

Abstract

Russian literary celebrity of the Soviet era is conditioned by specific factors that challenge certain assumptions in scholarship about celebrity focussed on Western culture. These factors -- which include stringent censorship, doctrinaire cultural policy, and *samizdat* – and the problems they pose in relation to literary celebrity are explored through an examination of the careers of poets Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and Boris Pasternak (1890-1960). Both experienced popular adulation, but were also subject to official anathematization that conferred notoriety. Political repression rendered them crucial role models for the Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia, engendering hagiographic representations based on their own self-fashioning in both Russia and the West, against the background of Cold War politics. Akhmatova's melodramatic self-presentation has recently formed the basis for attempts to challenge her cultural authority, which are considered in relation to gender and the paradoxical notion of posthumous celebrity. Finally, the particular cases of Akhmatova and Pasternak offer a useful prism for considering literary fame in relation to neo-Darwinist meme theory, because they illustrate the extent to which having an impact on public consciousness involves insistent repetition of culturally-ingrained, recognizable patterns and models. Overall, this article demonstrates that apprehension of the specificities of Soviet literary culture can make a significant contribution to understanding literary fame and celebrity more broadly.

Keywords: literary celebrity; Russia; melodrama; life-writing; Akhmatova; Pasternak

“It is unseemly to be famous”: Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and the Melodramatic Dynamics of the Myth of the Russian Poet in Russia and the West

Introduction

Literary celebrity in Russia, especially in the Soviet period, presents certain challenges to conceptions of celebrity focussed on Anglophone or Western European culture. Studies of contemporary Russian celebrity are emerging (Goscilo and Strukov 2010, Goscilo 2013), but its literary historical forms remain largely unexplored. The central problems posed by the Russian historical context will be identified here through analyses of the careers of Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, two major canonical poets who survived the necropolitics of the Stalinist regime.

Ohlsson *et al.* (2014) propose three differentiations in the concept of literary celebrity. First, they suggest, a writer's cultural capital should be taken into account, noting that discussions of literary celebrity usually centre on 'quality' authors, who inhabit the most prestigious areas of the literary field (p. 36). This is borne out by the frequency with which studies of literary celebrity invoke the same canonical figures. Byron, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce loom particularly large (Glass 2004, Jaffe 2005, Mole 2007, McDayter 2009, Leick 2009, Goldman 2011, Tuite 2015). While acknowledging the importance of extending discussion beyond 'highbrow' literary celebrity -- as some scholars have (Hammill 2007, Weber 2012) -- this article discusses two 'culturally "authoritative" poets (Moran 2000, p. 6),

who enter into the suspicion-laden, 'compulsive *pas-de-deux*' with mass culture described by Huyssen (1986, p. 47) and explored in relation to literary celebrity by scholars such as Jaffe (2005) and Goldman (2011).

The justification for this focus relates to the second differentiation advocated by Ohlsson *et al.*: namely, geographical. Akhmatova and Pasternak are instructive because, despite their affinities with modernists elsewhere, from 1917 they operated in a markedly different cultural context from their counterparts. Although the Russian context conforms to broader European expectations of 'highbrow' authorship as 'intellectual and moral instruction', (Braun 2011, p. 323), it is conditioned by political factors that distort and exaggerate this model, including rigid state censorship and the regime's doctrinaire cultural policy.

Thirdly, Ohlsson *et al.* emphasize the need for a diachronic perspective that considers the 'changing uses of one and the same literary celebrity over time, even long after the death of the author in question' (2014, p. 38). Shifts in the 'meanings' of writers are a highly visible feature of Russian culture, because of its turbulent history and the overwhelming importance of ideology, as is illustrated by the ways in which writers like Alexander Pushkin have been co-opted to various, often competing, causes (Levitt 1989, Sandler 2004). This article considers the demythologizing tendency that has surfaced in post-Soviet culture in relation to Akhmatova in particular, and investigates the historical function of Russian literary celebrity (Ohlsson *et al.* 2014, p. 3), by exploring the role that she plays in the late- and post-Soviet intelligentsia's self-mythology. Finally, in addition to the

differentiations advanced by Ohlsson *et al.* (2014), the discussion of Akhmatova and Pasternak highlights another; that of gender.

Contemporary Russian book publication is largely driven by the market, as elsewhere in Europe or in America (Polowy 2011, p. 527), but this was not the case under communism. This historical context problematizes two central, interlinked assumptions underpinning most accounts of literary celebrity and celebrity culture more generally. First, that it is a product of democratic capitalism (Marshall 1997, pp. 246-47, Rojek 2001, p. 188), 'irrevocably bound up with commodity culture' (Rojek 2001, p. 14), and second, that 'mass-media representation is the key principle' in its formation (Rojek 2001, pp. 13 and 45-46, Ohlsson *et al.* 2014, p. 35). Tuite (2007), for instance, distinguishes between 'merely famous' authors and literary celebrities on this basis, seeing the literary celebrity as a 'cultural commodity produced by highly-developed capitalist relations of production and consumption and a fully industrialized form of print capitalism' (p. 62).

