

**REPRESENTATIONS OF VLADIMIR MAIAKOVSKII
IN THE POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN LITERARY CANON**

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Signature: **Natalia Karakulina**

Abstract

This thesis examines the position of the most canonical of official Soviet poets, Vladimir Maiakovskii, in the post-Soviet Russian literary canon. Maiakovskii's status in the USSR was unchallengeable due to Stalin's endorsement of him in 1935 as 'the best, most talented poet' of the Soviet era. This work will assemble evidence from a range of post-1991 publications to show how Maiakovskii's position has been affected by the wide-ranging rejection of writers strongly identified as part of official Soviet culture, and examine the extent to which he has nevertheless retained his canonical status. A central question for discussion is how the representation of Maiakovskii has changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I analyse three different socio-cultural fields, which each have the potential to shape the literary canon: school education, literary anthologies and the public media. It is apparent that while Maiakovskii retains his canonical position, his representation has not only changed, but it also remains fluid, and several different (often contrasting) trends of representing the poet exist side by side. In each case I review how post-Soviet representations differ from the Soviet image of the poet. Taking into account the abrupt changes which the Russian literary canon went through in the 1990s and the intended target audience for each case of Maiakovskii's representation to be investigated, I outline the reasons for these multiple versions of the poet's life and legacy and argue how this multiplicity became possible in the first place.

This work is designed to aid those who wish to have a deeper understanding of the particular position of Vladimir Maiakovskii within the contemporary canon. It also seeks to contribute to the body of research analysing the development of the Russian literary canon in the post-Soviet period.

Note on Translations and Transliterations

All transliterations from Russian follow the Library of Congress system with the following exceptions:

- Proper names of authors whose works are published in English. Such names are kept the way they appear in the publication: for example, Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*.
- Non-Russian names of authors whose work is published in Russian are kept in their original form in the text, with a transliterated version in the footnotes. For example, 'Bengt Jangfeldt' in text, but 'Bengt langfel'dt' in footnotes.
- Proper names in titles of works which are published in English. These will be kept as per their publications: for example, Wiktor Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*.
- Quotations from English sources are kept as per original publication, therefore may follow other norms for transliterating Russian names.

The name 'Lili Brik' is presented in its original form, rather than derivative 'Lilia' unless it is a part of a title: for example, *Pro eto, pro poeta i pro Liliu Brik*.

Unless specified otherwise all translations from Russian are my own.

Quotations from Russian sources are translated into English, with the exception of lines from poetic works. Quotations from poetic sources are presented in Russian, with a word-for-word translation provided in the footnotes. In cases where poetic works are quoted within a larger prose citation, the poetic lines are presented in Russian. An exception to this is when such quotations form part of a sentence, in such cases the whole citation is translated into English with references to all poetic works presented in footnotes.

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Introduction

Ты посмотри какая в мире тишь
Ночь обложила небо звёздной данью
В такие вот часы встаёшь и говоришь
Векам истории и мирозданию.¹

Vladimir Maiakovskii, unfinished, 1928-1930

On 26 December 1991 a major historical event took place – the Soviet Union, consisting of 15 republics, ceased to exist and by the end of the year Russian Federation became its legal successor. The Soviet Union, however, did not collapse overnight and its last historical stage has become known as *perestroika*. Mark Lipovetsky defines this term as ‘a short period from 1987 to 1991, which witnessed the collapse of the Soviet ideological and political order’.² Throughout that period and during 1990s Russian literature underwent major changes and a colossal number of new names entered the book market. To name just a few among these newly-discovered works and authors: there were works previously banned by the state (the works of Mikhail Bulgakov, Anna Akhmatova’s *poema Rekviem*, Evgenii Zamiatin’s *My*, many works by the Silver Age poets, the writings of Daniil Kharmis, Vladimir Nabokov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Anatolii Rybakov), as well works by Soviet underground and émigré writers (Venedikt Erofeev, Andrei Siniavskii, Dmitrii Prigov). As a result of this overflow of new information the literary canon started to undergo a rapid and dramatic change. Lipovetskii spots two contradictory approaches among those who were at the centre of the changing of the canon: the liberals and the nationalists. The liberals advocated the expansion of political and civil freedoms, while the nationalists considered the only route for the development of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union was adherence to the notions of nationality, traditional customs and religion. Yet both of these groups were

¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Uzhe vtoroi dolzhno byt’ ty legla’ (unfinished works), in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, ed. by Vasillii Katanian and others, 13 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955-61), x, ed. by Svetlana Kovalenko (1958), p. 287. (‘Look how peaceful the world is the night has covered the sky with tribute of stars it is in such hours one gets up and speaks to centuries to history and to creation’).

² *Late and Post-Soviet Russian Literature*, ed. by Mark Lipovetsky and Lisa Wakamiya, 2 vols (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014-15), i: *Perestroika and the Post-Soviet Period* (2014), p. 12.

critical of the heritage left by official Soviet literature, differing only in their opinions on who was to blame for the shortcomings of Soviet literary works.³ Indeed, many Soviet writers were displaced from the canon entirely to make room for the newly-discovered names. However, it has been noted that the process was not that of objective analysis, but of a complete change of approach. Often what was banned during the Soviet period was automatically considered good literature, and what was canonical, widely-studied and published automatically became categorised as bad literature. Lev Aizerman in his book *Zachem ia segodnia idu na urok literatury* cautions against such hasty rejection of Soviet heritage:

For me, as for millions of other people of my generation, the new knowledge about our home country, its history, us, as its citizens, came at a great and bitter price. But that is why it pains me to see how rapidly and easily some changed their positions: hastily burning everything that they held sacred yesterday, and publicly and loudly worshipping everything that they yesterday also publicly and loudly burned.⁴

However, amidst this trend to forget and distance oneself from the Soviet heritage in its entirety there are still exceptions. There are some authors whose innovations in literature and talent guarantee them a continuing status within the canon, regardless of other any canonical changes. Vladimir Maiakovskii is one of those authors. His major innovations in poetic language and style ensured scores of imitators, and many contemporary poets still name him as their inspiration. And yet, Maiakovskii's stylistic achievements were not the main reason for his canonisation in the Soviet period, and while they certainly feature in the post-Soviet representation of the poet, again, they do not hold a central place when defining Maiakovskii's relationship with the canon. Maiakovskii's continued popularity amongst both academics and the general public alike is the reason he is the topic of this thesis.

For a large part of the Soviet period Maiakovskii was not only acknowledged as a major writer, but as the greatest poet of the era, an exemplary figure for other authors to aspire to. This hierarchical status largely came about in 1935 when

³ Lipovetsky and Wakamiya, p. 14.

⁴ Lev Aizerman, *Zachem ia segodnia idu na urok literatury* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005), pp. 107-08.

Iosif Stalin wrote that Maiakovskii 'was and remains the best, most talented poet of our Soviet era'.⁵ Yet it is not just his writings which became part of the canon, but the wholesome image of the poet of the Revolution which was created and perpetuated encompassing all aspects of Maiakovskii's life, career and literary legacy. Indeed, the life of the poet, his struggles to become a poet for the people and therefore a better person, and his support for the ideas of the Revolution were at the core of this image, not his literary innovations. Boris Pasternak wrote about this in his book *Liudi i polozheniia*: 'Maiakovskii was forcibly imposed, like potatoes during the times of Catherine the Great. This was his second death'.⁶ Chantal Sundaram, in her work 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend' connects this 'second death' to the idea that Maiakovskii's works and even his persona were effectively transformed by the state.⁷ Moreover, the allusion to death could be tied to the fact that after 1935 Maiakovskii was no longer a subject for debate, but a given constant. His representation was unchanging, immobilised, therefore comparable with death.

The two main questions this thesis aims to address are how representations of Vladimir Maiakovskii's life and work changed after the collapse of the Soviet system, and how Maiakovskii fits in the Russian literary canon today. In order to achieve this I have looked at three different socio-cultural areas, which in their own right represent, or arguably shape the literary canon. Thus I analyse approaches to teaching Maiakovskii at school, his position in post-Soviet Russian literary anthologies and, finally, how Maiakovskii is represented within the field of contemporary popular culture through the medium of television and the Internet. The literary canon is shaped by a considerable number of different factors, with no single authority making decisions about who gets included in or excluded from the canon. Therefore I have focused on these three areas to get a point of view from three separate (albeit interconnected) fields. Within the

⁵ Iosif Stalin, 'Rezoliutsiia I. V. Stalina', in "V tom, chto umiraiu, ne vinite nikogo"?. *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, ed. by Svetlana Strizhneva (Moscow: Ellis Lak 2000, 2005), p. 318.

⁶ Boris Pasternak, *Liudi i polozheniia*, in *Izbrannoe*, ed. by Evgeniia Pasternak, Evgenii Pasternak, 2 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1985), ii, pp. 224-74 (p. 266).

⁷ Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend 1930-1993' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2000), p. 146.

area of public education information is commonly designed by academics with approval from government structures. While publications are also often designed by academics, they need to receive approval from publishing houses, whose main focus is on saleability. Finally, television and the Internet often promote information which is generated by people outside of academia and the main focus is on entertainment and maintaining of the public interest.

Once I had established these areas of research it became apparent that as the literary canon and Maiakovskii's image was changing a peculiar situation had emerged. Rather than the establishment of a single representation of Maiakovskii which fitted the needs of the post-Soviet literary canon, several distinctive images of the poet have developed and are perpetuated within canon-forming institutions and structures. This thesis will therefore investigate the differences and similarities between the various aspects of post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii and reasons behind this variety. These reasons can only be identified if we look at how changes to Maiakovskii's representation developed and who influenced them. In 1991 Iurii Karabchievskii's book *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* was first published in Russia, however the work was published earlier (1985) abroad. This was the first attempt not only to re-evaluate the life and work of Maiakovskii, but also to suggest that he was not a hero others should aspire to emulate, but rather quite a despicable, miserable and mentally unhealthy individual: 'Maiakovskii's frozen childhood hurt, his hatred of those who achieve and own more, his revenge against those who reject him – these aspects are ever-present and pathological'.⁸ Karabchievskii's book can be seen as the tip of an iceberg of *perestroika* which crashed into the Soviet literary canon, a test to find out whether the set image of the Soviet Maiakovskii could be shattered.

Other, often contrasting representations swiftly followed, some choosing to focus on the poet's life, some on close readings of his works and others still on Maiakovskii's relationship with the Soviet state. I look at which changes came first and when they became widely accepted and evident. However, as the post-Soviet Russian literary canon is a fast-evolving phenomenon, which has yet to

⁸ Iurii Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* (Moscow: Enas, 2008) p. 26.

survive the test of time, the answers to these questions may not become fully apparent for some time yet. Similarly, since the process of canon formation is ongoing this means that while Maiakovskii's place in the post-Soviet literary canon is secure, the role he plays within it is indeed uncertain. Thus in the course of the thesis as I consider the precise nature of the changes in representation of Maiakovskii, I not only intend to look at who implemented those changes and why, but also consider the audiences to whom these differing images of Maiakovskii are addressed.

Finally, I will analyse how it became possible for such contrasting representations of Vladimir Maiakovskii to evolve. Maiakovskii's road to fame during his own lifetime was not a straightforward one. His work and public image were largely determined by the way in which he tried to present himself to achieve recognition, distinction and ultimately fame. As his career developed and the situation in Russia and later the Soviet Union changed, so Maiakovskii's goals changed too. Let us consider, first, these lines from his pre-revolutionary tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii*:

я –
Царь ламп!
Придите все ко мне,
кто рвал молчание,
кто был
оттого, что петли полдней туги, –
я вам открою
словами
простыми, как мычанье,
наши новые души⁹

In this work the poet presents himself as someone who is out of the ordinary: he is the crowd's only salvation, as he can share his talent with it, so that the crowd also gets a voice of its own. It is logical to view these lines, as well as the whole work, as a key element in the poet's construction of his own self-image, as the play's protagonist, the poet, shares Maiakovskii's name. Equally, during the few stagings that the tragedy had, the protagonist was played by the author

⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, ed. by Vasillii Katanian (1955), pp. 151-72 (p. 154). ('I am the king of lamps! Come to me all who tore through silence, who howled because the nooses of middays were too tight, - with words as simple as mooing I will show you our new souls').

himself.¹⁰ If we compare the lines above with the *поэма 150 000 000*, a work written after the October Revolution, in 1920, we will see a notable change in the poet's self-representation: Maiakovskii no longer wishes to be seen as someone outside and above the crowd, but instead associates himself as one of the collective:

150 000 000 мастера этой поэмы имя.
Пуля – ритм.
Рифма – огонь из здания в здание.
150 000 000 говорят губами моими.¹¹

Thus the poet is still the one who presents the poem, but he is not its creator. In *150 000 000*, the crowd, to whom previously only the poet could give voice, has a voice of their own and chooses to speak through Maiakovskii. These are not isolated examples and there is a strong connection between Maiakovskii's poetic character and the public persona which he strove to create. I will analyse how post-Soviet representations of the poet selectively utilise elements of the author's own self-image (which changed dramatically throughout his life) to support their claims to truthfulness.

Structure

As this thesis focuses on the changes in the representation of Maiakovskii in the post-Soviet literary canon it is important to identify not only the place he held in the Soviet canon, but also how he came to be a canonical author in the first place. Throughout most of his literary career Maiakovskii remained a major figure, however his canonical status was not guaranteed. The 1920s in particular was a time distinguished by intense struggle between different literary groups, who battled for the public's attention and the approval of the government; accusations that an author's writing lacked talent or sincerity in its proclaimed devotion to the cause of the Revolution were commonplace.¹² After

¹⁰ For more information on the staging of *Vladimir Maiakovskii* see Vasilii Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985) pp. 77-79.

¹¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *150 000 000*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, ii, ed. by Nadezhda Reformat'skaia (1956), pp. 113-64 (p. 115). ('150 000 000 is this poem's author's name. Bullet is its rhythm. Its rhymes are flames, jumping from house to house. 150 000 000 are speaking through my lips).

¹² See, for example, Vasilii Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, pp. 451-98.

Maiakovskii's death in 1930 the poet's public image continued to undergo changes, now relying on the accounts of his friends and family. They were trying to ensure that Maiakovskii remained published and remembered. The poet's friend and family not only relied on Maiakovskii's literary heritage, but also on representing his life and career as suitable for a major poet of the Soviet state: certain aspects were omitted, while other aspects were highlighted. However, it was not until 1935 that Stalin made known his opinion of Maiakovskii and the poet soared into the highest position within the Soviet poetic canon. While a letter from Lili Brik prompted this response, the reasons behind this move on Stalin's part can only be guessed at. Many aspects of Soviet state life were shaped by the demand for exemplary figures to act as models for those who wished to follow in their footsteps and emulate their achievements. In literature Maiakovskii has become a suitable candidate to be put forward as a hero-figure of this kind. Once again the poet's biography had to be presented in a certain light, which emphasized his difficult but ultimately successful road to becoming a socialist poet. At the same time aspects of his biography (his countless love affairs and the fact that he shared a flat with the Briks, a married couple) were left out or barely mentioned, and critical analysis of them was discouraged.

Therefore my first chapter 'The Literary Status of Vladimir Maiakovskii during His Lifetime and His Canonisation by the Soviet State' serves as a historical introduction to the topic of the thesis. I am analysing the period between 1912, the date of Maiakovskii's surviving poems, to 1940, the year which marked ten year anniversary of Maiakovskii's death. I review how Maiakovskii first came to fame during his lifetime and how he became part of the Soviet literary canon as 'the best, most talented poet' of the Soviet era.¹³ This chapter will also consider how Maiakovskii developed his self-image and how this representation was altered after his death and after his rise to the top of the Soviet literary hierarchy. This analysis will help to establish the roots of some of the more commonly-utilised traits used in post-Soviet representations of the poet. Following the 1940s celebrations and through the rest of the Soviet period Maiakovskii continued to hold the position of the first poet and an exemplary

¹³ See Introduction, footnote 5.

figure for others to emulate. The scope of this thesis does not allow for detailed evaluation of the period between 1940 – 1990. Maiakovskii's representation, however, changed little during that period and most of the comparative material I use in chapters 3 and 4 comes from 1960s-1980s.¹⁴

The second chapter 'The Changes in the Perception of Maiakovskii in Russia in the 1990s' describes the main trends in post-Soviet representation of the poet and identifies the key figures who were influential in bringing about the change in the perception of Maiakovskii's image. I have already mentioned one of the main authors discussed in the chapter: Iurii Karabchievskii, who, after 1935, was the first to publish an entirely negative outlook on Maiakovskii's character and achievements. As Aizerman has pointed out, throughout the 1990s it became common to criticize the Soviet past, thus several other authors, following in Karabchievskii's footsteps, vilified Maiakovskii as he was a poet who celebrated the Soviet state. Such negative representations of the poet, however, remained on the margins of both academia and popular culture, as contrasting representations of the poet began to emerge. The 1990s was the time when the works of Swedish academic Bengt Jangfeldt became known in the post-Soviet space. Unlike Karabchievskii, whose passionate dislike for the Soviet regime informed his approach to the representation of Maiakovskii, Jangfeldt chose to distance Maiakovskii from the Soviet State. Instead he focused mainly on Maiakovskii's approach to the topic of love (both in his life and in his works). In his work, *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, Jangfeldt writes: 'Maiakovskii [was] outwardly loud and confident, but inside [he was] insecure and in need of constant encouragement'.¹⁵ Thus a distinctly different image of Maiakovskii emerged, an image of a gentle individual in need of the love and support of others. At the same time, Valentin Skoriatin's work on uncovering and publishing archive materials related to Maiakovskii's death reignited public interest in the causes of this event. Articles and television programmes began presenting a whole host of theories about what might have influenced the poet's decision to kill himself, or, even, hypothesising that Maiakovskii was, in fact,

¹⁴ For detailed analysis of Maiakovskii's representation in throughout the Soviet Union see Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend'.

¹⁵ Bengt Jangfel'dt, 'K istorii otnoshenii V. V. Maiakovskovo i L. Ju. Brik', in *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, ed. by Bengt Jangfel'dt (Moscow: 'Kniga', 1991), pp. 9-46, (p. 18).

murdered. Typically such theories conclude that Maiakovskii was disillusioned in the Soviet state and that government agents were aware of this fact and actively interfered in Maiakovskii's life. Thus a third distinctive trend in post-Soviet representation of Maiakovskii came to be – an image of the poet as a victim of the Soviet state. All of the canon-forming institutions I focus on in the following chapters (school education, literary anthologies, television and the Internet) tend to favour aspects of the three distinctive traits in post-Soviet representations of the poet described in this second chapter.

The third chapter, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii and the National School Curriculum', looks at how methods of teaching Maiakovskii at school have changed in post-Soviet Russia. My analysis will focus on how Maiakovskii was and is studied at final-grade level in Soviet and post-Soviet schools. As all students engage with studying Maiakovskii's work and legacy at school, it is likely to shape their perception of the poet for at least some of their future lives.

As I am interested not only in the nature of the changes in the representation of Maiakovskii in post-Soviet Russia, but also in the reasons behind the changes. I will relate how factors such as the target audience (students) and the nature of literary education in Soviet Union and later in Russia have led teachers, textbook writers and educational institutions to favour certain representations of the poet over others. I will also look at which texts are favoured for classroom analysis and suggested for reading to determine whether they complement the image of the poet presented in lessons which focus on his biography.

Texts are also at the forefront of my analysis in the next chapter 'Vladimir Maiakovskii in post-Soviet Russian anthologies'. My aim was to discover which of Maiakovskii's works continue to be re-published after 1991. I chose to focus on a single type of publication – anthologies. While some anthologies focus on presenting little-known works, certain others aim to be a depiction of the literary canon. In such anthologies authors are included or excluded, depending on their perceived popularity and importance. This test of importance is twofold: firstly the work has to make it to the compilers' list, and secondly, the finished product has to appeal to the general public, who will go to bookshops and buy the anthology. Often compilers will aim to combine both of these goals and

include little-known works along-side famous authors, who are more likely to be of interest to the public.

Anthologies provide little or no biographical information about the authors of the poems included, thus the reader's perception about the poet is formed on the basis of the works included. While size is definitely a restricting factor when it comes to the selection of texts for an anthology, poems are generally organised in such a way as to introduce the reader to the author, present a certain image of them, so that the reader can form an opinion on whether they would like to get to know the author more fully.

The other reason behind the decision to focus on anthologies is the large number of poetry anthologies that appeared since 1991 and the popularity of this type of publication in post-Soviet Russia. Russian journalist Leonid Kostiukov wrote in 2004: 'the time of the anthology has come – this statement could be left without further commentaries, simply as a statistical fact'.¹⁶ However, he does comment further on his statement, suggesting that as people look back at the past century they try to make sense of history by compiling all that has been achieved in the field of literature. Since different anthologies target different audiences it will be particularly interesting to see not only how Maiakovskii is represented for a wider audience, but whether different anthologies choose to present the poet in a different way, depending on their target market or the compilers' own outlook and preferences.

My final chapter 'Maiakovskii and Contemporary Russian Popular Culture' is an analysis of how Maiakovskii is represented outside academic circles. I will focus on how Maiakovskii and his legacy is represented on television shows, as well as online. I will also review how parodies of Maiakovskii's character and his works contribute to the changing representations of the poet and his canonical status. While some of the material analysed in this chapter has been designed primarily for the audience's entertainment and is therefore not aspiring to present an accurate depiction of the poet, the widespread use of the Internet meant that sharing this material has become extremely easy, therefore

¹⁶ Leonid Kostiukov, 'Eshche dve antologii', *Arion*, 3 (2004), <<http://www.arion.ru/mcontent.php?year=2004&number=85&idx=1378>> [accessed: 12 December 2015]

contributing to the widespread popularity and public recognition of such representations of Maiakovskii.

Considering the sheer volume of material available online, as well as on television, it does not come as a surprise that popular culture, more so than public education and publishing industry, lacks a coherent image of Maiakovskii. While both the school curriculum and, to a lesser extent, print anthologies' have a distinctive uniform target audience, the material analysed in chapter 5 targets a multitude of different audiences. Thus depending on the nature of the material, the intended audience and the creators' own views on the poet, each representation becomes slightly different from all the others. And perhaps if, according to Pasternak, having a single unchanging canonical representation of one's life and achievements is akin to death, then the trend in popular culture to use Maiakovskii and present him in numerous different ways can be considered the poet's resurrection.

Methodology

Chapters 3 to 5 each investigate their own set of core material. The chapter on the school curriculum reviews sixteen different textbooks, published between 1991 and 2007. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the government no longer had a monopoly on the publication of textbooks, and consequently a large number of different textbooks appeared in a short space of time. During the 1990s, however, two main textbook compilers became widely used in various schools across Russia: Anatolii Barannikov and Vladimir Agenosov. As well as textbooks I have also analysed supplementary materials for students, particularly the 'pass notes', popular throughout the post-Soviet period, on how to write final exam compositions. In 2002 the system of the *EGE* (*Edinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen* [*Unified State Exam*]) was introduced and slowly implemented throughout the country. Each region decides independently which school subjects are available for *EGE*. The literature *EGE* does not consist of a single large composition, but instead of a series of tasks with a composition question as a potential element in the exam. The *EGE* composition is considerably shorter than its predecessor. In this chapter I mainly discuss material on how to write the longer old version of the literature composition, as it

provides better opportunities for a deeper analysis of major studied authors. The publications designed to get students ready for literature composition are widely available and suggested to students as preparation material for their exam. Often they will give examples of compositions on very personal topics, like 'My personal opinion of Maiakovskii's pre-revolutionary works'. It can therefore be suggested that while the curriculum encourages the development of critical thinking and individual opinions, many students would choose instead to appropriate the opinions suggested by 'pass notes' of this kind.

For the chapter on literary anthologies I have reviewed and analysed ten anthologies, published between 1991 and 2005. Two of the major anthologies, *Strofy veka* (1997) and *Russkaia poezia. XX vek* (2001) each includes works by more than 700 authors. I have compared these to a smaller selection of anthologies published before 1991 to trace which of Maiakovskii's texts have remained on the list of most desirable, which have disappeared and which have made their appearance only after the collapse of the Soviet system. While school textbooks are all aimed at the same audience – students and teachers, different anthologies vary in their aim and in the groups they target. I have therefore used critical literature, particularly the work by Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies*,¹⁷ to set a theoretical background for my analysis of the role anthologies play in canon formation and preservation. The popularity of anthologies has also been the topic of many discussions in Russian literary journals. I rely on the informed opinions of their authors to highlight the particularities of Russian literary anthologies created at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, and to help me better identify the specific role of post-Soviet literary anthologies in the formation of the contemporary Russian literary canon.

The chapter on popular culture was particularly challenging: there is simply too much material available. I have chosen to focus on television and the Internet, because of their prevalent place in Russian people's lives today, as well as their contrasting origins. Television dominated the media culture in the late Soviet

¹⁷ Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Union and the 1990s, whereas the Russian sector of the Internet is a post-Soviet construct. As it was not feasible to represent the full scope of Maiakovskii-related material online, I have focused on analysing three Russian online libraries, *Biblioteka Moshkova*, *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka* and *Librusek*. The aim was to see whether representations of the poet which originate outside academic circles differ from those highlighted in previous chapters. Online audience are not passive recipients of information, but instead are actively involved in online discussions. I envisaged that the representations of Maiakovskii in such an environment would be even more diverse than in anthologies and school curricula.

A large proportion of online representations of Maiakovskii are parodies, thus a sizable part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of the relationship between parody and the literary canon. I reviewed several parody sketches from the poetic project *Grazhdanin poet* to Maiakovskii-related performances on the Russian national comedy competition *KVN (Klub veselykh i nakhodchivykh [Club of the Merry and the Quick-Witted])*. While these representations do not form a pattern as readily as the material discussed in previous chapters, they all share a key feature – they are easily recognisable by a wide audience, who may not necessarily be familiar with Maiakovskii's works beyond the school program.

In the section on television in chapter 5, I analyse documentaries and drama films from 2002 to 2015 as well as an eight-part drama *Dva dnia* (2013). These films either directly focus on aspects of Maiakovskii's life and heritage or feature Maiakovskii as a central character. Many of these documentaries focus on the controversy around Maiakovskii's death, and thus represent the poet's biography as a detective story.

Chapter 1 and 2 are designed to provide historical background for Maiakovskii canonisation in the Soviet Union, as well as introduce the main trends in contemporary representation of the poet. Both these chapters posed a challenge when it came to compiling material. As Maiakovskii was the head of the poetic canon during the larger part of Soviet history and became such a controversial figure in post-Soviet Russia, there is a huge amount of material

written on Maiakovskii both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Within the timeframe of this project it would have been simply impossible to familiarise myself with the entirety of material available. My choice was informed by the relative canon-forming status of certain Maiakovskii scholars. When analysing Maiakovskii's life and legacy during the Soviet period I have relied on works by such highly accredited scholars of the time as Vasiliiii Katanian and Viktor Pertsov, as well as works written by people who knew Maiakovskii personally. Though such writings were largely unknown to a wider audience at the time, they were often used by Maiakovskii scholars. To illustrate the complexity of Maiakovskii's position before 1935 I will rely on the works and opinions of literature experts and authors, contemporaries of Maiakovskii, who disapproved of the poet's work.

The identification of major trends in the changing representation of Maiakovskii in post-Soviet Russia also required careful selection of materials for analysis. The three trends are each presented by an influential publication: *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* by Iurii Karabchievskii, *Liubov' – eto serdtse vsego*, by Bengt Jangfeldt and *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo*, by Valentin Skoriatin. Russian academia often considers opinions presented by Karabchievskii and Skoriatin controversial, lacking historical proof and poorly argued. For example, Dmitrii Bestolkov dismisses Karabchievskii's work as 'lacking any scholarly basis for the analysis of poet's artistic legacy'.¹⁸ However, their continuous republication in large print runs is a sign of their popularity with the wider public, and as such these works require my attention and consideration.

Theoretical Framework

Although much of my thesis is devoted to Maiakovskii's place within the canon, this is not a study of the Russian literary canon as such, but rather the poet's canonical status serves as a lens through which I will view the changing attitudes of readers, scholars and the government towards Maiakovskii. Nevertheless, before concluding any further analysis it is important to outline

¹⁸ Dmitrii Bestolkov, 'Tvorcheskoe nasledie V. V. Maiakovskogo v otechestvennom literaturovedenii poslednego desiatiletiia: kontseptsii i podkhody' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Tambovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. G. R. Derzhavina, 2012), p. 6.

the current debates in canon studies and my approach to defining both the Soviet and the post-Soviet Russian literary canon. It is a well established notion that canons change, however, who (or what) brings about the change is a matter for open debate. Frank Kermode in his study *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon* suggests the importance of the pleasure factor – works which make it into the canon are ultimately those which we enjoy and want to keep track of.¹⁹ However, the process by which those enjoyable works secure their place within the canon remains largely unclear.

In an essay ‘The Artist and the Canon’ Carey Perloff responds to Kermode by suggesting that ‘canons are not formed by “theological fiat or pedagogical fiat... or chance,” nor... by literary critics, but by the artists themselves’.²⁰ She argues that by adapting the work of their predecessors, artists keep the public knowledge of them alive and their works – inside the canon. Certainly, Russian authors have a long-lasting tradition of incorporating the works by other writers into their own texts. Perhaps, the most well known example of Maiakovskii himself using this approach is his poem ‘Iubileinoe’ in which the poetic persona is talking to the statue of Pushkin adapting the lines from Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*:

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 днём увижусь я.²¹

¹⁹ Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 31.

²⁰ Carey Perloff, ‘The Artist and the Canon’, in Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, pp. 76-81, (p. 76).

²¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Iubileinoe’, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, vi, ed. by Isaak Eventov and Iurii Prokushev (1957), pp. 47-56 (p. 50). (‘What was it you had Olga say?..

Not only is Maiakovskii paraphrasing the lines which every reader who went to school learnt by heart, but by incorporating them and using the theme of talking to Pushkin, Maiakovskii suggests that he is the other poet's equal and is therefore deserving of a similar place in the literary canon. However, as Alan Golding in his monograph, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry*, points out, this model of canon formation, based on artists' perpetuating works of other artists, does not explain how they come to know the works of their predecessors in the first place.²²

Finally, Paul Lauter, in his work *Canons and Contexts*, draws attention to the importance of the academic factors in bringing the change in the canon. He sees the canon as a cultural battleground, where defining what is 'central' and what is 'marginal' helps decide who has the power to determine priorities.²³ While this struggle might be true for academia, it certainly does not cover the whole of the literary canon. Lauter's theory does not incorporate non-academic literature, the popularity of which largely depends on the publisher's advertising companies and the readers' preferences, nor does it account for online discussions and debates. Both of these areas are central to this work and, as I will show, contribute to canon formation and representation.

Kermode also suggested that canon formation can be viewed as a game of chance where pieces get scrambled by the blind forces of circumstance and that the process should therefore not be viewed 'as a potential vehicle of coercion, exclusion, and covertly ideological manipulation'.²⁴ While this theory may work in certain contexts, it cannot be further from the truth when we

No, not Olga! From Onegin's letter to Tat'iana. "Your husband is a fool and an old bore, I love you, please be mine, I need to know right now in the morning that I will see you in the afternoon"). The original lines from *Evgenii Onegin* read:

Я знаю: век уж мой измерен;
Но чтоб продлилась жизнь моя,
Я утром должен быть уверен,
Что с вами днем увижусь я...

Aleksandr Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Detskoi literatury Ministerstva prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1963), p. 221. ('I know: my days are numbered, but in order to prolong my life I have to be certain in the morning that in the afternoon I get to see you...').

²² Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) p. 46.

²³ Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. ix.

²⁴ Kermode, p. 3.

consider the literary canon in Soviet Russia. The Soviet government took an active interest in the literary development of the state. In 1934 the creation of independent literary groups was banned and a nationwide Writers' Union was formed. Socialist Realism was proclaimed to be the only correct mode of literature. A hierarchy of canonical authors appeared, with those at the top set as examples for others to emulate.

The late 1980s and the 1990s brought so many new and forgotten names to the public it became apparent that it was no longer just the government and state-controlled bodies that were forming and perpetuating the canon. I share Golding's view that no single model encompasses the full complexity of canon formation, and the relative importance of each aspect remains a matter for debate. However, I believe that educational institutions, publishing houses and artists themselves all play a crucial role in reshaping the post-Soviet Russian literary canon. Thus chapter 3, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii and the National School Curriculum', largely reflects the position of educational institutions. Chapter 4, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii in Post-Soviet Russian Anthologies', represents the position of the publishing industry, but also of contemporary writers and poets. Finally, chapter 5, 'The Influences of Russian Media Culture on Vladimir Maiakovskii's Post-Soviet Canonical Status' similarly reflects the positions of the cultural elite and the artists, but also those held by members of the public. As the Russian government continues to tighten its control over public media, sectors of the Internet are set to represent the position of government controlled educational institutions.

Due to the impracticality of fitting in the newly-developing post-Soviet Russian literary canon into any one established canon model, several further ideas regarding canon have to be highlighted. In particular Alastair Fowler's arguments on canon formation are relevant for my chapter on literary anthologies. Fowler categorises canon as subsets of literature. As we can never comprehend literature in its entirety, we choose to focus on a selection of texts, which in turn become canonical.²⁵ However, Fowler argues that separate canons can exist side by side, depending on their aims and target audience.

²⁵ Alastair Fowler, 'Genre and the Literary Canon', *New Literary History*, 11, 1 (1979), pp. 97-119 (p. 97).

Thus the school curriculum is an example of the 'official canon', designed by a government. Anthologies, on the other hand, serve a different purpose. Almost all post-Soviet anthologies seek to introduce to the public little-known authors by placing them alongside established figures. According to Fowler, anthologies are part of the 'accessible canon', or the body of texts readily available to an average reader.²⁶ As my chapter on anthologies shows it is precisely the accessible canon which suffered the most dramatic change throughout the 1990s. The unique situation in post-Soviet Russia facilitated the re-discovery of a large number of works and authors. It is not surprising that different people picked out of this abundance of literary material something that suited their tastes, which has contributed to the subjectivity of attempts to introduce a coherent post-Soviet canon. John Guillory argues that the politics of canonicity center on: 'the representation or lack of representation of certain social groups in the canon'.²⁷ In post-Soviet Russia anthologies have served as the arena in which different cultural groups compete for the right to define canonicity.

In chapter 5 I analyse public media, which very rarely focuses on a whole text, or a comprehensive representation. Instead we are commonly presented with crude and one-sided images of Maiakovskii and only a few recognisable lines from his works. In this context it is relevant to consider Mikhail Gronas' argument that canonicity is intricately tied to mnemonics. Gronas defines canonicity as 'the measure of how often a text is read, reread, mentioned, cited, and analysed over a historically significant slice of time'.²⁸ In chapter 5 I analyse how advertisement industry appropriates Maiakovskii's legacy. While typically such industries are not considered to have an influence on a literary canon, Gronas' definition of canonicity informs my argument for the relevance of advertisement in preserving Maiakovskii's status. Overall, as I have stated I found it unfeasible to connect the development of post-Soviet literary canon to any single canon model. Thus as I analyse Maiakovskii's place in literary

²⁶ Fowler, pp. 97-100.

²⁷ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁸ Mikhail Gronas, *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 52.

education, anthologies and public media I will draw on models which bear the most significance for any particular case.

In recent years, Maiakovskii has attracted some interest among English-speaking academics. In 2000 Chantal Sundaram submitted a doctoral thesis on the topic 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend'. The focus of this work was the official Soviet image of Maiakovskii in the context of Soviet cultural policy.²⁹ Similarly, in 2002 Laura Urbaszewski submitted a thesis 'Creating the First Classic Poet of Social Realism: Mayakovsky as a subject of "celebration culture" 1935-1940'. Central to the idea of the Soviet canon in the Stalin era, for Urbaszewski, is the notion of 'celebration culture'. She shows how literary celebrations served as a tool for introducing and preserving the Communist Party ideology, but also as a chance for both the general public and artists to express ideas which would otherwise be unlikely to reach wide recognition.³⁰ Both of these works, however, focus on the Soviet era, thus there was a lack of analysis of Maiakovskii's position in the literary canon in post-Soviet Russia. Moreover, Sundaram suggested that Maiakovskii will not remain part of the literary canon after the collapse of the Soviet Union: 'today Mayakovsky has suffered a third death along with the collapse of the regime for which his legend served a purpose'.³¹ Twenty five years after the collapse of the Union, it is clear that Maiakovskii remains a central figure within the canon. However, unlike the previous Soviet era Maiakovskii, contemporary representations of the poet are not confined to a single legend of an exemplary poet, but continue to provoke debates and interpretations. In 2012, noting the lack of scholarship on Maiakovskii's contemporary status, Dmitrii Bestol'kov submitted a doctoral thesis which examines post-Soviet literary academia's relationship with the poet: 'Tvorcheskoe nasledie V. V. Maiakovskogo v

²⁹ Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend 1930-1993' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2000). Further references to Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend 1930-1993' are given after quotations in the text.

³⁰ Laura Urbaszewski, 'Creating the First Classic Poet of Social Realism: Mayakovsky as a subject of "celebration culture" 1935-1940' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, 2002).

³¹ Chantal Sundaram "'The Stone Skin of the monument": Mayakovsky, Dissent and Popular Culture in the Soviet Union', in *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, 16, Spring 2006, <<http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/sundaram16.shtml>> [accessed: 12 December 2015]. Sundaram refers to Pasternak's quote, who stated that canonisation of Maiakovskii in the late 1930s was forced and equated it to his second death. See Introduction, footnote 6.

otechestvennom literaturovedenii poslednego desiatiletiia: kontseptsii i podkhody'. Bestolkov's aim is to identify the overall status of Maiakovskii studies at the beginning of the twenty first century.³² While this work touches on the idea of multiplicity of contemporary representations of the poet, its focus on academia means that the full complexity of Maiakovskii's position in the wider Russian literary canon remains unclear.

This work, while continuing to build on the current discourse on Maiakovskii, offers a timely and necessary updated view of how Vladimir Maiakovskii's representation within the poetic canon has changed after the collapse of the Soviet system and developed in the years since 1991. It will be significant for anyone who is interested in learning more about the poet and understanding the controversies surrounding his status within the Russian poetic canon. More importantly, this work will prove that, despite Sundaram's prediction that the poet has no place in contemporary literary canon, Maiakovskii was and remains a major figure in contemporary Russian literary canon and a source of inspiration for readers and artists alike.

³² Dmitrii Bestolkov, 'Tvorcheskoe nasledie V. V. Maiakovskogo v otechestvennom literaturovedenii poslednego desiatiletiia: kontseptsii i podkhody' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Tambovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. G. R. Derzhavina, 2012).

Chapter 1: The Literary Status of Vladimir Maiakovskii during His Lifetime and His Canonisation by the Soviet State

- Прохожий!
Это улица Жуковского?

Смотрит,
как смотрит дитя на скелет,
глаза вот такие,
старается мимо.

«Она – Маяковского тысячи лет:
он здесь застрелился у двери любимой».¹

Vladimir Maiakovskii, Chelovek, 1916-1917

In 1930, shortly before his death, Vladimir Maiakovskii prepared an exhibition 'Dvadsat' let raboty'.² He had been writing for twenty years, he was the author of numerous poems, articles, public presentations, as well as larger works: *poemy*, plays, film scripts. The newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, for which the poet was working at the time, commented on this event: 'an exhibition of Maiakovskii's works is the best proof of the social significance of the writer'.³ The exhibition is also proof of Maiakovskii's constant drive to achieve success, which, during that historical period meant establishing himself as the poet of the Soviet people, the poet of the Revolution, and a canonical figure. However, just at that time his works were under severe criticism and the official recognition which he strove for would not come his way until after his death, when in 1935 Iosif Stalin himself proclaimed Maiakovskii to be the greatest Soviet poet.⁴

In order to understand the process of the canonisation of Maiakovskii in 1935 it is necessary, first of all, to look at the poet's life and the critical responses to his work. Maiakovskii strove to create an image of himself as the herald for the new, changing society of post-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union.

¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Chelovek*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 243-72 (p. 269). ("Passerby, is this Zhukovskii street?" He looks at me like a child at a skeleton, his eyes like so, he tries to look past me. "It's been Maiakovskii Street for thousands of years: he shot himself here at his lover's door").

² Vasilii Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, 5th edition (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985) p. 482. Further references to Vasilii Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti* are given after quotations in the text.

³ Anon., '20 let obshchestvenno-literaturnoi deiatel'nosti Maiakovskogo', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 2 February 1930, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 482.

⁴ See Introduction, footnote 5.

However, there were several obstacles in his path, all of which derived from the poet's past: his class origins and his association with the Futurist movement. This chapter is arranged chronologically and is divided into three sections. The first section, 'The Start of Vladimir Maiakovskii's Poetic Career', covers the period from 1912, when Maiakovskii (according to his autobiography) suddenly became a poet, to 1930 when, at the age of 36, the poet committed suicide. It analyses how the influence of different people shaped Maiakovskii's early creative work, and explores the way the poet presented himself to the public during the years leading to the February Revolution in 1917. It then looks at the political events in Russia in 1917 and the poet's response to them. The political ambiguity of the period between the February and October Revolutions created an opportunity for artists to explore new artistic methods and forms of representation without much interference from the government. However, starting from the early 1920s, government influence over the sphere of art increased. Avant-garde artists fell out of favour, as scholars and critics became doubtful about their dedication to the Revolution and the proletariat. I will analyse how these changes in the sphere of art affected the way in which Maiakovskii presented himself to the public. The late 1920s were difficult years in Maiakovskii's career. In spite of the changes he had made to the form and content of his works in order to be readily understood by a wider audience, his works continued to receive negative reviews from literary critics and scholars. His background as a member of intelligentsia and a Futurist remained a key factor in critical reception of his works.

The following section, 'The canonisation of Vladimir Maiakovskii in 1935', discusses how Maiakovskii became a prime candidate for the position of the best poet of the era. I will start by looking at the social and ideological changes which took place as Stalin established himself as the absolute leader of the Soviet Union. I will pay particular attention to the changes in the sphere of literature and the reasons behind them. In 1934 all writers were united into a single Writers' Union, thus negating the difference between proletarian writers and the so-called 'fellow-travellers'. This decision alone elevated Maiakovskii's status, as his non-proletarian background was no longer a factor when evaluating his works. I will look at how the Soviet official literary method,

Socialist Realism, came to be, and how it evolved in a way which required exemplary writers whose works were to be studied and emulated. The political changes and the changes in literature led to a situation in which the authorities needed authors who embodied the virtues of Soviet lifestyle and its literary achievements. That way the public could learn positive behaviours from approved texts, while other Soviet writers could follow the exemplars and emulate their feats. Thus in 1935 Maiakovskii ended up becoming the leading poet of the Soviet literary canon. I will show that this reinvention of Maiakovskii to suit his newly-gained status was not entirely the product of government control, but was in part designed by Maiakovskii himself, as he had always sought to become famous, and often ascribed to himself the role of a herald, leading the people behind him.

In the final section, 'The Final Steps in the formation of the Soviet Image of Vladimir Maiakovskii as the Head of the Poetic Canon', I will analyse the process of change which the representation of Maiakovskii underwent in order to fit his new role as the leader of the poetic canon. While Maiakovskii's non-proletarian origins were no longer a factor in determining his status as a poet, many aspects of his life still presented considerable challenges for literary scholars at the time: in particular his association with Futurism, his *ménage à trois* with the Briks, his affairs with married women as well as with women living abroad, and finally, his suicide. None of these attributes contributed to creating an image which was expected from a hero-figure of the Soviet literature. The late 1930s saw scholars approach the topic of Maiakovskii with caution – presenting this cult figure in a way which the government officials might find unsuitable was potentially very costly. However, 1940 saw the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Maiakovskii's death, and it was during that time that the image of the chief poet of the Soviet state became set. Any undesirable traits were either presented as obstacles on the poet's path to greatness which were then overcome, or omitted altogether. As in the previous sections I will show that many of the aspects of this canonical representation of the poet were inspired by the way the poet had represented himself during his lifetime.

The Start of Vladimir Maiakovskii's Poetic Career. His Self-Representation as a Poet and his Public Persona

Maiakovskii was born in Georgia in a noble family. However his father died when Maiakovskii was thirteen and the family was forced to move to Moscow in search of employment. In 1908 Maiakovskii became a member of an illegal Bolshevik group, and was arrested three times in the following two years. During his last arrest Maiakovskii spent eleven months in solitary confinement. When he was released from prison Maiakovskii turned away from politics and focused on getting an education. Maiakovskii joined the Moscow College of Art, Sculpture and Architecture, where in 1912 he met David Burliuk.⁵

In his autobiography *la sam* (1922; 1928) Maiakovskii wrote that he had 'suddenly become a poet' one evening in the Autumn of 1912 after his fellow student at the College of Art, Sculpture and Architecture Burliuk praised a poem he had written.⁶ In this section I will discuss how the influence of different people shaped Maiakovskii's early creative work, and the way he presented himself to the public. I will also look at how Maiakovskii later changed and adapted this image in his autobiography.

Svetlana Boym in her work *Death in Quotation Marks* wrote 'Vladimir Mayakovsky is a poet with a biography par excellence, a poet who is nonexistent without it'.⁷ Indeed, Maiakovskii made sure that his personality, his public image reflected his works and *vice versa*. Maiakovskii is, by no means, the first Russian author to focus on presenting a certain image of himself to the public. In fact, *zhiznetvorchestvo* [life-creation] and self-fashioning are central to many Russian Modernist authors.⁸ Boym points out that Maiakovskii both parodied and lived out the doctrine of *zhiznetvorchestvo*.⁹ For example, she

⁵ For further details on Maiakovskii biography please see Leonid Seleznev, 'Maiakovskii Vladimir Vladimirovich', *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, 35 vols (Moscow: Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 2002–), xix, ed. by Sergei Kravets and others (2012), pp. 436-37.

⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *la sam*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 9-29 (p. 20).

⁷ Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 120.

⁸ On the concept of *zhiznetvorchestvo* and its perpetuation by modern Russian authors see, for example, Irina Paperno and Joan Grossman, *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Zara Mints, *Poetika russkogo simvolizma*, (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2004).

⁹ Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 125.

rightly points out that Maiakovskii's use of his own name within texts far outstrips other Russian poets. Maiakovskii's first collection of poetry, which he self-published in 1913 is called *Ia* [I], and features four poems: 'Po mostovoi [moei dushi iz"ezhennoi]', 'Neskol'ko slov o moei zhene', 'Neskol'ko slov o moei mame', 'Neskol'ko slov obo mne samom'. The title page, illustrated by his friend Vasilii Chekrygin, features an angel.¹⁰ As a result 'in Mayakovsky the distinction between person and persona is particularly tenuous: most of Mayakovsky's personal anecdotes have "a residue of words," while the poet's words take on an urgent and vital quality'.¹¹ Boym is referencing Maiakovskii's autobiography in which he wrote that he intends to depict himself as a poet, and only talk about other aspects of his life if those are *otstoialos' slovom* [settled in words].

A large part of Maiakovskii's self-fashioning was his image: already tall and possessing a powerful voice Maiakovskii strove to capitalise on it – to be the most noticeable person around. Benedikt Livshits, describing Maiakovskii mentions his rebellious and ringleader streak. He remembers Maiakovskii as someone who was always full of new ideas, and whose poetic performances were noteworthy due to his talent as a public speaker and his remarkable voice.¹² Maiakovskii carries this larger-than-life representation into his poetic personas. Kornei Chukovskii wrote: 'Maiakovskii is a magnifier-poet. There isn't a speck which he couldn't transform into Mount Ararat. In his poems he manages such immensities which our other poets can't even dream of. It is as if he is constantly looking into a telescope. Even his words are maximalist'.¹³

Moreover, Maiakovskii's creation of his own image as a poet underwent several changes over the years and as a result it is inconsistent as well as, at times, misleading. His statement about becoming a poet instantaneously is one example of this self-mythologisation. Maiakovskii's passion for poetry dates

¹⁰ See appendix, 'Chapter 1', 'Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Ia*, title page.

¹¹ Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 126.

¹² Benedikt Livshits, *Polutorglaziye strelets* (Leningrad: izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1933) pp. 122-32.

¹³ Kornei Chukovskii, 'Akhmatova i Maiakovskii'

<<http://www.chukfamily.ru/Kornei/Prosa/maikovsk.htm>>, [accessed: 03 October 2016]

back to at least 1910 and his time in Butyraskaia prison, where he read widely. In his autobiography Maiakovskii commented on that period of his life:

I read all the new releases. From the Symbolists – Belyi, Bal'mont [...] But it was all alien. These topics, images are not from my life. I tried to write as well as they did, but about something else. Turned out you can't write in the same way about something else. It ended up looking hammy and maudlin.¹⁴

Maiakovskii concluded the following part of his autobiography by admitting that he was disappointed with his experience of writing poetry and therefore decided to study fine art. Maiakovskii supposedly did not return to poetry until two years later when he met David Burliuk and became involved in Russian Futurism, and in *la sam* Maiakovskii names this period as the start of his poetic career.

However, in 1929 (one year after Maiakovskii reviewed and re-published his autobiography)¹⁵ when the poet organised an exhibition to celebrate twenty years of his literary work he counted his non-surviving prison poems as the start of his literary career (Katanian, p. 470). This is just one example of how Maiakovskii, and indeed many who wrote about the poet after his death, have interpreted the poet's biography and his work to suit the needs of the moment.

However, the importance of Burliuk's influence on the young Maiakovskii cannot be underrated. Not only did he encourage the poet to focus on writing, he also provided him with a network of people who were associated with the Futurist movement in art. Last but not least, Burliuk paid Maiakovskii to write poems: '[David Burliuk] gave me 50 kopecks every day. So I could write without starving'.¹⁶ Burliuk, who was rapidly becoming Maiakovskii's best friend, had been a theorist and practitioner of Futurism since the early 1900s.¹⁷ Thus, despite the fact that it was Maiakovskii who became the central figure of Russian Futurism, the origins of the movement, and therefore, its particular modes and moods, largely lay with Burliuk. Of particular interest is the letter

¹⁴ Maiakovskii, *la sam*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Maiakovskii first wrote autobiography *la sam* in 1922 for the four-volume collection of his works, and in 1928 he reviewed it for a later ten-volume collection. See Vasilii Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 231.

¹⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *la sam*, p. 20.

¹⁷ Aleksei Kruchenykh, *K istorii russkovo futurizma: vospominaniia i dokumenty*, ed. by Nina Gur'ianova (Moscow: Gileia, 2006), p. 63. Based on the manuscript by Aleksei Kruchenykh *Nash vykhod*, 1932.

which Burlinuk sent to his friend, the poet Vasilii Kamenskii, in 1913: 'Maiakovskii spends all the time with me and is starting to write excellent poetry. He is a wild and gifted individual. I convinced him that he is a young Jack London. He is very pleased with that. He seeks to join the pedestal of fighting for Futurism. We have to act'.¹⁸

Maiakovskii welcomed the ideas of Russian Futurism and in December 1912 took part in the creation of one of the most well-known manifestos by the Russian Futurists – *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu* (Katanian, p. 62). In this work the poet and his friends expressed their views on their art ('only we are the face of our Time. The horn of time is trumpeting through us in literary art'); on the classics of Russian literature ('we have to throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and others off the steamship of modernity'); on other contemporary Russian writers ('all these Maksim Gor'kiis, Kuprins, Bloks, Sologubs, Remizovs, Avershenkos, Chernyis, Kuzmins, Bunins, etc. etc. only need a dacha by a river'); and finally on their place in society ('[it is the poets' right to] with loathing throw away from his noble brow the Wreath of petty fame homemade by You from sauna whisks... to stand atop the rock of the word 'We' amid the sea of jeers and resentment').¹⁹ *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu* became the theoretical platform of David Burlinuk, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh.

This manifesto of 1912 (and the principles which it voiced) was of great significance in Maiakovskii's representation of himself in his early works. It was also highly influential in forming the public perceptions of Futurist art and of Maiakovskii, and played a major role in the later reinventions of the poet's image. A typical newspaper report from 1913 described one of Maiakovskii's public appearances in the following terms: 'and he stated, as is customary of a

¹⁸ Vasilii Kamenskii, 'Maiakovskii iunosh'a', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 April 1930, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 75. In his article Kameskii dated the letter to 1911, when Maiakovskii indeed would have been 17, however, Maiakovskii and Burlinuk did not become closely acquainted until 1912. Vasilii Katanian assumes the letter was written in 1913, since this was when Kamenskii returned to Moscow, however Vladimir Maiakovskii would have been 19 by then. See Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, pp. 514-15.

¹⁹ David Burlinuk and others, 'Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu', in *Biblioteka poezii* <<http://mayakovskiy.ouc.ru/poschetchina.html>> [accessed: 23 June 2013]

Futurist, that they, the Futurists, are the heart of poetry, they are our salvation'.²⁰ Unsurprisingly the Futurists' 1912 manifesto was not well received by the literary critics of the time. Nikolai Khardzhiev wrote: 'the appearance of *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu* had an effect which was in keeping with the volume's title. The yellow press justified the author's premonitions, who swore to "stand atop the rock of the word 'We' amid the sea of jeers and resentment".²¹ However, despite the general disapproval of the new movement, there were those who spoke positively of Maiakovskii's work. In 1913 *Moskovskaia gazeta* wrote this review of a dispute between poets: 'the public, obviously, was in favour of the futurist [Maiakovskii]... For a quarter of an hour the hall was filled with applause'.²² However this is another fact that Maiakovskii chooses to downplay in his autobiography, where he gives a completely negative picture of the public reception of Futurism: 'the newspapers began to fill with [articles on] Futurism. Their tone was less than polite. Thus, I was just called a "bastard"'.²³

Despite associating with Futurism and following the premises set out in the Futurist manifesto, Maiakovskii was as concerned with successful publication as he was with shaping his own image. In 1914, when being known as a Futurist made it more difficult for Maiakovskii to publish his works, he made an attempt to distance his literary group from the meaning their name carried: 'They say I am a futurist? What is a futurist? I don't know. Never heard of them. Didn't think we had them. You were told of them by m-elle Critique'.²⁴

However, the majority of Maiakovskii's early works, true to the spirit of *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, explored the idea of the lonely poet, troubled by a hostile crowd which is deaf to the poet's sufferings. In 1913 Maiakovskii wrote:

²⁰ Anon., review of the honorary meeting of Kostantin Bal'mont on the 7th of May in the *Obshchestvo svobodnoi estetiki, Rech'*, 10 May 1913, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 67.

²¹ Nikolai Khardzhiev, *Ot Maiakovskovo do Kruchenykh: izbrannye raboty o russkom futurizme*, ed. by Sergei Kudriavskii (Moscow: Gileia, 2006), p. 26.

²² Anon. review of the public reading at the Vtoroi disput o sovremennom iskusstve, *Moskovskaia gazeta*, 25 February 1913, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 65.

²³ *Ia sam*, p. 21. For more positive remarks about Futurism from the period between 1912-1916 see Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, pp. 64-123.

²⁴ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'I nam miasa!', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 313-15 (p. 313).

Это душа моя
ключьями порванной тучи
в выжженном небе
на ржавом кресте колокольни!
Время!
Хоть ты, хромой богомаз,
лик намалюй мой
в божницу уродца века!
Я одинок, как последний глаз
у идущего к слепым человека!²⁵

However, lamentations of this kind were less dominant than the appeal to follow the poet's lead, to break with the past and embrace the new poetic movement. In the epilogue of his first major work, a play, which the poet named after himself, *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, he calls out to the public:

Придите все ко мне,
кто рвал молчание,
кто выл
оттого, что петли полдней туги, –
я вам открою
словами
простыми, как мычанье,
наши новые души,
гудящие,
как фонарные дуги.
Я вам только головы пальцами трону,
и у вас
вырастут губы
для огромных поцелуев
и язык,
родной всем народам.²⁶

In his autobiography *Maiakovskii*, staying true to his depiction of the public's response to his early works, wrote that the reception of his first play was entirely negative. However Vasilii Katanian has collected a number of reviews of the play, some of which mentioned the public's interest in the show (Katanian, pp.

²⁵ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Neskol'ko slov obo mne samom', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 48-49 (p. 49). ('This is my soul as a torn dark cloud up in the burned out sky on top of the church cross! Time! Maybe you, a lame iconographer, could paint my face in a shrine of the century's freaks! I am as lonely as the last eye of a man who walks to join the blind!').

²⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, p. 154 ('Come to me all who tore through silence, who howled because the nooses of middays were too tight, - with words as simple as mooing I will show you our new souls, buzzing like street lights. I will just tap my fingers on your heads and you will grow lips, well suited for huge kisses and you will speak in a tongue all nations can understand').

77-79). In particular, Benedikt Livshits remembered that ‘the jeers which came from different sides of the hall were left hanging’.²⁷ Livshits suggested that the reason Maiakovskii represented the reception of his first play in such a negative light was due to his own shyness and his changing opinion on the signs of success. Livshits himself deemed such theatrical reception as typical of the period.²⁸ However, it is more probable, that after the Revolution Maiakovskii consciously chose to depict such a negative reception of his early works. The focus on negative attitudes served to underline the severity of the literary struggle he had to engage in in order to overcome public hostility during the years of the tsarist regime. I will return to this argument later on when I analyse Maiakovskii’s changing self-representation in the 1920s.

