

Two Post-Soviet Anthologies of the 1990s and the Russian 20th-Century Poetry Canon

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As the Soviet Union went through crisis and collapse in the late 1980s and the start of the 1990s, the influence of institutions such as the censorship and state-controlled publishing houses that for decades had played a major role in controlling readers' access to literary works dwindled. Given these changes, it was almost inevitable that the canon of Russian twentieth-century poetry, meaning those authors and texts which were accorded exemplary status by being regularly published, discussed by critics, and established as part of the school and university curriculum, would be subject to question and revision. The canon had been changing gradually since the cultural Thaws of the 1950s and 1960s; this process now intensified and accelerated, in response to political and economic reforms which opened up the canon to the influence of rival literary groupings, including those previously active in Soviet-era unofficial underground culture, and the effects of a newly created market. The range of published poets and texts expanded significantly to include a wave of 'returned' literature by both émigré and underground poets, as well as previously unpublished texts by poets who were part of the Soviet literary establishment. As well as having to deal with this wealth of new material, readers and critics were faced with the problem of considering the familiar material of Soviet canonical poetry from

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a post-Soviet perspective. Readers and critics were almost overwhelmed by the mass of new material:

At the end of the twentieth century Russian poetry experienced a real culture shock when everything that had been created over the last hundred years was gathered up from fragments and made into a whole and appeared as if simultaneously, vertically.¹

In these confusing circumstances there was an appetite for authoritative guidance and a competition among rival literary groups to establish which ones could be most effective in asserting their authority.

The reassessment of the canon has not been limited to scholarly debates on the relative literary merits of particular authors or texts. The canon is closely bound up with questions of identity that are particularly significant for post-Soviet Russia. As Frank Kermode puts it, the canon reflects 'changes in ourselves and our culture. It is a register of how our historical self-understandings are formed and modified'.² Paul Lauter sums up the relationship between canon and identity as follows: 'A canon is, to put it simply, a construct, like a history text, expressing what a society reads back into its past as important to its future.'³ Russia's post-Soviet identity, and the extent to which it derives from the Soviet past, has proved to be a highly contentious issue. Questions of the composition of the literary canon offered plenty of ammunition for opposing camps engaging in polemics during the cultural transition of the 1990s, when discussions about the inclusion or exclusion of particular authors or groups featured vociferous attacks on opponents rather more often than measured reflection on the changing canon. This article will examine two anthologies of twentieth-century Russian poetry, both published in the 1990s, and consider their reception in Russia.⁴ Neither anthology was presented by its compilers

¹ Leonid Kostiukov, 'Eshche dve antologii', *Arion*, 2004, 3, pp. 37–61 (p. 41).

² Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, Oxford, 2004, p. 36.

³ Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts*, New York and Oxford, 1991, p. 58.

⁴ *Strofy veka: antologiya russkoi poezii*, compiled by Evgenii Evtushenko, Moscow, 1995 and *Russkaia poeziia, XX vek: antologiya*, compiled by Vladimir Kostrov, Gennadii Krasnikov et al., Moscow, 1999. While other significant anthologies were published in the 1990s, including the poetry section, 'Nepokhozhie stikhi', of *Samizdat veka*, compiled by Genrikh Sapgir, Ivan Akhmet'ev and Vladislav Kulakov, Moscow, 1997, and Mikhail Gasparov's anthology of Silver Age poetry, *Russkie stikhi 1890-kh – 1925-go godov v kommentariiakh*, Moscow, 1993, discussion will focus on these two as anthologies that took on the task of encompassing the whole of the twentieth century's poetry. For an extensive list of anthologies compiled by Ivan Akhmet'ev, see <<http://www.rvb.ru/np/publication/abbrev.htm>> [accessed 25 June 2012].

as a proposal for a new canon, yet each one was received overwhelmingly as a statement of the compilers' views on the twentieth-century canon from a post-Soviet perspective, implying a continued expectation that there should be a single canon expressed in authoritative printed form. The polemical discussions of both anthologies, as will be shown below, centred on their representation of poets and works associated with the official canon of Soviet poetry. This article will explore the extent to which these anthologies represent a significant revision of the pre-perestroika canon, as well as the extent to which they differ from one another in their selection of poets and works. It will investigate what the Russian critical reception of the two anthologies implies about attitudes in the early post-Soviet period towards the canon, its composition, and who determines its composition, and consider what the critical response to the anthologies shows about questions of canon and national identity in post-Soviet Russia. In conclusion, the article will consider the extent to which these anthologies have proved to be influential in the longer term.

The literary canon, its formation and revision, has been a growing area of interest in US and Western European literary studies since the 1980s, but is still a relatively new field when it comes to Russian literature. For obvious reasons, critical analysis of all the factors involved in shaping the canon would have been difficult to pursue in the Soviet Union. There is also a problem with terminology, as the use of the Russian word 'kanon' in the sense of a body of literary texts accorded the exemplary or representative status of 'classics' through systematic inclusion in the educational curriculum, anthologies and literary histories is growing but still far from universal; many Russian scholars and critics prefer to use the term 'klassika'. The Russian word 'kanon' is more commonly used to denote a set of rules according to which a text or other work of art is constructed, such as the rules governing the painting of an icon, or the conventions applied to the composition of specific poetic forms, such as a sonnet. Whether scholars are writing about the canon or about classic texts and authors, it is nevertheless evident that there is common ground in the two main theoretical approaches to canon formation used by scholars in Russia and the West. One ascribes a dominant role to institutions (schools, universities, literary prizes, anthologies, literary journals) in shaping the canon. John Guillory has been influential in arguing for the role of institutions in regulating access to the 'cultural capital' of literary texts, with canonical texts setting out the model for highly valued educated language,

the language of the dominant social class.⁵ The role of institutions is seen, however, as minimal by those who would place aesthetic considerations at the centre of canon formation, seeing canonicity as a quality inherent in texts themselves. The question of aesthetic value in relation to the place of 'official' Soviet poetry in the twentieth-century Russian poetry canon will be discussed further below. In the context of twentieth-century Russian culture, however, it is the canon-forming role of institutions which has attracted the bulk of scholarly attention so far.⁶

The Soviet Union had an impressive array of official bodies dedicated to regulating which texts and authors were made available to readers. Mikhail Gronas notes that foreign proponents of the aesthetic view of canon formation cite the example of Soviet institutions to express their scepticism about the effectiveness of such institutions as agents of canon formation, and states that: 'despite enormous institutional efforts [...] party ideologues were unable to impose a new canon.'⁷ Presumably Gronas has the longer term in mind when he refers to the Soviet state's failure to establish its own canon; considering the twentieth century as a whole, it is evident that attempts to remove poets such as Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandel'shtam from the canon resulted only in their short-lived exclusion. It might, however, be argued that attempts to impose an official literary canon during the Stalin era were notably successful in the short term. Of course, this canon did not represent the entirety of literary activity in the Soviet Union at the time. Many unpublished authors continued to write, even in the most repressive circumstances. Isolated volumes of poetry published earlier in the century remained in private hands; some texts were circulated in manuscript form or by word of mouth. It is, however, doubtful that much of the work of poets excluded from the institutionally-sanctioned canon was actually available to large numbers of readers, particularly before the growth of illegally published samizdat in the post-Stalin years. The banning of texts and authors, and their consequent

⁵ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Chicago, IL and London, 1993.

⁶ Most literary histories of the twentieth century, even if they do not discuss canon formation directly, place particular emphasis on the involvement of institutions and/or unofficial groupings in the development of Soviet-era literary life. For an alternative point of view, see Mikhail Gronas's book, *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics*, New York and London, 2011, particularly pp. 69–70, where the author suggests that 'cultural mnemonics', the capacity of a poetic text to be memorized, plays an important role in canon formation.

