

ENVOICING HISTORY: ON THE NARRATIVE POEM IN RUSSIAN MODERNISM¹

Robert Bird, University of Chicago

Caught between their sense of civic duty and their desire for creative autonomy, the Russian Modernists constantly tried to reconfigure the relationship between authorship and authority. Best known as lyric poets, they frequently sought ways to objectify their subjective voices as a speaking-forth of some greater authority, be it the nation, myth, or tradition. I shall argue that the narrative poem as a genre dramatized the dialectical relationship between authorship and authority by thematizing the crisis of the lyric voice and mediating it through narrative. In particular, the coherent yet open narrative structures of the Modernist *poema* provided a means of rendering subjective experience as a matter of common concern, engaged because engaging, vocal because evocative.

The narrative poem, with its musty nineteenth-century lineage, may not at first blush seem a particularly engaging or evocative genre. It is a form that in Russia has long been dominated by the powerful exempla of Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov (see, for example, Wachtel 119–70). The Soviets' penchant for the genre from the 1930s on coincided with their increasing orientation toward nineteenth-century canons and hunger for a national "epic," which they perceived as both more broadly accessible and more easily controlled than the lyric (Griffiths and Rabinowitz 1–39). More recently, Timur Kibirov has found the traditionalism of the narrative poem a fertile ground for parody (Kibirov). However, the pressure of tradition has often served only to instigate innovation. As Yury Tynianov observed, all notable narrative poems effectively reinvented the genre (255). By implication, each great narrative poem represented the failure of the genre to cohere under the dual pressure of the individual lyric voice and the "revolt of things," as Akhmatova character-

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ized the origin of her *Poem without a Hero* [*Poema bez geroia*, 1940–1965], borrowing an image from *Vladimir Mayakovskiy: A Tragedy* (Akhmatova 3: 215; Maiakovskii 1: 163). In the narrative poem the lyric voice comes into contention with a narrative world. When the narrative poem mimics living voices, it does so not to enforce repetition of the author's voice by the reader (as in the lyric), but to enable the reader's own vocalization.

The dominant role of voice in the narrative poem is supported by its persistent association with the oral tradition and oral performance. Compared to the novel, in the Russian literary tradition the narrative poem has sometimes been regarded as a "naïve" narrative which, by allowing for memorization and recitation, gathered communities of listeners and cultivated a common cultural consciousness (e.g. Dostoevskii 29/1: 39, 41–42). In one typical chrestomathy meant for communal recitation by "a wide circle of readers in the Soviet village," we read, "preference was given to narrative verses as those most easily understood by listeners" (Bulgakov 384). These characteristics make the narrative poem a central genre in milieux far beyond the school and the village hall. Locked in a packed train car en route to her Siberian labor camp, the writer Evgenia Ginzburg calmed her fellow deportees by reciting Pasternak's *Lieutenant Schmidt* [*Leitenant Shmidt*, 1927] and Pushkin's *House in Kolomna* [*Domik v Kolomne*, 1830] by heart (Ginzburg 175–76, 198 and passim). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn turned to the *poema* in the labor camps in part because he had no paper and the verses could be memorized and counted with matchsticks or prayer beads (Solzhenitsyn 3: 104). Most famously, Akhmatova's *Requiem* [*Rekviem*, 1935–1940] was recorded only in the memory of friends because it was too dangerous to be written down (see Chukovskaia 1: 73; Cavanagh). Thus the same orality which makes the narrative poem a site of national ritual has also been a factor in its continual volatility and its suitability for revolutionary periods. It is the genre that most fits Wesling and Sławek's definition of the "literary voice" as that which "simultaneously affirms writing and puts it into question" (3). Like the dramatic monologue, exemplified by Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, "[i]t is a genre we value for the way it brings to light and stages as a cultural problem the desire for an impossible vocal text" (Kreilkamp 157). The narrative poem is neither a written lyric whose authority lies in the authenticity of the authorial voice nor an oral epic where the author claims the authority to speak as "we," but a text where the individual author confronts the possibility of the "we" coming to voice at all.

The formal and functional malleability of the narrative poem is reflected in the failure of our attempts to describe it. It has been common to see Pushkin's mature narrative poems (including *Evgenii Onegin*) as the fruit of his creative trajectory from the lyric to the epic. The distinction has also been broadly applied to the resurgence of the narrative poem in Russian Modernist poetry, which, as Vladimir Markov has written, "started lyrically and ended epically" (1962, 36). V. Piskunov has defined the Modernists' "lyrical impressionism"

precisely in terms of their contradictory “aspiration towards a new epic synthesis, a monumental scale of generalization, and a ‘symphonic clairvoyance’” (23). Andrei Bely made the same observation about Soviet literature in 1932, noting an “explosion of the lyric” in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and welcoming the first signs of a “proletarian epic” or “production epic” which would negotiate the stormy waters “between the Scylla of the ‘documentary sketch’ and the Charybdis of merely lyric ‘superstructures’” (1932b, 230, 233). Nevertheless, lyric and epic types of discourse have not always been seen as polar opposites, and it was not uncommon for Russian Modernists to characterize their narrative poems as a mixed, “lyrico-epic” mode. As late as 1935 Sergei Tretiakov was still seeking to define a “lyrical epic” for Soviet literature, insofar as “the command given to reality can only be completely persuasive if it is colored by the most profound personal interest of the author, by his greatest subjective tension” (317). Thanks to this dual nature, even as it became the site of a ritualistic rehearsal of literary models the narrative poem remained a key locus of narrative innovation, responsive to developments in other genres of writing and even other art forms. This malleability confounded the Formalists’ attempts to fix the distinction between the narrative poem and the novel as between poetry and prose, especially in such liminal cases as Pushkin’s “novel in verse” *Evgenii Onegin* or Bely’s rhythmical novels.² In the twentieth century the label *poema* became attached to dramas (Nikolai Pogodin’s *Poem of an Axe* [*Poema o topore*], 1930), non-fiction (A. Makarenko’s *Pedagogical Poem* [*Pedagogicheskaia poema*], 1935), tracts of literary theory (Andrei Bely’s *Glossolalia*, 1917), and films, both speaking (Aleksandr Dovzhenko and Yulia Solntseva’s *Poem of the Sea* [*Poema o more*], 1958) and silent (Evgeny Chervikov’s *The Girl from the Distant River* [*Devushka s dalekoi reki: poema*], 1927). What unites most of these exempla is not any single formal or thematic feature, but rather a particular kind of narrative which remains closely aligned to the author’s subjective or lyrical perspective. In short, the *poema* is a narrative where lyric and epic discourse converge and where, in my terms, a voice confronts the world.