In 1917 Maiakovskii became part of an event which changed history and dictated both his further poetic style and his self-fashioning. However, a few years before this momentous event, Maiakovskii had met several people, whose importance in his life and his self-representation as a poet cannot be underestimated. These are, first, in 1914, Maksim Gor’kii, who was already at the time an extremely well regarded and well-established author, and whose patronage was crucial in Maiakovskii’s establishment as a published poet. Secondly, in 1915, he met husband and wife Osip and Lili Brik, who remained his close friends throughout the rest of his life. It was Osip Brik who first published *Oblako v shtanakh* (which has always been regarded as one of the best works by Maiakovskii) and it was Lili Brik whom the poet considered to be his muse and to whom he dedicated the vast majority of his works. It was also the Briks who inherited the unpublished manuscripts of Maiakovskii.²⁹

On 27 February 1917 tsar Nicholas II was overthrown and Russia was plunged into eight months of political uncertainty, as the provisional government tried to maintain control over the country. This event created an opportunity for artists to

²⁷ Benedikt Livshits, *Polutorglazi strelets* (Leningrad: izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1933), pp. 185-86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Vsem’ [suicide note], in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, xiii, ed. by Varvara Arutcheva and others (1961), p. 138.

take control over the sphere of art, and many of the leading artists of the time argued against governmental control over their works and artistic canon.³⁰

The events of the first Revolution of 1917 prompted Maiakovskii, who already had a rich background in public speaking, as well as political work, to take an active political stand, propagating his views on how art should develop under the new regime. On 4 March he took part in a meeting of artists, writers, and theatre and music workers, who created a Commission of Art, led by Gor'kii (Katanian, pp. 77-79). Around the same time Maiakovskii was also elected onto the board of directors for the Union of Moscow Artists. The newspaper *Ruskaia volia* depicts Maiakovskii's behaviour at one of their meetings in the following way: 'several times fierce and implacable Maiakovskii rises to speak. He is exasperated by empty words, he demands revolutionary actions'.³¹ The newspaper also suggested that Maiakovskii, who was passionate about Futurism, believed that only that movement should form the new artistic method: 'what do they [Futurists] care for other talents, which don't follow them? Away with them!'³²

While engaged in a busy political career, Maiakovskii continued to write and publish. For a period he worked as a member of staff at the newspaper *Novaia zhizn'*, the editor of which was Maksim Gor'kii. Maiakovskii published most of his new poems there, and in December 1917 Gor'kii published his third *poema Voina i mir* as a separate volume in an edition of 3000 copies (Katanian, p. 136).

At the beginning of summer 1917 Maiakovskii met the last figure who was to play a distinctive part in establishing him as a widely recognised writer – the Bolshevik literary scholar Anatolii Lunacharskii. Even prior to meeting Maiakovskii personally, Lunacharskii held the poet in high regard. In a letter to his wife he wrote about Maiakovskii: 'extremely talented, a young half-giant, filled with energy, right before our eyes going upwards and to the left

³⁰ See review of the general meeting of artists, 'Svoboda iskusstvu', *Rech'*, 27 March 1917. quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 127.

³¹ Anon., review of the general meeting of artists, 'Svoboda iskusstvu', *Ruskaia Volia*, 22 March 1917, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 127.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[politically]'.³³ After the October Revolution Lunacharskii became the Commissar for Education, and on numerous occasions assisted Maiakovskii with publishing his work. Until the 1920s, when the Bolshevik party started to interfere more directly in developments in the field of art, Lunacharskii was also a supporter of Futurism. Eventually he withdrew his support, as the party (and very importantly Vladimir Lenin) disliked the movement.³⁴

However, in the period of artistic uncertainty brought by the Revolutions, Futurism experienced its golden age. Maiakovskii, whose fame and support grew, was the movement's figurehead, proclaiming it to be the only true revolutionary art and promising to assist the Bolsheviks in their fight to establish a Communist society.³⁵ Engaged in spreading propaganda in favour of the Soviet state and having links to influential figures in the government, the futurist artists entered an era where they finally had the official support that enabled them to be published and introduced to a wider public. In the years after the Revolution, Maiakovskii succeeded in establishing himself as a recognised author, volumes of his works were printed in the tens of thousands, and Futurism was at the height of its popularity. In July 1919 Maiakovskii wrote Lunacharskii a report on the outcome of the work of his publishing house IMO (*Iskusstvo molodykh*) during the previous six months. In it he mentioned that for many of the works the number of copies published could not satisfy the demand for them.³⁶

Despite the fact that Maiakovskii's status as an officially recognised writer relied heavily on his relationship with one government official, Lunacharskii, it nevertheless allowed him to become a widely recognised author and public speaker. However, while the number of works published by Maiakovskii and other Futurists soared during the years immediately after the Revolution,

³³ Anatolii Lunacharskii, letter to Anna Lunacharskaia, 1 July 1917, in V. Zel'dovich, 'Pervaia vstrecha Lunacharskovo s Maiakovskim v 1917 g.', in *Novoe o Maiakovskom*, Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, LXV, ed. by Viktor Vinogradov, Il'ia Zil'bershtein, Sergei Makashin, Mikhail Khrapchenko (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), pp. 571-76, (p. 571).

³⁴ See Evgenii Naumov, 'Lenin o Maiakovskom (Novye materialy)', in Viktor Vinogradov and others, *Novoe o Maiakovskom*, Literaturnoe Nasledstvo, LXV (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), pp. 205-16

³⁵ See, for example, Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 128.

³⁶ Vsevolod Azarov, V. Spasskii, *Maiakovskomu: sbornik vospominanii i statei* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury) pp. 106-07.

Futurism came under severe criticism from rival literary groups. Some of Maiakovskii's critics argued that it was his friendship with Lunacharskii rather than the popularity of Futurist works which secured their publication. A. Evgenev in his article 'Futuristicheskaia Gekuba i Proletariat' published in *Vestnik Literaturny* in 1919 comments that the Futurist movement after the Revolution was a fiasco and posed the question: 'what would happen to Russian literature if the Futurists, who in a certain period were availing themselves of a certain influential protection, managed to "throw out of the steamship of modernity," the old Russian literature and in its place enthrone their own "trans-rational" writing?'.³⁷ While this comment does not name Lunacharskii as the benefactor, it is likely that he was the person the author had in mind, as most of the major Futurist works had been published due to his financial and critical support. In the year following the October Revolution he often publicly supported the movement, and in particular, Maiakovskii, linking him to the developing culture of the proletariat: 'even if we do not consider Futurism as a whole to be proletarian art, then we can still firmly say that some of the Futurist artists are close to the ideas of the proletariat'.³⁸

However, some of Maiakovskii's statements in *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, particularly his negative attitude towards the Russian literary classics, were, by the beginning of the 1920s, starting to hinder the poet's claim to fame. A few years later, when it became clear the Russian classics were to remain at the centre of literary scholarship, Maiakovskii attempted to revise the statements made by himself and his friends in *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu*. He argued that he and his fellow artists did not feel negatively towards classic authors themselves or their works, but towards literary scholarship of the period, which disapproved of literary works which did not follow the classic tradition. In an interview given to a journalist from the Odessa newspaper *Izvestiia* Maiakovskii said:

The Revolution changed the focus of our critical strategy. Our old tactic was encompassed in the 1912 motto 'to throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and others off the steamship of modernity'.

³⁷ A. Evgenev, 'Futuristicheskaia Gekuba i Proletariat', in *Vestnik Literaturny*, 10 (1919).

³⁸ Georgii Cheremin, *V. V. Maiakovskii v literaturnoi kritike: 1917-1923* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1985), p. 66.

These classics were nationalised. They were considered to be immutable and absolute art, which has given us everything which was new. For the people, classics should be just a textbook. This textbook is no better or worse than any other. We can celebrate the classics as they help the illiterate to learn.³⁹

Maiakovskii, perhaps intending to make sure that his revised position on the literary classics reached a wider audience also expressed his positive views about classic literature in his 1924 poem 'Iubileinoe', dedicated to Aleksandr Pushkin. In the poem, Maiakovskii talks to the poet as if he was alive, or as if Maiakovskii himself was dead and free to transcend time:

У меня,
 да и у вас,
 в запасе вечность.
Что нам
 потерять
 часок-другой?!⁴⁰

Maiakovskii suggests that Pushkin would do well working in Maiakovskii's literary journal *Lef*, praises Pushkin's poetic prowess and mourns the lack of talent among the poets of his own time. Most importantly, he attempts to disprove the notion that he felt negatively towards Pushkin or his works:

Вот –
 пустили сплетню,
 тешат душу ею.
Александр Сергеич,
 да не слушайте ж вы их!
Может
 я
 один
 действительно жалею,
что сегодня
 нету вас в живых.⁴¹

However, the Futurists' disregard for classic literature was not the only point of criticism they came to face in the 1920s. In order to understand the nature of the criticism of Futurism among Bolsheviks and their supporters at that time, it is

³⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, interview with *Izvestia* (Odessa, 1924), in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xiii, pp. 219-21 (p. 219).

⁴⁰ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Iubileinoe', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vi, pp. 47-56 (p. 47). ('You and I, we have eternity to spare. What does it matter if we waste an hour or two?!')

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51 ('So, they started a rumour to entertain their spirit. Aleksandr Sergeich, don't listen to them! May be I alone truly lament that today you are not alive').

necessary to look at the ideas about Soviet literature proposed by the Bolshevik party in general and by Vladimir Lenin in particular, who already in 1905 had said about the literature of the future socialist Russia:

Literature has to become party-oriented. To counter the bourgeois habits, to counter the bourgeois entrepreneurial [...] mercantile publishing, to counter bourgeois literary careerism and individualism [...] [and] the chase for profit, - the socialist proletariat has to come up with a principle for *party-oriented literature*, develop this principle and implement it into life.⁴²

Lenin argued for the importance of ideology in literature, for the importance of the plot to be closely connected with the reality of the day: 'this will be free literature, it will enrich the latest words of the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and everyday labour of the socialist proletariat'.⁴³ Thus, by the early 1920s the Bolsheviks dictated that the main focus of art should be on its content (it had to be revolutionary, and it had to be proletarian), whereas the main focus of Futurism and avant-garde movements was primarily on form, as artists came up with new ways of expressing their ideas.

In addition, increasingly the artists became categorised according to their social origins, which meant that Futurist writers risked being marginalised. The proletariat was considered to be the ruling class, and its virtues and values were absolute. All other classes had to be re-educated in order to become responsible members of the new society. With such policies in place, artists' social origins became of the utmost importance, and their talent or achievements were often secondary. Artists like Maiakovskii, who came from non-worker families, were often automatically considered with suspicion, as their dedication to the Revolution was questioned. It was during this time, in 1922, that Maiakovskii started writing his autobiography, and I believe this was one of the reasons he downplayed his literary successes in pre-revolutionary Russia. In order to appeal to the 1920s audience and critics it was important for Maiakovskii to demonstrate that he had not been highly rated by the previous bourgeois society. Even when describing his biggest pre-1917 literary success,

⁴² Vladimir Lenin, 'Partiinaia organizatsiia i partiinaia literatura', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th edition, ed. by Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri TsK KPSS, 55 vols (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967-75), xii: *Oktiabr' 1905 – april' 1906* (1968), p. 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

the *poema Oblako v shtanakh* Maiakovskii focuses on its negative reception: 'Oblako turned out wispy. The censors blasted through it. Six pages were covered in dots'.⁴⁴ Maiakovskii omits any mention of positive feedback of *Oblako v shtanakh*, apart from that of Gor'kii, a writer who was approved by the Communist Party.

At the beginning of 1923 Maiakovskii attempted to bring together all like-minded artists, establishing the literary journal *Lef*. The journal was supposed to combine the most revolutionary art movements and thus act as a vanguard for art both in Russia and across the world.⁴⁵ Maiakovskii argued that the journal would fight against individualism, decadence, formalism and mysticism and utilise technical elements from all artistic movements. However, the journal was never a success. Under the influence of criticism, as well as internal disputes, the activity of the journal declined. It appeared four times in 1923, twice in 1924 and only once in 1925, after which the publications stopped.⁴⁶ The following year, Maiakovskii made a second attempt to publish *Lef* calling it *Novyi Lef*. This attempt, while remaining a popular target for criticism, failed to produce any memorable works. As a result of internal misunderstandings and arguments the journal was dissolved in 1928 when Maiakovskii and Osip Brik left *Noviy Lef*. Thus, it appears that the initial success of the movement was largely dependent on the support of the Commissar for Education, and when this support was withdrawn the artists struggled to compete with other literary groups. The 1920s saw Futurism and other avant-garde artists considered by literary scholars and critics with caution. Lev Trotskii, who in 1924 reviewed the achievements of Russian literature since the October Revolution wrote: 'Under the impulse of events, Futurism directed its development into the new channels of the Revolution. In the very nature of the thing, this could not and did not result in a revolutionary art'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ia sam*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Izdatel'skii plan zhurnala "Lef"', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, xiii, p. 204.

⁴⁶ Cheremin, p.161.

⁴⁷ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. by Rose Strunsky (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 13.

Similarly important are the differences among members of the group which formed the members of *Lef*. Nikolai Aseev in his article “Artel’ Lefa”, wrote that the main difference of opinions lay between the writers of *Lef*, and the theorists of *Lef*, led by Sergei Tret’iakov. The latter argued that there was no place for imagination in Soviet art, and that all art should be a pure depiction of reality. The writers, Aseev and Maiakovskii in particular, struggled to accept or indeed understand this.⁴⁸

The authorities realised that they needed talented writers who could produce successful and convincing work on whatever topic was considered necessary. In 1924, in a resolution of the XIII Congress of the RKP(b) about publishing, the term *poputchik* (fellow-traveller) was first used to describe those artists who supported the Revolution and the Party but were not themselves party members and did not come from a proletarian background: ‘it was deemed crucial for the party literary criticism to systematically support talented writers from an intelligentsia background (the so called *poputchiki*) and help them overcome their erroneous views’.⁴⁹

Shortly after the October Revolution a group of writers and critics under the name of Proletkul’t [Proletarian culture], became prominent. In the intense struggle for government approval and the right to be called the official art of the new society, it was with the members of Proletkul’t that the Futurists and other avant-garde artists had the most heated debates. The two literary groups were compared to sphinxes; it was believed that ‘one would annihilate the other’.⁵⁰ Proletkul’t members were mainly workers or the descendants of worker families, and thus they considered themselves to be the true voice of the proletariat and the only artists capable of representing the new ruling class. Throughout the 1920s the content of a literary work gained more and more importance over the form. Thus Proletkul’t’s claim of creating content which was understandable and interesting for the proletariat was a major factor in asserting their position of

⁴⁸ Nikolai Aseev, *Zachem i komu nuzhna poezii* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1961) p. 292.

⁴⁹ Cheremin, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Pavel Bessalko, ‘Futurizm i proletarskaia kul’tura’, *Griadushchee*, 10 (1918), quoted in Wiktor Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski (New York: The Orion Press, 1970) p. 251. Further references to Pavel Bessalko, ‘Futurizm i proletarskaia kul’tura’ are given after quotations in the text.

dominance in the sphere of literature: 'We assume that proletarian culture is made by workers themselves, not by the intelligentsia, who by chance, or even deliberately, have come around to the ideas of the proletariat' (Bessalko, p. 251). Similarly, members of Proletkul't accused Futurists of imposing their class views on the proletariat, with whom the Futurists had nothing in common:

No one thinks of calling Cooper's novels [...] about Native Americans the literature of Native Americans. Why then do the intelligentsia chameleons writing about workers call their literature the literature of the workers? Does a caterpillar, which for reasons of self-preservation, assumes the appearance of a knot on a tree, cease to be a greedy caterpillar? (Bessalko, pp. 251-252)

In 1934 organisation of separate literary groups was banned and a single Writer's Union established, and in later periods of Soviet history the 1920s literary struggles were considered with caution. Due to the heated nature of arguments and debates, the 1920s failed to present a picture of a unified nation with unified artists all working for the betterment of their society. Thus Vasilii Rakov in 1976 described the extent of post-revolutionary literary struggles as exaggerated and argued that the authors involved ultimately aimed to create a united front of artists:

The existence of a variety of literary groups and the constant polemics between them are till this day represented by the bourgeois Soviet experts as one of the most important aspects of the first 10 – 15 years of Soviet literature.

There is no doubt that the inter-group struggles in the literary life of the 1920s [...] took a lot of time and effort [...] But one can only see this one aspect and not notice another, much more important phenomenon of the time, if one deliberately closes one's eyes.

Yes, we had literary conflict. But we also had other experiences: through the heated debates and literary struggle the unity of Soviet literature was borne, and by its cradle stood such artists as M. Gor'kii and V. Maiakovskii...⁵¹

Rakov's conclusion alludes to the idolisation of Maiakovskii in the later Soviet literary canon, however, back in the 1920s the poet struggled to maintain the high status he achieved with the support of Gor'kii and Lunacharskii during the first years after the Revolution.

⁵¹ Vasilii Rakov, *Maiakovskii i sovetskaia poeziiia 20-kh godov* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1976) pp. 5–6.

The late 1920s were difficult years in Maiakovskii's creative career. Despite the fact that in his works Maiakovskii always strove to portray socially and ideologically pressing issues, and had adapted his poetic style to be more readily understood by a wider audience, his works still received negative reviews from literary critics and scholars. Additionally throughout the 1920s his relationship with the state publishing house Gosizdat had been difficult, as the chief editors published Maiakovskii's works only reluctantly. In 1920, when answering a questionnaire, Maiakovskii wrote: 'I am considered a poet by everyone apart from LITO [*Literaturno-izdatel'skii otdel Narkomprosa*], everyone wants to publish me apart from Gosizdat'.⁵² In an article 'Lenin o Maiakovskom' Evgenii Naumov mentions that the activity of Gosizdat was supervised by Mikhail Pokrovskii, Lunacharskii's deputy, whom Lenin had asked to help fight Futurism.⁵³ However, it is unclear whether the relationship between the poet and the publishing house was influenced by Lenin's dislike of Futurism, or whether the key to the difficult relationship lay in the personal preferences of the chief editors of the house.

The uneasy relationship with Gosizdat continued throughout the poet's life. Perhaps one of the most vivid examples took place shortly before the poet's suicide in 1930. The journal *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* published a message of greeting to Maiakovskii, congratulating him on the opening of the exhibition marking twenty years of his literary work. In this message the journal named Maiakovskii as a 'great revolutionary of poetry and a tireless comrade-in-arms of the working class'.⁵⁴ R. Bershadskii, a member of *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, remembered that Maiakovskii was exceptionally happy to learn about this greeting and wanted to come to the editorial office himself to thank the staff.⁵⁵ However, the head of Gosizdat, Artemii Khalatov, ordered the greeting to be removed and wrote a letter to *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* asking how the editors 'dared

⁵² Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Anketa dlia lits, poluchaushchih akademicheskii paek', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, xiii, pp. 192-93 (p. 193).

⁵³ Evgenii Naumov, 'Lenin o Maiakovskom (Novye materialy)', in *Novoe o Maiakovskom*, pp. 205-16, (p. 210).

⁵⁴ Editorial of *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, greeting to Vladimir Maiakovskii, in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: sbornik*, ed. by Aleksandr Dymshits (Moscow: Isdatel'stvo akademii nauk, 1940), p. 290.

⁵⁵ R. Bershadskii in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: sbornik*, ed. by Aleksandr Dymshits (Moscow: Isdatel'stvo akademii nauk, 1940), p. 321.

to call the “*poputchik*” Maiakovskii a great revolutionary poet’.⁵⁶ Thus it seems that although Gosizdat still published Maiakovskii’s works, its directors saw his works as standing apart from the art of the proletariat.

The criticism against Maiakovskii hit new heights during 1929-1930. Pavlo Tychina, in an article of 1940 looking back at the late 1920s, ‘On otkryto govoril s narodom’, remembered an evening of Russian and Ukrainian writers in February 1929: ‘as per usual the writers’ meeting did not go without the taunting of Maiakovskii. I say “as per usual” because at the time it was fashionable to taunt Maiakovskii’.⁵⁷ This new wave of criticism was largely caused by two of Maiakovskii’s last plays *Klop* and *Bania*.

Klop was first performed in February 1929, and divided critical opinion. The majority disliked the play arguing that ‘it has the old drawback: socialism turns out thin and weak when it is inspired by the *Lef*-intelligentsia’.⁵⁸ At the time Maiakovskii was working in *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, but even his own newspaper, while arguing that *Klop* was the best show of the season, suggested that this was largely the achievement of the stage director Vsevolod Meierkhol’d, rather than the author, Maiakovskii.⁵⁹

Shortly after the staging of *Klop*, Maiakovskii started work on *Bania*, another play for Meierkhol’d’s theatre. Katanian put together evidence that Maiakovskii (arguably as a result of the reaction following *Klop*) took the new play very seriously, and on many occasions read it to both friends and on public meetings before it was first staged, asking for their opinions (Katanian, pp. 466–472). One such example is described by Mikhail Chumandrin: Maiakovskii was travelling from Moscow to Leningrad by train and read *Bania* to a group of artists, travelling with him:

Vladimir Maiakovskii paused several times.

‘You are not bored, are you? Shall I continue reading?’

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁵⁷ Pavlo Tychina, ‘On otkryto govoril s narodom’, in *Kommunist* (Kiev), 14 April 1940, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel’nosti*, p. 455.

⁵⁸ Anon., review of *Klop*, *Izvestia*, 26 February 1929, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel’nosti*, p. 457.

⁵⁹ Anon., review of *Klop*, *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, 27 February 1929, quoted in Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel’nosti*, p. 457.

'Of course! Please do!'

That was when I realised that he was very nervous. It was odd noticing it in a man, who rarely ever hesitated.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that before *Bania* was staged the majority of reviews of the play were positive (including a favourable review from *Komsomol'skaia pravda*), the performance of *Bania* was unsuccessful, and produced even more negative responses than *Klop*.⁶¹

The difficult relationship with his editors and the failure of his latest plays were a heavy blow for Maiakovskii, as, despite his best efforts, literary critics and scholars did not receive his works favourably. That is not to say that Maiakovskii's career had gone into irreversible decline. Katanian notes how busy the poet's schedule was: just on 14 April, the day Maiakovskii committed suicide, he had a meeting to attend and a talk to present (Katanian, p. 499). Maiakovskii might have failed at winning the hearts of literary critics and the Party, but his desire to be the poet of the people was fulfilled in his vast popularity among the public, in particular students. In 1931 Nadezhda Krupskaja, Lenin's widow, in her book *Vospominaniia o Lenine*, described his visit to VHUTEMAS (*Vysshie Khudozhestvenno-technicheskie masterskie*):

'What do you read? Do you read Pushkin?'

'Oh, no,' someone blurted out, 'he was a bourgeois. We read Maiakovskii'. Il'ich smiled: 'I think Pushkin is better'. After this time Il'ich felt better towards Maiakovskii. This name reminded him of the young people at VHUTEMAS, so full of life and joy [...] unable to find the words in the modern language to express themselves and seeking those expressions in the obscure poems of Maiakovskii.⁶²

Arguably, however, it was Maiakovskii's ongoing desire to identify himself as the poet of the Party, which alienated him most from his admirers. Dissatisfied with the title of *poputchik* Maiakovskii sought to identify himself further with the proletarian writers and in 1930, despite the wishes of his friends and literary colleagues, made the decision to join RAPP (*Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia*

⁶⁰ Mikhail Chumandrin, 'Neskol'ko slov o Maiakovskom', in *Vladimir Maiakovskii: odnodnevnaia gazeta LOFOSP*, 24 April 1930, p. 1.

⁶¹ See, for example, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 22 March 1930; *Krasnaia gazeta*, 26 March 1930; *Rabochaia gazeta*, 21 March 1930; *Nasha gazeta*, 28 March 1930; *Rabochii i iskusstvo*, 20 March 1930.

⁶² Nadezhda Krupskaja, *Vospominania o Lenine* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1931), p. 127.

proletarskikh pisatelei), who were leading the campaign against avant-garde artists and artists from non-proletarian backgrounds. However, instead of strengthening his position with RAPP, which by that time was a leading literary group, Maiakovskii succeeded only in undermining his position amongst his previous literary allies. His close friend Nikolai Aseev described his reaction to Maiakovskii's decision:

All of the previous members of LEF, whom he later united into REF [*Revoliutsionnyi front*], mutinied against his independent actions [joining RAPP], we decided to show him that we did not approve of his decision to dissolve REF and his joining of RAPP without his friends.⁶³

However, perhaps the most notable change in the way Maiakovskii presented himself in the 1920s was the change in his poetic language. As he made efforts to be understood by a wide audience his poetic language became less complex and the content of his works became easier to grasp and follow. Despite this, the argument that Maiakovskii was incomprehensible to the reading masses was a common critique of the poet's art in the 1920s. Viktor Slavinskii, who was taking the minutes at one of the poet's public readings at the Plekhanov Institute, wrote that several members of the audience complained that that they were unable to follow many of Maiakovskii's poems:

[Maiakovskii's reply:] 'to quote abstracts, lines taken out of context and thus argue for their incomprehensibility is just demagogy [...]'

The poet reads the poem 'A vy mogli by?' and says that 'this should be understandable to every proletarian. If a proletarian is unable to comprehend it, then he is ill-educated. He has to learn. It is important for me that you understand my work'.⁶⁴

Maiakovskii's was indeed concerned about the clarity of his works. The focus of his post-1917 works shifts dramatically from complex metaphors to clear content. Let us consider two thematically similar poems: 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu' (1913) and 'Moi progulki skvoz' ulitsy i pereulki' (1926). At first glance the theme of both poems is the same – the poet's depiction of his walk through city streets. This is what he wrote in 1913:

⁶³ Nikolai Aseev, 'V poslednii raz', in *Moi Maiakovskii: vospominaniia sovremennikov*, ed. by Leonid Bykov (Yekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2007), pp. 367-76 (p. 369).

⁶⁴ Viktor Slavinskii, 'Poslednee vystuplenie', in *Moi Maiakovskii*, pp. 353-66 (p. 362).

Ветер колючий
 трубе
 вырывает
 дымчатый шерсти клок.
 Лысый фонарь
 сладострастно снимает
 с улицы
 черный чулок.⁶⁵

And this is the depiction of the street we encounter in 'Moi progulki skvoz' ulitsy i pereulki' written in 1926:

Нету места странней:
 тут и нечет
 и чет
 по одной стороне
 в беспорядке течет.
 Замечательный случай,
 единственный в мире:
 № 15,
 а рядом –
 4!⁶⁶

The first difference is in the language: in the first poem the main accent is on form, on trying to discover unusual sound combinations, as well as interesting metaphors to describe everyday occurrences. In 'Moi progulki skvoz' ulitsy i pereulki' Maiakovskii stays true to his rhythmic style and innovative rhymes, however the complex metaphors are almost gone. The poem also features colloquial word 'нету' as opposed to grammatically correct form 'нет'. Overall, the second poem utilises the language which less educated reader is likely to use and is easier to understand. The second difference is in the aim of the poem. 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu' is designed to describe the poet's vision of the street, the relation between people, things and nature in a city. The latter poem has a very clear civic duty – it draws public's attention to a problem with inconsistent numbering of the houses.

⁶⁵ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu', in *Polnoe sobranie sovshinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 38-39. (p. 39) ('The biting wind snatches a tuft of gray wool from the chimney. The bald street-light sensually takes a black stocking off the street.')

⁶⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Moi progulki skvoz' ulitsy i pereulki', in *Polnoe sobranie sovshinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, vii, ed. by Vadim Kozhinov, I. Robin and V. Timofeeva (1958), pp. 217-20 (p. 217). ('You cannot find a stranger place: odd and even numbers are floating on the same side in disarray. A remarkable case, unique in this world: number 15 and next to it – number 4!')

Despite Maiakovskii's concern with the ideological content and clarity of his works, already by 1923 statements were starting to appear suggesting that his pre-revolutionary poems were better than his later work. Georgii Cheremin, in his work *V. V. Maiakovskii v literaturnoi kritike: 1917-1925*, gives an account of an article by one of Maiakovskii's literary opponents, Aleksandr Voronskii. The article, 'V. Maiakovskii', analysed post-revolutionary works of the poet and came to the conclusion that Maiakovskii did not understand the Revolution, which was the main reason why his post-1917 poetry was sketchy and abstract. 'The result – a scathing conclusion: Maiakovskii's post-revolutionary works are "paler, dryer, anaemic, more cerebral than *Fleita, Liubliu, Chelovek*".⁶⁷ There is evidence that Maiakovskii took such criticism very badly. Il'ia Erenburg in 1960 wrote about a public reading given by Maiakovskii in Paris in 1927:

Somebody shouted: "Please read your old poems!". Maiakovskii, as always, laughed it off [...] We agreed that the next morning I would come to his place [...] His bed was unmade – he had not slept. He met me looking grim and without a greeting asked: "do you also think that I used to write better?"⁶⁸

By the end of his life, despite his public statements Maiakovskii's works had become more critical in their attitudes towards contemporary realities. In addition to his controversial plays *Klop* and *Bania* 'Vo ves' golos', an introduction to an unfinished *poema*, provides a negative portrayal of Soviet Russia of the 1920s, featuring such lines as:

Роясь
в сегодняшнем
окаменевшем говне⁶⁹

'Vo ves' golos' also contains one of the most controversial lines in all of Maiakovskii's works:

Но я
себя

⁶⁷ Cheremin, p. 201.

⁶⁸ Il'ia Erenburg, *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh*, ed. by I. Chekhovskaia, 9 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1962-67), viii (1966), p. 248.

⁶⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Vo ves' golos', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, x, pp. 279-85 (p. 279). ('While digging through today's fossilized shit')

All of this indicates that our institutions do not understand the huge extent of Maiakovskii's influence – his propagandistic role, his relevance to the Revolution.⁷²

It was this letter which changed the position of Maiakovskii in the Soviet literary canon. Iosif Stalin did indeed read the letter and made a note in pencil on it: 'Maiakovskii was and remains the best, most talented poet of our Soviet era. Indifference to him and his works is a crime'.⁷³ Thus within a matter of days Maiakovskii went from being a half-forgotten poet, whose works were no longer in print, to being the most talented poet of the era. Several contemporary scholars, however, suggest that this change was not coincidental, but was the result of the social and ideological changes which had taken place in the early 1930s and created a situation which required a dead poet to be placed at the head of the official Soviet literary canon.⁷⁴

In this section I will discuss how Stalin's 1935 resolution became possible, and why Maiakovskii was a prime candidate for the position of the best poet of the era. I will look at the social and ideological changes which came as Stalin established himself as the absolute leader of the Soviet Union. I will pay particular attention to the changes, and the reasons behind them, in the sphere of literature. In 1934 all writers were united into a single Writers' Union, thus negating the difference between proletarian writers and 'fellow-travellers'. This decision alone elevated Maiakovskii's status, as his non-proletarian background was no longer a factor when considering his works and reputation. I will look at how the Soviet official literary method, Socialist Realism, came to be, and how it evolved in a way which required exemplary writers whose works were to be studied and emulated to spearhead the literary canon.⁷⁵ I will also analyse to

⁷² Lili Brik, 'Pis'mo tovarishchu Stalinu', in "*V tom, chto umiraiu, ne vinite nikogo*"?.. *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, ed. by Svetlana Strizhneva (Moscow: Ellis Lak 2000, 2005), pp. 322-23.

⁷³ See Introduction, footnote 5.

⁷⁴ See for example, Birgit Menzel, *V. V. Majakovskij und seine Rezeption in der Sowjetunion 1930-1954* (Berlin: Ost-Europa Institut, 1992), pp. 84-92.

⁷⁵ In my review of Socialist Realism I rely mainly on the work by Katerina Clark and Evgenii Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (London: Yale University Press, 2007). For further overview consider: James Vaughan, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Irene Masing-Delic, *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism: A Reader* (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2012). Also see Abram Tertz (real name: Anatolii Siniavskii), *The Trial Begins* and *On*

what extent the reinvention of Maiakovskii as a figurehead of the Soviet poetic canon was the product of government control, and to what extent it was pre-meditated by the poet himself.

Although Iosif Stalin had been General Secretary of the Russian Communist party since 1922, his position at that time, technically speaking, was not that of absolute leader. All important political decisions were made by the Politburo, which in the 1920s included seven members, and all the decisions were made according to the majority vote. After Lenin's death in 1924 the party became divided and rival groups engaged in campaigning for their own ideas used the Politburo as a battleground to establish their political power. Ronald Grigor Suny considers the period between 1928 and 1934 as the 'prehistory of Stalinism, the period when the political structures and social conditions were formed that created the possibility for a regime of extreme centralization of power'.⁷⁶ Stalin used the many methods available to him, including art, to secure his position as absolute leader.

Literature was among the most straightforward means of propagating ideas among the general public. A work of literature can deliver the author's message in a clear and explicit way, easily understood by any literate person. Literature was certainly attributed enormous significance by the Russian Communist party. Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, in their work *Soviet Culture and Power*, argue that literature served as a model for other branches of art to follow:

For most of the 1930s literature was a flagship for Soviet culture and other branches of the arts were expected to follow its models. This is no accident. In a decade when the Soviet leadership sought to legitimise and codify its regime, written texts assumed enormous significance [...] in the early years (1932-1934) all the energy in Central Committee bodies with oversight on cultural matters such as the Orgburo and the Kultprop went into literature [...] When, starting around late 1935 or early 1936, other branches of the arts such as film, opera, and ballet began to receive more attention from the

Socialist Realism, trans. by Max Hayward and George Dennis (California: University of California Press, 1992). Note Tertz' work was first published in the West in 1959.

⁷⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 261. Further references to Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* are given after quotations in the text.

leadership, most often it was the verbal text of a given work that was given most scrutiny.⁷⁷

By the early 1930s RAPP had become the leading group in the field of literature. Clark and Dobrenko mention that by 1931 'almost all literary publications were in RAPP's hands, ranging from the "thick journals" and *Literaturnaia gazeta* in Moscow to provincial journals' (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 150). If Stalin was to ensure that literature developed in a way that justified his political position he would either have to work together with the leaders of RAPP, or to remove this group from its position as the 'principal and leading organisation in proletarian literature, one that represents the Party line on literary issues'.⁷⁸ Stalin chose the latter option and in 1932 signed the resolution "On restructuring literary and arts organisations". The resolution stated:

A few years ago, when the significant influence of alien elements was still apparent in literature [...] when the cadres of proletarian literature were still weak, the Party did everything possible to help create and strengthen particular proletarian organizations in the sphere of literature and art [...]

At the present time, when the cadres of proletarian literature and art have managed to grow up and new writers and artists have come forth [...] the framework of existing proletarian literary and arts organizations [...] has become too narrow and is slowing the serious sweep of artistic creativity (Clark and Dobrenko, pp. 151–152).

Thus the party justified the proposed elimination of RAPP and united all Soviet writers into a single Writers' Union. This came as an unpleasant surprise for RAPP, as the resolution was prepared in secrecy and the leaders of RAPP were given no chance to argue their case (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 151). All decisions regarding literature in particular and culture in general became concentrated in the hands of the Party elite. Clark and Dobrenko note that Stalin personally paid particular attention to cultural developments and in the period from 1930 till his death took an active role in making most decisions, including fairly minor ones, whereas in other fields, such as industry, agriculture, and

⁷⁷ Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 139-40. Further references to Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power* are given after quotations in the text.

⁷⁸ Editorial, 'Za proletarskuiu literaturu', *Pravda*, 18 April 1931.

even state security some questions were examined by the Politburo in his absence (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 141).

The party's decisions to unite writers into a single Union which dictated many aspects of form and content of literary works undoubtedly limited many writers. However, at the same time the resolution freed them from the dominance of RAPP, which was often highly critical of writers from non-proletarian origins, and, on paper at least, the resolution made all writers equally appreciated by the Soviet state, as they became members of the same organisation. The particular literary methods and directions for development of the Writers' Union were not decided for a further two years, until in 1934 at the first Congress of Soviet Writers, Party member and close associate of Stalin, Andrei Zhdanov and writer Maksim Gor'kii defined Socialist Realism as the leading literary method for Soviet writers:

Comrade Stalin has named our writers the engineers of human souls. What does it mean? [...]

First of all, it means knowing life, in order to depict it truthfully in literary works [...] in order to depict reality in its revolutionary development.

At the same time truthfulness and historical specifics of a literary work have to marry the task of ideological reworking and education of working people to the spirit of socialism. This method of literature and literary criticism is what we call Socialist Realism [...]

Soviet literature needs to show off our heroes, needs to be able to look into our future. This will not be a utopia, for our future is consciously and systematically planned today.⁷⁹

In 1936 a new constitution was published proclaiming that Socialism had been successfully built within the Soviet Union (Suny, p. 229). This meant that the class war within the country was officially over, and since the society was now classless, the proletariat lost its special position of dictatorship. The step confirmed the Party's changing orientation from the dominance of proletarian and collective values to focusing on the importance of national and individual values. Several years earlier in 1931 Stalin denounced equal wages and henceforth skilled workers received better payment than unskilled workers. In

⁷⁹ Andrei Zhdanov, 'Rech' sekretaria TsK VKP(b), A. A. Zhdanova', in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd Sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. by Ivan Luppol, Mark Rozental', Sergei Tret'iakov (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 4-5.

the next year more benefits were introduced for the most productive workers. This attempt to boost the country's economy and increase productivity led to the appearance of the hero-worker figures known as Stakhanovites, named after a miner Aleksei Stakhanov, who set a record in hewing coal (Suny, pp. 243-248). A mania for breaking records in labour productivity swept the country.

The 1930s also saw the State propagate the revival of traditional values of patriotism and patriarchy. Suny thus describes the 1930s: 'Stalin was unwilling to accept backward Russia as it was, but while radically transforming it, he also wanted to solidify and stabilize his regime by restoring certain traditional values like patriotism and patriarchy' (Suny, p. 252). He used his influence in the sphere of art to guide artists into creating works which celebrated those qualities and therefore justified his political position as a strong leader. At the same time films, literature and art started to focus increasingly on the lives and achievements of strong leaders from the tsarist past, figures often associated with defending and expanding Russian territory, the most popular being Peter the First, Aleksandr Nevskii and Aleksandr Suvorov. This move away from the culture of collectivism and towards native Russian traditions and values which started in the 1930s and increased during the preparations for the Second World War came to be known as the 'Great Retreat', a term created by the sociologist Nicholas Timasheff (Suny, p. 258).

Hero-figures were being cultivated in all aspects of life. However, the need to cultivate hero-figures was not necessarily the same for different fields. In industry, the figure of Aleksei Stakhanov and other hero-workers served to inspire others to work harder, and ultimately become like them. In politics the cult of Stalin was established for quite the opposite reason – to convey the message that Stalin was the perfect leader for the country, and no-one but him knew how to lead the Soviet Union. In the sphere of art and culture, again, the situation was different. Dobrenko and Clark point out that although the leading method in art had been defined as Socialist Realism, the actual definition (given by Zhdanov and Gor'kii) was open to interpretation, and one was never sure what exactly constituted the method. A canonical hierarchy thus evolved to provide examples for other writers 'as authoritative spokesmen cited positive models to be emulated and condemned negative models' (Clark and Dobrenko,

p. 140). In prose such a positive model was Maksim Gor'kii, however, the place of the model poet was vacant, until, in 1935, Stalin proclaimed Maiakovskii to be the most talented poet of the Soviet era. Thus Maiakovskii became the positive model to be emulated as critics retroactively declared his works to be exemplars of Socialist Realism: 'in historical perspective we see even more clearly the timeless importance of the art of the founder of Socialist Realist poetry, a remarkable artist of the word, who in his works depicted the most progressive ideas of our era with extraordinary talent'.⁸⁰

It appears that in the early 1930s there were very few signs that might have led the public and critics to expect Maiakovskii's elevation to the top of the literary hierarchy. Chantal Sundaram, in her work 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Maiakovskii Legend 1930-1993', notes that the publication of Maiakovskii's works diminished dramatically after his death (Sundaram, p. 114). Interestingly, Sundaram notes that some individual works were published, for example 'Vo ves' golos', was published twice: in 1930 and 1931. Sundaram attributes this to the fact that this was the poet's final work, and that was the reason why the public's interest in it was high. She also argues that 'it was no doubt seen as a work that could serve as a denial of political conjecture about his suicide motives' (Sundaram, pp. 114-115). However, it is worth noting that while 'Vo ves' golos' was Maiakovskii's most significant 1930 work, it was not his last work. 'Vo ves' golos' was written in January, several months before the poet's suicide (Katanian, p. 478). During those months Maiakovskii wrote several poems and epigrams, but none of them expressed his personal feelings. 'Vo ves' golos', then, stands out from his other works of the period. Unlike all other works by Maiakovskii of the time, 'Vo ves' golos' is the only one which takes the poet himself as its central theme. However, despite the obvious suitability of this work in representing the poet's final message to the world it stands in stark contrast with the ideas of collectivism cultivated in the late 1920s and early 1930s:

Слушайте,
товарищи потомки,
агитатора,

⁸⁰ Cheremin, p.3.

been a source of Maiakovskii's inspiration and an ever-present theme in his poems.⁸⁴ Interestingly, Maiakovskii himself had also propagated the same idea. In 1922 in his autobiography he wrote about the year 1914: 'I feel I can express a topic [...] The topic is Revolution'.⁸⁵

Brik's other claim that Maiakovskii's work shows a steady progression of his consciousness from focusing on the individual to portraying the collective is, arguably, even more important, as it would remain at the centre of scholarly arguments about Maiakovskii for many years to come. Brik chose to show Maiakovskii's progress from focusing on the individualism of his nature to sharing the voice of the whole nation through the example of the *poema Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*: 'in all of world literature there can hardly be found lines that have expressed with equal power and conviction the transformation of individual feeling into collective feeling, and that great happiness that a person experiences having become conscious of that transformation'.⁸⁶ The focus on individualistic concerns at a time of collectivisation and unification of society was among the most common charges made against the Futurists and Maiakovskii during his lifetime. The origins of the argument that individualistic themes dominated the minds and works of Maiakovskii and many of his fellow artists came from the image that Futurists had created for themselves only a few years prior to the Revolution, when they had positioned themselves above and apart from the rest of society.

In his articles dedicated to Maiakovskii in the early 1930s Brik reiterated the image that Maiakovskii himself had sought to create. Under the influence of criticism Maiakovskii sought to show that he had moved away from portraying individualistic concerns and established himself as part of a community. In his *poema 150 000 000* (1920) he wrote:

150 000 000 мастера этой поэмы имя.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Osip Brik, 'Poet V. V. Maiakovskii', in *Shkol'nyi Maiakovskii*, 2nd edition, ed. by Osip Brik (Moscow: Shkol'naia biblioteka sovremennykh pisatelei, 1931), pp. 91-102.

⁸⁵ *Ia sam*, p. 22.

⁸⁶ Osip Brik, 'Lenin v stikhakh Maiakovskogo', in *Literaturnyi kritik*, 4 (1934), pp. 106-16.

⁸⁷ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *150 000 000*, p.115 (150 000 000 are the authors of this *poema*).

However, the critics did not find this new image of Maiakovskii convincing, and the reviews of the *poema* were mediocre at best. Maiakovskii was aware that his Futurist past and the Futurists' dogmas were a constant obstacle to his elevation in the ranks of Soviet canonical authors. He attempted to remedy the situation on numerous occasions, for example, in an article 'V kogo vglyzaetsia Lef?', Maiakovskii wrote:

Our previous motto: "to stand atop the rock of the word "We" amid the sea of jeers and resentment".

Now all we are waiting for is the acknowledgement of our aesthetical work, so we could dissolve our tiny artistic "we" in the huge "we" of communism.⁸⁸

However, despite Maiakovskii's many attempts at remedying the drawbacks of his pre-revolutionary claims, and recreating his (and Lef's) image as part of a unified community, avant-garde art remained on the fringes of the Soviet cultural scene. In the years immediately after his death it was Maiakovskii's friends' association with the avant-garde which largely prevented his works from gaining government recognition, despite their best efforts to promote his memory. Sundaram notes that the publication of *Al'manakh s Maiakovskim* in 1934 'met with much adverse criticism which centred not around the legacy of Maiakovskii himself but accusations that it represented an attempt at resurrecting the Lef grouping' (Sundaram, pp. 119-120).

In 1934, two years after the establishment of a single Writers' Union, the First Soviet Writers' Congress was held. Party representative, Andrei Zhdanov, gave a speech outlining what the party expected from the writers, as the Communist party at that time believed that literature should play a central role in public education.⁸⁹ There were over five hundred people present and during two weeks the Congress held twenty-six meetings. It was the first attempt to bring together delegates from all the Soviet national republics and coordinate the work of Soviet writers. The main aim was to discuss the ways

⁸⁸ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'V kogo vglyzaetsia LEF?', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, xii, ed. by Aleksandr Ushakov and others (1959), pp. 45-47 (p. 46).

⁸⁹ Zhdanov, p. 4.

in which literature should develop, however, the answer was already known – the literary method approved by the government was Socialist Realism.

This method was first mentioned in 1932, two years before the congress, however scholars disagree on how it was developed, and particularly, whether Stalin was the one who came up with the term and the directions in which literature should develop. Suny, for example, presents the theory that Stalin came up with the term himself (Suny, p. 270). Clark and Dobrenko point out that while during the Stalin era, it was indeed commonly believed that the method was formulated by Stalin, after Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 Socialist Realism was alleged to be a product of the development of Soviet literature itself (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 162). According to the memoirs of Ivan Gronsii, a member of Politburo and a literary expert, Stalin indeed came up with the concept of Socialist Realism, however, it was not a result of the suggestions given by leading writers, but as a measure to oppose the leaders of RAPP. More interested in invoking the ideas of nationality than class Stalin did not want to stipulate and emphasize the proletarian character of Soviet literature and art. Similarly, he was opposed to the idea of pronouncing communism as the theme literature should be concerned with. The establishment of communism would mean the end of government and his own rule, and, unsurprisingly, this was not the idea Stalin wanted to be promoted. Instead he suggested that literature should be focused on socialism, and the literary and artistic method should be named Socialist Realism (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 164).

It was almost immediately decided by artists and literary critics that the method 'had in effect emerged long ago, well before the October Revolution, principally in the work of A. M. Gorky, and now we only gave it a name' (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 164). There were several reasons for the desire to apply Socialist Realism retroactively. Firstly, there was a desire for continuity, for suggesting that the new culture was built on the same premises as the best works of previous eras. Stalin himself suggested it as one of the virtues of the method, as it seemed to have evolved from the pre-revolutionary literature of critical realism (Clark and Dobrenko, p. 164). Secondly, critics and literary scholars saw the need to list certain names of authors whose work already employed the method of Socialist Realism. In 1932, at the time of the Commission reviewing

the resolution 'On restructuring literary groups and organisations' (and in 1934, at the first Writers' Congress), Gor'kii was named as the leading figure whose works had undoubtedly been Socialist Realist, despite the fact that the method had not yet been formulated at the time when Gor'kii had written them. After 1935 the poetry would also gain its hero poet – Maiakovskii, who had mastered Socialist Realism, though it was not formulated until after his death. Despite the description of Socialist Realism by Gor'kii and Zhdanov at the first Writers' Congress, and prior to that by Stalin, very little practical advice was given by the Party on what aspects make a work fall under the category of Socialist Realism. Thus, without formulating a detailed set of guidelines on how to write Socialist Realist works, it was much easier for the government to keep things flexible if changes were needed. However, some further explanation of the prescribed artistic method was needed, and using particular artists and their work as an example can be seen as an attempt to guide authors and create a formal canon for them to follow.

In 1934 at the time of the Congress the letter from Lili Brik to Stalin had not yet been written, the place of Maiakovskii in the official Soviet literary canon remained uncertain and the poet's reputation was tainted by his connection with avant-garde artists. The first time that the subject of his work was discussed at length was on the eleventh day of the conference, in a speech by Nikolai Bukharin, who was presenting a report 'O Poezii, poetike i zadachakh poeticheskovo tvorchestva v SSSR'. It is worth noting that Bukharin was politically opposed to Stalin, and they often disagreed on party policies.⁹⁰ Thus it comes as little surprise that many aspects of Bukharin's speech were criticized. Nevertheless Bukharin's address was what Sundaram called 'the last genuine public debate about Mayakovsky in an official forum until the late eighties' (Sundaram, p. 126).

In his speech Bukharin suggested that while Maiakovskii had indeed enriched Soviet poetry and can be called a 'Soviet classic', the time for Maiakovskii's

⁹⁰ See for example Suny, 'the Stalin Revolution', 'Stalin's Industrial Revolution', 'Building Stalinism' in *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*.

propagandistic poetic taglines had passed.⁹¹ This comment provoked numerous indignant responses from the floor of the Congress in the debate which followed Bukharin's speech. Several speakers accused Bukharin of presenting an inconsistent opinion on Maiakovskii's legacy and his place in the canon. Several poets felt that the comment was aimed at their own work too, and therefore came to the defence of the memory of Maiakovskii. Maiakovskii's protégé Semen Kirsanov, for example, responded: 'according to comrade Bukharin's report we conclude that the works of Dem'ian [Bednyi], Bezymenskii, Aseev, Maiakovskii are all obsolete [...] On the contrary. Our editorial offices always feel the scarcity of such poets as Maiakovskii'.⁹²

In his second speech Bukharin addressed those criticisms, and again argued against the idolisation of Maiakovskii: 'I rate Maiakovskii very highly [...] but it does not mean that we should fetishize even such remarkable figures as Maiakovskii'.⁹³ Ultimately however, at that time, the government officials did not have any directive to make a definitive statement about Maiakovskii's legacy and so his place within the Soviet canon remained uncertain. Aleksei Stetskii, the director of the Culture and Leninist Propaganda Section of the Central Committee concluded the debate about Maiakovskii:

We do not have any party or government resolutions about giving official characteristics and ratings of individual authors, to credit writers and poets with any kind of "medals", marks of distinction, marks of promotion or marks of reproof or disparagement of any degree. I am equally not aware of any party or government resolutions regarding the "canonisation" of Maiakovskii. Maiakovskii is a remarkable poet, a poet of the Revolution, but we have no resolutions regarding all our poetry mirroring Maiakovskii's work alone.⁹⁴

Lili Brik's letter to Stalin was received on 29 November 1935.⁹⁵ It is unclear when Stalin wrote his famous resolution, but on 5 December the front page of

⁹¹ Nikolai Bukharin, 'O poetike, poezii i zadachakh poeticheskogo tvorchestva v SSSR', in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934*, pp. 479-503 (p. 502).

⁹² Semen Kirsanov, 'zasedanie dvadtsatoe', in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934*, pp. 523-26 (p. 525).

⁹³ Nikolai Bukharin, 'Zakliuchitel'noe slovo Bukharina', in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934*, pp. 573-77 (p. 576).

⁹⁴ Aleksei Stetskii, 'Rech zaveduiushchego otdelom kul'tury i propagandy leninizma TsK VKP(b) A. I. Stetskogo', *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934*, pp. 614-17 (p. 614).

⁹⁵ Strizhneva, p. 323.

Pravda stated: 'Maiakovskii was and remains the best and talented poet of our Soviet era'.⁹⁶ Vasilii Katanian suggests that the misquotation (replacing 'most talented' [*talantliveishim*] with simply one of the 'talented' [*talantlivym*]) could have been deliberate on the part of the chief editors. It was changed in the later editions of *Pravda* (Sundaram, p. 141). Such suggestions lead to two conclusions: firstly, and predictably, that there was no consensus on how Maiakovskii's art should be judged, and there were people working in the sphere of culture who disagreed with Stalin's resolution; and secondly, that, like many other resolutions by Stalin, the resolution about the canonisation of Maiakovskii came as a surprise.

Birgit Menzel in her work 'V. V. Majakovskij and seine Rezeption in der Sowjetunion 1930–1954' argues, however, that Maiakovskii was predestined to become the head of Soviet poetic canon, since poetry had lacked a leader figure to match Gor'kii's canonical status in Soviet prose.⁹⁷ In her thesis Sundaram reflects on the lack of a leading figure in Soviet poetry and argues that there were no other candidates who could fit the image and fulfil the role which the government needed from an exemplary figure at the head of the poetic canon (Sundaram, pp. 131-132). And while there were several noteworthy poets, who consistently celebrated the success of the Soviet State and the Revolution, a crucial aspect in determining the potential exemplar's suitability became the fact that he was dead, thus not able to contradict or inadvertently tarnish his exemplary image. As Anatolii Valiuzhenich, a contemporary literary scholar, summarised in his interview with Natal'ia Guk: 'in the late 1930s it was hard to fall in love with anyone. Say you fall in love with them and it turns out they are an enemy of the state!'⁹⁸ Thus even such seemingly suitable candidates as Dem'ian Bednyi were criticised during the first Writers' Congress, for failing to keep up with the times.⁹⁹ Sundaram suggests that the main reason living Gor'kii was elevated to the status of the best Soviet writer was due to his

⁹⁶ Editorial, *Pravda*, 5 December 1935, quoted in Vasilii Katanian, 'Ne tol'ko vospominaniia. K istorii izdaniia Maiakovskogo', *Druzhba narodov*, 3 (1989), p. 225.

⁹⁷ Menzel, pp. 84-92.

⁹⁸ Natal'ia Guk, 'Otpравiv pis'mo Stalinu Lili Brik spasla dlia strany Maiakovskovo', *Info-Tses*, 28 July 2006 <<http://www.info-tses.kz/red/article.php?article=14046>> [accessed: 12 April 2012].

⁹⁹ Nikolai Bukharin, 'O poetike, poezii i zadachakh poeticheskogo tvorchestva v SSSR', p. 490.

poor health: 'at the time of the Congress Gorky was seriously ill and did not pose a threat of long outliving his usefulness' (Sundaram, p. 133).

Sundaram also suggests that 'it might be argued rather simplistically that if Mayakovsky did not exist, the state would have had to invent him' (Sundaram, p. 133). Indeed, in order to fit Maiakovskii and his works into his new role of the head of the Soviet poetic canon his image had to be reinvented. Boym notes:

In the duel between the official Vladimir Mayakovsky and his flickering double, the first always wins. 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.¹⁰⁰

Both Sundaram and Boym suggest that the process of Maiakovskii's elevation to the status of an exemplary poet was forceful, that it has distorted the realistic true Maiakovskii. However, Boym's allusion to 'masks' makes us consider that while Soviet government officials did pick out certain desirable traits of Maiakovskii's work and character, it was Maiakovskii himself who created and perpetuated them in the first place. The Revolution and Soviet life was at the centre of the majority of his works and, more importantly, the larger-than-life image of a ring-leader that Maiakovskii himself had been building for most of his life made him suitable for his new status as a hero-poet. Thus, this 'reinvention' was not completely the product of government policies, but has been, at least to some extent, designed by the poet himself. Many of those who knew Maiakovskii personally spoke about how important it had been for him to be recognised as one of the best contemporary poets. Pasternak wrote:

One could guess instantly that if he was handsome, and smart, and talented, and maybe even exceptionally talented, - that wasn't the main thing about him. The main thing was his iron will, some covenants or noble charters, his sense of duty, according to which he did not allow himself to be anything else: less handsome, less smart, less talented.¹⁰¹

It would appear that ever since Maiakovskii realised his own talent, he had made a conscious decision to be the best living poet; he was deeply troubled by any evidence of indifference to his own work. Veronika Polonskaia,

¹⁰⁰ Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 153.

¹⁰¹ Pasternak, p. 261.

Maiakovskii's last love interest, commented in her memoirs on the negative reception of Maiakovskii's last two plays: 'Silence and indifference to Maiakovskii's art put him off his stride.'¹⁰²

It stands to reason then that a poet, who wanted above everything else to become famous and who was always so conscious of his actions would attempt to adjust his work and his demeanour to be what he believed was necessary so that he could become a famous poet in Soviet Russia.

Polonskaia remembered that when Maiakovskii was on stage she could not recognise him: 'he, it seemed, used to put on a disguise, "played" the role of a particular Maiakovskii, the way others imagined him to be'.¹⁰³

However, Maiakovskii's attempts at depicting himself as being just one of the general public were never quite successful. The picture we gain from reading his works and looking at the images, printed on the front pages of his books, is that of a leader, rousing people for battle. The people who knew the poet commented repeatedly on his remarkable voice, on his tall build, on his determination. Igor' Il'inskii wrote about his first encounter with Maiakovskii: 'his manner and style of public reading was unique, it combined the inner power and strength of his poems with the might and strength of his voice, his calmness and confidence'.¹⁰⁴ The poet has failed to fit his larger-than-life personality and his desire to be the best into the 1920s ideas of the collective. However, in the mid 1930s these exact characteristics became an essential quality for the hero figures of the Soviet State.¹⁰⁵ Maiakovskii's canonisation then, could indeed be considered 'predestined', as both the poet and his poetic personas possessed the qualities required from those whose work and life was to be served up as an example for others.

Of course, not all of Maiakovskii's work would become part of the Stalin-era poetic canon at the time of his elevation by Stalin. His pre-revolutionary poems

¹⁰² Veronika Polonskaia, 'Vospominaniia', in Strizhneva, *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, pp. 475-528 (p. 494).

¹⁰³ Polonskaia, p. 509.

¹⁰⁴ Igor' Il'inskii, 'S Maiakovskim', in *Maiakovskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, ed. by Nadezhda Reformat'skaia (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1963), pp. 288-305, (p. 253).