⁷ Mikhail Gronas, 'Dissensus: Voina za kanon v amerikanskoi akademii 80-kh–90-kh godov', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2001, 51, pp. 6–18 (p. 14).

inaccessibility, meant that there were times when certain names were known to many only by hearsay. The poet Ol'ga Berggol'ts recalled being asked by a Leningrad student of literature in the mid 1950s whether there was such a poet as Vladislav Khodasevich, and whether Akhmatova was an artist.⁸ Samizdat publications from the 1960s onwards meant that some work by unpublished writers was available to some readers, but even then it was quite possible for members of the intelligentsia in the 1960s, for example, to know the names of certain authors, such as Mandel'shtam, Andrei Platonov and Vladimir Nabokov, without actually having read any of their work.⁹ As G. S. Smith puts it: 'Stalin's totalitarianism and the philistinism of Brezhnev's apparatus had defined the cultural canon with unheard-of effectiveness.'¹⁰

After the Stalin years there was some gradual broadening of the canon, as represented in published works, criticism and literary history, though this was a slow and intermittent process. In private, the cultural underground of the 1960s and 1970s had already rejected much of the poetry that was available in Soviet publications in favour of émigré and samizdat poetry, but access to material of this kind remained restricted and uneven. 'New' names had begun to appear in the mid 1950s with the republication of Sergei Esenin and Marina Tsvetaeva, continuing with volumes of Velimir Khlebnikov, Andrei Belyi and Konstantin Bal'mont in the 1960s and, in the 1970s, Mandel'shtam, Maksimilian Voloshin and Nikolai Kliuev.¹¹ Nevertheless, these 'returned' poets appeared initially in very limited print runs, often available for sale only in foreign currency shops, and their work was presented to readers with significant omissions. At the end of the 1980s there was still a large backlog of unpublished work by poets of several generations. In the early 1990s came far-reaching institutional changes which removed censorship and replaced state control of publishing with the market. As a result of these changes both underground and official Soviet cultures ceased to exist as parallel entities with separate spheres of

⁸ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, 'Stenogramma vystupleniia na sobranii moskovskikh pisatelei, 15 iunია 1956 goda', *Dnevnye zvezdy. Govorit Leningrad*, Moscow, 1990, p. 391.

⁹ On the expansion of the intelligentsia canon in the 1960s, see Christine Engel, 'Proshchanie s mifom', *Znamia*, 1992, 1, pp. 205–08 (p. 207), and for an outline of developments through the 1970s and 1980s, see Valerii Shubinskii, 'V epokhu pozdnei bronzy', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2001, 51, pp. 293–314 (pp. 293–96).

¹⁰ Gerald Smith, *Contemporary Russian Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1993, p. xxvi.

¹¹ Viacheslav Dolinin and Dmitrii Severiukhin, *Preodolenie nemoty: leningradskii samizdat v kontekste nezavisimogo kul'turnogo dvizheniia 1953–1991*, St Petersburg, 2003, pp. 17–18.

influence and separate channels for publication and distribution. It was far from clear how these cultures, which were defined by their opposition to one another, could be successfully integrated.

The question of whether a single canon, even one based on consensus rather than institutional fiat, was necessary or appropriate in the post-Soviet era seems to have attracted little immediate attention inside Russia in the 1990s. G. S. Smith, writing in 1993, noted that: 'At the present stage of the history of Russian poetry, and of Russian literature as a whole, the canon of texts (and the very idea of a canon) has become increasingly problematical.'¹² In fact much of the polemical discussion around matters of the changing canon appeared to rest on the assumption that a single and unified canon was more desirable than multiple parallel canons. This may have been partly a result of cultural inertia: critics were accustomed to the notion of a single canon that they could contest or defend, and were preoccupied with challenging what they saw as opponents' attempts to impose their own version of the canon. During the 1990s and early 2000s some critics put forward proposals that would have involved the decanonization of a great deal of poetry identified as 'official' Soviet poetry, seen as relics of a now incomprehensible, aesthetically inferior culture, and the placing of a much greater emphasis on experimental underground poetry. Prompted by anxieties over a supposedly ascendant, Western-influenced avant-garde, others attacked what they perceived as attempts to create a misleading version of literary history. For example, in 2004 Sergei Mnatskanian complained bitterly about an encyclopaedia article on Soviet literature of the second half of the twentieth century, which presented 'only the underground or poets dreamed up by Western slavists', and was, he felt, nothing less than an attempt to 'cleanse the picture of Russian poetry of "outsiders"'.¹³ As the following discussion of the reception of two major anthologies will show, the perception that a triumphant avant-garde was busily imposing its own canon was not one shared by representatives of the avant-garde themselves, who felt that underground, experimental poets were being unfairly marginalized. Revisions to the school curriculum in the late 1990s suggest that fears of an underground 'takeover' were in fact groundless: most of the poets recommended for study were already canonical figures in the mid 1980s, if not yet required reading for schoolchildren. The primary curriculum published by the Ministry

¹² Smith, *Contemporary Russian Poetry*, p. xxiii.

¹³ Sergei Mnatskanian, 'Vek novyi – a poezii?', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 26 May 2004 <http://www.lgz.ru/archives/html_arch/lg20-212004/Polosy/art7_1.htm> [accessed 21 July 2011] (paras 7–48 of 69).

of Education in 1997 lists among recommended poets of the first half of the century the émigré Ivan Bunin, Aleksandr Blok, Maiakovskii, Esenin, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva and Aleksandr Tvardovskii. Works suggested for study largely avoid political matters, so Blok's 'Dvenadsat'' is absent, and Maiakovskii's revolutionary credentials are limited to Lenin's favourite anti-bureaucratic 'Prozasedavshiesia'. The secondary curriculum of 1999 adds to this list a selection of Silver Age poets, including Gumilev, Igor' Severianin and Mandel'shtam, as well as Boris Pasternak and Nikolai Zabolotskii; poets listed under the heading of 'second half of the twentieth century' include Andrei Voznesenskii, Evtushenko and Bella Akhmadulina, but also Nikolai Rubtsov, Joseph Brodsky, Vladimir Vysotskii and Bulat Okudzhava, whose place in the pre-perestroika official canon was uncertain at best.¹⁴

The sensitivities associated with revision of the canon were displayed particularly clearly in connection with the publication of two sizeable anthologies of twentieth-century poetry in the 1990s. The critical response to these two publications may be seen as particularly significant because poetry anthologies, as Il'ia Kukulin notes, lend themselves to being seen as representative of broader cultural change:

in contemporary Russian conditions it is precisely the poetry anthology covering the whole of the twentieth century or a significant part of it that is best placed to represent metonymically the main directions of Russian cultural evolution.¹⁵

In 1995 Evgenii Evtushenko's vast anthology *Strofy veka* (*Lines of the Century*) appeared, followed in 1999 by Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov's only slightly smaller anthology, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* (*Russian Poetry: The Twentieth Century*). Their publication was met by an array of interested parties with conflicting artistic, ideological and commercial agendas. Both anthologies attracted outspoken criticism

¹⁴ 'Ob obiazatel'nom minimume sodержaniia obrazovatel'nykh programm osnovnoi obshcheobrazovatel'noi shkoly', July 1997 <http://www.businesspravo.ru/Docum/DocumShow_DocumID_52815.html> [accessed 25 June 2012] (section 'Iz literatury XX veka'); 'Ob utverzhenii obiazatel'nogo minimuma sodержaniia srednego (polnogo) obshchego obrazovaniia', June 1999 <http://www.businesspravo.ru/Docum/DocumShow_DocumID_71939.html> [accessed 25 June 2012] (sections 'Iz literatury kontsa XIX – nachala XX v' and 'Iz literatury XX veka'). I am very grateful to Joanne Shelton for directing me to this information.

¹⁵ Il'ia Kukulin, 'Impressionisticheskii monument', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2011, 109, pp. 287–95 (p. 288).

which centred on their choice of poets and their compilers' allegedly self-interested and subjective agendas. The range of complaints was considerable: too much conventional 'official Soviet poetry' had been included at the expense of innovative underground poetry; the selection ignored the work of poets who were hugely popular among the general public; it was dominated by Russian nationalism, or by 'Russophobia'.

There is, of course, nothing new in anthologists being made the target of unfavourable criticism for their selections and omissions; their task, as described by Alan Golding in his study of the American poetry canon, involves balancing two conflicting principles: preserving texts which might otherwise be lost or become inaccessible to a wide readership, and selecting texts by making judgements about their relative aesthetic merits. In Golding's view, these competing principles of preservation and selection presuppose different views of what the canon should be:

Preservation, the historian's goal, presumes the value of breadth, of collecting as much poetry as possible; it discourages further comparative evaluations that extract a more selective canon from the whole accessible canon. The preservative impulse assumes the value of a broad, inclusive canon, while evaluation produces a narrow, exclusive canon. A long-term goal, preservation makes poems available as lasting documents of a literary period. But evaluation determines how long any work, once preserved, receives attention and, consequently, how long it is kept accessible.¹⁶

Golding sees a continuing role for anthologists once a canon has been established. They may choose to maintain it, or to change it.¹⁷ In the particular circumstances of post-Soviet Russia, however, anthologists were not so much trying to maintain or change an existing canon, as to carry out the groundwork for a canon which would replace one that was too restricted and fragmented to serve. The range of poetry that was accessible to most Soviet readers in print before the late 1980s was fairly narrow. This meant that before post-Soviet anthologists could present readers with a revised selective canon, they needed to give a broader overview of a newly accessible canon. In the 1990s the need to preserve texts that had emerged from near-oblivion in archives to encounter readers for the first time was particularly acute. This impulse was reinforced by the wish to create a complete picture and restore works unjustly excluded from publication.

¹⁶ Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry*, Madison WI, 1995, p. 4

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

A mass of material, including work by poets more or less unknown to a broad public, but also unpublished work by well known poets, made what was in many cases a hugely delayed first appearance in print. Inclusion in a major anthology would make many 'new' texts both less ephemeral and more accessible to a wide readership.

