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Suffering for Salvation: Nikolai Klyuev's Poetics of Brotherhood and Deliverance

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Suffering for Salvation:
Nikolai Klyuev's Poetics of Brotherhood and Deliverance

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
Of Bard College

by
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Introduction

In thirty years of activity, the Russian poet Nikolai Alekseevich Klyuev (1884-1937) created an original poetic world and a dynamic literary persona. Informed by disparate cultural and political strains, his poetics appear, if not paradoxical, then highly syncretic. Klyuev proclaimed himself a “peasant-poet,” but his early work reflects, in addition to the rites, customs, and art of the Russian peasantry, the distinct influence of literary modernism – a movement that originated among the urbanized stratum of the Russian intelligentsia. The themes of Klyuev’s poetry could be similarly incongruous. He maintained a consistent framework of references throughout his career – a striking admixture of folk culture, Old Belief and sectarianism, and paganism. However, when responding

to his historical circumstances, such as the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its aftermath, Klyuev's poetry and prose became programmatic, even propagandistic.

Another paradox of Klyuev's poetic mythology has to do with the inconsistency of his desire to associate and dissociate himself with spiritual, intellectual or social movements. The intermittent nature of Klyuev's involvement with different groups and organizations was predicated on his poetic and personal agenda. His affiliation with a spiritual society called the Golgotha Christians led to a collection of poetry which consciously glorified the tenets of the group's doctrine. In the volume of poetry he produced while under the Golgotha Christians' influence, Klyuev incorporated sectarian imagery and language to foster a poetic persona that embraced the ideology of his patrons. In response to the next formative extra-textual event of his career, the Russian Revolution, Klyuev altered his poetic identity. His initial support for the Bolsheviks, whose Marxist conception of the future Russian state was seemingly inimical to Klyuev's cultural agenda, caused him to engage with the rhetoric of revolution. Beginning in 1917, Klyuev introduced the Bolsheviks into a previously pastoral poetic world which had been populated by zealous peasants and sages. Klyuev cast himself as the intermediary between these disparate cultures. When the new regime's anti-religious, anti-peasant policies became increasingly oppressive; Klyuev's poetic persona underwent another reversal. In his later poetry, Klyuev returned to his prior milieu while addressing its irrevocably

changed existence. This brief survey illustrates that Klyuev's poetics were highly susceptible to the poet's changing circumstances.

The malleable nature of his poetry and the apparent contradictions of his poetic identity may account for the enormously varied responses Klyuev and his work have received since his first publication. The dichotomy between authenticity and fraudulency which have marked debate about Klyuev originated from his earliest encounters with the literary world. Klyuev, who was registered as a peasant at birth but likely had no relationship with subsistence agriculture (his father owned a local shop), claimed for himself the role of the Russian people's representative in his interactions with the Petersburg intelligentsia. In 1907, while still living in the Olonets region hundreds of miles north of St. Petersburg, the young Klyuev began a correspondence with Blok. In his introductory letter, Klyuev identifies himself as the voice of the peasantry,¹ a claim which the eminent Symbolist accepted and later disseminated when writing about Klyuev in his 1907 annual literary review.² At this point, Blok and Klyuev had not met in person, so Blok's judgment stemmed from his estimation of Klyuev's poetry (Klyuev enclosed poems along with his letters). In addition to claiming a connection to the peasantry in writing, Klyuev also generated a persona as a peasant poet. Those who did encounter Klyuev when he moved to St. Petersburg in 1912, were, as Michael Makin, in his book *Nikolai Klyuev: Time and Text, Place and Poet* notes, invariably struck by the poet's flamboyant peasant garb, the decoration of his living quarters with pieces of folk art, and his

distinctively rural style of speaking.³ In the summary of memoir accounts of Klyuev which Makin provides, these features are roundly mocked by the majority of observers and taken as evidence that the poet is merely playing the role of a peasant. The most prominent proponents of this view were Georgy Ivanov and Vladislav Khodasevich.⁴ They simply inverted Blok's opinion, stating that Klyuev not a voice of the peasantry but a pretender appropriating this voice in order to stand out among the bright poetic personalities – themselves included – of the Silver Age.

Recent scholarship of Klyuev in the Soviet Union and Russia has, to a certain degree, continued to support the authentic vs. inauthentic dichotomy. Makin, in his essay "Whose Klyuev, Who is Klyuev? Polemics of Identity and Poetry," identifies one pole with Klyuev's biographer Konstantin Azadovskii, who has devoted himself to unmasking the poet's misrepresentation of himself, and the other with Aleksandr Mikhailov, an authority on "peasant poets," who finds Klyuev to be the expression of the Russian national spirit.⁵ In the foreword to his biography of Klyuev – which constitutes the most complete account of the poet's life – Azadovskii defines the aims of his project in the following terms:

Кто же был он в действительности? Носитель "народной души," пришедший из "молитвенных чащ и молелен Севера" (слова Андрея Белого)...Или все-таки "мужичок-трансвестит," готовый с легкостью сменить поддевку и смазные сапоги на европейский "городской" костюм? Лукавый притворщик или одаренный актер?⁶

(Who was he in reality? The carrier of the "national spirit," who came from the "prayer thickets and chapels of the North?" (in the words of Andrei Bely)...Or a "little peasant-transvestite," who was prepared to replace his undersuits and blacked boots with a European "city" suit? A crafty dissembler or gifted actor?)

As is evident from this passage, Azadovskii considers settling the credibility of Klyuev's poetic persona the primary goal of his work. In his conclusion, however, he admits that this question is unresolvable. Mikhailov, on the other hand, does not countenance any such issue. His conception of Klyuev is straightforwardly laudatory:

В нерасторжимом единстве с огромной объективной ценностью выразил себя поэтический дар Ключева. Эта объективная ценность – Россия, но в значительной степени отнюдь не современная поэту, а Россия духовная в совокупности византийских истоков ее православия, их сохранения в старообрядчестве, культуры допетровского времени, крестьянской цивилизации с ее языческими и христианскими корнями.

(Klyuev's poetic gift was expressed in indissoluble unity with great objective value. This is the objective value of Russia, by no means that of the Russia contemporary to the poet, but a spiritual Russia in conjunction with its Orthodox Byzantine origins, their conservation in Old Belief, of pre-Petrine cultures, of peasant civilization with its pagan and Christian roots.)

Here, Mikhailov enumerates a few of Klyuev's favored cultural reference points, citing them as elements of "holy Russia," and asserting Klyuev's import as the articulator of this amorphous nation.

In the United States, scholars have generally understood Klyuev as an inveterate mythmaker and a skilled stylizer instead of seeing him as a potentially genuine or fraudulent voice of the people. Makin is the author of the only book-length study of Klyuev in English. Entitled *Nikolai Klyuev: Time and Text, Place and Poet*, the book analyzes textological details of Klyuev's work as its production and reception. Makin is especially informative about the intricacies of the publication of Klyuev's work. Klyuev's poetry underwent revision and

republication by the poet during his lifetime and, in the late 1980s, several poems long thought to be lost to the oeuvre reappeared in the archives of the Soviet secret police. Makin also examines Klyuev's poetic geography, exploring the dimensions of Klyuev's numerous topographical references.

In his dissertation *Nikolai Kliuev and the Construction of the Literary Peasant*, John Alexander Ogden analyzes Klyuev's self-presentation as a representative of the people. Ogden studies the poet's audience, contextualizing its interests in the political and cultural realities of early 20th century Russia. Responding to his Russian predecessors' approach to the same topic, Ogden writes "Treatments of Kliuev both by his contemporaries and in recent scholarship have often been preoccupied with the issue of whether or not he was 'authentic.' Such an approach to Kliuev and his poetry ignores his audience's complicity."⁷ Thus the scholar reframes the debate about Klyuev so as to study the sociological and cultural factors which shaped his reception. The question of Klyuev's "authenticity" has been central to the work of another literary critic, Ronald Vroon, who has likewise chosen to rearticulate it in another context. In his essay "The Garden in Russian Modernism: Notes on the Problem of Mentalité in the New Peasant Poetry," Vroon determines that Klyuev employs the trope of the garden in a manner more similar to that of Old Believers and sectarians rather than to his fellow peasant poets. Like Ogden, Vroon shifts the level of discourse away from Klyuev's person to his artistic credo. Vroon considers how the poet appropriates the sacral and esoteric elements, like Old

Belief, with which he claims a kinship. These three scholars have mapped out several approaches to Klyuev – the study of narratological devices and the cultural atmosphere – which elucidate how his poetry achieves its effect rather than evaluate his biographical and literary persona.

Although there has been an uptick in publications on Klyuev in recent years, he remains marginal in academia and unread amongst the Russian public. Little has been published on Klyuev in his native country. Editions of his work are rare and many of his manuscripts still remain unexplored in the Russian archives. The most likely reason for this lowly status is the combined factors of the near impossibility of experiencing Klyuev's poetry in full without recourse to a reference book and the fact that his far-flung allusions correspond to a time, space and cultural milieu entirely remote from that of the contemporary Russian reader.

This study examines Klyuev's invention of self and community through his appropriation of elements of folk Russian culture such as Old Belief and sectarianism, folk legends, and the daily life of the peasantry. In the first chapter I draw on conceptions of the authorial myth and reader response theory to explain the conditions which led to Klyuev establishing himself as a prophet of Golgotha Christianity. I examine how Klyuev's method of poetic sacralization enabled him to incorporate stylistic and figurative motifs from sectarianism alongside the doctrines of the Golgothans in the body of a poetic text. In the second chapter I analyze the inception of revolutionary rhetoric into Klyuev's

poetic world. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community" helps explain how Klyuev manipulated the identity of his constituency, the revolutionary peasantry, and mobilized them in the revolution, all while transforming his own authorial myth. In the third chapter, I chronicle Klyuev's disillusionment with the Revolution and study the tropes and poetic devices he developed to reinforce his retreat into a mythical world in which the values of old Russia are preserved. As a whole, this project aims at demonstrating how Klyuev constructed and developed his authorial myth during periods of his career in which historical and social events exercised a particularly strong influence on his poetry.

Chapter 1

The Prophet Speaks: Nikolai Klyuev's Sacral Poetics

The Making of an Authorial Myth

1.1. The Making of an Authorial Myth

The author lives two lives – the one bordered by earth and sky, the other by the margins of a page. While the author's biographical self enjoyed a rich

afterlife in the Romantic era, following Roland Barthes' seminal essay on the subject, the major schools of twentieth century literary criticism curtailed the commingling of text and its historical author. In "The Death of the Author," Barthes submits that, for the reader, "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality...to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me.'"⁸ The New Critics' concept of the "intentional fallacy" – which removes speculation about the author's aims and psychology from the realm of scholarship – and the Russian Formalists' insistence on exclusive examination of the literary work's intrinsic qualities are in keeping with Barthes' propositions. However, Michel Foucault, responding to Barthes in his essay "What is an Author?" posits that, while the real historical person is not directly accessible, the "name of the author remains at the contours of texts."⁹ Therefore, the author is perceptible to the reader, and that perception is, at least in part, shaped by the language of the text.

Following in the footsteps of Barthes and Foucault, the scholar Wayne C. Booth terms this presence the "implied author," or "the real author's literary version of him/herself."¹⁰ The implied author exists only on the page, often in the form of a narrator or lyric hero living an idealized life superior to that of the real writer. What can be gained from the study of this figure, fashioned from the life of its creator? Being able to discern and inhabit the mythic author's perspective offers us a singular portal into his or her creative world. By analyzing the implied author in the same way that one would analyze a character, we can, without

transgressing against the intentional fallacy, discover the significance of an off-repeated image or the motive behind a thematic fixation. Rhetorical devices can be related back to the rhetorician and his or her persona in order to better judge what it is, precisely, of which we are meant to be convinced. These considerations reveal and shape the authorial myth.

In many ways, Nikolai Klyuev's authorial myth is a product of the cultural climate of his era. During the Russian Silver Age (roughly 1890-1925), Old Believer¹ tracts and sectarian songs² were published and made widely available for the first time. The era's atmosphere of spiritual questing and apocalyptic anticipation drew many authors to the motifs of the eschatologically obsessed Russian religious groups. These religious groups were an object of widespread fascination among the intelligentsia, and many prominent authors appropriated certain of their motifs. As Vroon, in his essay "The Old Belief and Sectarianism as

¹ The reforms to Church ritual begun by Patriarch Nikon in 1652 instilled apocalyptic foreboding in those members of the Church who, following the 1666 schism, came to be called Old Believers. For the Old Believers, who considered rituals the realization of God's Kingdom on earth, these alterations constituted a diversion from the path of salvation. They concluded that the reign of the Antichrist on earth had begun and separated from the official Russian Orthodox Church to await the apocalypse. Over the next several hundred years, Old Believers endured brutal persecution and divided into a number of different factions.

² The term "sectarianism" refers to two offshoots from the Old Belief: the *khlysty* and the *skoptsy*. The *khlysty*, a sect founded in the late 17th century by a peasant claiming to be Christ incarnate, practiced mortification of the flesh and exhaustion through religious ritual. These customs combined denigration of the body – which linked them to the corrupted world of the Antichrist – and prayer aimed at hastening the eternal soul's salvation. The *Skoptsy* were a sect whose defining act, self-castration, likewise held a symbolic relationship to the apocalypse. It made the castrate the last of his lineage, displaying his renunciation of the earthly plane and his devotion to the Second Coming.

Cultural Models in the Silver Age,” notes, none of these authors aimed to faithfully reproduce or represent the theology of Old Believers and sectarians.¹¹ Klyuev’s correspondent and longtime advocate Alexander Blok conceived of the religious dissenters in terms of the rift between “the intelligentsia” and “the people” in Russian society. For Blok, Old Believers’ and sectarians’ physical and ideological remoteness from the urban intelligentsia made them repositories of organic Russian religiosity.¹² In Blok’s poetry of the Revolutionary era, he identifies Old Belief with the transformative power of the people’s will: in the apocalyptic poem “The Twelve,” the name of Jesus is spelled in the Old Believer manner. Andrei Bely was similarly inspired by the religious dissidents’ apocalyptic fixation. The novel *The Silver Dove* (1910) centers on a cult reminiscent of the *khlysty* whose members oversee the birth of the Messiah. According to his biographer John E. Malmstad, the poet Mikhail Kuzmin discovered in Old Belief an ancient but still vibrant cultural force with a unified spiritual tradition and a faith powerful in its simplicity.¹³ Makin notes that Kuzmin, in his collection *Autumn Lake* (*Осенние Озера*, 1912), appropriates the motifs and forms of sectarian verse in a manner similar to that of Klyuev.¹⁴ Each of these authors drew on Old Belief and sectarianism without presenting themselves as a disciple of these faiths or as the mouthpiece of any particular sect.

Klyuev was unique among his contemporaries in locating himself within the traditions of Old Belief and sectarianism. Throughout Klyuev’s career, the legitimacy of the poet’s claims – which were presented explicitly in mythopoetic

autobiographical essays and insinuated through his poetics – remained a contentious subject, marked by hyperbolic praise and categorical denunciation. While many of Klyuev’s contemporaries stylized and evoked folk religion in their work, Klyuev alone came to be regarded as a “prophet” by his devotees and as an “authentic voice” by his more reserved admirers. The Symbolist poet Valery Bryusov, in his foreword to Klyuev’s 1912 debut volume *The Chiming of the Pines* (*Сосен Перезвон*), was the first to relate Klyuev’s poetic language to the sacred speech of Russian religious sects.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, the leaders of a spiritual and philosophical group called the Golgotha Christians³ praised the visionary quality of Klyuev’s poetry, going so far as to name Klyuev himself a prophet.¹⁶ In the years immediately before and after the 1917 Revolution, Klyuev was involved with the Scythians – a literary group which glorified the native, non-European aspects of Russia’s culture. The group’s ideological leader, the critic known by the pseudonym Ivanov-Razumnik, portrayed Klyuev as the leader of a *khlyst* sect,¹⁷ while Andrei Bely saw Klyuev as the evangelist of a new gospel.¹⁸ In this chapter, I will examine how Klyuev’s appropriation of Old Belief and sectarianism contributed to his formation of a highly idiosyncratic authorial myth and led to his reception as a religious figure. I will focus on a period in his career notable for the impact of the Golgotha

³ The Golgotha Christian spiritual society grew out of the meetings of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii’s and Zinaida Gippius’ Religious-Philosophical Gatherings. The founding members of the group – Valentin Sventsitskii, Mikhail Staroobriadcheskii, Iona Brikhnichev – had participated in these meetings and, starting in 1910, sought to unite members of the intelligentsia under a religious aegis by establishing Golgotha Christianity. Occasional contributors to their journal “New Earth” (“Новая Земля”) included Merezhkovskii, Blok, Ivan Bunin, and Valery Bryusov. Klyuev was introduced to the group through Blok.

Christians on his authorial myth and poetry. In particular, I will consider how *Brotherly Songs*, the volume Klyuev produced during his involvement with the group, bears the mark of this artistic symbiosis and of the poetic persona which it helped create.