¹⁰⁵ See appendix, 'Chapter 1', 'The cadre from the film *Baryshnia i khuligan*'

were rarely republished. Similarly the Central Committee's 1935 resolution on Maiakovskii's publication mentions that the National Publishing House was supposed to publish the plays *Klop* and *Bania* along with an introductory article by Meierkhol'd. However, according to Sundaram, the plays were never republished during Stalin's lifetime (Sundaram, p. 150). Meierkhol'd, along with many of Maiakovskii's former colleagues, found himself out of favour and in 1939 fell victim of anti-formalist purges.

A large part of Maiakovskii's background was connected with the work of avant-garde artists, and therefore could not be ignored by literary scholars who started to create works reviewing the life and achievements of the 'most talented' poet of the Soviet era. However, while affiliation with avant-garde art movements caused a lot of problems for many living artists, for the dead Maiakovskii it was a positive thing, as it could be used to show how the poet had alone, without the help of his colleagues, succeeded in his struggle to overcome the negative tendencies of undesirable art movements.¹⁰⁶

At the same time there were other examples of the official recognition of Maiakovskii: in 1935 Triumfal'naia square in Moscow was renamed after the poet, and a year later Nadezhdinskaia street in Leningrad was also given Maiakovskii's name. Interestingly Nadezhdinskaia street is adjacent to Zhukovskii street (the one Maiakovskii predicted would be named after him after his death in his *poema Chelovek*).¹⁰⁷

While Lili Brik's letter triggered the canonisation of Maiakovskii as 'the best, most talented poet of the Soviet era', it was a combination of factors which made this change in status possible. On the one hand, the government needed exemplary authors to showcase Socialist Realism. On the other hand, these same authors had to not only produce inspirational work, they also had to live inspirational lives. These factors ensured that only dead poets could be considered for the status of the head of the poetic canon. After all, dead poets cannot express undesirable views and behave in an undesirable manner. While Maiakovskii's outgoing and unyielding personality, his dedication to the

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Aleksei Selivanovskii, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi sovetskoi poezii* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936) p. 78.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 1, footnote 1.

Revolution, and his timely death made him a suitable candidate, his canonisation as an exemplary poet was not straightforward. Certain aspects of Maiakovskii's life had to go unmentioned, while others had to be embellished. Equally, certain works were discouraged from circulation. Since Maiakovskii had died before Socialist Realism was first formulated the method had to be applied to his works retroactively. However, overall, if it was not for Maiakovskii's own self-fashioning, the Soviet government would certainly find it much harder, if not impossible, to reinvent him as an exemplary poet.

The Final Steps in the Formation of the Soviet Image of Vladimir Maiakovskii as the Head of the Poetic Canon

Celebrations and festivals were so common in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s that several scholars have suggested the term 'celebration culture' to describe the period.¹⁰⁸ Notably, it was not only the newly established Soviet heroes who were celebrated in this manner, but also nineteenth-century Russian authors, and some foreign writers. Laura Urbaszewski argues that to some extent the reason for the widespread celebration of foreign literary achievements was supposed to demonstrate 'the Soviet people's great cultural advancement and their status as the true heirs of the best cultural traditions' (Urbaszewski, p. 642). There is evidence in support of this argument. In 1936 Sof'ia Lunacharskaia wrote about the 1932 celebration commemorating the German poet Goethe:

Just as the hundredth anniversary of Goethe's death in Fascist Germany distorted the image of Germany's great poet and suppressed his true merits, the celebration of this holiday in the Soviet Union unfurled before the proletariat the great significance of Goethe's work for the culture of humanity.¹⁰⁹

Literary celebrations were also dedicated to increasing the public's familiarity with certain literary works and thus with a set of moral behaviours promoted in them which the state expected people to adopt. Marcus Levitt, in his work

¹⁰⁸ Laura Urbaszewski, 'Canonising the "Best, Most Talented" Soviet Poet: Vladimir Mayakovsky and the Soviet Literary Celebration', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9, 4, November 2002, p. 641. Further references to Laura Urbaszewski, 'Canonising the "Best, Most Talented" Soviet Poet: Vladimir Mayakovsky and the Soviet Literary Celebration' are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰⁹ Sof'ia Lunacharskaia, *Iubilei A. S. Pushkina v Shkole: posobie dlia uchitelie nachal'noi i srednei shkoly* (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1936), p. 3.

Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880, noted how the press in the late 1930s alternated between accounts of trials of public enemies and literary celebrations. Levitt sees this as a contrast between representations of negative and positive ideals for the new Soviet man.¹¹⁰

In this section I will analyse how the tenth anniversary of Maiakovskii's death shaped the image of Maiakovskii as the greatest Soviet poet and an exemplary for others to emulate. During the commemoration of 1940 Pasternak's comment about the forcible canonisation of Maiakovskii rang true: 'Maiakovskii was forced on us, like potatoes during the times of Catherine the Great'.¹¹¹ Maiakovskii entered all spheres of social life. Articles like 'Maiakovskii v bibliotekakh', by Agniia Ezerskaia,¹¹² and 'Maiakovskii v detskom sadu', by N. Oppengeim, appeared in 1940.¹¹³ Urbaszewski noted that the Maiakovskii commemoration articles were published not only in literary journals and general newspapers but also in specialised periodicals like *Molodoi kolkhoznik*, *Industriia-sotsializm*, *Obschestvennitsa* and *Sovetskoe studenchestvo*, thus ensuring that all members of society, regardless of their status and profession, were exposed to the commemoration of the anniversary of Maiakovskii's death (Urbaszewski, p. 663). Thus 1940 became the year when the Soviet population was exposed to a large number of works analysing the life and legacy of Maiakovskii, designed to help readers understand the poet's exemplary life and poetic talent.

The 1940 anniversary should be seen as the point when the canonisation of Maiakovskii became firmly established. I will analyse if anything changed in Maiakovskii's representation since 1935, which elements of his biography were strengthened and emphasised, and which were omitted. Finally I will offer a suggestion as to why the Soviet depiction of Maiakovskii relied so heavily on the physical aspect and the personality of the poet, rather than focusing solely on his literary heritage.

¹¹⁰ Marcus Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 165-66.

¹¹¹ See Introduction, footnote 6.

¹¹² Agniia Ezerskaia, 'Maiakovskii v bibliotekakh', *Krasnyi bibliotekar*, 2 (1940), pp. 3-16.

¹¹³ N. V. Oppengeim, 'Maiakovskii v detskom sadu', *Doshkol'noe vospitanie*, 6 (1940), pp. 44-45.

Urbaszewski points out that the process of canonisation of Maiakovskii in the 1930s was centred on the figure of the poet rather than his works (Urbaszewski, p. 637). Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that the state needed hero figures more than it needed good literature. Another reason for such representation stemmed from the unsuitability of many of Maiakovskii's works in representing the official literary canon the Soviet State sought to create. Urbaszewski comments that 'Soviet scholarship could not critically analyse the canonisation of Maiakovskii' (Urbaszewski, p. 637). This may refer to the fact that Soviet scholarship was based on the officially-declared canonisation of Maiakovskii as the best Soviet poet, and therefore it could not produce a realistic representation of how he, and his works, had achieved the status they held. Very few critical works on Maiakovskii appeared in the immediate years after 1935. The scholarship simply could not successfully reconcile the vision of the pre-1935 Maiakovskii with the new Maiakovskii, who had suddenly become the head of the poetic canon. Unsurprisingly, there were few attempts to perform such a reconciliation (Sundaram, pp. 153-158). In 1936 Gosizdat published an abridged four-volume collection of Maiakovskii's works with a foreword by Ivan Luppol, the Director-in-Chief of Gosizdat. This was one of the first attempts to describe Maiakovskii's transition from Futurism to being the head of the Soviet poetic canon. Luppol argued that Maiakovskii's life was 'the great path of the great man', who could transform himself from being a petty bourgeois rebel to someone who served the Revolution.¹¹⁴ However, this attempt to explain the difficult aspects of Maiakovskii's biography which threatened to spoil his Soviet image, as mistakes, which the poet had made, but which he had subsequently identified and regretted, did not bode well for Luppol, who was arrested the following year. In fact 1937 saw the arrests of several leading figures in Gosizdat. In addition many of the people involved in editing Maiakovskii's works, including Lili Brik, were relieved of their duties (Sundaram, pp. 153-158). The circumstances of the late 1930s made publishing any sort of scholarly works about Maiakovskii both tricky and dangerous, and

¹¹⁴ Ivan Luppol, 'Vstupitel'naia stat'ia', in *Maiakovskii: sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, ed. by Lili Brik, Ivan Luppol (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1936), i, pp. 5-36.

may help to explain the lack of scholarly input into the perpetuation of Maiakovskii's image throughout this period.

Urbaszewski suggests that the declaration that Maiakovskii was the best poet of the Soviet Union, published in *Pravda*, emphasised the fact that a new era of close party involvement in questions of literature and literary studies had begun (Urbaszewski, p. 638). Katerina Clark, in her work *The Soviet Novel*, and John Guillory, in *Cultural Capital*, both write about how the Soviet state utilised literature to present the population with a set of moral codes.¹¹⁵ Clark points out that these positive behaviours were presented to the public through the protagonists of Socialist Realist literary works. In fact, a large part of an author's success as a Socialist Realist writer depended on how suitable his protagonist was as an exemplar of socialist virtues.¹¹⁶ When it came to poetry, the rules were slightly different. Poetry could not follow the same strategy for outlining positive and negative characters as prose did. However, in keeping with the idea of hero-emulation, poetry critics and scholars of the late 1930s moved from placing a greater emphasis on the works themselves to focusing on the lives of their authors. Therefore, when it came to the role of the leader of Socialist Realist poetry, it was the personality and life of the author that took on great significance. Idolising the life achievements of the author, as opposed to those of his protagonists, also posed another problem. There was no guarantee that the publication of Maiakovskii's works on their own would ensure that the population would identify with the values and moral codes that he was supposed to stand for:

Because a text may not necessarily pass on the values of the canonising authority, critical commentary, notes, visual images, and other devices are produced in order to guide the reader and determine how the classic text will be interpreted. In the Soviet Union, literary celebrations became the occasion for producing these kinds of texts, as well as exhibits, amateur conferences, musical performances, and monument dedications (Urbaszewski, p. 639).

¹¹⁵ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

¹¹⁶ *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, p. 46.

In the case of Maiakovskii it was not a particular text which was canonised, but the poet himself. By time of the 1940 anniversary it was still dangerous to produce a written work analysing Maiakovskii's development as a poet, so the works which appeared at the time were mainly memoirs by his contemporaries. Great importance was also given to the promotion of images of Maiakovskii. It was, after all, his own life and personality which were canonised, more so than his works. Similarly, Urbaszewski's notes that the texts produced for the commemoration focused primarily on Maiakovskii's life, poetic genealogy and historical role in Soviet culture, rather than his literary works. One of the major works written at the time about Maiakovskii, his friend Nikolai Aseev's *poema Maiakovskii nachinaetsia* begins with a physical description of the poet:

Он шел по бульвару,
Худой
и плечистый,
возникший откуда-то сразу,
извне,
высокий, как знамя,
взметенное
в чистой
июньской
несношенной голубизне.¹¹⁷

In his work *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value* Iurij Striedter argues that in the process of canonisation the state has to canonise the whole work (Striedter talks about canonising texts, though he suggests that the same theory could be applied to authors and genres as well). As a work could, and in many cases does, contain not only the values the state wants to promote, but also less desirable elements, those too become canonised and available to the public. Thus every canonical text (or figure) retains within it some contradictory values.¹¹⁸ When Maiakovskii was suddenly elevated to the head of the Soviet poetic canon, his biography had to be made to fit his new role. However, his biography could not just be altered – the poet had written substantial amounts of

¹¹⁷ Nikolai Aseev, *Maiakovskii nachinaetsia*, in *Pamiat' let*, ed. by L. Belov (Moscow: Gosudartvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956) pp. 322-23 ('He was walking down the pavement, thin and broad-shouldered, having suddenly appeared from somewhere beyond, tall as a banner which was raised in the clear new June sky').

¹¹⁸ Iurij Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) pp. 204-06.

readily available material about himself, and, besides, too many people still alive and publishing knew him personally. Thus in the 1930s Maiakovskii's career path was occasionally explained in terms of mistakes, which the poet had recognised and corrected.¹¹⁹ Others blamed various well known public enemies of the time for all Maiakovskii's troubles, including the hostile reception of his works in the late 1920s.¹²⁰ However, mostly the task of making his biography fit for an exemplary Soviet poet was done, as Sundaram points out, by 'glossing over' the inconsistencies in Maiakovskii's biography in order to elevate the poet above them (Sundaram, p. 154). For example, Viktor Pertsov's account of Maiakovskii's life in the introduction to the 1941 *V. V. Maiakovskii. Sochineniia v odnom tome* completely omitted any reference to the poet's love-life; the poet's relationship with Futurism was discussed, however, Maiakovskii was always represented as a poet who stood apart from the rest of the Futurists, by virtue of his acute understanding of socialism and the needs of the worker population. Finally, even the fact of his death was discussed mainly in relation to the critical reception he suffered in the late 1920s from the members of RAPP, many of whom by 1940 have been recategorised as enemies of the state:

Maiakovskii was constantly met with leers and mistrust from those literary officials who were placed at major points of the literary front by the enemies of the state [...] those who found the work of a "propagandist, a shouting ring-leader" abhorrent, as it was the clearest expression in poetry of the will of the party, the directives of comrade Stalin.¹²¹

In 1935 the state took over Lili Brik's role as caretaker of Maiakovskii's legacy. In 1938 Maiakovskii's archive was declared to be state property, and the Maiakovskii museum opened its doors to the public (Urbaszewski, p. 641). The museum's main research focus at that time was on collecting factual information about the poet. Urbaszewski argues that this was done in an effort to 'fix memories and experiences of Mayakovsky in state institutions and authoritative

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Luppol, 'Vstupitel'naia stat'ia', in *Maiakovskii: sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols, pp. 5-36.

¹²⁰ For example, Sergei Tregub in his article 'Solntse Sovetskoi Poezii' blames Lev Trotskii for all the negative response which the poet had during his life: Sergei Tregub, 'Solntse sovetskoi poezii', *Smena*, 327, March 1940, <<http://smena-online.ru/stories/solntse-sovetskoi-poezii>> [accessed: 1 December 2014]

¹²¹ Viktor Pertsov, 'V. V. Maiakovskii. Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk', in *V. V. Maiakovskii: sochineniia v odnom tome*, ed. by Nikolai Aseev and others (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1941), pp. V-XLIII (p. XLII).

textual forms that could be processed, controlled, cited, or hidden' (Urbaszewski, p. 641). This call for factual information on the life of the poet might account for the large number of memoir-type publications on the life of the poet published at that time.

A ceremonial gathering of the Soviet Writers' Union to commemorate the death of Maiakovskii in 1940 was opened with a speech by its secretary Aleksandr Fadeev. Fadeev stressed that as socialism had already been built in the Soviet Union the people were now living in the world that Maiakovskii had envisaged.¹²² Like Luppol, Fadeev did not fail to take account of the less desirable aspects of Maiakovskii's career. Instead he spent considerable time talking about Maiakovskii's 'mistakes': his affiliation with Futurism and the dominance of individualism in his early works.¹²³ Moreover, Fadeev suggests that to elevate Maiakovskii above any possible mistakes would be incorrect:

Some of the scholars of Maiakovskii's art believe that he, as a poet, was born a ready-made pioneer of communism.

But this is incorrect. In his young pre-revolutionary years Maiakovskii in his own way suffered from a "childhood illness", which was particularly common for his generation – the illness of individualism. Similarly, his early works were also marked by the erroneous theories of that specific movement of Futurism with which he had connections.¹²⁴

However, Fadeev limited Maiakovskii's errors to his pre-revolutionary period and did not mention the poet's affiliation with Futurism or any other undesirable literary movements after 1917.

Menzel gives an overview of the number of works about Maiakovskii published specifically for the 1940 anniversary:

16 monographs, including four memoir volumes (Spasskii, Kassil', Shklovskii, and Kamenskii) four omnibus volumes, radio performances, a documentary film written by O. Brik, an artistic film script (Aseev's "Sploshnaia Nevidal'"), a series of musical works,

¹²² Aleksandr Fadeev, 'Maiakovskii', in *Sobranie Sochinenii v semi tomakh*, ed. Evgeniia Knipovich, Vitalii Ozerov, Boris Polevoi, S. Preobrazhenskii, 7 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969-71), v (1971), pp. 318-24 (p. 318).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

including one symphony, and more than 200 works published in newspapers and journals.¹²⁵

However, even at this time of increased interest in Maiakovskii's life, it would appear that not all projects came to fruition. Aseev's movie script was never finished, and there is virtually no mention of this work in subsequent accounts. Among published books there were also significant differences: formulaic third-person narratives featuring Maiakovskii's evolution into a great Soviet poet were published in huge print-runs of 100 000 copies, while Viktor Shklovskii's *O Maiakovskom*, which appeared in 1940, was printed only in 5 000 copies and received mostly negative reviews for its indeterminate genre and personal content (Urbaszewski, p. 648). Thus it would seem that while the status of Maiakovskii as the greatest Soviet poet was crystallised, many were uncertain as to how to represent the poet's life. While friends and colleagues of the poet were still able to publish their memoirs, formulaic texts depicting the poet's greatness and elevating his personality above undesirable aspects of his life prevailed.

An important feature of the 1940 commemoration of Maiakovskii's death was the creation of parallels between Maiakovskii and Pushkin. Urbaszewski counted that between 1935 and 1937 'at least ten articles were published in major newspapers and journals on the theme "Mayakovsky and Pushkin" (Urbaszewski, p. 661). Pushkin, whose centenary, took place in 1937, was then presented as the leading figure of the Golden Age of Russian nineteenth-century poetry. By drawing the connection between Pushkin and Maiakovskii, it was possible to connect the two periods together and both provide a picture of cultural and poetic continuation of tradition and elevate the status of Soviet poetry. One such article, written by Sergei Tregub and published in the journal *Smena* was called 'Solntse Sovetskoi poezii'. The author draws no explicit parallels between Maiakovskii and Pushkin, and in fact attempts to identify the title of his article with Maiakovskii's poem 'Razgovor s solntsem'.¹²⁶ However, Pushkin was widely known as 'the sun of Russian poetry'. The phrase was first used by Vladimir Odoevskii, who commented on Pushkin's death: 'The sun of

¹²⁵ Menzel, p. 142.

¹²⁶ Sergei Tregub, 'Solntse sovetskoi poezii', *Smena*, 327, March 1940, <<http://smena-online.ru/stories/solntse-sovetskoi-poezii>> [accessed: 1 December 2014]

Russian poetry has set'.¹²⁷ Thus the parallel between the two authors springs to readers' minds even before they start reading the article.

However, Maiakovskii was not only seen as a leading figure in Soviet poetry, he was also to play an important part in the development of Soviet culture in general. Some of the texts created for the 1940 anniversary were focused on portraying Maiakovskii as one of the founders of internationalist Soviet culture. For example, the poet's sister Liudmila Maiakovskaia wrote an article 'Na rodine Maiakovskogo', in which she stressed Maiakovskii's love for Georgia and his mixed ancestry.¹²⁸ Urbaszewski noted that similarly many anniversary essays and articles stressed Maiakovskii's active role in unifying the republics during his extensive travels across the Soviet Union and abroad (Urbaszewski, p. 646).

Urbaszewski also makes an interesting general point when discussing literary celebrations of the 1930s-1940s. She points out that the Communist Party tried to involve the masses in the celebrations and make them take an active role by participating in conferences, journal debates, etc. Thus the general population, at least on the face of it, became part of the body which formed and transformed the literary canon. Urbaszewski suggested that the main reason for such Party encouragement was to dissolve the specificity of the intelligentsia as a social group (Urbaszewski, p. 639). However, there were other possible additional benefits: the state aimed to promote literacy, as literature was seen as a source of moral values and acceptable behaviours that the state wanted the public to emulate. Thus by increasing the population's involvement in questions of literature, the state ensured that more people were brought up on the values portrayed in books, or, as was the case with Maiakovskii, represented by the author's life. Journals and newspapers actively promoted the image of a culturally progressive audience who was ready and willing to take part in literary discussions and debates. For example, the 1940 article by Oleg Leonidov 'Zhivoi Maiakovskii (obzor gazet)' praised the public's active involvement in commemoration discussions about Maiakovskii.¹²⁹ Leonidov concludes that

¹²⁷ See Vladimir Murav'ev, 'Russkii Faust', in *Vladimir Odoevskii: poslednii kvartet Betkhovena*, ed. by Vladimir Murav'ev (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1982), p. 17.

¹²⁸ Liudmila Maiakovskaia, 'Na rodine Maiakovskogo' in *30 dnei* 3-4 (1940), pp. 20-23.

¹²⁹ Oleg Leonidov, 'Zhivoi Maiakovskii (obzor gazet)', in *Zvezda*, 7 (1940), p. 188.

such involvement meant that Maiakovskii's work was still very relevant and close to people's hearts. Thus on the face of it the government has indeed succeeded in cultivating cultural and artistic awareness in the general population. With this key aspect shared by the whole population the class of traditional Russian intelligencia would dissolve. However many scholars have noted that this government initiative was not a straightforward success. The public anticipation and involvement in various celebratory activities were often greatly exaggerated by journals and newspapers and event organisers were often faced with apathy on the part of the public.¹³⁰

One particular issue which was tackled during the 1940 public representation of Maiakovskii was the notion that his poetry was incomprehensible to the general reader. This was an ongoing argument dating back to the poet's lifetime. Maiakovskii himself tried to argue against it, as he strove for the status of the poet of the people.¹³¹ However, Maiakovskii's argument that the ability of readers to understand a literary work was not only due to the merit of the author but was also a result of the level of literary education in society did not put a stop to the debates around his poetry. Published in 1928, the volume *Pisatel' pered sudom rabocheho chitatelia: vechera rabochei kritiki* described a worker's comment on Maiakovskii's poetic style: 'they [modern poets] write completely in the new way, and sometimes we don't understand anything, because we are used to speaking and reading in Russian, but some poet speaks in Mayakovsky [*po-Maiakovski*], and we can't understand a thing'.¹³² Since Maiakovskii was proclaimed to be the greatest Soviet poet, the argument about his incomprehensibility had to be countered, and in 1940 at numerous amateur conferences and debates the argument about the incomprehensibility of Maiakovskii's poetry was continuously disproved by the public's own experience

¹³⁰ See, for example, Alexander Zakharov, 'Mass Celebrations in a Totalitarian System', in *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, ed. by Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 201-18.

¹³¹ See, for example, Vladimir Maiakovskii, "Vas ne ponimaiut rabochie i krest'iane", in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xii, ed. by Aleksandr Ushakov and others (1959), pp. 164-70.

¹³² Anon., in *Pisatel' pered sudom rabocheho chitatelia* (Leningrad, 1928), quoted in Evgenii Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 132.

of reading his works. For example this account of the opinions of the technician N. Progov on Maiakovskii's work was published in *Krasnoe znamia* in 1940:

I have read almost all of Maiakovskii's works. In the beginning, I understood them with difficulty, because I did not know how to read. Then I began to practice reading aloud and gradually assimilated his style. I was convinced that in each of Maiakovskii's poem, even a small one, there is a deep meaning. Now Maiakovskii is my very favourite poet. I have acquired a full collection of his works. I read them over and over again.¹³³

This comment encompasses the literary journey of Maiakovskii and his works throughout the 1930s to 1940. At first he was seen as a good poet, but poorly understood by the general reader. However, it was not the poet's own fault, but rather a result of the fact that the audience was poorly educated for the reception of his work. Again, this argument was first presented by Maiakovskii himself: 'in about 15-20 years the cultural level of the worker population will increase and all of my works will be understood by everyone'.¹³⁴ As the audience's level of cultural development increased the general reader began to realise the deep meaning of Maiakovskii's works and consequentially Maiakovskii became the people's 'very favourite poet'.¹³⁵ Incidentally, even the sudden dramatic increase in the publication of Maiakovskii's poems and works about the poet was justified by this remark, as the readers of the newspaper could see that the public wanted to buy full collections of his works. Urbaszewski also noted that this portrayal of the way to unlock the 'deep meaning' of a Maiakovskii poem by reading it aloud downplayed the importance of putting the poet's works into their historical contexts (Urbaszewski, p. 651). In this way, the public was discouraged from analysing the poet's life beyond the readily available declarations of his greatness.

The 1940 commemoration of Maiakovskii's death was the first celebration of a Soviet author's death anniversary. It, as Urbaszewski points out, allowed the Soviet state to historicise (and thus legitimise) the first decade of the Soviet rule. The Revolution and the Bolsheviks' rise to power was now officially considered to be part of history, as was Maiakovskii's life. Maiakovskii's canonical image as

¹³³ Anon., 'Chitateli o Maiakovskom', *Krasnoe znamia*, 14 April 1940, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Slavinskii, p. 358.

¹³⁵ See footnote 131.

the greatest Soviet poet was presented as a historical fact. This meant that accounts of Maiakovskii's career were no longer closely linked to the recollections of people still living who had known him, and that the possibility of any debate on his poetic merit was limited.

Overall, the focus of the works on Maiakovskii produced in the late 1930s and 1940 was to support his status as the head of the Soviet poetic canon, a literary classic of Soviet culture and a hero-figure to be emulated. Works which focused on the analysis of Maiakovskii's artistic legacy were secondary to the large number of works published about the life of the poet and his undeniable contribution to the development of Soviet poetic style, as well as the cultural level of the general population. Typical works focused on Maiakovskii's biography, although some details (in particular his relationship with Futurism, his love-life, his suicide) were glossed over or presented as 'mistakes of youth'. Stalin's famous resolution was 'repeated like a mantra' (Urbaszewski, p. 647) and all works relating to Maiakovskii which were published after 1940 were composed to fit this statement.

Throughout his literary career Maiakovskii had always been concerned with self-representation, however, the way he presented himself to the public was at all times largely influenced by other people. When David Burluk first introduced the future poet to the Futurist movement, Maiakovskii, through his work and public appearances created an image of himself as a lonely misunderstood poet, fighting against the banalities of everyday life, and urging people to follow him into a better future. During the time of political and artistic uncertainty between the February and October Revolutions, Maiakovskii also established his image as a spokesman for the Futurists, proclaiming that his group was the future of Russian poetry. However, the group came under fierce criticism from writers and literary scholars who were opposed to Futurism. Under the influence of such criticism Maiakovskii sought to change not only the style of his works, but also his image, by reinventing many of the Futurists' statements made before 1917. In the immediate years after the Revolution, those changes as well as, in no small part, the support of the Commissar for Education, Lunacharskii,

secured the position of Maiakovskii as a widely recognised author and public speaker.

However, by the early 1920s Lunacharskii had to withdraw his support of Futurism, as Lenin disliked the movement. In addition, the Futurists' negative attitude towards the Russian literary classics resulted in strong disapproval from literary scholars and critics, as well as other writers. However, the biggest impediment to avant-garde artists' acceptance as representatives of the new state was the increasing class division. Maiakovskii and many other avant-garde artists came from non-proletarian backgrounds and this factor made critics doubt their dedication to the ideas of the proletariat and the Revolution. This factor was most frequently used against him by his literary opponents. Difficult relationships with his editors and the poor reception of his latest plays were a heavy blow for the poet, as, despite his best efforts, his aspiration to become the poet of the Revolution was never fulfilled.

As Stalin established himself in power he drastically changed the way Soviet literature developed. He believed that literature had enormous significance and should play a central role in public education. In the early 1930s the government established almost complete control over all published works. The official literary method, Socialist Realism, was also designed by Stalin himself, however, due to the lack of detail about how one might go about creating a work of literature according to this method it became necessary to have writers whose work could serve as an example of Socialist Realism. At the same time a mania for record-breaking swept the country, and in all branches of industry hero-figures appeared, for others to be inspired by. In this content, Maiakovskii's larger than life personality of a natural leader, his works, which presented officially suitable revolutionary and ideological content, and the fact that he was dead, and therefore no longer producing new works, or able to depart from the party line, meant that all the conditions that were essential to his official canonisation were in place.

Thus while the official canonisation of Maiakovskii began in 1935, it reached its peak in 1940. Maiakovskii's representation relied heavily on presenting the poet in accordance with Stalin's resolution. Moreover, the focus of this campaign to

recreate Maiakovskii and present him to the wider audience was not only centred on the analysis of his works, but, perhaps more importantly, on the reinvention of his public image. Maiakovskii, who strove to achieve success and recognition throughout his life, was of assistance to the literary scholars of the late 1930s, as he had left countless works propagating Soviet cultural values. He had also written a large number of articles in which he explained and justified his previous decisions: in particular, his identification with Futurism, his lack of respect for Russian classical writers, and the fact that his works were considered in the 1920s to be poorly understood by the working masses. The 1940 commemoration of the anniversary of Maiakovskii's death saw the Soviet canonical image of Maiakovskii crystallised: his relationship with Futurism was either omitted or described as one of the obstacles which the poet overcame on his path to greatness. His complex relationships with women were omitted altogether, and his suicide was mentioned only in passing, while the main focus was on blaming the enemies of the state for the poor reception of Maiakovskii's later works and on celebrating the poet's literary heritage. Despite these omissions it was Maiakovskii's life and his way of presenting himself which became the emphasis of analysis on Maiakovskii's legacy, rather than his works. In order to be a successful role-model for the population it was important that Maiakovskii was not only perceived as a talented poet, but also as someone who possessed desirable personal characteristics worthy of emulation.

Chapter 2: The Changes in the Perception of Maiakovskii in Russia in the 1990s

Но меня не осудят, но меня не облают,
как пророку, цветами устелят мне след.
Все эти, провалившиеся носами, знают:
я – ваш поэт.¹

Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'A vse-taki', 1914

The collapse of the Soviet Union spelled a drastic change in the state of the literary canon. The nation's past became widely criticised and dismissed and with it the art it produced. In 1997 Lev Aizerman wrote about the dramatic change in the way literature was taught at school:

Here is the new school reader for Russian literature of the twentieth century, still published by the same 'Prosveshchenie'. Blok is presented here without *Dvenadtsat'*, Esenin, obviously, without 'Rus' sovetskaia', Maiakovskii is presented by five pre-revolutionary poems and two post-revolutionary ones. There is no 'Levyi marsh', no *poema Khorosho!*, there isn't even 'Vo ves' golos', which, according to B. Pasternak, was his last and immortal work [...]

Yesterday we were ripping certain pages out of the history of literature, today we are ripping out others.²

Indeed the 1990s saw concern being expressed for the future of Maiakovskii in the literary canon. Many felt that the exemplary poet of the Soviet state had no future in post-Soviet Russia. Sergei Kormilov wrote in 1998:

These days Maiakovskii is read mainly by academics, not the average reader. Students learn about him, because they have to. But probably nobody reads him for pleasure. This great poet, who had nothing to do with realism, is still considered to be the classic of Socialist Realism which has been apparently rejected.³

However, despite these concerns Maiakovskii did not disappear either from the school curriculum, or from anthologies and the public media. In 2011 Aleksand Ushakov, a member of the Institute of World Literature, suggested in an

¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'A vse-taki', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, p. 62. (But I won't be judged, I won't be decried, like a prophet's, my footsteps will be covered in flowers. All of them with rotten noses know: I am your poet).

² Lev Aizerman, *Vremia ponimat': problemy russkoi literatury sovetskogo perioda* (Moscow: Shkola-Press, 1997), p. 3.

³ Sergei Kormilov and Irina Iskrzhitskaia, *Vladimir Maiakovskii: v pomoshch' prepodavateliam, starsheklassnikam i abiturientam* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1998), p. 3.

interview that the reason Maiakovskii did not suffer the fate of many other Soviet authors is due to the fact that his work always left space for arguments and that during his life he was not considered an exemplary writer.⁴

Indeed, the sheer volume and diversity of Maiakovskii's work is probably enough to support the most contradictory opinions about the poet. However the poet's biography and in particular his changing self-image played a crucial part in the re-invention of the post-Soviet Maiakovskii. This process is by no means complete, nor is it uniform. The 'hell-raiser' Maiakovskii continues to present challenges for contemporary scholars.⁵ As I will demonstrate, some see him as a great poet, others see him as a tragic victim of a soulless regime, and others blame the poet for supporting the said regime. In this chapter I will broadly define the three main directions in which post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii differ from the established Soviet ones. The first one, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Monstrous Villain', explores the early 1990s views that Maiakovskii was either a bad poet, or a bad person, but mostly that the Soviet regime made him into a dark messiah figure, who advocated and glorified the many atrocities which were to follow after his death in 1930. This representation of Maiakovskii remains on the fringes of both the public perception and academic reception, and its proponents are often criticised by academics and the reading public alike for a lack of historical perspective and the liberal use of out of context quotations.

The following section, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Gentle Lover', focuses on another trend in representation of the poet characterised by reading of his poetry through the perspective of his private life. As Aizerman highlighted, many examples of Maiakovskii's civic poetry were removed from the school curriculum in the 1990s, thus his love lyrics became central to the study of Maiakovskii at school. Finally 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Tragic Victim', discusses the theory revived after the collapse of the Soviet Union that

⁴ Aleksandr Ushakov, quoted in Stanislav Kuvaldin, 'O Vladimire Maiakovskom', online journal *Shkol'niku*, 3 (2011), <<http://journal-shkolniku.ru/o-mayakovskom.html>> [accessed: 7 July 2011]

⁵ In 1930 Maiakovskii wrote in an epigram to Nikolai Aduiev:

Я скандалист!

Я не монах

Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Aduievu', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, x, p. 168 ('I am a hell-raiser. I am not a monk')

Maiakovskii was either killed on orders from the government, or that government agents influenced his mental wellbeing, pushing him towards suicide. Both of these sections are distinctive but, unlike the negative representation portrayed in section one, they are not mutually exclusive and indeed, aspects of both of those representations are commonly found together.

As to Maiakovskii's canonical status, it would seem that, at least for now, the worries of the 1990s can be put to rest: Maiakovskii remains a central figure in the contemporary Russian literary canon. The Closing Ceremony for 2014 Winter Olympics Closing in Sochi featured a section on Russian literature. Artists read lines from the works of Anna Akhmatova, Lev Tolstoi, Aleksandr Pushkin, Fedor Dostoevskii, Anton Chekhov and others. Spearheading the performance, however, were the lines from Vladimir Maiakovskii's poem 'Poslushaite!'.⁶

Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Monstrous Villain

In 1985 Russian writer and literary critic Iurii Karabchievskii published a short monograph *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* in Germany in which he set out to review the image of Vladimir Maiakovskii. The book was not published in Russia until 1991, but when it eventually reached the public it produced heated debates. Today it still remains one of the major works to challenge the Soviet image of the foremost poet of the Revolution and present a negative, villainous picture of the former leader of the poetic canon. It was noted by literary scholars that the 1990s brought about a re-assessment of Soviet values. In the field of literature the Soviet classics were challenged, and often dismissed. Aizerman said:

In recent years it has often been the case that the necessary reassessment of what has happened and what we have lived through has become a simple change of emphasis: pluses become minuses, black becomes white and white becomes black. We are constantly faced not with a shift from monologue to dialogue, but with a substitution of one monologue with another.⁷

⁶ Closing Ceremony, 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, 23 February 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAv9MJm5yIQ>> [accessed: 23 November 2015]. Also see Appendix, 'Chapter 2', '2014 Sochi Winter Olympics Closing Ceremony'.

⁷ *Vremia ponimat'*, p. 3.

Indeed, the works by Karabchievskii as well as Aleksand Zholkovskii, another author discussed in this section, can be seen as an attempt to speak against the established norms, to challenge the system and promote a re-evaluation of Soviet literature canon. This approach fits in with the larger re-evaluation of the notions of hierarchy, characteristic of post-Soviet Russia.⁸ However, many works of this kind (*Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* included) present an all-round negative image of the poet, without attempts to promote further analysis. All too often the public is presented with a reinvented image of Maiakovskii, in which the poet turns from an exemplary hero-figure whose life should be celebrated into an immoral villain.

In order to create an image of Maiakovskii which presents an alternative to the Soviet canonical one Karabchievskii adopts a different approach to the representation of the poet. Historically, most conventional studies of a poet's life and works would begin by introducing the public to the poet's biography, or at least parts of his biography, and then have the opportunity to read his works. Karabchievskii places the poet's literary heritage in prime position, and provides very limited biographical or historical details. He justifies this decision by stating that in this way readers are more likely to remain impartial while forming their own opinions of the poet:

If we are going to talk about Maiakovskii, then we have to be absolutely sure that we are completely impartial. The main thing is to not have any preconceived ideas. It is key to not look for verifications [...] to open [a collection of Maiakovskii's works] and read poem after poem, as if reading a previously unknown poet, imagining the world and the image of the author that would emerge by themselves.⁹

The author, however, does not follow his own advice. Before Karabchievskii delves into the analysis of Maiakovskii's works he makes a pronouncement that was very popular in the 1990s: the Soviet government equates to an evil entity. This leads the author to put forward the hastily drawn opinion that Maiakovskii, the first poet of the Soviet Union, 'was true to himself in his service to evil'

⁸ I will discuss the changing opinions regarding the importance of hierarchy more in chapter 4, 'Anthologies, Hierarchy and Popularity'.

⁹ Iurii Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* (Moscow: ENAS, 2008), pp. 5-6. Further references from Iurii Karabchievskii, *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* are given after quotations in the text.

(Karabchievskii, p. 7), and later: '[Maiakovskii] becomes a herald of violence and demagogy and no longer serves the Revolution, but the government' (Karabchievskii, p. 8). In the following eleven chapters Karabchievskii constructs an image of Maiakovskii to fit the poet into the frame of the villainous herald of a villainous regime.

Karabchievskii claims that when reading Maiakovskii's works readers are constantly forced to keep their distance, they never quite believe the poet, never quite feel for him, because his lines are full of unimaginable violence:

We would love to [relate to the poet] – but it is not possible, moreover, it is completely out of the question. Because this poem ['Neskol'ko slov obo mne samom'] starts with a monstrous line, the page recoils from its blasphemy, a line which no man on earth could have ever written in any circumstances, whether he is fooling around, or jesting, or playing...

Я люблю смотреть как умирают дети.

(Karabchievskii, p. 12)

No mention is made that the poem was written in 1913 when the poet, along with a group of other avant-garde artists, frequently used shocking statements and behaviour to engage with the public and challenge their conventional ideas of art. Indeed, the author argues against such justifications, suggesting that a poet's work always plainly states the creator's desires and aspirations. Using this formula Karabchievskii concludes that there are two major themes in Maiakovskii's works: hurt and hatred: 'the greatest pain in the world, when Maiakovskii is offended, and the physiological sweetness of violence, when Maiakovskii is the offender' (Karabchievskii, p. 15).

Karabchievskii does not set to argue that Maiakovskii was a bad poet. Indeed, the author agrees that some of Maiakovskii's works show a great deal of talent (Karabchievskii, p. 9). However, he throws Maiakovskii off his pedestal as an exemplary poet, on account of his support for the Soviet regime and his supposed moral failings. Adopting ecclesiastical terminology Karabchievskii equates Maiakovskii to the devil himself: 'a devil. An anti-poet. His mission in this world is forgery. He replaces culture with anti-culture, art with anti-art, spirituality with anti-spirituality' (Karabchievskii, p. 290). Thus Maiakovskii's

political preferences become his personal moral failings and grounds for a complete denial of the artistic merit of the poet's legacy.

One of the many ways in which Karabchievskii demonstrates Maiakovskii's immorality is by presenting the poet as a dissatisfied misogynist:

The unsatisfied desire to possess – this is the corner stone of all his [Maiakovskii's] feelings. Here we obviously have, first of all, a woman, a concrete object of real and obvious desires [...] But it is also an icon, a physiologically felt symbol of the world yielding up – NOT yielding up [...] The world does not hurry to yield up either as a symbolic or a concrete woman. It does not love, it does not yield up, it does not adore, therefore it has to be destroyed! But first, cursed and disgraced, stamped into the mud, scolded, spat upon (Karabchievskii, p. 13-14).

A year after the first publication of *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo*, in 1986 Aleksandr Zholkovskii published an article 'O genii i zlodeistve, o babe i o vserossiiskom masshtabe' in which he sets out to debunk Maiakovskii's canonical status by presenting him as an immoral villain, mainly due to his bad attitude to women. It is unclear whether this work is influenced by Karabchievskii's, however their message and the methods by which the authors deliver it are similar. Like Karabchievskii, Zholkovskii claims to present an image of the poet based on his works: 'we will be talking about the literary persona of Maiakovskii (nominally: 'M'), or, his poetic figure, the 'implied author', which emerges from his works.¹⁰ However, Zholkovskii seems to have difficulty drawing boundaries between the literary persona of Maiakovskii which he claims to be analysing and the poet himself. Indeed throughout the article Zholkovskii interchangeably uses the term 'M' (for the poetic persona emerging from Maiakovskii's works) and Maiakovskii's actual name. Similarly, one of the sections of the article talks about Maiakovskii's poetic language, or indeed its crudeness and forced nature: "M" swamps the reader with half-baked sketches and anti-aesthetical "pieces of life" in repulsive combinations [...] blurring the line between art and non-art' (Zholkovskii, p. 217). However, a literary persona,

¹⁰ Aleksandr Zholkovskii, 'O genii i zlodeistve, o babe i o vserossiiskom masshtabe. (Progulki po Maiakovskomu)', in Aleksandr Zholkovskii, *Izbrannye stat'i o russkoi poezii: invarianty, strategii, struktury, interteksty* (Moscow: RGGU, 2005), pp. 195-20 (p. 195). Further references to Aleksandr Zholkovskii, 'O genii i zlodeistve, o babe i o vserossiiskom masshtabe. (Progulki po Maiakovskomu)' are given after quotations in the text.

a character cannot be held responsible for the way the poem reads – this is entirely down to its author, therefore while Zholkovskii claims to focus his attention (and his criticism) on an imagined literary figure, he, and, subsequently, the reader end up revising their opinion of the poet, not of his poetic persona. It is Zholkovskii who is blurring the lines between the author and the constructed character of 'M'. Like Karabchievskii does in *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo*, Zholkovskii raises the question of whether Maiakovskii can be both a talented poet and an immoral human being. Both authors come to the same conclusion: Maiakovskii is an evil genius, a somewhat contradictory term in Russian culture. Aleksandr Pushkin wrote in his play *Motsart i Sal'eri*:

Гений и злодейство – две вещи несовместные¹¹

The line is repeated twice during the play, once by Mozart and once by Salieri. Both times the validity of this assertion is left in some doubt, the characters themselves are uncertain about the truth of the statement. Yet, in Russian cultural tradition this line has become an unquestionable axiom: the true spirit of art cannot originate from any lowly feelings or aspirations. The necessary moral compass of art was a corner-stone for Soviet (as well as pre-Soviet) literature,¹² and writers were often seen as sacred prophets, capable of pronouncing judgements on the surrounding reality.¹³ It is, therefore, not surprising that in the early 1990s journalists and scholars were struggling to re-evaluate this notion in light of emerging truths regarding the Soviet State. Zholkovskii argues that the axiom about the incompatibility of artistic genius and evil is also a reason why Maiakovskii's immorality remained obscured from both scholars and readers (Zholkovskii, p. 208). Zholkovskii concludes that in the 1990s, when people can look back at the twentieth century as it comes to a close, the value of the axiom is challenged more and more often. Zholkovskii argues that despite the myth of incompatibility of genius and evil, Maiakovskii became a great poet, however

¹¹ Aleksandr Pushkin, *Motsart i Sal'eri*, in *Sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, ed. by Anna Saakiantz, 3 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), ii, pp. 356-64 (p. 363, p. 364).

¹² For further discussion of the importance of establishing moral and behavioural norms in Soviet literature see Chapter 3, 'Literature in Soviet Russian Schools'.

¹³ For more on the writer's role as a prophet with political and spiritual power see, for example, Kathleen Parthé, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

due to his soullessness his literary legacy promotes crudeness, anger, torture, megalomania and demagoguery (Zholkovskii, p. 220).

In about ten pages Zholkovskii uses 169 quotations from Maiakovskii's work to support his theory that Maiakovskii is a hateful misogynist. Eighty-five different poems have made it into the list of works which prove Maiakovskii's immorality. The most frequently used are, predictably, the longer *poemy*, in particular *Pro eto*, *Khorosho!* and *Oblako v shtanakh*. According to Zholkovskii, Maiakovskii accuses women of ugliness, soullessness, love of money (clothes, make-up, jewellery), venality, lustfulness, stupidity, aesthetic backwardness. He also, according to Zholkovskii, finds the institution of marriage foolish. One of the examples presented as evidence for the latter point is actually taken from a satirical poem designed not to undermine marriage but to promote faithfulness and gender equality (Zholkovskii, p. 198).¹⁴

After interpreting Maiakovskii's literary persona as an expression of the poet's misogynistic views Zholkovskii proceeds to argue that this attitude led to 'M's use and abuse of women, culminating in an accusation of rape:

We can trace approximate milestones in the psychological plot which led to rape. Provoked by females' flirtatious timidity and inflamed by their refusal of love 'just because' [misquotation from *Oblako v Shtanakh*], 'M' who is generally prone to imposing his will [...] proceeds to work them over using elements of domination and physical reprisals [...] When this sublimated rape fails, 'M', who, as one might say, struggles to keep his hands to himself [...] breaks the last fetters of morality (Zholkovskii, p. 205).¹⁵

¹⁴ The reference is to 1926 poem 'Liubov', Zholkovskii quotes the lines '[the unfaithful husband] бежит в перепуге от туфли жениной' ('[the unfaithful husband] is running away in fear from his wife's shoe'. Zholkovskii uses it to support his claim that Maiakovskii sees marriage as a suspicious petty bourgeois remnant, in which a couple leads an animalistic existence. The message of the poem, which does indeed go through several images evoking relationships which are not working, out states: 'надо голос подымать за чистоплотность отношений наших и любовных дел [...] Надо обвязать и жизнь мужчин и женщин словом, нас объединяющим: «товарищи»' (we have to speak up for the purity of our relations and love affairs [...] we have to tie together the lives of men and women with a word which connects us all: "comrades"). See, Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Liubov', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, vii, ed. by Vadim Kozhinov, I. Robin, V. Timofeeva (1958), pp. 146-50

¹⁵ The relevant section of *Oblako v shtanakh* reads:

Поэт сонеты поет Тиане,
а я –
весь из мяса,
человек весь –
тело твое просто прошу

Thus we have a truly despicable image of the once praised poet – not only is Maiakovskii presented as pro-Soviet, he also lacks any morals and promotes violence. From concrete examples of how the literary persona of Maiakovskii is violent to women, Zholkovskii moves towards accusing the persona of directing his violence towards everything in existence, claiming that woman in Russian literature ‘serves as an embodiment of life, reality, the earth, Russia’ (Zholkovskii, pp. 208-209). Zholkovskii’s interchangeable use of the term ‘M’ to define Maiakovskii’s literary persona and the poet’s actual name potentially leave the reader aghast at Maiakovskii’s atrocious behaviour. A careful reader might question whether Zholkovskii truly draws a line between the two - after all, a reference to literary genius can only be applicable to the author, not his literary persona. Notably, Zholkovskii has also written largely negative articles on Anna Akhmatova. Once again, in de-mythologising this poet Zholkovskii does not question Akhmatova’s talent as a poet, but rather the moral grounds on which she is canonised.¹⁶

The depiction of Maiakovskii as the immoral propagandist of a villainous regime has resonated in particular with Christian literary scholars. In 1990 Iulii Khalfin wrote an article ‘Apostol khoziaina’, in which he intermittently refers to Iosif Stalin as either ‘the Head Executioner’, ‘the Master’, ‘the Prince of Darkness’ and other similarly dramatic terms.¹⁷ The atheist Maiakovskii, who often loudly condemned the church, was, according to Khalfin, the perfect prophet of the great evil which was to come. Khalfin, like Karabchievskii, concludes that Maiakovskii promoted violence and, as a result, anti-culture: ‘The revolt against religion turned into a revolt against culture, a loss of its meaningful, spiritual significance’.¹⁸ The author of Russian literature textbooks Galina Lazarenko echoed this opinion in her 1995 textbook *Khrestomatiiia po otechestvennoi*

See Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Oblako v shtanakh, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 173-96, (p. 193). (The poet sings sonnets to Tiana, but I am all flesh – I am all human – I just ask for your body).

¹⁶ See, for example, Aleksandr Zholkovskii, ‘Anna Akhmatova: Scripts, Not Scriptures’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 40, 1 (1996), pp. 135-41; Aleksandr Zholkovskii, ‘The Obverse of Stalinism: Akhmatova’s Self-Serving Charisma of Selflessness’, *Self and Story in Russian History*, ed. by Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 46-68.

¹⁷ Iulii Khalfin, ‘Apostol Khoziaina’ *Vek XX i mir*, 8 (1990), <<http://old.russ.ru/antolog/vek/1990/8/halfin.htm>> [accessed: 5 January 2016]

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

literature XX veka. Like all authors previously mentioned in this section Lazarenko feels very strongly about the legacy of the Soviet Union. She writes about the orgy of the Revolution and the Red Terror, and contrasts these phenomena to Christianity, which she sees as the source of the 'spiritual and moral health' of the nation.¹⁹ Maiakovskii, in Lazarenko's representation, once again becomes a prophet of cruelty and inhumanity: 'revolutionary romanticism, dressed up in red heroic clothes, whose pioneer in the cruel twentieth century was Maiakovskii, who more often than not pursues inhumanity' (Lazarenko, p. 23). Maiakovskii was not the only poet to receive this negative portrayal in Lazarenko's textbook. In fact, Futurism as a movement is presented entirely negatively: 'Futurists used the word to defile national culture and humanity' (Lazarenko, p. 21).

Although Maiakovskii's association with the Futurist movement is not directly responsible for the emergence of the representation of Maiakovskii as an immoral villain of Russian culture, it is likely to have been a contributing factor. Even during Maiakovskii's lifetime authors and literary groups opposed to both Futurism and the poet himself promoted ideas about his soullessness. Vladislav Khodasevich wrote in 1927:

the poet should not, cannot, coarsen and trivialise the idea and meaning of a poetic work. Coarseness and banality can be topics of poetry, but not its inner stimulus. The poet may depict the banal, but he cannot become the herald of banality.²⁰

Predictably, Khodasevich concludes that Maiakovskii has devoted his literary life to the banal: 'his literary biography is a history of progress from unconsciously crude vulgarity to conscious vulgar crudeness'.²¹ Another literary opponent of Maiakovskii, Georgii Shengeli, wrote a monograph *Maiakovskii vo ves' rost* dedicated to presenting Maiakovskii as a soulless, unimaginative poet who did not truly understand the Revolution: 'I simply think that his yellow blouse and his literary scandals, that his "methods of self-affirmation" stem from

¹⁹ Galina Lazarenko, *Khrestomatiiia po otechestvennoi literature XX veka* (Moscow: Metodicheskii kabinet zapadnogo okruga g. Moskvy, 1995), p. 3. Further references to Galina Lazarenko, *Khrestomatiiia po otechestvennoi literature XX veka* are given after quotations in the text.

²⁰ Vladislav Khodasevich, 'Dekol'tirovannaia loshad' (1927), <http://az.lib.ru/h/hodasevich_w_f/text_0052.shtml> [accessed: 05 January 2016]

²¹ *Ibid.*

a lack of “inner content” and from a “feeling of personal inadequacy”.²² Shengeli attributed Maiakovskii’s interest in representing senseless violence to his lack of connection with the proletariat. This in turn led the author to conclude that Maiakovskii was marked by immorality and spiritual degradation.²³ Perhaps ironically, in the 1990s, by contrast, it is precisely Maiakovskii’s connection with the workers’ state that formed a major argument for the poet’s lack of moral codes.

There are numerous opinions, both from literary scholars and the general public, which challenge and reject Karabchievskii’s work and the negative image of the poet. On an online discussion forum contributor Timofei Miakin offers this review of Karabchievskii’s book:

The book lacks professionalism, lacks literary analysis. You are correct in just one thing – Karabchievskii’s book nowadays belongs in a museum, as a monument to what happens when someone artificially imposes a one-sided opinion on the art of a great poet, it leads to the same one-sidedness in its rejection.²⁴

Timofei Miakin echoes the warning of Lev Aizerman who cautioned against vilifying everything Soviet. In 2012, Benedikt Sarnov, reviewing the 1990s reinvention of Maiakovskii as a villain, suggests that more recent years have brought a further reconsideration of the poet:

The unbridled desire to throw off (the steamship of modernity) all officially recognised and approved masters of Soviet literature seems to have declined. The time to “throw stones” has passed, now it is time to gather them up again.²⁵

Despite the popularity of *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo* the negative representation of the poet’s personality and his works is not the invention of the late 1980s – early 1990s. Maiakovskii’s literary opponents used similar arguments throughout the majority of the poet’s literary career. Interestingly, in all cases we see authors come back to the question of genius and evil, morality

²² Georgii Shengeli, *Maiakovskii vo ves’ rost* (Moscow: Vserossiiskii soiuz poetov, 1927), p. 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁴ Contributor Тимофей Мякин, discussion forum ‘Karabchievskii “Voskresenie Maiakovskogo”’, *Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii* <http://v-mayakovsky.com/topic_karabchievskiy_voskresenie_mayakovskogo-page_1.html> [accessed: 13 November 2012]

²⁵ Benedikt Sarnov, *Putevoditel’ po Maiakovskomu* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2012), pp. 197-98

and art. Aleksandr Pushkin questioned whether a true artist has to be a virtuous person; his descendants, and the Soviet system in particular presented this as a given. This resulted in a paradoxical situation – how can Maiakovskii, whose works are filled with immoral scenes, be made to fit into this axiom? During the period of his Soviet canonisation discussion of traits such as violence in Maiakovskii's works were either avoided, or explained by their contribution to promoting the fight against the bourgeoisie. In the 1990s Maiakovskii's support of the Soviet state became the biggest cause for his downfall as a moral person. Authors used crude images in Maiakovskii's works to argue for his lack of spirituality and started to question (Zholkovskii, in particular) whether the phrase about incompatibility of evil and genius has any truth to it. However, the arguments about Maiakovskii's immorality or failure as a poet, despite producing heated debates, largely remained a phase of the early 1990s and much of the contemporary reading audience and canon forming institutions do not consider them seriously.

Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Gentle Lover

The collapse of the Soviet Union also brought to a wider public works about Maiakovskii written by non-Russian scholars. In particular, Bengt Jangfeldt, a Swedish literary expert and author of a number of works on Maiakovskii, received wide recognition outside academic circles in Russia. His work *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego* first appeared in Russian in 1991 and contained letters and telegrams between Maiakovskii and the Briks, as well as some pictures and a commentary by the author. Central to Jangfeldt's representation of Maiakovskii is his relationship with Lili Brik: 'Vladimir Maiakovskii and Lili Brik are one of the most remarkable pairs of lovers in the history of world literature'.²⁶ Thus, Jangfeldt has elevated the relationship between Maiakovskii and Lili Brik to an international and historic level, suggesting that this relationship was crucial in Maiakovskii's development as a poet and a person. To argue his case Jangfeldt turns not only (and even not mainly) to the poet's works, but to the memoirs of his friends and colleagues as well as his letters. The title of Jangfeldt's work

²⁶ Bengt Jangfeldt, 'K istorii otnoshenii V. V. Maiakovskovo i L. Ju. Brik', in *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, ed. by Bengt Jangfel'dt (Moscow: 'Kniga', 1991), pp. 9-46 (p. 9).

comes from a line in one of Maiakovskii's unsent letters to Lili Brik, written in 1923: 'Love is life, it is the main point. From it my poems, my deeds, everything comes to be. Love is the heart of everything'.²⁷ Thus the analysis of Maiakovskii's work is presented in an entirely new light. Values such as patriotism, hatred of the bourgeoisie, belief in the Party and the Soviet system – many aspects which during the majority of the Soviet era were considered the main (if not the only) characteristics of Maiakovskii's art, are completely absent from Jangfeldt's image of Maiakovskii. Instead Maiakovskii is presented as a gentle lover, often struggling to deal with his overwhelming emotions.

According to Jangfeldt Lili Brik remained Maiakovskii's true love throughout most of his adult life. Although he considers Maiakovskii's relationship with Tat'iana Iakovlevna to be another serious relationship, it did not last, therefore left less of a trace on the poet's life and works. Regardless of the argument about which of the poet's many relationships left a trace in the poet's works, it is notable that such analysis of his legacy became possible only after *perestroika*. Indeed, Soviet literature about Maiakovskii barely mentions his private life, focusing instead on his personal journey to becoming a Socialist Realist poet. The 1956 essay 'Velikii poet velikoi epokhi' by Viktor Duvakin which opens a collection of Maiakovskii's works, makes no mention of any of the poet's friends or colleagues apart from Maksim Gor'kii, focusing on presenting the poet as an idealised monument to everything virtuous:

The image of the revolutionary, the builder of the communist society is representative of the true hero of our era. Maiakovskii could describe this image both truthfully and convincingly, because for him communist values were not abstract: he could detect them in Soviet life, Soviet people, and he himself possessed them.²⁸

Jangfeldt argues that the importance of Maiakovskii's relationship with Lili Brik was downplayed as part of this trend to represent the poet as an almost superhuman being unencumbered by basic human desires and feelings.²⁹ Clearly, Maiakovskii's *ménage à trois* living arrangements with the Briks have

²⁷ Vladimir Maiakovskii, (unsent) letter from Maiakovskii to Lili Brik, 1-27 February 1923, in *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, pp. 111-15, (p. 113).