According to these arguments, literary celebrity could not have existed in the USSR where, from the mid-1920s onwards, the authorities exerted tight control over who was celebrated and what was published. The term 'celebrity', by these definitions, is applicable neither to Soviet authors who were awarded state honours and bombastically promoted through the media, such as Maxim Gorky or Mikhail Sholokhov, nor to popular non-conformists like Akhmatova, who for long periods was denied access to the mass technologies for printing the word and reproducing the image that are seen as fundamental to literary celebrity in Anglophone and Western European culture. Is it then only legitimate to refer to Soviet literary *fame*, reserving

the term *celebrity* for elsewhere, or other periods? One of the difficulties in apprehending Russian literary celebrity arises from the simultaneous existence of these official and unofficial cultural spheres. Both Akhmatova and Pasternak were popular, but were anathematized by officialdom in the mass media - does this constitute literary celebrity? Some regime-promoted authors were popular with a mass readership, but can they be thought of as celebrities? These issues matter, not least because of the frequency with which the terms 'celebrity' and 'famous' are used by literary scholars, biographers, and cultural historians in support of arguments and in justification of selections. This article demonstrates, with a focus on nonconformists, that literary celebrity was indeed a feature of Soviet culture, but that its definition needs appropriate adjustment to the political and cultural context.

1. Akhmatova

Akhmatova exemplifies what Rojek (2001) calls 'staged celebrity', displaying 'calculated technologies and strategies of performance and self-projection designed to achieve a status of monumentality in public culture' (p. 121). She was a talented self-fashioner, shaping 'a distinctive personality' and 'consistent mode of perceiving and behaving' (Greenblatt 1980, p. 2). The cultural context of the 1910s when her career began was neo-Romantic, demanding a deliberate aesthetic patterning of behaviour. Akhmatova's older contemporary, Alexander Blok, conceived his poetry as a lyric diary, conditioning the public to a particular way of reading that identified the poet with his poetic persona. Postcards of Blok were available from at least 1909, long before a Russian cinematic star system was established (Freidin 1987, p.44).

The exotic-sounding pseudonym 'Akhmatova' (she was born Anna Gorenko) quickly became a brand in the manner described by Mole (2007, pp. 16-17). Physically striking, Akhmatova cultivated 'visual trademarks' (Mole 2007, p. 18), such as her profile with aquiline nose, bead necklace, and straight fringe. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' includes 'elegance, ease of manners', and physical beauty (1993, p.150), and Akhmatova exploited these to maximum effect. Portraits by influential contemporary artists were reproduced in her books and in literary journals, and readers recognized her in public from these (Reeder 1995, p. 140). Her public profile was augmented by her marriage to fellow poet Nikolai Gumilyov, producing a form of what Apter (2010) calls 'celebrity gifting': they published poems ostensibly about one another, generating interest as a celebrity couple. Akhmatova established other intertextual relationships that enhanced her celebrity: when a poem dedicated to her by Blok was printed alongside hers to him it sparked rumours of an affair (Meyer 2013, p. xxvi).

Akhmatova's poetry hovers between Romantic self-dramatization and modernist impersonality. It conforms to the 'hermeneutic of intimacy' reading paradigm that, for Mole (2007), characterises Romantic celebrity culture, in that many lyrics were 'narcissistically' arranged 'around her own person' (Zholkovsky 2000, p. 50) and their confessional tone created the impression that they gave access to a fascinating individual. However, her poetry also bears a distinctively modernist textual 'stylistic stamp' or 'imprimatur', turning the author into a 'formal artifact' (Jaffe 2005, p. 20).

Thus far, Akhmatova's literary career closely resembles those of modernist literary celebrities elsewhere. However, in the 1920s, she became the focus of extensive

negative press from Marxist critics who deemed her poetry outmoded and overly personal. In 1925, she was silenced by a Central Committee ban that remained in place for fifteen years, during which time she wrote major works in secret, such as *Requiem* (1935-40), which chronicles the nation's suffering under Stalin's purges. Despite not being published, she remained an unofficial classic: a contemporary observes: 'as paradoxical as it may seem, she was well known' (Magonenko 1990 cited Meyer 2013, p. xl). This can be explained by her successful early self-fashioning, the 'mnemonic' qualities of her poetry, which was easily memorized (Gronas 2011), and the fact that she epitomized a lost era of Russian culture for which there was immense nostalgia (Rylkova 2007). Soviet literacy campaigns and *riskovannost'* -- the willingness to engage in politically risky behaviour, including possessing outlawed literature -- probably gained her new readers and contributed to her continuing reputation. When, in 1940, Akhmatova was permitted to publish, her collection sold out immediately. Soviet readers queued along the streets to buy it and second-hand copies fetched remarkable prices (Haight 1976, p. 111).

