakovsky's attempts to revivify Pushkin's legacy are yet another kind of resurrection. He cannot hope to resurrect Pushkin in the physical sense, but he attempts to achieve the next best thing: freeing Pushkin from his second death of monumentalization and

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[47] Ibid., 77.
[48] Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Pro eto,* in *PSS,* T. 4, 182.

bureaucratization. In the following chapters, I will examine the relationship between Pushkin and Mayakovsky in depth and illustrate the specific ways in which Mayakovsky struggles to ensure his ideal form of immortality for himself and his poetic father figure.

Chapter 2: Secret Freedom, Unfreedom, and the Poet's Autonomy

I have divided the present chapter into two parts: the first centers on Aleksandr Blok's understanding of Pushkin's legacy and the malignant forces that threaten it. As one of Mayakovsky's foremost poetic interlocutors and a prolific Russian poet of the early twentieth century, Aleksandr Blok presents a conception of Pushkin's legacy with which Mayakovsky is in constant dialogue. Blok and Mayakovsky's respective characterizations of Pushkin's legacy are the focus of the first section of this chapter. In the second section, I discuss the demands placed upon both Pushkin and Mayakovsky by their restrictive literary and political circles. I explore the tension between the poet's creative autonomy and the outside forces of society and the state bureaucracy, which both Pushkin and Mayakovsky experienced acutely, particularly in the last decade of their lives. These biographical similarities between the two poets lend more nuance to the discussion of Mayakovsky's intense kinship with his predecessor. Shklovsky's "study of unfreedom" provides further insight into the struggles faced by each poet, emphasizing why both poets felt the need to look forward to their future monuments.

Blok, Mayakovsky, and the Pushkinian Concept of Secret Freedom

Blok places bureaucracy in direct conflict with the poet's autonomy in his famous speech "On the Poet's Purpose" [«О назначении поэта»] (1921), given on the eighty-fourth anniversary of Pushkin's death. Blok affirms that the poet's highest responsibility is not to the mob, but to what Blok calls his own "secret freedom" (*tainaia svoboda*), an explicit reference to Pushkin's early poem "To N. Ia. Pliuskovaia" [«К Н. Я. Плюсковой»] (1818):

> На лире скромной, благородной
> Земных богов я не хвалил
> И силе в гордости свободной

Кадилом лести не кадил.
Свободу лишь учася славить,
Стихами жертвуя лишь ей,
Я не рожден царей забавить
Стыдливой Музою моей.

[...]

Любовь и тайная Свобода
Внушали сердцу гимн простой,
И неподкупный голос мой
Был эхо русского народа.[49]

[Upon my humble, noble lyre, / I did not praise the earthly gods / And power in its easy pride / I flattered not with incense. / Learning only to glorify freedom, / Making offerings of poetry to it alone, / I was not born to amuse the tsars / with my modest Muse. [...] Love and secret Freedom / Instilled in my heart a simple hymn, / And my honest voice / was an echo of the Russian people.]

Within this poem, Pushkin creates distance between the poet's inner artistic will and the designs of the outside world, the state in particular. The state, being separate from the poet's inspiration, comprises yet another part of the mob. The will of the mob and the will of the poet are completely at odds with one another. Blok argues that Pushkin's experience of the mob remains true for the twentieth-century poet, and that the poet's "secret freedom"—the sacred boundary between the poet and the outside world— remains unchanged since Pushkin's time. For Blok, this freedom represents the essence of the poet's legacy, which continues into the present day. But what exactly is secret freedom, according to Blok? Most importantly, how does Mayakovsky's particular poetic approach to Pushkin's legacy relate to Blok's idea of secret freedom?

[49] Aleksandr Pushkin, "K N. Ia. Pliuskovoi," in *Sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, T. 1 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1985), 192.

In order to define what the poet's secret freedom entails, Blok incorporates an excerpt from Pushkin's poem "From Pindemonte" [«Из Пиндемонти»] (1836) into his speech:

> ...Никому
> Отчёта не давать, себе лишь самому
> Служить и угождать; для власти, для ливреи
> Не гнуть ни совести, ни помыслов, ни шеи;
> По прихоти своей скитаться здесь и там,
> Дивясь божественным природы красотам,
> И пред созданьями искусств и вдохновенья
> Трепеща радостно в восторгах умиленья.
> Вот счастье! вот права…[50]
>
> [...To give no account / to anyone; oneself alone / to serve and please; not for power or a uniform / to bend one's conscience, thoughts, or neck; / On a whim to wander here and there, / Wondering at the divine beauties of nature, / And before creations of art and inspiration / Trembling joyfully in raptures of tenderness. / This is happiness! These the rights...]

According to Pushkin, the poet must follow his Muse wherever it may take him, regardless of the opinions of the mob. Though this approach may seem to portray secret freedom as a purely private phenomenon, Blok argues the opposite. The poet's personal artistic vision might belong to the individual in the most immediate sense, but, as Blok shows, the concept of secret freedom links whole generations of poets together across the centuries. Thus Pushkin's struggle with the forces of the mob becomes a lens through which early twentieth-century writers may view themselves.

According to Blok, the will of coarse society, the antithesis of secret freedom in both Pushkin's and Blok's time, is embodied within *bureaucracy*:

> Pushkin considered the mob to be approximately the same thing that we do. He frequently attached to this noun the epithet "society," giving a collective name to that ancestral court nobility, of whom nothing is left to their name but their noble titles; but already, before Pushkin's eyes, bureaucracy quickly occupied the space of the ancestral nobility. These bureaucrats are the very essence of our mob; the mob of yesterday and

[50] Aleksandr Pushkin, "Iz Pindemonti," in *Sochineniia,* T. 1, 584.

> today; [...] hucksters and vulgarians, in whom spiritual depth is hopelessly and substantially eclipsed by "the cares of vain society." The mob demands from the poet service to the same thing that it serves: service to the outside world; it demands "benefit," as Pushkin simply puts it; demands that the poet "sweep trash from the streets," "enlighten the hearts of his fellow men," and so on.[51]

According to Blok, vulgar bureaucracy assails the poet, hindering him from fulfilling his secret freedom's demands. The elevated aims of art and inspiration and the aims of the bureaucratic mob are in direct conflict with one another. Blok's representation of Pushkin's mob reflects the nascent and relatively innocuous stages of bureaucracy's violation of the poet's freedom—the era when unruly aristocratic writers were confined to their opulent estates for their state-imposed exiles. Blok's characterization of early Soviet bureaucracy is chilling in comparison:

> ...people thought to designate only one governmental organ—censorship—for the preservation of the order of its world, expressed in governmental forms. By this means they placed a barrier only on the poet's third path: on the path through which the poet brings harmony into the world. It seems that they could have thought to place barriers on both the first and second paths: they could find a means of obscuring the sources of harmony themselves. What holds them back—lack of perception, timidity, or conscience—is unknown. But, perhaps, such means are already being found?[52]

By 1921, the Russian bureaucracy had found more violent ways of suppressing the poet's autonomy than demanding he enlighten his fellow man. In August of that year, Nikolai Gumilev was executed by the Cheka. Bureaucracy had finally found its means of utterly destroying the poet's secret freedom: killing the poets.

The antithesis of the poet's secret freedom as Blok saw it—bureaucracy and the outside world—thus leads to the poet's death. At the same time, the name "Pushkin" becomes synonymous with secret freedom, and therefore life and hope, in Blok's poetic imagination. This

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[51] Aleksandr Blok, "O naznachenii poeta," in *O literature*, ed. T. N. Bedniakova (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1980), 266-267.
[52] Ibid., 267.

is the focus of Blok's poem "To Pushkin House" [«Пушкинскому дому»] (1921), which was written the same year as Blok's speech on Pushkin's legacy and was the last work the poet completed before his death. Pushkin's secret freedom as a source of hope and inspiration during the tumultuous years of Revolution and Civil War is the thematic focus of the poem:

> Имя Пушкинского Дома
> В Академии Наук!
> Звук понятный и знакомый,
> Не пустой для сердца звук! […][53]
>
> [The name of Pushkin House / in the Academy of Sciences! / An intelligible and familiar sound, / A sound that does not ring hollow to the heart!]

For Blok's poetic persona, the sound of Pushkin's name itself elicits feelings of comfort and familiarity. However, this familiar sound is not simply the inspiration for the poetic persona's feelings of nostalgia. The poem's entire metaphorical structure is based around the sound of Pushkin's name.

In Blok's poem, Pushkin's name is the both the sound of cracking of ice on the Neva and a conversation between two steamships. The steamship metaphor brings to mind the Futurists' call to cast Pushkin and other writers of the classics "from the steamship of Modernity." Blok pointedly brings Pushkin into the twentieth century here, as Mayakovsky will do in his later poems. At the same time, the concrete tangibility of these metaphors suggests the immediacy and relevance of Pushkin's legacy for Blok and his fellow poets. Pushkin is not simply a distant, abstract concept, but is essentially tied to the present day. In this sense, Blok and Mayakovsky's approaches to Pushkin's legacy are more similar than we might expect. For both poets, Pushkin's legacy is vitally important to their present reality.

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[53] Aleksandr Blok, "Pushkinskomu Domu," in *Stikhotvoreniia, poemy* (Moskva: Sovremennik, 1987), 324.

Blok's poetic persona continues to describe the sound of Pushkin's name through metaphor, this time comparing it to the distant and mysterious figure of "an ancient sphinx / gazing into the wake of a lingering wave."[54] This characterization of Pushkin's legacy implies that the poet occupies a privileged position among men, that he is privy to ancient and obscure knowledge about which mere mortals can only speculate. The Symbolists and the Romantics share their perception of the Poet-Prophet figure, to whom the secrets of the universe are revealed and who acts as an interlocutor between the divine and the quotidian. Much of Mayakovsky's early poetry incorporates the same theme, albeit in particularly Mayakovskian fashion. The poetic persona from his early play *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* possesses qualities similar to those of the Poet-Prophet: he wanders around the world, undergoing great suffering in order to improve the lot of those surrounding him. However, Mayakovsky's conception of Pushkin and his legacy cannot be described as that of a traditional Poet-Prophet. Instead of a mystical figure and guardian of arcane knowledge, Mayakovsky's Modernist Pushkin is a fellow fighter for the Constructivist cause of the Left Front of the Arts (LEF). Mayakovsky conceived the Modernist Poet-Prophet's task as using the literary Word to advocate for innovation in literature and to build an ideal Communist future.

While Blok does not associate Pushkin with the building of Communism, his poetic persona likens the sound of his name to the events of the October Revolution:

> Наши страстные печали
> Над таинственной Невой,
> Как мы черный день встречали
> Белой ночью огневой.[55]

[Our fervent sorrows / Above the mysterious Neva, / As we met the black day / With

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

a white, flaming night.]

Blok's persona connects Pushkin's legacy to what he perceives as the sentiments underlying the Revolution. What Blok means by "fervent sorrows" is not immediately clear, but the following stanzas contain a few clues:

Что за пламенные дали
Открывала нам река!
Но не эти дни мы звали,
А грядущие века.

Пропуская дней гнетущих
Кратковременный обман,
Прозревали дней грядущих
Сине-розовый туман.[56]

[What flaming distances / the river opened to us! / But we called not for these days, / but for the centuries to come. // Passing over the oppressive days' / transient deception, / We have seen the coming days' / blue-pink mist.]

For Blok's persona, the Revolution promises a future free of oppression. Still, this future remains obscure and mysterious after the Revolution is accomplished. The "flaming distances" of potential opened up by the Revolution remain unreachable in 1921. Blok calls out to Pushkin for aid in his struggle with the contemporary reality:

Пушкин! Тайную свободу
Пели мы вослед тебе!
Дай нам руку в непогоду,
Помоги в немой борьбе!
Не твоих ли звуков сладость
Вдохновляла в те года?
Не твоя ли, Пушкин, радость
Окрыляла нас тогда?[57]

[Pushkin! Of secret freedom / We sang in your wake! / Give us your hand in the storm, / Help us in this mute battle! / Was it not your sounds' delight / that inspired us in those years? / Was it not your gladness, Pushkin, / that then gave us wings?]

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 324-325.

Blok characterizes the poet's struggle in the Civil War years as a "mute battle," reflecting the central theme of the poem. Its metaphorical structure is based on sound: the sound of Pushkin's name itself and its many associations, as well as the inspiration which Blok and his contemporaries draw from the concordant sounds of Pushkin's verse. The poem's simple and clear diction even points to Pushkin's poetic language, while Blok's direct borrowing of the term "secret freedom" echoes Pushkin himself. Blok's use of sound-related metaphor highlights the vitality of Pushkin's legacy. At the same time, Blok's description of the "mute battle" fought by himself and his contemporaries against an unnamed foe denotes a lack of poetic sound and thus an absence of the poet's autonomy.

In his speech, Blok explicitly describes the poet's essential tasks as being related to the harmonious arrangement of sounds:

> The poet is the son of harmony, and he is given a certain role in world culture. Three tasks are laid upon him: first, to free sounds from the native eternal element in which they dwell; second, to bring these sounds into harmony, to give them form; third, to bring this harmony into the outside world.[58]

The bureaucratic mob uses censorship and other means of oppression to prevent the poet from fulfilling the third task: bringing poetry into the world. Blok demonstrates the paramount importance of poetic sound by building his poem's metaphorical structure around the sound of Pushkin's name. The absence of sound is similarly essential to the poem's message. By definition, secret freedom cannot be expressed aloud, and must be acknowledged covertly. In the poem's final stanza, Blok's persona makes the only appropriate gesture of acknowledgment to Pushkin's legacy possible in the oppressive circumstances of his existence—a silent one:

> Вот зачем такой знакомый

[58] Blok, "O naznachenii poeta," in *O literature,* 265.

И родной для сердца звук -
Имя Пушкинского Дома
В Академии Наук.
Вот зачем, в часы заката
Уходя в ночную тьму,
С белой площади Сената
Тихо кланяюсь ему.[59]

[This is why that sound / is so familiar and native to the heart— / the name Pushkin House / in the Academy of Sciences. / This is why, at the sunset hour / retreating into the darkness of night, / from the white square of the Senate / I silently bow to it.]

Blok's persona's silent bow to the Pushkin House—this poem's central symbol for Pushkin's legacy—exemplifies the suppression of the poet's voice as Blok experienced it in this period. Despite the poet's forced silence, his secret freedom remains potent. The final line of this poem reflects Blok's main point about censorship in his speech: that it is the means by which the flow of the poet's harmony into the world is disrupted. The unnamed destructive force in the poem that impedes the poet's inspiration and vitality is none other than the hostile bureaucratic mob that assails Blok and his fellow poets. The mob prevents them from exercising secret freedom, which is necessary for their existence.

Through censorship, the continuity of poetic sound is disrupted, leaving behind a void of what Blok in his speech calls the "absence of air" [отсутствие воздуха], which, Blok argues, was the true underlying cause of Pushkin's death.[60] As Blok implies in the speech, censorship of the poet's voice introduces a dangerous pattern. Once Soviet bureaucracy has silenced the poet through censorship, it will inevitably go to even greater lengths to assail him. In both this poem and his speech on Pushkin, Blok anticipates the increase in bureaucratic pressure felt by poets in the 1920s. He declares Pushkin's concept of secret freedom as the last refuge of the poet's

[59] Blok, "Pushkinsomu Domu," in *Stikhotvoreniia, poemy*, 325.
[60] Blok, "O naznachenii poeta," in *O literature*, 269.

autonomy. Blok not only holds up Pushkin as the ideal poet, but also presents adherence to Pushkin's legacy of secret freedom as a potential means of survival under conditions that were becoming more hostile to poets. Blok did not live to see just how hostile these conditions would become. He died in August 1921, just months after he gave his speech and completed "To Pushkin House." In "On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets," Jakobson attributes to Blok two separate deaths: the first death being that of Blok the poet, the second of Blok the man.[61] In this case, too, the poet's interrupted poetic output, or, as Blok would describe it, the interrupted flow of harmony into the world, means the death of the poet. Jakobson seems to suggest that Blok himself died from an "absence of air," mirroring Blok's commentary on Pushkin's demise.

The dangers of censorship and the lack of poetic autonomy play a somewhat different role in Mayakovsky's works. In certain poems, Mayakovsky even writes in praise of censorship. In "Homeward!," his poetic persona proclaims that he wants limits to be placed on his writing even to the point of bodily harm:

> Я хочу
> чтоб в конце работы
> завком
> запирал мои губы
> замком.[62]
>
> [I want / at the end of the day's work / for the Factory Committee / to bolt my lips / with a lock.]

As Mayakovksky's work is rife with contradictions, one should not simply take such a statement from his poetic speaker at face value. In the previous chapter, I discussed the necessity of play for Mayakovsky: the freedom to flit from one extreme stance to another while remaining

[61] Jakobson, "O pokolenii...," in *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Rokovoi vystrel*, 382.
[62] Mayakovsky, "Domoi!," in *PSS*, T. 7, 94.

essentially the same poet. In the original version of "Homeward!," Mayakovsky included an ending that seemed to contradict the poem's overarching theme of submission to literary bureaucracy:

> Я хочу
> быть понят моей страной,
> а не буду понят,-
> что ж,
> по родной стране
> пройду стороной,
> как проходит
> косой дождь.[63]
>
> [I want / to be understood by my country, / and if I am not, / well, / along my native country / I will pass to one side, / as passes / slanting rain.]

Although this ending was ultimately removed from the poem, it was published in the journal *Molodaia gvardiia* before Mayakovsky changed it. This fact indicates that, for a time, Mayakovsky intended to publish the poem widely in its original form.[64] Osip Brik originally suggested the removal of the original final lines, remarking that they undermined the poem's overarching pro-Soviet sentiment.[65] However, Mayakovsky's removal of the final lines does not diminish the fact of them having been written. These lines, which Mayakovsky later dismissed as "little rain-soaked feathers" that he "ripped out" of the poem, reveal the complexity of the poet's relationship with censorship.[66] The poetic persona metaphorically embodies himself within a natural element, presenting a Romantic individuality that contrasts sharply with his desire to work only within the strictures of the Soviet state, as reflected earlier in the poem. Despite this

[63] Mayakovsky, Variants of "Domoi!," in *PSS*, T. 7, 428.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Jakobson, "O pokolenii..." in *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Rokovoi vystrel*, 405.
[66] Mayakovsky, "Pis'mo Ravicha i Ravichu," in *PSS*, T. 12, 182.

fact, Brik's claim that the removed lines contradict the poem's pro-Soviet message do not take the poem's beginning into account:

> Уходите, мысли, во-свояси.
> Обнимись,
> души и моря глубь.
> Тот,
> кто постоянно ясен —
> тот,
> по-моему,
> просто глуп.[67]
>
> [Go off home, thoughts. / Embrace, depths of the sea and my soul. / He / who is unfailingly clear— / he, / I think, / is simply stupid.]

Mayakovsky's poetic persona does not unequivocally desire censorship at the hands of the state. He desires, at one and the same time, the freedom to function both as a tool of the regime and as his own Romantic, isolated identity. To be only one or the other is too simple, too "clear." In his biography of Mayakovsky, Edward J. Brown argues astutely that the removal of the poem's original ending "really emasculated the poem," because "a poem by Mayakovsky accommodates by its nature opposite extremes of feeling, and to argue that the closing minor note is out of place in 'Homeward!' is to do violence to the poet's special gift."[68] Mayakovsky's need for poetic play, the essential component of the poet's secret freedom, demands that he be both the "Soviet factory manufacturing happiness" and "slanting rain" simultaneously. His posthumous bureaucratization at the hands of the state removed this possibility, and his canonization as "the greatest poet of [the] Soviet epoch" was complete.

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[67] Mayakovsky, "Domoi!," in *PSS*, T. 7, 92.
[68] Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 302.

Mayakovsky was not only concerned with censorship by outside forces. As his decision to remove the final lines of "Homeward!" shows, he was also preoccupied with the concept of self-censorship. The most well-known and oft-quoted instance of self-censorship in his poetry can be found in *At the Top of My Voice*:

> И мне
> агитпроп
> в зубах навяз,
> и мне бы
> строчить
> романсы на вас —
> доходней оно
> и прелестней.
> Но я
> себя
> смирял,
> становясь
> на горло
> собственной песне.[69]
>
> [Even for me / agitprop / sticks in the gullet, / even I would / compose / romances for you— / it is more lucrative / and more charming. / But I / humbled / myself, / standing / on the throat / of my own song.]

Though difficult to render in translation, Mayakovsky uses the verb "to humble" here in the imperfective aspect, meaning an action that occurred multiple times in the past, rather than once as a completed action. This verb choice indicates that Mayakovsky's speaker presents self-censorship as a kind of habit, or, to echo Bloom, a "compulsion." As in "Homeward!," the poetic persona presents himself as unapologetically of two minds on the subject of his own autonomy. Once again, the poet's secret freedom to vacillate between extremes permits him to hold both extremes within himself.

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[69] Mayakovsky, *Vo ves' golos*, in *PSS*, T. 10, 280-281.

In certain of his poems, Mayakovsky finds a connection between Pushkin's legacy and censorship. For example, the poetic persona from "An Extraordinary Adventure..." complains that he is stuck at home drawing posters for ROSTA, while the Sun lazes around in the clouds:

> Я крикнул солнцу:
> «Дармоед!
> занежен в облака ты,
> а тут — не знай ни зим, ни лет,
> сиди, рисуй плакаты!»[70]
>
> [I yelled to the Sun: / "Freeloader! / You are over-pampered in the clouds, / but here—I know neither winters nor summers, / I must sit and draw posters!"]

At first, Mayakovsky's poetic persona sees no affinity between his own artistic labor and the Sun's daily labor of producing light. He sees himself as an artistic tool of the state, and the Sun as a social parasite and completely free agent who does no work at all. Here, the speaker expresses both pride about his own work ethic and envy toward the Sun for the apparent lack of imposed constraints on his work. Mayakovsky's use of the imperative forms of the verbs in the above quotation—"Sit! Draw!"—give the sense of an outside force compelling the speaker to sacrifice his freedom to its demands to yield to the pressures of censorship.

The Sun quickly proves Mayakovsky's poetic persona wrong about the heavenly body's lack of work and constraint when he descends to meet the poet for tea. The Sun and the poet strike up a conversation:

> Про то,
> про это говорю,
> что-де заела Роста,
> а солнце:
> «Ладно,
> не горюй,
> смотри на вещи просто!
> А мне, ты думаешь,

[70] Mayakovsky, "Neobychainoe prikliuchenie…," in *PSS*, T. 2, 36.

светить
легко?
— Поди, попробуй! —
А вот идешь —
взялось идти,
идешь — и светишь в оба!»[71]

[I talk about that, / about this, / that I'm tormented by ROSTA, / but the Sun replies: / "That's all right, / don't be glum, / look at things simply! / Do you think for me / shining / is easy? / Just you try it! / But there you go— / you've decided to go, / you're off—and shining on the alert!"]

The personified Sun asserts that he, too, struggles to produce his own particular labor: shining forth light. Despite the difficulties he faces, he continues to perform this task every day without fail. The Sun's encouragement inspires Mayakovsky's poetic persona to abandon his dejection at his monotonous artistic labor in favor of persevering optimism. The two new friends—poet and the Sun—come together to form a kind of poetic superhero duo:

«Ты да я,
нас, товарищ, двое!
Пойдем, поэт,
взорим,
вспоем
у мира в сером хламе.
Я буду солнце лить свое,
а ты — свое,
стихами». […]
Светить всегда,
светить везде,
до дней последних донца,
светить —
и никаких гвоздей!
Вот лозунг мой —
и солнца![72]

["You and I, / there are two of us, comrade! / Let's go, poet, / we'll shine like the dawn, / we'll sing / among the world's junk. / I will pour out my sun, / and you—your own, / in verses." [...] / To shine always, / to shine everywhere, / to the bottom of the last days, / to

[71] Ibid., 37.
[72] Ibid., 37-38.

shine— / and that's all! / This is my slogan—and the Sun's!]

I have already discussed in my first chapter how the Sun as personified in this poem can be interpreted as a stand-in for Pushkin. As a whole, the poem can be read as a cry for validation from one poet to his predecessor, who, at first glance, seems impossibly lofty and unreachable. After all, Mayakovsky himself had contributed to Futurist manifestos in which Pushkin was listed as one of the *klassiki* whom it was necessary to toss from the steamship of Modernity. However, it was not the poet himself Mayakovsky rejected in his early years, but the ossified and bureaucratized version of Pushkin pedaled by the Tsarist authorities and, most relevant for this poem, Pushkin's branding as "the Sun of Russian poetry" by the Symbolists. This depiction of Mayakovsky's predecessor places him in the realm of the abstract, thus removing him from the immediacy of the present and separating him from the plane on which everyday events transpire. By inviting the Sun of Russian poetry to tea, Mayakovsky's persona shatters the conception of Pushkin as an idealized entity detached from real life. Pushkin is not a God-like figure who watches from above, but a living, breathing, talking interlocutor from whom Mayakovsky's persona takes inspiration and encouragement.

While both Blok and Mayakovsky turn to Pushkin's legacy to address their struggles with censorship, the messages of their poems differ substantially. Blok's poem lacks any triumphant ending or resolution. The reader gets the sense that the years of oppression Blok describes continue on, with Pushkin's poetry as a beacon in an unknown future toward which he and his contemporaries strive. The deleterious force of censorship continues to prevail. In Mayakovsky's poem, censorship has an ambiguous quality; it is difficult to pinpoint the speaker's precise attitude toward it. His poetic persona makes no overt mention of oppression, as Blok's does. Still, the constraints under which the poet works cause him to feel discouraged, suggesting that

Mayakovsky himself felt that the state's voracious demand for propagandistic work was draining his resources and preventing him from reaching his desired poetic potential at this point of his career.

While both Blok and Mayakovsky felt stifled by state censorship to some extent, Mayakovsky's speaker in this poem does not turn to Pushkin's legacy as a possible source of rebellion against it. Rather, he views his predecessor's legacy as a source of motivation for working within the limitations of the state's demands. Instead of an idealized symbol of the poet's secret freedom, Mayakovsky views Pushkin as a fellow hardworking poet, who, like himself, was forced to grapple with the everyday realities of writing poetry under the auspices of an authoritarian state. Mayakovsky considers Pushkin a colleague with whom he possesses an affinity that transcends the hundred-year gulf between them.

In his speech "On the Poet's Purpose," Blok illustrates that he was acutely aware of Pushkin's struggle with bureaucracy and censorship and its relevance to his own experience as a poet of the early twentieth century. His poem "To Pushkin House" ensures that Pushkin's legacy is kept alive through its many metaphorical embodiments of the sound of Pushkin's name. What, then, should one make of Mayakovsky's Sun poem in the context of the revitalization of Pushkin's legacy? Mayakovsky's poetic persona makes no direct mention of Pushkin's name, including only the name of the village in which the events of the poem take place (Pushkino). Rather than intoning it as a kind of incantation, Mayakovsky conceals Pushkin's name and identity behind the attributes of the personified Sun. Can Mayakovsky's poem therefore be characterized as an effective resurrection of Pushkin's legacy?

Pushkin, Mayakovsky, and Shklovsky's Concept of "Unfreedom"

If Blok's poem reinforces the necessity of memory in keeping a poet's legacy alive, Mayakovsky's "An Extraordinary Adventure...," along with other poems I discuss in this project, highlights the importance of the *manner* in which the poet is remembered. For Mayakovsky, it is not enough to speak the poet-predecessor's name or to call out to him for aid in difficult moments. The poet must actively ensure that his efforts to resurrect his predecessor through verse reveal the true, underlying nature of the poet and his work, as he or she interprets it.[73] Otherwise, the poet runs the risk of perpetuating a false memory and thereby manipulating the predecessor's legacy into a narrative into which it would not otherwise fit. The forces of bureaucratization and monumentalization are comprised of exactly this kind of manipulated narrative. By only referring to Pushkin obliquely in the Sun poem, Mayakovsky avoids directly prescribing specific attributes to the poet, contrasting sharply with bureaucratized depictions of Pushkin. At the same time, Mayakovsky makes a connection between Pushkin's legacy and poetic innovation. By using his favored literary device of the visualized metaphor to embody Pushkin in the Sun, Mayakovsky uses a cliché image of Pushkin to force the reader to see him in a new light.