²⁸ Viktor Duvakin, 'Velikii poet velikoi epokhi', in *V. V. Maiakovskii: izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. by Viktor Duvakin (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo detskoi literatury Ministerstva Prosviashcheniia RSFSR, 1956) pp. 3-38, (p. 4).

²⁹ *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, p. 9.

also played a part in the way his biography was presented to the public. After all, the exemplary poet of the Soviet era could not be seen to be involved in such an eccentric lifestyle. However, Jangfeldt, whose cultural background is very different to that of Soviet scholars, considers that the problematic nature of explaining Maiakovskii's living arrangements to the public (including young readers) stems mainly from a need to represent the poet free from basic human desires, as well as uninvolved with the lives of intelligentsia in the 1920s.³⁰

While highlighting certain aspects of Maiakovskii's character which were overlooked during the Soviet period, Jangfeldt similarly undermines certain other traits which played a crucial role in creating Maiakovskii's Soviet image. In particular, Jangfeldt downplays Maiakovskii's devotion to the Soviet regime. One particular example is his interpretation of the work Maiakovskii undertook for the Russian Telegraph Agency on the satirical posters OKNA ROSTA. This period in Maiakovskii's biography was celebrated in Soviet accounts, and used as an argument to demonstrate the poet's dedication to the Revolution and the Bolsheviks. Jangfeldt instead argues that the major motive for the poet to join OKNA ROSTA was material gain: 'without detracting from the ideological aspects of this work [for OKNA ROSTA] it has to be noted that material benefits were an important stimulus'.³¹

Although Jangfeldt focuses on the importance of love between Lili and Maiakovskii and its influence on his works, he also highlights other aspects of Maiakovskii's personality which were left out of the Soviet image of the poet. In particular he speaks of Maiakovskii's lack of education and refined manners in comparison to the Briks:

They [the Briks] grew up in the centre of Moscow, he [Maiakovskii] – in the far away province; they received higher education, were worldly and well-read, he never completed school education, his erudition remained rudimentary and haphazard, he had problems with spelling.³²

³⁰ *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, p. 12.

³¹ *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, p. 23.

³² Bengt Jangfel'dt, *Revoliutsiia/liubov' Vladimira Maiakovskogo: "Ia" dlia menia malo* (Moscow, KoLibri, 2012), p. 82.

This statement would have been impossible to publish in the Soviet Union, as it went against the high status Maiakovskii held as the best Soviet poet and one of the founding fathers of Socialist Realism. However, it works quite well with the redefined image of Maiakovskii which Jangfeldt is trying to portray: the image of a troubled lyric poet who fell in love with a beautiful lady.

Jangfeldt also supports his argument for the importance of the poet's relationship with Lili Brik with references to the changes in the poet's behaviour and appearance. After meeting Lili he cut his long hair and stopped wearing his yellow shirt: 'on their first photo together the metamorphosis is obvious – Maiakovskii is wearing a tie and an English coat'.³³ While it is easy to attribute such changes to the influence of an educated woman on the young poet, we cannot consider that Lili Brik was solely responsible for all of the changes in Maiakovskii's appearance and behaviour. For example in his work *Repin, Gor'kii, Maiakovskii, Briusov*, Kornei Chukovskii wrote that Maiakovskii cut his hair in June 1915, after the artist Il'ia Repin asked Maiakovskii to pose for a portrait. According to Chukovskii, Repin was particularly interested in Maiakovskii's long inspiring hair. Maiakovskii did not want his talent to be considered on the merit of his hair, so had it shaved off on the way to his appointment with the artist.³⁴ Maiakovskii did not meet the Briks until a month later, in July 1915 (Katanian, p. 109).

Following from the relationship between the educationally inferior Maiakovskii and his worldly patrons and friends, comes the last identifying feature of this reinvented image of Maiakovskii. In contrast with the Soviet depiction of the exemplary poet, Jangfeldt's Maiakovskii is a person unsure of himself, who needs the constant support of others in order to continue writing poetry. Moreover, this readiness to provide support for the poet is one of the major factors in Lili Brik's and Maiakovskii's relationship:

Many have valued her [Lili Brik's] attention to artistic talent, her poetic taste, her ability and readiness to listen to others, her precision in evaluating literature, especially Maiakovskii, who looked loud and

³³ *Revoliutsiia/liubov' Vladimira Maiakovskogo*, p. 84.

³⁴ Kornei Chukovskii *Repin, Gor'kii, Maiakovskii, Briusov: vospominaniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1940), p. 166.

confident, but inside was unsure of himself and needed constant positive reinforcement.³⁵

In post-Soviet Russia the Briks' involvement in Maiakovskii's writing and publishing, as well as their unconventional living arrangements would become a central topic in the television programmes made about the poet.³⁶ Some programmes use arguments similar to those put forward by Jangfeldt and praise the Briks' influence on Maiakovskii's artistic development and career. However, many others portray the Briks as meddling egoists interested mainly in the poet's money and indifferent to his feelings.

At the same time post-Soviet school textbooks have also come to focus on presenting a more human image of the poet. While the intricacies of Maiakovskii's relationship with the Briks remains a somewhat difficult topic for a school lesson, other aspects of this reinvented image of a loving and gentle Maiakovskii take prime position in portraying his life and explaining his works. A popular description of Maiakovskii is that of a poet whose insecurity stemmed from feelings of loneliness, from a fear of being unloved. As the number of Maiakovskii's civic poems in the school curriculum decreased, so the number of love poems increased, thus supporting their claim that love was at the heart of Maiakovskii's inspiration as a poet. A study guide from 1998 offers the following observation:

[Love was] At the heart of Maiakovskii's personality and art [...] The media and television suggest different interpretations of the poet's death, suggesting various versions and causes, but all of them are circumstantial. Maiakovskii did not commit suicide because he was afraid of old age, or because Lili Brik stopped loving him and Tat'iana Iakovleva and Veronika Polonskaia had not begun to love him, but probably because he [...] realised: in this life there was no place for love.³⁷

The authors also advised students preparing for their final exams to focus their attention on the topic of love – either as an important theme in Maiakovskii's works or as a major source of inspiration for the poet. In another study guide

³⁵ *Liubov' eto serdtse vsego*, p. 18.

³⁶ I will discuss the themes for television programmes on Maiakovskii more fully in chapter 5, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii on Russian Television'.

³⁷ Kormilov and Iskrizhtskaia, p. 10.

Sarnov provides the following summary of the poet's life: 'Maiakovskii's whole life is a tragic sequence of love misfortunes, dramas and tragedies'.³⁸

It is worth noting that while Maiakovskii's post-Soviet image as a sadistic villain is commonly entirely based on the reading of his works (both Karabchievskii and Zholkovskii stress the importance of the works over the historical context which gets little mention) many of those who choose to adopt the image of Maiakovskii as a gentle insecure lover often focus firstly on the poet's biography and on the memoirs of Maiakovskii's friends and colleagues. Jangfeldt analyses Maiakovskii's letters and uses interviews with Lili Brik to support his argument, while Sarnov uses quotations from Maiakovskii's contemporaries to present the image of the poet and his times.

Thus not all attempts to provide a new, entirely post-Soviet view of Maiakovskii's legacy and re-evaluate his canonical status focused on Maiakovskii's relationship with the Soviet state. Interpretations such as those provided by Jangfeldt, Sarnov and others focused instead on presenting a positive, but more human image of the poet. Maiakovskii in this representation is not a perfect hero, whose role is to inspire others, but a troubled and flawed individual, who relies on support of his friends and colleagues. It is therefore the relationship between Maiakovskii and his contemporaries which takes a central place in this trend of representation of the poet.

Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Tragic Victim

Another significant shift in the representation of the poet in post-Soviet Russia was the sensation-seeking renewal of interest in the circumstances of Maiakovskii's death. One of the most significant works which sparked the public's attention was a collection of articles by journalist Valentin Skoriatin originally published in *Zhurnal'ist* between 1989 and 1994. In 1998 the articles were collected into a monograph *Taina gibeli Maiakovskogo: novaia versia tragicheskikh sobytii, osnovannaia na poslednikh nakhodkakh v sekretnykh arkhivakh*. Since then the collection has gone through several editions. In his introduction Skoriatin indicates that his interest in Maiakovskii's death was

³⁸ Sarnov, p. 48.

inspired by television presenter and journalist Vladimir Molchanov.³⁹ In 1989 in a programme *Do i posle polunochi* Molchanov showed the viewers a posthumous photograph of Maiakovskii on which a second dark mark on his shirt could potentially be explained as a result of a second shot and the dark smear on the temple might be interpreted as an abrasion.⁴⁰ Molchanov called the official version of Maiakovskii's death into question, suggesting a conspiracy surrounding the death of the most canonical of Soviet poets. According to Skoriatin Maiakovskii scholars rejected this theory. Vasilii Katanian, in particular asked: 'We know all of the circumstances surrounding Maiakovskii's death [...] Why do we need to turn the poet's tragedy into a vulgar detective story?'⁴¹ However, the public disagreed with this sentiment – the possibility of having yet another dark secret of the Soviet past revealed quickly gained popularity. The publishers of the 2009 edition of *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo* comment that Skoriatin's articles in *Zhurnalist* were always anticipated with particular impatience by the readers.⁴² Skoriatin questions Katanian, who said that all the circumstances of Maiakovskii's death were known:

Indeed – all the circumstances? What if something remains, after all, unknown, and that what is known could be read in a different light? So why must we 'salute' even such 'Maiakovskii experts' as V. Katanian? Would it not be better for this whole business if we were to calmly and impartially make sense of this old tragedy? (Skoriatin, p. 12)

Skoriatin proceeds to question several events in the last two years of the poet's life, in particular, the rejection of his visa application to travel to France in 1928. He also casts doubt on the materials used in the investigation of Maiakovskii's death and the way those were gathered. The reader's attention is drawn to the fact that among Maiakovskii's circle during the last years of his life were several agents of the OGPU (*Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie* [Joint State Political Directorate]), particularly Iakov Agranov, who held a high

³⁹ Valentin Skoriatin, *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo: novaia versiiia tragicheskikh sobytii, osnovannaia na poslednikh nakhodkakh v sekretnykh arkhivakh* (Moscow: Zvonitsa-MG, 2009) p. 9. Further references to Valentin Skoriatin, *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo* are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁰ See 'Posthumous photo of Vladimir Maiakovskii', Appendix, 'Chapter 2: The Changes in the Perception of Maiakovskii in Russia in the 1990s'.

⁴¹ Vasilii Katanian, quoted in Skoriatin, *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo*, p.9.

⁴² Publisher's introduction to Skoriatin, *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo*, p. 5.

person, and on the glorious self-sacrificial deed'.⁴⁷ And while the definitions of righteousness often differ for different commentators many draw the link between talent and tragedy. For example in 'O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov' (1931), an article written in response to Maiakovskii's death, Roman Iakobson writes:

The shooting of Gumilev (1886-1921), the prolonged spiritual agony and unbearable physical suffering, the end of Blok (1880-1921), cruel deprivations and inhuman torment of Khlebnikov's death (1885-1922), premeditated suicides of Esenin (1895-1925) and Maiakovskii (1894-1930). Thus in the space of the 1920s perish at the age of thirty to forty the inspirers of a generation, and each of them shares a conscious belief of his fatality.⁴⁸

Iakobson suggests that those poets knew of their impending death, and they reflected upon it in their writings. In particular he refers us to Esenin's and Maiakovskii's suicide notes, both of which feature poetry.⁴⁹ However, the other side of this argument is that the poets consciously created this tragic image of a martyr suffering for their beliefs: 'He [Maiakovskii] is already looking at his death note with the eyes of the day after tomorrow's reader. This letter in all its motives and Maiakovskii's own death are so intrinsically interlinked with his poetry that we can only understand them in the context of his works'.⁵⁰ Tragic persona, thus, can be seen as another of Maiakovskii's 'masks'.⁵¹ While there was little need for it in his Soviet representation, many post-Soviet scholars and critics made it central to their understanding of the poet and connected it to the idea of disillusionment with the Soviet State. Irina Iskrizhskaia, who mainly focuses on the theme of love in Maiakovskii's works, finds even in his earlier poems the theme of disillusionment with Soviet reality. Her reading of the *poema Pro eto* states: 'the concept of love in the *poema Pro eto* is connected to the higher meaning of existence, and the collapse of this idea resonated in the soul of Maiakovskii's lyrical protagonist with doubts in the truth of the new revolutionary world'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Kathleen Parthé, p. 108.

⁴⁸ Roman Iakobson, 'O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov', *Poeziia avangarda*, <http://avantgarde.narod.ru/beitraege/ff/rja_o_pokolenii.htm> [accessed: 03 October 2016].

⁴⁹ Iakobson.

⁵⁰ Iakobson.

⁵¹ See, Chapter 1, footnote 97.

⁵² Kormilov and Iskrizhtskaia, p. 11.

The theme of disillusionment has influenced not only the way that the school curriculum presents Maiakovskii (Iskrizhskaia's work is meant *to* assist students), but also popular culture. In 2011 Arkadii Inin and Nataliia Pavlovskaiia wrote a fictional interpretation of Maiakovskii's biography, *Dva dnia*, which was later made into an eight-part film. The negative aspects of Soviet reality become more and more apparent throughout the book, which shows Agranov to have played a major role in Maiakovskii's later life. It is claimed that he was behind the refusal of Maiakovskii's visa application and behind the bad reviews of Maiakovskii's later plays. At the same time the poet is portrayed as someone who struggles with the dissonance between the Soviet country he imagined, and the real Soviet State. In *Dva dnia*, in the scene of the poet's visit to America in 1925, his friend, David Burluk, who had emigrated after the Revolution asks him:

'Tell me honestly – am I a fool for leaving? Is it now all settled in Russia? Everybody can just live, make art? Here I am nobody, nothing, nameless...'

Vladimir doesn't answer [...]

'Why are you silent? Just say it: Dodik, you are a cowardly Jew, and not a Futurist!

[...]

'No, Dodik, it's not that simple. And I don't know which one of us is a fool... Perhaps we both are.'⁵³

Similarly to other post-Soviet trends in the representation of Maiakovskii, Skoriatin's publications and conclusions are by no means novel. Many of Maiakovskii's contemporaries, particularly in literary circles, felt that there was more to his suicide than the public was told and that Maiakovskii's changing opinion of the Soviet state played a major part in this. This is one of the OGPU's files related to the responses to Maiakovskii's death among writers:

The main focus is on the dissonance between the social command and the inner aspirations [of Maiakovskii], thus the conclusion is that violence and falsity dominate literature.

This opinion is repeated, in various variations by Em. German (Krotkii), E. Styrskaiia, V. Kirillov, B. Pasternak, I. Novikov, Bagritskii, V. Shklovskii, Argo, Levontin, Zenkevich and many others. All

⁵³ Arkadii Inin and Nataliia Pavlovskaiia, *Dva dnia* (Moscow: Astrel', 2011), pp. 298-99.

indicate that this is something ‘they have heard’. Thus we can conclude that this may be considered to be the prevalent opinion.

[...]

It was also mentioned [...] that it [Maiakovskii’s death] was supposed to be staged as a murder, but this later proved impossible.⁵⁴

In the early 1990s Skoriatin thus revitalised this idea that had been in circulation before the official canonisation of Maiakovskii by supporting it with his interpretation of events leading up to the poet’s death and the archive materials related to it.

Contemporary discussions of this tragedy in the media mainly focus on questions raised by Skoriatin: why the poet’s visa application was rejected and why the gun in the evidence collection differed from the one mentioned in the report (Maiakovskii owned two firearms). The validity of the suicide note is also frequently questioned. In the 1991 the State Museum of V. V. Maiakovskii asked the Scientific Research Institute of Forensic Expertise to analyse both the suicide note and the shirt in which Maiakovskii died for any evidence which would disprove suicide. The expert analysis came to the conclusion that the note was written by Maiakovskii and that the damage to the shirt was indicative of suicide.⁵⁵ I will show in chapter 5 that this later evidence did not prevent film producers from focusing on a possible conspiracy regarding Maiakovskii’s death. In a majority of cases the evidence provided by the Scientific Research Institute of Forensic Expertise is presented near the end of the programme, thus most time is dedicated to discussion of various other theories explaining this tragic event.

The 1990s brought drastic changes to the literary canon. Many names associated with Soviet culture were at risk of being removed and forgotten as the Soviet State often became vilified. There were justifiable concerns that Vladimir Maiakovskii, previously seen as the herald of the Revolution and the leading poet of the Soviet Union, might become one more victim of the changing regime. This however, has proved not to be the case. Maiakovskii

⁵⁴ ‘Shorokh’, ‘Agenturno-osvedomitel’naia svodka N 51’, 29 April 1930, published in Strizhneva, *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, p. 170.

⁵⁵ Strizhneva, pp. 19-22.

continues to play a large part in the Russian school curriculum, is an important and constant addition to post-Soviet anthologies and is widely discussed in the public media. However, Maiakovskii's representation has changed dramatically from the Soviet standard. These days he is rarely presented as a monument to communist values or a hero, whose behaviour we should strive to emulate. Instead the public sees him as a talented poet who nevertheless was a flawed human being.

As of yet, there is no single universal representation of the poet, and different sources offer drastically different images of Maiakovskii ranging from the poet being an immoral villain obsessed with violence, to the poet being a tragic and misunderstood loner. Some contemporary representations of Maiakovskii make little attempt to take into account the full complexity of context in which Maiakovskii was living and working. Moreover, the search for sensational stories and the desire to uncover yet another dark secret of the Soviet past, drive some to question the poet's death. Svetlana Strizhneva draws our attention to Maiakovskii's contemporaries, who like the 1990s audience, found it hard to believe that such a constant of Soviet literature as Maiakovskii could commit suicide.⁵⁶ In fact, most of the changes in the post-Soviet representation of the poet may be traced back to either the poet himself or the records of him in memoirs, letters and conversations of his contemporaries. Thus Karabchievskii and Zholkovskii seek to portray Maiakovskii through his poetic image – the image he started to create for himself when he first began writing poetry in 1912. At that time the poet was concerned mainly with shocking the audience and challenging their perceptions of art. A few years later the poet showed his readers the horrors of World War I, and, shortly afterwards, expressed his support for the Revolution and called the public to unite against the bourgeoisie and the associated lifestyle. This complex historical background, however, is often under-represented in accounts by those who aim to portray the poet as an evil, immoral person, thus the lines from his poetry, taken out of their literary and historical context, are used to showcase the poet's obsession with violence.

⁵⁶ Strizhneva, p. 19.

An altogether different approach to the representation of Maiakovskii focused on tracing the poet's inspiration to his relationship with friends, in particular Lili Brik. One of the most influential scholars who supports this representation of Maiakovskii is Jangfeldt. In his works the poetry often takes a secondary role and he focuses on analysing the poet's letters and the memoirs of those who were close to the poet. I have already discussed how Maiakovskii was very conscious about his public image and how he continued to alter it throughout his poetic career. It would seem that eighty years after his death the representations of the poet we have are still to a great extent influenced by Maiakovskii himself and his circle of friends and colleagues.

Chapter 3: Vladimir Maiakovskii and the National School Curriculum

Склонится толпа,
лебезяща,
суетна.
Даже не узнаете—
я не я:
облысевшую голову разрисует она
в рога или в сияния.¹

Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Deshevaia rasprodazha', 1916

Russian students study the works of Soviet poet Vladimir Maiakovskii throughout their time at school. In this chapter I restrict my analysis only to material covered in the final grade of school education. While this might seem limiting, as students are first introduced to Maiakovskii at a much earlier age, this approach enables me to draw conclusions about the image of the poet that students take with them when they leave school. In order to analyse what this image is, and how it may have changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union I shall discuss the approach to teaching literature in both Soviet and post-Soviet schools. Once I establish the framework in which Maiakovskii was and is studied, I will be able to reach conclusions about which of the poet's works receive most attention in the classroom, what aspects of his life are particularly highlighted, and, ultimately, what role the study of Maiakovskii plays for students who are in their final year at school.

The chapter is divided into four sections: the first establishes what the study of literature in Soviet schools consisted of (my focus is on the 1960s-1980s). I will show how literature as a subject became increasingly dogmatic and consisted mainly of learning information by heart and repeating interpretations suggested by textbooks. A major focus of literary education was the cultivation of moral and ideological principles in students, and the way the topics were presented left little room for ambiguity. Both the dogmatic nature of the teaching and the focus on cultivating timeless values resulted in a situation where both students and teachers were uncomfortable with the idea of independent analysis, instead favouring the repetition

¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Deshevaia rasprodazha', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 115-17 (p. 116). ('The crowd will bow, fawning, fussing. You won't ever know if it's me or not: it will paint over my balding head maybe horns or maybe a halo').

of information given in the textbook, which, in turn, reinforced the dogmatism of literary studies.

The second section of the chapter is dedicated to an analysis of how Maiakovskii was represented in the Soviet classroom. Stalin's resolution in 1935 proclaimed that Maiakovskii was 'the best, most talented poet' of the Soviet era,² and since one of the focuses of literary studies was to provide positive moral and ideological examples to emulate, Maiakovskii's image had to be presented as flawless. Any details which might be perceived contradictory to the established code of morality were represented as problems that the poet was able to successfully overcome as he developed greater maturity. Similarly, any inconvenient biographical facts (including a complex personal life and the poet's suicide) were glossed over to present Maiakovskii's smooth linear progression towards becoming the most talented Soviet poet and end that representation in a positive manner. Whether the majority of students agreed or disagreed with such an image of the poet remains unclear, as most of the written tasks focused on reproducing memorised material.

In the third section I examine the changes that took place in literary education in schools after 1991. One of the main differences becomes immediately apparent – whereas in the Soviet Union there was a single school textbook, which all teachers and students used, after 1991 numerous textbooks and readers appeared, often presenting different views and covering different material. The other major change is that with *perestroika* many new names appeared in the school literature curriculum – a process which continued throughout the 1990s. Such an increase in material led to a dramatic decrease in the number of study hours dedicated to any one author. However, the one aspect of school education, which remained largely unchanged from the Soviet era, was the importance of cultivating moral and ideological values in students, and this aspect has largely shaped the nature of post-Soviet literary education.

Finally, the last section of the chapter builds upon the earlier material to analyse how Maiakovskii is represented in post-Soviet Russian schools, and what the differences and similarities between the Soviet and post-Soviet representations of the poet are. This proved to be a far from straightforward task, as a multitude of available

² See Introduction, footnote 5.

textbooks resulted in a multitude of different, and, in some cases, contradictory representations. A majority of textbooks, however, feature similar representations of the poet, which are in stark contrast to the Soviet one. For example, when it comes to the selection of texts for analysis and inclusion, post-Soviet textbooks tend to focus on Maiakovskii's pre-Revolutionary works.³ Their authors also promote the idea that Maiakovskii, for large parts of his life, remained a tragic and lonely figure. Post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii evolved throughout the 1990s: while accounts presented in the early 1990s resemble in many aspects the Soviet-era canonical image of the poet, by the late 1990s the similarities almost disappear. The single common aspect shared by Soviet and post-Soviet textbook representations is the authors' reluctance to go into the details of Maiakovskii's private life. It is likely that in an area of school education which aims to cultivate positive traits in students, such aspects of Maiakovskii's personality still remain too controversial to be discussed.

Literature in Soviet Russian Schools

For the Soviet government, literature was a tool for propagating certain behaviours and values. When it came to the study of literature at school, the aim was not only to introduce students to authors and literary works, but also, and perhaps more significantly, it was to provide an example of morals and good behaviour that students were invited to emulate. Literature, therefore, became a primary tool in educating students in how to live their lives in the right way. There was little place for ambiguity – the textbooks contained all the examples to be studied and emulated, and the students had to show their knowledge of them. In this section I will mainly focus on the period between the 1960s and 1980s, as during this time Maiakovskii's official canonical image was already well established.

On the first page of the 1989 edition of *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura*, a textbook for final grade students, we see the slogan: 'Beregite knigu!' ['Take care of the book!'].⁴

³ For a comparison on which texts are most analysed and re-printed in Russian textbooks please see Appendix, 'Chapter 3'.

⁴ Valentin Kovalev, *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura*, 11th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1989), p. 2. Further references from Valentin Kovalev, *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura* are given after quotations in the text.

A book (particularly a textbook) had a very high status in the Soviet system of values:

Books help us to determine our future careers, teach us to think and to act, to develop our best moral qualities. The whole history of mankind, its ideals and aspirations are reflected and captured in books. Through literature we understand the past and the present, the life of our people and people from all around the world. A. Tvardovskii called literature a 'kind guide' in answering the main question for young people: who to become in future?

Love your book! Let it be your constant companion. Treat the book with respect, as a source of knowledge and a textbook for life, take care of it (Kovalev, p. 2).

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union literature was often referred to as *chelovekovedenie* [the study of mankind].⁵ This term has a two-fold meaning: first of all, literature as a school subject was designed to aid pupils in understanding the social realities of the day, and thus to contribute to the ideological education of the students so that they could become worthy, active members of society. Of equal importance was the students' moral development. Ivan Ogorodnikov, in his textbook *Pedagogika*, lists values and principles which are key for any builder of a communist society. Among the expected devotion to the cause of communism, collectivism and a high consciousness of one's social duties, are such universal moral values as respect for others, honesty, truthfulness, moral purity, modesty in public and in private life, mutual respect in the family and concern for the education of children.⁶ While the list of positive traits and qualities might seem extensive, the method of introducing students to these qualities was strictly defined and left no room for ambiguity: the texts included in the school curriculum depicted desirable values and personality traits, the teacher's task was to enable students to recognise those traits and values as positive. In turn, the students had to aspire to become as worthy as the protagonists they learned about in their literature classes.

Graduation from secondary school was the end of literary education for all those who did not go on to specialise in the field. Therefore the objective of the education system was not only to familiarise pupils with selected authors and their literary

⁵ Noah Norman Shneidman, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973), p. 57.

⁶ Ivan Ogorodnikov, *Pedagogika* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1964), p. 52.

heritage, but also to give them the necessary tools for understanding and interpreting any works of literature they might encounter in future. In Noah Shneidman's words:

the pupil must be taught to approach and analyse a work of art from the Leninist point of view. He must learn to appreciate and to like what is necessary to like, and to criticise what the official party line requires him to criticise. It is a difficult task and for many years literature has been taught as a dogma: a subject in which all the answers are given and the pupil has just to remember them.⁷

The texts included in the final grade programme were carefully selected with the main focus on the 'strong ideological level of the texts, their educational meaning for students'.⁸ This resulted in a fairly limited number of texts and authors studied over a fairly large number of teaching hours. The bulk of the final-year programme was made up of the study of the lives and legacies of Maiakovskii and Maksim Gor'kii. In 1970, Maiakovskii was studied over fifteen school hours and Gor'kii—over sixteen hours. The third most important Soviet author was Mikhail Sholokhov with his text *Podniataia tselina*, to which twelve hours of study time were dedicated. The rest of the authors, including Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Esenin, Aleksandr Fadeev, Konstantin Trenev, Nikolai Ostrovskii, Aleksei Tolstoi, and Aleksandr Tvardovskii, were studied for three to five hours each, with the exception of Tolstoi (eight hours), largely due to the fact that his work was represented with the rather weighty novel, *Petr 1*. Many of the later Soviet poets, such as Aleksei Surkov, Konstantin Simonov and Pavlo Tychina, were all studied together under the banner of patriotic works from the period of the Great Patriotic War.⁹ Thus students had more than a month to familiarise themselves with the works of Maiakovskii and the way he was represented in textbooks to fit into his image of 'the best, most talented poet'¹⁰ and a positive character for students to emulate.

⁷ Shneidman, p. 16.

⁸ Anon., *Skhema programmy po literature dlia srednei shkoly. Proekt: dlia obsuzhdeniia na biuro otdeleniia didaktiki i chastnykh metodik* (Moscow: Akademiia pedagogicheskikh nauk SSSR, 1983), p. 2.

⁹ Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia RSFSR, *Programmy vos'miletnei i srednei shkoly na 1969/70 uchebnyi god: russkii iazyk i literatura* (Moscow: Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1969), pp. 59-64. Also in Shneidman, *Literature and Ideology in Soviet Education*, pp. 91-92.

¹⁰ See Introduction, footnote 5.

Maiakovskii in Soviet Russian Schools

My analysis of the way in which Maiakovskii is represented in school textbooks will focus on a number of aspects which play a major role in creating the poet's image. These aspects are: the general description of the poet and his legacy; the description of the poet's upbringing; Maiakovskii's relationship with Futurism and the avant-garde; the authors with whom Maiakovskii is associated and by whom his work was allegedly influenced; love and work; and finally, his suicide. After analysing the image of the poet which was presented to students, I will consider how this information was supposed to be used in the tasks the students were given and how they approached them.

I will start the analysis by outlining the canonical Soviet image of Maiakovskii, as presented to Soviet children. I am mainly using one source—the literature textbook *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura* by Valentin Kovalev (referenced above). The reason that I am not using more than one textbook source is because during the Soviet period there was only one official textbook on Soviet literature which was used by all schools. I am using the eleventh edition published in 1989; the way in which Maiakovskii is presented in it is likely to have been the image which several generations of Russian children grew up with.

The first thing students learned about the poet (besides the fact that he was the most talented Soviet poet) was his biography, starting with his childhood. Students were presented with an idyllic picture of the poet's early life, with accounts of the young Maiakovskii's early revolutionary activities, fully supported by his loving parents, set against a backdrop of breath-taking Georgian scenery (Kovalev, pp. 121-122). Unlike the poet's childhood, his early adulthood and the time when he began his career as a poet is under-represented. After the initial post-revolutionary period Futurism and avant-garde art movements were viewed in a highly negative light and therefore Maiakovskii's association with them were topics in which teachers and textbook authors did not want to get involved. The names of David Burliuk and Velimir Khlebnikov, both of whom were crucial to Maiakovskii's development as a poet, are not mentioned anywhere in the textbook. The textbook's authors suggest that the young poet was somehow tricked into following the Futurist movement: 'The youth [Maiakovskii], whose world view was not yet fully formed, found himself surrounded

by artistic bohemia and its typically unstable social ideas and moral principles' (Kovalev, p. 123). Maiakovskii is therefore forgiven for having been involved with Futurism. He was too young to know any better, and other members of the group used his tender age to entice the talented poet under their banner. According to the textbook authors, the works Maiakovskii produced at that time are inferior to his post-1917 works, but nevertheless show great potential:

In his [Maiakovskii's] earlier works we can find various kinds of experimentations in rhyme, the structure of the poem and poetic language, deliberately harsh "lowered" ["*snizhennye*"] images [...] At the same time we can see more distinctively the poet's own voice, a growing interest in social topics, a critical attitude towards the bourgeois world (Kovalev, p. 124).

Even though Maiakovskii's actual artistic mentors were not included in the textbook, it was important to establish the poet within the accepted literary system, to show his positive relationships with other artists who were accepted and canonised during the Soviet period. "During the war the Futurist group came apart. A closer relationship with Gor'kii, meetings with [...] Blok, A. Kuprin, V. Briusov, the artist I. Repin, the literary critic K. Chukovskii enhanced Maiakovskii's social and literary interests" (Kovalev, p. 125). Particularly important is the influence of Gor'kii, who was considered the leading author of the Soviet prose canon, and became the first President of the Union of Soviet Writers. Parallels are drawn between the two authors' works (particularly Gor'kii's short story 'Chelovek', which would later become the title of a *poema* by Maiakovskii). Maiakovskii is also compared with Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nikolai Nekrasov and Aleksandr Blok (Kovalev, pp. 125-126).

Of particular importance for Soviet literary education was the idea of post-revolutionary literature as a legitimate and worthy successor to early Russian literary tradition, therefore authors were keen not only to draw parallels between Maiakovskii and his contemporaries, but also with canonical figures of the nineteenth century. However, it is far from easy to draw parallels between the poet who turned away from literary traditions proclaiming: 'we have to throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, etc., etc. off the steamship of modernity' and the predecessors he so vehemently rejected.¹¹ According to Soviet textbooks, one of the highlights of Maiakovskii's art is

¹¹ See Chapter 1, footnote 18.

his *poema Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, written in 1927. By that time, Futurism and its manifestoes were a thing of the past. The authors claim that in this *poema*:

[Maiakovskii] continues the traditions of classic literature, especially the *poemas* of Pushkin and Nekrasov in which major problems of history and of the life of the common people found an artistic incarnation. Maiakovskii created a deeply innovative text, which became a milestone in his artistic development and in the development of all Soviet poetry (Kovalev, p. 147).

Another problematic aspect of Maiakovskii's biography was the poet's relationship with his lovers, particularly his controversial relationship with Lili and Osip Brik. As is the case for the awkward question of Maiakovskii's link to Russian literary tradition this part of the poet's biography is also glossed over by the authors: 'he had complicated relationships, each case different in its own way, with some of his friends (N. Aseev, B. Pasternak, the Briks and others)' (Kovalev, p. 131). However, and this is a key feature of the Soviet image of Maiakovskii, which students were invited to emulate: 'Maiakovskii courageously fought against difficulties, overcoming temporary misconceptions, and openly discussing them' (Kovalev, p. 131). In this way, even the poet's shortcomings helped to build his image and students were invited to treat Maiakovskii's life as an example – to be courageous and stoical, to be prepared to discuss and acknowledge any mistakes they might make.

So far, the textbook's depiction of Maiakovskii's life and progress as an artist is fairly linear. The talented young man is supported by his loving family despite the difficulties they faced. As he grows up he is faced with challenges of his own and makes some mistakes. He outgrows those mistakes and becomes both a better poet and a better man: 'the revolutionary poet's many-sided talent developed and strengthened. In his works, the principles of partisanship and national spirit became firmly established' (Kovalev, p. 131). Eventually, the poet writes masterpieces of Soviet literature, including the *poemy Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and *Khorosho!*, which change not only his own art, but the whole of Soviet literature. And then comes Maiakovskii's sudden death. However, suicide does not work as a culmination of the poet's development. The description of the poet has to conclude in a positive manner if his life is to be treated as a positive example to follow. Yet again, Soviet textbook authors deal with this problem by glossing over this part of Maiakovskii's biography:

Vo ves' golos is the last work by Maiakovskii. On 14 April 1930, he departed from this life. Artistic projects were left unfinished, tours and

the people, working for the betterment of the Soviet state gave plenty of material for Soviet textbook writers to portray Maiakovskii's life and art in precisely this way.

In order to complete the image of Maiakovskii in the Soviet school curriculum, I have found it helpful to look not only at his biography, but also at the works which are mentioned and analysed in the textbook *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura*. The book mentions sixty of Maiakovskii's works by name. Fifteen works are analysed to varying degrees. However, out of this group of fifteen only two works, *Oblako v shtanakh* and *Chelovek* were written before 1917. Both of them are analysed briefly, *Chelovek* is approached mainly in a comparison with the work by Gor'kii of the same name. Of the rest of the works mentioned, two stand out and claim the most attention: *Khorosho!* and *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, with separate chapters dedicated to the analysis of each. Of the twenty-nine Maiakovskii related questions suggested to students for revision, seven are related to the analysis of *Khorosho!* and eight to the analysis of *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*. There is only one question on the poet's love lyrics and no questions focus on his pre-revolutionary works (Kovalev, pp. 162-163). Of the twenty-nine questions suggested, only four focus on using any form of independent analysis, while the majority (fifteen) are memory tasks. The remainder require students either to copy the material given to them, to explain the titles of Maiakovskii's works, or to trace how his poetic style and topics develop over time.

In his essay, 'Literaturno-tvorcheskie sochineniia v starshikh klassakh', Vladimir Litvinov discusses the type of composition in which students are invited to present their own opinions on a text.¹⁴ A Maiakovskii-related example of such a topic, according to Litvinov, would be 'My favourite poem by Maiakovskii'.¹⁵ It is notable that, according to Litvinov, only a small minority of students attempted to write such compositions; most preferred topics which were designed to show their knowledge of core and supplementary material, but which did not require them to present their own opinions.¹⁶ This preference for a lower-risk strategy is an understandable response: students may well have been unsure how a teacher would have reacted to them

¹⁴ Vladimir Litvinov, 'Literaturno-tvorcheskie sochineniia v starshikh klassakh', in Nikolai Kolokol'tsev, *Sochineniia v obshcheobrazovatel'noi politekhnicheskoi shkole (iz opyta raboty uchitelei-slovesnikov)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva prosveshcheniia, 1961) pp. 54-63, (p. 54).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

presenting a personal opinion. Despite this, Litvinov believes that such topics are necessary, and even suggests that students should not be marked down if their opinions are wrong: 'it is inadmissible to reduce the mark to a student who produced the answer in good faith, even though he seriously "lost his footing"'.¹⁷ Such willingness to consider answers from students based on their personal opinion rather than on interpretations taken from the textbook creates a potentially dangerous situation for the study of Russian literature resulting in written evidence that students did, in fact, like what they were not meant to like, and vice versa.

It is apparent that topics which invited students to share their opinions could be awkward. For the students mainly because they could not be sure of being able to express their ideas effectively, nor of how teachers might react to their opinions. Such topics were equally (and perhaps mostly) awkward for the teachers themselves: how should one mark such a composition? After all, the student's opinion might not only be different from the teacher's personal view (and sometimes unsupported by the core text or ideologically unacceptable), but these works might not present a good opportunity for students to actually show their full knowledge of core material. Perhaps this is the reason why so many tasks in the textbook focused on memorising material and only a few on analysing it. Thus even though it is fair to say that at least some teachers encouraged independent thinking and analysis, the majority of assessment was based on the students' ability to memorise material and reproduce aspects of it in order to correctly answer the questions.

In summary, the image of Maiakovskii that Soviet students took away from school consisted of an array of quotes supporting the assertion that he was 'the best, most talented poet' of the era.¹⁸ The students would have been aware of the large number of works produced by Maiakovskii, and would have been able to discuss (and quote from) a fair number of poems. Maiakovskii's best known works would have been *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* and *Khorosho!*. Of his early works, the most successful was considered to be his *poema Oblako v shtanakh*, in which he heralds the future Revolution. His last written work would have been 'Vo ves' golos'. Students would have known that Maiakovskii had some friends (though these relationships were complex), and also some good mentors (mainly Gor'kii). Despite the fact that the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁸ See Introduction, footnote 5.

young Maiakovskii rejected the Russian classics, his legacy, in fact, was viewed as a continuation of classic Russian literary traditions. Maiakovskii lived a very rich life, always vigilant towards enemies of the young state and always busy creating socialist art. The only information about his death available to students is the date. The subject of Maiakovskii's death was discouraged from consideration, and the focus instead was on the positive: the fact that the poet left behind volumes and volumes of his works, which continue to live through the ages.

Literature in post-Soviet Russian Schools

Post-Soviet school education, in contrast to Soviet-era education, is characterised by the availability of a large number of different textbooks. However, all of them to a greater or lesser extent reflect the most obvious change – the school curriculum itself. Many names have disappeared from the curriculum, however, what is more crucial for my studies is the fact that a disproportionately large number of new names have made it into post-Soviet school textbooks. While the 1989 edition of *Russkaia sovetskaia literatura* lists just nine authors whose works were studied extensively in the final grade, two years later, in 1991, the number of texts included in the school curriculum became so large that the textbook had to be extended to two volumes. Natal'ia Volchenko, in an article published by *Russkaia slovesnost*, comments on this period of changes to the school programme: 'in the years of *perestroika* [...] "new names" poured into the school programme like a never-ending stream'.¹⁹ By 2000, the list of authors represented in school readers exceeded seventy different names. Similarly, by this period the majority of textbooks included separate chapters on major literary groups of the twentieth century. Many collections of set reading material also published a selection of letters and memoirs as additional material.²⁰ With such a drastic increase in the material to be covered during the lessons, and no increase in the number of lessons themselves, the depth in which any one particular author could be studied decreased dramatically. This is a pressing concern for post-Soviet Russian literature teachers. In reviewing a 2004 literature examination,

¹⁹ Natal'ia Volchenko, "A vy noktiurn sygrat' mogli by na fleite vodostochnykh trub?" O probleme vypusknogo sochineniia', *Russkaia slovesnost*, 6 (2005) pp. 2-7, (p. 5).

²⁰ Anatolii Barannikov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka. 11 klass: khrestomatiia dlia ovshcheobrazovatel'nykh uchrezhdenii*, 2 vols (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2000). An overview of the material supposed to be covered in lessons can be gained by viewing the contents pages: i, pp. 379-81; ii, pp. 349-51.

Volchenko points out that there are, in fact, fewer teaching hours in the final grade than the number of topics presented in the literature exam.²¹

Equally challenging was the fact that there was no longer a single textbook to be followed during studies. The post-1991 period has seen a rapid increase in available textbooks and study aid materials, and schools had to decide which ones they were going to use in the classrooms. Having to choose between a number of literature textbooks resulted in another challenging problem: it is not uncommon for textbooks to have variations in the information provided and in the tasks that are suggested for students. This, in turn, leads to possible discrepancies between the content of textbooks and what is actually covered in final-year examinations. Volchenko presents an example of such a discrepancy in her analysis of ways in which Blok is studied: each of the three textbooks she looks at has a different way of presenting the poet and his works, and none includes an analysis of the poem 'Na zheleznoi doroge', which appeared in the 2004 examination.²²

Another concerned textbook author, Gennadii Belen'kii, warns that such an abundance of suggested literature in the final grade means that part of the material has to be studied in the earlier grades, when students are too young to develop a reasonable understanding and appreciation of the texts.²³ The main reason for his concern is that any moral and aesthetic messages in those texts are too complex for younger students to grasp. Belen'kii argues that the development of moral values should continue to be central to the study of literature at school. He presents this opinion as one shared by the majority of literature teachers: 'the vast majority of teachers are certain of the immense educational significance of literature, of its unique role in the process of the formation of individuals, their artistic potential and moral inclinations'.²⁴ Later, he elaborates on what he sees as the purpose of literary education at school: 'it is the task of the literature teacher to shape the students' attitudes to moral values, patriotism, national duty, work, family, religion, love, language, nature and their own individuality'.²⁵ Many of the textbooks I examine in

²¹ Volchenko, p. 2.

²² Volchenko, pp. 2-3.

²³ Gennadii Belen'kii, "Informoprobezhka" ili izuchenie?', *Literatura v shkole*, 9 (2003), pp. 26-29 (p. 26).

²⁴ Belen'kii, p. 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

this section repeat the idea of the importance of moral education in the study of literature. The idea that a work of literature provides a guide to moral and social norms was heavily cultivated during the Soviet Union. The subject of literature at school reflected this approach, and was seen as a subject which teaches you to recognise and follow those codes. Thus while the content of the lessons might have changed with *perestroika* the focus on the importance of literature in the general development of upcoming generations did not. Here is, for example, what author Galina Lazarenko says in the foreword to her reader, *Khrestomatiia po otechestvennoi literature XX veka*:

I doubt it is possible to overestimate the importance of the main subject in school – literature, especially in the final grade, because for the majority of students the systematic course of national literature comes to an end at that time. The lessons which they have drawn from their studies [...] (aesthetic, philosophical, moral ideals) will stay with them throughout their adult lives (Lazarenko, p. 5).

Lazarenko is very critical of the Revolution and the Soviet past, however, the idea that was central to Soviet literary study, that the aim of literature is to provide students with a moral education in preparation for adult life, remains central for her as well.

With the appearance of a plethora of new names in literature textbooks, their authors had to find different ways of bringing together established canonical Soviet writers and authors who, during the Soviet era, remained outside the official canon. The legacies left by these two groups of authors were often incredibly dissimilar, however there is a noticeable effort on the part of the textbook compilers to bring this array of material together. One explanation for this preoccupation with unity is that post-Soviet textbook compilers were attempting to sketch out a broader version of the literary canon which would combine the heritages of official and unofficial Soviet writers. One way to accomplish this task was to draw parallels between work of established canonised authors, such as Maiakovskii, and authors not commonly associated with the official Soviet canon, such as Andrei Platonov or Anna Akhmatova. In order to establish common ground between traditionally polarised authors, textbooks often attributed to them timeless moral values which remained unchanged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For example, Anatolii Barannikov writes:

The numerous and multi-faceted [people of] Rus brought forward authors from all social classes; they had polarised opinions on the events of the time, including the Revolution, but they were all united in their sincere love for Russia, their reflection of its fate and their desire to better the life of the people.²⁶

Such a focus on presenting authors as positive moral examples is similar to the way in which literature was taught during the Soviet times. Previously this approach to literature meant that there was commonly only one correct opinion and the majority of questions were designed to show how well students could convey the information they had read. However, when we look at what post-Soviet textbooks claim to offer, we see a shift in attitude towards the importance of the students' personal opinions. In 1991, in a textbook edited by Feliks Kuznetsov, we read 'the book invites us to think, to develop an independent opinion in the analysis of various literary phenomena'.²⁷ A few years later, in 1998, Iurii Lyssyi continued this idea, suggesting in the foreword to the textbook he edited: 'the material presented is not for learning by heart. Reading is a dialogue with the author: agreement, disagreement, sometimes even an argument'.²⁸ Indeed, this statement suggests that the subject of literature is starting to be taught in a less dogmatic way, with teachers and examiners more interested in students expressing their own opinions about the works they encounter.

However, it would appear that when it comes to final examinations, the notion that an author or a work of literature can produce a multitude of opinions is forgotten. Each year, publishing houses release booklets on how to write final-year compositions effectively. These booklets provide suggested answers to the most common questions. Evgeniia Basovskaia writes in one such booklet:

Most importantly [...] one has to adhere to certain 'safety measures' during the exam.

As your work is going to be marked by a certain 'Mr X', it is advisable to remain neutral. You cannot know whether your examiner prefers prose or poetry, Nekrasov or Fet, [...] long compositions or short ones... Thus in order to not find yourself in an irreconcilable contradiction with your examiner, not to set yourself up against him, you should not express

²⁶ Anatolii Barannikov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka : khrestomatiia dlia 11 kl. sr. shk.*, 2 vols, (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1993), i, p. 4.

²⁷ Feliks Kuznetsov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka. Ocherki. Portrety. Esse: kniga dlia uchascshikhsia 11 klassa srednei shkoly*, 2 vols (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1991), i, p. 3.

²⁸ Iurii Lyssyi, *Russkaia literatura XX veka. 11 klass: praktikum dlia obshcheobrazovatel'nykh ucherezhdenii* (Moscow: Mnemozina, 1998), p. 3.

yourself too emotionally [...] You should not come up with an unconventional compositional structure, create bold metaphors [...] Not to irritate your examiner – this is what is extremely important. Indeed, your composition will not be genius [...] But it will be what it should be – an entry ticket to university.²⁹

Thus it would appear that discussions and disputes are welcome during lessons, where, if teachers do in fact follow the textbooks' suggestions, students are encouraged to express their own opinions. However, when it comes to the one time it really matters, students are encouraged to ignore their own preferences and produce an essay which will not irritate their examiner, which conforms to established norms and is either similar to the examiner's own opinion, or at least does not contradict it.

The apparent desire on the part of the examiners to read well-established views on literature, presented in textbooks and supplementary materials, suggests that there is a considerable mismatch between the method of assessment (still largely unchanged from the Soviet period) and the attempt to promote a less restrictive and prescriptive way of teaching literature. Part of the reason for the apparent difficulty in moving away from this dogmatic approach may lie in the way in which the aims of literature study are formulated. The subject is designed to introduce students to the lives of authors and to their texts. It also teaches them to present coherent arguments. However, most importantly, the teaching of literature is still ultimately seen as means of moral education for the next generation. It is the main subject in which such ideas as goodness, patriotism and civic duty are discussed. Thus the reason students and teachers struggle with the idea of voicing personal opinions is still much the same as it was in the Soviet Union – when it comes to ideas of national identity and timeless moral values, it is expected that students will offer up the single “right” answer.

Maiakovskii in post-Soviet Russian Schools

When looking at the changes *perestroika* brought to the representation of Maiakovskii in post-Soviet Russian schools, I will focus on the same aspects of his life and legacy as in the previous section, namely, general description of the poet

²⁹ Evgeniia Basovskaia, *Literatura. Sochineniia. 11 klass: kniga dlia uchenika i uchitelia* (Moscow: Olimp, 1997), pp. 9-10.

and his works, the poet's childhood and upbringing, his relationship with the Russian avant-garde and the Futurist movement, other persons considered influential for the formation of Maiakovskii's style, as well as which other poets he is most commonly compared to, how the textbooks address the poet's personal life and his love lyrics, and finally, how Maiakovskii's suicide is portrayed.

However, the main difference in post-Soviet representation of the poet is the fact that there is no longer a single and uniform depiction of the poet. Whereas during the Soviet times all students were required to study the same textbook, in post-Soviet Russia, with the ever expanding list of studied authors and no government control over the precise curriculum covered, textbooks and supplementary materials multiplied dramatically. This resulted in some significant changes in the ways students are introduced to Maiakovskii. Multiple representations of Maiakovskii evolved throughout the 1990s and, as yet, no single dominant image of the poet has emerged.

The first difference in the shifting perception of Maiakovskii is that the poet's childhood and upbringing is hardly ever mentioned in the post-1991 textbooks. It has been noted that, for Soviet textbook authors, it was important to give the poet a stable and supportive family environment, in which his own views and beliefs, as well as his talent were rooted. However, hardly any post-1991 textbook mentions the poet's family beyond the dry narration of biographical details. Thus our meeting with the poet does not start from his childhood, but from the beginning of his poetic career:

Maiakovskii was a suffering and lonely youth when he came into Russian poetry. In spite of this, from his first appearance in the press and on stage he was forced into the role of literary hooligan, and he, in order to not sink into obscurity, maintained this reputation with audacious pranks during readings.³⁰

In fact, the motifs of loneliness and suffering have become key in post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii. This is in line with the general post-Soviet shift to emphasising Maiakovskii as an individual, rather than a hero-figure.

³⁰ Kuznetsov, p. 136.

Other aspects of Maiakovskii's post-Soviet representation in the school curriculum took longer to evolve. In 1991 Feliks Kuznetsov, editor of *Russkaia literatura XX veka* textbook still viewed the Futurist movement, with which the start of Maiakovskii's poetic career is associated, in a negative light: 'The antibourgeois mutiny of Maiakovskii in this *poema* [A Cloud in Trousers] was also a mutiny against spiritless due to its bare aestheticism parlour art. Thus, indirectly, instinctively, Maiakovskii, like any healthy, socially conscious individual, speaks against Futurism with its virtually aesthetic concept of art'.³¹ Equally Kuznetsov does not mention Burlinuk or Khlebnikov and their influence on the poet's early works. Having excluded these two figures from the poet's biography, the editors are left with the question of whom to compare Maiakovskii with. Soviet textbook authors made sure to draw parallels with other major Soviet authors: Gor'kii and Blok. *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, on the other hand, proposed that the poet had a lot in common with writers who were not acknowledged during the Soviet era, but who became widely read during and after *perestroika*: 'Numerous satirical works by the poet (poems, feuilletons, plays) suggest that he saw clearly the many difficulties in the cause of achieving great goals, in the same way as they were seen by Platonov, Bulgakov, Zoshchenko'.³² Thus during the time when affiliation with Futurism and avant-garde was still considered detrimental to the poet's image, and so was his affiliation with official Soviet culture, it appears textbook authors required new figures and connections to justify Maiakovskii's high canonical status and detach him from many other Soviet writers who were no longer canonised in post-Soviet Russia. Any such approach which aims to detach Maiakovskii from figures who have become politically unacceptable reminds us of Soviet practice, it is now used, however, with the opposite motivation.

Another similarity of this textbook with the Soviet-era textbook is that it has very little to say about the poet's personal life. We learn that when Maiakovskii was very young he fell in love with Maria Denisova. This unsuccessful relationship resulted in the composition of *Oblako v shtanakh*.³³ However, by the time this *poema* was finished, the poet was already in love with a different woman – Lili Brik, 'the character of another love drama, which filled many years, and was much more intense and

³¹ Kuznetsov, p. 142.

³² Kuznetsov, p. 142.

³³ Kuznetsov, p. 141.

destructive in its content'.³⁴ And that is all the information the textbook provides about Lili Brik. Considerable attention is dedicated to the analysis of Maiakovskii's love lyrics, and the tragedy of the poet's love, however the students will only have a vague idea as to why exactly his love is portrayed as tragic, or what prevented Maiakovskii's relationships from working out. Despite this similarity, post-Soviet textbooks typically do not attempt to present Maiakovskii's personal feelings and lyrical poetry as part of his strong community spirit. Thus the authors of *Russkaia literatura XX veka* separate Maiakovskii's love lyrics from his civic poetry: 'As much as the poet tried to "tame" the intimate within himself in the name of the communal, the socially rational, as he was "standing on the throat of his own song", "the topic" (love) "ordered" him to write about it'.³⁵ This is a stark contrast from the Soviet representation of the poet, where his love for a woman is identified as part of his love for life and humanity, and therefore his love lyrics are considered to have a civic aspect.

Unlike the complex relationship with Lili Brik, of which we learn very little, the textbook provides more substantial detail about Maiakovskii's later relationships, with Tat'iana Iakovleva and Veronika Polonskaia. The tragic end to Maiakovskii's love for Iakovleva and the unstable nature of his relationship with Polonskaia are given as some of the circumstances which led to the poet's suicide, a topic which, in post-Soviet textbooks, is openly discussed and analysed. In *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, it is suggested that there is no clear answer as to what led to Maiakovskii's decision to take his own life, however the authors put forward a whole multitude of unhappy, unfortunate and otherwise tragic events which happened in the months leading up to the poet's suicide.³⁶ One theory which the textbook disputes, however, is that the poet's psychological state contributed to his death. After the poet's suicide, this idea was cultivated by Maiakovskii's closest friend and ex-lover – Lili Brik, who suggested that even though Maiakovskii loved life, he was paranoid about getting old, and often

³⁴ Kuznetsov, p. 142.

³⁵ Kuznetsov, p. 144. The quotations within the citation are from Maiakovskii's poems, the first two ('но я себя смирял' and 'становясь на горло собственной песне' two are from 'Vo ves' golos', see Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Vo ves' golos', in see *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, x, pp. 279-85, (pp. 280-81); the last two ('имя этой теме: любовь' and 'эта тема ко мне заявила гневная, приказала') are from *Pro eto*, see Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Pro eto* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, iv, ed. by V. Arutcheva, Zinovii Papernyi (1957), pp. 135-84 (pp. 138-39).

³⁶ Kuznetsov, p. 165.

had suicidal thoughts.³⁷ Despite the indisputable fact that Lili Brik knew the poet very closely, the authors of *Russkaia literatura XX veka* suggest that her opinion was erroneous and unfounded:

What fear of old age when you are thirty-six! What suicidal tendency in a person, who so passionately rejected such action in the poem 'Sergeiu Eseninu', so passionately, so impatiently looked forward into the future! In a person who was obsessed with the notion of immortality!³⁸

The authors present their view as the only possible correct one, even though one does not have to spend long looking for evidence to support Brik's arguments. 14 April 1930 was not the first time Maiakovskii attempted suicide. Lili Brik describes in her diaries that Maiakovskii attempted suicide in 1916, but the gun misfired.³⁹ As for statements in the poet's own works which support Lili Brik's comments about Maiakovskii's anxieties, we can find plenty of both: ideas of suicide and thoughts of imminent old age. For example, in 1925 during his trip to America the poet wrote:

жил,
работал,
стар староват...
Вот и жизнь пройдет,
как прошли Азорские
острова.⁴⁰

And a year later Maiakovskii wrote these even more troubled lines:

Все меньше любитя,
и лоб мой
время
с разбега крушит.
Приходит
амортизация
амортизация
страшнейшая из амортизаций —
сердца и души.⁴¹

³⁷ Lili Brik, *Pristrastnye rasskazy* (Moscow: Dekom, 2011), p. 181.

³⁸ Kuznetsov, p. 169.

³⁹ *Pristrastnye rasskazy*, p. 181.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Melkaia filosofii na glubokikh mestakh', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vii, pp. 17-19 (p. 19). ('I lived, worked, have aged a little... Thus life too will pass, just as the Azores have passed').

⁴¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Razgovor s fininspektorom o poezii', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vii, pp. 119-26 (p. 124). ('I fall in love less, I dare less, and my brow is crushed by time as it runs at me. The most terrifying of erosions is coming – the erosion of heart and soul').

There are more examples to support Lili Brik's idea that Maiakovskii was prone to suicidal thoughts,⁴² equally there are also numerous examples that support the textbook's version that the poet despised such endings. The legacy of the poet's works is full of contradictory statements, and can easily support such contrasting arguments.