The compiler of *Strofy veka*, as well as the compilers of *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, expressed their aims in terms which suggest they were motivated predominantly by the task of preservation: they emphasized the broad and inclusive nature of their respective volumes. In newspaper interviews, Evtushenko stated his intention of bringing together Reds and Whites together as Russians, and characterized his role as someone who aims first and foremost to preserve texts, leaving the task of selection to others: 'The main thing is to preserve what there is. Our descendants can work out who is a poet and who isn't.'¹⁸ In a similar vein Kostrov and Krasnikov notified their readers that their anthology was 'without any kind of claim to completeness, absoluteness, scholarliness — it is an attempt to represent twentieth-century Russian poetry in its necessary breadth and development'.¹⁹ Both anthologies do without doubt succeed in giving a far broader and more inclusive account of twentieth-century poetry than the one represented by the officially-approved canon of the early 1980s. A comparison of poets included in *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* with those mentioned in the authoritative *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii* (*A History of Russian Soviet Poetry*), published by the Institute of Russian Literature in 1983–84, shows that both anthologies include significantly more poets than the *Istoriia*, even if one takes into account the fact that it appeared several years earlier and could not therefore have included poets whose careers began in the mid 1980s or later.²⁰ In *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, 461 poets are mentioned; in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* — 779; in *Strofy veka* — 859. This suggests a considerable expansion of the accessible canon since the mid 1980s.

In the critical discussion prompted by the publication of the two anthologies, it was, however, selection, not preservation, that was at the centre of attention, with particular emphasis on the perceived personal biases of the compilers. A significant number of critics responded sceptically to the anthologists' claims to breadth and inclusivity. Compilers

¹⁸ K. Kedrov, 'Voskresenie Evgeniia Evtushenko', *Izvestiia*, 25 May 1995 <<http://lib.userline.ru/samizdat/30427?page=49>> [accessed 15 July 2010] (paragraph 6 of 26).

¹⁹ *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 3.

²⁰ *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, eds V. V. Buznik, V. A. Kovalev and V. V. Timofeeva, 2 vols, Leningrad, 1983–84.

of anthologies, as Golding reminds us, may not be particularly explicit in outlining how they have resolved the conflict between preservation and selection; their choices may also be influenced by other concerns which are not expressed directly.²¹ Russian critical responses to the anthologies demonstrated a readiness to discern the compilers' self-interested hidden agendas. Valerii Shubinskii was in a significant minority when he defended them against accusations of being dishonest and biased.²² Comments by the anthologies' detractors were outspoken and often personal. Dmitrii Kuz'min described *Russkaia poezii: XX vek* as 'damaging and distorting', and its compilers as 'two inveterate Soviet graphomaniacs', whose 'party publication' contained 'heaps of mediocrities just like themselves'.²³ Evtushenko was accused of manipulating his choices so as to present his own work in the best possible light, choosing second-rate poems by his most obvious 'competitors', including a large number of poems by members of the war generation who acted as his mentors, and promoting the work of his own circle, the poets who gained popularity in the 1960s.²⁴ Krasnikov was quoted describing *Strofy veka* as 'the most objective anthology in terms of names, and the most subjective in terms of selection of texts', echoing Evtushenko's critics with a backhanded compliment.²⁵

Evtushenko's personal reputation certainly played a significant role in the initial reception of *Strofy veka*. The ambiguous position he had occupied in Soviet culture left him open to criticism both from those who were sceptical about the authenticity of his nonconformist credentials in view of his almost uninterruptedly successful career as published and privileged Soviet poet as well as from those who disliked his liberal views on, for example, Russian antisemitism. Some critics, however, readily acknowledged the prominent role played by *Strofy veka* in preserving a broad picture of twentieth-century Russian poetry, drawing attention to

²¹ Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*, p. 4.

²² Valerii Shubinskii, 'Nashe neobshchee vchera', *Znamia*, 2003, 9, pp. 196–201 (p. 200).

²³ Zakhar Prilepin, 'Ia ponimaiu liubov' k Rossii kak liubov' k verшинam dukha, a ne k krovavomu absurdu natsional'noi istorii', interview with Dmitrii Kuz'min, 27 November 2007, *Agentstvo politicheskikh novostei Nizhnii Novgorod* <http://www.apn-nn.ru/pub_s/1498.html> [accessed 20 July 2011] (hereafter, 'Ia ponimaiu') (para. 46 of 62).

²⁴ Charges of making manipulative and subjective selections are levelled at Evtushenko by Konstantin Kuz'minskii, 'Groz'd'ia gneva: ob antologii Evgeniia Evtushenko *Strofy veka*', *Zerkalo*, 1996, 1–2 <<http://barashw.tripod.com/zerkalo/kuzm.htm>> [accessed 20 July 2011] (paras 2–4 and para. 11 of 66), and by E. N. Lebedev, 'Dostoinyi sebja monument', *Novyi mir*, 1996, 2, pp. 205–08 (pp. 206–07).

²⁵ Viacheslav Ogrzyzko, 'Svoi pri vsekh rezhimakh', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 18 March 2005 <<http://www.litrossia.ru/archive/139/person/3402.php>> [accessed 9 December 2010] (paragraph 24 of 29).

the fact that his efforts to create the anthology had taken around twenty years, during which some texts had been taken out of the Soviet Union for safe keeping abroad. Konstantin Kedrov described *Strofy veka* as 'an astonishing book which will open up to the reader an unknown Russia and its poetry', 'a completely original poetic masterpiece' and 'a new crystal palace of twentieth-century poetry with room for everyone'.²⁶ Mikhail Gasparov saw breadth rather than selection as a defining feature of *Strofy veka*, and proposed that it should be designated a 'reader' rather than an anthology, a term that placed more emphasis on selection, being derived from the ancient Greek word meaning 'bouquet of flowers', with might imply misleading claims for the volume's status as a canon aiming to shape readers' tastes. In fact the 'academic editor' of *Strofy veka*, Evgenii Vitkovskii, suggested in his foreword that the volume should be designated a 'kniga dlia chteniia', or 'reader', a term Gasparov embraced as an appropriate description for a book which provides something to everyone's taste in its vivid assortment of texts, as well as a sense of discovery:

reading it is like making an expedition across an entire continent: it is huge, and with each new reading you arrive in a place completely unlike the one you have just visited. If you don't like one, you'll find another that you do like.²⁷

Viktor Toporov agreed that the term 'reader' was better suited to *Strofy veka*, as it implied no claims to universality. In his view, Evtushenko's volume was to be admired for what it included, rather than criticized for what it left out.²⁸

What unites most of the two anthologies' critics is a demand for selectivity and interpretation based on an objective and scholarly approach to the material. *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* present poets in broadly chronological order. In the former, poets are arranged in order of the year in which they were born, in seven sub-sections with descriptive headings such as 'Children of the Golden Age: Poets born before 1900', and 'Children of the Iron Curtain: Poets born between 1946 and 1953'. *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* features five sub-sections, each spanning a given time period. For anthologies which aim to provide their readers with breadth and variety of material, this seems to be a reasonable approach, yet their

²⁶ Kedrov, 'Voskresenie Evgeniia Evtushenko', paragraph 24 of 26.

²⁷ Mikhail Gasparov, 'Kniga dlia chteniia', *Novyi mir*, 1996, 2, pp. 214–15 (p. 214).

²⁸ Viktor Toporov, 'Kogda tainoe stanovitsia skuchnym', *Postscriptum*, 1998, 3, pp. 260–74 (p. 261).

compilers' chronological approach was criticized because it lacked any conceptual framework that might supply readers with a sense of how the different poetic groups and tendencies related to one another. Kuz'min likened Evtushenko's volume to the museum of curiosities founded in St Petersburg by Peter I by describing it as a 'gigantic *Kunstkammer*', which made it impossible for the reader either to form a sense of the whole, or to see the extent to which the poems included were representative of the poets or their times.²⁹ Several critics complained that Evtushenko, Kostrov and Krasnikov failed to follow the example of the compilers of a 1925 anthology, Ivan Ezhov and Evgenii Shamurin. Theirs was the last broadly representative anthology to appear in Russia for several decades, which brought together a broad panorama of early twentieth-century Russian poetry, including the Symbolists, Acmeists, Futurists, Peasant and Proletarian poets, as well as 'poets not connected with particular groups', in a volume supplied with three introductory essays and an extensive bio-bibliographical apparatus. Evtushenko's idiosyncratic, brief introductions to every poet he included came in for criticism as falling short of the proper scholarly standard of impartiality and for being 'tendentious', while Ezhov and Shamurin's work was held up as a model of scholarly objectivity.³⁰

While critics of both anthologies appeared to be in agreement that Ezhov and Shamurin managed to create an anthology that was genuinely representative of its time, they had grave doubts about the ability of either *Strofy veka* or *Rusaskaia poeziia: XX vek* to give an accurate representation of twentieth-century poetry. At the centre of Kuz'min's objections to both anthologies was the way that, in his view, the compilers were unable to overcome their perceptions of Russian literature as two separate, parallel fields. In his opinion, they had chosen one field, poetry identified as 'Soviet', as the core of their selection, and then supplemented it with 'experimental' and 'underground' poetry with which they were much less familiar. Kuz'min argued that the choice of published Soviet poetry as a basis for a representative anthology of twentieth-century poetry, an *antologiiia tselogo* (anthology of the whole) was likely to produce an

²⁹ Prilepin, 'Ia ponimaiu' (para. 47 of 62).