Klyuev's authorial myth was shaped by his readers' milieu and expectations. In his essay "Literature and Biography," Boris Tomashevsky advances the idea that the conception of an author's life is fashioned by both the author and the literary period. The writer presents "not his actual curriculum vitae, but his ideal biography" through his work, which frames the reader's understanding of the author's oeuvre.¹⁹ The more closely the reader resembles the author in terms of contemporaneity, nationality, and cultural and literary preconceptions, the more likely he or she is to ratify the authorial legend, according to Tomashevsky. In regard to the reception of Klyuev's ideal biography, it is useful to think of the writers and thinkers who perpetuated it as his ideal readers. Wayne Booth's theory of the implied author also accounts for "implied readers," who act as a counterpart to the implied author. This is the reader – representing a certain ideology and worldview – which the writer envisions when constructing the implied author and the work itself.²⁰ Booth's construct illustrates the author's and the reader's mutual dependence – the two work together to affirm a more or less concordant agenda. The fact that, in addition to being readers, Klyuev's critics were writers forging their own interpretation of the zeitgeist perhaps accounts for the influence they

themselves – particularly those with ideological agendas such as Ivanov-Razumnik and the Golgotha Christians – exerted on Klyuev’s authorial myth.

In Klyuev’s case, the “ideal biography” was not only embedded in his poetry – his persona was also fleshed out in a collection of autobiographical notes and essays which he composed at various points throughout his career. Klyuev was keen on shaping the reader’s impression of his biography, and his autobiographical writings particularly focus on an unspecified and largely undocumented period in his youth. Klyuev’s autobiographical texts contain unverified accounts of his studies at the famed Old Believer monastery on the Solovetsky Islands, his stay with a *khlyst* community, and his ancestral ties to the Old Belief.²¹ In one such text, dating from the 1920s, Klyuev lists early Old Believer leader Avvakum’s⁴ writings, Byzantine holy texts, and folk prayers, as fundamentals of his mother’s learning, which, in turn, were instilled in him.²² In another autobiographical essay, entitled “Forefathers” (“Праоцы”), Klyuev recollects his mother telling him of his grandfather and great-grandfather, both of whom served in the Vyg River community of Old Believers.²³ As Klyuev’s biographer Konstantin Azadovskii remarks, these tales, irrespective of their veracity, reflect, in large part, the poet’s spiritual world rather than that of his mother.²⁴ In “The Loon’s Fate” (“Гагарья Судьбина”), Klyuev depicts himself as a resident of the

⁴ Avvakum (1620-1681) was the Archpriest of Kazan Cathedral in Moscow who, in 1653, opposed Metropolitan Nikon’s Church reforms, leading to the Schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikon’s reforms constituted the denial of the accepted path to salvation for Avvakum and his followers, the Old Believers. Avvakum and the Old Believers suffered persecution during Nikon’s reign – the dissident was exiled twice. In exile, Avvakum completed an autobiography entitled *Life*. Finished in 1675 but banned until 1862, Avvakum’s *Life* is a striking work of literature which artfully combines rhetoric and memoir.

Solovetsky Old Believer monastery on two separate occasions. He glosses over his first visit, but, describing his second stay, the poet narrates how he became esteemed for his asceticism. We find Klyuev burdened by nine-pound chains and bowing 400 times a day, weeping for the defiled worldly folk who come to kiss his hand and supplicate themselves.²⁵ Here, Klyuev stresses in hyperbolic style that, by the time of his return to the monastery he is already removed from civilization, enmeshed in Old Belief. Klyuev's self-portrait as a figure sought out by supplicants – representatives of worldliness and sin – helps him to reinforce his status as an established ascetic figure. Given this overwrought scene, it might be concluded that these autobiographical essays were intended to be understood as "poetic myths," in Azadovskii's words.²⁶ However, Klyuev never identified them as part of a self-mythologizing endeavor. In an interview with the literary scholar P.N. Sakulin in 1916, he reasserted that he indeed spent several years as a novice at the Solovetsky monastery²⁷ – characteristically blurring the distinction between his poetic and everyday persona.

Also included in "The Loon's Fate" is a story of Klyuev's initiation into a society of *khlysts*, with whom, he records, he lived for two years. With the *khlysts*, Klyuev claims he was ordained by an elder and learned how to become, in accord with *khlyst* doctrine, Christ-like.²⁸ It is important to note that these three episodes tell the story of Nikolai Klyuev's education. The poet constructs the narratives specifically as a series of apprenticeships which begin with his mother's tutelage and extend throughout his life. This portrait of a participatory

pedagogy lends especial authority to Klyuev's poetics in that it enables him to speak convincingly from the standpoint (as well as on behalf) of sectarians and Old Believers, while simultaneously placing him outside and above the tradition. Although none of these tales can be confirmed or dismissed using other sources, they were referenced, directly and indirectly, by those who upheld or reappropriated Klyuev's vision of himself as "Avvakum's issue," the natural inheritor of Old Believer and sectarian culture.

Klyuev propagated his biographical myth beyond the autobiographical texts. He imbued his poetry with the semblance of Old Believer and sectarian religiosity using the rhetorical device of sacralization. This term denotes the incorporation of these groups' imagery, worldview, and the thematic and formal properties of their liturgy into Klyuev's poetics. Klyuev's "sacral speech" is the product of the above elements' application to non-religious themes – the peasant world, the Bolshevik Revolution, and so forth – which become, in combination, spiritual propositions. Therefore, the term "sacral speech" does not refer to the devotional or liturgical nature of the text. For instance, it is not analogous to the language of the psalter, although it was sometimes interpreted, especially during Klyuev's association with the Golgotha Christians, as comparable to sectarian liturgy.²⁹

Just as Klyuev's mythopoetic autobiography associates the implied author's origins with the traditions of the religious dissenters, Klyuev's sacral language appears to be based in Old Believer and sectarian literature. In his

book *Inscription and Modernity: from Wordsworth to Mandelstam*, John Mackay construes Klyuev's frequent evocation of the religious dissenters' ethos and motifs as a method of "sacralizing" his own speech.³⁰ Mackay suggests that, by borrowing from the holy language of these Christian sects, Klyuev's poetry gained a religious dimension. However, the sacral language of Klyuev's poetry is not beholden to any particular religious group – his implementation of the folk religious groups' motifs reflects the poet's personal aesthetic rather than (or in addition to) a collective dogma. Simply put, Klyuev's aim is to subsume Old Belief and sectarianism into his poetry and poetic persona, not the other way around. Vroon, in his essay on Klyuev's sacral speech, points to the numerous instances in which Klyuev transgresses against the spiritual traditions which inform his language. For instance, he contravenes the Old Believers' customary spelling of "Jesus" ("Isus'"), using the post-Nikonian variant instead. However, the most telling of these examples is Klyuev's attempt to sacralize thematic strains of his poetry inconsequential to Old Belief – particularly the peasant world – using language endemic to its liturgy.³¹ The fact that Klyuev eschews doctrine in favor of rhetorical effect indicates that his sacral language sought, even when used in contradiction to the belief systems from which it derived, to retain the religious aura of its source. Klyuev attempted to make this aura a part of his poetic persona so that his language was made "sacred" not by virtue of its association with folk religious liturgy, but because of its association with Klyuev himself, whose poetic persona presupposed Old Believer and sectarian religiosity.

Klyuev's sacral language achieves its effect through fluent articulation of the religious dissidents' worldview and a complex system of references. The object of Klyuev's sacral speech changed throughout his oeuvre, but the role of Old Believer and sectarian elements remained constant. A few examples from different eras help elucidate how it functions. In a frequently encountered method, Klyuev's lyric hero – the implied author – espouses a viewpoint or value characteristic of Old Belief and sectarianism. In the long poem "The Fourth Rome" ("Четвертый Рим"), written in 1922, the lyric hero denounces city life and exalts rural existence. His polemic echoes the Old Believers' rejection of the city as the locus of the Antichrist's reign and the breeding ground for soul-stultifying modernization. Klyuev's language specifically plays on this conception:

Анафема, Анафема вам
 Башмаки с безглазым цилиндром!
 (...)
 Попечалюсь родной могилке,
 Коту, горшку-замарашке,
 Чтобы дьявольские подпилки
 Не грызли слезинок ляшки.

 Чтоб была как подойник щедра
 Душа молоком словесным... –³²

(Anathema, anathema to you shoes and eyeless top hat...I will grieve to the native grave, to a cat, to the disheveled-pot, so that devilish blades do not gnaw the thighs of tears. So that like the bountiful milk pail the soul is rich with words...)⁵

Here, Klyuev uses the Old Believers' anathematization of the city as a basis for championing his own "peasant" poetry. Irina Paert, in her book *Old Believers:*

⁵ All translations from the Russian, unless otherwise indicated, are mine –MG.

Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850 references a 19th century Old Believer author who laments the discord of the individual in industrial society. The author upholds rural existence as achieving a state of harmony between body and soul and natural abundance.³³ Using the eyeless top hat and shoes, Klyuev conveys the fractured spiritual state of the individual stifled by these artificial materials. The top hat's blindness is symbolic of the damage to the soul and loss of poetic vision which the city incurs. He contrasts this condition with the word-rich milk pail, an image of rural abundance and spiritual and poetic good health. Therefore, Klyuev draws on the Old Believer concept of urban evil and presents the peasant world as its plentiful prelapsarian antidote. Later Klyuev names himself as the exemplar of this ideal world, announcing "Klyuev will not be lacquered" ("Не будет лаковым Ключев") – a rejection of the artificial allure of city life.³⁴ Klyuev's identification of the lyric hero with Old Belief lends spiritual gravity to his distaste for the city. His abhorrence is the product of more than just aesthetic preference or rationality, it results from metaphysical concerns. Klyuev co-opts the Old Believers' religious sensibilities (their distaste for the city) as a basis for his idealization of the peasant world.

In other cases, Klyuev imbued his poems with religious implications using a single word or phrase emblematic of Old Belief and sectarianism. In a formulation from his 1918 poem of the same name, Klyuev announces that "in Lenin there is the spirit of Kerzhenets" ("Есть в Ленине Керженетский дух").³⁵ Klyuev is referring to the Kerzhenets River, which was, beginning in the 17th

century, the site of a community of Old Believers. In this phrase, Klyuev uses a toponym (the name of a geographical place) significant to the history and tradition of Old Belief and sectarianism to insinuate Lenin's connection to the religious groups. Generally, the map of Klyuev's poetic world is dotted with Old Believer and sectarian toponyms, and, while they each have, no doubt, a distinctive meaning, they also operate simply as shorthand for indicating non-specific connections to Old Belief and sectarianism. In the latter sense, Klyuev's appellation of Old Believer toponyms to Lenin's name is a means of fitting Lenin into his poetic world. Framing Lenin in terms similar to those used to describe his own mythic self allowed Klyuev to establish, during the Revolution, a new episode in his biographical legend which saw him as an integral part of the new order.

In the same poem, Klyuev speculates that Lenin is looking for "the sources of destruction" in the *Pomorian Answers*³⁶ – a religious text important to the Vyg river region Old Believer sect and a frequent reference for Klyuev. Besides further drawing Lenin into Klyuev's poetic world (Klyuev's later autobiographical writings locate his birth on the White Sea coast, from which the Vyg community's founders hailed)³⁷ this reference suggests that Lenin and the Old Believers are alike in revolutionary spirit – the authors of the *Pomorian Answers* were powerful "polemicists, defiant of established power."³⁸ However, a dogmatic Old Believer would see the vehement atheism and modernizing designs of Lenin and the Bolsheviks as a manifestation of the Antichrist. Klyuev does not react to the

Revolution from the standpoint of an Old Believer but interprets the social and political upheaval according to the mandates of his “peasant” persona. Klyuev greeted the 1917 Revolution as an apocalyptic event, but a necessary one for the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, envisioning it as a “peasant paradise.”

In his autobiographical prose Klyuev portrays himself as an inheritor of the traditions of Old Belief and sectarianism, but his use of their motifs in his poetry marks him as an appropriator. In the former, Klyuev claims to have both been born into Old Belief by virtue of his mother’s heritage and tutored in it while living in the Solovetsky monastery. He similarly avers to have been indoctrinated into a *khlyst* sect. These episodes from Klyuev’s youthful education suggest that he absorbed these groups’ teachings into his worldview without remaining loyal to any particular sect. His transition from Old Believer monk to *khlyst* disciple indicates his unwillingness to resign himself to any one denomination. The manner in which Klyuev deploys Old Believer and sectarian motifs in his poetry reflects his prodigious erudition concerning the religious groups’ history and customs. However, in applying their motifs to themes and events important to his own poetry but incidental to the religious dissenters themselves, Klyuev becomes an appropriator. Klyuev’s method of appropriation, his “sacral” speech, differs from that of his contemporaries in that it dovetails with his poetic persona. Whereas Blok and Bely approached Old Belief and sectarianism from the outside, Klyuev’s authorial myth located his origins within these traditions, making

the groups' motifs endemic to the poet's world and art. Klyuev's self-identification with the religious dissenters lent credibility to those instances of evident appropriation in his poetry since – assuming the reader ratified the authorial myth – they derived from a representative of Old Belief and sectarianism rather than an outsider.

1.2 The Sacralization of the Brotherhood: Klyuev's Appropriation of Sectarian Imagery

Klyuev's involvement with the Golgotha Christians allowed his critics to construct and interpret Klyuev's persona around the concept of his sacral language. Considering the centrality of this concept to the interpretation of Klyuev's second collection, *Brotherly Songs*, some background information on the Golgotha Christians, a minor spiritual movement that inspired him, is necessary. The group was led by the defrocked priest Iona Brikhnichev, the religious thinker Valentin Svetsitskii, and an Old Believer bishop. The group's motley constitution – uniting two figures who originated out of divergent religious denominations – reflects the spiritual curiosity and syncretism of the age. The Golgotha Christians considered themselves a folk movement tasked with the creation of a new world religion based on the original Christianity. They were named for their central tenet: in order for the world to be renewed, every individual ought to climb his or her own Golgotha and become Christ-like.³⁹

Despite the radical upheaval which their doctrines suggest, the Golgotha Christians were a spiritual-philosophical society similar to Merezhkovsky's God-Seekers, counting mainly intellectuals within their ranks. The group maintained a journal called "New Earth" ("Новая Земля") which, beginning in 1911, regularly included Klyuev's work. By the time *Brotherly Songs* was published in 1912, Klyuev had become the prophetic voice of Golgotha Christianity. In his immoderate introduction to *Brotherly Songs*, Svetsitskii declares that Klyuev possesses the universal truth of human consciousness and, further, that truth's manifestation in a uniquely Russian context.⁴⁰ In particular, Svetsitskii praised Klyuev's visions as prophetic of the world to come. Iona Brikhnichev, one of the other leaders of the movement, professed a similarly worshipful opinion in "New Earth": "'After Christ, I have never loved anyone as I love Klyuev'" ("После Христа я никого так не любил, как Ключева")⁴¹. The Golgotha Christians encouraged this image of Klyuev, perhaps even more grandiose than the one the poet himself cultivated, for self-serving purposes – *Brotherly Songs* unmistakably promoted the group's religious doctrines and agenda. As Vasillii Bazanov remarks, the Golgotha Christians were unhesitant to accord any author whom they felt reflected their beliefs the status of prophet. In the pages of "New Earth," writers from bygone eras such as Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, and Chernyshevskii were retroactively declared prophets.⁴² Still, among living authors, Klyuev was the paramount prophet of Golgotha Christianity.

Brotherly Songs marks a unique moment in the development of Klyuev's sacral language – it would be the only time that the sacralized themes consistently reflected the influence of a literary patron.⁶ Certainly, the group's agenda largely coincided with significant themes in Klyuev's prior poetry: millennial foreboding and the inception of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth were common concerns. As John Ogden notes, the "dreamy yearning" for paradise in Klyuev's earlier poetry takes on "the strident tones of militant early Christians fighting for their faith" in *Brotherly Songs*.⁴³ Further, these beliefs derived from the same source – the traditions of Old Belief and sectarianism. Still, Klyuev's usual exaltations of the peasant world and the Russian North are completely absent from the volume.⁷ To speak of Klyuev's sacral language during his association with the Golgotha Christians is to refer to a slightly different project than that of his other work. The aspect of Klyuev's authorial myth that was based in folk culture is almost entirely absent, replaced by the demands of representing Golgotha Christianity. His role as "prophet" led him to sacralize the movement's ideas and themes using Old Believer and sectarian elements.

In order to examine the sacral language Klyuev developed during his association with the Golgotha Christians, it is first necessary to outline the purpose and significance which he attached to these texts. In his foreword to

⁶ In addition to naming Klyuev the movement's prophet and publishing him in their journal, the Golgotha Christian leader Iona Brikhnichev arranged for the publication of *Brotherly Songs*.

⁷ His prior collection, 1911's *The Chiming of the Pines* (*Сосен Перезвон*) with poems such as "Voice of the People" ("Голос из Народа") and "The Plowman" ("Пахар"), had emphasized the folk aspect of the biographical myth.

Brotherly Songs, Klyuev submits that his collection records and preserves certain of his previously extant songs, which were developed, originally, as oral works.⁴⁴ He further notes that those songs which went unrecorded have disappeared from the poet's memory and are therefore lost to the world.⁴⁵ Klyuev's prefatory remarks suggest that the contents of *Brotherly Songs*, during their existence in oral form, were actively sung – presumably by the brotherhood itself.

Contradictorily, in a letter to the poet Sergei Esenin, Klyuev averred that he had amassed his songs from a *khlyst* community in Esenin's native province of Ryazan.⁴⁶ These two claims – one public, the other private – identify the origins of the *Brotherly Songs* with Klyuev in the first case and with *khlysts* in the second, but both draw attention to their status as oral works, and, therefore, to the purpose of their recitation. Klyuev's prefatory remarks and his letter to Esenin imply that he conceived of the songs which he composed for the Golgotha Christians as analogous in function to the hymns of a folk religious sect. In other words, Klyuev hoped to borrow, along with the aesthetic elements, the liturgical aura of the sectarian hymns.