While making a mockery of the traditional genre classifications, these descriptions consistently support a definition of the *poema* as a narrative where the voice is enworlded and the world is envoiced. At the heart of this essay is a concept of voice in which the physical act of speaking is inextricable from less tangible issues of personal and social identity. With its connotations of protest and assent, voice has been perhaps the most sensitive register of historical change in Russia (cf. the use of *glasnost*, “envoicedness,” to denote political liberalization). It is, after all, only in speaking that the self composes

2. In 1924 Tynianov declared Bely’s rhythmic prose “not very productive” (159). However, as I quote below, Bely himself stated that he published his final novel as prose only to save space. On the Formalists’ classifications of Bely see Keys 58–61.

itself as a self, but at the same time, by presupposing both speaker and addressee, the voice grounds the self in a community which constrains individual identity. The voice thus instantiates the interaction between self and community, whether this interaction be coercive or emancipatory. The fact that voice is the locus at which the self intervenes in the world has made it a central concept in modern aesthetics, from Bakhtin's concern for polyglossia and dialogue to Althusser's concept of interpellation and Derrida's grammatology (for recent analyses see Wesling and Sławek; Kreilkamp; Dolar). My argument rests on the unique ability of narrative not only to capture voices but also to evoke a new voice by delineating an indeterminate discursive space which requires completion or composition by the reader.

1. *Speaking in tongues*

One of the credos of French Symbolism was Paul Verlaine's avuncular declaration, "De la musique avant toute chose" (326–27), which was taken to a characteristically absurd extreme by some Russian Modernists. The young Andrei Bely debuted in 1902 with a full-blown *Symphony* (billed as his "second," no less), which sacrificed narrative clarity to a rhythmic flow of words (Belyi 1991, 89–193). The genre failed to catch on beyond the author's immediate circle, but Bely's symphonic writing was highly influential, both for the narrative poem and for prose genres. In this section I shall contrast Bely's lyricization of prose to the narrativization of lyric poetry evident in *The Twelve* [*Dvenadtsat'*, 1918], the crowning masterpiece of Bely's sometime friend and fellow Symbolist Aleksandr Blok, which turned a basically musical source into a trenchant but complex narrative structure. The tensile narrative that resulted from this clash of lyric voice and history has proved to be one of the most engaged works of modern literature, precisely because, instead of projecting the author's voice into and onto the world, it created an open narrative space within which readers were free to compose and exercise their own voices.

Bely labeled his 1917 book *Glossolalia* "a narrative poem about sound" and even considered it his "most successful narrative poem," although it would by most measures appear to be a work of theoretical poetics in prose, albeit Bely's idiosyncratic rhythmic prose (2002, 4). Bely's main argument, if an argument it be, was that sound and image in art were "gestures" towards a transcendent reality which always remained invisible: "the characteristic of sound is a hint: the meaning of my exposition is that attention notes something beyond the image; all images are landmarks; and proceeding past them (not accepting them) illumines the subconscious of sound" (104). Sound is a mere "ornament" which arises on the surface of the world like a "crust," like the "flesh of our thought" (115). Non-representational and basically contentless, these verbal ornaments can be "read" rather as the great Theosophists deciphered the universe; Bely's own readings tended to resemble a game of

free association. A recent commentator advises us that if we are “incapable of understanding this book,” we should at least “try to *enjoy* it as one enjoys a work of art,—not to read it, but to listen as one listens to a virtuoso violinist or pianist” (Svas’ian 143). Perhaps that is sound advice, but it suggests that Bely’s writing was more a vehicle for his *voice* than the locus of any kind of *meaning*. Here “symphony” has more to do with an orchestrated unanimity than with the etymological sense of improvisational polyphony.

It was Bely’s use of language as vocal ornament, more than his opaque storytelling and two-dimensional characterization, which rendered his narrative poems and novels antithetical to narrative. Instead of cultivating modes of attending to the world, Bely’s ornamental prose incurs near-hypnosis by means of repetitive, textureless rhythms. “My prose,” Bely claimed in his last novel, “is not prose at all, but a narrative poem in verse (anapestic); it is printed as prose simply to save space” (1932a, 11). Bely’s prose therefore becomes an oral exercise akin to ventriloquism: “I write not to be read by one’s eyes, but for a reader who inwardly pronounces my text” (9). The fashion started by Bely for rhythmic prose was widely derided by critics as diverse as Viacheslav Ivanov and Yury Tynianov (Ivanov 4: 639–40; Tynianov 159), however to a certain extent Bely was simply taking to a logical extreme the widely shared Modernist notion of lyric poetry as the basis of all verbal art, according to which the poet was a univocal speaking forth of the inner truth of things.

Although Blok also linked the genesis of his narrative poem *The Twelve* to a musical inspiration, its narrative structure is more than a mere vehicle for projecting voices in an act of ventriloquism. *The Twelve* tells the story of a detachment of Red Army soldiers who, in the chaos of revolutionary Petrograd, march past such social enemies as a bourgeois and a weak-kneed orator, consigning them all to the dusty blizzard. A sub-plot concerns the (non-Bolshevik) soldier Vanka and the prostitute Katka, who are mercilessly shot down by Red-Guardsman Petka, Katka’s erstwhile lover. The twelve continue their inexorable march under a blood-red flag, shooting ahead of themselves, when there appears up ahead, “unharmd by the bullets,” “under a red banner,” Jesus Christ.