Mayakovsky presents a paradoxical approach to bureaucracy: he seeks to free Pushkin's legacy from the deleterious forces of bureaucratization and monumentalism, while at the same

[73] Mayakovsky inevitably runs into an obstacle here: how can one individual poet's interpretation fully comprise the "true" identity of the predecessor? Does a poet really have only one true identity? While these questions lie somewhat outside the scope of this project, I address Mayakovsky's own manipulation of Pushkin's legacy in my conclusion. The most important thing the later poet must do to revitalize the predecessor's legacy is to capture the spirit of the predecessor's work in a new and authentic way. Mayakovsky succeeds in this despite his prodding Pushkin toward the service of the state in his later poems.

time submitting himself to bureaucracy and censorship. In the Sun poem, Mayakovsky's poetic persona even calls upon Pushkin to inspire him to maintain his output of state-sanctioned work. The relationship Mayakovsky creates between himself and Pushkin in this poem shows that he regards the two of them as being subject to the same forces of censorship, a claim that has some merit. Though Pushkin wrote early in his career that he "was not born to entertain the tsars / with [his] modest Muse," he nevertheless spent the latter years of his life entrenched in court affairs. Pushkin's "freedom" from general censorship, granted by Nikolai I, entangled his artistic output with affairs of state: Nikolai became his personal censor in 1826. The monarch therefore had a direct line of influence on the publication of Pushkin's works. Pushkin was also compelled by his title of kammerjunker, also granted him by Nikolai in 1833, to involve himself and his wife in court events and intrigues. He writes in a diary entry dated January 1st of 1834 that "the day before yesterday I was granted the position of kammerjunker (which is rather unseemly at my age). But the court desired that Natal'ia Nikolaevna dance at Anichkov Palace."[74]

Knowing these facts about the latter part of Pushkin's career, it is no mystery that Mayakovsky saw in Pushkin a struggle similar to his own. If Blok idealizes Pushkin's secret freedom and finds inspiration in it, Mayakovsky sees the concept as fraught with implications that both he and Pushkin had to contend with on a deeply personal level. In this respect, Mayakovsky's preoccupation with Pushkin's legacy reflects more accurately the complex reality of the poet's relationship with his creative autonomy. Some critics even describe the two poets' deaths as the inevitable consequences of their inner struggle between two conflicting sides of their poetic identities.

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[74] Vikentii Veresaev, *Pushkin v zhizni*: *Sistematicheskii svod podlinnykh svidetel'stv sovremennikov* (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1984), 354.

In his article "Two Deaths: 1837-1930" [«Две смерти: 1837-1930»] (1930), Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii argues that Pushkin and Mayakovsky share an inner struggle between the ideals of the environment in which they reached poetic maturity, and the ideals of the milieu in which they found themselves later in life:

> Both Pushkin and Mayakovsky are figures inwardly contradictory by virtue of their typical transitivity. Both stand with one foot on one social soil, one foot on the other. Both were unable to resolve the conflict within themselves between the old and the new, between the class that cultivated them and the class for whose ascension their art was the literary accompaniment.[75]

Though Sviatopolk-Mirskii uses the language of class antagonism to depict the poets' inner struggle rather than the concepts of secret freedom and bureaucracy, his argument sheds light on the similarities between Pushkin and Mayakovsky's struggles with their literary and political environments, or, as Blok would say, with the mob. According to Sviatopolk-Mirskii, the class that cultivated Pushkin's early identity was that of the aristocratic landowners, the generation that defeated Napoleon and facilitated the Decembrist Uprising. Pushkin's later career was defined by the rise of a new literary generation:

> Pushkin was the central figure of a literary movement that developed in the years immediately following the victory of the Russian peasant-owners over the domestic and foreign class enemies Speransky and Napoleon. Based on its social origins, it was a movement purely of the landed gentry, and Arzamas can be considered the height of the nobility's ascendancy in literature. However, already at the beginning of the 1820s, literary life began to take on a distinctly bourgeois tendency, and Pushkin emerged as the main pioneer of this new era.[76]

Sviatopolk-Mirskii continues to argue that the ultimate cause of Pushkin's demise would be his inability to reconcile the two contradictory sides of his poetic identity: the Romantic poet-

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[75] Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii, "Dve smerti: 1837-1930," in *Vladimir Mayakovsky. Rokovoi vystrel: Dokumenty, svidetel'stva, issledovania*, ed. Leonid Katsis (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2018), 415.
[76] Ibid., 416.

aristocrat and the proto-Realist trailblazer of bourgeois literature. Being unwilling to fully play the courtly role assigned to him by the tsar, he was nonetheless unable to "break away from this environment that was engulfing and slowly poisoning him" due to his aristocratic origins.[77]

According to Sviatopolk-Mirskii, the trajectory of Mayakovsky's poetic identity is very much the same. Once again using the language of the class struggle, he separates Mayakovsky's ideological tendencies into the early anarchic bourgeois decadence of the Cubo-Futurists and the later proletarian collectivism of the LEF era. He argues that the poet's inability to reconcile the two contradictory identities turned out to be the main reason for his suicide:

> We do not know the personal reasons that led Mayakovsky to suicide (and we should hope that we will not soon find out—"the deceased hated gossip"). But the objective meaning of his death is clear: it is an acknowledgement that individualistic literature, which harkens back to pre-Revolutionary society, is not needed in the new Soviet culture.[78]

Though I agree with Sviatopolk-Mirskii that the aspects of Pushkin and Mayakovsky's poetic identities he describes are driving forces in their work, his approach oversimplifies the complex realities of the poets' lives. The connection he draws between Pushkin's origins among the creative Russian nobility and his later alliance with the Russian monarchy overlooks the fact that many aristocrats in Pushkin's circle were in favor of constitutional monarchies or republics and took part in the Decembrist Uprising of 1825. The fact that Pushkin's poetic identity emerged among other young aristocrats at the lyceum in Tsarskoe Selo and in the shadow of Aleksandr I's rule does not prove that allegiance to the monarchy would be an essential component of that identity. The conservatism of Pushkin's later years is not a return to his aristocratic roots, as

[77] Ibid., 417.
[78] Ibid., 431.

Sviatopolk-Mirskii suggests, but a separate phenomenon that emerged in the poet's work as a result of the conservative structure in which he was forced to operate.

Sviatopolk-Mirskii's observation about the unresolvable conflict within Mayakovsky's identity as a poet is also not entirely correct. While an internal struggle certainly existed in his later poetry, Mayakovsky often freely oscillated between strains of individualistic lyricism and the equally robust collectivist tendencies in his poetry. This fluctuation in and of itself did not lead to Mayakovsky's tragic death. The contradictory nature of Mayakovsky's identity itself was not the issue. The increasingly powerful Soviet bureaucracy of the time demanded from Mayakovsky a clarity of vision that it was impossible for him to give. In the late 1920s and beyond, Soviet literary culture, which was essentially bureaucratic, would no longer tolerate the great breadth of Mayakovsky's poetic identity with its many contradictions. The literary bureaucracy's fist had been slowly closing around him throughout the twenties, but until 1930, he had managed to make certain compromises and sacrifices while essentially remaining the complex and idiosyncratic poet that he had always been. It was not, as Sviatopolk-Mirskii argues, Pushkin and Mayakovsky's inwardly contradictory poetic identities that ultimately led to their deaths. We cannot know all of the reasons for either poet's end. Still, we do know that their inability to bring their contradictory inner selves into harmony with the oppressive environments that surrounded them must have caused them to feel that there was no way out.

While Sviatopolk-Mirskii's analysis reduces the complexity of Pushkin and Mayakovsky's struggles with their respective literary milieux, it illustrates that both poets faced similar lack of autonomy in their creative lives due to the environments in which they lived and worked. Mayakovsky was well aware of this affinity between himself and Pushkin: it is one of the underlying messages of "An Extraordinary Adventure...". At the end of their lives, neither

poet enjoyed the realization of his secret freedom. Both Pushkin and Mayakovsky, to one degree or another, were victims of "unfreedom," a concept to which Viktor Shklovsky devotes a considerable portion of his experimental memoir *Third Factory* [«Третья фабрика»] (1926). I view unfreedom as an ever-present force with which the poet must grapple in order to achieve the creative autonomy that defines secret freedom.

One of Shklovsky's central goals in *Third Factory* is to produce what he calls a "study of unfreedom."[79] In the true Formalist style of "laying bare the device," he neglects to outright define the concept of unfreedom, instead skirting around it and addressing it through loosely connected anecdotes and metaphorical reflections. Shklovsky's most frequently used metaphor to describe unfreedom is his comparison of the writer's lack of autonomy at the hands of the state to the processing of flax. Judging by this metaphor, unfreedom is violent and incredibly painful, and seems to have only negative results:

> Flax, if it had a voice, would scream as it's being processed. It is jerked from the ground by the head. With the root. It is planted thickly, so that it impedes itself and grows to be puny and scanty. Flax requires oppression. It is jerked. Spread out on the fields (in some places) or soaked in holes or streams. Streams in which flax is washed are cursed: there are no fish in them. Then the flax is crushed and beaten. I want freedom.[80]

According to Shklovsky, Soviet writers of the 1920s were a commodity that the state manipulated in order to produce the literature necessary for the new Communist society. Based only on this quotation, one might conclude that Shklovsky viewed unfreedom as a purely harmful phenomenon for writers. In reality, Shklovsky presents a more nuanced realization of unfreedom among his many observations about his own existence as a writer and his circle of colleagues.

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[79] Viktor Shklovsky, *Tret'ia fabrika* (Moskva: Artel' pisatalei "Krug," 1926), 69.
[80] Ibid., 81-82.

At another point in *Third Factory,* Shklovsky implies that unfreedom is not inherently harmful, but can even have positive effects: "Now I am occupied by the question of the limits of freedom, of the shaping of the material. I want to change. I fear negative unfreedom."[81] If there is negative unfreedom, which we might attribute to the flax metaphor presented by Shklovsky, what does positive unfreedom look like? In order to illustrate unfreedom's potential to produce good-quality literature, Shklovsky brings in Mayakovsky as an example of "flax of the best quality"—a writer who works tirelessly within the strictures of state control while remaining an innovative and original poet.[82] Shklovsky uses an evocative metaphor to describe Mayakovsky's struggle with the increasingly hostile literary-bureaucratic environment both before and after the October and Revolution and through the nineteen twenties:

> At that time[83] he was still being stomped on in the newspapers, being doused with boiling water, being worn out and battered in the comedic magazines. Mayakovsky [...] leads the right kind of life. He tinkers with his life like a broken-down motorcycle on the street, paying no attention to the passersby that have gathered around.[84]

The "tinkering" Shklovsky describes here represent the adjustments Mayakovsky made to his work in order to appease the mob of the reading public, bureaucratic officials, and censors who took issue with some aspect or other of his poetry. While Mayakovsky was able to make such necessary modifications earlier in his career, the literary establishment's toxic state at the end of the nineteen-twenties made it impossible to "tinker" without sacrificing the essential ambivalent nature of his poetic identity.

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[81] Ibid., 52.
[82] Ibid., 60.
[83] The time Shklovsky refers to here occurs soon after he made his acquaintance with the Briks and Mayakovsky, most likely during World War I and before the October Revolution. The author seldom gives exact dates in his anecdotal memoir, so the precise time he describes is a matter of conjecture.
[84] Ibid.

Mayakovsky's biographers devote significant space to their discussions of the poet's struggles with the literary constraints imposed by the state. According to Bengt Jangfeldt, Mayakovsky was aware as early as 1921 that he had become an object of suspicion and animosity by the major cultural authorities.[85] By 1923, his journal *LEF* had been forced into an alliance with MAPP, the Moscow subset of RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. In the final months of his life, Mayakovsky was subjected to what Shklovsky refers to as his "re-education" at the hands of the Party and RAPP.[86] The problem of unfreedom was essential to Mayakovsky's existence in the latter part of his career. His struggles with the state's demands are part of his affinity with Pushkin: both poets crave some degree of creative autonomy while operating under oppressive circumstances.

Anecdotes by Pushkin's contemporaries about the later years of his career suggest that he also felt the effects of unfreedom. While Prince Vyazemsky argues that Pushkin's rancor at being appointed a kammerjunker stemmed purely from his vanity and acute sense of honor, others who knew him indicate that his new position at court damaged more than Pushkin's fragile pride.[87] Fyodor Ivanovich Timiriazev, with whose family Pushkin was intimately acquainted during these years, remembers the poet's state of mind:

> At that time, Pushkin was already married, a kammerjunker, and often went out into society and to court, accompanying his beauty of a wife. This lifestyle was often a burden to him, and he complained to his friends that it not only did not agree with his inclinations and his vocation, but that it also did not agree with his finances.[88]

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[85] Bengt Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky: A Biography*, trans. Harry D. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 160.
[86] Viktor Shklovsky, *O Maiakovskom* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1940), 218.
[87] Veresaev, *Pushkin v zhizni*, 357.
[88] Ibid., 363.

A number of Pushkin's works and the circumstances of their publication reflect the conflict between the poet's inner poetic world and the demands of court society. In his study of Pushkin's prose works, Viktor Shklovsky discusses Pushkin's private and public responses to the raising of Alexander's column on St. Petersburg's Palace Square in 1834, citing a less-than-enthusiastic entry from Pushkin's diary on the occasion:

> I have not written anything down in the course of three months. I was absent—I left Petersburg five days before the opening of the Alexander Column, so that I would not be present at the ceremony with the other kammerjunkers—my colleagues.[89]

Also notable is Pushkin's lack of poetic engagement with the mood of solemn patriotism that surrounded the monument's unveiling. Shklovsky remarks that "even in those columnar years [колонные годы], when the image of the new monument was printed even on money, Pushkin was thinking about a different monument: he was writing *The Bronze Horseman* and *The Captain's Daughter*."[90] In addition to the monuments contained in each of these works, Pushkin was likely thinking of his own personal metaphysical monument, which would embody his legacy after his death. Though Pushkin would not write his famous Horatian ode until 1836, two years after the unveiling of Alexander's column, the question of his poetic legacy was most likely heavy on his mind in this period given the disconnect between his calling and the life he was compelled to live.

Hearkening back to his "study of unfreedom" in *Third Factory*, written nearly ten years previously, Shklovsky goes on to describe the constraints under which Pushkin was forced to work in the 1830s, beginning with the composition of his travelogue *Journey to Arzrum* [«Путешествие в Арзрум»] (1830/35):

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[89] Ibid., 213.
[90] Viktor Shklovsky, *Zametki o proze Pushkina* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1937), 132-33.

> Debts grew. There was also a literary debt. [Pushkin] had to write, because a book about Russia's victory in the war was expected. In spring of 1828, Pushkin received a denial of his request to travel with the army in the field. He went without authorization; he met with Decembrists, was at the front. His excursion elicited extreme dissatisfaction. Since he had gone of his own will, he was expected at least to write hymns of praise for the war he had seen of his own will.[91]

As Shklovsky notes, Pushkin published fragments of his travelogue right away, but they were not sufficient to appease certain members of the literary bureaucracy, who expected at least some triumphant odes describing the Russian victory.[92] Like Mayakovsky tinkering with his metaphorical motorcycle, Pushkin managed to work within the less-than-hospitable literary environment of his later years. For both poets, this "tinkering" came at a cost. In his article "The Evolution of Pushkin's Political Thought," Sergei Davydov remarks that Pushkin never became a courtier in the true sense of the word, but he "paid a steep price for the attempt to find a modus vivendi with the tsar."[93] The same could be said of Mayakovsky's mode of creative life in the midst of censorship and the largely hostile Soviet literary bureaucracy. Both poets "tinkered with [their] lives," enabling their survival in the short term but ultimately rendering themselves powerless to escape the oppressive circumstances in which the tsarist and Soviet regimes placed them. I argue that this tinkering, a technique which both Pushkin and Mayakovsky shared, is a result of their similarly contradictory political persuasions, each bordering on Romantic individualism on one hand and service on behalf of authoritarian regimes on the other.

Davydov echoes Prince Vyazemsky in his description of Pushkin's "liberal conservatism."[94] While some critics have interpreted Pushkin's later years as the poet's

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[91] Ibid., 133.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Sergei Davydov, "The Evolution of Pushkin's Political Thought," in *The Pushkin Handbook*, ed. David Bethea (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 285.
[94] Ibid.

transformation from “the bard of liberty” to a courtier, Davydov playfully references the narrative digressions in *Eugene Onegin* by comparing Pushkin’s political views to a unique blend of highly contrasting wines, combining allegiance to the state with devotion to “the elemental freedom of Nature,” the sword with the lyre.[95] In this light, one might compare Pushkin’s political approach to the following lines from “Homeward!,” in which Mayakovsky echoes the Usurper’s proclamation to the poet in *Boris Godunov* that “the union of sword and lyre is blessed hundredfold” [Стократ священ союз меча и лиры]:

> Я хочу,
> чтоб к штыку
> приравняли перо.[96]
>
> [I want / for the pen / to be made equal with the bayonet.]

In the spirit of the entirety of “Domoi!,” these lines unite seemingly disparate concepts—revolutionary violence and poetry—into a contradictory whole. This whole is the essence of Mayakovsky’s creative purpose: the conscription of verses composed at the whim of the poet’s inspiration into state military service.

At times, the inherent incongruity between the poetry’s conception and its intended purpose results in rejection by the entity the poetry is meant to serve. For example, Mayakovsky’s golem composed of all Russian citizens in the poem *150,000,000* fights for the benefit of the Communist collective, but the style of the work is highly idiosyncratic. Though Mayakovsky proclaimed that all 150 million Russian citizens were the collective author of the narrative poem, it is written in a grandiose epic style that could only belong to Mayakovsky. *Gosizdat*, the newly founded state publishing firm, delayed the poem’s publication for an entire

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Mayakovsky, “Domoi!,” in *PSS*, T. 7, 94.

year, and in the end it appeared in a print run of only 5,000 copies as opposed to the intended run of 25,000.[97] Lenin despised the poem, calling it "rubbish, [...] stupid beyond belief and pretentious" and condemned it as an example of literary "hooligan Communism."[98] Mayakovsky's verse foot soldiers were rejected by the state as Pushkin's depiction of the Russo-Turkish war in *Journey to Arzrum* was rejected by the state and literary establishment.

Assailed by unfreedom at the hands of censorship and literary bureaucracy, both Pushkin and Mayakovsky turn to their legacies in their later poetry. Instead of writing odes in praise of Alexander's column or Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish war, Pushkin writes an ode in praise of his own personal metaphysical monument: his immortal verse. Pushkin's poetic persona even boasts that his monument stands even taller than, and is therefore of greater consequence than, Alexander's column:

> Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный,
> К нему не заростет народная тропа,
> Вознесся выше он главою непокорной
> Александрийского столпа.[99]
>
> [I erected a monument to myself not made by human hands, / The people's path toward it will never be overgrown, / It raised its defiant head higher than Alexander's pillar.]

While Pushkin's monument is chiefly metaphysical, Mayakovsky makes it a physical entity, often industrial, at times corporeal. Being unable to achieve creative autonomy in their respective lifetimes, both poets explore the possibilities of creative immortality to ensure a kind of freedom through the posthumous vitality of their legacies. Blok's invocation of Pushkin's legacy through his address to the Pushkin House in the Academy of Sciences—itself a monument to Pushkin—

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[97] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 161.
[98] Lenin cited in Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 162.
[99] Pushkin, "Ia pamiatnik siebie vozdvig nerukotvornyi,..." in *Sochineniia*, T. 1, 586.

implicitly connects the poet's posthumous legacy with the concept of secret freedom. Blok's appeal to Pushkin in verse asserts his own creative autonomy, even in the face of oppression.

Mayakovsky's many verse invocations of Pushkin and his legacy can likewise be viewed as a defense of the poet's creative autonomy. Mayakovsky mounts his defense by casting Pushkin as his colleague and ally in the struggle between the unfreedom of literary bureaucracy and the poet's secret freedom. In so doing, Mayakovsky frees Pushkin from what he views as the stagnation of his predecessor's legacy. This posthumous stagnation is brought about by the same literary bureaucracy that silences the poet during his lifetime. Mayakovsky appropriates Pushkin's monumental theme to reverse the process of stagnation on Pushkin's behalf, as well as his own. This reversal is an exercise in the poet's secret freedom: before his death, the poet encodes in his verse a guide for his descendants to follow in order to free him from his entrapment within the tomb of monumentalism and bureaucratization. In the following chapter, I will analyze the development of Mayakovsky's dialogue with Pushkin's monumental theme throughout his oeuvre. In tracking the development of this theme, I intend to reveal Mayakovsky's process of exorcizing his anxieties about his posthumous legacy.

Chapter 3: Mayakovsky's Iambs and Monumental Anxiety

The present chapter is devoted to analysis of Mayakovsky's iambic Pushkinian poems. These iambic dialogues with Pushkin's legacy represent attempts by Mayakovsky to bring Pushkin into his leftist avant-garde literary present, thereby replacing the tomb of Briusov's *tombeau* to Pushkin with a new, living, "resurrected" Pushkin. In order to accomplish this resurrection through poetry, Mayakovsky first exposes the dangers of monumentalizing Pushkin by setting up a reversal of Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue. In this Mayakovskian myth of monumentalization, figures once powerful in life become impotent in their statuary forms. If their statues come alive at all, they are not feared like those in Pushkin's mythos but are laughed at and humiliated. Mayakovskian statues do not destroy, but the figures they are meant to glorify are destroyed through the sanitizing, ossifying, emasculating process of monumentalization.

Having established the deleterious process of monumentalization, Mayakovsky begins to use iambic poetry as a bridge over which Pushkin might step into the twentieth century and thus be freed of his stagnant monumental form. Iambs become a mutually intelligible poetic language through which Mayakovsky draws parallels between Pushkin and himself. These connections bring to light one of Mayakovsky's greatest concerns: that his own legacy would meet the same fate of monumentalization as Pushkin's. In order to stave off this future outcome, Mayakovsky uses the iamb in his final poems to affirm his legacy's longevity and poetry's power to abolish death.

Mayakovsky's Reversal of Pushkin's Myth of the Destructive Statue

Mayakovsky's iambic dialogue with Pushkin begins in earnest with the poem "To V. Ia. Briusov as a memento" [«В. Я. Брюсову на память»] (1916). The poem was prompted by Briusov's "completion" of Pushkin's unfinished work "Egyptian Nights" [«Египетские ночи»]

(1837), a poem that Mayakovsky rejected for reasons that become clear upon reading his response to it:

> Разбоя след затерян прочно
> во тьме египетских ночей.
> Проверив рукопись
> построчно,
> гроши отсыпал казначей.
> Бояться вам рожна какого?
> Что
> против — Пушкину иметь?
> Его кулак навек закован
> в спокойную к обиде медь![100]
>
> [The trace of plunder is lost forever / in the darkness of Egyptian nights. / Having checked the manuscript / line by line, / the treasurer poured out the coins. / What do you have to fear? / What / could Pushkin have against it? / His fist is
> forever fettered / in bronze impassive to insult!]

Mayakovsky's poetic persona metaphorically describes Briusov's addendum to Pushkin's work as "plunder" in the first line of the poem. The metaphor's tenor is revealed more decisively in the third line, in which the persona describes a treasurer, presumably at a publishing house, "having checked [Briusov's] manuscript / line by line." As pointed out by Kevin Reese in his study of Mayakovsky's iambic relationship with Pushkin, Briusov's seemingly illicit exchange of money for the manuscript in the poem mirrors the Italian improvisor's desire for money in Pushkin's story.[101] Mayakovsky's rejection of Briusov's attempt is based on his implication that, in "completing" the work, Briusov was motivated by financial concerns rather than artistic ones. Apart from Mayakovsky's disdain for what he perceived as Briusov's base motivations, this poem contains another, more essential component: Mayakovsky's anxiety associated with the

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[100] Mayakovsky, "V. Ia. Briusovu na pamiat'," in *PSS*, T. 1, 123.
[101] Kevin Reese, "'Without Pushkin I Cannot Go to Sleep': Maiakovskii's Iambic Dialogues with Pushkin" (paper presented at the Association for Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies conference, Washington, DC, November 2016).

monument's torpidity. This anxiety frequently finds expression through iambic meter in Mayakovsky's works.

Mayakovsky's poem to Briusov is written in iambic tetrameter—Pushkin's most frequently used meter. Combined with the poem's regular and relatively simple rhyme scheme, the meter is clearly meant to evoke Pushkin's metric idiom. It also echoes the meter Briusov uses in his poetic addendum to "Egyptian Nights," making Mayakovsky's condemnation all the more pointed. Mayakovsky berates Briusov condescendingly by showing that he, too, is capable of writing poems in iambic tetrameter. At surface level, this poem's meter might seem to reflect only its Pushkinian subject matter and Mayakovsky's rejection of what he saw as Briusov's exploitation of Pushkin for his own gain. However, the significance of the iambic meter goes beyond Mayakovsky's reproach of Briusov. This poem is our first clue in cracking the personal code of Mayakovsky's iambs, which reveal his preoccupation with the poet's posthumous legacy. An essential part of this preoccupation is Mayakovsky's rejection of the monument as the embodiment of the poet's immortality.

In his article "The Statue in Pushkin's Poetic Mythology" [«Статуя в поэтической мифологии Пушкина»] (1937), Jakobson describes Mayakovsky's peculiar relationship with Pushkinian statues and monuments:

> The motif of the statue constrained and fettered by immobility, polemically set against the Pushkinian myth of its majestic peace, takes on exceptional strength in Mayakovsky. In his poetry, addresses to Pushkin are inextricably linked with the theme of the statue.[102]

[102] Roman Jakobson, "Statuia v poeticheskoi mifologii Pushkina," *Lev Sobolev. Obrazovatel'nyi sait*, accessed November 10, 2018, http://sobolev.franklang.ru/index.php/pushkin-i-ego-vremya/212-r-o-yakobson-statuya-v-poeticheskoj-mifologii-pushkina.

Jakobson characterizes Mayakovsky's treatment of the monumental theme as a reversal of the Pushkinian theme. Mayakovsky's poem to Briusov adheres to this pattern. However, the contrast Mayakovsky creates here is not between his own depiction of the statue in stagnation and the Pushkinian ideal of the imposing, peaceful statue. Rather, Mayakovsky interrupts and reverses Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue. In the Briusov poem and other poems on similar themes, Mayakovsky both implicitly and explicitly references the foremost texts of Pushkin's oeuvre containing the myth of the destructive statue: *The Bronze Horseman* and "The Stone Guest." Mayakovsky's anxiety regarding the fate of his posthumous legacy reveals itself through this intertextual dialogue.

Within Mayakovsky's poem to Briusov, Pushkin's imprisonment in a monumental form allows Briusov's brazen and unauthorized completion of the poet's unfinished work. Being thus trapped, Pushkin is incapable of defending himself against what Mayakovsky interprets as Briusov's assault on Pushkin's legacy. Here, Mayakovsky draws a parallel between the eponymous monument to Peter the Great as depicted in Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* and Opekushin's monument to Pushkin. In Pushkin's work, Peter the Great's statue comes alive in response to Evgenii's despairing threat after a flood and chases him all over Petersburg:

> «Добро, строитель чудотворный! —
> Шепнул он, злобно задрожав, —
> Ужо тебе!..» И вдруг стремглав
> Бежать пустился. Показалось
> Ему, что грозного царя,
> Мгновенно гневом возгоря,
> Лицо тихонько обращалось...
> И он по площади пустой
> Бежит и слышит за собой —
> Как будто грома грохотанье —
> Тяжело-звонкое скаканье
> По потрясенной мостовой.
> И, озарен луною бледной,

> Простерши руку в вышине,
> За ним несется Всадник Медный
> На звонко-скачущем коне…[103]
>
> ["Fine then, O wonder-working builder!" / He whispered, trembling with spite, / "Just you wait...!" And suddenly, headlong, / he began to run. It seemed / To him, that the terrible tsar's face, / Flaring up with anger in an instant, / had stealthily begun to turn... / And along the empty square / he runs and hears behind him— / like the rumbling of thunder— / a heavy-ringing gallop / upon the quaking pavement. / And, illumined by the pale moon, / extending his arm on high, / Behind him rushes the Bronze Horseman / On his resoundingly galloping steed...]

Evgenii—the powerless victim—verbally threatens the perceived aggressor—the statue—in an act of total desperation. The roles of victim and aggressor are reversed in Mayakovsky's poem. Here, the victim is the monument—Pushkin's posthumous existence as a statue "fettered in bronze" makes him as powerless to control his fate as Evgenii in Pushkin's poem. However, Briusov's attempt to finish "Egyptian Nights" presents a threat entirely different from Evgenii's futile menace against Peter's statue. According to Mayakovsky, Briusov's "plunder" of Pushkin's work threatens Pushkin's legacy because it strips away the vital freedom of the poet's creation. The ironic question of Mayakovsky's poetic persona concerning "Egyptian Nights"—"What could Pushkin have against it?"—reminds us that the deceased poet, being immortalized in bronze, has no autonomy over his own work. He cannot keep his work for himself, because Briusov has built Pushkin a "tomb," to use Lipking's metaphor of the *tombeau*. Mayakovsky rejects both of Pushkin's monumentalizations depicted in his poem: the static powerlessness of the monument and the death of the deceased poet's autonomy as represented by Briusov's ending of "Egyptian Nights."