However, Klyuev's intimations that the poems in *Brotherly Songs* serve the same purpose as that of a sectarian liturgy⁸ are contradicted by their careful examination. At first glance, their origins appear close to sectarianism: the poems' prophetic visions, scriptural epigrams, and avowals of holy suffering

⁸ According to Leonid Heretz, sectarian prayers and songs combine ecclesiastical language and imagery with popular diction in a style similar to that of traditional Russian oral poetry. The dominant theme is the intense desire to escape the corrupt world of the Antichrist. The liturgy was recited during rituals of fleshly self-mortification such as ecstatic dancing and flagellation.

unmistakably evoke the religious dissenters' creed. They allude to the ritual act of self-flagellation commonly ascribed to the *khlysty*, and make use of garden imagery – a hallmark of sectarian religion.⁴⁷ These observations indicate that the poems derive from a bard akin to sectarians; his fluent expression of the groups' religious preoccupations identifies him as an initiate rather than an outside observer. However, the brotherly songs' thematic and stylistic heterogeneity delineate them from traditional folk hymns. Makin, in his comparison of *khlysty* hymns and Klyuev's *Brotherly Songs*, remarks that the former synthesize form and function for a spiritual purpose, while the latter forgo the monolithic nature of folk hymns in favor of the poet's vision, making them into "aesthetic echoes" of the folk models.⁴⁸ Therefore, Klyuev's songs do not fully embody the strictly liturgical aspect of the sectarian songs. Yet, as Makin concedes, these songs do retain a functional purpose – a fact to which Klyuev's introductory remarks and his involvement with the Golgotha Christians attests.

An illustration of instances of these "aesthetic echoes" serves to differentiate between the function of sectarian hymns and that of Klyuev's brotherly songs. Makin offers the following as an example of a hymn sung during a *radenie* or "zealous labor" which was performed by *khlysty* to summon the Holy Spirit:

Хлышу, хлышу,
Христа ишу,
Сниде к нам, Христе,
Со сьдьмаго небесе,
Походи с нами, Христе,

Во святом кругу,
Сокати с небеси,
Сударь Дух Святой.

I lash, I lash.

I seek Christ.
 O Christ, come down to us,
 From seventh heaven,
 Walk with us, O Christ,

In sacred circle,
 Descend from heaven,
 Lord Holy Ghost.⁴⁹

Here, the relationship between prayer and ritual is entirely monolithic. Indeed, the hymn is somewhat redundant – it narrates the ritual (self-flagellation while walking in a circle) and verbalizes the spiritual purpose of these acts (to summon Christ to earth). The hymn is inextricable from the context of the *radenie* because it is a verbal extension of the ritual. In most of Klyuev’s poems, such intimate merging of the ritual in rhetorical, verbal form and the poetic context is absent. Klyuev welcomes the narrative richness of the *khlyst* liturgy but he dramatically reworks it in order to develop the lyric hero’s character and milieu.

Included in *Brotherly Songs* is a three-poem cycle entitled “*Radenie Songs*” (“Радельные Песни”) in reference to the *khlyst* ritual. The first poem of the cycle bears the greatest resemblance to the example quoted above – it announces itself as a prayer with its injunction to the Good Shepherd to “come quickly” (“гряди”) and the closing “amen.”⁵⁰ The poem also emphasizes Christ-like suffering and its rewards. However, despite these common elements, Klyuev’s song is removed from the *radenie* ritual – the lyric hero’s perspective is not that of a worshiper immersed in an act of self-flagellation. Rather, in the opening lines, the lyric hero’s addressee is his “beloved brethren” (“любобовные собратья”) and the greater part of the poem comprises a vision of deliverance

from their current suffering which recalls the Golgotha Christians' spiritual agenda.⁵¹ The lyric hero foretells of the brotherhood's heavenly rewards:

Разделяют с нами брашна серафимы,
Осеньют нас крылами легче дыма,

Сотворяют с нами знамение-чудо,
Возлагают наши душеньки на блюдо.⁵²

(The seraphim will divide the food with us, they overshadow us with wings lighter than smoke, they create with us a miracle-sign, they lay our souls on a platter.)

In Klyuev's poem, the heavenly communion replaces the sectarian hymn's description of ritual self-flagellation as the means of expressing the lyric hero's intent. The sectarian version, while anticipatory of the future, is based in the here and now of the ritual; it follows the liturgy's objective of seeking Christ. A precise setting is absent from "*Radenie* Songs." Instead, the lyric hero announces the aim of his and his brothers' strivings through a prophetic expectation of deliverance. In this sense, Klyuev's poem is closer to prophecy than prayer. Given the absence of any blessing or consecration in the poem, the utterance "amen" seems to affirm the vision itself. This affirmation speaks to the brotherly songs' divergent functional purpose. It sanctifies the Golgotha Christians' religious dogma through visions and prayers. Whereas the folk variants evince monolithic purpose, the songs are inherently self-referential. Klyuev's visions and prayers serve the dual purpose of both articulating the group's doctrine and sacralizing it.

The primacy of visions over the style of prayer exemplified by sectarians is reflected in the prophetic status of Klyuev's lyric hero. The idea of the poet as a prophet is embedded in the poem "I was in the spirit on the day of resurrection..." ("Я был в духе в день воскресенья..."), in which the Archangel Michael is portrayed as passing on the divine word to the lyric hero. The poem's epigraph (identical to its first line) is taken from the first chapter of the *Book of Revelation*, wherein John of Patmos identifies himself as a brother to those who suffer in expectation of Christ's imminent return and as a divinely ordained chronicler of the Second Coming.⁵³ The epigraph suggests that the poem's lyric hero is akin to John of Patmos, both as an exemplar of the doctrine of suffering unto deliverance, and as a prophet of the End Times. The lyric hero's prophetic role is confirmed when the Archangel entrusts him with a white stone bearing an inscription and vows to "clothe the sublunar church" ("облечу подлунный храм") and designs the all-encompassing earthly church so as to "create an azure life" ("жизнь лазурную создам") as to reflect heavenly existence.⁵⁴ Possessing the stone talisman, the lyric hero takes up the Archangel's oath to renew the world: "I am faithful to the angel's words, / (the angel) inspired me" ("верен ангела глаголу, / Вдохновившему меня").⁵⁵ Like John of Patmos, he receives the verbal gift of prophecy from a divine source.

The imagery and themes of Klyuev's visions primarily reflect the main tenet of Golgotha Christianity: the necessity of suffering in order to be redeemed. In the cycle "On the Cross," Klyuev dramatizes redemptive suffering by narrating

the ordeal itself in first person and in the present tense. In the first of the two short poems entitled "On the Cross" ("На Кресте"), the revelation takes place in the lyric hero's final moments of mortal agony: "I see, dying,/ A forest of the lilies of paradise" ("Вижу, умирая,/ Райских кринов лес"). Before death, he hears a stone whisper "'let God rise'" ("Да воскреснет Бог"),⁵⁶ indicating that his imitation of Christ's trial has helped expedite the Second Coming. The second poem of the cycle depicts similar woes leading up to a vision. There, the lyric hero suffers from nails and thorns in the manner of Christ until he sees a seraph's wing waving in the fog, beckoning him to heaven.⁵⁷ These two poems interpret the Golgotha Christians' avowal of the personal import of kenotic suffering literally, using the instruments of crucifixion to emphasize closeness to Christ. They link suffering to prophecy – the torment induces the vision of transcendence. The lyric hero is, in addition to being a prophet of Golgotha Christian doctrine, a fellow sufferer, a brother.

Klyuev communicates the principles of The Golgotha Christians from a variety of perspectives. The vision which closes the first "*Radenie Song*" uses imagery iconic of the Golgotha Christians to depict, this time in future tense, a scene similar to that of "On the Cross":

Дух восносят серафимы к Саваофу,
Телеса на Иисусову голгофу.

Мы в раю вкушаем ягод грозди,
На земле же терпим крест и гвозди.⁵⁸

(Seraphim raise the spirit to Sabaoth, the body to Jesus' Golgotha. In heaven we partake of bunches of berries, yet while on earth we endure the cross and nails.)

The prophecy describes the group's plight and salvation in general terms rather than narrating the experience of crucifixion, as in "On the Cross." The brothers' bodies are earthbound and their souls are ascendant, the nails and cross bind the body to the earthly plane, while the soul enters heaven with the seraphim. In *Radenie Song*, as with many of the poems entitled "songs" in the volume, the lyric voice dissolves into that of the collective. The hero takes on yet another role as a member of the congregation which espouses the same vision of paradise foreseen in those poems which had him as the sole narrator.

Another poem, narrated in first person from the perspective of Jesus Christ himself and constructed as a prophetic utterance, focuses on the rewards of bearing the cross. Christ proclaims that those who have borne the Golgothan cross are compensated immeasurably in heaven for their trial:

На ком голгофского креста
 Печать высокая сияет
 (...)
 Тому в обители Моей
 Сторицей горести зачтутся⁵⁹

(The seal shines highest on him who carries the golgothan cross...To him in my abode grief is rewarded a hundredfold.)

Christ himself affirms the vision, expressed by individual brothers and the brotherhood as a whole in the abovementioned poems, and identifies redemption explicitly with the Golgotha Christians by mentioning their namesake. It should be evident from these examples that Klyuev availed of visions as a means of intimating the Golgotha Christians' primary belief – that

Christ-like suffering promised spiritual renewal after the death of the body. To this end, Klyuev developed a system of imagery based on the crucifixion as a scene emblematic of the Golgothans' beliefs. This archetypal setting frequently invokes the cross, nails, and Golgotha itself. By speaking both from the standpoint of the yet undelivered sufferers and Christ, to whose supreme spiritual status the lyric hero aspires, Klyuev was able to create a prophetic poetic persona whose powers are confirmed, in the text, by no less a spiritual authority than Jesus Christ.

The fanatical Christian brotherhood itself is another important object of Klyuev's sacralization. The brotherhood is an imagined religious community which embodies and dramatizes the values of Golgotha Christianity. Because the group is entirely fictional (despite what his introductory remarks might suggest), Klyuev repeatedly defines its make-up and purpose. Certain poems, either uttered by or addressed to the brotherhood, are highly self-reflexive and serve to outline the brotherhood's characteristics. These poems make it evident that the brothers constitute a community of militant Christian warriors who both pray and fight for divine victory. Often, they are actively enlisted by celestial forces – in "Brotherly Song" ("Братская Песнь") and "Song of the Campaign" ("Песнь Похода"), the collective is literally a group of heavenly warriors striving, with sword and shield, for the Second Coming. These poems focus on the brotherhood's deeds and the motives behind them. They also address the community using terms such as "brother-warriors" ("братья-воины"), "brother-

pilgrims” (“странники-собратья”) and “soul-warriors” (“духоборцы”). Elsewhere, the brotherhood is removed from the immediate setting of the Second Coming. Klyuev forges the fictive brotherhood in order to dramatize themes and images redolent of Golgotha Christianity.

In those poems which depict the brotherhood fighting in the name of God and Christ, the brotherhood is defined according to their actions. The first verse of *Brotherly Song*’s first poem, the quintessential “Brotherly Song” makes this abundantly clear:

Поручил ключи от ада
Нам Вселюбящий стеречь
Наша крепость и ограда-
Серафима грозный меч.⁶⁰

(The All-Loving One charged us with the keys to hell to guard our fortress and
fence – the terrible sword of seraphim.)

This passage establishes the contours of the brotherhood’s role and character. It identifies them as warriors favored by the heavens – even intimately connected with the divine order – and entrusted with a sacred task by Christ himself. It also introduces the image of the “key,” which becomes significant through repeated connection with the brotherhood’s endeavors and identity. The next few verses characterize the brotherhood in reference to Christ’s task. In the second verse, the collective pronoun which denotes the brotherhood becomes “brother-warriors,” condensing the event relayed in the first verse into an appellation which the second verse reiterates using the similar term – “spirit-fighters.” The fifth verse reintroduces the elements of the poem’s first lines as the brothers’ identity:

Мы – соратники Христовы,
Преисподней ключари.⁶¹

(We are Christ's cohorts, underworld's sacristans.)

Five verses after the task of guarding hell was first related, the brotherhood's identity is entirely defined by its role. The idea of the brotherhood as key-holders is also echoed by this passage – the Russian word for sacristan, "klyuchar,'" recalls the word for key, "klyuch." The image of the key and of the brotherhood as key-bearers recurs frequently throughout the collection. In the final lines of "Brotherly Song," a key is heard jangling at the "gates of Eternal Light" ("у предвечных светлых врат"),⁶² signifying that the brotherhood, now represented by the image of the key, has succeeded. As this poem demonstrates, Klyuev programmatically references the brotherhood's deeds and the descriptive language by which they are conveyed in his epithets and imagery to cement their identity.

The poem "Midnight Prayer" ("Полунощница") recapitulates the themes of "Brotherly Song" and links them with the Golgotha Christian doctrine of suffering and renewal. In the second section of the poem, narrated in the collective by the brotherhood, Klyuev affirms their prior designation in language almost identical to that of "Brotherly Song":

Нам дарована Звезда,
Ключ от адской бездны...⁶³

(We were given the Star, the key to the hellish abyss...)

Despite their similarities, the respective themes of “Brotherly Song” and “Midnight Prayer” serve to differentiate the two variants. Whereas, in “Brotherly Song,” Christ’s self-sacrifice on behalf of humanity came to define the brotherhood, in “Midnight Prayer,” by the time the brotherhood’s procurement of the keys to hell has been announced, their identity and motives have already been explained. The brotherhood takes on two new epithets in the first verse of “Midnight Prayer”:

Мы – глашатаи Христа,
Первенцы Адама. ⁶⁴

(We are Christ’s heralds, Adam’s firstborns.)

The first epithet refers to the brotherhood’s pivotal role in the Second Coming, and the latter epithet speaks to their privileged position in the new order. The next verse reveals Golgotha Christianity as the basis of their convictions:

Человечий бранный род
Согрешил в Адаме, –
Мы омыты вместо вод
Крестными кровями. ⁶⁵

(The mortal human race sinned in Adam, - we are washed with the blood of the cross instead of water.)

This passage suggests that the brothers’ bloody battles serve the same purpose as the Christ-like suffering of “On the Cross” – their bloodshed washes away the sins of the world. The brotherhood is therefore engaged, on a global scale, in the same project as the visionary holy sufferers, emphasizing fighting, rather than suffering, as necessary to the remission of sin and renewal.

Klyuev's method of sacralization sees the themes and imagery of the Golgotha Christians presented alongside that of sectarians. A known stylization of *khlysty* verse in *Brotherly Songs*, "He will come! He will come! And the mountains will tremble..." ("Он придет! Он придет! И содрогнутся горы..."), begins in the monolithic style of folk hymns and then shifts its emphasis to the brotherhood. According to Alexander Etkind, the poem features exact quotations from *khlyst* verse and makes prominent use of the sect's motifs.⁶⁶ The first three stanzas uphold Etkind's claim, describing the tumultuous descent of the "fiery King" ("огневого Царя") from heaven and the ensuing apocalyptic scene from a single, unbroken perspective. The imagery and themes typical of Klyuev's depiction of the brotherhood do not appear in the first three stanzas, but, in the later stanzas, the collective voice of the brotherhood disrupts the previously monolithic perspective:

Содрогаясь, мы внемлем Судьи приговору:
Истребися, воскресни, восстань и живи!⁶⁷

(Shuddering, we heed the sentence of Judgment: destroy, arise, awaken and live!)

This passage introduces the brotherhood and their creed of renewal through suffering into the poem. It also marks a shift in emphasis: Klyuev transitions away from the stylization of a sectarian hymn about the Second Coming to a poem more typical of his brotherly songs. Because the two sections are linked by the consistent theme of the Second Coming, the *khlyst* hymn and the brotherly song appear to derive from the same source. Further, since the first section has no

apparent narrator, the emergence of the “we” voice of the brotherhood midway through the poem implicates them as the narrator of the poem. The final verse completes the transition from *khlyst* stylization to brotherly song. An exemplary brotherly narrator proclaims his role in the Second Coming:

И пойму я, что минуло царство могилы,
Что за гробом припал я к бессмертья ключу...⁶⁸

(And I understood that the kingdom had passed beyond the grave, that
beyond the coffin I found the deathless key.)

Here, Klyuev employs his favored image of the brothers as key-bearers, echoing the imagery of similar scenes in “Midnight Prayer” and “Brotherly Song.”

Therefore, by the final stanza, the poem’s lyric hero is explicitly identified with the brothers and the *khlyst*-inspired section has been absorbed into the brotherhood’s perspective. In *Brotherly Songs*, Klyuev’s sacral poetics entailed a complex amalgamation of two spiritual groups (the *khlysty* and the Golgotha Christians) into one fictional community – the brotherhood of which Klyuev considers himself prophet and chronicler.

In another approach to sacralization, Klyuev employs the allegorical language of sectarianism to describe the brotherhood. In hymns, the sectarian community is frequently depicted as a garden.⁶⁹ Klyuev’s “Hasten to us, O brothers” (“О поспешите, братья, к нам”) beckons potential brothers to join the cause, to take root in their garden. In the first injunction, the brotherhood is characterized in non-sectarian terms: “Hasten to us, O brothers/to our

miraculous temple” (“О поспешите, братья, к нам, /в наш чудный храм”).⁷⁰ In the next verse, the call is repeated:

Спешите к нам, пока роса
Поит возжаждавшие травы,
И в заревые пояса
Одеты дымные дубравы.⁷¹

(Come to us, while the dew waters the thirsty grass, and the smoky oaks are dressed in a glowing belt.)