Official tolerance ended abruptly in 1946, when Akhmatova was publicly denounced in a tough clampdown on culture. A protracted mass-media campaign labelled her a propagator of 'decadence, pessimism, and a belief in the other world', whose poems were 'completely individualistic', 'empty', 'foreign to our people', depicting a 'frantic little fine lady flitting between the boudoir and the chapel'. Akhmatova herself was a relic of aristocratic culture, 'half nun, half harlot, or rather a harlot-nun whose sin is mixed with prayer' (Haight 1976, p. 144). This formulation, borrowed from positive Formalist scholarship, had also featured in the campaign of the 1920s, when Akhmatova was characterised as 'not quite a harlot burning with passion, not quite a

mendicant nun', who had responded to social change in a 'feeble', 'hostile' manner, and whose principal theme of unhappy love was 'saturated with the wretchedness of nervous debility characteristic of a refined aristocrat of the *fin de siècle*' (Haight 1976, pp. 69-74).

The campaigns against Akhmatova were crude, formulaic propaganda that served to hammer home an ideological position, but they were also highly personalised and made her publicly notorious. Is this a form of literary celebrity? Rojek (2001) suggests a useful approach by treating celebrity as 'the attribution of glamorous or *notorious* status to an individual within the public sphere [my italics]' (p. 10). Notoriety, like any celebrity, operates 'through impact on public consciousness' but 'whereas celebrity functions within a general moral framework that reaffirms paramount order, notoriety usually connotes transgression, deviance and immorality' (Rojek 2001, p. 31). Rojek's main examples of notorious celebrities in democratic cultures are serial or mass murderers, including Stalin (p. 145). In the Soviet order, the perceived threats to society were different, but the function of notoriety was comparable: transgression, deviance, and immorality were prominent accusations against Akhmatova.

Rojek observes that 'notoriety allows society to present disturbing and general social tendencies as the dislocated, anti-social behaviour of folk demons' (2001, p. 93). This emphasis on the anti-social is precisely what underpins the vilification of Akhmatova, who symbolized individualistic attitudes that the regime deemed counter-revolutionary. She had insistently presented herself as an enigmatic 'genius' whose poetry focussed on the private, emotional world of its speaker. Her modernist

engagement with celebrity culture through her self-fashioning, 'hermeneutic of intimacy', authorial 'imprimatur' and exceptionalism (Goldman 2011) -- in short, her very status as pre-Revolutionary literary celebrity -- rendered her antipathetic to a social order based ideologically on the collective. In this context, celebrity, which elevates the individual, was an inherently dangerous, subversive phenomenon. Transgression, Rojek notes, is also a feature of positive celebrity, and her notoriety made Akhmatova a martyr-like figure for non-conformists. She herself saw celebrity as encompassing notoriety: 'I was famous, then I was very infamous, and I am convinced that essentially they are one and the same thing' (Chukovsky 1987 cited Reeder 1995, p. 324).

Although most of Akhmatova's mature poetry was not published in Russia until the late 1980s, oppositional works like *Requiem* circulated clandestinely in the 1960s in *samizdat* (literally 'self-publishing'), another specificity of Eastern bloc culture that destabilizes prevailing Western conceptions of how literary celebrity is made. *Samizdat* is best defined negatively – 'any text [...] endorsed by an official organ of the state that reaches its audience without any change in meaning' is not *samizdat* (Kind-Kovács and Labov 2013, p. 3).

Harker *et al.* (1990) observe that Bourdieu - an influential presence in studies of literary celebrity - makes no allowance for the 'unique, innovative options which must lie at the heart of a concept of agency which has any measure of autonomy from the structures' of a given field (p. 206). *Samizdat* (which included visual and audio texts) is one such innovation, operating illegally and independently of official culture. A collective enterprise requiring numerous agents and materials, from 'tireless

spouses, trustworthy friends, armies of volunteer workers, intrepid foreign co-conspirators, and hard-to-obtain supplies' (Parthé 2004, p. 156), it constituted a vast 'transnational and transsystemic space of communication' (Lindenberger 2013, p. xii) that routinely breached the iron curtain in both directions (Parthé 2004, p. 46).

Rojek states that celebrity 'presupposes a mass communication system that is reliable, versatile and ubiquitous' (2001, p. 188). Similarly, Mole asserts that celebrity culture requires a 'modern industry of production, promotion and distribution, and a modern audience -- massive, anonymous, socially diverse and geographically distributed' (2007, p. 10). *Samizdat* qualifies as such an industry or system in many respects. Clearly, it was not driven by capitalist market forces or commodification in any economic sense – the capital exchanged (and generated) by it was symbolic and cultural. However, although most people never touched a piece of underground literature (Kind-Kovács and Labov 2013, p. 1), it circulated widely among a non-conformist, anonymous, dispersed cultural elite. The extent to which it created celebrity – or to which celebrity was a driver for it – warrants further investigation. It certainly enhanced it: the guitar-poet Vladimir Vysotsky was a Soviet 'superstar', most of whose fans only knew his songs through home-made recordings (Smorodinskaya *et al.* 2007, p. 670).