One argument on which the vast majority of textbooks agree is the fact that Maiakovskii was a great poet: 'Maiakovskii was and remains one of the most notable figures of twentieth-century poetry [...] it is impossible to brush Maiakovskii aside, to categorise him as one of the poetic trimmers with little talent'.⁴³ Even though this view is widely supported, not all textbooks are positive about the image of the poet. One striking example of a negative point of view presented in school is found in the reader by Lazarenko, *Khrestomatiia po otechestvennoi literature XX veka*. In her introduction, Lazarenko suggests that the social ills of contemporary Russia can be solved by providing students with higher ideals to which they should aspire in their everyday life. According to her, the ideal is Christianity (Lazarenko, p. 5). It is not surprising then that Maiakovskii, whose critical statements towards religion and God are well documented, is not one of Lazarenko's favourite authors. Lazarenko's book does not provide any biographical details about writers, however, it does contain a considerable amount of guidance notes and lesson plans, which allow us to establish an image of the poet. Lazarenko's representation of Maiakovskii is based on the analysis of the lines from his works. The lines Lazarenko chooses to select are all focused on the ideas of violence and egocentrism, which are the two aspects of Maiakovskii's art which Lazarenko condemns:

'The bow-tie of the poet's heart' should not hate. And in the *poema Oblako v shtanakh* the grown-up poet goes to fraternise with the 'tongue-less' street, in order to give it voice... Why not the Pushkin voice? ('For having roused noble thoughts with my lyre' – for many decades keeps ringing on the lips and the ears of descendants)? According to Maiakovskii, to give the street a voice means to arm it with the following slogans:

Власть
к богатым
рыло
воротит –

⁴² See, for example Roman Jakobson, 'O pokolenii, rastrativshim svoikh poetov'.

⁴³ Anatolii Karpov, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii', in Vladimir Agenosov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka* (Moscow: Drofa, 1996), pp. 252-88 (p. 252).

чего
подчиняться ей?!

Бей!!

(Lazarenko, p. 21)

Notably, the above quotation combines lines from three different poems by Maiakovskii: 'Nate!' (1913), *Oblako v shtanakh* (1915) and *Khorosho!* (1927), thus pulling together dramatically different periods of the poet's career.⁴⁴ Throughout the section on Maiakovskii, Lazarenko provides quotations from poems, without expanding on when, why and for what occasion they were written, to support her image of the poet as a violent revolutionary, lacking moral or aesthetic principles. It is possible that Lazarenko's opinion of the poet was influenced by the highly contradictory, but widely known book by Iurii Karabchievskii *Voskresenie Maiakovskogo*. As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis Karabchievskii argues that Maiakovskii's best poems are the ones where the main theme is hate, which leads Karabchievskii to conclude that Maiakovskii is 'an anti-poet', whose works are the antitheses of culture.⁴⁵ Thus, unfortunately, images of violence and egocentrism are the only ones we can find in the lines provided by Lazarenko's textbook, which presents a largely negative image of the poet, who might have made innovations in Russian poetic language, but overall was not a very nice person. Similarly to the authors of the 1991 textbook *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, Lazarenko also finds Maiakovskii's life highly tragic. However, she claims that it was not the tragedy of being misunderstood and lonely, as other textbooks suggest, but rather the tragedy of a young poet severing his connections with the aesthetic roots of Russian literary traditions (Lazarenko, p. 22). However, Lazarenko's textbook is more the exception than the rule.

In order to get a better idea of the image of the poet that students might have taken away with them from school, I will focus on topics suggested for revision, starting

⁴⁴ The first citation within the quote refers to Maiakovskii's poem 'Nate!' (1913), see Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Nate!' in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, p. 56; the image of the tongueless street is from *Oblako v shtanakh* (1915), see Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Oblako v shtanakh*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 173-96 (p. 181); the final citation ('The authorities turn their mugs to those who are rich—why follow them?! Strike!!') is from *Khorosho!*, (1927), see Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Khorosho!* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, viii, ed. by Vasilii Katanian (1958), pp. 233-328 (p. 238). The line from Pushkin is from the poem 'Exegi Monumentum', *Pushkin: Selected Verse*, ed. and trans. by John Fennell (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001), pp. 75-76 (p. 76)

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Monstrous Villain'.

with *Russkaia literatura XX veka* edited by Vladimir Agenosov, which was first published in 1996. This is one of the textbooks (albeit an earlier edition) analysed by Volchenko in the above-mentioned article “‘A vy noktiurn sygrat’ mogli by na fleite vodostochnykh trub?’”.⁴⁶ This, together with the fact the textbook survived multiple editions, allows me to conclude, that it is among the more commonly used across schools. The revision questions suggested mainly focus on the historical background of various works by Maiakovskii, however we also find the following question: ‘the image of the poet in Maiakovskii’s work (based on two or three poems, selected by the student)’.⁴⁷ Whereas this topic lends itself to students expressing their own personal opinions on the question, let us examine how the textbook presents Maiakovskii, as students are much more likely to base their answer on information they are provided with. Key to presenting Maiakovskii for Anatolii Karpov (the author of the chapter on Maiakovskii), as for other editors of post-Soviet textbooks, is the motif of loneliness and the tragedy in the poet’s life. In the textbook, this tragedy is related mostly to the later part of Maiakovskii’s life, the late 1920s: ‘together with sharp criticism of the present, a certain anxiety about the future, which has no place for true humanity, is discernible. This anxiety becomes more and more prominent in the poet’s work [...] which affirms [...] the motif of loneliness’ (Karpov, pp. 256-57). The motif of loneliness identified by Karpov is seemingly little supported by the biographical details of Maiakovskii’s life. For the first time, a plethora of previously little-mentioned names of the poet’s friends and acquaintances appear: Burluiuk, Khlebnikov, Aleksei Kruchenykh, as well as his less well-known American lover Elli Jones; his non-Futurist acquaintances—Gor’kii, Repin, Akhmatova and Osip Mandel’shtam, who all praised his talent, are also mentioned within the chapter (Karpov, p. 255). Given such a wide circle of friends, Maiakovskii’s feelings of loneliness and his eventual suicide need some explanation, and Karpov supplies two main reasons. First of all, he cites the political atmosphere in the country: ‘the era in which revolutionary ideals got dimmer and dimmer was indeed understanding the poet less and less (to be precise, it accepted him less and less)’ (Karpov, p. 258). Secondly, in the months leading up to his suicide he had an unhappy relationship

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3, footnote 19.

⁴⁷ Anatolii Karpov, ‘Vladimir Maiakovskii’, in Vladimir Agenosov, *Russkaia literatura XX veka* (Moscow: Drofa, 1996), pp. 252-88 (p. 286). Further references from Anatolii Karpov, ‘Vladimir Maiakovskii’ are given after quotations in the text.

with the actress Veronika Polonskaia, who, according to Karpov, refused to marry him despite the poet's love for her: 'the poet's demand to immediately unite their fates provoked a highly nervous reaction from Polonskaia. The final discussion happened in the morning of 14 April 1930: Polonskaia refused to choose a single role – that of the poet's wife – over everything else' (Karpov, p. 259). Like many textbook authors, Karpov tends to gloss over the intricacies of Maiakovskii's relationships with women. Thus neither Lili Brik's, nor Polonskaia's husbands feature in this presentation of Maiakovskii's life – after all, such a description does not portray Maiakovskii in a particularly good light and also does little to promote the image of the lonely and misunderstood poet.

In the step-by-step guidebooks for using Agenosov's textbooks we can see that Maiakovskii is allocated four study hours (just over a week). While this is dramatically less than the month he used to enjoy during the Soviet period, considering the density of the post-Soviet literature school curriculum, this is still a good number of hours. Of other twentieth-century poets only Blok enjoys the same amount of classroom time, while the majority of poets studied are covered over just two or three hours. The most hours are dedicated to the study of prose: Gor'kii enjoys five hours of study, Bulgakov and Sholokhov – six.⁴⁸

Looking at some typical exam questions, we discover that a considerable amount of attention is given to Maiakovskii's life and work. The questions are rather varied, from analysing Maiakovskii's earlier poetry (for example, Maiakovskii's poem 'Skripka i nemnozhko nervno'), to images of the loud-mouth ring-leader [*gorlan-glavar*] in Maiakovskii's works, to the place of the Revolution in his poetry.⁴⁹ One notable omission from the typical Soviet exam questions is any coverage of questions on the *poemy* "Khorosho!" and "Vladimir I'lich Lenin"—instead questions on his pre-revolutionary works are much more common. Students are thus much more likely to be more familiar with the pre-revolutionary works of Maiakovskii, where the poet's emotions and personal tragedies take centre stage. Tragedy and feelings

⁴⁸ Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii, Vladimir Agenosov, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii po ispol'zovaniiu uchebnikov "Russkaia literatura XIX veka" pod redaktsiei A. N. Arkhangel'skogo, "Russkaia literatura XX veka" pod redaktsiei V. V. Agenosova* (Moscow: Drofa, 2006), pp. 61-62.

⁴⁹ Aleksandr Kniazhitskii, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii i prakticheskie materialy k provedeniiu ekzamina po literature*, 2 vols (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnaia shkola distantsionnogo obucheniia, 2003), *passim*.

of loneliness, often expressed in early poetry, become key aspects in defining Maiakovskii's life and legacy. Particular characteristics of the poet might vary from textbook to textbook, but these two aspects are commonly highlighted.

The focus on Maiakovskii's pre-revolutionary works may also be explained by the growing popularity of the Silver Age literature (late nineteenth – early twentieth century). The Silver Age was marked by an upsurge of artistic creativity. As Sibelan Forrester and Martha Kelly note in their introduction to *Russian Silver Age Poetry*, the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of an unprecedented number of talented poets from a range of backgrounds. For the first time in Russian literary history the prominent poets represented 'a striking variety of class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality'.⁵⁰ Three major poetic movements form the bulk of the Silver Age legacy: the first to emerge was Symbolism, followed at the turn of the century by Acmeism and Futurism. Forrester and Kelly point out that many of the artists of the period were talented in more than one sphere of art: 'several of the major poets were (or could have been) musicians and composers; others were painters, important literary critics, religious thinkers, scholars or philosophers'.⁵¹ Maiakovskii himself studied fine art and was a talented painter and illustrator. Moreover, Maiakovskii and his futurist group's early public readings were accompanied with elaborate dress-up and face-painting. The artists would then walk through the streets and other public spaces in this theatrical attire. In 1913 the painter Mikhail Larionov and the writer Il'ia Zdanevich explained in an interview: 'The new life requires a new way of propagation. Our self-painting is the first speech to have found unknown truths. We have joined art to life'.⁵² Two notable tropes of the period can be glimpsed in Zdanevich's statement. First, the artists of the time (regardless of their allegiances to specific poetic movements), viewed their lives and works not only as radically different from anything which has been done before, but also as founding previously unknown truths. Boris Gasparov summarises: 'Modernist culture did not view itself as the most recent historical "stage," but rather as an eschatological and messianistic "phenomenon," which was conferring new (and perhaps ultimate) meaning on the

⁵⁰ Sibelan Forrester and Martha Kelly, *Russian Silver Age Poetry: Texts and Contexts* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015), p. xxxviii.

⁵¹ Forrester and Kelly, p. xxxviii.

⁵² Il'ia Zdanevich and Mikhail Larionov, 'Why We Are Painting Ourselves', quoted in translation by John Bowl, *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism 1902 – 1934*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988), p. 81.

entire course of “history”.⁵³ Indeed, many of Maiakovskii’s early works, which aided his image as a natural leader, in fact, feature a very prophet-like poetic persona: ‘A vy mogli by?’ (1913), ‘Ia’ (1913), ‘Neskol’ko slov obo mne samom’ (1913), ‘A vse-taki’ (1914), ‘Ei!’ (1916), ‘Ko vsemu’ (1916), ‘Deshevaia rasprodazha’ (1916), ‘Sebe, liubimomu, posviashchaet eti stroki avtor’ (1916), ‘Rossii’ (1916), as well as the tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii* (1913), and Maiakovskii’s early *poemy*. The noteworthiness of the Silver Age poets was further emphasised by the fact that, since the end of the Golden Age in the first half of the nineteenth century, poetry gave way to the novel as the genre of highest prestige. It was not until the end of the century that poetry reclaimed its status, once again gaining popularity with both artists and the public.

Secondly, central to the Silver Age poets’ world-view was the idea that art and life are interconnected and influence each other. Silver Age artists sought to live their lives in much the same way as they created works of art:

Art was proclaimed to be a force capable of, and destined for, the “creation of life” (*tvorchestvo zhizni*), while “life” was viewed as an object of artistic creation or as a creative act. In this sense, art turned into “real life” and “life” turned into art; they became one.⁵⁴

It was the Symbolists who embraced the idea of *zhiznetvorchestvo*, and though the Futurists viewed themselves in opposition to the Symbolists, they themselves also largely adhered to this concept. In chapter 1 of this thesis I discussed Maiakovskii’s initial parody of *zhiznetvorchestvo*. However, the poet adhered to the principle closely, self-fashioning an illustrative life of a Soviet poet and making art which aimed to improve life. In fact, Mayakovskii became one of Russia’s most remarkable self-fashioning artists.

There are no precise dates for the end of the Silver Age; however scholars agree that the Revolution was instrumental in its rapid collapse.

⁵³ Boris Gasparov, ‘The “Golden Age” and its Role in the Cultural Mythology of Russian Modernism’, in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, ed. by Boris Gasparov, Robert P. Hughes, and Irina Paperno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

Their [the Silver Age poets'] culture was fatally ruptured by the October 1917 Revolution: some of our poets died much too young [...], some emigrated and continued to work in smaller communities and increasing poverty [...]; some remained in Russia, now the Soviet Union, and adapted one way or another. [...] Some were eventually unable to adapt.⁵⁵

Both this rapid decline of the cultural abundance of the Silver Age, as well as the artists' own prophetic (and often tragic) self-representation, have lent this period of Russian literary history a sad and nostalgic tinge, which I will discuss further in my Conclusion. However, the popularity of the period undoubtedly played a major role in the revival of Maiakovskii's pre-revolutionary works and their importance for the school curriculum.

The way Maiakovskii is portrayed in post-Soviet Russian schools is a result of several factors. One important factor is that literature is viewed not only as a subject designed to enhance students' knowledge of texts and authors, but to cultivate their moral and civic values. As such, protagonists and authors are presented as having virtues to which students are encouraged to aspire. Although in post-Soviet education there appears a strong notion of the importance of the students' own opinions, the final examinations are still structured in much the same way they were during the Soviet period – students are actively discouraged from presenting anything that does not conform to standards set in textbooks and supplementary materials. The post-Soviet textbook representation of Maiakovskii, however, is vastly different from his Soviet-era image of 'the best, most talented poet'.⁵⁶ The main difference is the fact that *perestroika* brought an end to the single, unified image of the poet. The multitude of textbooks which appeared after 1991 led to the creation of several images of Maiakovskii, some of them quite contradictory. On the basis of the way Maiakovskii is presented in schools it is difficult to identify the place in the canon that he is thought to occupy. However, due to the tendency of focusing on his pre-revolutionary poetry, it is possible to say that he is being represented as a poet of the Silver Age. His is a compulsory name in the curriculum, but his significance is unclear, as he does not easily fit the image of a role model for students, and the

⁵⁵ Forrester and Kelly, p. liv.

⁵⁶ See Introduction, footnote 5.

representation of the poet varies from one textbook author to another. The only aspect that the majority of post-Soviet textbooks agree on (as well as the main difference from the Soviet-era image of the poet) is the idea that Maiakovskii was a tragic poet, who, for the large parts of his life, suffered from loneliness. This fits in with the general tendency to associate the lives of poets with foreboding tragedy.⁵⁷ In Maiavkosii's case his suicide was the ultimate tragedy. According to post-Soviet textbooks this stemmed largely from misunderstanding (whether by a single person, like Polonskaia, or a group of people, like RAPP) which led to the poet's suicide: another topic which became widely discussed only after 1991.

There are also similarities between Soviet and post-Soviet representations of the poet. For example, Maiakovskii's association with Futurism and the avant-garde was not looked at positively until the second half of the 1990s. Other similarities are more long-lasting and lie in the fact that, even though Maiakovskii is no longer an absolute leading figure in the poetic canon, he is still supposed to portray positive qualities in order to be sympathetic for students.

The understanding of Maiakovskii and his place in the school curriculum is still evolving. While Maiakovskii's place at the top of the poetic canon has been challenged and largely revoked, he remains among a small group of the most-studied Soviet poets (Blok, Esenin, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam and Aleksand Tvardovskii often being the others).⁵⁸ We can see a tendency towards a more humanised, more relatable image of the poet. As the focus in literary education is shifting towards the importance of discussion, of plurality of opinions, perhaps it is only natural that no single image of the poet exists. Because of this it is possible that while post-Soviet generations of students will not necessarily believe Maiakovskii to be the best poet, they will have a broader understanding of the poet's life and legacy.

⁵⁷ See discussion on Parthé and Iakobson in Chapter 2 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Tragic Victim'.

⁵⁸ Arkhangel'skii, Aleksandr and Agenosov, Vladimir, *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii po ispol'zovaniiu uchebnikov "Russkaia literatura XIX veka" pod redaktsiei A. N. Arkhangel'skogo, "Russkaia literatura XX veka" pod redaktsiei V. V. Agenonosova* (Moscow: Drofa, 2006), pp. 61-63.

concisely'.⁴ Indeed, the 1990s (re)introduced the public to previously little-known or entirely unpublished authors. The break away from the Soviet literary canon meant that readers had much more variety and choice over which authors to read, and as Kuz'min points out, the choice proved overwhelming. Thus the dismantling of the Soviet canon led to the establishment of the post-Soviet one, and while one might argue that this post-Soviet literary canon has not yet survived the test of time, it is clear that anthologies have been playing a central role in trying to define which authors will remain significant for the upcoming generations.

However, not all anthologies aim to provide a picture of the literary past or present – some choose to focus on representing certain themes through literary texts. For example, *Sankt-Peterburg, Petrograd, Leningrad v russkoi poezii*, published in 1999, is presented as an anthology, but the main aim of the volume is to collect works which focus on the same topic: depictions of the city. The selection of authors and their works is thus not designed to represent the most historically or culturally important works, but simply those which are about St Petersburg. Another example of a themed anthology is the 2001 publication *Poeziia russkogo futurizma*. Its compilers Vladimir Al'fonsov and S. Krasitskii are focusing on only one branch of Russian poetry: Futurism. The works they chose to include are therefore representative of this poetic movement, but not necessarily representative of their authors' overall legacy. For example the anthology includes two works by Georgii Ivanov: 'Sonet-poslanie' and 'Majskaia ballada', written in 1911 and 1912, despite the fact that soon after the start of his poetic career Ivanov moved out of the Futurist group Ego and his later works revealed little influence of Futurism.⁵ Barbara Benedict in her work *Making the Modern Reader* differentiates these two types of anthologies: a true anthology, which is a representation of the literary canon of a historical period, and a miscellany, or a themed collection of works compiled from fashionable material.⁶ Barbara Mujica adds to this definition of miscellanies: 'a miscellany is a

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Vladimir Al'fonsov, 'Poeziia russkogo futurizma', *Poeziia russkogo futurizma*, ed. by Valerii Sazhin and others (Saint Petersburg: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo "Akademicheskii proekt", 2001), pp. 5-66 (pp. 10-11).

⁶ Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 3.

medley, an unordered gathering of writings on the same topic or of the same genre, rather than a selective compilation'.⁷ Mujica considers miscellanies to be a creation of the book market as something designed to predominantly generate sales (Mujica, p. 203). Mujica's argument that miscellanies lack selective compilation is somewhat contradictory – as she also states that they follow a prescribed pattern (be it topic, or genre, or other criteria). However, the publication date of the above-mentioned anthology *Sankt-Peterburg, Petrograd, Leningrad v russskoi poezii* supports her statement about the miscellanies being driven by sales. It was released shortly before the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the city, and therefore had clear market considerations. Another major difference between a true anthology and a miscellany, according to Mujica, is that the latter has little bearing on the formation of the literary canon: 'the very format of anthology prompts canon formation, for while a miscellany invites short, disconnected readings, an anthology invites prolonged study' (Mujica, p. 203). It is however possible to argue that even those collections which are more suited to the miscellany type than an anthology, can have an impact on the literary canon, as they preserve and draw to light works and authors which might otherwise be forgotten. Indeed, Benedict argues that the difference between anthologies and miscellanies is not as great as might appear:

Both "miscellanies" and "anthologies" describe a form, shaped by readers and mediated by booksellers and editors, that works to define contemporary cultural literacy and the attitude of the reader [...]

The format of these books promotes the formation of a canon: a demonstration of refined choice.⁸

When it comes to collections of poetry the general reader is likely to be influenced by what is more easily available on the market. Thus both true anthologies and miscellanies (which are designed with sales in mind, are often oriented towards specific markets and tend to be cheaper) will both have influence in shaping the literary canon.

⁷ Barbara Mujica, 'Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology', *Hispania*, 80, 2 (1997), pp. 203-15 (p. 203). Further references from Barbara Mujica, 'Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology' are given after quotations in the text.

⁸ Benedict, p. 4.

In this chapter I am focusing on anthologies rather than miscellanies. However, I have analysed both and the results of my findings are summed up in the 'Tables and Figures' appendix. I will firstly analyse how post-Soviet anthologies set out to create a comprehensive historical picture of the past century and the difficulties this task poses. Using the example of two major anthologies from the 1990s, *Strofy veka* and *Rusaskaia poeziia: XX vek*, I will show how little consensus there is when it comes to representing the literary history of the twentieth century.

In the following section 'Anthologies, Hierarchy and Popularity' I will consider the notions of ranking in the post-Soviet literary canon. After all, anthologies (and miscellanies) are one of the most visual ways of promoting a sense of hierarchy: poets who are most worthy of being read are presented with a larger selection of poems, and less noteworthy poets are presented with a smaller selection. However, the 1990s saw not only an upheaval of the literary canon but also an attempt to move away from a strict hierarchical view of literature. Maiakovskii was no longer the 'best, most talented poet' of the era,⁹ but one among a group of major twentieth-century poets. Although all the anthologies analysed have multiple disagreements when it comes to the treatment of less well-known writers, they do all include works by the major Russian poets, including Maiakovskii. Thus in the last section 'The Representations of Vladimir Maiakovskii in Anthologies' the focus is not only on evaluating how high Maiakovskii's ranking is within the proposed canonical structure of any given anthology, but also on the way in which the compilers choose to present the poet. I will start the section by providing an overview of Maiakovskii's representation in Soviet-era publications, in which compilers had a clear idea of how Maiakovskii should be presented to the public. I will then move to consider post-Soviet anthologies and will specifically focus on four: a 'returned' anthology, *Rusaskaia poeziia XX veka: antologija russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, *Strofy veka*, *Rusaskaia poeziia: XX vek* and *Poeziia serebrianogo veka*. All of these four anthologies represent Maiakovskii in different ways. Surprisingly, in anthologies published during the Soviet time, when Maiakovskii's representation and status were fixed, I have noted more variation in which texts

⁹ See Introduction, footnote 5.

are selected; whereas post-Soviet anthologies' compilers seem to be rather more discerning regarding which of Maiakovskii's poems they choose to include and that selection typically serves to reinforce the compilers' representation of the poet.

Anthologies as Means of Restoring Literary History

Benedict argues that anthologies inevitably lead to the de-historization of texts, as different authors are presented side by side with little or no mention of the historical or political context in which their works were written. The uniting factor for placing the texts together is therefore not historical accuracy but artificial criteria by which various editors theme their anthologies: 'anthologies reprint material in different settings and according to different principles [...] Texts become dehistoricized, depoliticized, and hence "timeless", immortal, or, in other words, eternally contemporary'.¹⁰ While the 1990s certainly brought a large amount of themed anthologies, two of the largest (and, arguably, the most significant) ones *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* explicitly focused on representing Russian history through poetry. Both anthologies claim to present a truthful account of the history of the twentieth century, to preserve texts which play a crucial role in understanding the nation's past. The editors of *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* state their aims thusly:

We aimed to follow two fundamental criteria – artistic merit and the representative qualities of a text, how representative it was for poetry in general, historical contexts and the legacy of individual authors [...]

But even this is not enough. In Russian poetry of every period works of little artistic merit have been published which nevertheless had immense public or, more often, socio-political resonance. By not including some poems of this kind, we would simply be violating historic and artistic truth.¹¹

The editors of *Strofy veka*, Evgenii Evtushenko and Evgenii Vitkovskii, similarly set the aims for their anthology higher than a simple collection of well-regarded and talented twentieth-century poets. Indeed, *Strofy veka* claims to represent

¹⁰ Benedict, pp. 6-7.

¹¹ Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov, 'K chitateliu', in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek. Antologija*, 2nd ed., ed. by Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), p. 3.

the history of twentieth-century Russia, and not just literary history, but the history of the country and its citizens, depicted by poets: '[the anthology's] main theme presented itself naturally: history through poetry. When it comes to an anthology of Russian poetry, there cannot be any other way. "A poet in Russia is more than a poet"'.¹² Thus both of these major post-Soviet anthologies place great importance on representing the historical reality of the twentieth century. Their proposed aim is not to fix certain names and works in the literary canon, but to preserve and represent the history of the nation. Vitkovskii himself argues that *Strofy veka* is not a representation of the poetic canon (a concise shortlist of the best, most significant poets):

The compilers agreed that [the anthology] should feature not just certain main poets of the twentieth century, but, if possible, ALL talented authors whom we can trace and whose works we can fit inside: Soviet and émigré poets, those who published a hundred volumes in their lifetime and those who failed to publish a single line.¹³

The compilers' intention resulted in *Strofy veka* becoming an unwieldy tome of over a thousand pages, containing poems by 859 different authors. At the same time Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov, the editors of *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, which is not much shorter, intend to present canonical poets (those we should not forget) in their anthology, and acknowledge that this task will lead to the unavoidable exclusion of certain authors:

our publication, without any claims to finality, absoluteness or academic status, is an attempt to present Russian poetry of the twentieth century in its essential comprehensiveness and evolution. Unfortunately, it is impossible to avoid the violence of exclusion, given the type and overall size of this book.¹⁴

Thus despite attempting to represent the Russian poetic canon, the editors are quick to note that their anthology is not meant to be a finalised representation of the canon. This might come as a surprise considering the editors' aims to represent the historical past accurately, however the authors' caution in drawing

¹² Evgenii Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', in *Strofy veka*, ed. by Evgenii Evtushenko and Evgenii Vitkovskii (Moscow: Polifakt, 1997), pp. 7-15 (p. 13). The citation 'поэт в России – больше, чем поэт' was first used by Evgenii Evtushenko in his *poema Bratskaia GES*, 1965. The line has since become an idiom. See Evgenii Evtushenko, *Bratskaia GES*, in *Bratskaia GES: stikhi i poema* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), pp. 69-239 (p. 69).

¹³ Evgenii Vitkovskii, 'Grekh nashi tiazhkie...', in *Strofy veka*, pp.16-18 (p. 16).

¹⁴ Kostrov and Krasnikov, p. 3.

conclusions about twentieth-century poetry becomes validated when we compare the content of the two anthologies. Katharine Hodgson, in her article 'Two Post-Soviet Anthologies of the 1990s and the Russian 20th-Century Poetry Canon', points out that only 407 poets feature in both *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* and *Strofy veka*.¹⁵ Considering there are a total of 859 poets represented in *Strofy veka* and 779 poets in *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, this leaves us with a very large number of poets who have only appeared in one of those anthologies. Additionally, considering that the editors of *Strofy veka* were looking for any talented poets of the twentieth century, and the editors of *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* were attempting to bring together all the significant poets of the past century, we are left with the conclusion that nearly half of those poets whom Kostrov and Krasnikov considered significant, Evtushenko and Vitkovskii did not consider talented enough to merit appearing in *Strofy veka*. It becomes apparent that even such comprehensive anthologies as the two described remain largely subjective. Viacheslav Ogryzko thus reviews *Strofy veka*:

Alas, [Evtushenko] while proclaiming the beautiful mottoes of internationalism and political pluralism [...] has divided the "pure" from the "impure". Instead of a representation of life he ended up with a rigid schematic. Instead of poetry – with bad politics. Instead of Russia – with a country of the destroyers and the destroyed.¹⁶

Evtushenko, like the editors of *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek*, warns the readers of the anthology that, despite the editors' aims and the volume's size, it is ultimately a subjective work: 'you cannot have an objective anthology'.¹⁷ Thus these two major anthologies, setting out to represent the literary history of the twentieth century, present their readers with a noticeably different representation of what this history actually was. Valerii Shubinskii also noticed this trend and warned the readers against adopting any one anthology as a representation of the past: 'the contemporary professional reader (particularly reader of poetry) has to be curious and distrustful. He cannot be content with a

¹⁵ Katharine Hodgson, 'Two Post-Soviet Anthologies of the 1990s and the Russian 20th-Century Poetry Canon', in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 90, 4 (2012), pp. 642-70 (p. 658).

¹⁶ Viacheslav Ogryzko, 'Svoi pri vsekh rezhimakh', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 11, 18 March 2005 <<http://old.litrossia.ru/archive/139/person/3402.php>> [accessed: 13 December 2015].

¹⁷ Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 7.

“common past”, because it is common only inside a particular circle or group’.¹⁸ When Benedict discussed how anthologies de-historicize texts, she was analysing English anthologies from the Restoration to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The subject matter of these texts is therefore removed in time from contemporary readers, and the texts themselves became fixed in the canon through repetition. The topic of twentieth-century Russian poetry and history, on the contrary, is personal for anthology compilers as well as many readers. It is perhaps therefore natural that there is less agreement about it. Shubinskii argues that while the past continues to influence the present, the present will continue to attempt to alter the past: ‘it [the past] continues to be influenced by the present, while it itself influences the present [...] The past stops changing when its revision is no longer needed’.¹⁹ If we focus on the question of literary canonicity as one aspect of history we will indeed see that there is little cohesion. *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poeziia: XX vek* are a good example of this phenomenon.

Regardless of the compilers’ aims, the dramatic resurgence of previously forgotten authors and discovery of new ones which marked the 1990s posed the same difficulty for anthologies as for school textbooks. As the size of an anthology remains a constraining factor editors have to choose which previously under-represented poets to acquaint the reader with and at what expense. And, considering the importance of anthologies as summaries of the past, the choice the compilers make, regardless of their stated subjectivity, plays a role in post-Soviet Russian canon formation.

When it comes to the universally acknowledged canonical authors (like Vladimir Maiakovskii) it is not a question of whether his texts are included in an anthology, but of how the editors choose to represent the poet and which particular works they select. After all, one of the ways of including more poets in an anthology is by reducing the amount of pages devoted to the widely recognised authors, which, in turn, leads to changes in the way these authors are represented. *Strofy veka* is a good example of this strategy. Evtushenko writes in the preface to his anthology: ‘some experts might shrug in puzzlement

¹⁸ Valerii Shubinskii, ‘Nashe neobshchee vchera’, in *Znamia*, 9 (2003), pp. 192-201 (p. 201).

¹⁹ Shubinskii, p. 192.

when they see that there are more lines by Voloshin than by Blok in this anthology. But everybody knows that Blok is a great poet, whereas Voloshin as a great poet of the civil war has just entered our consciousness'.²⁰

Alastair Fowler categorises literary canon by its accessibility. Thus he speaks of the potential canon, or the whole corpus of texts written and passed down the generations. Out of this potential canon, the accessible canon is formed. The accessible canon is comprised of texts and authors which the general reader has access to through publication. Fowler speaks of a number of additional categories, out of which most notable for this work is the official canon: '[texts and authors] institutionalized through education, patronage and journalism'.²¹ Using Fowler's terminology we can say that anthologies have the potential to increase the accessible canon, without impacting on the official canon. Benedict in her work *Making the Modern Reader* suggests that anthologies are 'a haven for fugitive verse' and argues that it is precisely in literary anthologies that authors who are less known to wider public find their place and are represented.²² Indeed, it is this desire to include more names into the accessible canon that has led anthologies' compilers to struggle with the choice of which authors and texts to select. Alan Golding speaks of this challenge in his work *From Outlaw to Classic*. He argues that anthologies' editors are faced with conflicting principles of selection. According to Golding, compilers attempt to broaden the accessible canon by including more names and inviting critical evaluation of these authors. However, the compilers themselves choose which works to include into the anthology, therefore deciding what names to exclude from the accessible canon.²³ While anthologies often aim to revise the accessible canon, they also largely preserve the official canon, or authors likely already known to the public. However, with space being limited compilers often have to choose what aspects of a major poet's work and life to focus on.

²⁰ Evgenii Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 7.

²¹ Alastair Fowler, 'Genre and the Literary Canon', *New Literary History*, 11, 1 (1979), pp. 97-119 (pp. 97-100).

²² Benedict, p. 211.

²³ Golding, pp. 4-8.

Anthologies, Hierarchy and Popularity

Mujica in her article 'Teaching Literature: Canon, Controversy, and the Literary Anthology', argues that anthologies, due to their format, convey the notion of hierarchy (Mujica, p. 203). Authors are represented to a greater or lesser extent based on their position within the literary canon. Such an argument is particularly appropriate when we look at the Soviet canon with its strict notion of hierarchy and exemplary writers which other authors were invited to emulate. The choice of exemplary figures stemmed largely from the political needs of the time.²⁴ Throughout the majority of Soviet Russia's history Maiakovskii, due to Stalin's proclamation, enjoyed a prestigious position as the best most talented poet of the era.²⁵ An analysis of anthologies from the Soviet period allows us to see that a few of them clearly place Maiakovskii's name higher in the poetic hierarchy than other poets. This is what Nikolai Bannikov, the editor of *Tri veka russkoi poezii*, wrote about Maiakovskii's legacy in 1968: 'since the time of Pushkin this has been the most major, fundamentally new step in the development of Russian poetry'.²⁶ Similarly, in 1974, in a miscellany dedicated to early twentieth-century satire Maiakovskii's achievements are praised above those of other poets: 'one poet achieved the most complete wholeness and philosophical depth in portraying the conflict between man and society, and was destined to become the herald of the collapse of the old world and the creation of the new one. This poet was Maiakovskii'.²⁷ Maiakovskii continued to enjoy his high position within the hierarchy of the Russian literary canon until the late 1980s, when *perestroika* and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union necessitated a revision of the literary canon and the strict hierarchy it imposed.

However, Mujica also notes an anti-hierarchical trend of the late twentieth century and a shift in the perception of the role of anthologies. She attributed it to the ideas of postmodernism: 'postmodernism, with its emphasis on subjectivity, diversity, and decentralization of power, is at odds with the very

²⁴ See, for example Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, *passim*.

²⁵ See Introduction, footnote 5.

²⁶ Nikolai Bannikov, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii', in *Tri veka russkoi poezii*, ed. by Nikolai Bannikov (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1968), pp. 494-95 (p. 494).

²⁷ Isaak Eventov, 'Satiricheskaia poeziia predoktiabr'skikh let', in *Stikhotvornaia satira 1908 – 1917-kh godov*, ed. by Fedor Priima and others (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), pp. 5-54, (p. 36).

principle of anthologies, which propose a hierarchical classification of literature as determined by an intellectual elite' (Mujica, p. 208). I have already discussed how post-Soviet anthologies strove to move away from the notions of hierarchy and present poets who the public would have had little chance to discover otherwise. While this may partly be due to postmodernist tendencies in art we should also consider the unique situation in Russia at that time. The number of published writers had increased dramatically, while many of the Soviet literary idols were dethroned. There was a need for an overhaul of the Soviet literary canon, but no clear sense of direction, resulting in a reduction of the importance of the notion of hierarchy within any particular anthology, and within the literary canon in general.

However, despite the apparent drive towards a less hierarchical structure, the notion that anthologies represent the literary canon is as strong as ever. Even *Strofy veka*, in which the compilers claim to focus on the representation of less well-known poets, falls back on the ideas of canonicity and the related notion of hierarchy. In his preface Evtushenko admits that Gumilev, Maiakovskii, Mandel'shtam, Tsvetaeva and Pasternak were the main heroes of his anthology.²⁸ As he elevated these names above other poets Evtushenko reveals how he created the levels of his hierarchy: he explains that for him the key factor for selecting works for the anthology was the level of complexity in the poet's personal life in relation to state politics. Thus Maiakovskii is not just a poet – he is a poet who shot himself, Gumilev is a poet who was executed, Mandel'shtam is a poet who perished in the labour camps and Tsvetaeva is a poet who hanged herself. In *Strofy veka* Evtushenko sets out to portray the history of the twentieth-century Russia through poetry, however this history is seen only through the prism of hardship and pain. Evtushenko writes: “we are not doctors – we are the pain” said Gertsen once on the role of Russian writers. The main principle for selection in this anthology is the degrees of pain'.²⁹ Evtushenko's focus on suffering as a key element of a poet's life resonates with

²⁸ Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 13.

²⁹ Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 13. See Parthé, Kathleen, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

Parthé's observations on Russian literature and culture.³⁰ Thus Evtushenko replaces the Soviet hierarchy largely based on Party loyalty with a hierarchy of the victims of the Soviet state.

Not only does Evtushenko present his own version of the hierarchy of Russian poets, he suggests that the notions of hierarchy are embedded in the minds of poets themselves: 'we, poets, are painfully arrogant, intolerant, proudly underestimating each other and overestimating ourselves'.³¹ Indeed, Maiakovskii himself paid close attention to the notions of literary hierarchy and, understandably, his own place within it. In 1918 he took part in a poetry reading evening, where poets were judged by the audience and the winner was crowned 'King of poets'. It was not until after he came second (losing to Igor' Severianin), that the Futurist group he was part of presented a public speech arguing against the notion of hierarchy.³² Several years later in 1922 he organised a series of public presentations 'Chistka sovremennoi poezii', where he proposed a three-fold basis for constructing a Soviet hierarchy of poets: the authors' mastery of poetic language, the relevance of their work to the current political climate of the country and their dedication to their mission as poets representing real life.³³ According to the memoirs of Aleksei Kruchenykh, during these presentations Maiakovskii criticised such poets as Anna Akhmatova, Vladislav Khodasevich, Vadim Shershenevich and Fedor Sologub, who did not fit into the proposed hierarchical structure.³⁴ Nikolai Aseev, who was stylistically and ideologically close to Maiakovskii, as well as his personal friend, was the only poet who received a positive review during the first presentation.³⁵ Despite the fact that Maiakovskii did not explicitly promote himself as a poet during these presentations, it is not hard to see that, if we apply the proposed hierarchy to his own work, he would also hold a very high rank.

³⁰ Parthé, Kathleen, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

³¹ Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 11.

³² Sergei Spasskii, quoted by Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 142.

³³ Dmitrii Furmanov, quoted by Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 223. The term 'chistka' (often translated into English as 'purge') carried a political connotation and was used to describe processes designed to test whether members of an organisation meet the necessary ideological and professional requirements.

³⁴ Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Nash vykhod* (1932), quoted by Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 548.

³⁵ Dmitrii Furmanov, quoted by Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti*, p. 223.

Like Evtushenko (and the compilers of other anthologies), Maiakovskii, despite the public nature of his presentations, is subjective about which poets should be rated highly and which deserve less attention. Indeed, Evtushenko argued that poets are never objective, and neither, for that matter, are anthologies' compilers.³⁶ This, however, goes against the perceived role of a literary anthology – to present an overview of authors worthy of recognition. Dmitrii Sukharev, author of the *Avtorskaia Pesnia* anthology, argues that although many editors of anthologies state that their choice is largely subjective, what the public needs in anthologies is objectivity.³⁷ Indeed, anthologies have the potential to be one of the most visual representations of the literary canon: the more important poets deserve more space and larger selection of works included, while the less important ones are represented by a smaller selection of poems (usually one). A scientist by profession, Sukharev believes that it is possible to be objective when creating a literary anthology: 'Is compilers' subjectivity unavoidable? There is a method, commonly applied in other areas of human practices, of expert ranking, I mean "quantitative or ranking marks of processes or phenomena which are impossible to measure directly, based on specialists' assessments"'.³⁸ Sukharev considers that only poets themselves can be experts in poetry, therefore in preparation for his own poetic anthology he questioned 158 contemporary Russian poets about their favourite works.³⁹ Sukharev's scientifically objective anthology as yet remains unpublished, however he has released the results of his findings on the Internet.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Evtushenko argues that it is impossible to use poets' opinions of other poets as an objective indicator of a poem's worth, as those questioned tend to use parallels between their work and the art that supposedly inspired them to downplay the importance of the work of their literary rivals.⁴¹ While it is open for debate whether poets are, in fact, the right group to decide what the public needs to read, Sukharev's work stands out as the only one where

³⁶ See Chapter 4, footnote 12 and 26.

³⁷ Dmitrii Sukharev, 'Ekspertiza. Opyt Sostavleniia Poeticheskoi Antologii', *Ierusalimskii zhurnal*, 35 (2010) <<http://www.antho.net/jr/35/sukharev.html>> [accessed: 15 December 2015].

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sukharev quotes definition of the method of expert ranking from *Glossary.ru* <http://www.glossary.ru/cgi-bin/gl_sch2.cgi?Rdqxvlywt:!u.ltgo> [accessed: 15 December 2015].

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Dmitrii Sukharev, 'Dopolnitel'nye materialy, ne voshedsie v zhurnal'nuiu versiiu "Ekspertizy"' <<http://sukharev.lib.ru/Anthology.htm>> [accessed: 15 December 2015].

⁴¹ Evgenii Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 12.

material is contributed by a large number of people, as opposed to a small group of compilers.

Interestingly Sukharev mentions that originally he had no plan to create a hierarchy of authors – the anthology was supposed to represent particular works, which were named by contemporary poets as the ones which came to mind first. However, in the process of compiling the data Sukharev realised that many experts named different works by the same author, therefore while the works themselves do not necessarily score well individually, their authors are well known and loved. It would appear that the need for hierarchies does not stem necessarily from editors or even poets themselves, but is simply a necessary way of representing popular ideas adequately. Maiakovskii, in Sukharev's hierarchy of poets popular among other poets, holds the eleventh place in the list of 254 twentieth-century poets. In total thirty-nine contemporary poets referred to forty-three different works by Maiakovskii. The leader of the list is Osip Mandel'shtam: he was named by 107 poets and a total of 169 of his poems were mentioned. The ten other top poets were: Aleksandr Blok, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Iosif Brodskii, Marina Tsvetaeva, Vladislav Khodasevich, Nikolai Zabolotskii, Sergei Esenin and Nikolai Gumilev. The three most frequently named works by Maiakovskii were *Oblako v shtanakh* (named nine times), 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadim' (named seven times) and *Fleita-pozvonochnik* (named five times). In comparison the most frequently mentioned work turned out to be 'Pered zerkalom' by Khodasevich (named twenty-two times).⁴²

The Representation of Vladimir Maiakovskii in Anthologies

Anthologies have the potential to shape the canon and promote hierarchical structures, however the task of analysing how a poet is represented in any particular anthology brings certain unique challenges. Unlike textbooks and study guides anthologies provide little to no information about poets' biographies and literary careers, therefore readers are left to create an image of the poet based only on the selection of works which have made it into the

⁴² Sukharev, 'Dopolnitel'nye materialy, ne voshedsie v zhurnal'nuiu versiiu "Ekspertizy"'.

anthology. This has the potential to create dramatically differing representations of Maiakovskii. After all, if all we read by Maiakovskii are his love lyrics like 'Lilichka!', 'Pis'mo Tat'iane Iakovlevoi' and *Pro eto* we will form a very different image of the poet than if we read his civic poetry like 'Levyi marsh', 'Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte' and *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, and none of those images have much in common with the image of the poet who wrote 'Noch', 'Ulitsa' and *Vladimir Maiakovskii*. In the following analysis I will therefore focus on which poems the compilers choose to include in their anthology, whether these poems were written before or after the 1917 Revolutions, and whether they have a common theme or indeed, whether the editors attempt to present a set of poems which show several sides of Maiakovskii's art. At the same time, anthologies also serve as an easy tool for confirming where a poet stands within the hierarchy of the literary canon. We can easily see how much space is devoted to Maiakovskii and indeed how many of his poems are included and, most importantly, how an anthology's treatment of Maiakovskii compares with other poets.

I will start my analysis by looking at anthologies published during the Soviet period to establish how the poet was represented at the time when he was considered to be at the very top of the literary canon hierarchy. I will then move on to post-Soviet anthologies. I will be examining whether the representation of the poet changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I will analyse Maiakovskii's overall position in the hierarchical structure of anthologies. In particular I am interested in the types of texts post-Soviet anthologies' compilers use to represent the poet.

In 1957, marking forty years since the 1917 October Revolution, Luka Belov, Evgenii Vinokurov, Aleksandr Kovalenkov and N. Zamotin compiled a two-volume anthology to commemorate the achievements of Soviet poetry. The compilers state that when it comes to representing poets who started their career prior to the Revolution, they chose to only include poems written after 1917, although there are several exceptions: Maksim Gor'kii is one such exception (two out of the three works by Gor'kii presented in the anthology were

first published before the Revolution). Another exception is Aleksandr Blok.⁴³ Maiakovskii, who is represented with fourteen different texts, including fragments from two *poemy*, is no such exception. All of the poems presented in the 1957 anthology were written between 1918 and 1929. However, apart from this omission (which is partially due to the nature of the anthology) Maiakovskii is presented fairly comprehensively. The anthology mainly features his revolutionary poems: 'Oda revoliutsii', 'Levyi marsh', and his civic poetry *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin*, 'Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte'. However, compilers have also included a satirical poem 'Prozasedavshiesia', a poem about Maiakovskii's trip to America 'Blek end uait', and a fragment of *Pro eto* (one of the major themes in this *poema* is love). Thus while potential readers of this anthology will have no doubts about Maiakovskii's dedication to the Revolution and the Soviet state, they also have a chance of familiarising themselves with different aspects of Maiakovskii's art. Most importantly, the anthology clearly elevates Maiakovskii's role in Soviet poetry above other poets. While even such well-regarded names as Gor'kii and Blok are only presented with a few works: three in case of Gor'kii and four in case of Blok, fourteen works by Maiakovskii, spanning over fifty pages, have made it into the anthology.

In 1966 Vladimir Ognev edited *Vo ves' golos*, an anthology designed for foreign students learning the Russian language. It included fifty-two Russian poets, however Ognev particularly singles out Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Esenin, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Anna Akhmatova as the great poets of the early Soviet era.⁴⁴ Maiakovskii's status is further elevated by the fact that the anthology is named after his poem 'Vo ves' golos'. In a biographical paragraph dedicated to the poet, Ognev summarises the image of Maiakovskii as 'a rebel, a herald of the Revolution'.⁴⁵ In the anthology he is represented by eight works which span over twenty-eight pages (more than twice the number of pages devoted to any other poet). These works are: fragments from *Oblako v shtanakh* (1915) and 'Vo ves' golos' (1929), poems 'Poslushaite!' (1914), 'Lilichka' (1916), 'Iubileinoe'

⁴³ Luka Belov and others, 'Ot sostavitelei', in *Antologija russkoi sovetskoi poezii*, 2 vols, ed. by Luka Belov and others (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957), i, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Ognev, 'Foreword', in *Vo ves' golos: Soviet Poetry*, ed. by Vladimir Ognev (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), pp. 5-8 (p. 6).

⁴⁵ Vladimir Ognev, 'Vladimir Mayakovsky', in *Vo ves' golos: Soviet Poetry*, p. 373.

(1924), 'Blek end uait' (1925), 'Tovarishchu Nette' (1926), and 'Stikhi o raznitse vkusov' (1928). Thus even though Ognev presented a very simple image of Maiakovskii in his biographical abstract, the works he included give a fuller picture of the poet, as we have an example of his early writings, an example of his love poetry, an example of his children's writing, and one of the more widely known works from the period when he was an established writer (the mid-1920s). What we lack, unsurprisingly, is any notion of the poet being dissatisfied with the Soviet state. The fragment of 'Vo ves' golos' features only the middle of the poem and does not have the lines:

Но я
 себя
 смирят,
 становясь
 на горло
 собственной песне'.⁴⁶

The Revolutions of 1917 and the early years of the Soviet state were an incredibly turbulent and violent time, however despite representing Maiakovskii as rebel and a herald of these times, Ognev presents us with a very civil Maiakovskii, as the anthology does not include any of the more aggressive poems and none of the violent or overly explicit images which occur throughout Maiakovskii's works.

In 1979 Aleksei Sokolov published the poetic anthology, *Russkaia poeziia kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka*, which, interestingly, focused exclusively on pre-revolutionary poems. In the introductory article Aleksei Sokolov and Valentin Fatiushchenko present an account of literary movements and poetic discoveries during this period of Russian cultural history, which is commonly characterised by conflict and disorder. The largest focus of the article is, predictably, on the development of proletarian art, thus Maksim Gor'kii and Dem'ian Bednyi are both discussed at length. Futurism, similarly predictably, is presented in a largely negative light as a movement which rejected all previous cultural achievements. Maiakovskii's role in the Russian Futurist movement is described as minimal: the authors mention that the first time Maiakovskii published his

⁴⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Vo ves' golos', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, x, pp. 280-81. ('But I have tamed myself, stepping on the throat of my own song').

works was in the Futurist manifesto *Poshchetchina obshchestvennomu vkusu*, and that for a short period of time he had been part of a Futurist group. However, no achievements of the Futurist movement are attributed to Maiakovskii, and the single major Futurist poet is, according to Sokolov and Fatiushchenko, Velimir Khlebnikov, who is presented as the face and soul of Russian Futurism.⁴⁷ Not only is Maiakovskii's role in the development of Russian Futurism unrepresented, the authors remove Maiakovskii further from the movement by tracing his inspiration as a poet to Valerii Briusov and Aleksandr Blok. Furthermore, the authors claim that while Maiakovskii's poetic sense was established before the Revolution, his talent did not blossom fully until the 1920s.⁴⁸ Sokolov's anthology includes almost all of Maiakovskii's pre-revolutionary works, excluding only a few satirical 'hymns' and, more notably, his important early love lyrics: 'Lilichka' and *Fleita-pozvonochnik*. The list of Maiakovskii's works (and symbolically the anthology itself) finishes with his poem 'Revoliutsiia'. This presents us with the image of Maiakovskii who, together with the time, went through a period of becoming aware of, and then attacking the social injustices of the period. He then took an active part in the 1917 Revolution, which would ultimately result in the improvement of his art.

Just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1990, Ognev edited another literary anthology, *Russkaia sovetskaia poeziia*, this time focused on the Russian audience. In his foreword, as Ognev presents an overview of the Soviet literary period and its most notable representatives. Maiakovskii maintains a prime place in the hierarchy of the literary canon: 'the most complete, the perfect embodiment of [...] the unity of individual "I" of the artist and the idea of the century is the figure of Vladimir Maiakovskii. [...] A great innovator of poetry, he was, first of all, an innovator of life'.⁴⁹ Like Ognev's 1966 anthology Maiakovskii is again represented with eight works, however the selection is notably different. No *poemy* are included and the poems selected

⁴⁷ Aleksei Sokolov and Valentin Fatiushchenko, 'Russkaia poeziia kontsa XIX - nachala XX veka', in *Russkaia poeziia kontsa XIX - nachala XX veka: dooktiabr'skii period*, ed. by Aleksei Sokolov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1979), pp. 7-31, (p. 27).

⁴⁸ Sokolov and Fatiushchenko, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Vladimir Ognev, 'Neskol'ko slov o russkoi poezii sovetskogo perioda', *Russkaia sovetskaia poeziia*, ed. by Vladimir Ognev and Viktor Fogel'son (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1990), pp. 3-16 (p. 4).

are: 'Poslushaite' (1914) (also featured in *Vo ves' golos* anthology), 'Deshevaia rasprodazha' (1916), 'K otvetu' (1917), 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadiam' (1918), 'Prozasedavshiesia' (1922), 'Sergeiu Eseninu' (1926), 'Nashemu iunoshestvu' (1927), and most notably Maiakovskii's late love lyric 'Pis'mo tovarishchu Kostrovu' (1928). This selection may be indicative of the shift which was starting to take place in the perception of the image of Maiakovskii, from the herald of the Revolution to a more sensitive Maiakovskii, who, just like ordinary people, fell in love and suffered misunderstandings.

Notably, despite praising the post-1917 works of Maiakovskii and removing the poet from the undesirable context of the Futurist movement, many Soviet anthologies did, in fact, include a fair selection of the early works by the poet. One of the two most reprinted works in the Soviet anthologies I have looked at is 'Poslushaite!' written in 1914, and while the other one, 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadiam', is written after 1917, it is not a poem which highlights Maiakovskii's role as a herald of the Revolution and builder of a new society. Overall, I have found that the compilers of Soviet anthologies provided a fairly comprehensive overview of Maiakovskii's legacy. The only aspect of his art which was left under-represented were his love lyrics. Thus, it would appear that despite the fact that Maiakovskii's position and image in the Soviet literary hierarchy was established as the exemplary Soviet poet and one of the founders of Socialist Realism, the compilers of anthologies did not necessarily reinforce this image through their selection of his poems.

If anthologies (both comprehensive volumes and more specialised topical editions) were quite common during the Soviet period, then in the post-Soviet era, following the drastic increase in the number of published authors, anthologies boomed. Leonid Kostiuikov, in his article 'Eshche dve antologii' writes: 'at the end of the twentieth century Russian poetry lived through a real cultural shock, as everything which was created in the last hundred years had finally come together out of fragments and presented itself simultaneously'.⁵⁰ Previously unpublished works, previously forgotten poets, Russian émigré poetry were all being (re)discovered. Literary scholars and publishers were

⁵⁰ Kostiuikov, <<http://www.arion.ru/mcontent.php?year=2004&number=85&idx=1378>>.

facing a tough challenge – how was it possible to create a full and complete picture, when so much was on offer. Hodgson notes that ‘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 than measured reflection on the changing canon’.⁵¹ However, as I have already mentioned, the majority of these disturbances to the literary canon happened without much damage to the status of Maiakovskii. Instead of being considered the greatest poet of the twentieth century, he, in a move away from strict hierarchical structures, is now depicted as one among several great poets of the century, and no anthology presenting an overview of Russian literary past fails to include his works. However, with the changes in the representation of Maiakovskii that was brought about in the early 1990s, I am interested in whether anthologies have adapted to those changes, and if so, what version of the representation of the poet the compilers favour, and whether their selection of Maiakovskii’s poems reflects the description of the poet in the introductory article (if there is one).

The first publication I am going to discuss is a ‘returned’ anthology, *Russkaia poeziia XX veka: antologija russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, published by Amirus in 1991. This is a reprint of the 1925 anthology by Ivan Ezhov and Evgenii Shamurin. The editors, I. Vinokurov and T. Dmitriev, who wrote a foreword for this reprint, state: ‘while we far-sightedly look into the past we are moving forwards’.⁵² They justify the reprint by saying that the suppressed work of Ezhov and Shamurin has become undeservedly forgotten, together with many of the authors represented in it. The anthology, despite its rather narrow time margins, comprises the works of no less than 128 authors. Maiakovskii is represented with twenty-four poems, the latest being ‘Prozasedavshiesia’ (1922). The amount of space dedicated to Maiakovskii is comparable with that of other poets, for example the anthology includes thirty-two poems by Fedor Sologub. Vinokurov and Dmitriev reprinted the original foreword, ‘Sotsial’nye

⁵¹ Hodgson, p. 643.

⁵² I. Vinokurov and T. Dmitriev, ‘Rasshiriaiushchiasia vselelnaia’, in *Russkaia poeziia XX veka: antologija russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, ed. by Ivan Ezhov and Evgenii Shamurin (Moscow: Amirus, 1991), pp. 3-5 (p. 3).

korni russkoi poezii ot simvolistov do nashikh dnei', written by Valer'ian Polianskii, as well as biographical abstracts of the poets, written by Ezhov and Shamurin. The short biographical abstract is heavily based on the poet's autobiography *la sam*, first published in 1922. We are presented largely with factual data. The only traits of Maiakovskii's the reader is able to discover are that he greatly valued David Burluk, and considered him to be his greatest teacher who made him into a poet, and that Maiakovskii welcomed the Revolution.⁵³ The article by Polianskii is more noteworthy. Writing in the mid-1920s, Polianskii does not make any attempt to remove Maiakovskii from the Futurist movement, and openly states that he was at the forefront of the development of Russian Futurism, a movement which had little in common with the ideas of the proletariat.⁵⁴ When discussing Maiakovskii, Polianskii chose to quote Lev Trotskii's controversial opinion of the poet: 'Maiakovskii's revolutionary individualism enthusiastically joined the proletarian Revolution, but it did not become one with it. Maiakovskii's perception of the city, nature, the whole world is in its unconscious source not proletarian, but bohemian'.⁵⁵ No doubt, this decision did not add longevity to the original anthology.

The rather large selection of Maiakovskii's poems included in the anthology supports what is said in Ezhov and Shamurin's biographical abstracts as well as Polianskii's representation of the poet. The reader gets a fair selection of Maiakovskii's early Futurist poems, as well as his revolutionary propaganda poems. Maiakovskii's anti-proletarian individualism is highlighted by inclusion of such poems as 'Rossii', 'Nate!' and 'Sebe, liubimomu, posviashchaet eti stroki avtor', which feature lines:

Я
 если всей его мощью
 выреву голос огромный –
 кометы заломят горящие руки,

⁵³ Ivan Ezhov and Evgenii Shamurin, 'Maiakovskii V.', in *Russkaia poeziia XX veka: antologija russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, pp. 578-79, *passim*

⁵⁴ Valer'ian Polianskii, 'Sotsial'nye korni russkoi poezii ot simvolistov do nashikh dnei', in *Russkaia poeziia XX veka: antologija russkoi liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, pp. ix-xvii (pp. xii-xiii).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

бросятся вниз с тоски.⁵⁶

Notably, even in this anthology, produced before the Soviet canonisation of Maiakovskii, the poet's love lyrics are missing, as is any mention of Lili and Osip Brik and their part in Maiakovskii's career as a published poet. Despite this, the anthology offers a dramatic contrast to later Soviet publications and presents an altogether different image of the poet, who the readers see not as an idol to be emulated, but rather as one of the several major living and commonly published authors.