The parallel structure of the two verses suggests that the garden, like the temple, is indicative of the brotherhood. This is later confirmed by the poem’s final refrain: “Hasten to us, O brothers/ to the imperishable garden, under the cypresses” (“О поспешите, братья, к нам / в нетленный сад, под кипарисы”).⁷² Using the image of the garden, Klyuev is able to identify the brotherhood with a folk religious sect without stipulating a particular ideology. Instead of adducing a certain sectarian belief, Klyuev illustrates that the brotherhood conceives of themselves in a manner similar to that of sectarians. This leaves room for Klyuev to express the ideals of Golgotha Christianity through the brotherhood while still implying that the community is close to sectarians in spirit if not in ideology.

In *Brotherly Songs*, Klyuev’s poetics was centered on the sacralization of Golgotha Christianity’s beliefs using elements of sectarianism. This endeavor included an introduction framing the invented Christian brotherhood as an active sect which reveres Klyuev’s songs. Klyuev fashioned certain songs as aesthetic echoes of sectarian hymns, and employed the groups’ themes and

imagery, all while dramatizing and espousing the doctrine of the Golgotha Christians. Klyuev's sacral poetics achieved a balance between invoking sectarianism and disguising it. His language conjures images of the sectarian world but stops short of direct reference. Neither the label "khlyst," nor "skopets," nor "Old Believer" appears in *Brotherly Songs*, although less explicit allusions – the *radenie* ritual, the garden imagery, and the *khlyst* stylization – recur throughout. In *Brotherly Songs*' sacral poetics, these allusions coexist with the referents and themes that Klyuev developed to represent Golgotha Christianity: the cross and nails, the key-bearing militant brotherhood and renewal through suffering.

While Klyuev's status as a prophet was only upheld by his supporters, the Golgotha Christians, the sectarian aspect of his sacral poetics convinced others of Klyuev's intimate connection to folk spiritual traditions. Nikolai Gumilev, evidently swayed by Klyuev's introductory remarks, reasoned that "examples of folk creative art take shape just in this way, somewhere in the forest, on the road...."⁷³ Valery Bryusov, in his review of *Brotherly Songs*, saw Klyuev as the offspring of sectarian religion: "that which was captured in the collective creative work of certain communities among our sectarians is expressed by Mr. Klyuev in a fit of personal, individual inspiration."⁷⁴ Bryusov sees Klyuev's creative work as parallel to the sectarians' religious songs but does not consider Klyuev a functionary of any sect. These responses, from two of the most eminent poets of the time, speak to the persuasive power of Klyuev's sacral speech. Both Bryusov and Gumilev understand Klyuev in precisely the manner in which he presents

himself in his autobiographical writings and in his introduction to *Brotherly Songs*. While the two poets recognize the traces of folk art and sectarian literature in his work, they nonetheless take Klyuev as an independent talent, informed by these traditions but not limited by them.

Chapter 2

Forging Kinship, Breaking Bonds: Klyuev's Construction of an Imagined Community

2.1. Comrades or Brothers? The *Narod* as an Imagined Community

The analysis undertaken in Chapter One elucidates Klyuev's strategies in creating a fictional community in order to define his own role in relation to the Golgotha Christians and their ideological and artistic aims. Klyuev constructed the symbolic kinship by bringing together two extant spiritual groups – the theological society and a religious sect, the *khlysty*. His community construction project stipulated a leading role for its creator. Klyuev claimed, explicitly in the introduction and implicitly through the guises which his lyric hero took on, that he held a variety of privileged positions in the brotherhood. The roles Klyuev adopted were those of a prophet, chronicler and high priest. By giving himself such a degree of agency within the fictional association he helped bring to life, Klyuev entered a somewhat paradoxical state: he simultaneously placed himself within the collective and above it. This dichotomy requires closer examination since it also pertains to the Russian Revolution and its leaders. Vladimir Lenin, a figure who clearly fascinated Klyuev, and Leon Trotsky, originally Lenin's accomplice and later his great critic, considered themselves the avant-garde of a movement predicated on workers' unification, yet they derived from well-to-do middle-class families. Other Bolshevik leaders (Bukharin, Zinov'ev, Lunacharsky, Kalinin, Kamenev, Rykov, to name just a few) also took on the role of a revolutionary trailblazer who, by sharing the goals, aspirations, and hardships of the proletariat, claimed the right to represent the interests of the class. The element of self-fashioning necessary to the Russian Marxists in these endeavors – from the carnivalesque transformation of appearances and

frequent change of documents and places of living under conspiratorial circumstances, to the ideological “adjustments” made by the party to its agenda and political liaisons – provides a parallel to Klyuev’s own poetic strategies. The search for identity, often predicated on the political, economic, and ideological framework of any given historic moment, was as typical of party functionaries as it was of poets. In this chapter, I will examine how Klyuev responded to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath by reconciling his poetic world with Russia’s historic transformation.

Klyuev and the Bolshevik leadership defined themselves by ascribing an identity to the community which they claimed to represent. They thereby created an “imagined community,” which Benedict Anderson, in his book of the same name, defines as a grouping which is “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” The community is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁷⁵ On one hand, this model is relevant to Klyuev’s poetic project because of the shared spirituality and similar worldview which he ascribed to his lyric hero, his social and cultural milieu, and his reader. On the other hand, Klyuev’s community-building project – and the same holds true for the revolutionary leaders – constitutes an inversion of Anderson’s conception. Instead of evolving within a horizontal or egalitarian framework, the imagined community (of workers, in the case of the Bolsheviks, and of peasants in Klyuev’s

work) is constructed from the top down. Both community-building endeavors follow the same paradigm: a creator molds the group after his own self-image, patterning the community's aims and beliefs after his own. In Klyuev's, and indeed, in any, poetic world, this principle lies at the core of the world's ontology: the poet is *de facto* the creator. In Marxism-Leninism, the concept of the vanguard party accounts for such a schema. The failure of the workers to develop a class consciousness had, in Lenin's opinion, necessitated the introduction of radically-minded intellectuals as stewards of the revolution. These intellectuals would form political organizations to attract workers, then educate and radicalize them in their midst.⁷⁶ Klyuev, as will be seen in examining his early conception of revolution, had a similar program in mind for the peasantry.

The Russian "*narod*," or folk, is the community most frequently and vividly imagined in Klyuev's oeuvre. Between the 1860s and until 1928, when Stalin's policy of collectivization decided its fate, the political dimension of the *narod* was a subject of fascination for the intelligentsia. In the 1860s-1870s, a group of intellectuals called the "*narodniki*," or populists, developed the conception of the peasantry as the revolutionary class, postulating that the village's communal lifestyle was the key to achieving socialism. The *narodniki* stipulated that the peasantry needed to be made aware of its own potential by select members of the intelligentsia, which led to the tradition of "going to the people" – excursions to villages by intellectuals intent on imparting their populist ideology. The visitors were met with scorn by the peasantry and their teachings were flatly rejected.⁷⁷

The failure of the *narodniki*'s theories to find purchase with the peasantry resulted from a clash in conceived identities. Peasants were not prepared to embrace socialism as the *narodniki* had expected, and the *narodniki* themselves were immediately recognizable, by their appearance and their customs, as members of an alien class. The "communion" of mutual recognition which Anderson presents as essential to each member's sense of belonging in an imagined community was absent from the two groups' interactions. Therefore, while the peasant community imagined by the *narodniki* ascribed a primary role to the populist intellectuals, the peasantry's own sense of their identity precluded the admission of modernized, urban members of the middle- and upper-class into their society. The *narodniki*'s attempt to mobilize the *narod* as a political force was based on imposing an imagined community on an already extant imagined community – the *narod*'s sense of kinship. The fact that these intellectuals did not participate in the extant notion of the *narod* marked them as interlopers with ulterior motives rather than the products of an organic movement.

Starting with the 1905 Revolution, Klyuev himself was active in the peasantry's political affairs, disseminating propaganda for the Socialist Revolutionary Party and working for the All-Russian Peasant Union of 1905. One surviving piece of propaganda which Klyuev composed for the Socialist Revolutionary Party belongs to his poetic oeuvre and will be discussed in greater detail below. This prose piece sees Klyuev insert the themes and imagery of his

poetics into what is nominally an account of a speech which he gave to a peasant cell of Socialist Revolutionaries. According to Scott T. Seregny, during the 1905 Revolution the All-Russian Peasant Union enjoyed popular support deeply rooted in the peasantry, eclipsing the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The peasant union movement had more than 200,000 members from 359 different village organizations. It was notable in its establishment of a class identity, ideology and political aims from within the peasantry.⁷⁸ The movement marked an evolution in peasant class-consciousness – rather than responding to a theory imposed from without, the unions shaped a political identity for themselves based on pressing peasant needs. Klyuev’s involvement bespeaks his interest in shaping and expressing the will of the *narod* not only in literature, but in the political arena as well.

Klyuev’s commitment to social and political reform emerged at approximately the same time as his first attempts at versification; indeed, his activism following the 1905 Russian Revolution combined these two endeavors in religiously-tinged propaganda. Klyuev’s poetry, which first appeared in print in 1904, bore the influence of the 1905 Revolution with its images of social upheaval and political unrest.⁷⁹ In 1906, Klyuev spent time in jail for distributing revolutionary pamphlets for the Socialist Revolutionary Party.⁹⁸⁰ In his biography of Klyuev, Azadovskii quotes the leader of a Petrozavodsk-based Socialist

⁷⁹The Socialist Revolution Part inherited their ideology from the *narodniki*. The party was formed in 1902 and remained active until they were forced out of government by the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution.

Revolutionary faction recollecting a speech which Klyuev delivered to the group in the summer of 1906.⁸¹ The speech, which was preserved and almost certainly reworked by Klyuev in an edition of the *Olonets Region* (Олонетский Край) newspaper under the title “Meeting on the Mount,” (“Митинг На Кургане”)⁸² dates Klyuev’s propensity for using religious language to glorify himself, his comrades, and their endeavors to his earliest creative efforts. A brief introduction sets the scene: “By the cross, on a pile of stones, a few towering above the crowd, stands a man....Everyone avidly listens to him” (“У креста, на груде камней, несколько возвышаясь над толпой, стоит человек....Все ему жадно внимают.”)⁸³ The introduction makes it clear that Klyuev is this orator. Although he stands apart from the crowd, his message emphasizes unity: “Comrades! We are slaves, we are oppressed, no one is for us, everyone is against us; against us first and foremost is our government – the steward of capitalism! Unite!” (“Товарищи! Мы рабы, мы угнетены, за нас никто, против нас все; против нас прежде всего наше правительство – приказчик капитализма! Обединяйтесь!”)⁸⁴ Klyuev’s speech is as contradictory as his self-portrayal in relation to the crowd that surrounds him. While defining the group’s status, their plight and their enemy, Klyuev identifies himself as a member of the congregation using the revolutionary honorific “comrade.” The rest of the speech, however, sees Klyuev’s ringing call to his constituents repeated and reworked to take on Christian undertones and thus acquire spiritual significance. In the paragraph that follows, Klyuev names his addressees “dear comrades,

brothers” (“дорогие товарищи, братья) and “comrades-brothers” (“товарищи-братья”) while speaking of the “hundreds of sufferers who were living in Olonets province for your (the congregation’s) better future” (“В Олонетской губернии жили сотни страдальцев за ваше лучшее будущее.”)⁸⁵ The Olonets group to which Klyuev refers is apparently another cell of revolutionaries, whom he casts as “martyr(s) of the people’s cause” (“мученик(и) народного дела.”)⁸⁶ Klyuev’s message to the group conveys that, for him, revolutionary activity is comparable to a Christian congregation’s striving for salvation – some are martyred, others suffer, and all are united in the struggle.

The address to the Socialist Revolutionaries, published six years prior to *Brotherly Songs*, sees Klyuev invoke the Christian ideal of brotherhood while claiming to speak on behalf of one such brotherhood. Klyuev locates the sufferers in Olonets, his hometown, intimating to his audience in nearby Petrozavodsk that he is acting as an intermediary between the two groups. Klyuev further blurs the distinction between revolutionary faction and religious congregation when, after the speech is over, he depicts the audience singing the “Marseillaise”: “We renounce the old world, we brush off its ashes from our legs” (“отречемся от старого мира, отрянем его прах с наших ног.”)⁸⁷ By characterizing this song as a hymn, Klyuev suggests that a revolutionary faction and religious congregation are analogous because they share a similar function. Recitation of the Christian liturgy aims at expediting the Second Coming and gaining a better life for the soul in the Heavenly Kingdom. Marxist

revolutionaries advance the cause of the paradisiacal society on earth, usually through agitation and propaganda rather than hymns. Klyuev conflates these two forms and purposes to create a revolutionary congregation which sings Marxist songs to attain salvation on Earth.

Unlike the insular brotherhood of *Brotherly Songs*, the brotherhood of peasant revolutionaries which Klyuev constructs in his address is part of a larger fraternal society: the imagined community of the *narod*. Klyuev's imploration to his addressees to struggle alongside their brothers in Olonets, who are "martyring" themselves for the groups' common cause, indicates the extent of this community. Klyuev describes their cause as the "people's" ("народного"), suggesting that the two groups come from the same stock, and ought therefore to unite under that aegis. The poet's exhortations for brotherhood and comradeship are attempts to instill a sense of interdependence in his audience, emphasizing the imperative to suffer for their brother-comrades in the Olonets cell just as the members of the Olonets faction have suffered for them. Klyuev's rhetorical strategy is not only to construct a brotherhood and define its aims; he hopes – to paraphrase Anderson – to impart in the minds of his audience an image of fellow members of the *narod* who, despite being alien to them, are brothers in their class's struggle.

Klyuev's speech to the Petrozavodsk faction illustrates how poetic creation and political rhetoric converge when communities are "imagined." The revolutionary scene is depicted in terms characteristic of Klyuev's poetics:

images of religious suffering and Christian brotherhood abound and, as in *Brotherly Songs*, Klyuev assumes a prominent role in promoting their unity. While these elements have a variety of functions in Klyuev's later work, here they contribute to the address's urgent and direct political message. Klyuev imagines the revolutionary *narod* in terms strikingly similar to the ones Anderson uses to describe a nation: "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible...for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."⁸⁸ The fraternal bond which Klyuev is so intent on establishing between the revolutionary factions is also, according to Anderson, necessary in mobilizing an imagined community. Klyuev's speech, with its exhortations to fight back against the *narod*'s oppressors, emphasizes the audience's responsibility to its brother-comrades in Olonets who have done likewise. In his discursive work of the era, Klyuev's creation of the brotherhood of the *narod* is akin to a political organizer's insistence on a constituency's comradeship in method and in aims. Klyuev develops the *narod* into a political class with an identity taken from his poetic oeuvre.

2.2. The Hammer and the Hut: Reconciling Two Brotherhoods

Leon Trotsky, in his famous work *Literature and Revolution* (1923), casts doubt on Klyuev's fidelity to Marxism-Leninism, accusing the poet of accepting

the Bolshevik Revolution on his own, ideologically divergent, terms. Trotsky sees Klyuev as the voice of the Russian peasantry, a “poet of a closed-in world, inflexible in essence,”⁸⁹ whose sympathies are divided between the peasant world and that of the new regime:

Kliuev accepted it (the Revolution) not for himself alone, but together with all the peasantry, and accepted it in the manner of a peasant, too. The abolition of the noble estate pleases Kliuev. But the Revolution is, above all, a city one....Here is where Kliuev’s dualism arises in relation to the Revolution – a dualism, again, which is characteristic not only of Kliuev but of the entire peasantry. Kliuev does not love the city, he does not recognize city poetry.⁹⁰

Trotsky’s perceptive remarks frame the central questions of this chapter. How could Klyuev, given the vehement anti-industrial stance of his poetics, support a movement that was, as Trotsky and his comrades conceived of it, essentially urban? Further, why did Trotsky conclude that Klyuev’s response to the Revolution was representative of the entire Russian peasantry? Both questions relate to Klyuev’s poetic myth, which further evolved in response to the tumult of the years during and immediately following the October Revolution. Trotsky’s judgment of the peasantry as inflexibly hermetic is similarly applicable to Klyuev’s poetic ontology.

Starting in 1918, after the Bolshevik coup of 1917, Klyuev produced prose and poetry which, as in 1906, responded to revolutionary events from a religious perspective. It is important to note that his reaction to the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power was far more ambivalent than the uncomplicated anti-governmental, anti-capitalistic stance of his 1906 speech. Klyuev had been most sympathetic to the Socialist Revolutionary party, who were pushed out of power in the

Bolshevik coup. Interestingly, this ambivalence is far more evident in Klyuev's poetic self than in his biography. While, as will be seen later, Klyuev's relationship with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in literature vacillated between declarations of allegiance and deep distrust, cursory examination of biographical facts evinces an image of Klyuev as a willing Bolshevik supporter. His early standing in regards to the Revolution was evidently one of mutual support. August 1918 saw the publication of *Hytn Book (Песнослов)* – at that point the largest retrospective collection of Klyuev's work – by the People's Commissariat Publishing House. In October 1918 the publishing house of the Petrograd Soviet of workers and Red Army deputies printed his collection *The Copper Whale (Медный Кит)*.⁹¹ From 1919 to 1921 Klyuev regularly published poems and wrote articles in the "Vytegra Star" ("Звезда Вытегры"), a Bolshevik party organ.⁹² The articles are hardly straightforward works of propaganda – Klyuev's pervasive religious consciousness interferes – but their depiction of the new regime is often expressly favorable. Klyuev's statement, from the article "Red Alert" ("Красный Набат,") is representative of these pieces' tone: "Blessed be your weapon, young warrior" ("Да будет благословенно оружие твое, молодой воин."⁹³ Klyuev "blesses" the Bolsheviks on his own terms, using religious language to signify his support for their officially atheistic utopia.