The fact that she was never overtly disobedient facilitated Akhmatova's rehabilitation in the late 1950s-1960s. She was permitted to travel to receive an Italian literary prize (the Etna Taormina, 1964) and an Oxford honorary doctorate (1965). She was keen to expand her international reputation and, since most of her mature poetry had no prospect of publication, she presented herself abroad as a personality and

biography, and her own conception of her life formed the essential basis for life-writing about her. The three major Anglophone biographies of her to date are extremely hagiographic (Zholkovsky 1996), with titles packaging Akhmatova according to her own self-mythology as martyr, prophet-genius, and tragic queen of Russian literature: *A Poetic Pilgrimage* (Haight 1976), *Poet and Prophet* (Reeder 1994), and *Anna of all the Russias* (Feinstein 2005). Haight met Akhmatova in 1964, when few sources were available, so that her book was effectively 'ghosted' by Akhmatova, who dictated entire passages (Holmgren 1993 p. 195). Reeder and Feinstein, writing later, could consult other sources, primarily Lydia Chukovskaya's canonizing diaries of her conversations with Akhmatova between 1938 and 1966, which were published in the late 1970s in Paris and made their way to the Soviet Union in *tamizdat* (lit. 'published there', i.e., abroad).

These Anglophone biographies follow Russian biographical traditions, which adopted a hagiographic approach for political and social reasons. The oppositional role that many writers were forced into both under Tsarism and Soviet power, along with the covert transmission of literary texts that this situation produced, resulted in the elevation of literature to a form of surrogate religion and the author to secular sainthood (Parthé 2004). This engendered Romantic and Christological cultural expectations of the poet as heroic martyr with a cultural mission (Boym 1991). The (usually male) writer's biography – 'where he lived, how he suffered for his texts, how he died' – was thus a crucial element in the literary-political paradigm (Parthé 2004, p. 64). This situation was replicated elsewhere in Eastern Europe, which Wachtel (2006) wryly defines as 'that part of the world where serious literature and those who produce it have traditionally been overvalued' (p. 4).

Memoirs like Chukovskaya's acquired enhanced importance as a 'mode of wresting and bestowing power' in the Stalinist context because of the deliberate distortion and suppression of evidence by the regime (Holmgren 2003, p. xxii). This created a tendency to 'recycle the popular features of melodrama (a black-and-white moral schema, tragic and transcendent sacrifice)' (Holmgren 2003, p. xxix). The overriding image of Akhmatova projected by Chukovskaya is essentially that of an untarnished heroine battling head-to-head against the villainous Stalin (Zholkovsky 2000, Harrington 2011).

In the absence of democratic structures that allowed private opinions to be publicly represented, memoirs were a prime vehicle for indulging readers' interest in the personality, tastes, and behaviour of the famous individual. The melodramatic repertoire they exhibit is also a feature of celebrity discourses, as Hermes (1995) and Turner (2004) observe -- these too are characterised by hyperbolic sensationalism and ascribe stereotyped roles, manifesting concern with what Brooks (1985) calls 'the moral occult' - the 'domain of operative spiritual values both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality' (p. 5). Melodrama works to expose injustice and recognise virtue, and in politically repressive contexts has the clear psychological and cultural function of acknowledging moral courage (Harrington, 2011).

Russian hagiographic life-writing was presumably found internally persuasive by Anglophone biographers because the Cold War ideological battle was couched by the media in terms of morality, so that the lionizing of dissident writers in the West

was often accompanied by melodramatic rhetoric. *Time* magazine (1958), for instance, described how the 'Soviet state howled its fury at defenceless, white-haired Novelist [sic] Boris Pasternak' and portrayed Yevgeny Yevtushenko as an 'embattled hero' (1963).

Brooks (1985) sees the development of melodrama as a response to secularization. The Russian elevation of literature to a secular religion can be interpreted along the same lines, and the same case is frequently made of celebrity culture. Strong connections between fame/celebrity and religious worship are observed by Braudy (1997) and Rojek (2001), among others. Rojek (2001) points out, drawing upon Weber, that these parallels 'are reinforced by the attribution by fans of magical or extraordinary powers to the celebrity', positing a relationship between celebrity and shamanism (p. 53). In the USSR, attribution of prophetic and magical powers to writers was a habit of the atheist regime and reading public alike: 'Both Lunacharsky and Gorky spoke often of the shamanistic influence of art on human behaviour. Stalin [...] undoubtedly sensed the magical powers of art as something real; this was noted by [the poet] Osip Mandelstam who saw Stalin as superstitious, regarding poets as shamans (Volkov 2009, p. 131).

Marshall (1997) writes that the 'unique power of the charismatic prophet is its direct connection to a particular group of people' (p. 55). Such figures provide a model of strength for others, especially when 'the routine of a given role or group is endangered or disrupted' (Eisenstadt 1968, p. xxvii). This describes the situation of the Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia, for whom nonconformist figures like Akhmatova acquired emblematic significance. She opposed the system privately but

not publicly, instead practising a form of 'passive resistance' (Berlin 1997, p. 53). Passivity was an important element in her appeal because, after Stalin's death, although intellectuals were increasingly able to confront the regime without threat of imprisonment, few dared to, so that 'a special mythology capable of exculpating passive intellectuals as well as those who collaborated with the authorities' (Shlapentokh 1990, p. 113) became necessary. Akhmatova was a fitting celebrity figurehead. Chukovskaya's memoirs, which described the 'anatomy and physiology of the fear which was deeply rooted in the minds of intellectuals after 1917' (Shlapentokh 1990, p. 125), were crucial to this.