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[103] Pushkin, *Mednyi vsadnik*, in *Sochineniia*, T. 2, 183.

In order to delve more deeply into Mayakovsky's understanding of the concept of monumentalization in this early period of his career, I will examine the differences between Mayakovsky's and Pushkin's depictions of the statue come alive. In the fragment from *The Bronze Horseman* I cited previously, the metallic sound of Peter's statue as it pursues Evgenii is reflected by the repetition of the adjective *zvonkii*: "sonorous, resounding." The ringing of the horse's metal hooves on the cobbles is compared to "the rumbling of thunder." The physicality of the monument itself lends it more power through sound: it makes the pavement shake. In contrast, the statue of Pushkin in Mayakovsky's poem is utterly devoid of both motion and sound. Its extreme inertness is made conspicuous by comparison to Pushkin's depiction of Peter's statue. Still more telling is another implicit parallel Mayakovsky draws in his poem to Briusov between the addressee and Don Juan from *The Stone Guest*.

In Pushkin's "little tragedy," Don Juan manages to arrange a rendezvous with Dona Anna after his return to Madrid. Within sight of the statue memorializing Dona Anna's late husband, the Commander, Don Juan and his servant Leporello joke about what the dead man will think of his widow's forthcoming seduction:

Лепорелло

А командор? что скажет он об этом?

Дон Гуан

Ты думаешь, он станет ревновать?
Уж верно нет; он человек разумный
И, верно, присмирел с тех пор, как умер.[104]

[Leporello: And the commander? What will he say about this?
Don Juan: You think he will be jealous? / Most likely not; he is a reasonable person /
And has likely become subdued since he died.]

[104] Pushkin, *Kamennyi gost'*, in *Sochineniia*, T. 2, 469.

In his rejection of Briusov's additions to "Egyptian Nights," Mayakovsky casts Briusov as a kind of Don Juan, who freely takes ownership of the deceased poet's poetic property once he is dead and unable to object, just as Don Juan sets out to seduce the Commander's widow now that her husband is dead. In Pushkin's tragedy, Don Juan orders Leporello to invite the statue of the Commander to his own widow's seduction. The statue unexpectedly accepts the invitation, arriving to Dona Anna's and bringing about Don Juan's demise. As with Peter the Great's statue in *The Bronze Horseman*, the figure of the Commander in statue form possesses great physical power and an electrifying presence. In fact, the strength and awe-inspiring appearance of the Commander's statue far surpass those of his former, mortal existence. Don Juan reflects on this very fact when he sees the Commander's statue for the first time:

> Пора б уж ей приехать. Без нее —
> Я думаю — скучает командор.
> Каким он здесь представлен исполином!
> Какие плечи! что за Геркулес!..
> А сам покойник мал был и щедушен,
> Здесь, став на цыпочки, не мог бы руку
> До своего он носу дотянуть.[105]
>
> [It's time for Dona Anna to arrive. Without her, / I think, the Commander is languishing. / What a titan he is rendered as here! / What shoulders! What a Hercules...! / But the deceased himself was small and feeble, / Here, standing on tiptoe, he could not have / reached his own nose with his hand.]

In Pushkin, a human's monumentalization renders him more powerful and thereby more capable of retribution against and destruction of those who have offended him. In Mayakovsky's poem to Briusov, Pushkin's rendering as a monument has the opposite effect. Instead of taking his revenge on Briusov for his impudence, Pushkin's statue remains motionless. Instead of being empowered by his encasement in bronze, Pushkin is trapped by it.

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[105] Ibid., 463-464.

A similar fate of monumental impotence befalls the statue of Peter the Great in Mayakovsky's poem "The Last Petersburg Fairy Tale" [«Последняя Петербургская сказка»] (1916), written the same year as his poem to Briusov. In it, the Bronze Horseman and his statuary counterparts the horse and the serpent descend from their plinth out of envy of the lavish dinners given at the nearby Hotel Astoria in modern-day Petrograd:

> Стоит император Петр Великий,
> думает:
> «Запирую на просторе я!» —
> а рядом
> под пьяные клики
> строится гостиница «Астория».
>
> Сияет гостиница,
> за обедом обед она
> дает.
> Завистью с гранита снят,
> слез император.
> Трое медных
> слазят
> тихо,
> чтоб не спугнуть Сенат.[106]
>
> [Emperor Peter the Great stands, / he thinks: / "I shall celebrate upon this expanse!" / but nearby / to the tune of drunken shouts / the Hotel Astoria is being built. / The hotel shines, / it holds one luncheon / after another. / Loosened from his granite by envy, / the Emperor dismounts. / The bronze three / climb down / quietly, / so as not to scare the Senate.]

The first lines of the poem explicitly parallel the first lines of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman,* but the events depicted within represent a complete reversal of Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue. Rather than finding a city still firmly under his power, Peter's statue finds his creation to

[106] Mayakovsky, "Posledniaia peterburgskaia skazka," in *PSS*, T. 1, 128.

be almost unrecognizable—no longer Petersburg, but Petrograd.[107] Instead of striking fear into the hearts of Petersburg-dwellers, as with Evgenii in *The Bronze Horseman*, the statues remain unnoticed by those dining in the hotel until the horse mistakes drinking straws for hay and attempts to eat them.[108] The three statues, having left the hotel in shame of their ineptitude within this new era, flee back to their plinth to the sound of the city's laughter. The reversal of Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue in this poem makes it a particularly effective parody. At the same time, Mayakovsky's lines contain an undercurrent of melancholy that emerges at the end of the poem.

Like Pushkin in Mayakovsky's poem addressed to Briusov, Peter's existence in "The Last Petersburg Fairy Tale" is defined by a lack of potency due to his imprisonment within monumental form. The poem's final lines cement the parallel between Pushkin's monument as depicted by Mayakovsky and his portrayal of Peter the Great's statue:

> И вновь император
> стоит без скипетра.
> Змей.
> Унынье у лошади на морде.
> И никто не поймет тоски Петра —
> узника,
> закованного в собственном городе.[109]
>
> [And once again the Emperor / stands without his scepter. / The serpent. / Despondency on the horse's muzzle. / And no one will understand Peter's yearning ache— / that of a prisoner, / chained in his own city.]

[107] Although the city's name was changed from Petersburg to Petrograd in 1914, two years before the poem was written, the poem's title draws attention to the fact that what Mayakovsky calls Petersburg is Petersburg no more.
[108] Ibid., 129.
[109] Ibid.

Mayakovsky's slant-rhyming of "scepter" (*skipetrá*) and "Peter's yearning ache" (*toski Petrá*) draws special attention to the ineffectualness of Peter's statue, lending it an acute sense of loss. In life, Peter the Great was a large, powerful, and vigorous man who built the Russian Navy and oversaw the construction of a new Russian capital upon a swamp. Trapped in monumental form, he loses both the city that he built and his own power along with it.

Both Pushkin and Peter the Great are "forever fettered in bronze" in Mayakovsky's poetic universe. He even uses the same past passive participle—*zakovannyi*—to describe their plight. The poetic personae of both poems express sympathy for the powerful figures trapped within statues, despite the fact that the poems differ widely in both content and form. Despite its efficacy as a rejection of Briusov's "Egyptian Nights," Mayakovsky's poem to Briusov extends beyond the generational squabble between the Symbolists and the Futurists. While it is an adept parody of one of the foremost literary *klassiki* and exemplifies Mayakovsky's use of innovative imagery and rhyme, "Fairy Tale" is not simply a Futurist revitalization of a classic theme. Both poems address a problem essential to Mayakovsky's work. Monumentalized creators—in this case, Peter and Pushkin—are inevitably dispossessed of their creations. Pushkin no longer has control of his works, just as Peter loses his authority over his city. Considered in this context, it is no mystery that Mayakovsky's poetic personae feel sympathy for both Pushkin and Peter. Mayakovsky fears that, after his death, his own process of monumentalization will allow outside forces to lay claim to his own body of work, thus robbing him of his secret freedom and his legacy.

If the same underlying anxiety is present in both of these poems, why does only one of them contain iambic meter? Both poems respond to Pushkin thematically. If the Pushkinian theme were the only reason for Mayakovsky to use iambs in the Briusov poem, why not use

them in the later poem, as well? I argue that there is a reason for the metrical discrepancy between the two poems. While Mayakovsky sympathizes with the plight of Peter's statue, his poetic persona cannot relate to a deceased tsar in the same way he relates to a deceased poet. His poem to Briusov presents the first example of Mayakovsky relating to Pushkin as if to an equal. Mayakovsky's depiction of Peter, in contrast, is characteristically irreverent. While a similar impertinence can be felt in his address to Briusov, another poet, no such sneering can be found at Pushkin's expense. Rather, there is the sense that Mayakovsky reclaims the verse form in the name of Pushkin's legacy, countering Briusov's iambic addendum to Pushkin's work with his own poem in iambic meter.

The iamb itself becomes a means of emancipation from the stagnating force of monumentalization. Though Pushkin remains encased in bronze in the poem's final lines, seemingly beyond the reach of any attempt at revitalization, it is through Mayakovsky's iambs that the problem of the poet's posthumous death is brought to light. In Mayakovsky's later poetry, iambic meter will develop into more than a means of reclaiming and revitalizing Pushkin's legacy. In the early twenties, Mayakovsky uses iambic meter to establish connections between Pushkin and himself in order to fully bring his predecessor into the fold of the early Soviet avant-garde. Mayakovsky carries out this intention chiefly in his poem "An Extraordinary Adventure...," which I briefly addressed in the previous chapter, and in "The Jubilee Poem," which, though composed largely in Mayakovsky's characteristic accentual verse, contains key iambic passages and comprises an essential part of Mayakovsky's amicable dialogue with Pushkin as a fellow member of the revolutionary literary vanguard.

Mayakovsky's Iambic Dialogue with Pushkin

"To V. Ia. Briusov..." and "The Last Petersburg Fairy Tale" are not the only poems in which Mayakovsky transforms Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue. As I discussed in my first chapter, Michael Wachtel specifically describes "An Extraordinary Adventure..." and "The Jubilee Poem" as subverting this myth. Despite this similarity to the poems I discussed in the previous section, the subversion of the destructive statue myth is not the focus of these later poems. Rather, these poems depict the development of a poetic relationship between Pushkin and Mayakovsky from its first uncertain blossoming to a mature, intimate confidence and trust. Mayakovsky's use of iambic meter plays an important role in the development of this relationship.

"An Extraordinary Adventure" is one of very few poems from Mayakovsky's post-revolutionary career written almost entirely in iambic meter. The poem's unconventional arrangement on the page belies its traditional structure; it is composed of quatrains with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter with a regular AbAb rhyme scheme. This form is based on a ballad form used by different poets in the Romantic era, notably Pushkin in his folk ballad "The Bridegroom" [«Жених»] (1825) and Vasilii Zhukovskii in his translation of Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* (1773). In his later political poem "The Ballad of Gallant Emile" [«Баллада о доблестном Эмиле»] (1922), Mayakovsky borrows this same folk ballad structure to satirize Belgian socialist lawyer Emile Vandervelde's defense of the anti-Bolshevik Socialist Revolutionaries at their internationally publicized trial. In this context, the folk ballad becomes a scornful sneer, its parodic use of high-flown poetic language dripping with irony:

Замри, народ! Любуйся, тих!
Плети венки из лилий.
Греми о Вандервельде стих,

о доблестном Эмиле![110]

[Halt, people! Delight, be silent! / Braid wreaths of lilies. / Thunder a verse
of Vandervelde, / of gallant Emile!]

Mayakovsky creates yet another parody of the folk ballad in "An Extraordinary Adventure." However, rather than using the parody to ridicule and belittle, as in "The Ballad of Gallant Emile," Mayakovsky uses the ballad structure in this poem as a means of exploring his relationship with his greatest poetic predecessor. While the poetic speaker may initially regard the Sun with scorn, he ultimately finds common ground with him, and no trace of ironic distance is to be found by the parodic ballad's harmonious end.

In the second chapter of this study, I described the affinity the poetic persona discovers between himself and the Sun with regard to unfreedom. Through conversation, the Sun and Mayakovsky's poetic persona are able to realize their kinship. This poem marks the first time Mayakovsky's poetic persona engages with Pushkin the poet on a personal level. It shows, in a condensed way, his speaker's journey from opposition to Pushkin as the distant, archaic "Sun of Russian Poetry" to acceptance of him as a colleague and even to a deeper friendship. At first, the persona regards the Sun with disdain and envy, as from his perspective, the Sun seems to have a leisurely existence that contrasts sharply with his own. Then, when the Sun calls the persona's bluff and appears at his *dacha* for tea, he is frightened and awed, until the Sun emits an unusual "clearness" that puts him at ease:

Черт дернул дерзости мои
орать ему, —
сконфужен,
я сел на уголок скамьи,
боюсь — не вышло б хуже!
Но странная из солнца ясь

[110] Mayakovsky, "Ballada o doblestnom Emilie," in *PSS*, T. 4, 38.

струилась, —
и степенность
забыв,
сижу, разговорясь
с светилом постепенно.[111]

[The devil prodded my impudence / to yell at him— / flustered, / I sat on the corner of my bench, / fearing that it couldn't be worse! / But from the Sun a strange clearness / streamed, / and forgetting / my gravity, / I sit, conversing / with the celestial body little by little.]

This strange clarity, which seems to be an essential component of the Sun's being, contradicts the early Futurist proclamation that "the Academy and Pushkin are more unintelligible than hieroglyphs."[112] Once Pushkin appears to Mayakovsky as a living being, it becomes clear that his lack of intelligibility to twentieth-century poets has nothing to do with his essential qualities but results from the bureaucratization and monumentalization of his legacy. Mayakovsky turns the worn-out cliché of Pushkin as the Sun into his own Mayakovskian hyperbole of visualized metaphor. Uncharacteristically for Mayakovsky, this hyperbolic metaphor leads to a cheerful end, standing in stark contrast to the poet's frequent use of the same literary technique to depict scenes of violence and suicide.

Once the poetic persona and the Sun begin to talk in earnest, the persona discovers that he and the Sun have much in common. This affinity ultimately leads to true friendship by the end of the poem. The shift from mere acceptance of his predecessor to intimacy occurs on a metrical level in the poem. The only non-iambic line in the entire poem occurs in the final line of the following "quatrain," in which the Sun remarks to the poet that they are a pair:

И скоро,
дружбы не тая,

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[111] Mayakovsky, "Neobychainoe prikliuchenie…," in *PSS*, T. 2, 37.
[112] David Burliuk et al., "Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu (1912)," FUTURISM.RU, accessed May 8, 2021, http://futurism.ru/manifest/1912_slap.html.

бью по плечу его я.
А солнце тоже:
«Ты да я,
нас, товарищ, двое [...]».[113]

[And soon, / not hiding our friendship, / I slap him on the shoulder. / And the sun, too: / "You and I, / of us, comrade, there are two."]

This line is composed of three trochaic feet, a complete reversal of the established iambic trimeter. The marked shift in stressed syllables makes the line stand out from those surrounding it. The entire poem has been building up to this point: the moment in which the Sun and the poetic persona realize the true depth of their kinship and join together to fight the forces of darkness and death.

This poem represents a landmark in Mayakovsky's poetic career. Whereas he had previously concerned himself with Pushkinian themes in a more distant way, as in "To Briusov as a Memento" and "The Last Petersburg Fairy Tale," his poetic persona first enters into dialogue with Pushkin himself only in this poem, albeit through the metaphorical stand-in of the Sun. As I discussed in the second chapter of this study, the kinship between the two poets is centered around their mutual struggle with producing state-sanctioned art. Mayakovsky develops and complicates his affinity with Pushkin through another direct poetic dialogue with his predecessor in "The Jubilee Poem." The focus of this dialogue shifts from the challenges of working within the confines of unfreedom toward Mayakovsky's ultimate question: the poet's posthumous legacy.

In "The Jubilee Poem," the poetic persona addresses Opekushin's monument to Pushkin on Tverskoi Boulevard in Moscow. The poem contains several instances of iambic meter, the

[113] Mayakovsky, "Neobychainoe prikliuchenie...," in *PSS*, T. 2, 37.

first of which occur in the following lines at the beginning, in which Mayakovsky's poetic persona introduces himself to Pushkin's statue:

> Дайте руку!
> Вот грудная клетка.
> Слушайте,
> уже не стук, а стон;
> тревожусь я о нем,
> в щенка смиренном львенке.
> Я никогда не знал,
> что столько
> тысяч тонн
> в моей
> позорно легкомыслой головенке.[114]
>
> [Give me your hand! / Here is my ribcage. / Listen, / no longer a knock, but a moan; / I worry about it, / a subdued lion cub turned into a puppy. / I never knew / that there were so many / thousands of tons / in my / shamefully light-minded little head.]

Mayakovsky's speaker establishes a connection to Pushkin by echoing him in the very first line: his taking the hand of Pushkin's statue inverts the ending of "The Stone Guest," in which the statue of the Commander grips Don Juan's hand before dragging him to his death. This role inversion is accompanied by a marked difference in tone. Mayakovsky replaces the horror of Don Juan's fate at the hands of the Commander with a friendly, or even touching, scene between two colleagues: one human, and one statue.

When Mayakovsky's poetic persona says "Here is my ribcage" after taking the hand of Pushkin's statue, we imagine him placing the statue's metal hand on his heart. As Kevin Reese points out, these lines immediately spark a sense of intimacy—both physical and emotional—between Pushkin and his poetic persona:

> [Mayakovsky's speaker] describes the "contents" of his heart and head in iambic hexameter: the *стон* in his chest—his iambic heartbeat—is a lion cub that has transformed into a puppy; his light-minded head is weighed down by thousands of tons.

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[114] Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoie," in *PSS*, T. 6, 47.

> This brief iambic "interior monologue" could be characterized as an attempt by Maiakovskii's poet to meet "Pushkin" on his own terms, to put him at ease by saying in essence that, "my blood also has iambs in it." Note that these lines are all spoken while the poetic speaker is holding Pushkin's hand to his chest: this is a physically intimate moment, metrically intensified.[115]

It is at this moment of intimate connection that Pushkin's statue comes alive. As a result of the metrical connection Mayakovsky makes with Pushkin, the two poets are able to "talk" on an equal footing (Pushkin, not fully able to escape from his monumental form, remains silent). After this first encounter, Mayakovsky is able to help Pushkin down from his pedestal, and the two poets set off together.

From the beginning of the poem, we sense Mayakovsky's belief that only he is qualified to enjoy such an intimate relationship with Pushkin. He is convinced that only he could have caused Pushkin's statue to come alive. This point of view resonates with Mayakovsky's goal of freeing Pushkin from the stagnation of his legacy. If Mayakovsky is the only one who can truly see beyond the layers of academic dust and bureaucratic bowdlerizing that cover Pushkin's legacy, then it follows that he is the only one who can exist on an equal footing with him and inject life back into his monumentalized posthumous existence.

The following excerpt includes the other major iambic section of "The Jubilee Poem," in which Mayakovsky's poetic persona argues that Pushkin would be right at home at his leftist avant-garde literary journal *LEF*, even asserting that he would make Pushkin a co-editor:

Были б живы —
стали бы
по Лефу соредактор.
Я бы
и агитки
вам доверить мог.
Раз бы показал:

[115] Reese, "Without Pushkin I Cannot Go to Sleep."

— вот так-то мол,
и так-то…
Вы б смогли —
у вас
хороший слог.
Я дал бы вам
жиркость
и сукна,
в рекламу б
выдал
гумских дам.
(Я даже
ямбом
подсюсюкнул,
чтоб только
быть
приятней вам.)[116]

[If you were alive, / you would become / a co-editor at *LEF*. / I could / even / entrust / agitprop to you. / I would show you how once: / "do it like this, / and like that..." / You could manage—/ you have / a good turn of phrase. / I would give you / materials / and cloth, / into advertising / I would distribute / the ladies of GUM. / (I even / cajole you / in iambs, / just / to make / things nicer for you.)]

In *The Unlikely Futurist*, James Rann argues that Mayakovsky's attitude toward his predecessor in this poem is "double-edged, revealing elements of essential kinship between Pushkin and the Futurists, but also downplaying Pushkin's alleged mastery and establishing the Futurists as more suitable tutors for the new generation."[117] This excerpt of the poem certainly contains overtones of a patronizing attitude toward Pushkin. However, the poetic speaker's patting Pushkin on the head need not be read so straightforwardly: his irreverence might be interpreted as performative machismo rather than an actual sense of superiority. Not wishing to seem too in awe of Pushkin, the poet keeps him at arm's length in this passage, displaying vacillations between heartfelt intimacy and nonchalant praise. This dynamic is on full display in the following excerpt from the

[116] Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoe," in *PSS*, T. 6, 53-54.
[117] Rann, *The Unlikely Futurist*, 160.

poem, in which Mayakovsky's poetic persona flippantly pretends to misremember a bit of Onegin's letter to Tat'iana in *Eugene Onegin*, only to betray his intimate knowledge of the work by accurately reciting the final couplet of the stanza in question:

> Как это
> у вас
> говаривала Ольга?..
> Да не Ольга!
> из письма
> Онегина к Татьяне.
> — Дескать,
> муж у вас
> дурак
> и старый мерин,
> я люблю вас,
> будьте обязательно моя,
> я сейчас же
> утром должен быть уверен,
> что с вами днем увижусь я.—[118]
>
> [What was it / you had / Olga say? / No, not Olga! / From the letter / from Onegin to Tat'iana. / Something like / "Your husband / is a fool / and an old gelding, / I love you, / you must be mine, / right this minute / in the morning I must be certain, / that you and I will meet in the afternoon."]

Despite the speaker's irreverent attitude toward Pushkin, his admiration and affinity for his predecessor makes itself felt throughout the poem. He goes so far as to make Pushkin a co-editor at his leftist avant-garde literary journal, revealing the extent to which Mayakovsky saw his predecessor as an equal in poetic gift and craft. Mayakovsky's speaker has an implicit trust in him; despite Pushkin's lack of familiarity with Communism and the Soviet literary climate, the speaker assures him that, with only a little guidance, he would be a natural at writing agitation propaganda poetry. The poetic persona even uses iambic meter to coax Pushkin into agreeing to this hypothetical plan.

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[118] Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoe," in *PSS*, T. 6, 51.

Although the last four lines of this excerpt are arranged in Mayakovsky's characteristic *lesenka*, they stand out from the surrounding lines due to their meter and rhyme. In fact, these lines present a complete quatrain of iambic tetrameter with an aBaB rhyme scheme. In the line following this excerpt, the poetic persona states that Pushkin would have to "give up the lisping iamb" in order for their hypothetical plan to become realized. Mayakovsky's opinion at this time that iambic poetry hindered poetic innovation certainly did not prevent him from writing his final poems in iambic meter, as I will address in the final section of this chapter.

The speaker's suggestion that Pushkin give up iambic meter, as well as his parenthetical meta-prosodic comment about his own use of iambs, echoes the beginning of Pushkin's comedic narrative poem *The Little House in Kolomna* [«Домик в Коломне»] (1830). Pushkin's narrator begins the poem by defending his decision to abandon his typical form of iambic tetrameter for octaves of iambic pentameter with the complex rhyme scheme AbAbAbCC:

> Четырестопный ямб мне надоел:
> Им пишет всякий. Мальчикам в забаву
> Пора б его оставить. Я хотел
> Давным-давно приняться за октаву.
> А в самом деле: я бы совладел
> С тройным созвучием. Пущусь на славу!
> Ведь рифмы запросто со мной живут;
> Две придут сами, третью приведут.[119]
>
> [I'm sick of iambic tetrameter: / Everyone writes in it. For child's play / it's time to leave it behind. I've been wanting / to take up the octave for ages. / And really, I would master / the triple rhyme. I'll embark for glory! / Rhymes are completely at home with me; / Two will arrive on their own and bring a third.]

The entire poem being tongue-in-cheek, it is clear that Pushkin did not actually mean to give up iambic tetrameter. His narrator's statement reflects self-awareness of the author's poetic craft.

[119] Pushkin, *Domik v Kolomne*, in *Sochineniia*, T. 3, 136.

Throughout the poem's first eight octaves, the narrator pointedly uses prosody to draw the reader's attention to the form of Pushkin's composition. In other words, Pushkin "lays bare the device," illustrating the Formalist concept of *ostranenie* eighty-seven years before Shklovsky would first describe and name the phenomenon in *Art as Device*. By echoing one of Pushkin's most poetically innovative works, the speaker strengthens his assertion that Pushkin would thrive in the literary milieu of the twenties. He also strengthens the kinship existing between himself and Pushkin, which will extend into the distant future through both poets' legacies.

Having assured himself and Pushkin of his predecessor's qualifications to work in the leftist avant-garde literary circle, Mayakovsky's speaker is brought down to earth by the realization that this hypothetical plan cannot be brought to fruition. The fact of Pushkin's death makes any true collaboration between the two poets impossible. Mayakovsky's speaker laments this reality and suggests that only he is capable of fully appreciating the loss:

Может,
я
один
действительно жалею,
что сегодня
нету вас в живых.
Мне при жизни
с вами
сговориться б надо.
Скоро вот
и я
умру
и буду нем.
После смерти
нам
стоять почти что рядом:
вы на Пе,
а я на эМ.[120]

[120] Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoe," in *PSS*, T. 6, 51.

> [Maybe / I / alone / really am sorry / that today / you are not among the living. / During your lifetime, we / would have had to / make arrangements. / Soon / even I / will die / and become mute. / After death / we / will stand almost side-by-side: / you at "P," / and I at "M."]

The poetic persona's realization that his plan will not come to fruition is accompanied by a reflection on his own mortality. Not only will he die, but, like Pushkin, he will become a mute statue as a result of monumentalization. After death, he will be reduced to standing next to Pushkin only alphabetically, as a silent name on a list of Russian poets. Later on, he expresses annoyance that the poet Nadson comes between himself and Pushkin alphabetically and insists that he should be moved to the letter *shch* [щ], which is closer to the end of the alphabet. This mild protest would allow Pushkin and the speaker to remain physically close to each other after death, while keeping the forces of monumentalization and bureaucratization intact. Mayakovsky's speaker proposes a more effective protest at the end of the poem: exploding his own statue with dynamite.

Later in Mayakovsky's career, his poems will put forth a new antidote to monumental stagnation: man-made anti-monuments that allow for physical resurrection in the distant future. This immortalization program would allow Pushkin and Mayakovsky to collaborate in the flesh into eternity. I will explore this program in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. The next section of the current chapter concerns Mayakovsky's final unfinished poems, which feature iambic meter more prolifically than any other segment of his poetic output. I present these fragments as the fully realized final phase of Mayakovsky's reflection on his legacy. Iambic meter is an essential component of these final reflections.

Mayakovsky's Harmonium

In *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers*, Lawrence Lipking describes the poet's reevaluation of his life's work in his chapter on "harmonium": a term derived from a working title of Wallace Stevens' final volume of collected poems. The harmonium is a "summing-up," a poet's retrospective reflection on his or her career at a remove from the individual poems and the circumstances surrounding their composition. "Focusing on the pattern of the whole, an aging poet may find he needs new glasses. [...] Books must be held at a distance. And the change in vision can result in some curious methods of reading. [...] certain pages begin to fade, while others stand out in sharp relief."[121] Do Mayakovsky's unfinished final poems conform to this characterization of harmonium, or does his particular poetic mission contravene this approach? As Jakobson illustrates in "On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets," Mayakovsky's preoccupation with metaphorical suicide in his poetry ultimately became realized in life. In this sense, his poetic career and death by suicide exemplify Lipking's statement that "every poem is an epitaph."[122] If this statement is true, then how can we label Mayakovsky's final unfinished poems—which could very well not have been final, had the poet decided not to pull the trigger—as a harmonium?

One possible answer is that we designate the final poems as a harmonium simply by virtue of their being the final poems. The reader interprets the final poems in the context of the poet's death, which changes their reading completely. Lipking writes that "last works, like last words, have a special aura of authenticity."[123] Such an aura might be nothing more than an

[121] Lipking, *Life of the Poet*, 66.
[122] Ibid., 67.
[123] Ibid.

incautious critic's biased reading. In Mayakovsky's case, however, the aura is genuine. Written for the occasion of Mayakovsky's exhibition "20 Years of Work," his unfinished long poem *At the Top of My Voice* was intended to present the poet as the most prominent poetic voice of his time, whose legacy would live on into the distant future.