Klyuev was also among the first to herald Lenin's leadership in verse with his 1918 poem "In Lenin there is the spirit of Kerzhenets..." ("Есть в Ленине Керженский дух..."). In December of 1921, Klyuev delivered the completed

cycle "Lenin," via his companion N.I. Arkhipov, the Olonets province delegate to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets in Moscow, to the party leader himself.⁹⁴ Azadovskii writes that the book was received by Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya and passed on to Lenin, but nothing is known of his reaction to Klyuev's work.⁹⁵

The volume Klyuev sent to Lenin included an inscription in which the poet portrayed himself as the emissary of the spiritually rich people of Olonets province. Klyuev dedicated the collection "To Lenin from the walrus dawn of the northern seacoasts, from the mother-loaf, from the Russian paradise. I, Nikolai Kliuev, send this red written present, and as an ambassador comes my fellow fast-observer and fellow thinker Nikolai Arkhipov."⁹⁶ In the emerging political context of the Soviet Union, Klyuev's customary claim to speak for a collective, in this case the people of Olonets, took on new meaning. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets, the event which occasioned Klyuev's gift, was comprised of "ambassadors," as Klyuev labels Arkhipov, representing each Russian region. While Arkhipov is the official political representative of Olonets province, Klyuev is its cultural emissary – in fact, Klyuev's inscription leaves it unclear whether Arkhipov is the ambassador from Olonets or if he was sent by Klyuev himself. Klyuev's hyperbolic endorsement of his home province as a distinctively Russian paradise belies his hope that Lenin will recognize the spiritual greatness of the region and accord it a correspondingly prominent role in the Soviet regime. Whereas, during the 1905 Revolution, Klyuev exhorted his constituency only to

revolt, the new regime's representative government and supposedly egalitarian society prompted him to court the Bolsheviks with his poetic gifts.

In the "Lenin" cycle, the lyric hero embodies the role of the intermediary between the Russian *narod* and Lenin. This is most evident in the tenth poem of the cycle, "I am the emissary from the bear..." ("Я посол от медведя..."), wherein the lyric hero brings news of the bear's desire to join with the lion. The former is symbolic of the Russian *narod*, the latter is Klyuev's emblem for Lenin:

Я – посол от медведя, он хочет любить,
Стать со Львом песнозвучьем единым.⁹⁷

(I am the emissary from the bear, he wants to love, to become a harmonious
song resonating with the lion.)

Here Klyuev conveys that the *narod* wants to embrace Lenin (whose name features a homophonic similarity to the Russian for "lion"), implying that, while they have yet to ally themselves with the communist leader, they would be receptive to his cause. The condition for their cooperation, as related by the lyric hero, is no less than an equal partnership – a union between two sovereign animals, the bear and the lion. Klyuev's role in "Emissary from the bear..." is comparable to that which he enacts in his dedication to Lenin: both feature Klyuev announcing himself to Lenin on behalf of the people.

The second poem of the cycle bespeaks the opposite orientation; it is an address to the *narod* celebrating the advent of the Bolshevik Revolution. Klyuev uses the familiar refrain "brothers" in reference to his constituency, exhorting them to rejoice at their pairing with the forces of the Revolution:

Ленин – Красный олень, в новобрачном сказаны,
Он пасется меж строк, пьет малиновый звон.

Обожимся же, братья, на яростной свадьбе
Всенародного сердца с Октябрьской грозой.⁹⁸

(Lenin – the red deer, in the marriage legend, he is grazing between the lines, he drinks the raspberry tolls of the bell. Let us be deified, brothers, at the fierce wedding of the people’s heart with the October thunder.)

Here, as in his 1906 speech, Klyuev emphasizes unity and brotherhood as the path to salvation. His brotherhood, however, has expanded and now encompasses the Russian *narod* as a whole. With their “marriage” to the Revolution, all of Soviet Russia will be linked by fraternal love. In order to reconcile the Communists’ stance with his own peasant poetic persona, Klyuev envelops the emergent ruling class in his fictional brotherhood. The Bolsheviks come to blend in with the peasants and sectarians which traditionally form the brotherhoods of Klyuev’s poetic world.

Klyuev invoked his biographical legend, in particular, the map of his poetic world as established in his autobiographical essays, in order to interpret Lenin and the Bolsheviks within his own poetics. Old Belief and sectarianism are inextricable from Klyuev’s personal poetic geography – his toponyms are frequently references to these groups’ religious centers. As demonstrated in the first chapter, in the first poem of the “Lenin” cycle, Klyuev uses the toponym “Kerzhenets,” a city with a prominent Old Believer population, in order to link Lenin with the religious group. Such rhetoric is especially notable in Klyuev’s articles for the *Vytegra Star*, the Bolshevik party organ in which he was published

in the years immediately following the Revolution. Azadovskii notes that the essays approach the Russian Revolution and the “new man” of Soviet society in a prophetic register.⁹⁹ Given Klyuev’s reliance on Old Belief and sectarianism in his sacred speech, it follows that it is not accidental that these groups figure prominently in his prosaic essays as well. Klyuev’s articles, like his poetry of this era, see a melding of religion and revolution, but it is only in his prose that he reflects on the promise of the young Soviet society, delivering prophetic pronouncements about its ideal future.

In “The Red Horse” (“Красный Конь, 1919”), Klyuev adopts the worldview of Old Belief and sectarianism to depict the Revolution as the apocalypse. The title itself fuses the horseman of the apocalypse with the color symbolic of the Revolution. An epigraph from a song of the Olonets *skoptsy* precedes the article:

Забладаю я престолами,
И корною с державою...
Все цари-власти мне поклонятся.¹⁰⁰

(I own the throne, and the roots of power...All kings-authorities bow to me.)

The epigraph from Klyuev’s home province of Olonets immediately puts the article on the map of Klyuev’s personal geography. The beginning of the article sets the scene in the Solovetskii monastery, where Klyuev, in the autobiographical essay “The Loon’s Fate,” mentions he resided on two separate occasions. Klyuev describes a mural on the walls of the monastery which depicts a crucified peasant tormented by a noble lady beside a general with spear and

saber and a general sitting astride a thousand-year old stallion whose snort echoes throughout Russia. This image prompts Klyuev to query an elder from a city by Lake Onega (along which Olonets is also located) whether or not the *narod* will soon rise. The elder thunders in response: “It will rise, my sweet! The Seal is already breaking, the guardians are getting scared, the stone is crumbling...From the stone Horse’s head a Red horse will rear for the deathly battle with a Black stallion” (“Воскреснет...ягодка! Уж Печать ломается, стража пужается, камение распадается...От Коневой головы каменной выдбится Красный конь на смертное стражение с Черным жеребцом.”)¹⁰¹ The elder describes the red and black horses from *The Book of Revelation* doing battle: the red horse of the Bolsheviks fights the black steed, a symbol of famine.¹⁰² This image of the Revolution vanquishing the peasantry’s greatest foe – famine – establishes the event as a positive one for the class. The Old Believer elder perceives the Revolution as the coming apocalypse which will free the *narod* from its bonds.

The elder’s conception of the Revolution as the Russian people’s liberation is entirely consistent with Klyuev’s own view. Indeed, having conveyed his vision, Klyuev takes up his interlocutor’s prophetic tone. He announces that Christ has risen and exhorts the poor, meek, and downtrodden to join in the “red resurrection feast” (“красный пир воскресения.”)¹⁰³ Therefore, not only does Klyuev sacralize his sense of the Revolution as an apocalyptic event by delivering it through the mouth of an Old Believer monk, he adopts the monk’s

prophetic air. The poet, by extension, now represents the viewpoint of Old Believers to the readers of the *Vytegra Star*.

In another article from the *Vytegra Star*, Klyuev draws on the wisdom of the *narod* for a different purpose: “Semi-precious Blood” (“Самоцветная Кровь, 1919”) depicts the Revolution as working against the people’s interests. “Semi-precious Blood” features an epigram from an unspecified Russian *khlyst* sect:

Ты светись, светись, Иисусе,
Ровно звезды в небесах,
Ты восстани и воскресни
Во нетленных телесах.¹⁰⁴

(You shine, shine, Jesus, just as the stars in the heavens, you will rise and be resurrected in imperishable bodies.)

Klyuev uses this quotation to frame his essay’s central question: what is the “imperishable relic” (“нетленная мощь”)¹⁰⁵ of Christ? Klyuev claims that the answer to this question can be found in any old lady from Olonets or Kargopol.¹⁰ He recounts a tale about a wise sectarian elder whose teachings were preserved by his grateful brothers in verse:

Почивает Мощь нетленная
В малом древе кипарисном, -
(...)
Чистым ладаном окурена:
Лапоточное берестышко
Клюшка белая, волжоная...¹⁰⁶

(An imperishable relic rests in a small cypress casket...sprinkled with censers: bast sandals and a tin-plated white staff.)

¹⁰ Another town in the Russian North.

The sectarian identifies the imperishable relic with the *narod* and nature. Cypress trees, bast woven sandals and walking sticks retain a mysterious power. Klyuev uses this as a basis for the *narod's* important contemporary role in shaping the post-Revolutionary utopia. In the essay he states:

Народ хорошо осведомлен: о том, что "мощь" человека выявлена в настоящий век особенно резко и губительно. Лучи радия и чудовищепушка, подъемный кран и говорящая машина – все это лишь мощь уплотненна в один какой-либо вид, ставшая определенной вещью и занявшая определенное место в предметном мире, но без возможности чуда множественности и сознательной жизни, без "купины," как, определяя такое состояние, говорят наши Хлысты-белъцы.¹⁰⁷

(The *narod* well knows about the fact that a human "relic" has been revealed in our century particularly sharply and profoundly. Radio rays and the monster-cannon, the lifting crane and talking machine – all of these are relics in only one form, which has become a certain thing and occupies a certain place in the objective world, but without the possibility of a multiplicity of miracles and of a conscious life, without "burning bushes," as, defining a certain state, say our Khlyst-doves.)

Here Klyuev argues that the Revolution should welcome multiple views of miracles: both the technological advancements of the Bolsheviks and the biblical miracles prized by the *narod*. Klyuev invokes the scene of the burning bush from Exodus to illustrate the traditional response to miracles and revelations. The *narod*, among which the *khlysty* are counted, retain Moses' constitution – faced with the aberration of the burning bush, they profess fear and reverence for god's might. Klyuev warns that this religious consciousness will be lost with the onset of the technological "miracles" (the talking machine and monster-cannon which he calls miracles are really dangerous abominations rather than divine wonders) being instated when Klyuev was writing. As this

passage evinces, the tone of “Semi-precious Blood” differs from that of “The Red Horse.” The latter piece interwove Old Believer, sectarian and Bolshevik elements, bespeaking the groups’ shared purpose. In “Semi-precious Blood,” however, Klyuev reveals points of ideological disagreement with the Bolsheviks by suggesting that the technological and industrial dimension of the Revolution ought not obviate the native utopian traditions of the *narod*.

In the closing lines of “Semi-precious Blood,” the sense of latent danger which the monster-cannons and talking machines conveyed becomes an immediate threat to the *narod*. Klyuev uses the trope of the fire-bird, a folkloric animal which is both a blessing and a harbinger of doom for its captor, to symbolize the *narod*: “For now the fire-bird flutters and beats its wings deathly, drenched in semi-precious blood, under the steel eye of a machine gun” (“Пока жар-птица трепещет и бьется смертно, обливаясь самоцветной кровью, под стальным глазом пулемата.”)¹⁰⁸ The machine gun trained on the bloodied and dying fire-bird belongs to the godless creations which Klyuev warned of earlier. Now, these technologies have become tools in violently displacing the *narod* from the Bolshevik’s modernized utopia.

“Semi-precious Blood” and “The Red Horse,” both written during the Red Terror, take strikingly divergent views of the *narod*’s future in the Soviet state. In the latter, Klyuev foresees the *narod* and the Bolsheviks joining together and being exalted in their union. The former article acknowledges, albeit in visionary language, the deterioration of their relationship. During the period of political

repression termed the Red Terror (1918-1922), peasants and members of the Russian Orthodox Church were victims of a campaign of mass arrests and executions. By 1919, the year when Klyuev published his articles, the Cheka had arrested 500,000 peasant deserters from the Red Army and would arrest around 800,000 more in the following year.¹⁰⁹ In accord with Lenin's proscription, thousands of these "traitors to the people's cause" were killed and in some cases members of their families were taken hostage.¹¹⁰ At a time when Klyuev was alternately touting the Revolution as a vehicle for the *narod's* salvation and remonstrating it for turning modern technology against the people, peasant deserters and Lenin's soldiers had already proved their incommensurability in increasingly bloody clashes.

Religion, while central to Klyuev's poetic treatment of the revolution, was eradicated under Marxism's doctrine of atheism. In the early years of the Red Terror, Lenin decreed that the Russian Orthodox Church be made separate from the government and stripped of its legal status, the right to own property, and the right to teach. In the same year, 1918, Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow excommunicated the Soviet leadership, leading to the arrests and deaths of thousands of ecclesiastical officials.¹¹¹ While Klyuev rarely identified himself with the official Church, their removal from a position of power confirmed that atheism was to be an enforced policy and its opponents removed from prominence. In "Semi-precious Blood," Klyuev responds to another anti-religious measure undertaken during the Red Terror: the "suppression of miracles" of

1919. In order to disavow the populace of religious notions, the Soviet government publicly exposed saints' relics to show that their bodies had not been miraculously preserved.¹¹² This highly symbolic act attempted to wrest faith in the power of god from the credulous masses by appealing to their rational faculties. In his article, Klyuev rails against the government's efforts to convert the faithful by revealing the miracles of religion to be falsified and replacing them with the empirically verifiable wonders of technology. Klyuev's discussion of technological versus biblical miracles apropos of this campaign indicates that, despite the allegorical language employed in his articles, Klyuev was concerned with the policy-making of the new regime.

2.3. Myths of Salvation: Klyuev's Peasant Utopia

Klyuev's discursive writings on the revolution are informed by the tragic destiny of the Russian peasantry in the Revolution. His post-revolutionary poetry is full of ideological and spiritual propositions that are grounded not as much in history as in a timeless vision of deliverance through religion and spiritual community-building. The ending of "Semi-precious Blood" draws on a native utopian myth, the legend of the city of Kitezh, as a warning of the consequences of suppressing the Russian people's will. The legend of Kitezh was preserved and passed on by an Old Believer group called the "*beguni*" or

wanderers, and held special resonance for Old Believers and sectarians as a parable of salvation from the sinful world.¹¹³ According to the first part of the legend, the 13th century Prince Georgi Vsevolodovich founded two cities, Little and Great Kitezh, on the banks of Lake Svetloyar which were subsequently attacked and destroyed by the Tatar invader Batu Khan. However, Great Kitezh continues to exist as both an invisible presence on earth and as a city for the righteous in the spiritual realm. The narrator prophesies that, in the age of the Antichrist, those towns which uphold the true faith will likewise become invisible and their residents will ascend to the spiritual Kitezh. As the second part of the legend details, this heavenly city can also be sought and reached through asceticism and resistance to the temptations of the Antichrist's world.¹¹⁴ In the years following the Revolution, the legend of Kitezh features prominently in Klyuev's poetry as an emblem of deliverance and eternal return.

In "Semi-precious Blood," Klyuev invokes Kitezh to remind his reader of the *narod's* perseverant nature. According to Klyuev, the *narod* will not collaborate with the Bolsheviks but endure in spite of them: "The heart of the people will be hidden from them (the Bolsheviks) until a new time and age, as once the city of Kitezh was hidden from the earth, beneath the airs and waters of lake Svetloyar" ("сокрыто будет им сердце народное до новых времен и сроков, как некогда сокрыт был Град-Китеж землей, воздухами и водами озера Светлояра.")¹¹⁵ Here, Klyuev casts the Bolsheviks in the role of the Tatar invaders, depicting them as a conquering, but ephemeral, force. Just as Kitezh

weathered the Tatars' campaign by secluding themselves, the Russian *narod* will outlast the Soviet Union and resurface in another era. The spiritual dimension of Kitez' in the legend and the *narod* in Klyuev's poem enables them to withstand the earthly threats of non-Christians such as the Tatars and the Bolsheviks.

Some of the poems which Klyuev first penned in reaction to the Revolution allude to Kitez' in a manner that foreshadows the conflict expressed in his prose of 1919. In 1917's "For the mind – a republic, but for the heart – Mother Russia" ("Уму – республика, а сердцу – Матерь-Русь"), Klyuev establishes his devotion to Kitez' as a distinctly Russian utopia while registering his ambivalence about the Revolution's promise. The opening line expresses Klyuev's dichotomous sense of allegiance – the Revolutionary republic courts him with its egalitarian society, but the culture of Tsarist Russia is still dear to him. For Klyuev, Kitez' and Mother Russia are eternally inscribed in his being:

Пред пастью львиною от ней не отрекусь.
Пусть камнем стану я, корягою иль мхом, –
Моя слеза, мой вздох о Китеже родном,
О небе пестрядном, где звезды – комары,
Где с аспидом дитя играют у норы,
Где солнечная печь ковригами полна,
И киноварный рай дремливее челна...¹¹⁶

(Before the lion's jaws I will not disown her. Let me become a stone, deadwood or moss – my tears, my sigh are of native Kitez', of a woven sky where stars are mosquitoes, where a child plays with a viper by a burrow, where the sunny oven is full of loaves, and the cinnabar paradise is dreamier than a boat.)