In some respects *The Twelve* reaches back beyond Bely’s experiments to the tradition of Pushkin’s *The Bronze Horseman* [*Mednyi vsadnik*, 1833]. As in the latter, major events of national proportions are juxtaposed to a victimized individual, who is mercilessly crushed under the iron heel of rampant history (see Blok 5: 316, 348). The loose narrative form of *The Twelve* reflects the fragmentary structure of works which early Modernists Valery Briusov and Konstantin Balmont called lyrical narrative poems [*liricheskaia poema*] (for discussion, see Markov 1987), which were sometimes devoid of overt narrative progression. Although hardly distinguishable from a cycle of lyric poems, the very denotation of genre established a suspenseful horizon of expectation which, suspended and shifted in every line, supports a skeletal narrative. As

the Sibylline poet becomes a narrator, the reader enters a free interpretive space. The disjointed plot is a key means of actively engaging the reader to complete the narrative and to cultivate an appropriate comportment or mode of attention. Very often the narrative framework comments upon the work it is eliciting from the reader; in addition to referring to its characters, for instance, the title of *The Twelve* also refers to the poem's twelve-part structure, which mimics the relentless march of revolution with a drumbeat rhythm and, like the blizzard, swells with the words, slogans, and rhythms of the revolutionary street.³ This may well be a poem *about* revolutionary poetry.

A self-referential interpretation of the title is not far-fetched. From his earliest critical statements Blok (like many Russian Modernists) had privileged the lyric over the epic (i.e., narrative) for its "lofty melody and ancient rhythm, under which the cradle of epochs and nations slowly rocks" (7: 62). In the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, Blok had affirmed the "inestimable riches" of the lyrical element [*stikhiiia*], which nourishes "the fearless and experienced thinker, the scholar, and the social activist" (7: 62). In his essay "The Intelligentsia and Revolution," written at the same time as *The Twelve* in January 1918, Blok applied his old insights to the new, far more dire situation, extolling the destruction of civilization as a liberation, for which the writer bears particular responsibility:

It is not for the artist to make sure that what has been conceived [*zadumano*] is fulfilled, or to worry whether or not it is fulfilled. For the artist, everything matter-of-fact, worldly and transient will find its expression later, when it is burnt up in life. Those of us who survive [...] will turn out to be the masters of countless spiritual treasures. Probably only a new genius, Pushkin's Arion, will be able to take possession of them: he, "cast out by a wave on the shore," will sing his "former hymns" and dry his "wet robes" "in the sun, under a cliff."

The task of the artist is to see what has been conceived, to listen to the music which roars in the "air ripped apart by the wind." (Blok 5: 398–99)

Sharing some of the imagery and vocabulary of this essay, *The Twelve* can be seen as Blok's attempt to engage the world not by means of political comment or action, nor by imposing a rigid pattern onto observed events, but precisely by "listening to the music of the revolution" (5: 405). The effect, as Blok suggested in "The Intelligentsia and Revolution," would be the awakening of new "creative forces"—new *words*—in millions of silent "unenlightened" people: "in the future they may utter such words as our tired, stale and bookish literature has long since failed to utter" (406). *The Twelve* was a transitional utterance which might elicit new voices without dictating their content or tone. Blok's reluctance to impose his own voice and intonation on the narrative explains why he refused to declaim *The Twelve* despite its popularity.

3. One of Blok's manuscript fragments bears the title: "*The Twelve* (men and poems)" (Blok 5: 306). Of course, "the twelve" also evokes connotations of the twelve apostles and of the twelve thieves (from the Russian folk song derived from Nikolai Nekrasov's poetry), about which Blok also left textual evidence; see Blok 5: 307–9.

In part as a result of this authorial reticence, the work has elicited markedly divergent interpretations. The narrative limits itself to establishing a horizon of expectation against which the revolution can be experienced, envoked and interpreted by the reader.

Reading Blok's essay together with *The Twelve*, one begins to see how this fiction relies on intricate strategies of distanciation in order to engage with the world. To be sure, the poem directly mimics revolutionary sounds and images. Within the first part alone mimetic elements include the bitterly cold weather, the slogan "All power to the Constituent Assembly," the rhetorical response of the intellectual (several real-life models for him have been suggested), and even the shortage of cloth. More to the point, the work incorporates several recognizable songs of the pre-revolutionary era, mimicking the polyphony or even cacophony of the age (Petrovskii). The poem's narrative also reproduces a series of events which may well have been part of contemporary urban legend, and its sections mimetically reproduce various atmospheres and moods of the street. However, on all levels the mimetic similarities are disrupted by the discontinuous and indeterminate narrative. In many respects the poem seems intended less to reproduce the reality of the street than to suspend it in a state of stuttering half-completion. And then, of course, there is the enigmatic appearance at the end of Jesus Christ, whose name is given in an archaic spelling accepted only by the schismatic Old Believers. More interested in capturing the revolution's mood than in interpreting its significance, *The Twelve* describes the transformation of the fragmented *words* of the revolution into its supra-rational *music*, i.e. a coherent but inconclusive narrative. Blok projects the possibility of a coherent narrative of the revolution only in order to defer it at every level, from metaphysics right down to spelling. One sees why Boris Eikhenbaum described *The Twelve* as "the explosion of its own system, tragic for symbolism and for the poet himself" (1986, 441).

The elusive valence of the poem's powerful charge is confirmed by early witnesses to the poem's impact in revolutionary Russia. In her autobiographical novel *The Change* [*Peremena*, 1923] Marietta Shaginian described the reception of *The Twelve* during the Civil War in 1921, in an area then occupied by the Whites:

When the words of Blok's *The Twelve* first sounded in our small room, having been smuggled to us through the cordons, our meeting stood to its feet, astounded by a sharp excitement [...]. *The Twelve* was a spark passed from one to another as a rainbow that has arisen in the sky, saying to the soul:

"Don't be afraid! You are right. Love has gone over to those who are being called aggressors. I pledge this to you as the most beloved Russian poet..." (Shaginian 1930, 423–24; cf. Shaginian 1980, 609–10; Blok 5: 350–52)

The poem was literally "contraband" to be concealed from its enemies, who, like Herod, would smother it in the manger. Having reached its purported addressees, the poem brought sound and light to their underground. Nonethe-

less, its nourishing power for revolutionaries could not compromise its ability to engage with other populations, and by Blok's death in 1921 the poem was also being read as opposed to Bolshevism and prophetic of the collapse of its ideals in violence and greed (Tolstoi). Even Leon Trotsky, for example, while calling *The Twelve* Blok's "most important work," attributed to it an essentially negative significance, as "the swan song of the individualistic art that went over to the Revolution" (119). According to Trotsky, Blok associated the positive elements of revolution with Christ only because this was the highest "blessing" available to him within the framework of pre-revolutionary culture, whereas the revolution has brought fundamentally new criteria (124). Therefore, Trotsky concludes, "Blok is not one of ours, but he reached towards us" (125). As Shklovsky recognized, the poem's ability to wear various political tags is a function of its suspended synthetic form, which "reaches" towards the actual political reality without adopting a specifiable stance within it (Shklovsky 1990, 170–71).