Mayakovsky had faced criticism from many detractors in the latter part of his career. His play *The Bathhouse* had failed spectacularly among critics and the public, the splintering of *LEF* in 1928 had placed him at odds with other writers and friends of his circle, and his move toward advertising slogans and topical verse and away from lyric poetry had compromised his stature as a poet. *At the Top of My Voice* and the accompanying exhibition were meant to reestablish his position as a great poet and to inspire admiration from those who had doubted him. The exhibition itself was a kind of harmonium: a representation of Mayakovsky's collected works curated by the poet himself. In order to create the exhibition, Mayakovsky had to distance himself from his entire body of work and view it as a continuum rather than a collection of disparate poems. By summing up his own poetic career in this way, Mayakovsky enters the world of the harmonium, opening himself up to such questions as: "What have I accomplished? Who am I as a poet? What is my legacy?"

These questions are integral to the Horatian monumental theme, which Mayakovsky borrows from Pushkin in many of the poems I have already discussed in this study. The concept of poets building monuments to themselves demands the same type of perspective as the harmonium: the poet's retrospective view of their own work, with an eye to establishing a particular legacy. In my first chapter, I discussed Lipking's concept of the *tombeau*, the poem of commemoration written for the deceased poet by their poetic heir. At first glance, the concept of the monument seems like it should fit into the paradigm of the *tombeau*: monuments are often

placed on tombs. However, the Horatian monument is erected by the poet himself during his lifetime. Instead of allowing the descendant to place a monument, to create an epitaph, Pushkin and Mayakovsky state the meaning of their legacies in their own words.

Mayakovsky and Pushkin both write their own legacies in iambic meter. When broken down line by line, greater than fifty percent of *At the Top of My Voice* is iambic, with the majority of the lines being in iambic pentameter.[124] The poem begins in Mayakovsky's usual accentual verse, with the poetic speaker calling out to his future readers:

Уважаемые
товарищи потомки!
Роясь
в сегодняшнем
окаменевшем г[овне],
наших дней изучая потёмки,
вы,
возможно,
спросите и обо мне.
И, возможно, скажет
ваш учёный,
кроя эрудицией
вопросов рой,
что жил-де такой
певец кипячёной
И ярый враг воды сырой.
Профессор,
снимите очки-велосипед!
Я сам расскажу
о времени
и о себе.[125]

[Respected / comrade descendants! / Digging / in today's / petrified shit, / studying the obscurity of our days, / you, / possibly, / will ask even about me. / And, perhaps, will say / your scholar, / covering with erudition / a swarm of questions, / that there lived / a singer of boiled water / and a vehement enemy / of stagnant water. / Professor, / take off your bicycle-glasses! / I myself will tell / about time / and about myself.]

[124] This percentage is based on my own calculation of the ratio of iambic to non-iambic lines in the poem.
[125] Mayakovsky, *Vo ves' golos*, in *PSS*, T. 10, 279.

At the poem's very outset, Mayakovsky's poetic persona begins creating a legacy for himself. He describes himself from the perspective of his readers in the distant future, who may only have a nebulous understanding of who Mayakovsky the poet really was. After this introduction, Mayakovsky's speaker spends the rest of the poem educating his descendants about what kind of poet he is, and what kind of poetry he writes. This summing-up of his poetic career is the heart of the poem. Its thematic content reflects Mayakovsky's paramount concern at the time the poem was written: proving to himself and others that he was still a great poet and would be remembered as such. At the same time, this section of the poem is also its iambic core.

The iambic section of the poem begins in earnest when the poetic persona makes definitive statements about the nature of his poetry. He repeats the words "my verse" at the beginning of a line three times in succession. This use of anaphora amplifies the intensity of the lines, giving them insistence and volume, while the switch to iambic meter signals that we have arrived at the heart of the poem:

> Я к вам приду
> в коммунистическое далекó
> не так,
> как песенно-есененный провитязь.
> Мой стих дойдёт
> через хребты веков
> и через головы
> поэтов и правительств.
> Мой стих дойдёт,
> но он дойдёт не так, —
> не как стрела
> в амурно-лировой охоте,
> не как доходит
> к нумизмату стёршийся пятак
> и не как свет умерших звёзд доходит.[126]

[126] Ibid., 281.

> [I will come to you / in the Communist distance / not / as a sing-song Esenin-like hero. / My verse will reach you / across the mountain ranges of centuries / and over the heads of poets and governments. / My verse will reach you, / but it will not reach you as / an arrow / in an amorous, lyrical hunt, / not as a smooth-rubbed coin reaches the numismatician, / and not as the light of dead starts reaches you.]

The poetic persona creates an equivalence in these lines between himself and his poetry—his verse will live on into the distant future, therefore he himself will achieve immortality. This metaphorical equivalence between immortality of the poet and his poetry is also present in Pushkin's Horatian ode, of which Mayakovsky's poem is a thematic descendant. As I will discuss in the second section of the present chapter, much of Mayakovsky's later poetry is devoted to his conception of physical immortality. He takes up the established metaphor of poetic immortality and makes it a material necessity. The poetic persona's implication in *At the Top of My Voice* that he will attain immortality through his poetry is a manifestation of this idea. The most extreme version of this concept appears in Mayakovsky's final unfinished poems, in which poetry is made synonymous with living flesh. I will address this aspect in the second section of this chapter.

In the passage I cited previously, Mayakovsky's poetic persona continues to describe his poetry apophatically, giving a list of similes that describe the antithesis of his poetry's essence. His verse is neither like the overused cliché of Cupid's arrow, nor like a coin rubbed smooth from over-circulation, nor like the light of dead stars that reaches the earth centuries after they explode. In other words, the speaker presents his poetry as being both ancient and fresh to future generations—the inevitable passing of time will not diminish its immediacy.

After describing how his poetry will *not* appear in the future, Mayakovsky's poetic persona continues by describing what it *will* do and how it *will* be, transitioning from apophatic

to kataphatic similes. Through his characteristic visualized metaphors, he compares his verses to a Roman aqueduct and to ancient, but still deadly, weapons:

> Мой стих
> трудом
> громаду лет прорвёт
> и явится
> весомо,
> грубо,
> зримо,
> как в наши дни
> вошёл водопровод,
> сработанный
> ещё рабами Рима.
> В курганах книг,
> похоронивших стих,
> железки строк случайно обнаруживая,
> вы
> с уважением
> ощупывайте их,
> как старое,
> но грозное оружие.[127]
>
> [My verse / through labor / will rip open the bulk of years / and appear / weighty, / rough, / visible, / as into our times / the aqueduct entered, / constructed / by the slaves of Rome. / In barrows of books, / in which my verse is interred, / casually uncovering the iron of my lines, / you / with respect / touch them, / like an old, / but terrible weapon.]

Mayakovsky's poetic persona presents his verse as a kind of anti-monument that defies the forces of bureaucratization and monumentalization. Like the Roman aqueduct and the ancient weapon, his poetry will be preserved through time. It will not become decrepit and irrelevant, but will remain vital and urgent. Mayakovsky's use of adjectives to describe his verse in the previous passage—"weighty," "rough," and "visible"—highlight its potency. Here Mayakovsky returns to the Cubo-Futurist understanding of the self-sufficient Word. His characterization of his poetry as "rough" recalls the Futurists' primitivism in their reconstruction of poetic language. This

[127] Mayakovsky, *Vo ves' golos*, in PSS, T. 10, 281-282.

comparison also fits metaphorically: Mayakovsky's speaker connects primitive, yet deceptively sophisticated things—a Roman aqueduct and ancient weapons—to his own poetry. The incongruity created between the awesome, ancient constructs of Mayakovsky's verse and their future context recalls the Formalist concept of estrangement. The contrast between Mayakovsky's verse and the future reality in which it will appear will "rip through the mass of years," forcing the future reader to experience poetry as if for the first time. The vitality and immortality of the literary Word are the focus of this section of the poem, and will become the focus of his final unfinished poems.

Despite Mayakovsky's hearkening back to his Futurist roots, his use of epic, larger-than-life imagery in the poem places it firmly within the realm of the classical ode. Combined with the prevalence of the iamb within the poem's structure, this clear harkening back to classical imagery and the monumental topos connects the poem to Pushkin's monumental ode "I erected a monument to myself not made by human hands...." At the same time, the lines carry the unmistakable markers of Mayakovsky's authorship: the innovative slant rhymes, the striking visualized metaphors, and the characteristic *lesenka*. However, the unconventional visual formation of these lines belies their metric simplicity. If one were to rearrange them into stanzas, they would look no different from any other quatrains of iambic pentameter with an alternating rhyme scheme. One has only to scratch the surface of the poem for the classical structure and meter to come shining through, thus illustrating the great extent to which Mayakovsky invokes his poetic predecessors.

Michael Wachtel argues that even the effect of Mayakovsky's *lesenka* is connected to the classical Russian poetic tradition, as it stresses the importance of poetic declamation:

Ironically, even Mayakovsky's fascination with declamation (which for him justified

> *lesenka*) was not novel, for it developed the ideas of the most venerable and canonic of Russian poets—the eighteenth-century odists. As Mayakovsky's contemporary Iurii Tynianov demonstrated, the work of these poets had a marked oratorical orientation. Lomonosov, for example, put such emphasis on the act of recitation that he even developed a series of conventional gestures that the poet was to employ as an accompaniment to his verses. It is noteworthy that stylized hand gestures were an integral part of Mayakovsky's own performance practice. Most importantly, like most eighteenth-century odes, Mayakovsky's *lesenka* verse was written with a "tendency"—either to glorify, to commemorate, or to excoriate.[128]

The intent of the *lesenka* in the case of *At the Top of My Voice* changes depending on the intended target of the lines in question. The poem's occasion being an exhibition to mark twenty years of Mayakovsky's poetic career, it certainly carries commemorative weight. At the same time, the poem glorifies the poet and his work, while also scorning the destructive commemoration and glorification of poets that results in the stagnation of their posthumous legacies. *At the Top of My Voice* is the culmination of Mayakovsky's thematic dialogue with Pushkin's Horatian ode; his poetic persona presents his own vision of poetic immortality, which both builds on and diverges from Pushkin's monument.

The monumental theme arises most prominently later in the poem. Mayakovsky's poetic persona personifies his verse as the many soldiers who have died and who will continue to die in the service of building Communism. These heroic dead must have a monument worthy of them. Echoing Pushkin's monument "not made by hands," this monument is not made of bronze or "marble slime," but is socialism "built in battles":

> Пускай
> за гениями
> безутешною вдовой
> плетётся слава
> в похоронном марше —
> умри, мой стих,
> умри, как рядовой,

[128] Wachtel, *Development of Russian Verse*, 211-212.

как безымянные
на штурмах мёрли наши!
Мне наплевать
на бронзы многопудье,
мне наплевать
на мраморную слизь.
Сочтёмся славою —
ведь мы свои же люди, —
пускай нам
общим памятником будет
построенный
в боях
социализм.[129]

[Let / behind the geniuses, [130] / like an inconsolable widow, / glory drag herself / along in the funeral march— / die, my verse, / die like a soldier, / as our unnamed men / perished in attacks. / I don't give a damn / about the great heaviness of bronze, / I don't give a damn about / marble slime. / We'll each get our own share of glory— / we're not strangers, after all— / let our / collective monument be / socialism / built / in battles.]

Notably, Mayakovsky's speaker counts himself among those who will die in the effort to bring about the ideal Communist future. This preoccupation with martyrdom for the revolutionary cause is present in Mayakovsky's early poetry. In *A Cloud in Trousers*, the poetic persona proclaims that he will turn his soul into a bloodied banner in aid of the imminent revolution. By including himself among those who sacrifice their lives for the Communist cause, Mayakovsky's speaker depicts socialism as both a collective and personal "monument." Like Pushkin's metaphorical monument, socialism itself is not tangible. However, the things that build it—verses (made of sound, written on the page), human beings, factories, labor—are all physical and quantifiable. The classical, purely metaphysical monument becomes a constructed phenomenon

[129] Mayakovsky, *Vo ves' golos*, in *PSS*, T. 10, 283-284.
[130] The word "geniuses" in this passage has several possible referents: it could refer to the progenitors of socialism and communism, Hegel and Marx, whom Mayakovsky names in the preceding lines, those who died in the literal and figurative battle for socialism, or simply the collective whom the "collective monument" memorializes in the final lines.

in Mayakovsky's poetry, like the Roman aqueduct to which he compares his verse earlier in the poem.

Not only the monument metaphor, but the verse form of Pushkin's poem differs from Mayakovsky's *At the Top of My Voice* in an essential way. Pushkin's poem is in a form of the alexandrine, which, in the Russian tradition, consists of six iambic feet with a caesura after the third foot, with pair rhymes alternating between feminine and masculine. Wachtel describes Pushkin's use of the alexandrine in the afterword of his book on the development of Russian verse:

> [The Russian alexandrine] first became popular among Russia's eighteenth-century poets, where it was the meter of choice for any number of genres. However, it lost its privileged position in Pushkin's time, when the iambic tetrameter became dominant. Pushkin continued to use the alexandrine throughout his career, but never did he favor it until his very last years, when he suddenly turned to it in a series of major philosophical poems.[131]

Pushkin's Horatian monumental ode is one of his major philosophical poems composed in the Russian alexandrine. The form of the alexandrine carries a solemnity that ties Pushkin's verse to that of his predecessors, who wrote their own poems on this same theme, including Batiushkov, Derzhavin, Lomonosov, and Horace. Mayakovsky uses his own variation of the alexandrine in his final unfinished poems written before his suicide.

The most complete of the unfinished poems are the final two in the cycle: "Past one o'clock..." [«Уже второй…»] and "I know the power of words..." [«Я знаю силу слов…»] (1930). Like *At the Top of My Voice*, each of these poems exemplifies Mayakovsky's departure from purely accentual verse toward classical prosody. They also signal the poet's embrace of classical poetic genres: the metaphysical ode and elegy. The metaphysical ode of the eighteenth

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[131] Wachtel, *Development of Russian Verse*, 254.

century, invented by Lomonosov, is marked by the speaker's contemplation of the divine and universal, in contrast to panegyric odes written in praise of a monarch or on the occasion of military victories. It retains from the panegyric ode the element of solemn oratory, which, as Wachtel argues, remains present in Mayakovsky's later poetry through the *lesenka*.

In the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the metaphysical ode lent some of its characteristics to the elegy. While often still focused on the lyric hero's attempts to understand the universe around him or her, the elegy is narrower in scope, and concerns the poet as individual, who very often endures loss and suffering. Mayakovsky's unfinished poems include both elements of the metaphysical ode and the elegy; their combination of two separate poetic voices—of intimate lamentation and contemplation of the universal and eternal—create a bridge between the two classical genres. Mayakovsky's manipulation of meter in these poems reveals the interplay between the two. Despite its lack of punctuation and spacing, the regular rhyme scheme reveals that the unfinished poem "Past one o'clock" is composed of three stanzas of four lines each:

> Уже второй должно быть ты легла
> В ночи Млечпуть серебряной Окою
> Я не спешу и молниями телеграмм
> Мне незачем тебя будить и беспокоить
> как говорят инцидент исперчен
> любовная лодка разбилась о быт
> С тобой мы в расчете и не к чему перечень
> взаимных болей бед и обид
> Ты посмотри какая в мире тишь
> Ночь обложила небо звездной данью
> в такие вот часы встаешь и говоришь
> векам истории и мирозданию[132]

[132] Mayakovsky, "[Neokonchennoe]," in PSS, T. 10, 287.

> [Past one o'clock you must have gone to bed / The Milky Way flows like the silver Oka in the night / I'm in no rush and telegrams of lightning / I will not send to wake and \ trouble you / as they say the incident is played out / love's boat smashed on the daily round / You and I are even and there is no use / for a list of mutual pains slights and insults / Just look what silence is upon the world / Night has laid a starry tax upon the sky / in just such hours one stands and speaks / to centuries to history and all creation]

The poem's complex metrical structure illustrates Mayakovsky's facility in stretching aspects of classical poetry to fit his own particular aesthetic. He uses pure iambic pentameter in the first two lines, in which the speaker implicitly compares his sleeping lover to the Milky Way galaxy. On a superficial reading, these first two lines seem to have little to do with one another: the first focuses on the intimate personal details of the speaker's life, the second concerns existence on a grand scale. However, this poem, like much of Mayakovsky's poetry, elevates the personal to the level of the universal. These two iambic lines emphasize the equivalency Mayakovsky draws between the individual—himself in particular—and the universe as a whole. By placing the personal concerns of his poetic persona alongside the eternal and abstract, Mayakovsky blurs the line between the metaphysical ode and the elegy.

The poem's third and fourth lines are in iambic hexameter: the alexandrine meter used by Pushkin in his philosophical poems, which could also be characterized as nineteenth-century variants of the metaphysical ode due to their solemn contemplation of the eternal. Mayakovsky's use of the alexandrine here is entirely focused on the profoundly personal: the poetic persona addresses his distant lover, assuring her that he will not "wake and trouble [her]" with "the lightning of telegrams." By using the traditionally lofty alexandrine to depict the intimate details of a relationship, Mayakovsky once again raises the personal to the level of the existential.

Toward the middle of the poem, the iambic meter begins to break down. In the fifth line, Mayakovsky creates an amalgam of poetic feet: two iambs (*kak govoriát)*, an anapest (*intsidént*),

and an amphibrach (*ispérchen*). This shift from binary to ternary meter constitutes a substantial rhythmic shift, not unlike that of a musical composition switching from 4/4 to 3/4 time. I interpret this shift as a transition to the heart of the poetic speaker's distress: the failure of his romantic relationship. The iamb's solemn serene loftiness cannot adequately communicate the persona's despair, so he begins to switch to the less composed, yet still traditional, ternary meter. The transition is completed in the sixth line, which is entirely in amphibrachic tetrameter: *liubóvnaia lódka razbílas' o byt*. Mayakovsky's poignant metaphor of the "love boat smashed against the daily round," combined with the stark metrical change, contrasts sharply with the poem's first lines. No longer are individual concerns elevated to the universal; the reader is brought sharply down to earth, confronted with the inexorable influence of *byt*, just like the lyric speaker. The acute sense of loss in this line of the poem marks it as resting entirely within the elegiac mode. The same is true of the seventh line, also in amphibrachic tetrameter, in which Mayakovsky's persona continues to lament that his relationship with the addressee has ended. In the poem's final lines, the poetic persona steps outside of his suffering, returning to his existential contemplation of the first lines. The reappearance of iambic meter signals this change.

Mayakovsky's use of both iambic pentameter and the alexandrine meter in the poem's last four lines indicate a metrical return to the poem's beginning. Does the content of these final lines echo that of the first? Rather than addressing his lover, as he does in the opening, Mayakovsky's persona turns outwardly, addressing "the centuries," "history," and "all creation." The poems ends here, without indicating what exactly the persona intends to say in his address to existence. Once again using the solemnity of the metaphysical ode, he prepares the reader for something to come: a condensed summing up of his poetic career along the same thematic line as

At the Top of My Voice. This summing up follows in the fifth and final unfinished poem, and the last poem Mayakovsky ever wrote.[133]

The metrical basis of "I know the power of words" is the alexandrine. Unlike the poem that precedes it, it is entirely composed of iambs. It concerns not only the immortality of the literary Word, thematically echoing *At the Top of My Voice*, but also the Word's ability to bring about physical resurrection:

> Я знаю силу слов я знаю слов набат
> Они не те которым рукоплещут ложи
> От слов таких срываются гроба
> шагать четверкою своих дубовых ножек
> Бывает выбросят не напечатав не издав
> Но слово мчится подтянув подпруги
> звенит века и подползают поезда
> лизать поэзии мозолистые руки
> Я знаю силу слов Глядится пустяком
> Опавшим лепестком под каблуками танца
> Но человек душой губами костяком[134]
>
> [I know the power of words I know of words' alarm / They are not those that earn the crowd's applause / From words like these the coffins come alive / to march on quartets of their oaken legs / At times discarded not printed or published / Still the word rushes on, having tightened the cinch / it rings out for ages and trains crawl forward / to lick the calloused hands of poetry / I know the power of words It looks like nothing / A fallen petal crushed beneath the dance's heels / But it is human in soul, in lips, in its bones]

The poem is composed almost entirely in the alexandrine meter: only two of its eleven lines have a number of iambs other than six. The change in meter from "Past one o'clock..." coincides with a change of tone. Both metrically and tonally, this poem rests more firmly within the bounds of the genre of the metaphysical ode; it lacks the fluctuations in meter and tone that give the other

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[133] Not including Mayakovsky's suicide note, which incorporates altered lines from "Past one o'clock...."
[134] Mayakovsky, "[Neokonchennoe]," in *PSS*, T. 10, 287.

poem its sense of the lyric persona's tortured emotional range. The persona's individuality finds expression in a different manner in "I know the power of words...."

Mayakovsky's use of anaphora in the poem's first line highlights the continued importance of the individual in his poetry. His persona's repetition of the phrase "I know" (*Ia znaiu*) at the beginning of lines and at the caesura emphasizes that he alone is the authority on the poem's subject—the immortality of the Living Word. Here Mayakovsky evokes the Romantic topos of the Poet-Prophet: the lonely figure who, through his poetic gifts, possesses arcane knowledge of the universe. As I have already discussed in the context of his "20 Years of Work" exhibition, Mayakovsky certainly felt misunderstood by Soviet society and his own peers toward the end of his life. Through this poem, Mayakovsky brings the Poet-Prophet topos alive in a new way. His lyric persona asserts that he alone sees the literary Word's potential for metaphorical and physical resurrection. This poem is a reassertion not only of Mayakovsky's poetic gifts, which had been brought into question during the 1920s, but also an affirmation of his most urgent poetic project: bringing about immortality for himself and his greatest predecessor by fighting the stagnating forces of bureaucratization and monumentalization.

The poem's second line continues the Poet-Prophet topos, combining it with the similar theme of the poet who is at odds with the crowd. It illustrates that Mayakovsky's lyric persona is not concerned with "earn[ing] the crowd's applause"; the literary Word's true power does not proceed from the approval of outsiders, but from the Word itself. In the following line, Mayakovsky's persona asserts that the true power of the literary Word lies in its ability to give life to inanimate objects—in this case, coffins. The image of coffins walking on their "oaken legs" evokes Mayakovsky early Cubo-Futurist works, particularly the scene of the "Revolt of Things" from *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, in which inanimate objects come alive and

wreak havoc on the City and its inhabitants. The "Revolt of Things" is Mayakovsky's metaphor for the Futurist liberation of literary language from its old, worn-out associations. Through this image, Mayakovsky revisits Futurist aesthetics, recasting them in the light of his entire body of work and his poetic legacy.

In the following lines, Mayakovsky's speaker clarifies his conception of the literary Word. It is not limited to print on the page; the Word is sometimes "discarded," "neither printed or published," but it rushes ever forward into the future. Here, Mayakovsky brings in the concept of the oral Word versus the written Word. When unwritten poetry is committed to memory and retold anew to each generation, it lives on into the future, achieving immortality for itself and its author. In Mayakovsky's poetic universe, however, the oral Word does not rely on people to keep it alive; it lives on in and of itself. This characterization contrasts with Mayakovsky's metaphors in *At the Top of My Voice.* In that poem, the persona declares to his future descendants that they will touch "the iron of [his] lines" like ancient, but still-deadly weapons. In the later poem, the Word is not metaphorically embedded within written lines or books. Instead, Mayakovsky's poetic persona describes literary language as an autonomous living being.

As frequently occurs in Mayakovsky's poetry, metaphor morphs into metaphor, image into image, thus creating a thematic progression of ideas. This approach allows the speaker to transition seamlessly from one idea to the next, often without the reader realizing precisely how the transformation occurred. This phenomenon occurs with the walking coffin: first, the image of the coffin walking on four legs changes into a running horse, which the Word rides onward, "having tightened the cinch." The next image compares the unpublished Word to a bell that "rings out for ages." Despite this comparison of literary language to a seemingly inanimate object, we get the sense that the bell is not being rung by an outside force. It produces the sound

of ringing of its own volition, bringing us back to the concept of the autonomous oral Word. Then, the image of the rushing horse turns into the trains that "crawl forward to lick the calloused hands of poetry." The Word's power to transform objects from solemn stand-ins for death, like the coffin, to symbols of technological advancement, like trains, reflects its ability to propel things forward in time. Poetry continually updates objects, themes, and people to reflect the times. In contrast to *At the Top of My Voice*, the speaker of this poem presents his poetry not as an ancient relic to be discovered by future generations, but as an agent of radical transformation. The walking coffin represents the Word's ability to resurrect the dead. The coffin's continued transformation signifies the Word's power to go even further: to create life.

Continuing his metaphorical depictions of the Word's true power, Mayakovsky's persona explicitly compares it to a human being for the first time. In the eighth line, he likens poetry to a workman with calloused hands. Through this metaphor, Mayakovsky introduces the poem's Christological element. The image of poetry as the calloused-handed workman evokes Christ the carpenter. It hearkens back to Mayakovsky's poem "The Poet-Worker" [«Поэт рабочий»] (1918), in which the poetic persona asserts that the poets are not decadent wordsmiths or social parasites, but laborers first and foremost: they "work the oak of people's heads."[135] In "I know the power of words...," poetry itself becomes the agent of this labor—its hands are calloused from developing the minds and hearts of the people. In "The Poet-Worker," Mayakovsky invokes Christ's exhortation to His disciples that they should become "fishers of men":

> Конечно,
> почтенная вещь — рыбачить.
> Вытащить сеть.
> В сетях осетры б!
> Но труд поэтов — почтенный паче —

[135] Mayakovsky, "Poet-rabochii," in *PSS*, T. 2, 18.

людей живых ловить, а не рыб.[136]

> [Of course, / it is an honorable thing, to fish. / To drag in the net. / Let there be sturgeon in the nets! / But the labor of poets is even more honorable: / to catch human beings, and not fish.]

Here, Mayakovsky explicitly equates the work of Christ and the disciples to the work of poets. They all use the power of language to bring about change in people's souls. In the case of Christ's followers, this change ultimately brings about their resurrection and eternal life in Heaven. Mayakovsky uses Christological imagery in his late poetry to illustrate how the poet and the literary Word facilitate a different kind of resurrection and immortality.

Mayakovsky's particular resurrection exists on two different levels in this poem. First, there is the resurrection of "dead" poetic language, the hearkening back to the poet's Cubo-Futurist beginnings that I have already described. Second, there is the poet's metaphorical resurrection through the unfailing vitality and urgency of his poetry, which delivers him from obscurity. In this poem, Mayakovsky recapitulates the Horatian monumental theme without mentioning a monument at all—the Word itself becomes the monument that allows for the poet's immortality. By combining these two conceptions of resurrection and eternal life, Mayakovsky presents a summing up of his poetic career, from anarchic rebellious Cubo-Futurist to an engineer of souls. His use of the alexandrine throughout the poem reinforces the connection to the Horatian theme: Pushkin's monumental ode is also written in the alexandrine. Not only does Mayakovsky recapitulate his career in this poem, but he also connects himself to a long line of poetic succession, joining the ranks of other poets who attained immortality before him.

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[136] Ibid.

In the final "quatrain" of "I know the power of words...," Mayakovsky uses anaphora to restate his persona's knowledge of the Word's power in a new way. A subtle shift in tone occurs at this point in the poem. The poetic persona declares that "[the Word] looks like nothing, / A fallen petal crushed beneath the dance's heels," contrasting its many capabilities already enumerated by him with its deceptively simple appearance. The metaphor of the crushed flower petal evokes a tenderness that has not been present in the poem up to this point. Its comparative pathos points to the lyrical tendency of Mayakovsky's poetry, which some of his contemporaries had censured as antithetical to the leftist avant-garde project of revolutionary literature. Clare Cavanagh addresses the Soviet literary bureaucracy's rejection of Mayakovsky, pointing out that despite Kornei Chukovsky's assertion in a well-known 1920 lecture that Mayakovsky and Akhmatova represented diametrically opposed cultural and poetic impulses, both poets suffered similar treatment at the hands of Soviet literary critics:

> For all their cultural and ideological differences, [...] both poets were diagnosed with variants of the same disease by Soviet critics in the twenties. This illness took the form of incurable lyricitis, though its name varied depending upon the patient. Mayakovsky suffered throughout his brief lifetime from chronic "mayakovskovitis" (*maiakovshchina*), while Akhmatova was apparently plagued for decades by contagious "akhmatovitis" (*akhmatovshchina*) requiring extended periods of enforced isolation.[137]

Mayakovsky perceived that his "lyricitis" had to be cured if he wanted to continue to write poetry in the Soviet Union. During his final days, he even submitted to a program of "re-education" at the hands of RAPP, as Shklovsky testifies in his account of his last meeting with the poet.[138] Mayakovsky wanted, on some level, to assimilate into the political and literary milieu at this time, but this poem reveals an unwavering dedication to his own

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[137] Clare Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 23.
[138] Shklovsky, *O Maiakovskom*, 218.