Here, the image of Lenin as a lion takes on the menace that the lion held for the first Christians. Despite the threat which Lenin might come to pose, Klyuev is

inextricably linked to his homeland. Klyuev's loyalty to his native land entails a divergent vision of paradise from that of the Bolsheviks. His Kitezsh is a prelapsarian peasant paradise with endless expanses of land and natural harmony. As an eternal, timeless place, it is distinct from the Bolsheviks' earthly paradise. Klyuev despairs that his homeland will become overrun by the Soviet utopia which, with its skyscrapers and smoke-filled air, threatens to clutter the sky:

Железный небоскреб, фабричная труба,
Твоя ль, о родина, потайная судьба!¹¹⁷

(Oh, homeland, could your secret fate be an iron skyscraper, a factory
smokestack!)

These fears, which have been realized by the time Klyuev is writing "Semi-precious Blood," are assuaged by the Revolution's gesture of good intentions:

О тысяча девятьсот семнадцатый Февраль!
Под вербную капель и под грачиный грай
Ты выпек дружкин хлеб и брачный каравай,
Чтоб Русь благословить к желанному венцу...¹¹⁸

(Oh February 1917! Under the drops of Palm Sunday and under the rook's squawk you baked the best man's bread and wedding cake to bless Russia and her desired crown.)

By expressing the joining of the Bolsheviks with the *narod* using images from nature and stating that the Bolsheviks themselves have baked the ceremonial loaf of peasant weddings, Klyuev incorporates the Revolution into the folk cultural themes of his poetic world.

In “For the mind...,” Klyuev is both mourner and matchmaker, dealing with the eternal in the former case and the fleeting in the latter. Refrains from the First Panikhida, an Orthodox hymn sung at funeral vigils, follow each stanza of the poem. Klyuev is reciting the prayer, which expresses god’s immortal power and asks that god grant peace to the souls of mortals, at the funeral of Mother-Russia. Like Kitezh, old Russia and its culture has been overrun by godless hordes, but lives on in another realm. It resides in Klyuev himself, and, if the wedding vows are upheld, in the union between the Revolution and *narod*. To this end, Klyuev gives his heart over to the married couple:

Я запоздалый сват, мне песня не к лицу,
Но сердце – бубенец под свадебной дугой –
Глотает птичий грай и воздух золотой...¹¹⁹

(I, a belated matchmaker, I am not fit to sing, but my heart is a jingle beneath a wedding arch, gulping the bird’s squawk and golden air.)

While Klyuev voices his support for the joining, he emphasizes its fleeting nature. The carriage whisking them away and Klyuev’s sense of his being “late” to the wedding speaks to the suddenness of the event in contrast to the eternal repose of Mother-Russia. The final couplet is a direct quotation from the Book of Psalms:

Сей день, его же сотвори Господь,
Возрадуемся и возвеселимся в онь!¹²⁰

(This is the day which the Lord hath made, we shall rejoice and be glad in it.)

This passage is taken from Psalm 118 which begins by attesting four times that god’s love endures forever. The psalm’s theme of enduring love refers to

Klyuev's hopes that the wedding will be a long and happy one, but also speaks to the eternal triumph of god's love over ephemeral human designs.

Therefore, from the very outset of the Revolution, 1917, Klyuev accounted for potentially deleterious mutations of the Soviet experiment. He framed the events according to a model established in the legend of Kitezh, wherein a paradise on earth becomes a paradise in the spiritual realm. Klyuev's Kitezh, as a distinctly peasant-oriented paradise, is still felt on earth through the yearnings of the *narod*. Along with the *narod*, Klyuev vows to safeguard the legend's promise within his being even when open expression of peasant visions of paradise are overtaken and prohibited by the leaders of the republic. Klyuev's hoped-for utopic union between the *narod* and the Bolsheviks would shortly reveal itself to be a hellish ensnarement, but the parallel, immortal paradises of the Christian Kingdom of Heaven and of the city of Kitezh offered salvation after death, and a reason to rejoice on earth.

By 1918, Klyuev has come to depict the peasant world as being infested and invaded with modernizing elements. He again draws on the legend of Kitezh, intermixed with folk legends and rituals, to demonstrate peasant resistance and resolve. "On the icon shelf a bag of tobacco..." ("На божнице табаку осьмина...") opens with a scene of defilement:

На божнице табаку осьмина...
 Древо песни бурею разбито,
 Не Триодь, а Каутский в углу.¹²¹

(On the icon shelf a bag of tobacco...The tree of song is smashed by the storm,
 not the Trinity, but Kautsky lies in the corner.)

Tobacco, anathematized by Old Believers as a product of the corrupt Western world since its institutionalization by Peter the Great, and a volume by the Marxist thinker Karl Kautsky have replaced the spiritual items essential to the peasant hut. The peasant groom has been overpowered by the Bolshevik bride – the vision of the latter has come to dominate that of the former. Klyuev describes the peasantry’s withering condition by referring to Kupalo’s Day, a folk holiday:

Облетел цветок купальской веры
В слезный рай, в озимый древний шум!¹²²

(The Kupalo flower of belief circled in a tearful paradise, in a hibernating ancient noise.)

Klyuev inverts the sense of abundance of Kupalo’s Day,¹²³ which, according to Linda Ivanits, took place on the longest day of the year when vegetation was at its peak. The dwindling petals of the flower bespeak the poet’s lack of faith in the barren, wintery landscape of the Bolshevik “paradise.” Here, the importance the peasant calendar places on agriculture and the changing of the seasons informs Klyuev’s choice of imagery. Frequently, Klyuev refers to the Revolution as a winter storm or to the fact that it occurred in wintertime. Consequently, the springtime and the prospect of vegetation blossoming offer an antidote to the ravishments of winter. This view of time resembles that of the Kitezh legend. The cycle of being which the city of Kitezh undergoes (earthly existence, disappearance, and eventual reemergence), is also inherent in nature, where plants and seasons undergo the same transformations.

In the poem's final stanzas, the Kitezh legend, the changing of the seasons, and the folk legend of St. George are conflated to create an image of the *narod*'s salvation. St. George, often called Egory or Egora, was the subject of popular spiritual songs among the peasantry. According to Ivanits, these songs depicted him "now as a holy warrior and martyr and now as the savior of a Christian maiden, usually named Lizaveta, from a dragon."¹²⁴ Klyuev condenses these guises into that of a warrior and dragon slayer:

Смертны волны львиного поморья,
 Но в когисто-жадной глубине
 Серебрится чайкой тень Егорья
 На бурунном гибельном коне.

«Страстотерпец, вызволь цветик маков!
 Китеж-град ужалил лютый гад...»
 За пургой же Глинка и Корсаков
 Запевают: «Расцветай мой сад!»...¹²⁵

(Deathly waves are the lion's coasts, but in the clawing-insatiable depths the shadow of Egory silvers on the breakers of a disastrous horse. "Martyr, rescue our garden of poppies! Kitezh was stung by a vicious snake..." Throughout the snowstorm Glinka and Korsakov intone: "Blossom my garden!")

Klyuev contrasts the limited horizons of Lenin – the lion's coasts only stretch far enough to encompass "mortal waves" – with images of endurance. The first of these images is immortal Egory himself, who approaches to slay the lion (or the dragon) imprisoning the "poppy blossom" of spring (here representing the city of Kitezh). Klyuev returns to the idea that the Revolution's winter is smothering the peasant spring – by first creating a parallel between the spring blossom and Kitezh in his entreaties to Egory to save both, then by referring to the tune which Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov hum to drown out the storm.

In 1919's "The Copper Whale," Klyuev entirely renounces his vision for the Revolution, reverting back to addressing the *narod* exclusively rather than the peasant-Bolshevik "brother" of the "Lenin" cycle. The poem opens with a cruel irony: the city of Arakhlin, rather than Kitezh, appears on earth. According to legend, Arakhlin was a sinful city god punished by sending a dragon to torment its citizens.¹²⁶ The residents petitioned Egory to save them, and the saint took pity on the sinners and slayed the dragon. This narrative exemplifies Klyuev's sense of contemporary Russia: he sees it as a corrupted kingdom but holds out the possibility for the peasantry's salvation. He speaks to his imagined community of the *narod*:

Братя, это наша крестьянская красная культура...
 Бодожёк Каргопольского Бегуна – коромысло
 весов вселенной,
 И бабкино веретено сучит бороду самого Бога.
 Кто беременен соломой, – родит сено,
 Чтоб не пустовали ясли Мира – Великого Единорога.¹²⁷

(Brothers, this is our red peasant culture...The staff of a Kargopol wanderer is the yoke of the universe's scales, and an old crone's spindle spins the beard of God himself. Who is pregnant with straw will bear hay, so as not to empty the manger of the World – of the Great Unicorn.)

Klyuev depicts the humble peasantry doing acts of outsized piety, proving that the *narod*, despite the "red" elements infiltrating their culture, remain god-fearing and worthy of salvation. Peasant labor, like the woman's spinning, exalts god himself, and elements from peasant life are likewise exalted: straw, turned into hay, girds the manger of the world. Klyuev renews his address to the peasant brethren by reneging on his earlier endorsement of the Revolution:

Не величайте революцию невестой,
Она только сваха, принесшая дар –

В кумачном платочке яичко и свечка,
(Газеты пищат, что грядет Пролеткульт.)
Изба – Карфаген, арсеналы же – печка,
По зорким печуркам не счесть катапульт.¹²⁸

(Do not call the revolution a bride, she is only a matchmaker, bearing a gift... In a red kerchief there is an egg and candle (the papers squeak that the Proletcult approaches). The hut is like Carthage, its arsenal is a stove – watchful stoves hoard innumerable catapults.)

The Revolution is no bride or friend to the peasantry, indeed, in the last two lines quoted it is expressly the enemy, whose approach prompts the peasant hut to be outfitted for war. The egg and the candle are religious symbols of resurrection and life – which the *narod* must pursue absent the frustrated promise of the Revolution.

While Klyuev had presented the Revolution as a peasant-friendly Second Coming of sorts when he was favorable to it, the second half of “The Copper Whale” is dominated by plagues uniquely damaging to peasant culture following the breaking of the seventh seal. The beloved folk features of Klyuev’s poetic world are torn asunder:

Всепетая Матерь сбежала с иконы,
Чтоб вьюгой на Марсовом поле рыдать
И с Псковскою Ольгой, за желтые боны,
Усатым мадьярам себя продавать.

О горе, Микола и светлый Егорий
С поличным попались: отмычка и нож...
Смердят облака, прокаженные зори –
На Божьей косице стоногая вошь...

То новая Русь – совладелица ада,
Где скованы дьявол и Ангел Тоски.¹²⁹

(The Mother Who Has Been Praised in Song has run away from her icon to cry like blizzard at the Field of Mars and with Olga of Pskov, for gold bonds, sell themselves to whiskered Magyars. O woe, Mikola and bright Egory were caught in the act with a skeleton key and a knife...The clouds stink like lepers at dawn – on God’s hair lock festers a hundred-legged louse...This is the new Russia, the co-owner of hell, where the devil is shackled to the Angel of Sorrow.)

The peasantry, like the people of Arakhlin, suffers the destruction of their world because of the sins of the Bolsheviks. The traditional protectors of the peasantry and of Russia, the Virgin Mary, Olga of Pskov, the saints Mikola (Nicholas) and Egory are powerless to help. Images of impurity and infestation abound. Valiant Olga of Pskov falls into prostituting herself, the sky is leprous, and god himself is beset by a monstrous louse. Klyuev, having played matchmaker on behalf of the *narod* in the formation of this new, hellish Russia, now counsels them to beg for forgiveness. As was the case in Arakhlin, the Russian *narod* must bear their punishment for their complicity in the Bolsheviks’ sins. In his formulation of this plea, he again references the Kupalo’s Day holiday:

Прости, Кострома в душегрейке шептухи!
За бурей «прости» словно саван шуршит.
Нас вывезет к солнцу во Славе и Духе
Наядообразный, пылающий кит.¹³⁰

(Forgive, Kostroma in a sleeveless *sheptukha*! Behind the shroud of the storm “forgive” rustles. We will be carried to the sun in Glory and Spirit on a naiad-shaped glowing whale.)

Instead of the melody “blossom my garden,” the single word “forgive” is heard through the storm. Klyuev references a ritual carried out during Kupalo’s Day in which an effigy named “Kostroma” was subject to a mock funeral and

destroyed at the end of the holiday. These funerals were acted out by the peasants performing the ritual with a mixture of scorn and laughter for “Kostroma.” The effigy was later killed in order to assist plant growth and to be resurrected along with the new crop.¹³¹ The vision of deliverance which follows the call for forgiveness is the fulfillment of this resurrection. Despite the plagues which have befallen them, Klyuev envisions the peasantry’s salvation as coming through their own traditions. Just as he attempted to incorporate the Bolsheviks into his poetic world through a union with the *narod*, Klyuev, in “The Copper Whale,” responds to the horrors of the Red Terror by interpreting it according to a peasant perspective – as a trying, stormy winter but with a spring still to come.

In 1920, Klyuev was expelled from the Bolshevik Party for failing to renounce his religious convictions.¹³² The new government was less willing to reconcile Klyuev’s peasant-oriented, spiritual worldview with their own than Klyuev had been to adopt revolutionary ideology into his poetic world. Despite his portraying himself mobilizing the *narod* as a political force in his writing from 1905 and rallying his peasant brothers to support and join the Revolution in 1917, in 1920, Vytegra’s local Bolshevik authorities judged Klyuev to be unfit as a voice of the Revolution, and the poet’s work disappeared from the pages of the “Vytegra Star.”¹³³ At a conference convened to discuss Klyuev’s value to the party, the poet himself presented a group of party officials with an essay in which, according to a newspaper account, he argued that brave communist revolutionaries resemble the great martyrs and heroes of religion.¹³⁴ This

observation stems from Klyuev's earliest poetic conception of revolution expressed in his work circa the 1905 uprisings. Then, he saw it as a struggle with distinctively Christian overtones, emblematic of Christ-like suffering and harboring the potential for martyrdom. The fact that Klyuev retained this view of revolution from the start of the Russian Revolution in 1905 to the early years of the Soviet Union indicates the thematic consistency of Klyuev's poetics. Indeed, the stringent terms of Klyuev's poetic world made any expression of support for the Bolsheviks – no matter how enthusiastic – undesirable to the new regime. Despite expanding to account for the changing political landscape during the Revolutionary years Klyuev's poetry eventually returned to the motifs of folk culture and peasant existence which pervaded his early work.

Chapter 3

Symbolic Escape: The Sacralization of the Peasantry in *The Burned Ruins*

3.1. From Vytegra to Kitezh: Archetypes of Transcendence

In the late 1920s – early 1930s, as the Soviet regime tightened its hold on cultural affairs, the Russian peasantry struggled to survive and preserve its cultural heritage. The Sovietization of the Russian countryside, which went hand-in-hand with repressive measures against the “kulaks” as the wealthier peasants were known, coincided with the latter period of Klyuev’s career. In 1934 he would be arrested on unspecified grounds, and executed in 1937 after being accused of heading a non-existent terrorist cell. In the ten years prior to Klyuev’s tragic death, concepts of salvation and resurrection became increasingly apposite to his poetry, with some of the poet’s most treasured themes and their rhetorical embodiment changing to reflect the conflict of his time.

The blight of the civil war and subsequent years of unrest in the countryside led the peasantry to seek out signs of deliverance and escape. As Lynne Viola reports in her book *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, in this period, the “hand of providence

pervaded the everyday world of the peasantry” as “the alien culture of the state became the antithesis of peasant culture.”¹³⁵ Among other manifestations, the peasantry experienced a slew of sightings of heavenly omens, examples of which include the renewal of dilapidated icons and instances of spiritual healing.¹³⁶ These glimpses of the divine on earth served as symbols of regeneration, thus reflecting the peasantry’s desire for deliverance from the ravages of the Revolution and civil war. Just as the peasantry retreated into the distant spiritual world of tradition as a means of dealing with their dismal present, so too did Klyuev. He dealt with increasingly pervasive Soviet ideological incursions into the arts by writing poetry that memorialized and preserved those elements – folk art, customs, and religion – essential to his poetics but expressly forbidden by the authorities.

In the early part of the decade, Trotsky castigated Klyuev for his disavowal of urban culture, but, by the mid-1920’s, the peasant perspective expressed in Klyuev’s poetry became still more marginal to Soviet literature. In his essay “Overcoming the Destruction of Peasant Russia: The Epic Impulse in Nikolai Kliuev’s Late Poetry,” J. Alexander Ogden cites the opinion, commonly held by practitioners and purveyors of official Soviet art, that peasant life and culture were unsuitable impetuses for the art of the future since they constituted remnants of a past civilization.¹³⁷ Soviet culture had no place for the “peasant poet” – a retrograde figure and an enemy of progress. To provide an institutional basis for poets of peasant background, the All-Russian Union of Peasant Writers,

sympathetic to the Soviet authorities, arose. This new literary group advocated the “‘synthesis of greenery and steel.’”¹³⁸ As was illustrated in the second chapter, in the earlier days of the Bolshevik state, Klyuev conceptualized the relationship of the party to the peasantry using similar terms. Whereas, in Klyuev’s schema, the peasantry held a significant, even paramount role in the then-nascent state, the new group of peasant writers espoused the opposite orientation. As zealous converts to the proletarian cause, they expressed a worldview hostile to the old ways.¹³⁹ These developments meant that, by the latter half of the 1920’s, Klyuev’s place in the literary landscape of the Soviet Union had been erased, his niche role as representative of the peasantry had been obviated, and he himself had been replaced by a younger generation of peasants who were Soviet loyalists.