Akhmatova's charismatic authority was effectively legitimated and institutionalized after her death by the ubiquitous hagiography. Jaffe remarks that reputations, like coins, can 'lose their powers of sensuous specularity through [...] overuse' (2005, p. 11), and post-Soviet culture has given rise to attempts to challenge received hierarchies of cultural authority and to demythologize sanctifying narratives, with Akhmatova the main focus. Zholkovsky (1996, 2000 and elsewhere) argues that she established a personality cult (the term applied to Stalin's effective use of propaganda and the mass media in his self-presentation), using typically totalitarian techniques, such as ghosting biographies and manipulating visual representations.

Zholkovsky's provocative Stalinist image of Akhmatova found its way from academic scholarship into Russian mass culture, mediated by popular writer Tamara Kataeva in her books *Anti-Akhmatova* (2007) and *The Abolition of Slavery* (2011). These became bestsellers and were discussed extensively in the Russian media. Kataeva (now a scandalous literary celebrity herself) essentially accuses Akhmatova of

defrauding the public by pretending to be a great poet and exemplary human being when she was really a fame-obsessed coward and despot who did not suffer at all:

There was some success, but the world didn't fall at her feet. [...] Life went on, and the legends acquired details: aristocratic origins, gentry upbringing, superb education, deep religiosity, fateful passions, disappointments in love, self-sacrifice, humiliation, a bleeding maternal heart, executed husbands, persecution, banning from publication, weak health, wartime burdens, heroism, civic courage, fearlessness – these were all her inventions, and everything was absolutely, absolutely not like that (2007, p. 9).

Anti-Akhmatova prompted emotional public debate. It was described by admirers as the 'summation of Russian postmodernism', a book Derrida would have applauded - sold in high-brow bookshops and supermarkets alike (Baburov 2007). Its detractors claimed that Kataeva violates taboos that are essential for the survival of culture (Bykov 2007). Her speculations about Akhmatova's body, character, and private life – including her weight gain, menopause, possible lesbianism and heavy drinking – were particularly contentious. These strongly resemble the discourses and intrusions of tabloid journalism and echo the processes by which celebrities, once built up, can be brought 'down to earth' through forms of mortification of the body (Rojek 2001, p. 80).

But is this the scandalizing of the canon, literary celebrity, or both? Many accounts of celebrity insist that it is a contemporaneous phenomenon. Tuite (2007) asserts, for instance, that 'death marks the movement from the contemporaneity of celebrity to

the posthumous fame of posterity' (p. 81). Braudy (2011) also emphasises 'physical presence', observing that 'celebrity is in the moment' (pp. 1073 and 1075). Ohlsson *et al.* (2014), however, describe Stieg Larsson in passing as possessing '(posthumous) celebrity' (p. 36). If we identify celebrity as 'the point at which the public figure engages interest at the level of private life' (Tuite 2007, p. 60), then the posthumous Akhmatova certainly qualifies. In death, she remains a 'living cultural presence' (Rojek 2001, p. 64). Her grave is permanently covered with flowers, votive candles and icons from admirers, but she is Russia's only 'unforgiven' poet, the object of genuine public anger, that 'most living emotion' (Bykov 2013). Dead famous authors often attract interest at the level of their private lives, but they rarely have this affective force.

2. Pasternak

Pasternak became a renowned poet following his first collection, *My Sister Life* (1922). Its poems are characterised by a complex, metaphorical density and striking use of prosody that can be thought of as a characteristically modernist 'imprimatur' (Jaffe 2005) or exceptionalism (Goldman 2011). Like Akhmatova, Pasternak was physically striking, and his 'dusky Bedouin face, burning eyes, impulsive movements – corresponded to the traditional image of a poet' (Volkov 2009, p. 192). However, while Akhmatova advertised herself and performed the aristocratic *femme fatale*, Pasternak seemed modestly to avoid public attention, appearing aloof and detached from contemporary events to the point of 'almost vegetal insouciance' (Stonor Saunders 2014, p. 5). His biographer Hingley calls him 'that incarnation of self-disparagement' (1985, p. 95).

Pasternak repeatedly expressed discomfort with the notion of celebrity. In a poem of 1956, he wrote, 'It is unseemly to be famous/It does not exalt' and 'It is shameful, meaning nothing/To be the talk of the town'. He told his memoirist, Gladkov (1977), about the adulation he received at a public recitation in the 1920s:

I realized how easily I could embark upon a new career – one revolting in its cheapness and tawdry glitter. And there and then I was repelled for ever more by the limelight, by this wantonness fit for a variety show. I saw it as my task to revive the idea of poetry printed in books, on pages which speak with the power of deafening silence (p. 74).