In 1997 Evgenii Evtushenko published *Strofy veka*, an anthology over a thousand pages long, designed to represent the history of twentieth-century Russia through poetry. I have already discussed the aims of Evtushenko and his approach to the selection process. In the following section I would like to focus on how Evtushenko chose to represent one of his proclaimed heroes, Maiakovskii.⁵⁷ In the introduction to *Strofy veka* Evtushenko writes: 'political herostratism towards Maiakovskii in the recent years has led me to the idea of representing him as a great love lyricist, who cannot be devalued by any kind of cataclysms'.⁵⁸ True to his intention, in the biographical abstract dedicated to Maiakovskii, Evtushenko focuses on the tragedy of the poet wasting his talent as a love lyricist on civic poetry and propaganda. Despite this, Maiakovskii, according to Evtushenko, will remain a canonical poet:

All attempts to throw Maiakovskii off "the steamship of modernity", which began as early as the 20s, have failed. Those who mock and assault the great poet are dwarfed by comparison to him. Even if all of his political poems die he will remain a timeless author of love poems.⁵⁹

Sharing the anthology with the poems of over 850 other poets, the fourteen works representing Maiakovskii take up twelve pages. Unlike many anthologists

⁵⁶ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Sebe, liubimomu, posviashchaet eti stroki avtor', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, i, pp. 126-27 (p. 127). ('If I roar in all its might my huge voice, the comets will wring their flaming hands and plunge down in anguish').

⁵⁷ See Chapter 4, footnote 27.

⁵⁸ Evtushenko, 'Ot sostavitelia', p. 7. The term 'herostratis' derives from the Greek arsonist, Herostratus, who sought fame by destroying one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; it refers to aggressive and destructive behaviour for the sake of public renown.

⁵⁹ Evgenii Evtushenko, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii', in *Strofy veka*, p. 243. The quotation 'steamship of modernity' is from the futurist manifesto *Poshchecina obshchestvennomu vkusu*; see Chapter 1, footnote 18.

Evtushenko chose to include a full *poema Fleita-pozvonochnik* (an example of Maiakovskii's love lyrics), as well as fragments from three other *poemy* and Maiakovskii's unfinished works. Note that although this and other anthologies include several unfinished fragments, I have chosen to count those as one work for the purposes of analysing the number of poems included. Ten out of fourteen of the works presented are examples of pre-1917 poetry. The four examples of Maiakovskii's writing of the Soviet period are: 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadim', 'Vo ves' golos', as well as fragments from the *poema Pro eto* (another example of his love lyrics) and Maiakovskii's unfinished works. None of these four texts are examples of typical Maiakovskii's civic poetry or revolutionary propaganda. Many of the works included focus on sharing intense emotional pain and loneliness. Consider, for example, lines from Maiakovskii's poem 'Nadoelo', one of the works included in *Strofy veka*:

Нет людей.
Понимаете
крик тысячедневных мук?
Душа не хочет немая идти,
а сказать кому?⁶⁰

Thus both the commentary by Evtushenko and the selection of works included help create an image of Maiakovskii as a tragic figure, misunderstood in love as well as in life. This image of Maiakovskii as a martyr is further enhanced by (or perhaps is a result of) Evtushenko's view of twentieth-century Russian poetry as the poetry of pain.

Russkaia poeziia: XX vek, first published in 1999, like *Strofy veka*, sets out to represent every twentieth-century poet worth remembering. Unlike *Strofy veka*, this anthology includes only minimal biographical details, which in themselves do not help readers form an image of a poet. However, the anthology does suggest a representation of the poet in an article about the relevant historical period by Vladimir Smirnov:

It is commonplace now to contrast the early Maiakovskii with the Maiakovskii of the Soviet period. And not in favour of the latter.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Nadoelo', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 112-14 (p. 113). ('There are no people. Can you understand the scream of thousand days of torments? My soul doesn't want to walk mute, but who is there to talk to?').

Russkaia poeziia: XX vek also includes several of Maiakovskii's post-1917 poems, which do not set out to propagate Soviet values: 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadiam', 'Razgovor na odesskom reide desantnykh sudov: "Sovetskii Dagestan" i "Krasnaia Abkhaziia"'. Thus, the editors Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov reinforce the image of Maiakovskii presented in Smirnov's article: while the majority of the poems are selected for their artistic merit and present Maiakovskii as a great poet and an innovator of poetic language, it can be argued that some are selected to present the naivety of Sovietness. This argument is further supported by the fact that Kostrov and Krasnikov admit that some texts are included in their anthology not on the basis of their artistic merit, but because they resonate with a certain historic period.

The last anthology I would like to focus on is the less widely known *Poeziia serebriianogo veka*, edited by Boris Akimov, published in Moscow in 2005. Silver Age poetry is one of the most popular topics for post-Soviet anthologies and miscellanies. This one caught my eye, as it has 'Poslushajte!', a title of one of Maiakovskii's more well-known poems, as the volume's heading. Silver Age poetry is commonly seen in opposition to the official Soviet literary movement of Socialist Realism, therefore the fact that the title of Maiakovskii's poem provides the publication with its title is notable and depicts the trend to dissociate Maiakovskii from official Soviet literature and reinstall him as a Silver Age poet. Amongst the fifty-three poets included in the anthology Maiakovskii is presented with a comparable nine poems. This number of works may seem small in comparison to the selection of works by other major poets: for example, the anthology includes twenty-one poems by Anna Akhmatova. However, if we look at the amount of space dedicated to the two authors, we will find that they are almost identical: there are twelve pages dedicated to works by Akhmatova and eleven to works by Maiakovskii. Such a division of space in this anthology is indicative of the post-Soviet idea of moving away from notions of hierarchy. Indeed, Akimov states in his foreword: 'The Silver Age cannot be defined by any one name, even a very great one; its poetics cannot be reduced to the work of one, two or even several remarkable masters of the word'.⁶⁴ Similarly to the

⁶⁴ Boris Akimov, 'Kakaia muzyka byla, kakaia muzyka zvuchala!..', in *Poeziia serebriianogo veka*, ed. by Boris Akimov (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Radionova, 2005), pp. 5-14 (p. 5).

compilers of *Strofy veka* Akimov sees the poetry of the Silver Age through the prism of tragedy and hardship: 'the biographies of almost all of the artists of this poetic miracle [the Silver Age] are steeped in tragedy. The time that destiny has given them turned out to be fatal'.⁶⁵ While describing the atrocities of the Revolution and the early years of the Soviet state, Akimov does not focus on describing individual authors. The only information about Maiakovskii that readers can find in the foreword is that the Soviet state destroyed his talent: 'an unenviable fate awaited poets, who decided to work together with the new government: for Maiakovskii [...] it spelled the loss of poetic individuality'.⁶⁶ Out of the nine poems included in the anthology only two were written after the 1917 Revolution: 'Nash marsh' (1918) and 'Melkaia filosofia na glubokikh mestakh' (1925). As in *Strofy veka* neither of these poems represent Maiakovskii's typical civic writings of the period. The anthology includes only one example of Maiakovskii's love lyrics: the poem 'Lilichka'. Instead Akimov chooses to focus on poems which are mostly associated with the Futurist movement: 'A vy mogli by?', 'Sebe, liubimomu, posviashchaet eti stroki avtor', 'Iz ulitsy v ulitsu', 'Koe chto po povodu dirizhera'.

Across all the anthologies I have analysed, Maiakovskii's pre-revolutionary poetry is featured more often, by a considerable margin, than works from any other period of his life. Those anthologies that do include Maiakovskii's post-1917 poems tend to either include atypical examples of Maiakovskii's post-revolutionary writings ('Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadim', 'Vo ves' golos', 'Neobychainoe prikluchenie byvshee s Vladimirom Maiakovskim letom na dache') or his revolutionary poems ('Levyi marsh', 'Oda revoliutsii', 'Prikaz po armii iskusstva'). The poem that is by far the most frequently included in post-Soviet anthologies is 'A vy mogli by?', followed by 'Poslushaite!'. The most popular revolutionary poem to be included is 'Nash marsh'. This poem, written in 1917, is a call for action, for new life, however its form is in line with the ideas of Futurism, which makes it more similar to Maiakovskii's earlier writings than the works he produced later in life:

Дней бык пер.

⁶⁵ Akimov, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Akimov, p. 14.

Медленна лет арба.
Наш бог бег.
Сердце наш барабан.⁶⁷

Therefore while Soviet representation of Maiakovskii removed his links with Futurism, compilers of post-Soviet anthologies are certainly aiming to restore and emphasize them.

I have discussed the potential for anthologies to shape the literary canon. However, the several post-Soviet anthologies aim at more than just shaping the canon – at the turn of the century their compilers attempted to present the literary history of the past hundred years. The task proved to be challenging as *perestroika* made it possible for works by scores of previously unknown and unrepresented poets to be published. The number of new names have largely outstretched the possibilities of any one anthology and even such weighty volumes as *Strofy veka* and *Russkaia poezii: XX vek* remain largely subjective – as almost half of the poets included in one do not feature in the other.

Another common trait in post-Soviet anthologies is a move away from the hierarchical nature of literary canons. Often compilers make a conscious choice to present less widely-known poets more comprehensively than the established poets, of whom the audience would have better prior knowledge. The subjectivity of anthologies' compilers, along with the frequent aim of introducing the public to previously little-known authors means that while contemporary anthologies have a great potential to alter accessible canon, they also have very little input in redefining the official canon. Indeed anthologies, through introduction of previously unrecognised poets reshape the fringes of the literary canon. At the same time, by including authors whose canonicity was established in the Soviet Union post-Soviet anthologies preserve their status as the main canonical figures. The inclusion of more authors, however, led to the inevitable reduction of space devoted to any major poet's legacy. Furthermore, the move away from representation of Maiakovskii as an exemplary figure, brought him down from the rank of the best poet of the era to the rank of a

⁶⁷ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Nash marsh', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ii, p. 7 ('The bull of days is pied. The cart of years is slow. Our god is race. Our heart is a drum').

major poet. However, in the post-Soviet literary canon, which is not defined by authors others should strive to emulate, the rank of a major poet remains the highest mark of status.

Shubinskii, when analysing the subjectivity of anthologies, mentions the reading preferences of his students: '[students] read Akhmatova, they read the early Maiakovskii – extremely popular in life, these poets remain unforgotten even today'.⁶⁸ Later on in the article Shubinskii once again mentions the poet, this time in connection to his work of the Soviet period: 'far from everything in Soviet-era poetry is bad [...] the late Maiakovskii is still a genius who might have broken his wings but retained his posture and muscularity'.⁶⁹ Shubinskii's representation of Maiakovskii echoes the image of the poet presented in post-Soviet anthologies. The majority of post-Soviet anthologies favour his pre-revolutionary works, reinforcing the opinion that this was the most creative period of the poet's career. The works of this period often focus on intense emotions, in particular, feelings of loneliness and being misunderstood. Thus many post-Soviet anthologies promote the representation of the poet as a tragic, misunderstood loner. A few of the anthologies include Maiakovskii's love lyrics, however the overall focus on such works in post-Soviet anthologies is considerably less than in post-Soviet school textbooks, where the poet's love poems are often the main focus of analysis. The number of post-1917 works by Maiakovskii included in post-Soviet anthologies has, as might have been expected, decreased compared to the Soviet period. The works which are included most commonly are atypical examples of Maiakovskii's Soviet-period writing.⁷⁰ The comparatively small number of post-1917 poems compared with pre-1917 works reinforces Shubinskii's comment that the Soviet-period Maiakovskii might have lost his poetic inspiration, but retained his talent. Again, the trend to include a minority of Soviet-era poems compared to pre-revolutionary ones often leads to the representation of Maiakovskii's life as tragic: often his poetic inspiration is seen to be one more victim of the Soviet regime.

⁶⁸ Shubinskii, p. 195.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 198.

⁷⁰ For a comparison of poems included in post-Soviet anthologies please see Appendix, 'Chapter 4', 'Texts mentioned in selected post-Soviet anthologies by theme'.

Similarly, Chantal Sundaram, reviewing the appropriation of Maiakovskii's legacy by advertisers and the reduction in time dedicated to studying his works at school concluded that there is no place for Maiakovskii in contemporary literary canon.⁴ I will show how the post-Soviet appropriation of Maiakovskii's legacy is not in fact a sign of his declining canonical status, but on the contrary, a testament to its potency. Following Lauter's definition of canonicity I will show how various depictions of Maiakovskii, prevalent in post-Soviet Russian media, serve the purpose of providing a sense of identity for the viewers, as well as reinforcing Maiakovskii's ongoing significance. Maiakovskii's canonical status is continuously demonstrated by his adoption in popular culture and the advertising industry. His biography continues to attract television film-makers and his works continue to occupy a prominent position in Russian online libraries.

Literary critic Vladimir Kozlov describes the role of poetry in Russian culture as 'a means by which the individual can come to an understanding of national identity. Perhaps that is why Russian poetry is no less important as a brand than German philosophy, Spanish music, or French cooking'.⁵ It is in this light that I will review the canonical position of Maiakovskii. The poet continues to play a significant role in reinforcing a sense of national identity, of the unity of like-minded individuals with similar backgrounds. To this effect I will consider several documentaries focusing on Maiakovskii's biography, analyse his position in major Russian online libraries as well as his appropriation in contemporary parody. It is perhaps, not surprising that the depictions of Maiakovskii offered by these different sources vary. It would seem that while his image is fluid and open to interpretation, Maiakovskii will mean different things to different people. Thus he does not truly belong to any of the parties who are engaged in re-establishing Russian literary canon. Maiakovskii, who throughout his life time and time again revised his public image, has left us with many different versions of himself. Thus parties with conflicting opinions of

⁴ Sundaram, "The Stone skin of the monument": Mayakovsky, Dissent and Popular Culture in the Soviet Union', <<http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/sundaram16.shtml>>.

⁵ Vladimir Kozlov, 'Vertikal' sovremennoj poezii' in *EkspertOnline*, <<http://expert.ru/expert/2014/02/vertikal-sovremennoj-poezii/>> [accessed: 12 December 2015]

Maiakovskii's status and significance are able to turn to his legacy and find evidence to support their version of Maiakovskii.

I have chosen to focus on television and the Internet partly because of their dominant place in Russian people's lives today. The other reason is that Russian television and Russian Internet developed in entirely different ways. Television dominated the media culture in the late Soviet period and the 1990s. Like all means of public education in the Soviet Union television acted as top-down means of reinforcing Soviet identity. The Internet in Russia came to prominence at the end of the twentieth century. It was different to any other existing public medium and therefore could not be fitted into any established Soviet models of presenting information. Moreover, it was utilised and adopted predominantly by the public, and for some time at least the Internet succeeded in presenting bottom-up ideas on post-Soviet identity and literary canonicity. This bottom-up representation is, however, nuanced. A large section of the driving force for online literary discussions is made of academics and those who work in the field of literature. Thus, the opinions circulated are not necessarily those produced by the average Internet user. However, the average users are key in sharing and promoting these opinions. In recent years the government control over the Internet increased. However it is still often seen as a haven from any sort of restrictions to the accessing and sharing of information. Therefore the Internet has the potential to promote a multitude of diverse approaches to literary hierarchies.

The other reason for choosing to focus on these two media forms is the contrasting nature in the way they present information: television has an explicit focus on visual and audio information, and the Internet (while it is also used to share images and videos) is still largely focused on conveying textual information. While both television and the Internet have a tendency to present information with a broad appeal, and thus to focus on the sensational and dramatic, the Internet fulfils an additional function of being a data repository. Therefore a section of my analysis of Maiakovskii on the Russian Internet focuses on analysing material found in online libraries.

Soviet journalism, like Soviet education, focused to a large extent on creating a sense of national identity based on an easily defined and recognised code of good and bad behaviour. *Perestroika* and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union saw the Russian media turning away from the Soviet style of presentation, leaving it to the public to draw their own conclusions. However, time has shown that this significant change appears to have been short-lived. In 2006 Ekaterina Kratasiuk, in her article 'The Construction of "Reality" in Russian Mass Media News on Television and on the Internet', argues that the majority of Russian television viewers watch the news not to learn new information, but to reassess their sense of national identity.⁶ Indeed, starting from the late 1990s, we see a return to a style of presentation which focuses on establishing and maintaining a sense of national identity. Moreover, the late 1990s also saw an increase in government control over television. By the end of the century most of the information the public received through this media outlet was under government control.

The section on television analyses documentaries and drama films centred around Maiakovskii from 2002 to 2015 as well as an eight-part drama *Dva dnia* (2013). These films either directly focus on aspects of Maiakovskii's life and heritage or, as is the case with *Pro eto, pro poeta i pro Liliu Brik* (2006), feature Maiakovskii as a central character. There are also a number of documentaries as well as feature-length dramas, in which the poet appears as a minor character, but those will not be analysed in this chapter.⁷ I will focus on identifying the key changes in representations of Maiakovskii from the way he was represented in Soviet culture from 1935 onwards. One of my aims is to trace whether these changes are homogenous, or whether, as I have shown in previous chapters we are presented with a variety of images of Maiakovskii.

The second section of the chapter will focus on Russian Internet culture and will investigate what presence the poet has online. In this section I will consider how

⁶ Ekaterina Kratasiuk, 'Construction of "Reality" in Russian Mass Media News on Television and on the Internet', trans. by Maria Artamonova, in Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener and Natalja Konradova, *Ctrl+Shift: Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006), pp. 34-50 (pp. 42-43).

⁷ See, for example, series *Grekhii ottsov* (2004) <<http://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/405689/>>; a 3-part film *Smert' Tairova* (2004) <<http://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/428664/>>; television series *Esenin* (2005) <<http://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/161142/>>.

important Russian online space is for establishing the country's national identity. I will then focus on the role Maiakovskii plays in this virtual reality and how Internet users utilise Maiakovskii's legacy and image. In my analysis I will focus mainly on texts which are featured in Russian online libraries and evaluate their popularity with the public.

Finally, I will look at the comical and satirical use of Maiakovskii, where people parody either key features of the poet's personality or his works. For much of this section I rely on Iurii Tynianov's definitions on parody.⁸ In particular, I will discuss how a single aspect of Maiakovskii's representation, can be developed into a fully sustainable parody character. I will argue how such uses of Maiakovskii do not diminish, but, on the contrary, reinforce the poet's contemporary canonical status.

Post-Soviet Television: its Relationship with the Internet and its Role in Establishing Russian Cultural Identity

The development of television in Soviet Russia took place in the later years of the Communist Party rule, however, it rapidly developed into a major public medium of communication, and by the start of the 1990s television ruled the hearts and minds of the Russian population. Indeed Ellen Mickiewicz noted that in 1987 an estimated 90% of the population used television as their main source of information.⁹ Soviet television, like other media, was tightly controlled by the government and used in the propaganda of Soviet values. Philo Wasburn and Barbara Burke, in their article 'The Symbolic Construction of Russia and the United States on Russian National Television', note that government-controlled Soviet media focused less on the presentation of news, and more on constructing national identities in which positive images of the Russian people were contrasted to negative representations of the American way of life:

Russian media devoted considerable attention to the symbolic construction of the United States as a nation in which there was widespread racial conflict, unemployment, homelessness, social and

⁸ Iurii Tynianov, 'O parodii', in *Rusaskaia literatura XX veka v zerkale parodii* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1993) pp. 361-91

⁹ Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 32.

economic inequality, and social injustice [...] Russia was depicted as comparatively free from the social ills that beset America [...] and] the world's leading opponent of capitalist imperialism.¹⁰

Research shows that such a polarised way of presenting information is more memorable than presenting facts. While the public's reception of news is minimal, people tend to retain the general concepts which underlie the way the news is presented.¹¹ Moreover, Wasburn and Burke argue that once such categories are established through the socialisation process (partly through public media content) 'people tend to act on them without reassessment and without awareness of the social forces that created them'.¹²

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russian television went through a turbulent phase. David Wedgwood Benn points out that just in the four years between 1991 and 1995 the Russian media went through a series of ups and downs:

There were times, especially after the storming of the old parliament in October 1993, when media freedom seemed to be in imminent danger. At other times – notably during the Chechen crisis – the robust independence of Russian journalists greatly impressed the outside world. Media pluralism in Russia became – for the time being at least – a reality which no one could deny.¹³

Benn points out that while the political changes of 1991 were indeed abrupt and fundamental, they did not come out of nowhere. Literary journals in particular claimed that they had prepared the way for the change in publication and information industry.¹⁴ Thus, in 1989 *Novyi mir* published sections from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's openly anti-communist work *Arkhipelag Gulag*.¹⁵ In

¹⁰ Philo C. Wasburn and Barbara Ruth Burke, 'The Symbolic Construction of Russia and the United States on Russian National Television' in *The Sociological Quarterly*, 38, 4 (1997), pp. 669-86 (p. 669). For more examples on how Soviet state media focused on constructing the image of Soviet nation and its enemies as opposed to presenting world news see David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (London: Penguin, 1994), Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹¹ David Morley, 'The Construction of Everyday Life: Political Communication and Domestic Media' in David Swanson and Dan Nimmo, *New Directions in Political Communication* (California: SAGE Publications, 1990), pp. 123-46.

¹² Philo C. Wasburn and Barbara Ruth Burke, p. 670.

¹³ David Wedgwood Benn, 'The Russian Media in Post-Soviet Conditions', in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 3, (1996), pp. 471-79 (p. 471).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹⁵ See *Novyi mir*, 8 (1989), pp. 7-94; *Novyi mir*, 9 (1989), pp. 68-165; *Novyi mir*, 10 (1989), pp. 25-149; *Novyi mir*, 8 (1989), pp. 63-175.

1990 the 'Zakon o pechati i drugikh sredstvakh massovoi informatsii' was created and became the legal framework for freedom of expression in the USSR. It prohibited censorship and stated that newspapers and broadcasting stations could only be closed by court order and on specified grounds.¹⁶ Benn notes, however, that it took television another year to embrace the changes and it was not until May 1991 that the VGTRK (*Vserossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia televisionnaia i radioveshchatel'naia kompaniia* [All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company]) began to broadcast television programs with a slant markedly different from that of Soviet television.¹⁷

However in 1993 it became apparent that the legislation passed three years earlier was not being consistently upheld: in October 1993 in the pre-election period the Russian Ministry for the Press and Information attempted to ban a number of opposition newspapers, contrary to the 1991 media law. The newspapers most affected were *Pravda* and *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, and although both eventually won their court cases, they were effectively taken out of the pre-election debates.¹⁸ Yet, barely a year later, as the Chechnia crisis unfolded, the Russian media presented the audience with an account of events based on a radically antigovernment position, as journalist refused to accept the official stance on news delivery: 'for the first time, Russians were able to see pictures in their living rooms of their own wounded soldiers being interviewed, of Russian officers refusing to advance or of women begging Russian soldiers not to shoot'.¹⁹ Television played a central role in this change of approach. Benn notes that in 1993 television was accessible in 95% of Russian households, and believes that the key to the strengthening of anti-governmental journalism was the rise of non-state television and in particular the NTV station, founded in Moscow in 1993, which by 1994 reached a potential audience of 100 million viewers in European Russia.²⁰ The NTV news director at the time, Oleg Dobrodeev, stated in an interview that there was a 'unanimous agreement about the stupidity and wrongness of official information'.²¹ Benn also notes that

¹⁶ Wedgewood Benn, p. 471.

¹⁷ Wedgewood Benn, p. 471.

¹⁸ Wedgewood Benn, p. 472.

¹⁹ Wedgewood Benn, p. 473.

²⁰ Wedgewood Benn, pp. 473-75.

²¹ Oleg Dobrodeev, quoted in Wedgewood Benn, p. 473.

another reason for the increased influence of television was its growing popularity amongst the public as a primary source of news information. This, he argues, was in part to do with the economic crisis which hit the country in the early 1990s resulting in a drastic drop in the sales of newspapers and journals.²²

The popularity of television as a source of information led to it becoming a major factor in the confrontation between the President Boris El'tsin and the Parliament in 1993. Two major private stations, TV6 and NTV, were launched and were gaining huge audiences at a time when state-owned television channels were in financial trouble and losing audiences to the newly established private stations.²³ In 1994 by presidential decision the main state channel Ostankino (currently Channel 1) was privatised. However, this did not spell a victory for independent journalism. The President held the majority shares in Ostankino, which meant that he could appoint and dismiss the station's directors. The President was also able to exert pressure on the independent stations by cancelling or refusing to renew a television franchise.²⁴ And yet, in the mid-1990s there was an air of optimism surrounding media outlets in general and television in particular. Benn in 1996 noted that many Russian journalists and media sector employees were 'cautiously optimistic about the prospects for media freedom'.²⁵

However, at the beginning of the new millennium Russian television was once again under government control. Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener, in their article "Our RuNet"? Cultural Identity and Media Usage', note that:

After a short period of relaxation in the 1990s, the media sector, understood in a more narrow sense as television, radio and print journals, has been, since the presidency of Vladimir Putin, largely controlled by the State or (in part) by the open purses of the so-called oligarchs.²⁶

²² Wedgewood Benn, pp. 473-74.

²³ Ibid., 475.

²⁴ Ibid., 475.

²⁵ Ibid., 476.

²⁶ Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener, "Our RuNet"? Cultural Identity and Media Usage', in Schmidt, Teubener, Konradova, *Ctrl+Shift*, pp. 14-20, (p. 15).

The independent channels of the early 1990s had all but disappeared by the end of the decade: Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk wrote in 2006:

On Russian television the information field is formed by national TV channels: The First Channel, RTR, NTV and REN-TV. The first two channels are openly State-owned, while the names of the remaining two are associated with private media ownership, the ideas of 'the fourth branch' and 'the free press'. NTV keeps this status mainly for history's sake but REN-TV, despite the fact that its controlling interest has always belonged to the state, could, until a short time ago, claim to be the only 'independent' channel specializing primarily in news releases. Other channels, such as TVC, copy the agenda set by the central channels.²⁷

This situation was partly the result of the political and economic uncertainty of the transition period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Irina Prokhorova suggests that a major factor in this change of government attitude was the Russian economic crisis of 1998:

The economic crisis of 1998, which provoked a change of political priorities and power elites, set off mechanisms of partial re-Sovietization. The process of ideological restoration manifested itself above all in a consistent offensive against the socio-cultural institutions that had emerged in the previous period and in an attempt once more to concentrate all means of influencing public opinion in the hands of the state.²⁸

In particular, Prokhorova speaks of the increase of government's control over television: 'television [was] virtually re-nationalized'.²⁹ Other spheres have also experienced an increase of control over the public access to information: 'the state of libraries and archives has severely deteriorated; access to information has been restricted'.³⁰ Thus government influence could be felt in all institutions that aim to educate and create social identity, with the sole exception of the Internet. The late 1990s saw a 'blossoming of the Internet',³¹ which attracted the intellectual community as a safe place for both political debate and cultural discussion.

²⁷ Kratasiuk, p. 43.

²⁸ Kratasiuk, p. 4-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

However, the picture of government monopoly over the offline cultural sphere in the late 1990s and the following decade is not as negative as one might expect. Indeed, while Prokhorova does speak of the decline of cultural institutions in the late 1990s and increase in government control over the public media, she does also mention several examples of autonomous cultural institutions flourishing in the period, the theatre festival *Zolotaia maska*, and cultural and artistic institute *Pro Arte* being two examples. Of particular interest is Prokhorova's discussion of the literary journal *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, of which she is the Editor-in-Chief. The journal has been successful in publishing several different supplements, hosting numerous cultural and artistic events and even establishing a TV programme (*NZ na TV*).³² The latter appeared at the same time as, according to Prokhorova, the government tightened its grip over the public media.

It is notable that while post-Soviet television went through a period of rapid transformation, the public attitude towards the medium remained largely unchanged. Thus Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk argues that the post-Soviet audience is still suffering from the Soviet habit of watching television, which is characterised by aggressive distrust of public media.³³ Indeed Ellen Mickiewicz, in her study of television in the Soviet period, also noted that as early as 1973 there was survey data indicating public dissatisfaction with the single point of view on news and events propagated by the state television.³⁴ However, Lapina-Kratasiuk argues that the contemporary Russian public's interest in television and particularly in news is not fuelled by a desire to learn new information, but by the desire to achieve a sense of belonging: 'news that everyone shares, cements the unity of modern society and legitimizes its view of the world with the same measure of success as the myths and legends of traditional societies'.³⁵ This argument is strikingly similar to that of sociologists Wasburne and Burke, who in 1996 argued that Soviet television was

³² Kratasiuk, p. 5.

³³ Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk, 'Konstruirovanie Real'nosti v SMI: Politiki.net ili Protiv voiny, no za pobedu', in *The Russian Cyberspace Journal*, vol. 1, issue 1 (2009), pp. 61-69, (p. 61).

³⁴ Mickiewicz, pp. 30-34.

³⁵ Elena D'iakova and Anna Trakhtenberg, *Massovaia kommunikatsiia i problema konstruirovaniia real'nosti* (Ekaterinburg: UrO RAN, 1999), pp. 125-26, quoted by Ekaterina Kratasiuk, 'Construction of "Reality" in Russian Mass Media News on Television and on the Internet', p. 42.

characterised by the desire to create public opinion, offering viewers a set of stable categories which they would follow without the desire to reassess the information provided. Thus we are presented with a somewhat paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, the Russian public is seen to distrust the state-controlled media and, on the other, the same public strives for non-pluralised concepts which help create a sense of national identity.

Indeed, it was because Russian people did not trust traditional news channels that they turned to a new source of information – the Internet. Lapina-Kratasiuk poses the question of whether Russians prefer to use the Internet rather than other public media as a source of information and news, and whether this preference has led to the Internet becoming a key factor in shaping public opinion.³⁶ Through numerous interviews with journalists and editors Lapina-Kratasiuk argues that the Internet is the first and major source of news not only for the public but also for Russian news reporters themselves.³⁷ Therefore the two spheres exist not in an opposition to one another but in a symbiotic relationship: what might appear first on the Internet can quickly become voiced on television and what is first voiced on television is shortly after discussed online. Thus often television and the Internet work together to influence public tastes, reinforce a sense of national identity and manipulate people's cultural preferences. Lapina-Kratasiuk conducted an experiment among the Culture Studies students of one of the Moscow universities, which supports the idea that television and the Internet both contribute to the way the audience receives and responds to news. Lapina-Kratasiuk set out to investigate the different means by which students learn about news and form their opinion on the political events around them (in this case, the South Ossetia conflict). The results revealed that the majority of students preferred to see themselves as being distanced from the official Russian television channels (mainly *Pervyi kanal*) – claiming to use mainly Internet sources, foreign channels and apolitical channels (for example *kanal Kul'tura*). However, the survey also showed that

³⁶ Lapina-Kratasiuk, p. 62.

³⁷ See Kratasiuk, p. 43.

despite this claim the majority of participants were actively involved in watching official TV channels.³⁸

Lapina-Kratasiuk's analysis of student preferences when it comes to accessing news also reveals that the majority of those who prefer to get their news online do so through the Russian mail portals *Mail.ru* and *Yandex.ru*. Thus she concludes that although these participants are amongst the group normally considered selective in the way they receive news and form opinions, the fact is that the majority of them do not put any extra effort into researching the news, but read information presented to them when they go to check their email.³⁹ The information presented on such portals is easily obtainable, short and designed to stand out – these are all qualities traditionally associated with public media and television in particular. Thus even before the latest news enters the cycle of circulation (moving from one medium to another and creating discussions and debates in both) the way information is obtained from both the Internet and television is, for the majority of the audience, very similar.

Another outcome of this survey shows that for the group of students being investigated the nature of the news source was irrelevant: 'a group of students considered the following website characteristics largely meaningless: national financing/independence, genre (information agency, electronic newspaper, electronic version of a published edition, blog) and status – news from all these sources are taken in as part of a single stream'.⁴⁰ Thus a proportion of Russian population trusts equally facts they obtain from a newspaper and an online blog by a person they might never have met. Herein lies the main difference between national values created by the Internet, and those promoted by television. While in the latter a majority of information presented to the audience is structured to comply with government policies, the former becomes a mixture of information passed down from government sources, information passed up from readers, as well as, unavoidably, a large addition of ill-informed opinions and incorrect facts.

³⁸ Lapina-Kratasiuk, p. 65.

³⁹ Lapina-Kratasiuk, p. 66.

⁴⁰ Lapina-Kratasiuk, p. 66.

Since the Soviet era television has maintained the function of establishing and maintaining a sense of national identity for the Russian people. While the 1990s spelled a period of several major changes in the way the news was presented to the public, Lapina-Kratasiuk's research shows that the public themselves do not necessarily share with the journalists and television presenters the desire for factual news. Instead Russian viewers still see television as a way to reinforce their identity by providing a set of easily relatable characteristics. Moreover, the new public medium of the Internet shares with television this function of maintaining national and cultural identity, given that each informs the other. Cultural identity was aptly defined by Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener as: 'mental constructions that do not exist in "reality" but, nevertheless, have a real impact on the individual's as well as collective's world views'.⁴¹ It is in light with this relationship between viewer expectations and cultural identity that I will analyse the way Maiakovskii is represented in these public media.

Vladimir Maiakovskii on Russian Television

Throughout the early years of the twenty-first century Maiakovskii remained a prominent figure on Russian television. Literary talk shows and documentaries have always had a place on Russian screens, and Maiakovskii's turbulent biography has lent itself well to creating sensational stories the public wants to engage with. I will analyse whether the multiple versions of Maiakovskii presented on contemporary Russian television differ from the canonical Soviet depiction of the poet.

One of the most sensational element in Maiakovskii's biography is his sudden and unnatural death. Indeed, in post-Soviet television portrayals of the poet his suicide is a key element around which his whole image is often constructed. This comes as a drastic change from the Soviet depiction, which downplayed the poet's choice to end his life. In contrast, out of the eight films I have analysed, half refer to the poet's death in their title: *Smertel'naia igra Maiakovskogo* [*Maiakovskii's lethal game*] (2002), *Maiakovskii: smert' poeta*

⁴¹ Schmidt and Teubener "Our RuNet"? Cultural Identity and Media Usage', p. 16.

[*Maiakovskii: the death of the poet*] (2002), *Vladimir Maiakovskii: posledniaia liubov', poslednii vystrel* [*Vladimir Maiakovskii: the last love, the last gunshot*] (2013), *Vladimir Maiakovskii: poslednii april'* [*Vladimir Maiakovskii: the last April*] (2015).

Perhaps it is understandable that television representations of Maiakovskii would focus on his life (and death) over his poetic achievements. The audience might know very little about Maiakovskii's works, or indeed, dislike them. The poet's turbulent personal life, however, is much more universally interesting and easy to relate to. It is probable that it was journalist Valentin Skoriatin who first reignited the widespread public's interest in Maiakovskii's death with his series of articles, later compiled in the 1998 volume *Taina gibeli Maiakovskogo*. The publisher's introduction to Valentin Skoriatin's work reads:

During all that time when *Zhurnalists* magazine was publishing Valentin Skoriatin's articles (1989-1994) his readers awaited them with particular impatience. Of course! V. Skoriatin not only doubted the official version of Maiakovskii's suicide (such doubts have been voiced previously) but he was the first to oppose it with his own version about a forced death [...] Moreover, and this makes this book truly sensational, his version is based on a huge amount of materials which the author obtained from top secret archives.⁴²

Skoriatin's book is based on the same spirit of sensationalism which television programmes strive for to keep the audience figures up.

It is also important to note the relevance of arguments that Maiakovskii's suicide is inseparable from his literary heritage.⁴³ Boym writes 'Mayakovsky suggests [when talking about Esenin's suicide] that the poet's death [...] can be considered a part of literature, a final mysterious dénouement of the poet's work'.⁴⁴ While television programmes are generally little interested in providing an analysis of the poet's works, setting out the death as a central point from which further description of the poet is developed is a common occurrence. This

⁴² Publisher's introduction to Valentin Skoriatin, *Taina gibeli Maiakovskogo* (Moscow: Zvonnitsa, 2009) p. 5.

⁴³ See Chapter 2, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the tragic Victim'.

⁴⁴ Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks*, p. 148.

tendency also ties in with Parthé's observations on the value of suffering in Russian culture.⁴⁵

The emphasis on sensationalist and dramatic accounts results in television programme-makers being considerably more unanimous in their reinvention of Maiakovskii's image than many other forces involved in contributing to canon formation. The Maiakovskii we see on Russian television today is not a historical monument, but a living individual with a troubled and tragic life, whom viewers can easily relate to. However, what is most notable is that this reinvention of Maiakovskii is a twofold process: on the one hand, we have a single journalist who has raised an issue he was personally interested in, but which has proved to be popular with the wider public (including many who have little knowledge of the poet's life and works). On the other hand, the media, television in particular, have picked up on the popularity of the debates around the poet's death and have made it the centre of their representation of the poet. Maiakovskii's image therefore, while constructed by (or with the help) of the experts and the media, is tailored to be appealing to the public.

The most significant television representation of Maiakovskii is the eight-part series *Dva dnia*, released on the *Kul'tura* channel in 2013 to commemorate hundred years since the poet's birth. Like many other television versions of the poet, *Dva dnia* focuses the narrative around the poet's suicide. The title refers to the poet's suicide note, which was dated two days before the actual suicide.⁴⁶ The story takes the audience through key dates of Maiakovskii's biography in an attempt to show what or who might have driven the poet to end his life. Each of the eight episodes starts with scenes from 1930 showing the poet writing and re-reading the note, but this is quickly followed by flashbacks of episodes from the poet's life. Thus the opening scenes of each episode set a tragic tone that is maintained throughout the series. Not only are viewers instantly aware of the impending death of the poet by seeing him write the note, but the tone is further

⁴⁵ See Parthé, 'Righteousness and the Value of Suffering', in *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines*, pp. 132-59.

⁴⁶ The poet died 14 April, 1930, while the suicide note is dated 12 April. For a photocopy of the note see Strizhneva, *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, pp. 39-41.

underlined by the musical accompaniment – a solitary saxophone tune, emphasising the poet's loneliness.

Placing Maiakovskii's suicide as the central event in his life story, the producers of the film construct his biography as a series of incidents over which the poet had no control. In several key stages of Maiakovskii's life dramatic interventions are shown to have prevented key decisions from being made. The first such occurrence is in episode 3, when Maiakovskii and Lili are reunited and give each other rings to symbolise their love. Lili promises to talk to her husband Osip Brik about a divorce, but the Revolution starts in earnest and the conversation gets delayed, momentum is lost and as a result Lili does not divorce Osip.⁴⁷ The second such occurrence is in episode 6 when Maiakovskii comes back from America, where he has met and fallen in love with Ellie Jones. He is keen to explain himself to Lili and to start organising for Ellie to come to Moscow, but a phone call disrupts their conversation – Maiakovskii is informed that Esenin has committed suicide. Outside events once more take up all of Maiakovskii's attention, and Ellie never comes to the Soviet Union. Finally, in 1929, Maiakovskii is unable to get a visa to go to Paris and see Tatiana Iakovleva and as a result, she never agrees to come to the Soviet Union and eventually marries another man.

Alongside the overwhelming crush of historic events which demand the protagonist's full attention an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty is being born as the Revolution is followed by years of hardship and starvation. In episode 4 Maiakovskii's fellow Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov, unexpectedly returning to Moscow, prophetically highlights the negative aspects of the newly formed state:

Somehow life has become very scary [...] I suddenly felt that the world has shifted and was collapsing into an abyss, and I was looking for a place I can stay still, to give my soul a rest.

[...]

⁴⁷ Dmitrii Tomashpol'skii and Alena Dem'ianenko, *Maiakovskii: dva dnia* (TV series), 8 episodes, 2013, ep. 3 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YO06UjbnH2g>> [accessed: 29 November 2015]. Lili and Osip Brik eventually get a divorce in 1930, after Maiakovskii's death.

[I lived] with various kind people, but I never stayed long. Fear is everywhere.⁴⁸

The uncertainty not only plagues society and Maiakovskii's friends, it affects Maiakovskii himself, who, despite being a passionate supporter of the Revolution, feels doubtful about the future: as Khlebnikov unexpectedly leaves Maiakovskii questions Osip Brik:

'He left. Why?'
'Perhaps because he knows the way to go.'
'Then I wish I could be in his place.'⁴⁹

This sentiment is echoed two episodes later when Maiakovskii visits David Burluk in New York and expresses his uncertainty about the developing Soviet State.⁵⁰

The atmosphere of the early 1920s is set in stark contrast with the realities of Maiakovskii's final days. The sense of community, the importance of labour for the good of the people which Maiakovskii so passionately defended are taken to levels of tragicomedy. In episode 5 Maiakovskii's flatmate apologetically informs him that he had put in an application to revoke Maiakovskii's ownership of the room on Lubińska street which the poet has been using as an office to work in. His flatmate feels that it was wrong that Maiakovskii should need an office while his own family is all living in one room: 'You are a proletarian poet, but you don't act like a proletarian. I, a simple Soviet worker, need this room more'.⁵¹ The separation between the ideal (Maiakovskii's idealised Soviet state, Maiakovskii's idealised relationships) and the real is a constant focus of the film. In episode 5 Maiakovskii meets Maria, his first passionate love, after almost a decade of separation. She confronts his idealistic view of the world, of herself: 'I am not Gioconda, you dreamt it all up in Odessa, in real life, everything is different'.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Maiakovskii: dva dnia*, ep. 4 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScbdF9tD8n4>> [accessed: 29 November 2015].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See Chapter 2, footnote 51.

⁵¹ *Maiakovskii: dva dnia*, ep. 5 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7QjHKPOXdE>> [accessed: 29 November 2015].

⁵² *Ibid.*

The last two episodes show Maiakovskii suffering from tiredness and depression. He has new relationships, with typist Natal'ia and actress Veronika Polonskaia, but his obsessive behaviour makes it obvious to viewers that neither relationship will have a happy ending. Maiakovskii is still publicly supporting the regime, despite the fact that the regime is becoming less and less humanitarian. However both his friends and his enemies are of the opinion that Maiakovskii's support of the Soviet state is insincere. The Soviet government is represented with ever-increasing negativity. In episode 7 the viewers learn that it was Iakov Agranov who prevented Maiakovskii from going to Paris and shortly afterwards the audience discovers that he has officers who are spying on Maiakovskii.⁵³ The OGPU was also behind the boycott of the exhibition, marking twenty years of Maiakovskii's work, as well as orchestrating the negative reception of his play *Bania*. OGPU agents believe that Maiakovskii is not sincere in his dedication to the Soviet state and moreover that the recent unsuccessful plays and readings will drive him to suicide. One of the agents working for Agranov reports: 'Maiakovskii has had a breakdown. He does not believe in what he writes and hates his writings [...] He is upset, but silently. Even though it seems a perfect chance for him [...] to shoot himself'.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the first part of this quotation is, in fact, drawn from the report into the public's reaction to the death of Maiakovskii by the OGPU agent 'Arbuzov'.⁵⁵ Thus, this opinion was indeed voiced, but only after Maiakovskii's death, not prior to it. Moreover it was voiced by literary intellectuals who were critical of the regime. The idea that the government was inconvenienced by Maiakovskii and was involved in his death was voiced immediately after the poet's death and has been perpetuated in post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii. However, it is presented as a known fact in the film. Maiakovskii's death happens behind the scenes, and the viewers are left guessing whether the poet committed suicide, or whether there is any truth to the theory that Maiakovskii was killed by government agents.

⁵³ See Chapter 2, 'Vladimir Maiakovskii – the Tragic Victim' for more information on Agranov and the significance of his relationship with Maiakovskii.

⁵⁴ *Maiakovskii: dva dnia*, ep. 8 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWEG0XeuOHE>> [accessed: 29 November 2015].

⁵⁵ 'Arbuzov', 'Agenturno'osvedomitel'naia svodka 5 otd. SOOGPU No 45 ot 18 apreliia 1930 g.', in S. Strizhneva, *Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo*, p. 83.

Perhaps of even more interest is the final scene of the film, in which Maiakovskii and Lili Brik are sitting by the sea in wicker chairs. The scene is a reference to episode 6 in which Maiakovskii learned of Esenin's suicide. Esenin's death weighed heavily on Maiakovskii, who blamed himself for not praising the talented poet more. Lili tells him that Esenin can still hear him, and that there is definitely an afterlife:

We are all predestined for parting [Esenin's suicide note features lines 'predestined parting promises a meeting in the future']. Only it won't be any time soon. You and I will be two handsome elderly people, sitting in wicker chairs by the sea, the sea splashes and we fall asleep, happy and handsome.⁵⁶

Thus the film ends not with Maiakovskii's death or its aftermath, but transports us to an alternative reality or, one might conclude, an afterlife, in which Lili's comment stands true and the two of them spend eternity as a handsome couple. More importantly, the last scene restates the main focus of the movie – Maiakovskii's personal relationships with other people, Maiakovskii's growth as a person, not as a poet. And in this representation of Maiakovskii's biography by Dmitrii Tomashevskii the poet's and Lili's love, in the end, conquers all and prevails.

However, the film cannot be simplified to just a portrayal of Maiakovskii's personal life. His development as a poet, his acceptance and popularity, and last but not least his involvement in historical events which shaped the country are all depicted over the eight episodes of the series. A noteworthy pattern emerges – Maiakovskii's personal life is constantly put in opposition to his public image as a poet. It is a battle between private love and public recognition, and as the episodes develop Maiakovskii struggles either with one or the other. The first episode ends with his first major love walking out, however he returns home to find his first play published. In the third episode we see him arguing and leaving Lili's house in distress – only to hear his lines chanted by the passing soldiers on the street. In the fourth episode as Maiakovskii's struggle with the new regime becomes apparent, his relationship with Lili and Osip Brik stabilises. The episodes continue in a similar fashion, until in later episodes it

⁵⁶ *Maiakovskii: dva dnia*, ep. 6 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFCm1glQANg>> [accessed: 29 November 2015].

becomes obvious that both his personal life and his public image have taken a turn for the worse. Until then setbacks in his personal life were always compensated for by success as a poet, or vice versa, but in the end, Maiakovskii dies because both his lovers and friends and the reading public have failed him.

Alongside the *Dva dnia* series, two documentaries about Maiakovskii appeared in 2013: *Maiakovskii. Posledniaia liubov', poslednii vystrel* and *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Tretii lishnii*. As the titles suggest, both of these documentaries centre on Maiakovskii's life rather than his poetic career, and in particular on his difficult relationships with his friends and lovers. In both films, Maiakovskii appears to the audience as a victim of manipulative relationships. *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Tretii lishnii* in particular suggests that Maiakovskii's relationship with Lili and Osip Brik was detrimental both to his poetic talent and his mental wellbeing. The documentary starts with an interview with Maiakovskii's American daughter, Patricia Thompson, who only saw her father very briefly at an early age during a trip to Europe. Nevertheless Patricia tells the reporters that she believes Lili Brik felt threatened by her and her mother, Ellie Jones, as she saw them as competitors for Maiakovskii's inheritance. Maiakovskii's wealth becomes a key aspect in the narrative, and the presenters suggest that the only reason Lili decided to become Maiakovskii's lover was to avoid poverty after the Revolution. The documentary proceeds to focus on how Maiakovskii was providing money for the Briks. No mention is made of the fact that both Osip and Lili also worked to support their household.

Apart from Patricia Thompson, another of Maiakovskii's living relatives also provides an interview – his supposed granddaughter, the artist Elizaveta Lavinskaia. Elizaveta explains that her grandmother (also Elizaveta Lavinskaia) worked with Maiakovskii in OKNA ROSTA, where she had a brief affair with the poet, resulting in a child, Gleb-Nikita Lavinskii. Lavinskaia claims that there are many similarities between her father, Gleb-Nikita Lavinskii, and Maiakovskii: from the way they looked to the way they sounded, however Lavinskaia has so far refused to have a DNA test to prove her relationship to the poet. In 2014 in an interview with journalist Ivan Shipnigov she stated: 'I don't want to spend money on this. What is the point of this DNA analysis? I don't need to prove to

anyone that I am Maiakovskii's granddaughter'.⁵⁷ In *Tretii lishnii* Lavinskaia's unconfirmed family relationship to Maiakovskii is given as a fact. And similarly to the story of Patricia Thompson the audience learns that Gleb-Nikita Lavinskii believed that Lili Brik forced Maiakovskii into not seeing his son. Lili Brik is also portrayed as a villain in a recent 2015 documentary *Vladimir Maiakovskii. Poslednii april'*. Once again, this representation comes from Maiakovskii's living relatives (whose connections to Maiakovskii are tenuous and, as is the case with Lavinskaia, unconfirmed). Greed is again presented as the main factor in Lili Brik's relationship with Maiakovskii. Moreover, as the documentary puts forward the idea that Maiakovskii was murdered, the Briks are shown as the main suspects who had a clear motive: their wish to acquire Maiakovskii's sizeable inheritance.

Vladimir Maiakovskii: poslednii april' exploits several techniques to build up tension among the audience: from dramatic music, to reiterating the importance of 'newly-discovered facts, which place Maiakovskii's death in question'.⁵⁸ This documentary also features interviews with Thompson and Lavinskaia, who are both presented as unquestionable relatives of the poet. Very early on the topic turns to money as the presenter poses the question: 'Who benefited from the fact that Maiakovskii's descendants did not receive his inheritance?'⁵⁹ While the fact that Maiakovskii was murdered is never proved in *Poslednii april'* the Briks are consistently accused of having profited from the poet's death. Their trip to Berlin in February 1930 is seen as a betrayal, as they left the poet on his own, while he was suffering from depression.⁶⁰ The audience also learns that Lili Brik's handwriting was similar to Maiakovskii's and the presenter puts forward a hypothesis that it was Lili who wrote the suicide note. While this hypothesis is dismissed, it is pointed out that the Briks lived on Maiakovskii's money and the suicide note ensured them a hefty inheritance. The public similarly learns that

⁵⁷ Ivan Shipnigov, 'Elizaveta Lavinskaia. Vnuchka Maiakovskogo o sebe i svoei sem'e', *Prochtenie.ru*, 07.11.2014 <<http://prochtenie.ru/podcast/27913>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

⁵⁸ Tat'iana Freidensson, *Vladimir Maiakovskii: poslednii april'* (TV documentary) <<http://www.1tv.ru/anons/id%3D214343>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Osip and Lili Brik were not in Soviet Union at the time of Maiakovskii's death. On the 18 February they left with the purpose of visiting Lili's mother in England, travelling through Germany. See, Vinogradov, Zil'bershtein, Makashin, Khrapchenko, *Novoe o Maiakovskom*, p. 172.

Lili Brik supposedly tricked Polonskaia into refusing her part of inheritance, and finally is reminded that despite the fact that Maiakovskii still had living relatives when he died, it was the Briks who inherited the publishing rights for Maiakovskii's works and therefore ensured a comfortable life for themselves. Note that Katanianin an article 'Ne tol'ko vospominaniia. K istorii izdaniia Maiakovskogo' mentions that the publishing rights for Maiakovskii's legacy were actually split between the Briks and Maiakovskii's mother and sisters.⁶¹ Needless to say, the audience does not learn from *Poslednii aprel'* that the Briks had attended to the publication of Maiakovskii's works throughout most of his career, and therefore had every right to be considered the most knowledgeable when it came to his literary legacy. It is probable that much of the depiction of Osip and Lili Brik in contemporary television is influenced by anti-semitic stereotypes.

The 2005 documentary *Zhivoi Maiakovskii*, in spite of its title, does, in fact, focus on the reasons for Maiakovskii's death. The poet is presented as someone who struggled with feelings of loneliness throughout his whole adult life (the film draws the conclusion that this was a psychological trauma from the time the poet spent as a prisoner in solitary confinement when he was a teenager).⁶² Once again the *femme fatale* Lili Brik is presented as an uncaring villain, who had nothing but a negative impact on the poet's life.⁶³ Osip Brik's influence is similarly considered in a negative light. According to this documentary it was Osip who persuaded Maiakovskii to stop writing lyric poetry and start promoting official government propaganda. Similarly, according to the presenters, it was Lili Brik who ensured that Maiakovskii did not get a visa to go to Paris in 1929 to see Tat'iana Iakovleva, who was (again according to the documentary) ready to marry the poet and return to the Soviet Union: 'he [Maiakovskii] carries on a correspondence with Tat'iana, and she, charmed by his love letters, is ready to return to Russia and become his wife'.⁶⁴ However,

⁶¹ Vasilii Katanian, 'Ne tol'ko vospominaniia: k istorii izdaniia Maiakovskogo', *Druzhba narodov*, 3 (1989), pp. 220-27 (p. 222).

⁶² Sergei Tiutin, *Zhivoi Maiakovskii* (TV documentary), 2005 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y1YETiXv2Q>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

⁶³ See Appendix, 'Chapter 5', 'An unflattering image of Lili Brik from Sergei Tiutin's documentary *Zhivoi Maiakovskii*, 2005'.

⁶⁴ Tiutin, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y1YETiXv2Q>>.

there is no evidence to suggest Tat'iana was seriously considering such a return, and indeed she married soon afterwards. In the documentary the presenter describes her decision to marry someone else as a response to Maiakovskii's delay in coming to Paris, which Tat'iana Iakovleva deduced to be a result of the loss of his feelings for her:

When Lili Brik learns that Maiakovskii has dedicated poems to another woman, she starts a rumour that Maiakovskii wants to remain in the West, and he is not allowed to leave the country again. Tat'iana decides that Maiakovskii doesn't love her anymore and marries another man.⁶⁵

The narration completely avoids any mention of the poet's last relationship with Veronika Polonskaia, nor does it raise the possibility that Maiakovskii's feeling of loneliness might stem from the critical reception of his last plays as well as arguments with his friends over joining RAPP. In the end as the presenter reads out the poet's suicide note, he leaves out the passage in which Maiakovskii names his family – his mother and sisters, as well as the Briks and Polonskaia. Thus the poet's supposed loneliness is further highlighted.

While Lili Brik is a common victim of accusations regarding Maiakovskii's death, she is not the only one who is blamed for it. The poet's last love interest, actress Veronika Polonskaia, has similarly been accused of mistreating the poet. The 2002 documentary *Smertel'naia igra Maiakovskogo* concludes that while it was unlikely that Maiakovskii was murdered, he was forced to commit suicide due to the unhappy culmination of his relationship with Polonskaia. The presenters quote Polonskaia's police statement: 'I told him that I didn't love him'.⁶⁶ What the audience doesn't learn from the documentary is that Polonskaia was at the time married to the actor Mikhail Ianshin. It is very likely therefore that the young actress would not have been entirely sincere in her police statement, in order to preserve her own reputation and that of the late poet. In her memoirs, published first in 1938, Polonskaia writes explicitly about her feelings towards Maiakovskii, and their plans for a future together. Rather than not talking about the subject (as the presenters tell the audience) Polonskaia presents a different picture of

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Dmitrii Demin, *Smertel'naia igra Maiakovskogo* (TV documentary), 2002 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLHM8-kQrww>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

her last fatal meeting with the poet: she told Maiakovskii that she needed to go (she was late for a rehearsal), but that she would talk to her husband that very evening. She writes at length about how she and Maiakovskii were in love and were preparing to start living together.⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, none of this information appeared in her police statement in 1930.

Another 2002 documentary *Maiakovskii: smert' Poeta* is similarly interested in finding who was responsible for the poet's death. This time the audience is presented with a total of three different theories: one being suicide, one – murder by government agents and the last one also murder, but this time by killers hired by Polonskaia's jealous husband, Ianshin. Throughout their exploration of the murder theories the presenters continue to make cavalier use of the evidence in order to present their theories as valid. For instance Maiakovskii's open mouth on his post-mortem photograph is presented as evidence that he was trying to shout for help; the documentary fails to mention Polonskaia's record of the poet trying to tell her something as he was dying.⁶⁸ The documentary then goes back on its findings, and in the last five minutes disproves the murder versions by presenting the result of the forensic analysis of Maiakovskii's shirt in 1991, which concludes that the shot which killed the poet was in fact the result of suicide.

Not all the documentaries which focus on Maiakovskii's suicide choose to present his relationships in a tragic light and demonise Lili Brik, or name her as the main reason for the poet's death. A 2007 film *Pro eto, pro poeta i pro Liliu Brik* attempts to present a fuller account of Lili Brik's motives. The style of the film sets it apart from other television productions discussed here, as it is presented as one actress's quest to understand Lili Brik, so that she can play her role on stage. While this two-part film very early on introduces the idea that Lili Brik did not truly love Maiakovskii, it presents her as a very complex woman capable of almost supernatural affection: 'Lili Iur'evna had relationships with men, who she found interesting as people [...] I noticed an interesting detail: they [Lili's love relations] all now have encyclopaedia entries [...] She could

⁶⁷ Polonskaia, pp. 492-93.

⁶⁸ Polonskaia, p. 505.

sense talent'.⁶⁹ The film concludes that Lili did not fall in love with men, but instead was in love with life. Her last lover, the French artist François-Marie Banier says to the actress: 'Such people are whole, they are true to themselves and are capable of finding others and extracting from them everything that is true'.⁷⁰ This particular documentary does not focus on Maiakovskii's death, or indeed, that of Lili Brik, but instead looks towards the future, debating who would be the right actors to play Maiakovskii and Lili in a film.