³⁰ *Antologiiia russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti XX veka*, compiled by I. S. Ezhov and E. I. Shamurin, facsimile reproduction, Moscow, 1991. This anthology is used as a point of comparison in discussions of *Strofy veka* and/or *Rusaskaia poeziia: XX vek* by Vladislav Kulakov, 'Prezhdevremennye itogi', *Novyi mir*, 1996, 2, pp. 211–14 (pp. 211–12); Mikhail Gasparov, 'Kniga dlia chteniia', *ibid.*, pp. 214–15 (p. 215); Nikolai Starshinov, 'Fal'sifikatsiia poezii', *Zalp*, 2004, 8 <<http://orel-zalp.narod.ru/zalp8/Starshinov.htm>> [accessed 18 November 2010] (paras 1–3 of 88).

anthology that could not show the full range and variety of what was actually written. Instead, he argued, it would be dominated by work which had avoided stylistic extremes so as to be accessible to a broad readership and therefore more likely to be approved for publication.³¹ He suggested that anthologies of the second half of the twentieth century, when official culture and underground culture existed in parallel, should take unofficial poetry as the basis for their selection instead.³² The critic Il'ia Kukulin proposed that a new canon should be constructed predominantly from the work of émigré and underground poets, and claimed that contemporary poetry had its origins in non-censored literature alone, which had developed along the same lines as poetry in the USA and the West and was fundamentally different from Soviet literature.³³

There were numerous complaints that the compilers of *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* had included too great a proportion of texts from the official Soviet canon. An examination of the anthologies' contents, compared with the list of poets mentioned in *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, suggests that the accusation of disproportionate representation of poets belonging to the Soviet canon is in fact somewhat exaggerated. Of the 859 poets in *Strofy veka*, 235 feature in the late Soviet *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, or 28 per cent of the poets in Evtushenko's anthology. Of the 779 poets in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, 242 appear in *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, or 31 per cent of the poets included by Kostrov and Krasnikov. It should furthermore be borne in mind that the list of poets mentioned in *Istoriia russkoi sovetskoi poezii* represents a relatively liberal version of the Soviet official canon, including, for example, Anna Barkova and Varlam Shalamov, who had both been imprisoned several times for political reasons, Gumilev, executed in 1921 for alleged participation in an anti-Soviet plot, the Futurist Khlebnikov and the émigré Khodasevich. It should be noted that the majority of poets who appear in the two anthologies do not feature even in this extended, late-Soviet canon. Impressionistic assessments of the dominance of official Soviet poetry do not so much reflect the actual composition of the anthologies as a particular sensitivity to poets and poetry who had come to be perceived as 'alien' in the 1990s.

While most of the critics who responded to Evtushenko's anthology agreed that it was dominated by canonical Soviet poetry, Mikhail Gasparov

³¹ Dmitrii Kuz'min, 'V zerkale antologii', *Arion*, 2001, 2, pp. 48–61 (pp. 53–55).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³³ Il'ia Kukulin, 'Proryv k nevozmozhnoi sviazi (Pokolenie 90-kh v russkoi poezii: vozniknovenie novykh kanonov)', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2001, 50, pp. 435–58 (pp. 438–39).

stated that there was in fact nothing strange about this, since three-quarters of the twentieth century were lived under Soviet power. Somewhat wryly, he called *Strofy veka* 'the best monument to the culture of the Stalin epoch', as it shared the gigantomania of those times.³⁴ There was some sympathy for the view that a representative anthology of the century's poetry must include some work which captured the essential qualities of the times, and therefore must include poetry which was imbued with official Soviet culture. One reviewer would have liked Evtushenko to have included even more official texts, such as Aleksandr Mezhirov's 'Kommunisty, vpered!' ('Forward, Communists'), so as to provide a better idea of the 'cult classics' which ought to be part of any 'complete picture'.³⁵ There is no doubt that many poems belonging to the official canon were genuinely popular in their day, and that some, for instance Konstantin Simonov's wartime lyric 'Zhdi menia' ('Wait For Me'), have remained popular, but the anthologies' compilers seem to have struggled with the question of whether popularity alone should determine inclusion. Konstantin Kuz'minskii, compiler of the US-published *Blue Lagoon* anthology of unofficial poetry, criticized Evtushenko's omission of Eduard Asadov, a popular poet widely read in the later Soviet period and in the present day, but not critically acclaimed.³⁶

Critics who objected to the prominent place given in both anthologies to work identified as official Soviet poetry claimed that their objections were based on aesthetic rather than ideological considerations. As if in anticipation of their critics, Kostrov and Krasnikov stated in their introduction that their selection had not relied on artistic merit alone: they had made a point of including poems of little artistic value which nevertheless had significant social or political resonance when first published.³⁷ Their anthology includes the Stalinist 'greatest hits' by Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach: his lyrics 'Pesnia o rodine' ('Song of the Motherland'), made famous in the 1936 film *Tsirk* (*Circus*) and 'Sviashchennaia voina' ('Sacred War') of 1941.³⁸ There is a significant body of critical opinion that most Soviet poetry (a term rather loosely defined, but which has the potential in practice to be applied to any work that was published in the Soviet Union) was almost by definition artistically undistinguished.

³⁴ Gasparov, 'Kniga dlia chteniia', p. 214.

³⁵ Lebedev, 'Dostoinyi sebia monument', p. 206. Mezhirov's 'Kommunisty, vpered!' does not appear in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* either. For the text of Mezhirov's poem, see his collection, *Stikhotvoreniia*, Moscow, 1969, pp. 26–31.

³⁶ Kuz'minskii, 'Grozd'ia gneva' (paras 54–56 of 66).

³⁷ *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 3.

³⁸ 'Pesnia o Rodine', *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 255; 'Sviashchennaia voina', *ibid.*

Ol'ga Sedakova consigned Soviet poetry to the category of 'late folklore', describing it in relation to genuinely talented and marginalized poetry as 'drugaia poeziia' ('other poetry'), thereby reversing the convention of using the term 'other' to denote literary work that existed beyond the margins of official Soviet publications.³⁹ Dmitrii Galkovskii's anthology, *Utkorech'* (an Orwellian reference to 'duckspeak' — a term in Newspeak meaning to speak without thinking), is a collection of propaganda texts felt by the compiler to epitomize official Soviet poetry. Galkovskii dismissed texts that failed to fit the prescribed pattern as 'imitation Soviet poetry', and described poetry showing talent as 'antisoviet'.⁴⁰ Alongside such categorical statements were more conciliatory views suggesting that such work might, nevertheless, be of some ethnographic or historical interest.⁴¹ Sergei Zav'ialov wrote in 2003 that it was time for an objective reassessment of Soviet-era poetry, but suggested it might be most appropriate to approach it as an ethnographer might approach writing that was archaic or derived from folklore, presupposing its lack of genuine artistic interest, and ascribing to it the status of 'a monument of a defunct culture'.⁴² Certainly there are real questions about how accessible many Soviet-era poems are to readers who lack any personal experience or contextual knowledge about Soviet life. Zav'ialov noted that both Iaroslav Smeliakov and Ol'ga Berggol'ts wrote about their experiences of imprisonment during the years of Stalinist terror, assuming a reader who would recognize these experiences and follow their allusions in work which is not necessarily explicit in its treatment of the subject.⁴³ The same difficulty can be seen in the work of post-Soviet poets such as Timur Kibirov, who allude to a Soviet past which not all contemporary Russian readers remember.⁴⁴ There are critics, however, who have called for a far more measured assessment of poetry written and published in the Soviet Union, finding it unproductive to operate with absolute categories which fail to correspond with the complexities of Soviet literary life. They suggest that not all published poets may be consigned to the category of talentless bureaucrat, and not

³⁹ Ol'ga Sedakova, 'Drugaia poeziia', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1997, 22, pp. 233–42 (pp. 233–36).

⁴⁰ *Utkorech'*: *antologiiia sovetskoi poezii*, compiled by Dmitrii Galkovskii, Pskov, 2002.