Here, Pasternak articulates the tension between the 'solitude of creative achievement and the social pressure of the public stage on which that achievement must be displayed' that Braudy (1997) identifies as a feature of artistic fame since the eighteenth century (p. 550). One of the specificities of literary celebrity -- and possibly one of the reasons that traditional literary scholarship has neglected it or regarded it with suspicion -- is the pronounced dichotomy between ephemeral, superficial immediate fame and lasting fame based on acknowledged achievement. This arises from the combined legacy of the classical notion that the judgment of posterity is more important than earthly fame and the Romantic idea of the lone genius not understood by the philistine contemporary crowd. Lack of recognition or of commercial success become paradoxical marks of achievement, because 'serious' literature trades in symbolic and cultural capital. The field of cultural production is therefore 'the economic world reversed' (Bourdieu 1993, p. 29). This

explains why an 'element of reticence or resistance' in self-presentation is frequently integral to the construction of charisma in artistic figures (Braudy 1997, p. 178).

Pasternak explicitly rejected the idea that to be a poet requires conspicuous public posturing. His contemporary, Vladimir Mayakovsky, who projected a loud, spectacular public image, served him as a counter model: 'To avoid [...] appearing to mimic him, I began suppressing those elements that corresponded to his – the heroic tone, which in my case would have been false, and the cult of flamboyancy'. (Hingley 1985, p. 45). This implies strategic position-taking. Hingley convincingly suggests that Pasternak's self-effacement was 'choreographed', and that drawing 'attention to his ardent wish not to draw attention to himself' was itself a successful device for attracting publicity (pp. 120-21). Others also conclude that Pasternak's image of the artist 'not of this world' was 'consciously cultivated' (Volkov 2009, p. 192).

His habitual self-deprecation and reputation for otherworldliness protected Pasternak during the 1930s. Although he seemed undisciplined and changeable (whereas Stalin appreciated obedience and predictability), he met with tolerance. Volkov (2009) suggests that Pasternak 'probably sensed which buttons to push in his relationship with Stalin', speculating that Pasternak's 'infantile' behaviour was appealing (p. 191). Others also believe that he enjoyed a 'peculiar kind of "fool's license"', and that his spontaneous, 'almost childlike directness' might have impressed Stalin more than routine expressions of loyalty (Hayward 1997, p. 14). The superstitious attitude towards 'shamanistic' poets that Mandelstam detected in Stalin is an implicit factor - Stalin allegedly once ordered that the 'cloud-dweller'

Pasternak be left in peace (Sebag Montefiore 2008, p. 59). Stalin might well have sensed and been flattered by Pasternak's sincere fascination with him during the 1930s (Volkov 2009, p. 193): the poet sought opportunities to communicate directly with Stalin, including writing to thank him for proclaiming Mayakovsky the 'best, the most talented' poet of the age, claiming that his own significance had been exaggerated and he was glad that any suspicion that he possessed 'serious artistic power' had been removed (Volkov 2009, p. 192).

Pasternak's attitude towards the communist regime became increasingly oppositional and hostile from 1946 (Hingley 1985, p. 75). This reached its apotheosis in 1956, in the comparatively liberal but unpredictable atmosphere of the Thaw, when Pasternak made a gesture of active resistance by handing the manuscript of his novel *Doctor Zhivago* to the agent of Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, to whom he subsequently assigned world copyright. Arranging for a literary work to be published abroad without official sanction was something no Soviet writer had dared to do in almost thirty years - Boris Pilnyak, who allowed his novel *Mahogany* (1929) to be published in Berlin, had been executed in 1938.

This was an act of political defiance, certainly, but Pasternak's main concern seems to have been that his novel reach the widest possible audience, a mass readership that included 'even a seamstress or a dishwasher' (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 57). He remarked to Gladkov (1977) that he envied Alexander Fadeyev and Fyodor Gladkov, respectively the authors of *The Rout* (1927) and *Cement* (1925), two foundational novels of Socialist Realism, the officially-prescribed aesthetic, because 'major works of literature exist only in association with a large readership' (p. 87). In

this respect, Pasternak exhibits a characteristically conflicted modernist attitude towards mass culture. On the one hand, he disliked what he saw as the tawdriness of celebrity, but on the other, he was attracted to the idea of mass authorship, which influenced his choice of genre. In publishing *Zhivago* abroad, he invited the celebrity that he had previously disparaged. A sense of guilt appears to have been a motivating psychological factor. He told Gladkov (1977) that he felt 'terribly in arrears', was 'esteemed for more than [he had] actually done' (p. 87), and evidently worried that his survival of Stalinism could be interpreted as a sign of ideological conformism.

The details of the *Zhivago* affair are well known: Soviet attempts to recover the novel failed, and it became an international bestseller. It was published in Britain and the US in September 1958, topping the *New York Times* list for 26 weeks and selling 850,000 copies by March 1959 in the US alone (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 206). In October 1958, it was announced that Pasternak had been awarded the Nobel Prize. Two days later, the Soviet press went on the offensive. An editorial in *Literaturnaya gazeta* called Pasternak a 'malicious literary snob', as 'alien to the Soviet people' as his 'small-minded' hero Zhivago, revealed that the novel had been rejected by Soviet journals in 1956 for being counter-revolutionary, and – unprecedentedly - quoted offending passages. Excited at the opportunity to read excerpts of banned literature, people queued to buy the paper (circulation 880,000), which sold out in a matter of hours (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 166). A personalised mass-media campaign followed: Pasternak was denounced as 'anti-social' and a 'foreign body', the novel itself as 'notorious' (Finn and Couvée 2014, pp. 155 and 157). In a live radio and television broadcast, the Komsomol head described Pasternak as a 'mangy sheep',

and compared him unfavourably with a pig, for having 'fouled the spot where he ate' (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 180). Although Pasternak was a symbol of hope for nonconformists and received supportive letters from across the USSR and abroad, many Soviet citizens assimilated the propaganda. He was threatened, stones were thrown at his home, and he contemplated suicide. Fearing expulsion from the USSR, he felt compelled to decline the Nobel.