Klyuev’s return to Petersburg (from Vytegra, where he had been living since the outset of the Revolution), did not come voluntarily. In 1923, he was arrested in his home and transported to the city.¹⁴⁰ Besides the fact that the NKVD released Klyuev after only a few days, almost nothing is known about the charges against him or the circumstances of his dismissal. However, Klyuev’s oeuvre reveals his awareness that his poetry was becoming increasingly unpalatable to the authorities. There are no poems dated from 1923 or 1924 and the first poem of 1925 is entitled “I will not write from the heart...” (“Не буду писать от сердца...”).¹⁴¹ Makin notes that, in the mid- and late-1920s, Klyuev, like so many of his persecuted contemporaries, attempted to write

straightforwardly propagandistic works for the regime while privately composing subversive, presently unpublishable works for posterity.¹⁴² Fittingly, certain of his poems from this period deal, directly and indirectly, with the difficulties presented by the clash between Klyuev's poetic identity and the ideological imperative of the day – the Bolshevik government's expectation of subservience and direct political involvement from its authors.

The 1928 narrative poem *The Burned Ruins* (Погорельщина) is a prototypical statement marking a new stage of Klyuev's career. In many ways it is the fullest expression of Klyuev's sense of the tragic fate of peasant culture in the Soviet Union and the possibilities of preserving the art and values of this denigrated social class. In the past, Klyuev had habitually positioned himself at the head of an ascendant group – the brotherhood of *Brotherly Songs* and the peasantry during the Revolution. In *The Burned Ruins*, as his beloved peasantry is thrown by the wayside, Klyuev withdraws from the harshness of contemporary reality to a mythic, fairy-tale world. He develops the concept of an alternate, eternal Russia which, despite being overrun by the Soviet Union, is in essence impervious to the regime's oppression. Although the poem's title refers to a destroyed world, a landscape blackened by fire, his poem becomes a symbolic safe haven, a space in which the old Russia is preserved. Turned into a trope and removed from its earthly existence, it is now accessible to those who seek it out and safe from those who would destroy it.

The Burned Ruins maps the social change from the perspective of inhabitants of a peasant village – victims of the Revolution and its aftermath. If, as Katerina Clark claims in her book *The Soviet Novel: History As Ritual*, the officially sanctioned literature of the Soviet Union rendered the “history of the period in a comprehensible, ‘ritual’ form that secure(d) the social values of the new age,”¹⁴³ then Klyuev’s poem serves the same function for the bygone era. Just as the socialist realist novel acted as a “repository of official myths” which informed the rituals of Soviet culture, so did *The Burned Ruins* store romanticized tales of life prior to the Revolution with the intention of preserving endangered peasant practices.

The Burned Ruins can be divided into three sections, each distinguished by the change in the state of the village it portrays. The first of these sections chronicles the prelapsarian period in the life of Sigovy Lob (also called Sigovets): during that time humanity, nature, and the divine exist in mutually beneficent harmony. When the existence of another society, the Soviet Union, is introduced into the text, it becomes evident that the village’s idyll occurred prior to the Revolution. The third-person omniscient narration includes a break in which the chronicler of Sigovets calls attention to the fact that it is a “tale” – the first indication that story of the settlement is being told by someone living in a different era. The second part describes events that take place after the Revolution. It spans the period of Soviet invasion and ends when, abandoned by its residents – who reconstitute themselves in another realm – the village enters a

state of dormancy. This section is set entirely in Sigovy Lob and continues the narrative style of the previous episode. More variegated in its theme and structure, the third part begins when the "I" voice of the chronicler, located in the contemporary Soviet Union intrudes into the previously homogenous third-person narrative. Having manifested his lyrical "I," the narrator relates a story from his past, only to return to the story of Sigovy Lob's demise, then come back to the present to reflect on the events of the civil war, and, finally, to tell a parable about the ancient city of Lidda¹¹ which is strikingly similar to the chronicle of Sigovy Lob. In the very last episode of *The Burned Ruins*, the persona of the narrator as chronicler of the old Russia and opponent of the new regime comes to the fore. The parable of Lidda links Russian peasants' plight to ancient cultural archetypes while establishing him as a conserver of lost cultures.

Klyuev draws from Orthodox Christianity, Old Belief, and the myth of Kitezh in his conceptualization of the eternal Russia's metaphysical properties and earthly circumstances. He imagines the village as an idyllic realm, which, in its conjunction with and later separation from the rest of the world, resembles the Garden of Eden. In Eastern Orthodox Cosmology, earth and paradise were contiguous for the period during which the Garden of Eden was inhabited by humankind. After The Fall, when humanity was banished from the garden, paradise became separated from the earthly plane.¹⁴⁴ This biblical myth provides Klyuev with a model for an ideal society which is lost on earth but can

¹¹ Lidda was a city in the Plane of Sharon, depicted in the Old Testament as a bountiful, harmonious land.

be regained in heaven. Klyuev ascribes the village the status of the paradisiacal Garden by portraying it as both of this world and intrinsically foreign to it. The only exception to the traditional use of the archetype is his locating this patch of Eden on the border with the hellish territory of the Soviet Union. Being apart from the temporal world – both in essence (i.e. divine) and as a matter of actual division – is also a significant motif in Old Belief. According to Leonid Heretz, Old Believers’ “basic impulse was separation, whether in a concrete, geographical sense...or a spiritual/cultural purification.”¹⁴⁵ To avoid coming into contact with sin, they were compelled to live at a remove from the corrupted world both spiritually and physically. In this sense, their communities echoed the Garden of Eden as holy spaces cultivated on earth but untouched by the surrounding profanity.

In the section of the poem which deals with the village after it is invaded, Klyuev draws on Old Believer motifs of escape and deliverance. Specifically, Klyuev depicts villagers engaging in the rite of self-immolation, which was traditionally performed by Old Believer communities when hostile elements were closing in on them. By alluding to the religious dissenters, Klyuev suggests that, in its intolerance, the present-day Soviet Union is analogous to Tsarist Russia.

Thomas Robbins, in his essay “Apocalypse, Persecution, and Self-Immolation: Mass Suicides among the Old Believers in Late-Seventeenth-Century Russia,” notes that, after the Schism, “there was no legitimation for religious pluralism in Muscovite tradition...The holy church of Moscow was the exclusive vehicle of

Christian truth”¹⁴⁶ with the Tsar and the state as its agents. Just as alternative religious views were not afforded clemency in Tsarist Russia, so too, in the Soviet Union, were divergent practices censured. For the Old Believers, self-immolation was both a method of deliverance from the repressive measures of the Tsarist regime and a “heroic final exertion to consummate a life of spiritual purification.”¹⁴⁷ This “baptism by fire” was believed to allow the soul to leave the body and ascend to heaven, thus safeguarding the divine spirit while the corrupt flesh went up in flames. The fact that the self-immolation ritual combined political protest and high spiritual purpose makes it resonant for Klyuev. In *The Burned Ruins* he imagines the burning of his village by its residents. Like the self-immolators of the past, they undergo a spiritual and physical transformation rather than giving in to the approaching Soviet forces.

The legend of Kitezh joins elements of the Garden of Eden myth with the focus on escape central to the Old Believer tradition. As mentioned previously, the legendary Kitezh is a holy city – its founder, Prince Georgi Vsevolodovich, who was descended from St. Vladimir the baptizer of Russia, consecrated it by building three churches. In spite of its semi-divine status, Kitezh is invaded and destroyed by Tatar hordes. Klyuev recreates the archetypal juxtaposition of the peaceful, devout society, with the surging godless hordes of the invaders in *The Burned Ruins*. The Soviet enemy is described as a “horde” whose approach threatens to disarray the harmonic life of the village. Kitezh also offers a model for transcending oppression. Despite the fact that the city was completely

destroyed by the Tatars, a “hidden” Kitezh continues to exist. This is, according to Prokofieff, the “*ideal spiritual archetype* of Great Kitezh, which is indestructible and inaccessible to all outward foes...it abides in the spiritual spheres lying above the world of...particular historical circumstances.”¹⁴⁸ In *The Burned Ruins*, Klyuev postulates a similar fate for his village. After its disappearance from the earth, Sigovy Lob becomes part of another realm.

The legend of Kitezh, as a work which preserves the city’s brief earthly existence in writing, provides Klyuev with a model for sustaining the “ideal spiritual archetype” of his village after it ceases to be in the physical world. For the Old Believer groups who told and treasured it, the tale of the lost city of Kitezh memorialized the spiritual life of the pre-Nikonian era, when Russia was still a holy empire.¹² Likewise, once destroyed, the ideal community and the village which Klyuev constructs get relegated to the spiritual realm, accessible only through prayer and devotion. Art becomes the mechanism by which one is able to commune with the lost paradise, offering a glimpse into another time and realm. *The Burned Ruins* is therefore both a narrative of escape and the means through which escape is made possible.

3.2 The Burned Ruins: Klyuev’s Communion with Paradise

¹² Old Believers held that the pre-Schism Russian Empire was a holy kingdom; a designation which, after Nikon’s reforms, was inverted so that Russia became the domain of the Antichrist.

Klyuev constructs an impermeable temporal and spatial border between the two opposed societies depicted in *The Burned Ruins*. The contours of the idyllic community appear paradoxical – Sigovy Lob exists both finitely and eternally in a verdant, boundless garden which, evidently, is located within Russian territory. The village’s dimensions are never specified, but Klyuev’s setting conveys the sense of a vast untouched wilderness:

Наша деревня – Сиговый Лоб
Стоит у лесных и озерных троп...
Где губы морские, олень да остяк,
На тысячу верст ягелевый желтяк.¹⁴⁹

(Our village, Sigovy Lob, stands by the paths of forests and lakes...Where there are sea lips, deer and old unfallen trees, with yellow moss for thousands of versts.)

Not only do the pattern of forests and lakes and moss stretching for thousands of versts position Sigovy Lob in its own Edenic realm distinct from the rest of Russia, but the fathomless insular world of the village is also symbolized by the peasant hut, which Klyuev depicts as “a well without height or depth” (“изба – криница без дна и выси.”)¹⁵⁰ This image of the hut, that epicenter of peasant life, epitomizes a dimensionless world where space is magically mutable. The passage of time in Sigovy Lob is similarly measureless – Klyuev describes time as being either static or simply indeterminate. On the one hand, “Sigovets is the blossoming of spring” (“Сиговец же ярь и сосновая зель”) and, on the other, it is like a fairy tale which “goes on... for hours or years” (“и длится...часы или годы”) without differentiation.¹⁵¹ Therefore, Klyuev’s ideal community seems

sealed off from the world by its endless terrain as well as by a non-linear, ahistorical chronology.

Paradoxically, Klyuev also indicates that the village exists in a realm parallel to that of the contemporary Soviet Union. This fact is made evident when elements of the regime incur onto the idyll of the village. Prior to the transformation of Russia into the Soviet Republic – which Klyuev sees as an invasion – Sigovy Lob is conjoined with the rest of Russia: the well of the symbolic hut operates “eternally” (“извечно”), and the “soul cuckoos” (“душа кукует”) in joy even as the “horde rushes forward” (“орда...мчится”) and the “snow storm whines” (“ноет вьюга”) outside it.¹⁵² While the two realms are parallel, they experience drastically different states of existence. The Soviet world is plunged in a miserable eternal winter, while the village, so long as it remains untouched by the advancing hordes enjoys a paradisiacal existence.

The natural world of Sigovy Lob, like the village’s temporal and physical dimensions, combines worldly and otherworldly features. A prominent motif throughout *The Burned Ruins* is the idea of nature as a church or an intermediary to the divine. Like a church, nature in Sigovy Lob serves as the location of heavenly presence on earth without itself belonging to the heavens. In one scene, Klyuev depicts an angel walking in the village’s midst:

СНЕЖНЫЙ АНГЕЛ КАДИТ У ЛЕСА,
То киноварный, то можжевельный,
Лучась в потемках свечой радельной.¹⁵³

(A snow angel burns incense by the forest, he glows in the dark like an offertory candle, first cinnabar, then juniper.)

Here the angel is both a worshipper, burning incense at the altar of nature, and the instrument of worship itself, glowing like an offertory candle in the church of the woods and meadows. In the latter sense, the angel disperses his holy being across the earthly terrain, imbuing nature with holy radiance. Klyuev endows other aspects of nature, particularly vegetation, with this same spark of divinity:

Червлец, зарянку, огонь купинный
По косогорам прядут рябины.¹⁵⁴

(On slopes rowans spin crimson like a robin, a fiery bush.)

Klyuev invokes here the miracle of Moses' flaming bush. It is an image of god's presence on earth as communicated through nature. In Sigovy Lob, mankind has access to the divine without need for divine intervention. Every rowan tree there emanates the benign holy fire, every twig can reveal an Old Testament miracle. Even the seemingly inhospitable, trying aspects of the landscape bring one closer to Christ:

О, русская сладость – разбойника вопь –
Идти к красоте через дебри и топь.
И пестер болячек, заноз, волдырей
Со стоном свалить у Христовых лаптей!¹⁵⁵

(Oh, Russian sweetness – the cry of a bandit – to go to beauty through jungle and swamp. And to throw a purse of sores, splinters, blisters with a groan at Christ's bast sandals.)

The sores and wounds accumulated by trekking through the wilderness resemble those gained by Christ in his suffering, turning every peasant into an exalted Christian pilgrim. Klyuev's description of these injuries offered up as prayers before Christ reinforces the conception of nature as a place of worship.

Nature in *The Burned Ruins* is therefore both itself holy and a sacred place for communion.

The craftwork of the villagers harnesses the transcendent qualities of nature, contributing to the creation of art that is both sacred and eternal. Every resident of Sigovy Lob is an artist or craftsperson of some kind and each is aided by nature in their work. The icon painter Pavel, for example, takes the wood for his icon from a pine tree. On this wooden canvas, the “spirit of the forest” (“дух лесной”) still lives and breathes “a violet incense” (“кадит фиалкой.”)¹⁵⁶ The very material of the icon, in addition to the likenesses of saints which it displays, obtains holiness through its connection to nature. The traditional Biblical scenes depicted on the icon are also inspired by nature: in fact, they are the result of *en plein air* observations made by the icon-painter:

«Виденье Лица» богомазы берут
То с хвойных потемок, где теплится трут,
То с глуби озер, где ткачиха-луна
За красном янтарным грустит у окна...
Успение – с перышек горлиц в дупле,
Когда молотьба и покой на селе.
Распятие – с редьки: как гвозди креста,
Так редечный сок опалает уста.¹⁵⁷

(The “Appearance of His Face” icon-painters take from the darkness of conifers, where tinder smolders, from the depths of the lake, where the weaver-moon sorrows by the window beyond the red amber...The Assumption – from feathers in the hollows of turtledoves, when there is prayer and peace in the village. The Crucifixion – from the radish: like the nails of the cross, so does the juice of the radish sear the mouth.)

Each pose of Christ is paired with a fittingly evocative event taken from the village’s surroundings. The “Appearance of His Face,” an allusion to Christ’s

visage during Transfiguration, is drawn from the smoldering twilight, which, as an image of flaming light, recalls the earlier occurrences of the angelic offertory candle and of the rowan trees which reenact the miracle of the burning bush. In this context, it becomes clear that the light and fire mentioned in these passages refer to transfiguration. Their evocation is emblematic of the intersection of humankind, the divine, and nature which is exalted in the daily life of the village and captured by Pavel the icon-painter in his art. Here, Klyuev develops the idea of art as not only a scene of transfiguration, but as a portal into a metaphysical dimension. In Pavel's icon, for instance, the transfigured reality is that of Sigovy Lob, and the scene is one that has been played out before the artist's very eyes.

The art of icon-painting is itself a process of transfiguration. Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky write in *The Meaning of Icons* that, in the creation of an icon, "the earth, the vegetable, and animal kingdoms are not depicted with a view to bringing the spectator closer to what we see in the surrounding reality, but in order to make nature itself participate in the transfiguration of man and consequently to connect it with existence outside time."¹⁵⁸ An icon-painter is expected to enter the trance-like state of holy communion, to be divinely inspired for in order for his work to attain a sacral power. In Sigovy Lob, where holiness is already an attribute of nature, Pavel does not need to fast, pray, and renounce the world. He has only to observe a scene and capture it in paint to arrive at a divine image. The sacredness of the land ensures that the art

produced by its inhabitants takes on a similar spiritual significance. Eventually, the village is destroyed, but these works of art persist as the embodiments of the holy land.

Another piece of devotional art is created by Siliverst, a peasant who sculpts the head of Christ from clay for the Lopsky Cemetery in Sigovy Lob.¹⁵⁹ This piece of pottery will, Klyuev predicts, oversee the ascent of the dead into heaven:

Десятые звезды пойдут на-потух,
И Лопский погост – многоглавый петух
На кедровом гребне воздынет кресты.¹⁶⁰

(Ten stars will go extinct, and the Lopsky cemetery, many-headed cock, on a cedar crest will raise up its crosses.)