⁴¹ I. Akhmet'ev, 'O neofitsial'noi poezii v *Samizdate veka*', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1998, 34, pp. 307–10 (p. 308).

⁴² Sergei Zav'ialov, 'Peripetiia i tragicheskaia ironiia v sovetskoi poezii', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2003, 59, pp. 244–49 (p. 248).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 248–49.

⁴⁴ A. Alekhin, 'Iz veka v vek: zametki o desiatiletii russkoi poezii', *Voprosy literatury*, 2004, 6, pp. 54–67 (pp. 55–56).

all underground poets may be classed as gifted successors to the great modernist tradition. Valerii Shubinskii, for example, found Galkovskii's approach unhelpful, preferring a process of 'rehabilitation' of published Soviet poetry within the broader context of Russian poetry.⁴⁵ Similarly, Dmitrii Bak suggested a more nuanced approach to the work of poets who can be called neither victims nor products of the regime, listing figures such as Semen Gudzenko, Robert Rozhdestvenskii, Boris Slutskii, Arsenii Tarkovskii and Vysotskii.⁴⁶

Critics who disputed the place of Soviet poetry in the anthologies appear to have assumed that underground poetry of the period was automatically superior, a view challenged by Shubinskii. Members of underground cliques (*tusovki*), he suggested, were used to judging their work not by the standards of recognized literary greats, but by the standards of their own group.⁴⁷ When critics came to complain about the anthologies' insufficient attention to underground poetry, their comments focused less on its artistic merits and rather more on its underrepresentation, especially where experimental, avant-garde poetry from the second half of the century was concerned. The question of whether this was a result of the compilers' limited knowledge of the full range of unofficial poetry, rather than of deliberate omission, was left open.⁴⁸ In fact, *Strofy veka* includes work by more poets associated with underground literary activity, such as members of the Lianozovo group, than does *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*. Included in the former, but absent from the latter are, for example, Leonid Aronzon, Dmitrii Avaliani, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Elena Katsiuba, Igor' Kholin, Evgenii Kropivnitskii, Ian Satunovskii, Konstantin Kuz'minskii, Lev Okhapkin and Lev Rubinshtein. Gennadii Aigi features in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* only. Ry Nikonova and Vladimir Erle fail to feature in either anthology. Kuz'minskii criticized Evtushenko's anthology for its failure to reproduce the typographical layout of experimental poetry.⁴⁹ The poetry section of a volume on samizdat culture, belonging to the same series as *Strofy veka*, *Itogi veka* (*Summing Up the Century*) was

⁴⁵ Valerii Shubinskii, 'Nashe vseobshchee vchera', *Znamia*, 2003, 9, pp. 192–201 (p. 198).

⁴⁶ Dmitrii Bak, 'Revoliutsiia v odnoi otdel'no vziatoi poezii, ili besplotnost' ozhidaniia', *Arion*, 2002, pp. 12–26 (p. 16). The case for a more objective, less categorical approach to Soviet literature is made, for example, in L. Aizerman, *Vremia ponimat': problemy russkoi literatury sovetskogo perioda*, Moscow, 1997, and S. Rassadin, *Sovetskaia literatura: pobezhdennye pobediteli*, Moscow and St Petersburg, 2006, and *Samoubiitsy: povest' o tom, kak my zhili i chto chitali*, Moscow, 2007.

⁴⁷ Igor' Shaitanov, *Delo vkusa: kniga o sovremennoi poezii*, Moscow, 2007, pp. 428–29.

⁴⁸ Toporov, 'Kogda tainoe', p. 261.

⁴⁹ Kuz'minskii, 'Grozd'ia gneva', para. 30 of 66.

described by its compiler as a supplement to Evtushenko's volume, but with a polemical edge.⁵⁰ If *Strofy veka* was considered by several reviewers and critics to give an inadequate picture of underground and experimental poetry, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* offers an even more restricted view of this particular field.

While it seems that both anthologies are broadly similar in the space allocated to 'official' Soviet poets, and in their relatively limited representation of avant-garde poetry of the second half of the century, a further comparison of the two anthologies in terms of their treatment of poets in particular categories suggests that there are in fact significant differences between them. There are 407 poets who feature in both anthologies, but they make up slightly less than half of the total of those who appear in *Strofy veka* and a little more than half of the poets represented in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*. In other words, while the anthologies have a fair number of poets in common, a large proportion of each is made up of poets whose work appears exclusively in one or the other. In general, *Strofy veka* provides a more varied selection of poets. Not counting those poets who appear in both anthologies, it includes far more émigré poets (124) than *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* (78); many more of its poets served time in Soviet prisons and labour camps (67 compared with 25); it includes considerably more poets who published their work in the Soviet Union either very rarely or never (53 compared with 10). *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, meanwhile, features far more poets whose literary careers appear to have progressed smoothly, with a sustained record of publication. It also contains significantly more poets who are described as living and working in the Russian provinces, and more born in the 1940s and 1950s.

The fact that Kostrov and Krasnikov's anthology, in comparison to Evtushenko's, features rather more poets who pursued successful literary careers outside the capital cities from the 1960s onwards, supports to some extent many critics' opinion of Kostrov and Krasnikov's anthology as an expression of Russian nationalist cultural preferences. The relatively low profile of avant-garde poetry in Kostrov and Krasnikov's anthology should be compared with the much higher profile of work which is broadly in tune with nationalist sympathies. Indeed, Krasnikov has himself placed particular emphasis on his anthology as a collection of Russian poetry written during a century when Russia and Russian identity were seriously threatened. Anthologies do have a role to play in the construction of national identity, as shown, for example, by Golding's exploration of

⁵⁰ Akhmet'ev, 'O neofitsial'noi poezii', p. 307.

early nineteenth-century collections of American poetry as expressions of a developing literary nationalism, which associated American national identity with morality, in contrast to perceived European decadence.⁵¹ In post-Soviet Russia too the nationalists' assertion of Russian identity is often linked with claims of moral superiority over the West, and with maintaining a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them'. This view was expressed clearly by Krasnikov in connection with his more recent anthology, the 2009 *Russkaia poeziia: XXI vek* (*Russian Poetry: The Twenty-First Century*). Writing about this volume, its compiler claimed that Russian poetry was now 'the best in the world', rooted in national culture, the antithesis of superficial Western-style glamour and self-consciously complex 'texts'. Furthermore, the poems' 'transparent and profound simplicity' was not amenable to translation into other languages.⁵² It turns out that probably the most durable element of Soviet official culture in the post-Soviet period has little to do with Marxism-Leninism, and a good deal to do with the kind of Russian nationalist and patriotic sentiment that became a principal ingredient of post-war Soviet culture, gaining ground through the 1970s and 1980s, to emerge fully in the 1990s.⁵³ In the post-Soviet literary world nationalists have been on the alert for what they term 'Russophobia', commonly used as an anti-Western code word and cover for antisemitic remarks, but also used to attack Bolshevik ideas as a foreign import which almost destroyed the Russian people. In the opposing camp are critics deemed by the nationalists to manifest 'Russophobia'. Here we are moving away from questions of selection or preservation of texts. Selection is foregrounded as an aggressive act of exclusion; preservation conflates the perpetuation of texts with the perpetuation of an ethnic group that is perceived as being under threat.

Those sympathetic to nationalist views have championed figures such as Rubtsov, messianic martyrs who allegedly fell victim to anti-Russian machinations, or Iurii Kuznetsov. When it comes to the representation of Rubtsov's work in *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* the number of poems included is roughly the same (nine in the former, eleven in the latter), but only three poems appear in both anthologies, all of which offer muted and tender evocations of the poet's rural origins.⁵⁴ The other

⁵¹ Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*, p. 6.

⁵² Gennadii Krasnikov, 'Iz nemoty i molchaniia', *Moskva*, 2009, 1, pp. 179–92 (pp. 184–85; 187). The anthology in question is *Russkaia poeziia: XXI vek*, Moscow, 2009.

⁵³ See the study by Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953–1985*, Moscow, 2003.