Notorious at home, Pasternak was a sensation abroad. Recent revelations (Finn and Couvée 2014) about the extent of the CIA's covert manipulation of the situation from the outset notwithstanding, Pasternak exercised considerable agency, fuelling foreign press attention by granting interviews. He handed his poem 'Nobel Prize' (1958) – in which he portrays himself as a hunted animal with 'no way out' – to a *Daily Mail* correspondent. It made the front page (1959), translated into English, illustrated by images of Pasternak's handwritten text and a photograph of him looking cheerfully defiant. The article mentions Pasternak's fears for his safety, the threats of imprisonment or expulsion, and the Soviet accusations that he had sold out his country 'for 30 pieces of silver'. Pasternak is portrayed as a lone 'white cormorant' among black ones, and the *Zhivago* affair as a 'symbol of one man's struggle against the dictates of a rigid, unforgiving totalitarian order'. The Manichean rhetoric of 'white' versus 'black', and presentation of Pasternak as heroic moral authority in the West lay bare the typical structures of melodrama, as does the presentation of Pasternak as treacherous 'anti-social' villain in the Soviet Union. The emphasis there was on transgression, deviance, and immorality, as when Akhmatova was anathematized over a decade earlier.

As Braun (2011) observes, the literary celebrity conferred by the Nobel is different in kind to Anglo-American models of authorial stardom, conforming to a 'non-market-driven approach to valuing literature' (p. 321) that promotes the idea of 'elite authorship' (p. 328), and tends to recognize and reward moral instruction (p. 323). The ideological battleground of the Cold War intensified the kind of 'creator fetishism' that Braun identifies (p. 322): Pasternak was perceived not merely as elite author and moral authority, but as a heroic fighter for human freedom.

Braun notes that the Nobel Prize recipient 'experiences an overnight transformation in both [...] public standing and personal circumstances' (p. 321). In most cases, this transformation is presumably positive (despite elite authors' ambivalence about celebrity), but in Pasternak's it was personally catastrophic. Although his stature in the West increased exponentially, his public reputation at home was irrevocably damaged, and the stress of the situation undoubtedly contributed to his failing health. When he suffered a heart attack on 7 May 1960, the foreign press sought updates in a prurient 'round-the-clock death watch' (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 231). His death on 30 May (of lung cancer) was reported around the world, but virtually ignored by the Soviet press (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 235).

The Zhivago affair was an international literary and political scandal. Tuite (2007) suggests that a 'reliance on the ambivalent affective charge of scandal' is a defining feature of celebrity (p. 78), and Pasternak's literary celebrity/notoriety was certainly founded on it. As Rojek suggests, notoriety is not necessarily motivated by self-aggrandizement: the 'acquisition of unfavourable celebrity may be pursued as a strategy to expose a state of affairs in society perceived as unsatisfactory' (2001, p.

159). There may have been an element of self-promotion in Pasternak's gesture, but celebrity was not an end in itself - he acted in the service of his novel and as a matter of duty, at considerable personal cost. Gladkov (1977) watched Pasternak being mobbed by the foreign press after the novel first came out in Italian:

The earlier Pasternak would have thought it an unseemly comedy, but this new Pasternak stood there obediently [...], posing book in hand before the journalists while the flash-bulbs popped away. He evidently thought he *had* to do this for some reason or other [...]. He had been overtaken by world fame, but seemed none the happier for it – one could see the strain in the awkward way he stood there, and in the expression on his face. He looked more of a martyr than a conquering hero (p. 153).

Pasternak's late self-representation is replete with martyrological motifs. Upon handing the manuscript to Feltrinelli's agent, he allegedly remarked, 'You are hereby invited to my execution' (Finn and Couvée 2014, p. 13), and the speaker of his best-known lyric, 'Hamlet' (1946), is a composite of an actor playing a Romantic Hamlet, Christ, Zhivago, and Pasternak himself, who stands alone and reluctantly faces a tragic destiny.

Both Akhmatova and Pasternak repeatedly employ the Christological and martyrological motifs that had attached to Russian writers since Pushkin's untimely death. 'To speak the truth one must be a heretic', Pasternak remarked (Gladkov 1977, p. 88), Akhmatova aligned herself in her poem 'The Last Rose' (1962) with Joan of Arc and martyred Russian Old Believer, Morozova. This is not to suggest

that the application of religious models to shape behaviour and biography is unique to Russian poets. Far from it: Greenblatt (1980) identifies Christ as the recurrent model in Renaissance self-fashioning and Braudy (1997) observes a general twentieth-century 'preoccupation with the artist as self-styled (and actual) victim' that unites him/her 'with saints, martyrs, and even Jesus himself as a seeker of spiritual truths who desperately tried to shun the Roman spotlight until it sought, captured and killed him' (p. 581). However, religious parallels have especial purchase and resonance in cultures where 'the madness of the brave, the martyr's stake, and the poet's Golgotha are not just figurative expressions' (Jakobson 1987, p. 298).