"mayakovskovitis." He opposes the literary bureaucracy's critical reception of his poetry to his speaker's understanding of the Word's true power. The crowd's acceptance signifies little when the Poet-Prophet has received the Word from the literary tradition of the past and transmits it into the future.

The final lines of this poem present a strong response to those who criticized Mayakovsky's approach to revolutionary poetry**.** Here, Mayakovsky goes beyond Pushkin's prophet, whom the voice of God commands to "burn the hearts of people with the Word." In Pushkin's poem, literary language has the power to transform humans. In Mayakovsky's poem, not only does the Word transform, but it becomes human in and of itself. The poetic persona proclaims in the final line that the Word "is human in soul, in its lips, in its bones." Mayakovsky builds on the biblical theme of Pushkin's poem, thus completing the work his predecessor's Poet-Prophet began. While critics opposed his attempts to build a state-sanctioned version of Communism through poetry, Mayakovsky was creating his own ideal of revolutionary poetry: poetry that abolishes death.

In the Christian tradition, the biblical prophets prepare the way for Christ's coming through their Word—both their oral proclamations and the written Scriptures. Christ is the Word made flesh, as described in the Book of John: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."[139] Like the biblical prophets, Pushkin's Poet-Prophet uses his Word to prepare the way for a new existence, in which the Word is "made flesh." If Pushkin's poem exists in a kind of Old Testament time, Mayakovsky's poem represents New Testament time. In it, the covenant of

[139] Jn 1:14 KJV.

transformative literary language put in place by Pushkin is fulfilled. The Word reaches its full potential, and becomes human, thus ensuring a future resurrection.

At this point, one might ask why Mayakovsky uses biblical and christological imagery so prominently in a poem summing up his own poetic legacy. Throughout his oeuvre, he depicts God in terms ranging from the dismissive to the antagonistic. However, his poetic personae depict themselves as Christ figures in some of his earliest poems, years before Blok placed Christ at the head of the Bolshevik "apostles" in *The Twelve* [«Двенадцать»] (1918). Mayakovsky borrows elements of Christian theology and incorporates them into his conception of the building of a Communist utopia. While Mayakovsky inherited the tendency to borrow religious imagery from the Symbolist tradition, he makes it his own, creating his own Mayakovskian theology.

Mayakovsky's poetic personae are often ineffectual, impotent versions of Christ, as in *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*. Their tragedy lies in their failure to establish a new world order. Instead of becoming martyrs for the revolutionary cause, Mayakovsky's Christ figures martyr themselves through suicide. This theme reasserts itself in the long poem about *About This,* when the poetic persona sees a version of himself standing on a bridge over the Neva, and identifies him as "the savior":

Вон
от заставы
идет человечек.
За шагом шаг вырастает короткий.
Луна
голову вправила в венчик.
Я уговорю,
чтоб сейчас же,
чтоб в лодке.
Это — спаситель!
Вид Иисуса.
Спокойный и добрый,
венчанный в луне.

Он ближе.
Лицо молодое безусо.
Совсем не Исус.
Нежней.
Юней.[140]

[There / from the barrier / a little man walks. / His short figure grows with every step. / The moon / has set a crown on his head. / I'll persuade / him to immediately / get into a boat. / It's the savior! / The appearance of Jesus. / Tranquil and kind, / crowned in the moon. / He comes closer. / The young face is unbearded. / It's not Jesus at all. / More tender. / Younger.]

The man on the bridge undergoes several subsequent transformations, until he becomes a boy preparing to kill himself with a razor. The wind snatches away his suicide note, and the poetic persona thinks to himself: "How much / like me he looks! / Horrible."[141] Thus the radiant savior, whose fate it is to sacrifice himself for the good of all creation, becomes an ineffectual reflection of the despairing poetic persona. He desires to save himself and humanity by bringing about a new existence in an ideal Communist future, but utterly fails to do so. Due to the poet's inability to establish a transformed human existence, the Word takes over the immortality project and succeeds where the poet cannot. It is the true "Christ," appearing in human form to accomplish the posthumous immortality described by the poets who came before, from Horace to Pushkin.

Mayakovsky accomplishes two aims through this final fragment. First, he establishes the connection between his pursuit of immortality and that of his forebears, especially Pushkin. By taking up the ancient theme of the eternal monument, Mayakovsky places himself at the end of a long line of poetic succession. At the same time, he presents an entirely new interpretation of this theme, in which the monument becomes the living "Word made flesh." Combined with its intertextual dialogue with Pushkin's "Prophet," Mayakovsky's novel interpretation reinforces the

[140] Mayakovsky, *Pro eto*, in *PSS*, T. 4, 155.
[141] Ibid., 156.

poet's assertion that he alone understands the true meaning of Pushkin's poetry and legacy. Through this understanding, Mayakovsky effectively revitalizes Pushkin's posthumous legacy, thereby completing Pushkin's quest for immortality through poetry and "resurrecting" him.

Second, Mayakovsky affirms the transformative quality of his entire body of poetry and of the poetic tradition as a whole. His persona presents literary language as a powerful force capable not only of propelling his legacy into the future, but of raising the dead. Such convictions contrast sharply with the state of Mayakovsky's affairs near the end of his life. His persecution at the hands of the literary bureaucracy and the public's growing lack of understanding of his work did not bode well for his future posthumous legacy. Mayakovsky's brand of revolutionary literary language was falling out of favor as the canonization of Socialist Realism loomed on the horizon. In a last-ditch effort to protect himself from the malignant force of the literary bureaucracy, Mayakovsky makes one last poetic statement in defense of his art.

The strong presence of the lyrical impulse in Mayakovsky's final poems indicates that he considered the lyric to be an essential part of his legacy. Based on the poet's notebooks, it is clear that both the introduction to *At the Top of My Voice* and the unfinished fragments were being written simultaneously.[142] Mayakovsky's friends have stated that he intended the fragments to be part of a second introduction to the long poem—a lyrical introduction.[143] The language and imagery of the fragments supports this fact: they are unquestionably lyrical in nature. The image of poetry as a crushed flower petal reiterates highlights the lyrical strain of the fragment. If these fragments are essential components of Mayakovsky's harmonium, what do they tell us about the way he reads the sum of his life's work?

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[142]Notes to "[Neokonchennoe]," in *PSS*, T. 10, 376-377.
[143] Ibid.

The lyrical fragments indicate that Mayakovsky's harmonium strongly affirms the value and necessity of lyric poetry. The poetic persona in *At the Top of My Voice* remarks that he has "humbled himself" and "stood on the throat of his own song" many times over the years, in order to stifle his lyric voice. The unfinished fragments show that, in his completed final poem, Mayakovsky intended to defiantly state his dedication to his deeply felt lyrical impulse. This is not to say that Mayakovsky would have abandoned his equally strong impulse toward the political. To the contrary: Mayakovsky's final affirmation of his "lyricitis" constitutes a radical statement of poetic self-acceptance in the face of the literary bureaucracy.

Mayakovsky's refusal to suppress either of his poetic impulses allows him the "secret freedom" both he and Pushkin desired. By rejecting the censure of the Soviet literary bureaucracy, the poet denies its power over him. Thus, the poet's self-affirmation and acceptance provide a metaphorical escape from death. Even further, Mayakovsky's refusal to end his career with a repudiation of his past vacillations between the lyrical and political creates a new kind of harmonium: the harmonium as a work-in-progress. Paradoxically, Mayakovsky's harmonium resists summation. His final unfinished work presents the summation of his poetic career as an ongoing debate between the two "sides" of his poetic personality, of which there can be no winner. While the real-life Mayakovsky may have succeeded in "placing the period of a bullet at the end of [his] sentence," as one of his poetic speakers considers doing in *The Backbone Flute* [«Флейта-позвоночник»] (1915), his harmonium's persona makes no definitive final statement, leaving the reader with no punctuation at all.[144]

[144] Mayakovsky, whether deliberately or not, leaves all fragments of his planned long poem without any kind of punctuation. He resists putting a period at the end of his life both literally and metaphorically.

The last lines of Mayakovsky's final poem drive home its sense of resisting a conclusion. Its final quatrain is missing its last line, leaving the penultimate line unrhymed:

> Я знаю силу слов Глядится пустяком
> Опавшим лепестком под каблуками танца
> Но человек душой губами костяком

The absence of the final line produces a jolt not unlike the feeling of missing the bottom step on a staircase. Lipking argues that "the longest poem a poet makes is the ensemble of all his poems together."[145] Mayakovsky's poetic persona bows out, leaving the reader to fill in the final line, not just of this individual poem, but of the accumulated mass of all his poems. Like Pushkin's narrator in *Eugene Onegin*, he parts with his own narrative prematurely before reaching its denouement:

> Блажен, кто праздник Жизни рано
> Оставил, не допив до дна
> Бокала полного вина,
> Кто не дочел Ее романа
> И вдруг умел расстаться с ним,
> Как я с Онегиным моим.[146]
>
> [Blessed is he who leaves the festival of life early, / Not having drained / Its full bottle of wine, / Who did not read life's novel to the end / And parted with it suddenly, / As I part with my Onegin.]

The concept of secret freedom is present in both Pushkin's abrupt ending to his novel-in-verse and the absence of closure in Mayakovsky's final poem. In *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin's poetic play exemplifies the poet's utter control over his narrative, as if to say "I will end the story here, just because I can." This capricious outlook is an essential component of the poet's secret freedom, what Svetlana Boym calls the "dynamic and playful process of self-creation," which

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[145] Lipking, *Life of the Poet*, 70.
[146] Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*, in *Sochineniia*, T. 2, 336.

both Pushkin and Mayakovsky exhibit in their poetry. The lack of ending in Mayakovsky's poem goes much farther than Pushkin's ending to *Eugene Onegin*. By refusing to sum up his career in his last poem, Mayakovsky escapes the necessity of completing his own epitaph. If the poet has no epitaph, then the poetic fact of his death is thrown into doubt. In this sense, Mayakovsky's poetic persona succeeds in eluding death. He leaves behind no definitive statement of ideological clarity for the state to mold into an acceptable monumental form, and no last words for his poetic descendants to inscribe on his *tombeau*. In so doing, Mayakovsky attempts to escape from the forces of monumentalization and bureaucratization.

Despite a valiant effort, Mayakovsky was ultimately unable to save his legacy from these powerful forces. His "second death" at the hands of the Stalinist regime meant that his legacy would meet the same fate as Pushkin's. Mayakovsky would become a disembodied myth, an idealized poet-monument, whose political poems school children would be required to memorize, and whose likeness would stand in his "official bureaucratic bronze jacket" on Mayakovsky Square in Moscow.[147] However, all hope is not lost. There is still a chance of the poet's rescue from monumentalization and bureaucratization.

Being all too aware of Pushkin's posthumous fate, Mayakovsky anticipated that the same fate awaited him as well. Had he not felt this danger, he would not have worked so hard to prevent it. Even with all his efforts, he knew that his own poems could only have so much of an effect on his legacy. It would ultimately fall to his descendants to resurrect him, as he had tried to resurrect Pushkin. Pushkin and Mayakovsky's descendants would be at a great advantage. According to early unofficial Soviet ideology, humanity would eventually achieve immortality

[147] Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks,* 138.

through scientific advancement. Mayakovsky was not the only Soviet writer to latch on to this idea, but for him, it was profoundly personal: the possibility of physical resurrection was necessary in order to free Pushkin and himself from their physical and metaphorical deaths. In certain poems he wrote in the twenties, Mayakovsky left a blueprint with instructions for his future resurrection. Through a combination of close reading, biographical analysis, and cultural analysis, we can decipher these blueprints to determine precisely how literary language, particularly poetry, ostensibly leads to the poet's resurrection in the flesh.

Chapter 4: Mayakovsky's Poetic Immortalization Program

In the previous chapter, I focused on Mayakovsky's use of his iambic dialogue with Pushkin as a tool to revitalize Pushkin's legacy. Mayakovsky's use of iambs is intimately connected with the monumental theme, which he manipulates to show the dangers of posthumous bureaucratization and monumentalization. The present chapter is meant to illustrate the antidote Mayakovsky proposes for the destructive forces already experienced by Pushkin and which Mayakovsky fears he will also experience after his own death. The cure for both the death of the poet and his legacy is resurrection. In several of his later poems, Mayakovsky lays out his plan for immortalizing himself that he might be resurrected in the future. This immortalization program goes beyond Mayakovsky's metaphorical revitalization of Pushkin in the iambic poems—it is intended to bring about the physical resurrection of Mayakovsky himself, and, by extension, Pushkin.

Mayakovsky's dialogue with Pushkin's monumental theme continues in the narrative poem "To the Workers of Kursk, Who Mined the First Ore, a Temporary Monument by Vladimir Mayakovsky" [«Рабочим Курска, добывшим первую руду, временный памятник работы Владимира Маяковского»] (1923). The poetic persona's disdain for conventional monuments is revealed in the title of the poem itself. The concept of a "temporary monument" in the context of Russian poetic history is practically an oxymoron. Recall that in Pushkin's Horatian ode, the poetic speaker asserts that he will be famed "so long as in the sublunar world / but one poet still lives"—namely, for eternity. Before the poem has even begun, Mayakovsky has subverted Pushkin's conception of the monument, proclaiming that the present work is not meant to stand unchanged in perpetuity, but that it is provisional and subject to future improvements.

To some extent, the content of "To the Workers of Kursk" reflects that of the classical ode; Mayakovsky's poetic persona, like those of eighteenth-century poets Lomonosov and Derzhavin, writes in praise of his subjects' heroic feats and their strength in the midst of adversity. However, Mayakovsky chooses as the subjects for his epic not illustrious figures but a nameless group of proletarian miners, who mined the first ore deposits near Kursk in 1923.[148] Mayakovsky's poetic persona rejects the bombastic classicism of the past, glorifying instead the average worker, who is engaged in the everyday fight of building Communism:

Стало:
коммунизм —
обычнейшее дело.
Нынче
словом
не пофанфарониte —
шею крючь
да спину гни.
На вершочном
незаметном фронте
завоевываются дни.
Я о тех,
кто не слыхал
про греков
в драках,
кто
не читал
про Муциев Сцевол,
кто не знает,
чем замечательны Гракхи, —
кто просто работает —
грядущего вол.[149]

[Communism / has become / a most ordinary thing. / Now / with the word / you don't bluster— / you bend your neck / and hunch your spine. / On the imperceptible / surface battlefront / the days are won. / I speak of those / who have not heard / about the tussling / of the Greeks, / who / have not read / about the Mucius Scaevolas, / who do not know /

[148] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 265.
[149] Mayakovsky, "Rabochim Kurska, dobyvshim pervuiu rudu, vremennyi pamiatnik raboty Vladimira Maiakovskogo," in *PSS*, T. 5, 151-152.

what makes the Gracchi brothers so remarkable, / who simply work— / the oxen of the future.]

Mayakovsky references the ancient Roman figures Gaius Mucius Scaevola and the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchi as exalted figures from a monumentalized past. They may have accomplished great deeds of heroism and changed civilization, but their legacies are ineffectual and meaningless when it comes to affecting the daily struggles of the proletariat. The anonymous group of the workers of Kursk become the heroes worthy of praise in Mayakovsky's ode.

In his typical odic style combining the panegyric mode with exaggerated and flippant understatement, Mayakovsky's poetic persona mythologizes the events that led to the workers' mining of iron ore. He delves deep into the primordial past, describing the formation of the Earth's layers using imagery reminiscent of the Creation in Genesis:

Я
не геолог,
но я утверждаю,
что до нас
было
под Курском
голо.
Обыкновеннейшие
почва и подпочва.
Шар земной,
а в нем —
вода
и всяческий пустяк.[150]

[I / am not a geologist, / but I affirm, / that before us / below Kursk / it was / bare. / The most ordinary / soil and subsoil. / The Earth's sphere, and in it— / water / and all kinds of nonsense.]

By recasting the odic genre in his own idiosyncratic medium, Mayakovsky strongly differentiates himself from the classical tradition, emphasizing that his provisional monument is

[150] Ibid., 154.

not lofty and distant but is contemporary and relevant to the present Soviet reality. Mayakovsky incorporates many references to well-known figures from the period, including journalists, artists, fellow members of *LEF*, and Anatolii Lunacharskii. The poetic persona ridicules Lunacharskii's 1923 slogan "Back to Ostrovskii!," which instructed Soviet writers and dramatists to look to classical theatre and literature for guidance in creating proletarian art for the new era.[151] Mayakovsky's speaker likens this idealization of classical art to a return "to the mammoth."[152] According to Mayakovsky, the old art is insufficient to properly memorialize the industrial achievements of the workers of Kursk.

Conventional monuments and jubilees are similarly unsuited to consecrate the workers' labor. The poetic persona contrasts famous Russian writers and the many boulevards named after them with the nameless masses of the proletariat:

Я считаю,
обходя
бульварные аллеи,
скольких
наследили юбилеи?

Пушкин,
Достоевский,
Гоголь,
Алексей Толстой
в бороде у Льва.
Не завидую —
у нас
бульваров много,
каждому
найдется
бульвар. [...]
Обозначат
в бронзе

[151] William David Gunn, "Back to Ostrovsky!": Reclaiming Russia's national playwright on the early Soviet stage," PhD diss., (University of Southern California, 2012), ix.
[152] Mayakovsky, "Rabochim Kurska…," in *PSS,* T. 5, 164.

чином чин.
Ну, а остальные?
Как их слепите?
Тысяч тридцать
курских
женщин и мужчин.[153]

[I count, / walking / the boulevards, / of how many / have jubilees left their traces? / Pushkin, / Dostoevsky, / Gogol, / Aleksei Tolstoi / in Lev's beard. / I don't envy them— / we / have many boulevards, / everyone / will get / their own. / [...] They will label them / in bronze / rank by rank. / Well, and the rest? / How will you stick them together? / Thirty thousand / Kursk / women and men.]

Mayakovsky's speaker states outright that he does not envy Pushkin or Dostoevsky's memorialization. The posthumous commemoration that awaits him and the other famous writers is unremarkable: there are plenty of streets in Russia to bear their names. By including himself among those writers who will receive their own boulevard after death, the speaker differentiates himself from the anonymous workers of Kursk. They will enjoy an ideal legacy: the kind that Mayakovsky's poetic speaker wishes for himself yet knows is impossible for him. He imagines the workers' future hundred-year jubilee, at which "the Sakulins / will not pour out / their balm of speeches."[154] Instead, a more convincing speaker will deliver the speech:

[...]
в юбилее
не расхвалит
языкастый лектор.
Речь
об вас
разгромыхает трактор —
самый убедительный электролектор.[155]

[...at your jubilee / a sharp-tongued lector / will not lavish you with praise. / A speech / about you / the tractor will thunder out— / the most convincing electro-lector.]

[153] Ibid., 163.
[154] Ibid., 164.
[155] Ibid., 165.

The poetic persona's ideal posthumous memorialization replaces ineffectual academic speechifying with the sound of heavy industry. The kind of jubilee celebration Mayakovsky imagines for the workers of Kursk reflects the antithesis of the most well-known and well-documented of a poet's jubilees: Pushkin's. The most famous of these celebrations was the opening of Opekushin's monument in Pushkin in Moscow in 1880. Dostoevsky's speech on that occasion remains one of the most influential writings on Pushkin's legacy to date. Only two years before *To the Workers of Kursk* was written, Blok gave his famous speech "On the Poet's Purpose" on the eighty-fourth anniversary of Pushkin's death. By presenting the workers' jubilee as a favorable alternative to celebrations of Pushkin's legacy to date, Mayakovsky emphasizes the ineffectual nature of conventional memorialization in both the pre- and postrevolutionary eras.

For Mayakovsky's poetic persona, the most ineffectual aspect of posthumous memorialization is the monument. His antipathy toward monumentalization rests at the heart of this poem. Mayakovsky borrows the Pushkinian monumental metaphor, transforming it from a metaphysical embodiment of the poet's legacy to a purely physical practical one:

Курскам
ваших мраморов
не нужно.
Но зато —
на бегущий памятник
курьерский
рукотворный
не присядут
гадить
вороны.[156]

[Kursks / do not need / your marble. / But at least / on the rushing monument / of an

[156] Ibid., 164-165.

express train / made by human hands / the crows / will not sit / to shit.]

Instead of a static monument, whose solemn and dignified bearing is spoiled by bird droppings, the speaker favors a new kind of dynamic and industrial monument: an express train. The echo of Pushkin's destructive statues in motion—the Bronze Horseman, the Commander in *The Stone Guest*, and the Golden Cockerel—is purposeful. Mayakovsky reverses Pushkin's myth of the destructive statue once again here. Rather than embodying death and destruction, the industrial monument in motion embodies life and progress.

The most telling aspect of the monumental theme in this poem can only be fully explored with detailed knowledge of contemporary politico-cultural events and of Mayakovsky's biography. In the poem, the speaker names two sculptors, both of whom were active at the time the poem was written:

Вам
не скрестишь ручки,
не напялишь тогу,
не поставишь
нянькам на затор…
Ну и слава богу!
Но зато —
на бороды дымов,
на тело гулов
не покусится
никакой Меркулов.
Трем Андреевым,
всему академическому скопу,
копошащемуся
у писателей в усах,
никогда
не вылепить
ваш красный корпус,
заводские корпуса.[157]

[157] Ibid., 163-164.

> [You / won't have your little arms crossed, / they won't pull a toga on you, / won't place you / as an obstacle in the path of wet nurses... / And thank God! / Thankfully — / on the beards of your smoke, / on the body of your rumblings / no "Merkulov" / will interfere. / The three Andreevs, / the whole academic throng, / fussing / in writers' whiskers, / never / will sculpt / your red bulk, / your factory buildings.]

Nikolai Andreev, his brother Vyacheslav, and Sergei Merkurov were prominent sculptors both before and after the October Revolution. Nikolai Andreev is most well known for sculpting the famous impressionistic statue of Gogol on Nikitskii Boulevard in Moscow in 1909. Merkurov completed Lev Tolstoy's death mask in 1911.[158] In 1918, Merkurov and the Andreevs devoted themselves to Lenin and Lunacharskii's plan of monumental propaganda.[159] The plan, instituted by Lenin's decree and signed by Lenin, Lunacharskii, and Stalin on April 12, 1918, called for the removal of tsarist monuments and "the mobilization of artistic forces and the organization of a widespread call for the production of monument projects, intended to commemorate the great days of the Russian socialist Revolution."[160] Given these sculptors' dedication to building a new socialist society, why does Mayakovsky's poetic persona refer to them so dismissively in his poem, deliberately misspelling Merkurov's name and referring to the two Andreev brothers as a trio?

One explanation of his ridicule is that the sculptors were still affiliated with the old obsolete art in Mayakovsky's mind. Nikolai Andreev had some connections to the *peredvizhniki* school of visual art before the Revolution. The persona's mention of the sculptors and other

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[158] Gosudarstvennyi muzei L. N. Tolstogo, "Skul'ptura," accessed November 13, 2021, https://tolstoymuseum.ru/about/our-funds/sculpture/.
[159] Totalarch, "Arkhitektura SSSR i sotsialisticheskikh stran—Leninskii plan monumental'noi propagandy v deistvii," accessed November 7, 2021, http://ussr.totalarch.com/lenin_monument_propaganda.
[160] Vladimir Lenin, Anatolii Lunacharskii, Iosif Stalin, and Nikolai Gorbunov, "Dekret o pamiatnikakh Respubliki," in *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti*, T. 2, ed. S. N. Valk and G. D. Obichkin (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959), 95.

academic artists "fussing in writers' whiskers" could be an oblique reference to both Andreev's statue of Gogol and Merkurov's death mask of Tolstoy. Though these might seem like valid interpretations of the poetic speaker's disdain, the true source of Mayakovsky's antipathy toward the sculptors seems to have little to do with the men themselves or the artists they depicted. *To the Workers of Kursk*, in addition to being an ode in praise of the proletariat, is a pointed and sardonic response to Lenin's plan of monumental propaganda.

Contained within the poem's full title lies a clue to its interpretation. I have already addressed Mayakovsky's labeling of his poem as a "temporary monument." Lenin described his plan of monumental propaganda in a similar way:

> I would call what I am thinking about "monumental propaganda." [...] I am not thinking about eternity or even duration yet. Let it all be temporary. I consider monuments to be even more important than inscriptions: busts or whole figures, perhaps, bas-reliefs, groups. [161]

We cannot know whether Mayakovsky was aware that Lenin used the same word in describing his plan. Still, it was widely known during the Civil War years that there were very little resources for the creation of new monuments. As a result, the first monuments created to fulfill the plan were understood to be "temporary" and were made from nondurable materials like plaster, concrete, and wood.[162] By declaring his poem to be a provisional monument in verse, Mayakovsky at first seems to enthusiastically accept Lenin's cultural plan. Within the poem, however, his speaker delivers a scathing critique of the large-scale monumentalization the project entails. I argue that Mayakovsky subtitles his poem as a temporary monument in order to

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[161] Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Vospominaniia i vpechatleniia* (Moskva: Sovietskaia Rossiia, 1968), 198.

[162] Aleksei Baikov, "Otlit' v gipse i betone: 'monumental'naia propaganda' vremen revoliutsii," *Moskva24*, November 25, 2019, https://www.m24.ru/articles/pamyatniki/17072014/50597.

present it as a favorable alternative to the mass-produced likenesses in plaster and concrete ordered by the regime.

While Lenin planned for the temporary monuments to be eventually replaced with longer-lasting versions, this fact was not enough to satisfy Mayakovsky's desire for a more immediate and physical form of immortality. Lenin's temporary statues nonetheless perpetuate the stagnation that Mayakovsky fears. Many of the monuments constructed under Lenin's plan did not survive beyond several decades. However, the state's manipulation of influential figures' legacies continued until the fall of the Soviet Union. The monument is only the essential first step of the canonization process, the foundation on which posthumous legacy is built. It is not enough to simply erect a monument—the people must be instructed to properly interpret the monument and mythologize the depicted figure as somehow instrumental to the project of Russian Communism. In his initial explanation of monumental propaganda to Lunacharskii, Lenin stresses the significance of using new monuments as occasions for creating new holidays to commemorate the Revolution:

> Special attention must be given to the unveiling of these monuments as well. We ourselves, as well as other comrades and high-profile specialists, can be brought in to make speeches. Let every unveiling be an act of propaganda and a small celebration, and then, on the anniversary of their birth or death, reminders can be given about the great person in question, always, of course, distinctly connecting them to our Revolution and its aims.[163]

Mayakovsky rejects the plan Lenin describes for enlisting Russia's important cultural figures into the service of agitation propaganda. As Lunacharskii remarks in his account of the public's lukewarm response to the plan, "our Modernists and Futurists were especially enraged."[164] The

[163] Lunacharsky, *Vospominaniia*..., 199.
[164] Ibid.

reasons for Mayakovsky's negative response to the plan can be found throughout his poetry and are starkly present in *To the Workers of Kursk*. By glorifying the workers of Kursk as an anonymous multitude and declaring that sculptors "never / will sculpt / [their] red bulk, / [their] factory buildings," Mayakovsky's poetic persona strives to protect their legacy from the kind of canonization espoused within Lenin's plan of monumental propaganda.

Mayakovsky would be preoccupied with the problem of monumentalization for the rest of his poetic career. Through his poems, he attempts to rescue several entities from this posthumous fate, at the same time anticipating that he will become a victim of the process himself. In *To the Workers of Kursk,* Mayakovsky's speaker implies that he will be included among the ranks of those writers who have streets named after them, yet another symptom of monumentalization. Even despite this premonition, Mayakovsky the poet likely did not anticipate the fact that the very same sculptor Merkurov, who created so many monuments under Lenin's plan, would be one of the sculptors brought in to complete his own death mask immediately after his suicide.[165] Mayakovsky became a victim of the very process he fought against.