⁵⁴ These poems are 'Dobryi Filia', *Strofy veka*, p. 810, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 656; 'V gornitse', *Strofy veka*, p. 810, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 658; 'Tikhaia moia Rodina',

poems chosen by the compilers emphasize different facets of his work. Evtushenko's Rubtsov appears to be torn between the town and the countryside — 'Grani' ('Borders'), 'Proshchal'naia pesnia' ('Farewell Song') — while Krasnikov and Kostrov present a Rubtsov who is in harmony with Russia and its people, and mystically connected to his country's past — 'Ia budu skakat' ('I Shall Race'), 'Videnie na kholme' ('Vision on a Hill').⁵⁵ Kuznetsov is represented more fully by Kostrov and Krasnikov (thirteen poems) than by Evtushenko (seven poems), only three of his poems appear in both anthologies, all dating from between 1968 and 1972.⁵⁶ A comparison of the selections made by the anthologies' compilers shows a distinct difference of emphasis, with Evtushenko choosing mainly earlier, and Kostrov and Krasnikov choosing mainly later poems. Six of Kuznetsov's poems included in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* were written in the 1990s, and express the author's bitter dismay at post-Soviet society, coupled with a mystical reverence for the Russian people. Evtushenko's selection of Kuznetsov's work is drawn very largely from the late 1960s and very early 1970s, and includes two poems connected with the painful aftermath of the death of the poet's father in the war. 'Vozvrashchenie' ('The Return'), which appears in both anthologies, presents a disturbing image of a column of whirling dust, the spectral visitation of his father conjured up by his widow's longing for him. To this poem Evtushenko adds 'Otsu' ('To My Father'), which ends in the poet's vehement graveside reproach to his father for abandoning his wife and child; 'Lozhnye sviatini' ('False Relics'), selected by Krasnikov and Kostrov, speaks more generally and impersonally of the war dead, protesting that the tomb of the 'unknown soldier' contains the body of a man who was not unknown to his family, or to God. The Kuznetsov who appears in *Strofy veka* is more given to personal reflection. *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* presents a Kuznetsov whose poems reach out to the distant past ('Znamia s Kulikova'), across the vastness of Russian history ('Fedora'), or into highly charged metaphysical landscapes ('Rasput'e').⁵⁷

The poet Nikolai Starshinov claimed angrily that Evtushenko had allotted far more space to Timur Kibirov's work than to Rubtsov's. This

Strofy veka, p. 811, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 658.

⁵⁵ 'Grani', *Strofy veka*, p. 810, 'Proshchal'naia pesnia', *ibid.*, pp. 811–12; 'Ia budu skakat', *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 657; 'Videnie na kholme', *ibid.*, pp. 658–59.

⁵⁶ These poems are 'Atomnaia skazka', *Strofy veka*, pp. 874–75, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 709; 'Zavizhu li oblako v nebe vysokom', *Strofy veka*, p. 874, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 709; 'Vozvrashchenie', *Strofy veka*, p. 875, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 709.

⁵⁷ 'Otsu', *Strofy veka*, p. 874; 'Lozhnye sviatini', *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 710; 'Znamia s Kulikova', *ibid.*; 'Fedora', *ibid.*, p. 711.

is in fact not strictly accurate: *Strofy veka* devotes roughly the same space to each (about two and a quarter pages), but represents Kibirov's poetry with a single work, 'Russkaia pesnia: epilog' ('Russian Song: Epilogue'). Starshinov's objections rest on his judgment of Kibirov as the antithesis of Rubtsov: instead of communion with the traditions of rural Russia, his work offers a mocking patchwork of Russian and Soviet cultural allusions and references to Russia's brutal past. Starshinov quotes Evtushenko's introduction to Kibirov's poem, saying, "it seems as though he is making fun of all that is sacred — including the Motherland", and continues:

It's not a case of 'it seems as though', he really is making fun of *The Lay of the Warfare Waged by Igor*, and Leskov, and Blok, and Smeliakov. This mediocre versifier is incapable of creating anything of his own. He is only able, parrot-like, to make limp, dull, overlong parodies of other people's poetry. But Evtushenko has given him more space in his anthology than to Rubtsov.⁵⁸

In fact, Evtushenko's comments, when read in context, provide a quite different interpretation. Having reached the conclusion that Kibirov's continued parody of Soviet existence in the post-Soviet period was nothing more than 'insubstantial and risk-free mockery', Evtushenko then read 'Russkaia pesnia' and changed his mind:

Suddenly it seemed to me that I had found the key to Kibirov's poetry. The key is in the excruciating torment he undergoes when it seems as though he is making fun of all that is sacred — including the Motherland. Perhaps that torment is a form of martyred love?⁵⁹

A few stanzas from Kibirov's 'Russkaia pesnia' will help to illustrate why Starshinov was affronted by Evtushenko's choice of his poem, but also suggest that Evtushenko might be justified in interpreting Kibirov's poem as he does. The poet addresses Russia and evokes the way in which the ignoble and the elevated exist in it side by side:

Ты можешь плясать до упаду,
стихи сочинять до зари
и тут же, из той же тетради,
ты вырвешь листок, и смотри —

⁵⁸ Nikolai Starshinov, 'Fal'sifikatsiia russkoi poezii' (paras 27–29 of 88).

⁵⁹ *Strofy veka*, p. 956.

ты пишешь донос на соседа,
 скандалишь с помойным ведром,
 французов катаешь в ракете,
 кемаришь в вечернем метро,

дерешься саперной лопаткой,
 строптивых эстонцев коришь
 и душу, ушедшую в пятки,
 высокой духовностью мнишь!⁶⁰

You can dance until you drop,
 write poems until dawn
 and then, from the same notebook,
 you tear out a page, and, look –

you write a denunciation of your neighbour,
 quarrel over the rubbish bin,
 take Frenchmen for rides in a rocket,
 fall into a stupor in the evening metro,

fight with a sapper's spade,
 tell off stropy Estonians
 and imagine that your miserable soul
 is imbued with superior spirituality.

The poem ends with a declaration of faith in a new, transfigured Russia to come, though this declaration is subverted when the poet describes his faith as absurd, shameful, ridiculous, meaningless, irrational, and perhaps even sinful. It is an enlightening indication of the difference between the two anthologies that Kibirov is also represented in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* with just one poem, but one which parodies Leniniana rather than Russian cultural and historical tradition.⁶¹

It is also worth noting the anthologists' contrasting treatment of two prominent figures, one Russian and one Jewish, both Communist party members, both remembered largely for their writing about the Second World War, which has since the mid 1990s become an increasingly

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 957.

⁶¹ 'Pesnia o Lenine', *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 850. See Tat'iana Cherednichenko, 'Pesni Timura Kibirova', *Arion*, 1995, 1 <http://magazines.russ.ru/arion/1995/1/2_mon01.html> [accessed 26 June 2012], for an analysis of this poem and Kibirov as the 'last poet of our mass songs'.

important source of national pride. Aleksandr Tvardovskii is represented in both anthologies by three works on the theme of the war: an excerpt from his wartime narrative poem *Vasilii Terkin*, 'Pereprava' ('The Crossing'); 'Dve strochki' ('Two Lines') of 1943, in which the poet remembers a young soldier whose dead body he saw lying on the ice in Finland in 1940, and 'Ia znaiu, nikakoi moei viny' ('I Know I am Not to Blame'), a 1966 lyric touching on the poet's guilt at surviving the war.⁶² *Strofy veka* adds the long lyric poem, 'Ia ubit podo Rzhevom' ('I was Killed Near Rzhev'), written at the end of the war, and gives considerable space over to Tvardovskii's satirical work on the absurdities of the Soviet system, with an extract from the Thaw-era Terkin sequel, 'Terkin na tom svete' ('Terkin in the Other World'), as well as the 'Literaturnyi razgovor' ('Literary Conversation') from 'Za dal'iu – dal'' ('Distance Beyond Distance'), in which the writer is besieged by both readers and his ever-present editor.⁶³ Kostrov and Krasnikov avoid Tvardovskii's satirical poetry, offering instead several short poems in which Tvardovskii asserts his right to think and write as he sees fit: 'Moim kritikam' ('To My Critics'), 'Vsia sut' v odnom-edinstvennom zavete' ('The Entire Essence Is In One Single Promise'), 'Ia sam doznaius', doishchus'' ('I Will Find Out, Search Out for Myself'). Their selection foregrounds Tvardovskii's sense of duty before his country and his people — 'Spasibo, moia rodnaia' ('Thank You, My Dear'), 'Ia polon very nesomnennoi' ('I am Full of Undoubting Faith'), 'O sushchem' ('About the Essential Thing') — which promotes the image of Tvardovskii as a patriot and man of the people, as does the 1967 poem, 'Bereza' ('The Birch Tree'), about a self-sown birch tree inside the grounds of the Kremlin. The final poem by Tvardovskii in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* offers an ambivalent comment on de-Stalinization, noting the dangers of excessive attention to the creation of 'eternal' monuments, but also the efforts involved in 'chrezmernaia zabota o zabven'e' (an excessive concern for forgetting).⁶⁴ This poem seems to be at least partly in tune with growing Russian opinion of the post-Soviet period about attempts to erase, or 'blacken' Stalin's memory.

⁶² 'Pereprava', *Strofy veka*, pp. 521–24, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, pp. 357–60; 'Dve strochki', *Strofy veka*, p. 524, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 357; 'Ia znaiu, nikakoi moei viny', *Strofy veka*, p. 530, *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 361.

⁶³ 'Ia ubit podo Rzhevom', *Strofy veka*, pp. 524–26; 'Terkin na tom svete' (extract), *ibid.*, pp. 526–27; 'Literaturnyi razgovor' from 'Za dal'iu – dal'', *ibid.*, pp. 527–29.