While the interpretation of Blok's poem has been shaped by extra-aesthetic factors from sales to political influence, the source and character of its impact is perhaps best gauged by its resonance within the fictional realm, where it quickly proved as pervasive as Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*. In 1920 Sergei Gorodetsky expressed the hope that Blok's *The Twelve* would lay the foundation for a new art of the masses, "a meeting of old Pushkinian and new proletarian culture" (Blok 5: 348). Blok certainly set a new standard for the narrative poem, instigating a widespread anticipation of "the formation of a new *poema*," as Eikhenbaum put it (1924, 9). New kinds of *poema* did arise at the hands of relentless innovators like Mayakovsky, in part under the pressure of new technologies of transmission and projection, but with each innovation the genre continued to cohere as a specific locus of engagement, where the poet's voice composes itself into an open narrative framework, the meaning of which is composed only in readers' voices.

2. *At the top of his voice*

The central role of voice in the constant innovation of the narrative poem is attested to most directly by the next great exponent of the genre after Blok, namely Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky's initial renown was in no small part due to his new style of declamation; his comrade-in-Futurism Vasily Kamensky described how, with the "mighty timbre" of his voice, "Mayakovsky declaimed monumentally, as if gathering mountains" (1940, 161; 1968, 186–87). Marina Tsvetaeva called Mayakovsky "the first Russian poet-as-orator" (5: 378). Mayakovsky's voice was palpable even on the printed page, thanks to his use of tonic meters (going against the grain of two centuries of syllabo-tonic poetry in Russia) which he printed in terraced or "stepladder" arrangement. The effect, according to Bely, was a "living verse, which moves abreast with speeded-up time and which strives to express *its own intonation*" (Janecek

247). Thanks to Mayakovsky's embrace of new technologies of recording and broadcast, his voice became one of the first to be widely recognizable to the Russian ear, and he frequently thematized and even personified his voice in such narrative poems as *At the Top of My Voice* [*Vo ves' golos*]:

<p>Но я / себя / смирлял, / становясь на горло / собственной песне. Слушайте, / товарищи потомки, агитатора, / горлана-главаря. Заглуша / поэзии потоки, я шагну / через лирические томики, как живой / с живыми говоря. (10: 280–81)</p>	<p>But I / restrained / myself / by stepping on the throat / of my very own songs Listen, / comrade descendents, to the agitator, / the loud-mouth chief. Silencing / the streams of poetry, I shall step / through lyrical volumes, like a live man / speaking to the living.</p>
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Not surprisingly, Mayakovsky's death by suicide was widely perceived as a traumatic and cataclysmic falling silent—not so much of a poet, but of a historical world.

The amplitude and range of Mayakovsky's hyperbolic voice empowered him to write on behalf of the entire Soviet populus. "150,000,000 is the name of the author of this poem," he announces at the beginning of his narrative poem *150,000,000*, which appeared on the cover of the book as both title and author. "150,000,000 speak with my lips" (2: 115). While V. N. Orlov describes this work as a "polemic" with Blok's *The Twelve* (190), Blok did not claim to speak for his twelve characters or for the reader's performance of the poem, whereas Mayakovsky invariably claimed intonational authority over the content and declamation of his narratives. The presumptiveness of *150,000,000* and other poems suggested to many that Mayakovsky viewed his poetry as an occasion to impose his own voice on the world, just as its tonic meters seem to dictate the speed and volume of reading. Trotsky accused Mayakovsky of "Mayakomorphism" (149). Émigré critic Konstantin Mochulsky perhaps put it best, writing that

A guttural, bestial o-ho-ho, a neighing and mooing issues from beneath all of his words. It seems that the timbre of his voice, its low throaty tone engenders both the images and themes of his verse. [...] Mayakovsky does not roar because he rages, exposes or curses; rather, he seeks out objects of his emotion in order to roar. (100)

Tynianov established a historicist interpretive framework by linking Mayakovsky's expansive lyrics to a revival of the "oratorical genre" of the ode (252). Roman Jakobson opined that, even when Mayakovsky attempts "a bloody Iliad of the Revolution," "what appears is not an epic but a heroic lyric on a grand scale, offered 'at the top of his voice'" (274). Gerald Janecek has remarked that the "*lesenka* [stepladder] and other such devices were attempts by the author *as author* to fix the limits of allowable interpretation" (244). Nonetheless, I shall argue, the unique meaningfulness of Mayakovsky's poetry stemmed from his willingness ultimately to sacrifice authority over his voice by emplotting it in open-ended narratives which cohere only in their active appropriation by readers.

In short, far from being an exercise in solipsistic self-aggrandizement, Mayakovsky's poetry actually dramatized the possibility of envoicing the world. Many Soviet critics complained precisely of the constant sense of vulnerability and reticence in Mayakovsky's voice. For example, Shklovsky held Mayakovsky responsible "not because he shot himself, but because he stood 'on the throat of his very own songs'" (Shklovskii 1934). Straining and breaking under the pressure of history, Mayakovsky's voice turned the most martial propaganda into latent tragedy. In *150,000,000*, as in other poems, the tragic recoil of Mayakovsky's odes unfurls from the conflation of nation, poem, and the body of the poet or lyrical hero:

И вот / Россия / не нищий оборвыш, / не куча обломков, / не зданий пепел—	And here Russia / is not a penniless tramp, / not a pile of fragments, / not the dust of buildings—
Россия / вся / единый Иван,	Russia / is all / a single Ivan,
а рука / у него— / Нева,	And his / hand is / the Neva,
а пятки— каспийские степи. (2: 126–27)	and his heels are the Caspian steppes.