Lenin's death in January 1924 made the posthumous canonization of cultural and political figures an even more urgent issue for Mayakovsky. According to Lili Brik, Mayakovsky was deeply affected by Lenin's death and viewed the body lying in state approximately ten times.[166] When Mayakovsky began the epic *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, the longest poem he would ever write, the depth of his feeling for the late leader of the Communist Party was clear. However, as noted by Jangfeldt, Mayakovsky cared little about the historical and political details

[165] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 286.
[166] Cited in Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 285.

of Lenin's life.[167] It is no surprise, then, that the sections of the poem that ring the most true are not those that address Lenin as a historical figure but those that use Lenin's death as an opportunity for Mayakovsky's persona to return to his anxiety regarding posthumous monumentalization. The poem's language echoes that of *To the Workers of Kursk,* calling up similar imagery and even using the same word—"balm" [елей]—to describe the official glossy coating with which important cultural and political figures are covered after death:

> Я боюсь,
> чтоб шествия
> и мавзолеи,
> поклонений
> установленный статут
> не залили б
> приторным елеем
> ленинскую
> простоту.[168]
>
> [I fear / that processions / and mausoleums, / the prescribed regulation / of idolatries / will drench / with a cloying balm / Lenin's / simplicity.]

In *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin,* Mayakovsky identifies Lenin as a potential victim of the very plan that he created. His speaker makes no mention of Lenin's authorship of the plan in either this poem or *To the Workers of Kursk*. State censorship would never have allowed Mayakovsky to criticize the foremost Soviet leader, and it is possible that the poet was not conscious of the fact that Lenin was ultimately responsible for the upsurge in monuments and commemorations of important figures. Even if Mayakovsky had been aware of Lenin being the source for the plan of monumental propaganda, he may have ignored it, as confronting the fact would likely have

[167] Ibid.
[168] Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, in *PSS*, T. 6, 234.

caused a fundamental shift in his attitude toward the Soviet Union's future and an existential crisis.

Whatever Mayakovsky's knowledge and opinions were regarding Lenin and monumental propaganda, he never acknowledged the Party leader's involvement and even proclaimed in *LEF* that Lenin would have been categorically against his own monumental canonization. In the journal's first issue of 1924, *LEF* members renounced Gosizdat's advertisement of busts of Lenin by Sergei Merkurov, the very same sculptor previously singled out by Mayakovsky's poetic persona in *To the Workers of Kursk*. The writers present a new kind of iconoclasm that rejects all canonized images of Lenin in their missive to the cultural authorities entitled "Don't Trade in Lenin!" [«Не торгуйте Лениным!»] (1924):

> We are in agreement with the rail workers of Kazan, who, when requesting that an artist furnish their club with a "Hall of Lenin" without busts and portraits, said: "We want no icons."
> We insist:
> Don't turn Lenin into a mechanical stamp.
> Don't print his portraits on posters, oilcloth, plates, cups, or cigarette cases.
> Don't cast Lenin in bronze.
> Do not take away his living gait and human countenance, which he managed to preserve while guiding history along.
> Lenin is still our contemporary.
> He is among the living.
> We need him as a living person, not a dead one.
> Therefore:
> Learn from Lenin, but do not canonize him.[169]

Mayakovsky and the other members of *LEF* retroactively adopt Lenin as a fellow iconoclast, when the Party leader himself championed the cause of monumental propaganda. In order to reconcile himself to the Soviet reality of the 1920s, which did not coincide with his desires and

[169] Levyi front iskusstv, "Ne torguite Leninym!," in *LEF*, no. 5, 1924, 3–4, http://www.ruthenia.ru/sovlit/j/2946.html.

aims, Mayakovsky projected his own idealized concept of Lenin onto the deceased. Notably, *LEF*'s rebuke of the literary authorities was removed from the final publication by the censors. The establishment sought to continue Lenin's project of monumental propaganda and was thus in conflict with the leftist avant-garde and Mayakovsky in particular.

Mayakovsky's attitude toward Pushkin in this period parallels his approach to Lenin's posthumous monumentalization. The poetic speaker of *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* asserts that "Lenin / even now / is more alive than all of the living."[170] Mayakovsky's poetic persona cannot say the same of Pushkin: his greatest predecessor's transformation into a stationary monument had been underway even before Mayakovsky's own poetic career had begun in 1912. By asserting Lenin's continued vitality even after death, Mayakovsky hopes to reverse the process that had already claimed Pushkin's legacy. Mayakovsky strives to free Pushkin from this stagnation in "The Jubilee Poem," an address in which he reverses the Pushkinian destructive statue myth by having his poetic persona converse easily with Pushkin's statue brought to life, thereby forging a deep connection with his predecessor. Mayakovsky uses imagery reminiscent of both his poem to Lenin and *LEF*'s "Don't Trade in Lenin!," both written that same year, to describe Pushkin's canonized posthumous existence:

Я люблю вас,
но живого,
а не мумию.
Навели
хрестоматийный глянец.
Вы
по-моему
при жизни
— думаю —
тоже бушевали.

[170] Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, in *PSS*, T. 6, 233.

Африканец![171]

> [I love you, / but alive, / not a mummy. / They have coated you / in a textbook glaze. / You / I believe / in life / —I think— / also raged. / African!]

The entire poem, and this quotation in particular, presents the attempt of Mayakovsky's persona to chip away at the "textbook glaze" surrounding Pushkin's legacy to reveal his true nature beneath it. By addressing Pushkin as an "African," Mayakovsky hyperbolizes Pushkin's Blackness, his Otherness, in order to jolt the reader out of the conventional reading of Pushkin as the most familiar, archetypical Russian poet. Here, Mayakovsky takes the concept of estrangement and applies it not to poetic language, but to the poet himself. If automatization of linguistic perception is the death of poetry, as Shklovsky implies in "Art as Device," then the stagnation of the poet's legacy, the impossibility of seeing his life and work in new and unconventional ways, is the death of the poet.

More than a change of perception is required, however, in order to successfully vanquish the forces of bureaucratization and monumentalization. Mayakovsky's persona ends the poem with his wish for an unorthodox celebration of his legacy—the destruction of monuments by explosion during his lifetime:

> Мне бы
> памятник при жизни
> полагается по чину.
> Заложил бы
> динамиту
> — ну-ка,
> дрызнь!
> Ненавижу
> всяческую мертвечину!
> Обожаю
> всяческую жизнь![172]

[171] Mayakovsky, "Iubileinoe," in *PSS*, T. 6, 54-55.
[172] Ibid., 56.

> [For me / a monument during my lifetime / would befit my station. / I would lay down / dynamite / — come on, / explode! / I hate every kind of dead flesh! / I love / every kind of life!]

The rhyme of *dryzn'* (imperative mood of the verb *dryznut'*, a neologism that connotes the sound of an explosion) with *zhizn'* (life) suggests that in this poem, true poetic legacy is about destroying dead, static monuments and trying to create "living" ones. Mayakovsky's poetic persona makes clear the distinction between living and dead monuments earlier in the poem, when he says that he loves the "live" Pushkin rather than his mummified monumental stand-in.

Within this poem, Mayakovsky presents the destruction of monuments as a means of fighting against the bureaucratization and monumentalization of the poet's legacy. The obliteration of monumental "dead flesh," the metaphorical embodiment of death in the poem, is synonymous with life. At the same time, this method offers no path toward immortality for the poet. There exists within Mayakovsky's poetry another, more potent and productive avenue toward victory over death: the poet's idiosyncratic immortalization program. This program is spelled out in a number of Mayakovsky's late poems and can be found in its fledgling stages in *To the Workers of Kursk.*

The poetic persona of *To the Workers of Kursk* asserts that factory buildings are a more fitting monument to the anonymous group of workers than any conventional monument of the kind mass produced for Lenin's program of monumental propaganda. An essential part of their legacy's resistance to conventional monumental canonization is the connection between their labor and concrete physical objects. The factory buildings, the express train, the thundering tractor all serve as superior reminders of the workers' heroic labor. More than that, these objects, these man-made anti-monuments, contain physical traces of the workers' labor, which, as

Masing-Delic argues in *Abolishing Death*, might be used in the future to resurrect the individuals engaged in such labor:

> It is thus worthwhile to perform memorable deeds and leave a lasting labor legacy behind, since such deeds absorb the particles of the deceased's vital energies, encapsulating them, as it were, and preserving his soul in matter. A struggle for the success of the Revolution, a new scientific theory, a poem or building, an invention, an idea, a machine or any other labor product, offers a point of departure not just for recollecting a deceased but also for re-collecting him, particularly if supplemented by some item establishing his authorship.[173]

Though Mayakovsky's poetic persona does not specifically mention immortality in *To the Workers of Kursk*, he proclaims at the end of the poem that it is precisely the workers' mining of the iron ore that ensures them an honored place in the halls of glory:

> Двери в славу -
> двери узкие,
> но как бы ни были они узки,
> навсегда войдете
> вы,
> кто в Курске
> добывал
> железные куски.[174]
>
> [The doors into glory / are narrow, / but no matter how narrow they are, / forever will enter / you / who in Kursk / reached / the pieces of iron ore.]

These lines bring to mind Christ's words to his disciples in the Book of Matthew: "Again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."[175] The workers of Kursk have performed the heroic labor required to enter the earthly afterlife as imagined by Mayakovsky. This immortality is both metaphorical and literal.

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[173] Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death*, 13.
[174] Mayakovsky, "Rabochim Kurska…," in *PSS*, T. 5, 165.
[175] Matt. 19:24 KJV.

The monumental propaganda envisioned by Lenin and carried out by the cultural authorities is ineffectual because it provides no foothold toward immortality. Mayakovsky's "temporary monument" of verse in this poem is meant to stand in for something greater to follow later: a future resurrection, after which conventional monuments will become a thing of the past. Concrete or marble likenesses of prominent cultural figures will be rendered pointless in the face of Mayakovsky's vision of true immortality. His man-made anti-monuments retain the vital energies of those with whom they are associated and thus allow for the individual's future reconstruction and resurrection.

Mayakovsky's poetic speaker demands this very kind of resurrection in his narrative poem *About This*. When the "quiet chemist" of the Workshop of Human Resurrections contemplates whom to resurrect from the twentieth century, the speaker cries out for the chemist to resurrect him:

> Крикну я
> вот с этой,
> с нынешней страницы:
> — Не листай страницы!
> Воскреси!
> Сердце мне вложи!
> Кровищу —
> до последних жил.
> В череп мысль вдолби![176]
>
> [I cry / from this, / from the present page: / Don't turn the page! / Resurrect me! / Plant in me a heart! / Pour blood into me— / to the last veins. / Chisel thought into my skull!]

The imagery of these lines evokes a different kind of resurrection, perhaps the most iconic in all of Russian poetry: the death and resurrection via kenosis of Pushkin's poetic persona in "The Prophet." In Pushkin's poem, a six-winged seraph violently removes the speaker's tongue and

[176] Mayakovsky, *Pro eto*, in *PSS*, T. 4, 182.

heart and replaces them with a serpent's sting and a burning coal, respectively. He lies in the desert "like a corpse" and is only truly resurrected when the voice of God calls him to rise and spread His Word throughout the land.[177]

In Mayakovsky's vision of resurrection, Communism's vast scientific advancements of the future replace God's divine power. His persona's certainty that resurrection will be possible in the distant future is plain. However, he is not certain that he will be chosen for resurrection by the "quiet chemist." He decides that he is probably not beautiful enough to be resurrected, unlike his lover, the poem's likeness of Lili Brik. "They will probably resurrect her," Mayakovsky's speaker decides.[178] Still, the fact of the poem's composition, that Mayakovsky's persona appeals to his future resurrectors leaves open the possibility that perhaps, one day, he will achieve immortality through resurrection. He cries out not only from the page of the chemist's book of names but from the page of the poem itself—to us, to the reader. Mayakovsky's speaker calls for his future readers to use his poetry as the means for his reconstruction and resurrection.

Poetry itself is one of the most potent of the Mayakovskian anti-monuments. Poetry's ability to facilitate metaphorical immortality through memory was a thematic staple of Russian verse from the eighteenth century. The Horatian monumental theme is the most well-known example of this phenomenon, but other poems addressing similar themes resonate with Mayakovsky's poetry in particularly enlightening ways. Pushkin's poem "To Ovid" [«К Овидию»] (1821) is one of these. Written during Pushkin's southern exile, not far from the location of Ovid's exile in present-day Romania in the first century AD, the poem creates a dialogue between Pushkin's speaker and Ovid's in *Tristia*. Pushkin echoes Ovid's style by

[177] Pushkin, "Prorok," in *Sochineniia*, T. 1, 385.
[178] Mayakovsky, *Pro eto*, in *PSS*, T. 4, 183.

composing the entire poem in couplets of iambic hexameter. His speaker repeats Ovid's verses as he observes the landscape and remembers a specific moment from *Tristia*, in which Ovid's persona describes walking across a frozen body of water for the first time, in disbelief at the novel phenomenon:

> I can hardly hope for credence—yet since falsehood
> gets no reward, the witness should be believed:
> I've seen the wide sea iced solid, a frozen slippery
> crust holding the under-water still—
> not just seen, either: I've walked the solid sea-lanes,
> crunching their surface dryfoot. [...][179]

By visiting the location of the event Ovid describes and calling to mind the verses associated with it, Pushkin calls up a shade of the Roman poet, as if a part of him has remained behind in Tomis after his death and has been brought back to life by the memory of Pushkin's speaker:

> Я вспомнил опыты несмелые твои,
> Сей день, замеченный крылатым вдохновеньем,
> Когда ты в первый раз вверял с недоуменьем
> Шаги твои волнам, окованным зимой…
> И по льду новому, казалось, предо мной
> Скользила тень твоя, и жалобные звуки
> Неслися издали, как томный стон разлуки.[180]
>
> [I recalled your timid experiments, / the day, marked by winged inspiration, / when, with bewilderment, for the first time you entrusted / your steps to the waves fettered by winter... / And upon new ice, it seemed, before me / glided your shade, and mournful sounds / carried from afar, like a weary cry of parting.]

Pushkin's speaker continues by asserting that Ovid's laurel has not withered, that his legacy remains alive. At the same time, he laments that, unlike Ovid's, his own legacy will likely be

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[179] Ovid, *The Poems of Exile:* Tristia *and* The Black Sea Letters, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 56.
[180] Pushkin, "K Ovidiiu," in *Sochineniia*, T. 1, 256.

forgotten. However, if a distant descendant comes to this same spot, perhaps Pushkin's shade will appear to them, thus continuing the cycle of poetic immortality through verse:

> Но если, обо мне потомок поздний мой
> Узнав, придет искать в стране сей отдаленной
> Близ праха славного мой след уединенный —
> Брегов забвения оставя хладну сень,
> К нему слетит моя признательная тень,
> И будет мило мне его воспоминанье.[181]
>
> [But if my future descendant, / having learned about me, comes to search in this distant country / near these renowned bones for my isolated remains— / Leaving the cold shelter of the banks of oblivion, / My grateful shade will fly to him, / And his remembrance will be dear to me.]

The writing of poetry itself serves as a vehicle for future immortality. Assuming there are readers of the poet's verses in the distant future, they allow the poet to experience a metaphorical resurrection through their reading and interpretation of the poetry. This is the essence of the Horatian theme of immortality. Verses are the ultimate monument: unlike sculpture, they cannot be definitively destroyed. Even if the physical lines are erased or burned or lost to history, the words remain in both the memory of individuals and of the culture as a whole.

Like all of Mayakovsky's poetry, his conception of immortality through poetry is based on his idiosyncratic use of visualized metaphor. Pushkin's metaphorical monument becomes purely physical in his poems. Pushkin's poetic persona declares in his monument ode that "[his] soul in the sacred lyre / will outlive [his] flesh and flee from decay," and Mayakovsky insists that such a thing is physically possible—that physical objects, which verses certainly are in Mayakovsky's poetry, hold the key to becoming immortal and incorruptible. This idea begins to take shape in *About This* and is fully fleshed out in later poems.

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[181] Ibid.

Mayakovsky more seriously explores this aspect of his immortalization program in the 1925 poem "Brooklyn Bridge." The poem is one of the few in his collection of American poems depicting the United States that does not abound with distaste for its citizens' interminably bourgeois way of life—in fact, Mayakovsky's persona addresses the Brooklyn Bridge with reverence and admiration. The enthusiasm of Mayakovsky's poetic persona for a work of American architecture may not immediately seem unusual. After all, I have already established Mayakovsky's great admiration for man-made industrial structures like factories and trains and his branding of them as anti-monuments. However, in "Cross Section of a Skyscraper" [«Небоскреб в разрезе»] (1925), another architectural poem from the same collection, Mayakovsky depicts a sinister side of industrial architecture. His poetic speaker imagines a cross section of a skyscraper in New York City, in which every floor is occupied by all manner of capitalist monstrosities. Despite the building's novelty and its showcasing of American industrial and architectural prowess, Mayakovsky's persona disdainfully condemns it as a relic of pre-Revolutionary Russian society:

> Я смотрю,
> и злость меня берет
> на укрывшихся
> за каменный фасад.
> Я стремился
> за 7000 верст вперед,
> а приехал
> на 7 лет назад.[182]
>
> [I look, / and am overcome by anger / at those sheltered / behind the stone façade. / I rushed forward 7,000 versts to get here, / and arrived / 7 years back.]

[182] Mayakovsky, "Neboskreb v razreze," in *PSS*, T. 7, 69.

For Mayakovsky, not all man-made structures are created equal. The Brooklyn Bridge, though created in the same capitalist dystopia of Mayakovsky's imagining as the skyscraper, carries almost exclusively positive associations. Unlike the skyscraper, the Brooklyn Bridge presents itself to Mayakovsky as an ideal anti-monument. Why might this be the case?

Architecture critic and managing editor of *Harper's Weekly* Montgomery Schuyler wrote of the Brooklyn Bridge in an article entitled "The Bridge as a Monument" (1883). In it, Schuyler describes the bridge as a monument characteristic of its time:

> The Brooklyn Bridge is [...] one of the mechanical wonders of the world, one of the greatest and most characteristic of the monuments of the nineteenth century. [...] It is not unimaginable that our future archaeologist, looking from one of these towers upon the solitude of a mastless river and a dispeopled land, may have no other means of reconstructing our civilization than that which is furnished him by the tower on which he stands.[183]

Schuyler goes on to critique various aspects of John A. Roebling's architectural design, particularly its lack of elegance. At the same time, he argues that bridge's effect is not diminished by its architectural shortcomings, but rather is increased by it. The bridge is remarkable precisely because it sacrifices unnecessary artifice in favor of utility and strength. "It is a noble work of engineering," Schuyler maintains, "it is not a work of architecture."[184] The Brooklyn Bridge is a monument both because it encapsulates the spirit of American culture at the height of industrialization and because its solidity seems to guarantee that it will stand in perpetuity.

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[183] Montgomery Schuyler, "The Bridge as a Monument," *Harper's Weekly* 27, May 26, 1883, accessed March 15, 2020, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020054360&view=1up&seq=315.
[184] Ibid.

Mayakovsky views the Brooklyn Bridge in a similar way. His potent praise for the bridge is based on his interpretation of it as a victory of structure and utility over artifice:

Я горд
вот этой
стальною милей,

живьём в ней
мои видения встали —
борьба
за конструкции
вместо стилей,
расчёт суровый
гаек
и стали.[185]

[I am proud / of this / steel mile, / in it, large as life, / my visions have arisen— / a battle for construction / instead of style, / an austere account / of screws / and steel.]

By the early 1920s, Mayakovsky had embraced the cultural push toward utilitarian art, as evidenced by his leadership of *LEF*. His admiration for the bridge extends beyond a Constructivist view of architecture, however. Like Schuyler, Mayakovsky views the bridge as a monument, albeit an idiosyncratic one. In a section of the poem that is curiously reminiscent of Schuyler's speculation about the bridge's distant future, Mayakovsky's poetic persona describes how it will serve as a means of reconstructing the past after civilization as he knows it will cease to exist:

Если
придёт
окончание света —
планету
хаос
разделает в лоск,
и только
один останется
этот

[185] Mayakovsky, "Bruklinskii most," in *PSS*, T. 7, 85.

над пылью гибели вздыбленный мост,
то,
как из косточек,
тоньше иголок,
тучнеют
в музеях стоя́щие
ящеры,
так
с этим мостом
столетий геолог

сумел
воссоздать бы
дни настоящие.[186]

[If / the end of the world / arrives, / and chaos / has scoured the planet / to a shine, / and there only / remains / this / bridge, reared up over the dust of ruin, / then, / as from tiny bones, / thinner than needles, / are fleshed out / in museums standing / dinosaurs, / so / from this bridge / the geologist of centuries / would / reconstruct / the present day.]

All the tumultuous events that occurred during the bridge's lifetime are imprinted upon the bridge itself. The future geologist deduces from his examination of the bridge that it witnessed despairing unemployed New Yorkers jump from it to their deaths and witnessed the Americans of the 1920s using the popular recent inventions of radio and airplane travel.[187] Most importantly, however, the geologist sees that the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky once stood on the bridge, writing poetry:

Я вижу —
здесь
стоял Маяковский,
стоял
и стихи слагал по слогам.[188]

[I see— / here / stood Mayakovsky, / stood / and composed verses syllable by syllable.]

[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 85-87.
[188] Ibid., 87.

By depicting himself on the Brooklyn Bridge, Mayakovsky harkens back to Walt Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" from the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's speaker reflects on the nature of his existence in the universe as he travels on the Brooklyn ferry, declaring his own immortality to all those who will cross the waters between Manhattan and Brooklyn after him: "I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence [...]."[189] Mayakovsky establishes his dominance over Whitman by emphasizing his presence on the bridge. In his mind, the bridge's monumentality and its iconic architecture would have overshadowed the legacy of the Brooklyn ferry. By conquering the great American poet, whom Mayakovsky admired and read in Russian translation, Mayakovsky makes his own conquest of America. The poet's confidence that death has no power prevails in both poems. While Whitman's immortality is purely metaphysical, a co-mingling of souls across space and time, Mayakovsky makes the concept of the poet's immortality into a mechanical construct. For Mayakovsky, this construct possesses a durability that cannot exist in Whitman's version of immortality. True immortality is only facilitated through construction; a person lives on through the thing they have built, whether that thing be a bridge or a poem.

For Mayakovsky, the Brooklyn Bridge provides an avenue toward immortality through reconstruction of the past. Just as the future geologist can deduce humanity's condition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by examining the bridge, he can identify Mayakovsky's past presence there. The formidable ego of Mayakovsky's poetic persona partially explains the geologist's ability to "zoom in" on him from the distant future; his presence on the bridge in and of itself seems to him a remarkable event of world history. Still, the fact that the geologist

[189] Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Poetry Foundation, accessed July 3, 2020, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45470/crossing-brooklyn-ferry.

discerns that Mayakovsky wrote verses while standing on the bridge heightens the potency of his discovery.

The unofficial version of Soviet immortality to which Mayakovsky subscribed holds that the results of human labor, especially in service of building Communism, are contained within material associated with that labor. Mayakovsky viewed artistic labor in service of the Revolution as being at least as important as physical or industrial labor. In his poem "The Poet Worker" [«Поэт рабочий»] (1918), Mayakovsky's poetic speaker proclaims that he "[is] also a factory."[190] The work of writing poetry, just like the work of building a factory or a locomotive, creates an indissoluble link between the individual and the material object on which they leave their traces: in this case, the Brooklyn Bridge. Although Mayakovsky's speaker makes no overt mention of immortality or resurrection in the poem, the bridge's metaphorical function as a vehicle of the poet's future immortality is clear.

The most idiosyncratic and fully developed example of Mayakovsky's poetic immortalization program is "To Comrade Nette, Steamship and Human" [«Товарищу Нетте, пароходу и человеку»] (1926). In the poem, Mayakovsky's poetic persona describes a meeting between himself and the steamship named after his deceased friend Theodor Ivanovich Nette, who was a Soviet diplomatic courier killed in Latvia by terrorists aboard a train bound for Riga. The steamship *Tver'* was renamed in Nette's honor after his heroic death. Mayakovsky's persona addresses the steamship *Nette* as if it is the same man that he once knew. Irene Masing-Delic presents the poem as a prime example of how certain acts performed by an individual can be stored within material to ensure their future resurrection:

In this poem, the heroic martyr of the Revolution Theodor Nette is imprinted on reality

[190] Mayakovsky, "Poet rabochii," in *PSS*, T. 2, 18.

> by performing a self-sacrificial deed, and by having, as a result, a ship named after him. In fact, the ship is Nette himself in a new hypostasis, his heroic personality having metamorphosed into a ship. The poet recognizes his glasses in the round lifebelts on board. Preserving Nette's name, his memory traces, and even his likeness, this ship will come in handy at reconstruction day. Naturally, Mayakovsky's verses also serve Nette's eternal memory and eventual resurrecting. Such transformations as his, when people become ships, or verses, or "other long lasting matters" (*dolgiye dela*), do more than commemorate the deceased; they capture the essence of their personality, their "soul," for future immortalization.[191]

Mayakovsky's speaker addresses the steamship as the real-life Nette because, according to Mayakovsky's unorthodox understanding of immortality, the steamship *is* the real-life Nette. The man's soul has entered the "long-lasting matter" of the steamship, but that soul is inseparable from Nette's real, yet immortalized, flesh. The poem's title reflects this interpretation: Comrade Nette is both steamship *and* human.

Nette's human component is the most prominent when the poetic persona describes the moon's reflection behind Nette as resembling the bloody remnant of the moment of his murder:

> За кормой лунища.
> Ну и здорово!
> Залегла,
> просторы надвое порвав.
> Будто навек
> за собой
> из битвы коридоровой
> тянешь след героя,
> светел и кровав.[192]
>
> [The enormous moon is behind your stern. / How wonderful! / It has lain down, / ripping the expanses in two. / It's as if forever / behind you / out of that fight in the corridor / you drag a hero's remains, / bright and bloody.]

Here, the source of immortality arises directly from the manner of Nette's death. In his discussion of this moment of the poem in "Immortals Are Not Men: Maiakovskii, the Strugatskii

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[191] Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death*, 13.
[192] Mayakovsky, "Tovarischu Nette, parokhodu i cheloveku," in *PSS*, T. 7, 163.

Brothers, and the New Soviet Man," Kevin Reese describes the importance of Nette's humanity with his concept of "mechanized flesh":

> Thus the steamship Nette drags behind himself a bloody trail of the flesh that had once clothed him. But this flesh is fundamentally different from the weak flesh that could not resist sleep on the train: *this* flesh is associated with glory in death, and is therefore worthy to be connected with the more perfect physical form of the steamship Nette.[193]

This concept contains a contradiction: the mechanical and the corporeal are antipodes. In this poem, however, the two concepts exist together side by side to create Mayakovsky's new version of immortality. It is not only the soul embedded within material that is immortal, but the new, mechanized, perfected flesh itself. The Mayakovskian anti-monument not only allows for future reconstruction and resurrection of the flesh but can contain within itself a perfected flesh, as seen in "To Comrade Nette." This new flesh is reminiscent of Christ's resurrected body in the New Testament; he appears to his disciples not as a ghost or spirit, but as physical, yet immortal flesh. The Ascension marks the beginning of mankind's eternal life in Heaven. In "To Comrade Nette," Mayakovsky's poetic persona proposes an alternative to the Christian version of heavenly eternal life. For him, the kind of body that lasts is the built body, not the Christological body. Nette may not have built the steamship that came to bear his name, but he "built" his new perfect body through his heroic act of self-sacrifice in the name of Communism. The steamship *Tver'* may have looked basically the same before Nette's act and its renaming, but it was not imbued with Nette's spirit. It is Nette's spirit that made the steamship recognizable to Mayakovsky's poetic persona as Nette the man. In his perfect mechanized flesh, Nette is able to enjoy the kind of immortality that Mayakovsky himself desires. Mayakovsky's ideal is a perfect posthumous

[193] Kevin Reese, "Immortals Are Not Men: Maiakovskii, the Strugatskii Brothers, and the New Soviet Man," PhD diss., (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 117.

existence on Earth in which Communism has triumphed, linking all of humanity into a "human community" and providing worthy Soviet citizens with immortality in the form of a new kind of immortal flesh.

Mayakovsky's poetic persona desires to meet the same fate as Nette. For him, Nette possesses the ideal immortality. This fact is made explicit at the end of the poem, when the poetic persona describes that he would like to die like Nette and become another "long-lived thing":

> Мне бы жить и жить,
> сквозь годы мчась.
> Но в конце хочу —
> других желаний нету —
> встретить я хочу
> мой смертный час
> так,
> как встретил смерть
> товарищ Нетте.[194]
>
> [I would like to live and live, / rushing through the years. / But at the end, I want— / I have no other desires— / I want to meet / my fatal hour / just as / *he* met *his* death— / Comrade Nette.]