Thus throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century Russian television has sought to present viewers with a more human representation of Maiakovskii. Someone who may be seen as an important figure for Russian cultural identity and the future of the nation, but mainly someone the audience could sympathise with. The sensationalism of early 1990s television treatment of the poet still remains a prominent feature in the second decade of the twenty-first century, as documentary producers continue to focus on the 'mystery' of Maiakovskii's death, utilising the same claims about newly-discovered facts which made Valentin Skoriatin's work famous in the late 1980s.

There is also a strong focus on dramatising the poet's life – his relationships are often presented as tragic, and Maiakovskii's friends and lovers are accused of not understanding or supporting the poet. The documentaries produced in the second decade of the twenty-first century (*Vladimir Maiakovskii: tretii lishnii* and *Vladimir Maiakovskii: poslednii april'*) focus on interviewing Maiakovskii's living relatives, Patricia Thompson and Elizaveta Lavinskaia. Both are very critical of the Briks and in particular Lili, who is presented as a cold and calculating woman interested only in the poet's money. In fact, Maiakovskii's inheritance becomes the third most discussed topic (after his death and his relationships with women) throughout the documentaries. In this light, Tomashevskii's film *Dva dnia* (2013) is a refreshing representation of the poet's life, as it is not steeped in sensationalism or the desire to find those responsible for Maiakovskii's early death. The government is presented as accountable, however, emphasis is placed on the fact that the poet's death was the result of

⁶⁹ Sergei Braverman, *Pro eto, pro poeta i pro Liliu Brik* (TV film), 2007
<<http://my.mail.ru/mail/nototrema70/video/6492/6256.html>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the inhuman regime, rather than the actions of any one individual. The film does not end with Maiakovskii's death, but with a vision of the afterlife, in which Maiakovskii and Lili Brik are finally in love and at peace. Thus the Maiakovskii presented on contemporary television is not the dead author of poems, who is most famous for having produced Soviet slogans, but a living individual, whose struggle for love and happiness is something the audience can easily relate to.

The Development of the Russian Sector of the Internet: its Role in Preserving Russian Cultural Identity and Shaping the Literary Canon

The importance of the Internet in literary canon formation and revision becomes apparent when we consider the tendencies of Russian-speaking Internet users, and first and foremost, their identification with the term 'Runet' (Russian-Speaking Internet). Schmidt and Teubener note that the term has almost no analogue in Western languages, which suggests that the Runet offers an especially high potential for national identification.⁷¹ Moreover, Natal'ia Konradova suggests that an integral part of this identification with the Runet is due to its popularity with Russian people from the field of the humanities:

'RuNet only acquired its characteristic content when people from the field of humanities (the *literati* and academics) [...] turned their attention to it'.⁷²

Konradova explores the social identifications created online using *Zagranitsa* (a section of *Biblioteka Moshkova*, updated by and dedicated to Russians living abroad) as an example. According to her findings the majority of people who publish their works there have a strong sense of being Russian, an identity they have created from their opposition to the Western way of life: 'persistent ideologemes reflect reality (life standards, social services, etc.) only partially, but they are very much in line with the mythological stereotype that has historically been used to contrast "Russian character" and mentality with Western culture'.⁷³ However, Konradova concludes that Runet communication and online involvement not only promotes the idea of consolidating Russian

⁷¹ Schmidt and Teubener, "'Our RuNet"? Cultural Identity and Media Usage', p. 14.

⁷² Natal'ia Konradova, 'The Formation of Identity on the Russian-Speaking Internet: Based on the Literary Website *Zagranitsa* (world.lib.ru)', trans. by Maria Artamonova, in Schmidt, Teubener and Konradova, *Ctrl+Shift*, pp. 147-55 (p. 147).

⁷³ Konradova, p. 152. An ideologeme is a singular recognisable aspect or element of a given ideology.

identity, but also creates additional boundaries. According to Konradova, people who tend to publish on and frequent *Zagranitsa* identify themselves as 'Zagranitsa people', and they often contrast this definition with identities represented by other sections of Moshkov's library (for example *Samizdat*).⁷⁴ Konradova shows through an analysis of user comments how resources construct boundaries. The Runet, instead of being a tool for the exploration of new and unfamiliar ideas, functions no differently to a gathering of like-minded individuals in real life: in order to become recognised and valued as a member of *Zagranitsa* new users have to adopt the group's characteristic set of behaviours, and become part of its community. Then, once new users have explored the resources on the server and established their place among its users, they are often unwilling to investigate other resources, as they are alien, unknown, and will require time and effort to get used to and fit in with.⁷⁵ This view seems to be supported by the opinion of contemporary writer Linor Goralik, who is an active user of *LiveJournal*, a multinational blog server particularly popular with the Russian-speaking community. She reminisces about *LiveJournal*, or in Russian *Zhivoi Zhurnal*: 'Zhezhe [abbreviation of *Zhivoi Zhurnal*] is a website. Just a website. But, we, its close friends, we treat it differently. We treat it as a home [...] As a place, where, in a word, you could come at any point, and get into a proper little party [*tusniak*]'.⁷⁶ Thus, Goralik identifies people she might have never met in real life as part of the family, her home, on the basis that they, like her, utilise the same website.

Konradova is just one of many scholars of the Runet who comment on Russians' tendency to create online communities.⁷⁷ Floriana Fossato, in an article 'Is Runet the Last Adaptation Tool?', points out that 'Runet currently does operate as a device to spread and share information, but largely among closed

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁵ Konradova, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Linor Goralik, 'Comment on this', in *Russkii Zhurnal*, 30.03.2001

<http://old.russ.ru/netcult/20010330_goralik.html> [accessed: 20 March 2015].

⁷⁷ See articles: 'Virtual (Re)Unification? Diasporic Cultures on the Russian Internet', 'Russian LifeJournal. The Impact of Cultural Identity on the Development of a Virtual Community', 'Expert Communities on the Russian Internet: Typology and History', 'Netting Gender', in Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener and Natalja Konradova, *Ctrl+Shift: Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006)

clusters of like-minded users which are seldom able or willing to cooperate'.⁷⁸ Eugene Gorny goes further to suggest the reason for this apparent need to create communities, naming collectivism as a Russian national trait, identified by many sociologists and philosophers.⁷⁹ However, Russian collectivism manifests itself in sometimes paradoxical ways. Konradova notes the importance of commenting as an integral part of establishing oneself in an online community. Schmidt also highlights the significance of polemics in Runet, however, he sees the style of these discussions as a disturbing image straight of the pages of Fedor Dostoevskii's writings: a typical Russian user is a 'bored, cynical and malicious underground individual who is constantly involved in polemics against himself and others'.⁸⁰ This tendency to conform to artificial online communities, each with its own set of rules and behaviours, would suggest that the Runet, instead of being a tool for propagating a unified sense of national identity, serves to break it up, to create a multitude of different localised identities each perpetuated by its own set of online users. This in turn has an effect on the online approach to literary canonicity: instead of being presented with a unified structure, users are presented with a set of favoured authors, depending on which online community they belong to. This tendency partly contributes to the multiple and diverse representations of Maiakovskii on the Runet.

Another characteristic detail of Russian online activity is the prevalence of cultural and, in particular, literary discourse in the Runet . Fossato points out the popularity of online literary conferences: in 2006 the Russian State University organised an online literary conference, and the practice has now been adopted by other Russian universities.⁸¹ Gorny similarly draws our attention to the dominance of cultural discourses in Russian cyberspace. In his work 'A Creative History of the Russian Internet' he sheds light on the reasons why cultural and

⁷⁸ Floriana Fossato, 'Is Runet the last Adaptation Tool?', *Russian Cyberspace*, 1, 1 (2009) <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue01/pdf/issue1/Web-as-an-Adaptation-Tool_N-Fossato.pdf> [accessed: 16 March 2015].

⁷⁹ Eugene Gorny, 'A Creative History of the Russian Internet' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2006) pp. 246-52.

⁸⁰ Henrike Schmidt, 'Caught in the Web? The Fate of Russian Poets in the Internet', trans. by Christopher Gilley, in *Kultura*, 1 (2009), pp. 2-3 (p. 2).

⁸¹ Fossato, <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue01/pdf/issue1/Web-as-an-Adaptation-Tool_N-Fossato.pdf>

social discussions have achieved such popularity within Runet, using the example of *Zhivoi Zhurnal*:

Historically, the RLJ [Russian *LiveJournal*] community was first populated not by the teenage girls who form the majority of bloggers in the West but by mature professionals, predominantly male, including internet workers, journalists, writers, philosophers and artists [...] Thus, *LJ* conceived by its creator as a tool for keeping in touch between schoolmates unexpectedly acquired in Russia the aura of a playground for intellectuals.⁸²

Gorny identifies the economic situation in Russia in the 1990s as a major factor which led to this discrepancy between the average age of internet users in Russia and in the West: 'the relatively poor socioeconomic conditions in Russia is reflected in limited Internet access for the younger generation [...] the majority of Russians (up to 58%) connect to the Internet from work points'.⁸³

Gorny's conclusion about the maturity of Runet's users as well as Fossato's example of the Russian cultural elite using the Internet to promote discussion allows us to conclude that Runet is a definite tool for Russian intelligencia to consolidate a sense of national and cultural identity. Kozlov suggested that Russian poetry plays a major role in defining Russians' identity.⁸⁴ Therefore it is only natural to conclude that online libraries, with their extensive collections of poetic works, will be key places where different sections of Runet communities come together to promote their literary preferences.

Indeed, Russian online libraries enjoy tremendous popularity. Gorny commented on this phenomenon:

Almost any book published in Russian can be found and freely downloaded online. The Russian Internet has virtually managed to realize the hacker ideal of free information, in contrast to the "Western" Internet in which copyright and commercial concerns have severely limited the range of online publications.⁸⁵

Vlad Strukov, as well as Gorny, points out that the widespread availability of both classical and contemporary fiction online perpetuates a sense among the general public that writing is not supposed to be done in order to earn money,

⁸² Gorny, 'A Creative History of the Russian Internet', p. 244.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁸⁴ Kozlov <<http://expert.ru/expert/2014/02/vertikal-sovremennoj-poezii/>>.

⁸⁵ Gorny, 'A Creative History of the Russian Internet', p. 184.

but for the public good.⁸⁶ This attitude mimics the Soviet dogma that writers are ‘engineers of human souls’, therefore they work not for the sake of art, or profit, but for the benefit of the readers.⁸⁷

The difference between the Russian and the Western attitude towards copyright and intellectual property meant that the Runet became a serious tool in the preservation and development of the Russian literary canon. Online libraries have taken over many of the roles commonly associated with physical libraries and book shops. However, unlike physical spaces, online libraries work on the principle of public involvement. Indeed, until 2004 *Biblioteka Moshkova*, one of the largest and most well-known Russian online libraries, used texts scanned and submitted by the public, while its developer Maksim Moshkov viewed himself as no more than a receptionist.⁸⁸ Thus such online libraries develop to reflect only the tastes of the readers themselves. The reader is no longer a passive recipient of information, but also a promoter of it, and Runet library users aimed not only to find new material to read, but also to share their preferences.

However, in 2004 Moshkov’s library was sued for breach of copyright by the web portal *KM.ru*.⁸⁹ The trial highlighted the Runet’s users’ sense of collectivism and affiliation with their chosen web-portals. One of the online commentators on the trial pleaded with writer Eduard Gerovkian, who brought the case against the library: ‘Please understand, it is not just a website with a collection of texts – it is a symbol, a kind of eternal flame, or, in other words: our *home*’.⁹⁰ In 2005 Moshkov lost the copyright trial, and at the same time attracted the attention of the Russian government and the Russian Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications, who approved funding worth one million roubles to support the library.⁹¹ Moreover, the structure of the library changed: it became no longer possible for readers to suggest or send in texts. Instead, Moshkov invested in

⁸⁶ Vlad Strukov, ‘Digital (After-) Life of Russian Classical Literature’, *Kultura*, 1 (2009), pp. 9-10 (p. 9).

⁸⁷ See Chapter 1, footnote 76.

⁸⁸ Henrike Schmidt, ‘“Holy Cow” and “Eternal Flame”: Russian Online Libraries’, trans. by Christopher Gilley, *Kultura*, 1 (2009), pp. 4-8 (p. 5).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Nataliya Belenkaya, quoted in ‘“Holy Cow” and “Eternal Flame”. Russian Online Libraries’, p. 7.

⁹¹ ‘“Holy Cow” and “Eternal Flame”. Russian Online Libraries’, p. 7.

developing the classic section of the library (as this avoids copyright restrictions) and cooperated exclusively with authors who wish to publish their works on the library website.⁹²

Yet the spirit of free access to the cultural heritage lived on in the Runet, and became embodied by the *Librusek* online library (formed in 2007). Like in the early days of *Biblioteka Moshkova*, *Librusek* users themselves submitted their favourite texts to the library.⁹³ The creator of the library, Il'ia Larin, lives in Ecuador, and for a time this distance between the library's creator and the Russian court system worked in favour of the library and its users, who actively promoted piracy and did not adhere to copyright regulations. However, only two years later, facing financial difficulties and persistent hacker attacks, Larin changed the website, and at present one has to become a registered user in order to access any of the library archives. Nor is this library free to use – in order to gain access to texts, the user has to pay an entry fee which ranges from a one-off charge to an annual subscription.

Several scholars have commented on the fragmented nature of Russian online communities.⁹⁴ Indeed, if we consider the individual likes and preferences of the disjointed communities of the Runet, we come to the conclusion that Russian online activity leads first and foremost to a fragmentation of cultural values in general and the literary canon in particular. However, Strukov sees particular importance in the role of online libraries as he believes that amidst the shattering of cultural values and beliefs, online libraries serve to maintain a sense of national identity. He suggests that post-Soviet Russia is a country of 'confused national identity' and that online literary depositories function as a store for 'collective memories and imagination'.⁹⁵ However, according to Strukov, even these archives of culture may have contributed in their own way to the destabilisation of the literary canon. Strukov believes that the ability to upload and disseminate material may result in distortion of the canon as it

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Natal'ia Kondratova, 'The Formation of Identity on the Russian-Speaking Internet Based on the Literary Website *Zagranitsa* (world.lib.ru)', Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk, 'Konstruktirovanie real'nosti v SMI: Politiki.net, ili Protiv voyny, no za pobedu', Floriana Fossato, 'Is Runet the Last Adaptation Tool?'

⁹⁵ Strukov, p. 9.

becomes diffused with public's personal aesthetic judgements.⁹⁶ Kåre Mjør also views the online libraries' method of acquiring new material through readers' submissions as a contributing factor in the destabilisation of Russian literary canon.⁹⁷ However, one must be mindful that online availability does not in itself make a text or author canonical, just as publishing a paper copy of a text does not guarantee its popularity.

The move away from public compilation of online libraries to a greater involvement of groups of literary experts marked a turning point in the Russian cultural arena. Once again, the decision about what was to be considered good literature was taken away from readers, and placed in the hands of (often government employed) specialists. The late 1990s also saw an increase in government interest in the Runet in general. Mjør notes several major news and cultural websites such as *Lenta.ru*, *Vesti.ru* and *Russkii iazyk* as well as a major online library, *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka*, which were created on the initiative of and with monetary support by the government.⁹⁸ Mjør suggests that these websites were designed to attract their audience by reasserting traditional (largely Soviet) literary canon and cultural language norms.⁹⁹ Indeed, by the late 1990s the classical Soviet canon was well and truly dismantled, however, its replacement, a post-Soviet Russian canon, had not yet had a chance to pass the test of time, and had not fully established itself as an object of wide-ranging consensus.

Mjør shows this return to the literary canon of the past age by taking the example of the *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka (FEB)*, which, as a project, can be contrasted to the early days of *Biblioteka Moshkova*. The texts for this online library are selected by a committee of literary specialists, and while visitors are welcome to leave their comments, the texts are published as if they were printed on paper, and are not updated in response to readers'

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁹⁷ Kåre Johan Mjør, 'The Online Library and the Classic Literary Canon in Post-Soviet Russia: Some Observations on "The Fundamental Electronic Library of Russian Literature and Folklore"', *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian, and Central European New Media*, 1, 2 (2009), pp. 83-99 (p. 86).

⁹⁸ Marcus Alexander, 'The Internet in Putin's Russia: Reinventing a Technology of Authoritarianism', quoted in Mjør, p. 86.

⁹⁹ Mjør, p. 87.

comments. Neither can the readers influence the decisions about which texts appear in the library. In fact, the only texts which appear in *FEB* are the ones which already exist as a print publication.¹⁰⁰ *FEB* further enforces a literary hierarchical order by the way it presents information: some authors and their works merit not only a mention or a personal webpage in the library, but also a link to a corpus of references and academic discussions of their work. Mjør argues that by showing which texts or authors have proved to be worthy of further study *FEB* recreates the traditional Russian literary canon.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, Mjør points out that *FEB* favours both Soviet editions of eighteenth-century classics and, more importantly, Soviet literary criticism and research literature.¹⁰² Similarly *FEB* seems to coordinate its activities aimed at the preservation and formation of the literary canon with school and university curricula, as the developers claim to use school and university programmes as one of the key factors in determining which texts should be put online.¹⁰³

The government interest in the Internet and its capacity as a media outlet continued in the early years of the twenty-first century. Schmidt and Teubener note government attempts to grant parts of Runet the status of high culture product.¹⁰⁴ Schmidt and Teubener use the Runet award (first established in 2004) as an example to support this theory. As part of the celebrations marking ten years of the Runet the award was first presented to fifteen companies and projects for their contributions to the development of the Russian segment of the Internet. The event was funded and organised by the Russian Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications and even received the blessings of the Patriarch of Moscow, Aleksii II. This anniversary has become part of the nation's official cultural policy. The Runet award ceremony has been conducted annually and since 2007 it has been opened with a Runet anthem, rich with metaphors of monumentalism and national pride:

От портала к portalу проходит сигнал,
Чтобы девочка в снежной Сибири

¹⁰⁰ Mjør, p. 88.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener, '(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet', in Schmidt, Teubener, Konradova, *Ctrl+Shift*, pp. 51-72 (p. 52).

Прочитала, как в космос Гагарин летал,
Что страна наша – лучшая в мире.¹⁰⁵

Schmidt and Teubener suggest that this endorsement of the Runet by the government serves the purpose of using this increasingly popular media structure to appeal to the people's sense of national pride in their country's achievements as well as their trust in the authorities.¹⁰⁶

Another government strategy in dealing with the Runet, according to Schmidt and Teubener, is the separation of its content into high and low culture. While some websites and aspects of the Runet are celebrated and endorsed by the government, other aspects are condemned to induce a state of fear.¹⁰⁷

Consider, for example, former mayor of Moscow (from 1992 to 2010) Iurii Luzhkov's comment about the Internet '[the Internet is a] weapon of mass destruction', or Liudmila Narusova, a senator of Tula (from 2002 to 2006), who referred to the Internet as a 'cholera infection'.¹⁰⁸ When discussing how successful this campaign for vilifying the Internet has been it is worth considering that the Internet did not become available to the majority of Russians quickly. As recently as 2005 80% of the population were reported to have no access to the World Wide Web, and therefore largely relied on second hand information about it, mainly gathered from the television and other media.¹⁰⁹

However, Schmidt and Teubener also point out that according to Russian Internet activists up to at least the year 2005 there were almost no attempts at imposing Internet censorship and the general conclusion is that there was then no state control of the Runet.¹¹⁰ Instead of imposing control on existing and developing websites Schmidt and Teubener suggested that the Russian government separated desirable and undesirable aspects of the Runet into high culture, which was promoted, and low culture, which was condemned.

¹⁰⁵ Nikolai Stolitsyn, Anatolii Batashev and Valerii Batashev, 'Runet! Ty nas ob'ediniaesh', official anthem of the Runet, 2007 <<http://www.stihi.ru/konkurs/hymn/shortlist.html>> [accessed: 22 June 2015]. ('From portal to portal the signal rushes, so that a girl in the snowy Siberia could read how Gagarin travelled to space, and how our country is the best there is').

¹⁰⁶ Schmidt and Teubener, '(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet', p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ Schmidt and Teubener, '(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet', p. 52.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹¹⁰ Schmidt and Teubener, '(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet', p. 60.

Additionally Russian government saturated the Runet with government supported websites, such as *Russian Journal*, *Lenta.ru*, *Gazeta.ru*, *Strana.ru* and *Vesti.ru*, the aim of which is to deliver news (including news related to high culture) to the general population.¹¹¹

The 1990s was a time of online cultural Revolution in Russia. For the first time in decades Russian readers not only had access to a breadth of previously unknown or banned literature, but could themselves share their favourites with millions of readers online, therefore potentially contributing to the revision of the literary canon. Mjør notes that 'since state control and the hegemony of official culture were weaker in this decade [the 1990s] compared to the previous ones, the Internet facilitated the opening up of a new space for new cultural activities'.¹¹² This cultural freedom or indeed, anarchy was, however, short-lived and as the decade progressed and the Russian government found its footing after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state was once again regaining its control over published materials. Throughout the 1990s the public's social activism in satisfying its own cultural needs gave way to the more top-down organised online libraries – at present these are not only conforming to copyright laws, but also tend to publish literature chosen either by the website developers or by a similarly small group of experts.

However, the unprecedented phenomenon of establishing online communities has also led to a fragmentation among the Runet users. These communities, while they were established to unite individuals and thus provide a sense of identity, differ dramatically and are often opposed to one another. It is through this prism of fragmentation that I will explore the status of Vladimir Maiakovskii in the Runet, looking at the resources available at three different Russian online libraries. I will analyse how the poet is presented in these resources and what reasons may lie behind the choice to highlight certain aspects of Maiakovskii's life and legacy over others.

Valeria Stelmakh, in her article 'Book Saturation and Book Starvation: the Difficult Road to a Modern Library System', describes how online libraries have

¹¹¹ Schmidt and Teubener, '(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet', p. 61.

¹¹² Mjør, p. 84.

had drastic effects beyond the Runet communities. Stelmakh comments on the lack of print publications in Russia's regional libraries and says that, especially in peripheral areas of the country, online libraries have become the only sources of literature, in particular, contemporary literature.¹¹³ This puts further emphasis on the potential for online libraries to influence and reform the literary canon, and above all to introduce and perpetuate post-Soviet authors.

I have chosen to focus on three different libraries: *Biblioteka Moshkova*, *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka*, and *Librusek*. Each of them has a different history and has implemented different methods of collecting information, as well as a different relationship with their readers. While the particular aspects of how the libraries are run is outlined in the previous section, below I will focus on how each of these libraries treats Maiakovskii's legacy and how it promotes his place in the contemporary Russian literary canon.

Biblioteka Moshkova

In 2009 *Biblioteka Moshkova* was attracting approximately 500 000 readers per month, which prompted Schmidt to nickname it the 'holy cow of the RuNet'.¹¹⁴ The holy cow – an idol of worship which gathers people around it – can also be seen as a focal point for cultural and national identity. Thus Schmidt's comment once again emphasises the importance of online libraries in preserving and shaping the nation's cultural preferences.

One of the ways in which canonicity is judged and treated in *Biblioteka Moshkova* is by having a 'Classics' section (established in 2004). This is where we find the works of Maiakovskii. As is characteristic for notions of canonicity, a sense of hierarchy is also preserved and monitored. The section contains a table of the hundred most popular works. Popularity is judged by the number of times readers have downloaded them from the library catalogue in the last eleven months. In first place is *Gore ot uma* by Griboedov, in the second – *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* by Dostoevskii, followed by Turgenev's *Ottsy i deti* and

¹¹³ Valeria Stelmakh, 'Book Saturation and Book Starvation: The Difficult Road to a Modern Library System', *Kultura*, 4 (2008), pp. 3-7

¹¹⁴ "Holy Cow" and "Eternal Flame": Russian online libraries', p. 4.

Nekrasov's *Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho*.¹¹⁵ Very quickly it becomes apparent that the popularity list mirrors the school programme for nineteenth-century Russian literature. Indeed, in the modern day of easy access to a computer at home, finding a classical text online is an easier and faster option than trying to get one from the library where the number of copies is limited. In line with the chronological structure of the Russian school curriculum, the first twentieth-century text to appear in the table is *Na dne*, by Maksim Gor'kii. Maiakovskii features in this table once – his *poema Oblako v shtanakh* is number fifty-one on the list. Only two twentieth-century poets have merited a higher position than Maiakovskii. Aleksandr Blok (with his work *Dvenadtsat'*) takes up twenty-sixth position and Sergei Esenin appears twice ('Chernyi chelovek' is number thirty-four on the list and 'Pis'mo k zhenshchine' – number forty-nine).¹¹⁶ Furthermore the table provides exact details of the number of times the work was downloaded, and thus we know that in 2011 *Oblako v shtanakh* was downloaded 36 146 times. In 2012 this figure rose to 46 438 and in 2013 the *poema* was downloaded 53 245 times.¹¹⁷ However, these statistics can only provide us with so much accuracy when it comes to reflecting the popularity of texts and their authors.

The main issue in making an accurate assessment of popularity by using the library's figures arises from the fact that different texts entered the library at different times and therefore not all follow the same format. While the majority of entries represent a single work (a novel, a short story or a poem) some are entered as collections of several different texts (as is the case with Anton Chekhov, whose *Rasskazy i povesti 1898 – 1903* is presented in the library database a single entry).¹¹⁸ Due to the way in which *Biblioteka Moshkova* was established and operated it is not surprising that the information presented there

¹¹⁵ Anon., 'Reiting 100 samykh populiarnykh proizvedenii iz Sobraniia klassiki Biblioteki Maksima Moshkova', *Biblioteka Moshkova*, March 2014 <http://az.lib.ru/r/redaktor/text_top-100-2014-03-31.shtml> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, the Classics section in *Biblioteka Moshkova* includes a large number of translations from authors around the world. However, the top 100 chart is dominated by Russian names. In fact there are only three non-Russian works which made it into the list: these are Homer's *Iliad*, Jack London's *Martin Eden* (1909) and Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818).

¹¹⁷ 'Reiting 100 samykh populiarnykh proizvedenii iz Sobraniia klassiki Biblioteki Maksima Moshkova'.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

is poorly structured. When it comes to the entries on Maiakovskii, there seems to be little order as to how his works were digitised: webpages with Maiakovskii's poems can include as few as eight poems grouped into a single entry (for example, a webpage dedicated to his Paris trip in 1924 – 1925), to 126 poems in a webpage dedicated to poems written in 1928. Similarly, most of Maiakovskii's *poemy* merited their own webpage, however *Liubliu, IV Internatsional, V Internatsional* and *Pro eto* are all entered on a single webpage: 'Poemy (1922 – fevral' 1923)'.¹¹⁹

Despite the fact that there are 125 webpages in total dedicated to Maiakovskii in *Biblioteka Moshkova*, most of the information comes from a small number of sources. All of Maiakovskii's works are taken from the Soviet *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*. Similarly, while there are plenty of critical articles on Maiakovskii's work, the vast majority of those made available to users were written by Maiakovskii's contemporaries and uploaded to the library using the 2006 anthology *Maiakovskii. Pro et Contra* as the source work. There is only one late Soviet-era critical article on Maiakovskii by Aleksandr Mikhailov, which has been taken from the 1988 edition of *Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei*.¹²⁰

Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka (FEB)

This resource is considerably better structured than *Biblioteka Moshkova*, and presents itself as a serious database designed primarily for researchers and academics. The creators claim that the top priority for the *FEB* is the preservation of the Russian literary heritage.¹²¹ In other words, unlike the early days of *Biblioteka Moshkova* which highlighted the preferences of the reading public, the *FEB* aims to represent the top-down version of the Russian literary canon. The basis of the *FEB* database is formed by individual *elektronno-nauchnye izdaniia (ENI)* [electronic academic editions]. *ENIs* can be dedicated to specific authors, specific genres or specific texts, which are considered to have had a particular influence on Russian literature (although currently the only

¹¹⁹ Anon., 'Lib.ru/Klassika: Maiakovskii Vladimir Vladimirovich: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii', *Biblioteka Moshkova* <http://az.lib.ru/m/majakowskij_w_w/> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

¹²⁰ For a comparison of works presented in *Biblioteka Moshkova* please see Appendix, 'Chapter 5', 'Charts referencing the materials related to Maiakovskii available in online libraries'.

¹²¹ Anon., 'Tseli FEB', *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka* <<http://feb-web.ru/feb/feb/about1.htm>> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

works that have merit their own *ENI* are the early Russian works *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, *Zhitie protopopa Avrakuuma* and *Povest' vremennykh let*, which is currently in preparation).

The library became active in 2002, however large sections of it still remain undeveloped. For example the section of the library dedicated to twentieth-century Russian literature currently consists of only six names (Aleksandr Blok, Osip Mandel'shtam, Maksim Gor'kii, Sergei Esenin, Mikhail Sholokhov and Maiakovskii). Out of those only Maiakovskii, Esenin and Sholokhov have complete *ENIs*, the rest remain in preparation. In contrast, the *FEB's* section for nineteenth-century literature is comparatively well developed and presents *ENIs* for 12 different authors, 11 completed *ENIs* and 1 in preparation (Dostoevskii). Whether the library organisers view any of the twenty-first century authors and works worthy of inclusion in the canon remains unclear, but currently there is no section for contemporary writers on the website. The reasons behind such a restrictive vision of the Russian literary heritage also remains unclear. The developers do not specify how the information is chosen for upload to the site and why some authors are prioritised over others. However they do indicate that the materials are selected in accordance with the needs of academia and contemporary school education. The developers acknowledge that tackling a project this big is a serious challenge, however despite the explanations provided, their reasons behind the selection criteria for texts and authors remain rather obscure:

The developers of *FEB* are guided by the objective indicators of the importance of published materials, which undergo the strictest selection process: we take into account 'the citation index' of writers and researchers in academic periodicals, encyclopaedias, academic histories of Russian literature, whether a particular fictional or academic work features in university programmes and recommended reading lists, etc.¹²²

The *ENI* dedicated to Maiakovskii includes six sections: encyclopaedic details about Maiakovskii, works by Maiakovskii, works about Maiakovskii, bibliographical works, records of Maiakovskii's life and work and the index

¹²² Anon., 'Struktura i sostav tematicheskikh razdelov', *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka* <<http://feb-web.ru/feb/feb/about1.htm>> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

section. However, most of the *ENIs* provide only bibliographical information and the texts listed there are not available in the library. The texts which are available include the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh* (every volume), a 1939-1949 edition of the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 12-ti tomakh* (7 volumes only), several extracts from encyclopaedias, predominantly from Soviet publications, two works on Maiakovskii's biography and bibliography and a small number of critical or analytical texts (again the vast majority are from Soviet publications).

There are 119 texts suggested for further reading and nearly half of those are critical or analytical books, monographs and articles. Again, the vast majority of those (thirty-eight) are from late Soviet publications, however there is also a small selection of works published within Maiakovskii's lifetime, works published abroad as well as works published after 1991. Apart from Maiakovskii's collected editions and encyclopaedia entries mentioned above, the reference section includes a small number of memoirs, letters and works inspired by Maiakovskii. However, overall there is a noticeable tendency towards favouring Soviet publications over those produced after the collapse of the USSR.¹²³

Mjør argues that *FEB* is trying to re-instate the literary canon established in the Soviet Union.¹²⁴ Both the *FEB* developers' choice of texts about Maiakovskii, as well as the fact that the section on Maiakovskii is almost complete, while so many remain in development or lack any mention, supports this opinion.

Librusek

This library was started in 2007, and until 2009 remained a major online library providing free access to publications protected by copyright laws. The popularity ratings in the library are therefore specific to the type of users who choose this resource. The majority of most widely read authors are contemporary writers, whose books would not otherwise be easily available for free use. As is the case with *Biblioteka Moshkova*, most users prefer to read Russian authors rather than translated texts. Out of the hundred listed top writers only twenty-

¹²³ For a comparison of works presented in *FEB* please see Appendix, 'Chapter 5', 'Charts referencing the materials related to Maiakovskii available in online libraries'.

¹²⁴ Mjør, p. 86.

four are non-Russian. A majority of these are twentieth-century English speaking authors, however despite their larger numbers, their popularity is overall lower than that of contemporary best-sellers, in particular Stephenie Meyer (*The Twilight Saga*) and J. K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*).¹²⁵

The library also contains information on which texts have been most frequently viewed and downloaded. Surprisingly, the majority of these are non-fiction books. Out of the hundred most downloaded texts only ten books are fiction, while the most popular type of literature by a large margin is study aids. As of June 2015, out of the ten fictional books which made it into the top list six belong to Meyer's *Twilight Saga* series.¹²⁶

In this light, the large quantity of material on Maiakovskii presented in the library may come as a surprise. Locating it, however, is not a straightforward process. The library is loosely organised into major sections to aid the reader. These are: 'New additions', 'Genres', 'Series', 'Periodicals', 'Popular', 'Countries'. These sections attempt to gather and categorise library content, however this does not always prove successful. For example the 'Countries' section is supposed to categorise authors based on their country of origin, thus the reader who is interested in reading, for example, Australian literature is able to follow the link and find a list of Australian authors. The section contains links to Soviet Russia, Imperial Russia and the Russian Federation, however the authors included in these sections of the 'Countries' category are mainly little known and no traditionally canonical authors are included in it.

Similarly, following the section 'Genres', we are presented with a list of genres and subcategories. There are twenty-one genres in this section, ranging from 'Prose', to 'Religion and Spirituality' to 'Business Aids'. There is a 'Poetry' category, however the only Maiakovskii-related works the reader can find there are a 2011 book *O liubvi*, which contains Maiakovskii's love poems and some of his letters to Lili Brik, and a 2007 anthology *Zolotoi i serebrianyi vek. Intimnaia lirika*, which contains eight poems by Maiakovskii (both of these books can be found following the 'Lyric Poetry' subcategory). These are the only mentions of

¹²⁵ Anon., 'Populiarnye avtory', *Librusek* <<http://lib.rus.ec/stat/a>> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

¹²⁶ Anon., 'Populiarnye knigi', *Librusek* <<http://lib.rus.ec/stat/b>> [accessed: 22 June 2015].

the poet that a user can find through using the navigation tools. Fortunately, the website also features a search engine, allowing readers to search for a particular author, which reveals that the library contains 125 entries related to the poet, as well as information about the poet's biography.

Compared to the rest of the website the author's page for Maiakovskii is, however, extremely well organised. Users are provided with links to texts which mention Maiakovskii, anthologies and collections which contain his works, the *Biblioteka Vsemirnoi literatury* edition dedicated to Maiakovskii, the *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh* (each volume presented as a single document available for reading and downloading), as well as single works and criticism about the poet. Most of the documents available are works by the poet (these constitute nearly 70% of the total material). However, it has to be noted that it is not uncommon for *Librusek* to contain several copies of the same text, as the library contributors use different publications to digitise the same work. 13% of available files are anthologies or collections which feature Maiakovskii's work and the rest is comprised of criticism or analysis of Maiakovskii's life and work (the majority of which are post-Soviet publications), Maiakovskii's biography and memoirs about the poet. There is also a small number of texts which were inspired by Maiakovskii (for example, Aseev's *poema Maiakovskii nachinaetsia*).¹²⁷

Despite providing a good variety of material *Librusek* falls short on several important counts. Most of the works are digitised without heed for Maiakovskii's use of *lesenka* and therefore readers are unable to perceive the full impact of Maiakovskii's poetry. *Lesenka*, Maiakovskii's distinctive stair-step writing style, is a form of separation of poetic texts into sections, which allows the author to emphasise relevant rhythmic, intonation and syntactic elements of the narrative. This issue is picked up on by the users, who are able to comment on any of the documents uploaded to the library:

I don't know how one digitises a text, but Maiakovskii without his famous *lesenka* cannot be appreciated. He himself spoke of the importance of distinguishing stressed phrases, intonation and rhythm

¹²⁷ For a comparison of works presented in *Librusek* please see Appendix, 'Chapter 5', 'Charts referencing the materials related to Maiakovskii available in online libraries'.

– see article ‘Kak delat’ stikhi’. The poems are great, the formatting is poor.¹²⁸

The primary aim of the library is to make texts available for the public and not to catalogue information or provide clear referencing, and that is what lies at the root of the second problem with the content on Maiakovskii. A large number of documents (over 10%) lack any information on where the texts originally come from, therefore they provide a good introduction to the topic for a user whose primary objective is to read, but are next to useless for anyone who wishes to put texts into their context. Nevertheless, the large number of available texts on Maiakovskii is indicative of his important canonical status as seen by both the library developers and its users (who are able to add texts to the library catalogue themselves).

The three online libraries chosen have very differing approaches to representing the poet. While the complete works of the poet feature in all of them, it is through analysing the supporting texts presented to us that we can gather how Maiakovskii’s canonical status is defined by these online resources. *Biblioteka Moshkova* has the smallest number of academic and critical works about the poet, and the majority of those come from a single post-Soviet source. This lack of attention to the poet can be partially explained by the fact that in 2004 the library changed the way texts were being uploaded and it became impossible for the general public to suggest or upload texts. This inevitably meant that fewer texts were uploaded. Nevertheless, *Biblioteka Moshkova* provides evidence of Maiakovskii’s ongoing popularity with the public, as it places his *poema Oblako v shtanakh* among the top 100 most frequently downloaded texts. By contrast, the *FEB* has a comparatively large amount of secondary reading on Maiakovskii’s life and work, however most of these sources are by Soviet authors. This seems to be part of the *FEB* developers’ general trend for choosing material for inclusion – the *FEB* organisers are striving to preserve the literary heritage, but in order to do this, they have reverted to Soviet ideas of canonicity: the only authors currently featuring in the library are those who were highly valued during the Soviet era. Finally, *Librusek* has, once again, a

¹²⁸ Tortilla2, comment to ‘Maiakovskii: Sborniki stikhotvorenii’, *Librusek*, 05 November 2011 <<http://lib.rus.ec/a/18170>> [last accessed: 22 June 2015].

different approach to presenting Maiakovskii. This time the reader is provided with a large number of works about the poet written and published after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and thus, understandably, they present a somewhat different depiction of Maiakovskii's merits and characteristics.

By the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century all three of these online libraries have to a greater or lesser extent complied with top-down ideas about canonicity and the preservation of the literary heritage. However, due to the period of online publishing freedom in the 1990s even amongst these largely government endorsed high culture domains, Maiakovskii's image is incoherent and fragmented with each particular repository has chosen to present its own version of the poet's work and identity. I will now turn my attention to representations of Maiakovskii in the realm of popular culture, namely the parodies of the poet, to determine how Maiakovskii's is represented by parodists and whether their representations of the poet are more coherent than the versions presented by television documentaries and online libraries.

Parody as a Reflection of Maiakovskii's Canonical Status

Comical appropriations of the poet's image and legacy are an important and large aspect of contemporary representation of Maiakovskii in public media. Perhaps one of the best known examples of such an appropriation is the 1993 domestic appliance advertisement which reads: 'your love-boat will never crash against the every-day grind, if it is equipped with appliances from Siene'.¹²⁹ Sundaram suggests that, despite the fact that the poet himself was known to make fun of his own commercial advertisements 'the pun [...] does not spoof the trivial nature of consumerism so much as it trivializes [...] the Mayakovsky legend itself' (Sundaram, p. 317). Sundaram considers such trivial uses of Maiakovskii's image and legacy indicative of his waning canonical status in post-Soviet Russia (Sundaram, pp. 307-319).

Whether in an advertisement, comedy or social satire, such appropriations of Maiakovskii's image and legacy are examples of parody, and this will be the

¹²⁹ Anon., 'Vasha liubovnaia lodka ne razob'etsia o byt, esli na ee bortu bytovaia tekhnika Siene', *Kommersant*, 18 (1993), quoted in Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994) p. 282.

central topic for this section. Since before the collapse of the Soviet Union Maiakovskii was a common target for parodists. The main question I am going to consider is whether such uses of the poet's legacy is an indication of his decline in the canonical hierarchy, or whether parody is itself a reflection of the canonical hierarchy. If, as I will argue, parody is indeed reflective of the literary canon, then the use of Maiakovskii's image and legacy (be it in an advertisement or a comedy sketch) is not an indication of the poet's declining status, but, on the contrary, a representation of his enduring popularity.

I will start by exploring the controversial issue of using Maiakovskii's work or adaptations of it in commercial advertisements. Many Russian copywriters hold Maiakovskii in high regard: in 2010 the website *Reklamist.com.ua* marked the anniversary of the poet's birth with an article 'V. Maiakovskii: legendarnyi russkii copywriter'; another article 'Vladimir Maiakovskii kak genial'nyi copywriter' claims that the work done by Maiakovskii and the artist Aleksandr Rodchenko has become a classic of advertising.¹³⁰ Maiakovskii is held in such high regard not only because people aspire to follow his personal advertising successes, but also because his personal image and his poetic style are both easily recognised by the general public.

In fact, it is precisely Maiakovskii's recognisability that allows him to be the focus of parody sketches. It is social parody in particular which plays a prominent role in the instances I set out to investigate. I will look at several examples in which Maiakovskii-like verse is used to draw the public's attention to negative aspects of modern life, most notably his appropriation by the poetic project *Grazhdanin Poet*. The analysis of the use of Maiakovskii's photographic images, as well as the impersonation of his traits, leads to the conclusion that in such examples of appropriation the focus of the parody is not on the poet himself, but on society and modern life. I will argue that by speaking such

¹³⁰ Anon. 'V. Maiakovskii: legendarnyi russkii copywriter', *Reklamist.com.ua*, 6 July 2010 <<http://reklamist.com.ua/v-mayakovskiy-legendarnyy-russkiy-kop-14640/>> [accessed: 24 August 2015]; anon. 'Vladimir Maiakovskii kak genial'nyi copywriter', *Alldayplus.ru*, 06 April 2012 <http://alldayplus.ru/design_art_photo/culture/5467-vladimir-mayakovskiy-kak-genialnyy-kopirayter.html> [accessed: 24 August 2015].

contemporary truths through the poet's lips, parodists make Maiakovskii contemporary, current and very much alive.

Lastly, I cannot overlook the fact that although Maiakovskii parodies are popular in advertisements and in social satire, it is just as often that one comes across a Maiakovskii-related parody which is designed just to provide entertainment. Such examples do not seek to capitalise on the poet's success in advertising, nor do they set out to highlight the social ills of today. However, I hope with these examples I will be able to assess why Maiakovskii is such a popular target for parody, and whether indeed, as Sundaram suggested, the Maiakovskii legend is becoming trivialised. I want to establish whether the Soviet legend of Maiakovskii, which was the focus of Sundaram's research in her work 'Manufacturing Culture', has been outgrown by contemporary representations of the poet. Consequently, I aim to trace whether contemporary parodies of Maiakovskii reflect his Soviet image, or whether they have started to incorporate post-Soviet changes to the poet's canonical image.

Maiakovskii and the Post-Soviet Advertising Industry

Maiakovskii is known and highly regarded among Russian copywriters today, not only for his personal achievements in advertising, but also because using his images and quoting lines from his works makes advertisements recognisable and therefore grabs the attention of the public. Thus it is very common not only for copywriters, but also for journalists and writers to seize the public's attention by including a well-known quotation from one of Maiakovskii's works. Since Maiakovskii was so rigidly studied in Soviet schools, and still remains an important part of the school curriculum, advertisers do not need to look far for easily recognised lines. Perhaps the most familiar of these is the phrase 'Liubovnaia lodka', which Maiakovskii first used in his unfinished poem 'More ukhodit vsiat'. The term is repeated in the unfinished poem 'Uzhe vtoroi dolzhno byt' ty legla', and most notably in Maiakovskii's suicide note – the main reason it has achieved such wide recognition.¹³¹ Currently it is mainly used by lifestyle magazines oriented towards a female audience, in articles with tips on

¹³¹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'More ukhodit vsiat' and 'Uzhe vtoroi dolzhno byt' ty legla', in *Polnoe sobranie sochii*, x, pp. 286-87. The suicide note 'Vsem', in *Polnoe sobranie sochii*, xiii, p. 168.

how to have a healthy relationship, like ‘Chtoby liubovnaia lodka ne razbilas’ o byt. Retsepty schastlyvogo sovместnogo prozhivaniia v brake’.¹³² Meanwhile, the widespread use of the phrase in the advertising industry (namely, domestic appliances advertisement from 1993) was noted by several academics.¹³³ Sundaram suggests that such use of Maiakovskii’s legacy is indicative of the decline of his canonical status (Sundaram, p. 317). Contrary to Sundaram’s argument, Boym saw the advertisement as irony, attempting to redeem both the tragedy of Maiakovskii’s line as well as the grind of the Soviet every-day.¹³⁴ It is indeed contentious whether lines from a suicide note (though originally written elsewhere) are a suitable subject for parody, however, overall, I would argue that the use of Maiakovskii’s lines and the adaptation and appropriations of his style are not indicative of a fall in the poet’s canonical status, but to the contrary, are an indication of how high this status remains today. Gronas in his work *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics* argued that despite the fact that modern texts are presented to the reader as written documents, literature is still mnemonic. According to Gronas texts enter literary canons on the merits of their mnemonic qualities:

In order to survive culturally, a text must still have certain mnemonic qualities, no less so than an ancient epos or a folksong: it must comply with the demands of individual readers’ memories and fit in with the mechanisms of institutionalised cultural memory, also known as the literary canon.¹³⁵

In Russia, where such focus is placed upon memorising of texts, it stands to reason that the texts which are easier to remember will be the ones which endure canon revisions. Moreover, Gronas argues that for the purposes of canonicity, it does not matter whether whole work is remembered or only a small fraction if it: ‘the length of the text is not important; in fact, the mechanism of canonicity is more clearly evident when what becomes subject to the forces

¹³² Anon. ‘Chtoby liubovnaia lodka ne razbilas’ o byt: retsepty schastlyvogo sovместnogo prozhivaniia v brake’, *MedUniver.com*, 4 June 2013 <http://meduniver.com/Medical/Psichology/recepti_schastlivogo_braka.html> [accessed: 24 August 2015].

¹³³ In addition to highlighted in the thesis references to the advertisement by Boym and Sundaram, the advertisement is also cited in Svetlana Malykhina, *Renaissance of Classical Allusions in Contemporary Russian Media* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014) p. 74.

¹³⁴ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994)

¹³⁵ Gronas, p. 3.

of cultural reproduction is a minimal fragment – a stanza, a line or even a phrase'.¹³⁶ Gronas' argument ties in with my observation on Maiakovskii's use in advertising as reflective of his high position in Russian literary canon. The public easily recognises lines written in Maiakovskii's style as well as quotations from his works, and the advertising companies are quick to capitalise on their recognisability. The Voronezh-based Local Economics Research Centre (TsIRE) published an article 'Maiakovskii – krieitor sovremennoi reklamy', in which the author argues how relevant Maiakovskii's legacy remains for those who want to pursue the creation of advertisements:

These days many advertisement authors use old Soviet forms and graphics (sometimes changing it slightly, but mostly keeping the originals). Particularly popular are the red contours of the character of the Worker as well as the 'Maiakovskii-like' stylisation of the text [...] the similarities between the original lines and drawings of Maiakovskii guarantees quick recognition and memorisation.¹³⁷

This guarantee of recognition is what attracts copywriters to Maiakovskii. Indeed, their work is half done already if the audience is familiar with some or even a majority of the text. Such a feat could only be possible with an author whose works are studied and memorised, who remains part of the literary canon which continues to be studied today.

Chief Executive Officer Tat'iana Ardzhaeva from the business and marketing company *TSC Development Lab* creates youtube videos providing tips for developing business strategies. She too, has noted the popularity of Maiakovskii's work in advertising and called the phenomenon 'slogan à la Maiakovskii', which she believes leads to quick recognition and easy popularity of an advertisement.¹³⁸ Ardzhaeva warns her viewers not to overuse the most well-recognised lines, like 'я достаю из широких штанин', but to seek out other less commonly used expressions.¹³⁹ She concludes: 'take a volume of

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹³⁷ A. Khaustova, 'Maiakovskii – krieitor sovremennoi reklamy', *Tsentr issledovaniï regional'noi ekonomiki* <<http://www.lerc.ru/?part=bulletin&art=5&page=18>> [accessed: 15 August 2015].

¹³⁸ Tat'iana Ardzhaeva, 'Ia dostaiu iz shirokikh shtanin', 30 October 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJGRiz23I5w>> [accessed: 15 August 2015].

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, The quote is from Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte', *Polnoe sobranie sochlenii*, x, p. 71.

Maiakovskii's verse, look through it, he has many other similarly outstanding phrases'.¹⁴⁰

As Ardzhaeva's example shows, in their quest for originality, the copywriters are dissatisfied with repeating the same old stock phrases, they return to reading Maiakovskii, and finding new ways of creating connections between the object of their campaign and the poet, but also between the poet and the public. While it might be considered that such a use of Maiakovskii legacy is trivialising the poet's achievements, one should remember that the poet himself valued the importance of good advertising. In 1923 he wrote: 'not a single business, even the most respectable one, can succeed without advertisement'.¹⁴¹

Maiakovskii and Social Parody

In 2011 the poet Dmitrii Bykov and actor Mikhail Efremov took part in a satirical project *Grazhdanin Poet*. In this project Efremov reads topical poems written by Bykov in the style of well-known predominantly Russian poets. The project was originally broadcast by the television channel *Dozhd'*, but after only five shows the project was removed due to differences of opinions between Bykov and the editors of the channel. The project is now broadcast by the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* and also has a popular youtube channel. From 2013 the project was renamed *Gospodin khoroshii*, but kept its old youtube user-name. The youtube channel currently has sixty-one videos.¹⁴²

Since its start in 2011 the team has produced three parodies of Maiakovskii's work: in 2011 they released the sketch 'Ogurets-ubiitsa' and 'Dvadtsat' let – ni khrena net' and in 2014 – 'Za vse khoroshee'. Of particular interest is the title sequence that the team uses to introduce each episode. The viewers are informed of the programme title, the author of the poem – Dmitrii Bykov, and the artist reading the piece – Mikhail Efremov. However the next line reads 'featuring' followed by the name of the poet whose work is being parodied.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ardzhaeva <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJGRiz23I5w>>.

¹⁴¹ Vladimir Maikovskii, 'Agitatsiia i reklama', in *Polnoe sobranie sochlenii*, xii, pp. 57-58 (p. 57).

¹⁴² Andrei Vasil'ev, Mikhail Efremov and Dmitrii Bykov, *Gospodin khoroshii* <<https://www.youtube.com/user/GrazhdaninPoet/featured>> [accessed: 14 August 2015].

¹⁴³ Mikhail Efremov and Dmitrii Bykov, 'Ogurets-ubiitsa', *Grazhdanin poet*, 13, 12.06.2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PbITHZM8H8&spfreload=10>> [last accessed:

This creates a strong sense that the opinion presented to viewers is not only that of the project organisers, but also of the poets whose work is being parodied, thus making them current, living participants in the political issues and debates highlighted by the project. *Grazhdanin poet* thus presents us not the timeless immutable monuments of the poets' achievements, but encourages viewers to see them as if they were alive, with their own opinions and ideas about modern life. In doing that the subject of the parody shifts from the poet in question and their work onto modern life itself. Indeed, Bykov and Efremov are not trying to make us laugh at the appropriation of Maiakovskii's lines or his image, but to highlight social ills, which are the main subject of their satire.

Their approach to parody is by no means a new idea. In 1925 literary and cultural studies expert Ol'ga Freidenberg, who focused her studies on the literature and theatre of classical antiquity, noted in many ancient and medieval examples of parody an intent to bring the object of parody onto the stage, into the thick of the action: 'the god would be called into the midst of the mocking crowd, so that it might dwell there, amongst the obscenities and jokes'.¹⁴⁴ The objects of parody in the examples Freidenberg examined were mainly gods, as they were the figures to whom people looked up. I believe that in this case the parallel between the gods of old, and canonical figures of today is possible and appropriate. Indeed, in reviewing Russian literature from the eighteenth century onwards Parthé notes that writers have been viewed in secular terms, as prophets and keepers of social and moral values: 'as the tsar's saintly aura and the church's intercessional role declined, authors took up these mantles and acquired a potentially dangerous political and spiritual power'.¹⁴⁵

In both the rituals and performances Freidenberg studied and in *Grazhdanin Poet* the objects of parody are not called upon in order to be laughed at, but instead are invited to share the merriment, to join in, and comment on a life which they have never seen. In fact, according to Freidenberg, in addition to

14.08.2015]. In Russian it reads 'при участии', highlighting that the poet who is being parodied is an active participant in the current social and cultural debates discussed on stage.

¹⁴⁴ Ol'ga Freidenberg, 'Proiskhozhdenie parodii', in *Russkaia literatura XX veka v zerkale parodii* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1993), pp. 392-404 (p. 402).

¹⁴⁵ Parthé, p. ix. On the topic of veneration of authors and presenting literature as quasi-religion see also Catriona Kelly, *Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

social commentary, keeping gods (canonical figures) alive and close to the public is among the key functions of parody:

In parody lies not the masking or lack of content, as it might seem; in it lies the strengthening of content, the strengthening of the nature of the gods, and it laughs not at them, but only at ourselves, and does it so well that up until now we treat it as comedy, imitation or satire.¹⁴⁶

If we follow Freidenberg's argument, we must conclude that parodies of Maiakovskii cannot diminish his status. On the contrary, they reinforce it while providing a commentary on modern life and the modern audience. This is certainly true in case of the sketches from *Grazhdanin Poet*. Their first parody of Maiakovskii 'Ogurets-ubiitsa' is the artists' version of what the poet might have written in 2011 in response to Russia banning the import of European vegetables. Both Bykov's professional writing and Efremov's acting lead the public to believe that this is something the poet could have indeed written and performed himself if he was alive. The piece makes fun of the traditionally Soviet attitude of fear and distrust towards anything foreign, as well as comments on the political apathy of the general population:

Да больше, чем пол-страны
У нас поголовно овощи!¹⁴⁷

As is the case with other youtube videos, the viewers' comments posted beneath the video are largely concerned with the performance of the actor, as well as, in this case, the writing of Bykov. However, interestingly, several commentators fail to grasp the political irony of the piece. One commentator in particular says: 'I would be happy when the shops have vegetables grown in Russia, not abroad. They should be buying from us'.¹⁴⁸ It is possible that the perception of Maiakovskii as a patriotic poet, perpetuated during the Soviet era, makes it harder for some viewers to see the irony of the sketch.

¹⁴⁶ Freidenberg, p.403.

¹⁴⁷ Mikhail Efremov and Dmitrii Bykov, 'Ogurets-ubiitsa', *Grazhdanin Poet*, 13, 12 June 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PblTHZM8H8&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 14 August 2015] ('Over half of our country is generally vegetables!').

¹⁴⁸ 09mail, comment to 'Ogurets-ubiitsa' (2011) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PblTHZM8H8&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 14 August 2015].

‘Dvadtsat’ let – ni khrena net’, also dated 2011, is another of the *Grazhdanin Poet* parodies of Maiakovskii. This time the poem is a grim overview of the changes in Russia since 1991, and a condemnation of Putin’s leadership. It is interesting to see Maiakovskii being used as a prototype for this very liberal piece, as, due to the conventional Soviet representation of Maiakovskii, the poet is often associated with working with and for the government, or least seen as an unrelenting supporter of the Soviet regime. Despite this, in 2011 Bykov chose Maiakovskii to be the voice that speaks against the regime. I believe the choice of Maiakovskii is very appropriate, and, in a way, mirrors the poet’s own relationship with politics. The poet, having celebrated the Soviet regime for over a decade, wrote in 1928 in his autobiography: ‘I am writing a *poema Plokho*’.¹⁴⁹ Maiakovskii entered Soviet literature full of optimism for the future and carried this optimism through most of his career. However, in the years leading to his suicide his work takes on a darker mood, and more and more often we see him using parody and satire to criticise Soviet reality. In fact, the above-mentioned *poema Plokho* was designed to be a parody of his own 1927 work *Khorosho!*. Similarly, in ‘Dvadtsat’ let – ni khrena net’ Bykov and Efremov say:

Сейчас, конечно, совестно,
Но двадцать лет назад
Мы думали, что вскорости
Здесь будет город-сад.¹⁵⁰

Bykov and Efremov turn to Maiakovskii one more time in their latest act, ‘Mal’chik shel i Krym nashel...’, which is a parody of Maiakovskii’s famous children’s poem ‘Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho?’. Published online at the beginning of 2015, this is the artists’ response to the Russian annexation of Crimea. The country’s leaders, they believe, are promoting violence and inequality. The poem ends with the lines:

Если нынче хорошо,

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Ia sam*, p. 29. Maiakovskii never finished *poema Plokho*, but to many it symbolises his dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime.

¹⁵⁰ Mikhail Efremov and Dmitrii Bykov, ‘Dvadtsat’ let – ni khrena net’, *Grazhdanin poet*, 24, 28 August 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6zxSQny4Bg>> [accessed: 14 August 2015] (‘now we feel ashamed, but twenty years ago, we were thinking that in the near future we will have a garden-city here’). The phrase ‘здесь будет город-сад’ is taken from Maiakovskii’s propagandist poem ‘Rasskaz Khrenova o Kuznetskostroe i o liudiakh Kuznetska’: see, Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Rasskaz Khrenova o Kuznetskostroe i o liudiakh Kuznetska’, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, x, pp. 128-31. The sketch by *Grazhdanin poet* is a parody of that poem.