This Ivan subsequently steps across the world to initiate "class warfare" with the evil forces of President Woodrow Wilson and the city of Chicago. The ascent of a new sun—"Maybe / the hundredth anniversary of the October Revolution, maybe / just / an immaculately good mood"—is heralded by new voices:

«Голоса людские / зверьи голоса, / рев рек
ввысь славословием вьем.
Пойте все и все слушайте / мира торжественный реквием.[...]» (2: 161, 162)

"People's voices, / beasts' voices, / the roar of rivers
We weave to the heights with our praise.
Sing all and listen all / to the world's solemn requiem.[...]"

Various types of downtrodden now "trumpet the tidings of heaven today," each in their own way. The unity of the poem heralds a new tomorrow where each will speak with equal force, a promise that is realized today in the ability of the poet's voice, his throat even, to speak with such force.

The interchangeability of nation, individual, poem, body and voice make it impossible to place Mayakovsky in a position of final authority or, by extension, of authorship. His allegorical narratives remain splendidly open to new perspectives and reversals. Mayakovsky's pretense of speaking *for* the millions becomes a tormented acknowledgement of responsibility *before* the millions who will occupy his text, each envoicing it anew. Mayakovsky's sense of martyrdom did not always sit well with Soviet critics; Shklovsky complained that Mayakovsky "didn't realize that the revolution needed songs, and that songs don't need sacrifice" (1934).

If his living voice encouraged polyphonic reading, after his death it became increasingly monologic, especially in the hagiographical texts produced in copious quantities by members of his circle (see Shear-Urbaszewski). In his biographical poem *Mayakovsky Begins* [*Maiakovskii nachinaetsia*], Nikolai

Aseev describes his late friend's achievement as the gathering of Russia into a single voice:

<p>Он также мостил всероссийскую тину бульжником слов, — не цветочной пыльцой, ханже и лгуну поворачивал спину, в пощечины смаху хлеща подлецов. И понял я в черных бризантных вихрях, что в этой тревожной браваде юнца растет всенародный российский выкрик, еще не додуманный до конца. (Aseev 83)</p>	<p>He also paved the all-Russian swamp with stones of words — not flower pollen; he turned the backs of the idle and liars, beating scoundrels with slaps in their face. And I realized in these black breezy storms that in this youth's anxious bravado there grows an all-national Russian scream, albeit not thought through to the end.</p>
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After recounting Mayakovsky's rise to prominence, Aseev jumps ahead to the literary polemics of the late 1920s and the story becomes one of "how slowly / uphill / is drawn the squeaky cart / of posthumous glory" (127). This is the beginning of Mayakovsky's afterlife, centered upon the square that has been named for him in Moscow, which Aseev depicts as a more suitable monument than a statue. Riding on the bus, the public hears the "shrill / conductress scream": "Pushkin Square; Mayakovsky is next!" (129). Although the architecture is still "flat," the big "MM" of the Moscow metro, like "broad shoulders," a gateway to the innards of Moscow, is a sign of "the soul's new habits" (131). This makes him so close to Moscow that, Aseev avers, if you ever forget a line of Mayakovsky's poetry a "hundred voices immediately rush to prompt you!" (130). Mayakovsky Square is a nexus of transportation and communication networks at the center of the world's largest country, held firm by echoes of the poet's voice.

Just as Mayakovsky's martyrdom rendered his voice a site of ritual commemoration, so also did Mayakovsky's style and themes become a means of reinforcing literary canons. An apt example is the unfinished poem "White Sea Workers" ["Belomortsy," 1934] by the young Konstantin Simonov, which tells of the re-education of thieves through forced labor at the White Sea–Baltic Sea Canal. The construction of the Canal in the silent North is likened to the origination of a word and a voice:

<p>Люди работают справа и слева. — У каждого мир — / одинок / и мал, Но начало в здешних упрямых припевах Крепнуть простое слово «Канал». (Simonov 132)</p>	<p>People work right and left. The world of each / is lonely / and small But in the stubborn refrains around here There begins to strengthen the simple word: "Canal."</p>
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Nature begins to speak, to moan, and to complain at being violated. But gradually man finds his proper voice. The trigger is an accident, when the workers suddenly become conscious of their failure:

вниз рванулась вода	the water rushed down
И рухнула многопудовым морозом.	And crashed with a weifty frost.
И в мыслях застыло холодом льда,	And in their thoughts there froze with the cold of ice,
Как камень, тяжелое слово— <i>поздно!</i>	Like a stone, the heavy word— <i>too late!</i>

(134)

The day is saved by a silent old foreman who hesitantly calls the “canal soldiers” [*kanaloarmeitsy*] to work. The poet concludes:

Читатель, / простимся на этой главе.
 Дай руку. / В мышцах, и в разводе плеч
 Жарко пульсирует кровь человека,
 Сказавшего первую в жизни речь.

Теперь прижми к его сердцу поближе
 Пальцы обеих внимательных рук
 И...

—товарищ читатель, ты слышишь?
 Он меняется, сердца стук...
 И легкие работают чище,
 И голос звучит не так,
 И ветер иначе свищет
 В гуле мускулистых атак... (136)

Reader, / let us part at this chapter.
 Give me your hand. / In our muscles, in the breadth of our shoulders
 There feverishly pulsates the blood of a man
 Who has spoken out loud for the first time in his life.

Now put the fingers of both attentive hands
 Closer to his heart
 And...

—Comrade reader, do you hear?
 It's changing, the beating of his heart...
 And his lungs breathe more purely,
 And his voice sounds anew,
 And the wind is whistling differently
 In the humming of muscular attacks.

Here, instead of the narrative describing an open space to be filled by the reader's own voice, a character stands in for the passive reader and presents a determinate pattern to be imitated. This is the *poema* as ventriloquism, the imposition of a voice onto the reader, canceling out the indeterminacy of the narrative's conclusion in an artificial unison.