Siliverst's pottery head is expected to last many eons – long enough for ten stars to die out – until the graves are displaced and the souls rise from the cemetery like the rooster at dawn. The fate of the head of Christ is a testament to the imperishable power of art as well as to Sigovy Lob's ability to create holy objects that withstand destruction.

After the fate of the village is sealed, Pavel and Siliverst themselves turn into works of art, living out the guiding principle of their craft: to use nature in order to arrive at eternal divinity. In the same year that February (an allusion to the Russian Revolution) brings "woe, woe unto fair paradise!..." ("Увы, увы, раю прекрасный!.."), the icon-painter Pavel falls asleep for eternity.¹⁶¹ He leaves behind a final masterpiece, composed out of his very being:

Он сердце в краски переплавил,
 И написал икону нам:
 Тысячестолпный дивный храм,
 И на престоле из смарагда,
 Как гроздь в точиле винограда,
 Усекновенная глава.¹⁶²

(He melted his heart into paint, and made an icon for us: a thousand-beamed wondrous church, and on the emerald throne, like a bunch of grapes in a winepress, a beheading.)

This scene turns out to be prophetic; while describing the survivors of Sigovy Lob, Klyuev will allude to the severed head again, in an episode referring to the beheading of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. Although Pavel escapes earthly suffering by dying peacefully and being transfigured into eternal art, his concern for the community remains. His bodily icon ensures that the residents of Sigovy Lob receive his prophetic guidance as they prepare to weather the storm. For Klyuev, the transformation of the earthly realm – with all its brutal but temporary upheavals: wars, revolutions, famines – entails a new understanding of art. It becomes the means for humankind to persevere in the face of natural death or tragic, forced destruction.

Like Pavel, Siliverst applies the instruments of his art to his body, immolating himself in the Old Believer fashion. Siliverst, as a potter and sculptor, burns his creations in ovens. As such, his act of self-immolation constitutes the application of his artistic technique to his own being. Siliverst and the Father-in-Law¹³ take up the vows of Old Believer monks, living in asceticism until they are called upon to die. Siliverst and the Father-in-Law remain concerned with the fate of the village.

¹³Klyuev never makes clear to whom this character is father-in-law.

Nature, which in happier times was essential to the creation of their art, is now indispensable to their act of self-immolation, which, despite its apparent violence, resembles art in its transcendence of the worldly plane. Before their burning, they proclaim to the fauna of Sigovy Lob that Avvakum and Feodosy, two Old Believer saints who were also burned to death, watch over them from heaven, and that they will petition for the animals in the afterlife. The two future martyrs anticipate looking after the animals from heaven just as their predecessors, Avvakum and Feodosy, looked after them. The grateful beasts strike up a prayer for their departing guardians:

«Ныне отпускаеши раба Твоего, Владыко»
 Воспела в горести великой
 На человеческом языке
 Вся тварь, вблизи и вдалеке.¹⁶³

(“Now you dismiss Your servant, Oh Lord” was sung in great sadness in a human tongue.)

Again, nature becomes a place of worship as the creatures of the forest pray in a single human voice. The animals become intermediaries between the earthly and spiritual worlds, entreating god for the humans’ souls’ safe passage.

The act of immolation, as a freeing of the eternal soul, is the means by which Sigovy Lob and its residents are preserved despite their disappearance from the village, and thus, from the face of the earth. Analogous to the creation of art, immolation also transforms objects so as to bring out their divine qualities. Just as Siliverst bakes a piece of clay shaped like Christ’s head, changing it into the sacred object of the head of Christ, so does he burn himself

to transform his being into its spiritual form. According to Lossky and Ouspensky, transfiguration operates by the principle that “as iron is not transformed into fire but remains iron, merely becoming purified (when burned),” the object is “transfigured but nothing in it is destroyed or taken away.”¹⁶⁴ In Klyuev’s narrative, neither Siliverst and the Father-in-Law nor the church to which they set fire is altered by the blaze:

Когда же церковь-купина
Запыхала до вершины...
На облак белизны купавной
Честная двоица возшла¹⁶⁵

(Yet when the church-bush flared up to the top...The honorable duo ascended
on a cloud white as a lily.)

The two humans are transported to heaven and the church burns imperishably like Moses’ bush. The icons of the village undergo a similar process as Siliverst and the father-in-law, their souls gleam in undecaying glory as they disembark from their wooden frames.

3.3 Severed Self: The Metanarrative of Klyuev’s Vision

In *The Burned Ruins* Klyuev establishes a new poetic persona – now he is a high priest and earthly representative of the divine, eternal Russia. Both through his role as the narrator of the tale of Sigovy Lob and as someone who shares in the village’s spirit, Klyuev asserts his identity when he inserts himself into the text:

Нерукотворную Россию
Я – песнописец Николай,
Свидетельствую, братья, вам.¹⁶⁶

(I – the song writer Nikolai, testify to you, brothers, of a Russia not made by hands.)

Klyuev, in his habitual approach to situating his poetic persona, proclaims himself the authority on a certain subject – in this case of the “other,” salvaged Russia of which Sigovy Lob is emblematic – and terms his addressees “brothers.” This quote reveals Klyuev as the authorial voice which exclaims “But back to the tale!” (“Но вспять сказанье!”) in the first section of the poem – indicating that the fable of Sigovy Lob numbers among his repertoire of stories. In the past, Klyuev had employed the term “brother” in his characterization of the Golgotha Christians’ fraternity and to denote the peasantry during the Revolutionary era, in both cases envisioning this addressee as a devotee to his own cause. In the third section of *The Burned Ruins*, the specific character of the “brothers” is never developed. However, given the censure to which Klyuev was subjected, his audience was limited to a select few likeminded individuals. Therefore, in the latter period of his career, Klyuev’s brotherhood is a small band of fellow adherents to a bygone era who rely on the poet for his stories’ ability to recreate that world.

As is evident from the metanarrative which Klyuev relates, Russia’s past is still alive – albeit on another plane – and accessible through art and prayer. Klyuev testifies to his brethren of a vision in which holy Russia reappeared to him. Wandering in the wilderness, Klyuev’s authorial persona prays for the departed

Russia to reveal itself to him. The revelation, however, occurs only when his body becomes disassembled. Klyuev narrates a miracle: his eyes burst forth from their sockets, and, along with his tongue and heart, fling themselves against the adamantine gates of a floating city which has appeared in front of him. Only once his detached body is exhausted – his heart lies bloodied before the threshold – do the gates open onto a miraculous view.¹⁶⁷ Here, Klyuev's lyric hero imitates the villagers' self-destructive act of turning themselves into works of art in order to enter the heavenly kingdom. Like the self-immolator Siliverst, he mangles and dismembers his body as a means of displaying his devotion to the holy Russia and his renunciation of temporal existence. Klyuev emphasizes the futility of other attempts to enter the gates of the city, showing that the meek village which was lost to the Soviet onslaught is now an unvanquishable fortress. It is impenetrable to invaders but accessible to the humble and the devout.

Klyuev's concept of the alternate Russia's continued existence and accessibility is based on the trope of the invisible city central to the legend of Kitezh. When the gates open, Klyuev sees a catalogue of spiritually and culturally significant Russian cities floating before him: Kiev, Moscow, Novgorod, and Pskov appear in all their glory.¹⁶⁸ The legend of Kitezh stipulates that the heavenly kingdom can still be found by seekers who enlist their entire being in discovering it, living a pure, ascetic life and remaining faithful to the Christian ideals of the city. By doing so, the seeker of Kitezh replicates the lives of the sainted figures who now occupy the invisible city.¹⁶⁹ Klyuev's description of

Sigovy Lob's destruction and ascendance presents his Russia as functioning on the same spiritual plane:

Так погибал Великий Сиг.
Заставкою из древних книг,
Где Стратилатом на коне
Душа России, вся в огне,
Летит ко граду, чьи врата
Под знаком чаши и креста!¹⁷⁰

(So did Great Sig perish. Like the frontispiece from great books, where the soul of Russia like Stratelates on a horse, all aflame, flies to a city with gates emblazoned with chalice and cross.)

Here, the city which Klyuev glimpsed is revealed as the otherworldly incarnation of Sigovy Lob. Klyuev's lyric hero therefore emerges as a quester after the invisible Russia (which encompasses Sigovy Lob), and an exemplar of its ideals.

Elsewhere, Klyuev reflects on his relationship to authority, bitterly parodying his prior attempts to court the Bolshevik regime. A delegation of "forest people" ("лесной народ") arrives in the city – the seat of the tyrannical government – to offer up an icon of Christ as a gift to the ruler.¹⁷¹ This act recalls the time when Klyuev, who once considered himself the emissary of the people, presented Lenin with another work of art – his collection of poems. Klyuev's present to Lenin bespoke the poet's desire to work with the Bolsheviks in forging the identity – equal parts peasant and proletarian – of the new country. In *The Burned Ruins*, that identity is depicted as hopelessly fractured, with the forest people and city dwellers unintelligible to each other. As the emissaries travel the city streets, they encounter Soviet citizens bewildered by their presence and hostile to their overtures:

«Оставьте нас, пожалста, в покое!»...
 «Такого треста здесь не знает никто!..
 Граждане херувимы, прикажете авто?!».
 «Позвольте, я актив из КИМ'а!»...¹⁷²

(“Leave us, please, in peace!” ... “Here no one knows about such a trust!...Citizens cherubim, do you want a car?!”. “Allow me, I am an official from the KIM!”...)

In this scene, Klyuev offers a brief but disdainful satire of the conditions of urban Soviet life. The disembodied, swirling voices spout phrases vulgarized by official jargon. One such voice calls the cherubim-like delegates “citizens” in an attempt to gain their business. The urbanites’ responses to the villagers make it clear that there is no place for these strange visitors in the Soviet Union unless they conform to the workings of Soviet life, where bureaucrats and opportunists hold more authority than Christ.

In the final portion of the poem, Klyuev envisions art transforming his personal sorrow and that of the Russian people into beauty. He reflects on the task of writing itself:

Знаю, что слышатся хрипы,
 Дрожь и тяжелые всхлипы
 Под милым когда-то пером!¹⁷³

(I know that wheezing is audible, from the tremors and heavy sobs of the once lovely pen!)

The very instrument of writing pours out sadness, indicating that Klyuev, in his present circumstance, is unable to imagine his art as anything other than a lamentation. He offers up one such sorrowful tale:

Вы же, кого я обидел
 Крепкой кириллицей слов,

Как на моей панихиде,
Слушайте повесть о Лидде¹⁷⁴

(You, who I have offended with the strong Cyrillic of my words, listen to the story of Lidda, as though you are at my requiem.)

Here, Klyuev addresses the Soviet regime, inviting them to imagine that the poet is already dead and they are attending his wake. Klyuev indicates that his work will outlive him and be read at his funeral as a means of remembering him. The tale of Lidda is a parable whose features are strikingly similar to those of the story of Sigovy Lob. The city of Lidda was located in the Plane of Sharon, referred to in the Old Testament as a land of natural abundance.¹⁷⁵ In Klyuev's tale, Lidda is a utopic city in which humanity and nature collaborate, the Virgin Mary is embossed on the walls, and the peasants know no grief. Like Sigovy Lob, the city is attacked by a horde of anti-Christian enemies – the Saracens of the Crusades – and wiped out. The image of the Mother of God on one of the city's pillars becomes an emblem of endurance and transfigured grief:

Краски, киноварь с Богородицы
Прахом веяли у околицы.
Только лик пригож и под саблями,
Горемычными слезками бабьими,
Бровью волжскою синеватою,
Да улыбкою скорбно сжатою.¹⁷⁶

(Paints and cinnabar from the Mother of God blow like ashes at the threshold. Only her beautiful face, wretched with tears of an old woman under the sabers, her eyebrows Volga-blue, her smile sadly pursed.)

Despite being attacked, Mary's face is made radiant by her shining tears and Volga-blue features. The truly eternal wellsprings of art such as the divine, Klyuev

suggests, not only retain their beauty through oppression and the ages, but are transfigured to reflect their divinity through suffering.

It is fitting that *The Burned Ruins* ends with a scene in which Klyuev's poetry is recited at his requiem – the long poem's main theme is the possibility of existence beyond physical expiration. *The Burned Ruins* is saturated with examples of this phenomenon. The narrative draws on precedents in the legend of Kitez and the Garden of Eden as localities with both an earthly and divine component which are eventually transplanted to the heavenly realm. The villagers themselves undergo this same process of salvation, pouring themselves out into deathless artwork before disappearing. Finally, Klyuev himself reenacts the process – narrating his own funeral and presenting the tale of Lidda as his remains. In each of these instances, the ascendant person or thing leaves behind a trace of its being as a portal into the spiritual world where it presently exists. As a testament to the existence of the holy alternate Russia, the poem invites the reader to follow the example, set by the villagers and followed by Klyuev, to seek out the hidden realm of the spirit.

Conclusion

Nikolai Klyuev's penchant for myth, which encompassed the invention of the self and community as well as folkloric tales, imbued his corpus with a rich thematic framework. Klyuev habitually situated his poetic persona as an exemplary leader of a community, evolving specific tropes and images to lend authenticity to his claims. During his association with the Golgotha Christians,

Klyuev drew on sectarian motifs and ideology in order to sacralize the group's spiritual doctrine. He constructed a fictional brotherhood and placed himself at its forefront as both prophet and chronicler. The Revolutionary period sees Klyuev involve himself with a different community: the radical *narod*. In his prose and poetry, he assumes a role similar to that of the Bolshevik leaders, attempting to shape the identity of a class and mobilize it to act in accord with its given identity. At the outset of the Revolution, Klyuev felt that the *narod's* fate lay with the Bolsheviks, and his writings encourage and exalt the union between the two groups while depicting Klyuev as the marriage's matchmaker. As the new regime heightened repressive measures against the peasantry and outlawed religious affiliation, Klyuev turned to folk legends of salvation as a means of escape. His 1928 long poem *The Burned Ruins* is the quintessential expression of this impulse. Klyuev constructs his own myth of salvation, drawing on such native sources as the legend of Kitezh and Old Believer motifs in his creation of a prelapsarian village in which folk culture flourishes until a Soviet invasion causes the village to disappear from the earth. Klyuev conceives of his poem as a portal through which the reader may still access the sacred space of the village, and, therefore, commune with the Russia of the past.

This survey of three major periods of Klyuev's career evinces several drastic shifts in Klyuev's poetic persona and the imagined communities with which he allied himself. He transitions from the spiritual leader of an elite brotherhood of ardent Christians to a political matchmaker instrumental in the

fate of the entire peasantry during the Revolution, and finally ends his career as a marginalized representative of a bygone era. This trajectory is partly explained by the monumental historical and cultural changes experienced in Klyuev's lifetime. The poet began his career in a climate in which the "peasant voice" was afforded a certain cache in political and literary circles. As Klyuev's ideal readers, his literary peers ratified Klyuev's claims to be the authentic issue of the *narod*. By the end of his life, during the Soviet epoch, Klyuev's perspective was deemed worthless by ideologues bent on leaving the country's past behind.

On February 2nd 1934, Klyuev was arrested for distributing counter-revolutionary works and interrogated by the Soviet Union's secret police at the time, the OGPU. Klyuev's interrogation sees the poet reiterate the established traits of his poetic persona with the interrogator reconfiguring them in certain places and leaving them stand as incriminating evidence in others. In his book *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime*, Vitaly Shentalinsky provides an account of Klyuev's questioning:

From the moment he (Klyuev) filled out the standard form, his interrogator began to re-write his biography. Klyuev wrote: Nationality, Great Russian; Education, literate. Shivarov (the interrogator) crossed out both and inserted: Russian, Self-taught.¹⁷⁷

Klyuev refuses to abandon his peasant persona despite the fact that his continued allegiance to the peasantry was the cause of his arrest. Klyuev considers himself a citizen of the non-existent state "Great Russia," likely a reference to the land which he memorialized in *The Burned Ruins*. When questioned about his attitude toward Soviet policies, Klyuev stipulates that his

views are determined by his religious consciousness and life philosophy, presenting a brief biographical note in explanation:

As a descendant of a family of Old Believers, going back on my mother's side to the Archpriest Avvakum, I was brought up on the early Russian culture of Korsun, Kiev, and Novgorod. I absorbed a love for the old pre-Petrine Russia and became its bard.¹⁷⁸

This statement recapitulates Klyuev's typical narrative of self-presentation – defining his role as the bard of old Russia and citing his pedigree and upbringing as a legitimation of this claim. Given the strictures of his identity, Klyuev continues, he views the Soviet Union as an abomination.¹⁷⁹ The interrogator evidently affirmed these assertions – Klyuev was sentenced to five years of exile.

The charge on which Klyuev was eventually executed saw control of his poetic persona wrested from the poet and reshaped by his executioners. Shentalinsky writes that in the summer of 1937 scores of people, including thousands of peasants, were shot for belonging to a mythical organization called "The Union for the Salvation of Russia" which aimed at restoring the Tsar to the throne. Klyuev was accused of holding a leading role in the organization.¹⁸⁰ The fact that such a mythic union could, with some added conceptual sophistication, belong to Klyuev's oeuvre emphasizes the similarity of the political imagination to the poetic one. Of course, Klyuev had already envisioned his salvation as an escape into a piece of art which exalted the values of old Russia. Incredibly, Klyuev's vision was realized when, after the fall of the Soviet Union and some 60 years after its composition, his final work, a 4000

line epic which had long been thought lost, was found in the KGB archive. It had been preserved as evidence.

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² Mochul'skii, Konstantin. *Aleksandr Blok*. Detroit: Wayne St. Univ., 1983. 207. Print.

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⁴ Ibid. 50.

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