То что такое плохо?¹⁵¹

Despite the high ratings for the sketch, the viewers' comments in response to this particular clip are perhaps the most aggressive out of the three discussed, with many negative remarks focusing personally on Efremov. For example one viewer states: '[Efremov is an] Alcoholic and hypocrite! And they say Putin doesn't allow freedom of speech!)))) CRIMEA IS OURS!!!!'.¹⁵² The negative tone of the majority of the comments left on their youtube page is, perhaps, in keeping with the overall tragic tone of the authors. In this latest act, as well as the one from three years before, Bykov and Efremov appear to be more and more disillusioned by the way their country is developing.

However, not all of the social parodies involving Maiakovskii are as serious as those by *Grazhdanin Poet*. Maiakovskii is a popular figure for parody in the Russian comedy competition *KVN (Klub veselykh i nakhodchivyykh [Club of the Merry and the Quick-Witted])*, where the competitors take a considerably more light-hearted approach to social commentary. One such example is the 2007 sketch by KVN team *Tomsk 'Pisateli v mentovke'*. This short sketch parodies lyric poets who are too obsessed with being able to create a perfect narrative to notice real life. The two poets end up in police custody because they have had a fight. According to them the fight started because of Maiakovskii, after one of them quoted the poet's lines at a group of robbers. Interestingly, the line they attribute to Maiakovskii, and which the audience is supposed to associate with the poet, does not actually belong to him. The line contains profane language and refers to the great effort a worker makes to earn his money. Thus we are presented not with a comprehensive image of Maiakovskii, but with an appropriation of one part of it: that of an aggressive propagandist of the workers' state. While the humour in the sketch is mostly whimsical the sketch's ending is a powerful comment on contemporary life in Russia. The policeman, exasperated by the poets' inability to produce a coherent statement, threatens

¹⁵¹ Mikhail Efremov and Dmitrii Bykov, 'Mal'chik shel i Krym nashel...', *Gospodin khoroshii*, 12 January 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B8iEwsXwAI>> [accessed: 15 August 2015] ('if what we have now is good than what is bad?').

¹⁵² Сибиряк Иванов, comment to 'Mal'chik shel i Krym nashel...' (2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th6ekblXc9k>> [accessed: 15 August 2015].

to detain them. When the poets protest he replies: 'a cop in Russia means more than a poet'.¹⁵³

Thus we see a trend in parodies not to portray the whole image of Maiakovskii but to focus on and highlight just one aspect of the subject of parody. And indeed, when it comes to Maiakovskii different parodists choose different aspects of his life and work as a basis for their sketches. While *Grazhdanin Poet* largely portrays a disillusioned, down-cast Maiakovskii, KVN team *Tomsk* chose the image commonly associated with Soviet education: Maiakovskii as a fighter for the Soviet regime and the working class. In the following section I will analyse more comical parodies of Maiakovskii, where viewers are presented with a range of varying images of the poet.

Maiakovskii just for Fun

Literary critic and writer Iurii Tynianov said about parody:

Similarly to a thespian parody where instead of a *protagonist* there is an *actor*, in poetic parody instead of an authorial persona there is an authorial character with everyday mannerisms [...] this leads us to the very interesting phenomenon of *the parody character*.¹⁵⁴

I would argue that in case of Maiakovskii, this parody character is not singular, but differs depending on the message parodists are trying to deliver. One of the common aspects of Maiakovskii's life and persona to be parodied is his propagandistic belief in the superiority of the Soviet regime over capitalism. In 2007 such a parody character was successfully created by KVN team *Piatigorsk* in their sketch 'Terminator: versiiia po Maiakovskomu'. In this sketch the team combines scenes from the canonical American film *Terminator* with Maiakovskii-inspired poetry. *Piatigorsk* presents Maiakovskii as the Terminator and the robot's arrival to the present day in terms which echo the poet's 1925 trip to America, thus supposedly narrating Maiakovskii's alleged reflections on the Western way of life. For the most part the comedy comes from successful

¹⁵³ KVN team *Tomsk*, 'Pisateli v mentovke' (2007)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw7L9zQfBY4>> [accessed: 14 August 2015]. The statement is an adaptation of the line 'поэт в России – больше, чем поэт', first used by Evgenii Evtushenko in his *poema Bratskaia GES*, 1965. Also see Chapter 4, footnote 11.

¹⁵⁴ Iurii Tynianov, 'O parodii', in *Russkaia literatura XX veka v zerkale parodii* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1993), 361-391 (p. 380).

and unexpected comments on the events in the movie. However, the sketch is also designed to showcase the superiority of the Russian spirit over American values:

шары гоняешь,
мужик патлатый,
деньги тратишь на жвачку,
а я живу на одну зарплату¹⁵⁵

and later:

что ты куришь, дружище,
всякую дрянь,
и потом от неё хихикаешь?
Кто ты мне,
поближе встань,
может так свою дурь ты выкинешь.¹⁵⁶

The rendition of Maiakovskii as the almost universally recognisable athlete and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger underlines the parody character's strength and masculinity. Indeed, several *Youtube* comments suggest that the poet and the actor were physically alike. In particular, user Maksim Ogurtsov comments: 'Kids, have you ever seen MAIAKOVSKII. HE IS THE PROTOTYPE FOR SCHWARZENEGGER, if you don't believe me, pick a Soviet literature textbook'.¹⁵⁷ Likewise, a number of commentators speculate on whether Maiakovskii or Schwarzenegger would like this parody. User Gavrila Printsip states: 'Maiakovskii would have approved',¹⁵⁸ and user Vse Blogi wonders whether this video has been shown to Schwarzenegger.¹⁵⁹ Naturally, a minority of commentators dislike the sketch but only one accuses the parodists of

¹⁵⁵ KVN team *Piatigorsk*, 'Terminator: versiia po Maiakovskomu' (2007) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Oq2OIBKLhg&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 16 August 2015] ('I see you are playing pool, spending your money on chewing-gum, meanwhile I live just on my salary').

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* ('Why do you smoke all this trash, my friend, and then giggle because of it? Who are you, come, stand closer, maybe this will help you get better').

¹⁵⁷ Максим Огурцов, comment on 'Terminator: versiia po Maiakovskomu' (2012) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Oq2OIBKLhg&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 20 December 2015]

¹⁵⁸ Гаврила Принцип, comment on 'Terminator: versiia po Maiakovskomu' (2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Oq2OIBKLhg&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 20 December 2015]

¹⁵⁹ Vse Blogi, comment on 'Terminator: versiia po Maiakovskomu' (2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Oq2OIBKLhg&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 20 December 2015]

disrespectful treatment of the poet and Soviet culture. User Vostok 223 states: 'to jest at the sacred, at Maiakovskii – this is all our comedy bath sponges are capable of. The foolish people do not understand these principles of killing culture through jests'.¹⁶⁰ However, most viewers find the sketch witty, fun and easy to relate to.

Maiakovskii's image as a pro-Soviet dismissive observer of western values has also been used by another KVN team, *BAK-Souchastniki*. In 2013 they presented a sketch 'Maiakovskii', in which the parody character Maiakovskii comes up with a plot for the canonical Soviet film *Ironiia sud'by ili s legkim parom*. The film has traditionally been shown on New Year's Eve on Russian television channels ever since its release in 1976. In the parody sketch three Soviet television producers are gathered with the task of creating a New Year themed film, which will be shown every holiday for the next hundred years. While they are struggling to come up with ideas, in comes Maiakovskii, who reads a poem which mirrors the plot of *Ironiia sud'by ili s legkim parom*. It starts with the lines:

Заморским буржуям
вовек не понять
народа советского
нашего.¹⁶¹

As the story presented by Maiakovskii character is so intimately familiar to the vast majority of viewers, the audience is easily able to relate to it. Meanwhile the character of Maiakovskii continues to parody the poet's obsession with Sovietness:

гражданка советская входит к себе
в квартиру проэкта советского,
советским ключом открывает замок
и видит картину советскую¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Vostok223, comment on 'Terminator: versiiia po Maiakovskomu' (2013)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Oq2OIBKLhg&spfreload=10>> [accessed: 20 December 2015]

¹⁶¹ KVN team *BAK-Souchastniki*, 'Maiakovskii' (2013)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hf3LyuPlaE>> [accessed: 15 August 2015] ('The foreign bourgeoisie will never understand us the Soviet people').

¹⁶² *Ibid.* ('the Soviet citizen enters her flat, designed by the Soviet projects, she opens the lock with the Soviet key and beholds a Soviet scene').

The satirical commentary lies in the fact that the audience knows in advance that what the heroine is about to see is a very drunk protagonist sleeping in her bed – therefore not at all a positive Soviet image. Thus, in this instance, the team has chosen to parody the canonical Soviet image of Maiakovskii. However, *BAK-Souchastniki* do not just focus on this one aspect of Maiakovskii's image; they also pick up on the fact that Maiakovskii was very confident in his talent as a poet. In 1918 Maiakovskii said in his tragedy *Vladimir Maiakovskii*:

Я,
быть может,
последний поэт¹⁶³

In 1924 the poet compared himself to the absolute superstar of Russian poetry – Aleksandr Pushkin, in the poem 'Iubileinoe', and his confidence in his own poetic mastery remained a prominent aspect throughout his career.¹⁶⁴ In 1935 Stalin proclaimed that Maiakovskii was and remained the greatest poet of the Soviet era.¹⁶⁵ *BAK-Souchastniki* also chose to introduce this aspect of Maiakovskii's personality into their sketch. As the Maiakovskii character enters the stage he says to the film producers, who are about to get up to greet him: 'please sit, comrades, I am only the greatest Soviet poet alive'.¹⁶⁶ The satire, however, is not so much directed at the poet himself, or even his poetic persona, but at the Soviet image of him perpetuated after Stalin's announcement. This is highlighted by the fact that even as the poet proclaims his greatness, and the film producers acknowledge that his poem is indeed exactly what they are looking for and will make an excellent masterpiece for the public to watch again and again, the poet is still struggling with the Soviet bureaucratic machine. As the Maiakovskii character enters the stage he is followed by a receptionist who complains to the film producers that the poet came unannounced and has no right to be there: 'Comrades, Maiakovskii arrived, but he doesn't have a pass'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Vladimir Maiakovskii*, p. 153.

¹⁶⁴ Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Iubileinoe*, pp. 47-56.

¹⁶⁵ See Introduction, footnote 5.

¹⁶⁶ KVN team *BAK-Souchastniki* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hf3LyuPIaE>>.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Not all parody sketches of Maiakovskii choose to adopt the poet's personality traits. Tynianov in his article 'O parodii' suggested that in the process of parody the personality of the author can become deformed, or in rarer cases, not be represented at all.¹⁶⁸ Such is the case with KVN team *Piatigorsk's* 2003 sketch 'Sem'ia Maiakovskikh'. In this sketch the artists create a hypothetical situation – Maiakovskii's family with father Maiakovskii, mother Maiakovskii and son Maiakovskii. They talk to each other by declaiming rhymed lines. Their speech is filled with made-up words and clear gaps, which allow the listening audience to hear the rhyme better, and so to identify the sketch as a distinctive parody of Maiakovskii's poetic style. None of the characters on the stage is supposed to represent Maiakovskii himself, and the parody is mainly of his distinctive poetic style.¹⁶⁹

In parodies of Maiakovskii the poet's characteristic attributes are indeed highlighted and exaggerated, but at the same time different artists choose different aspects to focus on. Therefore the character of the poet we see never becomes a full representation of the poet. Indeed, Tynianov warned his readers that a writer's personality and his literary heritage should not be confused with his parody character, as the two are only loosely related.¹⁷⁰ However, one aspect stands true for all parodies: in order to be successful they have to parody something the audience is already familiar with. Tynianov said: 'Parodying half-forgotten phenomena is hardly possible' and later 'the motto of parody should be: only what is living and contemporary'.¹⁷¹ Indeed, in order to appreciate parody the public has to be intimately familiar with the subject of the parody in the first place. It has to be easily recognisable as well as something the audience can relate to. Thus the use of Maiakovskii as a subject for parody makes it evident that the poet still retains his canonical status.

In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union the mass media has taken great steps in re-inventing and updating the image of Maiakovskii to

¹⁶⁸ Tynianov, p. 380.

¹⁶⁹ KVN team *Piatigorsk*, 'Sem'ia Maiakovskikh' (2003)

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCctgytuo4>> [accessed: 14 August 2015].

¹⁷⁰ Iurii Tynianov, 'O parodii', p. 385.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

ensure his status as a poet who is contemporary and current. Television, with its focus on viewer numbers and ratings gave its audience a poet who was no longer the boring subject of a literature lesson, but a living individual with very human problems the audience could universally relate to. These representations relied on sensationalism and a sense of drama to ensure high viewer ratings. This more human image of Maiakovskii presented throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century is composed of three main aspects. The first one is the poet's death. Skoriatin's *Taina gibli Maiakovskogo* provoked a drastic reaction: the public became dissatisfied with the fact that the poet simply committed suicide, and sought a more exciting explanation of the mystery of his death, which television documentaries attempted to provide. While the mystery of the poet's death feeds into the sensationalist nature of television, the second aspect, the poet's loneliness, helps create a sense of drama. Maiakovskii, despite his popularity, despite his many affiliations with cultural institutions, despite his friends and family is presented as a lonely individual, who lacks emotional support and is poorly understood by those around him. The third aspect of this newly created image of Maiakovskii is (in keeping with the traditions of making a gripping show) focused on money. The viewers are informed that Maiakovskii was a very well-off individual and the mystery of his death becomes intricately tied to the question of inheritance.

Meanwhile the newly formed public medium of the Internet has also started to appropriate Maiakovskii. Unlike television, due to the fragmented nature of online communities, so far the Runet has failed to establish a homogeneous representation of the poet. Currently many major online libraries, which may potentially have an impact on the contemporary Russian literary canon, are to a greater or lesser degree controlled by the government. However, many of them have started out as public initiatives, representing a variety of public views on what a post-Soviet literary canon should look like. The exception to this is *Federal'naia elektronnaia biblioteka*, which was started in 2002 by government initiative and is striving to preserve the canon, as opposed to alter it. The *FEB's* representation of Maiakovskii remains true to his Soviet status. However, this is the exception which reinforces the rule of multiplicity of Maiakovskii's representations available online. Following Lauter's comment on canonicity as

an expression of society's views about its past which are relevant for its future, we have to conclude that while Russian online societies continues to attempt to redefine Maiakovskii, he will remain relevant and therefore canonical.

The widespread use of Maiakovskii in comical sketches or by the advertising industry does not diminish his canonicity, as it is a reflection of it and works only as long as Maiakovskii is continued to be regarded as an important and influential poet, whose works are taught and memorised. Some parodies choose to trivialise the Soviet representation of the poet as a propagandistic fighter against everything foreign and a defender of everything Soviet. However, Maiakovskii as a defender of Soviet values is only one portrayal amongst many, and it would be a mistake to suggest that a parodist trivialises the canonical position of Maiakovskii just by trivialising this one aspect of his portrayal. Finally, we have to consider whether, in these fragmented representations of the poet available to us through the public media, one stands out above the rest, and whether there is any one party that has succeeded at appropriating Maiakovskii to their needs. It seems to me that so far this remains unclear, however, what is concrete is that Maiakovskii himself has finally succeeded in achieving his self-fashioning ambition of becoming a poet of the people. In the current pluralistic society, many, often opposing groups, can all find something they can identify with, something worth canonising, in Maiakovskii's legacy.

Conclusion

Этими своими быстрыми ногами Маяковский ушагал далеко за нашу современность и где-то, за каким-то поворотом, долго еще нас будет ждать.¹

Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Epos i lirika v sovremennoi Rossii', 1933

I first started on the project of assessing the place of Vladimir Maiakovskii in the post-Soviet Russian literary canon in 2011. The project was timely, as while there have been several academic works in English on Maiakovskii in recent years, none have focused exclusively on the post-Soviet period.² Moreover, Chantal Sundaram concluded that with the collapse of the Soviet system Maiakovskii was unlikely to remain a key figure in the literary canon: 'today Mayakovsky has suffered a third death along with the collapse of the regime for which his legend served a purpose'.³ My own findings, however, have shown that Maiakovskii is far from forgotten. Instead the image of the poet has been reinvented to suit the post-Soviet era.

In 2011 Aleksandr Ushakov, a member of the Institute of World Literature said in an interview: 'I believe our study of Maiakovskii [*maiakovedenie*] is gathering force [...] old individuals are still active and a new generation is emerging'.⁴ Soon after, in 2012, Dmitrii Bestolkov submitted a doctoral thesis 'Tvorcheskoe nasledie V. V. Maiakovskogo v otechestvennom literaturovedenii poslednego desiatiletiia: kontseptsii i podkhody'. While Bestolkov touched on the topic of variety in contemporary representations of Maiakovskii, his research focused exclusively on academic works, ignoring the body of material about the poet which exists outside academia and which often attracts a larger audience.

It is with this in mind that this study focused on three distinctive areas, each with the potential to promote and reshape the literary canon. First, this work

¹ Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Epos i lirika v sovremennoi Rossii', in Marina Tsvetaeva *Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh: 1917-1937*, ed. by Aleksandr Sumerkin, 2 vols (New York, Russika publishers 1979), ii, pp. 7-26 (p. 8). (With his fast step Maiakovskii strode far beyond our times and somewhere, behind some turning, he will be waiting for a long time for us to catch up).

² See Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: the Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend 1930-1993'; Laura Shear Urbaszewski, 'Creating the First Classic Poet of Social Realism: Mayakovsky as a subject of "celebration culture" 1935-1940'.

³ See Introduction, footnote 26.

⁴ Aleksandr Ushakov, quoted by Stanislav Kuvaldin, 'O Vladimire Maiakovskom', *Shkol'niku*, 3, (2011) <<http://journal-shkolniku.ru/o-mayakovskom.html>> [accessed: 7 July 2011]

considered school education. All Russian students engage in studying Maiakovskii, and for some this introduction forms their lasting impression of the poet. Secondly, this thesis analysed literary anthologies. Finally, this study focused on the Internet and representations of the poet in popular culture. This chapter provided an especially original treatment of the topic of canonicity, given that popular culture remains outside traditional fields of academic analysis. Television and Internet representations of the poet often have little historical accuracy, and therefore cannot be used as scholarly representations of the poet. However, their popularity prompted me not to overlook their importance in defining Maiakovskii's place in the contemporary canon.

Throughout this work I was particularly interested in establishing parallels between the poet's self-image (which changed dramatically throughout his career) and the various contemporary representations of him. Many authors who have discussed Maiakovskii, both during his life and after his death, mention that he deliberately cultivated his public image. However, I am unaware of any scholarly attempts to compare the poet's self-created image to the various Soviet and post-Soviet representations of the poet. On the contrary, researchers tend to focus on how Maiakovskii's biography and character had to be misrepresented in order to achieve the desired image of the poet. Maiakovskii was image-conscious and often spoke on the subject of his acceptance by the future generations. My analysis therefore particularly addressed how the contemporary public perceives the poet and whether this mirrors the way he presented himself during his life.

I have focused on four main research questions. First I looked at how the representation of Maiakovskii changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As I have established that there was no uniform way to represent the poet I was also interested in the reasons for these multiple representations and the differences and comparisons between them. This question naturally led me to consider the target audience in each instance. Finally, I have also considered how such variety in representation became possible and how the post-Soviet representation of the poet utilises elements of the poet's own created self-image, as well as representations of the poet provided by his friends and contemporaries.

As I show in chapter 1, throughout his literary career Vladimir Maiakovskii had always been concerned with self-representation. The image he presented to the public, however, was strongly influenced by other people, as well as the political situation at the time. Thus throughout his life Maiakovskii's self-portrayal went through several stages: a misunderstood genius at the start of his career, a zealous critic of the war during World War I, an even more zealous supporter of the Revolution in 1917, a supporter of the Soviet state and spokesman of its people in the 1920s and one who is part of the working class towards the end of his life. In 1935 aspects of Maiakovskii's larger than life personality of a natural leader and his legacy which presented officially suitable revolutionary and ideological content became essential background to his official canonisation as an exemplary hero-figure.

This study identified three major trends in the post-Soviet representation of Maiakovskii, each of which departs from his Soviet image: Maiakovskii portrayed as an immoral villain obsessed with violence, Maiakovskii as a tragic and misunderstood loner, and Maiakovskii as a victim of the Soviet regime. While each representation is a departure from the Soviet image of the poet, they all choose to focus on different aspects of Maiakovskii's life and work. Works which vilify Maiakovskii are designed to debunk Maiakovskii's canonical position; to present him in opposition of his Soviet image as someone who is not only unworthy of emulation, but should be condemned. Works which focus on Maiakovskii's love lyrics and his complex personal life agree with the Soviet representation of Maiakovskii as a great poet, but focus on adjusting his image from super-human perpetuator of Soviet values to a more humanised figure who the average reader can relate to. Such works tend to focus on aspects of his biography commonly omitted in Soviet publications: his relationships with women and his involvement in the Futurist movement. Finally, those who theorise about the reasons for Maiakovskii's death commonly attribute it to his disillusionment in the Soviet state. Once again, such a representation of the poet does not question Maiakovskii's talent or his worth as a canonical poet. Instead it departs from the Soviet representation by arguing that the poet, at the end of his life, saw faults in the way the country was developing and sought to reflect this in his works.

Throughout, this thesis has shown how post-Soviet representations of the poet not only utilise Soviet scholarship, but also build upon the poet's own self-image either by quoting his works and his autobiography, or by quoting accounts of his public appearances left by his contemporaries. As the poet adjusted his public image throughout his career, it became possible for drastically different representations to emerge, all finding plenty of material to support their claims to truthfulness.

The school curriculum, literary anthologies and the public media each focus on a different target audience, which plays a significant part in the way Maiakovskii is represented. When it comes to presenting Maiakovskii at school, a major factor is the place of literature as a subject which is designed not only to enhance students' knowledge of texts and authors, but to cultivate their moral and civic values. As such, even though in other areas Maiakovskii is no longer viewed as a hero-figure to be emulated, in the school curriculum he is still often presented as a morally righteous person.

The dramatic resurgence of previously forgotten authors and the discovery of new ones which marked the 1990s presented the same difficulty for anthologies as for school textbooks: as the size of an anthology remains a constraining factor, editors have to choose which authors to select for inclusion. The drastic difference between the poets included in *Strofy veka* and *Rusaskaia poezii: XX vek* show that there is little cohesion between compilers when it comes to the selection of works and authors who are considered to be of importance. The Russian poet and literary critic Valerii Shubinskii warns the audience against anthologies' biased representation of the Russian literary past, suggesting that any particular representation is only truthful with one particular target group. In the same article Shubinskii also notes the popularity of pre-revolutionary poems by Maiakovskii amongst the general public and comments that the late Maiakovskii was still a poet of genius but that he 'has broken his wings'.⁵ This separation between Maiakovskii's early and late art is at the core of his representation in post-Soviet literary anthologies. It has been noted that after the collapse of the Soviet Union people's opinions on literature produced during

⁵ See Chapter 4, footnote 68.

that time became largely negative. Thus anthologies reflect this readers' preference by focusing on presenting pre-revolutionary works of Maiakovskii, or later works which are not associated with his typical civic poetry.

Similarly, in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union the mass media has also reinvented the image of Maiakovskii. While their work is largely oriented towards public demand, their representations of Maiakovskii ensure his status as a poet who is contemporary and current. Television, in particular, with its focus on viewer numbers presented a poet who was no longer the boring subject of literature lessons, but instead a living individual with very human problems which the audience could sympathise with. Unlike the school curriculum, where aspects of Maiakovskii's controversial life are still little discussed, television programmes focused almost entirely on the nature of the poet's relationship with friends and his love interests. The second major topic of focus became the poet's death, which satisfies the audience's preference for mystery and sensationalism.

Meanwhile the developing public media of the Internet has also appropriated Maiakovskii. The Runet, more so than any other areas addressed in this study, has failed to establish a homogenous representation of the poet. By their nature online communities remain fragmented and often there is little interaction between them. However, the majority of online representations of the poet find their origins in the way Maiakovskii presented himself during his life. Thus through this medium Maiakovskii has realised his ambition to remain current for future generations.

On several occasions I have mentioned the contemporary popularity of the Silver Age, the literary period associated with the pre-revolutionary upsurge of artistic creativity. Two of the three major trends in contemporary representations of Maiakovskii – that of a victim of the regime and a tragic misunderstood loner – are rooted in public and scholarly perception of the Silver Age. The third representation – that of an immoral villain – can be, once again, examined in relation to perceived Silver Age tropes reinvented in a negative light. Indeed, it is the poets' adherence to *zhiznetvorchestvo* that becomes the central topic of investigation for Zholkovskii, both in his analysis of Maiakovskii and Akhmatova.

Zholkovskii equated Maiakovskii's poetic image to the poet's personality, mixing art and reality into one, and accusing both the poetic persona and the poet himself of immorality. In his treatment of Akhmatova, it is her own act of self-creation that Zholkovskii finds disagreeable, accusing the poet of narcissistically manipulating her own biography.⁶

However, before I examine further Maiakovskii's legacy and representation in the Silver Age context, it is important to highlight why this period achieved such popularity in post-Soviet Russia and how it is perceived by the contemporary public. This will allow us to deduce how public perception of the Silver Age influenced the post-Soviet image of Maiakovskii.

The writer Tatiana Tolstaya in 1992 described contemporary attitudes towards the Silver Age:

Now when we look back with a feeling of sorrow and loss at that legendary time [the Silver Age], which seems separated from us by a transparent but impassable barrier, when we hear the dim, underwater voices of those people – their debates and quarrels, their amorous admissions, their unrealised and realised prophecies – we have a vision of the *Titanic* floating in the night and gloom on its way to destruction.⁷

Over twenty years later Forrester and Kelly still echo this opinion: 'in hindsight, the many personal losses lend a tragic tinge to the Silver Age, even for the poets who did survive beyond it. A reader cannot help thinking: what would have developed out of this amazing ferment, if war and revolution hadn't intervened?'.⁸ The Silver Age has acquired characteristics of nostalgia and sadness in its contemporary representations. All of its many representatives are seen in the light of the common tragedy that altered their lives: the Revolution. Despite their

⁶ Zholkovskii, Aleksandr, 'The Obverse of Stalinism: Akhmatova's Self-Serving Charisma of Selflessness', *Self and Story in Russian History*, ed. by Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 50.

⁷ Tatiana Tolstaia, 'Pushkin's Children', in *Pushkin's Children: Writings on Russia and Russians*, trans. by Jamey Gambrell (New York: Houghton Mufflin, 2003), pp. 86-87.

⁸ Forrester and Kelly, p. lv.

individual fates, the Silver Age poets are all seen as victims of the Soviet regime. Galina Rylkova considers the Silver Age to be 'a cultural construct of retrospective origin brought to life [in the first half of the twentieth century] as a means of overcoming the existential anxieties unleashed by the Bolshevik Revolution, the civil war, and the Stalinist terror'.⁹ The historic period attributed to the Silver Age was categorised by intense literary stifle: the Futurists, the Acmeists and the Symbolists saw their movements in opposition to each other, and spent considerable effort belittling each other's achievements. However, Rylkova notes that by the time the term 'Silver Age' was coined, artists 'began to see themselves and were seen as the sole bearers of cultural memory'.¹⁰ It is not surprising then, that towards the end of the Soviet period, the public and the scholars both turned to the Silver Age works in search of meanings and truths that the artists prophesised almost a century before. In the 1990s, when everything Soviet was largely considered in a negative light, the Silver Age artists became celebrated even further and were seen as a symbol for moral and artistic freedom. Forrester and Kelly, discussing the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, note: '[Silver Age] poets who had suffered and died acquired a moral authority that also heightened their aesthetic importance'.¹¹

In chapter 5 I referred to Parthé's work *Russia's Dangerous Texts*, which discusses the sacred and spiritual role which writers occupy in Russian culture. Indeed, while the Silver Age writers were not the first ones to come up with concept of the artist as a bearer of cultural values, many of them, Maiakovskii included, took it to heart. Indeed, his works and his self-constructed life were devoted to representing the poet as a modern-day prophet with a significant message to the nation and the ages. However, in Parthé's definition, a key element of the writer-prophet's life is suffering. The prophet's main aim is to stand up for truth and cultural values against overwhelming odds in a society which might have lost sight of its values.

⁹ Galina Rylkova, 'The Archaeology of Anxiety: The Russian Silver Age and Its Legacy' (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), p. 6.

¹⁰ Rylkova, p. 17.

¹¹ Forrester and Kelly, p. lvi.

Sacrifice is a natural element that emphasises the prophet's struggle. In particular, 'emphasis was often placed on a death caused by *chuzhie* (others), suffered as a Russian for Russia'.¹² Death as the ultimate sacrifice becomes viewed as the ultimate act of heroism – the stance for preservation of cultural values against overwhelming odds. Suffering and death at the hands of the Soviet regime are also central to Forrester and Kelly's definition of the Silver Age. Similar feelings are evoked in many post-Soviet anthologies, as well as television films and school textbooks. Interestingly, Maiakovskii himself often equated death with public validation in his works. In his poem 'Ko vsemu' (1916) the protagonist defies several deaths to come face to face with future generations and proclaim his greatness:

Вам завещаю я сад фруктовый
моей великой души.¹³

In 'Razgovor s fininspektorom o poezii' (1926) Maiakovskii proclaims that after his death it is only because of his and his companions' works that the future generations will remember his times. In *poema Chelovek* (1917) the protagonist (Maiakovskii) returns to earth millions of years after his death to find a street named after him.

In many ways, contemporary perceptions of the Silver Age shaped post-Soviet representations of Maiakovskii. It is not by chance that in school textbooks his biography is discussed with references to such other Silver Age poets as Akhmatova, Blok and Mandel'shtam. These poets have traditionally been considered in opposition to the Soviet regime – they were amongst its most well-known victims. Placing Maiakovskii alongside these poets and viewing him, first and foremost, as a Silver Age artist negates his Soviet legacy. Like the others the exemplary Soviet poet is now often viewed as a victim of the regime and a martyr for the preservation and advancement of cultural values.

¹² Parthé, p. 110.

¹³ Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Ko vsemu', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13-ti tomakh*, i, pp. 103-06 (p. 106). ('I devote the fruit orchard of my great soul to you').

Interestingly, Maiakovskii's representations as a Silver Age poet (either by directly naming him as such, or by attributing to him the qualities associated with the period) are more popular than his representations as a Futurist. One explanation for this is that Russian Futurism is still, largely, a little publically known and understood phenomenon; whereas the Silver Age (rightly or wrongly) sounds more familiar and recognisable to the vast majority of Russian readers.¹⁴ Another explanation for contemporary depictions of Maiakovskii as a Silver Age poet is connected to the importance of suffering as a traditional measure of one's artistic talent. Loud, scandalous and prone to mischief, Russian Futurists simply do not fit into this particular hierarchy of talent. As Maiakovskii is considered to be one of the most important poets of the twentieth century, it became imperative for him to have experienced a measure of suffering, and the contemporary perception of the Silver Age offered just that.

This thesis was instigated by a lack of scholarship on the contemporary representation of Vladimir Maiakovskii. My research has confirmed that Maiakovskii continues to hold a central place within the literary canon. The literary achievements section in the 2014 Olympic Closing Ceremony in Sochi has highlighted Maiakovskii as one of the authors who is considered to be at the forefront of the contemporary Russian literary canon. However my study has also shown that there is significant disparity when it comes to representing Maiakovskii and his legacy. Considering the multitude of nuanced factors which contribute to post-Soviet representations of the poet, it would be beneficial to engage in comparative study of the post-Soviet reinventions of Maiakovskii's poetic contemporaries. Such an approach would allow us to uncover whether the re-appropriation processes applied to Maiakovskii are comparable to the post-Soviet representations of other authors.

Finally, it remains to be seen, whether the growing top-down reinforcement of Maiakovskii's traditional canonical status will lead to a more uniform representation of the poet. Perhaps instead, the plurality of different representations of Maiakovskii, tailored by the needs of specific groups, will

¹⁴ See Rylkova, pp. 1-12.

prevail and keep the poet as an evolving phenomenon who remains current with the times.

Appendix: Figures and Tables

Chapter 1: The Canonical Status of Vladimir Maiakovskii during His Lifetime and throughout the Soviet Period

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Vladimir Maiakovskii, Ia, title page (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo G. L. Kuz'mina i S. D. Dolinskogo, 1913).

The title page of Maiakovskii's first published collection of poems, illustrated by his friend Vasili Chekrygin. For an electronic scan of the original volume see *Bibliophika* <<http://www.bibliophika.ru/index.php?id=3207>> [accessed: 11 June 2014]

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

The cadre from the film *Baryshnia i khuligan*, 1918, featuring Maiakovskii as the protagonist

Maiakovskii projects an image of strength and willpower, which will become key characteristics of his image as a leading poet of the Soviet literary canon.

For more images of Vladimir Maiakovskii see 'Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii. Fotoal'bom', *Khronos: vseмирnaia istoriia v internete* <http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_m/mayakov_foto.php> [accessed: 5 March 2012]

Chapter 2: The Changes in the Perception of Maiakovskii in Russia in the 1990s

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Posthumous photo of Vladimir Maiakovskii

The second (smaller) dark mark on the poet's shirt and apparent abrasion on the temple gave many a cause to doubt the official version of Maiakovskii's suicide.

See Aleksandr Maslov, 'Maiakovskii. Taina smerti. Tochka nad i postavlena' *Novaia gazeta*, 16 September 2002

<<http://2002.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2002/68n/n68n-s13.jpg>> [accessed: 15 October 2015]

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

2014 Sochi Winter Olympics Closing Ceremony

Left to right: Vladimir Maiakovskii, Sergei Esenin, Aleksandr Kuprin, Vladimir Nabokov, Anna Akhmatova, Maksim Gor'kii.

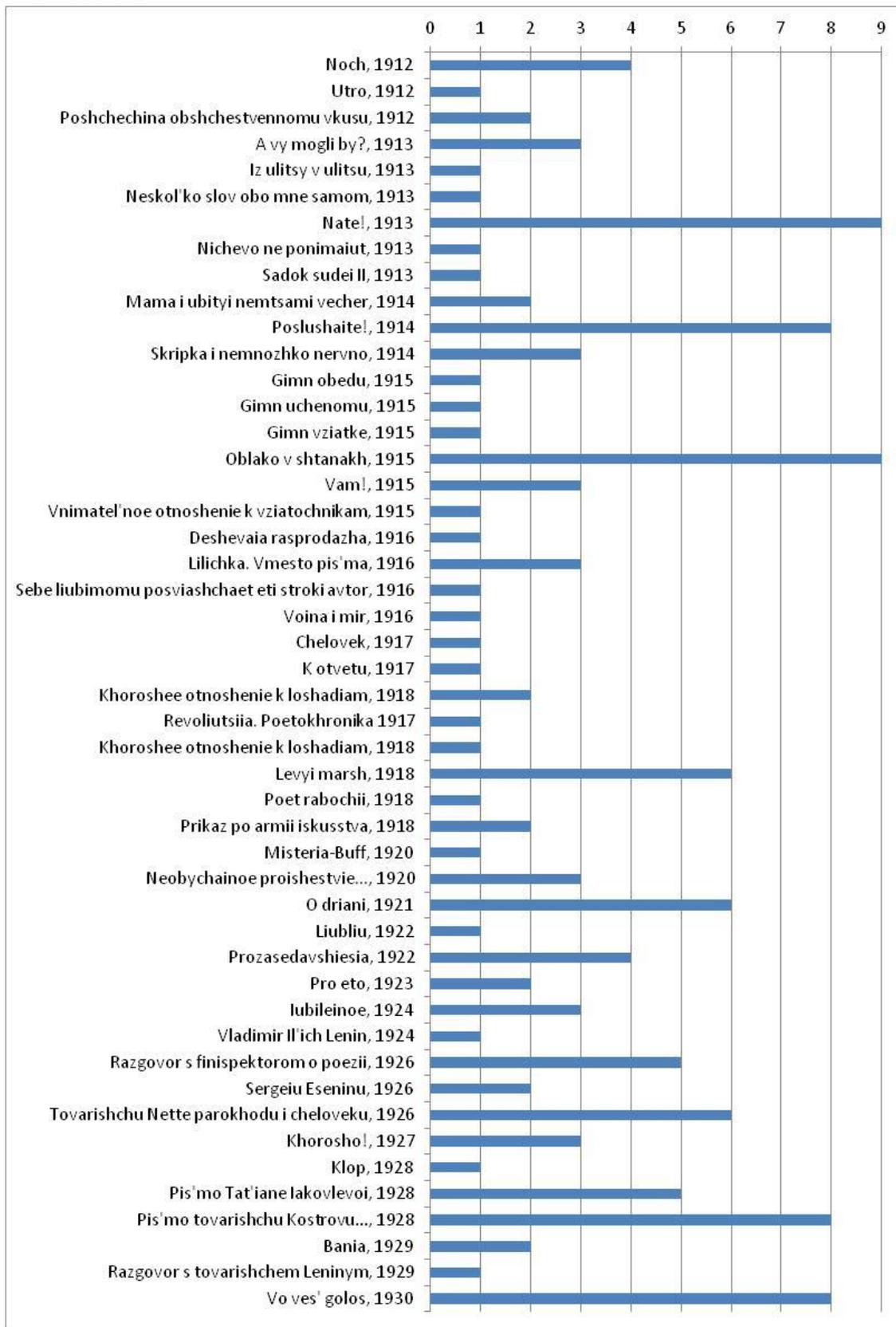
Other writers featured during the ceremony: Lev Tolstoj, Fedor Dostoevskii, Ivan Turgenev, Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol', Anton Chekhov, Nikolai Gumilev, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandel'shtam, Mikhail Bulgakov, Aleksandr Blok, Iosif Brodskii.

Closing Ceremony, 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, 23 February 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAv9MJm5yIQ>>

[accessed: 23 November 2015]

Chapter 3: Vladimir Maiakovskii and the National School Curriculum

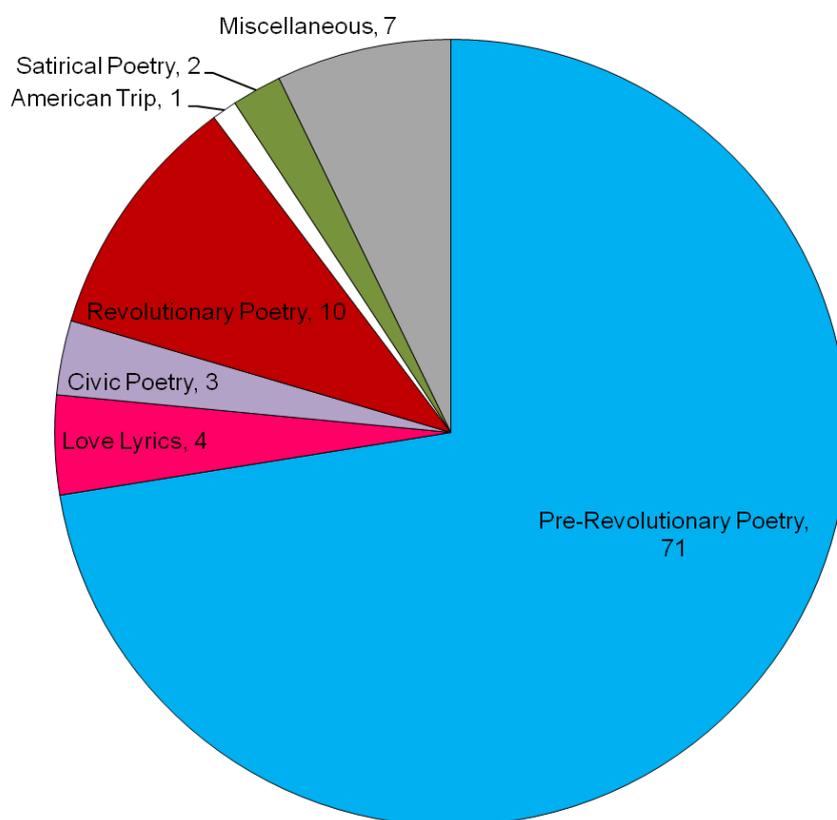
Texts analysed, printed and discussed in selected post-Soviet textbooks and readers



Books analysed: *Russkaia literatura XX veka. Ocherki. Portrety. Esse*, ed. by Feliks Kuznetsov, 2 vols (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1991); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Anatolii Barannikov and others, 2 vols (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1993); *Khrestomatiia po literature dlia srednei shkoly*, ed. by Gennadii Glinin and others (Cheliabinsk: Plastik-inform, 1994); Galina Lazarenko, *Khrestomatiia po otechestvennoi literature XX veka* (Moscow: Metodicheskii kabinet zapadnogo okruga g. Moskvy, 1995); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Vladimir Agenosov and others, 2 vols (Moscow: Drofa, 1996); *Khrestomatiia po literature. 11 klass*, ed. by V. Slavkin, V. Sitnikov (Moscow: AST, 1996); *Khrestomatiia po russkoi literature XX v.*, ed. by Leila Alieva and other (Moscow: Airis-press, 1997); *Khrestomatiia po literature dlia srednei shkoly*, ed. by Gennadii Glinin and others (Cheliabinsk: Ural LD, 1997); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Iurii Lyssyi (Moscow: Mnemosina, 1998); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Vadim Kozhinov (Moscow: Russkoe slovo, 1999); *Russkaia literatura XX veka. Khrestomatiia*, ed. by Vladimir Agenosov, Eduard Beznosov and Aleksandr Ledenev, 2 vols, 3rd ed., (Moscow: Drofa, 2000); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Anatolii Barannikov and others, 2 vols, 5th ed. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2000); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Iurii Lyssyi, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Mnemosina, 2001); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Vladimir Agenosov, 2 vols, 7th ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 2002); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Vladimir Agenosov, 2 vols, 10th ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 2005); *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, ed. by Vladimir Agenosov, 2 vols, 12th ed. (Moscow: Drofa, 2007).

Chapter 4: Vladimir Maiakovskii in Post-Soviet Russian Anthologies

Texts mentioned in selected post-Soviet anthologies by theme



This chart plots Maiakovskii's poems in the selected anthologies.

In order to analyse the representation of Maiakovskii in post-Soviet anthologies, I have separated his works into six distinct groups. Each of the six groups represents a different aspect of Maiakovskii's legacy and therefore each has potential to create a distinctive image of the author. These groups are: pre-revolutionary poetry, love lyrics, civic poetry, revolutionary poetry, American trip, and satirical poetry. Works which do not easily fall into those criteria are grouped together under 'miscellaneous'. These works are: 'Khoroshee otnoshenie k loshadiam', 'Neobychainoe prikluchenie, byvshee s Vladimirom Maiakovskim letom na dache', 'Razgovor na odesskom reide desandnykh sudov: "Sovetskii Dagestan" i "Krasnaia Abkhaziia"', 'Vo ves' golos', as well as unfinished works by Maiakovskii.

Several poems appear in more than one category (notably several pre-revolutionary poems also feature in 'love lyrics' category). Maiakovskii's unfinished works are always counted as one entry.

Anthologies analysed: *Ruskaia Poeziia XX veka. Antologija Russkoi Liriki pervoi chetverti veka*, ed. by Ivan Ezhov and Evgenii Shamurin (Moscow: Amirus, 1991); *Serebrianyi vek russkoi poezii*, ed. by Nikolai Bannikov (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1993); Evgenii Evtushenko and Evgenii Vitkovskii, *Strofy veka* (Moscow: Polifakt, 1997); Mikhail Sinel'nikov, *Sankt-Peterburg, Petrograd, Leningrad v russkoi poezii: antologija* (Saint Petersburg: Limbus Press, 1999); , Vladimir Kostrov and Gennadii Krasnikov, *Ruskaia poeziia: XX vek. Antologija*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001); *Poeziia russkogo futurizma*, ed. by Valerii Sazhin (Saint Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001); *Ot simvolistov do oberiutov. Poeziia russkogo modernizma. Antologija*, ed. by Nikolai Bogomolov, 2 vols (Moscow: Ellis Lak 2000, 2001-02); Boris Akimov, *Poeziia serebriianogo veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Radionova, 2005)

Chapter 5: The Influences of Russian Media Culture on Vladimir Maiakovskii's Post-Soviet Canonical Status

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

An unflattering image of Lili Brik from Sergei Tiutin's documentary Zhivoi Maiakovskii, 2005

Lili Brik is presented as a greedy and spiteful woman, who in 1929 started a rumour that Maiakovskii wanted to leave Soviet Union, so that he would be unable to go to Paris to see his lover Tat'iana Iakovleva.

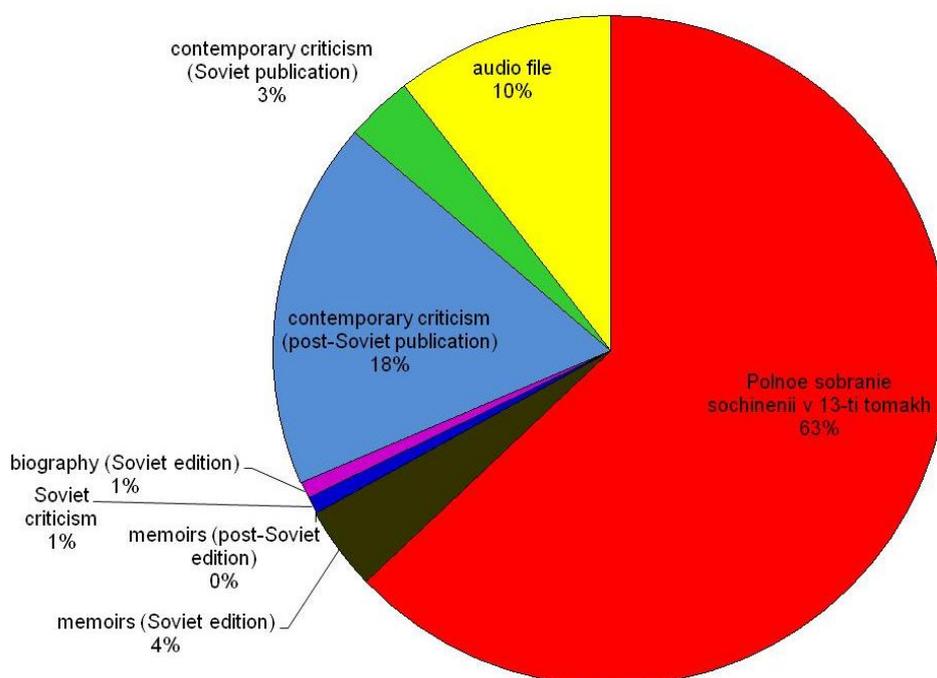
Sergei Tiutin, *Zhivoi Maiakovskii* (TV documentary), 2005

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y1YETiXv2Q>> [accessed: 05 May 2015].

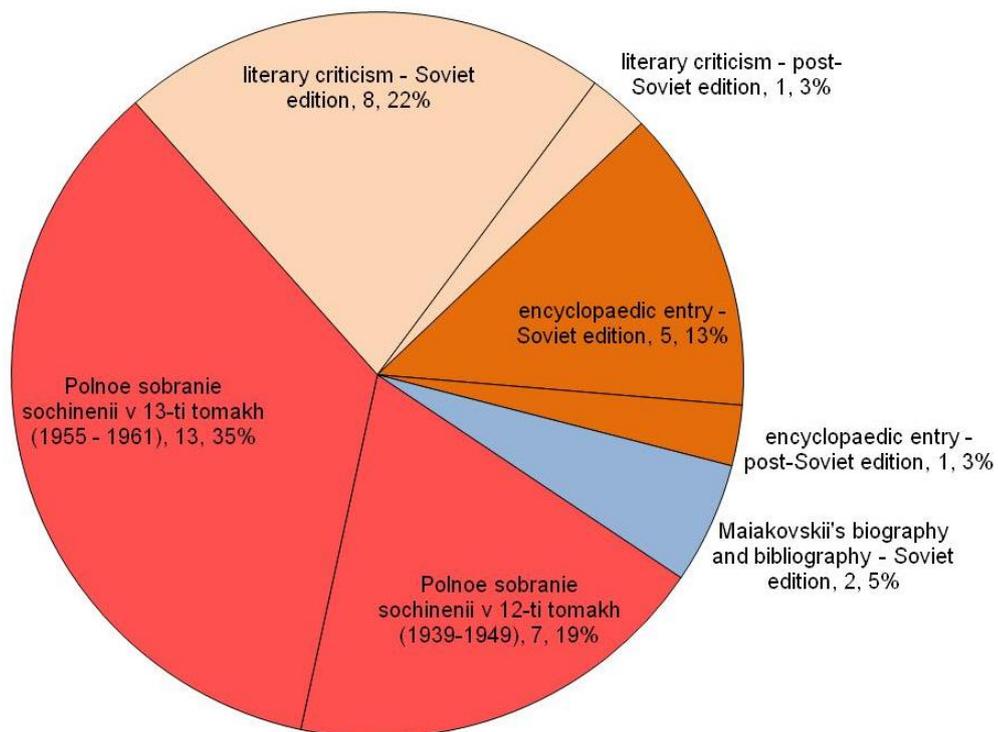
Charts referencing the materials related to Maiakovskii available in online libraries

I have divided the texts by genre: literary criticism, biography, encyclopaedic entries, memoirs, letters; as well as chronologically: materials first published during Maiakovskii's lifetime, those published after his death and those published after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

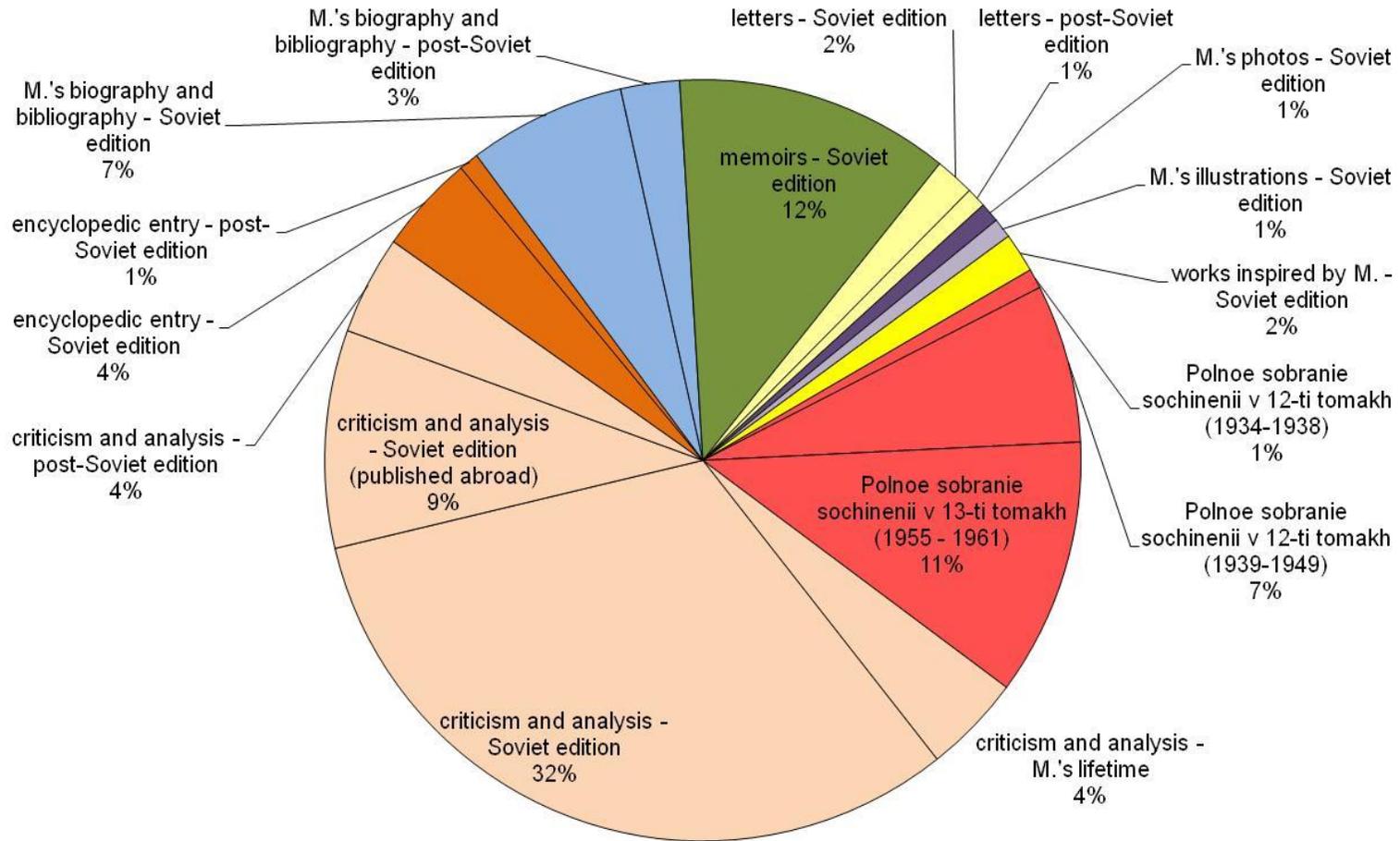
Webpages dedicated to Maiakovskii on *Biblioteka Moshkova*



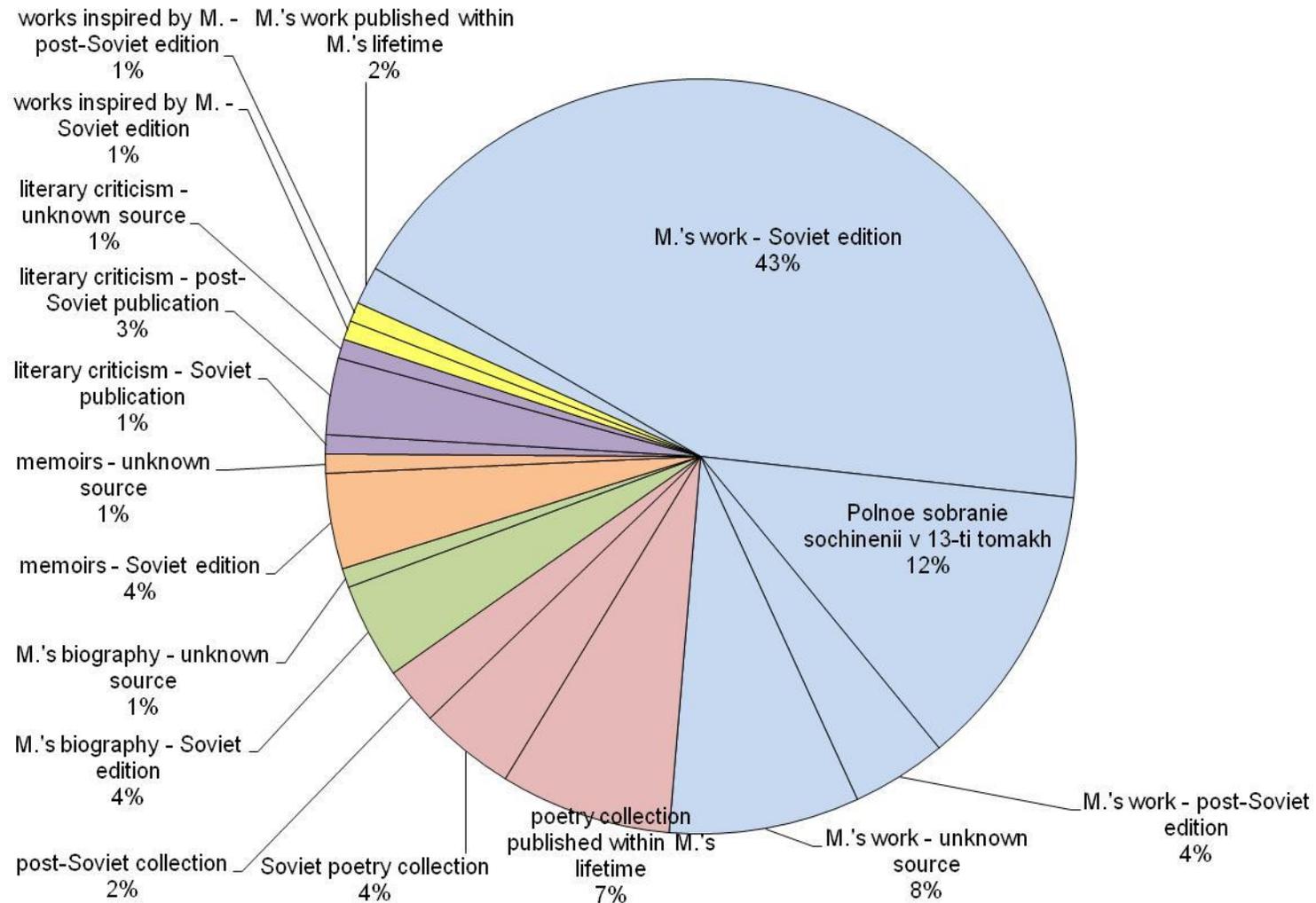
Works on and by Maiakovskii available on FEB



Works on and by Maiakovskii suggested for further reading on *FEB*



Texts related to Maiakovskii available on *Librusek*



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