3. *Voices of the Revolution*

Mayakovsky's poetry of voice was a significant factor in the push to integrate Soviet narrative poetry with emerging sound technologies such as the

gramophone and the radio, which heightened the tension between the introverted univocalism of the lyric and the open engagement of the narrative poem.⁴ Mayakovsky had himself recognized the power of radio in his 1925 poem “Radio-agitator”:

<p>Была ль / небывалей мечта! [...] Как можно в Москве / читать, а из Архангельска / слушать! А нынче / от вечных ночей до стран / где солнце без тени, в мильон / ушей слухачей влезают / слова по антенне! [...] А, может быть, / и такое / мы услышим по воздуху / скоро: рабочий / Америки и Чухломы спюются / одним хором. Чтоб шли / скорей / века без оков, чтоб близилась / эта дата— бубни / миллионам / своих языков, радио-агитатор! (13: 262–63)</p>	<p>Was there ever / a dream less unreal! [...] How can one read in Moscow And listen from / Arkhangelsk! But now / from eternal nights To countries / where the sun is without shadow, Into a million listeners' ears Words / crawl along the antenna! [...] And maybe / we / will soon hear through the air / something like this: A worker / of America and a worker of Chukhloma will join their voices / in a single chorus. So that the ages without chains / pass / more quickly, So that this date / becomes nearer— Drum out / with your million / tongues, Radio-agitator!</p>
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As this text suggests, and as contemporary critics complained, Mayakovsky's performances tended to impose his voice through his texts instead of using their narratives to foster the speech of the masses (see Viach. Em.; Ioffe; Bernshtein). This was undesirable for both ideological and aesthetic reasons; in fact, the problem of radio poetry demonstrated the inseparability of ideology and aesthetics. Thus, anachronistic styles of reading were labeled as counter-revolutionary wrecking [*vreditel'stvo*] because they “inspire[d], instead of revolutionary enthusiasm, the desire to turn off the radio as soon as possible” (Goncharova). It was gradually recognized that the key to engaging listeners with the sounds coming out of a mechanical box was not in bombarding them with the voices of authors or theatrical stars, but in involving them in narrative schemes while leaving them free to envision and embody—yes, even to envoice—the worlds they represented.

A case in point is the radio adaptation of Eduard Bagritsky's narrative poem *Meditation about Opanas* [*Duma pro Opanasa*, 1926], in which two deaths—of the Communist Kogan and the anarchist Opanas—are contrasted in distinctly stylized lyrical passages (Bagritskii 2000, 52–68). The first radio production replaced the lyrics with two recitals of the same folk song, thus occluding the difference between the characters. This was but one of the changes which, in the view of S. Valerin, softened the “accents in ideas and meanings” (Valerin). The same critic also criticized the reading style, which elided the “emotional intonation of each part of the poem and each image.” Thus, despite a captivating plot and stirring commemoration of the Civil War, the broadcast failed to achieve its potential “emotional effect.” Bagritsky's

4. On Russian writers and sound recording see Shilov.

“Taras Shevchenko,” which he was writing for radio performance at the time of his death, seems designed to avoid such dramatic flattening by distributing the text between two voices, those of the author and the hero. Each voice is distinguished by the metrical pattern of its verses, and the points of transition are marked by musical interludes, including a song with a distinct metrical pattern. Although the first performance was inexpressive, the work demonstrated the potential for effective radio poetry by eliciting active and engaged listenership (Novitskii).

The importance of a clear yet open narrative structure for the successful broadcast of narrative poems is underscored by the experience of Boris Pasternak, whose works for radio demonstrate how his turn to the narrative poem reflected a conscious exploration of the limits of lyric and epic. His debut effort in the genre, *A Lofty Malady* [*Vysokaia bolezn'*, 1924], explicitly identifies the lyric as an illness which is gradually overcome by the epic, just as subjective crises are absorbed into history writ large.⁵ *A Lofty Malady* begins by describing the birth of the epic in the siege of Troy in terms reminiscent of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth in a manger. Switching to the events of February 1917, Pasternak sees also an epic being born “in silence,” “behind” and “to the side” of history (1: 556). Like history, the epic rejects the poet's authorial rhetoric and instead uses the poet as a form of self-revelation:

Всю жизнь я быть хотел как все,	All my life I wanted to be like everyone else,
Но век в своей красе	But our age in its beauty
Сильнее моего нытья	Is stronger than my whining
И хочет быть как я. (558)	And wants to be as I.

It is not that the age wants to be Pasternak *per se*, but that it seeks a form of subjectivity, i.e. a voice. The tension between history and subjectivity is exactly the precarious bind of the epic, which requires poetic reinforcement just as the young revolution requires armed protection:

Ах, эпос, крепость,	Oh, epos, fortress,
Зачем вы задаете ребус?	Why do you pose a rebus?
При чем вы, рифмы? Где вас нет?	What are you for, o rhymes? Where are you lacking?
Мы тут при том, что не впервые	We are here because it is not the first time
Сменяют вьюгу часовые	That the sentries have followed a whirlwind
И в эпос выслали пикет. (560)	And an armed guard has been sent into the epic.

Both the epic and the revolution are dependent upon the subjects formed when history is internalized as meaning and spoken forth in speech.

Needless to say, Pasternak's narrative remains cryptic. Both contemporary and more recent critics have concurred in seeing the story of *A Lofty Malady*

5. Pasternak consistently identified the lyric with illness; see his 1930 letter to S. D. Spassky in Pasternak 5: 310. Tsvetaeva took issue with this association: “Boris, the best lyric poet of our age, has betrayed the Lyric before my very eyes, calling himself and everything in him ‘an illness’ (albeit ‘lofty’)” (Tsvetaeva 7: 552).

as emerging only in the digressions from lyrical thoughts, revealing a “tendency to grow an encrustation of imagery around an unnamed and sometimes barely identifiable thematic core” (Barnes 322). Marina Tsvetaeva likened the experience of reading Pasternak to trying “to catch a tail disappearing behind the left edge of one’s brain, like when one tries to recall and make sense of a dream” (Tsvetaeva 5: 385). Nonetheless the diverse elements gradually form the engaging tension of suspense; Tynianov wrote that it “gives an epic outside of narrative, as a slow swinging, a slow accretion of theme—and its realization towards the end” (Tynianov 195; cf. Shklovskii 1966, 439). After his publishers suggested cuts at the end of his final narrative poem, the dazzling, dizzying *Spektorskii* [1929], Pasternak pleaded with his editor Pavel Medvedev not to replace the fragmentation with sheer “formlessness”: “the *consciousness* of the limits (of the design or of my own powers) was to suggest the form of an end, to lead, so to speak, to a concluding thought which embraces this consciousness as a part” (Pasternak 4: 285). In this sense *A Lofty Malady* is a rare insight into the whirlwind of post-revolutionary chaos, which can be resolved only by each person envoicing the world individually, within the open space of the narrative. This openness suffered in Pasternak’s re-writing of the work in 1928, where he introduced Lenin as *the* voice of the revolution:

Я помню, говорок его
 Пронзил мне искрами загривок,
 Как шорох молнии шаровой. [...]
 Он был как выпад на рапире.
 Гонясь за высказанным вслед,
 Он гнул свое, пиджак топыря
 И пяля передки штиблет. [...]
 И эта голая картавость
 Отчитывалась вслух во всем,
 Что кровью былей начерталось:
 Он был их звуковым лицом.
 Когда он обращался к фактам,
 То знал, что, полоща им рот
 Его голосовым экстрамом,
 Сквозь них история орет. (1: 279–80)

I remember that his accent
 Pierced me with sparks of manes
 Like the rustle of ball-shaped lightning. [...]
 He was like the thrust of a rapier.
 Chasing after what was said
 He kept to his line, flailing his jacket
 And thrusting forward the tips of his shoes. [...]
 And this bare speech impediment
 Accounted for itself out loud in any question
 That was written in the blood of events:
 He was their face in sound
 When he turned to the facts
 He knew that, rinsing out their mouths
 With the extract of his voice,
 History screamed through them.

Uncomfortable with the illness of his own lyric voice, Pasternak here proved mistrustful of narrative, from which he found refuge in Lenin’s authoritative *dicta*.

Pasternak’s subsequent narrative poems represent some of the most complex and opaque plots in Russian literature, rivaled most closely by Pasternak’s and Mandelstam’s experiments in prose. *1905* presents a chronicle or, more precisely, “diary” of the first revolutionary year. The narrative is far from linear, consisting of six parts, each told from a different perspective: “Fathers,” “Childhood,” “Peasants and Factory Workers,” “Battle at Sea,” “Students,” and “Moscow in December.” The intonational unity of Paster-

nak's poem is provided by a relentless anapestic meter, which embodies "the elemental, sea-like movement of history" (Mirsky 284). As in *A Lofty Malady*, the telling of the revolution is itself a revolutionary act. In the introduction Pasternak addresses the revolution directly, just as he would a fellow poet or even a lover: "Everything insignificant is horrid to you" (1: 281). However, he is here even more conscious of the limitations of his purely subjective voice: "In our time the lyric has almost ceased to sound out, and here I must be objective and pass from the lyric to the epic," he commented (621). Nonetheless, *1905* also represented one of the most relentless experiments with the narrative poem.

The associations between *1905* and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* go far beyond the fact that they were written to commemorate the same events. Pasternak's poem is a worthy literary counterpart to Eisenstein's montage narrative. In *Lieutenant Schmidt*, which also narrates events of 1905, Pasternak produced a montage narrative with documentary material from the revolutionary hero's own letters, unified by the stirring story of the "transformation of a man into a hero for a cause in which he does not believe, his overexertion and death," as Pasternak put it in a letter to Tsvetaeva (Pasternak 5: 201). The original class conflict is presented as a clash of voices, registers, and languages:

Агония осени. Антагонизм
Пехоты и морских дивизий
И агитаторша-девица
С жаргоном из аптек и больниц.

И каторжность миссии: переорать
(Борьба, борьбы, борьбе, борьбою,
Пролетарьят, пролетарьят)
Иронию и соль прибою,
Родящую мятеж в ушах
В семидесяти падежах.
И радость жертвовать собою.
И—случая слепой каприз.

Одышливость тысяч в бушлатах
по-флотски,
Толпою в волненьи глотающих клецки
Немыслимых слов с окончанием на изм,
Нерусских на слух и неслыханных в жизни.
(А разве слова на казенном карнизе
Казармы, а разве морские бои,
А признанные отчизной слои —
Свои?!)

The death-throes of autumn. The antagonism
Between the marines and the naval divisions
And a young lady-agitator
With the jargon of pharmacies and hospitals.

And the jail-like mission: to out-shout
(Conflict, of conflict, in conflict, by conflict,
Proletariat, proletariat)
The irony and the salt of the incoming tide
Which engender rebellion in their ears
In seventy grammatical cases.
And the joy of sacrificing oneself.
And the blind caprice of chance.

The breathlessness of thousands of sailorish
pea-coats,
As a crowd in agitation swallowing dumplings
Of unthinkable words which end in -ism,
Un-Russian to the ear and unheard of in life.
(And can words in the official cornice
Of the barracks, and can sea battles,
And can layers recognized by the fatherland
Be one's own?)

(1: 311)

The mutiny of sailors on Schmidt's ship in support of the protests is described as an almost purely verbal confrontation:

А уж переключались с плацем Дивизии. Уже копной Ползли и начинали стлаться Сигналы мачты позывной. И вдруг зашевелилось море. Взвились эскадры языки, И дернулись в переговоре Береговые маяки. (313)	The divisions were already exchanging words With the parade-ground. Already as a mane The signals of the communications tower Crawled forth and began to spread. And suddenly the sea heaved. The tongues of squadrons shot up, And the shoreline lighthouses Jerked in mutual parley.
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Schmidt defends the mutineers and is locked up, creating a tense stand-off in “the open sea of mouths,” which is described as a stubborn “rumor” [*slukh*] which grows like thunder into a “hurrah” (317) and a full-blown revolt. The sailors and Schmidt are arrested and put on trial. The pregnant silence of the courtroom is broken by Schmidt’s speech, where he claims he was only performing his civic duty:

«Я знаю, что столб, у которого Я стану, будет гранью Двух разных эпох истории, И радуюсь избранью». (335)	“I know the post at which I stand [for execution] Will be the borderline Between two epochs of history And I rejoice at being chosen.”
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As Schmidt’s almost unwilling participation in this watershed event culminates in his becoming the unwitting voice of history, the reader ends up in a comparable position. The finale is a masterful crowning of suspense, as history finds its proper voice:

Счет пошел на миги. Крик: «Прощай, товарищи!»— Породил содом. Проектор побежал, Окунаясь в вопли, по люкам, лбам и наручням, И пропал, потушенный рыданием каторжан. (336)	Time passed by in instants. A shout: “Farewell, comrades!”— Raised all hell. The spotlight rushed, Drowning in the screams, across hatches, foreheads and handcuffs, And disappeared, extinguished by the convicts’ weeping.
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At the end all is silence, a silence which elicits speech—such as that of Evgenia Ginzburg as she recited this poem en route to the labor camps.