⁶⁴ 'Moim kritikam', *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, p. 360; 'Vsia sut' v odnom-edinstvennom zavete', *ibid.*, p. 361; 'Ia sam doznaius', doishchus'', *ibid.*; 'Spasibo, moia rodnaia', *ibid.*, p. 360; 'Ia polon very nesomnennoi', *ibid.*; 'O sushchem', *ibid.*; 'Bereza', *ibid.*, p. 361; 'Drobitsia rvanyi tsokol' monumenta', *ibid.*

Boris Slutskii, like Tvardovskii, is best known for his poetry about the war, and it is the war, or memories of the war, which dominates the choice of poems in both anthologies, though Evtushenko's selection is considerably larger (fourteen poems, compared to seven in *Russkaia poezii: XX vek*). Slutskii's war in *Russkaia poezii: XX vek* involves keeping faithful to the memory of dead friends — 'Golos druga' ('The Voice of a Friend') — and patriotic duty — 'Ia govoril ot imeni Rossii' ('I Spoke in Russia's Name'), both first published in the 1950s — while uncovering the antisemitic prejudices which led many to believe that all the Jews, including the poet himself, returned from the war unscathed — 'Pro evreev' ('About the Jews'), published first in 1987, a poem also chosen by Evtushenko.⁶⁵ The selection made in *Strofy veka* presents a broader panorama of the war including moral courage in the face of enemy attempts to dehumanize prisoners of war — 'Kel'nskaia iama' ('The Pit at Cologne') — acceptance of death in battle — 'Posledneiu ustalost'iu ustav' ('Weary with the Final Weariness') — but also the unbearable moral compromises Slutskii faced as a member of wartime military tribunals — 'Ia sudil liudei, i znaiu tochno' ('I Judged People and I Know Precisely') — his awareness of home-front mass deportations — 'Nemka' ('The German Woman') — and Soviet mistreatment of prisoners of war — 'Besplatnaia snezhnaia baba' ('The Free Snowman'), published in 1988. Evtushenko also shows more of Slutskii's awareness of the cruelties and compromises of the Stalin era, as he includes, in addition to 'Bog' ('God') (published once in 1962 then not until 1987), which appears in both anthologies, a second poem about Stalin, 'Khoziain' ('the master'), 'Prozaiki' ('Prose Writers'), about writers in the Gulag, and 'Vsem lozungam ia veril do kontsa' ('I believed all the slogans utterly'), an admission of his blind faith and his responsibility for the consequences if that faith had been misplaced.⁶⁶ With the exception of 'Pro evreev' and 'Bog', which had both circulated unattributed for years before finally appearing in print in the late 1980s, the poems chosen by Kostrov and Krasnikov were widely published in the USSR. Evtushenko's choice includes far more poems which emerged only during or after the Gorbachev years of glasnost'.

One curious feature about the rhetoric used by both sides in discussions about the anthologies is that they criticized one another by comparing their

⁶⁵ 'Golos druga', *Russkaia poezii: XX vek*, p. 462; 'Ia govoril ot imeni Rossii', *ibid.*, p. 463; 'Pro evreev', *ibid.*

⁶⁶ 'Kel'nskaia iama', *Strofy veka*, p. 639; 'Posledneiu ustalost'iu ustav', *ibid.*, p. 640; 'Ia sudil liudei, i znaiu tochno', *ibid.*, pp. 642–43; 'Nemka', *ibid.*, pp. 643–44; 'Besplatnaia snezhnaia baba', *ibid.*, p. 644; 'Bog', *ibid.*, p. 641; 'Khoziain', *ibid.*, p. 642; 'Prozaiki', *ibid.*, p. 642; 'Vsem lozungam ia veril do kontsa', *ibid.*, p. 643.

opponents' behaviour to that of the Soviet regime. Il'ia Kukul'in remarked that the poems in *Russkaia poezii: XX vek* had been selected on lines which would have suited the old Writers' Union. Krasnikov responded by accusing Kukul'in of authoritarian behaviour worthy of Communist Party officials.⁶⁷ Krasnikov's response also included hostile comments about Kukul'in's alleged promotion of a 'Soros nomenklatura' with a destructive 'Russophobic ideology', implying an unholy alliance between Soviet authoritarianism and Western capitalism.⁶⁸ Discussions of who should be admitted into the canon have not been without a lurking glance towards the West, the nationalists' decadent 'other' and source of Russophobic contagion. Evtushenko came under attack for his 'Russophobic' attitudes in an article by Starshinov.⁶⁹ He described *Strofy veka* as 'extremely subjective and extremely politicized', and as an attempt to make the Russian people look foolish and aggressively antisemitic. There have been accusations in Russian literary circles that Western Slavists have 'meddled' in literary developments by promoting certain poets while others are ignored; translating or writing about some, but not others. Vladimir Bondarenko, a leading figure of nationalist literary criticism, echoed Krasnikov's comments quoted above in his claim that former literary 'commissars' had taken advantage of the opportunity to travel to set themselves up as Slavists in the West and control which contemporary Russian poets could be admitted to Western Europe.⁷⁰ In the circumstances it is perhaps surprising that the critical responses to *Strofy veka* contained almost no mention of the English-language anthology of twentieth-century Russian poetry compiled by Evtushenko which appeared abroad slightly before *Strofy veka* was published in Russia.⁷¹ It seems as though E. Lebedev alluded to this fact when he mentioned 'the foreign reader, for whom *Strofy veka* was originally intended'. Kuz'min's comments that the same anthology appears to presuppose a reader who has no prior knowledge of Russian poetry whatsoever might also imply an intended audience of

⁶⁷ Il'ia Kukul'in, '750 poetov – eto mnogo ili malo?', *Ex Libris NG*, 4 August 1999 <<http://religion.ng.ru/printed/92509>> [accessed 25 June 2012] (paragraph 12 of 18); Gennadii Krasnikov, 'Vse, chto sbylos' i ne sbylos', *Moskva*, 2001, 5, pp. 185–97 (p. 188).

⁶⁸ Krasnikov, 'Vse, chto sbylos' i ne sbylos', p. 191.

⁶⁹ Nikolai Starshinov, 'Fal'sifikatsiia russkoi poezii' (paras 30–50, 80–82 of 88).

⁷⁰ Vladimir Bondarenko, *Poslednie poety imperii*, Moscow, 2005, p. 276.

⁷¹ *Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry*, edited by Albert C. Todd and Max Hayward (with Daniel Weissbort), selected with an introduction by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, London, 1993. This anthology comprises works by 245 poets, almost all of whom feature in *Strofy veka*. The range of poets is still wide, but the selections of poems are more limited, so that often a single poem is provided to represent a poet where several poems appear in *Strofy veka* under that poet's name.

outsiders.⁷² Disconcertingly, anxiety over Western influence seems to be coupled with a desire to have outside validation for one's chosen version of the canon. The nationalists' paradoxical desire for legitimization by being recognized in the West was noted by Natal'ia Ivanova in an article on a 2006 anthology, *Sovremennye russkie poety* (*Contemporary Russian Poets*), which had the explicit aim of promoting a set of Russian poets selected for their Russian-ness.⁷³

Conclusion

In the early years of the twentieth century members of the Russian Futurist movement announced their intention to discard the old cultural canon ('throw Pushkin from the steamboat of modernity') in favour of something entirely new. In the 1990s, as then, the canon was a site of competition and rivalry between interested parties pursuing their own agendas. The way in which *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* were received was closely connected with the circumstances of cultural transition. Writing in 2011, Kukul'in notes that 'the politicization of "canon debates" is typical for public evaluations of literary works in transitional periods'.⁷⁴ Now that some time has passed since both anthologies appeared, it seems reasonable to assess their importance beyond the immediate circumstances of their publication and reception. In the long list of anthologies on the Russian Virtual Library website, Ivan Akhmet'ev places *Strofy veka* at the top, with *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* some way down the page. Evtushenko's introductory essays are widely reproduced on the internet, either on sites dedicated to individual poets, or on individual poets' pages on large sites such as <<http://poetrylibrary.ru/stixiya/>>. *Strofy veka* has, it seems, secured its position as an authoritative anthology, having been reprinted twice (1997 and 1999). *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* has also been reprinted once (2001). The initial irritation aroused by the compiler of *Strofy veka* has been set aside. Although Kirill Korchagin, also writing in 2011, does note that this anthology was shaped by Evtushenko's perspective as a member of the 1960s generation, and by his preference for civic themes, combined with a lack of particular concern for form, he nevertheless commends it for the

⁷² Lebedev, 'Dostoinyi sebja monument', p. 207; Kuz'min, 'V zerkale antologii', p. 55.