This is the only part of the poem in which the poetic persona directly asserts that he himself desires immortality. However, knowing that Mayakovsky was preoccupied with the problem of achieving victory over death, we can determine with some certainty that this wish holds true not only for Mayakovsky's poetic persona but also for the man himself. Mayakovsky himself wanted to achieve the kind of immortality that he believes has been achieved by Nette through his incarnation in a steamship.

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[194] Ibid.

A potential criticism of this interpretation might be that this section of the poem shows the poetic speaker's desire to sacrifice his life for Communism. This criticism does not hold when we consider that Mayakovsky's glorification of Nette's death is not so much in exaltation of Nette's behavior as a hero of the Soviet cause but as a paragon of Communism's ability to achieve this mechanical and corporeal victory over death. Mayakovsky, unlike Nette's Soviet mythologizers of the mid-twentieth century, is not interested in such prosaic matters as Nette's proletarian childhood. Mayakovsky is specifically interested in Nette's unconventional immortality: his ability, through dying for the Soviet cause, to become a "long-lived thing." For him, this immortality is a justification for the existence of Communism, as the poetic persona declares that just the sight of the steamship Nette will "show Communism's substance and flesh" [естество и плоть].[195]

Near the end of the poem, Mayakovsky's speaker lists two objects into which one can be incarnated after death: steamships and verses.[196] I have already discussed how each of these objects can be interpreted as Mayakovskian anti-monuments: instead of trapping their subject within a state of stagnation, steamships and verses carry the vital energies of their subject, ensuring their immortality. As Masing-Delic argues, Mayakovsky's poem itself further contributes to Nette's immortality by capturing him in verse. In my discussion of Pushkin's "To Ovid," I addressed the power of verse to carry memory, thus allowing for a metaphorical immortality. In "To Comrade Nette," Mayakovsky's poetic persona implies that verses themselves are physical material and, just like steamships, possess the substance and vitality of their subject's flesh. Lines of verse are not simply printed text on a page, but live, breathing

[195] Ibid., 163.
[196] Mayakovsky, "Tovarishchu Nette…," in *PSS*, T. 7, 164.

entities. They are Mayakovsky's own brazen appropriation of the concept of the Word as flesh, the resurrection of the Word.

Mayakovsky's poetry abounds in many different kinds of flesh, often meant to provoke and disgust his readers: disfigured and diseased body parts, corpses, "dead meat," and many others. Only in his mature works, however, is the connection between the flesh and immortality is fully fledged, and it begins to take on positive associations. The mechanized flesh of the steamship *Nette* is a prime example of this different type of flesh. Simultaneously both flesh and not-flesh, it is Mayakovsky's ideal form of immortal embodiment, as his persona declares in the poem. In my discussion of the unfinished poems in the previous chapter, I illustrated that Mayakovsky's final verses affirm the poet's idea that poetry, the literary Word, can bring about immortality. The Word becomes flesh in its "soul," its "lips," and its "bones."[197] If the steamship *Nette* is alive with mechanized flesh, this final, biblical image might be called literary flesh. Like mechanized flesh and Christ's resurrected body, it is both flesh and not-flesh, a perfected and paradoxical resurrected substance.

Mayakovsky's immortalization program does not explicitly include a path to becoming embodied within literary flesh. However, considering his attempts to free Pushkin's legacy from stagnation, we can speculate about what this ideal posthumous existence might look like for Mayakovsky. Through Mayakovsky's treatment of his predecessor's legacy, he hopes for the "resurrection of the Word" as put forth by Shklovsky—the renewal of dead literary language—to become the resurrection of the poet himself. Until advanced Soviet science made physical resurrection possible, this was the closest Mayakovsky could get to resurrecting Pushkin.

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[197] Mayakovsky, "Neokonchennoe," in *PSS,* T. 10, 287.

Mayakovsky leaves his descendants to complete the project of resurrection on his behalf. Several writers will take up the mantle of the immortalization program after Mayakovsky's suicide. Whether they fulfill the plan according to its poetic specifications is another matter entirely.

Conclusion

The bureaucratization of Mayakovsky's biography began immediately after his death. Yakov Agranov, the NKVD agent who had been responsible for investigations leading to the execution of Nikolai Gumilev in 1921 and forced exile of Russian intellectuals in 1922, took over Mayakovsky's postmortem and funeral arrangements.[198] Not even Mayakovsky's corpse could escape from the state's violation of personal autonomy. Only several hours after his death, before his body was removed from his room in Gendrikov Alley to lie in state at the Writers' Club, scientists from the Moscow Brain Institute arrived to remove Mayakovsky's brain. Yurii Olesha, who was present in the apartment at the time, describes the harrowing scene in his autobiographical work *No Day Without a Line* [«Ни дня без строчки»] (1965):

> […] suddenly loud knocking was audible from inside his room—very loud, unceremoniously loud: such a sound, it seemed, could only be made when chopping wood. The opening of the skull was taking place, in order to remove the brain. We listened in silence, full of horror. After this, a man in a white coat and boots emerged from the room, either an attendant or some medical assistant: in a word, a person unconnected with us all, and this person was carrying a basin covered with a white kerchief, which rose up in the middle and almost formed a pyramid, as if this soldier in his boots and coat were carrying an Easter cheesecake. In the basin was Mayakovsky's brain.[199]

The Brain Institute was born in 1928 out of German neurologist Oskar Vogt's intensive studies on Lenin's brain.[200] It included the so-called "Pantheon of Brains," which had been conceived by neurologist Vladimir Bekhterev as a means of proving the intellectual superiority of the Soviet mind and extolling the purported scientific advancements the Soviet regime had

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[198] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 544.
[199] Iurii Olesha, *Ni dnia bez strochki* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1965), 153-154.
[200] Jochen Richter, "Pantheon of Brains: The Moscow Brain Research Institute 1925-1936." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 16, no. ½ (2007), accessed July 7, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/09647040600550335.

brought to fruition.[201] Lenin's brain became the prize of the Institute's collection, and the Moscow Brain Institute became yet another development of the burgeoning cult of personality that had already begun to surround Lenin's legacy. Scientists' discovery that Lenin's brain actually weighed less than the documented average for humans marginally tarnished the Brain Institute's propaganda, until they invented a suitable explanation. They subsequently attributed his brain's comparatively small size to Lenin's having suffered several strokes.[202] The official data for the average size of the human brain was adjusted to fit Lenin's brain, regardless.[203]

Mayakovsky's brain turned out to be 360 grams heavier than Lenin's. Brain Institute scientists pointed to this fact as an indication of the poet's particular genius. This is a prime example of the early Soviet state's particular brand of materialism: a poet's genius could not be decided on the strength of his work or his popularity. It had to be calculated using physical measurements. The Soviet state could only definitively assert Mayakovsky's purported genius after his death. Now the poet was unable to write contradictory poetry or retaliate against the intimately violent bureaucratization of his physical body. He was no longer a liability. Like Pushkin in his monumental form in the poem "To Briusov as a Memento," Mayakovsky was now metaphorically "fettered in bronze." His fears and predictions about his own posthumous fate had begun to come true, though not in a way he likely expected.

Neither Mayakovsky nor his family granted permission for the Brain Institute to take possession of his brain.[204] In the poem "Homeward!," recall that Mayakovsky's poetic persona

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[201] Joy Neumeyer, "A Visit to Moscow's Brain Institute," *Vice*, April 10, 2014, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qbejbd/a-visit-to-moscows-brain-institute.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky*, 546.
[204] Neumeyer, "A Visit..."

uses the loss of bodily autonomy as a metaphor for the state's violation his artistic autonomy, which he proclaims to desire: "I want / at the end of the day's work / for the Factory Committee / to bolt my lips / with a lock." Perhaps part of Mayakovsky would have felt gratified by this violation of freedom and privacy: the Institute, at least in theory, would use his brain to advance neurological science and usher in a Communist future all the more quickly. Perhaps the gifted Soviet scientists could even have used his brain to enable his physical resurrection of himself and that of others in the distant future, an outcome that he certainly desired, based on his poetry and the recollections of his contemporaries. At the same time, the state's removal of Mayakovsky's brain signified its new complete ownership over his legacy.

As Laura Shear Urbaszewski describes in her article "Canonizing the 'Best, Most Talented' Soviet Poet," Mayakovsky's biography contained many problematic facts that would contradict the state's mythologization of the poet if they remained at the forefront of the public consciousness:

> To create and affirm a unified, cohesive myth, the state needed to overcome a number of factors that complicated representations of Mayakovsky as an exemplary Soviet poet. These included the existence of many living contemporaries, Mayakovsky's Futurist past, his unconventional cohabitation with the Briks, his many affairs, his bad reputation among the masses, and last (but not least) his suicide.[205]

Despite the poet's vocal support for Communism in his poetry and speeches, he never became a member of the Communist Party. Mayakovsky's poetic career also presented many problems for the Soviet literary bureaucracy. His work was deemed to be too individualistic, its roots entrenched in bourgeois decadence, and it had become incomprehensible to the working class. Lenin had described his poetry as "hooligan Communism." Despite Mayakovsky's contacts with

[205] Laura Shear Urbaszewski, "Canonizing the 'Best, Most Talented' Soviet Poet: Vladimir Mayakovsky and the Soviet Literary Celebration," *Modernism/modernity* 9, no. 4 (2002), 638.

the OGPU and his conscious attempts to maintain the Party line with regard to literature—namely, his capitulations to RAPP in his final years—the state continually regarded Mayakovsky with suspicion. Now that the problematic poet was dead, his brain—the source of his genius—was claimed by the bureaucracy for its own use. The removal of Mayakovsky's brain was only the first, but perhaps the most intimately violent, step in the process of the state's denial of the poet's secret freedom.

A further monumental indignity suffered posthumously by Mayakovsky was the creation of two death masks. The first of these was done by sculptor Konstantin Lutsky, and during the procedure, the skin on Mayakovsky's right cheek was damaged. The death mask had to be redone. The sculptor who succeeded in taking the death mask was Sergei Merkurov, the sculptor who took Lev Tolstoy's death mask in 1911, and whom Mayakovsky's poetic speaker ridicules in "To the Workers of Kursk" for being complicit in the monumentalization of important literary and historical figures.[206] The death masks are yet another violation of Mayakovsky's personal autonomy. They make him a victim of monumental propaganda, the cultural plan to which he had objected so vehemently in his poetry.

The Moscow Brain Institute holds an undisclosed number of Soviet brains. Though a complete list has never been published, the owners of other "elite" brains in the "Pantheon" include Eduard Bagritsky, Andrei Bely, and Sergei Eisenstein.[207] Based on this incomplete list of influential Russian literary and cultural figures, we can imagine Pushkin's fate, had he died in 1937 instead of the 1837. His brain would have ended up preserved and analyzed for clues of genius right alongside Mayakovsky's.

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Richter, "Pantheon of Brains..."

In the first three years following Mayakovsky's suicide, the Soviet rehabilitation of the dead poet had only just begun and was in a state of flux. As Chantal Sundaram points out in her study "Manufacturing Culture: The Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend," the ultimate significance of Mayakovsky's poetic career and the political fact of his suicide resisted official interpretation in the early thirties:

> Although the historical moment of the suicide in 1930 is clearly significant in hindsight, it was not possible at the time for the new regime either to renounce Mayakovsky completely or to place him on the pedestal of national poet. Rather, what followed was a period of uncertainty as Stalinist culture emerged piecemeal out of the ruins of the culture of the twenties.[208]

Even as the state had taken ownership of Mayakovsky's brain, the materialistic symbol of his genius, a lively debate about Mayakovsky's motives continued. His suicide presented a problem for the new Stalinist regime of the 1930s. Could the poet be rehabilitated despite his manner of death? Some critics condemned Mayakovsky's suicide as an act of weakness while affirming his struggle against *byt*. Some placed the blame for his death on the malignant force of *byt* itself. Others, including, most prominently, Lunacharskii, presented the hypothesis that the true Mayakovsky had been murdered by an alter ego—a second personality that took control of his body. This interpretation allowed critics to defend the poet—whose popularity seemed only to grow in response to his suicide—without condoning his manner of death.[209] Osip Brik described the suicide as a "tragic accident" and attributed it largely to Mayakovsky's emotional and physical exhaustion.[210] Mayakovsky's official canonization as "the greatest poet of [the]

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[208] Chantal Sundaram, "Manufacturing Culture: The Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend," PhD diss., (University of Toronto, 2000), 78.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid., 99.

Soviet epoch" would not occur until several years later, partially as a result of the Briks' concerted efforts to rehabilitate him.

Mayakovsky's popularity began to wane after the shock of his suicide wore off. He was published very little between 1931 and 1935, and he was seen as a "fellow traveler" by the literary bureaucracy. The Writers' Congress of 1934 openly debated the issue of the canonization as the greatest Soviet poet. Though the Congress "took a decisive step in constructing a 'pedestal' for the new monuments of model Soviet literature," Mayakovsky would not be placed on it for another year.[211] The lack of enthusiasm for Mayakovsky's works both among the public and in the Party prompted Osip Brik to begin a targeted writing campaign to redeem Mayakovsky's legacy. It was not until Lili Brik wrote her well-known letter to Stalin in 1935 that Mayakovsky was officially canonized as the poet exemplar of the new Soviet literature.

Though Mayakovsky may not have foreseen the Soviet regime's forced acquisition of his brain or the other specific ways the monumentalization of his legacy would manifest, he anticipated the processes that made such a thing possible. The regime's appropriation of the poet's brain resembles one of Mayakovsky's visualized metaphors come to life—the brain metonymically signifies the poet's gift being handed over to the state for use by the Party. What Pasternak famously called Mayakovsky's "second death" was already under way. What could be done to fight against it? As I have shown throughout this dissertation, Mayakovsky encodes many clues about his anxiety surrounding death and immortality into his poetry, as well as his own plan to fight back against the monumentalization and bureaucratization of the poet's legacy. His blueprint for resurrecting dead poets requires his descendants to erect anti-monuments, just

[211] Ibid., 131.

as Mayakovsky did for Pushkin through verse. His descendants must return to his poetry to reconstruct the poet's true identity, and they must dedicate monuments in verse to him using the immortal Word. Many twentieth-century writers took inspiration from Mayakovsky after his death, but which writers actually successfully decoded his work and sought to resurrect him?

This concluding chapter is not intended to be a chronicle of all the aspects of Mayakovsky's Soviet canonization and more recent resurrection. Other scholars have already done this work. Rather, my intent is to show that, among specific writers, certain parallels exist between the revitalization of Pushkin and Mayakovsky's legacies in the late Soviet era. Marina Tsvetaeva, Abram Terts, and Iurii Karabchievskii successfully render Pushkin and Mayakovsky as complex and dynamic poetic personalities in distinct, yet similar ways. They return to the poets' legacies the secret freedom that they lost through their bureaucratic canonizations.

Marina Tsvetaeva was one of the first poets to make a conscious effort to reclaim Mayakovsky's legacy. She was also one of the first to recognize the parallels between Mayakovsky's posthumous fate and Pushkin's. In the aftermath of Mayakovsky's suicide and throughout the 1930s, Tsvetaeva wrote several works concerning each poet. The first of these was her cycle of poems *To Mayakovsky* [«Маяковскому»] (1930), which was completed in response to the poet's death. With these poems, Tsvetaeva initiates what would become the decades-long process of rehabilitating Mayakovsky's legacy, which other poets would continue long after her death. During this same creative period, she reflects on her particular understanding of Pushkin's legacy leading up to the centennial of his death. These two simultaneous undertakings are intrinsically related; they both concern the meaning of the poets' legacies in the long-term.

In her essay "The Poet and Time" [«Поэт и время»] (1932), Tsvetaeva emphasizes the essential concordance between Pushkin and Mayakovsky. She presents Mayakovsky's ambivalent rejection of Pushkin as an act of self-defense against a legacy too closely bound up with his own:

> In order not to die, sometimes it is necessary to kill (first and foremost, in oneself). And this is Mayakovsky's attitude toward Pushkin. At his core not an enemy, but an ally, the most innovative poet of his time, the same kind of creator in his own epoch as Mayakovsky was in his. He is only an enemy, therefore, in that he was cast in iron, and this iron was loaded on the backs of generations. (Poets, poets, fear posthumous monuments and anthologies even more than fame during your lifetime!) Mayakovsky's cry is not against Pushkin, but against his monument.[212]

Tsvetaeva's deep understanding of Mayakovsky's connection with Pushkin informs her cycles of poems written for both poets. In the second poem of her "To Mayakovsky" cycle, Tsvetaeva echoes Lermontov's elegy "The Death of the Poet" [Смерть поэта] (1837), in which the speaker charges the Russian court and the literary bureaucracy with complicity in Pushkin's demise. Tsvetaeva's poetic persona does not blame any particular entity for Mayakovsky's death. However, she implies that the literary establishment gains some benefit from his death by highlighting the discrepancy between the tragic reality of Mayakovsky's suicide and the blasé response of the Russian émigré intelligentsia and the press:

> *Литературная* — не в ней
> Суть, а вот — кровь пролейте!
> *Выходит каждые семь дней*.
> Ушедший — раз в столетье
>
> Приходит. Сбит передовой
> Боец. Каких, столица,
> *Ещё* тебе вестей, какой

[212] Marina Tsvetaeva, "Poet i vremia," in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh* (Moskva: "Ellis Lak," 1994), accessed November 7, 2021, http://tsvetaeva.lit-info.ru/tsvetaeva/proza/poet-i-vremya.htm.

Ещё — передовицы?

Ведь это, милые, у нас,
Черновец — милюковцу:
«Владимир Маяковский? Да-с.
Бас, говорят, и в кофте

Ходил»…
Эх кровь-твоя-кровца!
Как с новью примириться,
Раз первого её бойца
Кровь — на второй странице
(Известий.)[213]

[*Literary*—not in it / is the heart of the matter, but here: spill blood! / *Published every seven days.* / The departed comes once // in a century. The frontline soldier / is beaten. What *more*, capital city, / news do you want? What / *more* headlines? // For us, dear ones, it is like this: / The Chernovian says to the Miliukovian[214]: / "Vladimir Mayakovsky? Yes. / A deep voice, they say, and went around // Wearing a blouse…" / Oh, your blood, your dear blood! / How does one make peace with the new, / When the blood of its first soldier / Is on the second page / (of the news).

Tsvetaeva's poetic persona feels that, by turning Mayakovsky's suicide into headlines and a media spectacle, the foreign press has essentially removed Mayakovsky's humanity and used his untimely death as a means to widen their readership. According to her, they have cheapened his life, his art, and his suffering. The process of turning a poet into a headline resembles that of turning him into a monument. The poet is removed from the equation and replaced with a mythos that overshadows the original, obscuring the realities of his life that contradict the myth, and elevating or inventing details that conform to it.

The narrative that arose surrounding Mayakovsky's suicide foregrounded the personal reasons he may have had for taking his own life: his recent illness and his romantic entanglement

[213] Marina Tsvetaeva, *Maiakovskomu*, "Nasledie Mariny Tsvetaevoi," accessed November 7, 2021, http://www.tsvetayeva.com/cycle_poems/majakovskomu.
[214] Viktor Chernov and Pavel Miliukov, Russian émigré politicians and writers in Europe at the time Tsvetaeva wrote this poem.

with Tatyana Yakovleva, who had married months before. The official announcement of Mayakovsky's death in *Pravda* on April 15, 1930 asserts that "the early stages of the investigation show that the suicide was motivated by purely personal considerations, quite unconnected to the poet's public and literary activities."[215] While Mayakovsky's personal life certainly would have influenced his mental state leading up to his suicide, to exclude his struggles with the literary bureaucracy from the mitigating factors of his death is to whitewash his biography. Tsvetaeva describes a similar phenomenon in her poem: the literary bureaucracy trivializes and misrepresents the reality of Mayakovsky's suicide. The response of the émigré press differed from that in *Pravda* with regard to its political aims, but the result was the same: the poet's blood was splattered across the pages of the news. It no longer belonged to him.

In the poem immediately following this one in the cycle, Tsvetaeva fights to reclaim Mayakovsky's legacy from the literary bureaucracy. She uses a fragment from a daily news report of Mayakovsky's funeral describing the poet's appearance in his coffin as inspiration for an elegy. Her speaker's reflection centers around Mayakovsky's iron-soled boots, which function as a metonymical representation of the poet's true identity and witness to the authenticity and vitality of his revolutionary poetic spirit:

> В сапогах, подкованных железом,
> В сапогах, в которых гору брал —
> Никаким обходом ни объездом
> Не доставшийся бы перевал —
>
> Израсходованных до сиянья
> За двадцатилетний перегон.
> Гору пролетарского Синая,
> На котором праводатель — он.
>
> В сапогах — двустопная жилплощадь,

[215] As cited in Jangfeldt, 547.

Чтоб не вмешивался жилотдел —
В сапогах, в которых, понаморщась,
Гору нёс — и брал — и клял — и пел —

В сапогах и до и без отказу
По невспаханностям Октября,
В сапогах — почти что водолаза:
Пехотинца, чище ж говоря:

В сапогах великого похода,
На донбассовских, небось, гвоздях.
Гору горя своего народа
Стапятидесяти (Госиздат)

Миллионного… — В котором роде
Своего, когда который год:
«Ничего-де своего в заводе!»
Всех народов горя гору — вот.

Так вот в этих — про его Рольс-Ройсы
Говорок ещё не приутих —
Мёртвый пионерам крикнул: Стройся!
В сапогах — *свидетельствующих*.[216]

[In boots soled with iron, / In the boots in which he took the mountain— / Neither through detour nor byroad / would he reach the mountain pass. // In boots worn out to a shine / over the twenty-year haul. / The mountain: proletarian Sinai, / on which the law-giver is he. // In boots—a two-foot living space, / so the housing office won't interfere— / In boots in which, slightly wrinkling his brow, / He carried the mountain—and took it— and cursed—and sang— // In boots that trod to the limit and without limit / the unplowed places of October, / In boots almost like a diver's: / An infantryman's, to put it more cleanly: // In boots of the great campaign, / On Don Bass nails, no doubt. / The mountain of grief of his people's / One Hundred Fifty (publisher: Gosizdat) // Million…His own people, in a definite sense, when some were saying: / "There is nothing 'of one's own' at all!" / The mountain of grief of all peoples—there you have it. // In these boots, then— about his Rolls-Royces the whispers still have not abated— / the deceased cried to the pioneers: "Fall in!" / In boots that testify.]

Even before Mayakovsky's funeral, his life had already begun to be obscured by hearsay, notwithstanding the poet's statement in his suicide note that "the deceased hated gossip." There

[216] Tsvetaeva, *Maiakovskomu*, http://www.tsvetayeva.com/cycle_poems/majakovskomu.

was speculation about his romantic relationships and his finances. An old rumor that he had contracted syphilis reemerged with a vengeance, so much so that government officials felt it had to be refuted via Mayakovsky's autopsy (the rumor was indeed false).[217] As in the previous poem from this cycle, Tsvetaeva objects to the overshadowing of the real, living poet by unfounded narratives. However, in this poem, Tsvetaeva constructs a narrative of her own in order to redeem Mayakovsky's legacy. The history of the poet's worn iron-soled boots stamps out everything else. Tsvetaeva's poetic speaker paves the way for Mayakovsky's legacy to continue on untarnished, at least in the world of the poem. The rumors that trailed Mayakovsky after his death may have quieted, but they would eventually be overtaken by something more pervasive and insidious: the monumental mythos of Mayakovsky as the canonized Poet of the Revolution.

One year after Tsvetaeva composed "To Mayakovsky," she began a cycle of poems dedicated to Pushkin. The first of these directly addresses the different mythologized roles in which the literary bureaucracy had cast Pushkin since tsarist times. Tsvetaeva's poetic persona echoes Mayakovsky's objections to the monumentalization of Pushkin's legacy in "The Jubilee Poem," while delving more deeply into what Stephanie Sandler calls Pushkin's "bodily energy, erotic inventiveness, transgressive desire, and physical difference"—in other words, all of the poet's qualities that are lost in the process of turning him into a monument.[218] Tsvetaeva's speaker evokes her understanding of the real, living Pushkin directly in contrast to his official glossed-over image:

> Бич жандармов, бог студентов,
> Желчь мужей, услада жён,
> Пушкин — в роли монумента?
> Гостя каменного? — он,

[217] Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky,* 547.
[218] Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 10.

Скалозубый, нагловзорый
Пушкин — в роли Командора?

Критик — но́я, нытик — вторя:
«Где же пушкинское (взрыд)
Чувство меры?» Чувство — моря
Позабыли — о гранит

Бьющегося? Тот, солёный
Пушкин — в роли лексикона?

Две ноги свои — погреться —
Вытянувший, и на стол
Вспрыгнувший при Самодержце
Африканский самовол —

Наших прадедов умора —
Пушкин — в роли гувернёра?[219]

[The gendarmes' scourge, the students' god, / husbands' gall and wives' delight, / Pushkin in the role of a monument? / Of the Stone Guest? He— // crag-toothed, shameless-gazed / Pushkin—in the role of the Commander? // The critic, whining, the whiner, echoing: / "Where is the Pushkinian (sob) / Sense of meter?" Have they forgotten / the sensation of the sea upon the granite // As it beats? That saltwater / Pushkin in the role of lexicon? // His two feet—to warm up a bit— / having stretched out toward the fire, and upon a table / Having jumped up before the Autocrat / as an African rebel— // exhaustion of our great-grandparents, / Pushkin in the role of tutor?]

As in her elegy structured around the image of Mayakovsky's boots, Tsvetaeva's poetic persona presents her own particular understanding of the misunderstood poet's identity and legacy in this poem. She invents her own versions of the poets, which, according to her, reflect the true essence of the originals much more closely than their official versions ever could.

Tsvetaeva's Pushkin contains many different identities within himself: the gendarme's whip, the students' god, the African firebrand. Part of Pushkin's versatility comes from the sheer

[219] Marina Tsvetaeva, *Stikhi k Pushkinu*, "Nasledie Mariny Tsvetaevoi," accessed November 13, 2021, http://www.tsvetayeva.com/cycle_poems/stihi_k_pushkinu.

breadth of his body of work. Andrei Sinyavsky (Abram Terts) addresses the poet's vast range of themes, genres, and personalities in *Strolls with Pushkin*:

> No matter where we poke our noses, Pushkin is there, which is explained not so much by the influence of his genius or other talents, so much as the absence in the world of motifs that he has not already touched on before. Pushkin simply managed to write about everything for everyone. As a result, he became the Russian Virgil, and, in this role of the teacher-guide, he accompanies us in whatever direction of history, culture, and life we are headed for. Strolling with Pushkin today, you meet your very own self.[220]

Whom did Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva meet when strolling with Pushkin? They went off in search of Pushkin in their poems, but ended up finding themselves reflected in him. In his version of Pushkin, Mayakovsky finds a pioneer of revolutionary poetic language, an honorary member of the leftist avant-garde, and a fellow misunderstood poet. Tsvetaeva meets an irreverent Pushkin, a dynamic personality made all the more romantic due to his racial difference, which Tsvetaeva's speaker emphasizes in her Pushkin cycle.

Tsvetaeva's Pushkin is explicitly African. Like Mayakovsky's poetic persona in "The Jubilee Poem," who characterizes Pushkin as a rebellious *afrikanets*, Tsvetaeva's speaker emphasizes Pushkin's exotic nationality as a means of revitalizing his image. However, unlike Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva explicitly centers her characterization of Pushkin on his Blackness, as she also does in her essay "My Pushkin" [«Мой Пушкин»] (1937). In her focus on Pushkin's transgressions of the status quo with regard to prosody, class, nationality, and race, Tsvetaeva finds a Romanticism and exoticism to emulate and admire. Stephanie Sandler describes how Tsvetaeva's relationship with Pushkin allowed her to form her own multifaceted poetic identity: "[Tsvetaeva] found inspiration in [Pushkin's] poetry, in his biography, in his contemporaries,

[220] Terts, *Strolls with Pushkin*, 54.

and in his fictional heroes. In her relationship with Pushkin, she felt a gratifying fullness of self: his confidence and charm helped her invent a charismatic personality of her own."[221]

While Tsvetaeva cannot embody racial transgressiveness herself, she expresses an attachment to Blackness that borders on obsession and fetishization. Tsvetaeva uses her own particular understanding of Blackness to transform Pushkin's monument from a metaphor of the stagnation of the poet's legacy to a symbol of the poet's vitality and subversiveness:

> Pushkin's monument was black, like a piano. Even if no one had ever told me that Pushkin was a black man, I would have known that he was a black man. My crazed love for blacks, which I've carried my whole life to this day, and the sense of gratitude in my whole being when I end up near a black person in a streetcar or elsewhere, comes from Pushkin's monument. My white wretchedness side by side with black divinity. In every black person I love and recognize Pushkin—Pushkin's black monument of my unlettered infancy and of all Russia.[222]

Tsvetaeva engages in her own particular form of iconoclasm here. She tries to defeat the official Pushkin by creating her own version of the Pushkin monument that deviates radically from the poet's established mythos. Monumental bronze no longer corresponds to the white "marble slime" of stagnation and death, as it does in Mayakovsky's poetic universe. Tsvetaeva makes the monument definitively Black, replacing the dead emptiness of the traditional monument with vital energy and connecting it to her Romantic poetic worldview. In both her Pushkin cycle and her essay, Tsvetaeva invents her own Pushkin in which she herself is reflected.