Marina Tsvetaeva, whose own narrative poems are brutally monologic, registered her disapproval of Pasternak’s protagonist, claiming that Schmidt’s words and letters seemed empty alongside Pasternak’s own voice (5: 425). In a letter to Pasternak, she wrote, “Schmidt is not a hero, but you are.” She admitted, “I would like a *mute* Schmidt. A mute Schmidt and a speaking *you*” (6: 261). She developed this reaction in an essay “Epic and Lyric of Contemporary Russia” in which she contrasted Pasternak’s irrepressible voice to that of Mayakovsky in ways which are of particular interest here:

Each of Pasternak’s readers reads with his own mind. Mayakovsky has only one reader: Russia.

Readers of Pasternak do not forget themselves: they gain both themselves and Pasternak, that is, they gain a new eye and a new ear.

Readers of Mayakovsky forget both themselves and Mayakovsky. (5: 378)

As difficult as it is to agree with Tsvetaeva's characterization of Mayakovsky, her comments on Pasternak seem right on the mark. One can only add that, in addition to "a new eye and a new ear," the reader of Pasternak's narratives gains also a new voice. As Tsvetaeva put it, "We are just as incapable of speaking Pasternakese as Pasternak is of speaking our language, but both languages exist, and both are comprehensible and meaningful, only at different levels of development" (5: 378).

Bely's musical narratives provide an even better counterpoint to Pasternak's narratives than Mayakovsky's odes. After all, Pasternak resorted to poetry only when he lost faith in his musical abilities, and his poetry (even his prose) often made the impression of music by other means. But unlike Bely, Pasternak conceived of his poetry not only as conveying his voice, but also as outlining a narrative space. Collaborating on a radio production of his narrative poem *1905* in 1931, Pasternak re-structured the work, believing that "radio as an independent art form require[d] the deformation of the material" (Sherel' 280). Indeed, one critic regarded it as an attempt "to murder literature in the name of its radiofication" (Marchenko 56). The goal of this "deformation" was to preserve the open narrative shape within the new medium, without allowing the narrator's voice to dominate. In the event, the dramatic structure was judged a success, despite the addition of a musical accompaniment that, in the words of one reviewer "worried for us, felt for us and expressed its feelings out loud. We essentially did not participate at all; something was poured into our ears like broth into the mouths of babes" (Sherel' 280). Despite this complaint, the radio production of Pasternak's *1905* demonstrates the ability of his narratives to survive transposition into new media and new voices, while continuing to elicit ever new responses and interpretations. It may therefore be no exaggeration to call Pasternak's narrative poems the purest form of revolution.

Conclusion

While it is not unusual to see historical or political power being attributed to specific works of literature, the relationship between authorship and authority has always been fraught. Nowhere is this as evident as in Russian poets' claims to be speaking for history in the aftermath of the revolution, when the problem was less one of authoring revolutionary voices or recording the authoritative voice of revolution than of facilitating the composition of readers' own voices (see Gorham). I have argued that the narrative poem of Russian Modernism was not only particularly suited to this task, but that it explicitly dramatized the problem of voice for the poet, performer, listener and reader within an indeterminate narrative frame which, instead of impos-

ing authority, enabled the reader's own speech. Blok's *The Twelve* provides the clearest example of how a cacophony of historical voices is brought together into an open narrative which requires the reader to compose his or her own voice within its semantic space. Mayakovsky's tendency to project his voice onto reality made his narratives invariably self-referential, while Pasternak's idiosyncratic vision invariably resulted in highly cryptic narratives. By contrast, the narrative poems of Aseev and Simonov project closed narratives which impose a particular kind of voice upon readers. The definition of the *poema* as a narrative of voice provides new purchase on a genre that has defied definition because of its inclusion of lyrical, epic, dramatic and other elements. It also helps us to see how the distinctive narrative structures of the *poema* have influenced works in genres and media other than poetry. The open narrative structure of the *poema* explains why it became a central genre of writing in the 1920s and 1930s as the place where voice attains a world, and the world—a voice.

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Абстракт

Роберт Бёрд

Оглашение истории: поэма как жанр в русском модернизме

Сочетая в себе и лирическое и эпическое начала, субъективный голос и объективный мир, русская поэма не поддается легкому определению. В статье предпринимается попытка определить поэму как повествовательный жанр, в котором история приобретает голос, а голос входит в историю. Дело не только в том, что в поэме речь часто идет о голосе и голосах (см. «Симфонии» А. Белого или «Во весь голос» Маяковского). Если в лирической поэзии слова остаются неотделимыми от голоса и интонации автора, в поэме повествовательность создает некое неопределенное пространство, в котором история возникает отдельно от голоса автора, а читатель находит возможность понимать мир и говорить о нем своим голосом. В поэме Александра Блока «Двенадцать», например, голоса истории вплетаются в открытое повествование, которое читателю приходится самому завершить и осмыслить, т.е. «огласить». Также у Маяковского, невзирая на настойчивые интонации поэта и драматизацию судьбы его голоса, открытое повествовательное пространство требует оформления и оглашения от читателя, в отличие от поэм таких последователей Маяковского как Н. Асеев и К. Симонов. У Пастернака, наконец, наблюдается наиболее ярко, как в русской поэме мир начинает говорить—не голосом власти или голосом поэта, но голосом читателя. Поэтому поэма оказалась центральным жанром в эпоху революции, т.е. в эпоху принципиально нового состояния человека в истории.