⁷³ Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Liutye patrioty: osobennosti natsionalisticheskogo diskursa v sovremennoi literaturnoi kritike', *Znamia*, 2006, 7, pp. 170–78 (p. 173). The anthology in question is *Sovremennye russkie poety*, compiled by S. N. Kaznacheev, Moscow, 2006.

⁷⁴ Il'ia Kukul'in, 'Impressionisticheskii monument', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2011, 109, pp. 287–95 (p. 288).

wide range of poets represented in it, and calls it 'a valuable source'.⁷⁵

The two anthologies under discussion in this article have found their place as points of reference, Evtushenko's perhaps rather more than Kostrov and Krasnikov's, but since their publication the scenery around them has shifted, with the expansion of the Russian internet and its multiplicity of sites devoted to poetry. The quantity and variety of material available electronically, and the opportunity available to users to post material, or to respond to it with their comments, seem to run counter to the hierarchical view of the canon as represented in a weighty printed anthology. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the virtual literary world is free from top-down attempts to present a canonizing view of literature.⁷⁶ It is also not yet the case that critics believe the printed anthology has lost its canon-forming potential. The remarks by Kukulín and Korchagin about *Strofy veka* cited above are drawn from reviews of another major anthology of Russian poetry published in 2010, *Russkie stikhi 1950–2000 godov* (*Russian Poetry, 1950–2000*), this time covering the second half of the twentieth century in two thick volumes.⁷⁷ While Il'ia Kukulín is not convinced that this anthology amounts to the basis for a new canon, on the grounds of the compilers' own modest ambitions, their insistence on individual taste as the basis for their selection, or the absence of any apparatus that might offer a sense of their interpretation of material presented, others are more willing to see it as a contribution to changing the canon.⁷⁸ For example, Korchagin sees its role as building on the work done by *Samizdat veka* (*Samizdat of the Century*) in making unofficial poetry available to a wide readership:

the next stage was to be a reassessment of the poetry of the Soviet period in which the practices of non-censored literature predominated, giving pride of place to the classics of the underground rather than to official poets. It is precisely this goal which is served by *Russkie stikhi 1950–2000 godov*.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Kirill Korchagin, 'Ontologíia antologíi', *Novyi mir*, 2011, 8, pp. 180–84 (p. 181).

⁷⁶ See the article by K. J. Mjør, 'Onlain-biblioteka i klassicheskií literaturnyi kanon v postsovetskoi Rossii', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2011, 109, pp. 323–37, for an example of attempts to impose 'normative' versions of Russian literature through the 'Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka: russkaia literatura i folk'lor' project established by the Institut mirovoi literatury in 2002.

⁷⁷ *Russkie stikhi 1950–2000: Antologíia (pervoe priblizhenie)*, 2 vols, compiled by I. Akhmet'ev, G. Lukomnikov, V. Orlov, A. Urítskii, Moscow, 2010.

⁷⁸ Kukulín, 'Impressionisticheskii monument', p. 289.

⁷⁹ Korchagin, 'Ontologíia antologíi', p. 182.

Danila Davydov describes the anthology as ‘a first attempt at a balanced anthology of contemporary Russian poetry, compiled from, but not limited by the position of non-censored literature, embracing the entire continuum of Russian poetry in the second half of the last century’, and as ‘a project of reconfiguration which removes traditional hierarchies’.⁸⁰

It is possible to imagine that the cautious subtitle of this 2010 anthology — *Antologiiiia (pervoe priblizhenie) (Anthology: A First Approximation)* — expresses the compilers’ wish to escape the opprobrium that was meted out to Evtushenko because of his perceived arrogance and, indeed, a certain nervousness about the project of canon revision in general. Most of the reviews suggest that their trepidation was unfounded: the compilers’ work is considered critically, omissions are noted, comments are made about the decision to present the poets in order of their dates of birth and about the selections of individual poets’ work. Ezhov and Shamurin continue to be evoked as the model anthologists, but there is also consideration given by Kukulin to the particular circumstances in which poetry of this period was produced, namely the attempts to suppress all literary groups beyond the Writers’ Union, which meant that this anthology would have struggled to reproduce Ezhov and Shamurin’s approach of grouping poets according to their adherence to particular movements and associations.⁸¹ It is only in the review by Mnatskanian in *Literaturnaia gazeta* that the tone of the 1990s polemics surrounding the two earlier anthologies is revived, including the accusations that compilers, by omitting certain poets of the 1960s to 1980s, have acted in line with the Bolsheviks’ attempts to erase the names of Georgii Ivanov, Nikolai Otsup and Zinaida Gippius.⁸² The focus on the binary opposition between official Soviet poetry and non-censored poetry that was a dominant theme in discussions of *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* appears no longer to be a major concern for reviewers in 2010.

In the time that has elapsed since the mid 1990s, the twentieth-century poetry canon has been gradually evolving, under the influence of new literary histories such as the three-volume textbook by N. Leiderman

⁸⁰ Danila Davydov, ‘*Russkie stikhi 1950–2000 godov: Antologiiiia (pervoe priblizhenie)*’, *Vozdukh*, 2010, 2 <<http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/vozdukh/issues/2010-2/hronika/>> [accessed 26 June 2012] (paragraph 65 of 80).

⁸¹ See, Kukulin, ‘Impressionisticheskii monument’, pp. 293–94.

⁸² Sergei Mnatskanian, ‘Bratskaia mogila’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 8 September 2010 <www.lgz.ru/article/13774/> [accessed 25 June 2012] (para 24 of 37). For other views of this anthology, see Anna Golubkova, ‘*Russkie stikhi 1950–2000 godov: Antologiiiia (pervoe priblizhenie)*’, *Znamia*, 2011, 9, pp. 217–20.

and M. Lipovetsky, published in 2003 which has, in the view of Evgeny Dobrenko, succeeded in transcending 'the old interpretive schemes' and creating a single historical narrative which brings together émigré literature and literature written in Russia.⁸³ In the immediate post-Soviet period critics and scholars understandably directed their attention more towards contemporary culture than towards the culture of a past which tended to be evaluated categorically as either Soviet (bad) or anti-/non-Soviet (good). Yet this transitional stage seems to have been largely completed in the 1990s. Kuz'min noted that a certain amount of re-integration between the previously separate worlds of 'official' and 'underground' literature when he wrote in 2001 that it was now unimaginable to write about Aleksandr Kushner's work without also bringing into the discussion work by poets such as Brodsky, Evgenii Rein and Anatolii Naiman.⁸⁴ While critics were engaging in polemics, readers have been slowly assimilating the poetic legacy of the twentieth century. In 1990 the process of making sense of vast quantities of 'returned' literature had left readers of poetry in a state of 'reader fatigue', as Igor' Shaitanov put it, but twenty years of publishing, curriculum development, broadcasting, and not least internet coverage have given readers a chance to explore the last century's poetry.⁸⁵ As compilers of major anthologies that have been widely circulated and discussed, Evtushenko, Kostrov and Krasnikov have played their part in preserving twentieth-century poetry for others to consider further, and done so at a time when the readership for poetry appeared to be declining significantly under the influence of economic crisis. Their attempt to construct an inclusive picture of twentieth-century Russian poetry seems to have been out of step with a literary environment which can be characterized by fragmentation, competition and hostility. Yet the inclusive approach has served readers well by making material available to those who might consider buying an anthology rather than risking spending money on a collection of work by a single poet, and who are happy to rely on an anthologist to carry out a preliminary selection for them.⁸⁶ A quick glance at one established Russian online bookseller's site suggests that anthologies

⁸³ Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Sovremennaia russkaia literatura. Novyi uchebnik po literature v 3-kh knigakh' by N. L. Leiderman and M. N. Lipovetsky', *The Russian Review*, 62, 2003, 1, pp. 161–12 (p. 162).

⁸⁴ Kuz'min, 'V zerkale antologii', p. 53.

⁸⁵ I. Shaitanov, '... no trudnee, kogda mozhno. Fragmenty poeticheskoi khroniki nachala "perestroiki"', in *Delo vkusa: kniga o sovremennoi poezii*, Moscow, 2007, pp. 400–34 (p. 400).

⁸⁶ See Leonid Kostikov, 'Antologiya kak vo pl', *Arion*, 2001, 2, pp. 62–64.

remain marketable: anything to do with the Silver Age, émigré poetry, poetry on Petersburg, Moscow, religion, poetry by women, and while there are very few anthologies of poetry from the second half of the twentieth century, anthologies of recent or contemporary poetry, particularly poetry from the internet, appear to be enjoying a revival. Anxieties about levels of readership for poetry, frequently voiced in the 1990s, seem to have been overstated. The anthologies by Evtushenko, Kostrov and Krasnikov may have been attacked by critics when they first appeared, and provided an occasion for the rehearsal of literary polemics, but they have been appreciated by readers for helping to fill in some of the 'blank spots' in twentieth-century Russian poetry.