Conclusion

Celebrities function as 'markers of historicity and cultural memory' (Apter 2010, p. 89). Rojek (2001, p. 48) and Braudy (1997, p. 15) both note that celebrity history influences collective memory, contributing to cultural cohesion. This function assumes particular importance when cultural experience is abnormally disjunctive and turbulent, as in twentieth-century Russia. Gronas (2011), noting that the literary canon itself is often referred to as 'cultural memory', argues that the mechanism for canon formation must therefore rely on a 'specifically mnemonic – rather than a merely sociological or aesthetic – logic' (p. 69). Cultural evolution is 'keen on replication and perpetuation', so that 'to survive culturally, a text must have certain mnemonic qualities' (p. 3). This neo-Darwinist approach can productively be extended to celebrities' lives and images – as texts, the perpetuation of which relies on memory and repetition, potentially creating cultural icons or artefacts of them. Greenblatt uses the term 'social energy' to describe the force that an artefact assumes, and its 'capacity to have an effect on the mind of the hearer or reader'.

Again, 'repeatable forms of pleasure and interest' are key to this (Greenblatt 1990 cited Robson 2008, p. 69). Similarly, Raeburn (1984) points out that neither a writers' sales nor critical acclaim can adequately predict or measure public reputation – media coverage is paramount, and it is not variety, but repetition, that is important (p. 8). The reworking and repeating of recognisable patterns is crucial to shaping a compelling public image, as the melodramatic and Christological representation of Pasternak and Akhmatova by themselves and others indicates. Repetition is key to notoriety as well as positive celebrity - it was a fundamental feature of the propagandistic campaigns directed at Akhmatova and Pasternak.

All this suggests a fruitful methodological approach to celebrity - and to the cultural processes that turn it into fame, or *vice versa* - that involves tracing these patterns and their mutations. The study of literary celebrity has much to contribute to understanding of celebrity more broadly in this respect, because writers and their readers tend to shape and interpret behaviour, consciously or unconsciously, according to pre-existing archetypes. The melodramatic features of the Russian myth of the poet are reductive and one-sided, simplifying complex individuals and the cultural field they inhabited, but this hyperbole is precisely why they are memorable, possessing persistent affective power, making visible the 'moral occult'.

Ohlsson *et al.* (2014) argue that critical approaches founded on the 'death of the author' are now 'untenable', not least because of the importance of various types of witness literature and the bearing the embodied figure of the author has on their authenticity (p. 34 citing Burke 1992). In Russia, the author never disappeared from critical discourse. Even the Formalist tradition, whilst keeping the emphasis on the

intrinsic qualities of the literary work, attempted to theorize new approaches to the writer's life that were elaborated further by Soviet semioticians in the 1960s-1970s (Boym 1990, pp. 22 and 25). Around 600 published authors were arrested in the late 1930s (Volkov 2009, p. 118), and the idea of reducing the author to a function of the text - effacing the personality, body, and face behind literary production - has little to recommend it to a culture in which the death of the author was all-too-often literal.

Akhmatova and Pasternak both provided models of resistance - in her case passive, and in his, active. This dichotomy seems to disclose an implicit gender dimension. It is notable that, while Anglophone life-writing about Pasternak tends to take a similarly hagiographic approach to that devoted to Akhmatova - as Stonor Saunders remarks, 'a thick layer of piety [is] applied to him by his eager publicists in the West' (2014, p. 5) - biographers have been more alert than Akhmatova's to the possibility that Pasternak's public image amounted to deliberate strategy. The fact that the self-fashioning of male martyred non-conformists has not received angry public criticism in the way that Akhmatova's has raises the possibility that gender is a factor, and that a famous woman writer elevating herself to the status of heroic genius remains problematic even in the twenty-first century. Kataeva followed *Anti-Akhmatova* with an 'anti-biography' of Pasternak (2009), but it attracted little attention. The fact that different early self-fashioning strategies were employed by Akhmatova and Pasternak (self-advertisement and self-effacement) also indicate that gender is a further important differentiation to supplement those advanced by Ohlsson *et al.* (2014).

Geographical differentiation (Ohlsson *et al.* 2014) can highlight important ideological, political and cultural distinctions that bear upon literary celebrity. Many scholars emphasise the centrality of ideology to celebrity (Dyer 1998, Rojek 2001), which either affirms the established order, or provides models of transgression and opposition. This dual function applies to any political system; however, the Soviet historical context illustrates how, when freedom of expression is restricted, other media can be improvised, such as *samizdat*. This might even suggest that it is not the available media that produce celebrity, but rather celebrity that drives the production of the necessary media. Definitions of literary celebrity therefore need to be flexible enough to include authors whose private lives, bodies, and behaviour generate widespread public interest, emotional engagement and affect, within and beyond their lifetimes, in a variety of media.

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