Tsvetaeva likewise creates her Mayakovsky. Through her likenesses of Mayakovsky and Pushkin, she steps forward to claim her role as the keeper of the poets' legacies as she understands them. Tsvetaeva carries out in poetic form what Jakobson accomplishes in "On a

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[221] Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 214.
[222] Marina Tsvetaeva, "Moi Pushkin," *Nauka i zhizn'*, no. 2, 1967, accessed November 8, 2021, http://www.lib.ru/POEZIQ/CWETAEWA/pushkin.txt_with-big-pictures.html.

Generation that Squandered Its Poets." While his article brings to light Mayakovsky's obsession with suicide and preoccupation with immortality, it also casts Mayakovsky as a fated poet-martyr in the same line as the Romantics, removing political and biographical context from his life's narrative. The medium of poetry allows Tsvetaeva more flexibility with regard to her portrayal of the poet, but both writers reinvent him to suit their particular needs, just as Mayakovsky did with Pushkin in his poems.

At the same time, certain writers who follow Pushkin and Mayakovsky claim their predecessors as their own as a radical act of self-actualization. Instead of adhering to the established Russian cultural maxim "Pushkin is our everything" [Пушкин наше всё], Tsvetaeva declares the existence of her own personal Pushkin. This Pushkin is distinct from the culturally mythologized poet figure associated with the collective. The writer's individual understanding of the bureaucratized and monumentalized predecessor becomes a radical act in an authoritarian context. This is particularly true for Andrei Sinyavsky (Terts), who wrote *Strolls with Pushkin* while imprisoned in a labor camp, and who faced extreme backlash from both the Soviet and émigré reading public when the work was published.[223] The writer's dismantling of the mythologized predecessor is not pure iconoclasm, but a process of constructing and affirming the individual authorial personality.

Sinyavsky's *Strolls with Pushkin* echoes Tsvetaeva's "Poems to Pushkin," particularly its objection to what Stephanie Sandler calls "Pushkinolatry": the celebration of the mythologized cult figure of the poet.[224] Both writers also look to Mayakovsky's "The Jubilee Poem" as an

[223] Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 302.
[224] Ibid., 304.

example of how to destroy this myth.[225] However, as an early exemplar of Russian postmodernism, Sinyavsky went even further than either Tsvetaeva or Mayakovsky had in laying metaphorical dynamite at the feet of Pushkin's monument. The first sentence of *Strolls with Pushkin* is intended to immediately provoke the reader: "For all our love for Pushkin, which borders on worship, it's somehow difficult for us to express where his genius lies and why precisely to him, to Pushkin, belongs pride of place in Russian literature."[226] The idea that Pushkin's greatness might even be called into question caused an uproar among critics both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Even more damning were Sinyavsky's emphasis on eroticism in Pushkin's poetry, his insistence that the dead body plays a vital role in the poet's works, and his comparison of Pushkin's voracious poetic inspiration to a bloodthirsty vampire.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was one of the fiercest critics of *Strolls with Pushkin*. He responds to it in his essay "...Shakes your tripod" [«…Колеблет твой треножник»] (1984), in which he likens Sinyavsky and other literary "nihilists" to the crowd that misunderstands and derides the poet's art in Pushkin's "To the Poet" [«Поэту»] (1830):

> Поэт! не дорожи любовию народной.
> Восторженных похвал пройдет минутный шум;
> Услышишь суд глупца и смех толпы холодной,
> Но ты останься тверд, спокоен и угрюм.
>
> Ты царь: живи один. Дорогою свободной
> Иди, куда влечет тебя свободный ум,
> Усовершенствуя плоды любимых дум,
> Не требуя наград за подвиг благородный.
>
> Они в самом тебе. Ты сам свой высший суд;
> Всех строже оценить умеешь ты свой труд.
> Ты им доволен ли, взыскательный художник?

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Terts, *Strolls with Pushkin*, 7.

> Доволен? Так пускай толпа его бранит
> И плюет на алтарь, где твой огонь горит,
> И в детской резвости колеблет твой треножник.[227]
>
> [Poet! Prize not the people's love. / The fleeting noise of rapturing praises will pass; / You will hear the judgment of the fool and the laughter of the cold crowd, / but stay firm, calm, and austere. // You are the tsar: live alone. By a free road / travel where your free mind leads you, / Perfecting the fruits of your beloved thoughts, / Not demanding rewards for your noble deed. // The rewards are within you. You are your own highest judgment; / You can appraise your work more strictly than all others. / Are you satisfied with it, exacting artist? // You are? Then let the crowd find fault / And spit on the altar where your flame burns, / and in childish liveliness jostle your tripod.]

For Solzhenitsyn, Sinyavsky is just another vulgar critic who seizes the opportunity of perverting Pushkin's sacred poetic gift, a twentieth-century version of the nihilist literary critics of the 1860s. He also likens Sinyavsky to the iconoclastic Futurists, directly citing their most famous manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste":

> Over the course of fifteen decades, how many named and unnamed vulgarians have been using Pushkin as the easiest target? When the dried-up rationalists and the first nihilists needed someone to "overthrow," they began, of course, with Pushkin. When they were compelled to compose vapid anecdotes for the metropolitan mob, who else would they be about, other than Pushkin? When rabid early Soviet optimists itched to "throw someone from the ship of modernity," they, of course, threw Pushkin first.[228]

Solzhenitsyn misreads the Futurists' attack on Pushkin the same way their detractors did in the early twentieth century. They did not attack Pushkin the poet, but Pushkin's monumentalized and bureaucratized image. Solzhenitsyn's comparison between Sinyavsky and the Futurists is apt, but not for the reasons he intended. Both Sinyavsky and the Futurists seek to free Pushkin from the stagnation of his legacy and thereby bring him back to life.

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[227] Pushkin, "Poetu," in *Sochineniia*, T. 1, 474.
[228] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "...Koleblet tvoi trenozhnik," in *Novyi mir*, no. 5, 1991, accessed November 7, 2021, http://teljonok.chat.ru/progulki.htm.

Sinyavsky's early postmodern revision of Pushkin's legacy inspired a similarly revolutionary reevaluation of Mayakovsky's canonization as the "best and most talented" poet of the Soviet era. In *The Resurrection of Mayakovsky* [«Воскресение Маяковского»] (1985), Iurii Karabchievskii makes no secret of his goal to resurrect the "real" Mayakovsky, who had been buried under Soviet propaganda. Karabchievskii's choice of epigraph reflects the same direct approach: he uses Mayakovsky's plea for resurrection to the chemist of the future in *About This*. The message to the reader is clear: Karabchievskii intends to resurrect Mayakovsky through this book. The author responds to Mayakovsky's desire to be resurrected as expressed so frequently in his poetry. However, the poet would likely not have expected Karabchievskii's particular method of resurrecting him.

Karabchievskii's book echoes Siniavskii's in purpose, but it differs radically in the author's tone toward the subject. Throughout *Strolls with Pushkin*, the reader gets a sense of the author's feelings of joy and warmth surrounding Pushkin, even in the many irreverent passages. Karabchievskii, on the other hand, views Mayakovsky only through a severely critical lens. He argues that the Soviet state took on Mayakovsky as its poet-representative not because it misunderstood him, but because it understood him and his poetry well and used him to suit its political aims. From his earliest poems, Karabchievskii argues, Mayakovsky displays a penchant for graphic violence that could only be called sadistic. This evil, destructive obsession made Mayakovsky the ideal poet of the Revolution. After 1917, Mayakovsky had an outlet for his hitherto uncontrolled violent poetic rage—the destruction of the bourgeoisie:

> By 1917, young Mayakovsky happened to be the only well-known poet of whose verse blood and violence was not only the theme and occasion, but its material itself, its texture. The poet, who over the course of several years had lustfully rummaged with bare hands in turned-out intestines and severed members, was completely prepared to switch

over to the bayonet and the revolver.[229]

This interpretation obliterates the myth of Mayakovsky as the mythologized Soviet poet in several ways. It calls Mayakovsky's morality and sanity into question by depicting him as a pathologically destructive personality. Such indiscriminately destructive impulses could not coincide with the poet who had been mythologized as a dedicated builder of Communism. Neither could such a morally objectionable figure be forthrightly cast as an ideal for other Soviet artists to emulate. Karabchievskii also emphasizes what he perceives as the poet's lack of genuine interest in Communism. If the Revolution served Mayakovsky only as an outlet for his pathological tendencies, he could not have accepted it based on the merits of its ideology. Rather, he glorified the Revolution simply because it satisfied his lust for violence. In order to mask the unsavory aspects of Mayakovsky's life and poetry, the state and Mayakovsky's contemporaries contributed to the myth of Mayakovsky's brilliance and his stature as the greatest Soviet poet.

Karabchievskii characterizes this myth as a "system of falsehood" constructed around Mayakovsky's legacy and argues that this system will still continue to exist long into the future:

> Of course, the massive scale of the lies about Mayakovsky is explained not only by his personal qualities. It was a campaign organized from above; the great Revolution gave it its start, and its finish even now is yet to be foreseen. But the particularity of this campaign is the fact that its object does not remain passive, but actively cooperates with each participant, making the necessary adjustments by degrees each time. [230]

Here Karabchievskii radically departs from the narrative of Mayakovsky's monumentalization and bureaucratization established by Pasternak years earlier. In 1967, Pasternak famously interpreted Mayakovsky's "second death" as he understood it, emphasizing that Mayakovsky

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[229] Iurii Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* (Munich: Strana i Mir, 1985), 19-20.
[230] Ibid., 79.

was not to be blamed for it.[231] As Pasternak was a friend and contemporary of Mayakovsky, his statement is understandable: he wanted to absolve Mayakovsky from blame for being forced on the Soviet public. As Urbaszewski writes, Pasternak objects to the state's use of Mayakovsky on moral grounds:

> [...] Pasternak is writing not to describe this process, but to condemn it morally, while absolving Mayakovsky from blame for his Soviet afterlife. In the sentence "He is not guilty of it," Pasternak portrays the official Soviet canonization of Mayakovsky as a criminal act or a moral transgression. He writes to vindicate Mayakovsky by emphasizing the difference between the living poet and his objectified image in Soviet culture.[232]

In direct contrast to Pasternak, Karabchievskii explicitly places moral blame on Mayakovsky for his second death at the hands of the Soviet regime. In his opinion, had Mayakovsky not been a morally bankrupt, insincere, and empty poet and human being, the regime would not have been able to make use of his legacy as it did. "In Mayakovsky," he provocatively proclaims, "there was no Mayakovsky, and this is the whole awful secret."[233] If the real Mayakovsky was only an empty signifier, the regime could simply imbue his image and legacy with any meaning that suited it. In Karabchievskii's interpretation of Mayakovsky's legacy, the poet actively participates in his own second death. Even further, he is complicit in the violence and oppression exercised by the regime through his "[giving Soviet] power the gift of speech."[234]

Whether one agrees with Karabchievskii's arguments or not, his book fulfills its stated purpose of bringing Mayakovsky to life by forcing the reader to see him as if for the first time. The author leaves no stone unturned in his quest to debunk the myth of Mayakovsky. As with

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[231] Pasternak, "Liudi i polozheniia," 231.
[232] Urbaszewski, "Canonizing the 'Best, Most Talented' Soviet Poet," 636-637.
[233] Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo*, 58.
[234] Ibid., 56.

Tsvetaeva and Siniavskii, Karabchievskii's work to resurrect a dead poet reveals much about the author himself. Alexander Zholkovsky implicitly touches on this aspect of the book in his review:

> Written by an eloquent representative of a generation taught to love Maiakovskii but who has now shaken off the spell, the book is a powerful testimony. Maiakovskii, as the idol of Stalinist culture that lingered through the thaw on his avant-gardist credentials, had to be demolished in the changed spiritual atmosphere, and Karabchievskii achieves this by boldly stating what was already in the air. His love-hate is probably a better tribute to Maiakovskii than silent indifference [...].[235]

Karabchievskii's "testimony" is just as much a public response to trauma as it is a provocative collection of arguments against Mayakovsky. Karabchievskii may be biased against Mayakovsky, but his denunciation of the canonized Soviet poet is understandable when considered in the context in which it was written. His book presents a radical personal statement against not only Mayakovsky, but the concepts with which his legacy is associated: politicized art and avant-garde aesthetics. In Karabchievskii's view, these concepts are inseparable from the violence of the Stalinist regime. His ruthless attacks on Mayakovsky become justifiable in light of this view, whether or not the reader agrees with them. Perhaps even more importantly, Karabchievskii returns shock value to Mayakovsky, turning his audience's attention away from familiar and interminable rote memorizations of "Verses on My Soviet Passport" [«Стихи о советском паспорте»] (1929) toward his anarchic Futurist poetic persona, who proclaimed that he "love[d] to watch the children dying" and would "joyfully spit in [the] face" of his audience. Karabchievskii's mission to unsettle and disgust his readers through his interpretations of

[235] Alexander Zholkovsky, "Voskresenie Maiakovskogo," Review of *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo*, by Iu. Karabchievskii, *Slavic Review* 46, no. 2 (1987): 367.

Mayakovsky actually fulfills the aim of the poet's early persona to shock his listeners through his use of violent imagery and provocative language.

I do not intend to debunk Karabchievskii's denunciation of Mayakovsky. Rather, I aim to emphasize the larger picture: How is the poet's legacy kept alive? Throughout this study, I have explored how Mayakovsky "resurrects" Pushkin's legacy. He appropriates classical poetic meter and Pushkinian themes to expose the stagnating effects of monumentalization and bureaucratization, as well as grapple with his own fears surrounding his posthumous legacy. Through these combined processes of cultural critique and introspective self-exploration, Mayakovsky creates his own version of Pushkin. Mayakovsky's claim on Pushkin is complex: by necessity, part of inventing his own personal Pushkin means pressing his predecessor into government service. As Mayakovsky's poetic persona casts himself as a champion of the Left Front of the Arts, his closest equal and colleague must join the ranks. By creating his avant-garde, agitprop-writing version of Pushkin, does Mayakovsky actually take part in his predecessor's bureaucratization, the stagnating process his poetic personae claim to despise so vehemently?

In "Maiakovskii and the Mobile Monument: Alternatives to Iconoclasm in Russian Culture," James Rann argues that despite Mayakovsky's many objections to the state's commodification of Pushkin's legacy, both "poet and party hope to 'steer' Pushkin in order to make him into a sort of usable past that can help them build a new culture."[236] Mayakovsky and the state go about this "steering" Pushkin in different ways and with different goals. Rann argues that the Soviet state "sought a definitive recasting of the poet as a proto-Soviet radical and

[236] James Rann, "Maiakovskii and the Mobile Monument: Alternatives to Iconoclasm in Russian Culture," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 4 (2012): 778.

democrat as part of an attempt to limit the flexibility of culture."[237] In contrast, Mayakovsky's Pushkin corresponds to and interacts with the contemporary Soviet reality directly, turning the inflexible literary past into the flexible literary present. Mayakovsky may have enlisted Pushkin into the ranks of the leftist avant-garde in the mid-twenties, but he does not hold his predecessor's legacy captive. His mobilization of Pushkin into government service does not condemn Pushkin to a petrified posthumous existence.

Though Mayakovsky's poetic persona may "steer" Pushkin toward agitprop in "The Jubilee Poem," he does not have to steer him forcefully. In the second chapter of this study, I discussed how both Pushkin and Mayakovsky experienced unfreedom at the hands of the regimes under which they were compelled to work. Each poet sacrificed his artistic autonomy to government service to some degree. Both poets' political views can be viewed as a seemingly contradictory combination of individualistic Romanticism and service to an authoritarian regime. This commonality makes it possible for Mayakovsky to perceive Pushkin as a colleague on an equal footing. They are not only the most prominent poets of their epochs; more importantly, they faced similar struggles. Mayakovsky does not fabricate Pushkin's struggles with the tsarist court and literary bureaucracy by echoing Lermontov's characterization of him as "honor's captive" (*nevol'nik chesti*). He interprets them through his own lens and projects them onto his own early Soviet reality.

Mayakovsky eludes the pitfalls of reigning Pushkin in too sharply in part through his use of genre. As an individual poet, he approaches Pushkin differently from the state. The poet's prolific use of imagery and metaphor in poems like "An Extraordinary Adventure..." and "The

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[237] Ibid., 779.

Jubilee Poem" present complex representations of Pushkin that cannot be reduced to a singular one-sided interpretation. Mayakovsky's poetic personae frequently present multifarious and even contradictory depictions of Pushkin. His characterization of Pushkin as the personified Symbolist "Sun of Russian poetry" does not correspond exactly with his depictions of Pushkin as a statue, though they are thematically linked. Mayakovsky's reckoning with Pushkin's legacy develops throughout his poetic career, evolving in step with the poet's artistic, personal, and political concerns. When Mayakovsky dedicates his artistic output to the service of the state, he brings Pushkin along with him.

Likewise, Mayakovsky's poetic personae direct his predecessor away from the problem of state-sponsored art. He does so implicitly by turning to iambic meter—Pushkin's metric idiom—in *At the Top of My Voice* and his final unfinished fragments. By incorporating Pushkin's prosodic legacy in his non-political lyric poems, Mayakovsky illustrates that his relationship with Pushkin cannot be reduced to enlisting his predecessor into government service. Mayakovsky felt a kinship with Pushkin that transcended the vagaries of time and history. Had Mayakovsky lived to see the height of Socialist Realism and beyond, this kinship would have continued to evolve in response to the political and cultural conditions of the time.

Rann asserts that "monuments can be liberated from the straitjacket of official interpretations [...] by the use of the aesthetic sphere as a space in which to make a lasting adaptation of the monument that counteracts official narratives."[238] Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, Siniavskii, and Karabchievskii accomplish this feat through their works. They bring the poet of the past along with them into their contemporary discourses. The poet's legacy remains alive by

[238] Ibid., 790.

evolving at the forefront of the emerging literary culture. Official celebrations of monumentalized figures counteract this process by perpetuating the established myths surrounding those figures.

These myths are frequently built surrounding or associated with the physical space of the poet's monument—Dostoevsky's famous Pushkin speech to celebrate the unveiling of Opekushin's monument to Pushkin in 1880, Lenin's plan of monumental propaganda, and the unveiling of Mayakovsky's own monument in 1958 all contributed to the construction of the prevailing cultural myths surrounding poets. Several Soviet officials and bureaucrats made speeches at the unveiling of Mayakovsky's statue that lauded the poet's devotion to Communist ideals and the working class above all else. In his speech, Minister of Culture Nikolai Aleksandrovich Mikhailov went so far as to mobilize Mayakovsky into the Cold War struggle against the United States, proclaiming that the poet would have certainly attacked the United States for its colonialist involvement in the Lebanon uprisings in May of that year.[239] As Mayakovsky's poetic personae feared, the posthumous commemoration surrounding his monument comprised an essential part of his bureaucratized and monumentalized existence.

Just as the monument's physical space helps construct the official myth of the poet, it is also used to destroy it. In addition to liberating the monument in the aesthetic sphere, writers have used the physical monument as a tool for dismantling both cultural and state-sponsored myths that surround the poet. Rann describes a "dissenting poetic culture" springing up around Mayakovsky's monument immediately after its unveiling, with poets gathering around the statue's base for unofficial poetry readings.[240] These gatherings made a stark contrast in

[239] Nikolai Novikov, "Kak zhivoi s zhivymi govoria...," *Moskovskaia pravda,* July 29, 1958.
[240] Rann, "Maiakovskii and the Mobile Monument," 791.

comparison with planned state-sponsored celebrations in honor of Soviet cultural figures. Poets of the *shestidesiatniki* generation, like Andrei Voznesenskii, Evgenii Evtushenko, and many others, recontextualized Mayakovsky's monument as a site of poetic innovation entirely distinct from his canonization by the Soviet literary bureaucracy.

In the winter between 1911 and 1912, Mayakovsky predicted the existence of his posthumous monument in conversation with Evgeniia Lang, pointing to a spot across from Pushkin's monument and proclaiming that his monument would stand there one day. This proclamation contains several layers of meaning. Mayakovsky's fear of death drove his persistent desire to achieve immortality in some form. His documented personal belief in physical resurrection combined with his preoccupation with poetic immortality, producing the complex perspective I have analyzed over the course of this project. The metaphorical basis of this perspective becomes the poet's self-conscious forward-looking construction of his Horatian monument. For Mayakovsky, the Pushkin myth is inseparable from the metaphor of the monument.

At the same time, Mayakovsky's translation of the Pushkinian metaphor into his particular idiom goes beyond metaphorical play. The young, audacious poet Lang describes in her anecdote proudly envisions himself standing alongside Pushkin into eternity. This young poet never went away entirely. Even as Mayakovsky dreads the stagnation of his legacy, he feels a sense of pride in his conviction that history will judge him as Pushkin's equal, even if this judgment renders both poets as mute statues. This pride could not exist without genuine affection for Pushkin as a poetic father figure. Mayakovsky's statement in 1926 that he "[could] not fall asleep without Pushkin" characterizes the poet's intimate relationship with his greatest

predecessor as similar to that of a child and a parent.[241] Mayakovsky baits and criticizes his poetic father figure, but he also reveres him.

This relationship's complexity illustrates the question of the poet's legacy and influence as a matter of the literary past not remaining ossified in the past, but becoming vitally present through poetry. The poet does not always strive to build tombs for his predecessor or destroy his poetic father figure in an Oedipal duel. In some cases, poets turn to their predecessors for inspiration, guidance, and fellowship. It is no surprise, then, that many Russian writers of the turbulent twentieth century return to Pushkin and Mayakovsky in the way I have just described. The idea that our favorite poet is always with us and is kept alive through the memory and recontextualization of his or her poetry, ideas, and themes gives us hope and drives us forward into uncertainty.

[241] L. V. Maiakovskaia and A. I. Koloskov, *Maiakovskii v vospominaniiakh rodnykh i druzei*. (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1968), 306.

Afterword

Though not entirely within the scope of this project, the development of the Mayakovsky cult in the latter half of the twentieth century provides a wealth of material for further research. Mayakovsky's monument would become the site of an emerging dissenting poetic culture from the time of its unveiling to the early 1960s. This new literary culture coincided with the Neo-Leninist zeal for the Revolution exhibited among Soviet youth in the late fifties and early sixties. The revitalization of Mayakovsky's legacy in the "Thaw" period was connected with the youth's renewed dedication to Leninist ideals after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization reforms. Chantal Sundaram argues that the "Mayakovsky legend that was crafted for the purposes of Soviet cultural and political policy after 1935 had much in common with the Stalinized cult of Lenin."[242] Given Mayakovsky's preoccupation with the stagnation of Lenin's legacy in the *LEF* article "Don't Trade in Lenin" and his long poem *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, the connection between the two figures is unsurprising, despite Lenin's objections to Mayakovsky's poetic portrayals of Communism. The artists of the "second wave of the Russian avant-garde," as Irene Kolchinsky describes them, resurrected both Lenin and Mayakovsky. Unfortunately, their resurrection was destined to be brief.[243]

At the height of de-Stalinization, director Marlen Khutsiev began production on a film originally titled *Lenin's Vanguard* [«Застава Ильича»], which depicted the deep connection between Neo-Leninist youth culture and the younger generation's rediscovery of Mayakovsky.

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[242] Chantal Sundaram, " 'The stone skin of the monument": Mayakovsky, Dissent and Popular Culture in the Soviet Union," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 16 (2006), accessed September 14, 2020, http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/sundaram16.shtml.

[243] Irene Kolchinsky, "The Second Wave of the Russian Avant-garde: The Thaw Generation and Beyond," PhD diss. (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001).

The film's protagonist, a young military man who desires to return to early revolutionary ideals, keeps a small portrait of Mayakovsky in his room and recites the poet's verses by heart. Despite the film's Neo-Leninist subject matter and its original title, the poem that receives the most attention in it has nothing to do with Lenin at all. In one of the film's stand-out scenes, the protagonist wanders the empty streets of Moscow alone and inwardly recites lines from Mayakovsky's final unfinished fragments written shortly before his suicide. The scene's tone makes it particularly remarkable: it radiates solitude and melancholy. Its desolate backdrop of Moscow architecture, its gloomy piano soundtrack, and its spare sound design emphasizing the protagonist's footsteps and the distant bells of the Kremlin coincide with and emphasize the despairing tone of Mayakovsky's verses:

> Любит? не любит? Я руки ломаю
> и пальцы
> разбрасываю разломавши
>
> так рвут загадав и пускают
> по маю
>
> венчики встречных ромашек [...][244]
>
> [She loves me? She loves me not? I break my hands apart / and my fingers / I scatter, having snapped them: / so people pluck and disperse when guessing / through May / on the crowns of a meeting's daisies.]

The film depicts a nuanced cultural understanding of Mayakovsky that fundamentally differs from the Stalinized myth of the "best, most talented" Soviet poet. It allows for pure lyricism, the very aspect of Mayakovsky's poetic personae that the Stalinist regime continually downplayed. At the same time, Mayakovsky is presented as a revolutionary ideal for the film's young protagonists. Marlen Khutsiev allows both Mayakovsky's lyricism and his revolutionary spirit to

[244] Mayakovsky, "[Neokonchennoe]," in *PSS*, T. 10, 286.

coexist in his film, exemplifying Mayakovsky's desire for his posthumous legacy to remain complex and flexible. The revolutionary idealism the poet embodies in the film reflects the spirit of dissident literary gatherings at his monument on Mayakovsky Square.

Khutsiev's film in its original form presented the nonconformist youth culture that was already highly suspect by the time of its release in 1964. The film's run time was reduced from nearly three hours to under two, and its title was changed from *Lenin's Guard* to *I Am Twenty* [«Мне двадцать лет»].[245] The state had already cracked down on the unofficial literary gatherings at Mayakovsky Square, officially banning them in 1963.[246] Prominent semi-dissident poets Yevtushenko, Voznesenskii, and Rozhdestvenskii vacillated between giving voice to the youth protests and keeping within the Party line, which was growing ever more rigid as the principles of de-Stalinization were abandoned. This approach tied the poets even closer to Mayakovsky's legacy: "They walked a thin line between dissidence and acceptability, and were alternately disciplined and tolerated. This linked them with the ambivalence of the Mayakovsky legend itself. At times the regime made use of them - as it made use of Mayakovsky - in giving a public face to de-Stalinization."[247]

As Leonid Brezhnev came into power and de-Stalinization turned into stagnation, Mayakovsky lost relevance as a symbol of cultural dissidence. This fact is made light of in the Vladimir Men'shov film *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* [«Москва слезам не верит»] (1979), the first half of which is set in 1958—the year of the unveiling of Mayakovsky's monument. Two female protagonists walk by Mayakovsky Square as Andrei Voznesenskii—in a striking

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[245] Sundaram, "The stone skin of the monument...," http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/sundaram16.shtml.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.

cameo—gives an impassioned recitation of his Mayakovsky-influenced poem "Parabolic Ballad" [«Параболическая баллада»] (1959) in front of the poet's statue. After listening to the poem's first few lines, one woman turns to the other and says "I didn't understand a thing" (*nichego ne poniala*). In addition to highlighting the speaker's lack of cultural awareness, this scene exemplifies the Stagnation-era attitude toward the celebration of Mayakovsky as a dissident figure: it had become incomprehensible.

These examples illustrate the richness of Mayakovsky's posthumous legacy in the Soviet Union. Further research into the topic of Mayakovsky's late-twentieth-century legacy could extend into discussions of Soviet cult figures like Vladimir Vysotskii, who could not help but be influenced by Mayakovsky's work, both as a poet and as an actor.[248] Pushkin's legacy in the latter half of twentieth century is just as complex, and a continuation of the research I have completed in this project could illuminate the roles of these kindred poets in the literary and cultural landscape of the Postmodernist late Soviet and early post-Soviet eras.

[248] Vysotskii played Mayakovsky in a 1967 production of Veniamin Smekhov's play *Listen!* [«Послушайте!»] (1966).

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